



La forma

MUSEUM GUIDE



The idea of redesigning the MAV, thirteen years after its opening, stems from the desire to update our reflection on the current role and significance of traditional Valdostan handicrafts.

Over these years, we have worked on several fronts: education, exhibitions, preservation and communication, with the aim of encouraging the local community, and beyond, to observe and understand our craft heritage.

During these years, we have grown and changed, while values and trends have evolved. It was therefore urgent to renew the means of dialogue with our visitors. As a mirror of society, the museum is a cultural tool that must be able to evolve, engage with its audiences and set itself new objectives.

The new MAV presents a succession of thematic areas that highlight and explore aspects that we consider essential to understanding both the object and the culture that produced it.

Memory, as the symbolic and cultural root of local craftsmanship, is presented through the exhibition of the Brocherel Collection, respecting its original typological and collecting choices, as well as the thinking of the period in which it was assembled, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Decorations, polychromy, types of wood, forms and uses trace the identity of a craft tradition.

Material is explored through a diagnostic analysis designed to convey the importance of our raw materials in traditional craftsmanship, rooted in knowledge and practices passed down through generations.

Then comes form, which is repeated and transformed, following changing times, fashions and materials, tracing the paths through which an object's identity, its function and the ingenuity of its makers are recognised.

Then there is the gesture and the places in which it is expressed, an essential emblem of human production. Hands, eyes, knowledge and ideas bring the craft workshops of our valleys to life.

And finally, beauty, as the culmination of the story. This exhibition narrative seeks to offer visitors an insight into traditional Valdostan craftsmanship through attentive and analytical observation, revealing what lies behind and within each object. The accompanying texts are intended to guide visitors and encourage reflection.

Enjoy your visit.

MEMORY

“Look, there!”, a child might say, pointing at an object inside a display case. This simple, curious expression encourages us to remember who we are and how we inhabit the world around us, creating, together with that child—the privileged recipient of the act of remembering—a sense of “us”.

In a museum, as visitors move from room to room, they encounter stories and memories of others, preserved in objects that become carriers of memory.

But what is memory? Who is it for? And whose is it?

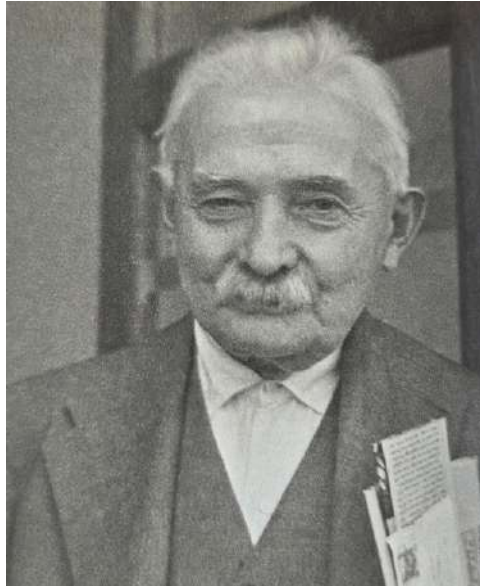
Memory is the connective tissue that binds the individual to the community.

Here, the visitor’s experience is shaped by the particular way in which they interpret the interplay of light and shadow created by the objects placed between them.

This section recreates the exhibition choices made by Jules Brocherel for the 1936 exhibition Valdostan Folk Art, an exhibition that, by bringing it to light, helped shape the destiny of local craftsmanship.

Recreating a historical display means not only paying tribute to an intellectual who, perhaps more than anyone else, succeeded in highlighting the distinctive qualities of Valdostan aesthetics through the appreciation of everyday objects. It also means restoring a living, malleable form of memory through objects that are always new, even though they remain the same: presented in the same way, yet capable of telling different truths and stories to different eyes.

Recalling the techniques and decorative models that once embellished everyday life offers us an opportunity to look today, with a sense of joyful wonder, at the gestures and hands of those who knew how to shape beauty from what was available. Through them, we can imagine more sustainable ways of living, guided by an ethos of reciprocity with the materials provided by the environment in which we live, and grounded in locality, rootedness and sharing.



JULES BROCHEREL

The first section of the museum is dedicated to Jules Brocherel, a central figure in Valdostan culture.

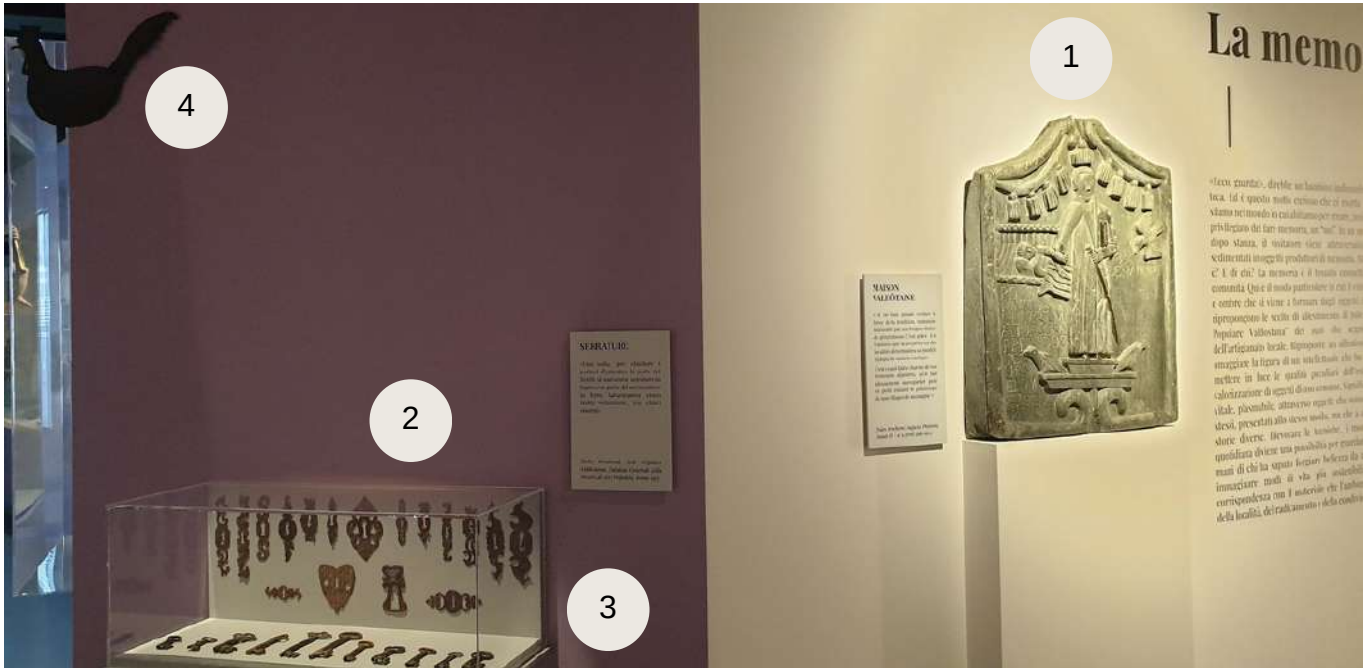
Born in Courmayeur in 1871, Brocherel was a mountaineer, explorer, photographer, scholar and ethnologist. After expeditions to Central Asia, he returned to the Aosta Valley and devoted himself to preserving local traditions, promoting Valdostan identity through articles, photographs and the journal *Augusta Prætoria*.

His most important role in relation to the museum was that of collector: for more than twenty years, he gathered objects from everyday life, photographs and handicrafts. The 1936 exhibition Valdostan Folk Art represents the culmination of his work. Most of the objects on display come from his collection, now owned by the Fondazione Torino Musei and loaned to the MAV. They are arranged according to Brocherel's original categories: domestic, personal, social and religious arts.

Brocherel died in Aosta in 1954 and now rests in Courmayeur, at the foot of Mont Blanc.

His collection continues to bear witness to the identity and memory of the Aosta Valley, renewing its contribution to the appreciation and preservation of its craft heritage.

Rural architecture



1. Commemorative plaque for Doctor 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



THE COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE FOR DOCTOR GRAPPEIN

This soapstone monolith is a commemorative stele, probably once displayed outside the medical practice of Dr Grappein in Cogné. The stele depicts the doctor standing beside a patient's bed, taking his pulse. In his left hand, he holds a medical manual and a cane, symbols of his profession. Two ravens are depicted beside the pedestal, while another flies near the doctor, perhaps symbolising the passage between life and death. The scene is framed by a canopy with tassels, lending solemnity to the image.

The inscription, in French, reads: "PORTRAIT DE CESAR EMANUEL GRAPPEIN DOCTEUR EN MEDECINE MORT 1855 LE 9 AVRIL", giving the doctor's name, profession and date of death.

César-Emmanuel Grappein, born in Cogné in 1772 and a physician from 1804, was an innovator and philanthropist. He was involved in the management of the Cogné iron mine, distributing profits fairly among all citizens and supporting poor families. He promoted public education, small classes, education for women and adequate salaries for teachers. Convinced that culture should be supported by public administrations, he advocated for elections open to all.

He died in Cogné in 1855, leaving a legacy of progress and social justice.

Popular religious devotion



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



THE VERGIN OF EINSIEDELN

This artefact is distinguished by its convex shape, an unusual feature compared to traditional religious sculptures. It depicts the Virgin and Child, both crowned and richly decorated. Their garments, once silver-plated, feature enamelled and gilded phytomorphic motifs. Their facial features resemble those of the Virgin of the Einsiedeln Shrine, a pilgrimage site held dear by the people of the Aosta Valley in the 18th century. It is likely that an artisan was inspired by the shrine's sculpture, although he portrayed the Virgin with a fair complexion rather than the dark complexion of the Black Virgin of Einsiedeln.

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

X13th - 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

Miscellaneous 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. Two Missal (liturgical book) stands

Wood

6. Bases for candlesticks

Wood

7. Missal (liturgical book) stand

1797

Wood

8. Missal (liturgical book) stand

Wood

9. Golden angel

Wood

10. Reliquary

Fabric and glass

11. Flower vase

Wood

12. Incense bolder

Silver-plated copper

13. Mask

1880

Wood

14. Mask

Wood

15. Mask

around 1850

Wood and fabric

16. Mask

Wood

17. Mask

Wood

18. Mask

Wood



MISSAL HOLDERS

As the name suggests, missal holders were used to store missals, that is, liturgical books. Made from a single block of wood, they were hollowed out on one side to create a space for holding the book.

In the example on display, lateral grooves around the opening indicate the former presence of a sliding lid, now lost. The dimensions of the container varied according to the size of the volume it was designed to hold.

The outer surfaces often feature engraved or carved decoration, sometimes incorporating Christian symbols; in some cases, the shape of the container itself recalls that of a book binding.



CARNIVAL MASKS

Carnival was, and remains, one of the most deeply felt social events in Aosta Valley communities, with roots reaching back to pagan celebrations marking the end of winter. The masks, of ancient origin, represent evil spirits associated with rites of fertility and the fertility of the land.

In the Aosta Valley, the masks draw on ancient folk traditions, featuring symbolic characters such as the Bear, the Guardian, the Devil, the Old Man and the Old Woman, and Napoleon with his soldiers.

Made of wood, the masks featured eye openings and carefully defined facial details, demonstrating the artisans' skill in creating grotesque expressions. Once the celebrations were over, they were hung on walls as decorations.

Traditional Carnivals are linked to local historical folklore and are found in specific valleys or villages. Among the best known is the legend of Saint Martin in Pont-Saint-Martin, where the saint stopped the devil from crossing the bridge that bears his name, and the Carnival of Verrès, which recalls the story of Catherine of Challant and Pierre d'Introd, lords of the castle. Also noteworthy is the Carnival of *Coumba Freida*, with its *Landzette*, whose colourful costumes are decorated with flowers and small mirrors, recalling Napoleon's descent into Italy through the Great St Bernard Pass.

