

## Nottingham Trent University Course Specification

### Basic Course Information

1.	Awarding Institution:	Nottingham Trent University
2.	School/Campus:	School of Art and Design/City Campus
3.	Final Award:	Master of Fine Arts in Fine Art
	Course Title:	Master of Fine Arts
	Modes of Study:	PT and FT
4.	Normal Duration:	PT 3 years/FT 2 years
5.	UCAS Code:	N/A

### 6. Overview and general educational aims of the course

The MFA course prepares you for the rigor of contemporary practice as an artist and researcher, the enquiry you undertake being seen in both a critical and professional context. Concerned with imaginative and inventive making and thinking, the course reflects on the diversity of contemporary Fine Art practice and the critical discourses surrounding it, incorporating practices from the newest technologies to the most traditional, challenging the boundaries of medium and technique, concept or expectation.

In this course you will be able to develop a specific focus to your practice and studies according to your individual needs and abilities while participating in critique, the exploration of relevant contexts and theories of art in order to engage critically with your practice. Essential to this course is the development of your on-going professional exhibiting experience and/or audience engagement, so it is outward facing, embracing and engaging with the creative art scene within Nottingham and the region. You will, therefore, focus on the widening of your professional network, supporting the creation of a sustainable practice, leading to an understanding of your place within a specific infrastructure inside the relevant art community, making use of the rigorous and rich art scene in Nottingham and the surrounding area.

You will be studying in a city that is recognised as having one of the most active artist-led scenes outside London and Glasgow, as was shown in a 2009 study by Networking Artists Networks and. Nottingham is in a very special geographical location and situation: it is of a specific size, large enough to have a vibrant regional art scene while at the same time small enough to recognize the place of the individual within it. Making use of this unique circumstance, the course includes a number of opportunities for you to undertake work-related contexts or engage with external opportunities, professional-led projects and activities, encouraging you to produce work of professional standard. In Nottingham and through this course you have the opportunity to become a recognised active member of an already established and strong art community.

This is supported by a partnership developed between Nottingham Contemporary and Nottingham Trent University, supported by the Arts Council. Members of Staff from NTU and students of this MFA course are invited to be actively involved in the development of the gallery's programme, including lectures, symposia, workshops, reading groups, screenings. This partnership also includes a student placement scheme for which you can apply, providing you with the opportunity to gain insight and knowledge to prepare you for your professional career post studies, leading to a smooth transition to a career in fine art.

The specific structure mentioned above becomes especially visible in the beginning of the second year when you can select between the following options:

- A post-graduate Erasmus exchange;
- Or intensification of your professional engagement, which could include, for example, work placement in and around Nottingham or abroad (linked to the Erasmus programme), international collaborations, or the development of an exhibition with another artist/practitioner.

Extending the learning experience across three-years (part-time) or two-years (full-time) and considering the focus on the professionalization of your practice, this MFA will also form an ideal preparation for further postgraduate studies, PhD and especially DFA. Through studying an optional 20 credit point module in *Advanced Art & Design Research*, which addresses research methodology in preparation for further postgraduate studies, the MFA award will provide you with a logical progression through to the Doctorate in Fine Art (DFA) from your degree in Fine Art. (If you choose this option then you will be undertaking a 100 credit practice-based module, instead of the 120 credit point module.) If you successfully complete this module you will have been introduced to the form of analytical writing in preparation for the DFA and will be offered the opportunity of an interview for the DFA should you wish to progress. To support you in your decision-making as to which option to choose you will have the opportunity to discuss the options available to you with your supervisor, the Course Leader and academic staff from the Advanced Research team.

#### 7. **Course outcomes**

Course outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of your course if you take advantage of the opportunities for learning that we provide.

#### **Knowledge and understanding**

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Display a comprehensive knowledge and a critical awareness of current issues with regard to Fine Art practices relevant to your project.
- Deploy an advanced research methodology in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in Fine Art.
- Establish an independent practical and professional engagement within the field of contemporary Fine Art.
- Critically apply knowledge and skills to create new opportunities that further your professional development.

#### **Skills, qualities and attributes**

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Communicate process and results of research and work in an effective and appropriate manner.
- Evidence the qualities of a reflective practitioner by demonstrating self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems.
- Learn independently and act autonomously to meet personal creative and intellectual ambitions.

