

Crawford Learn Art and Gallery Explore



Harry Clarke, *The Silver Snarling Trumpets* (Detail)

Leaving Certificate Gallery Question *Harry Clarke Marginalia*

An Online Exhibition

Sections:

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4. Questions that help direct your understanding of the selection, display, presentation and meaning behind the artworks.

Resource designed by Mark Ewart & Crawford Art Gallery.



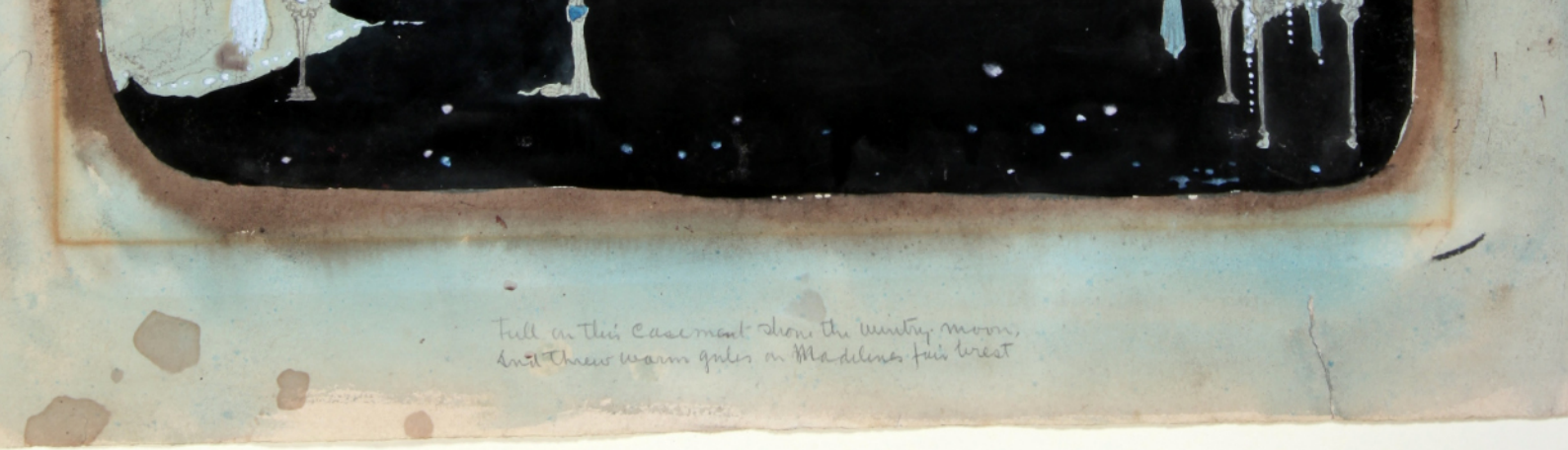
Harry Clarke, *Full on this Casement Shone this Wintery Moon* (Detail)

1. Introduction and Background

This resource is designed for the Leaving Certificate art history and appreciation exam, Section III (Appreciation of Art). It focuses on the 'gallery question' where students are asked about an exhibition they have visited.

The section on art appreciation encourages students to respond to a gallery visit and how the artwork was presented and curated. This question is looking for your understanding of how an exhibition is designed and your response to the presentation, theme and overall experience for the visitor.

Your interpretation and analysis of the exhibition is important. Bear in mind that every visitor to an exhibition will have a different experience. Why? Because our perceptions are influenced by our age, culture and life experience. In the context of the exam, it is important to use concrete examples to support your own interpretation.



Harry Clarke, *Full on this Casement Shone this Wintery Moon* (Detail)

2. About the Exam Question:

The gallery question can, generally speaking, be divided into two interconnected parts.

The first part deals with the overall exhibition setting.

Consider the following

- The surrounding environment of the exhibition space and the location of the venue.
- How accessible and navigable is the exhibition for visitors?
- In what way was information about the exhibition communicated? Pay attention to text panels, audio/video content, infographics, website design, social media, guided or virtual tours, access & education programmes for different ages, etc.

These considerations can also be applied, where appropriate, to online and virtual exhibitions

The second part of the question involves a closer examination of how the work was displayed within the space and usually you will be asked to describe and sketch two works from the exhibition.

Consider the following

- Exhibition works may be organised by their subject matter, material, theme or chronologically i.e. according to when they were made.
- A curator may present groups of work that complement each other visually or that provoke questions.
- In designing an exhibition, a curator may hope to tell a story or place the artwork within a broader social or cultural context.
- They may want to reveal something about an artist's making process.
- Practical considerations are important e.g. the exhibition budget, care of delicate work, available wall and floor space, lighting, the visitor's experience.



Harry Clarke, *Numb were the beadsman's fingers* (Detail)

Think about how the display of the work enhanced your interaction with the artwork.

- For example, did you find that the falling snow animation in the online Harry Clarke Marginalia exhibition distracting or atmospheric?
- What did you learn from the work itself about the artist(s)' intentions?
- What were the curatorial themes and did the work on display unite the exhibition?
- Did the exhibition address a broader social or cultural context?

You may be asked to sum up your experience in terms of your overall impressions.

- Based on your understanding of criteria for an effective display of artwork, consider the exhibition's success or how you think it could be improved.
- In your opinion, how do galleries and cultural institutions provide a positive and thought-provoking experience for the visitor?



Harry Clarke *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Detail)

3. Selected information to focus your analysis

About the Artist:

Harry Clarke (1889-1931) is an Irish artist who is admired for his imagination, drawing style and technical skill. He created unique illustrations and stained-glass designs during his short life, dying at the age of 41 from tuberculosis.

