

What is the smell of an exhibition?

A selection of works from
the olorVISUAL collection

LABoral
Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial

09.07.2014 / 13.10.2014

**When a work of art transmits
something special to me,
I immediately say, “this piece smells”.
My recollections have been awakened
through the sense of smell and
memory starts to bring me evocations.**

Ernesto Ventós

What Does an Exhibition Smell Like?

Evocation and Experimentation by way of the olorVISUAL collection

Alicia Ventura *Curator of the exhibition*

In an era marked by technological mediation, must the championing of the sensory necessarily be a nostalgic gesture linked to memory, or can it be projected forward, proposing new ways of inhabiting the future? Are other sensory approaches to the artwork and, by extension, to the exhibition as a format possible, desirable or productive? And if they are, must this sensory rediscovery of art emerge from a reformulation of the creation of subjectivity, of the seemingly eccentric, of the valorizing of other senses and thus of other forms of relationship with the real? These are some of the issues underlying the question that, with ambiguity and irony, but also with well-aimed precision, gives this show its title: What does an exhibition smell like?

The question also arises, of course, of the absolutely differentiating point of departure from which the creator of essences Ernesto Ventós launched the olorVISUAL collection 36 years ago: works chosen for their ability to activate the olfactory memory of the collector. Ernesto Ventós explains his project in these terms: ‘When a work of art transmits something special to me, I immediately say, “this piece smells”. By that I mean that my recollections have been awakened through the sense of smell and memory starts to bring me evocations.’

The olorVISUAL collection contains a large number of works acquired in galleries, art fairs, visits to artists’ studios and so on, but never losing touch with a subjective, almost affective link with the work’s creator. Each of the artists represented in the collection has written a brief text concerning the piece’s relationship with smell. In origin, however, the pieces acquired for the collection are the result of specific commissions, with the artists being asked to enhance the olfactory component and the synaesthetic quality of the new work. Thus, the incorporation of a work produced by Hugo Martínez-Tormo *ad hoc* for the olorVISUAL collection, under the aegis of the grant awarded in conjunction with LABoral, is in some ways a return to the origins of the collection.

nanoEssence_Graphene also incorporates most of the elements of the historic discourse of the olorVISUAL collection (synaesthesia/sensory specificity, memory/future, science/art, subjectivity/technology) and as such constitutes a privileged site from which to undertake a reappraisal of the audio-visual works in the collection.

The aim of Hugo Martínez-Tormo’s project — the audio-visual representation of processes that take place on the nanometric scale — connects perfectly with the basic premise of this collection: the belief in the capacity of art, in Paul Klee’s words, to render the invisible visible. Far from any Romantic *dérive*, for this task the artist employs analytical techniques, mathematical equations and high-tech apparatus. The specific choice of graphene as the material of his research is far from casual or capricious: identified by the scientific community as the material with greatest potential for a wide range of applications in the field of nanotechnology, in all likelihood graphene will soon be determining our daily lives.

The work by Hugo Martínez-Tormo, created at a time when half of the world’s laboratories are investigating possible applications of this material, presents itself as an alternative mode of research, a form of sensitive aesthetic experimentation of a future we are not far from inhabiting. Ultimately, *nanoEssence_Graphene* makes use of synaesthetic manoeuvres, translating and combining information drawn from and intended for different senses to reveal the impact of scientific and technological developments in our day-to-day engagement with the world around us, a relationship that is not only utilitarian but also sensory and aesthetic.

One of the issues that make the olorVISUAL collection especially interesting as a field of work for a curator is precisely the attention it devotes to the phenomenon of synaesthesia. If we understand synaesthesia as the transposition or interference of perceptions from different senses, it is tempting to regard it as a phenomenon closely linked to creation. In fact, this concept of

synaesthesia not as a specific figure but as an inherent feature of artistic processes is the idea that underpins the premise of the present exhibition and the selection of works of which it is composed.

Rather than pieces forced to fit into a pre-established discourse, the works in the exhibition are put forward as a repertoire of possibilities for the viewer, as a collection (in the most literal sense) of sensory triggers, waiting to be discovered and engaged. Thus, the ultimate significance of the exhibition lies not so much in the connections of content and form between the pieces as in the kind of invitation that it makes to us as viewers: to establish a new and unprejudiced aesthetic relationship with them, one that can in turn result in an enriching of our sensory relationship with the world.

