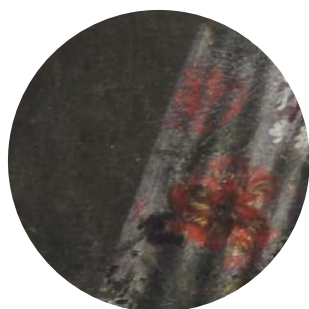


CASE STUDY

Follow Your Nose! A Guided Tour with Smells at Museum Ulm, Germany

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A portrait of Lizzie Marx, a woman with long, curly brown hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark, textured jacket. The background is a blurred interior space with a framed picture on the wall.

Case Study

Photo credit Chris O'Toole, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.



Lizzie Marx

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Guided tours are an important interactive and multisensory mode of engagement for heritage institutions. Tour guides can curate new and exciting paths through their collection and verbalise fresh and uncommon narratives to their participants. Within Odeuropa, we created an olfactory guided tour in collaboration with [Museum Ulm](#) in Germany and [IFF](#) called [Follow Your Nose! A guided tour with smells](#) (2022-present) which included [eight artworks](#) and eleven scents. Curator and researcher Lizzie Marx says an olfactory tour showcases “a story that has depth. The most impact or depth is created when the olfactory has a significant connection to the object or artwork on display.” You can read more about the creation and development of *Follow Your Nose!* on the Odeuropa website [here](#) and [here](#)

This is an interview with [Lizzie Marx](#), one of the curators of the event, Follow Your Nose! A guided tour with smells, which itself was part of the research that contributed to the creation of Odeuropa's Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: a 'How-To' Guide to Working with Smell in Museums and Heritage Institutions. A big thank you goes to Dr Eva Leistenschneider, Dr Stefanie Dathe, and the entire Museum Ulm staff for the knowledge, dedication, and creativity that they put into this project.

Who is Lizzie Marx?

[Lizzie Marx](#) is the curator of Dutch and Flemish art at [National Gallery of Ireland](#) in Dublin, Ireland. She received her doctorate at the University of Cambridge with her thesis titled [Visualising, Perceiving, and Interpreting Smell in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art](#). Marx has worked on several olfactory storytelling projects, including [Fleeting - Scents in Colour](#) at Mauritshuis in The Hague, the Netherlands. As a member of [Odeuropa](#), Marx worked on using AI to source historic imagery related to smell and incorporating olfactory storytelling into museum and heritage initiatives.

What was the aim of the use of olfactory storytelling for the Follow Your Nose! tours?

LIZZIE MARX: *Follow Your Nose!* was co-created by the Odeuropa team, [Museum Ulm](#) and [IFF](#). It was in fulfilment with Odeuropa's 'Impact' Work Package which focused on communicating and disseminating the project's outputs and methods through sen-

sory storytelling in GLAMs. Using the research that Odeuropa had carried out, it was possible to identify works in Museum Ulm's collection that also spoke to Europe's olfactory history. For instance, by using computer vision to source works of art that depicted scented gloves. This informed the decision to include the portrait of Helena Schermer where she holds her perfumed gloves as part of the olfactory tour in Ulm.

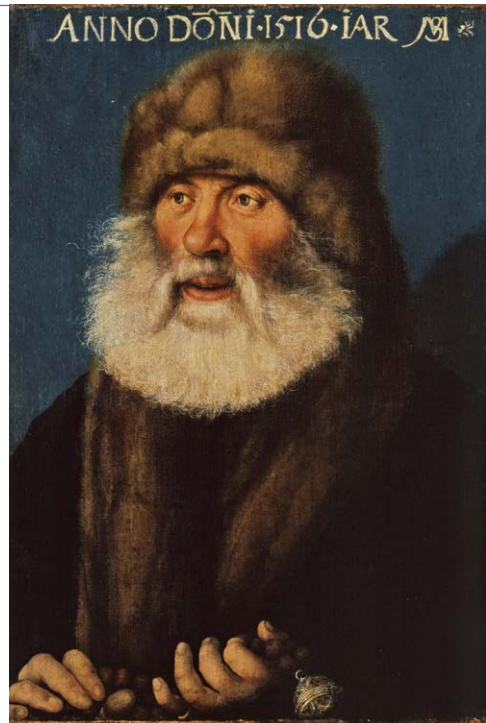


Andreas Schuch, *Portrait of Helena Schermer*, c.1620, Oil on canvas. Image courtesy of Museum Ulm, Germany.

