

catalyst

2027

BACHELOR OF ARTS / HE CERTIFICATE

Documentary Photography

Visual storytelling that unfolds across time. Learn the craft of seeing and the ethics of showing.

Institute for Creative Arts and Technology

Funkhaus, Nalepastr. 18, 12459 Berlin
catalyst-berlin.com

Overview

Where you'll learn

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Admissions Guide

Teaching Institution: Catalyst – Institute of Creative Arts and Technology
Final Award Title: Certificate of Higher Education (1 year)
Bachelor of Arts (Hons) (3 years)

Location: Berlin
Course start: September 2027

Mode of study: Full time
Language of instruction: English
Awarding Institution: Plymouth Marjon University

catalyst / Institute for Creative Arts and Technology

PLYMOUTH MARJON UNIVERSITY

Overview

Express your authentic self through photography

Our Documentary Photography BA is a practice-led programme for the next generation of visual storytellers. This course unlocks the potential of photography in the twenty-first century – as a tool for dialogue, an act of resistance, a space for care and a platform for unheard voices. At its core are social justice, critical inquiry and artistic ambition, combining technical skill with ethical awareness to prepare you for a photography career that matters.

This programme is ideal for anyone passionate about visual storytelling and eager to cultivate a professional practice in documentary and socially engaged contexts. You'll build strong technical and creative skills in photography, composition and showcasing your work. Alongside aesthetics and process, you'll critically engage with the medium's histories and contemporary contexts, reflecting on ethics, representation and social responsibility.

Most students who arrive here are already photographing or are self-taught – although prior experience is not required. What changes is the support and scale of the projects, as well as learning both an intellectual and professional framework for photography. Throughout the programme you are supported with technical training to bring your idea into the world.

Learning is practice-led, with the city of Berlin serving as both your backdrop and classroom. Through hands-on assignments and fieldwork, you'll develop your artistic voice while collaborating with Berlin's vibrant communities. Whether your path leads to freelance documentary photography, editorial work, publishing or socially driven artistic practice, this course supports your growth as an artist, storyteller and critically engaged citizen.

By the end of the course, you'll have:

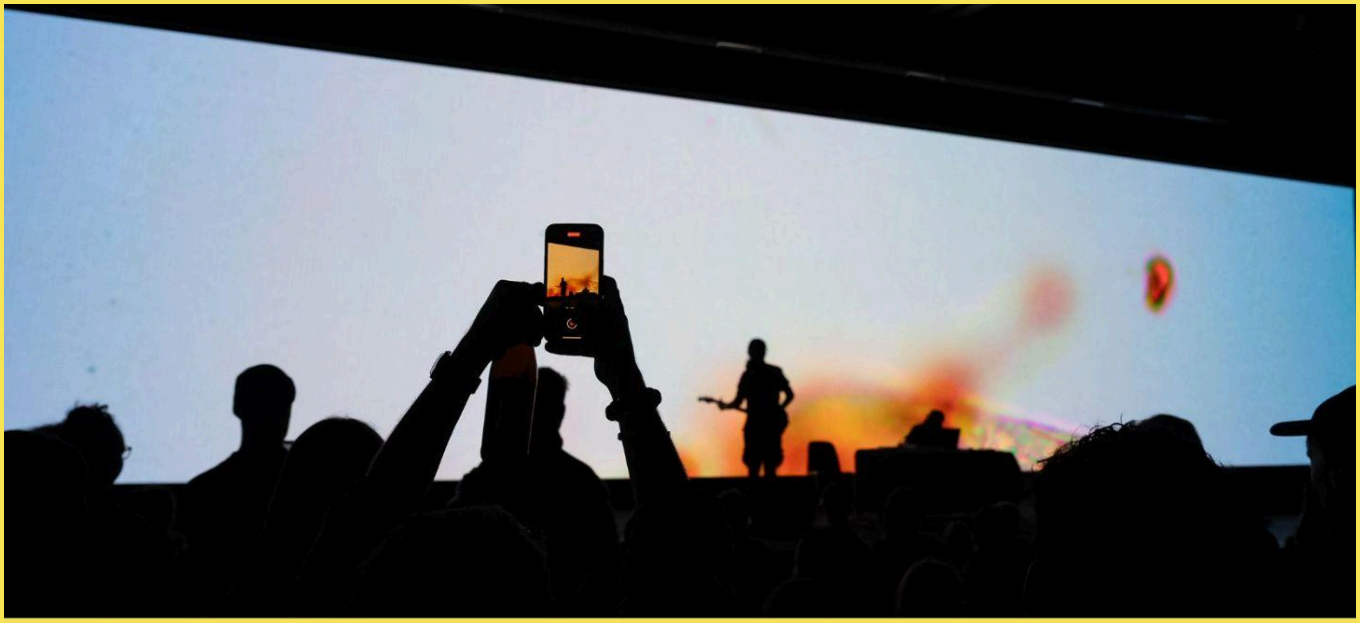
- A refined body of work, ready for exhibition or publication.
- Advanced technical proficiency and conceptual depth across a variety of platforms.
- A professional portfolio that demonstrates your artistic voice and industry readiness.
- The ability to present your work to diverse audiences, navigating ethical and creative challenges with confidence.
- Tools for career sustainability, including pitching, publishing, curating and exhibiting.
- A professional network built through live projects, collaborations and Berlin's international creative scene.

