

The Art of Luxury

The theme of this edition is “luxury”. But how can I literally define luxury in art? According to Webster’s dictionary, luxury is “a state of great comfort” or “extravagant living”. Art then by its very nature is the epiphany of luxury for me as I indulge in exhibitions that require a significant amount of time, passion and resources to curate.

STORY BY Deborah Iskandar

Generally when analyzing luxury, we can firstly consider the use of luxurious materials within the art piece or form. Since ancient times artisans used precious materials such as gold leaf, gem stones as well as rare minerals, colors and pigments for the creation of art.

The art of gilding, in which gold leaves are applied to objects, can date back to over 3,000 years ago. During the time of the pharaohs, gold was considered the “flesh” of the Gods. Gold items were found in great quantities inside the pyramids and its funeral objects. The most prominent was the tomb of King Tut, the boy king. When Henry Carter first discovered his tomb there was a sealed doorway that protected a wall of gold.

The treasures stored in the tomb were of immeasurable value, intended to accompany the Pharaoh on his journey into the afterlife. The tomb held jewelry, amulets, furniture, musical instruments and royal insignia. These objects were produced by skilled artisans using the most precious materials including ebony, alabaster, precious stones and of course gold. The culmination of all this splendor was King Tut’s death mask, whose beauty and elegance surpassed anything ever seen before.



Deborah Iskandar

Art Consultant

In this Art in Design section of Indonesia Design, **Deborah Iskandar** shares her knowledge and love for art. Regarded as a pioneer in the auction world in South East Asia, she knows how to navigate the current evolving market trends of the Art World.

After more than 20 years’ experience collectively, within the art world, she founded her own advisory firm, ISA Art Advisory® in 2013. Being widely respected in Indonesia and Singapore ISA Art Advisory®, aims to aid buyers, sellers and collectors to approach the art world with ease and to build collections that will retain value over time.

ISA Art Advisory®
Jl. Wijaya Timur Raya
No. 12,
Jakarta 12170
t. +62 816 841 029
e. isaartadvisory@gmail.com.

The use of gilding spread throughout Asia, including Indonesia. As early as the third century AD the islands of Borneo, Java and Sumatra were known as the ‘golden islands’ to ancient explorers and traders from India and China. The earliest known large scale collection of gold objects were discovered in a field during the early 1990s. Named the “Wonoboyo hoard” this collection consists of over 1000 gold ritual vessels, coins, jewelry and sculptures. Dating from the 9th century Hindu- Buddhist period, it is believed to have belonged to a king who retired from the worldly life to become a priest. It also included works from previous dynasties, such as the famed Majapahit and Mataram kingdoms. Indonesian gold was primarily used to make objects for the *keraton*, or princely temples, and used for religious and ceremonial occasions. You can see many of the ancient gold objects in the gold room at the National Museum in Jakarta.

Beginning around the fourth century BC in China, luxury minerals such as cobalt blue were appearing in the Ming dynasty ceramics. The cobalt was imported from Persia, but was elevated to an art form in the early Chinese ceramics. The height of luxury in China was



THE ART OF LUXURY
FROM TOP

—
Girl with a Pearl Earring by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer

—
18th century Chinese vase sold for a record £53,1 million in Bainbridges auction house, UK

—
OPPOSITE PAGE

—
King Tut’s death mask



during the reign of the Emperor Qinglong. Qinglong had workshops to challenge artisans to create artworks of many forms and techniques including ceramics, lacquer, ivory and many other materials. Qinglong also combined materials such as cobalt and gold leaf on ceramics to incorporate both western and oriental elements.

In the Western art world, the use of luxury materials flourished during the Renaissance era, from the fourteenth to seventeenth century AD. We observe luxury materials in sculptures, such as the use of Carrara marble in Michaelangelo’s David in 1504. Lapis Lazuli a

COURTESY OF THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC.



