

Valle d'Aosta
and her Handicraft Heritage



Our **artists** knew and still know their craft: in the course of time they have learnt through patience, obstinacy, perseverance, and will hand down their **experience** and skills to the younger generations in order that this abstract **culture**, which dates back to man's earliest existence in Valle d'Aosta, may live on into the future and immortalise her noble **traditions**.

Joseph César Perrin

Excerpt from "I volti I luoghi - Ritratti di 41 artigiani valdostani",
Musumeci Editore, Quart (Ao) 2009



a mountainous region,
a people proud
of their secular traditions





over a thousand
craftsmen

A striking number, especially if you consider how small Valle d'Aosta is.

Scores of people use craft tools, some for a hobby, others for their trade, all are bound to their traditions and a common desire to keep those ancient skills and techniques which reflect the landscape, the region's history and culture alive.



1920



1945



1954



1966



1987



OGGI

a thousand years of Craftsmanship

The relationship between man and his environment acts as a backdrop to stories about life in the mountains which are equally hostile and generous, and offer unexpected and unique gifts to those who can, or who have learnt to observe them through prudent eyes and a respectful soul.

A *montagnard* knows how to combine raw materials, manual skills and knowledge to create objects which powerfully express their indissoluble bond with the alpine setting. This is the history the third millennium craftsman repeats and interprets, time and time again.

Punctually each year, on 30th and 31st January the streets of Aosta are packed with the shapes and colours of local handicraft.

Buzzing anticipation takes hold of the entire city. On one hand artisans conclude their last-minute preparations: items to finish, assemble and set out, the stalls to put up in the morning darkness, all of them impatient to show off their year's work. On the other hand, the whole community takes part in the event, city life slows to a halt, gets ready to be overwhelmed by thousands of craft lovers, both tourists and locals.

the Fair of Sant'Orso: a rendezvous with a vintage flavour

All is poised, waiting to enjoy another Fair, always the same yet always fresh and different. An immense showcase of Valdostan culture, identity and *savoir faire*, a chance to admire the creativity and skill of artists and artisans.

Then, as dusk falls, the *veillà* commences – a celebration within a celebration. An ancient tradition with a joyful and convivial flavour, a blend of singing, dancing and tantalising local dishes.

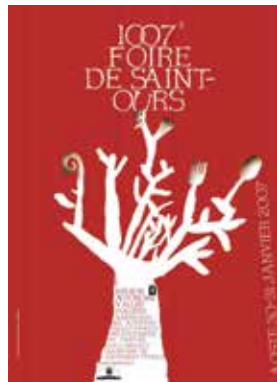
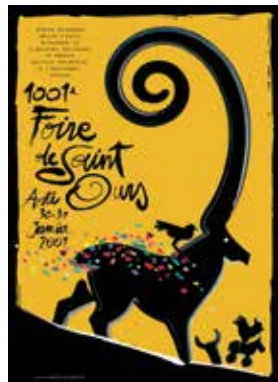
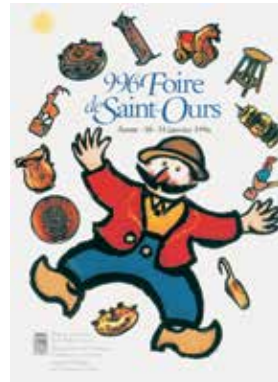
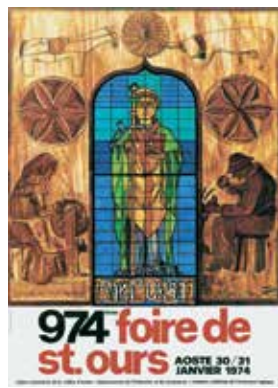




protagonists of the Fair of Sant'Orso

As day breaks on the day of the Fair of Sant'Orso, while making last-minute preparations, each person putting their craft on display is presented with an inscribed pendant identifying him as an exhibitor. This is a miniature copy of a traditional object and varies from year to year.

