MA Design Studies is indeed a new subject of study in the university. Designed to meet the needs of design in both practical and academic fields, the program aims to nourish the critical and systematic thinking behind design theories and practices and has guided the career paths that our students are beginning to carve out for themselves.

CAREER PATHS OF STUDENTS SINCE GRADUATION: TEN STORIES

Since the program’s inception, a new group of design thinkers coming from all backgrounds have gone out into the world. The two-year, 42-credit program will graduate its third class in Spring 2016. Some of the students from the class of 2014, 2015 and 2016 have already begun to establish themselves in various areas of work. Oddly inspiring and a testament to Parsons’ belief in creativity and ingenuity, these 10 stories aim to demonstrate how design studies applies to various professional and academic fields—proving that design in the 21st century is a dynamic and engaging field of study and practice.

SALEM TSEGAYE 2014’

“I received my bachelor’s degree in cultural anthropology from Duke University, and before joining the MA Design Studies program, I did research-based work for nonprofits.

I enrolled in the MADS program to investigate participatory practices in art and design. At the end of my first year, I started a yearlong fellowship in arts philanthropy at The New York Community Trust and was subsequently exposed to the city’s landscape of art nonprofits. Through this program, I got in contact with The Queens Museum and formulated my thesis around the social and spatial configurations that reflected the museum’s commitment to engagement as a result of the recent redesign.
After graduation, and based in part on the relationships I developed through my thesis research, I was hired as a grant writer by the museum. Now, I’m back at The New York Community Trust working with funders who seek to support arts and cultural advocacy, policy, and equity in New York City. I’ve organized a series of workshops for advocates, including a design charrette with the design strategy firm i2i Experience to help advocates generate ideas for collaborative projects.”

GIGI POLO 2014’
(Niberca LluberesRinicon)

“I am a graphic designer with a BFA in communication design and a MA in media studies from The New School. I was one of the first students to join the MA Design Studies program in 2012, and I came to get a broader understanding of design through a theoretical lens. I worked on my thesis, ‘Osmotic Bubble,’ with faculty from the psychology department at The New School for Social Research. It focused on developing an educational model that could potentially stimulate the whole brain to augment creative insight. I designed a multi-sensory space of instruction and a multi-disciplinary curriculum, which is currently in the testing phase after being awarded a design

Fig. 1. Salem’s study: the Queens Museum
fellowship from *Design Incubation*. I see this installation piece develop as an open-source model, or tool kit, available to schools and communities that can be adapted to various environments.

Fig. 2. Concept Map: The Osmotic Bubble Approach

I currently work as a coordinator of a special project at *Parsons SPACE Pre-College Academy* called Learning Portfolio that provides underserved high school students with a basic design education and digital literacy knowledge to prepare them for art school.”

**LINDSAY REICHHART 2014’**

“I received my undergraduate education at Fordham University. I double majored in studio art and art history with a focus on politics. In my junior year, I became interested in the intersection between design and politics via my studies on the Russian avant-garde.

After undergrad, I worked for The Drawing Room in East Hampton, managing artist relations and the gallery before deciding that I wanted to further pursue my studies on design—that’s when I found the Design Studies program at Parsons. During my time in the program, I continued to study the intersection of design and politics, zeroing in on the problem-solving capacities of design—assessing political, social and economic roles and their relation to both design and sustainability. My studies have resulted in a collection of written works that examine the ramifications of the Industrial Revolution on various urban and global contexts, such as my thesis, which focuses on the possibilities and shortcomings of Cuba’s approach to sustainability.

When I wasn’t working on my thesis, I taught class sections at The New School for undergraduate and graduate students and worked at the online marketplace 1stdibs.com and the Diller Scofidio + Renfro design studio. The program gave me the chance to work on some
interesting projects—I went to Poland with The New School’s Transregional Center for Democratic Studies, worked on the first issue of the student-run design studies journal Plot(s), and co-founded Design Forum at The New School with Salem Tsegaye.

I’m currently working at the New York City Department of Design and Construction as a content producer. Before starting here, I worked at the art production firm Culture Corps as their director, where I managed the production of the Kanye West x Vanessa Beecroft x Adidas show and worked with Alex Katz on an installation of his work at the Langham Place on Fifth Avenue.”

Fig. 3. An urban farmer in Havana makes the most of salvaged objects, reusing a soda bottle for sowing and roofing tiles as planter bed material.

VIVIAN CAI 2014’

“I come from a background in advertising with a degree from The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I found advertising fascinating because I saw it as the merging of business and design. But through my studies, I became more interested in the design portion—especially how design can deeply shape a brand’s image. I enrolled in MADS program to explore more on design theory and history.
After graduating from MADS, I founded an experimental art startup based in New York alongside two Chinese artists and a graduate from Parsons’ MFA Design and Technology master’s program. We used food as a medium to combine many art languages in order to create interactive ‘art events,’ and our first exhibit was an ephemeral food art show called ‘Finding Puberty.’ My work focused on the perspective of the millennial artist, who grew up under the influence of the Internet and globalization.

Now I work as a marketing specialist in a media company and am using the critical thinking skills learned in the MADS program in my daily work.”

