

A Fashion Week for Everyone



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Designers Najva Sol and Nicole Vaunt at Launch NYC *Ramsay de Give* for *The Wall Street Journal*

By

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Feb. 4, 2014 10:02 p.m. ET

Later this week, all eyes will be on the runways at Lincoln Center for [Mercedes-Benz](#) Fashion Week. But in the Flatiron District, a group of designers and fashion-types are setting up shop on their own, with the public and the environment in mind.

Sixteen burgeoning designers will showcase their collections from Wednesday through Feb. 12 at Launch NYC at 55 W. 17th St. There, the events are open to the public.

"You don't have to just stand outside and watch fabulous people walk in and out. It's much more than that

now. You can actually be a part of the experience," said Bob Bland, the founder and CEO of Manufacture New York.



Launch NYC is targeted to fashion lovers, bloggers and shoppers. Ms. Bland expects upward of 10,000 attendees for the week. The project is an offshoot of Manufacture New York, a fashion incubator and factory with a mission to "reawaken and rebuild America's fashion industry."

Local manufacturing is a unifying thread among the participating designers and the basis of Manufacture New York. Designers face lower fees at Launch NYC than they would at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, thus alleviating some of the financial risk involved with garment making in New York City.

Designers Nicole Vaunt and Najva Sol will debut their Vaunt & Sol unisex and women's brand, which looks to be based on flowing, airy designs and luxurious, earthy textiles, on the runway on Wednesday.

"We want to be engaged with the established system, but because we're doing it with Manufacture New York and Launch NYC and we're talking about sustainability and serious issues alongside of it that are not just about the clothes, we really hope that we will be at the forefront of change," Ms. Sol said.

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Bob Bland, founder and CEO of Manufacture New York
Ramsay de Give for The Wall Street Journal

The fall fashion season is kicking off in New York. Even though Lincoln Center is still the official home for the shows, designers are staging an exodus to the city's downtown hot spots. "On Style" columnist Christina Binkley explains.
Photo: Getty.

Since they formed their label, Ms. Vaunt and Ms. Sol have dealt with ethical questions, ranging from factory labor practices to the environmental sustainability of textiles and manufacturing processes.

The result is an economic dilemma. Ecologically sustainable fabrics and fair wages for factory workers come with out-of-reach price points than do synthetic fabrics and less humane working conditions overseas.

"No one is making money on any level and no one is responsible enough to make decisions to ensure we have a sustainable future," Ms. Vaunt said. "That's what we love about Manufacture New York. We feel very fortunate to have gotten in at this stage, even though it is still in flux."



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Model Vinca Minor *Ramsay de Give* for *The Wall Street Journal*

"It's a gamble, but we want to gamble with them because we believe in it," Ms. Sol said.

Many of the designers cut their teeth as apprentices in major fashion houses.

Womenswear and jewelry designer Sheena Sood worked in fashion for almost seven years before taking a long trip to India. She had no intention of launching her own label, Abacaxi, but returned to New York with unique embroideries from Rajasthan and Delhi.

"That's what inspired me to start my line when I came back," Ms. Sood said.

The independent designer will showcase her second collection, which features geometric wool fabric interwoven with a gold metallic raffia-like yarn, a bright silk handloom stripe fabric and bold, custom hand-woven patches.

Ms. Sood sourced her textiles both directly from a weaver she met in India and through Shrujan, an India-based NGO, then had the materials made into clothing in Manhattan's Garment District.



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Model Sani Bimta *Ramsay de Give* for *The Wall Street Journal*

Fine jewelry designer Cristina Giovanna Gabriele will showcase her brand, Heart and Noble, with a conceptual runway show. In an effort to combat "design blindness," her first collection is based on cable ties manifested in laser-cut acrylic. Clothing designer Gita Omri will feature Ms. Gabriele's precious metal line.

"This is the remit of the creative pursuit: to find beauty in the mundane, to reinterpret the ordinary in such a way that it merits a second look," Ms. Gabriele said.

Beyond a consistent design ethos, Launch NYC will offer its visitors—buyers and the public alike—a retail showroom to shop for the designs featured in the shows under the same roof as the runway.

"Why whisk away the garments when you just showed them in all their glory and then have no way to see them?" Ms. Bland posed.

Next season, Ms. Bland said it behooves Manufacture New York to continue with Launch NYC and a

permanent showroom in a yet-to-be-determined location.

Other independent shows are happening around the city, such as combined fashion and music shows at the Fest for Beatles Fans beginning on Friday, and Helpsy and the Deep End Club's Slow Fashion celebration at Market 605 on Saturday.

Fashion Week, Ms. Bland said, is "a beautiful, fabulous circus. It's a spectacle; we need to preserve this in New York City."