

SPEAKERS

[Huda Almazroua](#)

[Alberto Atalla Filho](#)

[Russ Bestley](#)

[Kevin Biderman](#)

[Silvia Bombardini](#)

[David Cross](#)

[Dora Souza Dias](#)

[Sam Gathercole](#)

[Ian Horton and Ian Hague](#)

[Jennifer Hankin](#)

[Zarna Hart](#)

[John-Patrick Hartnett](#)

Symposium The Design of History and the History of Design

London College of Communication

15 September 2025

[Fenella Hitchcock](#)

[Abbie Vickress and Sakis Kyratzis](#)

[Christopher Lacy](#)

[Timothy Miller](#)

[Danah Nassief](#)

[Jesse O'Neill](#)

[Nina O'Reilly](#)

[Patrick O'Shea](#)

[David Preston](#)

[Cheryl Roberts](#)

[Rebecca Ross](#)

[Antoin Sharkey](#)

[Andrew Slatter](#)

[Kate Trant](#)

[Vanessa Vanden Berghe](#)

[Judy Willcocks](#)

[Christin Yu](#)

A symposium for UAL's *Design History* research community

The *Design of History and the History of Design* is a one-day symposium that maps research into, through or at the boundaries of design history at UAL. While design history may underpin our teaching across different disciplines, research in design history across UAL is somewhat hidden. This symposium aims to share and make visible the work of researchers (staff and students) at all career stages across all UAL colleges.

Exploring the intersections of historical narrative and design practice, it examines how history is constructed, represented, and mediated through design, and how the discipline of design itself is shaped by its evolving historiography.

The symposium will serve as the starting point for a *Design History Network* at UAL, bringing together researchers from across the university. It also lays the foundation for a welcoming research community in design history, with potential for ongoing events, collaboration, publications, and curriculum development. If you'd like to join the network, please do get in touch.

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Please also sign up for the UAL Design Histories [Newsletter](#).

LECTURE THEATRE B

10:00 Welcome

10:15–11:45

Material Traces, Mediated Histories. A panel about objects and environments as sites of cultural memory, identity, and power. Moderation: Rujana Rebernjak.

Cheryl Roberts	<i>Narratives of Fur and Empires of Fashion Materialities.</i>
Patrick O'Shea	<i>The Baseball Cap as a Key Object in the History of Branding.</i>
Nina O'Reilly	<i>"A few feet from where you're standing someone was raving": designing subcultural histories at Kings' Cross Central.</i>
Vanessa Vanden Berghe	<i>Looking-beyond-Seeing: assessing the interwar interior as Mediated.</i>

12:15–14:00

Shaping Design: Pedagogy, Institutions, and Histories. A panel about the forces, pedagogies, institutions, and narratives that shape design and its histories. Moderation: Cheryl Roberts.

Dora Souza Dias	<i>Icograda.</i>
Andrew Slatter	<i>From MA to PhD: a reflection on—and a proposal towards—a critical evaluation on the impact of Ravensbourne's contribution within and beyond UK graphic design education 1963–1996.</i>
Ian Horton and Ian Hague	<i>Graphic Design Histories and the Absence of Comics.</i>
Judy Willcocks	<i>Art and Design Teaching Practice in Design History.</i>
Kate Trant	<i>Edward L. Bernays: "The father of public relations". (Or, when design history meets climate change).</i>

14:30–16:15

Designing Worlds, Rewriting Histories. A panel about design as a way of constructing worlds, histories, and identities. Moderation: Rujana Rebernjak.

John-Patrick Hartnett	<i>What's a (typographic) world? Traditional Irish music, modernity and Irish type.</i>
Antoin Sharkey	<i>The Architecture of the Museum: a history.</i>
Christin Yu	<i>Designing Metaphors: patchwork as method.</i>
Zarna Hart	<i>Not All Trunks Float.</i>
Danah Nassief	<i>Graphic Politics: a visual history of activism and resistance in the Arab world.</i>

16:15 Closing Plenary and Concluding Address

LECTURE THEATRE C

10:00 Welcome

10:15–11:45

Practicing History, Designing Methods. A panel about how design, making, speculation, and practice become ways of doing history differently. Moderation: Tai Cossich.

