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Beaucoup de wow

For some, the shows were too commercial, but there was enough sex appeal and drama to highlight Quebec talent

BY SHAUNA HARDY

The end of March is supposed to signal the beginning of spring. But for three days at Montreal's Bonsecours Market, the only thing on the minds of fashion editors and buyers from the world over was fall. The 14th edition of Montreal Fashion Week showcased the creations of some of the province's most talented designers. And while there was criticism that some shows were too commercial and others not up to par, there were enough highlights to remind everyone that the pool of creative design talent in Quebec runs deep.

Christian Chenail painted a sombre, futuristic picture with his show-stopping collection for Muse. Working with a palette of blacks and greys, punctuated with bright lemons and rich plums, the designer incorporated shiny fabrics, irregular pleats and unexpected textures into his collection. The show was perfectly styled, with models sporting dark black wigs and even darker makeup. The silver A-lined textured mini-dress got plenty of attention, as did the high-waisted trousers paired with a shoulder-baring plum-sweater. With easily one of the best shows of the week, the designer was greeted with a well-deserved standing ovation.

Joseph Helmer continues to wow audiences with his very special brand of haute couture. Trends have little effect on the designer's vision; instead, his inspiration is often drawn from places, he visits. For fall, he channels folkloric aspects of South America's Pampa region. Rich colours, Chantilly lace and plenty of drama are infused into his ruffled coats, artistic cocktail dresses and expertly tailored slim-fitting pants. Helmer's focus is clearly flirty femininity.

While arguably not her strongest collection, Marie Saint Pierre's show still delivered pieces with her signature modern edge. Ruffles ruled the runway, appearing on coats, jumpsuits and dresses. A primarily grey, black and white colour scheme was punched up with shots of vivid red and blue. Working mostly with jersey, georgette, chiffon and wool felt, shapes went from providing body-skimming sex appeal (a high-necked grey turtleneck with a mid-cut draped back) to ovoid-shaped modernity (a white sweater dress paired



From top: A lively coat with oversized buttons from Soia & Kyo and a flirty cocktail dress by Joseph Helmer. JIMMY HAMELIN/SENSATION MODE

with red tights and black toeless boots).

Two more commercial lines, Rudsak and Soia & Kyo drew huge crowds to their shows. Gun-metal grey was the star colour at Rudsak, showing up on everything from jackets and peaked caps to boots and bags. The younger sibling to Mackage, Soia & Kyo continues to focus on its forte: lively coats that pop thanks to their oversized buttons and asymmetrical collars.

Oprah's Big Give isn't the only place to learn about philanthropy. The Têlio show highlighted the top 25 stunning designs from a province-wide contest opened to fashion students.

Now in its third year, the contest turns the spotlight on to emerging talent, awarding scholarships totalling \$4,000 to the top three winners each year.

Next year, the initiative will be expanding to invite students from across the country to participate for a chance to showcase their designs on the Montreal catwalk.

"It's so important to support the next crop of designers," says Marie-Josée Trempe, president of Specs Model Management and partner in the Têlio event. "Their horizons are boundless and they have such a desire to merge creative work with a commercial angle. It is my dream that we will eventually be able to grant them business coaching and business mentoring so that they can truly maximize their potential."

The closing show marked a fashion first at Montreal Fashion Week. Presented by personal stylists Jeff Golf and Caroline Alexander of Ludique, the Urban Armour show was open to the public.

The benefit show, which raised money for a local women's charity, was designed to showcase wearable fall trends from top Quebec designers, including Marisa Minicucci, Denis Gagnon and Envers by Yves-Jean Lacasse.

"Often there is a missing link for the public between the theatrical styling of clothing on the runway and how individuals can imagine wearing designer creations," Golf says.

"We wanted to put together a show that not only highlights the very best of Quebec design, but also sparks people's imagination, showing them how these creations can be incorporated into every-day life."

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