

ART AND DESIGN

Paper 0400/01

Observational/Interpretative Assignment

General Comments

This was the first tranche of candidates taking the revised syllabus and in spite of significant changes the paper was well received. It is pleasing to note that standards of achievement were maintained and that responses were varied and creative.

Although the question paper is divided into an observational and an interpretative section there were many rewarding links between these approaches. This meant that candidates could answer questions in **section B** emphasising an observational rather than an imaginative approach, or answer questions in **section A** using an imaginative rather than an observational approach. Such crossovers between these sections are acceptable and can result in work of a very individual nature.

The examination saw many examples of candidates benefiting from the increased opportunities provided by a more open syllabus structure. Sculpture and large paintings were seen as outcomes that had been photographed and submitted as finished pieces, which was entirely appropriate. However, in such cases Centres should be aware that 3D work should be photographed from different viewpoints and include details such as textural qualities, along with an indication of the scale of work. Design based presentations were also seen where candidates had used these questions to set their own brief and arrive at original outcomes. Photography and computer aided imagery including video and animations were also submitted. There was still some evidence of over-direction: such as all candidates in a Centre were attempted the same question and in some cases, all candidates from a Centre produced the same view of a still life.

The revised Assessment Objectives and mark scheme place much more emphasis on Investigation and Research 20%; and another 20% for Exploration and Development. Candidates have access to 40% of the marks available even beginning their final examination piece.

The very best preparatory work was highly appropriate with few examples of 'padding out' with irrelevant work. Sheets were densely packed with drawings, paintings, photographs and mixed media studies from direct observation. Contextual references were relevant and carefully chosen and had informed individual development.

Less successful were the many candidates who still rely on producing sheets of cut and paste cut-outs from magazines and poor downloaded images which are all too often far removed from the candidates own experiences. There was, as always, a small number of candidates that failed to declare the source of their imagery. Such plagiarism is easily identified when the same image reoccurs in different candidates' work.

In the upper mark range the most impressive development and exploration was seen. The work generally involved compositional studies, experiments with media and processes with an element of risk taking. Digital manipulation was quite common in providing alternative solutions and easy methods of distortions. Photographs were used to document stages in the production of 3D forms, as well as explanatory notes. However, in the mid to lower mark ranges this proved to be the weakest assessment objective with individual studies of objects or images not interrelated in any way; the candidates only deciding on the final composition in the examination itself. Many had simply repeated the same objects three times using the same viewpoint with very little variation in media.

Clearly some candidates had been guided successfully which had enabled them to understand the formal elements of composition, form, space, tone and texture, and to use these through continual practice. However, some candidates need much more direction as well as time to practice drawing and painting techniques, and develop ideas with an emphasis on composition and viewpoint in their work.

Work submitted was mainly painting and drawing, although preliminary work in a range of media was present. Ambitious printmaking was used for several questions from **section B** and included stenciling and relief printing. Sculpture, of a high standard, was seen in clay whilst model making, which was often poorly constructed, was seen in the lower mark range. Photography was used as an investigatory tool but some candidates had used this for their examination work. Digital manipulation was a popular means of exploring and developing imagery and ideas. In some cases these images had been used in larger scale for the examination piece and combined with other mixed media approaches. The most successful outcomes had practiced their chosen media and could use this with confidence to not only convey form, space and depth but to impart a sense of mood or atmosphere into their work.

Personal Qualities were always more evident in submissions that had strong evidence of working from first hand sources. The ability to select their own subject matter and set their own arrangements is part of the process of critical evaluation. Whilst those who are working from other down loaded sources are only ever using the selected view of somebody else; just as those who are making detailed copies from photographs are only ever showing skills in clever transcription from one medium to another. Where candidates made reference to other artist's work the best were able to give a highly personal explanation of its relevance to their own development. However there are still many examples of sheets of copious biographical details about a chosen artist's life which did not inform their own work in any way.

