Part 1 (SL and HL): Comparative study

External assessment 20%

Why assess a comparative study?

Both SL and HL students need to understand the intricate relationship between theory and practice. The course encourages students to critically investigate the work of other artists and allow the work to inform their own art-making practice. This task gives students the opportunity to elaborate, extrapolate and present a comparative study of three works by at least two artists from different cultural contexts that they have investigated as a part of their art-making practice. HL students are further required to articulate the connections between the work examined in the comparative study and their own art-making, giving them the chance to think about how theory is related to practice.

Core syllabus areas related to the task

The following core syllabus areas are addressed in the comparative study assessment task. The term “artworks” is used here generically and could refer to a range of visual and cultural artifacts.

Visual arts in context

- What are the social, historical, political and intellectual contexts of each of the works explored?
- How do the artworks reflect aspects of the world in which they were created?
- What experiences of the world does the audience bring to their interpretation and appreciation of the artworks?
- Which critical methodologies are most appropriate to analyse, interpret and evaluate the artworks?
- How has exploring these contexts influenced the students’ own art-making? (HL only)

Visual arts methods

- What media, processes and techniques have been used in each of the artworks?
- What aspects of the processes and techniques are conventional or innovative?
- How have formal qualities, such as the elements and principles of design, been used and to what effect (or affect)?
- What motifs, signs and symbols have been used in the works and what do these communicate to the audience?
- How are the artworks evaluated?
- How have the artists’ methodologies influenced the student’s own art-making? (HL only)

Communicating visual arts
- What methods of organization and presentation most effectively communicate knowledge and understanding?
- How can visual organizers and graphics be used to convey information more effectively than words alone?
- Who is the audience for the comparative study? What prior understandings can be assumed?

Possible artists and approaches

The nature of this task is relatively open-ended, permitting a wide range of approaches providing that students still meet the requirements of the task and address the marking criteria. The following table provides a range of possible approaches to the task and relevant artists, artworks or artifacts. It is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Artists/artworks</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Thematic | Damien Hirst (British, b 1965) *For the Love of God* (2007), platinum cast of human skull encrusted with 8601 flawless diamonds.  
*Mosaic mask of Tezcatlipoca* (Mexica/Mixtec, c. 15–16th century CE) human skull, deer hide, turquoise, black lignite, polished iron pyrite, white conch (Strombus) shell. The nasal cavity is lined with plates of bright red thorny oyster (Spondylus) shell.  
*Quimbaya Death mask* (Colombia:Quimbaya c. CE 600-1100), gold. | **Memento Mori**  
This presentation focuses on Damien Hirst’s *For the Love of God* (2007) work and arose from the student’s interest in the *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead) imagery from Mexico.  
Comparisons are made between Hirst’s work and 15–16th century Mixtec *Mosaic mask of Tezcatlipoca* as well as the *Quimbaya Death mask*.  
The student considers the prevalence of imagery of death across the cultures, considering the function and significance.  
The student considers the juxtaposition of precious elements with morbidity. |
Banksy (British, unknown) *Untitled* (Keith Haring tribute, The Grange, Bermondsey, | **Crime to Commodity**  
The student was interested in graffiti/street art and was posing questions through their own work about the definition of art versus vandalism.  
To broaden the field of the student’s investigation, the teacher directed the student to the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, both of whom were in the graffiti scene before transitioning to the status of respected visual artists.  
The student explores the cultural context of the world in which each of the artists worked/work and the significance of the political commentary in the work. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>London. Street graffiti, spray enamel via stenciling.</th>
<th>The student was particularly pleased to find a Bansky image that paid homage to Keith Haring.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Andres Serrano (American, born 1950) *Piss Christ* (1987) photograph of a small plastic crucifix submerged in what the artist has described as being his own urine in a glass. | The Genius of Offense
Following a TOK presentation on Robert Hughes’ *Shock of The New: Art and the Century of Change*, the student launched himself into an investigation of recent controversial art and the power of art to provoke strong reactions. The comparative study considered the range of responses to symbols and imagery used in the works from the different perspectives of the audiences who would see and respond to the works in various contexts. The investigation resulted in a short-lived, but enthusiastic series of works that challenged some of the assumptions and the culture of his conservative faith-based private school. |
| Bill Henson (Australian, born 1955), *Untitled #38*, 2005/06, type C photograph, 127 × 180 cm, edition of 5 + 2 A/Ps. | |