“I worked as a journalist in India for several years before coming to New York for graduate studies. My interest in design and craft led me to the MA Design Studies program in Parsons, where I devoted my thesis to investigating the relationship between contemporary craft and design. *The Journal of Modern Craft* has recently indicated interest in my thesis, and I’m reworking parts to submit as a paper for publication.
While in the program, I interned at *Metropolis* and Maharam Design Studio. Since graduating, I’ve been working at Herman Miller in their brand editorial department. I write copy for their archival pieces like the George Nelson and Eames furniture that are reintroduced to the market, and I also contribute to their digital magazine *WHY*. In the near future, I hope to write a book about craft and design in the contested region of Kashmir in India.”

**RACHEL SMITH 2015’**

“My first degree was in cultural anthropology, and I came into MADS to explore design—particularly within the built environment as both a reflection and producer of sociocultural conditions. My thesis explored how architects and urban designers have interpreted the built environment as a tool for improving human well-being and how they mapped this against evolving design philosophies and theories of health. At its core, my studies focused on an inquiry into how designers continue to consider and utilize insights into human behavior in their work and ended up calling for a transdisciplinary and user-centered approach to building ‘for health.’

Since graduating, I’ve started work as a content coordinator at Ralph Appelbaum Associates, a museum exhibition design and planning firm. I work with designers and media producers to build visitor experiences for diverse public spaces. This position partly builds on my thesis interests in its integration of diverse expertise into the design process and its emphasis on shaping visitor experience. Going forward, I plan to continue exploring design as a transdisciplinary practice in roles stressing behavioral research or content development.
I also launched *Words of Mouth*, a newsletter that shares opportunities for employment and collaboration in the arts, design, tech, non-profit, architecture and urban fields. I see it developing into a community platform particularly for those who see themselves outside standard disciplines or industries.”

**VERONICA URIBE DEL AGUILA 2015’**

“Before coming to New York and joining the MA Design Studies program, I studied philosophy and ethics and taught in architecture schools in Lima, Peru. In my *thesis*, I explored how design projects that foster social change address a political dimension through a focus on speculative and critical design, socially engaged art, and DIY instruction. Through my work, I encountered a tradition of critical reflection and activism based on design.

This year, I am teaching political philosophy at the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas in Lima, and I am also a part of a research group on the consequences of nation branding.
for democracy at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. In Fall 2016, I will start my PhD in cultural studies at Stony Brook University, where I plan to continue my research on the political dimension of DIY activities.”

LAURA WING 2015’

“My first degree was in fine art and cultural anthropology. After a few years working in new media as an editor at a production company, then at an arts center managing the gallery and artist-in-residence program, I came to MADS to explore the critical capacities of design studies for opening up new lines of thought in understanding how we shape—and are shaped by—the artificial worlds we inhabit. I was drawn to the intellectual possibilities of doing this after interacting with Parsons faculty who encourage a cross-disciplinary approach. Once in the program, I began to focus on the role and work of objects. My thesis, ‘A Form to Care With: Design as a Mode of Action Consonant with Achieving a Politics of Small Things,’ was a meditation on the critical or subversive work of familiar objects. I sought to inquire what the interaction with small things offers in the way of social, psychological, and cultural truths for addressing the problems we are now facing. I explored the ways in which things involve and implicate our subjectivity and how, in their partiality and possibility, designed objects can offer models of a realizable justice—even the most humble of objects.
Partly based on the arguments I explored in the thesis, I’m now co-editing a book, *The Lives of Small Things*, which deals with designed objects in the intimate contexts of life. The work is composed of graduate student projects and writings from MA Design Studies and MFA Transdisciplinary Design, along with a series of texts from other authors.

I am also teaching courses aimed to address design issues in the 21st century at both Parsons and Pratt Institute. I see this work as a continuation of my thesis interests in a very concrete sense, and I aim to challenge how the interdisciplinary work of design is understood and articulated by discovering contexts through which it may be immersed in other fields of knowledge.”

**WILLIAM PERKINS 2016’**


At the moment, I am working as a creative strategy director at R/GA digital agency for Nike across all global categories. I’ve combined practice and my studies into researching trends in culture and how competitors are behaving inside and outside the category. I forecast business opportunities and synthesize those inputs into a creative territory that informs the ads or products we design to make them more desirable.
Situated at the center of the design process, my role is that of a design studies practitioner, as it engages across disciplines including design research, visual design, copywriting and experiential design.”

“I was born in Berlin and studied biology at the Humboldt University of Berlin briefly before switching over to fashion design, a subject which I now teach at Parsons. The question of how we can design and act responsibly in this world has since occupied my thought. While worrying about what I could possibly do with my training and also changing my views on fashion in relation to design, I became more interested in philosophy, which led me to Parsons’ MA in Design Studies.

The program presented a perfectly fertile breeding ground for all my former training. The opportunity to take courses in all parts of The New School—particularly those in The New School for Social Research—has been a tremendous opportunity without which my thesis on the techno-political problem of design-led governmental innovation would not have been possible. This project asks under which conditions and to what effects design operates in the public sphere, and precisely, what role does the designer take on? Is the designer an expert, facilitator, or creative professional? In this work, I attempt to unlearn the habit of taking for granted those organizing principles and governing rationalities that shape our environment and, in turn, shape us.

After graduating, I plan to continue asking these questions while embarking on my PhD studies in politics at The New School for Social Research.”