

# SILK

*The Magical History  
of Ferragamo Scarves*



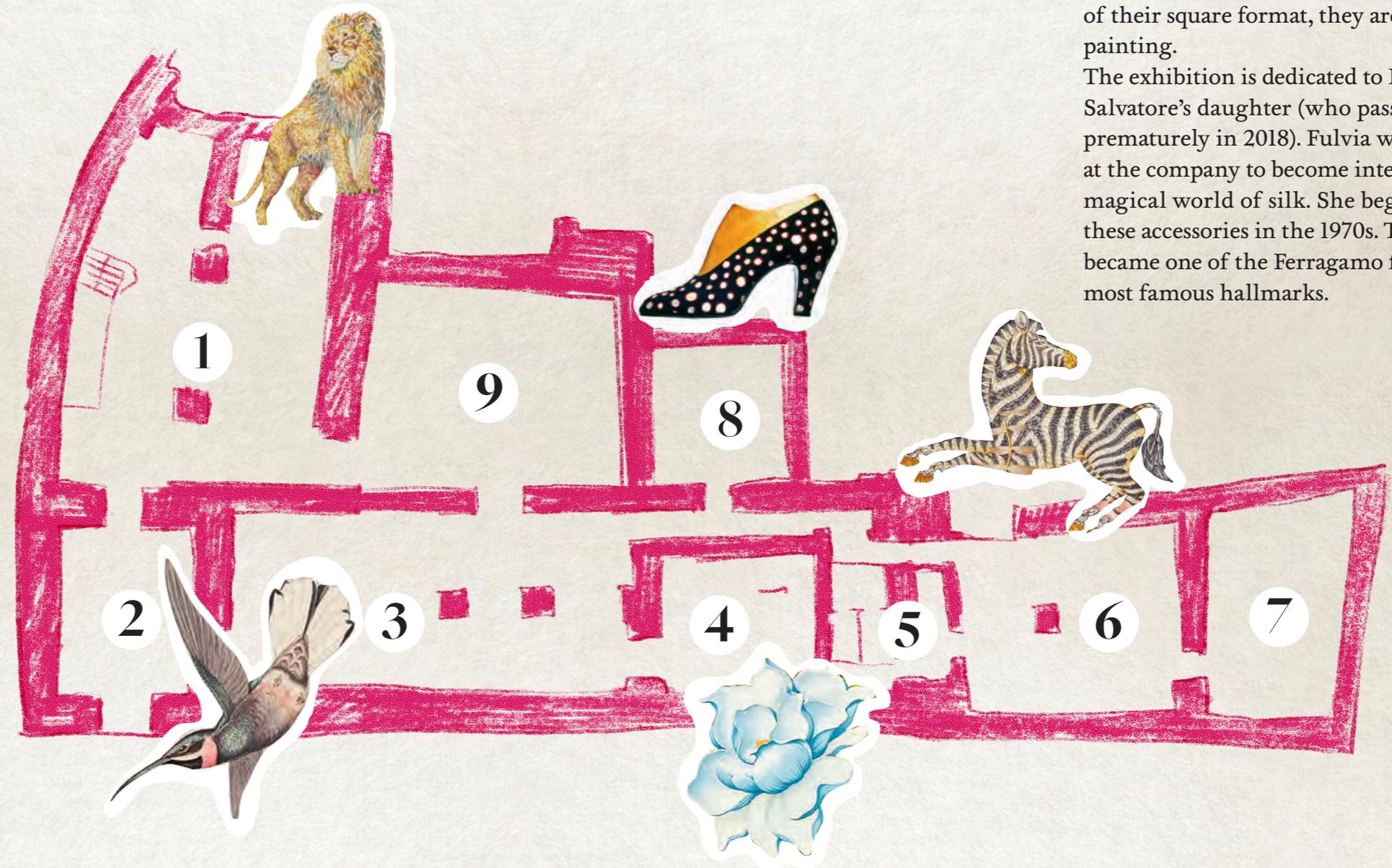
# SILK

*The Magical History  
of Ferragamo Scarves*

by  
Francesca Coronella

# Dear visitor, welcome to Museo Salvatore Ferragamo!

The museum was founded in 1995 to give the public, and young people like you in particular, the opportunity to find out more about the history of the Salvatore Ferragamo company and its founder, who was a famous designer of women's shoes, now considered to be veritable 20th-century artworks. Every year, the museum organizes a new exhibition, exploring a different chapter of Ferragamo's history and highlighting links with art, fashion and contemporary culture.



The exhibition you are about to visit is called *Silk* and was conceived to share the story of the creativity, craftsmanship and technology that goes into printing on silk, a practice that is the pride of Italian manufacturing. The exhibition focuses in particular on Salvatore Ferragamo's trademark scarves. You'll discover that scarves can be worn a thousand different ways – as a headcovering, wrap or belt – and that, because of their square format, they are treated like a painting.

The exhibition is dedicated to Fulvia Ferragamo, Salvatore's daughter (who passed away prematurely in 2018). Fulvia was the first person at the company to become interested in the magical world of silk. She began designing these accessories in the 1970s. They very quickly became one of the Ferragamo fashion house's most famous hallmarks.

