Art + Critique

CRITICAL & CONTEXTUAL STUDIES IN ART PRACTICE: ONLINE COURSE

Course Description

Studio practice and critical studies course that integrates practice and theory in a comprehensive programme of lectures, seminars, workshops, off-site visits, tutorials, assignments, feedback and peer support.

The curriculum fosters experimentation and collaborative study in a community of peers. It provides a supportive environment where participants will extend their knowledge of critical theories and discourses, develop their ability to discuss, write about and judge contemporary art, and contextualise their own practice.

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

The **Critical Studies** component offers a solid foundation in essential histories and discourses of contemporary art. The lectures map the key concepts and historical transformations that underpin the production and reception of contemporary art, providing a supportive environment to articulate ideas on the production, exhibition and interpretation of 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 and debates on the role of art in society, including the dichotomy between art and life, tensions between artistic autonomy and political art, 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? 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 delve into the creation, dissemination, and interpretation of contemporary art.

The **Studio Practice** component consists of regular group tutorials and workshops on creative practice, research and writing. These modules provide tools, references and feedback to help you develop and articulate your practice. Writing workshops are an opportunity to extend your skills in writing critical reviews and artist's statements or 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. Following each tutorial you will receive written feedback to reflect on and consider your next steps.

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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 within the broader contemporary 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 wish to develop their practice and extend their knowledge. You may have reached a pivotal stage in your practice, preparing a new project or portfolio, applying for a degree course or residency, developing a proposal for doctoral research, encountering contradictions or asking questions about your practice, or you may already have 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 and feedback on your practice and work-in-progress
- Workshops on the relationship between practice and theory
- Writing workshops, to develop a proposal, improve your artist's statement, exchange feedback and practice your critical and interpretive skills

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- Off-site visits, to 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.

After the course

Alumni will be invited to continue developing their practice through peer-support and mutual-support formats:

- **After-school Art Club** - a subscription-based monthly peer-support group for alumni in a programme developed collectively by the club members.
- **Pollinator** - a free international virtual residency of mutual support for alumni.

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
- Money for potential travel and exhibition entry (optional)

Upcoming course dates

19 Jan – 1 Jun 2027, Tuesdays 18:30-20:30 GMT/BST – ONLINE/Hybrid

This online course runs over two terms with a four-week spring break. The first term runs from **19 Jan – 9 Mar 2027** and the second term runs from **13 Apr – 1 Jun 2027**. We will meet every **Tuesday 6:30pm – 8:30pm during term-time**. Hybrid **Off-site visits** will take place on **Saturday, 20 Feb 2027, 2pm–5pm (TBC)**. Please make sure that you can attend during these dates and times. We may also have a hybrid session later in the course, pending a collective decision.

Please read the **Learning Agreement** before registering for the course. If you have any questions, please use the contact details at the bottom of the page to get in touch or **book a 15-min chat here**.

From	To	Time	Duration	Location	Advance Fees	Actions
Tuesday, 19 Jan 2027	Tuesday, 1 Jun 2027	18:30-20:30 GMT/BST	17 sessions / 35 hours	ONLINE/ Hybrid	£400 / £490 / £580	**REGISTER**

Course fees - Solidarity tiers

Course fees are payable either in full via invoice by the start of the course or using **PayPal Pay in 3** (a credit agreement subject to eligibility and approval). Advance rates are available until **4 Jan 2027**. Full rates apply from **5 Jan 2027**.

This course strives to be an inclusive learning environment that is accessible to everyone. But course fees can still be a barrier. The solidarity tiers help distribute course costs more fairly, while

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supporting the long-term sustainability of the programme. Participants are encouraged to select a tier that aligns with their financial circumstances.

Concession £400 advance rate (£430 full rate)
The concessionary tier is for those in financial hardship, low or precarious incomes, living on a tight budget and prioritising their basic needs. It aims to make the course accessible to everyone, regardless of financial background. If the concession is still a barrier to your participation, or if there are additional factors that prevent you from joining the course, please reach out to discuss additional options to make it more accessible for you.

Standard £490 advance rate (£520 full rate)
This tier is for those who can afford to cover the basic costs of the course and contribute to the sustainability of the programme. Please choose this option if your employment or freelance income covers your essential needs.

Supporter £580 advance rate (£610 full rate)
Please choose this tier if you have stable employment and rarely worry about meeting your basic needs. By choosing this tier, you help keep the course accessible to a diverse group of participants, enriching the learning experience for everyone.

Course Timetable

This sample timetable will give you a sense of the course content and pace. Please allow 1-3 hours per week for reading, research and coursework. You will receive the course pack with a detailed timetable, and guides to the course and online platforms before the course begins.

