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Fashioning the Russians from 1900 to 1925: The Autocracy, The Ballet, & the Émigré

By

Brooklyn Wichmann

A thesis

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## COMMITTEE APROVAL

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of BROOKLYN  
M. WICHMANN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Justin D. Stover, PhD  
Major Advisor

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Tara Young  
Committee Member

---

Laura Ahola-Young  
Graduate Faculty Representative

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Fashioning the Russians from 1900 to 1925: The Autocracy, The Ballet, & the Émigré  
Thesis Abstract--Idaho State University (2018)

This project explores the time in history of 1900 – 1925, in which Russians sought to create a fashion style that distinguished them from the rest of the western world. Three groups were in pursuit of what they believed to be the Russian style. First, Tsar Nicholas II had a vision of his court aesthetic that took influence from Russia's medieval past, which he believed would draw him closer to all his people. Second, Ballet Russes' artists believed that folk art was the answer to creating style russe which they succeeded in creating on the stages of Paris and London. Finally, white émigré that consisted mostly of aristocrats and artists wanted to maintain their cultural identity through fashion. Research utilizes primary sources of museum costume collections and advertisements to analyze what the stylistic vision was and how it was accomplished.

Keywords: Russian Autocracy, Ballet Russes, Fashion, 1900-1925, White Émigré

## **Introduction: Russian Costume History, 1900-1925**

Not until recently did academic writing examine the history of dress or costume. There is an abundance of costume academia, but it primarily falls into the category of reference and consist of images with sanitary museum descriptions without argument. Now, writers are studying costumes through modes of change, outward portrayals of inner emotion, or disseminators of culture. The terms costume and clothing will be used interchangeably throughout this study. Both terms are used because costume refers to the style of dress for a specific historical period or country, while clothing is a collective term for body coverings. I examine how the fashion image of Russia changed from 1900 to 1925 through three historical groups, the Tsar and autocracy, Ballet Russes, and White Émigré. Each group had a vision of how Russia should be portrayed at home and abroad through clothing. The three visions were not unique from each other but overlapped on important features, such as the inclusion of traditional Russian garments and that for it to be a Russian style it had to be made by Russian hands. Before this narrative can be constructed it must be broken down into its basic components, beginning with general costume history.

Anne Hollander and James Laver are two leaders in the field of costume history that have written about costumes beyond the scope of references and in terms of creating meaning and change. Laver's *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* chronologically tells that tale of costume beginning with the earliest records of human adornment and brings readers to the present day. His argument is simple: "In the present study it is proposed largely to ignore these complications [of chronology] and to concentrate on the two questions of form and material."<sup>1</sup> It could be said this was part of the beginning of a new method of looking at costume, by looking

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<sup>1</sup> James Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 7.

at it objectively through the silhouette of the period it was created and by giving it life subjectively through examining the material. In his 1945 *Taste and Fashion: From the French Revolution to the Present Day*, Laver helped students discern fashion periods and categories within periods of fashion. He accomplishes this goal through the dual scope of chronological investigation and subject examination. He began in 1780 France and worked forward. Through his other scope, subject, he categorized fashion into groups such as evening wear, corsets, colour and material.<sup>2</sup> Laver proposes this is a good way to survey costume history because not every gown in the 1910s was a day gown made of muslin and in the 1870s not every evening gown was made of stiff rustling taffeta. There is fluidity in what appears in each century with the young representing the trend. Laver's way of writing about costumes puts it in the realm of historical academia by arguing that dating costumes has been a hard task without a comprehensive guide that illustrates all the human idiosyncrasies.

Anne Hollander takes another approach that brings garments back into reality in *Seeing Through Clothes*. She examines clothing as an actor of history and not just a result of a historical period. Hollander analyzes clothing subjectively and chronological like Laver but through the lens of art. Her thesis reads: "This book is concerned with how clothes in works of art have been connected with clothes in real life, during the two and a half thousand years of Western history in which the aim of art has been to represent the visible world with conviction."<sup>3</sup> She discusses art and its connection with clothing by the progression of clothing being immortalized in art. For example, Hollander discusses the reoccurring use of drapery in painting that offers a mirror into what was truly worn.<sup>4</sup> Importance should be paid to one quote: "Unlike sex and art, however,

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<sup>2</sup> James Laver, *Taste and Fashion: From the French Revolution to the Present Day* (London, Toronto: G.G. Harrap and company ltd., 1945), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), x.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2-3 .

dress usually fails to qualify as serious in itself.”<sup>5</sup> This statement is accurate. Until writers like Hollander and Laver, clothing was trivialized and not thought to be important indicators of culture, politics, or society. Fashion and its writings are trivialized as simply fluff, eye-candy, or a passing fancy. Therefore, the importance of costume history is to stop trivializing what was worn back then and today. Fifty-years from today, what someone wore to a party or a gallery opening will be social, political, and cultural commentary.

A new field of cultural history that will breathe new meaning into clothing is the history of sense. The sense of touch is important to the study of clothing because it is uncharted territory. Historical records rarely, if ever, express feelings let alone touch experiences. While it is an inferred history, costume historians should utilize its hidden resources to understand the cultural and social implications of a garment. Constance Classen surveys the sense of touch through multiple types of touch including “A Place by the Fire,” “A Woman’s Touch,” and “The Modern Touch.” He theorizes that, “If the aim of the history of touch is not to denigrate premodernity as a primitive world of mindless sensations, neither is it to romanticize it as a purveyor of warm tactile experiences in contrast to the cold visual values of modernity.”<sup>6</sup> Classen believes the aim of the history of touch is to understand how the sense relates to cultural contexts of the time and their changes over times.<sup>7</sup>

Newer research on the senses focuses on the Russian Empire, a starting point for my research into the senses of Russian costume. Edited by Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks, *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present* is a collection of essays on various themes in the Russian empire. Sense historians agree that any depiction of life would be

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>6</sup> Constance Classen, *Deepest Sense* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2012), xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., xiv.

incomplete without depiction of the senses, even withstanding the complications.<sup>8</sup> Alexander M. Martin writes that “Russian history has created experiences that seemed unfamiliar, even bewildering to many people, or at least, to many of those who produced our historical sources. The senses provide an entry point into those perceptions.” In the case of Russia, often referred to as complex and unyielding, sense can help explain the unexplainable. Senses transcend borders because they are experienced by everyone regardless of time and place. For example, Matthew Romaniello writes in “Humoral bodies in cold climates” about the effects of the Russian climate and how the frigid temperatures in winter affect medical practices. The sense of cold is felt by everyone in the northern hemisphere at some point in their lives, but not to the extent of Russia. His study utilizes descriptions of climate and environment to help readers understand what type of cold is felt by the Russians.<sup>9</sup>

Beginning with costume history and moving to touch history, the narrative arrives at Russian history. By the 1917 Revolution, Russia had been a nation for a thousand years and under the rule of Romanov Tsars for 300 years. Therefore, the last Romanov Tsar and Tsarina, Nicholas II and Alexandra, are important to understanding the climate for fashion and its changes. In *Nicholas and Alexandra*, Robert K Massie’s states that until his book was published in 1967 there were almost no books written on the last Tsar and his family. After publication, there was a mass flood of works on the subject.<sup>10</sup> His goal for this book was to “weave all the available threads together and to interpret, in the light of modern medicine and psychiatry, an account of a family whose struggle with a disease was to have momentous consequences for the

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander M. Martin, “Introduction: The Sensory in Russian and Soviet History” in *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present*, eds. Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks (New York: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2016), 1. Classen, xi.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew P. Romaniello, “Humoral bodies in cold climate” in *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present*, eds. Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks (New York: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2016), 23, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Robert K Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), ix-x.

world.”<sup>11</sup> His lines of inquiry lead nowhere to costume history or touch history on the surface. His work instead details the political and social climate of 1900s Russia. Massie leads to new threads in the realm of clothing through the inclusion of primary source commentary on what the Empress wore or how the Tsar looked in his military finery. The subtle commentary on this seemingly trivial matter reveals it made an impression. No one would mention what someone wore to a wedding or funeral unless it made a positive or negative emotional impact on them. Like Classen points out, feelings are often inferred and if the description of a gown makes it into a diary or letter it stirred an emotional response.<sup>12</sup>

My study begins with the examination of the influence of the Tsar’s court on the development of “style russe.” As Christine Ruane explains, this style of clothing began after the 1903 Costume Ball that featured traditional Russian caftans of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>13</sup> It was developed and spread first by the Ballet Russes and then revived after the revolution by White émigré in Paris. Therefore, a thorough study of twentieth-century Russian costume history is incomplete without a study of the culture it came from. In recent years, the renewed interest in the last Tsar has indirectly lead to other studies in the garment industry and creative prowess of Russians throughout the centuries.

### **The Picture Book**

Missing from Classen and Romaniello is the study of touch of clothing. Classen mentions clothing in “A Woman’s Touch: Texts and Textiles,” by examining how upper-class ladies wrote letters to friends commenting on their spinning and needle-work. Here his sense study encompasses the touch of spinning cloth, embroidery, and the touch of pen to paper in writing.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,viii.

<sup>12</sup> Classen, xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Ruane, *Empire’s New Clothes*, 163-164.

<sup>14</sup> Classen, 82-83.

His examination focuses on what ladies of society would refer to as “women’s work” and leaves out the other side where production of clothing is also women’s work. Abby Schrader accounts for this oversight in “Market pleasures and prostitution in St. Petersburg.” Schrader explores the pleasure women took in shopping at the 1848 *Pazzah* on Nevsky Prospect. She also explores how the public shopping environment exposed respectable ladies to speculation of being a prostitute and the lengths women went to obtain the object of their window shopping fantasy.<sup>15</sup> My study makes up for the oversight of other writers by examining how clothing created an identity of the Russian empire from 1900 to 1925 through the senses of their creators, wearers, and viewers.

On the topic of Russian costume there is a wealth of books on the subject. As mentioned above, the books are primarily reference image books. *Russian Elegance: Country and City Fashion* written by Luisa V. Yefimova and Tatyavna S. Aleshina chronicles the fashion of the Russian empire from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the twentieth century and its progression to modernity. Their purpose was a broad survey of Russian costumes held at the State Historical Museum in Moscow.<sup>16</sup> This book is beneficial for those who study the costumes because it contains garments important to the development of modern Russia that are otherwise only accessible by visiting the museum. The highlights include ancient caftans of the Tsars, Empress Catherine the Great’s court gown, and a late 19<sup>th</sup> century court gown. These are all vital to the study of this culture and its progression from a pre-modern to modern nation and an agricultural based nation to one steaming ahead in industry. In costume history, when the garments are inaccessible to be

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<sup>15</sup> Abby Schrader, “Market pleasures and prostitution in St. Petersburg” in *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present*, eds. Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks (New York: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2016), 68-70.

<sup>16</sup> Luisa V. Yefimova and Tatyana S. Aleshina, *Russian Elegance: Country and City Fashion from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century* (London: Vivays Publishing, 2012), 7-8.

touched or viewed in person, an image speaks louder than a 1000 words on the garment.

Garments allow interpretation much like all forms of art. Yefimova writes that “[through] the authentic dress of the past centuries one gains a more vivid picture of history and the role that costume played as a clear identifier of the period in question.”<sup>17</sup> All historians agree that there is always a yearning for a source that recreates a time or place. Garments, costume historians would argue, is the missing source. You can understand thoughts, ideas, and events, but to understand a period of history completely the trivialized, in this case clothing, can unlock the wall between past and present.

A different type of fashion reference book that serves a similar purpose as Yefimova’s is *Designs by Erté: Fashion Drawings and Illustrations from “Harper’s Bazar”* by Erté and edited by Stella Blum. Blum writes that the fashion illustrations selected for the book were chosen for “both their interest as art and for their importance in the development of fashion.”<sup>18</sup> From this statement it is inferred that the book served a purpose beyond pretty pictures. The purpose is to expose readers to the best work of the great illustrator and designer Erté. She also states that the point of writing about this artist is that he was not only a designer for magazine covers, theatre, or fashion, but a designer of a dreamlike escape. Blum reiterates that reference image books can be legitimate scholarship on a subject, which leads back to the point of costume history, to demonstrate the importance in clothing and its design. Not only does *Designs by Erté* collect images in a convenient book, they are also accompanied by letters from the artist that had been printed in Harper’s Bazar. This body of work becomes a primary source compilation driven by a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>18</sup> Erté, *Designs by Erté: Fashion Drawings and Illustrations from “Harper’s Bazar”*, ed. Stella Blum (New York: Dover Publications, 1975),



secondary source goal. Therefore, the next step in Russian costume history is that a history is written using garments as the focus of the narrative.

### **Russian Costume History**

Word after word on the description or meaning of a garment is lost without the visual of that article of clothing. You must be able to see and read to develop a complete picture. A third element that brings everything together would be able to see, read, and touch garment. Christine Ruane brings academic writing to the world of Russian costume in *The Empire's New Clothes*. Her purpose of writing is “a fresh look at the impact of westernization upon Russian life by analyzing the changes initiated by [Peter the Great's] dress reforms.”<sup>19</sup> Reoccurring themes in Russian history include Peter the Great, westernization, and modernity. Ruane's fresh focuses on the rise of the fashion industry in Russia. Clothing production saw radical changes during the industrial revolution and while Russia lagged in industry it would rise to be a strong competitor with French and British fashion. Ruane's work is of great importance to my study. For instance, she argues that, “Like other forms of artistic expression, dress encourages individuals to fantasize, to dream, to give expression to their inner feelings and desires.”<sup>20</sup> This statement harkens back to costume history pioneers, Laver and Hollander. Clothing has always been something important for studying a period and people, because they express the inexpressible.

Ruane illustrates a continuing struggle in Russian history but through the lens of clothing. She writes that “[at] the same time modernism and commercial cosmopolitanism healed the breach in Russian culture. Modernism transcended narrow definitions of European and Russian culture articulated by the westernizers and slavophiles. Under the banner of modernism, Russian intellectuals redefined their culture to include both European and Russian artistic and intellectual

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<sup>19</sup> Christine Ruane, *Empire's New Clothes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 151.

traditions.”<sup>21</sup> Clothing allowed more artistic freedom for designers because there were no censorship laws on this type of expression. In stuffy gallery scenes there was backlash for expression that didn’t tow the line, including destruction of art. But what a man or woman puts on their body isn’t as overt in message nor is it easily destroyed without repercussions. Ruane ponders that question “how were modern Russian men and women to dress?”<sup>22</sup> The question is examined in the context of the restless environments of the 1905 revolution and the Great War. In a time of political uncertainty where nationalism was running high, would the Russians be wearing French, British, or German imports? She answers both questions that it was the goal of the Tsarist government to rid their industries of foreign intrusion and once the war was over this could be accomplished. Industry would be ran by Russian companies “using Russian textiles, machinery, and labor could fill the void left by foreign business concerns and establish a truly national fashion industry.”<sup>23</sup> History showed that it would come to fruition but under the Bolshevik regime.

Establishing a truly national fashion industry leads to barely explored territory in Russian history. What was Russian style? The answer has been discovered in literature, art, and politics; but not fashion. The new goal in costume history is discovering what is the French style, the German style, and now what is the Style Russe. The Russian style in fashion emerged in the early twentieth-century with help from Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes. Jennifer Homans traces the development of Ballet across the globe with a section dedicated to the Russians in *Apollo’s Angels*. The journey of ballet in Russia began in the court of the Tsars. It appeared throughout

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 235.

the centuries before being firmly established by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great.<sup>24</sup> Thus it was associated with the Tsar and authoritarianism. Her argument is that, “from the moment ballet entered Russia, it was inextricably bound up with the westernizing project that would shape the country’s history for generations to come.”<sup>25</sup> While Homans doesn’t specifically focus on the clothing, as Classen would, the meaning and feelings associated with ballet costumes is inferred.<sup>26</sup> Her contributions to the study of the Russian Ballet and Ballet Russes are grounded in the politics of the style developing from this art. With that in mind, Homans does present that ballet was not originally introduced as an artform but was meant to teach European etiquette to Peter the Great’s court. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Ballet was firmly in Russian hands while at the same time the autocracy foundation was crumbling. Homans argues that the ballet had to change, the changes would result in modernism and style russe which would prove beneficial after 1917.<sup>27</sup>

The great modernization in twentieth-century ballet happened through the Ballet Russes. In “East Goes West: Russian Modernism and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes” Homans illustrates that story of Ballet Russes. Either subconsciously or retroactively Sergei Diaghilev, the company manager, strictly presented productions abroad never presenting as a company in Russia. Homans argues this point by stating that “it was in Russia that the radical changes in dance that made the Ballet Russes first began, and it was to Russia that Diaghilev constantly returned for dancers and choreographers who were to set ballet on a new course.”<sup>28</sup> In her assessment the productions were wholly Russian but there was a break between the monarchy and arts. The

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<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Homans, “Tsars of Dance: Imperial Russian Classicism” in *Apollo’s Angels* (New York: Random House, 2010), 250-251.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>26</sup> Classen, xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Homans, 289.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 291.

inclusions of Homans ballet narrative is essential for the story of Russian costuming because when Ballet Russes is mentioned in a theatre circle Leon Bakst is the first name spoken. His genius helped thrust women's clothing into the modern world and would help foster an interest in Russian aesthetic prior to and after the Great War. Homans conclusion cements this because she states that after the 1917 Revolution in Russia "brain drain" occurred in the realm of ballet. Most of those associated with Ballet Russes could not or would not return to Russia and instead dispersed across the West.<sup>29</sup> Once again, reinforcing that clothing is political as well as artistic.

