



MA

Critical Theory and the Arts

MA Critical Theory and the Arts

A program of study in critical theory, social justice, aesthetics and the arts:

- Taught by distinguished faculty, the MA degree is completed in one year and culminates in the Comprehensive Thesis.
- Graduates go on to PhD studies in various areas; to work in galleries, museums, schools and nonprofit institutions; to teach at the college level; and to develop as public intellectuals.
- The demanding year of study, writing and discussion is meant for students with a lot on their minds who are prepared to have a whole lot more on their minds.

Curriculum

The Master's Degree in Critical Theory and the Arts is completed in three consecutive semesters: fall, spring and summer. In the fall and spring semesters, students participate in a closely organized curriculum of year long seminar classes in philosophy, art theory, sociology, political thought, and social and art history. In the summer semester, students and their advisors work in collaboration preparing the Comprehensive Thesis, which draws on the year's course work and student writings. To learn more about the curriculum: cta.sva.edu.

FALL	CREDITS
The Arts, Their History and the United States I	3
Critical Theory and Aesthetics I	3
Proseminar 1: The Situation of the Arts— "The Level of the Problem" I	1.5
Proseminar 2: The Serious Times Lecture Series I	1.5
Social Theory, Research and Criticism I	3
SPRING	
The Arts, Their History and the United States II	3
Critical Theory and Aesthetics II	3
Proseminar 1: The Situation of the Arts— "The Level of the Problem" II	1.5
Proseminar 2: The Serious Times Lecture Series II	1.5
Social Theory, Research and Criticism II	3
SUMMER	
Comprehensive Thesis	6

Course Offerings

THE ARTS, THEIR HISTORY AND THE UNITED STATES I AND II

These seminars broadly investigate the thesis that of all that humans make, art is the object that potentially and most of all reveals the antagonisms, felt conflicts and promises of human history and of the moment we inhabit. In this sense, as T. W. Adorno once wrote, art really does “know us better than we know ourselves.” And once this thought is on one’s mind, the impulse to understand how these considerable realities become coiled up in art, what they genuinely are, no less than wanting to know what it would mean intellectually and socially—whether in writing or in social action—to do justice to art’s more than important content, becomes insistent and can be developed in the study of individual artworks and their complex implications.

PROSEMINAR 1: THE SITUATION OF THE ARTS—“THE LEVEL OF THE PROBLEM” I AND II

In these seminars led by experienced and distinguished critics and curators, students gain considerable familiarity with the contemporary situation of the arts, especially in New York City. Students have unique access to meet with established as well as with newly emerging artists for intimate discussions directed toward understanding what artists today are immediately contending with, first of all in their studio practice, but also in terms of their intellectual and theoretical ambitions for their work. What is an artist today in the midst of rapidly shifting technologies of art manufacture and reproduction, all of which goes on while dealing with other artists, art markets and promotion, galleries, museums, patrons and collectors. What, in other words, are the problems of art today that are shaping its situation?

PROSEMINAR 2: THE SERIOUS TIMES LECTURE SERIES I AND II

In the Serious Times Lecture Series students work together in a seminar with a series of invited lecturers, faculty and discussants to engage critical problems of contemporary social reality. There is a threefold intention: students develop a substantial understanding of the complexities and tensions of social dynamics; students discover that these realities turn out to have considerable implications for what is happening in the arts today; and, at the same time, students are provided with occasions for close involvement with scholars, social activists and critics of considerable accomplishment.

Each year, the shape of the lecture series changes, depending on the social realities engaged and the group of scholars assembled. But, whatever the issues raised—whether these be the destruction of the earth’s climate, the gross economic inequality, gender struggle or recent transformations of industry and labor—the focal point of these seminars remains the

