

**Storycraft:
Twelve Olfactory Narratives**

at IAO Gallery
in collaboration with Craft Contemporary
Friday, September 26 – Friday, October 31, 2025

ABOUT

In the summer of 2025, twelve perfumers were invited to explore storytelling and scent as part of the Institute for Art and Olfaction's Maker-in-Residency program—the *IAO Storylab*—at Craft Contemporary, in Los Angeles.

Each perfumer spent six hours exploring a curated set of materials provided by MANE, deploying them to create an olfactory interpretation of a myth, a cultural memory, or an artwork. Sometimes delightful, sometimes troubling, the resulting scents each convey a narrative that is uncovered with patient, thoughtful smelling.

The IAO is thrilled to present these olfactory explorations in an exhibition at IAO Gallery called *Storycraft: Twelve Olfactory Narratives*, on view in September and October of 2025. Expanding on their work at Craft Contemporary, the perfumers participating in *Storycraft* were asked to further contextualize their work with an image or small object.

The resulting exhibition presents their olfactory work in a new context, exploring fundamental questions around scent's capacity to convey narrative.

As you experience these works, ask yourself: Does the scent benefit from the visual and textual forms? How does imagery impact our perception of an olfactory narrative?

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Dana El Masri | Jazmin Saraï

Daniel Krasofski | The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Debbie Lin + Na-Moya Lawrence | SAMAR

Joe Merrell | The Eyes Are Always There

Julianne Lee | The Institute for Art and Olfaction

L'lia 'Tizzle' Thomas | AROMAKAURA

Maxwell Williams | UFO Parfums

Minetta Rogers | The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Miss Layla | fūm Fragrances

Persephenie | Persephenie Botanicals

Saskia Wilson-Brown | The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Terry Carter | Travertine Atelier

Confidence, or the Common Tragedies of the Temporarily Embarrassed

by Minetta Rogers, The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Notes: Piña Colada, seaside, human grit.

One of the core American dreams is that anyone can become wealthy and successful with enough hard work (and maybe a bit of luck). Signals of wealth and success include waterfront property and the time to enjoy it.

This myth is not a reality for everyone, but we can partake in bits of it: a tour through a billionaire's estate with a longing glance at their indoor-outdoor pool that overlooks the Pacific; a lakeside timeshare that turns out to be predatory and results in years of litigation (with no visits to the lake); winning an all-expenses-paid cruise by calling a radio station at the right time. When a movie ends with the protagonist enjoying something boozy with an umbrella in it while reclining by the beach, it's almost always a happy ending.

2024 saw a massive influx of cocktail-based perfumes and an obsession with "smelling wealthy." These boozy perfumes were by and large tropical, paired with a story about a moment of relaxation and luxury by the beach. 2024 also saw continued wealth inequality in the United States, with the income gap ever-widening and the rich getting richer. If we can't have the lifestyles of the wealthy, we can at least smell like them for a bit. The author John Steinbeck is famously misquoted as saying in America everyone believes themselves to be a temporarily embarrassed millionaire.

Other works that inspired this accord: Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, a novel that takes place on a steamboat, where one of the passengers – who may or may not be the Devil – swindles, cons, and otherwise bamboozles people from every slice of American society. It is both a biting, angry portrayal of American types, and an experimental and poorly-received work of minor literature.

This accord opens with the scent of pineapple, booze, and creamy coconut. As it develops, notes of sea breeze and salty woods emerge. In its final stage, all that remains is the sweaty, musky, dirty smell of humanity.

Notable materials: chamomile, davana, calone, bee pollen tincture

Death and Other Joys

by Debbie Lin and Na-Moya Lawrence, SAMAR

Notes: Thunderstorm, guinep, butter cookies, farm musk.

Our work in progress explores the Jamaican myth of the “Duppy.” Simultaneously revered and feared, Duppies are believed to be the secondary souls of our loved ones lingering amongst us to complete their unfinished business - both benevolent and malevolent.

Through Na-Moya’s olfactory memories, we return to the celebration of life after her great grandmother’s funeral. The rain was heavy that night, turning dirt roads to mud and soaking through the clothing of anyone who hadn’t sheltered in their doorways. Bright cracks of lightning illuminated the pitch black gully at the heart of the village. This is the core of our accord, a hot spark diffused through a warm, tropical storm. Sweet, earthy green rises from the trees and the underbrush. Musk from the goats and chickens lingers like a shroud.

