

CELIA COOK
CLAN
CONCRETE





CLAN CONCRETE, 2018

A series of 30 unique woodcuts
by Celia Cook

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Celia Cook is not a risk taker by nature, she tells me, but “I don’t want to play it safe with my work”, rather, she has resolved to create a singular and very disciplined oeuvre. Throughout her artistic career she has been deeply invested in the practice of creating meticulous paintings, and latterly prints, where she “...can create something that I have not seen before. There is no story to tell here, no literal meaning”. Her work is the pure pursuit and demonstration of an all consuming love and deference for paint, and what she calls “visual riddles”.

Her process is intense, disciplined and perfectionist. The placement of a mark, from the first to the last, is crucial each time it is made. It is a little like making “order from nothing” she states. The first mark is a deliberate statement, a way of creating the kernel, from which she can then work and add what is to follow. The work is “exactly crafted, each line hand drawn, the process visible - nothing is hidden”. Her aim is to create an illusion of the tangible - bulges, dips, edges, corners, sides and tops suggest the promise of something concrete which, on closer inspection, dissolves in front of you like a mirage.

She comments that she wants the work “...to look fast and keep a sense of movement but I am very slow when I create. I believe in slow”. It is a long inquiry that calls for will power, capacity to keep alert, to not give up and to be sensitive to the demands and responsive nature of the task. Setting out without a plan, an idea or story, the possibilities are endless but also “... it’s a process wrought with failure and it is not always wholly pleasurable - I have to open up my shoulders, take it on seriously, be ambitious”. There is no grand gesture, no system and no rules. It is a difficult, obsessive practice but it allows her to keep engaged and she says, “The time and care invested makes it more likely that something unexpected will happen, for the work to give me something.

Cook studied fine art at the Royal College of Art, London. Seeking knowledge and aiming for understanding, Cook is “...in dialogue with art all the time”. She refers to her early discovery of cubist painter Juan Gris. “I liked trying to work out what was going on, the process of making something appear three-dimensional whilst simultaneously having flatness, a respect for edge”. She cites too, the Orphists - Kupka and Sonia Delaunay and the female Russian Constructivists for example Popova and Goncharova plus contemporaries such as Elizabeth Murray’s work from the 70’s and 80’s, Tomma Abts winner of the 2006 Turner prize and her great admiration for sculptor Richard Deacon, as influences.

In recent years, Cook’s curiosity has led to a pivotal moment in her practice with a visit to the world famous atelier of the late master printmaker Jack Shirreff who worked extensively with Gillian Ayres and Howard Hodgkin. He asked me a question related to printmaking and “I had to admit I hadn’t done

any", she recalls the wry smile and his words "You and I are going to make some work together". It was to become a catalyst for a new chapter in her artistic investigation and development.

Shirreff invited her to his studio to "work out" how to make prints and adapt the technique to her practice. She was enormously challenged and invigorated by the experience. Now collaborating with Shirreff's assistant, Amy-Jane Blackhall, and inspired by a show of Gabo woodcuts, they set out to devise a method to make Cook's vision into print. "It was quite a challenge to come up with a system for making prints intuitively, with no plan," she laughs. Using a line drawing of Cook's as a template, the image was cut into 6mm ply creating pieces like a jigsaw. These formed a matrix from which Cook could precisely construct entities by fusing separate images using Chine Colle - a process "more like felting". Observation of the work reveal edges just kissing, layering of shapes, one on top of the other, positive and mirror readings of each.

Her new series *Clan Concrete*, consists of 30 unique prints. Using the matrix method she chose to vary the process by putting the blocks straight on to the paper. It felt closer to how she paints although a little more fuelled by the faster and accurate responses it demanded. Colour too was important and she noticed that the blocks, still wet with ink, would bleed, mix and blend. It has moved her towards a more diaphanous palette. The first print became the genus from which each following print would then differ yet be related, as if "from the same family". None were discarded. The practice and possibilities that printmaking offers has been enlightening and she says, "very moreish".

The finished pieces are transfixing - "visual gymnastics". Very often her work has been described as diagrammatic or geometric, yet there is also a sensuality and restlessness in the energy we can see there. The lines and shapes appear almost mercurial. They twist and turn in on themselves at the edges, billow into realms of spheres, lines, curves and spirals, wrap around each other, bouncing and re-bouncing within the canvas; constantly shape-shifting.

For Cook the job is all or nothing. The process a push and pull to find visual engagement in both paint and print. It is a time-consuming, all-consuming pursuit that finds at its heart an artist who is squaring up to the task in hand and taking an emphatic risk. She does not play it safe. She tells me that she often has the words of Samuel Beckett in her mind when creating her work "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better." She says she is "...at peace with that". Cook "knows her thing" and sticks to it with absolute dedication, exercising a cool and meticulous exploration of her craft.

