

Launch of 'Art Detective'

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The Public Catalogue Foundation announces the launch of Art Detective.

Web Address: thepcf.org.uk/artdetective.

Art Detective is a ground-breaking initiative that connects UK public collections in search of information about their oil paintings with specialists and members of the public with relevant knowledge. Whether it is to discover the name of a beautiful 1930s society hostess or the artist behind a Dutch seventeenth-century still life, Art Detective will help collections put names to unidentified sitters, places and events depicted in their paintings and the unknown artists behind works.

Art Detective addresses the serious issue of insufficient – and declining – specialist knowledge within public art collections. The vast majority of the 3,000 or so collections that participate in Your Paintings, the website created by the PCF in partnership with the BBC – many of which are not museums – do not have fine art curators, whilst many have lost experienced curators through funding cuts over the years.

There are approaching 30,000 paintings on the Your Paintings website where the artist is not known and over 15,000 works where the attributions are uncertain. Some 8,000 portraits are missing the identities of the sitters and thousands of other paintings are missing information about the places or events depicted.

Art Detective has been built by the PCF using the support of public funding through the Arts Council's Renaissance Strategic Support fund. It has been developed in collaboration with the University of Glasgow, together with representatives of Manchester Art Gallery, the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, Tate, Yale Center for British Art and a number of smaller institutions, the art trade and academia. An Expert Panel comprising Professor David Ekserdjian (Chairman), Alastair Laing, Professor Nigel Llewellyn and Dr Jill Lloyd oversees the appointment of the specialists who lead Art Detective's special interest group online discussions. The website design and build was carried out by Keepthinking.

The principal outcome of Art Detective will be improved knowledge of the nation's oil painting collection. Art Detective will also actively engage the public in the care and curatorship of public collections, and allow them to witness and participate in the processes of art historical research, connoisseurship and knowledge creation that lie behind the displays and exhibitions in our public museums and galleries.

Reference:

WWW: Launch of 'Art Detective'. In: ArtHist.net, May 22, 2014 (accessed Jun 13, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/7784>>.