



**Transforming Assessment in Art History
Wednesday 3 April 2024, at AAH Annual Conference**

Report for HEC meeting, 17 October 2024.

Author: Samuel Raybone (sar69@aber.ac.uk)

Summary

Around 50 art history educators from a diverse range of institutions, backgrounds, and career stages, joined AAH HEC members Samuel Raybone, James Boden, & Emma Barker to learn about 'authentic assessment'. Participants arrived at the workshop with widely varying levels of knowledge and experience with authentic assessment: some were already leading on projects to implement authentic assessment at their institutions, while others had just started teaching that semester. Through facilitated small-group discussion of 3 key questions ("What is authentic assessment?", "How will I design and deliver authentic assessment?", and "How can I assess authentic assessment tasks?"), participants shared best practice and inspired one another to generate positive change.

Result

Of the participants who gave feedback (12), 100% agreed that "I have a better understanding of 'authentic assessment' after the workshop", and 83% agreed that "I will implement ideas from the workshop in my teaching and/or leadership".

Next steps

- Participants expressed enthusiasm about the possibility of future events, resources. 12 gave email address & consent for further contact.
- Where do we pitch our intervention / who are we looking to help? e.g. resources for module co-ordinators, &/or lobbying re: policies/projects at HoD level/above?
- Given the current financial climate of UK HE, will there be sufficient appetite for transformative change and/or collaboration across institutions? (Where) does the HEC have capacity to devote to this?
- Potential for online resource hub, e.g. collection of examples of best practice, e.g. collection of literature/resources?
- Potential to broaden out (e.g. consider other strands in assessment), or focus on authentic assessment?

Discussion points at workshop

“What is authentic assessment? Why is it worthwhile?”

- Opportunity for equity, transparency, and co-creation/partnership with students.
- Authentic to/for whom? (student life experience, ambitions, identities; future career; discipline of art history).
- “Dethroning the Essay” (project at Bath Spa).
- Concerns about managing student assessment anxiety.
- Authentic assessment and AI: designing-out opportunities for improper use of AI and/or incorporating positive uses of AI.
- Institutional challenges: shifting the culture.

“How will I design and deliver authentic assessment?”

- Emphasis on re-designing assessment from group up, first considering why we are assessing in the first place.
- Integrate assessment into teaching: design learning activities to understand and practice authentic assessment tasks, provide formative feedback.
- Students produce real outcomes of relevance beyond the module & with potential relationship to work/industry.
- Potential to offer student choice and/or student co-design of assessment task(s), generate buy-in, explain why assessments are changing.
- What place for essays & exams?

“How can I assess authentic assessment tasks?”

- Emphasis on first reflecting what is being assessed in granular detail.
- Consideration of need for clarity & parity between different assessment tasks, especially if students have choice of different modes of submission.
- Need for mark schemes, training to support assessors.
- Potential for employer/industry involvement in assessing submissions (bring in expertise).
- Concerns about managing unpredictable outcomes.

Appendix 1: Examples shared with participants

Learning Outcome

- Apply critical and theoretical concepts to understand familiar and unfamiliar artistic representations of the body.

Traditional Assessment

- Essay, e.g.: “How does Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘discipline’ help us interpret Ai Weiwei, *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, 2011-2013?”

Authentic Assessment

- You are a museum curator, hoping to stage an exhibition around Ai Weiwei’s *S.A.C.R.E.D.* (2011-2013), but your colleagues and manager are sceptical.
- Give a 10-minute presentation, advocating for your exhibition idea to the museum. Use Michael Foucault’s ideas to explain the meaning, importance, and relevance of Ai Weiwei’s work to contemporary society. Aim to convince your colleagues to exhibit *S.A.C.R.E.D.* (2011-2013).
- Write a sample exhibition label (300 words) to demonstrate to your colleagues how you would communicate these ideas to the general public.

Learning Outcomes

- Identify print processes and techniques through close looking.
- Interpret individual prints in light of the affordances and limitations of the process used, and the historical context in which it was made.