This programme's distinctive features: a documentary focus, hands-on learning, urban exploration, and showcase opportunities; ensure you graduate with both a strong artistic identity and practical industry readiness.

"Studying here was nothing short of amazing and to throw all of my talents and passions into one medium was magical."

Adam Munnings, Director and Catalyst alumnus

Come see it for yourself. **[Click here to book a visit →]**









Where you'll learn

Our creative campus

The programme sits within Catalyst's School of Film & Visual Media, on a 4,500m2 campus in central Berlin, shared with the Schools of Music & Sound, Acting and Creative Human Development.

On campus you have studio access for working under controlled light, a high-end scanner and a digital printer, which is what you need to get work off the screen, and up on a wall where it can be edited and critiqued. You also gain access to other campus facilities: editing suites, a cinema, a film studio with green screen, and the rehearsal studios. The music studios and our student-run Etikett Radio are also here on campus.

Collaboration is part of the curriculum, with the subjects you need for portrait projects or multimedia pieces with you in the same building. Over 70 nationalities work across the campus, giving you plenty of creative inspiration and resources to work with.

[Click here to book a campus visit →]





“Berlin does not just have many faces, but many characters. The vibe created by the people here is what makes the city so unique. It is a melting pot with room for everyone inside.”

— Anne-Louise Christiansen, Catalyst alumna

In Berlin

Berlin has a long documentary and photojournalistic history and an unusually dense exhibition culture for a city its size. C/O Berlin, the Berlinische Galerie and the Helmut Newton Foundation host major photographic work year round, and the C/O Berlin Talent Award is one of the few significant prizes aimed specifically at emerging documentary and critical image-makers. Alternative spaces such as nGbK's Art in the Underground puts work into the transport network, and collectives such as Palace 90mil support grassroots and socially engaged practice.

The more useful fact for a documentary photographer is what the city is made of. Berlin is a place where migration, economic pressure, protest, subculture and rapid redevelopment are all present and visible. It is a demanding yet meaningful canvas.

How you'll learn

Our learning method

There are no traditional exams at Catalyst. Every project is assessed through the work itself, so progress is measured by what you photograph, how you develop it and how you respond to critique. This rigorous method of iteration allows you to build a serious creative practice grounded in deadlines, self reflection and experiential knowledge.

Learning is practice-based and built around projects with real deadlines. In Year 1 the briefs come fast and stay short: you learn to see, shoot, edit and sequence within tight limits, because working under constraints teaches faster than working without one. In Year 2 the timescales lengthen and the projects become self-directed. In Year 3 you are running one sustained body of work across the whole year.

What you make is yours. The curriculum sets challenges rather than prescribing outcomes, so your background, your questions and the people you have access to determine the work you end up with.

Critique is the mechanism

Most photographers who apply here have been working alone. The part of this programme that changes the fastest is critique: showing unfinished work to people who take it seriously, and learning to say something useful about someone else's edit.

