

Glasgow School of Art Course Specification

Course Title: Socially Engaged Practice and Strategies of Dissent

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 2026-27 Academic Year.

Course Code:	HECOS Code:	Academic Session:
PELC267	TBC	2026-27

1. Course Title:
Socially Engaged Practice and Strategies of Dissent

2. Date of Approval:	3. Lead School:	4. Other Schools:
PACAAG August 2025	School of Fine Art	This course is available to students on PGT programmes which include a Stage 2 elective.

5. Credits:	6. SCQF Level:	7. Course Leader:
20	11	Dr Elizabeth Hodson

8. Associated Programmes:
This course is available to students on PGT programmes which include a Stage 2 elective.

9. When Taught:
Stage 2, online only

10. Course Aims:
The overarching aims of the stage 2 electives are as follows: • Encourage interdisciplinary, critical reflexivity from within an open set of choices; • Foster deep investigative approaches to new or unfamiliar areas of practice and theory; • Cultivate self-directed leadership and initiative-taking in both applied and abstract modes of practice/ study not necessarily associated with a student's particular creative specialism; • Enable flexible, ethical exploration and connection of diverse knowledge and understanding within a specialist programme of study. The course aims to: • Introduce you to historical and contemporary examples from within art and culture that demonstrate uses of dissent and protest. • Enable you to reflect upon, review, deepen and extend your knowledge and understanding of socially engaged practice as it intersects with forms of protest within art.

- Enable you to develop your intellectual, analytical, critical and evaluative skills by interrogating key ideas within socially engaged practice and the art of protest.
- Enable you to enhance your knowledge and understanding of professional practice via the development of your communication and presentation skills.

11. Intended Learning Outcomes of Course:

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

- Demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of a chosen aspect of Socially Engaged Practice as it meets with methods of dissent or protest as part of an informed dialogue with practice and with reference to historical and/ or contemporary contexts.
- Imaginatively conceptualise and speculate on your topic while applying your analytical and critical skills to problem solving, reflective evaluation and the interpretation of your chosen line of enquiry through the synthesis and realisation of your work in an appropriate form.
- Demonstrate your effective communication and presentation skills via the application of appropriate research methodologies and demonstrate your knowledge of ethical practice and responsibility in research and the presentation of research.
- Exercise initiative, personal responsibility, effective independent and/ or collaborative learning through your engagement with professional practice in the presentation of your work.

12. Indicative Content:

'Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it' (Bertolt Brecht)

Contemporary art is formed through its entanglement with the social. From Dada and the Situationist International to the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination and the Turner Prize winning Assemble collective, the role of the arts in bringing about socio-political change has a long and vital history. Antagonism and activism are integral to the practice of many artists working across the globe, as is witnessing and documentation. From the work of the Cooking Section and their project 'Climavore' to Mujeres Creadano and Black Athena Collective, artists are providing a vehicle to challenge every façade of our lives, from the energy crisis to housing and social welfare. This course will look closely at examples of artists' practices that court controversy with a range of purposes and agendas. Interrogating the ethics of collaboration and co-production are critical to the formation of socially engaged practice today. Whether art that dissents sheds light on gender inequalities, racial discrimination or prejudices against the LGBTQ+ communities, it also puts a spotlight on the social fabric of society and on hierarchies of control and power. In this course we will explore how artists from around the world use art to pursue social change, whether engaging with the climate crisis and the anthropocene or the role of community in rural spaces. We will discuss how art can be a platform not just for protest but also for structural change. We will also look quite simply at what artists are calling for today.

This course will begin by introducing students to key theoretical developments that have shaped socially engaged practices; from Nicholas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics (2002) to Grant Kester's (2011) dialogical art and the writing of Jacques Rancière and Claire Bishop. From here we will turn to a thematic examination of the art of protest, looking at such topics as climate, care, work, immigration, body and place. Artists we will explore include: Allora and Calzadilla, Tania Bruguera, Superflex, Kara Walker, SubRosa, Ron Athey, Yes Men, Finishing School, and the vacuum cleaner, amongst others. The course will be structured around lectures and seminars,

guest presentations and workshops. Each week we will offer a brief historic précis on the topic, showing how contemporary activism and the art of protest is steeped in a long history through to current concerns within contemporary practice.

