



MAV

TEXTS AND CAPTIONS

2022

The idea of renovating the MAV Museum setting up, after 13 years from its opening, comes from the desire to update the reflection and importance of traditional Aosta Valley handicrafts objects.

We have been working on different fields during the years: education, temporary exhibitions, safeguarding and communication in order to draw the attention of the local community and aiding understanding of handicrafts itself. As time goes by, we have grown up and changed so have values and trends.

Renovating the communication with our users was necessary. The museum is a cultural tool and as a reflection of the society, it must be able to evolve, to interface with the public and to establish and achieve new goals.

The new MAV offers a sequence of thematic areas that underline and analyze different spheres, essential for the comprehension of the object and the culture they come from. Memory, as the symbolic and value root of local craftwork, is narrated through the exposition of the Brocherel Collection, the latter's typological and collector's choices and the thought of the time ('900 beginning).

Decorations, polychromos, woods, shapes and customs mark the identity of the handicraft. The material is recounted with a diagnostic analysis, able to make us understand the importance of our raw materials in craft production made of traditional knowledge and gestures.

And then shape, which is reiterated and modified, follows times, fashion and materials and it underlines the identity of an artefact, its use and the genius of its maker.

Yet, gestures and places, where it expresses itself, are unavoidable symbols during human production creation. Hands, eyes, knowledge and thoughts live our valley handcraft workshops.

In the end beauty as a summary of a tale.

A narrative exhibition which aims to offer the visitor a vision of traditional Aosta Valley craftsmanship through careful and analytical observation. It must be capable of discovering what is hidden behind and inside the object, with textual devices that accompany and stimulate reflection.

Enjoy the visit.

Nurye Donatoni
Exhibition Curator

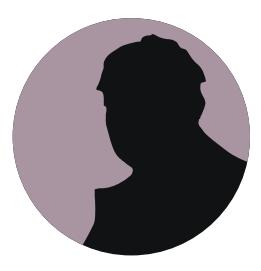


MEMORY

A child might point to something in a display cabinet and exclaim, “Here, look!” And it is this curious remark that compels us to remember who we are and how we fit into the world in which we live so that, together with that memory-acquiring child, we can realise we are “us”. As visitors move from room to room in a museum, they are permeated by the histories, the memories of others, formed in objects creating such memories.

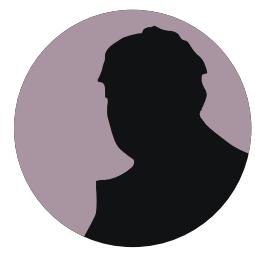
But what is memory? Who is it for? And whose memory is it? Memory is what binds a person to their community. Especially here where visitors interpret the interaction between light and shadow created by the arrangement of the objects. This section revives Jules Brocherel’s staging choices from the 1936 exhibition “Arte popolare valdostana– Aosta Valley folk art” which shone a light on the destiny of local craftsmanship. Re-presenting this original display is not just as a tribute to an intellectual who, probably more than any other, was able to highlight the distinctive qualities of Aosta Valley aesthetics by appreciating commonplace objects. It also means rekindling a crucial, adaptable memory using items that, despite being the same and presented in the same manner each time, always reveal new truths and stories to different pairs of eyes.

Recalling the techniques and models for embellishing everyday life offers a chance to look back with pleasure at the actions and the hands of those who were able to fashion beauty out of what was readily available and, through these aspects, imagine more sustainable lifestyles that are focused on an ethos of connecting with the resources provided to us by our local environments, a sense of being rooted and of sharing.



Jules Brocherel

Professor Alexis Julien Brocherel, going by the name of Jules, who was born in Courmayeur on 24 November 1871 and died in Aosta on 1 January 1954, was a person of myriad interests whose works had a significant influence on promoting Aosta Valley culture and its craftsmanship. Through mountaineering treks in the Sin-Kiang region of the Gobi Desert, he learned about China and developed an interest in climatology, glaciology, botany and hydrography. However, his passion for the Aosta Valley drew him back, where he worked with renowned Italian and European publications to photograph and describe the Valley's splendours far beyond the Alps. In order to preserve the region's historical and cultural heritage and, during the Fascist era, to advance linguistic autonomy, in 1919 he founded the highly significant journal "Augusta Prætoria", where he served as editor. He had an unwavering passion for all aspects of life expressing a historical period not yet affected by today's ultra-specialisation of knowledge, becoming an expert in various facets of its many manifestations. As an ethnologist, collector and organiser of exhibitions related to Valle d'Aosta folk culture, he became the principal advocate of Valle d'Aosta craftsmanship in Italy, also through the exhibition "Arte popolare valdostana". This exhibition – the result of over twenty years of work, gathering about a thousand photographs, and an ability he developed to find in the mountain chalets and huts «a haul of artifacts of all sorts» from which he selected «only the most expressive and authentic elements» – sparked an appreciation of the region's customs that still continues, as can be seen by the decision to restage it. A tireless and eclectic intellectual, he was the first director of the Library for the Aosta Valley Region and the city of Aosta. He died here at the age of 84 and is now buried in the modest cemetery of Courmayeur, at the foot of Mont Blanc.



Brocherel and folk art

The exhibition of folk art held in 1936 at the *Istituto Magistrale* school of Aosta represents the pinnacle of Brocherel's commitment to ethnography, a key field in the era's cultural politics. Brocherel had arrived there in the early 1920s through mountaineering and his membership in the Italian Alpine Club, following a development linked to mountains shared by other scholars considered today among the fathers of alpine ethnography, such as Alessandro Roccavilla from Piedmont, Georges Amoudruz from Switzerland and Hippolyte Müller from France.

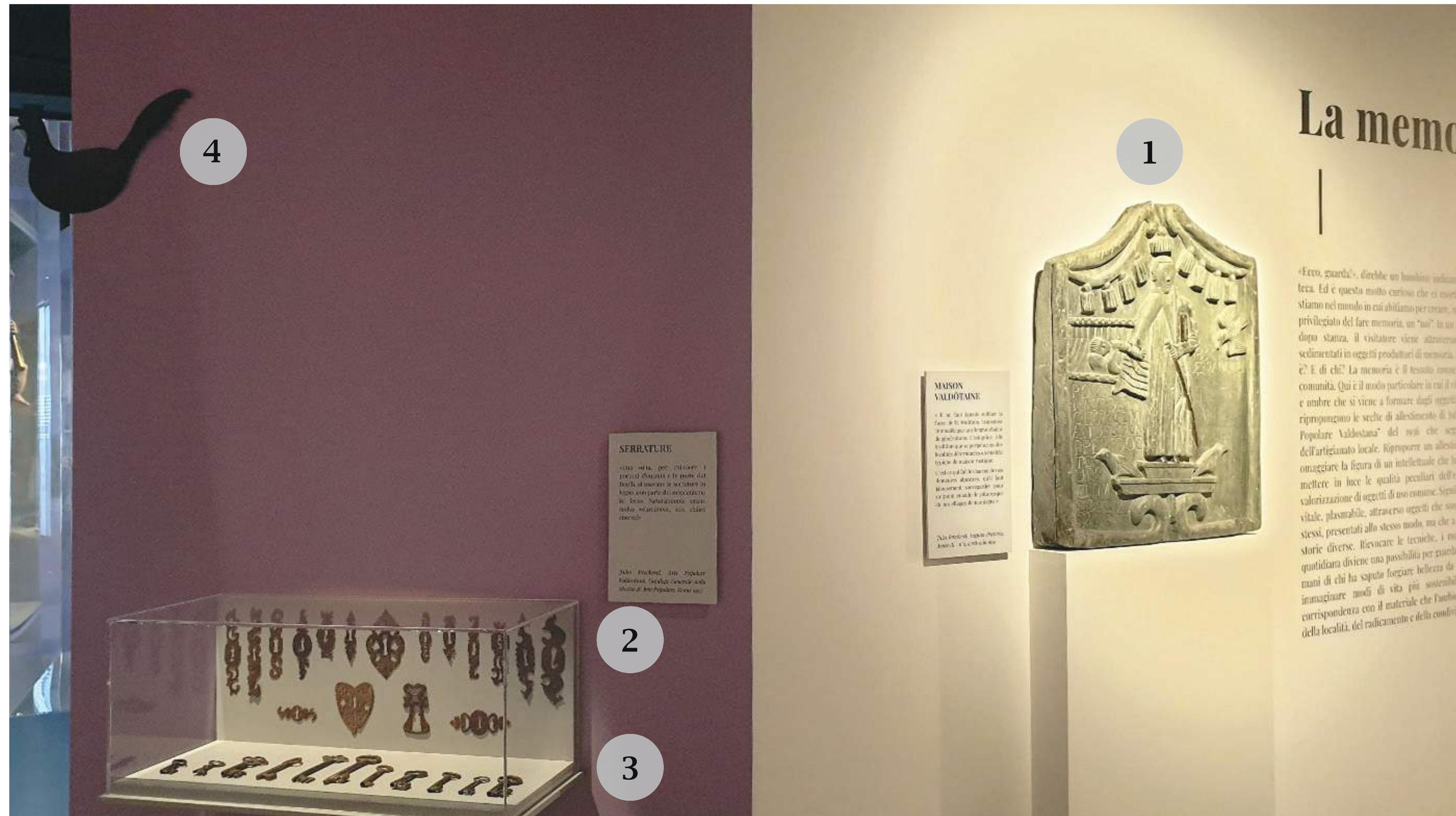
Brocherel collected the majority of the items on display in the 1936 exhibition from all over the region, based on a selection process that prioritised aesthetics over practicality. After the plan to build a sizable museum in the Aosta Valley was abandoned, in 1930 he sold more than 400 items to the Civic Museum of Turin, which are now on loan to the MAV (Museum of traditional Aosta Valley crafts).

The collection is presented here according to the original exhibition categories, inspired by a descriptive classification that modern anthropologists consider outdated: domestic arts (ways of living, furnishings and tools), personal arts (clothing, items for personal use and toys) and social and religious arts (objects related to worship and popular and family celebrations).

Sandra Barberi
Art historian



Architecture rustique



1. Commemorative plaque for

Dottor Grappein

Soapstone

2. Seventeen escutcheons for locks

17th-18th century

Iron

3. Eleven keys

14th century

Iron

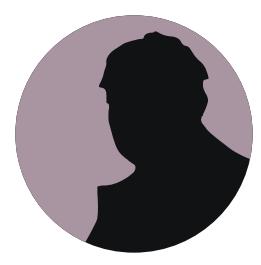
4. Cockerel for a bell tower cross

17th century

Wood

La memo

«Ecco, guarda», direbbe un bambino seduto terra. Ed è questa molto curiosa che ci esistiamo nel mondo in cui abitiamo per creare, il privilegiato del fare memoria un "no". In un duplo stanza, il visitatore viene attraverso sedimentati in oggetti produttivi di memoria. E' di chi? La memoria è il tessuto stesso comunita. Qui è il modo particolare in cui il ci e' ambe che si viene a formare degli oggetti riproponevano le scelte di allestimento di "Popolare Alzista" del 1936 che sono dell'artigianato locale. Riconoscere un'alegia omaggiare la figura di un intellettuale che lo mettere in luce le qualità peculiari dell'valorizzazione di oggetti di uso comune. Significativa, attraverso oggetti che sono stessi, presentati allo stesso modo, ma che a storici diverse. Riconoscere le tecniche, i modi quotidiani diventa una possibilità per guardi mani di chi ha saputo forgiare bellezza da immaginare modi di vita più sostenibili corrispondere con il materiale che l'ambito della località, del radicamento e della confiden-



