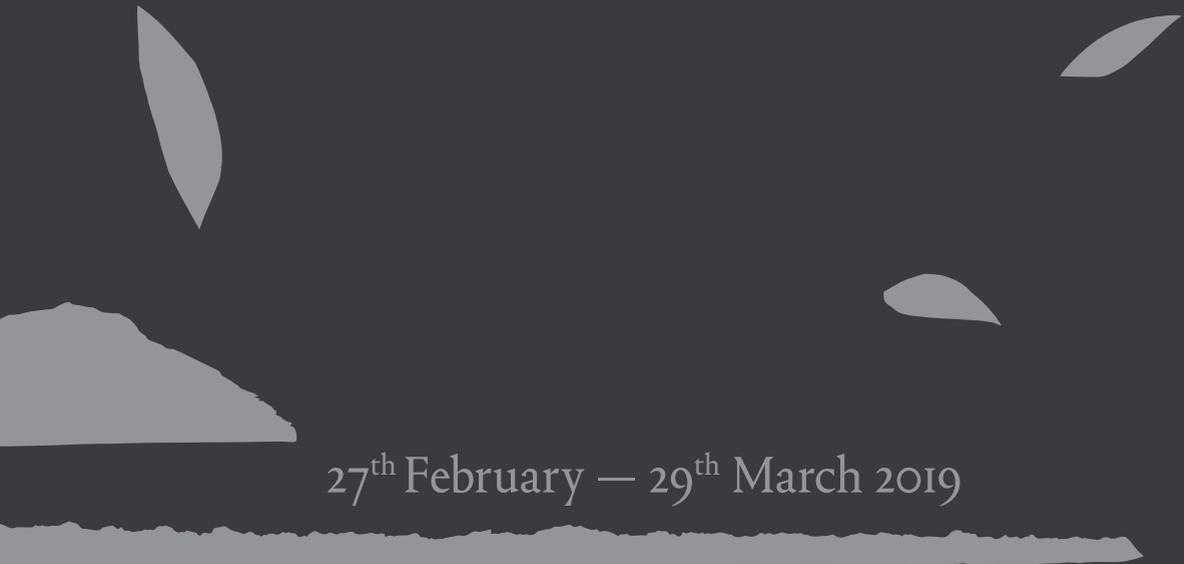


SIMS REED
GALLERY

Eileen Cooper:
Short Stories

The bottom of the poster features several light gray, stylized shapes. On the left, there is a large, irregular shape resembling a mound of earth or a leaf. To its right, there are three smaller, teardrop-shaped elements that look like leaves or petals, scattered across the lower half of the page. At the very bottom, there is a horizontal, torn-edge-like shape that spans the width of the page.

27th February — 29th March 2019

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Short Stories

by Sarah Lea

In 2016 Eileen Cooper RA OBE was invited behind the scenes at the English National Ballet to make drawings during Akram Khan's production for the company. The rich imagery of the *Giselle* and *Rosa Solo* linocut series, created following visits by the ballet's first artist Madison Keesler to Cooper's studio, provides the basis for the new collages displayed here, which follow earlier series made in Alayrac, Aldeburgh and Cornwall since 2011.

The American assemblage artist Joseph Cornell (1903–72) once wrote in a diary entry “collage = life”. This statement condenses the immediacy of montage: bring two things into contact and see what happens. Although collage is a relatively recent development in her work, Cooper is well-versed in this alchemy. For already within her paintings, charcoal and pastel drawings – and even those occasions when she ‘masquerades as a sculptor’ to create bronze cut-out reliefs that escape a rectilinear pictorial frame – Cooper fuses a rich cosmology of motifs into mysterious connection. In her works, the everyday and the unexpected jostle, quite casually, cheek by jowl.

Cornell's equation also points to an important distinction that sets Cooper's collage practice apart. Artists since Georges Braque have used the quotidian – magazines, tickets, newspapers – to literally mix life and art. By contrast, Cooper's collage materials eschew any such direct index and are instead

drawn from within her own artistic universe, albeit one in which daily life is an intrinsic thread. The raw materials are fragments generated from her printmaking processes (and Cooper is an expert printmaker): different states of colour proofs, new prints from blocks cut but never used, as well as ‘flats’ – papers pulled from blank plates loaded with ink, each time the plain ‘image’ is taken a lighter tone of the same hue results.

