

Hennessy

HENNESSY V.S.O.P IN COLLABORATION WITH UNITED VISUAL ARTISTS — Q&A

A conversation with the UVA collective, led by its founder, the British artist Matt Clark.

1. Please explain what United Visual Artists is.

UVA: We are a London-based art collective that combines a wide range of disciplines spanning traditional art media and new technology to create emotionally engaging art. UVA is a bit like a band where everyone has an important part to play: each member has mastered an instrument, but there's also space for improvisation.

2. What is UVA's philosophy?

UVA: We actively work in the space between disciplines, a concept can quite easily occupy a performance space as it could an art gallery.

Being open to collaboration means that we also get to work with specialists in fields outside of art and design. Many of our projects deal with highly complex subjects that may be grounded in science for example. Whatever the subject, we try to distill concepts into something that has a profound effect on the senses, into experiences that resonate on a very fundamental level.

Public engagement is also really important: we create artistic spaces where the audience are central to the work, so we are inspired by the viewer's perspective.

3. Can you please describe some of your source materials?

UVA: Each member of our team has a very personal source of inspiration, be it at a cultural level, such as philosophy, history, or contemporary culture. Science is definitely a source of inspiration for many UVA works: we look at how the physical world shapes perception: from cognition. Overall, we explore the interdependence between technology and culture, how technology can influence our perception of reality.

Because the perception of time is relative, that opens up an interesting space for us.

4. How does the UVA collective work?

UVA: UVA is greater than the sum of its parts, so working together involves improvisation and intuition. It's also iterative: there are many different technical and creative aspects particularly with larger-scale, complex works. My job is to guide the team through the development of the core concept so that every project forms a cohesive whole. It's actually very intricate; we overlap on an organic level. I honestly do not believe in the ownership of an idea when you are working in this collaborative way. Everyone owns a specific part of the conversation.

5. Please describe the UVA concept for Hennessy V.S.O.P?

UVA: The concept of "Blending time" means we're quite literally sculpting the immaterial, and that's something that flows with intensity!

When we got to know Hennessy V.S.O.P, it immediately crystallized for us that the ageing process for its eaux-de-vie mirrored perfectly our exploration of motion and light, of layers in time. Capsules are not unlike the many lights that reach us from distant stars, each one existing in a completely different time and space, yet blended as one by our perception.

Inspired by these dynamics, we decided to create artwork that resonated with the Hennessy V.S.O.P creation process. Harmonics is a kinetic installation that explores the concept of time blending through the perception of light and sound unfolding at great speed.

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Unable to process extremely fast information, our brain perceives these sequential sensory inputs as a single event in time. Meticulously orchestrated, shifting beams of light blend as volumes of colour, while multiple discrete sounds are perceived as a major chord. A state of continual flux appears as a harmonious, masterful whole.

6. Please elaborate on your creative process?

UVA: The way we see it, aim to distill complexity down to its essence. It's all about ways of processing information and making sense of things.

With "Harmonics", we've created a different lens for looking at something many people think of as familiar, opening up a new narrative for Hennessy V.S.O.P.

7. Please describe your storyline. What emotion do you hope to elicit?

UVA: There are many layers in this experience — some might be more narrative or poetic, while others are more sensorial or even emotional. There's an almost mystical quality to "HARMONICS" because there's no beginning or end, it's simply a continuum that fluctuates between moments of chaos and harmony.

Because of how we all perceive light, every viewer will have a unique impression of this work. At times it can seem like your eyes are playing tricks on you! Describing light is like characterizing flavor on the palate: the perception is highly individualized. We want to challenge perceptions and open up the world around us. The viewer, meanwhile, steps out of the everyday to enjoy an experience that defies complete understanding. Nothing is invariable. Everything is a time-space continuum. The notion that light and the universe are in constant flux is fascinating to us. The limitations of our senses to perceive that reality just expose the relativity of our experiences.

8. Hennessy V.S.O.P by UVA is based on immateriality.-How do you bridge that concept with the material world?

UVA: This is the first time Hennessy has ever committed to an art installation that focuses on Time, the continuum that forms the baseline for cognac making.

We wanted to create something expressive, with integrity, and also transpose an abstract concept into the material world.

That said, transposing light work to an analog medium such as a packaging design is definitely a challenge. We decided to work with reflective materials to create an object that manipulates light and the perception of the viewer. Something dynamic that does not rely on tech in any way, and that it could work in any environment

9. What can art in general bring to a company like Hennessy? How might art change public perception of a luxury goods brand?

UVA: art brings new layers of depth to a luxury brand. It opens up new narratives and introduces unusual forms of engagement.

10. What did you know of the Maison Hennessy before agreeing to collaborate on this project?

UVA: I knew Hennessy was quite present in hip-hop music. My first reaction was to look at the diverse group of visual artists Hennessy had worked with before. That was inspiring for me, especially the collaboration with John Maeda. We saw the total freedom of interpretation that Hennessy was offering and found that really refreshing and exciting.

Hennessy

11. What was your impression of Cognac? How do you see your art – and by extension, technology – intersecting with cognac-making?

UVA: In Cognac, the Hennessy Master Blenders taught us so much about how cognac is made, explaining for example how variations of sun and soil affect the grapes and, consequently, an eau-de-vie.

Each light beam represents a Hennessy eau-de-vie that ages at its own pace and comes to us from a different point in time. Together, they take on a life of their own. Sometimes it can seem subtle, sometimes very intense, but it's always very harmonious.

"A Blending of Time" also opened up a whole new way for us to explore color. Working with kinetic art lets us convey transformation in an intrinsic way: individual wavelengths gather speed and converge into something that appears very different. It's quite architectural in that sense, because it takes on so many forms.

12. Your installation is highly complex, yet the result appears deceptively simple, even minimalistic. Can you please break it down for us?

UVA: UVA sits on the matrix of art, design and technology. There's always more to it than meets the eye, just as there's a world beyond our earth-bound perceptions.

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"Harmonics" continues UVA's investigations into time, perception and the relativity of our experiences. This kinetic sculpture features five laser beams that rotate and shift colours independently, yet conveying a sense of global synchronicity— just as a Hennessy eau-de-vie that ages at its own pace combined with others to create a harmonious blend...

As the artwork evolves over time, individual beams speed up and our brain renders them as volumes, creating sculptural forms constantly drifting in and out of harmony with each other.

There is also a sonic aspect in "Harmonics" that reflects the same principle and takes the experience to a different level. Individual, percussive sounds play out as light moves through certain angles. When the rotation speed increases to a certain point, and sounds are played in a specific order, we perceive the multiple consecutive sounds as a single chord.

The result is a multi-sensory experience that exposes the limits of our perception but, at the same time, celebrate our capacity to perceive harmony

13. Your installation is highly complex, yet it appears deceptively simple, even minimalistic. Can you please address its inherent contradictions?

UVA: Creating sense of wonder through art transports people momentarily into a completely different psychological space, in many ways a transitional space to see the world from a different perspective is precisely where science and art overlap.

Our art may appear straightforward but the process to get there it's often very complex. We hope that when people are immersed in our V.S.O.P narrative, it will also leave a lasting emotional impression.