

# A Guide to Open Digital Image Collections

It has never been easier to find images of artworks online. But finding *good* images to use in your papers and presentations can still be a challenge. To find the best images, you often have to go to the source: the museums that house those artworks. And a growing list of institutions - like those listed in this guide - have decided to adopt **open-access** policies for their image collections.

Many museums have placed their collections online, but often only with low-resolution images, and with restrictions on how you are allowed to use them. If you want to publish an image, for instance, you usually have to get the museum's permission and pay a fee. Open-access institutions, on the other hand, make their high-resolution images available to everyone for free under a license like **Creative Commons Zero (CC0)**, which lets you download and use them for practically any purpose without getting permission first.

Even with open access, there are certain limitations. Open-access policies generally apply only to older artworks that are already in the **public domain**, so relatively recent works that are still protected by **copyright** are excluded. This means that you will not be able to download images of most artworks made after about 1900 and do whatever you want with them. But for images of modern and contemporary art, you can usually still make a good **fair use** argument for using them, at least for educational purposes.

**Disclaimer:** The information in this guide is intended only to provide general information on the proper use of images. It is not intended to provide legal advice on the use of any particular image. Always read the museum's **rights statement** for more detailed information, and if you still have questions, consult a copyright professional.



Mary Cassatt, *The Boating Party* (detail), 1893-1894, National Gallery of Art

# Featured Image Collections

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Adler & Sullivan, Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room (reconstructed), 1893-1894, Art Institute of Chicago

## Art Institute of Chicago

<https://www.artic.edu/collection>

The Art Institute of Chicago is one of the great American museums, best known for its exceptional examples of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Pages can be slow to load, but overall the collection is easy to navigate. Click on **Show Filters** to narrow your search or to specify only public-domain works.

Rights statement: <https://www.artic.edu/image-licensing>

## Barnes Foundation

<https://collection.barnesfoundation.org>

An outstanding collection of late 19th- and early 20th-century paintings, although only the earlier works are in the public domain. Like Dr. Barnes's philosophy of art, the online interface is unique, encouraging you to search by color, line, light, and space. The newly added **Search Collection** feature makes it easier to find specific works.

Rights statement: <https://www.barnesfoundation.org/collection/open-access-and-copyright>

## Cleveland Museum of Art

<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/collection/search>

The Cleveland Museum of Art has a well-balanced collection of all cultures and periods, although it is perhaps best known for its Asian art. The interface is straightforward, with **Advanced Search** and **Open Access** filters to narrow your search results. There is also a select group of downloadable 3-D models that let you "move around" an object (available at **Sketchfab**: <https://sketchfab.com/clevelandart/models>). Images from Cleveland's collection are also available in **Open Artstor**.

Rights statement: <https://www.clevelandart.org/open-access>

## J. Paul Getty Museum

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection>

Images in the Getty's Open Content Program have no restrictions on use. These include works in the Museum's collection, as well as images from the Getty Research Institute. Use the **Getty Search Gateway** to search both: <https://search.getty.edu/gateway/landing>

Rights statement: <https://www.getty.edu/about/whatwedo/opencontent.html>



Greek, *Getty Bronze* (detail), 300-100 BCE, J. Paul Getty Museum



Maqsud Kashani, *Ardabil Carpet* (detail), 1539-1540, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

## Los Angeles County Museum of Art

<https://collections.lacma.org>

LACMA was one of the first museums to adopt an open-access policy. Find free, unrestricted images by selecting the **Show public domain images only** option when searching the collection, or look for **Download Image\*** below an artwork.

Rights statement: <https://www.lacma.org/about/contact-us/terms-use>

## Metropolitan Museum of Art

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection>

The Met is the largest and most comprehensive museum currently offering open-access images, so this is often a good place to start. Check the **Open Access** box to limit your search results. The Met's images are also available in **Open Artstor**.

Rights statement: <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/policies-and-documents/open-access>

## National Gallery of Art

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/collection-search.html>

The National Gallery of Art has one of the country's best collections of paintings, along with sculpture, works on paper, and modern art. The Gallery's old **NGA Images** site is no longer active, so search and download images directly from the online collection.

Rights statement: <https://www.nga.gov/open-access-images.html>

## Rijksmuseum

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/search>

So far, many of the major institutions to adopt open-access policies have been American museums. A notable exception is Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, the world's premier collection of 17th-century Dutch art. In order to download images, you have to create a free account in its online collection, **Rijksstudio**. Filters are available to narrow your search results, but there is no way to limit your searches to public-domain works only.

Rights statement: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/data/policy>