Local religion



1. Madonna of Einsiedeln

18th century

Wood

2. Madonna in bas-relief

17th century

Wood

3. Madonna with Child

17th century

Wood

4. Madonna

16th century

Wood

5. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

Latter 19th century

Wood

6. Polychrome Madonna with Child

Late 17th - early 18th century

Wood

7. Primitive Madonna with Child and Saint

Wood

8. Polychrome rural Madonna

Wood

9. Polychrome Madonna with Child

Wood

10. Mission cross

About 1850

Wood

11. Processional cross

Wood



Saints



1. Ecce Homo

17th century

Wood

2. St John the Baptist

18th century

Wood

3. St Antony

18th century

Wood

4. Ecce Homo

18th century

Wood

5. Holy Knight

13th - 15th century

Wood

6. St Peter

1844

Wood

7. St Sebastian

Late 17th - early 18th century

Wood

8. Eternal Father blessing

Wood

9. St Paul

18th century

Wood

10. St Louis Gonzaga

Late 18th - early 19th century

Wood

11. St Peter

18th century

Wood

12. Crucifix

Wood

13. Christ without a cross

Wood

14. Crucifix

Wood

15. Crucifix

Wood



Mixture of religious art Carnival



1. Angels

Wood

2. Woodcut with religious motifs

17th century

Wood

3. Stamp block for fabrics

Wood

4. Woodcut block

Wood

5. Missal (liturgical book) stand

Wood

6. Missal (liturgical book) stand

Wood

7. Bases for candlesticks

Wood

8. Missal (liturgical book) stand

1797

Wood

9. Missal (liturgical book) stand

Wood

10. Golden angel

Wood

11. Reliquary

Fabric and glass

12. Flower vase

Wood

13. Incense holder

Silver-plated copper

14. Mask

1880

Wood

15. Mask

Wood

16. Mask

1850 circa

Wood and fabric

17. Mask

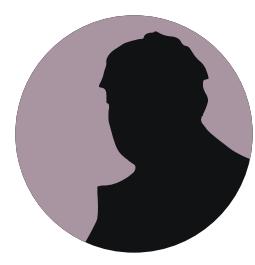
Wood

18. Mask

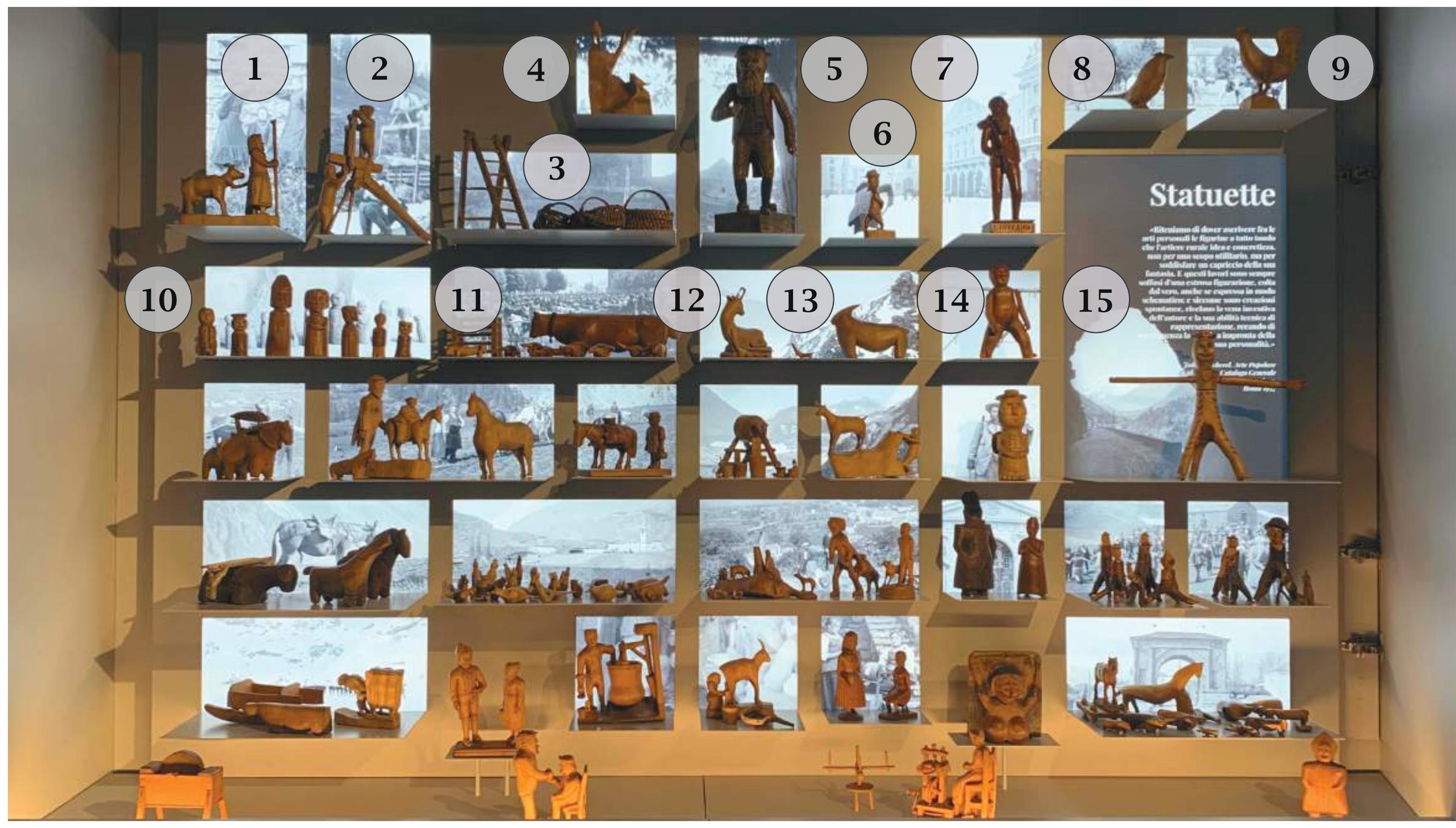
Wood

19. Mask

Wood



Figurines and toys



1. Woman

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

2. Sawyers

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

3. Agricultural and mountain pasture tools

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood and willow wood

4. Birds with nest

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

5. Figurine

Wood

6. Schoolmaster going to school

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

7. Winter

Wood

8. Hen

Wood

9. Cockerel

Wood

10. Game of skittles

Wood

11. Cow and *cornailles* toys

Wood

12. Chamois lying down

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

13. Ibex

Wood

14. Male figurine with jointed arms

Wood

15. Lamp holder figurine

19th century

Wood



Figurines and toys



16. Mules with packs

Wood

17. The mule track

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

18. Horse

Wood

19. Mule track and mule

Basilio Cerlogne (1864-1937)

Wood

20. Equipment for processing milk

Wood

21. Chamois hunter

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

22. Woman with backpack

Teotista Favre

19th century

Wood and fabric

23. Mules and horse with pack

Wood and willow bark

24. Group of hens

Wood

25. Ram, fox and goat

Wood

26. Shepherd and small dogs

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

27. Biting dog

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

28. Man with dog

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

29. Clerics

Wood and willow bark

30. Figurines with three legs

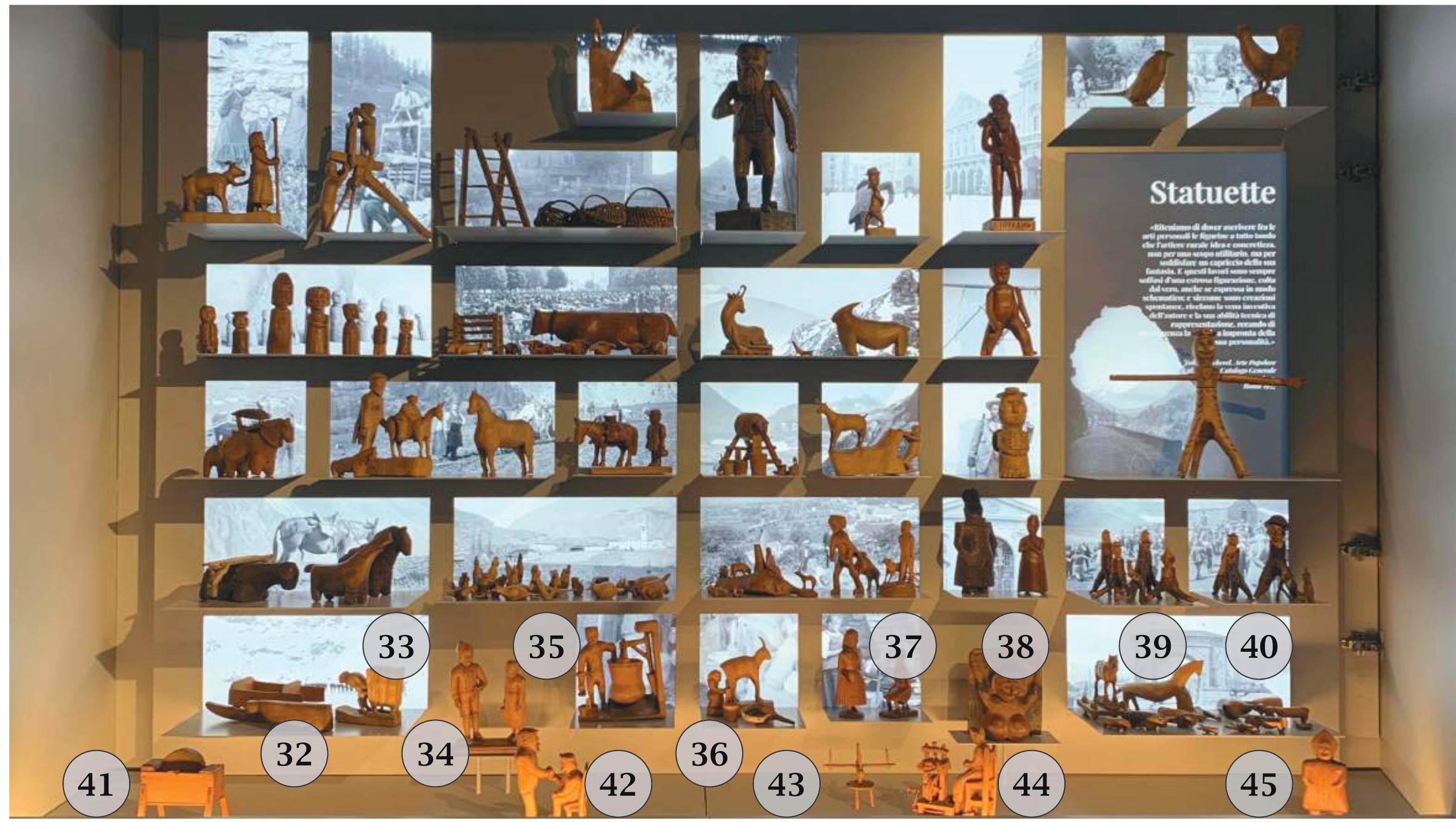
Various wood types

31. Sled

Wood



Figurines and toys



32. Animal

Wood

33. Man with sled

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

34. Couple in Aosta Valley costume

Basilio Cerlogne (1864-1937)

