

ADAA7000 Coexistent Perspectives Module

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Coexistent Perspectives ADAA7000

Question 4. Time, Memory and the Archive: In what ways do contemporary artists and designers remagine time, memory, and archival practice, whether through repetition, rupture, slowness, or non-linear temporality? How do these temporal aesthetics with culture, technological, or historical concerns?

The Time Concept and Artistic Interpretation in Norse Mythology

Selecting two contemporary artists, Olafur Eliasson and Cees de Rooek, with "time sculpture" as the core perspective, provides a creative reference for works on the theme of mythology in the field of visual communication.

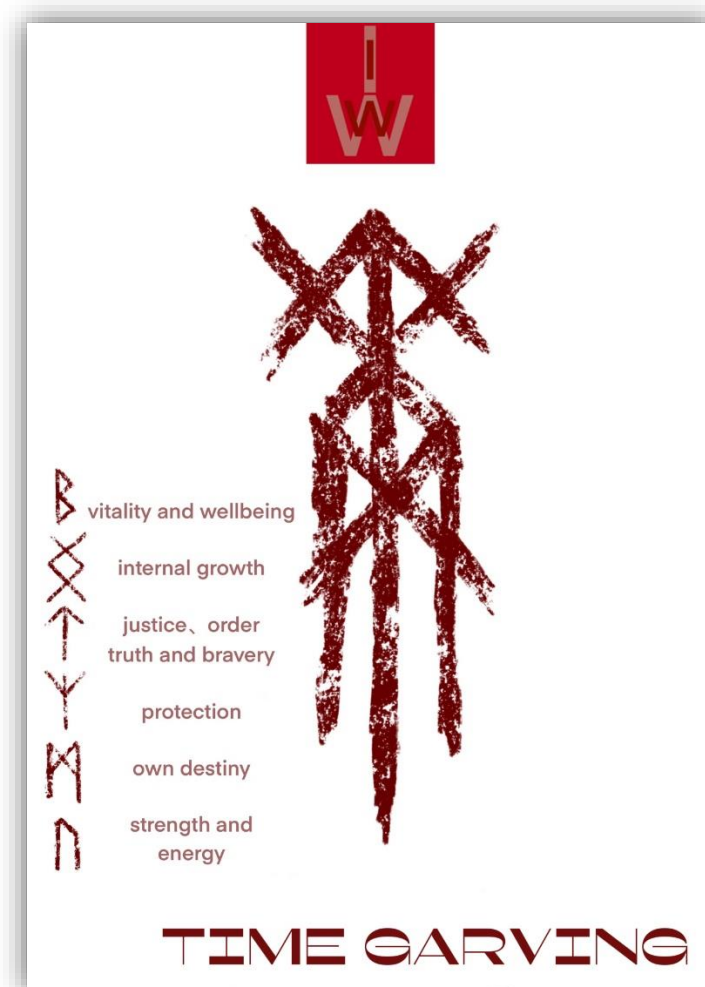


Figure 1. Coexistent Perspectives poster

The concept of time in Norse mythology is centered around "cyclicity" and "traceability". Through the two core symbols of the world tree Yggdrasil and Runes, it constructs a symbiotic relationship of "time-memory-existence", providing a deep interpretative framework for contemporary art practice. (Kaifan yang.2020)

Growth (the dimension of generation), Ygg-Drahil is rooted in the ice fields of Niflheim (the land of fog), drawing life-giving water from the Hvergelmir spring. Its branches extend to the Nine Realms, including Asgard (the realm of the gods) and Midgard (the human world), while its roots entwine with the giant snake Nidhogg, the dragon Fafnir, and the squirrel Ratatosk.

The time of this stage is the "unfolding of potential" - just like the universe emerging from chaos, everything acquires form through the flow of time, corresponding to the "shaping process of materials" in artistic creation.(Cock.M.2005)

Destruction (the dimension of dissolution), Ragnarök is the core node of the cycle - Fenrir the giant wolf devours Odin, Loki the god of fire and Heimdall perish together, the world tree is gnawed to collapse by Nidhogg, and the nine realms sink into floodwaters. But this is not ultimate annihilation, but rather "meaningful dissolution".

