The Smelling Committee

by Caitlin Berrigan and Michael McBean

Artist Statement:

The Smelling Committee is an interactive smelling artwork that is a goofy yet meaningful ecological awakening through the sensory exploration of our neighborhoods. *The Smelling Committee* works across narrative, performance, guided tours and an online mapped odor data bank to which users may post found smells via cell phone.

Inspired by the olfactory bravado of the original group, the first tour was led as an historical simulacrum of the 1891 adventure in Williamsburg, NY during the 2006 Conflux Festival for psychogeography. The trek invited reflection upon the ephemeral, odiferous fabric of Brooklyn neighborhoods by actively smelling sites, discussing the neurological structure of smell, a natural history of odor, pollution and industry in Brooklyn, and personal smell stories. We use our eyes to navigate geographies, but it is our sense of smell that ties us most tautly

to our emotional memories. Histories of New York are ripe with scents and stinks, some rousing citizen action just as the Smelling Committee of 1891 discovered oil refinery pollution along Newtown Creek. The Smelling Committee revival attempts to map a small portion of this heritage as a collective endeavor.

Participants are invited to embark upon an investigation of the aromatic territories in their own neighborhoods, and to join the ranks of *the Smelling Committee* by submitting their discoveries for comparison and reflection to a collective map online. Because experiences of odor are intimate, highly individualized and often ephemeral, such a mapping endeavor encourages an embodied experience of space, one that defies static mapping and often the notion of repeatable encounters. Nonetheless, the embodied investigation of fleeting experiences in one's surroundings encourages an involved ecological relationship with the materiality of the lived environment. Perhaps patterns will emerge of culture, pollution, cuisine, disarray, weeds and refuse-developing a new, non-taxonomic natural history of the stench and fragrance of the 21st century.

RELATED URLS:
[Documentation] http://membrana.us/smellingcommittee.html
[Blog & Audio Tour] http://smellingcommittee.org
[Article for Glowlab] http://glowlab.com/lab2/issue.php?project_id=141&issue_name=13
[Odor Data Bank]: http://smellingcommittee.org/mapit/sniffit.html

CONTACT: Caitlin [at] membrana [dot] us

BIOGRAPHY:
Caitlin Berrigan is an artist in tactile and edible sculpture, immersive installation, electronic media and interactive performance. Her pieces have been alternatively characterized as disturbing, sexy and even smelly. Invoking the history of science and pop culture, her works address the ruptures & confluences of the body's grotesque form, its medicalization, and many variations as object of desire. The results are quietly disturbing works of subtle humour & irony that speak to our violent and conflicted relationship to the body.

Berrigan's practice is conceptual, carried by material things. She is interested in objects and situations that lure in participants to activate them, producing an experience within their bodies that connects physiology and intellect.

She has presented her work in the Whitney Museum's Initial Public Offerings, Storefront for Art & Architecture in New York, Dumbo Art Under the Bridge Festival, Anthology Film Archives, P.S. 122 Demo Space in New York, L.A. Freewaves, SIGGRAPH, the Conflux Festival, the National Museum of Women in the Arts in D.C., the Bent Festival at Eyebeam, Stuttgart New Media Festival and the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv among other venues and festivals. Berrigan is a Master's candidate in Visual Studies at M.I.T. and received her B.A. in art production and art history from Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture and was an artist-in-residence at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Center for Biotechnology & Bioart and the Experimental Television Center in New York.