

# Research report, n°11.

Six-monthly publication – January 2009

## **Editorial**

While we had to wait until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the arrival of chemistry for perfume to become sophisticated and to undo the ties that bound it to the animal and the vegetable, it has since developed on an industrial level which has heavily oriented the perfume market in the manner in which it is consumed. Indeed, haven't these strategies of industrial concentration such as big retail distribution created a situation where the field of consumers has spread in a spectacular fashion to the detriment of innovative scents and a creative imprint? Faced with growing standardisation,

how have the aesthetic and economic alternatives developed in niche perfumes? This issue will examine the perfume economy where the economic stakes are as important as the aesthetic ones.

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# Perfume

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Jean-Claude Ellena has been the in-house perfumer at Hermès since 2004. Before joining Hermès, he created a number of perfumes including *First* (1976) for Van Cleef & Arpels, *l'Eau parfumée* (1992) for Bulgari and *Déclaration* (1998) for Cartier. At Hermès he created the *Hermessence* collection (sold exclusively in the Hermès stores), *Un Jardin sur le Nil* (2005), *Terre d'Hermès* (2006) and *Kelly Calèche* (2007). In 2008, he created the third part of the *Parfums-Jardins d'Hermès* collection, *Un Jardin après la Mousse*. He has also created scents for the *Artisan Parfumeur*, the *Editions Frédéric Malle* and *The Different Company*.

In September 2007, Jean-Claude Ellena published the new version of *Que sais-je ? Le Parfum* with the *Presses Universitaires de France* that followed on from the original that was written in 1980 by the perfumer Edmond Roudnitska and most notably the creator of *Eau d'Hermès* in 1951, the first perfume ever brought out by Hermès. Jean-Claude Ellena has also published *Mémoires de parfum* (with Josette Gontier, *Équinoxe*, 2003).

Olivier Assouly: What is the status of our sense of smell and our "olfactory culture" given the predominance of sight and the visual in a culture of images? Is not the sense of smell really the poor relation of the senses in the West? Has this had an impact on the variety and wealth of fragrances?

Jean-Claude Ellena: It so happens that in the West, sight takes precedence over smell. I can see two reasons for the relative poverty of smell as a sense: the standardisation of smell and as such of scents and a general acclimatisation to scents. Wherever you go in Europe, the taste of strawberry and vanilla is stereotyped and identical and I mention this as archetypes of taste exist that are more like caricatures of taste. These caricatures of taste are, by definition, much more prominent, and when one eats strawberry or lemon flavoured yoghurt we recognise strawberry or lemon but we do not taste the variety of fruit or any other subtleties. Training the sense of smell starts with the sense of taste and we have all the stereotypes that shape taste in our memories. The same stereotypes that have been unified by taste can be found in perfume. One example surprised me recently when they launched tea-flavoured yoghurts that were strangely like one of my perfumes, *l'Eau Parfumée au Thé* from Bulgari. On eating this yoghurt I had the impression that I was tasting the perfume and the reason for this was simple: they have made an Earl Grey version but the only thing I could taste was the bergamot flower and not the tea at all. It was merely a caricature of the tea. This conditions a standardisation of archetypes that then guides our choice of scents.

In addition, we have seen a more general process of acculturation since American tastes appeared in perfumes in the seventies. In order to conquer the American market that was one of the largest at the time, perfumers created perfumes that corresponded to American norms and tastes and which were nevertheless sold in America and in Europe as French perfumes. The strategy of the big groups such as Saint-Laurent and Dior was to impose this acculturation based on American olfactory references.

OA: But how were these olfactory types identified?

JCE: This was done by taking archetypal American scents and modifying them. For example, Saint-Laurent's Opium is a "copy" of Estée Lauder's Youth Dew: what happened was an amusing game of mirrors. Opium was a worldwide success stealing market share from Youth Dew to the extent that Estée Lauder brought out Cinnabar, a perfume inspired by Opium that was a commercial failure.

OA: Do you think that the culture of smell takes a back seat to sight in the West?

JCE: I think smell is quite important but that it is overlooked for a number of reasons. It is particularly important in our relationship with others but remains an unspoken code. The spoken codes are visual.

It is true that today, sight takes precedence over smell and to sell scent it is often enough just to put an image to the scent. The public buys the visual rather than the scent. This is all the more true as in big perfume stores one encounters such a "wall of noise" in terms of scents that it is impossible to truly appreciate one in particular. I must add that by creating caricatures, we have conceptually stripped the olfactory of meaning. We are in the same situation as wine. In Jonathan Nossiter's, *Mondovino*, a winemaker says: "I make vertical wines", then adds: "I don't like horizontal things". In perfumes, things are comparable in as much as we have produced smooth perfumes, with no real signature (horizontal). This is why, in parallel with mass perfume production there is a niche perfume industry that we will cover further on and a "parfumerie d'auteurs", being produced by people like Hermès and Cartier.

OA: What was your initial training?

JCE: I learned my trade on the ground in a company that manufactured natural raw materials. So I had real physical contact with raw materials. Later on I will talk about the importance of this physical, sensual, non-intellectual contact with materials. Then in 1976, I went to

the Givaudan school that had just opened in Geneva for a three-year training program. I ended up only staying nine months as I really needed a more direct approach. It was later on that I began to intellectualise what I was doing. This move towards intellectualisation and conceptualisation came slowly over time. I moved from the process of acquiring know-how to gaining knowledge.

It seems to me that current training structures do not train perfumers but technicians who acquire knowledge about the profession. In the same way that one becomes a chef, one becomes a perfumer through experience and contact with one's peers. This means that educational institutions alone are not sufficient and that they must be completed with education by one's peers. Unfortunately most industrial manufacturers want to hire people who are operational straight out of school and this doesn't work very well.

OA: So in what way did your particular journey eventually become decisive in the way you approach your work today?

JCE: In the beginning, everything happened in Grasse in an environment that was totally dedicated to perfume and industries that manufacture natural raw materials. This is why I mentioned the physical, carnal relationship with materials. This experience was decisive in terms of how I perceive my profession and the work I do today. I am at ease with natural raw materials while they may be intimidating for young people leaving schools as they are not used to handling them.

This is a paradox for at least two reasons. One is that natural raw materials are complex while synthetic materials are very simple. We can compare them as we would a wall to a brick. Building with a wall that has already been built is more difficult than building with bricks as a starting point as they are easier to handle. In addition, with a natural product you have to free yourself from the origins of the material. You must take the smell as the smell. We try to embellish natural origins but the truth is that roses don't smell like roses as in the scent of the flower.

It becomes the concept of the smell when we

realise that we can use roses beyond the scent of the flower, when it becomes abstract, conceptual. This is the point at which I actually become a perfumer and much more skilful. In any case, it is a slow profession that requires a huge amount of time unless you want to do imitations but that's another day's work.

O.A: What is the ideal manner to in which to "construct" a perfume given that the perfumer works within a business whose motivations are economic rather than purely aesthetic. The architect, Tadao Ando, when asked "How would it be to design a building with no constraints?", answered that it was unthinkable, unless architecture was to be considered, wrongly, as an art form.

JCE: I agree with him on this point. Just like architecture, we want perfume to be an art form but for economic reasons it is reduced to something that is not an art. We have to work with this constant pull from both sides, that actually makes it interesting. Ideally the first stage covers technique, knowledge, imitations, an accumulation of skills that can not be avoided. Then we enter the phases of analysis and synthesis that is another form of knowledge. So far we have covered technique and reason. In the last stage we enter the domain of the emotions and here one must be open to other forms of art. Exchanges with painters, dancers and musicians who have the same intellectual approach can often answer questions for me. All of this goes in to the ideal creation of a perfume.

It is taken for granted that the economic is linked to the technical and the aesthetic linked to the emotional. Once this is taken on board, it is possible to shake off the economic aspect so as to dedicate oneself entirely to the aesthetic. As a perfumer, I can make a beautifully smelling perfume at a tiny cost. This is to say that the problem is not the equation between the emotional input and the price. I have made very expensive perfumes as the raw materials were very expensive. It takes a long time to get over the cost issue, once one is over it the question remains: could I have made the same scent for less money?

