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TOP SCHOLAR



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Scholarship 2024 Art History

Time allowed: Three hours
Total score: 24

ANSWER BOOKLET

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

Answer THREE questions from Question Booklet 93301Q: ONE from Section A, ONE from Section B, AND the compulsory question from Section C.

Write your answers in this booklet. Start your answer to each question on a new page. Carefully number each question.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–27 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

Do not write in the margins (). This area will be cut off when the booklet is marked.

YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.

SECTION C

2

Oliver Maughan's text "Why Art Is Essential in the 21st Century" provides a compelling imperative on how we need to continue to connect with art as a society, ensuring we don't succumb to the rationalized and rationalizing pressures of technological development and modern life to do away with the aesthetic and the emotional. His text provides a critique of modern forms of experience, an extolling of art's ability to provoke innovation, and finally, an urging to maintain connection with art as a question of creativity and joy.

The first point he makes is a critique of the ability for technology and social media to preserve us a experience with art that "loses the sense of intimacy and interconnectivity of in-person viewing". In this sense, he is very much modelling his argument after the critical theorist Walter Benjamin, who, in his seminal essay: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," ~~elaborates~~ explains the ability of photographic reproduction to deprive artworks of their "aura", when the viewer does not engage with the artwork in its natural environment.

The "sacred or intimate" which Maughan evokes here is very much paralleling Benjamin's "aura," except Maughan has extended it to the capacity of social media for the endless circulation of these simulacra, and bemoans the impersonality of online viewing. Indeed, some artworks positively radiate "aura" or "intimacy" that cannot be replicated online. For example, the Marian Theotokos Mosaic in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, is positioned in every way to evoke a sort of sublime reverence which one cannot replicate in a social media encounter. The artwork is situated in a ~~large~~^{large} 40 meters above the ~~main~~^{nave} of the mosque (a former basilica), and so the viewer encounters the divine icon at both a large physical distance and a large figurative, spiritual distance, with Mary being a ~~high~~ ^{high} resident in Heaven. Mary and Christ are painted blue, and set on a background of gleaming gold tesserae. The tesserae shimmer and shine in reaction to the light streaming in from the upper windows. The idol is also anamorphically warped to appear to float off the surface of the dome. The Byzantine and the modern spectator both have to gaze up into the sky to see this shimmering

apparently floating figure, either in an experience supposed to be fit of an interaction with a divine figure. This is common in ecclesiastical art, the usage of perspective and trompe-l'œil was similarly done ~~to make~~ by Masaccio in his Holy Trinity, 1427 to make the encounter with the divine feel as real as possible from the point of view of the ~~spectator~~, the divine "aura" or "intimacy" impossible anywhere else. So far these artworks to be photographed and circulated on social media is for them to lose their power and, in turn, their entire purpose. Maughan doesn't say this for no reason - he deliberately contrasts "interconnectivity" with art to "interconnectedness" & humans in order to stress that we should maintain this "intimacy" with art as the past even as we become increasingly globalised and socialised.

This leads onto his second point, which I disagree with to an extent. He lists out the ability of art to foster "innovation", "critical thinking", "self-confidence" etc. This seems, in all fairness, to be too much of a rationalised and

~~control~~ corporate ~~effect~~ way to describe interaction with art. When Maughan's ~~art~~ contention that art can provide "joy and entertainment" or "Understanding of" the world around us is correct, but the idea of art as a reciprocal process to "train" the viewer, in a sense is art as something to be "produced and consumed" (as he says) is a reprehensibly rationalised way to quantifying the emotional experience with art which he had just provided such a good case for. In Susan Sontag's 1966 essay "Against Interpretation" critiques just this tendency, closing with the aphorism: "We need ~~as~~ an erotics, not a hermeneutics of art." Art can innovate and inspire, ~~but~~ for example - the abstract expressionist movement so saliently exemplified in Claire Mitchell's 1955 painting "City Landscape" - but to then use this to apply "critical thinking" and "self-confidence" to the 21st century makes it sound like a workplace exercise. Mitchell's painting very much provokes an "erotics of art" - it consists of ~~an~~ messy clusters of impasto paint, in ~~near~~ pink, yellow, and blue, strewn across the center of an off-white canvas. Paint drips down the canvas and spreads the color around.

