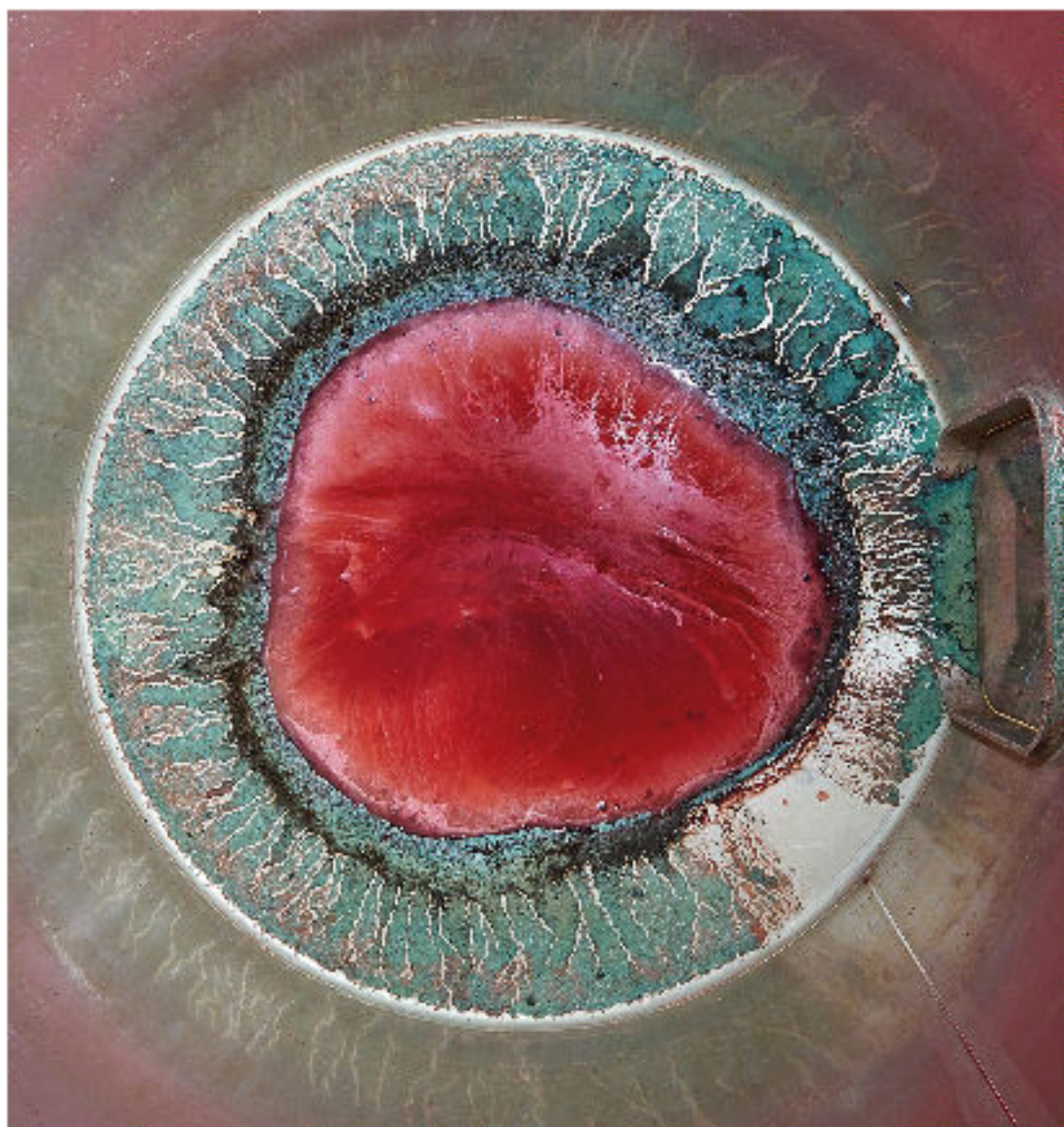


JUL 9 JEAN-BERNARD MÉTAIS: CLEPSYDRES, ESPRIT DE VIN | GALERIE LA FOREST DIVONNE

REVIEWS (/CULTURE/CATEGORY/REVIEWS)



