

## **Amsterdam Master of Choreography (AMCh)**

by Victoria Pérez Royo

This master is offered by The Theaterschool, one of the six faculties of the Amsterdam School of the Arts (AHK). The Theaterschool comprises the Departments of Theater, Dance and Technique & Media. (The Theaterschool also includes DasArts.)<sup>1</sup>

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<http://www.english.theaterschool.nl/en/dance-programmes/amsterdam-master-of-choreography/>

**Date of opening:** 2002

### **History:**

Dance Unlimited (2002-2006) was established as the first post-graduate study course in Choreography in the Netherlands, resulting from a collaboration between the three dance schools (Amsterdam, Arnhem and Rotterdam) Each one of them offered a different profile, so that the programme “enabled diversity (across the three profiles) and specificity within the individual study courses.”<sup>2</sup> In 2006 each programme was accredited separately and so emerged the actual AMCh, a pioneering Masters in Choreography in the Netherlands with exemplary standard of quality.

### **Professions the degree prepares students for:**

Dance artists, choreographers.

### **Student’s Profile:**

This is a programme designed for talented professionals / artists / choreographers who have already established a professional practice and seek possibilities for further reflection and development, so

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Jeroen Fabius for assisting us in the creation of this report.

<sup>2</sup> Amsterdam Master of Choreography. Master (HBO) in Choreography, Version 1.4 (abbreviated), p. 4.



that their work can be developed to an exceptionally high professional level.

**Specificity:**

The interest of AMCh bases on the contribution to the field of critical and contemporary dance research and creation with emphasis on the processes of praxis, or metapractice, so that the student is be able to make significant contributions to current artistic developments in the dance field.

The programme is based on the individual's artistic practice and research as point of departure and guiding thread of the course content design.

**Aims:**

The AMCh course is aimed at the display of possibilities unavailable to the participants in their everyday practice.

Concrete aims are:<sup>3</sup>

- to develop the talents of each individual student artistically and professionally
- to graduate students who will work in the top level of the professional field, both nationally and internationally
- to enable graduates to function in the professional field independently in a sustained manner
- to provide training in the necessary autonomous skills so graduates continue to develop within the context of the professional field; and in collaboration with others
- to educate the critical faculty of the student so that graduates can be expected to influence the professional field
- to augment, enhance and nourish the research praxis of makers who have already achieved a certain visibility as artists in the field of choreography
- to provide and facilitate contexts for expert and peer review of the methodological research processes of the students throughout the course duration
- to encourage and train the critical and reflective faculties of the student so that graduates can better influence the professional field through enhanced communicative skills

**Total number of current students: 6**

**Maximum number of admitted students per year: 3**

**Admission requirements for regular students:**

- Professional practice: A professional practice of at least three years; the capacity to examine and reflect on the own position within the given context.
- Previously achieved degrees: bachelor's degree in dance.
- To continue with the professional activity during the duration of the master.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 5.



### **Required Submission materials:**

- Curriculum vitae showing history of dance education and practice.
- Two written recommendation(s) from professional choreographers, colleagues, artists, scholars and/ or teachers in the field of choreography.
- Videos, dvd's and/or web-based documentation; and reviews and/or essays pertaining to previous and current work.
- Examples of writing about the own work or the work of others.
- Motivation letter and research plan.

### **Selection procedure:**

- It is recommended to start a personal contact with staff members of AMCh in order to facilitate a good understanding of the application.
- Evaluation of the applications
- Interview. The candidates will be invited to prepare a presentation of their research goals in an interview with a small committee (internal and external members). With the interview the dialogic relationship to the school constitutes two and a half semesters until graduation.

### **Evaluation criteria (for the interview):<sup>4</sup>**

The candidate is able to:

1. develop a creative and articulate approach to present the body in dance and/or other related art works
2. network and create structures to sustain their work
3. demonstrate knowledge about the social, political and economic context and implications of their choreographic work
4. further develop production and managerial abilities, and be able to solve problems within complex situations.
5. to comprehend, write and speak critically, regarding developments, representations and presentations of the body in dance and its discourses in contemporary philosophy, art and science.
6. further develop the capacity to reflect on his or her own compositional and production choices and processes; to enhance reflection on the conclusions of past projects and articulate the rationale for future initiatives.

