

Critical Cultures

Elective Programme

Autumn Trimester

23

NCAD

The **deadline**
to sign up for an
elective is **mid-**
day Thursday
21st September
2023.

Confirmation of
your elective by
Tuesday 26th
September 2023.

Classes start on
Wednesday 27th
September 2023.

An elective is an weekly 90-120 minute class offered by the Critical Cultures programme by the School of Visual Culture.

They are taught on-site at Thomas Street.

There is a choice of 15 electives.

You will be sent a link to sign up for your Critical Cultures Elective.

If you have not received it, please email visualculture@staff.ncad.ie

The invite to sign up is sent to your NCAD email address.

Students sign up for one elective unless they are Joint Course year 2 or year 2 BA Visual Culture or or doing Visual Culture Studio Plus. (These students sign up for two).

Final year Joint Course and Final Year BA Visual Culture students sign up for one elective.

Some electives will be oversubscribed. We cannot guarantee your first or second choice of elective but we will do our best.

Please do not sign up for an elective you have already studied before.

Details of times and summaries appear on the following pages.

Electives - Wednesdays

9.30-11.30

**Art and Money
Rachel O Dwyer**

13.30-15.30

**Systems and Networks:
Aesthetics and Politics
Francis Halsall**

9.30-11.30

**The Female City
Denis Kehoe**

13.30-15.30

**Art, Music and Activism:
Agitation and Protest
Anne Kelly**

9.30-11.30

**Art, Design, and the Sciences
Jye Benjamin O Sullivan**

13.30-15.30

**Thinking About Photography
Fiona Loughnane**

9.30-11.30

**Inside Jokes: Humour in Art and
Design
Vaari Claffey**

13.30-15.30

**Words, Images and Messages
Wendy Williams**

11.30-13.30

**Psychology of Space
Silvia Loeffler**

15.30-17.30

**Vision & Spectacle
Silvia Loeffler**

11.30-13.30

**Critical Race Theory - Race and
Gender
John Wilkins**

15.30-17.30

**Once Upon a Time in Cinema
Denis Kehoe**

11.30-13.30

**Fashion: Now & Then;
Contemporary Issues in
Historical Context
Hilary O'Kelly**

15.30-17.30

**This Class is Cancelled
Sarah Pierce**

11.30-13.30

**Art in a Time of Crisis
Emma Mahony**



Joseph Beuys, *Kunst=Kapital*, 1979

Art and Money

Rachel O Dwyer

Wednesdays 9.30-11.30

What makes a work of art valuable? Are there things, like art, culture, sex and carbon emissions, that shouldn't EVER be for sale? What if artists ran the economy? What are NFTs, and why are artists so interested in them all of a sudden? Is art money? Is money art? And why are artists so poor?

This elective begins with the idea that art and money share a lot of common ground. Looking closely at money can tell us something about art and cultural production, and looking closely at contemporary art can tell us something about money and the market economy. For one, art is tied up with capitalism in ways we'd sometimes like to ignore (hello Banksy, hello NFTs). For another, art and money, as we'll see, are rich, symbolic practices; they both involve speculating and 'making things up'; they both rely on an agreed set of social and cultural conventions to attain value. At a moment when hedge funds speak about art as a new kind of 'asset class' and artists, influencers and content creators are creating their own monetary tokens, we'll explore some of these questions.

Classes will be made up of a combination of lectures, seminars and small group work. Each week has a required text, or sometimes two. Very occasionally there is also a short exercise. I've also included additional texts. These are not required reading but are texts that inform the class and could form the basis for further reading for an assessment or future research project.



