

The Coral Connection

Lifestyle and Enviromental issue for a
precious gem from the sea



SINCE • 1976
massagioconda
di Giuseppe Marotta e F.lli s.a.s.

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The Origins

The city of Torre del Greco is worldwide renewed for its long and rich tradition in the Coral manufacturing, which even today passes down from generation to generation.

Over the centuries, coral fishing and manufacturing, made by experienced craftsmen, became a very important activity in Torre del Greco.

The local fishermen used to go with their Coral fishing boats even to the African coasts, exporting Coral all over the World.



Our History



Following their father Marino's footsteps, an experienced coral fisherman with a long tradition behind him and numerous journeys in the main Mediterranean ports, the four Marotta brothers founded in **1976** the Company *Massa Gioconda*, based in **Torre del Greco**. Led by the entrepreneurship of the eldest son Giuseppe, they gave birth to a florid activity by the name of their beloved mother, to whom her husband Marino had already dedicated a Coral fishing boat.



Since the beginning, the company had a very important place in the national market and soon expanded its business also in the European one.

In particular, the participation to the Basel Fair was a big step forward to the establishment of its business in the European market.

At the international level, the participation to the Pacific Jewelry Show in Los Angeles and to the Italian Jewelry Collection in Tokyo was a significant turning point, allowing the company to expand its business in the worldwide markets.

Today, we are historical exhibitors at the GJX Show in Tucson.



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ジョコンダ・マッサ



GIOCONDA MASSA



A close-up photograph of a person's hands working with coral in a workshop. The person is wearing a white lab coat over a dark blue sweater. They are holding a piece of red coral with their right hand and using a tool with their left hand. The workshop is filled with various containers and tools. There are several white bowls and yellow bowls containing red coral. A large white container is on the left, and a yellow container is in the foreground. A wooden stand is visible in the background. The text "Our Materials" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Our Materials

Our Materials: Coral

The Mediterranean Coral

Known also as ***Rubrum Coral***, this coral is mainly found in the Mediterranean Sea.

Its colour is always very uniform and compact and enhances the perfection of its surface.

As a matter of fact, the quality of *Rubrum* coral jewels and loose stones is mainly determined by its colour scheme and chromatic homogeneity, the absence of spots, the consistency of its structure and the lack of porosity.



Mediterranean Coral Colour Chart



Mediterranean Red Coral Loose Stones





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Mediterranean Red Coral Carvings





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Mediterranean Red Coral Loose Strands



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Our Materials: Coral

The Pacific Coral

Corallium Elatius: *Elatius* coral is mainly fished off the coasts of the Pacific Ocean. The main feature of Pacific coral, above all the one fished off the coasts of Taiwan, is its white central core, which goes through the whole branch, up to the smallest twigs.

According to its colour, *Elatius* coral may be divided into *Satsuma* and Bokè (one of the most precious corals).

Corallium Secundum: *Secundum* coral, as the *Elatius* one, is fished off the coasts of the Pacific Ocean. According to its colour, *Secundum* coral may be divided into two different categories, *Missu* (It has chromatic hues ranging from white, pinkish white, to pale rose) and *Midway* (It has chromatic hues ranging from white to peach rose, with red-tainted dots).

Corallium Japonicum: *Japonicum* coral is fished off the coasts of Japan. It has an intense, very shining colour, ranging from bright red to very dark red. As a matter of fact, unlike other corals, *Japonicum* coral seems as translucent as glass, but it is often imperfect and difficult to process. It is one of the rarest and most expensive corals in the world.