- Demonstrate the relationship of practice and theory within your work.
- Show inventiveness and independence of thought in the application of knowledge in your subject and make an advanced contribution to knowledge within professional contexts.

## 8. Teaching and learning methods

The MFA course uses a range of teaching and learning methods to help facilitate the course learning outcomes. These methods include: independent studio practice, feedback tutorials, studio seminars, individual and group presentations, skills workshops, exhibitions and projects, briefings, lectures and presentations, study visits and possible international exchange, self-directed research, workshop inductions, technical surgeries, self and peer evaluation, e-learning and the NTU's Online Workspace (NOW). The delivery of seminars and critical debate will be flexible, allowing for phases of intense teaching and debate followed by a period of consolidation. This will create a possibility for you to work through the material autonomously and integrate it accordingly into your own practice and research portfolio. This particular form of delivery will also enable you, should you be away due to, for example, an Erasmus exchange, or otherwise unable to be permanently in Nottingham, to plan for your time at the University.

The unique teaching and learning features and activities of the MFA at Nottingham Trent University are as follows:

### Research enhanced teaching

All the staff who teach you on the MFA course are active practitioners, scholars and/or researchers. Their practice extends from exhibiting, performing, screening, and writing into a range of art and critical practices in the wider cultural domain.

### Practice-led teaching

Throughout your course the Fine Art staff run practical and theoretical workshops emerging from their own on-going artistic and/or scholarly enquiry. You may use these workshops to enhance the way you already work or to change the media and direction of your practice.

### Contexts talks and Live lectures

All staff in Fine Art are actively engaged in research, which is made visible to you through the Contexts Talks Programme that all Fine Art students attend, BA, MA and MFA. These talks arise from current research and take varied forms. They are intended to demonstrate ways in which you might develop and contextualize your own practice and their changing focus mirrors that of the written tasks you will encounter through the year. The Live Lectures, which invite external artists, curators, writers, etc., offer other contemporary and historical perspectives alongside the Contexts talks to support the development of your own research and critical thinking.

### The Summer Lodge

After the summer term, all staff are invited back into the fine art studios for a ten day period, together with recent graduates and guest artists, to make and share work. In the summer (June) of your final year you are invited to participate in these events. During each year's Summer Lodge there is a day of conversation including 'Pecha Kucha' presentations on a theme related to artistic and research enquiry.

### Studio Space

As a part-time student and practitioner, we assume that you have your own studio or appropriate working space if your work is community based. While having an independent working space is not an entry requirement, it is part of your practice, and we will help you to find a space for the duration of your studies. While you are studying for your modules – the first module will run for two years - you are to engage fully with the events provided through the course. (If necessary, different modes of participation can be arranged, i.e., Skype, Vimeo.) It is essential that you remain in regular contact with your supervisor and that you take part in regular sessions such as Show & Listen seminars, where you are invited to work together with the full-time students, providing each other with feedback and exchange ideas.

As a full-time student studying for two years, you will be allocated a space within a studio to work.

## **9. Assessment methods**

Assessment for all modules is 100% coursework and for the practice based modules (120/100 credit point modules) this involves the presentation of practical work and an associated Research Portfolio, including a Learning Agreement. All formally assessed work will be assessed using grade-based assessment.

To ensure that you have a clear understanding of the way in which you are progressing within the modules, you will receive formative feedback on the progress that you are making on a regular basis. You will also receive written formal formative feedback both during, and at the end of the module, followed up verbally in a tutorial. Group tutorials are also an important opportunity to note the feedback that you are getting from your tutors and fellow students, and are seen as an important part of the feedback mechanism in the School of Art and Design.

All modules are assessed holistically which means you get one grade for all the work completed in that module. In each module, the Research Portfolio evidences the on-going documentation of work in development. It is a visual and textual dossier that includes documentation of your practice, the communication of your research and critical analysis and evidence of self-evaluation, as well as the Learning Agreement. This is a 'living document', which will accompany you throughout the duration of your studies, updated when and where appropriate. At each stage of study the emphasis of the Research Portfolio is modified in order to focus your attention to particular issues within art practice. Assessment methods may include exhibition, individual and group presentations, seminars and submission of written/visual material, as determined by your project.

