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Scholarship 2021 Art History

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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.

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

Section C Q7

In her essay on art and the current coronavirus pandemic, Rhiannon Cosslett explores the way that art can function as an important source of "meaning in times of crisis." Meaning in a cultural crisis can manifest itself in different forms from offering escapism, ~~to~~ and "comfort" to reflecting "pain" to even aiding ~~or~~ and abetting ^{the} "cultural crisis." ~~the~~

Rhiannon Cosslett ~~explores that~~ argues that humanity is "capable of creating great beauty" in times of crisis. This is valid as often artists seek refuge in "the communal whole" as a means of escape from harsh social realities. This is reflected in Henri Matisse's ~~Le bonheur de vivre~~, in which Matisse depicts a ~~mythic~~ mythological Arcadian past which, rather than advocate we return to, he offers a moment of escape from the rapid industrialisation of Europe. In ~~Le bonheur de vivre~~, Matisse draws inspiration from "that which came before" in a similar way to Cosslett in a time of crisis, recalling Titian's Bacchanal of the Andrians, Ingres' odalisques and harems, Japanese ukiyo-e, and Cézanne's The Large Bathers. He ties ~~these~~ ^{this "shared visual language"} stylistic inspirations to a mythic Idyll in a way that recalls "the communal whole", or the shared identity of both artist and contemporary viewer — his work therefore becomes immediately accessible, a vehicle for escape. Matisse's

and a thin wash of paint adding luminosity. Fauvist use of colour^{is significant; the garishly bright colours do not offer any naturalism but rather beckon the viewer to "step inside" the picture plane and escape. This is accentuated by the painting's treatment of perspective, eschewing linear perspective whatsoever. This creates "great beauty" as there is a sense that vision in the artwork must be experienced through both time and space — the viewer envisions themselves navigating through the painting, resulting in a multiplicity of perspectives. The work also offers a sense of escape from industrialisation through the use of line: flowing arabesques that define the contours of the women are reiterated in the curvilinear lines of the trees, and sinuous lines emerging from the hands and feet of some of the women feel like corporeal emanations of energy. The work stands in stark contrast to the rectilinearity of our modern industrialised cities. Thus, Casslett's argument that beauty often emerges from social crisis is legitimate; however, it often only emerges through escapism which is ultimately an illusory and temporary experience.}

The view that Casslett takes on art "representing the best ~~out~~ of our achievements" is questionable;

indeed, this is not the sole function of art.

"Humanity's creative drive is unassailable" and this results in artists reflecting cultural crises in their art, in a way that does not necessarily involve "great beauty." This is reflected in mid-to-late 19th century Realist art such as Manet's Olympia which reflects the social crisis of the debauchery of upper-class men in newly industrialising Paris. Unlike the work's immediate inspiration, Titian's Venus d'Urbino, Manet's work is non-naturalistic with a muted colour palette, harsh studio lighting that eliminates midtones to create a sense of two-dimensionality, and the general absence of tonal modelling or foreshortening. This ties into Clement Greenberg's formalist conceptions of art; that historically, "realistic illusionist art had disassembled the medium, using art to conceal art." Instead, Manet "uses art to call attention to art" through emphasising the flatness of the canvas. This stylistic authenticity ties in with the way the work authentically reflects Manet's "times of crisis". The model for the artwork, Victorine Meurent, would have been a familiar face to those at the 1865 Paris Grand Salon and Olympia the dog, a symbol of fidelity in Titian's work, is replaced by a "chatte" (cat) which is slang for female genitalia — thus, the ^{work}~~work~~-cat becomes an interrogation of prostitution and

'nocturnal promiscuity'. Manet thus removes the veil of mythology that traditionally 'clothed' female nudes through depicting a woman who returns the gaze of the viewer and is conscious of her sexuality; the only tonally modelled and foreshortened area of her body is her left hand which draws attention to her genitalia. Olympia's face is asymmetrical, her skin is pale, and the entire artwork's composition is eerily unbalanced. Thus, though indeed "social crises have given rise to new movements throughout history," these new movements often reflect cultural crisis in an authentic and unflinching way that is not necessarily beautiful or comfortable. To generalise that art offers "great beauty" and reflects "the best of our achievements" in a time of crisis is a dimunitive view of art which is instead a ~~more~~ subjective and illusory reflection of the human experience. //

Finally, Cassetti's sole focus appears to be her own "comfort" and "pain"; art to her appears to be a medium for personal enlightenment. This idealistic perspective on art ignores the way that art, rather than solely being "an articulation of resilience" in the face of crisis is often a tool through which ideas leading to crisis can be disseminated amongst a popular audience. This is best reflected in Umberto