It runs through everything. Work goes in front of the cohort while it is still unfinished, which is when feedback is worth having. Contextual and Critical Photography gives you the vocabulary for it, so that "this doesn't work" becomes a specific and useful sentence about sequencing, distance, framing or the relationship between you and the person in the picture.

Alongside it, **one-to-one tutorials** give you time to look at your own development with a tutor who knows the work, clarify what you are actually doing and decide what comes next.

We've got you every step of the way

Your **tutors** are practising photographers, artists and researchers, exhibiting, publishing and working on community-based projects alongside teaching. That shows in the feedback: specific, honest and often harder than you expect. They will ask difficult questions about your work rather than tell you what to do with it.

Your Programme Lead

Jonathan Purcell is a documentary photographer whose work explores urban life, subcultures, and marginal spaces, often focusing on public environments, human interaction, and the politics of space. His approach blends street photography, long-form documentary projects, and socially engaged storytelling.



Our **technical team** is part of your day-to-day experience. They help you choose the right camera, lens or lighting setup for what you are shooting, prepare equipment for workshops, support student-organised shoots, installations and exhibitions, and keep the kit across campus serviced so you are never working with unreliable equipment.

Our **wellbeing team** is visible and approachable, and part of everyday campus life. That includes confidential one-to-one counselling and coaching for creative blocks, anxiety, conflict and life transitions, help accessing medical resources and referrals, and Flourishing Fortnights, two-week workshop series on collaboration, boundaries, communication and self-awareness. An optional Self-Development and Leadership course goes deeper into how you see yourself and your creative role. Documentary work regularly puts you in other people's difficulty, and sometimes your own, so this support sits close to the practice rather than beside it.

Skills that outlast any camera

The role of the photographer has been redefined repeatedly over the past decade and will keep being redefined after you graduate. So the emphasis throughout, in the critiques, the tutorials and the fieldwork, is on the things that carry you through that change: self-direction, creative resilience, critical thinking and the ability to learn through iteration and reflection.

You will learn to approach film and digital imagery, lighting and post-production software, and to integrate text, sound and moving image into your work when the story calls for it. But the point is judgement rather than proficiency. When a new tool or a new format arrives, you will know how to assess whether it serves what you are trying to make.

“I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Catalyst. The cohort has extremely hard working people, those interested in collaborating and sharing ideas in a non-competitive space. My short film, 'Generation Z', was accepted into the LA Indie Short Fest, and I thank Catalyst for the amazing experience.”

Andrea Riba, Director and Film Production alumna

[Click here to learn about our student experience →]

Core skills for an industry-ready portfolio

This programme is built to prepare you for the **realities of contemporary photography**, blending hands-on technique with critical, ethical, and conceptual depth. You'll learn how to:

- Develop and produce socially engaged photographic projects
- Work confidently with digital and analogue cameras, lighting, and editing tools
- Integrate text, sound, and moving image into your visual narratives
- Collaborate across disciplines and with community partners
- Apply ethical frameworks and critical thinking to real-world topics
- Manage your creative process from idea to exhibition or publication

You'll graduate with a resolved portfolio and a distinct artistic voice—one that reflects your skills, perspective, and ambition as a documentary photographer ready to make an impact.





What you'll learn

Course structure & learning outcomes

The Documentary Photography programme unfolds over three years:

Year 1 focuses on the foundations: learning how to see, shoot, edit and sequence photographs within short timeframes and under creative limitations. You'll begin building core technical skills while exploring the ethics and possibilities of documentary storytelling.

Year 2 expands your practice after the intensive first year of exploration**.** You'll take on more ambitious, self-directed projects, deepening your technical range and investigating what you can uniquely bring to the medium – as well as what defines powerful visual narratives.

Year 3 culminates in a major project that integrates everything you've learned. In your final year, you're in control: dedicating time to a sustained, research-led body of work, ready for exhibition, publication or professional launch.

You can study this programme either as a full three-year BA degree or the first year only as a one-year HE Certificate. Please note that the following curriculum is non-binding and subject to change.

