

Fragrance and Aroma Painting

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Introduction

Fragrance painting means: smelling a part of a plant or any other sample and transforming it into a picture.

Fragrance painting is a method to transform sense perception into imagination with full consciousness, experiencing the etheric qualities of substances by using art as a tool.

In the following paper Torsten, who developed the method and Jasmin, who is performing it in workshops, present a practical example of a workshop. The background and theory of the method are described and it is introduced as an extension of the Aroma Painting method.

In 1920 Rudolf Steiner mentions a method for scientists to enhance their consciousness from sense perception into imagination (see literature at the end of this text). Here we want to outline how to practice this method in research and workshops.

We would always recommend beginning with a short description of the method and of the procedure the participants should follow, and then start doing, step by step. The background and theory can be explained later.

Workshop procedure

Materials needed:

1. Samples to smell or taste
2. Colours (we recommend pastel chalks, but others are fine too. Watercolours are too difficult to use in a short period of time)
3. Drawing paper (white printer paper is fine)
4. Cleaning paper or cloth for the hands

Procedure:

1. Prepare the working places

Before the participants arrive, each table should have an open colour box, the painting paper and the paper towels/cloth. It should give the impression of an invitation.



2. When the participants are seated, give a short introduction to the method

If we look at nature in our normal state of consciousness, we do not only have sense perceptions, but always bring thoughts into the picture of what we see. For example, we look at a plant and immediately we start to think: “plant”, “leaves”, “stem”, “rose”. We do not only have pure perceptions but fill our perception with concepts. Rudolf Steiner mentions that we should try to get a pure perception without having concepts. If we let go of our concepts, we clear our view and can see the spiritual world. This is very difficult. So Rudolf Steiner suggests the tool of “symbolising the sense perception”. What does he mean with symbolisation? In our view this means transforming the pure sense perception into a picture, while you are perceiving/observing.

To train the mind, it is easier to do this with the senses of smell and taste instead of using the sense of sight, because in these fields we do not have so many concepts. So, let’s start with smelling.

3. Smelling and symbolisation

The participants should be seated at a table and establish a calm mood before starting. Ask them to kindly stop talking and be quiet during the exercise so that they can concentrate.

A tray with the samples (one tray or something similar for each sample) is prepared. Let the participants choose one of the samples. This allows them to start freely, and they connect with one of the objects and become active. You ask them to smell and to observe what appears, and not to ask themselves “what is it?” but “what is it like?”. They then have the

task of bringing the experience into a coloured picture. Any picture will be fine: there is no right or wrong picture.

As samples you can take any part of a plant, because each has a specific odour. But it is easier to start with strong-smelling parts, like spicy leaves or seeds.

We have had good experiences with the seeds of anise (*Pimpinella anisum*), caraway (*Carum carvi*) and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) which are easy to obtain.

First observation: anise

You take the first sample in one hand and smell it. You can squeeze the seeds, so they will give more scent. You breathe in, and while breathing you inhale the scent. Now you experience the qualities of the anise in yourself and try to feel the quality without thinking of it and without forming terms. You now try to bring it into a picture. You will notice that you come into a time process. You experience some qualities at first that you try to transform. You are using your fantasy and trying to bring the quality what you discover into a shade of colour that fits and into a form or movement on the paper. You experience a quality in the scent that has a certain feeling, and you look for a colour that has the same feeling quality. You let the expression come through the colour. After painting that, you smell again and experience new qualities and try to paint these as well. And so on. After some minutes you have created an inner landscape of the scent of anise, and you have symbolised it.

When the participants are smelling, it often takes a minute or more before they start drawing. It is important not to talk now, so that we come away from the field of words, calm down and become more open to the observations. After 3 to 7 minutes most of the participants have finished.



Symbolisation of the scent of anise

After we have observed and symbolised, it is important to ask the participants to formulate in words what they have experienced and to share it in the group. Maybe you write it down. This helps to ground this exceptional observation.