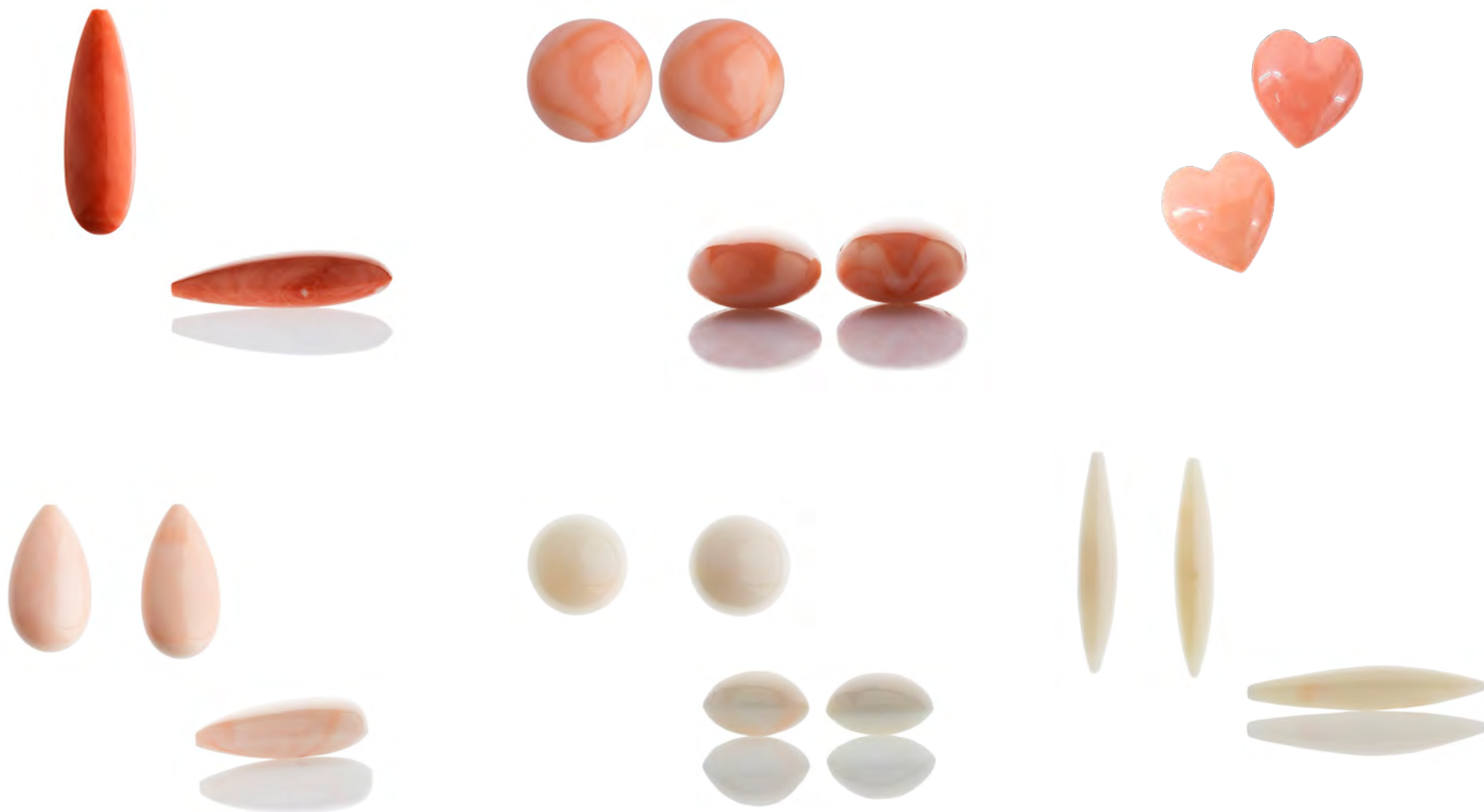


Pacific Coral Colour Chart



Pacific Coral Loose Stones

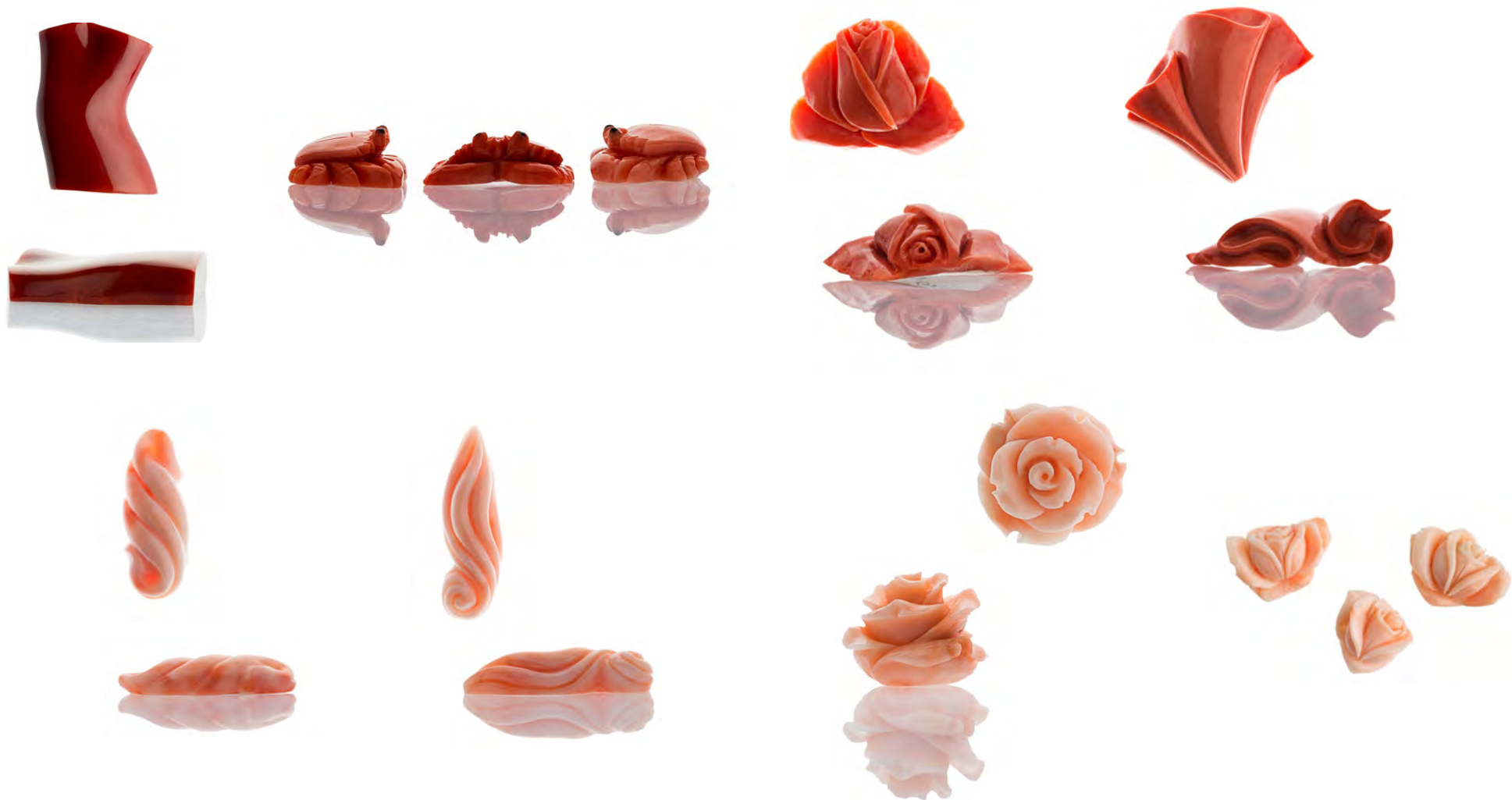




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Pacific Coral Carvings





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Pacific Coral Loose Strands



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Our Materials: Turquoise

Turquoise is an opaque, blue-to-green mineral, characterised by a uniform colour or occasionally by dark veins, which often create a unique structural pattern.

