

STUDIO VISIT

I Pezzi Dipinti

An afternoon at designer **Cathryn Collins**'s downtown New York City atelier



On mannequin: I Pezzi Dipinti ermine mini-kimono, \$9,450, and cashmere shawl, \$1,000; ipezzidipinti.com

Cult status. That term is thrown around a lot in fashion. But it's apt praise for New York-based designer Cathryn Collins. The niche that Collins's I Pezzi Dipinti brand of furs, sweaters, and scarves occupies may be narrow, but the love (obsession even) runs deep. Her clients tend to be always-back-from-somewhere women of opaque extraction who may work in fashion or just dress like it. (Like Collins herself.) Women in her hard-to-get cashmere scarves are known to give each other wordless, knowing nods on the street. Collins's customers, who buy her designs online and through her roving trunk shows, say it's the only time wearing the same thing as another woman actually feels good.

I Pezzi Dipinti operates from a tiny eighth-floor SoHo studio. "It's my decadent ruin," Collins, 57, tells us one afternoon, dressed in black denim. "And this is where I do most of my work." It's her favorite corner, where a mannequin wears a navy-and-white shawl and a white ermine mini-kimono. On a table blanketed in a crystal-encrusted textile of her own design is an antique silver mirror she found in Syria, covered with Masai jewelry she collected on safari in Tanzania. Vintage Indian portraits and contemporary photography dot the walls. Her Maine coon cat, Hendrix, seems to meditate. "For me," Collins says, shaking out her long, loose auburn hair, "designing has always been about operating outside of fashion, making things that are valued. And repeatable." —L.J.