The exhibitors are easily recognisable among the Fair crowds and multitude of stalls: they all wear this same token around their necks. These are the true stars of the *Foire*.



each year a different poster,
each Fair an original design:
a collection to save

when the Fair
only existed in winter



When winter is a faint memory, Aosta once again stages the Foire d'Été tradition: the summer version of the thousand-year-old Fair.



a living passion all year round

A replica of the winter version but painted in summer hues: an important open-air event with craft stalls lining the narrow city-centre streets, an Exhibition-Competition and Atelier des Métiers. A light-hearted experience, no overcoats or hats, caressed by the fine weather and surrounded by the alpine scenery in summer attire.

Many are the chances to become acquainted with the wide range of Valdostan handicraft. Numerous fairs and events take place throughout the year all over the region, each unique in itself: Donnas Fair foreruns Sant'Orso, at Antey-Saint-André Fair wood-working course participants display their work ...

Different settings, where visitors can breathe tradition and authenticity.



- 01 | Antey-Saint-André | WICKERWORK
- 02 | Aymavilles | CARVING
- 03 | Chambave | SCULPTING
- 04 | Châtillon | CARVING
- 05 | Donnas | CARVING | SCULPTING
- 06 | Doues | WICKERWORK

- 07 | Fénis | SCULPTING
- 08 | Gaby | CARVING
- 09 | Issime | CARVING
- 10 | Issogne | SCULPTING
- 11 | Jovençon | WICKERWORK
- 12 | Morgex | CARVING | SCULPTING | WICKERWORK



learning throughout the Region

- 13 | Perloz | SCULPTING
- 14 | Pollein | SCULPTING
- 15 | Pont-Saint-Martin | CARVING | WOOD TURNING
- 16 | Sarre | SCULPTING | WICKERWORK
- 17 | Saint-Christophe | CARVING
TEXTILES, FOOTWEAR AND ACCESSORIES
FARM TOOLS AND OBJECTS

- 18 | Saint-Oyen | TEXTILES, FOOTWEAR AND ACCESSORIES
- 19 | Saint-Pierre | WROUGHT IRON
- 20 | Saint-Vincent | WOOD TURNING
- 21 | Valgrisenche | SCULPTING
- 22 | Verrès | WROUGHT IRON | SCULPTING

handing over the baton



Many interesting craft courses have been set up in Valle d'Aosta to keep local traditions alive and renew the valuable identity of handicraft.

Adults of all ages can discover and experiment with different types of materials and techniques, compare them to traditional methods and get the true feel of the artisan world.

They develop and become the new defenders of memory, guaranteeing the future of local craftsmanship



artisan and workshop
an inseparable duo



a place to *tsapoté*

For an artisan *tsapoté* is not just an ordinary verb: it means “to carve” but encompasses the essence of what it means to be an artisan.

An artisan’s workshop is his private space, where he can *tsapoté*. One cannot exist without the other. This is where passion and talent converge.

Four walls withholding a magic spell. This is a special place, whether it be roomy or just a pokey corner, perfectly tidy or chaotic, it reveals the personality of its busy occupant.

Anywhere can become an improvised workshop. Small impromptu works of art can come to life anywhere. That prize piece may come to hand at any unexpected moment.

This is what the craftsman is: genius and naturalness, ancient movements, trusted tools and local materials.





one region,
many different materials



Eyes which scrutinise something only visible to him but does not yet exist ...

the artisan's eyes
can already perceive it

A tree trunk, a block of stone, a piece of leather or a strand of wool are much more than they appear.

A functional object of simple beauty is hiding within that raw material. The craftsman must free it. A few minutes to gather his thoughts, then inspiration comes from a particular grain or colouring. Diving instinctively into the task, the artisan combines experience, technique, perseverance; totally committing himself both physically and emotionally.

The craftsmen know that a slip can be fatal; an unforgiving mistake may ruin hours' work. A chemistry of sensations builds up: tension, pride and excitement, engrossing to the last.



