



Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board
to Central Saint Martins (University of the
Arts London)**

Date of visiting board: 21-22 March 2024

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 4 September 2024

1 **Details of institution hosting courses**

University of the Arts London
Central Saint Martins
1 Granary Square
King's Cross
London N1C 4AA

2 **Courses offered for validation.**

BA (Hons) Architecture (Part 1)
MArch Architecture (Part 2)

3 **Head of School & Course Leads**

Alex Warnock-Smith	Spatial Practices Programme Director
Gregory Ross	BA Architecture (RIBA 1) Course Leader
Andreas Lang	MA Architecture (RIBA 2) Course Leader

4 **Awarding body**

University of the Arts London

5 **The visiting board**

Sally Stewart (Chair)	Academic
Athina Moustaka	Academic
Gill Lambert	Practitioner/Academic
David Howarth (Vice Chair)	Practitioner
Tracy Flanagan	RIBA Validation Manager

6 **Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education**

The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

7 **Proposals of the visiting board**

On 4 September 2024, the RIBA confirmed continued validation/s of the following courses:

BA Architecture (RIBA Part 1)
MArch Architecture (Part 2)

The next visit to Central Saint Martin's, University of the Arts London will take place in 2029.

8 **Standard requirements for continued recognition**

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

- i external examiners being appointed for the course
- ii any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA.

- iii any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title.
- iv submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed.
- v in the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion by the of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

Spatial Practices

Architecture at Central Saint Martins is embedded in the Spatial Practices Programme. The title 'Spatial Practices' implies a more open discourse of positions, approaches, and practices within and about space. For us, Spatial Practice is situated, socially engaged and intersectional.

'Spatial Practices' connects the programme to Henri Lefebvre and his critical work 'The Production of Space' (1974). It is also a reference to Professor Jane Rendell and her position on Critical Spatial Practices, as 'those that question and transform the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene, as well as test the boundaries and procedures of their own disciplines'.

We believe that architecture should be understood within a social and political context. We sit with Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Heart thinking through the intersection of politics and education, democracy, and neoliberalism. We are committed to developing new forms of spatial practice, and educate our students to be conscientious, critical and politically engaged practitioners; concerned not only with the formal aspects of architectural design, but with the political and economic forces that shape it and the social, ethical and climate impact of their work.

We believe that the city should be as diverse and inclusive as the people who inhabit it, and that the spatial disciplines, including architecture and its related professions, should reflect and promote this. We are proud of our multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community and believe in the equality of all voices. We recognise the plurality of challenges that a plural society faces, and the multiple intersections that diverse communities experience. We strive to develop inclusive, accessible and decolonial practices that listen to and learn from multiple knowledges and perspectives.

Our approach aligns with the college and university's commitment to embedding climate, racial and social justice within all aspects of college life, and we encourage our students to be ethical practitioners and conscientious agents of change.

Manifesto

Our programme manifesto sets out the core principles and ethos of the Spatial Practices programme and informs our approach to architectural education. Developed in 2015, the manifesto provides a clear set of statements that explain our identity and position. The manifesto has been instrumental in communicating the distinctiveness of the programme to the outside world and distinguishing us within the wider context of architectural education in London, the UK and internationally. Since 2021 we have been

rethinking the manifesto, focusing conversations about who we are as groups of people, how we relate to one another and to the environment, and developing positions on climate, social justice, and anti-racism.

Central Saint Martins

Train us to practical power, make us great builders and adventurous experimenters. William Lethaby, founding principal of the Central School.

Our students and staff benefit greatly from the critically engaged, culturally diverse environment of Central Saint Martins. Collaboration is central to our pedagogy and is echoed across the college at all levels. UG and PG students undertake collaborative units with students and staff from other disciplines, enabling them to develop and refine their critical, creative and communication skills within an inter-disciplinary context. Students have access to wider events, platforms and contexts that support their learning, including public debates, round tables, symposia, and workshops, through which they are encouraged to refine their critical skills and ask questions of their profession.

