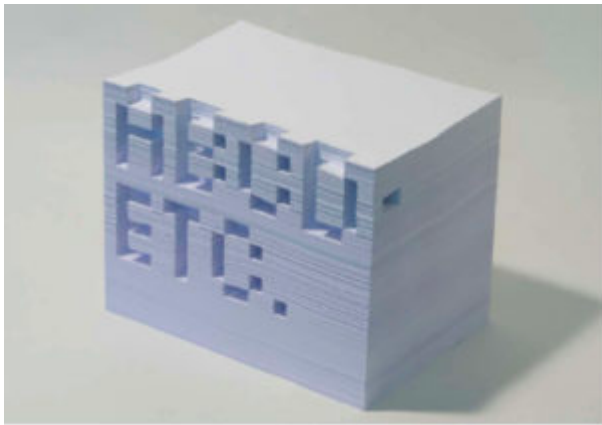


# / / / / What is the MA CAT?



## / / / / Re-imagine the Art School

Established by Neil Mulholland in 2001, the Masters of Contemporary Art Theory is a post-studio programme that supports the research and practices of artists and aspiring art professionals alike.

Our MA CAT encourages practices that are **speculative** and **reflective**, developing **artistic research** on, and in, a range of media, sites and organisations. The MA CAT supports an **applied knowledge** of art now, grounding schooling in the practices of art and contemporary art **theory** as well as **extra-disciplinary** and **intermedial** approaches.

The taught **curriculum** consists of an innovative series of **learning sprints** designed to support the development of your artistic research and practice through **workshops**, **practica**, **partnerships** with our stakeholders, and via carefully scaffolded approaches to **Collaborative Inquiry** and **peer-production**.

Students create art projects designed to engage and develop emerging hypereconomies of contemporary art and its variety of media, technologies, images, artefacts, tactics, texts, cultural contexts and professional practices.

---

# //// Who is CAT for?

The programme is aimed both at **aspiring arts professionals** and **professional artists** who want to develop a **research-practice** by extending their practical, theoretical, organisational and economic engagement with contemporary art. It develops from a broad to a specialist understanding of the technical resources and validating contexts in which artists work today.

The CAT programme supports graduate students seeking to focus on their:

## **Professional Development:**

The CAT programme will help you to develop a creative and organisational **professional-practice**, one that allows you to **take control** of the production and distribution of your work by effectively combining the roles of professional artist, theorist and programmer.

Our unique focus on artistic learning, additionally, means that you will graduate with a heightened awareness of the **educational possibilities** of contemporary art as a catalyst for social and political transformation.

## **Interdisciplinary Development:**

– If you are a **professional artist/theorist/curator**, the CAT programme will greatly expand and develop both your existing knowledge of contemporary art *and* your own practice, situating both in relation to emerging tendencies in cognate disciplines in the arts, humanities and social sciences such as materialist and cultural studies, educational research, geography, and social anthropology.

**OR**

– If you are an **aspiring art professional** with a non-art background, the CAT programme scaffolds and supports your **conversion** to contemporary art from cognate undergraduate disciplines in the arts, humanities or social sciences. Dedicated to widening participation in the arts and demystifying artistic learning, the CAT programme is unique in offering this bridge to anyone seeking a way *in* to our discipline.

## Researcher Development:

The CAT programme specifically prepares you to establish a scholarly and artistic **research-practice**, thereby enabling you to embark on a professional career as a researcher within the broad field of contemporary art, that is, in *both* academic (PhD) *and* artworld settings.

---

## //// Our Philosophy and Values

A defining aspect of our theory programme is the emphasis it places upon **speculative scepticism** – not proceeding from the position of knowing what post-studio practice is; rather, being motivated by speculation on what it might be. We generate an atmosphere that supports **mutual co-operation**, a dynamic, intellectually ambitious environment in which staff and students can learn together.

Our students generate and embody an **assemblage of practices**, combining process of production, translation and consumption. *Our students* make this happen – here's how we do this:

- MA CAT students often work on collaborative forms of practice and inquiry, therefore the programme faculty are eager to support applicants based on their ability to work as part of a creative team as much as we are interested in their artistic and academic potential. We attract students with very different backgrounds and experiences. This *difference* generates dissensus, diversity and a richness that is key to learning about, and expanding, the field of contemporary art. The focus on building a supportive creative community through innovative forms of peer-generated knowledge (such as paralogy, open networked learning and swarming), on the rigorous and experimental combination of theory and practice and the international profile of the student body makes our Masters programme unique.