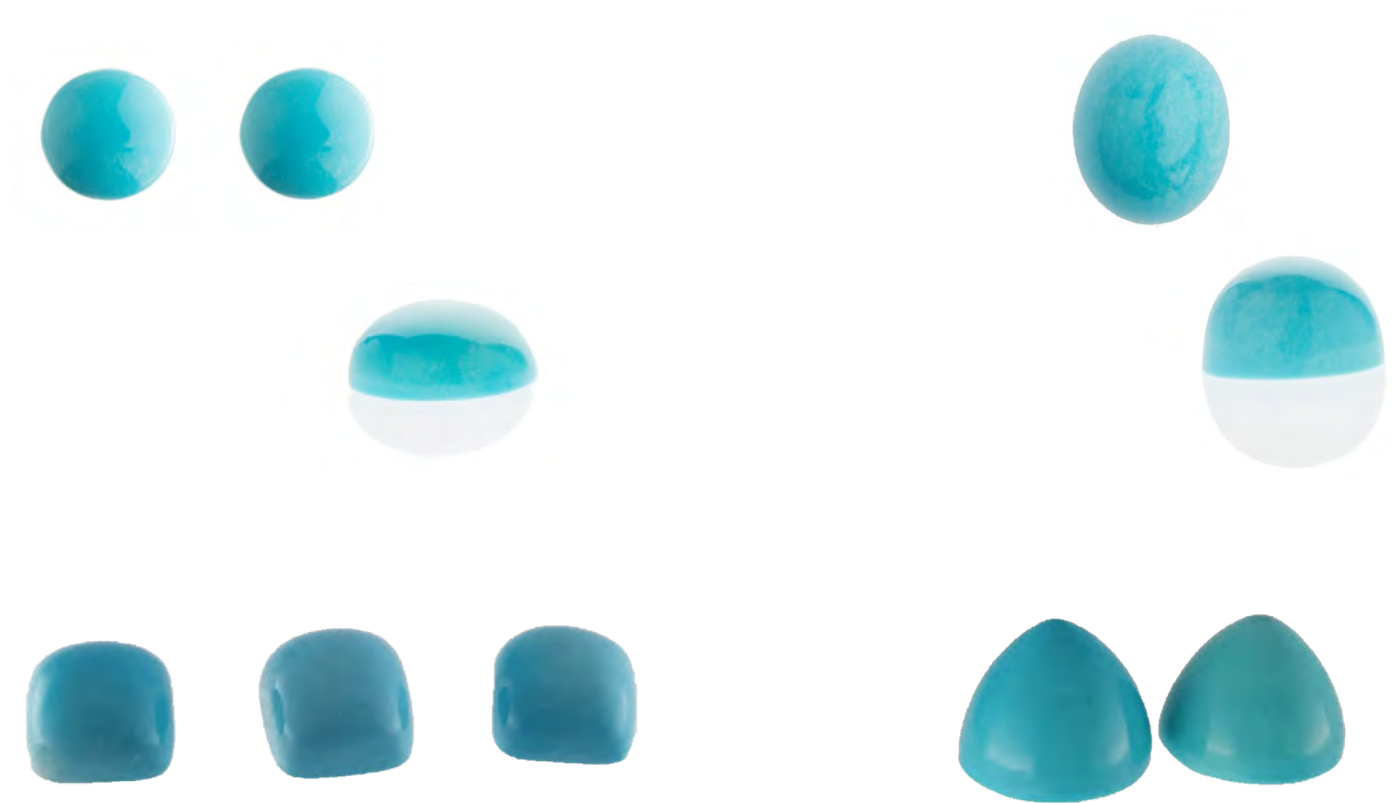
The porosity of turquoise often causes alterations in colour, above all if it comes in contact with perfume and acidic substances. For that reason, turquoise is sometimes treated or enhanced to a certain degree to preserve its colour.

The Sleeping Beauty Turquoise is a quality of turquoise from Globe mines in Arizona, one of the most important turquoise mines in the world. The name of this gemstone derives from the shape of the mountains where it has been mined and which resembles a sleeping woman laying on her back with crossed arms, that is to say a “sleeping beauty”.





