



Royal College of Art

Postgraduate Art and Design

Photography MA Specification 2018–19

1. General Information

Award	Programme Title	Duration	Mode of Study
MA (RCA)	Photography	2 Years	Full-time

Awarding Institution	Royal College of Art
Teaching Institution	Royal College of Art
Professional Accreditation	N/A
Qualifications Framework Level	M
Credit Value	240 UK credits
Date of most recent validation	January 2010
Programme Specification Date	2018/19

2. Philosophy of the Programme

Photography plays a crucial role in contemporary art. The Photography programme at the RCA aims to provide a critical and educational environment in which students can develop as artists with photography at the core of their practice. We have a fluid approach to image making. Whether still or moving, analogue or digital, the photographic image is for us a visual form that aims to be thoughtful as well as playful: an allegorical and thoroughly visual form.

The programme understands photography as a discourse that encompasses multiple practices. This disregard for a fixed essence is photography's strength: no aesthetic purity but a range of rhetorical forms used for the creation of fact, fiction and fantasy. Equally the boundary between the still and the moving image is now fluid and porous, enabling new forms of image making to be created.



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An informed practice of photography acknowledges the heterogeneous traditions of fine art and visual culture. It engages with practices of reading and writing about the image. On our course, theory and practice inform each other and this dialogue characterises committed study at postgraduate level.

The Photography programme is within the School of Art and Humanities. Photography relates specifically to practices and theories of contemporary art, rather than to media and communication studies as in most colleges.

Our approach to teaching is premised on an understanding that artists, makers, writers, curators, critics and historians today are neither constrained by their discipline, the medium they use nor by a sense of what content their work should address. Practitioners in the Arts & Humanities are valued for their contribution to culture and the broader economy because they test and reflect upon the way in which we try to engage with our rapidly changing world; exploit the possibilities of new technologies while also engaging with the value of traditional approaches; they enact new philosophical positions as well as reflecting upon how our thinking has led us to where we are. And they often adopt stances informed significantly by the past to antagonise our assumptions about society.

We also conceive of the Arts & Humanities as a range of subjects that are accessible to collaboration with other fields and disciplines; subjects that celebrate the deployment of diverse methods of research and production that are invented, borrowed and even stolen. At the Royal College of Art we enjoy an environment that is supportive of the varied research enquiries that the Arts & Humanities can enable. We support customary methods and processes whilst enabling others that we cannot even anticipate. We are committed to examining and researching both the means by which enquiries in the Arts & Humanities emerge – the rich array of positions, techniques, methods and materials used by practitioners to develop their research – as well as the subjects, ideas and issues that are successfully articulated, with a view to understanding a broader cultural, societal and economic impact.

Teaching in the school is organised around programmes that provide specific material and historical coordinates as points of reference from which students are encouraged to consider the development of their own work. Regardless of their programme of study, students interact across the broad area of the Arts & Humanities and are also encouraged to engage with other areas of the College.

Research in the School of Arts & Humanities often leads staff and students to less immediately cognate fields of the Arts & Humanities as well as the sciences, and the school works with a range of significant partners such as the V&A and Imperial College to further its ambitions in this regard.



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We therefore view all our programmes in the School of Arts & Humanities as useful pedagogical structures, in that they focus specific areas of activity within an ever expanding field. The programmes enable directed study within an environment that is ambitious not to proliferate and perpetuate what we know but to generate new practices and insights.

3. Educational Aims of the Programme

The MA Photography programme aims:

- to provide a learning environment which privileges experimentation and self-reflexivity in order to advance the practice and understanding of photography within contemporary art.
- to teach how to plan and produce works that are challenging and innovative technically and conceptually.
- to place photography within the context of contemporary art practices and theories.
- to establish a dialogue between theory and practice and to produce a practice which negotiates received theories.
- to enrich the students' experience by facilitating interdisciplinarity with the postgraduate culture of the School Art and Humanities.



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4. Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programme

Able to:	A. Intellectual Engagement
A1.	INNOVATION: Develop innovative ideas that challenge the understanding of their practice and discipline
A2.	CONTEXT: Demonstrate an advanced understanding of historical and contemporary debate and how it relates to their practice
A3.	RESEARCH: Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the principles and methods of research and apply them effectively to their own practice
A4.	COMMUNICATION: Effectively articulate and debate the intellectual and technical processes involved in the production of their work

Able to:	B. Technical Skills
B1.	PRODUCTION: Produce work at an advanced level that integrates thought, creativity and technique
B2.	EXPERIMENTATION: Experiment in their use of materials, processes and environments in order to translate ideas into practice
B3.	SKILLS: Display a mastery of the technical skills required in the creation, display and documentation of their work

Able to:	C. Professionalism
C1.	INDEPENDENCE: Take responsibility for directing their studies through setting goals and managing time and resources effectively
C2.	COLLABORATION: Participate as an active, thoughtful and responsible member of a community
C3.	IDENTITY: Define their professional identity through self-reflection and an understanding of the creative economy



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5. Programme Structure and Curriculum

First Year

During the first year of the programme students undertake three units of study: Unit 1a, Unit 1b and CHS. These Units are each worth 40 credits and assessed through a combination of continuous and summative assessment methods.

