



Hisako Inoue

(Photo:Yumiko Utsu)

Hisako Inoue creates interactive installations and workshops and produces communication programs, and exhibitions based on the concept of the relationship between memory and smell. Her representative workshops include "Kunkun walk," in which participants enjoy the environment, culture, and history through the memory of smells at educational institutions, museums, libraries, botanical gardens, corporations, parks, and airports in Japan and abroad.

In 2024, she did exhibitions and workshops at Aomori Contemporary Art Center [ACAC] + Hirosaki University, ONO POINT ART SPACE (Yokohama), Tokyo University of the Arts + YAU (Tokyo). In 2023, Yokosuka Museum of Art, Steering Committee for Supporting Children with Disabilities. In 2022, Tokyo Shibuya koen-dori Gallery, Chiba City Museum of Art, Mori Art Museum and others. In 2017, "Library of Smell" at

Museum Villa Stuck in Munich (collaboration: Mika Shirasu + Takuro Shibayama). In 2019, developed the olfactory workshop program "Smelling our way through the zoos" in collaboration with WWF Japan and Japanese zoos. This program won the Good Design Award 2019. In 2018, "Library of smell" was the finalist at The Art and Olfaction Awards 2018 in London.

Tracing My Memories through Smell Documentation of an Inclusive Program and Its Current Development

Hisako Inoue

Abstract

The inclusive program "Tracing My Memories through Smell" was held at Tokyo Shibuya Kōen-Dōri Gallery over four days, from May to June 2022, and was followed by a two-week exhibition. The program brought together participants from diverse backgrounds—including those who were sighted, blind, hearing, and deaf—to explore "memories of smells" unique to each individual. By bridging generational and gender divides, participants were encouraged to share their experiences while respecting each other's perspectives and sensitivities. Through this collaborative process, ten participants created personal "Scented Life Timelines," tracing scent-related memories from birth to the present. The project concluded with an exhibition featuring the completed timelines alongside corresponding fragrant items. The exhibition allowed over 560 visitors to engage with the participants' work and reflect on the connection between their own lives and scents. This paper presents the process and results of our project, while exploring the potential and future growth of inclusive recreation programs.

Keywords: *Inclusive, Workshop, Timeline, Smell, Memory, Communication*

Introduction

I create multi-sensory artworks that explore the theme of smell and memory. From May to June 2022, I organized an inclusive art program titled "Tracing My Memories through Smell" at Tokyo Shibuya Kōen-dōri Gallery. The project fostered dialogue on equal terms between people with and without disabilities, encouraging mutual respect for each individual's sensory experiences. It transcended generational and gender boundaries, allowing participants to learn from each other's life stories while creating their own personal "Scented Life Timelines."

The workshop, attended by ten participants of various ages, focused on sharing unique life experiences, from birth to the future, and creating individual timelines. Later, we held an exhibition featuring the timelines, paired with fragrant items representing each participant's life journey. This exhibition attracted around 560 visitors, offering them the opportunity to reflect on the connection between scents and life. This paper examines the process and the outcomes of the program, discussing the potential of such work and the challenges of fostering an inclusive society.

1. The Purpose of the "Scent and Memory" Inclusive Program

1-1. The co-development and Implementation

Since 2003, I have co-developed and implemented programs with special-needs schools, museums, and local government-affiliated NPOs, where people with diverse physical sensitivities could recall and share memories through scents. In February 2020, the Tokyo Shibuya Kōen-dōri Gallery, a Tokyo-based facility specializing ¹ in Art Brut exhibitions and inclusive programs, was established. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the

gallery began full-scale operations in October 2021, at which point I was invited to co-develop a program focused on scent and memory. After six months of preparation, we held the workshop "Tracing My Memories through Smell" from May to June 2022, followed by the exhibition.

