Branding and internationalization are critical aspects of any business, and the fashion industry is especially global in nature. Very few apparel items are entirely produced within one country, and it is relatively easier for fashion brands to enter international markets because little financial investment is required, small-scale retail space is possible, and economies of scale can be maximized. Accordingly, there are more successful internationalization cases in the fashion industry than any other sector, yet no one text handles these critical topics (i.e., branding and internationalization) in one book, particularly in case study format. This series will focus on fashion brand cases that have been successful in global marketplaces. By examining their strategies in diverse aspects such as internationalization, innovation, branding and communication, and retail management, these books will help students, scholars, and practitioners grasp lesser-known yet effective international marketing strategies.

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Marta Massi · Alex Turrini
Editors
The Artification of Luxury Fashion Brands
Synergies, Contaminations, and Hybridizations

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Artification is a relatively new concept, coined only in 2004 by Shapiro and developed jointly by Heinich, the French sociologist. According to these authors, artification refers to a process of transformation, by which that which is not art becomes art. As a process, artification demands major shifts of perspective and vocabulary, such that we no longer talk of production but instead refer to creation; producers become artists; products become artwork; observers become an audience or the public.

The recent emergence of this idea results partly from the expansion of art in postmodern societies: More people engage in symbolic, creative activities than ever, using them as powerful levers to increase the perceived value of goods, objects, and services. Furthermore, hierarchies of perceived personal value within society are no longer simple indicators of accumulated wealth; rather, today they can function as indicators of fame, prestige, creativity, and entrepreneurship, as summarized by the concept of the “creative elite”—terminology coined in 1966 by Weyl. Structurally, these new terms and concepts are symptomatic of
the growing recognition of the deep transformation affecting capitalism, producing a new form of aesthetic capitalism (Assouly, 2008) or “Capitalisme artiste” (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2013).

The recent emergence of artification also resonates with the growing valuation of art. Skyrocketing prices at Sotheby’s or Christie’s for pieces by contemporary artists offer tangible proof that art has become a gold standard. The world values art, and in turn, many activities get engaged within the process of artification to transform perceptions and social valuations. Accordingly, haute cuisine wants to be recognized as art, not to mention photography, hip hop dancing, the circus, and even luxury—the central focus of this timely and very well-informed book. Yet a question remains unanswered: Why does the luxury sector suddenly need to change public perceptions, through artification? Why now?

In 2014, an influential seminal article on the artification of luxury called attention to the latent, previously unnoticed transformation of luxury brands’ discourse and storytelling, from artisans to artists (Kapferer, 2014). Since that time, the luxury industry increasingly has demanded to be recognized as a fully artistic activity, not an artisanal one. Artisans or craftspeople perform repetitive, hard work, driven by rigor and the need to respect tradition and heritage, two major pillars of value in classic European ideas of luxury. Artists have been distinguished from artisans at least since the sixteenth century, with the assumption that only artists engage in highly conceptual creativity. Yet close, intimate links have always existed between luxury and art. Both share the same public: people with enough money to spend on nonproductive purposes. Both claim to be rare, taking the form of small series for luxury or unique pieces for art. Both claim a sense of eternity, such as when luxury aspires to represent the apex of quality and excellence, and art requires works to pass the barriers of years before they can be called great art.

But some claims might be questionable. For example, is luxury really as rare as its storytelling would suggest? A chasm is evident, between the concept of luxury and the reality of luxury activities. Whereas the concept cites attributes such as unique, rare, exclusive, and prestigious, these terms are remote from the reality of the luxury sector, which has grown steadily for 25 years and is now home to publicly listed conglomerates and megabrands (e.g., LVMH, Kering, EssilorLuxottica, Richemont,
Swatch group, Mercedes Benz) that break records when it comes to competitive advantages and profitability. Managing luxury brands today largely involves creating artificial scarcity, even though the mega-brands have plenty of volume on hand, to cater to the considerable demand of the new riches and upper middle classes from China and other emerging countries. But this reality needs to be hidden, and the story needs to feature rarity.

Consider a significant event that went virtually unnoticed. In 2011, Espace Louis Vuitton (LV) opened in Tokyo, four years before the Parisian version. Why was Tokyo the destination for this first space devoted to contemporary art, under the LV brand umbrella? The answer is that, even before the rise of China, it was Japan that ensured the commercial success of Louis Vuitton. According to one apocryphal story, half of all female office offers in Tokyo once carried a LV handbag. Therefore, to bring back or recreate an aura of exclusivity, the brand chose to ennoble LV, by bestowing the noblesse of art!

The brand in turn entered into collaborations with some of the most avant-garde artists in the world, with whom it designed limited edition products, in small numbers but priced twice or three times higher. By adopting the codes of art, the brand was able to create links to the creative elites of mature markets and millennials, attracting social media attention to these artful forms of newness. As luxury grows in size and penetration, reaching new layers of the population, questions arise about its social sustainability and legitimacy. Should more people be encouraged to invest huge amounts of money for conspicuous purposes and social representation? If they are eternal, why should people repeatedly buy handbags? To escape the contradiction, many major luxury brands have repositioned themselves and their mission to promote culture, so as to make their commercial aspects less salient.

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References


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When Fashion Meets Art: The Artification of Luxury Fashion Brands

Marta Massi and Alex Turrini

“Just a little while ago, as I was crossing the boulevard very hastily and jumping about in the mud, through that moving chaos in which death comes galloping toward you from all sides at once, I moved abruptly and my halo slipped from my head into the mire on the pavement” (Baudelaire 1869)

Abstract This introductory chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the phenomenon of artification—that is, the transformation of nonart into art—which has been increasingly strategically employed by luxury fashion brands in recent times. The chapter provides context and