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Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa  
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

## Level 3 Art History 2023

### 91483 Examine how meanings are communicated through art works

Credits: Four

## ANSWER BOOKLET

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Examine how meanings are communicated through art works.	Examine, in depth, how meanings are communicated through art works.	Examine, perceptively, how meanings are communicated through art works.

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

Write your answers in this booklet.

If you need more room for your answer, use the extra space provided at the back of this booklet.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–10 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

Do not write in any cross-hatched area (☒). This area may be cut off when the booklet is marked.

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

Excellence

TOTAL 07

PLANNING

Adoration of Magi

St of Athens

Madonnas

Virgin of Rocks

Apollo Belvedere

Laocoon

School of Athens

Fall of Constantinople 1453

Humanism + correspondences

penetrating decision making

Classical

myology  
drapery

Contrapposto

Adoration  
- Guisparre  
- self insert

Classical  
Vitruvius 1414

Linear  
man as basis

St Peters  
Basilica,  
Alberti



Question number: 2

Art work (1): Adoration of the Magi by Botticelli

Art work (2): School of Athens by Raphael

You should aim to write a concise response of no more than 5–6 pages in length. The quality of your writing is more important than the length of your answer.

The Renaissance saw a return to the classical ideas of Ancient Greece and Rome, as renewed interest in classical learning, prompted by continuous classical discoveries, ~~during the time~~, became prominent during this time.

Botticelli's work Adoration of the Magi conveys various meanings about classical themes, reflective of this growing interest in classical ideas at the time. The central figures feature Mary and Christ as they sit atop a stone block, elevated amongst the other individuals. Surrounding them are dilapidated stone ruins and old columns, signifying this shift toward classical features. Other figures featured prominently in the work is the Medici family, with Cosimo de Medici kneeling underneath Mary and Christ whilst his sons pose as the Three Wise Men. To the far left is seen Lorenzo de Medici. Botticelli's rendering of these individuals highlight the dominant classical theme in the work: the poses of these figures are dynamic and naturalised, implying movement. Moreover, each are situated in complex figure groupings which add to this idea. Lorenzo de Medici particularly exemplifies a more classical portrayal, with his bent left knee



and twisted torso offering a form which echoes that of a classical sculpture, this was in line with the classical ideas of the time, as discoveries of ancient sculptures such as the Apollo Belvedere and Laocoon assisted with these depictions of figures in art. We also see their forms highlighted by Botticelli's deliberate use of drapery to create shape, an element yet again notable for its classical influence. This, combined with the individualisation of the figures, underlined the clear classical influences within art at the time, conveying meaning about the classical themes which Botticelli wished to convey.

Adoration of the Magi by Botticelli was painted during a time where interest in the classical world reached its peak. This renewed interest was likely prompted when 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poet Francesco Petrarch said that reviving the ideas of the ancient world would also revive its splendours, sparking a new goal to refeature these classical ideas within art. Alongside this, classical writings and sculptures continued to be discovered, prompting further exploration of classical themes within art as artists began to compete with art from the past. Whilst the subject which Botticelli depicts in this work is of a religious matter, its inclusion of other notable figures, namely the Medici family, and its setting within old classical ruins, demonstrated the



changing nature of art as it began to become more secularised. Supported by its integration of classical features. The figures featured in the work all carry a sculpted quality to their form and appear highly realistic, which was in line with classical ideas. Influential writer and Humanist Leon Battista Alberti stressed that in order to correctly reproduce three-dimensionality within figures, as was characteristic of ancient sculptures of the human form, artists must know not only the surface of the body but also its anatomy. These efforts made by Botticelli and similar artists of the time to mimic and copy the grandeur of the ancient classical sculptures highlighted the renewed interest in classical ideas whilst underlining these classical themes explored within art.

Raphael's School of Athens additionally explores meanings surrounding classical themes during this period, depicting ~~the~~ the four Humanist cornerstones of knowledge which was made up of theology, philosophy, justice and poetry. Two central figures are featured in the centre of the composition - ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Their differing gestures symbolise their opposing beliefs: Plato gestures toward the sky, highlighting his belief in the theoretical world, whereas Aristotle's hand points downward.



and conveys meaning about

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showcasing his belief in the observable world which we can see. Their different beliefs and theories exemplify the classical values of ~~the~~ theology, wisdom, and intellect, as despite their varying theories, they are able to work in harmony amongst one another within a pool of abundant knowledge. The architectural setting guides the use of linear perspective, with ~~the~~ Plato and Aristotle at the centre of this point. Apart from the individualisation of the numerous noteworthy philosophers and mathematicians, conveying meaning about the classical themes of shared knowledge, we also see the inclusion of the classical gods Apollo and Athena, each respectively symbolic of poetry and wisdom, which frame both sides of the artwork. Raphael's work therefore exemplifies classical themes surrounding knowledge and intellect during this time, his both subtle and obvious classical references building on this exploration of classical themes.

In Raphael's artwork School of Athens he depicts varying references to the knowledge, intellect, and wisdom prevalent in classical themes at the time. The work was commissioned by Pope Julius II, who wished to create a Humanistically inspired vision of the papacy. This supported the representation of classical themes as it



presented a shift away from purely religious representation, and this was particularly notable due to the Pope having commissioned this. The work was designed to be placed in a room where Pope Julius signed official rulings, one of decision making. This followed the Roman tradition of decorating libraries with different spectrums of knowledge, thereby highlighting these clear classical themes within Raphael's work. Furthermore, the innovative use of linear perspective was thought to be attributed to a particular discovery of a manuscript written by Roman architect Vitruvius, which was discovered in 1414. Alberti's perspective theories build on this, with Alberti arguing that man is the basis for all proportion and should also be used within architecture and buildings. This was another clear example of the exploration of classical themes and influences within art during this time, as artists referenced these points such as Vitruvius' manuscript, and built on this with their own ideas and adapting it to fit within the modern society of its time.

Coinciding with this was also the fall of

Constantinople in 1453, leading many classical scholars to flee and bring with them classical writings and teachings. This further prompted interest in classical elements such as Greek mythology and Humanism, as is seen in the School of Athens. Overall, Raphael's work



exemplified the influence of classical themes on artworks at the time, using these elements, such as the inclusion of Plato and Aristotle and the use of linear perspective, to underline both its influence and the developments made on these classical ideas during this time.

Both Botticelli's Adoration of the Magi and Raphael's School of Athens conveyed intricate meanings surrounding classical themes in their respective artworks, using this to highlight the profound impact which the upsurge in interest in the classical world had on art.



## Excellence

**Subject:** Art History

**Standard:** 91483

**Total score:** 07

Q	Grade score	Marker commentary
Two	E7	Refers to relevant contextual information throughout the response in its in-depth explanation of the artworks' meanings.