



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2009 Art examination paper was well received and generally the responses were good. The overall standard of responses in 2009 was markedly better than in previous years. More students made serious attempts to respond to a variety of questions, and accurately followed the directions given in the instructions. Students seemed to be better at reading and following the instructions carefully.

The examination criteria for the 2009 end-of-year examination were defined as:

- understanding of interpretive frameworks in the analysis of artworks
- application of interpretive frameworks used in the analysis of artworks
- understanding of ideas, issues and/or arguments expressed in commentaries on art
- knowledge of artists and/or artworks from, before and since 1970
- application of skills and knowledge in the analysis of artworks to support the presentation of points of view about the meanings and messages of artworks
- analysis of artworks to comment on their meanings and messages
- understanding and appropriate use of art terms and vocabulary.

Areas of strength

- Art terminology was more competently applied, showing that the key knowledge and key skills in the study design had been clearly understood.
- There was evidence that more students had a good understanding of the material they had studied and were thus able to use that knowledge to address the questions accurately.
- Some students used the artwork captions to support and consolidate their response.
- In general, students prepared well and approached the examination with confidence. Responses to the questions in Section B showed that many students had developed a mature and perceptive understanding of the topics they had researched.
- In Section B students who nominated artists, titles and dates of work as required were advantaged. This clearly indicated what the student was writing about.
- Students seemed to have a better understanding of the conventions for using an artist's surname only in the body of an essay, rather than using their first name.

Areas of weakness

- Many students were strongly disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge of basic art terminology. Students should learn, understand and apply the elements and principles that are consistent with the current *VCE Art Study Design*. Information to support the use of appropriate terminology, including references to formal elements and principles under the Formal Framework, is on pages 12 and 13 of the new *VCE Art Study Design 2010–2014*.
- Students should **not** write in pencil and must ensure that their handwriting is legible.
- Students should use reading time very carefully. During this time students should choose the questions they will respond to and decide how they will address them. Students should ensure that they understand what each question is asking them to do.
- Many students did not use the captions of the artworks and missed the opportunity to use the information they contained, such as the title, medium, size and dates. In Question 1 it was not necessary to **rewrite** the caption provided.
- Many students indicated that they had no knowledge of the media used to make the artworks illustrated on the paper – that is, the artwork plate itself was identified as being the artwork.
- Some responses were not awarded any marks as they did not answer the question.
- Some students modified the set question to suit themselves. This was particularly evident in both parts of Question 2 where students did not follow the instructions as given. Students who crossed out 'formal interpretation' and replaced it with a framework of their own choice **received no marks** for that part of the question. Similarly, students who discussed a different artwork for the second part of the question **were not awarded any marks**.
- There still seemed to be some formulaic essays. Learned responses do not necessarily answer the question being asked.
- Some responses to Questions 4 and 5 appeared to have been pre-prepared and were not appropriate to the questions.



From 2010, the list of frameworks will be Analytical Frameworks:

- Formal Framework
- Personal Framework
- Cultural Framework
- Contemporary Framework.

The Analytical Frameworks are defined on pages 12–14 of the *VCE Art Study Design 2010–2014*.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

Section A

Students who scored well in this section applied adequate knowledge of the formal elements to the selected artworks and made strong use of appropriate comparisons. Some students struggled to identify, understand and apply appropriate frameworks when making their selections from the images offered. Students appeared to have a poor understanding of the meanings and limits of these frameworks, and tended to apply them to a definition of their choice. Many students wasted time and space by repeating the information given with the images without providing the appropriate context.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	3	15	18	25	20	18	4

- Illustration A: J M W Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her Last Berth to be broken up*
- Illustration B: Dorrit Black, *The Bridge*
- Illustration C: Edgar Degas, *Dancer Looking at the Sole of Her Right Foot*
- Illustration D: Jenny Orchard, *Nadzikambe Woman*

The most popular choices for Shape were Illustrations B and D, and for Movement, Illustrations A and C.

Many students did not gain full marks because they did not make any comparisons. In these cases, descriptions of the works replaced any comparisons. Students who wrote on only one artwork for each of the two formal elements did not gain any marks because their responses lacked the comparison required by the question.

Many students spent too much time on this question. The mark(s) allocated indicates the weighting of the question and should have given students an idea of the amount of information required in their response. Responses should have been short and direct. Students who wrote lengthy responses and included unnecessary descriptions and appreciations of the work were not advantaged. Overly long responses used up valuable time that could have been better applied to later questions.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses to Question 1.

