



GENERAL COMMENTS

Teachers should note that the comments made in this report are based on the Studio Art Study Design, 2000–2003. A reaccredited study design has been implemented in 2004.

As in previous years the Studio Arts written examination required students to address short answer and extended response questions. The examination drew upon key knowledge and skills required for Outcome 2 Unit 3 and Outcome 2 Unit 4 and students were required to answer the four compulsory questions in Section A. In Section B, one extended response of the three alternatives provided was to be answered. The inclusion of visual material in Section A required students to respond to previously unseen artworks. Visual material was only used in Question 1 and included a range of art forms. A total of 50 marks were allocated for the paper; 30 marks for Section A and 20 marks for Section B; 90 minutes allowed for students to complete the examination.

Section A responses were generally better handled than in Section B. Students demonstrated an ability to interpret the short answer questions and provide relevant responses which included information and an appropriate level of detail. Students should use the number of marks allocated and the amount of space provided as a guide to the level of detail required.

However, student responses to the visual material in Question 1 suggest that this is still an area that needs to be addressed more fully. Question 1 provided students with the opportunity to select an art work and discuss it in terms of two (out of a choice of four) designated areas. Whilst many students chose to discuss the interpretation of subject matter, it is apparent that some do not have a very clear understanding of the difference between description and interpretation. The question did not ask students to describe the art work, but rather to discuss what was happening and/or what the artist was trying to say. To talk about the meaning of a work is very different to providing a checklist about what one sees when they look at an artwork. The interpretation will indeed be personal, but it will also be firmly based on the information provided in the artwork. To this end the credits beneath the art works should assist students to understand some of the features of the work.

Other options in Question 1 included a discussion of how the materials and techniques were used in the artworks. Many students selected this option. However, it was noted that many students selected images that used materials or techniques they were not familiar with. A response to this question should clearly demonstrate an understanding of the qualities and effects that can be achieved using particular media and how the technique chosen by the artist produces a particular result.

Section B extended responses were not as comprehensively handled compared to the short answers required in Section A. In many cases detail required to fully answer the question selected was not evident. This may have been due to students allocating too much time within the examination to Section A by writing more than the marks allocated for this section. It is also apparent that some students lack the ability to apply their knowledge of artists and artworks to the specifics of the questions asked. While the marking scheme of 10 + 10 marks allows for knowledge of two artists and their works, it does not mean that students have to write two separate responses to the question.

In Section B, the responses that attracted the highest marks were those that were written in a fluent and comprehensive manner, linking both artists and their works in the same body of writing and demonstrating a strong understanding of the content of the artworks. It is important that students understand that they need the skills and knowledge to answer both specifically focused questions and more general questions. Pre-prepared answers are readily identifiable because students are not able to adjust their understanding or the information prepared to the specific requirements of the question. Furthermore, the knowledge gained through a comprehensive coverage of Outcome 2 in Units 3 and 4 should provide an excellent basis for handling whatever questions are posed in Section B.

Areas of strength and weakness

Strengths

Responses that were awarded high marks:

- answered each aspect or issue raised by the question
- provided relevant information with an appropriate degree of detail
- used art terminology appropriately and accurately
- demonstrated evidence of a strong knowledge base
- were clearly articulated, displaying critical and aesthetic awareness
- were creative in approach
- provided detailed information within context of question

- provided clear examples relevant to the discussion
- included coherent development of ideas
- included factually correct information.

Weaknesses

Responses that were awarded low marks displayed:

- lack of understanding of basic terms
- questions partly or largely unanswered
- misinterpretation of the question or a lack of understanding of the issues raised by the question
- limited discussion pertinent to what was being asked
- factual inaccuracies in relation to the interpretation of given terms
- repetition of information provided in the question
- inappropriateness of some examples and/or “issues” used for discussion
- selection of visual examples with no clear understanding of the art form
- inability to use specific examples to support discussion.

The most common faults reported in Section A and Section B were:

- providing a description of the visual image in Question 1 and using the title of the piece to introduce the response rather than an interpretation of the subject matter
- limited understanding of the techniques associated with the various materials and media used in the visual examples chosen for discussion and lack of appropriate terminology
- generalising and describing factors that affect artworks rather than using specific factual information to explain how they control conservation of works in Question 2
- lack of understanding of the difference between public and commercial galleries in Question 3
- inability to articulate the context that gave rise to the art industry issue selected in Question 4
- limited preparation for the extended responses evidenced by factual inaccuracies, superficial discussion and no reference to specific artworks
- pre-prepared responses that did not answer the questions provided
- biographies of artists rather than a discussion of relevant information and works pertinent to the question asked.

