

### Notes from the Biosphere

The biosphere...all the areas of the Earth in which the environmental conditions allow the development of life.

Sustainable Design today is the imperative of designing and making objects in harmony with the natural systems of our biosphere, using materials capable of long life, repair, and final biodegradability. Vegetable-tanned leather, one of the oldest transformations of resources, has been interpreted in the works collected here reflecting the awareness of the origins of the material and inspiring connections to ancestral stories of personal, generational, and contemporary creativity.

From the visceral work of the tanning process and the network of environmental protections that make this district the gold standard worldwide, we visit the ground-breaking research happening in the highly specialized laboratories dedicated to materials, their lifecycles and footprint, while traveling through a landscape shaped by centuries of place specific agriculture, vineyards and olive groves.

Each group that participates in Craft the Leather creates a very special dynamic around the experience of life in the Tuscan Leather District. The unique interaction of the tutors, (many in this cohort with well known professional work as designers/artist/shoemakers) and the students, exploring their interaction with the world of craft, product, values and impact, provides unexpected insights as we explore the complex and interdependent systems of the Leather District. We also have a tradition of asking for an "artifact" as a group project produced during the workshop, and the piece created by CtL 2024 absolutely embodies the experience.

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### Consorzio Vera Pelle Italiana Conciata al Vegetale

The Italian Vegetable-Tanned Leather Consortium was founded in 1994 by a small group of Tuscan tanneries that shared the passion to produce natural, high quality, long-lasting leather, embodying both heritage traditions and the most advanced environmental protocols. The Consortium, a non-profit association dedicated to the communication of the essential aspects of vegetable tanning, has as its mission to keep the Italian vegetable-tanning tradition alive, to guarantee a correct tanning process that respects the environment, and to promote the Tuscan craft. It is a tradition that has its origins in the Middle-Ages in Tuscany, documented in the Florentine Arts and Trades Corporations (the Guild of Leather Crafters was founded in Florence in 1282). Today the Consortium and its member tanneries are based in Tuscany, in the area between Pisa and Florence known as '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 that 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.

Beginning in 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 program, based in the heart of the Tuscan Leather District, focuses on the technical know-how of designer/makers intending to work professionally in the international fashion system. Importantly it provides a broad base for their knowledge of Tuscan vegetable-tanned leather both as a material and the environmental impact of its lifecycle. Craft the Leather 2024 is the 11th edition of the project..

## **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.



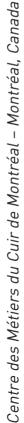
### GIORGIO TESTI Master Craftsman

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.











# Organimétrie

During my stay in Tuscany, I fell in love with vegetable-tanned leather—a unique material that pushes the boundaries of my creativity. What truly captivated me was discovering how, beyond its incredible aesthetic and technical qualities, this leather is also one of the most eco-friendly options available. This connection to nature deeply resonated with me, as it aligns with my own values.

I sought to reflect the finesse and technical precision of the perfectly smooth leather, and its sensuality and richness when it is shaped and molded. This seems a metaphor for creativity itself—a blend of organic thought and structured precision. Incorporating gold leaf felt like the ideal way to enhance the natural color of vegetable-tanned leather and highlight its timeless elegance.







### CYRIELLE SALAMON









#### CENTRE DES METIÉRS DU CUIR DE MONTRÉAL

Canada

The Centre des Métiers du Cuir de Montréal (CMCM) is Canada's only leather working school, dedicated to training artisans in leather craft, accessory, and shoemaking design. Our hands-on program covers traditional techniques and modern design, allowing students to create unique, high-quality pieces. We also offer continuing education for professional leatherworkers to refine and expand their skills. Through courses, workshops, exhibitions, and events, we support emerging talent and celebrate the next generation of artisans, fostering a community committed to craftsmanship, innovation, and cultural diversity in leatherwork.

cmcm.qc.ca

Very grateful for the invitation to witness the process of Tuscan veg tan leather production, ...to understand first-hand the full cycle of this material and to meet the humans behind these processes. The material-driven, experimental workshops reinvigorated my own relationship with veg tan leather, and allowed us all to share perspectives and practices with a global community of designers, educators and students.

