

*The Performative Role of Scent in Cultural
Constructions of Gender.*

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Outline

This output is a body of site-specific practice-based research, comprising 9 artworks, exhibited internationally as part of group and solo shows:

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence*, 2014 [solo show]
2. *Kustom*, 2016 [temporary public artwork]
3. *Monument*, 2015 [group show]
4. *I Will Be Your Lighthouse*, 2016 [group show]
5. *Libérez le Glamour*, 2017 [temporary public artwork]
6. *Bring Back the Hill*, 2017 [site-specific performance]
7. *L'Elephant*, 2017 [performance]
8. *L'Outil*, 2018 [group show/intervention]
9. *0*, 2019 [group show]



Eva Geckler performing as part of the work *I Will be Your Lighthouse*, 2016.

Project Details

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence*, 2014

This research was the result of a year-long residency at the **Monell Center** in Philadelphia, where I worked collaboratively with olfactory scientists **Pamela Dalton** and **George Preti**.

The exhibition was presented jointly by the **University City Science Center** and the **Monell Chemical Senses Center at Esther Klein Gallery**.

The research was supported by a Canada Council, Long Term Artist Grant, 2012-2014.

CA\$80,000 (£46,254)

2. *Kustom*, 2016

Supported by Glasgow International, 2016

Collaboration with car club, Kustom Kulture.

The research was supported by a Canada Council, Long Term Artist Grant, 2012-2014.

3. *Monument*, 2015

Funding for the exhibition: Stad Poperinge Achter

Her Font

The Olfactory Cultuurdienst

Gone West - Reflections of the Great War, Flanders State of the Art, West-Vlaadeeren de Gedreven Province

The research was supported by a Canada Council, Long Term Artist Grant, 2012-2014.

4. *I Will be Your Lighthouse*, 2016

Commissioned and Funded by

- Kunstverein Wolfsburg
- Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur

In collaboration with Curator: Jennifer Borknwho commissioned the work as part of the exhibition.

Artist fee: £400

Production: £500

Project Details

5. *Libérez le Glamour*, 2015

Commissioned by the Merchant City Festival, Glasgow, 27 July 2015

Artist Fee: £200

6. *Bring Back the Hill*, 2017

Commissioned by the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh (who are funded by Creative Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and Performance Portfolio).

Artist Fee and Production Budget: £3000

7. *L'Eléphant*, 2017

Commissioned by Museum Angewandete Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany, 2016, for the Frankfurt Bookfair, 20-21st Oct.

Funders include THE ARTS+, Albrecht Perfumierie

Artist Fee and Production Budget: £2000

8. *L'Outil*, 2018

Supported by Glasgow International, Bill's Tool Store, Fabric Bazaar, Garnethill Stores, Tam Shepherd's Trick Shop and Trongate News.

Funded by Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art and Canada House

Artist Fee: £400

Canada House: £150

9. *0*, 2019

Commissioned and Funded by Athena SWAN and LifeSpace Gallery, University of Dundee

Part of a three-person show at LifeSpace: Science Art Research Gallery and in collaboration with Athena SWAN, University of Dundee. Other exhibiting artists: Kira O'Reilly, Ker Wallwork. The exhibition also included objects from the museum collections at the University of Dundee.

Artist Fee and Production Budget: £850

TOTAL FUNDING: £53,394

Research Question

Research Question:

1. What can scent-based artworks reveal and challenge about cultural constructions of gender?
2. In what ways can scent intervene, in both humorous and affective ways, in cultural assumptions of gender?

Research Output

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence*, 2014

This scent-based solo show consisted of an installation across two gallery spaces and a temporary public art work.

The exhibition is jointly presented by the University City Science Center and the Monell Chemical Senses Center and was the result of a year-long residency at the Monell Center where I worked with an olfactory scientists Pamela Dalton and George Preti.

The gallery installation consisted of two rooms. The first room was filled with large tropical plants, creating a kind of jungle-lobby space, and the scent of different men's colognes and deodorants dispersed on timers. Announced over the gallery/lobby sound system was ad copy for men's colognes and deodorants re-edited and recorded into a sound work.



First Room of installation *A Big Stick of Confidence*, 2014.

Esther Klein Gallery. Scent, sound, plants..

Research Output

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence, 2014 (cont.)*

The second room contained just a single spotlighted stick of approximately 2mm on a wall. The room was filled with the strong 'natural' scent of men, formulated to resemble the smell of sweat in a boxing gym. The public space of the lobby was effectively with the scent as masking agent while the more private space of the enclosed room was filled with the unmasked pungent odors of the male body.



Second Room of installation *A Big Stick of Confidence*, 2014.
Esther Klein Gallery. Empty room with 2mm stick, spotlight, scent

Research Output

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence, 2014* (cont.)

Offsetting the masculinity of the rest of the exhibition, the invitation card acted as another player in the exhibition's repertoire of gendered codes and signs. The shiny red lipstick, at first a profoundly feminine image, takes on phallic connotations due to its dynamic shape, pointed edge and resonance with the (small, wizened looking) stick in the gallery.

The friction created between the glamorous invite image and the stark but pungent exhibition played on the work 'stick.' The lipstick and stick – both phallic symbols - created visual puns. One is associated with a phallic femininity (red lipstick, with connotations of power dressing) and the other is so small and shriveled as to resemble something dead and impotent.



Invitation card image for exhibition *A Big Stick of Confidence, 2014*

Esther Klein Gallery, Philadelphia

Research Output

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence, 2014 (cont.)*

The exhibition also included a transitory public art piece, on the opening evening, which was a street intervention that involved a 1972 Chevrolet (borrowed from a local classic car club) driving up and down the street just outside the gallery entrance and Market Street, which is one of the longest streets in Philadelphia. The car, a novel calling card for the exhibition, emitted the scent of 2 gallons of Brut cologne to engage the public and invite them into the space to consider the potency of scent, in this case, the (natural and cultural) scent of masculinity. The car, the deep forest green of Brut cologne packaging, used the visual iconography of men's cologne to connect with the palette of the exhibition.



Street Intervention (Public Art piece) on the opening night. (1972 green Chevrolet classic car, 2 gallons of Brut cologne.) Part of the solo exhibition *Big Stick of Confidence, 2014*. Esther Klein Gallery Philadelphia

Research Output



Research image for show: Brut advert from 1970s with boxer Henry Cooper and motorcycle racer Barry Sheene.

Research Output

2. *Kustom*, 2016

This was a scent intervention on the streets of Glasgow and a limited edition fragrance which acts as documentation of the intervention. I designed three fragrances, one for each individual car and owner, and dispersed via a mechanism I designed and made to exude from the back of the car near the exhaust pipe. A limited edition of the fragrances that acted as documentation of the intervention (as opposed to photographs of the event live) was available at the GI Hub as part of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art in 2016. Cards with a picture of the car and owner were dispersed in various venues throughout the city (mostly arts and music venues, as well as local cafes) as a 'clue' or 'trace' of the work, with a scent description in the back.



