



Department of Business and Management

Chair of Luxury Management

Art-oriented Maison  
How to increase prestige and  
reputation through art association

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*A chi l'arte riesce a coglierla in ogni dove,  
a chi rimane immobile e affronta le sue paure,  
a chi è vittima della sua natura,  
del mare provo una nostalgia racchiusa  
in un ricordo bello di te,  
che con lo sguardo rassicuravi,  
e grazie a quegli occhi il percorso davanti a me  
sembra più limpido*

*Nonna,*

*quell'amore ora riesco a trovarlo nelle persone vicine  
e a loro voglio dedicare il mio impegno.*

*A mia sorella che vedo crescere e continuo ad amare,  
alla mia famiglia in cui è sigillata la mia identità,  
alla mia seconda famiglia che vorrò bene sempre  
a Luca il mio rifugio e il mio futuro,  
ai miei amici, vecchi e nuovi  
che hanno conosciuto la parte più sicura di me  
e tra le disavventure quella più fragile.*

*E infine, a te mio amico fedele che rimarrai sempre  
un'immagine indelebile.*

*Federica.*

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## SUMMARY

Before summarizing the elaboration, I will report the ultimate goal of my thesis, which is not only to demonstrate how art contributes to luxury maisons' prestige and reputation, but also how art manages to penetrate business strategies in order to make a successful association precisely with the luxury sector. Since I have always been passionate about the multiform art universe, it was inevitable not to include in my thesis many visual references and examples that would immerse the reader even deeper into the natural and strategic association that links the two worlds. It was interesting to report in the last chapter a case that involved me personally as the interview with the visual merchandising manager of the Gucci Garden and the visit to Florence of the museum itself, and to report the Louis Vuitton collaboration case of which I did not have a direct experience of getting involved, but which I followed with great interest.

The luxury sector is an exclusive sector that more than any other on the international corporate scene subverts the traditional rules of marketing in which the demand for a good is directly related to its price as a sign of quality, authenticity and prestige. The *first chapter* provides an initial overview of the intrinsic characteristics of luxury goods by placing greater emphasis on the concept of exclusivity and tangibility, the latter representing a foundational value on which the thesis will evolve as a common element that allows association with the art world, which also has that intangible aura that makes the "product" special. Exclusivity and accessibility are today the two main objectives of luxury maisons that at the same time want to maintain a durable balance that allows them to be competitive and reach all kinds of targets in order to make a long-term profit and ride the wave of new trends; in this contradictory scenario comes the risk for luxury maisons of losing their credibility and reputation that has always made them first on the luxury scene with their haute couture collections and totally inaccessible prices reserved only for a certain type of elite that has always searched in material expression the uniqueness and refinement of products that are unpopular to celebrate a lifestyle according to which people strive to maintain a high and differentiated level of quality. It is precisely the elements of scarcity and uniqueness that are a fundamental meeting point between luxury and art, which is able to give

products a higher status and increase their value in the eyes of consumers. A classic example was reported that reflects the luxury industry's scarcity strategy according to which unique goods made by master artists are considered on top of industrially produced goods: the Hermès brand with the creation of the Hermès Kelly and Birking bags made not according to a production line, but by an artisan who takes hours of labor to make a unique product. From here, we connect back to the strength of the luxury industry, which lies in the brand image intangibility that differentiates the industry from that of FMCG and fashion thanks to the power of psychological logic and heritage that allow the product to confer an aura that communicates the uniqueness and DNA of the maisons in a mystery that makes them unique and timeless. Nurturing the brand becomes an essential practice as it represents the voice of one's product characterized by a network of meanings that define its identity and justify its premium price, especially in the luxury industry where the aesthetic and promotional aspect is characterizing to gain competitive advantage; in fact, 4 areas in which a branding strategy can operate are described in this section: monumental flagship stores, corporate brand communication, museums and exhibitions, and company social responsibility. Emphasis is then placed on market dynamics and trends in particular on the challenges that threaten the reputational sphere and the ideals for which luxury brands have always stood, and which see democratization and globalization as a major obstacle to their much coveted exclusivity. Society is becoming increasingly accessible due to the process of democratization and globalization shifting the focus of luxury strategies toward accessibility and innovation in spite of exclusivity, tradition, and reputation, according to a logic that allows customers to be closer to products in record time and to buy them more frequently according to the implementation by companies of strategies that are more sustainable and moved to expand their portfolios (eliminating the Benjaminian aura that characterizes the work of art according to which the artistic product to be such and unique must be admired from a certain distance). The growth of luxury involving a wide range of consumers through the opening of more international stores, the creation of more accessible second lines, and digitization as a facilitation of accessibility has led to a view of consumption that goes beyond the classic functionality of the product by bringing into play trends such as hedonism, sublimation, individualization, and forcing consumers to focus more on experiential and intangible luxury; paradoxically, according to several studies, the strong growth and democratization leads the big

maisons to a loss of power, which now more than ever need to communicate a sense of uniqueness and prestige to counteract the negative image of their savoir-faire and their universe that has become increasingly accessible. Luxury, thus, no longer lies simply in having and owning, but in the ability of brands to reshape the luxury paradigm for those consumers who desire greater uniqueness in their experiences. We have seen how uniqueness reflects the theory of the Benjaminian aura that has always characterized the work of art and considered by Kapferer the "pinnacle of human activity" as a strategic key to endowing luxury brands with a moral and aesthetic approval that is exempt from the characters associated with commerciality and profit. The latter, in all its forms and times, represents the key to a new corporate business model that bases its commercial, sales, marketing, and promotional strategies on the high aesthetic and associative value that art succeeds in giving to the luxury sector, facilitated by the value proximity of the two spheres.

Before getting into the heart of the association and the aspects that connect the two worlds, it was interesting to report in the *second chapter* in a more sociological key, the actual definition of art and the change it has undergone over time as a response to a new society demands new needs. Contemporary art is also becoming more accessible but it fits perfectly with the solutions and goals that luxury brands are seeking as, on the one hand, art is meeting reproducibility and accessibility and, on the other hand, luxury fashion maison are exploiting art practices to elevate their aura. We are faced with divergent goals but they manage to compensate each other precisely because of the similar nature of the sector, composed of the same values and the same contexts in which the "image" acquires a fundamental role and art increasingly needs to enter new channels and feed on publicity: galleries, emerging artists need notoriety, to establish relationships from which they can draw recognition in terms of alliances and collaborations with other market players and obtain help even at the economic level. Moreover, precisely because of the relevance of digital reputation in the art sector, it was important to report the close relationship that the luxury market has with these two industries by noting in digital an element that acts as a glue between the two worlds, moving the luxury industry toward intangibility and at the same time innovation that also sees the cultural industry revolutionized. Society's increasing digitization has allowed luxury brands to leverage new platforms and techniques to promote their image in order to reach an ever-growing audience, while still maintaining an association with the universal power of art, which, through

collaborations with artists and art institutions, fuels the brands' presence online and appeal on digital platforms (such as Instagram, which has proven to be an effective tool for the promotion and sale of luxury products due to its highly visual nature that often references the art world).

The *third chapter* opens with an explanation of "artification," which is increasingly in vogue among the researches of academics, in order to outline a trend in the luxury industry that confirms even more the importance of art within business strategies. According to Kepferer, in fact, the main protagonists of the fusion process between the art and business worlds are luxury fashion companies, driven first and foremost by the strategic desire to want to justify the premium price applied to their products by hindering the commodification process that risks threatening the reputation of the maisons, unlike other sectors where product growth and diffusion are not an issue. From a perspective in which the value that the customer perceives of a given brand is closely linked to the image that the company manages to convey, luxury maisons devote most of their energies to making sure that their reputation and narrative, both physical and digital, is continually juxtaposed and influenced by the universe of art, which is capable of elevating its image because of the universal power it holds. After a section devoted to the influences of the different art forms (music, painting, architecture, sculpture, filmography) that have always contributed to make the image of luxury brands more universal, the focus shifts to the origin of the association between these worlds dictated by a strong passion and commitment on the part of the founders of the most beloved maisons. Important to the image, as well as the founders' own passion, are the funding practices related to cultural heritage, sponsorships, and foundations that allow for greater dissemination of contemporary and modern culture. In fact, in the first half of the central chapter, importance is given to Italian and international cultural heritage as a priceless value that increasingly represents one of the key priorities for institutions in a society that is constantly informed about issues such as sustainability and protection of the environment around us. With this perspective in view, and in the wake of the founders' drive as collectors, the luxury industry cannot be indifferent to this as being an industry that is constantly developing and close to the needs of the customer, which is the focus of the luxury strategy, more and more of the major maisons are taking actions that demonstrate a real interest in today's issues and activities that increase the trust and appreciative relationship that customers have with the brands they love. It required a recurring use of examples of



maisons and their founders who made history in the heritage branch, such as Christian Dior, Coco Chanel, Miuccia Prada, Yves Saint Laurent, Salvatore Ferragamo through their biography and artistic proximity, patronage activities and the creation of foundations that still represent an important exhibition space for the dissemination and knowledge of heritage, as well as the commitment to the enhancement of artistic heritage in collaboration with FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano); famous was the case of Fendi and the funding for the restoration of the well-known Trevi Fountain in Rome. The second half focuses on the theory of aesthetics inherent in marketing, commercial and digital strategies, the influence of the creative director in the activities of maisons to raise prestige and reputation, and finally the extreme association with museum reality. According to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), art becomes a perfect aesthetic and social guarantor of luxury that has increasingly led the industry to build an effective and sustainable brand image over time by making use of tools such as: visual images, advertising campaigns, product design, store architecture, and marketing activities that are consequently sophisticated and of high quality since it is essential for a maison to convey a strong sense of aesthetics that recalls its culture and DNA in order to increase the loyalty of customers, who are themselves considered by the maisons to be true aesthetes. In the context of digital tools, the latter act as accelerators of the artification process through the world of the Metaverse exploited by some brands, (including Gucci) and immersive installations implemented within museums and stores. Further element of analysis has been Instagram, which first of all spread the concept of aestheticism by moving users to change their relationship with art, as a work has never been as accessible as it is today, going viral in a matter of hours consequently involving also the commercial policies of luxury. Extensive space was given to the charismatic figure of the creative director, who brought his philosophy within collaboration strategies, limited editions, and retail by bringing business ever closer to the creative sphere and the art world. There have been many artistic collaborations that I have mentioned among which it was inevitable to bring back even the most iconic images such as the transposition of Mondrian's works into the Yves Saint Laurent limited collection, or the collaboration between Fendi and the artist Arnaldo Pomodoro for making the maison's space available to host an exhibition containing the artist's works. On the international sphere, which is crucial for the reputation of the maisons as a window to reach different targets, have been collaborations with artists overseas (Loro Piana collaboration and Argentine artist

Cristiàn Mohaded, Milan Design Week 2023) and participations in contemporary art fairs such as Art Basel Miami 2022, in which the maisons of Bottega Veneta, Louis Vuitton, Giorgio Armani, and Fendi have been present. In connection with the artistic collaborations, the chapter closes by focusing on the prestige strategies of retail and flagship stores that develop associations supported by a logic of charismatic adoration of their leader according to which retailers aim to spread an ideology of beauty and aesthetics through a "performance and theatricalization" of the creative director's artistic reputation by emphasizing his or her relationship with art and conveying narratives designed to stimulate the development of brand-customer relationships. Artistic contamination becomes central in order to enhance the intangible value and the maison's goal of "selling" the aura of the product: the flagship store consequently represents the monument and business card of the maison, such as Celine, which displays and preserves within its stores about 80 works of art consistent with its commitment to cultural promotion.

It is no coincidence that the two most important maisons were chosen for the *final chapter*, representing the cornerstones of the international sphere and an example of the highest prestige within the luxury sector, both for their heritage and for their high innovative and creative capacity to create universal narratives that remain in the memory of world culture. The association that *Louis Vuitton* and *Gucci* hold with the art world is very strong, and both respectively focus on a strategy that makes them unique in their savoir-faire. The collaboration with Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama epitomizes the universal spectacularity that Louis Vuitton manages to convey through its artistic collaborations and the majesty of its flagship stores that serve as true architectural works, in fact in this case the focus was on the brand's ability to entertain collaborations with the greatest architects and artists on the world stage, under the banner of creations surrounded by an unshakable aura. The collaboration with Yayoi Kusama also embodies all the historical past that the maison has entertained with the oriental world culture, so much so that several collaborations with Japanese artists, among them important was the relationship with Takashi Murakami in 2007, considered one of the most influential artists in Japanese culture and exponent of pop art. To anticipate the case of the collaboration with Yayoi Kusama, it was interesting to report then Louis Vuitton's commitment to creating an aesthetic experience of its flagship stores through a strategy that could elevate the brand's image, an example of which was the creation of the flagship store in Japan "Maison Osaka Midosuji" in

collaboration with Peter Marino and Jun Aoki and the new building in Ginza in Tokyo with the aim of injecting awe in passers by raising the brand's visibility. In addition, I would like to point out that the case of the collaboration with Yayoi Kusama makes it clear how much a luxury company manages to involve art 360 degrees in its core strategies and how connected the entire universe of a promotional and commercial campaign is through such a strong visual impact that it achieves a narrative of an international character, spreading a positive image of the reputation of the maison.

We then arrive at the act of extreme contamination and fusion between luxury and art, as can be seen from the *Gucci case*, where in the business world creative companies, following artistic models and techniques, uphold the cultural integrity, self-definition and ideological independence that determine their own value, which although intangible in nature, is an excellent competitive advantage for the maison within the luxury landscape. The last case interested me directly as curiosity motivated me to travel to Florence to visit the Gucci Garden and get a more comprehensive view of what are the relationships between the luxury fashion industry and art, in addition to conducting an interview with the Head of the Gucci Garden visual merchandising, *Valentina Pavani*, who was an honor for me to listen to since she highlighted many elements that make the Gucci maison unique in its relationship with art, such as the involvement of the boutique sales staff in the cultural process of the museum, becoming a real tour guide. He also confirmed to me how the association with art and with a reality that recalls the connotations of the museum makes the product on sale more exclusive by attracting a clientele that prefers to collect the purchased clothes rather than wear them. As for my visit to the *Archetypes* temporary exhibition, with my own eyes I could see the museum's accuracy in displaying Gucci pieces as true works of art, both in terms of the museum gallery and the in-house store whose limited-edition products can be purchased exclusively in the museum. Inside the museum, one could sense the creative vein and philosophy of Gucci's creative director Alessandro Michele, who has been able to capture the new languages of society and transpose them into the artistic narrative of the fashion maison. In fact, Gucci's artistic directors have always sought to merge business, ethics and aesthetics and make use of the tool of art to bring to life prestigious and exclusive experiences related to the brand, increasing the brand's reputation through cultural contamination, which, as we have seen, with the support of digital is becoming increasingly original and innovative.

## INTRODUCTION

The luxury sector has always claimed to be an exclusive industry in which the intangible value of reputation must be kept high and sustainable over time in order to be competitive in a world where globalization is strong and new players have the ability to cross the boundaries. Prestige and consistency play a key role that enables luxury houses to make enduring profits, withstand crises, and maintain a customer base that perfectly matches the ideals for which luxury brands have always been the vehicles. To differentiate themselves, therefore, maisons leverage intangibility, which encapsulates a set of values, strategies, and objectives that can only be applicable to the luxury sector, as it itself is surrounded by 'immateriality'. Product quality becomes a secondary priority when it comes to prestige and reputation, as today's customers, in a more accessible world, expect an experience, a narrative, an association that invokes the concept of uniqueness, aura, and inimitability: the expressive form of art as a reminder of an aesthetic that bestows prestige and value.

The *purpose* of my paper is also to demonstrate how art penetrates business strategies and how this association is compatible precisely with the luxury industry. Having always been passionate about the multifaceted art universe, it was inevitable not to include in my thesis many visual references and examples that could immerse the reader even deeper into the natural and strategic association that links the two worlds. In addition, regarding the Gucci case, I reported two experiences that involved me personally, such as a visit to the Gucci Garden museum in Florence, which allowed me to have a more complete view of the relationship between art and the luxury fashion industry, and an interview with the head of Gucci Garden Visual Merchandising, who confirmed the prestige and exclusivity that the artistic association is successful in bringing to the brand.

The *first chapter* contains a general overview of the luxury sector, from its definition and the values that brands incorporate, to aspects concerning market dynamics, trends in recent years, and the process of democratization as an obstacle to exclusivity, one of the most important goals of the Maison.

Before getting into the heart of the association and the aspects that link the two worlds, it was interesting to bring back in a more sociological key in the *second chapter*, the definition of art itself and the change it has experienced over time, as a response to a new society that demands different needs and interests. Contemporary art, which has become more accessible, becomes a key piece that fits perfectly with the solutions and objectives that luxury brands seek, while the relationship with digital becomes a fundamental pillar for the meeting of the two worlds, in order to reach the generation of an era that wants to have things right away through visual images, immediate and more accessible experiences; space will also be given to the metaverse, the fulcrum of the interaction of art, luxury, digital and key to experimentation for both the art and luxury worlds.

Accordingly, the *third chapter* will be an answer to the questions, "Why exactly is the luxury sector able to benefit from the advantages of the art sector?", "How does the association succeed in elevating brands to a status of exclusivity and intangibility?" The different art forms have helped make the image of luxury brands more universal, famous, and founded on an idea of prestige that goes beyond the mere user experience, accentuating the experiential and narrative side that luxury already carried, thus justifying the high prices. The product becomes an art object according to the logic that "behind the object" there is more. Art is not only present within the marketing and communication strategies but also accompanies the Maisons as they demonstrate a cultural sensibility that is not apart from their vision; in fact, it is an integral part of a mission to enhance the world's cultural heritage and engage at the forefront to be the voice of change, in an increasingly globalized world that includes the world's diverse artistic personalities. So, the intersection between the luxury sector and cultural heritage is realized through companies that, riding the wave of an ever-expanding phenomenon, help the state in the protection and enhancement of artistic heritage, fostering synergies with the community and the territory and promoting initiatives with high media and reputational value. An important centre of analysis will also be the phenomenon of foundations, which originated as a cultural rib of luxury Maison. There will be a transformation of art into a source of sustainable competitive advantage for luxury brands as the association brings about a switch in strategy for companies based on social complexity and intangible assets that overcomes the logic of strategies based on tangible assets, a strategy that is instead easier to imitate.

It then reaches the *last section*, which will be focused in the elaboration of two separate cases involving Louis Vuitton's world and Gucci's world, two maisons that represent the cornerstones of luxury's "new" commitment to artistic research and its continued association with it, emphasizing new approaches that once again confirm the superiority of their narratives within the luxury scenario, particularly manifested through Louis Vuitton's famous collaboration with Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama and the Gucci Garden as the maison's museum.

## CHAPTER 1

### *1.1 The concept of Luxury and the characteristics of Luxury brands*

Before analyzing the concept of intangibility on which I would like to focus more attention for a better understanding of the association that lies between the world of luxury and art. I would like to start from the ancient definition of luxury and the fundamental pillars that have always supported the great Maison brands. The word "Luxury" has a polyvalent meaning and comes from the Latin "*Lux, luxus*" which indicates light, abundance and "*Luxatio, lux*" lust, excess of the way of life or ostentation. The term, from the Greek "Loxos", also means living in a distorted and oblique way, far from the rules and everyday life, the desire to avoid everything related to the real needs of life in which goods, services and experiences are connoted by a high symbolic value for which the customer is willing to pay more than the simple sum of costs. Luxury is an attitude that implies a satisfaction that takes its roots from superfluousness and unnecessary refinement and thus can have various applications such as artistic enjoyment, leisure use, decorations and furniture, and all kinds of enjoyment and personal taste. After the industrial revolution everything that was considered superfluous, becomes an indicator of a better quality of life, far from the economic and utilitarian logic where the aesthetic aspect, design and creativity become the most important factors. Examining Maslow's pyramid of needs, born in the field of social psychology and which schematizes the hierarchy of human needs, luxury can be placed on the level of the needs of social belonging and esteem, where it acquires values of seduction, aesthetic sensory elitism, power, *prestige and hedonism*, a fundamental characteristic of the postmodern consumer who increasingly needs to see his value and importance recognized. The search for luxury is one of the typical ways in which aesthetics and beauty spread in everyday life by adding elements of style and artistry to simple objects of use, giving the consumer a consumer experience that goes beyond the classic physiological need, able to meet the new needs that increasingly focus attention on the experiential dimension of the product and not on its high cost: events/shopping experiences that

take place in high-level places accompanied by ad hoc atmospheres and high quality services. All this emphasizes the psychological benefits of the person who has a relationship with luxury brands, which manage to add a high expressive value that other goods fail to bring.

As fundamental as this attribute is, no luxury brand can count on customers who are interested only in the symbol and not in the substance as they could travel from one symbol to another very easily; therefore, another fundamental feature is the *high quality* of raw materials, design and production that guarantee precisely that reliability and durability of the products that positively influence the loyalty and trust of consumers to use that type of brand.

Consequently, the third aspect to be considered is the *price*, which is higher than the average goods precisely because it is a sign of absolute quality and an artist's creation. The price is studied and set according to the customer's perceived value as it includes a story to be told, an aura to be created, and the satisfaction of the customer's imagination. Buying at a high amount there is a risk involved, for example, a Louis Vuitton bag created in collaboration with Japanese artist Murakami sold at an exorbitant price may over time acquire vintage value but at the same time no guarantee is presented, similar to the way contemporary art is purchased. Thus, demonstrating that the emotional and cultural part of the consumer prevails over the rational and logical part. In addition, average prices tend to rise to disincentivize middle-class customers and thus preserving the element of exclusivity and scarcity. Another key element, on which I want to pay more attention, that unites luxury products are the concepts of *scarcity and uniqueness* that are associated with "rarity" and "value" within a process of persuasion that aims to increase the desire to possess that given good; everything that seems complicated to find becomes more attractive and takes on an aura around that allows the creation of business and sales strategies created ad hoc: the big brands use limited distribution strategies of products to make them less available and it is here that the role of marketing takes economic advantage to create an air of tension, of the insecurity of purchase under the formula of limited editions, the limited time marketing at outlets and temporary stores; Essential lever to create an aura of privilege is the essence of the physical store, a place where the image of the brand is admired in all its sensory dimensions: these strategies allow to capture the attention of the media and support the "appeal" of the brand. Moreover, the very nature of the offer is strongly linked to the extremely qualified workforce



that guarantees the superiority of the products making their industrialization impossible. The discriminating factor is not the intrinsic value but the degree of uniqueness, as happens in the world of collecting and for some works of art that acquire value precisely by virtue of their scarcity and uniqueness: as well as the art collector, the consumer of luxury goods also has characteristics such as continuous research, curiosity, the love for culture, well-being, the pleasure of getting out of the box without following rules of stylistic uniformity and having rare and precious objects that in the eyes of others emanate a strong desire to own it.

Returning to Maslow's pyramid of needs, the purchase of luxury goods is strongly influenced by psychological factors and for luxury customers it is not enough just to have a certain economic capacity, but to possess an aptitude for this type of goods in which the fundamental element during purchasing behavior is emotion. In fact, it is important to emphasize how the deep sense of luxury fruition is transcendence that is placed before the formation of meanings, thought and reason in line with that much discussed "excess" that characterizes this sector. Even more, the real enjoyment of luxury is found in the representation of the personal exclusivity of existence and life as a response to the desire for subjectivity and intimacy that characterizes the human person. According to research by Y Pulse, 22 % of Millennials are seeing a stronger desire for individuality, a desire to feel unique, and in particular, the self-esteem of those who prefer products with inconspicuous or even completely absent logos is high. An example of debranding is the Prada logo that once featured monarchical symbols around the lettering, making the logo obvious. Over time it has followed a more minimalist line, left only the lettering, and eliminated the graphic elements of the rope, coat of arms, and ellipse. Prada also created editions in which the logo is hardly visible.



Figure 1 Prada site

In summary, the identity of a luxury consumer is characterized by several facets such as *personal* identity that includes character, the unique elements that differentiate one individual from another, *social identity* that concerns perceived belonging to a group, the emotional feeling of sharing with other members and creating self-brand connections with the brands associated and used by their target groups. This represents the combination of the desire to impress others and at the same time pleasure through the consumption of high-quality goods; nowadays, in addition to the actual consumption that is "shown" walking in any city, possession is made public through social networks that encourage the drive to desire and use luxury brands. Here too we will see how the association with art, through a simple Instagram photo, can even more improve the perception and positive judgment that one has of that luxury good, increasing the base of users who will want to "imitate" that "artistic gesture".