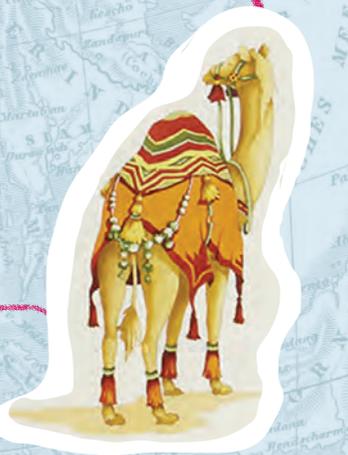
SECTION 1

# SUN YUAN & PENG YU and the Silk Road Chimeras

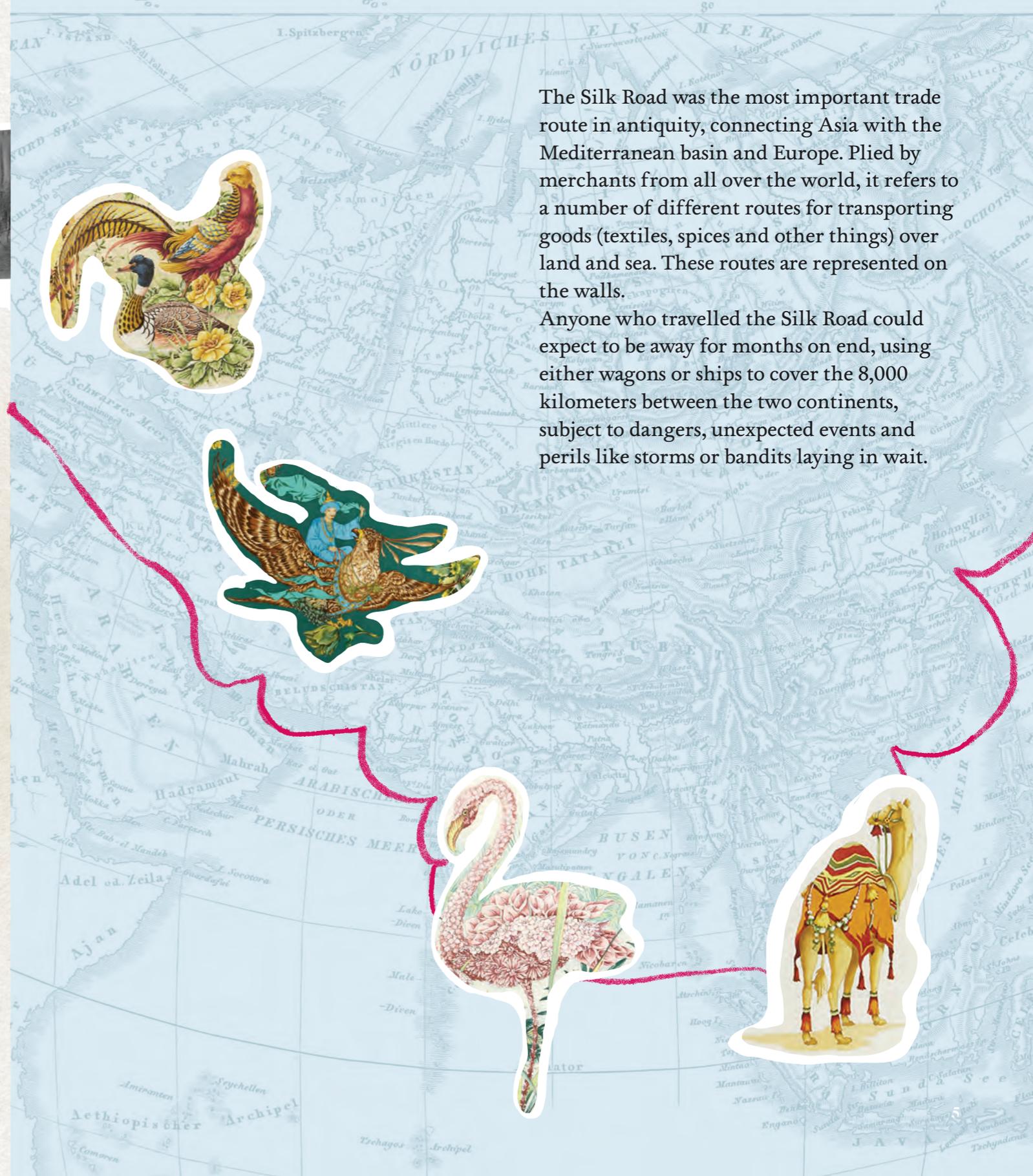
**It's time to step into the exhibition, into the crowd of animals invading the first room. Take a look at these creatures. What strikes you about them?**

Created especially for Museo Salvatore Ferragamo by Chinese artists Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, the installation *Were creatures born celestial?* is a series of sculptures along with some taxidermy, the bodies of real animals treated using special substances to preserve, exhibit and use them for educational purposes. The taxidermy comes from the private collection Naturaliter in Capannoli (Pisa) and the Museo della Specola in Florence, one of the most renowned zoological collections in the world, assembled by Grand Duke Peter Leopold of Lorraine in the late 18th century to raise awareness about animals in far-off countries.

**As you might expect, in those days travelling was by no means easy. Moving from one country to another was a difficult, time-consuming and dangerous business, still it was essential to cater to certain needs. Can you guess which ones?**



The Silk Road was the most important trade route in antiquity, connecting Asia with the Mediterranean basin and Europe. Plied by merchants from all over the world, it refers to a number of different routes for transporting goods (textiles, spices and other things) over land and sea. These routes are represented on the walls. Anyone who travelled the Silk Road could expect to be away for months on end, using either wagons or ships to cover the 8,000 kilometers between the two continents, subject to dangers, unexpected events and perils like storms or bandits laying in wait.



