

# Vain Glorious | Get a Whiff of This Girl

CULTURE, WOMEN'S FASHION | By CHELSEA ZALOPANY | OCTOBER 18, 2012, 6:00 PM | Comment



Courtesy of the artist and Envoy Enterprises, New York

Martynka Wawrzyniak's sweat, tears and hair, as perfume. From left: "Night Shirt #1 (NS1)," "Tears #8 (T8)" and "Sweat #5 (S5)."

**Who:** The performance artist [Martynka Wawrzyniak](#).

**What:** A new solo exhibition called "Smell Me," at Envoy Enterprises (87 Rivington Street) opens this Saturday and runs through Nov. 18. The show is all about olfactory experience (so no sniffles, please) and features handblown chemistry vials containing Wawrzyniak's sweat, tears and hair, as well as a scent chamber (Lady Gaga lent a scent diffuser from her recent perfume launch for the occasion!) in which visitors can inhale a synthetic compilation of Wawrzyniak's bodily essence.

**Why Bother:** Martynka Wawrzyniak has been driven by her nose ever since she was a young girl growing up in Communist Poland. "I have incredibly vivid memories of liking certain people because of their smell and being afraid of others because of their smell," she says, recalling packed bus rides filled with undeodorized passengers. "Nowadays we do everything we can to mask our own essence. We use scented soaps and shampoos and laundry powder and perfume — we all smell like a horrible cocktail." In a quest to capture the body's true essence, Wawrzyniak spent the last year capturing and cataloging her body's own scents. "I wanted to create something completely visceral without any visuals — and that could only be experienced through the primary, primal senses," she says. "It's taking the nude self-portrait to the next level of intimacy, because I didn't know what I would smell like."

After lengthy research, which included C.I.A. scent tracking, the 33-year-old artist called on the Hunter College chemistry professor [Donna McGregor](#). "I became a student for the summer," Wawrzyniak says. "Which is hilarious because I failed high school science." With a research team in tow, Wawrzyniak began collecting her smells (in addition to an all-vegan, unscented soap, coconut shampoo and no-deodorant regime, her clothing had to be presoaked pure cotton stripped of all labels) by putting her clothes in Mason jars after Bikram Yoga LES classes, and taking them back to the laboratory in order to extract the natural fetors with ethanol. Simultaneously, Wawrzyniak collected her tears by listening to childhood Polish songs, including the soundtrack from the film "Akademia Pana Kleksa," and a tape recording of her parents and herself in the kitchen when she was only 4 years old. "I would have to tell my husband, 'Sorry, I can't talk right now because I am having a crying session,'" she says about a process that resulted in whiffs of summer rain and salty dewdrops.

The experiments resulted in 47 essential oils, 10 of which will be on display in terrarium-style beakers in which one can watch their organic, continuously changing forms. Some of the beakers are filled with mist, while others are deep brown in color. In order to provide the olfactory part of the exhibition, the aroma vials were subjected to a secondary mixology to create synthetic fragrances. Under the guidance of the perfumer Yann Vasnier (he's worked with the likes of Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs) and the scent director Dawn Goldworm of 12.29, Wawrzyniak's many musks were refined into chemical compounds. "It's never been done before; Yann literally recreated the smell of my armpit," she says, about the sweat, tears, nightshirt and hair odors that will be continuously dispelled by a scent chamber installation throughout the exhibition's run. "Her nightshirt smell is deep and warm like a small, delicate animal in hibernation," Goldworm says. "Her hair smells like a memory from my childhood — civet, costus and musk with cumin, pepper, coconut water and spicy green galbanum." Note: In order to really grasp the essence of it all, leave your own perfume and antiperspirants at home.

**How Much:** "I'm selling a piece of my body in this vial; it's part of me and it's kind of strange to think someone can take that home," Wawrzyniak says. Organic essences entitled Sweat Shirt #1, Sweat #5, Tears #8, Hair #1, the MartynkaCandle and the Scent Chamber installation will all be for sale by inquiry through Envoy Enterprises Gallery (212-226-4552; [envoyenterprises.com](#)).