

catching a whiff

OLFACtORY ECOLOGIES

curated by Lowana Davies
presented by IN X OLD



Contents

acknowledgements

introduction Lowana Davies	4-5
Camphora (Breath Work) Keith Armstrong	6-9
LAYDAY Tessa Bergan	10-11
earth re(fuge) 3000© Merinda Davies	11-12
Respire II, Out of Breath Bella Deary	13-14
Perhaps, if I Let Go Amelia McLiesh & Tom Lyons	14-16
BEE_RILISE Hira Sheikh	17-18
Ritual Collaborations Lillian Whitaker	19-20

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We acknowledge the Kabi Kabi, the Gubbi Gubbi, the Yugumbeh, Turrbal and Yuggera people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this work was made. We recognize the continuing connection to lands, waters, and communities of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We acknowledge the people, creatures, and spirits of the lands that we have lived on and will live on. We pay our respects to Elders: past, present, and emerging.

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Special thanks also goes to Rebecca Ross, Emma Porteus, and Anna Young, Salvador Cantellano, Tessa Bergan, and Adrienne Kenafake who assisted in the production of "Smell School" and the development of "Catching a Whiff" with the support of Situate Art in Festivals, and Generate GC, to my QUT HDR supervisors Dr Keith Armstrong and Professor Jennifer Firn for their guidance and belief in me.

The exhibiting artists; Bella Deary, Merinda Davies, Keith Armstrong, Tessa Bergan, Lillian Whitaker, Hira Sheike, Amelia Mcleish, and Tom Lyons welcome you into their respective, intersecting smellscapes with this exhibition at The Old Lockup.



CITY OF
GOLDCOAST™

introduction

“Smell is evidence of the existence of another within ourselves”
(Tsing, 2015)

CATCHING A WHIFF - OLFACTORY ECOLOGIES is an invitation to dive nose-first into the fragrant atmospheres of 9 local artists that care deeply for the survival of this precious multi-species planet.

Considering the vast scientific evidence for impending ecological collapse, this exhibition of new olfactory artworks and accompanying Smell School workshop draws on the power of smells to reclaim space. In doing so, the works aim to softly hold space for our affections, rituals, and grievances for oceans, airs, soils, bodies, bees, and trees.

Human activity has and will continue to be inextricably intermeshed within multispecies atmospheres. But rising temperatures and anthropogenic¹ pollutants are causing widespread disruption to the vital chemosensory communication systems that help ecologies to function and survive in these atmospheres². The exhibiting artists have considered their own

relationship to olfactory ecologies in their immediate environs.

Each olfactory artwork proposes radically different ways of being with, thinking with, and smelling with one another on this incredibly diverse multispecies planet.

Smell Hira's *MASKPolis*, inhale the aroma of Keith's *Camphoria*, or catch a whiff of Lillian's *Ritual Collaboration*, remember we are not alone on Earth. Tessa's *LAYDAY*, Merinda's *earth-(re)fuge-3000* ©, Amelia & Tom's *Perhaps, if I Let Go*, and Bella's *Respire II: Out of Breath* bring us back into our bodies - physically accenting the performative nature of smells - from fragrant to fetid, to reveal the capacity for olfactory art to bring attention to the ecologies of the urban wilderness at The Old Lockup.

This way of thinking has also been informed by intersectional feminist approaches to environmental justice - adopting a networked, web-like model that considers the intersecting issues of capitalism, colonialism, racism, classism, quephobia, transphobia, and ecophobia. In a time of global uncertainty, this approach seeks to alter the smellscape of The Old Lockup in an invitation to consider the potential for peace for living things. Together, the works seek to find empathy through breath, in an effort towards health for all bodies that breathe life into this precious planet.

olfactory; adjective; of or relating to the sense of smell:

ecology; noun,

1. the branch of biology dealing with the relations and interactions between organisms and their environment, including other organisms.
2. the set of relationships existing between organisms and their environment:
3. advocacy for the protection of natural resources from pollution or its effects.

