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Examiners' Report

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GCE A/S, A2 Art and Design Examination Report 2006

General Comments

Moderators report that this year appears to have been one of consolidation. The Specification is well bedded-in, Centres understand the relationship of the AO's to Course structures and assignments, and it seems that most of the concerns expressed at the start of Curriculum 2000 are now history. There is a reported noticeable air of confidence; assignments have been tweaked to allow for much more individual development with less overriding anxiety that candidates may not be "ticking all the boxes". Heads of departments have realised that the AO's actually amount to a sound approach to visual education.

The most unwieldy aspects of the current Specification and the Assessment Matrix are addressed in the new Specification. The attempts to provide a Modular Examination structure that would allow for staged 'learning' in a subject does not easily fit the requirements of accumulated skills and knowledge as in Art and Design. A badly drawn pot may well be the result of an inadequate time schedule, stemming from Modular requirements across all subjects, nevertheless the pot will remain aesthetically displeasing. The aesthetic ordering of the formal elements of visual language (light, colour, tone, volume, mass, texture and space) are in many cases not at the forefront, or even in the background, of candidates' consideration of the personal outcomes of their endeavours.

This lack of aesthetic concern for the visual aspects of things made could well result from an approach that takes as its starting point the development of a 'concept', after which a search commences for the most appropriate medium and material through which that concept may be realised. This approach lends itself to the 'installation' manner of working. This is very different from realising an idea through empathy with a material/medium and a depth of knowledge of the performance properties of this material/medium e.g. working with ceramics. The first approach relies on an ability to discriminate, to be resourceful and quick witted. The second approach assumes a skill acquired through practice and depth of understanding of the potential of materials. This is not question of a value judgement to be made, more a recognition of the profound differences between approaches. There are dangers in making such a distinction, not least that the likelihood that crossover will occur, and

to be effective in today's climate undoubtedly such a crossover should take place. Moderators have increasingly reported on the prevalence of literary and literal approaches to themes, resulting in an exposition of issues that may well demonstrate candidates' concerns but less so the aesthetic implications of the way in which visual language may be employed.

Many Centres are already combining Units 1 and 2 and Units 4 and 5 closely together, research in one feeding development in the other. Realising that Units do not need to be hermetic, these Centres have devised opportunities for their students that pre-dates the new Specification, demonstrating the essentially cumulative nature of sound art education. The body of knowledge that an advanced level candidate will amass over a two-year period is rarely acknowledged.

Before encountering Endorsement-specific requirements, a candidate will find that visual research and the visualisation of ideas are both much enhanced by fluent drawing skills. These skills will be underpinned by an understanding of mark making and the suitability of expressive, descriptive and innovative marks. The candidate will also need experience in considering proportion, volume and space. Traditionally candidates have developed their drawing skills through primary observation and objective studies. There are many ways in which visual research has developed, freeing the hapless candidate from the unending studies of the Art department's repertoire of objects: those battered watering cans, old bicycles and tattered umbrellas, how candidates must have groaned over the years when confronted with this uninspiring collection. Drawing has become 'visual research', indicating the necessity for recording intentions and processes of investigation. The way in which the research is conducted also, of course, reveals aesthetic understanding. Candidates have been seen to make great strides understanding the principles of research and in so doing discarding slavish copying, there is also good evidence for the understanding of the value of analysis and establishing a context for the development of ideas.

Candidates require a visual vocabulary in the same way that a Modern Languages candidate has to display a grasp of vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Equally candidates should be able to display their understanding of visual culture through the ways in which the study of other artists has nourished their own personal work.

Candidates should be able to demonstrate their mastery of materials, their ability to experiment, sustain and develop their ideas. Many Moderators have reported this as being the weakest area in Candidates' submissions. At Advanced Level candidates should be able to review the progress of a piece of work, reflect on whether the work is satisfying their intentions and demonstrate their ability to refine the work as it progresses.

There has been a tendency over the life of this Specification to assume that AO's value process over outcome. This is an unfortunate reading of the AO's. Interpretations of the Specification have always emphasised the importance of the accessibility of the Candidates' journey to Moderators, and that the journey should lead towards a fully realised outcome, demonstrating the Candidate's' ability to synthesise skills and knowledge accrued to date. It is important that Centres fully understand that the AO's are indicative of areas of skills and knowledge that collectively represent sound art and design education and are not a sequential series of boxes to be ticked. The new Specification will, hopefully, further remove this misunderstanding still practised by some Centres.

