

New Exhibition at the Bata Shoe Museum Explores Dangers of Fashion

Toronto ON (June 18, 2014) – The Bata Shoe Museum is excited to announce the opening of its newest exhibition, *Fashion Victims: The Pleasures and Perils of Dress in the 19th Century*.

In the 19th century, the beautiful outfits fashioned by seamstresses and shoemakers supplied the privileged with enviable ensembles. Swathed from head to toe in expensive garments and shod in delicate footwear, fashion-forward women graced the boulevards and the ballrooms with their colourful presence—a pleasure to behold for painters, poets, and passersby who saw them. Their tailored male companions cut equally refined figures in their black coats, spotless white linens, lustrous top hats and shiny boots. Yet, presenting an elegant exterior was not without its perils for both the makers and wearers of fashion.

Curated by Elizabeth Semmelhack, Senior Curator, Bata Shoe Museum and Dr. Alison Matthews David, Associate Professor, School of Fashion, Ryerson University and building on Dr. Matthews David's research into the dangers of dress in the 19th century, this exhibition explores a wide variety of pleasures and perils associated with fashion from head to toe. In addition to highlighting exquisite examples of footwear and clothing from the 19th century, the exhibition also explores many of the often untold stories related to fashion and its production. Included in the exhibition are the dangers of dresses and shoes dyed arsenic green, the plight of mad hatters and mercury poisoning as well as the effects of constricting corsets and impossibly narrow footwear. The exhibition also looks at shifts in the making of fashion from independent craft to fragmented labour completed in garrets or on factory floors. The move from traditional shoemaking to factory-made footwear is also emphasized as is the role of those workers who were integral to the presentation of the fashionable figure from the seamstress to the shoeshine boy.

“Embedded in each artifact in this exhibition are multiple stories about 19th century fashion. From the challenges faced by those who produced fashionable dress to the risks taken by those who wore it, this exhibition will provide thought provoking insights into what it means to be a fashion victim,” says Elizabeth Semmelhack, Senior Curator, Bata Shoe Museum. “This unique look at 19th century dress includes important pieces from the Museum's collection and is a must-see for anyone curious about the history and evolution of this ever-changing industry.”

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“As an historian who has been privately unearthing fascinating documents, images, and objects for almost a decade and having many artifacts scientifically tested for the first time, it is a new experience to be able to share my passion for this topic with such a broad audience,” says Dr. Alison Matthews David, Associate Professor, Ryerson University. “Although the makers and wearers of the objects on display have been gone for over a century, we are still fascinated with the garments and footwear they left behind, which are capturing our imaginations and provoking new debates. One thing is certain: after seeing the glossy, rainbow-coloured, skillfully decorated items produced by 19th century artisans, factory workers, and chemists, we may be less likely to judge our ancestors for being seduced by these gorgeous yet dangerous garments and footwear.”

The exhibition features over ninety artifacts from the Bata Shoe Museum’s extensive holdings augmented by loans from private collections. Highlights from the exhibition include dresses that span the century, mauve-hued footwear dyed with the first coal tar colours invented in 1856, a shoemaking automaton monkey by famed French automaton maker, Jean-Marie Phalibois, beautiful hand-embroidered boots manufactured by the exclusive Parisian shoemaking firm of Francois Pinet, impossibly narrow Adelaide boots and gloves worn by Empress Elisabeth of Austria and a corset with a sixteen-inch waist from the Cleaver/Suddon collection.

Fashion Victims: The Pleasures & Perils of Dress in the 19th Century will be on view until June 2016.

The Bata Shoe Museum gratefully acknowledges funding provided by the Government of Ontario



About the Bata Shoe Museum

For every shoe there is a story. With an International collection of over 13,000 shoes and related artefacts, the Bata Shoe Museum celebrates 4,500 years of footwear history in four distinctive rotating galleries. In addition to our popular semi-permanent exhibition, 'All About Shoes', the Museum has three galleries for changing exhibitions, ensuring that each visit to the museum offers a new experience. Through the creation of its innovative exhibitions, the Museum strives to enlighten and entertain visitors of all ages. Exciting adult and children's programming activities and a unique gift shop complete the experience. A cultural gem in the heart of the city, the Bata Shoe Museum is definitely for the curious! Further information is available at www.batashoemuseum.ca.

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