

Art + Critique

CRITICAL & CONTEXTUAL STUDIES IN ART PRACTICE: ONLINE COURSE

[COURSE SCHEDULE](#) | [LECTURES](#) | [READER](#) | [COURSE DATES](#) | [TUTOR](#) | [BIBLIOGRAPHY](#) | [RESOURCES](#)

Course Description

This course integrates practice and theory in a comprehensive programme that emphasises critical inquiry in art practice and research. The course will help you develop your practice and research through a series of lectures, seminars, workshops, group tutorials and off-site visits. The syllabus offers a solid background in essential histories and discourses of contemporary art, to help artists address questions about their practice and its context: about what art is, how it is judged and how it relates to society.

The curriculum fosters experimentation and collaborative study in a community of peers and provides a supportive environment for participants to explore their practice and raise awareness of the issues and stakes. Participants will extend and develop their ability to discuss, write about and judge contemporary art, as well as their ability to reflect on and contextualise their own practice.

The programme of participatory lectures and seminars constitutes the **Critical Studies** component. Regular group tutorials and workshops constitute the **Studio Practice** component. These are integrated throughout the course to emphasise the reciprocal dynamic between practice and theory, discourse and action.

The **Critical Studies** component maps the theories and discourses that inform the production and reception of contemporary art, providing a supportive environment to articulate ideas on the production, exhibition and interpretation of art. We will look at the impact of philosophical, cultural and political discourses on art practice, and examine different theoretical perspectives and critical debates.

The lecture/seminar series provides an overview of key concepts and historical transformations that underpin the production and reception of contemporary art. The lectures demystify the art world and provide multiple entry points into critical theory from the Frankfurt School to the present. They foreground influential discourses, debates and controversies on the critical role of art practice, the tensions between artistic autonomy and political art, the dichotomy between art and life, interrelationships between identity and materiality, and the potentials and complicities of socially engaged practice.

What kind of knowledge and skills do contemporary artists need? What is the social role of art? Can art bring about social change? Is there a tension between the values of art and political values? Why does art have to be critical? What is critical art, critical of? Who is art for? How do we recognise art? What distinguishes art from other forms of cultural production? Is art a commodity? What is aesthetic autonomy? These are some of the questions we will address as we explore the historical and critical contexts in which contemporary art is made, circulated, viewed and understood.

The **Studio Practice** component is composed of regular group tutorials and workshops on creative practice, research and writing. These modules are designed to provide you with tools, references and feedback to help you develop, articulate and contextualise your practice. Writing workshops are an

opportunity to develop your skills in writing critical reviews and artist's statements or research proposals.

Group tutorials are structured peer-review sessions that will help you develop a project or body of work with critical feedback and peer-support. You might have work-in-progress and a set of problems or questions about how to proceed, or you may produce new work in response to a studio assignment. We will discuss research methods, process, technique, materials, professional practice etc. Following each tutorial you will receive written feedback and documentation to reflect on the session and plan your next steps.

Course aims, outcomes & learning objectives

The course aims to support artists as they develop, articulate and contextualise their practice within the broader contemporary and historical field of production in art and society. They will develop their writing skills and formulate research questions to guide their practice, achieving a clear sense of direction towards their stated goals.

By the end of the course:

- Participants will have a sound grasp of key historical underpinnings and current debates in contemporary art.
- They will be able to critically discuss and evaluate contemporary art in relation to the broader contemporary and historical field of production in art and society.
- They will be able to articulate and contextualise their practice within or against relevant practices, discourses and histories.
- They will be able to critically evaluate their own work and provide constructive feedback for their peers.

Participants will leave the course with critical awareness of contemporary art practice, a road map and a toolbox of methodologies for their continuing practice and the confidence to pursue it independently.

Who is it for?

The course is open to everyone at any stage of their career or level of experience but it is particularly suited to those who have a background and experience in art and wish to develop their practice and extend their knowledge of contemporary art practices and discourses.