Lowana Davies is an Australian smell researcher, olfactory, performance and installation artist focussed on multispecies justice via intersectional feminist, queer, and pro-indigenous thinking. Her work has been presented throughout Australia as well as in New Zealand, China, and Japan. She is a founder and core creative for Umwelt Collective, a Gold Coast performance art collective.-



1. First proposed by atmospheric chemist Crutzen in a 2002 article titled Geology of Mankind, 'Anthropocene' is widely accepted as a term that defines the current geological epoch as being shaped by human impacts on the planet.
2. Wilson, D. A., & Stevenson, R. J. (2006). Learning to Smell Olfactory Perception from Neurobiology to Behavior. Johns Hopkins University Press.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

Camphora (Breath Work) 2022⁶

Keith Armstrong

Artwork Description -

Camphora (breath work) seeks to draw connections between material worlds and the molecular odours they emanate; reminding how aromas trigger powerful recognition of our inseparable connections and participation within the wider ecosphere. The work consists of three elements: a carved slab of milled ‘unfinished’ Camphor Laurel wood, mounted just off the ground and inscribed with a complex array of organic patterns reminiscent of grass roots, alveoli and sub-bark insect trails; a copper dish on a stand containing Camphor Laurel wood chips, emanating a rich odour; and on the wall behind a printed poem.

Many years ago I inherited a Cinnamomum Camphora (Camphor Laurel) tree in our Australian yard - which was subsequently felled as a ‘Category 3’ urban weed¹. Its spare slabs (i.e., those not already turned into stairs, bench tops or furniture) remain, years later, stacked in the shadows of my studio, lying inconspicuously amongst forgotten artworks, raw materials and dust.

Yet still today, breaking the skin of one of those ageing Camphora’s slabs calls forth a stupendous cascade of invisible oily molecules: a heady odour that leaves me ‘gasping with breath’.



Involuntarily I'm drawn to nose-breathe, despite the headiness - maybe triggered by sensory memories of applied analgesics, repellents or past life cleaning products. Temporarily I find myself lost to Camphora's wickedly vaporous toxicities, eclipsed in a heady do or die moment of involuntary, yet precarious 'breath work'.

Breath work “breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth” - is an olfactory experience that recalls our inseparable connections and participation within the wider ecosphere (what Tim Morton calls the ‘symbiotic real’)².

Whilst textbook breath work may often assume neutral or ‘clean’ air aromas, its effects may become more vivid in the presence of coveted fragrances or heady perfumes that calm and ground the body and promote focus.

The artwork Camphora (Breath Work) presents one of these lost slabs, its skin, scarred rhythmically with a rapidly spinning blade to reveal all its heady aromas - suggesting the marking, tunnelling, and gouging of burrowing insects (although normally not in this their most repellent, malodorous of foods).

Accompanied by a printed poem and a dish of freshly minted Camphor chips emanating heady scents, gallery visitors are invited to engage in their own silent, breath work - becoming quietly enveloped within the lingering aromas of Camphora’s rhythmically scarified form.

1. <https://weeds.brisbane.qld.gov.au/weeds/camphor-laurel>

2. **symbiotic real /sɪmbɪ'ɒtɪk rɪ:l/**

A term used by Timothy Morton to describe the inseparable connection and participation of humans in the context of the wider ecosphere; It implies a non-hierarchical solidarity of humans with nonhumans and it stems from the critique of the use of word ‘nature’ which arbitrarily separates humans from the rest of the living systems surrounding us.

<https://cyberbiomes.org/lexicon/symbiotic-real>

Lie back on concrete or grass
Feel the power of a whole planet pulling you into its core

If it's raining, open your mouth and swallow a piece of cloud.
If it's windy, inhale scents drifting in the evening breeze

Inhale as deeply as you can
Draw upon those aromas, as deeply as you can
Feel them becoming a part of your body
Atmospheres that once passed through bats, dragonflies and cats
the exhalation of seaweed and trees

With your back on the ground
facing the celestial vault
feel the world turn

(Adapted from an extract by Nahum, 2021, *The World's Turn*)

Artist Bio -

Keith Armstrong is an experimental artist profoundly motivated by issues of social and ecological justice. He has specialised for over twenty-two years in collaborative, experimental practices. Through inventing radical research methodologies and processes he has led and created over sixty major artworks and process-based projects, which have been shown extensively in Australia and overseas, supported by numerous grants from the public and private sectors.





