

Assessment Report

Scholarship, 2008

Visual Arts

COMMENTARY

The overall standard of work submitted for Visual Arts Scholarship in 2008 demonstrated a strong breadth of diversity, engagement and visual intelligence. For those that were awarded Scholarship or Scholarship with Outstanding Performance the competition was rigorous across all five subjects. The initiative being employed by candidates is cognisant of contemporary art practice, discerning of discipline conventions/ parameters and demonstrates expert facility.

Unfortunately, there are still a large number of candidates not entering Scholarship who would be highly competitive in their respective fields. Candidates who achieve NCEA Level 3 with Excellence all have the potential to produce a Scholarship performance. If anything, the production of workbook material (as an integral working method at level 3) not only enhances practice and evidences understanding, it builds depth and complexity to the work presented on the portfolio. Although the additional requirements of producing a workbook may put some candidates off Scholarship, material sufficient and intrinsic to a workbook is usually generated as part of the development of a practical artistic project and could easily be assembled appropriately toward the end of the year.

In all of the five Visual Arts subjects there are areas that need attention if a candidate is to meet the Scholarship standard. These points are made in the subject sections below, however it is fair to say that, for the most, the issues remain the same as they have for the past few years. There is also much common ground applicable to all five subjects and therefore the Marking Panel recommends that candidates read the commentary on all subjects. Primarily, there needs to be an acute awareness on the part of the candidate of their brief/ intent, their line of enquiry, the methods and approaches they engage, a high degree of analysis, conceptual thinking, reflective thought and visual development, in conjunction with technical expertise and management of visual language that is aligned to content, concept and context. Successful Scholarship candidates operate inside their process, own their decisions and always know their proposition.

In 2008 it was good to see a real sense of the individual in evidence in submissions across all five subjects. There appeared to be more attestation of independent concepts being undertaken and a strong use of communication for these ideas. The ability of a candidate to pursue a project with a high degree of ownership is a key factor in ensuring an outstanding performance (submission) by virtue of its visual intelligence. This was often characterised as an honest approach, where candidates led their investigation, and referred to other artists/designers/contexts, but always maintained their own focus as the primary concern. They were in charge and were making all decisions based on how their work operated, i.e. not defined by an artist model for instance.

It was noted that the layout and presentation of the best Scholarship portfolios were intelligently considered and had a good visual impact. The layout of a portfolio and indeed the workbook were key aspects that often seemed to be unconsidered. In all of the subjects a well thought through layout not only supports but also intelligently articulates a body of work as a whole. Repetition, badly cut imagery, handwritten labels, odd spacing, poor printing (photographic documentation) and inadequate editing, reduced the overall receptivity and readability of the portfolio. Also, the inclusion of what appears to be literally working process and description, rather than proposition or resolution of sort undermined the focus and fluency of a portfolio.

Successful workbook and portfolios were distinguished by a relationship whereby the workbook operated as an active component, i.e. it reinforced, added, built, confirmed, extrapolated, offered

something other; a parallel body of work, figurings, drawings, maquettes and other options for deliberation. In general it was felt that the holistic nature of the workbook to portfolio needed more acute attention, particularly in those who were on the cusp of achieving Scholarship. Gaps appeared between ideas and resolution and there was too much reliance on descriptive documentation of either artistic reference or processes employed. The opposite was also noted where the workbook offered too many conceptual options and a lack of visual analysis or integration into practice. Hence the need to fine-tune appropriate methods for the most effective use of the relationship of workbook to portfolio.

Those candidates who achieved the most success were able to use the workbook as an ongoing platform to inform decisions about ideas in subsequent works (conceptually and visually). A major factor in this approach was the use of analysis of the candidate's own work to determine the most suitable outcomes or decisions. The introduction of another artist model did not necessarily signal a development of an idea, it just served to create a shift and not always a logical one. If artist reference was being used in this way it needed to be consistent and of apparent relevance, otherwise the candidate's work risked becoming a pot-pourri of others' artistic practice.

Many candidates are motivated to work with abstract ideas, e.g. cultural identity or the social construction of body image, to produce content in their work. It is important that the work that proceeds from such an aim is analysed and evaluated in respect to the quality and function of the visual metaphors produced. That is to say, candidates needed to critique their own work to consider the extent to which the meanings they wished to invoke were apparent. They needed to be critical of a tendency to imagine their work was about something when in effect it was not. Workbooks at times contained description of intent for the meaning of the work, but this was often described in didactic terms, talking about what was hoped for, rather than reflecting on how the work itself read. Understanding how an artwork can come to mean the things related to the candidate's aim is an important factor in effectively moving a body of work forward.