Most Centres had read and understood the administrative instructions, but a handful still continue to send in work on stretched canvases or heavy plywood or hardboard. Others are sending in sheets which are not attached firmly together. Paper clips, however large are simply not good enough as they inevitably catch and get pulled off. There were problems with reference work becoming detached from their backing sheets as pieces were not glued adequately, some even using Blu Tak.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 Two bundles of root vegetables

This was the second most popular question from this section and gave candidates the opportunity to show their abilities in analysing colour and tone, mixing and applying colour and simulating texture. The strongest work showed all these strengths as well as a good understanding of composition and viewpoint. They produced a cohesive arrangement of objects and background which was unified by means of light and shadow and reflected colour. Although even the best found problems in fully resolving the depiction of space and depth, particularly when representing the chopping board or brightly coloured bag against the muted tonal colours of natural forms. These were mostly resolved as paintings although many had used oil pastels with high levels of success. Extensive supporting work was in evidence. Candidates own photographs were often included as an aid to exploring close-up views and selecting viewpoints.

Unfortunately some candidates who chose to use pencil failed to use a full tonal range with outcomes lacking in form, space and depth.

Many weaker submissions encountered problems with the perspective of the chopping board. Several left out the bag or adopted a decorative patterned solution to the question with simplified forms sometimes overlapping in a vaguely Cubist style arrangement.

The best of the few who had attempted a more interpretative approach had made some well informed contextual references, particularly Van Gogh and The Impressionists. One Centre had encouraged candidates to make detailed studies from the natural forms which had been developed into brightly coloured abstract shapes, again making informed use of the work of others.

Question 2 Two electrical appliances

This was the most popular question in this section, and one of the most popular throughout, although few reached the higher achievement levels. Appliances such as hairdryers, drills, irons, kettles and hair tongs all proved popular. Hard reflective surfaces were explored where candidates attempted to capture subtleties of reflections, tonal variations and distortions. Those who had considered the electrical cables and plug or had linked the objects with cast shadows produced the most successful compositions.

Most candidates, however, struggled with the perspective and ellipses and often overlooked the importance of composition. Preparatory studies tended to be repetitive, lacking experimentation with media and relying too much on photography rather than the searching analysis of observational drawing.

Some weak submissions attempted to disguise their lack of basic drawing skills by colouring-in the objects in a pattern of colour and shapes without any evidence of cultural or historical references to pattern making. Others had adopted a deconstructed arrangement, taking the form of Cubist or Futurist styles. The stronger candidates had worked from direct observation and involved studying the objects from various viewpoints so that the final image was created from a range of angles. However others merely used photocopied images which were collaged together in sliced sections.

Question 3 Figure in a deckchair

Only a very few attempted this question. Outstanding preparatory work was seen from the best with studies exploiting the potential for interesting viewpoints by viewing the figure from the feet, giving them the opportunity to display foreshortening and depth. A few placed the figure in context such as in a beach setting. There were a few submissions in photography showing good competent selection and technique.

The weakest submissions had difficulty not only with accurately recording the proportions of the figure but also the angles of the chair against those of the body were mismatched.

Question 4 Portrait study

This was a much more popular question than Q3 and there were some very strong submissions indicating an excellent understanding of the structure and form of the face and hands. Candidates had clearly explored their subject from a range of sources; from both directly observed drawings and photographs taken from different viewpoints. An awareness of the effect of light falling on figures was demonstrated as was the ability to record reflected colour from clothing falling on the face.

This question also provided a popular stimulus for photography, including character studies with side lighting and exploring the concealment of the head with long hair. One exceptional entry had deliberately distressed their final photographs of a figure sat at a desk and lit by candle-light to capture the mood of an old photograph.

Weaker submissions were limited in recording, exploration and development skills with one entry using only a single digital photograph as a starting point. A few had attempted some development from this single image by experimenting with different viewpoints and developing compositions by cropping the image. Candidates in the lower mark ranges who used the single image (which was mostly a frontal view of the figure) simply attempted to copy directly from the photograph with no understanding of the basics of form, structure and proportion.

Section B

Question 5 Street furniture

A wide range of interpretations was seen, featuring street signs, fire hydrants, traffic lights, street lighting and seating. The very best work benefited from thorough research from first hand observation, from which many produced a more abstracted approach based on street signs and traffic lights. A Futurist style was used to suggest a sense of movement of traffic contrasting with the static road signs. Road and street side cafes were another interpretation with references to Van Gogh and Renoir. The contemporary influence of graffiti, especially Banksy, was used to good effect in contrasting items of street furniture viewed against a graffiti wall.

Unfortunately many candidates used this question to submit photographic outcomes of series of prints which lacked any real investigation or personal development and failed to move on from what were essentially snapshots.

All too often secondary sources of very poor quality had been used by candidates in the lower mark ranges. Results consisted of very diagrammatic representations of road signs lacking in form or structure.

