

A close-up photograph of a person's arm and hand. A white cloth is draped over the person's shoulder, partially obscuring their skin. The hand, which is dark-skinned and wrinkled, is resting on a surface. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with a clear sky and a body of water.

A thousand ways of seeing

Action Research Project 2024

Background / professional context

BA Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art

- Broad-based course
- Encourage making through thinking, thinking through making
- Theory and practice
- 140-180 students per year group



In my teaching context, non-Western discourses are compromised in favour of the dominant Western discourses.

Bourdieu (1994): art is implicated in the reproduction of inequalities, and that the relationship between culture and power is such that taste creates social differences.

Burke and McManus's Art for a Few (2009): it is important to consider which art is privileged and which type of art is encouraged and dismissed

Stuart Hall (1997) : cultural representations are always embedded in power relations and can be used to reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies.





A thousand ways of seeing

My research question looks at what decolonising or non-Western ways of seeing within fine art mean, ways to achieve it and how to implement them in our teaching practice.

What would incorporating them in a regular club/seminar look like?

The purpose of the project is to investigate ways to broaden the fine art curriculum to make it more inclusive.

Rationale – mimicry, internalized racism, postcolonial condition

Homi Bhabha on colonial mimicry. “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” (1994:122)



Chelsea BA Fine Art



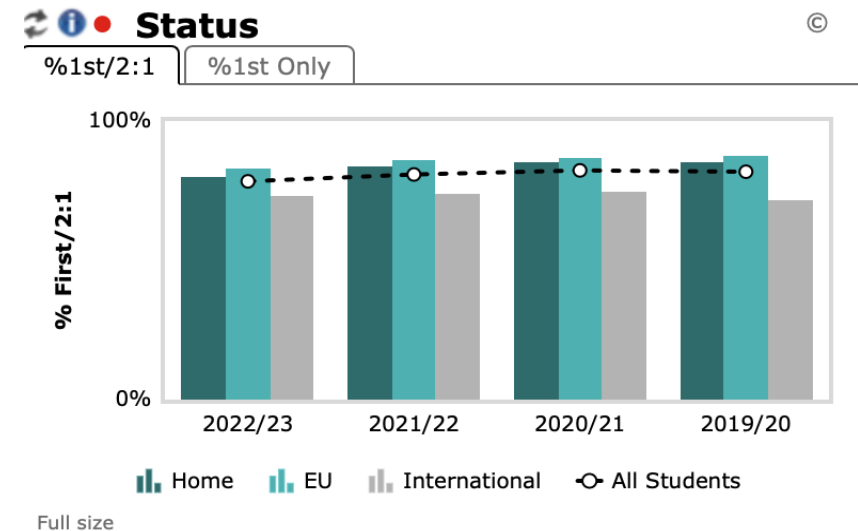
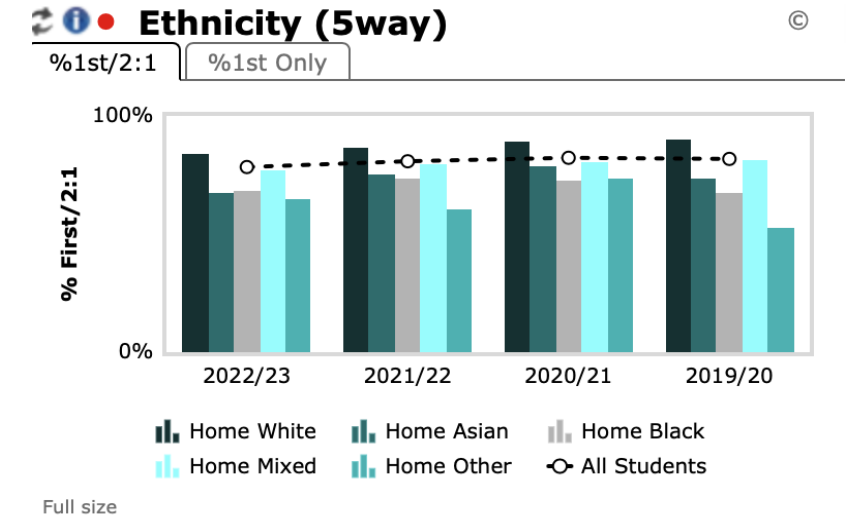
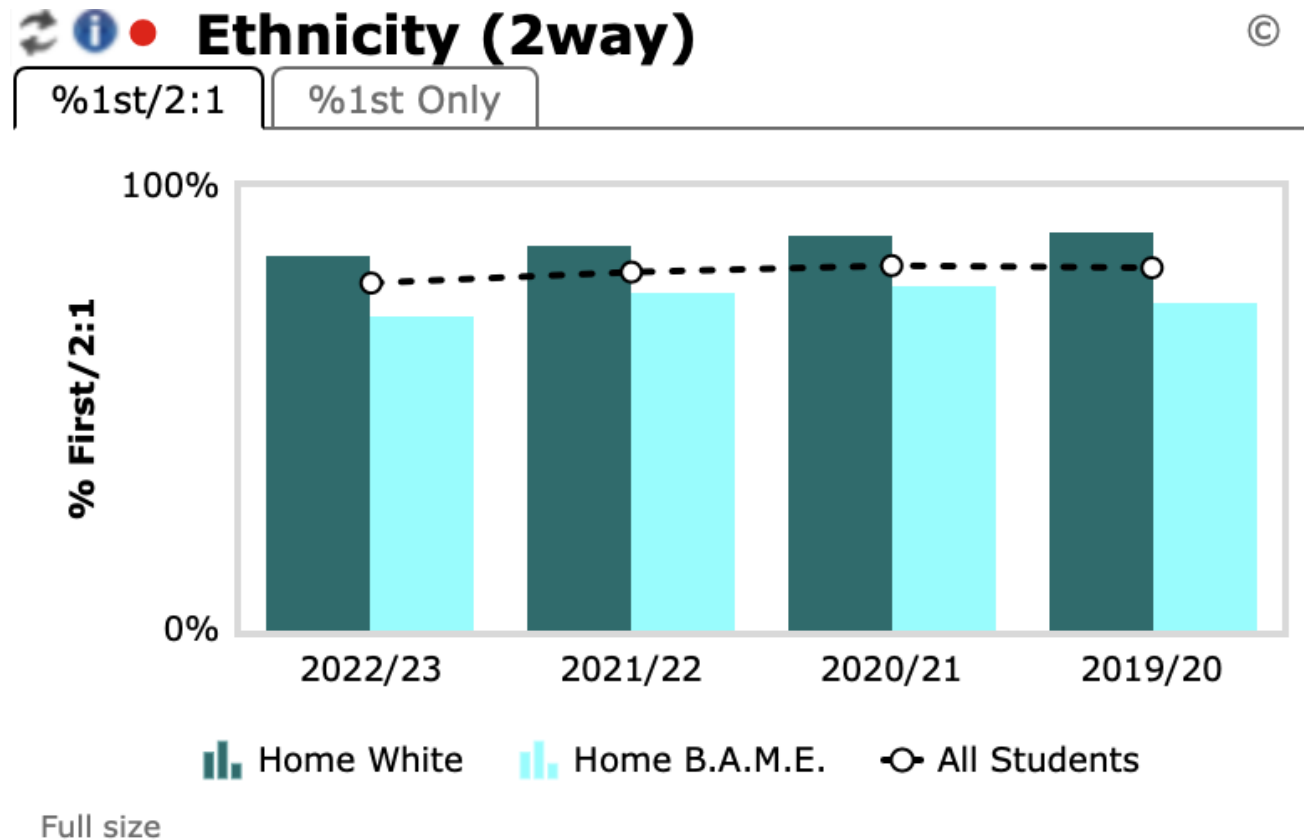
Slade MA Fine Art



Rationale - unfair
assessment

"...but she didn't reference any
artists or theorists..."