Image Credit: James Dixon . Car and owner: Bill Cochrane

Front of one of the Postcards that sat alongside the intervention in venues across Glasgow

Research Output

2. *Kustom*, 2016 (cont.)

For this project, I collaborated with *Kustom Kulture*, a hot rod and custom car club in Glasgow and surrounding area.

Hot Rodding is an international, male dominated pastime, where ingenuity and creativity are celebrated and where enthusiasts use whatever skills and means they have to realise their uniquely crafted dream car. In the past, the aim was to race, whereas now people cruise with the aim of turning heads with their creations. Years are spent sourcing parts to create a mutt of a car that is loved by other Rodders who appreciate these labours of love e.g. the motor of a 1903 Ford combined with the body of a Chevrolet cut to half its size decorated with flames, completed with antique, Harley Davidson motorcycle tires with gleaming silver spokes. Anything one can dream up can be materialised. Unlike the prestige of a Rolls Royce, or Jaguar, the appeal of hot rods has little to do with fetishized brand value but has everything to do with the imagination and craftsmanship of its owner.

Kustom

**An addictive base note of leather interiors
wrapped in a warm creamy breeze of sun kissed gorse.**

Now available through Glasgow International Festival
of Visual Art, The Hub, South Block, 64 Osbourne Street

www.claraursitti.com

Back of the postcard image



Details of the of Bill Cochrane's hotrod

Research Output



Hand-blended fragrance available at the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art Hub and Good Press that acted as documentation of the intervention (as opposed to photographs of the event live). Three different fragrances were designed for each car that participated. Each bottle and packaging was unique, hand painted by Ross Hardie, a well known pinstriper in Kustom Kulture, Scotland. 'Pinstriping' dates back to the 1950s, and is a highly skilled technique used on hotrods and customised cars with its own aesthetic codes and rules. It is often painted freehand, to enhance the curves of the cars, or hide any blemishes. This bottle was painted in the colours of Bill Cochrane's hotrod. Limited edition of 13.

Research Output

2. *Kustom*, 2016 (cont.)

The effects the time, patience and skill required to apply twenty layers of paint on the body to obtain a unique glitter affect in sunlight, or the complete opposite, to make it appear old and rusted are prized, as is the humour of many of these creations. After years of labour, what was once an 'everyman's car' is worth something and transformed into a highly desirable object to be paraded for the sake of parading.

Fragrances, like cars, are marketed lifestyle commodities that position the owner in particular ways. In the case of cars and men's fragrances, the marketed identity is one of power and potency. The work juxtaposed these two elements, cars and fragrance, and played with their contrasting visibility and invisibility.



Image Credit, car and owner: Fraser Walker

Front of one of the Postcard designs that sat alongside the intervention in venues across Glasgow

Research Output



Hand-blended fragrance available at the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art Hub and Good Press that acted as documentation of the intervention (as opposed to photographs of the event live). See previous images for more information. This bottle was painted in the colours of Fraser Walker's hotrod. Limited edition of 13, with hand painted pinstriping by Ross Hardie.

Research Output

2. *Kustom*, 2016 (cont.)

The idea of the *Kustom* fragrance was also re-worked for a limited edition publication zine (150 copies), published by the Institute for Art and Olfaction, Los Angeles, 2016 and featuring the work of 15 olfactory artists, including me. Amongst the others were Peter de Cupere, Ben Chase, Cat Jones and Christine Wang.



Image Credit: James Dixon

Research Output

3. *Monument*, 2015

An anti-monumental monument, this work was part of a survey exhibition of international artists using scent, curated by Peter De Cupere, for an exhibition titled *The Smell of War*, Castle De Lovie, Poperinge, Belgium, as part of a festival commemorating the centenary of WW1. May 1 - August 30, 2015.

The curatorial aim of the exhibition was to 'demonstrate that scent can really be context and /or concept of the work. Scents evoke memories and so also emotions and associations, but let the beholder also re-think and reflect about the context of the work' (Peter De Cupere, curator). In this context we were asked to respond to the centenary of the first gas attacks in WW1, 1915.



Image credit: the artist

Monument, 2015, part of the exhibition *The Smell of War*, Castle de loive, Poperinge, Belgium

Research Output

3. *Monument, 2015 (cont.)*

The work was researched and developed in relation to the architecture of the Castle De Lovie, the history of the area and the theme of the exhibition.

My contribution looked at creating an anti-monumental monument using scent. For this work, I created a formula recreating the scent of death/rotting corpses and dispersed it in an empty room of the castle, giving it the title *Monument*. The work was on a timer and the scent dispersed at regular intervals every half hour, in the space.

Monumental sculpture is typically large and permanent, and the history of the genre is dominated by male artists, more often than not commemorating men or male pursuits. As Jim Drobnick states, writing about *Monument*:

'Conventional war monuments typically aim to

uphold the deaths of soldiers as heroic and patriotic.' Jim Drobnick, 'Smell, Terrorism and Performance,' *Journal of Performance Research*, 24/4-5, 2018, pp.355-361

By contrast, this research aimed to disrupt and question this genre through making an impermanent, anti-monumental monument. Instead of being experienced through the distant and detached sense of vision, this work entered the body through inhalation, creating a much more intimate experience and inducing visceral and emotional reactions to death and decaying bodies.

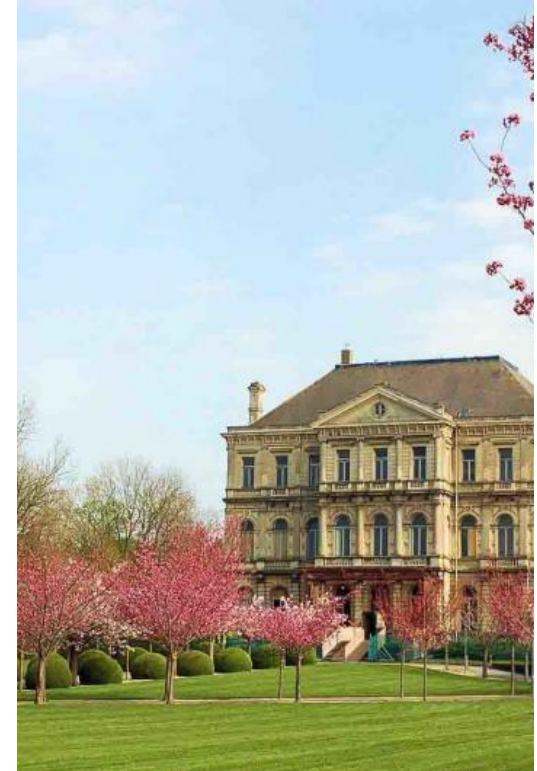


Image: Castle De Lovie, Poperinge where the work was sited. Built in the 1856 by Jules Van Merris, During WW1 it served as the served as headquarters of the French and English army corps. it was later used as a sanatorium for the chronically ill.

Research Output



Detail of *Monument*, 2015. One of the carrion loving flies convinced by the scent in the exhibition.



