The Ruskin School of Art

MFA Prospectus
About the School

The Ruskin School of Art is a top-ranked, intimate art school at the heart of the University of Oxford devoted to cutting-edge artistic production and rigorous thought. Founded in 1871 by artist and critic John Ruskin (1819-1900), it currently offers BFA, MFA (as of 2015) and Dphil degree courses. It boasts a rich learning history, counting many award winners among its past and present students and faculty. The School is characterized by its focus on the intertwining of practice and theory and emphasizes experimental histories of art and their potential to transform knowledge, forms and situations. Presently, it offers a particularly strong setting for work and study in moving image.

At the Ruskin you will benefit from the extraordinary resources of knowledge across the University including the famous Bodleian Library, the Ashmolean, Pitt Rivers and Natural History Museums and Modern Art Oxford. Alumni of Ruskin’s graduate programmes go on to work in fine art as practising artists, teachers and art writers, or as curators in public and private galleries and for arts councils and organisations. Many also pursue careers in academia, architecture and the film industry.
Elizabeth Price interviewing BFA student, Rosie Lakin for a school promo video. Photograph: Jon Roome.
About the Programme

The Ruskin MFA degree is an intensive, interdisciplinary programme in the practice of contemporary art, designed to support studio-based and theoretical components of the individual student’s artistic practice. The programme will provide an intensive course of one-to-one tutorials and weekly studio seminars focusing upon your own art-making, your key concerns and ideas, and your development. The studio-based learning programme will be supported by a regular seminar series on current debates in contemporary art history and theory. The curriculum of reading and discussion will be tailored to the concerns of the group and their dialogue with wider discourses of contemporary art and visual culture.

The student-centered approach to art making while placing the practice in its historical and theoretical context is made possible by the uniquely small scale of the Ruskin MFA. Great attention will be paid to individual concerns, whilst generating a collective dynamic of mutual participation in generous and robust discussion. Through this process, students will have a uniquely demanding and supportive opportunity to engage with what it means to work as an artist today, considering how an artist’s work and ideas are understood in and across different social, artistic and intellectual contexts. The course benefits from the extraordinary resources of knowledge across the University, placing special emphasis upon the experimental histories of art and art education, and their potential to transform knowledge, forms and situations. Students will be expected to develop their artistic practice within the programme, researching and generating an advanced body of art work, employing the technical resources and facilities of the School, and drawing upon Oxford’s extensive library and museum resources.

Varied teaching situations will be employed to identify and provide for individual students’ needs, and to draw individual artistic concerns into group dialogue to promote robust contextual knowledge and awareness.

These include:

- A studio programme of individual tutorials over all three (or six for part-time students) terms, with an allocated tutor who will oversee the student’s
Emily Motto (Queen's College), Degree Show 2014. Installation View. Photograph: greenroomphotography/Kinga Lubowiecka.
Adeniyi-Jones Olaoluwatunji (Christ Church), Degree Show 2014. Installation View.
Photograph: greenroomphotography/Kinga Lubowiecka.
academic development. An additional provision of elective tutorials will also be made, enabling each student to benefit from the individual research strengths of other permanent staff as well as regular visiting staff across the school, complemented by input from high-profile visiting lecturers.

- Two programmes of group seminars throughout the first and second terms, one dedicated to the presentation and analysis of studio work (such as group critiques) and one to the reading and analysis of contemporary art history and theory. These will be timetabled to facilitate the attendance of part-time students.

- Complementary support through access to technical training for new skills and techniques, delivered by the Ruskin's regular technical staff, as well as occasional skills workshops.

The MFA will have three main modes of assessment:

- An exhibition or presentation of a fully realised artwork or body of artworks made by the student during the MFA programme. This will require a candidate to develop, create and present a coherent, thoughtful exhibition, or other presentation as appropriate, of artwork. Other presentations may include websites, live performances, etc.

- An extended written text of 4000 words. This piece of written work will require candidates to reflect upon their studio practice, drawing together aspects of the technical and formal processes of art making and considering them in relation to art historical contexts and theoretical debates.

