



Works in the Public Domain

Generally, artistic works enter the public domain, or fall out of copyright, 70 years after the end of the year of the creator's death (in the United Kingdom).

There are, however, some exceptions:

- Engravings and photographs taken on or after 1st June 1957 that were unpublished as at 1st August 1989 will be protected in any event until 2039 even if that is longer than life of the author plus 70 years. (see Fact Sheet 17)
- Certain artistic works that are exploited by being made by an industrial process and marketed in sufficient numbers may only be protected for a shorter period of 25 years.

As the expression "public domain" implies, the work effectively becomes public property in that the image is no longer protected by copyright law.

Therefore the use in any manner or form of a work which is in the public domain does not require the permission of any party and will not incur a copyright fee. Nor does credit need to be given.

One must remember however that the medium in which any public domain image is reproduced may itself be a copyright work. For example, galleries or picture libraries may have transparencies of public domain works of art which they may loan or hire, but the transparency itself may be a photographic work still protected by copyright. Similarly taking a still from a film which reproduces a public domain image, may infringe the copyright in the film itself.

Thus, in broad terms one may reproduce public domain works with impunity and without let or hindrance, but you must bear in mind the varying copyright periods around the world, whereby works in the public domain in one country are still protected in others. It is advisable to check on any works created during the late 19th and the 20th Century.

The content of this fact sheet is of benefit interest only and is not an exhaustive explanation of copyright protection and remedies for infringement. This fact sheet is not intended to apply to specific circumstances. The contents of this factsheet should not therefore be regarded as constituting legal or other advice and should not be relied upon as such. In relation to any particular problem that you may have, you are advised to seek specific and specialist advice.