In addition, the constraints are not so much

linked to costs as to supplies. If I work for a big retailer, aiming for a broad cross section of the market, we need to get supplies in for the possible sale of millions of bottles of perfume. The availability of materials is a piece of data that I keep in my mind just like the odours of materials and their cost. When I write a formula, I can calculate the final cost to within ten percent. This comes from experience.

OA: Do marketing and sales techniques have a strong, even deal-breaking influence on the development of a "jus"?

JCE: Current commercialisation is poor as what is sold is the visual. The olfactory "noise" in the bigger stores prevents the potential customer from smelling anything and as a result, the feeling or emotion isn't transmitted. What's more, marketing has given rise to an elliptical approach to the market. It is constantly working with a rear-view mirror which means producing through comparison with other products and once we have to compare, it becomes merely a question of performance. There is another problem I would like to bring up and that is the dependence on the bottle. In marketing, the bottle is more important than the perfume doubtless because the visual is easier to grasp than the olfactory. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, François Coty revolutionised the market by launching the idea of a bottle for a perfume that was aimed at a very elitist clientele; an idea that exists still today for the mass market. I imagine that it is perfectly possible to change the code and propose not one but two, three or five perfumes per bottle to the mass market in as much as developing five formulae is no more difficult than developing one. This would mean selling an actual scent and not a bottle.

OA: What is your take on the prevalent marketing method that involves the systematic testing of a product before it is put on the market?

JCE: I don't understand it. I have worked with these tests. It is what I refer to as working on the cursor. Perfumers have become technicians where they only need to adjust the scent

according to the test results. We know how to make a console with cursors that say fresh, sweet, feminine, masculine, woody, etc. But the objective is to take two hundred percent market share I find we tend to spend a huge amount of money for a minimum risk.

In theory, testing is aimed at limiting the level of uncertainty in terms of the market, to protect oneself using a method, but there is more than one example of a product that performed well in tests that never fulfilled expectations once on the market. I can't explain it but it is a fact.

OA: Is it possible to reconcile high level creativity with mass-marketing and mass consumption of perfumes?

JCE: I don't think it's possible. I think we are moving more and more towards mass produced perfumes with their own codes and more elitist perfumes with different codes and the question is where we place ourselves. It is the same thing with wine, there is no reason for this to change.

OA: How can we nourish and educate rather than merely exciting the olfactory sensibility of individuals in the knowledge that it is absolutely essential to develop this sensibility in order to appreciate more complex and richer perfumes?

JCE : It would be necessary to sensitise the general public through all sorts of actions and by the way, I admire the work done by oenologists in explaining about wine, and no doubt we should take their lead. The Fédération de la Parfumerie should ask itself these questions and perhaps find some solutions. There have been exhibitions about perfume but they have been too rare and limited.

Distribution has an educational role to play in perfume. We know that a client spends around seven minutes in Sephora while they can spend half an hour in a boutique. In a boutique, the sales person can advise, initiate, educate. This is what we try to do at Hermès but only in our own stores as we can ensure the quality of the exchange that the staff will have with the client. We are working more and

more in this direction with people who are trained in perfume and not just in sales. A sale happens because the seller was able to put forward the qualities and uniqueness of a perfume. In this regard, Hermès is a good "house" to be with as it is a craftsman's house and the craftsman always has his say. What a craftsman has to say is always more interesting than what a salesperson has to say.

The stores will gain in terms of client loyalty and also the presence of another clientele. In big perfume retailers it is merely a question of pure consumption due to the lack of time. It is really the lowest level of consumption. For me it is just like the Fnac where a few years ago you could have a real exchange with a specialist who enjoyed their job but that now there is no dialogue left. You can only get information about the availability of a product.

I would like to come back to your question on training olfactory sensibility as it is, as you said, absolutely essential to the appreciation of more complex and richer perfumes. In my opinion, in perfume, complexity and richness are a means to mask a lack of creativity. The more complex and rich perfumes are, the more they resemble one another. But in fact, ideally what I consider to be the true values of perfume and luxury are simplicity, rightness, distinction and high standards. There is a marked difference between wine and perfume. Wine is a material that is transformed by man. The scent of grape juice contains 400 molecules and when it is transformed into wine it contains 1800 molecules in which case we can talk of complexity and riches. The craftsman transforms a material, grapes, into wine. Just like at Hermès, where the craftsmen work on leather to transform it into a Kelly or a Birkin bag, by rendering it more complex and giving it meaning. In perfume we are not dealing with a transformation but the composition of materials like in music or painting.

OA: But couldn't one reply that blending varieties in wine-making is comparable to this composition of materials in perfume?

JCE: No, as if I take the example of roses, I could work with different varieties of rose that are like varieties, but if I combine only roses I

will always end up with a rose scent and not a perfume.

OA: In your opinion, does the emergence of niche perfumes –the expression is far from apt– show the saturation of the mass market that has resulted in the appearance of a demand for higher standards from certain quarters? I feel that in as much as the term amateur (as in perfume-lover, someone who can classify and discern) to that of consumer (who enjoys without knowing why), can we compare perfume-lovers to wine-lovers?

JCE: Yes, of course. I like the word amateur and we could even go a little further and term them connoisseurs, those who know. The amateur/lover is discerning and can classify but the connoisseur knows even more. In any case, this follows on from a demand for uniqueness from a clientele that is dissatisfied with neutral, smooth perfumes with no signature. The same goes for wine, the wine-lover looks for a wine that has character and not just a woody taste or vanilla taste. This demands a certain amount of work and it is extraordinary to meet amateurs that produce this work. Today we see the emergence of perfume blogs where the bloggers are real perfume lovers. For example, there are a number of blogs about me with very in-depth analyses of my work. To begin with they were “amateurs” but unfortunately big companies noticed their work and started inviting them to launches and promotional events. In the end, a certain dependence will develop. But it is nevertheless true that I have read some very detailed and very pertinent work that I encourage greatly. While we’re on the subject, I think it is necessary to warn certain journalists who are at risk of being eaten up if they don’t take a more critical stance. They obviously depend on advertisers. They pretend to criticise between the lines, but not everyone reads between the lines.

OA: To get back to wine, Anne-Sophie Breitwiller who is currently finishing a thesis on perfume at the CSI (Centre de sociologie de l’innovation) and who also works at the IFM, has shown how wine developed from the vine

as a natural product. In fact, at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were attempts made to produce wine from dried raisins and at the end of the same century they introduced legislation strictly forbidding calling a product wine if it was not entirely produced from natural grapes, so not from raisins and with no added chemicals. Anne-Sophie Breitwiller has clearly outlined that, on the contrary, perfume took off with the advent of organic chemistry –it was you who pointed out that vanillin had transformed perfume at Guerlain– and that what was forbidden in wine manufacturing became not only the norm in perfume but the condition for its progress and sophistication.

JCE: Yes, chemistry did transform perfume. It is thanks to chemistry that it became an art form: through chemistry it freed itself from its origins and became something abstract, conceptual and artistic. Before the introduction of chemistry, perfume was very close to nature, it was named for flowers or bouquets of flowers and was made from natural materials. The beauty of perfume resulted essentially from the beauty, rarity and cost of the materials. Lavender was cheap and rose expensive so rose was seen as an extraordinary scent while lavender was seen to be commonplace. Chemistry freed up all of that and opened the door to other options.

For marketing and ecological reasons, we maintain a discourse on the advantages of the natural. It definitely has an economic interest and I’m sure there is a market for this. However, the natural interests me when I can change the way the raw material is perceived. At the moment for example, I am working with vanilla and lavender. For example, lavender is codified in terms of cleaning and sanitary products. So I have gone back to natural lavender that I reworked during distillation to remove some of the olfactory characteristics that are sweat and urine smells. In addition, I have gone back to natural vanilla without using vanillin. So the vanilla is different from the stereotype we are used to and what interests me is to incite curiosity. A new scent is not enough, there must be a composition and the perfume must be beautiful. There is a whole



scene to set in appearance terms that I find amusing.

OA: Does cultivating one's taste in the broad meaning of the term –olfactory as well as taste– encourage the development of one's critical sense?

