



What is Luxury?

A V&A and Crafts Council Exhibition

Sponsored by Northacre

25 April– 27 September 2015

www.vam.ac.uk/whatisluxury | [#whatisluxury](https://twitter.com/whatisluxury)

What is Luxury? aims to interrogate and expand understandings of luxury by presenting exceptional examples of contemporary design and craftsmanship alongside conceptual projects which interrogate fundamental ideas of luxury, its production and future. From a diamond made from roadkill to a vending machine stocked with DNA, a golden crown for ecclesiastical use to traditional military tailoring, over 100 objects address how luxury is made and understood in a physical, conceptual and cultural capacity.

The opening section of the exhibition considers objects defined as luxurious by the excellence of their design and craftsmanship. On display are objects which celebrate the investment of time and application of skill in the process of making, including the *Space Travellers' Watch*, an entirely handcrafted mechanical timepiece by renowned British watchmaker George Daniels, a laser-cut haute couture dress by fashion designer Iris van Herpen, a chandelier by Studio Drift featuring real dandelion seeds applied by hand to LED lights, a Hermès Talaris saddle which combines traditional leather craftsmanship with a technologically innovative structure, and the Bubble Bath necklace by Nora Fok, made from more than 1000 hand-knitted nylon bubbles. *Time Elapsed*, a large spirograph designed by Philippe Malouin for glassware company Lobmeyr which rotates to draw patterns made of sand, comments on the time-intensive process of making fine crystal and acts as a centrepiece.

Seemingly disparate objects are juxtaposed and presented alongside terminology associated with luxury in order to focus on specific aspects of its many possible interpretations. Bowls by the artist Chung Hae-Cho created entirely through building up multiple layers of lacquer are placed alongside a menswear ensemble by designer Carol Christian Poell, known for his devotion to critically examining and perfecting techniques of tailoring. The grouping demonstrates how a high level of expertise is refined and investigated in making exquisitely finished objects.

What is Luxury? also considers time and space as fundamental aspects constituting luxury, especially within a 21st-century urban context. Works including *Time for Yourself*, a playful toolkit for misdirection which features a watch with no dial and a compass which spins to random co-ordinates, invite visitors to contemplate the idea of getting lost and their relationship to the luxuries of space and time.

The exhibition speculates about the future of luxury by presenting a range of design and art projects which interrogate relationships between luxury, value and materials. *Hair Highway* by Studio Swine sets human hair in resin to create highly decorative pieces of furniture and accessories. The rich surfaces of the objects on display are reminiscent of valuable but limited luxury materials such as tortoiseshell, horn and exotic wood, but are made of one of the few natural resources which increases along with the world's population. Aram Mooradian's *A Comprehensive Atlas of Gold Fictions* re-examines our relationship with gold, a finite luxury material. Everyday objects made from gold mined in Australia, including a headphone jack and a pendant, are engraved with personal local histories to encode them with a new cultural value. Also on display are a set of vessels by Unknown Fields Division made from toxic mud collected on a recent expedition to the Rare Earth Elements' mines in Inner Mongolia.

What is Luxury? provokes thinking and debate through fictional scenarios that consider issues like privacy, resources and access that could determine future ideas of luxury. American artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo's *DNA Vending Machine* contains pre-packaged DNA samples and invites visitors to consider our increasing access to biotechnology and how privacy and ownership of one's own DNA may become a luxury in the future. In the installation *The Boltham Legacy*, artist Henrik Nieratschker tells the fictional story of a British billionaire who sends altered bacteria into space in an attempt to find valuable metals on distant planets. The piece speculates about the luxury of having exclusive access to resources.

Through the movement from more traditional explanations of luxury to conceptual projects, *What is Luxury?* aims to take visitors on a journey and prompt them to consider what luxury means and how it relates to their own lives. Visiting research fellow Leanne Wierzba, co-curator of the exhibition, says, '*What is Luxury? will reveal the stories and craftsmanship behind the exquisite and intriguing objects on display and demonstrate the precision, time and application of skills invested to produce them.*' V&A curator of Contemporary Furniture Jana Scholze and co-curator of *What is Luxury?*, adds, '*As its title suggests, the exhibition questions the very idea of luxury today. It challenges common interpretations of luxury, invites close examination of luxury production and extends ideas of what luxury can be. Essentially, the question of luxury is a personal one.*'

Rosy Greenlees, Executive Director, Crafts Council said: "*We are delighted to collaborate with the V&A on this third exhibition following Out of the Ordinary (2007) and Power of Making (2011), which both delighted audiences by offering new perspectives on craft. What is Luxury? brings together the distinctive expertise of our two institutions to explore the intricate connections between craftsmanship and luxury. Over 100 remarkable objects look beyond the widely understood perceptions of luxury involving skill, time and rarity to question what luxury means in the 21st century and in the future.*"

-ENDS-

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, please contact Lucy Hawes in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2500 or email l.hawes@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of high resolution images is available to download from pressimages.vam.ac.uk. For film footage please contact the press office.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- *What is Luxury?* is the third in a series of joint V&A and Crafts Council, following *Out of the Ordinary* in 2007 and *The Power of Making* in 2011.
- This FREE exhibition takes place in the Porter Gallery
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 to 17.45 and until 22.00 on Fridays
- The exhibition is co-curated by Jana Scholze, curator of Contemporary Furniture and Product Design at the V&A and Leanne Wierzbna, V&A/ Winchester School of Art Research Fellow

Digital commission:

To coincide with the exhibition the V&A has commissioned *Luxury Time*, a playful web app which references the time, skill and expertise required to craft a luxury object. The game requires the player to act as a craftsman by completing a series of tasks over three levels of increasing difficulty. Each level takes a longer time than the previous to complete and focuses on an object included in *What is Luxury?*. The first level involves inlaying diamonds, emeralds and rubies onto an 18th-century crown; the second assembling plywood sheets to create a positive mould for Joris Laarman's Bone Chaise; the third engraving 641 individual spherical shapes into delicate glass which could shatter with the slightest wrong movement.

Luxury Time is designed by creative agency The Beautiful Meme and built by games developer Guerilla Tea Games. It is free to play and available on mobile, tablet and desktop from the 25 April. vam.ac.uk/luxurytime

About the Crafts Council:

Crafts Council is the national development agency for contemporary craft, working with partners across the UK – including the V&A – to help promote craft to the widest possible audience. The Crafts Council's goal is to make the UK the best place to make, see, collect and learn about contemporary craft. Crafts Council is supported by Arts Council England who work to get great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people's lives. www.craftscouncil.org.uk

Support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition corporate sponsor, Northacre.

About Northacre

Northacre, the noble force in landmark residential development, has been at the forefront of the revival and development of buildings of historical significance and stature for over 25 years. Northacre's reputation is built on its intrinsic understanding of luxury combined with a passionate attention to detail and working with the finest craftsmen, values that chime with the content of *What is Luxury?*. Distinguished by its innovative and refined approach to residential development, Northacre has a flair for creating new prestigious locations. Notable landmark developments by Northacre include The Lancasters, The Phillimores, Kings Chelsea, The Bromptons and Observatory Gardens. Its latest luxury residential development is Number 1 Palace Street.

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