The point of Homans' narrative was that ballet was a radical tool of power for states but could also be an artistic vehicle. Her story doesn't take into consideration the effects of Ballet Russes into the post-war years. Alexandre Vassiliev continues the story in *Beauty in Exile*. He begins by arguing similar points as Homans. Stating that "even before the mass exodus of émigré from Russia as a result of the 1917 Revolution and ensuing civil war, Europe was acquainted with Russian culture from Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russes and other examples of Russian art abroad."<sup>30</sup> Homans and Vassiliev would agree that Ballet Russes were the starting point for the émigré fashion scene that resulted in the 1920s. They gave western Europe an artistic taste of what Russians had to offer. From their first performance in 1906 onward, Russian style would be a term cropping up in fashion magazines. Vassiliev illustrates this point through the most important designers and models that came to light in the wake of the white émigré exodus. Most of those who found themselves homeless in Paris, Berlin, or Harbin would wind up in the field of fashion. He traces the most influential persons from 1906 to the 1950s Russian model craze. Unlike other sources, Vassiliev's *Beauty in Exile* presents no definitive conclusion. The émigré

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>30</sup> Alexandre Vassiliev, *Beauty in Exile: The Artists, Models, and Nobility Who Fled the Russian Revolution and Influenced the World of Fashion* New York: Harry N Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 9.

presented paved the way for other Russians to take up interest. Likewise, the continued interest in émigré during the Cold War. A conclusion could be seen in the idea that by the 1950s, the children born in exile to white émigré were no longer émigré in the traditional sense. They were first generation children born in a country not of their ancestors. Vassiliev's interest lies in the topics of designers and how these people triumphed in the world of fashion, but his story also details the political and social nature of driving force and strengthen in the face of great tragedy. Marc Raeff likewise takes interest in the plight of the émigré in *Russia Abroad*.

The story of Russians abroad is a haunting tale of lost identity and homelessness, with hope in creative impulses. Raeff's goal is to "understand how an exiled group can carry on a creative existence, in spite of dispersion and socioeconomic or political handicaps, it not only will contribute to the eventual writing of a history of Russia abroad but it will also help explain the process of cultural exchange, dissemination and interaction."<sup>31</sup> He realizes that his history is not complete but that it will contribute to the discussion. For this study, it should be asked why fashion was excluded from that study. It goes back to a general misunderstanding that clothing doesn't play a large role in cultural development. Likewise, its concluded that literature or art are more substantial indicators of culture due to their almost purely social commentary without utilitarian purpose. Raeff still makes a valid case for the thriving culture of exiles and allow for continuing conversation in his conclusion. Vassiliev and Raeff agree that the story of Russian émigré is not a closed chapter. Raeff concludes that "the history of Russia abroad and its cultural life have been, and will be, inseparably part of the history of all Russia."<sup>32</sup> It's not something closed or finalized because it is largely unexplored territory. The purpose of my study would

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<sup>31</sup> Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: a cultural history of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford Press, 1990), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 198.

then be to expand on Raeff's comprehensive history and Vassiliev to take Russian émigré's clothing story further.

The story of clothing is one that is inherently woven with politics, culture, and society. Without one you cannot have complete knowledge of the other. Laver and Hollander illustrate the absence of many geographical locations of costume history, including the far east, middle east, Russia, and Latin America. Classen misses clothing and textiles in his study of the touch of history, and Massie misses both in his comprehensive study of how a disease and little boy could bring down an empire. Which leads to the various books commenting on specific areas of Russian costume, the émigré, fashion industry, Ballet Russes, and Erté. This study will fill in the gaps the sources mentioned. I will examine the development of "Style Russe" from its origins in Imperial Russia then to how the Ballet Russes took it abroad and created a niche easily filled by white émigré coming after World War I.

## **Chapter One:**

### **Russian Nationalism, 1894-1914: Styling Imperial Russe**

Nikolai Aleksandrovich Romanov ascended the throne of Imperial Russia on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1894. Nicholas II, as history would remember him, married Princess Alexandra of Hesse (Alix) in 1894. Two years later the couple were crowned the last Tsar and Tsarina of Russia. Their reign saw the Romanov dynasty into its 300<sup>th</sup> year which witnessed the end of Imperial splendor in March of 1917. Nicholas II reigned for twenty-three years until his abdication in February of 1917. His reign was a tumultuous time politically and socially with the burden of unifying the nation under the Tsar after years of assassinations and constitutional reform across Europe. Fashion was part of Nicholas II's solution, all Russians were one if they appeared as one. What Russians chose to wear made powerful statements throughout the centuries to the motherland and Europe. Specifically, Russians' "sartorial choices gave shape to individual and collective dreams about the Russian past, present, and future. New identities were coalescing while visions of the past tightened their grip on the public imagination."<sup>33</sup> Plainly, upper-class Russians were locked in a centuries long aesthetic battle with the West, and at the dawn of the twentieth century they were trying to pull themselves from the fashion periphery to the forefront in style.

This struggle dates to Peter the Great in his reforms of St. Petersburg from a barbaric eastern backwater to a cosmopolitan metropolis. He dreamed that his subjects were successful western warriors on the battlefield and fashionable courtiers. In fashion, he was not effective in using government control over citizen's choices of clothes. His reforms of dress were met with great hostility. Many believed it was not the role of government to dictate dress but the role of

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<sup>33</sup> Christine Ruane, "Adorned in Dreams "in *Empire's New Clothes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 151.

tailors.<sup>34</sup> One hundred years after Peter's vision of Russia, Leo Tolstoy published *Anna Karenina* in 1877 as a commentary on Russia's cultural progress. On the surface, the novel is the tale of an adulteress' fall from her secure Moscow life. Historians have begun to challenge this face-value analysis. For example, Linda Buckley argued that Tolstoy used fashion to defamiliarize his characters by highlighting their connection with Russia and the west. Tolstoy's Russians were described by their inner workings while westernized characters were referred to in terms of appearance.<sup>35</sup> Tolstoy and Peter the Great represent the migration of Russian thought from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The point of comparison is that Peter's visions were in vain because, by 1877 many thinkers in the nation felt they were becoming too European. Like Tolstoy, they did not celebrate but felt they had lost their way. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the stylistic changes Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra made to create a uniquely Russia style that harkened back to the unfettered centuries before Peter the Great.

Contemporary sentiment was divided as to whether the traditionalist values and style of Russia was something to be celebrated or rejected. After the 1903 Winter Palace social season, former Second Secretary of the US Embassy, Herbert J. Hagerman, wrote to American papers about the festivities he encountered. He suggested, "In her religion, as in some other respects, Russia is still almost medieval and in spite of foreign wars and internal dissensions, she is likely to remain so for several generations."<sup>36</sup> He found religious ceremonies were "barbaric in their splendor, "appeal to the senses," and satisfy "the superstitious and impressionable."<sup>37</sup> Hagerman

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<sup>34</sup> Vasili Klychevsky, *Peter the Great* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1958), 267-268.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Buckley, "Anna Karenina as Art: Tolstoy's Use of Fashion as Imagery," *Academia.edu*, 5, accessed July 14, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/24909517/Anna\\_Karenina\\_as\\_Art\\_Tolstoy\\_s\\_Use\\_of\\_Fashion\\_as\\_Imagery](https://www.academia.edu/24909517/Anna_Karenina_as_Art_Tolstoy_s_Use_of_Fashion_as_Imagery).

<sup>36</sup> Herbert J. Hagerman formerly Second Secretary of the American Embassy at St Petersburg, "THE RUSSIAN COURT," *Century Illustrated Magazine* (1881-1906) LXX, no. 2 (06, 1905): 242, accessed September 18, 2016, <https://search-proquest-com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/docview/125525781?accountid=11563>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



provided commentary on the religion and politics he encountered during the social season, but his opinions had been repeated by other visitors to Russia. For example, in 1934 Queen Marie of Roumania recalled Russia differently in her memoir. The court uniforms, something likewise experienced by Hagerman, she writes “this unity of attire made all Russian gatherings uniquely picturesque, saturating them with colour and brilliance unlike anything else. . . Byzantine in splendor, with all the mysterious gorgeousness of the East.”<sup>38</sup> Queen Marie and Tolstoy may be prejudiced in their communications about the nation they hold dear. They highlight the Russian style crisis during the late 1890s and early twentieth century to retain the eastern, exotic Russian past while presenting it to the world in a contemporary acceptable form. The coronation of Nicholas II and Alix represent the beginning of the end for style russe’ in twentieth-century Russia.

### **Wedding and Coronation**

Nicholas II and Alexandra were married on November 26, 1894. Their nuptials took place twenty-five short days after the death of Tsar Alexander III. Due to the hastiness of the wedding historians agree that, from the beginning, their reign was shrouded in darkness. It was commented that Alexandra “comes to us behind a coffin.”<sup>39</sup> Since Russia was a nation in mourning and only a week had passed since the burial of Alexander II, there was no reception or honeymoon. Even still, it was described as a breathtaking spectacle.<sup>40</sup> While descriptions of the wedding fixated on the bride’s gown, in Marfa Mouchanow’s memoirs she doesn’t describe the gown but focuses on the bride as a woman. After the emotional delay of the hairdresser on the

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<sup>38</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 8

<sup>39</sup> Robert K. Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

wedding day, she recalled, “none among us ever gazed at anything more lovely than she appeared to our eyes.”<sup>41</sup>

The bride was not the only topic of conversation on the wedding day; sources have also included observations on all women in attendance. It is important to highlight all women of the Russian court because in paintings and photographs they appeared as a sea of duplicates. She explained that, “the women of St. Petersburg society had assembled, wearing traditional Russian caftans of heavy embroidered cloth and tall velvet headdresses with pearls and long white veils; they stood uncomfortable in their finery, waiting for the bride and groom to pass through on their way to the wedding chamber.”<sup>42</sup> In 1895 American Ambassador Clifton R. Breckinridge’s wife Katherine wrote, “I have come to the conclusion that Their Majesties are to people here what the sun is to our world; I do not expect you to understand it; it must be seen and felt.”<sup>43</sup> These observations are important to the conversation in that they represent a broader cultural predicament. The problem being that there were multiple Russias with the elite making up one branch and the common people the second. Therefore, Nicholas II’s task was to find a way to unify the people culturally. All citizens relied entirely on the Tsar, with the elite even willing to sacrifice personal comfort to show loyalty and devotion. Not only were the elite heavily reliant on the Tsar for their daily lives but for their fashion. The Tsar was the regulator of court attire and his Imperial family were the style icon for the upper class and foreign courts. Thusly, the coronation marked the beginning of a new era of dress at court.

The coronation of the newlyweds took place May 26, 1896 in Moscow. Like everything in Russia, the coronation was governed by history and tradition. The ceremony was held in

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<sup>41</sup> Marfa Mouchanow, *My Empress* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Carolly Erickson, *Alexandra: The Last Tsarina* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001), 67.

<sup>43</sup> Greg King, *The Court of the Last Tsar* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 97.

Moscow because the solemn event was so steeped in meaning to the nation that it could not take place in the Western capital of St. Petersburg created by Peter the Great. As per tradition, Nicholas II entered Moscow alone on May 25<sup>th</sup> in a great procession of Imperial cavalry.<sup>44</sup> Guests Prince Felix Youssoupoff, future husband of Irina Nicholas II's niece, and Queen Marie remember the day in detail in their memoirs. Felix writes, "the sun was particularly bright that day, and played on the gold and gems of the glittering costumes. Such a sight could be seen only in Russia. When the Czar and the two Czarinas appeared before their people they were verily the Lord's anointed."<sup>45</sup>

Prince Felix's memory serves as a testament to what others say about Russia. Mrs. Breckinridge stated, a person had to be in attendance to understand Russia. It was almost like a mystical ancient beast that to truly understand you had to witness the events firsthand otherwise you wouldn't believe what you saw and certainly no one would either.<sup>46</sup> Queen Marie echoes this reflection, and unlike Prince Felix she takes great care with memorializing the events. She recalled seeing Dowager Empress Maria, Nicholas II's mother, in all white traveling in a carriage. Queen Marie pens, "the sun shines golden on the resplendent array, it lights up my memory a picture of might and splendor, of pomp and power, that has ever for ever passed."<sup>47</sup> Both guests paid attention to the sunlight, and that admission of this memory breathes life into the past. The atmosphere of Nicholas II and Alexandra's coronation was a religious experience, not only in the actual placing of crowns but in the overall atmosphere. Queen Marie illustrated that, the "heavy vestments [Nicholas] wore seemed to overwhelm him, the prodigious crown of his ancestors to be too heavy for his head. . . his face was pale, but there was the light of the

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<sup>44</sup> Massie, 52-53.

<sup>45</sup> Prince Felix Youssoupoff, *Lost Splendor* (New York: Helen Marx Books, 2003), 40.

<sup>46</sup> King, 97.

<sup>47</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, 89.

mystic in his eyes.”<sup>48</sup> Without saying it, the picture conjures in the minds of readers a celestial event occurring in the natural world. Almost as if the heavens opened and blessed the day. The golden Imperial Russian Regalia aided in creating this celestial vision.

The mantles worn for coronation became part of official regalia in 1724 with each Tsar having a new mantle created for his use. For Nicholas II’s coronation three identical mantels were created by Madame Olga, official seamstress to the Russian court. Each mantle measured twenty-three feet long (7m) and weighed twenty-eight pounds (13kg).<sup>49</sup> Sources conflict on what textiles were used to construct the garments. According to the Moscow Kremlin Museum, embroidered silk brocade formed the basic structure.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the Hermitage Museum stated that the base is plain gold cloth, probably silk, embroidered with the double headed eagle.<sup>51</sup> The differing opinions can be traced back to the lack of official records and training in textile identification. The sources do agree that each mantle is decorated in ermine skins, which are easily identified by the distinct white fur with attached black and white tails. Together the robes used roughly 2,691 ermine skins.<sup>52</sup> The extravagance of the coronation highlighted the disparity between the upper and lower classes, which from the beginning highlighted how removed the Tsar was from the people. In the painting by Laurits Regner Tuxen there are two groups shown. On one side of the painting there is a unifying image and presence in the heads of state, Nicholas II, Alix, and the Dowager Empress. On the right side of the painting, clothing creates a second harmony among the spectators. Together the image creates a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>49</sup> Svetlana Amelekhina and Alexey K. Levykin, *Magnificence of the Tsars* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 41.

<sup>50</sup> “Coronation mantle of Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna,” *Moscow Kremlin Museums*. The Moscow Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum and Heritage Site, 2017, Accessed December 12, 2017, <http://www.kreml.ru/en-US/exhibitions/virtual-exhibitions.kostyum-rossiyskikh-imperatorov-i-imperatrits-iz-sobraniya-muzeev-kremlya/nikolay-ii/>

<sup>51</sup> Amelekhina and Levykin, 41.

<sup>52</sup> “Coronation Mantle” and Amelekhina, 41.

picture of a divinely ordained event, with the golden Tsar center left and the angelic audience in white.



Images tell only part of the story of how it felt to be present at an auspicious occasion such as the coronation of a new Tsar, with those present presenting the second part. Memories of the coronation being described as golden and heavenly rely on the overlooked importance of human senses. They have been overlooked because there are no studies examining how those attended recall events with vivid detail. Queen Marie is a primary example of the importance senses such as sight are in memorializing events. Recent work on the history of sense reveals that colour plays a key part in historical remembrance and interpretation. While colours do have an appeal to the aesthetic of an object or event there is the hidden allure which lays in the “premodern notion of the power of color.” At the imperial coronation gold has the power of making everything appear brighter and in tune with the heavens. Similarly, the colours of garments harmonize the scene with the regality of gold in the foreground therefore legitimizing

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<sup>53</sup> Laurits Regner Tuxen, *Coronation of Emperor Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna*, oil on canvas, Denmark 1898, The State Hermitage Museum, , accessed August 06, 2017, <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/172896>.

<sup>54</sup> “Coronation Mantle.”

the Tsar's power. Everything appears in painting and memory to be happening naturally as ordained by the Lord.

### **Court Uniforms-Women**

Pictures convey "tactile value" through subject and representational style. To understand the value of a garment the visual and tactile must come together. The feeling of donning a Russian court uniform is recorded in primary documentation during the court of Tsar Nicholas II. This indicates a "hands-on culture of premodernity" because the tactile sense of touch held significance and was recorded by the observer.<sup>55</sup> Queen Marie and Mrs. Breckinridge support this claim in the Russian court. As shown, they repeatedly stated you must be there to understand. The same is true for women's court attire. You must feel it and see it in person to understand the intrinsic meaning woven into its fibers. Due to the delicate nature of the garments worn by Nicholas II and his family recreation of garments is the only way to understand the actual feeling of fibers to skin. Those unable to see or feel the meaning within the garment, the history and cultural significance must suffice.

