

Luxury fashion brands are making a splash in the art world

By [Alessia Grassi](#)

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Louis Vuitton [reopened its refurbished flagship store](#) in Florence in March 2019 to great fanfare from the fashion industry. The brand made great play of the fact that, alongside all the luxury apparel and accessories, the store is replete with artworks including works by Italian artists such as [Osvaldo Medici del Vascello](#) and [Massimo Listri](#).



'Arroz con Pollo' by US artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, part of the 'Basquiat – Schiele' exhibition at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, 2018. EPA-EFE/Bienne Laurent

Luxury fashion brands have long collaborated with artists – studies have suggested that an association with art allows commercial brands to be [perceived as more luxurious](#). The art world has long provided [inspiration for designers](#) setting out to produce [something new or timeless](#). And, as the trend becomes more widespread, some major fashion houses have invited in [street artists](#) to help to promote their brands.

“ [@gucci unveils art murals around the world: <https://t.co/ig0zOViJf8> \[pic.twitter.com/tiaY3djTjH\]\(https://t.co/ig0zOViJf8\)](#)— WWD (@wwd) [May 10, 2018](#) ”

It's now quite common to see fashion houses using art to promote their brands – whether this is through window displays, advertisements and billboards, or through in-store art exhibitions, art on the catwalks and in fashion shows.

So luxury fashion brands – which know that they need a point of difference if they want to enhance the apparent exclusivity which enables them to charge higher prices for their products – are moving directly in the art field. Instead of using art for mere commercial purposes, they have started to invest conspicuously in the cultural industry.

[Salvatore Ferragamo](#), [Trussardi](#), [Hermes](#), [Ermenegildo Zegna](#), [Prada](#) and [Louis Vuitton](#) are just a few of those luxury fashion brands which are investing in art. They are collecting valuable contemporary (sometimes modern) art pieces – and, in the spirit of being authentic, they are also [commissioning](#) new pieces of art [from both emerging and well-established artists](#).

Modern Medici

Prada and Louis Vuitton have gone one step further – [Fondazione Prada in Milan](#) and [Fondation Louis Vuitton](#) in Paris may carry the names of fashion houses – but they are fully-fledged art galleries.

“ [@FondazionePrada](#) is open today from 10 am to 9 pm

Currently on view:

Whether Line

The Movies

Atlas

Haunted House

Processo Grottesco <https://t.co/ZFxmhBSYvE#fondazioneprada #milano #mdw2019 pic.twitter.com/FW4EsRquoU>—

Fondazione Prada (@FondazionePrada) [April 14, 2019](#) ”

Prada's private collection contains pieces by [Jeff Koons and William N. Copley](#), to mention just two. The brand has also commissioned and produced pieces by artists such as [Anish Kapoor and Thomas Demand](#), while, pieces such as “[Nu bleu aux bas verts](#)” by Henri Matisse and “[Ladies and Gentlemen](#)” by Andy Warhol are part of Fondation Louis Vuitton's private collection.

As well as investing in art and holding exhibitions of established artists, both foundations are commissioning new work. “[Inside the Horizon](#)”, is a site-specific work by Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson on display at Fondation Louis Vuitton.

You could almost draw comparisons with the [the Medici family](#) in renaissance Florence – the two luxury fashion houses clearly understand the enormous power that art, and culture in general, can wield in a commercial and even political context.

It appears that these companies are moving their brand image from that of the ephemeral – producing clothing and accessories and interpreting style and trends – to a more something altogether more permanent and important: that of cultural definers.

This crossover is working the other way as well. In the spring of 2017, London-based auction house Sotheby's launched a luxury and lifestyle division that focuses on jewels, watches, cars, wine and fashion. At the same time the Sotheby's Institute of Art in London launched “Art of Luxury”, a 15-week immersive introduction to the global industry of luxury goods and services. Course leader Federica Carlotto said:

“ *Art and luxury have a long history of influencing each other to create timeless, aspirational experiences. From creative and editorial collaborations with artists like Salvador Dali, Cindy Sherman, Ed Ruscha and Takashi Murakami, to brand and creative directors increasingly drawing on trends and philosophy of art in their work.* ”

Mission? Or money?

But are either of these – essentially two sides of the same commercially centred idea – actually fulfilling any of art's core

functions? Art is a such a powerful tool for good. Art can help to create a [sense of community](#), it can help lonely people [find a purpose and a group to share their ideas with](#). Art [can help teenagers](#) understand what they are are feeling. Art can be therapeutic for people with [mental health problems](#) and it can help people from [diverse communities](#) find common bonds.

“ *Courtauld Collection’s 19th Century Masterpieces Returns to France with Foundation Louis*

Vuitton [#Blouin_Artinfo](https://t.co/CvuL0JW0R3#Blouin_Artinfo) [#Blouin](#) [#Artinfo](#) [pic.twitter.com/FKq4G10p6e](#)— BLOUIN ARTINFO (@artinfodotcom) [June 14, 2018](#) ”

To what extent are these foundations actually doing this? The Prada Foundation’s mission says it aims for “an attitude of openness and invitation” and to “find new ways for sharing ideas”.

It all sounds good, but in reality it’s very old-fashioned and traditional and flies in the face of many museums and galleries which are trying new things to engage the public with art. Prada has a great programme for children ([Accademia Dei Bambini](#)) where experts of specific fields – math and physics, for example – give lectures explaining difficult ideas to children using art. It’s a brilliant concept – but why not have something that engages adults just as much?

At the moment it is hard to see that these forays into the art world are about anything more than merely enhancing their own brand.

These brands are pioneers when it comes to fashion trends, but they still play a bit too safe when it comes to their foundations. And I think they could do better, taking on the role of disruptors and innovators – using their commercial brand power to bring more people to art. With their undeniable star power, names like these have the ability to make art cool again. Wouldn’t that be great?

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