- A portfolio of documentation of studio work. Throughout the programme, candidates will be required to make thorough, scholarly documentation of their work, to be submitted at the conclusion of the programme. This supports the assessment of the final exhibition or presentation in demonstrating the provenance of the processes, strategies and ideas manifest there.
Staff

Permanent Staff:
Hanneke Grootenboer (Head of School) | Jason Gaiger | Anthony Gardner | Brian Catling | Corin Sworn | Daria Martin | Elizabeth Price | Malcolm Bull | Maria Chevska | Paul Bonaventura |

Visiting Staff:
Brandon Taylor | Claudia Sarnthein | Dan Fox | David Tolley | Jost Münster | Justin Coombes | Lynette Yiadom-Boakye | Martina Schmuecker | Melissa Appleton | Melissa Gronlund | Oona Grimes | Sarah Simblet | Sigrid Holmwood | Tom Woolner | Katrina Palmer | Claire M Carter | Elisa Schaar |

Previous Guest Tutors and Speakers:
- Nairy Baghramian, Artist
- Miroslaw Balka, Artist
- Karla Black, Artist
- Harun Farocki, Artist, filmmaker
- Jonathan Griffin, Critic
- Tony Grisoni, Screenwriter
- Germaine Krup, Artist
- Mark Leckey, Artist
- Raimundas Malašauskas, Curator
- Francesco Manacorda, Curator
- Alan Michael, Artist
- Scott Myles, Artist
- Jayne Parker, Filmmaker
- Tom Price, Artist
- Sara Sugarman, Filmmaker
- Padraig Timoney, Artist
- Donald Urquhart, Artist
- Jan Verwoert, Critic
- Marina Abramovic, Artist
- Tomma Abts, Artist
- Dore Ashton, Author, critic
- Fiona Banner, Artist
- Phyllida Barlow, Artist
- Simon Baron-Cohen, Psychologist
- Kathy Battista, Director
- Robert Beavers, Artist/Filmmaker
- Eddie Berg, Artistic Director
- Zarina Bhimji, Artist
- Lewis Biggs, Museum Director
- Susan Blackmore, Psychologist
- Iwona Blazwick, Museum Director
- Sonia Boyce, Artist
- Ian Breakwell, Artist
- Helen Chadwick, Artist
- Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Artist
- Celine Condorelli, Artist
- Nigel Cooke, Artist
- Hilary Cottam, Designer
- Martin Creed, Artist
- Dorothy Cross, Artist
- Enrico David, Artist
- Jason Dodge, Artist
- Trisha Donnelly, Artist
- Marcus du Sautoy, Mathematician
- Geoff Dyer, Author
- Tim Etchells, Artist, writer, theatre director
- Pedro Ferreira, Physicist
- Anya Gallaccio, Artist
- Ryan Gander, Artist
- John Gerrard, Artist
- Ori Gerst, Artist
- Melissa Gordon, Artist
- Christopher Green, Writer
- Susan Greenfield, Scientist, writer
- Richard Gregory, Psychologist
- Dan Hicks, Anthropologist
- Jens Hoffman, Curator
- Will Holder, Artist
- Richard Hollis, Graphic & book designer
- A.L. Kennedy, Fiction writer
- Andrew Kötting, Filmmaker
- Tania Kovats, Artist
- Grzegorz Kowalski
- Jenni Lomax, Art Director
- Richard Mabey, Nature writer
- Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum
- Christina Mackie, Artist
- Goshka Macuga, Artist
- Matmos, Musical Duo
- Nathaniel Mellors, Artist
- Gustav Metzger, Artist
- Jeremy Millar, Artist
- Stuart Morgan, Writer
- Mike Nelson, Artist
- Nils Norman, Artist
- Chris Ofili, Artist
- Alfred Pacquement, Curator
- Cornelia Parker, Artist
- Mark Pauline, Artist
- Roger Penrose, Mathematical Physicist
- Max Richter, Composer
- Dieter Roelstraete, Writer and curator
- Gregory Rubinstein, Director
- Charles Saumarez Smith, Art historian
- Pierre Schneider, Author and critic
- Sean Scully, Artist
- Conrad Shawcross, Artist
- Rupert Sheldrake, Parapsychologist
- Iain Sinclair, Writer
- Lucy Skaler, Artist
- John Stezaker, Artist
- Robert Storr, Curator and critic
- David Thorpe, Artist
- Paul Tod, Mathematician
- Hayley Tompkins, Artist
- Erik van Lieshout, Artist
- Gunther von Hagens, Anatomist
- Mark Wallinger, Artist
- Marina Warner, Writer
- Mary Warnock, Philosopher
- Rebecca Warren, Artist
- Boyd Webb, Artist
- Alison Wilding, Artist
- Bedwyr Williams, Artist
- Keith Wilson, Artist
- Richard Wilson, Artist
- Richard Woods, Artist
- Richard Wright, Artist
- Catherine Yass, Artist
- Kirsty Carter & Emma Thomas, Graphic Designers
- Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, Artists
Intellectual Life and Community