In 1775 Catherine the Great suppressed Western fashion in Russia. While she was a German-born princess, Catherine hoped to exhibit the passion of the Russian people and her culture to western civilization. In Catherine's court, "female courtiers abandoned their French fashions in favour of Russian-style attire, an imitation of the multi-layered long-skirted dress of the upper classes of pre-eighteenth century Russian society and of contemporary festive folk dress."<sup>56</sup> Catherine did not simply abandon the premodern styles from the eighteenth century for ancient times but blended the style of east and west. Thus 1775 marked the beginning of re-Russification of court attire that would last until the end of the autocracy in 1917.

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<sup>55</sup> Classen, "Tactile Arts- The Feel of Art," 127.

<sup>56</sup> Svetlana Amelekhina, "Introduction" in *Magnificence of the Tsars* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 16.

Dress reforms continued into the nineteenth century through each passing Tsar. In January 1843 Philadelphia magazine *Campbell's Foreign Monthly* published an article about Emperor Nicholas I's reintroduction of ancient national costume at court.<sup>57</sup> The edict on national costume only effected women's costume, because Peter the Great required men to appear at court in military uniform. The article stated, "there exists undoubtedly no court which gala and court days presents so imposing an appearance as the Russians."<sup>58</sup> Primary sources state that the Russian court surpasses all other courts on the globe in grandeur. Often the women's gowns become the focal point of that argument. Like Catherine, Nicholas I's Russification blended the styles of ancient Russia with the contemporary style of 1834 when the edict was enacted.<sup>59</sup> A portrait of his wife Alexandra Feodorovna, Charlotte of Prussia, compared to the portrait of Queen Adelaide of England shows the marriage similarities and differences in style.



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<sup>57</sup> "Russian Court Costume," *Campbell's Foreign Monthly Magazine; Or, Select Miscellany of the Periodical Literature of Great Britain (1842-1843)* 2, (Jan, 1843): 288, accessed September 9, 2016, <https://search-proquest-com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/docview/89970734?accountid=11563>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>59</sup> King, 244.

<sup>60</sup> John Simpson, *Queen Adelaide*, oil on canvas, 1832, Brighton and Hove Museums and art Galleries, accessed August 06, 2017 <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/queen-adelaide-17921849-75503#image-use>.

<sup>61</sup> A Malyukov, *Portrait of Empress Alexandra Feodorovna*, oil on canvas, Russia, 1836, The State Hermitage Museum, accessed August 06, 2017, <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/128341>.

The styles of both gowns are off the shoulder, rounded necklines with small puffed sleeves layered over longer hanging sleeves. The differences are the diadem of Queen Adelaide compared to the large headdress known as a kokoshnik of Alexandra Feodorovna, Charlotte of Prussia. Therefore, the “ancient” reintroduction of court attire in Russia did not appear outdated as the term indicates. The gowns of women at the Russian court utilized contemporary styles with Russian elements. Sources agree that it consisted of three components: an underskirt, bodice, and overskirt. Each gown is also accessorized with a diadem shaped kokoshnik and veil.<sup>62</sup> Taken directly from ancient national Russian dress, the kokoshnik and veil are traditional elements of the uniform that are consistent with the whole look.<sup>63</sup> Images and sources support the claim that a veil and headdress were customary but there is lack of evidence that explains why. Drawing from traditional dress throughout the centuries, in medieval times married women’s hair was covered notably by a veil or headdress.<sup>64</sup> The open hanging sleeves that revealed the arms are the most distinguishable part of the gown. Throughout the nineteenth century, women’s formal and evening gowns were off the shoulders with rounded necklines but only the Russians possessed the hanging sleeves.

All women of the court wore the same styled gown, but each had personal beauty and distinction. An article from 1897 in *Bow Bells* highlighted that even the Maids of Honour to the Tsarina wore a gown consisting of an underskirt of white satin, an overskirt of velvet, and a bodice with large pagoda sleeves. The kokoshnik is again worn with a white veil.<sup>65</sup> Women’s ranks were distinguishable by the colours and materials they wore at court. The Imperial Family

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<sup>62</sup> Amelekhina, 16. “Russian Court Costume,” 288. King, 245.

<sup>63</sup> “RUSSIAN MAIDS OF HONOUR,” *Bow Bells : A Magazine of General Literature and Art for Family Reading* 36, no. 473 (Jan 22, 1897): 736, ccessed September 26,2016, <https://search-proquest-com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/docview/3406287?accountid=11563>.

<sup>64</sup> Laver, *Costume*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> “Russian Maids of Honour,” *Bow Bells*, 736.



used more elaborate textiles such as gold or silver brocade, while velvet was the primary material for ladies-in-waiting and maids of honour. Each duchess was assigned an exclusive colour and used valuable ermine, sable, and mink furs as trim. Due to the high quality and volume of orders the cost to produce these gowns was monstrous for the 1900s. In 1913 a second-hand gown was purchased by Baroness Aegnes de Stoeckl for her daughter at 1,360 rubles, which equated to \$13,600 in 2005 figures.<sup>66</sup>

Even with the daunting cost of court gowns they were still produced in regimental form for all ladies of the court. Queen Maria wrote, “the Russian court dress was exceedingly picturesque, and donned for all bigger occasions. It consisted of a cut velvet robe over a tablieur of white satin, the shape, with its train, and wide, long-hanging sleeves, had something medieval about it. These were heavily embroidered in silver or gold and were every colour of the rainbow; the riches of all were cloth of gold or silver.”<sup>67</sup> What Queen Marie describes, as historians agree, is a gown heavily regulated by the state and therefore less likely to exhibit delineation from the prescribed style; but as written in 1843 that was not the case. *Campbell’s Foreign Monthly* establishes that colouring is precise, but the Imperial Family can move within limitations and vary original cut to their taste. Even with small changes to design and colouring, the gowns produced a harmonious picture as intended by Nicholas I.<sup>68</sup>

The harmony created at Russian courts was reflected differently at foreign courts, creating instead great contrast. As shown, there were similarities in low off-the-shoulder necklines and fullness in the skirt. A stark difference between east and west was the prestige a gown held. In the west, any woman with means could purchase a gown from Charles Worth or

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<sup>66</sup> King, 245.

<sup>67</sup> Marie, Queen of Roumania, 87.

<sup>68</sup> Susan Carpenter, “Dress of Pomp and Circumstance,” *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 1909, 41.

Paul Poiret that they had seen in the papers on a Duchess or Lady. In Russia, the honour of wearing a court gown was a highly protected privilege. To wear this garment at court a woman must have a place at court. The idea of a foreigner being invited to court events was rare and even rarer was a foreigner having a place at court, even Alexandra's ladies-in-waiting from Hesse could not remain at her side.<sup>69</sup> The creation of court gowns was similarly a protected right given to select fashion houses in Russia.

The task of creating these garments rested with select workshops that specialized in court finery. The chosen few were Madame Olga Bubenkova, having preferential treatment, Nadezhda Lamanova, Anna Ivanova, and Izembard Chanceau.<sup>70</sup> Great talent and care was given to creating court gowns that would eventually influence European fashion. The extent that Russia influenced Europe can be seen in the line of gowns produced by Courtier Charles Worth entitled "*à la Russe*."<sup>71</sup> Even though great names in fashion produced Russian styled gowns the coveted privilege of making something for the Imperial Court stayed in Russian workrooms. Two final authentic Russian gowns were created by Madame Olga, for Grand Duchess Olga and Grand Duchess Tatiana in 1913. The Romanovs reached their tercentenary in 1913 and the Big Pair, as they were nicknamed, were old enough for a public role. Helen Rappaport stated, "it was a milestone for Olga and Tatiana to be present wearing matching formal Russian Court dresses."<sup>72</sup> Rappaport describes the gowns as "full-length, off-the-shoulder style in white satin with long, pointed, open sleeves, a front panel of pink velvet and a detachable train with garlands of

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<sup>69</sup> Hagerman, 242. Mouchanow, 17.

<sup>70</sup> King, 242.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>72</sup> Helen Rappaport, *The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014), 188.

artificial roses.”<sup>73</sup> Images show they were almost identical but revealed different styles of the sisters. Olga’s features lace trim while Tatiana’s uses tulle as trim down the front.



Both gowns feature the tell-tale open sleeves, rounded off-the-shoulder neckline, and white satin underskirt. Different from their mother’s first court gown is the overall silhouette. While the 1834 edict of Nicholas I called for a bell-shaped gown, Olga and Tatiana’s dresses reflect the slimming tubular shape of the nineteen-teens.<sup>75</sup> Both illustrate the beautiful craftsmanship coming out of Russia in the early twentieth century. While these gowns were beautiful works of art, sources highlight that most women did not enjoy wearing them. Often women referred to dressing for formal occasions as donning “the armor.”<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, men’s uniforms were daily wear for the Tsar, military, and government.

### **Court Uniforms-Men**

The coronation or inauguration of a new leader brings with it an overwhelming sensation of nationalism. These overwhelming feelings of national sentiment are often met with a specific

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “Olga and Tatiana’s Court Dresses on Display,” *Ghosts of Imperial Russia: Land of the Tsars*, Tumblr.com, 2016, accessed August 06, 2017, <http://ghosts-of-imperial-russia.tumblr.com/post/128747838123/olga-tatianas-court-dresses-on-display-olgas>.

<sup>75</sup> James Laver, *Costume*, 224-225.

<sup>76</sup> King, 246.

look for clothing. The feeling of cloth could trigger memories and therefore, a specific national identity and its power over the people.<sup>77</sup> The supreme power and keeper of Russian identity rests with the Tsar's autocratic authority. He always appeared to be all powerful and one with Russia and her people.<sup>78</sup> This was done for foreign and domestic citizens through the court uniforms. The Tsar pushed for unity within his court by governing women's dresses and the men's appearances. Before the women were regulated, men were required to appear in military attire as befits their rank within the Imperial regiments. Like the women, men's uniforms needed to stand out from the rest of Europe; most importantly, they were to showcase the unity of Tsar and his people.<sup>79</sup>

National unity came from the autocracy which regulated every part of people's lives. Nicholas I was especially keen to direct the fashion of his court first with the women and then the men. He did this for reasons like Catherine the Great, to encourage national sympathies at court.<sup>80</sup> Cultural nationalism was a governing influence on Russia's decisions and clothing was not exempt. Nicholas I's 1834 Official Nationality doctrine put autocracy, Orthodoxy, and nationality as key features that distinguished Russia in Europe.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to assume appearances of the Imperial family and court were the easiest route for his image goals. The rigid regulations at Nicholas I's court was just another check on his long list during his reign. By examining the looks of each Tsar from Nicholas I to Nicholas II there is consistency in appearance and the Russia ideal. The following images of Alexander II and Nicholas II

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<sup>77</sup> Alexander M. Martin, "Introduction: The Sensory in Russian and Soviet History" in *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 6.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>79</sup> Amelekhina, 17.

<sup>80</sup> Ruane, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

effectively demonstrate the uniformity. Likewise, compared to other royalty such as Prince Albert, Consort to Queen Victoria, they highlight the “Russianness” of attire.



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83



84

Herbert J. Hagerman was privy to the 1905 Russian Court season and made observations about the festivities that he later relayed to the western world. He felt that the functions given at the Winter Palace surpass all others in the world. He continues that every Russian man present is in a brilliant uniform – “military, naval, civil, or diplomatic.” He listed these distinctions because during this time any man who had a place at court achieved this through military, naval, civil, or diplomatic means. Hagerman describes the men as “glittering with gold lace, grand cordons, and decorations.”<sup>85</sup> His observations were unique to the Russian nation in 1905. In a Buckingham Palace ballroom, aside from military generals one would find men in tailcoats. While uniform

<sup>82</sup> Heinrich Von Angeli, *Portrait of Alexander II*, oil on canvas, Austria 1876, The State Hermitage Museum, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/778305>.

<sup>83</sup> Э. Липгарт, Портрет императора Николая II, Холст, масло, 1900 год, Tsarskoe Selo State Museum, accessed August 15, 2017, [tzar.ru/Pictures/big77882124177635.jpg](http://tzar.ru/Pictures/big77882124177635.jpg).

<sup>84</sup> Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Prince Albert (1819-61)*, oil on canvas, Great Britain 1842, Royal Collection Trust, accessed September 09, 2017, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/search#/34/collection/401412/prince-albert-1819-61>.

<sup>85</sup> Hagerman, 242.

was the custom for Russians it took fifty years to transition back from European to Russia. This again reiterates that the “style russe” they had been searching for was right under their noses. They knew what it meant to dress as a Russian at court but couldn’t figure out a solution for fashion outside of uniforms.

The Russian style of men’s uniforms began to change in the 1850s for both military and civilian. It would reach the peak of Russianness under Alexander III, meaning it was styled after traditional peasant garments. After the assassination of Alexander II, his son Alexander III wished to create an image that restored himself as a true Russian that spoke, ate, and dressed like his people. Part of his rebranding including changing the look of his military. It incorporated both western and Russian design; which consists of a caftan, loose black pants tucked into boots, and a lambskin cap.<sup>86</sup> It was the ethnic pride in oneself that was an ever-present component in the search for Russian aesthetic. Alexander III’s fashion achievement was evident in how, “Russian military men could now feel themselves to be part of European culture and yet still express their ethnic pride through dress . . .”<sup>87</sup> This was easily remedied by including traditional folk wear at the highest level of court function. Historians cite that this melding of peasant style with state performance demonstrated the national character of the autocracy.<sup>88</sup>

Alexander III passed down similar ambitions of aesthetic to his son Nicholas II. Historians have written that Nicholas II considered himself the first professional soldier of his Empire, and he dressed the part daily. At his coronation, he was dressed in the Colonel Preobrazhensky Life Guards Regiment’s uniform. He chose this uniform because, prior to ascending the throne, he has attained this rank.<sup>89</sup> Nicholas II must have believed that to appear as

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<sup>86</sup> Ruane, 159.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>88</sup> Amelekhina, 17.

<sup>89</sup> Amelekhina and Levykin, 39.

a man of the nation a Colonel's uniform reflected this because he had achieved it on merit. As prescribed by Peter the Great in 1722, noble birth did not grant a man higher rank in the military only a demonstration of their capabilities.<sup>90</sup> The uniform in question is described as a dark green wool with white edging. It is accentuated by a red collar and red cuffs embroidered with gilt thread. His epaulettes bear the monogram of Alexander II. Specifically noted by Svetlana Amelekhina and Alexey K. Levykin, Nicholas II “moved aside the small square folding, specially made on the breast of his coat, so that he could be anointed.”<sup>91</sup> The following images show the uniform in its current state at The Moscow Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum and Heritage Site and a painting of Nicholas II.



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Uniforms informed court attire. Men's fashion was just as important publicly and at court as ladies'. Holding to the tradition of uniforms at court the Imperial Senate and gentlemen

<sup>90</sup> Klychevsky, 101

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> “Coronation uniform of Emperor Nicholas II,” Cloth, rep, cashmere; wool with silk trimming and gold embroidery, Russia 1896, The Moscow Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum and Heritage Site, accessed August 18, 2017, <http://www.kreml.ru/en-US/exhibitions/virtual-exhibitions.kostyum-rossiyskikh-imperatorov-i-imperatrits-iz-sobraniya-muzeev-kremlya/nikolay-ii/>.

<sup>93</sup> Fernand Desmoulin, *Coronation Portrait of Emperor Nicholas II*, etching, France 1896, accessed August 18, 2017, <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/04.+engraving/1204545>.



without credentials had to adhere to a strict code. Senate members were required to wear white trousers with gold galloon, long dark blue or scarlet broadcloth coats with stylized laurels, leaves, and oak. If a gentleman was “unfortunate” to lack credentials for a military or civil uniform he could wear the uniform of nobility; white broadcloth trousers, mid-length Prussian-style black frock coat with gold lapels, collar, and cuffs.<sup>94</sup> Its important to note all three uniform styles for men because, what one wore to court made them instantly recognizable to those around them. Everyone in attendance could discern who was in the military, a civil servant, nobility, or a foreign visitor.

While uniforms abound at court they were sparse occasions when it was not worn. Nevertheless, Nicholas II primarily dressed in uniform and favored them above all other dress. But on private holidays Edwardian-inspired suits were chosen.<sup>95</sup> It has been said that the Russians loved a uniform so much that they simply looked foolish in anything else. For example, Prince Felix Youssoupoff recalled one occasion where General Bernoff, a family friend, did not wear a uniform and looked strange. He highlighted that Bernoff had a habit of using “in there” at bad opportunities often while charging ahead and confusing guards when dressed in a European suit. Even off duty military men felt more comfortable wearing their uniforms than civilian clothes. Felix felt that since they spent most of their life in uniform wearing anything else was as if they were in disguise.<sup>96</sup> His point illustrated that the uniform of men and women in Russia was intrinsically linked to the Tsar and his people. At the turn of the twentieth century Nicholas II must have felt there was something missing in his people and hoped to revive national sentiments through the past and clothing.

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<sup>94</sup> King, 246.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 249. Amelekhina,

<sup>96</sup> Prince Felix Youssoupoff, 49-50.