## ***1.2 Exclusivity and accessibility***

Exclusivity and accessibility are the two main goals of luxury maisons today, but at the same time they represent a huge contradiction in that the more desirable the brand becomes, the more it sells, but the more it sells, the less desirable it becomes. Making a product accessible today is important to broaden the customer base and make the brand a key to the world of luxury, consistent with the new trends that are emerging in this sector, which I will discuss later. At the same time, exclusivity embodies the dream, allows a higher price point, and again satisfies the typical need of the luxury customer, that of uniqueness. Luxury becomes a way of life, enters the contexts in which we live, influences the products we buy, brings exclusivity, and allows the occurrence of a phenomenon called the "one-way effect," whereby people strive to maintain that level of quality and find it difficult to go back on old steps. Therefore, in respond to the now evolved human need to feel special, unique, to maintain his status, the attribute of exclusivity plays a very important role in the strategies of the Maisons and to further deepen the concept of scarcity I would like to report the highest form of prestige that a luxury brand in the personal luxury goods

segment can aspire to: *Haute Couture*<sup>1</sup>. Haute couture is the tip of the pyramid, that luxury considered inaccessible and destined for a narrow elite, unique goods made to measure and distributed in a highly exclusive way. It is the art of supreme technical mastery, founded in the same era in which the sewing machine was invented and compared to the new emerging technologies it represents a distinction associated with the ancient tradition that concerned craftsmanship skills at the service of individual customers who required tailor-made projects and at the same time also responded to the artistic logic of the designer, as an independent creator. It is precisely the attributes of scarcity and singularity that represent a first point of contact between luxury and art, which is able to confer a higher and more elite status to products and increase their value in the eyes of consumers. In fact, not surprisingly, it is incredible to remember how haute couture was born in the same place and at the same time as modern art in a period in which there were several personalities of the time and attentive observers of fashion, such as Manet, Degas, Seurat who reported in their paintings the expressive form of clothes, giving life to a visual spectacle that entered the emotionality and dreams of the individuals of the time. Today the Maison Schiaparelli holds the official Haute Couture label received in 2017 from the French Federation of Fashion thanks to Elsa Schiaparelli who instilled a creative spirit in 20th century fashion with her creativity and imagination, through art and perfumes; famous for his iconic collaborations with artists such as Dalí, Cocteau, Man Ray and Giacometti that represent a timeless heritage. The major exponents in the world of luxury who actively participate in Haute Couture Fashion Weeks and fall into the category of European haute couture are Dior, Versace, Balenciaga, Saint Laurent, Givenchy, Armani, Valentino and Louis Vuitton; in addition, some haute couture houses own brands dedicated to the *prêt-à-porter*<sup>2</sup> and accessories sectors, which differs from Haute Couture in that they are mass-produced, through an industrial process, ready to be worn and more "accessible".

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<sup>1</sup> "*High dressmaking*" is the creation of an exclusive high-end fashion. Although this expression is closer to the world of fashion and tailoring, it is interesting to report it as an example of the maximum expression of luxury, whose uniqueness and prestige is reflected in the imagination of consumers, who tend to rise more and more to a status close to that excellence they dream of, thus increasing the visibility of a brand.

<sup>2</sup> "Easy-to-wear" ready-to-wear clothes that have allowed to bring down the price of a dress.

### ***1.3 Brand image and reputation***

Industrial production goods are considered a minor luxury compared to unique pieces made by master artists of haute couture, this mainly due to the diversity in the production process as the creation of masterpieces has always taken time. A luxury Maison that can see beyond industrialization, is able to employ a maximum number of experienced craftsmen to produce high-quality creations from the beginning to the end of the creation process. At the top of the luxury pyramid<sup>3</sup>, in fact, is the Hermès brand that has made its Hermès Kelly and Birking bags not using a production line<sup>4</sup>, but by a craftsman who takes hours of work to create a single product. The quality and high craftsmanship on which Hermès has always invested over time have made the brand unique and inimitable and carried forward from generation to generation what were the founding ideologies of Thierry Hermès, namely attention to detail thanks to professional craftsmen; as well as the orange color that has become one of the fundamental elements that characterize the Hermès Brand Identity.

The example I wanted to report represents a case of construction that luxury Maisons undertake to create a network of meanings that are projected into the minds of consumers and the public, through a brand image, in order to build a sustainable corporate reputation.

Starting from its most classic definition, the brand is a complex symbol that contains ideas and attributes, able to tell and express concepts and values to the customer, thanks to the set of associations that it has built over time as a public object. It does not correspond to the product but to its psychological idea as it forms an imaginary about things; a company may possess factories around the world, laboratories, retail but it is the brand that makes all this materiality appear as a single and compact entity that contains the essence, value and reputation, concepts that have to do with intangibility, an essential characteristic for a luxury brand. The brand image is considered to be the heart of a luxury brand's strategy which instead differs from two other industries represented by FMCG (fast mover consumer goods) and Fashion.

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<sup>3</sup> Pyramid composed of three levels of accessibility: at the top that inaccessible luxury based on elitism, uniqueness, icon; aspirational luxury that refers to those products that are selectively distributed but do not have custom features; accessible luxury distributed on a large scale that aims to differentiate from fast fashion or premium products, represents a key to access the pyramid. (Micheal Kors is one example)

<sup>4</sup> The production line involves one person whose job it is to start the process and others to complete it.

The decisions of the FMCG<sup>5</sup> industry require the support of strong marketing research and a large database to achieve the performance of the *product*, the keyword of their strategy. The fashion sector, on the other hand, leverages creativity, speed, and design to create a product that is in step with the times and at the same time transmits *freshness and trend*.

The luxury industry is entirely based on the intangibility that lies behind the image of the brand: we are talking about psychology, heritage, heart, concepts necessary for a Maison, precisely because of their abstract nature that allows the product to have an *aura* that communicates their uniqueness and their DNA. While the code of a brand is an external symbol that defines the color, the pattern, the graphic motifs, the logo and is immediately recognized by the customer, the DNA is the driving force behind everything connected to the brand, it is its identity that defines the inimitability of the brand, it is not influenced by customer perception and remains firm as it is the *raison d'être* of the Maison on which all the objectives are based. long-term of corporate strategies, it represents a constant and immutable point of reference (as opposed to innovation that represents an enormous challenge for the world of luxury).

The brand image incorporates an entire heritage and a history behind it that gives the Maison a mystery that makes it unique and timeless, attributing value and prestige through the exaltation of its past roots that can never change. One of the greatest challenges for luxury brands, in fact, is the continuous struggle between what represents innovation, the future, technology on the one hand and what represents the heritage, tradition, history that legitimize the brand's competitive position. A pioneering role in the valorization of heritage was played by German designer Karl Lagerfeld, who in 1983 was named creative director of Chanel, which had still remained in an old-fashioned, time-worn key. With a special hand and admirable foresight, Lagerfeld restarted from Chanel's codes, such as the tweed suit, the black dress, pearls mixed with gold chains, and the camellia, interpreting them in a contemporary key, transforming to perfection a dress and accessory that continued to respect Chanel's DNA.

The key to success for a luxury brand is to present itself with a strong name and grow through the brand *extension* strategy that allows it to be present in another category in addition to the one for which it was born, using the same name (for example Cartier

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<sup>5</sup> It refers to consumer products made and marketed in large quantities at an affordable cost thanks to the modernization of production processes that has led to a reduction in price and an increase in choice for the consumer.

that produces jewelry, decides to create a line of watches using the name Cartier). In addition to the brand extension there is the strategy of the line extension that always with the same name and in the same category, introduces a new product aimed for example at making the brand more accessible and having a greater chance of marketing success. Unlike the world of fashion (some brands to make their name more prestigious decide to eliminate the second lines), a luxury brand in order to maintain high prestige and reputation decides to implement the brand extension that risks less damage to the image of the Maison but requires more time<sup>6</sup> to complete the operation, as it implies penetration into a completely different market. The collaboration technique is the best way for a luxury brand to implement the brand extension and legitimize its presence. According to some research (Roux 1995) luxury brands that have expanded into different categories have strengthened their core image which in turn has allowed them to more easily extend the brand that is perceived to be of higher quality than those less expanded. In fact, the greater knowledge of the brand positively influences the perception of quality and the experience of the manufacturer, increasing the reputation of the Maison.

At the same time Dubois and Paternault (1995) have found that luxury products could lose their prestige when they are too widespread so if the extensions are not consistent and do not refer to the experience of the original brand, there will be a dilution of the brand image making you lose the feeling of being limited.

As of today, extending one's product range remains the most suitable strategy to increase consumer loyalty and increase their profits, but at the same time the pledge to pay is the loss of what made the brands special: now the "specialized" brands of the past will no longer return as the luxury brands, now, they promote everything related to lifestyle brand status.

#### ***1.4 Luxury branding***

For a luxury Maison, therefore, what is important is to know how to nourish the image of its brand that represents the true voice of the product, characterized by a network of meanings that define its personality, its identity that must be communicated to the public.

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<sup>6</sup> The first Bulgari watch took 7 years to succeed, as it takes time for the consumer to get used to the change.

There are 4 areas that are fundamental, in which a branding strategy can operate:

- Monumental flagship stores;
- Corporate brand communication;
- Museums and exhibitions;
- Company social responsibility (CSR)

### ***1.5.1 Monumental flagship stores.***

The identity of a brand is not only given by the product or communication but also by the stores and how they are managed. This aspect is fundamental for the analysis as there is a strong association between stores, luxury brands and the art world, which I will discuss later, to understand how art influences the strategies for the increase in prestige to which the Maisons aspire so much. Retail has always been the focus of attention in the strategies of luxury brands as they represent a fundamental business card to convey the aura and essence of the Maison. Luxury brands, today, invest heavily in stores as they give importance to the sensory aspects that characterize the industry, such as physicality, observation of spaces, perfumes, lights, design, the importance of the shopping experience and the customer relationship manager; the latter in fact includes a real *selling ceremony*<sup>7</sup>, a sales technique that increases engagement, average customer spending and the level of experience through a series of steps, present in the form of a ritual in any luxury store: before the sale, the customer's knowledge level is analyzed and the customer is welcomed, their needs are understood and the potential budget is estimated; during the sale, a certain accessory or outfit is proposed to try on and the price is communicated and then the deal is closed; Finally there is CRM Data Acquisition and the Customer Loyalty Stage. Over time we have had an evolution of the concept of store as before it was a "secret" Boutique, now it has become a large monobrand store with many product categories, more easily accessible, open for various occasions and not only for pure sales activity. Consistent with the growing importance attached to the intangible aspects of the brand, today the store becomes essential, it is considered a real temple, a place where customers meet their dreams and let themselves be overwhelmed by a

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<sup>7</sup> The key to the success of the luxury world is the quality of the customer relationship and the ability to be constant to maintain it. In fact, it's less expensive to retain a customer than to acquire a new one.

strong sensoriality. Depending on the degree of exclusivity and accessibility we have different types of stores: local store, seasonal store, department store concession, outlet store, travel retail store, corner, ordered from the most exclusive up to the most accessible. In first place there is the *flagship* store, a large store that has all the possible product variants in stock and all the services available. The goal is to communicate the prestige of the brand and its absolute exclusivity, in fact, it is considered the most important, expensive, and representative store of a brand, from the prestigious position and place where the most original store design solutions take place, by famous architects who have the intent to create iconic buildings. Here are two definitions that enclose the logic behind this branding strategy:

*“They carry a single brand, the brand manufacturer owns them, they are operated with the intention of building the brand rather than operating to sell product”<sup>8</sup>*

*“The pinnacle in retail chain, usually large and located in a prestigious, high foot-traffic location, with a full range of merchandise but an emphasis on the more expensive high quality and high fashion lines”<sup>9</sup>*

The large size of the flagship stores and their location within the most important shopping streets around the world, serve to strengthen the reputation and sense of status and prestige of the brand and, even, according to research, the proximity between them of these stores creates a sense of belonging to a luxury place, thus also influencing the reputation of the street / neighborhood / area in question (example Via Condotti in Rome, known all over the world for the number of monumental luxury stores). An example of a monumental flagship store is the sensational Bottega Veneta building inaugurated in 2018 in Tokyo in the Ginza district, whose name is linked to the refinement of the quality of industrial production and the luxury market, targeted by the Maisons in their branding strategies. The 6-story building, considered the largest ever built by the Venetian brand, reproduces on the entire facade exactly the “intrecciato” motif that has always distinguished the product, also inspired by the futuristic style and modernist architecture of the Japanese capital. Fundamental is

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<sup>8</sup> Kozinets et al. (2002)

<sup>9</sup> Varley (2007)



therefore the brand code that is applied to the appearance of the store to recall the identity of Bottega Veneta and create a visual experience that allows pedestrians and customers to immediately recognize the well-known Italian brand.

### ***1.5.2 Corporate brand communication***

Luxury brands hold a wide heritage, culture and reputation that differentiates them from mass-markets brands, which is why it is crucial for a Maison to succeed in communicating not its products, but the foundations of its culture, such as craftsmanship and the deepest values, thereby enhancing functionality and values that spread aspirations and lifestyle. Following Bulgari's example, in 2022 the House launched an advertising spot "Unexpected Wonders" which turns into a journey to discover Bulgari's iconic creations, underlining the importance "to appreciate simple things because even the ordinary can be extraordinary". In the spot we find the two actresses Zendaya and Anne Hathaway, two of the five world Ambassadors chosen by Bulgari, who embody its ideals, such as grit, lightness, inclusive ethics, elegance; the two women all the time wear the wonderful jewels of the Maison inside a historic building in Rome that aims to associate the brand and the quality of jewelry with Italian craftsmanship and the design of monuments. In corporate brand communication, a fundamental element for luxury maisons is the construction of narratives that tell stories to people, thus spreading the knowledge and "reputation" of the brand, through positive and negative associations to events. The definition of storytelling represents something that we tell our friends in the form of curiosity, of an event that must be remembered and handed down; the authenticity of the story plays a crucial role as it shows the audience that the brand embodies truth, passion, carries emotion and is consistent with its goals. Before the advent of social media, the communication strategy was applied exclusively to the biggest world fashion events, to the Oscars, to the premieres of cinema, through garments worn by the biggest Hollywood stars: thus was born the storytelling strategy that had the aim of creating buzz among the luxury circuit. Now communication channels have evolved, and the opportunity has opened up for big brands to communicate their narratives and values, even through a screen that reaches any type of customer, especially

Millennials who are becoming the most important segment of luxury consumers.<sup>10</sup> This is the case with Kering, which counts names such as Gucci, Balenciaga, Yves Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen, Bottega Veneta, and Pomellato in its portfolio, or LVMH, which owns Dior, Givenchy, Loro Piana, Fendi, Pucci, Celine, Kenzo, and Bulgari. Either in the cases mentioned or in those where the brand has remained in the ownership of the founder or his family such as Giorgio Armani, Salvatore Ferragamo, Missoni, the valorization of their own roots and history is fundamental.

### ***1.5.3 Museums and exhibitions***

Strategic channel that represents a fundamental and central element for my thesis about the art and luxury association. The Maisons have always spread their identity through the channel of art, culture, events as they play a role of exclusivity and quality in the mind of the consumer, attracted by the logic of beauty, sharing, entertainment, experience that involves. Events, exhibitions can represent an effective marketing technique to increase brand awareness and customer loyalty, through innovative and engaging experiences that include, for example, an "instagrammable"<sup>11</sup> setting, artisan workshops open to the public, an artistic fashion show, inaugurations, installations that transform us from consumers of goods to subjects who take part in a sensory and cultural world.

### ***1.5.4 Company social responsibility***

CSR includes all the social, ecological and economic contributions of a company that acts with real interest going far beyond simple compliance with the rules. Ethics, CSR and value proposition becoming as important as aesthetics. Luxury brands are requested to show their true value and commitment toward society with consumer more willing to see communications that reflect real life and everyday issues. According to widespread opinion, luxury and sustainable development do not get along since the last one embraces the values of sobriety and simplicity as opposed to

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<sup>10</sup> According to the Bain-Altgamma Luxury Study 2022, Generation Y represents 47% of the Personal Luxury Goods Market in 2022 and is expected to grow in 2030.

<sup>11</sup> The key to the success of the luxury world is the quality of the customer relationship and the ability to be constant to maintain it. In fact, it's less expensive to retain a customer than to acquire a new one.

luxury, which embodies abundance and complexity. However, a fundamental lever that helps bring the two worlds together lies in the quality of products, which are sustainable over time as they are created from the excellence of know-how, contrary to the logic of disposability, obsolescence and the hyper-consumer society. According to the report "*LuxCo2030: A Vision of Sustainable Luxury*" published by Bain & Company in collaboration with Positive Luxury, luxury would be in the most flourishing decade of sustainability, in a historical moment in which generation Z (born between the 90s and early 2010s) predisposes a particular sensitivity towards these issues, thus rewarding those brands that have a positive impact on the environment and society; Luxury brands therefore feel responsible and feel the growing expectation that society has on the big giants that should act as a model of real change by becoming agents of activism and realization of the promised commitments. According to various researches, if on the one hand the deepest attributes of luxury such as desire, beauty, exclusivity, superficiality, dreams are not compatible with the values of CSR (ethics, altruism, sobriety), on the other hand the sense of responsibility has become so strong that it has become the center of the business model of the largest Maisons, promoting an image of oneself that goes beyond the burden. More and more often, companies to protect their reputation use the Greenwashing strategy that allows them to build a completely artificial and deceptive positive image of themselves. To date, luxury Maisons are committed to promoting the idea of sustainability not as an obligation but as a founding value.

The four aspects described are useful to analyze later specifically the association of each of them with the practices inherent to the art world that become crucial for a luxury Maison in order to obtain greater prestige and increase the appropriation of the ideals that have always identified the concept of luxury with the concept of aesthetics and art.

## ***1.6 The luxury market***

### ***1.6.1 Market structure***

Within the market segmentation, luxury is positioned at the top of the pyramid, followed by the Premium segment. The luxury market does not sell simple products

of excellence, in spectacular places and with impeccable services, but what it offers is the brand itself that embodies the intangible element of the dream that activates a symbolic universe made of privileges, culture, imagination, art. What differentiates this sector from the premium segment is the dream fulfillment dimension. The Royale Salute brand is not a simple rare whiskey produced with a complex operation lasting 21 years, but embodies a high universal symbolic moment associated with the day of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II to whom the whiskey in question was offered as a gift. To date, the class of the "new rich"<sup>12</sup> it needs objects that enhance their status, their "having arrived" at a goal and feel part of a narrow elite composed of successful entrepreneurs who have built empires and new brands, who wish to live through their minds exclusive and inaccessible experiences. Within the ingredients of an American wine of 900 euros there is no Heritage, dream, history; Instead, tasting a wine belonging to the luxury sector you enter a symbolic universe made of culture, geography, savoir-faire, castles, aristocracy, winemakers, and a moment not marked by time.

All this is far from the primary objective of the premium segment, which is that of competition, to be at all costs "first" in what is produced and enhance functionality as opposed to aesthetics and hedonism. Luxury brands, in fact, do not need to justify their price to be competitive as it is the essence itself, the symbolic superiority that prevails over rationality, *reason why* or positioning tactics.

The difference lies in the social function of luxury, linked to the social hierarchy, no comparison except that of the ability of people to stand out. In the Premium sector, moreover, there is the rule of progress which also results in the obsolescence of products and therefore a short-term maturity; dreams, on the other hand, have a long-term expiration and aspire to immortality, a concept inherent in the biggest brands. As for the criteria that differentiate the sector from luxury from the premium one, mass brands and mass market we have 3 different criteria: the price location, distribution and media.

After describing the fundamental aspects of the world of luxury, it is right to report the current dynamics of the market, taking as a reference the *Bain & Company* –

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<sup>12</sup> It refers to the subjects that are part of phenomena of social mobility that lead some people to obtain a status of material wealth by abandoning belonging to a modest social class in which they held hardships, which they no longer have.

*Altagamma Luxury goods worldwide market study fall 2022 report.*<sup>13</sup> The global luxury market is divided into 9 segments that represent the different ways in which a luxury client spends their money.

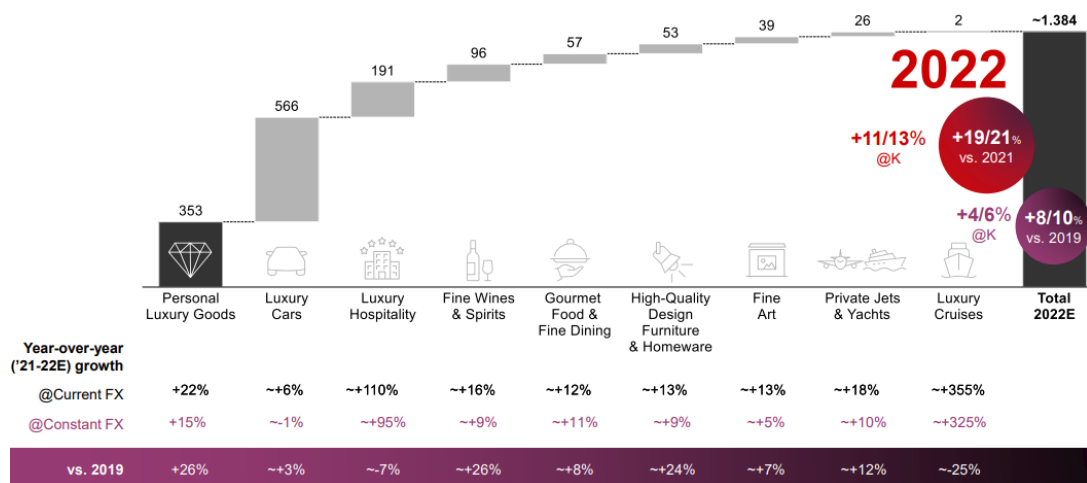


Figure 2 Global luxury markets fully recovering vs. 2019, driven by personal and experience-based products - Source: Bain, Altagamma

This analysis shows that, despite the current and future economic challenges, the global luxury market has achieved new growth in 2022 with an excellent performance of the brands (95% with positive growth). Companies in this segment continue to invest in their growth, even in the face of high inflation and rising costs. Claudia D'Arpizio, Senior Partner and Global Head of Fashion & Luxury at Bain, commented:

"The new wave that is affecting the luxury industry, and that is shaping new trends, will require an evolution of companies in the sector, which will have to work on their adaptation to uncertainty and focus on creativity in all areas of the business".

It is interesting to note that these different categories are actually competing with each other as the income that a person can spend to buy a luxury item is limited. The luxury customer is faced with choices that must necessarily be undertaken by the nature of the asset in question; That's why Maisons are increasingly keen to evaluate external growth strategies and consolidate their portfolio of businesses and consumer base to drive greater revenue streams. In fact, what distinguishes the luxury sector is the criterion of the "Share of wallet (SOW)" which refers to how much of a customer's expenses for a product or service category goes to a particular company.

<sup>13</sup> A global consulting firm serving companies to help them define plans for their future to achieve results that redefine the industry standard.

### ***1.6.2 How the luxury sector is resilient to the crisis***

The analysis by Bain and Altagamma predicts an expansion in the value of the luxury industry over the next decade and highlights how the impact of a possible global recession in 2023 is unlikely to harm the sector, unlike what happened following the global financial crisis of 2008-2009<sup>14</sup>. To understand how the luxury sector is facing today's crisis, it is necessary to take a few steps back to understand how it has evolved. In the years of the past crisis, the largest luxury companies such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci were forced to proceed with the internationalization operation to overcome a period of strong economic recession and widen the customer base. Unlike the super-rich whose reduction in purchasing power was marginal, the middle classes,<sup>15</sup> which represented a newly developed target thanks to the birth of "low cost" lines that, despite presenting lower prices, maintain the same prestige and value of the main brand, began to decrease their spending as secondary, unnecessary in a time of economic emergency. Bernard Arnault, founding CEO of LVMH, the world's leading luxury group with over 50 brands, defines modern luxury as "The ordinary of extraordinary people and the *extraordinary of ordinary people*" to underline the importance of both targets and objectives of luxury strategies. Therefore, the loss of purchasing power by this clientele, unemployment worldwide, have put in crisis the luxury brands that have seen a substantial decrease in sales; for those brands present more at national level that have failed to take advantage of the possibility of obtaining much better profits from emerging countries. At the same time, in fact, the demand for luxury goods from these countries was growing, especially Asian countries and China and the Maison of Louis Vuitton, as well as many other companies have well thought of building flagship stores all over the world, thus implementing a geographical diversification that could counteract the crisis. It is between 2009 and 2016 that there is an acceleration of the Chinese market as luxury brands cannot profit from the European market, direct their strategies and realize new store openings in Asia. In the last 15 years the luxury market has become increasingly Asian and according to Bain & Company's 2020 annual report, the purchase of luxury in the world (both within the national border and outside) by the

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<sup>14</sup> Also known as the Great Recession, it was one of the largest crises in history that had as its protagonist the US real estate market and the financial bubble that grew in this sector the crisis hit the United States, Europe and Japan to a greater extent.

