

Unearthed

Elfi Spiewack & Doc Ross





Doc Ross
Untitled (Earthquake
Gardens), 2015

Elfi Spiewack
Rinde, 2020
brooch/object,
sterling silver, bark,
18ct gold, opal
185 × 60 × 23mm

COVER:
Doc Ross
Untitled (Earthquake
Gardens), 2015

Elfi Spiewack
Garden Graze, 2020
brooch, sterling silver,
sheep bone, rutilated
amethyst
90 × 48 × 17mm



The swapping of work between artist friends is common practice, and always mutually beneficial, but a trade last year between contemporary jeweller Elfi Spiewack and photographer Doc Ross proved to be especially fortuitous.

From among Doc's large body of atmospheric documentary images of post-quake Christchurch, the particular photograph Elfi chose in their exchange is a night-scene showing a row of damaged buildings in the CBD. One of the buildings is buttressed by a stack of shipping containers while its neighbour is illuminated by an eerie, unseen light source that reveals the ghostly outline of the brick building that once stood there.

This image captures the mood and complexity of the situation in Christchurch

in the aftermath of the disaster, but the subject matter of Doc's photographs, Elfi contends, extends far beyond earthquakes: "They communicate ideas about turning points, reflections on something major, lives brought to a standstill, a mess that you can't make sense of, and a situation that repels you while at the same time exerting a certain lure or fascination."

The depth of Elfi Spiewack's response to the photograph she received in the trade with Doc Ross germinated

an idea for an exhibition. This would involve developing a new body of jewellery inspired by a selection of Doc's photographs of crumbling architecture around the city, gardens in the red zone going to seed, and images with overlapping elements that comment on the process of repairing and rebuilding Christchurch.

Elfi points out that her interest in the photographs isn't about the specific quake-related subject matter. "My approach," she notes, "is about the



process of reflecting on and reacting to an existing art work. When I looked at Doc's photographs it was clear that they triggered something. What fascinates me is thinking about how one artist responds to another artist's vision. My reaction to Doc's work draws on my own history, experience, feelings, interpretation, medium and creative technique."

The result is *Unearthed*, an exhibition at The National in Christchurch that Elfi regards as a "correspondence between art works" where the jewellery

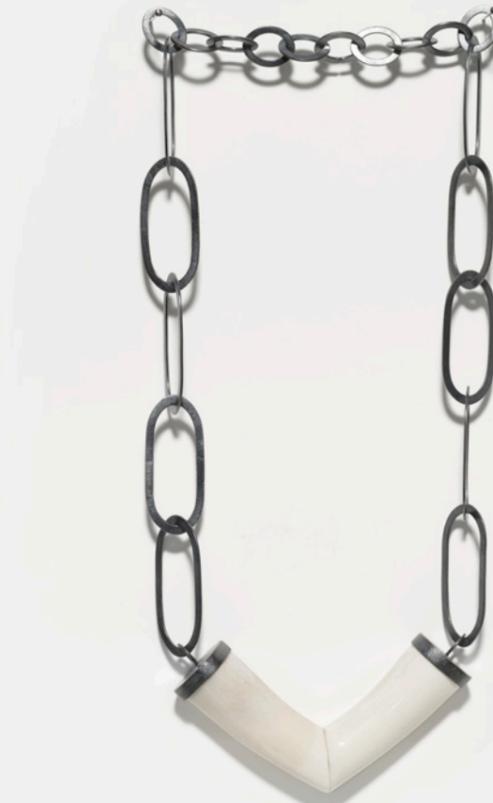
and photographs on display interact in challenging, playful and surprising ways.

Unearthed marks an exciting new development from Elfi's last solo exhibition, *In Splendour Moot, Adornment Re-Framed* (2017), curated and toured by Ashburton Art Gallery. *In Splendour Moot* set out to question concepts of beauty and preciousness in jewellery, and sought to problematise the way 'value' is ascribed to jewellery in an almost exclusively monetary sense.