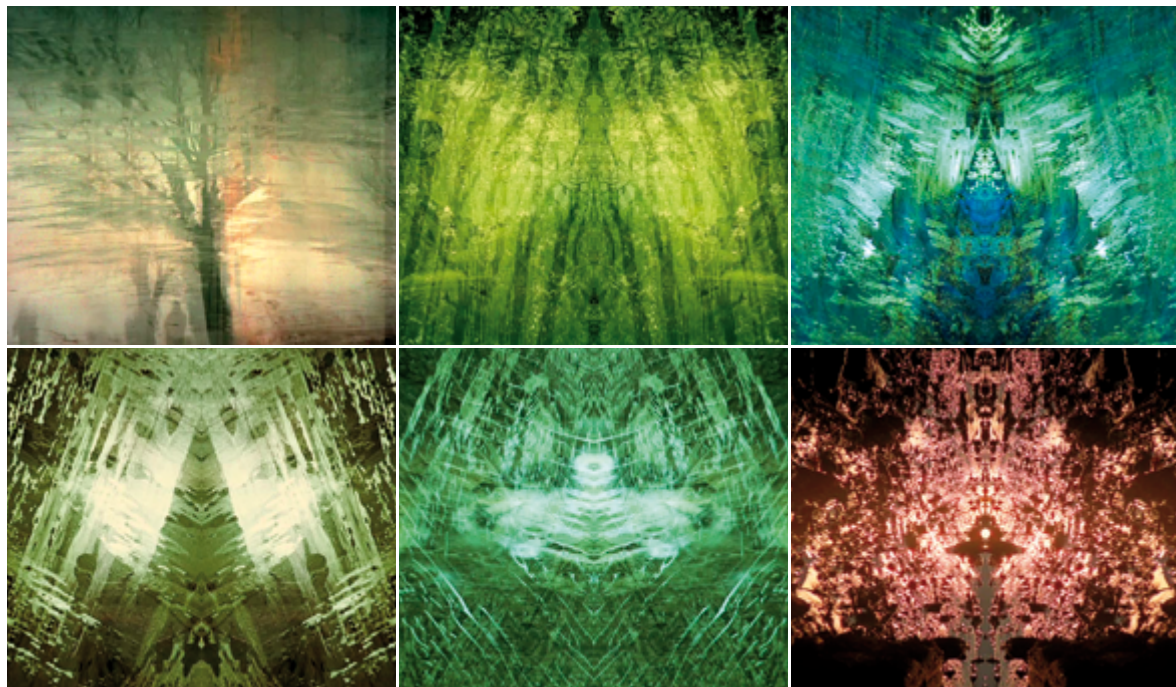
An unsatisfactory conclusion to this working process would be to lapse into indifference and arbitrariness: to end up imagining that any work would be equally capable of engendering this change in our attitude as viewers. On the contrary, the choice of work has to be every bit as rigorous, but it must also generate new parameters and criteria. Thus, from the moment we aim to create new models of relationship with the artwork and the world, new forms of subjectivity, is it not logical to take subjectivity itself as a starting point? Is it not coherent to trust the responses prompted in the collector by this group of works (the same sensations that led to its inclusion in the collection) as a guarantee of intensity, as evidence of its evocative potential?

Ernst Ventós, with his exceptional sense of smell, has put together this collection whose pieces point to discourses and locations that are particularly significant for our contemporary experience: they configure discourses on issues of a social and political nature, reflect on the fictional, the performative and the oneiric, or simply offer themselves as exercises of the imaginary. Given this diversity of proposals, we must look for the common denominator elsewhere: in the virtuosity with which the

artists revindicate, in an age of seemingly disembodied immediacy, the importance of the sensory; the ability of these works to remind us that the hypertechnological future will still be a physical, concrete space, inhabited by sounds, colours and smells. These are the realms in which the artists selected for this exhibition move: Andrea Bátorfi, Democracia, Nanna Hänninen, Carlos Irijalba, Clare Langan, Cristina Lucas, Albert Merino, Fleur Noguera, Marina Núñez, Javier Peñafiel, Benet Rossell, Charles Sandison, Amparo Sard, Martín Sastre, Hiraki Sawa, Mariana Vassileva, Tim White-Sobieski and Carla Zaccagnini.

The collector himself has said that ‘smell in our society is a sign that needs to be interpreted correctly. On one side it is prophetic and on the other historical’. The ultimate aim of this exhibition is that we as viewers place ourselves on this double vector, that of memory and imagination, of evocation and experimentation, of the real and the possible.

This particular approach, which affirms sensory transcendence and the evocative potential of smell, not only enables us to rediscover from a fresh perspective some outstanding works of contemporary audio-visual creation and become acquainted with one of the most significant and singular art collection ventures in this country. It also prompts us to rethink art as a space of evolution and creation, as a place from which to generate new sensations, new images, new textures and, of course, new smells.



Andrea Bátorfi
Unfolding, 2011

Animated film
Edition 1/7 - 9' 17"

The Scent of de Garden of Eden

Scent is the most delicate, most immaterial of all stimuli affecting our senses. Scent is the envoy of an entirely different, ethereal dimension. A delicate scent tunes our hearts to delicate feelings and prompts our minds to exalted thoughts. They say that at the highest grades of self-realization the yogi sense a scent of roses sweet beyond imagination, as if they were smelling the flowers of the heavenly Garden of the Eden.

The *Unfolding* film is in truth a messenger from another world. Through a series of successive gates opening and veils lifted, it points out the way towards new internal dimensions saturated with light and delicate energies, expressing faith in the possibility of creating the earthly Eden within ourselves.



Democracia
Charity, 2006

HDDV format video
Edition 1/7 + 2 PA - 7' 10"

Every morning, from 7.30 until 8.30, supermarkets in the Vallecas neighbourhood on the outskirts of Madrid offer a mix of recycling and charity. Expired food from the previous day is collected by people who queue each day outside these establishments, emphasizing their status as failed consumers.

The waste generated by supermarkets takes the place of institutionalized charity.

The quality control of the multinationals becomes a kind of Salvation Army: here Ecuadorians, Moroccans and retired people reflect the multicultural identity of Europe.

This project is based on an urban action in which these supermarkets' waste bins are painted with the word Caridad — 'Charity'.

A perfume has been created on the basis of this urban action: the perfume of charity. This project consists in the presentation of this perfume, also called Charity, produced by the olorVISUAL collection.

The scent called 'Charity' reproduces the smell of past-its-sell-by foodstuffs, thus complimenting and contrasting with the visual document of the collecting of expired food products with the olfactory sensation of rotting food.