To support their progress in Units 1a and 1b students are assigned a personal tutor with whom they discuss their work in tutorials twice a term. Students will also be guaranteed tutorials from other members of the programme team each term, and will have the opportunity to request tutorials from other staff on the school and a broader range of visiting tutors.

Students are assigned a personal tutor with whom they discuss their work in tutorials five times per academic year and assist their progress through Units 1A and 1B.

Although working primarily on their own practice, students are also invited throughout the year to attend group critiques, seminars, lectures, workshops and tutorials with other members of the course team. Students will produce work for studio critiques that take place in term one and two.

At the beginning of the spring term, first year students contribute to the Work in Progress Show in the studios. Their work is not expected to be resolved at this stage. It is an opportunity to take risks, trying new materials and ideas. As this is in a public context, it includes the question of spectatorship. This enables students to reflect upon the efficacy of the visual forms and concepts with which they have been working.

Each Unit is assessed in full at its conclusion as per the following:

<p>Unit 1A: 40 Credits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self assessment then progress feedback from 	<p>Unit 1B: 40 Credits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self assessment (Continuous assessment) 	<p>CHS: 40 Credits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered to the 7 Studios-based SoAH MAs, as before.
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<p>programme unit assessment meeting (staff double marking meeting) (continuous assessment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment: December • Learning Outcomes: A1. A2. A4. B2. B3. C1. C2. 	<p>and Exam feedback (Final Examination) from 1B exam panel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment: May. • Learning Outcomes: A1. A2. A4. B2. B3. C1. C2. 	
Critical & Historical Studies		
<p>The RCA provides a unique environment for postgraduate art and design students to reflect upon their own practice, and to engage with students from their own and other disciplines. The role of Critical & Historical Studies (CHS) is to support the studio programmes in enabling these critical engagements to take place. The courses offered by CHS to first year studio-based MA students propose an intellectual framework within which they can begin to establish a coherent relationship between theory and practice.</p> <p>In the autumn and spring terms there are a series of College-wide seminars and lectures. The autumn term series will relate to your particular discipline (though it is possible to elect to join a series being offered to students on other programmes) whereas the spring term series will be more broad-based and cross-disciplinary in nature.</p>		
Second Year		



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During the second year of the programme students undertake three units of study: Unit 2A (40 credits), Unit 2B (60 Credits) and SoAH School Unit (20 Credits). These Units are assessed through a combination of continuous and summative assessment methods.

In the second year, you select your personal tutor who appraises your work. You produce a self-initiated body of work, which is evaluated and discussed in group critiques and tutorials during the year.

In the third term the work you exhibit in the graduating show is part of your MA Examination. It consists of a major project undertaken in the second year of the programme. Your art practice should now demonstrate that you are able to make, develop and realise work at Masters level. Your work should now have a clear direction and resolution, demonstrating a level of conceptual and technical competence appropriate to your own aims and objectives. Your practice is expected to be self-initiated and thoroughly researched. You will be asked to articulate this process of producing work in the viva voce.

Professional Practice:

To involve students in outside projects and teach them how to manage and respond to a specific context of image production;

To broaden the scope of professional art practice beyond the context of the exhibition.

To provide experience of publication production as a form of dissemination

To think critically about context and audiences

Unit 2A:	Unit 2B:	SoAH School Unit:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 40 Credits ● Self assessment then progress feedback from programme unit assessment meeting (staff double marking meeting) (continuous assessment) ● December 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 60 Credits ● Self assessment (continuous assessment) and Exam feedback (Final Examination) from 2B/School Unit Joint Panel. ● June. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 20 Credits ● Assessed Portfolio at 2B/School Unit Joint Panel. (Final Examination). ● May ● School Exam Board then reviews marks from all units and recommends pass or fail.



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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Outcomes: A1. A2. A4. B1. B2. B3. C1. C2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Outcomes: A2. A3. A4. B1. B2. B3. C1. C2. C3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Outcomes: B2. C2. C3. • This is delivered to all 10 SoAH MA programmes.
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6. Learning and Teaching Methods

General
Teaching consists of individual and group tutorials, theory seminars, group critiques and lectures by leading artists and theorists.
Tutorials
<p>Students are allocated a personal tutor and will meet a five times per academic year. There are opportunities to arrange tutorials with other members of the programme team. Tutorials may also include a small group of students discussing work in progress with a tutor or visiting artist.</p> <p>At the end of the autumn and spring term, you write a work statement (200/300 words), which is a critical account of your practice, its development and reception in tutorials and critiques. This enables students to articulate and clarify in writing what their work attempts to achieve and the direction it takes.</p>
Critiques
Group critiques take place throughout the programme and may also involve guest tutors. The group critique collectively appraises and evaluates the reception and processes of the presenting student’s work.
Workshops



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Most of you come from a wide range of undergraduate programmes, with very different expertise. To focus these skills all students are inducted into the necessary workshops for their practice at the beginning of their studies. To continue their learning students are encouraged to learn from the Technical staff and engage with the sign up workshops to learn about new technologies.

