



# ARCHIE MOORE

## LES EAUX D'AMOORE

# SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

DJON MUNDINE

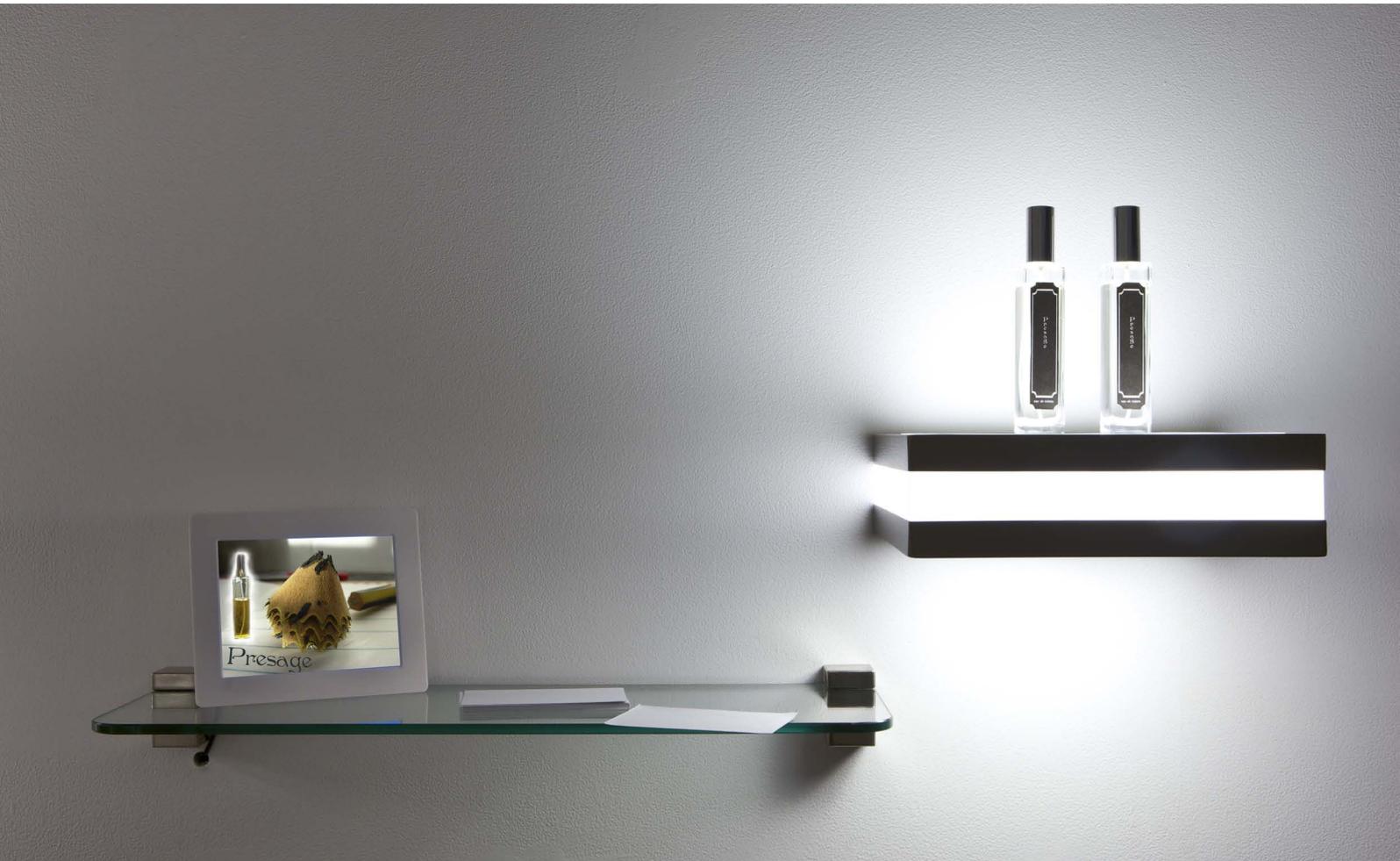
Perfume, aroma, smell, stink. As a child the most felt racist insult for me was 'you stink'. They didn't have to say, 'because you're Aboriginal'. That was understood. It made me feel ugly and despised. There is no defence for such stigmatising remarks. In later life it still stung. In their own personal way, everybody smells – everybody stinks.

Aboriginal people have always been told, 'why can't you be like Maoris or Africans who are so exotic'. Some 'white' Australian women have told me of how black African men had an erotic body smell. Africans are exotic; Aboriginals stink (apparently), or perhaps it's the stench and guilt of Aboriginal dead, of colonial crimes that still lingers in the air.

