

# Handicraft.

## Traditional products and artisan jewels

In Umbria, every aspect of life is connected and intertwined. Art and handicraft, both expressions of the great medieval culture, and then the Renaissance, have been refined over the centuries by means of ongoing exchanges. Regional handicraft, then, is always something more than simply the production of tools and objects for everyday needs. Umbrian handicrafts have reached results of superior aesthetic value, kept alive up to the present day by tradition, ongoing study, and revival efforts.

The **ceramics of Deruta**, a small town clinging to a hilltop, are world renowned. The origin of this production dates as far back as the Etruscans, and fine ceramics were produced here in the Middle Ages. But it was during the Renaissance that the art of Deruta reached its maximum splendour, admired and sought after by the nobles of all of Europe. Refined decorations and colours (gold, cobalt, white glaze) embellished the *piatti da pompa*, plates used for special occasions, the *coppe amatorie*, the gift of love on which female figures and romantic inscriptions were painted, and the exquisite floor tiles. Following centuries of decline, the ceramic tradition began to flourish again in the 20th century, and now involves numerous workshops. This led to the establishment of the Deruta School of Ceramics and the Regional Ceramics Museum, which exhibits objects from the Middle Ages to the present, but the highlight is the majolica floor of the Church of San Francesco. A short distance from Deruta is the village of **Ripabianca**, known for its glazed **terrecotta** produced according to centuries-old methods.

Deruta, however, does not have



a monopoly on ceramics. Gubbio is another well-known handicraft centre, brought to the fore as early as the 16th century by the works of the master artisan Giorgio Andreoli, whose “lustre” technique gave the objects extremely refined metallic reflections. For contemporary shopping, there are a number of artisan workshops scattered around



the streets of the town offering **pottery with polychromatic glazes and floral decorations, including vases made of bucchero (black ceramics)**. Gualdo Tadino is another important centre for **artistic ceramics (in particular objects with metallic reflections)**, a production that has

continued uninterrupted since the 13th century and now involves more than sixty factories. The town is home to the Umbrian Ceramic Centre and the Museum of Contemporary Ceramics, which exhibits all the prize-winning pieces from the International Ceramics Competition created by the great ceramists of the last fifty years. **Umbertide, Città di Castello,** and **Orvieto** also have longstanding ceramic traditions.

Though ceramic art is the pride and joy of Umbrian handicraft, other ancient crafts thrive throughout the region.

**Gubbio** proudly carries on its **wrought iron work**, entrusted to skilled and imaginative blacksmiths who create gates, signs, coins, keys, weapons, and more. Objects in wrought iron, especially decorative tools, jugs, andirons, and baking moulds, can also be found in Orvieto, Cascia, Magione, and Passignano, while Villamagna is known for files and rasps.

Textile production in the region dates back to the 12th century, from whence it became celebrated throughout Europe. Medieval and Renaissance techniques, colours, and designs have been faithfully recovered by artisans who still today use centuries-old wooden weaving frames. **Perugia, Città di Castello, Orvieto, and Montefalco** all feature the production of **fine fabrics (those in linen are amongst the best in Italy)**, decorated with ancient geometric motifs in blue, red, and gold, bearing the symbol of Perugia, the Griffin.

**Lake Trasimeno**, on the other hand, boasts **extraordinary lacework**: Irish lace and pillow lace on Isola Maggiore, and in **Panicale, tulle embroidered by hand** according to the precious Ars Panicalensis method. Embroidery featuring the "Assisi stitch" [or "Franciscan stitch"], a double cross-stitch technique invented in the Middle Ages, still survives in Assisi and Città di Castello. Not to be left out is the



Ars Wetana of Orvieto, a refined type of crochet-worked Irish lace. Wood-working in Umbria was expressed in history at two levels: the popular one involving the fabrication of objects for everyday life and farm work, and the cultured one of marquetry for decorating the interiors of churches and palaces between the Renaissance and the Baroque period. Also characteristic were the wooden crèches, a custom revived in the Monumental Crèche displayed each year in **Città della Pieve**. In any case, wood-working today mainly involves antique restoration and the production of furniture in period style. The main wood-working centres are Città di Castello, Gubbio, Assisi, Perugia, and Todi, which still has cabinet-makers and sculptors. **Glass-making is typical of Piegario**, where it has been practiced for eight hundred years; **the windows of the Duomo of Orvieto were created there**. Factories

have by now replaced single artisans, but the town's Glass Museum also engages a number of glass-makers who preserve the ancient techniques. In **Perugia** one artisan workshop is still in operation, Studio Moretti-Caselli, which has been producing **artistic fire-painted glass windows** since the mid-1800s; many of those in the Duomo were produced here.

Last but not least is **goldsmithery**, which is alive and well in Umbria and, indeed, constantly growing. Perugia, Torgiano, Terni, and Todi have workshops heir to a longstanding tradition, where the Etruscan granulation technique has been revived. Orvieto is home to the Ravelli School, repository of the city's goldsmithery tradition.

