

EXAMINER'S REPORT History of Art 8285/02 2008

Paper 2 Modern Art Marker's Report

This year candidates managed their time very well, giving (more or less) equal time to Sections A and B of the examination. However a preliminary remark must be made about the importance of legible writing in an examination script. Despite the examiner's desire to find points deserving a mark it is impossible to do so when points cannot be understood because there are no legible letters in the written words - only a little squiggle among other squiggles.

Also, many students need to be reminded that English is written in sentences. A sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. Meaning often becomes incoherent in long rambling paragraphs without punctuation.

Candidates need not spend time writing out the question or introducing their essays with generalizations that simply repeat material from the exam paper - (e.g. "...These artists both developed different painting techniques and subject-matter in their paintings." or "... there are great similarities and differences in the two works.") No marks are awarded for these meaningless statements. Each statement or observation needs to be backed up with an explanation or an example.

In Section A a majority of candidates chose to answer Question 1, and while some students addressed the question with appropriate examples of relevant works, many wrote their essay about the development of Cubism rather than the evolution of styles with an explanation of the key differences between them. Students were able to give a fair idea of the progression of Cubist development, but tended to have very little knowledge beyond 1912's *Still-life with Chair Caning*. There is still a very shallow understanding of Synthetic Cubism demonstrated by many students. Synthetic Cubist innovations are at the centre of answers to this question about key differences. A few candidates handled these differences very well, however.

A number of candidates answered Question 2, but very few were able to explain how "technical innovations affected the development of early 20th century art" in anything but a simple and naive way. It would be very advantageous for students to practise analysis of questions so that they do what the questions ask them to do (explain, or outline or evaluate or discuss - what exactly?)

Question 3 asked candidates to apply a statement about abstraction to the work of an artist, and most students chose to write about Mondrian. While the development of style was generally outlined in a satisfactory way the best essays made use of appropriate key words to relate Mondrian's style to colour, poetry, and music (words like *purity*, *neo-plasticism*, *Theosophy*). No student was able to explain the revolutionary way 'space' works in Mondrian's paintings.

There were no answers to Option 2.

The answers in Option 3 were disappointing. Question 7 asked for an evaluation - not about process, but rather about product. There was very little real understanding of the artists' works. Question 8 required some definition and discussion around "mass-produced urban media".

Many students seem to have a very simplistic understanding of American history and society. This question demanded examples of art works derived from advertising and the things advertised, and some analysis of the characteristics of mass-produced urban media. Most students only mentioned the work of two artists, but the best answers began with these characteristics and elaborated with examples of Pop art works by different artists

In Section B the time allocation was much better managed than in previous years. Question 13 was mostly satisfactory although some students did not realize that

Sonia Delaunay was a woman. Answers to Question 15 were generally very poor. Many candidates knew nothing at all about the works under discussion and demonstrated a naive and shallow understanding of the works and their relationship to 'feminism'. Despite this lack of knowledge there was often a determined effort to elaborate on this subject rather than the stylistic features or historical context of the works. (It may surprise some art historians to hear that Lichtenstein was such a "feminist"!) No student made reference to the type of subject matter he selected from comic-books, or the way his choice reflected the popular culture of America at the time.