<sup>15</sup> Occasional consumers or those who buy luxury goods frequently thanks to the new work situation, the positive trend of their entrepreneurial activity.

Chinese will represent 46-45% in 2025, up from 33% in 2019. This, in fact, represents one of the main challenges of luxury brands as if a single nationality weighs for 50% of the entire business, a strategic action is needed to meet the growing demand: luxury companies are increasingly incorporating the element of Chinese culture into their business plans to make their products and collections more attractive. Louis Vuitton's strategy for collaborating with artists will then be discussed.

Bringing attention back to the recent pandemic crisis, Bain-Altgamma's research considers the luxury market more resilient than during the 2009 financial crisis, able to respond immediately to today's challenges. The resilience factors identified are as follows:

- Increased savings preserved during the pandemic;
- Yolo culture, "*You only live once economy*": the trend has spread after the pandemic, especially among young people, to devote themselves to new experiences that are outside the standard work activity;
- TUNA resilience: Reduced impacts of "Tuna" after 2008-2009 crisis;
- Luxury as an asset class: purchase of luxury products with investment purposes and resale opportunities.

To define even more the preparation of the market and industry for today's crisis are factors such as: the wider customer base both internationally and socially as the most accessible products, a more concentrated market, increasingly personalized attention to the customer and a multi-touchpoint ecosystem.

### ***1.6 .3 Luxury market trends***

For the purposes of analysis and to spread a more complete overview of the luxury discussion, these last two sub-sections will report the main trends and challenges that the sector has encountered and will encounter in the last few years and in those to follow up to one of the central themes of my thesis concerning the *process of artification*, as a response to the democratization process already underway some time ago in the luxury industry and as a strategy to further increase the prestige of the

brand. According to research by Bain and Altagamma, new trends are emerging in a context of uncertainty where there is a need to ride the new wave of the market.

If on the one hand the *old continents manage to maintain* their first position in the ranking, confirming their power thanks to a solid local demand and a recovery in the influx of tourists, on the other hand there is a novelty: *new markets are beginning to flourish*. South-east Asia, Korea, India, Africa hold, unlike China with a huge contribution to the sector, a significant potential even if they do not have infrastructures that allow large brands to expand locally on the emerging territory. Tourism spending doubled in 2022 thanks to intra-regional and international tourism, led by the Middle East and the United States.

*Stores are regaining their central role*. The need to be physically present is now indispensable as the sensory experience becomes a fundamental requirement to fully enter the world of luxury, as well as the desire to socialize. In addition, the boundary between "single brand" and e-commerce is blurring as more and more brands adopt omnichannel approaches, supported by new technologies. Here comes a *more sustainable and digital luxury* linked to a new type of living a customer experience. The second-hand market is spreading more and more as a response to greater attention by young people towards the environment, ethics and animals, in contrast to those that are the values linked to the high-end. In 2021, Gucci launched Gucci Vault, an online concept store that sells products created by designers and artists who transform archival Gucci materials into new pieces through contemporary codes of the House and original details from the brand's creative lens; Gucci was also the first brand in the fashion world to have its own space on the digital platform The Sandbox<sup>16</sup> within which the Gucci metaverse takes the name of Gucci Vault Land giving the Maison the opportunity to present its concept of garden through which users can access the space to admire also pieces of the collection on display. To understand the direction in which digital marketing is going, it is interesting to underline how Gucci provides fashion items for The Sandbox players to buy and use in virtual reality. Large companies in the sector are becoming pioneers in the two major technological trends: the Metaverse and NFTs (Non-fungible tokens), certificates of ownership over digital works. An example is the virtual Gucci bags on

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<sup>16</sup> Sandbox is a game that combines blockchain technology and NFT in a 3D metaverse, allowing players to create and customize their own games with free tools, such as designing their own avatars. It allows users to create, own and monetize gaming and artistic experiences.



Roblox, Balenciaga on Fortnite and other video games that hold Louis Vuitton's NFTs. All this represents a possible solution to the great expectations of tomorrow's luxury consumers, in order to guarantee a sustainable and quality customer experience, thus raising the company's reputation.

*The era of "post-streetwear" is born* in which the Maisons' products maintain some elements of streetwear<sup>17</sup> namely fluidity, inclusiveness, clothing without events, comfort, sports inspiration, and at the same time support changes through more innovative and performing techniques, materials and functionality.

*The luxury consumer base is expanding* from 400 million in 2022 to 500 million by 2030. Growth due to a consumer base that is increasingly informing and implementing selectivity actions while increasing competition for loyalty. An important expansion has been recorded by the highest end consumers, who consistently with the trend of the value of the experience, demand unique products and privileged experiences, expecting VIC (Very Important Client) strategies from brands such as unique distributions and exclusive formats, customization, high creativity, attention. In addition, the new generations (Z and Alpha) will grow 3 times faster than the other generations up to a third of the market in 2030. According to a Forbes article published in December 2022, the consumer of the future will be young, female, of US and Chinese nationality as there is a substantial increase in consumption in China and a growing incidence of millennials who inherit or produce wealth.

#### ***1.6.4 Democratization and industrialization as obstacles to exclusivity: can art elevate the prestige and uniqueness of Maisons?***

The growth of the luxury sector has been mainly due to several factors including democratization, globalization, and the new vision of the customer. At the beginning of the chapter, I focused my attention on the dynamic between exclusivity and accessibility inherent in luxury strategies. Digital has created instant access to the world of luxury, favoring the process of democratization that has been underway for years in this sector. We went from the exclusivity of the shows, of the private events

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<sup>17</sup> Streetwear is a do-it-yourself movement developed from the bottom up in response to boring professionalism, exclusivity and expensive luxury brands.

that anticipated the collection then exhibited in the stores by months, to live streaming and immediate access for anyone who wants to take part in this world. The constant presence of luxury in the sphere of digital communication represents a fundamental challenge for Maisons that see the frontiers of the inaccessible retreat. The continuous growth both horizontal, vertical, and digital creates problems for the balance between exclusivity and accessibility since the dream of luxury is based on a concept of rarity, scarcity and privileged access to products and the increase in turnover is read as an increase in the number of consumers who increasingly detach themselves from the segment of the new rich; Ferdinand Porsche, son of the founder of Porsche, once said that he did not like to see two Porsches in the same street.

In the past, luxury brands belonged to a limited circle of people, but today we hear about the "democratization of luxury" referring to a process that increasingly involves a wide range of consumers, through the opening of a greater number of stores internationally, the creation of second lines with more affordable prices, ubiquitous communication campaigns, in order to spread more brand awareness and reach a wider slice of customers. The growth of luxury has been stimulated by the birth of a new type of luxury goods that aims to satisfy the "luxury hikers" through more accessible, mass products and brand extensions of historical brands. The increasing maturity of markets, the increase in income, globalization has led to a vision of consumption that goes beyond the classic functionality of the product and trends such as hedonism, sublimation and individualization come into play, forcing consumers to focus more on experiential and intangible luxury. As well as democratization, exponential growth, the industrialization process also contributes to damaging the reputation of a brand by setting aside the credibility of quality, craftsmanship, narratives that the Maisons have built over time. Back in the old times, luxury did not require as many brands and only a few people owned a car and just this ownership was enough to qualify their luxurious life. Today, luxury is identified by a multitude of brands that wish to increase their degree of differentiation because most people own a car and what is important for a Maison is loyalty and a strategy that elevates its name. The growth of luxury, consequently, is resulting in the abandonment of craftsmanship as a source of production, and paradoxically the more the industry grows the more it needs to communicate a sense of uniqueness, prestige, and reverence for craftsmanship to contrast the negative image of their savoir-faire and reputation. Furthermore, in this scenario of apparent

loss of power, many researchers and consumers criticized some of the strategies and advertisements carried out by the maisons as trying to spread the belief that their products continued to be handmade.

The world of luxury has inserted itself in a conflict that sees financial logic on the one hand and aesthetic logic on the other, productivity and commodification on the one hand and savoir-faire and craftsmanship on the other. All this goes against the logic of absolute rarity, inherent in the theory of luxury. We have said that luxury brands to raise the concept of scarcity and to counteract the commodification of the sector, adopt different exclusivity strategies such as limited editions, highly selective distributions, high prices, private events, all activities that belong to the "practical" and "tangible" sphere of a business strategy. But physical rarity is not well seen by shareholders of groups operating in the sector and listed on the stock exchange as it does not favor fast growth, and despite some brands such as Hermès, Patek Philippe stick to this objective rarity, the luxury sector is growing thanks to a *more abstract and symbolic rarity*, made of a cultural imaginary, Intangible, noble, historical, artistic, codified. If on the one hand Patek Philippe creates limited editions, on the other it creates a symbolic universe to associate the product, in fact material, with the incredible art of Swiss savoir-faire, through the installation in Singapore of its Watch Art Grand Exhibition that includes images, sounds, art, dreams, to emphasize how this luxury object is timeless and materiality. Art itself becomes central to nurturing the symbolic power that is no longer based on objective rarity but on the network of meanings that are staged to spread the evaluation of prestige and uniqueness of brands in the long term. According to the analysis reported before Bain & Company, one of the most recent trends concerns the convergence between luxury and art. The goal of the high-end is to transcend art from its original form, linked to craftsmanship and functional excellence, to broader meanings empowered by imagination and symbolic power. We thereby recall the fundamental concept mentioned many times in the chapter that includes the essence of the association that exists between art and luxury: intangibility, capable of justifying any high price and the deeper value of luxury, raising the image and prestige of the Maisons, beyond democratization and industrialization. Considered "the pinnacle of human activity" (Kapferer, 2014), art can give luxury brands moral and aesthetic approval, non-commerciality traits and a justification for high prices, enhancing the symbolic aura and gap with competitors. From the judged "fictitious rarity" of luxury, art becomes a key to success for the

return to authentic rarity through the creation of limited editions associated with works of art, artistic collaborations, foundations, cultural and artistic passion of the founders. Any kind of connection that the Maisons undertake with art can contribute to the incomparability of brands and to the neutralization of the risks deriving from the industrialization of luxury and its trivialization.

## CHAPTER 2

### ***2. 1 Art and its most recent form: contemporary art***

Art is a human activity that has deep roots in the history of humanity and that manifests itself in many different forms, such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance and theater. Its importance in society is manifold because art is able to communicate emotions, thoughts, ideas through the use of symbols, colors, sounds and movements; It also has the ability to inspire, arouse curiosity and challenge social conventions. Art represents an important role in the historical and cultural context in which it is produced, reflecting the social, political and economic influences of the time and becoming a source of historical and cultural testimony, able to communicate the trends and ideologies of the time. In fact, it is also seen as a means of personal expression and creativity, allowing the artist to express his vision of the world and communicate with others through his work. Art has gone through several phases throughout history. One of the first forms dates back to the prehistoric period where men painted images on the walls of their caves up to antiquity in which Greek art was characterized by the perfection of lines and the representation of ideal beauty: the Greek statue was considered an object of worship and personification of the divinity. On the one hand, Roman art was focused on grandeur and the representation of the power of the empire and in the Middle Ages Christian art developed through painting and sculpture representing mainly religious scenes. In the Renaissance, it was characterized by the search for perfection and harmony, having as object and centrality works such as the statue of David by Michelangelo and the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci; Here the ancient is rediscovered and the artists recover the language of Greco-Roman art, identifying it as classical but without ever "copying" it, rather as a model to imitate. In the Baroque period, art focused on grandeur and drama highlighting the characters of irregularity, while in France, in the Rococo the most decorative and frivolous art develops, at which time society begins to emancipate itself from the absolute monarchy and the concepts of the Enlightenment begin to spread. Nel XIX secolo, l'impressionismo portò un

cambiamento radicale nella rappresentazione artistica attraverso l'uso di colori vivaci e la rappresentazione di scene quotidiane. Finally, contemporary art, since the mid-twentieth century, is characterized by experimentation and the search for new forms of expression, often aimed at challenging traditional conventions and expectations. After the Second World War, currents developed that had to do with an "informal art" within which different currents, movements and personalities were recognized, united by the abandonment of figuration and of any formal or structural scheme in the classical sense, even with regard to abstract art.

*Contemporary art* is the most recent artistic form and reflects the realm of the multiplicity of today's society by recalling scientific knowledge and the different production methods to arrive at a strong public recognition that commits its energies in the construction of museums, organizations of prestigious exhibitions, with an increasing number of visitors, to open galleries all over the world and to solicit collectors and patrons. This type of art has always tried to demystify the classical notion of artistic creation, based on academicism, on transcendent ideals of beauty, on harmony and so on; In the course of this process, it was essential to add elements and techniques that until then had remained unknown. Marcel Duchamp was a pioneer of this practice and in 1913 presented in the form of a work of art a bicycle wheel on a pedestal and in his works incorporated elements such as door knobs, plastic bottles and other objects of everyday life. A complex phenomenon of trend linked to contemporary art that continues to attract the attention of art scholars, critics and artists themselves is the commodification of art. The *commodification* of contemporary art refers to its transformation into a commodity, in which art is produced and sold as a consumer product, rather than as an aesthetic and cultural experience. This phenomenon has been fostered by the growing interest in art as a financial investment, with a large number of works becoming the subject of financial speculation by collectors and investors, in a universe in which many contemporary artists have become famous thanks to their ability to create works of art that lend themselves easily to mass reproduction, such as digital prints, which can be produced in large quantities and sold at affordable prices. This commodification has led to several criticisms, including those according to which contemporary art has become increasingly sterile and commercial, devoid of cultural and artistic value; Some argue that contemporary art has been reduced to a mere commodity, where the only value is that of the market price. However, there are also those who argue that

commodification can have positive effects such as, for example, the diffusion of contemporary art to a wider audience and the possibility for artists to finance their creative projects through the sale of their works. This does not mean supporting a banal style or an empty form of content, but for artists and curators it means knowing how to decline their themes in a logical and understandable language, to establish a direct relationship with the public with a view to full accessibility, understood as an intellectual, ethical and social openness of an art that can be enjoyed by everyone. A symbolic character of the line of thought according to which art was now involved in a process of commodification is Andy Warhol with the current of pop art, who declared: *"It was enough for me that art had been channeled into commerce, outside the closed of certain environments, into the world of reality "*. Warhol finds his expressive form in the reporting of photographic images on canvas by means of screen printing, a technique with which a standardized form analogous to the methods of industrial production is defined; his painting elevates to the rank of works of art the symbols of mass society such as trademarks and consumer products: famous are the large acrylics depicting Campbell's boxes of soup or Coca-Cola bottles and the most renowned expressive techniques such as repetition, symbol of serial production. The artist himself, therefore, admitted that there was no message in his work, that he defined himself par excellence as a commercial artist and that commerce is the most artistic activity of all. The difference between the poster that portrays the Campbell soup, signed by Warhol and the actual product lies only in the discourse we make of it: it is the theory of art that makes something a work of art, which is why communication is so important for contemporary art. Art and artists have capitalized on the success of this concept, just as most brands try to do today. We talk about the storytelling that was discussed at the beginning of the chapter in relation to luxury, what defines a luxury brand from a premium brand, in addition to the price difference? The answer is the narrative handed down and spread, the intangibility and the chain of values that expands through communication in the sale of the brand. Postmodernism is animated by a strong relativism: everything is art, and everything is communication. Another 'definition of art was given by the Merriam-Webster society according to which art is associated with creativity and aesthetics, understood as "the conscious use of the skill of creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects," where art itself is able to elevate even viewers from mundane daily activities to transcend their daily lives.

## *2.2 Modern art direction supports luxury needs*

According to a definition by Benedetto Croce, the work of art is not subordinate to pleasure or utility, neither to truth nor to good because aesthetics is neither utilitarian, nor conceptual nor moralistic. The only purpose of art is art itself, that is, beauty that is defined as a successful communicative expression and the value lies precisely in the pleasure of beauty, which is a contemplative and disinterested character. That moment of realization of majesty is what Walter Benjamin<sup>18</sup> means by aura, a mystical religious feeling of emotion that is perceived when one has the opportunity to admire the original of the work of art, unique and unrepeatable; art, therefore, is the value of the work of art as this is at the service of worship and derives from the fact that the work of art is not accessible to everyone at all times and in all places. When the work of art was transported and inserted into the museums, it acquired an exhibition value, as it was subject to a broader look of the public within an environment that changes the ultimate goal of the work, that is to be there, as a historical testimony and as an exhibition, increasing the probability of being accessible to everyone at any time and in any environment. It assumes a modern value that symbolizes the victory of the science of technology over magic and worship, thanks to the advent of mechanical reproduction tools that allow the increase of exposure opportunities. According to a reflection by Filiberto Menna, the<sup>19</sup> exhibition moment and the construction of exhibitions are understood as a dialogue between artist and critic, between public and exhibition, as an active action in the fabric of art and criticism. The exhibition becomes a critical practice, a philosophical exercise that applies to the judgment and enhancement of the works, understood this time as a concrete cultural construction and as an opportunity to open the space of the work towards a wider position, in a communicative and dialogical dimension that encourages the encounter between artist, social conscience and public. Art progressively detaches itself from any cultural function claimed in this way, its own autonomy and demanding new forms of knowledge. Contrary to what Croce affirmed, in the art world there is a strong determination to adhere to the phenomenal reality to deliver an emotional representation that intensifies the relationship with things on a psychic and psychological level. The artist is therefore

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin was a philosopher, writer and literary critic who dealt with aesthetics, sociology, epistemology.

<sup>19</sup> Filippo Menna was an Italian art historian.



no longer tied to the frivolity of art for art (to the generation of things of a hedonistic and elitist type) but rather moves his steps towards trajectories that tend to transgress with all that is the past, conceiving a direct relationship with things, a relationship that aims to enhance visual and tactile stimuli in a universe that assumes a multi-valued character, multiaxial, polymetric. The definitive break with the two pillars that govern the pre-industrial aesthetic world takes place, those who saw in the classic and in the romantic a formal composure far from the liberal aspect of the emotional charge (*Videoculture History, theory and artistic experiences of the experimental audiovisual*). Today's artist does not need very long times to acquire notoriety and legitimacy of the works but very quickly follow thanks to considerable investments and a very strong organization both from a qualitative and quantitative point of view of exhibitions in museums and galleries at an international level, as well as a strong promotion at a critical and media level. We are in a scenario of globalization of contemporary art, a phenomenon that has intensified in recent decades thanks to the spread of digital technologies and the growing interconnection between different cultures; This direction has led to the birth of a global art scene, characterized by the presence of artists from all over the world and the spread of styles and trends that cross national and cultural borders. In this scenario, major international exhibitions and biennials have become real places of meeting and exchange between artists, curators, making art increasingly accessible and opening new perspectives. Once fairs were reserved only for the small circle of collectors and private and unadvertised events, today they have increased by expanding the circle of users internationally and offering potential buyers a plurality of products thanks to a diversified and solid offer. Groups of museum financiers, market operators, entrepreneurs who not only expect the work of art itself but also conferences, special exhibitions, exhibitions, advertising, shows are involved. An example is "the mother of all art fairs" Art Basel which showcases the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, present internationally with its exhibitions, Hong Kong, Basel, Paris, Miami; The organization reaches, thanks to its networks, a large space of users and operators in the sector, more than 2,500 contemporary artists and emerging stars and includes every form of artistic expression such as painting, drawing, installation, photography, performance and video art. The following chapter will deal specifically with the network that is created between fairs and luxury Maisons that benefit from

the notoriety of artistic events and the globalization of art, in particular bringing the example of Art Basel Miami Beach.

On the one hand, art goes against reproducibility, it meets accessibility, masses, commercialization even if it risks the loss of gold, on the other hand, luxury fashion houses exploit the association with art and artistic practices to raise their aura, by virtue of the common elements that have always underpinned their association. We are faced with divergent objectives that manage to compensate for themselves precisely because of the similar nature of the sector, composed of the same values and the same contexts in which the "image" acquires a fundamental role. Even in a sector like the artistic one, in a context of competition and globalization, the image becomes essential and art increasingly needs to feed on advertising, going to distort Andy Warhol's assumption that advertising itself is art. Galleries, artists need notoriety, to establish relationships from which to draw recognition in terms of alliances and collaborations with other market players and obtain aid also at an economic level through the support of external financiers. As a result of all these processes of convergence, brands find in the art world the source of legitimacy of their creativity and the boundary between art and brand becomes increasingly blurred. There is more than one point of intersection between the two worlds:

- the creative nature of their activities;
- their commercial objectives;
- their consumers;
- the fact that contemporary art is becoming a distinctive element of a certain way of life;
- the application of brand logic to their business in order to achieve their respective commercial goals.

An example of how art (in this case the musical universe) creeps into the business world is the interesting case of the Fenty brand, recently born on behalf of the artist Rihanna, born Robyn Rihanna Fenty, who became shareholder and CEO / creative director of a potential luxury brand bringing her vision, from women's prêt-à-porter to shoes, accessories, marketing and communication. What made Fenty a special case, unlike other artists such as Jay-Z who develop clothing brands, was the participation of the LVMH group in the project, whose goal was to create a luxury

maison based in Paris. The brand debuted in the spring of 2020 and launched its first collection with a pop-up in the heart of the Parisian Marais. <sup>20</sup>

### ***2. 3 Art as a society reflection: art – luxury – digital convergence***

One of the necessary issues to be addressed to deepen the relationship between art and luxury is precisely the digital world that luxury brands use to communicate their creativity, the deep bond they have with art and their ability to be inclined to this world. The emergence of new technologies and new media and unlimited access to digital content have shaped a new category of art defined as "hybrid" in that it is contaminated by both artistic and technological thinking, the latter based on a constantly connected and interactive audience. Luxury is associated with codes and values that refer to absolute uniqueness, limited visibility, exclusivity, vertical relationships, controlled distributions, confidentiality, rarity, physical space and high personalization. Today, parallel to the art sector that has become increasingly globalized through digital, changing all the old connotations, the world of luxury is also exploiting the wave of new technologies with the aim of matching the values of the past with the values of contemporary society. Social media represent a key role in spreading the concept of "image" mentioned above, which emerging artists need so much, as well as large luxury Maisons.

*"The current decay of the aura [...] It is based on two circumstances, both connected with the increasing importance of the masses in today's life. And that is: making things, spatially and humanly closer, is for the current masses a very lively need, as much as the tendency to overcome the uniqueness of any data through the reception of its reproduction."*

The aura of the work ensured distance and his goal was to abstractly separate the artistic product from those who had to contemplate it and force him to pay more attention. With the sentence quoted above, Walter Benjamin emphasizes that essential need to take possession of the object from a distance that is always as close as possible to the image, the desire of the masses that everything must be close

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<sup>20</sup> To date, two years after the collaboration, LVMH has decided to suspend its support to Fenty due to the failure to reach a market share. However, the French group has focused on Fenty Beauty and Fenty Skin, which have gained better market share and will expand investments in the singer's lingerie line.

because the time it takes to approach is experienced as lost and that call to "concentration" has now become a simple sign of social behavior. From this new "feeling" and from the decrease in the value of uniqueness comes a new perception of the work of art and the rebirth of artistic making. According to Nicholas Mirzoeff<sup>21</sup> (1999) our life takes place on the screen and life in industrialized countries is always lived under the constant surveillance of cameras, work and leisure are increasingly hinged on visual media and the human experience is becoming more and more visual and visualized than it was in the past. A new social need lies precisely in the image, in photography that embodies its appearance in the most popular social networks, such as Instagram, Tik-Tok, Facebook, which cultural value is replaced by the value of exposure, leading to a multiplication of reproduction and the replacement of a unique and singular event. In the photographic reproduction of a work, a fundamental element is missing: the *hic et nunc* of the work of art, its unique and unrepeatable existence in the place where it is located. Through the work of art in the *era of technical reproducibility*, Walter Benjamin wanted to underline two fundamental aspects that serve as a basis for the reflection that sees the mode of exposure and perception of art changed, within a future of a "new society" and <sup>22</sup>its relationship with technology characterized by increasingly sophisticated apparatuses and complicit in what can be defined as a media-world<sup>23</sup>. Artists and theorists do not deny the goal of understanding the events of the art system, within a "continuous metamorphosis" (Celant 2008), hybridizing "past and futurology" and trying to reconsider the destination and the very development of art and the understanding of art, to understand its associations, collaborations and influences. Therefore, today more than ever artistic experimentation produces its results in the attempt to decipher visual and complex events concerning the explosion of visual culture, the awareness of technologies by the new generations, the birth of new professionalism in the world of technological arts, the capitalist production experience, and its involvement in the tunnel of business. The relationship between art, the world of luxury and digital has evolved over the years, giving rise to a cultural economy in which these three areas intersect and influence each other. In

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<sup>21</sup> Theorist of visual culture.