Experimenting with the radical potential of making runs throughout our pedagogy. Richly endowed with extensive workshops and exceptional technical staff, the college provides a fertile context for teaching the practical and organisational arts of building. We situate our approach within and between a deep knowledge of the analogue skills of making and building, and the challenges and potential of digital technologies and AI.

We use the spaces and structures of the Granary Building as tools for learning, manifesting, and communicating our work. We activate the expansive spaces of 'the Street' and the college's multi-disciplinary workshops through 1.1 making, manufacture and construction experimentation, which extend outwards into live projects and industry collaborations in the spaces and communities around Kings Cross and beyond.

Our location in King's Cross, one of Europe's largest regeneration projects, provides a fertile and contested context for our work, which our students explore and understand through operating directly within it. We work with local partners through in-curricular live projects, industry collaborations and consultancy on placemaking, community building and education projects. Recent collaborations with Robert Blair Primary School (BA Architecture Stage 1), the roundhouse at the Story Garden (BA Architecture Stages 2-3), and Public Studio (MA Architecture), form integral parts of our teaching and learning methodology.

Climate Forum

'We recognise that Climate change not only threatens our ecosystems, it undermines the foundation of our fundamental rights, deepens inequalities and creates new forms of injustice. Adapting to climate change and trying to mitigate its impacts is not just a matter of scientific knowledge and political will; it demands a broader view of a complex situation.' Catalina Mejia Moreno, Spatial Practices Climate Studies Leader

Since 2019, we have foregrounded the climate and ecological-emergency across the programme, and have focused our teaching and learning, research and knowledge-exchange activities around climate-justice and climate-

centered design. We need to respond to the interconnectedness of the climate crisis to the social, racial, and environmental issues with which it is deeply entangled. We recognise that the climate crisis has global impacts and that these affect people and ecosystems in unequal measure. We understand that we are operating from a position of privilege and strive to find ways in which we can commit to climate action through foregrounding multiple voices.

In 2021 we appointed Catalina Mejia Moreno as Climate Studies Leader. Catalina is a spatial practitioner, writer, and researcher from Bogotá, interested in eco-feminist practices of resistance, environmental, racial, and spatial justice. Catalina teaches design studio in BA and MA Architecture and contributes to Contextual Studies and Technical Studies subject areas, embedding climate conscious education across the curriculum. Catalina runs several research and knowledge-exchange projects and leads the Climate Forum.

'Across Spatial Practices we think about the questions of climate and regeneration as two that need continuous reflexivity, plurality of voices and forms of action.' Catalina Mejia Moreno

The Climate Forum is a collaborative platform for curriculum activism, research and knowledge-exchange that brings the urgent focus of the climate and ecological emergency to the core of the Programme. The Climate Forum thinks and operates through 'Climate Emergence,' emphasising positive action towards social justice and environmental wellbeing. The Climate Forum engages with regenerative practices and socio-ecological frameworks as a way of working through the interlinked environmental, social, and spatial crises.

The climate forum has been instrumental in promoting a culture across staff and students, sharing work about the CEE, developing our curricula, and informing the way we teach. For us, every job is a climate job. M-Arch developed a collaborative Unit with MA Regenerative Design, and the Forest School which foregrounds embodied practices as a teaching and design methodology and promotes process-based thinking and place-based technologies. BA Architecture co-designed Unit 1- Ethics & Care: Making Space, Making Change, which foregrounds climate action and ethics as an introduction to the fundamentals of architectural education and practice.

The Climate Forum is leading a Climate Audit across MA and BA Architecture, which examines our current courses in relation to existing climate action frameworks. The Climate Audit analyses our curriculums, teaching and learning methods, staff, and student experiences, and articulates how we can further support staff and students to address climate in our pedagogies.

BA Architecture & MA Architecture

Our courses, students and staff are positioned at the critical edges of their disciplines, questioning, and experimenting with the boundaries of architectural practice, and developing a deep knowledge of architectural design and technical skills. Spatial practices are, for us, an expandable set of techniques that support the design of diverse civic places, celebrate human occupation, and embrace regeneration and urban change. Our education

offers students a broad understanding of the role of the architect, expanding the profession into new fields.

