

Designing Britain, 1750 to the Present

ARTH-UA 9650 L02

NYU London: Fall 2022

Instructor Information

- Dr Robert James Sutton, MA (Courtauld Institute of Art), PhD (York)
- rjs19@nyu.edu
- Available before or after class on Tuesday or by email.
Please contact me ahead of class if you would like to organise a meeting.
- Instruction Mode: In-person

Course Details

- Tuesday 1-3.45. Room G01, 6 Bedford Square

Course Description

Since the Industrial Revolution, British designers have consistently been at the vanguard of progressive, modern design. In contemporary terms, this is particularly well expressed in the Fall, when London goes out of its way to demonstrate its design credentials, with the week-long London Design Festival, the long weekend of London Fashion Week, and the Open House weekend.

This course examines changing attitudes to design in Britain from the eighteenth century, when it played a central role in the modernisation of the country, to the present day, when it is being called upon to refresh our image to the world, and project our “soft power”. We will ask whether there are features of British design over the last 250 years which are distinctively British; and to what extent British designers have informed, and been informed by, developments in the rest of the world.

Design now seems all-encompassing, and this very fact raises broader questions. Have we overvalued this work of the mind over more traditional hand-skills? Are we becoming cynical in the face of endless “rebrandings” (which includes the rebranding of cities and whole countries)? Does design necessarily falsify, or paper over the cracks? And is it good for the planet?

The classes are a combination of lectures and workshops, with formal presentations by the tutor, group discussion of the literature, and one-on-one feedback sessions. They also include visits or object-based learning to enable examination of the designed environment in a direct fashion. Assignments are designed to function as learning activities that build on each other to progressively enable the students to appreciate the designed environment with increased confidence and interpret it as a source to understand trends and changes in society, culture, and economy.

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- analyze objects as expressions of design culture;
- discuss changing theories of design, and patterns of consumption;
- identify recurrent themes in British design over the last 250 years;
- appreciate British design in its European and global contexts;
- relevant theories and methods in object analysis;
- write a critical essay about design;
- make use of different presentation formats to present research on design;
- understand design as cultural product.

Assessment Components

Assignments / Activities	Description of Assignment	% of Final Grade	Due
Fieldwork	500-word insightful report on a visit to location or event relevant to the course remit.	20%	30 Sept (Week 4)
Curation	Selection of ten images arranged in an online board or offline slideshow to build a virtual exhibition, accompanied by a 250-word curatorial statement.	20%	21 Oct (Week 7)
Presentation	6-8 minute presentation on a single object of British design, including hand-in of script.	20%	15 Nov (Week 11)
Essay	2000-word essay on an example of post-1945 British design, to be agreed with tutor.	40%	5 Dec (Week 14)

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class

Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows

Letter Grade	%	Description
A	93.5 and up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspired statement of research aims, and originality in the construction of the questions and their application; • detailed and critical commentary on sources beyond the reading list; if relevant, significant and extensive use of primary research; • coherent structure, which may show innovation in organisational form while retaining excellent legibility; transitions between topics are clear and convincing; • excellent use and critical understanding of how images are professionally presented; • incisive and fluent writing style; if required by the assignment, perfect bibliography and referencing.
B	82.5 – 87.49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research questions are relevant, and articulated in a clear and comprehensive fashion; • in-depth reading of the sources, mostly limited to the reading list; if relevant, understanding of primary research and insightful commentary on methods; • understandable structure; • good use of images and understanding of their contexts; • fluent writing style; if required by the assignment, properly formatted bibliography and referencing.
C	72.5 – 77.49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple statement of main research aims; • rudimentary account of main sources and research methods; unclear distinction between primary and secondary sources; • only adequate structure with focus on the questions • inconsistent use of images and basic understanding of their contexts; • straightforward writing style; if required by the assignment, short bibliography and limited referencing.
D	62.5 – 67.49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confused or vague statement of research aims and questions; • limited reading and vague account of research approach; failure to understand difference between primary and secondary sources; • sketchy structure and lack of focus on the research questions; • poor attempt to use of images, understand their contexts and present them in an appropriate manner; • sketchy writing style; if required by the assignment, inadequate bibliography and little to no referencing.
F	Below 60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the characteristics of Grade D, which in addition is submitted very late; plagiarism; failure to submit work.