Research Colloquia

In the autumn and spring term, a series of lectures, addressing the discourses of the photographic image' gathers presentations by artists, writers and cultural theorists on specific themes and issues related to research in photographic practice and theory.

7. Assessment

General

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

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment enables the student's performance and progress to be understood and accounted for through a wide variety of academic contact points, recognising that students are able to perform in different ways and through different means and aspects of the curriculum while still achieving the requisite performance standards. This assessment is validated through a structure that ensures that student performance is evaluated from a range of perspectives and by a range of different tutors who are able to triangulate their experience of the student and enable parity of assessment across the cohort.

All Studio based Units (1A, 1B, 2A & 2B) are assessed wholly or in part through a process of continuous assessment. This relies on staff who have had experience of the student coming together at the end of the unit in a Unit Assessment Meeting, chaired by the Head of Programme or a Senior Tutor, to review the student's self evaluation and to share their experience of the student in relation to the relevant learning outcomes.



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Final Examination

Final Examination examines the students' ability to synthesise their learning and to express it in a formal exam context, either through their performance in a live event, such as the viva voce examinations (previously interim and final exams) at the conclusion of Units 1B and 2B, or through the submission of a formal assessed element such as a dissertation or portfolio at the conclusion of the SoAH School Unit and CHS.

Unit 1B

The Final Examination for Unit 1B is held at the beginning of the third term as a Viva Voce. A Unit Assessment Meeting chaired by the Head of Programme or a Senior Tutor reviews the work produced by the student on the Unit. Students will be asked to demonstrate that their practice is evolving and that they are able to position your work within the context of contemporary art practice and theory, as per the relevant Learning Outcomes. The students' self evaluation report will be read and considered in relation to their performance in the viva and the Unit Assessment Meeting will recommend one of the following outcomes to the School Exam Board for further reference to ABCD: Pass, Referral, Fail.

A pass entitles students to be awarded the credits pertaining to the relevant unit. If the board concludes that their work is not developed enough, they will be referred and will be asked to submit new work by a set date. A fail indicates that work and studentship do not meet the required criteria for the continuation of your studies.

Unit 2 B

The Final Examination for Unit 2B is held at the beginning of the third term as a Viva Voce. A Unit Assessment Meeting chaired by the Head of Programme or a Senior Tutor reviews the work produced by the student on the Unit. Students will be asked to demonstrate that their practice is evolving and that they are able to position their work within the context of contemporary art practice and theory, as per the relevant Learning Outcomes. The students' self evaluation report will be read and considered in relation to their performance in the viva and the Unit Assessment Meeting will recommend one of the following outcomes to the School Exam Board for further reference to ABCD: Pass, Referral, Fail.

A pass entitles students to be awarded the credits pertaining to the relevant unit. If the Unit Assessment Meeting concludes that their work is not developed enough, they will be



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referred and be asked to submit new work by a set date. A fail indicates that work and studentship do not meet the required criteria for the continuation of studies.

SoAH School Unit

Students will be required to 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.

This will be submitted to the joint assessment panel for the Joint Unit 2B / School Unit Exam, taking place toward the end of academic year.

CHS

Students will receive individual tutorials to support the development of a dissertation which is submitted at the end of their first year, and which will be the element on which this unit is assessed. The dissertation should be between 6,000 – 10,000 words in length.

8. Admissions

Cross-College Requirements

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

Candidates for all MA courses are assessed on their existing qualities as demonstrated in their work and in their interview, as well as on their potential to benefit from the programme and to achieve MA standards overall. The assessment will consider: creativity,



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imagination and innovation evident in the work; ability to articulate the intentions of the work; intellectual engagement in relevant areas; appropriate technical skills; overall interview performance, including oral use of English.

Programme-Specific Requirements

Candidates are generally expected to have a good BA degree from a photography or fine art course. Candidates should be able to demonstrate an original and critical approach to photography as well as an ability to engage with current theories of art and culture that inform your practice.

Portfolio:

- A candidates portfolio must be well edited and include a coherent selection of recently completed work, which should not exceed 10 pieces. At this stage all visual work must be submitted as a PDF file. Moving image work should not exceed 5 minutes.

If you are selected for an interview:

- If successful at stage 1 candidates will be interviewed by a minimum of 2 members of the academic staff and a student representative. The candidate will bring a portfolio of work to the interview. Size should not exceed 50 x 60cm. Candidates will also bring a copy of their BA dissertation.

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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 93 in the TOEFL internet test with an additional writing test score of TWE 24 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.



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- 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 Course 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.