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FEBRUARY 2022

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Julia Garner and the
Golden Age of Grift



King Midas ENERGY

A crop of contemporary designers have unearthed an ancient technique.

BY JILL NEWMAN

After first discovering gold nuggets at the Tucson Gem Show in 2016, jewelry designer Lisa Eisner became so captivated by their raw, glowing beauty that she set off on a four-year search to find enough for a capsule collection. “They rolled around in the earth for millions of years, morphing into these amazing little sculptures. The nuggets were naturally beautiful. I couldn’t make them any better,” she says. “It’s like the gods spoke.”

As one origin legend goes, 4 billion years ago a giant asteroid strike showered the planet with gold deposits that settled in its core. For millennia since, gold has empowered nations, incited wars, and defined cultures, from the ancient Egyptians, who buried their rulers with ornate gold jewels to ensure a rich afterlife, to the Aztecs, who believed that gold was the teardrops of the sun.

Growing up in Ghana, Emeфа Cole heard many a tale about gold nuggets found glistening under the soil after heavy rains eroded the mineral-rich earth. Once known as the Gold Coast for its abundance of resources, Ghana has a legacy of exceptional goldsmiths, and their descendants trained Cole in their ancient techniques. Today the London-based jeweler is among a notable group of artisans using those age-old methods to create contemporary pieces that honor gold’s important legacy.

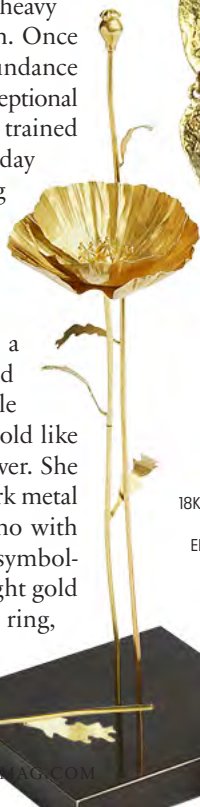
Cole’s large scale jewels possess a sense of emotion that can be achieved only by hand-working the malleable element, which is soft enough to mold like clay yet strong enough to last forever. She masterminds bold pieces, like the dark metal Vulcan ring, which depicts a volcano with a concave golden center, meant to symbolize the geological activity that brought gold nuggets to the surface. Her Caldera ring, on the other hand, makes a cameo in *And Just Like That*, HBO



LOREN NICOLE VIKING ORB NECKLACE, LOREN-NICOLE.COM



LISA EISNER JEWELRY 22K YUKON GOLD EARRINGS (\$12,000), THE ROW LOS ANGELES, 310-853-1900



EMEFA COLE 18K GOLD CALDERA RING (\$2,600), EMEFACOLE.COM



CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON ROYDS FINE JEWELLERY POPPIES: 18K GOLD EARRINGS AND BROOCH (\$12,900), CHRISTOPHER THOMPSONROYDS.COM

Max’s recent reboot of *Sex and the City*, further cementing the designer’s work in the zeitgeist.

Established jewelry houses have long paved the way for pushing the limits of gold. Take Buccellati’s transformation of its classic satin-finish gold into opulent gem-flecked cuffs. Or Vhernier’s innovative pairing of polished rose gold and matte black titanium. Or Bulgari’s high-minded interpretation of its signature Serpenti motif. Or even the way Pomellato layers carved turquoise, jet, and diamond charms into voluptuous gold chains.

Cole and the latest crop of designers offering their fresh takes may reflect an increased desire for that human touch—and nostalgia for the sculptural bravado of bygone eras.

“Craft is coming back into the offering at galleries in the form of textile artists and ceramicists—and goldsmiths, too,” says the British jeweler Christopher Thompson Royds, another modern Midas known for ethereal floral designs inspired by ancient Thracian crowns and wreaths.

To create his minimalist pieces, he shapes simple blooms out of paper-thin sheets of gold and then tweaks a petal or bends a leaf. “These small actions and irregularities make the flower come alive,” Royds says.

For her five-year-old line, Loren Nicole, archaeologist turned jeweler Loren Teetelli also mines ancient treasures for inspiration: King Tut’s cache of jewels, Greek artifacts. Hers is

a physically strenuous process that involves first melting gold flakes and blending the liquid with silver and copper alloys to create a 22-karat gold, and then pulling it into wire, weaving it into chains, hammering it, and granulating it to create her richly textured pieces. “I lean into the nature of high carat gold,” Teetelli says, “which takes marks as you wear it, shapes to your body, and creates an intimate connection with the wearer.”

Eisner, meanwhile, shows her reverence for her chosen medium by leaving the 22-karat gold nuggets in their natural state, exactly the way they were formed over billions of years of churning around in the ground through intense frost, heat, and earthquakes. “The warm color is glorious,” she says. “It’s easy to see why the Mayans and Aztecs thought gold was magical.” T&C