

BUSINESS / RETAIL

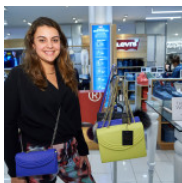
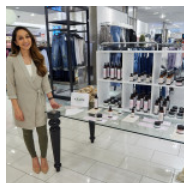
Macy's Workshop Instructs Minority and Female-Owned Brands

The program added a showcase for participants to sell their products at Macy's.

By [David Moin](#) on April 27, 2017



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It was back to school this week for Urte Tylaite, a fine-jewelry designer, but this time the classroom was Macy's Herald Square, in the auditorium on the 16th floor.

"I was taking so many notes and then Macy's handed us this big binder with so much more information," said Tylaite, who runs the Still House fine-jewelry brand and store at 117 East 7th Street in Manhattan.

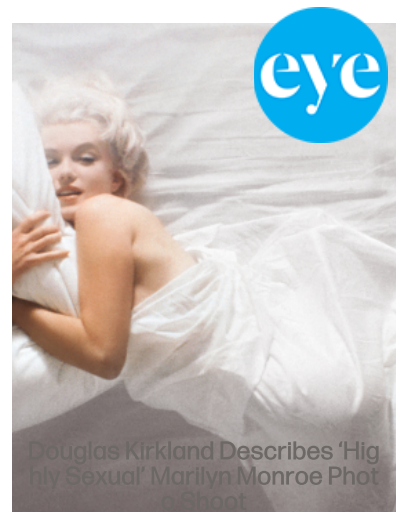
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She was describing The Workshop at Macy's, an annual four-and-a-half-day crash course for minority or female-owned businesses. It covers a range of subjects, from branding and budgeting, to logistics and communicating with buyers, with the goal of teaching small businesses how to sell big retailers. There are no tests, just a heavy dose of instruction and learning for those seeking to grow their businesses.

"I met so many people from Macy's and really learned how to analyze sales, how to do projections, about the merchant-vendor relationship and how to communicate with buyers most efficiently," Tylaite said.

The Workshop at Macy's is in its seventh year and this time raised its profile by staging a one-day, 600-square-foot showcase on the fourth floor of the Herald Square flagship last Wednesday. The showcase put the spotlight on this year's 11 Workshop participants and their products, and gave the public a chance to experience their brands, mostly for the first time and engage with the entrepreneurs. With a band, refreshments, Macy's executives and friends and family on hand, it felt like graduation day was happening on the selling floor.

"Each year the program has evolved, but this year we really brought it to life for customers," said Tim Baxter, Macy's chief merchandising officer. "It's become a regular part of what we do at Macy's, which is to support small and upcoming vendors."

"We have 11 amazing vendors with amazing stories and amazing products," said Jeff Gennette, Macy's chairman and chief executive officer, at the Workshop showcase. Without the program, Gennette noted, "Frankly, they wouldn't have had a shot at selling Macy's."

The Workshop program gives them a leg up, but offers no guarantee they make the Macy's vendor matrix. In seven years, Workshop has graduated 101 vendors, 10 of whom have become, as a direct result of the program, ongoing suppliers to Macy's or Bloomingdale's, both divisions of Macy's Inc. The corporation views The Workshop as an opportunity to pick up some fresh products to sell.

"I really feel the program filled a void on the back end, with things like logistics. It will help get us to the next level," said Lisa Vogel, founder and director of the Verona Collection, which offers modest attire for the Muslim community. "It's simple,

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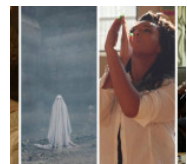
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elegant, classic design in soft earth-tone palettes at affordable prices,” said Vogel, who was among this year’s Workshop participants. The Verona company, based in Orlando, Fla., and London, offers items ranging from a \$9.94 hijab to an \$84.95 chiffon dress, and runs a web site and a store in Orlando. “Our products can be purchased by anyone,” Vogel said. “We are trying to get into a major department store. This program did give us the tools we need. There is no Muslim brand in any U.S. department store.”



Verona Collection cofounders Lisa Vogel and Nadine Abu-Jubara graduated The Workshop at Macy’s. Kent Miller

Ramon Travieso, the Cuban-born founder of Habana Coffee and another of this year’s Workshop participants, poured cups of his coffee for the crowd. He sells two flavors of Cuban-style coffee, Havana Nights and Santiago de Cuba, using coffee beans from Nicaragua and New Guinea. “The Workshop program gives me the opportunity to possibly get into the store. It’s a very big thing for a small minority business. It was so helpful. I learned about shipping, receiving, ordering — you name it. They covered the entire process from beginning to end.”

“It’s an M.B.A. in four-and-a-half days,” said Matthew “Mateo” Harris, founder of fine-jewelry brand Mateo New York, who participated in Workshop a few years ago. “I learned how to run a business on a large-scale platform.”

For The Workshop at Macy’s, “We receive 600 to 1,000 applications each year in September,” said Shawn Outler, Macy’s senior vice president of lease, pricing and multicultural initiatives. “We interview candidates for the program in March,

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and there is a 2 percent acceptance rate. We are very selective. The business has to be based in the U.S. It has to have great product. It has to be unique, and has to add value to our selling floor,” he said.

The other participants in The Workshop this year were:

- Thirty One Bits jewelry/lifestyle brand made by Uganda and Indonesia artisans.
- Courtney Noelle plus-size clothing “attitude” designed by ceo Courtney Smith.
- Kálos Skin natural/organic skin care, founded by Nadia Babar, and partners with nonprofit groups to educate and liberate girls around the world.
- Lauren Cecchi accessories and handbags for day into night created by ceo Lauren Cecchi and made in N.Y.’s Garment District.
- Liz and Roo luxury infant bedding made by sewing artisans in Kentucky.
- Rebdolls fashion-forward styles for women sizes zero to 32, founded by Griselangel Paula, a former plus-size model.
- Tejido luxury knitwear and accessories using South American artisans to preserve indigenous traditions and led by designer Shanti Rackley.
- That’s Smooth personal-care products founded by ceo Miguel Martinez so ethnic and multicultural men can shave without irritation or razor bumps.



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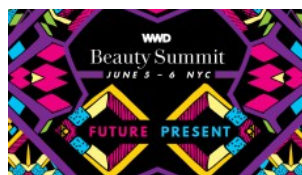
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