

Louis Vuitton

Art, Fashion and Architecture



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Contributions by Simon Castets, Jill Gasparina, Emmanuel Hermange, Taro Igarashi, Marie Le Fort, Ian Luna, Marie Maertens, Rebecca Mead, Cédric Morisset, Glenn O'Brien, Olivier Saillard, Valerie Steele & Philippe Trétiack.

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Preface

A symbol of elegance and the French art de vivre, Louis Vuitton has cultivated a close relationship with the world of art since its founding in 1854. Inventing the art of travel, Louis Vuitton and his successors kept pace with a rapidly changing age, and worked with the most accomplished engineers, decorators, painters, photographers and designers of the day. This fascination with ever-new forms of expression grew through the subsequent decades and continues today under the guidance of its creative director, Marc Jacobs; shoes, watches, jewelry and prêt-à-porter collections have joined the malletier's distinctive bags and travel accessories.

Louis Vuitton's interest in the arts grew sure strength in the 1980s when it began working with painters like César, Sol LeWitt and Olivier Debré. Demonstrating the influence of art on artisanship, these richly textured collaborations became a tradition and reached a new level when Marc Jacobs joined the company in 1997. Passionate about contemporary art, Jacobs invited some of the world's most renowned artists to join forces with Louis Vuitton, increasing the points of exchange between art and fashion to an unprecedented degree.

Among these renowned partnerships, the late Stephen Sprouse, Takashi Murakami and Richard Prince even intervened directly with the company's products, freely appropriating its forms and visual identity. Collaborations between Louis Vuitton and other artists have taken a variety of forms: shop window designs, site-specific art installations for stores, exhibitions at the Espace Louis Vuitton on the top floor of the Champs-Élysées flagship store, and the acquisitions of new works for the house's own collection.

In the same spirit, Louis Vuitton has called upon an international pantheon of architects to design its stores, including Jun Aoki, Kumiko Inui and Peter Marino. Advertising campaigns have also created opportunities to work with talented photographers as Jean Larivière, Annie Leibovitz, Inez Van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin.

Louis Vuitton: Art, Fashion and Architecture offers a critical selection—far from exhaustive—of the creative exchanges between Louis Vuitton and an ever-growing list of artists, architects, photographers and designers. A unique document of the relationships the world's leading luxury brand has forged with key figures involved in making of contemporary culture, this volume presents an original perspective on the increasingly symbiotic relationship between art and luxury.

Author Profiles

SIMON CASTETS

Simon Castets is a writer and critic based in New York. He curated the exhibit *Mellow Fever* for Galeries Lafayette's contemporary art space and has contributed to publications including *Frog*, *Uovo*, *Yishu*, *Flash Art* and *Art Asia Pacific*. He now conducts research for the Centre Georges Pompidou Foundation, is the Art Editor for *V* magazine and *V Man*, and is an editorial contributor to an upcoming issue of *Visionaire*, to be released in Fall 2009.

JILL GASPARINA

Jill Gasparina is a curator and independent art critic based in Paris. She is the author of *I Love Fashion: l'Art Contemporain et la Mode* (2007). She teaches at the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux and at HEAD in Geneva. She contributes to different magazines and periodicals: *Art21*, *02*, *Frog* and *Cahiers du MNAM*. She is currently preparing a thesis on massification phenomena in contemporary art. She is the artistic co-director of Salle de Bains, a contemporary art space in Lyon.

EMMANUEL HERMANGE

Emmanuel Hermange is a writer, art critic and educator. He was the assistant to the editor-in-chief of *La Recherche Photographique*, where he published his first essays in 1989. He regularly writes articles for scientific books and artist's monographs, as well as exhibition reviews and other texts for various magazines, including *Art Press*, *Pour Voir*, *L'Oeil*, *Parachute*, *Critique d'Art*, *Études Photographiques*, *Romantisme* and *Universalia*. He teaches the history of the arts at the École Supérieure d'Art in Grenoble and works regularly at the École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie in Arles. In 1998, he was awarded the Lavoisier fellowship by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

TARO IGARASHI

Taro Igarashi is an architectural critic, curator and educator based in Tokyo. His work has appeared in numerous books, including *Superflat Architecture and Japanese Subculture* (2000), *Buddhism and Metabolism* (2005), *Latecomers Living on an Utterly Flat Battlefield* (2006), and the catalogue for the exhibition *The "Post-bubble" Era and Architecture* (2007). He has also written numerous books in Japanese, including *Gendai kenchiku ni kansuru 16 sho* (16 Chapters on Contemporary Architecture), *Utsukushii toshi, minikui toshi* (Beautiful City, Ugly City), and *Senso to kenchiku* (War and Architecture). He is associate professor of engineering in the graduate school of Tohoku University, in Sendai, Japan. He curated Japan's exhibit in the Lisbon Architecture Triennale in 2007.

