

2015 VCE Art examination report

General comments

The VCE Art examination is based on content from the *VCE Art Study Design 2010–2016*. This report should be read in conjunction with the study design, the 2015 VCE Art examination and the examination assessment criteria.

The following criteria are used in context to assess the Art examination paper.

- understanding and appropriate use of art language and vocabulary
- knowledge of artists and interpretation of artworks made before and after 1970
- knowledge of a range of relevant resources used to support the interpretation of artworks
- comparing and contrasting the meanings and messages of artworks produced before 1970 with artworks produced since 1970
- understanding and applying all analytical frameworks to the analysis of artworks
- analysis of artworks to comment on their messages and meanings
- ability to develop a personal point of view on ideas and issues about art
- ability to discuss and debate issues with the use of supporting evidence; reference to the different points of view and opinions expressed in commentaries on art and relevant aspects of the analytical frameworks

The examination assessment criteria can be found in the VCE Art examination specifications on the VCAA website. It is highly recommended that students and teachers read the sample examination and previous examinations carefully, paying particular attention to examination advice and specifications.

Students need to have a comprehensive understanding of all analytical frameworks in order to respond well to the examination. Students should practise applying the analytical frameworks to a range of unseen and studied historical and contemporary artworks throughout the year. The rationale, key knowledge and key skills help to unpack each of the outcomes students complete during Units 3 and 4.

It was essential that students be able to demonstrate their knowledge of the artists and artworks studied during the year without relying on prepared essays to answer any of the questions. Many responses used a range of artists and artworks, demonstrating that students were well prepared for the examination.

Reading time in any examination is very important. Students need to actively engage with the examination during this time by reading and then re-reading the paper carefully, including the insert, and noting relevant instructions. Some students did not read every question carefully and missed important instructions. Students might like to highlight key terms or instructions before they commence answering each question; this can be a good reminder of the important aspects of the question.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding errors resulting in a total less than 100 per cent.

Section A

This section required students to apply key knowledge and skills to answer questions on unseen stimulus material.

It should be noted that not all art forms are represented in these types of theoretical questions, so it is advisable that students prepare themselves by accessing artworks that are produced utilising a range of different art forms. This section consisted of short-answer questions and assessed the theoretical understanding of key knowledge and skills in Units 3 and 4. These questions did not require responses with great breadth and depth of analysis, but rather a focused application of the student's understanding of key concepts such as the elements and principles of art, style or subject matter and how these convey meanings and messages.

Questions 1 and 2

In Questions 1 and 2 students were asked to discuss how tone and form were used as formal elements in the artworks. Overall, students responded confidently and demonstrated a good capacity to discuss how these formal elements were used in the artworks; however, tone was responded to more confidently than form. Some students tended to merely describe the formal elements rather than discuss how the artist had used them. It was clear in high-scoring responses to both questions that most students had a well-developed understanding of and the vocabulary needed to explain the use of the formal elements and could apply these to unseen artworks. Well-chosen adjectives were useful to link the art elements with the design principles to advance the student's response.

Students discussed the artist's use of the formal element of tone, often scoring well by using terminology such as 'lighter', 'darker', 'contrast', 'emphasis', 'depth', 'ground' and 'gradient' in reference to the composition. In response to discussing the formal element of form, students used terms such as 'symmetrical', 'perforated', 'apparent frailty' and 'hollowness' or 'solidity' to convey a sense of volume and mass.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	14	43	40	2.2

Artwork presented

Jim Nong, *Prune Tree Buds*, ink on paper, 25.4 × 29.8 cm, 1757

Low-scoring responses tended to superficially address the artist's use of the formal element. Students were given marks for using language relating to tone in their response, yet needed to apply this with specific references to the artwork. It was not necessary for students to restate the artist's name and title of the artwork in their answer. This uses up valuable time and writing space. Students should also be wary of writing too much. The answer space provided and the marks allocated to a question should be used as a guide to the required length of the response.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response.

