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The Bata Shoe Museum's *Icons of Elegance* Celebrates the Extraordinary in 20th Century Shoe Design

TORONTO, ON, April 20th, 2005 – The Bata Shoe Museum presents the shoe designers who transformed 20th century footwear in its upcoming exhibition, *Icons of Elegance: Influential Shoe Designers of the 20th Century*. Opening to the public on Friday, September 23rd, 2005, this is the first time in North America that shoes with such significance in the history of design and Western culture have been brought together.

Organized as part of the Museum's 10th anniversary celebrations, *Icons of Elegance* reflects the spirit of a century of changing times. The designers featured rose to the pinnacle of the shoemaking craft by very different paths. Creativity and inspiration are common factors, but the results demonstrate an astonishing diversity.

The elegant women's footwear featured in this exhibition ranges from exquisite examples of handcrafted perfection to shoes that rival modern sculpture as artworks in their own right. Highlights include footwear created by the turn-of-the-20th-century shoemaker Pietro (also called Pierre) Yantorny, whose exceptional shoes took years to make and a fortune to acquire; the innovative and elegant shoes of mid-century masters Salvatore Ferragamo and Roger Vivier, whose designs continue to impact fashion today; and the designs of contemporaries such as Manolo Blahnik and Christian Louboutin, whose celebrity status and chic footwear allow for an exploration into the role of fashion footwear in the construction of social identity.

According to the exhibition's curator, Elizabeth Semmelhack, "Of the myriad shoemakers creating footwear at any given time, only a few shoe designers capture the imagination. By focusing on celebrated 20th century shoe designers and their work, *Icons of Elegance* seeks to unravel the threads of cultural influence that both inspired these shoemaking icons and, in turn, were transformed by their innovative designs. From art movements to popular cultural moments, the work of these visionaries has incorporated, reinterpreted, and influenced the world around them."

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Icons of Elegance features over 100 artifacts selected from both the Bata Shoe Museum's collection and international collections. These include New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fashion Institute of Technology, and the Charles Jourdan collection and the Musée de la Chaussure, both in Romans, France. Due to the delicate condition of certain of the artifacts, they will be changed every three months, thus providing an enhanced experience for repeat visitors.

For this exhibition which celebrates design excellence, the Museum has retained award-winning firm *3rd UNCLE design inc* as the exhibition designers. Surprising and intellectually engaging, *Icons of Elegance* celebrates the extraordinary. It is an essential exhibition for anyone interested in fashion, design, cultural and social history, and all who appreciate fine craftsmanship.

There will be a media preview and gala party on Thursday, September 22nd, 2005, starting at 7:00 pm. *Icons of Elegance* will be on display until Thursday, August 31st, 2006.

This event has been financially assisted by the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, a program of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Culture, administered by the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund Corporation.



Sponsors of *Icons of Elegance* include FLARE, Holt Renfrew, The Fashion Group International® Toronto, Holman Exhibits and City of Toronto Economic Development.



About the Bata Shoe Museum

The Bata Shoe Museum is a centre of knowledge about the role of footwear in the social and cultural life of humanity. The Museum's growing international collection of over 12,000 objects touches on 4,500 years of history. A varied programme of events and exhibitions lets visitors discover the stories behind footwear from many lands and cultures.

Currently on exhibit: *Appeasing the Spirits: Alaskan Coastal Cultures*; *Paths Across the Plains: Traditional Footwear from the Great Plains*; *Beads, Buckles and Bows: Four Hundred Years of Embellished Footwear*; and *All About Shoes: Footwear Through the Ages*. Coming in September 2005: *Icons of Elegance: Influential Shoe Designers of the 20th Century*.

The Bata Shoe Museum is located in downtown Toronto at 327 Bloor Street West, at the southwest corner of Bloor and St. George Streets. For more information about the Museum, please visit www.batashoemuseum.ca.