



November 12th, 2012

Martynka Wawrzyński
Small Me

Envoy Enterprises

Interview by Abigail St. Clair Thomas



Tears #8 (78), 2012
collected on 05.18.12
tears essence, glass, brass
3 x 2 x 2 inches

ASCT

What was the inspiration behind your new work Small Me?

MW

The initial seed of inspiration came from the intense physical sensation I experienced during my Ketchup, Lipstick and Chocolate performances – which led me to the exploration of creating a work that was purely visceral – to be experienced through primal, animalistic sensation alone. Having been driven by my nose ever since I was a child I decided to focus my next project on the olfactory senses.

ASCT

What was the moment of conception for the main idea behind it?

MW

The idea of isolating the human essence and more specifically creating an olfactory self-portrait, became clear to me after I was intoxicated by the smell of my newborn nephew's head – which is known to have a profound effect on a woman. This made me think about pheromones and how the olfactory aura which surround each of us is a blueprint of who we are and what we are feeling – serving as an invisible form of animal communication.

ASCT

During your year of preparation for "Small Me" what was your most poignant experience? Your most distressing?

MW

A thrilling moment was smelling the first successfully extracted sweat essence in the lab, realizing that the procedure worked and that the essence actually smells pleasant! Another very memorable moment was in stage two of the project during which I worked with the perfumer Yann Vasnier and scent director Dawn Goldworm on recreating my essences for diffusion inside the scent chamber. After seven revisions I compared the recreated sweat sample to my own armpit and was shocked at how close it was! Yann and Dawn are geniuses!

A distressing moment was the failed attempt at extracting my essence through the process of enfleurage (an ancient method of scent extraction in which flower petals are placed in animal fat to absorb their aromatic essence). I performed human enfleurage by having a nurse cover me head to toe with Crisco, wrap me in sterile bandages, after which I marinated for three hours in the heat. After nearly a month of countless experiments we realized that it was simply not possible to isolate my essence out of the Crisco. I later repeated enfleurage with successful results by using paraffin wax, which was spread on my body, scraped off and melted into the form of three candles in 250ml chemistry beakers.

ASCT

Did you have to make yourself cry to extract tears, or did you wait for them to come naturally?

MW

The tears essence was the hardest to collect. I could not wait for them to come naturally as I had to have my contact lenses out, my face washed, no moisturizer ect. I scheduled crying dates and listened to a playlist of kids songs and clips of cartoons, which make me nostalgic for my childhood in communist Poland. I also listened to a tape of myself with my parents in our kitchen when I was 4 years old (when my parents were still together).

ASCT

Did you have a way to collect tears/sweat/hair on your own or was it all done at Hunter College?

MW

I collected the tears, sweat and hair on my own and would bring the "samples" to the lab at Hunter College where my amazing team of research students (Charles Paszkowski, Paul Tewfik and Paul Kozlowski) took care of the chemical extraction process. I cried at home into vials or a cloth, collected my dirty hair in mason jars and sweated into white, 100% cotton t-shirts that I either wore to Bikram yoga, or to sleep for 5 consecutive nights.

ASCT

Why did you choose to experiment outside of visuals?

MW

As I say above, I wanted to create an artwork, which was to be delivered and experienced through the primal, animal senses alone. Furthermore I wanted to portray the true essence of a woman, free of visual judgment.

ASCT

Do you consider "Small Me" a romantic work? Why or why not?

MW

This is really up to the individual's interpretation.

ASCT

What does scent convey that other senses don't?

MW

Scent conveys pure feeling – both physically and emotionally.

ASCT

How does scent skew image? Or vice versa?

MW

You need both scent and image for the ultimate 4 dimensional sensory experience. The absence of one instantly leads your imagination to substitute the other. That being said, I consider scent to be more important. It is harder to imagine a scent while experiencing pure visuals – imagine eating a beautifully presented meal without being able to smell it (therefore taste it)? It is a lot easier to associate an image to pure scent. Scent is known for being the strongest link to memory and emotion. A world without scent would be dull and lifeless. People who lose their sense of smell become depressed and suicidal.

ASCT

Is it important for viewers to experience your scent individually, as opposed to in a group? Why or why not?