Natural Turquoise Loose Stones





Natural Turquoise Carvings



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Our Materials: Shell and Stone Cameos

Carnelian shell: Carnelian shell comes from the coasts of Madagascar, Mozambique and Kenya, is characterised by a red-to-orange base and a cream-coloured surface.

Sardonyx shell: Sardonyx shell (*Cassis Madagascariensis*), whose origins were mistakenly attributed to the coasts of Madagascar, has its natural habitat in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Its upper light surface, with white-to-cream shades, and its internal dark brown layer make this shell entirely suitable for the realization of cameos.

Lava stones: Since ancient times, engraving activity has always attracted Mediterranean civilizations. Artisans used to realise, with great expertise, little sculptures on a big variety of precious and semiprecious stones and materials, including lava stone, which was highly appreciated by artisans and engravers of different historical periods. In Torre del Greco, lava stone was initially used by craftsmen as test material to train before realizing carvings on shells.











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A photograph of a rocky beach with a semi-transparent text box in the center. The foreground is filled with dark, wet, pebbly stones. In the middle ground, there are several bright red, segmented objects, possibly coral or sea anemones, resting on a wet, grey rock. The background is a blurred expanse of water and more rocks. A semi-transparent rectangular box is centered over the image, containing the word "Sustainability" in a black, sans-serif font.

Sustainability

At Massa Gioconda, it is very important to value the concept of Sustainability. For this reason, we want to emphasize that our corals are fished in full compliance with environmental and international rules.

Over the centuries, the Mediterranean Coral has been subjected to an intense and sometimes violent fishing activity, which has recently led to the development of environmental policies useful to regulate its fishing and use. However, according to scientists, the Mediterranean Coral should not be considered an endangered species, as large colonies are scattered and distributed throughout the Mediterranean Sea and most organisms continue to reproduce.

For this reason, Mediterranean Coral is not covered by the Washington Convention.

For what concerns Pacific Coral, it is protected by special regulations governing fishing areas and protected species. Pacific Coral, coming mainly from China, has been included in the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species*, also known as CITES, which is an international agreement entered into force in 1975 to prevent species from becoming extinct as a result of international trade.

The manufacture of our products takes also into account the organic origin and natural conformation of the raw material.



A black and white photograph showing several hands reaching towards the center, holding a thick rope. The background is very bright, creating a bokeh effect with out-of-focus light spots. The image has a grainy, artistic quality. A semi-transparent grey rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the title text.

What Coral Means to Us

«Without knowing it, I sailed over inestimable richness for a long time.»

When our father, Marino Marotta, said this, he was still unconcious of the great reach of his discover. He was just finding out a part of the huge potential of this material, a potential that now we know really well.

Coral is more than a fascinating organic material.
Coral is more than a precious stone suitable for carvings and jewels.

Now we know that Coral connects people and cultures around the world and talks about them.
Now we know that Coral is cabale of infusing emotions, as the ones we feel when we think about the whole history behind it, the numerous hands that have worked togheter so to fish it.
Now we know that Coral is a truly piece of art.

Coral is not only our treasure, but the one of the whole humanity.

A close-up photograph of a necklace made of numerous small, irregularly shaped red coral beads. The beads have a glossy, polished appearance and are arranged in a circular pattern. The background is a textured, light blue fabric. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the necklace, containing the text "Coral in History".

Coral in History

The trade in Corallium, primarily in the form of beads, dates to at least the Classical period and continued through the Middle Ages, with major exports of Mediterranean Corals from Rome to India. By the 17th century the major centres of the Coral trade were in Naples, Marseilles and Leghorn (the old Livorno), with exports to India and West Africa.

Exports continued into the late 1800s, when Italy began importing large quantities of western Pacific Corallium from Japan and re-exporting processed Coral beads to Asia and Africa.



