The creators, theoreticians and custodians that drive the collecting and archiving process are generating histories as well as providing fuel for present and future creative practice. This course will look closely at London’s historical and contemporary archives paying particular attention to how the history of collecting influences how we move forward. We will start with an intensive investigation of the Victoria and Albert Museum which offers a particularly rich resource due to its expansive collections and especially because the museum continues to grow and evolve its collection. How does the institutional vision stay relevant and progress and change over centuries of selecting specific objects for the collection? Through developing an in-depth understanding of how an institution like the V&A pursues a particular mission we will develop the tools to look at and understand other London archives and collections. We will also use London as a laboratory to look at how collecting and archiving is challenged by contemporary creative practice. How does one collect or archive performance art or street art? How has the internet changed the nature of collecting and archiving and do modern digital capabilities help or undermine the traditional archival institutions?

Students will write one research paper on a particular collection or on the links between related collections. Each student will also keep a weekly blog. Students that are interested can develop a hands-on art or archiving/collection project that relates to the course curriculum.