### **Financial aspects:**

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.english.theaterschool.nl/en/dance-programmes/amsterdam-master-of-choreography/application-and-admission/>



Registration fees: (full-time master's programmes) 1620€ (European Economic Zone); 2800€ for non-EU residents

There are no grants; the candidates must demonstrate their capacity to maintain the necessary support structures for their art practice.

The students receive a project budget of € 3500 peryear during their studies within the program.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

**Duration of the programme:** two years, non residential

**Total number of ECTS:** 120

### **Credits Distribution**

33% Seminars – 40 credits

67% Independent Study -

from which:

33% Individual track, Mentoring - 40 credits

16 % Residency and Research Presentation – 20 credits

17 % Ongoing Choreographic projects – 20 credits)

### **ECTS distribution through the academic year:**

Year 1: 60 ECTS

3 seminars of 2 weeks: 20 ECTS

Residency 6 weeks: 10 ECTS

Individual track / mentoring: 20 ECTS

Choreographic productions: 10 ECTS

Year 2: 60 ECTS

3 seminars of 2 weeks: 20 ECTS

Research presentation: 10 ECTS

Individual track / mentoring: 20 ECTS

Choreographic production: 10 ECTS

ECTS validation through participation in external events (e.g. conferences, workshops, etc.) is not possible, since it is taken for granted that the participants continue working professionally in their respective careers, showing works internationally during the time at AHK.



### **Learning approach:**

There are two main aspects concerning the learning approach: the inherent diversity of the dance discipline (and approaches to choreography) and the development of practice-led research in the arts.

It is a system based on self-directed education: the learner selects and carries out his / her own learning goals, objectives, methods and means to verify that the goals were met.

The AMCh operates following the model of the dramaturge:

- self-directed education.
- focus on on facilitating individual trajectories.
- structure to enable and foster the realization of artistic research and presentation plans of the individual student.
- continuous relations with the professional practice.

### **Modules / Structure**

The curriculum structure includes

- one eight-week individual residency in Amsterdam in the first year (Full-time residency is not compulsory)
- three two-week intensive group seminars
- continuous mentoring (internal and external)
- public presentation of both research and artwork
- participation in the scheduled residency, seminars, meetings and platforms

### **Detailed description:<sup>5</sup>**

#### **INDIVIDUAL RESIDENCY**

The programme is able to provide a variety of resources (including dedicated studio space in Amsterdam and a limited budget) for this sustained eight-week encounter with the student's making practice. The residency will be designed by the individual student with the support of the Core Staff and may involve collaborators (e.g. performers, dramaturges, designers, etc.). A draft design of the residency will already be a part of the second round of the selection process in order that AMCh programme resources can be made explicit in connection to the student's proposed research plans.

#### **INTENSIVE GROUP SEMINARS**

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<sup>5</sup> The course is perfectly described in the web page of the AMCh. Here (in the section Detailed description) is the full text, reorganised in accordance with the structure of analysis proposed by this series of reports. The written sources are the web page ([http://www.english.theaterschool.nl/fileadmin/download/theaterschool/COURSE\\_DESCRIPTION\\_AMCHOR\\_2008.pdf](http://www.english.theaterschool.nl/fileadmin/download/theaterschool/COURSE_DESCRIPTION_AMCHOR_2008.pdf)) as well as the numerous draft descriptions of the programme that Jeroen Fabius kindly gave us.



The two-week seminars (three-per-year) are intended as intensive events during which each student will present their research questions, methods and processes for peer review and feedback. Students and Core Staff will work together to prepare reading material or other objects of study for each Seminar; and this and various writing components of the programme (Dossier) will be collectively discussed.

The first seminar, organized at the start of the academic year, is intended as an orientation comprising two to three opportunities for each student to introduce their background, research plans and making practice. The Core Staff will lead various sessions on topics such as research documentation, meta-practices, interdisciplinarity and arts research issues and debates. Each student will take the lead for a day, introducing the others to their work and problematizing their motivation statements as research questions.

