AQA GCSE Art and Design Themes 2018

Resource Pack

Themes:

- **Human Figure** person · body · limbs · clothed · naked · gender · skin · anatomy
- **In the News** press · publicity · breaking news · tabloid · information · feature · public property · exposed
- **In a Different Way** alternative · dissimilarity · variation · differentiation · contradiction · new · opposition · unlikeness
- **Materials** media · traditional · new · cross-discipline · wet · dry
- **Telling Stories** fable · myth · books · gossip · truth and lies · history · knowledge · themes · undertones
- **Light and Dark** bright · dull · enlightening · dim · frightening · contrast · day and night · opposites
- **Connections** joint · connected · together · related · similarities · degrees · family · emotional · seen · unseen · unbreakable

It is usually the case that Artists and Designers use materials specific to the theme of their work, so they can illustrate a specific **meaning, mood** or **story**. They may also consider **composition**, **scale**, **colour**, **text** and **style**. They will develop their ideas, refine them through testing, reflect and record their work in writing and practical outcomes and present their work to reflect the theme running through it.
When collecting research and contextual influences:

- Consider **how** the artist has made the work.
- Look at **what materials** have they used.
- **Why** do you think they used these materials?
- Do you think the medium effectively portrays the **concept/ theme** of the work?
- Do you think there is **more than one** theme in the work?
- Do you see **inspiration/ influences** from other artists, art movements or events in the work?

The following artists particularly illustrate some of the themes listed above within their work:

**Human Figure** Renee So/ Thomas Mailaender/ Makiko Kudo/ Daniel Crews-Chubb/ Maurizio Anzeri/ Danny Fox/ Aaron Fowler/ Philip Pearlstein from Salon 004

**In the News** Thomas Mailaender/ Josh Faught

**In a Different Way** Josh Faught/ Alexi Wynn/ Maurizio Anzeri/ Renee So/ Matthew Chambers/ Thomas Mailaender

**Materials** Maurizio Anzeri/ Renee So/ Kate MccGwire/ Josh Faught/ Alexi Wynn/ Aaron Fowler/ Douglas White

**Telling Stories** Thomas Mailaender/ Makiko Kudo/ Danny Fox/ Aaron Fowler

**Light and Dark** Kate MccGwire/ Alexi Wynn/ Maurizio Anzeri/ Thomas Mailaender

**Connections** Maurizio Anzeri/ Renee So/ Kate MccGwire
Josh Faught is a multimedia artist who uses textiles, collage, found objects, sculpture, and painting to create installations which explore the history of craft, cultural neurosis, and the construction of ‘queer identity’. These works, founded on a laborious process of traditional fabric making techniques, have woven objects of commercial indulgence into their structure, exploring ‘kitsch ornamentation’ and ‘domestic dysfunction’. Faught includes objects such as self-help books, plastic food, greeting cards, novelty buttons, nail polish and political badges. These objects have their own networks of associations, which Faught has carefully curated together to offer a jumbled impression of compulsive decoration and cultural history. They are also everyday objects, making them accessible and relevant to the viewer. The use of colour is also important in each piece as it challenges our general association of colours with gender i.e. pink means feminine or female artist.

- Some pieces feature political slogans, which could feature in the news
- Using materials in a different way
- Combined materials
- Looking at social issues in a different way
Mailaender predominantly uses photography in his practice. He is a compulsive collector who uses images found on The Internet, flea markets and so on. He uses this large archive and presents these images in quirky, often very humorous ways. He manipulates and showcases them in the form of collage, installation and even ceramics. His work in this exhibition consists of large cyanotypes and a series called ‘Illustrated People’, which is created by burning negatives onto the participant’s skin using an intensive UV light. Cyanotype is a process which was used to create photographs before digital images had been invented. They are made by covering a surface with chemicals which will react with UV light, placing a negative on the surface and exposing it to sunlight. Although the two outcomes by Mainlander in this exhibition are seemingly very different, and make reference to different concepts, the processes followed by the artist are very similar.

In today’s society we are bombarded with images, whether in the form of advertising, or on social media. We feel we are affected by images of violence and conflict but are often (even unknowingly) desensitised to them. Having images from the Archive of Conflict exposed and branded onto human flesh, forces the viewer to re-engage with the subject matter. With strong, aggressive flash lighting and bodies only partially on view, the message of the work becomes much more aggressive and visceral. The ‘Illustrated People’ series forces audience members to look more closely.
Makiko Kudo’s work is chaotic and lively. Her well-crafted compositions evoke bittersweet memories of by gone days and balance between loveliness and loneliness. Kudo was born and raised in Japan where during the late 20th Century a strict society and failing economy left many young people feeling trapped and confined. In most cultures fantasy and escape are a way of avoiding reality and in Japan many young people turned to Manga as a form of escapism. Kudo uses this Manga character in her paintings like avatars. Invading dream like landscapes reminiscent of old masters such as Monet and Matisse. She creates these landscapes from places she has glimpsed sometimes only briefly but have stuck in her mind. She then fills them with elements of her childhood memories. She builds each image in her head (sometimes for up to six months) before she paints them in only seven to ten days. Her paintings are large, taking up the whole of the viewer’s vision. This allows the viewer to immerse themselves in Kudo’s fantasy landscape.