WOOD



STONE



NATURAL FIBRES:
WOOL,
HEMP,
LINEN



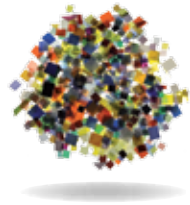
IRON



LEATHER



GOLD
AND SILVER



GLASS



COPPER



CLAY



materials for new forms of expression

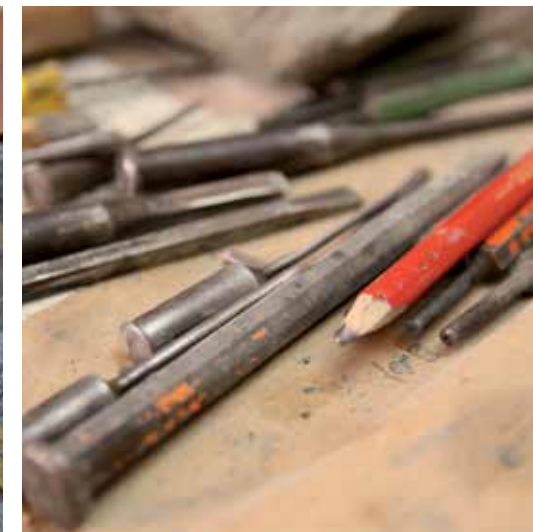
Traditions are updated; the craftsman explores and reinterprets different, versatile, strong materials.

Modern and exciting creative forms develop from the dazzle of gold and silver, the warm reflections of copper, the transparency of glass, the elegance of ceramics: unusual objects, daring combinations, intriguing shapes... handicraft capable of expressing both contemporary styles and tradition.

The craftsman and his tools:
a close bond



*rabet, masetta,
scupel, résetta, faoudèe, ...*



... plane, wood mallet, chisel, saw, apron. These are the tools that help the artisan's hands to mould the material. They are personal objects, often bound to a memory, always jealously guarded.

First his fingers run across the wood, iron, stone, leather, stroking it, feeling it.

Then the tools come to life. Loving hands prepare them, clean them, sharpen them.

When the job is finished shavings and dust adorn the floor, the tools are tidily replaced in the wall rack or thrown haphazardly into a workbench drawer ready for their next encounter with the artisan's hands and heart.



wood turning, carving,
sculpting, wickerwork ...

traditional articles produced
in the traditional manner

Chanvre from Champorcher, *dentelles* from Cogne, *drap* from Valgrisenche, *sabot* from Ayas, socka and traditional costumes from Valle del Lys. Five traditional handcrafted products specifically chosen and protected by a special regional law, five co-operatives working actively to keep this legacy of skills alive and esteemed.

Thanks to them we can admire the geometric patterns of bobbin lace, the smoothness of natural fibre textiles, footwear and costumes reflecting local habits and lifestyle.

CHANVRE



DENTELLES



DRAP

D'SOCKA

SABOT

objects
with a thousand faces



Valdostan handicraft is made up of many shapes and materials, interpreted by different hands.

Roaming among the fair stalls, through the Museum of Traditional Valdostan Handicraft, into IVAT boutiques or while visiting the workshops along *Chemin des artisans*, visitors realise just how extraordinary the range of objects is.

This vast assortment originates in the agricultural and farming background; objects grew from necessity: work tools, household implements and objects for everyday use.

Even the desire for beauty must be satisfied. At this point aesthetic elements are introduced and business mixes with pleasure. Progression from necessity to pastime and finally to artistic expression.

Each object is unique, like each chisel blow.



once upon a time
there was the friendship cup

It has travelled a long way in a thousand years. From being a humble object used in all homes, it has become an increasingly more elegant and refined ornament, no longer purely functional but an item to put on display.

Today's friendship cup is the result of true stylistic evolution, transforming from its original simple lines into elaborate designs, influenced by a thirst for beauty as well as practicality.

Like the cup, many other items have evolved and been transformed; the enthralling history of progressing craftsmanship.



coppa (cup) shaped like a simple bowl



turned *coppa* with a rounded shape and squat base



turned two-handled *coppa* (or with "ears"),

two-handled cup, hand hollowed

four-handled cup (or with "ears")