1-2. The Concept

In the 1960s, American psychiatrist Dr. Robert Butler introduced "reminiscence therapy ²," a psychological method that uses familiar objects, music, and photos to help people recall and share past experiences. It can be said that my scent-based program applies a similar approach. Smell is a unique sensation. Olfactory experience is visceral and cannot be shared with others. In developed countries, where people tend to process information more quickly through sight and sound, vocabulary to express smells is often limited. To convey an olfactory experience, one must recall and verbalize past scent memories. Since smells cannot be directly shared, the ability to describe them holds the key to communicating the experience. The workshop's goal was for participants of various ages from 10 to 60 to look back on their daily lives, recall certain smells, and create a scent-based timeline, fostering new perspectives on their lives. Furthermore, through the subsequent exhibition, we provided visitors with an opportunity to reflect on their own lives, passing the memory baton even further.

1-3. The Program Preparation and Implementation

Following the 2021 pandemic, hybrid education, combining remote and in-person classes, became common in educational institutions. This program was implemented in both formats. Online participants were paired with on-site staff who provided the necessary support, watched the monitors, supplied

their mentees with additional visual information, and bridged communication gaps between the members. Because we utilized a variety of fragrant items, we were able to share interesting differences between the reactions of the participants at the venue and the sensations created by the online distance.

Depending on the members' physical condition and their milieu, the way to manage the support system differs between face-to-face and online sessions. For instance, when we held the inclusive program "The Story of Smell ³" online in 2021, audio-based communication with visually impaired participants worked well. They did not feel any gaps between activities as long as they did not change their position or use items. On the other hand, supporting deaf participants during online sessions required more visual support than in face-to-face programs. If the program exceeds three hours, the organizer will need at least two sign language interpreters (* the same applies to in-person sessions) and text support to reduce fatigue and burden for the sign language interpreters. In addition, participants are encouraged to use multiple tabs on their screens, such as a tab to see the sign language interpreter and read captions fixed with a pinning function and a tab to monitor the progress of the entire program. The latter makes them more heavily equipped compared to face-to-face sessions.

For "Tracing My Memories through Smell," we set up an operational system to foster close cooperation among four facilitators, two sign language interpreters, three gallery staff members, two video staff members, and the instructor (Hisako Inoue).

The four facilitators held a training session two weeks before the program to simulate the sensory experience of not being able to see and hear. Training methods included, for instance, walking with eyes covered, assisting those who were walking blindfolded, and sharing activities that could not be visualized. In addition, participants learned how to perform activities and provide assistance in situations where loud music was played and surrounding sounds were blocked out.

Two sign language interpreters, Yūko Setoguchi and Misa Wada, who are well acquainted with working within the context of an art project, were asked to participate in the group work as part of the team to facilitate the participants' conversations.

The program also emphasized the importance of archiving the process and invited photographer Aoi Kudō and filmmaker Hideto Miyuki to document the event. Staying close to every participant, they did not miss a moment of importance and created a wonderful record of the event. Considering the unfolding events, Mr. Miyuki developed and kept in mind multiple plots during the shooting, each time setting up a key person of the day. Three months after the end of the program, the entire process was condensed into a 40-minute archival video that captured the vivid expressions of the participants.⁴



1-1 Self introduction time



1-2 Dialogue with a remote participant about smell



1-3 Group activity Facilitate dialogue through written communication

Photo1 : Team Meeting (program Day 1.)

Photographer : Aoi Kudo/Tokyo Shibuya koen-dori gallery exchange program [Tracing my memory through smell] Offer : the same gallery

1-4. The Communication Rules

During the workshop, we established five communication rules: (1) Avoid using vague terms like "this" or "that." (2) Do not speak and listen when someone else is talking. (3) Introduce yourself before speaking. (4) Work with sign language interpreters and speak slowly. (5) Use written notes to aid conversation. We checked various aspects of the venue, including tactile maps and seating arrangements, to ensure an inclusive experience for all participants.