Readings

Required weekly readings are all posted as links or PDFs in NYU Brightspace.

There are also a large amount of useful sources available in the NYU and University of London libraries at Senate House, as well as online via Bobcat.

A few of the best general texts available at Senate House include:

- Christopher Breward & Ghislaine Wood, *British Design from 1948: Innovation in the Modern Age* (London: V&A Publishing, 2012)
- Cheryl Buckley, *Designing Modern Britain* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007)
- Mel Byars, *The Design Encyclopedia* (London: Lawrence King, 1994)
- Kjetil Fallan, *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
- Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986)
- Paul Greenhalgh, *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion, 1990)
- Leonie Hannan and Sarah Longair, *History through Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).
- Jules Lubbock *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)
- Fiona MacCarthy, *British Design since 1880* (London: Lund Humphries, 1982)
- David Raizman, *History of Modern Design* (London: Laurence King, 2010)
- Michael Snodin & John Styles, *Design and the Decorative Arts: 1500-1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2001)
- Jonathan Woodham, *Twentieth Century Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Resources

Access your course materials: [Brightspace](#)

NYU London and Living in London Info: [LDN](#)

Databases, journal articles, and more: [Bobst Library](#)

Assistance with strengthening your writing: [NYU Writing Center](#) (nyu.mywconline.com)

Obtain 24/7 technology assistance: [IT Help Desk](#)

Course Schedule

(Detailed breakdown of class content below)

Week/Date	Content	Assignment
1. 6 Sep	Introduction and visit to the British Museum	-
2. 13 Sep	The Character of British Design	Assignment 1: Briefing
3. 20 Sep	Visit to the V&A	-
4. 27 Sep	After the Industrial Revolution: Neo-Classicism and Machine Production	Assignment 1: Submission
5. 4 Oct	Victorian Design: Revivalism and the Colonial Project	Assignment 2: Briefing
6. 11 Oct	Craftsmanship and Anti-Industrialism in the Arts & Crafts Movement	-
7. 18 Oct	Visit to the William Morris Museum	Assignment 2: Submission
8. 25 Oct	Modernism and Modernisation in the Interwar Period	Assignment 3 and 4: Briefing
9. 1 Nov	Modernism and Reconstruction after World War Two	-
10. 8 Nov	Visit to the Southbank Centre	
11. 15 Nov	Mini Conference	Assignment 3: Presentations
12. 22 Nov	Design and Popular Culture since the 60s	
13. 29 Nov	Design and National Identity in the 21 st Century	
14. 6 Dec	Visit to the Olympic Park in Stratford	Assignment 4 Submission

A typical teaching session at NYU will consist of:

- An introductory lecture led by your tutor;
- A discussion related to that week's readings led by up to three people;
- Local site visits;
- Research skills and presentation methods;
- A twenty-minute break.

There will also be a number of dedicated site visits throughout the course to London institutions and landmarks that will help us to engage with the history of British design.

Class Breakdown

1. Introduction

In this week's class you will be introduced to the objectives and structure of the course, and we will make some initial forays into exploring what we mean by design, and the roles Britain has played in the history of design.

We will then make a short trip to the British Museum, which is just around the corner from Bedford Square.

2. The Character of British Design

In this week's class, we will begin to consider what is 'British' about British design, and how the concepts of identity, context, and nationhood affect our thinking about the products and objects produced and designed in Britain at different historical moments.