To approach such an "erotic" expressionist piece through the selfishly humanistic lens of "critical thinking" is fallacious. As for other, abstract expressionist painters, Adolphe Gottlieb and Mark Rothko states - "It is our role as artists to make the viewer see things our way, not his". Mitchell's chaotic canvas provides an insight into her experiences with modernity - her view of a "city landscape", not representational, but expressionist, and like the Theotokos and the Massacre they should be met with "intimacy" not as edifice.

Magnin's final point is more agreeable - Le Vinphers the viewer to "not leave art in the dust" and not to "face the tragedy of living in a world with no source of creativity." Indeed, art serves as a potent reflection of interiority ~~throughout~~ throughout history - like Mitchell's - and ~~these interiorities need~~ to continue to be these interiorities need to continue to be interacted with "intimately" to maintain our connection not only with the past, but with creativity and subjectivity as we enter an age of "technology and the internet" an increasingly impersonal journey. Art works

should not be approached as "Skills" but as relationships with perspectives of the past - which is why I agree with his use of "interconnectivity" to describe art viewing.

Social media provides a lateral, mediated, and impersonal mode of interconnectivity, - art is cross-generational, ~~for~~ "erotic" (in Sontag's words) and intimate interconnectivity - sometimes we can get closer to artists of the past through art than we can to people of the present through social media. For example, "La Gare St. Lazare" is a 1886 oil painting by Claude Monet, depicting the terminus of a Parisian train station covered by a towering church-like iron shed roof. We are able to connect intimately with Monet's palpable, baroque and for modernity and modernization (just as we connect with Mitchell's disorientation at it). The low horizon of the pictorial space combined with the rigid line work (abnormal for an impressionist) and dark form of the shed makes us feel like we're gazing up at a church of modernity, the subject area. Here the transverse and orthogonal of the black iron frame lead us into the center of the pictorial space where Monet fills the canvas with rough thick impasto and

alla prima brushwork to emphasise the ever-presence of the smoke and steam billowing throughout the scene in flux, blending together into a fluid mass as Monet variegates the colours very little. The point here is that this one of modernity (A response to the 19th century Haussmann modernisation of Paris) is a direct response to Monet's own like and times - and we are transported back there by "intimately" connecting with it. This is why we need art - as a way to see things from new perspectives, the perspective of the past, to renew our ~~connections~~ interconnectivity and refuse to relinquish the past, which is, in a sense, what Macpherson argues.

Though Macpherson uses rather commodified terminology, his contention that we are heading for an impersonal age of technology and simulacra is overall correct - he himself ~~this~~ is prone to impersonalising his language. But the fact is that we must maintain art as a "relationship", an intimate ~~interconnected~~ "interconnectivity", lest we lose creativity all together.

SECTION 3: QUESTION 5.

The last two centuries of art have been full of innovation and rethinking of what ~~the~~ "art" can mean and be. Old art used to glorify, ~~to~~ represent, ~~to~~ ~~capture~~ capture. Now, art "impacts", art is a challenge to the viewer directly. To do this it needs to be ground breaking, and despite the prevalence of this in many cases, some artists insist on returning to academized complacency.

~~The~~ ~~best~~ The best way to break ground is to determine what is wrong with the current ground. This is what Martha Rosler did, when she published an essay in the 1970s critiquing the mode of photography she called "liberal documentary", which would capture photos of down-trodden, unfortunate people in order to incite sympathy in newspapers or exhibitions. Rosler believed that this was condescending self-gratification, that it "assuaged the stirrings of conscience like scratching an itch, while simultaneously assuring the viewer of their relative social and economic prosperity." In her 1975 exhibition "Three Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems", she

breaks ground with an impactful critique of these liberal documentarians. The exhibition features 25 photo frames depicting the Bowery, a street in New-York inhabited by homeless alcoholics and veterans of the Vietnam war. Each frame features one image of the sidewalk, littered with alcohol or trash, and one image of a series of words used to

