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FASHION  
RUNWAY  
*Show*

NEW YORK FASHION WEEK  
SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

## WELCOME TO THE 14TH YEAR OF THE EMERGE! FASHION SHOW.

I want to sincerely thank you for being here with us. Each year, Emerge! shines a spotlight on extraordinary emerging designers, and your support has allowed this platform to grow into one of the most anticipated showcases of New York Fashion Week.

This year has not been without challenges. In today's economy, keeping an independent production like Emerge! alive takes resilience, faith, and determination. Yet through it all, we have continued — because the mission to uplift new voices in fashion is too important to ever let go.

We are especially grateful to our dedicated sponsors who have stood by us and share in our vision: Basil Hayden, Jamaican Mango & Lime, Dermablend Professional, Bennett Career Institute, D. Williams PR Group, Darling Hair, and Models Inc. Their commitment ensures that designers have the opportunity to present their work on this stage.

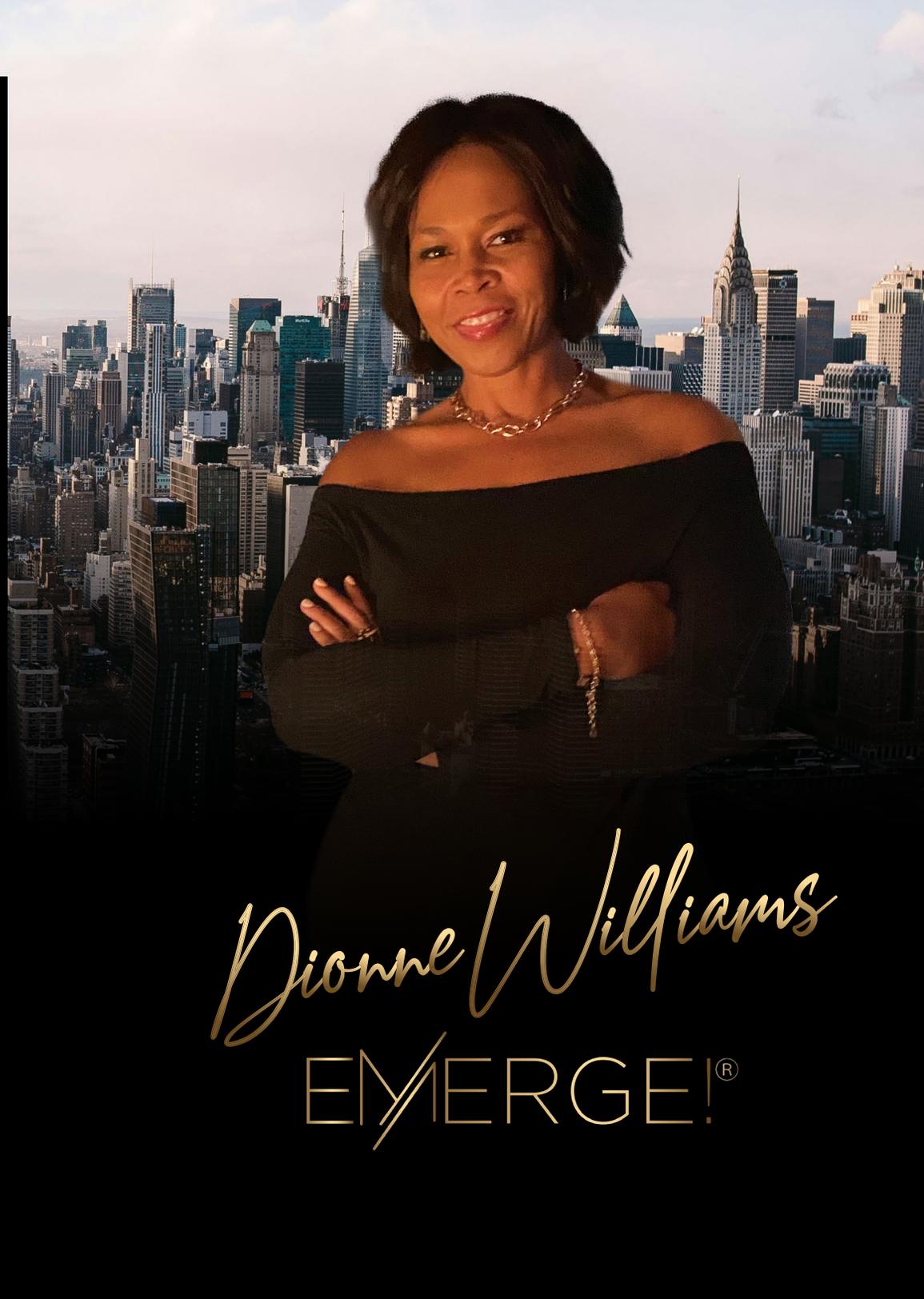
I encourage you to not only enjoy tonight's show, but also to support our designers beyond the runway — connect with them, shop with them, and help their dreams grow. Emerge! is a large production, and I am so thankful to the incredible team who makes it all possible year after year.

Over the years, we have been honored to recognize icons and trailblazers who have shaped the fashion industry, and we are proud to continue that tradition tonight.

Enjoy the energy, the creativity, and the passion of this year's Emerge! Fashion Show.

With gratitude,

**DIONNE WILLIAMS**  
Creator & Producer  
Emerge! Fashion Show



*Dionne Williams*  
EMERGE!<sup>®</sup>



The Emerge! Fashion Show is a premier platform dedicated to showcasing the work of emerging designers from across the globe. Founded with the mission to bridge the gap between aspiring designers and the fashion industry's forefront, Emerge! offers a unique opportunity for creatives to present their collections to an influential audience, including industry professionals, media, and fashion enthusiasts. The show is known for its commitment to diversity, innovation, and the celebration of new talent, providing a runway that highlights the creativity and vision of designers who might otherwise go unseen.

Over the years, Emerge! has become a springboard for many designers, offering them not only exposure but also the resources and connections necessary to advance their careers. The event has grown in scale and reputation, becoming a key fixture during New York Fashion Week and expanding its reach to include international showcases like Emerge! London. By honoring industry icons and trailblazers, the show also underscores its dedication to recognizing those who have paved the way for the next generation of fashion leaders. Emerge! continues to be a beacon of opportunity, driving the future of fashion by empowering emerging designers to make their mark on the global stage.

# FASHION INNOVATOR *Award*



**BRANDON BLACKWOOD**

Brandon Blackwood New York is a contemporary fashion brand that features accessories such as handbags and shoes as well as quickly expanding into new categories such as Ready-To-Wear.

Brandon Blackwood's philosophy centers on creating pieces that combine classic silhouettes with a modern, trendy edge. The brand uses a carefully curated palette of subtle colors, designs, and textures to craft each item, ensuring a perfect balance between contemporary appeal and high craftsmanship.

Since its inception a decade ago, Brandon Blackwood New York has been featured in top-tier fashion publications like Vogue, Vanity Fair, Forbes, Harper's Bazaar, Elle, InStyle, and WWD, marking its significant presence in the global fashion scene. The brand's success has led to its founder, Brandon Blackwood, being inducted as a member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) and included in the prestigious Time 100 Next List for 2024.

# FASHION INNOVATOR *Award*



**TY HUNTER**

Ty Hunter is a renowned fashion stylist who gained prominence for his work with Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. He was with Beyoncé for many years, creating some of her most iconic looks. He is known for his attention to detail, impeccable taste and ability to push fashion boundaries. He has also collaborated with other celebrities and worked on projects outside of styling. Ty Hunter's contributions to the fashion Industry have made him a highly respected figure in the fashion field.



## FORT MOSE 1738

Dr. Maurice Gattis is the founder and creative director/designer of Fort Mose 1738. Born and raised in Daytona Beach, Florida, Dr. Gattis designed the premiere collection in the fall of 2021. The brand is a fusion of west African textiles and western silhouettes and the ready to wear collections are made in honor of the first legally sanctioned free black community in America, Fort Mose, founded in 1738. Fort Mose 1738 has been featured in national and international magazines such as the Source, Lazin (United Kingdom), Salut Les Garcon (France), and featured on Spice TV, Fox 5 New York, and ABC 8 Richmond. The brand has been worn by celebrities including New York Times best-selling author, star of the Traitors, and winner of season 8 of RuPaul's Drag Race, Bob the Drag Queen, 2-time emmy nominated makeup artist for the Sherri Shepard Show, Rodney Jon, and reality star from Serving the Hamptons, Jodie Biasor.

Fort Mose 1738 has shown collections during Washington DC Fashion Week (3 times), Florida Mens Fashion Week in Miami, and RVA Fashion Week in Richmond, Virginia. Fort Mose 1738 will make its Paris Fashion Week debut this fall. Dr. Gattis has been nominated for rising star in menswear during RVA Fashion Week (Richmond, VA) 2 times and is also an associate professor at the VCU School of Social Work. Fort Mose 1738 is also committed to the development of emerging talent and one of the pieces for the Spring/Summer 2026 collection was designed by Chasity King, a student at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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## MALCOLM STAPLES

Malcolm Staples of Malcolm's Custom Made To Fit is one of the premier custom clothiers in the Washington DC metropolitan area. This highly acclaimed fashion designer believes in leaving no stone unturned and providing ultra luxury services as the norm not the exception.

Heavily influenced by his grandfather, a man of style, his fashion vision has been inspired by the 1950s era attributing his distinctive appeal and vintage flavor as a connection to this period.

Known for his perfectly tailored suits for both men and women, he has dressed clients globally. He has showcased at Paris Fashion Week, New York Fashion Week, Los Angeles Fashion Week, DC Fashion Week, Orlando Fashion Week, Pittsburgh Fashion Week and Atlanta Fashion Week.

His work has graced the covers of more than 175 national and international publications and editorials in over 200 magazines.

He was the winner of the Fashion and Beauty Olympics Designer Showcase sponsored by Fashion Avenue News Magazine and was named Designer of the Year by the SITA (Success In The Arts) organization and LH Luxe, Inc.

Malcolm is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University and the International Academy of Design and Technology. He is a graduate of Harvard University's Business School in Cambridge, MA.

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## MAKARASSI COUTURE

Makarassi Couture is a locally owned, family-operated fashion boutique dedicated to creating unforgettable shopping experiences. Founded by Aboul Aw, the brand combines artistry with heritage, drawing inspiration from the resilience and strength of the Toucouleur people of Senegal. Known for exceptional custom sizing, accessible pricing, and handcrafted gowns made with precision, Makarassi Couture designs embody empowerment, revolutionary self-love, and bold style. Each piece is created for the fashion warrior who isn't afraid to make a statement.



## BRODIE LEFRIDGE DEAR SYLF

Dear Sylf, is a streetwear brand redefining the energy of upcycling through emotion, artistry, and intention. The brand is known for its curated vintage garments—hand-selected Carhart and workwear pieces that are reimaged through techniques like distressing, custom dyeing, airbrushing, and patchwork. Alongside vintage, Dear Sylf, also creates customized matching sets, each one unique, each one intentional. These aren't just garments—they're time capsules turned into bold, modern-day statements.

Rooted in the DMV, the brand was born from Brodie's unexpected journey—from college baseball player to corporate professional to creative entrepreneur. "I don't consider myself a designer," he says. "I consider myself a multi-dimensional businessman." What started as a midnight idea has grown into a platform for storytelling, healing, and self-expression.

The aesthetic is raw and expressive, blending gritty nostalgia with elevated streetwear. Letters emblazoned on the back of each piece serve as affirmations—messages to the self. Reminders to keep going, to reflect, and to rise again. These wearable mantras are what inspired the name: Dear Sylf.

This September marks the debut of "Chapter One"—a collection that signals the genesis of the heights Dear Sylf is destined to reach.

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## LETWA BILLEY

Letwa Fashion embodies confidence, elegance, and sophistication. Her designs are timeless and versatile, characterized by bold prints and rich textures that effortlessly transition from day to evening, making them ideal for the modern woman.

Born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1976, Letwa was raised by her mother and grandmother. She began her academic journey with a basketball scholarship to American International College, where she completed her studies before joining the U.S. Navy. Specializing in Information Technology, Letwa quickly rose through the ranks to become a Naval Officer. After 25 years of dedicated service, she retired in November 2024 as a Commander, alongside her husband, Gavin, and their two sons, Travis and Joseph.

In 2016, while balancing her military career and motherhood, Letwa discovered a passion for redesigning clothing she purchased online, transforming it into unique, functional pieces. What started as a personal hobby quickly evolved into a professional pursuit, as her designs garnered attention and demand. This led to the founding of Letwa Fashion Collection in 2017. Letwa creates her collections using the finest hand-picked fabrics to craft statement pieces that combine both style and practicality. Each design is crafted with the intention of highlighting the wearer's unique beauty and confidence. Letwa Fashion offers custom-made designs for women of all ages and sizes, ensuring that every piece is a perfect fit.

Letwa currently resides in Virginia, where she continues to grow her brand and inspire women through her work.

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## SUZETTE OPARA THE 828 COLLECTION

An international custom womenswear line created for the style conscious, beautiful and confident woman - The Eighttweyght Collection was founded in 2004 by Chicago-born Nigerian designer, Suzette Opara.

During early childhood, Suzette's love for fashion stemmed from an array of interests - one, being exposed to the world of musical theater in hopes of becoming a Broadway actress and singer. Then watching her mother and aunts prepare their stylish traditional attire for events and family gatherings.

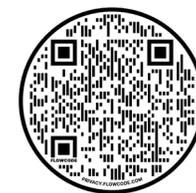
After graduating with a Bachelors degree in Marketing from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI, Suzette couldn't ignore her true passion of fulfilling her dreams to become a fashion designer. So she proceeded to teach herself how to sew and began to grassroot her business via bedroom from client-to-client.

In 2013, The 828 Collection debuted its SS2014 collection at EMERGE! during New York Fashion Week. Dazzling the crowd with signature pieces of femininity in organza ruffles and flowers, detailed shoulders mixed with intricate prints of Ankara fabric, the collection left the audience with an insatiable taste for more pieces.

Since Suzette's NYFW showcase, the Chicago-based and self-taught designer has quickly become one of the most requested and desired talents amongst media professionals, hotel industry mavens, fashion connoisseurs and socialites.

Upon the eve of its 10-year anniversary, The 828 Collection is celebrating the next chapter of style, grace and opulence with plans of extending the brand to a bridal and a possible menswear division. "I'm excited about the direction of the brand and the new construction techniques I'm learning. I look at some of my first pieces and I know I hadn't a clue of what I was doing," says Suzette. "However, I've since grown very confident and I'm most excited about dressing some of my favorite celebrities in Eighttweyght... Stay tuned!"

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## MELODY SHARI RODGERS

Melody Shari Rodgers is an award-winning producer, chart-topping singer, dynamic entrepreneur, and trailblazing media visionary.

Born in Brundidge, Alabama, Melody began her professional journey as a middle school English teacher after graduating from Alabama A&M University. After 3.5 years in education, she shifted into entrepreneurship—building a multimillion-dollar real estate and property preservation business, establishing herself as a powerful force in business and leadership.

But Melody didn't stop there.

