



Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

The Possibility of Things

A teaching case study on addressing global responsibilities in postgraduate education through an interdisciplinary, collaborative, large scale, and blended learning unit.

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Challenge-based learning

AcrossRCA, a unit for all RCA MA students that encourages participants to collaboratively develop ideas to address shared concerns. It aims to:

- inspire an interest in those concerns
- improve some aspect of the world
- Impel action

It encourages students to ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016) to address ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel and Webber, 1973) and, in doing so, ‘tell the story of their lives’ (Arendt, 1958).



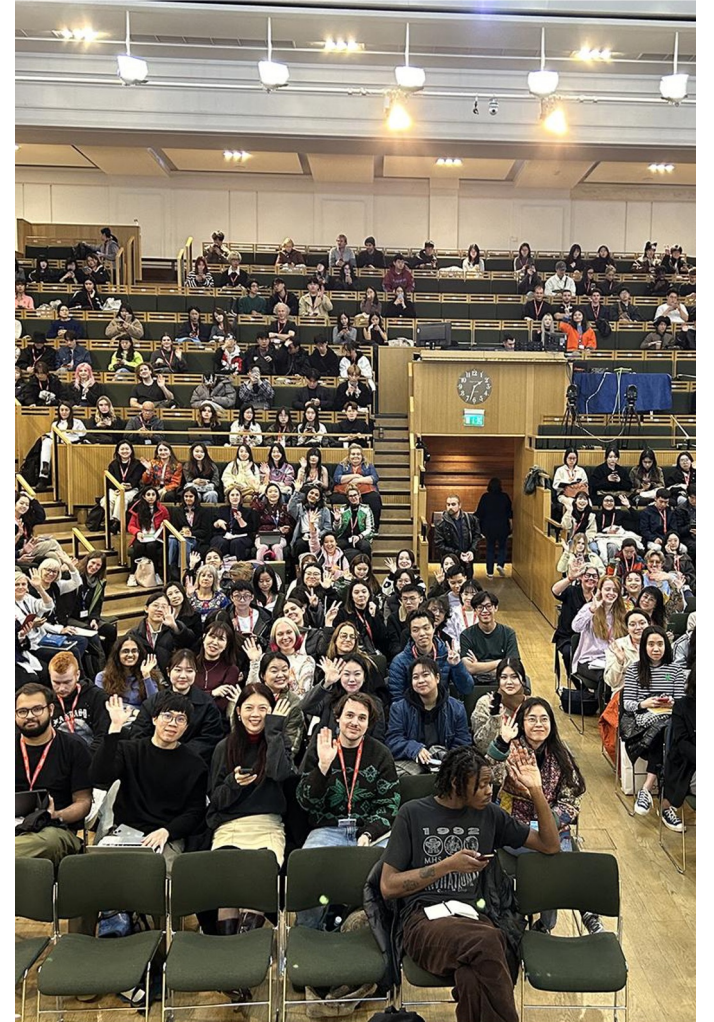
Institutional ambitions

To enable students to:

- Make connections across disciplines
- Generate innovative responses to complex problems
- Think critically about their creative practice

