

PART-TIME MST IN THE

History of Design



DISCOVER THE HISTORIES
HIDDEN IN EVERYDAY
THINGS AND PLACES

A transformative
part-time
master's with
Oxford University

Welcome

How do everyday things and places embody historical experience?

Explore design from 1851 to the present through objects, interiors, landscapes, images and the environments of daily life. Look closely at the designed world – and uncover the social, political and personal histories it contains.



Dr Claire O'Mahony
Course Director

'Objects for use and the environments in which we live, work, and play provide fascinating insights into everyday history. Understanding handicraft, industrial, and digital processes of making is vital for nuanced historical analysis. Historical interpretation of design is grounded in archival documents, advertising, design writing, and film which offer tantalizing glimpses of individual and collective memories of everyday life.'



At a glance

The **MSt in the History of Design** encourages the curious to learn how to research and interpret how material cultures of the past offer involving traces of making and memories of everyday experience.



Master's level

Postgraduate MSt



Study part-time

Alongside work and family responsibilities



2 years

Starts October 2027



Locations

Oxford and site visits



Blended learning

3 residencies of 3 days in person



Tutorial and seminar teaching

Individual tutorials and small cohorts

Who is this course for?

The **MSt in the History of Design** is designed for lifelong learners who wish to develop a critical understanding of how to interpret the materiality and collective memory witnessed in everyday things and places.

The programme is taught through blended learning, enabling participants from all over the world and those balancing their studies with other commitments, such as employment and caring responsibilities, to pursue postgraduate study at Oxford University.



Bior Elliott
2019-2021

'The most enjoyable part of the course is engaging with the amazingly varied lecture content and learning unexpected things from my equally varied cohort. Being surrounded by herbalists, architects, scientists, business executives and curators has definitely widened my outlook and provided inspiration.'

Read Bior's story: lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/student-spotlights/bior-elliott

What you'll gain

UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRET OBJECTS AND PLACES AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Develop the confidence to analyse designed objects, interiors, buildings, landscapes, images and texts as evidence of changing social values, technologies, identities and everyday experience.

INTEGRATE MATERIAL, VISUAL AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Build a versatile interdisciplinary research toolkit which integrates close observation of objects and spaces, critical reading of archival documents and design writing, and the interpretation of graphic design, advertising, information and feature film.

ENGAGE IN CURRENT DEBATES IN DESIGN HISTORY

Explore how design embodies sensory experience, local and transnational politics, private and public identities, engaging with recent research and methodological debates.

DEVELOP AS AN INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

Immerse yourself in focused case studies to develop extended essays and a substantial dissertation, supported by individual tutorials, group discussion and specialist supervision.



STRENGTHEN YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC PRACTICE

Enhance analytical, interpretative, and writing skills valued in museums, heritage, teaching, publishing, the creative industries, the art market and further academic study.

How you'll study

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Live online teaching: Most teaching takes place through scheduled, synchronous online sessions, ensuring that students around the world study together in real time. In year one, the full cohort meets on weekly Saturday afternoons, UK time, across three terms from October to June.

Small-group option seminars: During the first two terms of year two, students divide into smaller groups for their chosen option modules. These are taught through live online seminars on monthly Saturdays. The whole-cohort reconvene for group tutorials on selected Thursday evenings.

Individual tutorials and supervision: Across the first five terms, each student has two individual tutorials with the course director and departmental lecturer. In year two, four individual dissertation supervisions with the Course Director support the development of the final dissertation.

Oxford residencies: Three required three-day residencies bring the cohort together in Oxford.

Handling sessions and site visits take place at the start of each academic year, followed by a dissertation forum in the summer of year two. Students must attend at least 80% of residencies, seminars, and tutorials.

Independent weekly study: Plan for approximately 20 hours each week for reading, looking, reflection, preparatory tasks, discussion, and research. Fieldwork, direct observation and archival research are vital parts of the programme.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is through analytical writing grounded in close material analysis and historical context, alongside skills-development tasks in the virtual learning environment.