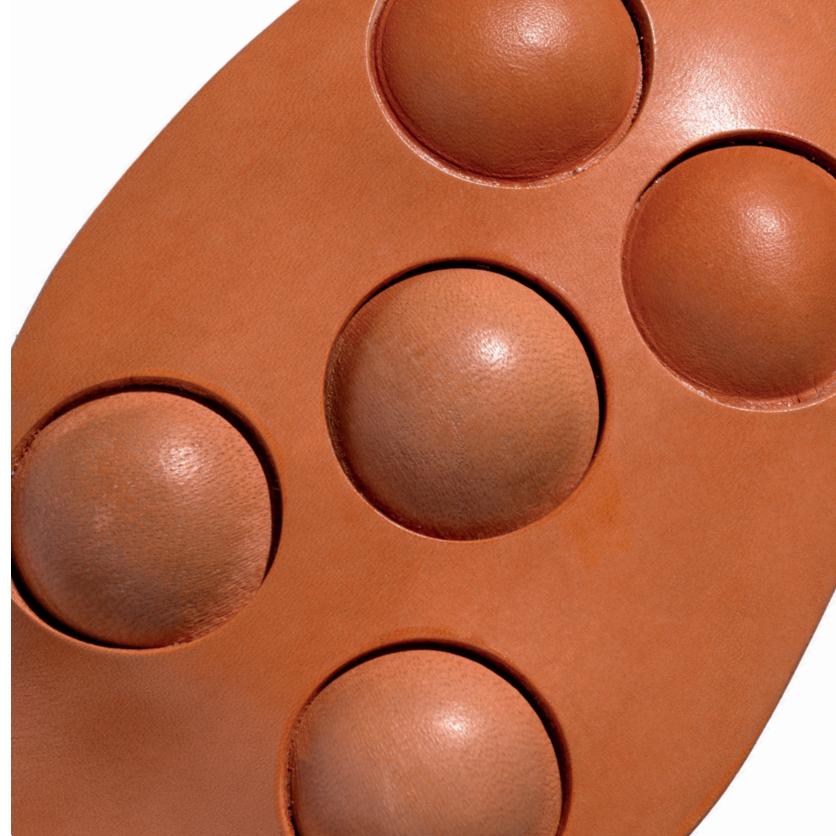
Centre des Metiérs du Cuir de Montréal - Niki Jessup



# Roots and Modernity

Witnessing the traditional tanning process using wood chips allowed me to rediscover the fundamental charm of the material. This experience led to the development of new details, such as cut lines that evoke the texture of wood.

To maximize the unique characteristics of vegetable-tanned leather, the soles were shaped by molding damp leather to create organic undulations. The selection of uppers and forms was guided by the aim of harmonizing the material's natural qualities with a balance of craftsmanship and contemporary sensibilities. By combining these elements, this collection seeks to honor the natural texture of leather while presenting new possibilities for modern shoemaking.







### ASAHI SATO

Hiko Mizuno College of Jewelry Tokyo - Japan







#### HIKO MIZUNO COLLEGE OF JEWELRY

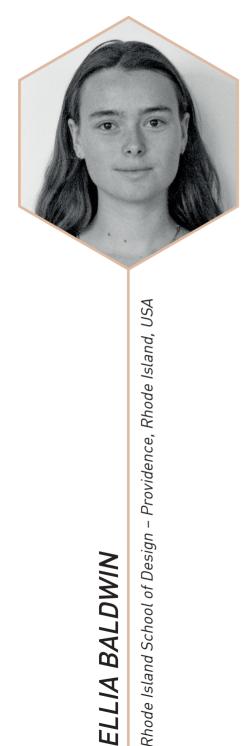
Japan

Hiko Mizuno College of Jewelry is the only government authorized jewelry college in Japan. It has continued its journey as a college nurturing "making" and creative design techniques by establishing the Watch, Shoes, and Bag departments, and in 2012, the Tokyo College of Cycle Design. Hiko Mizuno has attracted global recognition as an academy of developing design fields. Our educational policy "Man & Object" informs all areas of study: the relationship of objects to the human body and all products are designed with a good understanding of the human structure. The pieces produced by the students can be considered art pieces as well as fashion/product designs directly related to contemporary life styles.

www.hikohiko.jp

Craft the Leather gave us such an inspiring opportunity to meet many international talented designers. The workshops felt like experimental spaces, offering the freedom to explore materials and tools. The environment embodies the essence of education and represents an ideal learning setting.