A sense of tone is informed by the areas of concentrated ink that dissolve into more watered down areas, suggesting light. The tonal variations give forms a sense of three-dimensionality, imbuing the work with a degree of depth, and giving the curves of the trunk of the tree a visible roundness. The light tones that emanate from the sun in the upper right provide a contrast with areas with an absence of tone such as the negative space around the tree and the sun itself, establishing these areas as being characterised by light.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	26	39	27	1.9

Artwork presented

Michael Eden, *The Wedgwoodn't Tureen – Tall Pink Round*, three-dimensional printing from plaster/polymer material with unique, non-fired ceramic coating, 40 cm (height), 28 cm (diameter), 2009

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response.

Eden constructs a somewhat porous and brittle form composed of an array of distorted circular holes to imply fragility. The tactile nature of the form is emphasised in its uneven textures and consistency, countered by the overall curved and rounded nature of the sculpture.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	1	3	8	16	24	21	14	8	5.1

Artworks presented

William Hogarth, *The Painter and his Pug* [self-portrait with dog], oil on canvas, 90 × 69.9 cm, 1745
Petrina Hicks, *Jackson and Tiger*, lightjet print, 85.5 × 80 cm, 2005

In this question students were asked to compare the meanings and messages of the artworks. 'When the Analytical Frameworks are applied collectively to interpret and analyse an artwork, students learn to appreciate how an artwork may contain a number of different aspects and layers of meaning' (*VCE Art Study Design*, page 12). Students should consider the following: What are the stylistic qualities of the artwork and how do they contribute to meaning? What physical aspects or presentation of the artwork contains symbolic meaning and use of a metaphor? This may

include the use of formal art elements, the compositional arrangement of figures or objects, the medium or technique used by the artist, or the style in which the work is created.

High-scoring responses sustained an insightful comparison throughout their answers and used many comparative words such as 'compared to', 'whereas', 'in contrast to', 'comparatively', 'conversely', 'however' and 'contrary to'. High-scoring responses explained meanings and messages by citing symbolism and technique; for example:

A flash of teeth is also seen in Hick's photograph, as the small dog's facade of innocence is disrupted by the gleaming white tooth; a reminder that the dog is loyal to the boy, and will protect him if need be.

Students needed to ensure that they compared the two artworks and avoid simply listing their interpretation of the artworks by writing about one artwork and then the other separately. Many students simply gave a visual analysis of both artworks without presenting an understanding of potential meanings and messages.

The following excerpt is from a high-scoring response.

While Hogarth's painting from 1745 as likely a portrait to show his assets and riches to those who viewed the work, Hick's is in the style of a family portrait that is likely to be displayed as a reminder of love and closeness in the family. This can be seen through the positioning of the boy and his dog, and how they are in an embrace suggesting comfort. Hogarth's on the other hand depicts a painting of himself next to the pug, suggesting that there is less of a closeness there - perhaps the separation between dimensions even symbolises a barrier between them. Hick's artwork is also far more casual and possibly even satirical - the boy pulls the dog's lip up feigning a growl, perhaps a joke among the family (e.g a small, unintimidating dog pretending to be frightening). Hogarth's however is serious in nature, showing the dog as benign, perhaps even submissive to him - seen through the apathetic expression and meek pose suggesting benevolence.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
%	2	1	2	5	10	14	15	14	11	13	8	5	6.6

Artwork presented

Art museum installation view: Henry Moore, *Standing Figure*, bronze, 221 cm (height), 1950
 Outdoor installation view: Henry Moore, *Standing Figure*, bronze, 221 cm (height), 1950

This question required students to compare how the display of the same two artworks by Henry Moore affects how they are interpreted. Students responded well to the images and were able to confidently discuss both artworks by referencing the changing conditions of the weather and the viewer's position within the landscape compared to the more consistent conditions a viewer would experience when seeing the work in a gallery space.

