

Art Basel Miami Beach

Dwyane Wade Sneakers, Hennessy, and the Mass Commercialism of Art Basel Miami Beach

By Francisco Alvarado Fri., Dec. 5 2014 at 1:05 PM

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"The Third Element" on display at the Ritz-Carlton Residences Miami Beach sales center.

Inside a storefront with blacked out windows on Collins Avenue and 6th Street, footwear designer to the hip-hop elite Jon Buscemi is chatting up a tall man with dreadlocks past his shoulders dressed in all black, including a black Canadian Mountie-style hat and a fresh pair of black old school Air Jordan sneakers that were originally released in 1991, the year Michael Jordan won his first NBA championship with the Chicago Bulls. But the Jordans, a sold out limited edition run released during the Thanksgiving weekend that fetch more than \$350 on eBay, were not the most expensive sneakers on display.

In fact, you can't even put a price on the all-calf leather brown kicks Buscemi unveiled Thursday for an intimate gathering of guests who got a first peek at his collaboration with cognac maker Hennessy. That's because the shoes are not for sale. Through the remainder of Art Basel weekend, Buscemi is giving away the sneakers to about 100 close friends and clients, including a few undisclosed celebrities. They will also receive matching leather coasters, leather snapback caps, leather tote bags, and a leather porter shaped to hold a Hennessy V.S.O.P Privilege bottle. (Gotta keep a pimp game strong!)

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Dwyane Wade teamed up with fashion designer Alejandro Ingelmo to create "The Third Element."

"Limited edition is a term that is thrown around a lot now," Buscemi tells Cultist. "This is really limited and exclusive in a real way because you have to be invited to partake in the products."

The Hennessy-sponsored event illustrates how corporate and brand promotions have reached ridiculously insane levels during Art Basel week where showing off kicks the average Joe sneakerhead can't buy is considered high-brow art. Indeed, sneaker culture has even transcended the style pages of the *New York Times*. In a June story, the *Gray Lady* proclaimed:

"The once ungentlemanly sneaker, it seems, has undergone a fashion baptism. The distinction between dress and athletic shoes is on the verge of collapse for fashion-forward men, as the humble gym shoe has outgrown its youth-culture/streetwear origins to become a fashion accessory, as well as a staple on runways, red carpets and in the workplace, where it is no longer considered the height of quirk to wear them with a suit."



KirillWasHere.com

Jon Buscemi shows off his limited edition Hennessy sneaker.

That sense of style was abundant on Tuesday night, when Miami Heat star Dwyane Wade hosted a carnival-themed party inside the sales center for the Ritz Carlton Residences at Miami Beach for the launch of his new Li-Neng sneaker by fashion designer Alejandro Ingelmo. Dubbed the "Third Element," the shoe's price tag is \$325 and can only be purchased at exclusive retailers like the shop at The Webster Hotel in Miami Beach.

Ritz-Carlton Residences Developer Ophir Sternberg was rocking a pair of all black "Third Element" shoes with his black two-piece suit.

Amid acrobats climbing up a curtain to the ceiling and tumblers inside life-size beach balls, Wade led guests into a dark room where he screened a four-minute "art" film Ingelmo made depicting the creative process that went behind the "Third Element." Think Frankenstein's monster because the shoe is butt ugly.

Buscemi's creation is more refined and in line with his brand of luxury sneakers (retail prices start at \$800) that he launched last year. Some of his star customers include 2 Chainz and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs. Handcrafted in Civitanova, Italy, Buscemi's kicks are made from full grain calf leather, hand painted edges, and 24 karat gold locks that are clipped to the arch of the shoes. The Hennessy versions, as well as the matching leather goods, are embroidered with the company's name.

"This project starts and ends at Art Basel," said Buscemi, who has been coming to Miami for Art Basel since 2005. "We have about 20 or 30 musicians and influential people coming into this space in the next three days to receive their products."

Art Basel's evolution from an exclusive art event to one that is driven by mass commercialism wasn't lost on Buscemi. "When I came down originally in 2005, it was a much smaller, intimate vibe," he said. "Now it's a little bit more robust. There are a lot more corporations involved. It's a bigger stage now."