

Background information/pictures available online at:

www.toy-worlds-museum-basle.ch

Media, password: swmb

History under your feet

3000 years of shoes

Special exhibition 18 October 2014 – 6 April 2015

This special exhibition is devoted to an everyday object that for millennia has served to protect the soles of men, women and children: the shoe.

In collaboration with the *Northampton Museums and Art Gallery* in England, home to the world's largest collection of historical shoes, this exhibition of over 220 pairs of shoes takes you on a journey through the footwear fashions of the last 3000 years. In addition to its purely protective function and its importance for many people as a fashion item, throughout history the shoe has also been connected with social status and membership of particular social groups. In ancient Egypt, only pharaohs were allowed to wear sandals made of silver or gold. The oldest shoe in the exhibition comes from Egypt, and dates from around 1000 BC.

Every shoe form that we wear today has a link to the past. We are always wearing a piece of history on our feet. And in the meantime, the shoe has also become a subject for the art world. More than 30 artists from across the globe have made their artistic shoe creations available for the exhibition. Shoes from the designers of tomorrow also offer visitors a taste of the future.

Thomas Murphy, an English shoemaker of bespoke shoes for the young and old, will demonstrate his craft on various weekends. Our visitors will have the chance to experience live how handmade shoes are made today, and will have the opportunity to try their hand at a bit of shoemaking themselves.

Fascination with shoes, function and fetish

Shoes are known and desired around the world – for young and old they are a fundamental good of life and even survival. As a fashion item and commodity, they are subject to constant wear and require constant renewal. As protection for the feet, shoes are an indispensable part of our lives today. Ten billion euros were spent on shoes in Germany alone in 2012. This corresponds to the purchase of an average of three to five new pairs of shoes per person per year. Hardly any other piece of clothing has been so influential and full of meaning and emotions as the shoe. Shape, colour, material, workmanship, design and price tell of the lives of their owners. It is said that the truth about a person can be read through their shoes, which reveal character, status, social virtues, likes and dislikes. Wearing stilettos or handmade sandals reveals our social standing, lifestyle, attitudes and desires.

Since the Stone Age, women have been the collectors and men more likely the hunters. This might be a reason why men and women have different notions regarding the number of shoes one should own. According to surveys, one in five women has more than 20 pairs of shoes – among men, however, it is only one in 25.

In addition to its purely protective function, the shoe has always had an important fashion function, reflecting the social status or group affiliation of the wearer. In ancient Egypt, only pharaohs were allowed to wear sandals with gold or silver plating, and only high officials and priests could wear sandals at all. The general population went barefoot.

Among the ancient Greeks in around 700 BC, an ordinance was issued regulating the use of jewels on sandals. Even in the Roman Empire there were clear rules as to who could wear which shoes and how they could be decorated.

During the Middle Ages, the tip length of the then-fashionable pointed shoes revealed one's social standing. At the time of the Sun King Louis XIV (1643–1715, King of France and Navarre), only the king and high nobility were permitted to wear red heels.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, high-quality men's shoes, made with calfskin leather uppers (along with upmarket business attire), indicated that their wearer did not perform physical labour, belonged to the establishment and could afford such shoes, and also that he paid attention to the finer things in life.

Just as one's footwear was important as a sign of rank and wealth, voluntarily forsaking one's shoes held special significance, signalling humility and penitence. For many cultures it was customary to go shoeless when approaching the divine. Religious missions and pilgrimages were sometimes undertaken (as it were under harsh conditions) barefoot; the custom lives on in the Mediterranean region today. The German expression "Walk to Canossa" carries on the legend that Emperor Henry IV went barefoot and dressed in a penitential shirt to seek forgiveness from Pope Gregory VII in the winter of 1077.

What is a shoe?

A shoe is a foot covering, whose upper is permanently connected to a solid base made of leather, wood, rubber or plastic, which serves primarily to protect the sole of the foot. It consists of two main parts: the upper part and the *sole*. Often the *shaft* consists of several layers and individual pieces that have been glued or stitched together, such as an *inner shaft* (lining), *middle shaft* (interlining) and *outer shaft* (vamp).

The bottom of the shoe, depending on the model, consists of a *sole* (e.g. moccasins) or – in the case of a typical, low-cut leather oxford – of an *insole* and an attached *outsole*.

The shoe sole is often raised in height at the rear: the *heel*.

Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

The *Northampton Museums and Art Gallery* in England has the world's largest internationally recognized collection of historical footwear, of which we are presenting over 200 pairs. The oldest specimen dates back to ancient Egypt, around 1000 BC. The exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the world history of shoes, going back centuries and into the 21st century. In addition to more than 12,000 pairs of historical shoes, the museum in Northampton also documents the history of shoemaking, including the re-creation of an old shoe factory. Its permanent exhibition also includes advertisements, shoe accessories and shoe care. Thanks to this collection we are able to present in our special exhibition an old shoemaker's workbench and accompanying tools. Other objects, ranging from shoe advertisements to shoe buckles were also made available to us for the exhibition.

The items on display were selected in collaboration with Ms. Rebecca Shawcross, Shoe Curator at *Northampton Museums and Art Gallery*. This unique survey of shoe history owes its thanks to her great engagement and knowledge. Thanks to her deep expertise on the subject, we are also able to provide a wealth of information and background anecdotes on the various exhibition pieces.

Shoes throughout the ages

It is a privilege for people to walk in shoes. The history of footwear reflects the cultural history of mankind.

An *original shoe* does not exist per se. In colder regions, animal skins were likely wrapped around the feet and calves. In other regions, hides were placed only around the foot like a kind of *foot bag*; this developed into the moccasin. In warmer regions, palm leaves were used to protect the soles of the feet against the hot ground, as a kind of precursor to the sandal. It is difficult to pinpoint when shoes first began to be cut and laced; their first formal design is estimated to have occurred 40,000 years ago. The oldest shoe remains, a woven fibre sandal from around 8300 BC, covered the foot of a North American Paleo-Indian. The oldest remains of a leather shoe originated in the Bernese Alps. The shoe was probably worn by a Neolithic mountaineer around 4300 BC. The history of sandals goes back a very long way. Early examples were braided from straw or palm leaves, which the dry soil of Egypt has preserved for posterity. In ancient Egypt, covering one's feet with sandals was the sole right of the gods, rulers and dignitaries. In regions further north, women were the first to wear shoes; here it was the men. The sandal was a status symbol. Over the centuries, however, the Egyptian sandal lost its exclusivity. This development may have been similar in the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, where a variety of broad and pointed forms indicate changes in fashion.

One could find capped heels as well as upturned *beak toe* shoe tips. In Greece, like in ancient Egypt, wearing sandals was the exclusive privilege of high dignitaries. The heroes of the Trojan War bound magnificent sandals to their feet. It was only during the Classical period that other types of shoes became customary in Greece. Women and old men preferred soft, closed shoes in the Persian style: *persikai*. Hikers and hunters wore eastern-style mid-calf boots and leather laced boots.

The Romans essentially adopted the footwear of the Greeks, but regulated their use more strictly. Even under Emperor Hadrian (117–138) it was considered offensive for Romans of the rank of senator or women to go out wearing sandals, i.e. leather soles fastened round the ankle with straps, meant for home use. In addition to the toga, the *calceus* belonged to the costume of the Roman citizen as a sign of dignity. The customary footwear for the Roman citizen consisted of a leather sole and leather straps that were wrapped around the foot and ankle and secured with thongs. The number of thongs depended on one's social class. Ankle-high boots, with either closed or open toes, were worn outside the home along with the toga. Different orders were entitled to wear various styles of *calcei*. Patricians, and later only *curule magistrates*, had the privilege of wearing the *calceus patricius*, made from red leather with a high sole, leather tongue and a crescent-shaped ivory *agraffe* (clasp).

Emperor Aurelian (270–275) punished excess severely. He forbade men to wear coloured shoes. Women, however, were allowed to wear shoes made with precious materials, including pearls and gemstones.

While the sandal in all its variations was the predominant footwear in the ancient world, by the end of the 4th century it was the closed shoe and the slipper. These were mostly plain brown or black, but occasionally made from artfully decorated purple leather.

Both the German tribes east of the Rhine and the Franks in the West wore primitive foot coverings made of hide. During the Migration Period, this type of shoe, crafted from a piece of hide or leather and bound around the ankle, the *bound shoe*, largely displaced more sophisticated shoe forms.

Finer footwear was still worn, but evidently only by secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Customary for the Carolingian period (7th to 10th century) was a wrapped shoe that covered the foot and calf and left the toes free.

