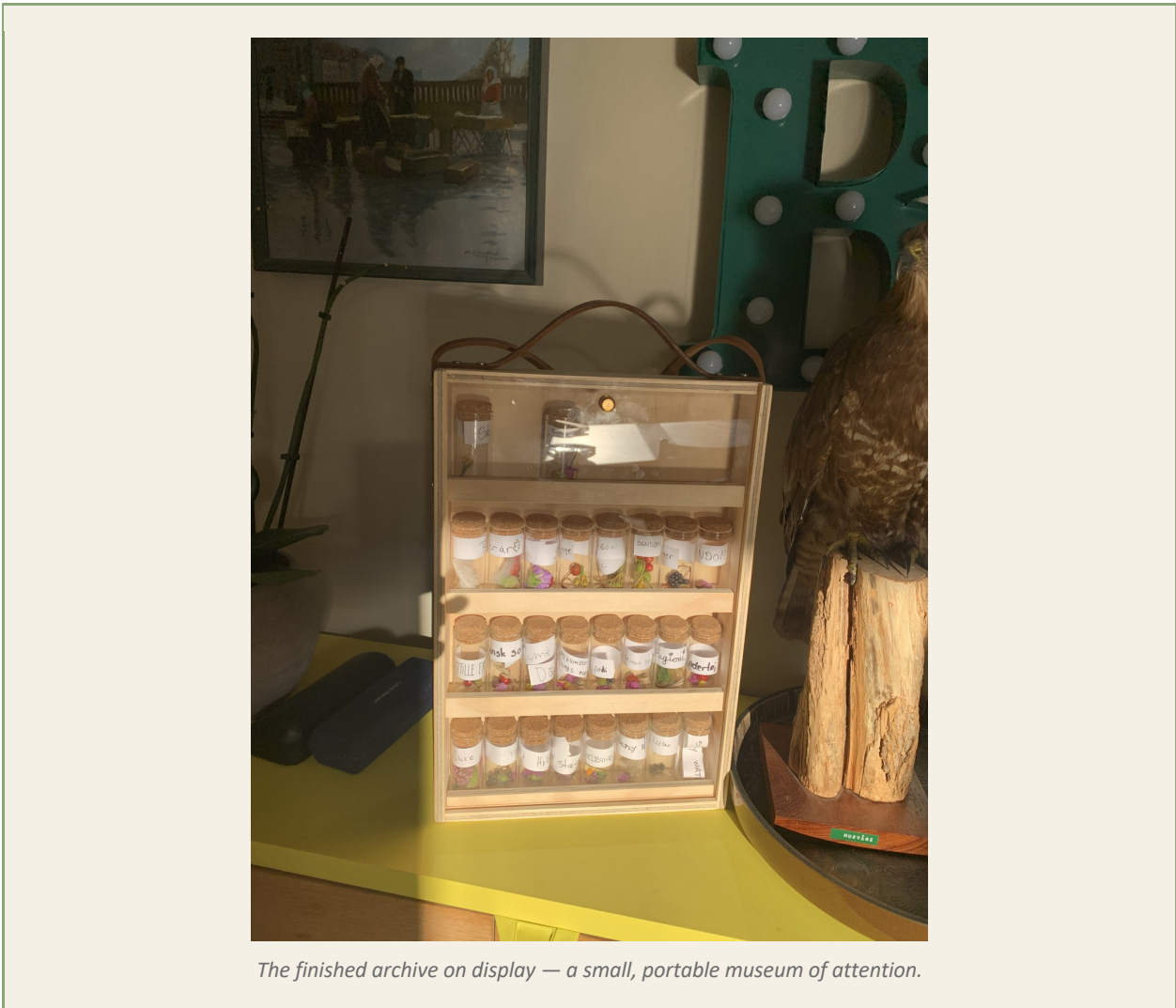


THE RIBBON OF NATURE

# The Scent Archive

*A performance walk and sensory collection in nature — an exercise for adults*

*What does this place smell like — and what does that smell remember?*



*The finished archive on display — a small, portable museum of attention.*

## About this exercise

The Scent Archive is a slow, choreographed walk through a landscape — a piece of quiet theatre that participants perform together by paying attention with their noses. Along the way, each person gathers smells into a small glass jar, gives the jar a name (not a description, but a name) and adds it to a shared wooden archive. The walk takes 60 to 90 minutes; the archive that comes out of it lasts as long as you let it.

