

The scent of bitter
turnouts 'a way's
reminded him of
the fate of unrequited
love

Perfume Stories 2

Michael O'Shaughnessy

oo / Time Travel

We have all experienced that moment when a perfume or fragrance stops us in our tracks and places us right at the centre of a particular time and place. Some are childhood memories but others are more complex. They can be incredibly vivid or like someone calling us from a distance. I never quite bought into Dr. Who when I was a kid, but this is time travelling. The Learners at HMP Liverpool understood this. Some scents take them outside, away from the internal walls of their confined spaces to another world. In nearly all cases, to a better place. A place and a time when they were happy.

Perfume Stories is a multi-sensory project based on the power of scent. It is a series of workshops that explore education, adult literacy and rehabilitation in custody. This is part of the wider HMP agenda around rehabilitation and reform.

The aim of this research project is to encourage literacy and learning based on storytelling. This is achieved through the experience of perfume and olfaction. For many of the Learners, these sessions initially become enablers and starting points for other creative practices such as drawing, poetry, spoken word and in many cases, critical thinking. In many cases, getting the learners to sit down, listen and contribute to the project, is a big step.

The programme originally began as a pilot scheme partnership with Novus and HMP institutions including HMP Liverpool, HMP Buckley Hall, HMP Hindley and HMP Risley. Novus deliver education, rehabilitation support and opportunity to 60,000 adults and young people in custody and in the community across England and Wales.

The Time Travellers: Alchemy and Essence was included in Enrichment in Custody, one of 4 Arts Projects delivering programmes at HMP Hindley, HMP Liverpool and HMP Styal. This was funded by Arts Council England in 2022.

The latest stage of this project Perfume Stories : Alchemy and Essence is being delivered by Novus staff across four sites in the North East - HMP Holme House, HMP Durham, HMP Northumberland, HMP Kirkcubrighton and HMP Deerbolt. This is supported by a collaboration with Carvansons UK, one of the largest suppliers and manufacturers of perfume in Europe and across the Far East.

This publication presents the genesis of this project over four different events. A time travelling roadmap from drawing practice and pedagogy to a personal obsession with perfume. Chanel No5, Cuir Du Russie, Mitsouko, Shalimar, Poison and Portrait of a Lady. There is an alchemic reaction at the heart of drawing. From Liverpool Art School to HMP Risley. This is my own Perfume Story.

Michael O'Shaughnessy

*“ My future can be seen in the mirror of my choosing.
From today I will remember good things. I am aware of my experience, I will teach myself how to feel healthy. I will look in the mirror and smile back.
So my future will smell good. “*

*And scent entered into their very core, went directly to their hearts, and decided or good and all between affection and contempt, disgust and love, lust and hate.
He who ruled scent ruled the hearts of men.*

Patrick Suskind
Perfume

The project was originally titled Perfume Stories but there were issues around getting Learners to sign up for the workshop. Most of the Learners thought the workshops would explain how to make Perfume. As it became more established at the HMPs, we returned to the original title of Perfume Stories.



Perfume Stories began as a series of workshops with Illustration and Graphic Design undergraduates at Liverpool School of Art & Design. A residency at Tate Exchange Liverpool led to an invitation to collaborate with Novus. They work in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Youth Custody Service (YCS), HMPPS Wales, NHS trusts, national and devolved governments, Local Enterprise Partnerships, charities, employers and local authorities. I was invited to pilot Perfume Stories at HMP Liverpool in February 2020.

These pages contain a combination of some of the science around smell and the literary references that I use to help frame the workshops. There are extracts from the Liverpool Tate Exchange Workshop and selected contributions from learners at HMP Liverpool, HMP Hindley, HMP Buckley Hall and HMP Northumberland.

My projects have explored some of the perceived ideas around how we measure intelligence through a tangible approach to writing and drawing. They began as part of a broad community of Practice. Projects with Tate Liverpool, The Everyman Theatre and Ørsted Energy included large scale external drawing and writing projects for multiple stakeholders and communities in Art and Design Practice. Some of this work included an acknowledgment of groups operating within and on the periphery of creative hierarchies. The learners at HMP Liverpool include groups that may have had an uneven relationship with education.

Perfume Stories encourages literacy and questions some of the assumptions around intelligence and cognition. One of the aims is to explore how these memory experiences may offer a different voice to examine adult literacy. Statistics illustrate that 50 % of UK prisoners have reading skills at or below the level of an 11 year old child. "There have been declines in the number of people participating in learning whilst in prison, and in achieving qualifications in recent years." Skills Funding Agency (2017) Further education and skills: November 2017, London: SFA

My research with undergraduates found that these creative workshops make learning more inclusive and are particularly successful at reaching less academic students.

The impact legacy of this project will enable the delivery of the project across this sector and begin to challenge the low literacy rates across His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

Memory resides in the hippocampus. Prof. Matthew Cobb discusses in The Royal Society of Biology study *Lessons from Larvae* (2020), that "*receptors are like invisible fronds waiting for some neural activity.*"

Cobb, M (2020) *Lessons from Larvae*, Royal Society of Biology
Cytowic, R and Eagleman, D (2011) *Wednesday is Indigo Blue*, MIT Press
Skills Funding Agency (2017) Further education and skills: November 2017, London: SFA

There are certain smells that transport us back to an old school or our grandmother's bathroom. Phenol was a component used in cleaning materials and in schools. It's one of the smells that always reminds us of our childhood. Vanilla can often be found in a lot of fragrances, soaps and talcum powder. It elicits one of the most common responses. It was developed as a synthetic fragrance in 1874.

01 / Liverpool School of Art & Design

The project initially ran at Liverpool School of Art & Design with final year undergraduate students studying Graphic Design and Illustration. It was a point in the semester where the students negotiate their final and most significant autonomous projects. Some are self-authored but many require a starting point. In a practice that is primarily based around problem solving and audience, it can be often be a significant challenge for students to manage a big project where they are required to become writers and authors.

"it suddenly came to me as a picture, not words "
Luca Turin, L (2006) *the Secret of Scent* Faber Faber

The workshops had a number of objectives. One was to encourage the student's thinking about narratives and storytelling. The workshops were managed in groups of between 6 - 10. There is a performative element to the sessions. The sessions are introduced with literary references. Despite the evocative quote from the magic realist Gabriel Garcia Marquez* which contains arguably one of the best opening lines of a novel in the last 25 years, I began to find multiple Perfume references whilst exploring the novels of the famous American crime writer Raymond Chandler. The character of the 'femme fatale' in the detective novel became synonymous with perfume and cigarettes. I sought out these references in other literature, (aside from Marcel Proust) Russian writers Fyodor Sologub, Mikhail Bulgakov and the French poet Charles Baudelaire .

The Learners were also introduced to some of the science behind how smell works. The most notable is a disclaimer that when we are stressed our sense of smell stops working. The emotional links become fractured and unreliable. This was one of my big concerns when I ran the project with Learners in HMP Liverpool.

Marquez, M (1990) *Love in the Time of Cholera* Jonathan Cape
Luca Turin, L (2006) *the Secret of Scent* Faber Faber

The student Learners were a mixed ability group. They were given a series of individual perfume samples to smell. Most contemporary perfumes are linear fragrances designed to produce a strong and instantaneous effect, striking the senses all at once and quickly dissipating. They are static. I specifically collected Perfume samples that had more depth and complexity. The Learners were asked a simple question "What does it make you think of".

