

**MA | DESIGN**

**RESEARCH,**

**WRITING**

**AND CRITICISM**



**Graduate Programs**

# Do you care about design and its impact

on the individual, society and the environment? Are you interested in honing your research skills and developing your unique point of view?

Whether your background is in design, journalism, science, history or something else entirely, the SVA MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism might just be the next step in your career trajectory. If you're interested in improving your current practice or in changing direction completely, feel free to email, call or drop by the department for a visit. We're always happy to talk about our exciting curriculum, show you our lovely studio, and introduce you to faculty, alumni and students.

We study design in all its manifestations, with a focus on its implications. This means we don't just consider designed products or buildings, but also the infrastructure that connects them and the policy that shapes them. We try to look at what happens after a designed product is launched. We go beyond the glossy images supplied by the manufacturer to discover how things actually get used and discarded,

and how they impinge upon our daily reality.

Here in the MA Design Research, Writing and Criticism Department, we learn to build arguments based on reporting and research, and to develop compelling narratives, which we then aim to get out into the world in the most targeted way possible. Central to the MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism are workshops in radio podcasting, video, exhibition curation, conferences, events and online media.

We've had remarkable success so far, with our graduates going on to work at museums and institutions like MoMA, the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, Vitra Design Museum, Storefront for Art and Architecture, Public Policy Lab, the Glass House and Institute of Play; at publications including *Metropolis*, *Domus*, *Curbed*, *ArchDaily*, *Surface*, *Pin-Up* and *Architizer*; at companies such as Real Art and Facebook; and design firms like Ziba Design, Steven Holl Architects and Project Projects.

Additionally, our graduates have gone on to teach at RISD, Pratt, NYU, Rutgers, University of Lisbon and California Institute of the Arts, among others; to pursue post-graduate research at the V&A Museum and Harvard University; to publish books with Thames & Hudson, MoMA, the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum and Princeton Architectural Press; to launch their own enterprises such as *CLOG* and *Superscript*; and to contribute to publications including *Design Observer*, *Dezeen*, *New York* magazine, *Works That Work*, *Core77*, *Designers & Books*, *Disegno*, *Los Angeles*

*Review of Books, Print, Abitare, Domus, The Architect's Newspaper, Design + Culture and Wallpaper.* They have also won writing awards and grants from *Core 77, Design Observer, Design History Society, Frieze* and AOL.

The MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism plans to expand this list still further by preparing students for future-facing careers in research, publishing, education, museums, institutes, design practice and entrepreneurship, or for continued studies in a design-related subject. In fact, the program is geared toward providing graduates with a comprehensive set of research tools and methods they can apply to any foreseeable career path.

All successful candidates will be offered a significant scholarship, bringing the tuition cost below market rate. We believe that this, plus the fact that the program runs for just nine months, makes our MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism a very appealing and viable proposition to mid-career professionals as well as recent graduates who want to deepen their knowledge of design and its consequences.

What do you think? We look forward to discussing your individual goals for graduate study in design research.

—Molly Heintz, chair

# About the Program

The SVA MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism offers a high-impact, targeted program well-suited to the circumstances of established professionals, in addition to graduates wishing to continue their studies at an advanced level. With a two-semester time frame, the MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism provides intensive instruction in the tools and techniques for researching, analyzing and interpreting design, and its cultural and environmental implications.

This rigorous, one-year MA program features an unparalleled core faculty, comprised of celebrated curators, editors, critics, and designers such as: *The New York Times* culture reporter Robin Pogrebin; author and SVA MFA Design co-chair Steven Heller; architect, writer and media consultant Pierre Alexandre de Looz; BBC producer and filmmaker Adam Harrison Levy; and urban design critic Karrie Jacobs. With more than 30 guest lecturers and critics visiting the department per year—including humorist and author Sloane Crosley; design historian and archivist Russell Flinchum; StoryCorps executive producer Michael Garofalo; MoMA design director Rob Giampietro; director of NEW INC, the New Museum's technology and design incubator, Julia Kaganskiy;

MOSS design gallery founder Murray Moss; executive director of American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY) Benjamin Prosky; Design Museum director Deyan Sudjic; critic and curator Mimi Zeiger; Gawker founding editor Elizabeth Spiers; and IBM Watson researcher Caroline Sinderson—the program takes particular care to connect students with inspirational mentors and help them to forge relationships with potential employers, mentors and colleagues.

The program's curriculum charts the cutting edge of design practice and is responsive to exciting developments in the media landscape. It aims to generate provocative new thinking about design and to help shape the ways in which design is engendered, presented and evaluated. In providing the tools for constructing compelling narratives about design in multiple formats, the program amply prepares students for future-facing careers in research, publishing, education, museums, institutes, design practice, and entrepreneurship, or for continued studies in a design-related subject.