<sup>22</sup> It means a society that foresees phenomena of consumption as a fundamental factor of the social existence of individuals that is based on a "democratization of well-being", according to which the old peasant taboos of saving and hoarding are abolished, and rushes to a widening of the excess of "secondary" consumption.

<sup>23</sup> A word coined by the sociologist Giovanni Boccia Artieri to indicate the evolution of communication within the technological dimension.

particular, the increasing digitalization of society has allowed luxury brands to exploit new platforms to promote their image and history to reach an ever-wider audience. Instagram has proved to be a particularly effective tool for the promotion and sale of luxury products, thanks to its highly visual nature that allows brands to create a distinctive and captivating aesthetic, which often refers to the art world, in order to arouse interest and desire for exclusivity and prestige in consumers.

In addition, the appreciation of art by social and cultural elites translates into a strong association between art and luxury, which becomes a powerful means of communicating value and the status of products. Consequently, luxury brands through collaborations with artists and artistic institutions feed their online presence and their appeal on digital platforms. In this way, luxury Maisons, art and digital are integrated into an ecosystem, whose boundaries between art and consumption, aesthetics and functionality and culture and commerce become increasingly blurred. It can therefore be said that brands and art both revolve around creativity and are expected to be united by other similarities. The business and business requirements of a designer or merchandiser, for example, may correspond to the same activities as an artist. While on the one hand critics say that art is losing its connotations of uniqueness by giving them away and transferring them to the world of luxury, on the other hand there are those who say that art is being reborn under a new form that is more democratic and present in everyday life; a new art that is admired by an increasingly large and aware public, which considers luxury products to be more "elevated" precisely because of the art that is able to transmit a universe of authentic symbols and that continue precisely because of this, in a key of co-creation of value between the two worlds.

## CHAPTER 3

### *3.1 From luxury brands to art: the artification process*

In a world that is becoming increasingly connected, globalized and more culturally aware, luxury brands are beginning to understand the direction they need to take aiming to benefit from all the advantages that arise from the art-luxury association, which is understood by today's researchers, in a dynamic key, as a process of "luxury artification." First it is important to define the concept of artification, which has been subjected to various interpretations over the years; in this paper we will consider a more sociological definition, assigned by Roberta Shapiro in 2004 and developed together with the French sociologist Henich that contemporary society tends to confer the status of artwork to particular objects, actions and practices. According to these authors, artification refers to a process of transformation, through which what is non-art becomes art and what is production becomes creation, producers become artists, products become works, and observers become audiences. The concept is analyzed in response to a general increase in artistic activity and production in Western societies, where the values of artistic work such as autonomy, expressiveness, commitment, and self-actualization are models that are increasingly desired in a society where the level of education is increasing. According to Shapiro, the basic assumption of artification is our belief in the higher value of art, built up over time and developed in conjunction with the birth of the Academy, a regulatory institution that acted as a barrier between artisans and artists, between professionals and amateurs (Heinich 1993). Today with the multiplication of bodies and forms of recognition it is no longer the Academy that defines what is art and what is not, but the public, society, newspapers, collectors, galleries, festivals, sponsors, and statistics. This explains why, over time, art forms have become more and more diversified thus promoting the process of artification. In the face of the problem of commodification resulting from increasing production volumes, recent research has brought attention to the fact that many companies in the fashion and luxury sector are implementing long-term strategies and increasingly close relationships with the art

world in order to appropriate values and meanings to associate with their Maison and product sphere to reinforce their aesthetic, moral and symbolic value. Yet close connections have always existed between luxury and art:

- same audience identified in a cultural elite, who possess enough money to spend it for non-productive purposes:
- they share the same creation of expensive goods and the aspiration to immortality because of the absence of function, which creates obsolescence as is the case with fashion that represents simple trend. Luxury, on the other hand, aspires to the height of quality and excellence, at the same time art is able to define itself as a great work once it overcomes the barriers of time;
- like art the price of a bag, which always remains a bag, becomes independent of its function.

But today, more so than ever, luxury needs art, as the industry has suffered major structural changes in recent years as a result of a path of fusions, acquisitions, and diversification of production that have revolutionized an industry composed of small-scale enterprises constituted by a strong connotation of familiarity and craftsmanship, leading to the establishment of financial mega-conglomerates owning major brands such as LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE, Kering SA, The Estée Lauder Companies Inc and Compagnie Financière Richemont SA at the forefront and the L'Oréal Luxe group and Chanel stable in fifth and sixth place, respectively, incorporating the best known and most prestigious brands. As a result of globalization, these large conglomerates have been forced to have to increase sales volumes in order to open up to new, fast-growing markets, such as China; thus, there is a restraint on exclusivity and the most important value for a luxury Maison, rarity. According to Jean Noel Kepferer's studies, "real" rarity is a difficult promise for luxury brands to keep to their customers; therefore, a new concept enters the field that has to do with the construction of an "artificial" eliteness and prestige that allows the luxury sector to be interpreted and admired in a new light guaranteed by its association with art. Kepferer speaks of artificiality constructed by a network of meanings, but that same network of meanings can be read, instead, in an authentic key, if one thinks of the strategies of creating limited editions in collaborations with artists, private exhibitions, sales reserved for a narrow circle and available only

during art exhibitions, at the same time as the development of an art that is no longer classical but experiential, globalized, imbued with new emerging artists and present in our everyday life and in the market, under the same roof as luxury.

The relationship between art and business has already been analysed since the 1980s, and several scholars have observed how the process of artification is also applicable to sectors other than luxury, such as food or fashion companies (not belonging to the luxury sector) that want to implement art-related strategies but with null attempts as they recall more of a simple process of "fictitious de-mercification" rather than true artification. As for the food sector, it is aiming at the "aesthetics of the plate" according to a new approach of consumers to cuisine who are no longer satisfied with enjoying a good dish but prefer it to be aesthetically accepted in order to associate it with a photograph that recalls the concept of a work of art; so much so that new professional figures such as the food stylist or the food designer are emerging.

According to Kepferer, the main protagonists of the fusion process between the world of art and business are luxury fashion companies, driven primarily by the strategic desire to want to justify the premium price applied to their products. So, while product growth and diffusion are not a problem for premium brands and other industries, which instead manage to benefit from market growth, on the contrary commoditization can result in an obstacle for the reputation of luxury goods. In fact, the increase in sales, in addition to the short-term economic benefit, can lead to the loss of the appeal of the maisons and their historical and narrative significance, distancing the elite that "ensures the long-term desirability of the brand."

Furthermore, the accessibility of luxury and its consequent expansion has resulted in an abundance of products and an overexposure of luxury brands, which have invaded everyday life, fostering a process of democratization to the detriment of the industry's reputation for prestige and even its *raison d'être*. At the heart of the analysis, then, is a process of artification, which consists of placing art at the center of luxury strategies as the key to solving the problems arising from the growth of luxury and the move away from the much-coveted exclusivity. The process of artification assumes that visual art is able to bring value to luxury brands thanks precisely to the similarity of values, such as craftsmanship, tradition, history, heritage, image, and colors allowing the end consumer to understand this association



and really attribute more value to the product, which is still, in most cases, industrial. The goal of the Maison is to provide powerful aesthetic and moral support by reinforcing the symbolic and intangible universe and to offer new segmentation criteria, neglecting the price factor, in favor of cultural and humanistic sensitivity. Important will be the dialogue with a new creative and postmaterialist elite, characterized by innovative people who value art and social and cultural sustainability, in view of a new future. Therefore, luxury will segment its target audience on the basis of culture, intelligence, and the ability to appreciate artistic value: art elevates people and therefore will appeal to an elite independently of their wealth.

The infusion of art also succeeds in responding to the moral critique that the consumption of luxury goods represents "senseless waste," and thus bring a higher and unquestionable meaning to this area. Artifice can also be an excellent strategy to discourage potential competitors from entering a world where it is difficult to decode tacit meanings and apply logics related to intangible values, as art-brand collaborations can be complex to define. So in conclusion, the process of artification is based on the assumption that visual art is able to bring value to luxury brands precisely because of the similarity of values, such as craftsmanship, tradition, history, heritage, image, and colours allowing the end consumer to understand this association and really attribute more value to the product which is still, in most cases, industrial.

### ***3.2 The influence of art forms***

There are different forms of association between brands and art that can be classified according to the degree of interaction, duration, depth of art within the identity of the luxury brand itself; in particular, how much it represents a fundamental aspect for the Maison. In some cases there are circumstances that are purely episodic, in which the brand comes into contact with a specific artist or a work of art in order to a short-term collaboration or relationships that take a more synergistic and lasting path through a more solid and characterizing bond. Designers and communicators have increasingly used the contribution of art as a source of inspiration for the textile field. Below will be reported, in a generic way, the influence of the different forms of art

within the world of luxury with particular attention to the form of painting and architecture that, from an artistic perspective in the strict sense, makes the products themselves "transporters of art" in memory of that universal art recognized by all in which luxury products are themselves pieces of art.

One of the most famous artistic forms in order of contribution for the Maisons is *architecture* as famous were the collaborations between luxury brands and architects in charge of designing their flagship stores and some called to design the design of their products, as Tiffany & Co did by commissioning Frank Gehry (who designed the Guggenheim in Bilbao) to create six jewelry collections. The close link between architecture and luxury brands is accentuated even more by the extension of the Maisons brand towards the hotel sector, with particular attention to design aspects modeled on the consistency of the DNA and codes of the brand; an example is Bulgari which, with its chain of Hotels & Resorts, is present internationally in the most renowned metropolises such as Milan, London, Dubai, Bali, Beijing, Shanghai, Paris, Tokyo, Rome and plans for new opening plans in Miami, Ranfushi and Los Angeles. The luxury experience is linked to the unique identity of the Maison through the combination of traditional local style and contemporary Italian design enriched by the use of rare and precious materials and custom-made furnishings, just like the internationally renowned Bulgari jewels. The success of the brand in the hotel sector was thanks to the careful choice of partners involved in the value creation process, from Marriott for the management to the choice, to the study of Antonio Citterio and Patricia Viel for the care of the architectural aspect.

As far as *painting* is concerned, it has been the most accidental contribution due to its highly visual nature and the number of great world-renowned artists, easily recognizable and universal. One of the most famous cases is the representation of the works of Piet Mondrian for the realization of some clothes launched by Yves Saint Laurent in 1965 and become true icons of the history of Western fashion; or Louis Vuitton which, in collaboration with the American artist Jeff Koons, launched in April 2017 a collection of limited edition bags, depicting five paintings by great masters, including the Wheatfield with Cypresses by Vincent Van Gogh and La Gioconda by Leonardo da Vinci, presented in the Louvre museum in Paris; Special features of the collection were the presence inside each bag, the biography and a

portrait of the artists. The association of the artistic component and the manual and original commitment have significantly raised the price of a Louis Vuitton bag.

The world of *cinema*, linked to modernism and dynamism, has been an important source of cultural legitimacy for many brands. The public has always associated cinema with dreams, events and actors in which they can identify themselves for the search for a model to follow for any life choices. Many famous actors have become a very exploited resource on television and on the internet for communication campaigns and to tell the DNA of the maisons through the correspondence of the lifestyle that has become "immortal" of a certain type of character. In 1961 the maison Tiffany debuted in the world of cinema with the iconic film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* whose protagonist is the British actress Audrey Hepburn whose portrait of Holly Golightly is indicated as one of the most memorable female interpretations in history managing to perfectly embody all those values of which the brand has always been the bearer such as elegance, love, change, the independence of women within a metropolis like New York. In addition, events such as the Cannes Film Festival are real stages and a source of exclusive and coveted advertising for luxury prêt-à-porter brands, as luxury fashion houses are willing to pay actresses very high prices to be able to see their creations worn. It is interesting to report an example of maximum manifestation of the interaction between cinema and the world of luxury through the creation of a film production company by the fashion house belonging to the Kering group, Yves Saint Laurent (Saint Laurent Productions) which claims to have been a pioneer in including a real film production in its business; the creative director said he wants to work with all the great film talents that have inspired him over the years and give them space, in particular with the collaboration of David Cronenberg and Paolo Sorrentino, directors who "opened his mind". The proximity of the brand to the film is also due to the cinematographic references that the creative director brought to the fashion shows, the most important for the refined aesthetic is the 1967 film by Luis Bunuel *Belle de Jour*, whose clothes were designed by Yves Saint Laurent. The presence of its own image, for luxury maisons, within the world of cinema, therefore becomes an important showcase to raise prestige and reputation, within a continuous and timeless narrative.

*Photography* also becomes an example of artistic influence in the luxury and fashion industry. In 2017 Raf Simons, Chief Creative Officer of Calvin Klein, decided to

report the works of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe on the creations of the spring/summer 2017 men's collection, presenting them at the fashion show in Florence, thus transforming transgressive black and white photos into fashion items; something that is called "Art on art". According to several interviews, Raf Simons' goal was to pay homage and exhibit the photographer's works in order to reach a wider audience and introduce new generations to one of the most influential photographers of the twenty-first century.



Figure 3 e 4 Men's spring-summer collection for Pitti, inspired by the work of Robert Mapplethorpe

Sometimes, on the other hand, it is the artist who needs luxury to attract the attention of the new generations who consider luxury exclusive and chic, and through the use of digital they manage to create new worlds, obtained by the fusion of the two realities and creating a 'completely original aesthetic that transcends commercialization and creates a continuous narrative made of associations. Emerging artist Jaffrey Czum uses the high visual capacity of Instagram to reach users, passionate about the world of art and luxury, through the publication of artificial desert scenarios in which the main subject is the name of the luxury brand. The purpose is to communicate a sense of unattainability, exclusivity, remoteness, and dreamy cityscapes. From a direct interview with the artist about luxury editions he says: *"I always thought it would be original to photograph mundane objects/buildings by giving them "value," a way to show something that people might overlook on a normal day. When they see a recognizable brand, they automatically associate it with a sense of importance."*

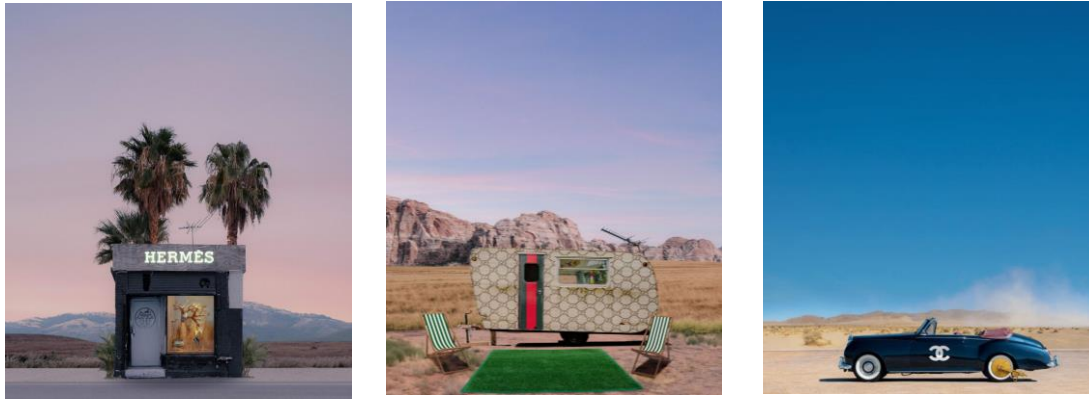


Figure 5, 6, 7 Digital photographs created by Jeffrey Czum

As far as *music* is concerned, a well-known case was the collaboration between Chanel and the American rapper Pharrell Williams who was allowed to create the first capsule collection in the history of the brand, as an amateur of the brand and the first male ambassador of a Chanel bag, the *Gabrielle*.

### ***3.3 The founder of a Maison as the glue between two realities***

#### ***3.3.1 The image of the founder and the personality of Coco Chanel***

Luxury is associated with a strong human component, which is usually codified in the founder since luxury is also an integral part of society and the values it embodies are those that consumers want to communicate to their community. Reporting in the following chapter the role of the founders of the maisons suggests a desire to want to trace the deep origins of the connection this entity has held with the art world, to highlight why precisely the luxury sector, compared to other companies, reflects exactly the perfect "candidate" to execute a successful artification process that is 100 percent compatible. Where do the common values come from? Why is intangibility inherent in luxury products? How can a brand's cultural heritage be legitimized? The answer resides in the founder. Especially in the luxury sector, the founder is the heartbeat of the entire organization as his vision and passion are the basis of the philosophy that the Maison decides to communicate and transmit to society. The very identity of the brand is reflected in its creator and is a kind of extension of his essence, values, interests, and culture. The founder's duty is transformed into a moral and cultural mission, an obligation that transcends mere managerial management and becomes central to the preservation of the brand's cultural heritage. This heritage

consists of the traditions, craftsmanship techniques, and stories that have accumulated over the years and helped define a company's reputation and prestige. The founder must therefore succeed in passing on the heritage to future generations, ensuring that the company's story becomes immortal. The identity is also evident in brands that are associated with the name of their creator and base all their communication around this personality, allowing them to build a coherent story around the brand; according to a Bocconi University professor as long as the brand comes to coincide with the personality this kind of strategy seems to work, but the moment the founding designer disappears it becomes complicated to manage; eliminating the designer's name, however, is also a way to perpetuate the brand over time and give it a second life and a new rebirth, marking the transition from the status of a griffe to that of a global brand, also considering the visual impact of a shorter name that is more easily recognizable and more effective to use on products. A pioneer of this strategy was Mario Prada, a leather craftsman who started the brand, who took over as the main name of the family business "Fratelli Prada" but then renamed the brand simply with his surname "Prada"; as well as leather luggage manufacturer Guccio Gucci who in the 1960s decided to change the name of the company from G.Gucci & C to Gucci, creating a very simple logo: the famous two crossed GG of Guccio Gucci. So, it is essential that there be an innovative and pioneering spirit in the figure of the leader, capable of passing it on to the future leadership of the Maison as well.

At the beginning of the paragraph, it was mentioned that luxury personifies what consumers want to convey to the community, it incarnates the values for which the customer who has truly understood the founder's "intention", enjoys to communicate; he communicates them by wearing his clothes, as, even before the design and color combination, they first share the ideal behind the product, the reason for creation inherent in the mind of the creator, considered in turn an ideal of determination, commitment, success, truth, creativity and history. One example is the incredible value inherent in the figure of Coco Chanel, that of her commitment to transmitting a different image of a woman, that of a strong woman, of a woman who wears clothes to please only herself, the message that it is not a simple piece of fabric that makes a woman a real woman, but the elegance with which one decides to wear her clothes, character and determination. Through her creations Chanel conveys the message of a woman who has always been underestimated, offended, violated and at the same

time independent, emancipated who never gave up or settled and fought to obtain her rights. Gabrielle Chanel who became a symbol for all generations, reached the apex of her creativity in the 1930s when after inventing the famous and revolutionary "tailleurs" consisting of a man's jacket and straight skirt or pants, she spread a sober and elegant style with an unmistakable characteristic. To this day, the founder is able to convey that need for freedom and personal emancipation through her classic designs that are still considered modern and relevant. It is thanks to testimonials, films and biographical books, that if we think of or admire a featured product branded "Chanel," we are reminded of the founder's story, of her eternal charm that remains in our memory in the form of a short-haired woman who distinguished herself from the crowd and lived a life devoted to sporting activities.

### ***3.3.2 Passion for art and artistic inclination: Christian Dior***

A passion for art is often a characteristic shared by the founders of luxury companies, as art is an inspiration for many of them and a way to express their creativity to such an extent that they become glues between the brand's cultural heritage and the world of art and culture; in fact, founders often use these passions to encourage artistic collaborations, and weave relationships with designers and museums. In this way, the luxury fashion Maison becomes a bridge between business and the contemporary art world, creating an endless dialogue between past, present, and future and contributing to the promotion of culture. The founder not only facilitates the process of artification in order to increase reputation but also makes credible in the eyes of society and institutions the pure love for art and the interest of the Maisons to become promoters of a cultural improvement that today is appreciated more and more thanks to globalization and the spread of new artistic currents, defined as new art. Christian Dior before becoming a major player in the luxury scene was first a strong art lover, becoming a gallery owner at the age of 23 and a collaborator as an illustrator for the "Figaro." He always showed such an innate passion for the arts that he was able to surround himself with many artist friends during his time in Paris, such as Jean Cocteau, Henri Sauguet, and the painter Christian Bèerard. Even against the wishes of his family born in an industrial environment and closely tied to an ideal of concrete and secure work, Dior, thanks to a friend of his who was looking for a

business partner, became the director of a picture gallery, which never displayed the artist's name due to the wishes of his mother, who did not want his last name to appear on the sign.



Figure 8 Man Ray, exhibition Surréaliste, Galerie Pierre Colle, Paris, 1933. Source: Le Monde

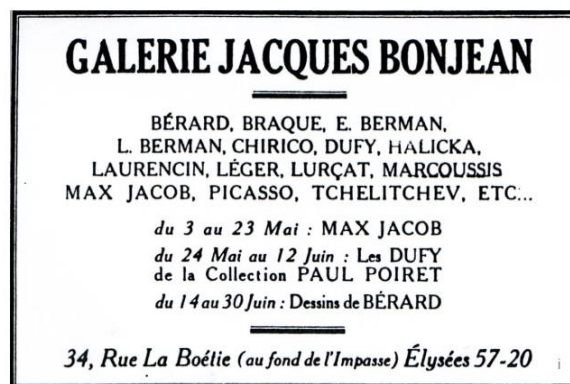


Figure 9 An invitation to the Galerie Jacques Bonjean, 1930.

The artworks that Christian handled belonged to all the greatest artists of the time: from the entire current of Surrealism with Salvador Dali's first exhibition, to everything that constituted the avant-garde with Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and even Giorgio De Chirico. More than two decades later he opened his fashion house expressing his love for art through the creations of clothes inspired by Goya's Spanish art and others inspired by Impressionist art that recalled the natural landscapes typical of this movement. In fact, considered one of the leading figures of French Impressionism, Monet was a great inspiration for the artist as the dissemination of an indefinite number of flowers in his creations was the starting point for making the Miss Dior of the 1949 collection. In the wake of Impressionism,



Edgar Degas was also a key inspiration for the creation of a white bustier with a tulle skirt that reinterprets the famous painting *The Dancing Lesson* (1875) in a modern key.

*"What can I tell you about my Maison? How can you talk about the present and what you live for? My enterprise is, in fact, my whole life."* -Christian Dior 1954.

Christian Dior's story, his vision, his creativity has been spread and told around the world through exhibitions that aim to enhance commercial brands and elevate them to the status of "dream" and exclusivity. A perfect medium, such as that of the museum, will be discussed later. The Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris has dedicated an exhibition to the history of the French fashion house "*Christian Dior, the designer of dreams,*" which recounts the numerosity of Dior's archives from its founding to the present day. The designer's story is also spread in Tokyo through a temporary exhibition, which is still accessible, and which marks the meeting point between East and West, at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The art installation was able to reproduce exactly the atmosphere of one of the country *chateau* where Christian loved to retreat and devote himself to developing the ideas that would make him the best-known fashion designer of all time. Shohei Shigematsu's architecture becomes a key element, interpreted as a narrative medium that aims to design the setting in the shape of a scenography by giving a new approach to visitors who are exposed to a different experience, that of accessing a different era, of postwar Paris, of the excesses of experimentation, artistic research and the return to the savoir-faire of the ateliers and artisans. It is like walking through the walls and foundations of a great house where the founder of the Maison wanted it in his image and likeness, a true explosion of creativity, design, history, color, innovation and prestige, a true art gallery. This continuous reference to art has allowed it to become part of the Maison's vision even today, within an even larger group represented by LVMH, which has succeeded in grouping under its name all those brands that carry with them an immense passion for art and demonstrate a culture based on the artistic personality of their founder.

### 3.3.3 *Maisons' reputation for cultural valorization: Patronage and Foundations*

Right on the impulse born of the passion of the founders and their relationship with the art world, the art-business relationship must be nourished over time to ensure that there is continuous mutual growth. The growing commitment to the promotion of one's corporate assets (which will be discussed below) has led large luxury groups to extend their 'interest in culture in a broader sense, with a view to Corporate Social Responsibility; therefore, there is no missing the aspect of funding and support for the arts sector from companies and entrepreneurs who are increasingly committed to the enhancement of artistic heritages. The art market is increasingly relying on multinational companies that embody the new trends and the perfect investment solutions for these expanding realities, thanks to their ability to implement suitable investment plans and promoting high media value initiatives that can support the State's commitment to the protection and enhancement of the national artistic heritage. Large luxury corporate groups, thanks to their economic availability and cultural reputation, intervene in the arts and culture sector through four different forms that represent four ways of relationship between the two markets:

- patronage;
- artistic mentoring;
- foundations;
- artistic collaboration.