David Cytowic and David Eaglemann discuss in their book *Wednesday is Blue*, the flexibility of cognition. How poets commonly fuse different senses and employ cross-sensory adjectives to induce a compound aesthetic experience. This experience has a synaesthetic quality. *Perfume Stories* offers a poetic journey. Of course poetry is irrelevant to the 'real' world power and politics, but so is philosophy, painting, music and any other human activity where something genuine can be found (Charles Simic 2005)

The Learners were asked to write down their thoughts and then share these experiences with the rest of the group. The narratives revealed stories that were based on individual unique personal experiences. Some students that reimagined scenarios based on a feeling or a sensation. This was unusual. There may have been a level of creative explanation. Some of the Learners who had mixed academic records responded positively. All wrote short descriptions about these sensations and read them out aloud to the rest of the group. For some, the inclusive approach gave them greater confidence to engage with the academic programmes. The space and environment where workshops take place is also a factor. These sessions work best in a quiet, more contemplative space.

*Only Chanel No.5, and kisses, and the pale glow of lovely legs,
and the mocking invitation in deep blue eyes. Innocent things like that.*
Raymond Chandler
The Little Sister

"Good art necessarily has an emotional component, and because emotion consolidates memory, it also helps us remember a work of art - take it with us in our minds, not an identical copy, but some version of it or a recollection of the experience."

Hustvedt S (2013) *The Drama of Perception / Living Thinking Looking*,
Sceptre Books

I delivered a follow up event at The Liverpool School Of Art. The aim was to road test this workshop with guests invited from non academic backgrounds. I invited three guests I knew had an interest in Perfume and Olfaction. Lynne Robertson, Head of Enterprise Education & Insight Lead, Santander Breakthrough at Santander UK, Kathleen Charters from Sahir House* and LJMU fashion alumni, Holly Bradbury, was the final guest for this session. This was part focus group and part speculative. One idea was to reach out to asylum seeker charities and groups operating in the third sector. Kathryn had real experience in this area. The conversation was expansive. The group shared vivid reminiscences of past narratives involving places, times and people. The significant feedback was about how each contributors record their individual memories.

Sahir House offer HIV support, information and training across Merseyside to people living with or affected by HIV.

Simic, C (2005) *Being Alive* Blood Axe Books

02 / Tate Liverpool

I was invited to submit a proposal for the Liverpool Tate Exchange Programme in 2019. I explored a number of ideas that would link Perfume Stories to the Tate Liverpool collection. I intended to frame the experience within the context of Tate Liverpool. Wassily Kandisky *Cossacks* is exhibited on the first floor. When this work was first exhibited in Russian in 1910, it is very likely that a visitor seeing this painting, would have worn Chanel's Cuir Du Russie or Krasnaya Moskva (Red Moscow). The Keith Haring Exhibition was on at the time. The fragrances in New York in the 1980's were likely to be colognes and perfumes, such as the Estee Lauder classic scent Aramis, the feminine perfumes, Obsession, Joy de Bain or Poison from Yves Saint Laurent. Andy Warhol famously wore Chanel No5. He wanted the smell to precede his entrance to a social event or a nightclub opening.*

Perfume Stories was installed at the end of December in 2019

The installation was made up of a film which explained some of the science and introduced the project.

A publication / handout.

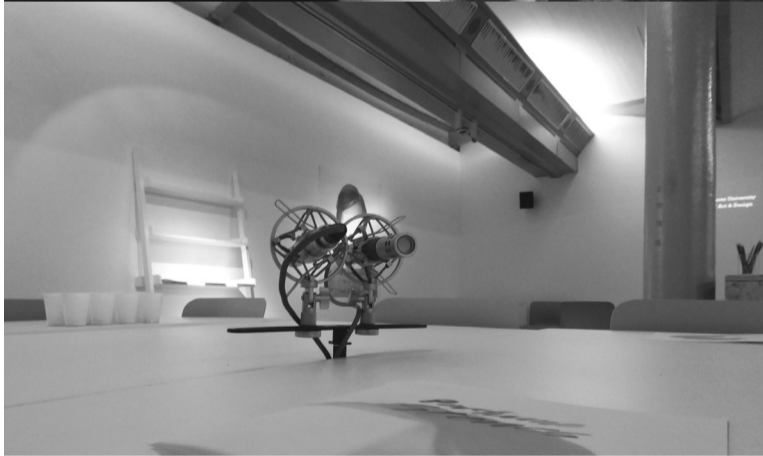
A suggestions box

A Perfume / Olfaction session where the general public could sign up.

I was assisted throughout the week's installation by LJMU final year Graphic Design and Illustration student Hibah Annam. I always remember the staff at Les Senteurs and Harvey Nichols telling me that some of the biggest purchases of perfume were by Saudi women. What I discovered was that these women would often use perfume as an expression of their personalities. There were parallels about the way Liverpool-born Muslim girls would personify that balance between the traditional family -focused Muslim girls, but with a strong Liverpool identity. My intention was to reach out to various Muslim groups in the city and get them involved in the project. Hibah encapsulated all those traits. She was also a fashionable Scouse and a perfume devotee. Oud in particular is the signature component in a lot of the perfumes worn by these groups of women (and men) .



** There are interesting parallels to the fate of Marie Antoinette. Houbigant supplied French Royals with Perfumes in the late 1700, famously causing the disguised Marie Antoinette to be recognized by a passer-by during her attempted flight from France. The perfume gave her away.*



Based on the focus group advice, I worked with a sound recording technician, Charlie Warhurst, to record the conversations and clean up the sound, post production. The mics were set up in the workshop area. The Perfume Stories Session had 6 participants. 5 Female and 1 attendee who identified as non-binary. I used the same format for the previous workshops, introducing the Gabriel Garcia Marquez quotation from his novel 'Love in the Time Of Cholera'

It was inevitable: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love. Dr. Juvenal Urbino noticed it as soon as he entered the still darkened house where he had hurried on an urgent call to attend a case that for him had lost all urgency many years before. The Antillean refugee Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, disabled war veteran, photographer of children, and his most sympathetic opponent in chess, had escaped the torments of memory with the aromatic fumes of gold cyanide.

This quotation starts to frame Perfume Stories. It introduces the concept of perfume narratives. Storytelling is placed at the centre of the session. The participants included European students, UK fashion academics, a chemical lab manager and a homeopath. My concern about running this type of public event was that it would only attract other artists. I wanted a wide range of participants.

I used samples from my scent library that I had collected over the past few years. One of the most intriguing responses continued to be from a classic scent made at the beginning of the century by Ernest Beaux.

In his book *The Scent of Empires* Karl Schlogel (2021) explains how aldehydes are molecules whose atoms of oxygen, hydrogen and carbon are arranged in a particular way. This phase in the organic reaction is known as oxidation. Chemists can stabilize aldehydes in this process. These molecules create a variety of smells.

Aldehydes are fleeting substances that dissipate quickly before vanishing altogether they intensify the aromas of a perfume and trigger reactions in the nervous system, a tingling freshness, a little frisson of an electric sparkle - mixed with florals is part of the success of Chanel no5
Karl Schlogel (2021) *The Scent of Empires* Polity

The participants often have an initial reaction to the top notes and aldehydes, such as a new car or dentists, My later workshops with the Learners at HMP Liverpool would often reveal the pleasure in smelling a new car or a place that was clean and new.

