

GENERAL COMMENTS

The performance of the 2002 students represented an overall improvement on the cohort of 2001.

The 2002 examination consisted of two equally weighted sections. Section A asked students to provide short answers to a series of previously unseen art works and commentaries. Section B required students to write one extended response selected from a choice of questions.

Students should read each question carefully to ensure they understand what it is asking and that they cover all aspects of the question. This means students will be less likely to miss out on marks that they might otherwise be able to attain. For example, Section A Question 1 asked students to compare any two of the four artworks illustrated. Students needed, therefore, to actually compare the two chosen artworks, and not simply to interpret them as two separate and unrelated pieces.

The marking allocations for each question provide an indication of the requirements of each question. For the same question, i.e. Section A Question 1, those students who discussed only one of the artworks could only receive a maximum of half of the marks allocated.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Direct excerpts from student responses reproduced here have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information..

Section A – Short-answer responses

Question 1

Line

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	16	45	38	2.18

Space

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	21	44	33	2.08

This was generally well answered with most students responding with clarity and conciseness. They also understood the requirement to discuss the artworks in terms of both line and space. More successful responses tended to link the interpretation of the two artworks together as a true comparison, while less successful responses tended to write two separate and unrelated passages that simply described the artworks rather than interpreting them in terms of the two formal elements.

Students achieving high marks for this question effectively compared the chosen examples. They used ‘telling’ comparative details in order to draw out key differences and similarities between the two selected artworks. They also demonstrated a capacity to analyse formal elements using relevant vocabulary and art terms where appropriate. Less successful responses presented a more generalised and/or unfocused comparison of the chosen examples. Points for comparison were not as well selected and did not draw out as effectively key distinctions and similarities between the two selected artworks. Low-scoring responses presented vague, generalised responses with limited comparison of obvious formal qualities and little analysis of the works chosen.

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

The student compared artworks (C) *The Gate Beyond the Gate* (Jan Senbergs) and (D) *Ngak Ngak* (Ginger Riley) in terms of **line**:

Example C uses line as one of the formal elements to unify this piece. The piece has been divided into many geometric shapes and line is used to create defined spaces and also to create texture. The lines are precise, straight and thin, positioned repetively close to each other to create a sense of rytham and pattern. Example D, however uses line in a more organic and liberated fashion. Thick painted white lines outline contours of the lanscape and lead the eye around the various sections of the piece ...

Question 2

a

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	6	17	34	27	14	3.22

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	8	20	30	25	14	3.07

This was generally better handled than last year, although there is still scope for further improvement. The trend remained for visual analysis, followed by symbolism, to be used as the two most popular interpretive frameworks for this question.

Students achieving high marks for this question presented an informed discussion of one or two interpretive frameworks (depending on whether they elected to write on either 2a) or 2b). Their responses demonstrated an understanding of the basic principles and approaches involved in the interpretive frameworks chosen and they were then able to apply these effectively to the interpretation of previously unseen art works. A critical and often creative and personal response to the work/s selected was another common feature of responses of this kind.

Less successful responses tended towards a more generalised and unfocused discussion of one or two interpretive frameworks. These responses often experienced difficulties in applying the chosen frameworks effectively to the interpretation of previously unseen artworks. Low-scoring responses presented a vague and uncritical response which struggled to identify interpretive frameworks and then to apply these to the interpretation of one or two unseen art works.

A useful distinction to consider when answering this question is the importance of understanding the difference between active interpretation as opposed to a less effective and more passive description of an artwork. A less successful, passive description of Question 2, no. 3, for example, would simply describe the artwork by noting that it shows a fisherman and his family trying to catch fish. A more successful and more active interpretation of the artwork, by contrast, might point out that the restricted range of cool colours and the yellow water and brown land might symbolise the unchanging harshness of this family's lives. It might also note, in terms of visual analysis, that the figures are linked together by strong diagonal lines that are created by the position of the boat and the line of the water's edge behind the fisherman and his wife.

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

The student discussed the artwork *One Million Kingdoms* (Pierre Huyghe), still from a colour video projection, 2001 in terms of the following interpretative frameworks:

- visual analysis
- symbolism.