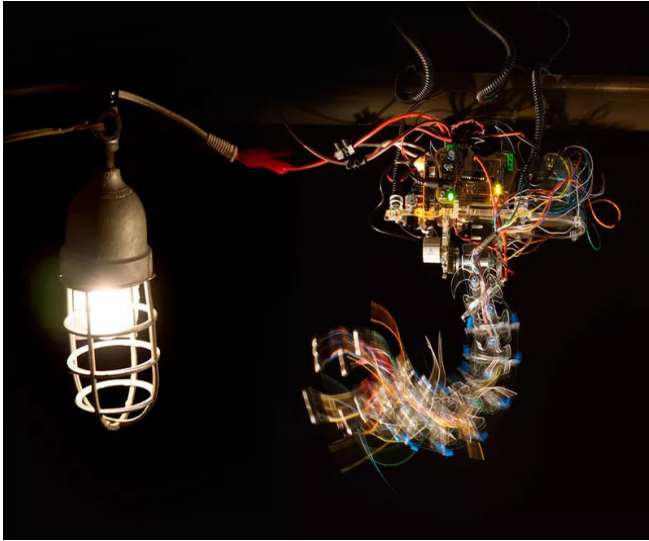
Sylvia Pankhurst mural in Bow, East London
(Jerome Davenport, 2018)

The Female City

Denis Kehoe

Wednesdays 9.30-11.30

This elective examines various intersections between females and the European city of the 19th and early 20th century. It explores the role of women and girls during the progress of modernity, and with respect to the expanding and changing city. The representation of figures such as the mother, the prostitute/sex worker, the suffragette, the woman of colour, the lesbian and the Jewish woman are all investigated and discussed. The seminar analyses both how these women's lives were represented during the period, as well as how they are represented today. A multi-disciplinary approach is taken, drawing on fiction, opera, cinema, TV, contemporary news, photography and painting, with films such as *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001) and writings such as those by Emeline Pankhurst studied. Ideas from feminist theory, urban theory, queer theory, Marxism and psychoanalysis, including the work of Elizabeth Wilson, Laura Elkin and Judith Walkowitz, are used in reading and understanding the different material under discussion.



Gilberto Esparza, Parasitos Urbanos, 2007

Art, Design, and the Sciences **Jye Benjamin O Sullivan** **Wednesdays 9.30-11.30**

Art, Design, and the Sciences traces the intersections between visual cultures and the sciences, outlining the different ways that image, architecture, and design have shaped, and have been shaped by, scientific and philosophical ideas. The elective uses case studies from different times and places, ranging from the medieval to today, to illustrate the co-formation of the sciences and art/design, as cultures with their own epistemologies (ways of knowing).

The elective places emphasis on identifying and analysing the ways in which science and aesthetics has been shaped by “Euromodernity”, i.e., Western ideas about progress, knowledge, and societal order, and it explores how visual cultures reveal what Yuk Hui terms ‘cosmotronics’, the way that technology shapes our worldviews and vice versa. We will examine a wide range of practices including the curation of natural history museums, critical posthumanism, witchcraft, and bio-art to critically understand the different ways that worldviews have been formed at the intersection of art, design, and science. These topics will be analysed from a range of art historical and philosophical perspectives with the goal of cultivating analytical skills for transdisciplinary practices.

Inside Jokes: Humour in Art and Design **Vaari Claffey** **Wednesdays 9.30-11.30**

Rather than acting in opposition to seriousness, humour can function as a rich carrier of meaning and can be instrumental in building the ‘architecture of a feeling’ - building a sense of experience of the world alongside knowledge.

This elective will explore how humour has been constructed and used in art and design especially at those moments when very substantial changes have been affected through humorous intervention. Looking at jokers and tricksters such as Lynda Benglis, Atelier van Lieshout and Vivienne Westwood within the worlds of art and design, we will also address the humorous (and often undermining) representation of artists, architects and designers in popular culture.

Examining who gets to make jokes and who needs to make jokes, it will look at the relationship between power and humour, particularly in relation to offence and dis/respect.

We’ll also take account of fashion and acceptability as well as the consequences of using humour, including the ideas of ‘backfiring’ and ‘falling flat’. Form will be considered too – whether as punning objects, word plays or as edited images.





Latifa Echakhch, *Speakers' Corner*, 2008 © The artist, installation at Tate. Photo: Tate

Psychology of Space

Silvia Loeffler

Wednesdays 11.30-13.30

How do we belong? This seminar series explores why we are drawn to certain spaces and are disconnected from others, and who 'we' are in the wide variety of spatial contexts.