describe alcoholics in the newspapers - "bleary-eyed", "plastered", "inebriated". She uses space and composition here to critique the way these people are typically represented. Space is used with the emptiness of the frames - Foster never once depicts a person, she only shows the bottles and glass that they leave behind. To depict a person would be to make them the subject or pity case as she's already shown, that pity is self-gratifying to the viewer. Her composition is also potent. Firstly, all the photos are wide shots at oblique or perpendicular angles to the sidewalk - as if taken

from the perspective of a passerby. But frequently they're at a high-angle, literally and physically looking down on the trash. Her composition of the words - the pejorative "drunk" synonyms - are arranged to mirror the composition of the photography - as if to say that both the photos AND

the performatives were condescending as "inadequate descriptive systems." Foster is deliberately rebelling here - "breaking ground" - to impactfully critique not only past antecedents, but also the viewer's complicity in it - a direct accusation.

Impact can be used in different ways than critique, however, - it can serve a vital societal function. This is relevant to the controversial and (literally and figuratively) ground breaking architectural memorial "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" by Peter Eisenman, 2004. Rather than depict any Jewish symbolism, iconography, or even names, Eisenman tried to create what he describes as a "Feeling of Otherness". The memorial comprises of nearly 3000 stone blocks - stelae - of varying heights, arranged in an array over sloping and undulating ground. The periphery, the outermost stelae, are only 1-2 feet high, but they gradually begin to dwarf the spectator the further in they go. In the center, they are towered by stone pillars on all sides, standing on shifting and disorienting ground. This is impactful in and of itself - the disorientation and immense sense of being lost replicates

to an ^{ever} extent the disorientation and helplessness
 of the Jewish people during the Holocaust.
 It also serves a similar purpose by its ~~decept-~~
~~iveness~~ ^{deceptiveness}, how easy it is to
 get swallowed into the center without
 noticing. The smooth, tall, stone blocks
 are cold and impersonal, and the
 entire site has a sense of "Otherness" just
 as Eisenman centered. Why? Other
 than this immediate impactfulness, it was controversial
 for not having specific reference to the
 Holocaust or commemorating the event - certainly
 a "ground-breaking" form of memorial. The point is,
 that by making it so interactive and
 personal, he achieves a plan with
 many memorials - that of redundancy. Robert
 Pinter, in his book "Interpassivity", mentions
 the fact that Nazi memorials could
 impede our remembering of the Holocaust
 "precisely because it represents the act
 of remembering as already done" for us.
 By making it more of an "experience"
 than a traditional memorial, Eisenman
 ensures the ~~Holocaust~~ memorial's perpetual
 relevance and thus the Holocaust's perpetual
 relevance. This is the "impact" that
 Eisenman achieves with his ground breaking
 - he ensures a more direct remembrance of
 the Holocaust than was thought previously possible.

Both aforementioned examples represent substantive innovations on their respective medium, - they derive their impact by being very much "avant-garde". But, as Clement Greenberg describes in his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", the avant-garde has its antipode - it's rear-guard is kitsch. The innovation of conceptual art has, to some artists, lead to a distaste. Some art considered "ground-breaking" and "controversial" goes against the meritocratic values of our modern consumerist and neoliberal society that places value in that which takes the most effort, not that which breaks the most ground. This has led to an army of traditionalists attempting to revive the old modes of art as representation, art as beauty, art as realism. Noah Verrier combines this kitsch traditionalism with modern kitsch consumerism in his art, taking beer brand labels from companies like Oreo or Dunkin' Donuts and painting realistic oil paintings of their products. His art is regressive - not "controversial" or "ground-breaking", and thus has no "impact" to speak of, it only entrenched our deep consumerism and commodity fetishism in the modern day. This is best seen in his 2024 oil painting "Dr Pepper", which shows a still

