

HOW TO FIND PUBLIC DOMAIN MUSEUM IMAGES

(transcript to the [resource video](#))

by the Alexandria Archive Institute/Open Context

Video and narration by Pinar Durgun

Hello and welcome to our video on how to find public domain museum images.

To learn more about why one should be using public domain images, refer to our fourth blog post in the Digging Digital Museum Collections series and to the resource: 3 Essentials in Museum Collections Research.

In this video, we will focus on finding public domain, copyright free museum images that you can use for your research papers, teaching materials, and social media content.

There are several different Creative Commons licenses. The Creative Commons license "[CC-Zero](#)," explicitly dedicates an otherwise copyrightable work into the public domain.

Many museums have made or strive to make their collections available online with high resolution images. The Getty for example launched their Open Content Program back in 2013 and made most of their images available under public domain.

Let's go to the collection search on the Getty website. If you need more instructions on how to do this, watch our previous video in this series. Once you are in the object page, below the images you can see that this object's images are under no copyright for the United States. Remember that copyright laws are different in every country, so make sure to check the copyright laws where you are.

You can view objects with public domain images on the Getty collection search by selecting the open content option. Again make sure to double check the license before you download the images.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art also made their images available under public domain or CC-Zero in 2017. But don't assume every object or artwork you find in the Met Museum websites will be public domain. The object pages in the Met collection will tell us whether it is under public domain or has copyrights. Objects may have different copyright rules if they are on loan from other collections.

Unlike ancient objects, artworks by contemporary artists, or artworks whose artists we know may have strict copyright rules. If you need to use these images for an article for example, you need to read more on the specific terms or directly contact the museum.

Another good platform to search for public domain images is the Smithsonian's Open Access Media search, which allows for searching across different Smithsonian museums. When we go to an object page, we can see that the license is specified under Restrictions and Rights and also indicated below the image.

Attribution -Non-Commercial-Share Alike licenses are also commonly used for museum images taken by individuals. If you see this license, you will need to cite the photographer's or owner's name and only share it for non-commercial purposes under the same license.

For example, this image of the day on Wikimedia Commons, is under Attribution -Non-Commercial-Share Alike license. Wikimedia Commons is often a good place to find public domain images. However, one needs to be diligent and careful using Wikimedia images. Let me explain why: Here I am searching for a coin issued by Alexander the Great. Let's pick this one. When I go to the "permission information," I see that it says "this image is in the public domain due to its age." Ancient object images can be exempt from licenses because of their age. BUT when using a museum image from Wikimedia commons, it is always a good idea to double check on the museum's website.

The image information on Wikimedia doesn't include the British Museum accession number, so I was not able to find the exact same coin from the 8000 something results in the museum collection. But here is a similar Alexander coin result from the British Museum collection search. You can see that it is more or less the same age, however it says "©The Trustees of the British Museum." To be safe, one would need to cite this copyright information when using this image in an academic publication, for example.

Even when an image is in public domain, it is both ethical and useful to cite the object properly and fully. The citation should include museum and accession information, as well as the stable link, so that others can find the object in their collections search more easily. Read more about how to cite museum images in our resource: [3 ESSENTIALS IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS RESEARCH](#).

One can also search for public domain or Creative Commons licensed images directly in search engines. On Google, if you go to "Advanced image search" settings, under usage rights, you can select to search Creative Commons Licenses or for Commercial Use Licenses separately.

Let's go this lekythos' Wikimedia Commons page. Here we have a museum display image taken by some who visited the Cincinnati Art Museum. At the bottom of the page, we see the licensing information, which is public domain, Creative Commons Zero. If you like this image, you can use it with no problem. The person who uploaded this images was much more diligent with providing the museum information, like the accession number, and even a link the museum's object page. So we can actually go find the museum's image of the same object. Here we can see the museum image has different fair use and copyright rules.

Similarly, if you are using other image repositories, such as the World History Encyclopedia's Media Library, which often uses images that are on Wikimedia Commons, make sure to double check the licensing at the end of the page. They may be public domain or Attribution -Non-Commercial-Share Alike. These are the licenses that will allow for creative use and remix for non-commercial uses like education and research.

We hope that you will find this video helpful. If you need any other instructional videos using digital museum collections or resources, please let us know. Thank you for watching and good luck with your image search!

March, 2021