## Winter Palace Ball 1903

1903 was a perfect opportunity for Nicholas II to showcase his image of Russia to the west at the celebrations of St. Petersburg's bicentennial. 1903 marked 300 years for the Romanovs and Empress Alexandra crafted a special way to celebrate. Recalling the revelries of 1903 Hagerman lamented, "there is nowadays not a great deal of gaiety at the Russian court. The Emperor is a very busy man; he probably has more to do even in time of peace, than any other man in the world."<sup>97</sup> Since 1834 this observation has been consistent with foreign and domestic visitors. As discussed, men and women's uniforms created a dazzling spectacle whose clothing is perfectly rehearsed down to the last stitching. To honour the prestigious year two balls were held in February to "showcase Muscovite culture, to project the powerful and glorious culture Peter had destroyed."<sup>98</sup> The first ball was for domestic consumption while the second was for the Foreign ambassadors. Nicholas II's goal for the second evening was to showcase his vision of Russia to the world.<sup>99</sup> Such an occasion for foreign dignitaries was quite a treat due to the closed off attitude of court, with only a few, six or eight, invited to annual gatherings at the Winter Palace.<sup>100</sup>

It was during an argument between poet V.A. Zhukovsky and Minister of the Imperial court, Baron V.B. Frederiks, that Frederiks triumphed Peter the Great's dress reforms while Zhukovsky argued national dress is more pleasing than frock-coats.<sup>101</sup> The argument was in the presence of Empress Alexandra who decided that ball would feature national dress. February 11th was the first ball that featured Nicholas II and Alexandra dressed as Tsar Alexei

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<sup>97</sup> Hagerman, 242.

<sup>98</sup> Ruane, 165.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>100</sup> Hagerman., 242.

<sup>101</sup> Amelekhina and Levykin, 100.

Mikhailovich and his wife Maria Miloslavskaia to honour the memory of Peter the Great's parents. In addition, Russian guests wore 17<sup>th</sup> century Muscovite attire. Two days later another costume ball was held for foreign guests who wore contemporary European dress, which greatly contrasted with the 17<sup>th</sup> century costumes.<sup>102</sup>

The Tsar and his wife's decision to appear in costume was controversial at home but praised abroad. Specifically, it was looked down upon for the Emperor to appear in costume in front of diplomats.<sup>103</sup> The Empress, in contrast, won high praise in the west. In the October 1904 edition of *Town and Country* Alexandra was praised as being "the most magnificent of all, and excited universal admiration."<sup>104</sup> The writer felt that "in the Russian national dress the young Empress also looks very charming, and she is always perfectly grounded on all public occasions."<sup>105</sup> While the Empress became a topic of acceptance the tsar was not. There were those who felt that the Tsar was deluding himself that the 1903 Ball was a display of national pride and not simply a costume fête.<sup>106</sup> The customary purpose of a costume ball is to "come in some sort of disguise, to dress up as someone else."<sup>107</sup> Orlando Figge points out that in the Imperial period every Russian aristocrat grew up in the country-side raised by serfs. By the time they reached adulthood their lives had been wholly Russian with small intermittent moments in European St. Petersburg. Therefore, Russian nobility were "a tiny island of European culture in a vast Russian peasant sea; they were aware that they were acting as if on a stage in a conscious, imitation of the west."<sup>108</sup> In the case of 1903 Ball, the disguise was their Muscovite ancestors

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<sup>102</sup> Ruane, 166.

<sup>103</sup> Amelekhina and Levykin, 101.

<sup>104</sup> Town and Country, 40.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ruane, 169.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>108</sup> Buckley, 3-4.

eclipsing their European island of identity. The costume ball was a success for the winter season because, it stirred up national feelings surrounding dress.

### **Forging “Style Russe”**

The Tsar wanted to create a tangible image of Russia consistent with his own vision for the nation. Due to his inability to stir the crowds, public groups took up the crusade to create a physical style that could be worn by the Russian masses.<sup>109</sup> Wanting a tactile experience of culture was not a new concept in the twentieth century. After the 16<sup>th</sup> century the experience of touching statues began to wane but was revived two-hundred years later. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe supported the idea of a tactile experience in museums and exhibitions. Goethe believed “to see with a feeling eye, to feel with seeing eye.”<sup>110</sup> German thinker Gottfried Herder similarly placed a higher importance on the sense of touch’s ability to afford the viewer a greater appreciation of beauty than sight alone.<sup>111</sup> These men’s ideas stand in contradiction with their modern contemporaries and with modern museum practices. But the idea that touch can enhance the experience of viewers or wearers was quite established in the world of fashion. In late Imperial Russia 1900-1917, clothing became the vehicle through which to present itself to foreign and domestic on-lookers. The costumed participants in February 1903 believed they were part of the presentation of their culture to guests and the clothing became the embodiment of the Russian spirit.<sup>112</sup> 1903 also begged the question of who was going to shape the twentieth-century Russian fashion industry, foreigners or Russians. This was not a new question but something

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<sup>109</sup> Ruane, 165-167.

<sup>110</sup> Classen, 132.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ruane, 167.

Russian aristocrats battled with since Peter the Great. What makes this a turning point is that artists had a vested interest in the fashion market.<sup>113</sup>

Russians had, in other cultural forms, examined the sensations of their country in taste, sound, and sight, had found what made them overtly “Russian” and “incorporated them into European forms of expression.”<sup>114</sup> In this marriage of East and West Russians were still retaining their European civilization while maintaining their identity as Russians. In the 1880s and 1890s a neo-Russian style was developed, by combining traditional lacemaking and embroidery with European style to accommodate both worlds.<sup>115</sup> The real situation brewing was the question of where the court fits into the equation. Royal courts ensured markets for couture designs, but aristocrats were so far removed from the everyday that they failed to be trend setters.<sup>116</sup> But like Nicholas II, there were public organizations who believed going back to Russia’s roots was the only answer.

The Russian Assembly was a sanctioned conservative organization made up of bureaucrats, intellectuals, and landowners who sought to halt the spreading evil of cosmopolitanism from the upper class. For them, clothing was an area the masses could easily access. Simply, they called for traditional caftans, sarafans, and headwear to be donned for formal occasions and the eventual spread to everyday attire.<sup>117</sup> The Union of Russian Women was another group to take on the crusade of fashion. Unlike the Russian Assembly it did not seek the abandonment of contemporary style but the amalgamation of traditional and contemporary. Its efforts were to reeducate the population in “knowledge of the motherland.”<sup>118</sup> While the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>114</sup> Martin, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Ruane, 163-164.

<sup>116</sup> King, 241.

<sup>117</sup> Ruane, 211-212.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 214.

artistic and political communities were butting heads, Diaghilev and associates were winning over the European crowds with dance. Ballets Russes costume designer Leon Bakst was among Diaghilev's association that took on the critics. He felt that there should not be a battle of past, present, and future. Instead art and fashion should reflect the present.<sup>119</sup> As will be discussed later, the trend in fashion included cultural elements in detail that were quintessential Russian.

## **Conclusion**

Ballets Russes took the challenge of forging Russian identity through fashion to bridge the gap between autocracy and the people. Their success lies in what the court could not provide, accessibility. Foreigners were rarely invited to court events or performances, whereas, Ballets Russes held performances that were open for public consumption abroad. Ballet also held another advantage: it was “a profound expression of individual identity.”<sup>120</sup> The court was caught up in showcasing Russia as it was before Peter the Great. Ballet was focused on the performance of tales from the Orient, and Russia's folk tales were on rotation during its highest success in 1906-1916. The Russian court was an experience needed to be seen, but ballet was seen, heard, and felt. Specifically, no matter how “expressive a tactical experience as a picture might be, there was always difficulty conveying a physical sensation through a visual medium.”<sup>121</sup> Images of the Tsar and his court performance could convey the identity of Russia. As described by countless first-hand experiences, Russia's pomp was something that had to be seen, heard, and felt to be understood. After 1906 Ballets Russes was frequently seen, heard, and felt across the globe carrying with it the heavy burden of the motherland's identity.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 218-219.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>121</sup> Classen, 126.

## Chapter Two:

### Cultural Change in Imperial Russia, 1909-1918: Ballets Russes

Ernest Newman observed that foreigners had a bad habit of lumping traits as “French”, “English”, or “Russian” without fully understanding a nation’s culture. His remark was in response to chatter circulating London of the Russian Opera and nationalism.<sup>122</sup> In short, he meant that a nation and its culture is not homogeneous but heterogeneous. Different geographical areas often account for widely varying differences in culture, even within a single nation. Sara Pritchard argues for this fluidity of nation and nationalism in her work, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône*.<sup>123</sup> To explore Russian ballet and nationalism, this chapter will borrow from her ideas of concrete and abstracts of nationhood as laid out in her study of the Rhone in France. This chapter will analyze the ways Russian artists used ballet and costuming to create a national image for the West that was not directly connected to the monarchy, which will contribute to the broader articulation of Russian cultural development. The beginning of ballet’s mission followed the 1903 Winter Palace Ball.

The celebration was an annual occurrence but 1903 marked 300 years of Romanov rule, and Tsar Nicholas II provided a special treat for foreign and domestic dignitaries to celebrate the occasion through a costume ball. Sources say that Tsarina Alexandra was meticulous in the recreation and study of these garments. She consulted with the director of the Hermitage Museum. Likewise, she used antique jewelry and garments brought from the Granovitaia Palace in Moscow.<sup>124</sup> Alexandra’s ensemble was described as: “a marvel of antiquarian reconstruction,

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<sup>122</sup> Ernest Newman, (1914). RUSSIAN OPERA AND RUSSIAN 'NATIONALISM.'. *The Musical Times, 1904-1995*, 55(858), 506. Accessed Feb 08, 2017, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/7753913?accountid=11563>.

<sup>123</sup> Sara Pritchard, “Introduction” in *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 7-8.

<sup>124</sup> Carolly Erickson, *Alexandra: The Last Tsarina* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 134.

if not of comfort. Dressed as Tsar Alexis's first wife, Tsarina Maria Ilinichna, she wore a sarafan of gold brocade with a silver design inlaid with emeralds, pearls and diamonds."<sup>125</sup> She completed the look with an antique headdress and white veil. Of course, Tsar Nicholas II exuded elegance in complement to his wife. He dressed as Tsar Alexis, ". . .in a red caftan thickly embroidered in gold thread, an authentic headdress from Alexis's time."<sup>126</sup> The court similarly dressed in 17<sup>th</sup> century sarafans and caftans. The photographs below were taken during the festivities.



The costumes not only caused a stir for those in attendance but likewise sparked international interest in artists and Russia's cultural heritage. In years following, artists no longer were satisfied with these "pretenders" but yearned for "real" Russian ethnic dress.<sup>128</sup> Art critic Sergei Makovsky stated: "We have fallen in love with [Folk Art], forgetting that the resurrection of national motifs is not an end in itself, but that these motifs are just material to be used in

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. A sarafan is a traditional Russian garment that was for centuries worn by both peasants and the monarchy.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> "Slide Show of Russia's Last Imperial Ball," February 1903, Woronozow-Daschkow collection, *Hoover Institution Archives*, accessed Feb. 15, 2017, <http://www.hoover.org/slideshows/slide-show-russias-last-imperial-ball>. Images left to right: Tsar Nicholas II, Group of Russian Dancers who performed Russkaia, and Tsarina Alexandra.

<sup>128</sup> Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 170.

creating a style that corresponds to the conditions of a European wide culture.”<sup>129</sup> Makovsky was saying that Russian national motifs were not art in themselves, but that they must be used in a way that the resulting art is uniquely Russia. This art must also contribute to European culture without being an imitation. While he did not create any art himself, he was a leader in the Russian art Renaissance nonetheless.

### **Russian Folk-Art Renaissance**

Artists’ attraction to folk art was that it was created by the Russian people who made up most of the population. Anthony Netting conducted research on peasant art and its preservation through generations. He finds that “art was one way of taking cultural control.”<sup>130</sup> The peasants could control parts of their lives and culture through art. Under authoritarian government, very little was controlled by the masses. Art was a medium for taking power back because it could not be regulated outside the country. Netting demonstrates this by discussing Russian peasant images and designs that appealed to them and how they incorporated them into art irrespective of high culture, artists then wanted to use this art to capture a dying culture.<sup>131</sup> Another appeal came from the images themselves. Folk art was riddled with homage motifs depicting men at arms “impregnating a female symbol or trampling their enemies,” which illustrates warriors are controllers of the earth.<sup>132</sup> Peasants therefore denied that divine rulers control the earth. At the end of the nineteenth century, artists sought to challenge the hegemony of the Tsar over art and to revolutionize a new art form. Leaders in this arena were artist, Leon Bakst; ballerina, Anna

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>130</sup> Anthony Netting, 66.

<sup>131</sup> Homans, Jennifer, “East Goes West: Russian Modernism and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes,” in *Apollo’s Angels* (New York: Random House, 2010), 299.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 65.



Pavlova; and artist, Alexander Benois. They later joined forces with Sergei Diaghilev to form Ballet Russes.<sup>133</sup>

Leon Bakst, Sergei Diaghilev, and Alexandre Benois were the three main men of this revolutionary art scene. Sergei Diaghilev, born in Novgorod in 1872, founded Ballet Russes in 1906 after training as an art critic. Within the art scene he was regarded as a “country bumpkin” because unlike some of the others, he did not come from a family of artists.<sup>134</sup> He had nothing in common with Alexandre Benois’ group and was very much alienated. They placed him within the margins because they believed he was not cultured, but that did not stop him from making a name for himself.<sup>135</sup>

Like Diaghilev, Leon Bakst felt very alienated within the St. Petersburg art community. Leon Bakst was a favorite of Parisian art circles and in the world of design. In Russia he did not receive the adoring attention from his countrymen but was admired by foreigners. In 1913, Bakst recalled, “Gradually, I became shut off by a wall of hostile silence.”<sup>136</sup> Bakst renounced his aesthetic for something that would sell, following an incident at an art gallery where his work had been crossed out. Eventually, he ended the charade, reverted to his old style and the attacks resumed. Bakst stated: “I reached the zenith of happiness. I was expelled from the city of my birth, and nobody, not a single person, rose to say that it was a shame for the country which I had done my best to glorify throughout the world.”<sup>137</sup> Bakst was exiled for his Jewish faith in 1912, but was alienated from Benois and Diaghilev’s group in his early days, and he found himself in

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<sup>133</sup> Ruane, 171.

<sup>134</sup> Charles Spencer, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Leon Bakst, PERSONAL NOTES., Otago Witness, Issue 3093, 25 June 1913, *Papers Past New Zealand*, accessed Jan. 10, 2017, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/OW19130625.2.266>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

direct conflict with Benois specifically.<sup>138</sup> The rocky relationship was highlighted by Benois's jealousy of Bakst's genius which resulted in outright anti-Semitic skirmishes.<sup>139</sup>

Despite their differences, these artists formed a group called the Nevsky Pickwickians, which inspired a larger movement and journal *Mir Iskusstva*.<sup>140</sup> The group met to discuss art, music, and literature, and had very defined tastes, specifically they were against crass and simplistic realism, and revered beauty and nobility, artifice and rules. Diaghilev also had a taste for Russian folk art, that was inspired by summers in the country.<sup>141</sup>

In 1890, Russia experienced an artistic renaissance. Historians differ on what developed artistically in Russia, but some say slavophilism, or "a concern with Russianness in everyday life, history, architecture, church and folk art," was the guiding force.<sup>142</sup> Others argue *Mir Iskusstva* and its value of Russian aesthetic, and exploration in all eras of Russian history and folk art was more influential.<sup>143</sup> Whether it was slavophilism or *Mir Iskusstva*, the fact remains that Russia was an artistic power at the turn of the twentieth century. It has been suggested that ". . . [b]y and large. . . the aristocratic circles of St. Petersburg tended to favour westerners rather than slavophiles."<sup>144</sup> The goal of the period was therefore to pursue the artistic potential of folk art and dress.

The traditional sarafans and caftans worn by peasants throughout the centuries was a foundation for the new movement. The images below illustrate these traditional garments and the

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<sup>138</sup> Spencer, 13.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>140</sup> Anna Winestein, "Quiet Revolutionaries: The 'Mir Iskusstva' Movement and Russian Design," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 21, no. 4 Ghosts of the Profession: Amateur, Vernacular and Dilettante Practices and Modern Design (Winter, 2008), 317, JStor.org, Accessed Feb. 27, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25228603>. *Mir Iskusstva* translates to World of Art.

<sup>141</sup> Jennifer Homans, "East Goes West", 298-299.

<sup>142</sup> Charles Spencer, *Leon Bakst and the Ballet Russes*, 29.

<sup>143</sup> Winestein, 317.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

ways artists expressed them for the stage. The first image is of a Ukrainian woman in her sarafan, followed by the artistic interpretation of Leon Bakst for *L'Oiseau de Feu (Fire Bird)*. The third image is of a Circassian man from Constantinople and lastly, Leon Bakst's interpretation for stage in *Thamar*. The general silhouettes of the traditional folk garments are retained while the artistic expression of these cultures is seen in the fabric choices (silk, acetate, rayon, and linen) or in the colour selection. The display of these garments was for the celebration of these cultures and harkens back to when life was at harmony with nature.