During the Middle Ages, the ruling secular, aristocratic society generally wore pointed shoe forms. As fashion often tends to exaggerate, by the late Middle Ages the toes of shoes had lengthened beyond all measure – not least under oriental influence and in connection with the Crusades. The *poulaines* became fashionable, and at the time, a sign of rank. With the help of a wooden under-shoe, the so-called *patten*, which was worn together with the *poulaines*, the gentry could both protect their precious shoe tips from outdoor dirt while also making themselves appear taller. When the toes of shoes reached lengths that prevented even the most delicate of strides, they were tied back to the leg. There were also bans on wearing *poulaines*. A dress mandate in Zurich from the year 1371 ordained: "No one, neither man nor woman, boy or girl, should wear a shoe that has a tip into which one can slip something in ..."

The precise origin of the heel and platform sole is unclear. Perhaps they facilitated riding with stirrups or made it easier to wade through grime along the poorly drained medieval streets. The development of the elevated sole reached a climax in the *chopines* of the 15th century (Renaissance). Reaching some 40 centimetres in height, the platform shoes that were popular in Venice and Florence required the use of various walking aids – servants or gallant gentlemen as a support on both sides of the wearer – along with an excellent sense of balance. The extravagant *chopines* of the fashion conscious, somewhat eccentric women of Venice and Florence possessed an extremely elevated sole of light wood that was covered with fabric or leather and usually sumptuously decorated. But even here, the High Council of the "City of Canals" soon issued regulations in an attempt to curb such fashion excesses.

While the sophisticated gentleman expressed his self-esteem through the length of his *poulaine* shoes, raising his heel at the very end of the 16th century now gave him a statelier, more striking appearance. By changing their posture, the raised heel gave women an erotic, hip-swaying gait. The sight of a bare female ankle flashing beneath long dress hems was a cause for delight among men. By the 17th century, shoes with heels had conquered all of Europe.

The baroque age made the heel and the rest of the shoe as ornate as the rest of the period's stylistic elements. The half shoe made of velvet or silk adorned with rich embroidery was preferred and clasps were added as well. Under the Sun King Louis XIV (1643–1715, King of France and Navarre) the heel reached such dangerous heights that ladies needed a cane to assist them when walking.

This ended with the French Revolution. The buckles on men's shoes and high heels were among the aristocratic symbols that had to be eradicated. Their successor was a new, more delicate, lighter, unadorned shoe without a heel: Slip on shoes embodied the sober style of the Empire.

Ornamentation returned only timidly, along with richer fabrics and coloured leather. Bows and ruffles were reinstated during the comfortable *Biedermeier* period. It was during the *Rococo* period that the heel again truly belonged to the shoe. This was also the heyday of the women's shoe as something both graceful and erotic. At the start of the 18th century, when slender feet became an aspect of the feminine beauty ideal, women's shoes were crafted into dainty, exquisite masterpieces. The broad hoop skirts were shortened to reveal the delicate feet and petite shoes. For men during the *Biedermeier* period, proper, elegant clothing prevailed, which for a century included the low boot: the *bottine*.

What had been taken into consideration during antiquity and the Middle Ages was rediscovered only in the 18th and 19th centuries: the anatomy of the feet. Shoes were made for left and right feet up until 1590s when the addition of the heel made it difficult for shoemakers to tailor shoes in this way. So they made straights – both shoes were the same and the act of wearing them gradually formed them into a left and right. By the beginning of the 19th century shoes returned to being flat with no heel and so shoemakers went back to making lefts and rights.

Orthopaedic findings led to the development and differentiation of contemporary shoe styles, many of which are still in use. This *orthopaedic turn* was led by the anatomist and Frankfurt native Georg Hermann von Meyer (1815–1892), who taught for decades at the University of Zurich.

From this point on, shoe fashion changed at a faster pace – and for good reason: the trade and the now powerful shoe industry were now unfettered by the restrictions and requirements of a single, universal style. Half a century later, during the *Art Nouveau* period, such ambiguity was again considered a deficiency. Subsequent generations rejoiced at the high *lace boot* and *button boots* and apparently also found enough time and patience to fasten them. New materials and decorative elements were introduced. The onset of industrialization ultimately led to shoes that were affordable for everyone. By the second decade of the 20th century skirts became shorter, giving view to the shoes. The full exposure of what had previously been partly hidden spurred a lively change in fashion. Shoes now varied in shape, colour and decoration. Goldsmiths gave luxurious appearances to buckle shoes of all sorts. Heels became higher and adorned with rhinestones or precious gems for more costly shoes. Gold and silver brocade and fine silk shoes in bright colours were a must for evening wear. For simple morning suits, court shoes, bar shoes, or ankle boots were worn in black satin, moiré or velvet. Leather workshops also developed a new material in the 1920s: foil-coated gold and silver leather.

