

Fall Fashion Week Starts in Moscow Manezh

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British designer Tony Ward with Miss Poland. Ward's new collection was modelled by Miss Universe contestants.

While Moscow may be a world center of wealth and business, this has not translated into clout in the fashion world. Most famous designers still operate out of New York or Paris, and people in the West often stereotype Russia as a land of tracksuits and fake fur.

This week, Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Russia aims to change these perceptions with a week of fashion shows and parties intended to attract international attention to Russian designers and bring in lucrative corporate sponsors.

Last weekend, Fashion Week kicked off the festivities in Moscow's Manezh with Fashion Industry Day on Oct. 25, a series of shows sponsored by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The headliner of the day's events was Slava Zaitsev, the venerable maven of Soviet fashion, who continues to be the most recognizable name in the Russian fashion world.

Following Zaitsev's show, a series of factories and manufacturing companies held showings, among which was a show of home textiles designed by Alena Akhmadullina, a young Muscovite designer who has been producing pret-a-porter since 2001 and has shown collections in Paris. The events were not without some non-Russian context: At a special event, visitors were given an analysis of recent shows in international fashion centers.

The next day shifted the focus from manufacturers to designers. Slava Zaitsev once again headlined the events with a showing of his latest pret-a-porter, yet he was joined by well-known British designer Tony Ward, who showed the latest products of his couture atelier using contestant's from this year's Miss Universe pageant as models.

Events continued Sunday with a show of children's fashion as well as adult fashion shows from a range of young Russian designers, joined by a few token foreigners.

Fashion Week will continue for the next week, with each day bringing a new assortment of shows and designers. While each designer will try to surprise their audiences, a look at the week's schedule reveals a few trends.

Firstly, Fashion Week Russia is dominated by Russian designers. While this might seem obvious based on the name, fashion weeks in other locations are far more international. Secondly, all of the designers are very young and have very little name recognition and so the organizers must be lauded for giving the youth a chance to show their work — traditionally, high fashion is a very difficult arena for newcomers to break into.

However, this lack of established names is likely due to a failure to attract famous designers to Moscow, rather than a purposeful initiative to promote young talent. It seems that the fashion world's more recognizable names do not view this event as a promising venue to show their latest products, and their absence would suggest a corresponding absence of wealthy backers, as the business community is more likely to be attracted by big names.

Nonetheless, Fashion Week Russia will provide the opportunity to see some rather unusual designers who get no attention on the international arena. Later in the week, the Belarus Fashion Week show will spotlight some of the country's young designers, while designers from elsewhere in the former Soviet Union will also have solo shows.

Audiences will even have an opportunity to see work by an Abkhazian designer, Rusiko — also known as Rusudan Kobyakova — a graduate of Slava Zaitsev's "Fashion Laboratory" who makes very unique clothing for slim women based on traditional Caucasian styles.

Indeed, Slava Zaitsev seems to be virtually omnipresent in this year's Fashion Week with two solo shows and his own one-day "Slava Zaitsev Fashion Festival," held a day after events at Manezh end in the Afimoll Siti center. His pupils are similarly ubiquitous, and he seems well placed to impart his particular brand of style to a whole new generation of Russian fashion consumers.

As for trends in this year's shows, RIA Novosti reports that long dresses and lace will be just as in vogue in 2014 as they were in 1914, so perhaps Russian fashion has come full circle over the tumultuous 20th century.

Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Russia will run until Oct. 31. A full list of designers, shows and locations can be found at mercedesbenzfashionweek.ru.

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