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

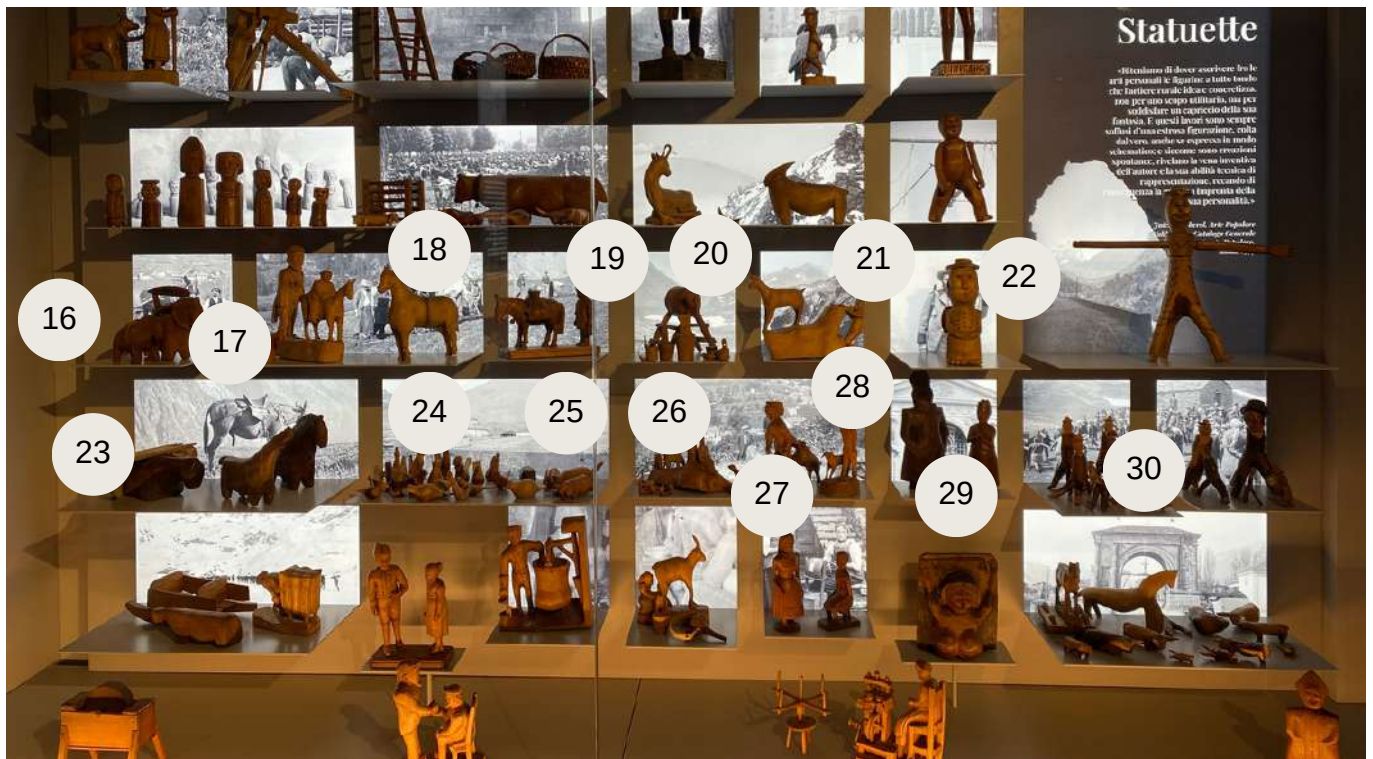
14. Male figurine with jointed arms

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

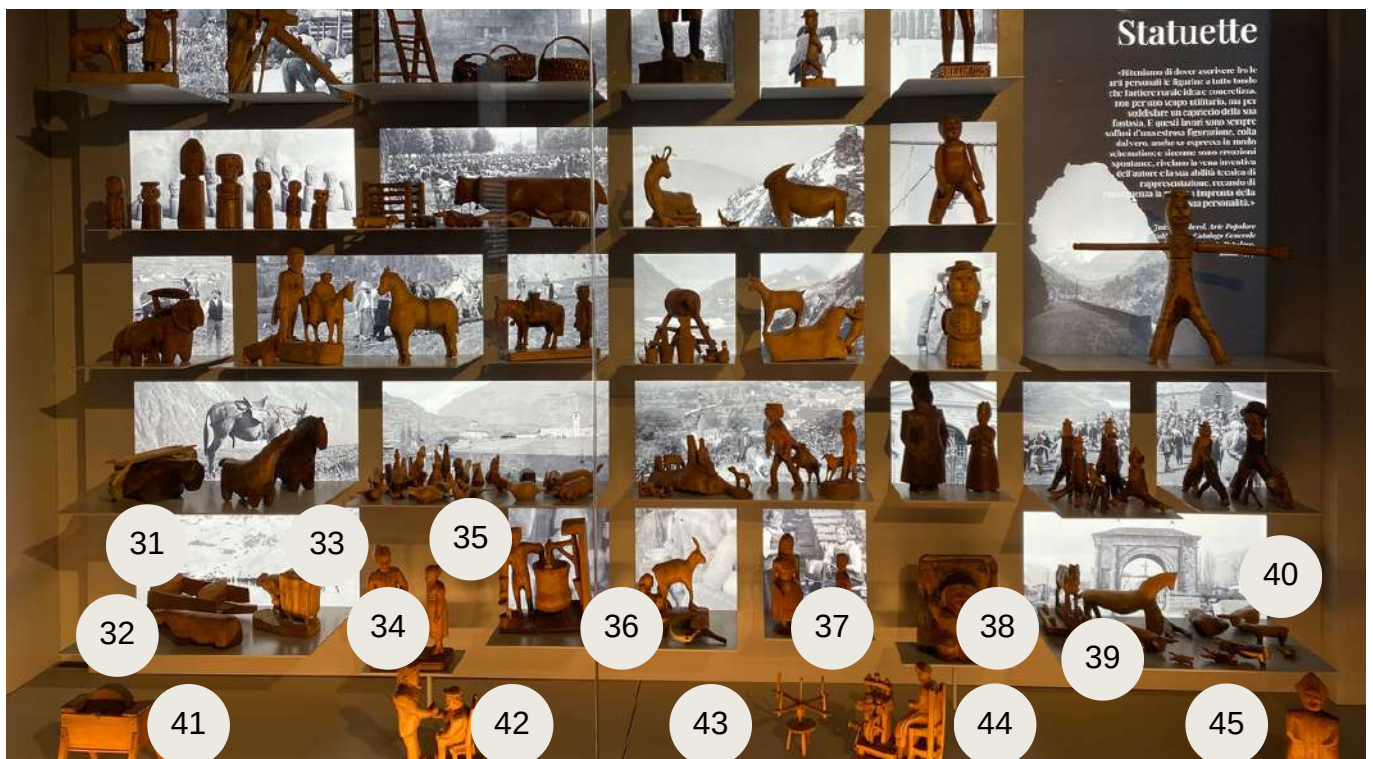
29. Clerics

Wood and willow bark

30. Figurines with three legs

Various wood types

Figurines and Toys



31. Sled

Wood

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



RUSTIC TOYS

As early as the 19th century, alongside the production of everyday tools, artisans began making small figurines to decorate domestic interiors and rustic toys for children.

These small wooden figures are the result of a common practice in which a simple pocketknife was used to create rudimentary sculptures. During breaks from daily agricultural or household activities, hands were never idle: the knife could be used to carve toys, animals and figures inspired by the local Aosta Valley environment. One example is the countless three-legged shepherd figures carved from tree branches.



CORNAILLES

The *cornailles* are small stylised cows. While out grazing, children themselves would use a pocketknife to carve a forked twig, shaping it to create the horns and other distinctive features of a cow. They would then play at cow fighting, the *Batailles des Reines*.

The *cornailles* are among the simplest and most traditional games of the past in the Aosta Valley.

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

Box

15. Case

1808

Wood

16. Four-compartment case

1831

Wood

17. Container

1797

Wood

Personal objects



18. Tool case

Wood

19. Container

1858

Wood

20. Case

1844

Wood

21. Case

Wood

22. Ruffier containier

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



PIPES, TOBACCO MORTARS AND SNUFFBOXES

A series of objects associated with tobacco use, predominantly by men, includes tobacco mortars used to grind snuff tobacco. These small cylindrical mortars had a pestle with a metal tip for crushing tobacco leaves.

Once prepared, the tobacco was transferred into practical pocket snuffboxes. One particularly fine example is a carved box depicting a kneeling man, perhaps the devil, with an engraved monstrance on the lid, a symbol of exorcism and possibly intended as a warning against smoking.

Pipes were also often decorated with refined ornaments, such as the pipe without a stem, carved with tools and products associated with the blacksmith's trade, resting on foliage. These objects not only served practical purposes, but also represented artistic and symbolic expressions.



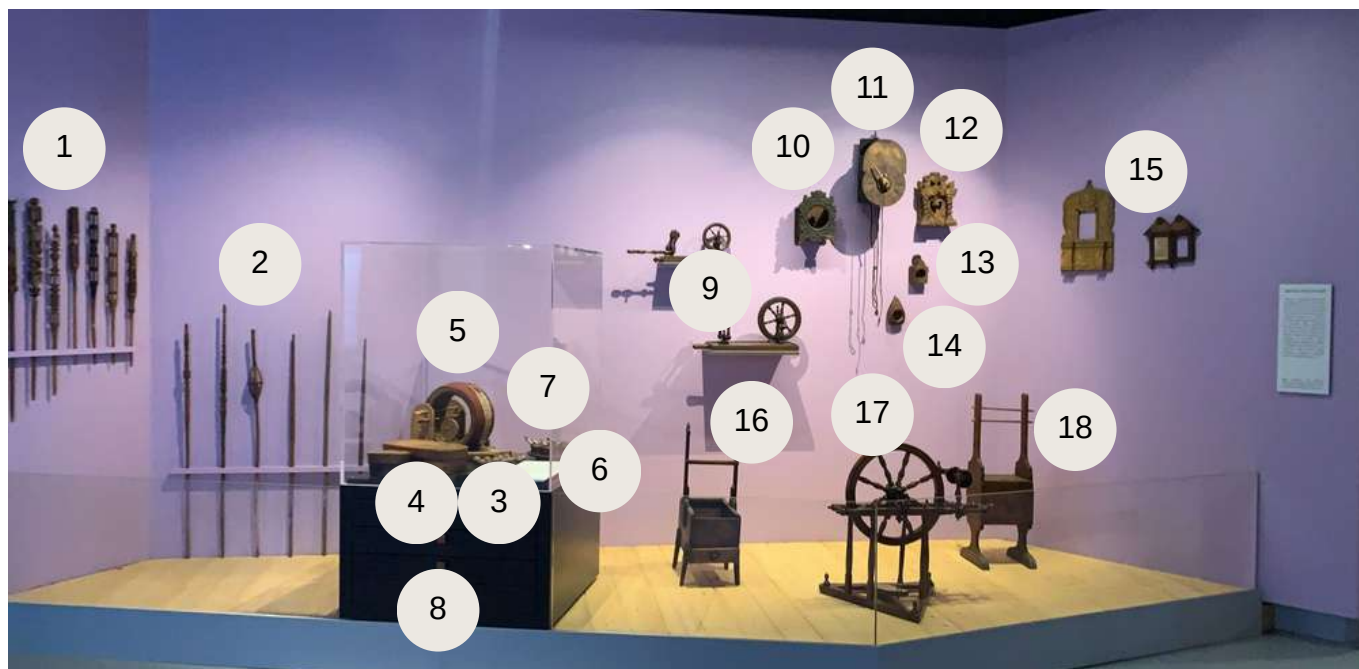
WALKING STICKS

The walking stick is an artefact found in cultural anthropology since its earliest origins and, like masks, is common to various craft traditions. Originally conceived as a means of support, it sometimes evolved into a symbolic and ritual object. Its functions may be aesthetic or ceremonial, serving as a sign of belonging to groups or sects, as a wedding or Carnival object, as a working tool such as the vincastro or cattle herder's stick, or for defensive or apotropaic purposes.

The examples in the Brocherel Collection are walking sticks made from hard woods such as boxwood and Mediterranean hackberry, and decorated with carvings featuring anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and phytomorphic motifs. The handles, in particular, depict faces or animals, while the shafts feature figurative elements such as people, animals, flowers, religious symbols and inscriptions. The very knots that characterise the branches stimulate the artisan's imagination, as the material is interpreted and transformed into grotesque or natural figures reflecting the cultural context to which they belong.

These walking sticks are true examples of folk art, conveying traditions and beliefs.

Domestic Industries, Lace and Spinning Tools



1. Seven distaffs

Wood

2. Six distaffs

Legno

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. Two tabletop spinning wheels

Wood and iron

10. Tabletop clock cas

Wood

11. Clock

1829

Wood and metal

12. Clock case

Wood

13. Clock case

Wood

14. Clock case in drop shape

1828

Wood

15. Two frames

Wood

16. Bobbin holder

Wood

17. Spinning wheel

Wood

18. Bobbin holder

Wood



DOMESTIC INDUSTRIES

The geographical features of the area and the availability of raw materials favoured the emergence of genuine family enterprises based on a high degree of craft specialisation. Wool processing, in particular, was a central activity: after days spent working in the fields and tending livestock, especially during the winter, families gathered in the péillo, the heated room of the house, transforming it into a domestic workshop.

Here, work was organised collaboratively: women were responsible for spinning and weaving wool, while men contributed by making the tools and processing the wood required for production. This integrated system created a complete production chain, beginning with raw materials and leading to finished products such as yarns, fabrics and handcrafted goods.

These family enterprises not only ensured self-sufficiency, but also generated a surplus for sale in local markets and at fairs, becoming an essential economic resource and an early form of organised household economy.

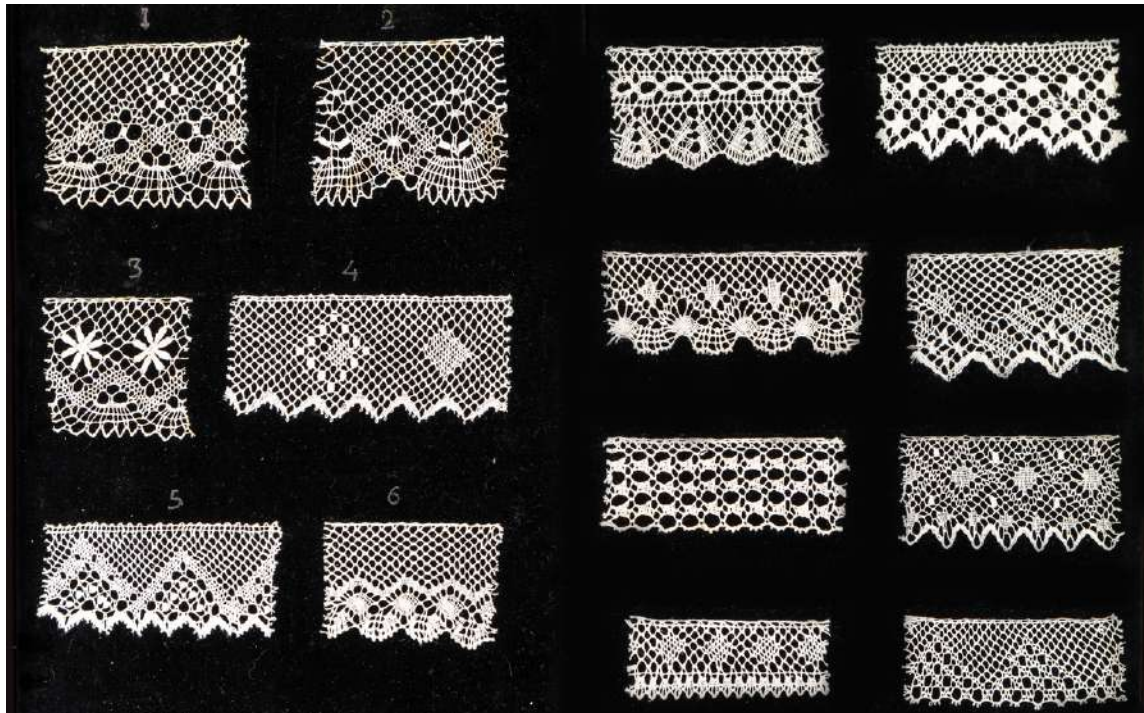


DISTAFFS

Distaffs are traditional tools used for twisting and spinning fibres. Although at first glance they may resemble decorated sticks, their function is quite different. They are among the few examples of polychrome artefacts in the Aosta Valley tradition, whose precious and rare natural pigments were reserved for objects of particular significance. In the case of the distaff, it represented a marriage pledge, given by the fiancé or mother-in-law to the future bride.

The morphology of this object features a smooth, tapered lower end, allowing spinners to place it under the arm or attach it to a treadle spinning wheel. The upper end, on the other hand, is carved and has a square section that varies according to the type of material to be worked: shorter wool distaffs feature openwork decoration with twisted columns or paired arches, while longer and narrower hemp distaffs have geometric decoration without openwork. Some distaffs also feature a bulging section made of wooden slats, held apart by a wooden disc. This type contained small wooden spheres inside the cage, producing a sound that provided a rhythm for the work.

The spinner attached the material to be spun, known as the *penneccchio* or *roccata*, to the tip of the distaff with a small cord. She then pulled and twisted the fibres with her fingers, forming the yarn, which was wound onto a spindle or a bobbin when the distaff was attached to a spinning wheel.



