

# OREGON JEWISH MUSEUM AND CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



Hans Coper, Cycladic vase, stoneware, 1975. Courtesy of York Museums Trust (York Art Gallery), York, England.



Hans Coper, Disc form with cylindrical base and neck, stoneware, 1959. Courtesy of York Museums Trust (York Art Gallery), York, England.



Hans Coper, Spinning top vase, stoneware, 1960. Courtesy of York Museums Trust (York Art Gallery), York, England.

## Media Release

May 9, 2019

### Exhibition: HANS COPER—LESS MEANS MORE

June 6, 2019 - September 22, 2019

Press Preview: June 5, 11am, RSVP [media@ojmche.org](mailto:media@ojmche.org)

[High resolution images on OJMCH website](#)

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### OJMCH Exhibition Features the Sculptural Ceramic Work of German-born British Jewish Artist Hans Coper

*HANS COPER—LESS MEANS MORE* presents the sculptural work of Hans Coper (1920-1981), a radical Jewish artist of the mid-twentieth century who was at the vanguard of British studio ceramics. Coper pushed the boundaries of clay and forms of abstraction as seen in the 45 pieces of his work on display.

Guest curated by Sandra Percival, founding Director and Curator of Zena Zezza, the exhibition presents Coper within the context of a selection of work by Austrian-born British studio potter Lucie Rie who was Coper's life-long friend, as well as selected works by other influential artists including Alberto Giacometti, Barbara Hepworth, Anni Albers, Peter

Collingwood, and Dan Flavin. Flavin collected Coper and Rie and in 1990 he created *untitled (to Hans Coper, master potter)*, a series of all white neon light works.

*LESS MEANS MORE* re-contextualizes Coper on the eve of the centennial of his birth in 1920 with an exhibition of work from the 1950s until the late 1970s. The exhibition draws from a seminal Portland collection and internationally from England's York Museums Trust, among others. The exhibition marks the first time Coper's work has been shown in the United States since the 1994 Metropolitan Museum exhibition *Lucie Rie/Hans Coper: Masterworks by Two British Potters*. It is also the first time Coper's work has been shown on the West Coast.

"There are many silences emanating from artist Hans Coper," said Sandra Percival, guest curator. "As a teacher at the Royal College of Art in London (1966-1976), Coper's impact as a teacher was described as 'gentle yet shattering.' He more often than not took his students to a teashop and talked about jazz, noting that 'improvisation' around a theme was a part of his own practice. He was also wary of any words to describe his work. Coper spent the last two years of his life alone in his studio writing in notebooks, reading and listening to music. He had all his writings and letters destroyed upon his death in 1981. *HANS COPER—LESS MEANS MORE* opens up a space for contemporary perspectives on Coper's work to expand upon his historic mid-twentieth century importance."

Hans Coper was born in Chemnitz, Lower Saxony, Germany, in 1920 near the Czechoslovakian border. Coper's Jewish father was the manager of a textile mill and Coper studied textile engineering in Dresden. Impacted by the rise of Adolf Hitler, Coper's father took his own life in 1936 to ease the plight of his non-Jewish wife and that of their two sons. In 1939, Coper emigrated to England. Shortly after his arrival, he was declared an enemy alien, arrested and sent to Canada where as a refugee he was put in an internment camp along with prisoners of war. By joining the Pioneer Corps of the British Army, he was sent back to England in 1941.

After the war in 1946 Coper found work in Lucie Rie's London studio, where, working side by side, they made ceramic buttons and later focused on the production of tableware, often signed together. Later in the 1950s Rie's and Coper's personal styles started to diverge: while hers remained functional in focus, his became increasingly sculptural in ambition. In an interview in 1988 Lucie Rie commented, "I am a potter, but he was an artist."

