

2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject:	Art History
Level:	2
Achievement standard(s):	91180, 91181, 91182

General commentary

The examination provided two areas of study: Towards Modernism and Art in Aotearoa. Towards Modernism continued to be the preferred area for the examination across all standards, far outnumbering the few candidates who submitted responses for Art in Aotearoa. The plates in the Resource booklet provided key works from the range of movements and styles explored in both areas of study. The plates aligned with questions and supported a breadth of content when selecting two for each standard or when accompanied by a candidate-selected art work for 91181 (meanings) and 91182 (context) standards. While additional details offered different viewpoints or perspectives of the plate art work, very few candidates made use of the extra information in their responses.

The trend towards writing beyond the suggested word limit continued to provide many accomplished responses with an exceptional level of in-depth knowledge. However, a greater number of extensively written digital responses included repetitive description and narration resulting in candidates not being able to effectively communicate their understanding and keep on track with the requirement of the attempted question.

There were more 'collective candidate' responses for the meaning and context standards than in previous years. Many candidates provided similar pre-prepared responses to context, style, and meanings of each movement. Very accomplished well-structured responses of a key art work related to a movement, combined with plates in the Resource booklet for Towards Modernism, provided in-depth content that could be modified for the meanings and contexts standards ensuring higher levels of achievement. However, the outcome of this practice from some schools in adapting exam preparation is creating an almost 'template similarity' of content for both meaning and context standards with minor modifications to the question type.

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91180: Examine the effects of formal elements of art works

Assessment

This standard assesses the visual analysis of the effects of formal elements in the selection of two art works from the Resource booklet. However, there were candidates who continued to provide a blended meanings and context response, with limited understanding of the effects of the formal elements selected. This interpretation of the standard occurred across both areas of study.

While there was understanding of the movement in most of the plates represented, what limited candidate achievement was the lack of accurate interpretation of the effects of the style of art work from the descriptions of formal elements given as evidence.

Commentary

Towards Modernism (Area One), continued to be the area of choice, with the largest number of responses. Very few candidates selected Art in Aotearoa (Area Two) for this standard.

Most candidates selected Question One – different styles. The plate styles that were more comprehensively understood were Romanticism, Realism, and Post-Impressionism. There was less accuracy in linking the influences of Neoclassicism and Impressionist styles to selected art works.

The most popular pairing of plates was plates 1 and 3 (works by David and Géricault) and plates 4 and 6 (works by Daumier and Seurat). There was less familiarity with plate 5 (Degas – *The Dance Class*). The evident lack of understanding of Impressionism and the artist's own style limited achievement in the choice of this work. The inclusion of architecture was not a popular choice, with few responses for plate 2 (*Arc de Triomphe*).

Fewer candidates chose Question Two – indoor and/or outdoor scenes. Candidates did not fully engage with the question when selecting two formal elements. Instead, the response made little mention of the indoor/outdoor theme and ended up merging the question with styles of art.

Candidates are more prepared for different styles and are probably not confident responding to an unknown theme that may come up in the Question Two option.

The most common formal elements selected were composition, form, and technique. Compositional analysis, while often paired with form, continued to be the least understood formal element. The selection of this formal element in the pairing of plates 1 and 3 should have provided good visual analysis of the structural nature of each art work and links to the effects related to the movement in each. However, there continued to be more of an emotional narration of content rather than an understanding of devices common to the style of art work that underpin the artists' structuring of content.

The depiction of form often responded to the emotional state of figures or described the basic appearance of figures, objects, and architecture as soft, hard, or outlined. Depiction of Neoclassical form rarely referenced classical inspiration, idealisation, perfection of musculature, restrained gesture, or precise delineation from classical sculpture. Realist, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist depictions of form often lacked the artist's individual stylistic way of working. Few candidates mentioned in Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage* the loose linear drawing with paint due to his background as a caricaturist, or Degas's experimental use of media in the work from memory drawing and use of photography evident as a technique in his work. These are all fundamental aspects of the artist practice for style that seem somewhat diluted in the understanding of Degas's Impressionist style.

