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Inside Louis Vuitton and Urs Fischer's Capsule Collection
Renegade conceptual artist Urs Fischer blurs the distinctions between fashion and art with French brand Louis Vuitton

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LOGO MASTER “Art is so cumbersome, and the more I work, I think we have to find other ways that it can function,” says Urs Fischer, sitting in his Los Angeles garden. PHOTO: BY MAEGAN GINDI

As a kid growing up in the early '80s in Zurich, the artist Urs Fischer would notice women around town carrying brown canvas handbags imprinted with a repeating pattern of letters and obscure symbols.

“I couldn't understand why all these ladies wanted to have the same purse with these strange things on it,” says Fischer, who is sitting on a deck of his Los Angeles home, speaking over Zoom. “I really didn't get it back then, but now I have a little more context.”

The bags from Fischer's youth were classic models from Louis Vuitton, featuring the French fashion house's signature monogram: a grid of intersecting L's and V's interspersed with geometric, floral abstractions that has, since its debut in 1896, been a symbol of luxury the world over. Now, a few decades later, Fischer, 47—who is one of today's most widely exhibited conceptual artists—had the opportunity to consider it up close. This January, a capsule collection built around Fischer's reinterpretation of Vuitton's beloved emblem will debut online and in the brand's stores globally. The collection includes six bags (and several bag charms), scarves,

sneakers, a mini trunk, a small selection of women's ready-to-wear and even a bike. These all bear Fischer's slightly trippy, deconstructed take on Louis Vuitton's monogram.

"What consumes me at the moment is finding lighter ways to put something into the world," says Fischer, who rose to prominence in the 2000s, showing sculpture, photography, painting and installations such as *Untitled (Bread House)* (2004–2005), a full-scale, Swiss chalet-style structure constructed largely from loaves of bread left to crumble over the course of the exhibition. He finds the traditional art-world model outdated, he says. Crates moved around the world, with artworks laboriously installed in gallery spaces for limited audiences, feels out of touch, while the immaterial visual things we constantly consume on phones are also unsatisfying. Fischer says he is interested in "the big space in between."

"Art is so cumbersome, and the more I work, I think we have to find other ways that it can function," he says. The new collaboration—which involves a fantastical takeover of Vuitton store windows at some of their worldwide locations—is in line with this.

"I thought about how a child would draw the logo from memory, in a very crude way," he says, "almost like a cave painting, a marking: I considered it as a kind of pre-story to this very refined thing."

In Fischer's iteration of the monogram—in black on a white background and red on black—the individual symbols are enlarged and distorted. He experimented with both hand-drawing and digitally manipulating each shape, interested by how the resulting pattern would be further obscured when worn. "It becomes more of an energy than a clear picture," he says. On the bags, which include the duffel-like Speedy and the more structured Cabas tote, he sought a three-dimensional effect: The monogram is delicately embroidered onto canvas using tuftage, a tufting technique. Fischer likens the effect to a patch of fake grass, or a swatch of teddy bear plush. "It's no longer just a flat thing. There's tactility, it becomes an object, more of a sculpture," he says. "It's not art; it's not really about fashion either."

The collection developed over the course of the past year, Fischer meeting the design team in Paris, then Zooming in from New York and L.A. Though he was first approached to design just a scarf, a wider collection evolved from there. "Everything was very natural," says Delphine Arnault, Louis Vuitton executive vice president, who hand-picked Fischer for the project. "Urs had complete *carte blanche*."

Fischer was particularly intrigued by the editing process, taking into account technical limitations and commercial considerations. "Art is all about not being practical, so it's just a different thing... This was a bit of a dreamland. It's a big, experienced, talented machine," says Fischer of working with Vuitton. He first worked with the brand in 2019 as part of *Artycapucines*, a project series that invites contemporary artists to use its Capucines bag as a blank canvas. Fischer opted to leave the bag's design untouched but created lifelike silicone strawberries, mushrooms, eggs and other seemingly edible appendages. Affixed with a thin golden chain, each dangled below the bag to surreal, humorous effect.

"My aim with the Capucines and this new project was never to make something that is cool or now," notes Fischer, whose work often challenges the status quo, setting out to bemuse but not necessarily to please. Take a life-size candle sculpture of Leonardo DiCaprio and his parents, which melted away while exhibited at Gagosian's Paris gallery in 2019, or an untitled piece from

2003 featuring a single, spotlighted banana suspended in midair on a nylon string, its revolving shadow cast onto a nearby wall. “I don’t come from a trend-driven world,” says Fischer. “I come from: This is what I like.”



A tote from his capsule collection with Louis Vuitton. PHOTO: BY MAEGAN GINDI

Louis Vuitton’s most widely recognizable art collaborations started in the early 2000s: Marc Jacobs, then artistic director (from 1997 to 2013), first asked the American artist and designer Stephen Sprouse to apply his signature graffiti-inspired lettering to some of Louis Vuitton’s classic bags. The collaboration sold out swiftly, and marked the end of an era—the monogram was sacrosanct no more. Jacobs later enlisted artist Takashi Murakami, who created a memorable multicolor monogram in 2002, as well as artists Richard Prince and Yayoi Kusama, to apply their vision to the brand’s handbags. Since Jacobs’s departure, the artistic partnerships have featured Jeff Koons and Cindy Sherman, among others.

“There’s no doubt that Louis Vuitton was the luxury brand that laid the groundwork and helped open up this whole art-fashion space,” says Angelo Baque, who was formerly brand director at the cult streetwear label Supreme, which did a Louis Vuitton collaboration in 2017. (Items quickly sold out and are hotly traded on the secondary market.) But fashion collaborations, across all categories, have proliferated, often reading as more marketing ploy than genuine creative exchange. “For these collaborations to remain relevant, they need to move beyond just being about cool or beautiful things,” adds Baque, who today runs the creative consultancy

Baque Creative and the streetwear label Awake NY. “There has to be a greater intent, and that’s really on the brand to define—the artist is just there to do good art.”

“It makes total sense for [Urs] to do something in the fashion space because he has a deep intellectual and artistic curiosity—if he can find another way to reach people, he will pursue it,” says art dealer and curator Jeffrey Deitch. He worked with Fischer on *Play* (2018), an interactive exhibition of robotic office chairs, and staged the artist’s first survey show in the U.S. in 2013 while he was director of MOCA in Los Angeles. Says Deitch, “He is not narrow in any way.”

As many of Fischer’s major projects have been on pause due to the pandemic, he jokes he’s currently working on “inner peace.” He has also been playing around with new, motion-based pieces. One involves light projections into nature, the other, compiling hundreds of thousands of TV commercials from the 1940s to the present. These are part of Fischer’s exploration of less imposing ways of making and showing art, like his collaboration with Louis Vuitton.

“Art is about communication. If that dialogue can broaden through a very tangible, real thing—like a bag—then that’s interesting,” says Fischer. “I hope to see someone walking down the street carrying it. I want to know how it translates—out there.”