

THE WINE CLUB



ALOK CHANDRA

Fruit of labour

We know that wine is most commonly made from grapes, that grapes are the fruit of the common grape vine (scientific name: *vitis vinifera*), and that wine grapes differ from table grapes in terms of sugar-acid balance and flavour characteristics.

The uninitiated would be amazed to know that there are between 5,000 and 10,000 varieties of *vitis vinifera* — 1,368 have been described in a recent book co-authored by British Master of Wine Jancis Robinson — but only a few are used to make wine in commercial quantities. Of these, about 30 varieties make up 90 per cent of the wines commonly available worldwide.

Grapes can be cultivated either as a free-standing bush or trained on trellises in vineyards — the science of cultivating grapes is called viticulture, which includes the whole nine yards: determining planting layouts and training methods, managing the vineyards (irrigation, fertilisers, pests and diseases), as well as pruning and harvesting of grapes. Grapes are normally harvested once a year — in the autumn in low temperate climatic zones and pre-summer in warmer tropical places like India, Thailand and Brazil.



Wines made from really old vines may have the term *vieilles vignes* ('old vines', in French) on the label

Harvesting was done by hand till advances in technology enabled machine-harvesting to increase the harvest speeds by up to 100 times (with concomitant cost savings). Of course, the vineyards have to be planted to suit the mechanical harvesters. So, the vineyards with those long straight rows are harvested by machines.

Some vineyards continue to be hand-harvested: vineyards in hilly terrains, estates where the quality of the wine justifies the labour cost, or wines where hand-harvesting is necessary (Sauternes, Ice Wines). In India, all grapes are still harvested by hand as the small size of plots does not justify the high capital costs of replanting vineyards and machine harvesters.

Grape vines take between three and five years to start producing usable grapes and can last for about 50 to 100 years — although most vineyards replant sections after 20 to 40 years. In Europe, most vineyards were wiped out by Phylloxera in the late 1800s, and so there are no vineyards over 100 years of age — the oldest grape vine I've been able to trace is a 450-year-old single trunk of Zametovka (a red-grape) in the town of Maribor, Slovenia (Eastern Europe) that is said to still bear fruit! Now that's longevity for you.

While yields reduce over time, grape quality improves, so some producers seek out parcels of old vines to produce their premium wines — this is still possible in areas that escaped Phylloxera: New Zealand, Australia, South America, South Africa, parts of Europe and the Napa Valley of California.

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Some of the wineries making wines from old vines include Boekenhoutskloof (South Africa), Bibi Graetz (Italy), Chateau de Saint Cosme (France), Tahblik (Australia), and St Urbans-Hof (Germany).

**My favourite old vine wine:** Chateau de Saint Cosme Gigondas, whose 2010 vintage was No 2 on *Wine Spectator's* Top 100 wines of 2012. A blend whose exact proportions change every vintage, this is produced from 60-year-old vines. The 2014 vintage (92 points on *Wine Spectator*, ₹6,311 in Bengaluru) is 70 per cent Grenache, 15 per cent Mourvedre and the balance split between Syrah and Cinsault — with roasted alder and savoury notes form a robust frame around the chewy-edged currant, plum and bitter cherry paste flavours.

Alok Chandra is a Bengaluru-based wine consultant

# Neighbourhood stories

A region riven by conflict comes together to express hope through ordinary lives. Veer Arjun Singh on an art exhibition that celebrates diversity and community

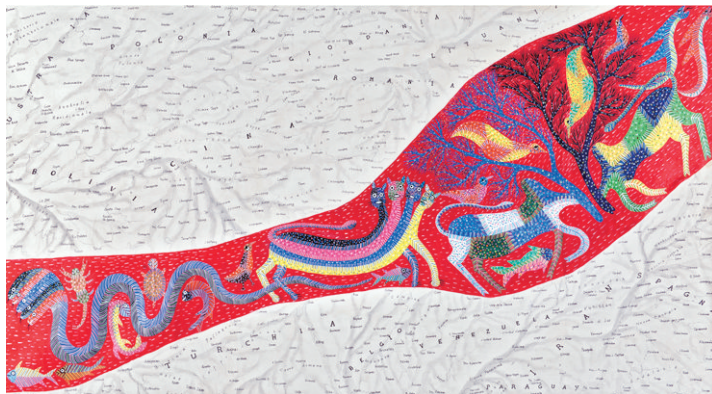


Untitled by Karan Shrestha



(Left) Nataraj Sharma's *Orchid Platina Phase 2*; (below) *Indo River* by Nicola Strippoli Tarshito with Anand Kumar Shyam

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In the South Asian context, there has been nothing ordinary about the past decade. Curator of an art exhibition in Delhi titled "The Edge", art historian Yashodhara Dalmia sees life in South Asia as a rolling cauldron of despair. And it is this common sentiment that has brought together artists from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and India, to speak out through their art about the issues that plague our times.