She is the co-owner of NubianTV, a culture-driven streaming network currently in development, designed to amplify bold, diverse, and authentic storytelling. As co-founder of Tilted Crowns Productions, Melody produces content rooted in transformation, truth, and empowerment. Her expanding television presence includes co-starring in the leading role on "Marriage Mansion" alongside Hassan Johnson of The Wire, and appearing in the feature film "Fortuitous" with Clifton Powell, among others.

Her brand empire includes Seventh Avenue Beauty, a luxury skincare line tailored for melanin-rich skin, and Seventh Avenue Athletic Wear, a size-inclusive fitness

## *Seventh Avenue Beauty*

BY MELODY SHARI

collection created to uplift and empower. Melody's impact in fashion also extends to her ambassadorship with celebrity stylist J. Bolin, affirming her status as a respected trendsetter.

As a recording artist, Melody has released a compelling catalog of music that resonates with emotional depth and self-empowerment. Her singles include Tell-Tale Signs, Cloud 9, Sidechick Award, Down, Take Me Back, Never Really Cared, and the iTunes chart-topping hit Nobody's Business. Through her music and storytelling, Melody has become a beacon for women on journeys of healing, strength, and renewal.

A devoted mother of four, a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and a passionate advocate for faith, mental wellness, and generational wealth, Melody Shari Rodgers continues to inspire millions as she builds legacy and empowers others to walk boldly in their purpose.

Her personal mantra?  
"When God says Go, Go."

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# GLOBAL PARTNER

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WEARABLE ART COLLECTIVE**

**LOLA OWOLABI**

**LOLA@WEARABLEARTS.CO**



I am pleased to write on behalf of the Wearable Art Collective to reaffirm our organization's unwavering global commitment to promoting emerging designers and to highlight our valued partnership with Emerge, a trailblazing platform recognized internationally for amplifying the voices of underrepresented creatives.

Since its founding, the Wearable Art Collective has positioned itself as more than a fashion initiative. It is a cultural development platform that connects tradition with innovation, and creativity with opportunity.

We are dedicated to supporting designers, particularly women, youth, and diaspora creatives—who often lack visibility and access to global markets. Through mentorship, capacity-building, and international showcases, our collective ensures that emerging designers are not only discovered but nurtured for long-term sustainability in the creative industries.

Our partnership with Emerge has been instrumental in bringing this vision to life. Emerge is globally acclaimed for presenting designers at New York

Fashion Week and other international runways, serving as a springboard for new talent to access global recognition.

Through this collaboration, the Wearable Art Collective has facilitated the inclusion of African and diaspora designers in spaces where cultural diversity and innovation are celebrated at the highest level. By bridging West African creativity with international fashion capitals, we are reshaping narratives and expanding professional pathways for emerging talent.

This partnership has also advanced our global advocacy for cultural equity and representation. Together with Emerge, we are addressing systemic gaps by:

- Creating international platforms for designers from Africa and the diaspora to showcase their artistry.
- Fostering intercultural dialogue, ensuring that African heritage is not only preserved but also integrated into contemporary global fashion.

At the heart of this work is our belief that creativity has the power to drive sustainable development. By supporting emerging designers, we contribute to broader goals of economic inclusion, gender equality, and cultural diplomacy. Our work with Emerge! is a testament to the fact that when creativity is given visibility, it transforms lives, strengthens communities, and contributes to building more equitable societies.

The Wearable Art Collective is proud to stand at the intersection of culture, creativity, and empowerment. Our partnership with Emerge represents not just a collaboration but a global commitment to ensuring that the next generation of designers has the visibility, recognition, and support they need to shape the future of fashion.

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FASHION RUNWAY SHOW NYFW

# FASHION INNOVATOR AWARD HONOREES

*throughout the years!*

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## EMERGE!

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Mr. Chet A. Bennett is the founder, Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of BCI. Mr. Bennett is a graduate of Morehouse College with a BA in Religion, he also holds a Masters Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision from Howard University. He has over 23 years of work experience in the cosmetology and barbering industry.

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