As well as enabling trade, these routes fostered contact between different peoples, who began to get to know one another, compare their customs and traditions, and exchange ideas about science, technology and religion. According to artists Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, this exchange between different worlds is the most interesting thing about the history of the Silk Road. As a one-off for this exhibition, the artists designed their own scarf which is on display here.

**Look at the composition the artists have created. How would you describe it? How have they depicted the characters?**



In Sun Yuan and & Peng Yu's personal vision, contact between distant cultures is prompted by curiosity about the mysterious and the fantastic, often expressed in ancient mythological tales and legends that have been handed down to us today. Complete with supernatural and symbolic characters, narrating adventurous events and creatures, myths are full of teachings about life and about how we should behave. In many cases spanning more than just one culture, the starting point for these tales is often the struggle between good and evil. Not just men but animals, with their own symbolic meanings, feature in such stories.



**Take a look at the animals around you. Focus on the ones you're most familiar with. What is each one's main characteristic? What symbolic meaning do you think they express?**

When they began delving into Western and Chinese myths, the two artists perceived some similarities. Regardless of their geographical origin, it's as if men from the past had the same inspirations, the same way of using imaginary characters made by mashing up humans and animals for their stories.

In the drawing Sun Yuan & Peng Yu turn this process on its head, dismembering some famous Greek and Chinese mythological figures such as the *Medusa* (a woman with poisonous snakes for hair), the *Centaur* (half-man, half-horse), and the *Qiongqi* (a creature with the body of a tiger, buffalo horns and bird wings).

**The artists "offer up" these individual parts to the spectator as building blocks, to reassemble and create a brand-new personal character that wipes out any cultural distance. So, what will your creature look like?**

# THE FASCINATION OF CHINA AT VILLA DEL POGGIO IMPERIALE

Take a look at the painted scenes on display in this room. What are the characters doing?

Silk is a precious fabric, typically used to make scarves, whose fibre spun from insect slime. Sericulture – the word that means the delicate process of making silk – has a long history that originated in China. There, five thousand years ago, men learned to rear a particular species of moth larvae (an insect from the same family as butterflies) that feeds on mulberry leaves. At a certain point in their development, these tiny larvae produce long filaments that they use to wrap themselves up in a cocoon. If these cocoons are heated up using steam and then plunged into water, they soften and release their fine threads which can be collected, woven together and dyed to make clothing and accessories.



Silk robes were once so valuable they were reserved solely for Chinese Emperors, who for centuries did everything they could to keep the technique of sericulture a secret!



This exhibit features a film about what life was like for girls at the boarding school in the early 1960s, around the time Fulvia attended. What activities do you recognize?

The watercolors on display in this room are from the Villa del Poggio Imperiale in Florence. In 1765 the Grand Duke of Tuscany Peter Leopold of Lorraine and his wife Maria Luisa chose the Villa as their beloved summer residence and furnished it with paintings and textiles specially imported from China, illustrating the country's customs and traditions, something that fascinated people in the West. Years later, the residence became a girls' boarding school. Fulvia Ferragamo attended the school from the age of ten. At this enchanted place, not only did pupils attend classes, they enjoyed contact with nature, played sports, studied art, and learned about creative handicrafts, theatre and music.

Inside the Villa, the girls lived and breathed an exotic atmosphere. The walls of the dormitory were covered in the valuable fabric wall hangings and paintings that the Grand Duke had commissioned two centuries earlier, depicting the most important jobs in Ancient China: harvesting rice, processing tea and, as you can see, silk-making. Fulvia's imagination was fired up by the Oriental world which influenced her creative thinking into adulthood, as you can tell from the scarves on display in this room.

# INSPIRATIONS



What do you think the phrase “source of inspiration” means?



There are thousands of Ferragamo scarves in the world, each one of them depicting different subjects. But where do the ideas for the designs for each new collection come from? Potential inspiration is endless, from works of art on display in museums to objects in everyday life, from old science books in libraries to illustrations in kids’ comics. Working with her colleagues, Fulvia Ferragamo collected clippings, sketches and annotations, assembling them into colorful collages that they could use as the starting point for the design of each scarf. Some pages from these original collections are on display in this room.



Test your powers of observation: see if you can spot the link between the sources of inspiration and the subjects on the scarves.



This late-18<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese armor comes from the permanent collection of Museo Stibbert in Florence.



Fulvia Ferragamo always had a passion for avifauna (the population of birds that inhabits a specific geographical area). She used to look at and photograph animals, like when she stayed in the Maremma region, near Grosseto, in Tuscany. She learned about species she could not see herself by studying them in books or admiring them in museum collections, like, for example, these penguins from the Museo della Specola in Florence.



*The Birds of America* by J. J. Audubon is commonly known as the world's finest – and most expensive – book on ornithology (the science that studies birds). Printed in London between 1827 and 1838, it is divided into four monumental volumes, with life-size depictions of some 1065 different species.

Illustrations from botanical books, such as *Hortus Eystettensis*, written in 1613 by German scholar Basilius Besler and now at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, came in very handy for studying floral subjects.