The fashion-conscious woman of the 1930s wore elegant pumps with semi-high to high heels, wedge heels or platform soles. Crafted from cork or wood, the wedge heel and platforms lasted until 1945. The chunky soles and heels did not go well with the feminine bell skirts of the *New Look* in the late 1940s. The soles of pumps became flatter and the heels narrower. While the classical pastel-coloured pumps of the 1950s had heels of around 6 cm, towards the end of the decade they narrowed to become the very high, extremely slender pencil or stiletto heel. In reaction to these quite pointy, high shoes, came the block heel, the truncated *square tip* and the flat, flexible *ballerina*, which was very popular among young girls.

For the miniskirts of the 1960s, stiletto heels on pumps became lower and wider. By the end of the decade pumps went out of fashion altogether. Hippy fashion called for colourful sandals and platform shoes made a comeback.

Shoe fashion in the 1970s was dominated by shoes with broad, flat toes and wedge heels or very high platforms. A new mix of materials and colours yielded plastic uppers and Plexiglas heels in red, green, purple and orange tones. Countering this trend was a movement to wear healthy footwear made from natural materials with soles that moulded to the shape of one's foot.

During the 1980s, high heels and platform shoes were joined by shoes in bright colours, *over-the-knee boots*, plain black buckle pumps and low-cut pointed shoes with side zippers. The growing popularity of fitness, jogging and aerobics made the *sneaker* not only suitable for everyday use, but also socially acceptable.

Today, the sheer diversity of shoe styles allows women to wear everything from *cowboy boots* to sneakers with a cocktail dress, and torn jeans with elegant *high heels*. Every type of shoe that we wear today has its connection with the past.

Children's shoes

Wearing shoes not only differentiated the poor from the rich, country folk from townsfolk, but also children from adults. Until the beginning of the 20th century, even city children often went about barefoot, at least during the warm summer months. For many it was only after Confirmation that shoes, along with the first pair of long pants, became part of a child's daily outfit.

Baby shoes were traditionally considered good luck, and were the shoes in which a small child took their first steps, usually between the ages of one and two years. Most of the well-preserved historical children's shoes date back to the 19th century and are rather simple models made from soft leather, often with the beloved buckle strap that is popular to this day. Some baby shoes were made entirely of linen or satin, colourfully embroidered and embellished, and likely came from well-to-do families. Regardless of age and social background, all of these small shoes from the 19th century share a trait that also applied to most of the adult shoes at the time: they were made on a *symmetrical* last. This meant that the last and thus the shoes had the same shape for both the right and the left foot. It was only after wearing the shoes for a longer period that the feet could impress their shape on the shoes. Clearly, such *breaking in* is bad for the feet, especially for small children, whose bones are still developing and thus particularly easy to deform. And yet this was customary for centuries. It was only starting around 1900 that shoes were made in pairs – the shoe reform needed time. Getting used to the unusual appearance of the new shoes required a radical re-thinking of beauty and physicality. A fundamental change in production methods was also needed, with regard to both the craft and the industry. After nearly 50 years of conflict in shoe culture, asymmetrical lasts and shoe pairs ultimately prevailed.

Our special exhibition includes children's shoes from the last few centuries. These are from the collection of *Northampton Museums and Art Gallery* in England.

Shoes and art

Shoes also entail creative potential. The trend for extravagant design has not only been present in the shoe industry: the boundaries between art, craft and product design have dissolved. Time and again, international artists and architects have been inspired by social and creative aspects of the

shoe. Regardless of its actual wearability, the fashionable, everyday object is transformed under their hands into unique, spectacular creations, conceptual and provocative statements or bizarre sculptural pieces.

Over time, footwear has not only joined the world of fashion, but also of art. Detached from its trivial, everyday functions, the shoe entered the art world during the early 20th century in the context of the Dadaist and Surrealist artistic movements. Then, as now, the aim was to provoke and irritate. For artists past and present, the shoe has proven to be a suitable medium for artistic confrontation. In contemporary art the shoe reflects, mocks, amplifies and criticizes the characteristics and excesses of our increasingly consumption- and leisure-oriented society.