Often described as having a 'jewel' like quality, Harry Clarke's technical skill is evident in the minute detail that he created on glass. This difficult work required precise etching on layers of glass held together by a lead frame.

Despite the conservatism of the early Irish Free State, he developed a highly original, unconventional approach to art, rooted in his imagination and a wealth of visual influences, including movements like Art Nouveau and fellow artists such as Aubrey Beardsley, Gustav Klimt.

Harry Clarke was a natural storyteller and was inspired by theatre, fairy tales and legends. He was drawn to stories that were fantastical and worked as a book illustrator. You can find some of his drawings for Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* held in Crawford Art Gallery's collection [here](#).

Stained-glass is usually site-specific, which means it is designed to be installed in a particular place. Since much of Clarke's glass work is located in remote churches or private collections and stained-glass can be difficult to photograph, many of his works are difficult to access or inaccessible.



Harry Clarke, *At Length Burst in the Argent Revelry* (Detail)

The story and narrative of the Eve of St. Agnes

In 1923, Harry Clarke was commissioned to create a stained-glass window for a domestic interior. His client was Harold Jacob of Jacob's Biscuits.

Ultimately, 'The Eve of St Agnes' (1819), a poem by John Keats, was selected as a source for what is considered to be a master-work. It follows the dreamlike romance of a pair of characters named Madeline and Porphyro on the moonlit eve of the feast of Saint Agnes, which takes place annually on 20 January. The vivid imagery of Keats' poetry, with its rich vocabulary of colours and allusions, was to capture the artist's imagination.

Networks - Cork and Dublin

Harry Clarke completed work on 'The Eve of St. Agnes' in April 1924. The eighteen watercolour studies, which Clarke had made in preparation for the window, were purchased from the artist for Crawford Art Gallery.

In 1916, Clarke had contributed eleven windows to the Honan Chapel at University College Cork, a jewel of the Irish Arts & Crafts Movement and one of his earliest major commissions. His book illustrations for editions of Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales* (1916) and Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1919) also brought him acclaim. Publishers and writers alike took note. By 1923, Clarke was a well-connected artist and enjoyed public success for his stained-glass work.



Hidden in the artist's preparatory works we find insights into his thought process, methods and materials. Lurking on the edge of *At Length Burst in the Argent Revelry* is a dishevelled and tired male figure that bears a resemblance to the artist himself. Might it provide an insight into Clarke's state of mind at the time? It offers a melancholy counterpoint to the exuberant party scene that it fringes.



On the reverse of *Follow me Child or Else these Stones Will Be thy Bier*, is another revealing sketch. Depicting a half-length female nude, the subject gazes out at us startlingly from the past. Could she be a woman known to the artist or a life model from the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art at which Clarke tutored in the early 1920s? IMAGE



In *The Curtain Call* (left panel) its placement is indicated at 'LEFT BASE' in Clarke's design, while another potentially sinister and grotesque figure with goatee beard and pointed ear also emerges.



Harry Clarke, *Full On This Casement* (Detail)

Art Gallery's online exhibition Harry Clarke Marginalia.

Interaction with the Exhibition: Context and Presentation

- What information can you find about the exhibition on the gallery website? Is it easy to find? Does it make you want to visit, and if so, how? What does the term 'marginalia' mean?
- Is the exhibition easy to navigate? What are the main themes, or what story is being told? Did the presentation entice you to explore the work more deeply, and if so, how?
- How does a virtual online exhibition compare to visiting a physical exhibition? Are virtual exhibitions more accessible?
- What does Harry Clarke's artwork reveal about the life of the artist in the context of early 20th-century Dublin? Can you imagine what it must have been like to live in those times?
- The gallery is housed in a historic building. Can you find information about this on the gallery's website? Crawford Art Gallery exhibits both historical and contemporary artworks. Do you think the historic building lends itself more-to historical or contemporary exhibitions? In your opinion, does the gallery setting influence the selection and presentation of artworks? Can you give examples to support your arguments?



Harry Clarke, *St Agnes Roundel* (Detail)

Interacting with the artwork

- What factors or specific attributes within any artist's work do you think guide a curator in deciding upon the theme or subject matter for an exhibition? What is the central theme of the Harry Clarke Marginalia exhibition? In your opinion is the presentation of artwork in this exhibition effective? How?
- What do the artworks in this exhibition reveal about Harry Clarke's artistic process? In terms of his method of working and more generally, is there something within his work that reminds you of another artist's work that you have studied or seen in a recent exhibition? Do the drawings and doodles at the edges of Harry Clarke's designs help you understand in any way the artist's personality or creative preoccupations?
- This exhibition shows workings or preparatory drawings for the design of a stained-glass window, but many people find these drawings important in their own right. Pick two works that appeal to you. What do you notice in terms of materials, colour, light, detail, composition, costume?
- Can you describe the relationship that exists between watercolour and stained-glass in terms of process? In what ways do you think that they might complement each other in terms of specific artistic elements and design principles such as colour, line and texture? Refer to a specific artwork that shows this relationship, in your opinion.

Useful Links to find out more about Harry Clarke

[Ireland's favourite painting RTE](#)

[Hugh Lane Gallery, Coffee Conversation: Harry Clarke The Eve of St Agnes](#)

[Irish Times, Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks](#)

Harry Clarke for different audiences

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/learnexplore1-talking-pictures-week-41-st-agnes>

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/jigsaw-puzzles-from-our-collection>

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/colour-our-collection>