

RETAIL

Barneys leverages VR to showcase choreography from a new angle

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Barneys dances closer to consumers with new film. Image credit: Barneys.

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

Department store chain Barneys New York is blending diversity, technology and art together in an immersive storytelling experience that brings the retailer closer to consumers.

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"Mantle," a virtual reality video experience, features a diverse group of dancers from the Martha Graham Dance Company who range in age up to 80 years old. The 360-degree film is being featured at select Barneys stores on Samsung Oculus headsets to make a lasting impression on shoppers, which is a vital component to in-store marketing today.

"With Mantle, we aim create a new way for people to experience creative," said Matthew Mazzucca, creative director of **Barneys New York**, New York. "It's time to redefine how we do an institutional campaign and brand message.

"There's so many ways to look at it," he said. "If it's an immersive experience, it has the potential to be successful.

"With the pieces in 'Mantle,' we were reacting to what was going on with fashion. We decided to curate a group of designers that are able to straddle the space between creative and commercial with ready-to-wear."

Technology and art

Since bricks-and-mortar has been disrupted by the digital takeover, it is important that retailers and department stores focus on creating one-of-a-kind experiences in their stores. Affluent shoppers are now looking for an experience when they come into a store, beyond just simply purchasing items.



Barneys combines dance and virtual reality. Image credit: Barneys.

This is the strategy Barneys is investing in through its video collaboration with Samsung and Martha Graham.

"Mantle" opens with the viewer standing in a dark room. When moving around her mobile device or mouse on a desktop, she can look around the room where dancers stand in the darkness while opening credits appear in front of them.

As the performers can be seen more clearly, they surround the viewer and start interpretive dance moves.

The room continues to brighten and the user can follow the dancers as they move around the space, continuing their performance.

Barneys' 360-degree video is available online but also features a 2-d clip

Barneys' video is a total 11 minutes long and was designed specifically as an interaction between performers and "an audience of one," says the retailer.

Choreographer Theo Stanley explained that the Martha Graham Dance Company set a theme of "exploring the inner landscape of the human experience" for the dance. The experience took more than a year to create.

Designer labels Prabal Gurung, The Row, Rick Owens and Loewe were featured as the fashion on the dancers for the film.



Barneys film is available in stores and online. Image credit Barneys.

Barneys launched the program on March 6, allowing users across the Internet to interact with the experience via its Web site, Samsung VR app and Samsung Gear VR headsets. In its New York flagship stores and Beverly Hills, CA location, visitors will be able to view the campaign via Samsung Gear technology powered by Oculus.

VR in luxury

Luxury retailers and brands are putting significant stock into VR, as it fosters an immersive connection with consumers and it becomes more accessible.

For instance, Kering-owned Gucci used a technology-driven approach to raise awareness for its 2017 gifting catalog through placement on New York Times' digital edition.

Gucci made digital its main focus for this year's gifting season with efforts ranging from peer-to-peer communications to out-of-home displays and scannable store windows. The addition to Gucci's gifting initiative leverages virtual reality video to explore its creative partnership with Spanish artist Ignasi Monreal ([see more](#)).

Chinese ecommerce platform Alibaba's Tmall is also now giving its luxury brand partners the opportunity to bring stores to users at any location with a new program indicative of the future of retail.

Luxury bricks-and-mortar stores are given the chance to enter into the digital realm by Tmall, as it partners with iStaging to recreate spaces in virtual reality. A new program will allow brands who sell on the ecommerce site, among whom are a number of luxury labels, to create their own VR stores that allow shoppers to take the in-store shopping experience with them anywhere ([see more](#)).

"We're creating a new experience," Barneys' Mr. Mazzucca said. "We've are pursuing what the idea of storytelling means.

"There's a lot of great innovations happening in AR and VR, and we understand what the retail experience can be with it," he said. "Having immersive experiences is something we're going to keep hammering at."