Time completes the liquidation of the old order amidst destruction, and the traces do not disappear; instead, they are transformed into nourishment for rebirth. This logic manifests in contemporary art as "deconstruction and transformation".
(Latham.2021).

Rebirth (The Dimension of Regression), After the flood receded, the world tree sprouted anew from the ruins, and the surviving gods and humans rebuilt the world, marking the beginning of a new cycle. This stage is characterized by the "reappearance and sublimation of traces" - rebirth is not a mere replication of the past, but an innovation based on historical traces.

In artistic practice, artists recycle material fragments from the "destruction stage", reassemble and reshape them, creating works that embody both historical traces and contemporary forms

This cycle breaks the limitations of the linear concept of time, proposing that "time is the accumulation and transformation of traces." Growth leaves traces of generation, destruction leaves traces of dissolution, and rebirth is the reorganization of traces. Artists make their works become the "material carriers" of time traces by recording the changes of materials in time. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Nordic mythology – Ragnarok

Runic script, "Memory engraving - Trace preservation - Meaning activation".

Runes are a symbol system in Norse mythology that combines "language" and "divine power". Initially, Odin comprehended them by hanging them on the world tree for nine days and nights, with a total of 24 core symbols. Each symbol corresponds to a specific deity, natural force, or life implication (such as "P" representing fertility, "N" representing vitality, and "D" representing courage). Its essence is the "materialized inscription of memory".

The process of using Runes involves the transformation of intangible memory into tangible traces. In ancient times, Norse people would engrave important events, ancestral wisdom, and wishes for blessings onto carriers such as stone, wood, and metal. Runic symbols thus became the "archival codes" of memory. This act of engraving is itself a freeze-framing of time. When memories are etched into materials, time is preserved in the form of "symbolic traces," preventing the passage and dissipation of memory.

The carriers of Runes (stone, wood, metal) possess durability, and even after thousands of years of weathering, the traces of the symbols remain discernible - this makes Runes "memory archives that span time". Compared to oral legends, the material carriers of Runes free memory from the limitation of "reliance on passing down from generation to generation", becoming "time archives" that can exist independently and be repeatedly interpreted.

Runes are not static symbols, but require "interpretation" and "use" to activate their meaning. In ancient Norse culture, people awakened the memories and divine power carried by runes through recitation and touching them. In contemporary contexts, artists activate the mythological memories and temporal significance contained within runes through their reconstruction and reinterpretation.

Artists transform Runic symbols into visual graphics and engrave them onto degradable materials. As the materials naturally change, the symbols gradually blur and deform, simulating the erosion of time on memory. Through the interpretation of the audience, the blurred traces are reborn with new meanings, forming a closed-loop archive of "inscription-preservation-activation".

The "symbol-carrier-meaning" structure of Runes corresponds to the relationship of "memory-material-narration" in artistic creation - the artist, like a "contemporary inscriber", transforms time memories related to mythology (such as cycles, extinction, and rebirth) into visual symbols (such as simplified Runic symbols and world tree lines), engraving them onto specific materials (such as metal plates, recycled paper, and eco-friendly plastics), making the materials the "archival

carriers" of memory. The audience's interpretation completes the contemporary activation of the meaning of memory. (Figure 3)