High-scoring responses cited evidence within the images to support their own interpretation of the experience of the viewer. Some students did not make enough use of the images or follow the instructions of the question, thus compromising the overall quality of the answer.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Viewing such a piece in the closed space of a museum elicit a sense of awe within me, as the solid, dead structure appears bigger and perhaps more divine, having been placed on a pedestal. This contrasts with the gentler structure of image 2, which, when surrounded by the organic forms of rocks, trees and hills, seems to embody these qualities itself. Surrounded by the vastness of the outdoors, the artwork becomes smaller, less threatening, and its bulging

joints and stretched arms become more human-like. There is also a vulnerability now, as I feel liberated in that I may now touch and interact with the piece myself, as nature and weather can now begin rusting and degrading the structure. In the museum, ‘Standing Figure’ is tall and intimidating, its bronze tones contrasting with the white walls, creating an alien like structure, whereas viewing the piece outdoors renders it as if it were living and part of a shared landscape.

Section B

This section required students to respond to the written and/or visual stimulus provided on the examination paper and assessed students' ability to analyse and interpret artworks and commentaries.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	4	1	1	2	3	5	8	13	11	15	13	7	4	6	4	4	8.5

Artworks presented

Artwork 1: JM Crossland, *Nannultera, a young cricketer of the Natives' Training Institution, Poonindie*, oil on canvas, 99 x 78.8 cm, 1854

Artwork 2: Christian Thompson, Untitled, from the series ‘Emotional Striptease’ [self-portrait], Pegasus print colour photograph, 107 x 95 cm, 2003

Students were required to apply the cultural analytical framework to discuss the different ways in which the two artists had responded to the depiction of identity in art. They were also required to reference both the illustrations and commentaries. There were several elements to be addressed and students needed to cover all requirements of the question.

Many students responded well to the cultural analytical framework. They were able to advance their discussion with reference to the commentaries but struggled to apply this equally to each artwork. Furthermore, some students neglected to focus their discussion on the depiction of identity in the artworks selected. Low-scoring responses relied heavily on the commentaries and grappled with interpreting the work beyond merely describing it or simply restating the commentaries.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Crossland’s portrait depicts an Aboriginal man caught in the unforgiving crossfire of British colonisation. This attempt in “civilising” the Aboriginal residents does not appear favourable nor accomplished, but instead seems oppressive and forceful. The man’s stiff pose imbues an unnatural feeling about his stance, as if he is acting rather than doing. It reflects the cultural disharmony of the time. The British were too arrogant in their beliefs, “forcing their European manners and dress” on to undeserving Indigenous people. The portrait of the man is in context of the vast natural environment, in which his unsuitably dressed appearance appears out of place and absurd. His “sad expression” reflects the torment experienced by his people and culture as well as the Western lifestyle was literally enforced on them, suffocating and oppressing their freedom and cultural identity. This cultural beauty is reignited in the modern work of Thompson however. The revolutionary red and black of the background elude to the aggression and passion of the Indigenous culture. The European “ruff collar around his neck” that strangles him for now is challenged by his “forceful expression” demonstrating how “he is strong and capable”. He does not hold a cricket bat, a symbol for English identity, but rather a boomerang, a symbol for Indigenous power and hunting. Thompson does not conform to the concept of not being “fully accepted” by the “imposed identity” of the colonial lifestyle, but instead he appears ready to retaliate and to restore the lost identity in a “contemporary society”.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	7	1	1	4	11	17	13	15	13	10	9	6

Artwork presented

Olafur Eliasson, *Riverbed*, water, blue basalt, wood, steel, foil, hose, pumps, cooling unit; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, dimensions variable, 2014

Students were required to write a response to be published in a new art journal. Students were also required to refer to the work illustrated and to the ideas raised in at least one of the three commentaries. Many students argued in favour of commentaries 1 and 3 and explored the relationship between the artist, museum and the viewer.