MARIE LE FORT

Marie Le Fort is an international correspondent based Paris. She contributes to the magazines

Numéro, *Wallpaper**, *Soon* and *Air France Madame* where she writes regularly on the work of contemporary artists and the creative exchange between luxury and the world of art.

IAN LUNA

Ian Luna is based in New York and is the author or co-author of several books on architecture, design and fashion, including *A Bathing Ape* (2008) with Nigo; *Tokyolife: Art and Design* (2008), with Toshiko Mori; *On the Edge: Ten Architects from China* (2007) with Yung Ho Chang; *Retail: Architecture and Shopping* (2005); *Imagining Ground Zero: The Official and Unofficial Proposals for the World Trade Center Site* (2004), with Suzanne Stephens; and *New New York: Architecture of a City* (2003).

MARIE MAERTENS

Marie Maertens is a journalist and art critic. She writes on contemporary art and the art market, and is a regular contributor to the magazines *L'Oeil*, *Le Journal des Arts* and *Technikart*. She is the editor-in-chief of *Technikart's* special edition on contemporary art, published in Fall 2008 and the author of *L'art du marché de l'art* (2008). She also writes for *L'Officiel*, *Arts Programme*, *Wad* and *Whitewall Magazine*. She teaches at Icart and is curating several exhibitions scheduled for 2010.

REBECCA MEAD

Rebecca Mead is a writer at the *New Yorker* magazine, where she has written profiles of Santiago Calatrava, Ronald Lauder, Nico Muhly, and Slavoj Žižek, among many others. She is the author of *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* (2007).

CÉDRIC MORISSET

Cédric Morisset began working as a curator when he was invited by the International Biennial of Design in Lisbon in 2003. He has since organized several exhibitions in France and abroad, including *French Reference* at the 1933 exhibition hall Shanghai, (2008), at Museum of Guangdong in Canton (2008), Märkisches Museum, in Berlin (2007) and *Icons of Design* Marq, Museum of Architecture, Buenos Aires (2008) and at Museu da Casa Brasileira, São Paulo (2009). Morisset is a regular design contributor to *A.D.*, *Mixte* and to *Le Figaro*. He is currently preparing a book of interviews with the Brazilian designers Humberto & Fernando Campana.

GLENN O'BRIEN

Glenn O'Brien is a writer, editor and creative director. As Editorial Director of Brant Publications, he oversees *Interview*, *Art in America* and the magazine *Antiques*. He writes a monthly column for *GQ* and a weekly column for the Italian edition of *Vanity Fair*. His copywriting has been behind some of the most influential

advertising of our time, and for years he was one of the most widely read writers about music. He remains one of the most influential writers on art in the world.

OLIVIER SAILLARD

Olivier Saillard is a fashion historian based in Paris and is head of programming at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. Saillard contributes to the magazines *Elle*, *Crash* and *Jalouse*. He is the author of the book *Les Maillots de Bain* as well as *Christian Lacroix* (with Patrick Mauriès Christian Lacroix and Grégoire Alexandre). He is an expert in contemporary fashion and has curated numerous landmark exhibitions and designer retrospectives since 1995. He curated an exhibit on the complete work of Sonia Rykiel in 2009.

VALERIE STEELE

Valerie Steele is director and chief curator of The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, where she has organized more than twenty exhibitions in the past ten years, including *Gothic: Dark Glamour* (2008); *Love & War: The Weaponized Woman* (2006); and *London Fashion* (2002). She is author or co-author of more than a dozen books, including *Ralph Rucci* (2006); *The Corset: A Cultural History* (2001); *Paris Fashion* (1999); *Fifty Years of Fashion* (1997); *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* (1996); *Women of Fashion: 20th-Century Designers* (1991); and *Fashion and Eroticism* (1985). She is also founding editor of the influential scholarly quarterly, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*.

PHILIPPE TRÉTIACK

Philippe Trétiack is an architect, urban planner, journalist and writer. He is a correspondent for *Elle* and is a regular contributor to *Elle Décoration* and *Beaux-Arts*. He is the author of over twenty books and has written extensive essays on the Anti-mafia movement in Italy as well as analytical biographies on Andy Warhol, Raymond Lowy, Cartier and others. He wrote a controversial architectural pamphlet, "Faut-il pendre les architectes?" (2001) and was made a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters. His study of Iranian clerics earned him the Prix Louis Hachette in 2007.