The following excerpt involved the application of the visual analysis interpretative framework:

Huyghe emphasises the futuristic stylisation of his piece through the clean structural lines of the background's rocks which juxtapose in terms of colour to the glowing lines of the green girl. The infinite blackness of the pieces first layer implies a stillness which matches the static quality of the figure of the girl ... The still adopts a limited colour scheme, true static black and grey functioning to push the brightness of the green glow. There is an undeniable sense of light in this piece, the viewer noticing a source of the girl's left as those rocks shine brighter than those on the right. The light of this and the girl's glow is, however, juxtaposed with the darkness of the grey which ultimately balances the piece visually.

The following excerpt involved the application of the symbolism interpretative framework:

The still suggests an emptiness and despair through the deep and endless sky and the girls expressive eyes. The stillness of the piece, created through highly stylised linework and the boldly empty sky, brings a mood of soundlessness. Other than the hum of the girl's electric outline, this land is devoid of noise and made barren therefore. The glowing edge of the girl also implies some idea of the ephemeral which enhances the sense of despair as the viewer realises that this girl may fade and flicker out leaving only a desolate land of ominous stone figures and a soundless sky. There is, however, a subtle hint of hope as the viewer is attracted to the still's left side noticing the suggestion of light ...

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	1	1	3	6	11	20	22	20	11	5	5.73

Responses to this question were generally very good. The question gave students the opportunity to express their own, often-passionate feelings about the meanings and purpose of art. This also helped most students to articulate a personal response and elaborate on the issues raised in the commentaries.

Students achieving high marks for this question perceptively discussed the issues raised by the artwork and its commentaries. They identified different points of view expressed in the commentaries and engaged with them critically in order to advance a clear and personal point of view about the artwork. They also supplemented these with effective reference to the artwork itself.

Less successful responses tended towards a more generalised discussion which did not use the commentaries in as much detail, or as effectively, to back up a clear point of view. A common feature of these responses was to present summaries of the commentaries rather than critical discussions of the issues raised about the artwork and whether or not it should be exhibited. Low-scoring responses often presented an unfocused and only generalised discussion which referred to the commentaries either superficially or not at all.

A useful distinction to consider when answering this question is the importance of understanding the difference between actively engaging with the issues raised in commentaries about an artwork as opposed to a less effective response that more passively summarises the points raised in commentaries. More successful responses tended to extend on the ideas raised in the commentaries rather than just to repeat them. Commentary 2, for example, noted that ‘you don’t go to a gallery to see knitted socks hanging alongside paintings’. A stronger response might have pointed out that many public galleries do (today) collect and display fashion. So the sentiments expressed in commentary 2 are out of touch and reflect the narrowness of this commentator’s understanding of what an artwork can be.

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

I disagree with the proposal and feels that this tattoo should not be positioned in the gallery.

This is not a practical idea. People indulge in, and surround themselves with their own creative expression every day – that is human nature, however only a select few forms of artistic expression are ever offered for public viewing in a gallery. This is because chosen works are suited to this medium and have something to offer the general public. I disagree with Commentary 2 who states that “a tattoo is not art anyway”. I feel that this is art, however this does not constitute its right to a place in a gallery. This, by no means undermines the quality and sincerity of creative expression of the “lady with tattoo”, however these qualities are not judged by the whether or not an artwork is installed in a gallery. The artist states “My body is a temple and I have chosen to decorate it with my own symbols of courage, honor and endurance”. The general public will not intuitively understand these “personal symbols” nor will they have a beautiful piece of artwork to view in ignorance.

I feel that this level of personal expression should remain purely “personal expression”. The artist is confident about her work, so she should not feel that the rejection by a gallery which is purely a means of display, is a criticism of her art, but simple a measure of appropriateness ...

Section B – Extended responses

(Average mark 14.97/Available marks 25)

Each of the two extended-response questions in Section B was worth a total of 25 marks. About 64 per cent of students attempted Question 4. This score was arrived at from a total of 12 and 13 marks allocated for each of the two bullet point requirements in each question. Students answering only one of the two bullet points in Section B Question 1 or Question 2 were unable to score higher than the total mark allocation for that requirement. Students would benefit, therefore, from being reminded of the importance of attempting all requirements in the examination.

Question 4

Required students to use interpretive frameworks to interpret the formal qualities and content of at least one artwork produced before 1970 and at least one artwork produced after 1970. A perceptive and well-informed detailed analysis of the artworks was assessed as a high-standard response to this question. Lower-scoring responses tended to analyse the artworks in more general terms and without as much detailed understanding of interpretive frameworks. Students who made it clear what artworks were being referred to and when the artworks were produced, ensured that a distinction was being maintained between pre and post-1970. Such an approach was especially necessary for artists working across the 1970 time divide.

