Often when we come to a museum we assume we are simply looking at art, however our perceptual experiences always involve complex interactions between many senses. Even more interesting those sensory experiences are dependent on information from areas of the brain associated with both emotion and memory that can profoundly alter how we consciously perceive what we are looking at.

With that in mind I want to focus on a sense that we may not normally associate with visual art, our sense of smell. This is not a description of what we literally smell when we're in a museum but rather this gives us an opportunity to consider how rich our perceptual experiences actually are.
Look at this artwork for one minute. Now close your eyes, and imagine yourself in this place. What is your perceptual experience? What do you smell? What sounds do you hear? What memories (if any) does this evoke for you?
Consider now how the introduction of actual scents might affect how you view these images. Is the experience altered in any way for you?

Charles Heaney, Mountains, 1938, oil on canvas
What is smell?

Take a deep breath. Stuff is made of smaller pieces, and you just inhaled them through your nose. These pieces are molecules, and they are released from foods, surfaces, plants, trees, dogs, bodies, and that delicious pint of beer in your hands.

Up your nose is a hidden cavity, where special cells called odor receptors grab specific molecules and respond by sending electricity directly into your brain! These odor receptors stick these hair-like processes through the ceiling of the nasal cavity to bind molecules, and send more wire-like projections through holes in the bone below your brain to carry the currents.

By breathing in, you’ve started an informative volley of impulses that will travel to specific areas of your brain to make you respond emotionally, call up related memories, and consciously perceive qualities of the smell…
These areas include the amygdala, which generates emotional changes in your body, and areas around the hippocampus, which are critical for memory. Input from odor receptors is also integrated with your other senses, including taste, touch, and vision, in complex networks of neurons in your frontal lobes...
How does all of this affect your experience when looking at art?

It turns out that our senses all inform and influence each other to create a rich perceptual experience that affects what you remember and your emotional state.

Consider how visual information, and the specific content of your memories and experience might contribute to evoking a more complex perceptual experience.

Consider other landscape images in the museum, do they evoke a memory for you? What sensory experiences do you associate with those memories? What emotions do they bring up for you?