

**Critical Cultures**

**Elective**

**Programme**

**Spring Trimester**

**Education year 2**

**24**  
**NCAD**

**The deadline to sign up for an elective is 4pm Wednesday 17th January 2024.**

**Confirmation of your elective by Monday 22nd January 2024.**

**Classes start on Wednesday 24th January 2024.**

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

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

If you have not received the link, please email [visualculture@staff.ncad.ie](mailto:visualculture@staff.ncad.ie)

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

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

Details of times and summaries appear on the following pages.

The rooms will be announced later.

# Times

**Algorithms as Culture**  
**Rachel O'Dwyer**  
**9.30-11.30 Wednesdays**

**Genderama**  
**Denis Kehoe**  
**9.30-11.30 Wednesdays**

**Visual Fictions**  
**Jennie Taylor**  
**9.30-11.30 Wednesdays**

**Critical Ecologies and  
Contemporary Art Practice**  
**Seoidín O'Sullivan**  
**9.30-11.30 Wednesdays**

**Design (as) Activism**  
**Kate Buckley**  
**9.30-11.30 Wednesdays**

**Profane Spaces**  
**Vaari Claffey**  
**11.30-13.30 Wednesdays**

**Fashion and the Archive**  
**Hilary O Kelly**  
**11.30-13.30 Wednesdays**

**Navigating the Art System**  
**Emma Mahony**  
**11.30 -13.30 Wednesdays**

**Queering The Post-Natural**  
**Jye Benjamin O'Sullivan**  
**11.30 -13.30 Wednesdays**

**Critical Race Theory**  
**John Wilkins**  
**11.30-13.30 Wednesdays**

# Algorithms as Culture

## Rachel O'Dwyer

### 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Algorithms are central to contemporary culture in ways that are sometimes obvious and sometimes almost invisible. Today, coded interfaces, including software, machine learning and big data increasingly structure and shape political, economic and cultural life. In this class we will explore the role of algorithms in everyday life, examine the impact of algorithms on visual and auditory culture, examine issues of bias and ethics in AI and machine learning systems and think about coding as aesthetic and political expression. In class we will be looking at the work of the AI Now Institute and the Algorithmic Justice League who are working to raise awareness of the impact of AI; working together to examine the algorithms governing machine learning models, machine vision, music streaming and content moderation on social media; and exploring the work of artist researchers who are engaged with algorithms, such as Vladan Joler who maps complex sociotechnical systems, or Winnie Soon, who writes queer and feminist code.



*Crosslucid*

# Genderama

## Denis Kehoe

### 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

This elective will explore incidences of gender divergence and diversity from Shakespearean times to the present day. Figures such as Claude Cahun, Grayson Perry, James Miranda Barry and Albert D.J. Cashier will be studied, focusing on issues of gender identity and expression and how these are formulated in the individuals' lives and work. The elective will trace how such forms of gender expression and identity can be read as potentially liberating, subversive, enriching, dangerous and creative. It will also explore the question of the categorisation of gender and its usefulness, or not. The articulation and representation of gender diversity across cultures and languages, from the South American film *Kiss of the Spider Woman* to the sworn virgins of the Balkans, will be discussed. Examples from popular culture such as the television series *Pose* and the Amazon series *Transparent* will also be investigated. Each week a key theoretical text from writers such as Jack/Judith Halberstam, Judith Butler, Susan Stryker and Magnus Hirschfeld will be applied to the chosen figure/film/series under discussion.



*Untitled (I am in training, don't kiss...), Claude Cahun, 1929*



## Visual Fictions Jennie Taylor 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Fiction can ventilate, record and generate invisible or unchecked elements of art, design, ideas and discourses. This elective examines the agency of fiction within and around fine art and design practice.

We will cover strategies including feminist narrative form, conceptual metaphor and fiction as imaginative material. Through discussion, reading and occasional writing exercises we will look at work by artists and writers including Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Travis Jeppesen and Maria Fusco. To underpin the intersection of art and writing, we will also spend time with literary works by Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Lydia Davis and Ursula K. Le Guin. We will consider the use of speculative thinking within fine art and design practices supported in a session on Design Fictions.

Set reading will be supplied each week.



'A Culmination', Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, 2016

## Critical Ecologies and Contemporary Art Practice Seoidín O'Sullivan 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

In what ways are contemporary artists responding to our many earth crises?

We will explore a range of current visual, design and spatial practices that critically and creatively respond to earth crises and system change. You will learn the histories and emergence of these practices and connect to key theories. It's a field that is gaining greater visibility and attention as the world turns its head towards recognising that we need to urgently rethink our collective multi-species futures.

Together we will critically examine ideas of 'Nature' and 'Ecology' and problematise the inherited histories of modern environmentalism. We will focus on artists and designers who 'stay with the trouble' and focus on creatives that are attempting to think otherwise in order to reveal and problematise normative western hegemonies and build just ecological futures. How do artists navigate and work across this complex multidisciplinary field? What and whose temporalities and timescales are we speaking to? In exploring the complex intersections between creative practice, ecological crisis and spatial justice, students will discover an inspiring array of creative practices and become equipped with current theory and debate in the field.



