

# Wallpaper\*

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## THE STYLE ISSUE

Embrace the future  
with flexible thinking  
and creative stretch

### STORY CRAFT

*The wit and wisdom of  
Silvia Venturini Fendi*

### SKY SCRAPER

*Richard Rogers' high hopes  
at Château La Coste*

### OBJECT LESSONS

*Dozie Kanu is asking  
all the right questions*

## Jewellery

'Erosion 1' ring in recycled oxidised bronze with gold leaf (this page), £1,850; 'Igneous' cuff in recycled sterling silver and yellow gold vermeil (opposite), £4,000, both by Emefa Cole



**E**mefa Cole is softly spoken but also a mistress of understatement. 'I don't like to be boxed in. I am an artist, but I design and I make.' Her methodology, one which segues from artisanal to modern practices, incorporates deep research, and has garnered her international critical acclaim. Add to this a loyal clientele and a place in the collections of major museums and institutions, and it becomes clear that she is quietly overachieving on numerous fronts. With influences that range from the many ethnic groups across Western Africa that create gold jewellery and objects to jewellery artists such as Giovanni Corvaja, hers is a tale of creating without compromise and trusting the process.

Since launching her eponymous brand in 2012, London-based Cole has been on a quest to distil notions of memory, loss, value and nature, in pieces that incorporate the use of patina, oxidised metals and gold plating for an effect that she describes as 'understated opulence'. She says, 'I daydream about Africa, because there is this longing for home that has grown a lot stronger in recent years.'

Cole's family is from Ghana (she can trace her lineage to traditional rulers on both sides of her family), and she spent her formative years there. 'I am learning so much more about where I come from,' she says. 'And that has led to my work evolving and changing,

and now incorporating a lot more of that part of me, as opposed to when I was younger when it wasn't necessarily at the forefront.' She uses her memories as design prompts, such as in the 'Erosion' series – which was inspired by childhood tales of people finding gold nuggets washed up after tropical rainstorms, as well as various natural phenomena where the elements leave their mark. Cole's interpretation of these events became oxidised bronze pieces that are gold plated in part. The choice of materials also makes reference to memory. Over time, the gold will peel and reveal the bronze beneath, acting as a new marker of time passed and matter lost.

Cole refutes the assumption that she is an overnight success. 'There are gatekeepers in the industry who promote people, and when they don't highlight designers of African heritage, people don't get to hear about them,' she notes. She was undeterred by early industry indifference. 'I didn't allow that to become an issue. I loved the fact that I could just be hidden away, creating things.' Experimentation has been at the forefront of her design process since her days at London Metropolitan University. She graduated in 2011 with a BA in jewellery and silversmithing.

Prior to the first Covid-19 lockdown, her love of experimentation led her on her boldest quest for knowledge yet: an

apprenticeship with the personal goldsmith to the Asantehene, the King of the Ashanti people, who, in turn, are seen as the principal custodians of gold craft in all its guises in Ghana. Cole's aim was to learn more about the lost wax casting method, a technique perfected by the Ashanti. She adds, 'Nana [Poku Amponsah Dwumfour, the goldsmith] and I explored how to create pieces like his but using Ferris wax, which is what we have here in the West.'

Last year, Cole's 'Vulcan' ring was acquired by the V&A Museum for its permanent collection after senior curator Clare Phillips spotted her work on show at the Handmade in Britain fair. The 'Vulcan' series was Cole's deep dive into volcanology, an exploration that also resulted in the creation of the 'Igneous' cuff. The acquisition, alongside one made by the Goldsmiths' Company for its permanent collection, have made Cole an undeniable part of the jewellery canon. 'I still have no words for it, to go from just slaving away at my bench and then to end up here – there are so many things that have happened,' she says with a wistful smile. But she is by no means resting on her laurels: a new series is currently in development and, in spite of the pandemic, Cole continues to work on private commissions and experiments at her bench. For her, making isn't about the accolades, it's a way of life. ★  
*emefacole.com*



# WONDER VISION

Experimental jewellery designer Emefa Cole looks to natural phenomena and the past for her understatedly opulent creations

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