Shape

Sample 1 – Artworks B and D

The use of shape in D is very solid and well defined. Physical shapes are created through the geometric use of cones, cylinders and cubes, combined to create the work. Less obvious shapes are used in B to compose the painting. Bold geometric shapes of squares and triangles are used in physical structures in B to create contrast against the free flowing, soft shapes created in the clouds and trees. The repetition of shapes in D allows the sculpture to balance and have visual harmony whereas the shapes in B are irregular and create a chaotic unrest.

Sample 2 – Artworks A and B

Although in A the artist utilises shape as a means to imitate reality, in B the shapes have been distorted and somewhat simplified to create a more abstract, disfigured subject. In both artworks the shapes depict objects from nature and reality, yet in A they convey an air of realism. The outlines of the shape are not particularly defined and almost fade into the background. In B the shapes are more geometric, solid and defined and certainly more stylised. The lack of tone renders the shapes flat and unrealistic.

Movement

Artworks A and C



C has used movement in the delicacy of the dancer's body. The sculpture, like a life drawing, suggests movement through the bends in the figure's limbs. Similarly in A, movement is used to show the bends and breaks in the water as the boats pass through. Movement is simulated through the white caps of the water surrounding the moving boat. The suggested left arm of the dancer in C suggests that movement could continue into the negative space if the dancer were able to evolve and rotate. The curvature of her body depicts her actions and the lack of balance suggest a need for movement. Where the movement in C seems sharp and unbalanced, A creates a soft flow of movement through the water's soft texture.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	3	7	9	12	14	14	13	11	8	7	5.6

Many students did not seem to know what the 'frameworks' meant, or how they might be applied to an understanding of the artworks. Students are encouraged to read pages 12–14 of the new *VCE Art Study Design 2010–2014* for the definitions of the frameworks. These definitions should be discussed in class so that students have a common understanding of their meaning, and what is required and acceptable.

Students need to take care with the application of the Formal interpretation framework. Too often there was a description of the work – that is, a list of what the work contained – rather than an analysis using the elements and principles of design and how they contributed to the work.

Sometimes students' interpretations of the frameworks were confused. Many students named a framework which they then did not apply appropriately. As the artworks are generally unfamiliar, the student's analysis of them depends on their understanding of the framework.

Two frameworks were given in the 2009 examination. Many students ignored the instructions on the examination and substituted frameworks of their choice for the given frameworks. Others used **two** different artworks when the requirements specifically stated that only **one** artwork was to be discussed. A formal interpretation was required, as well as the application of a second framework of choice to the same artwork.

The following excerpts are good examples of the enhanced understanding of previously unseen artworks through the competent application of the required frameworks.

Formal – Viktor Koen, *Damsel No. 15*

This print depicts a female in the traditional armour of a war fighter in the middle ages. Clad in armour, the woman's face is showing through the suggestion of a helmet. The cold iron colouring contrasts with the warm red and yellow of her cape, whose texture is simulated as it is caught in a gesture of wind. Light is used through the background's clouds to suggest an angelic nature, with the light reflecting off the armour and softening its grey tones. The print is asymmetrically balanced, with the right side using shallow space, filled with the figure, her cape and shallow, cluttered clouds. The left side stands seemingly barren, a whisper of a fence in the background, and then a depth of field leading back. The lines of the fence wire create a controlled contrast to the free flowing shapes and uncontrolled lines of the cape and clouds. Texture is also simulated in the wreath carried by the woman, the rough texture of the leaves contrasting with the soft skin of her hand.

Formal – Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant Hiding the Head of Holofernes*

The artwork is full of strong contrasts of light and dark tones, which are further emphasised by the tension created between the bright, warm colours – yellows and red, against the stark, hollow dark black, from which much of the dramatic evocations of the painting come. The painting's composition is also highly dramatic, and presents a narrative – with the woman in yellow dominating the centre of the composition, on which the eye is instantly focused. The long, sweeping lines of the folds of the dress and the sweeping curve of the red curtain bring elegance and majesty into the narrative of the painting, and the strong contrasts of black tones against vivid, bold colours further emphasise the romantic notions of legendary events depicted in the painting. The characteristic light which illuminates the whole painting is in the classic Baroque Style, reminiscent of Carravaggio, and is an effective technique which contributes to the drama of the narrative in the painting.

Cultural – Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Deceased Estate*

This artwork may be intended to reflect the disposable, materialistic culture of the 21st Century. The items contained are quite modern and reflect the abundance of furniture that may be seen in an everyday household. The cluttered composition of the objects may reflect the overproduction of household items within our society and how most of it ends up in a garbage tip, which is what the sculpture represents. The artists use of rope to 'choke' the items together may represent the grip that material belongings hold over the individual in the modern age.