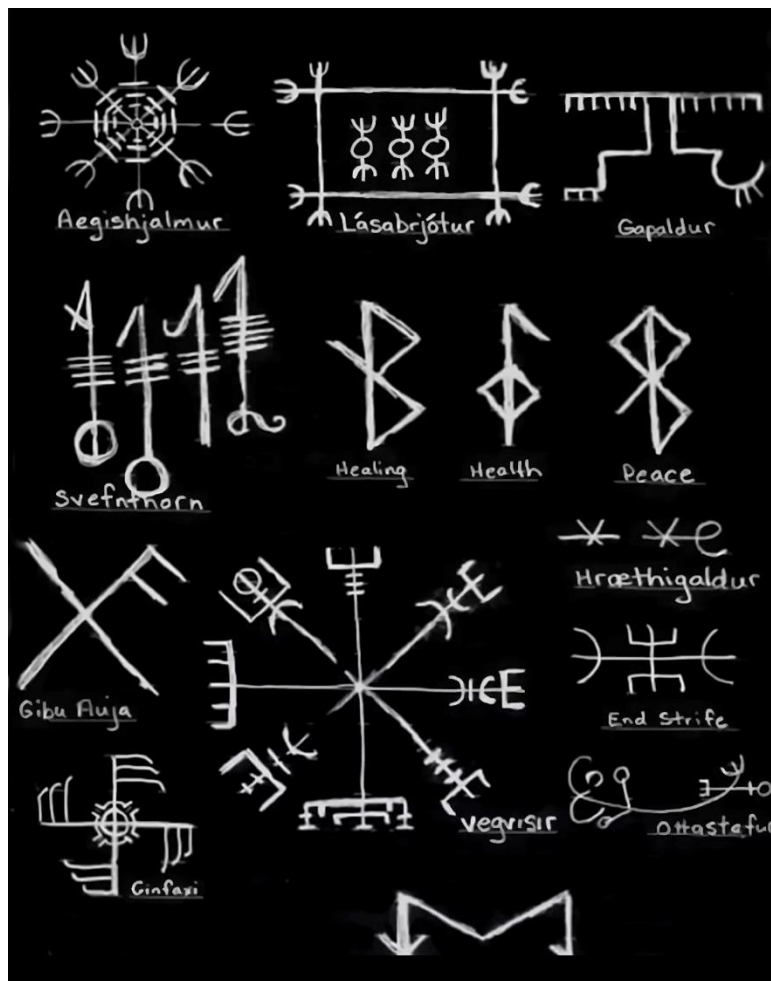


Figure 3. Viking Runes. Doo

Olafur Eliasson

Time imprints and ecological archives of natural materials.

1 Reconstruction of Nordic nature worship and circular time concept

The Norse mythological system is centered around the spiritual core of "nature worship" and structured around the narrative framework of "cyclical time perspective". The world tree (Yggdrasil) takes root in the nine worlds, with its roots drawing water from the underworld and its branches and leaves reaching towards

the divine firmament, undergoing an eternal cycle of "growth - withering - rebirth". Meanwhile, the gods' doom (Ragnarök) is not an end, but rather the birth of a new universe after the destruction of the old order, implicitly embodying the dialectical temporal logic of "destruction is rebirth".

Eliasson precisely captures this core motif of Norse mythology and transforms it from mythological narrative into contemporary artistic language. He abandons the traditional mythological expression of concretization and instead uses natural elements such as glaciers, water, and light as carriers to project the abstract concepts of "cyclical time" and "ecological connection" from mythology into the real-world context.(Figure 4)

In his works, nature is no longer the object of depiction, but rather the "time subject" with autonomous vitality - the millennial condensation and instantaneous melting of glaciers, the continuous movement of water streams, and the fleeting changes of light and shadow all become contemporary footnotes to the mythical concept of time. At the same time, they implicitly reflect the current issue of "the fragility of natural systems" in the ecological crisis, achieving a cross-temporal dialogue between traditional mythology and contemporary ecological criticism. (Kevin Walker.2022)



Figure 4. Olafur Eliasson. Riverbed. 2014

2 Materialized imprint and perceptual reconstruction

Eliasson proposed the artistic methodology of "time sculpting", the core of which lies in not relying on the subjective shaping of the artist, but rather allowing time to become the "creator" of the work through natural processes and audience perception. (Beccaria, M.2013)

2.1 Physical engraving. Temporal materialization inscription driven by natural processes

The essence of physical sculpture lies in allowing natural materials to "engrave" the trajectory of time onto the artwork through their own physical transformations, thereby achieving the visualization and materialization of time. In his representative work "Beyond Human Time" (2020), Eliasson's creative logic is manifested as the superposition of three levels of time. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Olafur Eliasson. Atmospheric. 2023

2.1.1 Preservation in geological time. The Greenland glacial ice fragments selected for the artwork are natural crystals formed through thousands of years of geological movements - each ice fragment encapsulates thousands of years of climate information such as temperature and precipitation, carrying the "historical memory" of the Earth's ecosystem. These glacial ice fragments are not only creative materials, but also "living fossils" of the Earth's climate.