four-handled cup, rim shaped to form spouts



The friendship cup as it is today

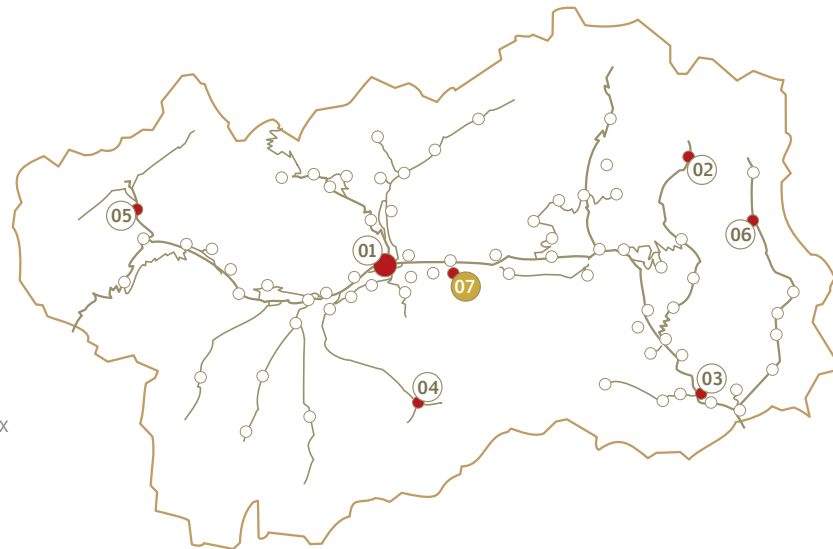
a completely closed *coppa* with lid and spouts



L'Institut Valdotaïn de l'Artisanat de Tradition is a regional body with two objectives: on one hand cultural growth, on the other promotion of trade. It has one common aim: to protect, gain recognition for and promote traditional handicraft, preserving its identity and originality.

IVAT tradition in progress

Six boutiques sell guaranteed craft products, a museum, events throughout the year, promotional ventures, research, education: IVAT is all this.



- 01 AOSTA
Place Chanoux
- 02 AYAS
Antagnod
- 03 BARD
Forte di Bard
- 04 COGNE
Rue du Docteur Grappein
- 05 COURMAYEUR
Rue de l'Église
- 06 GRESSONEY-SAINT-JEAN
Rue Linty

six boutiques

a museum,
MAV 07 FÉNIS
Loc. Chez Sapin



la chapelle pour
institutrice fournit aux
struction certes élémentaire,
à éradiqué l'analphabétisme.
le lait de tout
le village et de le travailler pour produire
de la fontine, du beurre et du fromage
pour la famille. On porte moudre le blé au
moulin, bâti près du torrent ou du ruisseau;
vers la fin de l'année les miches de pain
sortent du four commun, en quantité
suffisante jusqu'au prochain mois de
décembre. À la fontaine publique, les
femmes lavent le linge... et la tsemize
des absents. Sur la petite place, les hommes
délibèrent sur les corvées de réparation
chemins ou des canaux d'irrigation,
l'heure du carnaval ou de la fête
ils participent aux chants
l'esplanade.

Socialité

Il villaggio è l'esempio del
luogo in cui le difficoltà materiali e
comuni danno origine ad un grado
di solidarietà. Tutte le cose comuni
scopre la capella per la preghiera, il
dove l'ispirante da al lavoro in un
fore di lavoro, ma che si sono
scoprire l'antichità. La tsemize
di raccogliere il latte di tutto il villaggio e lo
trasformato in fontina, burro e formaggio per
la casa. Si porta il grano al mulino, costruito
sulla riva del torrente o di un ruisseau, verso
la fine dell'anno una lunga processione
di pani esce dal forno comune per soddisfare
le necessità dei successivi mesi.
Alla fontaine le donne fanno il bucato e
lavorano i panni degli assenti. Nella piccola
piazza, gli uomini deliberano le corvées de
conces per la riparazione delle strade e dei
canali di irrigazione. Il tempo del
il giorno del carnevale o della festa
la piazza si anima con i canti
festosamente cantati e ballati.



handicraft
and its home: MAV

exhibition, research,
hands-on learning for a genuine experience



A museum, a stone's throw from
Fénis Castle, an exhibition path
that entralls visitors visually and
emotionally, leading them on a guided
tour of a people's history represented
through objects.

Historical objects which proudly
show the marks of time and usage,
alongside more recent products and
works of art.
Passion and an enormous amount
of study and scientific research have
gone into protecting and sharing this
heritage.

The educational workshops and hand-
on experiences provide a chance to
understand and create. Only with dirty
hands and dusty clothes can children
learn what it means to be an artisan.

Project

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