



Exhibition Exploring Society and Culture Through Shoes Debuts at The Wolfsonian–FIU

Foot Notes: Shoes, Symbolism, and Society will run from July 2, 2026 to February 28, 2027

MIAMI BEACH (May 28, 2026) — The Wolfsonian–FIU will present *Foot Notes: Shoes, Symbolism, and Society*, an exhibition exploring culture in the first half of the 20th century through shoes, highlighting breakthroughs in materials, technology, and design. Drawing from The Wolfsonian’s collection and featuring rare loans, the exhibition will uncover unexpected stories about footwear, and how the design and symbolism of shoes intersect with politics, identity, and everyday life. Shoes by designers like Salvatore Ferragamo and Beth Levine will be in dialogue with broader histories of merchandising, innovation, propaganda, and recreation. The exhibition is curated by Danielle Charlap and will be on view July 2, 2026, to February 28, 2027.

“It’s the scope of The Wolfsonian collection, not to mention our incredibly talented staff, that makes an exhibition like *Foot Notes* possible,” said museum director Michael Hughes. “I can’t think of another institution able to use footwear to explore political statements, shifting societal values, and design innovation.”

Upon entering The Wolfsonian’s lobby, visitors will be greeted by Ann Slavit’s *Della (Waiting)*, 1978, a twenty-foot pair of larger-than-life inflatable legs in heels. The exhibition goes on to explore milestones in technology and design, featuring an X-ray shoe sizer from the late 1940s and a 1930s stocking finishing machine. The use of shoes in advertising includes a 1944 Prague ad for Krása women’s shoes that exemplified both graphic design and wooden heel styles of the time. Also included in the exhibition

are photographs of 1920s and 1930s shoe window displays, an art form that helped entice desire. An ad from Hungarian illustrator József Amberg for Harry's Finest Leather Polish highlights the care and maintenance required for leather shoes.

The exhibition will also present shoes and ephemeral material related to Beth Levine, a preeminent midcentury designer in the United States. Under the brand named for her husband, Herbert Levine, she was known as "America's First Lady of Shoe Design" until her passing in 2006. She popularized mules (a slip-on style of shoe with no back), invented a stocking/shoe hybrid, and reintroduced boots to 1960s fashion. Nancy Sinatra wore Beth Levine-designed boots for the promotional materials for the 1966 hit song "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'." Instrumental in fashion and design, Levine was a trailblazing American woman in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Ferragamo shoes have been loaned to the exhibition, including one notable pair of rainbow, platformed sandals created for Judy Garland. Known as the "Shoemaker to the Stars," Salvatore Ferragamo immigrated from Naples and settled in Southern California in 1915, where he rose to prominence in the film industry. In 1927 Ferragamo returned to Italy and established a permanent home for his namesake company in Florence.

The exhibition directly connects shoe design with furniture and decorative arts, placing a cantilever chair designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe next to heel-less black pumps by Mario Brini that seem to defy gravity. A pair of baby-blue Wedgwood Rayne heels will be displayed near Jasperware from The Wolfsonian's collection, highlighting the delicate white designs on the matte-finished objects.

Foot Notes also explores a darker side to the depiction of footwear, as they are used symbolically in 1940s propaganda posters about Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, promoting nationalism and the "stomping out" of enemy activity. A further section on recreation highlights ice skates, roller skates, and even metal pogo shoes from the early 1950s, with three coiled springs on each sole to give the wearer a bounce. A 1936 poster for the National Parks Winter Sports illustrates colorful characters skiing, sledding, and ice skating to entice visitors to the Parks for winter sports.

Through nearly 150 objects, *Foot Notes* connects fashion to history, design innovation, and cultural trends, proving that everyday objects are much more than they seem.

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[Foot Notes: Shoes, Symbolism, and Society hi-res images and captions](#)

About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

[The Wolfsonian–FIU](#) is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, political, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collections comprise more than 200,000 items from the period 1850 to 1950—the height of the Industrial Revolution to the end of the Second World War—and include fine arts, decorative arts, graphic design, industrial design, architectural drawings, rare publications, and ephemera.

The Wolfsonian receives generous and ongoing support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council.

About FIU

[Florida International University](#) is a Top 50, preeminent public research university with 55,000 students from all 50 states and more than 140 countries, as well as an alumni network of more than 340,000. Located in the global city of Miami, the university offers more than 200 degree programs at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels, including medicine and law. FIU faculty are leaders in their fields and include National Academy members, Fulbright Scholars, and MacArthur Genius Fellows. A Carnegie R1 institution, FIU drives impactful research in environmental resilience, health, and technology and innovation. Home to the Wall of Wind and Institute of Environment, FIU stands at the forefront of discovery and innovation. With a focus on student success, economic mobility and community engagement, FIU is redefining what it means to be a public research university.