Gender – Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant Hiding the Head of Holofernes*

The artwork presents a strong and unconventional depiction of women in the seventeenth century. The artist is a woman which is also very unusual at the time, since all active positions and employments, including the world of art, was dominated by men. The artwork itself is presenting a very different view of women to the one which is often seen in paintings of the time, with women



half- or fully naked, vulnerable and passive – an object of admiration and idolatry. However, in this painting, the woman takes up the focal position, which is emphasized by the brightness of her dress against the dark backdrop. Her gesture is of denial and solidarity, and she carries a sword and wears a crown, which empowers her in the eyes of the viewer. The male head is obscured and insignificant, compared to the towering, armed figure of the woman, who is admired by her servant, that looks up to her with a gesture of submission and deference. This is an extraordinary and a confronting view of women, which strongly defies the conventions of the time.

Historical context – Troedel & Co (printer), *The bush hawker*

The print depicts a scene of 1884 Australia. Set 30-some years after the first discovery of gold in Victoria and New South Wales, in 1851, 'The Bush Hawker' is rightly named as it manifests a scene where the seeming wealthy women are sought to buy goods from the hawker. During the gold rush of the 19th Century, the Chinese and Japanese were the first non-European to immigrate to Australia. Chinese and Japanese goods are being sold by the Hawker who, buy the name, one can assume stole the goods. The Asian men and some women were treated poorly, but not so much as the Aboriginals, and many of their possessions were taken from them or bought at unreasonable prices. The entire piece is reflective of the, almost, pride of degradation and discard for non-caucasian culture, yet the fact that the goods would seem valuable would confirm the opposite as the foreign trinkets interest the women in the piece and are seemingly sellable by the hawker.

Postmodernism – Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, *Deceased Estate*

In this work the collabritive artists have created a work that is post-modern in it's conceptual ideas and subject matter. The use of 'mixed media' of found objects from an artist warehouse is post-modern in its use of unconventional 'ready-mades' to create a sculpture. This work is also post-modernist as it may be referencing Dada influences such as Marcel Duchamp's 1911 work 'Wheel' that uses similar materials such as a bicycle wheel and furniture to make a piece of art that removes the objects pragmatism. The work is also making post-modernist comments on consumerist nature of our modern lives and how much stuff that is 'left-over' becomes obsolete and landfill. The ironic title may also suggest that the artists may be creating a form of contemporary memorial to their warehouse making a statement about how we become sentimentally attached to objects. This is also suggested in the title with the word 'deceased' which personifies the subjects matter. The work is ultimately post-modernist as it was made after the 1980's and deals with contemporary ideas of globalisation and consumerism.

Symbolism – Léon Bakst, *Costumes for Queen Thamar and a Guard*

Artwork 8 is comprised of two figures both well dressed and who solve a purpose. The Queen's outfit is of an earthy green which symbolises her youth and ability to rule her people with love and kindness. The repeated patterns of her dress show the many trials she and her people will face. The zig-zag pattern on her shawl and the squares show how the path will never end as she faces one problem and solves it another will arise and need to be dealt with. Her guard on the other hand is mainly dressed in a bodily pink colour of human flesh. This is indicating his loyalty to his queen and her people and how he is patriotic and is willing to shed his blood and flesh to keep them safe. The zig-zag on his outfit is sharper than his Queens. These geometric shapes end in sharp, jagged points which indicate the troublesome times he will face as a guard and the many injuries he will encounter in battle.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	2	2	4	8	14	18	16	16	11	8	5.5

Students expressed opinions enthusiastically and generally handled this question well. However, a number of responses did not demonstrate comprehension of the part of the question which asked whether the artwork should be brought to a major Victorian public art gallery. Too often students believed the work was intended to remain at the Tate Britain and argued that it should stay there. Others suggested it should be moved but did not mention a Victorian public art gallery as a possible destination. The artwork plates for this question were sometimes referred to as the artworks themselves. Many students failed to gain full marks because they did not meet all the requirements of the question.

A significant number of students commented on the Occupational Health and Safety issues resulting from the mix of movement and other factors such as artworks and spectators.

The following are complete responses which addressed all assessment criteria.