*Mir Iskusstva*, “reinterpreted the meaning and appearance of Russian-ness by simplifying their sources and fusing them with European and Asian ones to transcend revivalism inherent to the Style Russe developed within the design profession.”<sup>145</sup> The simplification is shown through the general silhouette of costume. The fusion of Asian and European is in the details. For example, the far-right costume is brightly coloured and embroidered, but when compared to the image to its left it is far more artistic than realistic. This synthesis continues to pass from Ballet Russes finally becoming “style Russe” of émigré designers in the 1920s. Not only does Russian folk-art make a lasting impression on costume and fashion but combines with dance to create a unique style of movement for Ballet Russes.

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<sup>145</sup> Anna Winestein, “Quiet Revolutionaries,” 317-319



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## Art Transcends Ballet

The marriage of folk art and ballet in meaning is not self-evident as it is with the costumes. Difficulty arose in discerning the meaning of images. The complexity of the images was that there was no oral or written meaning of motifs. When the peasants were questioned, they couldn't describe the meaning.<sup>147</sup> The power of the images seemed to transcend words, like in ballet. Charles Spencer suggests that the success of Ballet Russes was due in part to the art form's ability to transcend linguistic barriers. It was a visual spectacle played out by action, music, and dress not words.<sup>148</sup> Bakst expands and supports this observation that: “. . .the painter who knows how to make use of [colour], the director of the orchestra who can with one movement of his baton put all this in motion without crossing them, who can let flow the

<sup>146</sup>[*Woman posed in peasant costume, Ukraine, Russia*]. ca. 1918. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/90709997/>. (Accessed January 20, 2017.); Leon Bakst, *Costume for a Female Dancer*, 1910, National Gallery of Australia, Accessed Feb. 10, 2017, <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/balletsrusses/Default.cfm?IRN=107288&BioArtistIRN=11774&MnuID=3&GalID=7&ViewID=2>; Abdullah Frères, photographer. *Constantinople. Circassian*. 1865. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/93500448/>. (Accessed January 20, 2017.) ;Leon Bakst, *Costume for Lezghin: Thamar*, 1912, National Gallery of Australia, accessed Feb. 15, 2017, <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/balletsrusses/Default.cfm?IRN=206605&BioArtistIRN=19455&MnuID=3&GalID=13&ViewID=2>.

<sup>147</sup> Netting, 53.

<sup>148</sup> Spencer, 81.

thousand tones from the end of his stick, without making a mistake, can draw from the spectator the exact emotion which he wants them to feel.”<sup>149</sup>

Non-verbal communication is apparent in the garments created by and for the peasants and for Ballet Russes. Costumes cannot voice their meaning; therefore, the design and wearer must portray the meaning. Artistic meaning in garments is portrayed in cut, texture, and colour. The Academy in London in 1912 pointed out that Bakst used “crude colours with astonishing daring,” something that had not been seen in the previous decades. His color choices of scarlet, cerulean blue, and emerald green jumped out at ladies and gentlemen dressed in muted and pastel tones.<sup>150</sup> Through the elements of design Bakst’s half-fantastic and half-realistic characters became revelations of the East, mystery and barbaric splendor. His characters were formed from what he believed to be a progression in each colour’s meaning. He suggests a gradation that conveys, “frankness and chastity,” or sensuality and despair.<sup>151</sup> What Bakst is indicating is that a single pigment will suggest various meanings to the public based on the shade utilized, which is what he accomplished in *Schéhérazade*. Bakst identifies what the ballet was striving for: to derive meaning and words from dance and design. While color played a key role in Bakst’s designs, line and motif were also instrumental. Simple line designs were taken and repeated over a garment or series of garments to create a harmony among them. For critics, the true mark of genius was that the colours, lines, and motifs harmonized with the scenery to create a truer to life production.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>150</sup> Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History, fifth edition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 224.

<sup>151</sup> Spencer, 85.

<sup>152</sup> Mary Roberts, (1915, Dec 01), “THE NEW RUSSIAN STAGE, A BLAZE OF COLOR: WHAT THE GENIUS OF LEON BAKST HAS DONE TO VIVIFY PRODUCTIONS WHICH... COMBINE BALLET, MUSIC AND DRAMA,” *The Craftsman (1901-1916)*, 29, 265, accessed January 9, 2017, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/128284627?accountid=11563>.; Ruane, 176.

The textiles of the design tell the story for ballet audiences. When deciding on materials used, Bakst and other Ballet Russe designers chose carefully. A different emotion and story was played out dependent on the textile. *L'Oiseau de Feu (Firebird)* takes place in Russia and the costumes are based on Slavic peasant festival dress. Therefore, it was vital that the costumes were made primarily of cotton and wool with minimal silk.<sup>153</sup> It was more convincing than a fully silk costume with elaborate trim because the intent was to display Slavic folk costume for the townsfolks dancers.

Not only were the textiles convincing but the way they were manipulated created movement in the garments. Fabric selection also lends itself to *Shéhérazade*.<sup>154</sup> The story here took place in Persia, a kingdom whose history was deeply rooted in fine textiles of silk, bright colours, and exoticism. Silk's luster, texture, and rustle developed the feeling of the orient on stage. Cotton or wool couldn't achieve the passion and excitement in the movement of the dancers, because it lacked drapability and luster. It wasn't only the audience who needed to be transported to a new land; the dancers had to feel they were part of the Slavic peasantry or the Persian harem to make the audience convinced. To them the feeling of soft but durable cotton felt more restrained and rural. On the other hand, chiffon and satin were a mixture of airy weightlessness and heavy elegance.

Visual elements of Ballet Russes combined to create a radical new approach to ballet performances.<sup>155</sup> In August 1911, *Current Literature* published an article that conveyed just how "radical" Diaghilev's ballet was. The article reveals the West was shocked in their understanding

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<sup>153</sup> "L'Oiseau de Feu [Firebird]," National Gallery of Australia 2011, Accessed March 13, 2017, <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/BALLETSRUSSSES/default.cfm?MnuID=3&GalID=7>.

<sup>154</sup> "Shéhérazade," National Gallery of Australia 2011, <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/BALLETSRUSSSES/default.cfm?MnuID=3&GalID=5>.

<sup>155</sup> Ruane, 171.

of the function of ballet. From the Russian standpoint, dance was a vehicle of communication, driven by the command of technique and limbs.<sup>156</sup> In short, the west received the Ballet Russes well because it was a reinvigorating art form that breathed meaning into otherwise meaningless entertainment. *Current Literature* identified Ballet Russes as a vehicle of communication, but as well as a vehicle of artistic ideas. It stated: “Russian ballet dancing, says our authority, never for one moment escapes from its subjection to ideas. Those ideas are artistic ideas. They are conceived at a high pitch of emotional intelligence.”<sup>157</sup> Ballet dancer and choreographer Serge Lifar attributed Ballet Russes success to painting, affirming the idea that ballet was not simply a visual entertainment but evoked deeper reactions. It was an exhibition of passion over profession. There was a passion for art whether it was costume, scenery, or dance and Ballet Russes allowed freedom to show an inner passion unexhibited in Russia.<sup>158</sup>

Though each of these artists would ultimately succeed, they all struggled throughout their early careers. Bakst worked and earned prestige in the Imperial theater but felt “frustrated by the cultural conservatism of the imperial ballet productions.”<sup>159</sup> His frustration came from the belief that folk tales and legends should be presented and performed with a single meaning without censorship. This references back to the original intention of the Russian Renaissance artists, throwing off the hegemonic yoke of the autocracy. Outside of established institutions which allowed more creativity and freedom artists found in Ballet Russes, particularly Leon Bakst. In December 1915 Mary Roberts wrote an article for *The Craftsman* describing this new reality. She describes ballets as “an orgy of rainbows.”<sup>160</sup> That there is no phrase to describe the

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<sup>156</sup> “The Russian Ballet as a Vehicle of Artistic Ideas,” 195.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>158</sup> Spencer, 39. Anna Winestein, 315

<sup>159</sup> Ruane, 172.

<sup>160</sup> Roberts, 257.

“amazing beauty” presented by Bakst because it is “not merely dancing, merely anything.”<sup>161</sup> It was a combination of everything, it was visually beautiful in the textiles and scenery, emotionally provoking in the dance forms, and it told the stories of marginalized peoples.

### **Orient presented by the Orientals**

Geographically, Russia is situated in both Asia and Eastern Europe, functioning as a bridge between two worlds. Russian artists, too, were intermediaries between East and West. Russia imports were to the liking of European tastes. Ballet Russes upheld audience expectations that Russians were orientals.<sup>162</sup> To some historians, the evidence of Eastern influence is in the motifs of folk art, which informed the Ballet Russes. Motifs such as deer, dogs, pigs, cats, unicorns, griffins, and lions were repeatedly seen. Whether the motif is mythical or real, the fact is that the repetition of beings with a connection to the natural world left peoples of the modern twentieth century with an impression of backwardness.<sup>163</sup>

Before the appearance of Ballet Russes, Europe had long held an orientalist fascination.<sup>164</sup> In 1903 there was an exhibition of Islamic art in France; but before that the Orient was brought to France from Napoleon Bonaparte’s expeditions to Africa and Egypt in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. For Great Britain the Orient was daily business in the established colonies in Africa and India. The world of fashion had its exhibitors of the far East, Charles Worth and Paul Poiret. They were already beginning to introduce East Asian and Middle Eastern styles from their couture houses before Ballet Russes took the stage.<sup>165</sup> Generally, the styles portrayed by Worth

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 257-258.

<sup>162</sup> Ruane, 177. Oksana Bulgakowa, “The “Russian Vogue” in Europe and Hollywood: The Transformation of Russian Stereotypes through the 1920s,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 64, no 2. (Apr., 2005), 214, JSTOR.org, Accessed Oct. 10, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3664508>.

<sup>163</sup> Netting, 59.

<sup>164</sup> The terms orient, orientalism, and exoticism are used in the context of 1900 Europe.

<sup>165</sup> Spencer, 78-79.



and Poiret have been attributed to the Ottoman and Indian Empires, not Russia. The following images illustrate this fascination circulating in Europe.



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The image on the left is of a fancy-dress costume designed by Paul Poiret in 1911. This garment shows the continuing fascination with the east in Western Europe. This was worn for a costume ball held by Poiret. Which indicates that most “oriental” looks were simply costumes and not intended for daily wear in the West, and this appears earlier in history as well. The center image is a painting of Princess Royal Victoria in 1852 done by Sir William Charles Ross. It depicts the daughter of Queen Victoria in Indian attire surrounded by an ethnic looking atmosphere, which highlights Britain as an imperial authority. Like Poiret in 1911, garments of this type would have been strictly worn for portraiture or costume balls. Finally, the right image is of a costume designed by Sonia Delaunay-Terk for Ballet Russes’ *Cleopatra* in 1918. All three images dictate

<sup>166</sup> Paul Poiret (French, Paris 1879–1944 Paris), Fancy Dress Costume, 1911, *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed Feb. 02, 2017, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/81781?sortBy=Relevance&ao=on&ft=paul+poiret&mp;offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1>.

<sup>167</sup> “Victoria, Princess Royal, in a Turkish Inspired Costume,” by Sir William Charles Ross, 1852, LChase & SHScott, @2nerdyhistgirls, Feb. 12, 2017, accessed Feb. 22, 2017, <https://twitter.com/2nerdyhistgirls/status/830901975680217094>.

<sup>168</sup> Sonia Delaunay-Terk (Russia, active France, 1885-1979), Costume for 'Cléopâtre' in the Ballets Russes production of 'Cléopâtre' (Cleopatra), 1918, *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, accessed Feb. 02, 2017, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/236410>.

that while there was a fascination with the Orient, its application was restricted to costume balls and rarely worn for all occasions. While this may be the case, the public continued to eat up Ballet Russes ethnic displays of art.

Art historian Louis Reau and contemporaries of Bakst, use his religion as an explanation for his artistic genius. He illustrated: “in his Semitic origin, Bakst inhaled with delight all the emanations of the Oriental spirit.”<sup>169</sup> Bakst’s mark of greatness stemmed from his Jewish lineage, and the successful portrayal of Orientals in the ballet. Jewish people historically have been ostracized from society, as has people of the east. Bakst’s success is that he comes from both groups, and in the eyes of his contemporaries has been able to overcome those obstacles to be seen first as an artist. Orientalism is cited as powerful in Russian history. This is due to the Islamic communities concentrated in the Balkans region and the early domination of Rus’ by the Tartars.<sup>170</sup> This perceived connection is apparent in films of the 1920s. Therefore, in Russian films the cliché of orientalism and barbarism is portrayed. The same is true in ballet, Diaghilev placed “Russianness” in the context of modernism. It was modern in style and design but continued to give audiences what they perceived as true for Russians. Europeans felt that it was backward and lacked the requisites to distinguish them as a European nation. Both the film and theatre portrayed “foreign phantasmagoric ‘Style Russe.’”<sup>171</sup> The style exemplified by Ballet Russes was fantastic in the deception it depicts to audiences and dreamlike in the twirling costumes of colour and texture. These elements combined with audiences wanting more was the perfect platform for telling the Russian story through folklore.

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<sup>169</sup> Spencer, 77.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Oksana Bulgakowa, “Russian Vogue,” 212.

One way to present the orient for Western audiences was through the telling of folk tales. Ballet Russes were designed to capture the ethnography, emotions, and deeper meaning of historical folk tales. This was different from their predecessors; these performances had a message for society. They, “connected ancient and modern people’s together in that universal human search for the meaning of life.”<sup>172</sup> Folk tales represent characters in the struggle for the meaning of life, whether it is a sad or a happy meaning.

*Petrouchka* was a performance that was entirely Russian with multiple meanings. It was a Russian story that was set in a Russian village and dancers wore garments like those peasants wore every day. The story follows a dainty ballerina, Petrouchka a dejected rag doll, and the moor.<sup>173</sup> In the tale the ballerina, Petrouchka, and moor are puppets who are alive. Petrouchka and the moor both favor the ballerina and fight for her, resulting in Petrouchka’s death. His spirit then takes his revenge and scares the Charlatan, the puppet master, who flees in terror.<sup>174</sup> This ballet was a comment on Russian society. The Charlatan could be the Tsar or the West. The puppets are the varying elements of society, the ballerina is the aristocracy, Petrouchka the peasantry, and the moor is personification of the multi-ethnic Russian culture. All layers of society are being crushed and manipulated from above, presented as the Tsar. Petrouchka is freed by death to enact his wish to scare the controller away.

On the opposite side, the struggle for meaning is lighter. In an unproduced tale, the “Tsarevna Frog” (Frog Princess), the heroine struggles to connect with her princely husband while waiting for her curse that transforms her into a frog in the day to wear off. Every night she

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<sup>172</sup> Ruane, 172.

<sup>173</sup> Homans, 303-304. Claudia Jeschke and Nicole Haitzinger, “Dancing Swans and Firebirds: ‘Russianness’ Exhibited,” *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 32, no. 3, Choreographers at the Cutting Edge (2009), 471, accessed Feb. 27, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25598227>.

<sup>174</sup> “Petrouchka,” *American Ballet Theatre Foundation*, 2017, accessed October 14, 2017.

sheds her slimy frog exterior and transforms into a beautiful maiden. After burning her frog skin to end the curses cycle she is taken away by a witch due to his foolishness.<sup>175</sup> This folktale is lighter in its meaning because it illustrated a trait parents wish to instill in their children, patience. If the prince had waited for the curse to wear off, which it would have, he would have had his princess without risking her life. The following costumes illustrate the tales and their connection to folk art and tales.



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The connection with the past and the East were recurring themes in Ballet Russes. But after their successful launch in 1906, there were reservations by Diaghilev on changing the tone of productions. Fokine's *Chopiniana* (*Les Sylphides*) was added to the tour line-up in 1908. Diaghilev worried: "where was the passion, the barbaric Russianness, the sexiness French

<sup>175</sup> "The Frog Princess," *ArtRusse*, 2004, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://www.artrusse.ca/fairytales/frog-princess.htm>.

<sup>176</sup> Auguste Bert, photographer, 1912, "Principal Characters from Petrouchka," retrieved from the National Gallery of Australia, accessed Feb. 26, 2017, <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/balletsrusses/Default.cfm?IRN=199448&BioArtistIRN=11792&MnuID=3&GalID=11&ViewID=2>.

<sup>177</sup> Mijailovich Vasnetsov, unknown medium, 1910-1918, "The Frog Princess," Vasnetsov House Museum, retrieved from The Athenaeum, accessed Feb., 21, 2018, <https://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=222907>.

audiences expected?”<sup>178</sup> Historians find that the quintessential Ballet Russes performance was a tale of sex and violence. *Cleopatra*, which debuted in 1908 in St. Petersburg, was the beginning foray into orientalism for Bakst, which was met with criticism. Prince Lievan stated that there is nothing nationalistic in Bakst’s art.<sup>179</sup> This was not the first or last criticism that was laid on Ballet Russes from home.

