



Helmhaus Zürich

11 March – 8 May 2016

ELODIE PONG – PARADISE PARADOXE **A fragrant exhibition at Helmhaus Zürich**

You can close your eyes but you can't turn off your nose. Elodie Pong, video and installation artist from Zurich, investigates the invisible olfactory architecture that surrounds us as the point of departure for her solo exhibition at Helmhaus Zürich. Visitors encounter plants that ripened in a 3-D printer, a robot that hurls the names of perfumes at the wall – and a fragrance that has never been smelled before.

Art that we can smell: this is an exhibition that charts new perceptual territory. Zurich-based artist Elodie Pong examines smells as essential vehicles of meaning and metaphors for the liquid age in which we live. Scents establish nonverbal connections between people, objects and places; scents make an impact, and not only by following our noses. Have we just crawled out of the darkness of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* only to be immersed in a brave new world of olfactory sensations? Or does smell herald utopian and possibly even Edenic bliss, as presaged by the title of the show?

The Helmhaus exhibition offers an artistic response to these questions, creating stimulating arenas of thought and perception within the white cube that oscillate between odour and rumour. In new video works, Elodie Pong juxtaposes centrepieces from current olfactory theory with the dancing human body, as a literally vital source of many and varied odours. Pong's sculptures – a relatively new avenue of endeavour in her oeuvre – lend fragile shape to thoughts on the vagaries of smell. Some ingredients of perfumes are now produced synthetically because the plants from which they were once extracted are threatened with extinction. Pong draws on a very contemporary device: she grows replacements in a 3-D printer, an arresting metaphor for the disconcerting developments in our increasingly synthetic universe.

In another room of this solo exhibition, the first to be organized at the Helmhaus since San Keller's "Spoken Work", 2012, Elodie Pong has a projector moving around in space, its movements as random as that of the untold olfactory molecules that surround us. The beamer, mounted on a robot, projects the names of perfumes on the wall, including "Paradise" and "Paradoxe". The two words happened to appear side by side on the computer screen while preparing the exhibition and became the title of the show. Such names enable the multibillion dollar perfume industry to impose linguistic cubbyholes on something that has no words. Visual and audible stimuli can be effectively verbalized; being more elusive, smell seduces us into exploiting the benefits of eminently marketable placebos, viz. stories of paradise.

Elodie Pong has even enlisted the aid of the renowned scientist and scent investigator Roman Kaiser to create a new fragrance for the exhibition. Fragrances and our perception of them are irrevocably clear on one count: we never get a second chance to make a first impression. "Elodie Pong – Paradise Paradoxe" will impact eyes, ears and, above all, olfactory perception, creating impressions that will remain forever inscribed in the mind.

Publication

The accompanying publication *Elodie Pong – Paradise Paradoxe*, Edition Patrick Frey, Zurich, is forthcoming in April. Designed by graphic artists Huber/Sterzinger, the book expands the theme of the exhibition with texts by philosopher Georg Kohler, gender theoretician Jack Halberstam, neuroscientist Andreas Keller, and many more (book launch, 14 April, 6:30 p.m.).

Events: conversations, videos, performances and concerts

The exhibition is complemented by a diverse and enriching programme of events, which includes four conversations, two 5 o'clock Theses, two concerts, three musical workshops, guided tours for adults and children and an online performance beamed from Birmingham (1 April, 7:45 p.m.). The artist will speak with Bettina Steinbrügge, director of the Hamburg Kunstverein (17 March, 6:30 p.m.) and with olfactory specialists – neuroscientist Andreas Keller and Sebastian Fischenich, founder of the perfume label Humiecki & Graef – in a programme titled “Smell Talk” (21 April, 6:30 p.m.). At the first edition of the new series of conversations, “Willkommen in der Problemzone! Ausstellungen machen – weh” [Welcome to the Problem Zone! Making Exhibitions – Hurts], Elodie Pong will converse with curator Daniel Morgenthaler about making the exhibition (20 April, 5 p.m.). This conversation ushers in our new programme of talks among artists, technicians, office and reception staff, and curators about the joys and tribulations of mounting exhibitions.

In our regular programme of 5 o'clock Theses, Georg Kohler, professor of philosophy, will be confronted with the claim that “Gerüche sind ideale Metaphern für unsere flüssige Moderne” [Smells Are Ideal Metaphors for Our Liquid Modernity] (23 March, 5 p.m.). In our second 5 o'clock Thesis, chemist and olfactory scientist Roman Kaiser will speak about “Synthetische Duftstoffe sind natürlich immer von der Natur inspiriert” [Synthetic Aromas Are Naturally Always Inspired by Nature] (27 April, 5 p.m.). We also have the pleasure of announcing two video premieres: Luc Gut will show his work *OS LOVE* (31 March, 6:30 p.m.) and De La Fuente Oscar De Franco will present a film resulting from his Helmhaus exhibition “BLUECORE” in spring, 2015 (28 April, 6:30 p.m.). Two concerts also chart surprising territory: Björn Magnusson & The Cold Fiction Rehearsal present improvised collages of rock music (16 March, 8:30 p.m.), and Dorit Chrysler will perform lyrical pop songs on the theremin, one of the oldest electronic musical instruments, invented in 1920 (9 April, 8:30 p.m.). In addition, the musician will conduct three workshops for children and adults.