



Montreal Fashion Week: Helmer

Posted: March 27, 2008, 9:53 PM by Nathalie Atkinson
[Montreal Fashion Week](#)



Haitian-born Montreal mainstay [Helmer](#) (for images, click on the French-language version of his site) gives us belted charcoal grey coats with rows of short, stiff fabric ruffles in khaki, rust and brown; another, in navy, has a front panel showing the same technique, and a high curving capelet is similarly festooned with eccentric rows, in the manner of gypsy costume, with its found and treasured pieces of fabric scraps. Next, a series of white poplin dress shirts with extended interwoven tucks and folds and puff sleeves (one is covered in looping tabs, like rolled cash register tape) is paired with high-waisted pencil skirts and trousers, to recall the flamboyant caballeros of Argentina. Body-conscious dresses in Calais and Chantilly lace dresses and other pieces are further embroidered in the style of South American folkloric costumes.

But it's Helmer's dresses - truly incredible patchwork dresses - that I'm waiting to see come on the runway. As we sat down, there were murmurs: rumours that earlier this week, Helmer's studio was broken into and this collection vandalized but if that's true, there is no sign of it. Perhaps (and at the risk of hyperbole) with his meticulous handwork and sheer audacity of his pricelessly elaborate garments, Helmer is the closest thing Canada has to authentic *haute couture*. Next month, the [Palais de Congrès](#) in Montreal will exhibit 60 of his kaleidoscopic pieces, so you can see for yourself.

Photo: A recent patchwork gown by Helmer Joseph (Nathalie Atkinson/National Post)