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1980s Real Fashion On Show in St. Pete

By Yelena Minenko

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ST. PETERSBURG — An exhibition devoted to fashion from the 1980s comprising pieces from the private collection of Alexander Vasilyev is now on at the Erarta museum of contemporary art.

The items of clothing collected by the eminent fashion historian are on show to the public for the first time. "It is a world premiere; these dresses have not been shown to anyone yet," Vasilyev said.

The exposition comprises about 50 women's outfits and accessories that were made and worn in the 1980s, and occupies two floors of the five-story building that houses Erarta.

"The theme of the exhibition is very close to many of us because we lived through that era," Vasilyev said. "But 30 years have passed already, and that is a whole generation; today '80s fashion has started reappearing on haute couture podiums, and young girls want to know how their mothers dressed, how they did their hair, and why they didn't pluck their eyebrows."

Eighties fashion was the last major style of the Cold War epoch, according to the historian, who says the gaping differences between lifestyles in the East and West characterize the period. "The West was rich, and the East was poor; today it's the other way around," Vasilyev said.

"The image of a businesswoman was quite popular at that time. It had to be the conquering, powerful woman, like Margaret Thatcher was," he said. This is reflected in the prevalence of shoulder pads in the exhibited outfits: Women attempted to demonstrate that they could bear heavy loads on their shoulders by wearing tight jackets with shoulder pads. Both Britain's "Iron Lady" prime minister and Diana, Princess of Wales, were considered style icons of the era, along with the images shown by television.

"Cinema wasn't so important anymore," Vasilyev said. "TV had got all the power; television series such as 'Dallas' and 'Dynasty' influenced American designers, and they started popularizing really vivid and rich fashion." This brought everything extraordinary and "over the top" into the fashion industry. Bright, unnatural, contrasting colors, awkward forms, giant colorful beads, geometric bijouterie and shocking hairstyles spread from the West all over the world.

"The '80s were the last hymn to luxury and wealth," Vasilyev said.

Each exhibition room contains that distinctive luxurious atmosphere of the decadent '80s, created not only by the dresses themselves, but also by photographs of models from the '80s hanging on the walls and by perfume sprayed on each outfit especially for the exhibition.

"Each room is saturated with the aroma of the '80s, so that when you enter, you feel like you are in the most luxurious boutique of that time," Vasilyev said.

"Fashion of the '80s" runs through Aug. 28 at the Erarta museum of contemporary art. 2 29th Linia of Vasilyevsky Island. Metro Primorskaya, Vasileostrovskaya. St. Petersburg.

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