

The Natural World

Welcome to this audio guide for looking at paintings. This guidance is for looking at any painting in our Natural World gallery.

The guide will escort you around the painting, helping you to notice and enjoy some of the points of interest.

So...

Let's take a look at the whole painting for a moment. What's your first impression? Is the painting busy and full, or simple and plain, or somewhere in between?

Are the colours attractive to you?

Do you find the style to be realistic, stylised, impressionistic or something else?

Where do your eyes go – just to one spot, or maybe several spots?

Ok, now let's look a bit differently at the painting. I'm going to invite you to look in turn at what's nearest to you, then the middle-distance and finally the far distance of the painting, so this is a more structured way to view it.

Starting at the front. What's happening *here*? What details can you see? Check around the foreground of the picture to bring all the features to your notice.

Now letting your eyes move to the middle-ground of the painting. What do you find here?

And what's going on in the background of the painting? Perhaps you'd like to zoom into the canvas, if you can.

Using a structured style of looking like this can often reveal new features we haven't seen at first glance. Have *you* noticed anything new by looking at the picture in this way? Has your first impression of the picture changed in any way? Perhaps you think it's more, or less interesting.

Now let's try reading the mood of the painting. So how does this appear to you? Perhaps peaceful, perhaps cheerful, or dull, moody, or full of drama. Or something else?

Choosing three or four words, describe it to yourself now.

Painters use all sorts of ways to create atmosphere. How has the painter created the atmosphere you've just described in your three or four words? Is it to do with the colours? What are those like, and how do they affect your emotions?

What about the use of light? Perhaps there's a great deal of light, maybe lots of shade or darkness, perhaps there's a dappling or a pool of light that creates a certain atmosphere for you.

The atmosphere could be in part to do with the weather shown in the painting – a tranquil, still sort of a scene may feel very different to a wild and windy one. What's going on weather-wise in this picture?

The way a painting is arranged as a composition can also create an atmosphere – it could be there's a big sky, or that the sky is obscured. Maybe there's a striking feature of some sort, or an inviting detail that leads your eye into the painting such as a path or road, or perhaps something else.

When considering atmosphere, another aspect to think about is the style of the paintwork – so lots of rough textured brushstrokes could create energy, or even a sense of urgency, whereas smooth or soft brushstrokes might suggest a calmness.

Do you like the atmosphere in the painting?

Now let's make the experience of looking at this painting a little more vivid. So using your imagination, visualize yourself stepping inside the painting and taking a spot somewhere in this scene. Where are you? Are you visible or hidden? What are you doing? What can you hear?

If you stretch out your arms, what do your fingertips touch? What does the air feel like on your face?

And finally how is your mood? Do you feel safe, do you feel comfortable, do you feel isolated or something else? Does imagining yourself inside the picture change the way you see it?

We've come to the end of this audio guide now, although you're welcome to spend more time looking at the painting on your own.

Next, you might like reflecting on what you most enjoyed about this brief activity so scroll down to **Wrap up your painting** to have a go at this.