

Assessment highlights 2021

Visual Art

Internal assessment 1

Investigation — inquiry phase 1

Ryan Thwaite

Palm Beach-Currumbin State High School

Assessment overview

Context

This assessment instrument is the initial stage of a self-directed body of work and is part of a unit of study that explores the concept of 'art as knowledge'. Through an independent investigation of a self-directed inquiry question and application of critical thinking skills, students build knowledge about art, artists and audiences.

The student response is to be presented as a:

- written report of 1000–1500 words or
- a multimodal presentation of 7–9 minutes or
- a digital presentation (e.g. video, digital book) of 8–10 A4 pages/slides or equivalent timed digital media.

Experimental artworks are to be included to support individual interpretation of researched art practices and are presented using appropriate methods for the mode of delivery.

Task

Students were asked to develop an individual, open-ended inquiry question in response to the stimulus TED Talk by Pico Iyer, *Where is home?*, and investigate their inquiry question through making and responding to generate a personal focus for their body of work in IA2 and IA3.

In their response, students were required to:

- implement ideas and representations through an inquiry question to generate relevant solutions in response to the stimulus
- apply literacy skills using relevant visual art terminology, referencing and language conventions to recognise and distinguish features of artworks and practices
- analyse and interpret visual language, expression and meaning in artworks and practices through contexts
- evaluate relevant primary sources and secondary sources in formulating ideas
- justify viewpoints supported by the ideas and information presented through the stimulus
- experiment with visual forms, materials and processes in response to stimulus and experiences
- realise visual, written or spoken responses to communicate focus.

Student response

Note: The following sample is an unedited authentic student response reproduced with permission. Any images or sources that do not have copyright approval have been redacted from the response. The response may contain errors and/or omissions that do not affect its overall match to the characteristics indicated in the top performance levels of the instrument-specific marking guide.



Ryan Thwaite

Unit 3 – Art as Knowledge

Submission Date: 27/11/2020

INQUIRY PHASE 1

How do artists manipulate visual conventions to convey emotion in their works?

Summary

In this investigation, I am exploring the notion that homeliness can be found within people – not just physical structures. This is a response to Pico Iyer's Ted Talk 'Where is Home?' which describes one's family and friends to be 'pieces of soul' that replicate the comfort of a house, a 'piece of soil'.

The key artists I have chosen to study are Ben Ashton and Yang Jinsong. Each artist provided me with an alternate perspective of how emotion can be conveyed through manipulation of formal elements. Under their influence, I created two experimental works. Working in a formal and personal context, I represented strong duos within my own family. As I created these pieces, my focus emerged. My next body of works will centre around using symbolism and stylisation to create emotion.

Introduction

Being exposed to new forms of knowledge can reshape audiences' attitudes and beliefs. This became evident to me as I watched the stimulus: Pico Iyer's Ted Talk, 'Where is Home?'. Before viewing, I had only considered home as a literal idea – a country of birth, or a physical structure. Once subjected to the notion of home as a 'piece of soul' I was sent down a new path of thought, considering how the presence of another person could replicate the comfort of a house and how this could be conveyed through art. I settled on the focus of 'emotion'. Throughout my investigation, I assumed that a diverse range of works could be emotionally impactful. However, I discovered that the accentuation of human expressions and distorted environments were the most personally resonating. This led to the selection of my key artists, Ben Ashton, and Yang Jinsong who challenge formal elements – colour, shape, style, and composition – to augment the reality of daily life. Both artists critique aspects of their home nations: Ashton explores the historical image of Britain, and Jinsong discusses the detrimental impact of China's consumer culture. Using elements of their own world as props, the artists tie their personal feelings and emotions to bigger societal notions.

Discussion

Key Artist 1

Ben Ashton intertwines elements of his own life with historical contexts to create nostalgic portraits. He reinvents old things in a new light to explore how perceptions evolve over time, as our degree of knowledge expands.

Ashton's work is shaped by his obsession with history, and the aesthetics of different eras (London Art Blog, 2010). In his self-portrait 'To Our Glorious Future' (Figure 1), Ashton paints himself as a Regency Era gentleman in a black suit and white necktie. Influenced by old masters, the work is highly realistic, with slight nuances in colour and shadow. On the circular canvas, emblematic to the era, the process began with monochromatic contour drawings, that were built upon with tints and glazes of oil paint, and finished with textural impasto (Minus 37, 2019). The work critiques how the supposedly 'glorious' nation of Britain was riddled with corruption – the misalignment of the eyes and mouth, illustrates the withholding of truth, and the spreading of lies. By grotesquely distorting visual conventions, shape, colour, and composition, he shows how the British presented themselves as heroes, but in reality were responsible for various misdemeanours (Minus 37, 2019).

