

channel UNO

trends and other interesting things from around the world



▲ FAKE Louis Vuitton Bag from FAKWEAR DESIGN
Bea Correa 2004

In the last channel UNO I mentioned that we had been to Hong Kong as part of our annual IDP meeting. IDP being the International Design Partnership. It was while in Hong Kong and Kowloon, that we noticed how numerous the designer label shops were. Stumbling from one Dior shop through a Chanel and then sidestepping around a Tag or Cartier frontage to be met by the LV emblazoned leather façade of a Louis Vuitton store left us slightly punch drunk . The knock-out blow to our retail sanity came from a small Chinese lady, gesturing manically from her stall in one of Hong Kong's many side streets, 'you buy Louis Vuitton, good quality, give you



Customs officials busy sewing on designer labels

best price?'. Then like your eyes adjusting to a dark room you start to notice that everyone walking past you seems to be sporting these top designer labels, from the humble guy pushing a hand cart full of rubbish with his Armani eagled t-shirt, two local teenage girls with their matching, and way too small to be useful, Louis Vuitton rucksacks, and then later to some elderly lady peering through her bowl like Gucci shades at some dubiously smelling fish in the wet market.

Personally I have my suspicions that not all these labels were the real deal but it also made me question what was real. In this Channel

UNO I want to look at the wider issue of real and fake.

With some items the difference between real and fake has an inherent value, diamonds for example, are graded and valued on purity, whiteness, size etc and so a ring may have additional value because of the craftsmanship involved in mounting the diamond and the style of the ring, but the majority of the value will be in the 'raw material'. The diamond has a market value. Gold has a value that is dictated by the stock exchange and goes up and down in value depending on market fluctuations in supply and demand. The value of designers labels is a little more esoteric in nature.

Immortalised in Fabric

If we were to use a fashion designer as an example, then we would have an individual who has been trained to design clothes, after a number of years he or she, will work on a collection, then if they are suitably talented and ambitious they will start their own line. Gianni Versace is an interesting case in point, in that he started out in his mothers dressmaking business before freelancing for fashion houses. His success then lead to him forming his own couture empire, with numerous



No this my cousin, Lee Yu Vee Tong!

fashion awards, plaudits and financial success, until he was shot and killed in 1997 at the age of 50 outside his house in Miami.

His empire is now just that, an empire, there are numerous new ranges and the Versace badge can be found on cosmetics, fragrances, sunglasses as well as Jeans and T-shirts. The question of fashion houses is that although they were birthed by artists, the core of their art is a philosophy which is fortunately immortal and can be passed on to a new incarnation of the founder,

although normally less marketable. This is obviously quite different to other artists, who sadly when they die find it strangely difficult to produce new paintings, write new plays or poetry or pen new songs and music.

