

The background is a brown, textured surface with a pattern of irregular, raised hexagonal shapes, resembling a honeycomb or stone texture. A solid yellow vertical bar is located on the far left edge. A white hexagon is centered on the page, containing the text "Choose Wisely".

**Choose  
Wisely**



# THE PROJECT





# Choose Wisely\*

As so many plans and projects, our Craft the Leather invitational workshop for 2020 hovered in uncertainty until early summer 2022. In that suspended period of lockdown, we created new activities in the virtual space, connecting from individual home ateliers to a wide international network of students and schools- since we couldn't be together, there were no limits to distance and participation. The Consorzio Vera Pelle Conciata al Vegetale responded to the new format by sending leathers and information, our master craftsmen became adept at video demonstrations of leather techniques.

But, oh, the difference to be together, engaged with all senses in the heart of the Tuscan Leather District.

Layers of experience: the light on the fields early in the morning as we head to the tanneries, slanting through the hides slowing drying, and the soft glow of the long twilight in the courtyard of the convent as we share our evening meal and final glass of the local wine. Pungent smells in the tanneries of tannins and oils, and along old walls, capers in flower.

The rhythmic rotation of the great drums and so much deep information from experts of process, research, and craft. And then the leathers, full and rich and pliant, high touch experience that communicates all that has come before, and hints at all it may become.

If this is our chance to step into the world with an awareness of our choices, to consider critically where things come from and all the decisions regarding practice and impact, we can accept the challenge to make wonderful things, that can last and be used for a very long time. Heritage craft and innovation, stewardship of land, resources and tradition, and new instruments of accountability become the tools to make meaningful projects, to craft the leather.



\*Choose Wisely

A tribute to the late great Vivienne Westwood, who launched a radical challenge to the fashion industry in 2014 with the slogan: "Buy less, Choose well, Make it last".

These very principles have always been the core values of the Tuscan tanners of veg tan leather. Their message to designers, students, and consumers goes a step further, because how can you "choose well" without informed and substantive knowledge? That is the mission and the heart of work of The Consorzio Vera Pelle Conciata al Vegetale.





# THE DESIGNERS









**LEA KATRIN ELLEMANN**

*Amsterdam Fashion Institute - Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

## PLAY WITH:MY PERCEPTION

Focusing on the rhythmic elements of breathing and the intimate play between the body and the vegetable tanned leather, PLAY WITH:MY PERCEPTION is a 3 piece capsule collection which follows the exploration of movements guided by the re-invention of our relationship towards traditional craftsmanship techniques.

<https://www.stimulant.info/short-movie>

The pieces were developed through a collaboration with dancers which enabled the leather to naturally express its own shape finding process.

The garments take on a protective role giving the wearer the opportunity to listen into the sounds and emotions created within.

Aiming to translate the collective care experienced during the "Craft the Leather" workshop, each individual step in the tannery process and the repetitive sounds of the machines used, the collection is celebrating both the sharpness followed by fluidness, and the contraction followed by extension through a harmonic symbiosis of laser cut and hand-stitched patterns.

# AMFI

AMSTERDAM FASHION INSTITUTE











Lea Katrin Ellemann

*Amsterdam Fashion Institute  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*



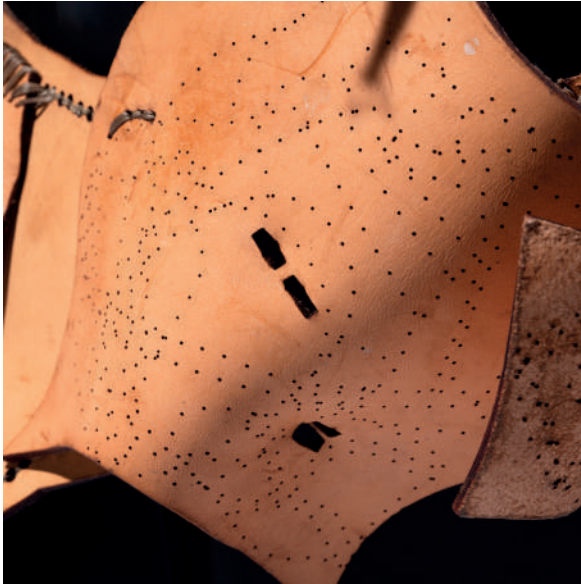






Lea Katrin Ellemann

*Amsterdam Fashion Institute  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*



“ As a Tuscan born, I cannot avoid thinking about how little I know about this virtuous reality of the industry, ...the quality of the product but also the effort to bring a traditional material into circularity and sustainability ”

*AMFI – Lorenzo Masini*





**GONÇALO CAMBOA**

*Central Saint Martins – London, United Kingdom*

## PELE EM CASCA

From a humorous take on dietary needs to a reflection on gym culture and norms, “PELE EM CASCA” offers multiple readings.

