

## In Profile – meet our alumni ↓

**Gwen Cunningham**



Alumni (Fashion Design & Visual Culture)



**Name:** Gwen Cunningham

**Graduation Year:** 2014

**Discipline:** Fashion Design and Visual Culture

**Location:** Amsterdam

**Current Career:** Circular Textiles

Programme Lead for Textiles at Circle Economy

Sustainability Coordinator and Lecturer at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute

### What career path did you want to follow as a child?

I was a notorious letter writer and diary owner. And I remember being envious of the solitary, hermetic life of the nuns in the convent near my house.

### Why did you decide to study at National College of Art & Design?

I changed my mind up until the last minute, jumping between it and a thousand other things. I worried that my more academic side would not be satisfied if I attended an art college. I worried that my more creative side would not be satisfied if I didn't. Ultimately, I think I chose it because it scared me a little, and so I thought it must be worth doing.

### How did you develop your career towards your current job / practice?

The day after graduating, I moved to the Netherlands, the 'circular hotspot' of Europe. Within months, I started interning at Circle Economy's Textiles Programme and was hired six months later as a researcher and analyst for the [Fibersort](#) project. We were, together with partners, building a technology that automatically sorted large volumes of mixed post-consumer textiles by fibre type. Once sorted, these materials could become reliable, consistent input materials for high-value textile to textile recyclers – allowing textile waste to be transformed into new textiles. It was very different to what I had been trained for, but I loved it.

In 2016, I became the Lead of the Textiles Programme. Today, we have the mission to

achieve a zero waste textiles industry. We do this by connecting a circular supply chain of producers and solution providers in order to 1.) build the data, technology and infrastructure needed to valorise textile waste at end-of-life, and 2) train and support apparel brands and educational institutions to adopt circular design strategies and circular business models.

During my first year in Amsterdam, I was approached by the Head of Design at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. Their sustainability coordinator and lead lecturer was retiring, and they wanted to build capacity in the field of the circular economy. I always had a big interest in education, and was excited by the opportunity to ensure that all the new knowledge and insight that I was developing in my role at Circle Economy, would be passed on to future generations of fashion professionals. Today, I continue to divide my time between both roles.

### What is the one experience – during your time at NCAD – that has informed you most in your career / work to date?

I followed a joint honours programme in NCAD, combining fashion design with visual culture. This dual education satisfied both my mind and my hands, and allowed me to take a critical, objective look at the industry. I realised that I didn't like what I saw; a system for producing, distributing, using and disposing textiles and clothing that operates in an almost completely linear, take-make-waste, manner.

My final year thesis explored alternative economic models for the fashion industry. I didn't realise it back then, but I was describing a circular textiles industry. My work, ever since, has the aim of turning that vision into a reality.

### If you were chatting with current NCAD students today, what is the one piece of advice you would offer?

For those in the field of design, I would ask – what do you want to achieve through the items you create? What is your purpose as a designer? What problem are you trying to solve?

### Given the global turmoil and change, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, what – in your opinion – are the opportunities for those in creative industries?

Constraint drives creativity. It is the role of the designer to imagine, and draw pathways

## What's Coming Up ↓

Show 2020

ncad.works

Last month our Graduate Programme 2020 was launched. Our digital catalogue shows the work of our 2020 graduating students; an extraordinary group who completed their NCAD journey during extraordinary times. [Explore the online catalogue here.](#)

### NCAD Online Graduate Programme 2020

This online and virtual programme promotes and documents the work of our graduate students through broadcasts from the NCAD's social media channels. It takes the form of a series of curated online broadcasts that include: student made behind-the-scenes filmed vignettes; online screenings of virtual and lens-based practices; film; and online symposia.

We kicked off this programme on Monday 28 September with online screenings of virtual and lens-based practice from our graduates.

### CEAD Graduates 2020 Exhibition

The Centre for Continuing Education in Art & Design (CEAD) at the NCAD offers part-time courses in art and design for adults and school-leavers who want to explore their creative potential and learn new skills.

- Monday, 5 October – Friday, 16 October 2020

[Find the schedule here.](#)

towards alternative future scenarios. Use your creativity to solve the social and environmental challenges that we are faced with right now. And start by immersing yourself in the uncomfortable ambiguity of the challenge you are trying to solve – embrace the problem-space first.

Portfolio Links:

<https://www.circle-economy.com/>  
<https://amfi.nl/>

Gwen's interview is part of our 'Alumni Stories' series, where some of our NCAD graduates reflect on their time at NCAD.

