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Photos for publication available upon request

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Explore the Style, Substance of Antique Shoes at the Flagler Museum’s Winter Exhibition

Designer Stuart Weitzman’s Historic Shoe Collection On View January 28 - May 10, 2020

PALM BEACH, FL - As part of its “Season of Style 2” offerings, the [Henry Morrison Flagler Museum](#) will open its winter exhibition titled *Walk This Way: Historic Footwear from the Stuart Weitzman Collection*, on Tuesday, January 28, 2020. The exhibition, organized by the New-York Historical Society, explores how shoes have transcended their utilitarian purpose to become representations of culture — coveted as objects of desire, designed with artistic consideration, and expressing complicated meanings of femininity, power, and aspiration for women and men alike. On view through May 10, 2020, in the Flagler Museum’s second floor gallery, the exhibition highlights 100 pairs of shoes from the iconic designer’s extensive private collection, assembled over three decades with his wife Jane Gershon Weitzman. The Flagler Museum will be the first venue to host this exhibition after its debut in New York.



The exhibition considers the story of the shoe from the perspectives of collection, consumption, presentation, and production. It explores larger trends in American economic history, from industrialization to the rise of consumer culture, with a focus on women’s contributions as producers, consumers, designers, and entrepreneurs. *Walk This Way* was coordinated by Valerie Paley, New-York Historical Society’s vice president, chief historian, and director of the Center for Women’s History, with Edward Maeder, consulting curator, and Jeanne Gardner Gutierrez, curatorial scholar in women’s history.



As Stuart Weitzman himself expresses in the exhibition catalogue, shoes “tell an almost infinite number of stories. Stories of conformity and independence, culture and class, politics and performance.”

“Fashion’s link to social history makes the Winter Exhibition — truly a ‘feast for the eyes’ — so compelling. Seeing and learning about personal items in a historic house museum such as ours adds an additional layer to our visitor’s experience, almost bringing Whitehall to life. We’re looking forward to discussing the importance of fashion history with Stuart and Jane Weitzman when they join us for our exhibition lecture on January 31st,” said Erin Manning, Executive Director of the Flagler Museum.

Top: Carlo, retailer. Boudoir shoes, 1867. Paris, France. Silk, embroidery, metallic thread.

Bottom: Unidentified maker. Lace-up boots, ca. 1900. Silk and silk brocade.

Stuart Weitzman Collection.
Photos by Glenn Castellano, New-York Historical Society.

Exhibition Highlights

Among the many highlights in *Walk This Way* are shoes of historic value that have survived the years to tell stories of the past, such as a pair of pink silk embroidered boudoir shoes created especially for the 1867 Paris Universal Exposition that reflected Western consumers’ clamor for exotic textiles in an era of European imperial expansion.

The early 20th century witnessed a revolution in the way women dressed, moved, and acted in public, as the floor-length gowns of the late 1800s gradually gave way to shorter skirts and slim silhouettes. Dance halls flourished, and manufacturers produced intricately beaded evening shoes



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with buttoned straps that kept shoes secure while women danced the tango or the Charleston.

The country also saw a revolution in women’s political participation, when the fight for the vote moved from the drawing room to the streets and hundreds of women marched down Fifth Avenue in New York City in America’s first suffrage parade in May 1910. Many suffragists wore practical but stylish shoes, such as the black leather and white felt high-buttoned boots (ca. 1920), spectator pumps, and lace-up shoes on view in the exhibition.

The dawn of department stores at the turn of the century created a place of leisure for affluent women and employment opportunities for working women, so retailers began to compete for customers with colorful advertisements and celebrity endorsements. Stores like



Saks Fifth Avenue offered glamorous shoes like red velvet and gold T-strap pumps (ca. 1937) or peep-toe mules with clear Lucite flowered heels (mid-1950s). The fashion industry also partnered with Hollywood to create custom shoes for motion pictures and celebrities — such as Salvatore Ferragamo’s handmade black needlepoint Tuscan lace heels (ca. 1954-55) designed for Italian actress Sophia Loren — which inspired consumers to purchase similar styles to emulate their film idols.

Fenton Footwear, maker. T-strap pumps, ca. 1937. Velveteen, leather.

Stuart Weitzman Collection. Photos by Glenn Castellano, New-York Historical Society.

Walk This Way also explores the process of shoemaking, examining shoe production and the role of women in the footwear field — one of the first industries to embrace large-scale mechanization. By 1850, shoemaking was America’s second-largest industry after agriculture. In the early 1900s, when women made up less than 20 percent of the total industrial workforce, one-third of the workers in shoe factories were women. Women became active in trade unions like the Daughters of St. Crispin — named after the patron saint of shoemakers — and the International Boot & Shoe Workers Union, participating in strikes to protest low wages and poor treatment. Considered radical for its time, by 1904 the Boot & Shoe Workers Union constitution called for “uniform

wages for the same class of work, regardless of sex.” An intricately beaded shoe (ca. 1915), stamped with the union seal, shows off the quality of American shoemaking.

By the second half of the 20th century, women designers had made a significant impact but were often hidden behind the scenes. The exhibition profiles the “First Lady of Shoe Design” Beth Levine (1914-2006), who ran Herbert Levine, Inc., a company named for her husband because “it seemed right that a shoemaker was a man.” Levine introduced luxurious new materials and innovative new designs like the “Spring-o-lator,” a strip of elastic tape to keep backless shoes on the wearer’s feet.

Publication

The exhibition catalogue, *Walk This Way: Footwear from the Stuart Weitzman Collection of Historic Shoes*, published by D Giles Limited, will be available for purchase in the Museum Store. The book by Edward Maeder, with contributions by Stuart Weitzman and Valerie Paley, features 180 illustrations, revealing the evolution of women’s footwear in parallel with changes in women’s lives.

Exhibition Lecture

Moderator: Valerie Paley, Director of the Center for Women’s History at the New-York Historical Society Museum and Library

Panelists: Stuart Weitzman, designer; Jane Gershon Weitzman, philanthropist

3:00 pm on January 31, 2020

Free for Members, Sustaining level and higher, and Whitehall Society Members

\$10 for Members, Individual and Family level

\$28 for Non-members, includes Museum admission

Space is limited, reservations are required



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The Henry Morrison Flagler Museum

When it was completed in 1902, Whitehall, Henry Flagler's Gilded Age estate in Palm Beach, was hailed by the New York Herald as "more wonderful than any palace in Europe, grander and more magnificent than any other private dwelling in the world." Today, Whitehall is a National Historic Landmark and is open to the public as the Flagler Museum, featuring guided tours, changing exhibits, and special programs. The Museum is located at One Whitehall Way, Palm Beach, FL 33480.

The Museum is open from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and noon until 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$10 for youth ages 13-17, \$3 for children ages 6-12, and children under six are free. Guided tours, audio tours, printed self-guide brochures and the Flagler Museum Audio Tour app are all complimentary with Museum admission. Audio tours and self-guide brochures are available in English, Spanish, French, German and Portuguese.

For more information, please call the Flagler Museum at (561) 655-2833 or visit www.flaglermuseum.us.