Our Part 1 students learn core knowledge and skills in architectural design, technical and environmental studies, contextual studies, and ethical practice, and develop integrated design projects and a critical position on architectural practice in Year 3. At Part 2 level, students are supported to build upon their prior knowledge, skills and experience and gain increasing independence through project-based, problem-led learning. This culminates in an independent, external 'live' project in Year 5, which requires students to define their own trajectory and marks the first step towards their incipient practice, incorporating and capturing new forms and structures of expanded architectural production.

Graduates and Destination

'New forms of Practice' We aim to provide students with the creative and critical skills and opportunities to reconsider conventional architectural roles in expansive and transformative ways; to act both productively and disruptively within the profession; and to form new trajectories of practice. Facilitating pathways into practice is an integral part of our mission, and we believe in a critical engagement with the profession during study. We also aim to support diversity in education and practice by providing accessible and affordable forms of education that combine academic learning with situated practice through live-projects with external partners, industry placements and, distinctively, work-learn models of PG education.

At Part 1 Level, live-projects and industry collaborations are embedded within the curriculum through the design studios and extra-curricular projects. UG students experience working with external clients through community engagement, co-design, and collaborative building projects, through which they are exposed to the social, economic, and ethical complexities of working in 'real-life' sites and situations: invaluable experience for their future professional life. BA Architecture at CSM was instrumental in establishing the RIBA Mentoring Partnership, which provides opportunities for final year students to work with mentors from professional practices, developing experience and networks which support their future Part-1 year out.

MArch is oriented towards supporting students to develop their own form of practice throughout the course and operates a work-learn model, enabling students to work in practice 2 days a week while undertaking their studies. The course requires 30 hours study per week across 2 calendar years and includes a 10-week industry placement during the Summer Term. Students develop lifelong skills which balance a critical approach, direct engagement with the social, political, and ethical complexities of practice, and the abilities to nurture and mobilise networks in the world beyond the course.

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The Board commends the programmes clear academic position which place's themes of climate, social and racial justice at the heart of its work.
- 10.2** The Board commends the staff and student community in their active and purposeful engagement in these areas, evidenced through its academic output and public facing activities.

11 Conditions

There are no conditions.

12 Action points

The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points. The university is referred to the RIBA's criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring processes. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 12.1** The Board advises the institution to consider the learning and teaching environment required to support the needs of teaching across both BA and MA courses, including taking into consideration the scale of current and future student and staff cohorts, and to ensure the level of student experience can be maintained.

13 Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the School on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development, and raise standards.

- 13.1** The Board advised the Programme to consider how assessment and reassessment parameters offer inclusive and equitable circumstances for students and acknowledge the associated additional workloads for staff.
- 13.2** The Board advises the school to consider how current research and knowledge exchange within Spatial Practices can be consolidated and supported, and recognising the centrality of climate, social and racial justice established within BA Architecture and MA Architecture learning and teaching.
- 13.3** The Board advised the BA Architecture course to consider how students can be better supported to prepare for a period of practical experience following completion of the Part 1 and provide practical strategies and timelines to help students transition into practice.
- 13.4** The Board advises the MA Architecture course to consider how bio-based and low carbon materials can provide further opportunities to explore a wider range of case studies including those scalable to mainstream and urban situations.

14 Delivery of graduate attributes

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered graduate attributes to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or an attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a graduate attribute was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Graduate Attributes for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture.

Graduate Attributes for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch Architecture.

- 15** It should be noted that where the visiting board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Themes and Values for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture (Level 6).

Themes and Values for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch (Level 7).

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture: **411**

Part 2 MArch Architecture: **57**

16.2 Documentation provided.

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

17 Notes of meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings. These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the next full visiting board.

- Budget Holder
- Students
- Head of Institution
- External examiners
- Staff