Readings

Paul Reilly, 'The Influence of National Character On Design', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 104, No. 4989 (26th October 1956), pp.919-939

Javier Gimeno-Martinez, "Primordialism: Nations as Perennial Entities", *Design and National Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp.31-49 AND 76-91

3. Visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum

This week we will visit the Victoria and Albert Museum to look at their collections of nineteenth and twentieth-century British design.

Reading

Purbrick, Louise, "The South Kensington Museum: The Building of the House of Henry Cole", in Pointon, Marcia, ed., *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp.69-86

4. After the Industrial Revolution: Neo-Classicism and Machine Production

In this week's class, we will look to consider the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the technologies of design and commercial production in England, as well as its impact on the commercial audiences for designed objects.

Readings

Forty, A, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), pp.13-28

Robin Holt and Andrew Popp, 'Josiah Wedgwood, Manufacturing and Craft', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (May 2016), pp.99-119

5. Victorian Design: Revivalism and the Colonial Project

In this week's class, we will explore the fashion for the revival of earlier styles from the Gothic and Medieval periods during the Victorian era, and we will discuss the importance and the legacies of both the Great Exhibition and the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) for how we understand Victorian design.

Readings

Kate Flint, 'Gilbert Scott, The Albert Memorial (1872)', *Victorian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp.45-49

Tim Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project', *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.11-27

6. Craftsmanship and Anti-Industrialism in the Arts & Crafts Movement

In this week's class, we will look to assess the morale and political ambitions of those associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, paying particular attention to the work of William Morris.

Readings

William Morris, 'The Aims of Art' in Linda Nochlin, ed., *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848-1900: Source and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp.129-141

Alan Crawford, "Ideas and Objects: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain", *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp.15-26

7. Visit to William Morris Museum

In this week's class, we will visit the William Morris Museum in Walthamstow to see both the museum's collection of objects related to Morris' life, and the temporary exhibition 'The Legend of King Arthur: A Pre-Raphaelite Love Story'.

Reading

Inga Bryden, 'All Dressed Up: Revivalism and the Fashion for Arthur in Victorian Culture', *Arthuriana*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 2011), pp.28-41

8. Modernism and Modernisation in the Interwar Period

In this week's class, we will focus on the introduction of modernist design into Britain during the 1920s and 30s, paying particular attention to where its impact was most closely felt, and asking why it didn't have the same impact it did in other countries at this time.

Reading

Julian Holder, 'Design in Everyday Things: Promoting Modernism in Britain, 1912-1944' in Paul Greenhalgh, *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion, 1990), pp.123-145

Michael Saler, 'The Earthly Paradise of the London Underground', in *The Avant-Garde in interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.92-121

9. Modernism and Reconstruction after World War Two

In this week's class, we will consider the impact of the Second World War on British design, where the bombing of cities and the renewed political consensus that gave rise to the foundations of Britain's 'Welfare State' created a demand for new approaches to social housing, schools, parks, hospitals and even sculpture.

Reading

John Boughton, "'If Only We Will": Britain Reimagined, 1940-51', *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London: Verso, 2019), pp.61-85

Catherine Jolivette, 'London Pride: 1951 and Figurative Sculpture at the South Bank Exhibition', *Sculpture Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2008), pp.23-36

10. Visit to the Southbank Centre

In this weeks class, we will visit London's Southbank to explore the architectural and artistic heritage and legacies of the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Reading

Patricia Simões Aelbrecht, "The Complex Regeneration of Post-War Modernism: London's Southbank Centre's Masterplan", *Urban Design International*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Nov 2017), pp.331-348

11. Mini Conference

This week's class will be given over to your presentations on an object of British design (your third assignment).

12. Design and Popular Culture since the 60s

In this week's class, we will consider the importance of popular culture for the development of new approaches to design in Britain, focusing particularly on Pop in the sixties, Punk in the Seventies, Rave in the 80s and the nationalist cultural revival of the 90s.

