

# Gen Art Looks to Corporate Brands and Second Cities to Build Membership

Gen Art is currently working with three corporate brands — American Express, Chase and Wedge HR.

By [Rosemary Feitelberg](#) on June 8, 2021



📷 Designs from Ninja Monk.  
Courtesy of Gen Art

Gen Art is repositioning for post-pandemic business while staying true to helping designers ring up sales.

On Thursday, Gen Art will host a free outdoor event and fashion show at the Gray Matter Museum in Newport Beach, Calif. This year's Gen Art Fresh Faces recipient Ninja Monk will offer shoppable runway looks that guests can buy via the brand's QR codes. All of the cast and models are locals ranging in age from 16 to 60. There will also be an art installation curated by Ethos Contemporary Art gallery owner Georgeana Ireland, who is also Gen Art's new resident art director.

Ninja Monk was started by Sandra Saulnier and Helga Solrun. The former, who is lead designer, has created additional designs for models to sport in the art installations that will include paintings and images by Amber Goldhammer and David Krovblit. There will be a finale performance with the triple-platinum recording artist Luciana (of “I’m Still Hot” fame with Betty White) and DJ Glovibes. The aim is to sell Gen Art memberships to attendees that will lead to invitations to future events and offers.

Targeting secondary cities such as Newport Beach, which is in the shadow of Los Angeles, is part of Gen Art’s strategy. “A lot of people have moved a little outside of L.A. into Hudson Valley, N.Y., and are permanently staying in the Hamptons. We decided for Gen Art to come back and really make sense, we need to create memberships in second cities,” said Gen Art partner and president Keri Ingvarsson. “We still want to figure out what we’re doing in New York. We want to bring our designer in lights. But our membership base is really looking at a lot of people have moved. In Newport Beach, there are a lot of people from New York, Europe, Chicago, Miami, tons of L.A. people even though it’s 45 miles north. It’s a totally different lifestyle. Google and Spotify have opened offices here on the waterfront.”

Not interested in putting on the big event purely for the big event anymore, she said, “It’s not about putting Gen Art’s name in lights anymore. It’s about putting the brands’ [names] in lights so that they can sell clothes.”

Part of the appeal of Ninja Monk being named a Fresh Face is that they have a Los Angeles factory. While Gen Art will support the company, Ninja Monk will give Gen Art the opportunity to work with three young California brands to utilize their factory or services to create a debut collection or a new collection for those having pandemic-related production issues.

“We are an organization with a legacy. We bring industry respect and a consumer audience. We want to utilize that audience to drive fashion brands forward so that they can sell clothing,” she said.

Gen Art currently works with three corporate brands — American Express, Chase (particularly its cardholder, women and women in business programs) and Wedge HR, a tech company that specializes in video-based résumés. Using their databases, consumers are being offered incentives to become Gen Art members, which would enable them to shop for Gen Art legacy and alumni brands, personal styling sessions or attend special events online and in real life.

True to its roots of being a launchpad, Gen Art remains designer-first, selling memberships to reach its audience so that consumers will buy the fashion brands. Emphasizing the experiential and immersive, Ingvarsson said, “It’s not like come for a fashion show because it’s Newport Beach. It is on the harbor at a huge museum. It’s not fashion week. You’re not going to bring them into the house for 15 minutes. It’s three hours. We want it to be immersive. There’s a DJ. All of the artists will be wearing Ninja Monk looks, because it is gender-fluid clothing.”



Ninja Monk has a factory in Los Angeles. Courtesy of Gen Art

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After years of large-scale fashion events with corporate sponsors, Gen Art is taking a more specialized approach with the 25th anniversary for its fashion division. Noting how sponsorship was \$10 million at one point, she said that led to hiring a large staff and becoming more of an event company. “Gen Art really started as a capsule to support young talent, when a fashion program was created in 1996. It was just about unearthing this young talent it gave a real platform to, putting them in fashion week and in front of real buyers,” Ingvarsson said, naming **Zac Posen**, and **Phillip Lim** as examples.

At that time, the focus was helping the designers to sell clothes. As social media gained ground, Gen Art tried different mediums, like holding a film festival for 14 years. By 2010, the organization “was in trouble” due to its reliance on large corporate sponsors and the staffing and overhead needed to support that. “I’m part of that. I was part of the teams. I’m not talking about anyone in the past,” said.

While Gen Art is just in fashion, one of the priorities remains keeping young designers employed and getting paid, whether that is through corporate projects or other means.

Through ties to one corporate brand, Gen Art is currently looking into opportunities for Brandon Maxwell, Ingvarsson said. Any financial payment for services comes from the corporations, not the fashion designers. Instead of putting on big fashion events like runaway shows for corporate sponsors, Gen Art is developing innovative shopping opportunities for consumers, online lifestyle sessions with personable designers and other ways to make an emotional connection with shoppers, Ingvarsson said.

In addition, Gen Art is trying to give opportunities to young designers “who can make clothes, handle an audience and aren’t making clothes in their kitchen, but no one knows who they are. How do we curate, find the best brands and then get those clothes on consumers so these brands can stay in business,” she said.

Thursday’s event will be the first that Gen Art has done in more than a year. In February 2020, Gen Art did a ticketed benefit fashion show for Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way” with a few emerging fashion designers. Gen Art has had a connection with the Grammy winner’s makeup artist Sarah Tanno for about 14 years.

Looking ahead to potential tie-ins for New York Fashion Week in September that build community while marketing a brand and helps sell clothes, Ingvarsson said, “It wouldn’t be any more let’s-put-on-a-\$150,000-runway show. I want to put our time, connections, sweat equity and our money on the designers.”