Sample 1 – In favour of exhibiting the artwork

'Work No. 850' should definitely be exhibited in the temporary exhibit at the Victoria gallery. The images depict a work that questions both what can be called art and the fast paced, developing society in which we live. The images of the athletes muscular, linear bodies contrasts strikingly with the static, silent halls of the gallery and the human form has always been celebrated through art, so human movement and vitality is just the next logical step as our modern society opens its mind to what can be called art. As commentary 3 states, the work 'upsets our preconceived ideas about art and how to engage with art', which encourages the viewer to consider the possibilities that could arise in our fast paced society. The work is about 'human vitality' and what better way to appreciate it than with a 'constantly moving celebration of athleticism' as stated in Commentary 3. Work No 850's 'example of aliveness' as stated in Commentary 1 prompts the viewer to consider the contrast between the static, permanent artworks in the galleries collection and the vibrant 'sign of life' that explodes every 30 seconds, jolting us awake and



shocking us with something new and fresh. It is not only a statement of the beauty of the athletic form and movement, the work also encourages us to embrace our 'aliveness' (Commentary 1) instead of just viewing art from the outside. Commentary 2 states that the money used could be better spent on a 'decent painting' that 'would last', however Work No. 850 is more than a lasting work, static and decaying, the vibrancy and joy of the human form could never be fully realised in a painting. The movement and life of Work No. 850 truly conveys the beauty and need for humans to move forward, progress and improve.

Sample 2 – Opposed to exhibiting the artwork

*As part of a decision panel I have decided to **not** present this artwork in a temporary exhibition to be held in a major Victorian Public Art Gallery. I agree with Commentary two that 'this is not a valid work of art' as it confuses art viewers as to whether or not it is in fact a commissioned artwork or merely a bunch of our charming youth culture making another 'hilarious' prank. This will make visitors feel uncomfortable, in turn disturbing their gallery visit. The fast motion of the 'sprinters' contrasts too heavily to the peaceful environment of our galleries, and puts visitors at risk of harm and danger, as well as the valuable artworks. Although I agree with Commentary 3 who believes this performance will bring to our galleries the 'immediacy and restlessness of new media', I do not view this as a positive factor. People visit galleries to escape the immediacy and stress of everyday life, to enjoy a quiet environment and ponder the many artworks. Performers trying to entertain our visitors as sweaty and motorised body's sprint around, is hardly a positive contribution to our galleries. I agree with Commentary two that it is a 'complete waste of time' and valuable space whereby a beautiful series of painting or a couple of installations could stand. Furthermore, I believe that such artwork is inappropriate and disruptive to our galleries and therefore I make the decision to not present the artwork.*

Section B

Generally, interpretive frameworks were handled differently in Section B than in Section A. In Section B students tended to be more aware of the requirements of the study design and applied the frameworks more accurately. There was an obvious distinction between students who had followed the study design and were familiar with the frameworks and students who did not understand the meaning of the frameworks or how they could be applied. To respond appropriately, students should ensure that they know exactly what a specific framework means and how it may be used as a tool in the analysis and interpretation of an artwork.

Section B responses ranged widely across artists and media. Students needed to read questions carefully, address the required time frames and choose artworks which were appropriate to the time frames. Some students did not gain any marks for Question 5 as they wrote about works **outside** the required time frame. Students are expected to be familiar with the correct spelling of artists' names, titles and dates for the works they have been studying. Some students used pre-prepared responses, which was not acceptable.

Question 4

Interpretive framework 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	5	5	8	11	13	14	16	16	13	4.8

Interpretive framework 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	9	6	7	10	13	13	13	14	15	4.6

Question 4 specified the use of **any two of the interpretive frameworks** applied to **one artwork**. No marks were awarded for the second part of the question if a different artwork was used.

The most popular artists chosen for discussion were Arkley, Brack, Gittoes, Goya, Henson, Kahlo, Munch, Piccinini, Sherman, Tucker and Whiteley.

The following are high-scoring responses to Question 4 which demonstrate the application of the interpretive frameworks.

Formal interpretation

Francisco de Goya, *The Third of May, 1808*, 1814

Goya's 'the Third of May 1808' is an oil painting created in 1814 in the Romanticist style. It has a strong concept of space, with a foreground depicting a group of unarmed Spanish victims and a group of armed soldiers from Napoleon's army. The firing squad stands in a diagonal line that recedes into the distance creating the illusion of space. The middle ground involves Principe Pio Hill where the execution took place and the background depicts a dark night sky and ghostly buildings in a village, appearing to be illuminated from below. The focal point is a martyr standing with the Spanish. This is because he stands in X-shaped form, and the viewer follows the lines of his body inwards to his centre. A lamp shines directly on him causing his white and yellow clothing to be especially bright in comparison to his dark surroundings. Large differences in tone with areas in shadow create tension and drama. The work is asymmetrically balanced as the focal point, the martyr, stands to the left. The



empty night sky also balances out the very crowded and hectic lower half of the composition. Created using a limited palette of browns, greys and ochres, there are vibrant flashes of colour, such as the clothing of the martyr and the red blood of a murdered victim. Painted very rapidly with thick paint, using a wet on wet technique that has resulting in a 'caked' quality to the work. The concept of overlapping has also created the illusion of space as Goya has overlapped figures within the work.