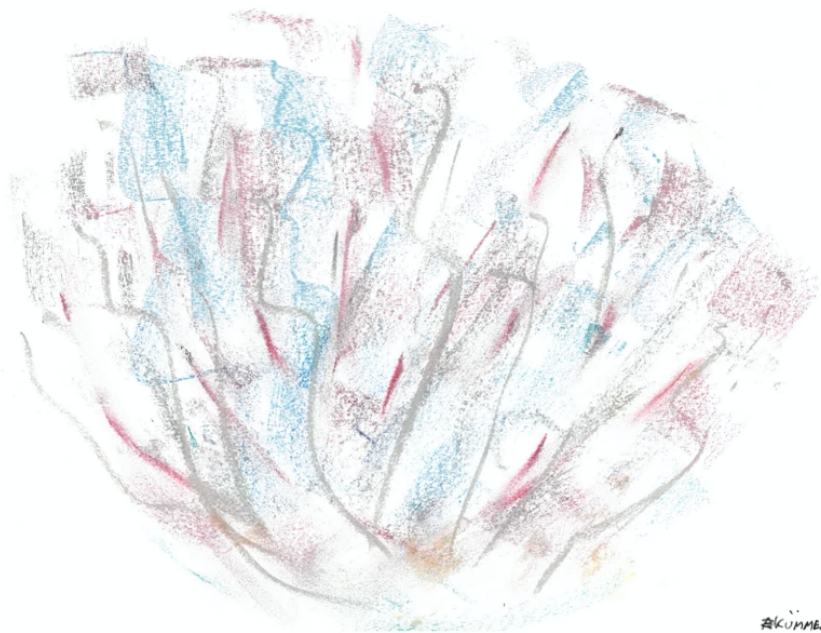
During the exchange, do not comment on what the participants say. Just register it and maybe repeat it to check if you have understood.

Examples for a description of anise can be: "It is immediately fresh, cooling and expanding. It is very intense; it has a little freshness and a strong vitality. There is a weak dark ground."

This whole process from smelling and drawing to talking about it, takes about 10 to 15 minutes for one object/sample.

Second observation: caraway

Now ask the participants to take a new sheet of paper and start with the second observation. Here it is caraway seed (*Carum carvi*).



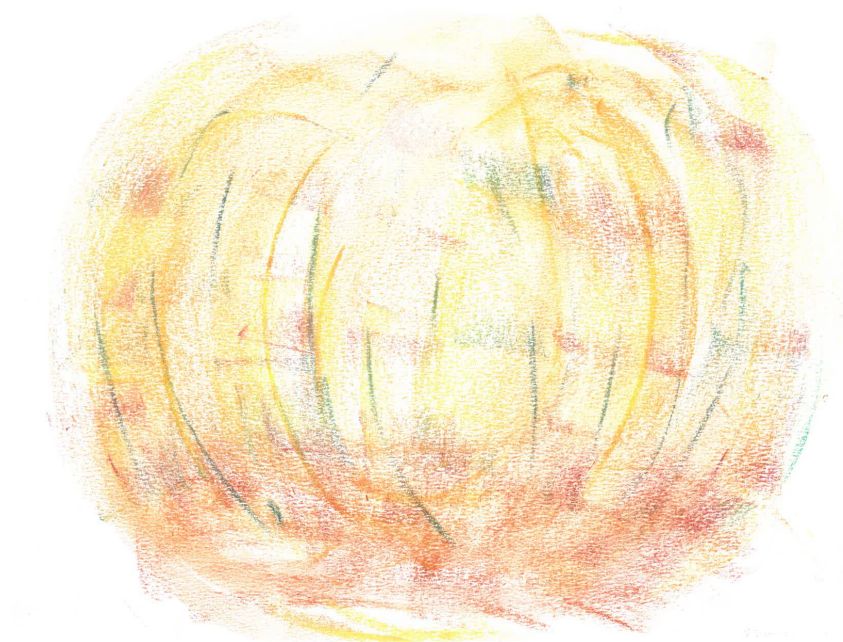
Symbolisation of the scent of caraway

Description: The scent of caraway is immediately warm, light, round and wrapping; it gains substance over time and is strongly grounded. The caraway substance is much darker and more on the ground than the quality of the anise. The caraway is more concentrated and more moving. It feels more down in the stomach. So, with these two scents we have a polarity of qualities: anise is expanding and light and caraway is concentrating and darker.

