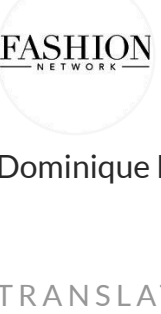


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# Young designers turn to grandmothers for inspiration

Never has the figure of the grandmother known such success as it does now, as shown by the popularity of grey-haired fashion models, and by the worldwide outpouring of grief at the death, of [Queen Elizabeth II](#), aged 96 and regarded as a true icon. This enthusiasm for the older generation was strongly felt at the International Talent Support fashion competition, held on September 9-10 in Trieste, Italy. Many ITS finalists chose their granny as muse, a phenomenon that seems to travel in a direction that is entirely at odds with our uber-technological, connected world.

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A look by Petra Fagerström inspired by her granny, a parachutist during the USSR era - itsweb.org

Indeed, the collections shown in Trieste displayed a willingness on the part of many designers to look back into the past to unearth concrete, sustainable solutions, including rolling up their sleeves and experimenting widely with materials. A trend that is partly explained by the pandemic. “In the midst of the pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, young designers stuck at home had to manage with what they had on hand, using tablecloths, their sofa’s leather upholstery, rugs and more. Two years later, they have processed their feelings. They have understood what happened. Some lost their grandparents. Others lived with them during lockdowns, an experience that made them understand the value of older generations,” said [Barbara Franchin](#), founder and director of ITS.

For example, Rafaela Pestritu, 27, who tapped the identity of her native Romania, starting from its most kitsch stereotypes to develop a new, humour-infused style, featuring organic mutant garments. “It’s a hymn to my grandmother. To develop my collection and my creations, I remembered her incredible stories of youth under communism,” said Pestritu, who believes in upcycling and is passionate about handcrafted products.

In a similar vein, German designer Tatjana Haupt, 26, drew her inspiration from two maternal figures: her grandmother, a traditional housewife, and her mother, a punk aficionado and IT pioneer. She combined their contrasting attitudes to create a joyful, striking collection big on crochet - another old-fashioned technique currently back in vogue - and sprinkled with feminist slogans, such as ‘Girls Masturbate Too’, accented by fun accessories like pink panties and gaiters bristling with spiky black wool hairs.

Martina Durikovic, 27, winner of the ITS Media Award, was also inspired by memories. Remembering that her grandmother Elena, who died five years ago and to whom she was very attached, used starch water from potatoes to water plants, the Bratislava-born Slovak designer decided to explore the virtues of this gelatinous substance. After many attempts, she managed to turn it into a kind of organic plastic, which she then cut into threads in order to be able to use it for crocheting. The end results are totally innovative, and biodegradable.



A model by crochet wizard Martina Durikovic - itsweb.org

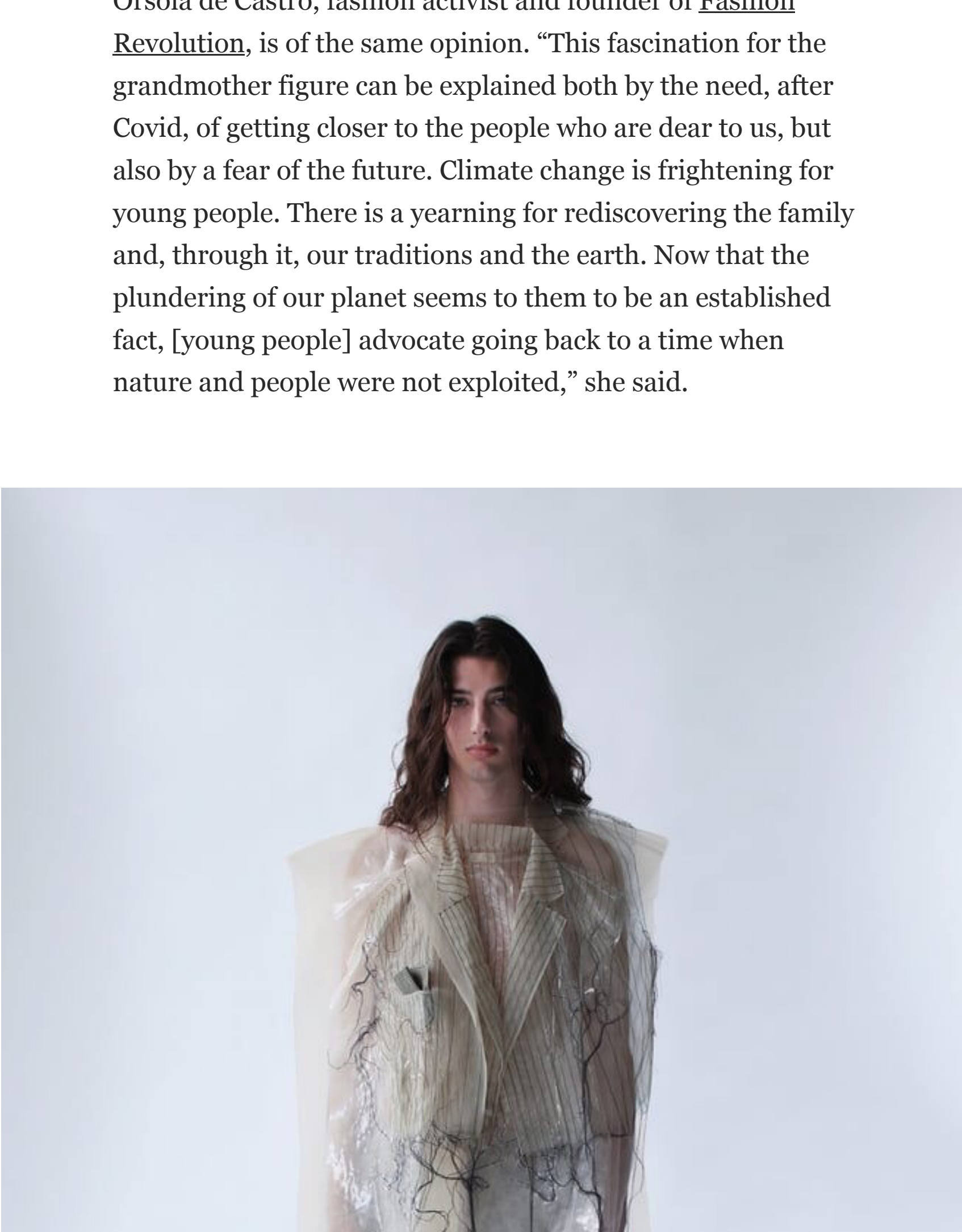
Swedish designer Petra Fagerström, 24, quite simply dedicated her collection to her grandmother, whose past as a Soviet parachutist she discovered rummaging through old photos. Fagerström’s collection, entitled ‘Flying Grandma’, featured long, pleated country-style dresses in printed nylon, and military surplus items refashioned in oversize volumes.

