



STUFF

MARTYNKA WAWRZYNIAK SMELLS LIKE A 12-YEAR-OLD LIVING ON AN ORGANIC FARM

By Christian Storm

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Tomorrow, artist **Martynka Wawrzyniak** will open her new show, "Smell Me," in which she displays the results of her year-long project to collect and synthesize the aromatic elements that make up her personal stink. Her sweat, tears, and hair will be concentrated to create a primal portrait of herself. While some people would be horrified about the prospect of the general public experiencing their odors, she seems to be OK with it. Martynka was kind enough to talk with us about her smelly new show.



Hair #1 (H1), 2011

VICE: I love the name of the new show. It really cuts to the chase.

Martynka Wawrzyniak: Yeah, I am quite blunt like that. I wanted it to be exactly what it is. It also kind of reminded me of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit." I'm a big Nirvana fan.

So how did this whole idea of bottling your own smell come about?

I had this obsession for a long time to do this, and I did a lot of research on the internet and elsewhere. I got an idea of how it should be done and realized that I should work with a chemistry team. So, I called up Hunter College, thinking maybe they could put a notice up on their board and help me find a chemistry student as an assistant. I got put through to this amazing woman, Professor Donna McGregor, who suggested that I enroll as a chemistry student for the summer. She gave me a team of three research students (Charles Paszkowski, Paul Tewfik and Paul Kozlowski). I was basically a living, walking extraction sample for the whole summer, because I would collect my hair and cry into vials. I still have jars full of hair in my room because I don't want to stop collecting my hair. I had to sleep in a T-shirt for five nights or go to bikram yoga class in it and then put it in a sterile mason jar. Then I would go straight to the lab and wash it in ethanol to get all the sweat out, evaporate all the water and ethanol off, and be left with the essential oil of my sweat. It was pretty cool.



Sweat #5 (S5), 2012

And from there, you went to a perfume master?

There were two stages of this whole thing. Those are the real, organic oils from my body, like my real juices, and those are for sale as the real objects in the show. But then I wanted to have an interactive experience for the viewers, but I couldn't squeeze out enough of my sweat to run the show for 30 days. I figured what I would do is synthetically recreate it, like they do with most things. I got connected, through a friend of a friend, to one of the top perfumers in the business, Yann Vasnier, who works for a company called Givaudan. He collaborated with a scent director, Dawn Goldworm. He's like the chemist-alchemist who figures out the formulas and she's like the creative director. She smelled me, and we tried to match my smells with natural and synthetic ingredients. Basically all natural smells, change over time, because all the light, green notes evaporate off and you're left with the heavy, sweet stuff. So Dawn would smell my armpit and hair to try and put back some of what was lost, so it could be even more authentic. I would say that the synthetic recreation is even more close to what I smell like than what's in the vials now, because they're already a year old.

The scent chamber at the gallery is going to be a room that you enter one at a time. It's invisible art. It's also kind of like olfactory terrorism, because you have no choice but to inhale it because you must breathe, so you've already consumed the art just by entering the space. But, at the same time, it coats you all around. Right now, we're doing construction on the gallery and the diffuser was turned on yesterday, and the workers were completely saturated with my essence. The whole street radiates with the smell of my sweat.

How does it make you feel that everyone at the show will smell like you?

It is a bit weird, I have to say. Initially, I was nervous about what I would smell like. In a way, it's even more naked than being naked because, when you're naked, you're exposed, but when you're really intimate with a person, you can smell them. But I became quite comfortable with my body smell over the course of the project. Now I'm so accepting of every smell of my body and I really quite like it, even when my T-shirt gets sweaty. I actually ended up realizing that I smell nice. Dawn sent me a nice quote: "Overall, being a vegan, your body smells very wet and sweet, like lactones and coconut water, with an infusion of fresh green notes and spices. If I didn't know you, I would have thought by your smell that you were 12 years old and living on an organic farm. Bright, sparkling, pure, and radiant olfactively," which I just thought was so beautiful.



Tears #6 (T6), 2012

I don't think I'd want to know what she'd say about me. Going back to the show, how do you think it will affect the viewers' experience to stimulate their sense of smell instead of sight?

I wanted to create a show that's completely the opposite of what we're used to seeing. We're overstimulated visually with everything in the world. I wanted to create a communication that was purely experienced in a primitive, primal way. It's like when you eat food, you don't have to intellectualize it, you just experience the flavor, and then you have a whole slew of sensations that occur and thoughts and memories that comes along with it. I wanted to create a show that's kind of like that, where I'm feeding people this idea in a way that can be absorbed into them in a very animalistic way. It's kind of a self-portrait without the prejudice of what I look like or my physical features.

I had this epiphany that the olfactive essence could almost be likened to what people call the "spiritual essence." There's an aura of pheromones and smells around us that we emit to form a subconscious communication with other human beings. We carry it with us like a halo, and it sends signals to other people about who we are, what we are, if we're ready to mate, if we're attracted to each other.

"Smell Me" will be on view (er, on smell) at **Envoy Enterprises** in the Lower East Side of New York City through November 18th.

By Christian Storm | 1 month ago

Tags: smell, scent, Martynka Wawrzyniak, envoy enterprises, show openings