2.1.2 The Flow of Instant Time. Eliasson places glacial ice on thick paper with a thin color layer, and the melting process of the ice becomes the "creative process" of the work - the melted ice water drives the pigment to slowly spread, forming irregular and organic color diffusion traces on the paper. This process is irreproducible and irreversible, and the melting speed and pigment diffusion direction of every minute and second are precisely recorded in the work, constituting the "instant time dimension" of the work.

2.1.3 Metaphor of circular time. The "thousand-year condensation" and "instantaneous melting" of glacial ice form a material cycle of "solid state - liquid state - gaseous state", echoing the life cycle of the world tree in Norse mythology and the logic of "destruction - rebirth" in the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarok. When the glacial ice completely melts, the color traces on paper become the "eternal imprint" of time - they are both proof of the glacier's existence and physical evidence of the passage of time, realizing the dialectical unity of "circular time" and "linear time".

It is noteworthy that Eliasson's physical sculptures are not mere "exhibitions of natural phenomena", but rather carry a strong ecological critique. In the context of global warming, the melting of Greenland glaciers is no longer a "means of artistic creation", but rather a "concrete expression of ecological crisis" - every drop of melting ice water in the work is a silent indictment of human activities disrupting the natural balance, allowing viewers to confront the ecological reality of glacier retreat when gazing at the work.



Figure 6. A work symbolizing the issue of glacier melting

2.2 Perceptual Sculpture. Time reconstruction of spatial construction.

Eliasson's perceptual sculptures draw inspiration from "Nordic regional culture", employ "optical illusion" as a technical means, and center around "audience interaction". The creative process of his masterpiece "By Means of a Sudden Intuitive Realization" (1996). (Eliasson, O. and Obrist, H.U.2008)

2.2.1 Spatial Translation of Regional Culture. The artwork is modeled after the traditional Icelandic Turf House, creating a closed and immersive space. As the birthplace of Norse mythology, Iceland's unique natural landscapes and cultural architecture embody the Norse people's reverence and reliance on nature. The Turf House, with its turf roof and stone walls, blends seamlessly into the natural environment, symbolizing the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. Eliasson transforms this architectural form into an artistic space, providing the audience with a venue to "return to the context of Norse nature and mythology." (Arbibliographies Modern. 1999).

2.2.2 The Time Illusion of Light and Shadow Technology. Within a sealed dome space, Eliasson installed strobe lights and water flow devices. The strobe lights flash at a specific frequency, creating a visual overlay with the continuously flowing water. Leveraging the principle of "persistence of vision," the continuously flowing water appears as static, ice-crystal-like droplets to the viewer's eyes, creating the visual illusion of "time freezing." This illusion is not a "denial" of time, but rather a "reconstruction" of time—it disrupts the inherent human perception of time as "linearly passing," allowing the viewer to experience the "mutability" and "subjectivity" of time.

2.2.3 Perception generation of audience interaction. The final completion of perception sculpting relies on the presence and interaction of the audience. When the audience steps into the dome space, they are not only "viewers" but also "perceivers" - each person's moving speed, viewing angle, and visual sensitivity are different, and their perception of "time freezing" will also vary. This personalized perception experience transforms time from an "objective physical quantity" into a "subjective psychological experience", echoing the intertwined time and space imagery of the "world tree connecting the worlds of life and death" in Norse mythology - in the work space, "the past" (thousands of years of glacial time), "the present" (the immediate experience of the audience), and "the future" (the unknown fate of ecology) are intertwined, forming a perception field that transcends time and space.(Figure 7)