COGNE LACES

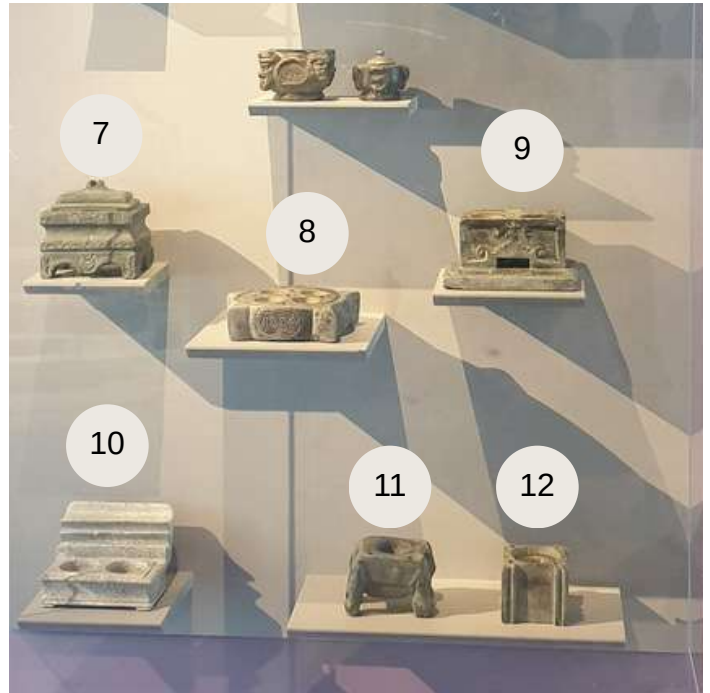
The tradition of bobbin lace, known as *dentelles*, in the Aosta Valley is thought to have been introduced around 1665, when a group of Benedictine nuns fleeing the convent of Cluny took refuge in Saint-Nicolas.

In 1853, Guichardaz Honorée, after learning the technique there, returned to Cogne and successfully taught the art of bobbin lace to the women of the village. The bobbin-lace pillows provide significant evidence of this tradition, as no examples dating from before 1860 are known.

The production of *dentelles* went through alternating periods of prosperity and difficulty, when only a few lacemakers kept the tradition alive. A major crisis occurred during the First World War, but in 1925 Anaïs Ronc Désaymonet, a passionate lace teacher, encouraged the lacemakers to resume production and to teach the technique to the young women of the village.

In 1981, the lacemakers of Cogne formed a cooperative, Les Dentellières, which continues to preserve this ancient tradition today, teaching it to young girls so that the community can safeguard it for future generations.

Inkwells



1. inkwell

1723
Soapstone

2. Inkwell

1884
Soapstone

3. Inkwell

Soapstone

4. Little-sized inkwell

Soapstone

5. Inkwell with four masks

1750
Soapstone
MAV collection

6. Inkwell with four masks

1778
Soapstone

7. Inkwell with four masks

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. Two jars without lid

Soapstone

11. Small saucepan

Soapstone

12. Two jars

Soapstone

13. Hand plane

1731
Wood

14. Small hand plane

Wood

15. Small hand plane

1783
Wood

Soapstone, Agricultural Tools and Means of Transport



16. Two sickle handles
Wood

17. Whetstone holder
Wood

18. Whetstone holder
1854
Wood

19. Multicoloured basket
1889
Wood

20. Basket
Wood

21. Basket
Wood

22. Basket
1732
Wood

23. Basket
Wood

24. Basket
Wood

25. Basket
1808
Wood

26. Multicoloured basket
1804
Wood

27. Basket
1833
Wood

28. Basket
Wood

29. Basket
1838
Wood

30. Basket
Wood



WOODEN CARRIERS

They are wooden containers with handles, considered by Brocherel to be a means of transport. If this term is understood only as referring to transport by wheeled vehicle or pack animal, however, it is limiting when considering baskets, gerle and leather vessels, which were used to carry goods and were often sized to facilitate their sale.

The wooden containers were multifunctional and reused to meet everyday needs: used to carry blessed bread, they were also employed in the fields for seed grain or in the home to store balls of yarn or fabric. These containers, with side panels carved with geometric and phytomorphic motifs and coats of arms, demonstrate the harmony between functionality and aesthetics in everyday work.

Wine Cups and Flasks



1. Goblet
18th century
Wood

2. Church goblet
17th century
Pear-tree wood

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
Wood

10. Pot with lid
Wood

11. Goblet with lid
Wood

12. Goblet with lid
Wood

13. *Grolla* cup
1726
Wood

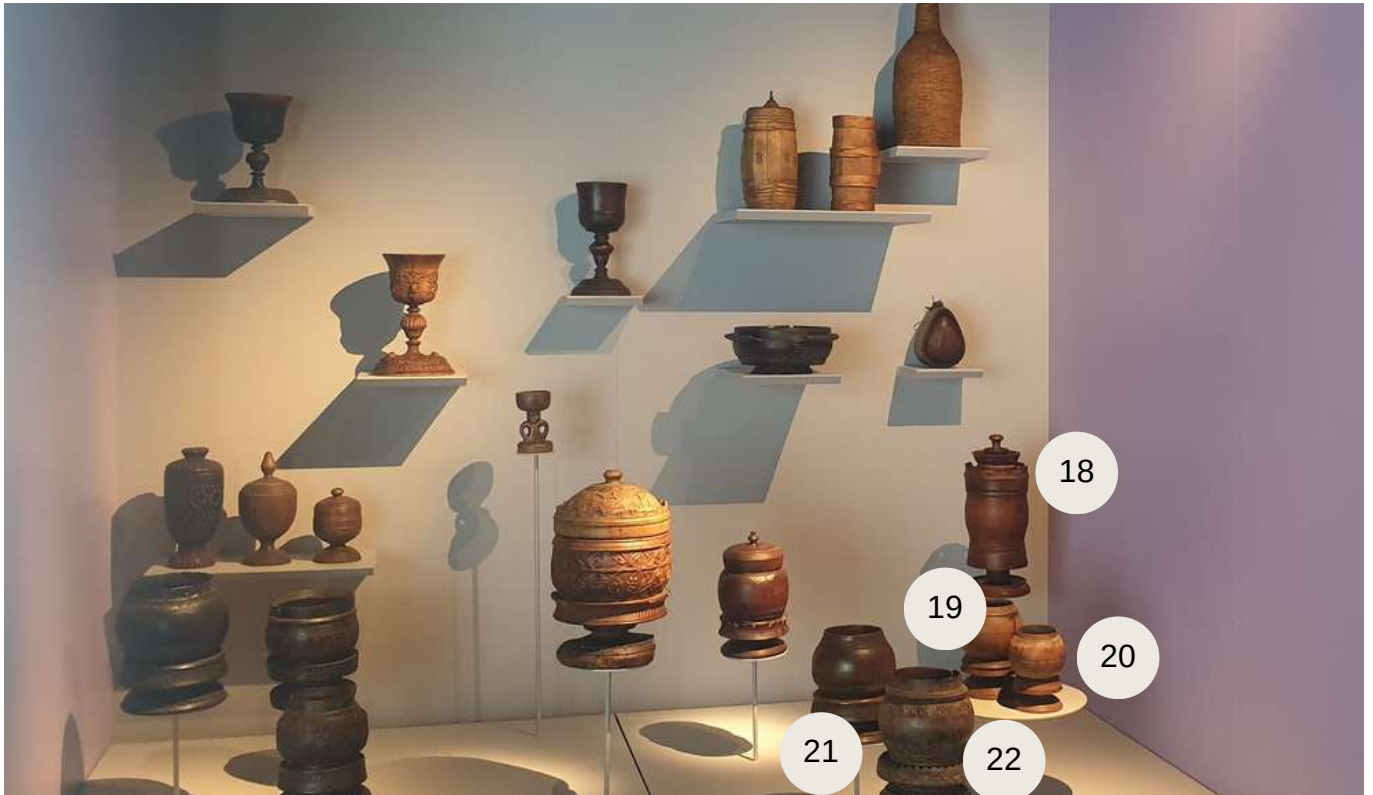
14. *Grolla* cup
Wood

15. *Grolla* cup
17th century
Wood

16. *Grolla* cup with bacchanalian designs
16th century
Bois

17. *Grolla* cup
Wood

Wine Cups and Flasks



18. *Grolla* cup
Wood

19. *Grolla* cup
Wood

20. *Grolla* cup
Wood

21. *Grolla* cup
Wood

22. *Grolla* cup
Wood



THE GROLLA

The *grolla* is one of the most emblematic objects of Aosta Valley craft tradition. This vessel, the result of the centuries-long evolution of the Eucharistic chalice, has a unique form. The earliest examples of chalices were turned, single-piece wooden vessels with harmonious profiles. They consisted of a broad foot, a slender, shaped stem and a flared bowl.

Over time, the chalice changed in form, evolving into the object now known as the *grolla*: a vessel with a “crown-shaped” lid, supported by a shorter stem and resting on a widened base. Unlike the chalice, the *grolla* has a greater capacity and is held by means of a recess carved beneath the bowl.

Its external decoration also evolved over time. Initially, the ornamentation consisted of carvings generally arranged in rings with a precise rhythmic pattern, often depicting garlands or phytomorphic motifs. These were later replaced by more elaborate carvings covering the entire outer surface of the object.

According to popular tradition, the term *grolla* derives from *graal*, which in the langue d'oïl means “chalice”, thus recalling its original connection with liturgical chalices.

Cradles



1. Multicoloured cradle

Wood

2. Cradle

Wood

3. Cradle

1749

Wood

4. Multicoloured cradle

Wood

5. Cradle

Wood

6. Cradle

Wood

7. Cradle

1814

Wood

8. Cradle

Wood

9. Cradle

Wood

10. Wood

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



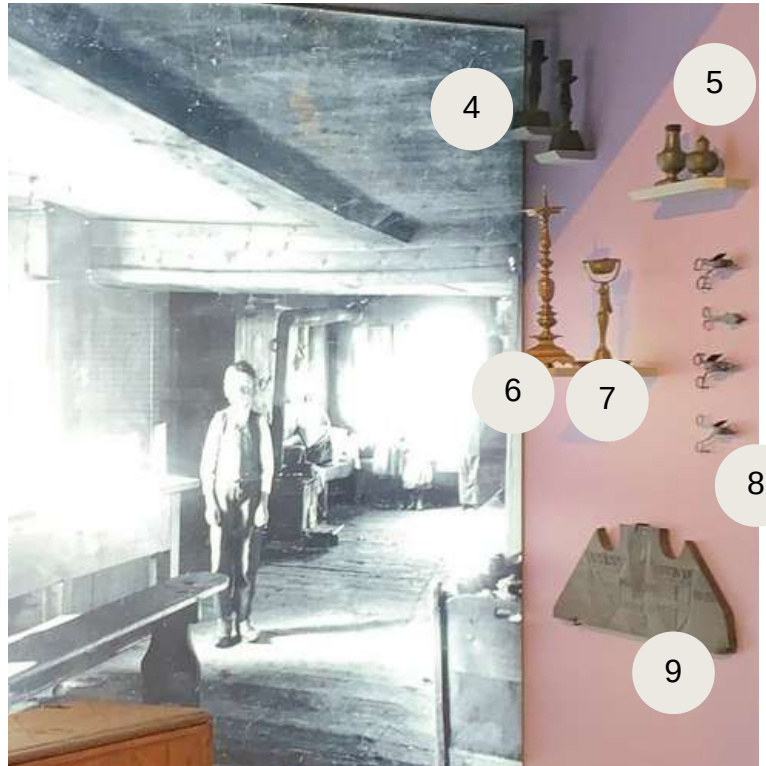
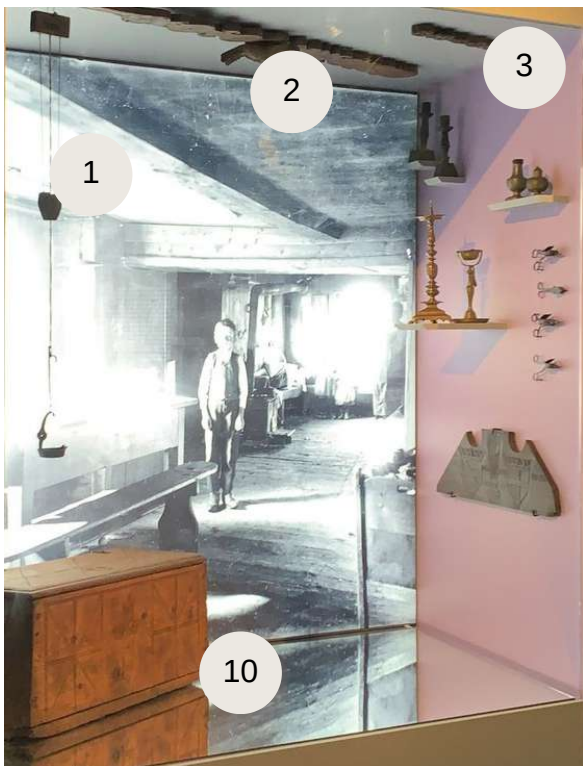
CRADLES

In Aosta Valley tradition, the cradle played a fundamental role as a symbol of care and protection, to be preserved and passed down from one generation to the next. Its structure consisted of side rails, a baseboard, headboards fitted into uprights, and curved rockers that allowed it to swing. Built using mortise-and-tenon joinery, each component served a specific functional purpose: the rockers helped lull the infant to sleep, the rails, with holes and knobs for ribbons, ensured the child's safety, while the perforated baseboard provided good ventilation.

Sometimes, an arch was fitted between the side rails to support a cloth protecting the infant from the sun or insects. Cradles were made by expectant fathers or given as gifts by godparents, and those used for baptism were decorated with carved geometric and phytomorphic motifs and religious symbols.

Alongside baptismal cradles, there were everyday versions, less decorated and more spacious to accommodate the child's growth. The latter represented an extension of the mother's arms, accompanying the infant while she carried out agricultural work and daily tasks in the fields.

