



Programme Specification

1. General information

Programme title:	MA Environmental Architecture (Full time)
Award:	MA
Qualification Framework level:	7
School/Department or equivalent:	School of Architecture
Campus location(s):	Kensington
Total UK credits:	180
Date valid from/to	2023-24

2. Programme Philosophy

Earth systems are changing. The globe is warming as a result of CO² emissions, with dramatic consequences in the form of abnormal and intensified climatic events such as floods or fires. At the same time, a series of related metabolic rifts, from ecosystem loss to species extinction, ocean water acidification, desertification, and the resulting loss of livelihoods, compound to generate environmental destruction and social tensions in the form of wars, famines and mass migrations. The underlying causes of these momentous shifts lie within the environmental and territorial architectures of capitalist modes of production, globalised through colonisation and development policies, and their discriminatory and racial logics. New environmental architectures are urgently needed.

The aim of MA Environmental Architecture is to constitute a new field of knowledge production and practice concerned with the design of alternative forms of co-dependence between life forms and earth systems. The MA Environmental Architecture is a design-led and field-focused course that emphasises a transdisciplinary approach to design research. The programme proposes a unique approach to environmental architecture education that brings together architectural and ethnographic research methods, with the use of technoscientific tools for analysing, classifying, and producing environmental data.

At the same time, you are exposed to the perspectives of those in the frontlines of environmental struggles across the world, to histories and theories of environmental change, and to the most recent advances in the related fields of environmental law and climate justice.

Through its long-term *Studio* units, the programme will provide you with the opportunity to engage with live projects in sites of complex environmental change, to work with experts from other disciplines, such as lawyers, geologists or biologists, and to embark on multiple-day field trips

where you will be able to engage stakeholders and meet local communities, while testing and exploring environmental research and analysis methods.

The MA Environmental Architecture aims to expand the scope and content of design-led research in the field of architecture, environmental studies and territorial management. Possible areas of inquiry can include sustainable forms of urbanisation; concepts of stewardship and care for nature; environmental change and its effect on migration and settlement patterns; climate justice adaptation to land use practices; impacts of resource extraction on ecosystems; environmental impacts of the energy transition; post-development and degrowth; indigenous struggles for land and environments; among many others.

Students of the MA Environmental Architecture will have the opportunity to pursue a degree within a world leading art and design institution, and to access the rich culture of radical and experimental interdisciplinary work at the Royal College of Art. Moreover, the programme will help you to establish a network of colleagues and mentors by offering them the opportunity of connecting to leading figures in Environmental Architecture both in London and internationally through an innovative practice mentorship scheme.

3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

Programme aims

The programme aims to:

- Define the practice of environmental architecture and become its leading programme, contributing to the re-invention of contemporary knowledge on environmental design and research;
- Expose students to unique and paradigmatic situations of environmental or climate change across the world;
- Contribute to the ongoing and global effort of imagining and designing alternative forms of co-existence on Earth;
- Promote an interdisciplinary working and research ethos where students develop their individual skills while learning to work with colleagues, research partners and stakeholders in a collaborative environment;
- Create an outstanding academic platform that provides students with systematic and in-depth knowledge of environmental research and practice informed by the most recent scholarship and technological innovations;
- Provide students with critical and technical skills that allow them to pursue independent research and to apply advanced, practice-based knowledge to the field of environmental architecture and design.

What will I be expected to achieve?

Upon successful completion of the programme, you will be expected to meet the requirements of both the College-wide Learning Outcomes and your programme-specific Learning Outcomes.

College-Wide Learning Outcomes

You should be able to:

- Interrogate and articulate the intentions of your work in relation to the critical and conceptual context of your field(s) of study;
- Independently plan and produce work that is informed by developments at the forefront of your field(s) of study;
- Evaluate and critique the principles and methods of research in your field(s) of study, and apply these principles to your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice;
- Demonstrate originality in how you translate knowledge into practice;
- Communicate your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice to a non-specialist audience;
- Critically reflect on the likely public impact of your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice, and on your responsibilities as a practitioner;
- Define your professional ambitions and identify the challenges involved in meeting them.

Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes

You should be able to:

- Formulate original research questions that contribute to knowledge in environmental architecture and address contemporary climatic and environmental problems;
- Independently plan or produce work that is informed by developments at the forefront of environmental architecture and related fields;
- Master forms of collaborative and transdisciplinary knowledge production;
- Devise and implement original methods of environmental analysis, representation and intervention;
- Develop comprehensive and imaginative ways to effectively communicate complex environmental questions to non-specialist audiences;
- Evaluate existing forms of professional practice and propose viable alternatives beyond the conditions defined by the private sector and public institutions;
- Critically assess your responsibilities as a practitioner in light of the likely environmental, social, and economic impacts of your research and design practice.

