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The Art Institute of Chicago Is the Latest Museum to Offer Open Access to Thousands of Images in Its Archive

The museum now allows viewers to download its 44,313 images or see them in close detail.

Eileen Kinsella (<https://news.artnet.com/about/eileen-kinsella-22>), October 23, 2018



Vincent van Gogh, *The Bedroom* (1889). Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Art Institute of Chicago is now offering unrestricted access to thousands of images—44,313 to be exact—from its digital archive. The release is part of the museum's [website redesign](https://www.artic.edu/articles/713/behind-the-scenes-of-the-website-redesign) (<https://www.artic.edu/articles/713/behind-the-scenes-of-the-website-redesign>), and the images have been made available under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license.

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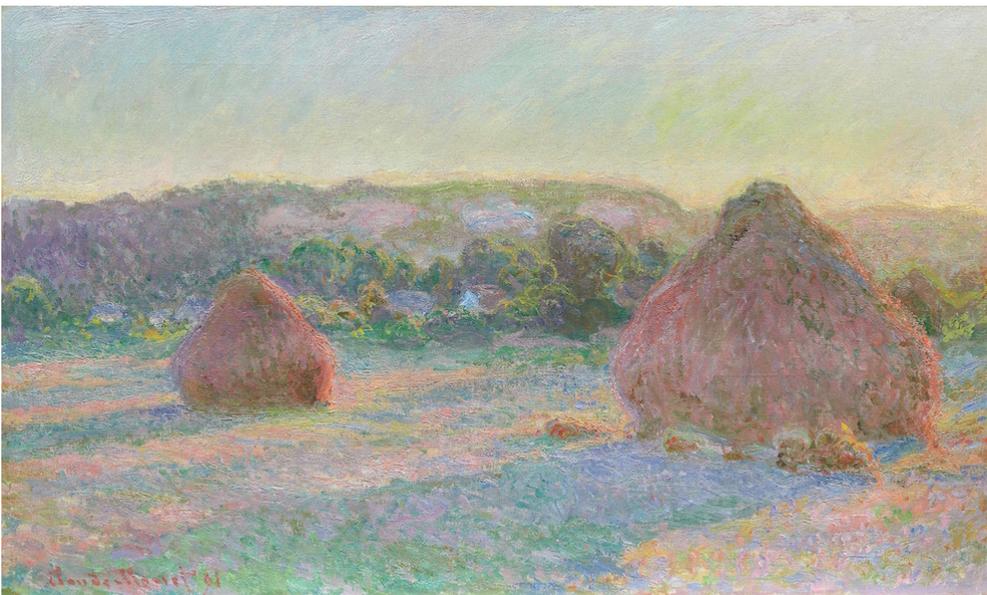
(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news->

[upload/2018/10/aic-seurat-sunday.jpg](#)).

Georges Seurat, *A Sunday on Le Grande Jatte* (1884-86). Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Art Institute has also enhanced the image viewing capabilities on the works, allowing them to be seen in far greater detail than before, for example. “Check out the paint strokes in Van Gogh’s *The Bedroom* (<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/28560/the-bedroom>), the charcoal details on Charles White’s *Harvest Talk* (https://www.artic.edu/artworks/111810/harvest-talk?artist_ids=Charles+White), or the synaesthetic richness of Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Blue and Green Music* (<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/24306/blue-and-green-music>),” wrote executive creative director Michael Neault a blog post.

Neault says if you’re doing research, “you’ll appreciate how our [collections search tool](https://www.artic.edu/collection) (<https://www.artic.edu/collection>) makes it easier to drill down and find exactly what you’re looking for.”



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news->

[upload/2018/10/aic-Stacks-of-Wheat-End-of-Summer-copy.jpg](#)).

Claude Monet, *Stacks of Wheat (End of Summer)* (1890-91). Gift of Arthur M. Wood, Sr. in memory of Pauline Palmer Wood. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Blogger and art historian Bendor Grosvenor, an advocate for open image access who has criticized UK institutions for their image fees, praised the new Art Institute of Chicago initiative. (<https://www.dailyartstory.com/articles/5046/Art-Institute-of-Chicago-Museum-image-fees-ctd>)s blog post. But while institutions such as the Art Institute of Chicago “can afford to do this because they charge for entry,” he says, UK museums have the added financial burden of supporting free entry to visitors.

“But not all open access museums charge for entry,” Grosvenor writes. “The Nationalmuseum in Sweden, which makes thousands of its images open access, has now introduced free entry (<https://www.nationalmuseum.se/en/bes%C3%B6k-museet>). So it is in fact possible to have both free physical entry, and free digital entry.”



(<https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2018/10/aic-cassatt-the-bath.jpg>)

Mary Cassatt, *The Child's Bath* (1893). Robert A. Waller Fund. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art made all of the public domain works in its collection available online for both scholarly and commercial purposes in February 2017. Within just six months, the museum reported dramatic results: the Met's website saw a 64 percent increase in image downloads and a 17 percent spike in traffic to the online collection. Users who downloaded photographs were reportedly spending five times as long on the site.

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