

Virtual gallery tours: art in the age of coronavirus

With most of them shuttered, art galleries have found ways to show off their work online

Galleries and museums all over the world have taken the decision to close their doors, said Anna Purna Kambhampaty in Time magazine. But these sudden closures don't necessarily mean we need to spend the coming months starved of art. Arts institutions of all stripes – from the **Tate Galleries** to South Korea's **National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art** – have been coming up with ways to share their collections online, and many of the world's greatest museums have already created platforms that allow browsers to virtually explore their galleries as if they were there in the flesh. Internet users can see collections that “would otherwise require a plane ride to visit”.

Google Arts & Culture is a good place to start, said Shane Reiner-Roth in The Architect's Newspaper. It has partnered with 2,000 global art institutions to open their virtual doors to the public. You can pop into the galleries of the **Musée d'Orsay** in Paris, pausing to take in Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, then head to the **Mauritshuis** (above) in The Hague for a close look at Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. While several museums on



The Mauritshuis, The Hague: pop in for a virtual look around

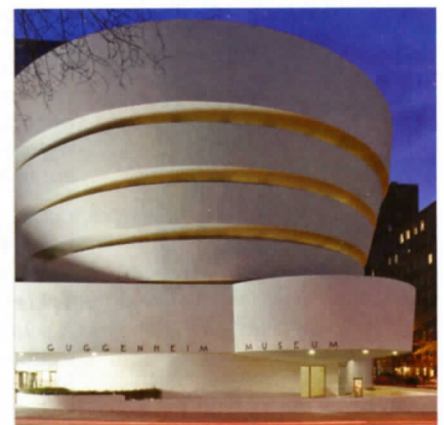
Michelangelo, alongside a stellar collection of ancient artefacts. The **Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza**, in Madrid, was forced to bring its blockbuster exhibition of Rembrandt portraits to an early close, but has since launched an impressive virtual tour of the show. Paris's **Louvre**, meanwhile, boasts less comprehensive but nonetheless fascinating tours of the gallery dedicated to ancient Egypt, the restored Galerie d'Apollon, as well as a panoramic view of the long-disused moat in its basement – a reminder that “the most popular museum in the world” was originally built as a fortress.

Offerings from American museums are no less enticing, said Maria Puente in USA Today. The **National Gallery of Art** in Washington DC boasts a virtual tour focused on Vermeer and Dutch genre painters, as well as a “brief survey of American fashions from 1740 to 1895”. The **Getty museums** in Los Angeles allow you to explore much of their vast collection by theme, with sections devoted to medieval depictions of heaven and hell, and food in the Renaissance. Similarly, anyone “longing for access to New York's museums” won't be disappointed, said Sarah Cascone on Artnet.com. Among the “heavy hitters” with good virtual access are **The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, **MoMA**, **The Frick Collection** and **The Guggenheim Museum**. More intriguing still is the chance to discover some of the US's more esoteric institutions, such as the **National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum** in Oklahoma City.

British museums are also well served, said Maire Rose Connor on Londonist. **The National Gallery's** Google Street View tour takes in some “300 Renaissance masterpieces”, featuring “panoramic views” of its most celebrated galleries. And though not without its faults, the **British Museum** website is a treasure trove for the internet tourist, allowing visitors to

browse exhibits by century, continent and theme”; each exhibit is accompanied by detailed written and audio descriptions. And though it has been closed for renovations since 2018, **The Courtauld Gallery** is hosting a virtual tour that presents its collection in “incredible detail”, allowing you unfettered access to works by Seurat, van Gogh and Modigliani.

There's no need to limit yourself to paintings and sculpture, said Poppy Greenwood in Spectator Life. The **V&A** website, for instance, allows visitors to explore current exhibitions including explorations of “styles in the 18th century British court”; traditional Indian textiles; and a survey of the “detail and symbolism of clothes of the emperor's court in China”. As a bonus, you get “much closer to the clothes and art than you would be allowed to in real life”. Elsewhere, **The British Library** is to make some of its “more hidden treasures” available to view online, said Mark Brown



in The Guardian. Among the highlights will be a number of historic antique globes, including an 18th century example that depicts California as an island and labels much of northwestern North America as “unknown parts”.

The joy of the internet is that it lets you beat the crowds, said A.J. Willingham on CNN. A virtual tour of Florence's **Uffizi** – home to Michelangelo's *David* and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* – allows you to skip the notoriously long queues, while the website of the **National Museum of African American History and Culture** in Washington DC gives “a taste of what the museum has to offer”, from exhibitions on slavery to Motown and beyond. In short, there is something for everyone. Just “plan out your dream art tour across the world” and get searching.



the website do not yet offer a virtual tour via Google Street View, they “provide the next best thing through high-resolution images of their most exemplary artwork”.

For a truly “immersive experience”, said Aimee Dawson in The Art Newspaper, try the video walk-through of the galleries in Saint Petersburg's **State Hermitage Museum** (on YouTube). It's a “five-hour-long cinematic journey”, encompassing 588 works of art, including paintings by Raphael, Cézanne, Goya and