



Bottle

Lucie Rie

Not on display

Title/Description: Bottle

Artist/Maker: Lucie Rie

Born: 1976

Object Type: Bottle

Materials: Porcelain

Technique: Throwing

Measurements: h. 228 x w. 72 x d. 69 mm

Accession Number: 412

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England

Copyright: © Estate of the Artist

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Austrian-born Lucie Rie (1902-1995) was a celebrated studio potter, known for her innovative ceramic forms, experimental glazes and vibrant surface decoration. Made in 1976, this porcelain vessel from the Sainsbury Collection was thrown on a wheel in sections, which were then altered and joined to produce the subtle geometry of a bottle. [1] The bottle's composite form is an elegant study of how light falls on the planes of an object.

The simple form of this vessel combines a squared-off base with an inverted funnel-shaped neck. To add interest to the bottle's profile, Rie has created a pronounced ridge beneath the rim, which encircles the form's elongated neck. Although the bottle's form is symmetrical, its shape does not appear static. When throwing, Rie was unconcerned with perfectly centring the clay on the wheelhead, and the resulting wobble or 'quiver' imbues her pots with an organic quality. [2]

Rie raw-glazed her pottery, firing it once in an electric kiln in an oxidised atmosphere. Her glazes

were thickly applied to the greenware using a household brush, and once dry, the work was subjected to a glaze temperature firing at around 1260 degrees. [3] This method is more cost effective because it eliminates the preliminary bisque firing, but it can also increase the risk of the clay cracking and warping in the kiln. Rie adopted this way of working in Vienna, when the nearest kiln was situated a tram ride away from her studio. [4]

The whiteness of the slightly pitted, smooth matt glaze decorating this bottle was probably produced with additions of tin and zinc. Rie mixed her own porcelain clay: a combination of ball clay, china clay, Bentonite, feldspar and flint. This mixture was an adaption of Bernard Leach's recipe, published in 'A Potter's Book' in 1940. [5] Rie sieved the ingredients, added water, and then left the clay to dry until it was workable and could be wedged. [6] This laborious process reveals Rie's understanding of the chemistry of her clay bodies and glazes, which provided the basis of her many experiments with surface texture and colour.

From the age of twenty Rie trained at the School of Applied Arts (Kunstgewerbeschule) in Vienna, receiving tuition from the technically adept potter and co-founder of Wiener Keramik, Michael Powolny (1871—1954). [7] Architect, designer and co-founder of the Wiener Werkstätte, Josef Hoffmann (1870—1956) recognised Rie's talent and in 1937 selected seventy of her works for display in the Paris International Exhibition, winning Rie the silver medal. [8] By this point in her career, she had participated in at least four international exhibitions. [9]

The rise of the Nazi party in Austria forced Rie to flee Jewish persecution and seek asylum overseas. Arriving in England in October 1938, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Rie quickly established a studio in Albion Mews in London. After trying her hand at making glass buttons for Fritz Lampl (1892—1955), Rie began manufacturing ceramic buttons and jewellery for haute couture fashion houses, examples of which can be found in the Sainsbury Collection (object number: L.64). [10]

Lucie Rie formed many enduring friendships throughout her long and productive career, most significantly with the potters Bernard Leach (1887—1979) and Hans Coper (1920—1981). Lord and Lady Sainsbury were enthusiastic supporters of her work, inviting Rie to exhibit at the Sainsbury Centre in November 1981 [11] and September 1990. [12] Rie was awarded an OBE in 1968, and a DBE in 1991 for her contribution to art and culture in Britain. [13]

Vanessa Tothill, December 2021

[1] Tony Birks, *Lucie Rie* (Somerset: Marston House, 1987, revised ed. 1994), pp. 198-99.

[2] Birks, p. 62.

[3] Birks, p. 66. 70-1.

[4] Birks, p. 61.

[5] Margot Coatts, 'Lucie Rie and Hans Coper: Potters in Parallel' (London: Herbert Press and Barbican Art Gallery, 1997), p. 41. Birks, p. 61.

[6] Birks, p. 61.

[7] Birks, pp. 17-20.

[8] Birks, p. 23.

[9] Birks, p. 33.

[10] Birks, p. 38, pp. 86-7.

[11] Birks, pp. 72-3.

[12] Birks, p. 78.

[13] Birks, p. 223.

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Bob and Lisa Sainsbury purchased this little bottle from their friend Lucie Rie in 1976. They were regular visitors to her studio, where she both worked and lived, in a quiet cobbled mews just north of the Bayswater Road in London. Lucie had moved there in 1939, within a year of her arrival in Britain from her family home in Nazi-dominated Vienna. From it she produced a steady stream of marvellous pots as different from the heavy earthenware then being produced by British artist potters as a delicate white wine is from a turbid English stout.

This particular piece, quiet and dignified with its elegant circular neck rising from a squared body, cannot truthfully be called typical of Lucie's work. But that is because her pots are so varied that no single one could possibly typify the range and ravishing beauty of her work. She made massive jars, as big as her kiln could accommodate, and others so small - she called them her 'dumplings' - that you could cradle them in your hand.

This bottle has a matt, slightly pitted, white glaze and Lucie certainly took a particular delight in white as a colour. She habitually dressed in elegant white trouser suits and once produced an entire exhibition of white pots. But she also rejoiced in colour - uranium yellow, vivid blue, electric green and a golden glaze so thick and luscious that she often deliberately allowed it to trickle down a bowl

from its rim. At the beginning of her career she supplied stores with near-identical tea-sets and coffee pots, but once freed from the commercial requirement for uniformity, she seldom if ever produced two pots that were exactly the same.

—

David Attenborough, broadcaster and naturalist

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1976.
