

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Louis Vuitton turns masterpieces into wearable art in Jeff Koons collaboration

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*Jeff Koons for Louis Vuitton*

By SARAH JONES

French apparel and accessories house Louis Vuitton is merging the worlds of fashion and art in a collection that takes inspiration from some of the most recognizable paintings.

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Artist Jeff Koons is translating his series of "Gazing Ball" artworks, which give a new perspective on masterworks, into a capsule of handbags, scarves and accessories for the fashion label. Aligning with art is one way for brands to add value and novelty to their designs, turning garments and accessories into collector's items.

"Jeff Koons plays with juxtaposing classics while also re-imagining the familiar without dishonoring the art and its creators," said Kimmie Smith, celebrity fashion stylist and co-founder/style director of [Athleisure Mag](#), New York.

"Jeff's work is iconic and one that you enjoy seeing from his perspective," he said. "There is a playful heritage to his style that meshes well with Louis Vuitton as a brand. It's about merging old world sentiments with a modern taste while creating a new form of art.

"Louis Vuitton wants to be able to imprint itself on this landscape and to showcase that it continues to be ahead of the curve in terms of pop culture and how it chooses to reflect on artisans of the past."

Ms. Smith is not affiliated with [Louis Vuitton](#), but agreed to comment as an industry expert. Louis Vuitton was reached for comment.

### Art history

Mr. Koons' Gazing Ball works recreates paintings from some of art's greats. These handpainted reproductions are staged with a reflective blue sphere placed in front of them, allowing the viewer to look at the art, themselves and the room behind them via the ball.



*Jeff Koons with one of his gazing balls*

Rather than being about copying, the artist said in an interview with [The Guardian](#) that his gazing ball pieces are about a shared dialogue.

For Louis Vuitton, the artist is again referencing some of these favorite works.

A short film created to debut the collection animates the paintings, bringing the depicted scenes to life to a hip-hop soundtrack. Leonardo Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" winks at the viewer, while Vincent Van Gogh's "A Wheatfield With Cypresses" shows the crops blowing in the wind.

*Louis Vuitton - Masters, a collaboration with Jeff Koons*

In an interview, Mr. Koons explains his approach to the collection. Each of the handbags in the collection features the artist's name in reflective block lettering atop the depicted painting, something the artist says is an accessory version of the gazing ball.

Looking ahead to the imagined owners of the handbags, Mr. Koons hopes that the people carrying the accessories are doing so to "celebrate humanity."

Other design features of the line include a deconstructed version of Louis Vuitton's monogram, which allows the individual components to stand out. Mr. Koons also placed his initials opposite an LV on the bags.

Along with the image of a masterpiece, the handbags feature brightly colored handles and trims. Mr. Koons' signature rabbit also makes an appearance on bag charms.



*Jeff Koons handbags for Louis Vuitton*

Other works given the fashion treatment include Titian's "Mars, Venus and Cupid," Rubens' "The Tiger Hunt" and Fragonard's "Girl With Dog."

The collection will retail exclusively at select Louis Vuitton stores from April 28.

"Brands are fighting to put a new twist on their product assortment and to reach out to new markets, ideas of thought as well as to show that they are able to curate the next best thing," Ms. Smith said. "Brands that don't showcase their

range will find that potential customers may not feel that they are on the pulse of what is taking place in the artistic landscape.

"Jeff Koons has proven that he had been able to depict various points of view that have been embraced by the art world and those that are simply intrigued by creativity."

#### Working together

Fashion and art can mutually benefit from the increasing convergence between the two sectors, according to a panel discussion at the 2014 FT Business of Luxury Summit.

Fashion uses art as a way to elevate products, while artists use collaborations as a method of marketing to raise the awareness for their work. However, fashion labels should think beyond the name attached, since the creative process can also be rewarding ([see story](#)).

Aside from the financial implications of artistic partnerships, brands also have the opportunity to reach out to new audiences through collaborations.

Champagne brand Dom Prignon kicked off a collaborative project with artist Jeff Koons as a way to reinvent itself and appeal to younger consumers.

The limited-edition Balloon Venus bottle and gift box was unveiled at a brand event during New York Fashion Week after a two-year collaboration. Collaborations with contemporary artists can reposition a brand's image to appeal to younger consumers while the limited availability of the product line will still draw brand loyalists ([see story](#)).

"As a brand, Louis Vuitton is showing that it is open to lending their brand heritage to those that speak a unified artistic language," Ms. Smith said. "Collaborations of this nature are a nuanced trifecta that incorporates the craftsmanship of Louis Vuitton, honoring the great artists of their time, as well as amplifying it through the new artistic vision of Jeff Koons.

"This exchange travels through art and time and is one that shows how a brand continues to evolve through the proper use of collaborations, capsules and limited editions."