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LAYDAY

2022

TESSA BERGAN

WAX, COCONUT SCENT, VARIABLE DIMENSIONS

Artwork Description -

When asked to be part of this show, to consider olfactory ecologies in response to this space, The Old Lock Up, I was in the middle of an extended period of enjoyable surf sessions. I thought about the environments and systems I move within, including the ocean and surf culture, and the minute elements that make for the richness of these ecologies; how something like the smell of surf wax contributes to my experience of the world. I wondered how diminished my life would be without something even as small as this, as well as the larger experiences it signals at. I connected the idea to the isolating space of a jail cell.

The phrase lay day was first used to describe a day for loading or unloading a boat, or a delay in port. Among surfers it's used to describe a day with no waves.

Here, in The Old Lock Up, laid out on a cell bench, the text may be conceived as a description of the base experience of the first intended users of the space, as well as linking the imagined experience of the cell to the idea of no waves / no action, or a delay in port / life.

The scent of coconuts – associated with tropical islands, the beach, suntan lotion, holidays, leisure, and, even more specifically, surf wax – is alien to the space, which was initially intended to be stark and devoid of pleasurable stimulation. Similarly, scent and text aren't a usual pair. Text is conceptual, requiring us to have formally learnt about it for it to hold any meaning. Scent, on the other hand, is bodily and we engage with it instinctively. I like the two forms of understanding overlapping and blending. Often it takes such irregularities to make us look – or smell – around with renewed curiosity, delving deeper into our environment, considering its histories against our current reality, and gaining more meaning from both as we do so.

¹¹ „I thought about the environments and systems

I move within, including the ocean and surf culture, and the minute elements that make for the richness of these ecologies; how something like the smell of surf wax contributes to my experience of the world. I thought about the environments and systems I move within, including the ocean and surf culture, and the minute elements that make for the richness of these ecologies; how something like the smell of surf wax contributes to my experience of the world...”



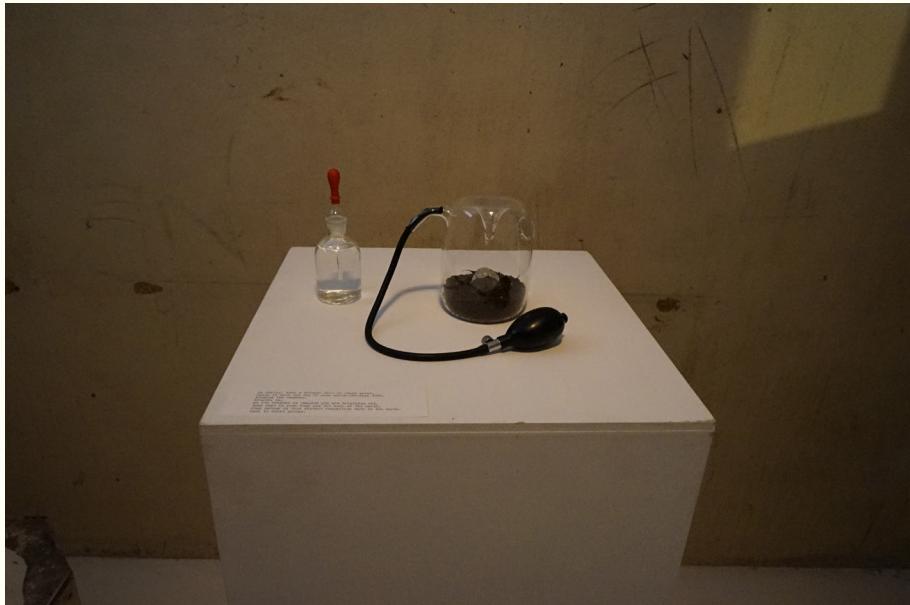
- **Tessa Bergan is an Australian multidisciplinary contemporary visual and performance artist. She is highly regarded as an arts educator, writer, and collaborator with an exciting emerging practice that subverts reality to reflect creatively on the comedic frailty of the human condition.**

@ZINGERBURGSTER

wake up - smell the earth - come home:

earth-(re)fuge-3000 ©

**Archival soils and creek water collected from Kabi Kabi land
(26°40'19.1"S, 153°02'52.4"E) pre-fallout, during March 2022.**



...on waking, take a dropper full of creek water, place it into the top of the earth-(re)fuge-3000, atomize the chamber, breathe in, as you breathe in imagine you are breathing out, take rest in your body and the body of the earth. Find refuge in this distant connection back to solid ground.

