

PRESS
INFO

Basel, February 2015

Belle Haleine – The Scent of Art

Museum Tinguely, Basel: February 11 – May 17, 2015

(Opening: February 10, 2015)

Museum Tinguely is pursuing the project of a series of exhibitions with which, in the coming years, it will shed light on the complex theme of the five human senses and on their representation in the art.



Sissel Tolaas, The FEAR of smell – the smell of FEAR, 2006 to today
Photo: Poul Buchard, Credit: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art

As the first show in this series, our group exhibition “Belle Haleine – The Scent of Art” from February 11 until May 17, 2015 deals with the fascinating and fleeting phenomenon of odor and thereby goes beyond the usual museum-based form of experiencing art, where the beholder’s sense of sight is appealed to above all. Across more than 1200 m² “Belle Haleine – The Scent of Art” presents

multimedia room installations, videos, sculptures and objects, conceptual works, drawings, photographs, and graphics by the following international artists: John Baldessari, Bernard Bazile, Louise Bourgeois, Marcel Broodthaers, Carlo Carrà, Marcel Duchamp, Peter de Cupere, Sylvie Fleury, Jaromír Funke, Yuan Gong, Raymond Hains, Carsten Höller, Bruno Jakob, Oswaldo Maciá, Piero Manzoni, Jenny Marketou, Cildo Meireles, Kristoffer Myskja, Ernesto Neto, Markus Raetz, Man Ray, Martial Raysse, François Roche, Dieter Roth, Ed Ruscha, Valeska Soares, Daniel Spoerri, Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger, Jana Sterbak, Jean Tinguely, Sissel Tolaas, Clara Ursitti, Ben Vautier, Bill Viola, Claudia Vogel, Meg Webster and Anna-Sabina Zürrer. In addition, a selection of allegorical works from the 16th to 17th century by artists such as Cornelis Dusart, Pieter Jansz. Quast, Jan Saenredam, Jacob Fransz. van der Merck will be on view in the first room of the show.

The exhibition places the olfactory potential of our aesthetic perception at the focus and in doing so poses a series of questions: What happens when our nose suddenly plays the principal role in the experiencing of art? How does art smell? Can scents and the various areas of our lives that are influenced by them be of use as a medium of artistic expression and creativity? Can artists succeed, in their works, in activating the beholder’s sense of smell at its emotional and cognitive level without using any odorants at the same time? Can odors be described and depicted in visually abstract form? The exhibits at Museum Tinguely demonstrate that there is indeed this

place for experiments and with it an expansion of the concept of art into the olfactory dimension. This dimension has significantly gained in importance in recent years.

As a biochemical sense, smell is apperceptual and is one of our oldest sensory capacities. It can be directly experienced, as our perception of odor is directly linked with the limbic system. As an important sensory characteristic our sense of smell is closely associated with recollection and with the rating of certain experiences, and is designed to integrate information about past events into the present moment. Therefore, scents evoke emotions, memories and associations that are subjectively and culturally shaped to widely varying degrees and are also subject to historical transformations.

The use of olfactory *stimuli* in art often occurs subversively and breaks many taboos. A certain scent attracts us or repels us. Scents provoke, stimulate, and influence us quite directly. Artists make use of this circumstance and in doing so place various burning questions of our times and society at the center of their works.

In a first room, allegorical depictions of odor from the Baroque period form the prologue to the exhibition. Alongside these, works and documents by such important artists of the 1920s as **Marcel Duchamp**, **Man Ray**, or **Carlo Carrà** are placed; in these, breathing and the volatile phenomenon of scent is taken up in different ways. With the commencement of the avant-garde at the start of the 20th century the relationship between fine art and the sense of smell became current. The artists of the 20th century strove for a synaesthesia, an interplay of multiple sensory inputs. Raoul Hausmann, the Dada artist and poet, was also later convinced that our thinking is strongly influenced by the five senses. In his book *La Sensorialité Excentrique* of 1969 he demanded a sensory capacity that is to extend beyond anything that was here before and thereby ring in an age of a new civilization. As the door was opened onto an artistic work concept from the 1960s onwards that sought a change of direction towards the everyday and thereby also direct contact with the beholder of art, this attitude gained in importance. Artists of Tinguely's generation, from the milieu of the Nouveaux Réalistes, Pop Art, Conceptual Art or Fluxus, attempted besides optical perception to appeal to as many other senses of the beholder as possible and to place these at the forefront.