Alberto Atalla Filho	<i>Tailoring the Past: An Approach to Dress, Making, and Embodied Knowledge.</i>
Sam Gathercole	<i>Historical Artefacts, Time Machines and the Strange Objects of Science Fiction.</i>
David Preston	<i>Activating History through Praxis: The Role of Practitioner-Historians in Mediating Past and Present Concerns within Design.</i>
Huda Almazroua	<i>The Eternal Tawaf: Archival Memory, AI, and Generative Historiography Documenting Tawaf via Generative Art and Actor–Network Theory (ANT).</i>

12:15–14:00

Resistant Practices, Contested Narratives. A panel on how alternative voices, subcultures, and radical practices challenge dominant narratives. Moderation: David Preston.

Fenella Hitchcock	<i>Uchronic fashion collections as queer archives.</i>
Russ Bestley	<i>Turning Revolt into Style: The Process and Practice of Punk Graphic Design.</i>
Kevin Biderman	<i>Everything to sell live—Subsumption, surveillance and the protest livestream.</i>
Abbie Vickress and Sakis Kyratzis	<i>The Curiosity Cabinet as a Contemporary Exhibition Design Practice: Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen as a decolonial museum typology.</i>
Jesse O'Neill	<i>Reporting on the Malaya Pavilions: Colonial Press Narratives as Historical Sources for the British Empire Exhibitions.</i>

14:30–16:15

Disputed Histories, Emerging Futures. A panel about reframing, reimagining, and re-authoring design histories across labour, ecology, institutions, and media. Moderation: Tai Cossich.

Christopher Lacy	<i>Breaking the Press: A Brief History of The Wapping Printers Dispute.</i>
Timothy Miller	<i>Enacting an Alternative History of Critical Design as Affirmative-Critical Design.</i>
David Cross	<i>Co-designing a co-operative university.</i>
Jennifer Hankin	<i>Moonbeams, Bio-Flight and Biospheres: Interdisciplinary Ecologies and the Emergence of Cyclical Knowledge</i>
Rebecca Ross	<i>Alphabetic Interventions</i>

David Preston

Activating History through Praxis: The Role of Practitioner-Historians in Mediating Past and Present Concerns within Design

Design history has struggled with its disciplinary positioning. Grace Lees-Maffei and Danniell Huppatz critique its legacy as a service subject supporting design education, while Kjetil Fallan has argued for its recognition as a legitimate sub-field within history. By contrast, Guy Julier and Viviana Narotzky describe it as increasingly redundant, an autonomous academic discipline severed from design practice. For them, design historians became ‘dangerously out of touch’ with the profession they aimed to analyse.

These contrasting perspectives reflect tensions within the discipline, often unacknowledged yet influential in shaping how scholars engage with the field. Some academics have responded by shifting their work into adjacent domains, such as design studies or design methods, where history plays only a peripheral role. But what is lost when historically engaged design research is relocated outside the domain of design history and is there still space for practitioner-historians to contribute meaningfully to the field?

Dedicated design historians have typically been against attempts to prove through the relevance of history, with efforts to link the past and present understood as instrumentalisation. Meanwhile, from within design, scholars like Andrew Blauvelt have argued for the need to develop more reciprocity between past and present to enable historical enquiry to inform practice. This paper explores how such reciprocity might be enacted meaningfully, without distorting history for presentist ends.

I examine strategies for activating history through practice, drawing on Maria Göransdotter’s concept of ‘Present-ing history’, Durepos and Mills’ ‘ANTi-History’, and Davide Nicolini’s ‘strong approach to practice’. These frameworks highlight how design practice can not only serve as a lens through which to study the past, but also generate new forms of situated, embodied historical knowledge. I argue that practitioner-historians are uniquely positioned to construct alternate, invested histories written from within design, offering valuable contributions to both historical scholarship and contemporary practice.

Dr David Preston is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher in Graphic Communication Design at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. He is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and SEDA Recognised Supervisor. David leads ‘Strategy & Identity’, a study platform concentrated on branding and communication design from a social purpose perspective. A design educator of twenty years, his interests encompass pedagogy, knowledge exchange and research. His educational development work has been showcased by Advance HE, while his knowledge exchange projects have received grant-funding from Innovate UK, who recognised his partnership with FreshBritain as ‘Outstanding’. He has presented his research internationally through conferences and invited lectures in Brazil, Finland, India, Netherlands, Portugal and the US. David’s doctorate examined how the emergence of programmatic branding impacted the professional development of graphic design practices in Britain. His single-authored monograph, The Development of Corporate Design, is published with Bloomsbury Academic.