Kerry Betsworth



CLAN CONCRETE 1, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 2, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 3, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 4, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 5, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 6, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 7, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 8, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 9, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 10, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 11, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 12, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 13, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 14, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 15, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 16, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 17, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



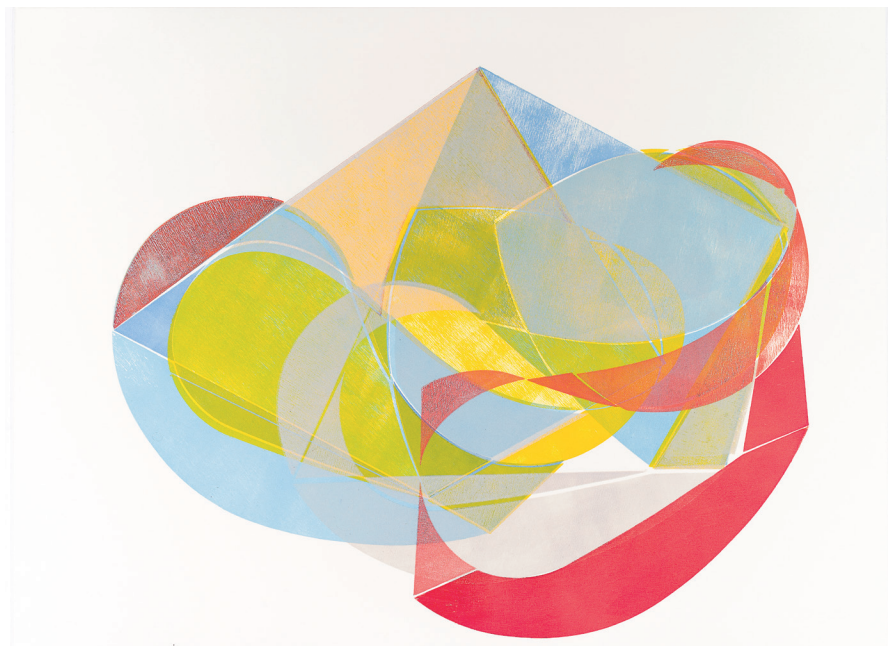
CLAN CONCRETE 18, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 19, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 20, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 21, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 22, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



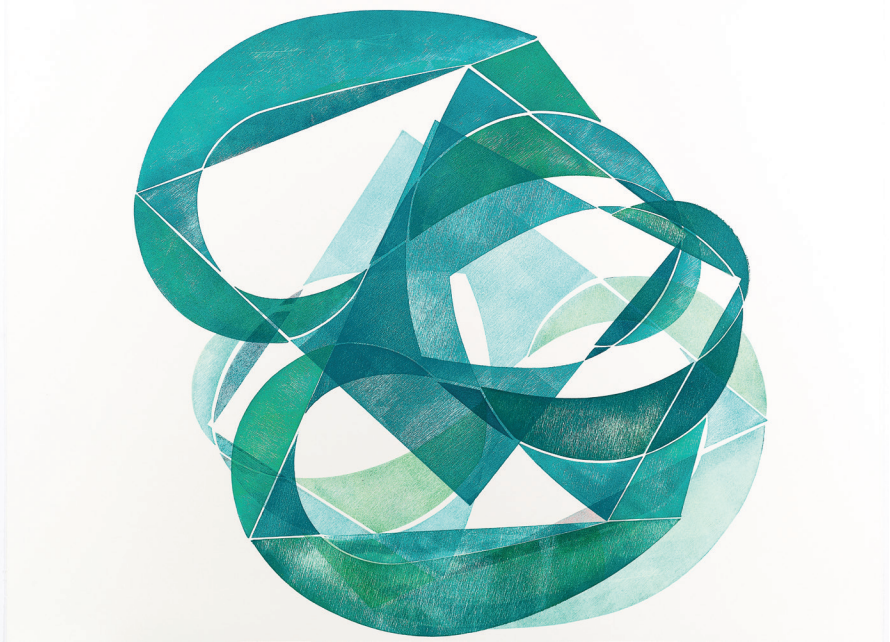
CLAN CONCRETE 23, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



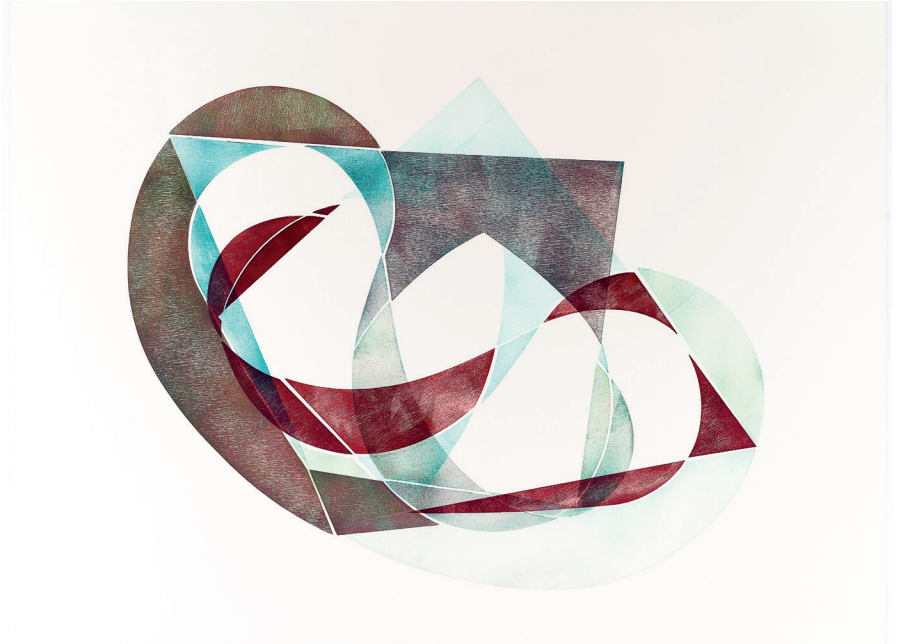
CLAN CONCRETE 24, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



