

SKILLS ACADEMY



FONDATION
D'ENTREPRISE
HERMÈS

LEATHER

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS
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PRESS KIT

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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Fondation d'entreprise Hermès invites applications for the eighth Skills Academy. The Academy will take place in 2027, on the theme of leather – one whose many artistic and practical applications extend back to the very origins of human history.

Held every two years since 2014, the Skills Academy invites artisans, designers and engineers to come together to explore the latest innovations in artisanal skills and expertise around a specific material. The programme takes place over eleven months, from January to November. Steered by the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, the Academy's year-long programme allows participants to extend and enrich their knowledge through lectures, visits and encounters guided by experts in their field, and to share and enhance their skills by taking part in a group workshop conceived as a laboratory of groundbreaking practice, combining skills transfer and exploration.

The Skills Academy reflects the Foundation's vocation to partner artisans, artists, designers and the solidarity sector, as they forge new skills to shape and transform our world, now and into the future. The Academy expresses the Foundation's continuing commitment to promote fertile exchange between the worlds of design and craft, with an enhanced focus on shared intelligence for experimentation, sustainability and economic development at the local level.

The theme for the eighth Skills Academy is leather, under the directorship of François Azambourg. The latter follows Constance Guisset (paper, 2025), Lina Ghotmeh (stone, 2022-2023), Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance (glass, 2021), matali crasset (textiles, 2019), Jean-François Dingjian and Eloi Chafai of Normal Studio (metal, 2017), Guillaume Bardet (clay, 2015) and Patrick Jouin (wood, 2014).

THE SKILLS ACADEMY

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Transmission of expert knowledge and best practices across disciplines that engage with the world of craft and promote its continued, contemporary relevance (design, the applied arts, engineering science).

Exploration of tomorrow's skills and expertise by bringing together practitioners from craft and related sectors, especially design and engineering.

Exchange and knowledge-sharing in a context of dialogue and emulation. The Academy promotes excellence, transmission, innovation, exploration and shared knowledge.

CORE ISSUES

Improve, learn and question your practice through exchange with acknowledged specialists in the field.

Contextualise your practice in relation to other spheres of knowledge. Discover technical and conceptual innovations and tools to shape tomorrow's expertise.

Share skills, ideas and knowledge across disciplines, within and beyond established professional communities.

Make time to consider your own and others' expertise from another perspective.

THE PROGRAMME INCLUDES

Exchange, learning and discovery through five morning sessions (lectures and panels) throughout the first semester, coupled with talks and visits to specialist businesses, industrial sites, workshops, studios, research centres, laboratories, technological platforms, etc.

Shared experimentation and innovation around the theme of the Academy's closing group workshop, during which Academy participants implement the thinking and knowledge developed over the course of the programme, and contribute their individual skills.

Conversations addressing economic and environmental issues from a broad perspective and at the local level (including activities rooted in the local economy, new and emerging models of artisan production, examples of innovation in product promotion and commercialisation).

EIGHTH EDITION: LEATHER

In dedicating the eighth edition of the Skills Academy to leather, the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès aims to engage both the wider public and the Academy participants in exploring a material that combines durability and suppleness – one whose many artistic and practical applications date back to the very origins of human history.

From prehistory to the present day, from hides painted by the earliest North Americans to armour crafted for Japanese samurais, from parchment to book covers, clothing to interior design, and from tanning processes to finishing, assembly and decorative techniques (dyeing, painting, embossing, engraving, stitching, braiding, etc.), the leather arts are expansive and among the oldest forms of craftsmanship. Together, we will examine their history and symbolism as well as current developments, innovations and challenges.

Like many raw materials, leather extends beyond the singular. The world of leathers is a world of diversity, encompassing the many steps – nearly 120 – required to bring leathers into existence and the wide range of tradespeople who transform and shape them: artisanal tanners, tawers, leatherworkers, glovemakers, bootmakers, trunk makers, saddle makers, bookbinders, parchment makers, embossers, manufacturers of tools and hardware for leather goods, engineers, designers, decorators and more. This eighth edition of the Skills Academy will highlight these areas of expertise, developed and refined over centuries and across regions.