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

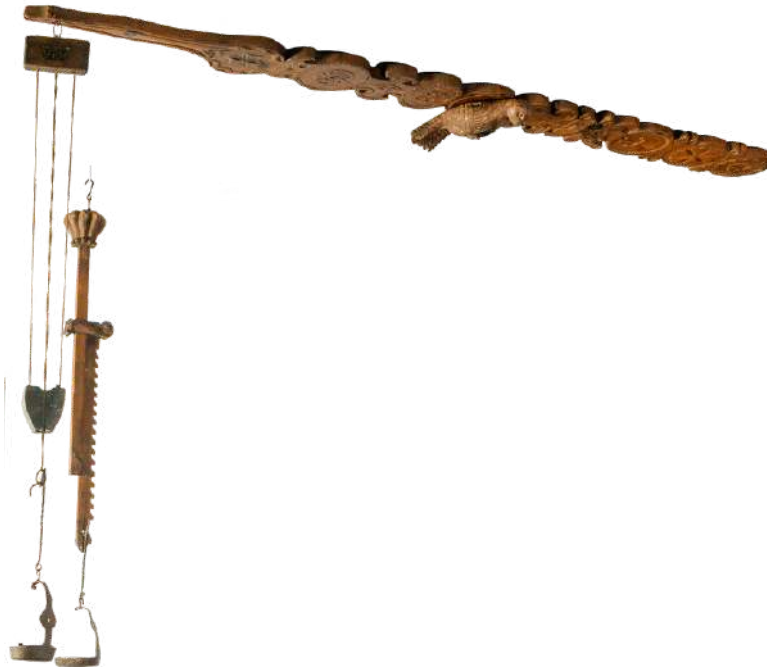
6. Candlestick
Bronze

7. Pivoted lamp
Brass

8. Four candle snuffers
Iron

9. Bedhead
1665
Wood

10. Chest
1778
Wood



LIGHTING IN THE TRADITIONAL HOME

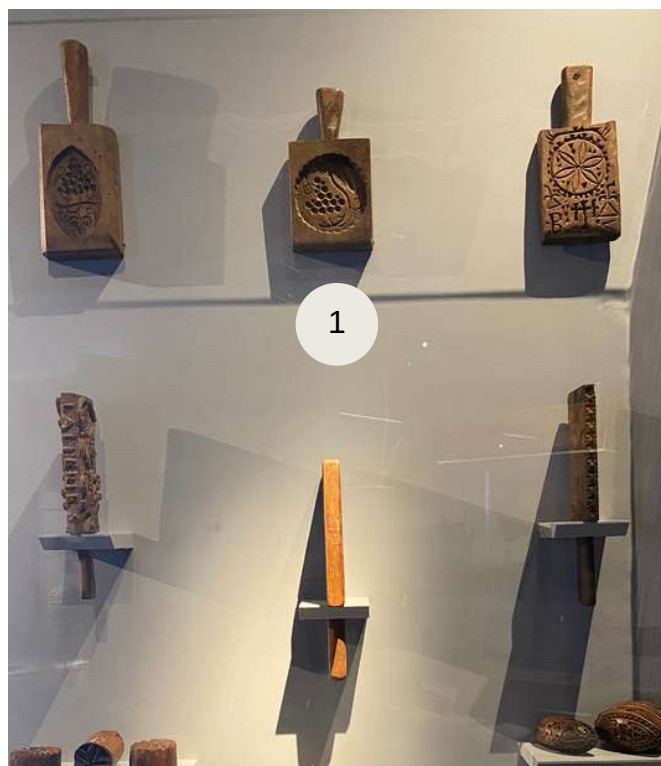
The traditional Aosta Valley home, characterised by limited windows and openings, had poor interior lighting. To compensate for this lack of natural light, various types of lamps were used, which were gradually replaced by electric lighting.

Initially, lamps used wax candles held in candlesticks. Some candlesticks featured a metal spiral around the candle, which was used to mark the passage of time: each ring corresponded to one hour. Special scissors known as *smoccolatoi* were used to trim the flame and retrieve the wick.

Over time, candles were supplemented by walnut-oil lamps and later by kerosene lamps, which took various forms: lanterns, candlesticks with oil reservoirs, pewter objects and iron lamps. The teardrop shape of the latter represented the evolution of terracotta oil lamps dating back to Roman times.

A particular support for this type of lamp was a shaped wooden board decorated with rosette motifs, attached to the ceiling by a pivot that allowed it to rotate. At one end, a pulley mechanism or toothed rack was attached to support the oil lamp. This device allowed the lamp to be moved both horizontally and vertically, illuminating different areas of the domestic interior.

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

Legno



BREAD AND BUTTER MOULDS

Objects for everyday use often arose from practical needs, as in the case of bread and butter moulds. Bread was made in the village oven, shared by several families from the same hamlet. Lit in December, the oven was managed in rotation by each family, who maintained the fire and oversaw the baking.

In the bread trough, a large wooden container, flour and water were mixed and divided into loaves. Before baking, each family marked its bread with distinctive stamps. The decoration—geometric or religious, featuring floral motifs or initials—made it possible to identify each family's loaves.

In dairy production, butter moulds were used for a similar identifying purpose. For household use, the mark served either a decorative function, featuring botanical and animal motifs, or a measuring function. In the latter case, the paddle had hinged side panels used to give the butter a precise shape and weight.

These moulds also served as production marks for dairy organisations, a cooperative dairy system widespread in the Aosta Valley, in which several farming families delivered their milk to a shared production facility. Dairy products were made there and then sold, with the proceeds, after expenses, divided among the members in proportion to their milk quotas, with all transactions recorded in a register.

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. Bismar weighing scales

Bronze

8. Bismar 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



THE KITCHEN

One of the central spaces in the traditional Aosta Valley home was the rural kitchen, where the large hearth was located.

This space, fundamental to the family's daily life, was where raw materials were transformed into food for sustenance and where the main meals were eaten. The kitchen also played an essential role in heating the home during the harsh Alpine winters. The utensils and tableware found in this kitchen were mainly made of metal and wood, materials chosen for their strength and durability. These objects, sparsely decorated but highly functional, were designed for practical tasks such as containing, processing and preserving food. Among the most common utensils were salt boxes and mortars.

Each object had a specific function, playing an essential role in everyday domestic life and in the self-sufficiency of the Aosta Valley family.

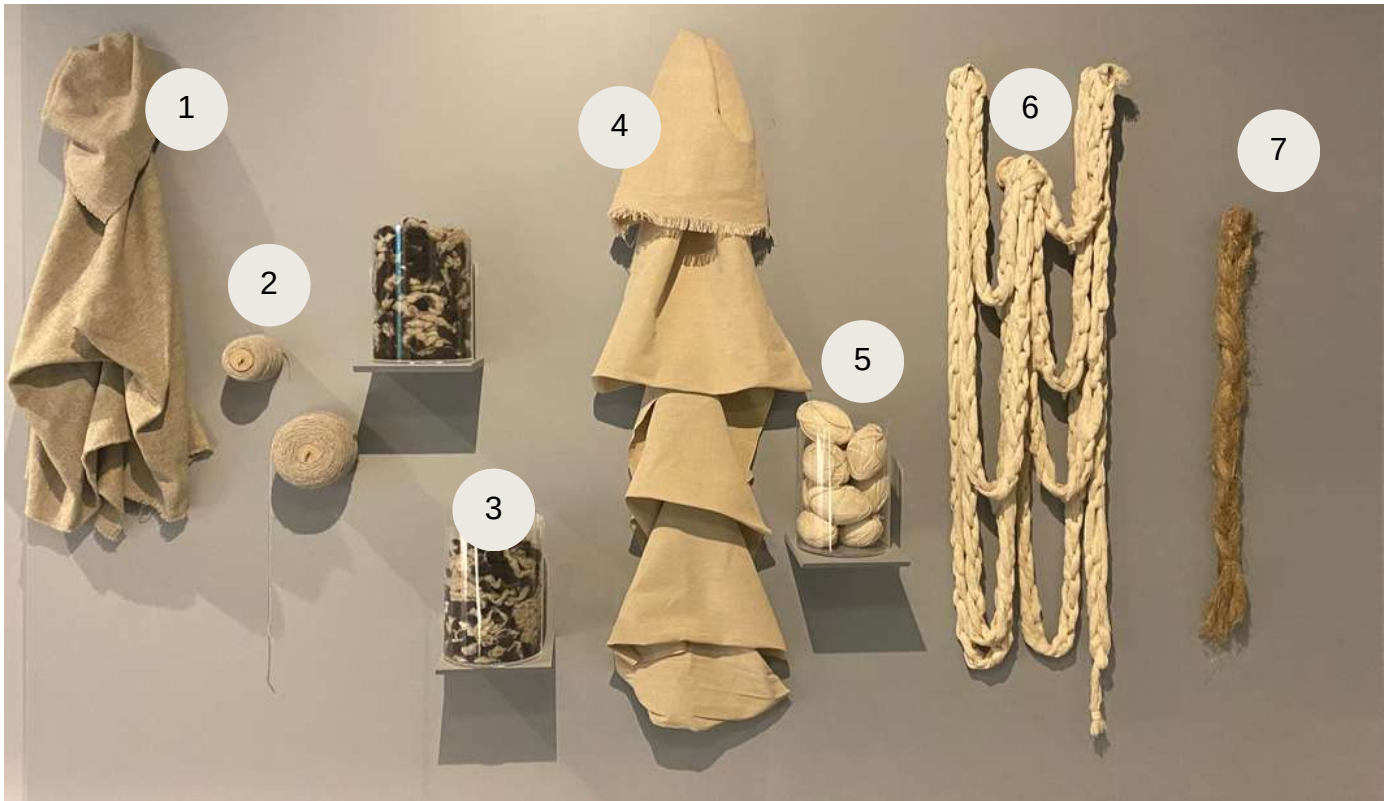
THE MATERIAL

We are accustomed to thinking of materials as subject to humanity's power to fix them indefinitely into a form. Yet the materials from which everyday objects emerge—wood, stone, iron and textile fibres—live through time, changing in colour and texture according to the conditions in which they evolve.

Every object is the product of a particular encounter in a specific place, shaped by its environmental conditions. One must know where to find soapstone, so well suited to making fire-resistant cooking vessels, or when to shear an animal to obtain its wool. The forest must be consciously managed so that it does not advance too far, encroaching upon areas devoted to agriculture and human activity, while its resources cannot be harvested at random. One must know wood well, because every object must be made from the most suitable species: maple for food-related uses; birch, “the lady of the forest”, for precious little boxes made from its bark; willow and hazel for gerle and containers.

Artisans ground the very meaning of their work in their relationship with the place in which they live. Coexistence with the environment and with what it provides must be managed according to the principle of mutual respect. What is created out of necessity—a bowl, a key, a sheet—reflects, on a broader level, the relationship between the individual and the world. Choosing a material, abiding by the rules of a nature different from our own, and acting in pursuit of a new balance are actions that evoke ethics, transforming craftsmanship into an ecological practice.

Textil fibres



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



WOOL

Traditional Aosta Valley wool is known as Rosset and comes from the sheep of the same name, an indigenous breed of the Aosta Valley. This Alpine breed is well adapted to the harsh high-mountain environment, where sheep farming has traditionally been widespread for the production of meat and wool.

The Rosset sheep is medium-sized, with males weighing 60–70 kg and females 50–55 kg. Its off-white, semi-open fleece consists of medium-length locks covering the body, except for the head, abdomen and limbs. Shearing takes place twice a year, in autumn and spring, with an average yield of around 2 kg of wool per animal. The natural shades obtained are ecru, brown and grey, the latter resulting from a combination of the first two.

Historically, wool was a fundamental resource for mountain communities, used to make garments capable of protecting against the cold. Shearing was carried out by hand, starting from the legs and moving towards the back, while the shorter, dirtier wool from the belly and limbs was discarded. After shearing, the wool was washed in lukewarm water without soap and rinsed in cold water to remove impurities. It was then carded and spun, a process requiring considerable manual skill.

Today, the processing of Rosset wool is continued by the Les Tisserands Cooperative in Valgrisenche.



HEMP IN THE AOSTA VALLEY

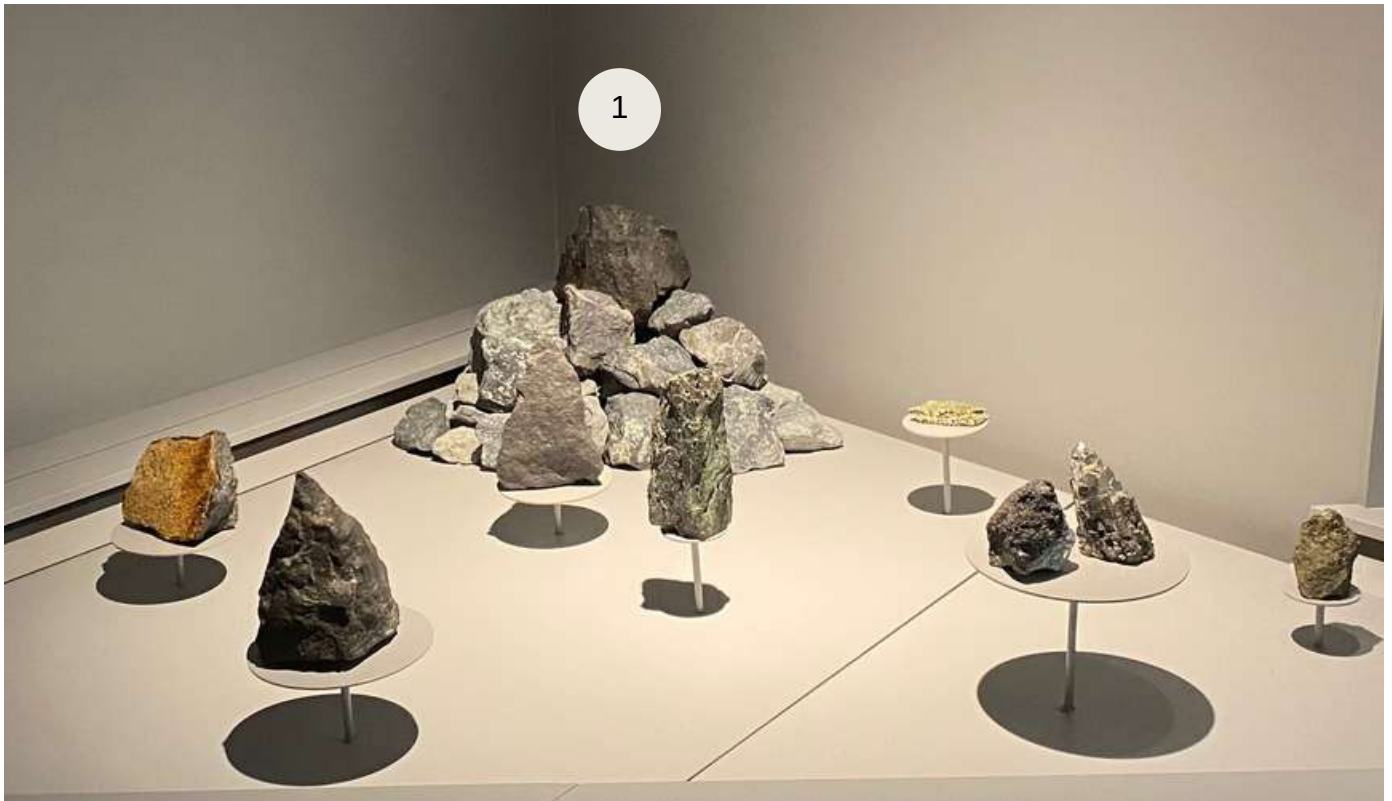
Hemp was introduced to Italy by the Romans around 300 BC and became widely cultivated over the following centuries. In the Aosta Valley, it was grown almost everywhere up to an altitude of 1,200–1,300 metres above sea level, in sunny areas. During the 20th century, however, its cultivation was gradually abandoned in favour of livestock farming. In Champorcher, cultivation ceased at the end of the 18th century, although hemp was brought down from the production areas to the valley for processing.

