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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE A Level
In History of Art (9HT0)
Paper 1 Visual Analysis and Themes

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Introduction

This is the first examination in the new History of Art specification. Paper 1 consists of Visual Analysis (Section A) and Themes (Section B). Centres and students were able to choose two of the three Themes to study but beyond this there was no optionality within the paper, with all questions being compulsory. The scope of the specification is much broader than the legacy one, requiring students to study work produced outside the European tradition, as well as within it, for the Themes section. There is a requirement to study the work of specified artists and architects, and works of art and architecture both pre and post 1850, for each Theme. There is also a requirement for students to study and reference Critical Texts in their long essay responses. Visual Analysis questions are now worth 12 marks each but are otherwise similar to the legacy specification; they are now marked using a levels of response mark scheme, however, in line with all other questions in the qualification. Themes questions have a 12 mark part (a) and a 25 mark part (b) question.

The Assessment Objectives have changed to allow students to be credited for the demonstration of knowledge and understanding of the contexts of art (Section B only), analysis and interpretation of artists' work, the demonstration of understanding of visual language and making critical judgements about art through substantiated reasoned argument.

The specification also includes synoptic assessment, which requires students to work across different parts of the qualification and to show their accumulated knowledge and understanding of a topic or subject area. Synoptic assessment enables students to show their ability to combine their skills, knowledge and understanding with breadth and depth of the subject. Synopticity is assessed in the 25-mark questions in Section B of Paper 1.

There were a pleasing number of high Level responses to all questions and students coped well with the demands of compulsory questioning. The strongest students used their works of art and architecture well in order to answer the specific requirements of each question. There was evidence of the study of a wide range of highly interesting and unexpected examples for all Themes. The inclusion of diverse examples of works from outside the European tradition, even when this was not required by the question, showed that centres have embraced this opportunity and not restricted themselves to those works named on the specification. Students wrote with passion and authority about their specified artists and/or architects as well as a huge array of others.

One point which must be addressed for future examination series is the understanding of 'works of art'. As stated in the specification, 'works of art' are works in 2D or 3D and are distinct from 'architectural works'. One student even wrote on their paper "*I wasn't sure if 'works of art' meant only painting or also sculpture – just in case...*" and proceeded to write about another painting in case their sculptural example was not valid. Where architecture is permissible as part of the response, the question will say 'works of art and/or architecture'.

Section A - Visual Analysis

The quality of responses to questions within this section was high with many students gaining the top Level on all three questions. The strongest responses were divided equally between the two parts of the question and were structured in two distinct parts to ensure that the requirements of the question were fully met.

Q1

Many students responded very well to this question, with a thorough and relevant discussion of the figure and the setting. There were some excellent answers which fully grasped Vermeer's use of light and tone although many students were less thorough in their consideration. The strongest responses provided a comprehensive discussion of the setting as well as the figure, and the emphasis on the action of pouring of milk as an indication of both a moment in time and the milkmaid's dedication to her work. They also considered the contribution of light to the mood/atmosphere of the work as well as more obvious consideration of shadowing and modelling. Weaker responses fixated on the milkmaid's status in society and/or that of the family for whom she works and tried to make other elements of the work correspond to their assertions. Some more superficial responses referenced only the light source and its highlighting of the figure.

Q2

There were a high number of very impressive responses to this question. Many students engaged very competently with the pathos of the work and discussed its expression in accurate, and often imaginative, detail. Most gave a reasonable discussion of the representation of figures in the sculpture. The strongest responses considered the relationship between the two figures eloquently and articulated the strong relationship between mother and son through describing the son's position as 'foetal' and focusing on the composition of the work as representative of their closeness and unity. There were, however, some lengthy descriptions of the lost wax process with no evidence presented as to how it had been used in Kollwitz's piece; students often referred to the bronze erroneously as being 'carved' or 'undercut'. Many knew of the high tensile strength of the material and tried to make this fit the work by suggesting that the toes or nose, for example, protrude as a result. The stronger responses referred to the sculptor not utilising this property but instead using bronze to create a compact and unifying composition. There were some very good responses where the student was able to evidence the versatility of bronze and its properties with direct reference to the sculpture.

Q3

Many students engaged extremely well with this building and were able to discuss the design and composition and expression of function authoritatively. Stronger answers made correct use of technical vocabulary in a thorough discussion of the composition and made a comprehensive exploration of how the architectural elements expressed function. Weaker responses failed to analyse the design and composition in a logical and comprehensive manner or to use correct terminology such as buttresses, stringcourses

and arcades. The most successful responses examined multiple aspects of the architectural features of the building in order to consider how they expressed function: generic aspects of the composition, such as verticality and mass; structural aspects, such as three separate entrances; functional aspects, such as bell towers and portals; symbolic aspects, such as the frequent use of the division into threes and verticality; decorative/didactic aspects, such as the bas-relief tympanum; and aspects of site, such as the contrast in height/mass with the surrounding buildings.

Section B - Themes

Students coped very well on the whole with the lack of predictability of questioning afforded by the new specification and the lack of optionality within Themes. In part (a) questions, students generally needed to focus more consistently on the question – tailoring their responses more tightly to the elements, gender or place in their chosen works of art. A few students failed to acknowledge the need to select works of art from either side of 1850; in this case both examples were considered and the mark awarded on the stronger exploration, with the answer being limited to a maximum of Level 2. Some students used architectural examples where the question specified ‘works of art’; in this case the answer was limited to a maximum of Level 2. There is no need for a comparison of chosen works and students would be well-advised to spend time on ensuring the inclusion of points to meet all the assessment objectives for each work instead.

