

Introduction

Smell is the sense of the imagination.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762

At the center of Max Beerbohm's cartoon *Dante Gabriel Rossetti in His Back Garden* (fig. 1), a dreamy, droopy Edward Burne-Jones nonchalantly presents a flower to a kangaroo to sniff, an allusion to the painter-poet Rossetti's penchant for keeping exotic pets at his Chelsea home. Surrounding this cameo is a caricatured cast of Victorian art world figures from the circle of the Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetic Movement. Among them, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne impishly tweaks the white quiff of a prancing James McNeill Whistler and a larger-than-life William Morris pontificates behind Elizabeth Siddall, the languorous muse posing for Rossetti, all observed by a hawk-nosed, keen-eyed John Ruskin. For the dandy and humorist Beerbohm, playfully looking back on Aestheticism in his 1904 book *The Poets' Corner*, the image of sniffing a flower and appreciating its scent offers a simple and direct way to encapsulate and parody Victorian Aesthetic sensibilities. Here, this simple gesture embodies several key concepts for Aestheticism: hedonism, pleasure in exquisite sensations, and a preoccupation with beauty; the vogue for synesthesia, evoking one sense through another in art, poetry, or music; and even the penchant for art, like scent, to evoke moods, emotions, and vague yet keenly felt associations. It signals the abundance of flowers in the paintings of Rossetti and Burne-Jones while pointing the way to the floral emblems of the Aesthetic Movement and Decadence: Oscar Wilde's sunflowers and green carnations. At the same time, Burne-Jones's mannered gesture points to the perceived affectation of Aesthetes, as ridiculed by Gilbert and Sullivan in their satirical play *Patience* (1881), while his gaunt and enervated appearance references the "fleshly school of poetry"—with its "weary, wasting,



Fig. 1 Max Beerbohm, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti in His Back Garden*, from *The Poets' Corner*, published by William Heinemann, 1904. Engraving. Photo: Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London / Bridgeman Images and Max Beerbohm Estate c/o Berlin Associates.

yet exquisite sensuality."¹ Above all, that one simple gesture of the kangaroo sniffing a rose references the prevalence of sensory stimuli, such as music and perfume, in the art and literature of Victorian Aestheticism, while aligning the aesthetics of scent with uncivilized animal behaviors and an unwholesome obsession with the pursuit of beauty.

This book explores the role of smell in Western art and visual culture in the period from circa 1850 to 1914. It shows the variety of ways in which, and the diversity of reasons why, artists were inspired by and engaged with smell, and how they grappled with its visual representation. In doing so, it reveals how an attention to olfactory symbolism reflects aesthetic trends and historic concerns.

Though often marginal in art of this period, olfactory images emerge across a wide spectrum of art styles and movements, including Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism—as well as Victorian Classicism, European Symbolism, Orientalism, American Impressionism, Art Nouveau, and Italian Divisionism—and across media types, from paintings to illustrations, graphic design, and photography.² This book explores works across all these movements, and mediums, but gives central place to Victorian Aesthetic paintings, in the broadest definition of that term, revealing that the possibilities of scent symbolism as a marker of mood and ambience fascinated several key artists and inspired a recurrence of scent motifs in international art.