Conceptually fuelled by the emptied and repaired fruit skins from Zoe Leonard’s “Strange Fruit”, the three accessories toy with the way mundane food such as bananas, oranges and eggs are perceived, contained and carried.

Whether fulfilling its function or bare empty after consumption, each piece celebrates the ephemeral qualities of the organic while bridging new associations between fashion and masculinity.

Visually, the leather chain on “POTÁSSIO” refers to the role of potassium in aiding muscle movement, the versatility of the spherical shape in “VITAMINA” symbolises the endless functions of vitamins, and the fragility of the boiled egg featured on “PROTEÍNA” portrays the precarious nature of maintaining an ideal image.

On the technical side, the collection explores the material properties of leather and wet pressing to achieve puffer-like round volumes and chain loops.

**ual:** central  
saint martins











**Gonçalo Camboa**

*Central Saint Martins  
London, United Kingdom*









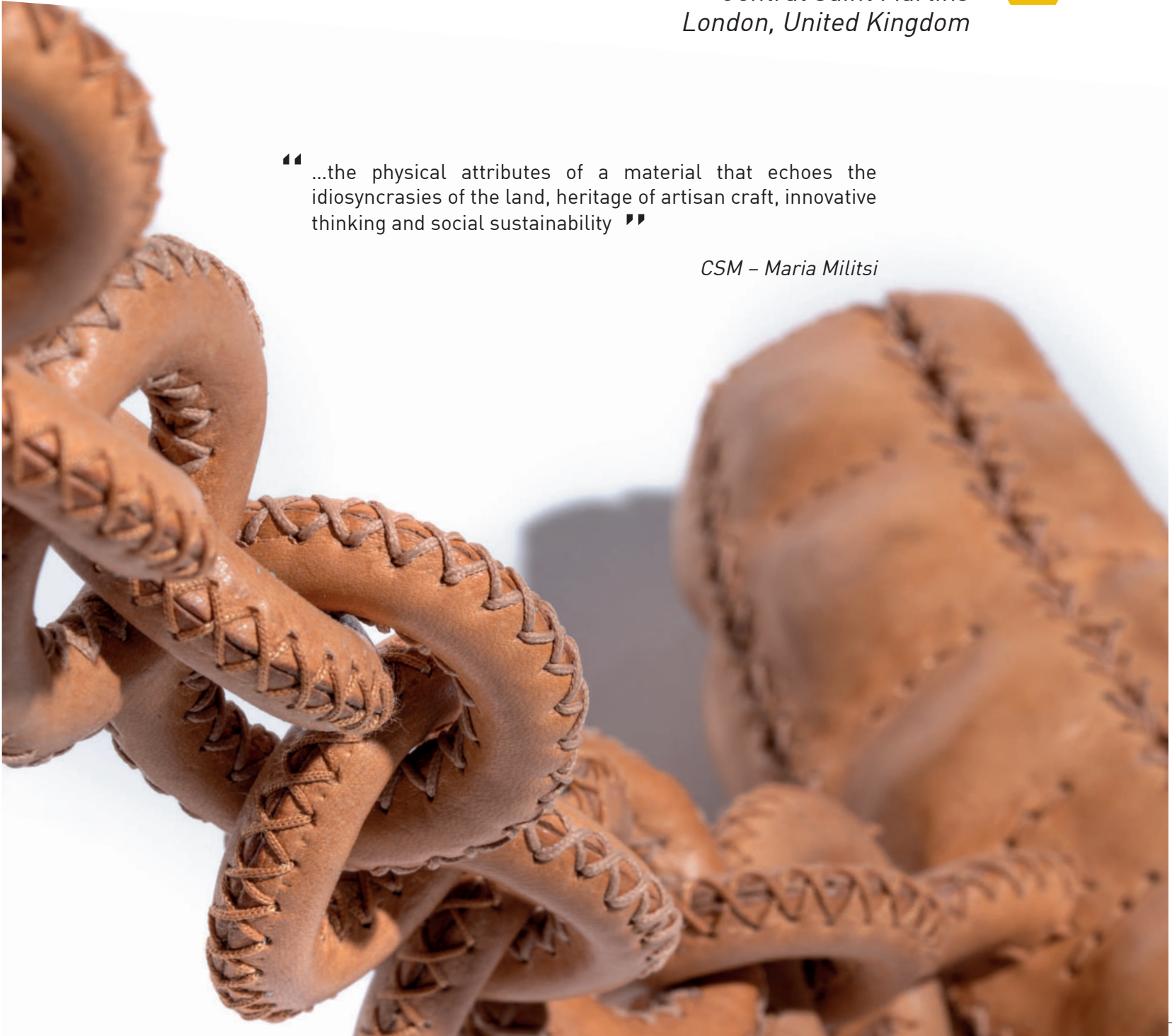
**Gonçalo Camboa**

*Central Saint Martins  
London, United Kingdom*



“...the physical attributes of a material that echoes the idiosyncrasies of the land, heritage of artisan craft, innovative thinking and social sustainability”