The reactions would differ from person to person. Some Perfumes would illicit no response at all with one participant whilst the same would evoke a very significant reaction with another participant.

"This is going to be a bit weird, but it reminds me of being in an old mosque. When I went to Saudi Arabia, I went to a few. We visited a few mosques and they were very, very old mosques. This was in Mecca and Medina. It just reminds me of the smell in those. I was with my family and it was walking into these old buildings. It was like that spiritual relaxation. It just reminds me of that. It has got that smell to it. But they were not burning anything. It was just the smell of the building. The old building. The oldness. Yes."

"It reminds me of my university days, 26 or 27 years ago, when you walked down the corridor and going past certain students more goth. That sort of smell. "

At each session there are always one or two participants who have a very powerful and emotional response to one of the samples.

“ This one, I could not get it to begin with. It was like there was a bit of a block. I could not get into it at all. Then whilst you were talking then, I did manage to get into it. The weird thing is, is because it is quite an emotional thing for me. Because it is to do with when my nanna died when I was a child. There was a particular smell around her house, which I have always remembered, that happened just before she died. I think it is to do with a fur coat as well. Whether she had this perfume or a similar perfume at the time. Because I am almost frightened of smelling it, because it is the smell of death for me. Because it was my first experience really of a close member of the family dying. I did not particularly like my nanna either, so it has got those sorts of connotations. I was a bit scared of her as well. I think I was probably about six or seven. But I did not go in there to begin with. It was almost like a, Do not go there, sensation. Yes, so it was quite powerful. “

“ This smell, smelling it more and more just reminds me of 14 years ago my mother passed away and I was not there. Because of medical reasons, I was not told that she passed away abroad. Anyway, later on, when all of her bags and her items were brought back to the UK, I wanted to keep her handbag. I still have it to this day. When I open it, open up her handbag, that smell reminds me of the smell on the handbag. It is a 14 year old handbag now. But I do not know whether it is the way I have stored it. It is just stored in plastic bag in a storeroom. That room reminds me of her. “

“ I am just getting a fresh smell. It reminds me slightly of my dad from probably early 70s. I am not saying Old Spice, but along those lines. I remember an aftershave and it was a really cheap one that I used to buy for my dad, because it was cheap. I think it was called Hai Karate or something like that. In the day. It was like he always had the same routine of a morning and I would not see what it was. It would be late 70s. Maybe even 1980. That is what it sort of reminds me of. “

In addition to the recorded sessions. I installed a box to collect written contributions from the general public. The A5 notes that were titled - What's Your Perfume Story ? I asked the participants to write down a Perfume or Cologne that invoked a particular memory. The submissions were all anonymous and collected in a large ballot box. Here's a sample of some of the unedited contributions.

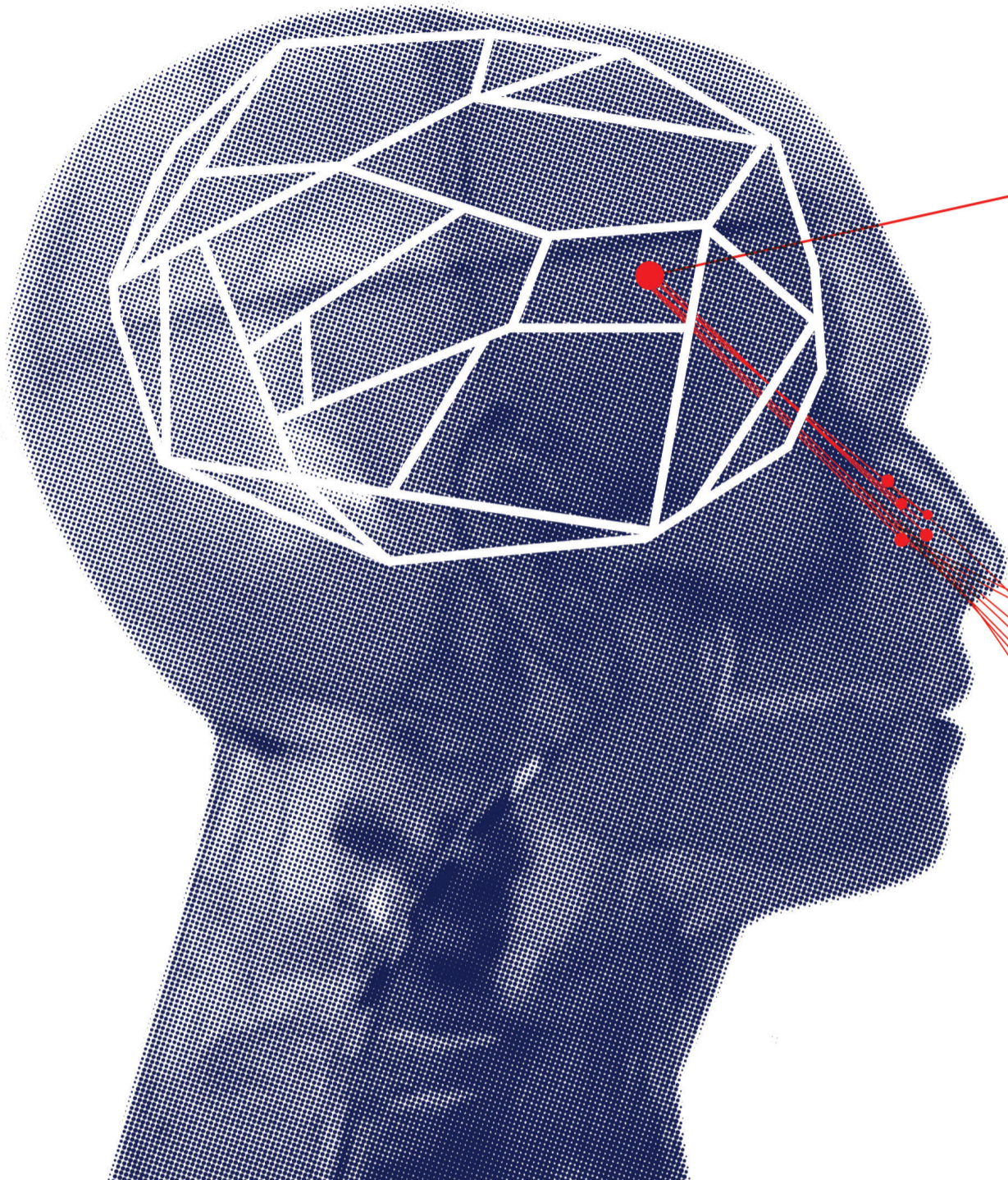
“ The Giorgio Armani Oud Royal Eau De Parfum reminds me when I went to Dubai. I remember my mum loved this Perfume so much that she would always want to go to Dubai just to smell the perfume, she loved it so much, so I got it for her birthday and now the Perfume reminds me of her, because she wore it all the time.”

“ Lancome La Vie Est Belle. The first Perfume I bought in University, reminds me of stressful deadlines and overeating “

“ When I was young my grandmother used to use Chanel No5. Everytime that I smelled that Perfume, I remember her.”

“ Black Opium reminds me of my cousin. Whenever I smelled that Perfume it always reminds me of her.”

