The LVMH Prize 2021 has announced the names of its nine finalists, and three of them are American.

Traditionally the award for young talent is made up of eight finalists, but as the final two won an equal number of votes, nine were selected this year.

The nine finalists are: Bianca Saunders, Charles de Vilmorin, Christopher John Rogers, Conner Ives, Colm Dillane, Kika Vargas, Lukhanyo Mdingi, Nensi Dojaka and Rui Zhou.

Two of the finalists create genderless collections – de Vilmorin, the happening young French designer based in Paris who participated to great acclaim in Gucci Fest and has since been named creative director of Rochas in Paris; and Rui Zhou, a Chinese designer based in Shanghai.
Paris; and Rui Zhong, a Chinese designer based in Shanghai.

The trio from the US – a country which has never provided a top-prize winner - is composed of Christopher John Rogers, a womenswear designer based in New York; Conner Ives, a womenswear designer based in London; and Colm Dillane, a menswear designer based in New York, whose brand is called Kidsuper.

Rogers, a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design, has already garnered enormous attention – nabbing last year’s CFDA Emerging Designer of the Year award, and providing the spruce purple coat that Vice President Kamala Harris wore on the US inauguration day. He is also a charming talker noted for his ruffle-mad sophistication for the red carpet, where he has dressed Rihanna.

Conner Ives focuses on developing fashion from deadstock and vintage looks, showing revamped sequin bubble gowns; patchwork Italian flag looks and upcycling fabulous sunset felt jackets.

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While Colm Dillane, a multimedia artist from Brooklyn, works in a counter-culture aesthetic with painterly graphics. His designs capture the ambitious energy of NYC; and his lookbook suggested he would be perfect for a future Moncler Genius collaboration.

The nine is completed by three women – the very talented knitwear specialist Bianca Saunders, a British designer based in London who creates menswear; Kika Vargas, a Colombian womenswear designer based in Bogota; and Nensi Dojaka, a courageous Albanian designer based in London, who showed some tremendous lingerie-inspired ideas.

And, finally, there is one South Africa talent, Lukhanyo Mdingi, based in Cape Town, who designs womenswear and menswear.

Young fashion designers under the age of 40 who have created at least two full collections may apply. Traditionally, the 20 finalists present their collections to a panel of experts in Paris during the women’s ready-to-wear season in early March.

This year, due to the pandemic, the LVMH Prize took place entirely digitally, with the young talent presenting their ideas with lookbooks; 360-degree clips of key outfits; short videos – many shot on iPhones - and mini interviews. Moreover, for the first time, members of the public were allowed to vote over the Internet; their cumulative vote counting for the same as one expert – out of 66 - in the final tally. This year marks the award’s eighth edition.
The finalists will be judged by a group of judges made up primarily of LVMH group designers, and including several executives, most notably Delphine Arnault, the brainchild behind the award. The final has also been pushed back to September this year.

Last year, the lockdown forced the cancellation of the final, leading LVMH to divide the prize equally between its eight finalists. Underlying the global interest in the €300,000 LVMH Prize, this year over 1,900 candidates applied from 110 countries.

All told, there are five prizes: The LVMH Prize for Young Fashion Designers with a €300,000 endowment and benefits from a one-year bespoke mentorship program provided by a dedicated LVMH team. The Karl Lagerfeld/Special Jury Prize that rewards a young designer with €150,000 and a mentorship program. And finally three prizes for young fashion-school graduates who completed their studies in 2020 or 2021 by allocating them, as well as their school, a €10,000 grant. The prize-winning graduates will also join the creative studio of an LVMH house for one year.