The city of Torre del Greco has a long tradition in the Coral manufacture. In 1790 was established *the Coral Real Company* in Torre del Greco, in order to promote the fishing and selling of Mediterranean Corals.

Unfortunately, this company was not successful, but the same attempt was undertaken by Paolo Bartolomeo Martin from Marseilles, who in 1805 obtained a ten-year license by Ferdinand IV and built the first factory in Torre del Greco.

Thanks to him, the Coral manufacturing spread into the city of Torre del Greco, where, until then, fishing was the only practice. In the XIX century, following the diffusion of coral manufacture, the craftsmen of Torre del Greco began also to import and work Coral from the Pacific Ocean. Pacific Coral is more suitable for carving than the Mediterranean one.

A black and white photograph capturing a group of men on a boat, engaged in the traditional practice of coral fishing. The men are seen from behind, pulling a large, heavy net that is brimming with coral. The net is being hoisted out of the dark, choppy ocean. The men are dressed in simple, light-colored clothing, and their muscular builds suggest a life of physical labor. The scene is set on the deck of a boat, with the ocean's surface visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is one of intense, traditional labor.

The Tradition of Coral Fishing

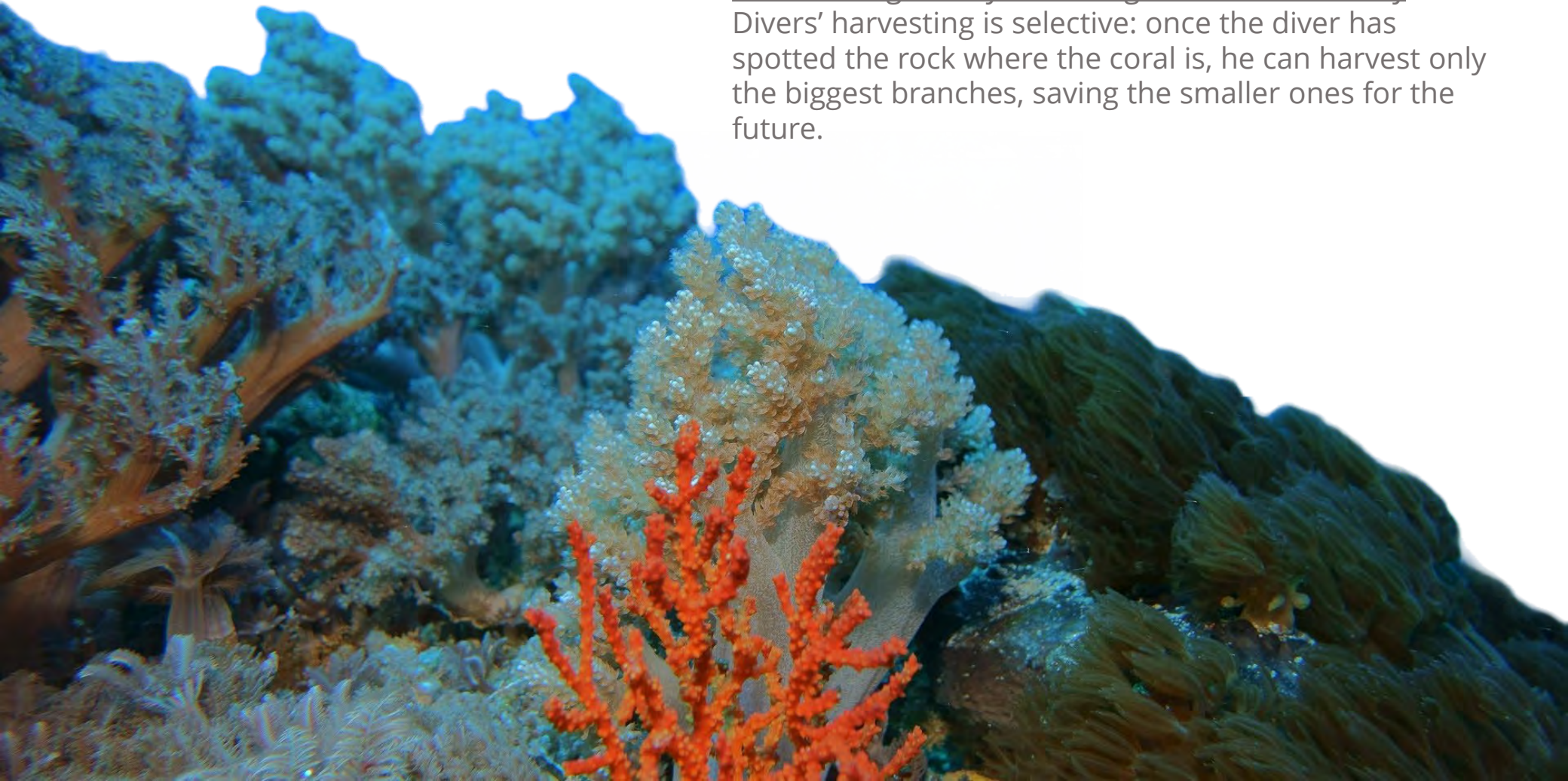
Beginning around 1000 AD, during the Muslim expansion in the Mediterranean sea, the *ingegno* or St. Andrew's Cross, a wooden cross with attached nets was dragged across the seabed to entangle Coral. The *ingegno* was a tool consisting of an iron bar (1m long and 60 cm in diameter) with pieces of old fishing net (called "retazze") attached. The *ingegno* was lowered from the boat (the *corallina*) and dragged along the seabed. The boat movement helped to tear off coral branches and bring them to the surface.