DESIGN

The best-performing candidates in design most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- ability to evidence an understanding of their audience by employing and inventing their own visual language to graphically communicate ideas and message; the scope of the brief empowered candidates to develop and invent formats, which reinforced the depth of exploration and ideas under investigation; inventive and purposeful formats added creative value to the message and ideas, as they cross-pollinated visual language with media and technical facility to produce graphically rich solutions
- ability to make connections and sustained links between their portfolio and workbook by documenting an intelligent critique of artistic references and associated contexts to formulate and develop ideas and pictorial / compositional strategies; these workbooks often included alternative ideas that had been critically explored, but edited out of their 90517 portfolio submission and integral to decision making; this ensured that they were not viewed as superficial or unrelated
- ability to produce a cohesive and visually articulate body of work throughout the portfolio that synthesised and capitalised on elements and ideas between boards one, two and three; this approach ensured that board three presented sophisticated outcomes that had been sensitive to

earlier ideas, risks and visual possibilities; in the case of brand and logo development, candidates were able to consistently link and operate a brand through varying formats across the portfolio

- ability to locate initial concepts and contexts at the beginning of board one and set out to build a visual language to uncover deeper realization; this included positioning the brief so that it was clearly situated within an appropriate genre, which enabled candidates to capitalise and refine visual ideas; time to focus on gaining control of the formal design elements such as; type/image structures, figure/ground relationship and treatments enabled candidates the opportunity to design and refine to produce elegant and graphic compositions
- clear understanding of their proposition and utilised design methods and visual strategies located in contemporary practice to extend beyond the confines of the initial brief; in these instances workbooks revealed intelligent references to the artist models used, moving beyond emulation and included models from across other visual art fields to expand and extend ideas
- ability to choose to explore an open-ended proposition that fostered an expansive and experimental approach to their ideas; these types of propositions offered candidates wider interpretation of their ideas, message and campaign potential; candidates did not use the workbook simply as a research document to analyse their portfolio - workbooks revealed a variety of imagery as starting points, often the candidate's own and the inclusion of relevant background, theoretical and conceptual studies, which underpinned the design process
- ability in the use of found or stock imagery, to show evidence of considered cropping, editing and manipulation to ensure genuine ownership and editorial fluency in the treatment of image construction and use.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in design lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- included imagery and reproductions in the workbook that were unrelated to the 90517 investigations and did not contribute to the learning that had occurred; this work acted as filler, was identifiable as 90515 project work and made no attempt to link to the purpose of the 90517 inquiry; significant editing and organisation is required to sustain a meaningful relationship between the workbook and portfolio to ensure that it directly pertains to the visual and contextual concerns that form the body of work
- did not demonstrate the level of technical skill and visual language knowledge that is required to produce graphic outcomes that are well crafted and message bearing; these candidates were unable to situate their ideas in a graphic genre that they had visual and conceptual understanding and command of
- were unable to identify and employ ideational or graphic strategies from suitable artistic models, which prohibited their ability to extend and expand upon initial ideas; they were unable to technically craft and control the formal design elements required to align their practice to appropriate aesthetic models; in these instances final solutions were visually unresolved and did not deepen the investigation
- lacked evidence of analyses and background research into relevant contexts and target audience; integration of media and visual strategies was unsubstantiated across the eight-page workbook; this lack of reflection and understanding revealed the absence of critical insight in the construction and communication of visual ideas
- were not able to explore ideas pictorially or conceptually, because they had not understood the design process of exploration, research, analyses, synthesis and clarification; the process loop is

integral to regeneration and the realisation of visual communication, and needs to be reinforced and sustained across both the workbook and portfolio

- engaged in formal competencies and were able to demonstrate knowledge of pictorial conventions, however were unable to integrate context or concept in a holistic manner
- collated a linear and narrow resource at the outset of 90517, which restricted development and idea extension; research needs to be ongoing and inform key points of synthesis and transition; workbooks often relied on written annotation to describe what the portfolio already communicated, therefore missing key opportunities to link, extend and expand across the eight pages.