This guide turns the exercise into a practical script for adult groups — facilitators, teachers, artists, retreat hosts, museum educators, theatre makers — anyone who wants to lead a small, dignified performance that doubles as embodied research into place, memory and language.

### AT A GLANCE

<b>WHO IT'S FOR</b>	Adults: teacher students, educators, artists, retreat groups, theatre ensembles, neighbours
<b>GROUP SIZE</b>	6–20 people (larger groups can split into sub-archives)
<b>DURATION</b>	60–90 min walk + 20 min written reflection
<b>SETTING</b>	Any landscape with distinct sensory character — coast, harbour, forest, garden, churchyard, market
<b>THEMES</b>	Sensory attention · memory · place-based learning · collective authorship · a/r/tography
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Small corked glass jars · paper strips & cotton string · pens · a shared wooden box or crate · one mussel shell or small container per person
<b>OPTIONAL</b>	A small bell or wooden block · a sound score · a field journal · a camera for documenting the archive

## The dramaturgy of the walk

Treat the walk as a four-act piece. Each act has a different attention, a different gesture, and a different time signature. The facilitator is not a tour guide — they are the dramaturg, holding the shape of the experience so that participants can disappear into their senses.

### Act I — The threshold (5–10 min)

A short ritual that separates the walk from ordinary time. Participants gather, receive their jar and shell, and listen to the opening invocation. The facilitator speaks slowly and only once.

### Act II — The walk (30–40 min)

Participants spread out. They walk at the pace of a snail; they stop whenever a smell reaches them. They speak only if they must. The facilitator drifts at the edge of the group, silent.

### Act III — The cave (15–20 min)

A sheltered spot — under branches, in a hollow, behind a wall, inside a circle of bodies. Each person seals their jar, writes a name on a paper strip, ties it to the jar, and places it in the wooden box. One by one. No explanations.

### Act IV — The reflection (10–20 min)

Field journals out. A short writing or drawing prompt. The archive sits in the middle. The walk ends not with a debrief but with a quiet, shared looking.



*The jars in the sun — RO, NATUR, BARNDOM, STILLE FRYD, DANSK SOMMER, VEJBLOMSTER LANGS... Each name a small poem.*

## Part 1 — The threshold

### OPENING THE WALK

Before anything else, mark a line. A real line in the ground, a doorway of two stones, a circle drawn with a stick. The participants step across it together. From here, the walk has begun.

Hand each person one corked glass jar and one small container or mussel shell. Hold a small pause. Then speak the invocation — slowly, once, without repeating yourself:

*From this point on, we walk with our noses. We are not looking for beauty, and we are not looking for information. We are looking for smell. Let the landscape offer itself to you. Stop whenever something reaches you.*

### Setting the contract

- Walk slowly — slower than feels natural. The pace is a snail's, not a hiker's.
- Speak as little as possible. A nod or a gesture is enough.
- You can pick up a pinch of earth, a piece of seaweed, a wet stone, a flower — anything that holds a smell. You can also collect a handful of air.
- If you fill your jar early, you can empty it and start again. The jar is a moveable instrument, not a trophy.
- If you find yourself thinking in sentences, stop and breathe through your nose.

## Part 2 — The walk

### COLLECTING WITH THE NOSE

This is the long act. Let it be long. Adults, especially those who work with their heads, often need 10–15 minutes before the body remembers how to attend. Resist the urge to fill the silence.

### Guiding the attention

If the group is restless, offer one of these prompts — quietly, to the air, not to anyone in particular:

- What reaches you before you see it?
- Where does the smell come from — earth, water, air, something living?
- Does it pull you toward it or away from it?
- Does it remind you of something — a person, a time, a place elsewhere?

### Inner prompts (for participants to carry)

- When did you last pay attention to smell?
- Is there a smell you associate with safety? With loss? With childhood?
- Can a smell belong to a place — or only to a memory?

### A NOTE ON WHAT ELSE YOU'LL NOTICE

Walking slowly with the nose forward changes everything you see. Participants almost always start noticing other creatures and textures they would have stepped past — a beetle, a caterpillar, a wet feather, the colour of a leaf on its underside.

Welcome this. It belongs to the same attention. You can suggest that the group keep a second, mental archive of these encounters and bring them up in the reflection.



*Found on the walk — not in the archive, but part of it. A goat moth caterpillar on the sand.*

## Part 3 — The cave

### FROM SENSATION TO NAME

Call the group in. A simple signal works best: one strike of a wooden block, a short whistle, or just your raised hand catching their eye. Gather somewhere sheltered — a cave, a hollow, the lee of a wall, or just a tight circle of bodies.

