

# R THE CHARM OF Rococo

## FEMININITY & FOOTWEAR IN THE 18TH CENTURY

### Buckles

Like pieces of jewellery, buckles were valued accessories worn on varying pairs of shoes to complement different outfits. The most expensive were made of sterling silver set with diamonds but most were embellished with glittering paste or rhinestones. The buckles on this pair of yellow silk shoes are typical of the preference for flowers and bows even on jewellery during the age of Rococo. *French, c.1760s.*



### Brocades

The American colonies were an eager market for English luxury goods in the 18th century and manufacturing centres, such as Spitalfield's, flourished meeting this demand. Many of the fine textiles used to create women's footwear in the 18th century were dress remnants. The design of blue stripes and delicate floral sprigs on this pair of Spitalfield's silk shoes reflect the full flowering of Rococo style. *French, c.1760.*



### Mules

Mules made of luxurious fabrics and embellished with elaborate embroidery in precious metal or silk threads were clearly impractical for outdoor wear, thus emphasizing the wearer's leisured lifestyle. They also suggested a kind of relaxed elegance and intimate *dishabille*. Eighteenth century paintings often feature women wearing mules among close friends or in the privacy of their own boudoir. *French or Dutch, c. 1720-30.*



## Marriage

Eighteenth century weddings, like those of today, were as grand as the bride's family wished. However, unlike today, the white wedding dress with matching shoes was not a bride's only choice. Many 18th century wedding shoes feature brocaded floral designs in keeping with the fashion of the day. These English shoes were worn by a Mrs. Gardner, née Peale, on her wedding day. *English, c. 1770s*



## Frills

The addition of frills was a defining feature of Rococo fashions and many evening shoes were adorned with lace, ruching, and bows in addition to the glittering buckles that secured them to the foot. A common trimming for footwear was fine silver bobbin lace delicately crafted out of precious metal wire. The pink silk of these shoes is simply the background against which the lavish silver bobbin lace was meant to shimmer. *English, c. 1735-1750.*



## Restrained Elegance

The late 1780s saw the beginnings of Neo-Classical restraint creeping into Rococo design. Encouraged to make more modest fashion statements, privileged women shifted away from the elegant Rococo brocades used earlier in the century and embraced a more subdued palette of plain silks, velvets and even leather. The luxury of this pair of shoes is conveyed by the richness of the velvet. The only adornment is a small bow at the throat. *Italian, c.1790.*



## The High Rococo

High heels reached their ascendancy in the 1770s and 80s. They also became more delicate in design and there was a preference for them to be set quite far back, directly under the heel. This style resulted in weakness under the instep. In order to compensate for this, many shoemakers employed wedge-like structures to help support the shank. This beautiful pair of embroidered black silk shoes with pink silk covered heels is a very good example of this. *English, 1780-1785.*

