

The digital-only dress "Iridescence" sells for US\$9,500.



**You can never be
seen wearing this
clothing in public**

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As digital models walked on a virtual runway last month when Shanghai Fashion Week was moved online, the message was clear: The era of cyber fashion has arrived.

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Some may view all this as marketing hype, but signs abound that digital clothing is here to stay and is making its mark in the industry among a younger generation habituated with the metaverse.

It's a trend that accelerated during the outbreak of COVID-19, when many fashion brands paused physical catwalk shows and turned to short films or virtual showrooms to release their seasonal collections.

In cyberspace, people can create, wear and trade virtual garments. Designers produce clothing that may exist or may not, using 3D software and computer-generated imaging technologies to yield super-realistic visual effects.

Cashmere, leather, or even water or fire. You can choose the material of clothing and add surreal touches, such as hooked barbs all over the body or a giant metal mermaid's tail.

Last year Gucci worked with the tech company Wanna and released its Virtual 25 digital sneakers, selling for only US\$12. That compared with Gucci's actual men's sneakers priced at around US\$800.

You can take photos or make videos featuring virtual footwear because technology can scan photo, find your feet and slip on virtual shoes. The

design of those shoes can be modified and shared on social networks. In fact, they are like real shoes except that you can't wear them down the street.

"Self-expression and the feeling of self-satisfaction will continue to be as important as the need for self-fulfillment and are part of our innate human nature," said Yanie Durocher, founder of Pom-pom Platform and co-founder of SanPOM Platform, which focuses on digital clothing.

For the generation born after 1995, "second lives" online have become important, and fashion adds to cyber-image. Many young people spend up to eight hours a day online, creating a parallel life that often blurs the boundary between reality and fantasy.

"I believe there will be less distinction between the physical and digital world," Durocher said. "Real vs unreal becomes irrelevant. Every person on the planet can have the chance to express themselves, no matter their race, gender or social status."

As one of the pioneers of digital fashion, SanPOM opened its Chinese official account on the popular social network Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book).

There, computer-generated models clad in a variety of fabrics and other materials strut with impossible sheen on virtual runways that may be under the stars, deep in the sea or in a glittering ballroom.

SanPOM has a mix of designers. Some have worked only on digital outfits and have never handled actual fabrics; others have experience in the real world of fashion and are venturing into cyberspace for the first time.

"Our 3D specialists create digital copies of 'real'