*CSM – Maria Militsi*







**MIRKO MICHELACCI**

*ISIA Design - Florence, Italy*

## Rașsa'a

The project symbolizes life, the rediscovery of oneself and the need to escape from daily routine. The 3 products are designed to achieve these goals: a vest that becomes a carpet to spread out; a bag that can be converted into a backpack; a wearable speaker.

The hexagon is a regular polygon that when inscribed into a circle, its side is equal to the radius. In numerology it recalls the number 6, which symbolizes creation. Moreover, the flower of life, is inscribed within a perfectly hexagonal structure.

To make the products traditional processes (like sewing and die cutting) have been combined with the processes typical to rapid prototyping (like milling and laser cutting) that require cad drawing. For the surface finish the leather was burned with a heat gun. In this way the material is reinforced and protected.



**ISIA**

*Firenze*









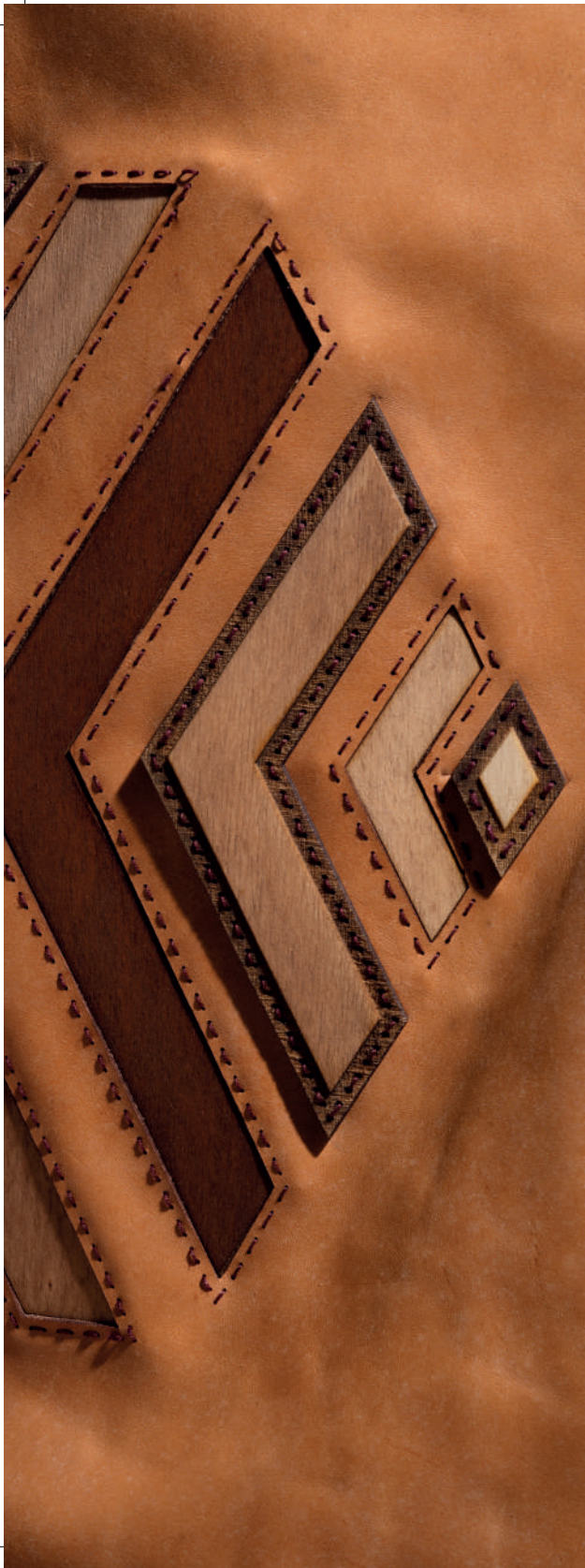


**Mirko Michelacci**

*ISIA Design  
Florence, Italy*







“...an immersive and stunning experience. The atmosphere you breathe is that of ancient knowledge where it is possible to hybridize traditional know how with innovative experimentation”

