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Christophe Laudamiel Frames Fragrance and Sells Scent Art in Berlin

By SUSAN STONE



Christophe Laudamiel looks through his Scent Square at Mianki Gallery in Berlin.

Photo By Susan Stone

BERLIN — Master perfumer Christophe Laudamiel has created hits in a bottle for Estée Lauder and Burberry, conjured up ambient atmospheres for Belstaff and Ferrari, and directed a scent opera at the Guggenheim Museum. His next incarnation? As a regular on Berlin’s gallery scene.

“Art is about provocation,” he said. “Provocation makes people think about a difficult problem. The fragrance industry never does that — it’s not their thing.”

Laudamiel, who also shows at New York’s Dillon Gallery, has forged an ongoing partnership with Mianki Gallery owner Andreas Herrmann. Herrmann will exhibit Laudamiel’s scent sculptures in conjunction with other artists in his roster, be they painters, photographers or sculptors. Laudamiel will also have a solo show at Mianki in 2015.

“We specialize in artists who work with special materials or in a special way with materials,” said Herrmann, “so it is perfect to work with Christophe here and open horizons for visitors.” It also didn’t hurt that Laudamiel and his partner have their home and perfume lab nearby in the neighborhood of Schöneberg.

The arrangement kicked off with Laudamiel’s contributions to the March-April exhibit “Emotions,” which paired scent works with digital color field images from Jakob Kupfer.

To display the olfactory artworks, Laudamiel and Herrmann developed several new exhibition forms, including Scent Squares — empty pedestal-mounted frames that visitors press on to release puffs of fragrance while gazing through them at different Kupfer works.

“I see this as an airy filter,” says Laudamiel of his almost silent, compressor-powered invention. “The point is to look at a visual through two different scent lenses. And the brain is going to connect the dots differently.”

Another new form was developed with porcelain maker KPM. Dubbed Scent Parabols, the large, white, lidded bowls were inspired by the Japanese tea ceremony. Small knobs of porous clay sit inside, fragranced with oils. To experience a Scent Parabol, the gallery visitor lifts the dinner plate-sized lid to his nose and inhales. The “Emotions” exhibit featured five Scent Parabols — two relating to temperature (“Warm” and “Kalt”) and a triptych playing on purity and femininity called “3 Shades of White.”

These new forms are helping formalize olfactory art as a collectable prospect, says Laudamiel, who says he now spends 80 percent of his time working on ambient perfumery projects.

“What do people buy? Do they buy the formula? Do they buy the smell? Do they buy a concept? It’s a lot of questions, and we’re answering them one by one. But I hope the art world jumps in it and defines some new things for scents,” he says.

Though the technology is still in development mode, Herrmann estimated the pair of Scent Squares together would carry a price of 6,000 euros, or about \$8,300. Another two works released into the gallery using diffusers from Prolitec are listed as selling for 1,800 euros and 3,600 euros, respectively, or about \$2,500 and \$5,000. Laudamiel’s firm DreamAir sells a home fragrance kit via its Web site with a similar diffuser and set of three scents for \$399.

Laudamiel and Herrmann seem most pleased with the Scent Parabols, which allow a more controlled scent experience. Signed and numbered in limited editions of five, each carries a price of 1,200 euros, or about \$1,660. The Scent Parabols come with enough scent oil to refresh the effect 600 times. If a collector runs out, refills can be ordered using a personal-edition number and certificate. Laudamiel clearly wants these pieces to endure.

“After the artist’s death, there are some plans — this has to be archived to ensure the purity of the art form,” he explains. Firmenich will record and hold Laudamiel’s scent sculpture formulae, as will the Osmotheque.

Monetizing this burgeoning art form should also help legitimize it. Yet Laudamiel insists his main mission in Berlin is education.

“For me, it’s obvious that we should have a price list and also give a value of things, and especially in the education part, because people think you buy a scent by the kilo, like potatoes. You never buy a Picasso or a Jeff Koons by the kilo — and you don’t buy a piece of music by the length. It’s the same for us. We want to increase the appreciation that people have for olfactory design or perfumery or anything that can be done with the nose,” he asserted.

It seems Laudamiel's hit the target the first time — Mianki sold one of the Scent Parabols from the “Emotions” show, titled “3 Shades of White — Volatile Marilyn #15,” to a Swiss collector. “It's fantastic for this exhibition and I'm very happy for the next steps,” said gallery owner Herrmann. He's just unveiled a new Laudamiel scent sculpture in conjunction with the current Mianki show “Identities,” featuring terra-cotta hybrids by Italian sculptor Anna Matola and running through June 22.

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