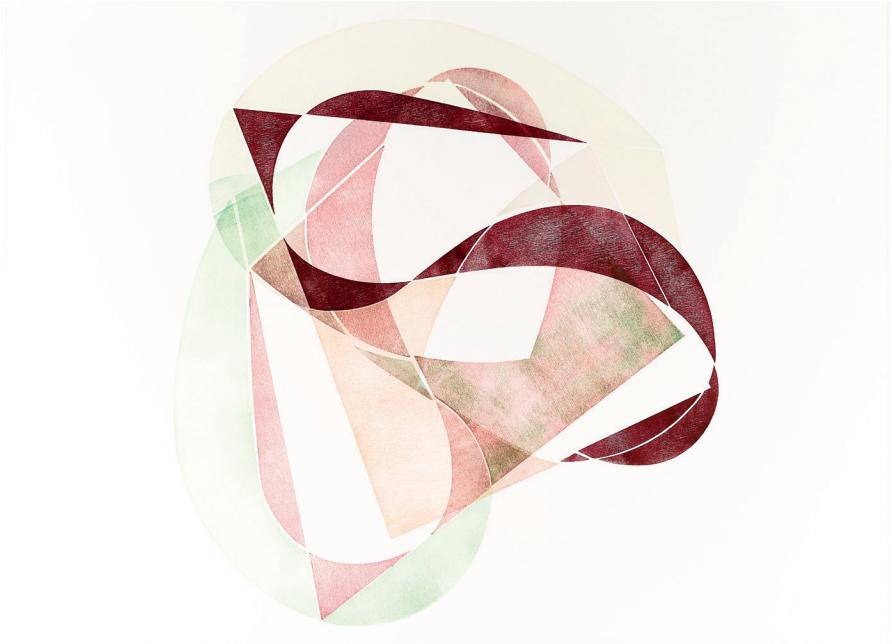
CLAN CONCRETE 25, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 26, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



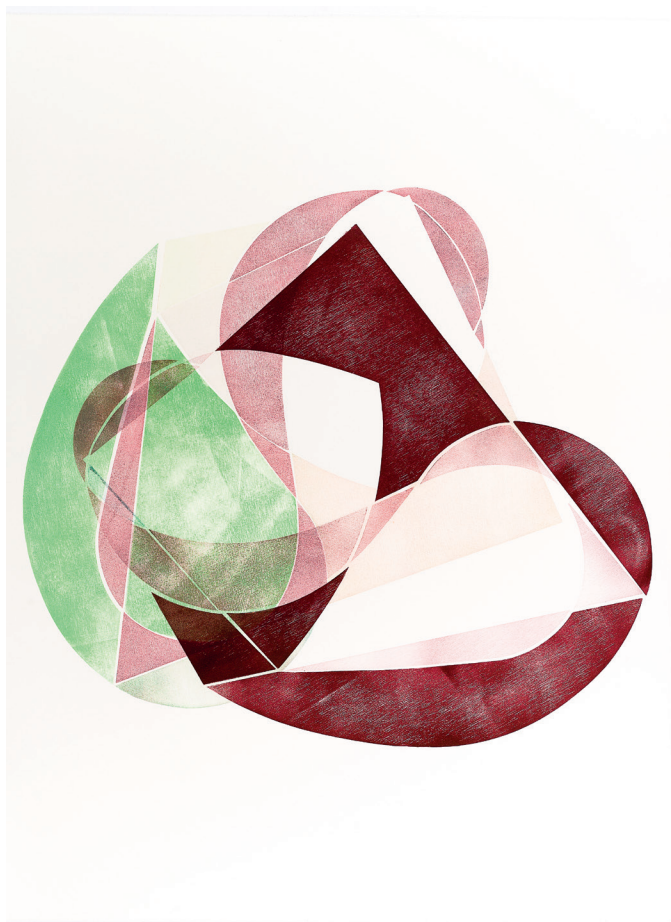
CLAN CONCRETE 27, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
56 x 76 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 28, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 29, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm



CLAN CONCRETE 30, 2018

Unique Woodcut on paper
76 x 56 cm

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