JCE: I am absolutely convinced of this, I would even write a manifesto on the subject. Developing one's taste and sensibility is the best way to civilise man. With "La pensée de Midi", Albert Camus shows us that reason wins out over emotion in the Western World and that it is time to take stock of the importance of sensibility in the process of civilisation. It is one of my dearest beliefs and one I defend with pleasure.

Reason has always been essential to research in perfume. One only has to refer back to the huge chromatographic and analytical work that has been carried out on odours in nature. There has been some extraordinary work done on capturing the scent of flowers in situ but it has produced an aberration. When you smell the product of this capture it is banal in the extreme, it corresponds to the photo of a flower by an amateur photographer. The photographer will remember the beauty of the actual flower but the photo is so commonplace that to someone else the beauty is lost.

Perfume, from Egyptian temples to the temples of consumption

Annick Le Guérer

For centuries, perfume was seen as a sacred and magic product, endowed with extraordinary powers. There is a legend, told by Ovid in the first century that illustrates this perfectly. To save the King Aeson from death, the magician Medea prepares a perfume with a very strong scent. Then she grabs a sword, opens the old man's throat and replaces his anaemic blood with the perfume she has made. The old man's beard and hair immediately go black, his body is vigorous once more, and the lines on his face disappear. Aeson is stunned to find he is a young man again. The "transfusion" reveals the secret of the extraordinary powers attributed to perfume. Perfume is seen as a blood substitute, the absolute "vital" substance. In the past, scents were not just made to improve the body. Their role was not reduced to the surface. They were supposed to act deep down, penetrating deeply to the centre of a being thus bringing the individual the virtues they were said to possess. Between perfume and flesh there was more than a mere proximity, there was practically a consubstantiality that was to dominate most of perfume's subsequent history.

This incarnation of perfume is above all religious as it was long thought to have divine origins. The Egyptians of the time of the Pharaohs identified it with sweat and the flesh of their Gods and a certain Christian tradition with the blood of Christ. This incarnation was functional as it also concerned the functions given to perfume. For a long time, it played an essential role in the preservation of human bodies. Pharmacy and perfumery were closely linked. And finally it was substance-linked as it touched the very substance of perfume whose manufacture often used flesh and blood literally. Perfumery only detached itself very slowly from the grasp of this idea that was to last for

thousands of years. We could say that it is really only in modern times that the process of dis-incarnation finally happened and that perfume became a consumer product among others within the luxury industry.

### Religious incarnation

The sweat of the Gods of the Nile

In the time of the Pharaoh's Egypt, the birthplace of perfume, aromatic oils and sacred unguents were considered by the Egyptians to be the "perspiration of God". Every morning the Pharaoh himself and all his priests used incense but also scented unction on the statue of God meant to be "his own scent, the sweat that comes from his flesh". Herbs and perfumes were also commonly used in embalming practices as they were considered to be essential in order to access a "second life" and become, according to the "Embalming ritual" a "perfumed one", a God. In the most expensive procedure, the abdominal cavity of the deceased had its intestines removed and was then filled with myrrh and cinnamon and sewn up. Finally the body was wrapped in very fine bands of linen soaked with an aromatic glue. While the officials applied oils and perfumed unguents, the priests talked to the deceased saying: "May the sweat of the Gods penetrate you... Receive this celebratory perfume that will embellish your body and protect you! May you be eternally happy once the perfume comes to you". They also said: "I complete your face with the perfume that comes from the eye of Horus... It will reattach your bones, reassemble your limbs, bring together your flesh and dissipate your ills! When it envelops you, its pleasant scent is on you... Your scent will enchant the Gods<sup>1</sup>". The deceased, deified by the aromatic substances then became a "Perfumed" one, a God, and his mummified body could rest in peace in the sarcophagus.

The balm of Christ and the odour of sanctity

Many centuries later, a certain Christian tradition returned to the connection between perfume and flesh and blood. The tortured body of Christ was meant to spread a balm that healed damaged souls that stank from sin. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the archbishop of Genoa,

Jacques de Voragine compared the body of Christ to a vase filled with cinnamon scented perfume; and he declared that "Christ wished his body to be pierced by the soldier's lance so that his precious perfume would come out and heal the stinking sinners<sup>2</sup>." In referring to the sweet-smelling body of Christ, it was natural that a sweet smell would be associated with holiness. "The odour of sanctity", "to die in the odour of sanctity", are not merely abstract expressions. Certain mystics such as Saint Teresa of Avila or Thérèse de Lisieux were both said to have given off perfumes considered to be miraculous, both alive and dead.

Even closer to our time, Padre Pio, the Italian priest who died in 1968 who was said to miraculously heal pilgrims and had the marks of stigmata on his hands and feet gave off a very pleasant floral odour according to some witnesses. But whatever the explanation given to these phenomena, stigmata and mystical perfumes are evidence of the strength and long-term effect of the idea of divine perfumes on the collective unconscious.

#### Functional incarnation: aromatherapy

With such prestigious origins, perfume just had to have extraordinary virtues. From antiquity to the industrial age it was thought to be able to heal the body and protect it from illness.

#### Kyphi

Kyphi was known as the "twice as good perfume" and was one of the most famous of Egyptian perfumes and was not only used to honour the Gods. When mixed with drinks it was also prescribed in treating lung, intestinal and liver ailments. It was also used for relaxation and euphorising purposes. According to Plutarch, its scent relaxed the body without resorting to drunkenness removed the painful worries of the day. The basic ingredients of this famous perfume were: cypress, whose large rhizomes resembled papyrus and which smelled of violets and ginger, juniper berry, raisins, terebinth resin (from the *Pistacia terebinthus*, a tree that grew mostly in Libya, Syria and Northern Africa in general), sweet flag (*Acorus calamus* or *Calamus odoratus*), sedge (*Andropogon schoenanthus* L.), broom flo-

wers, honey, myrrh (a resin from a tree that grew most notably in Yemen).

#### Queen of Hungary's water

Perfume continued to play a medical role in the Middle Ages. In 1370, a perfume appeared that was to make its mark known as Queen of Hungary's water. It was the first alcoholic perfume formula known in Europe. Its appearance was linked to the progress in distillation that had been mastered by the Arabs for many years and that came to the West through Spain and Italy. This formula based on rosemary and wine spirit (ethylic alcohol) was developed for the Queen of Hungary. According to legend, it even enabled the queen, then aged 72, to heal all of her infirmities, to get back her strength and beauty and even receive a marriage proposal from the King of Poland. The Queen of Hungary's water was a resounding success. It brought a lightness and a freshness that people hadn't experienced before. But this water of beauty and youth was also considered to be a medicine. The list of the medical virtues of this product that was used internally and externally is impressive. It was considered an excellent remedy against all brain, nerve and joint ailments, rheumatism, gout, headaches, toothaches, burns and even tumours. This water retained its prestige for many centuries. Madame de Sévigné was an avid user. As for Madame de Maintenon, she was so convinced of the positive effects of the product that she asked that the boarders in Saint-Cyr use it regularly. The triumph of Hungary water was sure to lead to imitations.

#### L'eau des Carmes

As early as 1379 the monks in the Saint-Just abbey composed the eau des Carmes using alcohol with rosemary. But they added many other ingredients such as lemon balm, aniseed, marjoram, thyme, absinthe, sage, juniper berries, cinnamon, cardamom, coriander and cloves. It would be used in particular for the treatment of epilepsy and intestinal ailments. The production of perfumes was to take on a growing importance as, in the upper classes, they were considered to protect from illness and also were used to replace water during

washing. The rich created aromatic gardens around their properties in order to make their own perfumes. Indeed, since the great plague of 1348 that decimated a quarter of the population in Europe, doctors believed that baths and especially hot baths encouraged the propagation of epidemics by opening the pores to the pestilent air. As a result public baths were progressively closed down and by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were practically no more public baths in use.

#### L'eau d'Ange

At the same time, perfume was being enriched with new ingredients. Indeed, with the development of maritime trade, it was easier to import exotic produce. L'eau d'Ange, which was very fashionable during the renaissance typified this change. It included, most notably, benzoin, a resin-gum that came from a tree that grew in Sumatra, cloves and cinnamon, styrax (a scented resin that came from the *Styrax officinalis*, a tree not unlike the quince tree), coriander, calamus (sedge) and lemon. This water was developed by François Rabelais who prescribed its daily use to the nuns in the abbey at Thélème. At the time of the Renaissance distillation techniques improved with the development of the coil. This technical progress and a broader range of raw materials led to the diversification of perfumes and their production.