There is a deliberate setting of similar but different tasks for assessment within each module of the course. These tasks move from skilling you to be curious, through to developing the critical skills to speculate and challenge before arriving at resolution through making and critical reflection.

Assessment is conducted according to the School policy 'Assessment and Feedback Principles and Guidelines' which ensures the academic standards, and their appropriateness, are made clear to you. All the modules on this course contain formal formative feedback sessions where you will receive written feedback on your progress. You will be provided with written Summative Feedback on all of your module assessments.

The purpose of assessment is to enable you to demonstrate that you have fulfilled the learning outcomes of each module and the course and have reached a specified standard to attain your postgraduate degree. The knowledge and skills that you will require in order to develop and complete your master's projects are supported by the formatively assessed tasks built in across the duration of the 120 plus 120 or 100/20 credit point modules.

Towards the end of the course, you will also undertake a synoptic assessment. This requires you to reflect on the range of activities and experiences across the entirety of your course in relation to your future employability aspirations.

Finally, all module grades will be aggregated. This will then determine whether you are awarded a distinction, commendation, pass or fail by the Board of Examiners at the end of your course. In the case of a 'fail' you may be offered a further attempt, in accordance with the University's Common Assessment Regulations.

If following the completion of the repeat attempt your work has still not achieved a pass at Masters level, then your work will be assessed against the interim award learning outcomes for the award of Postgraduate Certificate in Fine Art (which is equivalent to 60 credit points at Masters level), or Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art (equivalent to 120 credit points Masters level).

## 10 Course structure and curriculum

The course is modular as described in the diagram below. Part-time students study across a three year period and full-time students over two.

<b>Master of Fine Art (MFA)</b>			
<b>full-time route</b>		<b>part-time route</b>	
<b>Year 1</b> <i>Core module</i> <b>Research &amp; Project Development</b> 120 credits (Year 1)		<b>Year 1 and 2</b> <i>Core module</i> <b>Research &amp; Project Development</b> 120 credits (Year 1&2)	
		<b>Year 2</b> <i>Option B</i> <b>Project Realisation and Presentation (option B)</b> 100cr (yr 2)	
		<i>Option B</i> <b>Advanced Art and Design Research</b> 20cr (yr 2)	

The course is based on a core of practical studio skills and research methods underpinned with a critical understanding of your work within the contexts of contemporary fine art practice. The field of fine art practice is characterized by its diversity, which might include for example: drawing, installation, painting, curating, performance, photography, printmaking, sculpture, sound, moving image and writing.

You will be encouraged to re-negotiate what fine art practice is for your own context. You will work through practical engagement and experimentation, which may take place within a critical and supportive studio and workshop environment or through the development of work in/from specific sites. You are encouraged to test out your ideas through a variety of media in order to discover which is most effective and appropriate; many students work across the boundaries between media, developing a critical interdisciplinary practice.

If you choose to study part-time the structure will be different to that of the full-time students; while the full-time students complete the first module during their first year, you will do this over two years. Over this longer period of study, you will develop your practice and remain in regular contact with your supervisor. This time for self-directed study is key to your independent, professional activity as an arts practitioner. You will submit monthly reports on your progress, helping you to maintain a rigorous approach to your studies. During this period, you will also take part in seminars with your full-time peers, to enable you to continue your active involvement in the fine art community.

Module One (1 year for FT; 2 years for PT): 'Research & Project Development',  
Postgraduate diploma 120 credit points

This module starts with you focussing on a critical reappraisal of your practice. Studio and theoretical components are integrated and you are to engage in research, developing a research portfolio. During the first stage of this module you are formulating and developing your Learning Agreement. During this early period it is essential that connections are made with the art community in Nottinghamshire enabling you to be professionally engaged with your surrounding infrastructure for future developments, which is supported by activities arranged by the course team. In addition you will attend a series of sessions on research. These will introduce you to research methods and the development of a methodology relevant to your individual practice and work. While you are encouraged to critically engage and challenge these kinds of structures, it will also allow for a communal language to be developed within the group, while addressing your and your peers' work and practices.

At the end of January (end of July for part-timers) there will be a formalised formative feedback point. Using the Learning Outcomes of this module, you will be given an indication of your progress. It will also provide a natural point of focus with regard to finalising the first stage of your Learning Agreement, which will then be revisited during the later stage of your module when you will update the document if necessary.