THE ART OF LUXURY
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

— Diamond Dust Shoes (Random) (1980) by Andy Warhol; acrylic, silkscreen ink, and diamond dust on linen; 228.6 x 177.8 cm

— Gorgonia II (2014) by Timothy Horn; nickel-plated bronze, mirrored blown glass; 152.4 x 91.44 cm

— Toubou (2014) by Jason Martin; gold leaf and mixed media on aluminium; 56 x 32 cm

— Martin Jason Oeiras (2013) by Jason Martin; Pigment on aluminium (Quinacridone magenta); 88 x 64 cm

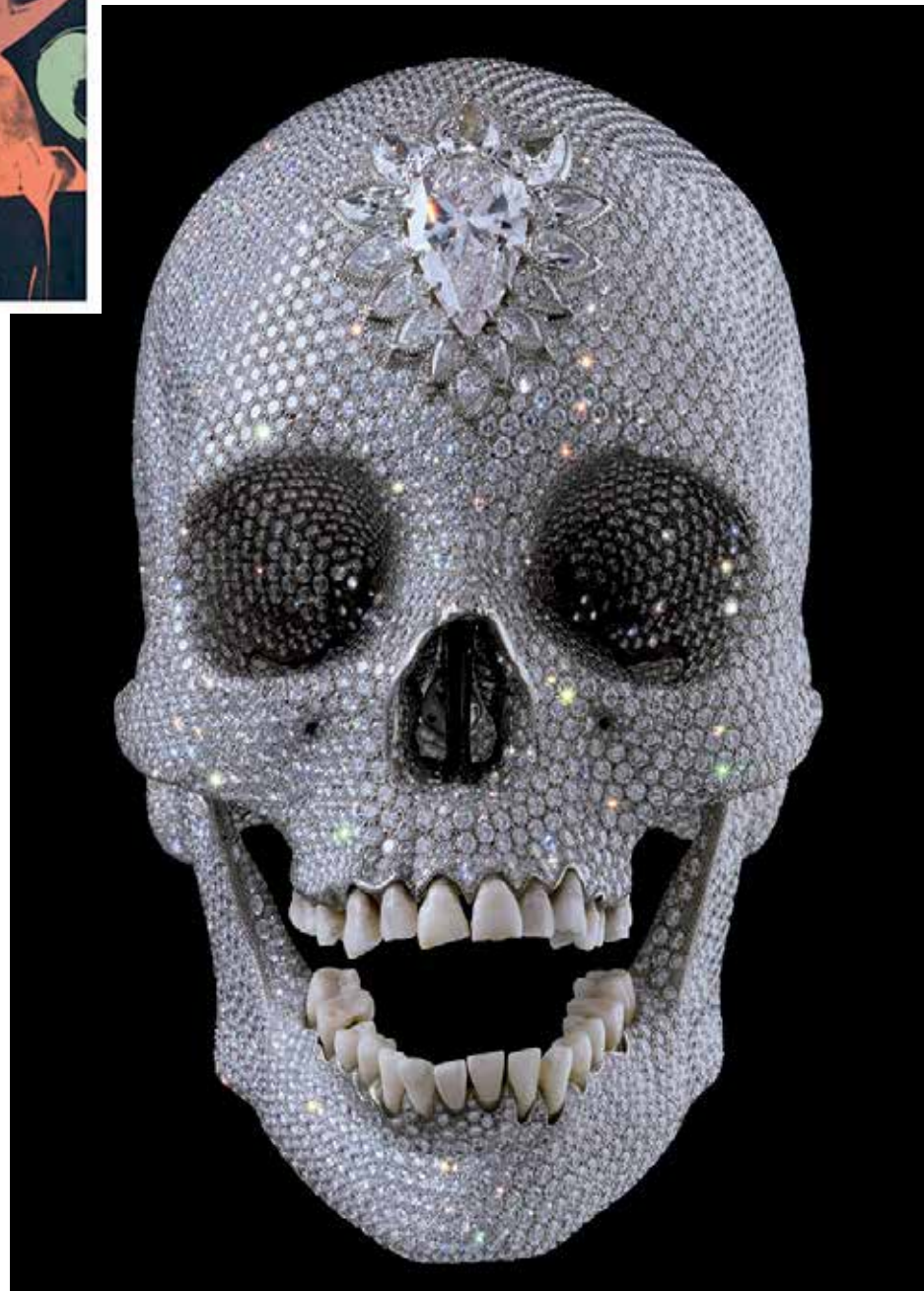
— For the Love of God (2007) by Damien Hirst; platinum, diamonds and human teeth; 171 x 127 x 191 mm

