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91483A



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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.

Merit

TOTAL 06

SELECTED QUESTION

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

QUESTION TWO: Late Renaissance (c.1470–1540s)

Select and name TWO late Renaissance art works that convey meanings about Christian stories and themes during this period. Both art works may be selected from Plates 6–10 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 Christian stories and themes, and

(b)

explain how the construction of these meanings relates to ideas about Christian stories and themes during this period.

Name your chosen art works:

Art work (1):

Madonna of The Meadow - Bellini

Art work (2):

Botticelli's Sorrow of Man

PLANNING

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     

Throughout the Italian Renaissance, Christian stories and themes continued to shape people's lives, but the way these narratives were told evolved dramatically. During the medieval era, the Church-controlled artistic production, resulting in heavily stylised depictions of saints and sacred icons. With the rise of humanism during the Renaissance, artists began involving religious figures with unprecedented naturalism, making faith feel more personal and relatable while still retaining its emotional power. Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna of the Meadow* and Sandro Botticelli's *Man of Sorrows* exemplify these shifts, highlighting changes in artistic form, audience experience, and the role of religion in society.

Bellini's *Madonna of the Meadow* is one of many Renaissance depictions of the Virgin and Christ Child, yet it differs from earlier examples in its strikingly humanised portrayal of motherhood. Mary dominates the composition, her upward gaze and triangular form leading the viewer's eye toward heaven. The infant Christ sits safely on her lap, creating an intimate moment that viewers could easily relate to. Bellini's master of oil point- shown through tonal modelling and careful treatment of light- gives Mary a lifelike presence that would have been considered inappropriate or even blasphemous in the medieval period.

Although the patron is unknown, the work was likely commissioned for a domestic setting showing how religious imagery moved beyond churches and into private homes, encouraging a more individual relationship with God. Instead of the dramatic didactic scenes favoured earlier in the Middle Ages, Bellini focuses on a quiet tender exchange between mother and child. This shift reflects the influence of humanist thought which held that God existed within the natural world and within humankind. Because of this, artists felt freer to depict sacred figures realistically, making devotion feel accessible rather than distant. These ideas, originating largely in Florence, eventually spread to places like Venice, where Bellini worked.

As Christian imagery adapted to humanist values, religious artworks also began to serve civic and political functions. In *Madonna of the Meadow*, Mary subtly promotes the stability, prosperity, and the beauty of Venice. Painted in 1505, the work showcases luxurious Venetian materials, especially the brilliant blue of Mary's robe- made from expensive lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan. Bellini's generous use of this pigment, combined with the glowing reds and finely rendered textiles, communicated Venice's wealth and cultural sophistication.

The Virgin and Child sit within a recognisable Venetian landscape painted using atmospheric perspective, reinforcing the connection between Mary's divine protection and the city itself. Elements such as the dry fields and weakened castle carry symbolic meaning, foreshadowing Christ's future suffering, while also anchoring the scene in a real, earthly environment. Through this blending of nature, faith, and civic pride, Bellini elevated Venice by placing it under Mary's protective presence, showing how humanist thinking encouraged artists to merge religious devotion with local identity.

In contrast, Botticelli's *Man of Sorrows* reflects an era of upheaval in Florence and a far more anxious relationship with faith. Created around 1500-1510, the work responds to the intense social and spiritual turmoil following the expulsion of the Medici and the rise of Dominican friar Savonarola. His apocalyptic sermons condemned the luxurious lifestyles of earlier decades and events like the 1497 Bonfire of the Vanities destroyed countless artworks. In the wake of plague, political instability, and widespread fear, many Florentines turned to deeply emotional depictions of Christ for guidance and reassurance. Botticelli's painting shows Christ after the crucifixion, indicated by the nail wounds and his bound arms crossed over his chest. A ring of angels holding instruments of the Passion forms a visionary halo as Christ emerges from darkness, confronting the viewer directly. The stark composition and Christ's intense gaze evoke sorrow, guilt, and reverence, urging the viewer toward repentance. While Renaissance art often emphasised comfort or ideal

beauty, Man of Sorrows reveals that religious images could still inspire fear, devotion, and moral reflection.

The work also exposes Botticelli's personal spiritual crisis. Painted near the end of his life-possibly his final work- it reflects the artist's growing fear for his soul after hearing Savonarola's warnings against vanity and excess. Christ's direct, frontal pose, rarely used in Renaissance art aside from examples like Leonardo's Salvator Mundi, heightens the sense that Jesus is addressing the viewer- and perhaps Botticelli himself. The intimate scale of the tempera panel suggests it was meant for private contemplation rather than public display, which was especially quite understandable seeing as most of the Florentine society in this period of time were in despair and distraught to Savonarola's teachings. Therefore Botticelli's Man of Sorrows was seen or was functioning almost as a mirror reminding the viewer of Christ's sacrifice and the omnipresence of God. In this way, Man of Sorrows demonstrates how, despite stylistic changes nonetheless, Christian narratives continued to profoundly shape individuals thoughts and actions.

In conclusion, Giovanni Bellini's Madonna of the Meadow and Sandro Botticelli's Man of Sorrows present contrasting yet equally powerful interpretations of Christian themes, shaped by the differing circumstances of Venice and Florence. Bellini offers a serene and humanised vision of divine love. While Botticelli delivers a stark confrontation with suffering and redemption. Although both artists worked at the same time and in the same country, their artworks are shaped by contrasting social climates and personal experiences. Yet each reveals the enduring influence of Christianity on Renaissance society. Even as artistic styles evolved, the emotional, spiritual and cultural impact of Christian stories remained central to both artistic expression and the viewer's experience.

Merit

Subject: Art History

Standard: 91483

Total score: 06

Grade score	Marker commentary
M6	<p>The theme of the question, Christian stories, is introduced and related to some general Renaissance contextual information. The first artist and art work is named and motifs are identified, and it is then explained in depth how these illustrate the theme. The candidate then continues to identify further historical information. The second artist and art work is identified and an in-depth account of the meaning of a range of motifs is given. It then concludes by coherently linking the art works back to the question and explains how the artists were influenced by social and cultural events that took place during that time.</p> <p>For Excellence, the cultural and historical contextual information needed to be more closely linked and specific to the art works, identifying how some of the motifs illustrated the relevance of the stories as well as the timeframe, and how the artists reflected through their inclusion of these particular images in the art works.</p>