

DRINKS

Max Allen



ART OF FERMENTATION

Using pen and paint to visualise the strangely beautiful science of winemaking.

WHEN WINEMAKER GILLES Lapalus first saw one of Cameron Robbins' wind-powered drawing machines it made him think about fermentation. Lapalus knew that as yeast gobbles sugar in grape juice, it farts out carbon dioxide: perhaps this gas could also be harnessed to create images?

Now the artist and the winemaker have joined forces to turn the idea into reality.

In a coolroom in Harcourt, central Victoria, where Lapalus makes his Bertrand Bespoke and Maison Lapalus wines, Robbins has hooked up a drawing machine to a barrel of fermenting marsanne. As carbon dioxide blups through the airlock in the barrel, a pen connected to the airlock by a wire makes a mark on a slowly revolving sheet of paper, tracing a strangely beautiful record of the progress of the ferment.

Robbins usually harnesses elemental forces to create large-scale images: wind, tidal currents, solar energy.

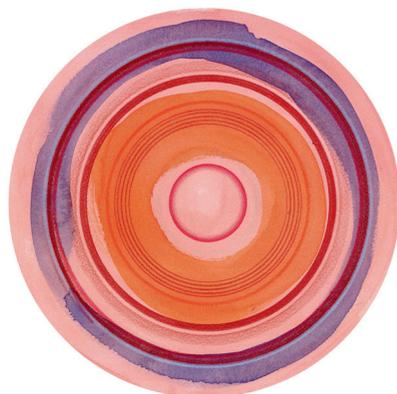
Here, more intimate images are created by the microscopic conversion of sugar to alcohol. "When we drink wine, we say its flavour is the signature of the vineyard," says Lapalus. "Well, each of these drawings is a signature of the fermentation of each wine. A unique representation of the wine you are drinking."

The Lapalus-Robbins ferment drawing project isn't the only example of wine and

art intersecting. In 2019, Brisbane-based artist Elizabeth Willing spent three months at the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) in Adelaide. The residency was organised by the Australian Network for Art & Technology, a group that brings together people from diverse disciplines.

"Three months wasn't nearly long enough," Willing says. "I could have spent three years just hanging out with the people studying yeast, let alone the rest of the researchers. Wine is a complex subject, everyone was so passionate. It's rich material for an artist to draw on."

For more than a decade, Willing's practice has explored ideas of consumption through food-and-drink-based sculptures, installations and performances. She has also spent time in the lab of Professor Charles



Spence, the British experimental psychologist known for his collaborations with celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, looking at how the brain perceives flavour.

"At the AWRI I worked with the sensory scientists developing visual imagery that could perhaps enhance the flavour of wine," says Willing. "They analysed six wines and I made six artworks [representing each wine]. I'm interested in how we can collect data about flavour and smell and transform that into something tangible and aesthetic."

She chose the circle form (below left) for each artwork, she says, because it creates an image with a beginning and end, from centre to edge, the way a wine's flavour evolves in a type of narrative that can be read like ripples.

Both these art/wine projects are works in progress.

"We're now testing to see whether liking increases when people taste the wine in conjunction with the artwork," says Willing. "One idea is to turn the images into a table-top that people can drink off."

Lapalus isn't sure yet what will become of the ferment drawings.

"Perhaps we'll sell them," he says. "Perhaps they will become the wine's label."

In the meantime, you can check out the work of the artists and winemaker at cameronrobbins.com, maisonlapalus.com, elizabethwilling.com and anat.org.au.



PROYECTO LA PINTA EL MILAGRO

ANDALUSIA \$38

A stunning, unique pet nat that Gilles Lapalus made in 2017 with some friends in Spain, using palomino grapes from 80-year-old vines. Light, hazy gold, fine spritz, beautiful flavours of apple and cashew, rich texture on the tongue.



2018 MAISON LAPALUS CHARDONNAY

VICTORIA \$46

Complex, vivid, seriously good chardonnay from a small vineyard planted in basalt country north of Melbourne: citrusy focused aromatics, bright and creamy in the mouth, finishing with an aftertaste of lightly grilled hazelnut.



2018 BERTRAND BESPOKE SYRAH

HEATHCOTE \$36

Made from shiraz grapes planted in the deep red soil slopes of Mount Camel in Heathcote, this is a beautifully vibrant young red wine. Fermented with 50 per cent whole bunches, it's medium-bodied and full of slurpy, silky, spicy cherries.