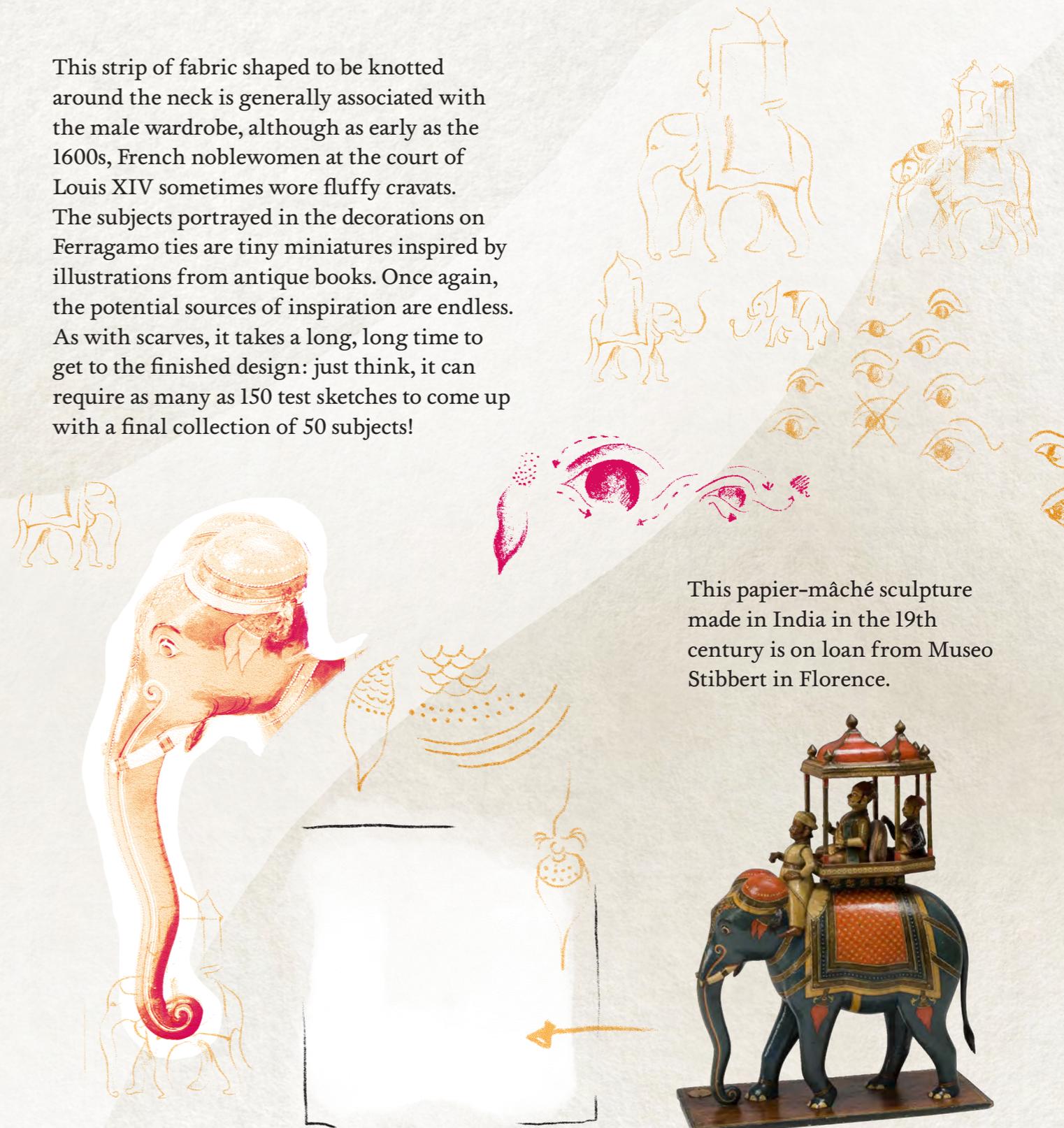


Painter Bartolomeo Bimbi documented the flora of Tuscany with scientific precision at the end of the 17th century. His compositions often feature a combination of plants in large bouquets, baskets or garlands, as you may see from this painting on loan from the Museo della Natura Morta in Poggio a Caiano.



**Not just scarves but other silk accessories are on display. Do you know what they're called?**

This strip of fabric shaped to be knotted around the neck is generally associated with the male wardrobe, although as early as the 1600s, French noblewomen at the court of Louis XIV sometimes wore fluffy cravats. The subjects portrayed in the decorations on Ferragamo ties are tiny miniatures inspired by illustrations from antique books. Once again, the potential sources of inspiration are endless. As with scarves, it takes a long, long time to get to the finished design: just think, it can require as many as 150 test sketches to come up with a final collection of 50 subjects!



This papier-mâché sculpture made in India in the 19th century is on loan from Museo Stibbert in Florence.



# FLOWERS

Are you familiar with the patchwork technique? What exactly is it?

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The earliest Ferragamo scarves portrayed animals “made of flowers”, that is to say, composed out of a patchwork of leaves, buds, petals, plant parts and sometimes even fruit, combined and overlapped as in a collage or a mosaic to create new shapes and optical illusions. This original technique, which

Fulvia started using in 1971, soon became a hallmark of the Ferragamo style. As is often the case, the idea can be traced back to a number of different sources of inspiration. Fulvia would have been familiar with the patchwork process, because it was one that her father used widely to design his shoes.