The second seminar, organized mid-year, will include a (semi) public interdisciplinary symposium. Speakers and topics will be determined in part by the various research vectors of the students; and they may be from any discipline, domain of information, area of expertise or knowledge.

The third seminar, at the end of the academic year, will serve as the context for a research progress report from all first year students and the final research presentation for those finishing the programme. Final presentations will take place in a public venue, engage a selected wider audience and give evidence (through documentation, demonstration, lecture, performance and other means) of the quality, reflexivity, rigor, relationality and integrity of the two-year arts research process.

The components of these seminars are three:

- 1) peer exchange, in order to assure the actuality of the programme.
- 2) theory / writing: is not based on teaching, but on coaching: the participants are inserted in a process of continuous reading and writing.
- 3) practical

## MENTORING

A critical component of the programme, mentoring supports the large independent study component and is provided by both Core Staff, as internal mentors, and external mentors with qualifications in the specific research vectors of the students. Responsive to a range of dynamics and relationships, mentoring augments written course materials and guidelines; integrates the results of ongoing quality assurance measures and enhances the contents of the study course.



Internal mentoring provides the necessary continuity of engagement between the student and the course structure; and site visits (outside of Amsterdam) are possible.

- Six documented mentor exchanges (staff mentors may be interchangeable)
- Self evaluations/ progress reports with mentor comments after each semester
- One mentor visit per year to the student's studio

External mentoring, an important aspect of the programme, is undertaken as a commission from the student for advice and feedback on the research process and progress; and to provide critical and professional input and reference points. As early as the first round of the selection process, the student is encouraged to propose external mentors who can best complement their research objectives, and Core Staff and the internal mentor will help to facilitate the eventual commission(s). External mentoring provides a vehicle for structured relationships with experts from complementary fields (science, social science, cultural studies, etc.) as well as professionals from the choreographic field.

- Three external mentor sessions per year. Can be translocally implemented via Skype, iChat, email/blog, etc.

## PUBLIC PLATFORMS

In addition to the final research presentation during the third seminar in the second year, it is the aim of the programme to facilitate a single public presentation of the students' performance work in local professional contexts.

## DOSSIER/ DOCUMENTATION/ DISSEMINATION

The dossier is a cumulative project that supports and explores writing across a range of registers including: enhancing communication, expanding observation and critical faculties and expository and creative writing based on reference research and extant literature. Questions arising from the relationship between writing, reading practices and research materials will be explored throughout the course.

The Dossier will contain the six reports from the mentoring sessions per year, two self-evaluations/progress reports per year, and one paper, to be published in the AMCh Journal or media presentation that reflects on a past or present work of the student.

Documentation refers to the specific methods and approaches used to trace something of the contours (physiological, phenomenological, psychic, nomadic, critical, emotional, theoretical, etc.) of the practice-led research. What questions does one circle around and return to through this



process? What means and modes of reflection are made possible through documentation and how can its dissemination further the public's engagement with the research?

Although AMCh is a practice-led research programme and as such takes the position that it does not focus primarily on theoretical practices per se (as would an academic Dance Studies degree course), the ability to communicate aspects of the process of personal practice through writing and various forms documentation will be a prerequisite for satisfying the terms of the study.

### **Monitoring of the student:**

- Research plans for the selection interview will lay the ground for the generation of appropriate individualized evaluation criteria for the candidate/artist. Upon selection, these will be further contextualized in and around the research plan, aims and objectives and the emerging documented results of the research process of the individual student.
- Evaluations are written together by candidate/artist, mentor and external mentor at the end of every semester. The student present his / her evaluation; the mentors write on this basis.
- Final presentations at the end of the second year will take place in a public venue, engage a selected wider audience and give evidence (through documentation, demonstration, lecture, performance and other means) of the quality, reflexivity, rigor, relationality and integrity of the two-year arts research process. (see Final Project)

### **FINAL PROJECT**

At the end of the programme, participants present their research in a public context (stage, screen, etc.) in collaboration with various organisations for public debate within the field of dance.

**Formal requirements:** There are no strict formal requirements for the final work. It must be a coherent development of the goals settled by the student at the beginning of the MA and be the result of its re-articulation during the two semesters.