With the new Studio Arts Study Design introduced in 2004, it is important that students continue to be provided with multiple opportunities to consolidate their visual literacy skills and develop a sound understanding of artists’ work. First hand experience of exhibitions, galleries, art spaces and experts working in the art industry provide students with a means of linking the theory with the practice. Responses that scored very highly displayed this understanding in a clear, articulate manner and demonstrated evidence of thorough understanding of the required knowledge and skills.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Direct student responses reproduced here have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information. The assessment criteria published by the VCAA were used as a basis for setting the examination and as a guide to developing a marking scheme. Current examination assessment criteria can be located at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au

Section A – Short answer responses

Students were required to answer four compulsory questions from this section and use information directly related to the focus of the question. Each question was allocated marks according to the specific requirements of the individual question.

Question 1 required a discussion of one of the works illustrated in terms of any two of the following:

- interpretation of subject matter
- use of materials and techniques
- influence of new technology
- development of a distinctive style.

Question 2 required discussion of two factors that were important in preserving and/or conserving artworks. The response required reasons to be given why each of the factors chosen were important. Examples of factors to include for discussion:

- materials
- temperature and humidity
- handling and storage
- lighting
- pest control.

Question 3 required discussion on two of the following in how they differ from each other in their presentation of artworks to an audience:

- public galleries
- commercial galleries
- art spaces other than public and commercial galleries.

Question 4 required students to identify art industry issues and discuss two different points of view.

Consequently if students only answered one of the requirements they could not score higher than the mark allocated for that requirement, regardless of how comprehensive the answer was. The space allocated for each question provided students with a clear indication of the required length of their answers.

Students were required to demonstrate:

Question 1

- an understanding of the methods used by artists to develop distinctive styles and approaches to subject matter
- a comprehensive and relevant discussion of the chosen example
- a capacity to analyse technical and visual characteristics expressed using appropriate and accurate art terminology
- an ability to discuss the use of identified techniques and the qualities of specific materials
- an ability to discuss the meaning of the artwork based on the information provided
- a clear understanding of the difference between description and interpretation
- an ability to discuss how new technology has influenced the creation of the selected artwork
- a capacity to move beyond the information provided with the visuals to apply their knowledge.

The following are excerpts from responses where students achieved a high mark:

Sample 1

Robert Anerson's, "Way west of Athens", is aptly named as he appears to have taken a satirical approach to the classical sculpture of Athens in ancient times. The piece captures all the elements of Greek sculpture, the bronze portraiture, the ceramic stand, the flooding water all gallantly placed upon a magnificent pedestal. However the artist defies the convention of classical sculptures "perfection" by showing the imperfections of the face of the central figure which becomes the focal point. In other words playing on the Greek's interpretation of perfection. The flowing water that cascades down the ceramic stand into a small pool is another play by the artist as many sculptures of that time were surrounded by a pool of water.

Sample 2

The artist has utilised many of the materials that would have been used in ancient times: bronze, marble created by ceramics and ceramics which come together to heighten the artists' play on Greek sculpture. The bronze sculpture looks to be highly oxidised with the appearance of the green patina. The bronze head itself could have been constructed by the use of the lost wax method of bronze casting whereby wax is moulded over the roughly shaped figure and then another layer of clay. This would then have been fired and the hole vacated by the wax would be filled with bronze. The ceramic base appears to have been made from a white earthenware clay fired at approximately 1120 C. The artist has then used bold contrasting blue glaze running over the pedestal to create the appearance of flowing water. Similarly the base created by ceramics was then painted using glaze to give the appearance of bricks and marble of which he has used a spackled technique to emulate the real appearance of bronze.

Sample 3

Leunig's Winter, provokes a great sense of despair and loss of hope. The mood is created through the low light and isolation of the figure. It appears that Leunig is suggesting that art no longer can reflect the realities of life, shown in the artist's false representation of the flowers in his artwork. These flowers presented in reality are lifeless and wilting. The body language of the artist, which is limp, suggests that he is depressed in trying to create something which he understands to be false. However hope is restored by the light being shed from the canvas, suggesting that in a world of turmoil the artist is able to create that which is beautiful and permanent, and thus a tension is created between life and art.

Sample 4

A significant feature of Leunig's style/ technique is the very loose, free quality of the line, which is essentially a simple line drawing but essential in creating mood. Tonal gradation is used throughout the work to create form and highlight those sections of the composition that are important. As a whole the work is predominantly a mid tone grey, reflecting its depressive nature. The contrast of the light onto the artist is successful in highlighting. Leunig uses perspective to create a sense of space within the work, echoed through the repetition of the vertical floorboards.