#### Santa Maria Novella

The famed pharmacy of the convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence was typical of this change. It was founded by Dominican monks and in the 13<sup>th</sup> century benefited from the protection of the Medici family, whose love of alchemy and potions is well documented. Its scented waters and elixirs acquired international notoriety in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The eau de lys was exported all over Europe and even as far as China. Today, visitors to the pharmacy at Santa Maria Novella are still welcomed by an intense perfume. Among the traditional productions, the "eau de la reine" created especially for Catherine de Médicis stands out. This Eau de la Reine along with the Queen of Hungary's water are the ancestors of l'eau de Cologne.

#### Eau de Cologne

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century during a visit to Santa Maria Novella, an Italian perfume dealer called Giovanni Paolo Feminis based in Cologne in Germany was taken with this perfumed citrus water. He managed to get his hands on the formula by means that may not have been entirely honest, brought it back to Germany and improved on the formula. Before dying in 1736 with no heirs, he passed the secret on to Jean-Marie Farina one of his grand-nephews. It is made of wine spirit, rosemary, lemon balm, bergamot essences, neroli, cedrat and lemon. This product was to go on to unparalleled fame and gave rise to many imitations and varied presentations. What is remarkable is that eau de Cologne was immediately integrated into the pharmacopeia of the time. People rubbed it on themselves and drank it without hesitation as it was said to be effective in fighting a broad range of ailments such as apoplexy, jaundice or tinnitus. Later on Napoleon was an enthusiastic user of eau de Cologne. Madame de Rémusat, the wife of his great chamberlain affirmed that he would use up to 120 litres per month. He liked the roll-shaped bottles that he could fit in to his boots even when on the battle field. He would rub it on himself energetically and did not hesitate, like many of his contemporaries to indulge in the "canard Farina" (the Farina duck), which entailed dipping a sugar cube in the liquid and eating it. During his exile on Saint Helena, Ali, his faithful mamelouk, managed to reconstitute the favourite water of the deposed Emperor using the ingredients available on site.

The health benefits of perfume was based on a strong conviction: doctors thought that scent was the energy in every substance and that it possessed the unique faculty of being able to penetrate the human body in depth. When fetid, it corrupts the organs and brings on illness. When sweet, it could, on the contrary, heal most infections. When in 1686, for example, Louis XIV was suffering from a tumour, his doctor, Antoine d'Aquin, applied a strongly scented poultice that contained galbanum, opopanax, myrrh, oliban and mastic. For the king's doctors, "All the virtue of medicine is contained in the communication of a certain perfume<sup>3</sup>".

## Substantial incarnation

It is at the composition stage in perfume that the incarnation is most obvious. The fat, skin, flesh, blood and various secretions of the animal have always had a very important place in this domain.

### Fat and flesh

Since the beginning, animal fat and flesh have been abundantly used in all sorts of creams, balms and salves. The perfumed cone worn by Egyptian men and women on their heads during banquets was made of crocodile and hippopotamus fat and aromatic resin. The perfumers from the medieval age, the Renaissance and the classical age used fats extensively: bear, wolf, deer, goat, pig, pigeon and capon fat. They often added earthworms, ants, scorpions and woodlice.

### Aromatic dogs

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, dogs became a part of numerous aromatic preparations that appear quite barbaric from a contemporary standpoint. In order to erase blemishes on the face the procedure involved the distillation of a dozen puppies with calf blood and aromatic plants. Another recipe involved cutting up newborn puppies and cooking them up with aromatic ingredients. It was advised to stir the mixture with a wooden spatula so that the little dogs wouldn't stick to the bottom of the pan. Once the oil was extracted, it was poured on to aromatic plants. There was no limit to the inventiveness of the perfumers. On the eve of the revolution, Jean-François Houbigant who had a boutique named "La Corbeille de Fleurs", rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, made a fortune selling his rose cream with snails!

### Blood

Blood was also very present in magic perfumes aimed at irresistible seduction. Cornelius Agrippa, for example who was physician to the mother of François the 1<sup>st</sup>, prepared perfumes "to make one loved". He recommended that one "should let the person one wishes to seduce sniff from time to time". His formulas blended cat, magpie, stork, swallow, pigeon or bat blood with musk, amber and roses. Human

flesh was even used to create perfumed compositions for medicinal purposes. The most striking example was a macabre aromatic preparation for internal and external use known as "mummy".

### The mummy

Like the name suggests, this product was originally manufactured using Egyptian mummies stuffed with aromatic substances and preserved in scented liquids. It was famous from the middle ages. Later on, the product became so fashionable that it became difficult to find real mummies. Catherine de Médicis even sent her apothecary to Egypt in 1549 to bring her back a remedy that would cure all types of ailments and even fight the plague. The supply couldn't match the demand however and new recipes started to appear. That of the great Paracelsus, the famed Swiss doctor of the 16<sup>th</sup> century which entailed the distillation of pieces of human flesh taken from a healthy cadaver with musk and aromatic plants. It wasn't until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that this medicine started to disappear. Mummy was difficult to eradicate in a universe that was deeply marked by the interpenetration of the balsamic and the carnal.

### Musk, amber, civet, castoreum

The tableau of the substantial incarnation of perfume would not be complete without the mention of the four odorous animal secretions that have played a huge role in perfume: musk, amber, civet and castoreum. They are reputed to sublimate vegetal scents giving them strength and longevity. Musk comes from a very primitive sort of deer, the male musk deer that is a protected species today. It lives on the woody plateaus of the Himalayas, in Tibet, and in Afghanistan. It is an abdominal gland, located under the skin between the navel and the male sexual organs that produces a liquid that changes in to grains that look like coffee grounds. The faecal and blood odour is overpowering but when the product is aged it refines and gives off a very persistent animal scent. It is difficult to get musk today legally. Amber is a pathological concretion that forms in the intestines of the whale when its intestine walls are injured by the beaks of the huge

squid that are its normal diet. It is expelled by natural means and floats on the water. Its scent, initially nauseating, changes in to a pleasant odour when the amber, having been brushed by the waves and heated by the sun, is infused in alcohol.

Civet is a secretion of the civet cat, a little African quadruped the size of a fox with a long tail. It is a soft, beige or brown paste with a revolting faecal odour. However, when mixed with other scented materials, it loses its aggressive character and becomes powerful and sensual. Unlike musk or castoreum, it can be collected without killing the animal that produces it. Castoreum is collected from two internal glands in the castor, it is a waxy/oily substance that adds a leathery, warm and sweet note. Egyptian perfume making did not use these materials. There are no irrefutable traces either in Greek and Roman compositions. Castoreum is mentioned of course but only for purely medicinal purposes.

#### Scented apples and gloves

Thanks to its contacts with Arab civilisations Western perfume-making integrated these animal raw materials. The crusaders brought them back from their expeditions in the east. They enabled the preparation of perfumes presented in gold or silver spheres known as scented apples. In 1174, the King of Jerusalem presented the emperor Frédéric Barberousse with a number of golden apples filled with musk. The high cost of amber and musk meant they were reserved for a rich clientele. Most apples were filled with less expensive scented ingredients. Bringing one's scented apple everywhere was an opportunity to mark one's social status and create a barrier to protect one from the nauseating stench that carried epidemics. Civet was used very often in a famous product: perfumed skin gloves. They were made fashionable by Catherine de Médicis, who came to France to marry the future King Henri II. They were delicate to manufacture and time-consuming. The gloves, once cut and sewn were placed in cases between layers of flowers that were changed every twelve hours. This treatment was known as "mise en fleurs" and lasted at least eight days.