*ISIA – Francesca Parotti*





**Mirko Michelacci**

*ISIA Design  
Florence, Italy*







**MARIE WITH**

*Kolding School of Design - Kolding, Denmark*

## Time led by hand

I believe the touch of the hand has a value through its lived past that is important to bring with us into the future. Thus, the collection is handcrafted without using any machines. Driven by composition and contrasts I have developed a continuous aesthetic throughout all three accessories. This aesthetic expresses how the valuable work of the hand, challenged by new compositions and contrasts, can move into a new age of handcraft. Meeting the Tuscan leather and its unique properties, I was inspired by traditional craftsmanship of leather goods. Creating the capsule collection, I let the properties of the material guide me in the design process of experimenting and making. During this process it was obvious to me that the vegetable tanned leather has the power to adapt over time and teach us the sensorial knowledge of tactile crafting.













Marie With

*Kolding School of Design  
Kolding, Denmark*









Marie With

*Kolding School of Design  
Kolding, Denmark*



“...The powerful opportunities the material holds for a sustainable future based on quality, longevity, and beauty -driven by craft and design.”

*KOLDING SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
Liv Johanne Eskholm*







**HANNAH ANDERGASSEN**

*NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti - Milan, Italy*

## Arabesque & Grotesque

During our visit at the Museo del Conservatorio di Santa Chiara in San Miniato, I was particularly impressed by the arabesque forms decorating most of the artworks. After some research I learned about the grotesque, the depiction of a human body fusing with an arabesque, leading to its distortion. As someone who studies fashion design I have always felt inspired by the way different forms, accessories or clothes interact with our bodies, manifesting themselves as functional, decorative or distorting. The whole project aims to a natural handmade aesthetics, particularly through the handmade stitching and the use of natural materials for the details. Using different techniques, from wet molding to carving, I started creating arabesque inspired forms out of the veg tan leather, then applying the main concept to different shapes, contexts of use and function.













## Hannah Andergassen

*NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti  
Milan, Italy*









## Hannah Andergassen

*NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti  
Milan, Italy*



“ ...side by side with international students and professors ...  
experiencing industrial and artisan practices and techniques  
led us to a fascinating space of knowledge and material  
experimentation. ”

*NABA – Ilaria Pavone*







**WOUT SPEYERS**

*Rene' Van Den Berg Academy*

*Hoofddorp, The Netherlands*

# The world is a natural product

Vast oceans, unchanging continents.

From afar on the surface not much to be seen.

Beneath the surface however, full of life.

Teeming with bugs, roots, fungi and millions of other organism, creating a thin layer, ensuring our life on earth is possible.

It's the layer we must protect and preserve.

That thin layer is like our subconsciousness.

It grinds and moves, it shakes and falls silent.

It is alive and like all life, it is vulnerable.

We know.... We know how fragile Earth is.

Albeit our knowledge that life is not a game, we continue disrespect and overexploitation.

However.....

There is a place where respect has been part of everyday life.

In Tuscany artisans have been producing leather since the Middle Ages.

Vegetable tanned leather, without heavy metals and chemicals.

Naturally gentle and persistent.

It's time to end the game with the earth and put the world on a pedestal.



RENÉ VAN DEN BERG ACADEMY











**Wout Speyers**

*Rene' Van Den Berg Academy  
Hoofddorp, The Netherlands*









## Wout Speyers

*Rene' Van Den Berg Academy  
Hoofddorp, The Netherlands*



“ ... visits to tanneries, museums, a water purification plant...the workshop by Giorgio Testi...Santa Chiara enjoying homemade local products, wines... to work with all the other talented students and teachers. ”

*RENE' VAN DEN BERG ACADEMY  
René van den Berg*







**JENNIFER SIMS**

*Royal College of Art - London, United Kingdom*

## FLAT - KNIT - FOLD

Natural, unadulterated, vegetable tanned leather in all its glory - stretch marks and all.

