



## Student Performance Q&A: 2001 AP<sup>®</sup> Art History Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP Art History. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also included. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

### General Comments on the Exam Performance (Free-Response Section)

This year's exam required somewhat more contextual discussion than in previous years, which made the exam difficult for some students. However, this slight but continued shift in emphasis on some questions is necessary, as this reflects the primary way in which the discipline has changed on the university level during the past several years. These types of questions have increasingly appeared on AP art history exams during the past 4-5 years.

On a general note, many students failed to read the questions fully or carefully, and thus answered questions incorrectly or partially. Teachers should advise students to read the entire question carefully, making sure they've answered all parts of the question. Moreover, if there are two slides shown, students need to look closely at both to see how each work addresses the question. For example, many students attempt to compare two slides, even when the question does not ask for a comparison; this can cause students to waste a good deal of time answering the question incorrectly.

### Question 1

"These two works portray the same Egyptian pharaoh. Identify the pharaoh. Discuss how the characteristics of these two works typify art during his reign."

*What was intended by the question?*

This question evaluated the student's knowledge of the stylistic characteristics of Egyptian art of the Amarna period. This significant change in style is discussed in all the texts. The images of Akhenaten were well known to students, and students as a whole responded well to this question.

*How well did the students perform?*

Students as a whole responded well to this question. Teachers had emphasized the art of this period. The majority of students were able to identify the pharaoh, Akhenaten.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

The most common problems students had with this question were the following:

- Many students were unable to distinguish between the Amarna Style and New Kingdom characteristics. When covering Egypt, teachers should emphasize how the Amarna style differs from other styles.
- Some students were limited by their lack of an adequate descriptive vocabulary.
- Some students were unable to identify the pharaoh, Akhenaten.

## Question 2

“In whose honor was this monument erected? How do the style and content of the monument reflect its culture’s social and political values?”

*What was intended by the question?*

The question evaluated the student’s understanding of Roman social and political values during the period of Augustus. While many students could not identify the work or discuss it contextually, it is a key work discussed in most art history courses.

*How well did the students perform?*

This question, more than any other on this exam, reflected the difficulties faced by teachers as the discipline of art history increasingly deals with contextual issues. It is clear that teachers will have to focus more upon contextual issues rather than formal analysis.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

This question proved to be very difficult for many students. In general, there was a lack of understanding of this work and its context. Students tended either to know about Augustus and the contextual aspects of this work or knew very little at all. The most common problems students had were the following:

- Many students were unable to identify the individual in whose honor this monument was erected.
- Many students had little or no knowledge of the work’s contextual meaning. This information isn’t difficult to find; most textbooks, particularly the newer ones, provide a good deal of contextual and historical background in the introductions to each chapter. Because textbooks may differ in the depth of this information, teachers may want to consult a variety of textbooks to gather a thorough understanding of a work’s context.

## Question 3

“The photograph on the left is by Nadar. The painting on the right is by Ingres.

Discuss specific ways in which Ingres’s painting both reflects and ignores the newer medium of photography, as represented by Nadar’s photograph on the left.”

*What was intended by the question?*

The purpose of this question was to determine the student’s understanding of the impact of the new medium of photography upon painting and of the relationships between these two media as represented in these two images.

*How well did the students perform?*

Responses clearly indicated that many students were unfamiliar with the early history of photography. All the survey books include a discussion of nineteenth-century photography, and it

is an incredibly important visual development in the history of art.

*What were the common errors or omissions? What can teachers do to improve student performance on the exam?*

This proved a very difficult question for many students who were apparently unfamiliar with the early history of photography. The history of photography should be taught, even if on a very basic level. Teachers may want to consult a variety of textbooks to ensure that their students are getting at least a basic overview.

Many students were very good at visually analyzing the two works, indicating that stylistic or formal analysis continues to be well taught by teachers.

#### **Question 4**

“In what ways do this medieval Florentine church and its plan show the influence of Early Christian architectural forms? In what ways do this church and plan show elements of the later medieval period?”

*What was intended by the question?*

The purpose of this question was to ask students to distinguish both earlier and contemporary trends in architecture as represented by Santa Croce, Florence. Both an interior view and a plan were shown to provide students with sufficient visual information. Students were not asked to identify the monument.

*How well did the students perform?*

Despite the fact that this seemed to be a straightforward question, student responses were not quite as high as was expected.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

The most common problems students had were the following:

- Students did not always look carefully at the slide of the interior view in order to determine appropriate responses.
- Some students clearly had difficulty reading an architectural plan, a problem that can be easily addressed in class.
- Some students did not utilize both the plan and the interior view together in order to best deal with the question.

*What can teachers do to improve student performance on the exam?*

Architecture seems to be the most confusing medium for students. One way to get students comfortable with reading plans is to begin practicing with early architectural examples. Students can practice looking at plans, identifying the various elements, and then connect the plan’s elements to actual photographs of the building.

#### **Question 5**

“These two works are by the same artist. Identify the artist. Using both works, discuss ways in which the works reflect the artist’s medieval roots as well as his awareness of Italian Renaissance innovations.”

