

2013

'The Six Senses of Art'  
Fifth Annual Colloquium

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# [TASTING IDEAS – INTIMATE ART]

[A long-standing tenet in aesthetic thought has been that the 'sense of taste' is not suitable for engaging art – an idea that is crumbling beneath the pressures of a new depth of knowledge about the senses and cognition, new practices in art, and new tools in the science of flavor and gastronomy. But, what can we communicate about the human experience through an engagement with taste and flavor?]

*“Tasting Ideas – Intimate Art”*

15 Minute Presentation/15 Minute Discussion

What can the ‘sense of taste’ tell us about the ‘human experience’? What story is told through its unique sensory language? Hagel stated that the relationship between taste and flavour is “purely sensuous” and therefore “cannot have to do with artistic objects”; is this assertion true? Doesn’t the sense of taste tell us about the lives of others? About their values, domains and cultures? Do our primordial connections between the chemical senses, emotions and memory not bind tasted experiences to us in the most intimate of ways? Can tastes and flavours represent specific concepts that can be utilised in art practice? If art is a discourse which explores the human experience using a symbolic language, should art not be able to utilise all of our sensory experiences, not only those of sight and sound?

This discussion is an interactive exploration of questions resulting from research into the ‘sense of taste’ and its potential to participate in contemporary art. It visits the most progressive applied research in taste physiology, cognitive studies concerning the chemical senses, contemporary gastronomy and food science to rewrite theories which have denied associations between gustatory perception and abstract meanings - excluding this sensory dimension from consideration in art. I will provide examples of contemporary artwork that communicates primarily through the sense of taste and introduce provocative questions to challenge long-standing beliefs about the dispensability of this sense in regard to art and the human experience.

To bring these questions into contemporary relevance, I will propose innovative directions for industry practice in both contemporary art and conceptual gastronomy - exploring ways in which these odd bedfellows might benefit through mutual engagement; directions which offer exciting new formats for museums, education and industry practice.

Source material will be drawn from my own research:

- Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, the Netherlands (2013-14) – theoretical and case study research into associations between flavour/taste perception, cognition, language and abstract concepts.
- University of Gastronomic Sciences, Italy (2013) – high-level conference on the relationship between art, food, and philosophy.
- Monell Chemical Senses Center, USA (2012) – investigations into the physiology of the chemical senses and their potential for use in contemporary art practice.
- Khoj International Artists Association, India (2012) – international artists residency addressing food, public spaces and ecology.
- Oxford Brookes University, UK (2011-2015) – curatorial theory and practice concerning the sense of taste in art.