Guide to Research Resources for Portraiture, Biography, and History

This guide for researching portraiture, biography, and history provides a listing of professional resources compiled by the National Portrait Gallery’s Catalog of American Portraits (CAP). CAP staff have worked with the public and numerous institutions on a wide range of research projects involving publications, exhibitions, documentaries and education programs. The public can locate art works using the CAP search on the Portrait Gallery’s website. The archive covers portraiture in painting, sculpture, drawings and decorative arts but generally excludes graphic art prints and photographs, except rare daguerreotypes. We encourage private collectors, scholars, and institutional representatives to register portrait collections and update portrait records in our research archive. To register a portrait, contact NPGResearch@si.edu.

Portrait Gallery staff are not authorized to appraise or authenticate art work for the public, but they can offer an informal opinion about historical portraits. If you desire a monetary evaluation of an art work, please contact a professional art appraiser or auction house representative, several of which are listed below. An art appraiser can research your portrait and possibly identify the sitter or artist, and a professional art conservator can examine fragile works and recommend appropriate cleaning and/or restoration treatment. Using technical processes, a conservator can sometimes discover inscriptions or historical evidence for an art work. If you know in which geographic region the art work was created, you can write to regional institutions, whose staff will be more acquainted with the artists active in that area. Also, you can seek museums that specialize in particular kinds of portraiture, such as naïve/folk art, western or military art.

The following U.S. and international organizations have online collection searches, archives, libraries and inquiry services to assist you with your portrait research. This guide is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of research resources or an endorsement of commercial organizations.

ARCHIVES, LIBRARIES, AND COLLECTIONS ONLINE RESOURCES

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.


Smithsonian Institution Libraries: http://www.sil.si.edu/
Tools for the Researcher: http://www.sil.si.edu/research/

Smithsonian Institution Research and Information System: http://www.siris.si.edu/index.html

Smithsonian main website: http://www.si.edu

Encyclopedia Smithsonian: Online Resources from A to Z, http://www.si.edu/Encyclopedia

Smithsonian Collections Search Center: http://collections.si.edu/search

Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives (SOVA): http://SOVA.si.edu

Smithsonian Archives of American Art: http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections

Smithsonian American Art Museum: http://americanart.si.edu/visit/
National Art Inventories, Research and Scholars Center (Inquiry Service): http://americanart.si.edu/research/programs/inventory/
Researching Your Art, http://americanart.si.edu/research/tools/art/


Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, National Anthropological Archives: http://anthropology.si.edu/naa/index.htm

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture: http://nmaahc.si.edu/

United States


National Gallery of Art, Library and Archives, Washington, D.C.: http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library.html


Print and Photograph Division, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/


Costume Collections

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Costume Institute, NYC: http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/museum-departments/curatorial-departments/the-costume-institute

Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, NYC: http://www.cooperhewitt.org/


First Ladies Collection: http://americanhistory.si.edu/first-ladies/first-ladies-collection
Folk Art Collections


Hispanic Collections

Hispanic Society of America, NYC: http://www.hispanicsociety.org/


National Hispanic Cultural Center, Albuquerque, NM: http://www.nationalhispaniccenter.org

University of Houston Libraries, Hispanic Collections, TX: http://info.lib.uh.edu/about/campus-libraries-collections/special-collections/hispanic-collections

Presidential Collections

Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery: http://npg.si.edu/portraits/collection-highlights/daguerrotype?objectID=dbp-1424166684336-1424166684336-1

White House, Washington, D.C.: http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/inside-white-house/art

White House Historical Association, Washington, D.C: http://www.whitehousehistory.org/

American Presidents, links to historic sites, under the National Park Service program, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C: http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/list_of_sites.html

Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, TN: http://thehermitage.com/

Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, VA: http://www.monticello.org/

John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA: http://www.jfklibrary.org/


James Madison, Montpelier, Orange, VA: https://montpelier.org/

James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library, Fredericksburg, VA: http://jamesmonroemuseum.umw.edu/

Harry Truman, Little White House, Key West, FL: http://www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.com/

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives, Hyde Park, NY: http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/

George Washington, Mount Vernon, VA: http://www.mountvernon.org/about/mvla


National First Ladies’ Library, Canton, OH: http://www.firstladies.org

Military Collections


US Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, MD: http://www.usna.edu/Museum/


Western History Collections

History Colorado Center, Denver: http://www.historycoloradocenter.org/

American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY: http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/

Western Americana Collection, Yale University Beinecke Library, New Haven, CT: http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/curatorial-areas/western-americana

Western Americana Collection, University of Texas, Austin: http://www.cah.utexas.edu/collections/western_americana.php

Thomas Gilcrease Museum/Institute, Tulsa, OK: http://gilcrease.utulsa.edu/

National Portrait Galleries Abroad

  Enquiry services: http://www.npg.org.uk/research/archive/enquiry-services.php

Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland http://www.nationalgalleries.org/portraitgallery


American Collections Abroad

American Museum in Britain, Bath, UK: http://www.americanmuseum.org/

Franco-American Museum of the Château of Blerancourt, France: http://www.museefrancoamericain.fr/


Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy: http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/

Guggenheim Collection, Bilbao, Spain: http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es/

American Academy in Rome, Italy: http://www.aarome.org/


Your Paintings, joint initiative between the BBC, Public Catalogue Foundation, and participating collections and museums in the United Kingdom. This database includes works by American, British, and other foreign artists: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/about

ORGANIZATIONS

Museum and Professional Associations

American Alliance of Museums publishes the Official Museum Directory, which is available online by subscription and at public libraries.

American Art Collaborative, Linked Open Data Initiative: http://americanartcollaborative.org/


International Society of Portrait Artists: http://www.isofpa.com/

New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, NYC: http://newyorkfamilyhistory.org/

Portrait Society of America, Tallahassee, FL: http://www.portraitsociety.org/

Appraisals

American Society of Appraisers, Reston, VA: www.appraisers.org

Appraisers Association of America, NYC: http://www.appraisersassoc.org/index.cfm

International Society of Appraisers, Chicago, IL: http://isa-appraisers.org/
Conservation


Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, Philadelphia, PA: http://www.ccaha.org


Smithsonian’s Museum Conservation Institute, Suitland, MD: http://www.si.edu/mci/english/about_mci/index.html


REFERENCE WEBSITES

American National Biography Online (subscription), http://www.anb.org/main-home.html


Art Google.com, http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project


Biography.com, www.biography.com


E Museum, www.emuseum.net

Getty Research Institute, http://www.getty.edu/research

Grove Dictionary of Art or Oxford Art online (subscription), http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/jsessionid=DB6DA38C08425822B6E9302231FD0E9E

HistoryLink.org, www.historylink.org (Pacific Northwest history and culture)

This selected bibliography provides samples of the study possibilities, bringing up a range of issues in portraiture.


