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Two Days Only for Taylor Collection at GUM

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The actress had a huge jewelry collection with more than 800 pieces.

Auction house Christie's is showing part of movie actress Elizabeth Taylor's vast collection of jewelry, paintings, and dresses in a glamorous show at the GUM department store on Red Square.

This show, which is open only Thursday and Friday, is the first on a world tour that will see the collection head to London, Los Angeles, Dubai, Geneva, Paris and Hong Kong before going to New York, where all the items will be auctioned off in December.

One of the biggest Hollywood stars of the 20th century, Taylor rose to fame as a child actress in the 1944 film "National Velvet" and went on to win two Academy Awards. She was as famous for her personal life and was married eight times, twice to Richard Burton, the great love affair of her life, whom she also starred with in two of her most famous movies, "Cleopatra" and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

Taylor was seen by many to be the epitome of Hollywood glamour, and the collection does little to dissuade that impression. Her jewelry collection is one of the largest in private hands, made up of more than 800 hundred pieces — a number of which came from those two marriages to Burton.

"It's more than just jewelry, it's a love story," Lithuanian actress Ingeborga Dapkunaite said at GUM on Wednesday. "To me, the pieces are not interesting in themselves, but how she got them [is]. ... These pieces are signs of love."

Among the highlights are two pieces that Burton gave to Taylor; "The Night of the Iguana" brooch, designed by Jean Schlumberger for Tiffany & Co. in the shape of a fish and made with 30-carat diamonds and sapphires, and a ruby and diamond ring of 8.24 carats by Van Cleef & Arpels worth more than $1 million.

"Almost every piece of her jewelry has a story behind it. Each piece represents a moment in 20th-century history," said Matthew Stephenson, director of Christie's in Russia, telling the story of how Burton once promised to find Taylor the world's finest and most beautiful ruby.

One Christmas after presents had already been opened, Burton sent his daughter in to Taylor. "Mommy, Daddy sent me to tell you that you have forgotten something very important that was at the bottom of your stocking," Stephenson explained.

"Her daughter hid her hands behind her back and asked Taylor to pick a hand. When Elizabeth was then presented with a red little box, which was carrying the ruby ring, she cried out loud and ran downstairs to find her husband Richard Burton sitting in a chair and nonchalantly reading the newspaper. It took him three to four years to actually find this ruby, which he thought was perfect."

Part of the proceeds from the collection's tour will go toward the AIDS foundation that Taylor set up in 1991, after the death of her friend and co-star Rock Hudson.

Apart from the jewelry collection, visitors can also see designer dresses by the likes of Christian Dior and Dolce & Gabbana, a yellow gown that Taylor wore in the movie Cleopatra and a selection of paintings from her private collection, such as Picasso's "Tete de Femme au Chapeau Mauve," and Roy Lichtenstein's "Still Life With Sculpture."

Moscow was chosen as the first stop of the tour not only to give potential Russian bidders a chance to look at the objects, Stephenson said, but also because Taylor visited Russia three times in her life, the last time in the '70s, when she starred in the first American-Soviet film production, "The Blue Bird," a fantasy film directed by George Cukor.

The Collection of Elizabeth Taylor is on Thursday and Friday. GUM, 3 Red Square. Metro Ploshchad Revolyutsii. www.christies.com/elizabethtaylor

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