Detail of *Monument*, 2015, part of the exhibition *The Smell of War*, Castle de loive, Poperinge, Belgium
Photo Credits: The artist

Research Output

4. *I Will Be Your Lighthouse*, 2015

Performance reading and accompanying limited edition free publication (recontextualised reenactment of an earlier artwork, *Bill*, 1998), 2016

I Will Be Your Lighthouse was developed in response to an invitation to re-exhibit the historical work *Bill*, 1998 at The Kunstverein, Wolfsuerg in 2016. This work and one other have been included in several survey exhibitions on Scent in Art in different museum spaces (*Eau Claire*, 1992 -3, in the survey exhibition *Belle Haleine: The Scent of Art*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland, 2015; and *Bill* in the survey exhibition *There is Something in the Air: Scent in Art*, Villa Rot Museum, Ulm, Germany, 2016).

I used this exhibition as an opportunity to test and challenge this format of re-showing old work by developing *Bill* into a new work to maintain its relevance and currency to the present that it is 're-presented' within. In this sense, I wrestled the work away from its intended curatorial positioning as a significant 'museum object' and proposed its reenactment as a reinvigoration of the art work and the questions it asks.



On the opening night, theatre student, Eva Geckler, read and performed the letter, translated into German, in a room with older work *Bill* installed.

Research Output



Publication accompanying the work, titled *I Will be Your Lighthouse*. The publication contained the entire transcript of the victim statement of People vs Brock Turner with images from various protests on campus at the time in response to the verdict.

Research Output

4. *I Will Be Your Lighthouse, 2016* (cont.)

Bill consists of an empty room that is filled with the pungent scent of semen. When it was first shown in 1998, its title was a nod to Bill Clinton's impending impeachment trials (1999), for his alleged affair with then White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. The work responded to this context, and to the prurient media interest in the trials and the public shaming of Lewinsky.

For the 2016 re-enactment, I introduced the context of 'People vs Turner' (2015), also known as the Stanford rape trial, which was prevalent in the news at the time. The performance reading, *I Will Be Your Lighthouse, 2016*, was a one night performance, with a limited edition publication of the transcript of the letter that Stanford student Chanel Miller read out at her rape trial. This was viewed as a landmark case because of the reaction to the lenient sentence received by her convicted rapist, Brock Turner.

On the opening night, theatre student, Eva Geckler, read and performed the letter, translated into German, in a room with older work *Bill* installed. After the opening, the scent of *Bill* remained in the room as an artwork, but the letter was available as a small publication for the viewer to take away.



Image from the internet, also included in the publication accompanying the work, titled *I Will be Your Lighthouse*. The publication contained the entire transcript of the victim statement of People vs. Brock Turner with images from various protests on campus at the time in response to the verdict.

Research Output

5. *Libérez le Glamour, 2017*

This output is a scent intervention that took place at the Fashion Cultures programme of the Merchant City Festival, 27 July 2015. The research was commissioned by the Merchant City Festival.

A group of female body builders gatecrashed an art event and film screening heavily scented with the iconic 1980s 'power perfume,' Giorgio by Giorgio Beverly Hills. This heady floral perfume was infamously banned in some New York bars and restaurants at the time (Susan Irvine, *Perfume: the Creation and Allure of Classic Fragrances*) due to its offensiveness and ability to induce headaches.

When using existing perfume, I tend to select 'loud' scents, often described as 'power perfumes' that were iconic in the 1980s; ones that might be described as garish, heady, sickly or cloying. e.g. Dior's Poison, YSL's Opium, CK's Obsession. Heavily marketed and popular perfumes such as these subtly trigger memory.

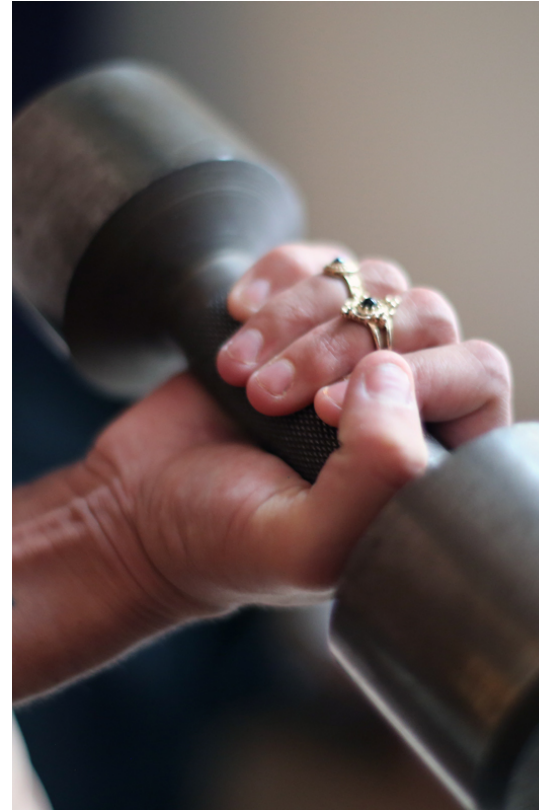


Image on Left: One of the body builders preparing.

Image on the right: Cropped Giorgio by Beverly Hills advert

Research Output

6. *Bring Back the Hill, 2017*

Commissioned site specific sound performance with the East of Scotland Car Club for Edinburgh International Festival of Art by the Collective Gallery plus limited edition fragrance *Bring Back the Hill*.

Context: The East of Scotland Car Club have been meeting on Calton Hill in Edinburgh since the early 90s, where the Collective Gallery is now located. Calton Hill is a UNESCO's world heritage site. Its monuments attract tourists and locals alike, most notably the Scottish National Monument that in 1826 was conceived to be another Parthenon, commemorating Scottish Soldiers killed during the Napoleonic wars, but left incomplete due to lack of funds.

Surrounding the hill are terraced homes, with owners and the city both viewing the club and their modified cars as anti-social.



Image: Invite Card.

Research Output

6. *Bring Back the Hill, 2017* (cont.)

Historically the club met at the top of the hill, however, the recent installation of a locked gate prevents this, and they therefore now meet at the bottom. The name of their monthly social meetings, and title of this work, *Bring Back the Hill*, directly reference their exclusion from this space and their nostalgia for a former time of access. Through the Collective Gallery, I was able to negotiate access to the keys for the gate and permission for the club to reconvene at the top of the hill for the duration of my project.

Over the course of a year, we met regularly, developing ideas for the project and discussing the aesthetic choices they made when modifying their cars. They are a male-dominated group, mostly in their 20s and 30s who had parents that were car enthusiasts that used to meet on the hill. Although another car sub-culture, they are very different from the Hot Rodders, whose style is markedly more flamboyant. Instead, the modifications of this group consist of lowering the cars, changing the engines, and decorative painting on the steering wheels, engines and hub caps.



Image from rehearsal. Image Credit: James Dixon

Research Output

6. *Bring Back the Hill, 2017* (cont.)

