

## Counterfeits & Luxury Markets

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Summary by Zach Sicco

Having that new Louis Vuitton or Gucci bag is the quintessential addition to your outfit. Many of us, however, do not have the money for such pieces. Our desire to have and show off such pieces drives us to purchase low-priced knockoffs or counterfeit goods, creating a multibillion dollar industry. Ariele Elia, assistant curator of the Museum at FIT, presented the dark world of this part of the fashion industry and explained her most recent exhibit “Faking It: Originals, Copies, and Counterfeits”.

In the fashion industry there is always the copying of styles and designs, which led to knockoffs of certain highly desired pieces. There are two types of knockoff pieces: authorized and unauthorized copies. A clear example of this, highlighted in the exhibit, is the two identical looking Coco Chanel suits from the 1966. They look exactly the same from a distance, but the true detail in construction can distinguish the original from the licensed copy. Copies are not as good quality as the originals. Problems that many haute couture designers have with people copying extends from exposure by the press and even the workers selling the designs and garments from the factory. To protect the authenticity of their designs, many haute couture designers look to their labels for defense. Paul Poiret signed his labels, Madeleine Vionnet used her thumbprint, and Christian Dior had “trademark” expressed on his label. Many designers even go to court today over copyright infringement. One example of this was with Dapper Dan, with his luxury logo-covered clothes, who was sued for infringement of use of trademarked logos. Despite all of these efforts for protection, counterfeits and copying still exists. Copying fashion is highly rampant in the United States due to the absence of laws that protect fashion. Trademark laws only protect the labels, logos, and prints. This allows fast fashion stores such as H&M, Zara, and Forever 21 to function. Laws in Europe, however, are much more strict, especially in France where purchasing a counterfeit item or simply wearing one could result in a 300,000 euro fine and three years in jail. This protection is why many fashion houses are located in Europe. Satirical parodies such as Lichtenberg’s “Homies” collection and Moschino’s “M” collection ride the fine line of these laws.

The counterfeit industry is a \$600 billion dollar industry. It’s no longer just limited to back-alley deals that occur in places like Canal Street in New York; it has expanded vastly due to the Internet. Numerous websites are created to sell “extreme” sales of these luxury (counterfeit) goods. Even eBay at one point was affected by this market with about 70% of its Tiffany jewelry being counterfeit. The IACC has been set up to protect and monitor the Internet from counterfeits through their efforts with RogueBlock. A new threat, however, has entered the market with the emergence of “Super Fakes”, which are counterfeits that are so well done that they are hard to identify as fake due to their use of authentic pieces and high quality construction. To combat this problem a company called Entropy has developed a handheld microscopic photo device to take pictures of the surface textures of the authentic pieces, which can be used to compare against questionable pieces with tremendous success. The biggest ethical issue with the counterfeit industry is not that they are copying designs, but the fact that it has been proven to be sponsoring terrorism and the drug industry. It also involves child labor. People’s desire for luxury goods at a cheap price is what drives this counterfeit and knockoff industry. Laws should be enacted to help protect designs, but to ultimately stop this industry the consumer mindset must change and realize the value of quality and supporting the designers who create the designs.