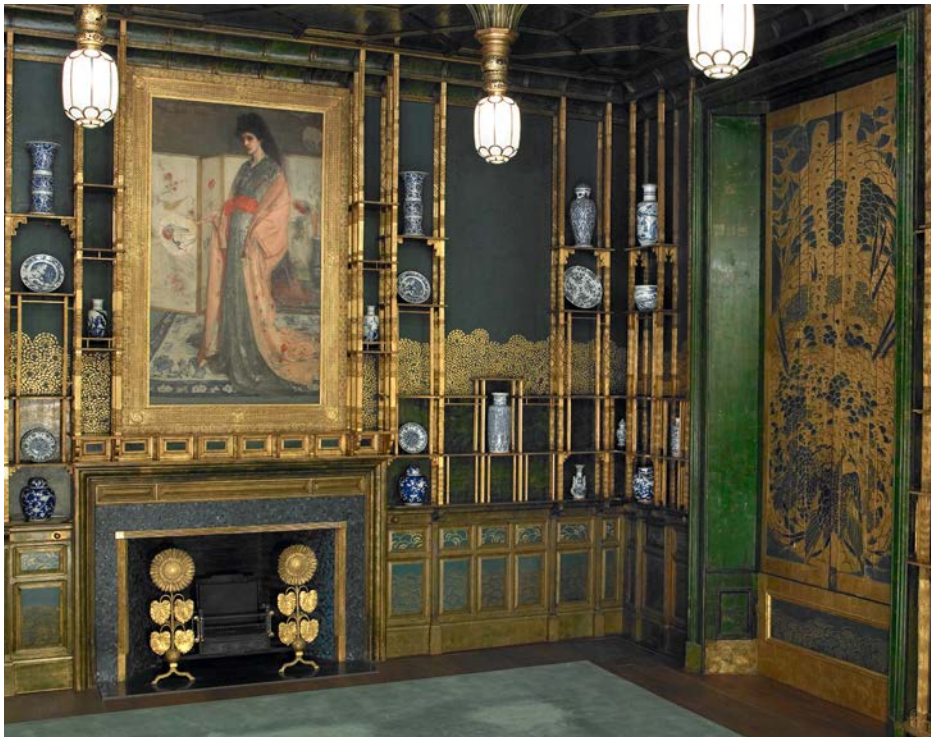
Edo peoples (Court of Benin), *Queen Mother Pendant Mask: Iyoba*, 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art

## Smithsonian Institution

<https://www.si.edu/openaccess>

The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (together known as the National Museum of Asian Art) have provided open-access images for a number of years, and the Smithsonian has since expanded this policy to cover all of its museums. Keep in mind that the Smithsonian's collections are vast and diverse, so a search for artworks may also yield some unexpected results, like ephemera and scientific specimens. Use the **Museum/Unit** filter to limit your search to only the most relevant collections.

Rights statement: <https://www.si.edu/openaccess/faq>



James McNeill Whistler, *The Peacock Room*, 1876-1877, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution



Visigothic, *Eagle Fibulae*, 6th century, Walters Art Museum

## Walters Art Museum

<https://art.thewalters.org>

You can download images directly from the museum's website or find them in **Wikimedia Commons** ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Media\\_contributed\\_by\\_the\\_Walters\\_Art\\_Museum](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Media_contributed_by_the_Walters_Art_Museum)). Neither of these platforms provides a very sophisticated search function, so expect to scroll through a lot of results. Images are available at a sufficient size for a PowerPoint presentation, but they are not large enough for use in print publications.

Rights statement: <https://thewalters.org/about/policies/rights-reproductions/>

# More Open-Access Collections

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Belvedere

<https://sammlung.belvedere.at>

Birmingham Museum of Art (Alabama)

<https://www.artsbma.org/collection/>

Birmingham Museums (England)

<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank>

British Library

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm>

Clark Art Institute

<https://www.clarkart.edu/museum/Collections/Browse-Collections>

Dallas Museum of Art

<https://collections.dma.org>

Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields

<http://collection.imamuseum.org>

Koninklijke Bibliotheek

<https://manuscripts.kb.nl>

Kunstmuseum Basel

<http://sammlungonline.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/eMuseumPlus>

Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/>

Minneapolis Institute of Art

<https://new.artsmia.org/art-artists/explore/>

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz>

Nationalmuseum

<https://www.nationalmuseum.se/en/samlingarna/fria-bilder>

Paris Musées

<https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/en>

Saint Louis Art Museum

<https://www.slam.org/collection>

Statens Museum for Kunst

<https://www.smk.dk/en/article/free-download-of-images/>

Yale Center for British Art

<https://collections.britishart.yale.edu>

Yale University Art Gallery

<https://artgallery.yale.edu/collection/search>



Paul Cézanne, *Card Players* (detail), 1890-1892, Barnes Foundation

# Glossary of Copyright Terms

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## Copyright

When something is copyrighted, there are restrictions on how you can use it. Copyright can apply to an artwork, but it can also apply to a photographic reproduction of that artwork, so you need to be aware of the copyright status of both.

## Creative Commons Zero (CC0)

Standard licenses like those provided by Creative Commons are often used to tell you what you can and cannot do with an image. Some Creative Commons licenses do have certain restrictions - such as giving credit to the creator, or not allowing commercial use - so be sure to pay close attention to the licensing. Creative Commons Zero, or CC0, is the most permissive license. CC0 means that the creator has waived copyright altogether, so you can use the image for any purpose, and you don't need to get permission or pay a fee.

## Fair Use

Fair use is an exception to copyright law that might permit you to use a copyrighted image in certain circumstances, such as for educational purposes. This usually covers the use of images in term papers and classroom presentations, but it may not allow you to publish the copyrighted material to a wider audience, and it probably will not allow you to use it commercially.



Chinese, *Cranes and Serpents* (detail), 475-221 BCE, Cleveland Museum of Art

## Open Access/Open Content

Materials that are designated as open access or open content are generally intended to be used free of charge by anyone, often with no further restrictions on use. Institutions may define these terms somewhat differently, so read the fine print to see what is and is not permitted. Their meanings may overlap with those of other terms, like CC0 and public domain.

## Public Domain

When something is no longer copyrighted, either because it has expired or it has been waived, it passes into the public domain. There are no restrictions on how you can use something in the public domain.



Rembrandt, *The Syndics* (detail), 1662, Rijksmuseum

2nd edition (2021)  
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