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## Getting Literal About 'Inner Beauty'

By [ANDY BETA](#)

On a recent afternoon in a corner of the downtown Brooklyn art and music venue Issue Project Room, musician Sergei Tcherepnin was busy installing a massage table. This was no professional set-up, though. Mr. Tcherepnin, an artist-in-residence at IPR, arranged three chunks of marble on the ground, set a five-foot slab of plywood atop them, and attached a six-inch surface transducer (which looks and acts like a speaker cone) to the underside of the board.



Bradley Buehring

Sergei Tcherepnin conducts a 'Massage Performance,' in which a music composition is played through one's body.

Then he draped a cloth over the whole thing and invited a reporter to experience his "Massage Performance," which plays a six-channel electronic-music composition through the participant's body. The effect was somewhere between sitting in an electric massage chair and handling a jackhammer, the vibrations from the speakers rippling through the reporter's body. Only it was quiet enough that nearby office workers hardly noticed it.

After the 15-minute composition had finished, Mr. Tcherepnin, who is 31, explained that "Massage Performance" is more about one's sense of touch than one's sense of hearing "The sound feels like it is surrounding you and everywhere, yet it also sounds like it's coming from you, as part of the sound comes from bone conduction," he said.

The composition, which will next be presented at IPR on Nov. 27, addresses and acts upon an awareness that a person's entire physical body, as much as his auditory or visual sense, can absorb and process an art work, particularly a musical performance. "You hear it outside, but your bones and skin and body mass is amplifying it," Mr. Tcherepnin said. "The sound travels directly through your bones."



Envoy Enterprises

Artist Martynka Wawrzyniak created the corporeal fragrances for her new exhibit, 'Smell Me,' with the help of Hunter College chemistry students.

"Massage Performance" is not the only current exhibit that derives its art from the human body. A similar corporeal resonance is found in Martynka Wawrzyniak's most recent gallery event, "Smell Me," at Envoy Enterprises on Rivington Street. Ms. Wawrzyniak is known for her work in photography, video and, especially, interactive performance art. In 2009, her piece "Ketchup" found her blindfolded and doused in the condiment by a firing squad of squealing kids; in 2010, she submerged herself in chocolate syrup for "Chocolate." Her latest endeavor is a self-portrait of sorts. But it's not to be seen.

"Both the ketchup and chocolate had very strong aromas which lingered on my body for days after the performances," Ms. Wawrzyniak said via email. "So I wanted to create a work that was purely visceral, animalistic sensation alone. The idea became clear to me was when I visited my newborn nephew and fell under the magic spell of the scent of a baby's head, which is known for having an incredibly powerful effect on women."

"Smell Me" is a literally named exhibit. Working with a research team of Hunter College chemistry students, Ms. Wawrzyniak offers 10 crystal vials of perfume extracted from her sweat, tears and hair. The austere Lower East Side space suggests an uptown perfume counter, complete with a scent chamber that spritzes the essences into the air for visitors.



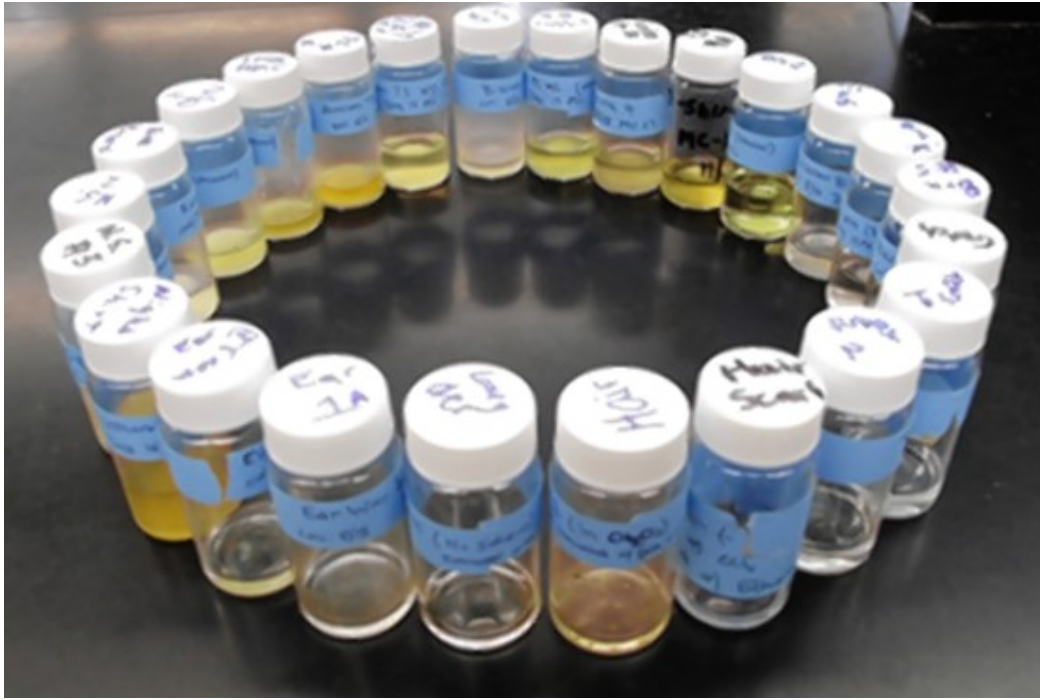
Envoy Enterprises

Martynka Wawrzyniak wrapped herself in absorbent material for the exhibit.

Collecting the various scents was more than a simple matter of Ms. Wawrzyniak saving a pile of dirty laundry. "After a couple months of my own research on how to attempt to isolate the human essence, I realized that I must work with a chemist," she said. So she began calling chemistry departments at local colleges.

"Martynka called in January of 2011 and said, 'I'm looking for info on scent extraction,'" recalled Donna McGregor, a chemistry professor at Hunter College who oversaw the project. "It was a wacky idea, but it was still utilizing a scientific process to solve a problem. So we had Martynka enroll as an undergraduate in the summer of 2011 so she could get into the research lab." The team at the lab, including undergraduate chemistry students Charles Paszkowski, Paul Tewfik and Paul Kozlowski, set about collecting and extracting Ms. Wawrzyniak's scents via a complex system of treating 100% cotton clothing that she would wear, then washing the clothes in ethanol and leaving it to evaporate. "Any water in the sweat samples allows for bacteria to grow," Dr. McGregor said. "That's what gives rise to the body odor that everybody associates with sweat or the scent of the human body." The chemical process left behind only the aromatic essential oils. They were delivered to perfumers Yann Vasniers and Dawn Goldworm, who stabilized the scents that became "Smell Me."

The process took 18 months. "One of the funniest moments was in testing a sweat sample," said Dr. McGregor. "When we took off the cap and one of the students said, 'I think it smells like chocolate,' we thought he was kidding. But it had that sweet, earthy, chocolate smell to it. It wasn't like anything I ever expected. I, too, thought it would smell like body odor, even as a scientist knowing better—but my senses didn't expect it to smell like that."



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Being inside the scent chamber at Envoy offers a unique portrait of the artist. Delicate, floral scents fill the air and become gently intoxicating. "It's like taking the nude self-portrait to the next level of intimacy," Ms. Wawrzyniak said. "We reserve smelling each other's bodies for the most intimate human encounters." Or, as Dr. McGregor put it after experiencing the show, "It's not like you can close your eyes and not see the art. You have to breathe. And so you are forced to inhale a part of the artist."

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