



SMOKE

Jesse Wakenshaw

Puzzle Gallery

19 - 25 Wellington Street, Chippendale

12 April - 26 April 2024

THIS EXHIBITION INCLUDES A STRONG USE OF OLFACTIVE ELEMENTS

Scent is a subtle language with immense power: it unlocks memories, alights our instincts and arouses the senses. Jesse Wakenshaw's latest exhibition, *Smoke*, is one which might be sensed before it is seen. Combining his skill as an experimental perfumer and a sculptural artist, Wakenshaw conjures a hair-raising scene. The smells and forms he has alchemised for this show are inviting yet uncanny. We sense, on entering the exhibition, that we might have intruded on a recently-abandoned scene, or visited a projection of the mind.

There is something distinctly nocturnal about this environment. Perhaps, in the witching hour, creatures emerged from their hideaways to converge in secret. Or perhaps the creatures are the objects themselves, and have anthropomorphised. Arranged in a circle, as if a séance has taken place or a ghostly presence has taken flight, the sentinels gather and hold our focus. Some kind of action has occurred – we sense this from the scattered rose petals to the fragrance which hints of pheromones, to the burning incense left behind. This atmosphere is one of pleasurable fear, of drama and fringe experience.

Wakenshaw predominantly works with second-hand materials. The items he engages with are already imbued with a presence from their past lives. For *Smoke*, Wakenshaw has manipulated used furniture, but not beyond recognition. Through sawing, gluing, scorching and nailing, new forms emerged which the artist pulled from a subconscious space. The furniture-creatures find themselves teetering between uselessness and utility; the animism of his forms intensified by the scent they are infused with. It is earthy, spicy, scorched and alive. Animal products are often the carriers of vintage fragrances. While forbidding, these animal-hybrids may also represent beings that are threatened. This sense of empathy is heightened and layered further by Wakenshaw's characteristic use of human hair, and the occasional piercing, inviting us to relate to the works on a bodily level.

Wakenshaw is adept at constructing atmospheres that beckon engagement. This ability speaks to his years of formal dance training, and his work as a makeup artist. He innately understands the relationship between light, set, colour, shape and gesture. The language of theatre, high fashion and film are also important to his practice. Translating these worlds in *Smoke*, Wakenshaw draws selectively on the colour red. Red spotlighting is used alongside a salvaged, theatrical curtain backdrop. A powerful shade, red evokes the most dramatic spectrum of human experience, from passion and sensuality to anger and panic. It also taps into cultural motifs, from the underside of Dracula's cloak to the twirling protagonist possessed by her ballet slippers in *The Red Shoes* (both films speak to Wakenshaw's investigation of dread).

Wakenshaw regards his exhibitions as iterative and *Smoke* takes a decidedly more gothic turn. There is narrative complexity to be found: watch out for *Grip* and the desperate hand that clings, and to *Vertebra*, a sinuous being hanging from the gallery wall. Wakenshaw also invites us to interact. If you look to the pair of shoes presented in the space, entitled *Shuffle*, you might like to lean in closer. The artist has customised a scent but you can only take it in if you are bold enough to smell the insides of the shoes. For those with a curious nose, the risk is worth the reward. Through this action, Wakenshaw asks if we're willing to lean into discomfort, to peer into the unknown as he has done.

Smell is deeply personal and in harnessing it, Wakenshaw finds a complex and sensitive way in which to communicate. Complex because scent expresses itself through nuance, much like art. Below, Wakenshaw leaves us with a few words which evolved in the making of this exhibition:

*The room feels with smoke
I wake from a bad dream
I'm about to choke
Scanning the room for reassurance,
A scream with no sound.
Reassurance no-where to be found
Birds crowing ahead
O god I dread
A mess in my head
Bad place, I say again*

- Jesse Wakenshaw

In *Smoke*, tread lightly and don't be afraid to engage the senses, but be careful not to disturb the scene, stir the beings within, awake the dreamer.

Essay by Emma McLean

Emma McLean is acting editor of *Look* magazine. She currently lives and works on Gadigal Land.

1. Porcupine 2024

Stick, Acrylic Spikes, Stainless Steel Screws, Enamel Paint, DC adapter plug.

Scent: Olibanum Resin Tincture

Dimensions Variable

2. Vertebra 2024

Bronze Mesh, Steel, Rust, Leather, Steel Nails, Fringe Pins, Castor Wheel, Human Hair.

Scent: Agarwood oud accord, Cumin seed Tincture, Coffee Co2, Bourbon Oak Tincture, Jasmine Sambac co2

Dimensions Variable

3. Smoke 2024

Sherry glass, Lipstick, Red Wine.

Scent: Cade oil, Smoke accord, Opponax resinoid, Olibanum cO2, Olibanum tincture, Benzion, Aged Vanilla Tincture, Black pepper Co2

Dimensions Variable

4. Plug 2024

Lustre Inkjet print

5 x 7"

5. Grip 2024

Stainless steel, Plywood, Stainless steel Bolts, Enamel paint, Pest control spikes, Mannequin Arm, Tweezers, Cotton Bud.

Scent: Ebanol, White Musk Accord, Palo Santo, Ambretolide, Ambrette seed oil, Galaxolide, Tonquitone

Dimensions Variable

6. Witches Dinner 2024

Timber Pillar, fork, Cigarettes, Apple, false eyelashes, earring.

Scent: Cassis accord, Jasmine, Sambac absolute, Verdox, Veramoss, Labdanum

Dimensions Variable

7. Shuffle 2024

Found Leather Shoes.

Scent: Cocoa C02, Cocoa nib tincture, Sage tincture, Dark Patchouli oil, Choya loban oil, Saffron tincture, Hinoki wood oil

Dimensions Variable

8. Dracula 2024

Roses, Plywood, Glass Vials, Nail Scissors, Toothbrush, Steel threaded rod, Stainless steel grommets, Soil, Charcoal.

Scent: Rose Maroc Co2/ Damascone, Rosemary tincture, Cypriol oil, Olibanum C02

Dimensions Variable

9. Vertigo 2024

Plywood, Pine, Linseed oil, Steel rod, Enamel Paint, Faux Fur, Synthetic Hair.

Scent: Helichrysum oil, Labdanum C02, Carrot seed oil, Lavender Co2, Roman Chamomile, Costus, Civet(Synthetic), Coumarin

10. The Red Shoes 2024

Lustre Inkjet print

6 X 4"