Year 1 – HE Certificate

Semester One	Semester Two
Development	
Contextual & Critical Photography I	Creative Practice I
Visual Storytelling I	Visual Storytelling II
Practical Photography I	

Throughout your first year, you'll develop a professional and creative toolkit that enables you to:

- Understand and apply the core principles of documentary photography – from exposure, composition and visual sequencing to ethical storytelling and critical context.
- Experience using a range of cameras, lighting & software.
- Collaborate with your peers on projects rooted in real-world practice, from street photography and portraiture to experimental narratives.
- Explore Berlin's neighbourhoods, communities and visual history as you begin to define your own photographic voice.
- Investigate what matters to you – your interests, values and creative perspective – through photography as a tool for expression, research and social impact.

Year 1 Workshops

Practical Photography I

Build core technical skills in photography and learn how to handle your camera with confidence. Through hands-on workshops and assignments, you'll explore camera settings, composition and exposure, in order to create visually coherent and technically sound images.

Contextual and Critical Photography I

Dive into the histories and theories of documentary photography, exploring how images shape meaning and reflect the world around us. Through discussion, writing, and analysis, you'll sharpen your critical thinking and learn to read images with depth and nuance.

Visual Storytelling I

Explore the building blocks of photographic narrative. By working with sequencing, framing, and engaging with your subject, you'll start to craft stories that go beyond single images and begin developing your own approach to visual storytelling.

Creative Practice I

Experiment with different materials, techniques and photographic methods. Take creative risks, explore new ideas and reflect on your process as you develop your own artistic voice.

Visual Storytelling II

Build on your previous storytelling skills by creating more sustained and personal visual narratives. You'll consider how form, content, and context work together, while also learning the ethical dimensions of telling someone else's story.

Practical Photography II

Deepen your technical skills, gain confidence with lighting, lens choices and digital workflows, in order to deepen your practical independence and refine your process and creative control.

Year Two – HE Diploma

Semester One	Semester Two
Development	
Collaborative Practice	People, Place, Practice
Creative Identities	Creative Practice II
Professional Practice I	

The course content in your second year will focus on:

- Immersive fieldwork and deep research
- Self-directed capstone project
- Advanced technical and conceptual refinement
- Critical writing and visual ethics
- Professional development and public showcase

Year 2 Workshops

Collaborative Practice

You will work with classmates on shared photographic briefs, learning how to collaborate creatively and ethically. You'll practice negotiation, co-authorship, and collective responsibility—key skills for working in socially engaged and community-based contexts.

Creative Identities

You will explore how your personal, cultural, and political identity shapes your work. Through self-directed projects and research, you'll experiment with representation, authorship, and visual voice—developing a distinct practice grounded in your values and worldview.

Professional Practice I

You will begin shaping your professional presence. From self-promotion to project pitching, you'll explore real-world expectations of the photography industry and clarify your creative direction and career aspirations.

People, Place, Practice

You will investigate how photography connects people and place. Working with communities or locations of personal interest, you'll develop site-specific projects that consider ethics, participation, and representation – producing socially coherent and visually powerful outcomes.

Creative Practice II

You will develop and complete a self-directed project from concept to completion. This extended module supports creative independence and critical thinking, helping you bring together your research, experimentation, and artistic ambitions into a resolved body of work.

Year Three - Bachelors Degree

Semester One	Semester Two
Development	
Immersive Practice	Professional Practice II
Contextual and Critical Photography	Creative Practice III

Year 3

- Clarifying your creative direction through sustained self-reflection, critical feedback, and career-focused mentorship.
- Evolving your documentary voice into a resolved, research-informed body of work that reflects your values, context, and ambition.
- Crafting a professional-standard proposal that articulates your conceptual framework, ethical approach, and intended public outcomes.
- Leading your final project from ideation to execution – taking full ownership of research, production, editing, and exhibition or publication.
- Engaging with real-world presentation formats, whether through a public exhibition, printed publication, digital platform, or research-based thesis.
- Strengthening your industry readiness by developing a professional portfolio, artist statement, and communication tools to share your work with curators, collaborators, and clients.
- Building your professional confidence through one-to-one tutorials, peer review, and critical dialogue with staff and guest professionals.
- Consolidating your personal and technical toolkit, ensuring you graduate with the independence, insight, and creative resilience to thrive in evolving visual cultures.