4. What will I learn?

Curriculum Map

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Research Studio I: Architectures of Extraction (15 credits)	Research Studio II: Environmental Interventions (15 credits)	Independent Research Project

		(60 credits)
Seminar I: Metabolic Rifts (15 credits)	Seminar II: Critical Future Scenarios (15 credits)	
Media Studies (15 credits)	School-Wide Elective (15 credits)	
AcrossRCA (30 credits)		

Programme Structure

Unit Title	Term	Credit Value	Core or Elective?
Research Studio I: Architectures of Extraction	1	15	Core
Media Studies	1	15	Elective
Seminar I: Metabolic Rifts	1	15	Core
AcrossRCA	1&2	30	Core
School-Wide Elective	2	15	Elective
Research Studio II: Environmental Interventions	2	15	Core
Seminar II: Critical Future Scenarios	2	15	Core
Independent Research Project	3	60	Core

Independent Research Project

The purpose of the Independent Research Project (IRP) is to enable you to apply the intellectual, technical and professional skills that you have developed throughout the programme to a challenging self-set brief. The IRP can be developed either individually or in group, and it should be based on the proposition for intervention developed in *Research Studio II, Environmental Interventions*. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the theme of the studio while pursuing your own research interests.

The IRP includes a public presentation of work and exhibition, alongside peers from your programme, and following the conclusion of taught elements of the unit. This activity will help you to present the key design intentions of your work orally and visually. Focus will be given to forms of representing and communicating complex environmental issues, with a particular focus on exploring environmental aesthetics. You can make use of a variety of media including film, animation, models, drawings or other as adequate.

IRP teaching consists of studio-based tutorials and seminar sessions focusing the written components. Additionally, you will require access to technical facilities and the library.

The IRP can be submitted through project or by thesis, and across a multiplicity of media and formats, from drawings, to film, animation or model making.

Particular focus will be given to forms of representing and communicating complex environmental issues and research to both academic and non-academic audiences. This might include exhibition, performance or the organisation of seminars/ public events.

5. How will I learn?

Research Studios:

The programme's main teaching method are the Research Studio (RS) units. Each RS investigates a contemporary and paradigmatic case study at the frontline of environmental or climate change, in a 4-year cumulative research project. Students choose their RS at the start of the year.

Each new cohort builds on or adds to work developed during the previous year. This unique format promotes multi-year relations between student cohorts and alumni. Moreover, the 4-year project allows establishing long-term relationships with stakeholders and partners on the ground, and the development of a stronger collective contribution to the field.

LIVE project:

A LIVE project structures teaching in *Research Studio Unit 1: Architectures of Extraction*. The LIVE project consists of a collective research project. LIVE projects change every year, have a real-world output, and are devised in collaboration with partners on the ground as short-term intensive engagements. The LIVE project aims to place collaborations with non-academic organisations, engagement with real-world scenarios, and exposure to paradigmatic sites of environmental change at the centre of learning.

Individual and group tutorials:

For both *Research Studio* and *Seminar* units, a combination of one-to-one, small and large group tutorials will be conducted regularly between students and staff. Specialists and invited experts will also contribute depending on each unit's research interests and sites.

Field Trips:

National or international field trips are an essential component of the programme's pedagogical model. The MA Environmental Architecture focuses on case studies and organises research around site-specific LIVE projects. The field trips will allow you an opportunity to experience unique environmental conditions in their material and social aspects, to produce landscape and ecosystem analysis, to document the site's conditions and transformations, as well as collaborating with local partners, stakeholders and practitioners. Field trips are also key opportunities to test and explore environmental research methodologies.

Technical learning:

Studio teaching is supported by technical workshops delivered by the RCA technical faculty and by invited specialists. Technical workshops aim to provide you with observational, imaging,

documentation, and visualization techniques. You will be taught to examine new systems of representation, and your ability to create original and experimental spaces of intervention within the field.

Student-led Roundtables:

This is an essential teaching method that aims to foster autonomy and peer-to-peer learning processes in the *Seminar* units. Student-led roundtables provide a model where you are allowed to lead collective discussion and learning processes.

Lectures:

This includes lectures and presentations prepared by programme staff, School of Architecture staff, invited academics and practitioners. Apart from events organised by MA Environmental Architecture, you will be encouraged to follow the School's international lecture series, across school symposia and interdisciplinary forums organised by the School in collaboration with other academic institutions.

Critiques and reviews:

In *Studio* units, you will have to present their work to programme staff and invited critics multiple times each term. Panels will include School of Architecture staff, experts and specialists involved in the selected case studies or student project sites, UK-based and international academic and practitioners with a distinguished track record in environmental architecture and related fields, as well as the programme's practice mentors. Regular reviews will provide valuable opportunities for students to get feedback and to develop and improve their skills in oral presentation.

Practice Mentors:

A practice mentorship programme connects students to the workplace through regular meetings taking place in Term 3 with prominent industry members, who will advise of work and career issues. Students and practices are paired according to intercepting research interests. In doing so we hope professional practices and organizations might have a foundational role in your development.

In order to realise their work successfully students will be expected to attend:

- Briefing sessions
- Individual and group Tutorials
- Student-led roundtables
- Lectures
- Technical Workshops
- Progress reviews and critiques
- Field trips
- Public presentation of work
- Examinations and assessments

6. Assessment and feedback

Regulations

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found [here](#). Please familiarise yourself with these.