PROGRAMME

DIRECTOR:

FRANÇOIS

AZAMBOURG

François Azambourg explores the expressive potential of the processes used to shape and manufacture materials, whether industrial, artisanal, innovative or traditional.

With a background in electrical engineering followed by studies at the Beaux-Arts de Paris and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art (Ensaama) – Olivier de Serres, he grounds his practice in research, with a focus on combining technique and art.

François Azambourg is driven by a quest for lightness and durability, seeking to limit the environmental impact of his creations and accentuate noble materials. He has extensive knowledge of leather as a material and favours bold combinations like leather and glass, creating objects that question our relationship to the material and reexamine our habits. François Azambourg is recognised for his experimental and poetic approach to design. His interest in leather has led him to explore this material in ways that are both singular and original.

Though he primarily produces furniture and lighting pieces, François Azambourg also creates scenography and stage design, contributes to urban planning and designs interiors for local councils, hotels and private residences.

Laureate of the Villa Kujoyama (2015), the Grand Prix du Design de Paris (2004), the Villa Médicis Hors les Murs (2003), the Prix de la Vocation de la Fondation Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet (1993), the Fondation de France (1988) and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs competition (1985), he has received support from VIA through five production grants, a Carte Blanche (2005) as well as several Labels and Étoiles du Design.

His work has featured in numerous exhibitions in France and abroad, and his creations are included in the collections of the FNAC, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

François Azambourg has taught for thirty years at various institutions including the École Boulle, École Camondo and ENSCI - Les Ateliers.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

WHO CAN APPLY TO THE SKILLS ACADEMY?

The Skills Academy is aimed at professionals seeking to further their training and skills.

Dedicated to leather, the eighth edition is aimed at artisans working in trades related to the production and transformation of leather (artisanal tanners, tawers, leatherworkers, glovemakers, bootmakers, trunk makers, saddle makers, bookbinders, parchment makers, embossers, manufacturers of tools and hardware for leather goods) as well as designers and engineers specialising in leather trades and related industrial sectors.

Twenty applicants will be selected. Applicants (of any age) must be French-speaking, and active in France or a neighbouring country. Half of the group will be professional artisans, with the remaining half composed equally of designers and engineers.

WHEN TO APPLY

The call for applications is open from Wednesday, April 1 to Sunday, June 28, 2026.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted through the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès website: www.fondationdentreprisehermes.org/fr/candidatures

Candidates must include:

- a cover letter detailing their interest in the Skills Academy
- a CV

If they wish, candidates may also provide:

- a portfolio of work
- a short film presenting their motivation and expectations, and their interest in the material to be explored this year: leather

KEY DATES

July 2026

Pre-selection of 40 candidates.

October 2026

Individual interviews with pre-selected candidates conducted by a jury drawn from members of the Academy's steering committee, chaired by the guest programme director François Azambourg.

November 2026

Announcement of the selected candidates.

THE FONDATION D'ENTREPRISE HERMÈS

Since 2008, the actions of the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès have been guided by a single, unifying conviction: "Our gestures define us and show who we are". In other words, by acting for the well-being of all, we grow and become better human beings. The Foundation's four core missions enact its commitment to targeted philanthropy and support through in-house programmes designed to transmit skills and expertise, create new works of art, protect the environment and encourage gestures of solidarity. The Foundation supports its beneficiaries as they contribute to building tomorrow's world.

The Fondation d'entreprise Hermès upholds skills transmission through programmes dedicated to know-how. Our initiatives are tailored to school pupils, students and professionals, for whom transmission is a path to learning, personal fulfilment and the perfection of skills. Whatever their profile, our beneficiaries are invited to take ownership of and advance their journey, through the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Transmission is a generous act of patronage, a source of discovery, a way to reach out to others and to progress, helping individuals achieve self-determination and find their place in society.

Since the introduction of the Skills Academy in 2014, the Foundation has invited professionals to collectively explore a universal material across disciplines and practices, combining innovation, experimentation and environmental responsibility.

Presided over by Olivier Fournier since 2016 and directed by Laurent Pejoux since 2021, the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès is now in its fourth five-year mandate, with a budget of 61 million euros for the period 2023-2028.

PROGRAMME CONTACTS

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applications process to:
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