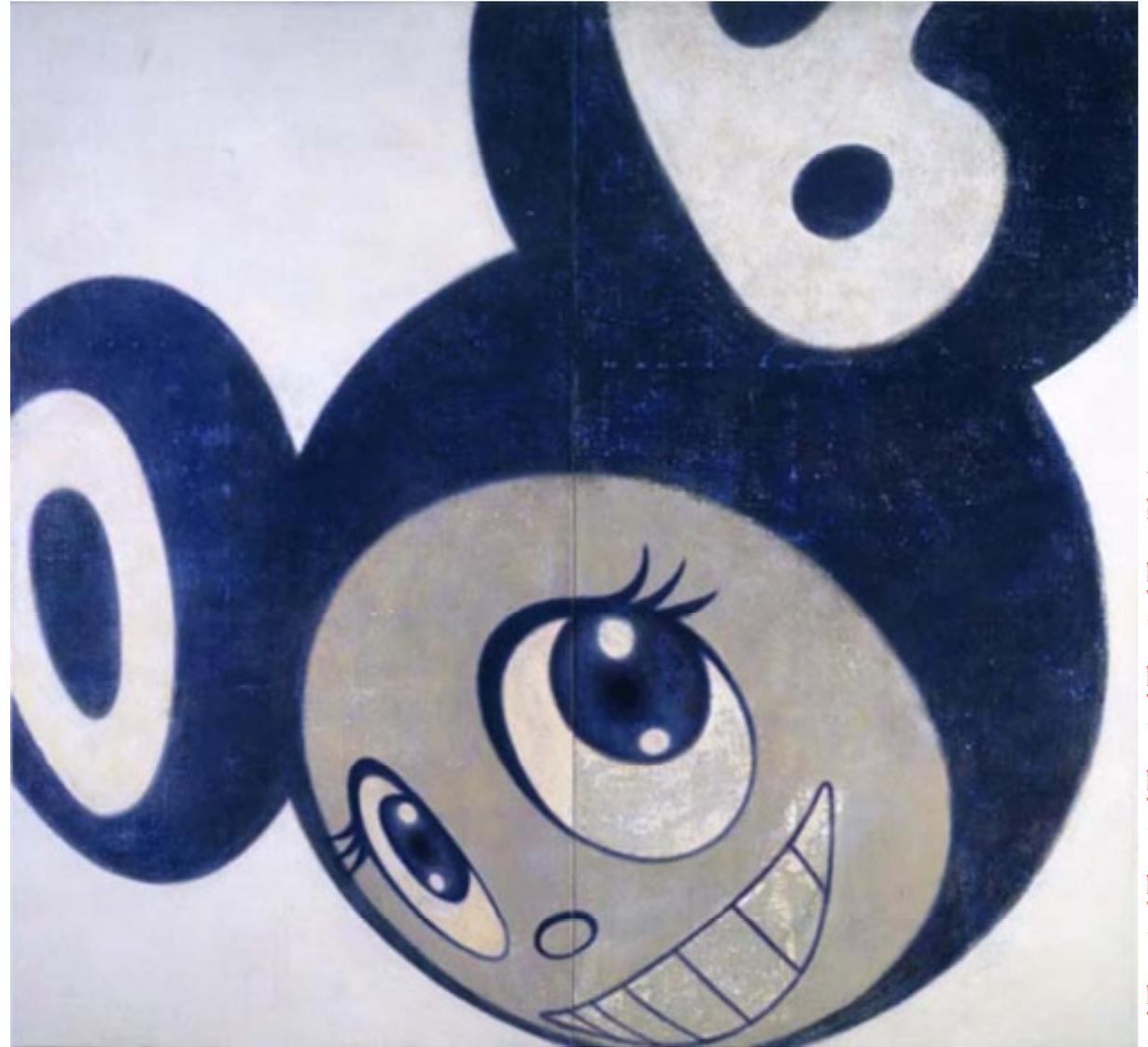
What then makes these labels real? What gives them substance? The answer is that we do. These labels are like Tinkerbell in Peter Pan, who's existence is tied to the children's willingness to believe in fairies. As ridiculous as this may sound, it actually applies to many brands, particularly those

at the premium end of town. We have mentioned in other episodes of Channel UNO the emotional component of brands, however there is a distinction between brands that have an emotional component as part of their brand mix and those who rely almost solely on emotion as the key foundation of their brand and most of these fall into the 7 deadly sins category.

Making of a 'must have'

The Louis Vuitton brand has adopted an interesting technique to enhance both the artistic merit of their brand and its stylistic fluidity, namely that of commissioning Takashi Murakami to collaborate on the design of a limited edition range of bags. Murakami, is a renowned and sometimes controversial Japanese artist with a strong manga and otaku influence, his use of 'low art' or street culture themes and images to create high art pieces, allows his artwork to be both easily accessible and yet still be acclaimed in the rarefied world of high art.

His blend of manga cuteness, huge eyes and innocent expressions, with the more sexually charged Otaku elements gives his work a riskiness that when blended with Louis Vuitton's traits of quality, heritage and craft makes for a uniquely styled



And Then, And Then And Then And Then And Then (Blue)
Takashi Murakami 1996

product which made it the 'must have' item for all red blooded fashionista's and subsequently the 'must have' item for all of their faithful followers, except this market is catered to by the almost equally advanced forgery industry.

Fashion and the Faker

The scale of this market is hard to estimate, it can be measured in the forecasted loss of sales, which always seems tenous at best, as few would be either willing or able to pay

the real price for these goods, and then there is the estimated cost in lost tax revenue that governments make on luxury goods, lastly there is the estimate from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation, of \$200 Billion (US) of counterfeited or pirated goods. This figure is from 2005 but it took the OECD over 18 months to compile all the figures.

The ubiquitous nature of some brands in HK is such that the values of the brand appear to have little relevance or importance to the wearer, who simply sees the T-shirt as a T-shirt, a simple garment to wear while pushing his dust cart. It is ironic that brands, who's very expense visualises the distinction between the have's and have nots in society, should be the ones to end up becoming so commonplace that the expectation is that all are fake.