Wood

35. Dairyman

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

36. Woman milking a goat

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

37. Women in Aosta Valley costume

Wood

38. Bust of a woman

Wood

39. Wheeled foal and horse

Wood

40. Group of *cornailles* toys

Various wood types

41. Millstone

Wood and iron

42. Two comrades

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

Wood

43. Swift for winding yarn

Wood

44. Spinning machine

Leonardo Perruquet

19th century

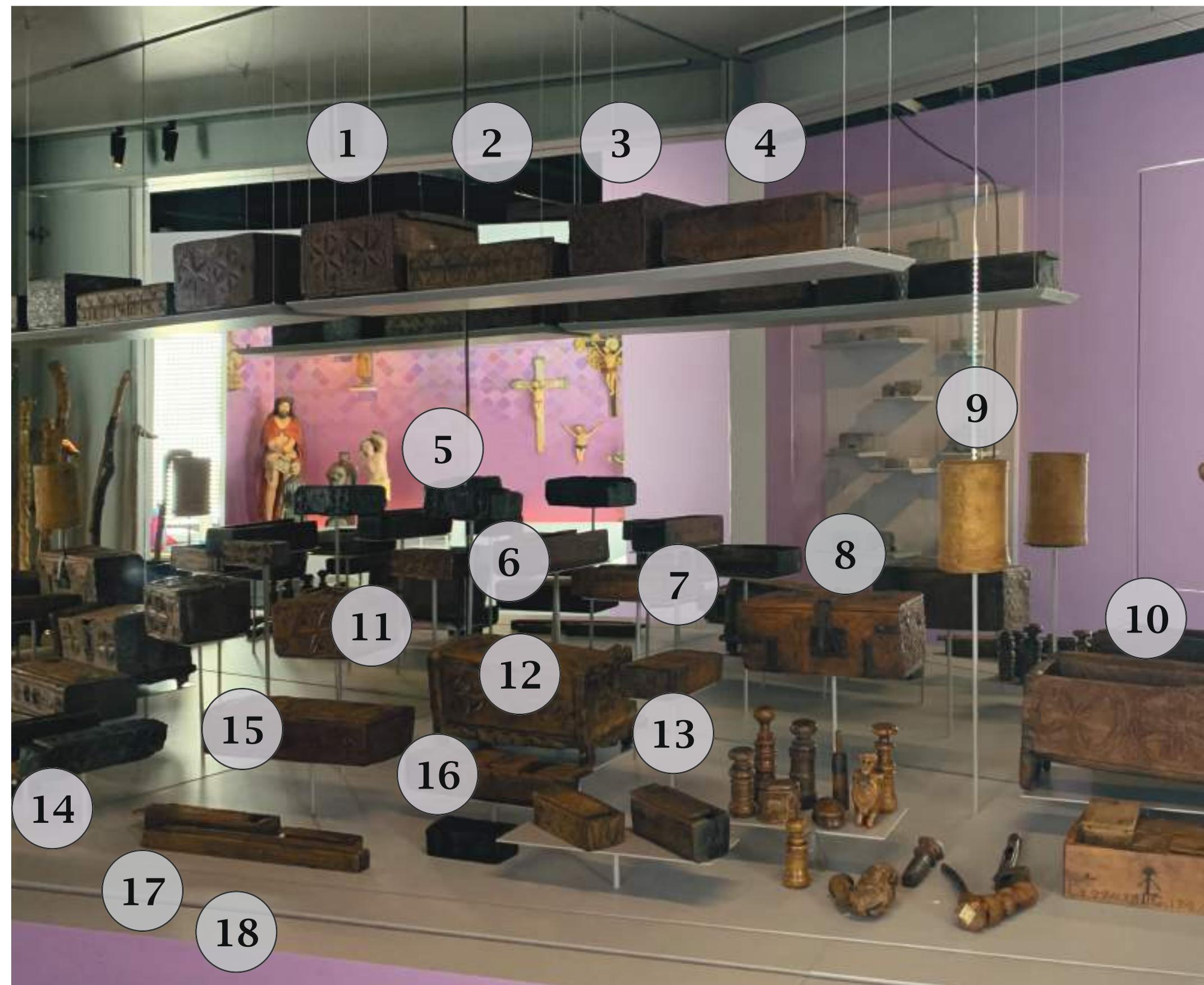
Wood

45. Bishop

Wood



Personal objects



1. Container

Wood

2. Cerisey container

1818

Wood

3. Box

Wood

4. Box

1748

Wood

5. Case

1598

Wood

6. Case

Wood

7. Case

1810

Wood

8. Casket

Wood and iron

9. Box

Birch wood

10. Casket

Wood

11. Container

1703

Wood

12. Container

Wood and iron

13. Case

Wood

14. Case

Wood

15. Case

1808

Wood

16. Four-compartment case

1831

Wood

17. Container

1797

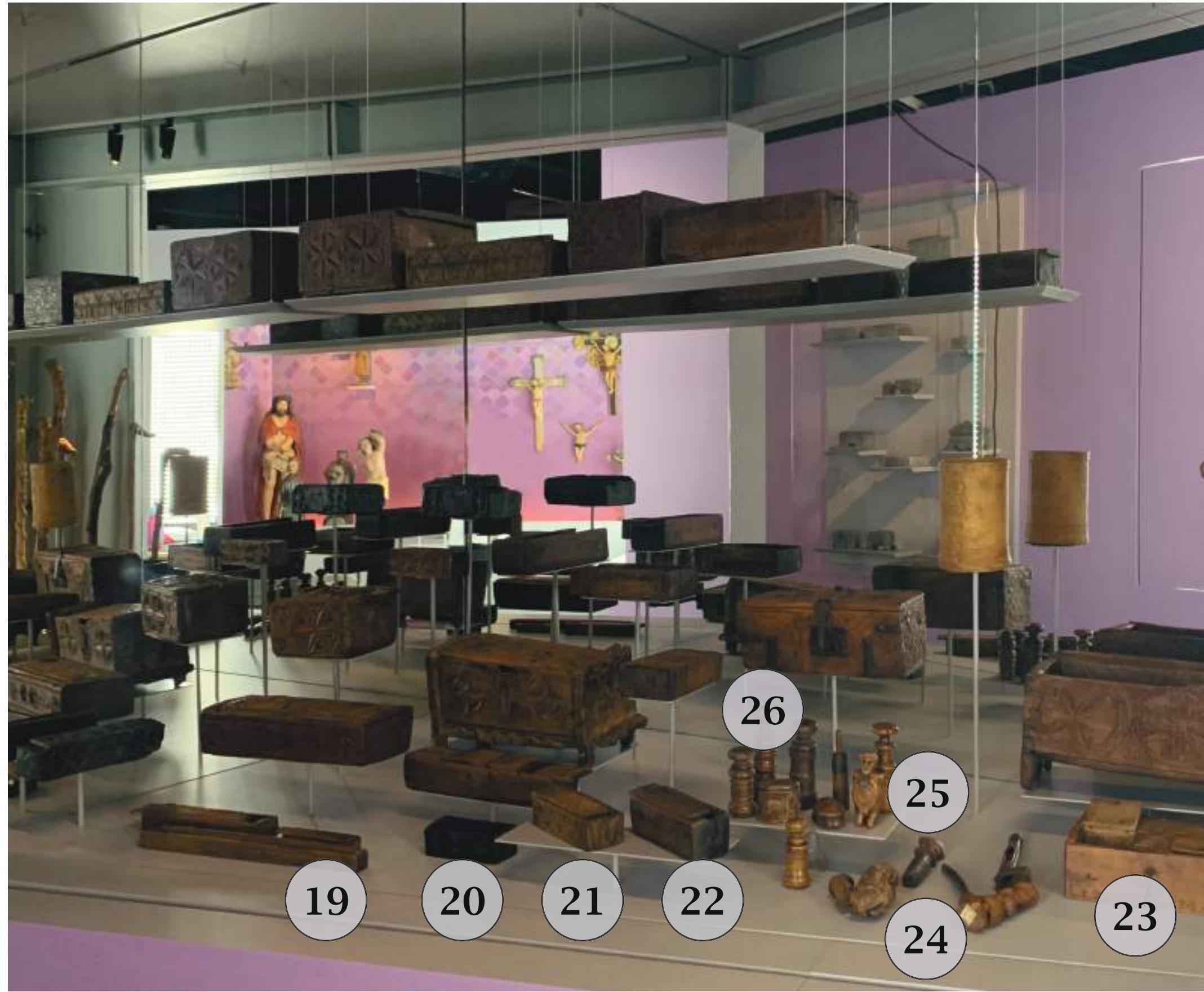
Wood

18. Tool case

Wood



Personal objects



19. Container

1858

Wood

20. Case

1844

Wood

21. Case

Wood

22. Ruffier container

1831

Wood

23. Three-compartment box

1747

Wood

24. Pipes and pipe holder

Late 19th – 20th century

Wood

25. Tobacco container

1870

Wood

26. Tobacco tampers

Wood

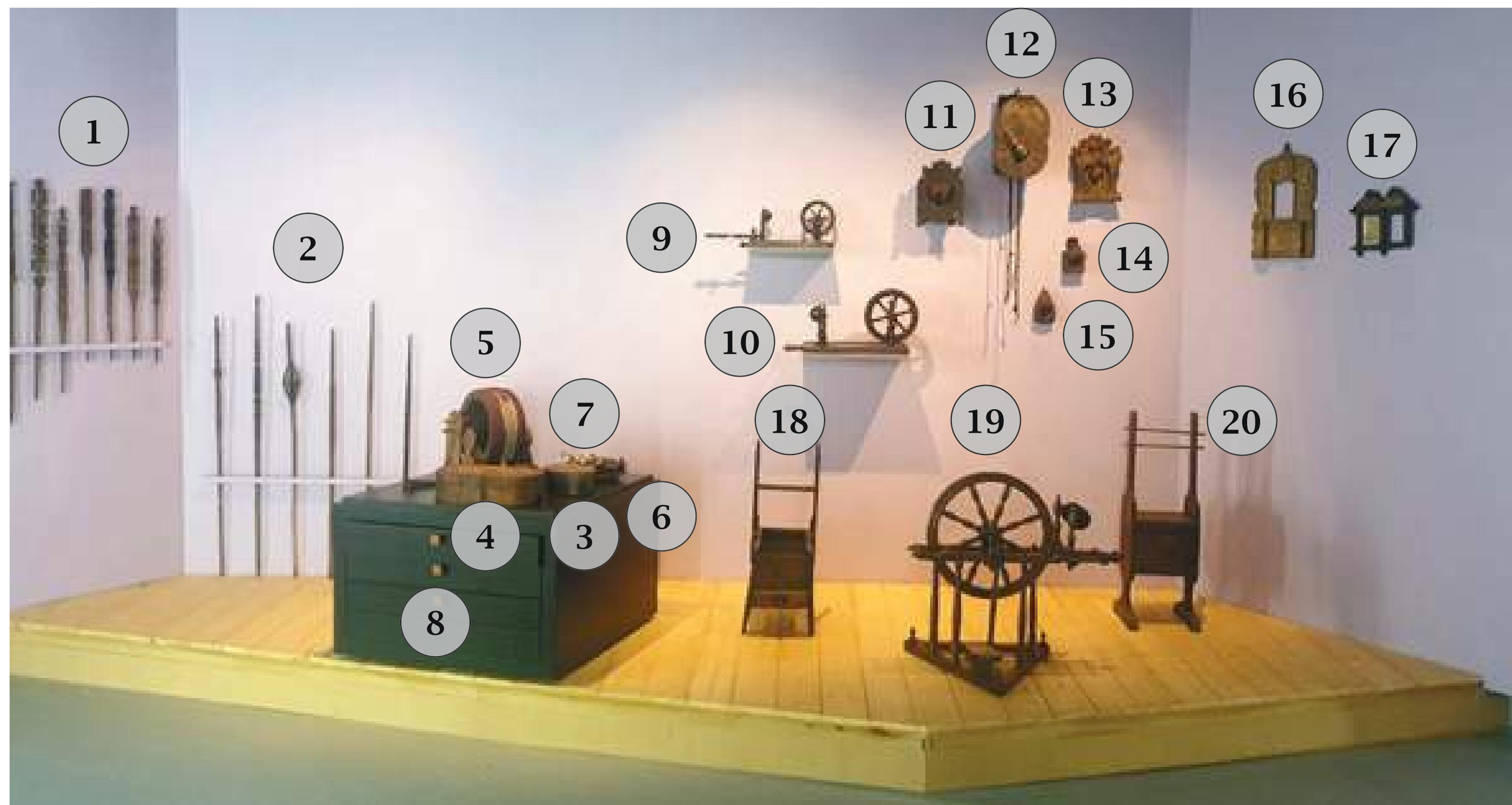
27. Eleven walking sticks

19th – 20th century

Various wood types



Domestic manufacture, lace and spinning tools



1. Seven distaffs

Wood

2. Six distaffs

Wood

3. Oval box

Bois de bouleau

4. Oval box

1780

Wood

5. Bobbin holder and bobbin

Wood, fabric and wicker

6. Shears

Iron

7. Basket for balls of yarn with bobbins

Wicker, wood and linen

8. Lace sample book

Linen

9. Tabletop spinning wheel

Wood and iron

10. Tabletop spinning wheel

Wood and iron

11. Tabletop clock case

Wood

12. Clock

1829

Bois et métal

13. Clock case

Wood

14. Clock case

Wood

15. Clock case in drop shape

1828

Wood

16. Frame

Wood

17. Frame

Wood

18. Bobbin holder

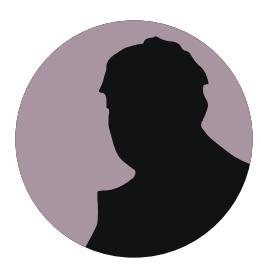
Wood

19. Spinning wheel

Wood

20. Bobbin holder

Wood



Inkwells



1. Inkwell

1723

Soapstone

2. Inkwell

1884

Soapstone

3. Inkwell

Soapstone

4. Petit encrier

Soapstone

5. Inkwell with four masks

1750

Soapstone

IVAT collection

6. Inkwell with four masks

1778

Soapstone

7. Inkwell with four feet

Soapstone

8. Five-point inkwell

1884

Soapstone



9. Inkwell with cross

Soapstone

10. Inkwell with penholder

Soapstone

11. Inkwell with four feet

Soapstone

12. Square inkwell

Soapstone



Soapstone, agricultural tools and means of transport



1. Eight goat collars

Wood and leather

2. Clamp

1707

Wood

3. Drill

Wood and iron

4. Hand plane

1698

Wood and iron

5. Whip

Wood and leather

6. Pulley

Wood

7. Milking stool

1812

Wood and iron

8. Holy water font

Soapstone

9. Pot

1523

Soapstone

10. Jar without lid

Soapstone

11. Jar without lid

Soapstone

12. Small saucepan

Soapstone

13. Jar

Soapstone

14. Jar

Soapstone

15. Hand plane

1731

Wood

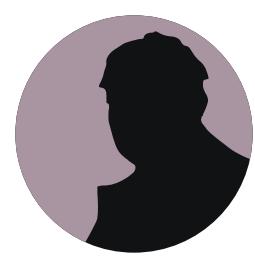
16. Small hand plane

Wood

17. Small hand plane

1783

Wood



Soapstone, agricultural tools and means of transport



18. Sickle handle

Wood

19. Sickle handle

Wood

20. Whetstone holder

Wood

21. Whetstone holder

1854

Wood

22. Multicoloured basket

1889

Wood

23. Basket

Wood

24. Basket

Wood

25. Basket

1732

Wood

26. Basket

Wood

27. Basket

Wood

28. Basket

1808

Wood

29. Multicoloured basket

1804

Wood

30. Basket

1833

Wood

31. Basket

Wood

32. Basket

1858

Wood

33. Basket

Wood



Wine cups and flasks



1. Goblet

18th century

Bois

2. Church goblet

17th century

Bois de poivrier

3. Church goblet

1795

Wood

4. Keg

Wood

5. Keg

Wood

6. Covered bottle

Glass and willow wood

7. Cup

Wood

8. Keg

Wood

9. Anthropomorphic goblet

17th century

Bois

10. Pot with lid

Wood

11. Goblet with lid

Wood

12. Goblet with lid

Wood

13. *Grolla* cup

1726

Wood

14. *Grolla* cup

Bois

15. *Grolla* cup

17th century

Bois

16. *Grolla* cup with bacchanalian designs

16th century

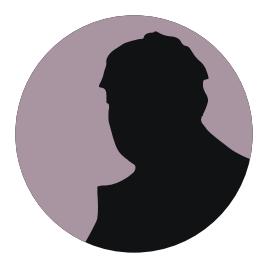
Bois

17. *Grolla* cup

Wood

18. *Grolla* cup

Wood



Wine cups and flasks



19. *Grolla cup*

Wood

20. *Grolla cup*

Wood

21. *Grolla cup*

Wood

22. *Grolla cup*

Wood



Cradles



1. Multicoloured cradle

Wood

2. Cradle

Wood

3. Cradle

1749

Wood

4. Berceau polychrome

Wood

5. Cradle

Wood

6. Cradle

Wood

7. Cradle

1814

Wood

8. Cradle

Wood

9. Cradle

Wood

10. Cradle

1678

Wood

11. Multicoloured cradle

Wood

12. Multicoloured cradle

Wood

13. Multicoloured top over the cradle

Wood

14. Multicoloured top over the cradle

1807

Wood

15. Multicoloured top over the cradle

1828

Wood



Lamps



1. Lamp holder with oil lamp

17th century

Stone, cord and iron

Private collection

2. Rack

Wood

3. Rack with dove decoration

Wood

4. Candlesticks

Wood

5. Lamps

Pewter

6. Candlestick

Bronze

7. Pivoted lamp

Brass

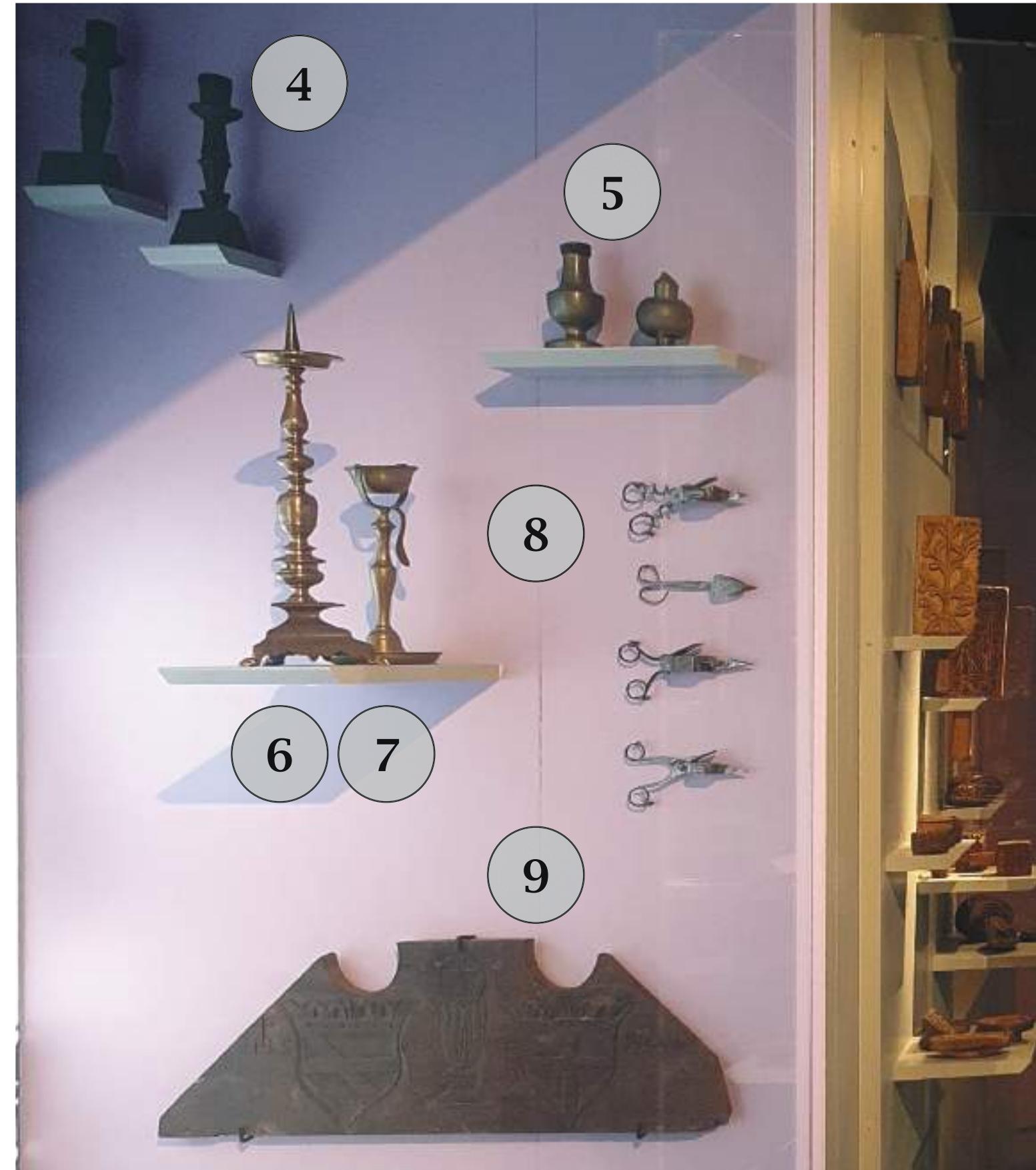
8. Four candle snuffers

Iron

9. Bedhead

1665

Wood



10. Chest

1778

Wood



Moulds



1. Six butter stamps

Wood

2. Three cylindrical bread stamps

Wood

3. Three cubic bread stamps

Wood

4. Boat-shaped bread stamp

Wood

5. Bread stamp

Wood

6. Bread stamp

Wood

7. Bread stamp

Wood

8. Round bread stamp

Wood

9. Oval bread stamp

18th century

Wood

10. Bread stamp

Wood



11. Bread stamp

Wood

12. Bread stamp with handle

Wood

13. Bread stamp

Wood



Home



1. Three goblets

Wood

2. Rotating cheese platter

1860

Wood

3. Three salt cellars

Wood

4. Clothes iron

Iron

5. Pepper pot

Wood

6. Coffee grinder

Iron

7. Bismarck weighing scales

Bronze

8. Bismarck weighing scales

Wood and iron

9. Portable scales

Bronze

10. Little saucepans

Bronze

11. Three spoons

Metal

12. Papin digester/pressure cooker

Cast iron

13. Mortar

Stone

14. Fountain

Copper



MATERIAL

We are accustomed to thinking of matter as being fixed indefinitely in a form by human power. Yet the materials from which everyday objects emerge, such as wood, stone, iron and textile fibres, endure over time, altering their colour and texture depending on the conditions in which they develop.