Nineteenth-century depictions of scent have been “right under our noses,” despite the absence of attention to smell within art-historical scholarship. For example, the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais produced six scent-infused paintings in an intense two-year period of work, the best known of which are *The Blind Girl* (1854–56; see fig. 42) and *Autumn Leaves* (1855–56; see fig. 31).³ Frederick Sandys evoked aspects of scent in at least five paintings, including *Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1859), *Morgan Le Fay* (1863–64), *Medea* (1866–68), *Gentle Spring* (pre 1865), and *Grace Rose* (1866). With their profusion of flowers, Rossetti’s *Venus Verticordia* (1864–68; see fig. 17) and *Lady Lilith* (1866–68, 1872–73) seem saturated with the scent of abundant roses, while incense smolders in *Proserpine* (1874), invoking the figure’s status as a goddess.⁴ Incense is a central motif in three of Simeon Solomon’s watercolors: *Two Acolytes Censing, Pentecost* (1863; see fig. 43), *Heliogabalus, High Priest of the Sun and Emperor of Rome* (1866; see fig. 45), and *A Saint of the Eastern Church* (1867–68; see fig. 44).⁵ Burne-Jones too explored smell and smelling in *Woman up a Ladder Smelling a Blossom* (ca. 1860), the *Legend of Briar Rose* series (1885–90) with its profusion of blossoms, and *Pilgrim in the Garden—The Heart of the Rose*, a wool and silk tapestry designed by Burne-Jones ca. 1890 and woven by Morris & Co. in 1901 (see fig. 56). Lawrence Alma-Tadema, whose transgressive canvas *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888; see fig. 58) depicted Roman revelers suffocating under a tempest of rose petals, sustained interest in olfactory symbolism over a period of at least forty-five years, painting a multitude of images of women carrying or scattering flowers, or bending to smell them, in both his contemporary and classical subject paintings.⁶ Frederic Leighton, George Frederic Watts, John Singer Sargent, and John William Waterhouse each concentrated on the theme of scent in a small number of works, including *A Noble Lady of Venice* (1866), *Choosing* (ca. 1864; see fig. 5), *Fumée d’ambre gris* (1880; see fig. 19), and *The Soul of the Rose* (1908; see fig. 53), respectively. In this book, the “scented visions” of these and other British Victorian and Edwardian artists, including John Collier, Herbert Draper, Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale, John William Godward, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, Albert Moore, and John Roddam Spencer Stanhope are considered within the wider context of Western arts in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, when, as historian Constance Classen has shown, artistic engagements with the senses took manifold forms.⁷

Why Study Smell in Art?

From iconic nineteenth-century paintings evoking smell to kitsch photographs of swooning, lovelorn beauties, lost in scent-inspired daydreams, “scented visions” are instructive for both the art historian and the sensory historian. Whether they are well-known or newly unearthed and empowered by this research, the works

explored here demonstrate how the wealth of associations around the sense of smell and the cultural nuances of specific odors furnished artists with possibilities for connecting with the themes of modernity. While it is more accurate to point to sporadic and diverse yet recurring pockets of interest than a “fashion for depicting scent in art,” an exploration of these works uncovers the rich cultural significance of the olfactory and demonstrates how smell informed the interpretation of art and visual culture in ways hitherto overlooked.⁸

It may seem ironic that smell, long sidelined by the privileging of the visual, is here explored through the discipline of art history. Yet, as paradoxical as a project on invisible smell seems for a visually oriented discipline, this book is important for art history. It shows how reconnecting with nineteenth-century ideas about smell, gleaned from discourses on the body and senses, hygiene, science, medicine, pathology, death, spirituality and religion, and so on, can prompt fresh interpretations. It also reveals how attending to sensory history and the cultural associations that cluster around the senses—voiced in countless forums, including soap advertising, physiology texts and public health reports, religious tracts, etiquette guides, travel accounts, and gardening books—can bring to the fore significant and previously overlooked aspects of artworks. Many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas about smell and smelling, such as the belief that smell is disease or that a fragrant flower can cause asphyxiation, seem outlandish today. Yet this contextual information proves vital for understanding “scented visions.” For art historians, then, this research exhibits the value of sensory history, demonstrating how it can inform and transform analyses of art and its critical reception.

Equally important for sensory history, this research shows how artworks mirror sensory ideas and suggests an alternative, image-based approach to the discipline. From Academy showstoppers to graphic design and ephemera, the artworks explored here are interpreted in the context of what Mark Jenner calls the “period nose”; they have meanings that hinge upon an understanding of contemporary ideas about smell, such as the deadliness of miasma, the drug-like effects of perfume, and the nexus of fragrance and femininity.⁹ These and other ideas about smell intersected with cultural attitudes toward modernity and, where they inform the subjects of artwork, they reveal responses to issues of the day. While images of smell pre- and postdate the period under investigation, “scented visions” from circa 1850 to 1914 are of interest for what they tell us about attitudes toward industrialization and the impact of technology; rural depopulation and the growth of cities; sanitation; morality; sexuality; mental health; immigration; race relations; poverty; education; women’s liberation; and faith and secularization. For the sensory historian, the visual analyses provided here demonstrate how images of the olfactory reflect and shape contemporary ideas, enriching our understanding of the cultural history of the period.