A portrait of Leital Molad, a young man with dark hair, wearing a dark, textured sweater. He is sitting on a striped couch against a background of patterned wallpaper. The image is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the blue background.

# Talking Stories with a Podcast Pioneer

“People in film, TV and print are finally catching on to an idea that all of us radio nerds always knew, which is that audio has a unique quality to it,” says Leital Molad, instructor in the MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism Department. ►

Radio nerd is one way to describe Leital, but it may not be the best: After almost 20 years of working in radio and podcasting, she is a master of the form, standing at the center of the universe that is audio journalism, a position achieved through years of hard work, creative ingenuity, and a smattering of luck. It began at the University of Texas at Austin, where, as an undergrad, she worked at the university's renowned student-run station, KVRX. The station's slogan, "None of the Hits, All of the Time," refers to its commitment to a free-format programming of alternative music, but it is also known for producing shows that cover and discuss stories and issues often neglected by mainstream print and broadcast outlets.

Inspired by her experience at KVRX, Lietai moved to New York after graduating to pursue a master's in journalism. After earning her degree, she landed a job as a production assistant at WNYC and Public Radio International, working on the Peabody Award-winning arts and culture show *Studio 360 with Kurt Andersen*. She stayed on the show for more than 10 years, editing, producing, reporting and eventually rising to the role of senior producer. It was here that she first heard about the MA in Design Research, Writing and Criticism at the School of Visual Arts. "We had quite a few faculty members on the show," she recalls, "and Kurt had been invited to teach. He asked me if I wanted to co-teach with him."

Since the inception of that first class in 2008, podcasting has exploded, with nearly a half-million podcasts available on Apple and other mediums. Leital's class has become a mainstay of the department, giving students the opportunity to express their ideas with broader audiences in mind. Under her guidance, they record in the field, write scripts, do multiple interviews, and gather different kinds of sounds in order to craft audio stories centered around their thesis topics.

"I think most can attest that it's pretty fun to do," Leital says. "Telling stories and doing journalism in audio really captures your listener's attention and engages them."

And Leital should know. Since her days at *Studio 360*, she's gone on to work as an executive producer at WNYC and First Look Media. She currently heads up content development at Pushkin Industries, an audio company founded by Malcolm Gladwell and Jacob Weisberg, whose podcasts include *Revisionist History*, *Against the Rules with Michael Lewis*, and *Deep Background with Noah Feldman*. The company's aim is "to spread the joy we've found in making and listening to podcasts." It seems to be Leital's mission statement as well.

# Curriculum

## FALL

## CREDITS

Approaches to Design History	4
Contemporary Issues in Design, Architecture and Urban Planning	4
Cultural Theory	4
Research and Writing I: Journalism Tools and Inspiration	2
Research and Writing II: Narrative Nonfiction Writing	2
Thesis Development Workshop	0

## SPRING

Thesis Research, Writing and Production	6
Media Workshop	4
Research and Writing III: The Personal Essay	2
Research and Writing IV: Editing for Writers	2

**“If there’s one thing I’ve learned as a professional, cemented for me after going through the D-Crit program, it’s that extensive research informs the best work and can lead you down pathways you never thought of. Having research as a tool in my arsenal has made me a better designer and, probably, a more engaged person.”**

—Erin M. Routson, creative director, 160over90, (MA 2012)







# Course Offerings

Through workshops, seminars, lectures and site-visits, students examine the issues and policies that shape the designed environment; learn research methods, reporting techniques and theoretical models; and experiment with a range of media vehicles for communicating their research, including non-fiction writing, personal essay, visual narrative, publication development, and podcasting.

Each student identifies an individual research territory to explore during the year, culminating in a thesis portfolio of written and applied media projects. Degree candidates must successfully complete 30 credits, including all required courses, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. A residency of two academic semesters is required.

## CULTURAL THEORY

This seminar exposes students to key issues in cultural theory and criticism, with a view to the study and interpretation of designed space and objects. Special consideration will be given to the development of critical positions that serve as a lens for reading the complexity of the built environment within a larger context. Sessions will focus on key texts drawn from disciplines that include philosophy, critical theory, art criticism, cultural studies, anthropology and media studies. These readings offer different perspectives on cultural economies, politics and systems of meaning, with a goal of helping students define their own critical framework for research.



Students in the 2016 Summer Intensive presented op-eds in public space.