Boccioni's Futurist sculpture, Unique Forms of Continuity in Space. The artwork, counter to Cosslett's perspective, is one that advocates for the destruction of "museums" (which were labelled as 'cemeteries') and "that which came before," heralding a new era of dynamism, violence, machinery, and change. Felice Filippo Marinetti ~~summa~~ summarised the Futurist worldview as follows: "we wanted to fight ferociously against the fanatical, unconscious, and snobbish religion of the past." The ~~far~~ popularity of Futurism in Italy aided and abetted its social crisis when Italy became a Fascist state as the ~~Futurists viewed~~ romanticised war as an effective means of obliterating old forms of culture. These ideologies are reflected in the sculptures style. Boccioni captures a runner in motion through synthesising the different positions of a runner in space into a contiguous artwork that carries a sense of forward momentum and 'four-dimensionality'. He sculpts the environment around the figure, creating a sense of aerodynamics such as through the flamelike projections emerging from the runner's heels. ~~The helmet~~ The sculpture is indeed a perfect medium to capture this sense of dynamism and the fast pace of modern life as when one moves around it, the viewing angle changes and hence so too does the ~~a~~ perceived shape of the sculpture. Boccioni thus applies a Cubist faceting

of forms not to reveal structure but to reveal motion and violence. The sculpture itself is juxtaposed against the solid cubic plinths on which it stands, embodying masculine and heroic narratives of progress through struggle and the mechanised body; indeed, Nietzsche's 'super man' was a universal obsession of Fascists at the time who were infatuated with ideas of change and violence. Thus rather than simply be a means of escapism or pensive reflection of society, art can also be a call to arms, offering a "meaning in times of crisis" that only serves to exacerbate crisis, without any true resolution.

Thus, Cassioli's perspective that the drive to create is always a productive one or always leads to beauty is ^{irrationally} idealistic or, at the very least, misguided. Escapist art appears to be the only type function in line with her philosophies, and even this is only ephemeral.

Section A Q2

How significant is the human figure in art? Discuss the treatment of the human figure... //

The human figure is of utmost significance in art because it is of utmost significance in our lives. We constantly scrutinise and interact with the human form. The primary visual lens through which we interact with the world is gazing at other individuals' figures. As a solely visual medium for the most part, therefore, the human form in art is of even greater significance. In art, treatment of the human form reveals constructions of women, is used as an extension of one's individuality, and interacts with space to reflect the panoply that is the human experience. //

The treatment of the human figure often reveals more about the lens of the viewer and artist than the subject itself. For instance, examining the treatment of women's figures can reveal a lot about the male gaze and patriarchal constructions of women in our societies. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the notorious misogynist Pablo Picasso's work, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon. The work itself is a depiction of five nude female prostitutes at a brothel on Barcelona's Carrer de Càmera d'Avinyó, a street

which Picasso himself often frequented. In the work, the female body is objectified and becomes a vehicle for Picasso's personal self-gratification. For instance, Picasso appears to employ his trademark cubist facetting of forms through stitching multiple planes of perception together on the canvas, ~~revealing the~~ creating a work that emphasises flatness. Indeed, there is a lack of linear perspective, foreshortening, tonal modelling, or ~~soft~~ chiaroscuro which creates a sense of emotional flatness of these women. They are painted in fleshy pink tones and fill the foreground of the canvas due to a tightly-cropped composition, which exaggerates the objectifying treatment of their figure even further. Some of the women appear to be wearing African masks; Picasso was in his African-influenced period and ties the racist constructions of African people as 'primitive' to the primitiveness of the women in the canvas. It is important to recognise that the work was inspired by Le bonheur de vivre, but rather than the jagged drawing arabesques of the women in that painting, Picasso paints jagged, uneven forms that connote a sense of violent desire. The women peer out of the picture plane towards the viewer, who must occupy the 'male gaze', interrogating the form of the women. Indeed,

examining the artwork today through a feminist lens ~~reveals~~ reveals that the treatment of the human women's figures in the painting speaks to a set of implicit cultural assumptions: the gender of the viewer, the 'primitiveness' of sexual desire and the construction of women as objects of reciprocal desire. ^{This recalls} ~~repeating the~~ Virgin-whore dichotomy that has traditionally characterised the treatment of women in Western art. Thus, the treatment of the human figure is significant as it creates associations in the viewer's mind, which ~~which~~ ^{'othering'} perpetuate cultural ~~stereotypes~~. //

The human figure in art is also used as a synecdochic extension of one's individuality. The violation of one's bodily autonomy speaks to the wider cruelty underlying human nature. This is best exemplified by Marina Abramovic's performance art piece, Rhythm 0, in which she invites the audience to use one of 72 objects—ranging from gentle like perfume to violent like nails and a loaded gun—on her body. The work began relatively tamely but as it progressed over six hours, the audience's treatment of the human figure became increasingly sadistic with somebody slashing Abramovic's throat and somebody else holding the loaded gun to her head.

