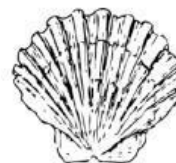


Reading – The Shell Artist



You are going to read an article about a man who makes works of art out of seashells. For questions 1-8, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

THE SHELL ARTIST

At the age of 83 Peter Cooke has become a master of his art.

There are still many things that Peter Cooke would like to try his hand at – paper-making and feather-work are on his list. For the moment though, he will stick to the skill that he has been delighted to perfect over the past ten years: making delicate and unusual objects out of shells.

"Tell me if I am boring you," he says, as he leads me round his apartment showing me his work. There is a fine line between being a bore and being an enthusiast, but Cooke need not worry; he first into the latter category, helped both by his charm and by the beauty of the things he makes.

He points to a pair of shell-covered ornaments above a fireplace. "I shan't be at all bothered if people don't buy them because I have got so used to them, and to me they're adorable. I never meant to sell my work commercially. Some friends came to see me about five years ago and said, "You must have an exhibition – people ought to see these. We'll talk to a man who owns an art gallery". The result was an exhibition in London at which 70 per cent of the objects were sold. His second exhibition opened at the gallery yesterday. Considering the enormous prices the pieces command – around £2,000 for the ornaments – an empty space above the fireplace would seem a small sacrifice for Cooke to make.

There are 86 pieces in the exhibition, with prices starting at £225 for a shell-flower in a crystal vase. Cooke insists that he has nothing to do with the prices and is cheerily open about their level; he claims there is nobody else in the world who produces work like his, and, as the gallery-owner told him, "Well, you're going to stop one day and everybody will want your pieces because there won't be any more."

"I do wish, though," says Cooke, "that I'd taken this up a lot earlier, because then I would have been able to produce really wonderful things – at least the potential would have been there. Although the ideas are still there and I'm doing

the best I can now, I'm more limited physically than I was when I started." Still, the work that he has managed to produce is a long way from the common shell constructions that can be found in seaside shops. "I have a miniature mind," he says and this has resulted in boxed covers in thousands of tiny shells, little shaded pictures made from shells and baskets of astonishingly realistic flowers.

Cooke has created his own method and uses materials as and when he finds them. He uses the cardboard sent back with laundered shirts for his flower bases, a nameless glue bought in bulk from a sail-maker ("If it runs out, I don't know what I will do") and washing up liquid to wash the shells. "I have an idea of what I want to do, and it just does itself." He says of his working method, yet the attention to detail, colour gradations and symmetry he achieves look far from accidental.

Cooke's quest for beautiful and especially tiny, shells has taken him further than his Norfolk shore; to France, Thailand, Mexico, South Africa and the Philippines, to name a few of the beaches where he has lain on his stomach and looked for beauties to bring home. He is insistent that he only collects dead shells and defends himself against people who write him letters accusing him of stripping the world's beaches. "When I am collecting shells, I hear people's great fat feet crunching them up faster than I can collect them; and the ones that are left, the sea breaks up. I would not dream of collecting shells with living creatures in them or diving for them, but once their occupants have left, why should I not collect them?" If one bases this argument on the amount of luggage that can be carried home by one man, the sum beauty of whose work is often greater than in natural parts, it becomes very convincing indeed.



1 What does the reader learn about Peter Cooke in the first paragraph?

- A he has produced hand-made objects in different materials.
- B he was praised for his shell objects many years ago.
- C He hopes to work with other materials in the future.
- D He has written about his love of making shell objects.

2 When looking round his apartment, the writer

- A is attracted by Cooke's personality
- B senses that Cooke wants his products to be admired.
- C realizes he finds Cooke's work boring.
- D feels uncertain about giving Cooke his opinion.

3 The "small sacrifice" in paragraph 2 refers to

- A the loss of Cooke's ornaments.
- B the display of Cooke's ornaments.
- C the cost of keeping Cooke's ornaments
- D the space required to store Cooke's ornaments.

4 When the writer enquires about the cost of his shell objects, Cooke

- A cleverly changes the subject
- B defends the prices charged for his work.
- C says he has no idea why the level is so high.
- D notes that his work will not always be so popular.

5 What does Cooke regret about his work?

- A He is not as famous as he should have been.
- B He makes less money than he should make.
- C He is less imaginative than he used to be.
- D He is not as skillful as he used to be.

6 When talking about the artist's working method, the writer suspects that Cooke

- A accepts that he sometimes makes mistakes.
- B is unaware of the unique quality his work has
- C underrates his creative contribution
- D undervalues the materials that he uses.

7 What does the reader learn about Cooke's shell-collecting activities?

- A Not everyone approves of what he does.
- B Other methods might make his work easier.
- C other tourists get in the way of his collecting.
- D Not all shells are the right size and shape for his work

8 What does "it" in the last sentence of the text refer to?

- A Cooke's luggage
- B Cooke's argument
- C the beauty of Cooke's work
- D the reason for Cooke's trips.