Third observation: fennel

Now a new sheet of paper is taken. It is good to wait until everything is prepared for the next round before going onto the next smelling. If the participants first get the sample and then prepare the next sheet of paper, it makes too much noise and unrest in the room. Keep the atmosphere calm and concentrated.

Let the participants take their third sample, in this case fennel seed (*Foeniculum vulgare*). If we take only two samples, we automatically come into a polarity. By taking a third object we come out of the polarity. It becomes more complicated with three observations but it opens the mind into the real dimension of what we will observe in the imaginative world. It gives at least a glimpse.



Symbolisation of the scent of fennel

Description: "At the beginning strongly aromatic, earth-like, warming, wrapping. The fennel is aromatic, light fresh-smelling and much more moving than the other two. It has no darkness, it is calming, softening and balancing."

After the third observation, you can ask the remaining participants who have not so far shared their experience to describe their three experiences and show their three pictures.

Doing a session in this way with three samples and 12 participants takes about one hour.

Additional points

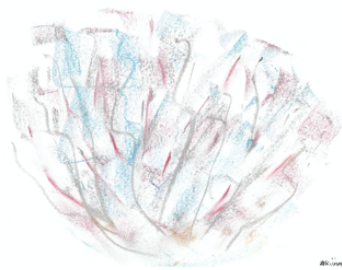
Some people like to look at all the pictures afterwards. You can pin them to a wall or lay them on the floor: one person's pictures from left to right in a row and the next under it. In this way you get an overview, and the people like to see similarities between their pictures. Some people like to make three groups with all anise pictures in one spot and the caraway in

another, and so on. This is also nice because you see the general colour in the three places. But it is less strict. Looking at all the pictures this way takes at least 20 to 30 minutes. Do not underestimate this. But it is nice to do if you have the time.

Jasmin paints it this way:



Anise



Caraway



Fennel

Torsten paints it this way:



Anise



Caraway



Fennel

The pictures were drawn without seeing each other's during the process. We think the samples look quite similar, but that is not important. The pictures do not have to be similar: it is more important to go from picture to picture and feel the change and diversity of qualities between them.

Types of observations

Most people make exact and interesting observations. Some categories of what can be described:

1. Movements, developments. Pairs such as dark and light, warm and cold, up and down, and so on. These are descriptions on the etheric level, and these are the observations we are looking for.
2. Some people describe memories such as: "this reminds me of a meadow", and they have the picture of a meadow in mind. Then you can ask: "What did you experience to think of a meadow? What was the stimulus for remembering a meadow?" If they say something like, "the light fresh quality in the smell", then you realise that this experience/observation induced the memory.

3. Some describe feelings such as, “this wakes me up” or “this makes me feel sleepy”. These are the observations of the soul, of the astral. With everything you observe there is always a change in mood of the observing people.

4. Some people make judgements such as: “I don’t like this” or “I love this”. There again we can ask what quality they observed to come to this judgement. Judging is a quality of the intellect, that is added to the observation and that we try to avoid.

Additional descriptions and observations of the plants

After the observations you can talk about the use of the plants in the kitchen and as remedies: anise is used for sweet buttery cakes and waffles. Caraway is used as a spice in fatty meals or with cabbage: it activates the digestion. Fennel is a spice and also a remedy against bloating of the stomach. It calms the stomach, aiding the rhythm of digestion.

