



Examiners' Report Lead Examiner Feedback

January 2021

Pearson BTEC Nationals in Art & Design
Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in Art &
Design (31828H)

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January 2021

Publications Code 31828H_2101_ER

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Introduction

This Lead Examiner report has been written to support your understanding of how learners performed during this examination series and to help inform on-going delivery of this unit. When reading this report, you should consider the points raised in conjunction with the following materials:

- Unit content – which can be found in the qualification specification
- The set task - which can be accessed on the qualification pages of the BTEC website
- The unit marking grid - which can be accessed on the qualification pages of the BTEC website.

The assessment for this unit requires learners to independently conduct purposeful research prior to sitting a supervised assessment where they are presented with unseen material to respond to. As such the paper is presented in two parts. Part A is provided prior to the release of Part B.

Part A provides learners with a theme, a scenario, and a list of five practitioners from which learners must select one practitioner to research. It is expected that learners would spend approximately 15 hours independently researching the theme and the practitioner they have selected from the list provided. Due to the independent nature of this research it is completely acceptable for this to take place either in the classroom or learning resource centre, or as remote activity. The last three hours of the preparatory period is undertaken in a monitored session or sessions in which learners must curate their research, summarising it in up to 2 sides of A4 notes that can be taken into the supervised assessment period. It is important to note that during the three hours of monitored preparation learners are permitted to have access to the Internet or other research sources in order to produce these summary notes.

Part B provides an image of a specific piece of work by each practitioner listed in Part A of the paper, along with relevant information such as title, date, medium and size where appropriate. In addition, Part B also introduces an additional unseen practitioner that learners must respond to. For the new unseen practitioner, learners are provided with an image of a specific piece of work, as well as a short body of text which provides contextual information about the unseen practitioner in response to the theme.

During the supervised assessment period learners will not have access to any research sources and therefore will need to rely on the summary notes they have produced in the preparatory period and the information provided in Part B of the paper. Learners then have 3.5 hours to produce a formal written response to the set task in Part B. Learners are not expected to provide a bibliography or list of sources as part of this task, but it is recommended for any quotes used by learners provide, at the very least, a basic reference to the source of the quote.

Centres should take specific note of centre instructions in both Part A and Part B of the paper, as well as the administrative support guide for unit 2 to ensure that they are adhering to the requirements of this assessment.

The unit mark scheme for this paper has remained unchanged since the last series and reflects the requirements of the set task. The mark breakdown is:

- AO1: Be able to apply an effective investigation process to inform understanding of creative practitioners. Marks available = 12
- AO2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners. Marks available = 20
- AO3: Demonstrate understanding of how contextual factors relate to creative practitioners' work. Marks available = 12
- AO4: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners. Marks available = 16

The total marks available for this paper are 60.

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

For January 2021 the theme was 'Art Imitating Life'. It was clear from the responses that learners found the theme accessible and most learners were able to make useful connections between the theme and the selected practitioners. For some learners the interpretation of the theme was very literal, and they made reference to art being made to represent something in real life. However, a number of learners demonstrated a more sophisticated analysis of the theme and discussed the idea of art transcending the boundaries between imitation and reality. A number of learners even went so far as to relate the theme and the practitioners work being discussed to the philosophical theory of mimesis as considered by the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. These interpretations are all valid and learners are free to apply any number of interpretations to the theme as they feel are appropriate and relevant.

Part A of the paper provided learners with five creative practitioners who were carefully selected to represent a diverse range of Art and Design disciplines. Learners are free to select a practitioner of their choice, even if the discipline falls outside of the learners' own experience of specialist practice. Whilst there may be some advantage to learners having practical knowledge and experiences of the discipline represented by their choice of practitioner, it is also completely plausible for learners to respond just as positively to a practitioner who works in a new discipline. For the unseen practitioner introduced in Part B of the paper, the work selected will only relate to one area of specialist practice. Nevertheless, it is expected that learners working in any discipline will be able to deconstruct the visual language and messages in this piece of work. Over the lifetime of the qualification, the aim is that a rich and diverse range of practice will be explored. Therefore, in preparing for this assessment, it is vital that learners are exposed to a wide range of creative practitioners and have the confidence to apply their skills in visual analysis across a broad spectrum of disciplines. All practitioners included in Part A of the paper have been selected to ensure they have a connection to the given theme and a sufficient international profile to provide learners with ample opportunity to undertake appropriate research.