I wanted to demonstrate three very different outcomes, showcasing the leather with as little interference as possible, creating form and interest through manipulation, rather than decoration.

The flat bag allows you to closely examine the beauty of the leather, showing the life it lived before tanning. The knitted bag combines a simple and traditional process with the natural and traditional leather. The folded bag takes a flat, simple piece of leather and draws it up into a more complex form.

All three bags are made entirely by hand - cut, stitched and knit with only hand tools, in a slow, careful and traditional way. Linen thread and the absorption of the natural oils from my hands, the only additions.



**Royal College of Art**

Postgraduate Art and Design





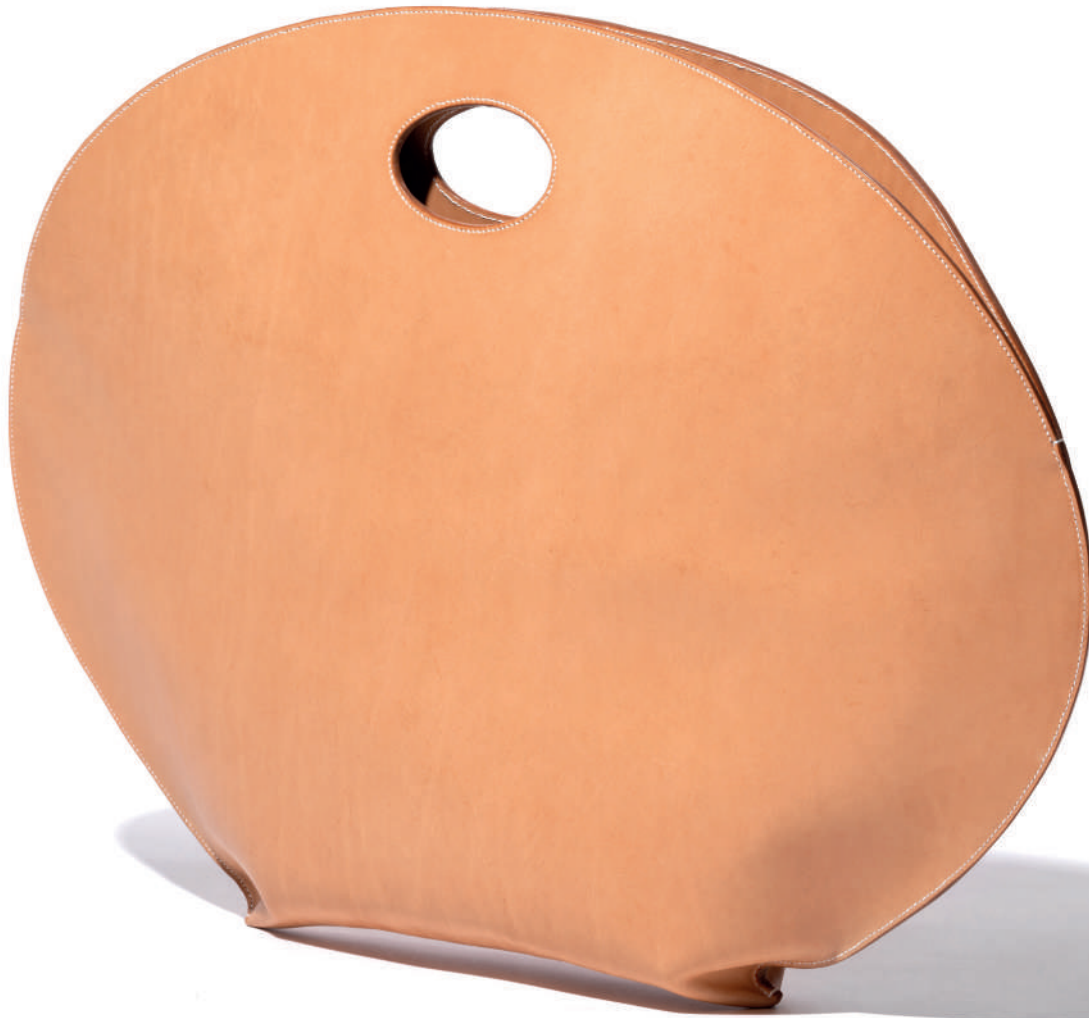






**Jennifer Sims**

*Royal College of Art  
London, United Kingdom*











**Jennifer Sims**

*Royal College of Art  
London, United Kingdom*



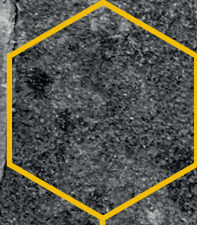
“ My experience at Craft the Leather ... opened for me a different way to work with leather. ”