The Period Nose

This book focuses on the years just prior to the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) and the fifty years or so that followed. During these years, a number of cultural shifts took place that make this an interesting and important time vis-à-vis smell and its influence upon the artistic imagination. The 1850s were a decade of heightened fear of smell as an indicator of both hygienic and social danger. With advances in sanitation reform and the advent of germ theory in the 1860s, this fear was supplanted by a suspicion of perfume, which was increasingly perceived as toxic and linked to mental and emotional instability and deviant behaviors. Literary historian Cheryl Krueger has shown that this perception of the toxicity of perfume coincided with the repositioning of the booming fragrance market toward a primary focus on women at a time when anxieties around women's liberation were on the rise.¹⁰ The 1860s and 1870s also witnessed a gradual acceptance of Darwin's theory of evolution. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin had suggested that humans lost their acuity of smell in the process of evolving from animals. Subsequently, "the suppression of the sense of smell in humans became one of the defining characteristics of 'civilised man,'" as the authors of *Aroma* have shown.¹¹ Ideas about perceived correlations between race, class, age, gender, and degree of olfactory acuity resonated in philosophical discussions over whether perfumery could and should be elevated to an art form.¹² Equally, they informed nineteenth-century artistic representations of smell and smelling, including racialized and gendered paintings of harem women perfuming themselves or white Western "angels of the house" making potpourri. Indeed, the abundance of "scented visions" featuring women corresponds with contemporary studies in which women were reported to possess a more acute, animal-like sense of smell and to be more susceptible to its pleasures and pains than "the more civilized sex."¹³

I argue here that, in line with traditional gendered sensory coding and reinforced by the discourse on evolution, smelling was defined by art from circa 1850 to 1914 as an irrational, feminized pursuit—an idea underpinned by Immanuel Kant's alignment of smell with the emotions over the intellect.¹⁴ In turn, the identification of women with smell and therefore with spirituality, magic, eroticism and seduction, intoxication, memory, dream, and reverie reinforced stereotypes of women as leisured and irrational. Motifs of daydreaming women or girls smelling fragrant flowers, burning leaves, applying scent, making potions and potpourri, performing magic, smoking cigarettes, shimmying to incense fumes, reposing by censers, or swooning and suffocating amid intoxicating perfumes proliferated across diverse styles, movements, and mediums. Whether depicted in a salon painting, a decorative daub, a magazine illustration, a photograph, a



Fig. 2

Léon Henri Marie Frédéric, *The Fragrant Air*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 100 × 66 cm. Private collection. Photo © Whitford Fine Art, London, UK / Bridgeman Images.

song-sheet cover, a poster for coffee, or a perfume trade card, images of women and scent reinforced an ideal of feminine beauty as private and introspective. Under the guise of presenting the spiritual, romantic, or nostalgic “affect” of scent upon the female figure, and even of triggering the same response in the viewer, such images appealed to a prevalent male fantasy of passive, static, and anonymous femininity.

While exalting female beauty by equating it to exquisite scent, nineteenth-century “scented visions” typically subject the female figure to both the objectifying “male gaze” and the “male sniff” by inviting the male viewer to muse upon her scent.¹⁵ Male artists contrast the miasmatic River Thames with the moral pollution of the prostitute, emphasize the susceptibility of women to the erotics of scent, suggest the ensnaring perfume of the femme fatale, and evoke the eroticized death of an adolescent girl, suffocated under the scent of flowers. Moreover, “scented visions” often promote racialized constructions of femininity in Orientalist scenes—that is to say, images of a so-called exotic East, produced

by Western artists for a European audience, that fetishize the culture of the Middle East and North Africa. For example, in *The Sultan's Favorite* (1886), by the Spanish painter Juan Giménez y Martín, an odalisque reclines on a fur skin, surrounded by scattered roses, a hookah pipe, and a coffee pot, with incense fumes scenting her sprawling body in readiness for the approaching sultan. Sometimes, troublingly, they eroticize childhood: perhaps none more so than *The Fragrant Air* (1894) by the Belgian Symbolist Léon Frédéric (fig. 2), in which we see the sexual awakening of a very young girl overcome by the scent of cabbage roses, lilies, hyacinths, and tulips. Occasionally they do both, as in the American Impressionist Henry Siddons Mowbray's *The Rose Harvest* (1887), in which exotically garbed young girls wallow and swoon among heaps of petals (see fig. 67). Such tropes were ingrained in the public consciousness and, while some women artists sought new ways to respond to the effect of scent upon body and mind, others reiterated the imperatives of the "male gaze" and "male nose."¹⁶