In *Unearthed*, Elfi takes the

Elfi Spiewack
Wild, 2020
 brooch, sterling silver,
 possum vertebrae,
 rabbit bones, pearl
 63 × 64 × 19mm

Doc Ross
Untitled (Earthquake Gardens), 2015



creative process itself as her subject matter, prompted by a sequence of three linked questions: “Would my interpretation of Doc’s photographs in my medium of jewellery be like a 3D version of the mood of his images? Would a connection be apparent to someone looking at Doc’s photographs and my jewellery alongside each other? Would they see what I see and feel what I feel?”

Many of Doc’s photographs consist of layered elements and the juxtaposition of different times. There is a kind of telescoping of the historical and the contemporary going on, particularly notable in his images of the imposing statue of Queen Victoria superimposed against collapsing buildings. The time-jumping aspect of Doc’s work is also apparent in the sepia tone of several of his images, and in the circular and arched shapes of selected works that speak to a bygone era of photography.

Elfi’s jewellery responds to Doc’s layering of visual elements through the use of disparate materials as well as through the mix of traditional and contemporary jewellery techniques. “It’s hard to explain how half of my pieces came together,” she remarks candidly, “it was almost automatic how I chose the materials. Something in the photographs spoke to me and I reacted.”



Doc Ross
The Empire is in Ruins, 2020

Elfi Spiewack
Empire, 2020
necklace, oxidised sterling silver, sheep bone
275 x 125 x 26mm

Elfi Spiewack
Found, 2020
brooch, sterling silver, 18ct gold, quartz crystals
65 x 55 x 15mm

Doc Ross
Untitled (Lost City), 2020

Elfi reacted, for instance, to the industrial elements she observed in a photograph showing the back view of the statue of Queen Victoria, with a crane overhead and several superimposed, quake-damaged buildings in the distance. The necklace Elfi made in response to the image is divided into distinct sections: the lower section features an oxidised sterling silver hand-made chain and two tubes, resembling steel, which is contrasted in the upper section with traditional faceted citrine beads strung together; the kind of stones that Elfi imagines Queen Victoria might well have worn.

She was drawn to the complexity of one of Doc's compositions depicting a cropped billboard in the foreground, with the capitalised word 'ON', and tall buildings in the background partially obscured by foliage creeping all over the image. Elfi explains that she found the layering of the urban scene really fascinating; "overgrown and claimed back by nature like the forgotten and neglected gardens after the earthquake. I reacted with a brooch made of a smoky quartz crystal, which looks chaotic, but is actually a perfect creation of nature, on top of a textured plate of oxidised silver that mimics the shape in the image."

A photograph of a dead tree standing leafless, limbless and forlorn in the centre of an untended garden provoked a brooch in response that features a piece of bark drawn from Elfi's extensive collection of found objects,