The bundles of hemp were immersed in the waters of the Ayasse stream for retting, a process that had to be neither too long nor too short. After retting, the hemp was dried in the sun and then processed with a flax brake to break the woody core and release the textile fibres. These were combed to separate the coarse fibres from the cellulose. The highest-quality fibre, known as rita, came from male plants and was used for fine fabrics, while the waste material was used to make shoes, mattresses and hay covers. After scutching, the hemp was spun and washed in boiling water and poplar ash to soften the yarn.

Loom weaving, a central activity in the community of Champorcher, was traditionally carried out during the winter. Before the snow isolated the village, hemp yarn in balls and skeins was distributed among local families to be woven, and in spring it was returned as finished fabric.

Today, the traditional handloom weaving of hemp is continued by the Lou Dzeut Cooperative in Champorcher.

Iron



1. Fragments of magnetite
Cogne mine



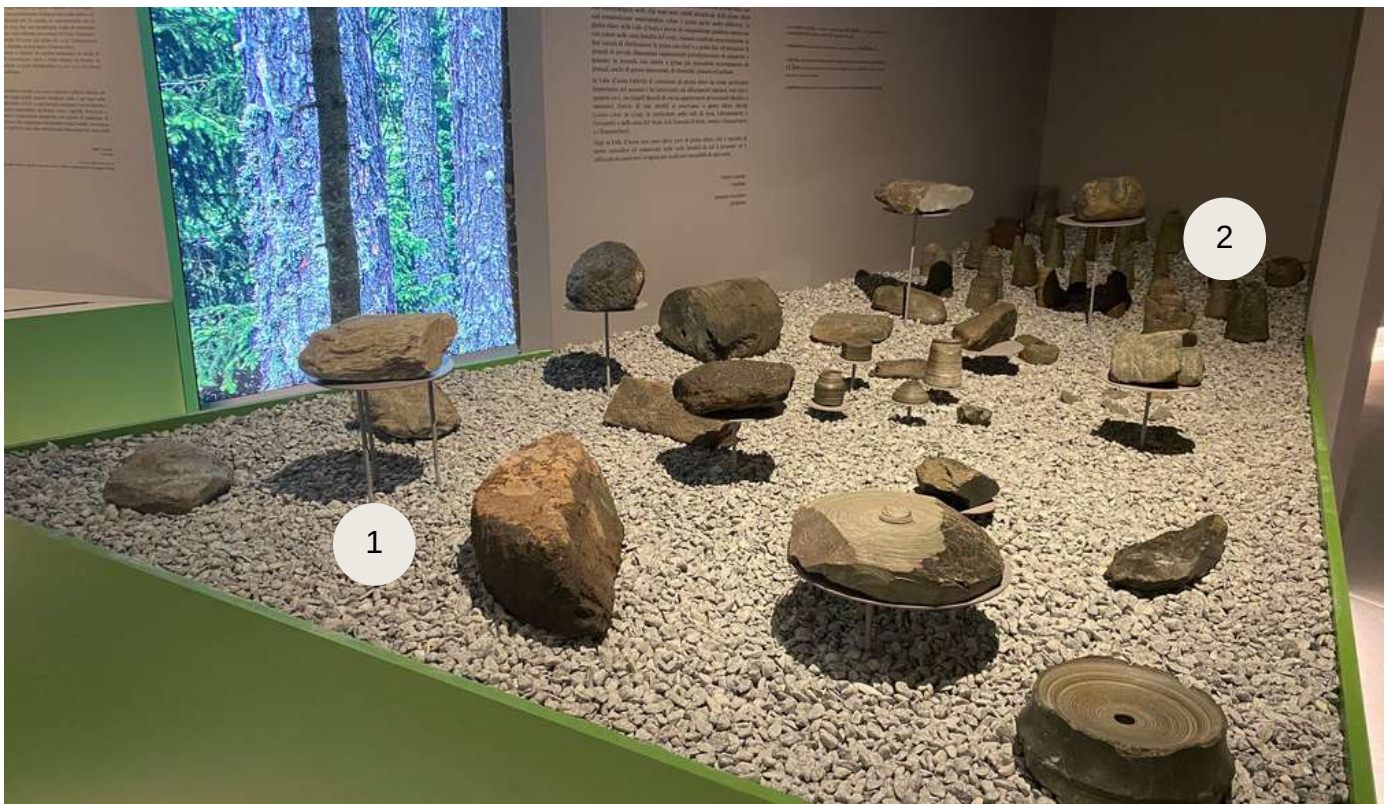
IRON AND MAGNETITE

Magnetite, an iron oxide with a metallic appearance and black colour, is found in the serpentinites of the Aosta Valley. Its extraction, documented since the 15th century, was intensive and widespread, involving deposits of varying quality. However, most of the mines were abandoned around 1850 due to the crisis of the Aosta Valley iron and steel industry, caused by several factors: the depletion of forests used to produce charcoal as fuel for local ironworks, high production costs, difficult access to the deposits, inadequate roads and competition from foreign iron.

The most important mines are those in the Cogne Valley (Liconi-Colonna and Larsinaz), whose exploitation dates back to 1425, although it presumably began earlier. Modern extraction began in the first decades of the 20th century, coinciding with the construction of the Aosta steelworks, and ended in 1979, with a total production of 25 million tonnes of magnetite.

Other mines were located in the municipalities of Fénis, Chambave, Pontey, Châtillon (the Ussel mine, already mentioned in 1415), Champdepraz (Lac Gelé, at 2,600 metres, exploited from 1693) and Champorcher. Other iron deposits, such as siderite and hematite, were exploited in Courmayeur, Sarre and Saint-Rhémy-en-Bosses. The Mont-Flassin mine operated for only four months a year due to its altitude (2,600–2,700 metres).

Stone



1. Fragment

Valmérianaz (Pontey)
Grindstone

2. Fragments and semi-finished pieces

Champorcher, Ayas, Valmérianaz (Pontey)
Soapstone



SOAPSTONE

Soapstone is a generally green-coloured rock characterised by high resistance to weathering and to contact with food, as well as high thermal refractoriness and low porosity. Its very low hardness makes it easy to work with metal tools, both by hand and on a lathe.

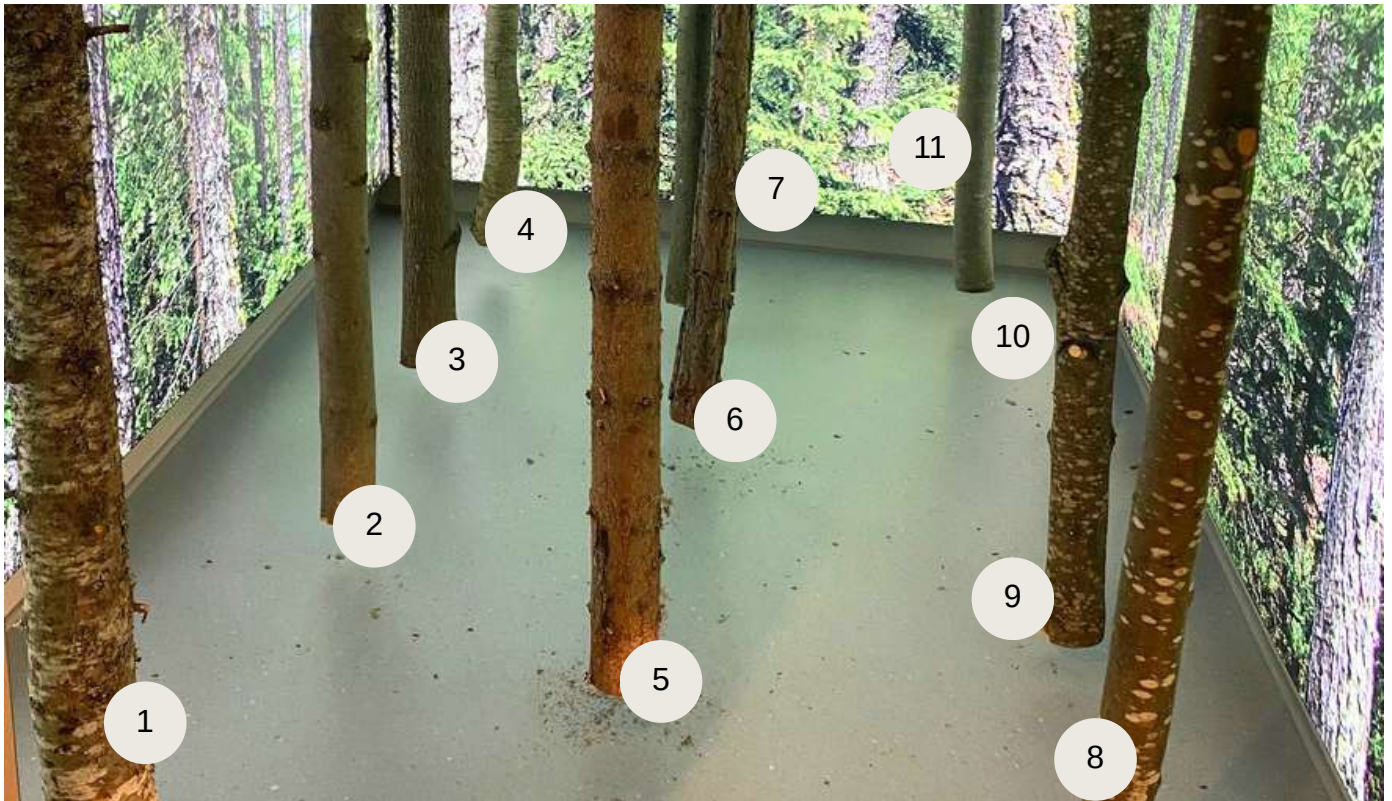
The name “soapstone” derives from the Latin word olla (“pot”) and the material has been used since prehistoric times to make a wide range of objects, including fire-resistant vessels, food containers, inkpots, spindle whorls, loom weights, lamps, figurines, stoves, holy-water fonts, cinerary urns and architectural elements.

The term “soapstone” has no precise petrological meaning, but refers to various types of rock sharing similar characteristics while differing in mineralogical composition, colour and grain. Soapstone from the Aosta Valley has a relatively homogeneous composition, with greenish shades, and consists mainly of two varieties of chlorite schist: one with fine-grained chlorite and inclusions of magnetite and garnet, and the other with coarser chlorite and inclusions of chloritoid, garnet and amphibole.

In the Aosta Valley, soapstone extraction has historically been significant, involving both exposed rock formations with actual quarries and individual blocks found in scree or glacial moraine deposits. Quarries were located in the Ayas, Valtournenche and Gressoney valleys, as well as the Mont Avic area, at elevations ranging from 2,000 to 2,600 metres above sea level.

Today, soapstone quarries are no longer active, and collecting is sporadic and mainly amateur. Nevertheless, many artisans continue to use the material to create a variety of objects, keeping a centuries-old tradition alive.

Wood



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



WOOD

From walnut to maple, from willow to larch, every tree has its strengths and weaknesses, its own grain and colours. In the forest, many species can be found, including poplar, Swiss stone pine, birch, hazel, spruce, ash, cherry, chestnut, oak and barberry, each with its own value.

In the past, the relationship between people and wood was based on mutual respect. The forest was regarded as a fundamental element of the landscape and carefully managed through regular maintenance.

It was not merely a resource from which wood could be obtained, but also an element of protection for the village. Wood was treated as a precious resource that should not be wasted. For example, cutting down trees simply for fuel was unthinkable: firewood was obtained from branches and brushwood collected in the undergrowth. Only what was strictly necessary was taken from the forest, and it often came from unproductive fruit trees in the meadow adjoining the house.

Leather



1. Split leather

Cowhide

2. Leather

Cowhide

3. Leather

Hand-tanned chamois hide

4. Leather scraps

Hides from various animals, naturally or chemically tanned



LEATHER

Leather is one of the oldest materials known and used by humankind, with evidence of its use dating back to around 3000 BC for footwear, clothing, tools and household objects. Over the millennia, as tanning techniques developed, the uses of animal hides multiplied: containers for liquids, water flasks, baskets for storing food, saddlery, bags and clothing. From Roman times through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, leatherworking was a thriving craft. However, around the middle of the 19th century, the advent of industrialisation radically transformed the traditional craft system.

For the artisan, the raw material is animal hide. It consists of two main layers: the epidermis and the dermis. The epidermis is the outermost layer and is normally removed, while the dermis accounts for approximately 85% of the hide's thickness. The upper part of the dermis has a characteristic pattern specific to each animal species, which, in tanned leather, is known as the grain.

Tanning is a fundamental stage in the processing of hides because it prevents decomposition without compromising the softness, flexibility and structure of the raw material. Both natural and synthetic substances can be used for this purpose. In the past, tanning was entirely vegetable-based and relied on tannins, organic substances found in the bark of oak and chestnut trees. The hides were soaked in vats or barrels and left for several months, allowing the tannins to penetrate the material, close the pores and strengthen the fibres.

Chemical tanning was later developed using chromium salts, aluminium salts or potassium alum. After tanning, the leather is ready to be worked by artisans.

THE SHAPE

Shape gives structure to experience, organising it and bringing it into order. As such, it cannot be fixed or frozen in time; rather, it is a journey. Not a solution, a result, or an end, but a process of genesis, growth and essence.

Shape is presented through categories rooted in the creative process, history, territory and personal (or family) style, which are expressed through the formal qualities of objects: typology, function, ingenuity and balance. Within each of these subcategories, the continuum between originality and repetition of a traditional object re-emerges.

The underlying message is one of openness to becoming, to multiple and diverse forms of expression. It is the change that takes place through the encounter between the artisan's hands and the material world in which they are engaged: the possibility of metamorphosis.

Through the balance between preservation and the drive towards renewal, shapes become traditional through repetition. This dimension of reiteration is expressed through similarity and is also the result of a technique based on repeated gestures, whose rhythms and cadences influence the relationship between the artisan and the material.

Yet every repetition of the gesture also produces differences. In each object, the message is reiterated that there is no discontinuity between society and the individual, between typology and know-how. Every artefact speaks of a particular hand, a particular tool, a particular form of craftsmanship, and a moment of correspondence between artisan, material and environment.

