

2021 VCE Art external assessment report

General comments

The 2021 VCE Art written examination was based on the *VCE Art Study Design 2017–2022*. Overall, students managed the examination well and had been prepared despite another disrupted year of learning. They managed their time during the examination to answer or attempt to answer most of the questions, seemed confident in linking evidence from the artwork to justify their answers, and showed engagement with artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and female artists.

However, some students did not always read the questions carefully and often missed key criteria they needed to address in their answer. This was particularly evident in Question 5, where many did not include the relationship of the viewer with the artwork. It is essential that students understand how the analytical frameworks function to interpret the structural, personal, cultural and contemporary meanings and messages.

Students should also demonstrate an understanding of the art process and apply it to unseen and unstudied artists and artworks, not just the making of their own artworks. The art process is defined on page 12 of the study design as integral to the conceptualisation, development and making of artworks. It is an iterative component of the practice of artists and includes the application of analytical frameworks when interpreting and making artworks.

The five components of the art process are:

- exploration of ideas through a conceptual and practical investigation
- experimentation with art elements and art principles, materials, techniques, processes and art forms
- development of ideas, concepts, style and visual language
- refinement of materials, techniques and technical processes to provide visual strength to artworks
- resolution of ideas, directions and concepts.

Students are advised to prepare for the Art examination in the following ways:

- practise applying the analytical frameworks to a range of unstudied artworks
- use past examination papers to target specific areas they would like to improve upon
- practise responding to questions within time limits
- use the didactic information supplied as evidence in their answer
- practise handwriting to ensure it is legible
- select specific evidence from the artwork to justify their answer
- practise applying the vocabulary associated with specific art elements and art principles
- read the requirements of each question carefully to ensure all parts of the question are addressed
- practise applying the art process to a range of unstudied artists and artworks
- read past examination reports published on the VCAA website.

The [VCE Art examination specifications](#) were used to assess the Art examination.

Specific information

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	16	45	36	2.2

Students were asked to discuss how an art element was used in an artwork. Colour, texture, shape and form were all popular art elements selected by students. Responses that scored highly incorporated information about the artwork provided and a precise discussion of how the artist used art elements. The question did not require students to address more than one art element and students should ensure that their discussion remains focused on their selected art element rather than introducing others and complicating the analysis. Many students appeared to not understand the difference between shape and form and conflated the two terms. For example, both shape and form use descriptive terminology such as organic and geometric, yet a shape cannot be described as a cube and form cannot be described as a square. Students should also avoid writing more than is necessary to answer Questions 1 and 2, as they do not require highly detailed answers.

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

Form

Soft natural curves dominate the ceramic, creating a vaguely anthropomorphic form of two figures bound to one another. The form is fluid and free moving; abstract within its design yet signifies the need for the two figures to be 'Together' towards the viewer. However, the wavy, ethereal ceramic form is contrasted by the sharp, angular hollow cubic form that creates the unstable platform the figures sit upon.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	13	43	38	2.1

In this question, students were required to discuss how one art principle had been used in a second artwork. Many students wrote about the art principles of emphasis, repetition (pattern) or movement. Responses that scored highly coherently and confidently identified and discussed one art principle, using accurate and sophisticated art language. They made clear and direct links to visual evidence from the artwork to answer the question. These responses maintained a focused discussion on the art principle and used an art element as a 'pivot point' to unpack the manipulation and application of the art principle and its effect. They wrote specifically about the quality of the lines and how they were used to create a pattern. Responses that did not score well tended to nominate one art principle but then provide a discussion about another or did not link their opinion to evidence from the artwork.

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

Repetition (Pattern)

Wavy lines with varying thickness dominate the background, creating repetition through the consistent usage of thick lines flowing in waves. Furthermore, the contrast between the black and white circles contributes to creating a cyclical pattern surrounding the orange orb. From then on the line can also be seen to be partial semicircles or circles cut off by the wavy lines, reinforcing the idea of a circular pattern from the larger, tucker circles.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	2	0.5	1	2	6	19	22	22	16	9	6.3

This question required students to compare the meanings and messages of artworks. Responses that scored highly approached this question with an introductory sentence that broadly articulated the overall thematic meaning shared between the two artworks. For example, common connections were ‘the home’, ‘home-life’, ‘urban living’, ‘domestic spaces’ and ‘interiority’. They then identified and discussed similarities and differences using specific parts of each artwork to justify their answer. The structure of the answer also helped students achieve a higher score. Responses that made multiple comparisons and ‘weaved’ them into their answer scored more highly than responses that discussed the artworks in two separate paragraphs linked with a comparative term.

