

The Louis brand through the ages: from the XIVth to Vuitton

ART AND LUXURY SHARE A JOINT FOCUS ON CONTEMPORARY CONSUMERS WITH A NEW CONCEPT OF STATUS, OBSERVES **PROFESSOR DR DIRK BOLL**, MANAGING DIRECTOR CONTINENTAL EUROPE, **CHRISTIE'S**

Art and luxury have always combined successfully. Leading artists have been in the service of the luxury industry, at least since Jean-Baptiste Colbert promoted French luxury manufactures in order to raise funds for his sovereign's vision of Versailles. The reason that we associate the subject today rather with shop window displays at Louis Vuitton boutiques is part of a process which started over 30 years ago.

In the early 1980s consumers began to develop an increasing awareness of style. Ever since, an interest in art and art collecting have become an indispensable part of the lifestyle of consumers of luxury products. The collector surrounds himself with art objects to enhance his standing and provide him with a positive ambience. At the same time, contemporary

art became more and more avant-garde in character, charged with metaphysical and philosophical meaning, and regarded as a nucleus of the essence of life. To be avant-garde, art has to challenge now more than ever traditional viewer preferences and tastes.

This brought about a status change for art: previously, art works which demonstrated the owner's affluence would not be brand new, so as to indicate inherited wealth. Contemporary art has turned into a status symbol not only because of its (unconsciously assumed) high price, but mainly because it reflects back on the owner as a person of intellectual curiosity and education, who has the nous to engage with the work. For the first time, ownership of art took on a double meaning comparable to other status symbols: a haute couture dress conveys not just that the wearer has the wherewithal to buy it, but also that the selection is informed through being part of a 'community'. Not only do I consume, I also choose – *intellego, quid emo*.

At the King's pleasure: while artists of the Ancien Régime strove to improve on the familiar, the status of today's art is rooted in its avant-garde characteristics. Art and lifestyle are joined under the banner of lifestyle, combining the autonomous work with the popular aesthetics of marketing. The artist becomes the creative centre and motor of this universe, creating art, designing consumer products and being regarded as a rock star. Broadening art ownership into intellectual status is only possible through contemporary art. Art and fashion share the absolute focus on the present, and it is therefore not surprising that many companies driven by innovation now seek to sponsor cultural and artistic endeavours. This is especially true for industries whose concept of luxury comprises the longevity of their products, which in turn become fashionable through the influence of contemporary art. Louis Vuitton's seasonal shop window doubles up as a museum! ■



Yayoi Kusama in a Louis Vuitton store window