High-scoring responses referred to at least one commentary and the image of the artwork and engaged with them well to present a clear and compelling justification for their opinion. However, low-scoring responses simply reworded the commentaries rather than analysing the content and engaging with it.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response.

Eliasson's contemporary installation at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art challenges the very meaning of both modern art and a museum space in a very daring and unique manner. The atmosphere of the museum is literally walked over through the art work. As it "questions the meaning and experience of the museum itself" (Quddus). The highly tangible work mimics the environment in a hyper realistic manner yet some question "why is it so clean?" as being the contemporary piece it is, Eliasson could have made a statement on "the pollution of the world's rivers" and other "ecological crises". Enclosed within white museum walls, the earthy and rugged terrain creates tension "between the artist, building and viewer" (Quddus) in a way that some consider quite "disorientating". The highly conceptual piece of work challenges the very nature of art and the expectation to "look but not touch" especially with regards to its site-specific installation at a museum of art. This work is truly challenging and expressive, through its odd invitation to viewer "intervention".

Section C

This section gave students the opportunity to provide extended responses to two questions. In Question 7, students had to discuss a statement with reference to analytical frameworks and one artwork they had studied during the year. In Question 8 students had to discuss their viewpoint about an art issue they had studied during the year. Students were also required to reference at least one artwork and two different viewpoints expressed in commentaries.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Average
%	6	1	1	3	4	6	7	11	10	10	13	10	8	10	8.1

High-scoring responses addressed all parts of the question: the statement, two frameworks and one artwork. Students who did this used two analytical frameworks to discuss the statement 'An artwork may contain a number of different aspects and layers of meaning', in reference to one artwork. This question gave students the opportunity to apply their knowledge of one selected artist and artwork from Unit 3. The student could choose either a pre- or post-1970 artwork to successfully answer this question.

Students were clearly passionate about their selected artwork, showing clear evidence they had studied carefully throughout the year and practised applying a range of analytical frameworks to interpret meanings and messages. Students demonstrated that they were able to write confidently using two analytical frameworks; the formal and personal frameworks were popular choices. It is important that students address each part of the formal framework in their answer. At times, students would respond well to the visual analysis, yet neglect the artist's technique and style.

Some students ignored the requirements of the question and gave prepared responses, therefore not meeting the assessment criteria. Low-scoring responses demonstrated difficulty in identifying the analytical framework they were using or nominated one framework yet their answer suggested a different analytical framework.

The following example is of a high-scoring response to Question 7.

Name of artist: Julie Rrap

Title of artwork and approximate date: *Puberty* (1984)

Analytical framework 1: Formal

Julie Rrap is a contemporary Australian artist; her work 'Puberty' (1984) is an appropriation and recontextualisation of Edvard Munch's work of the same title (1894). Both depict a naked female figure gazing directly at the viewer - however, while Munch's work aims to sexualise the figure, Rrap attempts to change this archetypal objectified view of women in art history, showing how this artwork contains layers of meaning and could easily be interpreted differently (different aspects). The work is in the form of a cibachrome print of a collage: the photographed female figure crosses her arms over her lap in a protective manner and is cut into horizontal strips and displaced to the left and right. The painted background is comprised of a blue irregular shape, while the surrounding space is black.

Rrap's contemporary work is reminiscent of Cubism; figurative but semi abstracted. By fragmenting the female figure, she deprives the image of seductiveness, averting the voyeuristic male's gaze. She also adds vitality and energy to the work through technique: her broad and agitated brushstrokes of the background associates the female figure with strength rather than depicting her shy and awkward as was done in Munch's work.

Rather than Munch's original dark and earthy palette, she also implements a brightly coloured background - vivid yellow and deep blue. The achromatic figure contrast against this, creating a focal point around the main symbolic aspect of the work, as Rrap attempts to create a more subjective view of the female.