Liza Snook and her Virtual Shoe Museum

To collect shoes as art, as Liza Snook does in her *Virtual Shoe Museum*, is an ever-greater task. Imagine the collection as a large circle. What lies inside the circle is known; what is outside is still unknown. Thus the circle grows every time new art and new design enrich the collection. Designers, architects, game designers, artists and graphic artists take to the stage of shoe design. New materials, new perspectives and new artisanal approaches continuously reveal new themes. At the heart of the mission of the *Virtual Shoe Museum* is to question the essence of the shoe, raising questions such as: Is this really a shoe? Is it wearable? If not, does it really matter? In a virtual realm, such questions are no criteria for judgement, but merely additional aspects of an ever-growing collection. The *Virtual Shoe Museum* needs no presentations, display cases, mounts or additional storage, no security measures, no air conditioning and no insurance. There are no buildings and no opening times. Liza Snook's *Virtual Shoe Museum* is open 24 hours, seven days a week and 365 days a year, for everyone to discover and enjoy.

The *Virtual Shoe Museum* has been around for more than a decade. It began with a digital presentation for friends and visitors of a vast collection of real shoes, including shoe articles, postcards, books, shoe souvenirs, Barbie shoes, clogs, dance shoes and iconic footwear from film history, such as the ruby slippers that Dorothy wore in *The Wizard of Oz* and Jane Fonda's silver Barbarella boots. This collection was compiled over the course of some 25 years and now fills many shelves. The collection transferred to a virtual space, leading Liza Snook to sort and categorize the objects and rethink their connections to one another. Together with her partner Taco Zwaanswijk she created a map of the virtual museum, outlining its structure and paths of discovery. This rethinking of her personal collection was a major experience that helped her recognize its potential as a virtual shoe museum. Many designers and artists helped by contributing their shoe images. Since its launch in 2004 there has been a huge increase in contributors and visitors.

A few years ago the *Virtual Shoe Museum* received its first request to participate in a real shoe exhibition. This invitation to return to the real world, so to speak, opened up a new dimension with new contacts. With exhibitions at the Grassi Museum of Applied Arts in Leipzig, Museum Villa Rot near Ulm in Germany and SHOEtting Stars in the KUNST HAUS WIEN in Vienna, Austria, Liza Snook entered into new territory. Working with various museums also led to contact with artists that would otherwise never have come about. These collaborations were also very helpful for the further development of the *Virtual Shoe Museum*. Increasingly, it has become a platform for research and collaboration. More and more young artists and designers find their way there and share their

wonderful work with the *Virtual Shoe Museum*. With the many new approaches there is much to do in the coming years. A visit to the *Virtual Shoe Museum* is well worth it!

www.virtualshoemuseum.com

Thanks to our collaboration with Liza Snook and her *Virtual Shoe Museum* it is possible for us to present in our exhibition more than 40 *artistic shoe objects* by over 30 renowned artists, architects and designers from around the world. These include names such as Zaha Hadid and Valentini Argyropoulou from London, Iris van Herpen (the Netherlands) and Omar Angel Perez (USA).

The future of shoe design is also covered. The exhibition presents shoes addressing the theme *toys*, which were created for Basel as a thesis project by students of the Dutch Shoe Academy in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Playmobil®, Lego®, Perler® beads and puzzles – it is incredible how all these toys find expression in the form of shoes.

Other shoes come from graduates of the Fashion and Shoe-Designing Course at the Academy of Fine Arts (SASK) in Sint-Niklaas, Belgium. The academy offers a part-time course, either as a second degree or in addition to full- or part-time work. The programme offers rigorous training in design, craftsmanship, materials and historical background, along with very high academic standards.

The shoemaking craft

The oldest shoemaking tools are over 35,000 years old, proving that even cave dwellers of the last ice age had to protect their feet against the adversities of nature and weather.

The profession of shoemaker (*cobbler*) was, in contrast to many other handicraft trades, relatively easy to learn and hardly required expensive or specialized tools. For this reason, the shoe trade developed into the quantitatively largest handicraft sector during the 18th century. In the Middle Ages, starting around 1250, the first shoemaker guilds were formed throughout Europe – including in Basel.

To become a shoemaker, a young man had to complete a seven-year apprenticeship that concluded with the creation of a masterpiece. Shoemakers were often very wealthy. In the 17th century, a shoemaker in London would employ up to 60 workers to produce large numbers of shoes. The tools needed for the production of shoes – awls, lasting pliers, knife, welt irons, etc. – have hardly changed over the centuries.

