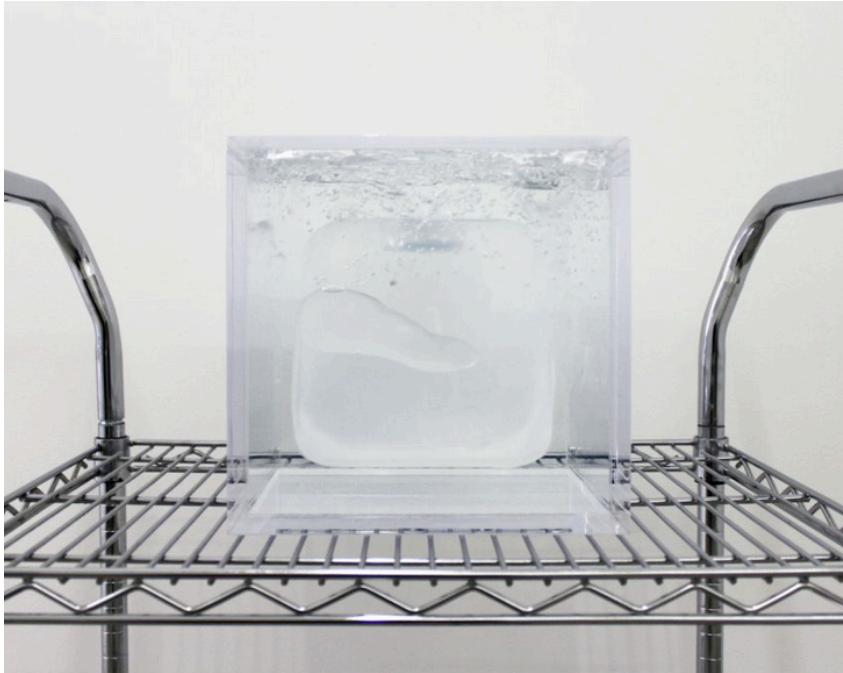


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SEAN RASPET: "Residuals" Reflects Everyday Substances' Chemistry

Written by Kimberly Chun
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Sean Raspet, *Arbitrary Embodiment (A06)*, 2014

In even the most tranquil art space, no one can hear the long-gone plant life scream. That's one finding after Los Angeles artist Sean Raspet took a sampling of the atmosphere in Jessica Silverman Gallery, the site of "Residuals."

"One thing that showed up strongly was the compound hexenal. It's the one thing that's very common in the environment in general: it's the plant distress signal, one of the smells of cut grass," says the artist, 33, from Southern California. "It smells nice, but basically the plants are releasing a compound as a way of saying, 'Help me,' and

the compound attracts insects — if a caterpillar is eating a plant, it releases the compound, which will attract a wasp. But the main source of hexenal in the environment is the treated wood used in everything."

The low-level airborne particles coming off wood, paint and building materials are just some of the elements that make up "Standard Recovery (GC/MS VOLATILES-WHOLE AIR: 37.784749 °; -122.414129 °)." As a part of the work, Raspet sampled Silverman Gallery's air for a week, using a SUMMA canister, and sent the samples to a lab for a readout of the molecular compounds and ratios, which he then had microencapsulated into a scratch-and-sniff emulsion that he will paint on the gallery's walls, floors, desks and surfaces.

"It's almost like a background noise of the air space, but very intensified," he says. "The gallery will smell like itself, but like a concentrated version of itself. A high-resolution smell in a way because there are compounds that the lab analysis might pick up that the human nose might not. This is basically a laboratory interpretation of the background smell."

"Standard Recovery" connects to other works in "Residuals": reconstitutions of crude oil that Raspet describes as "abstract gasoline," and "Arbitrary Embodiment (A06)," a sculpture suspended in hair gel that harks back to older pieces. "I became interested in these cosmetic products and everyday

substances in circulation, fragrances that are used in functional ways," Raspet says. "They call it functional perfumery. Over the years, I got interested in the chemistry."

Raspet sees his approach as an extension of most artists' concern with materials, though his fascinations have led Raspet far from those who prize the handcrafted.

"Almost on a visceral level, I react against something that's too handmade — somehow it seems inefficient — but aside from that, it's an artificial, arbitrary position that society has placed on art, being this thing that's quote-unquote creative, individual and unique. So to take the pre-existing reality of mass-scale manufacturing and reflect that, but to have it as much as possible exist in the space of art, it's compelling."