

## *Notes on Wine*

A text by Charlott Weise

*I hold my glass against the light and make my wine into a stained-glass window.*

Among human artifacts, wine is unexcelled as a symbol of resurrection and the fertility of this world. *Vino* has been much transfigured in rituals, whether it's the libations(1) of Dionysus & Bacchus, gods of ecstasy, or the communion of Jesus Christ, who said, "This is my blood, given for you." Today it is *Gaia* whom we crucify. Thereby subverting an essentialist notion of the female body to nature. *Gaia* gives us our wine, our expression of terroir, our *blood of the earth*.(2)

The Cambridge Dictionary states on *terroir*: "The special character that a wine is thought to get from the particular place where the grapes were grown to make it: *The French tend to talk lyrically about the terroir, the characteristics given by particular climate and soil, while Americans worship winemakers instead.*"(3) Abstraction also is deeply tied to terroir in the French tradition of painting. Color, gesture, materiality are primary, imagery is secondary - that's why Joan Mitchell's work has been deeply accepted in France. Her favorite wine was Sancerre.(4)

Wine, liquidity and paint. I am reading about northern Italian vines, the Nebbiolo and its relative Freisa, which was always associated with the vineyards surrounding the town of Turin. These grapes' dark velvety bodies look as if painted in smokey *sfumato* performed by Leonardo da Vinci, carrying metaphysical information. Typical aromas include: red cherry, blackberry, mountain herbs, minerals.(5) Prussian blue, Ultramarine, Crimson, Vermillion come to mind. Wine culture is so similar to

that of perfume, and also that of abstract painting.

*Dream 1: In a Dionysian sway, the divine has her again: In a metaphysical emotional moment, she imagined herself as a 1991 Vintage only waiting to be uncorked.*

It seems alcohol is the only socially acceptable escape that still is left in our society and controversially it is the glue of the art world social fabric.(6) Drunk moms, sommelier selected wines on sale at Aldi. Letting loose. There is something connecting us with the ancient idea that wine is an elixir. I am thinking of sedimentation - and the unconscious, sinking to the bottom.

Altered states, *pre-modern nightlife*: the foundations of *clubbing* go back thousands of years to Mesopotamia, when people first abandoned nomadic lives to build and live in cities,(7) cultivate gardens, land and grow crops.

People probably have always looked for an escape from the social and behavioral constraints of the day. That's what the dark of the night has always been about. I think of wine as a drink of the twilight. *Entering the shadow side.*

*Lacrimae novae, lacrimae sacrae, lacrimae rubrae.*(8)

In the *Bacchanalia*, early Roman festivals, people celebrated Bacchus, the Greco-Roman god of wine and with him freedom, intoxication and ecstasy,(9) They soon formed mysterious cults connected to the dark side. I see paintings by Rubens, Titian and Velazquez: Satyrs & Fauns dancing in the forest amongst wasted men and women urged by bacchanalian priestesses to break social and sexual boundaries. A release party of tensions, appeasing their desires to feel connected to Bacchus and the pleasures mother earth has to offer. "My intention is

to tell of bodies changed,” Ovid in *Metamorphoses*.

There is another god of wine according to Roman sources. Liber Pater is Rome’s equivalent to Dionysus and Bacchus (both of whom were sometimes titled *eleutherios* - liberator). Liber protected various aspects of viticulture, (male) fertility and virility; he personified male procreative power, which was ejaculated as the “soft seed” of the grape. His temples held the image of a phallus.(10) Together with Libera he formed an ancient Roman god couple that specialized in the protection of the harvest.(11) And as Liber’s divine power was incarnate in the vine, grape and wine, he was offered the first, sacred pressing of the grape-harvest, known as *sacrima*.(12)

Cy Twombly also has been inspired by this cosmos. His *Bacchus* series are huge paintings with intense unembarrassed vermillion swirls of bloody red riffing off bacchanalian euphoria and its madness, (drunken) violence and war. In 1957 Twombly wrote in line with this spirit(s): “To paint involves a certain crisis, or at least a crucial moment of sensation or release, and by crisis it should by no means be limited to a morbid state, but could just as well be one ecstatic impulse”.(13)

*Dream 2: Left a club atrociously besotted and took a seat on the curb next to Marie Jeanne, she was a tall magnum Bordeaux. That’s when Rihanna stepped out of a long limousine with a wine glass in hand. (The painting Purse, Phone & Wine inspired by Rihanna’s fashion of leaving restaurants with a wine glass). (14)*