Jean Bernard Metais, *Le Cuvier de Jasnières 3_6*, Tirage pigmentaire Ed 6ex + 1EA, H 110 x L 110 cm, 2017 | © Jean Bernard Metais

Written by Hanna Yoon

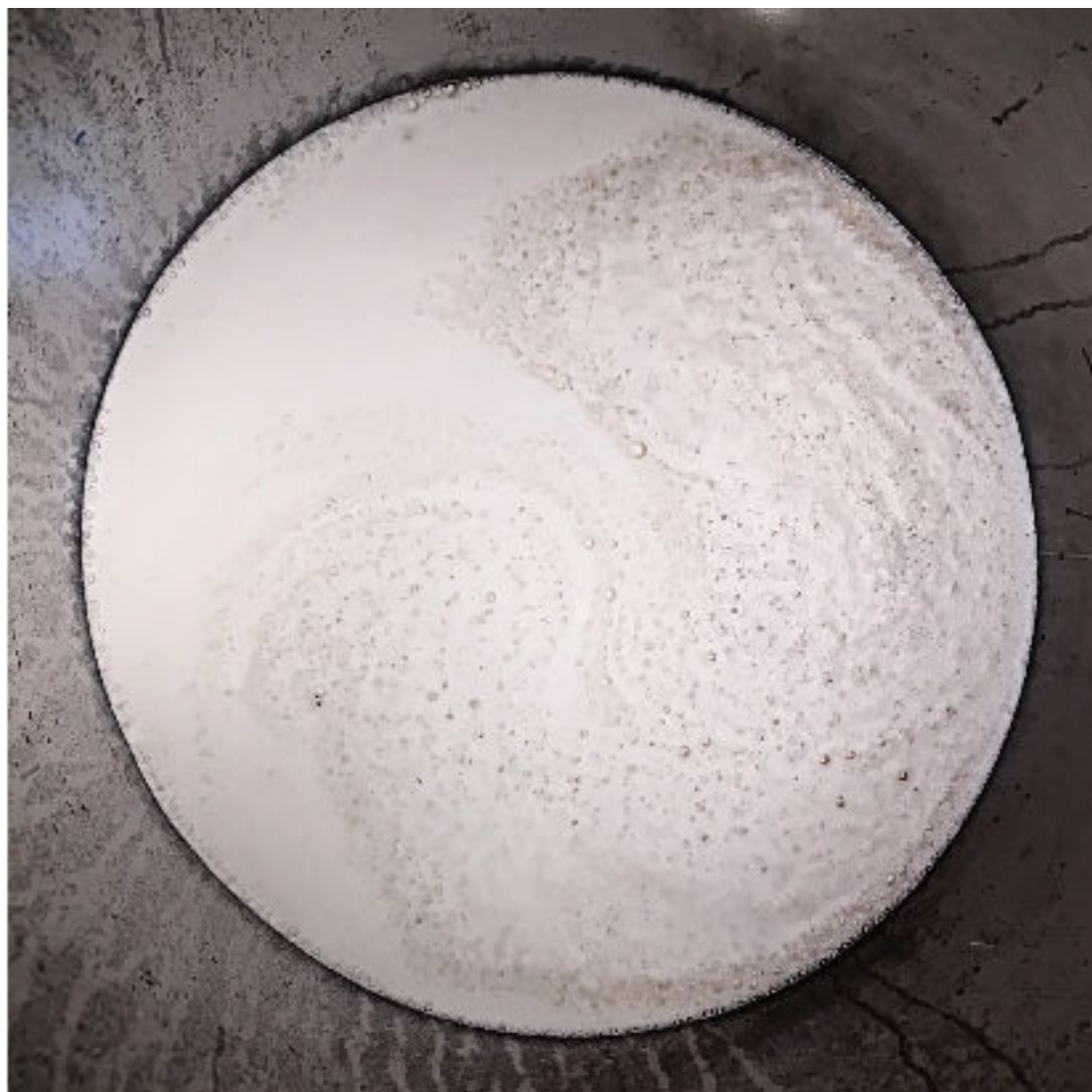
What does the bottom of a wine vat have to do with the cosmos? Standing before Jean-Bernard Métais' photographs at Galerie La Forest Divonne in Paris – on view through July 11, 2026 – the question dissolves almost immediately. The answer, it turns out, is time – the one thing the vat and the cosmos are both busy measuring.

