



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bata Shoe Museum Explores Footwear in the Age of Enlightenment in New 18th Century Exhibition

August 12, 2020 (TORONTO): The Bata Shoe Museum is excited to announce the opening of its newest exhibition, *The Great Divide: Footwear in the Age of Enlightenment*. The first of three exhibitions in the museum's 25th anniversary lineup, *The Great Divide* explores several timely issues from gender and race to imperialism and colonization. Featuring extraordinary 18th century artefacts from the permanent collection, the exhibition highlights complex stories about privilege, oppression, danger, desire, revolution and resistance that are as relevant today as they were 300 years ago.

The Age of Enlightenment was a period in European history from the end of the 17th to the end of the 18th century when Western philosophers and scientists wrestled with concepts of 'human nature' and 'natural rights'. Some argued that all people had inherent social and political rights but many more advocated for the reordering of social hierarchies using 'scientific' proof to divide people through the identification of 'natural' differences such as gender and race. Much of the oppression and imperialism that marked the period was supported by these ideas.

"Throughout the 18th century, Western fashion, including footwear, was central to the 'naturalization' of difference in Europe," says Elizabeth Semmelhack, Creative Director and Senior Curator at the Bata Shoe Museum. "Distinctions between men and women, children and adults, Europeans and 'Others' became increasingly codified through clothing. Yet, European fashion was also used to blur the lines between classes as social mobility and access to consumable goods grew as a result of imperialism."

The exhibition was thoughtfully designed by the award-winning designers Arc + Co who focused on creating a space that engages with the powerful themes and issues of the 18th century explored in this gallery. With loans from the Gardiner Museum, the design also includes a look at contemporary footwear, asking visitors to reflect on shoes and society today.

Highlights in the exhibition include:

- Late 18th century shoes that began as Indian jutti but were transformed into a pair of English women's shoes that embody British Imperialism in India.



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- Moccasins said to have belonged to Myaamia leader Mishikinawa, also known as Little Turtle, who resisted the incursion into Myaami territory by delivering one of the worst defeats in U.S. history at the Battle of Wabash in 1791.
- An early 18th century silver side-saddle stirrup made for a woman from a powerful colonial Spanish family in Peru. Roughly 85 percent of the world's silver was mined by conscripted Indigenous people and imported enslaved Africans in Spanish-held South America.
- A pair of shoes whose use spans decades from the 1730s to the 1740s shows evidence of second-hand use reflecting the fact that while the majority of women in the West did not lead privileged lives, they were expected to meet the same feminine obligations of upper-class women, including the wearing of impractical heels even while doing physically taxing work such as domestic service.

To find out more, join us at the BSM and experience *The Great Divide: Footwear in the Age of Enlightenment* – opening today and on view until February 2022. For more information on the exhibition and how to purchase tickets, please visit our website.

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ABOUT THE BATA SHOE MUSEUM

Celebrating 25 years of the World at Your Feet. With a growing international collection of over 14,000 shoes and related artefacts, the Bata Shoe Museum showcases 4,500 years of footwear history in four distinctive rotating galleries. Through the creation of its innovative exhibitions, the BSM strives to enlighten and entertain visitors of all ages. For every shoe there's a story. Discover thousands at the Bata Shoe Museum. Further information is available at batashoemuseum.ca, [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and our [YouTube](#) channel.

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