

The gold artisans

There are ten thousand businesses in the goldsmith sector in Italy; 350 of them are factories and the rest are tiny artisan firms. 70% of the gold in Europe and 15% of gold worldwide is transformed into jewellery in Italy, for a total of 25 million pieces. Production is concentrated in three districts, but the major one is Valenza: nine contiguous municipalities that transform 30 tons of gold a year. The goldsmith industry was born in Valenza around the year 1840, thanks to an artisan named Vincenzo Morsetti. One of his apprentices perfected his technique at the best jewellers in Torino and Paris and he began to create higher-quality jewellery.

In turn, his apprentices opened their own workshops, thus giving rise to a proliferation of artisan firms that is still going on today. The three goldsmith firms that existed back in 1850 had become 300 by 1945, the year the Associazione Orafi Valenza was founded in Piemonte. Today, 1,200 firms work in the district, and most of them are family enterprises. These gold artisans, designers united in their own association, have many strong points in common: their patrimony of technical knowledge, which is handed down to young people in part through training courses; the close relations they maintain amongst themselves; the promptness with which they adapt to new requests from the market; their creative talent. One important transformation that has taken place in recent years is that many firms that were once specialized in commercialization have entered into the orbit of important international trademarks like Damiani, Bulgari, Cartier, Tiffany and Pasquale Bruni, which have set up their own production in Valenza.