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# Rad Hourani Goes Seamless

by [Katia Jean Paul](#)  
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## Fashion's wunderkind reflects on 5YRS of Unisex at the Phi Centre

In the land of fashion lies a panoply of *avant-garde* clothing lines, each one more enigmatic, intricate, and daring than the last. And then there's **Rad Hourani**, whose namesake unisex label stands in a class of its own. So much so that this past January in Paris, the Montreal expat presented the first unisex haute couture collection in fashion history—sanctioned by *La Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*—and simultaneously became the first Canadian designer to enter the prestigious ranks of Parisian haute couture.

The latter is no small feat for the Jordanian-born former stylist who, *sans* formal training, launched his eponymous line only five years ago, and is now the subject of the month-long curatorial *Rad Hourani: Seamless 5 YRS of Unisex*, now showing at Montreal's **Phi Centre**.

Katia Jean Paul sat down with fashion's industrious rarity, whose unisex vision goes far beyond the seams.

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In 2007, Rad Hourani made his fashion debut. Two lines—Rad by Rad Hourani, his ready-to-wear line, and his namesake haute couture line—and 20 collections later, the Canadian-bred *artiste* has broken new ground in the fashion industry, eschewing traditional gender-specific sartorial presentations, and successfully bringing asexual couture to the fore. Yet despite his numerous accomplishments, Hourani, 31, is surprisingly humble, self-possessed, speaking softly but confidently when I meet him for very first time. On a windy Wednesday morning, I sat with the designer at the Phi Centre to talk about his illustrious career spanning only five years, the concept of unisex, and what lies ahead for his namesake brand. Here's what he had to say.

### How did this curatorial come about?

"When I met Phoebe Greenberg [founder and curator of the Phi Centre] through Renata Morales, Phoebe introduced me to the centre and I understood what the centre was about. And for the past five years since I started my line, I always wanted to do something in Montreal, but I didn't really necessarily want to do a runway show because I don't consider myself a designer. I don't consider that I do only fashion, music, art, or film. I got many invitations since the beginning of my brand, but it was never the right fit. I wanted to wait until I could do something complete, that I can find myself through music, art, style, design, architecture, etc. When I met Phoebe and understood what the Phi Centre was about, for me it was the perfect marriage because it's a place where it's about all the mediums of expression. When I understood the music part, the film part, the exhibit part—the whole thing—it made complete sense to do this project with Phoebe and bring it here. And I'm extremely excited about it."



### What can we expect to see during this month-long curatorial?

"The second floor [of the centre] will have all my work, the process of my work through unisex anatomy. That's when I started understanding the man's anatomy and the woman's anatomy, and I merged both of them into a unisex pattern. That's [also] when our first canvas started because there was never a unisex canvas before—and they had to create that canvas. It's a man and woman's body. The unisex anatomy is my photography, and then the pattern is my sketch design, because I don't sketch like a typical fashion designer since I did not study fashion. I don't necessarily have the talent of drawing silhouettes. I do it by graphic design, so it looks like architecture in a way. Then you have unisex portraits of different kinds of people that wear my clothes that I shot as well, and that will be another wall section. And then the last section of the exhibit will be all my collections for the past five years. There's 20 collections, and you'll also have screens of different videos with music custom-made for each video that was made for each show. In the [arthouse] cinema theater, you're going to have a video installation of my past video work.

"The fun part is the pop-up shop downstairs, where I invited different artists to collaborate with. I wanted to go in the field of architecture, dance, painting, music, art, and sculpture. The whole theme is unisex, and these collaborations will be limited-editions, available at the pop-up for the whole month of November."

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For people who may not be familiar with the concept of unisex, how does unisex differ from androgyny? "It's a completely different thing. It's more complex for people to understand because it's not something that existed before. Yes, there was someone taking the men's shirt and putting it on a woman, or Yves Saint Laurent taking the men's suit and making it for women, but it's not what I do. Every piece that I design is made on a canvas that is studied to fit a man and a woman's body. Androgyny is a style as much as '50s, punk, pin-up is a style. It's each one's choice to make [my language] their own style. The style can look androgynous, feminine, sexy, fatale, casual, punk, edgy, commercial. Whatever style someone wants to adapt my clothes to, they can because they have the freedom of a garment that is not related to any reference in the past. You cannot see my clothes and say, 'It's '80s or '90s.' You cannot say it's gothic or rock. I'm free of all these references. I never put buttons because I find a garment with buttons can be dated, and I don't want my clothes to look dated."



Five years ago, when you set out to create a purely unisex line in what is inarguably a very gender-focused society, did you already have a clear vision of how to break the mold to go beyond simply androgynous clothing and how did you go about it?

"I know for sure that when I first conceptualized where I was going to start, I knew it was 100% a reflection of who I am. I took my way of thinking, my way of being that is without any limitation of age, race, religion, nationality, gender, culture, tradition, etc. I've never been interested in any of that limitation. Since I was a kid, I always traveled a lot with my parents. I lived in different parts of the world, saw different traditions, different religions [and so on], and it made me understand more that we're all, at the end of the day, looking for the same thing. It's just different styles, different concepts, and our main canvas, the basis of our humanity, is the same. I believe that if you believe in something and you really want something, you put all your energy and effort in it, and you're doing it with honesty and hard work, [when] you start it, someone else will see it, and someone else [and so on]. I believe in that, in individualism. I believe in own constructions and own deconstructions. You can construct yourself as much as you can deconstruct yourself. It's all in you. It has to come from you."



You've mentioned in past interviews that unisex is not only a sartorial reference, but also a philosophy, a language that you've since expressed not only through fashion design, but photography, art direction, filmmaking, writing, and other modes of self-expression. How else would you like to express this language and proliferate this philosophy in the future? What is next for Rad Hourani? "Painting, film, art installations. I would also love to open my own restaurant one day. The way to create food is rife with tradition. Acrylic paintings, more photo exhibits, more film. I think there's many ways. Furniture, houses. I think it's endless what I can do with unisex. It's an endless language."

*Rad Hourani: Seamless or 5YRS of Unisex* runs until November 30. It includes a pop-up shop with exclusive objects made in collaboration with architect Gilles Saucier, painters Leela Sun and Renata Morales; a limited-edition book, *Rad Hourani 5Yrs of Unisex* with only 300 copies available worldwide; Rad Hourani's interactive jacket from the Tate Modern in London; a free conference and Q&A with the artist on November 8; musical performances by friends Pierre Lapointe, Chris Garneau, Jacques Green, and Meleke; and much more. [Click here for the full schedule of events.](#)

All photos by Rad Hourani.

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