

Master in Critical Design



How could subversive imagination be a trigger for transforming the current environmental, political and cultural crisis into desirable futures?

Master in Critical Design

Start date
September

ECTS credits
60

Course duration
400 hours

Language
English

Degree
Master's Degree in Critical Contextual Design. Degree issued by Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya (UVic-UCC)

Schedule
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.
For academic reasons, sessions may be scheduled exceptionally in a different time frame.

Director
Cristina Goberna Pesudo

Admission Requirements
Architecture, design, art graduates. Professionals with experience in architecture, art, design, curatorial practices, activism, critical studies and individuals interested in politics, ecology and how contemporary critical design can generate an impact in society and space.

Critical Contextual Design

In a moment in history with global challenges like the climate crisis, extreme political polarization, war conflicts or social disparity, a contextual critical design that invents hopeful futures renders more necessary than ever. This Master in Critical Design instrumentalizes critical thinking to create an impact in our society, cities, and other environments.

Critical Design emerged in the 60's, when Italian architects and industrial designers started to dissociate their work from the logics of the market, linking it with political ideas that would confront the challenges of their time. This swift change of interests transformed the figure of the designer into someone who participated in intellectual and political public discussions from their own practice, widening its scope and creating an impact in the world.

During one academic year, this master programme combines theoretical study, research investigation and practical work led by international architects, thinkers, artists, activists, curators and publishers. The programme explores history, current debates and gives a landscape of contemporary practices that are challenging hegemonic discourses today.

Ultimately, the students will acquire a broad set of perspectives on key challenges of our times and tools to add to the international conversation on geopolitics, spatial justice, environmental activism, care, identity politics, feminist studies and practices, climate justice, extractivism, non-human rights, political art and design, critical architecture or urban radical alternatives among others, though experimental criticism applied to design research.

The curriculum is structured in three themes: Critical Thought and Design, Current Debates, Contexts (Cities and Environments), and culminates in the development of a Master Thesis.

Programme

The programme is organized into 2 terms and 6 modules/subjects, offered in a low-residency mode which runs for 40 weeks over 10 months between September and June. Each term combines theory lectures and seminars with workshops on specific themes. The curriculum is structured through 12 questions that interrogate criticism, the environment, cities, politics, care and the figure of the designer as a public voice and disseminator of ideas. The questions are:

What Criticism? What Care? What Politics? What Extraction? What Nature? What City? What Spatial Justice? What Future? What Conceptualization? What Dissemination? What Question? What Project?

The programme ends with a Master Thesis that could take the shape of a design project, an architectural proposal, an art piece, a performance, a political action, a curatorial initiative, a publication project, a pedagogical initiative, a theatre play, a film... as well as research written work and a plan for its development outside of the university.

1. September – December

1. Agonism: Critical thought in Art, Architecture and Design

This research seminar explores the potential of agonism to open unexpected paths for the identification of current polemics and their confrontation through architecture, art and design.

The students will be introduced to methods of advanced critical thinking and research, to be applied in their work and in the analysis of the works of others.

Ultimately, the aim of the course is to give instrumental tools to the students so that they get involved with the fabric of our times in terms of current international conversations and practice, bridging alliances and complicities in an increasingly polarized world.

2. Contemporary Debates I: What Politics? What Care?

This class explores how art, architecture and design navigate political, environmental, social, and cultural challenges of our times.

The students will embark in two class modules taught by relevant figures working with politics, gender, feminist issues and questions of care. Employing a case-study approach, the course showcases examples from both within and beyond the realms of these fields, aiming to investigate how they contribute to collective concerns within culture and politics.

Ultimately, the students will study the history of the subjects, the current conversations on the matter and will produce one project for each module guided by each of the professors. Ultimately, the course takes a critical stance, examining the agendas, tools, methodologies, and their contributions to the advancement of these disciplines.

3. Contexts I: Environments. What Extraction? What Nature?

In this series of studio classes, students will engage with critical thinking to explore the intersections of art, design, architecture, climate emergency and the issue of extractive practices. They will also explore the social and political implications of climate change and its impact on vulnerable non-human communities. Through design exercises and critical reflection, students will develop a deeper understanding of how our fields can contribute to create creative resistance to damaging practices for our planet.

4. Contexts II: The City. What City? What Spatial Justice? What Futures?

This subject will focus on a different city every year, with potential trips and collaborations between Elisava and their local urban actors. In this class on critical thought and Barcelona's urban context, participants will explore the intricate relationship between history and the present condition of the city and its challenges. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the class will explore the historical, cultural, and socio-political factors that have influenced the city's urban development. This master class offers an opportunity to engage with the vibrant and complex landscape of Barcelona while exploring the broader themes of urbanism, mass tourism, gentrification, culture, spatial justice and the question of degrowth.

2. January – June

5. Contemporary Debates II: What Conceptualization? What Dissemination?

In this seminar, participants will delve into the realm of critical thought in its intersection with contemporary discussions through publishing and curatorial practices. Participants will analyze the methodologies and strategies employed by critics, publishers, and curators to convey and shape our cultural imaginary. Ultimately, participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of these practices as a tool to navigate and contribute to contemporary discussions in their field.

6. Thesis Seminar and Studio. What Question? What Project?

The Master Final Project or Thesis is a detailed work that presents a rigorous investigation into a design topic selected by the candidates under the guidance of their faculty. Thesis students must demonstrate their capacity to critically synthesize design knowledge and make precise projects that show their excellence in argumentation, creativity, invention, presentation, creation and skills in scholarly and fieldwork research on design. The objective of this dual class is to distill students' interests to start working on their Thesis during the Winter Semester for its presentation at the end of the academic year. The final product of this Master thesis could be a design project, a performance, an exhibition, a curatorial proposal, an academic program, a publication, an architectural proposal etc.