We will analyse place-based feelings (rootedness) and its counterparts (displacement and nomadism), and we will create a rhythm-analysis of our personal routes.

We will analyse our relationships with the city and rural landscapes; the need for blue and green spaces; how sites shaped by memory, trauma and mourning can be counter-balanced with transformation.

We will explore public spaces and spaces of intimacy with emotional mappings, based on key texts by Elizabeth Wilson, bell hooks, Henri Lefebvre, and James Joyce.



Critical Race Theory; Race and Gender

John Wilkins

Wednesdays 11.30-13.30

The image above is of a medallion struck by Josiah Wedgwood to raise funds for the abolition of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Arguably, the binary of race, black and white, was constructed to rationalise chattel slavery. Moving on from 1787, and Wedgwood's problematic visual representation of Black male identity, Critical Race Theory (CRT) interrogates the Law to pinpoint how present day legislation in the United States and Europe promotes racial binaries that were engendered by the institution of chattel slavery. Moreover, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of "Intersectionality" opens the discussion of oppression, discrimination, cultural representation, and marginalisation to gender. This course looks how the Law influences culture. Themes in class will include the analysis of media images and the design of cities, as well as the work of contemporary artists, designers and film-makers who have made critical interventions into the representation of race and gender.

Fashion: Now & Then; Contemporary Issues in Historical Context

Hilary O'Kelly
Wednesdays 11.30-13.30

The 'new' and the 'now' are constantly referenced in popular fashion coverage. However, whether obviously or obliquely, much fashion refers to history. This course explores the 'new' in relation to the 'old' of fashion. It considers fashion and its social and cultural contexts.

Because as much as fashion is clothing, it is also ideas, images and systems. Taking contemporary examples as its starting point, the course will study fashion and its production, mediation and consumption. Class readings and discussions will include themes such as gender, status, politics, function and waste. Weekly readings will be set which all students are expected to engage with.



Image credit Getty Images: 2018 LACMA Art + Film Gala - Arrivals

LOS ANGELES, CA - NOVEMBER 03: A\$AP Rocky arrives at the 2018 LACMA Art + Film Gala at LACMA on November 3, 2018 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Gregg DeGuire/WireImage)

Art in a Time of Crisis

Emma Mahony
Wednesdays 11.30-13.30

This elective interrogates how art and artists have responded to crises from the 80s to now, from the AIDS epidemic to the Covid-19 pandemic, from the Repeal the Eight referendum to the current climate crisis, and from the crisis of the Global South to Black Lives Matter.

It will start by focusing on the legacy of the critical art practice termed 'institutional critique' in order to reflect on and challenge the shifting social, economic and political conditions that shape today's late capitalist, neoliberal reality. It will examine the evolution of 'institutional critique' during this same period, from its emergence as a practice targeted at art museums and galleries but simultaneously sanctioned and censored by them, to what I term 'interstitial critique', a form of parasitic critique that infiltrates the cultural institution from below. Interstitial critique holds the art institution to account for its complicity – through the receipt of corporate sponsorship – in perpetuating climate change, precarious working conditions, and ultimately, the white supremacist, colonial narratives that underscore these related grievances. Subsequent classes will examine the various 're-directional turns' that have shaped artistic practice since the 90s, including 'the social turn', 'the collaborative turn', and 'the activist turn'. Within these 'turns' it will explore issues including the ethics of artist's using "other people's bodies" to perform sometimes ethically dubious actions, and the complex role of aesthetics in practices that operate in the spectrum of social work and activism.



Artists in Ukraine are assisting defence groups in welding tank traps called "hedgehogs," to push back against the Russian invasion. Scott Peterson/Getty Images

Systems and Networks: Aesthetics and Politics

Francis Halsall

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

There was very little, if anything, positive to be said about the conditions of living during a pandemic. But it did make two things apparent.

