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Over The Weekend: Where Fashion Meets the Russian Avant-Garde

The Effect of Time exhibition explores how the Russian avant-garde has influenced contemporary culture, particularly the world of fashion.

By Felix Ward

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Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center

A new exhibition at the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center, The Effect of Time, explores how theRussian avant-garde has influenced contemporary culture, particularly the world of fashion. The show exhibits more than 100 works including paintings, drawings, graphic studies and dresses.

On display are early 20th century Russian masterpieces from artists such as Konstantin Rozhdestvensky, Ivan Punin and Vladimir Tatlin. Paintings are shown on the walls of the room, and outfits from leading fashion houses such as Celine, Diana von Furstenberg,

and Chloé are shown in the center of the hall.

"The aim of the exhibition is to show that there is a very close relationship between the clothes exhibited on the catwalks all over the world and Russian art produced over 100 years ago. This art, which often seems so distant and unintelligible, has played a very significant role in the contemporary fashion industry," Maria Nasimova, the curator of the exhibition, told The Moscow Times.

In order to depict the close relationship between the Russian avant-garde and fashion, outfits are positioned next to the paintings, drawings, and graphics to which they are similar. For example, Rozhdestvensky's graphite study, "Analytical Composition" (1930) is shown next to a dress fromValentino's 2016 autumn/winter collection. Set side by side, their visual similarities are striking. Thedress is not a copy of the painting, but it has the same color scheme and similar shapes. Suddenly you see two different art forms in perfect aesthetic harmony.

Over the last decades, globalization has meant that clothing designers can get inspiration from different cultures, different time periods and different historical events. The show makes clear that since the1960s, leading fashion designers have turned to art for their main source of inspiration, including theradical work of the Russian avant-garde.

This exhibition brings together two artistic worlds that at first glance seem incredibly distant. However, the exhibits illustrate the sheer force and everlasting influence of the revolutionary Russian avant-garde. As Russian artists revolutionized the art world, fashion designers stretched the boundaries of their art form.

In the end, the show highlights the unprecedented significance of the Russian avant-garde, not only inthe context of its relationship with contemporary fashion, but on a greater scale. It illustrates an informal and mutually beneficial cultural exchange between Russia and the West. The avant-garde overcame what the curators call "temporary limits, territorial borders, and linguistic and cultural barriers" byinspiring the fashion industry for decades. "These works have influenced the clothes which we want towear and buy," they said. Indeed, the effect of time has been only to spread and intensify the influence of the Russian avant-garde throughout the world.

Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center
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