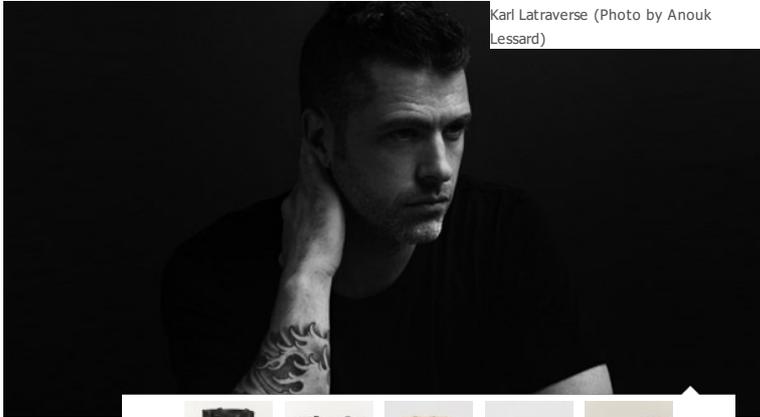




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Karl Latraverse (Photo by Anouk Lessard)



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My Montreal: Designer Karl Latraverse of There Are Many of Us

by Katia Jean Paul

Karl Latraverse is the brain behind the luxe leatherware label **There Are Many of Us**, handmade multi-functional travel bags and accessories built to last, with minimal hardware, full-grain Italian leather and zippers imported from Switzerland. Each item is emblazoned with the line's urban DNA: a cityscape of Montreal by night adorns the lining inside all the bags.

Born and raised in Montreal, Latraverse has dabbled in fashion design since childhood. The designer recalls dressing himself at the age of three. At 10 years old he graduated to deconstructing vintage clothing for fun. His studies in fashion design at Lasalle College, coupled with the five years he spent working as a fit and campaign model for the likes of Dolce & Gabbana and Versace in Europe in the late 90s gave him a first-hand look at fine craftsmanship from inside the couturier's atelier and whet his appetite for designing professionally.

Latraverse owned a womenswear, menswear and accessories line called AIR_D, from 1999 to 2008, but left this project to explore new horizons. Self-taught in industrial design, he helms his own consulting firm called Innovation IDK, through which he creates gazebos and outdoor furniture. There Are Many of Us marks his latest sartorial endeavour and in the one year since its inception, Latraverse has shown his fine, homegrown leather goods at trade shows throughout Europe, the latest of which during this past London Fashion Week. With accounts in Vietnam, Singapore, Russia and a collaboration with a high-end Chinese label slated for later this year, There Are Many of Us is growing.



72-Hour canvas bag with cityscape of Montreal. (Photo by Marcio Lana-Lopez)

We sat down with the man behind the brand to pick his brain about the design process, learn about his favourite Montreal culinary haunts and get his advice to aspiring designers.

What is the philosophy behind There Are Many of Us?

There Are Many of Us means a lot of things. There are many options —there are many bags and many sizes. Some of them are very adaptable



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and transformable. We wanted something that is not pretentious. The bags are simple but they have strong identities that enable them to last through the years. We decided to use high-end materials so that when you have the bag, you can appropriate it for several years. Sometimes, it's better to pay a bit more but have something for a very long time. The design is a balance of minimal and super functional that is timeless.

It also means there are many of us doing a lot of things. Everybody is important. We need each other in life to function. We are all a part of something. We're all human. Whether we're white, black, red or yellow, we're the same. The line was a way to bring people together.

There are many of us means there isn't just one person behind the concept. There are a lot of people involved in the process: my artisans, Kristin Hofmann and Thierry Lorient, who give me feedback, and Marcio Lana-Lopez, who is behind the promotional photos and videos, the image of the brand.

The name was inspired by *There Are Many of Us*, the book based on the short film *I'm Here* by Spike Jonze. It's a love story between an old generation robot and a modern one. And like the story, the line is about finding our way back to human values, not technology-based values.

What inspires your design process?

I've been traveling since I was 18, so I know the complexity of travel, especially since 9/11. One of the main things we wanted in terms of design was to have a functional product for the complexity of travel. Something that is mobile so that you can adapt and transform it depending on your need at the moment or the meeting you have. Travel doesn't necessarily mean boarding a plane; it can also mean taking the train or a Bixi. Whenever we design a bag, we think about all the possible ways you can wear it in a day so that you don't have to carry two or three bags.

What would be a typical workday for you?

First thing: press start on my espresso machine. It's a religion. I make myself two cappuccinos in the morning before leaving. I spend one hour and a half reading my emails and [design] blogs, and drinking my coffee. Then depending on where I'm at in the production process, it could be a few hours of pattern making, colour or swatch searching. I spend at least one or two hours per week with my artisans. I do [industrial design] consulting at the same time, so most of time, I have consultation meetings, brainstorming and I communicate with my Asian team since my industrial design production is based in China. I chat with them daily to make sure projects are running on schedule and stuff like that.



The 72-Hours bag, the piece that started it all.
(Photo by Marcio Lana-Lopez)

How would you describe your personal style?

I'm very minimal, functional. I spend money on my clothes and I try to take care of them. But I'm never flamboyant.

Where do you like to shop in Montreal?

I would say **Reborn** for their jewelry selection, **SSENSE** because it has pretty much everything you could look for, **Naked & Famous Denim** on Saint-Laurent because of the fit of their jeans, and because it's made in Quebec. **Les Étoffes** for their selection and the boutique itself and **Michel Brisson** because they always have high end basic pieces. That's basically where I go.

What's next for There Are Many of Us?

We started out with bags, but it may evolve to clothes and housewares in the future.

Which neighbourhood do you call home?

I think my home is really Pointe St-Charles. I feel good there. It's a mix of industrial and old Irish. It's kind of a trashy hood that became kind of rich at the same time. The mix is interesting, and I find the architecture very pleasant. It's very industrial. You're right behind the Atwater Market, so it's very accessible.

Where do you like to go to unwind and grab a bite to eat?

I think **Voro** [on Fairmount] is great for a quick drink. I like **Le Dépanneur** on Bernard for breakfast. It's very trash. No two chairs, plates or forks are the same, and it's cash only. You go there and people are friendly, but you're like a nobody, which is cool. There are always artists playing live



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music. And it's healthy, homemade food. I really like [Café St-Henri](#). As for restaurants, I like [Bouillon Bilk](#) on Saint-Laurent. Otherwise, I'm always eating Asian food, so I like little Japanese spots like [Kazu](#) [on St. Catherine, near Guy]. It has a friendly atmosphere and the chef is amazing.

And I'm almost always on the Lachine Canal in the summer. It has industrial charm and it's trendy at the same time.

What advice would you have for aspiring designers?

Be true to yourself. Believe in yourself and your vision. And open yourself up, which means go to art galleries, go see art house films, random shows with artists you may not know. We have an amazing music scene in Montreal, and small venues like Casa Del Popolo and Sala Rossa, and you never know what will inspire you. All these things are such great inspirations in my daily life.

And travel as much as you can. If you don't have the money, go on travel blogs and travel that way.

There Are Many of Us bags and accessories available at Michel Brisson on Laurier Ave., Reborn on Saint-Paul St., and on the website:
<http://www.therearemanyofus.com>

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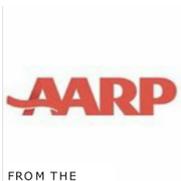


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