



100 SHOES

THE COSTUME INSTITUTE

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

INTRODUCTION BY
SARAH JESSICA PARKER

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SHOES

Front cover: *"Portrait" Shoes*. Vivienne Westwood, British, b. 1941. Leather, 1990.
Millia Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2006 2006.14a, b

Back cover: *Evening boot designed by Roger Vivier*. Photograph: Paul Schutzer/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

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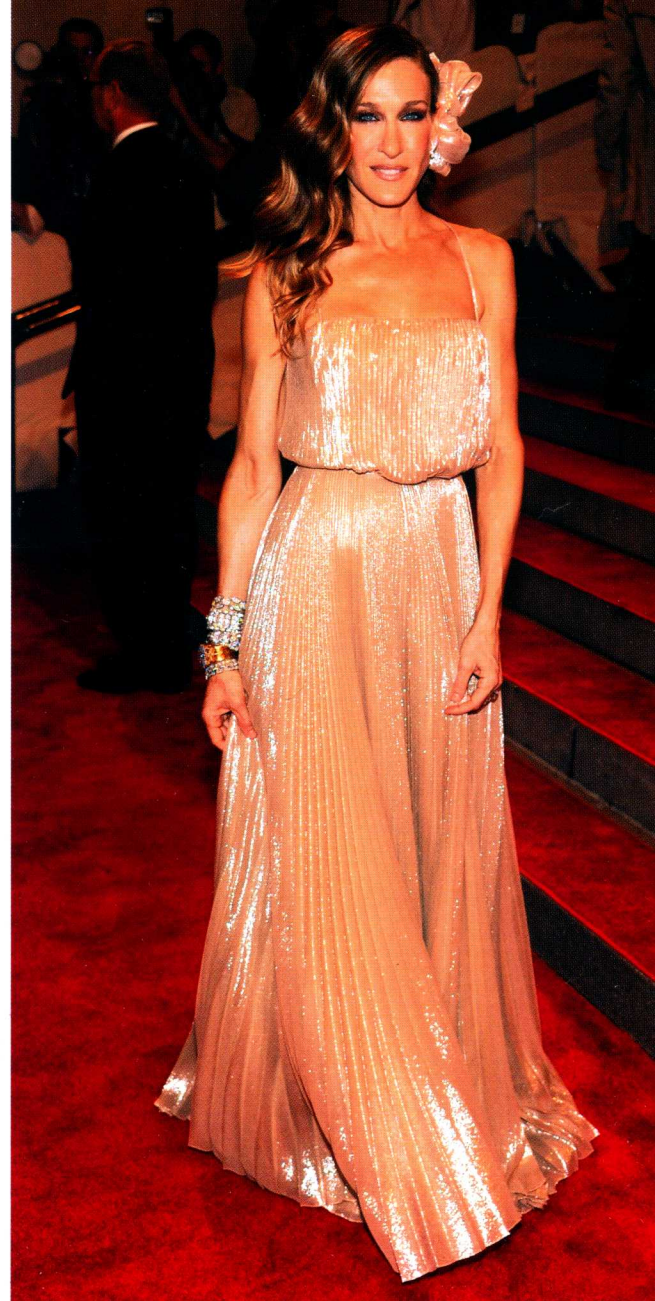


INTRODUCTION

When I was asked to write the introduction to *100 Shoes*, my reaction was “Only 100?” Considering that so much history and style are represented in the 2,500 shoes at The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute, I didn’t know how the curators could possibly choose only 100 pairs from such a vast collection of the most exotic, enduring, and elegant footwear.

The broad range of designers makes identifying the iconic masterworks a real challenge. As I flip through the images, I see some of my favorites—Manolo Blahnik, Alexander McQueen, Christian Louboutin—but also many discoveries from long ago and far away. Rather than browsing shoes in a store, seeing them in a book or museum lets us appreciate them as works of art with a place in culture and history, and also as mechanisms to elevate the style, stature, and status of women around the world.