Nanna Hänninen
Meditation Practices II. Trying to Be a Better Me, 2009

HD DVD
Edition 1/5 + 1 PA - 8' 36"

There is a silent face with some movement -eyes are closed- breathing in and out. Smells become strong too, and yes- they do distract myself from the practice. There is a scent of sandalwood incense and a small sign of a tension in my armpit. A peaceful moment, no sound in the meditation room, chaos outside the frames. Like a city is restless -or a mind too as it is a bigger construction than any city ever was or will be. I witness it all and let them go too. I am here. I am peaceful.

Mind might be steady or might not be -you cannot see. Either can you see the city, but you can see all the lights captured. Exposure time was long so I could record my breathing on the film. It was like a performance made with smallest but most essential tool in the world, breath -and smelling while breathing because you cannot even avoid that. I could smell rosemary under my nose and neighbours cooking some dinner while exposing the negative. I felt myself lonely because I had no company for the dinner at that night.

Carlos Irijalba
Inercia, 2012

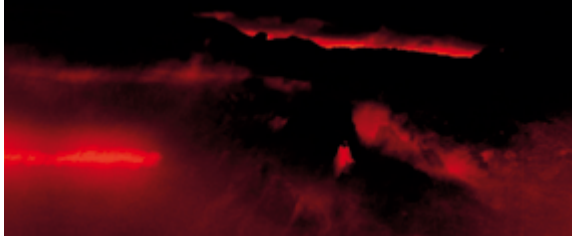
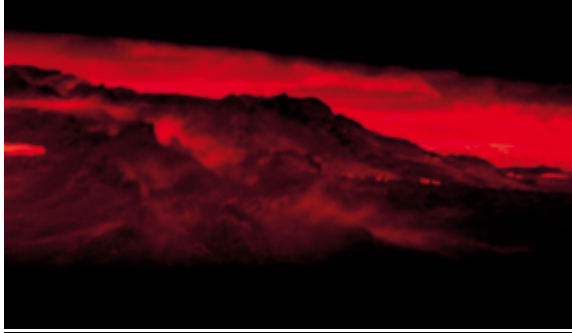
Video
Edition 2/5 - 3' 44"

The Intangibility of Inertia

Inertia describes how the territory is not one, single and flat. At the same time, neither are memories, and their importance is marked by the sense with which they are connected. The memory of smells engages other, less common parameters in this culture of ours. The sense of smell is capable visual and aural of leaping decades in a second.

During two years of filming, the project was carried out at various locations in the Basque Country, Navarra and Cantabria. The weather meant that the sessions had to be reduced to two summers, in which we were frequently surprised by thunderstorms, and the parched earth, dried out by the eucalyptus trees, sent up a dust laden with nuances. The eucalyptus is one of the species that deplete the soil most severely, and they grow very fast. They are cut down every summer and sawmills abound in the area. Their smell impregnates whole valleys and that indescribable smell accompanied us during long nights of filming.

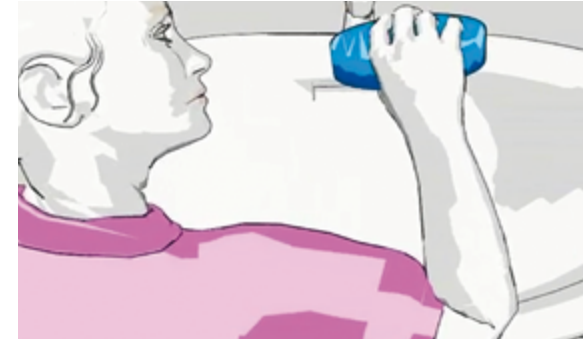
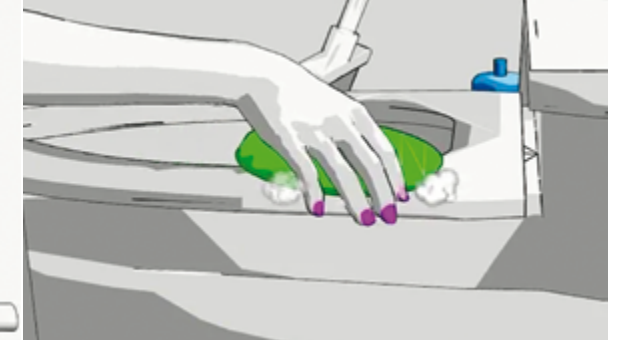




Clare Langan
Glass Hour, 2002

*Super 16mm film transferred to DVD
Edition 3/5 - 8'*

Glass Hour's scent could be described as hot and sulphuric. The heat from the fire and the hot earth burns the nostrils making breathing difficult. Yet somehow mankind has adapted to exist here in this toxic environment, even though only in the form of a solitary figure. A constant wind blows throughout the film both dissipating the air and at the same time feeding the fumes of the fire.



Cristina Lucas
El Eje del Mal, 2003

*3D animation
Edition 3/3 + 1 PA - 3'*

It's easy to imagine the terrible war that is waged between germs and housewives on Saturday mornings. The relentless pursuit of disinfection and purity. Any means is justified by this end: 'kill germs even if they seem harmless'.