Unit assessment

The programme makes use of formative and summative assessment.

Assessment may include, but may not be limited to:

- Group submissions of project work
- Group presentations
- Individual presentations
- Oral presentations
- Blog posts
- Written research proposals
- Long-form written submissions (essays, thesis etc)
- Research Portfolio
- Viva Voce examination
- Public-facing presentation of work

Formative assessment:

You will receive oral feedback throughout the year. In the *Research Studio* units this will be given weekly by the studio tutor, and in the case of the *Seminar* units by the seminar tutors. Additionally, reviews with invited guests will provide valuable opportunities for you to get formative assessment on their design research and to develop and improve their skills in oral and visual presentation.

Summative assessment takes place at the end of each unit. These are formal examinations your work that evaluate your progress as you move through your studies. Further details will be included in the unit descriptors.

Independent Research Project:

The assessment of the IRP unit has two main components:

- Public presentation of work;
- Final submission of work (Portfolio + Thesis).

The public presentation of work will take place as part of a public event or exhibition usually following the conclusion of taught elements of the unit. You will be required to orally and visually present your work to programme staff and a non-academic audience.

The final submission of work will take place at the end of term and should include:

- Portfolio of work: providing critical intellectual and material context to the IRP, from the original proposal up to the strategy for the public presentation of work.
- Written component of 5,000 words for submission by 'Project' and 10,000 words for submission by 'Thesis'. Complementary visual elements such as maps, films or other media are allowed.

Information regarding individual assessments will be included in the Unit Descriptors, and will be available to students at the beginning of the academic year.

7. What award can I get?

To be awarded an RCA MA degree you need to gain 180 credits at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will involve successfully completing all units.

If you fail a unit at the first attempt, you will be offered an opportunity to resit the unit. If you are successful at resit you will be awarded the credits for that unit. If you are unsuccessful, you cannot progress further in your programme.

Exit awards:

If you have gained at least 120 credits at level 7 of the FHEQ, you may be eligible for the exit award of Postgraduate Diploma. An exit award is a final award from the College and cannot be rescinded.

For more detailed information about the College's assessment, progression and awards policies see the Regulations.

8. Admissions

Cross-College requirements

Academic Entry Requirements

Candidates must normally have obtained a good relevant undergraduate degree or an equivalent qualification. The College recognises as an equivalent qualification any degree, diploma, certificate or other evidence of formal qualification awarded by a university or other higher education establishment where the award is made following the successful completion of a programme of at least three years' study, the programme of study being open, as a general rule, only to persons holding a certificate awarded on the successful completion of a full programme of upper secondary education.

Other qualifications may be approved, providing that the College's Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) is satisfied that the applicant has the ability to pursue the programme of study successfully. The ABCD is empowered to make judgements about the extent to which qualifications or experience gained elsewhere may be accepted in partial fulfilment of its requirements.

Portfolio

All applicants are required to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. A portfolio is a showcase of an applicant's work as an artist or designer and can be made up of images, videos or writing examples. The portfolio helps us to better understand the applicant and allows them to show evidence of their ability and motivation to undertake a given programme.

Each programme is looking for different things in a portfolio; each Head of Programme provides specific advice on portfolio requirements in the online application system. We advise prospective students to consider these requirements carefully before submitting their application.

Applicant Qualities

Generally, we are looking for applicants to demonstrate their:

- creativity, imagination and innovation;
- ability to articulate the intentions of the work;
- intellectual engagement in areas relevant to the work;
- technical skills appropriate to the work;
- potential to benefit from the programme and achieve MA standards overall.

English Language

Applicants who are not a national of a majority English-speaking country will need to demonstrate their English language proficiency. The College accepts a range of English language qualifications. The full list can be seen at <https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/entrance-requirements/english-language-requirements/>

Applicants are exempt from this requirement if they have received a 2.1 degree or above from a university in a majority English-speaking nation within the last two years.

If a student would need a Student Visa visa to study at the RCA, they will also need to meet the Home Office's minimum requirements for entry clearance.

Admission Process

Applications must be made directly to the College through our online application portal:

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/application-process/ma-application-process/>

Upon completion of that first stage of the application process, candidates will be invited to submit a portfolio of their work, a 300-word statement of intent and a video communicating clearly their motivations, personal interests and why they are pursuing a Masters degree at the Royal College of Art. These materials are reviewed by members of the programme team who will communicate an academic decision to the College Registry, who manage the process of offer-making in line with the College's recruitment targets. In some cases, where the programme team is not able to make an admission decision based solely upon the work submitted by the applicant, we may invite the candidate to undertake an interview with us.

Whilst there are still spaces available, successful candidates will be made an offer of a place. If there is no vacancy for a subsequent successful applicant, the candidate will be placed on a waiting list, and may be made a firm offer should a place become available.

Programme-Specific requirements

Specific advice on programme portfolio requirements is provided by the Head of Programme in the online application system. Please consult the College website for further information on programme-specific admission and portfolio requirements.