1 Abramovic's endurance art piece in which she occupies a shamanistic role completely abdicating responsibility over her bodily autonomy, speaks to the latent potential for violence underlying human nature. The artist becomes the art object while the viewers occupy the position of artist, helping to construct the work through their own treatment of the human figure. Abramovic reveals how viewing without responsibility has the potential to harm the object of perception and hence, despite this not being her intention, a feminist interpretation emerges. This is highlighted by the way in which viewers performed sexual aggressions, leading Abramovic to say she felt that she was "Madonna, mother, and whore." When Abramovic began to move again, the audience quickly dispersed, unable to face her as a sentient human being. Thus, there is a suggestion in her work that the human form is significant because though it is synecdochic of a wider individuality and bodily sovereignty — after all, her shamanistic attitude is a dissociation of identity — it is also apparently transparent. Through examining the human figure alone, we are unable to feel the reality of the individual. This speaks to the limits of artistic practice in using

the human figure as a way of suspending disbelief and creating individuals on the canvas.

Thus, to truly consider the human figure as an individual, it seems, the viewer need to be able to empathise with them. This is only possible when the figure and viewer occupy the same shared space; hence, the human figure can only speak to us in a significant way when in conjunction with the wider environment in which it is perceived — much like real life. Antony Gormley explores this idea through his sculptural art and environmental work, Another Place, in which 100 statues across 3km of Crosby Beach, Liverpool, stare out towards the ocean. The viewer is inclined not to gaze at the figure in question, but to empathetically gaze out at the landscape, and through this we feel their reality. The statues themselves are manufactured from a cast of Gormley's own body which adds a sense of naturalism, but they are also each cast is welded separately together. This gives the work a mechanical air and the seams which run along logical areas of division (such as across the torso) create a sense of stability and security. The significance of this way of treating the human figure is that

as the statues decay due to their environment — the ebb and flow of the tides causes some to sink into the sand, the iron is gradually oxidised, and the statues are colonised by marine animals — there is still a sense of order and permanence. Each figure stands an average of 500m apart and any variations in position are a product of natural rather than creative processes. Through being set alone against the vast backdrop of the Atlantic container and the Ports of Liverpool, there is a sense of guardianship and as ships move through the ocean we feel both regret and solace in the ever-changing world. Thus, it is the interplay between the figures human figure in art and the context into which they are placed that can speak to us on an emotional, existential level; alone, human figures can be easily reduced to objects of desire or sadistic gratification.

Ultimately, the treatment of the human figure in art has an indisputable effect on our understanding of the artwork in two senses. Firstly, it can reflect embody influence the cultural assumptions underlying the artwork and secondly, the illusion of the human figure is a flawed representation of the individual that can help or hinder shape art's realism and communicative power.

section B Q5

Art is in the eye of the beholder. Discuss...!

Art's communicative power lies in the space between the artwork and the viewer's own lens. The viewer's lens, however, in contrast to the artwork itself, is highly subjective and malleable. Thus, to the greatest extent, art is in the eye of the beholder, but equally we must recognise the forces that shape the beholder's way of seeing itelf.

The emotional agency of an artwork is highly dependent on the beholder's ability to 'read' a work's iconography as well as the environment in which it is viewed. This idea is reflected in the Northern Renaissance oil-on-oak painting, Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele by Jan van Eyck. This work is didactic and its ability to inspire faith in the beholder is highly dependent on the beholder's prior exposure to religious iconography. For instance, van Eyck uses symbolism to capture both narratives of both original sin and humanity's redemption in a single visual motif — something which is only 'legible' to a trained eye. Jesus the Baby Jesus holds a parrot symbolising the Garden of Eden as well as a bouquet of flowers.

which seem to merge into each other. The unnatural colours of the mustard flowers carry symbolic significance representing Christ's crucifixion: red symbolised blood; white, purity; and blue, humility. Yet ^{the poor purpose of this} ~~this symbol itself~~ cannot be understood without a contextual knowledge: the patron, Joris van der Paele had polymyaglia rheumatica and was concerned about his mortality — the work's allusions to Christ humanity's redemption can be read interpreted as van der Paele's show of piety and request for divine mercy. Aside from iconographical elements which can only be understood to certain beholders, the place in which the work is viewed is also significant. The painting's modern museum setting is far removed from the original Church of St. Donatian in Bruges, where it would have been displayed along van der Paele's altar and tomb, and in the space in which ~~the~~ church of which he was both the canon and a generous benefactor. The intended beholder's ~~were~~ were the canon's acquaintances who would have appreciated the wealth brought to the ^{church} ~~church~~, something highlighted in the way that van Eyck paints over a layer of gold foil, giving the painting's surface luminosity and opulence, and includes an image of the canon's spectacles: a symbol of wealth. Thus, art's ability to communicate in a truly emotional

way is entirely dependent on the eye of the beholder — though this beholder's literacy in iconographical literacy and even who this beholder is are shaped by wider context. //

