



THE BARNES FOUNDATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

BARNES FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF NEW FRAMEWORK FOR SEARCHING COLLECTION ONLINE

Mirroring the organization of the Barnes collection galleries, the new collection website allows visitors to browse artworks based on visual characteristics

Images of over 1,400 works in public domain now available to download

Philadelphia, PA, November 7, 2017—In celebration of its fifth anniversary in Philadelphia, the Barnes Foundation has launched a new collection website that enables visitors to explore thousands of works in the Barnes’s unparalleled collection based on aesthetics, and download high resolution images of over 1,400 works that are in the public domain.

Led by Shelley Bernstein, Barnes Foundation deputy director for audience engagement & chief experience officer, and funded by a \$155,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the new online tool is the first in the museum field designed to search holdings with a deep focus on visual properties such as light, line, color, and space, in addition to more traditional searches by artist name, media, or historical movement. Based on the same criteria that Dr. Albert C. Barnes applied to displaying his collection in ensembles, the website extends the Foundation’s commitment to promoting visual literacy and discovery for online audiences.

“Dr. Albert C. Barnes used his collection to teach students how to understand and appreciate art without an art historical background. By grouping works together according to their formal elements, rather than historical connections, he emphasized the universal nature of human expression, making them more accessible no matter one’s level of familiarity with the arts,” said Bernstein. “This project is an opportunity to apply this pioneering approach in the context of contemporary digital practice. Our goal was to build a next-generation collection website that is designed for all online users without barriers that inhibit deeper connection and discovery.”

“We are committed to extending our mission of engaging the public with the arts beyond the walls of the Barnes, which is why we are thrilled to expand our online resources as we celebrate five years in the heart of Philadelphia,” said Thom Collins, executive director and president of the Barnes Foundation. “We look forward to sharing our outstanding holdings with new audiences and providing them with tools for unlocking new discoveries.”

Rather than requiring users to be familiar with names of artists or art historical movements, the Barnes’s new collection website, designed by Area 17, takes into account the average person’s primary interest—the image of the work. Online audiences can search the collection by the visual characteristics to cluster and filter images according to aesthetic similarities.

The project was developed using new technology widely used on the internet and in digital projects but rarely in the cultural sector. Machine learning and computer vision were used to

analyze visual information about collection images to understand the visual relationship between works of art. Elasticsearch, a tool that backs search capability on some of the internet's most popular websites, was used to engineer the search of information related to each work in the collection.

This new website offers an entirely new front-end presentation and an innovative approach that provides users a way to engage with the collection online in an accessible and self-directed fashion using the formal elements—light, line, color, and space—as ways to explore.

Vital to the project's development has been the consistent sharing of findings and methodology with colleagues in the museum field. In releasing code and through [blogging](#) about the process, the Barnes sought to foster discussion and information sharing both to identify possible solutions for the Barnes site and to support the work of colleagues in the field. In the near future, as newer technologies form the basis for the online presentation of museum collections, taking these steps helps lead the field toward adopting modern methodologies.

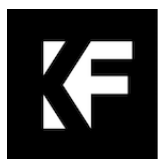
“Technology has changed the way we live, and museumgoers have new expectations for their experience both inside and outside the museum,” said Victoria Rogers, vice president for arts at Knight Foundation. “Institutions like the Barnes continue to play an integral role in communities, yet they will be even more successful if they seize the opportunities of technology and find new avenues for wonder.”

There are over 3,000 works in the Barnes collection and over 2,000 have been published online as part of this project. The Barnes has also embarked on an open access project that makes copyright-free collection images available for download. Images of works within the public domain under both US law and the law of the artist's nationality are now available for download in high resolution, guaranteeing greater access for students, scholars, and general audiences. This includes over 1,400 works of art in the Barnes collection, which are now newly available for the public to download by clicking on the [“details”](#) tab of the painting or object's record.

The Barnes has also added contextual information about each work of art to accompany the images. Over time, additional contextual information will be added—such as provenance—along with visual descriptions of the same works of art for those who are blind or sight impaired. Additionally, for the first time, an object's publication history is included as part of each work's record, serving to spotlight scholarship on the works in the collection. These resources will continue to grow, helping make information and scholarship readily available moving forward.

SPONSOR

The Barnes Foundation's new collection website is made possible by generous support from The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.



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Design: AREA 17 is a digital product agency, founded in 2003, with studios in Paris and New York.

Engineering and Development: Aaron Straup Cope (architecture); Micah Walter (lead engineer) with Rachel Nackman and Eric Chaves; and Girlfriend Labs (Cassie Tarakajian, Sam Tarakajian, Ana Giraldo-Wingler).

Computer Vision: Visually related results of collection objects are powered by ArtPI, the art API created by [Artrendex](#), with special thanks to Ahmed Elgammal. Additional technical development using computer vision to analyze object keywords was provided by Sam Hains.

ABOUT THE BARNES FOUNDATION

The Barnes Foundation is a non-profit cultural and educational institution that shares its unparalleled art collection with the public, organizes special exhibitions, and presents programming that fosters new ways of thinking about human creativity. The Barnes collection is displayed in ensembles that integrate art and objects from across cultures and time periods, overturning traditional hierarchies and revealing universal elements of human expression. Home to one of the world's finest collections of impressionist, post-impressionist, and early modern paintings—including the largest groups of paintings by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne in existence—the Barnes brings together renowned masterworks by such artists as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and Vincent van Gogh, alongside ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and non-Western art as well as metalwork, furniture, and decorative art.

The Barnes Foundation was established by Dr. Albert C. Barnes in 1922 to “promote the advancement of education and the appreciation of the fine arts and horticulture.” Since moving to the heart of Philadelphia in 2012, the Barnes has expanded its commitment to teaching visual literacy in groundbreaking ways, investing in original scholarship relating to its collection and enhancing accessibility throughout every facet of its program.

As the Barnes celebrates five years on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in 2017, the Foundation continues to increase its public programming and initiatives in service to the Philadelphia community, the region, and visitors from across the country and the globe.

The Barnes Foundation is open Wednesday–Monday, and tickets can be purchased on-site, online, or by calling 215.278.7200. Ticket prices and current hours are listed on our website.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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