Despite the smaller number of entries for this paper there was evidence of learners responding to all of practitioners listed in Part A of the paper. Ron Mueck (Sculptor) was by far the most popular choice of

practitioner with many learners opting to research his work. Ikuko Iwamoto (ceramicist), Vija Celmins (artist) and Jeremy Scott (fashion designer) were also quite popular choices for learners. There was less evidence of learners selecting Simon Patterson (artist).

The unseen practitioner revealed in Part B, Richard Billingham, was found to be generally accessible and the majority of learners appeared to understand the nature of his work and understood how it linked to the theme 'Art Imitating Life'. A number of learners were able to successfully make some very thoughtful observations about his work, drawing relevant conclusions based on the contextual information provided.

The Set Task

AO1: Be able to apply an effective investigation process to inform understanding of creative practitioners

The underlying principle of this unit is to develop learner's skills in undertaking appropriate research and then be able to apply the research to a given task. Based on the responses to this paper it was clear that the unit content had generally been well taught, and most learners were able to demonstrate appropriate skills in the use of research to provide relevant and well-articulated responses.

During the 15-hour preparatory period, which includes the 3 hours of monitored preparation, learners should undertake in-depth research into the practitioner they selected from the list provided in Part A of the paper. Research can be conducted using a variety of secondary sources including books, journals, video clips and the Internet. Although learners should be encouraged to use a variety of different sources, learners are not penalised if their research is predominantly Internet based.

During the monitored preparation period learners must curate and summarise their research into bulleted notes that they can use to support their response during the supervised assessment. Most learners were able to demonstrate they had researched from a range of sources and developed a clear understanding of the work and the context of their chosen practitioner. Centres should continue to ensure that research skills are taught as part of the delivery of this unit and

that learners are able to recognise the varying quality of information from different sources.

For responses achieving in the higher mark bands there was evidence that learners had engaged well with the practitioners they had selected to research. This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 4 for AO1. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach is taken to marking and there was more evidence found across the whole submission to support the final mark in band 4.

"Iwamoto first developed her own unique design language during her time working with visually impaired people, she wanted these people to see how brilliant art could be and make "invisible things visible" so she began to focus her bespoke, crafted sculptures towards the ideas of varying textures, making the piece not only aesthetically interesting but also giving it an unusual, almost alien like physical feel. The focus on different surface textures is clearly visible within her work, evident through the many lumps, bumps and spines that she uses to decorate her work. Additionally, much of her work entirely lacks colour, with only a few select features receiving even sparing use of the stuff. This is due to her focus on making her pieces subtle, yet dramatic, with Iwamoto herself saying that "Colour is to me like music, if there is too much going on it becomes annoying, it has to be simple and cheering" since she firmly believes that "if you keep the colours down, the tension and other subtle nuances of your work will naturally stand out so I only use colours as an accent." Personally I think she also keeps colour to a minimum to avoid alienation within the partially sighted people that helped her to develop her own style of working."

This learner's selection of research is purposeful and evidences understanding of the nature of the practitioners' work. The learner has demonstrated a good level of knowledge about the work produced by Iwamoto Ikuko and has applied this to suggest a rationale for visual elements within the work. The learner has applied an effective and consistent use of written communication.

Learners who engaged with a limited number of research sources and simply stated 'facts' about the practitioner's life or work fell into lower mark bands. Below is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 1 for AO1. As before, this is merely an extract from the learners' submission. A holistic approach is taken to marking

and there more evidence found across the whole submission to support the final mark given in band 1.

“Vija Celmins is Latvian born artist that spent most of her life in America because she was a refugee due to the events of world war 2 but the moving around saw a change in her work from war related things because of the war things in the media and the things happing around her to sky`s desserts, oceans and other natural forms.”

This learner’s selection of research is superficial and there is limited application in relation to the theme of the paper. They have demonstrated some knowledge about the contextual factors relating to Vija Celmin’s work, but it is not clear that the information has supported the learners understanding of the work by this practitioner.

The structure of work submitted in this series predominantly showed an appropriate and logical structure in line with the expectations of Level 3. There were varied approaches to structuring the response with some learners choosing to use subheadings and page breaks whilst others wrote their response as continuous prose. Learner’s responses varied greatly in length (word count), with some response spanning up to 12 pages whereas other response were far shorter. The task does not provide learners with any specific guidance regarding the length of their response, and the only limitation for learners is the timed nature of the assessment. However, it is important to note that longer responses do not necessarily equate to higher achievement and excessive word counts often lead to some repetition. Learners should be encouraged to be concise and succinct in their responses and to leave sufficient time to review and, if necessary, edit, their work.