To some the growth of this 'fake' market is a blessing, they see it as some form of welfare sharing, as the less affluent are now indistinguishable from the moneyed few, except when they are sitting at the lights in their rusting Corolla. Louis Vuitton (part of the luxury group LVMH) have a different take on the subject, *"We always thought that counterfeit requires zero tolerance for several reasons,"* Yves Carcelle, chairman and chief executive officer of Louis Vuitton. *"It's a gray economy that escapes all rules of normal labour and normal economic rules and taxations, so it's a bad thing for every state in the world. Secondly, it's bad for any kind of creativity, research and development, because if you don't protect*

intellectual property, why should people dedicate time and energy to create?"

At the start of April Louis Vuitton celebrated the unveiling of a new camouflage print developed by Murakami and Marc Jacobs called 'Monogramouflage' and a special installation designed to bring attention to its ongoing battle with the counterfeiters. To highlight the issue they decided on a rather novel approach and decided to set up 10 New York-style street vendors — not to sell fakes, but rather authentic Louis Vuitton products and special Monogramouflage canvases that Murakami has created specifically for the exhibition.

Vuitton is no newcomer in the fight against counterfeiters. This year also marks the centennial of its first court case. In 1908, the brand won a ruling from the Paris Appeal Court to halt the distribution of look-alike trunks.

The virulence of the fashion industry towards its counterfeiting nemesis is in many ways understandable, the investment in developing new ranges, the cost of promotion, the risk of being poorly received are not faced by the counterfeiter.

The fashion world is also keen to voice the same message as another, possibly more troubled victim, the film and music industry, that these forgeries are stealing their income and so making it difficult to deliver as many new ranges and endangers the livelihoods of their designers and craftsman. This link was further highlighted as LV's most recent high



Takashi Murakami - 'Monogramouflage' for LV.



Historically we have used clothes to augment and enhance certain elements of our physique, corsets, bodices, bustles, high heels and the bizarrely named codpiece (which has a bizarre history all of its own), have all framed us with new and exaggerated proportions, that when the straps were undone could have left an erstwhile admirer shouting the word fake. The art world was also not beyond a little exaggeration or old school re-touching, as their wealthy and landed clients/models had their appearances improved with some flatteringly fraudulent brushwork.

profile bag carrier was the old roller Keith Richards, I presume the link was meant to be that he only trusts 'LV' products with his guitar rather than the 'ones made of leather and the other just looks like it'. You can be the judge on which is which.

The Film and Music Industry, who with the advent of digital technology are easy prey to anyone with a PC and a half decent broadband connection, have increasingly borne the brunt of this assault on their livelihood and the message they are driving home is that 'piracy is theft' and that it is also morally wrong as well as being a criminal act to copy their intellectual property. Yet although these two industries are perhaps the most readily perceived examples of the impact of fake on what is real, there is a fake issue much closer to home, although arguably closely associated to the fashion industry, the issue being our image.