Moderators have reported fine work at the higher mark ranges, showing that Candidates have the confidence to use their subject knowledge with great enthusiasm and imagination. At the lower mark ranges Moderators report a continuing presence of Candidates who obviously have little ability in the subject. Centres reveal that these Candidates either have not taken GCSE or have very low grades. Although it is possible for Candidates to succeed in this subject without prior experience, it is unusual and would be much less likely in other subjects. Moderators feel great sympathy for these Centres where the subject appears to be held in such little regard and where teachers have to spend so much of their time in remedial teaching of basic subject knowledge, such as colour mixing and even limited recording skills.

Moderators report the privilege of seeing some exhibitions of note. Frequently the display in itself indicates the devotion of teaching and technical staff undertaking such an enormously time consuming activity. Moderators also report the sheer backbreaking effort of sifting through piles of folders and portfolios in inadequate spaces. It is always surprising when a Centre does not consider it necessary to allow sufficient space and ease of access to their Candidates work.

Work Journals

It never has been necessary to assume that the Work Journal should be an A3 or A4 hardback book. Certainly, in terms of the convenience in keeping together reflections on source material and the development of ideas, the sketchbook is ideal. A3 is seen as giving Candidates room to stretch, A4 is ideal for portability.

This year there was less evidence of pages of secondary source material, and exhortations about over-decorated pages are beginning to have their effect. Careful reading of Journals has indicated that Candidates have understood, particularly in the higher mark ranges, the value of the analysis of source material and there is sound evidence of Candidates' ability to make judgements based on secure knowledge.

Teachers at many Centres are to be congratulated on making certain that their Candidates are exposed to a large variety of museums and galleries. Centres make exhaustive trips overseas, to major galleries in this country and also to specific collections in local museums. Candidates benefit enormously from these opportunities to extend their visual learning and aesthetic experience, providing a rich and important resource for their future development. Journals frequently detail the journey taken by the Candidate and in doing so reveal the Candidates' thinking, their use of sources and ability to develop their ideas thus addressing at least three of the AO's.

Moderators report that some of the most exemplary Journals seen were those by Textile Candidates compiled from swatches and samples, demonstrating depth and understanding of the discipline and a familiarity with a wide range of sources. Textile teachers most frequently have a firm grasp of contemporary developments in the field and are to be congratulated on passing their enthusiasms on to their Candidates.

UNIT 1 6021 A - G Thematic Enquiry

Most Centres have realised that this Unit, which is content based, benefits from the skills that should be acquired in Unit 2, which is now normally embarked on as the first Unit. As in all Units, Unit 1 depends on judicious assignment writing, enabling candidates to address specific areas of study, in particular the relationship of form to content.

Undoubtedly the best work in all Centres was seen to stem from initial first hand studies:

- The built environment
- Selected studies of a town
- Buildings with particular emphasis, glass, external evidence of structure etc.

Or more capable interpretation:

- Inside, Outside
- Entrances

The least successful were those general titles e.g. "The environment". These approaches rarely commenced with visual research, more frequently Candidates produced a mind-map/spider diagram. Moderators view these with considerable antipathy as they encourage Candidates to think in terms of labels rather than visually.

Candidates at the higher mark ranges are proving adept at collecting visual information and undertaking visual research. This was easier for those Candidates who were able to link Units 1 and 2 and particularly noticeable where Candidates used life drawing as a basis for e.g. "Domestic Interiors". Candidates demonstrated ability to support and nourish their own work with a great variety of appropriate references. At one Centre Candidates were seen to be taking Critical and Contextual Studies (G) linking the theme of "Interior Space" with an essay on selected ways in which interior space has been depicted: Crivelli - 'Annunciation', Bonnard - 'Tub' - with practical work on their own imaginative interpretations of interior space. Importantly, these Candidates showed a wide range of visual experience culled from visits to the major collections and work in the life class. There are many ways in which work in more than one Endorsement supplies Candidates with opportunities to overlay experience in the subject, but it undoubtedly puts a considerable strain on their energies.

Moderators note some Candidates, and indeed sometimes whole Centres, who had difficulty transposing ideas from their Journals to large-scale pieces. These Candidates frequently demonstrate imaginative ideas, well nourished by study of source material, but are unable to find ways in which work on a larger scale needs to be more than simply a scaled -up version of the original.

UNIT 2 6022 A - G Expressive Study

Large numbers of Centres were seen to begin this Unit with a drawing project, more concerned with gathering visual information than making 'presentation drawings'. Moderators made approving comments about those Centres who encouraged their Candidates to establish a close relationship between the nature of mark making and the investigation of a particular motif.