Tipology



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 bread stamp

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

Tipology



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

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. Sonnaile
Iron

29. Cowbell
Renzo Ferrari (1941)
20th century
Stone

30. Mortar with pestle
18th century
Stone and wood

Tipology



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



THE HEADREST

The wooden headrest, or shepherd's cushion, is a functional object belonging to the material culture of the Aosta Valley Alps. It was used in mountain pastures as a support for the head or neck during short periods of rest while tending livestock. This wooden object has no textile components and was designed to provide insulation from cold or damp ground while offering a minimum degree of ergonomic support in challenging environmental conditions.

Generally carved from a single block of local wood, mainly spruce, maple or larch, the cushion has a simple shape, sometimes slightly concave or contoured, obtained through handcrafting with traditional tools. The surface is smoothed, with possible signs of use and workmanship, while decoration is generally absent or limited to simple functional carvings, confirming the object's primarily practical purpose.

The use of the headrest is documented mainly from the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century. It forms part of the broader range of personal tools used by shepherds and represents a significant testimony to the strategies developed to adapt to life in mountain pastures.

Ingenuity



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 (1938-2024)
2010
Wood

6. Covered bottle

1860
Willow wood and glass
RAVA collection°

7. Potato basket

20th century
Various wood types
RAVA collection

8. Goat collar

19th - 20th century
Walnut wood

9. Pair of carding tools

1822
Wood of walnut, poplar and iron
Private collection

10. Basket for balls of yarn

20th century
Willow wood
RAVA collection

11. Grater

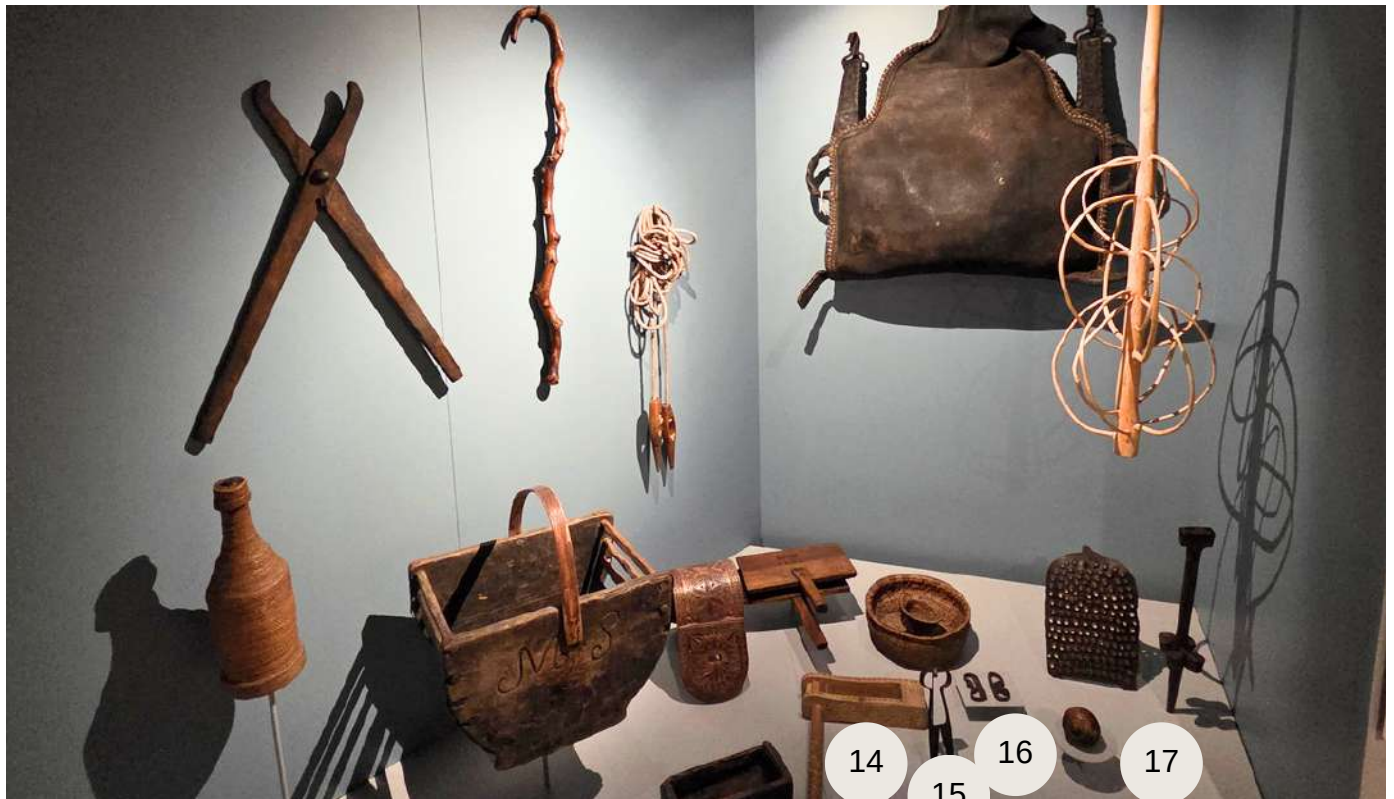
17th century
Iron

12. Scythe anvil

20th century
Iron
Private collection

13. Case

1828
Swiss pipe 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



THE WOVEN BOTTLE

The distinctive feature of this object is the protective covering applied to the container: a glass bottle wrapped in a woven wicker casing made from willow branches. The base consists of a wooden disc from which the woven branches extend, forming the protective outer layer.

In this case, a particular technique known as the “stitched weave” is used, in which the branches are woven very tightly together. As they rise towards the neck of the bottle, the branches become increasingly thinner. The stopper, made using the same technique, fits perfectly into the opening, making the object both functional and aesthetically refined.



THE POTATO BASKET

This container is made entirely of wood, with side panels supporting the slats that form the base and the short sides. A curved handle is attached to the centre of the side panels, providing a convenient grip for carrying.

The considerable distance between the slats indicates its intended use: transporting potatoes. Once the tubers had been harvested and placed in the basket, it could be immersed in a fountain or stream to rinse them. If no water source was nearby, the basket was carried home instead. Its open structure allowed the soil to dry and detach from the tubers, falling through the gaps and preventing unnecessary weight from being transported.



THE STONE BARREL

The stone barrel on display consists of twelve staves sealed with mortar and two ends, one of which has a hole in its lower section for the insertion of a tap. This large artefact, weighing approximately two tonnes, remains a mystery, both because of its extraordinary size and its intended use. It was found in a cellar in Arnad, in the hamlet of Echallod, an area renowned for its vineyards and the quality of its wines. However, no sediment was found inside to suggest that it had been used for wine.

The stone used is calcschist, a metamorphic rock composed of calcite, quartz and mica, resulting from the transformation of ancient marine sediments. This material was once used to create architectural elements such as roofing slabs and fountains. In the construction of stone barrels, each artisan leaves their signature through the particular inclination of the staves, visible on the ends.

Function



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

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

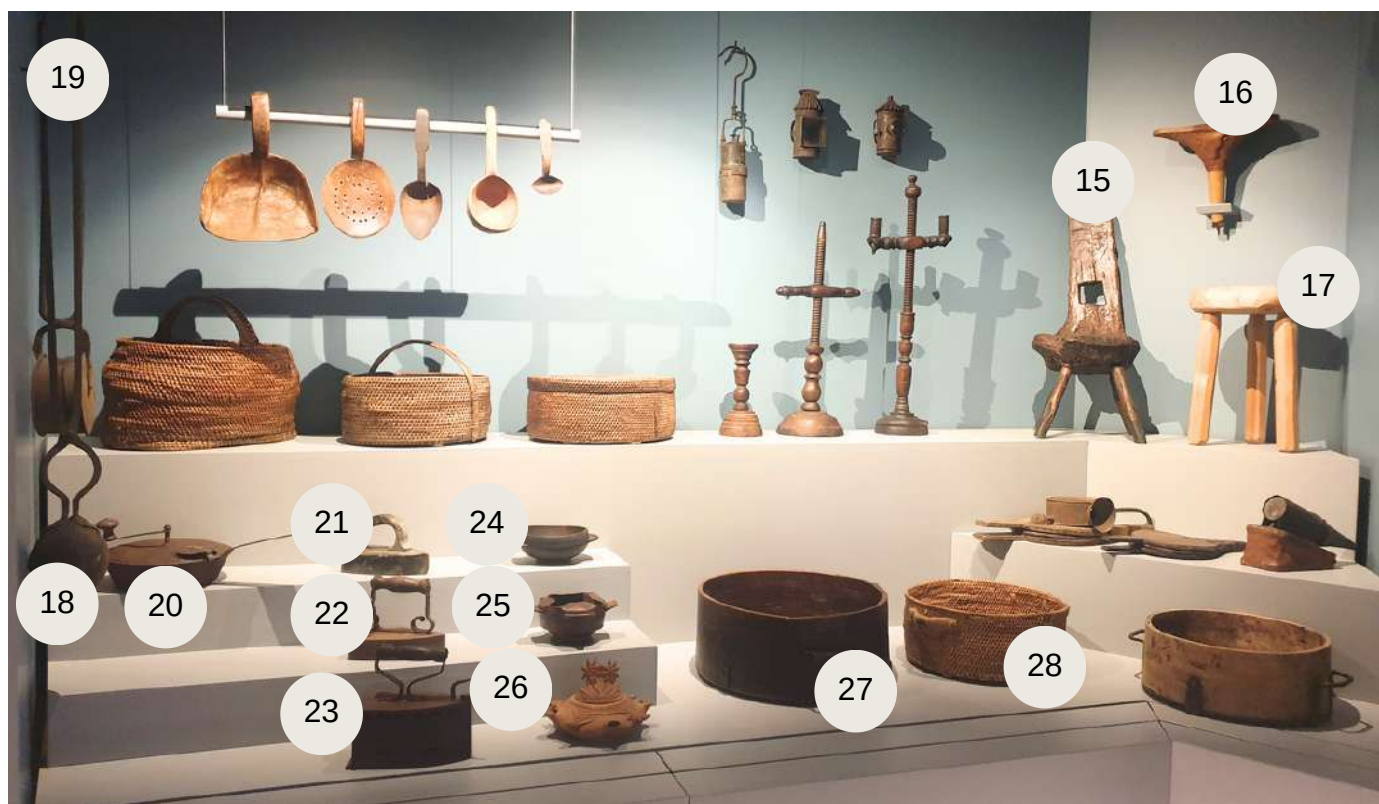
13. Porte-lampe

18th century
Walnut wood

14. Candle holder

17th century
Walnut wood

Function



15. Chair

19th century
Walnut 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

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

Function



29. Measure for cereals

1839

Walnut wood

RAVA collection

30. Dusting tool for winegoving

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



CEREALE MEASURES

In the past, cereals were among the most widely cultivated agricultural products and were essential to the subsistence of local populations. Since ancient times, units of measurement had been used to quantify land areas and quantities of grain. Although these were replaced at the end of the 19th century, they remained deeply rooted in popular culture.

The difficulty in using these units lay in the relationship between name and value: although the value of a given measure might be known, the same name could indicate different quantities in different areas. For example, a *coppo* used in one community could have a different value from the same unit elsewhere.

Units of measurement were used both for capacity and for surface area, since the extent of a plot of land was linked to the quantity of seed it could accommodate. Grain was measured using wooden containers of various sizes, whose names varied according to the quantity they could hold. If a measure was found to be too large, it could be adjusted by means of a patch placed on the bottom, regulating the excess capacity.

Official measures were branded with a heated iron, indicating their capacity, the relevant territory or province, and the date. The emina, for example, ranged from 7.30 to 4.82 litres depending on the area.

Cereals measures were generally expressed in litres, as they were units of capacity rather than weight. Consequently, the weight of a given quantity of grain varied according to the type of cereal being measured, making the correspondence between volume and weight only approximate.



THE CUP

The wine cup has undergone significant changes over time. Initially used for sharing among family members, it had a simple shape, similar to a bowl. Handles were later added to improve the grip. Over the years, the rim of the cup was partially closed and the handles folded inward, while openings were retained to facilitate drinking.

The current form, known as the Coppa dell'Amicizia (Friendship Cup), is characterised by the presence of spouts and a lid that closes the central opening. This final stage in its evolution transformed the cup into one of the most recognisable symbols of the Aosta Valley.

Although it has partly retained its original function as a container for liquids, particularly hot beverages, today the cup is mainly used to enjoy caffè alla valdostana, traditionally served “à la ronde”: the vessel is passed from one diner to the person on their right and is not placed on the table until its contents have been finished.



THE MILKING STOOL

The milking stool is a small, low wooden seat with a single leg, traditionally used for hand milking.

Its low height provides easy access to the animal's udder, while the strap attached to the top of the seat allows the farmer to fasten it around the waist like a belt. It is designed to allow the farmer to work comfortably and steadily, maintaining balance while also moving without having to carry the stool by hand, thus keeping both hands free to handle the milk buckets.