Rationale – consistent attainment gap across ethnic groups and fee status; particularly stark between home white and home black students



Research methods – interviews and questionnaire

Interview questions for staff

1. What does decolonising ways of seeing mean in contemporary art and art teaching context?
2. How is it different, if at all, from non-Western centric ways of seeing?
3. Where does power lie in contemporary art?
4. Who/what form the canon in contemporary art?
5. How do you think art is being taught at Chelsea, does it focus on particular perspective? What is it?
6. Do you think that some art forms/ways of making are deemed more legitimate than others?
7. Do you think that there is a need to broaden ways of seeing contemporary art, and hence teaching art at Chelsea?
8. What are the strategies you use to broaden ways of seeing/thinking in your teaching practice?
9. Are there any underrepresented voices during your time of teaching at Chelsea?
10. How can an informal club/seminar series that explores the underrepresented voices/perspectives of contemporary art or the fringes of contemporary art practice be helpful in broadening ways of seeing?
11. What would you suggest we do in these seminars? What to talk about, focus on, places to visit...etc.
12. What other strategies, methods, ways do you suggest that can be beneficial with this aim in mind?
13. Anything you'd like to add?

A Thousand Ways of Seeing

Thank you for participating in this research project to help me develop my teaching practice. The purpose of the project is to investigate ways to broaden the fine art curriculum to make it more inclusive.

The research questions guiding the project are: what does decolonising ways of seeing / a non-Western approach within fine art mean? What are the ways to achieve it? How can we as teaching staff implement them in our teaching practices? What would incorporating them in a regular club/seminar look like?

* Required

1. What is your understanding of decolonising ways of seeing in relation to contemporary art and art education?

* 

Enter your answer

2. How is it different, if at all, from non-Western centric ways of seeing in the Contemporary art and art education?

* 

Enter your answer

Project findings

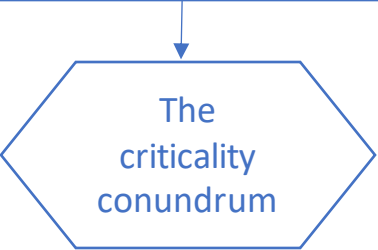


Criticism of UAL of its own predatory colonial practices; decolonisation as a token gesture of diversity and inclusion – an empty rhetoric

Student 2: “The university's commitment to embracing diverse perspectives almost became propaganda through the promotion and inclusion of additional sign-up talks and resources, particularly during liberation months. However, the core curriculum itself exhibited a clear prioritisation of certain knowledge, and the staff lacked adequate exposure to perspectives beyond this dominant (Western) framework.”

Decentering oneself from our own education and experience; constantly questioning your position

Conceptual bias
- Conceptual and "more cerebral" type of art production is deemed more legitimate