The main focus of the exhibition lies on a selection of artworks from the last twenty years, in which the olfactory sense is called into service in various ways. At the same time a number of works, not least, place the enormous discrepancy between naturalness and artificiality at the forefront and demonstrate that a more sensitive perception of the environment by means of our nose is more current in the 21st century than ever before.

One important theme is our ambivalent relationship to the human body and its natural odors, effluvia and messenger substances, which we attempt to influence through deodorization. **Sylvie Fleury** in *Aura Soma* (2002) – 102 little bottles that are filled with oils and water in different colors – deals with the fashion phenomenon of esotericism and the scent and aroma therapy associated with this. **Piero Manzoni**, an important representative of Italian conceptual art, declared his own body an artistic medium in *Merda d'artista* (1961) or *Fiato d'artista* (1960). **Dieter Roth** extremely provocatively impregnated his literary publication *Poemetrie* of 1968 with a blend of pudding and urine. In **Jana Sterbak's** *Chemise de Nuit* (1993–2013) and *Container for Olfactive Portrait* (2004) the theme is the complex erotic/sexual attractive force of our body. The participative/performative installation *The FEAR of Smell – the Smell of FEAR* (2006–2015) by Norwegian artist and odor researcher **Sissel Tolaas**, by contrast, places the exciting connection between, fear, odor and revulsion, along with our explorable attitude toward it, at the focus.

In opposition to this are **Ernesto Neto's** space-consuming works *Mentre niente accade / While nothing happens* (2008) and *Lipzoid Spice Garden* (2000), the constructively minimalist *Fainting Couch* (2002) by **Valeska Soares**, and **Meg Webster's** monochrome paper works and *Moss Bed* (1986/2005–2015), which under the use of unadulterated materials such as spices, lilies, and moss, stir up our yearning for nature and ultimately for paradisiacal states.

In the walk-on installation *Volàtil* (1980–1994) by **Cildo Meireles** the visitor is strikingly confronted with strong emotions through his physical and not least olfactorily requisitioned direct participation. By means of the cloud-soft talcum powder, a candle, and the sulfurous, synthetic odorant that is blended with commonly available household gas as a warning odor to alert us to leaking gas in good time, associations with limbo and the horrors of the Holocaust are inevitably evoked.

Entirely contrary emotions are conjured up on experiencing the early video and sound installation *Il Vapore* (1975) by American artist **Bill Viola**. The visitor is enveloped by the intense odor of eucalyptus vapor, which fills the whole room. Based on the overlapping of various planes of time and reality the artist depicts the transformation of the various physical aggregate states of water, from the liquid substance to the gaseous ephemeral steam. With this Viola points out the meditatively transcendental quality of water, the universal substance.

Many of the questions that preoccupy us in connection with the sense of smell in today's era are also contained in the video work, consisting of ten interviews, *Smell You – Smell Me* (1998) by Greek artist **Jenny Marketou**, which is presented at the center of the exhibition.

“Belle Haleine – The Scent of Art” is neither a perfume exhibition nor does it pursue the aim of an art historically comprehensive chronological collective exhibition. Its approach is deliberately experimental and its intention is to prompt reflection on our often neglected and at the same time so important and exciting sensory capacity.

A diverse supporting program, such as, for example, Basel's first Pheromone Party (St. Valentine's Day, February 14, 2015), an interdisciplinary symposium (April 17 and 18, 2015) featuring renowned international speakers from humanities and sciences, lectures, guided tours, special family Sundays, and workshops (including with Sissel Tolaas on April 19, 2015) will accompany the exhibition at Museum Tinguely. The exhibition has been devised by Annja Müller-Alsbach.

General information on Museum Tinguely

Opening hours:

Tuesday – Sunday: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. (closed Mondays)

Special opening hours:

Monday, 23 February 2015, closed

Friday, 3 April 2015, closed

Sunday, 5 April 2015, 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Monday, 6 April 2015, 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Thursday, 14 May 2015, 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission prices:

Adults: CHF 18

Schoolchildren, students, apprentices, unemployed: CHF 12

Groups, 12 persons and above: CHF 12 (per person)

Visitors under 16 years: free admission

More information on the exhibition along with press images can be found at:

<http://www.tinguely.ch/de/presse/pressematerial/2015.html>