### **Criticism from the Motherland**

While the Ballet Russes aim was wholly Russian, composed of artists, dancers, and choreographers from Russia, it never performed in Russia. Individuals were familiar faces at the Imperial theater but never under the name of Diaghilev. While not performing in Russia, the population was informed of their success abroad and leveled their own criticism.<sup>180</sup> Since the introduction of ballet to Russia by Catherine the Great, it had always been closely linked to the court and therefore the monarch.<sup>181</sup> The domestic criticism against Ballet Russes usually dealt with the presentation of an unrealistic image. As discussed, the image perpetuated by Diaghilev and company was that of exoticism and barbarism. Critics pointed out “. . .the role of art in creating an appropriate image of the empire.”<sup>182</sup> In short, to export art was to export the image of the nation.<sup>183</sup> While the image of Russia as exotic and barbaric was not entirely correct, historians indicate that fault was not entirely that of the ballet. The consensus was that international praise of Ballet Russes as anything other than a foreign curiosity was tantamount to praise of their successful autocracy. It was an admonition of successful governing because other

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<sup>178</sup> Spencer, 77-78.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>180</sup> Homans, 290-291.

<sup>181</sup> Hanna Järvinen, “The Russian Barnum,” 19

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 22. Jeschke and Haitzinger, 470.

powers had not succeeded in creating a wholly nationalistic and innovative art form.<sup>184</sup> Russian productions continued to be viewed as barbaric and uncivilized even after the fall of the Romanov Dynasty. Furthermore, in film throughout the 1920s, Russians were often portrayed as barbarians on a journey to adopt civilization. They were children of nature, isolated from civilized Europe; a grim foreshadowing of post-World War II divisions.<sup>185</sup>

Ballet Russes represented Russian cultural power. This created a problem because “. . . instead of recognizing the might of Russia and the history of ballet in performances of 1909, the French seemed to think Russia was some sort of Oriental backwater inhabited by naturally dancing barbarians.”<sup>186</sup> It is true that the dancing was meant to be naturalistic. Choreographer Mikhail Fokine was steadfast in his belief that the dancing must “have unity of expression.”<sup>187</sup> This unity usually harkened back to the past and folk practices. In short, the Russian aristocrats were frustrated that successful Russian ballet would bolster international stereotypes of them as unsophisticated and medieval when they saw themselves as modern and radical. A comment from French art historian J.L. Vaudoyer states that Russians were new because they had not “attained civilization.”<sup>188</sup> He also equated Russian ballet and art movements to those of 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy.<sup>189</sup>

### **The Russian Moment and Fashion**

Prior to 1914, the primary foci of the ballet were the Ottoman Empire or India. World War I brought the Russian empire and its folk-tales into the forefront for productions. The multicolour phase of Ballet Russes (1909-1916) spread from the stage to clothing and interior

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>185</sup> Bulgakawa, 214.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>187</sup> Homans, 293.

<sup>188</sup> Järvinen, 25.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

design. It has been coined as “slavophil/Bakstian orientalism.”<sup>190</sup> The quintessential production during this period was *L’oiseau de Feu (Firebird)*, defined as having visual luster.<sup>191</sup> During the tumultuous war years, Diaghilev took his ballet across the ocean to America. Here it was also well received. In a 1914 review by Mary Roberts, she congratulates the ballerina Nazimova “great and weak, beautiful and undisciplined, has given America a special vision of suffering Russia.”<sup>192</sup> She continues by stating that Russian drama is gay, tragic, and “always with the heart of the people, always with the cruelty of the over-lord saturating it.”<sup>193</sup> For Russians, *Pavillon* and *Sylphides* were originally created for Maryinsky Theater and were the first real Russian ballets.<sup>194</sup> But every ballet including Hindu *Le Dieu Blue* were considered Russian. Bakst stated: “For the Russian soul, ever seeking and ever restless, never limited and never lying still, keeps searching for the one tendency which is always dear to it-mysticism.”<sup>195</sup> Here he is identifying and describing a condition between people and nation that existed before Ballet Russes dancers stepped on foreign stages.

Bakst was interpreting what Russia was to him through his costumes, but he was only one opinion in the nation of millions. Ernest Norman also supported this idea. In 1914 he stated, “So that however ‘typically Russian’ a Russian may be, he is not a Russian if he looks, as many Russians do, beyond the borders of his own country, and finds certain aspects of foreign art more interesting than indigenous art of the home territory.” He continues: “I would much rather be a good [artist] than a good patriot.”<sup>196</sup> It could be interpreted that after Bakst’s exile in 1912, his

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<sup>190</sup> Spencer, 81.

<sup>191</sup> Jeschke and Haitzinger, 471.

<sup>192</sup> Mary Roberts, 257.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Homans, 300.

<sup>195</sup> Roberts, 264.

<sup>196</sup> Norman, 507.

loyalty remained to himself and not the Russian nation. With that in mind, Bakst exhibited a behavior that sources believed was unique to Slavic people. Bakst was adaptable and eagerly reached out for all human experiences.<sup>197</sup> Bakst may have been hurt by his exile, he still displayed Russian aesthetic in art due to being born and raised in Russia. The Slavic temperament Roberts describes is deeply engrained and part of his style. Leon Bakst continued to work for Ballet Russes until 1922 but continued to work as an artist until his death in 1924.

Bakst's Style Russe continued even during his Ballet Russe hiatus between 1914 to 1917. During those years, he designed for Anna Pavlova, notably in 1916's *Sleeping Beauty*.<sup>198</sup> Another famous Russian designer designed Diaghilev's *Sleeping Beauty* in 1922: Romain de Tiroff, better known as Erté.<sup>199</sup> Not only did he work for Ballet Russes, but he began his career working under Paul Poiret. The mingling of stage and couture house illustrated the beginnings of Style Russe in fashion. The importance of Ballet Russes in theater was not sustained, but it did continue to play an important role in fashion. They quickly ushered in a desire for modernity in dress. Corsets, lace and pastels were replaced by "vivid colors, harem skirts, fringe and voluptuousness."<sup>200</sup> Historians agree that not only did Ballet Russes create a desire for modernity, but its influence goes deeper. After the 1910 performance of *Carnival*, Bakst's designs became the popular silhouette between 1915 and 1916.<sup>201</sup> The beginning of Russians in couture houses prior to WWI, established a taste for Slavic works and the East. Thus, after the Russian Revolution in 1917, White émigré could easily settle into a thriving fashion market.

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<sup>197</sup> Roberts, 269.

<sup>198</sup> Spencer, 121,131.

<sup>199</sup> Vassiliev, 33-34, 365.

<sup>200</sup> Ruane, 177.

<sup>201</sup> Vassiliev, 1



The ability for émigré to feel at home in the fashion house began with the influence of Diaghilev. Erté exerted influence on Russian fashion between the 1903 ball and to the rise of Ballet Russes. He connected with Ballet Russes in 1922, illustrating joint Russo-European cultural influence. Russian design began with royalty and followed into exile.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 13, 365.

### Chapter Three: White Émigré Material Culture, 1915-1925; Russian Style

In 1918 Teffi reflected that, “Its not for nothing that I mention my sealskin coat. A woman’s sealskin coat represents an entire epoch in her life as a refugee.”<sup>203</sup> Teffi, whose real name was Nadezhda Alexandrovna Buchinskaya, wrote on her journey from Moscow to the Black Sea in 1918. She left her motherland fleeing Bolshevik violence that had captured Russia, taking only the necessities with her including her sealskin coat. She continued, “Dear gentle beast, comfort and defense in difficult times, banner of our lives as refugee women, A whole epic could be written about you. I remember you and salute you.”<sup>204</sup> Teffi’s detailed nostalgia for a simple fur coat illustrates how clothing was an integral part of Russian émigré culture and survival. A coat provided comfort from the difficult trials of being in a foreign land, as well as, comfort and defense from the harsh cold as many fled across Europe. She highlights that her story is not unique, a fur coat was the first belonging packed by most upper-class émigré.<sup>205</sup> Teffi was also a key figure in the examination of Russian émigré. Previous studies focused on literature of the exiles because literature is easily exported, and language defines a culture.<sup>206</sup> This chapter examines émigrés’ material culture. It will show the white émigré used fashion to alleviate the stresses of exile and recreated Russian style abroad.

White émigré, as history has dubbed them, were Russians who fled the Bolshevik regime after October 1917. There are no precise numbers of those who resettled in Europe, but estimates range from tens of thousands to millions.<sup>207</sup> Scholars agree that there is difficulty in tracing the lives of those who left Russia due to scarcity of primary sources, periodicals, and biographies.

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<sup>203</sup> Teffi, *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea* (New York: New York Review Books, 2016), 64.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>206</sup> Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford Press, 1990), 95.

<sup>207</sup> Raeff, 24.

There was an abundance of memoirs published during the twenties and thirties, but they devote more pages to pre-1917.<sup>208</sup> Memoirs written leave impressions that “. . .help us imagine ourselves there with them, as them, in their shoes as it were.”<sup>209</sup> While there is not an abundance of sources on life during the twenties many émigrés left behind material culture that can help recreate this poignant time in the lives of Russian refugees, garments. Clothing is an important article left behind by those seeking to make a living in a field they felt they understood. Fashion design was a means of surviving and connecting with the past due to its ability to draw you into a moment.<sup>210</sup> Russian émigré didn’t refashion themselves once they arrived abroad, instead they kept Imperial Russia alive in foreign lands.

## **Emigration**

Russians poured out of the motherland and into foreign lands following the 1917 February and October Revolutions and subsequent Civil War. Teffi was one of these émigrés who detailed her exodus in 1918. While waiting for a train, she and her travel companions reminisced. She recalled, “not a word about either our present or future.”<sup>211</sup> Survival was about the past and living outside of reality even for a moment meant mentally surviving. Mental and emotional survival was the most important concern when emigrating as an exile. As will be shown, these people were able to physically survive by gaining jobs and skills that allowed them to feed themselves and provide a roof over their heads. With that in mind, it is important to establish who emigrated.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>209</sup> Nina Edwards, *Dressed for War* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2015),6.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Teffi, 33.

Scholarship shows that there were no firm numbers on how many people left Russia; sources vary from hundreds of thousands to upwards of 1.5 million.<sup>212</sup> Out of those who emigrated mostly young single men made the journey. In 1939 it was estimated that the ratio of male to female exiles was 60.48 to 39.52.<sup>213</sup> Due to poor circumstances upon arrival many men did not marry, which contributed to low birth rates. Women who did leave Russia were either too young to marry or were already married. Other statistics show that nobles made up a small percentage of émigré, but overall a high number of émigré were educated.<sup>214</sup> These numbers illustrate that Russian exiles constituted not only individuals but also a Russian society in exile, it was also a society because all social classes went abroad. People chose to congregate in groups across Europe due to political discord abroad caused by inadequate information, and feelings of helplessness, nostalgia and anger towards the past.<sup>215</sup> They departed towards Kiev and Odessa and then traveled towards Europe through the traditional Byzantium capital of Constantinople.<sup>216</sup> They settled in metropolitan areas across Europe, particularly London, Berlin, and Prague, and many chose Paris as their new temporary home.

France offered white émigré more benefits than any other country. At the peak of emigration, 200,000 settled in France primarily in Paris.<sup>217</sup> France issued work permits to Russians, but they limited their job options. While many were educated and skilled in specialized fields such as law, medicine, and education, they were restricted from these occupations. French

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<sup>212</sup> Robert Johnston, "The Great Patriotic War and the Russian Exiles in France," *The Russian Review* 35, No. 3 (1976): 303, accessed February 05, 2018, <http://jstor.org.libpublic3.isu.edu/stable/128406>; Tatiana Schaufuss, "The White Russian Refugees," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (1939): 4, accessed February 05, 2018, <http://jstor.org.libpublic3.isu.edu/stable/1021884>.

<sup>213</sup> Raeff, 25; Schaufuss, 46.

<sup>214</sup> Raeff, 25-26.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 7, 9.

<sup>216</sup> Vassiliev, 57, 61.

<sup>217</sup> Johnston, 303.

citizenship was required for liberal professions. As we will see, this didn't bode well for Russians due to reluctance to naturalize. Russians seemingly settled into their new lives smoothly and it wouldn't be until 1930 that life presented new challenges.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, Paris became a huge hub for emigres, with it quickly becoming the intellectual and spiritual center of life in exile.

France was the most desirable choice for émigré but there were those who did seek asylum elsewhere. The United States appeared as a "promise land" for those looking to assimilate and resolve problems of exile.<sup>219</sup> It should be mentioned that the United States was an unlikely choice for Russians. American policies stood in direct conflict with émigré goals and dreams. Magazines instructed citizens on their duties as Americans following the Great War, even progressive periodicals such as *The Delineator*. Articles were published that championed women's reform while maintaining that women's vital role was in upholding conservative family values by "Americanizing" new immigrants. These American goals were continually pushed throughout the 1920s. Columnists covered what were thought to be communist activities and how to guard against them. Russian's case was further complicated when vice-president Calvin Coolidge wrote a three-part series on communism in 1923. It denoted "what must be cleansed, who must be cleansed, and how the cleansing should be carried out."<sup>220</sup> If political and social scrutiny did not keep away Russian émigré, the USA's distance from Russia did.

The locations of émigré were not chosen on a whim but were due to distance to the motherland, as well as other factors. Scholars agree that most Russians wanted to retain ties to

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>219</sup> Schaufuss, 49-50,52.

<sup>220</sup> Sidney Bland, "Shaping the Life of the New Woman: The Crusading Years of the *Delineator*," *American Periodicals* 19, no. 2 (2009), 165,181, accessed August 21, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23025159>.

home. When they arrived in the west they chose not to assimilate in hopes of returning home to Russia but remained “committed to carrying on a meaningful *Russian Life*.”<sup>221</sup> A meaningful life therefore began to mean one that was still culturally Russian. As Nikolay Karamzin observed, “these unfortunates felt that by depriving them of their ancient habits Peter was depriving them of their fatherland itself.”<sup>222</sup> He was commenting on Peter the Great’s westernizing reforms that virtually stripped Russians of their traditional dress. Peter’s reforms took place in the eighteenth century, but Karamzin’s reflections can be used to the Russian émigré experience in the twentieth century.

Russian émigré were truly liminal: they were refugees in the sense they were pushed from their homes, but they were not typical refugees as most never returned home nor became culturally integrated into their host countries. Three main reasons have been cited for the mass exodus of Russians. First and foremost was the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and instillation of the Bolsheviks. Second, the collapse of White Russian forces saw increase departures between 1919 to 1922; and finally, famine in 1921. Regardless of when they left, Russian emigres’ reasons for leaving were more personal than political or patriotic.<sup>223</sup>

Personal safety caused most if not all white émigré out of their homelands, and because of this they figuratively and literally never “unpacked” their suitcases out of their belief that Bolshevism would be short lived.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, their lives revolved around preserving and passing on the real Russia while abroad, superimposing their past lives onto new places.<sup>225</sup> In a sense, their “adaptability would prove essential for future émigrés, compelled again and again to

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<sup>221</sup> Raeff, 5.

<sup>222</sup> Karamzin, 136.

<sup>223</sup> Schaufuss, 45.

<sup>224</sup> Raeff, 4.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 47.

reinvent themselves.”<sup>226</sup> They reinvented themselves as Russians living abroad by recreating their surrounding as something familiar but maintained their cultural identity. Adaptability was also essential for the new world one found in post-war Europe and in the fashion scene.

### **The Great War and Fashion**

To understand where white émigré fashion fits within the broader context of post-war fashion a brief synopsis is necessary. The changes in fashion that occurred during the Great War up until the 1920s cannot be simply summed up as slimmer styles were replaced by fuller skirts and uniforms. The argument has more layers to it than just silhouette. Prior to the outbreak of the war there was a passion among women to layer rich materials like chiffon over plain materials like solid coloured satins. This layering effect was accentuated by V-necks or *les decollates du jour* to create a startling innovation in 1913.<sup>227</sup> It was startling due to its source of inspiration, The Ballet Russes. Evening dresses were the first garments to see these revelations, but instead of a V-neck the neckline or décolletage became horizontal and was held up with simple straps. The new look for evening was described as rather soft and fluffy with flaring skirts which was seen in the daytime.<sup>228</sup> The conclusion of war in 1918 did not bring back the slimmer silhouette overnight. It was another gradual shift from one style to the next.

The full skirts that were worn during the war were easily redesigned for the post-war woman. A new even slimmer style developed in the early 1920s. It featured long cylinder-shaped skirts accompanied by a flat boyish chest with no emphasis on a waist.<sup>229</sup> The new styles were direct reflections of the attitudes of the those coming-of-age. The Great War had afforded new

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<sup>226</sup> Edythe Haber, ‘Introduction’ in *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea* by Teffi (New York: New York Review Books, 2016), xvii.

<sup>227</sup> Laver, *Taste & Fashion*, 97.

<sup>228</sup> Laver, *Taste & Fashion*, 100.