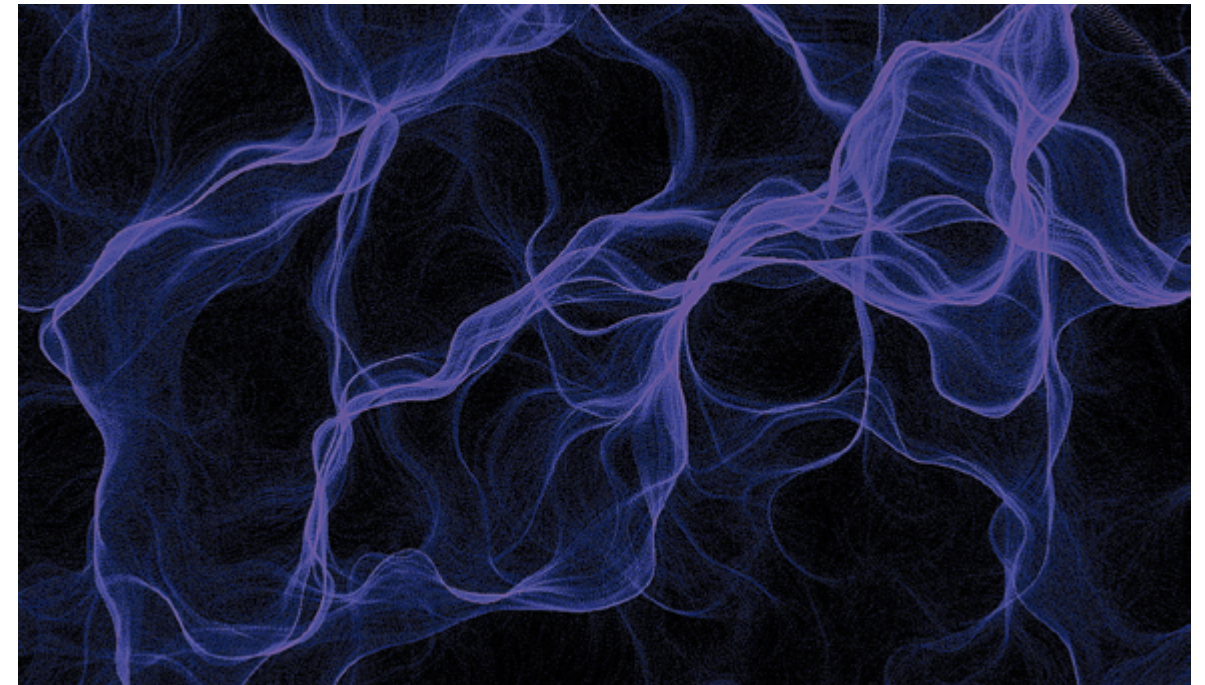
For such a 'noble' task it is essential to transmit this knowledge from generation to generation, thus main-

taining the established order and the outcome, the prize is that lovely smell clean we like so much.

But, strangely enough, the clean smell is nothing but the absence of smell. When nothing is recognizable to our noses.



- Representation by Hugo Martínez-Tormo of the carbon atom and its classification in the periodic table, visualized with its colour on the nanoscale
- Installation by *nanoEsencia_Grafeno*



Hugo Martínez-Tormo
nanoEsencia_Grafeno, 2014

*Immersive audiovisual installation of generative art
 Wood, acrylic, Mac mini computer,
 27" monitor, headphones, peephole*

What Do Atoms Smell Like?

Installation that invites visitors to delve into the inner depths of matter — in this case, the nanomaterial graphene — to perceive the colour of the atoms that compose it and their analogue sound, providing us with a wealth of new sensations.

To talk of the smell of an atom is almost impossibly complex, because in order for a smell to exist and be perceived it is necessary for a particular molecule to exist, and a molecule is composed of a number of atoms. Atoms can be perceived by the colour of the light they emit and by the

analogue sound associated with that colour's wavelength. Here we have the basis of a synaesthetic interplay in which colour and sound can awaken specific olfactory sensations.

What would it be like if we were the size of a single atom? What would matter look, sound and smell like at that scale? Here a scale that is effectively invisible to us becomes a haven for the imaginary, a realm in which our minds can wonder and imagine freely, allowing us to experience remarkable chromatic-acoustic sensations that give rise to new perceptions through the sense of smell.



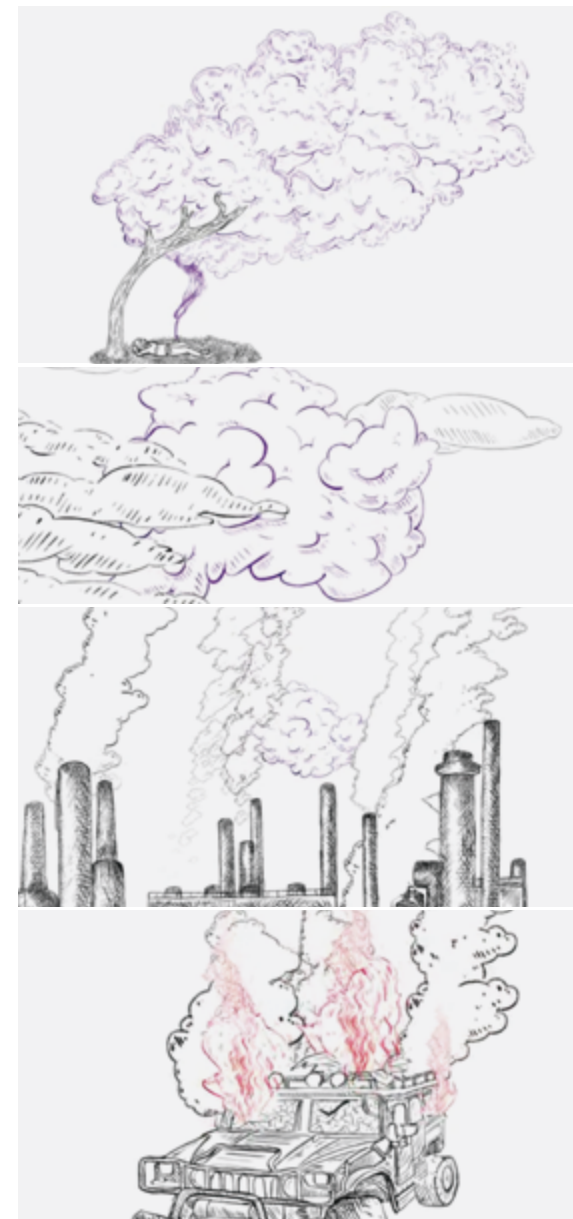
Albert Merino

La esencia de la piedra, 2013

1080p HDV
Edition 1/5 - 7' 53"

A walk through the architectonic spaces of a place in which the olfactory qualities of the stone and its walls are evoked through the appearance of decontextualized objects, hidden presences and a whole series of unusual elements.

