



Royal College of Art

Postgraduate Art and Design

**V&A/RCA History of Design MA
Specification 2018–19**

1. General Information

Award	Programme Title	Duration	Mode of Study
MA(RCA)	V&A/RCA History of Design (pathways in Design and Material Culture, Performance and Photography)	15 months with 18- month option for home/equivalent students	Full-time with part-time option for Unit 5 (Home/equivalent students only)

Awarding Institution	Royal College of Art
Teaching Institutions	Victoria and Albert Museum and Royal College of Art
Professional Accreditation	N/A
Qualifications Framework Level	7
Date of most recent validation	March 2017
Programme Specification Date	2018/19

2. Philosophy of the Programme

V&A/RCA MA History of Design offers groundbreaking tools and approaches for studying the history and material culture of design, performance and photography in everyday life, across a global geography from 1400 to the present. The MA is jointly offered by two world-leading centres for scholarship and creativity, the RCA and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), and draws on the extensive resources of both institutions and our location in London.

We embrace history that is public-facing, experimental and committed to scholarly excellence, as befits our location in the public museum and the art school. We use artefact analysis – of services, interactions, policies, institutions and legal and technical systems as well as physical objects and spaces – alongside more conventional historical methods to generate new perspectives on large historical questions. We employ a distinctly global outlook to historical questions, whether this means placing local histories in comparative context or tracing global networks through material culture.

The **Design and Material Culture pathway** uses artefact analysis – of services, interactions, policies, institutions and legal and technical systems as well as physical objects and spaces – alongside more conventional historical methods to generate new perspectives on large historical questions. Specialist areas for teaching and research include fashion and textile history, architecture, science and technology, the material culture of politics and the everyday, making/craft, practice-based history and global history through material culture. Tutors' research and teaching expertise range from the early modern to the contemporary, with particular area expertise in the UK/Europe, North and South America and Asia.

By engaging with a wide range of materials from the National Collection of Performing Arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum, students on the **Performance pathway** explore how the material remains of performance inform our understanding of the performing arts, historically and today. Jointly offered with the V&A's ground-breaking Theatre and Performance Department, the pathway offers collections-based teaching with one of the world's most diverse collections of material documenting current practice and the history of performance. It draws on curatorial, industry and academic expertise and experience to provide new insights into the culture, economics and politics of performance.

The **Photography pathway** employs collections-based teaching with the V&A's extensive photography collection to consider photography as a set of material practices, processes and artefacts. Jointly offered with the V&A Photography Department, the pathway emphasises diverse methods for understanding photographs as variously artistic, scientific, technological and social artefacts, and for exploring historical and contemporary

issues - including questions of global history and empire - through photography as material culture.

3. Educational Aims of the Programme

V&A/RCA MA History of Design (Design and Material Culture, Performance, Photography) aims to provide students with a postgraduate education in a range of relevant research methods and approaches for the history and material culture of design, performance and photography, for application across a variety of professional challenges.

To this end, the programme's aims are:

To develop students' skills in historical research and interpretation from both primary and secondary evidence;

To develop students' ability to identify and employ relevant research methods for studying the history and material culture of design, performance and photography, with particular emphasis on artefact analysis;

To enable students to identify, assess and engage critically with relevant existing research in the history and material culture of design, performance, photography and their related areas;

To develop students' ability to identify and critically employ theoretical concepts and approaches for the analysis of practices and material cultures of design, performance and photography, past and present.

To develop students' confidence in using empirically-researched data and theoretically-informed ideas in conjunction with each other.

To develop students' skills for presenting an articulate, reasoned and compelling argument in written and oral form, to diverse audiences;

To develop students' understanding of the conventions and mechanisms involved in presenting written and oral work at postgraduate level;

To develop students' ability to critically contribute to social and environmental sustainability as a design historian.

By the end of the period of study, we aim for students to have achieved the programme's objectives, which can be summarised as follows: To enable students to emerge as fully-fledged historians of the practices and material cultures of design, performance and photography, equipped with the necessary intellectual skills to pursue advanced research in these areas and to apply them across professional contexts, both academic and non-academic, within a variety of self-defined career paths.

4. Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programme

Able to:	A. Intellectual Engagement
A1.	INNOVATION: develop innovative ways to approach the history and material culture of design, performance and photography, including artefact-based research.
A2.	CONTEXT: demonstrate an advanced understanding of the practices, processes and materials of historical and contemporary design, performance and photography, as well as their cultural, economic, political, social, technological and historical contexts and dynamics.
A3.	EXPERIMENTATION AND RISK-TAKING: experiment in the use of research methods, topics, modes of presentation, collaborators and audiences for the history and material culture of design, performance or photography.
A4.	CRITICALITY: demonstrate the ability to critically assess the relevance and rigour of existing and emergent arguments, debates and bodies of research around the history and material culture of design, performance and photography, and to engage as a critical, reasoned manner with them.