You can also look at the shapes and flowers of the plants or where they like to grow. This all helps to form an inner picture. But it is not as important as smelling. So, it is hopefully evident that there is an inner connection between the observations of the imagination of the scent and the different digestive effects.

Theory/background

We recommend presenting the theory or background of the method. The best way to do so is to talk about it in two parts, i.e. before and after the smelling and symbolising.

1. What happens in this process

In normal perception we transform the perception into concepts. We smell the seed and identify the anise-scent as anise. In doing so we close the perception and have a result in the form of a word with meaning. If, on the other hand, we try to symbolise, we dive into the quality of what we experience. We deepen the experience and come to experiences of forces, of movements, of relationships. They appear as feelings that take us into their existence. We then use our phantasy to create a representative colour and form to picture the quality that we experience. This means that we activate our intention and our will. If we have a normal sense perception, we only see the given, the past, and are passively receiving. If we try to paint the experienced inner quality, we create something new with our will and we move into the future. In this way we change from passive perception to active creation. In doing so, our will becomes an organ for the qualities of the perception. The will, in which we are normally asleep and of which we are unaware, becomes enlightened.

When we perform this process it is good not to think too much and, after becoming accustomed to it, we think less and less and increasingly intuitively choose a colour and let ourselves be guided by the smell to create a form with it, through the qualities of the scent. We can say that the scent is painting the picture, and we are the transmitter for it: the witness of a vital activity in ourselves.

2. Some ideas about what we are doing

Rudolf Steiner claims that if we let the pure sense perception stream into us, our “physical organism reacts by creating Imaginations”. What are imaginations? If we expect new kinds of physical pictures, we will be wrong. These would be hallucinations. Instead, we experience forces and movements, we experience different qualities of vitality. We are in the world of constant movement without seeing pictures of things. We are in something, a little like being in a river. And in the same moment we can observe this and bring it to consciousness.

What we experience is not only taking place in our physical body and is not perception with a physical sense, though starting from there. We have experiences with the whole etheric body. The scent is the entrance door, but the etheric body becomes an organ to observe the quality. When smelling, some people say “it is expanding” and make gestures that go far beyond the boundaries of the physical body. We experience something in a new area of ourselves, in the etheric body.

We make observations that are within us but at the same time are also objective. Rudolf Steiner says these are subjective-objective observations, and states that Goethe had a desire for these kinds of experiences.

It seems that the experiences come from within our centre, from a fountain in the area of our heart.

By creating an artistic picture, this method therefore helps us to actively go with our consciousness from a sense perception to imaginations of the qualities.

3. Rudolf Steiner points out that we have certain basic qualities in the imaginations and that these relate to three senses. There is a sense for movement, meaning we can feel the movement of our body and, even if it is dark, we can find our nose with our hand or finger. We then have a sense that allows us to stand upright and orientate towards the earth. Our sense for balance. And the third sense is for our own vitality: In the morning we feel fresh and good, but in the evening we feel tired and weak. These three are what are known as the lower senses. Here in our observation, we find that the substances give us movements, they orientate us to the earth, and they show us vitality or weakness. So we experience the quality of the substance through the basic qualities of these senses. Rudolf Steiner says that we see the bare inside of the lower senses. And he claims: “When one has penetrated as far as that which lives in the sense of balance, the sense of life, and the sense of movement, one has reached something that one experiences initially as the true inner being of man because of its transparency.” (See literature at the end of the text)

4. A few words about memorising

These experiences that we made cannot be remembered. We do not think them with our physical brain. We experience them in the etheric world. They become part of the world ether. This means we must create the experience again if we want to experience it. It helps to keep the pictures. And if we look at them sometime later, we can recreate a slight memory about what we experienced.