Question 2

- understanding of the importance of different factors in the preservation/conservation and/or of artworks
- relevant terminology and factual information
- an ability to discuss why the chosen factors are important
- a clear understanding of the difference between factors
- an ability to use the factors provided as the starting point for discussion.

The following are excerpts from responses where students achieved a high mark:

Factor: Temperature and humidity

It is important to consider and monitor the humidity of the environment in which works are presented and stored as the amount of moisture in the air can damage art works. High humidity can result in the distortion of works, and can contribute to mould growth or the corrosion of works. It is important that the humidity of the environment is kept below 67% as at such humidity mould thrives and damages many organic works such as works on paper or wood sculptures. Humidity is monitored using equipment such as hygrothermographs to ensure stable conditions (preferably between 45-55% humidity), and can be prevented by placing a salt solution or silica gel near the works to absorb excess moisture. Low humidity can result in the shrinking of organic works as they lose moisture to the atmosphere. A bowl of water in the environment can prevent this. It is important that works are stored in appropriate humidities for the materials they are made of and the environment they were created in (ie. A wooden mask from Africa would be stored in conditions similar to the climate in which it was made). A temperature of around 20 C can help stabilise humidity and coincide with human comfort levels.

Factor: Lighting

Lighting can deteriorate most works of art so it is important that works are stored and presented in suitable lighting conditions to ensure their conservation. The amount of light in a room is monitored using meters that measure illumination in lux. Items highly sensitive to light such as paper, photos, textiles, some plastics and mixed media pieces can fade and discolour or deteriorate (the fibres of paper/ textiles) and so are usually presented in low light, no more than 50 lux. Works more tolerable to light intensity such as paintings, furniture or wooded sculptures may be presented in areas of 150-200 lux, whilst materials least effected by light such as metals and ceramics can be stored in any illumination. To avoid the damage caused by infra-red or UV rays, filters are used on lights to avoid such rays from deteriorating or discolouring art works. All works are generally stored in darkness and exhibitions are rotated to avoid any long-term light exposure and damage to works.

Factor: Handling and storage

When handling artworks, cotton gloves should be worn to prevent the transferring of acid and other bodily fluids onto the work. Acid causes discolouration and embrittlement, especially in the case of textiles. Large flat textiles should be handled to distribute even weight over their surface, not placing strain on any direct area. This can be done using transport boards or mannequins in the case of textile based costumes. Large 2D textiles should be layered between acid-free paper and rolled up on acid-free cardboard tube. Smaller textiles should be layered between acid-free paper and stored flat in Solander boxes. If the textile happens to take the form of a costume or fashion item it should be stored on a body emulating a mannequin or model to sustain its shape and all weight should be distributed evenly. If this is not possible then the costume should be padded out with acid-free tissue to emulate the shape of the body and placed in a Solander box. Through storing textile-based artworks appropriately, acid damage can be limited and the life of the work sustained. Handling and storage is important as this involves the movement of the piece, under which damage can readily occur. It is also where the work resides for the majority of its life so it is important it is done properly. In order to allow future generations to view the work for enjoyment and historical purposes, storage and handling should be carried out appropriately.

Question 3

- an understanding of the methods involved in the presentation of artworks to an audience
- a clear insight and knowledge of the different methods used by public and commercial galleries and other artspaces when presenting artworks to an audience
- use of relevant terminology and vocabulary
- an ability to distinguish between public and commercial galleries and other artspaces
- an ability to use relevant examples to highlight major differences.

The following is an excerpt from a response where a student achieved a high mark:

Public galleries have an educational aim. Their works are generally not for sale but provide entertainment and education to the public. Often their collections are permanent. Public galleries are government funded and can allow people to see famous and valuable works by borrowing collections from elsewhere in the country or even overseas. Most public galleries do not charge general admission. The experience is open to everyone. Commercial galleries have a primarily commercial aim. They are a business funded by the sale of works. They provide a service to the public by giving an outlet to buy artworks from. They also are often pivotal in promoting up-and-coming artists. They provide a service to both the artist and the viewers who wish to be stimulated and exposed to new talent and fresh works. The collections are constantly changing. Though anyone can view the works in a commercial gallery there is the belief that viewers will buy and unlike a public gallery the works belong to the artist and not the public.