In addition, each time before welcoming participants and conducting the activity we checked various aspects of the venue, including making sure there was a tactile map of the venue that could be experienced through the sense of touch, verifying the configuration of the venue and positioning the sign language interpreters, caregivers, and service dogs, placing staff members where their voices could be easily heard, carefully checking the viewing angles for the cameras and planning the flow with the shooting director and the photographer. Becoming aware and reflecting on one's unconscious behavior in daily conversation provided a valuable experience in fostering compassion for others.

2. The Workshop Process

2-1. Four Days of Reflecting on Life Together

It is difficult for participants who have never met each other before to suddenly open up and foster conversation. Therefore, the four-day process was carefully planned so that participants could recall their memories naturally through dialogue, using smell as a communication tool.

Day 1: May 7, "Talking about Smell." Participants warmed up their sense of smell and introduced themselves while drinking original medicinal tea prepared by Maho Suetsugu, a Chinese herbal medicine pharmacist. The guest speaker, Mika Shirasu, an Olfactologist, led a lecture on the science of smell, using fragrant items to explore the unique way each person perceives scent. Participants then created "sensory sheets" to analyze their impressions, sharing personal memories tied to the scents they had brought from home. As the discussions unfolded, the tension in the hall gradually dissolved, and

the personalities and sensitivities of each participant came into view, bringing the first day to a close. (Photo.1), (Photo.2)

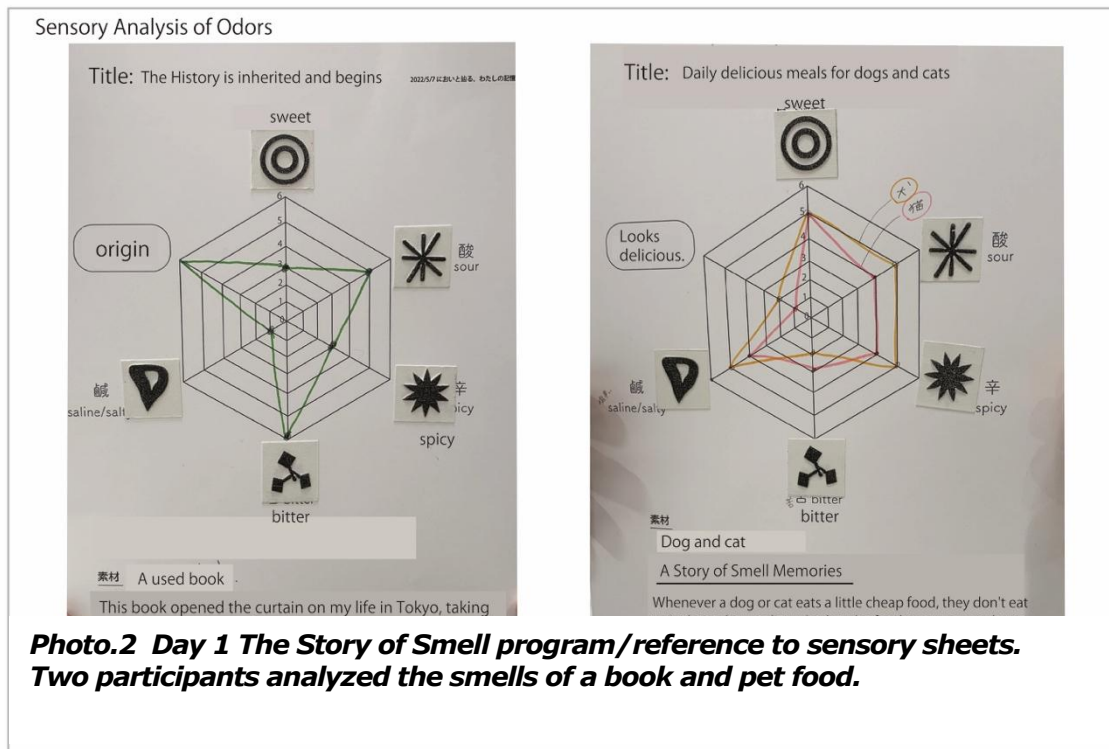


Photo.2 Day 1 The Story of Smell program/reference to sensory sheets. Two participants analyzed the smells of a book and pet food.

