# Aspects of Sensory Experience in Visual Culture (Vilnius, 13-14 May 27)

Vilnius, May 13–14, 2027
Deadline: Oct 14, 2026

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“And an exceedingly pleasant fragrance emanated from the painting…” Aspects of Sensory Experience in Visual Culture.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in historical and art research seeking, on the basis of written sources, to reconstruct the sensory dimension of the past. The sensory dimension of visual culture is often encountered directly: when its object has physically survived, it discloses itself to sight and to the contexts preserved in visual memory. In art history and criticism, the image of a cultural object apprehended through sight is frequently correlated with its earlier, ‘historical’ visual experience as conveyed by historical sources. The present gaze is thus compared with past gazes ‘sustained’ in texts and thereby endowed with meaning. However, visual culture is not solely visual: it is also experienced through other senses, including touch, taste, smell, and hearing.

Within human experience, the senses not only manifest themselves but also interact: they evoke, indicate, associate with, stimulate, substitute for, or complement one another. Such processes are equally operative in the creation, expression, and reception of visual culture. Smell, sound, touch, spatial perception, and emotional atmosphere have shaped, and continue to shape, the viewer’s relationship with visual production, whether in the form of paintings, sculptures, objects of applied art, installations combining multiple media, or architecture closely bound to bodily presence and movement in space.

The domains and meanings of the senses, their modes of dissemination and experience, as well as their designations and interpretative contexts, have continually shifted throughout cultural history, yet they remain recognizable and open to investigation within the broader framework of cultural phenomena. For instance, a pleasant fragrance was experienced and described in the presence of miraculous images of the Virgin Mary and of saints’ relics, being equated with evidence of the supernatural agency of God. The iconography of Baroque still life enables the reconstruction of a wide range of olfactory registers, from the odors of fish and other seafood to the nose-tingling dust of old books, from the mustiness of birds’ feathers to the freshness of newly picked flowers. In this way, works of art become iconographic sources for the history of smell and conduits for the history of the senses.

At the same time, contemporary curators of art exhibitions increasingly collaborate with scent designers, inviting audiences not only to see but also, in the immediacy of the ‘here and now’, to

smell aromas that accentuate the works' fields of meaning, stimulate their perception on an emotional level, or shape the overall atmosphere of the exhibition.

The conference invites scholars from a range of disciplines to analyze the expression and interaction of the senses in visual culture, to investigate manifestations of atmosphere, its meanings and media, the established and newly emerging correspondences between iconographic and olfactory dimensions in culture, the interactions between the body and its sensory environment, color and scent, and the modes and forms of their articulation.

The conference also aims to address methodological approaches that enable the analysis of the immaterial and ephemeral aspects of visual culture.

Proposed themes for papers
• Sensory experience in the reception of the visual work;
• The atmospheric quality of the experience of the artwork;
• Art as a source for the history of sensory experience;
• Symbolic expression of sensory in visual culture;
• Bodily memory and the senses in the perception of visual creation;
• Sensory strategies in museum displays and contemporary art exhibitions;
• Scent curation;
• The role of smell and other senses in architecture and the experience of space;
• Methodological challenges in researching the immaterial aspects of visual culture.

Conference languages: Lithuanian and English. Duration of presentations: 20 minutes.

Proposals for participation in the conference, including paper titles, abstracts (approx. 250 words), and a short biographical note (up to 120 words), should be submitted by 14 October 2026 to the following email addresses: tojana.raciunaite@vda.lt and ramune.savickaite@vda.lt.

On the basis of the conference papers, a peer-reviewed issue of the scholarly journal Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis is planned.

Conference organizers:
Tojana Račiūnaitė (The Institute of Art Research of the Vilnius Academy of Arts)
Ramunė Savickaitė (The Institute of Art Research of the Vilnius Academy of Arts)

Scientific and Organizing Committee of the Conference:
Dalia Klajumienė (The Institute of Art Research of the Vilnius Academy of Arts)
Jolita Liškevičienė (The Institute of Art Research of the Vilnius Academy of Arts)
Anna Sylwia Czyż (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw)
Ruth Sargent Noyes (Estonian Academy of Arts)
Laura Petrauskaitė (The Church Heritage Museum in Vilnius)
Joana Vitkutė (Lithuanian National Museum of Art, The Institute of Art Research of the Vilnius Academy of Arts)

Reference:
CFP: Aspects of Sensory Experience in Visual Culture (Vilnius, 13-14 May 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 15, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54230>.