*RCA – Akiko Ito*





THE SCHOOLS





## AMSTERDAM FASHION INSTITUTE

Amsterdam – The Netherlands

Amsterdam Fashion Institute (AMFI) is the leading fashion education in The Netherlands and is an active part of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS). Within the Digital, Media, and Creative Industries faculty, AMFI teaches the realities of the fashion industry while conducting academic research into the future of Fashion Design, Development, Branding, Business, and Use with more than eight full-time Research Professors. Research is done with staff and students in collaboration with our fellow AI, Software Development, Digital Communication, Digital Design, Creative Business, and Digital Society departments. Inside our Wearable Data Studio and with the Professor of Fashion Technology, we combine cutting-edge technologies like Machine learning with traditional craft technologies like knit and vegetable-tanned leather.

[www.amfi.nl](http://www.amfi.nl)



## CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS University of the Arts London

London - United Kingdom

BA (Honours) Jewellery design at Central Saint Martins is part of the Programme of Jewellery, Textiles and Materials. The course promotes a very broad interpretation of Jewellery and offers a stimulating learning environment in which, innovation, originality and excellence are encouraged and developed. We seek students who are keen to define the future direction of contemporary jewellery. Central Saint Martins, part of the University of the Arts London (UAL), is Internationally renowned for the creative energy of its students, staff, and graduates with an exceptional reputation for educating foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate and research students in arts, design and performance. Alumni include Francesca Amfitheatrof, Emilia Clarke, Gilbert and George, Christopher Kane, Stella McCartney, and Alexander McQueen.

[www.arts.ac.uk](http://www.arts.ac.uk)





## ISIA DESIGN - Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche

Florence - Italy

ISIA Firenze is the first and oldest university-level public institution for Design education in Italy. Institute founded in 1975 to follow up on the great tradition of Italian design, it has been training designers and conducting research in the field of design for over 40 years.

ISIA belongs to the AFAM – Higher Artistic and Musical Education – sector of the Ministry of University and Research (MUR).

The ISIA teaching model is characterised by a high educational quality and an experimental method capable of combining research, cultural and theoretical knowledge with practical / technical skills and experiences in two main areas: Industrial product and systems design and Communication and digital product design

ISIA acts as an experimental laboratory, promoting a three-year and master's university education.

[www.isiadesign.fi.it](http://www.isiadesign.fi.it)



**ISIA** | *Firenze*

## DESIGNSKOLEN KOLDING

Kolding – Denmark

Kolding School of Design builds on the tradition of Danish design, placing focus on design that is meaningful. We believe that innovation comes from relating to history and tradition. The school's approach is not to provide the answer, but to find the answer together. We build on knowledge and research and place emphasis on sensory perception and experimentation – a union of hand and spirit, head and hands. The program is an international talent workshop for Danish design.

We work at eye level, believe in equality and respect diversity. Social inclusion, sustainability and cultural diversity are core values of the school and we work in fields of research, artistic development and knowledge from practice.

Kolding School of Design has university status and provides a framework for a number of recognized researchers in a young field of research as well as an increasing output of PhD projects.

[www.designskolenkolding.dk](http://www.designskolenkolding.dk)





## NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti

Italy

NABA is an international Academy focused on arts and design: it is the largest Academy of Fine Arts in Italy, and the first one to have been recognised by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR), back in 1981. As a recognised Academy, NABA offers in its two campus in Milan and Rome academic diplomas equivalent to first and second level university degrees in the fields of design, fashion design, graphics and communication, multimedia arts, new technologies, set design, visual arts. The Academy was founded by Ausonio Zappa in Milan in 1980 with the involvement of Guido Ballo and Tito Varisco during a first phase, later attracting to its faculty artists such as Gianni Colombo and many others, the idea being to abandon rigorous academic traditions and instead introduce new visions and languages based on contemporary artistic and professional practice. NABA was selected by the QS World University Rankings® by Subject Art & Design as the Best Academy of Fine Arts in Italy and among the top 100 universities in the world, by Frame to be included in the Masterclass Frame Guide to the 30 World's Leading Graduate Design, Architecture and Fashion Schools, and by Domus Magazine as one of Europe's Top 100 schools of Architecture and Design.