Equilibrium



1. Multicoloured chest

1896
Fir wood
Private collection

2. Multicoloured cradle

19th century
Fir wood

3. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA Collection

4. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA collection

5. Goat collar

Rino Giuseppe D'Herin
2006
Hackberry wood

6. Goat collar

Pietro Péaquin
2007
Walnut wood

7. Goat collar

Pietro Paolo D'Herin (1905-1992)
20th century
Maple wood

8. Goat collar

Pietro Paolo D'Herin (1905-1992)
20th century
Maple wood

9. Goat collar

20th century
Wood

10. Multicoloured goat collar

19th century
Hackberry wood
RAVA collection

11. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA Collection

12. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA Collection

Equilibrium



13. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA collection

14. Multicoloured goat collar

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA collection

15. Multicoloured goat collar

1941
Hackberry wood

16. Goat collar

19th century
Walnut wood and leather

17. Butter stamp

19th century
Walnut wood

18. Butter stamp

1908
Walnut wood

19. Butter stamp

19th century
Maple wood
RAVA collection

20. Butter stamp

20th century
Walnut wood

21. Butter stamp

Wood

22. Five butter stamps

Wood

23. Butter stamp

1935
Wood
RAVA collection

24. Butter stamp

1852
Walnut wood
RAVA collection

25. Three keys

15th century
Iron
RAVA collection

26. Swift fot winding yarn

19th century
Larch wood

Equilibrium



27. Pepper pot

19th century
Walnut wood
RAVA collection

28. Pepper pot

20th century
Walnut wood
RAVA collection

29. Basket for balls of yarn

19th century
Swiss pine wood
Private collection

30. Grolla cup

Amato Brunodet (1917-2018)
20th century
Walnut wood

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 wood

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

Equilibrium



39. School case

19th century

Wood of walnut and scots pine

RAVA collection

40. Shaving stand

Wood

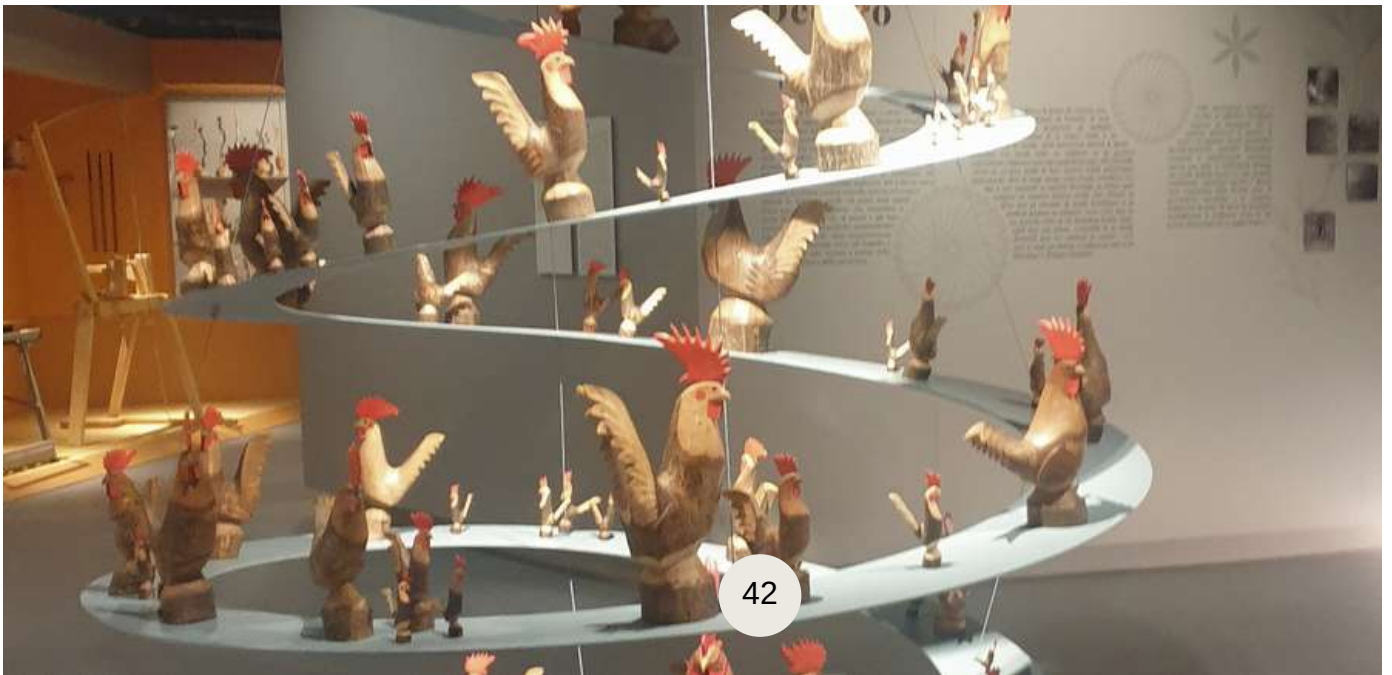
41. Mortar

16th century

Stone

RAVA collection

Equilibrio



42. Cockerels
Amato Brunodet (1917-2018)
21th century
Wood
MAV collection



43. Barrel
Stone
MAV collection



GOAT COLLARS

Goat collars are traditional objects made from a thin wooden strip, shaped through a process of bending in hot water. The heat allows the wood fibres to adapt and curve naturally, creating the desired shape. The ends of the strip are then tied together to maintain the curvature, and the collar is left to dry so that the wooden strip permanently acquires its arched form.

Once the wood has dried, the outer surfaces are decorated, usually with knife carving to create geometric motifs. The ends of the collar are pierced and fitted with a leather cord used to support the cowbell.

In the past, goat collars were often painted with natural pigments, turning them into objects of considerable craftsmanship. The use of particular colours and decorations indicated the importance of the animal, whose products were essential to the family's livelihood.



THE SHAVING KIT

The portable shaving kit is a complex and richly decorated artefact. Its structure consists of a cubic base topped by an inclined surface. A sliding lid on this surface protects the mirror and locks a second lid positioned perpendicular to the base. The concealed compartment contains soap and a shaving brush. At the back, a third, longer sliding lid closes a section where the razor is stored.

An interesting aspect is its geographical distribution: it is found almost exclusively in the Gran San Bernardo Valley. This suggests that its craft production may be connected to the passage of French soldiers during the Napoleonic invasions. It is likely that some local artisans observed the soldiers' equipment and drew inspiration from a similar object used for shaving.

Carlo Jans, an artisan and leading expert on Valdostan craftsmanship, attributes the invention of this "small cabinet" to Giovanni Battista Marguerettaz, an artisan from Saint-Rhémy, who produced them in large quantities until his death in 1879. Nevertheless, the object's distribution remained geographically confined to the Gran San Bernardo Valley.



THE CHAMPORCHER CHEST

The chest is an expression of traditional Alpine furnishing. It often represented part of a young woman's dowry: when she married, she brought the piece of furniture to her new home, together with its contents of embroidered sheets and tablecloths.

Simplicity, limited space and the needs of everyday life never prevented harmony and aesthetic expression: furniture was often decorated with knife-point carving or shaped panels. In the Aosta Valley, the most widespread traditional technique for decorating wood is knife carving; however, the Champorcher Valley represents an exception, as the most commonly used decorative technique on furniture was painting, using natural pigments applied directly onto the preparatory drawing made on the wooden surface, without a preliminary layer of gesso.

This particular production is geographically (Champorcher Valley) and historically (from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century) localised.

The decorative repertoire of the oldest furnishings is mainly based on geometric motifs, among which the rosette and the wheel are the most widespread. The heart is another recurring decorative element, often combined with plant motifs or crosses. Phytomorphic subjects such as leaves, flowers and other natural forms create decorative bands that frame, emphasise and complete the ornamentation. The most frequently used colours are red, blue, green and black. Towards the end of the 19th century, painted decoration became richer both in its figurative repertoire and in its use of colour. The chests and cradles produced from the late 19th century onwards were so richly decorated that the painted motifs almost entirely covered the wooden surface.



THE ROOSTER

The sculptural representation of the rooster in the history of Valdostan craftsmanship does not have particularly ancient roots. Farming artisans frequently depicted the animals that populated their everyday lives, including roosters, hens, horses, donkeys, ibex, chamois and foxes.

The production of carved roosters dates back to the 1950s, when some artisans began making models in different sizes. In the 1960s, however, production experienced a real boom, thanks in particular to the Brunodet brothers, Aimé and Dominique. These artisans developed a new version of the rooster, giving it a prouder appearance with an eagle-like beak, while preserving its simplicity and popularity.

The production of the brothers from Valtournenche gradually shifted away from traditional woodturning, in which they were true masters, towards the increasingly large-scale production of roosters. This change was undoubtedly influenced by the decline in the use of utilitarian wooden objects during the 1960s, while interest in aesthetic objects representing local cultural identity was growing.

Thus, the rooster became a symbol of Valdostan craftsmanship, finding its way not only into homes but also into the collective imagination as an emblem of tradition.



THE STONE BARREL

The stone barrel on display consists of twelve staves sealed with mortar and two ends, one of which has a hole in its lower section for the insertion of a tap. This large artefact, weighing approximately two tonnes, remains a mystery, both because of its extraordinary size and its intended use. It was found in a cellar in Arnad, in the hamlet of Echallod, an area renowned for its vineyards and the quality of its wines. However, no sediment was found inside to suggest that it had been used for wine.

The stone used is calcschist, a metamorphic rock composed of calcite, quartz and mica, formed through the transformation of ancient marine sediments. In the past, this material was used to make architectural elements such as roofing slabs and fountains.

In the construction of stone barrels, each artisan leaves their signature through the particular inclination of the staves, visible on the ends.

THE GESTURE

Behind the scenes in the workshops, the artisan's hands meet materials and tools, revealing a unique balance between imitation and originality each time. A gesture that is at once individual and shared. It is this expressive tension that gives an object its truth, making it authentic.

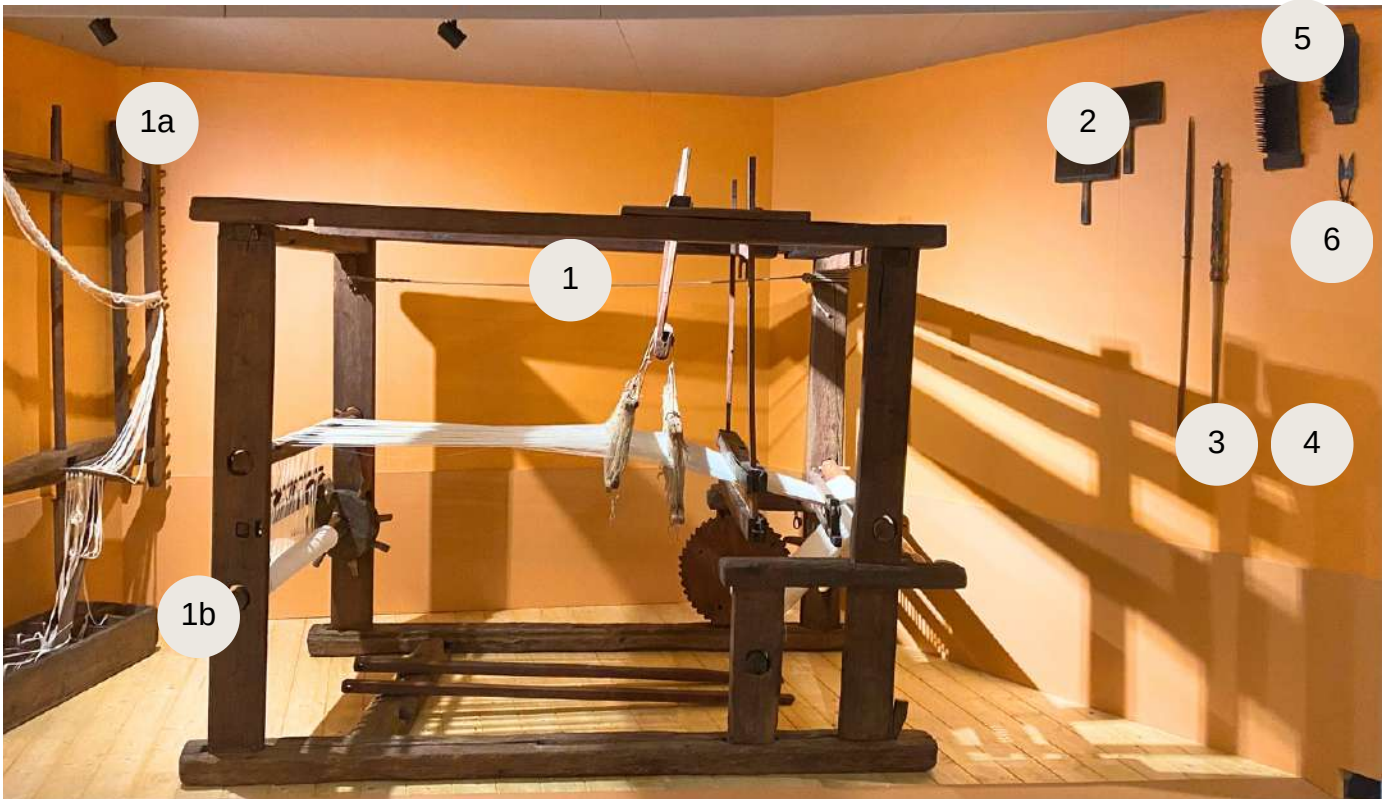
Behind it lies the rustle of tools against living material, the persistent rhythm of sanding, the spark of an idea taking shape. When a machine does it, it is not the same. Sound becomes noise, and every object, identical to the next, becomes a number. A machine cannot learn from masters by "stealing with its eyes" the secrets and fascination of the know-how embodied in a traditional technique, and it silences the tradition of which handmade work is the voice.

The hours of an artisan's work are valued on a par with the instant output of a machine. Objects are mass-produced and sold in large quantities, forgetting that what creates tradition and renews it are the intimate gestures of artisans in their workshops.

Only then does an object transcend the time of its use and speak of a tacit knowledge, absorbed unconsciously through a thousand small daily gestures that accumulate over time. From these emerges a practice capable of giving voice to mountain life, to the care of a territory and to its culture.

Only in the extended time of the workshop does the spirit of the Aosta Valley whisper its qualities through works that are unique each time.

Weaving



1. Loom, swift yarn winder (1a), warp (1b)

Wood and hamp
Fénis Municipality

2. Pair of carding tools

Wood and iron
MAV 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



WEAVING

Weaving is an ancient technique that interlaces the warp, arranged vertically, and the weft, arranged horizontally. The warp threads, divided into even and odd sets, are raised alternately to create the shed, the opening through which the shuttle carrying the weft thread passes. The warp threads then cross to hold the weft in place, and the fabric takes shape as the thread is beaten against the previous row. In the 19th century, weaving was widespread in the Aosta Valley and represented a moment of family social life, carried out to the rhythm of the loom that marked the passage of time.

THE LOOM

A loom is a machine used to interlace two sets of threads, known as warp and weft, arranged perpendicular to one another. A large reel is often positioned beside the loom, carrying the threads from the warping frame to the heddles, which are operated by pedals. The shuttle passes the weft thread between the warp threads, thereby completing the process.

There are looms for wool and for hemp; the example on display is a hemp loom originating from the municipality of Fénis.

Sculpture



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

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 Champretav
Wood

13. Carpenter's table

Various wood types
Private collection



SCULPTURE

Sculpture is an ancient practice that has accompanied humankind in the expression of concepts and forms, adapting over time to different materials. From its origins, the study of proportions and aesthetic canons has guided sculptors, who transformed matter by giving it meaning and balance.

In Valdostan folk art, sculpture was initially devoted to religious statuary, particularly representations of saints, which adorned mountain chapels and small churches. Alongside these, sculpture also found its place in private settings, where, next to small household altars, scenes of everyday life were carved, recounting the artisan's memory, family and animals.

In contemporary production too, artisans draw inspiration from the past, shaping materials in unique and personal ways. In some cases, it is the material itself that suggests the subject, prompting the artisan to “liberate” the image inherent in the form with chisel and mallet.

Making sabot clogs



1. Clog maker tools

Wood and metal
Private collection

2. Pair of child's dogs

Leandro Favre (1950)
20th century
Poplar wood
MAV collection

3. Clog-maker's blade

Wood and metal
Private collection

4. Pair of clogs for men

Leandro Favre (1950)
20th collection
Poplar wood
MAV collection

5. Two left clogs

Late 19th collections
Fir wood
MAV collection

6. Five gimlets

Wood and iron
Private collection



SABOT CLOGS

Sabots are sturdy wooden footwear originating in the Ayas Valley, similar to traditional models found in other European countries. They were used to protect the feet from cold, water and mud. In the Ayas Valley, they were worn by everyone, adults and children alike. Children tied them around their legs to prevent them from slipping off. Women's sabots were finer, decorated and had higher heels.