Two figures seek each other through the halls and grounds in a static chase, in the course of which the space is stripped bare to expose its wounds and absences in an unfolding that transcends the gaze and embraces the other senses.



Fleur Noguera

Smoke, 2008

PAL DVD
Edition 1/50 - 6' 48"

Smoke is an aerial, atmospheric fiction, an incitement to wander. The rhythm is hypnotic, accompanied by a piece of electronic music.

The protagonist is a cloud of smoke that lets itself be carried along by the flow of events. The story is fixed by the treatment, precise, floating on the white background. The drawings of J. H. Fragonard¹ inspired the first few seconds of the animation, the scene with the smoke merging into the foliage of the tree.

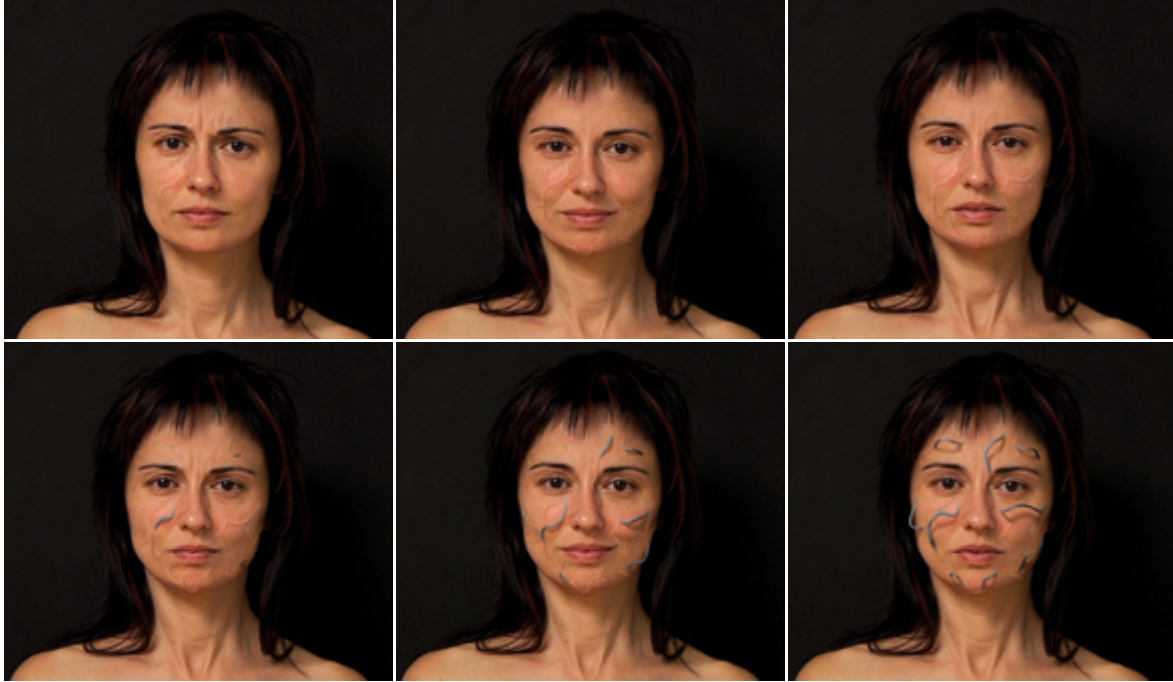
Smoke is also the smell of camping in the forest, of sausages grilled over a wood fire, of snow-covered mountains, of polluting factories, of roasting metal, of a cigarette burning down.

It's when I reflect on the sources of inspiration that the precise memory of two olfactory emotions come back to me.

The smell of a cigarette in summer when the weather is hot.

The day I met a cloud during a walk in the Alps. Curiously, the cloud had a perfume.

1. *Les grands cyprès de la Villa d'Este* (1760)
J.H. Fragonard (*Grasse*, 1732- *Paris*, 1806)



Marina Núñez
Red, 2006

DVD
Edition 1/3 - 1' 50"

Some of the characteristics of monsters are: the instability of a soft fluid body capable of metamorphosing, the heterogeneity of a hybrid body formed of illegal combinations, the obscenity of a body without edges or containment that transgresses its own limits.

However, the really horrifying thing is the idealized or canonical body, a rigid body, pure and sealed. I don't know who could inhabit it without suffering from cramps, autism and claustrophobia.

Luckily it is only an imaginary body.

The nose, the ears, the eye sockets, the mouth, the pores of the skin... our senses lie in holes. Our skin is not armour, but rather a fragile mobile membrane, perforated, permeable, contiguous with the rest of the world.

