General Certificate of Education
Advanced Subsidiary Examination
January 2009

General Studies (Specification A) GENA1

Unit 1 AS Culture and Society

Source Booklet

Sources for use with **Questions 1.1** to **1.30** and **Questions 2** to **4**.

PASSAGE FOR QUESTIONS 1.1 TO 1.30

Source A

Already mades

(1) Young British Art, in its opening flush, produced some undeniably memorable works, but in most cases the memory will do. Hirst's shark, Whiteread's room, Quinn's blood head, Emin's tent, Patterson's tube map: see them a second or a twentieth time, and these works can only repeat – or fail to repeat – their initial impact. They don't, on further acquaintance, accumulate or unfold. You go back for more and what you get is the same again, or less.

(2) Maybe this is an inherent feature of the kind of art that's now dominant. It offers the viewer a one night stand, a holiday fling, rather than the possibility of a developing relationship. That feeling was certainly sharpened by the loss of some of this art – including the Emin tent – in last year's Momart warehouse fire. Where was the loss, exactly? Hadn't the work already been used up, before it was consumed in the flames?

(3) I was glad at least that Whiteread's plaster-cast parlour wasn't incinerated, for that's a work with staying power. Or so I would have said. But when I bumped into it unexpectedly in a London gallery on the day after the fire my gladness that it had survived was checked by realising that this piece too had done its work, told its story, given up the ghost. It sat there – a dud relic of its original resonance.

(4) What does this mean? It means that our continuing interest in these works becomes merely nostalgic, a fond harking-back to that memorable first encounter. Or, perhaps, it means that we should stop trying to take a continuing interest at all, and stop getting disappointed. We should become more brisk and detached art-lovers. We shouldn't expect a work of art to be worth sticking with. We shouldn't seek to renew or develop the relationship.

Tracey Emin's *My Bed*

(5) And what about the artists? How is their relationship to their own works affected by the kind of work they do? There seems to be a problem of development here too. The tendency is for the artist's work not to *develop*: to evolve out of its own latent potential. No, it proceeds either by repetition, doing narrow variations on the original idea, or by ruptures: complete restarts.

(6) Damien Hirst's work was greatly advantaged by the fact that, at the very start, he had an abundance of visual ideas that could be replayed in numerous permutations.

The animal carcasses, dead flies, dead butterflies, balls suspended on a jet of air, pills, cigarette ends, knives, laboratory and surgical equipment, glass chambers, preserving fluid and gore; they've all been put through their paces, working sometimes as sculptures, more often as melodramatic window dressing – but now in ever closer circles.

(7) The four large paintings by Hirst showing at the Gagosian Gallery are titled *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John,* the four Gospel writers. They are huge. They are framed in enormous power frames, like a big business abstract. They have a field of one-colour gloss paint – a different, dull colour in each picture – dotted with an array of bright, dead butterflies. In the middle there's a double page of printed text (Bible?) assaulted by a big smear/blast/spatter of earth stuck to the surface.

(8) The pictures have been bought by an Italian collector, to furnish a deconsecrated chapel in Rome. But their preposterous religiosity is neither here nor there. It's their sheer helpless pictorial inertia that steals the show. They are simply prettified, pomped up, Hirst-ed versions of the sort of picture – the paint surface ravaged and encrusted with charred books, grit and gunk – that John Latham was doing in the 1950s.

(9) Marc Quinn's problem has been that he used his entire stock of ideas supremely well in a single, dense, early work. Everything since has been an extension of the first hit. What affects your feelings is how the figures are made. They have been modelled from the bodies of their subjects, but then 'sculptured up' by a firm of statue-makers. And the bottom line is that these craftsmen are completely incompetent. They can make a nice graveyard angel, I'm sure, but a classical figure is infinitely beyond them, and the work that Quinn has commissioned is simply rubbish.

(10) Simon Patterson is in a similar pickle. His recasting of the London underground map, with all the station names replaced with those of famous people, wasn't a bad joke about systems, diagrams and common knowledge. You could imagine it being made in a Monty Python book. But it turned out to be the only joke up his sleeve.

(11) What was nice about it was that, at a time when people were saying art had got popular, this work was able to prove its popularity by being reproduced and sold as a poster. Admittedly, mass-produced joke items – tea towels with humorous slogans, etc – are a rather dubious thing. And Patterson's poster now hangs like a large question mark over the personality of anyone who has it on the wall.