[www.naba.it](http://www.naba.it)



## RENE' VAN DEN BERG ACADEMY

Hoofddorp – The Netherlands

The René van den Berg Academy was founded in 2019. It is a private school located in Hoofddorp, The Netherlands.

The school provides a 3-year course for traditional shoemaking. The students learn at least 9 of the most common shoe-styles. The school offers books that show the entire process of each shoe-design on a step-by-step basis. Besides shoes, the program also teaches the students how to modify existing lasts for a perfect fit. Making shoes for partners, family members and even clients is highly advised by the school. Each student has access to their own workstation with a post-bed machine. Other machines, like the belt-sanders and skiving machines are shared. There is extensive attention on how to operate these machines in a proper way. Knowledge on different types of leather is also part of the program. Although not mandatory, the students are challenged to design and make creative variations on the common shoe-styles.

[www.renevandenbergh.nl](http://www.renevandenbergh.nl)



RENÉ VAN DEN BERG ACADEMY



## ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART

London – United Kingdom

Fashion at the RCA is facing forward, asking questions, looking to the new languages of bio materials, virtual identities, the debates and nuances about gender and economic shifts. This all adds to the excellence of line and craftsmanship as the skills required to establish new fashion design and new fashion business models.

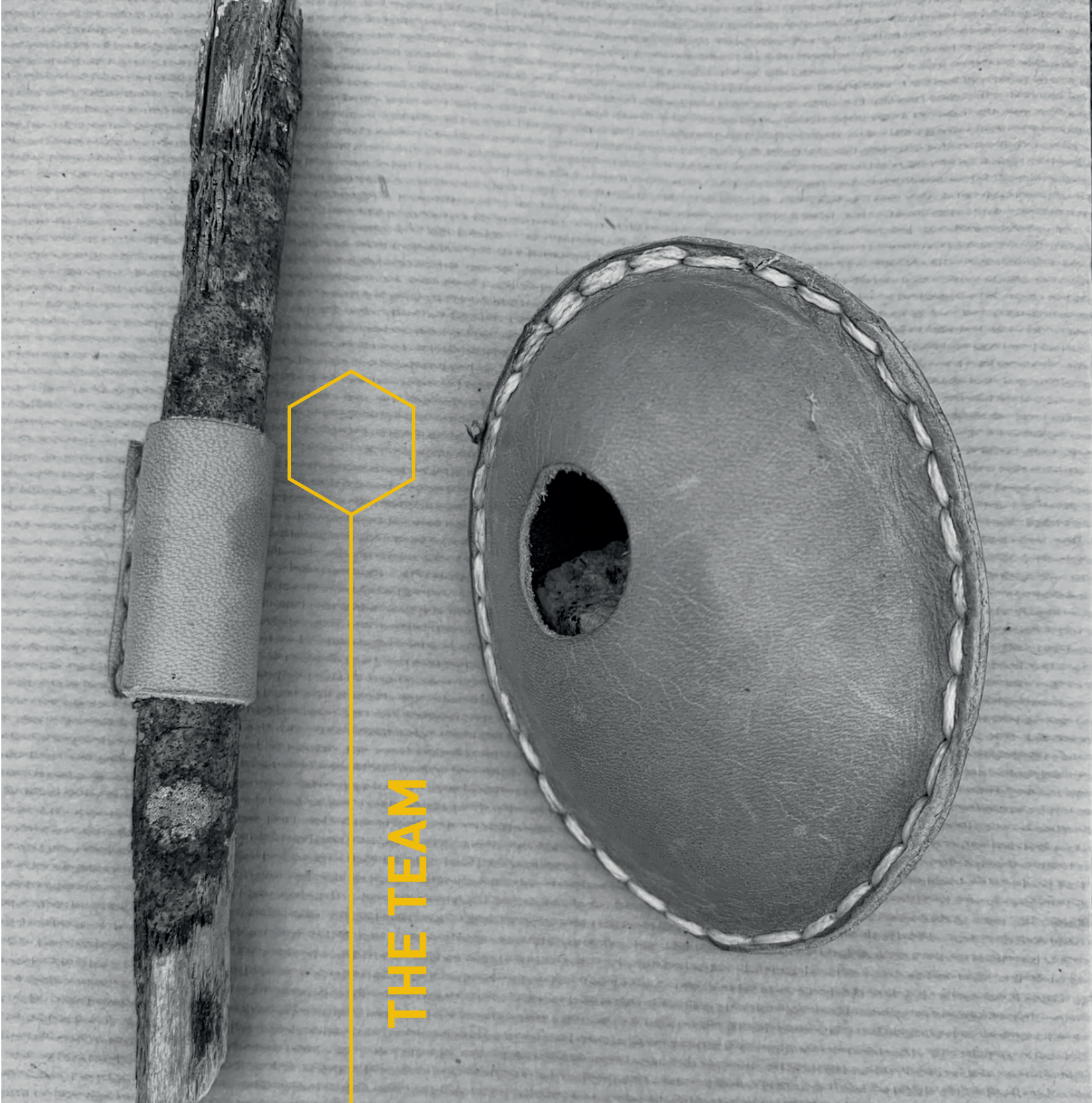
The Royal College of Art (RCA) is the world's number one art and design university (QS World University Rankings), and the only entirely postgraduate university devoted to research and knowledge exchange, teaching and practice in art, design, communication and humanities.

