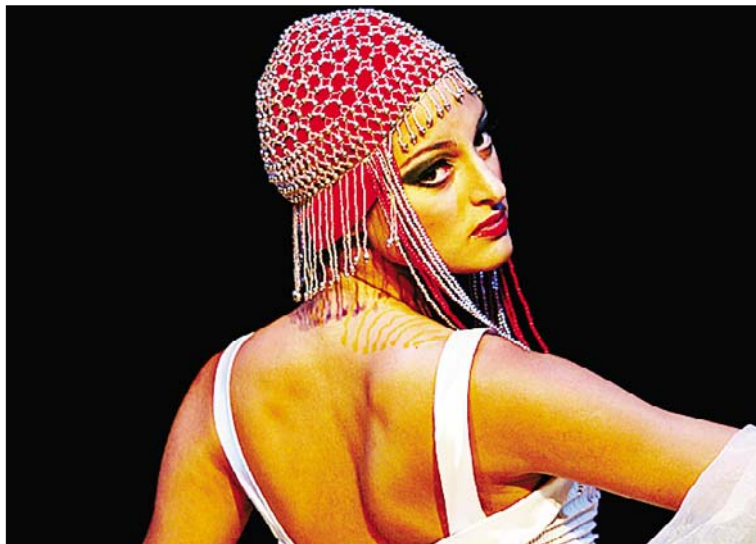
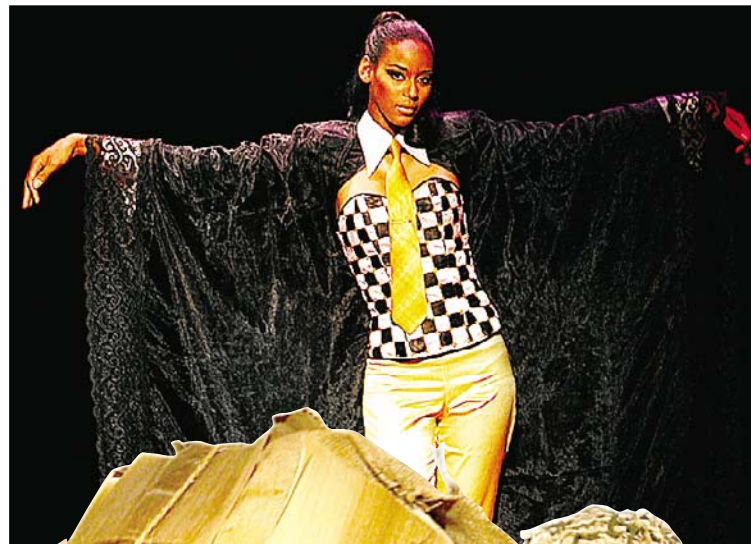




Cuban designer Piedad Subirats presented a work called "La Gloria," left, while Jesus Frias designed an outfit called "La Cohiba," based on the famous label.



JAVIER GALEANO/AP

Havana Heat

Cuban style turns over a new leaf

Cuban models twirled turquoise ribbons and flaunted papier-mache tops Wednesday in a fashion show that paid homage to the art behind Cuba's long tobacco tradition.

Designs inspired by Cuban cigar labels ranged from earthy to extravagant, seductive to serene in the "Art and Fashion" show, which aimed to blur the line between the two.

"This is the art of dressing, the portable art," said Jesus Frias, a designer and an organizer of the event held in a cozy theater inside Havana's National Museum of Fine Arts.

The models acted and danced on stage as they showed off the designs, each spending several minutes in the spotlight accompanied by opera, rock and traditional Cuban music.

Some models looked as if they had stepped out of the cigar label being shown on a big screen, such

as a woman wearing Frias' design of a black-and-white checkered shirt and mustard-yellow pants mimicking the famous Cohiba label.

Some connections were more symbolic, like the man who appeared on stage as an oversized insect wearing black platform boots and flapping enormous metallic arms. The design, by Otto Chaviano, represented ancient traditions and the presence of indigenous Caribbean people in tobacco lithographs.

"This isn't about tobacco as a product, it's about the history," said show director Rafael Mendez Gonzalez.

Other designs were quirky — like Michel Mirabal's, inspired by the H. Upman brand. A model showing off Mirabal's costume sported a cup and saucer on her head and a large, pregnant belly — complete with a sewed-on belly button — under her

extravagant gown.

Patched bohemian dresses and elegant flapper styles were also present, as was an elaborate jester outfit in the form of Ignacio Carmona's colorful crocheted jumpsuit with mirrors and bells.

"This provides hope that art and fashion can coexist," Mendez said. "It also tries to keep alive other Cuban traditions, of our tailors, artisans and makeup artists."

The show was sponsored by the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, as part of a weeklong series of events in Havana honoring cultural diversity.

VANESSA ARRINGTON (AP)

A model presents "San Cristobal de la Habana" from Cuban designer Alicia Nunez in a fashion show celebrating the history of tobacco in Cuba.

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