This is the moment of translation. Each person closes their jar. They take a paper strip and write a name for what they have gathered.

#### NAMES, NOT DESCRIPTIONS

A description tries to be accurate. A name takes responsibility for a relationship. Encourage participants to write the name only they could have written.

Examples from the Ejerslev archive (Mors, August 2025): "Stille fryd" (quiet joy), "Dansk sommer", "Min mormors køkkenhave" (my grandmother's kitchen garden), "Slutningen af sommeren" (end of summer), "Vejblomster langs sommer-marker" (wildflowers along summer fields), "Sur hyldebær" (sour elderberry), "Håb om en dansk sommer" (hope for a Danish summer), "De fire årstider" (the four seasons).

Each name is a small poem. Each is also a piece of research data. In a/r/tographic practice, these are the same thing.

### The naming circle

When the labels are tied on, sit or stand in a circle. One by one, each person holds up their jar and reads the name aloud. No explanations, no questions. Others may respond with one of two short phrases — or nothing:

*"I know that smell." / "I have never smelled that."*

This is a small piece of choreography. Keep it strict. The discipline of the form is what gives the names their weight.

## Part 4 — The archive

### BECOMING A COLLECTIVE

Open the wooden box in the centre. One at a time, each participant places their jar inside. They can place it gently or with intention; they can pause before letting go. By the end, the box holds many people in one place — a sensory portrait of this group's encounter with this landscape on this day.

Then leave the archive on a rock, a tree stump, the edge of the water, a windowsill, or the front of the room. Look at it together in silence for one full minute. The looking is part of the work.

### What the archive can become afterwards



## Part 5 — The written reflection

### FROM BODY TO PAGE

Field journals come out — outdoors if the weather allows, otherwise back indoors. This step completes the a/r/tographic loop: from body-in-place, through artistic action, to documented reflection. Give participants 15 minutes of writing or drawing. Offer one of these prompts (or all of them):

1. Describe one smell from the walk as precisely as you can — without naming it.
2. Write the memory that a smell brought up. What does this memory know that you forgot?
3. Draw the texture of a smell — its shape, its weight, its colour, its temperature.
4. Write a sentence that a smell said to you.
5. What could not be archived? What slipped past the jar?

## Performance-walk ideas

The Scent Archive sits on the edge between exercise and performance. With small, deliberate changes you can shift it further toward theatre — without ever losing the integrity of the sensory work. The walk is the performance. The audience is also the cast.

### The score

Write the walk as a score with five or six numbered cues, each tied to a sound or a gesture. The score replaces verbal instructions and allows the facilitator to lead almost without speaking.

- Cue 1 — Threshold bell. The group steps across the line.
- Cue 2 — A long held note (voice, flute, or recorded drone). The walk begins.
- Cue 3 — Wooden block, single strike. Everyone stops where they are for one full minute.
- Cue 4 — Wooden block, three strikes. Time to begin walking back toward the cave.
- Cue 5 — Silence at the cave. The naming circle begins when the silence has settled.
- Cue 6 — A single bell at the end of the looking. The walk is over.

### Roles

Even with a small group, named roles tilt the exercise into performance:

- The Dramaturg (the facilitator). Holds the time signature. Speaks only at the threshold and the close.
- The Scribe. Walks at the back of the group with a small notebook and writes down anything that is said aloud, including half-sentences. Their notes become a found poem read aloud at the end.
- The Witness. One participant rotates through this role each act. They do not collect; they watch the others collect, and at the cave they describe what they saw in one sentence.

- The Archivist. Arranges the jars in the box as they arrive — by colour, by mood, by alphabet, by chance. The arrangement is the final composition.

## Variations to try

### The dawn walk

Begin one hour before sunrise. Smells are sharper in cold, wet air; the body is still half-asleep, which is exactly the state the exercise wants. End the walk by watching the sun come up over the archive.

### The blindfolded leader

One participant wears a blindfold and is led by a partner. They collect only by smell and touch. After 15 minutes, they switch. This variation almost guarantees that participants discover smells they would otherwise have walked past.

### The paired walk

Walk in silent pairs. One person collects; the other watches them collect. At the cave, the watcher reads aloud what they saw their partner do — "You stopped at the wet wood. You held it for a long time." — and the collector tells them the name they chose for their jar.

### The night archive

Walk after dark with a single lantern between the group. Smells in the dark are louder. The archive is opened the next morning and the names are read in daylight, when the walkers cannot fully remember what they meant.