At the window of an uncle’s house, cookies were passed out to all the kids awake past their bedtimes. They’re buttery, sweet, and cookie in a way that Na-Moya has never forgotten. The scent of them is a gourmand tease in the background of our composition. When a little cousin asked for a guinep, Na-Moya cracked open the fruit’s thin shell with her teeth, sucked the sweet, tart pulp from the big seed and shared it with the cheerful and chubby toddler that she had played with all night. Guinep’s flavor and scent dances at the edges of other fruits that have become more familiar (attainable) over the years. Lychee. Lime! No, tamarind. Mango? Delicious and ephemeral as it weaves between sparks of lightning and memory.

ICARIA - Eau de Cautione V#2, A Heeded Caution

by Daniel Krasofski, The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Notes: Wild rosemary, sun-warmed bushes, sun-dried feathers, salty sea breeze

In the opening lines of Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus," we are introduced to Faustus with the words: "Till, swoll'n with cunning, of a self-conceit, / His waxen wings did mount above his reach, / And, melting, heavens conspired his overthrow." This reference to Icarus immediately frames Faustus's ambitions within the myth's cautionary tale. We see both characters rising to forbidden heights, only to be brought down by their own hubris and desire to transcend mortal limitations. In both stories, each is warned not to overstep the bounds of nature. Yet, intoxicated by their dreams, they both ignore the warnings. This story, this myth, has inspired the idea that there is always a possibility of redemption... if one heeds the caution. Icaria- Eau de Cautione ultimately become two version: V1 Unheeded (not on display) & V2 A Heeded Caution (on display).

Inspired by the notion that redemption is possible until the very last second, this version imagines Icarus choosing to "fly the middle path, not too high and not too low." This scent still includes the accords from version #1 but reduces the idea of death and omits the excessive sunlight. This version is a meditation on restraint and possibility, the scent of the middle path. Ocean mist drifts over the same flora of the island, softened and hopeful. There is no fire in the scent, only sun-dried feathers and a breeze. Where the first scent evokes hubris and downfall, this one allows space for breathing and freedom. This version honors the choice to heed the warnings, to fly neither too close to the sun nor too near the sea, and to arrive safely. Uplifting and grounding, it celebrates the quiet triumph of survival and redemption through self-awareness.

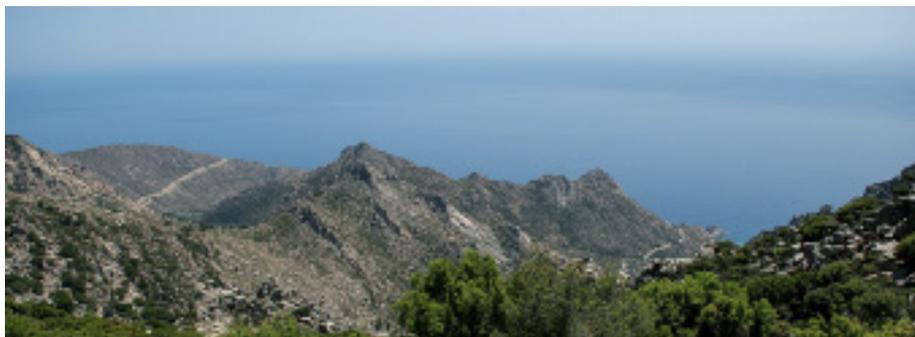


Image: Monti Atheras.Icaria, 2013, Source: Wikimedia

Emily's Bridge

by Maxwell Williams, UFO Parfums

Notes: Ghost pine, hemlock, ectoplasm, Douglas fir.

The Gold Brook Covered Bridge aka Emily's Bridge in Stowe, Vermont is haunted by the ghost of Emily, a young woman who leapt to her death onto the rocks below after being spurned by her true love. She has haunted the bridge ever since.

My late father, Douglas — known as Dougie to my mother — was a socialist construction worker who worked on the bridge's restoration in the 1970s. It is as much Dougie's Bridge as it is Emily's.

