



# THE EYE

STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF MAGIC

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## Jeanette Andrews' *Bottling the Impossible*

Sensory illusionist Jeanette Andrews remembers to this day how the visual of Harry Eng's impossible bottles struck her upon first sight eight years ago, but it wasn't until recently that she realized just how thoroughly that image had lodged itself in her brain. In *Bottling the Impossible*, her one-woman parlor show that opened in Chicago this year, Andrews centers the show around three impossible bottles that she created herself to combine magic, history, and scent.

"I had first tried to make one six years ago and I failed miserably," Andrews tells "The Eye." "But it was always something in the back of my head that I wanted to try to figure out." Then in 2018, when considering what to work on next, Andrews decided to create a new show explicitly themed around scent. "All of a sudden I realized instead of using the bottles in traditional ways, I could actually use them as perfume bottles and then have the objects inside coincide with the ideas in the

show and the scents that they're in," she says.

Andrews' research originally began in 2015 while she was developing *Thresholds*, a show she created with interactive illusions for each of the five senses. But from that broader sensory perspective, Andrews gave in to the particular pull she felt toward scent specifically, and she has been developing her own brand of olfactory magic ever since. *Bottling the Impossible* focuses on parlor magic and mentalism, and while the effects she presents aren't exclusively tied to the bottles she created, many do involve scent in some way

Andrews spent over a year just developing her own method for constructing the impossible bottles she had dreamed up. Then she had to figure out how to make the bottles work with the fragrances, and the fragrances work with the magic.

"Smelling each of the scents causes each type of magic," she explains. "The scents are dispersed in the room, either to the entire group or to one person at a time, depending on the effect. It might be the audience member who's on stage with me, and it gives them the ability to help perform that particular piece of magic."

The *Bottling the Impossible* experience begins with ticketing, relying on a multi-step RSVP process to build suspense and generate a special air of mystery around the show. Aesthetics at every level are a crucial part Andrews' perfor-

mance process; while building out the gallery space for *Bottling The Impossible's* debut earlier this summer, she hand-upholstered every velvet-covered stool in the house.

"I wanted the audience to be seated in chairs without backs, because I'm really interested in having an active audience," Andrews says. She was inspired to explore this balance between passive comfort and active attention on a visit to the Rothko Chapel in Houston. "I wanted people to have that weird feeling of sitting on something traditionally luxurious and plush but also bizarrely uncomfortable." Andrews will next stage *Bottling the Impossible* in October at the Elmhurst Art Museum in Chicago.

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