With this product, glove-makers at the start of

the 17<sup>th</sup> century became the true ancestors of our current perfumers. Perfume until then had been a scattered activity that was the preserve of apothecaries, grocers and haberdashers. In January 1614, glove-makers received "permission to call themselves master glove-makers-perfumers" from the King and during the reign of Louis the 14<sup>th</sup> enjoyed a solid status. In order to become "Maitre Gantier-Parfumeur", one needed a number of years of apprenticeship where one learned to work, sew and above all, scent gloves. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries they enjoyed an extraordinary following used to more macabre ends by some people who used scented gloves for other purposes entirely. René le Florentin, perfumer to Catherine de Médicis, was accused of creating poisoned gloves. And the Princesse Palatine tells the tale in her Mémoires of Madame de Maintenon to whom she refers as "old witch" or "old bitch" was suspected of having tried to poison the Dauphine with a pair of scented gloves.

However, under the regency, the fashion started to turn away from the animal scents favoured under Louis XIV. They were seen to be too heavy and the aristocracy preferred lighter, fresher scents that were put in more concentrated alcohol. The names were evocative: Eaux d'Adonis, de Venise, Eau mignonne, celestial, divine... "L'eau couronnée", worn by Queen Marie-Antoinette, included violet, iris, daffodil, orange blossom, white musk rose, mace, tuberose, cloves, bergamot and Portuguese orange.

#### Toward disincarnation

By the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, perfume had lost most of its ancient roots. The time of the "sweat of God" was far behind. The scented glove that brought the animal and vegetal together to perfume human skin had disappeared. What's more, perfumery and pharmacy split up definitively in 1810.

An artificial, intellectual and artistic product...

For example, in 1874 Tiemann and Reimer first industrially manufactured the olfactory principle of the vanilla pod, vanillin. Fifteen years

later, Aimé Guerlain would use it to create the still famous Jicky. An incontestable work of art in modern perfume like Chanel's N°5 owes much to the aliphatic aldehydes that the great perfumer Ernest Beaux dared to use for the first time. Animal products were also replaced by synthetic products. Between 1888 and 1891, Baur created an artificial musk that was much cheaper to obtain than secreted male deer musk and in 1926, a company named Synarone brought out ambrarome absolu, aimed at replacing grey amber. Since 1990, animal products have not been used due to their cost and animal protection measures. Today they have practically disappeared from formulae.

The progressive replacement of natural components by artificial components has had direct repercussions on the very conception of the profession of perfumer. It is now linked to chemistry and has taken on a more scientific, intellectual, abstract, more artistic bent. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards the vision of the perfumer artist came to the fore. They were often compared to composers. They too bring together notes, they search for chords. The perfumer Edmond Roudnitska, creator of the famous Eau Sauvage, sees the creation of a perfume as an abstract art. He affirms that the perfumer does not compose with his nose but with his brain. He would still be able to create even if he lost his sense of smell in the same way that Beethoven was able to compose his 9<sup>th</sup> symphony even though he had become deaf. For this reason, Edmond Roudnitska demands a copyright for all of his perfumes. Recently, French courts have ruled in favour of this demand. But the decree from the Cour de Cassation on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2006 put an end to this, perhaps temporarily.

#### An industrial and marketing product

The arrival of chemistry has had other important consequences. It made perfume a huge industry and made the products more accessible. They are no longer sold just in specialist boutiques. They are now available in supermarkets, the modern day temples of commerce. But this industrialisation also had a perverse effect. Mass production and a constant search for lower costs are at odds with the

artistic aspirations of the creators. This is all the more the case since the seventies when marketing came into play from the United States aimed at working out the expectations of the consumer in advance and orienting the work of the perfumer. In reality, marketing goes way beyond that. By affirming its stronghold from conception to commercialisation, it brought a new set of values to the table in which the communication around the product becomes more important than the product itself. It has become a pretext, the simple illustration of a concept elaborated by marketing executives, perfume has dematerialised. It has become a victim of a loss of substance summed up in by one great perfumer: "Today, the cost of materials is such that we can no longer use anything. We should really make perfume with water as it's not expensive".

Perfume is also threatened by ordinariness and standardisation. Globalisation is moving toward a risk-free product, one that appeals to the lowest common denominator. In addition, the policy of high-profile launches for ephemeral products has made them easier to fake to the detriment of originality. In order to shore up against this dilution, smaller "niche" perfume houses aim to bring quality and creativity by using high quality ingredients and refusing to bow to the dictatorship of marketing tests. This has resulted in some big name brands launching small, prestigious collections in parallel with their mass production. For example, Guerlain has bottles of perfume in their Champs Elysées store that cost 20 000 euros.

We can only hope that with these new approaches, perfume will become less diluted and commonplace and will regain substance, creativity and some of its old prestige.

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1. Cf. J.-C. Goyon, *Rituels funéraires de l'ancienne Egypte*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1972, p. 43-44.
2. Jacques de Voragine, *Quadragesimale aureum*, 1874, I, 415.
3. Abbé Rousseau, *Préservatifs et remèdes universels tirés des animaux, des végétaux et des minéraux*, Paris, 1706, p. 107.

Andy Warhol started his career by designing window displays for big New York department stores. When he became a figure of the international art scene in the sixties, he never forgot his roots, and created a collection of serigraphs of Chanel's N°5 perfume. This encounter between the world's biggest-selling perfume and the pope of pop-art was as astonishing as it was inevitable and it marked a turning point in the history of art and perfume. Art and perfume seem close on the surface but really are from two very distinct sectors and the examples of crossovers between the two worlds that we will detail here show just how different they are. They do however maintain a mutual and reciprocal fascination and this explains some of their common adventures. Art fascinates by its avant-gardism, its freedom, its boundless creativity and its exclusivity; perfume attracts using mystery, its seductive powers, accessibility and economic strength. Art gives perfume back some of the rarity and exclusivity it has lost with the recent increase in frequency of product launches and the easy accessibility of products. Perfume gives art the possibility to explore a new support for creativity and to use this new media to touch a broader public.

Initiatives that bring these two universes together can be split into three categories each of which happen in specific locations.

Artist-based approaches are shown in art galleries whether it be Marcel Duchamp or Francesco Vezzoli, who play on the advertising codes of perfume (parodies of their names, adapting the bottles, caricatures of advertising graphics...). Artist's perfumes are presented in

department stores and perfume stores (Salvador Dalí, Nikki de Saint Phalle, etc.), and are really just spin-off products. Finally when art and the olfactory are brought together with the same desire for creativity the results are usually exhibited in temporary exhibitions or events.

The first artistic event that integrated a perfume dates from 1921. Marcel Duchamp, using the pseudonym Rose Sélavy, created Belle Haleine, eau de toilette (a pun on "Belle Hélène" "haleine" means breath in French). In 2009, Francesco Vezzoli paid homage to Duchamp by creating Greed, a perfume-work of art whose bottle is a reference to Duchamp's Belle Haleine. While the artists are separated by almost a century, their approaches are comparable. They explore and parody the advertising codes of perfume, taking the traditional image of femininity and turning it on its head in an extreme and caricatured manner, with no interest in the olfactory dimension. The container is the subject of their work, the olfactory contents have been evacuated.

Duchamp used the ready-made technique where he would take an object that already exists, for example a bottle for "Un Air Embaumé", a perfume created by Rigaud, and transformed it into a piece of art. He meticulously reproduced all of the perfume codes of the twenties, (a Lalique frosted crystal bottle, a delicately decorated label with a picture of a woman, a commercial brand, a romantic name) all the better to turn them on their heads. A portrait by Man Ray represents Marcel Duchamp, dressed up as Rose Sélavy, his female avatar. It is a parody of packaging with codes of femininity that are exacerbated and travestied so as to underline the convention of the genre. The RS brand with the initials of Rose Sélavy copy the typography of the Rigaud brand. The name Belle Haleine is evocative but fake and refers to a less than pleasant odour. Its subtitle eau de Toilette is a pun that uses the appellation eau de toilette.

Francesco Vezzoli is continuing the work of Duchamp. He pays homage to the master by choosing an identical bottle to Belle Haleine. He continues his literal approach by having his photo dressed as a woman taken by Francesco



Scavullo. And his portrait decorates the label of the bottle of Greed like that of Rose Sélavy, alias Marcel Duchamp decorated that of Belle Haleine. He goes on to give his perfume an ironic name Greed. While the theme of desire is frequent in perfume concepts (Covet by Sarah Jessica Parker, Envy by Gucci) Vezzoli decides to push the envelope and treat it as caricature.

