

RETAIL

Selfridges journeys to The Flipside to study luxury's meaning

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Selfridges' The Flipside investigates luxury's meaning. Image courtesy of Selfridges

By SARAH JONES

British department store chain Selfridges is immersing consumers in an exploration of luxury's modern meaning through a multi-sensory exhibition.

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Titled "The Flipside," the exhibit features displays that showcase a variety of interpretations of the concept of luxury. These divergent ideas are intended to spur consumers to uncover their own personal views on luxury.

"The exhibit is the natural evolution for Radical Luxury, turning a concept into an exhibit," said Chris Ramey, president of **The Home Trust**, Palm Beach, FL.

"Selfridges is forward-thinking," he said. "They're opening the discussion with the public where they can control dialogue.

"In the meantime, they're also redefining their brand and reinventing the department store category."

Studying luxury

In January, Selfridges launched a campaign on the subject of "Radical Luxury."

The retailer is making it its mission to strengthen the definition of luxury in a society where almost everything can attain the coveted moniker.

Luxury brands are struggling to find themselves in today's climate, where quality goods are easily attainable and countless services and products are deemed as "luxury," even if the item is not on par with the standard, traditional definition of the characteristic. Selfridges feels the word has lost all meaning and is undergoing an investigation to determine what it means to be luxury today ([see story](#)).

The latest activation for Radical Luxury is The Flipside, an exhibit that opened at the Old Selfridges Hotel on April 27.

Spread over 32,000 square feet, the display features multimedia installations from seven brand partners.

Louis Vuitton chose to focus on its house code of travel, while Loewe chose to tackle the topic of natural resources.

In Loewe's forest installation, the brand presents a future of luxury in which craftsmanship and design help to preserve raw materials.



Inside The Flipside. Image credit: Selfridges

Perfumer Byredo also looked at a dwindling resource: water. The brand posits a look ahead to when water will be a precious good.

Other installations are more escapist, such as Gareth Pugh's video installation covering freedom and clarity.

Thom Browne chose to immerse consumers in its own runway show, staging it as if it were a fashion music box.

For The Flipside, Selfridges is also working with the Google Pixel 2. The exhibit has a guided tour option that leverages the mobile device, placing a phone in each visitor's hand.

Consumers can use the Google Pixel 2 to document their journey through the installations.

Some elements of the exhibit are interactive, while others rely on multiple mediums to tell a story.



Selfridges' The Flipside takes a multimedia approach. Image courtesy of Selfridges

In addition to the installations, Selfridges is hosting events at The Flipside.

Podcast The High Low will do a live taping, and dance company Rambert will perform. During London Craft Week, CommuneEast will hold a discussion about the value of time.

Open to the public with free admission, The Flipside will be up until May 20.

What is luxury?

Along with The Flipside, Selfridges is bringing Radical Luxury to the big screen with a short film.

Created by photographer Norbert Schoerner, the 60-second film touches on new themes in luxury and how the industry has changed ([see story](#)). This marks the retailer's largest advertising effort to-date as well as its first film made for cinemas.

Beyond Selfridges, others has put the definition of luxury up for debate.

The term luxury is in need of a rebrand, according to the creative director of Spanish leather goods house Loewe.

Using handbags as an example, the designer pointed out that many brands simply produce the same shapes that are already on the market, looking to feed consumer demand rather than prioritizing risk-taking and individuality. In a discussion at the FT Business of Luxury Summit in 2017, the creative director said that more than anything, consumers are buying into the emotion surrounding a product or brand, calling for marketing that establishes a distinct personality and sense of feeling ([see story](#)).

"The redefinition of luxury and the shift to experiential retail is being driven by consumers not industry," Affluent Insights' Mr. Ramey said.

"Ultimately, Selfridges is a brick-and-mortar retailer redefining its boundaries by leveraging what some may claim is a liability into an asset," he said.

"Selfridges' Radical Luxury underscores that you don't sell product; you match values. If department stores are to survive, Selfridges is showing its peers how."

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