You may have reached a pivotal stage in your practice, preparing a new project or portfolio, applying for a degree course or residency, encountering contradictions or asking questions about your practice in the context of the art world and society more broadly, or you may have already formulated a set of questions and need to develop a critical framework to address them.

You will be expected to develop a project or line of inquiry, commit to the course, participate in the co-learning space, support your peers and have an interest in alternative art education.

The course will benefit socially engaged artists, performance and installation artists, video and sound artists, media and digital artists, sculptors, painters, print-makers, designers, artist educators, curators, writers, researchers and anyone who is pursuing a career in the arts.

Course Format

The course is delivered online with hybrid off-site visits and facilitated via [Canvas](#) and [Zoom](#). Both platforms are user-friendly and you will receive a course pack with detailed guidance on how to access them at least three days before the course begins.

The course programme includes modules and support in the form of:

- A programme of six lectures and reading seminars
- Regular peer reviews on your practice, process and work-in-progress, followed by written feedback
- Workshops on the relationship between practice and theory
- Writing workshops to develop a project, curatorial or research proposal, improve your artist's statement, exchange feedback and practice your critical and interpretive skills
- Off-site visits participate in critical discussions, articulate aesthetic judgments and build analytical skills
- Optional one-to-one peer mentoring
- Present your practice for a final round of discussions and written feedback. The format is up to you, it typically consists of a summary of central formal and conceptual issues in your work or the overall argument and key points of your project proposal, ending on a question about your practice.

What you will need

- A **reliable** internet connection
- A computer with webcam, mic and speakers or headphones
- You will receive an access code to register on [Canvas](#)
- Download and install [Zoom](#)
- Notebook and pen
- Examples of your work in physical or digital form for group tutorials
- A computer, laptop or iPad with internet access for assignments, research and preparation for your final project presentation
- Money for potential travel and exhibition entry (optional)

Upcoming course dates, info & fees

17 Oct 2023 – 5 Mar 2024, Tuesdays 18:30-20:30 BST/GMT+1 / 17 weeks / ONLINE

This online course runs over two terms with a four-week winter break. The first term runs from **17 Oct – 5 Dec 2023** and the second term runs from **16 Jan – 5 Mar 2024**. We will meet every **Tuesday 6:30pm - 8:30pm**. **Off-site visits** will take place on **Saturday, 18 Nov 2023, 2pm - 4pm**. Please make sure that you can attend during these dates and times.

Course fees are **£435 / £348 Concessions** (student, unwaged, disability). If the course fee is a barrier to your participation please get in touch so that we can find a way to make it more accessible for you.

Please read the [Learning Agreement](#) before registering for the course. If you have any questions please use the contacts at the top of the page to get in touch.

From	To	Time	Duration	Location	Fee	Actions
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Tuesday, 17 Oct 2023 Tuesday, 5 Mar 2024 18:30-20:30 BST /GMT +1 17 sessions / 34 hours ONLINE £435 / £348 Concs. [REGISTER](#)

Course Schedule

This sample timetable will give you sense of the course content and pace. Before the beginning of the program you will receive the course pack with a detailed course schedule, a guide on the online platforms and tools that we will use and other information. Please allow at least four hours per week for reading, research and coursework, and to prepare your final project presentation.

Autumn Term

- TUE 17 OCT **1. Introduction**
- TUE 24 OCT **2. The Critical Function of Art: Lecture/Seminar 1**
- TUE 31 OCT **3. Group Tutorials & Studio Brief**
- TUE 7 NOV **4. The Politics of Art: Lecture/Seminar 2.1**
- TUE 14 NOV **5. Group Tutorials**
- SAT 18 NOV 6. Off-site Visits (2pm - 4pm)**
- TUE 21 NOV **7. Politics & the Institution of Art: Lecture/Seminar 2.2**
- TUE 28 NOV **8. Creative Practice: Practice & Theory Workshop**
- TUE 5 DEC **9. Writing Workshop: Exhibition Reviews**