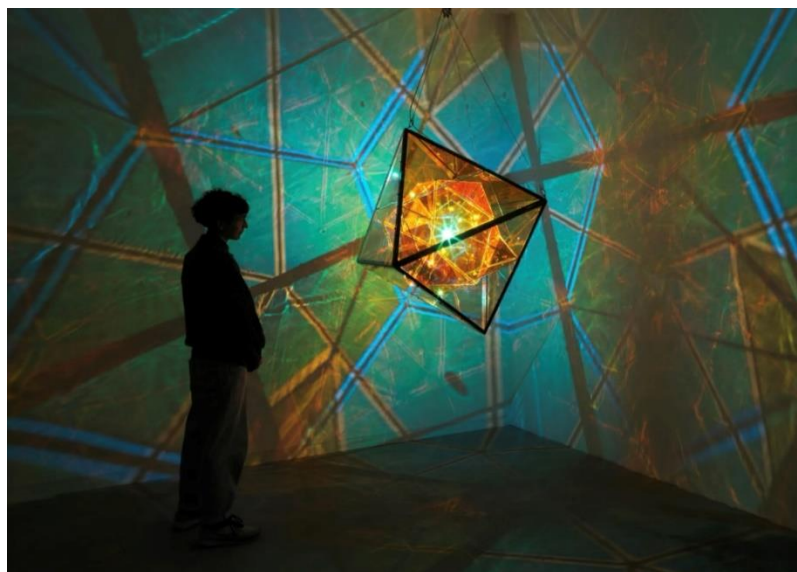


Figure 7. Strong contrast between light and shadow colors

3 Archival Practice Strategy. Construction of Natural Archives and Ecological Critique.

Eliasson's artistic practice does not end with the completion of his works, but extends to the systematic documentation and archival preservation of the process of their creation, establishing a "natural time archive". This archival practice strategy is not only a "preservation" of the works, but also a "deepening" of ecological issues.

The content of the "Natural Time Archive" encompasses the entire process of artistic creation, including geological information records of glacier samples (such as collection location, age, composition, etc.), video records of the creative process (such as real-time videos of glacier melting and pigment diffusion), drawing records of pigment diffusion trajectories (such as the color blending patterns of each artwork), and records of audience perception and experience (such as audience feedback, interviews, behavioral trajectories, etc.).

These archival materials are interconnected, forming a multidimensional archival system encompassing "natural time, creation time, and perceptual time", which comprehensively presents the generation logic and cultural connotation of the works.

The core value of the archive lies in establishing a dialogue bridge between traditional mythological time and contemporary ecological crisis. On the one hand, the glacier samples in the archive embody the cyclical time concept of Norse mythology, symbolizing the eternal cycle of natural systems. (Duranti, L. and Franks, P.C. 2019)

The photographic records of glacial melting and the color trajectory drawings also document the irreversible retreat of glaciers under the contemporary climate crisis - the two form a stark contrast, making the mythical "destruction and rebirth" no longer an abstract narrative, but a realistic issue concerning human survival.

Through the systematic preservation of archives, Eliasson endows traditional mythological motifs with contemporary ecological critique connotations, allowing

viewers to deeply recognize the destruction of natural time cycles by human activities when consulting the archives.

Eliasson's "Archive of Natural Time" is not a closed art collection, but rather a public and educational "ecological knowledge platform".

He has made the archive content accessible to the public through various means such as art gallery exhibitions, online archive access, and academic seminars, enabling more people to understand the history of glaciers, the current state of the climate crisis, and the connection between art and ecology.

This public archival practice breaks down the boundaries between art and the public, making artworks an important medium for promoting the awakening of ecological awareness. They are no longer merely "aesthetic objects" for appreciation, but rather "ecological tools" that trigger public reflection and promote social change. (Williams, B. and ChatGPT 2024)

4 Conclusion

Taking the motifs of Norse mythology as a starting point, employing "time sculpture" as a methodology, and extending to a "natural time archive", Olafur Eliasson has constructed an artistic system that integrates "aesthetic value, cultural connotation, and ecological critique".