SOCIAL THEORY, RESEARCH AND CRITICISM I AND II

Because art is inextricably joined with human struggle, experience and aspiration on every level—and no less because increasingly artists feel compelled to engage social struggle in their own work—writers and critics require an understanding of political realities and economic and social structures. Here study necessarily engages several fields at once as does this course which comprises political philosophy—questions of political representation and those of social justice, progress, human equality and emancipation—as well as sociology and an introduction to techniques of social investigation and observation that aim at insight into a world that characteristically veils itself from our efforts at understanding, “What is really going on here?” The aim of the two-semester course is for students to have a genuine grasp of what begins to answer this question and the overarching structure of the program seeks to bring this developing capacity into relation with art itself. The seminar begins with Freud, Rousseau and Hobbes, and in the course of the second semester leads students with considerable lucidity through to the thinking of Marx, Simmel, Mauss, Weber, the Frankfurt School, and contemporary feminism and gender studies.

question of how it can be that society continually develops new possibilities for improving human life and ameliorating human suffering, while at the same time the toll of social calamity continues to mount. Why? Given that there are so many achievements in the sciences, in civil equality, in absolute power to control nature, why does the social order remain so destructive and immune to urgent realities?

CRITICAL THEORY AND AESTHETICS I AND II

These seminars investigate the philosophical developments that undergird contemporary critical theory as it bears especially on questions of art, a field sometimes described as aesthetics. The first semester presents the tradition of thought stretching from antiquity to Kant, Hegel and Marx. The second semester begins with a study of the seminal importance of Nietzsche and Heidegger, tracing how their writings fused in the early 20th century with

the French tradition in Bergson, Valéry and Lévi-Strauss and spurred the development of the most dynamic body of critical theory devoted to the arts of the modern era, from Barthes to Foucault and Althusser, and from Derrida and Rancière to Badiou and Žižek. Students are encouraged to examine the close reasoning of these thinkers and to achieve a genuine and perhaps rare understanding of a complex field that is often presented in a limbo of cursory and vague approximations.

Faculty

Jeremy Cohan

Sociologist

Education: BA, with honors, University of Chicago; MA, New York University

Professional experience includes: president, Society for Psychoanalytic Inquiry; organizer and chair: Class, Politics, Society Conference at New York University

Presentations include:

Presentations on neoliberalism, the authoritarian personality, teacher strikes and the social theory of André Gorz, Wilhelm Reich, Adorno, Lukács, Marx and Foucault for the International Sociological Association, Sandor Ferenczi Center at the New School for Social Research, Reblaw Conference at Yale University, Social Theory Workshop at the University of Chicago, Economic and Political Sociology Workshop at New York University, Leftforum, Cultural Studies Association, Marx and Philosophy Society and the Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society

Awards and honors include: Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award, New York University; Henry MacCracken Fellowship, New York University; Resident Scholar, Home School 3 Art Space; John Billing Fiske Poetry Prize, University of Chicago

Alhelí de Maria Alvarado-Díaz

Intellectual Historian

Education: BA, Johns Hopkins University; MA, M.Phil., PhD, Columbia University

Presentations include: "Rosa's Afterlives:

Revolutionary Legacies in Theory and Practice," Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung; "Castrating Mothers, Insubordinate Daughters: A Feminist Reading of Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters*," Interdisciplinary Network, Dubrovnik; "Two Gospels of Redemption: Ernesto Guevara and Leonardo Boff in dialogue with Alain Badiou," Latin American Studies Association Annual Conference (LASA), Washington,

DC; "Herbert Marcuse, Prophet of Economic Collapse," Public Intellectuals Conference, Harvard University; "Curing Contradiction in the Ave of Affluence: Marcuse's Prescriptions for the Liberation of the Self," Columbia University Libraries; "Keep Calm and Carry On: Marcus Aurelius' Ancient Cures for Modern Ailments," Association for Core Texts and Courses Annual Conference, Los Angeles; "Clastres, Abensour, Negri and Rancière: A Major Polyphony in Radical Philosophy," Terceras Jornadas del Archive General de la Nación, Montevideo

Awards and honors include: Provost's Hybrid Learning Grant, Heyman Center Postdoctoral Working Series Grant, Columbia University; Postdoctoral Lectureship in Contemporary Civilization, Dissertation Writing Fellowship, Columbia University; Sciences Po-Paris Doctoral Exchange Fellow; DAAD; Phi Beta Kappa

Krista Johansson

Philosopher

Education: BA, MA, University of Helsinki; MA, PhD, The New School

Presentations include: "Nietzsche, The Enigma of Eternal Recurrence and Dance," The Nietzsche Circle, New York; "Friedrich Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil as Music — Misogyny Reconsidered," Department of Philosophy, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

Publications include: "Necessity of Chance and Affirmation of Plurality," review of the first Finnish Translation of Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy

Awards and honors include: Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award, The New School; American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship; University of Helsinki Research Foundation; Finnish Concordia Fund

To learn more about the faculty, visit: cta.sva.edu.

