

MARKETING

How synthetic materials, AI will change luxury's future

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Artificial materials will likely supplant traditional ones in the future. Image credit: Kering

By DANNY PARISI

LISBON, Portugal Synthetic and sustainable materials will be the future of luxury due to their programmability.

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At the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference on April 19, futurist Sophie Hackford explored the myriad ways that scientific advances will change the process of luxury manufacturing. She argued that the mutability and sustainability of these products will make them complete game-changers in the way luxury goods are manufactured in the future.

"Many of these materials are still being prototyped and tested," Ms. Hackford said. "For example, there's leather made from mushrooms, there's leather and fur being made from stem cells, diamonds are grown in the lab, 100,000 carats of diamonds were grown in San Francisco last year."

Synthetic materials

For centuries, luxury brands have made use of traditional materials such as fur, leather and silk to create their goods.

Yet with rising concern about the rapid use of non-renewable resources, much research has been done towards creating synthetic alternatives to these materials.

Ms. Hackford spelled out some of the alternatives, such as lab-grown leather and silk engineered from artificial materials.

These materials will become a major factor in the future of luxury for several reasons. For one, they are more ethical to use than materials such as fur, which has swiftly gone out of vogue in the fashion world.



Kering has used synthetic materials for the production of its eyewear. Image credit: Kering

Secondly, these materials are valuable because in the future they will be programmable. Manufacturers will be able to create artificial leather with whatever properties they want and not have to adhere to what is available through natural means.

For example, brands could engineer leather that is already waterproof or comes out in large single sheets so minimal cutting and stitching is required.

"The important thing about these materials is that they are programmable," Ms. Hackford said. "You can change and fine tune them.

"You can make leather that is flexible or make it smell certain ways or make it difficult to counterfeit."

The future of luxury

While we are not quite at the place where programmable leather is a reality, luxury brands have begun embracing other types of artificial and sustainable materials.

Kering is one of the biggest proponents of sustainability and reducing emissions in the luxury world. Through its large stable of brands, Kering has made it clear that sustainability at all levels is a priority.

The latest iteration of this plan is a partnership with Bio-on, a sustainable materials company, to create a new type of plastic for manufacturing eyeglasses. This partnership is part of Kering Eyewear, the company's newly minted eyewear subsidiary ([see story](#)).

Ms. Hackford also emphasized artificial intelligence's role in the creation of these materials.



Sephora's AI Virtual Artist tool. Image credit: Sephora

In an era of fast fashion, latching onto trends quickly is key to successful apparel designs, and AI designers can make that process even faster.

Amazon is reportedly working on machine learning technology that can analyze what makes an outfit stylish and theoretically create entirely new designs along those lines. With this potential in mind, artificial intelligence could be a key factor in the future of fashion design ([see story](#)).

But Ms. Hackford emphasizes that AI can be used to help design and create artificial and synthetic materials that are easier to work with, more sustainable and yet still luxurious.

"We need to work with machines to co-design and co-create," Ms. Hackford said. "We need to mediate between machines and humans.

"We are seeing some incredible stuff with simulations," she said. "AI is going to help designers imagine the future and simulate a possible material in advance."

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