From this super low-tech palette of papers – already infused with characters, textures, atmospheres and myths – Cooper begins to invent. Like a play within a play, short stories unfold, drawing us ever further into her world. Indeed, the layering of collage is akin to the scenery of stage flats. As in her paintings Cooper is not interested in a rationally defined perspectival space, but a metaphysical or theatrical one in which reality and imagination fuse. Sometimes the composition calls for something new: a number of works, such as *Golden Hour*, *Myth* and *Listener*, feature drawn or watercoloured elements.

Cooper recalls that art was a place of escape for her as a child, and links her present collages to cutting out paper dolls and fixing on their clothes with folded tabs. Today, she gains inspiration from the making process itself. Scissors, scalpels and tearing produce different edges to work with, and during the cutting out, unpredictable negative shapes arise. Even the very, very long table she encountered in the Tarn Valley in France in 2011 – the residency when Cooper made her first series of collage works – was an exciting expanse that invited multiple compositions to shuffle and dance into being simultaneously.

Cooper is a formidable colourist. The earthy tans and pastels of the *Fable* and *Short Stories* groups are a departure from the high-key blues and reds of previous collage series, although these signature colours, which reoccur throughout Cooper's paintings, are still present in a quiet yet powerful way. They wind sinuously through the deep maroon sections of *Source* and *Fable, Dawn* as quick, fluid strokes. These are remnants of the background of *Rosa Solo*: freed from her figure and turned landscape, as in *Glory*, or the spreading, interlacing rhythmic pattern upon pattern in *Fable, Release*, which, like *Fable, Compose*, cannot fail to evoke Matisse, with its unadulterated cobalt blue sky, a piece of an earlier proof of the same image.

Often there seems to be a sympathy between the figure and the tree or branch that accompanies her – a shared gesture, angle or momentum. In *Fable, Extend*, the tension of the gracefully lunging woman's muscles is acutely observed, the forearms twisted to place her hands back to back, this upward motion balanced by the flat, horizontal contact of her planted foot and trailing shin on the floor. In *Fable, Duet*, the shadow seen in the original *Giselle* linocut has become a doppelganger. The distribution of weight in the doubled pose is echoed by two leaves lying at the base of a tree, whose curving trunk, branches and leaves are created entirely from collaged elements. In *Fable, Compose* the right-angled elbow of the arm mirrors the visible straight edges of the tree block in the top left, while in *Fable, Roots* the bent pose places tendrils of hair in touch with the ground.

This intuitive formal twinning and dealing with doubles is found throughout Cooper's oeuvre, and extends to her monoprints too. For instance, in *Daybreak* the upstretched arms reaffirm the reach of the tree, while in *Echoes* a profile is reiterated, emanating like ripples on a pond, a call seemingly answered in *Echoes, Proposal* by the apparition of an upside-down, overlapping 'reflection'. Cooper has called monoprinting 'drawing with colour', an apt description for *Red Sky* and *New Chapter 2*. This is the first group of works in which she has hybridised the subtle surface qualities of the monoprinting technique, already bristling with energy, with collage. So sparingly and deftly are they applied, it takes a while to find the additions in *New Chapter 1*. Even in these uncharacteristically 'finicky' details, Cooper's touch is so light that the spontaneity, that is core to her work as a whole, is preserved. From the fringes of her printmaking process, Cooper has created a collection of painterly collages that contribute something new to this versatile and immediate medium.

Sarah Lea is a curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, where she recently curated *Joseph Cornell: Wanderlust* (2015) and *Klimt/Schiele* (2018-19).

Collages

“In thinking about a body of work for Sims Reed Gallery, bearing in mind that it is an established print gallery, I was keen to use a low-tech, print-based approach, linking these collages to print and drawing, a little removed from the meticulous way that I work towards editions. It allowed me a little bit more movement and playfulness, which I find liberating and expressive. I chose not to use a print studio, rather preferring to make the work in the more intimate space of my painting studio. It feels like exploring printmaking on the edges or the margins of a subject. I also introduced a monoprinting element – a new feature to the collages.”