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

Both Hamilton and Suh’s artworks portray the notion of home despite their contrasting mediums. Hamilton explores a disorganised environment that is much contrasted to Suh’s portrayal of an apartment that is covered in polyester fabric, heightening an extreme sense of sanitary. Hamilton creates his messy and unsettling interior through the technique of collaging, with random and incongruent insertion of household objects that are positioned at a typical spot, such as the free-floating microwave and the way the floor blends into the walls which disturbs the viewer’s sense of space and order. This is augmented by the black and white print of a woman who stands in a stiff position, holding a confused expression. Unlike Hamilton’s portrayal of disorganisation, Suh’s installation view conveys an extreme degree of sanitary in an apartment that almost resembles a hospital setting as the polyester fabric wraps the interior including the toilet and cabinets. The hollowness conveyed by the stainless-steel tubes also deprives the apartment of a sense of belonging and identity, rendering it quite unwelcoming and odd as it is expected to be rather homely and expressive. Both artworks play on the viewer’s emotions and sense of space as while they are both settings of a home, they do not portray any sense of familiarity and comfort.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	0.5	1	5	9	12	20	19	15	10	7	6.5

In Question 4, students were required to discuss the use of the experimentation component of the art process using materials, techniques, processes and art forms, referring to details in a series of images provided. Reading images and the information embedded in them was essential to answer this question. Many students made sensitive observations about the women working collaboratively and the connection to the land through their use of found materials. Responses that scored highly used information from the images in a descriptive manner to make assumptions about the process of experimentation suggested in the images. They discussed how the women were experimenting with found materials to create three-dimensional forms and considered the time frame in between each image. Many of these responses also discussed experimentation with found materials versus the final sculpture that was created with colourful wool.

Responses that scored highly speculated about how the images may have related to each other and discussed how experimentation may have led to the creation of the final artwork using language such as ‘weaving’, ‘aligning’, ‘stitching’, ‘binding’, ‘tying’ and ‘combining’. While many students confidently referenced the stages of the art process, responses that did not score well tended to list the stages of the art process

without using evidence from the images or discussing how the stages stemmed from apparent experimentation.

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

Tjanpi Desert Weavers' artists begin their process by experimenting with figures made in Image 2, using natural materials of grass from Image 1. Their traditional methods from Warakurna most likely consisted of crafting various figures using pure grass, however, in 2011 they are seen experimenting with various other materials using their traditional techniques of weaving with wool and raffia, which added colour to their latest figures. In Image 3, after perfecting their process of grass weaving with other materials in 2011, 'Caring for Country...' was created with wool, raffia and stitch. The figures seen to be a pair of koala bears are completely covered by the contemporary materials compared to Image 2, where wool and raffia were used as accents suggesting experimentation and development of the design. The stitched wool and raffia created short, thick lines across the bodies of the figures, depicting an ethereal, otherworldly view towards the bears. The saturated complementary colours of burnt orange and dark blue mirror the earth and land seen in Images 1 and 2 with the similarly vibrant green and yellow of the baby bear representing new growth in the tjanpi grass used and found in the area near Warakurna. Thus, the usage of the koala bears and colours symbolize the deep, innate connection the Tjanpi Desert Weavers' have with the land that they gather materials from, but also a testament to their 'Caring for Country...' The larger, more thicker lines of red suggest burns and wounds, creating another association with the bushfires created from climate change, hence 'Caring for Climate' when the weavers have an integral connection towards the land and its inhabitants.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	2	0.5	1	5	17	30	29	10	6	5.3

Students needed to use the personal analytical framework to discuss how an artwork reflected the artist's personal circumstances and the viewer's life experiences. Most responses that scored highly combined the personal experiences of the artist and the viewer, including childhood, family and education, in their discussion and interpretation of the artwork. However, many otherwise well-written responses failed to address 'the viewer's life experiences'. Students relied heavily on the commentaries to formulate their answers and high-scoring responses supported their interpretation of the commentaries with specific reference to the artwork, such as the shield and sword as symbols of empowerment. Responses that scored highly incorporated the artist's quotes within their own discussion, such as the notion that the artwork was political through its reference to Wonder Woman, a character in popular culture. They also described the transformation of a traditional-looking figure that has been reclaimed to reflect contemporary ideas embodied in the artwork's title *#EveryWomanIs*. Responses that did not score well tended to restate the commentaries without reference to the artwork or cited the listed materials or title without any further analysis.