Mary Cassatt, *The Child's Bath*, 1893

Mary Cassatt's 'The Child's Bath' (oil on canvas, 26 x 39 inches) depicts a dark haired woman bathing her child, reminiscent of an Italian portrayal of Madonna. The mother clad in a long, striped dress of pastel hues sits diagonally across the middleground, creating an asymmetrical arrangement and a closed composition. Cassatt has also utilised tone effectively, accurately capturing the roundness and full figure of the toddler who sits comfortably upon her mother's knees. Both look down into their reflections from a bowl of water which lies at their feet.

The mood and vibrancy of the image is created with the use of warm, rich colours throughout the painting, particularly in the background, which consists of a rug, opulent furnishings and intricately embellished wallpaper. These details in the background also add texture to the image. The darker shades of the backdrop contrast strongly with the lighter, more pastel hues of the subject, allowing the viewer's eyes to linger principally on the two figures. Both balance and harmony are achieved through the strategic placement of shapes and the asymmetrical composition.

Cultural

Del Kathryn Barton, *Please ... Don't ... Stop*, 2006

*Raising children in the modern, westernised culture of Australia, causes Barton to retreat into her children's innocence and find the injustices that society set upon young girls. Traditions of Australia have been changed through the consumer culture, wanting and begging for the latest fashion trends and beauty secrets. Barton challenges the values of modern culture by depicting in *Please ... Don't ... Stop* the destruction caused by the fast-paced consumerism of westernised countries. Barton shows the role that glossy fashion magazines have over the traditions and values of young girls. With the young girls greedy and hungry for material possessions they are being stripped of the culture that should teach them traditional values and beliefs. Barton's work challenges society to take a step back and look at the world that is being created due to westernisation. Young girls are being stripped of innocence and being devoured by fashion fads. Barton calls for the injustices of modern society to be reconsidered if we want our traditions to be carried on by our society and to have our culture saved and not run by consumerism.*

Gender

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #39*, 1979

*Sherman created her images to portray the familiar idea of a woman. As the images were taken to reflect women during time of the war, Sherman was able to show the many masks of femininity. She created an atmosphere where she portrayed as Sylvia Plath says, 'a dead woman', one who is passive and only there for the male gaze. Sherman reflected this idea by placing her body within the image, but removing her mind. She therefore portrayed women how men often viewed them. Through her photos, Sherman explored ideas of identity and was able to accurately portray the **familiar** woman. By constantly reinventing herself, Sherman enabled herself to be like the majority of women. However, offering them the idea of hope for a new future. During the time the images were taken, women were offered the opportunity to gain jobs as the men went to war. This new found power gave them, again, a new personal to morph into.*

Albert Tucker, *Victory Girls*, 1943

Tucker's misogynistic attitude towards women is highly evident in the painting 'Victory Girls', which is similar to his other works entitled 'The Images of Modern Evil', in which he depicts women as sly, deceitful, fallen creatures that open themselves to men and are always ready to seduce. This is evident in the highly negative portrayal of the two girls in the painting. They are half-naked, grinning broadly and rather vulgarly, with their noses resembling the snouts of pigs, and their enormous red mouths stretched and distorted. This is a most degrading and unappealing image, and it bears some of the emotions Tucker felt throughout his personal experiences such as his relationships with his wife and mother. The two girls seem hardly human, with their blonde hair resembling dolls, and their skirts in the colours of the American flag, showing their shameful eagerness to be sought by American soldiers. Tucker witnessed the degradation and decay of morality in society, and combining his negative view of women with his experiences in the war, he portrays women in the most degrading and shameful light.