*What was intended by the question?*

Students were asked to distinguish between the influence of medieval traditions and contemporary Renaissance innovations upon the printmaking of Durer.

*How well did the students perform?*

The artist and prints were well known to students. Those who scored highest clearly understood the general stylistic characteristics of both medieval and Renaissance art. It was encouraging to see that students were able to discuss prints, a medium with which students sometimes have problems.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

The most common errors were the following:

- Some students reversed the periods discussed, noting that medieval characteristics were in fact Renaissance, or vice versa.
- Some students were vague as to which period they were referring.
- Students often tried to compare the two works, even though the question did not ask them to.

In general, students should be able to determine whether a question is asking them to compare and contrast two works. Sometimes two works are provided only to give students more to write about; additionally, using two images increases the possibility that a student has seen one of the images.

### **Question 6**

“The slide shows the Virginia State Capitol, designed primarily by Thomas Jefferson between 1785 and 1789.

What is the art historical term for the style of the building? Discuss the social, political, or philosophical reasons for Jefferson’s choice of this style.”

*What was intended by the question?*

This proved to be an excellent contextual question which asked students to think about and then apply their knowledge in an intelligent manner. This was an excellent question regarding the issue of allowing students to explore the relationship between style and its underlying meanings.

*How well did the students perform?*

Student responses were often excellent. Those who scored in the upper level clearly knew about Jefferson and some of the social, political, or philosophical issues in America during this period. Students were able to apply material learned in art history and elsewhere to aid them with this question. The responses indicate that many students had been well trained to deal with an “unknown” (an image they are unfamiliar with) and yet place it within a broader context. This is a very important way to teach students to deal with art historical material.

The better essays were able to apply intellectually both contextual and stylistic knowledge to answer this question, whether or not students were familiar with the structure.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

The most common problems were the following:

- Weaker responses were those in which the student treated the question as a visual analysis only, ignoring the contextual component. This may be because students did not read the question carefully, so they didn't get to the part of the question dealing with context.
- Some students were unable to identify the style of the building.

### Question 7

“Identify the painting. How does the painting represent a radical break with many of the traditions of Western art?”

*What was intended by the question?*

Students were asked to discuss the radical ways in which Picasso's seminal *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* broke with the traditions of Western art. This work was well known to students, and they performed very well overall.

*How well did the students perform? What were the common errors or omissions?*

Students were very well prepared for this question. Many fully understood the ways the work broke from artistic traditions of the day. Some students had difficulty identifying the title of this work of art (which was asked for), but the majority did not.

### Question 8

“Virtually all of the world's cultures have defined sacred spaces for religious purposes. The design and appearance of these spaces vary greatly. Fully identify two specific spaces, at least one of which must be from beyond the European tradition. For each choice, discuss the relationship between the appearance of the space and its religious function.”

*How well did the students perform?*

One surprising aspect of question 8 is the lack of range of images that students refer to. For example, teachers and students are wonderfully free to utilize art and architecture from the area they live in as long as it is beyond the European tradition. AP art history teachers in Arizona or New Mexico might wish to deal with Native American cultures to answer question 8, and yet these types of relevant regional choices are rarely used as examples.

This is the one question on the exam that can be prepared in advance. Teachers are now fully used to this format, and students write better essays than they did during the first year or two of this type of question. It's important that teachers prepare their students for both possible topics, which are announced in the *AP Art History Course Description*. A topic may be used two years in a row, or it may not be used at all. Throughout the academic year, teachers should be preparing students to write about both topics.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

The most common problems students had with Question 8 were the following:

- Some students make surprisingly poor choices, particularly since they have the entire academic year to consider appropriate examples. Many of these students are not certain as to whether their examples were part of or “beyond” the European tradition. On the other hand, many teachers had prepared their students very well on this issue.
- Students often did not identify their choices fully. In many cases they wrote in general about basilicas, pyramids, cathedrals, and mosques, without indicating specifically *which* basilica,

pyramid, etc. A full identification would include both the specific work and the culture from which it came.

- Some students had difficulty being able to explain how spaces are designed to accommodate specific functions or activities.

### **Question 9**

“Representations of the human body vary considerably in different periods and cultures. Fully identify two specific representations of the human figure, each from a different period or culture. Discuss how each work reflects the cultural values of its time period or the place where it was made.”

*What was intended by the question?*

The purpose of this question was to ask students to relate visual representations of the human body to the cultural values of that culture or time period.

*How well did the students perform?*

Responses were on the whole very good, despite the fact that students were tired by the time they reached this final question.

*What were the common errors or omissions?*

The most common problems students had with the question were the following:

- Students did not carefully read the question, and thus only partially or incorrectly answered it or ignored the cultural values issue.
- Some students did not fully identify two specific works of art.
- As with Question 8, many students made inappropriate choices for their examples. Students have 30 minutes to answer this question, and they should spend 5 of those minutes reading the question carefully and thinking about the most appropriate choices *before* they begin writing their response. In the end, this will save them a lot of misguided effort.
- Some students had difficulty discussing how their choices related to cultural values. In some cases, this was due to poor choices of examples.