

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION
(Taught Postgraduate)**



1	Awarding Institution	Newcastle University
2	Teaching Institution	Newcastle University
3	Final Award	Master of Fine Art
4	Programme Title	Master of Fine Art
5	Programme Code	5900 F
6	Programme Accreditation	N/A
7	QAA Subject Benchmark(s)	Art and Design Benchmark Statement 2026
8	FHEQ Level	Level 7
9	Last updated	May 2026

10 Programme Aims

Master of Fine Art, (MFA (top-up) 5900) is about cultivating an ambitious, critically-engaged professional contemporary art practice within an advanced research environment.

The programme incorporates bespoke and individualised studio-based support and critique for individual creative enquiry alongside the development of abilities required to exhibit and communicate at a high level. This enables original and sustained investigation and equips artists with a versatile set of skills applicable to a diversity of Fine Art disciplines. Students build practical and analytical expertise and the ability to confidently articulate their position within a breadth of relevant cultural, social, and historical contexts. Central to the programme is the building of abilities to independently shape and direct a robust creative practice and to articulate an individualised critical position. The curriculum centres self-reflexive practice and research through an emphasis on experimentation, risk-taking and empowers students to innovate in the field.

The 'lived experience' of the programme encompasses collaborative projects, studio and exhibition-making and is a step up from the guided and structured approach of the Master of Fine Art MFA Stage 1.

Students engage with other artists, curators, scholars, and audiences, forging networks with the wider community. Engaging with leading-edge research supports students to develop their practical and analytical skills and critical thinking, encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration and emphasising the importance of building sustainable relationships within the contemporary art ecosystem. The programme also offers a grounding for those hoping to progress to practice-based PhD study.

The Aims of the programmes are:

1. To support and challenge students' thinking and making through self-directed independent studio practice

2. To nurture creative curiosity, intellectual rigour and the discovery of fresh perspectives through active engagement with practice and relevant artistic and academic debates.
3. To encourage the interrogation of students' own work and that of other artists towards an advanced understanding of the relationship between practice and theory.
4. To facilitate theoretical and written skills as independent practitioners in the visual arts field within regional, national and global contexts.
5. To advance knowledge of a range of intellectual and practical approaches, which prepares students for independent professional practice and/or further academic, practice-led research.

Learning Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes in the following areas. The programme outcomes have references to the benchmark statements for Art and Design Framework 2020.

Knowledge and Understanding

On completing the programme students will have an advanced critical understanding and knowledge of:

- A1.** The physical and intellectual techniques and methods pertinent to the development of an independent critical studio practice.
- A2.** The exploration and communication of ideas in a range of appropriate media.
- A3.** The relevant cultural, historical and critical debates surrounding visual arts practice and their impact on students' individual practice.
- A4.** The practical and critical issues surrounding a broad range of exhibition practices and the challenges facing the field of visual arts.
- A5.** The institutional and professional structures within which contemporary visual arts practice exists.
- A6.** The roles of artists, curators, critics and audiences in shaping contemporary visual art.
- A7.** Advanced Research methodologies in fine art and a critical understanding of the relationship between practice, writing and critical theory.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The Learning and Teaching Strategy (LTAS) for the MFA is based around facilitating creativity, collaboration and communication through experiential learning.

Tutorials, seminars and group criticisms are the primary means by which specialist knowledge and understanding are imparted. This is supplemented by lectures given by Fine Art staff and a range of professional visitors(A1-7).

The programme takes a holistic approach to supporting independent practice with students embedded in their studio and exhibition space and supported through the stages of a public exhibition, strategies for promoting it and the critical analysis of it in an in-depth piece of research work in three 60-credit stages. Such problem-based learning advances and encourages the sharing of knowledge around contemporary practice, discipline-specific understanding and vocabularies, and testing and evaluating material approaches. Regional, national and global contexts of creative work and the specific associated terminologies guides this activity. Working with

professional artists and leading researchers, students learn in groups and individually and advance their critical abilities through interdisciplinary dialogue.

Students develop as independent artists through the production of independently achieved bodies of studio work (A1-7). In addition, understanding of the implications of public exhibition is encouraged through students working as a team to realise all aspects of an ambitious public exhibition of work at the end of the programme (A3 & A5). Students are encouraged to seek opportunities to exhibit independently outside the institution (A3 & A5). Understanding of historical, theoretical and contemporary debates and the relationship between text and their own practice is also encouraged through the Dissertation in Semester 2 (A4-A7).