However, this fishing method produced different perturbations on Coral populations. The *ingegno* in fact broke the branches even if it left the colony base.



How do we fish today?

Coral fishing in Italy is no longer made in this way.
Divers' harvesting is selective: once the diver has spotted the rock where the coral is, he can harvest only the biggest branches, saving the smaller ones for the future.





Coral in the World

Coral in China



In China, the first records of the use of Coral date back to the Han dynasty. These were tributes or offerings that reached the Chinese Empire from Persia along the **Silk Road**. With the spread of Buddhism, coral acquired an increasingly religious dimension.

Listed in the Sutras as one of the seven treasures of Buddhism, Coral has become a symbol of longevity and good fortune for those wearing it. The red colour, which characterises of the variety of Coral most commonly used in the Tibetan culture, is part of monks' robes, sacred buildings, but also of the instruments and vestments used in the most effective rituals.

Coral in Tibet

The graphic form of some of the Coral engravings is also linked to the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. The “eight-armed coral branch” plays the role of alluding to one of the principle symbols of Buddhism: the **“wheel of doctrine”** (*dharmachakra*).

As it is a Buddhist stone, Coral has always been so appreciated by the Tibetan population, as Marco Polo also testifies in *The Million*, that it is also used in traditional clothes.





Coral in Mongolia

Coral is also part of the traditional culture in Mongolia. It was imported from the Mediterranean at least from the 11th century if not earlier, but it was especially between the 13th and 16th centuries, which means from the founding of the great Mongolian Empire until its destruction, that the Coral trade between the West and Mongolia became prosperous.

Directly linked to the local shamanic and religious culture, Coral also took on a powerful symbolic value in Mongolia. Indeed, it was used as a lucky charm by warriors and represented their military rank.

A Marriage Between Art
and Coral

The reason why **Coral is a constant presence in art** is tied to the different meanings that this material has taken over time.

The triple nature of Coral, which connects the plant, animal and mineral world, has fascinated men since ancient times, embodying the concept of transformation, evolution and regeneration.

This unique characteristic allowed Coral to enter into the good graces of artists who celebrated its **eternal beauty over the centuries**.



