

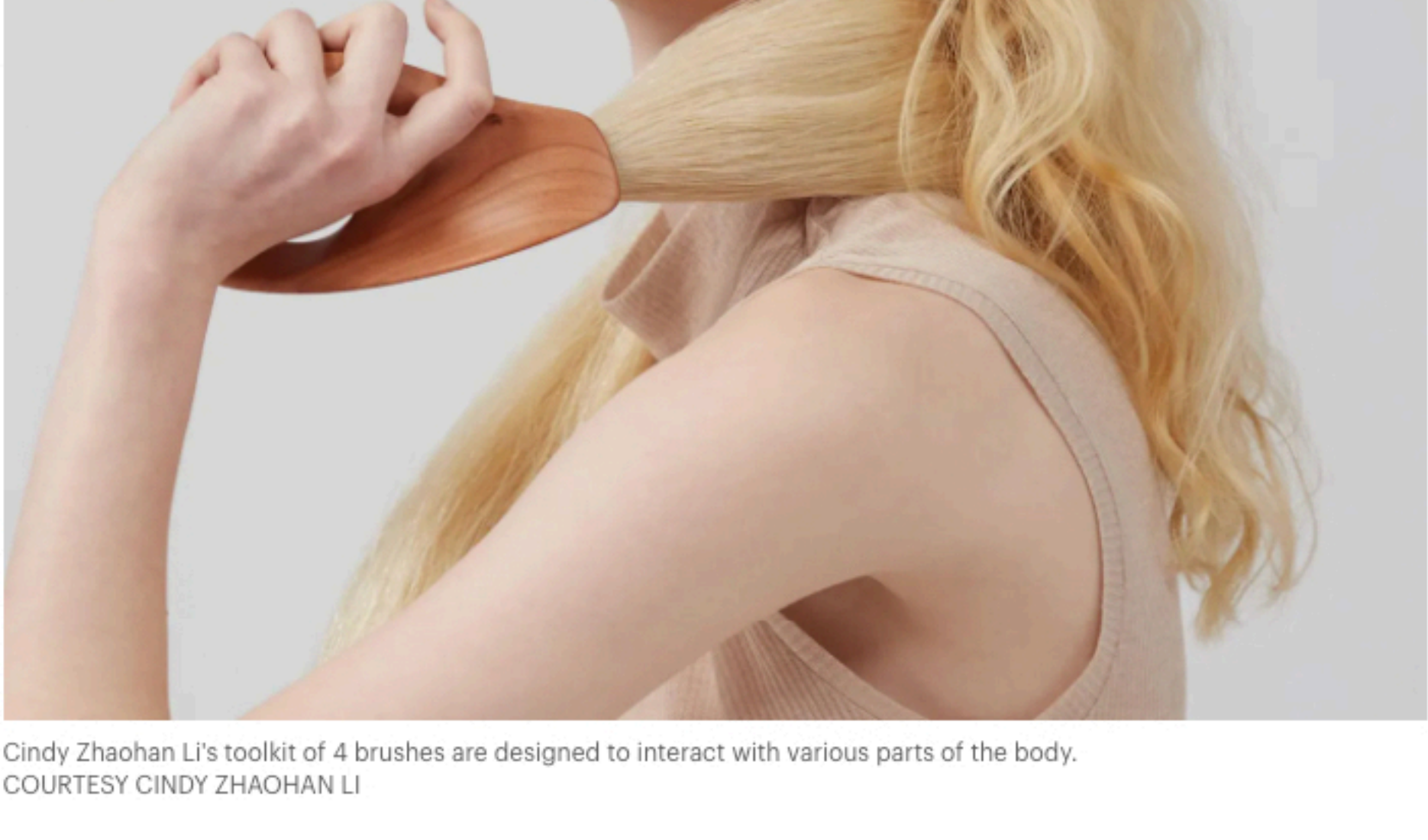
This Scouting Platform Is Predicting The Future Of Fashion

Discovering talents such as Chanel's current creative director Matthieu Blazy and Balenciaga's Demna, the scouting platform ITS has reached cult status. The newest cohort was just announced.

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Cindy Zhaoan Li's toolkit of 4 brushes are designed to interact with various parts of the body.
COURTESY CINDY ZHAOCHAN LI

Launched in 2002, ITS Contest's panel of experts from the worlds of fashion, art, and culture make it one of the world's most prestigious scouting platforms for emerging talent. Previous winners include [Balenciaga's](#) creative director Demna, Matthieu Blazy now at Chanel, and Haizhen Wang—who runs his successful label from Shanghai.

