



A Level Art and Design

PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

Theme for A level Personal Investigation: Exploration and Discovery

GCE Art and Design

Personal Investigation support

Centres are free to devise their own projects, tasks or themes for the Personal Investigation component.

This document suggests a broad theme that you could use with your students for the A level Personal Investigation component. It also suggests starting points relevant to each of the endorsed titles, although students can interpret the theme according to their own interests and research, or the resources available. Your students' approach to the personal study can be as individual and creative as their own practical work.

The theme and starting points within this document are suggestions and are not intended to be prescriptive. You are free to devise any project, task or theme for the Personal Investigation.

Theme

Exploration and Discovery

Early images of animals were often realised from description alone. Travel in those times was often restricted to explorers and scientists who were the only people to have seen the creatures first hand. Albrecht Dürer's engraving of a rhinoceros is one of many classic examples.

Our senses are bombarded with fresh visual information by events such as holidays, social events, visiting distant relatives, sporting fixtures, trips to galleries and museums, and new friends. Even a simple motorway journey can take you through major contrasts in architecture and landscape.

Exploration into the microscopic world can transport us to an alien environment of fantastic organisms with endless shapes and forms.

Dissection of the human body reveals the incredible complexity of its mechanics and systems. Dr Gunther von Hagens's *Body Worlds* exhibition displayed this fragile beauty.

Discovering and reading a new book can create pictures of entire communities, environments and individuals in your imagination. It is interesting to see how the film version of a book often provokes a feeling of disappointment. This may be because it is the director's own visualisation of characters and places, rather than your own.

Here are some more ideas that might help you begin your research:

- climbing, caving, bird-watching, canoeing, gliding, hiking
- experiments, dissection, dismantling, deconstructing
- exotic food, music, literature
- rock pools, areas underneath stones, dead wood and metal sheets
- zoological gardens, theme parks, fun fairs, museums, libraries
- scrap yards, exposed rock strata
- derelict gardens, cemeteries
- snorkelling and metal detecting
- magnifying lenses, telescopes, binoculars.

If possible, begin your work on the theme by recording from direct observation and experience. Try to select sources which are unusual or challenging, sources which will provide you with a variety of visual stimuli from which you can develop your work.

Starting points

The starting points below may help you form ideas. You can follow them closely, use them as a source of information, or produce your own individual response to the theme.

- **Fine Art** – the exploration and discovery of the self has been a constant theme in modern art. Surrealists, such as Delvaux, De Chirico and Ernst, relied on the psychological speculations of Sigmund Freud, who sought to uncover the mysteries of the unconscious. Kandinsky aspired to unlock 'the spiritual' in art by developing ways of working that were not directed by rational thought, proceeding instead from his 'inner self'. More recently, Jenny Saville's work is a self-conscious exploration of her own persona. Leonora Carrington along with her contemporary Surrealists explored the subconscious world of dreams and psychological spaces. Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono both 'live' their own art, so that the artists and their work become entirely one, each discovering the power of the language of performance art.
- **Fine Art** – pop art and op art were breakthroughs in discovering and exploring non-traditional subjects and styles. They made people see things differently and they overturned previous artistic values. Bridget Riley explores optical themes. Peter Blake celebrates ordinary life and popular culture. Such subjects would have been considered unsuitable for 'high art' in earlier times.
- **Fine Art** - The migration of people and its related narrative and trauma have often inspired artists. Lubaina Himid's work frequently references the history of the movement of people across continents, perhaps inverting the traditional idea of the exploration and settling of countries through her powerful painting and installation, as does the painting and sculpture of Kara Walker.
- **Graphic Communication** – stamps and first-day covers are often produced to commemorate notable events of exploration and discovery, such as the moon landings, the discovery of the Americas, the development of penicillin and the isolation of DNA. Such simple images and appropriate typography can be presented in a more elaborate and larger format in specialist collectors' magazines. Stamp and poster designs by Mike Skidmore are examples.
- **Graphic Communication** - Typography and the potential to discover and create new letter forms and letter/ image dynamics have provided endless opportunities for graphic designers to express their creativity. Bea Feitler's design changed the face of graphic design through an exploration of how text and image combined to communicate a powerful feminist voice. Dorothy Hayes pioneered typography in the 1960's, and Paula Scher's experimental typography has transformed branding and identity.
- **Textile Design** – tapestries have been used to record adventures and exploits throughout history. In the 16th century they took many months to complete, and incorporated rich silks and gold thread. The idea of using textiles to narrate important discoveries or personal milestones has also inspired contemporary artists and craft workers. Tracy Emin's appliqué work on the inside of her tent installation titled *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* is an interesting exploration of this use of textiles.
- **Textile Design** - Mixing and re-inventing past trends and fashions have provided great inspiration for more modern and contemporary fashion designers. Vivienne Westwood looked back at Regency and Elizabethan clothing interpreted through the radical punk movement to create multi-layered tailored clothing mixing historical tradition with innovation. Eva Sonaike rediscovers her African heritage in her textile furnishing designs.

- **Three-dimensional Design**—archaeologists continue to unearth artefacts that inspire and excite contemporary artists and craftworkers. The Staffordshire Hoard excited worldwide interest similar to the excitement generated by the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The surviving metal, glass and ceramics of the great classical civilisations have provided inspiration to many artists, potters and jewellers such as Grayson Perry, Duncan Ross, Jon Bull, Andrew Richards, Ian Godfrey, Richard Batterham, Carol Seiden and Carolyn Gang.
- **Three-dimensional Design** - Ceramic designers often explore historic sources for their designs. The unique traits of particular societies are often appropriated and reinvented in their contemporary ceramic pieces. Lucie Rie's ceramics were a driver of the British studio pottery revival in the 20th century, looking to Japanese craft techniques for inspiration, and contemporary African American artist Theaster Gates has studied Japanese pottery traditions in his work which explores Black History. Carol McNicholl, Alison Britton and Magdelene Odundo look to the Bronze Age, Egyptian, Greek and Nigerian ceramics for inspiration.
- **Photography**—photography is often used as a device to enable people to explore and discover places and events which they cannot themselves visit. The sports photographer can get closer to the action on the field or track than the ordinary spectator. Photography enables us to enter war zones, awards ceremonies and the private spaces of celebrities. Chris Hondros's images of the conflict in Iraq transport the viewer to the terrifying environment inhabited by the civilian population. His images are reminiscent of those taken by Nick Ut in the Vietnam war.
- **Photography** - Documentary photography is a powerful tool that can be exploited to present a biased, or honest version of the events being depicted. This concept has driven many photographers to produce unique and moving images. Dorothea Lange shows us the interwar depression poverty of the US, pioneering socially powerful yet sensitive journalism through photography, whilst Lee Miller documented life in WW2. Claude Cahun's work in contrast is a radical exploration of self and gender identity. Issac Julien makes films about our colonial past, and how as a black man he can make sense of his position in the world, and of his ancestral links to slavery and exploitation.