The most successful Candidates were seen to work in Journals and then transpose these initial marks to large scale A1 or A0 drawings, responding to the quality of things seen e.g. the response to light and shade in a wood. Other projects looked at the function of domestic objects and how these may be interrogated to determine appropriate mark making e.g. an egg whisk or a teddy bear. Less successfully, some Candidates had made perfectly effective studies but when attempting to transpose these studies into print were inclined to forget all that they had discovered about visual research and mark making. Unit 2 is the appropriate Unit for the acquisition of all those technical skills appropriate to the full range of Endorsements. These should include those tools of analysis as required for contextual study including the interrogation of ways of looking that would be part of Critical Studies. Candidates should also include in their submissions, as evidence of study where appropriate, examples of techniques of model making for 3D studies, textile swatches, dark room practice.

It should be emphasised that at Advanced Level Candidates should present evidence of an ability to "sustain investigations and exploration". One visit to a life class, one still life drawing, do not present evidence of sustained observation. This Unit should demonstrate the Candidates' ability to acquire visual language skills and familiarity with the formal elements. Candidates' understanding of these building blocks of the subject should be enhanced by the analysis and critical evaluation of source material.

Moderators note that Candidates appear to experience difficulty when attempting to use the same imagery in a variety of disciplines. There are many factors at play here, not least those Centres using the specialities of their teachers to engage Candidates in different disciplines. A Candidate undertaking visual research with one teacher may well encounter another teacher when this research is taken into print, 3D or

textiles. Adjustments have to be made about differences of approach, identification of requirements in terms of visual research, and understanding of pattern, colour and form. A Candidate encountering this brisk change from one approach to another at the beginning of the AS course may find it unnerving. The new Specification linking Units 1 and 2 will offer more time for the Candidate to become acclimatised to the demands of AS and less likely to face an Assessment in the first few weeks of a new course.

Many Moderators are teachers or have a role within Art education that enables them to encounter at first hand, and therefore understand, the time constraints and stresses of Modular learning and Assessment, not least the cross-curricular requirements of such a system. Centres are not viewed unsympathetically when there is evidence of struggle with deadline and Assessment procedures. Moderators are required however to apply National Standard, which in some instances may seem unforgiving.

UNIT 3 6023 A - G Externally Set Assignment

Theme: Habitation

It should be noted that Unit 3 is not a Question Paper, it is designated as Course Work and as such Unit 3 is an Externally Set Assignment. There has been no change in terms of demand, timing or format. It is unfortunate that, in spite of annual exhortations in the Examiners Report, Centres still treat Unit 3 as a Question Paper. The rationale goes something like this: "We give the students the Question Papers and expect them to come back after three days with a few ideas." Candidates are required to research and investigate the theme and relevant reference material as presented in the ESA. Candidates must demonstrate in their Journals and preparatory work their ability to conduct visual and critical research, and create a context for developing ideas aided by exploration of appropriate materials that lead to a personal outcome. (The Timed Test). The totality of preparatory studies and the Timed Test is presented for Assessment. The above exhortations appear in one form or another every year. It is unfortunate the Candidates still suffer from a lack of structured organisation at some Centres.

It is unwise for Candidates to embark on a whole new discipline at this stage. A Fine Art Candidate may well find a way of interpreting a Theatre Design suggestion but it would not be wise to actually produce a stage design as such. The ESA is essentially a synthesis of subject knowledge.

Many Candidates saw the theme as an opportunity for the resurgence of Still Life, some of which were very good indeed, demonstrating Candidates' ability to use modulated and reflective colour. A few fortunate Candidates were able to see the Morandi exhibition at the Estorick Collection, London, running concurrently with the ESA. These Candidates absorbed some of Morandi's quiet intensity into their own preliminary studies, but not always the final outcome. Those Candidates who had Life Class experience, and there were many, were able to use their understanding of the figure in a series of intimate paintings showing study of Bonnard and, in rare cases, Beckman. These Candidates had linked contextual study of the nude with primary observation, providing them with the facility to produce highly confident pieces of work.

Many of the weaker responses to the ESA followed the reference material slavishly but failed to interpret it. There were many pastiches of Van Gogh's bedroom and interiors of Candidates' bedrooms painted using the methodology of Anthony Green's birds-eye view.

There were some instances of Candidates responding to the concept of the hidden narrative with secondary source material, based on gruesome subject matter. Candidates' intensions were frequently hampered by a severe lack of visual language skills. There were many instances in their Journals of Candidates making sensible and thoughtful responses to work studied, but they lacked the necessary skills to develop their ideas on a larger scale.