Some students included architectural examples in their responses to Q4 and Q5(b). The fulfilment of the critical text requirement in part (b) questions was impressive. Very few students made no attempt to address this stipulation and the best responses integrated the texts into their argument naturally and utilised them in a sophisticated manner. The use of critical texts to enhance argument was an excellent discriminator.

Q4(a)

This question was answered well by many students, with Hokusai’s ‘Great Wave’ and various examples by Turner being popular choices of works produced before 1850. Hepworth’s sculptures as well as video, installation and Land Art examples were used most often for those produced after 1850. The strongest responses answered the question directly, with relevant evidence relating to the depiction of the elements; less convincing answers failed to focus on the element, with only a superficial description of the work of art and little consideration of AO1.

Q4(b)

The strongest responses to this question included a clear introduction and conclusion with sustained argument followed through their chosen examples. They also contained detailed examination of the relevance of materials and techniques in contrasting examples from different periods, and frequently different cultures, and explained directly how they were or were not the most important factor in depicting nature. Examples of Land Art, sculpture, video and installation were used alongside oil paint, watercolour, print-making and consideration of technological developments relating to materials and

techniques. All responses successfully referred to specified artists (with Dürer and Turner proving to be the most popular) and named works of art; critical texts were usually referenced although not always consistently engaged with. A few students chose to discuss works of architecture as examples, which could not be credited. Unlike in the legacy specification, where a work of art or architecture was not valid this did not necessarily affect the mark awarded as examiners were instructed to 'read around' any invalid examples and so the top Level was still accessible to students who fulfilled its requirements.

Q5(a)

This question was answered very well by many students, with a wide range of examples being used from Van Eyck, Titian, Rembrandt and Vigée le Brun to Grayson Perry, Frida Kahlo, Liu Cunhia and Marc Quinn. Many students explored the expression of gender with competence, relevance, and imagination. Weaker responses, however, discussed chosen works in more general terms that failed to answer the question directly.

Q5(b)

This question was answered very well by many students, who gave a thorough description of chosen examples of architecture with relevant discussion of how they did or did not solely reflect the identity of the architect. The focus of the question, on architecture, eradicated almost all erroneous work selection and ensured that all students delivered on the requirement to include a specified architect; all of the specified architects made an appearance in these responses. Most students provided a balanced argument which asserted that whilst the identity of a given architect did determine the identity of some buildings, that of others was determined by the patron, location and/or function. The inclusion of buildings from beyond the European tradition in response to this question showed how successfully the global element has been integrated into learning. The strongest responses contained detailed and relevant analysis and interpretation of the features of the buildings (AO2) as well as strong contextual understanding (AO1) in relation to the question. Weaker responses gave little or no description of the buildings themselves, demonstrating poor grasp of visual language and analysis of the architect's work while some failed to answer the question directly, giving an unclear or absent discussion of Identity.

Q6(a)

Many students answered this question well with clear reference to the place affected by war. This required clear AO1 in relation to where, when and why the war took place and how it was thus affected, along with convincing AO2 related to the place under consideration. Several strong responses used Nash's landscapes of battlefields or Night attack on the Sanjo Palace, for example, and kept 'place' at the centre of the question. Weaker responses tended to shift away from the focus of the question into general description of the work. Picasso's Guernica and Goya's war works were used frequently with no mention of the place, just descriptions of the figures.

Q6(b)

This question elicited many comprehensive, interesting and wholly convincing responses. It was clear that most students had considered the necessity for an understanding of context in relation to images of war in their prior learning. The scope of the question allowed students to draw on the full range of examples of works of art studied. All responses successfully referred to specified artists (with all the specified painters being used and Deller being particularly popular as a specified sculptor) and named works of art; critical texts were used particularly well in relation to this question. Many made strong cases for a distinction of necessity of context based on chronology or visual language. Even fairly weak responses identified the difference between a work that requires specific context and something that is meant to operate on a more universal level. The strongest responses gave thorough description of the historical and social context of each work (AO1), explaining the relevance in relation to the question as well as clear and relevant AO2. Critical texts were used particularly well in relation to this question. Weaker responses failed to understand how context might play a role in understanding meaning or indeed how or why it may not and gave a superficial, limited description of chosen works. A few students chose to discuss works of architecture as examples which could not be credited. Unlike in the legacy specification, however, where a work of art or architecture was not valid this did not necessarily affect the mark awarded as examiners were instructed to 'read around' any invalid examples and so the top Level was still accessible to students who fulfilled its requirements.

In summary:

- The standard of responses was considered to be high given the change of specification, level of demand, length of paper and skills being tested.
- The embracing of works beyond the European tradition was particularly noteworthy.

Based on performance on this paper, future students should ensure that:

- All knowledge of materials, techniques, processes and all assertions made in Section A questions are supported by evidence from the work of art under consideration.
- They have a clear understanding of the distinction between 'works of art' and 'architecture'.
- They meet the requirements of the question (particularly relevant to part (a) questions in Section B) where they are instructed to give works before and after 1850, for example.
- They focus on the particular aspect of a work of art or architecture being asked for (again most relevant to part (a) questions in Section B).
- They sustain their argument and support it with relevant works of art and/or architecture, analysed and interpreted in detail relevant to the question, in part (b) questions in Section B.
- They continue to meet the requirement for specified artists, where stipulated, and to use critical texts to enhance or counter their argument.

