



Documentary Photography BA (Hons) / HE Certificate

Programme overview	2
Our teaching method: learn by doing	5
Course structure & learning outcomes	9
Admissions guide	15

Awarding Institution: Plymouth Marjon University

Teaching Institution: Catalyst – Institute of Creative Arts and Technology

Location: Berlin

Mode of study: Full time

Language of instruction: English

Final Award Title: Certificate of Higher Education (1 year) / Bachelor of Arts (Hons) (3 years)

Overview

Express your authentic self through photography

Our **Documentary Photography BA** is a practice-led programme that approaches photography as visual storytelling across time. You'll learn how sequencing images constructs narratives, how editorial choices shape meaning, and how to create long-form photo essays that engage the ethical complexities of representing people's lives. This programme combines technical craft with critical frameworks—preparing you to work with individuals and communities. Not just to photograph them but to create documentary work grounded in trust, care and sustained engagement.

This programme is ideal for those who want to develop documentary practice as both creative craft and social responsibility. You'll build technical proficiency across photographic formats and learn to work fluidly between analogue and digital approaches, choosing tools based on each project's needs. Alongside building your portfolio or real work, you'll critically engage with documentary photography's histories and contemporary debates around ethics, representation, power and authorship—understanding not just how to photograph, but what responsibilities come with documenting people's realities.

Learning happens by doing at Catalyst. From your first term, you'll work on documentary projects with Berlin's communities—grassroots organisations, migrant groups, activist movements, cultural initiatives. This means spending weeks or months with subjects, building relationships gradually, and navigating the genuine ethical questions that arise in community-based photography. Supported by a team of working experienced documentary photographers, you'll be guided through the full professional cycle: from initial community engagement through to exhibition preparation, publication design, funding applications and career sustainability.

You can study this programme either as a full three-year BA degree or the first year only as a one-year HE Certificate.

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

- A body of documentary work that's been publicly exhibited in Berlin and professionally critiqued—not just submitted as coursework —demonstrating your capabilities with real audiences.
- Technical fluidity across photographic formats and critical judgment about when to use digital or analogue, colour or black-and-white, mobile or medium format cameras based on project needs.
- Ethical frameworks for community-based photography, developed through actual practice navigating consent, representation, access and power dynamics with real subjects over sustained periods.
- Collaborative experience working with Film Production, Music & Sound and Acting students on interdisciplinary projects—mirroring how documentary photographers actually work professionally.
- Professional capabilities for building sustainable documentary careers: pitching projects to editors and funders, constructing portfolios, applying for grants and residencies, preparing exhibitions and publications.
- Your distinctive documentary voice and critical perspective on photography's role in visual culture—developed through continuous making, public presentation and one-to-one mentorship with practicing photographers.

This programme's distinctive approach—practice-based learning in community contexts, tool fluidity pedagogy, interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical complexity as core focus, and mandatory public presentation—ensures you graduate with both proven documentary capabilities and critical understanding of the responsibilities documentary photographers bear.



Define your artistic voice in Berlin

Catalyst is located at the Funkhaus—Berlin's iconic GDR-era broadcasting complex—where our School of Film & Visual Media operates alongside Music & Sound, Acting and Creative Human Development. This interdisciplinary campus means your next collaborator is often just down the hallway: actors, musicians, filmmakers and researchers working under one roof.

Campus facilities include: fully equipped film studio, cinema with professional projection, production labs, editing suites, darkroom facilities, and student-run Etikett Radio. You'll create alongside students from other disciplines, finding documentary subjects and collaborative projects naturally within the campus community.

Beyond campus, the city of **Berlin serves as your primary learning environment**. You'll work directly with grassroots organisations, migrant communities, activist groups and cultural initiatives—photographing transformations shaped by migration, gentrification, resistance and creativity. Berlin's documentary photography history, from photojournalism to contemporary practice, provides rich context for developing your work.

Photography infrastructure: Major institutions like C/O Berlin, Berlinische Galerie and Helmut Newton Foundation show influential documentary work. Alternative spaces like nGbK's Art in the Underground and collectives like Palace 90mil support grassroots activism and socially engaged practice. The city's galleries, photography festivals, bookstores and zine fairs offer continuous engagement with contemporary documentary photography.

Berlin's complexity makes it an ideal place to define your photographic voice and contribute to ongoing conversations about representation and social change.

[Come see it for yourself. Click [here](#) to book a campus tour →]



Learning by doing

Our learning method and philosophy

Why we teach this way

We believe the best way to become a powerful visual storyteller is by getting behind the camera, out into the world, and making work that matters. That's why this course is built around practice-based learning – a progressive approach that integrates theory with hands-on, real-world practice.

Ready to leave outdated learning methods behind?

→ You'll work on sustained photography projects from the start, applying technical skills to meaningful themes. This turns learning into doing – helping you build both your confidence and your craft.

Tired of passive learning?

→ This isn't about memorising photography terms or analysing images from a distance. You'll explore the ethics of representation while creating work that's informed by real communities, conversations, and contexts.

Want to feel ready for real-world work?

