



The Art of Whisky (in Lockdown)

The subjects of fine art and Scotch whisky might not be obvious companions, but when the two come together it opens up a **world of craft, subtlety and expression for the beholder to explore**. This is the story of how a global pandemic led to one such unlikely, but truly enriching, blend of talents.

Art-imitates-whisky-imitates-art

After many years of painstaking analysis and delicate investigation, experts from the world of fine art estimate that the Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci's most celebrated masterpiece, contains more than 30 individual layers of considerably applied paint and glaze.

The result of this technique, whilst not obvious to the naked eye, was masterfully pursued by da Vinci in an effort to achieve a so-called 'dream-like quality' to his work. It was, we are told, the artist's own relentless 'standards of subtlety' that set his craft apart from centuries of other artwork, paintings and rivals.

Multiple layers. Dream-like qualities. Standards of subtlety. Speaking in these terms, it is not difficult for any whisky drinker - art enthusiast or not - to begin drawing lines between da Vinci's domain and the world of Scotch.

Of Scotch whisky: ours is also a masterful craft, one that spans centuries in terms of its evolution, complexity and pursuit of quality. Now and again a genuine masterpiece is also uncovered.

Our master blender is the artist; our copper still and oak cask act as brush and paint; our new make the ready canvas; and our beholder, within whom beauty lies, is the discerning drinker.

Whisky on canvas

When it comes to Scotch whisky I know a good degree. I know considerably less about art. But I've always been aware of some connection, a presence between the two crafts of whisky making and painting. To draw out some of the parallels: natural talent, honed technique, resolute patience, and minutiae of detail that the artist or craftsperson must invest in creating something so complex yet innately consumable, a result worthy of more than just a passing glance of the eye or wash across the palate.

For me these two worlds collided, meaningfully at least, towards the beginning of what will forever be known as 'lockdown'. Amidst the all-consuming confusion and turmoil of those early days, in what would turn out to be a prolonged conversation of relative calm I was contacted by an artist based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with something of a penchant for Scotch.

A Corryvreckan of paint and whisky

The artist, Gisela Garcia Gleria, took note of my occasional commentary on the subject and suggested we work together to extract aspects or nuances of the world of whisky which could serve as inspiration for her future artwork.

The wider world, but the whisky industry in particular, has seen a raft of inspiration, collaboration and opportunity born out of enforced lockdown and social isolation.

With that in mind, and keen to put any extra time at home to good use, Gisela and I began our conversation. It was a conversation about whisky. And about art. And about how we could bring whisky to life using her talents on canvas and my 'talents' for, well, thinking a lot about the subject.

At this point, let me state the obvious: Gisela's paintings don't (yet) command the same profile as da Vinci's. But, dear reader, we already know that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, and this particular beholder (me) saw a world of enchantment in the idea of exploring the art of whisky and the art of painting.

So evolved our fervent, Transatlantic connection.

Even though we could barely step out of our front doors, here we were toing and froing across oceans blending two seemingly separate subjects, and two complete strangers, in a Corryvreckan of paint, whisky, inspiration and frustrated isolation.

Fast forward to mid-May (we're still in lockdown...) and Gisela has produced eight glorious expressions of whisky artwork, each one depicting a different whisky distillery from across the regions of Scotland.

Painted using acrylic on canvas, Gisela knits together tones that evoke each distillery's surrounding environment, the subtleties of its produce and the emotions she experiences when drinking the whiskies to which they give life.

Looking at each one in turn, you can almost inhale the aromas of malted barley, hear the new make running from the stills, and savour the mouthfeel of a perfectly matured dram hewn straight from the cask in a cool, damp dunnage.

To date, Gisela has captured the essences of Strathisla in the snow, Tomatin on ice, Dalwhinnie bathed in moonlight, Bruichladdich under cloudy skies, Ardbeg battered by waves, Lagg surrounded by flowers, Arran in a storm, and - my favourite so far - the stunning view from Raasay's stillroom across to the mountains of Skye.

With the 'Distillery Series' now in full flow, expect to enjoy a host of further expressions of this kind, as well as new reflections of the whisky world on canvas in the not-too-distant future.

A happy 'homecoming'

In a happy case of 'homecoming', the owners of Raasay Distillery were so taken by their own expression that the original painting is, as we speak, making its way to Scotland to hang on the distillery walls. Art-imitating-whisky-imitating-art.

It is incredibly gratifying for both artist and writer - especially at a time when distance has never felt so relevant - to think that an idea which began in Edinburgh, and then became a reality in Buenos Aires, is soon to adorn the home of one of the Scotch whisky industry's most exciting new ventures.

If Raasay's maturing cask samples are anything to go by, then they'll be a fine match for the beauty, subtlety and craft evident within in each and every one of Gisela's paintings.

And, as with the Mona Lisa's smile, any painting worth its canvas, or whisky worth its barley, leaves the beholder with something of an enigma to ponder long after the glass is empty.

“Our master blender is the artist; our copper still and oak cask act as brush and paint; our new make the ready canvas; and our beholder, within whom beauty lies, is the discerning drinker.”

Gisela Garcia Gleria is an artist living and working in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is a passionate whisky enthusiast, and is open to commission requests for whisky inspired artwork from whisky lovers everywhere.

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Strathisla Distillery in winter



Lagg Distillery surrounded by flowers



Dalwhinnie Distillery under moonlight



Arran Distillery in a storm



Bruichladdich Distillery under cloudy skies



The view to Skye from Raasay Distillery's still room

About Messrs. Whisky & Co.

Messrs. Whisky & Co. provides consultancy, experiences and media services to the Scotch whisky industry and its consumers. Founded in 2018, it was established with one guiding principle: to help discerning whisky businesses, producers, retailers, societies and enthusiasts get the most out of every dram.

To us, Scotch whisky is the most social of currencies. This is our ethos and we promote it across the world, bringing people closer with Scotch whisky.



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