

1. it remains unclear which visitors in fact targeted *Heavenly Bodies*. Finally,
 2. the inclusion of many specially commissioned garments by Thom Browne,
 3. Bolton's life partner, portends a potential conflict of interest.¹ Nevertheless,
 4. the Costume Institute curator and team successfully executed their most
 5. ambitious show to date. *Heavenly Bodies* provided a thought-provoking
 6. exploration into the connections between Catholicism and fashion, from
 7. simultaneously reverential and transgressive perspectives.

1. Browne was the most prominent living American designer featured in the exhibition, as the dresses by Rodarte were removed by the time of my visit.

9. References

10. Bolton, Andrew (2018), 'Sunday at the Met – *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and*
 11. *the Catholic Imagination*', curatorial talk, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
 12. New York, 23 September.

13. Metropolitan Museum of Art (2018), '*Heavenly Bodies* Most Visited Exhibition',
 14. [https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2018/heavenly-bodies-](https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2018/heavenly-bodies-most-visited-exhibition)
 15. [most-visited-exhibition](https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2018/heavenly-bodies-most-visited-exhibition). Accessed 12 December 2018.

16. Email: jasonbcyrus@yahoo.com

17. Jason Cyrus has asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and
 18. Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format
 19. it was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

28. CARSTEN HÖLLER AND STEFANO MANCUSO, *THE FLORENCE EXPERIMENT*

30. Curated by Arturo Galansino, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 19 April – 26
 31. August 2018

32. *Reviewed by Diana K. Murphy, Independent Critic*

33. Located in the heart of Florence, Palazzo Strozzi is a Renaissance palace
 34. featuring an open cortile and congruous proportions. Its monumental
 35. facade signified the status of its inhabitants, principally, its commissioner,
 36. Filippo Strozzi the Elder – a notable rival of the Medici clan. The struc-
 37. ture, completed in 1538, was bequeathed to the city of Florence and, by
 38. extension, its citizens, in 1999. Since the establishment of the private
 39. Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in 2006, the space has been transformed into
 40. an incubator for the presentation of critical exhibitions, public program-
 41. ming, and generative projects and events. Given its long and storied
 42. history, it is quite surprising for the facade to diverge from its typical
 43. appearance. In a radical intervention upon the site, German conceptual
 44. artist Carsten Höller and Italian scientist Stefano Mancuso transformed
 45. the very architecture of the palace through the addition of an imposing
 46. interactive structure, distorting its facade with a Plexiglas tube encasement

that was installed along the *primo piano* and affixed to budding plants that peeked out from the structure's mullioned paired windows. Their project, entitled *The Florence Experiment*, was a rousing participatory exhibition that united the discourses of contemporary art and science, specifically, that of plant neurobiology.

To most tourists and international flocks of students that arrive en masse, Florence signifies nothing more than the Renaissance, a city static and buried by its past aesthetic triumphs. Yet one may find respite from the ever-constant Uffizi and Accademia galleries in Palazzo Strozzi. Its mission is to generate an international approach to producing culture in Florence. The private foundation is a contemporary project, encompassing installations in its cortile, cafe, shop and digital media that extends beyond its rusticated stone walls. Significantly, the exhibitions are conceptualized collaboratively; the curator's perspective is one of many, resulting in a chorus of voices that grants nuance to the exhibition theses.

Its dedicated contemporary space, the Center for Contemporary Culture Strozzi (CCCS) was inaugurated in 2007 and produced largely thematic exhibitions, utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to address urgent social issues. It has exhibited works by a diverse array of established contemporary artists alongside those of emerging artists, fostering multilayered dialogue and reflection pertaining to the selected topics. The challenges and opportunities afforded by Palazzo Strozzi's Renaissance architecture for the display and mediation of contemporary art is a stimulus to draw connections between past, present and future. The CCCS has since been absorbed by the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, where contemporary art is now folded into its programming and mission.

The Florence Experiment is, on first reflection, a conceptually baffling blend of art and scientific research at a moment when contemporary artists are frequently engaging with and responding to the most recent breakthroughs in ecological issues. Part science experiment and part site-specific interactive installation, the project began in the palazzo's courtyard, an *en plein air* display space, where contemporary works of art call into question the history and harmony of their host's Renaissance architecture. Carsten Höller thus reimaged the way in which one inhabits and moves through the open quadratic space. Upon entering the cortile, users were confronted with two imposing and intertwining steel coils wrapped around a vertical pole that connected the third floor of the palazzo to the floor of the courtyard, and extended vertically about sixty feet high. These irreverent twisted *serpentinata* forms contorted around each other like two colossal snakes. This fantastical scene was accompanied by sounds of merriment – and a few screams – as visitors descended the palazzo within the enclosed tube slides affixed to the building. Höller, known for his conceptual interventions, implemented twin interweaving and interactive slides that transformed the palace into a temporary playground for adults and children alike, thus reconfiguring the way in which users experienced the familiar site of Palazzo Strozzi. The work was at once thrilling and participatory, a work of sinuous sculpture in its own right; the form also referred back to the exhibition's origin in scientific experimentation, as the snaking coils also resembled DNA strands.



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36. Carsten Höller, *The Florence Experiment (2018)*, installation view, 60'. Photo:
37. the author, © Carsten Höller, courtesy of Palazzo Strozzi, Florence.
38.