Hiko Mizuno College of Jewelry - Hiroko Matsumoto



# **Freemartin**

Crafting these works has felt like a form of worship—rooted in time, process, understanding, and care. The origins of leather draw my attention to the animal whose hide becomes mine to use. I ask: What is it to be born for harvest and consumption?

I studied cows' behaviors, anatomy, and movements, shaping a love story: a herder, awestruck by his wards, takes on their likeness, crafting from materials they leave behind. Each piece—boots, a bag, and a whip—was made intentionally, balancing function and embellishment. I incorporated cow bones into the boots' heels and whip handle, while the bag mirrors stomach forms. Leather deserves our respect; caredfor objects give back cyclically, echoing Consorzio Vera Pelle's ethos.







### ELLIA BALDWIN





#### RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Rhode Island - USA

The Rhode Island School of Design, RISD's mission, through its college and museum, is to educate its students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship, innovation and critical making.

www.risd.edu

Injecting a deep understanding of the cyclical and far-reaching benefits of leather use in apparel and goods into the student design process heals a disconnect between material and product that will help us all shift toward better quality, longer lasting beautiful objects.

Craft the Leather is a life-changing event for students. It offers them an accessible, scaled approach toward a sophisticated relationship between materials, quality and production, and the design work they will influence to move away from current systems that profoundly and negatively affect individuals, targeted groups, climate, and our planet.

Rhode Island School of Design - Sarah Madeleine T. Guerin

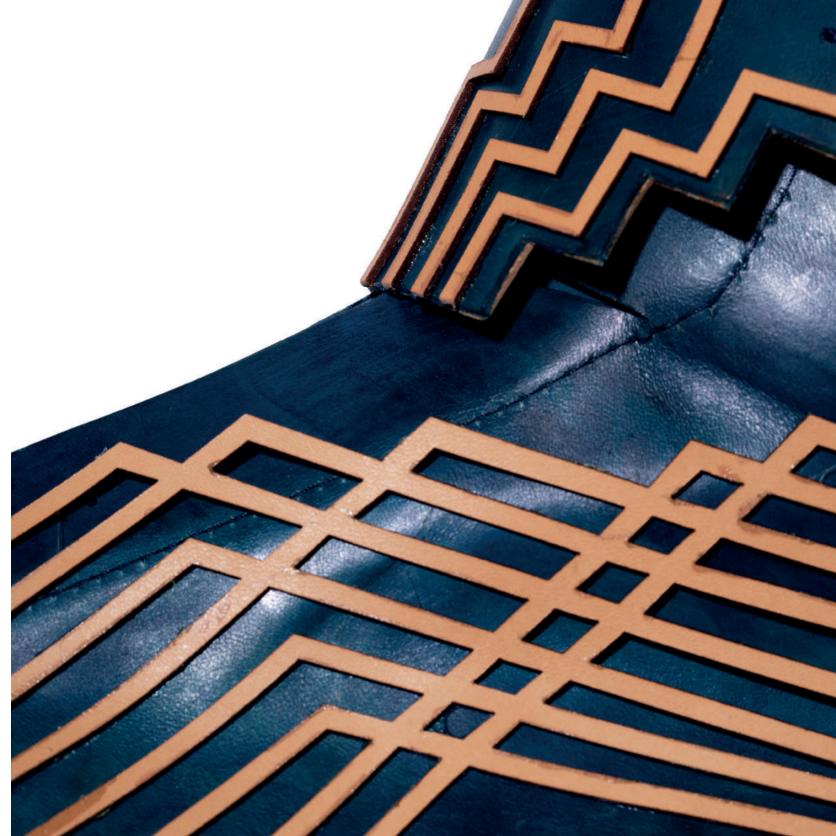


# LEXaqua

LEXaqua is a collection that merges the worlds of design, law and craftsmanship. Inspired by the regulatory frameworks that govern Tuscany's historic leather tanning industry. As both a designer and a legal advisor, I explored the Italian tanning processes and the legal landscape during my time in Tuscany.

This collection delves into the Italian legal landscape, particularly environmental law and intellectual property, which regulate the craft and protect its heritage. Each shoe embodies a stage in the water cycle fundamental to leather production, echoing the environmental regulations that ensure sustainable practices and the legal safeguards that preserve artisanal knowledge.