Custom-made and ready-made shoes

Until the mid-19th century, shoes were almost exclusively custom-made, because the local shoemaker would usually make shoes to order according to the customer's wishes. A new shoe last was not made every time, but rather a well-fitting one would be individually selected.

A shoe *last* is a three-dimensional model that corresponds to an image of the foot in a normal position at medium load. It takes into account the characteristics of the planned shoe model, such as shape, size and length of the toe spring and the heel profile (to later determine the heel height).

Custom-made shoes

With custom-made shoes, one must differentiate between orthopaedic and normal shoes. The custom orthopaedic shoe is made exclusively according to specific medical indications. In contrast, the classic custom shoe is hand crafted according to the customer's individual wishes and foot

dimensions. Today, in the era of globalization, there are companies that offer online ordering of bespoke shoes. Customers can specify their foot dimensions using an online form, and the data is used to create the shoe lasts. Shoes are then hand sewn on the customized shoe last. Custom shoes ordered in this manner tend to be well priced for the custom shoe industry.

Good custom shoemakers have become rather rare in Europe. A high standard can usually be found where there is competition. This is true for some major cities, such as Milan, Paris, Vienna, London and, naturally, Northampton. The latter is a veritable shoe capital and home to world-renowned bespoke shoemakers.

Of course there are shoemakers elsewhere who have dedicated their skills to the custom-made shoe. Among them is Thomas Murphy, of Richmond (England). After graduating from Cordwainers College in London in 2002 he opened his own shoe studio and honed his craft, designing and creating handmade shoes for the catwalk for Boudicca, Robert Cary-Williams and Ann-Sofie Back. In 2007 Thomas Murphy founded his eponymous shoe label and now sells his shoes through boutiques worldwide. His shoes for women bear his trademark copper heel, which develops a typical blue-green shimmer through natural oxidation. Currently an instructor at the prestigious Royal College of Art in London, Thomas Murphy continues to develop and produce luxurious shoes for London's fashion talents.

Recently, Thomas Murphy founded another label with his wife Fay: *Chapter 2*, a modern and luxurious unisex line for children aged 4 to 10. The label creates a symbiosis between quality, originality and craftsmanship. Each pair of shoes in the line is hand crafted in their studio in London. Thomas Murphy also offers courses at his studio, in which under his guidance and assistance you can reconstruct a pair of your favourite, worn out shoes – an extremely interesting and emotional experience.

Thomas Murphy wants to create long-lasting shoes that reflect the character of their wearer. Sustainability is very important for him. On certain weekends, the exhibition offers the opportunity to meet Thomas Murphy and see his craftsmanship on site at the museum.

Ready-made shoes

From the mid-19th century onwards, the first machines for the industrial production of shoes were developed in the USA due to rapidly increasing demand. In just a few decades, the mass-produced shoe had largely replaced the handicraft production model of the custom shoe. A few years later, the same development occurred in Europe. For the first time, customers could buy ready-made shoes instead of having to wait for them to be produced to order. The selection was larger and shoes could be viewed and tried on before purchase. Prices sank, while the quality of the machine-produced shoes was on par with that of the handmade ones. Above all, the quality was consistently high, while handmade shoes varied in quality depending on the daily composure and quality standards of the individual shoemaker. Despite fierce resistance by the craftsmen, this development was unstoppable: the shoe had become an affordable commodity. It was no longer an expensive purchase or even a luxury item. Those who previously could only have afforded wood-nailed shoes could now buy sewn shoes.

Industrial mass shoe production required a standardization of shoe sizes. Although an English shoe sizing system had existed since the 14th century, new size systems were now added: continental sizes such as the Paris point system, half sizes and even quarter sizes. Despite all standardization

efforts, different sizing systems exist even today for shoe lengths and widths; even conversions are not always carried out consistently.

Fairy tales, customs and idioms

Feet and shoes play an important role in many ancient customs, myths, fairy tales and folklore. Those who have no shoes, often have no bread – is a recurrent theme in fairy tales. In his tale “The Little Match Girl” Hans Christian Andersen presents a prototype of child poverty. Here, poverty starts with the feet. A person with bad, torn or no shoes at all externally reveals the extreme hardship that characterizes his or her life in general.