“ Salvador Dali Black Perfume always brings back memories of my University years in Moscow, Russia. I studied Art & History of Art in the early 1990's. The dark and difficult time, but we were young, full of hopes and aspiration. My boyfriend of the time gave me a small bottle of Salvador Dali as a gift and this was like now you would be given a Bentley. We experienced lack of everything, the shops were empty people would be queuing for anything. But my boyfriend did a military service in the Kremlin Squad and was entitled special shopping coupons in special shops with foreign goods. We went for the first ever Dali Exhibition in Pushkin Museum. We had to wait for hours but it was amazing.”



Her whole body smelled of Orris, which overpowers the senses with its heavy, sensual exciting perfume. A delightful drowsiness and lethargy.

Fyodor Sologub
The Petty Demon

You'd like to sleep with her. They all would.

You'd like to share her dreams and sniff the rose of her memories.

The Long Goodbye
Raymond Chandler

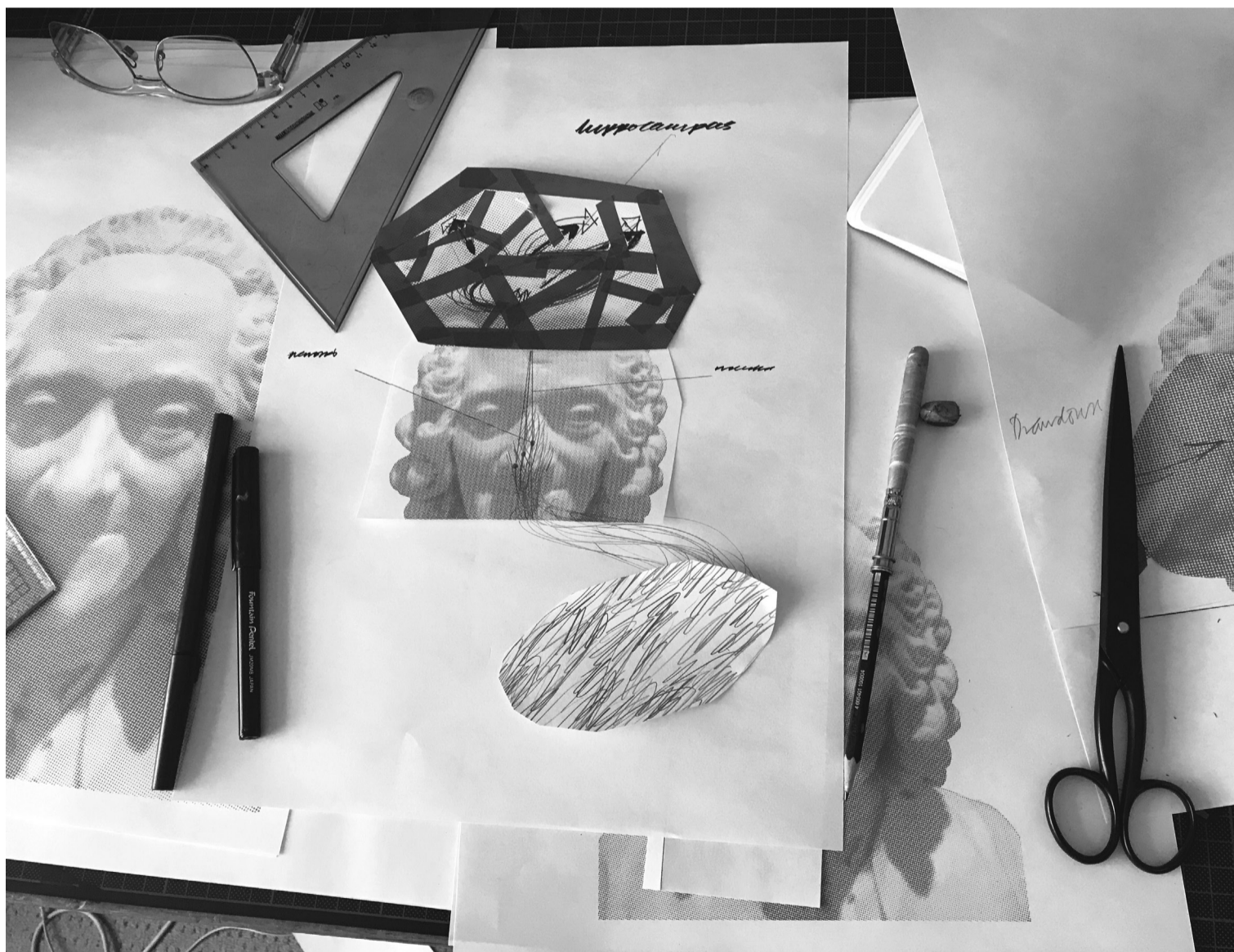


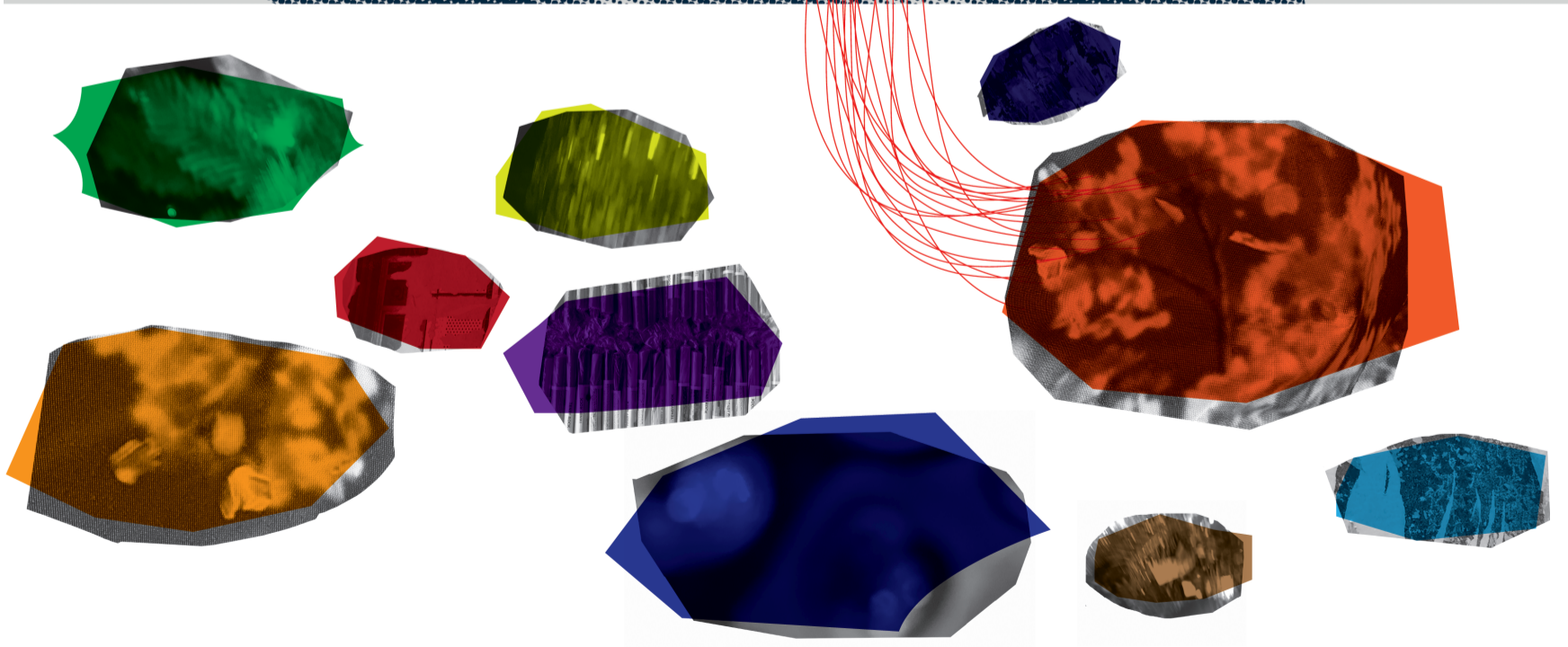
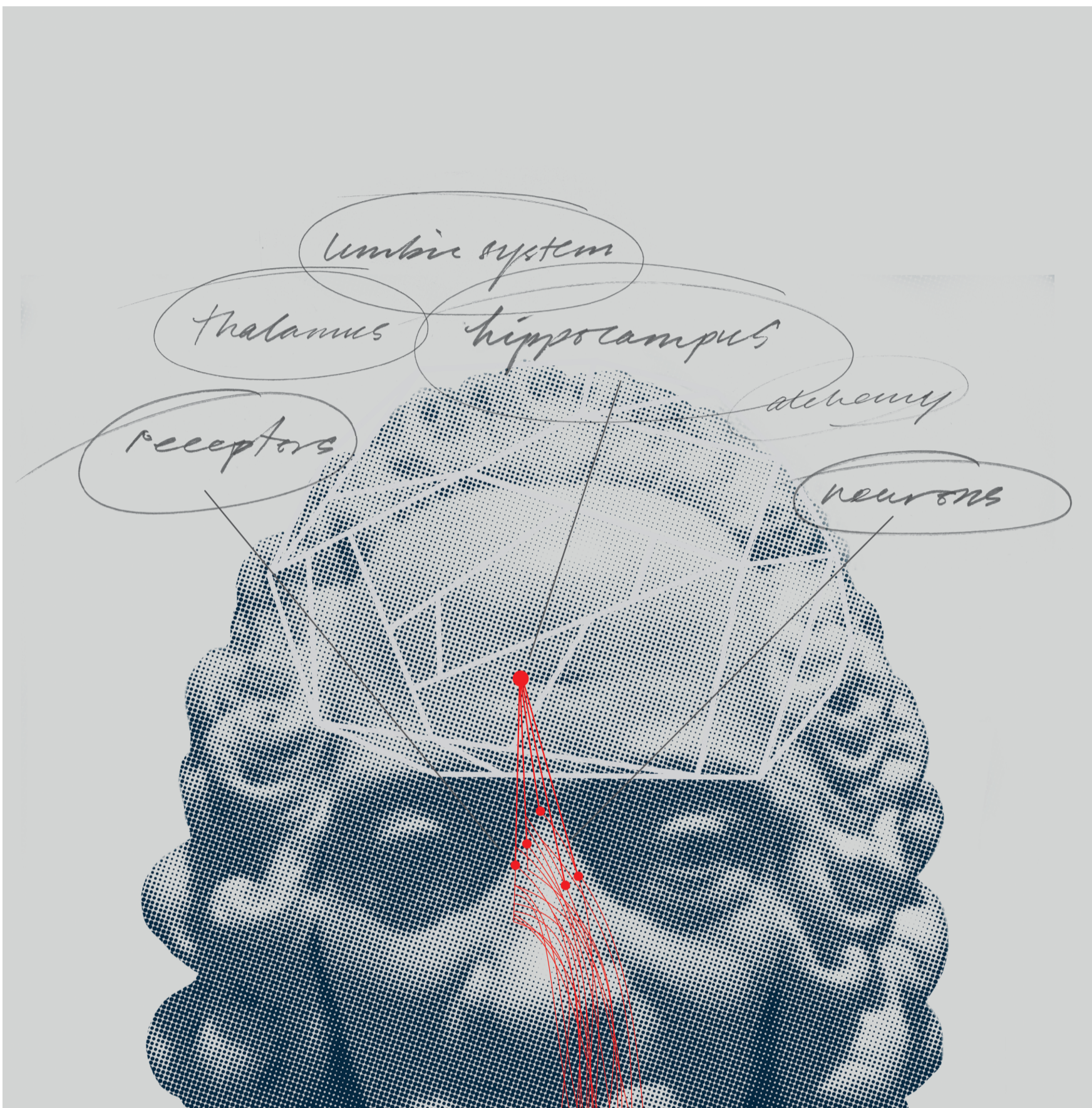
In a sweet though slightly hoarse voice the girl made an announcement which sounded rather cryptic but which, judging from the faces of the women in the stalls, was very enticing: Guerlain Chanel Mitsouko Narcisse Noir Chanel Number 5 evening dresses, cocktail dresses...
Mikhail Bulgakov
The Master and Margarita

I lived on my wits and on the tough kibbutz survival skills I had been taught plus a large bottle of Guerlain's Shalimar which I slathered myself with every morning.
Linda Grant
When I lived in Modern Times

All the Tate Exchange 2019 contributors were invited to attend a plenary session at Tate Liverpool at the end of January 2020. I was approached by Andy Holland and Sarah Hartley, the Operational Lead for Creative Arts and Enrichment at Novus, to examine how the idea might work with Learners at HMP Liverpool and potentially across other HMP's in the North West. For almost 30 years Novus has been helping offenders change direction and contributed to the sustainable rehabilitation, resettlement and employment of tens of thousands of individuals across England and Wales. We discussed the idea of how this project would transition with inmates at HMP Liverpool and potentially across other HMP institutions that work with Novus.