The sound of their cars is particularly important to the club. They spend time and money obtaining specialist software programmed to make the car sound like it is not automatic, fabricating sounds such as engine clicks, and sounds described as 'hooting' owl. They were so invested in cars that they could recognise each others and different car models solely through sound.

Final work: For the Edinburgh Festival of Art, we recorded the sounds of the cars and made a composition which was used alongside the cars as part of the performance. What was also unusual was that although the club was mostly men, it was organised by a woman, Sarah Waugh. It was decided that she would lead the performance, like a conductor, with the crescendo of all the engines being revved up live.

A limited edition fragrance mimicking the scent of diesel engines, remained in the gallery as a document of the work, and was also dispersed on the night throughout the audience.



Top Image: Club organiser, Sarah Waugh's customised wheel

Bottom Image: *Bring Back the Hill* limited edition fragrance

Research Output

7. *L'Eléphant*, 2017

A scent intervention commissioned by Museum Angewandete Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany, as part of the Frankfurt bookfair (2016).

Kenzo Jungle Eléphant fragrance was worn by a group of men under 50 years of age, who infiltrated the bookfair. They each had a gold index finger.

The fragrance was created for the commercial market in 1996 by perfumers Jean-Louis Sieuzac and Dominique Ropion. Discussing the pungency of the perfume, Ropion says: *'It was inspired by techno music. They wanted a perfume so powerful you could smell it when you walked into the building. And their offices were on the fifth floor.'* Vogue, 18th Dec 2015.

This work is an example of 'air play,' a loose term I have coined for a group of works (e.g. *Poison Ladies* 2013; *Libérez le Glamour*, 2017) that consist of three components: a demographic; a fragrance; and a social space (e.g. an art opening, an art fair, a film screening etc.) where the work could be situated but un-announced. The Frankfurt Bookfair is in a large space and I therefore needed a strong scent. For the card that went alongside, I photographed male hand to look like an elephant, but also phallic. My 'agents' were planted within the crowd wearing copious amounts of the fragrance, with one gold index finger that the audience may or may not notice.



Left: Postcard image, distributed at the Frankfurt bookfair (2016); Right: documentation of the site-specific intervention at the Frankfurt bookfair (2016).

Research Output

8. *L'Outil*, 2018

This scent-based intervention was part of a group, site-specific show located within a family run Glasgow City Centre tool shop, Bill's Tool Store in the Glasgow Barrowlands, an old working class market area of the city centre.

The intervention was part of Glasgow International, 2018, and included works by Dave Sherry, Erica Eyres, Jack Cheetham, Beagles & Ramsay.

All of the artworks deployed some form of humour as a key engagement strategy. The shop is well known in the city for its value for money, honesty and heritage (being there for over 75 years). It is frequented by building tradesmen and artists alike, many of whom have studios in the area.

I developed a limited edition fragrance *L'outil*, (French for 'the tool'). The fragrance was woody and contained several different natural wood essential oils, including hibawood, cedar, hinoki, palo santo, and rosewood.



One of the 'spritiz boys' at the shop entrance on the left. A billboard on the street advertised the fragrance, inviting the public in to sample the perfume and acting as a sign for the show. It employed the aesthetic of all the other signs in the shop, hand written by the owner, Alan Duff. The aesthetics and décor of the shop that have not changed in style in decades are part of the iconography of the traditional tool shop.

Research Output

8. L'Outil, 2018 (cont.)

'Spritz boys' were planted in the shop, wearing jeans and a tool belt like the rest of the staff. In their tool belt was a bottle of the scent, scent strips in the shape of a saw, and a blue tooth speaker that played an advertising jingle for the fragrance with the lyrics

'L'outil. Now available exclusively at Bill's tools. At Bill's Tools, we have everything, and more. I am not asking you to throw all your cash. Just take a sample with a little splash.'

The humour and surprise came from two worlds colliding: the luxury of Department store launches and promotions where the spritzing of perfume is commonplace and a family shop that prides itself on the moto 'honesty, quality and value,' frequented by tradesmen. The fragrance could be purchased and was on the shelf. You had to ask the price and the shop owner decided on how much to charge.



10



36

Details of the bottle and scent strips. The bottle had a spirit level embedded in the top of the cap.

Research Output

8. *L'Outil*, 2018 (cont.)

During the research and development of this work I discovered that it housed a collection of antique tools in a locked space above the shop, the result of 75 years of collecting. It is effectively a privately owned single object museum. No one other than family had seen the collection. Staff had heard about it but never seen it. Alan Duff, the owner, offered me a tour one day, and we mooted the idea of opening the museum for the week of the Glasgow International Festival as part of the *L'Outil*. We agreed that on days he was in, the 'spritz boys' could ask him if the Tool Museum was open. If he replied yes, they would ask selected customers if they would like to see the Tool museum, and that customer would receive a tour.

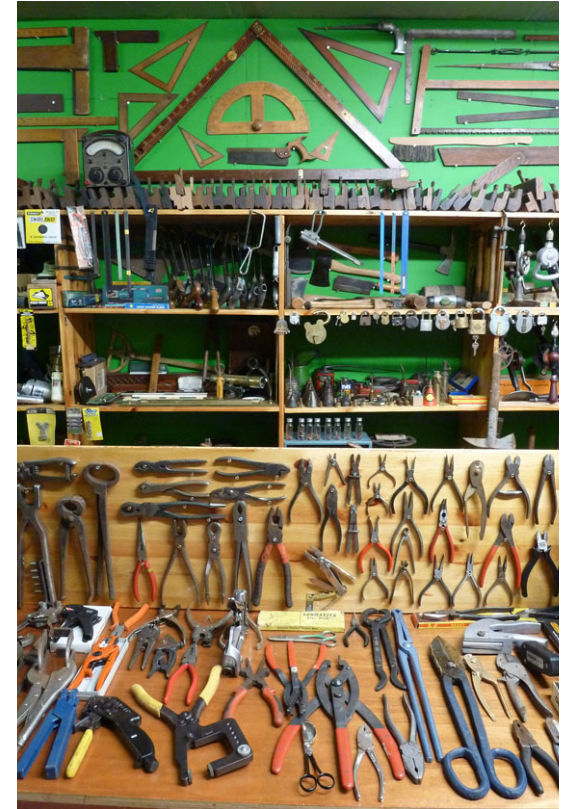


Image: Part of the Tool Museum Collection

Research Output

9. 0, 2019

This output was part of a three-person show, *Disentangle: Science in a Gendered World* (2019), curated by Cicely Farrer, at the LifeSpace Gallery, a science, art and research gallery, located in the ground floor of the School of Life Sciences at University of Dundee. The other exhibiting artists were Kira O'Reilly and Ker Wallwork.

The exhibition, and related workshop and talk addressed and challenged the prevalence of men in science and the issue of unconscious bias as part of the university's Athena SWAN work.

The exhibition was part of a project *Doing Science in a Gendered World*, which is a quote from mathematical biologist and feminist historian of science, Evelyn Fox Keller.

The scent of this work emanates from the leather jackets, from which the sculpture is made. There was also a sound piece accessed through headphones.