Spring Term

- TUE 16 JAN **10. Spectacle and the Everyday: Lecture/Seminar 3**
- TUE 23 JAN **11. Research: Practice & Theory Workshop**
- TUE 30 JAN **12. The Abject, Identity & Process: Lecture/Seminar 4**
- TUE 6 FEB **13. Writing Workshops & Group Tutorials**
- TUE 13 FEB **14. Writing Workshops & Group Tutorials**
- TUE 20 FEB **15. Studio Assignment: Feedback & Critique**
- TUE 27 FEB **16. Participation, Dialogue & the Gift Economy: Lecture/Seminar 5**
- TUE 5 MAR **17. Project Presentations**

Lecture Outlines

The lecture and seminar programme examines the historical and critical contexts in which art is produced, circulated, viewed and understood. The lectures introduce key concepts that inform art practice, tracing these concepts from their emergence to their subsequent transformations and development. Each lecture is a sustained argument supported by cases studies of art movements and practices, with summaries of philosophical, theoretical and aesthetic concepts and critical discourses, their origins and definitions. The lectures are discursive and participatory. You will be provided with handouts containing a summary and bibliographic information at the beginning of each lecture.

1. THE CRITICAL FUNCTION OF ART

Since the emergence of autonomous and avant-garde art in the 19th century, art is considered to be in critical confrontation with society. We will consider the opinions of writers such as the Critical Theorist Theodor Adorno and the critics Clement Greenberg and Benjamin Buchloh to discuss the avant-garde in modernist and post-modernist critical contexts. These writers suggest that art should be more than entertainment or decoration; that it should not simply reflect and perpetuate the values of society, but that it should engage critically with the dominant social, cultural and aesthetic values of its time. Some of the questions that we engage with in this lecture include: Who is art for? What is the relationship between art and entertainment? How do we understand art as a critical practice? What distinguishes art from other forms of cultural production? What is the value of art? What is the critical function of art? What is “critical art”? Why does art have to be critical? What makes a work of art critical? Is it defined by subject-matter, medium or context? What is critical art, critical of? What is critical theory? What is critique? What is the autonomy of art? What is self-critique? When is art not critical? How can art be critical within pluralism? Can artistic practices play a critical role in a society?

2.1 THE POLITICS OF ART

In this lecture we explore theoretical perspectives on the dichotomy between political art and autonomous art, the nuances within each camp and theories that depart from this simplistic dichotomy. According to the Marxist tradition, the political theorist Chantal Mouffe and artists Martha Rosler and Hans Haacke, art appears either as a politically embedded and thus conservative practice, or as part of a critical or revolutionary process which effects change. On the other hand, for Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno art must maintain its autonomy to achieve its political aims. The critical theorists Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin, and the philosopher Jacques Ranciere adopt more complex positions between the two camps. Some of the questions that we engage with in this lecture include: What is the social role of art? Do artists have political obligations? Is art an effective tool for effecting or resisting political change? Is there a tension between the values of *art* and *political* values? How is art linked to politics and political or cultural struggle?

2.2 POLITICS & THE INSTITUTION OF ART

In this lecture we explore the political role of art as an institution, and how it ultimately de-politicises art by aestheticising it. We will trace the concept of autonomy back to enlightenment aesthetics and consider Herbert Marcuse’s critique of affirmative culture alongside the Marxist concept of ideology. We will explore the ontology of art through Marcel Duchamp’s ‘readymade’ with reference to the institutional theory of art and the concept of the ‘artworld’ in the work of Arthur Danto and George Dickie. We will explore the three successive waves of Institutional Critique in the practice and writing

of artists in this movement. Returning to the topic of politics, we will consider the political role of the institution alongside Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Some of the questions that we engage with in this lecture include: How do we recognise art? What is art, who gets to decide? What distinguishes art from other forms of production? What constitutes the 'artworld'? What is the institution of art? What is an institution? What is Institutional Critique? Are museums political institutions? Is art a political institution?

