

The joy of scents – sniffing out Covid-19 at Being Human 2020

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic it took a campaign by activists – many of them humanities researchers – to persuade the Government to accept loss of smell and taste as a symptom of coronavirus. Now it is considered one of the key symptoms.

As part of the 2020 [programme](#) for Being Human, the annual humanities festival led by the School of Advanced Study (SAS) at the University of London, Professor Barry Smith and guests will investigate how the loss of this vital sense can affect health, wellbeing and our relationship with the world around us. How does it change us, and how does it feel to recover and to 'return to our senses'?

Director of the Institute of Philosophy at SAS, and its Centre for the Study of the Senses, Professor Smith was part of the action group that won acceptance for this important Covid-19 symptom and will share his insights into how research can form dynamic links to policymakers to bring about change. This event, ['Being Human in Conversation: Returning to Our Senses'](#) (18 November 6–8pm), will also include some simple try-at-home sensory experiments that will make you think differently about the importance of your sense of smell to your everyday life.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the Being Human festival features an impressive 220 events exploring this year's 'New Worlds' theme from 12 to 22 November. Luckily for its fans, Being Human has proved itself an event that Covid-19 couldn't cancel.

The activities are broken down into five sub-themes and 'Returning to Our Senses' is part of Culture and politics (the others are: Urban decay and regeneration; Social inclusivity and equalities; Open spaces, landscapes and health; Museums and collections).

Of course Covid-19 will be explored elsewhere, like [Pandemic Survival: Ancient and Modern](#) (18 November, 6–7.30pm), University of Lincoln. Join archaeologist Carena Lewis online to learn about the Black Death (bubonic plague), the world's first pandemic. Snapshot talks are interspersed with interactive quizzes, card draws and even a 'battleships'-style game to shed light, bust some myths and find insights relevant to the Covid-19 pandemic.

'In the midst of a pandemic, and the economic fallout it created, attention necessarily turns to science, medicine, economics. But research in the humanities is also essential in helping us navigate the current crisis and build back better – as the Being Human festival this year demonstrates,' explains festival director, Professor Sarah Churchwell. 'We need the humanities and sciences working together to help us understand the world we inhabit, the cultures and histories that inform it. And we need them to help us imagine and create new worlds.'

Other 'Culture and politics' highlights include:

- [Being Human in Conversation: the American Election](#) (Organised by the School of Advanced Study, University of London). Professor Churchwell and

playwright and critic Bonnie Greer, both natives of Chicago, will discuss the impact of the 2020 American election. This online event also has a Q&A.

- [Kit de Waal: Novels That Shaped My World](#) (Organised by the University of Wolverhampton and the School of Advanced Study). Novelist and short story writer Kit de Waal will join Professors Karina van Dalen-Oskam and Sarah Churchwell to discuss the benefits of a more diverse, inclusive reading 'diet' and the impact literature had on her vision of the world. From Black Lives Matter to the #MeToo movement and Extinction Rebellion, campaigners demand changes to how society is run, and that includes the books we read and study. The English literature canon – the books that are agreed to be good, important and worth studying – is also under revision.
- [Many hands](#) (organised by Queen Mary University of London). Join poets, historians, weavers and dancers in this online workshop to unravel the histories of Bengali weavers and their treatment under British rule. Learn about the complex interwoven Bengali and UK histories of craft and manufacture from Dr Lipi Begum, London College of Fashion; try your hand at some weaving; and allow poet Laila Sumpton to help you express your response to the workshops and discover how creating poems can help process and articulate emotions, politics and identity.
- [Making a home away from home](#) (organised by the British Academy and the University of Reading). Explore a replicated United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees tent decorated by a Syrian refugee and reflect on what 'home' looks like for the people who have been forcibly displaced. Drop in to chat with the researchers behind the project and try some Arabic coffee.

Now in its seventh year, this multi-city festival is run in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy. These are just samples of some of the free public online and socially distanced face-to-face activities taking place across the UK.

The full Being Human 2020 festival programme is available at <https://beinghumanfestival.org/events/>

Find out more about the festival at <https://beinghumanfestival.org/> and follow the latest news on Twitter at @BeingHumanFest.

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. **For all enquiries**, please contact Maureen McTaggart, Media and Public Relations Officer, School of Advanced Study, University of London, maureen.mctaggart@sas.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 7862 8859
2. **Being Human**: the UK's only national festival of the humanities, 12-22 November 2020. Led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British

Academy, Being Human is a national forum for public engagement with humanities research. The festival highlights the ways in which the humanities can inspire and enrich our everyday lives. For more information, please visit www.beinghumanfestival.org or follow the festival on social media at @BeingHumanFest.

3. **The School of Advanced Study (SAS)**, University of London, is the UK's national centre for the promotion and support of research in the humanities. SAS and its member institutes offer unparalleled resources, facilities and academic opportunities across a wide range of subject areas for the benefit of the national and international scholarly community. Last year SAS welcomed 892 research fellows and associates, held 1,903 events highlighting the latest research in the humanities, received 25.9 million online visits to its research resources and platforms, and hosted 173,493 visits to its specialist libraries and collections. The School also leads Being Human, the UK's only nationwide festival of the humanities. Find out more at www.sas.ac.uk or follow SAS on Twitter at @SASNews.
4. **The Arts and Humanities Research Council** is part of UK Research and Innovation. We're the UK's largest funder of arts and humanities research and training, investing over £100 million every year. We fund independent researchers in a wide range of subjects, including history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and many more. The research we fund provides social and cultural and benefits that contribute to the economic success of the UK, as well as to the culture and welfare of societies around the world. Find out more about us at ahrc.ukri.org, or on Twitter at @ahrcpress.
5. **The British Academy** is the voice of the humanities and social sciences. The Academy is an independent fellowship of world-leading scholars and researchers; a funding body for research, nationally and internationally; and a forum for debate and engagement. www.britishacademy.ac.uk, @BritishAcademy. For further information, please contact Sean Canty at the British Academy press office on s.canty@thebritishacademy.ac.uk or +44 (0) 207 969 5273.