Historical context

Max Beckmann, *Bird's Hell*, 1938

*In its proper historical context, *Bird's Hell* can be interpreted differently as an allegory of Nazi Germany. The golden-yellow birds or 'Goldfasanen' represent the Nazi officers, and their strutting stance parodies the way in which they conducted themselves. The figure in the foreground is an expression from Beckmann of the sorrow he felt for all the victims of Nazi power, which lurks in the form of the Prussian Eagle, the emblem of that regime. The 'seigheil' salute being performed by the Nazi soldiers on the left is a reference to the blind yet forceful obedience of that era, and the historical optimism of the Nazi beliefs is encapsulated in the 'Mother Earth' figure, ready to create a new Aryan race with her maidens behind her. This sinister picture is a reference to Hitler's desire for Aryan women to become pregnant to Nazi soldiers to create a new 'elite' race. Meanwhile the sinister optimism is contrasted with the speakers on the right, Beckmann's tribute to the death camps. So, with knowledge of the historical context, 'Bird's Hell' can be interpreted entirely differently.*



Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1599

In the late 16th and early 17th Centuries the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation Church remained powerful. After surviving the turmoil of the Reformation, Rome became Europe's artistic and cultural centre. The Church began to direct artists to appeal to the familiar people, not just the privileged by painting Biblical or Gospel stories, saint's lives and scenes from religious ecstasy. Caravaggio easily fitted into the essence of the Baroque era as he depicted the people off the streets in his paintings of religion. 'Judith Beheading Holofernes' (1599) tells a Biblical story; young, Jewish widow, Judith seeks Assyrian General, Holofernes, makes him drunk, then decapitates him, freeing her town from siege. Caravaggio appeals to the guidelines of the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church depicting every-day ordinary people in religious paintings, appealing to them. This theatrical, horizontal painting creates a dialogue between the 'people of the street' and the painting, as many were illiterate, teaching them of Biblical stories, that ordinary people, like them, achieved such things.

Political

Jacques Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784

David's work was commissioned by the conservation. During this time, elements of the French Revolution were emerging for which David was a strong supporter of. In combination with his interest of Classical works, David intertwined in the work ideals of heroics and loyalty to the State within a Classical Roman myth which embodied the same principles. Undivided loyalty and devotion to the state are expressed through the work's underlying narrative which involves the Horatii brother's swearing an oath of loyalty to total devotion towards defending their city. In the same way David expressed the need for loyalty towards the state, against the malintention of the royalists. A strong sense of unity and masculinity is blended with glory and power through the bold triangular arrangement of the Horatii. The emphasis is on the strength and unity drawing attention away from the weeping and sorrowful feminine groups which may represent elements of weakness. The colours used also promoted the richness and embodying nature of the oath and the statuesque lighting bathes the ideal in an aura of near immortality. The positive connotation to the oath suggests the benefits of total devotion and allegiance to the State, drawing upon the revolutionary ideals that rejected notions of power of the dominating royals.

Postmodernism

Marcel Duchamp, *Etant Donnes*, 1946–1966, installation

'Etant Donnes' can be interpreted via a Post Modern framework. Duchamp has made use of a multiplicity of art forms such as glass, wood, leather, linoleum and ready-made objects such as a cookie jar – a common element of post-modern artwork. The construction of the installation invites the viewer to become a dynamic part of the work as they peer through a spyhole cut into a large wooden door. Duchamp has appropriated traditional art forms such as Ancient Greek marble sculpture as a woman inside lies naked, headless and her arms and legs are partially cropped. Her skin is of flat color and looks flawlessly smooth. Duchamp has also manipulated aspects of traditional painting such as Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', as layering of partially painted and photocopied trees and hills recede towards the sky line. Duchamp's 'Etant Donnes' also plays to the common post-modernist element of irony and humour, as ironically, Duchamp created his masterpiece in secrecy, however left a 'manual of instructions' to inform others on how to assemble and disassemble his work. He has also left the viewer to gain their own interpretation of the installation as like most post modernist works, it is often difficult to discern meaning.

Psychological

Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893

Munch was inspired to create this work after a personal experience in his home town, Oslo. He said in his diary 'I looked out at the fjörd, I was ill, the clouds were red – like blood – they were screaming'. The site where the painting was set was situated next to a women's asylum where Munch's sister was held. On top of this there was also a slaughterhouse at the bottom of the cliff. As a result the whole area was constantly filled with the screams of women and livestock. Munch felt depressed and ill all his life, full of heartache, and felt that his voice was unheard. He came from a strict Lutheran home filled with death. (his mother died when he was five and his sister died when she was 15). Munch's landscape distorted his feelings and his feeling distorted his landscape. Munch saw Oslo as the central cause of all his sadness in the work and that he himself was internally screaming. His work marks the very beginnings of expressionism and emotive rather than realist interpretations of subject matter.

