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More than hype: Virgil Abloh's enduring legacy

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With Virgil Abloh's Louis Vuitton x Nike AirForce 1 finally on sale, here is a lookback on what makes his legacy and the shoes so valuable. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

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Rule-breaking designer. Boundary-pushing artist. Community-driven groupie. Virgil Abloh needs no introduction after all, the hype-fueled throngs of streetwear lovers lining up outside his **Off-White stores** spoke for themselves.

At 33, Abloh founded his first fashion house, a bridge between luxury and functionality, that became destined for worldwide success.

The designer, known for dressing megastars such as Kanye West and Jay-Z, passed away in November aged 41 after privately battling cancer since 2019. His legacy is set to inspire the future with his unyielding dedication towards Black and brown people, standing as the first Black artistic director at Louis Vuitton as well as an advocate for a new, diverse wave of talents, something he nurtured through the establishment of a \$1 million scholarship for Black students and mentorship programs.

Abloh's loss is one that is being felt by an entire generation of rising talents, sneakerholics included.

As for the countless collaborations? There is more to the story.

Abloh may not have considered himself a sneakerhead, but his neon orange latch and "AIR" graphic have become bold statements in street culture, defying popular expectations and signaling what is next.

Take the **LV x Nike Air Force 1** for example: a collaboration between French fashion house Louis Vuitton and Nike's Air Force 1 project, the sneakers raised a whopping **\$25.3 million** at auction in February. And last week, they were finally made available for purchase to a lucky few consumers via lottery, selling for almost double the price of typical Louis Vuitton sneakers.

Prior to his death, Abloh was coordinating the auction with his family at Sotheby's in New York. The sale set new global benchmarks as the most valuable sneaker and fashion auction ever recorded. The proceeds, which were more than eight times the auction's overall \$3 million estimate, went toward Abloh's scholarship fund.

"As a whole we need to uplift Black voices, and bring Black talents into positions of power across all industries and occupations," opined Abloh in May 2021, six months ahead of his passing. "Change needs to start from within not only within organizations but within each person, by listening, educating themselves and others, being an active partner in anti-racism, and standing for the inherent value of Black lives."

Unlike other designers that have reached a similarly astonishing benchmark of success such as Kim Jones' *Air Dior*, for instance Abloh's resonance with the world of fashion acquired a deeper connotation for its humble roots and community-centric underpinnings, as he shared peerless advice to anyone who he crossed paths with and received it in turns.

Maybe because, above all prestige, Abloh always viewed fashion as a place for all to be and live within. He was a skater kid a sport where sneaker culture is firmly entrenched as well as a DJ and a Black designer who worked in luxury fashion.

Idea generation remained at the heart of Abloh's practice, which democratized the business of fashion.

Through collaboration, he injected a soulful yet modern stroke to his collections as well as his creations at Louis Vuitton, a house that had long prided itself on quintessential aestheticism over innovation.

From the reinvention of the Nike sneaker to his lifestyle collection for IKEA, from his NBA drop to the Kith's capsule, none worked quite well as the LV x Nike Air Force 1: the sneaker epitomized the perfect marriage of his technical know-how and ability to create sought-after aesthetics.

Which is why, as street culture stands on the brink of saturation with potentially generational consequences, we need to eulogize the efforts of leaders such as Abloh. If we engage with his work rather than seeing it as merely hype-worthy we might learn something instead.

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