**Historical**

| Sandro Botticelli (Italian, Early Renaissance: c. 1445–1510), *Nascita di Venere* (Birth of Venus, 1486), tempera on canvas, 172.5 × 278.9 cm | Visions of Venus
This comparative study emerged from the student’s own art-making practice, which focused on representations of the human form and changing notions of beauty. The comparative study provides a survey of key works representing the female form in Western art. In analysing, interpreting, evaluating and comparing the works, the student adopted a feminist critical methodology, which identified how feminist theory informed the interpretation of imagery in the works and the evaluation of the significance of the works within the context in which they were created and to the broader canon of Western art. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandre Cabanel (French, 1823–1889), <em>Naissance de Venus</em> (Birth of Venus, 1863), oil on canvas, 130 × 225 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883) <em>Olympia</em> (1863), oil on canvas, 130.5 × 190 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (The Young Ladies of Avignon, 1907), oil on canvas, 243.9 × 233.7 cm. | Primitivism in Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*
The student’s interest in this subject arose from a TOK discussion on the ethics of appropriation in the arts, with a particular focus on the exploitation of indigenous motifs. |
Fang mask used for the ngil ceremony (Gabon, Central Africa, c19th century), wood, 66cm.

Iberian female head (Province of Albacete, Castile-La Mancha, Spain, c. 299–100 BCE), sandstone, 15 × 17 × 10 cm.

The student was directed to a copy of Hal Foster’s “The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art”, October. Vol 34, (Autumn, 1985), pp. 45–70, which helped the student evaluate the claims, denied by Picasso, that the stylistically transitional elements in Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon were influenced by his contact with African and Iberian sculpture.

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669), Self-Portrait with Two Circles (c. 1665–1669), oil on canvas, 114.3 × 94 cm.

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890), Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear, Easel and Japanese Print (1889), oil on canvas, 60 × 49 cm.

Frida Kahlo de Rivera (Mexican, 1907–1954), Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird (1940), oil on canvas, 61.25 × 47 cm.

Brett Whiteley (Australian, 1939–1992), Art, Life and the Other Thing (1978) (Triptych), oil, glass eye, hair, pen and ink on cardboard, plaster, photography, oil, dried PVA, cigarette butts, hypodermic syringe on board, 90.4 × 77.2 cm, 230 × 122 cm, 31.1 × 31.1 cm.

Selfies

The artworks explored in this study were originally investigated when the student was working on a series of her own self-portraits.

As her own portraits were being completed rapidly, as a series over a specified period of time, she was particularly interested in artists whose bodies of work included numerous self-portraits.

Her comparative study considers the changing conventions of portraiture within the context of the time and place in which the works were created.

Her analysis and interpretation considered the ways in which meaning was conveyed through the use of formal and symbolic codes, and in the case of the Whiteley, written codes as well.

The number of works examined compelled the student to rely on the thoughtful and considered use of annotated images and other visual organizers to convey her understandings in a succinct manner.

Resources

The Visual arts guide (March 2014) strongly recommends that at least one of the works explored in the comparative study is a work that the students have experienced first-hand. This makes visits to art museums and galleries or artist studios of critical importance as a resource to students. The artwork itself should be considered itself as a primary source. Where the school’s geographical, political or economic context makes access to museums and galleries impractical, students need to have access to good quality reproductions.

The visual arts teacher is undoubtedly the most influential source that students have direct access to. The quality of instruction that students need in order to analyse and deconstruct works and to research the cultural contexts of works is critical to their success.

Scholarly books on visual arts, artists, styles, movements, periods and themes are extremely useful. They can often provide the quality reproductions of works that can be used as primary source material as well.
as reliable and critical secondary source opinions about the intent and purpose of works, the cultural context of the work and the significance. Exhibition catalogues in particular can provide models for constructing a comparative study if viewed critically, considering why the curator has chosen to put certain works together? What associations and connections are being suggested?

Visual arts journals and periodicals also provide a rich resource, and often reflect more up-to-date contemporary trends in art-making practices than is available through other published works.

