

Eileen Cooper: Ambivalence and Desire

14 July - 16 September 2023



STAGES (1979)
EILEEN COOPER

This summer, a new exhibition of unseen drawings by Eileen Cooper RA, spanning the years 1977 to 1983, will go on display at Huxley-Parlour, London. As well as giving an insight into Cooper's early practice, this exhibition contextualises her work as fundamentally linked to the radical feminist politics of that era and highlights her as a bold, uncompromising voice of the time.

In these 22 works on paper, unseen until now, Cooper presents the fraught energy of this period in history, including the fight for sexual and political freedom. The drawings chart a formative six years for the artist, between graduation from the RCA and the birth of her first child. Cooper's drawings from this period chronicle an intense investigation of personal identity and sexuality, and also represent experimentation with process, material and form.

These works come from a time when many of Cooper's female contemporaries were eschewing drawing and painting in favour of performance and conceptual practices. Although many of the works are abstracted, the subject matter remains rooted in the female form. The works are highly personal and highly charged. Cooper states that they 'laid the groundwork' for the work she is known for today.

Taking inspiration from Shunga as well as Indian miniatures, the drawings focus on the female body, and the way it takes up, and moves through, space. As Linsey Young, Curator of British Contemporary Art at Tate Britain, has noted, the female bodies in Cooper's early work 'layer forms that could be a

multitude of bodies or one repeated and intertwined - they become emblems for the different ways in which a woman might understand her place in the world'. In addition, the recurring motif of the mirror in these works manifests in a material, emotional and sexual sense the politically radical act of female self-discovery.

This important group of works on paper are a testament to a career dedicated to exploring the complexities of female identity and the exhibition seeks to reclaim its radical potential. Throughout her career, Cooper's work has drawn on themes that have long been disregarded as 'domestic', those of motherhood and the female experience of home and work, that are now understood to be a vital, and previously overlooked, aspect of contemporary life. The drawings demonstrate Cooper as a fearless practitioner, who has mined discomfiting and personal territory since the beginning.

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HUXLEY-PARLOUR, 3-5 Swallow Street, London W1B 4BE

Opening, Friday 14 July, 6-8pm

Opening Hours Monday to Friday, 10:00am - 5:30pm

Saturdays 1:30 - 5:30pm

Entry is free

More information can be found online at www.huxleyparlour.com