His works not only allow the audience to appreciate the timeless beauty of natural materials, but also confront them with the grim reality of the contemporary ecological crisis. In his creations, art is no longer an "ivory tower" isolated from reality, but a "link" closely connected to nature, society, and human destiny.

Sissel Tolaas

Memory Imprint and Sensory Time in Olfactory Archives

1 Olfactory reconstruction of the Mimil Spring

In Norse mythology, the Well of Mimir is a fountain of wisdom located at the roots of the world tree. Those who drink from its waters gain cosmic-level knowledge and memory. "Memory" and "inheritance" are the core spiritual essence of this motif.

Sissel Tolaas captures the symbolic imagery of "memory stored in springs" in mythology keenly, using intangible and ethereal scents as a contemporary translation medium. Compared to sensory media such as sight and hearing, scent possesses a stronger subconscious penetrating power. It does not rely on concrete forms for presentation, yet it can directly evoke deep memories and emotional resonance in people. Just like the spring of Mimir, it carries the "perceptible" spiritual core in an "invisible" form. (Figure 8)

In Thurasdotir's creative logic, olfactory archives are no longer a simple collection of odor samples, but are endowed with the cultural metaphor of "sensory fountainhead".

The Mimmir Spring stores the wisdom of the mythical universe, while the Odor Archive preserves the collective memory and individual experiences of the Nordic land. Both essentially embody the concept of "achieving the cross-temporal continuation of memory through storage media". This reinterpretation not only retains the spiritual core of Nordic mythology but also reconstructs the path of "memory inheritance" in the language of contemporary art, giving ancient myths a new lease on life through olfactory sensory experiences.



Figure 8. Sissel Tolaas and her installation art

2 The practical path carved by time

2.1 Sensory sculpture. Smell as the material carrier of time.

The essence of "sculpting" lies in transforming intangible concepts into tangible forms. The author's innovation lies in utilizing scent as a sculpting tool, engraving the abstract "memory of time" into a perceptible sensory experience.

Since 1990, she has embarked on the construction of the "Smell Archive", which is not a random collection of scents but rather one with a clear geographical orientation towards Nordic culture.

The collection of over 7,000 odor samples covers the natural ecology and daily life scenarios of Northern Europe: from the natural dimensions of Nordic forest humus odor (mixed with the decaying leaves and moist moss), the mineral flavor of glacier meltwater (clear and slightly astringent with rocks), the salty and fishy smell of fjord sea breeze, to the cultural dimensions of traditional wooden house wood aroma (the warm and mellow scent of pine and oak after years of precipitation), the soapberry flavor of handmade wool fabric, and the seafood flavor of dried fish in fishing villages.

Each scent is a fragment of time captured in a moment - the scent of humus soil carries the seasonal cycle of the Nordic forests, while the aroma of wooden house timbers engraves the construction and living history of traditional residences.

These scent samples are sealed in specially crafted glass containers, accompanied by precise textual and chemical annotations, forming a "tangible" storage system. When the audience opens the container, the instant the scent molecules diffuse, it completes a sensory-level time travel: without the guidance of images or text, the scent directly triggers associative memories in the brain about Nordic land, nature, and life, transforming invisible time and memory into tangible experiences that can be smelled and felt. Assoc. (Prof. Firdevs SAĞLAM .2022)

2.2 Narrative sculpture. Reconstructing mythological space-time narrative through scent combination.

If a single scent sample can be seen as a "fragment" of time, then Tolass's scent composition practice is to piece these fragments together into a complete mythological narrative of time and space. Based on classic scenes from Norse mythology, she constructs an exclusive "mythological olfactory formula" through the blending and combination of scents, allowing the audience to embark on a sensory journey through mythological time and space through olfactory experience.

(Chakraborty, N. 2020)

For example, for the mythological scene of "the dark aura at the roots of the world tree", she did not create it out of thin air. Instead, based on the description in mythological texts that "the roots of the world tree extend deep underground, surrounding the Fountain of Mimir, where dragons and undead dwell", she selected the scent elements of the Nordic underground ecology - damp earthy smell, decaying fallen leaves, and the sweetish-sour taste of moss, supplemented by a trace of mineral scent, to simulate the dark and mysterious atmosphere of the deep underground.