I once wrote of the work of Karla Dickens that memories flutter and bristle like coloured hair or strips of brightly dyed cloth in the breeze to catch your attention. They can evoke a Proustian response, where you're automatically moved to tears, or laugh out loud, and don't quite know why, by a sound, a word, a wind, heat or cold, or the scent of garlic, or a blossom. How beautiful and powerful are these moments, without even knowing the source of the emotional release. They lead us to search our minds for the small fragment of memory, time and event that stirred these strong feelings.

With Hongi, Maori people share air, breath of life, one's soul, and inadvertently smell. A bonding ritual of smoking marijuana is the 'shotgun' where both ends of the 'joint' are smoked at the same time to share the aroma, and people are face to face up close and personal. Smoking ceremonies are now a widespread, common pan-Aboriginal ritual for most public events. I've often found this as now almost impersonal and perfunctory. A just as important, but it would appear little-known ritual in the south, is the rubbing of your sweat on the mouth, eyes, ears, face, limbs and body of another person, to make you smell their smell, to heal and protect. It was the smell of the land, and the smell of the people. It was the smell of the ancestors of that 'country' so they will recognise you. It is as intimate as kissing, or sex and, due to this nature, is little practised in present day social exchanges. It's a very different sort of intimacy and still practised seriously in a number of Aboriginal groups.

In an earlier work of Archie Moore large blurred black words behind frosted glass beckoned the viewer closer until your nose was flattened against the pane when the words starkly appeared; BOONG NOSE. Perfume trade chemists, or really magicians, are known as a 'nose'. Archie Moore worked hand-in-hand with the Brisbane-based perfumer Jonathon Midgley of Damask Perfumery to achieve this amazing and intensely personal exhibition of mnemonic triggers.



Archie MOORE, *Presage*, 2014, from the series *Les Eaux d'Amoore*, custom made perfume compound in glass bottles, lightbox, shelves, digital display, testing cards, 39.5 x 88.0 x 28.5 cm (overall dimensions)  
Photo Jessica Maurer, courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney

I described in a review how the paintings of the late painter Sally Gabori were 'socialised' – she titled her seemingly 'abstract' landscapes as 'her father's country, her husband's country, and her mother's country, her brother's country and 'the river where I was born'. And so here with the aromatic portraits of Archie Moore. *Un Certain T'y* (his probable biological father's clothes smelling of wood smoke along with the smell of wet clay from excavation sites where he worked), *Presage* (French for initiation, for his first day at school, where he smelt the cedar of wood pencils and paper), *Sapphistication* (the smell of rum and Brut 33 from his aunty's lesbian friends), *Investiture* (his first girlfriend, who wore rose oil and Elizabeth Arden's Red Door), *Amoore* (a self-portrait personified by chewing gum, chocolate and dried apricots), *Wulu* (Kamilaroi for 'wattle' representing his country), *Bougres* (French for uncultured men found in a local country pub smelling of stale beer and cigarettes).

An Aboriginal elder once told me of how the first missionaries came to convert his community and how his people in turn, in reality, educated them, and others who came after them. As each generation of the Australian art world 'saw' a 'new' appearance of Indigenous art they strived to name it, to define and 'tame' and control it. It was however never 'conceptual', never 'cerebral or intelligent', never 'relational', but always ultimately remaining 'primitive' and less than Western art achievements.

Another stereotype is that silence or that to be reserved, equals stupidity. How wonderful it is to have the silent artist Archie Moore in our time and his art practice with us. How powerful it is to have his smell enrich our lives.

Djon Mundine, OAM, is a Bandjalung curator.



Archie MOORE, *Un Certain T'y*, 2014, from the series *Les Eaux d'Amoore*  
custom made perfume compounds in glass bottles, 2 x 50ml bottles each 15.5 x 2.5 x 2.5 cm  
Photo Jessica Maurer, courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney

## Archie Moore: *Les Eaux d'Amoore*

9 October – 4 December 2015

### LIST OF WORKS

#### Archie MOORE

Kamilaroi people, New South Wales

*Les Eaux d'Amoore*, 2014

custom made perfume compounds in glass bottles, light boxes, shelves, digital displays, testing cards, dimensions variable  
Courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney

#### Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art

University of South Australia  
55 North Terrace, Adelaide, SA 5000

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Cover image: Archie MOORE, *Les Eaux d'Amoore* (detail), 2014, custom made perfume compounds in glass bottles, lightboxes, shelves, digital displays, testing cards, dimensions variable  
Photo Jessica Maurer, courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney



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