

RETAIL

Net-A-Porter spotlights sustainable brands with latest Vanguard selections

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Artclub is one of the brands named to Net-A-Porter's mentorship program, The Vanguard. Image courtesy of Net-A-Porter

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Online retailer Net-A-Porter has announced the emerging brands joining The Vanguard mentorship program for the upcoming fall/winter season, as talent showcases become increasingly essential for fashion platforms to reach new customers.

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For the fifth iteration of The Vanguard, the designers behind Artclub, JiaJia and MinjuKim will receive guidance about the fashion business from Net-A-Porter's global team of specialists. Luxury ecommerce platforms such as Net-A-Porter have turned to emerging talent programs to help support designers while differentiating their own offerings.

"It is more important than ever to support emerging designers now," said Elizabeth von der Goltz, global buying director at Net-A-Porter. "It has been so difficult for new brands to show with buyers not being to travel and see shows and visit showrooms.

"To be able to give these emerging brands a global audience to help them showcase their talent and help them navigate these difficult times is more important than ever," she said.

Fashionable support

The Vanguard debuted in September 2018, and has since identified emerging designers twice a year along the traditional cycle of the fashion calendar. In addition to being sold on Net-A-Porter's ecommerce site, the brands benefit from a mentorship experience.

Participating designers are able to use resources from Net-A-Porter, and are able to ask advice from the retailer's president, legal team, marketing department, public relations division and social media department. The spring/summer 2020 class included Christopher John Rogers, Gauchere, Ioannes and S. Joonhouses ([see story](#)).

For the fall, Artclub and JiaJia will be new and exclusive additions to Net-A-Porter. MinjuKim will debut its second exclusive collection, after its Seoul-based designer won Netflix's Next In Fashion competition, which was sponsored by the retailer ([see story](#)).

Net-A-Porter introduces the fall/winter 2020 Vanguard class

Each of the brands are led by women: Australia's Heidi Middleton is the founder and creative director of Artclub Jia-Jia Zhu is the founder and creative director of her jewelry line JiaJia; and Minju Kim is the founder and creative director of her eponymous label.

Furthermore, the brands reflect Net-A-Porter's values of sustainability and artisanship. In 2019, the retailer launched a vertical dedicated to environmentally-conscious offerings, Net Sustain ([see story](#)).

For instance, Artclub is an apparel brand with a focus on sustainability. The limited-run pieces are made locally, which minimizes carbon emissions, using recycled fabrics.

The fine jewelry from JiaJia is made with uncut and untreated crystals that are hand-selected for unique necklaces, bracelets and rings. Ms. Kim's designs, including feminine dresses and coats, are a whimsical take on haute couture.



JiaJia is a hand-crafted crystal jewelry line. Image courtesy of Net-A-Porter

Net-A-Porter is also supporting the Vanguard launches with a multichannel campaign spanning video, social media and email marketing.

In the campaign film, shoppers can hear from the designers themselves and learn about their experiences as a designers as well as the inspirations behind their work. The women also discuss how the current global climate has impacted them this year.

Identifying talent

Net-A-Porter is not alone in supporting emerging talent through mentorship programs.

At its peak, department store chain Barneys New York had also differentiated itself by working with up-and-coming designers. However, the prominence of upscale ecommerce retailers, such as Net-A-Porter, hampered this strategy ([see story](#)).

In 2017, competitor MatchesFashion created the Innovators program to showcase and encourage a broader dialogue with a series of new names. MatchesFashion has released its 2020 list of The Innovators as the London-based online retailer offers support to menswear and womenswear designers whose progress is threatened by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic ([see story](#)).

Supporting designers has become more important as many small and independent brands are struggling amid the pandemic.

"We need to continue to provide a platform for all emerging talent as they are the future of our industry," Ms. von der Goltz said. "The Net-A-Porter shopper is interested in the latest brands so giving them a chance to be included in the Vanguard program provides them a global audience and mentorship from an early stage in their business."