Traditional Assessment

- Essay, e.g.: “Explain the key differences and similarities between etching, engraving, and lithography. Analyse specific examples of each.”

Authentic Assessment

- Choose 3 objects from the department’s print collection: 1 from each category on the provided list [so that students select an etching, engraving, and lithograph but receive no information about them].
- You are a cataloguer working in the department collection, and these three prints have just been donated. Use close observation and art historical research to complete the following metadata fields in the database: artist, title, date, description, materials, technique, subject, curator’s comments (200 words).
- Write a 400-word report on each object for your line manager, justifying your identification of the materials and technique.

Appendix 1: Examples shared with participants

Learning Outcome

- Identify and distinguish the styles, practices, and ideas of the key art movements in nineteenth-century Europe.
- Explain how and why European art changed over the course of the nineteenth century.

Traditional Assessment

- Essay, e.g.: “What are the key differences between Classicism and Romanticism?”

Authentic Assessment

- Write the script for a 25-minute public gallery tour through the nineteenth century rooms at the National Gallery, London. Progressing chronologically, in each room choose 1-3 works which, taken together, exemplify the key art movements we have studied. Use visual analysis to explain how each work showcases the distinctive style, practices, and ideas of its movement. Use your knowledge of historical contexts to explain why these movements developed and changed over time.

Learning Outcome

- Assess specialised debates in the secondary literature on the Northern Renaissance and evaluate current research.

Traditional Assessment

- Annotated bibliography of recently published sources.

Authentic Assessment

- You are hosting an academic conference about new developments in scholarship on the Northern Renaissance. Working in groups of 4:
 - Write a 1,000-word call for papers, which summarises the current state of knowledge and suggests 3 key themes or problems which you think need further research.
 - Invite a keynote speaker. This should be an eminent and agenda-setting scholar in the field. Justify your choice through reference to their research and its impact.
 - Write a list of 5 art historians who you hope will attend. Justify your choice and explain how their research fits your chosen 3 theme / problems.

Appendix 1: Examples shared with participants

Learning Outcomes

- Interpret and compare works of modern art based on knowledge of the appropriate historical, historiographical, and critical contexts.

Traditional Assessment

- Essay, e.g. “Was Surrealism primarily a tool of oppression or a means of liberation for women artists?”

Authentic Assessment

- You work in Tate Modern’s social media department. Design a social media campaign for Women's History Month, highlighting works by women artists from the collection.
- Select 31 works by different women artists in the Tate collection which represent the key ideas, practices, and problems of modernist art. These artworks will be posted daily on Instagram.
- For 4 of your selected artists, write a 200-word caption which introduces the artist and explains the significance of her work for histories of modernisms.
- Write a 1,500-word blog post explaining the historical and critical issues at stake in the study of women artists in modernism.

Literature reviews

- Koh, Kim H. "Authentic Assessment." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. 27 Feb. 2017. <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-22>
- Vanessa Murphy et. al., "Keeping it Real": A review of the benefits, challenges and steps towards implementing authentic assessment", All Ireland Journal of Higher Education, vol. 9, no. 3, 2017. <https://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/280>

Step-by-step guides

- University of Reading, "Designing Authentic Assessment". <https://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/-/media/project/functions/cqsd/documents/ade/tandl-resources/prp-authentic-assessment.pdf?la=en&hash=BDEBEC0DC939ECEFEA40BF02341C8C06>
- Sally Brown And Kay Sambell, "A Step-By-Step Guide To Designing More Authentic Assessments", Heriot Watt University. https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/GUIDE-NO31_A-step-by-step-guide-to-designing-more-authentic-assessments.pdf
- Mary Simper, "Beyond the 'real world': exploring authentic assessment design", Open University. <https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/learning-design/?p=1659>

Collections of examples

- Lydia Arnold, "Expanded Assessment Top Trumps". <https://lydia-arnold.com/2022/11/14/expanded-assessment-top-trumps/>
- Kay Sambell and Sally Brown, "Covid-19 Assessment Collection". <https://sally-brown.net/kay-sambell-and-sally-brown-covid-19-assessment-collection/>