



Sensory Maps guides users through the practice of sensory mapping | Photo source [Mulyadi on Unsplash](#)

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SMELL MAPS CREATE NEW WAYS OF EXPLORING CITIES



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Travellers can make their own map or follow one already made

Spotted: Sensory exploration is a growing area of interest, for reasons pertaining to both health and enjoyment. By engaging more fully with a broader range of human senses, individuals can experience an event or location in greater depth and detail. Researcher Dr Kate McLean, an artist and course leader of the BA Graphic Design programme at the University of Kent, uses mapping techniques to bring the complexities of city odours to life.

McLean's 'smellscape' work combines data with art. She leads smellwalks around the world and uses watercolour, animation, sculpture, and scent diffusion to make the data visible. The smellscape are often brightly coloured, and feature swirls and dots, conveying the sense of constant motion without becoming overwhelming.

Each smellscape is ephemeral and is only ever a snapshot of a particular moment in time. McLean highlights the depth of emotion that many of her smellwalk participants reveal when they come across certain combinations of odours. As well as leading and teaching smellwalks, McLean provides a guide to smellscape mapping on her Sensory Maps website.

The human body's olfactory system connects to the brain's memory centre. As multi-sensory products and experiences become more common, scents become more powerful, evoking, as many do, certain thoughts and reminiscences from a person's past. Springwise has spotted scent being used to remind people of [the origin of a lamp](#) made from orange peels and as a means of [bringing a classical painting to life](#) in a new way.

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5th September 2022

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Takeaway:

Mclean is not alone. Researchers are increasingly recognising the importance of smells, and sensory experiences more broadly, in day-to-day living. The authors of a new book *Restorative Cities: urban design for mental health and wellbeing* discuss how sensory benefits can be used to balance out the complaints that impinge on an individual's sense of health and wellbeing, both mentally and physically. In a [recent interview](#), the authors say that, "In urban design, there's too much focus on vision and, to some extent, sound. But if we think about how humans have evolved, we know people actually make use of all of their senses-plus a sixth sense, which is an appreciation of the ambience of a place."