

Recycle this: Bolivian turns waste into high fashion

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A model presents a Marion Macedo creation at the "Recycle Yourself" fashion show in La Paz on November 17. Each dress is a unique, eco-friendly work that takes about a week to make by hand and comes with a \$250 price tag.

Crafted from old newspapers, plastic bags, discarded CDs and soda bottle caps, Bolivian designer Marion Macedo's quirky fashion creations have added an eclectic dimension to the catwalks of Europe, South America and Asia.

Each dress is a unique, eco-friendly work that takes about a week to make by hand and comes with a \$250 price tag. Macedo does most of the work herself, using giant needles for the crochet work.

"Not only do we recycle paper, but we also use vegetable dyes, cocoa

bean shells, and we even make our own natural adhesives," Macedo told AFP, adding that her goal was to be as "ecologically pure as possible."

Since starting out in 2005, the fashionista has been invited to present her work at several international venues, including the 2006 Amsterdam [Fashion](#) Week, the 2008 Paris Chocolate Festival -- which featured French singer Anne-Laure Girbal wearing one of her eco-dresses -- fashion shows in Tokyo in 2007 and 2010, and in Madrid in 2010.

At her seventh fashion show, entitled "Recycle Yourself" this month in La Paz, a model wore a white Macedo dress of crocheted paper with two large ruffles, one around the neck and the other around the hem, made of pink polyethylene bags.

"Paper is good material to work with," said the designer, boasting that she learned how to "give it movement" like fabric. "It's the material I feel most comfortable with."

Describing herself as an amateur designer, Macedo has in the past bought her own materials and recycled household waste, including CDs discarded by her photographer husband.

Her latest show was the first for which she had the backing of corporate sponsors, and she jumped on the opportunity to use material from their products for her creations.

One model hit the runway wearing a blouse adorned with soda bottle caps, and a plastic red skirt with the ubiquitous white-on-red Coca-Cola logo. Another had a blouse made out of paper flyers from a local shopping mall, another sponsor.

A model wearing a dress covered with old CDs attracted a round of enthusiastic applause. Another wore a miniskirt made of nylon bags.

Fellow designer Claudia Perez describes Macedo's work as "more art than fashion", as it was created to be displayed rather than worn.

"It's a work of art ... well done and creative," she said.

The designs may be mainly for show, but Macedo says she has orders for outfits as well as accessories like shawls, neck pieces and paper flowers.

Most of her customers are middle-class women who fork out between \$50 and \$100 for a handmade blanket -- one of her best sellers.

Wedding gowns and cocktail dresses are made to order -- and in 2008 a bride got married in a Macedo-designed paper dress.

Macedo was trained as a wallpaper designer and became a clothing designer almost by accident when her husband did a photo shoot with a subject wearing a suit crudely made from newspaper.

In 2007, she won a prize for creativity from the Buenos Aires-based Latin American Design Association.

But not everyone is impressed.

"Many of the outfits looked more like craft day at the local preschool than fashion," said Krista Westervelt, who writes about fashion on the popular website Gather, commenting on a 2010 show.

"Practicality of this outfit is low," she wrote, commenting on a corrugated cardboard hat and shawl.

"The hat may [work](#) for a sunny day, but you don't want to get caught in the rain wearing this. Have you smelled wet cardboard? Not attractive."

Commenting on a dress made out of a table runner with flower details, Westervelt wrote: "This piece is infinitely more wearable than the others. Not sure that's a compliment, though."

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