Year one includes a 2,500-word object case study, a 3,000-word methodology and critical-sources analysis, and a 5,000-word extended essay. Year two involves two 5,000-word advanced papers and the dissertation.

The Oxford experience

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT WITH OBJECTS AND PLACES

Oxford residencies create opportunities to learn through handling sessions, collections, archives and site visits. Looking closely at material evidence helps connect online study with the physical realities of the history of design.

A GLOBAL, DIVERSE, AND INTERACTIVE COHORT

Study alongside participants bringing experience from different countries, professions and design cultures. Live teaching, seminars, and tutorials make discussion and collaborative interpretation central to the programme.

LEARN FROM SPECIALISTS

Teaching is led principally by the course director and departmental lecturer, with guest speakers invited to discuss recent curatorial research, publications and professional pathways across the history of design and related fields.

MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES, AND DIGITAL RESOURCES

The degree focuses upon direct observation, archival searching and fieldwork relevant to individual research interests. Students are encouraged to research case studies where they live as well as in Oxford's extensive museum and library collections. Teaching and library staff facilitate digital resources to support coursework and dissertation research.

OXFORD COLLEGE AFFILIATION

As a matriculated postgraduate student, you will become a member of one of Oxford's multidisciplinary colleges. College life offers opportunities to encounter new subjects and perspectives through seminars, dinners and informal exchange.



Oksana Kovalenko
2023-25

'I initially took the course out of passion, but I am now looking for work in this area. Studying history through the lens of automotive design turned out to be something I really enjoyed, gave me an opportunity to contribute to the field, and strengthened my interest in it.'

Read Oksana's story: lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/student-spotlights/oksana-kovalenko

Where could this course lead?

The part-time **MSt in the History of Design** can support progression to doctoral research and careers or professional development in museum curatorship, heritage, the art market, teaching, arts publishing and the creative industries. Studio practitioners may also use historical and methodological insights to enrich their own work.

For more information, please visit: lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/courses/mst-in-the-history-of-design



How to apply

APPLICATION DETAILS

For information about entry requirements and how to apply, please visit: lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/courses/mst-in-the-history-of-design

Deadlines

12:00 midday UK time on:

- Stage 1: Wednesday 27 January 2027
(Latest deadline for most Oxford scholarships)
- Stage 2: Tuesday 2 March 2027
(Final deadline for 2027 entry)

If you have any questions about the progress of your application, please contact the Course Administrators using the email pgt@conted.ox.ac.uk.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants are normally expected to hold a first-class or strong upper second-class undergraduate degree, or the international equivalent, in a relevant humanities, design, social-science or engineering discipline. Relevant subjects may include history of visual and material culture, modern history, modern languages, film studies, literature, studio practice, anthropology, cultural studies, and design-related fields.

Selection also considers the strength of the full application, evidence of academic ability, research potential, motivation and fit with the programme. Applicants whose first language is not English may need to demonstrate the University's higher level of [English-language proficiency](#).

PREPARING A STRONG APPLICATION

- Allow time to prepare the required documents and written materials.
- Approach referees early so they can submit references before the deadline.
- Demonstrate sustained interest in design history and readiness for independent postgraduate study.
- Show how your academic, professional or creative experience prepares you to analyse objects, places and historical evidence.
- Check any scholarship-specific requirements and deadlines separately.

FEES AND FUNDING

Course fees and estimated costs are published on the University of Oxford Graduate Admissions course page. Funding guidance is also available through Oxford Lifelong Learning and the University's Fees, Funding and Scholarship search.

Applicants seeking scholarship support should note that many Oxford funding opportunities use an earlier January application deadline.

www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding

GET IN TOUCH

Course enquiries: pgt@conted.ox.ac.uk

Course page: lifelong-learning.ox.ac.uk/courses/mst-in-the-history-of-design

Graduate Admissions: www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/mst-the-history-design





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