One of the ideas is to encourage the Learners to understand that whilst some of the standard mechanisms for learning are a good measure of intelligence, for many Learners it is not straightforward. It offers the Learners the opportunity to value some of their own stories. A gateway to thinking differently about engaging with education. This might be useful for Learners in these institutions that may not engage with traditional learning schemes. The sensory nature of the project asks the Learners to question and reassess their own approach to learning.







03 / HMP Liverpool, HMP Hindley and HMP Buckley Hall

In February 2020, I presented a revision of my project with learners at HMP Liverpool. It would be part of their enrichment programme. A question I was asked, was "What does it mean for the inmates participating in the Workshop?" Perfume Stories champions alternative thinking and challenges some of the assumptions and conventions about the way we learn. The project can also promote curiosity and provide a genuine platform for engagement. We could see how this might be empowering, a new way for the learners to engage with education programmes.

At the beginning of the project, because the learners are not allowed perfume / liquid (due to flammable liquids being prohibited), they could not keep the paper samples. H+S would have to test the fire quality of the scented paper. For the Learners this was very much a new experience. I was told ahead of the visit that I was referred to as The Perfume Man.

"If a time traveller from 100 years ago walked into a prison today - whether one of the inner-city Victorian prisons or the new-builds where the majority of men are held - the similarities would trump the differences. They would recognise the smells and the sounds, the lack of activity and probably some of the staff. It is not only the buildings that have stayed the same - it is the whole ethos of the institution."