(12) There's a case for simply ignoring these pitiful exhibitions. But there is also a case for noticing that three very reputable artists are nowadays producing work that is no good at all, and for saying that this may not be entirely their fault. Partly it's a matter of reputations. Reputations are investments – emotional and financial. There are plenty of people who wish to keep these particular shows on the road, and are ready to overlook their abject decline. But partly it's to do with the art of our time, and how hard it is to keep up.

(13) The only artists who can master this situation are those blessed with inexhaustible powers of invention but the point is that, while inventiveness has always been seen as an artistic bonus, it has never been such a necessity as it is today.

(14) Some people think that contemporary art is easy, and when you see what some artists can successfully get away with, of course it does look easy. But if you take the job seriously, then art has never, perhaps, been harder. To make, and to continue making, good art on those terms is formidably, forbiddingly and almost gratuitously difficult. The task may not even be worth the candle.

Source: adapted from an article by Tom Lubbock, *The Independent Review*, 14 March 2005

Turn over ▸

SECTION B

SOURCES FOR QUESTIONS 2 TO 4

Read **Sources B** to **D** on **the British political system** and answer **Questions 2** to **4**.

Source B

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland now have elected parliaments or assemblies that ensure that they can have the final say on decisions that affect their own communities and do not apply to the rest of the kingdom. They are responsible for areas like education, health and housing.

England has become the exception to this rule. If English MPs, representing 81% of the House of Commons, do not vote together, and they rarely do, then the 117 non-English members can decide the outcome on key issues, even if the vote is on legislation that affects only England. In the UK Parliament a majority of English MPs voted against university tuition fees but were defeated with the help of votes from Scottish constituency MPs. The problem would get seriously worse if the next general election produced a hung Parliament.

Source*:* Adapted from MALCOLM RIFKIND, 'Be fair – Give devolution to England', *The Sunday Times*, 4 November 2007

Source C

Britain's democratic system is in crisis, say political commentators. Turnout in general elections is falling, young people are disenchanted with voting and trust has broken down between the people and the politicians. The doomsters first started making their case after the 2001 election when turnout fell to 59.4%, the lowest figure since 1918. It rebounded slightly to 61.4% in 2005, but was still 10% lower than in 1997.

There is little mystery about the figures, given that the results of both elections were foregone conclusions. Conversely, the biggest turnouts were in 1950 and 1951 when more than 80% cast their votes. Those elections were fiercely contested by parties sharply divided over the future direction of the nation. Paradoxically, most people then were happy to admit to political ignorance and voted according to class interest. Today's voters are more discerning, more interested in politics and, in an era of intense media scrutiny, know much more about politicians.

A falling propensity to vote should be seen for what it is: a recognition that votes often make little difference in most constituencies. Many potential voters prefer to devote their political efforts to campaigning on single issues such as the environment where they can make an impact. Low voting figures for younger voters is nothing new – people have always increased their engagement with politics as they grow older and take on responsibilities. Young people will take part when issues (Iraq, top-up fees) concern them. Voters still turn out when real choices face the country.

Source: Adapted from JOHN WILLMAN, 'Voters still turn out when it matters', *Financial Times,* 8 September 2007

Source D

British republicans are concerned to see Britain become a true democracy by electing its head of state, rather than settling for the random outcome of an hereditary lottery. There is no guarantee, of course, that an elected head would prove any better, but, at least, he or she would be accountable to an electorate. We could throw them out after (or even during) a fixed term in office.

I want to celebrate our nation's heritage but the monarchy has now come to represent the past more than the future with its refusal to change its style. It projects an image of Britain as an insular country, clinging desperately to a time when it was a great power, ruling over a world-wide empire.

At present, in the United Kingdom, we are subjects rather than citizens. Monarchs have given the Prime Minister powers that make him or her more powerful than any president. A republic would make the Prime Minister much more accountable to Parliament.

Britain as a republic would be a self-respecting society run from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. By cementing our class structure the monarchy has encouraged a culture of privilege and connections and stifled the change this country so sorely needs.

Source: Adapted from ANTHONY HOLDEN, 'The Republic of Britain', *Daily Mail,* 25 October 2003

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