

Google offers Street View art gallery tours (Update)

1 February 2011, by Sam Reeves



A woman poses in front of "The Cholmondeley Ladies" while looking at the digital version of the image on the new "Google Art Project" website at the Tate Britain in London. Art lovers will be able to stroll through some of the world's most acclaimed galleries at the click of a mouse, after Google launched a website using Street View technology to put the museums online.

Art lovers will be able to stroll through some of the world's most famous galleries at the click of a mouse after Google put the venues online Tuesday using Street View technology.

In a collaboration with 17 leading galleries in nine countries, the US Internet giant has taken equipment from the cars it used to map cities and recorded the galleries so they can be enjoyed by anyone with web access.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York, London's National Gallery and the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid are three of the galleries that art aficionados will be able to explore by logging on to www.googleartproject.com.

Art by Vincent van Gogh, James McNeill Whistler and Sandro Botticelli are among more than 1,000 works that have been photographed and "hung" in the virtual galleries.

Visitors will be able to look around more than 350 gallery rooms containing work by more than 450 artists.

While many big galleries have already put their work online, Google claims its Art Project takes the experience to a new level.

As well as the Street View-style tours, the site offers an application to build up a virtual private art collection, and super high-resolution pictures which allow enthusiasts to look at works in minute detail.

The project represents "a major step forward in how a lot of people are going to interact with these beautiful treasures," said Nelson Mattos, vice president of engineering at Google.

"We hope it will inspire ever more people, wherever they live, to access and explore art," he told journalists at a launch event in the Tate Britain gallery in London, one of the venues involved in the project.

For the website, Google used cameras from their Street View cars and took them inside for the first time, filming with specially designed trolleys in the galleries to create the 360-degree virtual tours.

Each of the 17 galleries photographed one super high-resolution image -- each image contains around seven billion pixels and took between four and eight hours to capture.

This means visitors can see details in pictures that were previously impossible to view with the naked eye, such as the tiny Latin Couplet in "The Merchant Georg Gisze" by Hans Holbein the Younger, in the Gemaeldegalerie, Berlin.

Other works to get the super high-resolution treatment include Van Gogh's "The Starry Night", which is in the Museum of Modern Art, and "In the Conservatory" by Edouard Manet from the Alte

Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

The project organisers played down concerns that putting art works online would slash the number of visitors to the museums, and instead said they expected the site to boost attendance.

"In our experience, people -- once they get a glimpse -- want to see the real thing," said Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate.

He also laughed off a suggestion that putting detailed pictures of the galleries online could provide information for potential art thieves.

"If you're really thinking of stealing a painting, coming to the museum is probably the best way to check the security system," he said.

More information: www.googleartproject.com/

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