

Cecile Elstein: *The Sisyphus Suite*

1979-80, Screenprints

The Sisyphus Suite is a series of 8 screenprints made between 1979-80 by Cecile Elstein in response to the 1942 philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus (1913 - 1960).

In the Greek legend, Sisyphus is condemned for all eternity and ordered to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down again. Camus borrowed from the myth to explore themes of individual struggle and the search for meaning in life.

Made during a period of upheaval, finally settling in Manchester after relocating several times, Elstein began work on *The Sisyphus Suite* as a means to engage in the creative process during this time of transition.

At the time of making the work, Elstein wrote:

“I found the brilliant explanation of the *Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus absolutely in tune with the work I was contemplating. Sisyphus loves only the joy in life and rejects the thunderbolts of war, therefore, he is snatched to hell and held in its depth. However he takes with him his passion for life. It is this which releases the energy and motivates the effort needed for his return; where he finds both joy and tragedy. By his decision to accept both he receives the benediction.

Subjective reality of a moment in time is objectively defined - objectivity (in this case) does not rise from perceiving the external world of objects, but from a certainty and understanding of a subjective experience. It is the clarity of this experience which forms the structure of the ‘art object’ which is then in the world of things. Experience is depicted. Clarity arises from the knowledge of that moment when a relationship with something other than that which might be perceived in the outer world is realised, the moment when the inner world might manifest itself through the medium of ink and paper.”

The Sisyphus Suite was gifted to the Collection from Cecile Elstein Studio Ltd in 2023.

Cecile Elstein: *The Sisyphus Suite*

About the Artist

Cecile Elstein is a printmaker, sculptor, and environmental artist based in Didsbury, South Manchester. Born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1938, Elstein relocated to the UK in 1961 with her young family, moving from London to Southampton, before settling in Manchester in 1977.

From 1965 she studied ceramics under the surrealist painter-potter Catherine Yarrow, going on to study sculpture at the West Surrey College of Art and Design. Sculpture forms a core pillar of her work, with landscape, environment, and accessible design influencing and informing her wider practice.

In the 1980s, Elstein worked at the Manchester Print Workshop with the Master Printer Kip Gresham. The Workshop was based at the University of Salford until 1985. A number of her prints made at the time were acquired into the University Art Collection, along with some of the Workshop members including Kip Gresham, Alan Whitehead and Richard Riley.

Enriching her interest in landscape and environment as both a subject and medium for her practice, she achieved her MA in Art as Environment at Manchester Metropolitan University in 1996.

Elstein's work emerges from a need to adapt, repair and celebrate. Her practice merges her deeply personal experiences with the universal, exploring the essence of why artists produce work. Across mediums, she creates as an instinctive act of capturing and documenting. These moments are revisited in new contexts and from new perspectives. Elstein is represented in public and private collections across the UK and internationally.



Cecile Elstein in her studio. Courtesy the artist.

About the University of Salford Art Collection

The University of Salford Art Collection exists for the benefit of students, staff and public. Works are displayed across campus, at the New Adelphi Exhibition Gallery, with key partner venues, and are made available for UK and international loan. Founded around 1968 and now including over 900 works of modern and contemporary art, the collection continues to grow through an ambitious 'commission to collect' model and with industry partners. Key collecting strands include About the Digital, From the North, and Chinese Contemporary Art, and key themes and approaches include artist development, diversity and inclusion, and sustainability & environmental issues.

As well as exhibitions and commissions, the Collection offers talks and events, professional development opportunities, residencies and more, including cross-discipline and cross-School collaborations.