Crook, F (2021) *The reform of prisons has been my life's work, but they are still utterly broken* The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2021/aug/10/reform-prisons-utterly-broken>

The support from Sarah Hartley at Novus was invaluable. Her questions were straightforward and full of insight. I worked closely with Sarah on a new iteration of this workshop. The mix of experience and background in Art and Design Practice helped me to understand how the Learners might respond. The focus on rehabilitation also helped with some of the moral complexities around working with the Learners.

Encouraging the Learners to tell a story in an environment where adult literacy is low can only be encouraged. Some of the Learners may have been excluded from school or withdrawn from education at an early age. The Perfume stories combines Graphic Design, Literature, Science and Olfaction, a new gateway to learning and engagement, a catalyst for the Learners to value lateral thinking. It should be a pleasurable experience. It also needed to start being clearer and less speculative. Capturing what the Learners experienced was going to be difficult. We took notes during these sessions but all names and personal information was redacted. I produced a graphic to explain the science of the process. A visual image that represented where the neural activity was and introduced some of the scientific terms such as the hippocampus and the limbic system.

We visited two small groups of 4x Learners in a small learning room adjacent to the main wings at HMP Liverpool. I was informed that Learners are inclined to leave the workshops mid way if they don't want to engage. The hard surfaces and harsh light weren't the ideal conditions for these sessions. I always frame the session by explaining that its not a game of guess the scents. I began by introducing writers that have perfume references in their work and then ask the Learners to reveal, if anything, what the perfumed paper samples make them think of.

The Time Travellers

D.V.N. reminded me of when I used to live in a house I thought was haunted every night between 9-10 I used to smell this ~~nausea~~ smell and heard floor boards move I said the house was haunted, and the smell is still there today even tho the room has been painted.

We used six different scents. Some were high-end luxury brands and some obscure bespoke perfumes. The scents were all chosen for the complexity of their make up and the quality of the components. The reaction to the experience appeared very positive. It was not what the Learners were expecting. Some revealed childhood memories and others, very vivid stories from their past about neighbours and friends. One of the most poetic and revealing stories was from a Learner at HMP Liverpool who told us one of the scents transported him back to the house of a neighbour who smoked and had a canary with small birds in his garden.

It is possible to present these learners with very specific and specialist scents, such as the smell of rain or freshly mown grass. Some of these elements are part of the dna of traditional perfumes, such as the Hermes Perfume Un Jardin Sur La Lagune.

At the conclusion, the Learners were encouraged to write or draw about these memories as short stories, poems or songs. At a later follow up visit, one of the Learners was encouraged to use written words and imagery to describe his experience. The Learners may not have the vocabulary to express how they feel. This part of the workshop encouraged a more visual response. There were a couple of occasions when one of the Learners registered a memory provoked by one of the samples. There was a reluctance to share the story with the rest of the group. Vulnerability may not be something that Learners want to admit to. All the scents chosen for this particular session avoided strong masculine components. The first sessions trialled more feminine and complex Perfumes. Many of the Learners had positive memories of matriarchs and grandparents. The intention is to introduce one or two key masculine fragrances at later follow up sessions when the Learners are more relaxed and have trust in the programme.

Frances Crook is the Chief Executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform

In preparation for the visit, Sarah Hartley described the typical behaviour and engagement of Learners. I was really surprised at their vulnerability. What I wasn't really prepared for was the noise and smell of the building. Processing the environment and these initial encounters was really difficult. It became easier at later visits. We also discussed the importance of how information was passed through word of mouth and by key Learners and trustees. Would the success of the programme and take up rely on this ?

The Covid-19 Pandemic required a rethink of how to continue and facilitate Perfume Stories. A remote / blended version. Throughout January 2021, I worked closely with Sarah to produce a film which would explain and frame the workshop. The Learners would receive a DVD of this to watch in their cells. They were loaned DVD players to play the film.

I produced a stripped down A3+ folding worksheet that had a number of aims. It included a set of directions. There were references and extracts from Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, literary references about Mikhail Bulgakov, Fyodor Sologub and Raymond Chandler. There were also a few facts about Perfume. I had no prior knowledge of the educational range of the Learners. Some of the Learners may be inspired to read more around this subject or simply enjoy the works of the 'magic realist' Marquez or the detective novels of the American crime writer Raymond Chandler.

The double sided graphics poster contained the image from my last visit about how smell works. After feedback and advice from Sarah Hartley, I was asked to think about an activity sheet, something the Learners could annotate or draw on. I produce a graphic which had a grid with colour references, Perfume components, numbers and another graphic which tried to explain the smell process. Some of the colours used in the diagram was my own subtle or unsubtle references to synaesthesia. Some of the later Learners did describe the smell sensations as colours. Poets commonly fuse different senses and employ cross sensory adjectives to induce a compound aesthetic experience (Cytowic, R, 2011) Its very difficult to quantify this, only the subject has this experience.

Cytowic, R and Eaglemann , D (2011) Wednesday is Indigo Blue MIT Press

Finally - each Learner received 5 letter coded paper samples impregnated with individual perfumes in sealed airtight packs . There were 11 Learners that signed up for the programme. Covid restrictions meant that my follow up visit would be to phone the Learners in their cells using an internal phone system.

In February 2021 I presented “Perfume Stories: Alchemy, Olfaction and Synaesthesia: From Liverpool Art School, Tate Liverpool to Walton Jail (HMP Liverpool)”, at the Education and Illustration: Models, Methods, Paradigms. 11th Illustration Research Symposium at Kingston University, London UK This gave me a different perspective on the project. The feedback from fellow academics was encouraging and very positive.

Quite unlike its pristine and logical presentation in journal articles – ‘the reconstructed logic of science’ – real research is often confusing, messy, intensely frustrating, and fundamentally non-linear – (Marshall and Rossman 1989:21)

I returned to HMP Liverpool on Friday 21 May 2021. My Learners were all located on one specific wing of the prison. We were to interview the learners at the cell doors. The hard surfaces in these environments amplified the background noise. Working directly on the wing and at the cell door meant that in addition to the conversations with the individuals, I was trying to process my own experience. Working on the VP wing (Vulnerable Prisoners) raised many of the standard moral arguments about these types of Learners. Many of the Learners are on the wing because they owe debt or would struggle within the main prison cohort.

One of the potential issues is that you have to pause or wait between experiencing each scent. A few of the group felt all the perfumes smelled the same. If you don't pace or have a break, the nose will stop detecting any nuances or significant differences. On the return visit, they were more aware of the subtleties. This can be due to the basenotes that are more lasting. I was asked to return with more samples. The feedback about the information sheet was really helpful and constructive.

“ The work sheet was complicated with lots of information – could it have less to be easier to follow?”

“ I didn't get the colours or the letters – what were they for?”

“ There were too many smells, so for me all smelt the same, maybe less would be better?”

Jicky was the first modern fragrance.

Created in 1889 it was a fougere or fern fragrance, based on coumarin a synthetic molecule, designed to replicate the smell of freshly mowed hay. It also included linalool occurring in bois de rose and vanilla. This was one of the first modern perfumeries in Paris 1889 - 1921.

From a Design and Illustration perspective, I had placed far too much emphasis on the visual output, the graphs and diagrams. How I wanted the work to look. After feedback from the Learners, the diagram went through a number of iterations. The activity diagram became simpler. The arbitrary and peripheral motifs were removed. On one of the final formative sessions, the participatory section was completely revised. The idea is to present a range of visual prompts which would extend the workshop beyond the olfaction stage. The Learners felt that it was an intriguing experience. I was hoped that challenged some of the Learners expectations about where this project may lead. The reaction from this group was really revealing.