May 7, 2022 The story of smell program @ Shibuya koen-dori Gallery

Day 2: May 14: "Life is Smell, Life is OO." Participants reflected on the smells they had encountered throughout their lives, from birth to the present. They shared memories of significant moments, discussed the smells associated with these milestones, and began creating their own personal "Scented Life Timeline."

Day 3: May 21: "Mini KUNKUN Walk" and exhibition preparation. As this was a one-day program, the morning session took participants outside the gallery for a "scent walk" through the streets of Shibuya. In the afternoon, they resumed working on their timelines.

Day 4: June 11: Preparing the space for the "Tracing My Memories

through Smell" exhibition. All participants worked together to set up their own exhibits.

Throughout these four days, scent became a medium for emotional release and connection between participants. Every session ran over time as conversations flowed well beyond the program's scheduled end. Witnessing the participants' converse freely, feeling a deep sense of connection, and being in a space filled with laughter created a truly blissful experience.

2-2. The Scented Life Timelines

Recalling memories of smells and verbalizing life experiences requires a considerable amount of time. Group discussions were organized in pairs of three to four participants, who were encouraged to gently reflect on their pasts, sharing memories such as the scents of their favorite childhood items or the nicknames their families used for them. Each participant recalled scent-related situations from different life stages—ages 0, 3, 5, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, the present, and the future—and handwrote them on "chronology cards." For visually impaired participants, staff members took dictation and compiled their responses. Of course, participants were not required to discuss anything they felt uncomfortable disclosing or did not wish to share. They were encouraged to write about topics such as insightful hobbies they were passionate about, which helped illuminate their lives, or from the perspective of an imaginary person. While a fictitious chronology may seem to lack authenticity, it still captures genuine experiences from the perspective of an individual's inner life, such as memories of scents and scenery. We welcomed this approach as a mirror that fully represents the person's life.

The maximum number of episodes included in the chronology was set at 25. The design was created to allow each participant's contributions to fit onto a piece of tapestry measuring approximately 75cm wide by 120cm long, using a font size of 32 points with a maximum of 250 characters for each decade, resulting in a total of 6,350 characters. However, more than half of the episodes overflowed into dense narratives surpassing the character limit. Ultimately, everything was adjusted to fit dimensions exceeding 210cm in length. (Photo.3)

3. The Results and Future Prospects

The timeline's length is not solely determined by age; it reflects how people live daily. Every unique life is a magnificent journey filled with joy, anger, sorrow, highs, and lows, navigating various conflicts to embrace the present. Among the participants in this year's event were individuals who shared their experiences of losing their eyesight in later life, those who have navigated a journey between life and death and are now living resiliently, young caregivers who had forged a new future through their experiences, and those striving to achieve their dreams. For all of them, the project created a unique opportunity to share their own biographical stories and to see them in a new light as if they were truly transformative events or miraculous encounters.

Participants also shared their reflections on the quality of the workshops. One remarked, "It was fascinating to see how the walls around my heart were torn down with each session, shifting my perspective to a more positive one as I looked back at my life through the lens of scent." Another participant expressed, "I felt a strange sensation as if I were experiencing reincarnation; my memories were awakened, allowing me to relive them through a simulated experience. When I read the timeline

for the future in 2076, I realized that I would no longer be in this world, and I felt the joy of honestly passing the baton to the future."



