

Is Wine Art?

I came to wine last. First, there was dance, classical ballet mostly, but other styles as well. Formal dance training was also formal music training: classical music, jazz, Broadway musicals. Adolescence led me through the annals of rock and roll and my heart still belongs to those iconic musicians of the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties. I was a dance major in college and supplemented my education studying acting, painting, music, philosophy and astronomy. I fell in love with the Impressionists while traveling the globe. Once I was out in the real world, I never veered far from an artistic life, but in supporting roles rather than on stage performances. I found myself transitioning into the fascinating wine world and embraced the pursuit of wine education and certification collection with tremendous vigor. Philosophical ponderings crept in too until finally; I went back to the ivory tower to immerse myself in learning the Humanities focusing on philosophy and cultural studies. I discovered that my lifelong questions about art had a discipline called aesthetic philosophy. I realized an enduring fascination with its tenuous criteria. There is something about just knowing art at a glance, or hearing discordant music and realizing that it isn't quite melodious. What is an aesthetic musical score, dance performance, or work of art? Why does one painting achieve greatness when another may not? What does this have to do with wine? Can wine, the object itself, be art?

I spent my graduate studies contemplating these and similar questions and I wrote my master's thesis on the aesthetics of wine. I uncovered distinct intersections between the formal qualities of the wine object and the fine art object, specifically paintings. From there, I developed a matrix for evaluating both objects side by side. It is a very simple question, just three little words, with a very difficult and multifarious answer. On the surface, it seems a simple yes or no. However, in thought, the complexity reveals itself as there are so many variable and possibilities. Is wine art? What do you think? Oenophiles often jump right into a resounding yes. We will explore these exciting questions in my series about wine and art.

According to the Stanford University online philosophy database, fondly known as the *Plato Pages*; "Art is a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, auditory, and performing artifacts, expressing the author's imaginative or technical skill, intended to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power...the term 'aesthetic' has come to be used to designate, among other things, a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value. For the most part, aesthetic theories have divided over questions regarding whether artworks are necessarily aesthetic objects." Philosophers, going back to Aristotle, have conventionally disregarded the senses of touch, taste, and smell when evaluating life and valuing art. Traditionally, foods and beverages have not been considered art objects. The definition goes on to describe art (artifacts) as "original and authentic works, and not intended to become or serve as a commodity." On that note, fine art is definitely a commodity, such as Monet's *Water Lilies* painting, of which he produced hundreds of similar paintings in a series valued in the millions of dollars. It is well known that art has been commodified.

It is easy to see how wine may or may not fit into these definitions. At first glance, people either firmly say yes or no. Many people, winemakers, critics, educators, and industry professionals agree that wine is art. Just as many people reserve that valuation for something more than a bunch of fermented grapes claiming wine is more of a craft and artisanal object. Now wait, isn't the root word of artisanal, art? Let me take this one step further. Aesthetics can refer to an object and/or to an experience. Some philosophers claim that the aesthetics of an object are inherent while others claim that aesthetics are experiential, within context. Perhaps if the aesthetics are not inherent in the object but only occur in the experience of the object, it is a nebulous experience, the experience of physical consumption. We consume fine art with our eyes and music with our ears. We consume wine physically but process the object through our senses of feeling (texture), taste and smell. Is Botticelli's *Primavera* painting beautiful

or is its beauty truly in the eye of the beholder as an expression of aesthetic experience? If either of these ideas is true, then why not use the concepts and apply them to wine? Is a glass of Perrier Jouët Belle Époque Fleur de Champagne rosé beautiful to observe, or is the beauty in the sip? I argue that it is both. It is my conclusion that wine, some carefully cultivated and crafted wine, can be an art object but I have also found that the aesthetic experience is where the real beauty lies. Imagine if you will, the experience of being in love, walking arm and arm along the Seine in Paris, snuggling up al fresco in a café and watching the shimmering Eiffel Tower while sipping on a glass of wine. One can just imagine cartoon hearts floating all around you and your lover. That wine is no doubt the most delicious wine you have ever tasted. Therein lies the aesthetic experience. Smuggle that same bottle home in your luggage and drink it on an ordinary Thursday evening while eating take out Thai in front of the TV, and it will never taste the same or as exquisite.

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Simone FM Spinner, MH, CWE, CWS, is an aesthetic philosopher and wine educator living and working in Colorado. She earned her Master of Humanities at the University of Colorado, Denver, after writing her seminal thesis about the aesthetics of wine. She also created and earned the first degree in the Study & Business of Wine for MSUD. She holds a series of wine credentials from WSET, Court of Master Sommeliers, Spanish Wine Academy, and various other organizations. Simone is hoping to complete her WSET diploma in 2017. Simone works as a wine industry professional and teaches classes about philosophy, cultural studies and wine at the University of Colorado, Denver. She is conducting preliminary research for her Ph.D., a continuation of her work in aesthetics of wine, which she plans to complete at the Universities of Lisbon and Copenhagen in a consortium. Simone owns two companies: Wine Rocks & Chasing Grapes, and is the senior editor for French Wine Girl Travels blog. Currently, she is penning a book called *Denver Food: A Culinary Evolution* and is drafting a wine travel series called *Chasing Grapes* based upon her wine region travels. In her spare time, Simone finds inspiration consuming the arts, traveling, dancing and going to concerts with family and friends. She lives in the foothills west of Denver with the loves of her life: her two Shiba Inu dogs.

IMAGES

Botticelli's Primavera

Monet's Water Lilies