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A Couple New Yorkers Capitalize on 'Slime'

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By Kate King

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The Sloomoo Institute is an 8,000-square-foot exhibition devoted to 'slime' in New York City.

Photo: Sarah Wagner Miller for The Wall Street Journal

Karen Robinovitz and Sara Schiller knew they wanted to build a business around "slime," and for the past year they have been throwing goo around to see what would stick.

The two friends joined the growing number of experience-based businesses in New York when they opened the Sloomoo Institute in October. Slime is currently in vogue among children and adults who make the glue-based substance at home and watch online videos of well-manicured fingers pulling and pushing colorful, elaborate creations.

Ticketing platform ShowClix, which sells for Sloomoo, expects to serve between 250 and 300

experience-based businesses nationwide this year compared with 130 in 2019, President Brian Arnone said. About 15% will be in New York City, where the Museum of Ice Cream is credited with kicking off the craze in 2016.

At Sloomoo, an 8,000-square-foot exhibition in SoHo, visitors can stick their hands in vats of multicolored and scented slime and walk barefoot through a large 250-gallon pit of slime. At the end, they can stop by a slime bar where they can make their own slime creations to take home with them.



Karen Robinovitz and Sara Schiller, the creators of the Sloomoo Institute.

Photo: Sarah Wagner Miller for The Wall Street Journal

“It’s a way to connect with other people, it’s a way to get out of your own head,” said Ms. Robinovitz, who on a recent afternoon was recording photos of visitors for Sloomoo’s Instagram page.

Established brands, from Nike to Baskin Robbins, are increasingly using experience pop-ups as marketing tools to increase their exposure on social media and cultural cache, said Denise Lee Yohn, a brand leadership expert and author. But other companies are building businesses entirely around experiences based on themes like pizza or rosé.

Doreen Bloch said she wasn't worried about market saturation when she decided to launch the Makeup Museum, which will open in New York City's Meatpacking District this May. The experience will start out as a subsidiary of the beauty-data company Poshly Inc., where Ms. Bloch serves as chief executive, although she hopes that it will eventually become a free-standing museum dedicated to the history of makeup.

The initial six-month exhibit will focus on makeup from the 1950s and feature cosmetics used by Marilyn Monroe and Greta Garbo. Tickets, which went on sale March 1, cost \$25 to \$40. Ms. Bloch said she's confident it will draw in a variety of visitors, including tourists, local museum-goers and industry veterans.



Visitors prepare to have slime dumped on them at Slime Falls at the Sloomoo Institute.

Photo: Sarah Wagner Miller for The Wall Street Journal

"We can strike the perfect balance between what traditional museums do so well, which is to educate and preserve and be an authority for historical record, and also take the best of what new, Instagrammable and immersive pop-ups are doing," she said.

Few experience-goers are repeat visitors, Mr. Arnone said, so immersive experiences either need to reinvent the exhibit over time or build a sustainable retail component. Museum of Ice Cream, for example, started a line of branded ice cream that is currently on sale at

Target and Safeway stores. The company recently signed a 10-year lease for its SoHo location.

Sloomoo Institute sells artisanal slime and supplies, apparel and accessories and its founders are thinking about wading into children's books, an animated television series, conferences and events.

The women behind the slime have experience in business and branding. Ms. Robinovitz co-founded Digital Brand Architects, a talent-management agency for digital influencers, in 2010. Ms. Schiller's company, Meet, hosts brainstorming and other corporate meetings at three locations in Manhattan. A third partner, Toni Ko, is an entrepreneur whose first company, NYX Cosmetics, was acquired by L'Oréal in 2014.

The three founders invested \$1 million to open Sloomoo Institute. They said they have sold 90,000 tickets and pulled in more than \$5 million in gross revenue, including retail store sales (items include artisanal slime guaranteed to make it through airport security).

Ticket sales account for 80% of their revenue, and retail 20%, Ms. Robinovitz said. Admission starts at \$38, and includes a take-home slime she valued at \$16.

Despite being profitable, Sloomoo's founders say they are looking to cut costs, particularly payroll. The company has six full-time employees while the rest of its workers are hired from temporary-staffing agencies.

To lower labor costs, Sloomoo is turning to automation. Ms. Schiller said they are working with industrial engineers to automate the slime bar.

The ability to find affordable short-term leases has given experience founders room to build their brand first and then figure out what product, if any, to sell. In SoHo, where Sloomoo Institute is located a few blocks south of the Museum of Ice Cream, the retail availability rate was 23.8% in the fourth quarter of 2019 compared with 13.7% five years earlier, according to an analysis by Cushman & Wakefield.

Sloomoo's founders, who declined to share how much they pay in rent, recently renewed their lease through January. They said the abundance of vacant retail space has them thinking of expansion, particularly to malls.

"This location really was a test location," Ms. Schiller said. "We had to see—can it be done? To us, first and foremost, it's about building a brand."

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