Symbolism

Salvador Dali, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931

The work is rife with symbolism, every aspect holding significance. The drooping 'soft' watches suggests the passage of time and its escape and fluidity but also its unreality. So much emphasis is put on the passing of time that Dali seems to suggest its insignificance as it droops to the floor, melting silently away. The white creature symbolises Dali himself, washed up on the sands of time. The white creature is a reference to 'The Great Masturbator' seen in several other works by Dali, its sleep signified by the oversized, closed eye and thick lashes. The olive tree is a traditional symbol of hope, but its dead state conveys the opposite, the melting watch drooping over a branch suggests the lost hope in the passing of time, the white form supporting this as it appears defeated and slumped. The ants swarming over the gold, hard watch suggests death and decay, adding to the hopeless, eerie atmosphere of the work. The landscape itself, the sheer cliffs and vast ocean were a familiar landscape to Dali symbolising his home. These symbols combine to create a possible image of the contents of Dali's mind, his self-perception, love and fears of death and the passing of time and life and unite to create a surreal, haunting image despite its bright, vivid use of colour.

Question 5



Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	14	4	5	8	11	12	13	12	10	10	4.8

The most frequently discussed artists in Question 5 were Arkley, Basquiat, Bennett, Booth, Henson, Moffatt, Piccinini and Whiteley. It was good to see that a wide range of artists was chosen for discussion and covered a broad range of media. For the most part, students discussed these artists enthusiastically and knowledgeably. While there was little evidence of personal gallery experience, there was a high level of research of individual artists and artworks. Despite an improvement in student engagement with the commentaries, and their increasing confidence in the use of these commentaries, it is still of concern that some students did not discern the **quality** of some of the comments with which they supported their arguments. Some students seemed to realise that an attributed quotation was of value in their discussion, but then followed a worthwhile and legitimate quote with a word or a phrase from a dubious or unnamed source.

A list of appropriate sources for commentaries can be found in the *VCE Art Study Design 2004–2009* on page 25. Commentaries are defined in this document as coming from ‘a broad range of written and transcript material. These could 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, museum guides and wall text, radio, video and film documentaries.’ Therefore, commentary made by teachers in class is not acceptable.

Rather than discussing how or which commentaries were helpful in developing personal points of view about meanings and messages in artworks, and discussing those points of view about meanings and messages, some students chose to critique the comments of various ‘expert’ writers.

The following are excerpts from responses which addressed the requirements of the question in an appropriate way.

Gordon Bennett, *Notes to Basquiat (Jackson Pollock and his Other, 2001)*, 2001

The meanings and messages behind this artwork have become apparent to me both through detailed study, and also through analysis of commentaries on art. Bennett’s work is often preoccupied with issues of cultural identity and certain motifs in his work are present in this work, however, in his commentary on the artwork, he said that he ‘translated it into American’ using appropriation in order to find the similarities between America’s and Australia’s racial and cultural issues. Thus the meaning becomes more than a representation of the horror of 9/11, but is also shown to be a tool for cultural connection and scrutiny.

Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of death in the mind of someone living*, 1991

In my exploration of this artwork I found that the many commentaries about this controversial artist persuaded and assisted me in making my own opinion about one of his most notorious works of a dead tiger shark in formaldehyde. My reaction to Damien Hirst’s work is that while his conceptual ideas seem to be intriguing, profound and solid, his execution is somewhat too pretentious and minimalist, making his piece lose its depth of meaning. When the artist commented on his work saying ‘I am going to die and I want to live forever, I can’t escape that fact and I can’t let go of the desire’ I identified with his point of view and was attracted to the art that he created that focused on that subject matter. However my disappointments in the realisation of his conceptual aims was validated for me when I read a commentary on the Stuckists’s movement (a group of contemporary artists who champion the act of figurative paint’ when they said on their website ‘a dead shark does not address the idea of death, the only possible meaning of the work is that being dead is like being in a contemporary gallery’ – this confirmed my ideas that Hirst has pushed the line of art too far, he has created an object and given it meaning rather than letting the work speak for itself.

Brett Whiteley, *Alchemy*, 1972–1973

Upon viewing Alchemy, my initial reaction was towards the overwhelming boldness and expressive nature of the work. I was fascinated by the sensuous forms and fluid line but found it confusing to interpret in many ways. It seemed to allude to a mindscape but other than that, I wasn’t sure about the way to approach the work. Brett Whiteley himself commented that it was a work portraying his ‘inner paddock’ and ‘transmutation of self’ reinforcing my initial notion of mindscape. He also stated that ‘art should astonish, transmute, transfix, ... work at the tissue between truth and paranoia’ which suggested to me that the work involved a conflict of ideas, the two complementary halves representing opposing ideas held together by the central ‘IT’.