Another main aim of this event was to use it as an opportunity to collect data and measure the impact and value of olfactory storytelling in GLAMs. These questionnaires informed the relevance of sensory experience in heritage initiatives and contributed towards the preparation of *Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: a 'How-To' Guide to Working with Smell in Museums and Heritage Institutions*.

How and why did you choose the artworks that were interpreted into olfactory storytelling for Follow Your Nose!?

LIZZIE MARX: We were very selective with the artworks and focussed on choosing olfactory storylines that were closely connected to them. For instance, some scents evoked the odours represented in the artwork, such as the [pomander](#) of Eitel Besserer. Others evoked imagined olfactory atmospheres, such as the Smell of Hell in Martin Schaffner's *Christ in Limbo*. There was also an opportunity to explore synaesthesia and the olfactory associations of the colours orange and blue in Ellsworth Kelly's titular painting, *Orange Blue* (1964–1965).



Martin Schaffner, *Portrait of Eitel Besserer*, 1516, Mixed techniques on panel. Image courtesy of Museum Ulm, Germany.

What advice would you give to GLAM professionals who want to use olfactory storytelling?

LIZZIE MARX: It begins with a compelling story. It requires time, and research, but with great rewards. Take, for instance, the stop on the olfactory tour that discussed the *Portrait of Eitel Besserer*.

He is portrayed holding a rosary with a pomander, a scented pendant that was believed to protect from illnesses. The inclusion of this painting in the exhibition required research through historic medical treatises into what sort of ingredients might have com-

prised a sixteenth-century pomander. Breaking down the pomander's recipe into its individual components generated stories about each ingredient, such as the importation of [nutmeg](#) to Europe, or the origins of the [animal-produced ingredient ambergris](#). The unique incorporation of the pomander in the rosary, which Besserer holds, also opened up new avenues of storytelling. For example, the multi-sensory approach to prayer in the Early Modern period (fifteenth until the eighteenth century). In the case of the portrait, the story is compelling because the olfactory is integral to the understanding and interpretation of the painting.

What was the biggest challenge of the scent development process and how did you 'evaluate' if the heritage scents suited their function?

LIZZIE MARX: One of the biggest challenges, but also the most interesting insights into the process, was learning about the terminologies used in the perfume industry. For instance, the scent of leather in perfumery is not akin to [historical tanned leather](#). It is a scent category used by perfumers, defined by smoky, bitter notes, which can be misleading from a historical perspective. It required all of the team members to clearly communicate the aims of the storylines and the qualities of the scents that were being used in the formulas.

The evaluation process was carried out through smelling sessions with Dr Leistenschneider and the Odeuropa team, and then feedback sessions with the perfumers at IFF. As discussed above, it was important to be clear on the story we wanted to tell with each of the stops on the tour. For instance, the aim of Helena Schermer's portrait was to tell the story of her scented gloves. The scents were meant to demonstrate the malodorous process of tanning leather, and the perfumes adopted to fragrance and overpower the scent of tanned leather. It was a fine balance between creating a smell that could evoke the foul smell of tanned leather, and create a fragrance formula that convincingly masked the fouler aspects of leather. Through consultation with Museum Ulm, Odeuropa, and IFF, the IFF perfumers developed drafts of the scent. It took as many as three drafts of the scent until we were satisfied with it.

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Heritage Scents of Museum Ulm's Follow Your Nose!:

Helena's Gloves | mimosa, cypress, myrtle, jasmine, neroli, rose water, orris, incense, amber, musk, civet, tolu

Eitel Besserer's Pomander | rosemary, oregano, cinnamon, rose, lavender, clove, civet, ambergris, musk

The Smell of Hell | cade oil, Indole, skatol, civet, clove bud oil

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*These scents were created by [IFF](#) in collaboration with [Museum Ulm](#) as part of Odeuropa.

How and why did you choose your chosen method of smell distribution?

LIZZIE MARX: During the development of the project, we explored several options, including blotters, scented hand fans, and handheld dry diffusion. Handheld dry diffusion was eventually selected, as, unlike a hand fan, the individual user could control the amount of scent diffusion through varying the amount of pumps. While blotters took time to prepare in advance of a guided tour, the handheld dry diffusion method held the scent for far longer than blotters, and did not need to be replenished with scent quite so often.

