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DEC 15

## Eye Exam: Nose to the Air with Celebrity Scents

Installation

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By Jason Foumberg

“That’s what I would call the cheapening of celebrity,” said Catherine Walsh, SVP of global marketing at Coty perfumery, on the hurried release of B-list celebrity perfumes this shopping season, in the New York Times. The artist duo Industry of the Ordinary would likely agree, but might extend the condemnation across the board, to all celebrity products. “Celebrity and the Peculiar” is their room-sized artwork that offers samples of celebrity fetish fragrances in smell tents. By luck, “Celebrity and the Peculiar” is on view concurrently with “The Art of Scent, 1889-2012” at the Museum of Arts and Design in Manhattan.

Certainly there’s something in the air. But what? I poked my nose in the celebrity smell tents to find out. Here are my reviews of the scents in “Celebrity and the Peculiar.”

**Covet**, by Sarah Jessica Parker. The top notes are crisp iceberg wedge salad (low-fat ranch dressing, hold the bacon) followed by the tang of vodka that’s been smuggled in an Evian bottle. Bottom aroma is something eerily rancid—is that dust burning on the overheated television set? No, a woman just walked by who shined her patent-leather pumps with Covet.

**Instinct**, by David Beckham. Men. Lots of men in a room. They’re told that strippers are about to arrive at any moment, then the air conditioning is turned off, doors locked, and lights turned out. What do you smell? Nervous sweat and failing deodorant. Unwashed denim and spice. Spilled beer. Dollar bills. Violent abs. Somebody bottle this, quick! Oh wait, thank you, David Beckham. If you rub this on your muscles I will totally snack on you.

**Glow**, by Jennifer Lopez. This smells so forgettable, like the trailing whiff of someone who’s perpetually sneaking out of a room. It’s one of JLo’s eighteen unique scents on the market, and by unique I mean desperate like buying supermarket roses

**Someday by Justin Bieber.** A boy-child slams his face on a rotating glass door at the Radisson and has a hallucinatory vision of ambrosia that turns women sterile and men into humping satyrs. When oxygen is finally restored to his brain, the boy-child goes through with production of the fragrance. But Someday is totally innocuous. In fact, it's quite safe to use on your genitals and anus, and I recommend it as a douching agent instead of a topical fragrance.

**Unforgivable by P. Diddy or Sean John or whatever.** The perfect accessory with those sweatpants you wore to Starbucks. Musky meets mocha latte. No need to shower today, dude.

Both of the fragrance exhibitions offer aroma samples. Whereas the New York exhibition, "The Art of Scent, 1889-2012," attempts to educate about the science and significance of crafted scents, Chicago's "Celebrity and the Peculiar" shows just how cheap and easy perfumes can be. New York has a fantastic interior design by the architects Diller Scofidio & Renfro with wall-integrated scent-diffusion machines manufactured Scentcommunication. In Chicago, the scents are offered via Honeywell-brand humidifiers in standing tents of plastic pipe and shower-curtain liner. It would be nicer if one could just step right into these tents and get kissed by the celebrity mists. Isn't buying and wearing celebrity-endorsed perfume as plebeian as taking a shower, but lazier?

I think if any scents are to be displayed in an art gallery, they should be more evocative, nostalgic, psychological and human, like the Odorifics machine in "Harold and Maude." Don't give me this Walmart shit; give me scents to twerk my brain.

*"Celebrity and the Peculiar" shows through December 16 at the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 East Washington.*

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