

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Balenciaga explores virtual world in eerie, futuristic campaign

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Protagonists in the new CGI fashion film. Image credit: Balenciaga

By NORA HOWE

French fashion house **Balenciaga** is celebrating the global release of its fall/winter 2021 collection with a jarring virtual epic.

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The campaign follows a CGI protagonist as he tries to navigate a chaotic and disconnected virtual world, searching for his love interest. Directed and produced by video game developer **Quantic Dream**, the film came to life through the use of motion capture to create animated versions of real-life people.

"Balenciaga has adapted the video gaming/virtual reality world and used this tool to bring the brand to and influence a younger audience, drawing their product away from more traditional marketing venues and placing it where their prospects are," said Rebecca Miller, CEO/founder of **ARTful Communication**, New York. "By adapting its marketing/communication style and venues, it is demonstrating the fun, versatility and ease of their designs through the diverse characters, colors, texture and styling of its clothing."

Augmented fashion

Balenciaga is one of several luxury labels to embrace gaming motifs in marketing efforts, from films to partnerships and mobile games.

Keeping in line with the gaming experience, Balenciaga's latest campaign tells a love story in augmented reality.

The Balenciaga fall 2021 campaign, created by Quantic Dream

The three-minute campaign opens with a bird's-eye view of a dark, gray room where individuals in matching black robes stand in line for a virtual-reality simulator.

The protagonist bumps into another character, their eyes meet, and there is an apparent connection between the two, who are subsequently separated by the procession.

He ultimately finds his way to the front of the line, puts on the VR glasses and enters the "Afterworld," a brighter, more colorful reality that seems to have no organization or rules.

This is a reference to "Afterworld: The Age of Tomorrow," a video game-style show launched in collaboration between Balenciaga and [Streamline Media Group](#) in December 2020. While Balenciaga was not the first to incorporate interactive gaming into its brand, the launch was the first time an international luxury fashion brand has launched a wholly digital in-game experience ([see story](#)).

In the Afterworld, the film's protagonist then joins a sea of characters dressed in pieces from the Balenciaga fall 2021 collection.



Two looks from the fall 2021 collection. Image credit: Balenciaga

He scrambles through the unfamiliar place, searching for the woman he met in line. They eventually reconnect, but just before they kiss, his headset is pulled off.

Back in real life, the love interest finds the hero, and they are reunited. As they kiss, they glitch through the 37 looks from the collection.

Fashion and gaming

Although some luxury brands still remain hesitant about experimenting with gaming and virtual influences, brands like Balenciaga, Gucci and Louis Vuitton have recognized the ample opportunities presented by the channel.

During the [Technology in Luxury Conference](#) in March 2021, panelists spoke about the risks and opportunities for brands exploring the gaming space. With more consumers around the world identifying as gamers, luxury brands have an opportunity to engage with a large, captive audience ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion house Gucci attempted to create its own gaming microcosm, promoting an arcade element included in its app which is ranked second for worldwide downloads among a selection of luxury retail apps during the pandemic, from January 2020 to March 2021.

In 2019, Louis Vuitton implemented in-game skins for video game League of Legends. When Riot Games brought League of Legends to mobile phones in the United States at the end of March 2020, it invited gamers to purchase skins, champions and other cosmetic items.

The collaboration appears to be fruitful for Louis Vuitton, with its app seeing the most downloads worldwide during the pandemic, from the period of January 2020 to March 2021, with a spike in August 2020 of more than 120,000 downloads ([see story](#)).

"Balenciaga has bridged an obscure gap between fashion and gaming, two unlikely bed fellows from the onset, yet a natural way of expressing inclusion and acknowledging the complexity of their global audiences, where they reside, their emotions, creativity and their communities," Ms. Miller said. "While not the first house to use gaming to showcase a new collection, Balenciaga has embraced cultural and location diversity to express the intent that their brand is for everyone individual, not just a particular type."