In the artworld too, some artists experimented by combining single individual elements to create a new design. Take, for example, sixteenth-century artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s “composed heads”, in which faces are made up of flowers, fruit and vegetables. One of Ferragamo’s early silk printers recently told us that



TV may have played an important role in how these first scarves evolved. Between October 1970 and February 1971, the RAI 2 TV channel showed the animated movies by director Jiří Trnka (the so-called Czech Walt Disney) in which the characters came to life out of a patchwork of flowers.

Over time, these patchworks evolved into scarves with floral subjects alone; all facets of nature were represented abstractly yet realistically.

As a child, Fulvia had a chance to learn about and closely observe many species of plants and flowers on the farm estate at the SS. Annunziata boarding school at Villa del Poggio Imperiale. Later, she pursued her interest in botany and fed her creativity mainly by consulting art, naturalistic and book collections in Florence, such as the collection of exotic plants in wax at the Museo di Storia Naturale (Botanica). Can you recognize the flowers in the scarves displayed around you?



*Scarf*  
*Flower*

**Write down the name of the scarf and compare the drawings with the plants on display to identify the name of the flower in it.**



*Scarf*  
*Flower*

**Look at the preparatory drawings on display in this room and try to find the finished scarf to which they refer.**

Making a scarf is a highly complex process. After the initial idea, it takes a month of work to develop the final design, during which time the designers make dozens of sketches and test drafts until they achieve the perfect result. Once upon a time, the process was done entirely by hand using pencils, tempera and watercolors. Today, thanks to digital technology, artists who work in the industry also use computers.



*Scarf*  
*Flower*



SECTION 5

LOOK  
BACK  
ANOUK



The screen plays a short film, *Look Back Anouk*, which the young artist duo Rocco Gurrieri and Irene Montini created specially for the exhibition. Inspired by the animated film *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Jiří Trnka, who we've already mentioned because of his patchwork flower puppets, it is a tribute to the figurative world of Fulvia Ferragamo's scarves, one that straddles nature, fantasy, rationality and magic.



# EXOTIC ANIMALS

The animal world, especially exotic wildlife, is another Ferragamo style staple. Elephants, giraffes, zebras and above all big cats with spotted coats, symbols of elegance and grace in motion, come to life in these prints. Take a close look at the scarves on display in this room. You may recognize the flower patchwork technique we mentioned before.

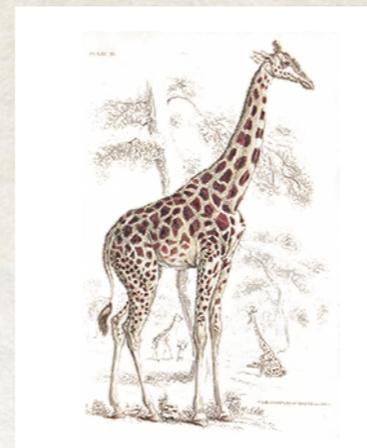
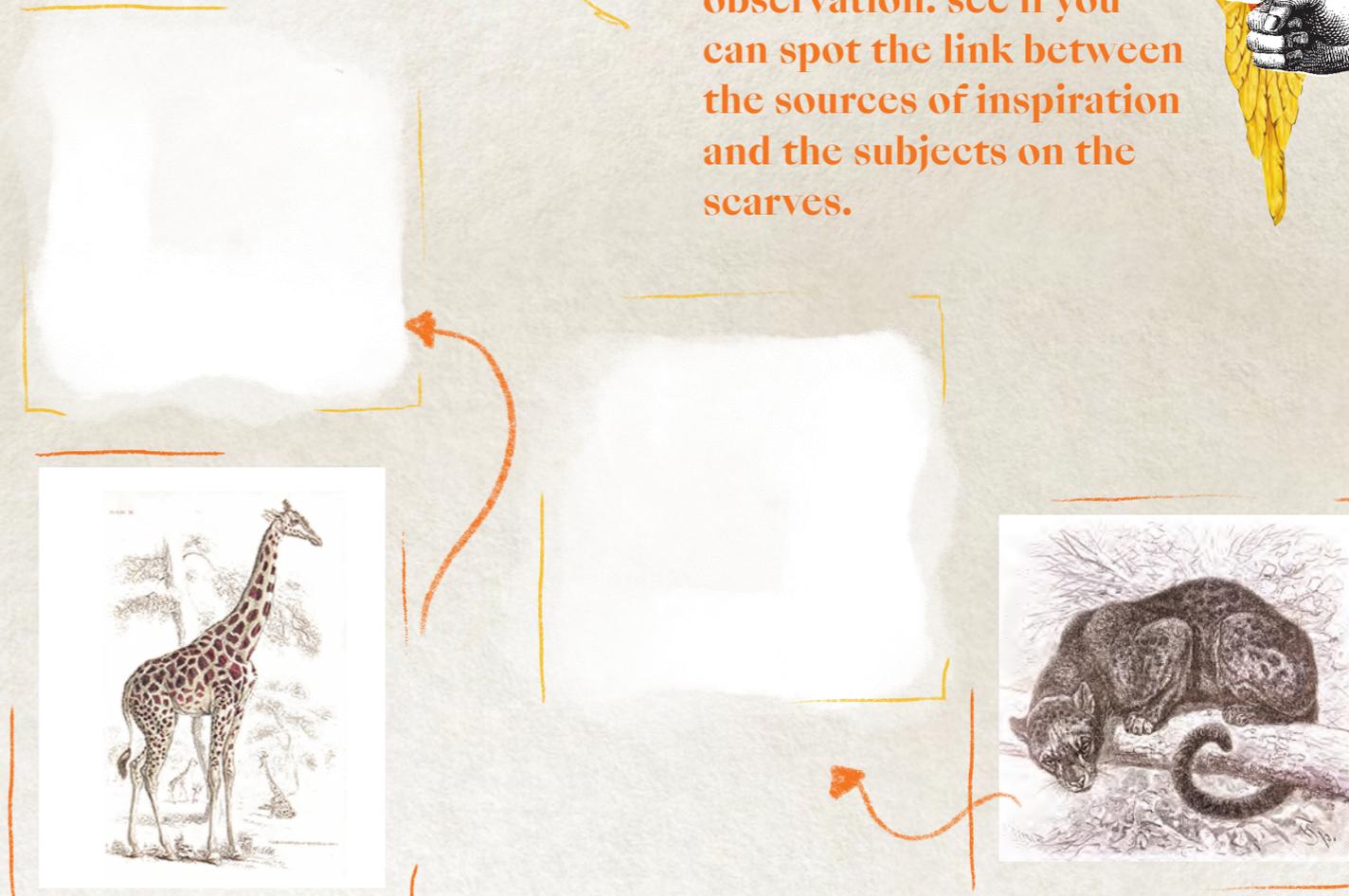
Usually, a scarf is made in a number of variations. This means that the same design is printed in different color combinations.