At the end of this module you will have the opportunity to present your work as part of the group in the interim exhibition, outside the University's premises. This exhibition will be visited by relevant members from industry, for example Nottingham Cotemporary, who will engage with your work and provide professional critique

furthering the development of your practice. You will also write a plan for the MFA stage and make preparations for the final year, considering in particular the first stage of the final year.

The final year comprises of two options:

*either: A) Project Realisation and Presentation – 120 credit points  
or B) Project Realisation and Presentation – 100 credit points **and**  
Advanced Art and Design Research – 20 credit points.*

Option A:

Module Two (1 year FT; 1 year PT): 'Project Realisation and Presentation', MFA 120 credit points

The MFA stage furthers the in-depth interrogation into the chosen research area and fine art practice. It consolidates independent thinking and working, methodologically as part of the Research Portfolio and practically, allowing for an advanced contribution within professional contexts.

During the first stage of this module you will have the possibility to select from the following options:

- Apply to participate in the International Master Erasmus exchange course, giving you the opportunity to work with one of our partner universities, engaging in different ways of addressing practice and the processes of making.
- Or intensify your professional engagement, which could include, for example, work placement in and around Nottingham or abroad (linked to the Erasmus programme), international collaborations or two artists developing an exhibition. Support in relation to your future career aspirations is an important aspect of the MFA course. During that time you will have the opportunity to apply for a paid professional development placement with Nottingham Contemporary. Successful candidates will work within one of the two curatorial departments, Exhibitions or The Public Programme. The placement offers you the opportunity to contextualise your practice in relationship to the work of leading contemporary art institutions, while gaining experience and transferable skills relevant to the realisation of exhibition, performance, moving image and discursive programmes.

During July you will be invited to take part in the Summer Lodge, a research activity lead by the Fine Art staff team described above.

The Learning Agreement will be updated and finalized. This final stage culminates in the presentation and celebration of your work for the final degree show, held in a venue outside NTU and organized by yourself as a group as part of your overall professional practice.

Option B:

Module Two (1 year FT; 1 year PT): 'Project Realisation and Presentation (option B)', MFA 100 credit points

While the module content of this 100 credit module is similar to the one outlined above, including research analysis, you are studying research strategies in a more focussed manner in the module 'Advanced Art and Design Research', (20 credit points Part-time and full-time students final year). The amount of time spent studying this module and the amount of work you as expected to undertake and submit for the 100

credit point module assessment will differ to that of the 120 credit point module. Your supervisor will work with you to establish an agreed amount of work.

The 'Advanced Art and Design Research' module will introduce issues that may arise when conducting interdependent theoretical/practical research and provide strategies for overcoming them to develop rigorous research methodologies. The sessions will build on the series of research sessions you have undertaken in your first year and will help to develop your capacity to engage in high level practitioner research and prepare you for the demands of further postgraduate study: PhD/DFA should you wish to continue your studies.

## 11 Admission to the course

### **Entry requirements.**

For current information regarding all entry requirements for this course, please see the 'Applying' tab on the NTU course information web page.

## 12 Support for learning

Throughout this course you are supported and guided through your studies and learning experience by the Course Leader and the course tutors/supervisors. You will receive regular formative feedback on your progression through tutorials and written feedback at the end of each stage. In addition to this, the feedback given to you by peers during seminars and critiques is seen as invaluable feedback and essential to your learning experience.

The first part of the first module is an extended induction, where you will meet the staff and your fellow students and will be able to find out more about how you will be taught and assessed on your course. During this time you will get time to get to know each other and to introduce one another to your practice. Through activities such as visits to galleries and reading groups, you are encouraged to share your experiences such as working methods, your research and reasoning behind your own practice, thereby developing yourself and supporting your peers. This will form the first step of your research portfolio as well as allowing you to take ownership of your course; put your stamp on it! Also, during that time, you are inducted not only into the University and the School resources and opportunities for support, but also to the city, and its 'cultural' points of interest. Knowing your cultural environment within the area of Nottingham is crucial to this course with regard to your professional practice aspect of the MFA. Introducing you to the vibrant active artist-led scene in Nottingham at that point in your studies is a way of sharing not only your experiences of work and practices, but also creates a foundation for future connections that are to be built as part of your course.