like of a Dr Pepper can. He uses light to provide form, as in a traditional still-life, but with tinges of ersatz product placement - it strikes the white of the "Dr Pepper" logo front-on as it shines reflects directly into the eyes of the viewer. Water drops reflect globules of light, reminiscent of a fast-food advertisement. While these typical still-lives represent studios in form and space, there is no space to speak or here - the 8x10 inch canvas has only enough room to just contain the commodity, which is all the artist is interested in. Even the medium and technique itself indicates kitsch - oil painting and representational art has ceased to be part of the artistic Zeitgeist, - mimesis has given way to conceptual, non-representational art. Greenberg states that kitsch "takes for raw material the debased and academized simulacra of genuine culture", and that it takes "the styles and themes of academic art, turns it into a system, and discards the rest." Verrier's kitsch art is abjectly commodified, and represents the opposite of the "groundbreaking" formal innovations that the prior two artists embodied. In this sense, there is no "input" because Verrier is discursively re-affirming the capitalistic system

within which he is producing. While Foster and Eisenstein critique the distance and impersonality of art while Verrier embodies it. There is no "real impact".

Thus, we can see that much art is existing in ~~an~~ ~~a~~ system hopes at transgression, of "ground breaking" - while much of it represents immence and regression. To hold "impact" art must surpass itself and cause a self-reflexive re-evaluation of the medium within which it acts - it cannot fight artistic progress by attempting to hark back to a bygone system of expression if it wishes to derive real impact.

Q1A SECT. A QUESTION ONE

Form has asserted itself in a variety of different modes and contexts across art history, and has served a number of different roles. There is no doubt that it is a "key factor" in every artwork, ~~whether holding deductive~~ ~~presence~~ whether occurring on a personal, general, or symbolic scale.

The most common usage of form is the personal, human form. This can be seen clearly in Masaccio's 1423 fresco painting

"The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden" in the Brancacci chapel. This ~~petrine~~ chapel depicts Adam and Eve in two frescoes, while the rest depict the life of St. Peter, and thus contrast the original sin of humanity ~~through the path~~ with the path of absolution from sin through St. Peter and the Catholic Church. He stands for. Considering this, form is a key factor when representing Adam and Eve in the sense that it represents their imperfection and mortality following the Fall. "Expulsion" shows this event - the two being expelled from the Garden of Eden by an Angel. In the ~~fresco~~ fresco, Adam and Eve's forms are emphatically naturalistic - saggy and pallid flesh tonally modelled with a pale gray and a dull, earthen skin tone. Not only does this emphasise their forms stripped of their divinity - extremely human and vulnerable; but the colour of their form also holds significance - it is the same colour as the dusty earth in front of them, recalling God's phrase in Genesis - "thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return". Eve's form is represented ~~more~~ less sparingly than Adam's - she was, after all, the one to commit the original sin. Her

face is contorted into a horrified grimace, the facial modeling ~~showing~~ causing her face's shrinking to look demonic. She covers herself, ashamed at her nudity, mimicking the Venus pudica pose - only instead of playful and coquettish she is aghast at her own sin. All while Massacio contrasts their horrified forms with the idealistic form of the angel, representing the divinity of heaven by comparison. Form is by far ~~the most~~ ~~important~~ not only a key factor here - it is by far the most important one, in both a visual, symbolic, and allusive manner.

But form can also be considered at a much smaller scale - the representation of the human form shrunk down to minuscule size and multiplied to emphasise humanity's everpresence. This was the goal of much protestant art, especially genre scenes. John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*, describes the bourgeois attraction to genre scenes by stating that they identify not with the intricacies of the figures, but with the moral that they represent. This serves this point - the macroscopic view of form as contributing to a ~~small~~ moral of human

presence is what makes it a key factor here. We may examine this in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1565 painting "Hunters in the Snow", which depicts an expansive village on a snowy mountainside (the scale of which is emphasised by aerial perspective as it recedes into the pictorial space), filled with human forms either at labour or at ~~leisure~~ ^{leisure}. The viewer is led into the painting by a group of three hunters on the bottom left side of the canvas in the foreground, as we follow the diagonal leading line into the mid-ground, where members of the village are ice-skating or hauling logs. The use of form in this painting is almost entirely done in service of contrast. The "moral" that Berger speaks of is in this case, human subsistence - which the contrast of form emphasises by pitting the disparately dark human forms against the pure white background of the snow, as if to speak to the human ability to subsist in such an inhospitable climate - and moreover, subsist enough to pursue leisure. To elaborate: the hunters and dogs in the bottom left are all forms with warm ochre tones, dressed in pelts, etc. Next to them is a