Javier Peñafiel
Conquista básica te vuelvo a pedir
que te definas, 2004

Video
Edition 1/3 - 1' 09"

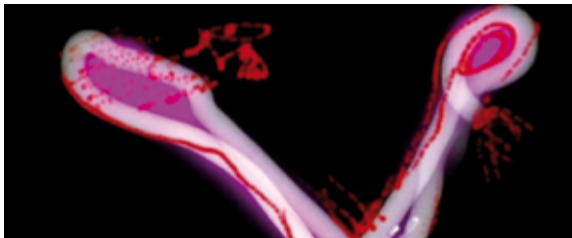
Even if the person who provoked it disappears, the smell remains. Is desire provoked? Can democracy be provoked? The video *Basic Conquest, I Ask You Again to Define Yourself* addresses these questions. A transparent ballot box, the bag of a vacuum cleaner and the enigmatic operation, in ritual mode, of an unidentifiable person.

Basic Conquest, I Ask You Again to Define Yourself are words with a sense of melodrama and at the same time of acquired rights. In many cases our methodologies of equality turn out to be hierarchical distributions of an immense void. Many people have seen in this video something like a vaginal resonance, others an ironic play with visibility or the enigmatic reconstruction of magic tricks, while yet others have had feelings of uneasiness that come from looking at videos as if they were mirrors.

For me, after the gestures of that unrecognizable someone, something remains in the place of that strange ritual. Between the voids of the ballot box and the yellow bag there might be a deliciously sweet and sour smell. One more activity has taken place, a ceremony in accordance with chaos itself. Afterwards the smell and the object that is the ballot box remain. The subject has disappeared, gone with his customs and negotiations.

It is the persistence of that which has not found a solution, of unforgettable events. The expectant need to go back to a problem, in a mixture of biography and hypnosis, is similar to the fact of recognizing a particular smell and seeing that it is no longer exactly the same, a heady sensation of fleeing from the learned world.





Benet Rossell
Mil a Miró, 1993-2009

Video + 1000 shots
Edition 2/8 + 4PA + 2HC - 16' 36"

A thousand images with a trilingual poetic text, taken from the video *1000 to Miró*, which I made in 1993 to mark the centenary of the artist's birth of the, Miró Year, the negative of a non-existent story board that I decided to name story abroad, offer another record of the narrative, or perhaps an alternative non-narrative that shows the closest and most confident version.

Among the new additions are the text, a poem-river of 1000 lines in trilingual version, conceived for this edition; the materialization of the virtual image, created with pixels instead of ink, imperceptible to the rules of filmmaking that impose their optical servitudes; the incorporation of ink the progenitor of art, and of smell, suggested by the explosion of shapes and colours: the wet grass that awakens with bell chimes, the perfume of frost and ice of an initial landscape, the cleanness of the white figures that stand out in the dark, the sea subject of jellyfish, the acid touch of early pomegranate rain and the candied sweetness of tropical fruits yet to be discovered, the cheap intensity of the line of the *tanguero*, the sweat in the stadium stands, the full olfactory range of the imaginary cosmos, and the stale smell of the shipwreck...

1000 to Miró is a patient work, which requires a slow, intimate observation, like consulting a source in the Library of Alexandria, where every text, every plate, every page, one beside the other, transforms the space into a new landscape, active and heterodox.



Charles Sandison
Genoma, 2006

Single-channel video projection - loop
Edition 4/5 + 1PA

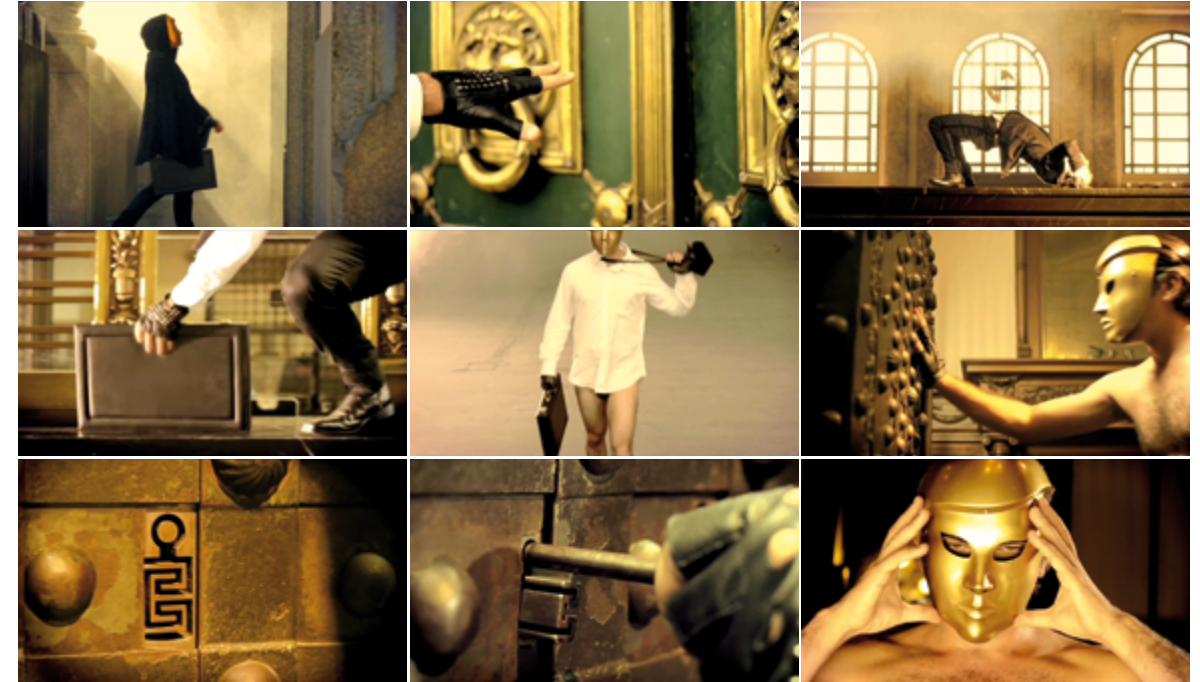
Sometimes I try to visualize the journey of a word as it leaves the lips of a speaker and moves towards a listener, or imagine, when standing in a public library, that all the books are quietly talking. The vision that occurs in my mind is that of a vast flock of birds, which seem to move chaotically, yet somehow manage not to collide. With *Genoma* I'm looking for the first, the first smell, the origin of everything.