According to tradition, production began after All Saints' Day: two artisans worked together, one on the inner part and the other on the outer part, producing up to twelve pairs a day.

Swiss stone pine was chosen for its strength, while Scots pine was avoided because of the pain it could cause. The craft of the clog maker, with its gestures and tools, was passed down from one generation to the next and became essential to the local economy in centuries past.

Carving



1. Carving tools

19th - 20th century

Wood and metal

Private and MAV 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

RAVA collection

5. Goat collar

20th century

Walnut wood

RAVA collection

6. Crucifix

Livio Charbonnier (1938)

2010

Walnut wood

7. Whelstone holder

Tobie Deval (1920-1998)

Maple wood

8. Butter stamp

19th century

Maple wood

RAVA collection

9. Butter stamp

Wood

10. Butter stamp

Wood



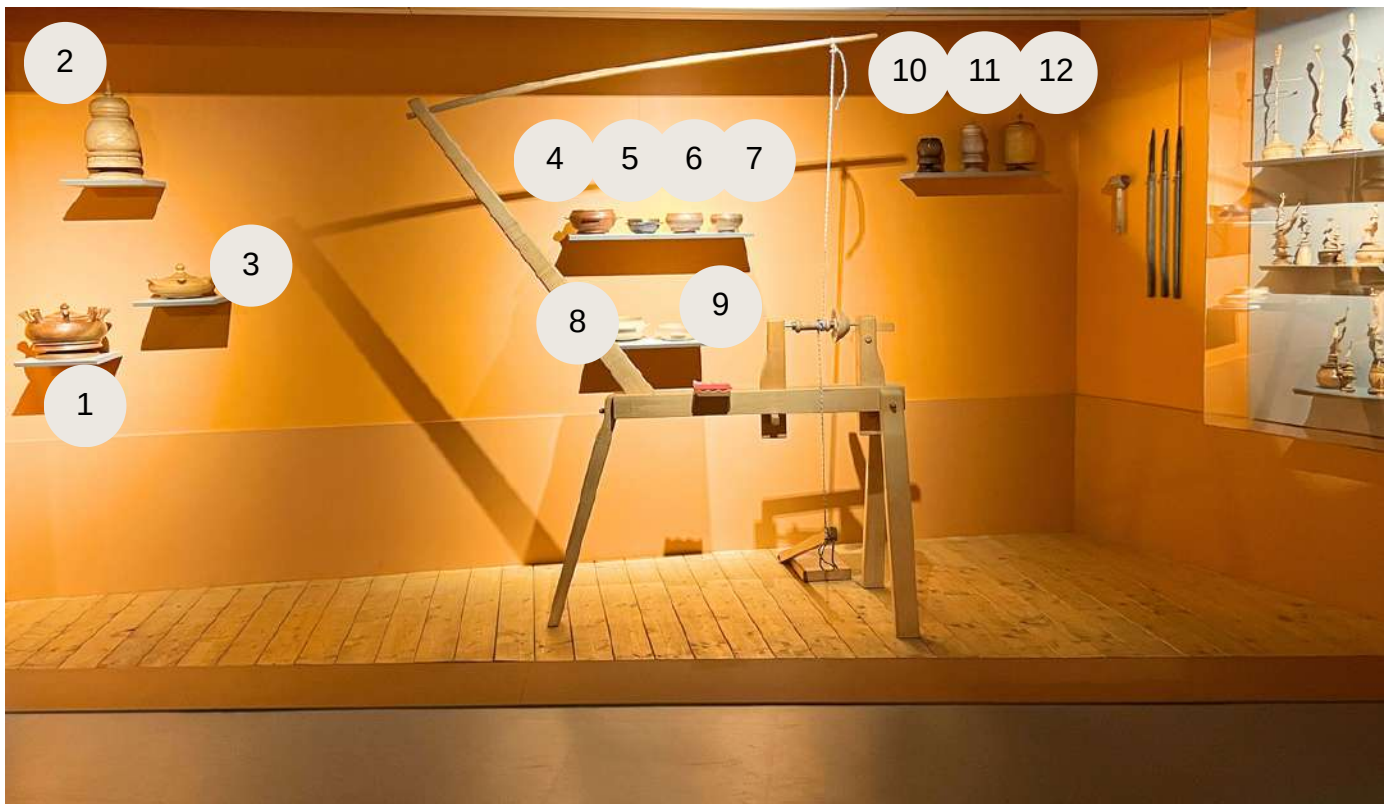
CARVING

Wood carving is an ancient technique developed to decorate everyday objects, make them more personal and satisfy the aspiration to beauty, while adding a certain value to utilitarian objects.

In the Aosta Valley, wood carving is certainly the most widespread technique for decorating everyday objects, using geometric motifs such as triangles, lines and rosettes; symbolic motifs such as the Christogram and crosses; and natural motifs, including plant and animal elements inspired by the surrounding landscape.

The widespread use of wood carving is also linked to the versatility of the tools and the simplicity of the work setup. Drawing techniques likewise allow great freedom in the creation of patterns and motifs.

Wood turning



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

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
Legno di acero
Collezione RAVA

11. *Grolla* cup

Mauro Petitjacques (1945)
2000
Legno di noce

12. *Grolla* cup

Alfonso Laurent (1881-1968)
20th century
Maple wood

Wood turning



13. Hammer and *crochets*

Wood and metal

14. Multi-axis wood turning

Luigi Merivot (1945-2020)

Wood

15. Pole late

MAV collection



WOODTURNING

Woodturning is a technique in which material is removed through the rotational movement of a piece of wood. During this process, the cutting edge of the tool, generally moved in a straight line, comes into contact with the wood, removing excess material and shaping the block. The continuous or intermittent rotation of the piece allows the wood to be shaped into various forms, such as round, cylindrical or spherical shapes. Woodturning is carried out using a lathe and specific tools, which vary according to the desired shape.

The choice of wood is essential, as the material must be free of cracks or knots, defects that can cause the piece to break during processing. Today, the mechanical lathe is the most widely used machine, as it automates the rotational movement of the workpiece. In the past, however, foot-powered lathes or pole lathes were used.

The latter was powered by human force through a system of ropes connecting a pedal or stirrup to the workpiece. It consisted of two upright posts supporting a crossbeam into which the workpiece was secured. The key element was the rope, attached at one end to a pedal or stirrup, wound around the spindle, and at the other end to a flexible pole positioned above the lathe. This lathe produced an intermittent rotational movement, but had the advantage of leaving the artisan's hands free during the work, thereby increasing the efficiency and speed of the process.

A large proportion of the objects produced at the beginning of the 20th century were made using this technique, providing an important testimony to traditional craftsmanship.

THE AVANT-GARDE

Alfonso Laurent, a renowned artisan from the small village of Gaby in the Gressoney Valley, one day decided to sacrifice a large maple tree, going against the economic logic of his family and community, in order to create, for the first time, “useless” objects, such as the enormous spoons on display, as well as bowls and skimmers. It was the 1960s.

Unbeknownst to him, at the same time in New York, the artist Claes Oldenburg, reflecting on consumerism from a different perspective, was creating oversized versions of everyday objects.

One of the qualities of tradition is its ability to renew itself through exceptional gestures, introducing new and sometimes astonishing syntheses that radically transform the way we see the world. Avant-garde movements emerge as moments of emancipation, as repeated impulses towards transformation—decisive leaps that may or may not find fertile ground where they arise.

In Valdostan craftsmanship, everyday objects free themselves from their utilitarian function to become symbols of a new way of conceiving craftsmanship, one that becomes an original interpretation of place.

Similarly, cows, omnipresent in traditional representations, appear in Brunodet’s works in stylised, almost unrecognisable forms, freeing the artisan’s work from mere reproduction and emphasising the individual style of the maker.

Thus, the past becomes a place of exploration from which a tradition emerges that remains constantly in step with the contemporary world.

Avant-garde



1. Large eagle

Renato Champretavy
20th century
Swiss pine wood

2. Large spoon and spatula

Alfonso Laurent (1881-1988)
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

THE BEAUTY

“In the search for a personal style, the artisan seeks to fulfil his instinctive aspiration towards beauty” (Jules Brocherel).

The value of beauty is widely recognised as a key element of human existence, yet it remains one of the most difficult to define. It may be evoked by order and harmony, but also by the depths of chaos, from which everything emerges. Its appeal to the senses does not fully encompass it: it touches the senses and transcends them, broadening the horizons of the imagination.

When is a craft object beautiful? If you ask the artisan, the answer is: when it is well made, functional and durable. A beautiful handmade object is described by connoisseurs as “right”. An object is “right” when it is pleasing to the eye and touch, light and easy to use, well balanced, made with materials recognised as local, and when the artisan’s technical skills are evident.

The “rightness” of an artefact embodies a profound unity of a society’s moral and aesthetic values, and their vital expression. Beauty incorporates a society’s values, while ugliness reflects its negative values.

Today, through beauty, the artisan resists a throwaway, hurried world that forgets details and flattens its richness into uniformity.

Beauty



1. Grolla cup

18th century
Maple wood

2. Wayfarer

Giulio Vuillermoz (1933-2022)
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
Walnut wood

7. Cup

18th - 19th century
Maple wood
RAVA collection

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

12. Cup

1771
Maple wood
RAVA collection

Beauty



13. Oval box
19th century

14. Saint Ursus
Giovanni Thoux (1935)
21th century
Walnut wood

15. Container with lid
17th - 18th
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 (1925-1966)
20th century
Birch wood

21. Madonna with rosary

Hans Savoye (1901-1966)
20th century
Maple wood

22. Saint Lorenzo

Maurice Vagneur (1915-2022)
20th century
Walnut wood

23. Saint Ursus

Pietro Giuseppe Perret
1962
Pear wood

24. Grolla cup

Maurice Vagneur (1915-2022)
20th century
Walnut wood

25. Saint Giocondo

Gino Thomasset (1922-2014)
20th century
Walnut wood

26. Saint Agostino

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)
20th century
Maple wood

27. Friendship cup

Domenico Brunodet (1914-1997)
1976
Maple wood

28. Mask

Wood

29. Mask

Wood

Beauty



30. Devil mask

Oscar Brocard (1926-2006)
20th century
Birch bark

31. Reaper

Giulio Vuillermoz (1935-2022)
20th century
Maple wood

32. Musicians

Gino Anselmo Dagusin (1935-2024)
2009
Soapstone

33. Musicians

Gino Anselmo Daguin (1935-2024)
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
MAV collection

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

Beauty



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

48. Shepherd

Carlo Gadin (1943)
1972
Walnut wood

49. Baldoche (traditional pageant)

Hans Savoye (1901-1966)
20th century
Walnut wood

50. Grolla cup

Brunodet brothers
20th century
Maple wood

51. Cowbell

18th century
Iron
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

Bellezza



54. Veil of Veronica - panel
16th century
Swiss pine wood
RAVA collection



FOOD PRESERVATION

In the Alps, the period suitable for food production is relatively short, so over the centuries mountain communities developed various techniques to preserve food during the long months between harvests. Tradition and experience taught them methods such as salting, drying, smoking, freezing, cooking, and protecting food from air and light. Combining several techniques considerably extended storage times: salting meat ensured good preservation, while adding drying prolonged its shelf life even further. Protecting food from air and light, in cupboards or containers, also improved its preservation.

Salted meat was stored in soapstone containers, taking advantage of the stone's thermal properties and heat conductivity. Their lids were weighted down with large stones so that the brine completely covered the meat. Valdostan farmers had also learned that, when properly processed, some foods could be preserved for more than a year.



SAINT URSUS

Saint Ursus was a priest from the city of Aosta who lived between the 5th and 8th centuries and was known for his humility, simplicity and devotion to charity. He celebrated Mass in the cemetery church of Saint Peter and, although he was not distinguished by spectacular deeds, his holiness was expressed through prayer and assistance to those in need. According to legend, he cultivated a small field and divided its harvest into three parts: one for himself, one for the poor and one for the little birds, which would perch on him. For this reason, he is often depicted with a small bird on his shoulder.

His liturgical feast is celebrated on 1st February, the day of his death. Although few details are known about his life, numerous miracles have helped shape his image. One example is the “Fountain of Saint Ursus”, where tradition holds that, during a severe drought, the saint caused water to spring from a rock with a stroke of his staff. The spring, located in Busseyaz, still flows today beneath a chapel dating from 1649. Another miracle concerns a terrible flood caused by the overflowing of the Buthier stream, which threatened Aosta. After praying and making the sign of the cross over the water, the current stopped, sparing the city. Saint Ursus was also known for his gift of prophecy and for defending the weakest. He is therefore regarded as a protector against drought, livestock diseases, severe weather, floods and abuse.

In iconography, he is often depicted holding the priors’ staff, symbol of his connection with the Collegiate Church of Saints Peter and Ursus, which he is said to have founded. His fame is also linked to the centuries-old Saint Ursus Fair, held on 30 and 31 January, in the days preceding his feast. The fair originated in the saint’s charitable work, as he is said to have distributed wooden clogs to the poor.



BELLS AND COWBELLS

In the agro-pastoral society of the past, bells were a familiar presence in everyday village life. Church bell towers marked the passing of time, called the faithful to prayer and set the rhythm of work in the fields.

The daily life of herders also involved important sound-producing objects, such as cowbells. Worn around cows' necks, they helped guide the herd and enabled herders to locate animals that had strayed while grazing. Goats were also fitted with smaller cowbells.

Their shape and size affect their sound, which may be deep or high-pitched, while certain details in their forging make it possible to identify the artisans who made them.



THE TATÀ

The Tata is a traditional valdostan wooden toy depicting a mule or a horse. Its distinctive feature is the presence of wheels instead of legs, allowing children to make it move. In the smaller versions, a cord attached to the neck enabled children to pull the toy along.

The name “Tatà” seems to derive from the onomatopoeic sound “ta-ta”, imitating the noise of the wheels rolling across the wooden floors of houses. In some versions, artisans created Tata toys large enough for children to ride and propel themselves forward with their feet.

Today, the Tata is still part of local craft production, but it has lost its original function as a children’s toy, becoming a true sculpture, often finely decorated, that preserves the charm of the traditional craft.



VERONICA

The Holy Face of Christ, also known as Veronica (Vera Icona-Real icon), refers to the tradition according to which the image of Jesus' face was imprinted on the veil used to wipe it. This subject appears frequently throughout the history of art. The Veronica displayed here is a wooden work dating from the 16th century.