Each object is the result of a particular meeting in a specific setting with its own environmental trend. It is important to know where to look for soapstone, so suitable for making fire-resistant pots, or when to shear an animal for wool. The harvesting of the forest cannot be left to chance: we must actively manage it to prevent it from encroaching on land used for agriculture and cultivation. It is necessary to be knowledgeable about wood since every object must be made of the type most suitable: maple for food use, birch, «the lady of the wood», for precious boxes using its bark, willow and hazel for baskets and containers.

The interaction between artisans and their environment informs everything about their work. Coexistence with the environment and what it offers must be carefully managed in accordance with the principle of mutual respect. What is created out of necessity – a bowl, a key, a sheet – more broadly reflects the relationship between the individual and the world. Craftsmanship takes on an ecological perspective when the material is chosen by following the proper norms of a non-human nature, and when ethical actions are taken to find a new balance.



Wool supply chain

Since 2002, through a project promoted by AREV (Association Régionale Eleveurs Valdôtain), a portion of the wool used in the Valley has come from the shearing of the small number of Rosset sheep which are a recently rediscovered and revived native breed. The sheep are shorn once a year, in autumn, when the fleece is more plentiful and cleaner than in the spring.

In our mountains, wool was a precious raw material, a reliable ally against the long and cold winters, used for making all kinds of garments: a cosy nest for prematurely born babies; a remedy for back pain and sore throats. Sheep farming was therefore widely practiced in order to cater to the needs of alpine life. The sheep were shorn with shears starting from the legs, working up to the belly and ending with the back. The wool of the legs and belly was discarded as it was shorter and dirtier. The fleece was first washed (warm water, without soap, and then rinsed in cold water) and then carded and spun. At one time it was spun before washing (lan-a crua ou grassa): a laborious process, but by washing the spun fibres, the dirt was removed, yielding a fine, precious and easily workable yarn. A distaff or spinning wheel was used for the long and meticulous task of spinning, which requires exceptional manual dexterity. A kilo of wool took eight to ten days to spin...

Once all the wool had been spun, it was twisted to combine three separate threads and create a skein. Black sheep's wool was combined with white wool during the carding process to create a grey yarn.

Coopérative « Les Tisserands » de Valgrisenche
AREV - Association Régionale Éleveurs Valdôtain



Hemp supply chain

Each and every centimetre of hemp thread is the end product of a long process that begins in the soil and continues via water, air and sunlight. There is a first phase of plant growing, a practice once widespread along the centre of the Aosta Valley. The sheaves are then allowed to macerate for the “right” amount of time – not too long as “rotted hemp does not make cloth”, nor too short (the thread would not detach from the bark). Once dried, the plants are debarked, and the raw thread is separated from the cane using tools called *teuillì*. The resulting fibre is combed and selected: the first-choice hemp (usually coming from male plants which produce a decidedly finer yarn) is called *rita* and is used for producing fine fabrics, while the waste, called *etoppa*, was used for sewing shoes, mattresses, sheets for hay, etc. Before moving on to weaving, the process continues with spinning, another very delicate operation. The skeins must then be washed to make the threads softer: this special washing used to be done with boiling water and poplar ash. The raw material (the threads) is finally ready for the loom, set “in motion” by the coordinated pressure of hands and feet.

Hemp farming

Around 300 BC, the Romans brought hemp cultivation to Italy. Over the centuries, this cultivation grew to a point of occupying, in the 1903-1913 period, about 90,000 hectares, with a yield of 79,500 tonnes per year, second only to Russia at that time. Hemp was sown almost everywhere in the Aosta Valley, up to an altitude of 1,000 metres. In the sunnier areas it could be grown at up to 1200-1300 metres. In the period in the early 20th century when there was a widespread conversion of fields to pasture, it was one of the first crops to be abandoned.

Coopérative Lou Dzeut de Champorcher



Textile fibres

Originating from animals (wool) or plants (hemp), the raw material is transformed from a shapeless mass of fibres to exquisite fabrics, cosy blankets and delicate lace.



1. Loom fabric sample

Valgrisenche

Rosset wool

2. Spools

Rosset sheep wool thread

3. Raw wool

Black and white Rosset sheep wool

Shorn in October 2008

4. Loom fabric sample

Champorcher

Hemp

5. Balls of yarn

Spun hemp

6. Skein of yarn

Hemp

7. Skein

Raw hemp



Iron

Magnetite

Magnetite, an iron oxide with a metallic appearance and black in colour, is found in the serpentinites of the Aosta Valley. Magnetite sometimes concentrates giving rise to mineralization whose mining in Valle d'Aosta, documented since the 15th century, has been very intense and split among a myriad of mines, some reliable and profitable, others poor in quantity, quality and location. Almost all the mines were abandoned around 1850 following the Valle d'Aosta steel industry crisis, which was due to a confluence of factors: the depletion of the forests brought on by the almost exclusive use of charcoal as fuel in the Aosta Valley ironworks; the high production costs owing to the unfavourable location of the seams; the inadequate development of the road network and an outdated steelmaking technique; the reduction of duties on foreign iron.

The most important mines are in the Cogne valley (Liconi-Colonna and Larsinaz mines), where mining is recorded as taking place since 1425, although it likely dates back to an earlier period. Modern exploitation began in the early 20th century, concurrent with the construction of the Aosta steel mills, and ended in 1979, with a total estimated magnetite production of 25 million tons. Other mines were operated in the municipalities of Fénis, Chambave, Pontey, Châtillon (mine located near the Ussel Castle, mentioned as far back as 1415), Champdepraz (the Lac Gelé mine at an altitude of 2,600m, exploited since 1693) and Champorcher. Further iron mineralization, mainly siderite and hematite (carbonates and iron oxides), was also mined in the areas of Courmayeur, Sarre and Saint-Rhémy-en-Bosses; in this last location, in the Mont-Flassin mine, due to its altitude (2,600-2700m), the work could only be carried out for four months a year.

Cogne mines

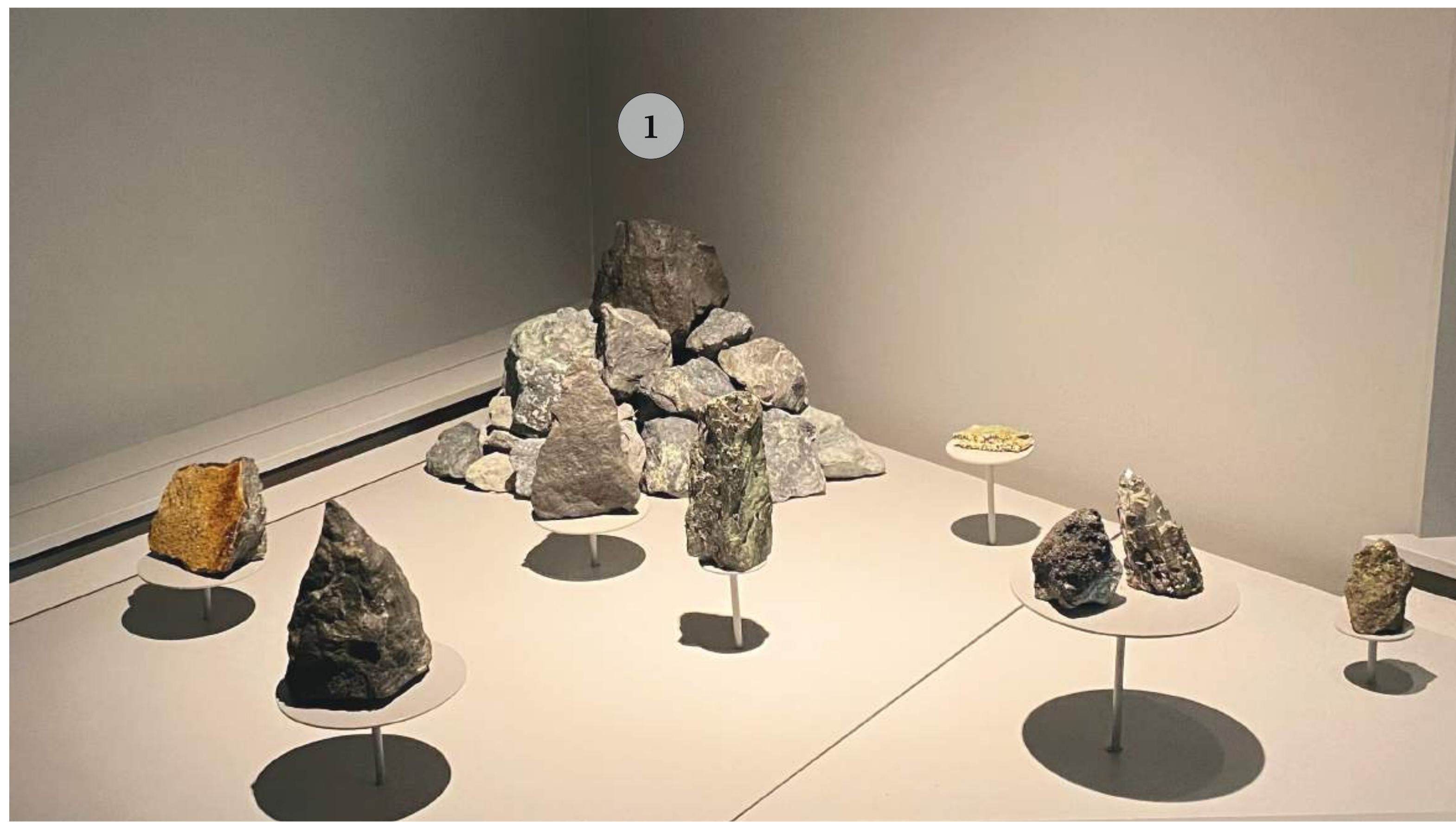
The ore was extracted in Cogne up to the 19th century at Liconi, where open pit mines and tunnels were built at an elevation of around 2,500m. From there it was conveyed down steep paths by sled and finally melted down in the numerous foundries in the Aosta Valley. Local infrastructure was developed in the 20th century starting from the level of the Colonna mine; the mineral was conveyed via wells, trolleys, railways and cableways to the crushing and magnetic separation plant located in Cogne. From here it was loaded onto a train that travelled to Acque Fredde, a locality in the municipality of Gressan, and finally via a further cableway to the Società Nazionale di Cogne steel plant in Aosta.

Paolo Castello, geologist

with the collaboration of Osvaldo Ruffier, Bruno Zanivan, Giuseppe Béthaz, Livio and Silvio Charbonnier



Iron



1. Fragments of magnetite

Cogne mine



Stone



1. Fragment

Valmériaz (Pontey)

Grindstone

2. Fragments and semi-finished pieces

Champorcher, Ayas, Valmériaz (Pontey)

Soapstone



Soapstone

This rock typically has a green colour and the following chemical and physical properties: inalterability to atmospheric agents and food, high thermal refractoriness and resistance to temperature changes, with slow accumulation and slow return of heat, low porosity and very low hardness, which enables it to be easily worked using metal tools either by hand or on a lathe. Its name derives from the Latin “olla” (pot) and it has been in use since prehistoric times for making fire vessels, food containers, and everyday items like inkwells, small containers, spindle whorls, loomweights, lamps, bracelets, nativity figures, stoves, moulds for weapons, cinerary urns, holy water fonts, architectural elements and statues.

The word “soapstone” only has a generic meaning and is not specifically petrographic; in fact, soapstone types of very different mineralogical composition, colour and grain have been identified in the Alps. However, the soapstone of Valle d’Aosta is of a relatively homogeneous composition, with colour in various shades of green, consisting essentially of two varieties of chlorite schist: the first with fine-grained chlorite and inclusions of small granules mainly of magnetite and garnet; the second with coarser-grained chlorite accompanied by granules, even large ones, of chloritoid, garnet and amphibole.

In the past, soapstone extraction in the Aosta Valley was of great importance and involved both rocky outcrops, with quarries, and individual blocks of rock from debris or morainic accumulations. There are still signs to be seen of this activity, sometimes at high altitudes (2,000-2,600m), in particular in the Ayas, Valtournenche and Gressoney valleys and in the Mont-Avic area (municipalities of Fénis, Pontey, Champdepraz and Champorcher).

Today in the Aosta Valley there are no active soapstone quarries, and it is collected sporadically by amateurs in the various locations where it is present and is used by numerous artisans to make all sorts of artifacts.

Paolo Castello, geologist

Roberto Zavattaro, artisan



Wood

The forest

In the past, the relationship between man and wood was based on respect. The forest was regularly maintained because it was regarded as the primary component of the landscape. It was consequently crucial to preserve this resource to protect the community and as a source of a precious material, wood, not to be wasted.

For example, it was unthinkable to cut down trees for fuel; instead the stove was fed by fallen branches collected in the undergrowth. Therefore, only what was absolutely necessary was taken from the forest, while for many other purposes, use was made of the old and unproductive fruit trees from the *verdjé*, the meadow next to the house. So rather than being a matter of exploitation, it was a balanced relationship, governed by established tradition and precise rules. The “historic” consortia for the management of the woods, which are widely found in the Aosta Valley, are an example of this. These organisations made plans for investing the proceeds from the sale of the timber in group projects (new structures for the village, school maintenance, etc.).

Felling

A consolidating of ideas and methods (only partially “validated” by modern science) has come about as a result of observation and experience. A clear example of this is the connection between the motion of the stars and the behaviour of fauna and flora. Even today, the lunar calendar and the planets (the constellations of our zodiac, crossed by the lunar star) are closely observed by craftsmen, stockbreeders and winegrowers. As regards wood, there are calendars with propitious dates for felling trees intended for specific uses.

For instance, for construction wood, the trees should be felled in the first eight days following the new moon in December (Aquarius or Pisces), or, in general, in the crescent moon in Pisces, in late autumn/end winter.

The period is not chosen at random, regardless of the moon: in these periods the sap does not rise (the wood is resting) and therefore the tree does not degrade during drying and maintains its volume. Wood may only be sculpted on certain days, which are in March, November and December, otherwise the wood could split or break when it is cut.

(cf.: Calendrier Forestier 2005, Gottfried Briemie).

Skidding

Today's lumbering procedures are mechanised. However, in the past, use was made of the setting, in this case the slope of the woodland. People created corridors in the forest called tsablo, natural cavities down which the trunks were slid, one by one, to the village in the valley. Reduced noise and little effort, but it was necessary to keep the tsabos clear and clean.

In the sawmill

Here the trunks are sorted according to their diameter, "line" (straightness of the trunk), and number of knots... Each tree's advantages and disadvantages are considered when determining its intended use, which in the initial stage is either as a beam or as planks.

Drying

Drying is the process in which trees lose moisture as they encounter the dry outside air. According to custom, the thickness of the loppe (the "planks" of wood, ranging from 5cm to 12 cm thick) is correlated to the years of drying. The only way to prevent internal stresses in the wood is to dry it slowly.

Seasoning

Mineralization is a natural process that begins “in the tree”. The minerals in the sap are deposited in the pores, modifying the chemical-physical properties of the wood to the point where its colour is altered. It thus becomes challenging to recognise a wood type after a couple of centuries since mineralization is a process that continues over time.

