

IELTS READING – Museums of fine art and their public S15AT3



IELTS READING Museums of fine art and their public listening practice test has 10 questions ..

The fact that people go to the Louvre museum in Paris to see the original painting Mona Lisa when they can see a reproduction anywhere leads us to question some assumptions about the role of museums of fine art in today's world.

One of the most famous works of art in the world is Leonardo da Vinci's, Mona Lisa. Nearly everyone who goes to see the original will already be familiar with it from reproductions, but they accept that fine art is more rewardingly viewed in its original form.

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However, if Mona Lisa was a famous novel, few people would bother to go to a museum to read the writer's actual manuscript rather than a printed reproduction. This might be explained by the fact that the novel has evolved precisely because of technological developments that **Q27 made it possible to print out huge numbers of texts**, whereas oil paintings have always been produced as unique objects. In addition, it could be argued that the practice of interpreting or 'reading' each medium follows different conventions. With novels, the reader attends mainly to the **Q28 meaning of words** rather than the way they are printed on the page, whereas the 'reader' of a painting must attend just as closely to the material form of marks and shapes in the picture as to any ideas they may signify.

Yet it has always been possible to make very accurate facsimiles of pretty well any fine art work. The seven surviving versions of Mona Lisa bear witness to the fact that in the 16th century, artists seemed perfectly content to assign the reproduction of their creations to their **Q29 workshop apprentices** as regular 'bread and butter' work. And today the task of reproducing pictures is incomparably more simple and reliable, with reprographic techniques that allow the production of high-quality prints made exactly **Q30 to the original scale**, with faithful colour values, and even with duplication of the surface relief of the painting.

But despite an implicit recognition that the spread of good reproductions can be culturally valuable, museums continue to promote the special status of original work. Unfortunately, **Q31 this seems to place severe limitations on the kind of experience offered to visitors.**

One limitation is related to the way the museum presents its exhibits. As repositories of unique historical objects, art museums are often called 'treasure houses'. We are reminded of this even before we view a collection by the presence of security guards, attendants, ropes and display cases to keep us away from the exhibits. In many cases, the architectural style of the building further reinforces that notion. In addition, a major collection like that of London's National Gallery is housed in numerous rooms, each with dozens of works, any one of which is likely to be worth more than all the average visitor possesses. In a society that judges the personal status of the individual so much by their material worth, **Q32 it is therefore difficult not to be impressed by one's own relative 'worthlessness' in such an environment.**

Furthermore, consideration of the 'value' of the original work in its treasure house setting impresses upon the viewer that, since these works were originally produced, they have been assigned a huge monetary value by some person or institution more powerful than themselves. Evidently, nothing the viewer thinks about the work is going to alter that value, and **Q33 so today's viewer is deterred from trying to extend that spontaneous, immediate, self-reliant kind of reading which would originally have met the work.**

**Q34 The visitor may then be struck by the strangeness of seeing such diverse paintings, drawings and sculptures brought together in an environment for which they were not originally created. This 'displacement effect' is further heightened by the sheer volume of exhibits.** In the case of a major collection, there are probably more works on display than we could realistically view in weeks or even months.

This is particularly distressing because time seems to be a vital factor in the appreciation of all art forms. **Q35 A fundamental difference between paintings and other art forms is that there is no prescribed time over which a painting is viewed.** By contrast, the audience encourage an opera or a play over a specific time, which is the duration of the performance. Similarly novels and poems are read in a prescribed temporal sequence, whereas a picture has no clear place at which to start viewing, or at which to finish. Thus art works themselves encourage us to view them superficially, without appreciating the richness of detail and labour that is involved.

**Q36 Art history should focus on discovering the meaning of art using a range of media. NOT GIVEN**

Consequently, the dominant critical approach becomes that of the art historian, a specialised academic approach devoted to 'discovering the meaning' of art within the cultural context of its time. **Q37 This is in perfect harmony with the museum s function,** since the approach is dedicated to seeking out and conserving 'authentic', original, readings of the exhibits. Again, this seems to put paid to that spontaneous, participators criticism which can be found in abundance in criticism of classic works of literature, but is absent from most art history.

**Q38 The displays of art museums serve as a warning of what critical practices can emerge when spontaneous criticism is suppressed.** The museum public, like any other audience, experience art more rewardingly when given the confidence to express their views. If appropriate works of fine art could be rendered permanently accessible to the public by means of high-fidelity reproductions, as literature and music already are, the public may feel somewhat less in awe of them. **Q40 Unfortunately, that may be too much to ask from those who seek to maintain and control the art establishment.**

**Q39 Reproductions of fine art should only be sold to the public if they are of high quality. NOT GIVEN**

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