

## Archie Moore – Les Eaux d'Amoore

The Commercial Gallery, Sydney  
13/06/14 – 12/07/14

exhibition text by Bec Dean

Archie Moore's diverse practice gives form and presence to the frail substances upon which Australian mainstream culture is built, examining the repercussions of its colonial past and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. He takes materials that we might consider benign and gives them weight and power with language that elicits racial and religious meaning. His new work, *Les Eaux d'Amoore*, a series of seven portraits in perfume, engages with another kind of fabrication of meaning.

Enfleurage, expression and distillation are perfume extraction techniques that enable a scent to be taken from its origins and be applied to the human body. Ordinarily, through these processes, a flower's scent can retain vibrancy and aliveness long after its plant origin has died, and in this way traditional perfume manufacture could be described as a kind of plant memorial. Perfume is olfactory representation, a semblance which stands in for the dead original, rather like a photograph of a person. But, unlike photographs which can be stored away and forgotten, scents arrive in our nostrils unbidden, triggering biochemical reactions that can stimulate strong memories, associations and feelings. We can't shut them out. They assault us.

Moore's series of seven perfume portraits, which venture considerably beyond the standard repertoire of traditional perfumes, delve deeply into the idea of scent as memory and seat of prejudice. Working with a master perfumer to resynthesise the strongly associative smells of his youth in South-East Queensland, this suite of aromas range from the at-face-value benign but in-fact anxiety-inducing odours of graphite pencils and paper from his first day of school in *Presage*, to the rather more routinely unpleasant combination of Brut 33 and rum in *Sapphistication*. For Moore, his concoctions are recipes associated with familial uncertainty, shame, poverty and the brutal slap of everyday racism as experienced by an Aboriginal child growing up in a less than hospitable white dominated society. But how will we interpret them from our own perspectives? Like traditional perfumes, these scents may react strongly against our own skin, inflame our nostrils, cause nausea or force thought to the images they stir. For some they may smell like nothing much at all.

In this work, Moore has crafted olfactory resonances of his past which, when we encounter them, will be absorbed by our bodies whether we want them to be or not. As we bring the scents inside ourselves, can we imagine the memories of the artist that they relate to, or the possibility/impossibility for empathy, understanding or even reconciliation? As with perfume, this transference of smell-memory from origin to host is highly subjective, impossible to grasp or to retain. The scent eventually wears off. And, like memories or personal experiences, Moore asks can we ever really share, know or understand those of another?