Time and Place

- Artworks need to be examined in the context of the time and place in which they were produced.

- Artworks can be interpreted in a number of ways often providing layers of meaning that may change over time because of the background and perspective of the viewer and the changing contexts in which the work is seen.

- Commentaries by critics, historians and artists can help us to understand how and why art was created and how it can be interpreted.
Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)
Mona Lisa 1503-06
oil and Tempera on wood
76.8 x 52.7cm
Louvre

Leonardo da Vinci is famous as one of the most gifted artists of all time. He was very interested in mathematics and the Mathematical proportions of the human body.

**Title /Subject**
It is generally accepted that this is the portrait of Lisa Gheradini, the wife of Francesco del Giacondo. Mona shortening of Madonna (my lady)

The figure is sitting on a balcony overlooking a complex real and imaginary landscape. Her body is partially turned away from the viewer

**Historical / Cultural Context**
Height of the Renaissance Period at the beginning of the 16th Century in Italy. Portraiture was becoming more common as art was being commissioned by wealthy private citizens such as Francesco del Giacondo. The age of exploration was expanding. Leonardo and Michelangelo were expanding knowledge of the human body through observation and dissection.
- **Materials/Technique**

- Mona Lisa was painted on a small panel of popular wood. Leonardo was an Italian pioneer of oil painting, taking advantage of the slow drying quality of oils (pigment mixed with oil) to rework sections over time.

- Leonardo used **Chiroscuro** to explain 3Dimensional form. i.e using light and shadow. He started with dark undertones and built the illusion of three dimensional features through layers and layers of semi transparent glazes.

- He then used the **sfumato technique** to blend colours and tones without visible boundaries “without lines or borders in the manner of smoke” Leonardo.

- His colours range from light to dark on a continuous gradation of subtle tones, the forms seem to emerge from and merge into shadows.
Follow the links provided to increase your depth of knowledge

A closer look at the Mona Lisa

http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/joconde/indexEN.html

The theft of the Mona Lisa


Identity of the Mona Lisa

Marcel Duchamp (1887 – 1968)

Duchamp gave a definition of his new art of the readymade: whether or not he made it with his own hand has no importance. He chose it. He took an everyday article (in this case a tourist postcard), placed it so that its usual significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - and created a new thought for that object.

Distinguishing features: The Mona Lisa's deep-set eyes and round face do not conflict with Duchamp's act of violence. The beard and moustache seem a completion. Duchamp said the Mona Lisa becomes a man - not a woman disguised as a man, but a real man. This hints at a different meaning from vandalism, for all the crudeness of those letters, L.H.O.O.Q., which sound out the French sentence: "She has a hot arse." This is not simply an attack on the mass-produced tourist icon the Mona Lisa had become, but rather an interpretation of it. Sigmund Freud had psychoanalysed Leonardo's art and related the artist's inability to finish his works to the sublimation of his sexual life to art. He also argued that Leonardo was homosexual.

Duchamp's Mona Lisa is a Freudian joke. Duchamp reveals, in a simple gesture, that which the painting conceals. But this is not merely an allusion to Freud. Duchamp uncovers an ambiguity of gender at the heart of Leonardo's aesthetic - that Leonardo sees the male form in the female.

This kind of hidden self-portrait is what Duchamp discovers in his rectified readymade. His Dadaist intervention redeems Leonardo's masterpiece from the banality of reproduction and returns it to the private world of creation.
Andy Warhol

In the first few months of 1963, the Mona Lisa was seen by nearly two million people in New York and Washington DC. Shipped to the United States on a diplomatic mission – escorted by the French culture minister and received by President John F. Kennedy – the painting did little to assuage Franco-American tension about NATO and nuclear proliferation, but the visit certified Lisa del Giocondo’s status as the smiling face of high art, as iconic as any modern movie star.

Several months earlier, an up-and-coming Pop artist named Andy Warhol, notorious for painting consumer goods, turned his attention to celebrities including Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. Instead of painting their portraits by hand, he adapted a technique from commercial printing, in which a photographic image could be transferred to canvas by pushing paint through a mechanically-produced silkscreen template. Any photo could be replicated, including those in newspapers, favorite sources for Warhol since they reinforced the relationship of his paintings to mass media. The newspapers might even give him ideas, suggesting popular subjects. And in the winter of 1963, few subjects were more popular than the touring Mona Lisa.