Kevin Lotery

Art Historian

Education: BA, Columbia University; MA, PhD, Harvard University

Presentations include: presenter, "The Hamilton Variations: Sigfried Giedion and Richard Hamilton," Columbia University, Mellon Postdoctoral Lecture Series; roundtable, "Practicing Art History After Trump," Columbia University; co-organizer, "Art and Law: Objects and Spaces as Legal Actors," Association for Art History Annual Conference

Publications include: author, *The Long Front of Culture: The Independent Study Group and Exhibition Design*. *Deutsche Guggenheim* magazine; *Enclave Review*; *Texte Zur Kunst*; co-editor, contributor, *October 150*

“ But if there is a sense of reality, and no one will doubt that it has its justifications for existing, then there must also be something we can call a sense of possibility.”

—Robert Musil, Austrian writer

About the Program

THE ACADEMIC YEAR

The intensive year of study begins with two semesters of seminar work in social theory, aesthetics, art history, psychoanalysis, political thought and gender studies focused on the contemporary situation of the arts. These semesters, in which students take five, rather than the usual graduate school curriculum of three classes per term, succeed at condensing into the year what otherwise generally takes two years of graduate level work. Students meet individually with an academic advisor throughout the entire year from admission to the program right up to graduation. Students choose a second advisor to direct their MA thesis work, which is completed with the collaboration of a three-member thesis committee. In the summer semester, students and their advisors work in collaboration preparing the Comprehensive Thesis, which draws on the year's course work and student writings. The program as a whole combines to focus on what is going on in art today in a way that involves the entire history of art and society and the most important questions we have about our lives.

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

The students who join us for the year have a lot on their minds and mean to have a whole lot more on their minds. They have made it clear in their applications that they have a serious developing involvement in the arts

and questions of social reality. These students bring an intensity for education to the program at a moment when it is widely recognized that society and a pragmatically narrowed education are largely in retreat from engaging some of the most tense, most difficult problems that have ever confronted humanity—problems that art, at whatever apparent distance from society, cannot help but share.

The students come from various fields of undergraduate education, including art college. A number are active in studio work. Because the curriculum is wide ranging, it necessarily turns out that each student is more prepared in one area of study than in another. Those, for instance, with a more extensive background in art history, philosophy or sociology may have less direct experience in making art than do art school graduates, who may themselves know less about contemporary society than those who have studied sociology or whose lives have long been engaged in social activism—and so on. We expect this, and the array of strengths, familiarities and backgrounds produces a collaborative atmosphere in which students support and fill each other in. The faculty, fully aware of this situation, themselves have different areas of expertise and make these differences a productive source of reflection in the classes.

LIFE AFTER CRITICAL THEORY AND THE ARTS

Students come to Critical Theory and the Arts motivated by intensities of inquiry, intellect and an ongoing engagement in problems of social reality and the arts. This is practical: knowledge engages us in life, and it could not be otherwise. Graduates from this program discover that the MA degree prepares, qualifies and recommends them for many more life possibilities and kinds of work than more narrowly specified craft or career programs, which, though they have their own advantages, do not. Students are able to seek—and have achieved—teaching positions at various levels; work in many areas of the arts, including galleries, museums and foundations; students go on to seek advanced degrees, including the PhD, in areas including art history, literature and philosophy. Students may discover an impulse to become public intellectuals; to invent a life for themselves that no one may have thought of yet; other students return to their engagement as artists with new perceptions and critical insight.

Alumni Mang Su (MA 2017) and Jamie Keesling (MA 2013).



PROGRAM SIZE

A small group of students is selected annually by the Committee on Graduate Admissions. Students who, for various reasons—international students, especially—may need to plan far ahead to join the program, may request deferred admission for the following year.