For the "bright aura of Asgard", we extract the fresh aroma of Nordic alpine plants, the warm scent of sunlit pine needles, and the sweet fragrance of honey. Through the layered overlay of scents, we create a sense of brightness and sanctity, reminiscent of the mythical dwelling place of the gods.

At the exhibition, these scent formulas are placed in specific spatial installations. Without the need to read complex mythological texts, visitors can independently conjure up corresponding mythological scenes under the guidance of the scents. The core of this "narrative sculpture" lies in using scent as a narrative language, breaking away from the traditional art narrative mode that relies on vision, and allowing time and mythology to achieve a new reconstruction and expression in the sensory dimension. (Figure 9)



Figure 9. Memories of time and history

3 Archival practice strategy. The dual integration of scientificity and culturality.

Thurasdotir's olfactory archive is not an isolated artistic creation, but a complete practical system that combines scientificity, culturality, and communicability.

3.1 Classification and archiving. Establish a multi-dimensional odor database.

- Natural Environment: Based on the landform and climate of Northern Europe, it encompasses the scents of diverse ecosystems such as forests, glaciers, fjords, and tundra;
- Mythological scenes: Based on descriptions from Norse mythology texts, through research on folklore and textual criticism, the direction of odor elements corresponding to the scenes is preliminarily determined;
- Contemporary Life: Focusing on the ambiance of modern life in Northern Europe, encompassing the scents of urban streets, industrial plant areas, family kitchens, and other settings.

While categorizing, she introduced scientific analysis methods and collaborated with the chemistry laboratory to analyze the components of each odor sample, recording data such as its molecular structure and volatility. She also tied it to the corresponding cultural background, folklore, and historical documents, forming a three-dimensional archiving system of "odor sample + chemical data + cultural archive". (Figure 10)



Figure 10. Aromatic Art Installation

3.2 Analytical Synthesis. Cross-disciplinary Integration of Science and Mythology.

The value of archives lies in their utilization, rather than static storage. Sissel Tolaas combines mythological texts and folklore descriptions with chemical analysis data to create creative odor syntheses. This process is not a simple odor superposition, but a precise balance between science and art: for example, when synthesizing the "breath of the roots of the world tree," chemical data ensures the safety and stability of the odor components, while mythological texts provide creative direction for the tone and layering of the odor, ultimately achieving an odor formula where "science is the bone and culture is the soul". (Curran, R., N. Wognum and M. Borsato 2015).

3.3 Cross-border cooperation. Realize the cross-time and cross-space transmission of memory.

To prevent olfactory archives from becoming mere niche academic materials, Thurasdotir has leveraged cross-disciplinary collaborations to unlock the contemporary communication value of these archives. (Kochanska, E. and Pieriegud, J. 2014) She has partnered with Nordic fashion brands to craft bespoke mythological-themed scent backdrops for fashion shows, allowing audiences to immerse themselves in the spiritual essence of Nordic culture through their sense of smell while admiring the clothing

She collaborates with art galleries and museums to create olfactory immersive exhibitions, combining scent archives with installations and videos on mythological themes to build a multi-sensory narrative space. She also collaborates with educational institutions to incorporate scent archives into Nordic cultural courses, allowing the younger generation to inherit local cultural memories through sensory experiences.

4 Contemporary significance of practice

Sissel Tolaas' olfactory archive practice offers a fresh "sensory narrative" perspective for contemporary art. It challenges the long-dominant position of visual art,

demonstrating that scent, as an independent artistic language, can bear profound cultural connotations and the weight of memory.

(Lewis, B. 2026)

It also provides an innovative path for "cultural memory inheritance" - when the dissemination of words and images faces the dilemma of homogenization, the uniqueness of olfactory senses allows cultural memory to be perceived and remembered in a more infectious and human-oriented way.

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