Emotionally, Ashton creates highly chaotic atmospheres. Within his compositions he conflicts dream-like elements (the clouds, the delicate fabrics, and the seamless shading) with nightmarish elements (the gore and distortion of facial features). Simultaneously, the works comfort and unsettle the viewer – and overall, instil a sense of nostalgia. The nostalgia is accredited to the sense of fantasy: the style is intriguing, and its beauty evokes audiences longing for a period in the past.

Ashton will be the greatest influence of my works. Specifically, I will take inspiration from his augmentation of shape. By departing from what is normal, I want to express emotion that surpasses what is experienced in everyday life. I also want to capture a similar nostalgia by using images of family members. I will focus on the stories of people I know; something I can better understand.

Key Artist 2

The works of Yang Jinsong are shaped by modern consumer culture, and its intruding influence on the wellbeing of society. In his works, he creates atmospheres depicting his struggle to live amongst this cornucopia of illusions (M.F.A. - Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, 2002).

Like Ashton, Jinsong exploits a personal context by using elements of his own world to represent a larger societal message. His distinctive style emerged around the time he produced the work 'Overture', 1996 (Figure 2). The work is painted in oils, on a large 2.9 x 3.5 metre canvas. It depicts two figures – Jinsong and his wife – as they lean intimately against each other. Their heads are contained within the circular face of monstrously sized alarm clock. Their sad eyes and pursed lips create an unhappy atmosphere, suggesting the flood of domestic objects is suffocating their marriage and boundaries of personal space. The uncomfortable tone is further developed with the exploitation of formal elements. The incongruous sizes of the objects, perspective lines, and the directions of the eyes, and the monotonous yellowed colour scheme adds to the nauseating feel. Jinsong suggests that freedom and happiness is destroyed by this commercial era, where knowledge is constantly being consumed – to the point where it intrudes on our personal lives and makes us prisoners of our own home.

I will take influence from Yang Jinsong's use of perspective – however, I will subvert it to show a position emotion, to represent the bonds in my family. The use of cluttered objects also inspires me, and I will consider ways I can include objects to create emotion. Potentially, they could act as a form of symbolism or as a distorted stylistic element.

Experimental Research

Throughout my experimental process, old photographs I uncovered were integral, forming the basis of the imagery and the development of emotion. For instance, both "Shelter" works (Figure 3) were inspired by a single image that I felt held the essence of home in both 'soil' and 'soul' (Iyer, 2013). I was influenced by the way Ashton distorts reality and the use of family members as actors. My impressionistic strokes of oil-pastel, and subdued colour palette created a fluid and illusive atmosphere, depicting the childhood memory, with a dreamlike mood. The work is set in the sanctuary of our toy-littered childhood backyard, and it features my twin brother and I, dressed and posed identically. Our brotherly reliance is reflected in the way we are pushed together into the secure, shadowed corner of the composition. The hoodies symbolise that we are like fish sheltering from the open ocean, when we are in the parameters of a brick garden fence. A stark contrast is established in the second "Shelter" piece. I was inspired by Ashton to remove this secure, homely environment, instead placing the figures in 'unsafe' and 'tainted' foreign terrain (Medium, 2020). The imagery of the dark, dense forests, and the children wearing red-riding hoods, was my reimagining of 'Little Red Riding Hood', meant to instil a feeling of danger. However, the sight of the two figures navigating this alien environment together feels more comforting: I wanted this to epitomize the strength of human connections.

My second experimental work, "Indulgence" (Figure 4), depicts my grandparents enjoying an extravagant picnic. The piece captures a Jinsong-esque clutter of objects, but rather than eery, the scene is lively; vibrant reds and greens, free-flowing lines, and the glistening of the fruits and drinks conveys an 'Alice in Wonderland' essence. This distinctive style was developed through drastic changes I made in the making process. Originally, I was aiming for a more realistic look with the gouache, however, midway I decided to experiment with line as a leading formal element, taking

inspiration from Jinsong. Adding horizontal lines to the female figure, against the vertical lines of the picnic blanket added a crosshatched feel: emblematic to the unbroken marriage of my two grandparents. I also cut down the original gouache piece and added a bold continuous line drawing around the square edges. The sharp contrast between the two styles, and the distorted, Jinsong inspired characterisation of objects, instils the feel of an augmented reality. This element of fantasy captures the union of the two people as something that was meant to be.