*"Thanks to art, the high symbolic value of luxury brands no longer depends only on the exclusivity of possessing a product but is linked to the knowledge and mastery of exclusive and complex artistic codes, since understanding it is difficult for those who do not understand it" (Hagtvedt & Patrick).* The four types of relationships correspond to the need for brands to reinforce their exclusive status and gain more prestige through identification with art. It is also interesting to analyse these ties on the basis of the motivations involved in each mode of choice of strategies that link luxury and art, referring to a study by *Claude Chailan* that aims to analyse the types of relationships and ties between the two reality in order to better understand the role of art in creating the uniqueness and prestige of luxury and explain how each Maison contributes to distinguish itself in order to neutralize precisely such risks arising from

the industrialization of luxury. To better understand how luxury brands converge with the arts, the study focuses on a vision of branding based on daily activities and practices in the field of management by focusing on the relationships between art and some major French and Italian luxury maisons, which account for 55% of global luxury goods sales due to their history, culture, organization, and creativity. In *Claude Chailain's* research, a matrix is given that divides the four types according to two dimensions of luxury brands' art strategy concerning the temporal aspect of engagement with art and the depth of engagement to leverage the growing demand for luxury goods and at the same time sell the universe of symbols and magic.

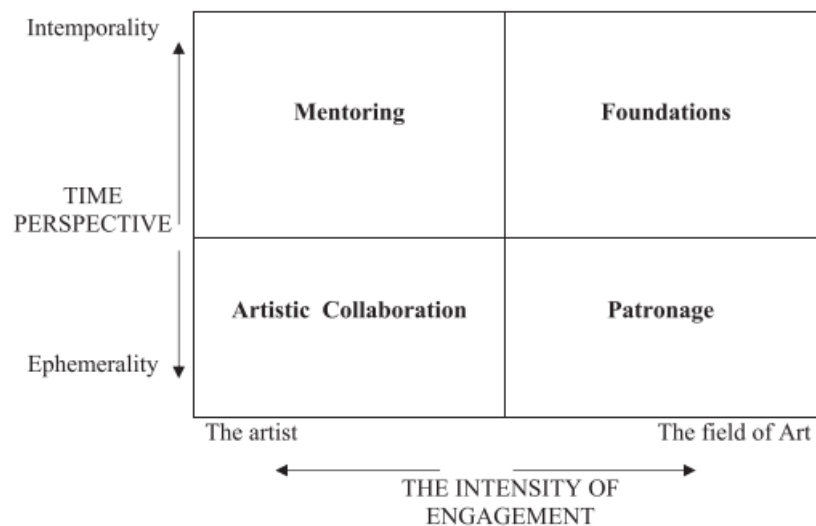


Figura 10 Art-to-luxury brand strategies, C.Chailan Journal of Business Research "Art as means to recreate luxury brands'raririty and value"

The following section will focus on the aspect of *patronage and the role of foundations*, considered as deep artistic relationships that focus on the interaction that the luxury sector has precisely with the art sector in general that goes back to the choices of the founders themselves, as opposed to the other two forms, less inherent in the historical heritage of the Maison that instead consist of having shorter relationships, with artists as people. Artistic collaborations will be treated later in order to best optimize the structure of the paper.

*Corporate patronage* represents a practice through which the founder/leader decides to finance a cultural project for his own personal interest which has innovative characteristics and risk factors, without expecting a certain direct return, except that

of reputation, since the company becomes a promoter and activist in the implementation of artistic and cultural projects in the footsteps of the founder's passions. From a historical perspective, the activity dates to very ancient origins during which it was undertaken by political power, the Church, and private individuals who had an amount of money that would allow them to offer money and hospitality to artists in exchange for commissioned works. Patronage is known to be a characteristic feature of the Popes of the Modern Age and of Renaissance princes such as the Medici who were the patrons of a large number of artists such as Leonardo, Michelangelo or Botticelli whose family collections are kept in the main Florentine museums thanks to the determination and artistic passion of Princess Anna Maria Luisa de 'Medici; it is no coincidence that Florence is now considered the city of art for excellence<sup>24</sup>.

As far as the luxury sector is concerned, the most notorious aspect of the patronage system is the sponsorship of artists and the commissioning of works of art, which represent a strong image return for the Maison, as well as the continuous financing undertaken by the biggest maisons. In fact, investment in the arts and culture sector is a growing phenomenon, as is sponsorship of cultural initiatives, which exploded in the 1980s that has become one of the most important marketing strategies for companies that want to associate their image with ideals that differ from commercial objectives. Two motivations behind the patronage of luxury companies have been identified: the desire to reinforce the image and consequently the identity of the Maison on one side, and the derivation of a genuine passion of the founder on the other; in the last one there is the interest in commissioning works and donations that seem to recall their desire to return to the original values of the company and cultivate their own passions. Precisely with regard to the last motivation, each year various publications and online platforms including Artnet, Forbes, and others rank the most influential "*top collectors*" of investors and benefactors who are part of the international contemporary art scene. During 2019, there has been an increase in the number of contemporary art collectors from China, Russia, India, and the Middle East, which has seen a widening of the art market network in locations where the idea of owning art assets as status symbols was previously unknown. It is interesting

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<sup>24</sup> Anna Maria Luisa entered into an important agreement with her successors called the "Family Pact" to preserve the Medici art collections and open them to the public; the Uffizi Gallery was born. The pact also saved the heritage from the Napoleonic invasion.

to report the example of a quintessential art lover who ranks 74th in Artnet's world ranking, *Miuccia Prada*, granddaughter of founder Mario Prada, and now the undisputed leader of Maison Prada. It is in art that Miuccia's personality re-emerges as a long-time supporter of contemporary artists and a perfect example of a spirit of true, passionate, and knowledgeable collecting and patronage, in contrast to other forms of financing that obscure the only interest in artistic ostentation for a forced association with art. Together with Yves Saint Laurent in 2012 an exhibition was dedicated to her at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, an event that gave her an incredible tribute, as she made art a second job, distinct from fashion. In the 1990s she and her husband devoted themselves to collecting pieces of modern art primarily for private use, and it was in 1993 that they opened the Fondazione Prada in Milan with the goal of disseminating modern art. Famous is her recent statement reported in *La Stampa*: "I hated the idea of making expensive clothes for rich ladies, that it was all a big game of business and profits. I used to throw myself into art, to look for aesthetics and principles, then I got involved in ideas, philosophers, [...], but in the end it's like in intellectuals I recognized little generosity. Beauty supports me more, I went back to art." Following this statement Miuccia ventured even more into art through collaborations with artists, architects and designers and the proposal of new exhibitions, such as *"The Boat is leaking. The Captain lied"* (May-November 2017, Venice), a three-dimensional exhibition project intended as a space for experiences and encounters between emerging artists, writers, and movie-makers that gives expression and meaning to past and present worlds in a society divided between the desire to live and the loss of confidence, anguish, and endless hope, a theme evidently dear to Miuccia. For the founder, art is not an end in itself but represents a political, social tool to make reflections on the world, it represents something "alive" that must be transmitted to young people for the purpose of education; Miuccia sees art from a more experimental perspective, compared to her husband who instead represents the collector for excellence from a more traditional taste, carried by a rigorous method and criterion that allows him to study art.

Resuming the discourse of patronage, notorious are the sponsorship activities through spending on the restoration and preservation of historical-artistic heritage strongly linked to the territory to which it belongs, which constitute a strategic tool for the maisons to increase their corporate image and obtain visibility for a larger public, such as tourists in the case of the restoration of the Trevi Fountain in Rome

by the Fendi maison, thanks to a program named "*Fendi for Fountains*." The interesting aspect that helped elevate the brand's prestige is the total absence of logos and promotional messages that referred to the maison's contribution. In fact, the communication strategy adopted proved to be unique and unexpected on the occasion of the inauguration of the newly restored Fountain, made to coincide with the 90th anniversary of the maison. In fact, it was precisely on the surface of the water at the base of the monument, so loved by tourists, that Fendi's second haute couture fashion show took place, through the exhibition of the collection created by Karl Lagerfeld, the brand's creative director. In this case, the association between art and luxury brand is very strong as it recalls in a very natural way the historical and cultural roots of the brand inherent in the symbol of the Roman "Dolce Vita" and icon of the eternal city, according to which the monument represents a perfect medium to enhance all those intangible values that Fendi's maison wishes to communicate.

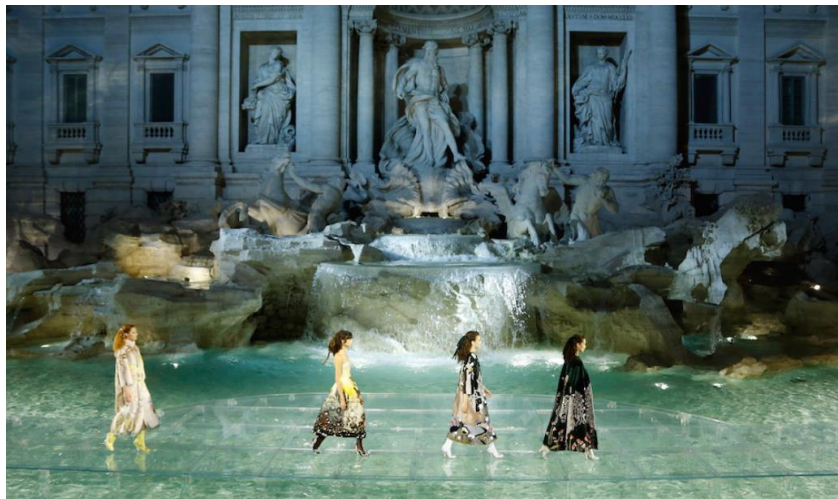


Figure 11 Fendi Trevi Fountain fashion show. Source: ilPost

The Prada Group also demonstrates a great willingness to cooperate in the protection of artistic heritage proven by its collaboration with FAI, Fondo Ambiente italiano in order to carry out a series of restoration projects aimed at enhancing Italian artistic heritage. The brand helped finance the completion of the restoration of the panel painting representing *L' Ultima Cena* made by Giorgio Vasari in 1546 that was damaged during the 1966 Arno River flood. Many restorations and financial support have been provided by the Maisons in collaboration with FAI. Recently on the occasion of Milan Design Week 2023, a partnership between the Maison *Dolce&Gabbana* and FAI was made official in order to promote Italianness, culture,

tradition, education, and beauty. The founders very attached to Sicily chose Syracuse and Marzamemi as places to host the fashion show in celebration of ten years of haute couture, spreading the love for the most iconic monuments and at the same time offering them high visibility thanks to the events organized at the cathedral of Monreale and in the iconic Piazza Pretoria. Also long has been the collaboration between the fund and Giorgio Armani, who back in 2008, impressed by the artistic and cultural richness of the villa, became one of the major sponsors of the restoration of Villa Necchi Campiglio allowing its opening to the public as a house-museum; through direct experience on the site it is interesting to report an extremely positive judgment of those buildings as they seem to embody the Milanese essence of fine design, history and heritage of a family that lived for years in that mansion, and it is also thanks to the help of these Maisons that today I can say that I have enhanced my cultural background, which otherwise would have been increasingly poor.

In the sphere of patronage belongs especially *the role of foundations or "corporate art collections"* that spread in the core of European companies around the mid-1980s in the wake of the American ones, because of the willingness of companies to purchase contemporary art works and open cultural foundations. These foundations are the result of a strong passion and activism of the collector-entrepreneur who chooses to concretize his collection of works by promoting them within a suitable space for public exhibition. The phenomenon of foundations was born as a "cultural rib" of luxury maisons that need more and more to interact with the social texture and take responsibility as a corporate sponsor through a coherent and comprehensive approach. Luxury companies are the perfect candidates to spread corporate art collections as they carry dynamic values such as flexibility, innovation, experimentation, and escape and in turn marry the values manifested in the works of certain artists and currents based on their heritage and DNA. In fact, the luxury and fashion sector is a modern and avant-garde sector and shares with this ancient legal instrument (*foundations refer to Articles 13-35 of the Civil Code and Article 45 of the Constitution*) components of material character and components of immaterial character, such as clothes, history and memories of the narrative itself. Before introducing some examples of foundations, it is interesting to emphasize the importance given to the physical spaces in which they reside, the locations, and the smallest details since the goal is to communicate clear messages to the public related to brand identity and to make them experience total involvement; for example,

Fondazione Prada in Milan wanted to communicate a "nonconformist aesthetic" peculiar to the brand, through the architectural, stylistic and decorative choices, as well as the Prada tower, inaugurated in 2015 and designed by architect Koolhaas and studio OMA, built in a space formerly resided by an ancient distillery of the early 1900s with the aim of replicating a place where reflection on aesthetic and artistic canons of contemporary society reigns, a construction that is already art in itself. Characteristic was the project of the construction of a bar "Bar Luce" inside the tower, architected by the famous director *Wes Anderson*, who was able to express his taste for vintage and turn-of-the-century atmospheres; evidence of the incredible expressive and artistic freedom that Prada grants to artists of all genres, in fact Anderson says he was excited by the idea of personifying the role of architect and having the opportunity to give life to a space of his own, a childhood dream. Below I will give some examples of foundations that have managed to achieve high reputational value because of the values they are able to convey through culture:

- *Prada foundation*, created in 1993 by Miuccia Prada and her husband Patrizio Bertelli as an institution dedicated to the arts and the realization of projects in contemporary art, cinema, photography, philosophy, dance and architecture. Its headquarters are in Milan, the Observatory in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan dedicated to photography and Cà Corner della Regina in Venice opened in 2015 overlooking the Grand Canal. The main site has hosted over the years several temporary exhibitions of internationally known contemporary artists such as Steve McQueen, Enrico Castellani, John Baldessari (beloved by Miuccia Prada), Louise Bourgeois, Anish Kapoor, and many others and has at the same time a permanent gallery with works by Walter De Maria, Jeff Koons, Pino Pascali, Damien Hirst, Carsten Holler with his famous Mushrooms placed on the ceiling that were the subject of many photo shoots spread on social media; they contributed to the knowledge of the building that has become even more famous today. The goal is to provide new opportunities and offer a space where to "teach" to an increasingly diverse audience. Together with the tower and the Prada Cinema foundation, it represents an original architectural project that embodies the Maison's vision: warehouses, fermentation silos, and laboratories of the former distillery alongside the three modern buildings. The project reflects the Prada Group's vision as actors of change where transformation and



innovation of reference codes are the basis for a pioneering perspective and a distinctive interpretation of the contemporary. Here, also, spreading the image of a brand committed to sustainability becomes crucial through a policy that places the planet, people and culture at the center of the strategy;

- *Cartier Foundation*, important exhibition center dedicated to different expressions of art created in 1984 by Alain Dominique Perrin in the vicinity of Versailles and later moved to the heart of Paris at 261 Boulevard Raspail. It involves different expressions of art, including the latest in digital art, from painting to video art to performance art, and engages in the acquisition and commissioning of works. Peculiar to the foundation is the organization of collateral activities involving dance, music, theater, cinema, garden walks, and educational activities aimed at children;
- *Alda Fendi Foundation* is among the most recent foundations created in 2019 and located in the heart of Rome inside a Baroque palace that houses innovative spaces designed by Jean Nouvel, a famous architect best known for the realization of the Agbar Tower in Barcelona and numerous international works. The foundation is the result of a dream of Alda Fendi, who after years dedicated to the family business decided to devote herself to art and promote the confrontation between ancient and contemporary in an exchange of contamination and interference of artistic currents, a concept visible in the unconventionality of the structure of the space;
- *Nicola Trussardi Foundation*, founded in 1996 and financed by the three founding partners and a private group of patrons, represents a logic of transmission of culture marked by a flexible, rapid and innovative strategy to engage the general public in the new language of contemporary art in continuous evolution. At the same time, it engages in the restoration of historic Milanese palaces such as Palazzo Litta, Palazzo Citterio, and Palazzo Dugnani by inciting international artists to create new works. He has obtained several collaborations of an international nature with museums such as the Tate Modern in London, the Kunsthaus in Zurich, and the Venice Biennale.



*Figure 12 Prada foundation complex*

To conclude therefore, important becomes the role of brand responsibility, as in an era of fluid values, the brands that accompany us every day become the true carriers of values<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, in order to achieve a positive image and to be a promoter of those values, a Maison must support issues such as sustainability, social responsibility, and art, especially contemporary art since, as reported in the second chapter, it is closer to the spirit of today's society and new generations of consumers. Ian Rogers, director of LVMH's digital universe, says that "If you don't love a brand's culture, you won't love its products either," since there is an increased consumer awareness of sustainability issues that consequently impose challenges for maisons to improve their reputation by including social responsibility and sustainability issues in the value proposition. In addition, even if art contributes to the strategy of differentiation from competitors, it is important for a Maison to maintain the right authenticity as it happens more times than not that in order to become sponsors of cultural events at all costs, the purity of real activism towards culture is lost in favor of the phenomenon of "widespread patronage," different from the distant role historically played by Patrons. Here is that there is a profound reputational difference between those who use art only to appear and those who promote it, this becomes an important discriminating factor to distinguish the prestige of a Maison, from brands that have not yet obtained the right credibility to survive in the prestigious network of luxury, in him the high reputation itself becomes a "luxury" for the few.

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<sup>25</sup> Fondazione Golinelli, la Repubblica.it

In this section we have treated foundations as promoters of general culture for the enhancement of all forms of art, particularly contemporary art. Further on, the foundation will be analysed as a dialogue between the company and the territory in order to spread the collective imagination of a brand, fundamental will be the strategy of the Maison Gucci, which will be treated in the last chapter, as a classic example of a real museum.

### ***3.4 Aesthetic theory and brand elevation through marketing strategies***

The symbiotic relationship between culture and commerce has long been a subject of research in the social sciences, marketing and study of consumer behavior<sup>26</sup>. According to a study by Annamma Joy, Jeff Jianfeng Wang, Tsang-Sing Chan, John F. Sherry Jr., Geng Cui on consumers' perceptions regarding the sales practices of luxury stores and the international contemporary art market, agreements, negotiations and pricing take place through a continuous interaction with a culture that involves aesthetic judgment and social recognition according to which art and commerce mix and confuse each other by reinforcing the intrinsic value of the other. According to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), art becomes a perfect aesthetic and social guarantor of luxury that gives it prestige and reputational increase, one of the primary long-term goals for maisons in a world that has become increasingly accessible and material. Most organizations have aesthetic manifestations of art forms within their activities; the brand itself is represented by a logo or images that are based on artistic symbols. Aesthetics are even present in the organization's spaces with paintings, sculptures, art installations, and photographs pervading recreational areas and offices that increasingly resemble art galleries with the goal of welcoming company stakeholders by generating aesthetic experiences that influence people's perceptions. But the real understanding of the value of art in the world of fashion houses and luxury concerns its use as a management tool to address competitive challenges and support performance improvement by developing greater reputational value.

Aesthetics refers to a visual response that enables a perception of pleasure that one has of an object or experience, through which a brand can communicate directly to its consumers without recourse to the use of words or pricing strategies. Especially in

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<sup>26</sup> Arnould and Thompson 2005

the luxury sector, it plays a key role because through it, maisons are able to build an effective and sustainable brand image over time. On the one hand, therefore, aesthetics is the way a luxury brand presents itself to the public: the visual image, product design, advertising campaigns, and marketing activities that must be elegant, sophisticated, and of high quality in order to attract the interest and admiration of consumers; in marketing strategies, luxury brands are distinguished from other brands by their ability to create a luxury experience through aesthetics, which goes beyond the mere functionality of products. On the other hand, there is culture that complements aesthetics as it represents the heritage and tradition from which the brand takes inspiration, which can also be expressed through product design, choice of materials, handcrafted details, and the history of the brand itself. There are several factors that enhance the importance of aesthetics and design for luxury fashion houses, which are:

- *society's inclination to aestheticism* as it is daily exposed to brands that in order to be competitive subject their products to aesthetic optimization, from Ikea to Conran to Alessi. Today design is well recognized by the extreme use of colors, of the particularity of shapes even for more common objects such as refrigerators or cell phones. Also Louis Vuitton, on the occasion of Paris Fashion Week, produced for star Jaden Smith, son of famous actor Will Smith, a bag with the appearance of a dollhouse that exactly replicated the house in which the founder of Louis Vuitton lived and in which he created his first workshop for the company, a key project to capture attention on social media, though also the collaboration with the star;
- *the facility with which certain forms, contrasts, harmonies and other aesthetic aspects are recognized and memorized*, becoming a source of emotions and sensory memories in those exposed to them. Here is where aesthetics and the memory aspect play a key role in luxury marketing and communication strategies, which in order to achieve perfection take advantage of the extreme beauty of the world, of the aura mentioned above. A Jacquemus bag is recognized as such because of the unique rectangular shape it has, which allows it to be distinguished from other brands, as well as the famous "intrecciato" of the Bottega Veneta bag, which is recognized even in the absence of the logo by the most experienced;

- *presence of a negative correlation between "beauty" and the price of a product* since aesthetics contributes to a decrease in consumer sensitivity to price. According to some research there is a strong negative correlation between the price of a product/experience and the aesthetics built around and for that product;
- *tendency to "shareability" of the product* as aesthetics represents one of the variables that drives a consumer to take advantage of the old phenomenon of word of mouth and share on their personal profiles the product or luxury experience, they are having. In fact, according to a market analysis conducted by DOTcom Distribution regarding the impact of aesthetics within marketing strategies, 40 percent of users are eager to share their shopping experience if the packaging is strongly branded or otherwise identified by a recognizable aesthetic.

Therefore, it is crucial for a luxury brand to exude a strong sense of aesthetics that must be in line with its values and the culture it represents in order to convey its DNA and codes in an authentic and compelling way in order to create a strong emotional relationship with consumers and increase loyalty by creating a unique and distinctive brand image. Luxury maison consider their potential customers to be aesthetes<sup>27</sup> for whom it must be able to adopt strategies to increase the likelihood of making connections and connecting with them.

### ***3.4.1 Art in advertising and the Instagram aestheticism: symbol universe***

According to a paradox, the society that was once called the consumer society has turned into the least materialistic society ever, toward a miniaturization of products that are ever smaller and lighter, to a transition to a service economy and in particular to a market exchange of images, signs and messages. The use value tends to be progressively obscured by the symbolic/sign value of the good, by a new DNA that is constituted by the ability of the good to inform and communicate; as well as the exchange value that has become a social exchange. The brand, especially in the

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<sup>27</sup> According to the philosopher Kant, aesthetics was considered innate and transcendental, understood as man's ability to perceive and categorize the beautiful.

luxury sector, in its most evolved manifestations expresses with great transparency the new reality of the dematerialization of markets. The product has lost its protagonism, the material blurs into the universe of signs and itself becomes a sign. The luxury sector is the one that most needs the power of symbolism to elevate its products because in a society that is increasingly directed toward democratization and the attainment of accessible pleasures, the luxury sector risks losing its *raison d'être* of uniqueness, despite the trend of dematerialization in contemporary society. Therefore, it becomes necessary to recall the role of aesthetics and art within the advertisements of major maisons, which is the main means by which this process of signification takes place in contemporary societies, with respect to a role that goes beyond its traditional sales function. Luxury advertising bypasses traditional processes and embodies an aesthetic environment to seek artistic harmony and approval with its target consumers. In fact, the best strategy for advertising a luxury brand is the 360-degree reference of the art world, from sound to film to architecture to painting. A striking example of an advertisement that itself can be considered an artistic product is Bulgari's "Unexpected Wonders" commercial, which embodies the brand's symbolic universe of dreams, magic, cinema, art, timeless beauty, colors, history, the future, and elegance, all of which are conveyed by director Paolo Sorrentino through the choice of two Hollywood stars, Anne Hathaway and Zendaya, perfect Bulgari Ambassadors. The spot was designed as an emotional mini-film reflecting on the concept of wonder, through the precious jewels that give a strong light of truth and beauty to the scenes, accompanied by a shower of flowers on the background of the city of Rome and its historical monuments. The importance of the scenery reminds the viewer of the strong association that Bulgari holds with the monuments of its city, as it has always been possible to see reference to the architectural elements of Rome in the design of its creations, such as the Caracalla tiles, the ring in the shape of the Colosseum, and the shape of the most famous city squares.



