

Directions: In this section, you are going to read a passage with ten statements attached to it. Each statement contains information given in one of the paragraphs. Identify the paragraph from which the information is derived. You may choose a paragraph more than once. Each paragraph is marked with a letter. Answer the questions by marking the corresponding letter on *Answer Sheet 2*.

Why the Mona Lisa Stands Out

- A) Have you ever fallen for a novel and been amazed not to find it on lists of great books? Or walked around a sculpture renowned as a classic, struggling to see what the fuss is about? If so, you've probably pondered the question a psychologist, James Cutting, asked himself: How does a work of art come to be considered great?
- B) The intuitive answer is that some works of art are just great: of intrinsically superior quality. The paintings that win prime spots in galleries, get taught in classes and reproduced in books are the ones that have proved their artistic value over time. If you can't see they're superior, that's your problem. It's an intimidatingly neat explanation. But some social scientists have been asking awkward questions of it, raising the possibility that artistic canons(名作目录) are little more than fossilised historical accidents.
- C) Cutting, a professor at Cornell University, wondered if a psychological mechanism known as the "mere-exposure effect" played a role in deciding which paintings rise to the top of the cultural league. Cutting designed an experiment to test his hunch(直觉). Over a lecture course he regularly showed undergraduates works of impressionism for two seconds at a time. Some of the paintings were canonical, included in art-history books. Others were lesser known but of comparable quality. These were exposed four times as often. Afterwards, the students preferred them to the canonical works, while a control group of students liked the canonical ones best. Cutting's students had grown to like those paintings more simply because they had seen them more.
- D) Cutting believes his experiment offers a clue as to how canons are formed. He points out that the most reproduced works of impressionism today tend to have been bought by five or six wealthy and influential collectors in the late 19th century. The preferences of these men bestowed(给予) prestige on certain works, which made the works more likely to be hung in galleries and printed in collections. The fame passed down the years, gaining momentum from mere exposure as it did so. The more people were exposed to, the more they liked it, and the more they liked it, the more it appeared in books, on posters and in big exhibitions. Meanwhile, academics and critics created sophisticated justifications for its preeminence(卓越). After all, it's not just the masses who tend to rate what they see more often more highly. As contemporary artists like Warhol and Damien Hirst have grasped, critics' praise is deeply entwined(交织) with publicity. "Scholars", Cutting argues, "are no different from the public in the effects of mere exposure."
- E) The process described by Cutting evokes a principle that the sociologist Duncan Watts calls "cumulative advantage": once a thing becomes popular, it will tend to become more popular still. A few years ago, Watts, who is employed by Microsoft to study the dynamics of social networks, had a similar experience to Cutting's in another Paris museum. After queuing to see the "Mona Lisa" in its climate-controlled bulletproof box at the Louvre, he came away puzzled: why was it considered so superior to the three other Leonardos in the previous chamber, to which nobody seemed to be paying the slightest attention?

- F) When Watts looked into the history of "the greatest painting of all time", he discovered that, for most of its life, the "Mona Lisa" remained in relative obscurity. In the 1850s, Leonardo da Vinci was considered no match for giants of Renaissance art like Titian and Raphael, whose works were worth almost ten times as much as the "Mona Lisa". It was only in the 20th century that Leonardo's portrait of his patron's wife rocketed to the number-one spot. What propelled it there wasn't a scholarly re-evaluation, but a theft.
- G) In 1911 a maintenance worker at the Louvre walked out of the museum with the "Mona Lisa" hidden under his smock(工作服). Parisians were shocked at the theft of a painting to which, until then, they had paid little attention. When the museum reopened, people queued to see the gap where the "Mona Lisa" had once hung in a way they had never done for the painting itself. From then on, the "Mona Lisa" came to represent Western culture itself.
- H) Although many have tried, it does seem improbable that the painting's unique status can be attributed entirely to the quality of its brushstrokes. It has been said that the subject's eyes follow the viewer around the room. But as the painting's biographer, Donald Sassoon, dryly notes, "In reality the effect can be obtained from any portrait." Duncan Watts proposes that the "Mona Lisa" is merely an extreme example of a general rule. Paintings, poems and pop songs are buoyed(使浮起) or sunk by random events or preferences that turn into waves of influence, passing down the generations.
- I) "Saying that cultural objects have value," Brian Eno once wrote, "is like saying that telephones have conversations." Nearly all the cultural objects we consume arrive wrapped in inherited opinion; our preferences are always, to some extent, someone else's. Visitors to the "Mona Lisa" know they are about to visit the greatest work of art ever and come away appropriately impressed—or let down. An audience at a performance of "Hamlet" knows it is regarded as a work of genius, so that is what they mostly see. Watts even calls the preeminence of Shakespeare a "historical accident".
- J) Although the rigid high-low distinction fell apart in the 1960s, we still use culture as a badge of identity. Today's fashion for eclecticism(折衷主义)—"I love Bach, ABBA and Jay Z"—is, Shamus Khan, a Columbia University psychologist, argues, a new way for the middle class to distinguish themselves from what they perceive to be the narrow tastes of those beneath them in the social hierarchy.
- K) The intrinsic quality of a work of art is starting to seem like its least important attribute. But perhaps it's more significant than our social scientists allow. First of all, a work needs a certain quality to be eligible to be swept to the top of the pile. The "Mona Lisa" may not be a worthy world champion, but it was in the Louvre in the first place, and not by accident. Secondly, some stuff is simply better than other stuff. Read "Hamlet" after reading even the greatest of Shakespeare's contemporaries, and the difference may strike you as unarguable.
- L) A study in the British Journal of Aesthetics suggests that the exposure effect doesn't work the same way on everything, and points to a different conclusion about how canons are formed. The social scientists are right to say that we should be a little sceptical of greatness, and that we should always look in the next room. Great art and mediocrity(平庸) can get confused, even by experts. But that's why we need to see, and read, as much as we can. The more we're exposed to the good and the bad, the better we are at telling the difference. The eclecticians have it.
36. According to Duncan Watts, the superiority of the "Mona Lisa" to Leonardo's other works resulted from the cumulative advantage.
37. Some social scientists have raised doubts about the intrinsic value of certain works of art.

38. It is often random events or preferences that determine the fate of a piece of art.
39. In his experiment, Cutting found that his subjects liked lesser known works better than canonical works because of more exposure.
40. The author thinks the greatness of an art work still lies in its intrinsic value.
41. It is true of critics as well as ordinary people that the popularity of artistic works is closely associated with publicity.
42. We need to expose ourselves to more art and literature in order to tell the superior from the inferior.
43. A study of the history of the greatest paintings suggests even a great work of art could experience years of neglect.
44. Culture is still used as a mark to distinguish one social class from another.
45. Opinions about and preferences for cultural objects are often inheritable.