



A Level Art and Design

PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

Theme for A level Personal Investigation: Passions and Obsessions

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

Passions and Obsessions

People, projects, objects or places can all become focal points of obsession or passion. The driving force behind every artist stems from their own personal passion or fixation. The galleries of any museum or public collection display a bewildering assortment of personal objects that represent past or present human obsessions.

The sculptor Alberto Giacometti lived in his workshop towards the end of his life, totally absorbed in his figurative explorations and rejecting the outside world.

Artists such as Caravaggio, Rodin, Wyeth, Augustus John and Salvador Dali have produced intense paintings inspired by their close relationships with their models.

A passion for nature and organic forms inspires many architects and designers who fully exploit the flexibility of modern construction materials to mimic natural forms. The Beijing National Stadium (the 'Bird's Nest'), built for the 2008 Olympics, is a classic example of this.

Alexander Calder and Jean Tinguely were fascinated by kinetics throughout their lives, producing sculptures that arc gracefully through the air or that intentionally rattled themselves to destruction.

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

- relationships, families, weddings, christenings
- sadness, joy, disappointment, kleptomania, paranoia
- collections, money, poverty, recycling, charity
- politics, power, religion, trust, war
- ambition, fame, celebrity, television
- birth, presents, carnivals, sport, holidays, travel
- food, security, hygiene
- convents and monasteries.

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** – love or obsession has inspired many artists, such as Anthony Green, Pierre Bonnard, Andrew Wyeth, Maggi Hambling, Vilhelm Hammershoi and Edward Hopper. Anthony Green shows his love for his family, home and memories in his obsessive depiction of minute details of domesticity. Bonnard's fascination with light and colour inspired him to paint the same figure and bathroom many times over, with infinite variations in colour and pattern. Edward Hopper painted his wife over decades within different interiors and narratives.
- **Fine Art** – personal interests and hobbies can be an inspiration for artists, such as Peter Lanyon's experiences with hang gliding that led to abstracted paintings based on aerial views of the landscape. Early experiences in boxing inspired Sam Rabin's paintings of the sport. Edgar Degas' enjoyment of horse racing provided the visual stimulation for several studies and paintings.
- **Graphic Communication** – fashion designers are passionate about the way their work is presented. In addition to their own sketches, illustrators are often employed to refine the look of a brand. Fashion illustrations function in different ways: they can bring life to a fashion design; they can help to promote a style in the form of advertising; they can also be a work of art in their own right. Julie Verhoeven created a series of designs for Mulberry in 2007; James Jean's designs were used for Prada's summer 2008 show.
- **Textile Design** – textile production can involve the intense working and reworking of materials to create layered, complex pieces. Artists obsessively use combinations of techniques and materials to produce highly individual works. Alice Kettle uses tiny stitches and rich colour to generate pieces which are narrative and evoke human emotion. Michael Raedecker makes haunting images concerned with light and composition by combining painting, appliqué and embroidery in creative ways.
- **Three-dimensional Design** – many theatrical productions deal with passions and obsessions, and provide designers with unique opportunities to build sets and costumes that exaggerate the tension and energy of such powerful emotions. Examples such as Richard Napier's designs on Peter Shaffer's production of *Equus*, Robert Innes Hopkins' sets for the RSC's production of *Macbeth*, and Maria Björnson's sets for *The Phantom of the Opera* have produced spectacular environments that greatly enhance the visual spectacle on stage.
- **Photography** – many photographers and filmmakers explore our passion for mystery and intrigue. Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and Tim Burton's *Nightmare before Christmas* (1993) and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) are good examples of this. The futuristic artist Mariko Mori also plays with the senses in her videos and installations. In the ambitious piece *Dream Temple 1999*, she combines many disciplines: architecture, computer graphics, video and virtual reality in a piece that comments upon the nature of human consciousness.