Images of men smelling were rare but likewise colored by stereotypes of race, class, and sexuality. White, middle-class, heterosexual male figures are typically shown as intolerant of stench or else unreceptive to the pleasures of scent.¹⁷ In contrast, working-class men are shown to have a high tolerance for stench, as in William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* (1861), in which the foundry workers appear "nose blind" to industrial odors.¹⁸ Images of men flaring their nostrils to inhale tend to be limited to racist illustrations of vicious-looking "savages," tracking on all fours, and Orientalist paintings of geographically nondescript, effeminate "Oriental" men sitting in a tobacco-induced torpor, smoking hookah pipes or watching harem women make perfume—their idle enjoyment of scent marking them as "Other."¹⁹ Alternatively, they were homoerotic in flavor, with scent acting as a means of "queering the image." An example is *Hypnos* (1896), by the Boston pioneer of art photography Fred Holland Day (fig. 3), in which a young nude man inhales the scent of a (scentless) poppy, the petals of which trace against his lips—a rare reference to opium-taking. Besides women, then, the most common protagonists in olfactory imagery were hounds "on the scent," non-Westerners, and homosexual men—in other words, those beings then held to be less civilized than white, middle-class men and so thought to have an acute sense of smell.

Symbolism and Realism

As an irrational, feminized pursuit, smelling was a subject best suited to the irrational, emotive art movements that followed in the long wake of Romanticism, including Aestheticism and Symbolism. In the realms of fine art, the emotiveness of smell appealed to numerous painters seeking to convey inner truths and "vague and unspeakable longings."²⁰ Scent infused not only the art of Victorian painters working along Aesthetic and Symbolist lines but also that of European Symbolists such as Fernand Khnopff, Edgar Maxence, and Odilon Redon,

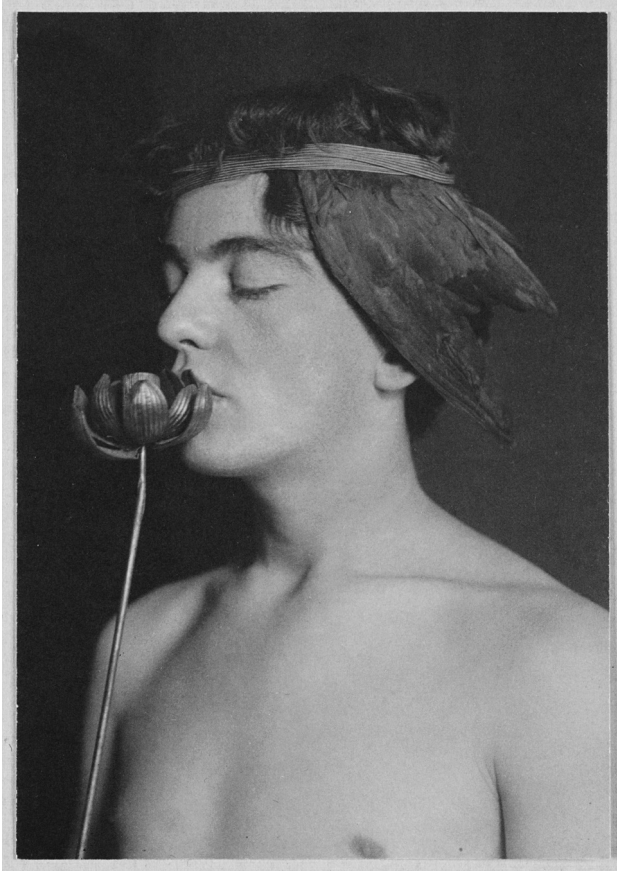


Fig. 3 Fred Holland Day, *Hypnos*, January 11, 1896. Photograph. Photo: The Royal Photographic Society Collection / Victoria and Albert Museum, London / Getty Images.

for whom the evocation of scent provided a means to express the inexpressible. In contrast, invisible smell was less often a focus for Realist painters (including plein-air painters and French Impressionists) who sought to describe visual appearances. Yet, as David Peters Corbett has shown, Realist and Symbolist modes of representation are not polar opposites but “points on a continuous range of possibilities.”²¹ Many paintings of the period share both traits. For example, the American Impressionist painter Charles Courtney Curran painted at least nine works of women, girls, or fairies smelling. These works fuse the Impressionist focus on capturing fleeting effects of light with a sense of transcendence, evocative of realms beyond the visual.

