

# Crafting Shoes Never Meant to Be Walked In

In Venice, a coterie of craftspeople reinterpret Tod's driving shoes.

By Jessica Roy

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Last week at the Venice Biennale, the milliner Giuliana Longo wore gold earrings in the shape of hats as she showed off a hat sculpture made of natural agave. Ms. Longo, who has worked as a milliner since 1969, said through a translator that she fell in love with hats because “if you wear a hat, you become a different person.”

Dotted with 500 “pebbles,” each hand stitched to the fabric, the hat was in fact not just a hat but a tribute to a shoe: the Tod's Gommino driving shoe, a hand-stitched loafer in leather or suede with rubber pebbles on the bottom and back that make it look a bit like a soft, chic cleat.

Tod's, the Italian leather goods and fashion company, had assembled 11 Venetian craftsmen to interpret the Gommino using their own tools and artistry. The works, created by Venetian glassblowers, mask makers and other artisans, were exhibited at a cocktail party on April 19. At an airy warehouse across the canal from the Italian Pavilion, craftspeople stood proudly by their work.

Sara Menegazzo, the daughter of the last family in Venice to practice traditional goldbeating, showed sheets of gold leaf that her father, Marino Menegazzo, had beaten by hand. With Ms. Menegazzo's mother, Sabrina Berta, the family runs the last battiloro workshop in Venice. In partnership with Tod's, they created a Gommino shoe and corresponding shoe box entirely covered in gold leaf, which Mr. Mengazzo beat for two hours by hand with a heavy hammer.



Sara Menegazzo, a goldleaf artisan, demonstrates her craft. Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times



Roberto Beltrami, a Murano glassblower, speaks with a guest near his glass shoe. Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times

Roberto Beltrami, a young glassblower who operates a family business called Wave Murano Glass on the nearby island of Murano, created a Gommino shoe in the Tod's signature orange. It was made entirely out of glass.

“I was always a pyro,” Mr. Beltrami said. “Setting things on fire is my calling. I set a couch on fire before I could walk.”

Mr. Beltrami's contribution to the Tod's exhibition, a Cinderella-esque glass Gommino, took several hours of hot sculpting to complete. “It's very hard to control glass and make it do whatever you want to do,” he said. “The most difficult part was just getting the right proportions, the right shape and getting the feeling of the shoe. I'm still not 100 percent happy. I think if I make a few more, I could make it better.”



Gianpaolo Fallani demonstrates his screen printing in front of a wall of his images. Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times

The Venetian project is a new chapter in the Art of Craftsmanship, a Tod's initiative that seeks to highlight the importance of handmade artistry, both a brand pillar and a personal interest of its chairman, Diego Della Valle. This is the second iteration of the project. The first, which was introduced last year at Milan Design Week, featured original photography by the British fashion photographer Tim Walker celebrating the tools and materials used in Tod's products.

Outside the Biennale event, guests gathered near a red neon coil created by the artist Federica Marangoni to smoke cigarettes and huddle against the winds whipping off the canal. The actors Adrien Brody and Kelly Rutherford rubbed shoulders with the designer



Julia Roitfeld, the Vice Media executive chairman Shane Smith and at least one count. Waiters served Aperol spritzes, glasses of white wine and small plastic packages of crackers as a live pianist played gentle background music.

At the event, Mr. Della Valle held court with press and admirers, pausing to take photos. “The brand is very close to the culture and the artisan lifestyle, so it’s a perfect mix,” he said with the help of a translator.

“The artisans are people who are super-free because they depend only on their hands,” he added. “I’m a bit jealous.”

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