Artwork Description**earth-(re)fuge-3000 ©****Merinda Davies 2022**

How can we find ways to thrive within collapse? This olfactory device is designed to cocoon the user in the scent of the earth. The earth-(re)fuge-3000 © is designed for apocalypse, designed for a distant and not so distant future world where our soft bodies are not able to handle the outdoor world; the temperatures, the humidity, the smells, the grief of climate collapse. A world where our soft bodies need care while we work to restore.

The earth-(re)fuge-3000 © is designed for a future world where we have travelled to distant places, where we live on a floating home in another galaxy, for a future where we have lost contact with solid ground.

suffix: -fuge

expelling or dispelling either a specified thing or in a specified way.

noun: refugee

1. shelter or protection from danger or distress
2. a place that provides shelter or protection
3. something to which one has recourse in difficulty



Merinda Davies is an artist using performance, movement, installation, and conversation to question the current structural paradigm of inequality. Her work is inspired by the environment, human and non-human social structures and the possibilities available to us in future imaginings. She is a founder and core creative for Umwelt Collective.

RESPIRE II: OUT OF BREATH

2022



BELLA DEARY

Mixedmedia installation comprised of a 2300 x 1100 millimetre latex object, surrounded by smaller 13780 x 1500 mm latex forms contrasted by industrial materials such as asphalt and concrete, and an original fragrance.



Artwork Description -

Respire II: Out of Breath (2022) highlights an enlarged mitochondria made using latex, which acts as a symbol for multi-species respiration, as this is the component of the cell largely responsible for cellular respiration.

Air pollution from industry and motor vehicles enters the body via the olfactory system through the process of respiration and has been found to have adverse effects on most bodily organs, even potentially resulting in mitochondrial dysfunction.

The installation addresses this problem by forming tension between organic and industrial materials – demonstrated as the soft latex form drapes off a concrete bench compromising its intended form as it sags towards the ground while pieces of asphalt assemble throughout the form.

Meanwhile, clusters of small latex sculptures resembling cell structures multiply throughout the space. As if reclaiming the melancholy scene, these lively forms give insight into the ability for new life to persist and adapt to changing environmental conditions. These forms emanate a sweet rubbery scent, conflicting with the artist's custom fragrance, reminiscent of smoke and asphalt. Respire II: Out of breath aims to address the harmful effects that air pollution has on human and nonhuman respiratory and olfactory systems, and it is hoped that viewers will leave the space with a greater sense of empathy for both their own bodies and the bodies of other life forms.

Bella Deary is a Meanjin (Brisbane) based visual artist whose practice gathers influence from environmental science and climate activism to promote the equality of all living forms. Her practice seeks to promote awareness of the interconnections between humans and nonhumans by developing interactive latex-based installations and video projections. Deary's work aims to dismantle the hierarchy between human and non-human life by emphasising the body's organic qualities and simulating interactions between these forms.

Artist Bio -

Perhaps, if I Let Go. 2022

Field Recordings & Arrangement by Amelia McLeish

Bowed Guitar by Tom Lyons.

Artwork Description-

Perhaps, if I Let Go is an audio installation comprising electronically manipulated sounds that aim to perturb the synaesthetic. The act of listening is similar to the act of smelling, we become accustomed to the little sounds - the sounds of a dripping tap, the sounds of the outside world. Similarly we become acclimated to the scent of our own home.

Wesson & Wilson suggest that the olfactory and auditory neurons in the brain are closely linked, showing that sound can evoke a sense of scent and vice versa.

Can you listen with your nose?

Perhaps, if I Let Go. is a gentle invitation to connect soundscapes with smellscapes, as something beyond-human, yet profoundly embodied.

1. Wesson, D W. & Wilson, D A. (2010). Smelling Sounds: Olfactory–Auditory Sensory Convergence in the Olfactory Tubercl. Journal of Neuroscience, 24 February 2010, 30 (8), DOI: 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.6003-09.2010

Amelia is a multidisciplinary artist, administrator and researcher. Her practice examines the value of art, art institutions and the portrayal of art in pop culture. These concerns produce community-focused participatory projects, installation and performance art; which is applied through pop art, parody, sound, and institutional critique-based strategies. Amelia's sound work often utilises field recordings of the inner city, samples of popular media and digital manipulations to create noise.