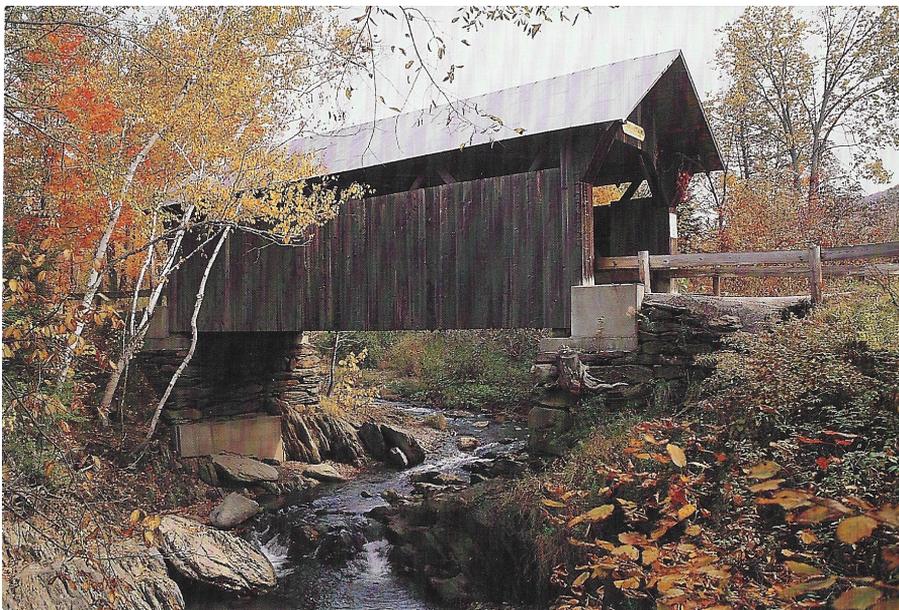


Image: The Gold Brook Covered Bridge, vintage postcard, courtesy of the artist.

Galatea, The Living Likeness

by Julianne Lee, The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Notes: Labdanum resin of Cyprus, roses, lilies, dusty workshop, polished ivory, sweaty flesh.

This scent is inspired by the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, as taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written in approximately 8 CE. To preface, Aphrodite cursed a family of women to become the first prostitutes, punishing them for refusing to honor her. This occurred on the island of Cyprus, Aphrodite's domain. The sculptor Pygmalion reacts in horror, seeing "women spend their days in wickedness" in their "countless vices". He vows celibacy from women and carves a perfect woman out of ivory to love instead: Galatea. He adorns her in flowers and resin, caresses her, and prays to Aphrodite to make her real. His wish is granted, and Ovid ends the story there in a happy ending: "She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins!"

We might recognize in this the logic of an incel fantasy: loving your own creation, an AI girlfriend. What happens when a mimetic artwork becomes the love-object? He begs, "O Gods, if all things you can grant, my bride shall be"—he dared not say my ivory girl—"the living likeness of my ivory girl." Pygmalion must now contend with the contradictions of the flesh, and we, with the uncanny edge between ivory and life.



Image: Haklai, Yair. Pygmalion and Galatea by Auguste Rodin, Metropolitan Museum of Art, via Wikimedia Commons. References: Ovid. Metamorphoses. Translated by A.D. Melville, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Home

by Joe Merrell, The Eyes Are Always There

Notes: Spicy, earthy, woody, violet leaf, rose.

I created this scent as a response to Salvador de la Torre's "un puño de tierra." I was drawn to the installation initially for purely aesthetic reasons: the rich colors, the simplified forms of a domestic space with a bench off to the side beckoning viewers to sit and relax. The installation also underlines the myths that we create around the concept of "home".

The sign next to the door stating that the home is "heterosexual and cisgendered" and warning against "gay propaganda" is really at the heart of the installation and serves as a reminder that the "homes" many may remember fondly or view with feelings of comfortable familiarity aren't always accessible to members of the LGBTQ+ community.

To a large extent, the scent I made is a purely synesthetic take on the visual aspects of the piece. The earthy, spicy notes reflect the deep browns and yellows. The rich green of violet leaf absolute represents the plants and foliage. I also included traces of rose at the top as an acknowledgement and offering to members of the community who may be struggling to find their own places of love and acceptance in these difficult times.