### **Evaluation criteria:**

Since the great majority of the participants are not interested in the credits *per se*, nor in the graduation, but rather in the further development of their works, the AMCh do not evaluate the works on the basis of their quality, but rather on the basis of their investigative effort.

The evaluation consists of the public showing of the work and an oral presentation concerning the research process, which has been carried out following the assessment criteria. On the following day one-hour discussion takes place, in which the student and the board discuss topics such as: “student’s *raison d’être* for artistic research, the quality and integrity of research strategies with





respect to current practice, methods of problematising, decision processes and production constraints.”<sup>6</sup>

**Examining board:** Mixed. The final presentation is evaluated by one colleague, two core staff members and two external reviewers.

**Number of final projects per semester:** 3

**Financing:** Centre. The co-financing with a collaborating institution is possible, although difficult to achieve.

**Competencies obtained by the student on completion of the degree:** <sup>7</sup>

The AMCh graduate should have: the capacity to respond creatively to the inherent diversity of dance and choreography; and to take advantage of changes brought about by developments in arts practice-based research. The graduate should be able to do so successfully in the context of the chosen professional domain as determined by the environment of that domain, whether discipline-specific, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary. Additionally, the AMCh graduate will have achieved a clear and distinguished ability to communicate their questions, reflections and research processes (methodological approaches) both to their peers and a broader public.

**Degree**

Master of Dance (comparable to MFA).

TEACHING STAFF

**Full-time Staff:**

The full-time staff is composed by one coordinator and a team of two or three teachers.

Duties:

- to mentor the participant’s work.
- to follow the development of each participant’s work.
- to supervise their written and practice-based research.
- to guarantee the engagement of the student within the MA context.
- to facilitate the residency period of the students.

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<sup>6</sup> Amsterdam Master of Choreography: Master (HBO) in Choreography, Version 1.1, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Amsterdam Master of Choreography. Master (HBO) in Choreography, Version 1.4 (abbreviated), p. 6.



Required professional qualifications: they must be respected leaders in their respective fields.

### **Part-time staff.**

- Guest teachers. On average there are 4 to 5 per semester.
- External Mentors: Each AMCh student chooses an external mentor who can best help them in their research objectives.

Function:

They provide expert knowledge and practice in areas of research relevant to the student's work.

Required professional qualifications: Since the Master is focused on the individual interests of the participants, the teaching staff is also selected according to them. Relevant factors to select the external mentors are their qualifications in the specific research fields of the students. Actually it is the participant who proposes the external mentor who can best complement his / her research objectives.

There is also an intermediate figure, the artist team: each artist's own working team continues collaborating with him / her during the six month residency.

## **RESEARCH GROUPS**

(See Report on DasArts MTh)

## **CONTEXT**

### **Academic Network:**

From 2005-2007: Intensive eight-day lab of 12-15 participants of several Master degree courses in Netherlands. Topic: to explore collaboration between interactive media arts, digital and sound art, choreography, theatre and live arts practices

### **External networks:**

The links to the professional context is assured by means of the external mentoring system. It facilitates structured relationships with experts from the choreographic as well as from other fields relevant to the participant's research. Furthermore there is a tight network of relationships with the professional field achieved through the figures of invited and guest teachers, visiting choreographers and visiting companies.



Links to the Holland Festival and Springdance in Utrecht and with Gasthuis/Frascati Theaters in Amsterdam are being organised; they will offer further opportunities for networking and collaboration.

### **Public events.**

- Series of lectures every January:

The lectures do not follow the models of traditional theoretical lecture, but rather propose new ones emerged from the artistic practice.

- Final works and research presentations of the participants every June. A collaboration with Gasthuis/Frascati Theater in Amsterdam.

### INFRASTRUCTURES

Rooms for theory classes and for individual work, laboratories, audiovisual studios, library, hall for presentations. These are shared with the other degrees of The Theaterschool.

### SELF ASSESSMENT

Self assessment takes the form of feedback from participants, in a close and continuous dialogue with them, together with regular questionnaires to monitor student satisfaction made by the AHK in collaboration with the director of the department.

