From Kenzo to Gucci, luxury labels seduced by the metaverse

By Dominique Muret - 15 February 2022

Hardly a week goes by without at least one, if not several luxury labels announcing a new initiative in the virtual world. Constantly attempting to outdo one another other, brands are vying for the most original project: Philipp Plein recently forked out the equivalent of €1.2 million to buy a huge tract of virtual real estate in the Decentraland metaverse, while Gucci has bought digital space on Hong Kong video-gaming site The Sandbox, where it plans to offer “immersive experiences.”

![Image of Gucci store interior](image)

The NFT created by Gucci with art-toy designer Superplastic - Gucci

Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga and Gucci paved the way for this virtual spree by digitally outfitting characters in various videogames, and the majority of luxury houses have since followed their lead. The latest is Prada: this week, the label's sportswear line Linea Rossa is launching a series of virtual outfits and equipment (from skis to snowmobiles and fatbikes) on extreme sports videogame Riders Republic, where it is also staging the ‘Prada Beyond the Line’ multi-player event.

In the last twelve months, labels have been tapping the craze for NFTs, non-fungible tokens that are certified as unique, non-exchangeable virtual assets by means of blockchain technology. NFTs are akin to certificates of authenticity, they cannot be falsified and enable brands to create unique, exclusive digital models, sometimes matched with physical originals. Though the existence of NFTs has not stopped other operators from virtually replicating products by renowned brands, like Hermès handbags and Nike sneakers, and selling them online.
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Despite this, luxury labels have entered the digital fray with gusto. At the end of 2021, Dolce & Gabbana, AZ Factory and Givenchy in association with graphic designer Chito have each developed their own NFTs, followed by Balmain, which teamed up with Barbie. In January 2022, Prada launched a collective project to create art NFTs with Adidas. More recently, it was Kenzo’s turn. In parallel with the first capsule collection designed by new Creative Director Nigo, inspired by Japanese ‘boke’ flowers, the label has created 100 NFTs, which will be assigned by lottery draw among customers who own a physical item from the collection and are registered on the Kenzo site. The lucky winners will also have access to exclusive content “in the world of Kenzo.”

Ambush, the Japanese label by Korean-American designer Yoon Ahn, about to show in Milan, is premièring on the virtual stage too. From February 14, Ambush is selling online the ‘Reboot’ collection consisting of 2,200 NFTs which reproduce in 3D a series of rings inspired by the label’s iconic Pow! design, the same pop motif that made Ahn’s early success in the 2000s, when she started out by designing jewellery.

As for Kenzo, owners of the Ambush NFTs will benefit from “exclusive access to online events as well as bonuses and special deals.” Ambush has also joined the Discord app, where it set up a server. In a press release, the label stated that it wants to “create a new metaverse community as a virtual home and meeting place for its fans.” Ambush NFTs are therefore not simply digital tokens, but a kind of “membership card” for this virtual community.

In early February, Gucci successfully launched SuperGucci, a series of NFTs sold on the Kering-owned label’s Vault site and created in partnership with US art-toy specialist Superplastic, matching them with physical figurines in painted porcelain. In the wake of this, Gucci is transforming Vault from an e-concept store, initially focused on selling second-hand vintage items, into a digital experience venue.

The label’s Creative Director Alessandro Michele has defined Vault, which recently opened its own Instagram account, as “a space where the past, present and future co-exist through the power of the imagination.” Recently, again via Vault, Gucci has joined Discord and created the Gucci Vault Discord server, also announcing on social media it has bought virtual land on The Sandbox, once more under the Vault banner. Gucci is clearly trialling multiple experiences in an effort to stake out its terrain, exploring first-hand all the possibilities offered by the
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Other luxury names are active too. OTB, the group that owns Jil Sander, Maison Margiela and Marni, has created BVX (Brave Virtual Xperience), a company whose sole aim is to focus on possible new metaverse developments. Balenciaga has announced it intends to create a dedicated virtual department. The metaverse game is just getting under way.

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