Question 4 read:

Discuss at least one artwork produced before 1970 and at least one artwork produced after 1970 that you have studied this year in terms of

- one or more of the following interpretative frameworks: visual analysis, style or technique
- and**
- one or more of the following interpretative frameworks: historical context, symbolism or other interpretative frameworks (such as feminism, psychoanalysis, political perspectives).

The following is an excerpt from a response where the student achieved a high mark for Question 4:

In 1942, Melbourne artist and member of the ‘Angry Penguins’, Sydney Nolan was drafted into the army and sent to work in the Wimmera. It was here he first encountered the landscape and with fresh eyes, produced a series to its name, capturing the sparseness of the vast flaxen wheat fields and intensity of the brassy sun, rediscovering the Australian landscape with an innocence and intelligence, depicting it in a truely Modernist style. At the beginning of the 1980s, Australian landscape art was reborn again, this time under a new definition, not only new way of depicting it. Howard Arkley created his post-modernist works with explosive colour and dynamic, amalgamating styles, claiming middle-class suburbia and lifestyle as a more appropriate representation of the Australian land ...

Nolan painted ‘Train Wimmera’ in 1942 with ripolin on cardboard. The image depicts the country side of the Wimmera, the gold sunburnt fields griding up the picture, a dull sky overhead. Faint green trees scatter the horizen line to the left, near a house and windmill. A road divides the canvas asymmetrically, whilst a train cut through it and along the fields, making its way up the canvas dominating out of proportion to all else in the frame. The analogous colour theme is earthy and dull: browning fields; grey road, house and windmill, neutrally hued sky; and dim tress, giving a pervading intensity on nature, its solitude and vastness, yet there is

also a focus on the imposition of man in the isolated space, moving into a new age. There is a strong sense of naivete throughout this series, which captures the ‘innocence of the eye’ so the art can then register a sense of immediacy of human experience ...

Arkley created ‘Nubrick’ in 1966, with acrylic on canvas, applied with the airbrush. The image is tightly cropped giving it a cinematic feel, arguably a post-modernist approach. The houses are dramatically cut off on either side of the image, showing only the edges of walls and the beginning of a pattern of bricks. A darkly tarred road lies in the centre of the image, sharply meeting another in the near distance, before confronted with façade of houses in the background looking like props as the sky shines through them. It is as if a camera were panning across a neighbourhood scene, voyeuristically searching for signs of life before pausing at this eerie close-up. ‘Nubrick’ emphasises the landscape nature of the environs, focussing on the linear format of the suburban plane ...

Arkley’s works both use strong black or brown outlines to define the objects, putting a clear emphasis on the object as a form. The paintings are characteristic of 1970s American pop art: the unrealistic, highly saturated colours; their comic-book – like nature; the dramatic outlines and simplification of form; and the ‘zooming-in’ quality reminiscent of a Liechtenstein but without the dots. The use of the airbrush, if appropriated, was done so from his own environment. The 80s and 90s graffiti boom that swept through Melbourne obscuring Arkley at the time. This urban applicator, only strengthened to emphasise his intention of depicting the local environment in which we live ...

Question 5

This question required students to discuss artworks produced by at least two artists in terms of their meanings and messages. Students who were able to identify and discuss ideas, issues and/or arguments as expressed in commentaries on the chosen artworks and who were then able to draw on these ideas in their application of at least two interpretive frameworks to interpret the artworks were best able to respond to this question. Answers of this type were also able to express personal points of view about their chosen artworks.

The commentaries aspect of this question was generally better handled than last year, although there is still scope for further improvement. Students were required to identify specific commentaries and to discuss the ideas, issues and/or arguments they raised about the chosen artworks. The importance of different opinions about art as expressed in different commentaries should continue to be emphasised in teaching VCE Art. It is also important for students to clearly identify their use of commentaries in responses to questions of this kind. Students’ ability to recall specific publication details of commentaries is not a key consideration in the examination. Rather students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the different points of view about art that are expressed in varying comments on it. As was noted in the February 2000 *VCE Bulletin*, commentaries on art can include published commentaries in newspapers, periodicals, journals, Internet sites, exhibition catalogues or monographs by art critics/historians together with other transcript commentaries such as lectures, class debates, museum guides and wall text, radio, TV and film documentaries.