Color in this design and create your own variation of the *Top-kapi* scarf (Fall/Winter collection 1992-93)



Even if this “Silk Zoo” looks highly imaginative and colorful, the animals are always faithfully depicted. In the 1980s and 1990s, before the internet, the best ways of sourcing images of the animal world were either old illustrated zoology manuals, or photographic features in nature magazines.

Test your powers of observation: see if you can spot the link between the sources of inspiration and the subjects on the scarves.



SECTION 7

# YOUNG TALENTS ON THE SILK ROAD

The themes of the exhibition and the history of Ferragamo prints inspired *Storie di Seta*, the new Ferragamo perfume collection, made up of four fragrances dedicated to as many different habitats: gardens, jungles, savannahs and oceans. In this context, in 2020, a creative project was born in collaboration with the Liceo Artistico di Porta Romana e Sesto Fiorentino. Five students were invited to interpret these scents, artistically conveying the emotions and sensations evoked by each perfume in a highly-personal graphic form. Their designs have been collated in the immersive video installation you can see in this room.



## SHOES



Salvatore Ferragamo was born in 1898, in a small village called Bonito, in southern Italy. From a very young age, he was passionate about the craft of shoemaking. He made his first pair of shoes when he was just nine years old. Not long after that, he began working at the local village cobbler's. After a few years in Naples, in 1915 Salvatore decided to emigrate to America, a distant country with lots of factories and modern machinery that would give him the opportunity to build up

his skills. He tried working in a shoe factory in Boston but found the experience very disappointing: the machine-made shoes were ugly and uncomfortable! He moved to California, where he began working in the film industry, creating custom models for actors, actresses and celebrities of the day. In 1923, he opened his own store in Los Angeles: the *Hollywood Boot Shop*. In the meantime, he took evening classes at university to study the anatomy of the foot and create even better

shoes. In 1927, he decided to return to Italy and settle in Florence, famous worldwide for its artistic beauty and the skill of its craftsmen. He lived in Florence until the end of his life, in 1960. Salvatore always showed great creativity and ingenuity. He invented thousands of models, and kept prototypes, documents, photographs, even newspaper clippings that illustrate his work, starting what has become the Archivio Salvatore Ferragamo. Shoes make up the biggest part of the collection counting almost 15,000 models!

Ferragamo footwear and silk accessories came together in the late 1980s, after the first exhibition dedicated to Salvatore Ferragamo and his creations, held at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence in 1985. That exhibition was such a huge success that museums around the world hosted it. In the following years, it travelled to London, Los Angeles, Tokyo and Mexico City. Since then, Ferragamo's most famous shoes, patent designs, logos and advertisements appear on the scarves.

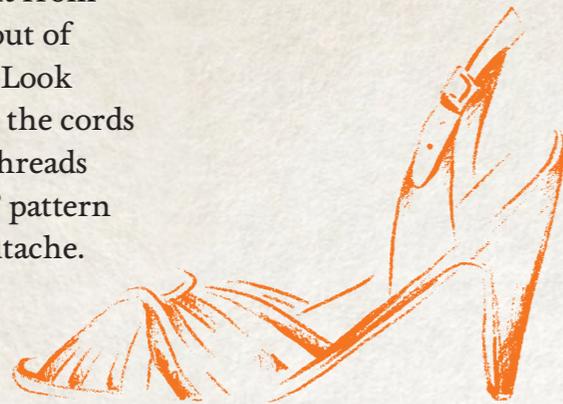
Some original Salvatore Ferragamo shoes from the archive are on display in this room.

Read the descriptions in your book. Can you identify the models depicted in the *Bacheca* scarf (Fall/Winter collection 1990-91)? Mark them out with an arrow or circle.



In the early 1930s, Salvatore Ferragamo created his *Iride* model, with embroidered upper in Tavarnelle lace and colored silk. He was the first to experiment with lace in footwear; previously, it had only been used for the finishings of clothing or household linens.

