

The Marquage Makeover

HELLO! makes a note of the most indulge-worthy trend this season that's giving a new lease of life to all your priceless luxury leathers

At a time when a Hermès Birkin was picked up at a Christie's auction for a staggering US\$135,856 last year, one would think keeping their purchase pristine is the way to go – but, maybe not! With globetrotting transforming from a luxury to a necessity, Birkins and Balenciagas rarely turn heads anymore – instead, what may attract attention is accessorizing with a handbag that also doubles up as a work of art.

Today, the ultimate accessory to any luxurious possession is best accentuated with monograms, hand-painted designs and graffiti accents. And, artists the world over are redefining luxury through creativity and craftsmanship. Take for instance, Kim Kardashian West's one-of-a-kind Christmas present from husband Kanye West. The American rapper gave his wife a stunning Hermès Birkin bag painted by New York City-based contemporary visual artist George Condo. Or when



Kim Kardashian West sported a one-of-a-kind handpainted Birkin (above) featuring an artwork by New York based contemporary visual artist, George Condo (inset); Louis Vuitton's very first collaboration with Stephen Prouse, the neon flower bags (left);



Artwork by British painter, Boyarde Messenger on a Hermès bag and Gucci Horsebit leather slippers

Eva Longoria turned heads as she stepped out carrying a tote emblazoned with a beautiful painting of her baby son, Santiago.

For the uninitiated, the expression is known as "marquage" – a French word that means making a mark on luxury products – that is having a bit of a moment. By extension, it refers to the act of personalising an item. And for these highly sought-after marquage artists, luxury leather goods are the canvas on which their work thrives. Sanjana Gupta from The Leather Works and Kanika Ranka from the Studio Project give us insights on the most sought-after trend of the season.

THE DELICATE PROCESS

It all begins by first examining the leather type to understand how well it will react to the colours. The step is followed by understanding the requirements of the clients. Pictures of their products are shared, with an outline of what they are looking to get personalised on the item. "Rough sketches are then made and traced and only shared with the client once the products are in our custody. Once we have the approvals, we begin the process, which can take anywhere between two to 15 days to finish, depending on the size and complexity," shares Sanjana Gupta, founder of Ahmedabad-based The Leather Works – a

bespoke art house that redefines wearable art on luxury goods.

DETAIL IS THE KEY

Mumbai-based marquee artist, Kanika Gupta who started The Studio Project three years ago, elaborates on the process. "Each artwork has 10 to 15 layers of thinly applied paint, setting a strong foundation for the durability and vibrancy of the work. Multiple layers of varnish are applied once the painting dries, making it crack and waterproof," shares Kanika, who is currently working on a super cute Louis Vuitton stroller for the South Indian actress, Samantha Akkineni.



A Fine Arts graduate from the Art Institute of Chicago, Kanika Ranka founded the Studio Project three years ago



The Leather Works by Sanjana Gupta restored a damaged Louis Vuitton bag (above); Michelangelo-inspired Adam's hands on Nike Air Force One shoes by The Leather Works (below)

IMPORTED PAINTS

In the past year she has created masterpieces out of several luxury leather goods – including a Moynat and Delvaux – and restored a Dior and over a hundred Goyards. But, Sanjana still reminisces working on their first Hermès Birkin, featuring an Audrey Hepburn artwork with a quirky quote. "The paints we use are manufactured in Italy and the US – they are custom-made to work on leather. Our colours are water resistant, too," says 29-year-old Sanjana, who graduated with a degree in Statistics from Lady Shri Ram College and went on to pursue a short fashion course from Central Saint Martins – University of Arts, London.

PRICE RANGE

The pricing is decided entirely on the size and complexity of the artwork chosen. "The bigger and more complicated the design, the more expensive it will be,"

shares Kanika, who accounts for both the material used, and the time and effort put into creating the piece. While basic and classic art like initials, stripes, small motifs have pre-decided prices, The Leather Works' price range also depends on the leather type, "ranging from anywhere between INR 3,499 to INR 1,00,000," shares Sanjana.

DAMAGE CONTROL

About the safety measures in effect, Kanika states, "I have never damaged a bag till date, and I don't



foresee it ever happening. But, I do send out a document with care instructions and terms of service." She adds that the document provides detailed information on their method of operation, how to clean the bag and most importantly, how to prevent damage. The Studio Project is currently working on a collection of hand-painted jackets with designer Arjun Khanna.

INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

"My most favourite association was Louis Vuitton's very first collaboration with Stephen Prouse, the neon flower bags – it added so much character and colour to their signature brown totes," says Kanika whose international inspiration happens to be London-based artist, Boyarde and the US-based Alec Monopoly, "whose graffiti style makes the bag a total statement piece with his pop art cartoon imagery and neon colors." While Gupta's team is also inspired by Monopoly's work on Birkins, "we are truly inspired by Banksy and his art," shares Gupta who recently recreated 'Napoleon Crossing the Alps' – a Jacques-Louis David painting on a Louis Vuitton Brown Monogram Laptop Bag.

WHATS TRENDING?

Throwing light on the current trends, Sanjana shares, "What we see now is more about Richie Rich showing off his wealth in different ways, the expensive cars, the Joker, artwork related to travel and famous TV shows. There are floral patterns for women and also iconic characters like Audrey Hepburn with some quirky quotes."



Neat monogramming on a Michael Kors by The Leather Works



Boyarde Messenger paints Darth Vader on a Goyard Limited Edition Trunk

TEXT: ANKITA RATHOD