a warm fire and a brick inn. All these forms connoting life and human activity are a basic stark contrast to the white snow they sit on the canvas. Further down, are more houses, and the myriad black forms playing on the ice in the mid-ground. The connotations of "life" ~~is~~ it even all over human forms: the aforementioned dog, but also the slyster sparrow in the ~~stare~~ foreground contrasted against the white-grey sky, and the form of the ~~tree~~ black tree in the foreground that stretches up with a multiplicity of branches to give the appearance of human veins. "Hunters in the Snow" reflects the protestant ideal of promoting human acts and human spirit - in contrast ~~then~~ to the Italian renaissance revering God and the ~~single~~ ^{form} human figure, the Northern renaissance used form to revere "humanity" as a whole or a collective. While the primacy of form isn't as monopolistic as it is in ~~the~~ Expulsion, it is still arguably the most important ~~key~~ factor in the moral of Hunters in the Snow - only its consonance and entanglement with colour.

The last use of form is a more unconscious one, used to give prominence to certain elements of a painting over others. This

is found in Rembrandt's 1635 painting "Self Portrait with Saskia" (also known as "The Prodigal Son in the Brothel"). This painting depicts Rembrandt himself sitting at a table with Saskia, his newly married wife, sitting on his lap. Rembrandt raises a glass to the sky and turns to look at the viewer with cheer, holding his head out to display his wife and acting as a *reposeur* that invites the viewer directly into the painting. Form is used here to create contrast too, but in a more interesting way than in *Hunters*. Rembrandt's form is fully totally modelled, lit by the *chiaroscuro* lighting of the room, and his hand *emphasizing* raising the glass completes a pyramidal composition with leading lines running down his hat and Saskia's gown. However, Saskia's form is only totally modelled below Rembrandt's arm, where he embraces her. Above his arm her form becomes remarkably flat, and her pose appears upright and austere, staring modestly at the viewer. The top left part of the pictorial space, which she occupies, contains only a blank wall. This ~~emphasizes~~ contrasts Rembrandt greatly, his kinetic form, modelled figure, and smiling face. Saskia's form has the appearance of a

two-dimensional painting - as if she has been
 literally objectified to present to the viewer in
 a way. A revisionist feminist theory approach may
 interest us here - Laura Mulvey's essay,
 Visual Pleasure and Narrative Pleasure, describes
~~the~~ using psychoanalytical theory, the
 tendency of the "male gaze" to discursively
 represent females as objects of scopophilic
 pleasure. Like in the Rembrandt painting,
 she states that the male spectator
 treats the represented woman as an
 object of pleasure while simultaneously
 identifying with the represented male (Rembrandt)
 so he can possess the woman within
 the narrative of the painting too. Rembrandt
 is the ideal-ego, and Saskia is aesthetically
 subjugated as a form, to be an object.
 As John Berger states: men act, women
 appear. In this case, form is a
 key factor when viewed through
 a feminist aesthetic lens, as it
 allows Saskia not to be presented with
 any real agency or humanity other than her
 flat representation. This objectification
 and ~~the fact that~~ Rembrandt's visible
 glee, is made more potent by the fact
 that Saskia came from a wealthy
 noble family of far higher standing than
 Rembrandt - she is here treated as if

she was literally a material acquisition. From this context, form is absolutely a key factor.

We have thus viewed form as a means of praise, objectification, contrast, didacticism and more. In Expulsion, form was used to represent the patheticness of humanity, while in Hunters it was used to extol the virtues of humanity - and then in Self-portrait, it was used to strip somebody of their humanity entirely. In all three cases, form has not only been a key factor, but the most key factor and is thus ~~not~~ in all its forms across art history, a key factor.