As Classen explains, aesthetic interest in immaterial smell from circa 1850 to 1914 emerged in the context of “a widespread movement by artists directed against what was perceived to be the materialist tendencies of modern culture, principally scientific rationalism, industrial capitalism and bourgeois worldliness.”²² During these years, scent entered art predominantly along spiritual, religious, and mystical lines, as well as those of gender, sexuality, and the erotic. Artists directly registered pleasant scents in a wealth of images of women burying

their faces in roses—images with sexual or spiritual overtones, or both. Stench, on the other hand, was typically excluded from the art of the period—even in Realist works that challenged the old equation of art and beauty. Though we might expect to find the odors of sweat, steam engines, filth, and fumes in pictorial observations of work and living conditions, foul odors were repressed into general tropes of contamination, closeness, and invasion of space in scenes of pesthouses, asylums, forges and factories, urban crowds, cityscapes, battle scenes, and slums. Stench may be insinuated but is rarely explicitly signaled, whether by sniffing gestures, glimpses of vapor, or, indeed, in the painting's title.²³ Similarly, artists rarely represented the smell of food, which, according to the Irish-Canadian novelist and popular science writer Grant Allen, was too utilitarian and earthy for the lofty realms of art.²⁴ There are exceptions, of course: the plumes of black smoke signaling the acrid smells of industry in Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* (1861) or the rising steam in Vincent van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* (1885). However, given that smell tended to be evoked more directly in images of sensuality and spirituality than in Realist images of "the great unwashed" and given that this project focuses on works where we can be sure smell was intended, it is the former that makes up the major preoccupation of this book.

The Scented Breeze

My exploration of the role of smell in the visual arts from circa 1850 to 1914 ranges across broad transnational horizons. I not only find fragrant imagery located within Victorian painting but also highlight the scented breeze that passed over swaths of European and American nineteenth-century art, design, and visual culture. By moving across a broad range of artistic movements and media, from Pre-Raphaelite paintings to Art Nouveau posters and perfume bottles, I offer fresh juxtapositions between very different artists through the discovery of shared motifs. In doing so, I indicate the value of drawing connections across the art of Britain, Europe (including France, Italy, Spain, Hungary, and Russia), and America. Despite some cultural differences in perception (or, as the cultural historian Mark M. Smith puts it, "being separated by a different nose"), ideas about smell diffused across national boundaries, monarchical reigns, and the century divide.²⁵ Indeed, a major payoff of this thematic approach is how it brings into focus crosscurrents within international art, which are obscured by place-specific studies of artists, groups, and movements. By exploring smell in Western art during this period, we see markedly different artists—from the Pre-Raphaelite Rossetti to the Futurist Russolo—responding to similar ideas, sources, and motifs, in different yet connected ways, thanks to what Classen has described as "the global circulation of senses."²⁶ Juxtaposing Aesthetic, Realist, Symbolist, and Modernist works, we see how artists across movements reacted to seismic shifts in the "sensescape" of modernity.