### **DEMPSEY PAUWELS**

d'Academie beeld – Sint-Niklaas Sint-Niklaas, Belgium









#### D'ACADEMIE BEELD - SINT-NIKLAAS

Belgium

d'Academie Beeld Sint-Niklaas, Belgium, is part of the part-time art education system in Belgium. Students attend evening courses and during weekends. The four-year shoe design program focuses on the dynamic between the artistic and craft aspects. Students are trained to analyze these different angles of approach and stimulated to push their boundaries. The program was set up to train shoe designers who are capable of using their creativity to design shoes and turn out prototypes. Since 2019 students can choose to study 2 more years as a master course specialization. The department is very ambitious. By establishing contacts with other institutions, foreign schools, studios, workshops and the industry specialized in shoes, we create an environment where the students can fully develop themselves. The apotheosis of every academic year is a show, in collaboration with the fashion design department, where the designs of the students are shown to a mixed public of professionals and fashion lovers.

#### www.beeld.academiesintniklaas.be

What really struck me is how passionate the people in the leather industry are and how they breathe the story of this area .

Craft the Leather gives students the opportunity to discover vegetable-tanned leather in a very thorough way, from the tanning process and everything involved to its use and applications.

d'Academie beeld - Sint-Niklaas - Anne Poesen



# Dear Olimpia

My design concept for this project was inspired by the research about my ancestor Olimpia, a Cimbrian woman. Cimbrians are known as an historical ethnic minority from Northern Europe who came to the Cansiglio forest in the nineteenth century; It's the place where my mum was born and where my grandfather is living today.

The jacket's curves are inspired by the collars of children's shirts, the boots were the most common footwear of that time and the shape of culottes' is taken from my grandmother's trousseau.

Each piece enhances the intrinsic characteristics of the material: the structural resistance in the larger panels, the plasticity in the folds and the propensity for a positive aesthetic variation due to use and sun exposure.

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### MARIA CHIARA TEMPERA

IUAV Università di Venezia Venezia, Italy







## MARIA CHIARA TEMPERA

# **IUAV UNIVERSITÀ DI VENEZIA**

Italy

The luav University of Venice is currently an institution entirely dedicated to design, distinguished by its strong experimental focus. Originally established as the University Institute of Architecture, it now encompasses a range of disciplines, including urban planning, product design, fashion design, and multimedia arts. It was the first Italian university to introduce design studios, adopting an educational model that combines theoretical training in the humanities with hands-on, experimental laboratory work.

Specifically, the Bachelor's Degree program in Fashion Design and Multimedia Arts integrates analytical and design methodologies with a particular emphasis on material culture. Throughout the three-year program, students engage with theoretical courses on aesthetics, the history of fashion, and the arts, alongside fashion design studios. The program explores creative processes and products, fostering a dialogue between artistic research and design practice. It extends the concept of technological innovation to address themes of the body, identity, and memory in contemporary visual and design culture. The program is closely connected to the productive, conceptual, industrial, and consumer systems of art and fashion, with a particular focus on the Made in Italy context.

### www.iuav.it

The collaboration between different schools and the Consorzio demonstrates how possible and fundamental it is to evolve the fashion system by encouraging synergy between research, teaching and industry by deepening the knowledge of raw materials, production symbiosis and sustainability strategies.

IUAV Università di Venezia – Alessandro Zannoni





# **Traces of Connection**

Our lives are deeply connected to nature, evolving together through time. Traces of Connection explores this interplay, using leather and natural materials to reflect the relationship between time, nature, and human touch.

Vegetable-tanned leather transforms with use and exposure, deepening in color and texture. It responds to sunlight, moisture, and touch, embodying the marks of time. Combined with nacre, wood, and animal hair, the project emphasizes organic materials. Leather's softness contrasts with wood's strength and nacre's glow, creating a unified whole.

As leather fragments join into a whole, the work symbolizes the unity of nature, humanity, and time. It invites you to embrace transformation as part of a shared journey with the natural world.

— HEAD Genève





# SUAN YOU

HEAD Genève Genève, Switzerland





# **HEAD GENÈVE**

#### Switzerland

HEAD – Geneva, part of the HES-SO, is the only university in Switzerland offering a Bachelor's degree in Jewellery, Accessory, and Product Design.

This unique program balances traditional craftsmanship with contemporary innovation, focusing on personal products such as watches, jewelry, and accessories.

Through a rich pedagogy combining hands-on workshops, theoretical courses, and collaborations with industry leaders, students master materials, technical skills, and project methodologies.