The *Simona* sandal incorporates a Salvatore Ferragamo patent from 1957 for the upper, formed out of intertwining colored cords. Look closely and you will see that the cords are made from thin silken threads woven into a “herringbone” pattern using a technique called *soutache*.



The patchwork technique was used as early as the 1700s by American pioneers, who cut out surviving parts of worn clothing to reuse after sewing them together. Salvatore Ferragamo began experimenting with this technique for his shoe uppers in the 1920s. It allowed him not just to salvage offcuts from shoemaking, he could create infinite combinations of materials and colors, producing new models such as the 1942 closed shoe with wedge heel that you see here.

The 1941 *Divia* sandal is made out of strips of sea leopard, a fish of the North Sea. Salvatore Ferragamo was the first to use fish skin for footwear, in response to the shortage of materials during World War II. The skin of sea leopard was widely used also in the 1950s after a deal was struck with the Danish company that worked and distributed this leather. Even Queen Ingrid ordered Ferragamo sea leopard shoes in a variety of colors for herself and her daughters.



# DRESSING IN SILK

Fulvia Ferragamo and her team's successful silk creations prompted the company's designers to consider carrying over the motifs on the scarves to items of clothing. And so it was: from the 1970s onwards, shirts, dresses, sarongs, t-shirts, cardigans, trench coats and waterproof jackets appeared in the company's ready-to-wear collections with designs taken from the silk prints. As you may see in this room, these original garments perfectly express how the Ferragamo style evolved over the years.

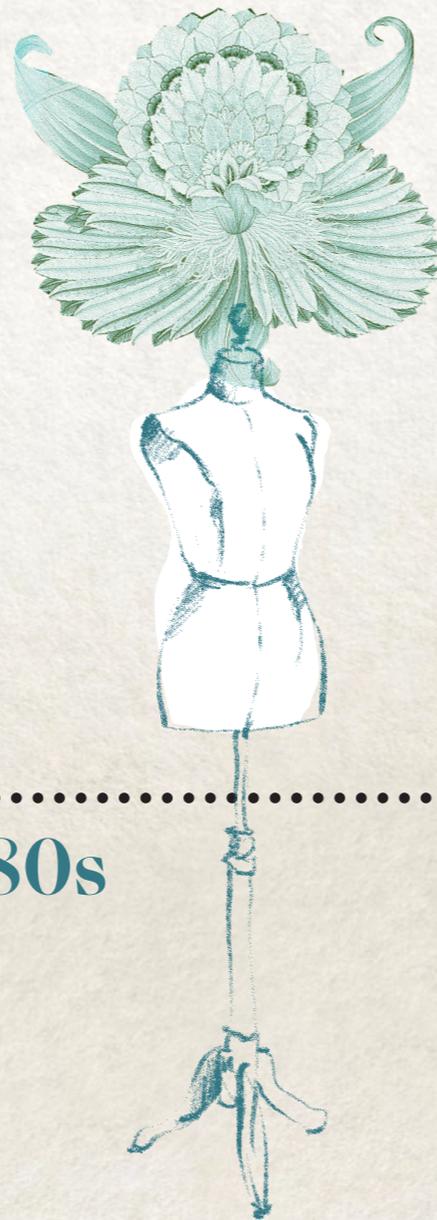
## 1970s

Fulvia's elder sister, Giovanna Ferragamo, was a fashion enthusiast from a very young age. She went on to become Head of Ferragamo's clothing division, where she adopted the *Marelle* logo – an oval shape obtained by interlocking two specimens of the letter "F". The word comes from French, where it means a children's game: "jouer à la marelle" is to play hopscotch. Do you know how to play the game?



## 1980s

Wild animals and exotic scarf backgrounds came alive on jackets and trench coats, sometimes as inner linings. Can you spot who's hiding under this raincoat?



## 1990s

Scarves inspired by historical Ferragamo shoes turned into fun and sporty garments.



## 2000s

## today

The hook logo named *Gancini* became the dominant motif on Ferragamo shirts, trench coats, trousers, and dresses. The origin of the design is uncertain. According to oral tradition, the source of inspiration was the wrought iron gate of Palazzo Spini Feroni, the medieval palace that is the Ferragamo company's Florence headquarters. Fiamma Ferragamo originally designed it in the 1970s, as a fastener for her mother's bag. Ever since, *Gancini* has increasingly been used on leather accessories, footwear, scarves and clothing, ultimately becoming an unmistakable Ferragamo brand icon.

A new version of patchwork was born. Printed garments summarize, in a single fabric, the most famous scarf designs from years past, to all effects simulating an archive repertoire. How many scarves can you recognize on the dress?



You've come to the end of your visit to Museo Salvatore Ferragamo. You'll have learned a lot about an accessory that has almost endless potential... and now it's time to play around with it. When you get home, look for scarves in your or your parents' wardrobe, and wear them inspired by what you've seen today. The only rules are imagination and creativity!

There's a perfect combination for every occasion, whether you prefer to be elegant or casual, romantic or adventurous, trendy or understated. Choose your style, take some pictures and past your favorite one onto the following page.