<sup>229</sup> Laver, *Costume*, 230.

liberty to older married generations and paved the way for the new generation reaching adulthood. It was the flapper girl with her money to spend that dictated fashion for the next decade. Leon Bakst promoted this style and felt that fashion needed to be modern and in the now, and not looking to the past or even future. Androgynes was the look for the emancipated women of modern society.<sup>230</sup>

The modern women of society stand out in the examination of war and post-war style, but men also received make-overs during this period. The first decade of the 1900s saw the popularization of the lounge suit. It had a straight-cut jacket with no fitting darts at the waist, wide shoulders, small lapels, and four buttons. The trousers were narrow and creased in the front and the back. By 1910 it was the standard look for middle and lower classes, and only worn by the aristocracy on very casual occasions. The Prince of Wales led men in fashion and upset the traditionalists by wearing a lounge suit to Goodwood races when a black morning suit was required. During this time the biggest argument in men's fashion was where trouser cuffs should fall. Arguments on the subjects battled over whether the cuff should break across the top of the show or be cut lower over the heel.<sup>231</sup> The Great War would temporarily put a hold on the development of men's dress. After 1910, the suit changed again. It became a single-breasted jacket with two to three closely spaced buttons. The waist was nipped in and the shoulders became more natural. The cuffed trousers remained narrow but were worn above the ankle. This style was easily mass produced. Mass production would soon be a theme for menswear at the entrance of war.<sup>232</sup> The following image illustrates the new silhouette for men prior to the Great War.

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<sup>230</sup> Christine Ruane, 219.

<sup>231</sup> Maria Costantino, *Men's Fashion in the Twentieth Century: From Frock Coats to Intelligent Fibers* (New York: Costume & Fashion Press, 1997), 10-14.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 24.





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Men's participation in the fight on all sides gave their wardrobes a new garment, the mass-produced uniform. It became a symbol of patriotic duty, manliness, being one with the nation, and chivalry. It wasn't only an outward symbol but something that stirred emotion inside. "A uniform was something to anticipate with pride and could allow entry into all manner of social milieu."<sup>234</sup> Similar to women's fashion, materials were notable in the uniforms of men. Khaki was the separation between "formal and service dress." This material became synonymous with World War I and military attire. Russians opted for designs that explicitly announced their allegiance. Attempts were made to continue that romanticized Russian uniforms but in khaki. This was achieved through the additions of coloured collars, cuffs, and buttons. A breastplate or plastron were additional elements for a more romanticized aesthetic.<sup>235</sup> This romanticized Russian aesthetic would appear again in émigré stylings for women, while men returned post-war to a lounge suit. All fashions followed similar influences during the early twentieth-century.

War influenced fashion as early as 1913. It was heavy in women's fashion and introduced stylistic foundations such as cravats, scarlet and vermillion pipping, militaristic costume jewelry,

<sup>233</sup> F. Lohmann (England, active early 20<sup>th</sup> century), Three-piece suit, 1911, *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, accessed Apr. 10, 2018, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/220975>.

<sup>234</sup> Edwards, 21.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 29.

and travel suits with military style lines.<sup>236</sup> An advertisement aimed at American audiences in the January 1917 edition of *Harper's Bazar* sheds light on the extent of this influence.



D—Again the Cossack! From the top of her turbaned head to the very tip of her Russian-booted toes the débutante, for whom this black velvet outfit was designed, will look the part of a Russian.

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The image recalls two influences. First, the military Cossack who were a specialized group of soldiers of the Tsar. The second, was Russia, and the mysterious east both for her military elite and fur. Russia retained influence during the Great War even while its Ballet Russes toured America. It has been said that the “success of the Russian ballet was one of the most startling phenomena of the five years which preceded the War.”<sup>239</sup> As discussed, there were many notable reasons why the Russes were successful, but in war-time fashion it was because of its revolutionary artists and their capabilities to influence aesthetic.<sup>240</sup> There was a visual desire for the styles presented by Ballet Russes and they supplied what audiences desired.<sup>241</sup> The same can be said for all clothing during war.

<sup>236</sup> Edwards, 54.

<sup>237</sup> *Harper's Bazar*, Volume 52 (New York: Hearst Corporation, 1917), Digitized by University of Michigan, January 23, 2014, downloaded from HathiTrust, accessed February 3, 2018, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015038723071;view=1up;seq=9>.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Laver, *Taste and Fashion*, 93.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Anne Holland, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 312.

Fashion seems trivial in time of war. It was that interest in texture and colour of clothing, the confidence of a new haircut, and having sufficient hairpins at hand that grounded people and “helped them endure.”<sup>242</sup> Enduring one’s circumstance was crucial to the survival for many émigrés, because fabrics provided feelings of comfort and protection. “It’s texture, or its deficiency to protect or suit weather conditions can be singularly distressing.”<sup>243</sup> Teffi’s sealskin coat provides evidence of this. It created not only a feeling of comfort and familiarity but was a means of protection from weather and outside cruelties. Sealskin’s coats were not the only parts of clothing that provided comfort for most émigré, but a long-established familiarity in the fashion world.

### **The Russian Element**

Fashion and costume design deal in the materials of the human body and textiles and artists move within these art circles. Two notable designers, Chanel and Romain de Tiroff (Erté) designed for Ballet Russes. Bakst likewise designed for the fashion house of Jeanne Paquin. In many ways this was a “this two-way collaboration between ballet and fashion [that] brought greater fluidity and perhaps dramatic impact to fashionable dress, and the skills of the atelier to ballet design.”<sup>244</sup> Both sides of the collaboration had something to gain. The fashion house gained publicity and more dramatic designs, while the skills of successful design were bestowed upon the ballet. The connections between theatre and fashion are more than what each has to offer the other. Other connections include design, dramatics of fashion shows, performance of wearing, and the “star” system. Importantly, they came to rely on each other for marketing. Theatre’s target market was middle class women, which was an untapped market for the courtier.

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<sup>242</sup> Edwards., 73.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>244</sup> Edwards, 135.

The courtier could use a design opportunity to showcase their designs to larger audience and it was a respectable venue.<sup>245</sup> This is important to the topic of white émigré design because Chanel and Poiret became employers of many Russian exiles. Erté is important for the discussion of white émigré because he was an established designer before the revolution in 1917 and was proof that there was a desire for the Russian aesthetic.

At nineteen, Romain de Tiroff or Erté emigrated to Paris from Russia in 1912 to pursue a career in fashion design.<sup>246</sup> His first job was working for what he called an obscure fashion house called Caroline. He was fired on the grounds that he had no talent and should give up his dream. Undeterred, he left his calling card and fashion rendering with couturier Paul Poiret. Poiret was impressed and called upon him to work for him the following day, January 3, 1913.<sup>247</sup> He designed for the house of Poiret until the declaration of war in August 1914, when Poiret closed his doors. After recovering from scarlet fever, Erté temporarily moved to the warm climate of Monte Carlo and sought employment with an American magazine. By November 1914, he received a check from *Harper's Bazar* and was officially in their employment for the next twenty-two years until 1937.<sup>248</sup> His career would continue until his death in 1990. This quick timeline of events illustrates that even before most Russian exiles arrived abroad there was a successful tradition of Russians in fashion. It also highlights that Erté was more at the heart of interest in Russian style than even ballet Russes or Poiret.

Erté's importance and influence in fashion began with *Harper's Bazar* in 1914. It is interesting that he mentions a signed design of his own was first published in *Harper's Bazar* in

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<sup>245</sup> Nancy J. Troy, "The Theatre of Fashion: Staging Haute Couture in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion," *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 1 (March 2001): 1-2, accessed August 21, 2017, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/34830>.

<sup>246</sup> Ruane, 315. Erté, *Thing I Remember* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1975), 9.

<sup>247</sup> Erté, 21-22.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 116.

1915; but his designs appeared sooner but under the name of Poiret. He points out that it was upsetting but he was still thankful for Poiret launching his career and so were *Harper's Bazar* readers.<sup>249</sup> In February 1922, an article appeared title “Why Erté?” The article details that they received that question from many readers and the answer is simple. To untrained eyes his designs appear over the top, almost an unattainable ideal of feminine style. While his designs are high fashion, the ideas presented are practical and earn him praise.<sup>250</sup>

His ideas were also adapted by Hollywood, “he brought the spirit of Parisian fashion ateliers, the imagination of Russian ballets, and theatricality of variety reviews to Hollywood’s costumes.”<sup>251</sup> This point supports the idea that Erté was the missing link between authentic style russè and western concepts of Russian style. He brought all the elements necessary for true Russian design. Further research supports this idea. It’s said that ““scratch a Muscovite and you will find a Tartar.””<sup>252</sup> How this idea applies to Erté is that he is descended from princely Tartars, the Tirts. He took his ancestry and transformed it into his costume designs, namely for Folies-Bergère.<sup>253</sup> The image on the right comes from Folies- Bergère and the image on the left from a *Harper's Bazar* cover. They illustrate his high fashion taste, Russian influence, and practicality as a designer.

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.,37.

<sup>250</sup> *Harper's Bazar*, Volume 57, 163.

<sup>251</sup> Vassiliev, 365.

<sup>252</sup> Spencer, 77.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.



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Erté was not the first nor the last émigré who had to find his place in a new country. But it could be said that he was one of the first to successfully find their place in the world of fashion. Emigres had to provide for themselves and didn't want to live on welfare. Émigré women took work as seamstresses, in handicrafts, making flowers, and in crochet. Most were exploited by employers.<sup>256</sup> However, wartime shortage of rich fabrics spurred interest in embroidery, with an influx of skilled inexpensive émigré labor rising to meet the demand. This influence was not only in the embroidery but in the silhouettes appearing in the 1920s. The simple shapes between 1920 and 1923 were reminiscent of Russian national dress.<sup>257</sup>

French designer Coco Chanel began employing Russians in the 1920s. In May 1922, *Harper's Bazar* detailed Chanel's charitable employment of the exiles. It stated that, "Russian women, enforced exiles, are interesting themselves in Maison Chanel, lending their taste and

<sup>254</sup> "Silk," Erté, 1927, gouche, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O187875/silk-drawing-erte/>.

<sup>255</sup> Gift of Grosvenor Gallery, London. "Robe d'après-midi (Afternoon Dress), for Harpar's Bazaar," Erté, pen and black ink, brush and black gouache on heavy paper, September 1922, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, [https://www.si.edu/sisearch?edan\\_q=erte](https://www.si.edu/sisearch?edan_q=erte).

<sup>256</sup> Raeff, 41.

<sup>257</sup> Vassiliev, 181.

their serious efforts to that house.”<sup>258</sup> Maria Pavlovna was influential in this regard. She was an exile to France and began her career by knitting sweaters and dresses to make ends meet. Maria Pavlovna was introduced to Chanel by her brother Dmitrii Pavlovich, who was a Chanel’s friend and potential lover.<sup>259</sup> So she could embroiderer for Chanel, Maria had to learn to use a machine and took classes at a factory to meet her goals.<sup>260</sup> It is important to note here that Maria illustrates that women became the providers and often the saviors of their families abroad.

Women were essential to holding the family together while in exile. All women had been important during the war in assuming new roles in the public sphere and it was vital that Russian women continued in their new roles. White émigré men were often lost in nostalgia and melancholy in the early months and years in exile, leaving the role of breadwinner to their wives and daughters. All lives of émigré had to adapt to survive, even if it meant women working.<sup>261</sup> As mentioned most women took jobs in what most of them were trained in, the domestic arts of handicrafts. Handicrafts required skills, which many aristocratic émigrés possessed. It was also an ideal occupation because they could sew from home.<sup>262</sup> Émigré women found their niche in fashion. Teffi illustrated how clothing could bring feelings of familiarity back to émigré. She describes an evening while in Yekaterinodar while walking to a theatre in 1918. She recalled, “I hurried off, clacking my heels on the pavement, so I could hear that I had returned to my ordinary life.”<sup>263</sup>

## **Style Russe and the 1920s**

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<sup>258</sup> *Harper’s Bazar*, Volume 57 (New York: Hearst Corporation, 1922), Digitized by University of Michigan, January 23, 2014, downloaded from HathiTrust, 41, accessed February 3, 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015024397658>.

<sup>259</sup> Vassiliev, 163.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>261</sup> Haber, xix.

<sup>262</sup> Vassiliev, 141.

<sup>263</sup> Teffi, 225.

There were design elements that have always been present in clothing termed “Russian.” These features included fur, embroidery, and the kokoshnik. As shown, the silhouettes of clothing after the Great War slimmed and shortened. A gradual shift occurred that moved away from constricting tailored clothing to a relaxed look.<sup>264</sup> Many responded to the end of the war by falling “back on pre-war fashions and habits of dress, in a manner of nostalgia for that lost innocence. . .”<sup>265</sup> Regression renewed interest in Russian styles that spread over the next decade proceeded.

Russians were proud of their artistic and literary contributions; which made it more difficult when emigres were forced to leave home. Most couldn’t take books or works of art with them abroad, only a small suitcase of essentials.<sup>266</sup> Clothing which was material culture that they could and did take with them. What clothing they couldn’t take with them was easily replaced abroad. By 1917 almost every monthly issue had something Russian to show women readers. August 1917 *Harper’s Bazar* writes that the “Russian influence is hard to kill.”<sup>267</sup>

Images below illustrate what the west believed was Russian style. Traveling suits were usually termed and styled as Russian but the fur of the kolinsky was a key Russian portion of design. The hat in particular comes directly from Russia. It is western styled kokoshnik, an important accessory that will be further discussed. In October 1917 another garment appeared in *Harper’s Bazar* under the category of Russian. The caption for the right image reads; “A Russian dress in dark red broadcloth has the long straight lines that show a slender woman at her best. A high collar and moderate cuffs of black astrakhan emphasize the Russian note. Within a few

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<sup>264</sup> Edwards, 174.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Raeff, 10.

<sup>267</sup> *Harper’s Bazar*, Volume 52, 638.



months two suits decorated with fur appeared in *Harper's Bazar* showcasing that fur generally equated with Russia.



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Fur had long been associated with Russia before the Great War. Politics affected fashion in 1893 and 1896 when the Russia fleet visited Toulon, France, and three years later Tsar Nicholas II visited Paris, France. After his visits fur became a vogue for men and women across Europe and synonymous with Russian style because of State visits.<sup>270</sup> Historically, the pre-revolutionary Russia seamstresses excelled in winter designs. This was because Europe had milder winters compared to Russia.<sup>271</sup> Fur was every bit a part of Russia because of its use as a winter staple in a country that had harsh long winters. It was not the only decorative element that was wholly Russian that would make its appearance in the west.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. Drawing by Dorothy Edinger.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 777.

<sup>270</sup> James Laver, *Costume and Fashion*, 210-211.

<sup>271</sup> Vassiliev, 44.



Embroidery was another form of decoration that became synonymous with white émigré. The August 1922 edition of *Harper's Bazar* published an article detailing the Russian trends in clothing for the coming season. The title of the article reads, "Russian Influence will be Strong in Line and Embroidery."<sup>272</sup> The west associated embroidery with style russe because of émigrés use of the ornamentation. Embroidery was a centuries old tradition among the peasantry and upper classes of Russia. Therefore, any embroidery not produced by a peasant woman or white émigré cannot be called authentic, it is the sanitized version, but any garment with embroidery that resembles Russian embroidered can be called "style russe." This is due to the deeply intrinsic part of history that embroidery holds in Russian minds. It was part of national costumes for centuries and traditional cross-stitch stood out as Russian in the minds of foreigners.<sup>273</sup>

Chanel was a leading 1920s designer who utilized Russian embroidery in her designs; it appeared on corsages, sleeves, and hats.<sup>274</sup> Chanel employed Grand Duchess Maria Pavlova Romanov for embroidery, who started the company Kitmir. Grand Duchess Maria had an exclusive contract with Chanel which launched her career from exiled royalty turned artisan to an haute couture professional.<sup>275</sup> Prior to her success with Chanel, Grand Duchess Maria was taken in by Queen Marie of Roumania. Sources state that this time in Bucharest with Crown Princess Elizabeth stirred a passion for embroidery in the Grand Duchess. As a child Grand

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<sup>272</sup> *Harper's Bazar*, Volume 57, 775.

<sup>273</sup> S. A. Brock Putnam, "Russian Embroideries and Laces," *The Decorator and Furnisher* 26, no. 4 (1895): 139, doi:10.2307/25583143.

<sup>274</sup> *Harper's Bazar*, vol. 57, 417.

<sup>275</sup> Vassiliev, 151.

Duchess Maria was taught embroidery and loved it.<sup>276</sup> Her success was in part due to her love of needle art and having those around her support her in honing her passions. Kitmir was also successful because at the end of the Great War through the early 1920s everything Russian was in vogue. The height of Kitmir was in 1925 but unfortunately by 1927 the popularity of embroidery was waning.<sup>277</sup> The story of embroidery and Kitmer illustrates what most émigré had feared, that they would integrate abroad and would lose their cultural identity.

Embroidery and fur were decorative markers that a design was in the Russian style for clothing, and in accessories the Russian headwear the kokoshnik. The kokoshnik is important to the émigré narrative because it was part of aristocrats' court uniform and national dress among peasants. In 1925, Miss V. Sanford wed the Honorable Patrick Kinnaird on December 10<sup>th</sup>. On her head she wore a "Russian headdress of orange-blossom fastened the full tulle veil. . ."<sup>278</sup> This is not the only instance of a bride wearing a Russian headdress on her wedding day. During the 1920s, the Kokoshnik was adapted for all formal and informal occasions. It was an exceedingly popular feature in Parisian fashion due to its adaptability, but bridalwear was a common occurrence.<sup>279</sup> The Kokoshnik as explained in chapter one, it was a crescent-shaped headdress that was originally worn by peasants but adapted by the medieval upper-class boyars.<sup>280</sup>

Together, fur, embroidery, and the kokoshnik were stepping stones to an authentic Russian style in the west. As shown in previous chapters, this development occurred in three stages. First the upper class presented an image of Russian dress through court uniforms for men

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 153,155,161.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 172-174, 179.