The curriculum encourages a conceptual understanding of design, exploring its sociocultural dimensions while fostering personal creative expression.

With specialized courses in watch culture, partnerships with renowned brands, and an interdisciplinary approach, HEAD provides an inspiring environment for students to craft meaningful and innovative products that respond to the demands of a global, evolving market.

## www.hesge.ch/head

Craft the Leather is a unique chance to discover the manufacturing of leather and what its production implies in order to meet the high quality standards set by the luxury industry. It was great to interact with tutors, students, craftsmen and specialists from all around the world. This week in Tuscany allows for a different pedagogy and one-of-a-kind immersion in the world of leather.

HEAD Genève - François Dumas





# **Transumanza**

Transhumance—the centuries-old practice of seasonal livestock herding across the natural landscape—embodies a deep connection between humans, animals, and the Earth. This custom reflects a traditional way of life which respects the animals and the environment that sustains them. The collection draws inspiration from the various tools of animal husbandry and pays homage to the interconnectivity between the cow and the farmer. Each piece strives to celebrate and express gratitude for the generations of animals and sustainable farmers that work to nourish us.

For Transumanza, I created custom wet molding forms for the bag and bell. The milking stool was handmade by my father and I, with the proportions being based on one owned by my grandfather.



# **COLTER BEACH**





# **COLTER BEACH**

Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, Virginia, USA







### VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Virginia - USA

A national leader in arts education since 1928, VCUarts is a public, nonprofit four-year arts and design school within Virginia Commonwealth University, a pioneering research institution. Located in vibrant downtown Richmond, Virginia, we offer 18 bachelor's degrees and 5 master's degrees in 16 departments and programs that span the visual and performing arts. We are a community of creators, performers and scholars dedicated to pushing boundaries and tackling challenges beyond traditional arts practices. Every piece, project and performance celebrates the creativity of our community, the trust among our colleagues and the new perspectives our faculty, staff and students explore daily.

Virginia Commonwealth University is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls nearly 30,000 students in 238 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. Twenty-three of the programs are unique in Virginia, many of them crossing the disciplines of VCU's 11 schools and three colleges.

vcu.edu

vcu.e

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There is no other program I know like Craft the Leather. By the end of the workshop, my understanding and appreciation for Italian leather was infinitely multiplied. Other than the obvious benefits of being surrounded by creative leather artisans, we were given an inside perspective of several leather facilities that would be inaccessible otherwise.

Virginia Commonwealth University – Cate Latham



# **Salmantina**

A celebration of the women's traditions from Salamanca and their deep-rooted symbolism. They adorn themselves and their homes providing protection and prestige through a splendid variety of visual tradition. My interior pieces encompass this idea as homes represent places of safety and personal identity. The mirror as a symbol of one's beauty, the clock of endurance through time and the lamp of hope, all paying homage to their folkloric inspirations' symbolism e.g. devotion, protection and fertility.

To highlight veg tan leather's inherent properties I chose molding as my main technique, pushing the boundaries of what it can do and look like. The surface patterns tell a story through an abstract merge of the shapes and motifs found across SALMANTINA traditions.









# ANA DEL RIO

De Monfort University Leicester, UK





## **DE MONFORT UNIVERSITY**

United Kingdom

De Montfort University (DMU)'s award-winning School of Fashion and Textiles offers a wide range of future-facing undergraduate and postgraduate courses, shaped by contemporary culture, industry practice, digital innovation and sustainability.

Recognized as one of the UK's most sustainable schools of its kind (Green Gown Awards, 2021), we cover a variety of specialist disciplines from contour and footwear to fashion and knitwear.

Located in Leicester, our courses reflect the city's strong fashion trade heritage. Our 90-year-old Footwear Design and 75-year-old Contour Fashion courses are unique in their offering, and widely regarded by industry experts as some of the world's best degrees dedicated to their disciplines. Like all of our courses, they combine heritage, innovation and technical excellence.

### www.dmu.ac.uk

Visiting the leather consortium in Tuscany opened my eyes to the inspiring work happening between scientists and tanneries to make Vegetable-tanned leather a circular environmentally sustainable system."

De Monfort University - Jo Cope



# 11<sup>th</sup> International Creative Competition for young designer/makers

Catalogue of the work inspired by the weeklong workshop experience 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: CTC-Ars Tinctoria, 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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