	Spring Term
TUE 19 JAN	**1. Introduction**
TUE 26 JAN	**2. Creative Practice: Practice & Theory Workshop**
TUE 2 FEB	**3. The Critical Function of Art: Lecture 1**
TUE 9 FEB	**4. The Politics of Art: Lecture 2.1**
TUE 16 FEB	**5. Politics & the Institution of Art: Lecture 2.2**
SAT 20 FEB	**6. Off-site Visits 2-5pm (TBC / Hybrid session)**
TUE 23 FEB	**7. Group Tutorials & Studio Brief**
TUE 2 MAR	**8. Group Tutorials**
TUE 9 MAR	**9. Writing Workshop: Exhibition Reviews**
	Summer Term
TUE 13 APR	**10. Spectacle and the Everyday: Lecture 3**
TUE 20 APR	**11. Research: Practice & Theory Workshop**
TUE 27 APR	**12. The Abject, Identity & Process: Lecture 4**

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TUE 4 MAY **13. Writing Workshops & Group Tutorials**

TUE 11 MAY **14. Writing Workshops & Group Tutorials**

TUE 18 MAY **15. Participation, Dialogue & the Gift Economy: Lecture 5**

TUE 25 MAY **16. Studio Assignment: Feedback & Critique**

TUE 1 JUN **17. Project Presentations**

Lecture Outlines

The lecture and seminar programme examines the historical and critical contexts in which art is produced, circulated, viewed and interpreted. Each lecture introduces key concepts and debates in art practice, from their emergence to their subsequent evolution and transformation. The lectures are discursive and participatory. Handouts with summaries and bibliographic information will be available before each lecture.

1. THE CRITICAL FUNCTION OF ART

Since the emergence of avant-garde art in the 19th century, the relationship between art and society has been confrontational. Today, it's widely acknowledged that art should engage critically with the dominant social, cultural and aesthetic values of its time. But what makes a work of art 'critical'? Can artistic practices play a critical role in a society? What is critical art, critical of? Can art be critical within pluralism, or is it easily recuperated by the culture industry? We will consider the historical events that reshaped the role of art in the Modern era, alongside the discourses and theories that continue to inform and make sense of the role of art in society. This lecture will address the autonomy of art and the influence of the Frankfurt School, as well as developments in art education, practice, theory and criticism.

2.1 THE POLITICS OF ART

This lecture explores the dichotomy between artistic autonomy and political art. According to the orthodox Marxist tradition, art is inherently political--whether it aligns with established social norms or revolutionary movements that strive for social change. Advocates for the autonomy of art, on the other hand, maintain that art must maintain its autonomy to achieve its political aims. We will explore this dichotomy and look at approaches that challenge the oversimplified terms of this debate. What is the social role of art? Do artists have political obligations? Is art an effective tool for bringing about or resisting political change? Is there a tension between the values of art, and political values?

2.2 POLITICS & THE INSTITUTION OF ART

In this lecture we will explore the ontology of art and the role of art as an institution. How do we recognise art? What is art and who gets to decide? What constitutes the ‘artworld’? What is the institution of art? After accounting for the readymade in light of the institutional theory of art and the concept of the ‘artworld’, we will consider the autonomy of art and the legacy of Enlightenment aesthetics, alongside the critique of affirmative culture and ideology. Coming to Institutional Critique, we will address the political dimension of art institutions and the difference between aesthetic and political discourse.

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3. SPECTACLE & THE EVERYDAY

Henry Lefebvre coined the term "everyday" to draw attention to the overlooked significance of the mundane experiences and routines of daily life. Since its entrance into epic painting, the quotidian has become a common concern in artists' practice. But far from wishing to represent the everyday, 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, and the avant-gardist ambition to integrate art and life. Who is art for? Is art entertainment? What is the everyday? How can the routine, the ordinary and the unremarkable be investigated and represented? What strategies have artists used to integrate art and life?

4. THE ABJECT, IDENTITY & PROCESS

This lecture considers materiality and the body via Julia Kristeva's concept of the *abject*. We will trace the origins of the *abject* in 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 will explore feminist art, performativity, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism and materialist art criticism. Why are we disturbed by ambiguity? What is a taboo? Is disgust an aesthetic experience? Why are we fascinated by images that provoke horror? How is identity constituted? What is the difference between what a work of art says and what it does?

5. PARTICIPATION, DIALOGUE & THE GIFT ECONOMY

This lecture explores art practices that collapse the distinction between art and life by emphasising participation, community, collaboration and collectivity, alongside theories on participation, social engagement, community, dialogue, the gift economy and commodity fetishism. Where is the work of art in participatory art, and what are the criteria of aesthetic judgement? How do these practices challenge our expectations of art and aesthetic experience? 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? Why do we feel compelled to return a favour? How does capitalism create alienation? Why are artists worried about audience passivity and broken bonds in the social fabric?

Course Reader

The Reader is available online. All set reading and viewing for the course is available to download or view online. You are not required to purchase any books. 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. Note that the Reader may change before the start of the upcoming course.

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 joining the in-person group visit to exhibitions in London, or participating via Zoom.

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Pedagogy, participation & accessibility

The course is informed and structured along collaborative, co-operative and collective principles and pedagogical models. 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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