M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

Project Title	
A Poetical Science: Exploring Art, Feminism and Technology through Contemporary Curatorial Practice	

LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	Nottingham Trent University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham ☐	Coventry ☐	Leicester ☐	Nottingham ☒

PARTNER ORGANISATION	
Name of organisation	Nottingham Contemporary
URL for organisation website	https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/

THE RESEARCH PROJECT
To enable M4C to promote the CDA project effectively on the DTP website please can you present the information for applicants about the CDA project under the following headings:
Project: Please ensure that the project title and project description will make sense to all readers, keep the title and description as clear and straightforward as possible.
Process: Clearly articulate the expectations of the methods of research required to develop the project.
Place: Focus the marketing text on telling potential applicants what will be expected of them, who they will be working with and how they will be supported.
Person: Broadly identify the desirable knowledge, skills and experience applicants should have without using language which will discourage qualified and talented applicants.

PROJECT:

This practice-based curatorial research project explores the intersections of art, technology and feminism, inspired by Ada Lovelace's legacy and Nottingham's industrial textile history. In collaboration with Nottingham Contemporary and Nottingham Trent University, the research highlights historical contributions of women artists working with technology and situated within a genealogy of global artistic production.

Women artists working with technology have faced the dual challenge of operating within a traditionally male-dominated field (the 'techno-patriarchy') while working with a medium that has only recently gained acceptance into the canon of fine art. The contextual underpinning of this project draws upon various sources to examine the gendered relationships between art and technology, craft and counterculture, and male and female work. These sources include British cultural theorist Sadie Plant; VNS Matrix, who first coined the term 'cyber-feminism' in 1991; Radhika Gajjala and Mindy Seu, who re-evaluate this term in light of current conflicts and conversations between feminisms and technologies; Janis Jefferies, whose ongoing exploration focuses on the intersection of weave and digital technologies; and recent AHRC projects such as 'Weaving Codes, Coding Weaves', explored in a special edition of TEXTILE Journal (2017).

Lovelace is widely regarded as a pioneer of computer programming and described her approach as a 'poetical science' by way of signalling the importance of intuition, and thinking beyond pure rationality, in science and mathematics. The project will investigate the ways in which Ada Lovelace's legacy and explorations between loom and computer technologies can serve as a starting point for investigating artistic practices that subvert binary divisions between art and technology, craft and counterculture, male and female work, and visuality and tactility.

The project traces a lineage of practice, from early pioneers to contemporary practitioners, with a focus on understanding the contributions of women artists worldwide. It reaches beyond a Euro-centric perspective to examine how women artists globally have co-opted the instruments of male-dominated technological systems as poetic tools. The research will uncover women artists, activities, and geographic areas that have been overlooked in traditional accounts of art and technology. A crucial aspect of this study involves examining the institutional settings where this work has been presented and critically analysing the history of exhibitions that delve into this field.

PROCESS:

In this study, the PhD candidate will approach the research from a feminist perspective, looking beyond the Euro-centric perspective to consider a wider historical context. Multiple research methods will be used, including practice-based curatorial work; historical research; visits with artists, collections and archives; and interviews. The project will involve a written thesis as well as culminate in a collaborative large-scale exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary in Winter/Spring 2026. The exhibition will be developed jointly by the PhD candidate, the supervisory team, and the curatorial team at Nottingham Contemporary.

PLACE:

The candidate will be embedded within the curatorial team at NC supporting the research and development of the exhibition. Over the course of the project, they will be expected to: conduct a global literature review; engage in curatorial meetings, studio, collection and archive visits; research artists and artworks for inclusion in the exhibition; support the production of new commissions; liaise with artists and lenders; support exhibition design; write exhibition interpretation; contribute to the development of the Live Programmes alongside the exhibition and any legacy for the exhibition.

The candidate will benefit from the collaborative context, including supervision and support from Nottingham Contemporary's curatorial team, University supervision and NTU's wider Doctorial support including seminars within both the Humanities and Art Schools. National touring agency Hayward Touring have expressed interest as a partner and would provide additional curatorial and financial support, as well as a further partner for the candidate to work with and learn from.

PERSON:

The PhD candidate should ideally have familiarity with one or more of the following areas: feminist and post-feminist theory, digital art, textiles and technologies intersection in art, cyber-feminism, and identity. Additionally, experience in curation and exhibition-making would be beneficial.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE	
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