

Brian Goeltzenleuchter turns scent into an art form

By Seth Combs

The second in our series on the artists awarded grants through the Creative Catalyst Fund

When the San Diego Foundation announced the winners of its Creative Catalyst grants program this past January, Brian Goeltzenleuchter's project certainly looked and sounded interesting. Still, to hear him explain it, the "look" and "sound" will have very little to do with anything.

"Here, smell this," he says excitedly in his Talmadge studio, carefully handing over a brown bottle of liquid that smells like freshly-cut grass. "This is kind of like perfume chemistry. If you mix that one with this one, you'll get the smell of burnt grass."

Goeltzenleuchter's project, for which he was awarded \$20,000 and paired with local literary nonprofit San Diego Writers Ink, is all about olfaction or, simply put, our sense of smell. It's a rather curious medium, but over the past five years, he's become somewhat of a smell chemist, mixing up liquid scents (mostly purchased online) to create concoctions meant to induce cerebral reactions in the smeller.

The San Diego native's most recent show was in January at the *San Diego Keeps Her Promise: Balboa Park at 100* exhibition at the San Diego Art Institute. He interviewed six people about their memories of Balboa Park and created scents associated with their "smell stories." Patrons would then smell these scents and take a self-guided tour of places associated with the memories, like the botanical garden and the lily pond (see more at bqprojects.com).

Goeltzenleuchter will extend this kind of experience to the Creative Catalyst show, but in a much broader way. The idea is to have a sort of spoken-word-style reading with writers' "olfactory memoirs" accompanied by the smells from the stories.

"We'll be pumping in a smell to a room that's negatively pressurized so we can pump it right back out," says Goeltzenleuchter, who's working with an engineer to build a machine capable of this. "We need it so that within 30 seconds, an entire room of air is essentially exchanged."

While there's no venue yet for the show and San Diego Writers Ink is still work shopping the stories, Goeltzenleuchter is confident the resulting work will be both startling and enjoyable.

"This isn't going to be like walking by the Macy's perfume counter," Goeltzenleuchter says. "We want it to be cinematic. This will be more along the lines of walking through a park. It's not all good smells. That's what I like about olfaction as an art form. You can choose to look at something or taste something. Smell just happens. If you're breathing, you're smelling."

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