Short Stories, Safekeeping
Collage with screenprint, linocut, monoprint, ink and watercolour, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
56.5 x 76 cm



Fable, Centre
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Fable, Roots
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Glory
Collage with linocut, monoprint, watercolour, ink and pencil, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm

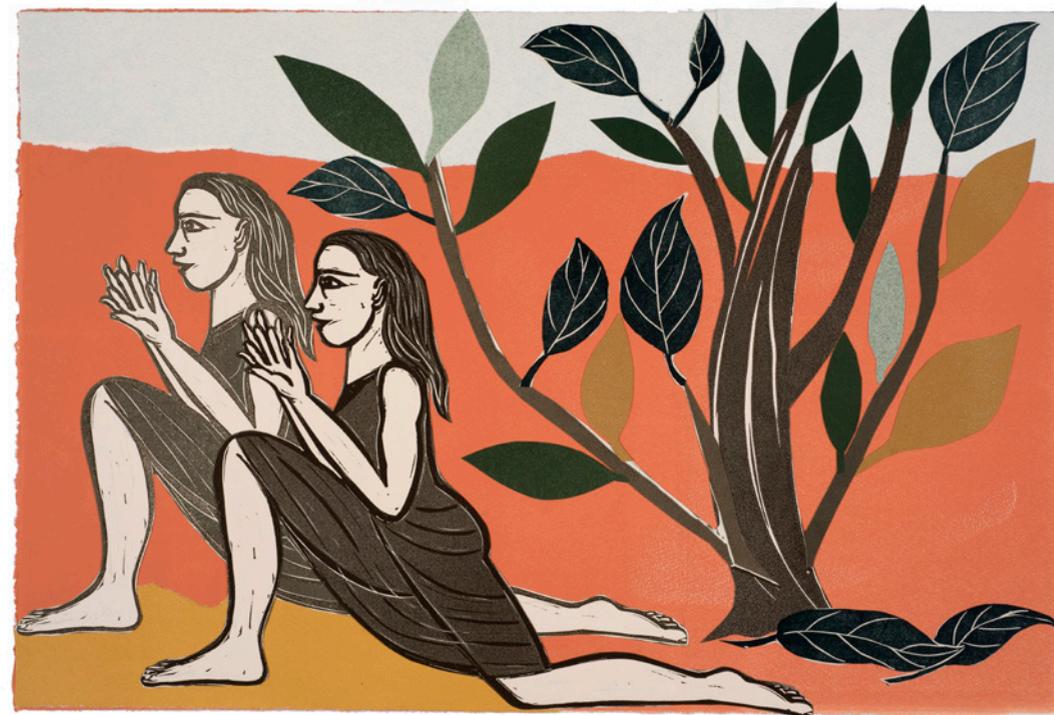


Fable, Extend
Collage with linocut, monoprint and inkwash, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



‘I’m always inspired by the female body and many of these new collages are closely linked to my experience of drawing at the English National Ballet during 2016-17.’

Short Stories, Duet
Collage with screenprint, linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
57 x 76 cm



Fable, Duet
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56.5 cm



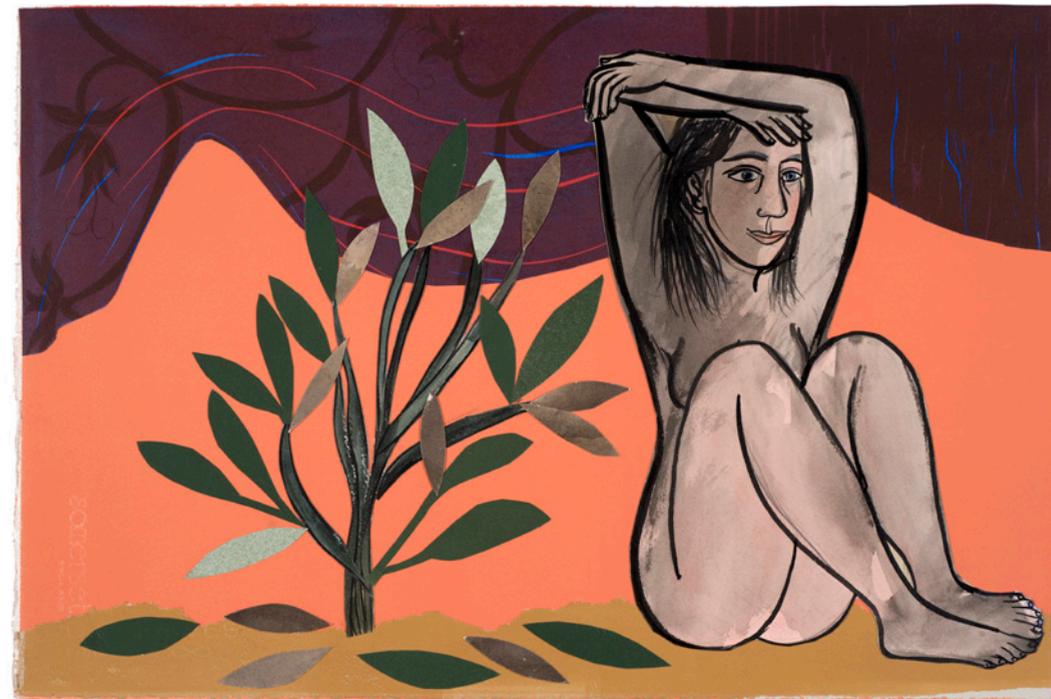
Fable, Source
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