As literary historian Hans Rindisbacher observed in *The Smell of Books* (1992), interest in the aesthetics of smell was not attributable to any one person or movement but resulted from a complex international network of personal and professional relationships among artists, novelists, poets, and other cultural figures.²⁷ The artists and writers featured here enjoyed international networks and cultural awareness, facilitated by the relative ease of travel, the speed of new communication systems, and the global trade in literature, prints, and publications. Far from being insular, many held strong international profiles and studied and traveled abroad.²⁸ They were well-versed in current trends in Western art, and their works filtered into the European and American consciousness through international trade fairs and touring exhibitions, the art market, public and private art collections, lectures, letters, travel, and word of mouth. Although “scented visions” tended to be intimate works, as opposed to the larger, grand-themed showstoppers singled out for exhibition abroad, participating at international shows raised an artist’s profile, spurring increased awareness of their oeuvre through subsequent books, articles, and reproductions. During the years 1850–1914, cheap print media proliferated, and fine art journals played an important role in disseminating “scented visions” across countries and art movements. As art historian Katherine Haskins has argued, “art audiences were awash with visual stimuli” thanks to highly collectible and widely disseminated reproductions in international art journals.²⁹ By all these means, visual motifs diffused far afield, with the scented reveries of Aestheticism, for example, becoming an important arena for contact with European Symbolism.³⁰

“Scented visions,” however, were not just the domain of fine art. Rather, they emerged across the spectrum of Western visual culture and by the early 1900s appeared in journal illustrations, advertisements and posters, product packaging, trade cards, and even greeting postcards. An attractive item of ephemera might be quickly discarded, shared, added to a scrapbook, or slipped into a drawer, resurfacing years later. At the same time, ideas about smell (from scientific developments to poetic motifs) recurred in far-reaching sources. News stories that tapped into nineteenth-century fears around the perils of perfume could spread far and fast or resurface years later. Indeed, the sheer ubiquity of scent imagery, both verbal and visual, hampers the potential of tracing connections between motifs.

Art History and the Olfactory Silence

This is one of the first books dedicated to the task of rediscovering the role of smell in art. Why? As art historians Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher have noted, “representations of fragrant scenes and the act of smelling occur in images of all aesthetic styles and historical periods.”³¹ Despite the low status of smell in the hierarchy of the senses, numerous Western artists from Brueghel to Picasso have embraced it as a legitimate vehicle for artistic expression, often appreciating

the very qualities of scent that have denied it conventional aesthetic viability.³² We might note the aromatic gifts of frankincense and bitter myrrh symbolizing prayer and Christ's suffering in Renaissance images of the Adoration of the Magi. Likewise, one could point to scenes of the Annunciation, in which the Angel Gabriel brandishes a lily (symbol of purity) toward the Virgin's womb as if impregnating her with a wand, its scent silently and invisibly penetrating the body with the breath, in fragrant parallel to the divine conception.³³ Think too of paintings of Mary Magdalene with her attribute, the pot of fragrant ointment; of the fetor of the corpse in scenes of the Raising of Lazarus (signaled by the mourner Martha clamping a cloth to her nose); or indeed of God breathing life into Adam. Yet despite the long-standing presence of smell in art, its significance has been largely overlooked, with the exception of recent studies in contemporary olfactory installation art.³⁴

The absence of smell from art history, which this book addresses, is a lacuna left by the omission of smell from twentieth-century critical and historical accounts, after Sigmund Freud wrote the repression of the sense of smell into the history of civilization.³⁵ In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud drew on Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) to claim that man's erection from the quadrupedal stance initiated an intellectual distancing from the animals. Elevated from the level of sexual and fecal stenches, man surveyed the landscape, prioritizing sight as the leading channel of the intellect. Bodily odors became less important for hunting food or creating sexual excitement, and this liberation from olfactory drives enabled the development of reason over base instinct. Odors, Freud argued, became embarrassing, associated with feces, menstruation, sweat, and other body fluids, and this led to a species-wide repression of the sense of smell, which in turn led to a decline in olfactory prowess.³⁶ Freud's voice was influential in generating the "olfactory silence" of the twentieth century, when, as Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott have argued, smell was "repressed in the modern West and its social history ignored."³⁷ The history of art as a discipline only emerged in the early twentieth century—a consequence, indeed, of the hegemony of sight—and cultural forces have shaped both its subjects and its silences.