However, adopting the handheld dry diffusion method for the tours presented some issues: when the containers were in storage, they were kept in airtight containers. Dr Leistenschneider reported that the scents were “leaking” and, as they were stored near the museum’s offices, they were proving to be disruptive to the staff’s work environment. While they were the most effective method for the guided tour, specialised storage needed to be taken into consideration.



Museum Ulm’s curator, Dr Eva Leistenschneider using handheld dry diffusion to sniff the Smell of Hell in front of Martin Schaffner’s, *Christus in der Vorhoelle (Christ in Limbo)* from 1519. Photo credit Sofia Collette Ehrich.

Did you develop malodors as a part of Follow Your Nose!?

LIZZIE MARX: Yes, we developed two malodours for the tour and two further scents that were considered neutral, but turned out malodorous for certain participants. For Martin Schaffner’s painting *Christ in Limbo*, we developed a scent to evoke the Smell of Hell. While the scent was one of the most repellent on the tour, it received one of the strongest responses. Developing a fragrance that represents a concept that is familiar to the visitor yet has an unknown smell can generate an enthusiastic response.

We were mindful that the olfactory tours are a cultural activity that should surprise and enrich but not disturb. Working with perfumers who are trained to design fragrances rather than malodors, was helpful in this regard. They were adept in ensuring that the malodorous scents were notably unpleasant and generated discussions from the participants, but not intensely foul enough that participants no longer wished to continue on the tour.

When conducting an olfactory guided tour, how do you usually present the scents in relation to the olfactory history, relevance, and storytelling?

LIZZIE MARX: The order of telling the story and sampling the smell was not prescriptive and could vary according to the needs of the storyline. It was advised that tours started and ended with a pleasant or neutral scent, and that a balance of malodorous and pleasant scents were used, with preference of pleasant scents. It is usually helpful for a guided tour to provide the (historical) context of the scent before sampling it, so as to anchor the associations of the fragrance to the storyline. However, there are advantages to sampling the scent in advance of sharing the storyline. The smell of the pomander, for instance, is a complex scent that consists of many ingredients. Asking participants to smell the fragrance and then share their initial



Martin Schaffner, *Anastasis / Christ in Limbo*, 1549, oil on panel. Image courtesy of Museum Ulm, Germany.

impressions of what ingredients they could identify was an opportunity to stimulate discussion among the group. The experience of the scent is then further enriched by providing the storyline.

During the guided tours, how did the different target groups respond to the smells and the space differently?

LIZZIE MARX: I noticed that senior visitors of the guided tour had particularly nostalgic associations with the scents. The rose elements from Helene Schermer's scented gloves reminded certain participants of the fragrances worn by their mothers or grandmothers. In another case when I

observed a selection of guided tours, I was impressed to see how engaged a final-year school group was. Dr Eva Leistenschneider, the curator of Museum Ulm, who was also instrumental to the development of the tours, said this was exceptional for a guided tour of their age group. This suggests that the smells of the olfactory guided tour kept their attention.

What precautions did you take to ensure a safe experience for the GLAM's staff, visitors, space, and collection?

LIZZIE MARX: When a malodour was diffused, participants were given due warning. Tour guides were also encouraged to note to participants how evocative scents can be in reviving particular memories – some positive, but also negative. Preparing visitors helped to work through any unexpected responses to the scents.

How does safeguarding of olfactory heritage and engagement with smells contribute to worthwhile storytelling in GLAMs?

LIZZIE MARX: When smell is integral to the meaning or interpretation of an artwork or object, engaging with the smells that they reference adds an entirely new dimension to the experience. It can deepen our understanding of history and heritage, and can bring it to life. Incorporating smells into GLAM initiatives also creates the possibility for new audiences to create meaningful connections with the collection.

The olfactory is a large but, until only recently, neglected part of our heritage. If it is not safeguarded, then we are at risk losing a significant part of our heritage. Getting acquainted with olfactory heritage presents an opportunity to understand and engage with the past in new and exciting ways. Showcasing elements of olfactory heritage presents research that is both novel and engaging, and creates opportunities to draw in new audiences to cultural heritage institutions.