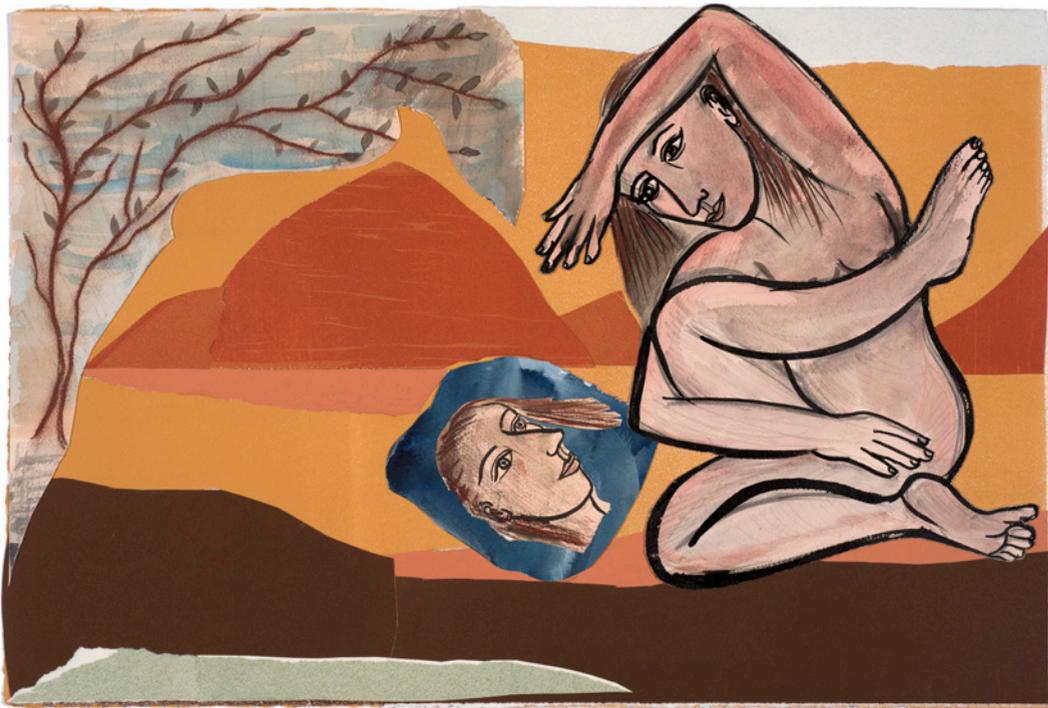
Fable, Compose
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Short Stories, Footsteps
Collage with screenprint, linocut, monoprint and watercolour, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
56,5 x 76 cm



Source
Collage with linocut, monoprint, ink and watercolour, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Golden Hour
Collage with linocut, monoprint, ink, watercolour and pastel, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