## APPROACHES TO DESIGN HISTORY

The history of design can be best understood when explored through a spectrum of experiences: makers and users, intentions and consequences, experiences and interpretations. Design influences culture at every level, at the level of individual behavior, the construction of community and our foundational systems and structures—businesses, governments, civic institutions, systems of belief. To what extent do we understand the underlying belief systems that drive those systems? As design writers, what responsibility do we have to understand, investigate, critique and expound on our analysis of the larger social dynamics at play? In this course, we consider ways of approaching design history. Beginning with an introduction to the field of design history itself, our episodic structure zooms in on case studies across various periods and types of design: from the chair to the room, exhibitions, graphics, and digital technology. While examining this handful of moments within an expansive field, students are encouraged to consider relevance to contemporary discourse as well as biases and gaps—both here and in “the canon.” Together we will discuss how ideas in history inform design thinking and making, and attempt to understand how we construct cultural narrative and meaning through history. Reading and writing about design requires a broad social lens focused on those whose stories are often left untold alongside those who have gained a megaphone to amplify their voices.

## THESIS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Through group meetings and one-on-one consultations, each student will choose a thesis topic that is innovative and rich enough to withstand extended inquiry. Students will be guided through the process of identifying problems, developing critical questions, conducting a literature review and embarking on primary research. Students will explore research methodologies and resources related to design research as they develop a thesis research question and build a research dossier to support their writing.

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PLANNING

This course will provide an overview of some of the social, economic, political, institutional and personal forces giving shape to our contemporary designed environment—both in New York City and globally. Through seminars, a selection of walking tours, site walk-throughs and visits to some of the city’s design and architecture studios and planning offices, students will be introduced to the issues, controversies and development conflicts that impact the urban environment, and the protagonists who play a role in them. They will investigate how everything from the tallest skyscraper to the smallest bit of ephemera is part of the design ecosystem that is otherwise known as a city, and they will find out how urban design is affected by the political process. By the end of this course, students will be familiar with the work of a broad range of international designers, architects and urban planners, and will be conversant with many of the policies and processes that determine the material form of the 21st-century city.

## MEDIA WORKSHOP

This workshop is predicated on the idea that critical research and writing encompasses a rapidly expanding range of media and that a researcher, writer, editor, or scholar working in the contemporary design and media landscape needs to be proficient in multiple media formats beyond the written text. Students will learn how to translate their thinking about design, architecture and visual culture into the form of a compelling podcast. By the end of this workshop, students will have produced a portfolio piece. Other media to be explored will be chosen by the department chair.

## RESEARCH AND WRITING I: JOURNALISM TOOLS AND INSPIRATION

This course offers tools and inspiration for probing journalism—covering reporting strategies, research methods, writing styles and ethics. How to create a compelling narrative, use language vividly and precisely, and structure different writing formats will be addressed, and students will research, report, write and edit news stories, features, profiles and reviews. Distinguished writers will visit the class to discuss their strategies and experiences. Students will learn how to initiate and develop story ideas and how to pitch stories to editors. Structuring a story using a lede, nut graf and kicker will be explored. Particular emphasis is put on interviewing techniques, which play an important part in gathering information for all kinds of stories.

## RESEARCH AND WRITING III: THE PERSONAL ESSAY

This course focuses on developing the writing portion of students’ research projects through a series of workshops based on the essay. Students will experiment with voice, style and form as they hone their research and explore how to tie it to a narrative. Guest visits from notable writers focused on design and visual culture are a feature of the course. Drawing on readings and other sources related to research projects, students work toward fostering a public discussion about design through clear, engaging and illuminating writing.

## RESEARCH AND WRITING II: NARRATIVE NONFICTION WRITING

In this course students explore the building blocks of research-ing and writing feature-length nonfiction narratives. The course begins with a warm-up workshop focused on objective versus subjective approaches to writing about design. The next segment of the course focuses on interviewing skills, while the final segment asks

students to develop narratives from material found in selected archives. Students will learn interviewing skills and best practices, conducting several interviews to produce a written profile piece. A selection of New York’s most significant and esoteric public and private archives, collections and libraries will be visited, and students will practice constructing compelling visual and written narratives based on individual discoveries and research.

## THESIS RESEARCH, WRITING AND PRODUCTION

The thesis explores a particular research theme connected to design, architecture, or visual culture that makes an original and significant contribution to knowledge. Working in consultation with their thesis advisors, students will develop detailed research plans, identify useful archives and sources, analyze the results of their research and develop a thesis portfolio, including a reflection essay, research dossier, podcast and 5,000 words of writing. They will also meet regularly with their advisors during the writing and editing phases.