Art is in the eye of the beholder often due to its ambiguity and subjectivity. Thus, what the beholder sees in an artwork is easily manipulated by the ways in which this art is presented. This is all too clear in Twittering Machine by Paul Klee. The artwork was derived from a spontaneous proto-surrealist doodling of a wind-up bird toy, but ~~is has~~ is open to multiple interpretations due to the way Klee attempts to access the ambiguous world of the collective unconscious. For instance, the painting can be interpreted as a celebration of whimsy with its miasmal field of atmospheric blue and acid pink watercolour. The crank of the machine projects out of the picture plane, inviting the viewer, and the work reads as a sonic spectrograph, different lines emerging from the birds' beaks representing different sounds. However, the work is also somewhat cacophonous and can be interpreted as a commentary on the mechanisation of nature; an ominous quality emerges in the black smudges, due to the oil transfer process, the wiry and spindly use of line, and the rectangle of below infinitely deep

the thread on which the birds are so precariously perched ~~at which has a sense of infinite depth~~ — due to Klee's use of simultaneous contrast, an op art colour technique. Thus, Klee leaves the work ambiguous: to be completed by the viewer. However, this was undesirable to the Nazi regime which favoured clearcut artworks that were only open to one interpretation and could not be challenged; hence, they displayed it in the Entarte Kunst (Degenerate Art) exhibition. Here, they positioned beholders to ridicule the work without critical thought — as this was a threat to the regime — which iconoclastically erased its original meaning. Thus, art is to the greatest extent in the eye of the beholder; only, the beholder is truly flawed and easily manipulated. This makes it so easy for ambiguous meanings to be erased; beholders therefore bear some responsibility to see the artwork with eyes unclouded and approach it critically, but not derisively. 11

Art that directly aspires to influence a cultural context is to the greatest extent in the eye of the beholder. This is because to be well-received and consciousness-raising the work must overcome the beholder's preconceptions. However, as cultures change, so do the lenses of the

beholder, & and thus the meaning of art an artwork is in constant flux. This is best exemplified by Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party, a feminist artwork that helped to popularise ideas related to second wave feminism — sexual liberation, the need to expand teaching to subvert patriarchal & canons — in the United States. The work itself is a triangular table measuring 15m on each side with 39 place settings for prominent women throughout history. This communicated to the viewer effectively by being on a scale traditionally reserved for men. The larger-than-life-size porcelain plates lie atop intricately-woven textiles that incorporate two artistic media — ceramics and textiles — traditionally excluded from Western artistic canon as they were defined to be women's 'crafts'. The process behind the artwork's creation was also well-documented and would have communicated to the beholder through inviting them to consider how popular masculine narratives of originality and individuality underlie art making; the work is instead collaborative, including men with the majority of collaborators being female artists, highlighting their artistic achievement. However, from for a beholder in the modern-day, the a different lens shapes the artwork itself. The imagery of female genitalia on

each plate, rather than being viewed as a challenge to patriarchal constructions of women such as the male gaze, can be viewed as essentialising: it excludes ~~sexually~~^{gender} diverse women and implies the existence of a universal human experience. Furthermore, the work can be seen as only codifying the exclusion of Black women from popular discourses with the only plate dedicated to a Black woman, Sojourner Truth, also being the only plate not to feature an image of genitalia — mistifying Black female sexuality. Finally, it is ironic that for an artwork rebelling against male narratives of individual success the work suggests that women's history is defined by the achievements of 39 individuals as opposed to the structures of patriarchy and discrimination. Thus, to the greatest extent, the eye of the beholder can warp the way that an artwork is perceived. This adds to the beauty of art, however, which becomes an open medium for discourse, debate, and dissent. //

Ultimately, art is in the eye of the beholder but societies, the way art is presented, and knowledge/familiarity with iconography all place a lens over this eye. The lens can correct, confound, or shift perspectives and is hence

always an important consideration when viewing art.

When viewing any work of art, we must consider the following factors:

- previous knowledge of the artist and his/her style
- personal experiences and feelings
- critical analysis of the work
- historical context in which it was created
- art period or movement to which it belongs
- cultural background of the artist
- suggested meaning(s) and interpretations
- characteristics of the medium used
- size and scale of the work
- lighting conditions under which it is viewed
- composition of the work
- texture and color
- mood and atmosphere
- subject matter and its meaning
- and so forth

, mechanical

* The static¹ form of these figures is thereby juxtaposed with the dynamism of nature. "

** They are also uncanny, with their arms on either side¹ and purely symmetrical eschewing the contrapposto favoured by sculptors of antiquity. "