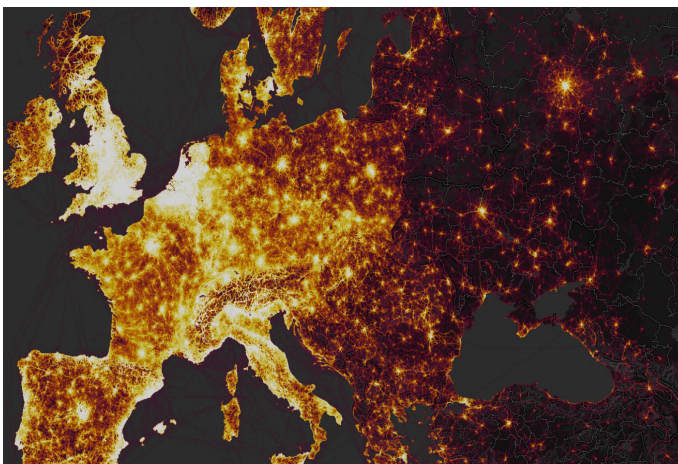
One, that we are all significantly, inextricably, unavoidably, connected together in a global system. A virus emerging at one particular place in the planet, has, within a breathtakingly short time, affected everyone on that planet. Two, from supply chains to online activities, our contemporary lifestyles would be impossible without systems and networks.

The world system is a single entity. Within its networks various things including people, money, information, ideas, memes and viruses are transmitted. We live, as Gawande puts it, in the "Century of the System." From networks of Social Media to the emerging Internet of Things; from health-care systems to furniture systems, air-conditioning systems, clothing systems and many others, systems and networks are embedded into our life, and us into them.

The aim of this seminar is to provide some definitions of key terms in the theories of these systems and networks and demonstrate how these can be applied to a wide variety of cultural and social practices including art and design. We will reflect on the aesthetics of digital and (so-called) new media alongside other implications of the applications of systems and networks as metaphors for complex forms of organisation.

We will consider how the systems and networks we live in are far from neutral but have social, political, epistemological and ethical consequences. They shape the way we all live and think.

Set reading will be supplied each week.



Strava map of cyclists in Ireland.

Art, Music and Activism: Agitation and Protest

Anne Kelly

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores strategies, tactics and modes of address at the intersection of art, music and activism. Classes will examine key movements since the 1960s including the Situationist International, women's liberation, rave culture in the 1990s, Black Lives Matter, and recent nature-rights activism. We will focus on the actions of artists, musicians, designers, groups and citizens who push boundaries, give voice to the marginalised, and confront power to effect social change.

In addition to the groups and topics listed here, you will have the opportunity to identify cultural movements and protest aesthetics, reflect on agitation and protest as an artistic medium, and consider art, design and music's capacity to mobilise, intervene into, or alternatively negotiate, social challenges.

In the weekly seminars exploring real-world examples, you will participate in class discussion and reflect on assigned texts. There will be an opportunity for the student group in this elective to consider activating a public outcome too (a class-led event, happening or intervention).



ICA, London. COUM Transmissions, 1976



Erik Kessels, 24 hours in photos, 2011

Thinking About Photography

Fiona Loughnane

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

Photography surrounds us. On a daily basis we take and view countless photographic images. But it's a slippery and fugitive medium, with constantly changing technologies and processes, allowing images to be widely circulated and reproduced in a bewildering range of contexts. Photography is part of a modern expansion of vision which opens the world to our view; but is also a means through which we ourselves are increasingly subject to the gaze of others. This elective will introduce critical ideas about photography drawing from key figures such as: Roland Barthes; John Szarkowski; Luigi Ghirri; Kaja Silverman; Ariella Azoulay and John Tagg. The course will include both historic and contemporary forms, ranging from the carte de visite to Instagram. While the work of notable photographers – such as Lee Friedlander, Susan Meiselas, and Trevor Pagalen – will be discussed, the course will also engage with anonymous, vernacular and commercial practices. Ultimately, this elective will introduce debates about the essential characteristics of photography and its diverse functions and situations.