5. We must create the experiences of the imagination, but do we “make” it? Rudolf Steiner claims that these imaginative qualities are always connected with every sense perception. But our mind makes something in the world out of that. It creates the physical world. (This makes us free because we do not feel connected to the pictures of the world.) But the inner processes are always there. With this method we gain access to this etheric world because we quieten that part of the mind that creates the illusion of a “world outside, opposite to us”. In the imagination we experience our inner connection to the living world.

Remarks

We take substance from the earth, which is holy, and we give it to the participants. If we see the substance in its spiritual quality, we emphasise that we sacrifice the substance. The people take it, sense it, and they resurrect the substance in their pictorial, etheric consciousness by creating new pictures as symbols for their experiences. The laboratory table has become an altar. By performing these kinds of research, we are pioneers in the future of consciousness. We go from the earth and from sense perception to the etheric forces by keeping the connection to both realms. We connect the etheric world and the world of the senses, entering the spiritual world in a combination of science and artistic work.

Use this method to connect to plants and experience their forces. Everyone likes doing this (or almost everyone). But will they use it in their work? Encourage them to repeat it with plants and substances they like and are working with. It can even be done with children. It is amazing how expressive their pictures are. But most of all it is a tool for scientists and all those working with quality in nature. They can connect with nature and experience the quality of etheric substance. This is a basis for deciding about the possible use of the plants.

Aroma Painting

This method can also be applied to tasting. As simple samples that everyone should have at home, we suggest taking sugar, honey and salt.

The procedure and the method are in principle the same as those described for smelling. Here the samples are, for example, offered on a spoon. You do not need a big quantity, and it is tasted, not just smelled. Encourage the participants to discover what the sample is like and not ask what it is.

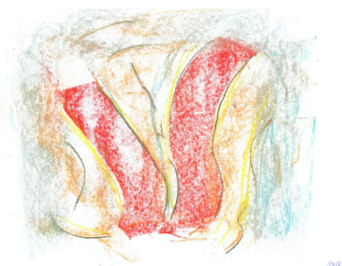
Jasmin paints it this way:



Sugar



Honey



Salt

Torsten paints it this way:



Sugar



Honey



Salt

The pictures were drawn without seeing each other while painting.

Observations:

Sugar: light, metallic, movements in and out. Expanding.

Honey: warm, covering, aromatic sprinkles, sticky, heavy ground. Many experiences and a long time of development of the taste.

Salt: very warm, it is only one experience, no manifoldness.

These three tastes are interesting, because the honey is from the realm of animals, sugar is from plants and salt is a mineral.

Difference between tasting and smelling

Smell or odour is something that occurs in the element of air and is all around: there are no spatial limitations. A scent fills the whole room. The plant is expressing its being into the air. We take this in and experience the being with our etheric body and feel this in our soul. The plant touches our soul with its soul.

Taste is more linked to the substance and transformation into a liquid is needed in order to be able to perceive it as taste. The tasting is a process, and we observe this more with our etheric body and physical body. Tasting is not as soulful as smelling.

Conclusion

With the Fragrance or Aroma Painting we show a simple method to enter into and go beyond sense perception. It is an easy procedure with which to recognise qualities connected with substances. We would like to encourage all those interested to experiment with this method and develop their experience. Dear readers, we would love to read your suggestions or questions on this method!

December 2022

Rudolf Steiner citation: Boundaries of Natural Knowledge

GA Nr. 322, Lectures on Oktober 2nd and 3rd, 1920. Given in Dornach, Switzerland.

“In my book, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*, I have described an entirely safe path leading to the super-sensible, but I describe it in such a way that it applies for everybody, above all for those who have not devoted their lives to science. **Today I shall describe a path into the super-sensible that is much more for the scientist.** I will now assume that *The Philosophy of Freedom* has been worked through already with one's ordinary consciousness in the way described. Now we are in the right frame of mind for our souls to undertake in a healthy way what I described yesterday, if only very briefly, as **the path leading into Imagination. It is possible to pursue this path in a way consonant with Western life if we attempt to surrender ourselves completely to the world of outer phenomena, so that we allow them to work upon us without thinking about them but still perceiving them.** In ordinary waking life, you will agree, we are constantly perceiving, but actually in the very process of doing so we are continually saturating our percepts with concepts; in scientific thinking we interweave percepts and concepts entirely systematically, building up systems of concepts and so on. By having acquired the capacity for the kind of thinking that gradually emerges from *The Philosophy of Freedom*, one can become capable of such acute inner activity that one can exclude and suppress conceptual thinking from the process of perception and surrender oneself to bare percepts.”