The Sensuous Eye

In 1879, the decorative silversmith Sampson Mordan produced a pair of ruby-red glass perfume and smelling salt bottles (fig. 4) shaped and joined to resemble a pair of opera glasses with the silver-gilt caps forming eyepieces and the bases mirrored to resemble lenses. Through this pair of perfume bottles masquerading as opera glasses, invisible, sensual perfume is rationalized and made knowable with reference to visual technology and optical science. Yet this is a fallacy. Holding up this parody of visual apparatus to the eyes does not enable us to see



Fig. 4 “Opera glass” perfume bottles, Sampson Mordan, ca. 1879. Photo: Steppes Hill Farm Antiques Ltd.

perfume magnified or to understand its mysteries any more than it can facilitate viewing the external world. Rather, the sniffer, acting the role of viewer, is bombarded by the fragrance contained within, which takes him or her far away from the here and now into interior realms of memory and daydream—the visions of the mind’s eye. This object points to a nineteenth-century fascination with intersections between looking and smelling, smelling and visual reverie, and so encapsulates this book’s exploration of the relationships between sight and smell.

When it comes to the senses, the years 1850 to 1914 have been predominantly associated with visual modernity—with billboards and gaslighting, microscopes and cameras; with the kinetic—with trains, trams, and steam-liners; and, of course, with bringing the two together in early cinema.³⁸ Here, however, I explore the perceived affinities between the olfactory and the visual, arguing that in an age of ocularcentrism, artists—along with scientists and writers—frequently framed smell in visual terms. Artistic attempts to visualize smell sit within the context of a widespread popular and scientific impulse to render the invisible visible and so easier to know and control.³⁹ The desire to see smell or give it visual form manifested itself in myriad ways. The artistic impetus to translate olfactory sensations into visual form tells not only of the contemporary

fascination with synesthesia and the potential for one sense impression to stimulate another but also of the deep-rooted belief in sight as the sense that makes sense of everything.

By looking at art through scented lenses, this book aims to restore the sensuousness of the eye. Twentieth-century Modernist artists and critics such as Clement Greenberg were influential in segmenting the senses and restricting aesthetic experience in the visual arts to sight alone. According to art historian Caroline Jones, the young Greenberg suffered immense shame concerning his body odor. For him, “smell was part of a world of unconstrained animality, compulsive sexuality, and anal regression. Scent summoned a doggy terrain of rumps and musks,” sparking his determination to repress the sense of smell by championing art’s ocularity above all else.⁴⁰ Today, Greenberg’s segregation of the senses still informs and limits the way we look at and think about art. Yet is this Modernist approach to looking at art the best way to consider Victorian Aestheticism and other paintings created with a synesthetic approach to looking in mind? In turn-of-the-century Britain, advocates of Modernism, with its clean lines and pure aesthetic, reacted against the sensuous intensity of Aestheticism, including the scents, music, colors, and textures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s paintings and what the critic Roger Fry dubbed Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s “highly scented soap.”⁴¹ Here, however, I invite a sensorial reconnection with pictures designed to be experienced through the five senses.

In *Sensual Relations* (2003), the anthropologist David Howes urged researchers to “break free from the spell of the specular and look, not beyond their noses, but *at* their noses.” Influenced by Jacques Derrida, who argued that Western privileging of the senses of sight and hearing occurs through the stripping away of their sensuousness, Howes suggested that a more nuanced understanding could come from studying the relationships among the nonvisual senses. He reinstated this call in *Ways of Sensing* (2014), cowritten with Classen, in which the title gestures toward “the plurality of sensory practices in different cultures and historical periods” and “the manifold relations among the different senses,” reminding us that, despite John Berger’s iconic book, “seeing” is not the only way to experience art.⁴² Today, appreciation of this approach is growing. In 2010, the sensory historian Mark M. Smith noted that “historians have begun to tackle the history of intersensoriality—how the senses worked together and in concert, not in isolation,” while art historian Simon Shaw-Miller championed a sensory approach to the discipline of art history, arguing that the senses are interconnected and work in tandem with the imagination.⁴³ Since then, Ian Heywood has suggested in *Sensory Arts and Design* (2017) that, “when separated” in works of art, the senses “call out, appeal to and echo one another.”⁴⁴ While the recent focus on sound, taste, touch, and smell to the exclusion of vision has helped destabilize the hegemony of the visual, we can now envisage studies of art and visual culture that explore relationships between all five senses on a

more equal footing. This includes studies of nonvisual as well as visual artworks that depict sensory experiences. This book signals the multisensory nature of both the artistic imagination and the “viewing” experience from circa 1850 to 1914. Like looking past the tip of one’s nose, it focuses on the nose and beyond—on visions inspired by scent and scents inspired by the visual.