Amparo Sard
Hauptpunkt (Esencia), 2013

HD DVD
Edition 1/9 + PA - 4' 54"

Hauptpunkt (Essence) speaks of an experience that places the emphasis on the landscape, as the Romans did in their day.

To contemplate, smell and enjoy nature, sharing and delighting in the unusual and the unknown, is a source of pleasure. And the pleasure it brings lies in the recognition of the 'perfect' balance (subjective, of course) between the ideal and reality. *Hauptpunkt (Essence)* is thus a metaphor for life as a landscape, a high point of that journey in which we are able to return to the 'mirror of the soul' through the contemplation and apprehension or comprehension of what surrounds us and of ourselves.



Martín Sastre
U from Uruguay (Sé rico, sé famoso, sé maravilloso... O sé tú), 2012

Colour and sound DVD
Edition 1/3 - 2' 22"

I wonder what Uruguay smells like and go to Las Delicias, to 'Los Piratas'. I close my eyes. Dawn, my uncle Meme is watering the newly mown grass, it smells of green, of morning.

It's summer, the wind brings a storm and we go outside to get wet in the water pouring off the roof, the hot pavement cools down, it smells of rain, of the south-easterly wind.

My sister and I resolve that all animals are our friends, hummingbirds, beetles, crickets and frogs, we are Indians and jump through the trees of the gully, the white foam of the silver bay, our skin smells of seaweed, of Atlantic saltpetre, of the sun's glare.

I come home and my mum picks me up, she smells of earth, her skin calms me. The sun sets between white walls, purple tiles, my grandmother sings, Eugenia de Montijo, Tránsito Olasa, she tells me about the beginning of her saga. Lala's grey eyes turn pink and she smiles, a spoiled girl, she smells clean, a pure soul.

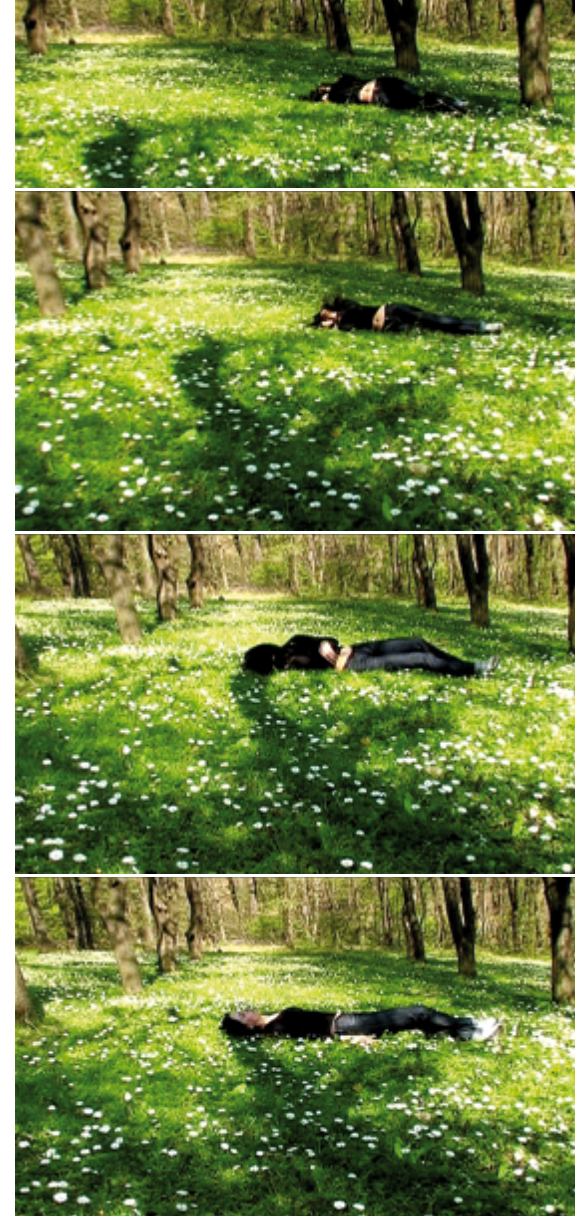
It's night, in the background the forest, pine trees, lambertianas. Virgilio's flowers, and the well where Grandpa planted a jasmine, she now guides us in dreams, she smells of cosmos, of galaxies. They say that one's native land is that, a memory of childhood. To me Uruguay smells of home, of my house, 'Los Piratas'.



Hiraki Sawa
Sleeping machine I, 2009

Single-channel video
Edition 2/8 - 7' 07"

The smell is the moment of the interval, the gap,
the space in between.