- The CAT programme's faculty and our partnership organisations regularly identify and examine what are (currently) accepted notions of artistic production as a means of encouraging CAT students to develop a highly ambitious research-practice. To this end, faculty seek to provide specialist support for students wishing to pursue research on and in established fields of contemporary art practices and theory while fully engaging with the ever changing context of emerging media and innovative forms of critical and organisational praxis.
- 

## //// CAT Programme Director's Overview

Professor Neil Mulholland

Re-imagine the Art School :

An Introduction to the Masters of Contemporary Art Theory Programme

## //// A Vision for Artistic Research

*"Research is not a particular thing you do for so many hours each day. It is rather a way of living curiously – that is, with care and attention."*

Ingold, Tim. Anthropology Between Art and Science: An Essay on the Meaning of Research, *FIELD*, Issue 11, Fall 2018

The CAT programme's long-term aim is to ensure that all researchers *will take their lead from artists. To enable this*, we approach re-search as a careful, continuous quest driven by curiosity.

Rather than simply teach our research, CAT faculty actively involve our students *in* the research process. A curriculum

that is fresh to colleagues and students, is a curriculum that provokes curiosity.

The strategic management of our programme's resources – then – is driven and transformed by what *actually* makes staff and students curious. How do we ensure this?

---

## **//// Transformational Curriculum: A Crucible of Research-led Teaching**

The Masters of Contemporary Art is spearheading The University of Edinburgh's programme of Curriculum Transformation project by generating new learning structures that support a holistic and integrated art school culture. The programme has re-aligned learning and teaching with artistic research and the needs of our arts communities, enabling CAT staff and students to lead our University's Strategy 2030.

The residual culture in *most* art schools still remains motivated more by teaching than by research. This presents its own solution: *re-imagining our teaching* in contemporary art theory is the motor of our research, re-igniting research as a form of Collective Inquiry ('swarming'), sparking authentic connections between staff and students.

To grow and diversify our artistic research culture, CAT staff update and develop our programme using staff-student Action Learning Sets. What CAT staff learn from teaching each course forms the pillars of each annual iteration of the CAT programme, allowing us to integrate the latest research and development in art into our courses:

### **Semester 1 | Teaching Blocks 1 & 2 :**

**Contemporary Art and Open Learning ARTX10064 (20 Credits) – This course is built upon four learning sprints.**

**Themes in Contemporary Art ARTX11044 (40 Credits) – This course is built upon four learning sprints.**

### **Semester 2 | Teaching Blocks 3 & 4 :**

**Contemporary Art + Anthropology ARTX11042 (20 Credits)**

**Curating ARTX11047 (40 Credits)**

**Summer | Teaching Block 5 :**

**Contemporary Artistic Research ARTX11050 – (60 credits)**

## **//// Radical Perspectivism: Contemporary Art as Anticipatory Organisational Praxis**

By consciously rooting our CAT curriculum in our collective inquiry, we seek to continually expose contemporary art's Hidden Curricula to scrutiny.

If the contemporary artworld is to become a learning organisation this process of unlearning and decolonising art education is a crucial first step.

The Contemporary Art Theory programme adopts a 'perspectivist' approach here. The programme begins by acknowledging that the perspectives faculty offer to our students shape and valorise their identities. Here, the CAT programme seeks to develop a holistic approach to materiality, beginning with the provocation that:

*the production of objects is always simultaneously the production of people and social relations*

Graeber, David. 'Turning Modes of Production Inside Out, or, why capitalism is a transformation of slavery..' *Critique of Anthropology* 2006 26: 1, 70.

By engaging equally with the *production of people and social relations* **and** the production of material objects, MA Contemporary Art Theory students shift from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from being helplessly reactive to actively creating their artworlds. For this is to happen, our art students can't simply learn how to see things from an artist's

viewpoint.

The MA Contemporary Art Theory programme is, thus, an integrated curriculum (ICM) – specifically crafted to develop an understanding of multiple perspectives in ways that open up different possibilities for our graduates to those offered by cookie-cutter MFA Studio and Curatorial programmes.

