

BEAUTY, IDENTITY, PRIDE

Native North American Footwear

Curator's picks

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For centuries, the Indigenous women of North America created footwear for their families. The extraordinary beauty and fascinating diversity of these functional works of art are a testament to the individual artistry of their makers. These artefacts reflect larger issues of regional and cultural identity as well as pride in their distinctive patterns of construction and symbolism.

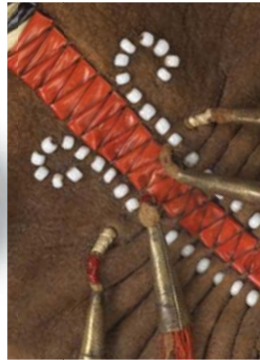
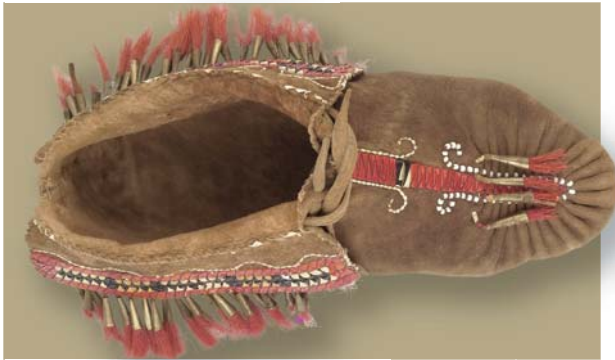


Photos: Matthew Plexman and Pete Paterson
Footwear: Bata Shoe Museum Collection



A pair of Chipewyan winter moccasin from a 19th century collection of former Lieutenant Governor Louis Francois Rodrigue Masson. The moccasins are made of native tanned and smoked moose hide with caribou skin cuffs and they feature colourful symmetrical flower embroidery on the apron.

Chipewyan, McKenzie Borderlands, Canada 1870 - 1900



One of the treasures of the Bata Shoe Museum is this 18th century moccasin acquired in England. The center seam construction and porcupine quillwork establish its antiquity and cultural affiliation. Metal cones with reddish died hair tassels and wrapped quill bars on the collars demonstrate the craftsmanship of the maker.

Huron, Great Lakes, Canada 1790



This pair of beautifully beaded moccasins has been identified as Cherokee. The black buckskin was a favoured material of many Eastern and Great Lakes people. This dark colour could be achieved by using the oxidized pulp of walnuts and provided a perfect background for colourful beadwork.

Cherokee, c. 1840





Lakota women on the Central Great Plains created some of the most stunning bead and quillwork produced in this region. Exceptional examples of their work include special occasion shoes with elaborately beaded vamps with forked tongues festooned with tufts of horsehair and fully beaded soles.

Lakota or Cheyenne, late 19th century



The embellishment of many Plateau moccasins reflects the interaction of these people with those who lived nearby. The beadwork on many eastern Plateau moccasins shows a lively mixing of beading styles from the northern Crow stitch to the more central Lane stitch while the frequent use of floral motifs suggests Métis influence.

Nez Perce, c. 1885

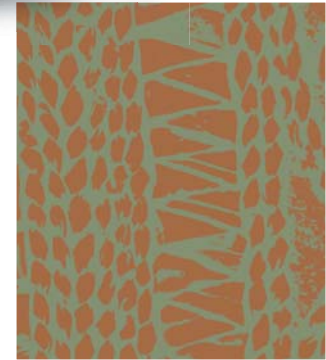


Although pigmentation is a prominent form of embellishment in southwestern footwear, beading, fringe and tin cone decoration were also used. This exceptional pair of Jicarilla Apache shoes features all of these adornments.

Jicarilla Apache, c. 1870



Beads
A great variety of European glass beads were traded from the moment of initial contact. It was not until the widespread introduction of imported glass seed beads and steel needles in the 1800s that the fine beadwork associated with American Indian embellishment came into being.
Different cultures favoured different stitches and colour combinations for the embellishment of their clothing and footwear.



Quilling is a very time consuming process and, in some cultures, only the most skilled were allowed to produce the quillwork that adorned pieces of tribal significance. The Blackfoot restricted the right to quill to only a small number of women, while the Cheyenne, Arapaho and Gros Ventre had highly structured quilling "guilds" with membership being conferred by invitation only.