He depicts two models of femininity, incarnated by two feminine archetypes: the sweet and innocent brunette as opposed to the mean and Machiavellian blond. Following the current laws of perfume advertising that dictates that actresses have replaced models as the international ambassadors for luxury brands, Vezzoli cast two Hollywood stars in his advert: Nathalie Portman plays the brunette, Michelle Williams the blonde.

They appear in the sixty second "ad" filmed for the real launch campaign for the fake perfume. Yet again, in line with the genre, Vezzoli handed the reins of the film over to a star director, Roman Polanski. He films the confrontation between the two women over the bottle of perfume. The film starts off very calm and low-key in a luxurious interior and the ambience gets progressively more violent as the two protagonists fight over the perfume.

In both cases, the distribution for these real/fake perfumes is very exclusive. They are shown in museums and for sale through galleries, reserved for a small and in the know public, that of art lovers and collectors.

These objects are pieces of art rather than perfumes and their cost reflects this. It is the cost of unique or limited edition pieces that have nothing to do with the world of perfume.

The most surprising thing in this artistic endeavour is that the olfactory dimension is inexistent. This is not the point the artist is trying to make: Marcel Duchamp kept the scent of an "air embaumé", on the principle of the readymade with the appropriation of the object, Francesco Vezzoli did not have a perfume made. The olfactory is not mentioned. It has been evacuated. The perfume is but a pretext, a support that enables it to be analysed and to denounce the advertising codes of a precise genre, in this case, that of seduction. But he also highlights the ambiguity inherent

in this perception of reality, when it is troubled by the power of seduction of language.

The approach of artist's perfumes leaves more room for the olfactory aspect. They appeared in the eighties, were sold in perfume stores, and were known as celebrity perfumes. They sanction the international notoriety of artists whose names become the equivalent of an international brand. They are known to all and recognised for their creativity, they can legitimately put their signature to a luxury product that associates creativity, refinement and accessibility.

From Salvador Dali to Nikki de Saint Phalle, not to mention Arman or Andy Warhol, these perfumes all come from the same strain as couturier's or designer's perfumes; they are an entry point into the universe of the creator. The appearance of the bottle and graphics is essential. They must seduce and attract the spectator by making them penetrate into the work of the artist immediately and without ambiguity.

Nikki de Saint Phalle created her eponymous perfume in 1982. The stopper for the bottle is a faithful reproduction of one of her sculptures: two interlaced snakes that represent the union of beauty and passion. "In my perfume, the gold snake is the male and the female snake is of course the coloured one, the glorious one" said Nikki de Saint Phalle at the time. It is an accessible art piece, almost an artist's edition, and a glass sculpture that is gilded and enamelled. The approach was similar for the perfume launched by Salvador Dali in 1983. Dali designed his own bottle taking inspiration from his "Aphrodite of Knidos in Landscape" painting. He chose to give his first perfume a face with the nose and mouth of his Aphrodite. The advertising also referred to the work of the artists. The Nikki de Saint Phalle advert used a simple photo of the sculpture/bottle, and the Salvador Dali perfumes were integrated into a landscape by the master. They went to great lengths to suggest that the perfume belonged to the oeuvre of the artist.

The treatment of the olfactory was also very important as while the bottle and the advertising campaign won a clientele for their first purchase, the perfume made them loyal. Artist's perfumes are developed by marketing

experts who know nothing of the arcane world of olfactory creation, in collaboration with companies such as Givaudan or Firmenich, and are usually made to please everyone. They are highly influenced by whatever the market trends happen to be at the time of their launch. The Salvador Dali perfume was created by Alberto Morillas, and the note is a blend of traditional cypress with floral facets using jasmine, Dali's favourite flower and rose, the favourite flower of his second wife and muse, Gala.

As the bottle must intrigue and seduce, the perfume must reassure and please. Originality does not go beyond the bottle. Here, the objective is not to create an olfactory work of art but to make the work of the artist accessible thanks to a spin-off product.

The retail network is selective but varied; department stores, perfume stores and today the internet. These are the usual retail outlets for luxury perfumes. Artist's perfumes must be accessible, they are aimed at hundreds of thousands of clients. So, logically, the pricing policy is comparable to that of luxury perfumes which means 50 to 70 euros pour a 50ml bottle. Artist's perfumes use the same codes as luxury perfumes in each of the elements of the marketing mix. The artist has the same role as the fashion designer: they provide the creative and narrative credibility that feeds the brand. Artist's perfume is a spin-off product as such. It is like an accessory that was created for a huge retrospective of the artist's work, it is a chance to own a piece of the artist's work. But it is a precious accessory as it comes with the aura of luxury that perfume brings. The artist is rarely involved in the creation of the perfume, their contribution is often limited to the bottle and the advertising.

We must note that the olfactory area has been touched on little by artists. While they have explored all of the creative possibilities that solicit the other senses, the sense of smell has been neglected. While the history of modern and contemporary art has seen an explosion of hybrid creations, multimedia and various methods (painting, sculpture, film, music, installations, performance...) attempts to integrate perfume into a piece of art have been rare. Some have attempted to incorporate an

olfactory aspect to their work, moved by a desire to innovate and a will to explore a support that was left blank in contemporary creation.

These initiatives are often in reply to an invitation from an exhibition curator or come from an encounter with a perfumer, as such they are rarely spontaneous. Most often they are reactions or commissions. The world of perfume seems so mysterious and specialised that few artists are tempted to explore it on their own. The originality of the approach and its rarity merit a mention. It is motivated by a real interest in the olfactory, and few artists have shown this interest. It necessitates a real encounter between an artist with an often graphic, visible, material universe and a perfumer or a "nose" whose register is olfactory, invisible, and immaterial. The objective of this encounter is to transpose a visual universe through smell.

The perfumer is at the beck and call of the artist enabling him to give his work an olfactory dimension. This creative process is often a collaborative effort. It is the work of four hands and two noses, where two worlds collide and come together to create a hybrid work, the fruit of their respective talents.

In June 2006, the "Essences Insensées" exhibition at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris, presented the collaborative work of thirteen duos of artist and perfumer. It was organised by Anne Pierre d'Albis, as part of the Parcours St Germain, and exhibited thirteen works of art to be seen and smelt.

The idea was to create the ideal container for the ideal perfume. The creations were the chance for exchanges between artists and perfumers: the latter trying to penetrate the universe of the former. Actual olfactory training sessions were organised. The artists acquired olfactory basics with which their guided the creation of their perfume. In parallel, they shared the development of their bottle with the perfumers.

The designer Patrick Jouin worked with Christel Bergoin on the idea of the illusion of nature. They create Syn, a piece with a delicate and unnerving sculpture created using stereolithography –a process with no human intervention– and a surprisingly natural-smelling scent made entirely from synthetic

ingredients. The perfumer/artist attempted to imitate nature using only non-natural elements.

The approach chosen by artist Sam Samore and the perfumer Michel Girard was more naturalistic. It entailed creating a shamanic experience by exploring the powers of a Mexican mushroom. A woody scent that evoked smoke and incense with a suggestive hallucinatory power accompanied a ritual bowl in which the tribes drank their narcotic potions. The latter was posed on an engraved mirror with words that took absolute concentration to read. Like the perfume, the words became hallucinogenic and opened up a new space for the active participation of the public. Other experiments bringing together artists and perfumes have been successfully carried out: the perfume *Nuit Blanche* created by Christine Nagel, for Bertrand Lavier, as part of the Paris *Nuit Blanche*, in 2004; the green perfume developed by Michel Girard for the Claude Lévêque exhibition at the Mamco in Geneva in 2003. Not to mention the nomadic *Odorama* evenings organised by Isabelle Gaudefroy and Hervé Mikaeloff at the fondation Cartier in 2004. All of these works were presented at exhibitions or for one-off events. The ephemeral character should be underlined. Olfactory art is experimented over time; the time the exhibition lasts, but also the time necessary for the spectators to take the scent on board.