Able to:	B. Technical Skills
B1.	RESEARCH: display a mastery of the research skills necessary for developing, testing and substantiating a sound academic argument from primary, secondary and theoretical sources, including artefact analysis and archival skills
B2.	PRODUCTION: present written and oral arguments at an advanced level appropriate for postgraduate work.
B3.	COMMUNICATION: articulate and debate ideas in a professional, reasoned and effective manner to diverse audiences.
B4.	PRESENTATION: Present written and oral work to standards expected at postgraduate level.

Able to:	C. Professional Development
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C1.	INDEPENDENCE: work independently to initiate, manage and complete research in a timely manner, including collections-led projects and external collaborations.
C2.	COLLABORATION: participate as a reasoned and respectful member of group projects, workshops and seminars, including collaborations with external partners.
C3.	IDENTITY: define and demonstrate the ability to reflect on a professional identity as a historian and researcher through the articulation of professional values and skills, in relation to chosen subfields and disciplines.

5. Programme Structure and Curriculum

Programme Units and Credit Ratings

HoD1 (Programme): Artefacts in Context 40 credits
HoD2 (Pathway): Research in Context 40 credits
HoD3 (Programme): History as Public Practice 40 credits
HoD4 (Pathway): Research Methods 20 credits
HoD5 (Programme): Independent Research Project (Dissertation) 60 credits
SoAH School Unit: 20 credits
College-wide Unit: 20 credits

6. Learning and Teaching Methods

Seminars

Seminars consist of group discussion of particular historical themes, provocations, practices or issues based on set readings for each session, led by the tutor, a visiting lecturer or students. Seminars will often include small group projects and presentations, and are often conducted partially or in entirety in V&A galleries and collections, or in other sites across London. Seminar overviews, schedules and other reading lists are made available online in advance of each term. Students are expected to keep up with the reading and to take an active part in the seminars, including contributions to discussion and to group work.

Workshops

Workshops offer an intensive learning experience focused on a particular topic or problem. They are concentrated in a short time, often but not exclusively in a one-week block, and will often involve experimental research and learning methods, working to a brief and group work. Workshop overviews, schedules and reading lists are made available online in advance of each term. Students are expected to keep up with the reading and to take an active part in workshop activities, including contributions to discussion and to group work.

Lectures

As conventionally understood. Lectures ordinarily include time for questions and discussion, either as a full group or in smaller discussion sections. Lectures may include

screenings or performance.

Tutorials

Teaching on the MA is supported extensively by 1:1 tutorials for solo independent work, and by group tutorials in the case of group projects. Tutorials take the form of a focussed discussion between a student or group of students and a tutor, on a topic agreed in advance. Tutorials are used predominantly for the following purposes:

To discuss choices for essay, dissertation, project and other independent work; to suggest areas of research focus and reading material; to provide feedback on draft material; to discuss problems encountered with students' research and project work; to provide mentoring

To present and discuss feedback on submitted work after assessment;

To discuss more general issues with the programme material and coursework.

Students are expected to prepare for each tutorial and take a proactive role in them. It is good practice to make a list of action points following each tutorial, and to check these with tutors.

Research Seminar Series

Speakers drawn from the staff team and wider community present talks relating to their current research. Some speakers work within the history and material culture of design, performance and photography; others represent cutting-edge, relevant research in related areas such as theatre and performance studies, anthropology, economic history, geography, the history of art and architecture, medical humanities and the history of science and technology. Seminar details are publicised internally to the V&A and RCA communities and externally, to researchers and students working in similar or related fields.

Students are expected to participate fully in the research seminars, asking questions as well as attending. Participation is an important part of professional development, and allows students to meet other specialists and make contacts beyond the RCA and V&A.

Site Visits

Trips ask students to apply methods and perspectives gained in taught sessions to the analysis of performances, spaces, buildings, historical sites, exhibitions and environments in London, elsewhere in the UK and internationally. Some trips are organised and led by students, others are organised by students, supported by tutors, as part of coursework.

Site visits and trips may have advance reading and ordinarily include a discussion of issues generated by the reading onsite.

7. Assessment

General

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found in the College Regulations, sections 2.7 – 2.10.

Unit based assessment

Final Examination

All assessment in V&A/RCA MA History of Design is summative. Final Examination examines the students' ability to synthesise their learning and to express it through the submission of a formal assessed element such as an essay or portfolio, or in a formal exam context through performance in a live event, such as the viva voce examinations at the conclusion of Units 2, 3 and 5.

Termly self-assessment forms, progress tutorials with the personal tutor and progress report forms completed by the personal tutor support students in recognising their attainment of programme learning outcomes beyond formal assessment points.

Unit 1 Essay

This c. 6,000 word essay is expected to develop three main intellectual skills. First, the ability to locate and interpret archival sources; second, the ability to explore different ways of interpreting a single object; third, the ability to relate archival evidence to a wider context, and to demonstrate an understanding of an object's social and ideological context.

