





## TRANSFORMATIVE

Every workshop seems to crystallize around a distinct point of view- a theme that ties together all the experiences and information. It is determined by the unique group that has come together in San Miniato, in the Tuscan Leather District: students preparing for a professional career in creativity and their tutors bringing deep and varied portfolios of achievement in their fields of design and creation, of both products and systems of ethical sustainability.

The highly specialized research of the tanning sector and the complex interaction with a very specific environment (a heritage landscape rich in food specialties) give us parameters to consider what are sustainable choices based on new systems of empirical measurement. We consider the questions around biodegradability and what might be the optimal timeline for this process. How long should things last, and what can happen in afterlives?

And then, as always, the material experience of working with the veg tanned leathers is enchanting. The power of making, the dance of tools and surfaces, of experiments and happy surprises, and the reawakening of the deep, very human, joy of craft.

Looking now at the collections that have been created, some by students for whom this was their first experience working with leather, we see evidenced the profound work of the tanners to transform resources and create a material of infinite storytelling capacities.

Dume Becker

## Consorzio Vera Pelle Italiana Conciata al Vegetale

The Italian Vegetable-Tanned Leather Consortium was founded in 1994 by a small group of Tuscan tanners with the shared passion to produce high-quality, natural, and long-lasting leather, establishing a non-profit association to communicate the essential aspects of vegetable tanning. The Consortium's mission is to keep the Italian vegetable-tanning tradition alive, to guarantee a proper tanning process respecting the environment, and to promote the Tuscan craft. With origins in the Middle Ages in Tuscany, vegetable-tanning was recognized by the Florentine Arts and Trades Corporations (the Guild of Leather Crafters was founded in Florence in 1282). Today the Consortium has 19 member tanneries, all of them based in the Tuscan Leather District, in the area between Pisa and Florence.

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% of the process happens in Tuscany. 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.

Since 2012, the Consortium has extended a yearly invitation to talented students and tutors from the most prestigious and innovative international fashion and design institutes to participate in an experiential training workshop: Craft the Leather. This project aims to enrich the technical know-how of designer/makers intending to work professionally in the international fashion system and to enhance their knowledge of Tuscan vegetable-tanned leather both as a material and the environmental impact of its production. Craft the Leather 2023 is the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the project.

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.









## Leather waves

The movement and energy of the forms evoke, for me, an Amazonian warrior who dresses and molds the leather as a fluid armor. The project unfolds through the manipulation of wet leather, modeled on the body, highlighting the qualities of vegetable-tanned leather.

The molded leather creates the illusion of waves moving on the body, expressing a sensation of life, movement, strength, and fluidity. Each item in the collection is shaped to wrap the body without hiding its nakedness, but rather emphasizing every detail, from stretch marks to scars. The semi-naked body, elegant and wild, just like the vegetable-tanned skin, naked and precious in its imperfection, expresses a beauty that speaks and tells authentic and vivid stories.

It has been an incredible creative journey for me, allowing me to transform leather into a living canvas through which I could express an idea of strength, femininity, and authenticity.





ALESSANDRO BRIENZA Accademia Italiana - Florence, Italy







### Alessandro Brienza

Accademia Italiana Florence, Italy



Accademia Italian campuses in Flor was the first Flore international leve international netw and Creative stud The vibrant stude more than 50% of nationalities. Accademia Italian accredited by the short professiona abroad experience

We need to return to a design dimension that starts from the dialogue with the matter. This incredible material can bring to life objects that are not only unique, but also that preserve and tell stories, conveying emotions. A living material that reflects the beauty of time and transformations.

### ACCADEMIA ITALIANA

Italy

Accademia Italiana is an international school of creative arts with campuses in Florence and Rome. Founded in 1984, Accademia Italiana was the first Florentine School of art, fashion and design operating on an international level. Today, Accademia Italiana is part of AD Education, an international network of 20+ schools specialized in the fields of Design and Creative studies with more than 70 campuses around Europe.

The vibrant student community of Accademia Italiana is composed of more than 50% of international students coming from 70+ different

Accademia Italiana offers full bachelor's and master's degree programs accredited by the Italian Ministry for Universities and Research (MUR), short professional programs, summer courses and a unique study abroad experience for US university students.

www.accademiaitaliana.com

Accademia Italiana – Sarah Magni



## Soma

As human beings we all have some sort of identity that differentiates us from one another. What we all have in common though is that we all have a body. And this body is unique. It comes in different shades, heights, and weights, with scars and its own way the skin stretches as it ages. Our body is a vessel that carries us from place to place throughout our lives.