The teaching and learning methods are underpinned by a multidisciplinary, experiential learning approach that fosters collaboration and innovation. The programme incorporates in-person activities to promote the understanding and application of theoretical concepts in real-world contexts. The curriculum recognises the importance of integrating theory and practice by involving both academic experts and practitioners. Modules are designed to empower learners to innovate, advance their conceptual understanding and practice and put on an exhibition of their work alongside their peers. They also complete a substantial piece of writing that provides an analytical commentary on their work with the ability to communicate their concerns and approach to both a professional and an academic audience.

Learners achieve this by engaging in studio work, lectures, seminars, regional and national trips to exhibitions, weekly visiting lectures and individual one-to-one tutorials and group critiques, reflective and interdisciplinary learning experiences and individualised supervision for dissertation. Individual and group-led research activities may involve conducting library research, visiting relevant sites and organisations, and dialogue with professional practitioners. Furthermore, learners are provided with opportunities to deliver group presentations to build confidence and supportive networks. Overall, this teaching and learning approach equips learners with a well-rounded skill set that combines theoretical knowledge, research-skills, practical application, collaboration, critical thinking, and innovation.

Assessment Strategy

This programme uses authentic and holistic assessment design through which students become advanced studio-based practitioners. Each semester is organised in 60 credit blocks with the assessment journey marking key moments of attainment towards the exhibition in Semester 3 (see programme structure – section 12). Assessment across modules therefore allows students to advance their practice, whilst critically appraising their development alongside the theoretical, social and cultural contexts that shape it. The assessment criteria focus on creative practice and the communication of it to evidence depth of knowledge, critical analysis, creativity, interdisciplinary understanding, collaborative skills, ethical awareness and communication capabilities.

Across the programme students are assessed in the following ways:

Studio-based art practice and the presentation of artwork through exhibition and digital portfolio (A1; A3; A4; A5)

Individual and group based assessed critiques of students' work within a studio or exhibition context (A1, A2, A4; A5)

Dissertation proposal and dissertation articulating the critical, theoretical and methodological position of their work (A2; A3; A5, A6, A7)

Regular constructive feedback is provided to learners on their assessments through group, peer-to-peer crits and individual tutorials. Feedback emphasises strengths and areas of improvement to encourage continuous learning and development throughout the programme. By employing this cohesive assessment and feedback strategy, the programme effectively evaluates learners' knowledge and understanding, foster multi-disciplinary collaboration, and promote a reflexive approach to addressing the complex challenges of building a distinctive and sustainable fine art practice

Intellectual Skills

On completing the programme students will be able to:

- B1.** Critically assess and articulate the need for changes/adaptations of different models of theory and practice in the visual arts field.
- B2.** Articulate in written and verbal form the decision-making underpinning to their practice and research critical judgements in relation to their own practice and research.
- B3.** Use materials and assess their use to produce advanced studio-based and exhibition work.
- B4.** Lead arguments and new positions in the field in relation to their own ideas and those of others.
- B5.** Organise, structure and direct an ambitious self-managed studio practice.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The LTAS is articulated in 11a and is based around experiential and project-based learning and teaching methods. To develop the intellectual skills B1-B6, which encompass critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, problem-solving, critical analysis and creativity, the programme provides a range of teaching and learning methods to engage learners. These include:

- Studio and exhibition based critical analysis, critical judgement and editing in relation to digital portfolios (B1; B2; B3).
- A long-term studio and exhibition project, broken up into three incremental stages (B2; B3; B5)
- Advanced research and writing in a dissertation format that can also be communicated to a non-academic audience (B2; B3; B4)
- Articulation of different perspectives and problem-solving approaches through collaborative projects and through presenting their work to others (B4; B5)

Regular feedback from tutors within the studio supports students through assessment. It emphasises strengths of critical practice and encourage students to broaden their horizons and knowledge. Combining these teaching and learning methods creates a dynamic and enriching educational experience, fostering the development of critical thinking, creativity, and analytical skills necessary for developing a self-reflexive contemporary art practice.

Assessment Strategy

The main objective of the overall programme assessment strategy is provided in section 11a.