“ Mental escapism, the project translates you far beyond the prison walls.”

“ Good project, it had me thinking.”

“ I was surprised how powerful the project was in evoking memories – I enjoyed it though.”

“ It held my attention, unusual, unique, interesting – different from any other education in here.”

“ Magic – the connections to the scents got me to think and I can see links to poetry.”

“ Positive experience in a place like this.”

“ Different initiative, it transported me back to primary school.”

“ It was boss, I enjoyed exploring the activity.”

Some of the Learners wrote and annotated on the worksheets. One Learner wrote additional stories and responses to the project on separate sheets of paper. Some of the unedited responses (italic)

“ That rusty dry smell you get in Autumn.”

“ You see I didn't really understand anything about this course until I sat here and I really began to sit with the thoughts and each smell had its own smell which triggered memory's some good some bad the most memorable memory would be over my nan. “

“ I'll always remember the smell of my dear old Nan, I just hope she's in a better place now dancing away with Elvis & John Wayne two of her favourite people in the whole world.”

“ The moment I first detected the scent, I pictured myself standing on a shore with huge waves crashing onto the beach. I can't fully explain this image but it seems to be similar to a day in September 1988 when, aged 23 I stood on the beach at Aberystwyth looking out to sea day dreaming. The colour that came to mind, not unexpectedly was light blue.”

For my follow up visit to interview this group. I made revisions to the large infographic. It stripped way much of the information and added more space to annotate or write. I also introduced the phrase 'time travel'.

When I returned to speak to the Learners at HMP Liverpool, I asked them if these positive stories and memories stayed with them. The response was very positive. They kept returning to the idea of escapism. All the Learners seemed to understand the project. They were more reflective and appeared calmer.

"I've done a lot of education in prison over time and this project is totally different from anything I have done before."

"I wanted to be involved as I was intrigued as to what it was."

"Smell isn't just in the nose, it's an all over body experience."

"The opportunity started me thinking, gave me a different focus, creative thinking."

"Positive, emotion connected to my past – it's good, One of the scents reminds me of Jif which makes me think of my mum and Sam."

One Learner wanted more smells. On this visit I returned with two very distinct and floral-based scents.

"The smells, took me back to memories of good times, which is positive in the current circumstances. This new smell reminds me of my step dad's mums house. I loved that house as a kid – it's crazy how that one small thing can transport you back."

What surprised them the most was how vivid their memory recall was. The memories were positive. A common theme was childhood and grandparents. One of the Learners spoke articulately about the comfort those memories gave him. His grammar and structure was poor, but the stories had real value. You could suppress the more negative and embrace the positive. "Of all our senses, olfaction is especially involved in forming and remembering emotional associations" Tollas S (2010) *Life is Everywhere* Mono Kultur 23 The positive stories stayed with many of the Learners. The Learner who told us about his Batman outfit and church on Sunday with his Nan, although he felt less inclined to write, was encouraged to make drawings and paintings. Some of the conversations became more expansive. Olfaction is especially involved in forming and remembering emotional associations (Tollas, S 2010). The stories themselves had real value and meaning for the Learners.

"the scent brought out a few different emotions, in most ways it touched my heart because it reminded me of some of the good times."

Tollas S (2010) *Life is Everywhere* Mono Kultur 23
Abbott J H (1981) *In The Belly Of The Beast* Vintage

I was invited by Novus to run a series of Perfume Stories sessions at HMP Hindley, a Category C Prison, somewhere between Bamfurlong and West Houghton in the North West. I spent 11 weeks working with three groups of Learners in different areas of the Prison.

It is visually the aldehydes in some of the fragrances that the learners react to. There are reoccurring reactions albeit around similar themes such as a visit to the dentist. These types of common reactions reveal more personal stories. The dentist visits when they were children. When pushed, the Learners can remember what they were wearing. But it is the heart of the perfumes that provide some of the most enduring stories.

One of the Learners was returned to his mothers bedside at a Palliative Care Ward in Liverpool. Another re experienced the smell of his fathers work van. One of the most curious stories was from a Learner who had the olfactory sensation he experienced at a home in the North of England. He was convinced that the house was haunted.

"The perfume reminded me of the day my nan came round to my mums and we sat in the living room. When my nan asked me to make her a cup of tea. I can remember the day like it was yesterday."

"I'm getting the smell of violets. They are sweets that I use to buy on my way to school or my mam would buy a bag of mixed sweets and there was violets in the mixed bag."

"The smell reminded me of new school shoes – the smell of leather. In particular it took me back to me childhood. Buying new school shoes for the new school year. Remembered keeping them in the box in my pine slatted wardrobe in my bedroom where we lived. It also evokes a memory of chewing on leather straps which I cannot place. Later that day and for a couple of days after I remembered my childhood at our house and the feelings of going to secondary school in my new uniform. Feeling a combination of excitement and trepidation – awareness of growing up."

"Also brought up very old memories of living in Essex. The magic of childhood. Though there was unsettling memories of feelings which I don't have a visual memory of. For a couple of days felt a little unsettled. I acknowledged this and it has passed now. I was surprised by how much that smell affected me."

The title Perfume Stories was always a difficult sell to many of the Learners. Although they were inquisitive, the feedback from staff was that they were put off signing up, because of associations with the word 'Perfume'. Prison and Novus staff supporting this project agreed. There was an issue around the language. We discussed a number of alternatives at the final session with the Learners. The most popular title with the Learners was The Time Travellers: Alchemy and Essence.

In his visceral and searing book about the US Prison system, *In The Belly Of The Beast* (1981), Jack Henry Abbott, talks about his memory of being arrested; being in jail and how it changes and begins to tear itself free from facts and reality. Perhaps, that is why the Learners responded so well to this workshop. These vivid references may just provide a starting point or a gateway to learning and rehabilitation. Perfume Stories can fold back time. The learners become Time Travellers to somewhere real. Stories and vivid references may just provide a starting point or a gateway to learning and rehabilitation.

I am often asked by staff before the workshops, what do the Learners get from these sessions? It is a form of critical thinking. Making connections between the history and context of a Perfume. We discuss Magic Realism and Symbolist Literature, where perfume becomes the protagonist in a story, and of course, the neuroscience. What is also important is that the Learners themselves have shaped and helped design the sessions. Feeling like they a stake in the learning is an important part of this educational journey.

04 / Carvansons and the North East

In January 2023 I visited Carvansons, based in Lancashire. They produce and manufacture perfume for companies across the UK, in Europe and throughout the Far East. The Carvansons Headquarters is part science laboratory and part high tech factory. I met with Luke Whowell Director at Carvansons and the Head of Marketing, Vicki Last. Carvansons were keen to support the project and to provide technical advice.

We discussed the idea of producing a kit with a bespoke range of scents from Carvansons for the Learners at the HMP's and the Novus teams. These new scents would be inspired by some of the reoccurring narratives from previous workshops - cut grass, wood and bubblegum. I thought these direct scents may resonate with Learners.

I went back to HMP Buckley Hall in April 2023 and introduced these new Carvansons fragrances to a new group of learners. HMP Buckley Hall is a category B and C Prison. The HMP Buckley Hall Learners are normally a couple of years into a long sentence.