Analytical framework 2: Personal

Julie Rrap's work demonstrates different aspects and layers of meanings by adding insight to her life and personal experiences. Rrap is a feminist, having 'attended student demonstrations in the 1960's...which attuned her to the concerns of the women's movement' (Victoria L). Her series 'Persona and Shadow' in which 'Puberty' featured was created in response to 'an exhibition - Zeitgeist - Rrap saw in Berlin in 1983...[it] contained the work of only one female artist' (Victoria L) which inspired her to create art that better represented women.

In her artwork, she uses a photograph of herself which symbolises taking control of her own body and exemplifying her feminist views (a main characteristic of feminism being taking control of one's own life). Her work symbolises to me that modern society in which we live, and how it constantly sees advances in equality. Her work furthers equality between the sexes.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	8	2	4	4	4	8	12	10	7	10	14	8	9	7

Most students responded well to this question; however, some students presented a prepared answer and did not meet the requirements of the question. There were key components to this question and all needed to be addressed to score highly. Students who clearly articulated the art issue for discussion at the outset were able to fully address the question.

High-scoring responses discussed the student's viewpoint of the art issue and measured this against two informed and different points of view expressed in commentaries. They effectively evaluated the artwork in relation to the art issue and presented an articulate response.

Some responses to this question used commentaries that were anonymous or from unreliable sources. It is important for students to attribute their commentaries from reliable, recognised and relevant sources. Some students struggled to apply what they had studied in Unit 4 to the question and were unable to make a stance or present a viewpoint on the issue.

It still remains clear that there is a lack of clarity regarding what an art issue entails. An art issue must have at least two clear different points of view and be supported by attributed commentaries and artworks. The student should be able to apply the relevant aspects of the analytical frameworks to enhance their debate and discussion, and clearly present their own viewpoint. Additionally, the study requires students to analyse their own viewpoint as well as that of others and link their thinking to a broader conceptual understanding, including the role of art in society. Teachers and students should refer to the Unit outline on page 25 of the study design to seek clarification of the requirements of this aspect of the study.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Art issue that you have studied: 'political, cultural and social dissension has a place in art'

Name of artist(s): Ai Weiwei

Title(s) of artwork(s) and approximate date(s): *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* 1995

It is the role of the artist to challenge fixed perceptual attitudes within society, exploring the realms of dissension and censorship. William S. Burroughs described artists as the "real architects of change"; artists orchestrate change in the way they push viewers to question political and social norms. Such a notion is epitomised in contemporary artist Ai Weiwei. Weiwei's artwork serves as a poignant critique of personal past and present political and cultural heritage. Weiwei's work is somewhat crude and condemnatory, yet as he surmised, "there is a responsibility of any artist to protect freedom of expression", otherwise artists would become mere technical conformists barred from responding to the world around them. This translates to his provocative performance piece entitled 'Dropping the Han Dynasty Urn', whereby the artist is depicted shattering a traditional Chinese urn dating back thousands of years. Yet Weiwei is utterly devoid of remorse, as if the relic had absolutely no cultural vitality. Such artwork is a blatant disparagement of his country's political foundations and is further indicative of the role of destruction; it redefines art and culture and paves the way for new customs. Perhaps the overarching call for censorship is a protest against profanity and obscenity, yet Weiwei's art is neither profane or obscene; it merely challenges dogmatic political beliefs which has labelled him a "deviant" and "plagiarist" by his own government. As art critic Adrian Searle stated, Weiwei "brings to this language something crucial and acute", he combines unique art forms such as installation and performance which lend themselves to contradicting traditional order of art and society. This is evidenced in the destructive nature of 'Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn', whereby the artist is somewhat promoting dissent and alluding to the power of individuals to incite change. Professor Murray Edelman stated, "art should be recognised as a major and integral

part of the transaction that engenders political behaviour"; dissension in art serves to stimulate change and broadens the perspectives of individuals, therefore it should be considered an absolute necessity rather than promoting its censorship.