

The raw, mythical aesthetic of Monastery jewellery

After studying jewellery and fashion in Florence, young artisan Ashleigh McCulloch has launched her own designer brand of jewellery, called Monastery, that not only straddles the continental divide between Italy and her home country, South Africa, but also toggles between art and accessory.



McCulloch's choice to keep one foot on the ground in the city of Michaelangelo's David, is tied to the thriving artisanal jewellery culture that exists there and the ease with which this context enables her to meet the technical and aesthetic demands of her work. Her hand-crafted pieces are sold in upscale galleries and artisanal stores anywhere from Florence to Fresno – and online – and she divides her time between Cape Town, Johannesburg and Italy.

One of the reasons she became a metalsmith is that she could never find the kind of jewellery she wanted to wear, so she resorted to making it herself. "Jewellery is my channel of expression," she explains, "and because I have often struggled to find pieces that I liked, I decided to make my own."



Twenty-seven-year-old McCulloch called her brand Monastery as a fitting umbrella name for her various collections that pay homage to ancient spirituality – they are monastic in this sense only. Other concerns in her work include nature and its influence on the metalsmithing process, and the centuries-old esoteric and philosophical tradition of hermeticism. Monastery pieces "are intended to be mythic, raw heirlooms crafted with slow, meticulous care," the designer says.

McCulloch smiths in silver, gold and bronze and occasionally incorporates found objects and beadwork. She often upcycles precious metals by reworking found pieces. She crafts an assortment of neckpieces, necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets and rings that are all thematically linked. Her work has the characteristic appearance of seeming intentionally unfinished, and reflecting a pure or raw state.



“When I make jewellery, I let the materials behave as they are and as they choose to. I am not interested in making controlled objects but just intervening enough to guide the flow of molten silver in a general direction,” McCulloch states.

Monastery is [available online](#) and is stocked at Bjork Gallery in Florence, Italy and Haas in Cape Town, South Africa, among others.

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