Otobong Nkanga, *Revelations*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist



# Design (as) Activism

## Kate Buckley

### 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores the capacity of design to entice progress and change within society. We will investigate how designers have become agents of change and how design practice has evolved as a result.

Through image and video-based lectures the purpose, intention and outcome of socially engaged and radical practices will be explored. Projects that will be discussed may be situated outside of commercially driven practice so we will question how designers have and can integrate personal beliefs with their professional practice.

Students will be expected to read assigned texts and participate in class discussions on a weekly basis.



*Santiago Cirugeda: Taking back the street / Recuperar la calle*

# Profane Spaces

## Vaari Claffey

### 11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores how artists, designers and architects 'make profane' those spaces, artefacts and materials that may hold some 'sacred' value in relation to historically dominant ideologies. It will also consider the reverse process, when objects or practices once regarded as profane are made 'sacred'.

The art and design worlds have long been invested in ascribing value and preciousness to steady objects: what is the potential of making materials and objects behave unexpectedly, changing their previous use and context?

We will look at how buildings and sites are adapted - disrupting, overwriting and absorbing their previous ritualised use to become, for instance, night clubs, galleries or farms. Museums and galleries - including Palazzo Fortuny Arsenale, Venice, Tate Modern, London and the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin - will feature too, to consider how systems of display and organised publicness borrow from the idea of the temple or palace. We consider art and design-strategies of adaptation including collage and assemblage, 'post-production' as described by Nicolas Bourriaud and ruination. Key concepts will include gentrification as well as queering and reclaiming (particularly around class and race).

Key artists and practices in this elective include Zineb Sedira, Hito Steyerl, Roman Signer, P. Staff, Marcel Broodthaers and the Ghetto Biennale.

*Installation view of Ghetto Biennale by Atis Rezistans at documenta 15.*





## Fashion and the Archive

Hilary O Kelly  
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Through exploring collections of dress, photographs, film and published material in this elective, we will think about fashion using the object as a starting point. To animate or activate, the archived garment we will complement object-analysis with other research methods using visual, literary, film and historical sources. The elective aims to develop the critical and analytical skills for fashion studies. The aim is to study historical garments as a source for contemporary design and fashion thinking. Today, students commonly claim the two-dimensional images on Instagram and social media as sources for fashion research, this object-based study will highlight the cultural riches of the real object. Evidence embedded in garments will be used to develop design ideas, and to support or contest received histories and theories of fashion and dress.



Ricerca Mazzini Archive, a collaboration partner of Bologna University, Italy <http://www.archividiricercamazzeni.it>

## Navigating the Art System

Emma Mahony  
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

When you graduate from NCAD you will need the knowledge, tools and skills to navigate the art system, which includes a thorough understanding of how it operates, and the values and inequalities that shape it. This elective offers a critical overview of the art system and the various public and private institutions that comprise it, including the art museum, the commercial gallery, the global biennial, the art fair, and the auction house, as well as the forces that attempt to resist its instrumentalising focus including the artist-run space and art activist collectives that forge relationships with social movements. *This class is suitable for anyone interested in cultural politics and the public sector.*

It begins by exploring the birth and evolution of the public art museum from the role it played as a mechanism for governing citizens and driving nationalist and capitalist narratives. It then considers evolutions in exhibition display from the birth of the White Cube in the 1930s, to more recent challenges to this rigid display format. Jumping forward to the 1990s it examines how the art system begins internalising the values and practices of neoliberalism and globalisation, resulting in the emergence of a proliferation of global biennales, art fairs, megamonster museums, corporate sponsorship and an all-consuming art market. In light of these developments, it then considers how artists, collectives and activists are fighting back and attempting to either “liberate” the neoliberal museum through a combination of strikes, boycotts and occupations, or to prefigure alternatives to it centered on the principles of commoning, radical care and interdependence.



Liberate Tate, Human Cost (2011). Tate Britain.



Yong Xiang Li *I'm Not in Love (How to Feed on Humans)*, 2020  
single-channel video,

## Queering The Post-Natural Jye Benjamin O'Sullivan 11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Queering The Post-Natural traces, the complex relationship between queer theory and discourses on the "Natural" and "Post-Natural" through a wide range of artistic, design-based, and theoretical practices. From European Shamanic practices as explored by Rick Dolphijn to the queer vampiric subject of artists such as Yong Xiang Li, this elective aims to firstly give participants a grounding in elective Theory. Secondly, it aims to explore the way that the category of "Natural" has been formed in relation to Euromodernity. Finally, we will bring these two discourses together in a discussion of the post-natural, grounding participants in the discourses that contextualise contemporary Queer Ecological artistic practices.

By the end of the elective, participants will be not only familiar with contemporary discourses on the intersection between queer theory and the post-natural, but will also be equipped to use this intersection as a lens to analyse varying different mediums, including video, text, painting, installation, textiles and performance.



## Critical Race Theory: Race and Gender John Wilkins 11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

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 elective 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.