



'Coronet for KK', 2014, 24ct gold plated silver, Tasmanian sapphire, citrine, quartz, zircon, stones from antique brooch



'Observatory Necklace', 2012, 24 ct gold plate, concrete, gold dust, Tasmanian black spinel, sandstone from MONA, 96 x 8 x 0.4 cm

EMMA BUGG - Jewellery maker for the new millennium

THE wedding coronet displayed in the window at Handmark Gallery, Hobart in June, 2014 invited closer inspection; a show stopper for Tasmanian jewellery maker extraordinaire Emma Bugg whose exhibition was then on view. But there was much more inside.

Her inspiration for the coronet was a piece of handmade vintage lace, thereby addressing the wedding tradition of "something old". She first stiffened the lace with PVA glue from which she made a mould then cast it in solid sterling silver. The next task was to make the settings for the gemstones – citrines, quartz, zircons, some stones from an antique brooch and one Tasmanian sapphire from her personal collection – to bring in "something borrowed and blue". Once the lace and settings were finished in 24 carat gold by Graham Knowles, the coronet was ready to receive the gemstones. Ultimately, a one-off piece fit for a goddess stepping out to tie the conjugal knot.

The coronet typifies the manifold oeuvre of Emma Bugg, a young, well-travelled jeweller with a lively imagination and inquiring mind, who marks homecomings to her

'Cultured and Manly' (two sets), 2012, cufflinks, stg silver, brass, concrete, sand from Manly Beach, NSW, 2.3 x 3.2 x 0.8 cm

beautiful island the moment Mt. Wellington appears on the horizon. Her current body of work stems from observations of nature. It is indeed "organic" in the truest sense of that oversubscribed word. For it is concrete, not gold, silver, platinum or titanium, emeralds or diamonds, that sets her imagina-



'Alchemist #1', 2012, ring, stg silver, oxidised stg silver, keum boo, 24 ct gold, brass and concrete, 2.3 x 3.2 x 0.8 cm



'Dar Una Higa' (two-part brooch), 2012, 18 ct gold, stg silver, oxidised stg silver, cuttlefish bone, titanium, quartz, concrete, sandstone, stainless steel pins, both 5.2 x 4 x 0.4 cm

tion on fire to produce exquisite, contemporary one-off pieces that are simply of their time – i.e., this time – when artists and consumers often seek out the monochromatic tones of black-grey and silver to signify who they are and the style to which they aspire. More dash

than flash perhaps. Nevertheless, Bugg also diverges from the predictable, incorporating touches of gold, platinum, diamonds, precious gems and even cutting-edge technology into her work.

Her jewellery is exemplified in the necklace titled *Risen*, as in risen from the ashes. It evolved one day when she went for a drive shortly after the huge bush fires had swept through the Tasman Peninsula, and she collected some ashes from a place called Duck Creek Road.

'What I noticed was that there was a lot of twisted and rusted corrugated iron lying around from the fire's aftermath,' says Bugg. There is reference to this in the way she treated the concrete in this piece: the ashes she collected are visible in the surface of the concrete. The juxtaposition of sentiment and history with concrete is analogous to the strong concrete made from volcanic ash, observed by archaeologists at the ruins of Pompeii, which helped preserve the bodies in the form of casts rather than bones. Pompeii concrete is very strong due to the ash content. It is the *Risen* necklace that is typical of this artist's ongoing and highly successful current work. Meaning made concrete it could be said.

But there is a whole lot more that sets Emma Bugg's work apart. She



has evolved a way to impregnate precious memories into commissioned jewellery pieces. The idea is so fantastic and original that at first it's difficult to grasp. But once aboard, the idea becomes both mesmerisingly striking and seductive. It brings back that time of golden coronets, medieval tales and secret thoughts buried in a locked diary or book – a practice which continued up until the 20th century. Today one's poetry, private letters, thoughts, novel and medical records, even a loved one's ashes or those of a pet, can be locked away in a brooch, necklace, bangle or ring, accessible by the owner's mobile phone. All this intuited and designed by Emma Bugg thanks to her ingenious coupling with microcomputer software and QR



'Halfway House Earrings', 2012, oxidised stg silver, 24 ct keum boo gold and antique marcasite, each 1.2 x 0.7 x 1 cm

codes. And that is revolutionary! Already being used in wearables as shown at trade fairs in Berlin and Rome, it seems the potential for incorporating new technologies are endless. It seems we require another word to describe such groundbreaking creativity in the 21st century, as jewellery becomes for Emma Bugg 'the interface by which to lead into messages of personal history or memory, just like a portal or diary'.

'Observatory Ring', 2013, stg silver, concrete, gold dust, Tasmanian black spinel and sandstone from MONA, 2.5 x 2.2 cm



'Reversible Inner City Necklace/Pendant', 2013, stg silver, brass, pigmented concrete, polished concrete, blue metal (basalt) and demolition site rubble on silk cord, 4.8 x 3.6 x 0.6 cm



'Brickwork Necklace', 2012, stg silver, brass, concrete, stainless steel cable and clasp, 5 x 1.7 x 0.6 cm



'3D Box Earrings', 2012, oxidised stg silver, concrete, demolition rubble and keum boo 24 ct gold, each 2.2 x 2 cm



True to her organic aspirations, little is wasted nor is waste created; a practice which philosophically resonates with our times. Times of secrets and lies too, as always it could be said. So what finer way to file our secret selves, our precious memories, travel mementos, our knowledge, than in a striking casket around the neck, a bangle on our wrist, even a ring perhaps. All is up for discussion between the artist and her private client.

On her website Bugg explains that combining concrete with precious metals and stones challenges the value we place upon this material. In the form of a building, concrete is highly valued, but when a building is demolished and the material is taken out of context, all that is left is worthless rubble.

Emma Bugg is the current "Tasmanian Arts", artist-in-residence, enjoying excellent studio space in Hobart for one year. Her jewellery was also featured in the book *Five Hundred Art Necklaces* published by Lark Crafts in 2013. Her imagination seems to know no limits and her jewellery making resonates with the now of this resourceful rethinking epoch. Thinking sends her out into the field of nature and onto building or demolition sites where she gathers the necessary ingredients to incorporate in her pieces – lime, concrete, sand and building rubble – which are then ground and manipulated into the shapes and textures she requires ... All worthless materials made new. Then the hard work commences, involving art, science and technology in order to create remarkable beauty in the form of bracelets, pendants and necklaces, such as the reversible *Inner City Necklet*.

Jan Jones

Jan Jones BA; AICA is a writer and freelance arts journalist; member of the International Association of Art Critics.

'Alchemist #2 Ring', 2012, stg silver, oxidised stg silver, keum boo 24 ct gold, brass and pigmented concrete, 2.5 x 2.3 x 1.6 cm