AO2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners

This assessment outcome is focussed on the learner’s ability to visually analyse the work identified. This is the highest weighted outcome in this paper and is worth one third of the total marks available. Learners are expected to provide a visual analysis of the selected work by their chosen practitioner as well as the work provided for the unseen practitioner. As learners are provided with images of both pieces of work to refer to during the supervised assessment learners should be encouraged to provide equal emphasis on the visual analysis of both

pieces of work. However, it is possible that a particularly strong analysis of one piece can compensate for slightly weaker analysis of the other piece. It is important to note that learners visual analysis must specifically relate to the pieces of work identified in the paper. As in previous papers, an unfortunate number of learners based their visual analysis on other work by their practitioner, making little or no reference to the work identified in the paper. This unfortunately resulted in these learners achieving lower marks for this assessment outcome.

For the majority of learners there was appropriate evidence of visual analysis of the work of their chosen practitioner. For learners achieving higher marks for this assessment outcome it was clear that their visual analysis had helped to inform understanding, including thoughtful connections being visual elements, subject matter and meaning being explored. This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 5 for AO2. This is merely an extract of the submission to demonstrate the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported the final mark awarded for AO2.

"Through a single image alone, the viewer is capable of making judgements of the characters. With their bright red skin and wrinkled old faces neither the mother or father look particularly healthy. This is further strengthened through the knowledge that his father was an alcoholic and his mother was a chain smoker. Alcoholism and smoking are often synonymous with a feeling of deprivation and despair suggesting a sense of unitability in the household. It is impossible to tell due to the colourisation and expressions whether the image itself depicts a positive scene or a negative one. Although the man is smiling, the woman is not. This perplexity and unease strengthens the theme of conflict and instability. The artwork Billingham has created is therefore representing his life but out of the original context. Daveion Thompson wrote that, "If you remove something from the context of its everyday environment...does it become something else entirely?" Therefore, this piece is open to interpretation for the viewer. They can choose whether to see a political message about poverty or a depiction gratefulness for the ability to capture memories of childhood."

This learner has demonstrated a sophisticated approach to analysing visual elements, demonstrating assured understanding. They have

included a variety of pertinent and insightful references and have made use of a quote from their research.

Learners achieved lower marks for this assessment outcome when they took a more formulaic and descriptive approach to visual analysis. By simply listing visual elements in the work the learners were only able to demonstrate limited understanding. Below is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 1 for AO2. As before, this is merely an extract from the learner's submission and a holistic approach is taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported the mark awarded for AO2.

"The colour in 'Web #1' is minimal as per usual In Celmins' work as she goes by "Less is more", but this is also because of the use of charcoal, the piece consists of blacks and whites which help build up the tone strongly. The texture of the piece is very soft, smooth and gentle from the tenderness of the background and the precision of the web's detail, we could interpret that Celmins' took a lot of time and care in this piece and that she was extremely firm with the different variants of charcoal she used to capture the realistic look within the outcome. The pattern in this piece is all from the line on the webs, the delicacy of them, we see alternations of direction and length to further back up the realism in Celmins' work."

This learner has demonstrated a limited ability to analyse visual components, demonstrating limited understanding. They have started to make tentative connections to subject matter and meaning but this is quite superficial.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of how contextual factors influence creative practitioners work

During the preparatory investigation it is important that learners research the wider context in relation to their selected practitioner, as well as developing their understanding of the theme and how this impacts on the interpretation of the selected work. During the assessment learners must draw on this research as well as the text provided in Part B in order to analyse the contextual factors that influence the identified work.

For a high proportion of learners, contextualisation in relation to the theme of the paper lacked depth of analysis. Some learners took a very

literal approach to interpreting the theme and contextual factors. These learners had a tendency to rely on extracting detail from a practitioner's biography and made little or no reference to wider contextual factors. It was unclear if these superficial responses were the result of poor research or a lack of understanding regarding the nature of contextual information and how it informs an understanding of visual work. Below is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 1 for AO3. As before, this is merely an extract from the learner's submission and a holistic approach is taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported the mark awarded for AO3.

"Jeremy Scotts work is inspired by all types of food and the ingredients that where used within the foods that people eat on an everyday basis, this could link to how he possibly had an eating disorder from the builling that he sustained as a child and is showing them through his work, other pieces of his work are inspired by children linking to how he was builled as a child and didn't get to fully experience his childhood, he links his work to when he had to sleep in the metro which is why his first piece of work resemble garbage bags and hospital gowns. Jeremy Scotts work depicts his life as a child that he now produces it through clothing as an adult, yet his work does show how he had to live on the streets before he became the creative director of Moschino and sole owner of his own company."