The School is committed to assisting you to achieve the best results possible during your studies with us, providing a wide range of academic help and advice. Your Course Handbook will contain details of the support available to you should there be an interruption in your studies, due to circumstances outside of your control, or through other factors affecting your academic performance.



As an international student, you are able to attend a pre-session course set up to specifically support students with language issues. It will also help you to familiarize yourself with the spread of helpful resources you can access. The language support is available through the Language School and the International Office will provide you with on-going support.

The NOW (NTU's Online Workspace) encourages you to take responsibility for your own learning. All course and module information is uploaded for ease of access when working on or off site.

### **13 Graduate destinations / employability**

As professionalisation is at the heart of this postgraduate course, we envisage that you will be able to make lasting connections with institutions outside the University while you are studying for the MFA. Early in the course, you will learn about core employability skills and begin your career planning activity. You will therefore be provided with unique opportunities to work closely with internationally renowned galleries such as Nottingham Contemporary. The connection established between Nottingham Contemporary and NTU, especially the MFA course, will provide you with the opportunity to gain insight and knowledge preparing you for your professional career post studies, leading to a smooth transition to a career in fine art. The options offered to you at the beginning of the second year will enable and support you in making informed choices with regard to work placement, Erasmus exchange, an in-depth research module, addressing research methodology in preparation for further postgraduate studies such as PhD and DFA.

The synoptic assessment at the end of the course will enable you to reflect on your skills, experiences and activities undertaken throughout the course in relation to your future employability. It allows you to reflect on the whole NTU learning experience made during your studies, including external activities outside the course but relevant to your professional development.

### **14 Course standards and quality**

All courses conform to University requirements. There are well-established systems for managing the quality of the curriculum within the School. External examiners are appointed to each course and report on the appropriateness of the curriculum, the quality of student work and the assessment process. The External Examiner is employed to make judgements and report on the standards of the course and confirm that our internal system of moderating marks is consistent. Following their visits they then summarise their annual visit in a report, which is then received by the Course Committee. The course team then reflect on this together with the feedback received by students and staff across the year and compile their Interim Course Report which is received at the School's Academic Standards and Quality Committee for review.

The School reviews, defines and updates its courses and modules; with dialogue between staff and students an important part of this process. Whilst there are good informal relationships between staff and students, the School and University, also have formal channels for student feedback which comprise: Student/staff liaison committee, held three times a year; formal module evaluation, undertaken by questionnaire; regular year group meetings and discussion arranged by the course team for each year; student representatives elected by the student group represent students on Course committees.

We would like you to contribute to the continuing development of this course and we welcome all feedback and have a number of ways in which we can formally and informally receive this. You will have an opportunity to put yourself forward to be considered as a course representative at the beginning of each of your years of study. As part of this role you will be invited to attend the course committee meetings that occur three times a year and contribute to the conversations and debate to support the continuing health of the course. Any issues brought up at the course committee meetings are reported to the School Academic Standards and Quality Committee responses are reported back to you either via the next course committee meeting or via the NOW (NTU's Online Workspace).

At the end of each year, the course team write an evaluative report, which is received at School level and contains an action plan to ensure that the development of the course continues.

**15 Assessment regulations**

This course is subject to the University's Common Assessment Regulations (located in Section 16 of the Quality Handbook).

**16 Additional Information**

Collaborative partner(s):	n/a
Course referenced to national QAA Benchmark Statements:	Art and Design 2016
Course recognised by:	
Date implemented:	10.08.17 SASQC approved PCR/CR Modification changes and general updates

**Innovative features of this course**

The MFA course will prepare you for the rigor of contemporary practice as artists and researchers whose enquiry can be seen in both a critical and professional context. Essential to this context is the development of an on-going professional exhibiting experience and or audience engagement.

Enabled by its specific structure, the MFA will focus on the widening of your professional network, supporting the creation of a sustainable practice, leading to an understanding of your place within a specific infrastructure inside the relevant art community, making use of the rigorous and rich art scene in Nottingham and surroundings.

Extending the learning experience across three-years part-time (two years full-time) and considering the focus on the professionalisation of your practice, this MFA will form an ideal preparation for further postgraduate studies, PhD and especially DFA.