Finnish designer Hanna-Lotta Hanhela, 33, took a different approach. It was not the strength, but the fragility of her grandmother, who suffered from Alzheimer’s disease, that inspired her. Hanhela’s work is akin to that of a designer gradually losing their memory and creating deconstructed, frayed, often unfinished garments, sometimes merely sketched by a thin layer of thread on a transparent background, with hair clips replacing missing stitches here and there.

No fewer than five ITS finalists out of the 13 selected in the fashion category focused their collections on these important female figures, their grandmothers. “When the applications came in, we realised that this was emerging as a recurrent theme, each time treated in a wonderfully different way by students from all kinds of schools and backgrounds. It was the common thread that united everyone this year,” said Franchin.

“Never did anyone mention their grandfather. The emphasis was entirely on grandmothers, the women who take care of everything and are closer to [these young people]. The amazing thing is that they bypassed their parents’ generation. For these young designers, their grandparents, not their parents, are the benchmark. It’s quite revealing. [Their parents’] generation has perhaps been unable to act as a foundation, as a significant touchstone for their children, who also undoubtedly see their parents as the people who ushered in the world of today, a society that advocates waste and overconsumption,” added Franchin.

Orsola de Castro, fashion activist and founder of [Fashion Revolution](#), is of the same opinion. “This fascination of the grandmother figure can be explained both by the need, after Covid, of getting closer to the people who are dear to us, but also by a fear of the future. Climate change is frightening for young people. There is a yearning for rediscovering the family and, through it, our traditions and the earth. Now that the plundering of our planet seems to them to be an established fact, [young people] advocate going back to a time when nature and people were not exploited,” she said.



A water-soluble garment designed by Eva Heugenhauser - itsweb.org

“At a time of great difficulty, first because of the Covid pandemic and then the invasion of Ukraine, and faced with a worrying future, this new generation of designers needs to anchor itself to a strong element, like the family. They need to plunge into their roots to regain strength,” said [Stefania Ricci](#), director of the [Salvatore Ferragamo](#) Museum, like de Castro a member of this year’s ITS jury.

Another surprise was that, when ITS participants were asked what object surprise was that, when ITS participants were asked what object they would save from our planet, they unanimously said “a book.” “It amazed me, because I didn’t expect it at all. Now that everything is digital, they want to save books! This means there is hope,” said Franchin.

While images, screens and social media are still ubiquitous in the world of fashion, this emerging generation of designers seems above all to want to exist in real life, developing practical solutions to move things forward. For example, materials are central to their approach, with fabrics they most often develop themselves from natural resources. No longer driven by aesthetics, but in order to reduce waste.

As such, Martina Durikovic’s biodegradable collection based on starch water is exemplary. Equally telling was the collection by Austrian designer Eva Heugenhauser, 25, who worked on the concept of water-soluble clothing, and won the ITS special mention award sponsored by [Vogue](#) Italy. Not to mention of course the ITS competition winner, Charlie Constantinou, 24, who developed a stretchable quilted nylon adaptable to all sizes.