Essay: Architecture

by Taro Igarashi



**Learn
from
vuitto**



Essay: Architecture

■ ing Louis ■ on

Learning from Louis Vuitton by Taro Igarashi

THE SHOCK OF LOUIS VUITTON, NAGOYA

Everything began in Nagoya in 1999.

The Louis Vuitton store in Nagoya by the architect Jun Aoki stands as a rectangular solid in the corner of a shopping district. While its shape is simple, the building's shop windows are built from a double-pane wall of fritted glass that cause passersby to be momentarily transfixed. Louis Vuitton's trademark checkerboard or Damier pattern—known vernacularly as *ichimatsu*—is etched on both the outer and inner walls, and creates a beautiful moiré effect. The geometric patterns seem to flutter and undulate as one walks around the building, an experience that can never be approximated by a still photograph.

Aoki's conceit is most beautiful at night, when the boutique's interior light, diffused by the fritted glass, gradually illuminates the darkness. Evocative of an opulent jewelry box, the building's transparency achieves greater effect deeper into the evening, as it looms mysteriously over a nondescript streetscape. Restrictions were imposed on altering the interior plan of the shop, and the architect used this to his advantage, focusing instead on the facades by employing a technique, that while simple and delicate, renders striking visual effects largely through the manipulation of texture and light.

The geometric illusion of the building is performed on a decidedly smooth, flat surface. From the context of contemporary art, the *ichimatsu* pattern that creates the moiré phenomenon could be considered as an instance of Op(tical) Art—engaged by artists such as Bridget Riley in the middle of the 20th century—in the field of architecture. Op Art specialized in illusions borne out of geometric patterns, and attempted to graphically fuse art and science. The construction of the Louis Vuitton store in Seoul (2000), initiated by Aoki, produces similar visual effects, this through the application of mosaic tile and a metal mesh layer. Subsequent Louis Vuitton stores handled by Kumiko Inui, and Yuko Nagayama from Jun Aoki & Associates also draw from similar principles. Verner Panton's work comes to mind as crucial examples of spaces reminiscent of Op Art. Generally known for stackable, colorful chairs featuring a sleek fluid curve, or an inverted conical structure, he had also handled interior designs that made use of repeating patterns of circles and squares. What he produced were hypnotic decorations that incited a mild visual vertigo. A hallway on the fifth floor of Louis Vuitton's Omotesando flagship store also

features a repeating rhombus, creating a space that was perhaps inspired by Panton, even by M. C. Escher.

For his Louis Vuitton store in Roppongi Hills (2003), Aoki, while using different materials throughout, covered the exterior and interior of the building with the repeating motif of identically scaled, 10cm-diameter circles. The outer wall is a screen of about 30,000 glass tubes, and on the walls, the ceiling, and even in the partitions inside, the identical circles repeat themselves. The reason why he chose the particularly small circle was to avoid scaling the circles to a size close to the products on display, so that they would not clash with the spatial design. Compared to the era of Op Art or Panton, the Louis Vuitton buildings are careful to increase the degree of transparency of their ornamental surfaces, resulting in a highly sophisticated design.

Following the success of Louis Vuitton, Nagoya, Aoki developed a variation of the same pattern for the frontage of the Louis Vuitton shop in Ginza's Matsuya department store (2000), and went on to deploy different variants for branches in Omotesando, Roppongi Hills, Ginza's Namiki Dori (2004), as well as New York's Fifth Avenue (2004). Each store reflects a concern for perfecting visual and spatial phenomena that can only come to life in a specific place. The success of these experiments owe no small debt to Louis Vuitton's meticulous standards of architectural production, in which a life-size mock-up is first created, from which several adjustments are made until the desired results and variations in effect are achieved. As the *ichimatsu* pattern saw broad use in Louis Vuitton stores located elsewhere in Nagoya, as well as in outposts in Tokyo's Shinjuku, Sendai, Singapore and Seoul, the style became a signature device—but one that retained significant thematic flexibility.

The first Nagoya store could really be seen as the opening salvo in the revival of the luxury boutique in the late 1990s. Heralding an important shift in Louis Vuitton's architectural program, the success of the store even goaded competing brands to employ a house architect of Aoki's dexterity. These initial collaborations between Aoki and Louis Vuitton enhanced the reputations of architect and patron in equal measure, and the subsequent boutiques in Kochi, Kyoto's Daimaru Department Store and Nagoya's Midland Square (respectively by Kumiko Inui, Yuko Nagayama and Takayoshi Nagaishi) made their young authors much sought after throughout Japan.