However, learners achieving higher marks for this AO were able use their research convincingly, demonstrating understanding of the practitioners' creative practice and making insightful links to the theme. This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 3 for this AO. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO3:

"His most famous piece of work named 'The Great Bear' created in 1992 could easily be mistaken for London's widly iconic tube map at a first glance, as it is an exacty replica of Henry C Beck's map of the underground. However he has replaced the names of the stations with those of well known people ranging from engineers to philosophers, musicaians to actors and even planets. The name was given to the art by Simon Patterson as a reference to the star constellation of Ursa Major seamingly the tube stops become the stars in a 'galaxy of fame'. Patterson himself comments "the

underground map moved on from being an underground map as a fixed logical thing, to a meaning that, like music is in the mind. I started with a map that is to some extent an abstartion of the urban land scape". The lines that connect each stop deveate from three main lines of lineage, evolutionary, philosophically and religious. I feel that his work of 'The Great Bear' could also be concidered to be a reversal of 'art imitating life' as life imitaing art is a movement that is very prodominant in the modern era of art. As art plays a fundimental role in the influence and progression of society on a world wide scale."

This learner has provided a competent analysis of some key contextual factors that are relevant to Patterson's work. These have been thoughtfully linked to the themes and ideas that have impacted on the production of the work. Contextual understanding in relation to Richard Billingham was understandably less developed as learners were reliant on the short body of text provided in Part B of the paper. It is important that learners develop their skills in analysing the information provided to be able to extract the relevant information; using the information to develop their understanding of the work they are discussing in the task. Learners need to understand that providing a direct transcript of the given text within their own submission has no real value. Learners must use the information to inform their understanding of the unseen practitioner and the work being discussed in the task. The text should provide sufficient information to allow learners to interpret and contextualise the work and to support the formulation of independent interpretations and opinions.

AO4: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners

For this AO learners must communicate independent judgements and demonstrate their understanding of the work of both creative practitioners (the one selected from Part A and the unseen practitioner introduced in Part B) in relation to the theme of the paper. For most learners this AO was specifically addressed towards the end of their written submission through a summary of their findings and ideas regarding both practitioners, comparing their respective work. Learners are required to make a decision as to which practitioner's piece of work from the two being considered most relates to the theme of the paper. It is important that when addressing this AO that learners

remember their answer should relate specifically to the pieces of work that have been selected for each practitioner. The question does not relate to the practitioner in general or other works they may have produced, but specifically asks learners to provide “a justification of which piece of work you think most relates to the theme...”.

Whilst there is clearly no right or wrong answer to this question, it is important that learners do make a clear decision and provide supporting arguments. Although most learners in this series were able to reach a conclusion, there were a worrying number of learners who appeared to completely dismiss the work of Richard Billingham simply based on the fact they felt photography took less time and skill to produce. Learners should be encouraged to remain open minded regarding all art and design disciplines and such dismissive comments cannot be considered as valid justification.

For learners achieving higher grades for this AO they provided some well-articulated and thoughtful responses. This is an extract from a learner’s submission that achieved a mark in band 4 for this AO. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach is taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported the mark awarded for AO4:

“In conclusion Mueck’s work both represents mimesis and rejects it through the sheer unrealistic scaling. The illusion of his face would be convincing if not for its work. His work is unlike Maurizio Cattelan’s which are deliberately hyper realistic to enhance the tragicomic devices of questioning the institution. Nor does his work explore the relationship between science, nature, art and the environment as Patricia Piccinini’s mutant models. Instead his work is just a conformation of his abilities. Although life-like and shocking, the unusual scales of his pieces such as “Mask” serve little purpose but to catch the eyes of onlookers. He is not passionate about art “I am not driven by art; it is just all I can do,” which suggests a lack of emotional drive. Life itself encompasses the human condition which is a broad term to describe the emotional drive surrounding important aspects we experience. Therefore, without the emotional connection to his pieces, his work cannot truly be described as a representation of “Art Imitating Life,” as significantly as Richard Billingham who appears to want to connect with his audience to create meaningful artwork.”

Summary

Based on responses seen in this session, centres and learners are offered the following advice:

- Encourage learners to evaluate the quality of research sources being used, especially when researching using the Internet.
- Ensure research is wide ranging and includes a diverse selection of work produced by the practitioner as the actual piece included in the paper will not be known until the release of Part B of the paper.
- When undertaking visual analysis of the work of both practitioners encourage learners to apply analysis and not simply describe the visual elements in the work.
- Develop wider understanding of the impact that social, political; religious and environmental issues have of the creation of work to support understanding of context.
- Ensure learners remain open minded to all art and design specialisms and do not dismiss work based on personal prejudice without reasoned justification.



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