

MARKETING

3D printing can complement handcrafted luxury, not replace it

February 21, 2018



3D printing lets brands create quick, customized products efficiently. Image credit: Loewe

By DANNY PARISI

In the past few years, additive manufacturing, popularly known as 3D printing, has made waves in the way products can be produced today.

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Since its conception in the 1980s, 3D printing has mainly been thought of as a way to manufacture industrial goods in a more efficient and cost-effective way. But recent developments have seen players in the luxury space experimenting with the unique properties of 3D printing, creating an interesting dichotomy between the industrial and mass-produced and the luxurious.

Three-dimensional printing allows brands to create items that are more efficient while retaining their luxury charm by allowing brands to create custom items for individual customers.

One of the most significant names in the luxury 3D printing world today is VOJD, a Berlin-based studio that has worked with Loewe, Alexander McQueen and others to create 3D printed luxury goods.

"It is important to be aware of the limitations of 3D printing and not to compromise on the brand's values," said Hristiyana Vucheva and Christian Hartung, co-founders of **VOJD Studios**, Berlin, Germany. "The implementation of 3D printing has to be aligned with the overall company as well as product strategy and shouldn't be incorporated in the business for its own sake if the value it currently offers doesn't align with the overall goals, for example product quality requirements."

In this Q&A, VOJD founders Ms. Vucheva and Mr. Hartung emphasize that 3D printing is not a replacement for the handcrafted care that luxury is known for, but is instead a complement to those manufacturing traditions.

Do you think there is a challenge for 3D printed luxury goods that they might be perceived as less "luxury" due to being printed?

At VOJD, we firmly believe that established production techniques like craftsmanship and new manufacturing technologies like 3D printing should not be considered strict alternatives. On the contrary, it is the symbiosis between tradition and innovation that catalyzes progress.

In our projects, we try to adopt the best of both worlds. 3D printing is the main manufacturing tool we use, with a focus on the most advanced materials and precise technologies, while the finishing of the products often involves manual work and traditional skilled craftsmanship a collaborative approach that we believe would push forward the applications of digital manufacturing in the future.



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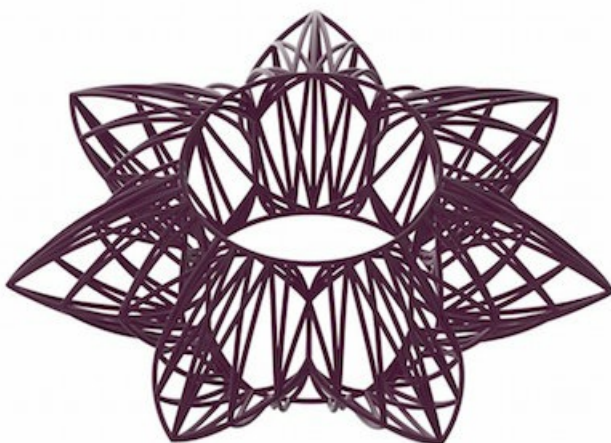
Alexander McQueen x VOJD. Image credit: Alexander McQueen

What are some of the advantages of 3D printing luxury goods?

One of the most talked-about features of 3D printing technologies is their ability to build customized pieces, since each one is printed separately and without the prior requirement of mold making. The latter typically incurs significant fixed costs which can only be amortized through the manufacturing of a large number of identical products.

In the near future, the elimination of this requirement can lead to easier personalization, thus an increased role of the consumer in the ideation and creation of the final product they buy. Besides that, 3D printing enables creative freedom and design complexities, which are impossible or too expensive to achieve with other technologies.

This, combined with the introduction of new materials and properties over the next years, can direct the aesthetics of the future and transform most creative industries, including fashion. That said, there are limitations that need to be considered, such as materials available, finishing, object size and, of course, costs.



CAROLINA HERRERA
NEW YORK

Carolina Herrera x VOJD. Image credit: Carolina Herrera

Do you have any advice for luxury brands looking to incorporate 3D printing in the future?

First of all, it is essential for designers and brands to know what to use 3D printing for and what value it can provide for them, for example cost savings, faster development and production, design innovation, enhanced retail experience through customized products, etc.

Depending on the direction one takes, the solution spectrum can vary significantly, and it is easy to lose track in the

vastly complex and rapidly evolving 3D printing ecosystem. In any case, 3D printing is most likely to have the best suitability for small accessories or hardware components considering materials currently available as well as manufacturing cost structure.

Developing a clear business case on the endeavor will help keeping the design and business angle aligned.

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