Mention was made in 2005 Examiners Report about the need to treat downloaded images with a substantial health warning. Candidates lacking discriminatory skills are confronted with a plethora of images and those chosen are frequently more for their literary content than visual interest. Candidates are also becoming more and more unaware of the potential use of texture when their main visual experience is essentially flat and texture free.

UNIT 4 6024 A - F Contextual Study

Many Centres have found difficulty with this Unit in the past, but Moderators report that there are far fewer instances this year of Centres professing major problems. Examiners Reports for some years have recommended that Units 4 and 5 run in tandem, contextual knowledge feeding practice and vice versa. The most common form for the Unit is the essay, although the use of PowerPoint is gaining in popularity, as is the video. A tendency towards form rather than content has been noted in video.

The most important feature of the Unit is the quality of research. This may well be driven, and certainly is likely to be located, in those areas of interest related the Candidates' practical work. There should be opportunities at the early stages of the Unit for much exploratory work, and it is vital that Candidates should be encouraged to involve themselves in speculative ideas. It is important for Candidates to be able to test out their thinking, to spend time using their understanding of the processes of analysis and evaluation to see where references will lead them, and then consider the relevance of their thinking. Candidates at the higher mark ranges demonstrate and ability to focus their ideas and research in ways that will lead to a topic that has strong visual potential for their work in Unit 5. Centres where this approach has been established will welcome the new Unit 3 that will combine Units 4 and 5. A very good example of this unity of theory and practice was see where a Candidate studies light on architecture, particularly the new London City Hall, this was usefully supported by historical evidence of the way in which light becomes a visually conditioning factor on a building façade. This Candidate demonstrated depth of subject knowledge. There are unfortunately Candidates who embark on a topic with little understanding and it is difficult sometimes for Centres to monitor a Candidate's work without discouraging them. An example is a Candidate seen studying Expressionist portraits, both critically and practically. It is difficult to argue for Gainsborough's portrait of Mr. and Mrs Andrews as Expressionist, but this Candidate certainly tried. An equally obvious example of the need for guidance would be the Candidate tackling a topic entitled "The Nude from the Renaissance to the present day". Every year Moderators encounter the work of Candidates labouring under such huge titles, most frequently these Candidates embark on long descriptive passages, which lack a central core of argument.

There are several ways in which Candidates diffuse their energies and Moderators have noted in their Reports some of the following. The present specification does not require practice based outcomes in this Unit and Moderators always stress that it is an unnecessary use of Candidates' time, particularly at the expense of the written part of the Unit, which is nearly always the case. Equally it should be stressed that unless it is for analytical or evaluative purposes, there is little value in copying the work of selected artists, particularly from books, postcards or downloads. Bland copying indicates most frequently the lack of a point of view. The sub-titled requirement of the Unit is for a "personal study" requiring "personal" insight, "uncritical replication.....will not gain credit."

Candidates should be encouraged at the earliest possible stages of the Unit to consider the context in which those works that are studied have been made. Candidates should be reminded that "context in which work was made" is not the same as lengthy biographical details, which are rarely necessary.

Many Candidates are lax about providing a bibliography, which should be either in the Work Journal or at the end of the Personal Study. This provides valuable information about the Candidates' study for the Moderator.

UNIT 5 6025 A - F Creative Problem Solving

Candidates should be in a position, reflecting the step up from AS, to negotiate their own assignments in this Unit. Undoubtedly some of the most successful work seen resulted from Candidates 'ownership' of Unit 5. There was evidence however of Candidates working on prescribed courses towards specific ends. It was explained to some Moderators that these Candidates were insufficiently mature in their subject knowledge to develop their own ideas. Most frequently these Candidates were not expected to gain an award at AS, had done so, and decided to stay on to A2. The remedial work required with these Candidates necessitated curtailing planned assignments.

Many Candidates were seen to work from direct links to Unit 4 e.g. a Candidate working on Henry Moore (How Did More Moore Create Form?) decided to embark on direct stone carving that resulted in some extremely ambitious (and life-consuming) pieces. There were however many examples of issue-based topics. These were infrequently successful, as Candidates rarely worked from primary sources and the results lacked the depth of visual understanding and resourcefulness. Candidates found difficulty in accepting that in order to engage with content in this way, a fluent command of visual language is necessary as are well-developed skills. Most frequently these Candidates will be required to visualise ideas, rather than work from a site visit, which would facilitate visual investigation, they therefore lack the opportunity to understand through looking and recording.