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Editorial project by Fondazione Ferragamo in collaboration with Museo Salvatore Ferragamo

Edited by:  
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Graphic Design:  
RovaiWeber design

Photo credits:  
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Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, *Were creatures born celestial?*, 2020. Courtesy Sun Yuan & Peng Yu and GALLERIA CONTINUA: p. 6

Plates belonging to the *Silk Cycle* at Poggio Imperiale (*Harvesting mulberry leaves; Preparing the warp; Cutting the silk pieces*), first half of the eighteenth century. Courtesy Soprintendenza archeologia belle arti e paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato: p. 8

Japanese manufacturer, *Tosei Gusoku (modern armor)*, early eighteenth century. Indian manufacturer, *Elephant statuette with palanquin*, nineteenth century. Photo Arrigo Coppitz © 2021 Museo Stibbert, Florence: pp. 12, 15

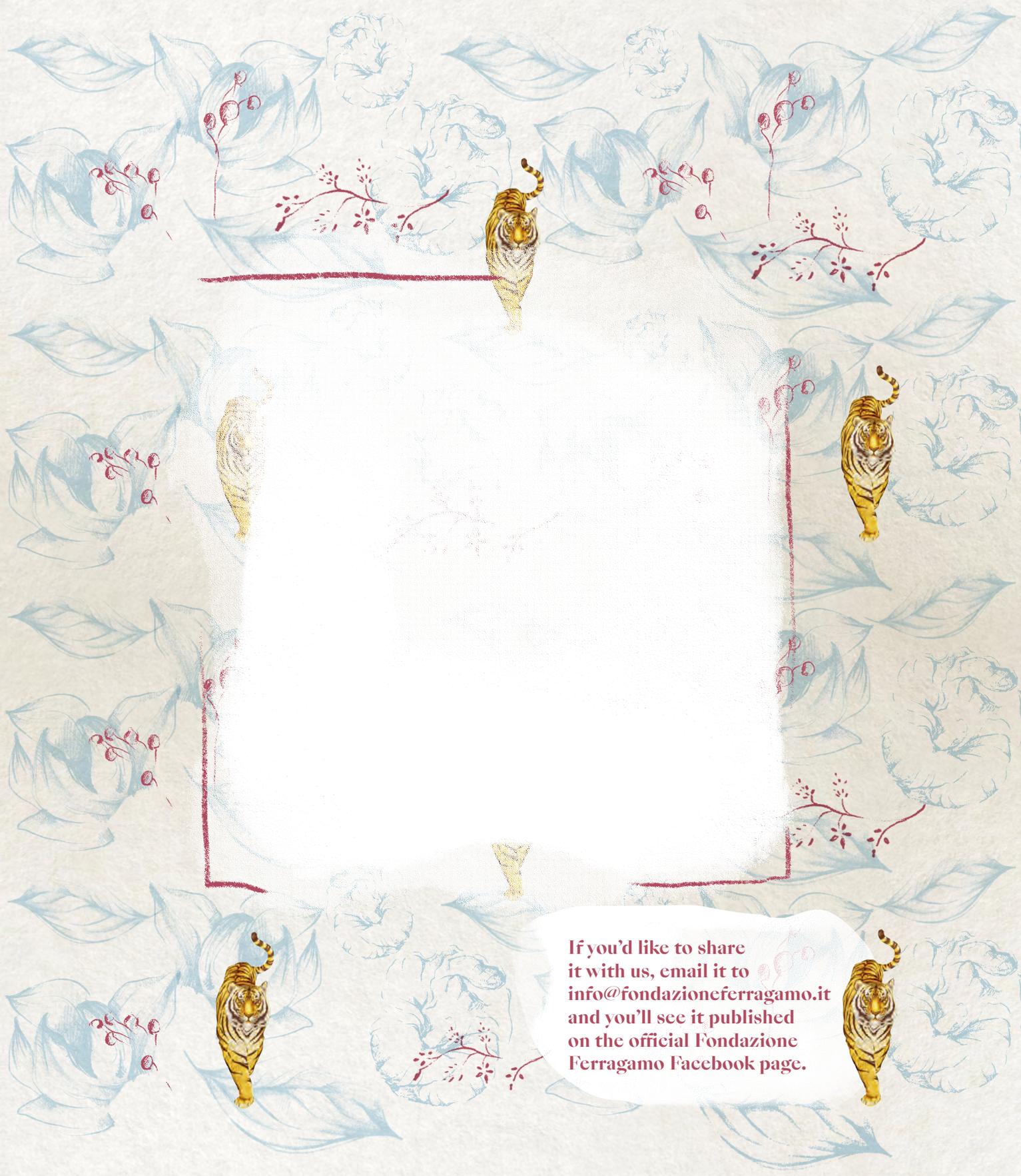
John James Audubon, *The Birds of America* 1827-1838. Basilius Besler, *Hortus Eystettensis*, 1613. Photo Arrigo Coppitz, courtesy Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze: pp. 12, 13

*Crested penguin (Eudyptes chrysocome)*, 1898; *Adelia's penguin (Pygoscelis adeliae)*, 1902. Photo Arrigo Coppitz, courtesy Sistema Museale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze: p. 13

Bartolomeo Bimbi, *Garland of flowers with two swallows*, c. 1690-1697. Photo Arrigo Coppitz, courtesy Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Direzione Regionale Musei della Toscana, Museo della Natura Morta, Poggio a Caiano (Prato): p. 14

Museo Salvatore Ferragamo, Florence: pp. 2, 3, 5, 6 (top), 9, 10, 11, 16, 18-20, 21 (bottom, photo Irene Montini), 23 (photo Silvia Montevecchi), 26-29

Printed in Italy with FSC paper, 2021, Polistampa, Florence



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