The Ruskin School of Art is home to a uniquely integrated creative and intellectual culture of graduate and undergraduate programmes as well as students and staff. Its intimate scale fosters highly productive and informal collaborations across all parts of the school and Oxford University, allowing students to work closely with some of the UK’s leading contemporary artists, writers and art historians. Students and researchers at the Ruskin are also able to draw upon the expertise of staff, resources and facilities across the Oxford community, including the extraordinary collections in its world-famous museums and libraries.

Studio and Technical Resources

The Ruskin has dedicated studio space for all students to work together or individually. It provides workshops for specialist training by Ruskin tutors in digital, 2D and 3D media. A new project space at the Ruskin’s redeveloped Bullingdon Road site will be equipped for the full breadth of contemporary art practices, from performance and digital installations to painting and sculptural work. The project space will open to the street for maximum public engagement with new work by students and staff. There are also communal spaces to foster dialogue and collaboration across all levels of the Ruskin’s undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Museums and Galleries

The University of Oxford contains an incredibly rich cluster of museums holding some of the world’s richest collections of rare books, art and artifacts, including the Ashmolean, Pitt Rivers and Natural History Museums and the Museum of the History of Science. In addition Modern Art Oxford, the contemporary art gallery, has an international reputation for excellence for its exhibitions of contemporary art as well as its accompanying community and education programmes. The Ruskin fosters close connections with Modern Art Oxford and its staff and students participate in exhibitions and public presentations on a regular basis.
Melanie Gurney (St Edmund Hall) working in the Media Lab. Photograph: Rob Judges.

Louisa Siem (St Catherine’s College) casting a model. Photograph: Rob Judges.

Emma Inge (St Hugh’s College), Degree Show 2014. Installation View. Photograph: greenroomphotography/Kinga Lubowiecka.
Libraries and Archives

The Oxford University Libraries with at its heart the famous Bodleian Library, hold the UK’s largest academic collection of books and other publications. The integrated library service of the University of Oxford comprises nearly 40 libraries, many offering borrowing rights. The Bodleian Library (http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk) is a copyright library and as such it has long collected copies of all works published in the United Kingdom, in addition to an extensive range of foreign publications. As it is not a lending library, its holdings are immediately available on request.

A main point of reference for most Ruskin graduate students is the Sackler Library (http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/sackler), one of the university’s principal research libraries which has incorporated the collections of the former Ashmolean Library (Western Art), History of Art, Eastern Art, and Classics. Its holdings are in excess of 200,000 volumes, and include monographs, catalogues, periodicals on fine and decorative art, theory, criticism, historiography, as well as the collections of former art history professors Edgar Wind and Francis Haskell. All books and periodicals are accessible to students.

The Ruskin has its own specialised in-house library of more than 6,500 volumes, which has been entirely reconfigured over the past three years based on our teaching. Since summer 2004 we have evolved fully functioning lending and reference collections. Both collections include written material on art history, art theory, art techniques, exhibition catalogues and artists’ monographs. The Ruskin holds around 20 sets of art journals and more than 2,000 art-related pamphlets. The library is fully integrated into the University’s electronic circulation system and a digital archive of the slide collection, comprising 15,000 images, is available on the departmental server. Ruskin library terminals offer full access to the electronic resources of the Oxford University.