Coper assiduously studied Ancient Art at the British Museum and shared an affinity for Cycladic sculpture with Giacometti and Brancusi. Coper, who was also influenced by Picasso and Matisse, would frequently draw firm outlines of his pots in advance in chalk, pencil, or clay. In addition he pursued architect Mies van de Rohe's maxim "less is more". Coper maintained a minimal set of materials and methods in creating his work—clay as material, the wheel at the core of generating form and, at times, the assembling of two or more thrown shapes with metal pins or rods. The presence of each form—whether four

inches or the seven-foot high monumental candlesticks he created for Coventry Cathedral —simultaneously projects an inherent modesty and monumentality.

“This June marks OJMCHÉ’s second year in our home on the North Park Blocks,” said Director Judy Margles. “With *HANS COPER—LESS MEANS MORE* we recognize the legacy of this beautiful building, the last home of the Museum of Contemporary Craft before closing, and find it particularly meaningful to have this powerful exhibition of mid-century ceramic work begin our second exhibition year. The exhibition is nothing short of stunning and we are elated to share this important work.”

Hans Coper exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1953; won a Gold Medal at the Milan Triennale in 1954; and exhibited in New York in 1956. His work was shown and purchased for the collection of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 1967, 1984, and, posthumously, in 2014. Exhibitions also include: in 1970 at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; in 1980 at the Hetjens-Museum, Dusseldorf; 1984 at the Serpentine Gallery and 1985 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London; 1994 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; 1997 at the Barbican Gallery, London; and, more recently in 2009-2011, a Hans Coper retrospective toured in Japan.

### **About the Portland and York Art Gallery collections**

The work featured in *HANS COPER—LESS MEANS MORE* is from a seminal Portland collection, the York Art Gallery, England, as well as works from collections in California and beyond. The first work by Coper in the Portland collection was acquired in 1969 after viewing the exhibition *Peter Collingwood | Hans Coper* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Over nearly half a century, the Portland collection has grown to include Coper’s *Spade*, *Cycladic*, and large *Ovoid* forms among others, and Rie’s *Vases* and *Bowls*. The York Art Gallery’s Coper collection stems from a large gift in 2001 of over 3,500 works of British Studio ceramics from W.A. Ismay, the first collector of Coper’s work. In 2020, the York Art Gallery will mount a Hans Coper exhibition to celebrate the centennial of his birth in 1920.

### **About Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education**

The Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education (OJMCHÉ) explores the legacy of the Jewish experience in Oregon, teaches the universal lessons of the Holocaust, and provides opportunities for intercultural conversation. OJMCHÉ challenges our visitors to resist indifference and discrimination and to envision a just and inclusive world.

OJMCHÉ was formed through the 2014 merger of the Oregon Jewish Museum (founded 1990) and the Oregon Holocaust Resource Center (founded 1984). Together we have deepened our focus on Jewish art, history, and culture, while simultaneously recognizing the challenge of remaining relevant in a changing and tumultuous world.

In June 2017, following a successful capital campaign, OJMCHÉ moved into our new home in

Portland's North Park Blocks. The museum building now has gallery space capable of accommodating traveling exhibitions and robust public programming, state-of-the-art storage for our archives and artifact collections, an auditorium, a gift shop, and a café. We serve as the community repository for the Jewish experience in Oregon and as the proud stewards of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial in Portland's Washington Park, offering year-round tours and speakers from our Holocaust Speakers' Bureau and bringing thousands of school children to both the museum and the Oregon Holocaust Memorial.

As a cultural organization serving all of Oregon and southwest Washington, OJMCHÉ provides a community-wide gathering place for exhibitions, public events, educational programs, and performances, and offers a wide range of collaborative opportunities. OJMCHÉ welcomes people of all income levels, ages, religions and ethnicities. At OJMCHÉ we seek to teach visitors how to recognize the roots of hatred, how to instill values of inclusion and respect, and how to participate in an inclusive, vibrant democracy built on understanding one another and reconciling differences. Our values shape all of our exhibitions and programs, which celebrate and explore – in the broadest terms – issues of identity, the forces of prejudice, and Jewish contributions to world culture and ideas. For more information, visit [www.ojmche.org](http://www.ojmche.org).

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