In your final year, you'll develop a sustained, research-led body of work that reflects your full technical ability, conceptual understanding, and critical perspective. This is a year of consolidation, where independent practice, professional readiness, and artistic clarity come to the forefront.

You'll begin by proposing a major project that defines the scope, method, and goals of your final photographic work. Whether it's a long-form documentary, a personal or political series, or a collaboration with a community, your project will require deep research, visual planning, and critical engagement.

Throughout the year, you'll refine your photographic voice through one-to-one tutorials, peer feedback, and guidance from experienced tutors. You'll explore ethical representation, audience engagement, and the broader impact of your work in social and cultural contexts.

You'll also prepare for your professional future—developing a portfolio, writing artist statements, and learning how to present your work across different platforms, from exhibitions and photobooks to digital media.

By graduation, you'll have a fully realised body of work ready for public presentation and the skills to move forward as an independent photographer, artist, or socially engaged creative.

This is your moment to define your practice and take the next step as a critically engaged visual storyteller.

Supporting workshops

Immersive Practice

Undertake an in-depth photographic enquiry that engages directly with the real world. You'll carry out deep research, build ethical relationships with subjects or communities, and create work that is responsive, thoughtful, and socially meaningful.

Professional Practice II

Prepare for the next stage of your career by refining your professional toolkit. This includes developing your portfolio, exploring funding strategies, improving your communication skills, and learning how to present your work with clarity and purpose.

Contextual and Critical Photography II
Engage with contemporary debates in documentary and socially engaged photography. Through independent research and writing, you'll explore topics like visual ethics, authorship, and power—developing a critical, research-informed perspective that supports your creative work.

Creative Practice III (Capstone Project)
Design and produce a major final project that represents the culmination of your time on the course. Whether it's an exhibition, publication or digital platform, this project will showcase your technical skill, conceptual clarity, and artistic vision to a public audience.



Admissions Guide

Get to know us better

Virtual Open Days → Get a virtual overview of what we're all about, held online.
In-Person Open Day → Get a first-hand feel of our school and community.
Campus Tours → Come see our facilities at one of our weekly tours.
Virtual Taster Workshops → Join a programme-specific info event or masterclass
Admissions Open Hours → Book your one-to-one application support on-demand.

Admissions Guidance

1. **Course fees & payment plans**
2. **Early enrolment bonus**
3. **Funding opportunities**
4. **Application deadlines**
5. **Visa requirements**
6. **How to apply**

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PLYMOUTH MARJON UNIVERSITY

1. Course fees & payment plans

We believe creative education should be accessible, transparent and free from hidden costs. Our tuition plans are flexible – you decide to pay monthly, per semester, annually or in full with discounts. Extended payment options let you spread costs beyond your programme.

2027-28 / Plan type	Standard fee	Early Enrolment Bonus €1,000/Year	Duration	Notes
By semester	€6,000	€5,500	3 years / 6 sem.	Annual enrolment fee €895
Annually	€11,640	€10,640	3 years	3% discount by paying each year upfront. Annual enrolment fee €895
Total tuition upfront	€33,120	€30,120	One-time	8% discount by paying total tuition upfront. Annual enrolment fee €895
12 instalments per year	€1,083	€1,000	3 years	Annual enrolment fee €895
Extended yearly	€9,540	€8,790	4 years	Payments continue 1 year after graduation. No enrolment fee for the fourth year.
Extended instalments	€855	€793	4 years	Payments continue 1 year after graduation. No enrolment fee for the fourth year.

Enrolment fee
This non-refundable fee of €895 per study year is due before the start of each academic year and secures your place. No enrolment fee is charged in the post-graduation year if you choose an Extended Payment Plan.

Extended payment plans
In addition to single or installment payment options, we offer Extended Payment Plans. This spreads tuition payments over an additional year, resulting in smaller monthly payments that continue for one year after graduation.

Enrolment confirmation & billing

- Enrolment fee: due within 14 days of receiving your offer.
- Billing cycle: tuition installments begin 1 July 2027 and are billed on the first of each month until your chosen plan ends.

