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Ruinart discovers contemporary art deep within historic cellar

March 18, 2016



Ruinart bottle in its cellar in Reims, France

By SARAH JONES

LVMH-owned Champagne brand Ruinart is exploring the landscape of its cellars in Reims, France with the help of a photographic eye.

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Every year, the self-proclaimed oldest Champagne house collaborates with an artist, giving them free reign to produce a work that tells the brand's story in a new way. This year, Ruinart tapped Danish multidisciplinary artist Erwin Olaf, who documented the influence of nature and man on the cellars.

"We have followed and admired Erwin's work for a long time," said Nicolas Ricroque, brand director for **Ruinart Champagne**, New York. "With his eye for perfection and reverence, he emphasizes precision in all visual elements painterly lighting, flawless hair and make-up and settings that create an allure of serenity.

"At first, we were interested about the typical photographs of Erwin with characters and scenography," he said. "On his first visit to Reims, Erwin was fascinated and impressed by the depth and immensity of the crayres, preferring to concentrate on the details of their prehistoric natural formation and the traces left by man."

Going underground

Ruinart's relationship to the art world stems from its founding in 1729 during the Age of Enlightenment, when the arts and culture flourished.

Today, that sense of French art de vivre is present in Ruinart's support of contemporary art, including its appearances at a number of art fairs.

Previous editions of its artistic collaboration have included a light sculpture of a gala table by Maarten Haas to celebrate the launch of a new vintage in 2008 and a gift box for Blanc de Blancs by Georgia Russell. Last year, Hubert Le Gall paid homage to the house's lengthy heritage with a calendar made of glass ([see story](#)).

When Mr. Olaf first visited Reims, he was taken by the depth and size of the house's crayres. He then decided to document them using the Hasselblad camera he has owned for 35 years.

The original black-and-white photography he created for Ruinart finds the complexity in the cavernous space, from a carving of a human face to a the grooves in the walls.



Photography by Edwin Olaf

In a short video, Ruinart shows his process, descending into the cellar with his camera. This acts not only as a documentation of the project but as a miniature tour of the underground space.

He explains in an echoing voiceover that he was interested in the human touch left on the space, which to him resembled wall art. His photography typically focuses on people, so this artwork presented a challenge, as he created still lives.

Mr. Olaf also took inspiration from the curves in an illustration by Alphonse Mucha commissioned by Ruinart in 1896, the first in a long line of artistic partnerships.

Erwin Olaf, the great artist of tomorrow

Another short film focuses on the cellar itself, a chalk canopy that has been the chosen location for aging Ruinart Champagne since the mid 1700s.

The timing of this campaign enables Ruinart to commemorate the cellar's recent distinction as a historic site.

A number of Mot Hennessy's properties, including Champagne hillsides, houses and cellars, have been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.



Ruinart cellar

The sites selected, which include Ruinart's cellars under Saint-Nicaise hill, are being noted for their value to the global population, and will be protected and preserved. For the wine and spirits division of LVMH, this helps to reinforce their position in society beyond products ([see story](#)).

"With the actual photo shoot occurring within the cellars, Erwin emphasizes the beauty of our cellars which have just been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site," Mr. Ricroque said.

"Normally photographers try to capture the cellars in their entirety," he said. "However, Erwin decided instead to focus and bring to life the details of the cellars showing a new vision of this famous crayres."

Art at heart

Ruinart's artistic pairings extend to other forms of expression.

The New York City Ballet paired with Ruinart Champagne to create the first official Champagne of the dance company.

The partnership began in the fall of 2014 in the David H. Koch Theater, home to the NYC Ballet. Ruinart has the opportunity to align itself alongside the company and the art presented at each performance, while also likely gaining a consumer base among ballet enthusiasts ([see story](#)).

Ruinart maintains a presence at a number of international art fairs. It is currently the official Champagne sponsor of Art Dubai, appearing with other luxury labels.

Jeweler Piaget is supporting the tenth edition of Art Dubai, giving itself a platform to illuminate some of its most creative designs.

Taking place at the Madinat Jumeirah resort from March 16, the most prominent art fair in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia will bring together 94 galleries from 40 different nations, making it a truly global affair. During the show, Piaget will host a specially curated exhibit of pieces from the 1960s and 70s and high jewelry designs, allowing the brand to showcase its artistry to the creatives gathered ([see story](#)).

"Ruinart has a long and consistent history within the art world," Mr. Ricoque said. "The house has been working with artists since 1896.

"Ruinart is very involved within the art world and has significant presence in many of the art fairs around the world," he said. "Our presence and commissions with artists give us a great platform to communicate with our consumers.

"While we always give our artists 'carte blanche,' there is always an element of Ruinart's rich history that comes through."

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