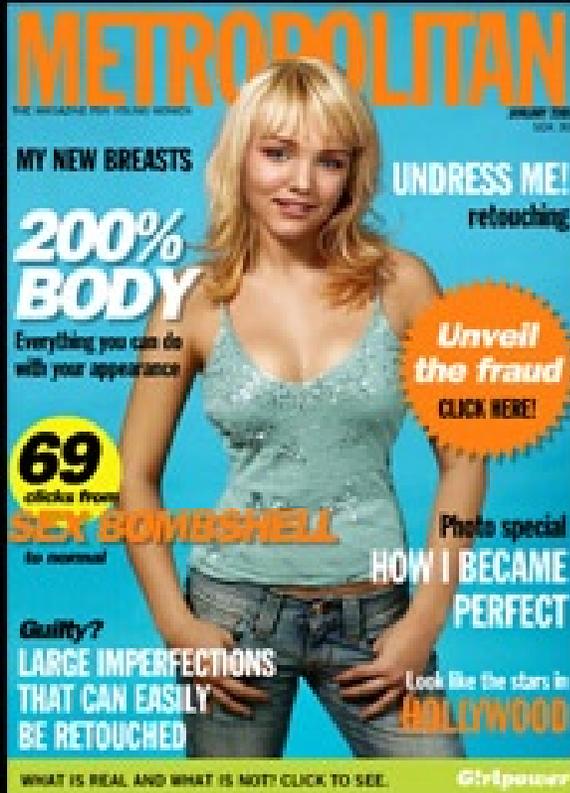


Henry VIII's Dress Armour or Dress Amore? - Tower of London

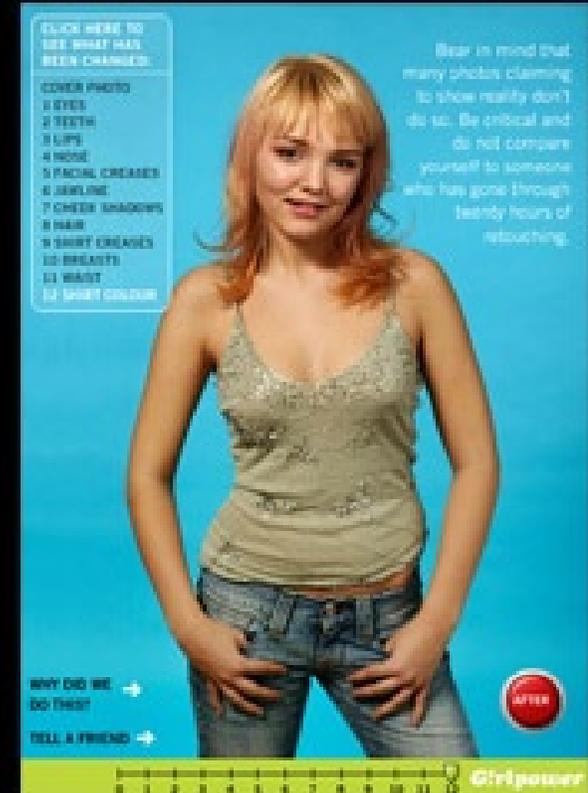
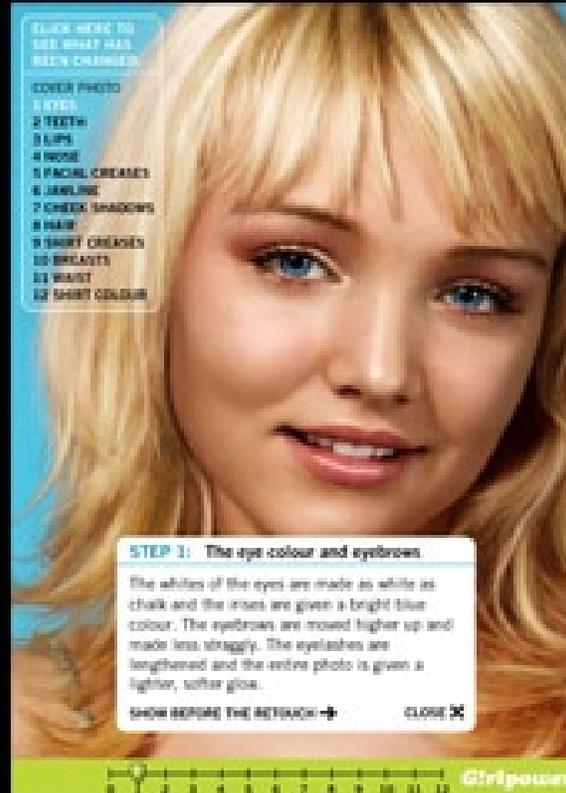
Beauty is in the mouse of the Re-toucher

Today, we have more sophisticated technology to hand, simple airbrushing of photographs has been advanced by the use of software, so common is this that its often referred to as being photoshop'd. Celebrities have their images re-worked for publicity shots, and mainstream magazines retouch everything by default, and if you thought it was just a little more red in the lips or a tad more warmth in the complexion, think again, with today's technology and a fair degree of skill it is possible to change eyeshape, facial profile, body shape, muscle tone, remove any and all blemishes, change eye colour, skin tone, alter hair colour, in fact with a skillful operator, the model may be completely transformed by a multitude of mouse clicks.

The extent of this manipulation has become so widely used and abused that Magazine editors in the U.K. have agreed to meet to discuss a code of conduct to limit the amount of re-touching. This move is part of a series of recommendations that came out of Britain's Model Health Inquiry, an initiative established by the British Fashion Council and led by Baroness Kingsmill, who concluded that retouching could "perpetuate an unachievable aesthetic. The likelihood of this ban being widely adopted is fairly low, and another measure which was discussed was labeling the images that have been altered with the wording 'this image has been digitally enhanced', is in my view, equally unlikely to gain much industry support.