«Monna Vanna» by Dante Gabriele Rossetti

We can find coral as an amulet in Medieval and Renaissance paintings. In many of them, it is possible to notice its presence, which in addition to its well-known apotropaic meaning, with the advent of Christianity becomes a **symbol of the salvific gift of Christ's blood**, as the Coral twigs are similar to the blood vessels.



«Madonna di Senigallia» by Piero della Francesca

Coral, however, in addition to the meaning brought by Christianity, maintained its profane interpretation, as a sign of superstition that cannot be dispensed with. Indeed, many paintings offer an iconography in which coral carries along **the heritage of a story full of magic and folklore.**



«Portrait of a girl» by Domenico Ghirlandaio

Coral is also often **associated with the female figure.**

It is easy to find several portraits in which coral strands stand out on young women's necks. This is because coral takes on more and more value: jewels were expensive during the Renaissance and were therefore **a treasure to keep for a lifetime.** Some of the red beads necklaces in these portraits could be coral strands given as a gift at their birth and then restyled in beautiful necklaces once they become adults.

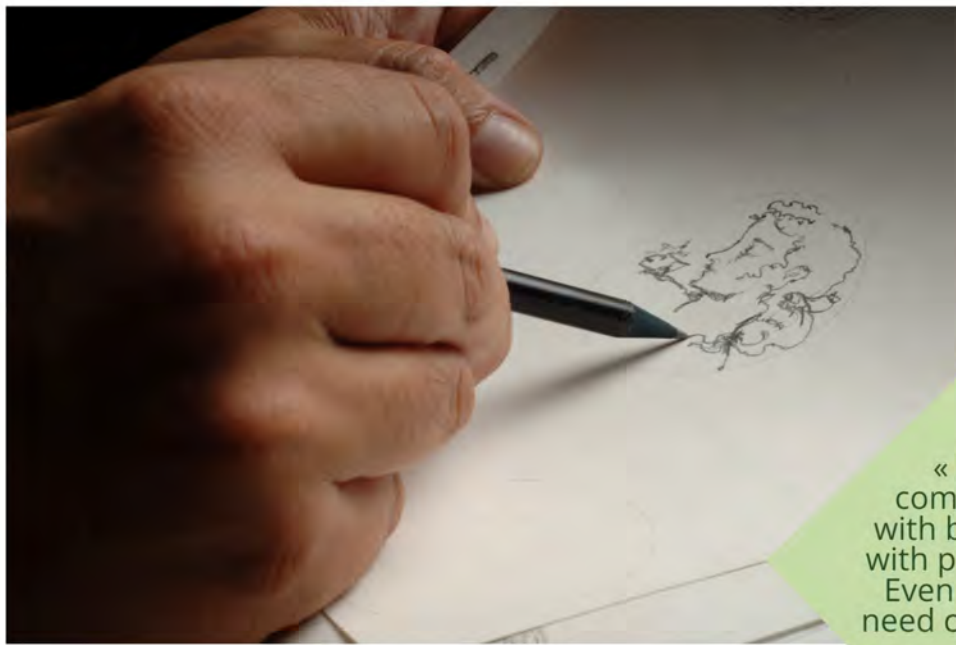


«Portrait of a young lady with a coral necklace» by Liéven De Winne

Coral was also considered a **symbol of youth** as it is typically associated with **vitality and health**.

Not only because of its vivid colour, but also because it has been seen as a **“living stone”**: it is not extracted from the earth like other stones, but it grows in the seabed, constantly renewed.

This special quality has given Coral a reputation as a life preserver, protector, and healer. For this reason, Coral became one of the jewels that it was customary to give to children, a tradition that has survived for many centuries.



« I did the best
combining affection
with business, working
with people dear to me.
Even in business, you
need consciousness and
love ».



Our Mission

To offer an honest, reliable, sustainable and satisfying business development together with our customers and partners. To enhance the beauty of our tradition and promote originality in the innovation process.



Our Vision

To respect the organic nature of raw materials. To instill passion and share knowledge while creating unique and inimitable products.



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