

Classic and Contemporary

Erskine Hall & Coe

*Article by
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THE IMPORTANCE OF ANITA BESSON IN PROMOTING ceramists such as Alex Siesbye and Claudi Casanovas in Britain meant that her retirement in 2010 (see issue 87) left a big space and her exhibitions were a hard act to follow.

Matthew Hall of Erskine, Hall & Coe, which took

over the elegant gallery in Royal Arcade in London, had worked with Besson for 10 years, assisting in running the gallery and carrying the Besson banner at SOFA in Chicago and New York. But instead of letting white walls concentrate the attention on a sparse display of pots he has decided to put the walls



to use and show ceramics in the context of compatible two-dimensional work, collages and graphic works by potters such as Ewen Henderson and other artists such as Matthew Harris. Though he prefers the concept of a slow transition, he is putting his personal mark on this well known venue, as indeed he must to give it a new identity. His choice of new potters shows a preference for the fine and detailed – porcelain glazed in shiny white and black or chocolate brown, as if the spirit of Lucie Rie were hanging around somewhere, giving her blessing to work that is courteous and well behaved. There is an atmosphere of good breeding about the gallery, though it is welcoming and not daunting or oppressive, as are so many galleries in London's West End.

As this is the leading London gallery for ceramics, to be chosen by Matthew Hall is quite an accolade for new potters such as Sarah Flynn and Deirdre Hawthorne, but it is clear that he is not putting the emphasis on youth. To coincide with the annual Royal College of Arts fair 'Ceramics London' he put on a show of 16 artists of whom only half are still alive. Amongst the youngest of them is 45 year

old American Tim Rowan. Amongst the recently deceased potters are Ruth Duckworth and Colin Pearson, who is represented by a major winged form, and director Matthew Hall has sought out four works by the esteemed American artist George Ohr, who died in 1918. To my taste, the most exciting artists in this *Classic and Contemporary* exhibition are Japanese artist Shozo Michikawa and Ewen Henderson and, in particular, American potter Tim Rowan, who recently had a one-man show at the gallery and whose rugged work using coarse clay, which he digs from a variety of locations, rather belies the polite ethos of Erskine, Hall & Coe. He is a muscular potter and acts as a torchbearer for the next Erskine Hall exhibition – a one-man show for Claudi Casanovas, which is a tribute to his mentor, Ryoji Koie.

Tony Birks is the author of numerous books on ceramics including *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor*, the biographies of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper as well as the *Complete Potter's Companion*, which has sold more than 100,000 copies in the US, published by Bulfinch Press.



Above left: Hans Coper. *Cup on a Stand*. 1970.
 Above: Shozo Michikawa. *Twisted Form*. 2012.
 Below left: Jennifer Lee. *Large Open Bowl*. 1989.
 Below right: Tim Rowan. *Sculpture*. 2012.