In addition, intellectual skills are assessed by digital portfolios of work (B1; B3; B4), proposing and executing a dissertation (B1; B2; B4; B5;), advanced studio-based practice and the production of a major exhibition (B2; B3; B4), analysis of studio work and group critiques (B5, B4).

Practical Skills

On completing the programme students will be able to:

- C1.** Apply specialised techniques appropriate for the realisation of individual or collaborative creative projects in visual arts.
- C2.** Lead and manage a professional visual arts exhibition.
- C3** Articulate in written and verbal forms the critical, innovative and creative thought for managing exhibitions.
- C4.** Direct and organise their own practice and lead others to do the same.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The LTAS is articulated in 11a and is based around experiential and project-based learning and teaching methods. To develop the practical skills C1-C4 which encompass the material aspects of creative work and the exhibition of it, students will engage in:

- Advanced studio-based practice and creative solutions to practice (C1; C4).
- The organisation and management of a major exhibition and implement creative solutions to achieving it (C2; C3)
- Research and the critical underpinning of their work and be able to articulate this to professional artists, curators and both verbally and in writing (C1-C4)
- Self-reflexive analysis of their work to articulate their own place and position as an artist (C1-C4)

These teaching methods are the main learning strand of the programme, with students working in the studio in Semesters 1 and 2 and then being resident in their exhibition space for the 60-credit final project module. This allows for a dynamic and bespoke learning experience.

Assessment Strategy

The main objective of the overall programme assessment strategy is provided in section 11a. In addition, practice-based skills are assessed by producing art in the studio (C1, C2), exhibiting work, analysis and group critiques and in the written dissertation (C3, C4).

Transferable/Key Skills

On completing the programme students will be able to:

- D1.** Communicate their own expert knowledge in verbal and written forms, sourcing and referencing evidence to support this.
- D2.** Use specialist secondary and digital resources and for a range of different outcomes.
- D3.** Plan and manage events and projects efficiently both independently and in groups and in an organised and timely manner.
- D4.** Identify and solve problems through creative and critical thinking and strategising and be able to articulate the decision-making to others.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The LTAS is articulated in 11a and is based around experiential and project-based learning and teaching methods.

Key transferable skills are acquired through knowledge, intellectual and practice-based skills and learning strategies (see above). In the execution of a major project students are introduced to:

- Case studies, examples and digital resource to position themselves as experts and solve complex problems (D1; D3).
- Debates and discussions of contemporary art practice from leaders in the field so that they may begin to shape their own leadership (D1; D2).
- The production and promotion of public facing exhibitions (D3; D4).
- Opportunities to present their work, decisions and critical arguments in front of their peers and professional artists, allowing for constructive feedback (D1; D4).

Assessment Strategy

The main objective of the overall programme assessment strategy is provided in section 11a. Key transferable skills are also acquired through successful attainment of the skills and knowledge outcomes and how they are assessed (see above). Specifically, key transferable skills are assessed through advanced writing about students' own art practice in relation to other artists in dissertation form (D1 and D2) the leadership and management of practice, of exhibition and in digital capture of their work (D3; D4).