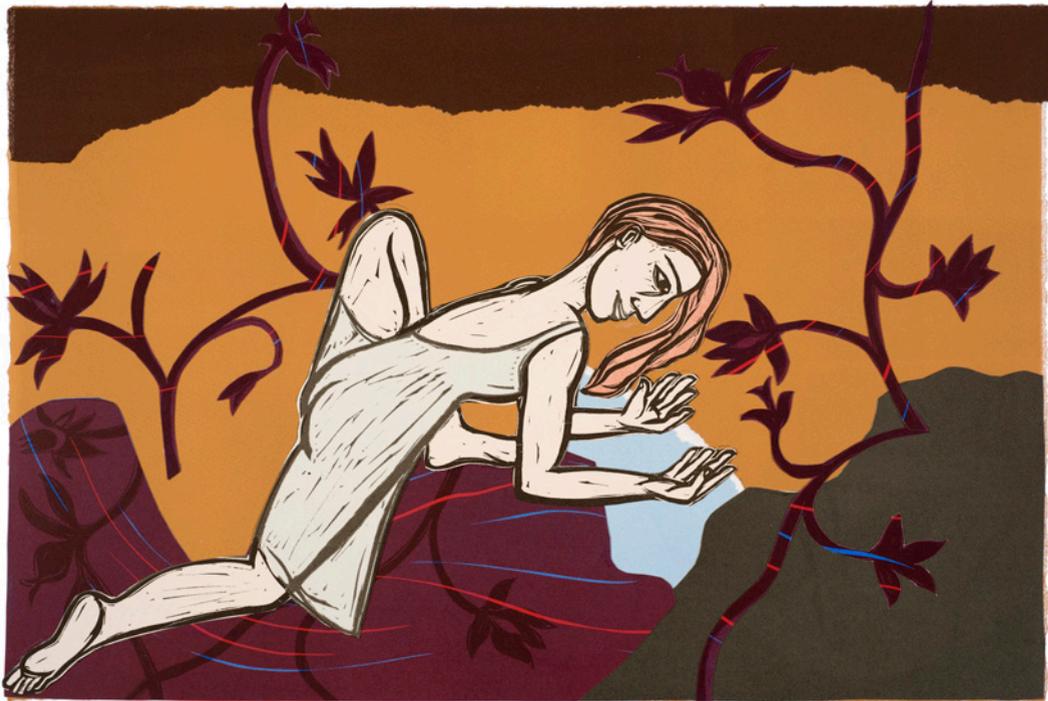
Myth
Collage with monoprint, ink, watercolour and pastel, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Fable, Dawn
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Listener
Collage with screenprint, linocut, monoprint, ink and watercolour, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
56 x 76 cm



Fable, Release
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



Fable, Curve
Collage with linocut and monoprint, 2018.
Signed in pencil.
38 x 56,5 cm



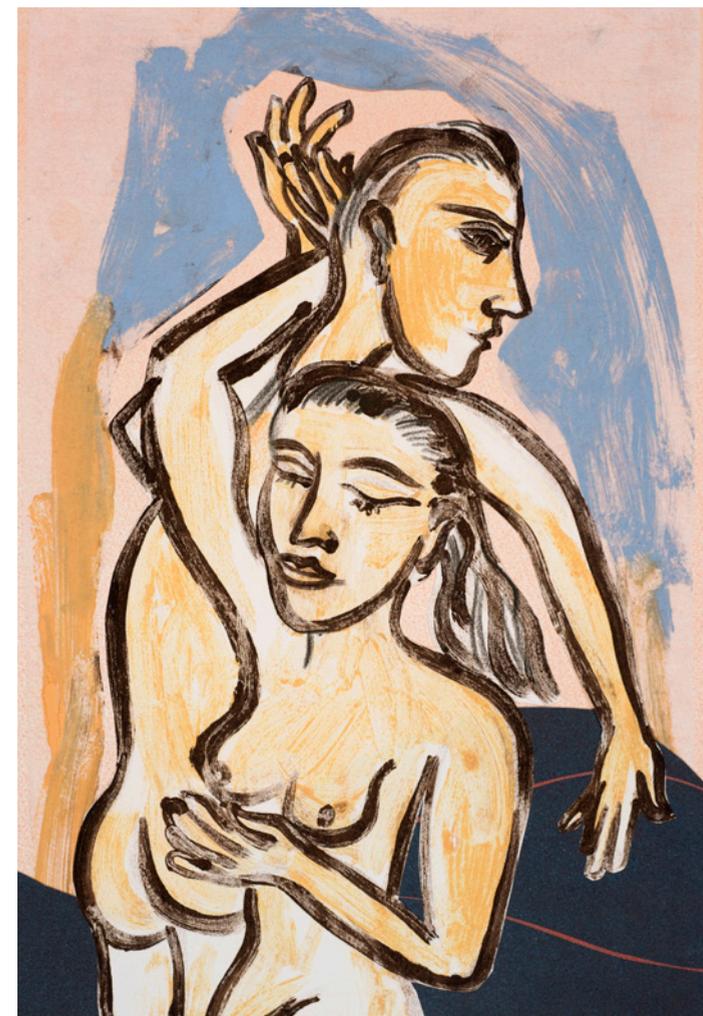
Monoprints

'In the monoprints, I was keen to make them as intimate and low tech as possible. As in much of my printmaking, hand printing seemed to be the right approach. This also allowed me to work on them in my home studio. Monoprinting offers me the spontaneity and the immediacy I find in drawing.'