Conclusion

Meaning can exist within the formal elements of a piece – and manipulated with the use of colour, shape, pattern, and size. However, it can also reside within the subtle, subsurface levels of a work, in the form of symbols and metaphors. Pieces by Ashton and Jinsong, for example, have a multitude of historical, cultural, and personal layers. They explore notions surrounding British history and contemporary consumerism, through personal contexts– using pieces of their own world: familiar people, places, and things. By studying these key artists and creating my own works, I have found that the most integral element of an emotionally impactful artwork is the artist’s connection to the subject matter. When working with old family images, my process became more instinctual, and my connection to the knowledge led to more sophisticated meanings about ‘home’.

Focus

For my resolved body of work, I would like to further develop the symbolic meanings present in my pieces. Through my investigation I have found that emotion is best conveyed when the artwork tells a story that both the artist, and their audience can find personally resonating. By capturing elements of ‘Red-riding hood’, and an extravagant style reminiscent of ‘Alice In Wonderland’, I have hybridised elements of my personal life with stories most people know. Incorporating these tales allow for the notion of home to be fundamentally embedded, even within the subsurface layers of the piece (both tales follow a protagonist who gets lost within a foreign place). I plan for the resolved piece to be more conceptual and illusive by moving away from realism. Augmenting the threshold of reality, will allow me to capture emotional ties in a way that surpasses everyday life. Rather, I will explore emotion in a more metaphorical way – representing my knowledge with stylisation and symbolism.

Bibliography

- Iyer, P. (2013, June). *Where Is Home?* Retrieved from Ted Talks :
https://www.ted.com/talks/pico_iyer_where_is_home
- London Art Blog . (2010, November 3). *Interview with Ben Ashton*. Retrieved from London Art Blog :
<https://london-art.net/interview-with-ben-ashton>
- M.F.A. - Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. (2002). *Fanxi Delarue Gallery*. China: Fanxi Delarue Gallery.
- Medium. (2020, Sep 14). *History is Cyclical: an interview with artist Ben Ashton*. Retrieved from
Medium: <https://medium.com/eracontemporary/history-is-cyclical-an-interview-with-artist-ben-ashton-63a0e6bf12a0>
- Minus 37. (2019, December 3). *Ben Ashton: History and Meaning of Contemporary Art*. Retrieved
from Minus 37: <https://www.minus37.com/2019/03/12/ben-ashton-surreal-artist-interview/>