12 Programme Curriculum, Structure and Features

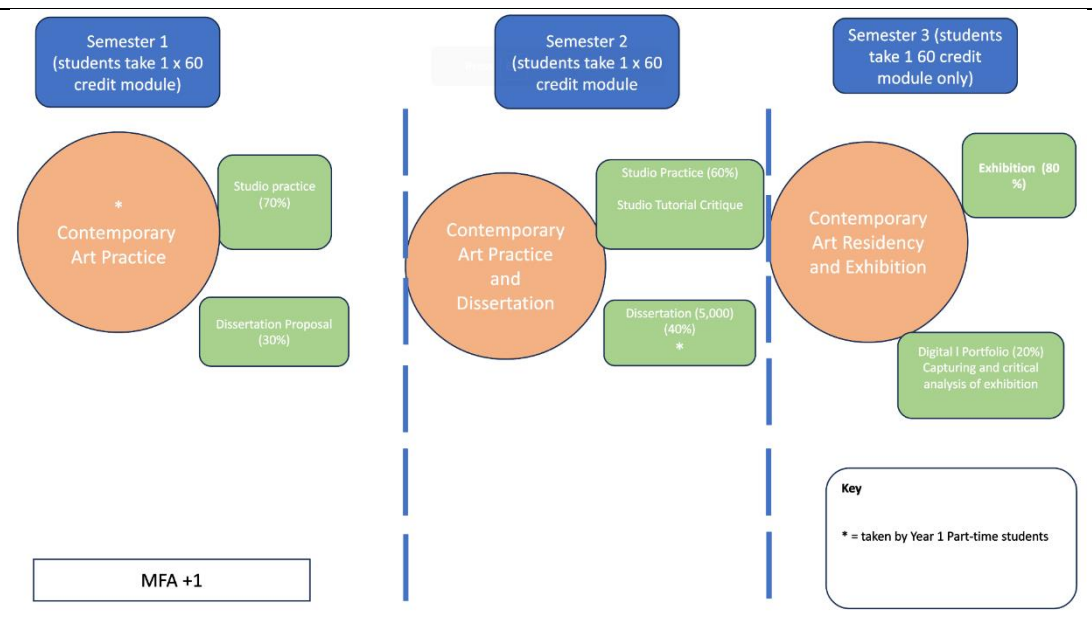
Master of Fine Art, (MFA (top-up) 5900) is about cultivating an ambitious, critically-engaged professional contemporary art practice within an advanced research environment.

MFA 5900 is a one-year studio-based Fine Art course based on and taught in parallel with MFA stage 2. It is designed as top-up for those who have successfully completed MA Fine Art / MFA stage 1 at Newcastle University. It is also devised as an entry point to advanced PGT study at Newcastle University for those with an existing MA Fine Art qualification from elsewhere.

This Master of Fine Art (MFA top-up) is designed to enable students to develop careers as professional artists and to articulate their own creative position. It offers a contemporary visual art education, incorporating bespoke and individualised studio and gallery-based support, alongside research skills and methods, to equip graduates with a versatile set of skills to make a meaningful, critically-engaged contribution to the field of Fine Art. This is achieved through substantial commitment to studio-based practice through three incremental stages. **Semester 1** focuses on advancing skills in the first studio-based module and expanding theoretical knowledge through the preparation of a dissertation proposal. Students develop their creative capacities, research skills and ability to verbalise their own critical, cultural and creative position in written and verbal forms. In **Semester 2** students write their dissertation whilst continuing to develop their studio practice and beginning to shape how they will exhibit it. The critical research and practice work holistically and through regular verbal discussion and supervision, students can better articulate their creative identity. **Semester 3** offers students a fully immersive residency in their exhibition space, where they are able to realise an ambitious, professional public exhibition.

The programme offers a sound grounding for those hoping to progress to PhD degree study.

Basic structure and assessment journey



Key features of the programme (including what makes the programme distinctive)

The Fine Art department celebrates the **centenary of the establishment of the Fine Art degree at Newcastle University in 1923**, as the first Fine Art BA in the country. The MFA Fine Art course draws closely on the legacy of the BA Fine Art and has established itself as **one of the longest running Fine Art MFA programmes** in the UK.

The suite of Fine Art postgraduate taught courses (MFA 5808, MA Fine Art 4186 MFA (top-up) 5900) is housed together and based in excellent purpose-built studio space and taught by a wide range of distinguished and internationally celebrated practicing artists. The course can accommodate a wide range of practice: painting, sculpture, digital media, drawing, performance, photography, printmaking, installation or video art. Our weekly Visiting Lecturer programme enables some of the most interesting and original artists, critics, curators, historians and art professionals working today to present and discuss their projects. Students have 24hr access to studios and towards the end of June, when the undergraduate students are no longer in the building, the MFA students have access and the use of all the studios in the building in which to work over the summer and to subsequently exhibit. Students also use the Hatton Gallery to show work and are encouraged to engage fully with galleries and other professional and potential employment opportunities in the region and beyond. The course (and student body which includes BA, MA, MFA and PhD) very much benefits from being within a large, culturally and technologically rich, multidisciplinary university, in the centre of a city with a vibrant and growing contemporary art scene.

The MFA/MA programme plays a crucial role in the art department and continues to lead radical models of Fine Art practice. The MFA continues to instil open ended, practice-led approaches to art education and maintains traditional values of Fine Art pedagogy based on engagement with tools, materials and making in the studio-based course. The unique provision of student studios and exhibition spaces allowing for a full semester residency for final exhibition has become a rarity in the field.

