

Critical Craft Studies (Groningen / Oude Pekela, 29–30 Oct 26)

Groningen / Oude Pekela, Oct 29–30, 2026

Deadline: Sep 13, 2026

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Critical Craft Studies: Clay, Kilns, Bricks (NICA x OSK).

Much of the Netherlands is built on, and with, clay. This mineral resource plays a key role in Dutch cultural exports and aesthetics, and appears as a prime material in brick production, dug up from the beds and banks of the IJssel, Waal, and Rhine. These bricks were formed and kiln-fired across the country, often by hand, well into the 20th century. Dutch bricks were internationally renowned for their quality, and brick edifices and embellishment served a central component of national monument buildings and social housing, as well as travelling abroad via colonial expansion. As a craft, brickwork also has a longstanding history of labour exploitation: precarious contracting and child labour were common occurrences throughout the Industrial Revolution.

Today, kilnworkers remain some of the most abused workforces in the Global South today, while in Dutch floodplains and polder areas, clay continues to be extracted and fired for building materials and ceramics. In response, designers, artists, and crafters are interrogating the heritage of clay for rural, urban, and coastal landscapes, engaging with circular production methods, experimenting with low-fire ceramic techniques, and exploring the potential of local waste materials.

This two day programme considers what can be learnt from these various re-engagements with bricks as material and cultural objects. How can hands-on art-based approaches to making-with-clay help us think about shifting relationships to material value, manual labour, raw material extraction and (un)sustainability, on local and global scales, in contemporary making practices?

About Critical Craft Studies:

The Critical Craft Studies series approaches materials as sites of critical and cultural inquiry. Responding to Glenn Adamson's position that 'craft only exists in motion', we approach materials as opportunities for studying processes of extraction, production, and artistic experimentation in contemporary life. With the help of visiting experts, sessions will be aimed at expanding our understanding of making; deepening our autonomous research and artistic practice through field trips, theoretical reading, and hands-on workshops.

During these sessions, we will think with raw and processed materials as research tools, using them to investigate questions of heritage, labour, gender, and the environment. Rather than adopt binary schemes of amateur/professional, hand/machine, factory/workshop, this series seeks to contextualise making through a merging of high and low-tech approaches. In doing so, we consid-

er how materials operate across diverse sites of production and trade, while re-imagining what a creative engagement with these materials might look like.

Attendees will receive a reader and assignments to prepare in advance of the sessions, and those wishing to take the course for credit can receive 2EC by submitting a written or creative reflection after the session.

This course is open to research master's students, PhD candidates, and artistic researchers based the Netherlands. For registration and inquires please email: r.e.de.vos@pl.hanze.nl & l.e.ewart@rug.nl.

Reference:

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