On March 20, ITS president Barbara Franchin presented the 10 finalists for ITS 2025. Each received €10,000 and took part in a creative residency in Trieste. "This is the new generation," she stated. "They are offering hope for this moment which is dense with black holes." This edition, innovative designs and concepts included a seated dress from Naya El Ahdab, Gabrielle Szwarzenberg's paper fashion, and headwear from Mijoda Dajomi designed to collect rainwater.

The closely-knit group also launched an unexpected ITS 2025 manifesto at the ceremony, railing against the hierarchical nature of the industry predicated on the so-called "single spark" of a lone creative director. "A brand is not a one-man band," reads Maximilian Raynor, the receipt of the special honour. "Be gone the days of invisible makers and unheard juniors."



Yifan Yu was awarded the Fondazione Ferragamo prize at ITS 2025.
COURTESY YIFAN YU

Of the 10, an impressive 4 were Chinese: Zhen Cai from Wuhan, Cindy Zhaoan Li who grew up in Beijing, Chongqing-born Qianhan Liu, and Yifan Yu from Hangzhou.

On the night, additional awards went to Yifan Yu whose [menswear](#) project exploring the history and properties of fur alternatives, secured him the Fondazione Ferragamo prize — worth an additional €7,000. Yu graduated with a BA from Donghua University which he followed with MA Fashion Design Technology at the London College of Fashion.

As part of the residency, Valentina Maggi, director of design practice at the recruitment agency Floriane de St. Pierre et Associés, interviewed the 10, offering them a realistic perspective of how the industry works. Maggi was impressed by Yu's maturity. "Yifan has a very precise point of view that makes his collection very consistent and commercially ready to go to the market now. "The materials are extraordinary and his use of color, print, and treatments are so uniquely specific" she explains. Yu's is now based in Shanghai and plans to start his own label.



Zhen Cai's slow fashion collection is inspired by a Chinese garden and traditional Chinese family life.
COURTESY ZHUEN CAI

Contemporary Zhen Cai won a scholarship worth €5,000 from the Camera Nazionale Della Moda Italiana (CNMI) for his focus on responsibility and sustainability actions. His work was based on the concept of a Chinese garden which he uses as inspiration to investigate the relationship between Chinese 'family' culture and the individual with clothing.

According to the CNMI's international brand ambassador Sara Maino, Zhen's "patience, sustainable working process, and emphasis on slow fashion" were vital factors in the decision. In the future, he will be supported by the CNMI to understand more about production processes. Zhen was additionally awarded OTB's training day—a chance to visit the fashion group's headquarters to see various production stages up close.

Alongside OTB's Andrea Rosso, this year's jury of leading designers, stylists, photographers, artists, journalists, and influencers, were collectively "blown away" by Qianhan Liu's "reference to Eastern traditions and philosophies in her clothes, and a constant play with materials."



Qianhan Liu's collection was printed and textured to evoke wood
COURTESY QIANHAN LIU

Jury member Serge Carreira, director of emerging brands initiative at the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, highlighted many designers' focus on natural materials like wood including Liu, noting: "She has a great concept with a message that is also super technical and creative."

Following her European [education](#) (CSM and IFM), Liu used her masters as a route back to "reclaiming her Asian identity and to challenge clichés and expectations." Through contrasting soft and hard tailoring, her work explored the connection between leather, wood, and leaves in a project that explores how nature impacts well-being. One look was created from leather offcuts dramatically reworked to resemble thousands of fallen leaves. Liu is currently based in Paris.



Cindy Zhaoan Li's was honored on the London College of Fashion's MA Artefact.
COURTESY CINDY ZHAOCHAN LI

Finally, Cindy Zhaoan Li's celebration of brushwear was honed on the London College of Fashion's MA Artefact. Her toolkit of 4 brushes was designed to interact with various parts of the body in a step-by-step exploration of touch and sensation. As well as impressing Carreira, Li's celebration of the humble brush also spoke to Marco Sammiceli, Director of Museo del Design Italiano, who says it's important to spark the surprise. "I loved her energy and found a lot of joy in her work. The way she carved and molded the wood is very interesting. I know a lot of work that went into these pieces in terms of technique. It is part of an existing tradition of objects that can offer and liberate your thinking."

Li, who lives in London, used the project to problem-solve and says she struggles to categorize her work. "I am a designer who starts from my own perspective and the problems I experienced in the past. I started off making jewelry and you can see this mix in my work. I'm not bound only to accessories."

Following the residency, all the finalist's work will be added to the archive of ITS and on display at the Arcademy museum in Italy which is open to the public.



Qianhan Liu's look on display at the ITS Arcademy in Trieste.
COURTESY OF ITS