The difference between townsfolk and country folk is also reflected by what they wear – or don’t wear – on their feet. In the fairy tale “The Two Travellers” by the Brothers Grimm, a travelling tailor meets a shoemaker. Both are on the move in a big city. The shoemaker says, “In a small nest there is nothing to earn, and in the country, people like to go barefoot.” In “Puss in Boots” by Charles Perrault (1697) an ordinary cat is treated like a gentleman thanks to his shiny boots, and is courted by all.

Red shoes are particularly desirable in the Grimm’s fairy tales, as they were reserved for the upper classes. For Hans Christian Andersen, red shoes play a tragic role in the famous tale “The Red Shoes” (1845). Young Karen is so fond of her red patent leather shoes that she even wears them to church for communion. As punishment, the shoes start to dance on her feet. The girl cannot stop dancing until both her feet are chopped off. Crippled, but redeemed from the sin of pride, the child is allowed into heaven.

Such stories also suggest that shoes that were fine, special and fashionable did not enjoy a very positive reputation in popular tradition. “I see you have fine boots on, which are well blacked. But if you wish to travel about like me, they will not last long. Look at mine, they are of buffalo leather and have served for a long time,” says the soldier in the Grimm’s fairy tale “The Boots of Buffalo Leather” to an unknown man in the forest. Shoes should be durable and robust. Made-to-measure shoes made by a good shoemaker could last a lifetime.

The fantasy-filled world of fairy tales also includes magic shoes, with which the weak triumph over the strong. This view is addressed in Wilhelm Hauff’s fairy tale “The Story of Little Muck”, about an amiable, somewhat inept and unlucky boy, whose clothes are always too big for him. When by chance he dons a pair of oversized slippers, he is surprised to find that he can run as fast as the wind wherever he wants, leading to a career as a royal runner. Ultimately, however, he withdraws from the world and the magic slippers fade into obscurity. Perhaps it is not such good fortune after all, being able to immediately be wherever one wants to be.

When shoes are mentioned in fairy tales, women’s shoes are more common than men’s.

Presumably this is related to the fact that women have more to do with shoes than men in real life as well. In addition, the erotic nature of the shoe as a feminine object plays a role. Advertising today also plays with this motif. The shoe scenes in “Cinderella” by the Brothers Grimm come immediately to mind. The beautiful shoe stands for the beautiful woman; she who wears it must herself be beautiful. This also reflects the view of society at the time, which was far from understanding the notion of an exclusively inner beauty. The beautiful shoe arouses the male desire to slip the shoe onto the beautiful woman. The earlier custom of the shoe as an engagement gift likely played a role in this context.

Other well-known stories include "The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces", "The Seven League Boots", as well as "The Wizard of Oz" with Dorothy's sparkling, ruby red shoes.

The foot and shoe in the German expression *to stand beneath someone's slipper* are used to symbolize possession and domination. Similarly, the old hunting custom of proudly placing one's foot upon the killed game expresses both domination and possession. Other common expressions include *the world lies at our feet, to fill someone's shoes, to gain a foothold, to stand on one's own two feet/legs, to get back on one's feet, to have both feet on the ground, to live on a shoestring, to lick someone's boots, to put yourself in someone's shoes, to wait on someone hand and foot, as comfortable as an old shoe, to give someone the boot and the boot is on the other foot.*

At our exhibition, visitors large and small can immerse themselves into this magical world.

Activities accompanying the exhibition

The exhibition is accompanied by several interesting short films, for instance on the shoemaking process. On certain weekends workshops offer our young visitors the opportunity to design their own flip-flops, which can be taken home as a souvenir.

Celebrated English shoemaker Thomas Murphy will demonstrate his handicraft on certain weekends. Our visitors will have the chance to experience first-hand how even today custom shoes are handmade, and will be able to try their hand at a bit of shoemaking themselves.

Facts & figures

Opening hours.

Museum, shop and restaurant
from 10.00 until 18.00 daily

The Swiss Museums Pass and the Museums-PASS-Musées are valid for the Toy Worlds Museum Basle.

Admission.

CHF 7.00/5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free of charge and only the company of adults.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair-accessible.

Media contact

Further information is available from:

Laura Sinanovitch

Managing Director/Curator

Toy Worlds Museum Basle

Spielzeug Welten Museum Basel
Steinenvorstadt 1
CH-4051 Basel
Telephone +41 (0)61 225 95 95
sina@swm-basel.ch

www.swmb.museum

Background information/pictures available online at:

www.toy-worlds-museum-basle.ch

Media, password: swmb