It was one of these evenings, sometime in 2005 during the infamous

George W. Bush era, when a politically and socially disillusioned

artist sat in a hotel bar in New York and was suddenly approached

by an attractive gentleman in a tuxedo. The initial small talk

quickly developed into an intense conversation, and when the

stranger outed himself as a perfumer, he kicked off a creative

avalanche in Lisa Kirk. She grabbed a pen, wrote her phone number

on the baffled entrepreneur’s dress shirt and took leave with the

words: »I have a spectacular idea for a fragrance. Call me!«

The very next day, inspired by the perfumer’s call, who showed

himself interested in cooperating, Lisa Kirk began with the concept

for a fragrance that would revolutionize the market in the truest

sense of the word: a fragrance that was meant less as a product but

rather the projected matter of an artistic process focusing on a

reckoning with the Bush administration and the Iraq war. An

essence that would protest against existing conditions and call to

ultimate resistance. That would demonstrate the absurdity of

consumerism and the manic desire for label and luxury goods. Or,

as Kirk put it: »If we can’t start a real revolution, at least we can

create a fragrance that symbolizes rebellion.«

Kirk is known for her uncompromising, socially critical projects.

Her work deals primarily with the contradictions of our modern

consumer society as well as the aestheticization of radical political

interpretations; but to transfer these approaches to a perfume, to

translate them to liquid matter, posed entirely new problems for

Lisa Kirk. Paradoxically, the solution was to raise a question. And

that question was: how does revolution smell? Lisa Kirk began to

search the world for answers to this question. She contacted Central

and South American revolutionaries, spoke with Black Panthers,

and approached members of militant left-wing underground groups,

with historians and French philosophers. The results of her survey

can be summarized as an extremely virile but not particularly pleasant

blend of sweat, blood, tear gas, burnt rubber, rotting meat, and

urine. The next step was the olfactory implementation of this wild

cocktail, for which Kirk didn’t rely on her bar acquaintance but the

perfumer Patricia Choux. This process wasn’t for the squeamish;

Lisa Kirk would proceed as radically as her reputation called for.

Therefore, her directions for mixing the ingredients occasionally

demanded: »Let’s put some pussy inside!«

A few months later, Revolution celebrated its premiere: in the New

York art space Participant Inc., models disguised with ski masks,

terror-style, sprayed large amounts of the fragrance on the assembled

guests, whose reactions oscillated between outright horror and

great amusement. The magazine Artforum wrote that the scent

itself was at home »somewhere between patchouli and body odor«.

Ulrich Lang, a German native and perfume and art consultant who

advised Lisa Kirk during the realization of Revolution, described it

as »extremely smoky, avant-garde, and experimental«. A scent that

is not pleasing or fit for the masses, but absolutely wearable. And

that defined itself as a pure art project.

About a year later, in October 2007, Lisa Kirk created a follow-up

to the revolution project. At the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, an

offshoot of MoMA, she installed an imaginary perfume laboratory

that appeared like a terrorist hideout and had been completely

turned on its head as a metaphor for the political, social, and cultural

status quo. Eventually, in 2008, a further continuation of the

revolution cycle followed: in the form of proper packaging for the

rebellious essence. For this purpose, Kirk hired the New York based

Goldsmith Jelena Behrend. Together, they created a bottle

that was modeled after a pipe bomb and produced three prototypes

made of sterling silver, gold, and platinum. The bottles were

manufactured by Participant Inc. upon requests from willing

luxury revolutionaries – for the low, low price of $ 4.000 to $ 40.000,

depending on the version. Thus, Kirk succeeded with a brilliant

and ambivalent sleight of hand: she intentionally launched a product

that served as an example of consumer criticism and exaggerated

it in such a way that it reduced society’s notorious demand

for luxuries to absurdity – and turned it into a success.

To respond to the demands of marketing, Kirk conceived a sensational

commercial together with the photographer Gabriel Jeffrey.

Filmed in the style of a Calvin Klein spot, a female and a male

sniper who have accidentally been assigned the same target find

each other. At the end of the highly aesthetic, brilliantly cut mini

movie that is accompanied by elegiac music, the female sniper

pulls the mask from her face and opens her right hand. In it:

the deceptively real pipe bomb bottle, followed by the message

»Revolution – a fragrance for women and men«.

After he saw the clip, Ulrich Lang proposed that the artist should

take the final, logical step and commercialize the fragrance once

and for all. »Lisa agreed, so we got back into contact with Patricia

Choux«, says Lang. The perfumer now produced a more inexpensive

variation of Revolution, bottled in small 12ml laboratory

vials.

In the progressive concept store »Project No. 8« on 29th Street,

Kirk and Lang found the ideal distribution partner, especially since

the trendy hotel Ace, which is affiliated with the store, offered to

show the Revolution clip as video-on-demand in their rooms. At

this point, the revolution had finally arrived in New York.

Now Germans will also have an opportunity to sniff the smell of

rebellion. Starting in September of this year, Quartier 206 in Berlin

will become the exclusive distributor of »Revolution«.

For those who want to know what’s inside: the perfume owes its

burnt note to birch resin and tar, ambergris and musk are responsible

for the animal, sweaty nuance, and vetiver gives it a smoky

touch. Not necessarily a fragrance that Herr Westerwelle or Herr

Wulff would wear, but they don’t necessarily burst with the spirit

of revolution, either. Maybe other leading lights will soon try their

hand at insurrection. And will profess their – at least olfactory –

allegiance to the good old slogan: »Long live the revolution!«