3. SPECTACLE & THE EVERYDAY

Since its entry into the representational arts in the mid 19th century, the everyday has increasingly become a common concern in artists' practice. Far from wishing to represent the everyday in art, the *avant-garde* wanted to abolish the separation of art and life altogether. Contemporary art has inherited these two opposing and contradictory projects. This lecture explores the critique of everyday life through the work of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Georges Perec. We consider the avant-garde ambition to integrate art and life via the artistic strategies of Aleksandr Rodchenko, Allan Kaprow, Dan Graham and the Situationist International, and we consider Peter Burger's claim that the culture industry of the late 20th century fused art and life. We also look at critiques of space, time, consumption and practices of appropriation in post-modern art. Some of the questions that we engage with in this lecture include: What is the everyday? How can it be investigated and represented? How can we bring routine, the ordinary and the unremarkable into visibility? What strategies have artists used to reveal the everyday or to integrate art and life?

4. THE ABJECT, IDENTITY & PROCESS

This lecture considers materiality and the body in art practice and discourse, and specifically the themes that emerge from Julia Kristeva's concept of the *abject*. We trace the origins of Kristeva's concept to consider theories of identity and desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis, group identity and oppression in the work of Georges Bataille and concepts of pollution and taboo in the work of Mary Douglas. We explore feminism and the female artist in the work of Carolee Schneemann and Cindy Sherman. We look at performativity in art through the work of Judith Butler, John Austin and Pierre Bourdieu. The lecture explores Minimalism and Process art (Post-Minimalism) through the work of Robert Morris, Eva Hesse and Richard Serra. Some of the questions that we engage with in this lecture include: Why are certain things considered clean and others dirty? Why is food appealing in some contexts and repulsive in others? Why are we disturbed by ambiguity? What is the difference between the sacred and the unclean? What is a taboo? Why are we fascinated by images that provoke horror? How do materials respond to manipulation? How does our physical engagement with art change the way we understand and respond to artworks?

5. PARTICIPATION, DIALOGUE & THE GIFT ECONOMY

This lecture explores a broad range of art practices since the 1960s that appropriate social formats, in order to collapse the distinction between art and everyday life and emphasise participation, community, collaboration and collectivity. We consider a broad range of critical theories on participation, social engagement, community and dialogue, including Suzanne Lacy's *New Genre Public Art*, Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, Claire Bishop's *Participation*, Grant Kester's *Dialogical Aesthetics*, Jacques Ranciere's *Emancipated Spectator*, Homi Bhabha's *Conversational Art* and Mikhail Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination*. We examine the Gift Economy in the work of Marcel Mauss and commodity fetishism in the work of Karl Marx. Some of the questions that we engage with in this lecture include: Why are artists worried about alienation, lack of participation and broken

bonds in the social fabric? How does capitalism create alienation? Why do we feel compelled to return a favour? Where is the work of art in relational art? Is it the outcome, the process, or the idea? How do these practices redefine aesthetic experience? How do they challenge our expectations of art? By what criteria do we judge participatory art? What happens to the role of art when it is put to the service of society? What happens to the role of the artist when the division between art and non-art breaks down? What happens to the autonomy of art?

Course Reader

The Reader will be available to download, you do not need to purchase any books for the course. Please allow one hour to familiarise yourself with each text in preparation for the corresponding seminar or workshop, and make notes of questions and comments that you want to address. Please make sure you have access to the set texts for each session in print or on screen. This list is provided here as an example from previous courses and the texts may change.

LECTURE 1. THE CRITICAL FUNCTION OF ART

- **Mouffe, Chantal (2008).** [Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space](#). *Open* No. 14, Art and the Public Domain. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, SKOR, pp. 6-15.

GROUP TUTORIALS: Feedback + Critique

- **Lerman, Liz (2003).** [Toward a Process for Critical Response](#). *communityarts.net*.

LECTURE 2.1 THE POLITICS OF ART

- **Piper, Adrian (2014).** [Political Art and the Paradigm of Innovation](#). In *The Idea of the Avant Garde - And What It Means Today*, Marc James Leger ed. Manchester University Press, pp. 4-11.
- **Adorno, Theodor (2002/1970).** [Aesthetic Theory](#). Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum, excerpts pp. 225-227.