**Photo.3 : [Tracing my memory through smell] exhibition at the venue
Photographer : Aoi Kudo / Tokyo Shibuya koen-dori gallery exchange
program [Tracing my memory through smell] Offer : the same
gallery**

Conclusion

After the exhibition, visitors remarked, "It was a wonderful exhibition that deeply captured each person's story and a moment in their life, making me believe that 'smell' could change the world—from the individual to others, to society, and across different cultures," or "The chronology of each individual felt like reading a novel." Hearing this, I felt we had truly succeeded in touching people's hearts and passing on the baton of memory to others.

In June 2021, to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities Japan revised the Law and set a new goal to create a society where all citizens, regardless of disabilities, respect each other's personality and individuality and support one another.⁵ I believe the inclusive art program "Tracing My Memories through Smell" has brought us closer to this goal by promoting diversity and raising awareness for the future (Figure 3). Since 2023, I have expanded my activities beyond the art field to include regional projects, implementing programs in collaboration with the Yokohama City Welfare Council and special-needs schools, as well as an inclusive "Smell and Memory" program with Kazo City in Saitama Prefecture.

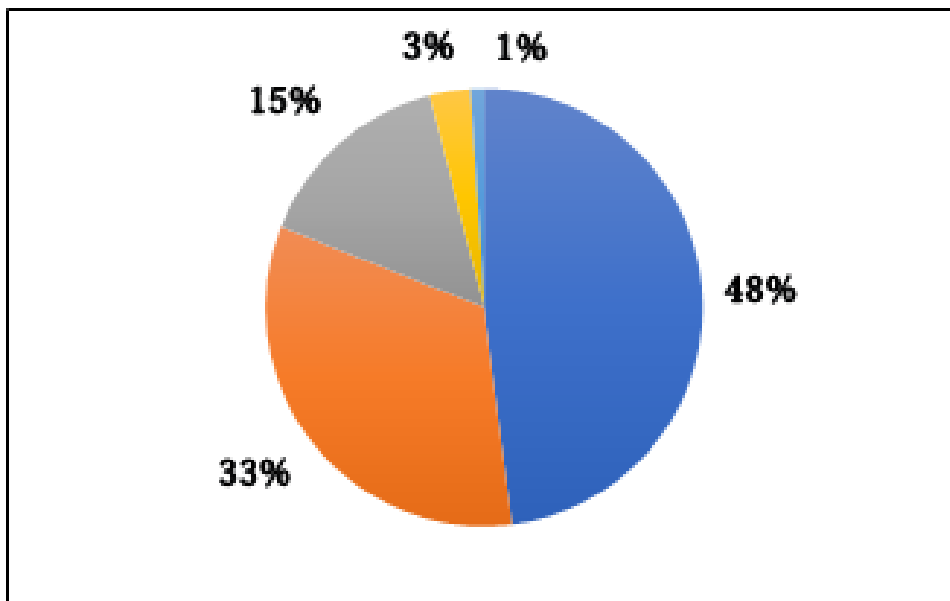


Figure 3: Are you interested in the potential of art in a symbiotic society (10 respondents) Breakdown: 48% very much, 33% yes, 15% no, 3% not much, 1% no (Produced and provided by Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery)

If we can create a society where everyone communicates in diverse ways—such as viewing sign language as common knowledge, a foreign language

to be learned, or considering becoming someone's eyes a normal part of daily life—and if we foster an environment where individuals support one another without labeling it as a disability, we can cultivate a more prosperous culture and contribute to a more symbiotic society. I will continue our efforts to ensure that the program "Tracing My Memories through Smells" remains a catalyst for raising awareness in people's hearts and minds.

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Olfactologist:

Mika Shirasu (Specially Appointed Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, The University of Tokyo)

Photographer: Aoi Kudō

Filmmaker: Hideto Miyuki

Staff: Emi Hayashi, Shoko Aoki, Kotoka Hidano, Yui Itomi

Sign Language Interpreters: Yūko Setoguchi, Misa Wada

Props: Kampo Life Design (Maho Suetsugu)

10 participants

Translator: KUZMINA EKATERINA, Naoko Hatta

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