

## Why the latest addition to the V&A's jewellery gallery is a coup for independent creatives

Emefa Cole's Vulcan ring was noticed at an independent craft fair and now sits in the museum's prestigious gallery

By Annabel Davidson

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Emefa Cole's Vulcan ring was inspired by the inner workings of volcanoes

For any jeweller, having a piece acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum is a huge deal. To have your work displayed alongside historical objects and contemporary greats is validation of its importance and relevance. From a late Bronze-age gorget found in Ireland to jewellery worn by Catherine the Great of Russia, important Art Nouveau pieces by Lalique through to British legends Andrew Grima and Elizabeth Gage, the collection shown in the William and Judith Bollinger Gallery really is unsurpassed. But one recent acquisition is of particular importance.

It has been an extraordinary 10 months for London-based, Ghana-raised jeweller Emefa Cole. She has gone from a very quiet, almost reclusive life of being an independent jeweller who exhibited at fairs and had a word-of-mouth clientele, to having her work featured in *British Vogue* and *Vanity Fair on Jewellery*. Now, after a long wait due to the pandemic, a ring from her Vulcan series is finally on display at the V&A.

Clare Phillips, curator at the museum and renowned jewellery historian and author, came across Cole's bold rings and cuffs at the Handmade Fair in London in November last year. "I was bowled over by their beauty of form and their perfection of finish," she recalls. "How her rings work both on the finger and in the hand – their three-dimensionality, their balance, their power."



Vulcan ring in oxidised silver and gold leaf, designed and made by Emefa Cole, England 2012. Purchased through the generosity of William & Judith, and Douglas and James Bollinger. | CREDIT: Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Cole's Vulcan series is inspired by the inner workings of volcanoes. Early sketches show bubbling lava and hidden tunnels inside blackened forms. "As I'm creating, things always change during the process," says Cole, who carves her pieces by hand from wax before having them cast. "I was very interested in what the volcano does on the inside, and what we can't see – the tubes and tunnels. I just started to carve [the ring] and was so inside the process that all these new things came up."

Cole is referring to the multiple layers inside the ring which seem to erode downwards – the effect is like peering into a cave which reveals a wealth of treasure deep within. Cole used a squirrel-haired brush to paint the inside in gold leaf of a particularly luminous yellow, which, juxtaposed with the almost-black oxidised silver of the outside makes for a mesmerising effect.

"Emefa's work is very minimal, very pure, influenced by nature but more as a force than any naturalistic detail," says Phillips. "It is individual, very self-contained and poised. I knew immediately that I wanted to take this further."



Emefa Cole

“I am humbled to have a piece in the permanent collection of the V&A,” says Cole. “I consider this to be the best jewellery collection in the world. I always dreamt of my pieces being discovered by archaeologists in centuries to come. It fills me with immense joy that one piece will be preserved under the best conditions of the The William and Judith Bollinger Gallery. It is a pleasure and a dream to be amongst the greatest makers such as Giovanni Corvaja and Shaun Leane.”

For Phillips, Cole’s work belongs in a very particular area – that of artist jeweller. “Certainly her approach is that of an artist, a sculptor,” she says. “The forms come from within, and as with many pieces of sculpture there is an emotional or even spiritual pull. She also has the great advantage of really understanding that jewellery as art must also work on the body – obvious but perhaps an aspect that doesn’t always work so well with jewellery designed by fine artists. Most of the contemporary work that the V&A acquires is from individual artist jewellers – and I see her as part of this rich and diverse field.”