2. Early enrolment bonus

Apply by our **early enrolment deadline** to secure your place, save €3,000 off your total BA tuition (€1,000 per study year).

- **Visa-required applicants**: apply by 26 February 2027
- **EU/visa-exempt or post-arrival applicants**: apply by 31 March 2027

Please note that to be eligible for the **early enrolment bonus**, you must pay the enrolment fee within the two week deadline as presented in your offer letter.

> 🖤 **Apply before the new year for an extra goodie!**
> Whatever your applicant category, apply by 31 December 2026 to secure a guaranteed spot and a free hoodie when classes start, on top of your early enrolment bonus above.

3. Funding opportunities

As an officially accredited higher education institute based in Berlin, Catalyst offers access to a range of national funding opportunities for eligible students available across Germany and the EU. Please note: support from BAfoG (German Federal Student Aid) is not yet available for the Documentary Photography BA programme. Depending on which country you are a citizen of, this may also open up funding from other programmes supporting further-education. **Read more about the various funding opportunities on our website.**

4. Application deadlines

Visa-required applicants

- Priority: 26 February 2027 (includes early enrolment bonus)
- General: 30 April 2027 (subject to processing time and availability)

EU/visa-exempt or post-arrival applicants

- Priority: 31 March 2027 (includes bonus & guaranteed spot on preferred course)
- General: 4 June 2027 (granted on a rolling basis)
- Late: until 31 August 2027 (subject to availability)

5. Visa requirements

- **Visa-required**: If you require a visa before entering Germany (e.g. citizens of India, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, China, Turkey), you must apply at a German embassy before arrival. After enrolment, we send you a guide which helps you through the visa application process. Visa processing can take 3–6 months, so early application is essential.
- **Post-arrival visa**: If you're from a country that allows visa-free entry (e.g. USA, Canada, Japan, South Korea), you can enter Germany without a visa and apply for your student residence permit after arrival. After enrolment, we send you a guide to help you secure an appointment.
- **Visa-exempt (EU/EEA/Switzerland):** If you're a citizen of the EU, EEA or Switzerland, you don't need a visa or residence permit to study in Germany.

6. How to apply

Our application process is straightforward – just follow these seven steps:

1. **Check deadlines** – especially if you need a visa to enter Germany or financial support.
2. **Check entry requirements** – including age, English language level and educational qualifications. You can find these on the Admissions FAQ page on our website.
3. **Prepare your work sample(s)** – When you're ready to apply, you'll need to upload your work to an online platform (such as Vimeo, Youtube, Tumblr, Soundcloud) so that we can review it online. We do not accept file download links. For each work, you'll also need to add a short description in the application form (telling us the inspiration behind it and how you made it).

   For Documentary Photography we ask you to:

Share a series of photographs that you have created. This could be an existing body of work, or you may produce a new project specifically for this submission. We are looking for work that demonstrates your interests, perspective, and approach to documentary photography. Your images might explore people,

places, objects, or events - large or small. We welcome projects in any style, from traditional photo essays to more experimental approaches. What matters most is your ideas and the way you use photography to tell stories or raise questions, rather than technical perfection.

4. **Submit your application** at catalyst-berlin.com/apply, including personal and educational details, a motivation statement, your work sample(s) and supporting documents such as transcripts or proof of language ability.
5. **Wait for our response** – we'll be in touch within around two weeks. Sometimes we'll ask for follow-up information or invite you for an interview. Keep an eye on your inbox.
6. **Confirm your place** – once you receive an offer letter, secure it by paying the enrolment fee within 14 days.
7. **Get ready for Berlin** – once your enrolment fee is paid, you're officially enrolled. Next you'll set up your payment plan, receive your welcome pack and access preparation materials for your studies. We recommend finding accommodation as soon as you're sure that you're studying with us, and arriving one month before your classes begin. The welcome pack has lots of information to help you find accommodation and get settled in Berlin.

Get in touch. We're here to help.

Reach out to our Admissions team by email at **admissions@catalyst-berlin.com** or book a call **here**.

