

Art for the Knowing Nose

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The New York Times:

Peter De Cupere's "Tree Virus" sculpture wasn't much to look at: a dead, black tree rooted in a craggy white ball suspended over a dirt pit, all of it covered by a plastic igloo. Built on a college campus in the Netherlands in 2008, the whole thing might have been leftover scenery from a Tim Burton film if it weren't for the outrageous smell.

Inside the igloo, a heady mix of peppermint and black pepper saturated the air. It flooded the nose and stung the eyes. Most visitors cried; many ran away. Others seemed to enjoy it, laughing through the tears.

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Smell has an unfair advantage over the other senses when it comes to eliciting a response, researchers say. "There is a unique and directly intimate connection between where smell is processed in the brain and where memory is stored," said Rachel Herz, a psychologist at Brown University and the author of "The Scent of Desire: Discovering Our Enigmatic Sense of Smell." The olfactory bulb — the bundle of neurons that transmits information from the nose to the brain — is part of the limbic system, which supports emotion, long-term memory and adrenaline flow. "This is where that special characteristic that really distinguishes olfaction comes from."

Read the whole story: [The New York Times](#)