List of Figures



Figure 1: Key
Artist
To Our Glorious Future, 2019
Oil on Linen Panel
61 × 61 cm

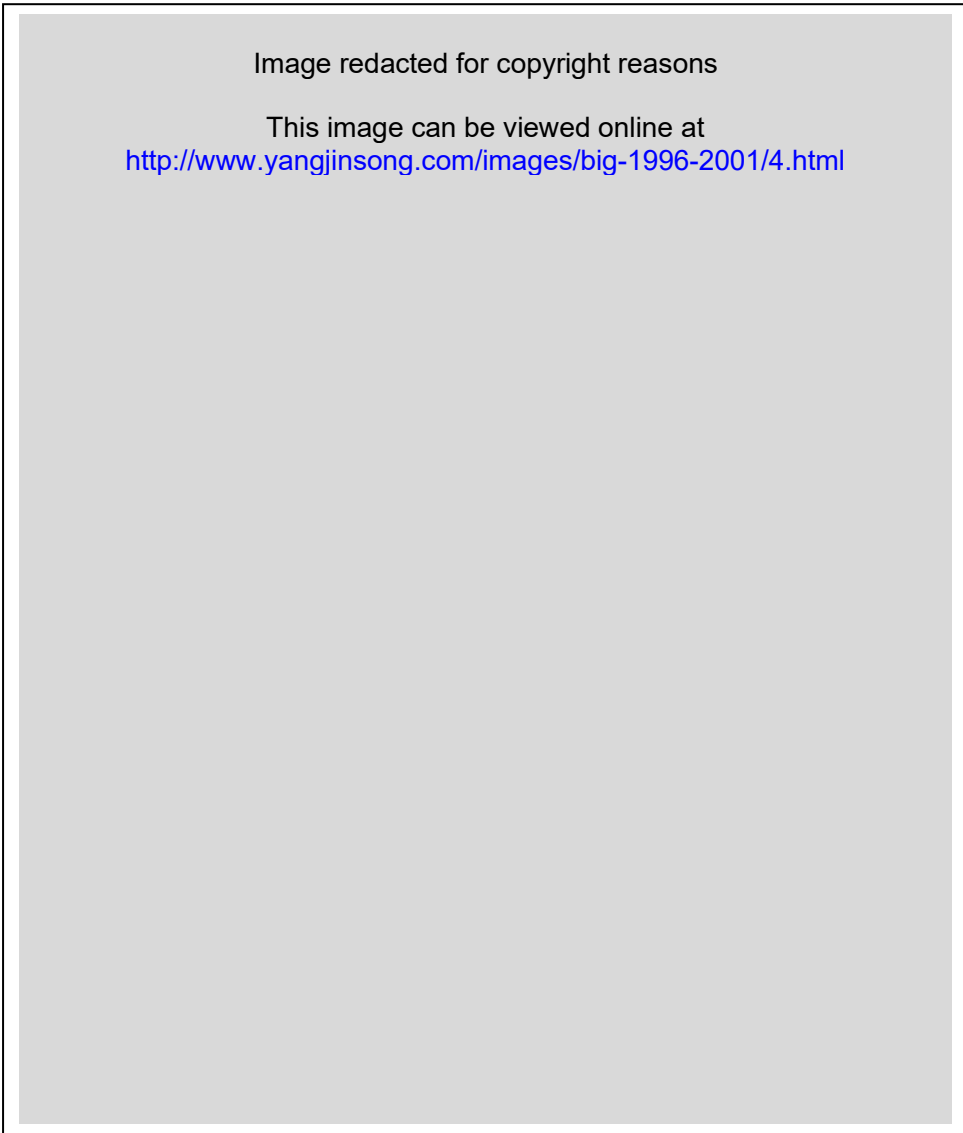


Image redacted for copyright reasons

This image can be viewed online at
<http://www.yangjinsong.com/images/big-1996-2001/4.html>

Figure 2: Key Artist

Yang Jinsong

序曲 (Overture),

1996

oil on canvas

350.5 x 287 cm.

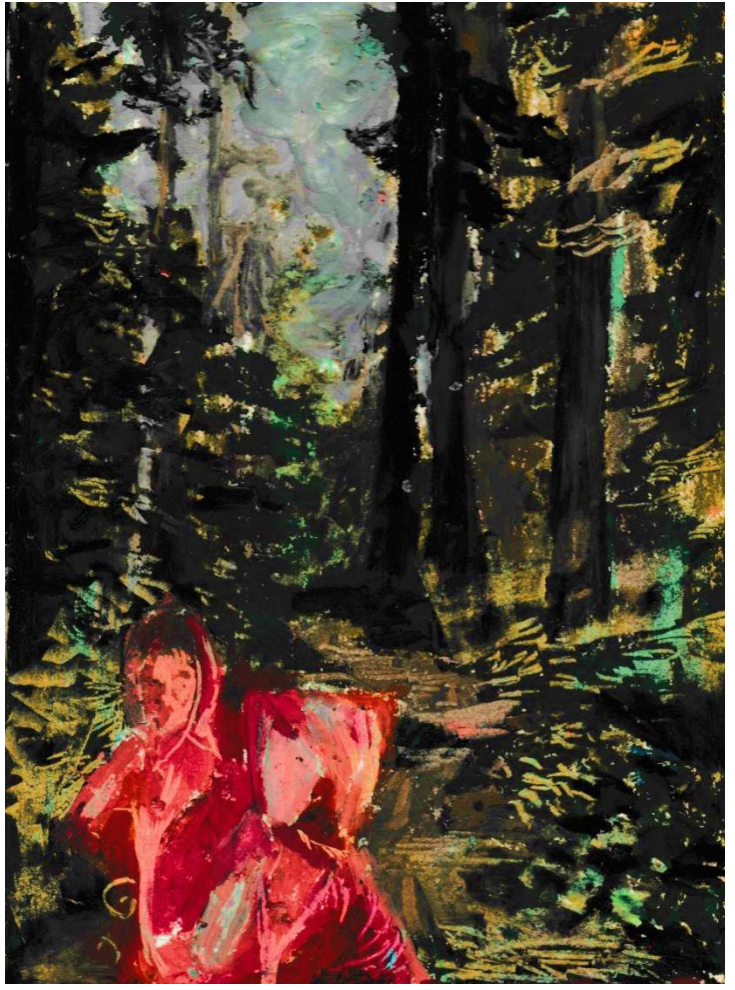


Figure 3: Experimental Work
Shelter
Oil Pastel on Paper



Figure 4: Experimental Work
Indulgence
Gouache, acrylic and ink on canvas paper

Unless otherwise indicated the student response is © Ryan Thwaite 2022. This resource has been made available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence (CC BY 4.0)

Attribution *Assessment Highlights 2021 Visual Art IA1* © Ryan Thwaite 2022. CC BY 4.0

Other copyright material in this publication is listed below.

1. 'To our glorious future' by Ben Ashton sourced from <https://www.benashtonart.com/about-to-our-glorious-future> Used with permission.

Certain images and layouts may have modified for copyright reasons or to improve publication quality.

Published by Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) 2022.