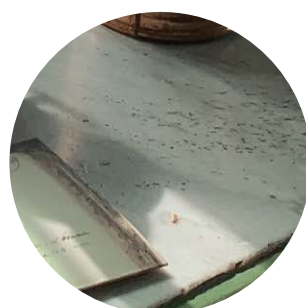
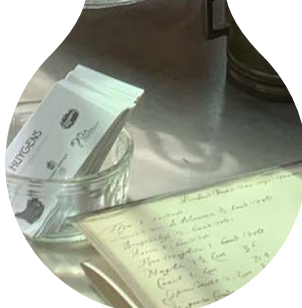


CASE STUDY

Reconstructing a Perfume from Historical Texts

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The whole Geheugen van Geur team, from left to right: [Daan Sins](#) (Founder and Co-owner of [Huygens Paris](#)), [Marypierre Julien](#) (Senior Perfumer at [Givaudan](#)), [Maureen van Dam](#) ([Brein in Beeld/Vrije Universiteit](#)), [Marjolijn Bol](#) ([University of Utrecht/De Jong Akademie](#)), [Nadine Akkerman](#) ([Leiden University](#)), [Ineke Huysman](#) ([Huygens Instituut/NL-Lab](#)), [Geeske Bisschop](#) ([Royal Collections/Huygens Instituut](#)), [Hanneke Hulst](#) ([Leiden University/De Jong Akademie](#)). Photo courtesy of Ineke Huysman.

Ineke Huysman

Senior Researcher, NL-Lab/Huygens Institute, the Netherlands

WEBSITE:

<https://brievenconstantijnhuygens.net/2022/04/10/riekend-water-van-mijn-moeder/>
<https://www.hofwijck.nl/>

Many heritage institutions hold rich (digital) collections filled with historical texts that offer insights into what life was like throughout time. Researcher and scholar, [Ineke Huysman](#) spends much of her time in various archives, looking through correspondences of Dutch statesmen and women. While doing so, Huysman stumbled upon the perfume recipe book of [Constantijn Huygens](#) (1596-1687). Inspired by his perfumes, Huysman set out to recreate some of his recipes in collaboration with the [Geheugen van Geur](#) (*Memory of Scent*) team of [De Jonge Akademie](#) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This resulted in the project [Ode de Parfum: To My Mother](#) (1635) and was a collaboration between various academic disciplines, which shows how interdisciplinary and complex olfactory related projects can be.

This case study captures Huysman's personal thoughts and experiences from working together with the Geheugen van Geur team on the recreation of Constantijn Huygens' (1596-1687) Ode de Parfum: To My Mother (1635).

Who is 'Geheugen van Geur'?

'Geheugen van Geur' is an interdisciplinary team that contributed to the recreation of one of Constantijn Huygens' (1596-1687) perfumes during the project *Ode de Parfum: To My Mother* (1635). The team included a perfumer, a neuroscientist, an art historian, and multiple scholars. [Ineke Huysman](#), one of the scholars on the project, is a senior researcher at [NL-Lab](#) and the [Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands](#). Huysman is currently the coordinator for research projects around the letters of Constantijn Huygens, Johan de Witt, and Dutch and Frisian Stadtholders' Wives, in which the correspondence is being digitised and made accessible through an online database.

Why did you choose to reconstruct this particular perfume and what did you hope it would communicate?

Constantijn Huygens was a man of many trades. He was a politician, a poet, and a perfumer (amongst other things). During his lifetime, he created and wrote down over 150 perfume recipes. Huysman emphasises that she "especially wanted to create the scent

that reminded him of his mother (in Dutch 'Rieckend water van mijn moeder') to make people aware of how much scent, memory, and emotion are connected."

The aim of this collaborative project is to show both educational and historical impressions. Huysman hopes that through the reconstruction of the perfume, sniffers can gain a better understanding of Huygens' himself and historical perfumery practices.

How was the perfume recreated based on its historical text?

A key part of the research into the scent composition was using authentic distillation methods which Huygens would have used. When recreating the original scent by hand, Huysman and the rest of the team were careful to follow Huygens's recipe as closely as possible, by for example using the steam distillation method or by using the plants from his garden in his country house [Hofwijck](#), which is still accessible as a museum today in Voorburg, the Netherlands.



Based on the team's research results, [Marypierre Julien](#), senior perfumer at [Givaudan](#), was able to create the final perfume.

In what ways did you invite people to engage with Huygens' perfume and history?

At the [The Huygens perfumery](#) exhibit at his [Hofwijck](#) country house in April 2022, the Geheugen van Geur team helped create several ways to engage with the historical and sensory content of the project. There was a designated table where visitors could experience the scent as a spray as well as interact with the raw materials from the recipe like nutmeg, cinnamon, and lavender. Additionally, the perfume was commemorated as a candle created by the French apothecary, [Huygens Paris](#), which the public was able to buy on site or online. This helped spread the word about the project even further.

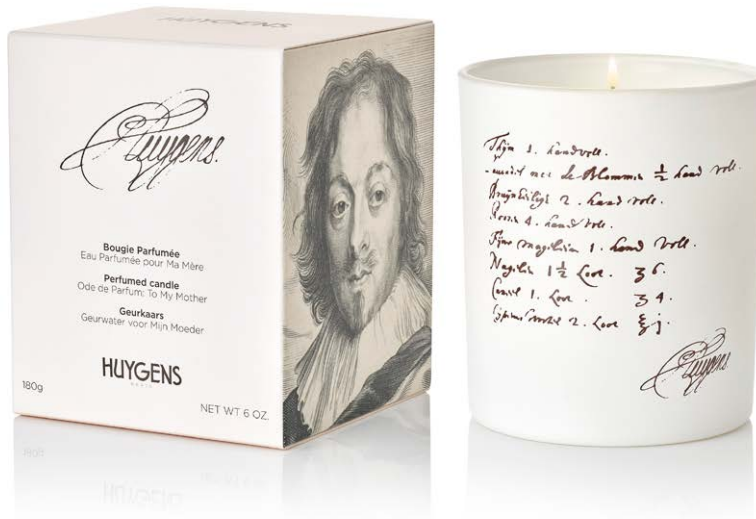
Alongside the exhibition and the candle, the project is explained on the Making Scents of the Past [website](#), which features a [video](#) detailing the process. Communicating the project through various informative outputs, like a video, a website, and an exhibition, is important to explain and showcase the depth and versatility of the conducted olfactory research, which can be more difficult to grasp for the general public. These resources are helpful as they inform audiences about the goals and process of the project through audiovisual material.



The Huygens perfumery exhibit at Huygens' Hofwijck. Photo courtesy of Ineke Huysman.

In your experience, how does engagement with smells contribute to worthwhile storytelling in heritage institutions?

It is when history comes alive – so to speak – by involving scent. For most people, smell is something so essential, everyone is interested in it. Even those who may have nothing to do with history can be stimulated in new ways and take interest.



The candle of Huygens' *To My Mother* perfume with the fragrance by Marypierre Julien. The candle was created by Huygens Paris and is sold on [their website](#). Photo credit to Antoine Kralik.