*Figura 13 An Unexpected Wonders spot*

A similar spot that recalls the brand's association with the beauty of the monuments of its own city and the world is the "*L'Odyssée de Cartier*" advertisement, which exalts through a strong aesthetic note the magnificence of art, for which few jewels can live up to it. A short film shot by director Bruno Aveillan that tells the story of the brand through an imaginary journey into a world characterized by the motifs and design that made Cartier jewelry famous across 15 different cities. The spot, made for the brand's 165th anniversary, is part of a series of 10 short films divided into chapters that convey a journey through time between royal courts, international influences, iconic creations and important clients, all framed by the power of art.

High jewelry, according to Vanity Fair, is art as the product itself is the result of strong craftsmanship and manual skills that give rise to unique shapes derived from stonework. The strategy of luxury maisons must align with the manufacturing process, raw materials and brand history, and it is important that the role of communication to the public, both physical and digital, succeeds in transmitting the magnificence of the product. The increasingly widespread reference to the adopted strategies of the cultural and artistic sector is an excellent way to disseminate the art that resides in the creations (still not fully appreciated as such) since they are a strong moment of empowerment of the maison that justifies the transition of the simple product to an artistic elevation. Even more so, the luxury jewellery market where industrialization of products is not possible compared to luxury fashion companies, manages to become one with the artistic sector by eliminating its boundaries. Appropriate is the reference to Maison Tiffany, which in 2022 organized one of the largest jewellery exhibitions in the form of a real exhibition where visitors buy tickets to admire the art and beauty of exceptional stones up close. In interior spaces divided into galleries, the products take on the appearance of illuminated sculptures that spread an aura that once could only characterize the ancient sculptures of the greatest classical sculptors. The Vision & Virtuosity exhibition going against the wake of digitization in which all activities now take place through a screen, has thought to meet the needs of those seeking an immortal space to spread the experience and artistic magnificence on Instagram. Indeed, it is in this space that custom-created activities and shades of light have been included to be "posted," such as digital writings that visitors can write on a wall, a corner dedicated to Tiffany's engagement rings, all accompanied by a strong aesthetic presence, which prompts users to communicate the event on Instagram. The last one becomes a key medium

for the luxury world thanks to the strong relationship between art, luxury and digital that was discussed in the second chapter. Instagram, in fact, in the digital era becomes a new exhibition space through which emerging artists and luxury maisons start a new cultural construction by allowing the opening to a communicational and dialogical dimension that incentivizes the encounter between artist, social consciousness and audience. Social media are changing our relationship with art, as a artwork has never been as accessible as it is today by going viral in a matter of hours, and at the same time an emerging artist can become popular through simple user shares, nourished by the desire to spread beauty and knowledge. In this scenario then, what role do luxury maisons play? Because of the aesthetic assonance with art and the platform, luxury brands engage in the creation of advertising campaigns geared toward brand elevation through association with artistic collaborations that are able to spread a sense of prestige in the users' minds, while at the same time contributing to the spread of the notoriety of the artist in question. An example of an advertising campaign that best represents the art-luxury-digital relationship and the increase in the reputation of maisons through an "Instagrammable" reality is the collaboration between Louis Vuitton and the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, whose art project has exploded extensively on every Instagram profile, shared by autonomous users, high-viewing profiles, famous personalities, and profiles that contribute to the spread of art and fashion. The last chapter will discuss in more detail the Louis Vuitton case and its longstanding relationship with art.

### ***3.4.2 Digital as an accelerator of the artification process***

In keeping with what was mentioned in the second chapter, it is interesting to analyze how technology has contributed to the elevation of brand prestige, increasing even more the association between art and luxury under a new guise that sees digital at the center of the artification process. In the last period, there has been an increasing interest from brands and investors in "non-fungible tokens" NFTs, which are compatible with the world of luxury as they have a uniqueness mechanism that makes something digital and impossible to exchange; according to Forbes, luxury maisons should increasingly introduce NFTs within their strategies by embracing this new digital frontier as they go to highlight even more the three levers of luxury: exclusivity, authenticity and the ability to make unique experiences. So, at this point,



one wonders what role art plays in the relationship. NFTs are most widely used in the art industry to buy and sell digital works and at the same time they can turn into images of physical objects, gifs, video game skins, virtual stores, etc. Thus a relationship is established between NFTs, luxury goods and art in that there is a continuous nurturing of each other between the latter two even in the digital world. To understand this concept, it is interesting to bring up the example of the fashion house Gucci, which was the first major luxury brand to experiment with the world of art and design in NFTs. The fashion house was able to display a unique, non-fungible, and irreplaceable collection of works by 29 cryptoartists through its collaboration with SuperRare, which represents the leading marketplace for digital art and culture by allowing artists to find alternative ways to emerge and thrive. Gucci thus inaugurates the Vault Art Space, untethered from physical walls, a gallery that becomes a digital place to admire and collect the forward-looking visions of the 29 contemporary artists who have found in Gucci a new window to emerge. The exhibition, called "The Next 100 Years of Gucci," aims to make people reflect on the Maison's century of history and imagine the future through the fusion of past and present codes that become suggestions for the Maison's future. In addition, each NFT work represents a collectible fragment of Gucci's kaleidoscopic heritage. As a result, the metaverse space is becoming a secondary space in which luxury brands hold events and fashion shows at events such as Metaverse Fashion Week in which they were the avatars of models and models who walked the runway inside virtual locations that were taken care of in every detail thanks to artistic and architectural support.



*Figure 14 Alanna Vanacore, Gucci Frame, 2022. Vault Art Gallery and Gucci Source: Exibart*

Instead, another digital tool that is increasingly being used within the museum realities of luxury brands and in stores are digital installations that evoke an immersive

experience between art, digital, and brand as digital is increasingly central to meeting new consumer demands and supporting retailers in a society where luxury needs art and digital to enhance its image. Specifically in the collaboration between the Maison Dolce & Gabbana and M-Cube, a leading company in In Store Digital Engagement solutions, the client experiences the relationship between the Maison, creativity and immersive experience through digital by establishing a multisensory connection with its audience. The immersive room transmits animated images, emotional videos, imaginary worlds and elements that refer to the world and codes of the Maison.

### ***3.5 The creative director and the charismatic figure***

Getting to this point, it is important to analyse the key role that contributes most to making sure that new proposals bring an enhancement to the brands' image and reputation. The creative director is in responsible for product creation processes, collaborative strategies, collection concepts and the exhibition space, aspects related to the "artistic making" of a luxury Maison. He is responsible for elevating the brand's degree of customer loyalty, trying to improve and enhance it with innovative and creative ideas, in keeping up with contemporary trends, particularly related to the world of art and exhibition modes, which are increasingly original and digital. The creative director of a brand, like the critic-curator, tells, but in telling his project and the suggestions generated by its materials he expresses himself, thanks to the "understanding by doing" that is a fundamental part of every creative process. In order to generate an innovative vision, the director works on sedimented elements, which belong to the past, which have been momentarily forgotten, but which are waiting to be reactivated and put back into circulation through a vision that is capable of adapting them and handing them back to the future, in their new relocation. A pioneering role in the enhancement of heritage was played by German designer Karl Lagerfeld, who in 1983 was nominated creative director of Chanel, a fashion house that at the time needed to revive and be renewed. With much foresight and talent, he was able to transform the clothes to perfection, making them more contemporary while at the same time maintaining the Maison's characteristic codes, such as the tweed suit, the little black dress, pearls mixed with gaudy gold and camellia chains. According to Dion and Arnould, luxury brands reflect the personality of its designer of reference, and in order for the goods to acquire the status of a work of art, they must be created

by well-recognized artistic directors; as in the case of Louis Vuitton, which although it has collaborated with well-known artists, it was only with Marc Jacobs in 1998 that the relationship between the Maison and contemporary art intensified, bringing to light several collaborations with artists who revolutionized LV's materials and monograms.

We have seen that luxury products have always been exclusive and surrounded by that aura that Benjamin mentions which is comparable to the halo created around a work of art, thus connoting uniqueness and prestige. However, these attributes are being lost due to the massification of marketing strategies, so that the challenge for new art directors remains to create new products within the brand but without losing the aura of the Maison, characterized by its DNA and its narrative. According to Shaw (2001), the answer lies in the charismatic aura of the creative director to preserve the legitimacy and reputation of the luxury brand despite mass distribution and market industrialization. The brand management strategies of a luxury Maison focus particularly on the exceptional expression of the leader's charisma, as a person who conveys assurance, quality, security, in this case "artistic making." Weber in his writings reports the definition of charismatic figure referring to a person who has qualities out of the ordinary (genius ability, original personality traits, proactivity, self-confidence, awareness, etc...). Thus, in this case, the artist/creative director is presented as a source of legitimacy, presenting themselves as art lovers and emphasizing their relationship with the art world and an aesthetic vision. Reconnecting with the paragraph of the founders Christian Dior, in fact, as founder and artistic director, plays the role of avant-garde art collector, friend of many contemporary artists and avant-garde talents. The charisma of the creative director therefore particularly coincides with the personalities of the founders as they are possessed of all the qualities possessed by the artistic directors, but lately this coincidence of roles does not always happen because on the luxury market sphere there are some directors who were not brand founders and who "rotate" among the masons; in addition, some original founders have passed away and the responsibilities of the creative director have to pass to other personalities. Another characteristic, then, lies in the second millennium trend of the so-called "*walzer of creative directors*", an expression that alludes to the movements of a creative director from one brand to another at an increasingly fast pace. An example is Raf Simons, who was creative director of Dior (2012-2016), of Calvin Klein (2016-2018), and then returned to creating brands under his own name and since 2020 became co-creative director of Prada together with

Miuccia. It is evident how these aspects provide evidence of the historical change of the figure of the designer of a luxury brand, which used to be limited to the sphere of product and craftsmanship, but today instead becomes a key element in building legitimacy of a Maison as it is immersed in a society desiring narratives, culture, and aesthetic originality for marketing plans, and it is important for luxury brands to manage succession among artistic directors as best they can precisely to avoid the dissipation of the founder's charisma.

### ***3.5.1 Art collaborations: limited editions and art installations as exclusivity strategies***

To this day, companies find themselves competing within a dynamic and ever-changing market environment in which competition is becoming increasingly aggressive. In this complex scenario, luxury maisons, to maintain their exclusive nature and reinforce their reputation in order to maintain a high gap with smaller companies that want to enter this market, more frequently use collaborations to obtain customer loyalty and create "appeal" for the new generations, which are increasingly attentive to new strategies. In fact, collaborations give traditional luxury brands a more modern presence and a revitalization of their offerings in order to penetrate youth culture. In addition to co-branding activity, which consists of creating new value through an alliance between two or more well-known brands, there is a collaboration that allows the world of luxury to be combined with the art sector, at the same time allowing an artistic divulgation that brings value both for the Maison as it benefits from the artistic association to increase its reputation and for the artist who finds a new channel through which to express himself and make himself known. Up until recently, companies that have always been art collectors, did not routinely take part in the network of collaborations between contemporary artists and art curators, today the creative director as was mentioned, plays a key role as he is able to interpret society's trends by staying up-to-date with art trends and artists on the international scene. According to a paper "*Collaboration with art in the luxury industry as a marketing tool for value creation*" by Ochkovskaya M., artistic collaborations happen either by having ties with new and emerging artists or by taking inspiration from artistic heritage in cases where the artist is deceased, in the latter case the paintings inspire creative directors who interpret and implement them in a luxury brand. One example of the transposition of paintings by the greatest artists into luxury fashion collections is

due to the contribution of the figure of Yves Saint Laurent, who starting in the second half of the 20th century revolutionized fashion by making art the protagonist of his collections that saw the transposed works of the most famous artists, from Mondrian, to Picasso, to Matisse. *"It is a pictorial collection inspired by Delacroix's odalisques, Ingres's women, Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring, de La Tour, Rembrandt, Degas's ballerinas with their black corsets, but also by Visconti's Senso, the War of Secession, and Sternberg's Marlene. An extremely egocentric collection in which I bring in not just clothes, but everything I love in painting"*<sup>28</sup>. His love of art attracted the attention of Yves Saint Laurent, who flipping through a book dedicated to the Dutch painter Mondrian, who had become famous at that time thanks to his "grid" style, decided to dedicate an entire collection to him. In 1965 Yves created the famous "Mondrian Dress," which was on sale at the time for 130,000 lira and is now displayed as a piece of art at the Victoria and Alber Museum in London. *"Mondrian is purity. I don't think there is anything purer in the art world"*<sup>29</sup>. The charismatic personality of the creative director/founder knew how to understand the new, more liberal youth culture by transforming a painting from its two-dimensionality to a three-dimensional dress that would attract society's attention and at the same time valorize the current to which Mondrian belonged, that of Neo-Plasticism or De Stil which was not well known at the time. This was in a sense an tacit collaboration since Mondrian himself was not involved but homaged.

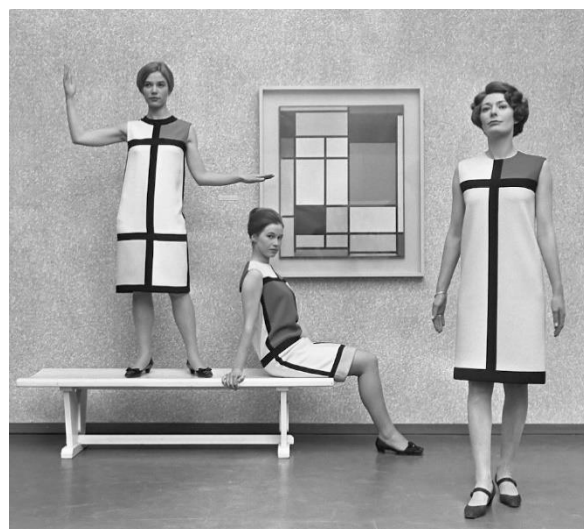


Figure 15, 16 - Vanity Fair

<sup>28</sup> Vogue testimony on the 1976 Ballet Russes collection.

<sup>29</sup> Yves Saint Laurent talking about Mondrian

Art collaboration carries emotional and symbolic values for consumers such as aesthetic pleasure and the feeling of embodying the essence of an art connoisseur and being part of the international cultural elite. A study conducted in Moscow whose data were collected in 2018 from the Facebook and Instagram platforms allowed Ochkovskaya to uncover the motivations behind the consumption of luxury goods by Moscow residents (as the research was conducted in Russia): the desire to express individuality, demonstrate understanding and closeness with art, and obtain aesthetic pleasure for themselves. Previously, we have already mentioned the four forms of artistic collaborations between the arts and the luxury industry by analyzing foundations and patronage in detail. In the following section, we will discuss arts mentoring and specifically the fourth form, which concerns arts collaborations in the strict sense, understood either as long term or occasional relationships for a particular collection or event. Artistic mentoring refers to efforts by maisons to support the work of emerging artists and help them emerge in the market, an example being The Mentor and Protègè Arts Initiative launched by Rolex in 2002 to support artists in the fields of architecture, film, and other creative forms. Researcher Chailan defines artistic collaboration as a classic business relationship between the artist and the brand, in which the artist agrees to create a product or line for the brand during a limited period while receiving compensation in return; the period may be longer or shorter depending on the success and type of intention on both sides. In this case, the collaboration relates to the sphere of the limited-edition strategy that aims to increase the exclusivity of the brand through a offering that is less than the possible market demand, to convey a sense of immediacy in customers as the products are available in limited number and time. An example is Kongo's Hermès "Graff"<sup>30</sup> collection, which in 2011 launched a project that produced a highly publicized series of limited-edition scarves. The latter included six different silk scarves enhanced by the artist with colorful tag-style prints and the brand name enclosed in exuberant bubble letters, all inspired by a strong note of color and vivacity. In the wake of globalization and the importance of international fairs that are becoming increasingly popular in a capillary way (as covered in Chapter Two), it is interesting to report on a recent collaboration that sees the creation of a limited edition of Loro Piana's "Arca Bag" made with Argentine artist Cristiàn Mohaded whose pieces have been incorporated into the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Musèe Les Arts Dècoratifs in Paris. The bags

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<sup>30</sup> Internationally known French Vietnamese graffiti artist

bring back both the savoir-faire and craftsmanship of the Loro Piana identity through the classic wicker design and leather details and the originality and creativity of the artist. Here the sales strategy is highly exclusive since the bags, as they are limited edition, can be sold exclusively in the Loro Piana Monte Napoleone store in Milan during the Milan Design week. In fact, in addition to the artistic collaboration takes over another strong artistic association that enhances the Maison's brand which concerns the dimension of installation and exhibitions. On the occasion of Milan Design Week, Loro Piana is making its spaces available to host "Apacheta," three art installations created by the artist inspired by the traditional rocky piles that constellate the Andean landscapes<sup>31</sup>, whose pieces are covered with the Maison's salvaged fabrics. Also, interesting to report how Loro Piana "uses" the exhibition space and the artistic atmosphere created for Design Week to launch its new Interiors collection, whose pieces are exhibited among the artistic pieces, a clear sign of association to elevate the prestige of the Maison.



Figure 17 Loro Piana site, Design Week Milan 2023

Artistic collaboration, therefore, can also be analysed by referring to the installation tool that takes into account the temporal dimension of collaboration and the importance of spreading awareness of new and emerging artists or honouring established artists. Installation refers to a form of visual art developed in the postmodern era that exhibits art in its three-dimensionality and includes media, objects and expressive forms of all kinds placed within a single environment to create total immersion on the part of the viewer. Fundamental to the collaboration between luxury and art is the practice inherent to the "site-specific" concept, that is, the production of

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<sup>31</sup> The rock pile once served as a landmark and as ritual offerings to Mother Earth.

works in which the relationship with the structural and architectural context is fundamental, as in the case of Loro Piana's provision of space for the installation of the artist's works. I report here on an example that is also very current and in progress, which is that of the collaboration between sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro and the Fendi Maison, which has decided to make available its headquarters in Rome, the Palace of Italian Civilization, to temporarily exhibit the artist's works for a few months in an exhibition entitled "*The Great Theatre of Civilizations*." According to the Pomodoro Foundation, the collaboration is a perfect example of a strategic partnership in which the mission and vision of both are united by finding expression in the celebration of art as a tool capable of spreading respect for the historical heritage, both the legacy of the luxury Maison and the legacy of the Pomodoro Foundation, all according to a logic that acts in the perspective of sustainability and innovation.

### ***3.5 .2 International art exhibitions as a prestige tool: Art Basel Miami Beach***

Installations as well as cultural popularization fairs represent an excellent window for both artists and Maison's as one nurtures the value of the other, while at the same time increasing the reputation of the parties by being present on the international sphere in contact with a multitude of people such as tourists, avant-garde young people, art lovers, and culture lovers in general who represent precisely the new trendy target audience for the luxury industry. International trade fairs are key events *because they give the public the opportunity to affirm their belonging to the world*<sup>32</sup>, and it is precisely the appropriation of artistic tools and participation in this type of event that makes luxury maisons increasingly part of the art circuit, approaching new targets and playing on elements such as elitism, distinction, elevation, digital, and 'internationalization that consequently lead to a reputational increase of their brand, within a continuous innovation and narrative. As anticipated in the second chapter, in the scenario of international exhibitions, one of the main contemporary art fairs is Art Basel, a meeting point for artists, collectors and important personalities of the international art scene and having a large space that allows the exhibition of large works such as sculptures, video projections and live performances. In 2002, the Art Basel Miami Beach fair opened in the United States by having 160 galleries from 23 countries, followed later by Art Basel Hong Hong Kong, and then also having a presence in Paris. It was at Art Basel Miami Beach 2022 that the maisons of Armani,

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<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *The distinction, social critique of taste*, Il Mulino, 1983



Bottega Veneta and Fendi were present, continuing to affirm the closeness of the two worlds that feed off each other, in turn creating new market niches and investments that keep them contemporary. Bottega Veneta is displaying the chairs created by Gaetano Pesce<sup>33</sup> at its spring summer 2023 fashion show in Milan, a collaboration that made the Maison the bearer of a political message encapsulated in the chairs, "*Who makes culture today? The museum or the luxury fashion company?*"



Figure 18 Art Basel 2022, Bottega Veneta



Figure 19 Art Basel 2022, Bottega Veneta

Giorgio Armani presents its own genderless capsule collection entitled LOVE, presenting monochromatic clothes and four blue animal sculptures created in collaboration with contemporary Italian artist Marcantonio. The experience is also implemented with the help of augmented reality by scanning a QR code. Also, the ever-present Louis Vuitton featuring a selection of works by contemporary artists and unique original designs for trunks commissioned in 1909 by Henri Matisse and Francis Picabia. Presents are several collaborations such as a Van Gogh silk scarf by Jeff Koons, a branded skateboard by Stephen Sprouse, a travel trunk by Cindy Sherman, paintings by Richard Prince and Alex Katz. The maisons once again confirm their

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<sup>33</sup> Gaetano Pesce born in 1939 in Italy is an artist who during his career has embraced projects in architecture, urban planning, interiors, staging and industrial design from a modernist and progressive perspective. His works are exhibited in more than 30 permanent collections in the world's most important museums, such as MoMa in New York, Metropolitan Museum in New York, and many others.

relationship with art and its popularization at the Venice Biennale, an international art exhibition held every year in which Burberry, Swatch, Louis Vuitton, Dior and Valentino participate, the latter two being among the main funders of the 2022 Biennale. For the design of the new Valentino Des Ateliers collection, more than 16 artists were invited to collaborate to honor creativity and at the intersection of the arts, choosing the Gaggiandre of the Venice Arsenal as the location for the fashion show, right during the course of the Biennale. Valentino creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli says the project was designed as "*a conversation between Valentino's ateliers and artists' ateliers.*"

### ***3.5 .3 Retail prestige strategies and flagship stores***

Compared to the fashion industry that is characterized by short-term cycles and perpetual change, luxury is typically focused on long-term logics and approaches that subvert standard mass marketing approaches according to which it is not the objects that define a perception of luxury but the relationships and associations that develop behind it, supported by a logic of adoration that has a defined "charismatic" basis. For many years, the legitimacy of luxury was based on traditional elements such as the quality and rarity of materials, the accuracy of craftsmanship, and distributional focus, a key priority for most brands, such as the Hermès brand. The 1990s present an intensification of mass marketing through the opening of numerous retails, online business, opening in duty-free areas, and consequently a marketing of accessories to a wider audience. This mass distribution strategy goes against the exclusivity that the Maisons want to convey, threatening their brand legitimacy. The maisons, therefore, to balance their commercial strategies aim for the uniqueness of their offerings centred on the adoration of the charismatic character of the creative director, as mentioned above, through the transposition of the values, DNA, inventiveness, aestheticism, and ideology of the leader and the brand through the retail experience. This represents one of the strategies of luxury retails that aims to spread an ideology of beauty and aesthetics through a "staging and theatricalization" of the creative director's artistic reputation by emphasizing his or her relationship with art and the brand's historical heritage in order to preserve the brand aura, convey narratives, and incentivize the development of relationships between salespeople and customers, according to a successful CRM. For example, in historic flagship stores such as the Chanel store on

Rue Cambon present since 1954, the Carter store since 1899, and the Dior store on Avenue Montaigne, the founder is praised through images and explicit references. Another strategy is to let one's retail open up to a strong artistic contamination. Today in major luxury stores, products are never displayed in windows, rather they leave room for artworks that are no longer hidden but are the center of merchandising strategies. So, luxury products are immersed in an artistic environment to enhance the intangible value and spirit of the maison in order to "sell" the aura, history, and artistic passion even before the tangible products. Promoting sales has taken a back seat in favor instead of promoting the brand, the dream and the experience, where the image of the store plays a significant role in promotion. Intensifying the artistic association is the use of the window as a free creation space for artists, who in collaboration with the brand create real d'art. The world's most famous jewelry maison Tiffany & Co. in 2022 decided to set up the windows of its stores, starting with the one in Manhattan at the launch of the new "Lock" collection by selecting a work of art to frame the jewelry displayed in the window. The artwork was created before 2019 by Sicilian sculptor Francesco Vullo, who specializes in digital illustration and sculpture and created "Empathy," a lock with two brass profiles looking at each other, connected by the same arch. Another example unrelated to the strategies of the maisons but important for understanding the trend the luxury world is moving toward is the creation of a true contemporary exhibition in the display windows of Milan's most famous street Via della Spiga, in the heart of Milan's Quadrilatero and luxury. In the windows there was no mannequin or set-up to draw attention to the product rather there was a new exhibition format curated by Federica Sala "VIATAI" that stems from the idea of using the windows as an exhibition space for artworks and art installations to encourage creativity.