"The issues of people across the borders are very similar to ours," says Dalmia. The polarisation and lack of governance, the haphazard development and marginalisation — these issues both divide us and trap us together. Sumedh Rajendran's artwork shows people trapped behind steel fencing. Sri Lankan artist Anoli Perera's "Masked" series reflects on the lives of people in a country ravaged by civil war. "But it's not just about the aftermath of the war," says Dalmia. "Isn't the struggle of ordinary life also a kind of violence?"

In *Orchid Platina Phase 2*, Nataraj Sharma paints a village outside Vadodara once frequented by people wanting to escape the stresses of city life. But the last decade of unplanned development has robbed the place of its quietude. Dalmia points to the man in the middle of the canvas. Though surrounded by concrete on all sides, he is still savouring his

*jalebis*. "It's the resilience of the people, the endurance, that gives us hope," she says.

Not just the expression but also the quality, imagination and the palpable energy of these 15 artists — which include names like Gigi Scaria, Jagath Weerasinghe and Karan Shrestha — says Dalmia,



Masked IV by Anoli Perera

made her bring the art under one roof. The two-week long exhibition kickstarts the 10th anniversary of Delhi's Shrine Empire Gallery, which will be followed by curated exhibitions and panel discussions spread over the year.

"The Edge" is on display at Bikaner House in New Delhi till September 22



Sumedh Rajendran's steel installation

## A little like love

Taapsee Pannu takes the focus away from the men in Anurag Kashyap's *Manmarziyaan*, says Indira Kannan

In *Manmarziyaan*, Anurag Kashyap's latest film that premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival on Tuesday, in a theatre that was surprisingly only about two-thirds full, an "updated" "love triangle" as we've been hearing for a long time? Not really. But does it need to be one to be enjoyable? Not really. *Manmarziyaan* is worth a watch because it's mostly good fun, with some great performances.

The story revolves around the possible romantic, sexual and matrimonial choices for Rumi, a sporty, spirited and assertive young woman in Amritsar. She wants to spend her life with Vicky, a local DJ and charming peacock. But he can't commit to marriage; there are always other priorities, including *gobhi parathas*. Enter Robbie, an NRI suitor who is determined to marry Rumi. Why, why and why? Well, who can ever tell? *Manmarziyaan* doesn't even try.

A triangle, by definition, needs three angles. If any of the angles collapse, it's no longer one. Here we have Abhishek Bachchan playing Robbie, a banker who works in London, returning home to Amritsar to choose a Punjabi bride who might please his parents. He does the most justice to the formal opening placard in films, about all the characters being entirely fictional. Sure, Robbie is fictional, but could he ever be even somewhat plausible? We're never quite sure why he is hellbent on choosing Rumi, after

just one look at her photograph. It's as much of a mystery as his polished Hindi in the midst of the hearty Punjabi Hindi spoken by every other character around him. Or the reason for his infinite patience with Rumi, which at times appears more silly than sensitive. Similar characters, of husbands waiting patiently for their wives to return their affection, have already been portrayed

with more conviction in Mani Ratnam's *Mouna Raagam* (1986) and *Roja* (1992) and even in Aditya Chopra's *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (2008), among others. This is meant to be Bachchan's comeback after a long break. The script does not do him many favours, but there are some moments in this film that make you wonder if he's still on that break. Or if he should be.

Vicky, aka DJ Sandzz, is the object of Rumi's love and lust, played brilliantly and with unrestrained abandon by Vicky Kaushal. He's happy to play second fiddle to the confident and smarter Rumi, but proves himself incompatible with responsibility, or

indeed, intelligence. Inexplicably, Rumi is emotionally attached to him even after, as she points out, he didn't show up when she once needed to have an abortion. Vicky's character starts out as endearing, but slowly loses steam as it turns out there's nothing more to him. But Kaushal owns the role, whether he is portraying manic energy, *joie de vivre*, cluelessness, bravado or heartbreak.

With two of the three angles wobbling, it leaves only one point in the triangle. Luckily for *Manmarziyaan*, that point is a bright spot in the form of Rumi, who carries the film all by herself. Taapsee Pannu delivers oodles of spunk, angst and aggres-

sion in her role. But unlike *Sholay's* Basanti, who's still unmatched as a character — who chose to work, live and love on her own terms — Rumi does not put up with a lot from Vicky, yet can't let go of him, not even when Robbie offers an easy way out. Pannu's performance is dazzling and dominates the film, and it's ironic that the English title for *Manmarziyaan* at TIFF was "Husband Material", focusing instead on the men in the film.

The colourful, bustling town of Amritsar is a joy to watch. Amit Trivedi's music is sumptuous, and there's lots of it, as Kashyap leaves nothing unsaid, or rather, unsung.

The "updated" aspect of this romance seems mainly to lie in its switch from tenderness to "Tenderness". But some of the strongest — and funniest — moments of *Manmarziyaan* are indeed to be found in its references to social media as well as Aadhaar, which promises to be a bottomless gold mine for joke writers for the foreseeable future.

The last scene is one of the best moments of the film, as Robbie and Rumi share a walk and an easy conversation, mercifully free of overpowering music, angst or anger. It's a very satisfying, though somewhat belated, end to an unlikely crowd-pleaser from Anurag Kashyap.