The understanding of techniques and colour provided the strongest responses in plates 4 and 6. Especially commendable was the detailed visual analysis and evidence of Seurat's pointillist technique.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- wrote long descriptive responses, with limited engagement of visual analysis
- wrote descriptively about some formal elements and/or effects
- provided an uneven response between the two art works selected
- described formal elements incorrectly as symbols in descriptions of art works
- provided some visual evidence from art works
- focused responses on effects of formal elements with limited understanding of the second part of the question
- demonstrated some generalised understanding of the question.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- described in some detail formal elements and effects with some unevenness between art works
- described in depth the formal elements and effects in two art works
- described visual analysis of formal elements incorrectly as being symbolic
- provided relevant visual evidence from selected art works to broaden the description of formal elements and effects for higher Merit
- demonstrated even, in-depth of knowledge of effects, linking to the second part of the question
- included art historical terminology with some accuracy.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- described detailed visual analysis of effects of formal elements convincingly, with perception
- provided interpretive explanations of effects of formal elements with sophisticated skilled analysis in one or both art works
- provided visual analysis of the art works, perceptively signposting the effects of the stylistic characteristic linking to second part of the question
- demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of art works supported by a depth of contextual knowledge at the higher level of Excellence
- focused consistently on the question and provided competently articulated ideas and key points with fluent art historical terminology
- wrote a comprehensive, well structured response.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- identified rather than described formal elements with little or no evidence of effects in art works selected
- provided a narrative of the art works' content, rather than addressing formal elements and/or effects
- provided background information not relevant to the question rather than formal elements and effects
- selected plates and/or questions from different areas of study or their own art works not provided in the resource booklet
- discussed one work and/or did not complete a sufficient response to meet Achievement.

Achievement standard 91181: Examine the meanings conveyed by art works

Assessment

Candidate responses demonstrated a greater level of preparation towards this standard. Candidate-selected art works paired with a given plate provided a good opportunity to display their knowledge and learning. Most responses demonstrated expansive in-depth interpretation of meanings using sophisticated art terminology, while referencing a varied range of symbols/motifs and supporting contexts that broadened the understanding of ideas expressed in both art works. Many candidates improved their overall performance with a stronger self-selected art work.

Lengthy responses dominated the standard, with far fewer handwritten responses than in previous years. Digital responses continued to increase in length with over half of candidates exceeding the word limit by one thousand words. Many longer responses failed to write to the theme of the question, loading the response with irrelevant narration of content and inaccurate contextual information.

Commentary

The most popular question selected from Area One was Question Two – depiction of individuals and/or groups of people. Half of the candidates selected plate pairings from the Resource booklet, and half combined a plate with a self-selected art work. The most popular pairings were David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* and Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*, and Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage* and Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*. Responses to this question demonstrated good knowledge of the art works. Evidence using symbols/motifs to explain meanings was purposeful and supported ideas about individuals and/or groups. Self-selected art works often expanded understanding of meanings related to the question, responding to themes of heroism, propaganda, class, and modern life of the individual or groups of people. The preferred art works that provided strong support of ideas related to the question were David's *Death of Marat*, Vigée's *Marie Antionette*, and Manet's *Olympia* and *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.

Fewer candidates attempted Question One – life and/or architecture. Those who did, chose the theme of 'life' rather than 'architecture'. The combination of the two proved challenging and was not attempted. Candidates provided a wide range of interpretations related to 'life' as a theme. The most common were meanings about life of the working class, modern life, and the life of Napoleon. Also explored were life and death on Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*. The theme of life related to social class was often explored in Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage* and Seurat's *La Grand Jatte*, with impressive explanations of meanings supported by contextual influences.

Of the few candidates who attempted Art in Aotearoa, the preferred question was Question four – cultural meanings. The overall lack of in-depth knowledge of art works selected from the Resource booklet resulted in achievement outcomes lower for this area of study.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- selected two appropriate art works and explained the meaning of at least two motifs/symbols in each art work
- selected motifs/symbols within the art works that provided a good discussion regarding the overall meaning of the art works, which could be related back to the question
- demonstrated an understanding of the aims and intentions of the artists and how this was reflected in their selected art works
- provided a sufficient discussion of both artists and art works to provide a clear, meaningful response to the question
- provided some appropriate art terminology when describing symbols/motifs.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- provided a detailed, in-depth explanation of meanings conveyed by the art work(s)
- made connections between differing features of the art works to discuss how the art works conveyed meaning holistically
- demonstrated an understanding about how meanings were constructed in the art work, with supporting evidence
- demonstrated an understanding of the art works in relation to their art movements, and some generalised comments on contexts
- provided more depth about the significance of the imagery in terms of the artist's style and intentions, going beyond a general explanation of each motif
- discussed other elements/symbols/motifs in the art works, providing a closer connection in answering the question more explicitly and/or discussing other art works/artists that were relevant to their discussion and the question.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- displayed a thorough understanding of art movements and their contexts in their responses, and answered the question perceptively and coherently
- demonstrated critical understanding by choosing art works that allowed them to discuss the question perceptively, rather than trying to fit art works that were not suited to the question
- demonstrated knowledge about how meanings are constructed in art works, rather than discussing the meanings' ideas, with reference to the art works and the timeframe in which they were produced and how this impacted on them
- chose art works that provided them with a lot of scope and were well known, so the response had a significant amount of evidence about art and what it was like at that time
- kept referencing back to the art works during their explanation of the art works and the symbols/motifs, to clarify how they were relevant for the time and the artist's style/aims
- articulated ideas/meanings with sophisticated art terminology and addressed the question without irrelevant content.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- provided an incomplete response with only one work attempted or works from another area of study
- provided only brief descriptions of the art works and did not clearly identify two symbols/motifs in BOTH art works
- interpreted art works in a personal manner, without understanding informed by specific knowledge of the artists, movements, and contexts
- lacked specific details in their explanation of the meanings of motifs and features in the art work
- described what was seen in the art works instead of explaining the relevance of specific imagery
- selected art works that did not provide sufficient scope to answer the question or wrote information not relevant to the question
- responded about stylistic elements rather than about the meaning of specific imagery in the art works.

