

The Sun Peeped o'er yon Southland Hills by Joseph

Farquharson: date unknown

Welcome to this audio guide. We'll be spending a few minutes with this painting getting to know it a little better.

It's title, 'The Sun Peeped O'er Yon Southland Hills', is unusual in its poetic style. The painter liked to title his works with lines from poems, and he was something of an expert at snow, sheep, sunrise and sunset effects and the general atmospheric depiction of winter.

This is a classic example of his work. A great expansive landscape covered in deep snow opens out before us. What do you think at first glance? Do you find it rather desolate? Or, perhaps it makes you feel calm and peaceful?

There's certainly lots of snow and it might look as if there's not much to see, but in fact there's plenty to discover.

Those three sheep at the front might catch your attention - a small group, caught in the moment. One seems to be looking for grass underneath the snow. One looks away from us and one looks right out at us, holding our gaze. What affect does this have? Then if you take your eye to the right, there's two more sheep and again, one of them looks out at us. It's as if, by creating these little, intimate moments, the painter is leading us into the painting, inviting us to look back at the animals, and then onwards into the landscape of these snowy hills. Does it work like that for you?

What else draws our eyes in this picture? There's a large splash of shadowy-coloured trees in the foreground, and that's quite a dominant feature against all the snow.

Notice how the dark trees lead off up that sunken ditch, again inviting us to look further into the distance. With all that darkness in one place, the canvas could look a bit bottom heavy, but notice how the artist has added in dark faces for the sheep. Painters are often keen to create balance in their use of colour, light and shade in their work. Do you think the patches of dark colour are balanced well across this

picture? Half closing your eyes will help you see the tones of the painting more easily and that'll help you judge them better.

You might notice how deeply those trees are sunk into the cleft in the snow. Is that a river bed? A road? How deep is it? It's anyone's guess how tall those trees are. Now let your eye wander backwards up the canvas, following this deep cleft as it snakes into the distance, travelling first one way and then another, becoming less defined as it becomes more remote from us. Where does it end? Or, where do you lose sight of it?

The painter has used the trees to show us how sharply the perspective travels away from us. The trees grow rapidly smaller and smaller, lighter and lighter, until they are just dabs of paint. How would you describe the scale of this landscape? How does that scale make you feel? Bearing in mind the scale of the landscape, look at the crinkly little clefts in the snow high up on the hills. Could these be, in reality, quite deep if you were close up to them?

The other big thing we can't miss in this painting is that radiant sun. It splashes colour onto this wintry scene and gives it a real touch of warmth. Do you think it's sunrise or sunset? What makes you think that?

Talking of colour, even though this is a snow scene, and appears to be a bit colourless at first glance, really there are lots of subtle colours. Take a look at the shadows. Far from being mostly grey, here the painter has used lots of pastel shades of purples and pinks as well as blues. And that large hill in the background – although we read this as whitish snow, how much actual snowy white is there on the hillside, or in fact anywhere on the canvas? Zooming in, if you can, on areas of the snow will help you see the colours more clearly.

Far back to the right, there's a dash of sun catching the hilltop – again, we know this hilltop is covered in white snow, but the painter has used all those bright colours to show us the touch of the sun's rays, making that peak look almost like it's made of ice cream. Farquharson uses colour to invoke in this painting, along with many of his others, a uniquely warm and pleasant quality, despite the wintry theme. He aims to

show a welcoming face of Scottish winter, free of grimness or bleakness. Do you find this scene as crisp and enticing as Farquharson obviously does?

This painting is so realistic that we can almost feel ourselves standing in the snow. Farquharson aimed to be as accurate as possible, so much so that he painted out of doors, straight from nature. Given that he was working in Scotland, he sensibly constructed a special painting hut on wheels, complete with stove and landscape window through which he could view the scenery. He even had a flock of imitation sheep made, so that these could be placed wherever he wanted them, and stay obligingly still. He painted so many wintry scenes of sheep and cattle that he was nicknamed 'Frozen Mutton Farquharson'.

So now, take a moment to imagine *you're* in the painting. Feel the air on your face. What's that like? Are the sun's rays touching you? Is your breath clouding in front of you? Are your fingers cold?

What sounds can you hear? Perhaps the sheep make a sound, moving on the snow, breathing, chomping the frozen grass? Is there any birdsong, wind in the trees, your own feet crunching on the snow, or just silence?

Taking one last look at this scene now as you start to walk away.

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.