Wood, yesterday and today

An extensive variety of wood types was utilised by past generations as all available wood was used. Because fruit trees grow more slowly than resinous types, the wood from the fruit trees is compact and heavy. As a result, wooden items can be found from the past carved out of the wood of almond or plum trees... The range has considerably diminished in modern times. Modern fruit farming has changed the structure of the trees so that they are of lower average height and the trunk is hard to use. The variety of wood types processed has progressively reduced. Almost all the raw material processed in the Aosta Valley is now imported. This means that forests are now living independently: the tsablos have become overgrown with shrubs and trees are only felled for those who still want to cut wood for boilers and stoves.

Ezio Thomasset, artisan



Socio-cultural evolution of forests in Aosta Valley

The strong and growing industrialisation from the late 1700s to the early 1900s needed a massive harvesting of timber in our region to fulfil the demand for charcoal.

Countless charcoal pits were prepared up to the treeline, which led to the near total deforestation of most of the woods. It also caused the vegetation limit to be lowered by about 200m (from an altitude of about 2,600-2,700m to 2,300-2,400) and drastically reduced the fundamental protective function that forests once provided.

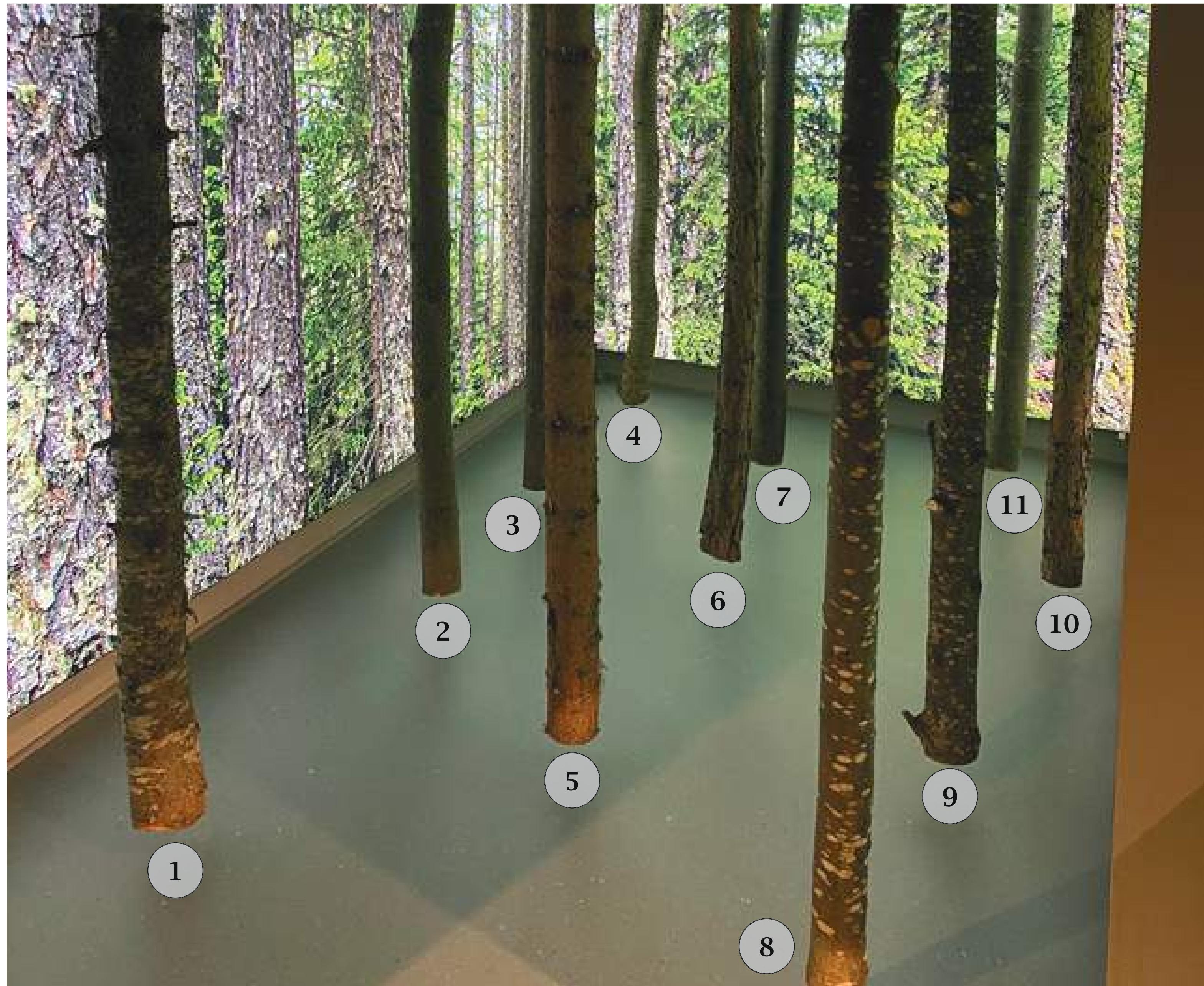
Forests have now been able to re-form and spread as a result of numerous reforestation efforts made in the first part of the 20th century, the abandoning of agricultural crops in less favourable places and a more careful forestry policy.

Corrado Letey
Forestry expert



Wood

From shrubs to large woodland trees: each has its strengths and weaknesses, its veins and colours. Walnut, sycamore maple, larch, Swiss pine, fir, ash, beech, cherry, chestnut, linden, Scots pine ... these are the wood types you will encounter during your visit.



- 1. Swiss pine**
- 2. Ash**
- 3. Linden**
- 4. Cherry**
- 5. Norway spruce**
- 6. Scots pine**
- 7. Chestnut**
- 8. Whitebeam**
- 9. Sycamore maple**
- 10. Larch**
- 11. Beech**



SHAPE

Experience is organised and given order by shape. As such, it cannot be fixed or stopped in time, instead it is a path. Not a solution, outcome or end but a genesis, growth and essence. Shape is presented through categories anchored in the process of creation, history, territory and personal (or familiar) style, which are expressed through the formal attributes of the objects: typology, function, ingenuity and balance. The continuum between originality and reiteration of a traditional object can be seen in each of these subcategories. The meaning that it seeks to convey is that it is capable of evolving into a variety of diverse manifestations; it is the shift in the interaction between the craftsman's hands and the material world in which he works: the potential for metamorphosis. The shapes become traditional through repetition as a result of the tension between conservation and the drive for renewal. A technique consisting of repeated actions, whose rhythms and cadences influence the relationship between craftsman and material, produces the dimension of repetition resulting in similarity. However, despite the action being repeated, variations appear each time and in each object, reinforcing the idea that there is no separation between society and the individual, between typology and know-how. Each object speaks of a specific hand, a tool, a manual skill, and of a specific moment when craftsman, material and environment worked in harmony.

«The shape of the object is conditioned by the particular use for which it is intended, and the raw material used; the quality of the wood determines the technique of the work. The shape of a tool stems from a blending of primordial forms that have been modified as experience suggests. The craftsman finds it hard to follow a traditional model because he is not without imagination and aesthetic taste, and thus aims to give his work a fresh look. In this case, even though the work is devoid of embellishment, it can still have artistic merit due to its originality».



Tipology

Up close, no object is the same as the others. Even items that have the same use can vary depending on its maker's preferences, the area of production or how its usage has changed through time. In ideal types and forms, where it is possible to understand the transformation rules that result in structural invariants or constants, these variables are produced on axes of coherence. It is possible to glimpse a specific moral and ethical world through the artisans' descriptions of their locally produced works: "robust shapes, restrained colours and horizontal lines, balance and stability, and a compelling impression of grandeur and pride".



1. Basket with band

20th century

Willow and hazel wood

2. Basket

Pietro Daudry (1915–2014)

20th century

Willow wood

3. Basket

20th century

Willow and hazel wood

4. Cup with two handles

1920

Maple wood

5. Headrest

1852

Maple wood

6. Bread stamp

1877

Swiss pine wood

7. Bread stamp

1878

Swiss pine wood

8. Bread stamp

1879

Swiss pine wood



Tipology



9. Three butter stamps

20th century

Wood

10. Cowbell

Iron

11. Cup with two handles

20th century

Maple wood

12. Headrest

1797

Maple wood

13. Inkwell

Soapstone and glass

14. Inkwell

1896

Soapstone

15. Inkwell

Soapstone

16. Group of *cornailles* toys

Various wood types

17. Tobacco container

20th century

Boxwood, iron and leather

18. Tobacco container

20th century

Wood, birch bark and leather

19. Tobacco container

20th century

Wood, birch bark and leather

20. Cowbell

Iron

21. Cup with four handles

20th century

Maple wood

22. Headrest

1852

Swiss pine wood

23. Three butter stamps

Wood



Tipology



24. Whetstone holder

1888

Wood

25. Whetstone

Stone

26. Whetstone holder

Late 19th century

Ibex horn

Private Collection

27. Whetstone holder

20th century

Poplar wood

28. Sonnaille

Iron

29. Cowbell

Renzo Ferrari (1941)

20th century

Stone

30. Mortar with pestle

18th century

Stone and wood

31. Mortar with pestle

18th century

Stone, wood and iron

32. Tabletop tobacco holder

Tobie Deval (1920-1998)

1997

Wood and birch bark

33. Tabletop tobacco holder

20th century

Wood and birch bark

34. Tabletop tobacco holder

Oreste Ferrod

2010

Wood and birch bark



Ingenuity

By expressing the conflict between standard and innovation, ingenuity refers to a living tradition in which artisans are not mere reiterators of a constant image (form), but are brilliant innovators who breathe new life into tradition while remaining in accord with previous models and typologies. The emergence of individuality, an idea or a solution serves as the catalyst for change. It has to do with the very idea of creativity as the ability to resolve issues brought on by circumstances. Ingenuity is linked to use, to the ability to adapt the objects and materials available to meet specific needs. It is a lateral thought that can flout established conventions. Washing potatoes, often laden with soil, is facilitated by designing a potato basket to have recurring slats rather than being interwoven, maximising its functionality.



1. Laundry tongs

20th century

Maple wood

2. Stick

20th century

Wood

3. Pair of hay-tying bobbin shuttles

20th century

Cord and aspen wood

4. Leather bottle

17th century

Leather and iron

5. Cheese curd cutter

Livio Charbonnier (1938)

2010

Wood

6. Covered bottle

1860

Willow wood and glass

RAVA Collection

7. Potato basket

20th century

Various wood types

RAVA Collection



Ingenuity



8. Goat collar

19th-20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

9. Pair of carding tools

1822

Wood of walnut, poplar and iron

Private Collection

10. Panier porte-pelotes

20th century

Willow wood

RAVA Collection

11. Grater

17th century

Iron

12. Scythe anvil

20th century

Iron

Private Collection

13. Case

1828

Swiss pine wood

14. Ratchet

Hans Savoye (1901-1966)

20th century

Walnut wood

15. Shears

17th century

Iron

RAVA Collection

16. Pair of fire strikers

15th-17th century

Iron

RAVA Collection

17. Spinning top

20th century

Boxwood

RAVA Collection



Function

Function is the task that objects must fulfil: a bowl is used to drink or eat, a cradle to carry babies, a bell to identify an animal. Artisan objects are defined by their use: they must be used and must perform their function well. On this, all artisans concur. But an object's use might change and, despite an apparent uniformity of what we consider traditional, each specifies an area of realisation. The function of objects changes with the changing needs that are historically renewed or with the diversified purposes of similar objects: a bell for a goat will be different in size and sound from one intended for a cow, and a chair used for milking will be structurally different from a chair for the home or workplace.



1. Scoop

1857

Maple wood

2. Skimmer

19th century

Maple wood

Private Collection

3. Spoon

20th century

Beech wood

4. Ladle

Late 19th century

Maple wood

Private Collection

5. Spoon

20th century

Maple wood

6. Acetylene lamp

20th century

Metal

7. Lantern

19th century

Metal and glass



Function



8. Lantern

20th century

Metal and glass

9. Jar

19th century

Willow wood

Private Collection

10. Basket

19th century

Willow wood

RAVA Collection

11. Oval container

19th century

Willow wood

RAVA Collection

12. Candelabra

20th century

Maple wood

13. Porte-lampe

18th century

Walnut wood

14. Candle holder

17th century

Walnut wood

15. Chair

19th century

Maple wood

16. Milking stool

Tobie Deval (1920-1998)

20th century

Maple wood

17. Stool

Ezio Thomasset (1953-2013)

21th century

Wood

18. Barley roaster

18th century

Iron

19. Barley roaster

19th century

Iron



Function



20. Coffee roaster

20th century

Iron

21. Clothes iron

19th century

Soapstone

RAVA Collection

22. Clothes iron

20th century

Iron and wood

23. Clothes iron

Iron and wood

24. Cup with two handles

20th century

Maple wood

25. Friendship cup

20th century

Maple wood

26. Friendship cup

20th century

Maple wood

27. Measure for cereals

1773

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

28. Measure for cereals

19th century

Willow wood

Private Collection

29. Measure for cereals

1839

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

30. Dusting tool for winegrowing

1920

Wood, iron and leather

31. Dusting tool

20th century

Beech wood, metal and leather

32. Dusting tool for beehive

19th-20th century

Maple wood, iron and leather



Equilibrium

Decoration

What is decoration for? And what does it mean? Carvers claim that their only goal is to «embellish objects» and «honour the wood». A celebrating of the material by enhancing its features and consolidating the social significance of the objects within a community by emphasising the geometries that the community can relate to. We can never fully comprehend the intricate relationships that decorative motifs represent, which is why they have such a powerful hold over us. They are the component of a handcrafted object that transcends its practicality by aspiring to beauty understood as a shared sensibility developed over time that is difficult to define in words. The decorations on the utilitarian objects displayed depict shapes that allude to the histories of materials, people and their origins, to traditions in actions and crafts, and to local beliefs. They frequently serve as symbols for the community in which the object is made, while other times they describe the craftsman's hand and technique.

«All these decorations, cut with the tip of a knife, are closely linked to the carving technique. They are simple to do and allow for multiple decorations. The main theme is the connection between the rosette, a six-petalled star, and the vortex, a radiant sun. These motifs, on their own or arranged in more complex compositions, impose themselves with an almost obsessive regularity. Around these two basic motifs, other more geometric shapes appear: wolf fangs, zigzags, claws, and crosses, arranged each time in decorative themes and used to accent and frame other patterns. Alongside the decoration is integrated a whole set of heraldic motifs and secular or religious symbols: heart, cross, cornflower, lily, tree of life, a leafy branch, a pot of flowers, star, sun, moon, cockerel, bird ... all these decorative motifs can be enlivened by colour, allowing red to dominate and contrast with black or dark blue».

(Jacques Chatelain)

The craftsman understands a language that is expressed through silence, the hand and the gaze in the «perpetual and ancient» decorations. Geometric, floral-phytomorphic, symbolic ornaments, and zoomorphic or anthropomorphic figurations further demonstrate the formal multiplicity that makes it difficult to pinpoint a single traditional model from Valle d'Aosta because the decorations are an expression of the various specific areas of origin, while the techniques define the hand of those who produced them, multiplying tradition as in a prism crossed by a ray of light.

