

Homes & Property Exhibition

homesandproperty.co.uk with Zoopla

Is luxury quality or cost? Who knows, asks **Corinne Julius** at a new V&A exhibition

LONDON has become home to some of the world's wealthiest people in recent years. We are surrounded by images of opulent homes and sumptuous interiors, expensive branded clothes and cars.

While we all have personal views on what is luxurious, we have all, to some extent, been "persuaded" by popular views of splendour. Recent American research has shown that if we know something is expensive and branded as luxurious, our brains perceive it as more lavish.

High-end brands have fought long and hard to persuade us that buying their products confers exclusivity. But as Guy Salter, deputy chairman of luxury brand association Walpole, states, there is a "discernment curve" whereby branded products become less appealing when sold to a wider base of consumers.

So what is luxury? For some, privacy has become the ultimate luxury. For busy people, it is time. A joint exhibition between the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Crafts Council, titled What is Luxury? and opening at the V&A, sets out to challenge popular assumptions on the subject.

"As its title suggests, the exhibition questions the very idea of luxury today," says Jana Scholze, V&A curator of contemporary furniture and co-curator of the show. "We didn't want to offer a definition, but rather to stimulate discussion."

Scholze and her co-curator, visiting research fellow Leanne Wierzba, have ensured that this is not just a galaxy of golden objects, branded bling and familiar luxury items, or even beautiful objects from the V&A's collection.

There are some wonderful historical works, including textiles, a bejewelled snuffbox, a silver howdah and a

WHAT IS LUXURY?



Precious metals: the Golden Fleece Headpiece took 2,500 hours to make



Everyone's cup of tea: metal worker Simone ten Hompel's silver spoons



Hairway to heaven: Studio Swine's Hair Highway, with human hair set in resin to create colourful accessories



Timeless: George Daniels's Second Space Traveller Watch, inspired by the first moon landing in 1969

golden crown, but the underlying ideas are mostly illustrated by work from contemporary designers and makers, with a number of important new commissioned pieces.

"The show reveals the stories and craftsmanship behind the exquisite and intriguing objects on display and demonstrates the skills invested to produce them," says Wierzba.

There are four sections – Creating Luxury, A Space for Time, A Future for Luxury and What is Your Luxury?

Creating Luxury looks at the time and skills involved. As well as historical objects, the section features modern works such as the sculptural positive mould Bone Chaise (2006) by Joris Laarman, made using software inspired by the biology of human bones, and silver spoons from Simone ten Hompel's The Stuff of Memory exhibition (2010).

Time taken to make an object – and the maker's passion – are illustrated by pieces such as Giovanni Corvaja's Golden Fleece Headpiece (1999), a gold and platinum wire hat that took 2,500 hours to make, and Chung Hae-Cho's Five Lacquer Bowls (2013).

Ever more crucial and seemingly unobtainable luxuries in the 21st century are examined in A Space for Time, featuring George Daniels's Second Space Traveller Watch, while A Future for Luxury looks at the relationship between value and materials, as the world changes and the latter become scarce.

It features objects such as Hair Highway (2014) by Studio Swine, with human hair set in resin to create decorative pieces of furniture and accessories, in a material reminiscent in colour of exclusive materials such as tortoiseshell, horn and exotic wood.

This free, thought-provoking exhibition examines luxury in its broadest sense and raises questions that visitors might not expect in a decorative arts museum.

■ What is Luxury? From Saturday to September 27, The Porter Gallery, V&A.
 ■ Designers in the show include Max Lamb (maxlamb.org); Marcin Rusak (marcinrusak.com); Simone ten Hompel (tenhompel.com); Studio Drift (studio drift.com) and 1660 (1660london.com). Many will work to commission.