PAINTING

The best-performing candidates in painting most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- ability to provide notations in workbooks (in the candidates own words) which asked open questions, the answers to which were manifest in both the comments by the candidate and in their work
- ability to employ a highly developed technique necessary to make clear and achieve the purpose of the project
- ability to reference in both workbook and portfolio works, genres of painting and cultural milieu that were well understood and intrinsic to the work
- ability to utilise photographic source material (used in the derivation of subject matter) that the candidate has taken for himself or herself; this revealed a process of invention and discovery that enables the development of a purposeful enquiry central to the production of original work; in submissions where photographically derived subject matter was gathered or appropriated from existing imagery, such appropriation was entirely consistent with the type of work being made and the purpose of the project
- sufficient skill and critical reflection to make subtle and articulate evaluations of and shifts in pictorial space
- ability to include works in the workbook, which demonstrated an extension of their knowledge of the confines of the project submitted in the portfolio.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in painting lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above, and in addition they:

- made superfluous and lengthy written descriptions of steps taken in making the works, which were easily seen in the works themselves
- made written descriptions of works, which were not of any significance or relevance to the issues central to the work being undertaken; this revealed a lack of understanding of the purpose or effect of the work
- made overbearing descriptions of “concepts” that were supposed to precede the work, to motivate it or be present in it; the work did not make such concepts manifest

- failed to adequately draw together a range of experiments with media and conventions of practice into a coherent whole or failed to adequately draw substantial and sustaining options from a particular selection of media and conventions of practice into a coherent and sophisticated whole
- made leaps that were too big from one phase of the project to another, thereby under-utilising possibilities important to the project; this seemed to be done in favour of introducing possibilities that, while legitimate, were disconnected from the possibilities that preceded them; thus, a central proposition was not adequately extended or re-phrased
- presented submissions that focused on laying out surveys of artists and artistic periods considered to be of significance to the project, without providing evidence of the assimilation of these influences into the work itself
- did not use their workbooks as a forum for revealing tests, advances and intelligent divergence
- appended a “further developments” section in the workbook, which amounted to a superficial decision, the implications of which were not signalled or responded to in the project as a whole
- relied heavily on digital and photographic source material; such imagery was in places, painted over and “coloured in”; this reduced some candidates’ ability to develop and analyse ideas using techniques appropriate to established forms of practice, relevant to the chosen field; it also prevented some candidates making critical decisions toward the production of original work.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The best-performing candidates in photography most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- ability to generate a proposition that was strongly embedded within their own personal interests and knowledge base; this starting point for a project provides sufficient motivation and traction to enable the breadth and complexity required of a sustained photographic investigation
- ability to demonstrate substantial awareness of the photographic medium in terms of the conventions of practice and understanding of how concepts can be communicated through the language of photography
- fluency in their understanding and use of photographic techniques and technologies; with increased opportunities to manipulate images through the use of digital processes comes the increased potential for their arbitrary manipulation; whilst technical facility is necessary to attain Scholarship, this alone was not sufficient without evidence of critical reflection and decision making; exploration and experimentation are necessary as the project unfolds in order to generate potential avenues of inquiry rather than further developments artificially grafted on at the end
- ability to demonstrate (in some instances) an intelligent understanding of other forms of contemporary art practice; sculpture, performance, film and installation, and the ability to successfully incorporate and extend such understanding within the photographic medium
- ability to bring two or more contexts to bear upon the central proposition (“contexts” not to be read as artist models, but rather ideas around content, concepts, medium, aesthetics and genre); in this manner a much greater wealth of opportunities was generated without the focus of the investigation defaulting to a linear progression
- ability to harness the workbook to further demonstrate authority and comprehension of the nature of the proposition undertaken; these workbooks critically advanced and opened up discussion, which was potentially already being evidenced within the portfolio, thus elaborating and

extending evidence without relying upon replication and repetition; there are many ways in which to use and assemble a workbook, some advantageous aspects of these included:

- i. succinct research and assembling of information pertaining to the central proposition
- ii. applied visual analysis, identifying relevant strengths and weaknesses of practical explorations
- iii. critical reflection supported by close analysis of their own ideas and processes
- iv. effective opportunity to revisit, reframe and remodel the inquiry as a result of insights gained through practical investigation
- v. strategic deployment and discussion of aesthetic sensibilities and/or stylistic attributes that are able to reinforce and sustain the concepts being explored
- vi. different options for editing sequences of photographs that demonstrated a critical understanding of what was being proposed.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in photography lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- relied upon an insufficient proposition, failing to generate a critical avenue of inquiry and therefore often reverted to being derivative of too few or too similar artists models
- were not adequately conversant with basic conventions of photographic practice, i.e. they did not use appropriate photographic printing methods; the nature of the photo paper reflects on the readability of the image, as does the print quality; selection of appropriate media is a key component in the successful resolution and visual development of a photographic work
- failed to consider the full extent of possibilities, i.e. they did not engage in the question “what if”; further extension of ideas does not necessarily imply, change in format, change in medium, e.g. proposing on the last page of the workbook that they would now deal with projection, when it had little relevance to the ideas that have been pursued in the workbook and portfolio, is not an appropriate extension
- confused the introduction of colour as an extension to previous works; colour in itself does not necessarily extend an idea – it needs to be a purposeful addition that will critically advance the proposition
- relied solely upon standardised formats in terms of sequences of photographs; altering the scale of photographs is a useful device to convey different options, possibilities, readings of the work
- within the workbook:
 - relied extensively on lengthy descriptions of other artists’ practices, thereby not providing sufficient evidence of the candidate’s own practical explorations and developments made perfunctory description as to what they did, as opposed to considering the questions that could continue to drive the development and direction of a photographic investigation
 - failed to account for the relationship between the concepts being communicated and the technical means by which they were made manifest, that is, the interdependence of form and content
 - described, rather than contextualised artistic references, for instance, there is no advantage in presenting biographical material of the artist’s life story, including undue technical explanation of photographic processes employed by the candidate and providing laborious account of portfolio layout options; the workbook is not a guide to the portfolio - it needs to

go beyond a reiteration of what can already be evidenced within the portfolio in order to impart the critical decision-making and expansion expected of scholarly engagement.

PRINTMAKING

The best-performing candidates in printmaking most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- ability to shift through a variety of print media in a manner that best suited the ideas they were dealing with; the variation of print disciplines enabled the candidate to regenerate the series they were working with and extend possibilities for further series; it must be stressed that a change in media use should be in keeping with the ideas being dealt with and not introduced merely as change for its own sake
- ability to use the workbook as a thinking tool, e.g. ideas and images were trialed within the workbook and either used or discarded and then, if appropriate elaborated on; this form of analysis became evident with the appropriate type of work presented on the portfolio; in a number of cases drawing itself was used extensively in the workbook to unravel possibilities and offer alternative decisions
- ability to exploit nuance and subtle skills within print media and also (crucially) with the compositional devices employed; hence 2D concerns were given equal consideration as the techniques of print
- ability to use the workbook as an extension of the portfolios and not only as a documentation of the journey undertaken; in this, work appeared in the workbook that offered neither, alternatives to that which was on the portfolio or extended out beyond the third panel; actual conceptual research also operated in this manner; again, it is the correct use of analysis to determine which information is best suited to enhance the work
- ability to demonstrate the use of “play” by incorporating other media outside of print to establish a new context for reading the ideas concerned; as with print processes this use of multi disciplinary media needs to be in keeping with the subject matter/ideas being explored
- ability to use the three panels of the portfolio in a clear and concise way to demonstrate the sequential development of the work produced; each panel was able to keep the momentum going and not repeat previous discoveries so as to become mere filler; successful candidates were able to clarify intentions through intelligent layout; each body of work within each series was presented in such a way to show a clear development
- with artist models used as reference in the workbooks, they were often more successful when they were able to revisit an earlier model and demonstrate that by re-evaluating their own work in response to the model they were able to regenerate ideas for further series; by establishing links between the models used they clearly identified more understanding
- ability to employ technical skills and subtle use of a range of materials within compositional devices. Candidates who engaged in this way were rewarded at the high end as were those that used the print media in a slightly more raw or experimental form which was entirely appropriate to subject matter.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in printmaking lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- were unable to extend ideas beyond the initial premise offered, and hence the work became too repetitive and relied too heavily on a few basic approaches, either within the concept or technically, or sometimes both
- were unable to utilise the workbook effectively; too often the artist models used and/or research into concepts and processes were too descriptive; they lacked analysis in terms of intentions and the ability to clarify ideas for further regeneration; the workbook pages sometimes appeared as afterthoughts or page fillers; documentation needed to be about the decisions made and a thinking process related to their work
- merely described technical processes and thus failed to demonstrate how an understanding of a process could be used in a more experimental way and thus did not offer the potential to further enhance and extend the work undertaken; possibilities or opportunities were not grasped because of only referencing a technical process and not “experiencing” it fully
- presented portfolios in which presentation and layout also highlighted some problem areas; unsuccessful candidates either had insufficient work or the development of ideas moved far too slowly across the three panels; other areas of concern were portfolios where works made abrupt change for change sake and were not clarified in the workbook or in the work preceding on the portfolio; to some extent this could be seen in the use of inappropriate print related materials, which bore little relation to the work itself; unfortunately this approach also surfaced sometimes on the last page of the workbook where the notion of extended work was quite forced and had little relation to the logic and relevant progression of ideas on the portfolio
- were unsuccessful where the workbook far exceeded the visual evidence on the portfolios; in this, the ideas and concepts researched were not able to be generated into a coherent visual argument; pictorial or technical print skills were left unresolved; thus the workbook needs to have a balance of researched ideas and methods best used to synthesise the concerns into visually successful works.