Installation shot of *O* (2019), foyer of Life Sciences Building, University of Dundee.

Research Output

9. 0, 2019 (cont.)

(Instructions for 'the Observer,' located on the mezzanine overlooking my sculpture)

Observer

You are to describe the Subject's reaction to the sculptural work titled O. Please describe in any form you wish (poetic, scientific, literary, conversational to name but a few). Be as creative or as actual as you wish.

A few conditions and guidelines exist for the description. These follow here:

Please **do not** use any gender pronouns (e.g. she/he). The Subject should be referred to as "they".

Describe the Subject's movements and reactions to the work titled O. Pay particular attention to whether or not they use the earphones and or notice the scent.

Describe the Subject's proximity to the work. Do they get up close, or stay far away, for example? What part of the room are they standing in at the point when they encounter and experience the work?

Try to describe any emotions that you intuit they might be feeling.

You can add to the above list as well as well, provided you do not use any gender pronouns.



Installation shot of *O* (2019), foyer of Life Sciences Building, University of Dundee.

Research Output

9. 0, 2019 *(cont.)*

(Instructions for the Subject, interacting with the exhibition)

Subject

1. Relax
2. Be yourself
3. Explore the exhibition, make sure to look at every work in the show.

Context

This body of work builds on two-decades of practice-based research on the culturally gendered associations of everyday scent – both ‘worn’ fragrances and ‘natural’ body odor. Since 2014, I have explored the potency and subversive potential of both masculine and feminine scent through a series of site-responsive ephemeral art works in both public spaces and galleries.

My research uses both existing perfume, cologne and deodorant - associated with a particular time and its gender politics - and ‘natural’ body odour, taking both humorous and affective approaches to engage an audience both viscerally and intellectually.

This body of work is situated in the field of olfactory research, but takes a broader context; one that takes a sociological interest in the signification of scent. While I am often positioned by critics and curators as an internationally leading olfactory artist, my research goes beyond an interest in developing and testing scent and is instead an investigation of the cultural associations of scent and its power to conjure and challenge those associations on an affective level. My

research contributes to studies of the sociology of scent. Building on the research of sociologists such as Karen A. Cerulo (2018), who explores the role of culture in olfactory sense-making, and Kevin E. Y. Low (2005; 2007), who positions smell as a social intermediary that can manifest as a moral judgement of others, my research demonstrates, through practice-based experiments, the power of smell as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

An ongoing research interest is an examination of ocularcentric bias, through making work that focuses on the the non-visual proximal senses. The work attempts to create an emotional affect on the audience. We are saturated by advertising images in public and virtual space that is increasingly colonised by market interests in late capitalism. Social anthropologist David Howes argues that our sensory hierarchy and understanding of the world is formed socially. Through choosing to develop a practice that focuses on the ‘lower’ end of the sensory hierarchy, I seek to engage audiences to think differently about their bodily/sensory relationship to the world.



Audience member in the installation *Monument*,
2015

Context

Artists working with scent (e.g. Peter DeCupere; Ernesto Neto, Gayil Nalls, Maki Ueda, Anicka Yi, Ernesto Neto, Oswaldo Macià) include sculptural/visual elements to their work. Increasingly, I am solely using scent and sound to work with groups of people and situations that touch on the socio-political. In this way, the work sits somewhere between sculpture and performance, and is less focused on the art object and its collectability and preservation for museum spaces. Rather than olfactory artists, my research builds on the work of conceptual artists such as Adrian Piper, particularly her early *Catalysis* series (1970 -71), where she performed and documented experiments in public space, including wearing a foul smelling clothes on public transport to challenge social constructs of the black female body in public space.

For over 20 years much of my work has consisted solely of a scent in an exhibition space, reliant on the viewer's subjective experience of it, with little or no visual element or information, other than a title. This is

challenging for the audience, in that they have to rely on their ability to identify an odour to interpret and experience the work. Identifying odour sensations is difficult, in that we do not have a language for what we smell, in the same way that we have for other senses, such as sight, for example, where we can identify a visual sensation in terms of colours (e.g. that lemon is *yellow*). Instead we speak of odours as smelling *like* lemon, or *like* coffee, or in crude dichotomies of good and bad that are socially determined. It is this subjective interpretation that I am interested in, as it is not fixed and exposes our biases.



Peter de Cupere, *Smoke Room*, 2010
Installation made of cigarette butts.

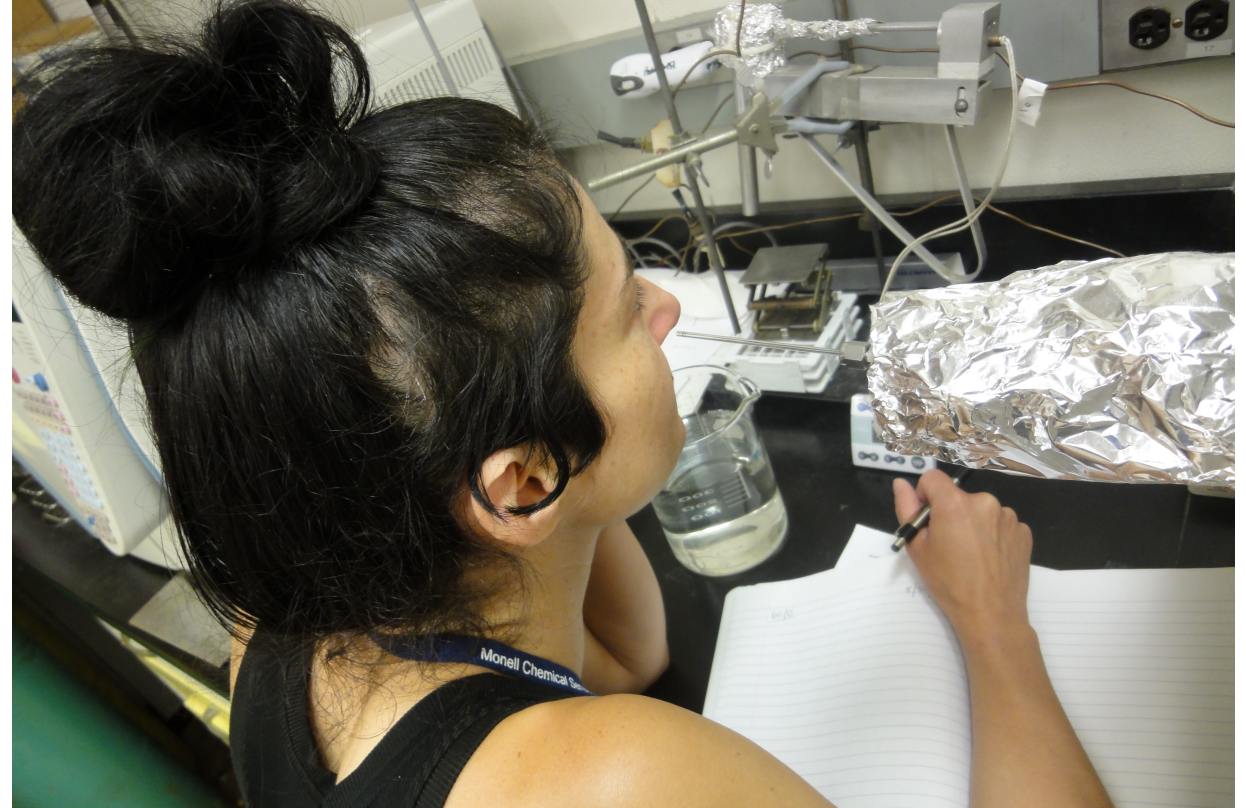


More audience non-verbal reactions to *Monument*: on left, woman with disgust face. On right, an woman covers her nose with her hand.