### The returning archive

A long-form variation. The same wooden box is brought to four different landscapes across a year — one per season. Old jars stay; new jars are added. By the fourth walk the archive is a small symphony of places and times.

### The public walk

Stage the walk in a city — a harbour, a market, a back-street, a churchyard. The performance is visible: passers-by see a small group of adults walking slowly with jars and stopping to smell. Some will ask. The walkers may answer only by holding up a labelled jar.

## Sound, costume, light

- Costume — Ask participants to wear something they don't mind getting wet or earthy. A neutral colour palette across the group reads, from a distance, as a quiet uniform.
- Sound — A long drone played quietly from a portable speaker can hold the group together over open ground. Live voice or a single instrument (recorder, harmonica, shruti box) reads warmer than recorded sound.
- Light — At dusk, walk with a single oil lamp held by the Witness. At dawn, no light at all.

## The collection as object

Take the archive seriously as an artwork. Photograph it on a neutral cloth. Number each jar. Make a printed list of names — Danish, English, or both — and pin it next to the case. Consider how the case is carried: a leather handle on a wooden frame turns the archive into a portable shrine, and turns walking with it into a small procession.

## Sample names from the Ejerslev archive

Names written at the water's edge on Mors, August 2025. Use them as inspiration for your own walks, or read them aloud as an overture before a new group sets out.

Dansk	English
<i>Stille fryd</i>	Quiet joy
<i>Dansk sommer</i>	Danish summer
<i>Barndom</i>	Childhood
<i>Min mormors køkkenhave</i>	My grandmother's kitchen garden
<i>Slutningen af sommeren</i>	End of summer
<i>Vejblomster langs sommermarker</i>	Wildflowers along summer fields
<i>Sur hyldebær</i>	Sour elderberry
<i>Træbund</i>	Wood base
<i>Håb om en dansk sommer</i>	Hope for a Danish summer
<i>Eddike</i>	Vinegar
<i>De fire årstider</i>	The four seasons
<i>Ro</i>	Calm
<i>Natur og hygge</i>	Nature and hygge
<i>Underlej</i>	Underlay
<i>Salty water</i>	—

## Facilitator notes

HOLDING THE ROOM WHEN THERE IS NO ROOM

Before the walk

- Walk the route yourself a day in advance. Notice the smells you'll meet. Note where the wind comes from.
- Decide in advance where the cave is. A site you've already chosen anchors the whole dramaturgy.
- Prepare jars by sterilising them and warming up the corks (a dry cork seals better).
- Have spare paper strips and a second pen. People drop things in grass.

### During the walk

- Resist the urge to teach. The exercise is built so that learning happens without instruction.
- Walk at the back. If you walk at the front, the group will follow you instead of their own attention.
- Don't fill silences. The silences are the work.
- If someone gets distressed by a memory — and this can happen with smell more than with any other sense — sit with them quietly. Don't try to solve it.

### After the walk

- Photograph the archive before the group leaves. Names are easy to lose.
- Ask permission before sharing images of the archive publicly. The names are intimate.
- Keep one jar for yourself, if it feels right. The facilitator is also a participant.

#### THREE IDEAS UNDERNEATH THE EXERCISE

Sensation before interpretation. Participants are not asked what a smell means — only what it does. This slows the cognitive reflex and returns attention to the body as a place where knowing happens.

Naming as relation. When we name something, we enter into relation with it. The names in the archive are not descriptions; they are commitments. They say: I was here, this reached me, I chose to hold it.

The collective as a form of knowledge. No single jar tells the story of the place — only all of them together. The archive is a small rehearsal of how shared knowledge actually emerges: between people, in shared attention to the world.

## A note on a/r/tography

This exercise comes out of a/r/tographic practice — a form of practice-based research that holds three positions at once: artist, researcher, teacher. In the Scent Archive, all three are alive throughout:

- As artists, participants create a performative installation in the landscape — the archive itself is a work.
- As researchers, they investigate the relationship between smell, memory, place and language — through the body rather than through analysis.

- As teachers or learners, they discover how the senses can open space for collective knowledge and shared vulnerability.

The process is more important than the product. What makes the Scent Archive a/r/tographic is not the box of jars — it is the movement between sensation, creation and reflection that produces it.

*The archive is not a collection of objects. It is a record of attention.*



## THE RIBBON OF NATURE

*The Ribbon of Nature (TRON) is an Erasmus+ project developed in collaboration between Limfjordsteatret, Tomatierra, University College of Northern Denmark (UCN), and Universidad de Granada.*

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