PHD IN CURATORIAL PRACTICE
Launched in March 2014, the MADA PhD specialising in Curatorial Practice is the first in Australia and among the first in the world. This program joins the field at a moment when the discipline of curating is as dynamic and contested as it is established. The Curatorial Practice PhD at MADA is practice-based, and supports a spectrum of doctoral projects, from experimental curatorial models to academic dissertations. The university is one of the few arenas for criticality and experimentation, and this program welcomes projects driven by these same qualities.

The program plans to develop as an international centre for radical curatorial models that reflect critically on how we engage with our cultures, our cities, and our world. It fosters curatorial projects that test the limits of arts institutions. It supports advanced scholarly work on exhibitions and their histories, conditions of art’s public appearance, and the politics of display. Finally, the program nurtures spaces of retreat to allow forms of research other than those that normally occur within the framework of educational institutions.

The PhD encourages slower and more sustained research, writing, and practice than is normally possible under the demands of contemporary curatorial practice. Curatorial work is pressured by professionalisation and overproduction, and at times diminished by a related shift from criticism to publicity. This program counters such trends by being rigorous but also adamantly open, examining the forms of knowledge produced by curating, but also cultivating spaces of reflection and experimentation.

PhD candidates develop arguments that evolve over several years and are tested by peers and modified constantly. The program looks closely at the systems of representation available to us, and the relations of artworks and artistic practices to conditions of production, labor, and appearance. Candidates query what forms of practice are neglected, which structures have calcified and why, and which need breaking apart. The program understands curatorial knowledge as a process rather than a result, and one that can be reflected on throughout.
CANDIDATES

Candidates will have advanced knowledge of art, art history, arts institutions, and curating, or relevant fields of inquiry. The PhD in Curatorial Practice requires candidates to hold a minimum four-year Bachelor’s degree with Honours and a final grade of no less than H2A. Candidates will preferably hold a research Master’s qualification in a relevant discipline.

Candidates apply with a specific research project in mind, and will receive MADA’s support in realizing that project at the doctoral level. As it is a research degree, the PhD in Curatorial Practice does not provide vocational training in curating or arts administration. While situating the program within an active art school emphasises curating’s engagement with contemporary art, the program is open to applicants whose projects are interdisciplinary or historical in nature. MADA’s faculty, with expertise in art, architecture, design, theory, and history, is available to curatorial PhD candidates.

International candidates are highly encouraged to apply as well, and scholarships may be awarded to qualified applicants subject to University scholarship assessment and terms and conditions. Scholarship recipients may receive tuition and/or stipend, and must enroll full-time.

This program is ideal for independent curators with a significant research project that would benefit from being sited within an academic institution. These projects may take the form of an exhibition, or may be more experimental—spatially, temporally, and politically—and may dispense with the white cube and black box entirely. Projects engaging with the public sphere and urbanism will be supported.

The Curatorial Practice PhD welcomes curators embedded within institutions who propose either a project independent from that institution, or a project that would be realized within the institution, but would productively challenge or extend its normal procedures. Curatorial projects can, therefore, change institutions from within. Research proposals for these latter projects must demonstrate a significant addition to conventional parameters for an institutional exhibition, whether through expanded practice or writing.

Daniel Von Sturmer, *Into a Vacuum of Future Events*, 2005, 5 single channel videos in DVD format, colour/sound with customised metal screens
A central focus of the Curatorial Practice PhD is improving curatorial writing. The program plans to host a biennial curatorial retreat with an emphasis on writing for curatorial PhD candidates and invited guests from a range of fields, including literature, poetry, cinema, anthropology, history, political theory, and philosophy.

The program generates opportunities for candidates to publish by partnering with and supporting Melbourne’s thriving independent publishing field. The program also collaborates with international institutions to foster curatorial research through fora such as symposia, workshops, exhibitions, and publications.

In addition to the program requirements of the MADA PhD, candidates meet monthly during the academic year (three times per semester) in order to allow curators working within institutions to participate in the program. Candidates are required to attend these intensive monthly sessions, which allow multiple intakes of students to interact, and supplants the isolation that occurs during research, writing, and development of practice phases with built-in workshop sessions throughout the candidates’ tenure.

The curricula of the monthly sessions is tailored to the candidates’ research interests, occasionally led by the candidates themselves, and takes advantage of guest lecturers, visiting artists, and significant exhibitions and events in Melbourne and further afield. Monthly sessions are structured to facilitate the mandatory requirements for completion of the Art Design & Architecture PhD: coursework units, skills training, and academic milestones (Confirmation, Mid-Candidature Review, Pre-Submission Seminar).
One of the strongest advantages of the Curatorial Practice PhD is its location within an art school. MADA is a catalyst for creative engagement in the visual arts, and supports an active community of some of the country’s leading artists, designers, architects, thinkers and cultural producers. Curatorial work is inherently dialogic, research based, and interdisciplinary, which aligns it with the ethos of the art school. Candidates benefit enormously from being in constant contact with artists, designers, and architects, through formal and informal encounters. They gain a deeper knowledge of how art is made and its material production. Candidates are critiqued by fellow Fine Art doctoral candidates, and vice versa, and further collaborations beyond this structure are encouraged.

Bottom: Curatorial Intensive with Latitudes (Max Andrews and Mariana Cánepa Luna), May 2014.

Emily Floyd, *This place will always be open*, 2012, Ian Potter Sculpture Court at Monash University Museum of Art; photo: John Brash
MADA's Curatorial Practice Advisory Board is comprised of individuals with strong ties to MADA or to curatorial education, and includes Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, New Museum; Charlotte Day, Director, the Monash University Museum of Art; Juliana Engberg, Artistic Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, and Artistic Director, 19th Biennale of Sydney; Juan A. Gaitán, curator of the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art; Alexie Glass-Kantor, Executive Director, Artspace, Sydney; Callum Morton, Head of Fine Art, MADA; Julian Myers-Szupinska, Associate Professor, Curatorial Practice, California College of the Arts; Tom Nicholson, artist; Daniel Palmer, writer and Senior Lecturer in the Art Theory Program, MADA; Anne Wagner, Professor Emerita of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of California, Berkeley, and Visiting Distinguished Professor at the University of York; and Tirdad Zolghadr, writer and curator.

The PhD program occurs in collaboration with a number of key local institutions, foremost MADA and MUMA, a museum of contemporary art committed to innovative, experimental and research-based contemporary art and curatorial practice. Candidates engage with artists, curators, and thinkers practicing in Melbourne, as well as international visitors, including, most recently, Biljana Ciric, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Clémentine Deliss, Juan A. Gaitán, Hou Hanru, Lars Bang Larsen, Latitudes (Max Andrews and Mariana Canepa Luna), David Joselit, Terry Smith, Simon Starling, and Jarosław Suchan.

The PhD program is led by Tara McDowell, Associate Professor and Director of Curatorial Practice at MADA. McDowell is Editor-at-Large of The Exhibitionist, a journal on curatorial practice and exhibition making published and distributed by MIT Press and for which she served as Founding Senior Editor. She has held curatorial appointments at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, where she mounted over two dozen group and solo exhibitions. She publishes and lectures frequently, and writes criticism for art-agenda and artforum.com. McDowell holds a Ph.D. in the History of Art from the University of California, Berkeley. Her research interests include exhibition histories, contemporary curating, the institutions of art, feminist and queer spaces of sociability and production, alternative archives and forms of documentation, and historical and contemporary models of experimental arts education.