Words, Images and Messages

Wendy Williams

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

This module looks at the ways in which words and images are produced, combined and used to inform, to persuade and to entertain. Signification, the making of signs is central to human communication, and semiology proposes the theoretical analysis of the relationship between image and meaning. This elective starts with a step-by-step introduction to semiological analysis (Saussure, Barthes) and develops this as a tool to understand uses of word and image within their times and cultural contexts. Topics include typographic legibility and the plasticity of letterforms; political cartoons and eighteenth century Japanese wood-block prints; early twentieth century developments in ideographic communication and IKEA assembly instructions; fantasy illustration and ideas of childhood; subliminal advertising, 1960s music posters and representations of COVID statistics.



Bonnie Maclean, poster, The Yardbirds, The Doors, 1967

Vision & Spectacle

Silvia Loeffler

Wednesdays 15.30-17.30

Spectacle derives from the Latin *specere* – to look at – and evokes visual experiences that concern something striking or unusual – an impressive public display in a society dominated by consumer and celebrity culture.

Based on W.J.T. Mitchell's "What do Pictures Want?" in the visual arts, literature, media, and fashion, our focus will be on visual display, public space and cultural constructions of intimacy and desire. We will evaluate 'the spectacular' - from cabinets of curiosities to subversive installations - and discuss how free time, private life, leisure and personal expression change with the shock and surprise of seduction.

We will evaluate freak shows, fantasies and illusions that transport us into worlds of magic. This elective allows for a creative exploration of spectacle, based on students' own visions and narratives as counter-voices to rigid models of spectacles and spectatorship determined by the market economy.



dir. Martin Scorsese 2023

Once Upon a Time in Cinema

Denis Kehoe

Wednesdays 15.30-17.30

What is the role of the director in a film? How does the director put her or his imprint on their work? How do they construct a narrative in a way that is specific to them? How do the films they make represent wider social, political and historical issues and events?

This seminar series will explore the work of ten directors and how their films fit into the history of cinema.

Amongst the directors under discussion will be Quentin Tarantino, Sofia Coppola, Claire Denis, Jane Campion, Spike Lee and Alfred Hitchcock. The films of these directors will be examined using a variety of lenses including psychoanalysis, theories of gender and race, Marxism, postcolonialism and auteur theory. Connections will be drawn between their creations and the worlds of fashion, graphic design, architecture and music. This elective would be ideal for anybody who wants to deepen their knowledge of the history of cinema and investigate the various potentialities of the medium of film.



Niki de Saint Phalle, Temperance Chapel, Tarot Garden (1979-2002), Tuscany, Italy, evoking alchemy, harmony, and divine intervention. Image: Pietro Izzo/Creative Commons; Source: Metropolis

This Class is Cancelled

Sarah Pierce

Wednesdays 15.30-17.30

This course will equip students with a critical understanding of debates in visual culture involving two distinct but related concepts: censorship and cancel culture. We will look at historical examples of censorship in art alongside recent cases where contested images and acts have become the subject of public scrutiny. With the support of key texts by Jack Halberstam, Susan Sontag, Fred Moten, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Peggy Phelan and Gareth Harris, among others, we will discuss controversial, racially charged, sexually explicit and often violent images that are the subject of these debates. As we unravel contests between knowledge and power, social responsibility and personal freedom, we will consider the different contexts in which artists and intellectuals face restrictions today, including political censorship and the legislation of LGBTQ+ artists in illiberal democracies, algorithms policing images online and narratives around historic monuments. Maggie Nelson writes: "At a time when bigots and thugs deploy 'free speech' as a disingenuous, weaponized rallying cry, it makes sense that some would respond by criticizing, refusing, or vilifying the discourse of freedom, and postulating care in its place." Beyond obvious and official acts of silencing, we will ask what other impulses regulate the cultural realm. What does it mean to "care" for art in the face of real, systemic, and violent erasures. From micro-aggressions to trigger warnings, self-censorship to anti-woke rhetoric, safe spaces to book bans, what are the implications on creative and intellectual work?



Protest in front of Dana Schutz's painting, Open Casket, at the Whitney Biennial, 2016.