These events are organised by cultural institutions and not by commercial galleries. This makes the issue of commercialising and selling these 'pieces' complicated. While the subject should not be ignored, it is never an issue at the start of a project. These works have no price. Or, their price is virtual. It has never been calculated. Logically, the art galleries that represent the artists should take care of the sale of these works. In these projects, the creative approach is the same: the olfactory is integrated from the start of the process. Perfumers and artists work together and are the co-creators of the piece. The pieces are not there to be sold but to be exhibited.

The notion of artist's perfumes is ambiguous. It brings a number of realities together: a conceptual work like Marcel Duchamp's "Belle

Haleine" that has no olfactory aspect; a spin-off product like Salvador Dali's perfume whose scent is a classic; an actual work of art with an olfactory dimension like those shown in the *Essences Insensées* exhibition.

Between the work of a conceptual artist, without perfume and perfumed sculpture with no commercial aim, there is a third way for real olfactory pieces to be commercialised in galleries. Co-creations between artists and perfumers that integrate the formal and olfactory aspects in their conception. Associating formal seduction and olfactory emotion, the attraction of the visual and the unnerving of the invisible, they bring together the most educated of our senses, sight and the most primitive, smell. They propose a new form of art, a new artistic hybrid that must find, attract and educate its public.

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### Who are the clients?

In a world that partially rejects the false choice between identical products, innovative gadgets and bland industrial products, our contemporary society has seen the advent of the “alter consumer” who looks for depth, meaning and more authentic values when spending. The alter consumer is ethical and ecological, committed, active and educated. He or she can take a step back from advertising and orients his or her choices toward original, different products rooted in a culture and the production of which, if possible, has some craft-based input.

No sector has escaped; alter consumers are put off by the size and blandness of the range of products on offer and the increasingly frequent “new products” on the market and are as such rejecting the banality of short term profit-making initiatives. This heralds the emergence of a “consumer culture” that demands the meeting of two minds so that a product can be appreciated for its true value. These “evolutionary” consumers are on a quest for experiences that take them out of the real. They try to get beyond themselves through sensual and spiritual pleasure and the exploration of their subjective emotions.

In order to seduce these consumers that make up over a quarter of the French population even though they perceive themselves to be unique<sup>1</sup>, perfume must distinguish itself from mere consumer products. Without this, it dilutes the values of creativity, uniqueness, rarity and excellence that enable it to get beyond the simple status of merchandise by adding immaterial value. As a result, “we really won’t be able to tell the difference between a mobile telephone and a perfume” (Vera Strubi)<sup>2</sup>. But perfume is essentially a product that demands involvement. The five factors that according to Kapferer and Laurent<sup>3</sup> constitute the level of involvement of the consumer have very high

scores: the interest of the consumer for the product is very high; the subjective probability of making a mistake is huge; the seriousness of such a mistake is important, at the very least on a financial level; the value of social signs associated with the product is highly important; and the emotional or hedonistic value of the product is quite considerable. In the same way that make-up hides imperfections, perfume is a protection, a façade, even a mask placed over the personality. Perfume reveals and affects the domains of fantasy, pleasure and feelings “by touching people with emotions and something in particular” (Véra Strubi)<sup>4</sup>.

Anything that enables one to express one’s own “distinctiveness” has turned out to be a new territory for expression for brands that have recognised that the essence of the product is all. The appearance doesn’t matter. The upsurge in “niche” perfumes, on the edges of the mass perfume market correspond to the renaissance of a territory free of olfactory libertinage, an enclave in a world of norms that must answer the demands of the marketing men who conform their desires and short-term profit to the taste of the lowest common denominator. It is like a return to the roots of perfume, initiatives that favour innovation and adventure have taken up the flame rather than brand names.

### Who are the niche brands?

Niche brands are not necessarily small brands. Here we are dealing with a different type of luxury that promotes audacity, quality and creativity. And, while niche perfumes don’t have a federation that can attest to their growth figures, the French market is estimated at 400 million euros<sup>5</sup>. The houses can be one hundred years old or very recently established, their growth began around the year 2000, and they are aiming to federate a clientele that is curious, loyal and educated with a project with a strong personality.

Niche brands are faithful to the luxurious characteristics of traditional perfumes where the quality of the ingredients takes precedence and are developing olfactory concepts that are systematically strong, articulated around char-

acteristic notes with a powerful wake that is an end in itself the wearer should wear with pride. They give creation back its suggestive strength. Unlike brands that produce huge volumes, their creations last by attracting a clientele that wish to express their uniqueness through a choice of perfume that makes them stand out from the masses.

A history that harks back to the roots and traditions of perfume, an in-house retail circuit, low-key elitist launches with controlled advertising and communication with an emphasis on press relations are the cornerstones of their strategy of exclusivity. "We put money in to the product, not into marketing or advertising" (Luc Gabriel, *The Different Company*)<sup>6</sup>.

### Innovation, a key role

#### The conception of the product

The eighties heralded the vulgarisation of the perfume market: strategies that before had been applied to mass market products (accessible in terms of cost and highly visible in the media) were used on perfumes. Profit-making objectives and a demand for short-term success replaced the quest for something different with a real personality and a long life. Marketing took perfume over and removed its sacred aspect. "Perfumers became detergent sellers. The market brought out a non-event every three minutes and lost its magical connotations" (Vincent Grégoire, Nelly Rodi)<sup>7</sup>. Marketing –the decision-maker– became the major player in the sector. It acted as a real decision-maker in as much as it organised the birth of a perfume stage by stage. It determined the characteristics to begin with, outlined the target market and the image to be projected. Then it outlined the objectives to be aimed for on an olfactory level while it managed the work of the designer of the bottle and the media agency.

The early noughties and the growth in niche perfumes put an end to this system where creativity was expected to be "on tap" at the mercy of a marketing brief and got back to emotional, free and instinctive creativity that would valorise audacity and inventiveness. This type of strategy demands patience, a qual-

ity that is in short supply with the short-term strategies of the big corporations that are after huge and immediate profits in order to pay for their colossal advertising investment. Niche brands accept that development time can be long in order to fully respect the freedom of creativity that can not be made to toe the line. They lay a claim to passionate "noses" and a non-formatted formulation that are incompatible with the tests carried out on mass market perfumes to ensure that they appeal to the lowest common denominator. "Sniff tests" do away with surprise and originality as when suddenly confronted with a smell a person will always go for a more familiar, reassuring one. This means that there is an overload of unoriginal fragrances. Niche brands have managed to get beyond these tests and bet on creativity. This has meant a little revolution in a universe that heretofore had been exclusively guided by profitability. The vocation of a niche perfume is to be an innovative product that makes those who like it loyal to the scent. The idea of "a perfumer, a product" has come back into vogue. The key to success being above all the rate of sales of a perfume once the media fires have gone out, and niche brands seem to have made the right choice: "If you try to please everyone, you will please no one" (Véra Strubi)<sup>8</sup>. The off the shelf retailing that came into practice in the middle of the nineties with chains such as Marionnaud, Sephora, Douglas or Watson seriously contributed to perfume's loss of prestige. Since the off the shelf system arrived, the market has needed perfumes that "sell themselves". Choosing a perfume from a stick favours head notes that are easy and strong: immediate perception is all that counts. The obsession with pleasing the customer immediately, with the "top note" takes precedence over the definitive or base note that is nevertheless essential as it is what defines the wake of the perfume, and is the basis of the success of the great classics. Niche perfumes mark the return to the ancestral rites of application as vectors for choice.

Wholesale sampling has led to incessant olfactory stimulation: now, everything is perfumed but nothing has a smell. Western societies are both deodorised and "over-odorised" and have lost their olfactory markers. The overabun-

dance of candles, incense and deodorant sprays remove and dilute the identity of things. In the same way that wool should smell of wool, wood of wood, leather of leather, toilets should smell of water, not lavender. This all weakens the sense of smell and the individual's knowledge of perfume that has a hard time existing in the permanent olfactory lie in which niche brands refuse to participate. They prefer unique taste that makes a difference to the universal standard and are on a quest to discover new olfactory worlds. So quite a number of them are rehabilitating the culture of perfume making and are developing explanatory tools –bringing the client backstage.