MW

The idea is for viewers to enter the scent chamber individually so they can have a one on one, intimate exchange with my smell. Additionally the presence of another person would pollute the space with the smell of their body.

Bottle Images:



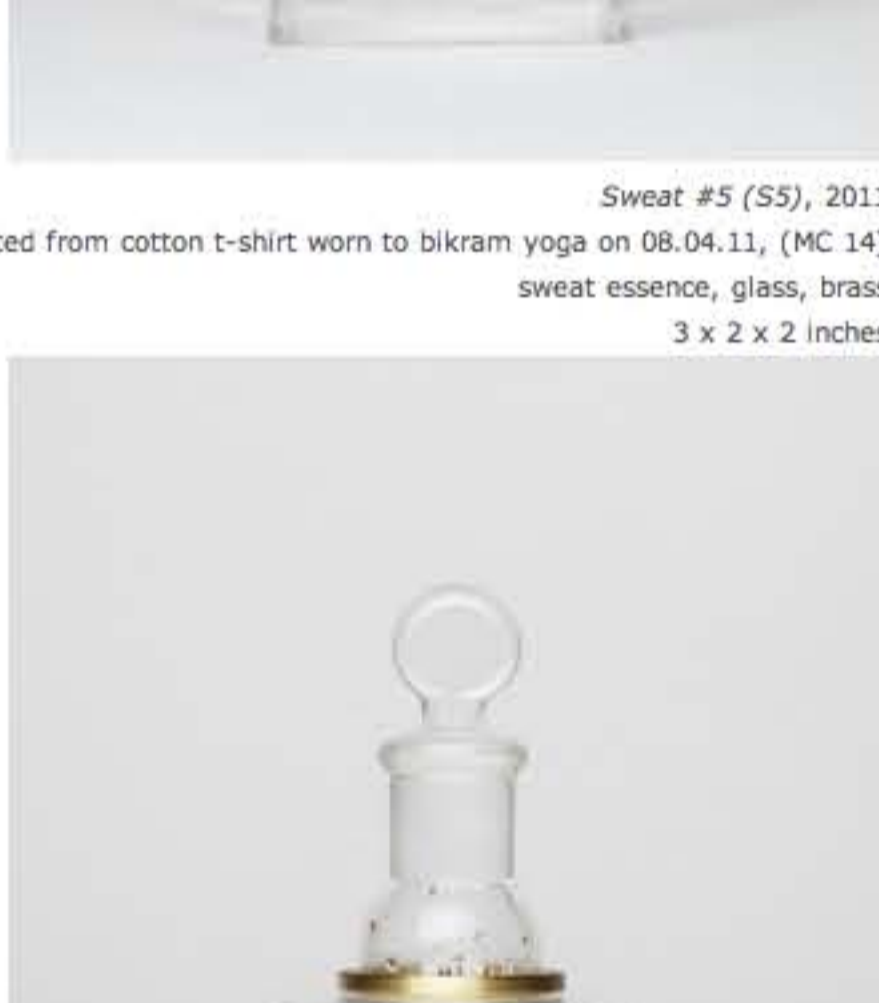
Martynka Candle 1 (C1), 2012
scraped off body on 05.20.12
paraffin, stearic acid, sweat essence, wick, beaker
3 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches



Night Shirt #1 (NS1), 2011
collected from cotton t-shirt worn to sleep for 5 nights between 08.06.11 – 08.11.11, (MC 16-21)
sweat essence, glass, brass
3 x 2 x 2 inches



Sweat #5 (S5), 2011
collected from cotton t-shirt worn to bikram yoga on 08.04.11, (MC 14)
sweat essence, glass, brass
3 x 2 x 2 inches



Hair #1 (H1), 2011
extracted on 07.20.11
hair essence, glass, brass
3 x 2 x 2 inches

Hunter College Lab Images:



Paul Tewfik washing a sweaty t-shirt in ethanol.



Martynka Wawrzyński with students Paul Kozlowski and Paul Tewfik.



Martynka smelling a freshly evaporated essence.



Charles Paszkowski with a freshly evaporated sweat sample.

Gallery Installation Images:



Installation View (Scent Chamber, Organic Essences and Candles)



Installation View (Organic Essences detail)



Installation View (Organic Essences detail)

All images: Courtesy of the artist and envoy enterprises, New York.

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