Unit 2 Essay

This c. 6,000 word essay assesses competing explanations of change in the artefacts, environments or other aspects of material culture of design and performance. The essay should demonstrate three intellectual skills. Firstly, the ability to identify patterns of historical change in the design or realisation of a particular aspect of the history and material culture of design or performance; secondly, and understanding of the relevant historical reasons for change over time, among them social, cultural, gendered, political and technological forces; and thirdly, the ability to evaluate different forms of explanation for change, and to apply them in a critical way.

Unit 2 Oral Examination

A 20-minute oral examination in term 3, following completion of Unit 2, in which the student's progress towards programme learning outcomes, as demonstrated through growth during the Unit 2 weekly components and Unit 2 assessed work, are discussed. The examination takes place concurrently with the SoAH School Unit.

Unit 3 Oral Examination

Following completion of the Unit 3 Project Portfolio, students prepare and deliver an oral and visual presentation in a viva voce format to an exam board composed of staff team members who have taught the student. The presentation addresses accomplishments, skills learnt and challenges met during Unit 3 Project Portfolio work, in relation to programme learning outcomes and supported by material, visual and/or textual documentation of projects. This examination takes place concurrently with the Unit 5 Examination.

Unit 4 Research Proposal

A research proposal presented in writing, using a pro forma outlining research topic, objectives, archives, methods and theoretical approaches, existing literature, key challenges, budget, timeline and other relevant aspects, and in oral presentation.

Unit 5 Dissertation: An 18-20,000 word dissertation on an original topic, based on original primary and secondary research, employing relevant methods and theoretical frameworks to generate and substantiate an academically-sound argument at postgraduate level.

Unit 5 Oral Examination

Following completion of Unit 5, students are examined on the dissertation's achievements in relation to unit and programme learning outcomes, by a panel of staff team members who have taught the student. Students have the option to begin the examination with a five-minute presentation but are not required to do so. This examination takes place concurrently with the Unit 3 Examination.

SoAH School Unit Portfolio

Students produce a pre-formatted digital professional practice portfolio, documenting selected work and practice, and articulating it in relation to some of the key concerns raised in the unit. This should encompass a 1500-2000 word statement, to include: a record of participation in school crits (500 words per crit), with images of work presented, reflection on conversations that took place and key references.

an additional 500-1000 words on contextualised practice in economic and social context, referencing work in MA school group and what's next series.

The portfolio is assessed at Unit 2/School Unit Joint Panel. (Final Examination). (20 Credits)

School Exam Board then reviews marks from all units and recommends pass or fail.

Learning Outcomes: B2. C2. C3.

This is delivered to all 10 SoAH MA programmes.

SoAH College-20 Unit

This unit is delivered as a college-wide unit. Assessed Portfolio with panel feedback (Final Examination). (20 Credits)

Learning Outcomes: A1. B1. B2.

To graduate, the student must accumulate 240 credits and pass each assessment.

8. Admissions

Cross-College and Cross-School Requirements

Refer to the College Prospectus for details of cross-College entrance and portfolio requirements for the MA Entrance Examination.

Programme-Specific Requirements

Students should have a good first degree in an arts and humanities or art, design, photography or performance practice background. Students from other backgrounds, for example in the social sciences or professions, are also encouraged to apply. We welcome applications from students of all ages, and view both prior academic and professional experience as valuable.

Candidates should supply one piece of recent writing, for example an academic assignment, which displays their preparedness and appropriateness for the programme. Candidates who are not recent graduates are welcome to supply a new piece of writing, such as an exhibition or book review.

Candidates who do not speak English as their first language are required to produce evidence that within the previous two years they have achieved at least 90 in the TOEFL internet test with an additional writing test score of TWE 20 or an IELTS exam score of 6.5 with 6 in writing.

9. Quality Indicators

Refer to the RCA Quality Handbook for more details of the College's quality and standards procedures.

All academic programmes at the Royal College of Art are revalidated on a six-yearly cycle. Revalidations involve external subject experts and internal panel members appointed by the College's Academic Standards Committee (ASC).

Programmes are required to submit an annual Review, the primary purpose of which is to evaluate the experience of students enrolled on both its MA and MPhil / PhD courses.

External Examiners are appointed for a maximum of three years to ensure that:

- the academic standard for each award is set and maintained at an appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this;
- the standards of awards are comparable with those of other UK higher education institutions;
- the process of assessment and examination is fair and has been fairly conducted.

An Internal Moderator is appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of ASC to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for the objective assessment of student work and to ensure comparability of examination practices between programmes within the College.

Students have the opportunity to provide feedback through regular programme-level meetings (at least one each year considers the delivery of the MA programme and the External Examiner report); and through an annual College-wide MA student survey. A Student Representative Council brings forward issues from School and Programme Forums and programme-level meetings to the President and Vice-President of the Students' Union who then, where appropriate, present these issues at College committees or to the Senior Management of the College.