The internet is increasingly useful in investigation if used judiciously. Often, it is assumed that students have the skills needed to navigate the web with discretion, but this is rarely the case. Students need direction in finding the authors of sites and how to determine if the information provided is reliable. Many art galleries and museums have great websites with educational pages or forums. These are great starting points, as are the growing number of established contemporary artists who manage their own websites.

A guide for students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking criteria</th>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>What the examiner is looking for:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A Analysis of formal qualities    | 6     | • an effective identification and analysis of the formal qualities of the selected artworks, objects and artifacts.  
At the highest level of achievement, the work identifies and analyses the formal qualities of the selected pieces from at least two cultural origins and the analysis of these formal qualities is consistently informed by reliable sources and effective. |
| B Interpretation of function and purpose | 6     | • an informed and appropriate interpretation of the function and purpose of the selected artworks, objects and artifacts within the cultural context in which they were created.  
At the highest level of achievement, the work demonstrates a consistently informed by reliable sources and appropriate interpretation of the function and purpose of the selected pieces within the cultural context in which they were created. |
| C Evaluation of cultural significance | 6     | • an informed understanding of the cultural significance of the selected artworks, objects and artifacts within the specific context in which they were created.  
At the highest level of achievement, the work demonstrates consistently informed and appropriate evaluation of the material, conceptual and cultural significance. |
The comparative study is an externally examined assessment task worth 20%.

To complete the task, you are required to present a comparative study of at least three artworks by at least two different artists from different and contrasting cultural contexts. The work should be selected from work you have investigated as a part of your independent coursework, and will be explored further and presented as a series of screen-based slides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Task Title</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Making comparisons and connections</td>
<td>• an effective identification and critical analysis of the connections, similarities and differences between the selected artworks, objects and artifacts. At the highest level of achievement, the work critically analyses the connections, similarities and differences between the selected pieces. These connections are logical and coherent, showing a thorough understanding of how the pieces compare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Presentation and subject-specific language</td>
<td>• information that is conveyed clearly and coherently in a visually appropriate and legible manner, supported by the consistent use of appropriate subject-specific language. At the highest level of achievement, the work clearly and coherently conveys information which results in a visually appropriate, legible and engaging study. Subject-specific language is used accurately and appropriately throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Making connections to own art-making practice (HL only)</td>
<td>• an analysis and reflection on the outcomes of the comparative study investigation and on how this has influenced your own development as an artist, identifying connections between one or more of the selected works and your own art-making processes and practices. At the highest level of achievement, the work analyses and reflects upon the outcomes of the investigation consistently and appropriately. You effectively consider your own development, making informed and meaningful connections to your own art-making practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Task summary**

The comparative study is an externally examined assessment task worth 20%.

To complete the task, you are required to present a comparative study of at least three artworks by at least two different artists from different and contrasting cultural contexts. The work should be selected from work you have investigated as a part of your independent coursework, and will be explored further and presented as a series of screen-based slides.
Formal requirements

SL

- SL students submit 10–15 screens, which examine and compare at least three artworks, objects or artifacts, at least two of which need to be by different artists.
- The works selected for comparison and analysis should come from differing cultural contexts.
- SL students submit a list of sources used.

HL

- HL students submit 10–15 screens, which examine and compare at least three artworks, objects or artifacts, at least two of which need to be by different artists.
- The works selected for comparison and analysis should come from differing cultural contexts.
- HL students submit 3–5 screens, which analyse the extent to which their work and practices have been influenced by the art and artists examined.
- HL students submit a list of sources used.