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40. The aesthetic connection of the cortile slides to science was made all
41. the more palpable, as, upon ascending the palazzo steps to reach the base
42. of the slides, visitors were invited to attach a small bean seedling to them-
43. selves in a burlap belt before they made their descent. The purpose of this
44. detail was to test the exhibition's hypothesis that human emotions can be
45. transferred to plant life by contact and movement. This empirical inves-
46. tigation was not immediately apparent to visitors, and it was not until
47. physically entering the gallery space below the *cortile* after experiencing
48. the slides that the exhibition statement was better clarified.

49. Following the amusement afforded by the sliding experience, visitors
50. were directed to the CCCS gallery space where the exhibition continued.

This next segment was entitled 'Plant Decision-Making Based on Human Smell of Fear and Joy', and fully encapsulated the experiment's *raison d'être*. Within the stark white gallery walls, a fully equipped temporary laboratory was erected to fully document the embodied changes that the plant molecules underwent as a result of the interactions with and transference of human energy and emotions. A large lab table covered with plants at various stages of the experiment displayed, among them, three test groups: the first comprised those plants that had embarked upon the slides attached to users; the second consisted of those plants that had gone on the journey alone without the company of a human; and the third was the control group of plants that did not experience the slides at all. These three groupings visually signified the effects, if any, of the experiment and, at a higher level, humanity's impact upon and relationship with nature.

In a conjoining space, opposite the laboratory, was a large-scale installation encompassing two identical and makeshift movie theatres that were connected by their screens with seating arranged on each side. The two cinematic screens juxtaposed compilations of film clips from various horror and comedy films that would affect human emotion and, in turn, as hypothesized by the project, manipulate chemicals in the brain depending on which screen was being watched. The theory, clarified on the didactic panels, was that neurotransmitters in the human brain may have a similar effect upon plant life, and this part of the experiment both documented and explored this hypothesis. The results of this testing incubator would be visually apparent on the facade of the palazzo, as the air collected within each of the two concealed cinemas was pumped into the tubes from two separate ducts that ran along the *primo piano* of the palazzo's facade. The plants chosen for this particular experiment were of the wisteria genus, and grew on a Y-shaped apparatus and subsisted on either the 'joyful' or the 'frightened' air that was fed into the tubes as it emanated from the two cinemas. The resulting forms assumed by the plants were hypothesized to be the direct result of the two distinct energy fields that agitated the chemical compounds in the brain, which were then projected to the plants.

As users exited the exhibition, they were invited to take home a plant. This invitation broke the barrier between the specimens on public display and the private space of the home, as visitors could further document changes to the plant as part of an ongoing process. The project and ensuing experiment thus became a long-term investment with the inclusion of a souvenir. Over time, users could track the impact of their various emotions on plant growth. A dominant theme of the exhibition as a whole was its interactive nature that was apparent throughout the entire palazzo, from the slides in the *cortile* to the cinemas in the gallery, and even long after leaving the museum entirely. It demystified Palazzo Strozzi as the laboratory where the theory was conceptualized by Höller and Mancuso and then enacted by visitors, and broadened that effort to include the home as a site for supplementary testing and experimentation.

The Florence Experiment at Palazzo Strozzi explored the convergence and conversation between science, contemporary art and audience participation.

1. The show encouraged a greater respect for nature in its analysis of the
 2. supposed intimate and interrelated relationship between humans and
 3. plants. The merging of Höller's interactive sculptural forms with Mancuso's
 4. expertise in the foundational study of plant neurobiology challenged visi-
 5. tors to reflect on the stream of consciousness that permeates all living
 6. things. A generative and unique project, the exhibition agitated the tradi-
 7. tional museum experience and instead assembled an interactive space
 8. in which users, artists, scientists and plant life co-created a constantly
 9. evolving network of exchange: a space within which certain actions that
 10. are typically prohibited in galleries such as touching, taking photos and
 11. directly interfacing with the objects on display are both permitted and
 12. encouraged, thus contributing to their transfiguration and permutation.

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14.
 15. Diana K. Murphy has asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs
 16. and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the
 17. format it was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

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 25. **COME UP TO MY ROOM 2018**

26. Curated by Christophe Jivraj, Jana Macalik and Lukus Toane,
 27. Gladstone Hotel, Toronto, 18 – 21 January 2018

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 29. *Reviewed by Elizabeth Handley-Derry, Independent Critic*

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 32. A room can mean a great deal of things to different people: a space for
 33. coming together, a space for sharing, a space for privacy, a space for
 34. solace. As self-contained entities, they carry their own purpose and are
 35. comprised of their unique contents nested within the walls and ceilings
 36. of their dwellers. In the West Queen West neighbourhood of Toronto, the
 37. Gladstone Hotel hosts the annual *Come Up To My Room (CUTMR)* – a
 38. four-day alternative art and design exhibition – that takes over the five-
 39. storey building, inviting artists and designers to build an intimate safe
 40. space where creators and visitors can pause, explore and learn from one
 41. another. Using art and design as vehicles for social impact and change,
 42. they address personal and private matters that concern society as a whole.
 43. Green blankets of grass with severed fingers poking through collapse
 44. the dichotomy of human and non-human species to peer into the other
 45. side of the divide. A set of ordinary old furniture, upon closer inspection
 46. reveals the scrolled markings of abuse and torment, burned and etched
 47. into the skin of its wooden surfaces. Photographs of young women
 48. showing themselves unashamedly eating ice creams, melted on their faces
 49. and arms, to reject the societal pressures of a clean-cut body image. These
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