[www.rca.ac.uk](http://www.rca.ac.uk)



**Royal College of Art**  
Postgraduate Art and Design





THE TEAM



# Genuine Italian Vegetable-Tanned Leather Consortium

The Genuine Italian Vegetable-Tanned Leather Consortium was founded in 1994 by a small group of Tuscan tanneries. Linked by their common passion to produce high quality, natural, and long-lasting leather, these tanneries formed a no-profit association to communicate the essential aspects of vegetable tanning. The Consortium's aims are to keep the Italian vegetable-tanning tradition alive, to guarantee a proper tanning process respecting man and the environment, and to promote the Tuscan craft. The origins of this tradition dates to the Middle-Ages in Tuscany and it was already documented in the Florentine Arts and Trades Corporations (the Guild of Leather Crafters was founded in Florence in 1282). So Tuscan vegetable tanning is a perfect marriage of natural quality, heritage tradition and advanced technology.

Today the Consortium has 20 member tanneries, all of them based in Tuscany, in the area between Pisa and Florence called 'Tuscan Leather District'.

The Consortium is the exclusive owner of the trademark "Pelle Conciata al Vegetale in Toscana" (Tuscan Vegetable Tanned Leather). The trademark has been registered internationally. It guarantees the quality of raw materials used and the artisan production process, but most of all it certifies the 100% Tuscan origin of the leather.

Only the tanneries that are members of the Consortium and comply with the Consortium Production Regulations can sell vegetable tanned leather with the Pelle Conciata al Vegetale in Toscana symbol.

[www.pellealvegetale.it](http://www.pellealvegetale.it)



## DIANE BECKER

### *Director of Didactic Projects*

Having worked in all aspects of the fashion accessories field: retail, trend forecasting, shoe design, and fashion design education, from New York to Tokyo to Firenze - Diane brings an international vision to this iconic Tuscan project. Researching and conducting this intensive, experiential workshop that delves deeply into how veg-tan leather is made and the ethical and sustainable choices involved, she intends to inspire the creation of wonderful objects that can last a long time.



## GIORGIO TESTI

### *Master Craftsman*

With a lifetime of experience, from directing high end luxury manufacturing to a personal leather goods atelier on his native Island of Elba, Giorgio has the knowledge, tools, techniques but above all the passion for working with Tuscan veg-tan leather. Constantly exploring new ways of using his favorite material, he leads the practical workshop with demonstrations of an entire vocabulary for creating with veg tan leather that inspires everyone, from the student who approaches leather for the very first time, to the skilled expert delighted to explore something new in this atmosphere of activity and creativity.







## 9<sup>th</sup> International Creative Competition for new designer/makers

Catalogue of the work inspired by the weeklong international workshop  
exploring the culture, tradition, and innovative possibilities of a product  
of local excellence: Tuscan Vegetable-Tanned Leather.

Photo and Artwork: Key Image + Marketing.

With special thanks to all of the community that makes Craft the Leather possible:

Mario Berner, Gustavo Defeo,

Consorzio CuoioDepur, Consorzio Toscana Manifatture, PO.TE.CO.,  
the member tanners of the Consorzio, for their continuing support of this project  
through the generous sharing of their time, experience, and of course, leathers,  
and all the staff at the Fondazione Conservatorio Santa Chiara in San Miniato.



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