of a few contemporary artists. But this time, they are positioned as a satire to luxury: Andy Warhol, the voice of consumerism and excess, incorporated diamond dust in his 'Diamond Dust' screen prints series. He glittered the arrangement of ladies footwear with diamond dusts and arranged them as if they had been spilled onto the floor with their toes pointed toward the center of the image. He also used diamond dust in his candies. This use of diamond dust heightens the sense of glamour, fashion, and money - three things that Warhol coveted.

rare paint pigment was used by the important Renaissance painters such as Vermeer and Titian. The artists of this period also illustrated luxury elements such as jewels and the pearl earrings in the paintings to depict the enormous wealth of the patrons of the arts. The Amber room installed in the Catherine Palace of Russia took the concept of luxury to a new level. It was an entire study of Amber panels, and was called the 9th wonder of the world. The display of wealth by early kings and queens cannot be replicated again, but thankfully it is preserved in museums for us to enjoy.

As the world modernized, and the during rise of industrialization, there was a move away from luxury materials in art and focus shifted on to the maker (brand), be it artist or artisan. Starting in the mid-1800's there was the establishment of luxury goods companies such as Cartier and Louis Vuitton. You also had the rise of the modern art dealers, such as Henry Duveen who sold paintings to the titians of industry. Correspondingly, there was a move away from the use of luxury materials in art to the appreciation of ideas, concepts, and free thinking.

Recently, these materials have found their way back to the art world in the hands



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND P.P.O.W GALLERY, NEW YORK



MARKWOODS.COM, COURTESY OF GALERIE FORSBLOM



Following the footsteps of Warhol, in 2007, Damien Hirst encrust 8,601 flawless diamonds onto an 18th-century human skull. The highlight was a rare pear-shaped pink diamond located in the skull's forehead, one that is known as the 'Skull Star Diamond'. The value of the materials used in the artwork was \$20,000,000, but the work which entitled 'For the Love of God', sold for around \$100,000,000 to a consortium of investors, not collectors. This is Damien's folly of the current state of the art market.



COURTESY OF GALERIE FORSBLOM

At the Armory Art Show in March, I discovered the use of luxury materials in contemporary artworks. Jason Martin (who is listed as one of the 50 artist under 50 to collect by Art and Auction magazine) created his signature pigment painting using gold leaf. The gold shimmers in the valley of the paintings and creates a richness not usually observed within the realm of contemporary art.

Another interesting work that I found at the Armory show is a giant jewel sculpture by Timothy Horn. The work is part of Horn's series that begun in 2007. Horn made the pearls from hand blown glass on bronze armatures. Resembling antique 16th century

jewelry, this work draws inspiration from Horn's visit to the Pitti Palace. Horn feels that the Renaissance style is in tune with the late 20th-century gay culture discussion; the muscles, the beauty and perpetual youth.

After reviewing the artworks through the ages, I stopped to reflect. As an avid art collector, advisory and overall art addict, what does luxury in art mean? Our original premises, luxury is a "state of great comfort", is true. BUT the luxury of art is not always about the physical materials the artworks consists of - I think the true luxury of art lies in the richness of sharing it with friends or contemplating its inspiration during quiet enjoyment. 10