At the heart of the programme is a **curriculum that centres creative, critical, self-reflexive practice and research**. Students are encouraged to explore their own creative interests and research questions, guided by a diverse staff made up of practicing artists and art historians. Through workshops, lectures, group work and independent study projects, students develop their own sustainable studio practice and own voice and vision as artist. By emphasizing experimentation, risk-taking, and reflective practice, the programme fosters a culture of innovation and inquiry, preparing students to make meaningful contributions to the field of Fine Art practice.

The Fine Art department successfully creates a strong **sense of belonging** and a meaningful learning environment, reflected not only in a high level of student satisfaction, with the BA(Hons) programme achieving consistently high NSS results (National Student Survey) and recognised in nation league tables as one of the best courses in the country. The MA Fine Art programme responds also to societal challenges through its highly ambitious studio programme as well as a wide range of *Extra Curricular Activities* and opportunities open to MA students: Current extra-curricular activities include: specialist Forums (Performance, Animation, Painting, Greenfinger Forum) in order to facilitate opportunities for cross-year teaching and engagement. [For more information please see the Fine Art Community Board.](#)

Preparing students for life after university is a key priority in Fine Art. Thanks to the **Bartlett and Forshaw endowments**, Fine Art students (UGT and PGT) can apply their skills and develop professional relationships outside of the department. They complete artist residencies, work at the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, receive feedback from leading artists, curators, and critics, and exhibit their work outside the department engaging with the art world in Newcastle. Fine Art students also benefit from the department's partnerships with the European Ceramics Work Centre, The NewBridge Project, the British School at Rome, Newcastle City, and local schools.

The department encourages artistic responsibility. Students and staff have responded to the climate emergency through the **Bartlett Sustainable Practice Award** which encourages students to develop a sustainable artistic practice. Fine Art also has a Climate Crisis Working Party made up of teaching and technical staff committed to lowering the department's carbon footprint. The Fine Art department works towards best practice principles in climate aware arts education in line with Newcastle University's Vision Statement that recognizes environmental sustainability as strategic goal. Soup Wednesdays see staff and students make and share soup made in the **Fine Art student café**

New initiatives including the new public research seminar **Art and Ecology** series offer a platform for engagement with research in history of art at a time when the discipline is under-going change in response to issues of urgent significance, including intergenerational justice, colonial legacies, and environmental breakdown.

The Fine Art public speaker series **Future Climates: Artists and Curators** respond to the Climate Crisis in a new series of talks developed in collaboration between Art Monthly and the Fine Art, Newcastle University. The series brings together international artists, curators, writers to reflect on how cultural practices can respond to the climate crisis and its complex, societal, political, economic, historical entanglements with a specific focus on practices and thinking that go

beyond aesthetic and conceptual engagement and set about making a real-life difference.

The Fine Art department celebrates **FINE ART 100**, the four-year-long centenary of the creation in 1923 of the very first BA Fine Art in Britain, at Newcastle University. Our activities 2023-27, will celebrate the past, look at the present, and question what the next 100 years of Fine Art education and creative research might be.

Programme regulations

[Programme Regulations 2026-27](#)

13 Support for Student Learning

Generic information regarding University provision is available at the following link.

[Generic Information](#)

14 Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning

Generic information regarding University provision is available at the following link.

[Generic Information](#)

Accreditation reports

Additional mechanisms

15 Regulation of assessment

Generic information regarding University provision is available at the following link.

[Generic Information](#)

In addition, information relating to the programme is provided in:

The University Prospectus: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/>

Degree Programme and University Regulations: [University Regulations | University Regulations | Newcastle University](#)

Please note. This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and of the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if she/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities provided.

Mapping of Intended Learning Outcomes onto Curriculum/Modules

Module	Type	Intended Learning Outcomes Level 7			
		A	B	C	D
FIN8020 Contemporary Art Practice 1: studio and research (60 credits)	Compulsory	1, 2, 7	2, 3, 6	1,	2, 3, 4
FIN8021 Contemporary Art Practice 2: Studio and Dissertation (60 credits)	Compulsory	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	1, 3	1, 2, 4
FIN8022 Contemporary Art Practice 3: Studio residency and exhibition (60 credits)	Compulsory	1, 3, 4,, 5, 6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4