## THESIS RESEARCH, WRITING AND PRODUCTION

This course focuses on developing the writing portion of students' research projects through a series of workshops based on the essay. Students will experiment with voice, style and form as they hone their research and explore how to tie it to a narrative. This course features guest visits from notable writers focused on design and visual culture. Drawing on readings and other sources related to research projects, students work toward fostering a public discussion about design through clear, engaging and illuminating writing.

## RESEARCH AND WRITING IV: EDITING FOR WRITERS

In the publishing world, a team of editors and proofreaders is responsible for developing, refining and checking an author's prose before publication. The copyeditor sets the style standard and enforces it, knows and applies grammar and punctuation rules, and formats text elements such as citations, all while being sensitive to the author's voice and the expectations of the audience. To develop their own inner copyeditor, students will learn to hone their self-editing tools, including recognizing common mistakes and challenges in editing their own work. This course also features guests in other editorial roles, including acquisition editors and assignment editors who become part of the students professional network beyond the program

## DESIGN WRITING AND RESEARCH SUMMER INTENSIVE

As design's social and environmental implications become more profound, it is more important than ever to write about design engagingly and intelligently.

The Design Research, Writing and Criticism Department at the School of Visual Arts is pleased to offer an online writing summer intensive aimed at those who would like to refine their skills as thinkers, researchers and storytellers. For practicing designers, this is a chance to examine the profession and its impact through writing and publishing. Clear thinking, deep research and engaging expression are vital skills in a contemporary designer's tool kit. For creative professionals, this program offers methods and insights for understanding and writing compellingly about images, objects and spaces.

A range of writing genres and imaginative approaches will be introduced. Working individually and in small groups, participants will experiment with essential techniques such as interviewing, archive research, close observation, analysis and critique, and then to develop and finesse several projects. In addition to personal work, the team will collaboratively produce and distribute a publication.

Through a robust schedule of seminars, lectures and virtual field trips, the intensive offers students and working professionals a unique opportunity to study with a faculty composed of leading writers and editors, and engage in conversation with prominent designers, architects and urban planners.

The intensive offers students and working professionals a unique opportunity to study with a faculty composed of leading writers and editors. Lectures and virtual trips to New York sites and studios allow participants to directly interact with prominent designers, architects and urban planners.

By the end of the program, participants will have completed several pieces of writing, formulated ideas for stories, and garnered a robust set of tools and approaches for writing authoritatively and imaginatively about design.

# Notable Alumni

**Frederico Duarte**  
MA 2010; curator,  
design critic

**Angela Riechers**  
MA 2010; program director,  
graphic design,  
The University of Arts

**Avinash Rajagopal**  
MA 2011; editor-in-chief,  
*Metropolis Magazine*

**Amelie Klein**  
MA 2011; independent  
curator

**Barbara Eldredge**  
MA 2012; writers, Google

**Bryn Smith**  
MA 2013; writers, Google

**Matt Shaw**  
MA 2012; senior editor, *The Architect's Newspaper*

**Anne Quito**  
MA 2014; design writer,  
*Quartz*

**Lila Allen**  
MA 2016; editor, *AD Pro/Architectural Digest*

**Ida Benedetto**  
MA 2016; experience director  
and design strategist, NOBL  
Collective

**Alicia Ajayi**  
MA 2020; faculty, School  
of Visual Arts; faculty,  
Columbia, GSAPP

**Jon Key**  
MA 2021; faculty, School of  
Visual Arts; Black Design  
Visionaries Grant recipient

“D-Crit changed my life—which sounds overly sentimental but is truly what happened. [...] The program pushed me to think more deeply about everything (work and life) and to meet the brilliant people who I continue to learn from and collaborate with today.”

—Sneha Mehta, writer (MA 2019)

# Faculty

To learn more about the faculty members and to read their full biographies, visit: [designresearch.sva.edu/faculty](http://designresearch.sva.edu/faculty).

**Molly Heintz**

chair, MA Design Research, Writing and Criticism; co-founder Superscript; editor-in-chief, *Oculus Magazine*

**Pierre Alexandre de Looz**

arts writer, architect, media consultant

**Steven Heller**

co-chair, MFA Design, School of Visual Arts; editor, writer

**Karrie Jacobs**

author, contributing editor, *Architect Magazine*

**Adam Harrison Levy**

writer, documentary filmmaker, producer

**Leital Molad**

senior producer, WNYC's "Studio 360"