“But there is something else we can do in order to strengthen the forces of the soul and absorb percepts unelaborated by concepts. One can, moreover, refrain from formulating the judgments that arise when these percepts are joined to concepts and create instead symbolic images, or images of another sort, alongside the images seen by the eye, heard by the ear, and rendered by the senses of warmth, touch, and so on. If we thus bring our activity of perception into a state of flux, infusing it with life and movement, not as we do when forming concepts but by elaborating perception symbolically or artistically, we will develop much sooner the power of allowing the percepts to permeate us as such. An excellent preparation for this kind of cognition is to school oneself rigorously in what I have characterized as phenomenism, as elaboration of phenomena. If one has really striven not to allow inertia to carry one through the veil of sense perception upon reaching the boundary of the material world, in order to look for all kinds of metaphysical explanations in terms of atoms and molecules, but has instead used concepts to set the phenomena in order and follow them through to the archetypal phenomena, one has already undergone a training that enables one to isolate the phenomena from everything conceptual. And if one still symbolizes the phenomena, turns them into images, one acquires a potent soul for enabling one to absorb the external world free from concepts.”

“If one desires to do real research concerning human physiology, thinking must be excluded and the picture-forming activity sent inward, so that the physical organism reacts by creating Imaginations. This is a path that is only just beginning in the development of Western culture, but it is the path that must be trodden if the influence that streams over from the East, and would lead to decadence if it alone were to prevail, is to be confronted with something capable of opposing it, so that our civilization may take a path of ascent and not of decline. **Generally speaking, however, it can be said that human language itself is not yet sufficiently developed to be able to give full expression to the experiences that one undergoes in the inner recesses of the soul.”**

“In striving for Imagination, however, one wends one's way through the sensations of smell, taste, and touch, penetrating into the inner realm so that, by one's remaining undisturbed by sensations of smell, taste, and touch, the experiences stemming from balance, movement, and life come forth to meet one.

It is a great moment when one has penetrated through what I have described as the sense-triad of taste, smell, and touch, and one confronts the naked essence of movement, balance, and life.”

“When one has penetrated as far as that which lives in the sense of balance, the sense of life, and the sense of movement, one has reached something that one experiences initially as the true inner being of man because of its transparency. The very nature of the thing shows us that we cannot penetrate any deeper. But then again one has more than enough at this initial stage, for what we discover is not the stuff of nebulous, mystical dreams. What one finds is a true organology, and above all one finds within oneself the essence of that which is within equilibrium, of that which is in movement, of that which is suffused with life. One finds this within oneself.

Obviously, we cannot expect to achieve this quickly. Spiritual research demands of us far more than research in a laboratory or observatory.”

“The whole man experiences something in the act of sense perception. Sense perception, together with its content, passes down into the organism, and the ego with its pure thought content remains, so to speak, hovering above. We exclude thinking inasmuch as we take into and fill ourselves with the whole content of the perception, instead of weakening it with concepts, as we usually do. We train ourselves specially to achieve this by systematically pursuing what came to be practiced in a decadent form by the men of the East. Instead of grasping the content of the perception in pure, strictly logical thought, we grasp it symbolically, in pictures, allowing it to stream into us as a result of a kind of detour around thinking. We steep ourselves in the richness of the colors, the richness of the tone, by learning to experience the images inwardly, not in terms of thought but as pictures, as symbols.”