The most important strategy adopted by luxury brands is undoubtedly the increasingly frequent opening of flagship stores, which are considered by customers as the highest aspirational goal to have a luxury shopping experience. It is enough to mention that many people, especially tourists, prefer to buy products at a higher cost as long as they are purchased within flagship stores. This is evidence of how the value of the luxury item encompasses not only craftsmanship and quality, but the intangibility of the experience that sees aesthetics and art at the heart of the Maisons' strategies. Flagship stores support the luxury business through the creation of an aura enhanced by elegance, prestigious locations, architecture and artistic contribution by transforming

the classic commercial shopping experience into an opportunity to discover new realities. Famous is Bulgari's flagship store in Rome's Via Condotti nicknamed by founder Sotirio Bulgari the "Old Curiosity Shop" with the hope of attracting British and American tourists attracted by the English lettering. The store became a temple-like cultural space displaying objects collected during Bulgari's travels, precisely in line with the leader's charismatic theory of catching the attention of the curious. Today, all flagship stores around the world are called architectural jewels based on a concept that draws on the maison's Roman roots and cultural tradition to enhance a vision of Italian modernity, always echoing Bulgari's signature DNA and symbols. In each store, one can observe the entrance columns, antique vases, and the geometries of circles, squares, and stars made of more than 400,000 glass and marble tesserae, the result of a relentless pursuit of perfection, from the creativity of design to the craftsmanship that reflects Bulgari's talent for sculpting beauty in form. The Celine maison, on the other hand, in order to eulogize and enhance its products, decided to associate its flagship store in central London with the contemporary art museum experience in that the entire space is filled with 17th-century Flemish oils on canvas, contemporary sculptures, site-specific tapestries commissioned specifically for the location, and even architecture made of fine wood panels. All this is consistent with the Celine Art Project, which features an estate of some 80 works of art stored in various global flagship stores.



*Figure 20 Celine London New Bond Street; Source: Celine's website*

Luxury brands involve art in their retail strategies as a source of legitimacy and exclusivity through the creation of an offering that does not aim to satisfy customer demand but to develop an aesthetic ideology to be diffused in the consumer who visits

the store. The goal is no longer to sell but to "surprise," "tell," "make known," and "spread the culture," to achieve, thus, a more ingrained space in the mind of the consumer, who will remember the brand for the experience he or she has had and at the same time obtain long-term profits and confirm the immortal role of the luxury industry. The customer thus enjoys personal attention and becomes more culturally informed, as in the view of museum visitors, the experience is of the *Hic et nunc*.

### **3.6 *The Luxury Maison Museum***

In order to obtain a competitive advantage and an image return, luxury maisons, today, considering Porter's theories, understand that investment in art and culture can be an important lever allowing them to offer added value to the consumer. Art in this scenario favors an authentic and original offer, in step with technology, encouraging the development of all those activities that have to do with finding new and creative solutions that allow them to stand out from competitors. Corporate museums represent the ultimate expression of fusion between the cultural and luxury sectors, in which the philosophy of museums (originally designed to hand down works of art) is combined with corporate philosophy, profit, image, and reputation. A maximum communication tool located at the end of a journey in which companies have managed to become aware of the role of art and culture, allowing its inclusion in their production chain, as a source of generating creative ideas and for building a relationship of trust with the community, through which the product itself becomes history and a founding part of a city and a nation. This kind of project is possible if the maison has a strong corporate culture that allows its valorization and integration of the project within the core business. If for other brands the corporate museum is just an additional communication and marketing tool available to management, for the luxury sector it is an integral part of the strategy as it exactly reflects the value of intangibility behind a luxury brand, a cultural model that propagates its philosophy, policy, tradition through the awareness of its identity representing "a business card" for new targets. Authenticity is the focus of this paragraph as for maisons this characteristic has become fundamental, and managers are increasingly looking to brand history and historical and artistic associations that can enhance the brand image through storytelling and visual experience that only the great field of art can deliver. If until

now we have intended the relationship between art and luxury as continuous collaborative research, sharing of space, artistic appropriation, and corporate patronage, with the corporate museum we are not talking about association but it is the maison itself that incorporates all the connotations of the art sector, from exhibition practices, to the narration of the works, to the artistic heritage, to the creative directors who are eulogized here as true artists. The major cities of Italy and France are invaded by museums that hold the name of a luxury maison, and the visitor approaches them as real museum institutions being already aware that he will come out with a cultural background that creates in him a greater awareness of why a luxury product costs so much. This is precisely one of the reasons that drives luxury companies to create so much aura and immersive immersive experiences, to justify the high value of their products and maintain a high enduring reputation, compared to the many brands that cannot have access to the luxury world, as they still lack the maturity to spread their coherence and credibility, which is why barriers to entry are high and "luxury companies never die." So does art, which results universal and immortal. The museum remains there, implanted, and to delete the museum would be to erase a piece of history that has now been consolidated in the minds of loyal consumers and in the products, whose purchase is equivalent to buying a piece of art, precisely because the reference of the association of the maisons to the museum world is strong.

*"Luxury is not one, but changes over time and space, always balanced between the exclusivity of the rare object and the accessibility of mass consumption, between the legacy of the past and the creativity of the future, between the material of production and the immaterial of culture."*<sup>34</sup>

With the above sentence recalling the definition of luxury described in the first chapter, we want to emphasize how museums are part of that sphere that encourages the immateriality of culture and the legacy of the past through the exclusivity of collections as works of art. At the same time precisely because the sector is changing over time it is heading towards a process of digitization that precisely because it is associated with the artistic world does not go to reduce the value of the maisons; several times we see within museums and stores digital and immersive installations that recall technological progress to emphasize that by now they too are part of the

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<sup>34</sup> From Ansa, article published May 10, 2023

brand's heritage, just as the incredible aesthetics of Instagram profiles and advertisements, known to most young people, are part of the brand's heritage. One example that it is crucial to report for a better understanding is the Salvatore Ferragamo private museum that has been the subject of study of many passionate researchers, dedicated to the history of the maison, the life of its founder, and in particular to his creations that are elevated to works of art as they are the bearers of innovative aesthetics and craftsmanship techniques. The museum is located in the center of Florence in the historic Palazzo Spini Feroni, established in 1995 at the behest of the family, which wanted to enhance and preserve in time and memories the artistic qualities of Salvatore Ferragamo and the important role he played in the history of footwear and international fashion. Confirming its influence in Italian culture through various initiatives, exhibitions, and displays designed in the museum that expressed the company's interest in the most current phenomena, it was awarded the Guggenheim Enterprise and Culture Prize in 1999. I conclude the chapter with the example of Ferragamo's history without going too much into the museum reality as I will devote part of the last chapter to Gucci's corporate museum, the subject of my analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### **4.1 Case introduction**

On the competitive panorama sphere of the luxury market, the top two groups emerge with 79.2 and 20.3 billion euros in revenues, respectively; top ranked hold a multitude of prestigious brands that share the same vision and philosophy as part of a family that ensures their stability, success and reputation. LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton and Kering, internationally known, represent the inspiration points for all those brands that aspire to the luxury world thanks to the reputation and prestige they have acquired over the years that sees them as long-standing players on the world scene, at the forefront of both the most recent and traditional issues such as innovation, progress, sustainability, creativity, craftsmanship, social and cultural commitment, and activism. The following chapter will focus specifically on Louis Vuitton and Gucci maisons, belonging to LVMH and Kering, respectively, as since reputation and art are the main themes of the paper, it is interesting to analyse the respective strengths of the artistic association strategies used that have led the two maisons to be part of a narrative that sees them as immortal in the consumers' minds and the world's cultural heritage. Below I will report the separate analysis of the two cases for a greater understanding of the different strategic approaches while also reporting a brief introductory overview of the LVMH and Kering groups and their commitment to art and culture; in fact, in addition to elevating their image through aesthetics and association with contemporary art, the founders of the different maisons first demonstrated an innate passion for contemporary art, demonstrating a spirit of patronage and spreading knowledge of art until projecting this vision into today's society, which increasingly needs a connection with art in order to feel part of an elite cultural group that sees luxury as the achievement of its own truest and most exclusive interests. On the one hand, Louis Vuitton's business strategy dedicated to collaborations with the greatest artists of the contemporary scene in particular the artistic *spectacularization* by Yayoi Kusama, and on the other hand a process that sees the museums at the center of its value as a place to tell the Gucci brand story, as a sensory experience that elevates the Gucci Garden to



a true museum experience, that becomes an attraction for all kinds of targets interested not only in the world of luxury but in any kind of cultural integration that elevates their knowledge. Both focal points that the two maisons most focus on, respectively, are accompanied at the same time by a strong influence that is not only artistic, but digital, which accompanies the luxury-art relationship in its public-facing manifestations, thus augmenting what is the brand's image in a world where the three elements of business, art, and digital continually converge, carried by the social trend that sees aestheticism as the key.

## **4.2 CASE 1. Louis Vuitton and artistic collaborations: Yayoi Kusama**

### **4.2.1 LVMH Group and Louis Vuitton Maison**

*“Since LVMH's founding, I have wanted a commitment to the arts and culture to be integral to the Group's development. It embodies the values shared by all our Maisons, savoir-faire, excellence and creativity, fully inscribing them in their artistic, cultural and social environment” - Bernard Arnault<sup>35</sup> .*

The multinational group created in 1987, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE in extended form, now owns more than 75 brands divided into five different sectors: Wine & Spirits, Fashion & Leather Goods, Perfumes & Cosmetics, Watches & Jewelry, and Selective retailing, in each of which it brings common values such as creativity and innovation, excellence, cultivation of entrepreneurial spirit, and commitment to positive impact. Some of the founders of the individual maisons belonging to the conglomerate have demonstrated a strong artistic inclination by bringing their vision of art within their own creations and strategies, taking advantage from the synergies and associations that already by nature bring the two worlds and different targets closer together. LVMH therefore incorporates the histories, collaborations, and passions of the individual brands by creating an invaluable cultural heritage that contributes to the creation of luxury's reputation at the international level (the Maisons included many cherished acquaintances with great artists such as Christian Dior and Jean Cocteau, Hubert de Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn, Elsa

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<sup>35</sup> President e CEO LVMH

Schiapparelli and Salvador Dali). It therefore rises naturally, for LVMH to devote itself to initiatives that promote art and culture and to share its passion for creativity with as large an audience as possible. One demonstration lies in its founder Bernard Arnault, who proves to be a patron, collector and connoisseur of the contemporary art world, so much so that for the realization of the new headquarters in Paris of the Louis Vuitton foundation commissioned to the famous artist Frank Gehry, he gave birth in 2014 to a new space, 12 thousand square meters large, ready to host collections and temporary exhibitions of all kinds, encouraging the promotion of artistic creation in all its forms.

The Louis Vuitton brand, specializing in fashion, leather goods and pocket watches, is one of the most prestigious and internationally recognized luxury maison, established in 1854 through the opening of a firm of luggage trunks and travel articles in Paris by its namesake founder. Thanks to the increase in travel trends with the development of the railroad network and the possibility of traveling more and more frequently, the products became a true example of style and status for those who used them, becoming the favorite items of illustrious personalities and even appearing in the 1950s and 1960s alongside beloved actresses such as Anna Magnani. In 1867 the brand participated in the Universal Exposition in Paris, one of the most important exhibitions of the time that showcased the greatest artistic, architectural, scientific and technological excellences, and only some 20 years later Vuitton opened its first foreign store, in London inaugurating the beginning of its international fame. In 1896 the founder launched his famous Monogram brand inspired by the oriental design of the late Victorian Age, characterized by the founder's initials flanking designs of shamrocks and flowers. So it was that LV achieved success through its monogram, which became an exclusive distinctive code that led to the strengthening of the maison's reputation; in fact, according to a 2010 study it was considered the 19th most valuable brand in the world with an estimated value of more than \$19 billion, so much so that precisely because of its iconic image it was one of the most counterfeited brands in the world that it prompted the company itself to invest in a team of lawyers and detective agencies. Over time the logo has been colored, modified, and hidden by images created by artists who have collaborated with the brand and helped to increase the reputation of the symbol by reaching a very large clientele that includes both the new target audience and the target audience that likes the traditional and classic product, which prefers untouched or modified codes. Louis Vuitton's successors have in fact introduced numerous innovations while remaining consistent with the brand's

DNA and codes and developing a constant search for absolute excellence that has led the iconic Monogram canvas to become a continuous inspiration for contemporary reinterpretations by Artistic Directors and visionary artists.

#### 4.2 .2 *Art world collaborations and Japanese influence*

Louis Vuitton has been pioneering collaboration with the art world since the 1980s. At that time, it engaged in the launch of the collection of a series of scarves designed by internationally known artists and designers such as Philippe Starck, Sol Le Witt, and James Rosenquist or even the use of Stephen Sprouse's graffiti over traditional canvas monograms, an American artist who made history in 1980s New York and collaborated with other major artists such as Andy Warhol. Known was the collection created in 2017, "*Masters LV x Jeff Koons*", which included bags, backpacks, charms and scarves, and concepts for store windows that enclosed five of the most important paintings of the Western model: Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Titian's *Mars, Venus and Love*, Pieter Paul Rubens' *The Tiger Hunt*, Jean-Honorè Fragonard's *Girl Playing with a Dog*, and Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Cypresses*. The bags all displayed a copy of an extract from each painting, accompanied in the center by the artist's last name.



Figure 21 *Masters LV x Jeff Koons* collection bag.

Jaffrey Koons is an American artist recognized among the world's richest and best-known artists for creating kitschy works that ironically represent the American way of life and its tendency toward consumerism while at the same time being an icon of neo-pop style. With this collaboration Louis Vuitton was a pioneer on the contemporary art scene in the unique association created between a creative luxury brand, one of the most prominent contemporary painters on the scene, and 5 immortal works by the greatest artists in history; this helped make the maison unique by nurturing the narrative line that links it to its priceless heritage, attracting the attention of the public

and critics who appreciated the initiative by recognizing in it the sign of contemporary art creativity, in which collaboration is a key process and the accessibility of symbols of past cultures according to which everyone can own art. It is precisely thanks to artistic collaborations that in the last two decades Louis Vuitton's presence has been reinforced, bringing about a revitalization of the brand, which has gone from being a simple manufacturer of trunks to becoming an international luxury leader with about 500 stores in more than 60 countries. In this process, which we can define as an increase in international prestige, a defining role was played by its creative director Marc Jacobs, who from 1997 to 2013 was at the forefront of all collaborations with international artists who helped enhance Louis Vuitton's visual narrative. These projects include the collaboration with Stephen Sprouse, the collection of bags designed by Julie Verhoeven<sup>36</sup> in 2002 that have become cult and valuable to the point that they are now on sale at the Hotel Drouot auction house in Paris, the collaboration with the Japanese postmodern anime artist Takashi Murakami dating back to 2003 which was the most commercially and visually successful and became a bestseller. Before exploring this latest collaboration in depth, it is only appropriate to bring to attention the winning arrangement that connects Louis Vuitton with Japan in order to have a background that also introduces the more recent case of the collaboration with Yayoi Kusama, central to my analysis as a striking example of the reputational elevation and visual experience that has made Louis Vuitton present in all the most beloved cities and social media. The brand's presence in Japan dates back to 1978, when it opened its first store in Tokyo, thus beginning its long relationship with the overseas reality shaped by shared values and the principles of tradition and modernity that have led the maison to venture into the discovery of innovation and futurism, while maintaining its solid foundations and projecting its history in Japan as the perfect cultural exchange. The cultural fusion between Louis Vuitton and the Eastern world is enhanced even more by an exhibition "Volez, Voguez, Voyagez" at the Shanghai Exhibition Center held in 2018 by curator Olivier Saillard, which staged a broad narrative of the history of the maison by exhibiting traditional historical works and contemporary pieces that demonstrate the strong relationship with China, accompanied by an atmosphere that references the perfect Oriental style among red lights and lanterns branded with the maison's monogram. If one wants to analyze in

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<sup>36</sup> American artist and designer who has collaborated with brands such as Louis Vuitton, Versace and Peter Jensen has exhibited her work at the Mobile Gallery in London and at Colette in Paris.

depth the reasons behind the relationship one has to take a step back to discover that George Vuitton himself and his son were passionate about Japanese decorative arts such as the guards found on the blade of swords and the creative motifs for the family crests, the latter in fact being a particular influence on the famous Monogram, evidence of Louis Vuitton's passion for Japan. In 2004, half of LV's business volume was for Japan exclusively, and to date, most of its flagship and monobrand stores are located in urban areas such as Ginza, Omotesando, and Aoyama, which help reinforce the brand's prestigious image. Returning to the collaboration with Takashi Murakami in 2007 in conjunction with the artist's exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, Louis Vuitton hosted a pop-up store inside the museum that sold a limited edition of bags created in collaboration with Murakami who is considered one of the most influential artists in Japanese culture and an exponent of pop art through which, following in the footsteps of Andy Warhol, he interprets the influences of Western culture on Japanese culture in an artistic key. Marc Jacobs pursued the collaboration for more than 6 years as an admirer of Murakami's new expression of introducing the concept of remix into the art world, which in Louis Vuitton's case gave rise to a fusion of manga figures with the classic texture of the Louis Vuitton logo. Cherry Blossom was the first line created that reproduced as its dominant motif the cherries so beloved by Japanese culture as they represent the beginning of spring, the collection in fact was for the spring/summer line. Subsequently numerous were the capsule collection creations that enriched Louis Vuitton's heritage some of which were exhibited and offered for sale together with other objects by the artist. Consequently, the mentioned collaboration can be defined as a historical collaboration that had the intention of joining their creative universes to give birth to an association that profited both: Louis Vuitton to raise its reputation through the conjunction of the two worlds and Murakami to reach a wider consumer base and achieve notoriety to increase sales of contemporary art.

#### ***4.2.3 Window aesthetic experience as an image strategy***

According to Kapferer and Bastien regarding marketing strategies, art is the aesthetic guarantor of luxury that has transformed retail into hybrid institutions, part fashion store and part museum making art its core business. Louis Vuitton has always invested

in collaborations with the art world particularly with high-profile artists to increase the brand's reputation and globalization in order to achieve a constant presence in the press and social media in addition to art patronage. A key strength of Louis Vuitton's strategy to reinforce its capital culture and image is its investment in collaboration with famous architects and international artists to design its retail spaces that embody the brand's core values and the high aestheticism that the brand wants to convey in order to emphasize the association between the maison and art in any form. Aesthetization, that is, all forms of sensory experiences related to the arts, has long existed in retail as they represent additional value for brands. In the case of the luxury brand Louis Vuitton, aestheticization and spectacularization are central parts of the value chain and positioned at the top of the maison's exclusivity strategy, which allows it to be recognized through its communication and sales activities, such as architectural majesty, innovative design, and the location of its stores, elements that contribute to the enrichment of its image. Prominent figure in collaborations with Louis Vuitton for retail/exhibition spaces is architect Peter Marino, who directed several projects in which he highlighted his style and interest in the art of the maison through the selection of skilled artisans and the installation of works displayed in boutiques around the world. One example is the February 2020 opening of the new flagship store in Japan, "Maison Osaka Midosuji," designed by Peter Marino and Jun Aoki, which is a work that once again underscores the relationship between the Maison, art, and Japan as the building is reminiscent of the large sails of merchant boats that honor the maritime vocation of the city of Osaka, the so-called Higaki-Kaisen. In a further way, the interior spaces, in addition to recalling the fusion of Louis Vuitton style-Japanese culture, are invaded by as many as twenty works of contemporary art flanked by classic trunks that recall the association between past and present.



Figure 22,23 Maison Osaka Midosuji

Another artistic collaboration with Peter Marino and Jun Aoki was the creation of a new LV building in Tokyo's Ginza with the aim of injecting wonder into passersby and thereby raising the visibility of the brand, built in addition with the intention of spreading a contemporary aesthetic movement that represents a melancholic return to futuristic art (which never existed) through a waving structure that reflects, and distorts the images and lights around it. The inspiration for the design here was again the influence of the tradition of the Japanese city Ginza, a district known for its Art Deco influence and cultural vibrancy. According to creative director Marc Jacobs, the reason that lies in the association between commercial activity and the art space lies in the fashion house's historical proximity to artistic contexts such as the ateliers that always captured the attention of the founder influenced by famous impressionistic acquaintances such as Monet and Renoir.

#### ***4.2 .4 A polka-dotted world: Louis Vuitton x Yayoi Kusama***

The expressive forms inherent to the collaboration with Murakami, described above, and to the collaboration with Yayoi Kusama derive from a common matrix of the set of Japanese subcultures for which Louis Vuitton cannot do without. I wanted to focus more attention on this latest collaboration since in addition to being the most recent (after already a first Joint Venture occurred of 2012), it is characterized by a strong spectacularization which strategy encapsulates a multiplicity of tools used as a device to "show" the ongoing relationship between the maison and the artist Yayoi Kusama: from traditional window display forms, to the maison's product line, to art installations placed in cities, to immersive installations and the use of digital social platforms that disseminate content to reach all kinds of uninformed targets. The collaboration perfectly embodies today's society, which needs a strong narrative to be persuaded and a multitude of increasingly connected screens and solutions to call their attention. As they are to attract attention, the singularity and banality of a simple motif that invokes both curiosity and amazement, that of colored polka dots. These last ones have been the artist's form of expression since she was 10 years old since, according to several interviews, it represents for her the symbol of the search for infinity through their boundless form. Kusama, nicknamed in the 1960s the "princess of polka dots," became a prominent artist in the 21st century who bases her inspiration on hypnotic and colorful art, the characteristic feature of which is to endlessly repeat patterns. So it

was, that in 2020 they initiated the collaboration that included an advertising campaign, entitled "Creating Infinity" in keeping with Louis Vuitton's values, which sees creativity and the pursuit of infinity as the two pillars of its vision. Delphine Arnault, executive vice president of Vuitton defined the reason that prompted the fashion house to collaborate with Yayoi Kusama: "*One of the aspects of her work is happiness, and we thought it would be really refreshing after the pandemic to bring together the worlds of Vuitton and the world of Kusama in that being a very inclusive art can speak to everyone: to a child and to an intellectual. It's not hard to understand, although it's very complex.*"

Thus, to understand the artistic scope of the project, which was highly visual and impactful in the minds of consumers, it is appropriate to report on the different collections of the collaboration. The roots of the project are founded in the motif of the *Painted Dots* made on the capsule collections through an elaborate screen printing and embossing technique on leather where the harmonious meeting of polka dots with the Louis Vuitton Monogram is brought to life; the effect created should give the idea that the artist has just placed and lifted the brush from the surface leaving the paint still wet and fresh. Another limited collection is the *Metal Dots*, which through the mirrored spheres is intended to convey the glow of infinity, a collection inspired by Kusama's work *Narcissus Garden*, shown in 1966 at the Venice Biennale.



Figure 24 *Narcissus Garden* exhibition in the Venice Biennale; search: Exibart.



Figure 25 *Metal dots* collection.

The other two collections created are *Infinity Dots* and *Psychedelic Flower*, the latter due to a strong interest of the artist in flowers that invoke a vision opposed to the sense of the eternal and infinite as a symbol of the passing beauty of the superfluous.



Regarding the latest collection, on the other hand, it was launched less than two months ago and presents on a selection of the maison's pieces, a series of enigmatic motifs such as the iconic *Infinity Dots*, his beloved *Pumpkins* that have always fascinated the artist for their round, playful and human-looking shape, and the *faces* motif taken from his work "My Eternal Soul" debuted in 2009, which fits between surrealism and eclecticism by reproducing stylized eyes and cellular shapes.

The collaboration's advertising images featuring polka-dot motifs and the likeness of the artist with the red helmet quickly became a worldwide phenomenon with the aim of reproducing a continuous narrative through an unforgettable spectacle to be experienced in the main cities where the brand is present. In this scenario, there is also no missing the Maison's digital strategy according to which the high spectacle of the promotion has led millions of people to post on social profiles the collaboration characterized by a strong note of "instagrammability," in addition to the classic institutional sponsorships and advertisements that invade the Instagram home. As well as the exhibition at the Tokyo National Art Center in which Yayoi Kusama traces his artistic past with an "Instagram-format" collection as his personal diary. As for the strategy of making stores the center of attention, famous has become the store window on New York's Fifth Avenue in which the 93-year-old artist appeared in robot format intent on painting her famous polka dots, defined as the artist's "animatronic" in the wake of the boutique trend: about being "on the move." The robot even has been called the technological image of 2023, which has gone viral on all platforms, from Instagram to Tik Tok. Just as the image representing the magnificence of Yayoi Kusama's giant sculpture placed atop the Champs-Èlysée flagship store building specially renovated for the collaboration has gone viral.



