

Q&A

with Natsha Nair, student and Alana Hampton, teacher
St Hilda's School

Visual Art, Internal assessment 1: Investigation — inquiry phase 1 and
Internal assessment 2: Project — inquiry phase 2

Natsha Nair, student

Q: What did you enjoy most about Visual Art?

A: Visual Art was an opportunity for more individualised, student-directed work. This enabled me to delve deep into the subject matter, art techniques, and art history that I was passionate about. I also thoroughly enjoyed the investigative approach that was encouraged in this unit. This allowed me to explore different ideas and concepts as they came and to learn from my mistakes. Additionally, the analysis of other artists and the written components required difficult analysis and critical thinking, which was unlike any other subject I took, in that we were encouraged to think beyond the obvious.

Q: How did you prepare for this assessment task?

A: The first step in completing this assignment was undertaking the authentic experience — a full-day class trip to a variety of locations in our local area to observe, collect and investigate our local environment. Each student was able to take something individual from this experience that personally resonated with them and then further explore these ideas/issues in the classroom. This months-long process involved experiments with a variety of art materials, studying the work of artists, and reflecting on discoveries and mistakes throughout.

Q: What made you choose the topic or method of presentation?

A: I chose to present my IA2 assessment piece in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. I felt that written words could convey my meaning and the complexity of the visual details better than I could do in person. The still images additionally allow those viewing the presentation to observe at their leisure.

Q: What are your thoughts about this assessment and the approach you took when responding to the task?

A: Initially, I set myself very ambitious goals in terms of my final body of work, feeling the need to work very large scale and somewhat unconventionally in order to convey my intended meaning. This posed a variety of challenges for me along the way, especially considering COVID-19 restrictions. Through the support of my teacher, genuine enjoyment and fascination with my project, and hard work, I was able to produce a final product I was very proud of (composed of a 4-metre-long work, two 1-metre-long works, and a video installation).

Q: How will you use what you have learnt in this subject?

A: I believe that what I learnt in Visual Art will be extremely useful in my future endeavours, both inside and outside The Arts. Visual Art taught me how to think critically about big issues and to never stop asking questions. I believe my time spent experimenting creatively taught me how to learn from, and re-evaluate after, mistakes.

Alana Hampton, teacher

Q: What was the purpose of this assessment and what key decisions were made in the design of the task?

A: The IA1 and IA2 were designed to elicit personal and multidimensional responses to the authentic experience in order to consider how others, past and present, have responded to place through a range of viewpoints — art, science and historical. Students were challenged to engage with places they might ordinarily take for granted. Students played the role of the archetypal artist/scientist when landed in an immersive, often contradictory encounter with their immediate physical environment. On an extensive curated tour, they took samples (objects, swabs and photographs) and explored back alleys and the hidden fringes of natural places. At the end of the excursion, they prepared a labyrinth walk on the beach with time to reflect on how far they had travelled in body, mind and spirit over the journey. After this immersion, they were challenged to look back, question, reflect on and distil what knowledge they had accumulated and deepened. This provided the genesis for their inquiry question. Natsha's reflections fortified her passion to explore the concept of the Anthropocene and triggered both anger and the compassion compelling her to find ways to express her insights.

Q: How did your teaching and the student learning experiences prepare the students to complete this assessment?

A: Students engaged with an extensive array of resources and stimulus and were challenged to simultaneously reflect, sort, explore, critique and reject the materials as they found points of relevancy or inspiration while building their own digital 'visual diary' resource. They followed sources and found their own reverse chronologies. Very early on, it became clear that students were finding a myriad of points of engagement extending from the rich offerings of the authentic experience and their ownership of their own methodological approaches.

Over the course of many consultations we sifted through the many trajectories that might inform their understanding of 'what they wanted/needed to say'. The diversity of artist approaches, methodologies and ways to formulate an inquiry question explored accommodated the needs of each student and their ideas evolved over time. For Natsha, this process consolidated a way for her to resolve a uniquely meaningful body of work in a way that made it count for her.

Q: Can you explain the exemplary aspects of Natsha's response?

A: Natsha's realised body of work is unique to her stated intentions and true to her early intuition that this work needed to be both engaging through scale and emotive in mark and representation. Her ideas and approaches evolved as she worked with and exploited the charcoal in a range of forms — ground with rocks, crushed and dragged with bare hands, scumbled and scraped across canvas, both as part of her meaning making and in the full knowledge of its raw and affective materiality.

Carbon, carbon everywhere saw Natsha take ever-more-creative risks, never once 'playing it safe' as she maintained an intentional balance between expressive mark making and representation. In this, she acknowledged and built upon her growing understanding of other art makers to synthesise her ideas and create new work.