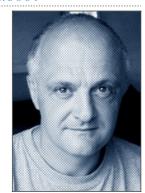
Perfume Notes

Luca Turin on perfume and other things

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S-perfumes



Let me say right from the outset that everything about the public image of S-perfumes felt purposely made to jangle my nerves. The silly name, the little spermatozoon figures everywhere, the website patter "Inspired by the intoxicating, whirlwind, absolute feeling of love", the tiresome harping on sex, in short the whole art-school flimsy-whimsy look-at-me mind-fuck attitude that is taking over so much of niche perfumery to so little avail. Two things didn't fit, however: the letter written by owner Sacré Nobi that came with the samples was thoughtful, humorous and articulate; and the fact that he had managed to get some of the very best to compose perfumes for him: Sophia Grojsman, one of the greatest

perfumers of the last 30 years (her *Kashâya* was, I swear, the only fragrance ever to come out of a bottle smelling in stripes like Signal toothpaste); Christophe Laudamiel and Alberto Morillas, no slouches themselves; and my heroine Annick Ménardo.

To get this crew to work for you is not easy, and I started thinking this might be a surf-king version of Frédéric Malle. Well, it is, and it isn't. The Morillas fragrance is a salty musk that didn't do much for me. Grojsman's 100% Love is a deceptively quiet rose-and-chocolate accord that feels remote and tender like a love letter written on feather-light airmail paper reaching you three weeks after it was written. It has the affecting, ghostly quality of the backstage orchestras sometimes used for operatic effect. Laudamiel's S-eX (aargh) is a remarkable leather-animalic-metal accord that convincingly modernizes, in a jaunty and elegant way, a style of fragrance that had become overburdened by heavy-lidded sensuality. This one I could wear every day.

All the fragrances are reminiscent of the futuristic artist's impressions posted at car shows: deliberately sketchy things designed to demonstrate the creativity of designers without committing to the full windshield-wipers, cup holders and seatbelts thing. Most perfumers pooh-pooh these demos because they are not fully working products. *S-perfume*'s great merit is to have fleshed out the ideas to the point where they move under their own power without in the process losing that fresh less-is-more shock.

Two more remarkable things were in the box: a small sample of Annick Ménardo's depiction of anger (Ira) in Nobi's seven deadly sins series. This weird fragrance contains all the alarming emergency-sign bright yellow shades of the citrus aldehydes and ethers and achieves a waxy, plastic rain-gear heady luminance that I have never encountered before. Lastly, and most fascinating, a tiny decant of a Ménardo self portrait, an extraordinarily rich, dark and intelligent vetiver that struck me as a convincing likeness of what I imagine to be her passionate, nostalgic genius. Neither seems to be for sale.

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