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***The essential potness - Lucie Rie and Hans Coper*.** By Mienke Simon Thoms, Titus M. Eliëns, Dorris U. Kuyken-Schneider and Margreet Eijkelenboom-Vermeer. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen [Website: www.boijmans.nl], Rotterdam 2014. 216 s. ill. litt. 25 €.

Lucie Rie and Hans Coper occupy a central position in the history of studio pottery, and their work holds a comparable place within the studio ceramics collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. With a total of 37 and 26 unique works respectively, the collection represents the most significant public holdings of Rie and Coper's work in Continental Europe. This beautifully illustrated and welcome volume is both a catalogue of this superlative collection, and a study of the mutually beneficial relationship between the two artists and the museum.

It is indeed this exploration of museum activity that stands as the most fascinating aspect of the book. Museum collections are not passive and neutral entities. Rather, they reflect the philosophical and intellectual positions, as well as the passions, of curators, the leading protagonists here being Bernardine de Neeve and Dorris Kuyken-Schneider. The collection reflects their active engagement, and contains significant works acquired from the Boijmans exhibitions, *English Potters* in 1960, and *Lucie Rie and Hans Coper* in 1967. Discussion of the latter is of much interest, particularly in connection with Coper's ideas about the display of his work in groups. Similarly revealing is the fact that Rie's inclusion came at Coper's request, rather than the reverse, as has erroneously been stated elsewhere.

Both then as now, the inclination to bracket together the work of Rie and Coper seems inescapable. Yet this insistent pairing is perhaps a barrier to our appreciation of their individual achievements. At the root of this is the concept of 'the essential potness', the desire to assert functionality and the vessel as defining conditions within studio pottery, and within the work of Rie and Coper. Deriving from Douglas Hill's catalogue essay for the 1967 exhibition, the concept of 'the essential potness' reflects the Boijmans' approach to studio ceramics, and perhaps also Rie's, as evidenced by her often remarked upon placing of flowers in Coper's pots. Yet it perhaps over-emphasises their similarities, and neither helps us understand Coper's power as a sculptor, nor Rie's brilliance as a colourist. It is time perhaps for the separate reappraisal of the work of Lucie Rie and of Hans Coper. *The Essential Potness* cannot offer that, but it does provide a frank and engaging historical account.

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