Achievement standard 91182: Examine the influence of context(s) on art works

Assessment

Candidate responses demonstrated an improved level of preparation towards this standard. There were responses from candidates sitting both 91181 and 91182 that successfully modified content to suit the requirements of both standards. The same art works from the Resource booklet or candidate selected provided a similar level of knowledge and effective use of wider contextual support in explanations for this standard.

Candidates who signposted key ideas about the context from the question resulted in clearly communicated understanding of the context. However, some candidates often referred to symbolism. This distracted the candidate's focus on the way evidence was interpreted for the context standard.

Commentary

Area Two (Towards Modernism) continues to be the area of choice in preferred teaching and the candidates write with confidence in this area. The questions were evenly popular. However, Question One – social contexts, provided the most engagement with art works that explored class, the impact

of the Industrial Revolution, the modernisation of Paris, and leisure in response to the context. The most popular pairing of plates for social context were plates 3, 4 and 6 (art works by Géricault, Daumier and Seurat). Candidate-selected art works in combination with plates often elevated the level of understanding of ideas related to social issues explored. Millet's *The Gleaners* and Manet's *Olympia* and *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère* were the most popular works chosen for this context.

Candidates provided less depth of understanding for Question Two – political contexts. While preferred plates 1 and 3 (art works by David and Géricault) provided candidates with a range of political ideas, the use of evidence selected in each art work did not explain or support the context. Plate 3 (David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*) was a popular choice. However, there was far less knowledge of the political context of the work in relation to Napoleon's rise to power. Popular candidate-selected art works that provided stronger responses to the context were David's *Death of Marat* or *Oath of the Horatii*, Vigée's *Marie Antoinette and Her Children*, and Courbet's *The Stone Breakers*.

In Art in Aotearoa (Area Two) the small number of responses demonstrated limited knowledge of the art works selected from the Resource booklet plates in relation to the context. Candidates responding to Area Two struggled to provide contextual information for both social and artistic contexts.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- wrote descriptively when engaging with their chosen art work, with description of the subject matter
- responded directly to their chosen question using relevant art works
- explained or clarified relationship(s) between the context and the art works sufficiently to demonstrate understanding
- referred to some features from the art works and related this to the specific context that was stated in the question
- provided an interpretation with plausible link(s) between the art work and context.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- provided an art work of their choice, enhancing the level of in-depth knowledge of the context
- used art historical terminology with some accuracy
- identified specific relationships between art works and context in the introduction
- addressed their chosen question using relevant art works, linking several details with their chosen art works and/or context
- clarified their response in a discussion of the relationships between the context and art works using detailed explanatory language
- integrated supporting evidence to demonstrate an in-depth understanding.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- used art historical terminology with confidence and fluency
- demonstrated a perceptive understanding of their chosen question and art works in a well-structured, fluent response, using relevant evidence
- explained and evaluated a range of relationships between art works and the context
- demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the question using analytical and evaluative language in a coherent discussion, supported with evidence from art works and other sources.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- wrote about one context and art work and/or did not complete a sufficient response to meet achievement
 - responded with little or no relevance to the question and/or the context
 - presented limited and/or irrelevant information to address their chosen question
 - selected inappropriate art works in relation to their chosen question and the contextual relationship(s) they responded to.
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