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Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Level 3 Art History 2025

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 the margins (🚫). This area will 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

SELECTED QUESTION

Copy and paste the question you have chosen into the space below.

QUESTION FIVE: Modernism to Postmodernism (1940s–c.2000)

Select and name TWO Modernist to Postmodernist art works that convey meanings about popular culture. Both art works may be selected from Plates 21–25 in the resource booklet, or they may be art works of your own choice, or a combination of the two.

With reference to your selected art works:

(a) explain the meanings in EACH art work that demonstrate ideas about popular culture, and

(b) explain how the construction of these meanings about popular culture impacted on art during this period.

Name your chosen art works:

Art work (1):

'Marilyn Diptych' by Andy Warhol

Art work (2):

'Whaam!' by Roy Lichtenstein

PLANNING

Thesis:

- layered meanings
- consumerism
- mass media
- commodity-driven

Intro:

- social and cultural change
- Pop Art
- Critic Lawrence
- Appropriated familiar mass culture images

Pt 1:

- individual
- headshot - reproduced
- silkscreen process - consumer culture
- The Factory
- vacant image

Pt 2:

- mortality
- brightly coloured
- fading - inspiration
- celebrity glamour
- monumental scale

Pt 3:

- consumable entertainment
- DC
- flat primary colours - machine-like
- no blood
- destructive realities

Pt 4:

- high art
- history painting - Delacroix
- scale
- artificiality of mass reproduction
- commodifiable product

ANSWER SPACE

Type your answer in the space below. You should aim to write a concise response of no more than 800–900 words. The quality of your writing is more important than the length of your answer. (The counter will change colour when you reach the recommended word count.)

B I U ☰ ∨ ☷ ∨ ↶ ↷ ?

Andy Warhol's 'Marilyn Diptych' (1962) and Roy Lichtenstein's 'Whaam!' (1963) convey layered meanings about consumerism and popular culture in the 1960s. They adopted the visual languages of mass media such as silkscreen printing and comic book aesthetics to reflect the commodity-driven nature of celebrity, violence and even art itself. Art often responded to the social and cultural changes of its time which is reflected in 'Marilyn Diptych' and 'Whaam!'. Pop Art was a direct response to the Abstract Expressionist movement and was often influenced by celebrity photography, comic books and advertising. The English-American critic Lawrence Alloway coined the term 'Pop Art' describing it as being concerned with "popular imagery, mass media and the flood of consumer goods which had become the American environment". Both Warhol and Lichtenstein appropriated familiar mass culture images such as Hollywood publicity shots and comic book panels which was quite common for Pop artists to do, and which were mass-produced during the 1960s. Two meanings in 'Marilyn Diptych' are how Marilyn Monroe was framed as being a mass-produced commodity rather than a unique individual and the fragility of fame and life. Two meanings in 'Whaam!' include how war and violence were trivialised into consumable entertainment and how consumer culture eroded the boundaries between "high" and "low" forms of art.

One meaning demonstrated in 'Marilyn Diptych' by Andy Warhol is that Marilyn Monroe was seen as a mass-produced commodity rather than a unique individual. Warhol silkscreened the same studio headshot from the film *Niagara* (1953) fifty times across two joined canvases. This repetition reflects how celebrity images were continuously being reproduced in the media like magazines, posters and films during the mid-twentieth century. The silkscreen process, borrowed from commercial printing, flattens the image and removes evidence of the artist's hand. The process also ties Marilyn's identity directly to consumer culture with the repetition of her face making her appear to be a commodity. Warhol was not trying to show an idealised image of beauty in this work but rather was trying to question the idea of perfection. Therefore, each image of Marilyn is slightly different with some imperfections. This could have been the artist trying to make the work more sellable and unique though, like a one-off work. Warhol called his studio 'The Factory' and associated it with a real factory that churned out consumer goods. This reinforced his desire to be a machine. In this way, Warhol repeated Marilyn's face multiple times to give a machine-like quality and also, because he believed that if a person was exposed to an image enough that they would become desensitised to it and it would become banal. By repeating Marilyn's face multiple times, the artist is trying to desensitise the audience to the actress' popularity and death. It has been suggested though that Warhol might actually be trying to re-sensitise the audience to this unfamiliar image and thus helping us through our grief for the actress. Marilyn is reduced in these images to a vacant image and a one-dimensional (sex) symbol, revealing how mass-produced she was. Warhol might be suggesting that Marilyn Monroe, a manufactured star with a made-up name is perhaps not the most appropriate object of our almost religious devotion. Feminist art writer Lucy Lippard noted that Warhol "turned people into things and things into people, flattening out distinctions until all were commodities." Overall, the meaning of Marilyn Monroe being seen as a mass-produced commodity is clearly shown in 'Marilyn Diptych' conveying the core meaning around popular culture.