Essay: Architecture

ARCHITECTURES OF SUPERFLAT

When I first saw the Louis Vuitton store in Nagoya, a certain concept that best explains the cultural evolution of contemporary Japan came to mind: Superflat.¹ A catchall term coined by Takashi Murakami in an ambitious attempt to make sense of the diversity of contemporary Japanese cultural production, he wrote in 1999 that Superflat exists “within a spatial consciousness of super-flatness. The world is never a self-contained sphere. It can be said that it is an infinite space of limitlessly flat, ever-expanding horizon.”²

The philosopher Hiroki Azuma's critique of Murakami's *Mr. DOB* series cites a number of general tropes that emphasize the graphic nature of Superflat—that would later be pressed into the service of Louis Vuitton: “Their numerous contorted spheres that float above a flat surface, their disavowal of the concept of single ‘space’ in the vein of perspective drawings, and their lack of depth. The pictures are also without a central locus, and a myriad number of symbolic eyes drift about. Here, the way of looking at a picture that has been standardized by the spatial expression of contemporary perspective drawings does not exist. This concept takes its clues from the world of *anime* and *manga*.”³

This general inclination towards the Superflat have corollaries in various art and design disciplines, including those of film and photography. In graphic design, for example, there is Groovision's ubiquitous invocation of Chappie, its emblematic *kawaii* character. In photography, there is Hirnoix, the *shojo* photographer. In other examples, there are the architectural models that tend toward horizontal establishment as opposed to vertical massing.

This flexible interpretation of Superflat opens itself up to architecture as well, and herewith Jun Aoki's Louis Vuitton store can be considered. Clearly, architecture does not exist in a two-dimensional world; it could even be argued to exist far beyond the scope of this very concept of dimensionality. And yet at the same time the architecture cannot be limited to a literal flatness. Murakami himself considers the three-dimensional figurines of *anime* characters to belong to the realm of the Superflat that lacks a normal sense of 3-D. By focusing first on the expressions of the façade which functions as a membrane of a building, I would like to define the architecture of Superflat to be designs that sport a 2.5-D spatiality. In other words, the architecture characterized by its thinness and lightness, or those that lack the traditional depth of three-dimensionality. Secondly, the Superflat architectures suggest a building that breaks down the hierarchy of programs and function.

Jun Aoki's Louis Vuitton, Nagoya, showcases a moiré effect brought about by the interference of its double *ichimatsu* patterns. The setback of the entrance, displays, and lightings are installed inside the 111mm gap created by

the building's outer glass wall and the inner structural wall. The electrical lights at night turn these into a visual wonder, while under sunlight the glass outer wall reflects the clouds in the sky, the buildings across the street, as well as the *ichimatsu* pattern in overlapping layers. Because the Louis Vuitton store at Ginza's Matsuya department store (2000) was a renovation of a pre-existing building, the depth of the double-skinned wall is even less at 70mm, but by using an *ichimatsu* pattern of different sizes and thereby creating a triple layer of patterns, the building creates alternating scales of the moiré phenomenon from the point of view of passersby.

While traditional perspective drawing limits the field of view in which such optical effects can be experienced, the moiré, borne out of the double façade, depends on movement to take full effect. This can be compared to the argument between “literal transparency” and “phenomenal transparency” suggested by the architectural critic Colin Rowe. According to Rowe, the Bauhaus school, with its spatial gaps of glass, falls into the former category, while Le Corbusier's manipulation of structure, as evidenced in his facades featuring overlapping multiple patterns, is placed in the latter. This is because the surface transparency of Le Corbusier's work makes itself known *ex-post facto*. In this sense, Aoki's Louis Vuitton constantly requires the movement of the viewer to be effective, and at the point in which one registers the transparency of its exterior skin the strongest, the building can be said to possess a “phenomenal transparency.” Yet at the same time, it contains a “literal transparency” as suggested by its dependence on the materiality of glass.

It is interesting to compare the building to Bramante's Santa Maria Presso di San Satiro in central Milan. Because the site of the church lacked depth, the plan to construct a Latin cross was aborted; it only had enough space to allow the shape of a “T” at best. Bramante, however, employed a new technology of proportion and perspective that was perfected during the Renaissance. By adding an imaginary depth to the inner wall of the “T,” Bramante created the effect in which the structure looks like the Latin cross when seen from the church's entrance. For the Louis Vuitton store, Aoki on the other hand focuses on the surface's inherent lack of depth, and disregards altogether the need for the sense of depth in the three-dimensional convention. Where Bramante attempted to visualize a depth that did not exist, Aoki desired to create a surface that compels the viewer to imagine a depth that cannot be seen. In the October 2004 issue of *Japan Architect*, Aoki wrote, “The outer wall creates the spirit of space that does not exist in reality.”