REVEAL THE BLUFF



ORIGINAL PICTURE

The ability to manipulate our body image goes beyond Photoshop, we can now nip, tuck, lift, pull, plump and augment most parts of our bodies, not normally at the same time – which is probably just as well. It was estimated (as there are worryingly few reliable sources) that last year there were around 67000 invasive cosmetic surgeries in Australia. The non-surgical procedures, liposuction, botox, peels, dermal fillers are far more prevalent and the popularity of these has

grown astronomically as we attempt to prolong youth, even if it means injecting botulism toxin to paralyse our expression. The interesting point with Botox is that if our expressions are a means by which we personalise and add meaning to our communication then by turning our faces into a fixed and emotionless mask we are surely losing something of ourselves. And what do we gain, but a thin and temporary veneer of youth.

Pinocchio's Wish

Yet even with all this the desire for real is becoming stronger every year, but by real the definition seems to be something that has meaning and in some way links us to the source. In terms of fashion, it's a connection to the designer and the lifestyle, with food it may be small organic retailers, or products which are regionally distinct and which are imbued, as the French would say 'terroir', which roughly translates as the 'spirit of

a place'. The organic and 'slow food' movement are also advocates of 'real food'. The various food scares that continue year on year has added weight to their arguments, but there is a hurdle to be crossed, which is that sometimes real food isn't real pretty.

Waitrose, the UK grocery chain, faced with a dilemma when their regular suppliers of Apples were badly effected by some late season storms which caused the apples to be both mildly discoloured and strangely shaped, although taste and texture were unaffected. The issue was that UK consumers, much like Australian ones, have become used to buying fresh produce that is unnaturally uniform in shape and colouration. Waitrose decided that some re-education was necessary and so have pushed the benefits of real and local, in much the same way as Farmer's Markets do here and where the acceptance of so called 'ugly' food is much higher than within the supermarket arena. Suppliers will now be able to sell a variety of class two products, cutting down on produce wastage while getting a larger return than would otherwise be possible and perhaps more importantly allowing consumers to reacquaint themselves with all the vagaries of real produce.

The fruit will be marketed for cooking purposes as it does not comply with the supermarket's strict class one code, and consumers will receive a 50 pence to £1 discount per kilo on the items.

"The eating quality is exactly the same as class one, but as they are not class one in appearance we are branding

them as part of our range of cooks' ingredients," said a Waitrose spokesperson.

Since 1995 Britain has lost half its orchards, as growers struggle to meet the standards and price demands of retailers. Until now, most class two produce is immediately assigned to the juice trade, where growers pick up as little as £60 per tonne for apples and pears. Other European countries appear less affected by the fashion for perfect produce. The continued presence of fruit and vegetable market stalls in countries such as France and Italy means consumers within those countries are used to seeing non-perfect, fresh produce.

The Welsh dairy co-operative 'Calon-Wen', sells organic milk which is sourced from 20 farms, the milk is not homogenized, it has cream at the top as used to be the norm and this little group is doing exceptionally well, outselling other milk brands and own-label produce by 2 to 1. Which is seriously bucking the trend in a market where supermarket pressure to control the price of staples has lead to practices such as homogenization and blending which has de-natured the milk to a point that you have a product which is essentially fake.

The thing with fake products, is that to be successful they generally need to be indistinguishable from the real, so the key difference between real and fake often lies within us. If we believe in the values of the real item then a fake is a hollow imitation, whereas if we merely have a passing fancy to carry a Louis Vuitton bag or wear

a chunky Rolex but are not a devotee of these brands then they are just objects, which are as valueless as a cut glass bauble is to a diamond. The distinction then is in the value that we give to these objects fake or real. Were we to take a remote and existential view then all objects would be devoid of value and so the concept of fake or real would be an absurd one, however apart from a rare few we are all gloriously rich in absurdity.

In my definition of real there are two key elements, one is honesty and the other is personality, one without the other is achievable but gains a 'so what' response. Your view will probably differ but then that's what making it real is all about.

This is our channel for airing opinions; a few of ours, our International Design Partnership friends and if you've got some, yours. Our aim is to start a few fires, kick a few tired ideas into shape and stir up a healthy debate on what we see around us.

If you want to join in the debate or introduce a friend to the channel then you can mail us at the newsdesk@uno.net.au



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