<sup>278</sup> "Marriages," *The Times* (London, England), Friday December 11, 1925; pg. 17; Issue 44142, Accessed February 10, 2018, <http://find.galegroup.com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=isu2441&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS286202251&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>.

<sup>279</sup> Vassiliev, 187.

<sup>280</sup> Greg King,245.

and women; simultaneously, Ballet Russes presented an artistic display of peasant garments on stage; and finally in the 1920s the Russian aristocrats took up the challenge of forging a new “style russes” that took ideas from both high culture and peasant culture. While traditional costumes and urban differed in basic style, they evolved alongside one another. There were small borrowing and sharing that occurred: a low neckline, large elbow sleeves traded for traditional clothes with folk embroidery and lace.<sup>281</sup> There were those who asked for help from artists prior to the revolution in making a distinct style. Tamara Karsavina was one such individual who asked for Russian designs made using Russian materials sewn by Russians. Revolution and exile permitted this to be realized.<sup>282</sup>

### **Russian Designers**

Russian émigré contribute to a rapidly changing fashion climate in the wake of the Great War, “Because fashion can represent simultaneously contradictory messages of class, gender, and nationality, changes in fashion serve as important guideposts in understanding complex social and cultural transformations.”<sup>283</sup> This is what occurred during the 1920s through blurring of gender lines and social classes. The émigré felt this keenly, since most of those that entered the fashion industry were once part of the Russian aristocracy. The blurring of nationality was one part of this new climate that they tried to resist. White émigré felt that naturalizing was a betrayal to Russia.<sup>284</sup> It was therefore their goal to preserve the Russian culture and give children

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<sup>281</sup> Yefimova and Aleshina, 9.

<sup>282</sup> Vassiliev, 42.

<sup>283</sup> Christine Ruane, "CLOTHES MAKE THE COMRADE: A HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN FASHION INDUSTRY," *Russian History* 23, no. 1/4 (1996): 312, JStor.org, accessed February 11, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/stable/24660930>.

<sup>284</sup> Raeff, 4, 42-43.

skills that would be useful in a future free Russia.<sup>285</sup> It could be said that clothing was one avenue that they pursued to preserve the Russian culture and spirit.

As pointed out, there were those prior to the revolution, that wanted to see Russian clothing coming from Russian designers, using Russian materials, and sewn by Russians.<sup>286</sup> This was partially realized by the Russian émigré designers. The groundwork was laid down by Ballet Russes during their tours of the west. By 1909, the custom of borrowing and imitating western was reversed thanks to the ballet.<sup>287</sup> Due to aristocratic Russians feeling that they were not instantly recognizable outside of their court attire, they decided to develop their own style. While “. . . dress had been a key marker of ethnic identity in early modern Europe. . .” twentieth-century Europe desired a synthesis of traditional ethnic and modern.<sup>288</sup> This blending of old and new to create style russes was taken up by two important designers, Yteb and IRFE.

The Russian brand Yteb was first featured in America in *Harper's Bazar* in 1922. It showed a yellow bure and fur wrap for sports and towns. The advertisement is important because it highlights that women's clothing was accomodating a need for sportswear and that a Russian designer abroad was making its mark across the ocean in America. Yteb was officially founded in 1922 by Betty Buzzard, the Baroness Hoyningen-Huene. Her father was a Russian military officer and her mother was an American, but she was able to secure a position at the Russian court as a maid-in-waiting to Empress Alexandra.<sup>289</sup> Her story is similar to most émigré, especially Grand Duchess Maria of Kitmir. She took up needlework abroad to save her family from destitution when they arrived abroad in Paris. Yteb was the fashion house that Tamara

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>286</sup> Vassiliev, 42.

<sup>287</sup> Ruane, "Clothes Make the Comrade," 312.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>289</sup> Vassiliev, 233-234.

Karsavina was dreaming of, it was a truly Russian endeavour. It was designed by a Russian born woman with Russian seamstresses, models, and salespeople.<sup>290</sup>

Yteb reconciled a Russian aesthetic with modern fashion. During the 1920s clothing became more practical particularly because sports were now in fashion for women. Sportswear needed to allow the body to move, which also meant no more stockings and the need for women's breeches.<sup>291</sup> Sportswear was on the rise but there were women who still wished to keep to historical gender standards by wearing dresses. Dressmaking became simpler in the 1920s with garments being made of mostly squares and rectangular pieces. By 1923 the waist of the dress dropped to the hips not to return until 1929. Sources examine that, "the low waist of the twenties is one of the curiosities in the history of fashion."<sup>292</sup> Yteb's pieces highlight this change of design to simpler fashion.



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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>291</sup> Edwards,

<sup>292</sup> Laver, *Taste & Fashion*, 102.

<sup>293</sup> "Corsage van felroze rozen en dito druiven", Maison Yteb, c. 1918 - c. 1920, druiven: takken: takken: silk bladeren: velvet (fabric weave) rozen: silk, Paris, Rijksmuseum, accessed February 11, 2018, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.339536>.

<sup>294</sup> From the Collection of the Goldstein Museum of Design, Gift of the Estate of Norris D. Jackson. "Dress," Yteb, 1918-1919, wool, glass beads, Paris, Goldstein Museum of Design, accessed January 16, 2018, <http://collection.goldstein.design.umn.edu/proficiowebmodule/JDetail.aspx?db=objects&dir=GOLDSTEIN&rid=1991.030.010>.

The two pieces shown were produced between 1918 and 1919. They represent the shift from war fashion to the 1920s. The waist is at its natural position on the garment to the left, but the right garment shows a slight dropped waist. Both garments also feature the Russian aesthetic for embroidery, with the right garment being epitome of Russian embroidery. The right dress would also be more easily recognized on the streets of Paris as a Russian garment.

While women's wardrobes were becoming peppered with Russian designers, mens wardrobes were not. There is no evidence to suggest that Russian émigré took an interest in menswear. It is still important to highlight the changes occurring in mens fashion because the émigré men had to adapt and integrate their clothing. Edward Windsor was a significant icon in menswear at the turn of the twentieth-century. He shaped fashion during the 1920s and even after his abdication from the British throne in 1936.<sup>295</sup> In 1920 he was twenty-six years old and considered not too young nor too old to be a rebel in fashion for post-war Europe. His motto was; "Dress Soft" which meant sweaters, soft collars, and wide trousers with deep pockets.<sup>296</sup> The softness of menswear was also found in the materials used. Soft fabrics such as woolen tweeds and flannels became associated with the new sporty leisurely lifestyle.<sup>297</sup> As illustrated, the common fashions were soft and natural for both men and women. Which stood in contrast to what another Russian designers aesthetic, IRFE.

IRFE stood for the initials of its founders Irina Romanov and Felix Youssoupoff. They left Russia in 1919 alongside Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna. Irina and Felix were able to live comfortably abroad at first but quickly needed money.<sup>298</sup> They turned to fashion to fill their pocketbooks in roughly 1924. Irina's elegant taste was the influence for their designs in

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<sup>295</sup> Costantino, 32.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>298</sup> Vassiliev, 271.

the early years but by 1926 they also included sporty designs in their repertoire. The overall feel of this Russian house was elegant and noble in aesthetic.<sup>299</sup> The following image illustrates this noble and elegant style.

The evening dress below is part of the simple style of the 1920s, with no visible waistline and a short hemline. The uneven hemline is also a signature of IRFE for eveningwear.<sup>300</sup> This style of gown also exhibits the overall new trendmarkers in fashion, the juvenile flapper. The look was a flat bust and tubular body. While this style did not emphasize the waist nor the hips for some women it still required new undergarments. The corset devolved into just a girdle to support the stockings and brassieres that flattened the bust.<sup>301</sup> For fuller shaped and older women a new corset that extended from the above the bust to the hips, creating a flat straight silhouette.<sup>302</sup>



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<sup>299</sup> Vassiliev, 277.

<sup>300</sup> Vassiliev, 279.

<sup>301</sup> Laver, *Taste & Fashion*, 134. Edwards, 95.

<sup>302</sup> Laver, *Taste & Fashion*, 103.

<sup>303</sup> "Evening Dress," Gift of Mrs. Seaman Schepps, 1957, Irfè, 1927, silk, metal, glass, France, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/98481?sortBy=Relevance&ft=irfe&offset=0&pp=20&pos=1>.

<sup>304</sup> "IRFE Designed Costume, Paris, 1925," IRFE Paris, 1925, satin, fur, silk, Paris, Augusta Auctions, Purchased by a private buyer April 9, 2014, accessed October 18, 2016, [https://www.augusta-auction.com/component/auctions/?view=lot&id=13752&auction\\_file\\_id=30](https://www.augusta-auction.com/component/auctions/?view=lot&id=13752&auction_file_id=30).



The second image above is another known work from IRFE produced in 1925. This design is a better example of “style russe” to come out of Maison IRFE. It has a fur trimmed vest, the pearl decorated Kokoshnik, and cuffs that emulate the embroidered designs of Russian national dress. It also highlights the aesthetic brought to west by Ballet Russes, the use of bright colours. A primary source from 1922 highlight that, “probably it is a Russian influence that has allowed so much vivid color to creep into sports costumes this season.”<sup>305</sup> The images above are two known surviving garments from IRFE from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a private collection. Sources cite that there more garments may have survived but to avoid customs when traveling to the United States purchasers removed tags from the garments in an attempt to pass as American goods.<sup>306</sup> The fashion house also had a short lived run, closing in 1931.

Yteb and IRFE met similar ends in the early 1930s. Yteb and IRFE attempted a merger to save both fashion houses which was not successful. Yteb held on until 1933 when it finally closed its doors two years after IRFE. Yteb was able to be successful for so long because of its ability to adapt like its founder Betty Buzzard. Financial difficulties are cited by sources as the cause of IRFE’s failure but there could be another reason.<sup>307</sup> Felix and Irina did not have a head for business and mismanaged their finances. They had international clientel with clients insisting on seeing “The Prince himself.”<sup>308</sup> This point illustrates another possible failure, that the Russian craze had died down. Russian designs were no longer in high demand and Prince Felix’s involvement in Grigory Rasputin’s death also lost interest. Regardless of what caused Russian designers to go under, the importance in them lies in that they were successful in delivering what

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<sup>305</sup> *Harper’s Bazar*, vol. 57, 602.

<sup>306</sup> Vassiliev, 283.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

Russia had always wanted: Russian design by Russians that presented the world with an authentic national image.

This chapter examined the material culture that white émigré brought abroad into exile. It also highlighted the material culture that many created after reaching what would become their new home. Designers and seamstresses struggled with maintaining their Russian identity and exploitation by employers. While many lived new lives that could still be Russian, there were a select few with talents that briefly stepped into the limelight to successfully design for the Western woman. The white émigré faced challenges along their path to safety and a normal life, but they were still able to contribute to material culture of both their homelands and their host nations.

## Conclusion

The goal of Russian artists and the aristocrats was to be on par with the western world. It was successful in military prowess like the west; literature from Russian authors and poets were read world wide; but a clothing image was not successful until the 1920s. Nicholas II attempted to create an image of Russia through the court but it was only attainable by the elite of Russia. The Ballet Russes exhibited the peasant traditions in clothing with an artistic flair that spurred interest in the west but it fell short in showcasing authentic Russian design in a modern context. Success was found when the thousands of Russians fled their motherland for safety abroad. It was abroad that Russians were able to design Russian garments that could both distinguish themselves from the populace of the west, and exhibit the Russian spirit. White émigré combined the aesthetic from both the aristocracy and the peasantry to create clothing that would have met both the goals of Nicholas II and Ballet Russes. The styles produced by exiles were created by the artistocracy, therefore had an elevated sense of fashion, texture, colour, and ornamentation. But they used styles that had been popularized by the ballet, casual peasant style garments with folk embroidery and coloring.

The goal of this study was to trace the development of a Russian aesthetic during the early twentieth century. The goal was achieved but it was also uncovered that Russians were selling themselves short. They wanted clothing that would make them recognizable abroad and at home. They were able to create this image but at the expense of making themselves what the west accepted as Russian style. In short, white émigré commercialized themselves and put their culture on the market for sale. Russian style was Russians designing, creating, and wearing clothing that showcased their heritage. Russia didn't need to be on par with the west, because they had their own unique contributions to global style and art.

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## APPENDIX A

As part of my thesis I created six costumes that represent each chapter and the twentieth century Russian fashion narrative. The garments were then displayed in an exhibition in the John B. Davis Gallery. The garments traced the course of a Russian couple in the early twentieth-century. Beginning in their young lives in the Russian court wearing heavy satin gowns and dashing military uniforms to their new lives abroad in the 1920s. These garments are not supposed to represent one man or woman but are the collective Russian souls who woke up in glittering finery in the 1900s but ended up sewing to survive abroad in Paris France after their exile by the Bolsheviks.

The garments were created by using commercial patterns and hand drafted patterns. The commercial patterns were chosen based on their historical accuracy, which led to the use of Truly Victorian, Folkwear, and Past Patterns. These patterns were used to make the 1913 corset, bloomers, chemise, and 1920s skirt. The patterns that were hand drafted were made using basic body blocks that were created from my measurements and my husbands. Each garment was created with detailed historical research into cut, colour, and construction. In addition, all materials used were historically accurate and included natural materials such as cotton, silk, wool, and rayon. Construction techniques used were historically accurate, except for a modern sewing machine was used to stitch all major seams and a modern overlock machine used to finish inner seams of the Russian court gown.

Images of individual garments are provided below.



**Imperial Russian Court Gown, 1900-1917**

Silk Satin, Silk Gauze, Cotton Sateen, Rayon/Silk Velvet, Spring Steel Bones, Silk Organza Flowers, Brass Buttons  
(By Alexander Strong)

- Over 300 hours to complete.
- Material cost \$906.22
- Design based on extant garments from The Hermitage Museum, particularly Olga and Tatiana Romanov's 1913 gowns and Maria Feodorovna's 1860 engagement gown.
- Hand finished hems on over skirt and underskirt.
- Hand finished lining on bodice, hand sewn individual hooks and eyes, and hand finished hanging sleeves.
- 100 hand-made silk organza flowers.
- Machine stitched scalloped trim that was hand pleated and sewn to bodice front and over skirt hem edge.



### **Imperial Russian Court Uniform, 1900-1917**

Wool Broadcloth, Wool Gabardine, Cotton Sateen, Silk Threads, Metallic Trim, Silver plated brass reproduction medal of St. Stanislaus (By Alexander Strong)

- 120 hours to complete
- Material cost \$229.15
- Design based on the Russian Chevalier Guard Regiment
- Hair canvas interfacing applied to all bodice pieces.
- Basic tailoring of pad-stitching on front chest and hand finished front edge, sleeves, vents, and skirt edges.



### **The Tsarevna Frog, Ballet Russes, 1906-1917**

Silk Chiffon, Silk Dupioni Trim, Cotton Net, Rayon Trim, Spiral Spring Steel Bones, Brass Buttons (By Alexander Strong)

Silk Dupioni covered headpiece with Cotton Buckram form, Swarovski Stones, Fresh Water Pearls

- 105 hours to complete
- Material cost \$135.89
- 85% hand sewn
- Designed using Leon Bakst's design aesthetic of line, colour, and repetition of motifs
- Mounted silk chiffon on inner corset with spring steel bones





### **Edwardian Undergarments, 1912-1919**

Cotton Twill, Cotton Lace, Cotton Twill, Spring Steel Bones, Spiral Steel Bones, Nickle Grommets

- 40 hours to complete
- Material cost \$69.73
- Undergarments created to be worn under Court Gown for accurate 1910-1914 silhouette
- 24 bones used in construction, 2 spiral steel bones on each seam and 2 spring steel at center back



### **Women's 1920s Ensemble, 1919-1925**

Wool Gabardine, Silk Chiffon, China Silk, Silk Organza, Wool/Silk Blend, Rayon

- 94 hours to complete
- Material cost \$230.14
- Design based on extant white émigré designs and 1920s French fashion plates.
- Cuff embroidery pattern from a 1920s magazine article
- Skirt created using Past Patterns 1922 skirt pattern reproduction
- Hand finished blouse cuffs and facing, with hand sewn hook and eyes center front
- Hand finished hem and waistband on skirt.



### **Men's 1920s Suit, 1919-1925**

Wool Suiting, Bemberg Rayon, Cotton, Hair Canvas  
Interfacing, Cotton Flannel

- 160 hours to complete
- Material cost \$162.84
- Design based on 1920s advertisements and fashion icon Prince Edward Duke of Windsor
- The suit is a relaxed natural fit with slightly tapered waist, natural shoulders, and tapered pants with cuff.
- Tailored suit jacket with pad-stitched front chest, lapels, and collar.
- Hand applied twill tape along front opening and lapel roll line
- Hand finished sleeve, body, and vent hems
- Sleeve lining is hand sewn to jacket armsyce