Methods

This experimental research practice requires various stages of iteration, testing and development. Methods include: surveys of relevant scientific and cultural history literature on scent; collaborative working with scientists to develop new scent formulae; dialogues with psychologists to better understand the social significance and affective operation of scent; testing in studio with small sample groups; and public dissemination as a form of further testing the effectiveness of a particular scent in a particular context.

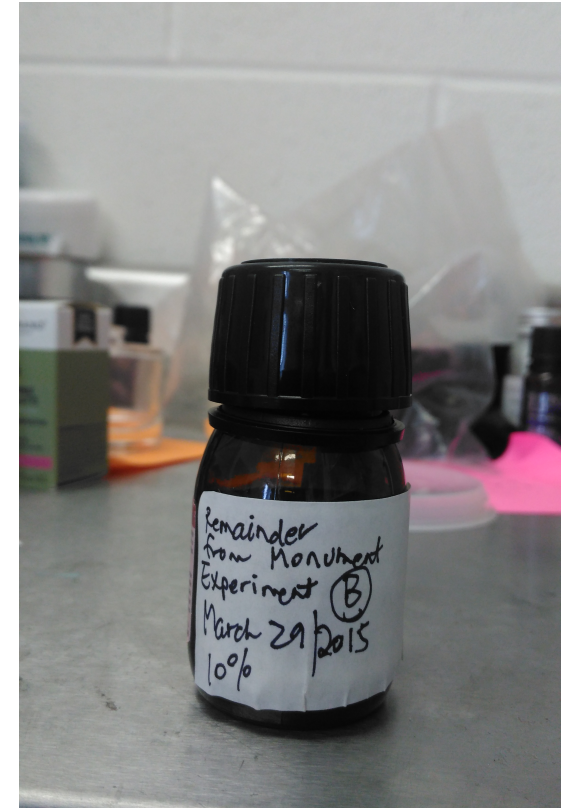
Over the duration of my research into scent, I spent time in labs working alongside scientists to develop the fragrances and have used scientific methods to test scent in different contexts, however, the social impact and cultural significance of scent is not hard science. For example, I will often give scent strips to strangers and friends and ask them to try to identify them, and make a note of their responses. At other points, I will time how long it takes for a formula to move across the room. My training as an artist means that I approach scientific method in a different way and for different reasons to olfactory scientists and even to commercial perfumers.



Sniffing out a sweat sample from a GC machine and taking notes.

Methods

Across this body of work, I have attempted to emphasise the performative aspect of fragrance, as opposed to its objecthood. Unlike Peter DeCupere who is interested in the preservation of his olfactory works, I am not concerned about my uniquely formulated scents lasting forever (they cannot, they change as factors such as safety hazard information, resource scarcity, climate crisis and animal rights movement come into play). I am interested instead in the specific social/psychological affect, which is temporary, political and culture and gender specific. My research explores and capitalises on the ephemerality of scent.



One of the formulas I made for *Monument*,
2015

Methods

Research Methods

- Literature surveys on relevant scientific literature on scent, e.g. for *Monument* (2015), literature on isolating volatile chemical components in rotting corpses
 - Conversations and interviews with experts in different disciplines (e.g. Cognitive Psychology; Biochemistry) examining the sense of smell to further inform the development of the formula.
 - Consulting scientific scent experts for their view on the development of the scent.
 - Problem solving the dispersal of the scent in the space, timing, and maintenance. This is mainly done through rehearsing different formulas in the space through carefully controlled experiments in my studio, and in laboratories.
 - Rehearsing the work in the studios with small groups of invited people
- Crucially, the exhibition itself is a method in the realisation of the work. The ultimate test of the work is with an audience. This informs the next work and also informs any necessary changes. Informal observation of audience reactions is key to the testing and development of my research. Audience responses are noted and used for further iterations of the existing work as well as informing new work.



One of the Laboratory fridges in my studio with materials and formulas



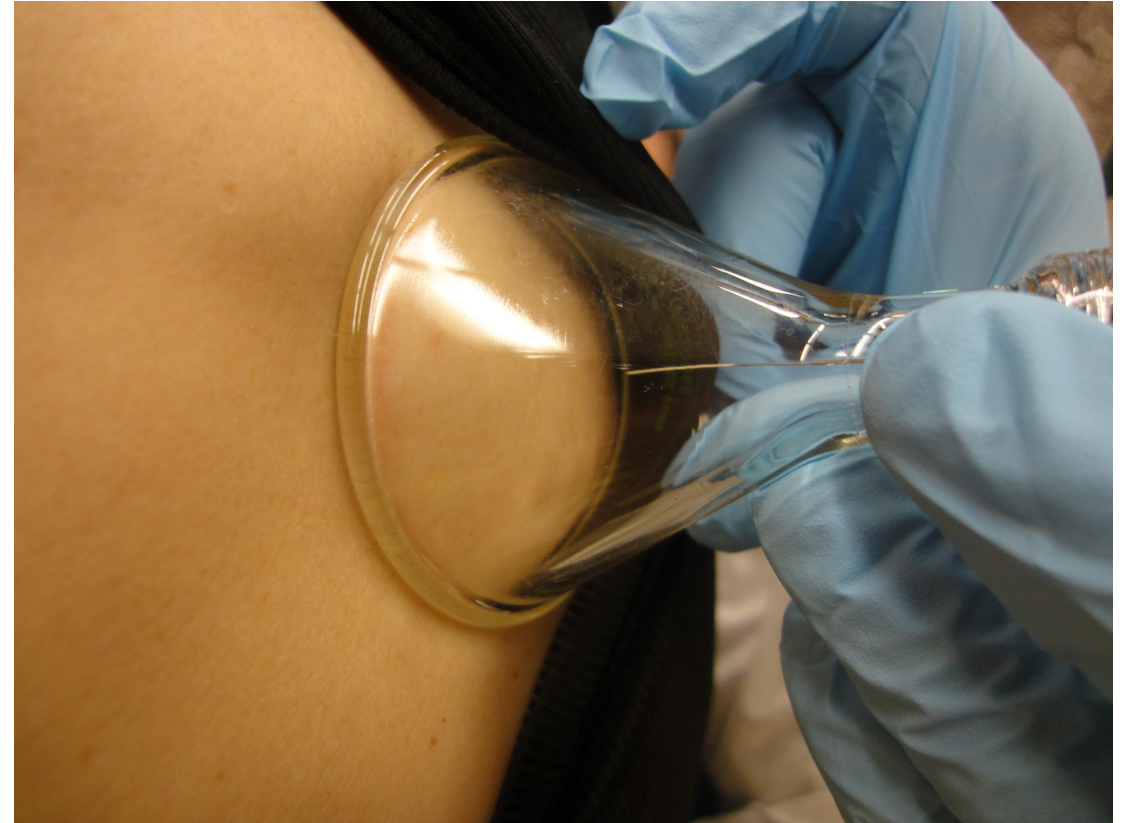
Audience in exhibition *A Big Stick of Confidence*, Esther Klein Gallery, Philadelphia, 2014

Contribution to the field

Investigating the cultural connotations of both natural and manufactured scent (and both 'found' and original formulae), my research harnesses scent's power to evoke memory - and associated feelings - to challenge dominant conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity.