On the other hand, some examples that befit my second definition of Superflat architecture are Aoki's Louis Vuitton store in Omotesando, that eschews the construction of

hierarchy among structure, furniture, and finishing touches; as well as the stance of Kuma Kengo (also a Louis Vuitton collaborator) that attempts to release architecture from the heavy constraints of object art, proposing it instead as something to be understood as an aggregate of particles.

RETHINKING THE "DECORATED SHED"

Recently, and largely through the vehicle of luxury brand boutiques, the design of surfaces has become increasingly radicalized. In architectural history, traditional structures such as temples, churches and palaces were the principal typologies since the dawn of civilization through the 19th century. With the advent of modernity, public and commercial institutions such as museums, city halls, train stations and office towers—as well as private domiciles became the locus of change, but retail design was paid scant regard. Even now, university courses in architecture tend to overlook this particular sector. This lingering academic bias makes the current reversal that has resulted in the ascendancy of retail spaces particularly interesting. According to the relationship of structure and decoration, the following two trends can be distinguished today:

First, the integration of structure and decoration in retail spaces is evident. In traditional architectural designs, the structure defined the building, with decorative flourishes added later. However, the development of computer graphics, and the accompanying advancement in mathematical learning have made complex structures that incorporate figuration (or ornament) possible. For instance, consider the concrete façade of Toyo Ito's Tod's Omotesando (2005) building that mimics the branches of trees, or the rhombic frame of Prada Aoyama store designed by Herzog & de Meuron (2004).

The second trend comprises architectures, like those of Jun Aoki, that consider the structure and decorations to be separate entities. When Aoki first took on the work of Louis Vuitton, he was reluctant as an architect to undertake what seemed like mere surface design, but gradually began to see decoration in its own light, and grasped its inherent possibilities. The Louis Vuitton spaces designed by Kengo Kuma, Kumiko Inui and Yuko Nagayama can all be placed within this shared genetic lineage.

Such categorization is consistent with the great work on postmodern architectural theory by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in *Learning From Las Vegas*. Upon researching the sprawling development along the Las Vegas strip, they cited the importance of signs over structures, and coined the concepts "Duck" and "Decorated Shed." The "Duck" signifies the architectural style in which the structure itself is distorted to give the effects of a billboard. On the other hand, the style of "Decorated Shed" separates the billboard (sign) from the box-shaped body (shed), and considers its design strategically. In

actuality, the commercial institutions call for a façade that draws the eye. In an era where postmodern architecture acts as a conveyor of information, it was inevitable that architects should turn towards designing stores.

Venturi's team inclines towards the symbolic "Decorated Shed" over the Modernist "Duck," which requires the structure of a building to represent its inner functions. The latter proposes the integration of structure and decoration, while the former applies to the autonomy of decoration. Aoki's Louis Vuitton store in Ginza's Namiki Dori (2004), which was a remodeling and expansion of an existing building, fuses the box with the sign while also hiding the interior by wrapping the entire building. Moreover the store, outfitted with differently sized openings and translucent marble that permit and modulate the amount of natural light, makes it difficult to distinguish the individual floors, as similar windows never align on the same floor. This suggests a disparity from a typical function of a billboard that attempts to directly represent the interior. The building, wrapped entirely in GRC (Glass Reinforced Concrete) panels, helps to increase the mysticism of the store and the brand as it prompts the viewer to fantasize about the space that exists inside.

Jun Aoki remains sympathetic to the concept of the "Decorated Shed," but he has questioned the communication theory that suggests a billboard should convey the internal substance of the building⁴. He maintains that modern architecture has suppressed decoration, and while Venturi has attempted to release them, his work has not been a complete rehabilitation of the decoration in the most fundamental sense.

The façade design of Aoki's Louis Vuitton stores does not exist to communicate the internal meaning of the edifice, nor does it exist independently as an outer wall. While separated from the actual materiality of its internal spaces, by serving as a form of disguise, the decoration tempts the viewer to imagine an interior space that that does not really exist. The concept is similar to the function of fashion in relation to the body. Aoki calls such a style the "Absolute Decoration."⁵

THE TEXTURE OF THE DIGITAL AGE

In 1914, the Louis Vuitton store that appeared on 70 Avenue Des Champs Elysées, bore an Art Nouveau façade. In essence, it was a design that separated itself from the styles of the past, commanding a newer style composed of flowers, plants and other nature-inspired designs.

Let's consider for a moment *Ornament and Crime*, a critical essay against superfluous decoration proposed by the influential modernist architect, Adolf Loos. Loos proclaimed that "The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects," paternalistically