The Oxford Centre for Research in the Humanities is called TORCH (http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk) offers a stimulating range of interdisciplinary activities for academic staff and graduate students.
The Collegiate System

Oxford is a collegiate university, consisting of the central University and colleges. The central University is composed of academic departments and research centres, administrative departments, libraries and museums. The 38 colleges are self-governing and financially independent institutions, which are related to the central University in a federal system. There are also six permanent private halls, which were founded by different Christian denominations and which still retain their Christian character. The different roles of the colleges and the University have evolved over time.

The collegiate system is unique, giving students and academics the benefits of belonging both to a large, internationally renowned institution and to a small, interdisciplinary academic community. It brings together leading academics and students across subjects and year groups and from different cultures and countries, helping to foster the intense interdisciplinary approach that inspires much of the outstanding research achievement of the University and makes Oxford a leader in so many fields.

Studying at the University of Oxford means that you belong to both a college and the Ruskin School. Each college has its own distinctive character, so you may well have a preference. When applying, it is possible to chose a specific college or to make an open application, where you select the subject that you wish to study but do not select a college. With an open application, you will then be assigned a college. Please bear in mind that successful candidates can be offered a place at a different college to the one to which they originally applied.

You can find more about the collegiate system and individual colleges at: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/colleges.
Ruskin Alumni

The impact of Ruskin alumni on the international art scene is significant. For instance, at the Venice Biennale 2011, exhibitions were included by Conrad Shawcross RA (1996), Nathaniel Mellors (1996) and Helen Marten (1998) while exhibition manager Holly Slingsby (2003) was working with Mike Nelson on the British Pavilion. Other examples of the success of our alumni are the Oscar-winning visual effects by Paul J. Franklin (1986) on Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2011), and the collaboration by video artist John Gerrard (1994) with pioneering choreographer Wayne MacGregor and the Royal Ballet on *Live Fire Exercise* that received praise for its innovative use of technology.

In a wider context, Dan Fox (1995), Senior Editor of market-leading art publication *Frieze Magazine*, commissions and writes reviews on contemporary visual arts projects worldwide for a discerning audience of collectors and curators. Showing the range of disciplines in which Ruskin alumni make an

impact, the recent Royal Academy exhibition Modern British Sculpture Show was co-curated by Keith Wilson (1985), and Karly Allen (1994) is Education Manager at the Royal Collection. Other historically significant alumni include sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, Pulitzer Prize-winner John Updike, R.B. Kitaj, Stephen Farthing RA, Michael Stanley, Simon Preston, Adam Lowe, Ben Sadler (of Juneau Projects), Ged Quinn, Ian Dench (of ELF fame), Oliver Beer, Oliver Herring, Roma Tearne, Tessa Farmer and Tim Braden.

**Notable Tutors, Fellows and Academic Visitors**
Notable previous tutors include John Piper, Paul Nash, Eric Ravilious, Stanley Spencer, Turner Prize nominees Rebecca Warren, Chris Offili, and Tomma Abts, while academic visitors have included Turner Prize winner Mark Wallinger, Anya Gallaccio and Louise Wilson and Richard Wentworth as the most recent Ruskin Master. Currently we count Turner Prize winner Elizabeth Price and Turner Prize nominee Lynette Yiadom-Boakye among our staff.
**Entrance Requirements**

Applicants are normally expected to be predicted or have achieved a first-class or strong upper second-class undergraduate degree (or equivalent international qualifications), as a minimum, in fine art or a related subject.

Appropriate indicators include:

- **Academic references/letters of recommendation.** Your references will support artistic achievement and creativity, intellectual ability, academic achievement, motivation, ability to work individually and in a group.

- **Written work and/or portfolio produced by the student**

  - A digital portfolio of recently completed studio work documented through images or other mode of documentation (maximum 15 images and/or 12 minutes of moving image work) is required. Portfolios should be accessible via a non-Oxford University website (such as Vimeo, Wordpress or equivalent) and the relevant web address provided in your application. Portfolios will be assessed for evidence of creative thinking and artistic accomplishment, and clarity in the exposition of ideas.