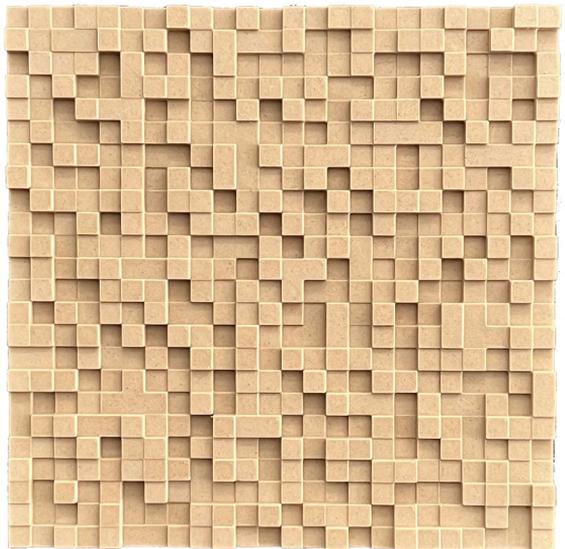


Image: Untitled, courtesy of the artist

Peace Rose

by Miss Layla, fūm Fragrances

Notes: Rose accord.

Myth of my culture: America is a symbol for freedom and democracy.

In recent years there has been a growing discussion about whether the United States still fully embodies the ideals of freedom and democracy. Concerns stem from various issues such as, challenges of fair elections, fundamental human rights, women's rights, immigration policies, executive power expansion and increasing political polarization.

Why rose? Roses have different meanings across cultures globally. Being that America is a mosaic of diverse culture, I wanted to choose the unifying symbol of rose to illustrate hope; but also to represent the myth of my culture that America is a free, democratic nation.

Roses are commonly associated with American beauty and purity. Conversely, roses can represent decay, pain (especially from the thorns) and corruption beneath a seemingly perfect, romantic exterior. But roses have, "flower power" and have been seen throughout American history during times of war and political unrest. While roses have long been associated with love and beauty, the Peace Rose specifically stands out as a powerful symbol of peace for Americans. The Peace Rose (World War II) represents America's desire for global peace and serves as a reminder of working toward a more harmonious future.

In this time of struggle and uncertainty in our American nation, I wanted to offer this aromatic symbol as an analogy of what myth we face but also what is possible moving forward.

Queen Calafia and Her Griffins on the Island of California

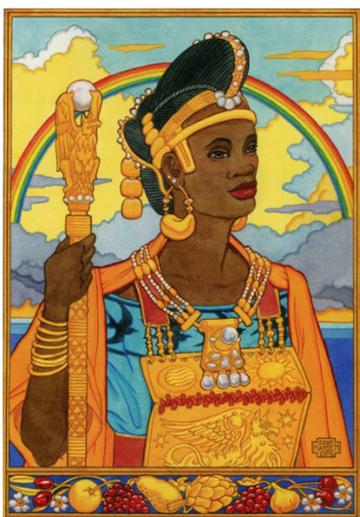
by Saskia Wilson-Brown, The Institute for Art and Olfaction

Notes: The Queen (geranium, patchouli, peppermint); Her Griffins (musk notes); Her Golden Armor (cinnamon, citrus, cardamom); The Plants of California (hexenol cis-3, chamomile); The Waters of California (cetalox, marine formate).

In the 16th century Spanish book *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (The Adventures of Esplandián) by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, Queen Calafia rules over a fictitious island called California. De Montalvo's California—possibly derived from the Arabic word “khalifa” (or leader)—is a land characterized by its rocky shores and lush landscape. Rich in gold, the island is populated by ferocious, man-eating griffins, and warrior women who lived without men in the “manner of the Amazons.”

The queen, herself, was Black, stunningly beautiful, and wore golden armor decorated with pearls. She sailed to Constantinople to lead an army of women and flesh-eating griffins into battle, siding with the Muslims against the invading Christians. Eventually defeated, she married a Christian man and converted to his religion, before heading back home to her island paradise.

When the Spanish landed on the land now known as Baja California, they possibly named the land California in honor of the fictitious island, and its fearsome and beautiful queen. It's a theory, anyway.



This scent interprets the fictitious Queen, her golden armor, her ferocious griffins, and her beloved land in an homage to an embattled and mythologized place we now know as California.