→ Each project simulates professional scenarios – whether that's preparing an exhibition, pitching an idea, or documenting a social issue. From day one, you'll be working with real briefs, real tools, and real stakes.

Struggle with creative motivation?

→ Our curriculum is built around creative challenges, not box-ticking. You'll be encouraged to follow your curiosity, make your own decisions, and learn through experimentation – with support from tutors who understand the ups and downs of creative work.

Want to learn how to turn creative ideas into action?

→ Practice-based learning continuously pushes you out of your comfort zone, requiring you to take action. Our supported structure for experimenting, testing and refining your ideas, allows you to build confidence in your creative decision-making and practice.

Want a portfolio that reflects who you are?

→ You won't just leave with assignments. You'll graduate with a body of documentary photography work that reflects your voice, your values, and your journey – ready to share with collaborators, curators, and communities.

We've got you every step of the way

At Catalyst, you'll be supported by a dedicated team of practicing photographers, artists, researchers, and educators who bring real-world experience and critical insight into the classroom. Whether they're exhibiting internationally, publishing work, or collaborating on community-based projects, they understand the creative and professional realities of being a visual storyteller today.

They'll guide you through a balance of structured learning and creative exploration—challenging your thinking, offering honest feedback, and helping you shape your unique voice as a documentary photographer. One-to-one tutorials are a core part of the experience, giving you time to reflect on your progress, clarify your ideas, and set goals that align with your personal and artistic direction.

Our technical support team is an essential part of your journey. They'll make sure tools and environments never limit your creativity, helping you:

- Choose the right camera, lens, or lighting setup to fit your project's concept and context
- Troubleshoot equipment issues during workshops so you stay in the flow
- Explore new digital workflows, formats, and post-production techniques
- Plan and support student-led shoots, installations, and exhibitions
- Maintain and manage equipment across campus, so you always have access to high-quality tools when you need them

Whether you're shooting on the street, preparing for an exhibition, or experimenting in the studio, we're here to help you stay technically empowered and creatively focused.



A future-proof creative toolkit

Alongside hands-on experience with digital and analogue cameras, lighting setups, editing software, and storytelling workflows, you'll build a mindset rooted in self-direction, critical thinking, creative resilience, and the ability to learn through reflection and iteration. These soft skills are among the most valuable tools you'll take with you—transferable to any career path or creative challenge you pursue.

In a time of rapid technological change, where the role of the photographer continues to evolve, we focus on helping you stay adaptable, collaborative, and ethically engaged. This course isn't just about photographic technique—it's about shaping your voice, vision, and values as a storyteller in an ever-shifting world.

Alongside your academic and creative development, Catalyst offers a range of support services to help you navigate challenges, build confidence and stay creatively focused:

- **One-to-one counselling and coaching** – confidential sessions with qualified professionals to support emotional wellbeing, anxiety, creative blocks, conflict resolution and life transitions
- **Flourishing Fortnights** – immersive two-week workshop series focused on topics like creative collaboration, healthy boundaries, communication and emotional self-awareness
- **Self-Development & Leadership Course** – an optional deep dive into how you perceive yourself, others and your creative role in the world
- **Practical wellbeing support** – help accessing medical resources, therapy referrals, diagnosis pathways and other essential life services
- **Everyday check-ins** – a wellbeing team that's visible, approachable and part of the day-to-day campus life.

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

– Adam Munnings, alumnus

[\[Click here to explore the student experience →\]](#)

Your creative community

You'll become part of an international, multidisciplinary community of photographers, visual storytellers, filmmakers, musicians and creative practitioners, where collaboration is embedded in our learning philosophy. You'll learn not only by doing, but by working alongside peers who bring diverse perspectives, ideas, and artistic approaches to the table.

At Catalyst, our campus is designed to foster interdisciplinary experimentation. As your photographic practice grows, you'll find opportunities to collaborate with students from the Schools of Film, Music & Sound, Acting, and Creative Human Development—whether through portraits, multimedia installations, or sound-image experiments.

With students from over 70 different nationalities, you'll be immersed in a vibrant creative community that mirrors the global and collaborative nature of today's visual storytelling landscape. Whether you're out on a street-based shoot, editing your latest series, or preparing a group exhibition, you'll be surrounded by people who challenge and inspire you to think—and see—differently.

“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.”

— Andrea Riba, Director and Film Production alumna



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	

Year 1

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.

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	

Year 2

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

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.

Core skills for an industry-ready portfolio

This programme prepares you for contemporary documentary photography's realities, blending hands-on technique with critical, ethical and conceptual depth.

Long-form documentary project development. Documentary photographers are judged on bodies of work, not single images. You'll construct photo essays developed over weeks or months, building narratives with depth and the sustained engagement essential for ethical documentary work.

Technical fluidity across photographic formats. Professional documentary photographers choose tools based on each project's needs. You'll work across digital and analogue, developing critical judgment about when different formats serve your purposes and how tools shape your relationship with subjects.