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

Byrne's use of the materials of ceramics was influenced by her growing up in her 'mother's antique shop surrounded by ceramics of all kinds'. This environment then encouraged her to further her skills in ceramics, working her way from 'modelling figurines in plasticine', then 'clay', then to move 'on to study ceramics at art school'. Her upbringing fostered her passion for ceramics. #EveryWomanIs shows Byrne's familiarity with antique ceramics as she has transformed this vintage porcelain figurine into a modern artwork. Through this piece, Byrne also explores her personal viewpoint on women in today's society by depicting the woman as both beautiful and powerful. Wonder Woman is a superhero that is depicted in pop culture. Byrne has used her and her symbols in this piece to emphasise the strength that women have. Her use of the delicacy of the 'vintage porcelain figures [combined] with other materials' show Byrne's feminist values through the piece being 'highly political and beautiful' 'at once'. Through

those feminist values, Byrne aims to connect with the viewer. As a female, I feel empowered by Byrne's artwork through the correlation between a strong female figure such as Wonder Woman, with the vintage porcelain figure that is inherently meant to make the female appear delicate, which Byrne juxtaposes with the strength of the armour on her. Through this, I also feel personally reminded of times when society has made me feel fragile regardless of the strength I feel. This further empowers me as a viewer, which is Byrne's intention for all who view '#EveryWomanIs'.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	1	6	23	32	22	13	4.0

This question required the students to use the cultural analytical framework to discuss how the artist depicted family and their leisure activities in the artwork. They were required to refer to the artwork and the ideas raised in the commentary provided in their response. Responses that scored highly often noted the socioeconomic aspects of the middle class depicted in Brownrigg's painting to expand on ideas about class systems and family structures in this time period. Some students even reflected on how this view of 1850s life was different from their own culture. Many responses noted the gender differences and expectations by society at that time, and some focused on the colonial nature of the white family, which raised interesting cultural and historical contexts for discussion. Fewer responses noted that the artist was documenting her experiences of the culture directly. The strongest responses also linked the discussion to the artist's use of techniques. For example, discussing how the 19th-century 'atmosphere' within the artwork was conveyed through Brownrigg's use of pallid watercolour techniques, thus further alluding to the conservative and stifling 'social norms' depicted. Responses that did not score well merely repeated the artist's statements, the supplementary information about the artwork and the commentary, rather than describing how the artist had manipulated the structural features of the painting in order to convey 19th-century social norms and conservative domesticity.

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

Brownrigg's work depicts her six children in the drawing room at their leisure activities, suggesting that a family should stick together. In the 1850s, interests such as piano, writing and needle work was promoted as refined and reflected values of the time – a focus on education across the arts, especially with women knowing how to read and write as a proper lady. Beautiful needlework, as one of Brownrigg's children is doing, is often an indicator to their skill in household activities, and presents the idea of a demure, elegant lady to those in 'middle-class families'. Thus, Brownrigg depicts a scene where leisure activities at the time often had practical and social values, and being together in a family drawing room and spending time with one another creates the sense of a tight knit family.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
%	4	1	1	2	7	11	12	15	14	15	10	8	7.1

Students were required to discuss art ideas and related issues in the provided artwork and refer to art ideas and related issues, the artwork and the commentaries provided in their response. Responses that scored highly often discussed the way that Escobar transformed an everyday, lower-socioeconomic object into something desirable but non-functioning. They also included a response to the commentaries and their opinion on 'mass production' and 'availability of resources', and discussed how the addition of gold hinges changed the function of the skateboard. Many students spoke from their personal and cultural experiences

with skateboards and how they would react to this type of modification, which created an engaging response to the artwork. They used the commentaries to support their own assertions. Responses that did not score well restated the information provided in the commentaries, included little reference to the artwork and tended to speak in general terms rather than address a specific issue provoked by the artwork.

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

The art idea that Escobar explores in industrial objects, their value and their development through periods of time. Through using an old 'cheap consumer' product such as a skateboard and creating a 'connection' to 'luxury items' through the luxury items of gold parts creates a connection between the vast differences between these two different objects. Escobar explores 'the accumulation [of merchandise]' and the 'reflection about the industrial object' with an aim to show the differences between these 'luxury' and 'cheap' items, as well as to ultimately suggests that there are similarities between the two. Through making an ordinary item appear luxurious and expensive through gold detailing, Escobar comments on our materialistic society and the difference between classes of people too. This is shown in 'Untitled' (2016) as it is ultimately still the same cheap object, however, it has just been slightly altered to make it more luxurious and changing the purpose of this item. Escobar aims to create 'a new configuration of an element repeated obsessively', which he has done in 'Untitled' through his taking of the mundane object of a skateboard and making a configuration through sectioning it, adding gold metal, and placing it in an arch shape. Escobar encourages the viewer to view these everyday items from the 'past and present' in different lights. He may also possibly be suggesting the ever-changing society and the progression of objects, turning this object into a piece of art, unable to use the skateboard in the same way they once did.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average
%	3	0.5	0.5	1	2	4	6	10	9	11	14	10	12	8	7	9.3

Using two analytical frameworks, students were required to interpret the messages and meanings of one post-1990 artwork they had studied. Responses that scored highly correctly applied each analytical framework that they nominated, used accurate terminology and made numerous direct and specific references to the artwork in their interpretation. They also provided a precise description of the artwork early in their response that summarised the art form and subject matter of the artwork. Responses that scored highly provided an accurate and balanced application of the two analytical frameworks. Responses that did not score well tended to incorrectly apply or mislabel the analytical framework, provided no interpretation of the artwork studied or did not use evidence from the artwork to justify their opinion.

