

WAVE



REALITY

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*In the age of “I post therefore I am”,
has the mermaid tail become the new
evening dress?*

By LAURENT DOMBROWICZ

Digital has taken over creativity, and one thing’s for sure, it’s only just begun. As the on-screen and off-screen worlds continue to meld, people looking to make a dollar have a lot to gain, especially because the demographic in the crosshairs is 15- to 20-year-olds who will make up no less than 40% of luxury consumers in 2030. So, it’s no surprise that digital beauty, initially a mix of traditional cosmetics and a basic digital filter, infiltrated WeChat, Snapchat, TikTok and the like before really attracting the attention of influencers, then the beauty and fashion industries more broadly. The beauty industry of old was the precursor to our current selfie generation, which generated futuristic beauty filters such as BeautyGan and Beauty3000 before easier and more fun apps came on the market, fueling new addictions and behavioral disorders. “Snapchat dysmorphia” is the term used to describe a gradual loss of a sense of boundary between the physical and the digital self, with often disturbing consequences. Fun, temporary enhancement with a filter gets replaced by a real fixation on becoming the digital self one sees on screen. ●●●

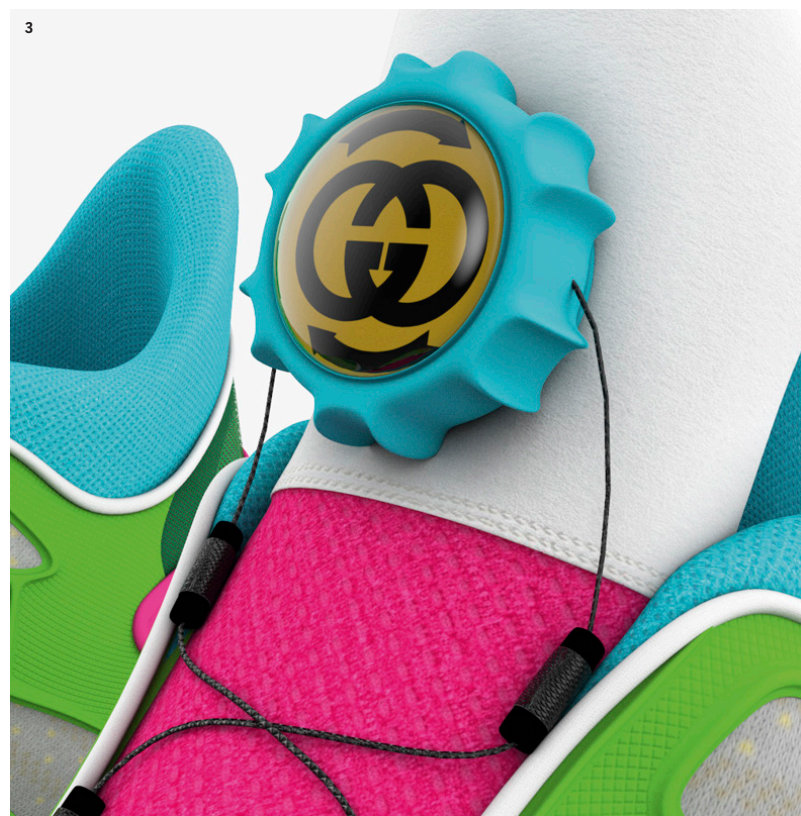


1. Auroboros virtual show during the London Fashion Week, June 2021
2. Maitrepierre fall-winter 2021/2022
3. Gucci's *Virtual 25* sneaker

depressing way — just the opposite, really. For weeks on end, we watched videos of people dancing at home, going on walks, playing sports, decorating their interiors, just having fun. Our models for the collection are avatars who gradually become a part of the decor in the room around them, creating hybrid pieces like a duvet suit, a parquet dress, a vase bag, a sofa coat, a coat-hanger bag, the list goes on.”

But the real revolution underway is the disappearance entirely of physical garments, accessories, and products marketed to the drive-to-the-store consumer. One of the first houses, if not the very first, to pull the trigger on digital products was Gucci with its *Virtual 25* sneaker, unveiled in October 2020. It's a 100% virtual sneaker that you will never take home to

... On the positive side of things, however, creatives are seizing on what the beauty-filter world has to offer and running with it. Take Inès Alpha, a French 3D makeup artist who's made such a name for herself that she's collaborated on product lines with London department store Selfridges and even Dior cosmetics. More recently, fashion label Mansour Martin brought her in to help design their fall 2021 ready-to-wear collection with prints that are stranger than fiction. People are increasingly fascinated by their virtual self and the ways that self can impact reality, which in the beauty and fashion world is generating an aesthetic “mise en abyme”. Balenciaga has shifted its marketing and communication towards gaming, putting the consumer in the role of a gamer. Young French designer Alphonse Maitrepierre has a more subtle variation on that theme. The communication of his eponymous famous brand is grafting the new age onto the old ways of haute couture and high fashion. Working with graphic designer Adem Elahel, he's created an aesthetic that combines hi-tech, 3D, and old-fashioned needle and thread in a collection that pays homage to Madeleine Castaing, a famous interior decorator known for her striking powers of mix and match. *“It was during France's second lockdown that I came up with the idea for the collection. We were all locked up at home again for the second time and I wanted to make models that looked locked down, but not in a sad or*



your closet. Instead, you wear them in virtual-reality chat platforms or the online game Roblox. One pair costs €12.99, which is a price low enough to draw a host of active consumers on social media and fans of ephemeral novelties. Even more daring is Paula Sello and Alissa Aulbekova's London-based label Auroboros, which will make history this year with the first-ever entirely virtual fashion show to be presented during London Fashion Week 2021. The collection is called *Biomimicry* and takes inspiration from forms and organic structures found in nature. Cyber couture uses 3D scanning wherein you buy the code of a real garment that will then fit any and all body types in VR, never existing in the real world. These other-worldly outfits can cost up to €800, which you wear in a virtual chat, all while slumped on the coach in your sweatpants. "Who would ever buy that and why," you ask? Well, an entire generation, or at least those in the younger generation who have a lot of money and have already replaced clubbing and bars with online socializing. There are millions of VR partyers, and not just in Asia. They exist through their virtual image alone and it's redefining beauty and fashion consumerism as we know it. So long as you have to buy an evening dress you'll only wear only once, why not a digital mermaid's tail? It'll get a heck of a lot more likes! While it does sound like something out of an episode of *Black Mirror*, the smartphone is now where people go to off their newest threads ●

THE REAL REVOLUTION UNDERWAY IS THE DISAPPEARANCE ENTIRELY OF PHYSICAL GARMENTS, ACCESSORIES



4. Print by digital artist Inès Alpha for Mansour Martin fall-winter 2021/2022