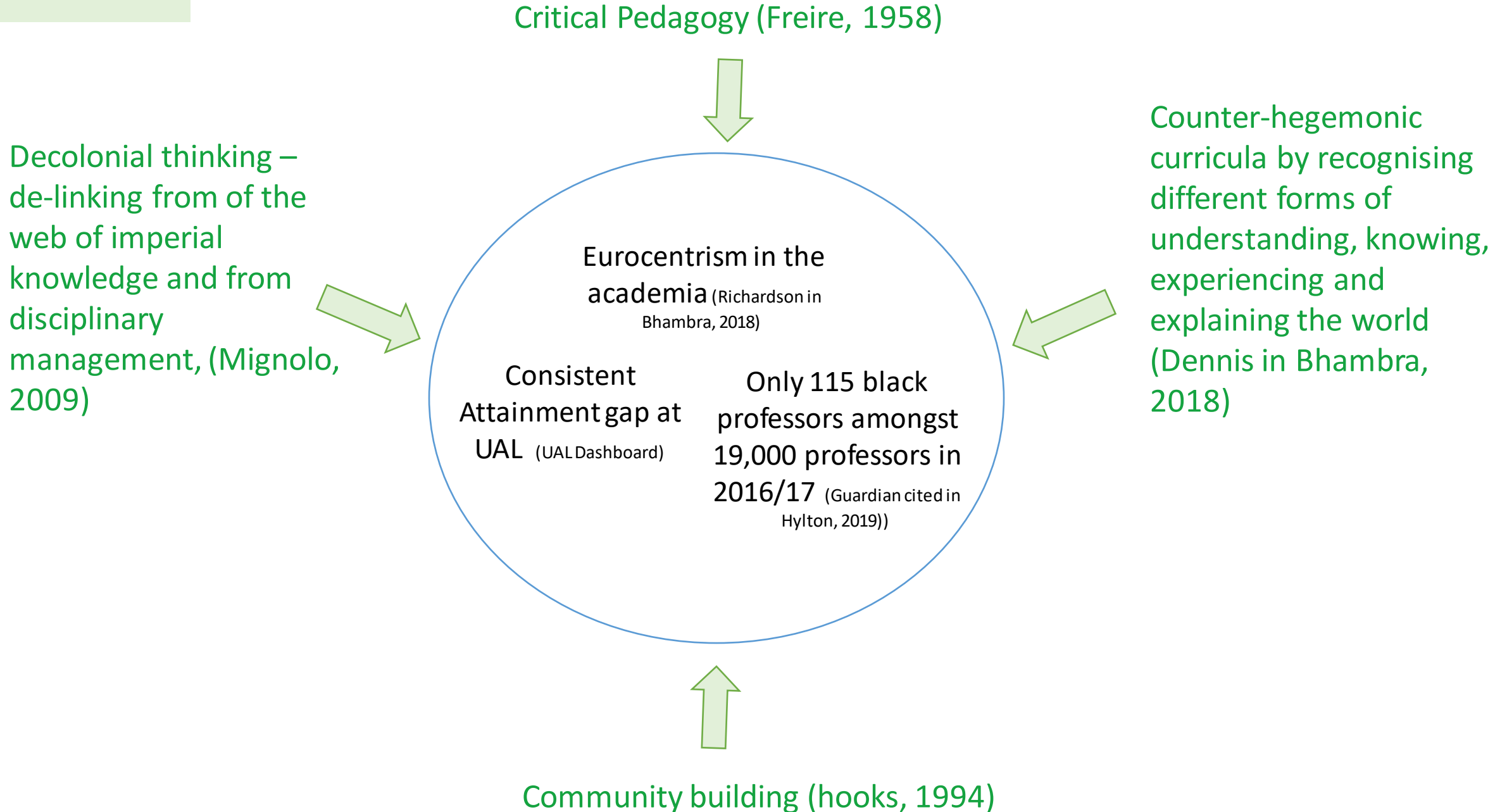
Listening and empathy.
Listening with care, not in a disabling way or to input what you know about it but listening with intent of understanding

bring in the masters’ tool to dismantle the master’s house

Staff member 2: “Giving every student the tools like dismantle concepts and institutions and sort of like in a way that's the goal, isn't it, to make sure each student can turn its back and refuse art college and university.”

Bring in the mainstream but make sure each voice is heard

Staff member 3: “to borrow Angela Davis, it’s not about being at the centre, but knowing that your voices at the margins have been fought for, you are in flocks around the centre, constantly developing and evolving



“My painting is an act of decolonisation”

Wildred Lam, Cuban abstract painter (1902-1982)



References for the presentation

- Bhabha, H. (1994) "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in: Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge)
- Bhabha, G.K., Gebrial, D., Nişancioğlu, K. (ed.), (2018), *Decolonising the University*, London: Pluto Books
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, London, Routledge
- Burke, P.J. and McManus, J. (2011) 'Art for a few: exclusions and misrecognitions in higher education admissions practices' in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32 (5). pp. 699-712
- Freire, P. & Ramos, M.B., (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin Books
- Hall, S. (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. CA: Sage.
- hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom*, London: Routledge
- Hylton, R., (2019), 'Decolonising the curriculum' in *Art Monthly*, 426, May 2019. Available at <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/decolonising-the-curriculum-by-richard-hylton-may-2019>
- Mignolo, W.D. (2009) 'Epistemic Disobedience Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26: 7-8, 2009, pp. 159-181
- UAL Communications (2021) Publishing our Anti-racism action plan and a demanding target for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff representation. Available at <https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/press-office/stories/Publishing-our-Anti-racism-action-plan-and-a-demanding-target-for-BAME-staff-representation>
- UAL Dashboards (2023) Attainment gaps for all Fine Art courses in UAL, 2020-22, UAL Data Dashboards. Available at <http://dashboards.arts.ac.uk>