- The human figure in each painting depicts a representation of the artist, telling stories about the artists past memories, moments and dreams

- The paintings, which each feature a different landscape, are telling stories
Human Figure/ In a Different Way/ Materials/ Light and Dark/ Connections

Maurizio Anzeri

When confronted with Anzeri’s work, one becomes overcome with a feeling of unease. The pieces are much smaller than in other rooms in the exhibition. They draw you in and invite the audience to have an intimate relationship with each of the individuals from their “tribe”. The pieces show portraits with their faces veiled, and eyes and mouth exposed. Anzeri uses the contours of the face to distort, elongate or magnify certain features so the ‘creatures’ are other-worldly yet recognisable. They peer out from behind their masks. They can see you but you cannot see them.

Anzeri comes from a Mediterranean fishing village. During his childhood he spent considerable time mending fishing nets, so he works to bring this element of his identity back into his pieces by making these photo-sculptures. He is also an obsessive image collector (similar to Mailaender). He speaks about the photographs he uses as magical moments captured. Although the works in this exhibition consist of vintage photographs, his practice transports them into the future and makes them very “current”. He also builds a relationship with each of the images, giving each one a new title or name. The use of the vintage images is also significant because they are not like the portraits/ selfies that we are constantly bombarded with every day.

- The **human figure** is the centralised subject
- The identities are being looked at **in a different way**
- **Materials** are being used **in a different way**, exploring cross-discipline techniques
- **Light and dark** themes run throughout the work, both in terms of tones and the sense of unease created with the threaded masks
- **Connections** are created through stitching and between the foreground and surface of the work
Hidden within the many layers of Fox’s paintings we come across intriguing references such as ‘IKEA’ and eyes peering out through the surface of the canvas. The work has an immense presence, both due to its size and the unapologetic use of bright colours and brisk brushwork.

Fox has no artistic training whatsoever. Growing up in Cornwall, he was exposed to beautiful quaint paintings of the south-west coast where he still often visits. These influences however seem to have been supplanted by other cultural references after Fox moved to London and then on to LA (Skid Row).

“There has always been a colonial interest in my work but I’ve been thinking about it more and more since moving to LA” Fox.

In several of his paintings, Fox talks about what it must have been like for an Englishman to have moved to America 200 or so years ago. Skid Row has one of the largest homeless communities in the US and Fox states that living there is similar to the conditions of living in the Wild West. His travels have also influenced him in many ways. This is particularly evident in his use of colour, which he uses to hint at the location his ‘hero’ figure is often found in. His way of working is very relaxed. The canvases are very heavily layered with paint and avoid any meaningful detail. This is another reason why the scale of his paintings is so important. The vast canvases seem to dominate the space that they occupy. Perhaps this is a similar concept to the colonial references that he makes in his work.

Horses feature in his work both as the wild buck carrying the cowboy ‘hero’ and as the noble stead carrying the colonial officer.

- The human figure is featured throughout Fox’s paintings- often depicting the hero or other cultural representations
- Each painting tells a story with its use of colour and content
- Some paintings are telling stories relevant to the artists own history, whilst some are telling stories about historical moments
So explores the history of human self-design, with a particular focus on the contours of Assyrian facial hair. Her sculptures and knitted panel pictures invent a uniquely stylized yet simple, almost cartoonlike bearded figure, which she frequently repeats like a motif.

Her two-dimensional work is painstakingly produced using a knitting machine. So does however embrace the imperfections that can be created through a mechanical method. The use of earthy tones and limited colour palette adds to the sense of ‘tales in time’. The colours in the background are neutral and allow the focus to be mainly on the figures. The connected faces offer both a feeling of hinged togetherness and a feeling of contrast, with the opposite faces similar yet individual. Connected by the beard, the figures are also silenced by them, leading the viewer to question what their story is and who is silencing who?

- The **human figure** features in each piece
- Identity is explored **in a different way**, with each **human figure** having multiple faces
- **Materials** are explored **in a different way**
- The two faces show **connections**
Aaron Fowler grew up in St. Louis where he was consistently surrounded by gang violence, drug-dealing and racial discrimination. Each work is a narrative that is inspired by his own personal history. His work is an attempt to psychologically grapple with his own history. He often depicts himself as a pirate or renegade in a scene of people who suffered the consequences of being involved in violence. His work uses multimedia collage incorporating found objects. Occasionally the objects emerge from the canvas into the viewer’s space, such as an empty chair or gang plank inviting the viewer to join the scene and experience a world they may not be familiar with. The intense sense of action with the use of mixed media materials, is also heightened by the freeze-frame composition. The way the characters seem to be frozen in motion, affords the viewer a glimpse into the action and a moment to digest the story which is unfolding.