For this collection I am focused on revealing the true nature of vegetable-tanned leather and how it can be subtly manipulated. My process started from experimentation on the skin in its most natural state. I stained the leather with wood stain to expose the stretch marks of the skin revealing the signs of its age.

The shapes I created represent the natural nonsymmetrical curves our body has inside and out. The closures symbolize how our body holds in our souls.

Soma is our body in its complete wholeness.









Transportation Design.

#### **COLLEGE FOR CREATIVE STUDIES** USA

Located in the heart of Detroit, the College for Creative Studies (CCS) is a world-class institution that educates artists and designers to be leaders in the creative professions. CCS provides students with the tools needed for successful careers in the dynamic and growing creative industries, fostering students' resolve to pursue excellence, act ethically, engage their responsibilities as citizens, and learn throughout their lives. With world-class faculty and unsurpassed facilities, students learn to be visual communicators who actively use art and design toward the betterment of society.

The College for Creative Studies (CCS) is a nonprofit, private college. Founded in 1906 as the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts, CCS plays a key role in Detroit's cultural and educational communities. A fully accredited college, CCS enrolls more than 1,400 students, pursuing Master of Fine Arts degrees in Color and Materials Design, Interaction Design, Integrated Design and Transportation Design and Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in Advertising Design, Art Education, Crafts, Entertainment Arts, Fashion Accessories Design, Fine Arts, Graphic Design, Illustration, Interior Design, Photography, Product Design and

#### www.collegeforcreativestudies.edu

Very grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with the Craft The Leather team and many talented international designers and mentors. Their passion and commitment to raising awareness and fostering educational opportunity has been truly transformative. We will forever cherish this enriching experience.

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College for Creative Studies – Stephen Schock



# a Day in Tuscany

My shoe collection is inspired by my stay in Tuscany, full of sensational surprises when you live in the moment, embracing the day's every kind of surprise and believing in miracles. Much like crafting, where the imperfections contribute to the uniqueness of each piece, our expectations in our daily lives don't always turn out as we expect. In both realms, it's the individual moments and outcomes that stand out as truly unique.

*Espresso Elegance Flats* are crafted for enjoying long breakfasts, savoring beautiful views, and sharing inspiring thoughts. It doesn't really matter if you get out of bed on the wrong foot; we can create our wonderful day ahead.

Sagra Serenity Spaghetti Clogs have molded through walks in Tuscany's old streets, feeling like they'll last forever with their warm wooden soles—a tribute to classic clogs.

Golden Elegance Cinderella Stilettos with golden steps transport the user to Wonderland. Wondering about the other shoe, the prince, and long golden curly strands, wondering if somebody will step on it. It's common to wonder about everything but important not to forget to dream big.









The Estonian Art Academy Accessory and Bookbinding department saw its beginning in 1917 when the bookbinding and cardboard workshop opened in the former art school in Tallinn. Soon, all fine leatherwork was taught there. For a very long time, we were called the Department of Leather Art and taught the specialty of leather art and design. Today, the specialisation is an option within the BA curriculum of Fashion, Textile and Accessory Design. The curriculum concentrates on the design of bags, footwear, gloves, headwear etc, using creativity, sustainable means, research, innovation and cooperation with companies. The curriculum also has bookbinding projects, which give skills for designing and creating exclusive products and artefacts. Our studios support professional studies with the know-how and machinery for the students to make final products themselves. There is an opportunity to continue professional studies in the MA programmes of the Faculty of Design: Circular Design, Social Design and Craft Studies.

It was a great pleasure to see one of the largest leather production areas in Europe. Participating in the project gave me the confidence to continue working with vegetable-tanned leather, an excellent material for which alternatives cannot yet be produced.

### **EKA - EESTI KUNSTIACADEEMIA**

Estonia

#### www.artun.ee

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EKA – Eve Kaaret



## **39 Queens**

Most, if not all that's made in physical space is subject to the standard of perfection. Making the sculptures was a selfexploration, questioning self-worth and being in fetishized environments that praise the masks that wrap around desire. Three women's collective experience of being nearly blinded by the mask they wear, with only their natural hair left of their true character. The hair plays a role of desire for the mask's imperfections, which I aimed to embrace, celebrating its stretch marks and scars.





Iceland University of the Arts - Reykjavík, Iceland **KARITAS SPANÒ** 





with academic and artistic research. ecological responsibility. Iceland and internationally.