The Rise of Sensuous Scholarship

A growing awareness of the cultural and aesthetic significance of the nonvisual senses is due in part to the emergence of the wider field of “visual culture” and its inclusion within art history. The formidable literature generated in recent years on the cultural construction of sight and the semiotics of visual representation has prompted a parallel awareness of the lack of a comparable discourse on the relevance of the nonvisual senses for the appreciation and understanding of the visual arts.⁴⁵ Classen first indicated this lack in *The Color of Angels* (1998), observing that art history’s traditional ocularcentric approach “begs the question of how the nonvisual senses may have been theorized and evoked in earlier periods of art.” She later picked up this baton in *Ways of Sensing* as well as in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire* (2016) and *The Museum of the Senses* (2017)—books that have inspired the move away from “single-sensed understandings of art.”⁴⁶ It is, however, the art historian’s close critical looking and understanding of artistic context that differentiates the present study from those of sensory historians.⁴⁷

In recent years, the hegemony of the visual has been challenged by a growing body of scholarship that places a new focus on the senses as mediators of experience. Ever since Alain Corbin instigated the social history of smell as an area of academic inquiry with the publication of *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1982), a history of smell in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, and Patrick Süskind placed it in the public consciousness through his novel *Perfume* (1985), there has been a move toward a more sensuous approach to social and cultural history.⁴⁸ Today readers can feast upon a banquet of major, yet eclectic, compilations of sensory scholarship, proving that sensory analysis, can, as Howes and Classen have said, “be relevant to the study of *any and all* cultural fields”; these include sensory book series, academic journals, and a growing number of monographs delving into the meanings attached to the senses in a particular context, place, or moment in history.⁴⁹ This body of scholarship reflects a “sensual turn” across many disciplines, including Robert Jütte’s *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace* (2004), Holly Dugan’s *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (2011), Susan Ashbrook Harvey’s *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (2015), C. M. Woolgar’s *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (2006), Mark

Bradley's *Smell and the Ancient Senses* (2014), and Aimée Boutin's *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (2015), among many others.⁵⁰

As art historian Jenni Lauwrens proclaimed in 2012, "it is no longer feasible that art history limit its inquiry to the visual field alone."⁵¹ Ian Heywood's *Sensory Arts and Design* (2017), Francesca Bacci's *Art and the Senses* (2011), and Patrizia di Bello and Gabriel Koureas's *Art, History and the Senses* (2010) have all brought art into the realm of sensory history.⁵² Moreover, the growing phenomenon of contemporary olfactory art has led to the emergence of a small but growing band of "olfactory art historians," with Jim Drobnick and Larry Shiner at the helm.⁵³ In recent years, Caro Verbeek has also brought "art history to its senses," introducing smells into seminar and exhibition spaces and reconstructing ephemeral olfactory artworks, while in 2021 the Mauritshuis museum in Holland held its *Fleeting—Scents in Colour* exhibition, curated by Ariane van Suchtelen, to explore the aromatic connotations of Dutch seventeenth-century paintings.⁵⁴

Within the field of nineteenth-century studies, notable scholarship on the senses has included Classen's *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire* (2016)—a rich sensory survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history and culture—as well as a growing number of books relating to individual senses in various contexts.⁵⁵ Smell scholarship has emerged in social history, American studies, environmental history, medical history, and literary studies, including Mark M. Smith's *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (2014), Melanie Kiechle's *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (2017), William Tullett's *Smell in Eighteenth-Century England: A Social Sense* (2019), Jonathan Reinartz's *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* (2014), Catherine Maxwell's *Scents and Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture* (2017), and Janice Carlisle's *Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction* (2004), as well as recent articles by Cheryl Krueger and Érika Wicky on perfume in nineteenth-century French literature.⁵⁶ While the sociologists Classen, Howes, and Synnott broke the "olfactory silence" leading to the excavation of these and other lost sensory histories, the potential of sociocultural sensuous scholarship to stimulate richer, book-length readings of art remains largely unrealized. This book, therefore, plays an important role in revealing the research potential of uncovering olfactory cultural connotations and their influence upon the conception and reception of art.