Question 4

- an understanding of contemporary art industry issues
- knowledge of the context that gave rise to the issues

- clearly expressed responses displaying a knowledge and understanding of such ethical issues as appropriation, copyright, plagiarism, licensing and/or cultural considerations governing the ownership and use of images
- terminology and vocabulary that is specific and correctly used
- clear reference to different points of view relating to specific issue chosen
- an ability to distinguish between the context, the issue and two different points of view.

The following are excerpts from responses where students achieved a high mark:

Issue: Australian Council grants using taxpayer's money – are they inappropriate?

Point of view 1

In August, the Herald-Sun ran a front page newspaper article entitled “Art Attack” in which it argued that the Australia Council was spending taxpayer's money inappropriately. It used three examples of works. The first being a website “Virtual Palestine” which it regarded as having anti-Jewish sentiments. The second was funding of arts projects for prisoners in maximum-security jails. Lastly it used the example of Ben Morrison's “Wheelie drawings.” It argued that these projects had not benefited the average taxpayer. It stated that the Australian Council had spent in total \$117 million over 2001/02 and that this money could have gone to rural hospitals or the hiring of new teachers. It generally regarded these grants as “bizarre” and “unnecessary”.

Point of view 2

We are able to understand the Australia Council's view on the issue through its own statement and also an article published in the Age by Sian Prior. Australia Council stated that the whole point of the visual arts was to “try new things” and to “provoke debate.” It justified the grants for “Virtual Palestine” and Ben Morrison's work under these conclusions. In regard to “Virtual Palestine” it also stated that the site was seen by the Council as a forum for debate (as people could put views on the site). In regard to the prisoners, it said that it had a responsibility to make sure that all Australians have access to the visual arts. Sian Prior also noted that the point of art was to “challenge social moves” and in this way justified the grants. We must realise that Australia Council receives applications for thousands of grants each year and that it uses its discretion as to deciding which projects to fund. We must trust this discretion and stick by the Council.

Issue: The return of the Elgin Marbles to Greece

Point of view 1

PM Tony Blair and members of the curator's board of the British museum assert that the Elgin Marbles taken from the Parthenon in Athens in the 1900's by Lord Elgin are better preserved and accessible in the British museum. Despite extensive criticism regarding their rightful ownership, the PM of Britain Mr Blair says that the Elgin Marbles were transferred to Britain through a legal process, no matter how old and dated. He refers to the contract between Lord Elgin and the Ottoman Emperor in the 1900's which allowed Elgin to “rescue” any artefacts to foster a British phase of romanticism and be of benefit to artists to view the “greatest sculptures ever made.” The British also assert that if it were not for Elgin's recovery of the marbles they would still be rotting on the Parthenon. The British feel that the marbles are more accessible to the wider public in the museum.

Point of view 2

The Greek government want the marbles returned to Athens in time for the upcoming Olympics. They say they are a symbol of their extensive history and often to house them in a new Acropolis museum at the foot of the original Parthenon. This will effectively display the frieze of marble whilst providing an educational perspective for visitors. The Greeks are also angry that the stones have been cleaned so extensively and consequently damaged. In a period of the British believing a romantic Greek work should be pristine white, the marble was harshly scrubbed and chipped. It is also questionable to the Greek government as to why the British museum should be able to profit individually off these artefacts if they do not really belong to them. However, personally, I would like to know why the Greeks have taken so long to request the return of these precious historical friezes and if the Elgin marbles are returned then how many other features of the British museum like the Rosetta Stone will also have to be returned.

Section B – Extended responses

Students were required to answer one question from three alternatives provided. Each question was allocated 20 marks. However, the marks for each question were broken down into two parts requiring students to discuss two artists and their work. Students who chose to discuss one artist only could not score higher than 10 marks.

The questions required students to demonstrate:

- an understanding of the effect of materials, techniques and work environments on artistic practices
- an understanding of the methods used by artists to develop distinctive styles and approaches to their subject matter
- a comprehensive and informed discussion of the influence of other artists on particular artists' style
- a knowledgeable discussion of how particular artists have influenced chosen artists' style
- a clear link between influences of other artists and how this is evidenced in selected artists discussed
- an understanding of the ways that changing materials and techniques have affected the artistic practices of artists studied
- a clear explanation of examples using relevant vocabulary and terminology

- coherent and specific responses using names and terms correctly
- a range of appropriate and relevant examples related specifically to the issues raised in the question
- an ability to discuss two artists and their artworks with the same degree of depth
- a capacity to provide personal interpretations and opinions that reflect knowledge of artists' work.

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Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
41 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne 3002

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