Figure 26 Animations takes over giant billboard in Tokyo; search: Hypebeast.



Figure 27 Kusama's robots in LV's window of ny's fifth avenue; search: The art newspaper.

Art installations have been placed in some spaces in the cities, such as in Milan, which to announce the new collection, Louis Vuitton decided to place on the three hills of the square in San Babila three colorful polka-dotted pumpkins in contrast to the fascist architecture of the place. There is no missing the aspect of 3D structures and immersive realities, from large digital manifestos on large city displays to immersive realities that allow us to enter the artist's world of polka dots, flowers and huge pumpkins. Indeed, in Tokyo, the brand has created a giant billboard that, thanks to a three-dimensional effect, gives passersby a huge scene showing a giant trunk opening with colorful pumpkins inside, as well as the 3D appearance of the artist's head. Another example is the so-called spaces of the ex-Garage in Milan that host the commercial exhibition reality of Louis Vuitton that shows in its windows the typical motifs of Yayoi Kusama's art; while the ground and first are intended for sales, the second floor is designed as an environment for exhibitions that currently hosts the immersive experience "Creating Infinity: the worlds of Yayoi Kusama and Louis Vuitton" that can be enjoyed. A global operation that on the one hand celebrates one of the most revered artists in contemporary society and on the other has originated reflections on the spectacularity of collaborations between contemporary art and the luxury sector, under the banner of the most modern and original marketing strategies that the fashion house has implemented. The reason for the success is clear, because Louis Vuitton was able to convey in the collaboration a high aesthetic and narrative content through the power of the colors, the majesty of the work, the history of the collaboration between the fashion house and Japan, the level of international fame of the artist, and the performance of the highly "*Instagrammable*" scenarios. This notoriety has helped make the maison's narrative richer, arousing the public's interest so much that they want to inquire about the reasons that lie in the collaboration with a Japanese artist, and to enhance the brand even more.

### ***4.3 Case 2. Gucci and the new business museum concept: the Gucci Garden***

#### ***4.3.1 Kering Group Overview and Gucci Maison***

Kering S.A. is a Paris-based international group founded in 1963 by Francois Pinault, who founded a company in Rennes that operated in the marketing of construction

wood. In 1988, following rapid acquisitions in the industry, the company was quoted on the Paris stock market, and through an initial strategic move, it undertook diversification into specialized distribution to retail outlets in 1990. In the late 1990s, the group entered the luxury sector through the acquisition of 42 percent of Gucci's shares and the acquisition of the famous Yves Saint-Laurent maison, and it was in 2013 that after the generational change held by son Francois-Henri Pinault, the group was inaugurated under the definitive name Kering. The group soon, through a series of progressive sales of collateral businesses and acquisitions of luxury brands over the years transformed into an internationally acclaimed conglomerate with sales of 20.3 billion in 2022. Kering, unlike LVMH, operates in only three sectors, fashion and leather goods, jewelry, and Kering eyewear, the latter division created only in 2014 that handles eyewear production for 12 of the group's brands. The group's subsidiaries are: Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Boucheron, Bottega Veneta, Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Brioni, Girard-Perregaux, Queelin, Dodo, Pomellato, Ulysse Nardin, Lindberg, and Maui Jim. Central to Kering's strategy is a strong passion for creativity that embraces the philosophy of all the brands it possesses, which is why the Group constantly contributes to the promotion of arts, heritage and culture by initiating various projects. A lover of heritage as a place where beauty and history are created, in 2012 it decided to relocate its offices by establishing its Headquarters at 40, rue de Sèvres, an area known to Parisians as it housed the headquarters of the Laennec Hospital in 2000, a site characterized by rich and majestic architecture, steeped in history that could perfectly reflect the Group's values. After a period of renovation that represented an ambitious challenge for Kering, the latter decided to open its doors to the public every year on the occasion of European Heritage Days because the site represents a rare beauty and a harmony of spaces that Kering wants to share with the public. In October 2022, the site hosted the exhibition "*Sculpting Paradise, the collection of Marie Lalanne*," a selection of works by Claude and Francois Xavier presented by the world's largest auction house Christie, as part of the Paris contemporary art exhibition and the also contemporary art exhibition at Art Basel, this last one analyzed above. Kering, then, thanks to its founder, also becomes an important patron in favor of culture promotion, so much so that Francois Pinault's family in 2019 invested millions of dollars for the reconstruction of Notre Dame Cathedral, following a huge fire that devastated the monument. In also, Francois Pinault, in addition to being the founder of Kering, is the owner of the famous

Christie auction house as he himself is ranked as one of the largest collectors of contemporary art holding a collection that has more than 5,000 works of art belonging to the currents of Arte Povera, Minimalism, and Pop Art exhibited around the world.

Gucci is Kering's most famous maison, holding 50.6 percent of the Group's sales to this day, with revenue of 10.49 out of the total 20.35 billion; followed by Yves Saint Laurent and Bottega Veneta. Founded by Guccio Gucci in Florence in 1921 as a luggage manufacturer, a skill born out of its founder's time spent in one of the world's most prestigious hotels, where as a porter he was able to acquire a refined and distinct taste for the quality and style surrounding guests' precious luggage and suitcases. He thus opened his first workshop in Florence producing luggage and items inspired by equestrian sports and received his first success in 1925 through the marketing of a particular model of travel bag. With the advent of fascism and the war in the 1930s he began experimenting with the production of bags, which immediately gained such fame and notoriety that a few years later he opened his first store in Rome, on Via dei Condotti, and later opened in Milan as well. It now became a giant in the history of luxury fashion, establishing its modern reputation as a creator of cult accessories and clothing capable of matching the style of elegance and extravagance, marked under the indistinguishable logo with the double "G"; this was not always the logo as it was revisited several times in different eras, from the italicized and oblique name "Gucci" to the block letters. The 20th century was a period for Gucci when the most iconic bags were produced with the intention of naming the accessory after the most famous celebrities, one of them being the "Jackie" bag, dedicated to Jackie Kennedy who in 1961, described as the most elegant woman in the world, was photographed with a Gucci unisex duffel bag. In 2014, due to the relevance of music for the maison, both as a soundtrack to the fashion shows and as collaborations, major personalities such as pop star Madonna, who in collaboration with creative director Alessandro Michele wore the costumes he made for her entire tour, were involved in the following years. Alessandro Michele served as creative director of Gucci from 2002 to 2022, a key role for the maison due to his contribution to the brand's notoriety, capable of relaunching it by reintroducing the iconic double G that became the company's trademark for good and defining a new, inclusive and subversive character image, making it acquire a prominent identity worldwide, following the logic of a nonconformist aesthetic.

#### ***4.3 .2 Alessandro Michele and Gucci's narrative care***

Central to the Gucci universe has been the personality of creative director Alessandro Michele who, with his aesthetic, has been able to transform the maison's logics by directing them toward modern fashion horizons that see in the concept of assemblage the organizing principle of the collection and the Gucci world, according to which different eras and cultures are mixed in a multiform result in continuous evolution that does not know the static and the limit of things. He, in fact, moves away from the styles of previous creative directors by eliminating in the creations the concept of the difference masculinity and femininity, present and past, inserting an aesthetic that recalls the Renaissance. Michele defines himself as "a blender who reworks everything he lives" due to his highly eclectic personality able to take inspiration from any cultural source and everyday life to elaborate a scenario that includes a high degree of creativity that is what characterizes the reputation of the maison.

Following a renunciation by Greece to host Gucci's new collection on its runways, Alessandro Michele worked to ensure that the Cruise 2018 collection could be presented in Florence in a show setting that resulted in a more than positive judgment to the maison's image. Here, too, art becomes the scene's protagonist through an association that sees, on the one hand, the aura of Renaissance artworks hanging on the walls of the palace's gallery and, on the other hand, the Gucci collection parading in the center of the room surrounded by a not indifferent artistic heritage, such as that of the Pitti Palace, in an eclectic atmosphere as it was accompanied by music that played completely contrasting pieces from "Tryng to lift a rock with a bottle on your head" by the Hungry Ghosts, to "Imitation Of Bells" by the Berlin Chamber Orchestra. The traditional Renaissance art joined by the colorful and extravagant clothes tones and sunglasses worn by Jared Leto despite it being evening, created an atmosphere that gave Gucci a strong distinction and reputation being the only luxury fashion maison to create these highly visual artistic juxtapositions that become part of its narrative every time. The Gucci Cruise shows have been held in very significant locations both historically and artistically such as The Cloisters of Westminster Abbey in London, the Promenade Des Alyscamps in Arles, and the last one that took place in 2020 set in the Capitoline Museums, the latter another chapter in the narrative that testifies to Gucci and Alessandro Michele's love for art, architecture, and culture.



Figure 28 Gucci Cruise 2010 collection fashion show at Palazzo Pitti in Florence; search: ilPost

The scenography, therefore, becomes a key element in welcoming an exclusive audience, and the artistic and high aestheticism determine, according to the creative director, an atmosphere capable of conveying the value of Gucci. "Telling" the story on the runway represents a stratified transmission of historical and cultural values that make the show an immersive universe. Gucci under the artistic direction of Alessandro Michele has always been skilled at narrating its values and codes in order to reinforce its image even in a changing reality, and such ability is certainly not missing in the digital world, as it qualifies as the first luxury maison to create its own metaverse space in which to spread its heritage and culture. A digital storytelling that allows the maison to reach even the youngest targets, experts with technology, who, curious about virtual reality, will experiment the Gucci world. A universe of symbols born from the design of the Vault space conceptualized by Alessandro Michele as a concept store that becomes a place for continuous experiments involving displays of Gucci's rarest articles up to penetrations into the metaverse and the NFT world. Exactly one year ago the maison created in the Roblox platform, a centralized metaverse that houses millions of games and a virtual world in which to interact with others, a virtual neighborhood in which avatars can interact with the brand's codes according to the creative director's vision, a unique space that hosts various activities that include, the possibility to create artwork, participate in exhibitions by artists invited by Gucci, visit the concept store's collections to purchase digital articles for their avatars to wear, a universe that allows them to learn more about the Maison and its heritage, expressing their exclusivity and prestige in the new codes. An example of the revitalization of traditional codes that Alessandro Michele implements in the Maison's narrative sphere

through artistic association is the Vault Art Space in collaboration with the first marketplace for digital art SuperRare. Through this project he invites the audience to re-imagine the Maison's codes from different points of view by virtually admiring the cryptoart gallery characterized by works created by emerging visionary artists whose main subject matter is the Gucci theme that can be interpreted by following a multiplicity of narrative paths.

Gucci's storytelling is wide and that is precisely why the expressions "Guccy," "Guccify," and "Guccification" attributed itself by users online and discovered by Alessandro Michele on Instagram who does not hesitate to reproduce them on the collections' clothes have become famous. An expression that refers to Gucci's ability to mix data, music, art, history, digital, signs, cinema, cultural genres creating an unconventional and new product, without boundaries as it is difficult to separate the different areas of culture of which fashion and luxury are now part of. The maison under the artistic care of Alessandro Michele, is thus transformed from a simple luxury company to one and real cultural industry allowing the brand to acquire international value on the luxury scene characterized by a few large groups and small independent players. From the above examples, it can thus be understood how Gucci has shifted its focus from the mere marketing of products to a strategy that invests in association and aesthetic integration according to a broader corporate culture that goes beyond the appearance and quality of products. What makes Gucci a cultural industry par excellence can be summarized through three different points of view that link the maison to art, reporting the model elaborated by Giorgia Sepe and Alessia Anzivino in the paper "Guccification: redefining luxury through art. The Gucci Revolution." The model summarizes Gucci's association with art through three spheres: the sphere of art as the inspiration for its collections, the sphere of the contamination of artistic vision, and the sphere of the implementation of a culture of purpose. Regarding the first one is intuitable, the second one refers to the total involvement of art in its core business for the construction of a relevant reputational identity in the artistic world, through the presence of the maison in all initiatives concerning the artistic collaboration and promotion sphere such as the Guccigram project launched by Michele Alessandro on Instagram to invite different emerging artists to create artworks combined with Gucci products. As well as the fashion shows that take on a strong artistic connotation, carefully curated down to the smallest details that showcase an aestheticism so high that it makes the show an eclectic universe and not only inherent to the display sphere

of simple Gucci clothes and accessories. The third sphere, on the other hand, concerns the Maison's *raison d'être*, which undertakes its choices according to a logic directed toward a specific purpose in accordance with the philosophy of Gucci Equilibrium, which embodies a commitment to the environment and to people in order to increasingly cultivate a positive corporate culture in which the process of artification becomes a consequence of the concept in question. One example is the Art Lab project established in 2022 also by Alessandro Michele, an artistic prototyping and experimentation laboratory comparable to an art room, which explores collecting itself as an art form and a space where prototypes of Gucci's leather goods and footwear are made and tested, in order to encapsulate leather goods and footwear-related activities under one environment to promote optimal implementation of skills. The walls of the atelier are hand-painted with works by artists who have collaborated with Gucci in order to make the space even more closely aligned to the maison's identity.

### ***4.3.3 The Gucci Garden***

Michele Alessandro's vision and the concept that the maison is seen as an integral part of a cultural industry, expresses its essence in the physicality and world of the Gucci Garden, a private museum inaugurated in 2011 on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the brand's birth and located in the beloved Florence in Piazza della Signoria inside the ancient Palazzo della Mercanzia, thanks to the curatorship of Alessandro Michele and Maria Luisa Frisa. The choice of the museum's location within the Palazzo della Mercanzia was well thought out as at one time within it stood the tribunal called to judge the disputes that occurred between members of the city's corporations regarding the problems of the textile workers who at the time helped make Florence an important commercial and cultural location of the European Renaissance: it was therefore important for Gucci to fit into a site where the tradition of Florentine craftsmanship was alive, in which it itself was a part of and thus emphasizing its relationship to its roots in the place where it was born and attached. The museum even before acquiring the name Gucci Garden, from 2011 to 2018 was characterized by an initial version that defined it as a traditional business museum divided into five theme-based rooms in some of which metal installations were placed holding large windows to display Gucci's works as a large archive that encapsulates



the heritage of the maison, all designed by creative director Frida Giannini in collaboration with architects, graphic designers, and fashion curators for the organization of the environments and content. Since as early as 2011 there was the idea that museums should not be static and show only works of a permanent nature, one of the exhibition rooms called *Contemporary Art Space* was left free in occasion of exhibitions managed in collaboration with the Pinault Foundation. The organization of the spaces inside the museum, in fact, was to communicate the themes most dear to Gucci and that are part of its philosophy, which is why the room was a free interpretation left to the most emerging artists who could adapt their vision, their art within a space dedicated to the promotion of art. The dynamism of culture and keeping up with the times became so important that many major museums considered old-fashioned the logic of exhibiting according to chronological criteria, in favor of rotating displays supported by different themes. And so it was that Gucci did in that in addition to the theme of promoting culture, the other four rooms focused on the most important themes of the maison's narrative: the *Handbags Room*, the *Travel Room*, the *Logomania Room*, and the *Evening Room*. The Travel Room represents the founder's inspirational principle, in fact, it is the starting point for the narrative of the maison's historical journey that sees the display of trunks, suitcases and accessories and the presence of a Cadillac that serves as a collective imagery recalling Gucci's proximity to the United States when globalization did not yet exist. It was in the United States that Gucci through its collaboration with General Motors created the Cadillac Seville Designed by Guccy, where it succeeded in matching the house's codes with the icon of American luxury and aesthetics. The Logomania Room focused on the history of the brand and its evolution; finally, the Evening Room represented the end of an itinerary showcasing evening creations commissioned for the most exclusive red carpets and events on the international scene.

In 2018 under the care of creative director Alessandro Michele, the museum transformed its connotations as a traditional business museum to a new concept under the name Gucci Garden, which is not just a celebration of the historical archive but a dynamic and interactive experience, known as an unconventional exhibition space. The name derives both from the maison's core aesthetic of natural worlds, flowers, plants, and animals and from the metaphorical meaning of the imagination and fantasy of a world populated by plants and animals where the rule of perpetual beginning and perpetual return applies, according to which, for Gucci, the past is an integral part of

the present. The new environment is organized on a large exhibition area spread over two floors featuring strong Gucci-style decorations and wallpaper whose walls were created by American and British artists who had already forged relationships with the maison for the creation of collections and graphics. To today, the museum not only displays the permanent collection of historical creations but also exhibits the narrative of the maison between past and present, between tradition and innovation, between traditional methods characteristic of the museum and revolutionary methods such as digital and video installations by including in the museum management policy also the online aspect through the dissemination of qr codes that allow users to enter the ground floor rooms in an immersive way.

The Gucci Garden has hosted several exhibitions that told the story of the brand, but the most recent one I will focus on represents the most enduring and important one (from May 2021 until September 30, 2023) as it was designed for the Maison's centennial. Archetypes 2021 traces Alessandro Michele's inclusive and free-spirited aesthetic and philosophy told through 15 iconic Gucci campaigns from the past 6 years, told through traditional methods and immersive and multi-sensory spaces that allow reaching any kind of target audience according to an innovative storytelling, to the point of having allowed, for a limited time, to explore the exhibition by accessing Roblox's metaverse platform in which avatars absorb the elements of the exhibition transforming into digital works of art. The entrance to the exhibition features an unusual access as the walls accompanying the stairs are plastered with handmade graffiti and phrases about love and freedom reminiscent of the classic underground style in memory of the "Gucci Dans Les Rues" collection made to pay homage to the Paris riots. It is possible to witness once again the idea of travel as upon entering one room, one has the feeling of being in a moving train car thanks to window screens that project moving landscapes and the mannequin's hair that seems to be touched by the wind. It then continues into two other rooms characterized respectively by a control room that projects real-time images of the exhibition itself and the other room by a wall overrun with screens that projects the Gucci Beauty campaign through a kaleidoscopic composition of faces, lips and eyes. This contrasts with the almost dreamlike room without a digital element that exudes the idea of freshness, simplicity, and nature through the installation of a sofa placed in the middle of a garden where one is catapulted into the floral and fragrant paradise of Gucci Bloom, the famous campaign that shows the vision of femininity of the maison.

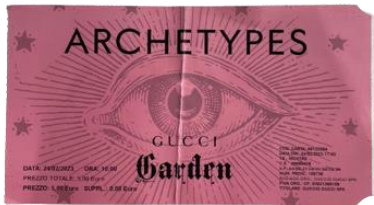
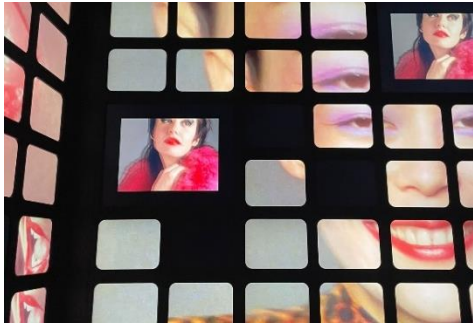


Figure 29,30,31,32 Gucci Garden ARCHETYPES. Pictures taken by me

Next one enters the narrative of the Cruise 2016 campaign structured in a large room invaded by mirrors arranged like a labyrinth in which one can see one's image faceted according to different angles that make orientation difficult. Continuing the journey, it is possible to enter a room that evokes the reality of the 1980s through the installation of a Berlin nightclub bathroom side by side with the incredible change of scenery of a modern villa that houses the Cruise 2020 collection. There are many other immersive installations that refer to Gucci's DNA under the banner of innovation and the integralist vision of its creative director who makes the museum a space to experience the brand from a contemporary and progressive perspective that includes new forms of knowledge. On the ground floor, on the other hand, is Massimo Bottura's Gucci Osteria restaurant and the concept store in which every corner recalls Gucci's colors, style and codes according to a 1920s-style décor mix of retail and artisanal workshop

that can tell the story, preserve the memory and offer an authentic experience for consumers. Regarding the boutique, I had the opportunity to interview Valentina Pavani, Gucci Garden's visual merchandising manager, to whom I had the opportunity to ask about the store, how customers are attracted to the collection on show, and to what extent art influences their choice of purchase. The boutique showcases collections designed specifically for the Gucci Garden and historical archive pieces that have a one-size-fits-all defined by the appropriate nomenclature as "unicum" since they are found nowhere else in the world, a sign of absolute exclusivity that makes the products comparable to pieces of art; in fact, she says that the most loyal customers prefer the museum store because of the added value of art and history that allows them to collect the clothes they purchase without wearing them, as they are unique in the world and universal, just like art. Different from the classic monobrand stores that present a more local clientele, the Gucci Garden store presents a more tourist and international clientele because of the association with the "Exhibition" mode of both the archival exhibition and Archetypes. Tourists, in fact, are attracted by the cultural component that invites them to buy a unique piece as a luxury souvenir to remember their experience at the exhibition and in the city itself of the beloved brand. In addition, an important association that Valentina Pavani reported is the crucial role of Gucci Garden salespeople who are part of a highly exclusive strategy of the Maison that sees them transformed into the role of "Docent" museum guides supporting "Big Clients" who are given the opportunity to organize trips to Florence in which the salespeople accompany them on a totally personalized itinerary that includes the possibility of visiting Gucci's historical archives (closed to the public and open by invitation only), the museum and the store.

The tool of the store placed in a museum context makes us understand how many luxury brands, including the promoter Gucci, use resources that go beyond the process of product creation based on function and the creation of spaces moved only for sales, but include more articulated processes, the interweaving of languages, music, smells, stories, according to a compelling narrative that carries the brand's reputation high in an increasingly evolving cultural context. In fact, Gucci's artistic directors have always tried to merge business, ethics and aesthetics and make use of the art tool to bring to life prestigious and exclusive experiences related to the brand, increasing the brand's reputation through cultural contamination, which, as we have seen, with the support of digital is becoming increasingly original and innovative.

## CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, the luxury sector interfaces with a multitude of scenarios and trends that increasingly make for a complex and challenging environment for maisons that want to continue to sustain their reputation according to the fundamental pillars that define the luxury environment: premium price, prestige, exclusivity, tradition, scarcity, creativity, and heritage. Luxury no longer lies purely in the having and owning, but in the ability of brands to reshape the luxury paradigm for those consumers who desire greater uniqueness in their experiences. At the same time, in a society that is becoming increasingly accessible thanks to the process of democratization and globalization that allows customers to be closer to products in record time and to purchase them more frequently according to companies' implementation of more sustainable strategies aimed at expanding their portfolios, maisons are looking for alternative ways beyond classic commercial strategies in order to take the route that leads them toward uniqueness and rarity. We have seen how uniqueness reflects the Benjaminian aura theory that has always characterized the art piece. The last one, in all its forms and times, represents the key to a new business model that bases its commercial, sales, marketing, and promotional strategies on the high aesthetic and associative value that art is able to give to the luxury sector, facilitated by the value proximity of the two spheres. From a perspective in which the value that customers perceive of a specific brand is closely linked to the image that the company manages to communicate, luxury maisons devote most of their energies to making sure that their reputation and narrative, both physical and digital, is continually juxtaposed and influenced by the art universe, which is capable of elevating its image by the universal power it holds. Important for the image, as well as for the founders' own passion, are the funding practices related to cultural assets, sponsorships, foundations that allow a greater dissemination of contemporary and modern culture, collaborations with emerging artists and internationally renowned artists in a world where, as described in the second chapter, art needs new forms of expression, new contexts in which to be reborn, and the association with the world of luxury fashion can be a springboard to create a contaminated universe open to new ways of knowing. The one in some way

positively influences the other by nourishing it with new experiences that lead both industries to greater profit and long-term reputation while at the same time a bond that has made luxury consumers feel they have been elevated, indirectly, to the rank of lovers and connoisseurs of art.

It is no coincidence that the two most important maisons were chosen for the final chapter, representing the capstones of the international sphere and an example of the highest prestige within the luxury sector, both for their heritage and for their high innovative and creative capacity to create universal narratives that remain in the memory of world culture. The association that Louis Vuitton and Gucci hold with the art world is very strong, and both respectively focus on a strategy that makes them unique in their savoir-faire. The collaboration with Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama embodies the universal spectacularity that Louis Vuitton is able to convey through its artistic collaborations and the majesty of its flagship stores that serve as true architectural pieces, in fact in this case the focus was on the brand's ability to entertain collaborations with the greatest architects and artists on the world stage, under the sign of creations surrounded by an unmovable aura. Until then, we arrive at the act of contamination and extreme fusion between luxury and art, as can be seen from the Gucci case in which in the business world, creative enterprises, following artistic models and techniques, sustain the cultural integrity, self-definition and ideological independence that determine their own value, which although intangible in nature, represents an excellent competitive advantage for the maison within the luxury scene.

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