13. Description of Summative Assessment Methods:

Work presented for assessment will demonstrate the extent to which you have fulfilled the learning outcomes of the course.

You will be assessed on your ability to:

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the concepts, theories and practices discussed within the course;
- Reflexively relate concepts and theories of visual arts and socially engaged practice to your own work;
- Devise and manage your own research projects.

Assessment Method	Description of Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week (assignments)
Essay	3500 word essay (this should include visual material where appropriate, as well as a bibliography)	100	Week 11, Stage 2
OR			
2. Portfolio	An annotated portfolio of practice-based material, including a 1000 word contextualising statement	100	Week 11, Stage 2

13.1 Please describe the Summative Assessment arrangements:

Assessment takes place at the end of Stage 2. For this course, assessment of student work will consist of either:

- A 3500 word essay correctly presented and referenced, relating to a topic pertaining to the course. Students intending to write an essay should have the topic approved in advance by the course tutor. The text may include such aspects as outlining the student's motivations, theoretical perspective, findings as appropriate, as well as a critical reflection on the value and outcome of the research.
- A portfolio of creative practice relating to a topic pertaining to the course, which must be agreed in advance by the course tutor. Creative submissions should be accompanied by a 1000 word contextualising statement, outlining the student's motivations, theoretical perspective, findings as appropriate, as well as a critical reflection on the value and outcome of the creative practice.

14. Description of Formative Assessment Methods:

Formative appraisal will take place in week 5.

Engagement with formative assessment is recommended.

14.1 Please describe the Formative Assessment arrangements:

The student led presentations (week 5) will enable you to present and discuss your ideas in preparation for final assessment. This is an opportunity to gain formative feedback from your tutor and your peers.

15. Learning and Teaching Methods:

Formal Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
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20	200
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15.1 Description of Teaching and Learning Methods:

This course consists of ten two hour online seminars, one session per week (over 10 weeks), delivered in Stage 2. This course is led by a specialist tutor and includes formal presentation, reading directed extracts from primary and secondary texts, student led seminar presentations and group discussion, independent learning, one to one tutorial support, library research/ resources.

Timetable: TBC

2 hours weekly for 10 weeks, taught on Wednesdays or Fridays.

16. Pre-requisites:

Completion of Stage 1

17. Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students?	Yes
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18. Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning?	No
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19. Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad?	No
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20. Is this course collaborative with any other institutions?	No
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20.1 If yes, then please enter the names of the other teaching institutions:
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N/A

21. Additional Relevant Information:

N/A

22. Indicative Bibliography:

Key texts/ directed extracts from:

El Baroni, B. ed. (2022), *Between the material and the possible: Infrastructural Re-examination and Speculation in Art*, London: Sternberg Press.

Van den Berg, K., C. Jordan, P. Kleinmichel. (2019), *The Art of Direct Action: Social Sculpture and Beyond*, London: Sternberg Press

Bourriaud, N. (2002), *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les Presses du Réel

Demos, T.J. (2013), *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

- Deepwell, K. ed. (2020), *Feminist Art Activism and Activisms*, Amsterdam: Valiz
- Esche, C. and W. Bradley, eds. (2008), *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader*, London: Tate Publishing
- Gavin, F. and A. Bieber (2021), *The Art of Protest: Political Art and Activism*, Berlin: Gestalten
- Madoff, S. (2019), *What about Activism?* London: Sternberg Press
- Marchart, O. (2019), *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*, London: Sternberg Press
- Minh-ha, T. (2016), 'The image and the void' in *Journal of Visual Culture*, No. 1, pp. 131-140
- Rancière, J. (2004), *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London: Bloomsbury
- Reilly, M. (2018), *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*, London: Thames and Hudson
- Serafini, P., J. Holtaway, A. Cossu, eds. (2017), *Artwork: Art, Labour and Activism*, London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield