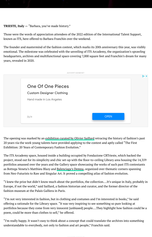

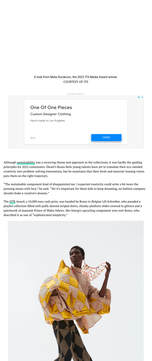

FASHION

Demna-led Jury Bestows 2022 ITS Awards as Contest Marks 20th Anniversary

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By **ironity**

TRIESTE, Italy — "Barbara, you've made history."

Those were the words of appreciation attendees of the 2022 edition of the International Talent Support, known as ITS, here offered to Barbara Franchin over the weekend.

The founder and mastermind of the fashion contest, which marks its 20th anniversary this year, was visibly emotional. The milestone was celebrated with the unveiling of ITS Arcademy, the organization's sprawling headquarters, archives and multifunctional space covering 7,000 square feet and Franchin's dream for many years, revealed in 2020.

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The opening was marked by an exhibition curated by Olivier Saillard retracing the history of fashion's past 20 years via the work young talents have provided applying to the contest and aptly called "The First Exhibition: 20 Years of Contemporary Fashion Evolution."

The ITS Arcademy space, housed inside a building occupied by Fondazione CRTrieste, which backed the project, stood out for its simplicity and chic set-up with the floor-to-ceiling Library area housing the 14,359 portfolios amassed over the years and the Gallery space showcasing the works of such past ITS contestants as Bottega Veneta's Matthieu Blazy and Balenciaga's Demna, organized over thematic corners spanning from Neo-Futurists to Raw and Singular Art. It proved a compelling atlas of fashion evolution.

"I knew the prize but didn't know much about the portfolios, the collection….It's unique in Italy, probably in Europe, if not the world," said Saillard, a fashion historian and curator, and the former director of the fashion museum at the Palais Galliera in Paris.

"I'm not very interested in fashion, but in clothing and costumes and I'm interested in books," he said offering a rationale for the Library space. "It was very inspiring to see something so pure looking at portfolios because they come from very innocent [unbiased] people….They highlight how fashion could be a poem, could be more than clothes to sell," he offered.

"I'm really happy. It wasn't easy to think about a concept that could translate the archives into something understandable to everybody, not only to fashion and art people," Franchin said.

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In March, ITS Arcademy will officially open to the public and Franchin said her team is laying out a full agenda of activities, including residencies, workshops, educational activities and more.

For anyone familiar with ITS, the space replaces the former archives housed inside a small attic of an 18th-century palazzo in the city center. That location will be reconverted into a lodging space. Franchin plans to kick off artists' residence there, staging conversations between local and international creatives.

The ITS Arcademy was testament to the effort the contest's team has channeled into discovering and promoting the next generation of designers, offering them financial support and publicity for two decades.

On Saturday night, the jury of the 2022 edition, led by Demna, bestowed 11 awards. Other jurors included Franchin; Andrea Rosso, Diesel sustainability ambassador and founder of Myar; singer Róisín Murphy; Carlo Capasa, president of the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, and Stefania Ricci, director of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum and Foundation, among others.

Balenciaga’s creative director Demna with ITS founder Barbara Franchin.

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Left free to express their creativity with no briefs, talents looked inward, presenting deeply emotional collections, oftentimes referencing the domestic environment and grandparents explicitly. “Some of the designers lost them during COVID-19 and felt that emptiness coming from absence or simply they spent more time together at home,” Franchin contended.

“There was something deep in talents’ creative élan this year, it’s good that designers wanted to express their feelings, even though they were oftentimes of sorrow. The output was highly creative,” echoed Rosso.

The ITS Arcademy Award, coming with a 15,000 euro cash prize and a six-month tutoring by Pitti Immagine, was bestowed on British talent Charlie Constantinou, who presented the most commercially viable collection on show.

A look from Charlie Constantinou, the 2022 ITS Arcademy Award winner.

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Inspired by protective gear Inuit tribes in Alaska and Canada have been using for hundreds of years despite their lack of textile resources, the utilitarian lineup filled with hooded knits layered under embossed vests and flared pocketed pants was crafted from modern materials such as nylon and sherpa fleece. It brought to mind Stone Island's edgy sportswear or even A-Cold-Wall's Samuel Ross' manipulation of silhouettes, but it maintained an organic feel of its own via layered textures, garment-dyeing and tie-dye effects.

Mata Durikovic's whimsical and fierce concoctions scooped up the ITS Media Award of 8,000 euros presented by the press jury. The Slovakia-born designer's haute couture vision was filled with inventiveness: the opening look, a PVC-looking trenchcoat and jumpsuit trimmed and dotted in safety pins and crystals, was made from starch-derived bioplastics, while the sea creature-looking rib-knitted looks were repurposed old garments.

A look from Mata Durokovic, the 2022 ITS Media Award winner.
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Although sustainability was a recurring theme and approach in the collections, it was hardly the guiding principles for 2022 contestants. Diesel's Rosso feels young talents have yet to translate their eco-minded creativity into problem-solving innovations, but he maintains that their fresh and material-leaning vision puts them on the right trajectory.

“The sustainable component kind of disappointed me. I expected creativity could solve a bit more the pressing issues with face,” he said. “Yet it’s important for these kids to keep dreaming, no fashion company should choke a creative’s dreams.”

The OTB Award, a 10,000 euro cash prize, was handed by Rosso to Belgian Lili Schreiber, who paraded a playful collection filled with puffy sleeved striped shirts, chunky platform slides covered in glitters and a patchwork of mannish Prince of Wales fabrics. Her lineup’s upcycling component won over Rosso, who described it as one of “sophisticated simplicity.”

A look from Lili Schreiber, the recipient of the OTB Award at ITS 2022.
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Other prizes bestowed here included the ITS Video Presentation and the Digital Fashion Awards, as well as a number of awards from ITS partners including the Swatch Art Peace Hotel, Lotto Sport, Luxottica, Vogue Italia, the Camera della Moda and the Fondazione Ferragamo.

As the ceremony closed, Franchin invited the 24 finalists of the 2022 edition to join her onstage, alongside contestants for the 2020 and 2021 editions, which were held digitally. They were invited to Trieste to enjoy the contest's IRL experience they missed due to COVID-19 restrictions in the past two years.

It was a homecoming for many — including Demna, who won the contest's 2004 edition.

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