ITS 19 Awards: Sustaining Fashion through Transformation

By Rebecca Voigt

Garbage, 'armchair nostalgia,' and migration are some of the inspirations of the winners of the ITS (International Talent Support) fashion and accessories awards held on July 12. The annual three-day event, launched in 2002 by Barbara Franchini, attracts top stylists to Trieste, which is situated on the Adriatic, a hobbled dream of Austrian-Hungarian fantasy on Italy’s far eastern border. This year’s 95 finalists competed for 10 awards with grandios, internships, mentoring, and showcases from PHI Inmagine, CTB Diesel, Tomorrow showroom, Lotto sport, Illy coffee, Allianz Insurance, and others.

The 10 winners from the 2019 ITS awards. Photo: Courtesy of ITS Awards.

Deyuan Ding (B) - from Zhejiang is the designer of the ITS Awards for 2021.

Deyuan’s “disorientated” found in the heart of the fabric development. "I'm passionate about things that look familiar and unfamiliar," said the designer who was inspired by René Magritte’s "Empire of Light," a poor scene set against a cloudy blue sky. His "Migratory Vagueness" collection presents traditional merchandise through a positive/negative haiku for slightly distorted tailoring topped with bucket hats that evoke a shadowy array. Deyuan plans to launch his own brand and believes that fashion sustainability bears with quality over quantity.

Corinna Goutos, 28, Amercat, won ITS’ Sustainability Award of 3000€ and a feature on Italian Vogue’s Talents website for her “semi-stig” jewelry that combines shells, wood, and stone with “non-functional” bits of lighters, headphones, and “luxury” items like ear rings. Goutos transforms her natural/manmade assemblages with lapidary techniques, aluminum castings, and electroforming which discloses scrap metal and reforms it on objects giving them an ancient look. After collecting shells as a child, she began making jewelry from soda cans at age 14 and perfected her technique at the Saranah College of Art and Design before moving to a 400-year-old farm house near Hamburg where she launched her own brand for one-of-a-kind pieces in 2015.

“I’ve always been attracted to organic forms, the negative effects of the ‘throw-away’ era, and have an obsession with shipwrecks,” says Goutos. “With few exceptions, sustainability feels more like a publicity stunt than a solution to me, but the amazing thing is that for makers of my generation it’s now a given, not an option.”

The ITS OFB Award of 10,000€ with the possibility of an internship with one of Only the Brave group’s brands (Marni, Maison Margiela, Viktor&Rolf, .....) went to Australia’s Annaliese Griffith-Jones, 26, from New York’s Parsons School of Design. The floral tides in her grandparents’ 1970s home and Ajur Appadurai’s theory of universal nostalgia for an unknown past led her to work in liquid silicone, a jelly-like fabric for which she developed a reverse hand-printing process. “I would love to focus on textile design and fabrication for Marni, Prada, Dries Van Noten, or Simone Rocha before I start my own brand,” said Griffith-Jones whose cartoon-like layered patterns project a larger-than-life “faux reality.”
After applying to ITS five times, Rafael Kouto’s “Suspended Bodies” collection made the final cut this year with his “eclectic” notion of human waste and clothing suspended in space. “The bodies that don’t fit” Kouto, CD — whose wear-upcycling brand produced in Switzerland uses materials like melted plastic and industry waste, was inspired to design this collection for its durability and to mix traditional African craftsmanship with sport and military staples. - won ITS’ Diesel Award with a six month internship at the brand’s headquarters in Italy’s Venice.

For juror member Valentine Maggi, Director of Design Practice at FIDM, “ITS is the chance for an early look at designers whose careers will be built by working from one pod to the next throughout the fashion industry. ‘All the brands we work with want to inject innovation and creativity. We’re looking for freshness and strength in terms of product, image and visual identity,” said Maggi who has attended ITS for the past 16 years and cities as a case in point, Felipe Oliveira Baptista, 44, who was first recruited as Creative Director of LaCoste in 2010 and recently moved to Kenzo.

Not everyone at ITS wants to work for a big brand. Stefano Martines, CEO of Tomorrow London Holdings Ltd., styles his company as a “business incubator” helping new independent brands source production and develop sales through showrooms in Paris and Milan, New York and Hong Kong. Tomorrow invested recently in the young French brand Coperni. Online ITS juror, he says he’s looking for designers with “unusual skills” who can combine production, direct-to-consumer marketing, and selling to the best stores in the world (increasingly overlooked by the big brands), which he says is essential for young brands to grow today.

The one thing that everyone seems to agree about at ITS 19 is that sustainability remains the great unresolved question at the heart of fashion. “What can we do?” asks fashion historian Francesca Romei, who presents an award when she saw Japanese designer Yukie Satō’s collection ‘Gabungan’ made from materials floating in the river near her home. One response to this question is the creation of the ITS Academy (archive and academy), a new space in Treviso set to open in 2021 to ITS’ 20th anniversary as an expanded platform for the ITS archive of applicant dossiers and finalist prototypes, as well as a center for workshops by ITS designers.