Iceland University of the Arts – Katrin Maria Karadottir 💵

### **ICELAND UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS**

Iceland

Founded in 1999, the Iceland University of the Arts (IUA) offers a range of study programmes in fine arts, architecture, design, performing arts, arts education, film, and music. This multidisciplinary institution is committed to an educational approach that combines artistic creativity

The Design Department, with its BA programmes in Fashion Design, Visual Communication, and Product Design, along with the MA Design and New Environments programme, emphasizes critical thinking, environmental consciousness, and social collaboration with community projects and industry partnerships. It regards design as a potent force for societal impact and transformation, encouraging a dynamic interplay between local relevance and global innovation. The department's philosophy is rooted in creative exploration, forward-thinking, and

IUA cultivates interdisciplinary collaboration and cultural engagement across all its programmes, enriched by international exchanges and collaborations. This comprehensive approach positions graduates to play influential roles in the diverse fields of arts and design, both in

#### www.lhi.is

<sup>11</sup> It is so important in our time to really look into materials and craftsmanship. To know how things are made, that nothing goes to waste, strict environmental standards set for the production, not to mention the importance of the endlife of the product that it is biodegradable. It was also very inspiring to meet the people involved in making this program happen and the other participants – all generous and talented people.



# **Eternal Vitality**

All things are endless. Every line and every silhouette are a reflection of nature's essential vitality. The charm of Tuscan vegetable-tanned leather accentuates the leather's vitality.

Inspired by the golden ratio, the three-piece collection combines the uniqueness of handcrafted leather, through molding, carving and shaping to bring out the leathers natural elements.

Practicality and artistry are woven through the work, with the aim of broadening the integration of vegetable-tanned leather into modern lifestyle pieces. I believe that sustainable slow fashion is a philosophy that leads us to the original meaning of life by allowing us to breath in unison with the earth.

> Kingston University London







## Bingbing Bai

Kingston University London, UK





categories.

Home to Kingston School of Art, it is internationally renowned for producing highly skilled industry-ready fashion graduates who go on to work at leading labels such as Burberry, Calvin Klein, Paul Smith, All Saints, Alexander McQueen, Margiela and Saint Laurent. The Department of Fashion has strong industry links and four courses to choose from -Fashion BA (Hons), Fashion Promotion and Communications BA (Hons), Fashion MA and Sustainable Fashion: Business and Practices MA.

### **Bingbing Bai**

#### **KINGSTON UNIVERSITY** UK

Kingston University opens up opportunities, equipping students with the future skills and knowledge to thrive in successful careers. Its teaching excellence has recently been recognised in the latest Teaching Excellence Framework, where the University was one of just 46 higher education providers to secure an overall Gold rating, also receiving Gold awards for both the student experience and student outcomes

www.kingston.ac.uk

I thought I knew leather but my participation in the Craft the Leather workshop showed me a whole new world of possibilities.

Kingston University – Sass Brown



# **Wearing Etiquette**

This collection of three artefacts represents my reflection on formal social behavioral norms in the context of Chinese working culture. My work identifies and captures particular gestures of a handshake, a fist and palm salute, and the universal thumbs up. I aim to explore and frame the body language of these three gestures as wearable expressions.

The fabrication techniques used are wet-moulding and weaving leather in combination with bamboo. I focus on how the leather transforms from being moulded and stitched over the form of human hands and shifts seamlessly into an open weave with bamboo tips.

Working with CTL fine leathers has taught me the benefit of crafting with quality, where material manipulation is fluid, and surface remains smooth and delicate. Coming from a 3rd generation of a family business in bamboo craft this experience has allowed me to merge my family legacy of craft with my interest in luxury leather goods and enriched my journey as a maker.







## Shiyu Gong



departments. and reflect on our lives today.

#### LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION UK

The University of the Arts London is Europe's largest specialist arts and design university, home to 19,000 students from over 130 countries. It brings together six esteemed arts, design, fashion and media colleges -London College of Fashion being one of them.