Banksy, *One Nation Under CCTV*, 2008

The immediacy and accessibility of Banksy’s work really informed by point of view about meanings and messages in this year’s work. His piece ‘One Nation under CCTV’ is a clever and poignant reminder of our increasing surveillance yet simultaneously decreasing safety and privacy. It is clear that surveillance does not discourage violent or destructive crime, as Banksy himself pointed out by completing his work in full view of a security camera.

Banksy’s work cuts to the core of an issue and makes a comment about it, and I think it is important for art to do that – not to fence-sit, but engage with the social and political issues around it.



The following complete essays were considered high scoring because they addressed the question appropriately, acknowledged commentaries and offered the student's considered viewpoint.

Rosalie Gascoigne, *Sweet Sorrow*, 1991

I believe that commentaries have helped me to better understand the meanings and messages of the artworks I have studied. Rosalie Gascoigne's 'Sweet Sorrow', 1991, depicts a series of retro-reflective road signs, cut up and assemble onto a rectangular piece of plywood. The assemblage of road sign cut-outs have been carefully placed as singular letters to create short words. I agree with artist Liz Hyland that 'Sweet Sorrow' resembles the 'construction, fragmenting and repetition of the creation of a poem' as the grid-like alignment of letters reminds me of a word puzzle. I also agree with Hyland as Gascoigne had previously been trained in literature. Art critic Kelly Gallantly believes that Gascoigne's work is a reflection of Shakespeare's tragic love story 'Romeo and Juliet' as words such as 'wed' and 'sad', which can be seen in her assemblage 'may be clues suggesting the bittersweet nature of marriage.'

Despite what can be derived from looking at the words in her artwork, I believe that 'Sweet Sorrow' holds a further and more personal meaning. I believe this because Gascoigne's other works are a reflection of her life when she moved to Australia, her experiences, emotions and surroundings seem to be what has driven her artwork. For example her well known masterpiece 'Monaro' 1989 represents the dry Australian landscape through its golden colouring. Rosalie Gascoigne herself has stated that 'I just like the colors yellow and black'. Some of her fondest childhood memories were of the yellow china her grandmother owned, and winning a table decorating contest decorated with yellow flowers at the age of ten. Perhaps the color yellow she loves as it reminds her of her home. New Zealand artist Amanda Lee interprets the harsh contrast of yellow and black as symbolising Gascoigne's emotional struggle when she moved to Australia. This comment has helped me to derive a message of loneliness and isolation as the letters which make up the word 'love' have been separated by their outlines. I believe that the harshness of the contrast within the work symbolises the despair and sadness she felt when she moved to Mount Stromlo, away from her home and family in New Zealand. As I now feel as though I have a deeper understanding of Gascoigne's work 'Sweet Sorrow', I thus believe that commentaries have helped me to better understand Gascoigne's motives, meanings and messages behind her work.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Versus Medici* (1982), *Untitled* 1981 (1981)

When Jean-Michel Basquiat exploded onto the international art scene in the 1970's, his unconventional work was often discussed as 'All this gunk rolled into a ball around Basquiat's tiny talent and produced a reputation' Robert Hughes (American Visions). His raw, expressive and abstract art was seen as childish, something any one could do. I sided with this train of thought; anyone could take an oilstick, thrash it over a large board in squiggles and stick-figure-like people and call it art. However, another commentary questioned by depth of thought and level of understanding in works of art, one made in response to Robert Hughes infamous comment by John Seed, 'Mr Hughes, Basquiat seems to have done many of the things the modernist heroes did'. Seed referenced the hidden meaning in Basquiat's work that was lost on Hughes, and was for some time, lost on me too.

*Basquiat's work is an outlet, a personal expression of complex emotion. His work is purposeful; the skeletal and anatomical figure in *Versus Medici* has psychological significance to Basquiat, who treasured a Grey's Anatomy medical book as a child. *Versus Medici* is in many ways Basquiat's interpretation of self portraiture; when he looks inside himself, and turns to express it, the only way he can accurately delineate himself on canvas is through referencing the way he sees human beings beneath the skin. Basquiat struggles with issues of identity when he creates artworks; a reflection of his Afro-Atlantic heritage. To the viewer it then becomes evident that Basquiat interprets people in two ways; beneath the skin as well as in skin colour itself. *Untitled* 1981 contains crowns and black faces with the purpose of making social comment on the racial conflict he bears within himself and that was evident in American society during his lifetime. What Hughes can only observe as squiggles and lines; kindergarten art, Seed has helped me to see as the 'heroic' aspects of Basquiat's work. Basquiat created work that was healing for himself, or an escape from a tormenting world as he perceived it.*