

The Public Catalogue Foundation – Your Paintings

<http://www.thepcf.org.uk/>



A registered UK charity, the Public Catalogue Foundation realizes the vision, not of art experts, but of an amateur who longed for systematic catalogs of collections he visited. Since 2003, the PCF has worked collaboratively with the widest range of British public institutions, from major galleries to firehouses, to catalog and photograph the estimated 200,000 oil paintings in public ownership. This national corpus is gradually being published in a series of county-by-county catalogs. Thirty-four volumes have appeared and fifty more are planned. Recognizing

the limitations of print, the PCF has joined forces with the BBC to create *Your Paintings*, a parallel, open-access database <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/>. Over 100,000 works are already online, and Britain's entire national collection of oil paintings will be available by December 2012.

Though separate, the PCF and *Your Paintings* websites are carefully linked and co-branded, with a shared template, color schemes, and bold, pictographic navigation. The PCF site describes the foundation, promotes the benefits of institutional participation, and simplifies rights registration for artists. *Your Paintings* leverages the BBC's entertainment and educational expertise to target a popular audience. Videos, slide shows, and interactive maps enliven the site. Contextual information is being expanded. Artist biographies will be sourced from a third party, and television and radio programming added from the BBC archives. Community participation is encouraged with links to social media, facilities for sharing lesson plans, and a conduit for "art detectives" to provide expert knowledge.

Individual works have basic descriptive data, notes on the holding institution, and contact links for physical access and reproduction rights. Images may be printed or downloaded as small JPEG's. *Your Paintings* can be browsed by location, collection, or artist, but subject and genre searching are limited. The PCF is asking the public to provide critical metadata through social tagging <http://tagger.thepcf.org.uk/>. Nearly 6000 volunteers are adding controlled vocabulary and user-generated terms which are then verified through an algorithm-based process. Much hinges on PCF's success in recruiting dedicated taggers as some 175,000 paintings have yet to be addressed.

While museums around the world offer digital access to their holdings, Britain's effort to make tangible the public collection writ large seems so far to be unique. It will be fascinating to see how art literacy, visitation, preservation funding, and new giving will be affected by *Your Paintings*, and how the concept of a union catalog of artworks is taken up elsewhere. Though not the PCF's primary target, this large and comprehensive corpus of paintings will also attract an academic audience. More than a mere locator tool, the PCF is creating an enormous dataset ripe for innovative digital humanities scholarship.

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