Historically LCF was 'Cordwainers, the prestigious school for shoemakers', founded in the late 19th Century, and over these 125 years the school has evolved to accommodate the ever-changing ideas and demands of the fashion industry. The heritage of craftsmanship and expertise set in place by the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers remains strong at the core of the Footwear, Accessories and Artefact

MA Fashion Artefact at LCF is now in its sixteenth year. It is internationally recognised as a pioneering incubator of artisan designer makers, where we nurture a combination of traditional craftsmanship, industrial technologies and independent design perspectives to make contemporary fashion products that challenge socio cultural attitudes

www.arts.ac.uk

*…we are rarely invited to focus on one 'thing' at a time in our noisy* lives – but this workshop is designed to swath you in the process and passion that surrounds this material right at the heart of Italian culture. On a personal note – I was able to re-connect with my own affinity with leather and making through the physical workshop days. Using this sort of leather is a visceral experience and remembering that natural leather responds to touch and manipulation by hand is the very reason I started making shoes. Sometimes we need space to play and this 'leather retreat' allowed me to re-connect with my own love of making.

London College of Fashion – Georgina Goodman



# An Analogy of Tarnished Culture

In today's rapidly changing world, the tension between traditional culture and global development is often palpable. This collection unravels the two conflicting forces of heritage and gentrification coalescing into one, contributing to a deeper understanding of how culture evolves in the modern age.

Drawing inspiration from my own heritage, these products reference and distort signifiers of Mexican culture on veg-tan leather with a steel corroded surface design. This process is made possible by the leather's natural ability to evolve and transform boundlessly allowing the rusted materiality to obscure and industrialize the initial inspiration emerging An Analogy of Tarnished Culture.







### Balbina Brunell

Parsons School of Fashion New York, USA



The innovative Parsons BFA Fashion Design program has trained six generations of designers who have shaped the global industry. Employing design thinking and creative problem-solving strategies, students explore form, silhouette, material, and process - including social and environmental imperatives — to create beautiful, sustainable, responsibly produced fashion for a complex and evolving field. Uniquely within global undergraduate Fashion study students are able to select specialist study routes offering opportunities to build connections between fashion, the body, and object. Within the Fashion Product pathway students learn to use craft methodologies and technological advances to develop a range of new fashion-led products developed with function, environmental context, and user in mind. We consider fashion products in the broadest sense, examining societal impact and responsibility, ethics, performance, narrative, and storytelling as conceptual manifestations, locators, social signifiers, and platforms for meaningful positive impact.

www.newschool.edu/parsons/bfa-fashion-design/

#### **PARSONS SCHOOL OF FASHION** USA

*Craft the Leather was an unforgettable experience and opportunity* to engage with the rich history and heritage of localized making and sustainable leather production in Tuscany. The residency connected a community of global designers, practitioners and educators dedicated to craft, haptic making, slow fashion and the preservation of tradition for future generations.

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Parsons School of Fashion – Jane Francis



## **CHIARA**

In the heart of San Miniato, a captivating collection emerged— CHIARA; three pieces that unite to form an ensemble. Together, they signify a journey of becoming, where spirituality and human experience merge.

The arm cuff mirrors organic patterns from the town's flora and the motifs of Santa Chiara Museum's tapestries. The cape is inspired by religious attire evoking flowers in bloom. The headdress introduces an element of secrecy by concealing part of the face, encouraging us to focus on what lies directly in front.

Beyond aesthetics, CHIARA has a deep commitment to sustainability, embracing the concept of "unmaking" by refraining from using other materials and considering the end of life of the collection. Through the use of technologies, an intertwined mechanism was designed for the shoulders, making any additional thread unnecessary.

CHIARA, a one-material design collection, symbolizes my connection with the heritage of San Miniato, creating cohesion through form and material.

## TU/e









Industrial Design at TU/e 's mission is to carry out research on and education in the design of systems with emerging technologies in a societal context. This mission places us in a unique balance between technical innovation and design strategies, keeping us at the cutting edge of our disciplines, which prepares our students to handle wicked problems and be challenge-led solvers.

leather processing.

#### UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY EINDHOVEN

The Netherlands

www.tue.nl

*Craft The Leather provided us an exceptional educational and* practically comprehensive overview into transparent ways and differences in leather processing. From front and center manufacturing, including shipping, processing, finishing, and chemistry-- to hands on crafting with guided master techniques, we all learned together and from one another, ways of rethinking and making with veg-tanned leather and how this special leather and processing stands apart from other forms of toxic

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TU/e Industrial Design – Holly Krueger



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

Catalogue of the work inspired by the weeklong workshop immersed in the culture, tradition, and the frontiers of research of the Tuscan Leather district. These are the explorations and celebrations of the innovative possibilities of this 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: Ars Tinctoria, Consorzio CuoioDepur, Consorzio Toscana Manifatture, PO.TE.CO., Mario Bemer, Cassandra Kane and Zerolab Firenze, 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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