

Site a rare pearl

Mauritshuis Museum has impressive virtual experience

If you're an art lover, seeing one of your favorite paintings in person is a treat. There's a memorable scene in the movie "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" when the school-skipping teens go to the Art Institute in Chicago. One



KEVIN O'NEILL

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of them is mesmerized by the George Seurat painting "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte." The large scale of the painting stops him in his tracks. As he peers deeper and deeper into the painting, he discovers it's made up of countless, tiny, abstract marks of color, that when seen from a distance, form a beautiful image. That's the kind of experience you can have when viewing great art in person.

There are some wonderful art museums within driving range of us featuring many masterpieces. Unfortunately, some of the best art is an ocean away in European collections. If you have the time, and money, it's worth a trip to view the works of the masters.

If that's not possible, technology brings much of this art to you.

Many art museums have websites that

allow you to view their collections virtually. The Mauritshuis is a small museum in the Hague, Netherlands that has an impressive collection of some of the greatest Dutch and Flemish masters of the 17th century, like Rembrandt, Rubens and Vermeer. It has a great website, mauritshuis.nl/en/, that lets you get up close and personal with some amazing art.

The home page currently features a large self portrait of Rembrandt that locks eyes with you. The painting, on loan from the Frick Collection in New York, is part of an exhibit that will be closing the day this publishes, so it may be replaced by the time you read this. The background of the site is black, with bright pink and white splashes of type highlighting various features. The site scrolls horizontally, revealing more features as you pan to the right.

The museum's prize possession is Johannes Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring." There is a high-resolution image of the painting that lets you zoom in close enough to see the brushstrokes and cracks in the paint. There are articles about various aspects of the painting, as well as a video discussing the artist's techniques. The site has many videos on different topics. This one was in English with Dutch subtitles. Some are in Dutch with English subtitles, and some are in Dutch with no subtitles. The "Girl" painting will be on loan to another museum in February, so the Mauritshuis has a promotion where you can submit your own version of the artwork with a chance to have it displayed where the original usually resides.

There are similar in-depth features on Rembrandt and some of the museum's

more notable pieces.

The Our Collection link at the top of the site takes you to a page with thumbnail images of the entire collection. Clicking on an image brings up a high resolution version and more information on the history and technical aspects of the painting. The site has a virtual tour that lets you wander through the galleries and zoom in on pieces that catch your eye.

While viewing great art in person is ideal, there are some advantages to viewing it virtually. You save time and money if you don't have to travel. Also, many of the most famous works of art have taken on celebrity status, which means there are always crowds surrounding them. This makes it hard to get close to, or spend the amount of time you'd like to with them. Often, you have to make appointments for a time slot to view the most popular pieces, and you have to share the experience with a throng of other fans. When viewing the same art virtually, you can get as close as you want for as long as you want with whoever you like.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.

