



The “emotional body” is a part of the Trigger Spray installation that portrays the way triggers — points of conflict in people’s lives — are formed. Photo: Claire Wang

Since Feb. 17, an unfurnished storefront on the ground floor of a luxury SoHo condo has been transformed into a laboratory of sorts, an interactive DIY installation revolving around an organic spray its creator says fosters emotional resilience.

Trigger Spray is an innovative aromatherapy mist designed by New York-based artist Elana Langer. Swarming with lavender, mandarin, tarragon and hemlock, the potion elevates you to a Zen state by soothing the nervous

system. At least momentarily, it imparts a peace of mind that enables one to think through an emotional stimulus rather than impulsively react to it. “I was fighting with the people I loved,” Langer said. “This product comes from a desire to help people get along.”

Curated by Chashama, a nonprofit organization that supports local artists by turning unused property into art spaces, the Trigger Spray Pop-Up Shop is a hybrid of an art installation and a boutique store.

Merging art, philosophy and commerce has been the central theme of Langer’s projects. “It’s a store, but I’m not just selling a product,” she said. “I’m also selling a message, and that’s the art.”

The product costs \$20, but the message is free.

The building’s spartan aesthetic stands in stark contrast to purpose of the gallery within. Its glass walls are bare but for a baby-pink, Pop Art-inspired “Trigger Spray” logo stamped near the gallery door. A trio of bold, catchy verbs written on paper dangles below: “Stop,” “Spray,” “Breathe.” Each has a corresponding, roughly sketched emoticon.

“The most important tool is our awareness,” reads a sign propped up on a sheet music stand inside. The maxim expresses Langer’s philosophy on feelings. Aromatherapy, she said, prescribes certain characteristics to one of the four elements: earth, fire, water and air. Earth, for example, represents the “cool” and the “life-giving,” while air embodies the adventurous.

Each emotion has an antidote in smell: grapefruit mist neutralizes anger, laurel mist lifts up melancholy. The theory offers people a more artful, positive way of analyzing fiery emotions. “Instead of saying, ‘Oh you have a lot of anger in you,’ you say, ‘Oh, you have lot of fire in fire,’” Langer explained.

The studio splits into a pair of installations. In the forewing is nestled the “emotional body,” a ribbon-riddled cave-like space enclosed by black velvet curtains. Inspired by the animated movie “Inside Out,” the body is a physical demonstration of the way triggers are formed. Like conflicting feelings, ribbons and yarn swerve and snake into inextricable knots that can be freed only through thorough examination.

Building the emotional body was a cathartic, interactive exercise involving half dozen participants. During the first 10 days of the exhibit, Langer invited visitors to chart their thoughts on the web of emotions. They draped and yanked strings over her original design, creating knots and tangles that represented triggers, or points of conflict in their private lives. Some jotted down their feelings on notebook paper and hung them in batches on a string. They dangle from the ceiling like handcrafted chandeliers.

Langer compared emotional unrest to a scratch on a vinyl record, a blemish that can be easily be mended given a little time and patience. “I wanted to show people what it’s like to sit and walk around in something that’s bigger than you,” she said. “Order may be desirable but it’s tenuous; we all have to learn to control chaos.”

The back-wing of the studio consists of a Trigger School—a miniature model of a high school classroom complete with a whiteboard, notebooks, and tablet-arm desks where visitors can write and talk about their “trigger topics” – of memories, whether traced to persons or incidents, that elicit overwhelming emotion, be it grief or bliss. This can be the recollection of the death of a parent, of a devastating breakup, or of an inconsiderate fellow subway rider, Langer said.

“Coming to an understanding of your emotions takes time,” she said, “so it’s important to remember to give yourself space — to stop and breathe — before you react.”

The exhibit closes March 9.

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