Polychrome

Knife point carving was the most popular traditional wood decoration technique in Valle d'Aosta, while multicoloured decoration was only used on objects of great significance, such as cradles, distaffs or goat collars, or objects with a distinct territorial origin, such as Cogne. Beginning in the early 20th century, industrially produced colours took the place of the original pigments, which had always been made from natural, mineral or plant elements.

Artefacts in the Cogne Valley combine intaglio decorations with multiple colours. One of the most decorated objects is the baptismal cradle, which has rosettes with six or twelve petals, radiated or round, and the monogram of Christ. It's also common to see heart-shaped elements paired with crosses or twigs and flowering stems. These subjects are often framed by bands of wolf's teeth, flowers (very often lilies), and semicircles.

Decorations in the Champorcher Valley, on the other hand, stand out in the artisan landscape because the most widespread decorative technique on furniture is to paint with natural pigments directly onto the wood, without first plastering. This unique production is localised geographically (exclusively in Champorcher) and historically (from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century).



Equilibrium

Sometimes equilibrium is a sensation, determined by features of form such as balance, straightness, symmetry. Other times it is a functional necessity like in a cradle, whose proper operation depends on carefully managing weights, volumes and materials. A balanced object is the consequence of the wood's quality, the working technique, and the artisan's personal imagination and aesthetic taste. Balance is created through a sense of proportion, the ability to distribute the weight of shapes in a composition, and the good and harmonious use of materials. More broadly, the sense of balance typical to the aesthetic taste of the Aosta Valley, which is characterised by the pursuit of symmetry in objects, shapes and decoration, reflects a culturally cherished and also aesthetically formalised way of being.



1. Goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

2. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

3. Goat collar

Rino Giuseppe D'Herin

2006

Hackberry wood

4. Goat collar

Pietro Péaquin

2007

Walnut wood

5. Goat collar

Pietro Paolo D'Herin (1905-1992)

20th century

Maple wood

6. Goat collar

Pietro Paolo D'Herin (1905-1992)

20th century

Maple wood



Equilibrium



7. Goat collar

20th century

Wood

8. Multicoloured goat collar

19th century

Walnut wood

9. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century

Hackberry wood

RAVA Collection

10. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

11. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

12. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA Collection

13. Multicoloured goat collar

1941

Hackberry wood

14. Goat collar

19th century

Walnut wood and leather

15. Butter stamp

19th century

Walnut wood

16. Butter stamp

1908

Walnut wood

17. Butter stamp

19th century

Maple wood

RAVA Collection

18. Butter stamp

20th century

Walnut wood

19. Butter stamp

Wood



Equilibrium



31. Grolla cup

Vincenzo Lauretig

2007

Maple wood

32. Two grolla cups

19th century

Maple wood

33. Box

19th century

Swiss pine wood

RAVA Collection

34. Case

1899

Wood of swiss pine and larch

35. Tobacco box

1909

Wood

Private collection

36. Casket

1868

Swiss pine wood

37. School case

19th century

Swiss pine wood

38. School case

Carlo Jans (1936-2015)

1997

Swiss pine wood

39. School case

19th century

Wood of walnut and scots pine

RAVA Collection

40. Shaving stand

Wood

41. Mortar

16th century

Stone

RAVA Collection



Equilibrium



42. Cockerels

Amato Brunodet (1917-2018)

21th century

Wood

IVAT Collection



43. Barrel

Stone

IVAT Collection



THE GESTURE

In workshops, where a craftsman's hands combine with materials and tools, a unique understanding is reached between imitation and originality. An individual yet shared gesture. It is this expressive tension that gives truth to an object, making it authentic. Behind it all is the sound of tools on living matter, the constant rhythm of the hand plane and the spark of an idea taking shape. If it's done by machine, it's not the same: the sound changes to a din and each object becomes identical and a number. A machine does not learn from the masters by "work-shadowing", discovering the secrets and the allure of the knowledge of a traditional technique, and it silences that tradition whose ultimate expression is in being handmade.

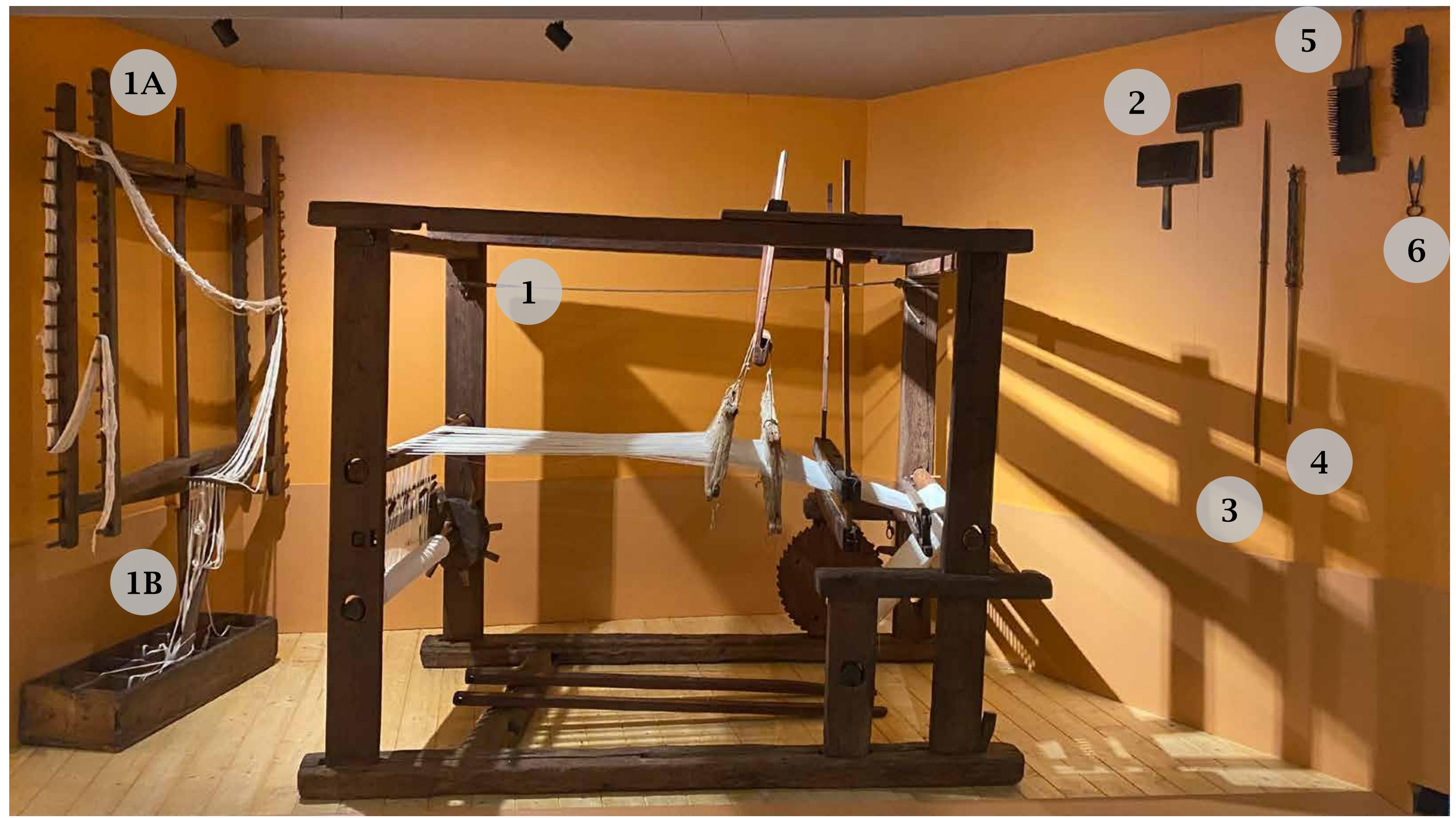
A craftsman's hours of work are compared to the machine's instantaneous time. The items are mass-produced, sold in bulk, losing sight of the fact that tradition is created and renewed by the personal gestures of the artisans in their workshops. It is only in this way that an object does not end with its time of use, and it indicates that a tacit knowledge has been absorbed without conscious thought. From the sum of a multitude of small daily gestures, a practice arises that can give voice to mountain life, to the care of a territory and its culture. Only in the slower time of the workshop does the Aosta Valley spirit whisper its own qualities with works that are unique every time.



Weaving

«Loom weaving is primarily a passion, a choice to continue a tradition. Hemp fabrics are known for their strength, durability and understated elegance. But the manual expertise of those who make them continues to fascinate people now as it did in the past. Ancient manual weaving on wooden looms, where hands and feet move in combination like the gears of a machine, will always be a labour-intensive yet interesting activity of yesteryear. Technique, precision and dedication are the right mix of elements that transform this ancient skill into an art. Like any other artist, the weaver combines precision of action with a creative spirit. Weavers strive to preserve tradition while keeping an eye on the present. We achieve this by looking for ways to include both tradition and innovation. The thread is a metaphor for the pleasure and struggle that sometimes bind the two ideas together, since weaving a cloth is like weaving the strands of life. Ultimate satisfaction is our reward»

Cooperativa Lou Dzeut, Champorcher, weavers



1. Loom, swift yarn winder (1A), warp (1B)

Wood and hemp

Fénis Municipality

2. Pair of carding tools

Wood and iron

IVAT Collection

3. Distaff

19th century

Wood

RAVA Collection

4. Distaff

20th century

Swiss pine wood

RAVA Collection

5. Two brushes for hemp decortication

Wood and iron

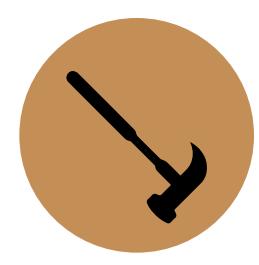
Private Collection

6. Shears

17th century

Iron

RAVA Collection



Sculpture

«Sculptors express their feelings through their creations. For me, sculpture is life, it is a form of art innate to me, an act of creation. Sculpting cannot be forced on you, either you have it or you don't. You can instruct in technique, wood selection and sketching, but it's hard to communicate art if you don't experience it within».

Carlo Gadin, sculptor



1. Chisels, gouges and knives

Wood and metal

Private Collection

2. Mallet

Carlo Gadin (1943)

Wood

Private Collection

3. Clamp

Wood

4. Apron

Leather

Private Collection

5. Man with bundle

Gino Thomasset (1922-2014)

20th century

Swiss pine wood

6. Man with bucket

Armando Laurent (1925-2011)

20th century

Birch wood

7. Swing

Hans Savoye (1901-1966)

20th century

Barberry wood

8. Woman with basket

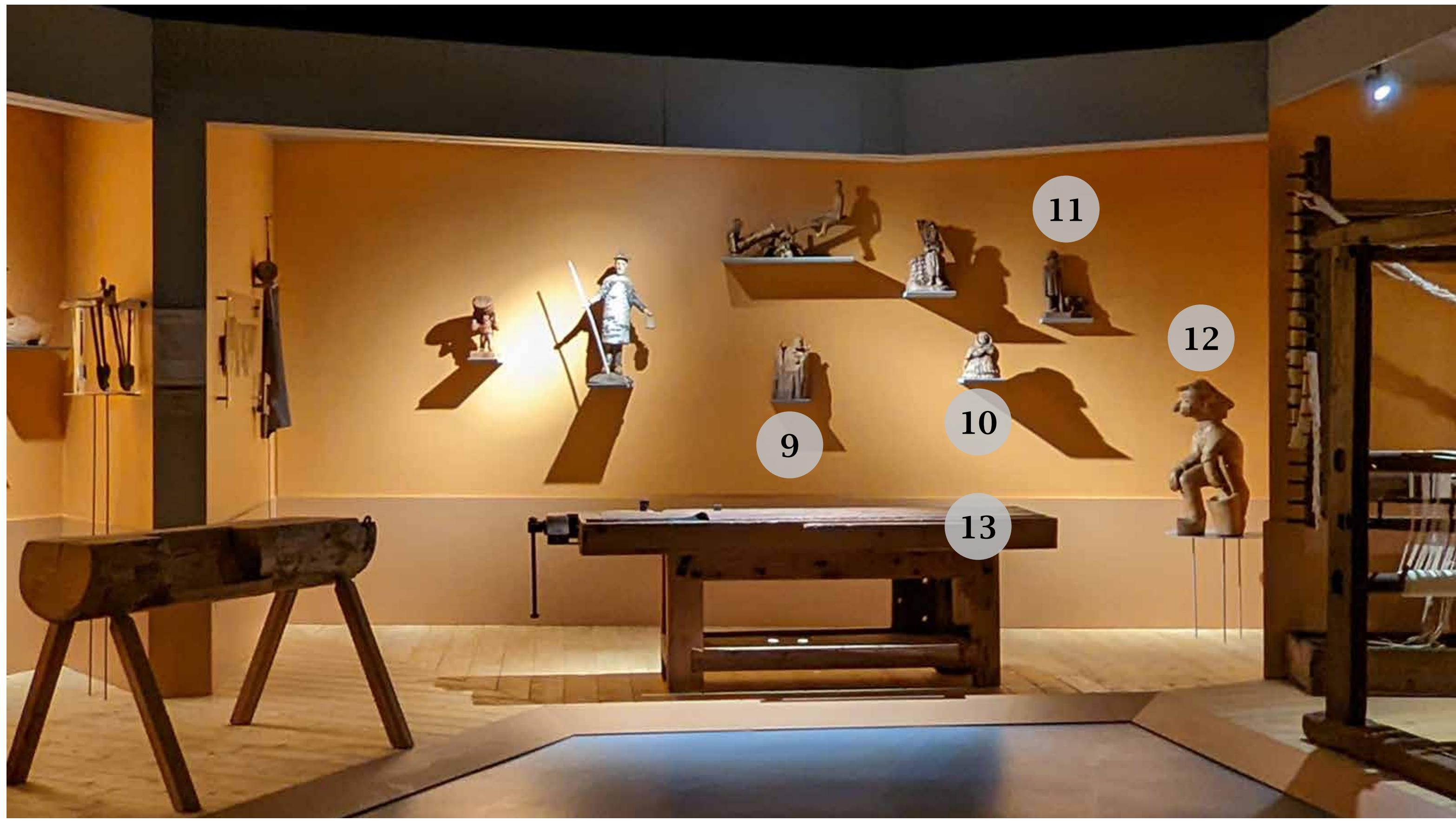
Giuseppe Binel (1955)

20th century

Walnut wood



Sculpture



9. Saint Ursus

Massimo Clos (1959)

Wood

10. Woman

Peter Trojer (1981)

Walnut wood

11. Man with dog

Maurice Vagneur (1915-2002)

20th century

Walnut wood

12. Milker with stool

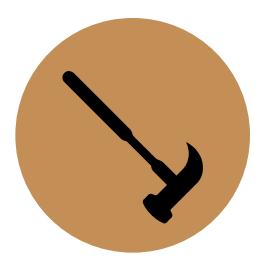
Renato Champretavy

Wood

13. Carpenter's table

Various wood types

Private Collection



Making sabot clogs

«In order to preserve a long-standing tradition that is an integral part of the Ayas area's character, producing clogs has now evolved into more than just a job. These days they are produced for cultural reasons rather than for the market. The process of making sabots by hand involves repetitive actions that do not leave much room for individual creativity, but manual dexterity and gestures make all the difference. For a “sabotier”, having a “good eye” is essential for selecting the tree, seeing the shape in the wood to avoid too much waste, and knowing how to determine the object's proportions and shapes.