SCULPTURE

The best-performing candidates in sculpture most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- demonstrated an understanding of sculptural conventions and contemporary practice through research into appropriate artist models; this referencing was intelligent and critical, feeding directly into the candidates own explorations
- explored other relevant research material to provide a strong contextual and conceptual base from which to develop work; this included, but was not limited to, engagement with current social, political and cultural issues
- identified key issues in the work from the outset on the portfolio; candidates evidenced an intelligent selection of subject matter that offered a range of possibilities for developing works, and a depth and integrity in their engagement with this; there was a sense the candidate “owned” the work
- used drawing as a generative tool to explore ideas, evidencing an understanding of the potential of drawing to develop and build on ideas; a sculpturally informed drawing practice was integrated into the development of the work at every stage

- developed a large body of work consistently and logically, building on previous explorations to “push” the work further
- were able to demonstrate that all investigations, from drawing to resolved works, supported the sculptural proposition and evidenced fluency and intelligence in the consideration of the conceptual and aesthetic
- successfully developed the conceptual underpinnings of the work through a considered material exploration; within the expanded field of sculptural practice there exists a diverse range of different practices to draw on, from the formal to the performative; candidates were able to select and explore a mode of practice that was entirely appropriate to the development of their ideas
- took risks and showed ambition in the scope of their sculptural proposition and in the type of work produced; they operated with a pace that displayed a wide range of thinking, aptitude and lateral investigation
- demonstrated a sophistication and high level of resolution in finished works, evidencing a clear understanding of the chosen mode of practice and materials used
- were critically reflective, with clear evidence of their ability to make informed, intelligent decisions about the direction of the work, and relevant connections between works
- used the workbook practice to expand on their proposition; these workbooks showed thorough research practice, evidence of problem solving through material play, documentation and/or drawing of alternative works; it was clear that a critical, analytical decision making process was in play when these workbooks were considered in relation to the portfolio
- utilised methods of documentation that best suited the content of the work; still images and series of images clearly described/represented the object and/or action; this documentation was also of a suitably high standard, further demonstrating their fluency and understanding of all aspects of a sculptural practice.

Candidates who did NOT achieve Scholarship in sculpture lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- used a wide range of often unconnected and inappropriate artist models; artist models were closely followed rather than critically explored in relation to the candidates own interests
- lacked understanding of the sculptural conventions in which they were working; this was particularly the case with some submissions which addressed performative or relational modes of practice, with the work sometimes being derivative and superficial
- repeated sculptural works, in both drawing in the workbooks and on the portfolio, rather than extending them
- perused ideas in a literal and didactic way, with work serving to illustrate a concept rather than explore and build on it through processes, materials and actions
- included documentation that was difficult to read and did not adequately describe the work; they used poor quality paper and/or printing methods to produce images for the portfolio; dull, dark, matt imagery is not appropriate for documentation of three-dimensional work it is vital that sculptural work is shown off to the best capability possible, especially given it is already one-stage removed from the original
- lacked an understanding of the formal language of sculpture and ability to expand on fundamental sculptural concerns

- did not make enough sculptural work; in some cases, a singular work was stretched out across several panels, demonstrating a lack of development in the work, ideas and concepts being explored; sculpturally, there needs to be a number of shifts made that reinterpret the inquiry; these should be new investigations, not a rearrangement or addition to existing work.