Sarah Jessica Parker at The Costume Institute Gala Benefit celebrating the opening of “American Woman: Fashioning a National Identity” at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



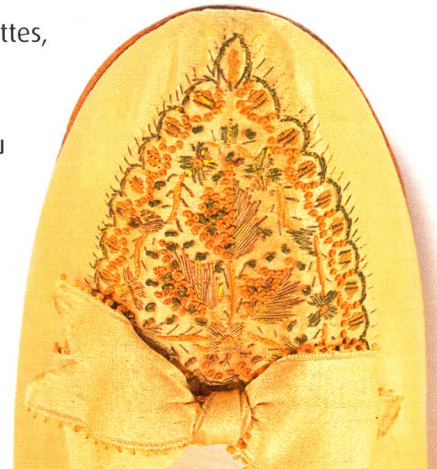
French shoe,
1690–1700



At Met exhibitions, we glimpse shoes on the “American Woman,” “The Model as Muse,” and “Superheroes,” or see paintings of eighteenth-century aristocrats wearing the shoes of their era. If truly lucky, a curator friend might show us vintage Viviers in specially designed drawers. In May, walking up the Met’s steps into The Costume Institute Gala Benefit, I love to see what everyone is wearing from head to toe, especially after selecting the ideal shoes for my McQueen or Halston gown. But being able to sit on the sofa at home and look back through time at 100 expertly chosen shoes makes for a whole different kind of treat.

As an essential fashion accessory, shoes allow us to manipulate our attitude and height, change our look, express our passion. *100 Shoes* shows a range of objects from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, including some that remind me of my favorite shapes and silhouettes, many with unexpected and more obscure histories. Platform shoes, for example, are nothing new. Venetian women wore them from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, and Manchu Chinese women wore them in the 1800s. In the late 1930s, Salvatore Ferragamo introduced

Court presentation
shoe, 1896



modern platforms, and these height-enhancers have remained popular, with notable resurgences in the 1970s and again in the 1990s, courtesy of Vivienne Westwood.

Sandals go back at least 5,500 years to the ancient Egyptians, who made them out of papyrus, palm leaves, grass, reeds, and even solid gold. In the West, sandals declined in the seventeenth century and didn't reemerge until the late 1930s.

Stilettos have a history that began well before Manolo's time. Popular with aristocratic European women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, high heels fell out of favor after the French Revolution. Low heels and flats were the It-Shoe until the mid-1800s, when heels rose again. They've remained in style, in varying heights and shapes, ever since.

Platforms, sandals, and stilettos, plus an array of other showstoppers, are highlights of a shoe collection that inspires us to assert our style and power.

—Sarah Jessica Parker



Christian Louboutin
platform shoe, 2008



Chopines 1550–1650

Probably Italian

The raised thick-soled shoes known as chopines first appeared in fifteenth-century Venice as an upper-class fashion that had both a practical and a symbolic function. Taller versions covered with suede or leather are thought to have been worn outdoors for protection from irregularly paved and muddy streets, while those of more perishable materials were worn indoors. Both versions indicated the elevated social status of their wearers.

The chopines shown here are covered in a rich velvet decorated with gold braid edging and a beardlike tassel below the open toe. The lobed platform sole is trimmed in gold lace with hobnails, and the vamp, with shirred ribbon.



The height of chopines made it difficult for women to walk, so they were usually accompanied by attendants on whom they could balance. Gradually, very high chopines became associated with the courtesan, whose thus-increased stature served to draw attention to herself.



Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire of Bavaria, wife of Louis XIV's eldest child, is shown with two of their sons in this detail of a painting by Pierre Mignard (French, 1612–1695). The pointed toe of one elegant shoe is visible beneath her skirt.

Shoes 1690–1700 French

During the long reign (1643–1715) of Louis XIV, the French court championed elaborately ornamented clothing and accessories. In the same way that *robes à la française* were designed to showcase luxurious embroideries and silk damask fabric, women's shoes provided a canvas for the period's woven artistry.

The embroidered floral design on this pair of shoes is pleasingly rendered, and the stitching along the sole and heel adds an appealing element of contrast. The high tongue, pointed toe, and domed sole are typical of fashionable ladies' shoes of the era, and the red heels indicate that the former owner was a noblewoman. Louis XIV, who always wore red high heels, decreed that only members of his royal court could do the same.





Latchet Shoes

1750–69

British

The bold, colorful, and finely worked flame-stitch uppers are an immediate eye-catcher on these latchet shoes. A common embroidery style, flame-stitch canvas work is preserved in upholstery and small accessories from the period, although the shoe at left has an unusual level of variety in the pattern. Its printed silk heel is also atypical, as printed silks were uncommon and seldom used for footwear.

The evolution of the fashionable silhouette can be seen when this shoe, dated to 1750–69, is compared with the pair of flame-stitch shoes from 1720–29 at right. In the former example, the heel is higher and more upright, the toe is blunter and less upturned, the sole is flatter, the throat is lower, and the metallic braid trim seen in the center of the vamp on the older pair has disappeared.