My research positions scent as a performative agent within social spaces. Unlike most olfactory artists, I am not primarily concerned with developing new scent that can be replicated. Rather, my research argues and demonstrates that scent is fundamentally ephemeral; it is culturally and historically specific and is subject to constant change, depending on the politic of its time. The loudly feminine power fragrances of the 1980s gave way to the androgynous perfumes of the 1990s, indicative of a shift – however slight – in cultural conceptions of femininity and the societal role of women.

Taking a particular interest in the feminist artist's interventions in masculine homosocial spaces, my research makes a practice-based contribution to the sociology of scent by demonstrating its cultural signification in relation to binary gender systems and the norms they propagate.



Collecting my sweat in the laboratory for analysis

Dissemination

1. *A Big Stick of Confidence*, 2014

Esther Klein Gallery, University City Science Centre, Philadelphia, solo show, September – October 2014

2. *Kustom*, 2016

Scented intervention on the streets of Glasgow and limited edition multiple available at the GI Hub for Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art, 2016

3. *Monument*, 2015

- *The Smell of War*, curated by Peter de Cupere, Castle De Lovie, Poperinge, Belgium, as part of a festival commemorating the centenary of WW1. May 1 - August 30, 2015. The estimated visitor numbers was over 25,000. There was a press conference and numerous articles in the local and national press covered the exhibition as a whole. Other artists included: Camilla Maurer (DE), Christophe Laudamiel (FR), Dr. Elena Bodnar (UA), Lisa Kirk (US), Maki Ueda (JP), Mattia Casalegno (IT), Oswaldo Maciá (CO), Peter De Cupere (BE), Priyanka Choudhary (IN), George Grosz (DE), Otto Dix (DE)
- *The Smell of War*, publication. Book, hardcover, 112 pages, Stockmans, BE, 2015, ISBN: 9789082251630
- Artists Talk at Newcastle University, Department of Fine Art, October 30, 2017

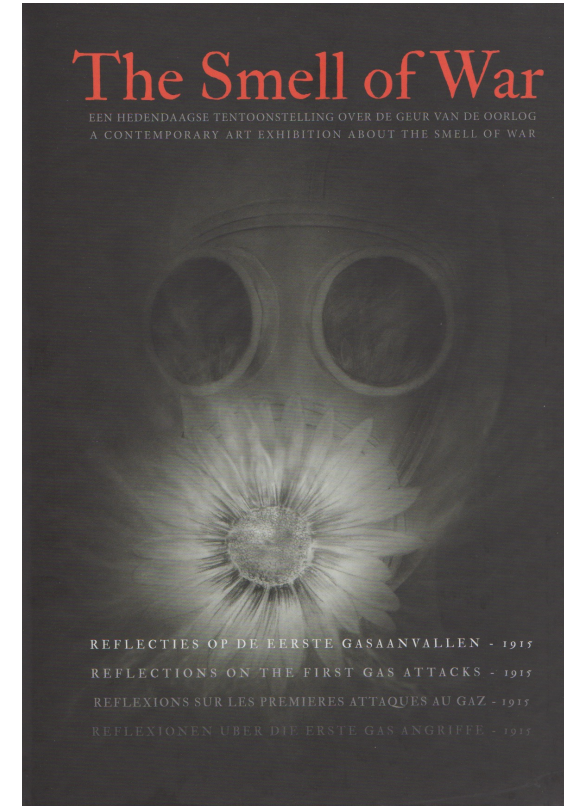
4. *I Will Be Your Lighthouse* (recontextualised reenactment of an earlier artwork, *Bill*, 1998), 2016

Part of the group show *Sex Smells* at The Kunstverein, Wolfsburg, 2016. Other exhibiting artists were: Julia Barbee, Peter de Cupere, Sarah Schönfeld.

Limited edition publication in English and German accompanying the work with same title.

5. *Libérez le Glamour*, 2015

Scent intervention into the Fashion Cultures programme of Commissioned by the Merchant City Festival, Glasgow, 27 July 2015



The Smell of War, publication. Book, hardcover, 112 pages, Stockmans, BE, 2015, ISBN: 9789082251630

Dissemination

6. *Bring Back the Hill*, 2017

Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, 2017

7. *L'Elephant*, 2017

Scent intervention at the Frankfurt Bookfair, 20-21 Oct, 2016

8. *L'Outil*, 2018

Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Art, 2018. An intervention as part of the project *Good Luck*, a group show intervention at Bills Tool Store. Other exhibiting artists: Dave Sherry, Erica Eyres, Jack Cheetham, Beagles & Ramsay.

9. *A Hole in the Sky*, 2018

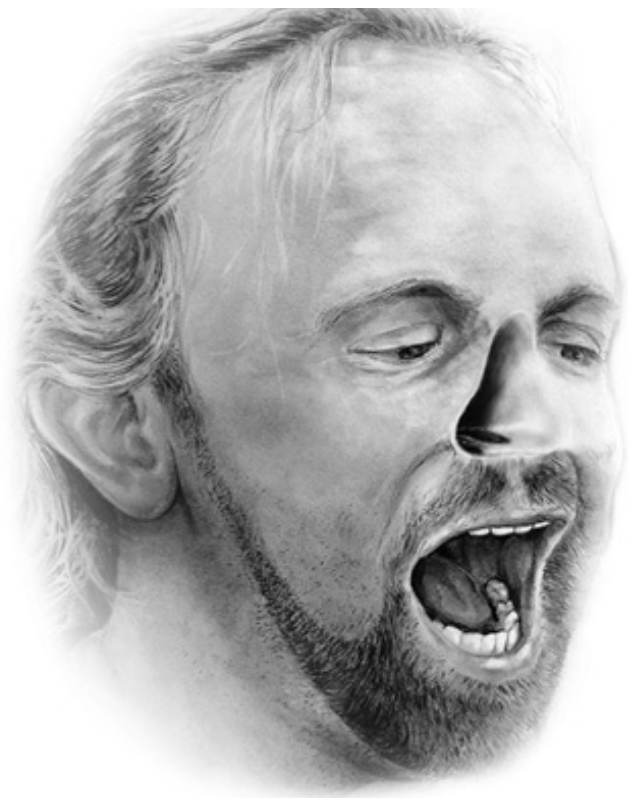
Group show at The Modern Institute, Airds Lane, Glasgow, 2 Feb - 17 March 2018. Other exhibiting artists: Peter Basma-Lord, Il Colorifico, Nick Evans, Claire Quilty, Alys Owen, Caitlin Merrett King, Tamara MacArthur, Hannah Reynolds.