A second meaning shown in Warhol's 'Marilyn Diptych' is the fragility of fame and life. The artwork is divided between brightly coloured images on the left which are meant to evoke glamour and allure. The colours shown include bright red for her lips, yellow for her hair, orange for the background and her skin is tinted artificial pink and turquoise. On the right however, the same image is repeated in a monochrome, fading colour palette which gradually dissolve into smudges. This fading progressions mirrors Marilyn's own decline and tragic death in 1962, which is thought to have been the inspiration for the work. Warhol denied that there was any relation between the images and the celebrity's death but this work was made only a few months after she died. The fading also suggests that media overexposure could have made her lose some of her humanity. The contrast between the highlighted parts and the shadows may be the artist reminding the audience that the image of Marilyn was once a photograph and the contrast is meant to resemble a photographer's flash. It also show how quickly celebrity glamour can vanish much like a consumer product loses value one consumed. Art historian Robert Hughes noted how Lichtenstein saw in Marilyn's face "both the mask of radiant promise and the hollowed shell of overexposure". The monumental size of the diptych also recalls medieval altarpieces such as 'Diptych with Virgin and Child Enthroned and the Crucifixion' (1275-1280), yet it worships a doomed Hollywood star, revealing the hollowness of celebrity culture. Fame, like a

product, was thrilling when new but disposable once worn out. Overall, the meaning of the fragility of fame and life relates to the meaning of popular culture and is clearly shown in 'Marilyn Diptych'.

One meaning in 'Whaam!' by Roy Lichtenstein is how war and violence were trivialised into consumable entertainment during the Cold War era. The image for this artwork was taken from a 1962 DC comic book 'Star Jockeys' which was part of the series 'All American Men of War'. These styles of comics, which were considered 'low-brow reading' were part of the United States military propaganda towards young men to encourage them to fight in wars and conflicts like the Vietnam War. However, Lichtenstein has enlarged this image to a monumental gallery scale. The work is almost four metres wide and split across two canvases creating a diptych, and features the onomatopoeic text "WHAAM!". The connection between the two panels creates a cause-and-effect of aggression and destruction, as the left plane fires a missile which moves across to hit the plane in the right hand panel. Lichtenstein used elements of comic books like flat, primary colours, bold outlines and Ben-Day dots (meticulously made by hand) which create excitement and immediacy but deliberately lack emotional depth. For example, the explosion is in the comic book style and could be representing our desensitisation towards the violence often shown on the news. The machine-like quality and flawless appearance of the Ben-Day dots further removes evidence of the artist's hand. It is interesting to note that the artist has not depicted any blood or human suffering, only spectacle. Art critic Barbara Rose noted that Lichtenstein's comics "turned combat into décor". This approach asks the audience to question their own desensitisation to violence. There are many meanings that have been suggested for 'Whaam!' but some of the more common ones include whether it is our desensitisation to Hollywood warfare during the Cold War era or possibly that the action represented Lichtenstein's anger towards his first wife Isabel Lichtenstein. Lichtenstein and Isabel divorced in 1965 and the artist's girlfriend of ten years, Letty Eisenahuer, reportedly stated that Lichtenstein was always angry with Isabel but did not extensively show it. Thus, this image may have been ways for Lichtenstein to act out 'revenge fantasies'. By depicting the scene in the language of cheap comics, it shows how destructive realities were packaged into simplified, entertaining images. For example, warfare during the Cold War era such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the escalating conflict in Vietnam. Overall, the meaning in 'Whaam!' of war and violence being trivialised into consumable entertainment relates to the idea of popular culture and is shown through many elements of the work.

A second meaning in 'Whaam!' by Lichtenstein is how consumer culture blurred the boundaries between "high" art and popular, mass-produced imagery. Lichtenstein enlarged a disposable comic book image to the size of a monumental history painting, parodying the grand tradition of battle scenes painted by artists such as Eugene Delacroix and Theodore Géricault. The monumental scale of the diptych mimics billboard size connecting it directly to advertising and consumer spectacle. By using mechanical-looking Ben-Day dots instead of traditional modelling and depth, Lichtenstein flattens the image and creates anonymity, critiquing the artificiality of mass reproduction and questioning originality in art. Ben-Day dots were invented in 1875 by Benjamin Henry Day Jr for newspaper engraving, and were often used in comic books during this period. Ben-Day dots had never been used in art before and made it resemble a comic book but its size made it a gallery artwork, further blurring the boundaries between "high" and "low" art. There are many paradoxes which can be seen in 'Whaam!' including how the imaginary world can sometimes have echoes in the real one which was a characteristic of Pop Art. Pop Art reflected the real world through advertising, silkscreen printing or comic book aesthetics but in an impersonal manner compared to Abstract Expressionism. Hal Foster argued that this work "exposed the gap between the unique art object and the infinitely reproducible media image". Lichtenstein could be suggesting with this work that art itself is a commodifiable product, by tying the 'commodity' status of a comic book to gallery artworks. This work clearly shows the inherent paradox of Pop Art which is that it critiques the consumer system while simultaneously thriving as a highly sought-after commodity in the 1960s art market. Overall, the meaning of the erosion of boundaries between "high" art and popular imagery is clearly shown in 'Whaam!' and relates to the overall meaning of popular culture.

In conclusion, both 'Marilyn Diptych' by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein's 'Whaam!' convey meanings about popular culture in the 1960s. For example, in 'Marilyn Diptych', Warhol shows us how Marilyn Monroe was viewed as a mass-produced commodity rather than a person in of herself, and the fragility of fame and life. In 'Whaam!', Lichtenstein shows how violence was trivialised into consumable entertainment and the erosion of boundaries between traditional art ('high art') and popular, mass-produced imagery.

Excellence

Subject: Art History

Standard: 91483

Total score: 07

Grade score	Marker commentary
E7	Identifies two artists and art works by each that are relevant to the questions of popular culture. Gives some detailed information about how these reflect the timeframe and the context. Perceptively discusses the motifs in the art works linking the subject matter, style, and meaning to the questions, as well as referencing relevant contextual information. Gives further insight and makes reference to the art movement that is specific to the question and concludes by reinforcing how the two art works directly illustrated the theme of popular culture.