Apart from the necessary skills, to make good sabots you need to hone your eye and to believe that it is our duty to uphold an ancient tradition».

Samuel Becquet of the Cooperativa Li Tsacolé d'Ayas, sabotiers



1. Clog maker tools

Wood and metal

Private Collection

2. Pair of child's clogs

Leandro Favre (1950)

20th century

Poplar wood

IVAT Collection

3. Clog-maker's blade

Wood and metal

Private Collection

4. Pair of clogs for men and women

Leandro Favre (1950)

20th century



Poplar wood

IVAT Collection

5. Two left clogs

Late 19th century

Fir wood

IVAT Collection

6. Five gimlets

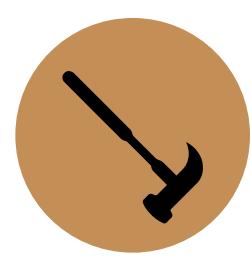
Wood and iron

Private Collection

7. Bench and shoe block

Wood

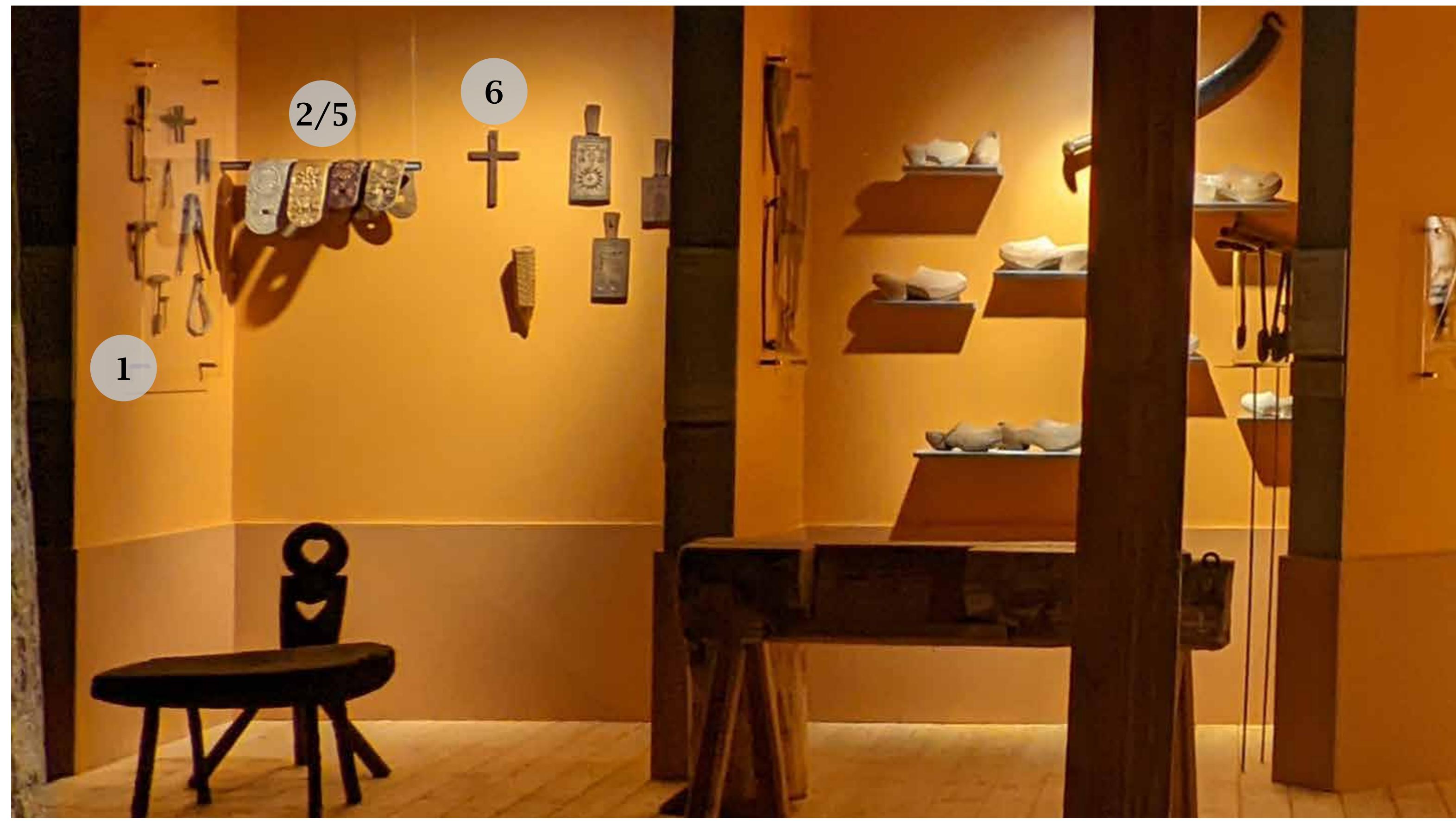
Private Collection



Carving

«The carving on an object tells an entire story rather than just serving as decoration. The work of carvers requires not just patience and accuracy but also investigation since, in order to communicate, they need to be familiar with the symbols through which to express themselves. Every time I use a knife or chisel to engrave a symbol, whether it's a monogram, a vine, the sun or the stars, I do it knowing that I am marking out a discourse that other people will read. Like a phrase, a carved decoration should be straightforward but effective. Exaggerated and intricate decorations do not improve the beauty of an object, they merely obscure it and weaken the intended impact of the decoration».

Livio Charbonnier, carver



1. Carving tools

19th-20th century

Wood and metal

Private and IVAT Collection

2. Goat collar

Selve Crétaz (1909-1991)

20th century

Maple wood

3. Goat collar

Rino Giuseppe D'Hérin

2004

Hackberry wood

4. Goat collar

Perruchon

1958

Walnut wood

Collection RAVA

5. Goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

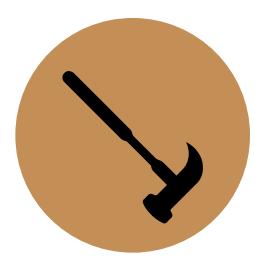
Collection RAVA

6. Crucifix

Livio Charbonnier (1938)

2010

Walnut wood



Carving



7. Whetstone holder

Tobie Deval (1920-1998)

Maple wood

8. Butter stamp

19th century

Maple wood

RAVA Collection

9. Butter stamp

Wood

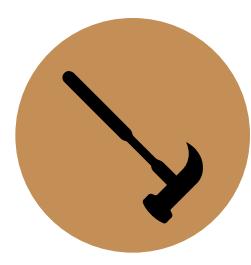
10. Butter stamp

Wood

11. Chair and table

Wood

Private Collection



Wood turning

«One of the most basic craft techniques is wood turning. The lathe spins the piece of wood, human hands are responsible for everything else. Simply by removing material from the piece of wood, the artisan transforms what nature has provided. I already know what I'll make out of piece of wood as soon as I see it: a plate or a bowl. The wood turner simply brings out the shape of what is already presented in nature. The most interesting wood turning is the traditional, manual type because it preserves ancient knowledge and restores a direct connection to the raw material and the environment. The only tools required for manual wood turning are a hatchet in your backpack, a crochet hook and some rope. Everything else is provided by the forest».

Rudy Mehr, wood turner



1. Friendship cup

Domenico Brunodet (1914-1997)

1976

Walnut wood

2. Grolla cup

Domenico Brunodet (1914-1997)

20th century

Maple wood

3. Friendship cup

Domenico Brunodet (1914-1997)

20th century

Maple wood

4. Cup with four handles

Maple wood

5. Cup with four handles

19th century

Maple wood

RAVA Collection

6. Cup

20th century

Maple wood

7. Cup

20th century

Maple wood



Wood turning



8. Cup with four handles

20th century

Maple wood

Private Collection

9. Cup with four handles

21th century

Maple wood

10. Grolla cup

19th century

Maple wood

RAVA Collection

11. Grolla cup

Mauro Petitjacques (1945)

2000

Walnut wood

12. Grolla cup

Alfonso Laurent (1881-1968)

20th century

Maple wood

13. Hammer and *crochets*

Wood and metal

14. Multi-axis wood turning

Luigi Merivot (1945-2020)

Wood

15. Mechanical lathe

Private Collection

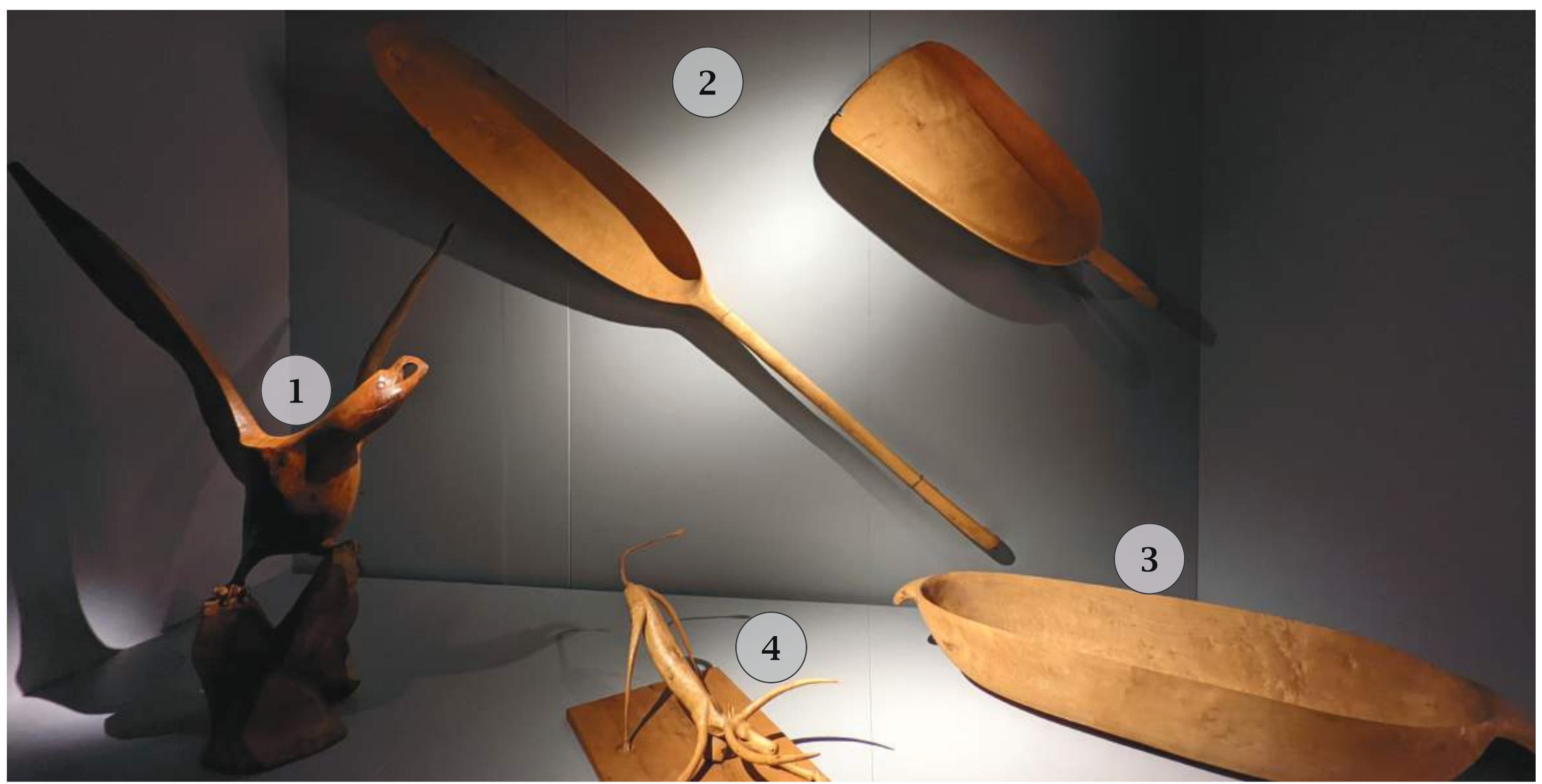
16. Pole lathe

IVAT Collection



AVANT-GARDE

In defiance of the economic principles of his family and community, the well-known craftsman Alfonso Laurent from the small town of Gaby in the Gressoney valley, decided one day to fell a sizeable maple tree to create – for the first time – “useless” objects, such as the huge spoons on display as well as bowls and scoops. It was the 1960s. Unbeknownst to him, in the same period in New York the artist Claes Oldenburg was creating oversize everyday objects, reasoning in other ways about consumerism. Tradition has the ability to reinvent itself through extraordinary actions that bring about novel and perhaps unsettling syntheses, radically altering our perspective of the world. The avant-garde is conceived as an emancipatory event involving repeated thrusts towards transformation, decisive impulses that may or may not succeed in the terrain in which they emerge. In Valle d'Aosta craftsmanship, useful items are liberated from the constraints of regular usage to represent a fresh conception of craftsmanship, becoming a unique interpretation of the locality. The same is true of cows depicted everywhere in traditional representations: in Brunodet's pieces they are stylised and almost unrecognisable, freeing the craftsman's work from mere replication, and emphasising the style of its author. Thus, the past is used as a starting point for exploration from which tradition emerges that is always in sync with the contemporary.



1. Large eagle

Renato Champretavy

20th century

Swiss pine wood

2. Large spoon and spatula

Alfonso Laurent (1881-1968)

20th century

Maple wood

3. Container

Alfonso Laurent (1881-1968)

20th century

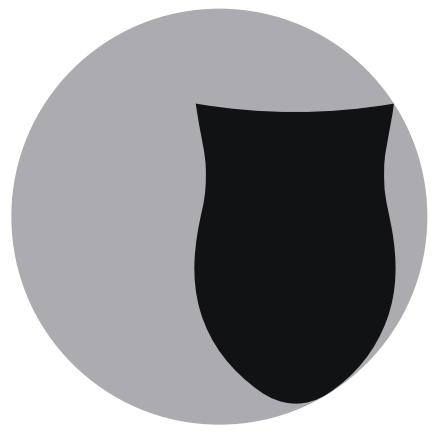
Maple wood

4. Stylised cow

Antonio Brunodet (1924-1997)

20th century

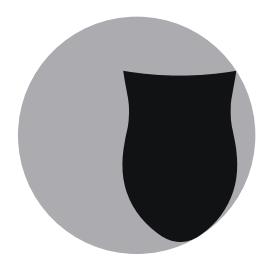
Maple wood



BEAUTY

«The artisan seeks to indulge his innate need for beauty in the pursuit of a personal style» (Jules Brocherel). The importance of beauty is universally acknowledged as a crucial component of human existence, while being one of the most elusive concepts. It can be evoked by order and harmony but also by the abysses of chaos, from which everything emerges. Its sensorial appeal does not exhaust it: rather, it influences the senses and transcends them by broadening the horizons of the imagination. When is a handcrafted object considered beautiful? If you ask the craftsman, he will respond when it is properly made, is functional and is durable. Connoisseurs define a beautiful artifact as being “right”.

