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Maison Ruinart Unveils Immersive Art Installation in Historic Champagne Cellars

Julian Charrière’s “Chorals” explores deep time and environmental themes beneath Reims, marking countdown to 300th anniversary.

Tuesday, September 30, 2025



Maison Ruinart, the oldest established Champagne house, has unveiled a new art installation by Franco-Swiss artist Julian Charrière at its historic site in Reims, France. The work, titled “Chorals,” is part of Ruinart’s ongoing Countdown program, which marks the decade leading up to the house’s 300th anniversary in 2029. Each year, Ruinart invites an artist to create a permanent piece that explores the relationship between art, nature and the Champagne terroir, with a focus on environmental themes.

Charrière’s installation is located deep within one of Ruinart’s famous chalk cellars, known as crayères. These vast underground spaces were carved from chalky subsoil formed over 65 million years ago by the sedimentation of marine micro-organisms. The crayères are not only central to the aging of Ruinart’s wines but also serve as a geological record of a time when the Champagne region was covered by a warm sea.

During his first visit to 4 Rue des Crayères, Charrière was struck by the sense of descending into both the earth and deep time. He decided to create an immersive sound and light installation that evokes the memory of this vanished sea. Visitors follow a stone path around a shallow pool of water that reflects the chalk walls. Underwater recordings—capturing rustling, clicking and currents—are played through speakers synchronized with shifting light effects. The result is an environment that simulates being submerged beneath the ocean’s surface.

Charrière’s approach does not deliver an explicit message but instead offers a sensory experience that encourages reflection on humanity’s relationship with nature and time. The installation draws attention to how geological processes unfold over millions of years, in contrast to the rapid environmental changes seen today due to climate change and ocean acidification.

The artist’s connection to Champagne is personal as well as professional. Charrière is half-French, with family roots in the region, and spent many childhood summers there. His previous collaboration with Ruinart involved a series of screen prints depicting coral reefs, created using chalk pigment from Champagne. These works were exhibited at international art fairs as part of Ruinart’s Conversations with Nature series.

Ruinart’s crayères have played a key role in both local history and winemaking. Since Gallo-Roman times, chalk has been extracted for construction and later used for storing and aging wine due to its stable temperature and humidity. The crayères were recognized as a “Remarkable Natural Site” by France in 1931 and designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2015.

The importance of chalk extends beyond its historical uses. For Champagne producers, chalky soils regulate moisture and provide optimal drainage for vines, contributing to the distinctive minerality and complexity of the wines. The slow ripening process fostered by these conditions is essential for developing flavor.

Ruinart has made efforts to preserve and highlight its heritage at 4 Rue des Crayères, which remains open to visitors year-round. Guests can tour the underground cellars, explore gardens featuring other artworks from past Countdown editions, and sample Ruinart champagnes.

The Countdown program reflects Ruinart’s commitment to culture and environmental awareness. Previous artists have included Mouawad + Laurier (2019), Tomás Saraceno (2021), NILS-UDO (2022), Yann Arthus-Bertrand (2023), and architect Sou Fujimoto (2024). Each project aims to connect visitors with nature through art while raising awareness about ecological challenges facing both Champagne and the wider world.

Charrière’s “Chorals” stands as both an homage to Champagne’s ancient origins and a meditation on its future in an era of climate uncertainty. By inviting visitors into this subterranean echo chamber, Maison Ruinart continues its tradition of blending heritage, creativity and environmental consciousness at one of France’s most storied wine addresses.