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Charlie Constantinou and Mafa Durikovic Win the ITS Awards in Trieste

BY TIZIANA CARDINI
September 14, 2022



The scene at the ITS 2022 competition. Photo: Courtesy of ITS

That the Italian city of Trieste—located up north near the Slovenian border, full of history and beauty yet rather insular—has for 20 years hosted the ITS Awards, one of the most coveted international prizes for emerging fashion talents, is proof of the iron will of its founder, Barbara Franchin. She has slogged through unnerving bureaucracy (it's Italy baby!) and endless setbacks to finally achieve her longtime dream: the opening of ITS Arcademy, the team's sprawling headquarters which also serve as a comprehensive archive, fashion museum and a space for exhibitions and artistic activities.



Look from Charlie Constantinou's collection. Pietro D'Aprano



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The contest's return in IRL format after the pandemic also came with an international jury spearheaded by Balenciaga's Demna, who was the prize's recipient in 2004. Together with Irish singer Róisín Murphy, CNMI President Carlo Capasa, OTB's Andrea Rosso and others, they granted the ITS 2020 Award to menswear designer Charlie Constantinou (@charlieconstantinou), who will receive €15,000 in cash and a six-month mentorship by Piriti Imagine Tutoring & Consulting. His accomplished, market-ready sportswear collection was inspired by Inuit tribes' culture of protective garments in extreme weather, made from the natural resources available on their native land. Handcrafted elements like imperfect stitching, hand dyed coloring, and puffy paddings gave the collection a feel of authenticity and a certain raw grace, even if its genealogy could be traced back to the edgy sleek silhouettes of Simon Ross's A-Cold-Wall or Stone Island's cool, utilitarian sophistication.



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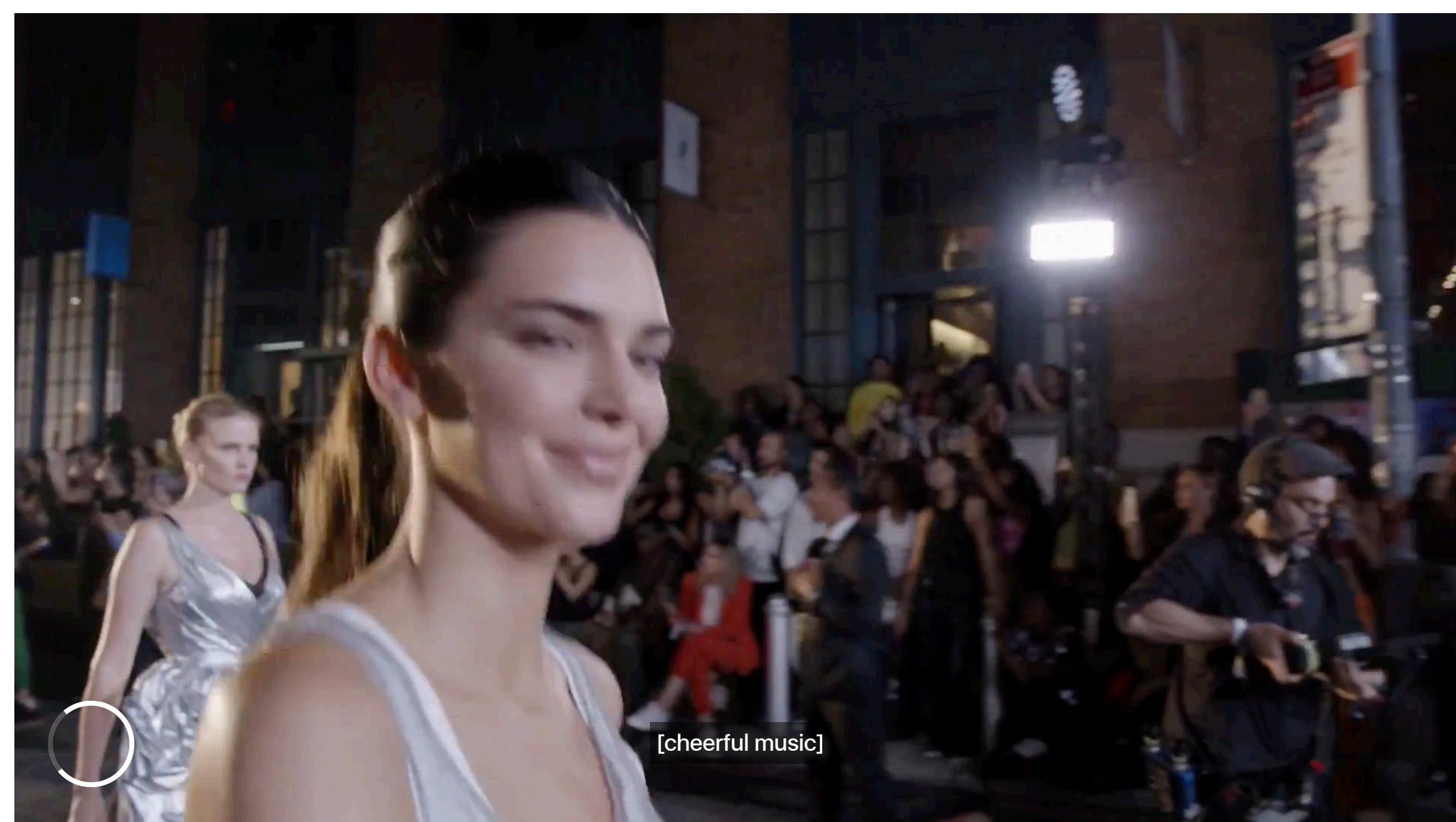


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On the opposite end of the creative spectrum, the whimsical collection by Slovakian-born Mafa Durikovic (@madbymad_) took home €8,000 for the Media Award, whose jury praised her inventive use of a home-grown bio plastic, concocted by the designer in her kitchen out of a potato starch, which she called "crystal leather." The handmade pieces looked like bonkers haute couture renditions, infused with a poetic, fierce punk vibe. Colors were extracted from food ("you could add your own taste if you wish," said Durikovic); upcycled wool and scraps of fabrics were crocheted into a new age organic ballgown. Björk's costume designer should definitely take note.

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Asked to expand on the overarching themes of this year's edition, Franchin said that "the isolation due to the pandemic had the designers reflect on their personal lives; they've mined their family history for images and memories, so their creations have an intimate feel." A widespread source of inspiration was grannies and mothers, whose stories and pasts were revalued and cherished during the pandemic either because of their absence, or because of a renewed forced proximity, or because they had been lost to COVID-19. They often embodied examples of feminist resilience against cultural stereotypes, or of resourcefulness and strength in times of scarcity. Deep feelings and a profound sentiment of humanity were embedded in almost all collections. "This year's designers are such romantic, fierce dreamers, yet there's no trace of nostalgia in them," said Franchin.



Look from Mafa Durikovic's collection. Pietro D'Aprano

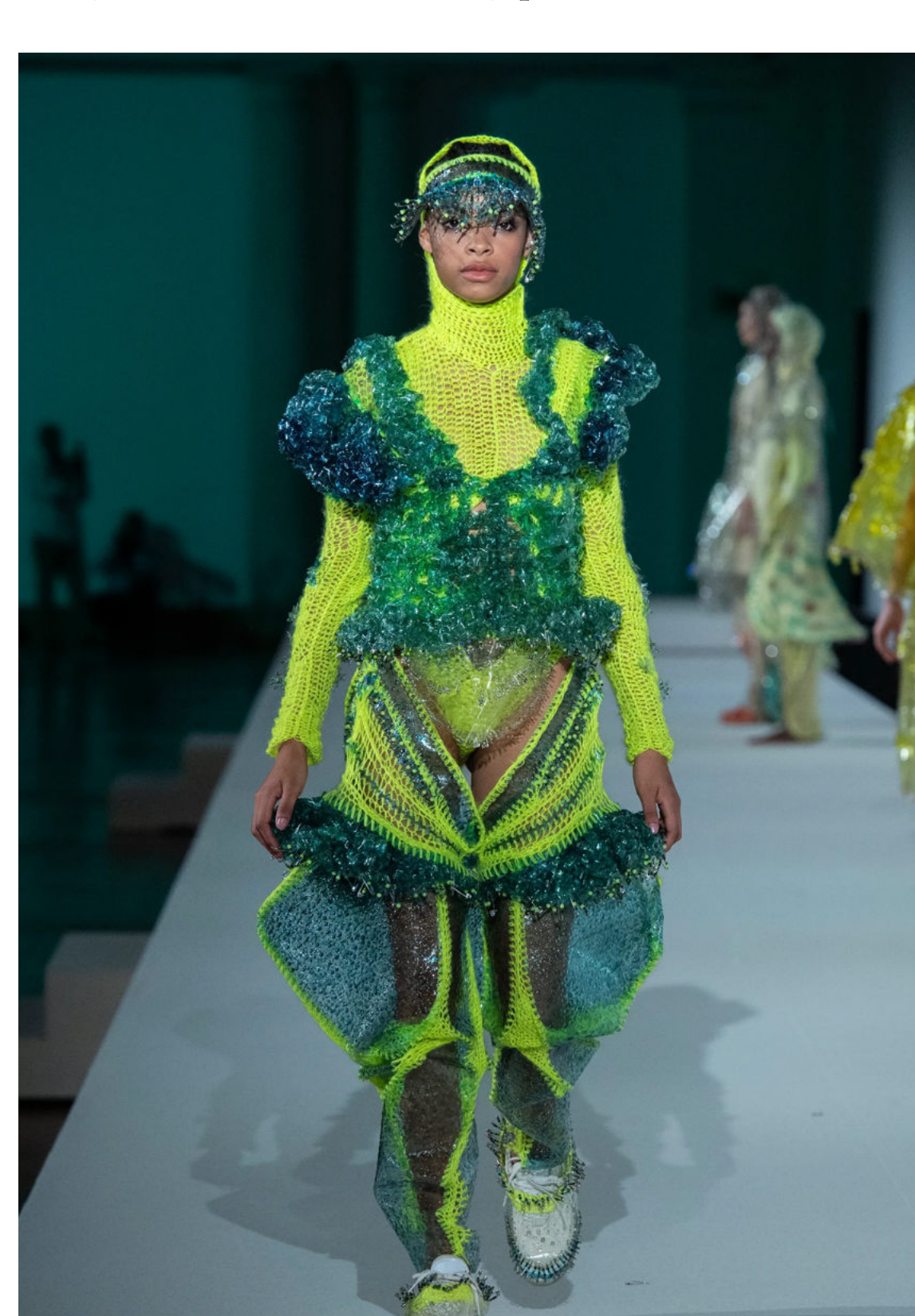


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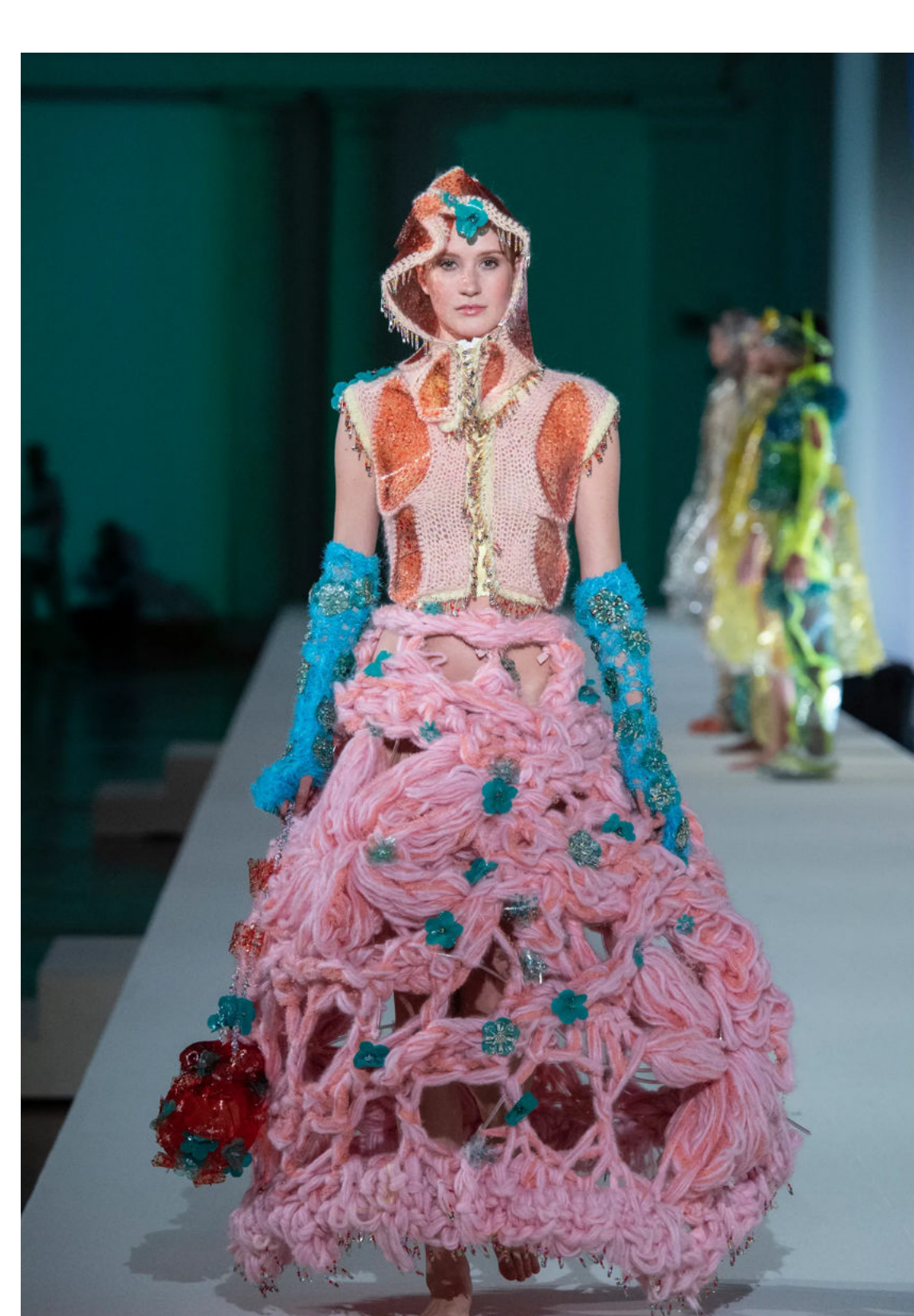


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Throughout its two decades, the ITS Awards have been bestowed on a flotilla of now-famous designers including Demna, Bottega Veneta's Matthieu Blazy, Cecilie Bahnsen, Emma Chopova and Laura Lowena, and Richard Quinn. That's a source of pride for Franchin. But the culmination of her hard work is the Arcademy, which was opened with an elegant exhibition curated by Olivier Saillard. It showcased an edit of the stunning portfolios submitted by young creatives and of their artistic collections, which will change over time. "The portfolios are truly unique, elaborate artworks, always handmade; they're not power points sketched hastily on a screen," said Saillard. "The finalists' first collections have all been accurately preserved, which isn't always the case, as they often get lost, dismembered or sold." He was struck by their "innocence and purity, the extreme variety of their inspirations, that can be lyrical as well as very dark and intriguing, and by their poetry, still undiluted and not yet deformed by the laws of the luxury industry. If people doubt fashion's artistic quality," he concluded, "they should see this exhibition. These handmade pieces come from a place of purity and take the form of an artistic gesture." In these initial stages, fashion can still represent a space where purity and imagination can inspire desire, shaping an authentic personal vision. The ITS exhibition was a reminder of how uplifting it is to see so many creations still so fiercely pure.



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