



NADIA WAGNER - URBAN OLFACTICS 1A/1B - IN COLLABORATION WITH CURATOR JOEL MU

The pervasiveness of smell in everyday life is often overlooked. From our natural environment to our urban cities the multitude of odours that waft through the air and stimulate our olfactory senses – our noses, tastebuds and cranial nerve - result in a sensual experience, where pleasant and unpleasant smells are constantly discerned and contrasted against preferred ‘non-smelling’ ones. In cities where our relationship to smell is especially thwarted by highly sophisticated methods of washing, filtering, incinerating of odorous discharge and the ever increasing use of personal deodorants and air ‘purifiers’, the role of smell or questions of its functionality, are characterised by a neutralised environment, keenly negated or masked. In recognition of this longstanding suppression the creation of fragrance – which is also intimately linked with flavours – has thrown our sensitivity of smell into a reductive state. Sexual attractiveness, supported by pleasure pouncing pheromones, is the prima facie result of our odorant-receptor interactions.

Why do we have this compulsion to conceive of smells as being purely pleasurable or not? Perhaps it is the absence of a satisfactory classification scheme, explained by abstract terms and concepts, such as red or blue. In contrast to colours, the classification of smells is either tied to terms referring to objects or condition. A smell is understood as “lavender rotting”, for instance, but to smell “open” and “close” becomes entirely baffling.

The work of Nadia Wagner can be characterised as a mixed library of design foundations, formal experiments with skilled perfumers, a broad interest in the urban environment and how this cityscape is conceptualised beyond the dialectic of word and image in contemporary art.

Nadia’s first solo exhibition Urban Olfactics 1A/1B presents a perfume installation that allegorically conceives a city as being the opening and closing of an aluminium blind. Similar to another perfume work, NOSOEAWA (2004), presented in the 3rd Berlin Biennale (2004) by Norwegian born, Berlin based artists Sissel Tolaas, Nadia has created a fragrance that distils the city into its various bits. Yet unlike Tolaas who employed a strategy of personal subjectivism, Nadia’s own entry point to 1A/1B is through a breakdown of objective parts, which include equations of materiality to more conceptual considerations of movement as a gesture.

In regarding the problematic of smell, Nadia reflects:

“It’s extremely stressful when a perfumer with 40 years experience puts a smelling strip under your nose and asks you what you are smelling, whereas if a painter with 40 years experience were to show you the colour red you could easily identify it. It is unfortunate that we do not have an olfactory language. Australian perfumer John Lambeth explains that when you learn to smell it’s like someone has changed the TV from black & white to colour - your perceptions of the world change dramatically.”

In 2005, Nadia Wagner and Joel Mu met at the artist run space Sparwasser HQ: Offensive for Contemporary Art and Communication Berlin, while both were studying at the Berlin University of Fine Arts. Since then, Nadia has worked closely with perfumer John Lambeth at an international fragrance house, has exhibited in Beijing and Berlin and is currently researching her Master of Design (Honours) titled: Urban Olfactics: Proposing an Odour Classification Key for the Design of Olfactory Profiles that describe the Urban Environment. Joel is an independent curator and former Sparwasser co-organizer. He has curated group shows in Berlin and is currently working towards his latest curated exhibition This is Curating (1-50 Results), to be held this year at Firstdraft gallery in April through May, supported by their Emerging Curator Grant. The conceptualising of Urban Olfactics 1A/1B as an exhibition is the result of Nadia and Joel’s collaboration.

This exhibition acknowledges the kind support of John Lambeth, Richard Goodwin, Vaughan Rees, Julian Wong, Family, Friends and