- The human figure is a strong and central focal point in this very action packed work. It centralises the activity evident within the work and makes reference to the artist, telling his story
- The work is mixed media, using a mass of different materials. The use of so many different media helps to emphasis the drama evident within the work
Crews-Chubb’s paintings are large in scale and character. The intensely formed human figures which inhabit the canvases depict both male and females. Sitting in-between bright waves of bold colour, each sketchy figure illustrates their own persona, as well as relationships between one another.

The artist is heavily influenced by the raw expression evident in Jean Dubuffet’s work. Crews-Chubb’s paintings evidence bold and vibrant shapes and colours, which are emphasised by his use of mark-making. The human figure is central to this work and plays with the notion of how we have perceived humans in primitive art and ancient rituals.

“Picasso, Baselitz, Jorn and De Kooning are all major influences, but in the end the female form has been a conduit or enabler for playing with abstract mark-making and paint” Crews-Chubb.

- Figurative human figure
- Interpretation of the human figure
- Distorted human figure
Kate McCGwire is a British sculptor whose practice focuses on using the medium of feathers. She collects feathers from birds such as pigeons and crows (sometimes for years) until she has enough to complete a sculpture. By taking this waste product from ‘rats with wings’ and raising them to the status of art, McCGwire re-contextualizes these objects, thereby challenging our notions of beauty and disgust. Her work references Freud’s theory of “the uncanny”, the idea of a familiarity that is somehow unsettling. These works, which are familiar and yet alien, leave the viewer with a spectacle that is somehow ‘other’. She keeps the structure of the work deliberately a secret adding to the layers of mystery surrounding the pieces. It is left entirely to the viewer’s imagination as to the density and weight of the pieces. The fact that the structure also has no beginning and no end adds to the idea that the work represents anxiety and tying oneself in knots.

- Natural materials
- Hidden materials
- Layered materials
- Strong lighting on a dark mass and dark subject matter
- Connected mass
- Interconnected
Wynn’s work focuses on exploring classic notions of beauty. She uses anatomical techniques in order to examine themes including light vs dark, positives and negatives and human perceptions of reality.

In ‘Echoes of the Kill’ (pictured), Wynn invites the viewer to engage with a setup of seemingly beautiful natural forms. What many take to be trees or coral are in fact the wax filled insides of cow and horse lungs. Displayed on a butchers block, the once seemingly delicate and light sculpture becomes more of a sarcastic prod, which disrupts the viewer’s often predictable expectations.

This work offers a strong sense of contrast in both the perception of what people find beautiful and in what people often originally imagine the work to visually represent. The use of positive/ negative space also adds to the contrast felt throughout the piece.

“My aim is to challenge our disconnect from the natural world. Casting directly from animal organs, I abstract the flash in an attempt to find a new language with which to perceive the body” Wynn.

- **Materials** used in a different way to show light and dark subject matter
- Viewing our own perceptions of beauty in a different way
- Natural materials
Materials **Douglas White** Gallery 10

The forms White creates are often organic and beautiful. They are reminiscent but not a replica of objects found in nature. His work *Old Skin for a New Ceremony* (pictured here) gives the viewer a sense of doom and despair. The sculpture is supported by a wiry internal structure that is collapsing under the weight of the vast sacks caked in clay. This piece was inspired by an elephant carcass White came across while travelling through South Africa. He speaks about how this experience made him want to not only recreate this form but also to embody it in some way. His work is about transformation. The transformation of forms and mediums. Clay is usually associated with smooth, well-refined pottery and White has used it to create the surface of a rough decaying carcass. He has also created, destroyed and re-created this particular piece in different locations using different displaying methods, which gives the piece a sense of timelessness. The clay also dries more and more every day so the appearance of this sculpture changes each day, much like an actual decaying carcass would in the wild.

- Natural **materials**
- **Materials** which will evolve and change
- **Materials** which reflect the theme of the work
Each painting featured in the exhibition plays with the traditional conventions of portraiture. Both scale and composition are finely orchestrated and help to emphasise the rich content of each painting. With each image, Pearlstein celebrates his depiction of the human nude, a subject that has preoccupied the artist since 1960.

“It is a shape that is always changing. [By 1960], I decided I didn't want to express other artists' ideas any longer. I wanted to paint what was in front of me.” Philip Pearlstein, Studio International, 2016

There is an honesty to Pearlstein’s depiction of the human figure, which is both alarming and alluring. In the 1980s, Pearlstein began to incorporate objects from his personal collection in and around the human figures. This simultaneously challenged both Pearlstein’s process and the viewer’s perception. These additional elements also lay emphasis on the layered structure and depth evident in the paintings. This complexity is a feature that continues in his paintings today.

- Multiple human figures
- Painted human figure
- Nude human figure