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

Ben Quilty

'Captain Kate Porter, after Afghanistan' (2012)

Structural Framework

'Captain Kate Porter, after Afghanistan' (2012) is an oil painting that depicts a personal trauma stemming from the brutal effects of war. The vertical design composition portrays Captain Kate Porter's naked figure as she sits up straight, covering her bare torso with a distraught expression. Looming in the background is a black silhouette that towers over the woman, its organic and smoke-lit shape embodies feelings of entrapment and claustrophobia as well as the PTSD that many soldiers suffer with after the war. Quilty's distinctive style of gestural painting application and nudity here aims to amplify the physical damage of conflict on humans, and especially to acknowledge women's endurance of an undignifying strip search as part of their participation in the force.

Contemporary Framework

Ben Quilty's sole showcase of Captain Kate Porter's body calls on his audience to acknowledge the detriments of war rather than the powerful ammunitions that many traditional artists portrayed to convey soldiers' involvement in the war as heroic or victorious. Quilty, in fact, has always been more interested to share the vulnerability of soldiers and their personal hardships to condemn conflict. The reception to nudity in the modern world is also much more welcoming than traditional times, enabling Quilty to closely examine the injured flesh and express this to his audience at a higher and more confronting level that may even cause discomfort in some. Yet, it is a powerful and effective way to lament mass conflict and appreciate those who had to sacrifice for their countries. Quilty more so asks his audience to not overlook the horrific consequences of war, especially the psychological trauma that most are still stigmatised for.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
%	11	1	1	2	6	8	9	9	16	15	12	9	6.9

In Question 9, students were required to examine and analyse the opinion and viewpoints in two attributed commentaries they had studied in 2021 that enriched their understanding of an art idea and related issues. They had to refer to at least one artwork and two attributed commentaries in their discussion. Some of the most engaging responses focused on contemporary art ideas and issues involving the representation of 'women in art', 'NFTs' (non-fungible tokens) and 'experiencing artworks on social media versus in the gallery space'.

Students are recommended to select ideas and issues about the role of art in society that can provide a basis for a rigorous discussion, drawing on a variety of viewpoints and opinions. They should be aware that opinions about some artists and their practices and artworks have shifted, and students are required to draw on current commentaries about these topics. For example, students who wrote about 'street art as vandalism' seemed unaware that many issues about the role of art in society have become more normalised in recent times. They are advised to try to include more recent examples of artists and artworks and commentaries that examine street art's new role in society.

With regard to the choice of commentaries and their perceived authority, the study design requires students to ensure that the sources are 'reliable, recognised and relevant and reflect viewpoints that enrich the discussion about the artworks'. Students needed to develop and expand upon their personal points of view by supporting them with evidence from 'attributed commentaries'. They were expected to be able to specify the author of the commentary and where and when it was published.

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

The Hesitant Bride by Auguste Toulmouche, 1866

Commentary 1: John Berger

Commentary 2: Emil Zola

'The Hesitant Bride' by Auguste Toulmouche explores the idea of gender stereotypes. In 1860s France, women were often paired off in arranged marriages, and were expected to be demure, polite and subservient, as Berger implies 'submissive and passive', is often the image of women. However, the active gaze of the bride suggests she is anything but hesitant about the marriage - despite looking as pretty as one of 'Toulmouche's delicious dolls' (C2), the bride's fierce gaze represents women in a sense of reality instead of aesthetic romanticism, where women were only there 'to be looked at' (C1) compared to men, who did the 'looking' (C1). Her bright, contrasting white wedding dress compared to the dull yet ornate background suggest her social class and position as a 'bride prize' to be married off for political connections, deepening one's understanding of the issue of gender stereotypes reflected in marriage - that women were more often than not, treated as an object and expected to be soft and passive. Thus,

the breaking of such a stereotype in 'The Hesitant Bride', where she is expected to be happy with her marriage, enriches the current social issue of arranged marriages in South East Asia. Toulmouche's portrayal of woman and fashion made him popular in his time, as he depicted the current societal trends from women's fashion and subtly presented women as genuine people with a love for fashion, despite being seen as mere 'dolls' (C2) by other critics of the time – thus, the artwork also breaks the stereotypes of woman portrayed within the art world as more than the ones to be consumed, but as also a major consumer and gave an accurate reflection upon themselves.