“It sure would be possible to construct an entire history of art considered solely through the prism of alcohol”(15) I’d love that. Words for being drunk from *thesaurus.com*: besotted, inebriated, intoxicated, boozed up, wasted, laced, flushed, lush, under the influence,

juiced, totaled, slobbered, glazed. After all, the origins of viticulture remain somewhat mysterious. That's why I believe that cave paintings have been performed in a drunken ritual. Ancient works of literature, like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, are referential to wine, but it seems no one says where it came from! Nor do the ancient Egyptians offer an origin story for wine. They used the liquid to symbolize blood, and it is known that 26 casks of it – each labelled according to vintner, vineyard and vintage – were buried with King Tutankhamen.(16) He seemed to have preferred red. And after all the Bible credits Noah, a noted drunk, with planting the first vineyard, but it doesn't say what inspired him to ferment grapes.

### *Visions of Wine*

*I imagine an Egyptian grave filled with carton boxes of wine. If death is a journey to the afterlife, then drinking wine is a transformational journey - une petite mort ...*

... alcohol's magic is miraculous, for it transforms the most metaphysically capricious thing we have yet found in this universe: human consciousness. So I put on my wine hat and let my painting *struggle* through a drunken state. "Stomped grapes on canvas" - I am reading that if you want to bring out the grape's most complex tastes and aromas, you have to make the vines struggle. Apparently the vine will get too comfortable if it's got all it needs, it'll focus on growing big and sprawling. So if you're leaving the vine a little *thirsty* "it will focus its effort on reproducing itself sexually, which for a vine means making grapes."(17) I am in the studio and I am thirsty too (Libido), and so I go and make paintings.

While drunk painting is too appealing, it nearly always goes wrong. Drunk woman, binge drinking, hysterical, in the mood for love, aphrodisiac potions lifting the spirit in spirits. That is how I go. I let myself loose on my notebooks, they are a dissertation, an experience.

- (1) An act of pouring a liquid as a sacrifice (as to a deity).
- (2) Ross Anderson, <https://aeon.co/essays/even-in-a-secular-age-wine-remains-a-sacred-elixir>
- (3) <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/terroir>
- (4) Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter*, p. 385.
- (5) Ian D'Agata, *Italy's Native Wine Grape Terroirs*, p.172.
- (6) I am writing this in anticipation to the opening at Cascina Gilli, it's 2021 y'all.
- (7) Mark Bellis, professor of public health at Bangor University in Wales addresses the *22nd International Tourism Safety Conference* in Las Vegas on the lessons that 21st-century cities and resorts can draw from the long human history of over-indulgence. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/news/binge-drinking-what-ancient-world-can-teach-us-about-dealing-drunken-revellers-a83716.html>
- (8) Translation: new tears, sacred tears, red tears.
- (9) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacchanalia>
- (10) St Augustine, (trans. R. W. Dyson) *The City of God against the pagans*, 7.21., in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, 1998, pp. 292-3. St Augustine (AD 354 – 430) uses Varro (116 – 27 BC) as source.
- (11) The ancient Roman goddess Libera was daughter of the agricultural goddess Ceres and wife to Liber, god of wine and freedom.
- (12) Barbette Stanley Spaeth, *The Roman goddess Ceres*, 1996, pp.41, 43.
- (13) *Stuart Brent presents Cy Twombly*, ed. N. de Roscao, 1951.
- (14) <https://time.com/4431632/rihanna-wine-glasses/>
- (15) <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160105-the-art-of-heavy-drinking>
- (16) <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/king-tut-drank-red-wine/>
- (17) <http://www.wineanorak.com/struggle.htm>

*Charlott Weise's (Görlitz, 1991) art practice stems from painting and approaches the rich history of this medium with an intuitive process that could be described as a form of writing with images. Deeply fascinated by the fluidity of oil paint, she embraces its shifting character to give shape to dream-like fantasies and fears, idiosyncratically giving a painterly stage to female archetypes and famous women from the past as much as from the contemporary. Weise holds a BFA in Fine Art from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie from 2014 and was an artist in residence at the prestigious program De Ateliers in Amsterdam from 2014 to 2016. She has an upcoming solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Münster (Münster, 2021) and her work was exhibited among others at Palais Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 2020), Damien and The Love Guru, (Brussels, 2019), Ginevra Gambino (Cologne, 2017) and NADA Miami (with FORMATOCOMODO, 2016). In 2020 she was awarded the Koninklijke Prijs voor Vrije Schilderkunst prize for painting. Charlott Weise lives and works in Amsterdam.*

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