OFF-SITE VISITS

- **Kahneman, Daniel (2011).** [The Associative Machine](#). In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, excerpt pp. 50-52.

LECTURE 2.2 POLITICS & THE INSTITUTION OF ART

- **Fraser, Andrea (2005).** [From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique](#). *Artforum* 44/1, Sep 2005, pp. 278-283.

CREATIVE PRACTICE WORKSHOP

- **Duchamp, Marcel (1975/1957).** [The Creative Act](#). In *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames & Hudson, pp. 138-140. **AUDIO**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP

- **Groys, Boris (2012).** [Under the Gaze of Theory](#). *E-flux Journal* #35, May 2012.

LECTURE 3. SPECTACLE & THE EVERYDAY

- **Debord, Guy (1967).** [The Culmination of Separation](#). In *Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, pp. 6-17.
- **Lefebvre, Henri (1987).** [The Everyday and Everydayness](#). *Yale French Studies* No. 73, pp. 7-11.

WRITING WORKSHOP: Statements + Proposals

- Williams, Gilda (2015). *Write On: On Today's Art Writing Explosion, and the Tyranny of the Artist's Statement*. *Art Monthly* 348, pp. 11-14.

LECTURE 4. THE ABJECT, IDENTITY & PROCESS

- Douglas, Mary (1966). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, excerpts pp. 1-7, 44-50, 149-150.
- Kristeva, Julia (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, excerpt pp. 1-6.

LECTURE 5. PARTICIPATION, DIALOGUE & THE GIFT ECONOMY

- Jackson, Shannon (2011). *Quality Time: Social Practice Debates in Contemporary Art*. In *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. New York: Routledge, pp. 43-74.

Off-site Visits

Off-site visits usually take place on Saturdays. We visit London-based galleries and museums in a hybrid format. You will have a choice between travelling to museums or galleries in London, or viewing the exhibitions and participating in the discussions via Zoom.

Pedagogy, participation & accessibility

The course is informed and structured along collaborative, co-operative and collective principles and pedagogical models, employing alternative models of art education. The course structure is responsive, it is designed to initiate student-led discussions and encourage participants to help shape and steer the course.

Using the course outline as a starting point we will use collective decision-making to modify and adjust the course to our needs. Conditions under Covid-19 gave us the opportunity to cast aside our expectations of what education should be and think in terms of pedagogical practice as a collaboration between participants who are teaching each other what they need to learn. Be prepared to take an active role in deciding how the course unfolds and making your voice heard in discussions.

To ensure that we all start from an equal footing please include any access requirements or concerns in the registration form. This includes anything that might prevent you from participating fully in the course.

Tutor

Sophia Kosmaoglou is an artist, tutor, curator and researcher. Her work addresses the construction of identity through relationships and more recently her research and practice is oriented toward group dynamics, collectivity, cooperation and self-organisation. Blurring the boundaries between art, education and activism, her work questions the ontology of art, its social functions and institutional contexts, and creates opportunities to experiment with collective economies and learning environments. In 2015 she founded **ART&CRITIQUE**, an alternative art education network, which was succeeded in 2019 by the **Radical Pedagogy Research Group**, a peer-led participatory action-research project. She is currently working on a project to start a **co-operative art school** that will provide a self-organised and sustainable alternative to mainstream art education.

Sophia has a practice-based PhD in Fine Art from Goldsmiths. Her research interests include institutional critique and the relationship between art and politics, institutions, independent organisations and collective practices. She is a visiting tutor at Chelsea College of Arts and previous teaching experience includes BA Critical Studies and Studio Practice at Goldsmiths. She is a former member of Exploding Cinema, The Field, Deptford Cinema, Body Politic and other collectives. For more information please see <https://videomole.tv>

Contact

If you have any questions about the course or concerns about accessibility, or if you encounter any problems with the website please contact Sophia Kosmaoglou at sophia@videomole.tv or call +447875268641.

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