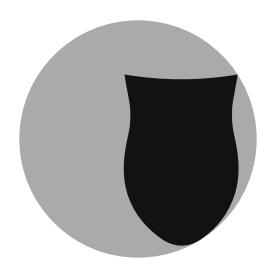
An object is right that is pleasing to the eye and to the touch, if it is light and easy to use, if it is well balanced, if it is made of locally sourced materials, and if the craftsman’s technical abilities can be identified. The moral and aesthetic values of a society are profoundly connected, and the rightness of an artifact is their essential embodiment. Beauty represents a society’s positive values, while ugliness represents the opposite. Through the use of beauty, today’s craftsman fights back against the “disposable” and fast-moving world, a world that overlooks details and flattens its richness in uniformity.



Ethics and aesthetics in craftsmanship

Ethics are everywhere and, on closer inspection, so are aesthetics. There is no place where humans do not consider what is right or do not look for beauty. Yet not all places have the same opinions. As a result of a specific relationship that requires ongoing adjustment, ethics emerge in the friction that is formed between ourselves and the environment in which we live, the resources it provides to us and others, human and non-human. Ethics, by their very essence, are a way of doing things and of reacting to the world. The manual labour of the craftsman, in his constant endeavour to work with the materials and preserve the balance with nature necessary for the community to thrive, is eminently ethical.

The aesthetic qualities of a piece are linked to a certain way of being in Valle d'Aosta craftsmanship: «the faces we sculpt are the faces of our people. Restraint of lines, plasticity and expressing the essential are traits of our art». An ethical system is defined and made both internally and externally recognisable by the notions of simplicity, restraint, balance and gravity, used to characterise objects. Technical dexterity is a collection of learned, practiced and passed-down skills that anchors an artisan production to its region, and to specific social and cultural contexts. If craftsmanship is still alive it is because it serves as a representation of the community and its surrounding area. In creating forms that embody a distinct aspect of the human spirit and which, when shared, convert a chaotic sensation into an organised and meaningful space to which a group feels emotionally connected, local craftsmanship highlights the crucial interaction with the environment. Ethics and aesthetics are based on a shared ground of affections in the special encounter between the state of living in a place and an attitude of “happily” looking upon it, to start shaping the future from there.



Beauty



1. Grolla cup

18th century

Maple wood

2. Wayfarer

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)

20th century

Maple wood

3. Scoop

Armando Laurent (1925-2011)

20th century

Maple wood

4. Ram

Vittorio Vuillermoz (1883-1962)

20th century

Maple wood

5. Mask

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)

20th century

Maple wood

6. Owl mask

Maurice Vagneur (1915-2002)

20th century

Bois de noyer

7. Cup

18th-19th century

Maple wood

Collection RAVA

8. Cup

Maple wood

9. Sieve

19th century

Willow and hazel wood

10. Basket

Angelo Nicco (1951-2007)

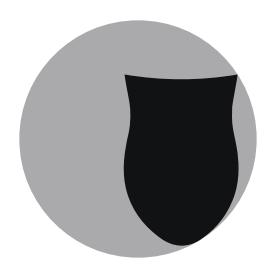
Hazel and fir wood

11. Grolla cup

Amato Brunodet (1917-2018)

20th century

Maple wood



Beauty



12. Cup

1771

Maple wood

RAVA Collection

13. Oval box

19th century

Swiss pine wood

14. Saint Ursus

Giovanni Thoux (1935)

21th century

Walnut wood

15. Container with lid

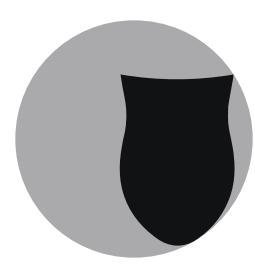
17th-18th century

Soapstone

RAVA Collection

16. Container

Soapstone and iron



Beauty



17. Devil mask

Luigi Meynet (1922-2012)

20th century

Walnut wood

18. Man with flask and broom

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)

20th century

Maple wood

19. Devil

Grato Agostino Maquignaz (1910-1970)

20th century

Maple wood

20. Woman

Armando Laurent (1925-2011)

20th century

Birch wood

21. Madonna with rosary

Hans Savoye (1901-1966)

20th century

Maple wood

22. Saint Lorenzo

Maurice Vagneur (1915-2002)

20th century

Walnut wood

23. Saint Ursus

Pietro Giuseppe Perret

1962

Pear wood

24. Grolla cup

Maurice Vagneur (1915-2002)

XXe siècle

Walnut wood

25. Saint Giocondo

Gino Thomasset (1922-2014)

20th century

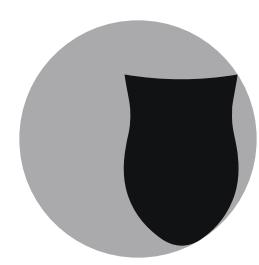
Walnut wood

26. Saint Agostino

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)

20th century

Maple wood



Beauty



27. Friendship cup

Domenico Brunodet (1914-1997)

1976

Maple wood

28. Mask

Wood

29. Mask

Wood

30. Mask

Oscar Brocard (1926-2006)

20th century

Birch bark

31. Reaper

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)

20th century

Maple wood

32. Musicians

Gino Anselmo Daguin (1935)

2009

Soapstone

33. Musicians

Gino Anselmo Daguin (1935)

2010

Soapstone

34. Winter landscape

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)

20th century

Maple wood

35. Three men on a sled

20th century

Maple wood

36. Mule taking fright

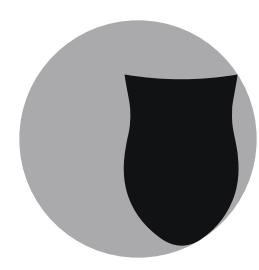
Federico Jordaney (1918-1995)

20th century

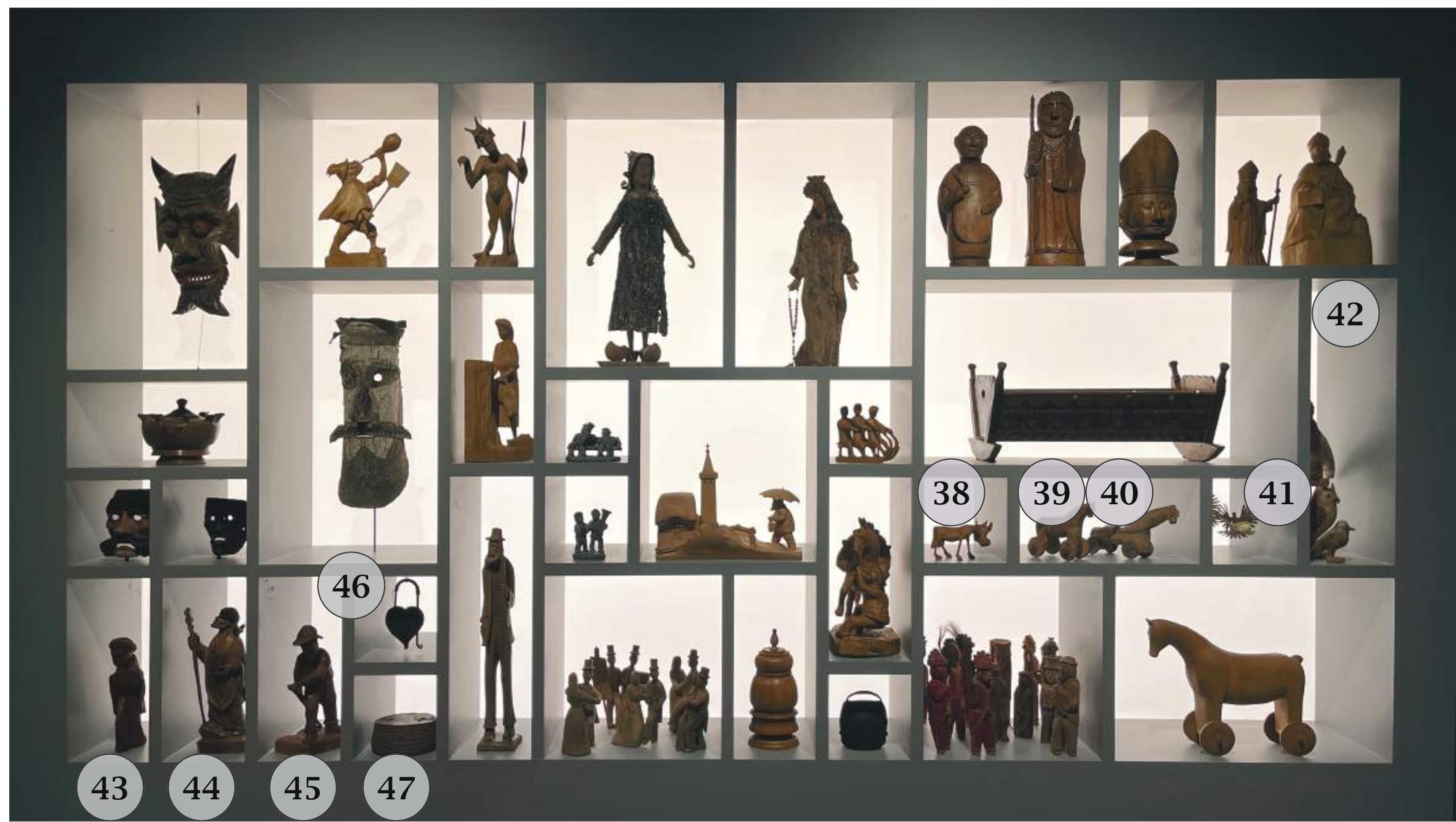
Maple wood

37. Multicoloured cradle

Painted fir wood



Beauty



38. Stylised cow

Giovanni Brunodet (1910-2006)

20th century

Maple wood

39. Tatà (wheeled toy animal)

Marcello Brunodet (1898-1967)

20th century

Maple wood

40. Tatà (wheeled toy animal)

Daniele Maquignaz

20th century

Maple wood

41. Doves

Rino Giuseppe D'Herin

20th century

Willow wood

42. Birds

Vittorio Brunier (1914-1988)

1988

Swiss pine wood

43. Saint

Carlo Gadin (1943)

20th century

Larch wood

44. Saint Ursus

Luigi Meynet (1922-2012)

20th century

Walnut wood

45. Man mowing

Gino Thomasset (1922-2014)

20th century

Swiss pine wood

46. Padlock with key

18th century

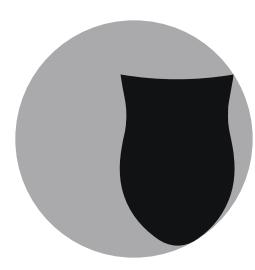
Iron

RAVA Collection

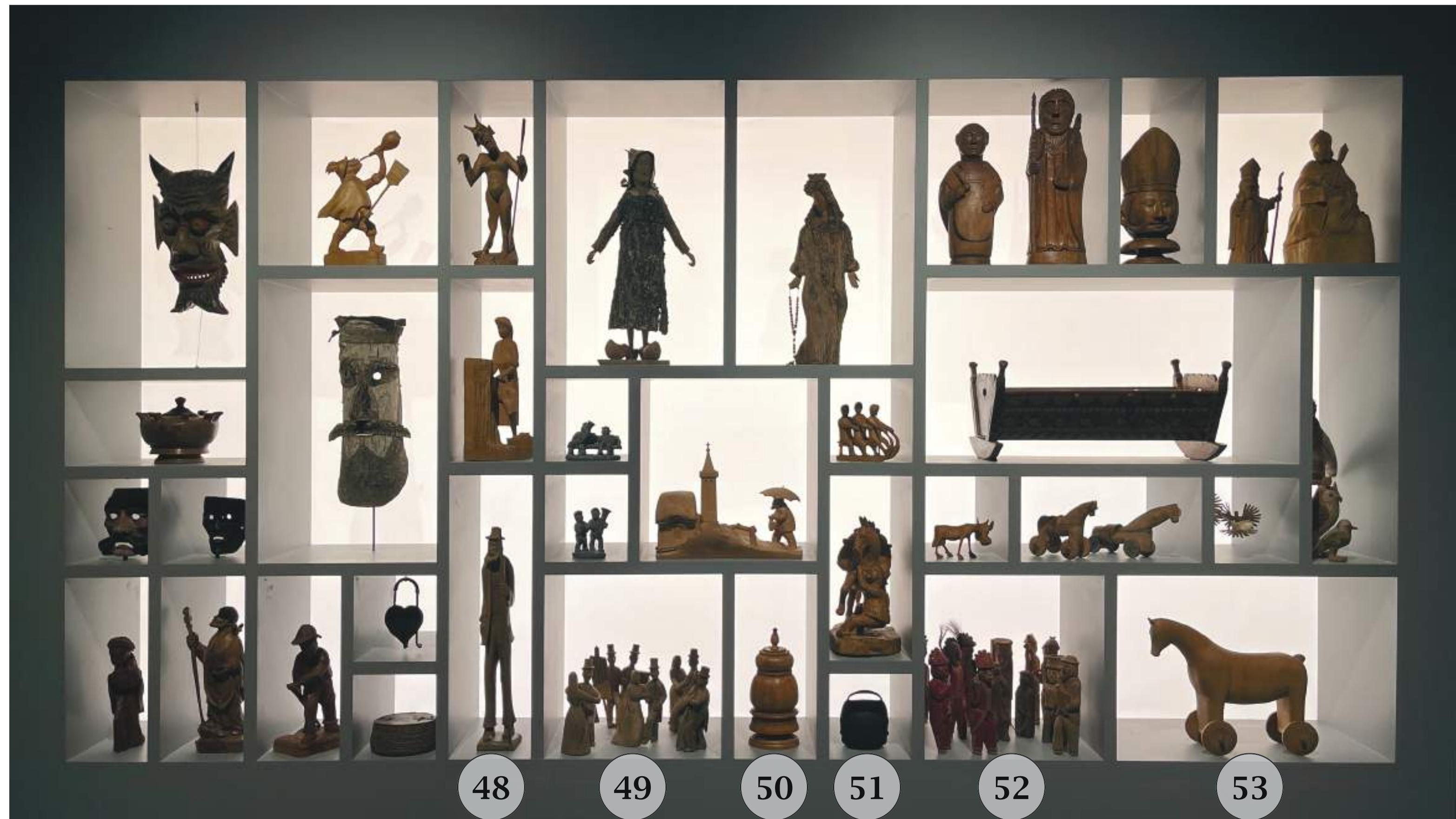
47. Shepherd's basket

18th century

Swiss pine and willow wood



Beauty



48. Shepherd

Carlo Gadin (1943)

1972

Walnut wood

49. Badoche (traditional pageant)

Hans Savoye (1901-1966)

20th century

Walnut wood

50. Grolla cup

Brunodet brothers

20th century

Maple wood

51. Cowbell

18th century

Fer

RAVA Collection

52. Coumba Freida carnival

Rino Diemoz (1930-1979)

20th century

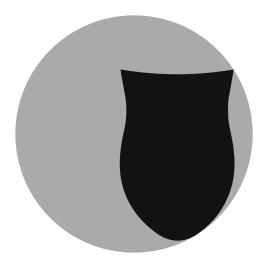
Maple wood

53. Tatà (wheeled toy animal)

Amato Brunodet (1917-2018)

20th century

Maple wood



54. Veil of Veronica - panel

16th century

Swiss pine wood

RAVA Collection