- **Statement of purpose/personal 1,000-word personal statement written in English.** This will be assessed for:
  - your reasons for applying
  - an understanding of your artistic work within broader contexts of contemporary art practice and discourse
  - evidence of motivation for and understanding of the proposed area of study—commitment to the subject, beyond the requirements of the degree course
  - capacity for sustained and intense work-reasoning ability.

- **Performance at interview(s)**

  Interviews are normally held as part of the admissions process. Although we prefer to conduct interviews in person, overseas candidates or applicants unable to attend are offered the option of skype or telephone interviews. In all cases, there will be a minimum of two interviewers.
Additional supporting material (such as a more extensive portfolio) may be requested before the interview. Details of any publications and/or exhibitions you have held that would be of interest to the assessors should be included in the application.

The following factors will govern whether candidates can be offered places: The ability of the Ruskin School of Art to provide the appropriate supervision, research opportunities, teaching and facilities for your chosen area of work. Minimum and maximum limits to the numbers of students who may be admitted onto Oxford's research and taught programmes.

The provision of supervision is subject to the following factors: The allocation of graduate supervision is the responsibility of the Ruskin School of Art and it is not always possible to accommodate the preferences of incoming graduate students to work with a particular member of staff. Under exceptional circumstances a supervisor may be found outside the Ruskin School of Art.

**English Language**
If your first language is not English, or if your first language is English but you are not a national of the UK, Ireland or a majority English-speaking country recognised by the UK Home Office, you must supply suitable evidence that you have reached the relevant higher or standard level before any offer of a place can be confirmed. For more details please visit: [http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/applicationguide](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/applicationguide).

**Disability, Health Conditions and Specific Learning Difficulties**
Students are selected for admission without regard to gender, marital or civil partnership status, disability, race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age or social background. Decisions on admission are based solely on the individual academic merits of each candidate and the application of the selection criteria appropriate to the programme of study. Further information on how these matters are supported during the admissions process is available in our guidance for applicants with disabilities.
Ally Clark (Brasenose Collage), Degree Show 2014. Installation View. Photograph: greenroomphotography/Kinga Lubowiecka.
Other Information

Whether you have yet secured funding is not taken into consideration in the decision to make an initial offer of a place, but please note that the initial offer of a place will not be confirmed until you have completed a Financial Declaration.

Assessors

All recommendations to admit a student involve the judgement of at least two members of the academic staff with relevant experience and expertise, and additionally must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies or Admissions Committee. Admissions panels or committees will always include at least one member of academic staff who has undertaken appropriate training.
For up to date details please visit:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/mfa-fine-art.

How to Apply
Please follow the detailed instructions in the Course Guide available at:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/postgraduate_courses/course_guide/fine_art.html and consult the Ruskin School of Art (www.rsa.ox.ac.uk) website for any additional guidance.

Queries about the MFA programme can be directed to the Ruskin’s Director of Graduate Studies at dgs@rsa.ox.ac.uk.

Details of this procedure, exact submission dates, and the importance of choosing the most appropriate one, can be found at http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/postgraduate_courses/apply/application_guide.

The set of materials you should submit comprises:
• a personal statement of around 1,000 words in length; a CV, three academic reference letters; official transcripts detailing your university level qualifications and marks to date; a document comprising the web address (URL) of a publicly-accessible digital.
• portfolio of up to 15 still images and/or 12 minutes of moving images, documenting recently completed studio work of yours.

All supporting documentation, including letters of reference, must be received by the deadline.

For the most detailed information on the application process please refer to the University Admissions webpage: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/postgraduate_courses/index.html. Or contact the Graduate Admissions office at graduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk.

Information on fees and living costs can be found at http://www.ox.ac.uk/feesandfunding/fees.
Hana-Mai Hawkins (St Catherine's College), Degree Show 2014. Installation View. Photograph: greenroomphotography/Kinga Lubowiecka.