

The Tolkien Art Index

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The Tolkien Art Index may be found at <https://tai.tolkienists.org/>

The Tolkien Art Index is an online *catalogue raisonné* of all published Arda-related artwork created by J.R.R. Tolkien. It provides a succinct and unambiguous way to refer to each of his paintings, drawings, sketches, and doodles that are (or might be) related to his legendarium, briefly describing each and listing the publications in which each work has been reproduced.

History

When writing about Tolkien's written works, we use abbreviated forms that are commonly understood within the field of Tolkien Studies. *The Lord of the Rings* is often rendered *LotR*, for example, and the seventh volume of *The History of Middle-earth* is often written as *HoMe 7* or as *Treason*. This saves space, of course, but it also gives us a common language that we use to clearly and concisely communicate information.

There has been no similar way to refer to Tolkien's artwork. For decades, of course, this scarcely mattered: for well over thirty years after the original 1937 publication of *The Hobbit*, only twenty-two of Tolkien's Middle-earth drawings and paintings had been reproduced. It was easy to refer simply to *Rivendell*, for example, and to be confident that the writer and the reader pictured the same painting.

This number grew by almost one hundred in the '70s with the publishing by Allen & Unwin and by Ballentine Books of various 'Tolkien' calendars and diaries and with Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien edited by Christopher Tolkien. The number slowly crept upwards in the '80s and early '90s, and then mushroomed over the last twenty-five years thanks to Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull's *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator*, *The Art of The Hobbit*, and *The Art of The Lord of the Rings*, as well as most recently the companion books to the Bodleian exhibition *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth* (the catalogue of the same name and the diminutive *Tolkien Treasures*), and the catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France's recent exhibition, *Voyage en Terre du Milieu*.

As of 2020, there are now well over five hundred items that fit the index's criteria.

Scope

Ultimately, it is hoped that the *Tolkien Art Index* will comprehensively catalogue every extant specimen of anything created by J.R.R. Tolkien that might be construed as art, other than items consisting purely of Tengwar or Cirth writing. (For these, see the excellent *Mellonath Daeron Index of Tengwa Specimina* (DTS) and *Index of Certh Specimina* (DCS), respectively).

The current aim is more modest: to include all of Tolkien's *published* artwork related (however tangentially) to Middle-

earth in particular and Arda in general; or, more broadly, all published artwork not demonstrably *unrelated* to his legendarium.

Order

There is no perfect order in which to list these works. Perhaps the most obvious possibility is date of creation; unfortunately, for most of Tolkien's artwork we would be forced into educated speculation as to the exact date – and often (especially in the case of maps), composition of one work continued for months or even years.

Categorising works (such as 'maps,' 'sketches,' 'friezes,' 'elevations,' and so forth) is also a mechanism fraught with grey areas of forced interpretation and decision-making: is a bird's-eye view of the Falls of Rauros a map? A sketch? And what of the drawings of Farmer Cotton's house? And when the *Index* is expanded to include all of Tolkien's art, would it really make sense to include his sketches of real-world houses in the same categories?

Another possibility would be to organise items by their geographic location, but then the question of scale becomes problematic: if we create a classification for 'Mordor' and place sketches of Mt. Doom and Barad-dûr and Shelob's lair in it, then where should we place a map that includes Mordor, Rohan, and Gondor?

At the end, it has seemed best to follow the time-honoured practice of organisation by *accession number*; that is, more or less, assigning each item a unique number as we first come to it. Improving a bit on such a 'system,' we can imagine a world in which the *TAI* was created in the early twentieth century, with new artwork added to it as it was published. And this, indeed, is what the *Index* has tried to recreate, with the first items listed in the *Index* detailing the artwork published in the first edition of *The Hobbit* from 1937, and the last items cataloguing material published for the first time in *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth* in 2018. (2019's *Voyage en Terre du Milieu* introduced no previously unpublished reproductions related to the legendarium.)

The cardinal rule of any *catalogue raisonné* is that the numbering will never change, so that as new items are added to the *Index* – whether because they are published for the first time or because they were not originally within the scope of the *Index* – they will simply be added to the end. As with so much else, this too is a compromise; however, it does mean that researchers may simply and safely refer to (for example) TAI #67 and it will in perpetuity unambiguously refer to the watercolour 'Nargothrond' that appeared as figure #33 in *Pictures of J.R.R. Tolkien*, as figure #54 in *The Art of The Hobbit*, and as the April feature in the 1979 *Silmarillion Desk Calendar* – and which was first published as the May feature in the Allen & Unwin 1978 *Silmarillion Calendar*.