*“Reminded me of the resin I used as a kid playing the violin.
That was over 30 years ago.”*

*“A football changing room when I was younger and used to play
for a local team.”*

In June 2023 I met with Novus teams from HMP Northumberland, HMP Durham, HMP Holme House, HMP Kirkclevington, and HMP Deerbolt at the Novus at the North East headquarters in Durham.

In attendance were Sarah Hartley, the National Manager for Education at Novus and North East Regional Manager Sonia Sultman plus HMP Novus North East staff, Janine Baron, Rachel Radcliffe, Maxine Gunn, Elena White, Jo Willis, Cate Sparks and Bev Hughf.

I presented an overview of Perfume Stories. We discussed how this project could be rolled out across a number of HMP sites in the North East. This also offered an opportunity to draw on the counselling, dyslexia expertise and teaching methodologies of the Novus Education teams. Reviewing the handouts, one suggestion was to remove standard graphic devices such as lines and graphs that indicate where text should be written. I was told that these academic formal structures can be very off putting and a barrier for many dyslexic and non typical Learners. I provided learning and perfume scent packs. These were based around the first session from the Perfume Stories series of workshops. There are three in total. In addition to the packs of scent, the handouts included a large poster info graphic, examples from classic literature that reference perfumes in their stories, such as works by Raymond Chandler and Fyodor Sologub.

I also tried out some of the Carvansons scents with Learners on the Sexual Offenders Training Programme at HMP Risley. More than two in five (43%) men in prison aged 50 or over have been convicted of sex offences. (The Prison Reform Trust 2023)

How would the project run when it is delivered on site by the Novus Teams? Initial feedback has looked promising. The project proved to be a good fit for those groups studying English.

“Enshrined in the box was a sealed envelope, en-grained with the faint scent of Cuir de Ruisse lingering in the air like she was standing next to me in her bold stature. Intrigued to open the letter, there it was in bold the rea-son behind the scent that she wore. I was touched by the reason behind the scent and could feel the tears running down my cheeks. Upon reading each page, I could peel every layer of the mask behind my Grandma's boldness and see the softer side.”

“A world so far apart to the world I have been used to. I was remembering the times when I was so homesick and all I wanted to do was spend time with my mum cooking and reading together.”

In December 2023 I was invited to take part in a bespoke Learning session at HMP Holme House in Stockton-On-Tees with Victoria Last and Anthony Wilcock from Carvansons. The event was organised by Beverly Hughf, the Educational Manager at HMP Holme House and Sarah Hartley from Novus. The Education Staff from Novus had been running Perfume Stories for a few months. We were treated to a specially designed 'Perfume Stories' menu, which featured special dishes remade by learners based on their own olfactory history. It included 'Banksy's Nan's Chicken Broth'. The food and the service in the learner ran restaurant was excellent.

Perfume Stories had been integrated across the curriculum at HMP Holme House. The work included maths and infographics that explained how the learners responded to the scents. The positives and the negatives. Social Enterprise Staff worked with learners on a range of scented Christmas cards. IT Learners produced digital artwork that framed quotes from the Perfume Stories Workshops.

Anthony Wilcock and Vicki Last from Carvansons gave a presentation which they normally ran with their clients at Perfume Seminars across the Middle East. This workshop was a mix of learners from the Maths and English classes. It was an investigation of the three primary fragrances that make up the smell of the popular fizzy drink, coca cola. At the end of the session, the learners had to work out which ones they were. Considering its focus was around history and science. The learners sat and contributed to the session for its entire duration of over one and a half hours. Based on previous feedback from the Novus staff, this level of sustained focus is unusual. The inclusion of an olfactive and multi-sensory aspect played a significant part in the success of this workshop.

My own drawing and research journey began with Rembrandt's sleeping Hendrickje Stoffels at The British Museum, the drawings of John Singer Sargeant, Honore Daumier, Laura Knight, Barnett Freedman, David Hockney, Cy Twombly, Eric Ravilious, Augustus John, Reginald Marsh. Drawing offers us a different way of exploring memory. It is also a sensory experience where time is often suspended. You can become immersed in the process. Drawing also has a directness and immediacy. Smell is a short cut to the brain. Both are embodied experiences. For the HMP Learners at Hindley, Liverpool, Buckley Hall, Risley, Northumberland, Durham, Holme House, Kirkclevington and Deerbolt. The Time Travellers is a direct route to the past.

*My mother's old leather handbag
crowded with letters she carried
all through the war. The smell
of my mother's handbag: mints
and lipstick and Coty powder.
The look of those letters, softened
and worn at the edges, opened,
read, and refolded so often.
Letters from my father. Odour
of leather and powder, which ever
since has meant womanliness
and love, and anguish, and war*

Ruth Fainlight
Handbag

Michael O'Shaughnessy Senior Lecturer Graphic Design and Illustration
at Liverpool School of Art and Design / LJMU

His clients have included Universal Music / Elbow / Vogue / The BBC / Penguin Books. Collaborations with Tate Liverpool and The Everyman Theatre were based on a Research Practice that included 'Drawing and Writing'. These ideas challenged the view that handwriting was a measure of intelligence. Two public facing aspects of this project were large external billboards. The Everyman Theatre Liverpool and This Beautiful Place at Kings Wharf / Port of Liverpool in the UK. The latter was commissioned by a partnership between Robertson Construction UK and Ørsted Energy.

Epilogue

Charlie Taylor, Chief Inspector of Prisons in his Annual Report (2022) cited the lack of purposeful activity in Prisons and that the lack of face-to-face teaching had the most negative impact on prisoners with low levels of literacy and additional learning needs.

Some of my visits had to be rearranged because of a shortage of security staff. Nearly half of officers (47%) who left the service in 2022 had been in the role for less than three years, more than a quarter (25%) left after less than a year. (Prison Reform Trust 2023). There were a couple of times were I turned up at a HMP, to find the session had been cancelled. Learners did not or could not, be released from other duties.

I met lots of excellent and caring staff right across all the HMP's. Sarah Hartley and the Novus Team, were the key facilitators in this project. They supported and helped me develop the project. It was a unique opportunity to visit and work with Learners in some unusual places. From the VP wing at HMP Liverpool to the Chapel and the recovery group at HMP Hindley.

I can understand why most of the luxury Perfume companies never responded to my requests for feedback or interviews. Companies selling expensive perfume may not want to be associated with institutions that deal with crime and punishment. There is real complexity in building a workshop around something that has a big connection with image and sexual allure. The Marquez quote from Love in the Time of Cholera begins with unrequited love. The end of that novel has a surreal and poetic ending. The quote below from one of the learners at HMP Hindley may not be a line from Gabriel Garcia Marquez. But quite possibly, it could be the start of something else. Change, rehabilitation and redemption.

*"The more I can Imagine my future - the greater the possibility.
What does my future smell like ? Does the world have a place for me.
The past was how I remembered it. How I experienced it. It taught me
how to feel. I experience now through the mirror of the past. How I respond to the
past affects my future."*

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Operational Lead for Creative Arts and Enrichment at Novus.ac.uk.
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HMP Hindley, visitors car park / defunct



Sonia Valde O'Shaughnessy 1958

All text / Images by Michael O'Shaughnessy 2023

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