Ethical frameworks for community-based photography. Documentary work involves real people whose lives continue after you photograph them. Through practice with Berlin's communities, you'll navigate building trust, negotiating consent, understanding power dynamics, and creating work that respects people's dignity—protecting both subjects and your professional integrity.

Collaborative capabilities across creative disciplines. Documentary photographers rarely work in isolation—they collaborate with filmmakers, researchers, NGOs and publications. Through projects with Film Production, Music & Sound and Acting students, you'll develop collaborative capabilities that mirror professional practice.

Professional practice and career sustainability. Most documentary photographers sustain careers through multiple income streams. You'll learn to pitch projects, construct portfolios for different contexts, apply for funding, and manage the realities of freelance creative work—enabling you to actually sustain documentary practice long-term.

Critical perspective on documentary photography. Understanding how images function in visual culture and what responsibilities you bear to subjects is essential for ethical practice. You'll recognise how your perspective shapes what and how you photograph, preparing you to navigate documentary photography's ongoing debates around representation, truth and authorship.

You'll graduate with a publicly exhibited portfolio and distinct documentary voice—reflecting your technical skills, ethical practice and professional readiness for sustaining meaningful documentary careers.



Admissions Guide

Here's everything you need to take the next step in your application:

Get to know us better

Virtual Open Days → Get a virtual overview of what we're all about, held over Zoom.

In-Person Open Day → Get a first-hand feel of our school and educational programmes.

Campus Tours → Come see our facilities and creative spaces at one of our regular 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 – save €3,000 off total tuition**
3. **Scholarships**
4. **Application deadlines & Visa requirements**
5. **How to apply**
6. **Contact us**

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.

Plan type	Standard fees	With Early Enrolment Bonus	With €6,000 scholarship	Payment Plan Duration	Notes
By semester	€5,028	€4,528	€4,028	3 years / 6 sem.	Annual enrolment fee €895
Annually	€9,753	€8,753	€7,753	3 years	3% discount by paying each year upfront. Annual enrolment fee €895
Total tuition upfront	€27,752	€24,752	€21,752	One-time	8% discount by paying total tuition upfront. Annual enrolment fee €895
12 instalments per year	€921	€838	€755	3 years	Annual enrolment fee €895
Extended yearly	€8,005	€7,255	€6,505	4 years	Payments continue 1 year after graduation. No enrolment fee for the fourth year.
Extended instalments	€733	€670	€608	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 2026** and are billed on the first of each month until your chosen plan ends.

2. Early enrolment bonus

Apply by our **priority deadline** to secure your place, save €3,000 off your total tuition (€1,000 per study year) and access visa support sooner.

- **Visa-required applicants:** apply by 28 February 2026

- **EU/visa-exempt or post-arrival applicants:** apply by 31 March 2026

3. Funding opportunities and Catalyst scholarships

As an accredited higher education provider, our students are eligible for a variety of national and international financial aid schemes. This includes the German state funding stream BAföG, which is open to citizens of Germany, EU countries and some non-EU citizens too. 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.](#)**

We also offer our own **€6,000 scholarships** for eligible Bachelor's students. These reduce tuition by €2,000 per year across three years. Scholarship recipients are embedded into the Catalyst community by taking an active role in collaborative projects and event support.

1. **Global stories & cultural perspectives scholarship:** For documentary photographers from diasporic, non-Western or otherwise underrepresented cultural backgrounds who use imagery to tell stories not typically seen in mainstream media.
2. **Equity in film & visual media:** For photographers exploring identity, community and systems of power, particularly from perspectives often left out of the mainstream. It supports those navigating structural barriers as they build a creative path in visual media.
3. **Social justice & documentary storytelling scholarship:** For photographers using long-form, community-based or issue-driven approaches to investigate displacement, climate, borders or social inequality.
4. **Narrative reinvention scholarship (career switchers):** For applicants moving from another field into documentary photography, bringing new perspectives, transferable skills and life experience to visual storytelling.

4. Application deadlines

Visa-required applicants

- Priority: 28 February 2026 (includes bonus & visa support)
- General: 30 April 2026 (subject to processing time and availability)

EU/visa-exempt or post-arrival applicants

- Priority: 31 March 2026 (includes bonus & guaranteed spot on preferred course)
- General: 5 June 2026 (granted on a rolling basis)
- Late: until 28 August 2026 (subject to availability)

Visa requirements

- **Visa-required:** If you require a visa before entering Germany (e.g. citizens of India, Brazil, Mexico, China, Turkey), you must apply at a German embassy before arrival. Our Visa Support Service (included in the enrolment fee) supports you with paperwork, appointments and timelines. 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.
- **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.

5. 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. **Prepare your portfolio** – requirements vary by course, check our “How to apply” page.
3. **Submit your application** at catalyst-berlin.com/apply, including personal and educational details, a motivation statement, your portfolio and supporting documents such as transcripts or proof of language ability.
4. **Apply for a scholarship** (if eligible) – by completing the additional Scholarship Form, which requires an additional motivation letter and background information.
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 enrollment 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 package 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.

Contact us for support

Reach out to our Admissions team by email at admissions@catalyst-berlin.com or book a call [here](#).