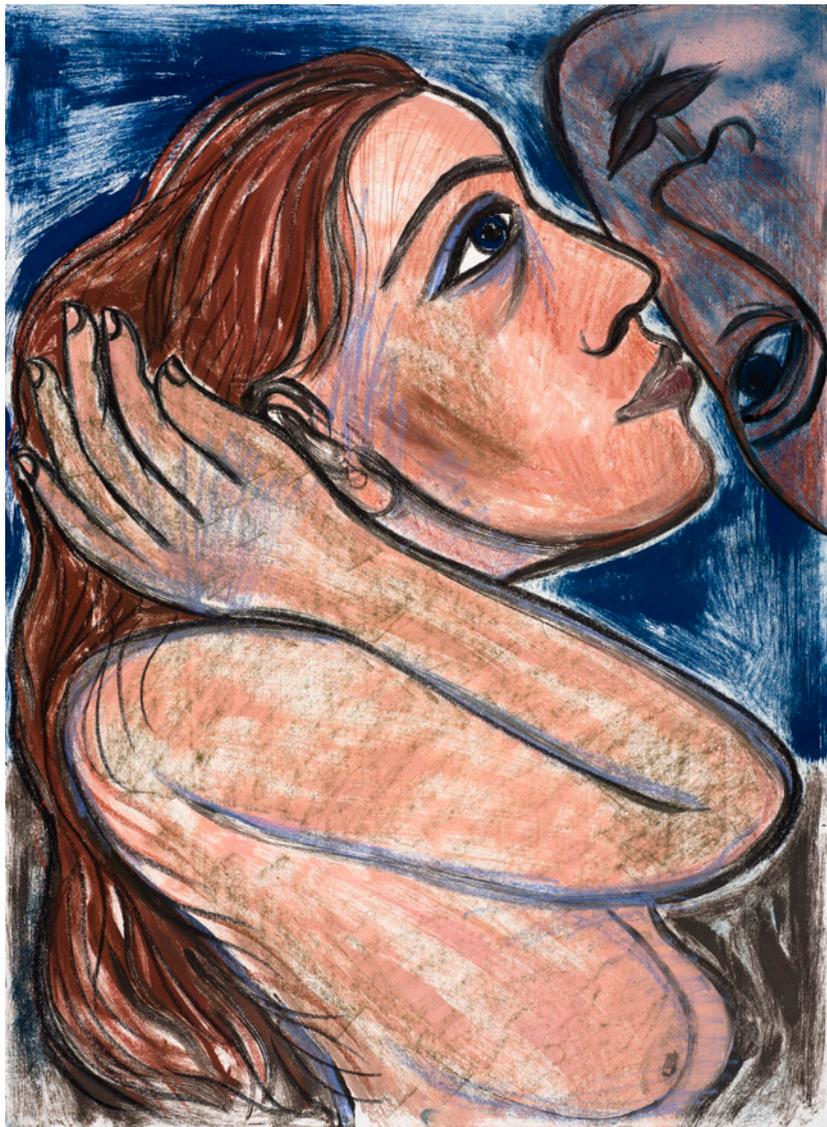
Short Stories, Stand
Collage with screenprint, linocut and monoprint, 2018 .
Signed in pencil.
56.5 x 76 cm