Tom Lyons is an experimental pianist, composer, and performer. The focuses of his work are jazz, improvisation, and extended piano techniques. Amelia and Tom are working together to imagine the sounds emerging from the smellscape at The Old Lockup.

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BEE_RILISE

2022



Artwork Description -

The COVID-19 virus inserts its genes into the cells it contaminates, manipulating the genealogy of the organism it encounters. The virus does not breathe, but remains animated in how it affects the breathing of other organisms. Bee propolis (a dark brown waxy substance) and honey contain phenolic compounds that possess many therapeutic powers to combat respiratory syndromes and block/reduce the adsorption of the virus into the host cells.

Pollen, viruses, pollutants and other toxins in the air all carry a positive charge that keeps them suspended in the air. Beeswax made out of honey and burr comb, when burnt releases negative ions to negate the positive charge of air contaminants, and neutralises them. While there is no direct correlation between beeswax and the reduction of airborne virus transmissions, ionised air has been proven to prevent influenza and other viruses. Since, the COVID-19 outbreak, an increased number of people have been using negative ion air purifiers.

As we lose our sense of smell. Disinfect and curb our leaking bodies (sneezing,

How do we share air with viral pathogens? What do we deem dirty and hygienic?

coughing) with masks and sanitisers. Sterilise the air we breathe. BEE_RILISE – sanitiser, gloves, and mask installation acts as symbolic virus blocker, air cleanser, smell sense detector, and bronchodilator – to make for a smelly, stained, bodily, and a tad uneasy experience to question: how do we share air with viral pathogens? what do we deem dirty and hygienic? Why are we comfortable or uncomfortable with certain smells and aesthetics?



Hira Sheikh is an interdisciplinary PhD researcher and creative designer. Her artistic practice takes on an ecocritical and a decolonial approach to explore human-environment relationships.

Artist Bio | Her collaborative artwork has most recently been exhibited by Ars Electronica.ART Global Gallery and Helsinki City Museum.

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RITUAL COLLABORATION

2022

LILLIAN WHITAKER

Artwork Description -

Ritual Collaboration (2022) takes the form of obscure beeswax sculptures. The work has a strong conceptual focus on the mutualistic phenomena of pollination, presenting sculptural depictions of mapping practices, emphasising topographical terrain and pollination tracking/mapping. As the title suggests, the theme of collaboration is intrinsic, where the relationship of a beehive to its environmental surroundings is explored, as is the relationship between honeybee and artist.

The co-collaborative relationship between artist and honeybee is grounded upon concepts of ecocentrism which dispute destructive, anthropocentric hierarchies between humans and non-humans¹. Honeybees are bestowed agency and authorship as co-collaborative agents in Ritual Collaboration.

A strong olfactory presence additionally accompanies the sculptural work where scents of beeswax, smoke and various botanicals subtly emanate from the objects. These are smellscapes, or perhaps, smellmaps of the beehive's pollination journeys.



1. 1 Casas, A. B., & Burgess, R. A. (2012). The practical importance of philosophical inquiry for environmental professionals: A look at the intrinsic/instrumental value debate. *Environmental Practice: Journal of the National Association of Environmental Professionals*, 14(3), 184-189.

“Honeybees are bestowed agency and authorship as co-collaborative agents in Ritual Collaboration.”



Lillian Whitaker is a Meanjin-based artist whose practice adopts an environmentalist lens. Currently completing her practice-led Masters of Philosophy at QUT, Whitaker analyses aspects of ecology with a specific focus on themes of pollination mapping and ecocentric collaboration with European honeybee colonies. She aims to highlight the importance of ecological balance in the context of a human-induced Anthropocene. Whitaker uses practical field-work methods whereby she carefully observes environmental phenomena and links these to conducted scientific research. Her art-making processes involve collaborations with honeybee colonies to create beeswax sculptures, video and soundscapes.

When we breath in through our nostrils and mouth, molecules travel up towards our olfactory bulb, sometimes we detect a scent. The information is passed through the limbic system, and in our amygdala in our brains, we may have an emotional response, or a memory may be triggered. Can you describe what you are smelling? The intensity? How does it make you feel?

smellnotes

odours.intensity/10.emotions