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Review. National Portrait Gallery Online

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National Portrait Gallery
St. Martin's Place, London UK WC2H
URL: <http://www.npg.org.uk/>
Gratis
Last visited July 2003
Keywords: Art Museums, Great Britain

For those of us who cannot visit the historic London gallery in person, this website may be the next best thing. Founded in 1859, the gallery today boasts over 310,000 paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings and photographs of important British men and women. The National Portrait Gallery's website serves as a visitor information center, offering versions in French, Spanish, German and Japanese. The site also provides a link to special events, displays and the location of the touring collections around the country. Visitors may also query the Heinz Archives, a major research center in the field of British portraiture.

The highlight of the site, of course, is the images themselves. Although images are not available for all works, a hefty 20,700 of the collection are available for virtual viewing, and there is basic information (sitter's name, artist, date, medium, measurements) on nearly 44,000 additional works. Before planning a trip to the gallery, a visitor may also find out whether or not a particular work in the collection will be on display at the time, avoiding disappointment upon arrival.

Basic searching options are sitter (default), artist, and portrait. A sample search for "Oscar Wilde" as a sitter retrieves a single result indicating him as a sitter in eight portraits (The "sitter" refers to the person depicted in the portrait, whether or not that person actually "sat" for the rendering). Clicking on the name will then retrieve thumbnails of the portraits. The "Search Help" option gives useful tips such as the ability to enter a part of the sitter's name ("wins churc" is all that is needed to retrieve portraits of Sir Winston Churchill). This feature can come in handy when one is uncertain of the exact spelling of a sitter's name. In the "Advanced Search" menu, it is possible to search and retrieve images by professional category, group, timeline and medium type, via drop-down menus. A recently added advanced search option includes subjects and themes, an illustrated timeline and a link, if applicable, to relevant documents from the Heinz Archive. For example, it is possible to retrieve all available images of the Bloomsbury group, or results of a particular theme such as "Death Masks."

Regrettably, the thumbnail images cannot be enlarged. The images are copyrighted and the NPG requires those who are interested in using them for website inclusion to obtain clearance and pay applicable fees. Quality reproductions can also be purchased. All the forms, pricing, availability and terms of condition are easily accessed from "Picture Library" link.

The site is uncluttered, updated frequently and the links are easy to navigate. The images load quickly and are of excellent quality. For maximum accessibility, a large print, text-only version of the site is available. Those interested in British cultural history,

art history, portraiture or simply planning to visit the gallery in person will find this resource extremely valuable.

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