**Robin Pogrebin**

culture reporter, *The New York Times*

**Jon Key**

artist, designer; principal, Morcos Key

**Alicia Ajayi**

architectural designer, researcher, writer

**Margaret Arbanas**

researcher, author

**Rob Walker**

writer; author *The Art of Noticing*

**Eric Schwartau**

comedian, columnist, *Gawker*

# Selected Critics, Readers & Lecturers

**Michael Bierut**

partner, Pentagram; co-founder, *Design Observer*

**Justin Davidson**

architecture, classical music critic, *New York magazine*

**Daniel D'Oca**

principal, co-founder, *Interboro Partners*

**Keller Easterling**

author; faculty, *Yale University*

**Rob Giampietro**

director of design, *Google*

**David Hadju**

author; music critic, *The New Republic*

**Jeremy O. Harris**

screenwriter, *Zola*; playwright, *Slave Play*

**Gary Hustwit**

director, *Helvetica*, *Objectified*, *Urbanized*

**Natasha Jen**

partner, *Pentagram*

**Cliff Kuang**

author; senior staff designer, *Google*

**Alexandra Lange**

author, design critic

**Alexis Okeowo**

staff writer, *The New Yorker*

**Chee Pearlman**

design curator, *TED*

**Rick Poynor**

design, visual culture critic

**Natalia Radywyl**

design researcher

**Cassim Shepard**

author; founding editor *Urban Omnibus*

**Roberta Smith**

co-chief art critic, *The New York Times*

**Sam Tanenhaus**

editor, *The New York Times Book Review*

**Meredith TenHoor**

author; educator; researcher, architectural history and theory

**Julio Torres**

screenwriter, *SNL*, *Los Espookys*

**Avery Trufelman**

host, *99% Invisible*

**Khoi Vinh**

principal designer, *Adobe*

**Amanda Williams**

visual artist, educator

**Mimi Zeiger**

critic, curator



Students with faculty member Karrie Jacobs for her "Complexity and Contradiction in Times Square" seminar, part of the course Contemporary Design, Architecture and Urbanism.





TOP: Students discussed their thesis research at “Vital Signs,” the 2016 graduation conference. BOTTOM: Thesis excerpts were published in the student-designed programs conference programs.

# Application Process

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For a full list of application requirements and detailed instructions, visit:

[sva.edu/grad/howtoapply](https://sva.edu/grad/howtoapply)

- Online Application and \$80 Application Fee: [sva.edu/apply](https://sva.edu/apply)

## DEADLINES

For information on application deadlines, visit: [sva.edu/grad/timeline](https://sva.edu/grad/timeline)

## IMPORTANT LINKS

- FAQ: [sva.edu/grad/faq](https://sva.edu/grad/faq)
- International students: [sva.edu/grad/intl](https://sva.edu/grad/intl)
- Tuition and fees: [sva.edu/tuition](https://sva.edu/tuition)
- Visit SVA: [sva.edu/grad/visit](https://sva.edu/grad/visit)

# Contact Us

We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a department tour, meet with the chair, attend a lecture, sit in on a class or sign up to attend an Information Session. For more information and to register, go to: [sva.edu/grad/visit](http://sva.edu/grad/visit).

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: [gradadmissions@sva.edu](mailto:gradadmissions@sva.edu).

**Molly Heintz**, chair

**Eric Schwartau**, director of operations

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**Department site:** [designresearch.sva.edu](http://designresearch.sva.edu)

 [twitter.com/DCrit](https://twitter.com/DCrit)

 [@svadesignresearch](https://www.instagram.com/svadesignresearch)

“The program taught me to think of design writers and strategists as agents of change—or voices of reason—and I continue to carry the torch professionally every day.”

—Derrick Mead (MA 2012)

## ACCREDITATION

The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents ([www.highered.nysed.gov](http://www.highered.nysed.gov)) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Advertising; Animation; Comics; Computer Art, Computer Animation and Visual Effects; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of programs in Art Education; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching on graduates of the program in Art Education; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education ([msche.org](http://msche.org)), 1007 North Orange Street, 4th Floor, MB #166, Wilmington, DE 19801, 267-284-5011. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation ([accredit-id.org](http://accredit-id.org)), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

The School of Visual Arts' Department of Art Education is a member in good standing of the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP), a national accrediting organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The School of Visual Arts' Department of Art Education is currently pursuing accreditation of its educator preparation programs under the AAQEP standards with an anticipated quality assurance review in fall 2023. Pursuant to Section 52.21 of the

Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, the educator preparation programs offered by the School of Visual Arts are therefore considered to be continuously accredited for purposes of meeting the New York State requirement that all such programs maintain continuous accreditation. The School of Visual Arts' Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program was previously accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The Master of Professional Studies in Art Therapy degree program is approved by the American Art Therapy Association, Inc., and as such meets the Education Standards of the art therapy profession.

## CREDITS

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# School of Visual Arts

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