Metaverse Fashion Week: Fashion meets Decentraland’s extravagant denizens

By Matthieu Guinebault - 30 March 2022

On March 24-27, the virtual world of Decentraland hosted the first Metaverse Fashion Week (MVFW), concrete proof of the growing influence of the virtual fashion market. The event provided a visibility boost for a metaverse domain, Decentraland, that faces a number of virtual competitors, and a fresh opportunity for labels that are absolutely set on taking this new world seriously, jettisoning the scepticism that once hailed the emergence of e-tail. The result was a creative and commercial cocktail that proved refreshing for the industry, despite technology issues and organisational glitches. An event that also raised genuine questions about the potential of virtual fashion.
The first MVFW truly kicked off on Thursday with the show by Dolce & Gabbana, hosted under an array of laser beams at the UNXD Luxury District, itself inaugurated only a few hours earlier (coordinates -100/-18). A huge, immaculate open space sits right at the heart of the UNXD Luxury District, clearly inspired by Paris’s avenue Montaigne and home to stores by Dolce & Gabbana, Etro, Auroboros and Franck Muller. In the centre of this space, multiple avatars showcased virtual fashion collections on a catwalk in the shape of a figure 8.

The whole performance was minutely scripted. A little too much perhaps, as some among the hundred or so spectators started messaging each other. “Nothing’s happening over here. Anything at your end?” asked a surprised visitor, one of many. By the time they had a connection again, the show alas was over, a giant countdown dial announcing a long wait for the next event.

The same problem seemed to occur on Friday at the Etro show, and again, though to a lesser degree, during the week-end. It meant that some missed the cloud of pink stars showered on Etro’s show. Not even the most robust fibre broadband and a gaming pc were sometimes enough for a stable connection.

Another venue that hosted a number of shows was Kollectif Catwalk (97/-13). A transparent tube in the shape of a loop alongside which many Decentraland denizens were gathered, watching Perry Ellis, Christine Massary, MTA x DressX and 8sian showcase their collections on a futuristic runway. Virtual models stepped along the runway, stopped, pausing in synch three times, and sauntered by again and again. Repetition was a good idea, as it allowed visitors to join the event when already under way, without missing anything.
Another very popular venue was the Plein Plaza (-80/-57). The German designer did not disappoint. In the centre of a vast tract of land, a creature not unlike a gastropod periodically opened its macabre maw, from which models climbed out, flaunting otherworldly looks. Otherworldly, but not quite so much for Decentraland. This was one takeaway from the first MVFW: perhaps labels aren't going far enough.

Should real-world codes adapt to virtual world?

Decentraland’s friendly, welcoming inhabitants stroll around their metaverse sporting the most extravagant outfits: fluorescent neon wings, backlit jumpsuits, robotised parkas and centaur-like bodies. A clear sign that the event, and the major labels it featured, was eagerly awaited. Some of the shows seemed rather tame compared to those who came to watch.

Which raised questions about the metaverse strategy real-world labels ought to adopt: should they conform to their physical collections’ style, like Etro, or adapt it to the creative excesses allowed by the virtual world, like Dolce & Gabbana (at the risk of wandering off on a tangent)? One certainty is that, given the diversity of the looks worn by the audiences, there are plenty of potential customers. What needs to be assessed is the actual size of this market, and the investment it could justify on the part of labels.

Besides the shows, MVFW was the opportunity for Selfridges to inaugurate a virtual flagship (63/14), a building with a honeycomb façade inspired by the chain’s Birmingham branch, showcasing Paco Rabanne’s virtual creations. On Rarible Street (-44/70), visitors were able to visit the Perry Ellis and PumaxArtisant flagships, alongside pure players like Crypto Couture. Ikks opened its flagship on another street dedicated to fashion, the
alongside pure players like Crypto Couture, Ikks opened its flagship on another street dedicated to fashion, the Portal Fashion District (-86/108), home to some 15 labels, among them Hogan and Tommy Hilfiger.

Tommy Hilfiger himself attended MVFW in person. Unfortunately, as some visitors complained on Friday, a mistake in the official calendar's timetable (corrected after the event) scheduled his speech much later than when it actually took place. Fashion weeks seem to be plagued by timetabling issues in the metaverse too. As for the MVFW's round-table debates, they were on the whole pertinent, but attending them on virtual bench seats facing a screen on one's own screen makes one wonder about the format’s complexity.

Shopping on Decentraland's commercial streets poses issues too. One advantage of physical stores over e-shops is that customers can take a close-up look at clothes. Inside a metaverse store, clothes are only as visible as they are on Decentraland's internal marketplace. Sooner or later, this will raise questions about the relevance of virtual stores that simply replicate real-world ones, besides the experience itself.

Estée Lauder, whose products cannot be easily virtualised, seems to have followed this approach for its Decentraland address (-17/140) at MVFW, featuring a giant night cream bottle floating in the air. Inside, visitors
were able to enjoy the Estée Lauder Experience.

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