Fame was Warhol’s true medium, which he subverted by insisting that he was just like everybody else.
Jean Michel Basquiat, a martyr to his own inner fire that burnt out his very existence at the age of only 27, began in the artistic world with the famous graffiti signed SAMO - his identification mark - and was recognised, together with Keith Haring, as belonging to the American graffiti movement of the late seventies.

This work seems to be Basquiat's answer to Warhol's Dollar Bill and Mona Lisa paintings. Basquiat usually paints large fields of colour by applying broad brush strokes with acrylic paint, while drawing and writing in oil stick. This pattern applies to the orange top part of this painting. The portrait at centre, however, has hair, skin and parts of the bust filled-in with repeated oil stick lines. Leonardo's Mona Lisa seems to grow into the dollar note at top, obscuring what would be the face of George Washington. Art and money are two different currencies, even different worlds, which can be converted only with difficulty. The uncompromising and urgent way the artist spent the money he made is legend. In this painting he lets us know that although he loved money his ultimate faith lay in art.
One of the most notorious, known only by the pseudonym Banksy, has puckishly taken up where Warhol left off. “In the future, everyone will be anonymous for 15 minutes,” he wrote in 2006 – spraypainting the words on an obsolete TV set – while tauntingly keeping his identity masked.

The world famous UK-based graffiti artist Banksy is no stranger to controversy. Many of his pieces are politically motivated in the vein of social and cultural criticism of war, capitalism and politicians. The artist is also no stranger to a little satirical humor, though, which he cleverly conveys in some of his less serious but just as thought-provoking pieces. This is the case with his piece known as Mona Lisa with Bazooka Rocket, which was originally located in London, UK.

In this simple and comical piece, the viewer sees Mona Lisa wearing her classic ambiguous facial expression, but instead of sitting idly with her hands folded, she is holding a bazooka rocket and wearing a headset as if she is a soldier. The message Banksy is trying to convey is unclear. Perhaps he is showing how numb people and soldiers have grown to war and violence that their feelings can be summed up in Mona Lisas cool, calm expression of nothing in particular.
To this day, Banksy remains known only by his exploits, including his own Mona Lisa appropriation, La Gioconda wearing a yellow smileyface: centuries of Western art distilled to a perfect cliché. In 2004, Banksy smuggled his painting into the Louvre, illicitly attaching it to the wall with double-sided tape. Within minutes it was found and hustled from view by museum staff. However the anxieties it elicited cannot so easily be effaced.

Banksy is the godfather of a new form of pop art that originated on the street. He used a foundation created by peers to spread powerful messages using accessible street art. Anyone can see Banksy’s stencil art, which enables him to reach a large audience and to make strong statements. City officials have the power to paint over works or allow them to stay. Even when his ephemeral art is destroyed, it draws attention to political issues.
Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa is arguably the world's most famous and renowned work of art and as such, it has been celebrated—and ridiculed—by just about everyone including world famous artists including Salvador Dali, Andy Warhol, Rene Magritte, Fernando Botero, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Banksy.

In art historical terms, Warhol’s copies fall under the category of appropriation, a subgenre dating back at least as far as 1919 – when Marcel Duchamp drew a mustache on a Mona Lisa postcard – in which legitimate artists technically come closest to forgery. Though not produced under false pretenses, works of appropriation art are fundamentally derivative. Like forgeries, they trade on borrowed status. Their significance emanates from an absent original.

Appropriation is a form of critique, a mode of questioning

Art has a lot to learn from forgery. The Mona Lisa is not only the most admired but also the most reproduced image in all art
References

- http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/08/art-vandalism_n_1947616.html
- http://youtu.be/Qu6y2XaYHdA
This is a question from Section 1 of the 2012 HSC exam. You task is to answer it in relation to this presentation.

Question 2 (8 marks)

- Analyse the ways in which the artworks represent and comment on the world.