[Explore the full series here.](#)

## In Action ↓



The importance of public art in NCAD's curriculum has recently been enhanced through the college's participation as a project partner in the **PARTGO EU R&D Partnership**. **PARTGO** is an EU initiative that aims to increase knowledge of, and skills in, public art among art institutes in Europe, with a special focus on the development of public engagement and public relations skills.

The partnership with NCAD began in September 2019 and it is envisaged that it will run until September 2022. As part of the **PARTGO** partnership, NCAD will work alongside art colleges from Finland, Estonia and Hungary to develop the professional skills of students and teachers in the fields of visual arts and media. NCAD will work with students to plan and execute public art works, while learning new techniques and ways to collaborate with the public. Learnings from the pilot modules will be developed into a digital public art toolkit that will inform public art education across Europe.

## Opportunities ↓

**Black Church Print Studio** is now inviting applications for its 2021 Emerging Curator Award. This programme is designed to provide a platform for emerging curatorial research. It is open to recent graduates (graduates from 2012-2020) from academic backgrounds including Art Theory, Art History, Aesthetics and Fine Art backgrounds. The successful applicant will be given the opportunity to realize a public exhibition of work at the prime location of The Library Project in Temple Bar in September 2021.

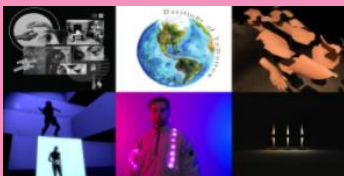
Deadline: Monday, October 12th

[Further information can be found here.](#)

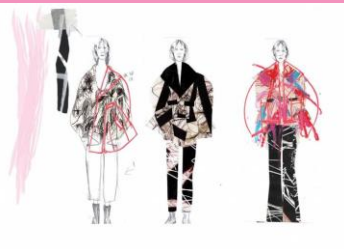
## Staff / Student Achievements ↓

### NCAD grads win double scoop!

Sabhín O'Sullivan (BA Product Design, 2020) has been voted the overall winner of the Design for Social Good category and Diarmuid Farrell (BA Interaction Design) has won in the Interaction / Game Design category in the **ARTSTHREAD i-D Global Graduate Awards 2020**. [Read more here.](#)



Communication Design Students have been recognised nationally and internationally at the **International Society of Typographic Designers (ISTD)** student assessments. Five final year BA Graphic Design students have been recognised for their responses to the ISTD set briefs, and have been offered membership to the Society. The students and staff involved were awarded certificates in recognition of their achievements at the ISTD Awards on 18th September.



This year's winner of the **Brown Thomas Designer to Watch** bursary is NCAD's Una Curran, who was chosen for her collection, *Entangled Traces*.

The prize includes a paid internship with designer, JW Anderson in London, living expenses and a showcase of her winning designs as part of CREATE at Brown Thomas. [More details can be found here.](#)

The **2021-22 Fulbright Irish Awards** are open for applications until 2 November 2020.

These awards fund and support students, researchers, academics and [professionals](#) across all disciplines to study, research, or teach / lecture in the USA.

[More details can be found here.](#)

## September on Campus ↓

We are very much looking forward to starting the new academic year, and after months of planning we are all set for NCAD college life to start again both on campus and online. This is always an exciting time of year - and this year, while a little unusual is no different - and we are delighted to welcome our incoming first year and postgraduate students and wish them every success for their journey at NCAD.

As well as all the preparations underway on Campus, September has been busy at NCAD; it was a pleasure to welcome a number of our graduating students back to our studios and workshops NCAD in order to further resolve their final projects. The students worked with Anne Kelly, Curator of NCAD In Public to host a day virtual Open Studio inviting an expanded audience into the studios to see their work in progress and hear more about their projects. [The films made during the day can be seen here.](#)

We were also delighted to welcome Minister Simon Harris on a virtual visit to the campus to meet some of our graduating students and launch our new digital platform for our [2020 Graduates](#).

In addition to our activities supporting our 2020 Graduates, our continuing PME students were working in the NCAD Gallery to develop their Change Lab project - delayed by the campus closure, and the results of the project will be viewable through [ncad.ie](#) in October.

We look forward to continuing to support our 2020 graduates with a number of virtual and physical programmes and events taking place over the year which will showcase the work of this extraordinary group of students who are graduating in extraordinary times. At times like these we need thinkers and doers who are not afraid to ask questions, adapt and lead, and this generation of NCAD graduates' creativity and resilience will benefit us all in years to come.