This rule does mean that overlooked items 'discovered' by the compiler after the *Index* was first published will necessarily

have higher *TAI* numbers than expected, but workarounds for that difficulty tend to be ungainly.

Organisation

Each entry in the Index comprises two distinct sets of information. These are shown on the website with white and with pale blue backgrounds.

On the top and the left of the entry, with a white background, is information about the work of art. The work's title is listed across the top. On the left side is a space for the thumbnail, and also many pieces of metadata:

- A single black and white tag shows the library which holds the item (the Bodleian or Marquette), if relevant, and its reference ID, or shelfmark.
- In orange one will find the type of item, such as frieze, tableau, artefact, map, and so on.
- The materials Tolkien used to create the item (inks, pencils, watercolour, etc.) are shown in a French blue colour.
- In green is a list of items that the work portrays (mountains, birds, the sun, etc.).
- Geographic locations that are represented or portrayed in the piece are listed in blue.
- Any characters that might be in the work, such as Bilbo and Smaug, are listed in purple.

Each entry also features a table on the right, with a pale blue background wherein publication information is listed chronologically for the piece of artwork. For each published reproduction one can find:

- the year of publication;
- the name of publication;
- the earliest associated number in Hammond & Anderson's bibliography (if relevant);
- the page number (for volumes) or month (for calendar);
- the figure # (for volumes, if relevant);
- and notes about the reproduction, such as whether the image has been colourised or rendered in greyscale, and whether it's been rotated, flipped, or cropped.

Images

An index of this sort, of course, is far easier to use if, in addition to a brief description of each item, it also contains a reproduction of the item – even if only a small 'thumbnail' image. *Thumbnails cannot be presented at this time; however, discussions with the Tolkien Estate continue.*¹ In the meantime, the brief descriptions make the Index useable, especially if one also has access to the Hammond and Scull volumes or exhibition catalogues mentioned above for reference.

Use

Using the *Tolkien Art Index* is straightforward. The home landing page at <https://tai.tolkienists.org/> is in itself the entire catalogue. Visitors can easily scroll through the list in their browsers and move instantaneously to the top or the bottom of the page by the usual browser commands. And, of course,

one may take advantage of the browser's *Find* or *Find on Page* command (Control-F on Windows, Command-F on Macintosh, and Find on Page in the sharing menu in iOS).

Visitors can easily look at smaller portions of the *Index*: everything on the site that has the geometric shape of a *stadium* (also called an *obround*) is in fact a link to a subset of the *Index* that includes only those items that include that value. For example, clicking on a French-blue *watercolour* stadium displays a page containing forty items that were made (at least partially) with watercolour paint. Clicking on a green *stars* stadium brings up a page of thirty-six works that include stars (either in the sky or used as ornament). In almost all cases, the items are in order by *TAI* number; that is, mostly, when they were first reproduced.

One interesting feature is that it's possible to click on a *source* stadium, such as *Maker of Middle-earth*. This will display a list of all of Tolkien's Arda-related artwork that was reproduced in that book – in the order in which it appears within that book.

Similarly, clicking on a *Bodleian* or a *Marquette* stadium will bring up a list of Tolkien's published Arda-related artwork held by the library in question, in order by the library's shelfmark system.

Terms of Service

The *Tolkien Art Index* is free in every way, though donations (to help defray the costs of hosting the site, obtaining reference material, and physically travelling to libraries to check shelfmarks) are accepted. The use of *TAI* numbers in print, web, and other media to refer to the artwork with which they are associated is acceptable, legal, and encouraged. More than one Tolkien scholar is currently planning to use *TAI* numbers to refer to artwork in their upcoming books.

Updates

Though *TAI* numbers are guaranteed never to change, the *Index* itself is regularly updated. All changes and additions are outlined on a dedicated *Updates* page. Anyone who is aware of reproductions not currently listed, or who notices an inaccuracy or would like to add a description or other information is encouraged to get in touch at <https://tolkienists.org/contact>

Notes

- 1 Cathleen Blackburn, 'Re: Permissions request: *Tolkien Art Index*,' e-mail messages with Erik Mueller-Harder, Sept. 14, 2017; March 23, 2020; April 22, 2020.