



# A Level Art and Design

## PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

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Theme for A level Personal Investigation: Exploration and Discovery

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# GCE Art and Design

## Personal Investigation support

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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

Artists in the 16th century created illustrations of exotic foreign creatures from descriptions alone, descriptions that were recounted by explorers who had actual experience of the creatures. 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Three-dimensional Design** – archaeologists continue to unearth artefacts that inspire and excite contemporary artists and craft workers. 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.
- **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.