

# **MILK CHAMPAGNE ,**

## **The Great Urban Remedy**

### **for Wasting, Debilitating**

### **and Nervous Diseases.**

Carbonated fermented milk beverage.

Ingredients: pasteurised bovine milk, lactoserum, honey, motherculture.

Production date: 16.07.08

BOVINE (COW'S) MILK & LACTOSERUM donated by Andriy Kogut courtesy of Friesian cows grazing in Frankston, HONEY from Lyndon Fenlon courtesy of Queen Charlotte's hive on Ballarat Road, Footscray.

The Greater Melbourne Milk Champagne is an urban facsimile of an ancient milk drink called *kumis*<sup>\*</sup>, known in foregone times as *melikratos* – a mix of milk and honey – purportedly the first alcoholic drink of humankind.

The process of discovering, reviving and reinventing this ancient fermented beverage has provoked and made some suprising connections between isolated dots of past and present knowledges and social encounters across the contemporary Melbourne. Making the milk champagne turned out to be a kind of social archeology for it charted a many different and unexpected sets of relations between people and other living creatures alike.

The slow process and gradual reinvention of the drink unfolded from a steady stream of emails, telephone and face-to-face conversations with people living in Greater Melbourne, among them: Lyndon Fenlon (urban beekeeper), Olga Bursian (lecturer in Social and community welfare at Monsah University and active member of the

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<sup>\*</sup> Spelling variations include *kumyz*, *coomys*, *koumis*, *koumiss*

Russian community), Alexander Abramoff (Russian Ethnic Representative Council), Mike Love (Chairman of the Melbourne section of the Victorian Apiarists' Association), Amal Shihata (microbiologist, Dairy Innovation), Andriy Korgut (Frankston cheesemaker specialising in Caucasian style cheese and fermented milks), Marie-Claire (Slow Food, Victoria). It was with the unforgettable help of all these individuals that I was able to locate suitable sources of ingredients, as well as indispensable information needed to manufacture this lactic fizz.

## PUBLIC ECONOMICS

For a while now I've been interested in the feat of publicly provisioning and preparing food that has been found in the urban environment. The public act of provisioning and preparation demands what I'd call a 'public economics' – that is, a domestic economics or 'housekeeping'<sup>+</sup> applied to the shared spheres of the city. The milk champagne, although based on a traditional recipe of *kumis* or *melikratos*, is adapted according to the local circumstances of Melbourne. The 'making-of' is not so much a rigorous reconstitution of a historical recipe but rather a translation and reinvention of the stories and memories from various individuals who were directly or indirectly involved in its genesis.



milk champagne domestic test no.1# Amsterdam, May 2008

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<sup>+</sup> Etymologically, the term economy is derived via Latin from Greek: *oikonomia* meaning 'household management'

## URBAN CURE-ALL

Aside from its long shelf-life, one of the reputed benefits of milk champagne is as a ‘magic strength’ vaccine for longevity and as a medicament against pathogenic bacteria. The reasons for its health-giving reputation are many. One of them is that the lacto bacillus used in fermented milk beverages hold age-defying properties. Another is that the urban ingredients sourced from various animals (cows, bees and a squillion single-celled organisms of mostly unidentifiable yeasts and bacteria) have been exposed to pollutants, but moreover, the animal’s own process of digestion helps to remove the toxic effects of pollutant matter. The ingredients of the Greater Melbourne Milk Champagne is therefore a counter-toxic agent to injurious pathogens in the urban habitat, as a d-i-y pharmacological for contemporary and future metropolitan living.

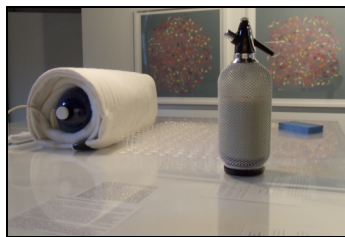
## THE CITY OF MILK & HONEY

When I decided on making a milk champagne for *A Time Like This*, my research first involved where in Melbourne to find appropriate milk and honey. And next how to produce the right kind of fermentative changes so that the milk and honey achieves a palatable fizziness and enough alcohol to preserve this *vinum lactis* for a month or more. Preliminary investigations led to a lot of contradictory anecdotes and advice. For a while I really thought that the milk champagne would be only procure life as an urban legend. With time, however, the idea did start to coagulate into action. From the growing network of people, a collective drink was made. The result? A subtle sweet and sourish sparkling brew, yoghurt, but with a distinctive vinous twang. Although I think it still needs some aging to acquire the finesse of a sparkling wine, the exhibition *A Time Like This* was a convivial setting to raise the tasting cup and toast to the *vinum lactis* for greater metropolitan life.

— Wietske Maas, July 2008



Greater Melbourne Milk Champagne bar with fridge supply of milk champagne,  
VCA gallery, 2008



Greater Melbourne Milk Champagne bar with soda siphon, tasting cups and  
fermenting milk wrapped in electric blanket , VCA gallery, 2008