Clepsydras, Esprit de vin marks fifty years of a singular photographic practice, one that began in December 1976 when Métais, rushing to leave his family estate in Jasnières after the harvest, forgot to clean one of his settling vats and returned to find something unexpected forming in the dark. What that oversight produced was not a mistake but a method: for the next fifty years, Métais would return to the settling vat with a camera aimed straight down, photographing whatever the drying residue had drawn – vintage after vintage, never the same image twice.



Jean Bernard Métais, *Le Cuvier de Jasnières, iris bleu 3_6*, Tirage pigmentaire Ed 6ex +1EA, H 120 x L 120 cm, 1976 | © Jean Bernard Métais

The photographs that fill this retrospective all share the same framing: a circle inscribed within a square, the camera aimed straight down into the vat. The subject never changes. And yet, moving from image to image, scale comes loose entirely: a vat floor barely a meter across reads now as a microscope slide, now as a view from orbit, now as deep space. In *Le Cuvier de Jasnières* (1976), the residue left by a clarified wine fans outward across the vat floor in electric blue – each fractal branch so precise, so alive, that it reads less like organic matter than like a circulatory system. The boundary between the biological and the cosmic collapses. This is not a photograph of wine; it is a photograph of time making itself visible.



Jean Bernard Métais, *Le Cuvier de Jasnières*, "Remontage de vin blanc" 16, Tirage monté sur aluminium, H 110 x L 110 cm, 2000 | © Jean Bernard Métais

That Métais is also a sculptor – known for monumental public commissions in Tianjin, Cardiff, Luxembourg, and Paris – is not incidental. His eye has always been drawn to matter in flux, to the moment when the solid world becomes liquid, and the past announces itself in the present. In *Le Cuvier de Jasnières* (2018), the deep purple of fermenting red wine swirls with flecks of pale sediment, the surface churning like a storm system seen from altitude. The image has the scale and drama of a Romantic landscape painting – Turner's dissolving sea storms come to mind – except here the sublime is contained within a circle roughly a meter wide, in a cellar in the Touraine.



Jean Bernard METAIS, *Le Cuvier de Jasnières 2-6*, Tirage pigmentaire Ed 6ex + 1EA, 24 x 24 cm, 2016 | © Jean Bernard Métais

The sculptures anchoring the exhibition extend these preoccupations into three dimensions. The *Ampoules temporelles* (2021) – small glass spheres sealed with wines ranging from pale straw to deep amber – are coloured hourglasses: time made liquid, then stopped. The *Sablier Ici* (2024), an hourglass the viewer is invited to set in motion, carries the same logic: sand that Métais first encountered flowing from rock pockets in the family cellar, ancient sediment returning to movement after thousands of years of stillness. To tip the hourglass is to participate in the same alchemy the photographs document – the transformation of matter, the collapse of scale, the past pressing into the present.



Jean Bernard Métais, *Le Cuvier de Jasnières 1_6*, Tirage pigmentaire Ed 6ex +1EA, H 120 x L 120 cm, 2025 | © Jean Bernard Métais

There is a useful word for what Métais does, and he offers it himself: the exhibition's title. A clepsydra is an ancient water clock, a vessel whose steady emptying measures time. In Greek and Egyptian antiquity, it was the most precise instrument available for marking duration. Métais' photographs are clepsydras – not because they measure time exactly, but because they make its passage felt in the body. Standing before *Le Cuvier de Jasnières* (2025), its amber surface mapped with the ghostly traces of fermentation, what one experiences is not information but vertigo: the same vertigo, perhaps, that Métais describes when tasting very old vintages, when one physically becomes, for a moment, the time of the wine itself.



Jean Bernard Métais, *Le Cuvier de Jasnières*, EA, Tirage pigmentaire 1EA, H 110 x L 110 cm, 2018 | © Jean Bernard Métais

Jean-Bernard Métais (/culture/tag/Jean%E2%80%93Bernard+M%C3%A9tais),
Galerie La Forest Divonne (/culture/tag/Galerie+La+Forest+Divonne)

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