

Images Re-vues, no. 20: Picturing Sensory Experiences

Deadline: Jun 30, 2021

Battisti Marta

Picturing Sensory Experiences

This special issue of the journal *Images Re-vues* explores various approaches to picturing sensory experiences. The aim is to interrogate both the visual representations of sensory perceptions and the sensory experiences shaped by the creation and reception of such images. The proposed contributions will build on the vibrant interdisciplinary research carried out in sensory studies in recent decades.

The history of the senses and the history of visual cultures both emerged in the 1980s, with the latter examining both the history of sight and works meant to be apprehended visually. Crossing these approaches, several works – building on the seminal research from the medievalist Carl Nordenfalk (1976) – have been devoted to the iconography of the five senses, thus including images among the materials of histories of sensory cultures. These pioneering studies, which include the catalogue of the exhibition *Immagini del sentire: i cinque sensi nell'arte* (Ferino-Pagden, 1996), have identified the allegories and symbols associated with the senses in visual cultures. For example, representations of the – most often Aristotelian – sensorium can be seen in *Floris and Cort* (The Five Senses, 1561), Brueghel the Elder and Rubens (*Allegories of the Five Senses*, 1617), and vast Renaissance collections of emblems. In these and other images, it is frequent to find sight pictured by a mirror, hearing represented in the form of a deer or a musical instrument, whereas flowers were a known symbol of smell, in the same way that monkeys and food symbolised taste. Touch could be alluded to by the depiction of contact with fabric, for example, and its finesse was characteristically suggested by the figure of the spider. Previous studies that have explored these issues have also highlighted the functions attributed to each sense and provided descriptions relating to the functioning of sensory organs.

Drawing on these works as well as more recent developments in the field inspired by the fruitful dialogue between sensory history and the history of emotions (Bodicce and Smith, 2020), this special issue proposes to study practices of picturing the senses as a window into the sensory experiences of the past. Rather than exploring the symbols representing the senses, we wish to consider how visual depictions of sensory perception intersect with the sensory experiences that come into play during the creation and reception of artistic and scientific imagery. Analysing how sensory perception, an invisible practice experienced in the present, could manifest in visual depictions will lead us to pay attention to bodily gestures and technological devices (such as the acoustic horn or the eyeglass) connected with sensory experience and its depiction. This perspective could also be enriched by considerations of sensory deprivation stemming from disability studies.

We will also consider the interplay between practices of creation – the senses of the maker – and the sensory experience depicted in the image, attempting to capture the resonances from one to the other. Likewise, the reception (and reactions of disgust, laughter, pleasure) by the viewer of the image will also be examined to evaluate the mobilisation, at the imaginative level, of the viewer's senses. Considering the visual representations of the senses as sensory experiences of the world will lead us to discuss the implicit intersensory nature of visual representations of the senses, as we will consider both the production and consumption of images. In a word: our collective inquiry will question the esthetic dimension (< aesthesis, sensation) of picturing sensory experiences (Boutaud, 2012).

A global approach to the visual depictions of sensory perception will provide a fresh understanding of practices and knowledge related to sensory experience and the sensory models that have governed human relationships with the surrounding world. The consideration of different visual artistic media (e.g., paintings, engravings, drawings, sculptures) and of a wide variety of cultural fields (e.g., arts, natural sciences, medicine, gastronomy, music, religion) will help us interrogate the functions of these representations and their contribution to an aestheticisation, objectivation, or reflection about the nature of sensory experience. The absence of chronological and geographical boundaries will allow us to explore the diversity of answers to these questions and perhaps to develop a comparative approach interrogating multiple ways of picturing the senses.

Avenues of research that can be explored include but are not limited to:

- The artistic, religious, economic, philosophical, and political contexts informing the representations of sensory perceptions, as well as issues connected with the social, gendered, and racialised characterisation of the subjects of these representations.
- The intersection between hierarchies of the senses and the arts. Sample questions include whether the lower senses were natural subjects for artistic genres considered inferior, such as caricature? Alternately, did such representations require an allegorical detour?
- Which visual strategies could be employed to depict the intensity or deprivation of sensory perceptions?
- The visual representations of sensory imaginaries beyond the five senses of the sensorium defined by Aristotle. Pre-Hispanic (Cruz Riviera, 2019) and medieval Islamic art (Le Maguer, 2013) invite other examples and analyses of sensory experiences.
- The commonplace sensory imagination in a given culture and period, such as, for example, representations of anatomical dissections and banquets in the Renaissance, or the end-of-century representations of young girls dreamily smelling a flower.
- Visual depictions of sensory experiences offered by different conventional systems escaping the usual representational codes shaping the visual arts, like sensory maps and visualisations of brain activity.

Proposals for articles (750 words maximum) in French, English, or Italian describing the research questions and the corpus of sources should be sent to Marta Battisti (marta.battisti@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr), Viktoria von Hoffmann (v.vonhoffmann@uliege.be) and Érika Wicky (erika.wicky@uni-

v-lyon2.fr) by June 30th, 2021. Articles (30,000 – 60,000 characters) will be expected by February 1st, 2022. Per journal policies, each article will be subject to a double-blind peer review by the editorial committee and the scientific committee of Images Re-vues.

For the Italian and French translation of the call for papers, see the website: <https://journals.openedition.org/imagesrevues/9406>

Reference:

CFP: Images Re-vues, no. 20: Picturing Sensory Experiences. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 23, 2021 (accessed Apr 7, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/33938>>.