Marking criteria summary

Possible structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Summarize the scope of your investigation from which the focus artworks, objects and artifacts have been selected, and any thematic or conceptual framework you have used to draw the investigation together.</th>
<th>1 screen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The artworks, objects or artifacts and their contexts | Summarize your research from a range of different sources and present your inquiry into the identification and interpretation of the selected artworks, objects and artifacts. You also explain how you have applied a range and combination of critical theories and methodologies to the works. Areas of investigation might include:  
  - analysis of the cultural contexts of the selected pieces  
  - identification of the formal qualities of the selected pieces (elements such as shape/form, space, tone, colour, line, texture and principles such as balance, rhythm, proportion, emphasis, pattern, variety)  
  - interpretation of the function and purpose of the selected pieces (such as the meanings of motifs, signs and symbols used in the work)  
  - evaluation of the material, conceptual and cultural significance of the pieces and the cultural contexts in which they were created. | 3–5 screens |
| Making comparisons | Present your comparisons of the different pieces, clearly identifying links between them. These comparisons might include:  
  - comparing the cultural contexts of the selected pieces | 3–5 screens |
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| and connections | • comparing the formal qualities of the selected pieces  
|                | • comparing the function and purpose of the selected pieces  
|                | • comparing the material, conceptual and cultural significance of the pieces. |

| Connecting to own art-making practice (HL only) | Reflect on your research outcomes and the extent to which your own art-making practices and pieces have subsequently been influenced by artworks, objects, artifacts and their creators examined in the comparative study. These influences and personal connections, which should be evidenced in both visual and written forms, might include:  
|                                                   | • cultural context  
|                                                   | • formal qualities  
|                                                   | • function and purpose  
|                                                   | • materials, conceptual and cultural significance. |

When referring to your own artwork and practices, you must be sure to identify and acknowledge your own artworks with the same rigorous attention to detail as with images from other sources.

| Sources | Include a reference list of sources used during the study. In-text referencing is required throughout the comparative study. Every image used within the comparative study must be appropriately referenced to acknowledge the title, artist, date (where this information is known) and the source, following the protocol of the referencing style chosen by the school. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Further advice for students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Most students will complete the comparative study using a slide presentation software such as Microsoft’s PowerPoint®, Apple’s Keynote® or Prezi Pro™, and then convert the document to a portable document file (PDF) for electronic submission. Avoid using animations within slides and animated transitions between slides that may be lost when the file is converted, or may be missed if a moderator advances through your presentation prematurely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When importing images for your presentation, resize them first to a maximum height or width of 1,500 pixels, optimized for web and devices. This will significantly reduce the overall size of your file, without compromising the image quality when viewed on a screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use a consistent design scheme for your presentation. Use one or two fonts throughout the presentation. Sans serif fonts tend to be easier to read on screen. Avoid narrow or cursive fonts. Make slide backgrounds subtle and consistent and use high contrast between background and text colour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wherever possible, communicate with visuals and graphics in preference to text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check your grammar and spelling, paying particular attention to the spelling of artists’ names and subject-specific terminology.

Your teacher is able to provide suggestions to improve your comparative study on your first draft only. Make sure you submit it on time.

Example 1: Comparative study

To view the various elements of this example, please use the icons at the side of the screen.

The examples included in this section are fabricated student work. Please note that some of the material has been retyped.

Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1: Comparative study criteria</th>
<th>Markband achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A                       Analysis of formal qualities</td>
<td>5–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B                       Interpretation of function and purpose</td>
<td>5–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C                       Evaluation of cultural significance</td>
<td>5–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D                       Making comparisons and connections</td>
<td>3–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E                       Presentation and subject-specific language</td>
<td>5–6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examiner comments

A Analysis of formal qualities

Formal analysis is consistently strong, supported by appropriate source materials. Works are compared from three artists working within a Western 20th century visual art context, but from different cultural backgrounds.

B Interpretation of function and purpose

The interpretation of function and purpose is demonstrated in an informed way, showing understanding of the cultural context from which the works were created, such as the mention of Twombly’s Quattro Stagioni series as a metaphor for the passing of time, at the top of screen 3.

C Evaluation of cultural significance
The student clearly understands the cultural significance of each work discussed, seen in the discussion of key influences for each artist, such as the sociopolitical climate, related art movements and artists and environment in which the work was made (for example, the discussion of Klee’s colourful Tunisian inspired works of 1918–19).

D  Making comparisons and connections

Connections, similarities and differences between Twombly and Klee are only seen on screen 11, and are general, not specific to a particular artwork. These are organized clearly, but lacking in depth. No mention is made of Bertalan in comparison to the other two artists.

E  Presentation and subject-specific language

Subject-specific language is used appropriately throughout and the information is coherently organized, resulting in a legible and engaging study, though the form is rather too essay-like overall.