Mariana Vassileva
Tango, 2007

PAL DVD
Edition 4/5 + 2 PA - 45"

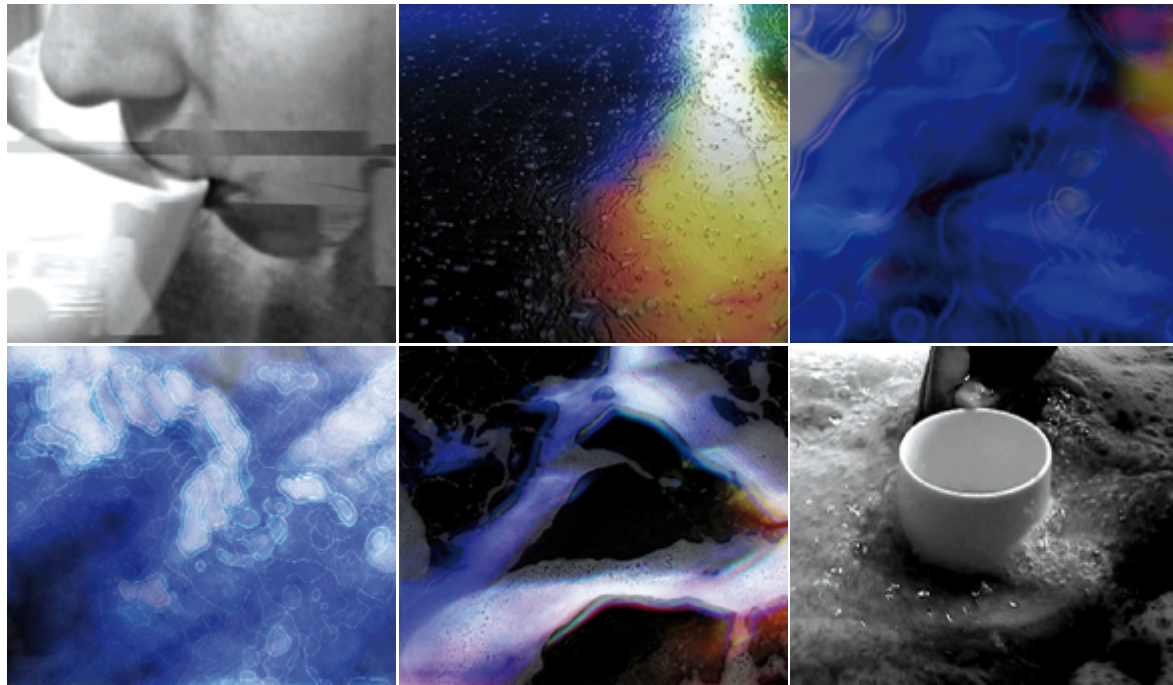
After watching my video, a woman said to me:

'I can recall the smell of the grass of that time, when I was a girl still and I could hide among the bushes or roll down a steep meadow.'

We were born in the melancholy of solitude and one of our conscious or unconscious urges is to run away, to escape.

The first recollections of our childhood search for meaning stay with us always. We go back time and again to our wonderful places of memory to recover and to renew there our energy and hope.

By way of smell I have entered through the little private door into the great precincts of longing and dreams.



Tim White-Sobieski
On the Wing, 2003

Video DVD
Edition 7/10 + 4 PA - 10' 47"

The music utilized in this video gives a feeling of a nature, movement, breeze of fresh air –another words –new experiences.

At the beginning, starting with the images of the infinite waiting halls of an airport in can be substituted by a smell of running cars, trolleys, smell of machinery, some smells of a cooking food –another words –all traces of civilization that can be felt by regular way in everyday life.

Since the concept of the film is based on juxtaposition of reality and imagination, next part of a sense attrib-

uted is described as nature specific smells, vibrations –again like breeze of ocean water, vibration of ocean waves hitting a shore, smell of greenery.

The film presents two majors parts of a nature –air & water.

(...)

The whole film is a movement, bouncing between calm & quite & smells & movement.

Carla Zaccagnini
E pur si muove, 2007

DVD
Edition 1/5 + 2 PA - 69'

There was a faint smell of old snow, the kind that lingers even under a sun that doesn't hide, or of a freezer that hasn't been cleaned in a long time; a faint smell of rock or of dry earth, but heavy or compact, that won't blow away; of a cold lake and a cold wind, free of dust, transparent; something of the smell of my deer, Federico, but very faint, like a background; and a smell of green.



EXHIBITION

Curator

Alicia Ventura

Coordination

LABoral

Patricia Villanueva

María Romalde

olorVISUAL collection

Cristina Agàpito

Technical team

LABoral

David Morán

Sergio Redruelo

Space design

longo+roldán

Graphic design of the space

Think diseño

Communication

LABoral

Pepa Telenti Alvargonzález

Diego Ugalde

olorVISUAL collection

Yrene Bueno

Education

LABoral

Lucía Arias

Mediation

LABoral

Elena Álvarez

Transport of works

ARTERRI

www.laboralcentrodearte.org

Los Prados, 121

33394 Gijón (Asturias), España

www.olorvisual.com

Apartado de Correos 14019

08080 Barcelona

CATALOGUE

Coordination

olorVISUAL collection

Cristina Agàpito

Yrene Bueno

Texts

Alicia Ventura

Artists / *olorVISUAL collection*

Graphic design of the catalogue

David Torrents + Silvia Míguez

Production and printing

Gràfiques Ortells, s.L.

Images

© Artists

© Charles Sandison,

Nanna Hänninen, VEGAP, 2014

Translations

Mireia Bas

Graham Thomson

Ted Krasny

PRODUCTION

laboral

Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial

colección **olorVISUAL**

IN COLLABORATION WITH

nh | HOTEL GROUP **nh** GIJÓN