Sacred Space: Protectress of the Borderland

by Dana El Masri, Jazmin Sarai

Notes: Rocks, stone walls, onyx, low grass, desert bushes, grazing flocks.

Beyond theology, borders and modern dogma, the worship of this pre-Islamic goddess was trans-culturally and geographically vast. Specifically; Palmyra, Salkhad, Wadi Rumm, Hatra, Al-Ula, Ta'if, Dura-Europos. There have also been different iterations and associations with her depending on the place and language.

Shrines dedicated to Allat were built in rocky deserts and dry lands, with similar geo-coordinates, representing open-air sacred spaces. There was no bloodshed of animals or humans allowed around any of her shrines, nor was there any felling of plants and trees. The landscape plays an important role, creating a sanctuary within the mountains and desert.

Allat was the protectress of the borderland, of migrants on their journeys across the desert. She was invoked for joy, mercy, well-being, ease, peace, prosperity and protection. With some curses on revenge and anyone who destroyed the carvings! Her iconographic representations were male lions and gazelles. Inscribed in petroglyphs, her shrines were crafted from granite, sometimes limestone and other types of rock forms. One could also find gold, onyx and silver castings.



Image: Allat with a palm branch and her lion from the Temple of Baalshamin in Palmyra, first century AD, Damascus, Syria. Source: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz; Nationalmuseum, Damaskus via Wikipedia.

Strange Fruit: Extrait d'Humain

by Terry Carter, Travertine Atelier

Notes: None listed. Part of this work is discovery.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit



Image: Courtesy of the artist.

The Quiet Between

by L'lia 'Tizzle' Thomas, AROMAKAURA

Notes: Oceanic, earthy, metallic, quietly fruity, floral, and spiced.

In *The Quiet Between*, scent becomes a vessel for transition—a scent for moving through the thresholds of grief, sensuality, and sacred becoming.

Days before arriving at Craft Contemporary, I had already begun crafting the essence of "The Quiet Between" in my mind. Upon entering the space, I felt called to realign and ask: "Is this still the message I'm meant to share with the collective today?" I turned to the divination tools I brought that day: three oracle decks, a rattle and small broom to clear energy, and a pendulum for clarity of intent. Of the three oracle decks, the pendulum swung in a circular motion, affirming my use of the African Goddess Rising Oracle, and declining with a back and forth motion for the Hoodoo Tarot and Lightworker Oracle. One by one, I shuffled using the popout method to receive five cards—each corresponding to an element: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Ether/Heart. These African Goddesses became the portals through which the scent unfolded:

Yemaya (Water): saltwater tears, grief as medicine.

Ala (Earth): fertile soil, endings nourishing new life.

Erzulie Dantor (Fire): ember-sweet protection, fierce love, energetic cord cutting.

Ayizan (Air): veiled winds, hidden truths revealed.

Qetesh (Ether): sensual pulse, reclamation of pleasure.

I chose not to share the sentiment behind the accord with anyone until I had completed it. This was to maintain the energetic integrity and intention of the essence without outside influence. I typically don't choose ingredients solely by their aromatic qualities; I listen to the spirits and energy behind them.

Each African Goddess from the cards I pulled that day affirmed the original essence and energy I felt prior to entering Craft Contemporary but also guided me toward the materials that would carry their messages: briny and metallic, earthy and spiced, quietly floral and heat-laced. The result is not just a perfume, but a portal—a reverent offering to the liminal.

Tree House

by Persephenie, Persephenie Botanicals

Notes: Orange blossom, rose, jasmine, cedar, patchouli, vetiver, cade.

Tree House is inspired by my childhood yearning for nature, security, and magic. Upon entering the installation *espíritu y tierra* by Andrés Cortes, a wave of nostalgia and longing ran through me.

The olfactory aspect that I craved for my younger self, in this pieced together sanctuary, was the multi-dimensional scent of plants, earth, and flowers—alongside smoke and warmth.



Image: Tree Songs (Detail), Persephenie, 2025

CURATORIAL TEAM
Julianne Lee
Minetta Rogers
Saskia Wilson-Brown

IAO STORYLAB DESIGN
Lead: Daniel Krasofski
With: Julianne Lee, Minetta Rogers, Saskia Wilson-Brown

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**Craft
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