Methodology

The Master in Critical Design blends theory and practice to foster a mix of critical thinking and hands-on creation. This approach values the connection between thinking and doing, believing that knowledge thrives when both aspects work together.

Within the programme's curriculum, an ongoing cycle of thought-provoking lectures, hands-on workshops, and lively seminars, creating a continuous cycle of generating ideas.

The programme also emphasizes collaboration through various learning methods and field trips, promoting knowledge sharing and community building. Its final goal is not just about adapting to changes in society, technology, and culture but to actively create resistance and different futures. This straightforward methodology aims to make a meaningful impact on design and societal discussions within the realm of Contextual Design and Critical Design.

We go beyond critical design

Expanded Design

Expanded Design in the Master in Critical Design signifies a broadened and inclusive approach that extends beyond traditional design boundaries. It embraces diverse perspectives, methodologies, and interdisciplinary practices to address complex societal challenges. This concept encourages students to explore innovative ways of thinking and making, incorporating elements from various fields such as art, science, activism, and architecture. In essence, Expanded Design within this programme encourages a holistic and dynamic approach, enriching the design process with a broader range of influences and possibilities to create solutions that are not only visually compelling but also socially and culturally impactful.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy in the Master in Critical Design refers to an educational philosophy that goes beyond traditional teaching methods. It involves a transformative and reflective approach, encouraging students to critically examine and challenge existing norms, power structures, and assumptions within the realms of design and society. Critical Pedagogy aims to empower students to question, discuss, and shape their understanding of design within broader socio-cultural contexts. It fosters an environment where learning is not just about acquiring skills, but also about developing a deep awareness of the social implications of design decisions and the potential for design to contribute to subversive and positive societal change.

Collaboration and Care

Collaboration and care are commitments to shared learning and compassionate engagement. Collaboration emphasizes the collective exploration of ideas and perspectives, encouraging students to work together across disciplines and backgrounds. This approach recognizes that diverse viewpoints enrich the creative process and contribute to more comprehensive solutions. On the other hand, Care in this context goes beyond technical considerations; it involves a conscientious regard for the internal work of the faculty and students, as well as their ethical and social implications of design decisions. It encourages students to approach their work with a sense of responsibility, empathy, and an awareness of the broader impact their designs may have on individuals and communities. Together, collaboration and care form a foundational ethos, shaping an environment where thoughtful, inclusive, and socially conscious design practices can flourish.

Team

Director

CRISTINA GOBERNA

Cristina Goberna is an architect, critic, and educator director of Architectural Agonism (www.architectural-agonism.com), which she founded in New York City in 2008. She works as architect and as expert consultant in architecture, cities, critical thought and for museums, governments, and institutions and as organizer/frequent speaker in international round tables, juries, events and lectures. She is an architectural critic for the magazine *El Ministerio de Ctxt*.

Architectural Agonism proposes futures by the exploration of the potential of Agonism or positive dissensus to reveal spaces frequently forgotten by the discipline, and their relationship with politics, society, culture and the environment. Her production has been widely and internationally awarded, published (*A+U*, *Log*, *Volume*, *Bauwelt*, *Domus*...) exhibited in Biennials (Venice, Hong-Kong, Lisbon, Buenos Aires, Oslo, Chicago, Spain...) and museums/galleries around the world (MoMA, Guggenheim, Centre Georges Pompidou, Chicago Art Institute among many others). AA's work has been acquired by the Centre George Pompidou (Paris) and the Chicago Art Institute (Chicago) for their permanent collections.

She has taught among other places at Columbia University GSAPP (New York), MIT (Cambridge, Boston), Cooper Union (New York), Royal College of Art (London), Sydney UTS (Sydney) or IE University (Madrid), institutions where she has coordinated various courses, thesis and research projects. She is a PhD Candidate at the RMIT University Architecture and Urban Studies School (Melbourne) Research Through Practice Programme. She was educated at Columbia University (New York) as a Fulbright grantee, at the European Graduate School (SaaS-Fee, Switzerland), New York University, MACBA Independent Studies Programme PEI (Barcelona), ETSAB (Barcelona) and ETSAS (Sevilla).

After 13 years in New York she is currently based in Barcelona, where she works internationally and locally.

Faculty

LARA ALMARCEGUI, Artist
MIREIA LUZÁRRAGA, Takk Architecture
PAOLO CIRIO, Artist and activist
MARÍA LLOPIS, Artist and writer
STANISLAVA PINCHUK, Artist
AMAIA SANCHEZ-VELASCO, Grandeza Studio
JORGE VALIENTE, Grandeza Studio
IGOR BRAGADO, Common Accounts.
ANTONIO GIRÁLDEZ LOPEZ, Bartlebooth
PABLO IBÁÑEZ FERRERA, Bartlebooth
DAVID TAPIAS MONNÉ, Aixopluc Architectures

WHY GO BEYOND?

→ You can find out more about the Master in Critical Contextual Design at elisava.net

- If you are a Bold Category Member of Elisava's Alumni Association, you may enjoy a 15% discount on our Master's tuition.
- There may be some changes to the faculty for reasons beyond the course programme.
- Elisava will make the necessary and appropriate changes in the programme or, in exceptional circumstances, cancel the programme altogether if the course has not reached the minimum number of students to ensure its proper functioning two weeks before its initiation. Elisava will only refund the amounts already paid by the students.
- According to their specific necessities, the Master schedules may include additional hours, including during the weekend.