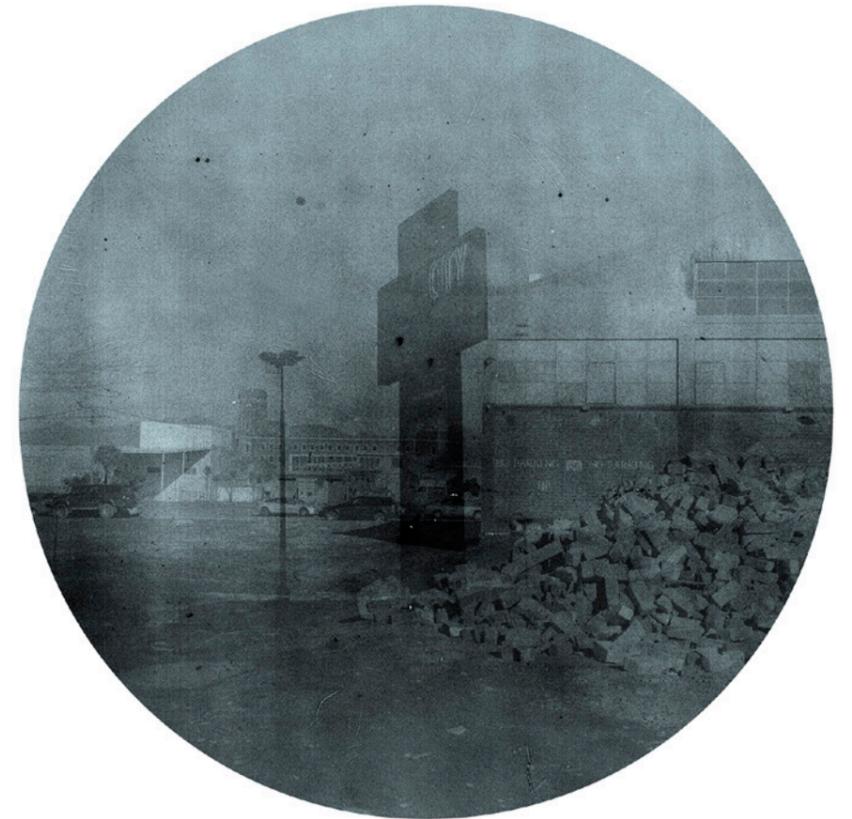


Doc Ross
Untitled (The Empire is in Ruins), 2020

Elfi Spiewack
Highness, 2020,
 necklace, sterling silver,
 sheep bone, raw agate.
 318 x 225 x 25mm

Elfi Spiewack
Ruins, 2020
 brooch/object, copper,
 sterling silver, smokey
 quartz crystal
 124 x 65 x 28mm

Doc Ross
Untitled (Lost City), 2020





Doc Ross
Untitled (Earthquake Gardens), 2015.

Elfi Spiewack
Wandering, 2020,
 brooch, deer antler,
 sterling silver, 18ct gold,
 rhodolite garnet
 60 × 58 × 18mm

with a structural design that she finds very beautiful. An opal set in 22 carat gold is attached to the bark fragment, which is mounted onto a shaped silver plate. The pairing of photograph and brooch is an example of a “lucky match”, Elfi remarks, “and an instance in which the jewel fits the image perfectly.”

Elfi Spiewack hopes that the associations that arise from the correspondence between her jewellery and Doc Ross’s photographs will create new meanings and provoke questions,

although she is quick to point out that those questions don’t necessarily need to have answers. The bark brooch with the opal, for example, might cause a viewer to wonder whether the fragment of bark came from the same dead tree in the photograph. Another might wonder if the tree is still there. Another might think that the life of the tree is memorialised in the brooch that Elfi has made. Another might read the bark brooch with the glowing opal as a symbol of new life after a great loss.



There is no limit to the memories, associations, questions and emotions that can be unearthed through the act of looking at art. “To me,” Elfi explains, “being an artist has lots to do with the ability to see beyond the obvious. In Doc’s photographs I see the stillness after the big event and the mood they convey was the inspiration for my new body of work.”

Bronwyn Lloyd



Doc Ross

Doc Ross was born in Eketahuna, New Zealand. Since moving to Christchurch in 1998, he has been one of the city's most intimate biographers. Doc Ross is a self-taught photographer. His work is in the collections of Christchurch Art Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and many prominent private and corporate collections worldwide; he has exhibited in New Zealand, Melbourne and Sydney, and in 2002 his work was included in an exhibition of Contemporary Australian and New Zealand photography at Sotheby's New York.



Elfi Spiewack

Elfi Spiewack is a contemporary jeweller based in Christchurch. Born in Germany, Spiewack completed a goldsmith apprenticeship and trained at the University College of Design in Pforzheim (1996) graduating with a Bachelor of Arts. She has been based in New Zealand since 1999, and has exhibited in New Zealand, Germany, Australia, the Netherlands and the USA. Her major solo exhibition *In Splendour Moot, Adornment Re-framed* was shown at The National in 2018 and toured through public galleries in New Zealand throughout 2017-19.

Doc Ross
Untitled (Piranesi visits Christchurch), 2020
Elfi Spiewack
Reclaim, 2020
 brooch, oxidised sterling silver, quartz crystal
 72 × 49 × 17mm