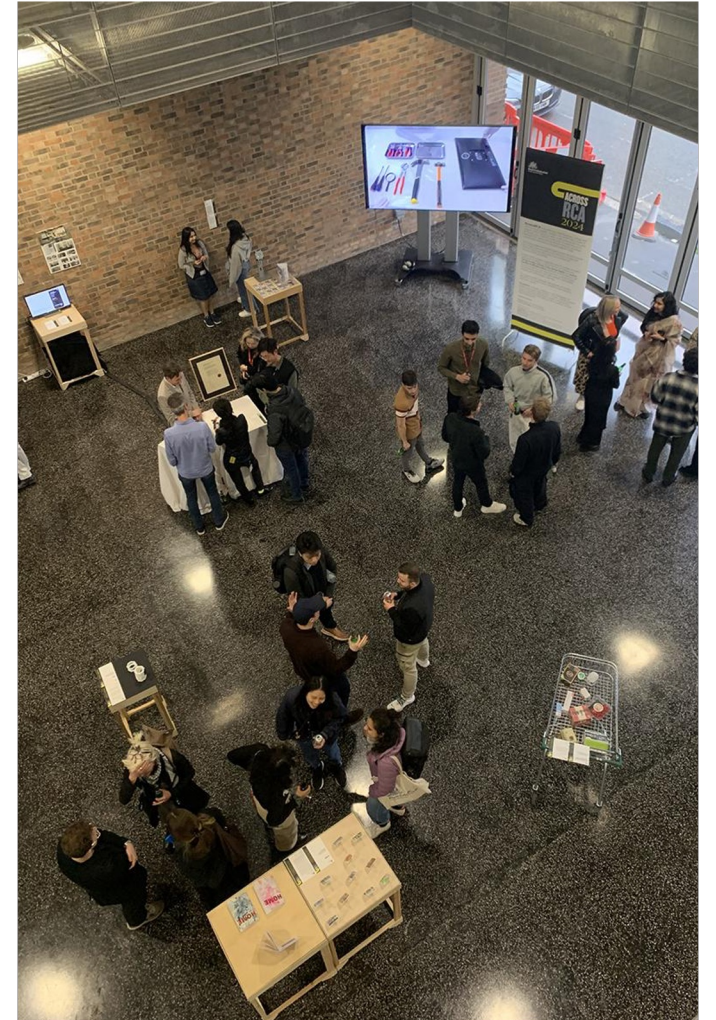
To enable the institution to:

- Experiment with burst/blended modes of delivery
- Limit reliance on physical spaces and resources
- Create a common structure across all MA programmes



AcrossRCA

- 2,200 students; 460 teams; 70 tutors; 5 theme and core skills leads; 3 professional services staff; 4 keynotes, 30 panel and lecture speakers.
- Across diverse disciplines and schools
- International cohorts
- Digital showcase:
www.acrossrca2024.rca.ac.uk



Projects

Themes

- Being Digital
- Caring Society
- Climate Crisis
- Justice Equality and Misinformation
- All Themes

Subthemes

- Artificial Intelligence
- Awareness
- Climate Change
- Communication
- Communities
- Consumption
- Direct Action
- Education
- Fictions
- Food
- Gender
- Identity
- Inclusivity
- Medical Care
- Mental Health
- Narratives
- Physical Health
- Play
- Social Care
- Spaces
- Surveillance
- Technologies
- The Body
- Wellbeing

230 Projects for All Themes

- Image View
- List View
- Random
- A-Z
- Z-A



Verde Vanish

Verde Vanish is a ground-breaking fashion project that merges fashion's and plant life's vitality.

- Climate Crisis
- Awareness
- Climate Change

Tutor agency

- Tutors given training and handbook, but are invited to decide on their approaches to delivery
- Tutors bring their own flavour to their teaching
- Some in-person; some exclusively online
- Different digital tools used in delivery
- Different approaches to assigning and managing groups
- Trade-off: Parity vs. tutor agency



Practicalities

External venue for launch

Blended (in person and online)

Digital tools:

- Zoom
- Padlet
- Mentimeter
- Moodle
- Panopto
- Platform



Assessment

Collaborative responses to theme

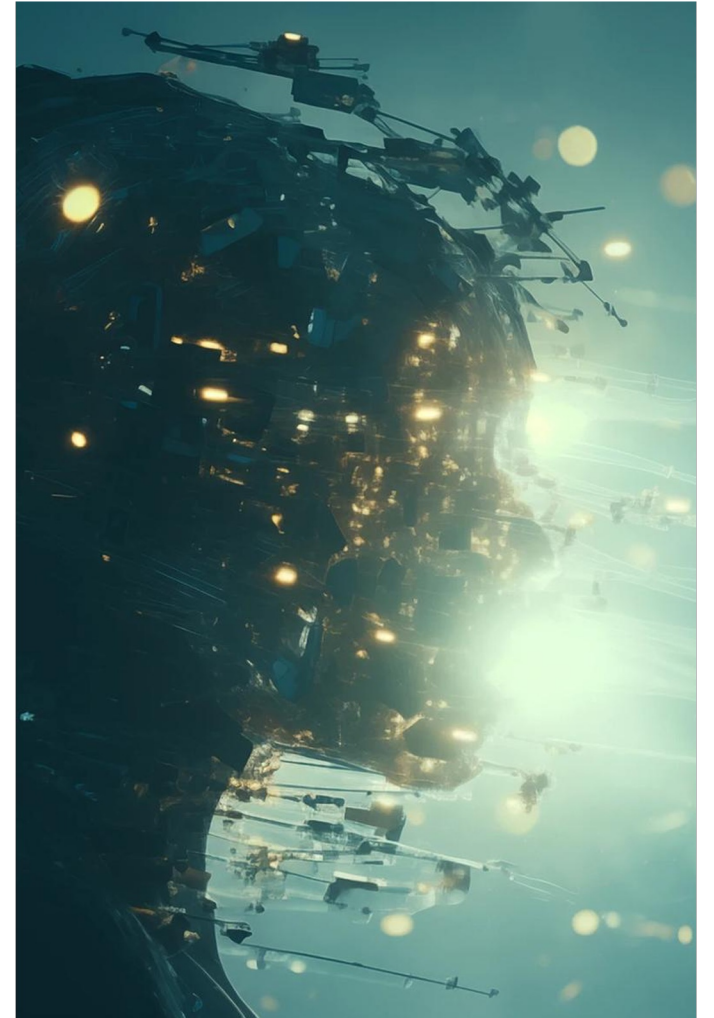
Focus on process over product

Encourage risk; reduce fear of failure

Pass/fail (individual grade)

Learning Outcomes:

- Critically reflect on global concerns
- Evaluate the impact of collaboration
- Critically reflect on social responsibilities



Positives

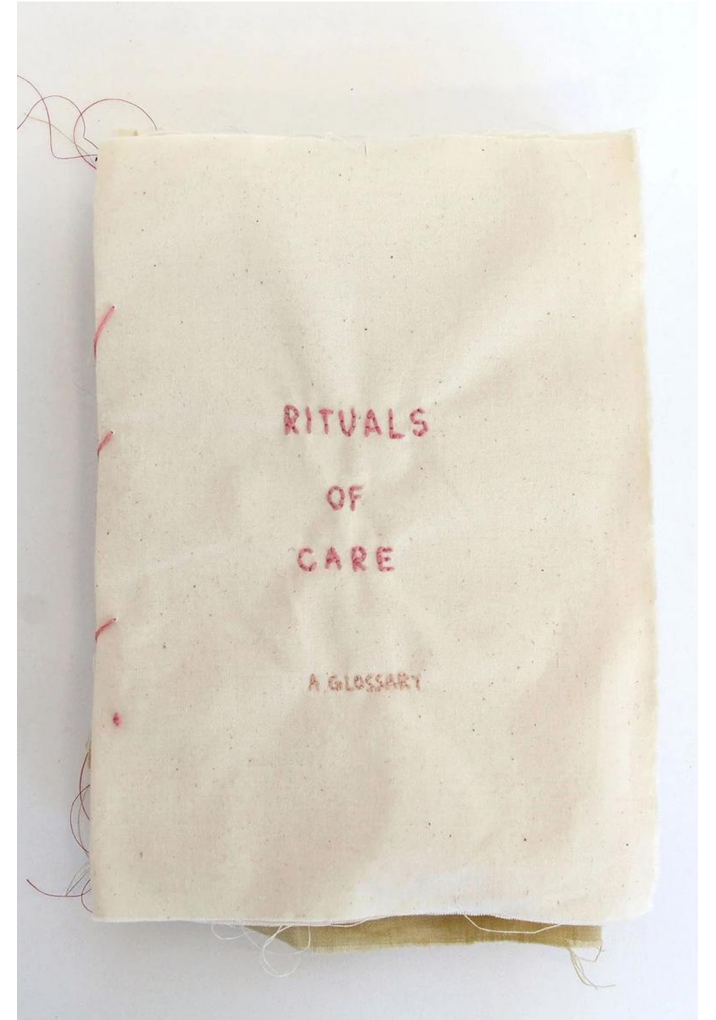
Tutor and student feedback:

- Interdisciplinarity
- Students formed cross-programme networks, yielding further collaborations and friendships
- Informed future research and projects
- Virtual studio
- Terms of engagement - 'living manifesto'
- Diverse range of outcomes



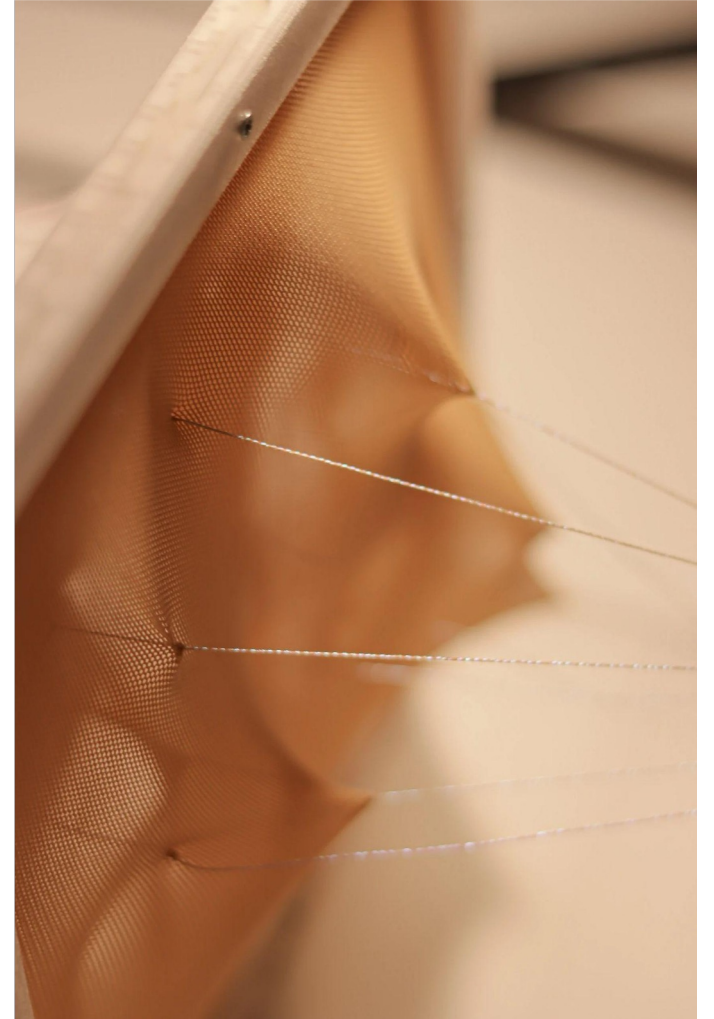
Challenges

- Students engagement online
- Convincing of relevance to core disciplines
- Lack of access to technical facilities
- Assumptions about the 'quality' of output
- Uneven programme sizes and diversity of cultural backgrounds



Future Developments

- Smaller (shorter)
- More in-person
- Focus on team learning, reflection, and sharing
- Assessment
- Theme development



Questions

- How do we manage the tension between tutor agency and a parity of on-campus, online or blended experience?
- How can we embrace disciplinary differences to build strong teams?
- How can student teams harness cultural differences?
- How can collaboration best be supported in a blended environment?