FINANCIAL AID

We are able to provide some financial assistance and, on occasion, select assistantships for our students.

Notable Alumni

Kyle Baasch
PhD student, University of Minnesota

Christopher Carlton
PhD student, Binghamton University

Paloma Crousillat
college instructor

Andrea De Caso
Museum Employee, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), Mexico City

Justin Elm
college instructor

Hannah Garner
PhD student, Rutgers University

Fátima González
gallery staff, Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

Cara Greene
PhD student, University of New Mexico

Jamie Keesling
gallerist, college instructor

Amy LeBlanc
paralegal work, activism

Noa Leshem-Gradus
artist; one-person exhibition, "Into the Smokeless Air," Janco-DADA Museum, Israel

Eric-John Russell
PhD student, Kingston University, London; co-founder of *Cured Quail*, a new journal of critical theory

Sarah Snyder
social worker

Robin Treadwell
co-founder, Codex Bookstore (NYC)

Department performance and lecture by pianist Aaron Likness.



Lecturers

Guest lecturers who have spoken with our students include:

Paul Chan
artist, publisher

Eric Foner
historian

Richard Foreman
founder, Ontological-Hysteric Theater

Steve Fraser
historian

Joelle Gamble and David Palmer
The Roosevelt Institute

James Hansen
climatologist

Doug Henwood
journalist and economic analyst

Martin Jay
intellectual historian

Michael Katz
historian

Ira Katznelson
political scientist

Yve Laris Cohen
artist and choreographer

Kristen Lombardi
journalist, The Center for Public Integrity

Sven Lütticken
art historian and critic

Barry C. Lynn
author, economist

Jane McAlevey
organizer and author

Sarah Michelson
choreographer

Meleko Mokgosi
painter

Nicolai Ouroussoff
architectural historian

Frances Fox Piven
sociologist and activist

Laura Poitras
filmmaker

Tom Porteous
Human Rights Watch

Moishe Postone
historian

Rachel Price
scholar

Jean-Michel Rabaté
literary scholar

Ariana Reines
writer, performance artist

David Salle
painter

Jay Sanders
curator

Kristen Sollee
writer, curator, editor

Joan Waltemath
painter

Jamieson Webster
psychoanalyst

Application Process

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For detailed instructions, visit: sva.edu/grad/howtoapply

- Online Application and \$80 Application Fee: sva.edu/apply
- Statement of Intent/Personal Statement
- Résumé
- Three Letters of Recommendation
- Official College Transcript

Some applicants may be required to submit the following:

- Proof of English Proficiency
- Copy of Permanent Residency Card
- Declaration of Finances
- Verification of Finances
- Foreign Transcript Evaluation

DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

For specific guidelines about these requirements, visit: sva.edu/grad/deptreq

- Writing Sample
- Interview

DEADLINES

For information on application deadlines, visit: sva.edu/grad/timeline

IMPORTANT LINKS

- FAQ: sva.edu/grad/faq
- International students: sva.edu/grad/intl
- Tuition and fees: sva.edu/tuition
- Visit SVA: sva.edu/grad/visit



Contact Us

We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a departmental tour or sign up to attend an Information Session. For more information and to register, go to: sva.edu/grad/visit.

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: gradadmissions@sva.edu.

Jeremy Cohan, director of operations

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This program isn't for anyone who

can't tolerate contradiction. There aren't many answers, but you leave the program with lots of big, important questions."

—Paloma Crousillat, MA 2014

ACCREDITATION

The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents (www.highered.nysed.gov) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Advertising; Animation; Cartooning; Computer Art, Computer Animation and Visual Effects; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of the programs in Critical Theory and the Arts; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching on graduates of the program in Art Education; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Art Writing; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of the programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography. Data required by the U.S. Department of Education on "Gainful Employment" for each of the above programs may be found on each individual program page at sva.edu/ge.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (msche.org), 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 267.284.5000. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

The School of Visual Arts is an accredited institutional member of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (nasad.arts-accredit.org).

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (accredit-id.org), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

The Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The Master of Professional Studies in Art Therapy degree program is approved by the American Art Therapy Association, Inc., and as such meets the Education Standards of the art therapy profession.

CREDITS

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School of Visual Arts

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