There is temptation in this Unit to work 'in the manner of', particularly when there is a seductive ease in the subjects studied in Unit 4. There were examples of Graphics Endorsements where Candidates had studied 60's posters in Unit 4 and were required to produce a poster for Unit 5. These Candidates had difficulty in avoiding what seemed like an invitation to produce a pastiche. Candidates at the higher mark ranges demonstrated sound understanding of Unit 4 as a study of content that might well nourish Unit 5 in contextual terms, in other words: why things were made not just how they were made.

Ambitious and challenging work has been seen in this Unit. Ambitious in terms of scale: murals, installations and site-specific work. Challenging in terms of content, mostly autobiographical, substantiated by serious and thoughtful work in Journals. It

was noticeable that Candidates at the higher mark ranges demonstrated an ability to reflect and to refine their progress and intentions. These are positive contributing factors in the

development of ideas and are totally distinct from the customary evaluation at the end of the Journal. There is little value in this "evaluation" unless it promotes active reappraisal of work done or determines the ways in which contextual links may carry the work forward. The axiom that the Journal contains evidence of things seen and things done is appropriate in most instances.

UNIT 6 6026 A - F Externally Set Assignment

Theme: Objects and Objectivity

It should be noted that the first paragraph on Unit 3 also applies to this Unit.

Unit 6 is essentially a synoptic Unit, and should demonstrate Candidates' skills and knowledge to date. It has been stated elsewhere that Candidates on Modular courses in the visual arts are notorious for forgetting those processes that might achieve particular visual results. Candidates should be encouraged to look through their Journals to be reminded of how and why things were done.

From the Candidates' Journals it was evident that as they worked their way through the possibilities contained in the ESA a number of opportunities were presented. A frequent interpretation of the theme was 'Objectification', in particular the objectification of women. Much of this referred to Jenny Saville, Sarah Lucas, and the depiction of women in magazines, women seen as 'objects', particularly objects of sexual desire. This was mostly, though not always, a female candidate's approach. Where Candidates avoided an over-literal interpretation of the theme and concentrated on the visual aspects of the objectified gaze the results were in the higher mark ranges. Few examples of Endorsements were reported. Many Centres used carefully planned visits to the major galleries as a starting point for the ESA. Where there was evidence of specific, well-constructed contexts for the visits, Candidates' Journals indicated firm support acquired for their intentions that contributed to the development and resolution of ideas. Candidates were noted who had taken the theme 'Horror in Art' in Unit 5, studied Caravaggio in Unit 6, and developed their ideas through those objects that inspired horror. Candidates used, as contextual material, Caravaggio's self-portrait as John the Baptist, leading to an interpretation as the candidates' own severed head self-portrait, as an object of horror.

There is good evidence that Candidates are using the languages of visual study to move easily and confidently between one form and another. A Candidate practicing Bacon's 'Rag-wipe' can be seen to use this technique on painted objects that are part of an installation. In the right hands this is the sensitive and imaginative use of textural marks, less well used it is a pastiche.

A route taken by some candidates towards investigating and developing ideas on the theme was to contrast an actual object with its symbol. The experience of opening a box to

see a smelly heart displayed in an 'appropriate' setting alongside painted symbols of a heart was one of the more remarkable experiences of this year's Moderation. Nevertheless there was enormous potential. Unfortunately the Candidate had little contextual reference, there was a note on Jarman but no visual, textual reference and there was little evidence of the skills needed to carry the work forward. In common with many Candidates the intentions were admirable, the level of enquiry suggested potential but Candidate's visual language skills were inadequate for the task of exemplifying these intentions.

Moderators were surprised by the way in which some evidently able Candidates were unable to sustain and continue developing ideas. It seemed that when Candidates had arrived at a concept they considered suitable very little more was required of them. Candidates obviously found it outside their understanding and experience that there is a process colloquially called 'working into', in other words ideas would be developed by further manipulation of the medium. These Candidates will not score well in AO3, which is unfortunate when there is evidence of interesting ideas that will not be fully realised.

Statistics

Unit 1 Thematic Enquiry (6021A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	64	58	50	42	34	26
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 2 Expressive Study (6022A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	64	58	50	42	34	26
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 3 Externally Set Assignment (6023A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	64	57	49	41	33	25
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

Unit 4 Contextual Study (6024A-F)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	64	58	50	42	34	26
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 5 Creative Problem Solving (6025A-F)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	64	58	49	41	33	25
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 6 Externally Set Assignment (6026A-F)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	64	58	50	42	34	26
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

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