

Christophe Laudamiel, the air sculptor



Five shades of Berlin, 2015
© Fürcho GmbH

Just like an odour, he infiltrates himself everywhere. The only classically trained nose to go from the lab – chemistry studies, Procter & Gamble, IFF – to the contemporary art circuit, Christophe Laudamiel was still co-authoring global blockbusters (*Fierce* by Abercrombie & Fitch, *Polo Blue* by Ralph Lauren) a year before his pieces were shown at Art Basel Miami Beach 2003. Ever since, the techno-punk native of the French town of Clermont-Ferrand goes from taking commercial briefs to speaking at Harvard, and from the Berghain in Berlin to the Guggenheim in New York, where

Green Aria, an opera whose purely olfactory characters he composed, was staged. “When I introduce myself, I never call myself an artist,” Laudamiel says. But *de facto* he is one, since he is represented by two galleries, Dillon + Lee in New York and Mianki in Berlin. The shift began in 2000, when he and Christoph Hornetz conceived 15 compositions drawn from Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume*, launched as a limited edition coffret by Thierry Mugler when the film adaptation came out in 2006. After this series, undertaken without a commission but still closer to illustration, he went on to produce works based on the specific processes of olfactory art, namely the

way it plays with and off the other senses. For example, there was the piece shown at the Mianki gallery in 2014: a base containing an atomizer, onto which an empty frame is set, facing a lightbox where abstract, coloured shapes are constantly shifting. Each time you smell a puff of the scent while gazing at the moving images, you perceive it differently even though it hasn’t changed – the brain sees-smells-names semi-hallucinated objects. In another perceptual sleight-of-nose trick, Laudamiel’s *Scent Sculptures* highlight the power of word over odour. For instance, wet grass. Suddenly, a viscous, sickly smell drifts up. The image jumps out as

soon as the odour is defined by the title, *Toad in the Grass*. In the brand he launched in the spring of 2017, The Zoo, the perfumer also plays on the power of words: by offering the same juice under two different names, to be chosen by the customer, he slyly exposes the projection mechanisms of marketing in a covertly didactic gesture that reflects the third sphere of Laudamiel’s activities. The first winner of the Contribution to Scent Culture Award presented by the Institute for Art and Olfaction in 2017, he is a pedagogue out of necessity, noting that, “I have to spend my time explaining my pieces, because the public isn’t up to scratch yet when it comes to the olfactory”. Hence his “Liberté, Égalité, Frangancité” manifesto, published in February 2017 on the occasion of his latest New York show. Real information, education, respect for the works and their authors, a democratization of olfactory culture. “The public shall be taught that the brain gets as much information, pleasure, intelligence and decision power via our noses as via our eyes,” he writes in the manifesto.

Denyse BeauLieu