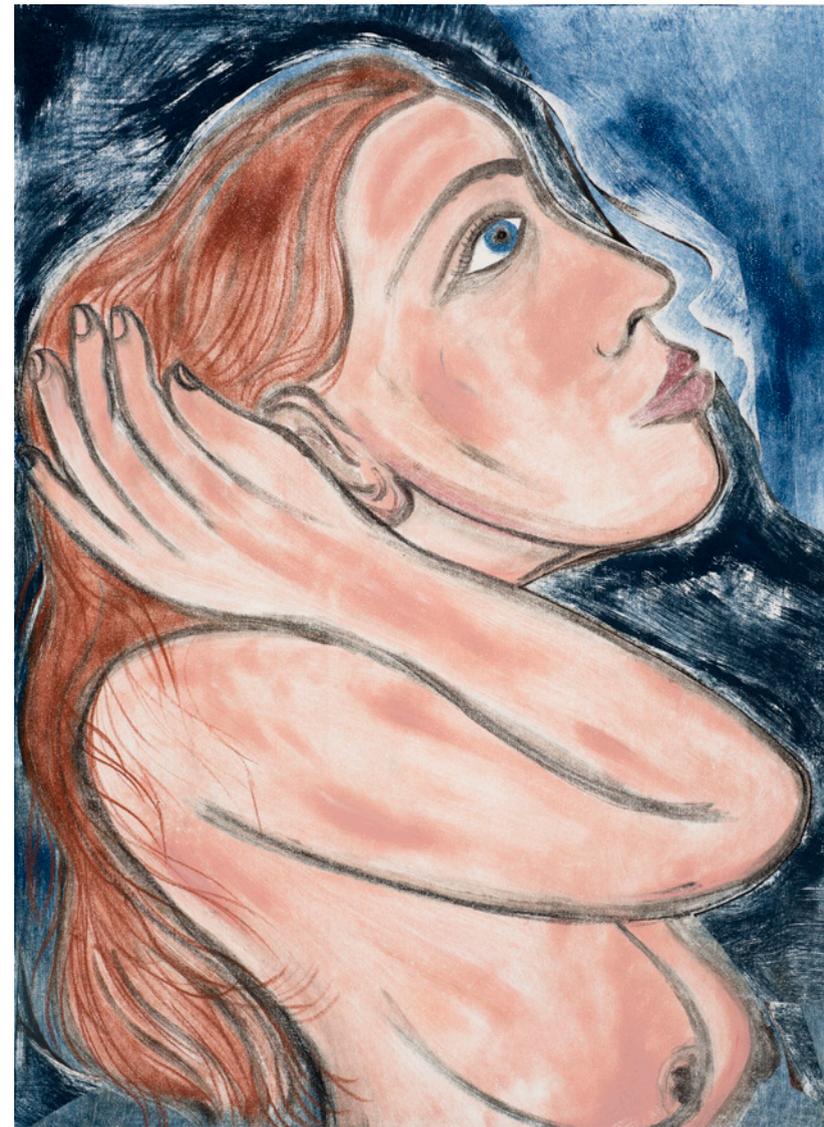
New Chapter 1
Monoprint with collage, 2019.
Signed in pencil.
43 x 30 cm



New Chapter 2
Monoprint with collage, 2019.
Signed in pencil.
43 x 30 cm



Echoes, Proposal
Monoprint with collage and pastel, 2019.
Signed in pencil.
61 x 46 cm



Echoes
Monoprint with collage, 2019.
Signed in pencil.
61 x 46 cm



Red Sky
Monoprint with collage, 2019.
Signed in pencil.
45 x 32 cm



Daybreak
Monoprint with collage, 2019.
Signed in pencil.
45 x 32 cm

Biography

Eileen Cooper (b. 1953) (OBE, RA) was born in Glossop, in the Derbyshire Peak District. She studied at Goldsmiths College from 1971–1974 being in the cohort of students who were selected by Jon Thompson. Senior members of staff at that time included Bert Irvin RA, Basil Beattie RA and Michael Craig Martin RA. She went on to study Painting at the Royal College of Art under Peter de Francia, graduating in 1977 and soon began to exhibit her work. During the 1980s she became a major figure, well known and regarded for her strong and passionate figuration. Cooper has always taught part time in numerous institutions including St Martins, Royal College of Art and the Royal Academy Schools. She became a Royal Academician in 2001 and served as Keeper of the Royal Academy of Arts between 2010 and 2017, making her the first woman in the history of the Academy to do so. She curated and coordinated the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 2017.

Recent exhibitions include *Till the Morning Comes*, The Fine Art Society, London (2017) and *Under the Same Moon*, Letitia Gallery, Beirut (2018).

Her work is in collections including the British Museum, the Royal Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Arts Council of Great Britain.



Published by Sims Reed Gallery February 2019

43a Duke Street St James's London SW1Y 6DD

+44 (0)20 7930 5111

gallery@simsreed.com

www.gallery.simsreed.com

Introductory text by Sarah Lea, Curator at the
Royal Academy of Arts, London

Designed by Plakat (plakat.co.uk)

Type set in Portrait by Berton Hasebe

Text pages printed on Galerie Art Satin, Cover on Colorset

Printed and bound in London by Dayfold Print

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