Full reference

- Abdulla, D., Cisneros, T., Francke, A., et. al. (2020) *Decolonizing: The Curriculum, the Museum and the Mind*, Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press
- Akussah, A., Hansika, J., Panesar, L., Patel, R., 2018, *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on Higher Education, Zine 1 & 2*, London: University of the Arts London. Available at: <https://decolonisingtheartscurriculum.myblog.arts.ac.uk/>
- Bhabha, H. (1994) "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in: Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge)
- Bhambra, G.K., Gebrial, D., Nişancioğlu, K. (ed.), (2018), *Decolonising the University*, London: Pluto Books
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, London, Routledge
- Burke, P.J. and McManus, J. (2011) 'Art for a few: exclusions and misrecognitions in higher education admissions practices' in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32 (5). pp. 699-712
- Freire, P. & Ramos, M.B., (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin Books
- Hall, S. (1992) 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power.' In S. Hall & B. Gieben (Eds.), *Formations of Modernity* (pp. 275-320) London: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. CA: Sage.
- hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom*, London: Routledge
- Hylton, R., (2019), 'Decolonising the curriculum' in *Art Monthly*, 426, May 2019. Available at <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/decolonising-the-curriculum-by-richard-hylton-may-2019>
- Law, W.S. (2009) *Collaborative Colonial Power – The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
- Mignolo, W.D. (2009) 'Epistemic Disobedience Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26: 7-8, 2009, pp. 159-181
- Mignolo, W.D. (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham: Duke University Press
- NUS (2011) Liberation, Equality, and Diversity in the Curriculum, [Online] London: NUS. Available at: <https://www.sparks.ac.uk/uploads/Liberating%20the%20curriculum.pdf> [Accessed 4th July 2023]
- Sim, J; Waterfield, J, 2019 'Focus group methodology: some ethical challenges', *Quality & Quantity*. Available at <https://keele-repository.worktribe.com/output/413994>
- Thiong'o, N. (1986) *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*
- UAL (2003) UAL Decolonising Arts Institute. Available here: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/ual-decolonising-arts-institute>
- UAL Communications (2021) Publishing our Anti-racism action plan and a demanding target for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff representation. Available at <https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/press-office/stories/Publishing-our-Anti-racism-action-plan-and-a-demanding-target-for-BAME-staff-representation>
- UAL Dashboards (2023) Attainment gaps for all Fine Art courses in UAL, 2020-22, UAL Data Dashboards. Available at <http://dashboards.arts.ac.uk>

Image references

- Slide 2 – (Top left) Kailene Gray, (Bottom left) Fenna Kosfeld and Marnie Green, (right) Synchar Pde, BA Fine Art students 2021-22, source: Chelsea College of Art website. <https://www.arts.ac.uk/subjects/fine-art/undergraduate/ba-hons-fine-art-chelsea>
- Slide 3 – Varnedoe, K. (1993) High & Low. Modern art, popular culture. Publisher: museum of modern art
- Slide 4 – Tree
- Slide 5 – Chelsea College of Art, [Chelsea College of Art website](#), and Slade School of Art, UCL Media Services, UCL
- Slide 6 Sanrio characters, Sanrio Europe website. <https://www.sanrio.eu/37th-annual-sanrio-character-ranking-vote-is-now-open/>
- Slide 7 – UAL dashboards
- Slide 8 – presenter's own
- Slide 11 – (left) Le Sombre Malembo, 1943, Wilfredo Lam, Source: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/wifredo-lam-exhibition>. (right) Wilfredo Lam. Source: <https://www.artoftheworldgallery.com/others-artists/wifredo-la/>