But, before anything, niche brands are concentrating their investments in the olfactory: the quality of the ingredients and the time spent bringing them together. While the basic cost of a traditional perfume is around 4 euros (not counting marketing and advertising costs), that of a niche perfume is about 6 euros. All of them speak, either directly or indirectly of their creator and underline the importance of their artistic gift like Apollonius used to say in ancient times: “the excellence of each perfume depends on the skill of the artists and the good quality of his materials”<sup>9</sup>.

### Retail and distribution

As vectors for a perfume's image, retail outlets have become the unavoidable representatives for the philosophy of niche brands. Their retail networks are in-house, often small, and have become the cornerstone of their success. Their boutiques are destinations in themselves rather than places one pops into. Their strength lies in basic creativity. The plainness of the wrapping (bottles and retail outlets) give this strength its meaning. Low-key, little known retail outlets make the point that their perfumes remain a precious and intimate luxury. Without giving in to the temptation of mass retail, niche brands have found locations necessary to their growth in department stores within the network of “concept stores” and online. The problem is to know when to stop being restrictive and whether an elitist product can resist relative expansion without losing its soul. This is what is at stake for the future.

On a merchandising level, everything is designed and set up to emphasise the scents. Innovative olfactory platforms are made available to the public. Olfactory libraries make clients want to find out more about perfume: they are often the preamble to discovery workshops and initiation classes in olfactory composition. Columns, cones and perfume organs enable one to experience the wake of a perfume. These machines help visitors to understand the technical means used by professionals to know and appreciate a perfume. So the retail outlet becomes a space for sharing knowledge where intimacy reigns like in the boudoirs of old. Learning about perfume becomes a fun thing to do that is also technological and poetic. For example, The Different Company has clients smell the “jus” of their perfumes like nectars in wine glasses: by breaking with the traditional codes of the way scents are smelled, the brand reinvents a “perfume attitude”.

Finally, great care is taken training the staff who provide expert advice. In addition to the fragrances and the actual location, luxury here is a question of the time given over to the client. Elitism comes from the correct orientation of the choice.

### Well thought-out communication

While one perfume advertising campaign is simply outdoing another in cost, niche brands have not given in to the temptation of outlandish media investments or wholesale sampling. The question here is not to buy a high level of visibility in order to guarantee a quick return on investment demanded by the financial groups behind the big brands. As with the product, the methodology regularly employed in advertising is more like supermarket advertising than that for a luxury product. So the messages are simple, strong and direct so as to seduce the broadest range of clients possible. All perfume advertising images are the same: they depict the same models in similar positions and with similar expressions. This confusion maintains the feeling of déjà vu that the niche brands are fighting against as they prefer word of mouth among those in the know and client loyalty to massive recruit-

ment. The omnipresence of big brand innovation in all media has tended to standardise their advertising and give certain sameness to their strategies. The multitude of promotional events and their systematic nature dilute the intrinsic values of perfume and reinforce the image of retailers as discount operators.

On the other hand, a direct marketing program enables the creation of strong emotional links to the brand, helps with the valorisation of the clientele that likes to be recognised and engenders an exceptional level of loyalty. “Perfumes are exceptional products made to be introduced extremely slowly” (Frédéric Malle)<sup>10</sup>. One must be patient for the “nez à l’oreille” (nose to the ear) to work, to use an expression by Serge Lutens. Good press relations are essential to this. Press events are planned as ceremonials that re-enchant the surprise of something new.

#### Time to reform the codes of traditional perfume?

In order to try to rehabilitate perfume, the players in the traditional perfume industry, both developers and distributors have been taking the lead from the niche brands and are getting rid of the mix-marketing mantras in favour of perfumes that have “taste” meaning distinction and uniqueness. Perfumers are yet again allowed to speak of their instinct, to invent new forms and listen to their imagination to get beyond the conventional schemas and the creative crisis that perfume is going through at the moment. It is in this chaotic environment, which is being constantly redefined, that the big brands are launching their counter-attack.

#### A return to perfume as a profession and the tradition of in-house perfumer

For the most part, perfumes today are created by outside perfume composers while in-house perfumers such as Jacques Polge at Chanel, Jean-Michel Duriez at Patou and Richard Fraysse at Caron remain the exception. Even though it was in-house perfumers that developed the clearly identifiable olfactory signatures for the big name brands. For example the “Guerlinade” (a warm and amber

accord that brings together all of the house’s favourite materials<sup>11</sup>) and the “Mélodie Patou” (a duo of jasmine and rose) are still very much a part of the success of these brands.

With this in mind, certain brands have made the choice to go back to this tradition with the aim of telling true stories from the inside. So all of the recent in-house hiring is synonymous with superior quality and a need to split with habitual marketing practices. After Jean-Claude Ellena at Hermès, Mathilde Laurent at Cartier, LVMH have just hired François Demarchy: “we are coming back to the traditional schema that puts the emphasis on an affinity between brand and perfumer” (Antoine Lie)<sup>12</sup>.

#### Growth in made-to-measure perfumes

While couture, jewellery and accessories have been made to measure for a long time, shifting this service into perfume is part of the attempts by the big name brands to bring perfume back to its former glory. This approach is a means for the big brands to get back to the skills and values that have been neglected by mass consumerism while at the same time satisfying the need for individualism. Free creativity, rarity, individuality and noble materials justify their elitist price tags.

Alongside independent perfumers such as Patricia de Nicolai or Francis Kurdjian, some of the big houses have institutionalised the practice. Perfumers are only too glad to participate as made to measure enables them to express themselves fully with no financial constraints. However, this approach is not a worldwide thing. France, and most notably Paris are still today the incarnation of the prestige of the older brands.

Jean-Michel Duriez, for example does his “parfum Couture” in the first floor salons of the boutique on 5 rue de Castiglione designed as a “rare perfume showcase” by Eric Gizard. The success of this customised beauty is a follow-on for a demand from the consumer for a certain amount of appropriation. They co-produce with the brand, they are the co-composer. The demand is clear: “make me unique!”.

## The resurgence of old perfumes and retro notes

Other big name brands have indicated their wish to get back to their roots with the re-edition of the perfumes of their origins. La Violette de Madame and the Mouchoir de Monsieur first launched in 1904 were recently resuscitated by the Maison Guerlain when they reopened their store on the Champs-Élysées. The examples are numerous: Femme de Rochas, Habanita de Molinard, and Diorling... all ways to give credibility to a roots in traditional perfume. Bid retail is following close behind: Sephora is going for vintage with the re-launch of Fracas by Robert Piguet (1948) and a version of Métopion, the famous Egyptian perfume. Harrods in London has created a special space for re-editions of old successes while the Bon Marché is referencing the creations of Téo Cabanel whose "jus" are bringing the perfume of the start of the last century to life. Distributors are also trying to gain legitimacy through this approach.

Another tactic for latching on to the signs of traditional quality : delving in to forgotten families. Some fragrances that were considered too segmenting in market terms are making comebacks in forms that are being made more accessible. So ferns are coming back in a big way in men's fragrances. While in women's scents, aldehyde and cypressy flowery scents are back despite their strong scents. Retro notes are also back in style: violets and lavender are being reinterpreted; notes of myrrh and incense are being used to create the wake of some oriental fragrances. Not to mention the forgotten colognes that have been best sellers since their renaissance in 2000.

## Collections that are more edgy and rare

A few big brands have launched edgier lines like their "image" collections where they can express their elitist vision of traditional perfume. For example, Giorgio Armani has developed the Armani privé collection around scents that are very personal "just like when perfume was a real luxury industry"<sup>13</sup>. Their high cost and relative rarity add to this exclusivity. Jean-Claude Ellena has designed the Hermessences collection as "a new language

for the initiated in search of different sensations, for connoisseurs who want to be surprised". By launching more low-key projects of this type, the big name brands segment their olfactory offer as they have been doing with their clothes since ready-to-wear came into being.

This portfolio of strategic actions is aimed at retaining a growing clientele attracted by the alternative in niche perfumes. Brands are also rethinking their retail strategies in favour of in-house boutiques designed as intimate and convivial spaces that enable the clients to benefit from a multitude of services. Taking one's time is on the way back. You have been warned.

Catherine Têtu  
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Nelly Rodi

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January 2009, Six-monthly publication

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