

Glasgow School of Art Course Specification

Course Title:

Design History & Theory 3A: Concepts and Territories of Design



Image: Anita Sarkezi

Please note that this course specification is correct on the date of publication but may be subject to amendment prior to the start of the Academic Year.

| Course Code | HECOS Code | Academic Session |
|-------------|------------|------------------|
| | | 2026-27 |

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| Course Title | Design History and Theory 3A: Concepts and Territories of Design |
| Course Contact | Nicholas Oddy, Head of DHT |

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|--------------------|---------------------|
| Credits | 10 |
| SCQF Level | 9 |
| When Taught | Stage 3, Semester 1 |

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|------------------------------|---|
| Associated Programmes | BA (Hons) Communication Design BA (Hons) Fashion Design BA (Hons) Fashion Narrative BA (Hons) Interaction Design BA (Hons) Interior Design BA (Hons) / MDes Silversmithing & Jewellery Design (Integrated Masters) BA (Hons) Textile Design |
| Lead School | School of Design |
| Other Schools | |
| Date of Approval | PACAAG April 2026 |

Course Introduction

This course supports students in building their knowledge, understanding, critical reflection, and research methods within Design History and Theory. The course asks students to sign up for one of a range of elective strands that examine a broad scope of approaches, issues, ideas, and debates.

The elective strands allow students to follow study routes connected to themes and conceptual approaches, and each strand cohort brings together students from different studio disciplines. The range of elective strands covers themes such as how design histories are constructed and contested, postcolonial theory and design, the politics of design, the politics of space and everyday experience, technology, time, and the moving image, and digital cultures.

All students share an assessment brief for this course. The assessment consists of a submission that asks students to critically appraise a topic within the scope of their chosen elective strand. The assessment approach enables students to enhance their understanding of a focused area of interest and how to use sources as research tools. It helps inform their approach to source gathering for the self-directed research proposal in Stage 3, Semester 2.

Course Aims

The aims of this course are to:

1. develop informed knowledge and understanding of defined research methods according to individual research interests

2. facilitate the informed application of a wide range of key terms, knowledge, skills and understanding in discussing design contexts
3. recognise that different critical opinion can be reached on any aspect of visual and material culture depending on informed interpretation of evidence and/or the method selected for criticism
4. support and evaluate an informed range of skills in structuring, articulating and presenting information and ideas, verbally, visually and in written form
5. situate the importance of self-directed and critically reflective work in critical, historical and cultural studies

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. demonstrate informed knowledge and critical understanding of defining theories, concepts and issues related to design, process and practices
2. apply informed knowledge, skills and understanding in carrying out reflective research and methods of enquiry drawing upon a range of sources
3. undertake informed critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of design theories, concepts and issues
4. select and defend reflective and informed arguments using textual and visual resources in a structured form to accepted academic standards
5. manage reflective research and assignments exercising autonomy and initiative

Indicative Content

The course will introduce students to:

- informed approaches to critical and contextual studies in relation to themes and conceptual approaches
- critical analysis and evaluation around core design histories, theories, concepts and issues
- approaches to gathering, evaluating and critically reflecting on sources as research tools
- ways to engage with critical and contextual learning in visual, verbal, and written form

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

A range of learning and teaching methods are used to support students to engage in an explorative approach to learning in Design History and Theory. These include:

- briefings
- tutorials and workshops
- talks, lectures, seminars
- presentations and writing
- reflection and self-evaluation

Independent learning skills will be developed and supported through guided activities and digital online learning resources available on Canvas.

A variety of teaching and learning approaches, including in person, blended and online learning and delivery, are employed to support student engagement with the curriculum and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

| Indicative Contact Hours | Notional Learning Hours |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 12 | 100 |

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Students are supported in their learning through a range of activities with staff and peers, such as workshops, reviews and tutorials offering ongoing formative feedback as they progress through the course.

Students have the opportunity to present an assignment proposal for formative feedback to support developing and refining their work towards submission for summative assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

The summative assessment brief is shared across all elective strands. The assessment brief describes and provides guidelines for the summative assessment, which is a written submission critically appraising a topic of interest within the scope of a chosen elective strand (indicative word count: 2000 words).

Summative assessment is designed to support students to reflect on and communicate work produced in response to the assessment brief and learning and teaching activities associated with the course.

Submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the Code of Assessment, which outlines reassessment opportunities where a student has not passed the course.

| Description of Summative Assessment Method | Weight % | Submission week |
|---|----------|-----------------------|
| Written submission critically appraising a topic of interest within the scope of a chosen elective strand (indicative word count: 2000 words) | 100 | Semester 1 Week 12 |

Exchange/Study Abroad

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| Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students? | Yes |
| Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning? | No |
| Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad? | No |
| Is this course collaborative with any other institutions? | No |
| If yes, then please provide the names of the other teaching institutions | |

Reading and On-line Resources

Course indicative reading and online resource lists connecting to each elective strand are accessible via [Resource Lists](#). These lists will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect course content and subject developments.

Alternative Narratives

Design Politics

Digital Culture

Postcolonial Theory and Design

Screen Memories

The Politics of Space