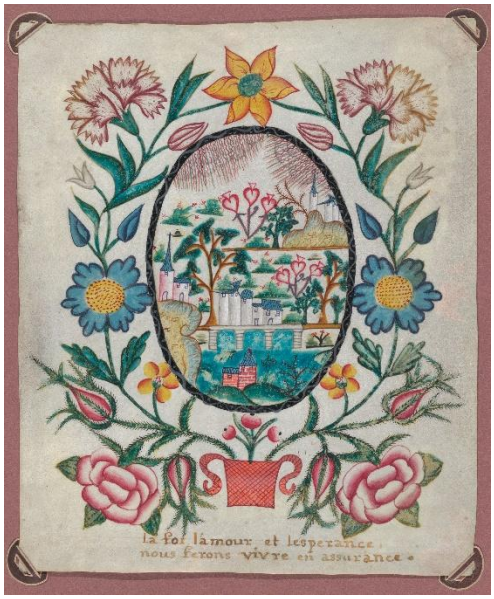

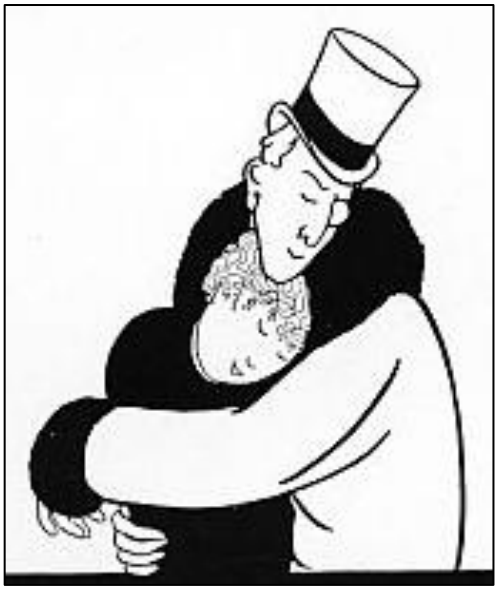

On this Valentine's Day

...my heart belongs to the art museums that have posted their public-domain treasures online and made them super easy to search, download, and utilize however we want—all for free. Forget clip art! Now every website, newsletter, blog post, invitation, and brochure can really shine. Which means that you and your organization can really stand out.

Take note if your budget is tight. Or if your subject matter is tricky: how do you illustrate mental illness, for example? Or concepts such as "change?" A painting or drawing can often capture what photography cannot.

A fruitful search takes time, of course, and you (or your designer) may have to scroll past more than a few "reclining nudes" to find the right images for your purpose, but the hunt is no chore. From the Getty we have Van Gogh's Irises. Look for Winslow Homer at The New York Met and elsewhere. The National Gallery offers Mary Cassatt, whose paintings seem tailormade for a maternal and child health center. All gorgeous. All free. (Usually thanks to philanthropy, by the way.)

As for me, I get the biggest thrill from unexpected finds like the 18th century valentine shown here from The Met. I also relish obscure artists like A.H. Fish, whose black-and-white romantic embrace appears here next to the valentine. (Kudos to Project Gutenberg, the free online library, for letting me search "illustrated" volumes. Images are relatively few at Project Gutenberg, but I did discover these lovers, so you never know.)

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If you're new to open access, I hope you'll dive in. Everyone benefits when all of us raise our standards. After all, nobody *has* to look at our stuff, so let's give people something worth viewing.

Museum employees and volunteers have already posted millions of images for open access, and they add more every year; honestly, I don't know how they do it, but I'm grateful. They believe that public-domain art should be readily available to everyone, and I love them for it.

P.S. To learn more, you might start with the University of San Francisco's introduction to open access and its list of participating museums. Ditto the Common Law Center.

Shown here:

French Valentine, Anonymous, ca. 1775. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Object #1984.1164.69. Gift of Mrs. Richard Riddell, 1984.

"He takes her in his arms," by A.H. Fish, illustration from *Behind the Beyond and Other Contributions to Human Knowledge* by Stephen Leacock, 1913. Courtesy of Project Gutenberg.

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