Reading

Nigel Whiteley, "Pop, Consumerism and the Design Shift", *Design Issues*, Vol.2, No.2 (Autumn 1985), pp.31-45

Peter York, 'Culture as Commodity: Style Wars, Punk and Pageant' in John Thackara, ed., *Design After Modernism: Beyond the Object* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), pp.160-168

13. Design and National Identity in the 21st Century

In this week's class, we will discuss the impact of national identity on approaches to design in the 21st century, and we will look to assess where and how national identity is manifest and represented in the complex and multi-faceted cultural sphere in which we find ourselves.

Reading

Christopher G.A. Bryant, "National Art and Britain Made Real: the London 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony" *National Identities*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2015), pp.333–346

Shanti Sumartojo. 'The Fourth-Plinth: Creating and Contesting National Identity in Trafalgar Square, 2005-2010', *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2013), pp.67-81

14. Visit to the Olympic Park in Stratford

For this final week of class, we will visit the Olympic Park in Stratford to look to assess the impact and the legacy of the 2012 Olympics on East London, ten years later.

Course Policies

Classroom Etiquette

- Thank you for not consuming food and snacks during teaching and learning activities;
- Please refrain from using mobile phones or laptops, unless required by the teaching activity;
- The typical session is made of sections of 45-50 minutes separated by breaks of ten minutes. Please use only these breaks to refresh yourself.

Academic Honesty, Plagiarism and Late Work

Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the [University and school policies](https://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/academic-policies.html). You can find details on these topics and more on this section of our NYUL website (<https://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/academic-policies.html>) and on the Policies and Procedures section of the NYU website for students studying away at global sites (<https://www.nyu.edu/academics/studying-abroad/upperclassmen-semester-academic-year-study-away/academic-resources/policies-and-procedures.html>).

Attendance

Key information on NYU London's absence policy, how to report absences, and what kinds of absences can be excused can be found on our [website](http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/attendance-policy.html) (<http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/attendance-policy.html>)

To ensure the integrity of the academic experience, class attendance is required and expected promptly when class begins. These rules apply to class excursions and activities as well.

Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations, but must follow NYU London's absence reporting procedure. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also [University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#)

Moses Accommodations Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented and registered disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (+1 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Inclusivity Policies and Priorities

NYU's Office of Global Programs and NYU's global sites are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In order to nurture a more inclusive global university, NYU affirms the value of sharing differing perspectives and encourages open dialogue through a variety of pedagogical approaches. Our goal is to make all students feel included and welcome in all aspects of academic life, including our syllabi, classrooms, and educational activities/spaces.

Pronouns and Name Pronunciation (Albert)

You can edit your pronoun and name pronunciation information on your Albert account, making it visible for faculty and staff. Information on how to do this can be found on the [Pronouns and Name Pronunciation web page](#).

Bias Response

The New York University Bias Response Line provides a mechanism through which members of our community can share or report experiences and concerns of bias, discrimination, or harassing behavior that may occur within our community. For more information, including how to report an incident, visit the [Bias Response Line website](#).

Your Lecturer

Dr Robert James Sutton is a freelance lecturer and curator, and a research associate at the Patrick Heron Trust working on the catalogue raisonné of Heron's paintings. He has taught at universities including Leicester, Oxford Brookes and Coventry and at NYU London.

Robert is primarily interested in the art and design of mid-to-late 20th century Britain, and has particular expertise in the sculptures of Henry Moore and the public art and build environment of post-war Britain. He completed his doctoral thesis on 'The Educational Roots of Henry Moore's Public Works, 1938-50' at the University of York and Tate Britain, where he contributed to the Tate research project Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity and co-curated two room displays of Moore's work. More recently, he supported the development of the exhibition *Bill Brandt Henry Moore* for the Yale Center for British Art and is currently working with the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery on a rehang of their 20th century collections.

His research is concerned with the memorial functions of artworks commissioned for the new public spaces of post-war Britain, with a particular focus on the works of Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Peter László Peri.