This means focusing not only on what we teach, but on on how we learn, AND on the many different environments we learn in.

In the CAT programme, artistic learning and research is conducted in a wealth of settings: in galleries, biennale, residencies, art fairs, AND – of course – through artistic and theoretical practice itself.

Artistic learning and research is an exploded network; we will learn how to pool and share our resources to cultivate a climate in which all communities flourish.

---

## //// Our Curious Commons

Artistic research is not just for artists: everyone is curious and everyone cares. Indeed, as a (Scottish Funding Council) SFC-funded charity, the CAT programme strives to be a democratic intellect for the public benefit, visibly upholding the value of research-led art education as a means to develop a learning society.

In 2021, open research became the new norm. A **Plan S** for artistic research has presented the MA CAT with a major opportunity in the form of a challenge:

*How can the art school common more of its research and educational resources to foster new publics?*

As it stands, a lot of contemporary art is freely accessible in public contexts. Open Access (Plan S), however, additionally offers insight into the 'workings' of artistic research.

The CAT programme has seized on this unique opportunity to lead on The University of Edinburgh's Open Education and Widening Participation initiatives by researching AND teaching 'in the open'.

Open Art Education – initiated and supported by our new Semester 1 course Contemporary Art and Open Learning – generates vital *informal* learning resources and for *formal* accreditation such as Access to Creative Education in Scotland (ACES).

*You can watch to Professor Neil Mulholland presenting a reflective practice paper on the 10-year incubation of this unique open art course here (link – 15mins):*

## //// Who Cares?

The shared experience of lockdown during the COVID pandemic has led everyone to realise that we deserve better care and attention.

To transform CAT's vision of open artistic learning and research into a practice, good intentions must become good habits. To collectively instill good habits, CAT faculty have nurtured a unique peer-to-peer mentor culture: a **paragogs** that ensures all staff and students have a core group of peers ('**basho**') who will listen to them. Active listening *is*, of course, the best form of feedback...and the most difficult to provide!

Mentoring is a vital skill we can co-learn. Hosting all staff AND students within mutually supportive **basho** enables us to



effectively support each other as researchers.

These are but a few of the ways in which CAT's transformational curriculum germinates a holistic and integrated art school culture.

Making our wide variety of practices more porous for students and our broader publics, the Masters of Contemporary Art Theory programme dissolves barriers to learning and ensures that we can all feed our curiosity.

## **//// What might you do?**

The MA CAT will nurture the creative, organisational and economic knowledge required for a career in today's contemporary art world(s), enabling you to integrate a range of perspectives traversing the roles of artist, academic, art critic, producer and curator.

The Theory programme, equally, bridges the gap between undergraduate and doctoral research, enabling you to prepare a successful application to a PhD programme.

The MA CAT will also support your creative and professional development as an art educator.

### **Some of our Alumni include:**

Dr Panos Kompatsiaris – Assistant Professor of Art and Media at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia.

Dr Tim Stott – Associate Professor in Modern and Contemporary Art History, Department of History of Art and Architecture, School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin, Ireland.

Dr Deborah Jackson – Head of Fine Art Critical Studies, School of Fine Art, The Glasgow School of Art, Scotland.

Dr Laura Edbrook – Lecturer in Fine Art Critical Studies, The Glasgow School of Art, Scotland.

Dr Emma Balkind, Teaching Fellow in Visual Culture, ECA, The University of Edinburgh.

Dr Jake Watts, Lecturer in Visual Culture, ECA, The University of Edinburgh.

Kristín Dagmar Jóhannesdóttir – Director of Gerðarsafn

Kópavogur Art Museum, Iceland. Chair of International Council of Museums, Iceland

Claire Walsh – Assistant Curator: Collections, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland.

Rachael Disbury – Production Director at Alchemy Film & Arts Hawick, Scotland

James Clegg – Assistant Curator, Talbot Rice Gallery, The University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Dr Tiffany Boyle – Co-Director of Mother Tongue

Dr Norman Hogg – Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded PhD Graduate, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

Dr Dane Sutherland – Arts & Humanities Research Council Funded PhD Graduate, School of Art, University of Edinburgh. Director of Most Dismal Swamp (art and record label), London.

Professor Neil Mulholland [(c)krs] #été MMXXI Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license 20212-23