

Malraux's imaginary museum is now a virtual museum



In his 1947 book *The Imaginary Museum*, André Malraux analysed the growing importance of photographic reproduction in museums. This technology allowed people to view artworks from all over the world: "Today, [we] can access colour reproductions of most masterpieces... [we] can discover many lesser works... An *Imaginary Museum* has been opened, and it will push the inadequacies of real museums to breaking point... The *Imaginary Museum* is what I call the totality of knowledge available to people outside museums: the reproductions that they can see, the books that they can read in libraries."

Malraux's prediction has come to fruition in ways he could never have imagined: new digital technologies have separated photography from physical supports by promoting the widespread diffusion of high-quality images. With the internet, we have most of the world's masterpieces at our fingertips. The *imaginary museum* is now a *virtual museum*, a 'museum without walls', open all hours and free to anyone.