10. *0*, 2019

Part of the group show, *Disentangle: Science in a Gendered World*. Newly commissioned work January-April 2019. This research was organised by LifeSpace: Science Art Research Gallery and the School of Life Sciences and in collaboration with Athena SWAN, University of Dundee. Other exhibiting artists: Kira O'Reilly & Jennifer Willet, Ben Nemmerofsky Ramsay, Ker Wallwork. The exhibition also included objects from the museum collections at the University of Dundee.

Evidence

2. *Kustom, GI, 2016*



A Publication Featuring
15 Artists Working in Scent

Readings by
Zoe Crosher
Christine Wang
Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal

Music by
Sean Raspet

The Institute for Art and Olfaction
932 Chung King Road, LA

May 26, 2016
7p - 10p

Poster for launch of *Now, Past later Zine*, which includes my work amongst 15 olfactory artists selected by the Institute for Art & Olfaction, included as limited edition as part of *Kustom, GI, 2016*

Evidence

3. Monument

- Performance Research Journal 23·4/5, 2018, titled *Smell, Terrorism and Performance*, Jim Drobnick
- My website: claraursitti.com
- Clara Muller (writer for *Nez: The Olfactory Magazine/ La Revue Olfactive*) wrote her Masters Thesis and interviewed me about this work
- Flemish newspaper, *De Morgen* reviewed the show and the the work. Circulation of 53,860

The complete sensory experience—incorporating sight, sound, taste, touch and smell—is too often overlooked in art. In recent years, however, artists have been experimenting to create immersive works that engage the fugitive power of scent

by Jo Barratt

UNDER YOUR NOSE

Of all the senses, smell is the most elusive. It's invisible, often hovering just outside our awareness, and when it does seep through the crack of perception, we invariably let it drift back out of grasp as we hastily grapple for the right descriptive words. Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer invented the word "ear lids" to draw attention to the immersive ambiguity of sounds in our lives. Well, perhaps there is also a place for nostril lids, since smelling—linked to breathing, to life—is even more pervasive. Ever present but usually only wobbling around the periphery of our attention, smells can send us, irrespective of our will, on great Proustian whooshes across space and time.

We become accustomed to the familiar, which explains why we seldom notice our own immediate smellscape. We notice smell when it is new, to log it, but more often smelling is remembering. The fabric-conditioner note found in the fragrance that artist Alessa Cobene created as part of her immersive video installation *Like, Like* (2009) allows for a type of remembering that is simultaneously specifically personal and comfortingly generic. The bespoke scent, which also

contains amber musk, bergamot, juniper bark and black pepper, among other ingredients, is diffused through the gallery space while a two-channel video shows clips of love-lorn women from Hollywood films. To map smell is really to map our relationships with the world, and the people in it. To use smell in art, or to talk about how art smells, then, is not as niche as it might seem; it is a way of experiencing art that we have all at some point felt, if not acknowledged.

Art smells different to everyone because art is different to everyone. A publicist friend of mine described the smell of art as "bees, Botox and bulldozer." Two of these may not be smells, but the scene the description conjures is legitimately evocative. In 2013, Glasgow-based Canadian artist Clara Ursitti staged *Poison Ladies*, a gallery intervention, by sending 28 women wearing the Christian Dior perfume *Poison* to an exhibition opening. Most aged older than 60, the women comprised a demographic sometimes considered invisible, but because of the aroma they carried into the room, they became visible—impossible to ignore. There is another perfume, *Molodé 01*, that since its release in 2006 has come



Clara Ursitti, *Poison Ladies* (performance documentation) 2013. Scent intervention

to represent, for me, the smell of the art world. It disperses a cloud of familiarity with a form and force not dissimilar to Ursitti's artwork. This expensive and addictive scent comes with its own stories, which are as powerful and appealing as its aroma: "It smells different on everybody" and "It's made of pheromones" are untruths repeated by those wearing it, waiting their way around galleries on preview night.

But art is more than a social circuit, and the white cube does not smell of nothing. It smells of paint, carpet, air conditioning and dust, even before you put anything in it. And then there is the stuff art is made out of, the material elements—from paint, wood and metal to stranger things with stranger smells. The smell of art is most often a glorious mishmash of synthetic and natural worlds: turpentine, linseed and more sinistinely derived gums and gums, not to mention the myriad fluorescent pigments that come from minerals, roots and creatures, but glow with the association of less wholesome chemicals. Part of being an artist is being able to control the combination or transformation of materials, and to understand these things is, in part, to smell them.

I was once tasked by a composer to find a smell with no cultural point of reference—something that would bring with it no recollection of grandmothers, lost love or childhood trauma. The composer wanted a note, a colour—something that felt like the reverberation of bass in music.

It was to be left, not smelled. The heavy, sonorous musk we selected worked wonderfully for the task at hand, but in another way we failed. Though all but a select few perfumers and flavourists would notice, the molecule, Iso E Super, is actually one of the most abundant aroma chemicals found in good-smelling things—it's in both shampoo and cigarettes—and is the single component of that perfume so adored by much of the art world. It was only by using one of the most common, though exceptionally subtle, smells in our world that we could create the illusion of a smell with no connection to it.

Smelling is a very pure form of attention. As Susan Sontag reminded us in the year before she died, "It's all about paying attention. It's all about taking in as much of what's out there as you can. Attention is vitality. It connects you with others." ■

Article in *Canadian Art Magazine*, Spring 2017, with image of my work.

Evidence

<https://www.roots-routes.org/interviewing-a-scent-artist-clara-ursitti-by-laura-estrada-prada/>

<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/international-report-printemps-de-lart-contemporain-2018-festival-marseille/>

<https://www.collective-edinburgh.art/programme/2017-clara-ursitti-with-east-of-scotland-car-club>

<https://vimeo.com/230467807>

<https://lifespace.dundee.ac.uk/events/artists-talk-doing-science-gendered-world>

<https://parsejournal.com/authors/clara-ursitti/>

<https://parsejournal.com/event/work/>

https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/international_lexicon_of_aesthetics_item_detail.php?item_id=63

<https://scentculture.institute/tag/clara-ursitti/>

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<http://fairfood4u.com/smell-of-art/>

<https://why.org/articles/with-help-of-monell-artist-offers-pungent-exploration-in-philly/>

<https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2016/06/16/canadian-artists-use-scent-instead-of-paint-to-shape-their-art.html>

<https://www.prweb.com/releases/2014/08/prweb12120150.htm>

<https://artreview.com/october-2014-mood-is-made-1/>

<https://elephant.art/the-standout-artists-of-2020-16122020/>