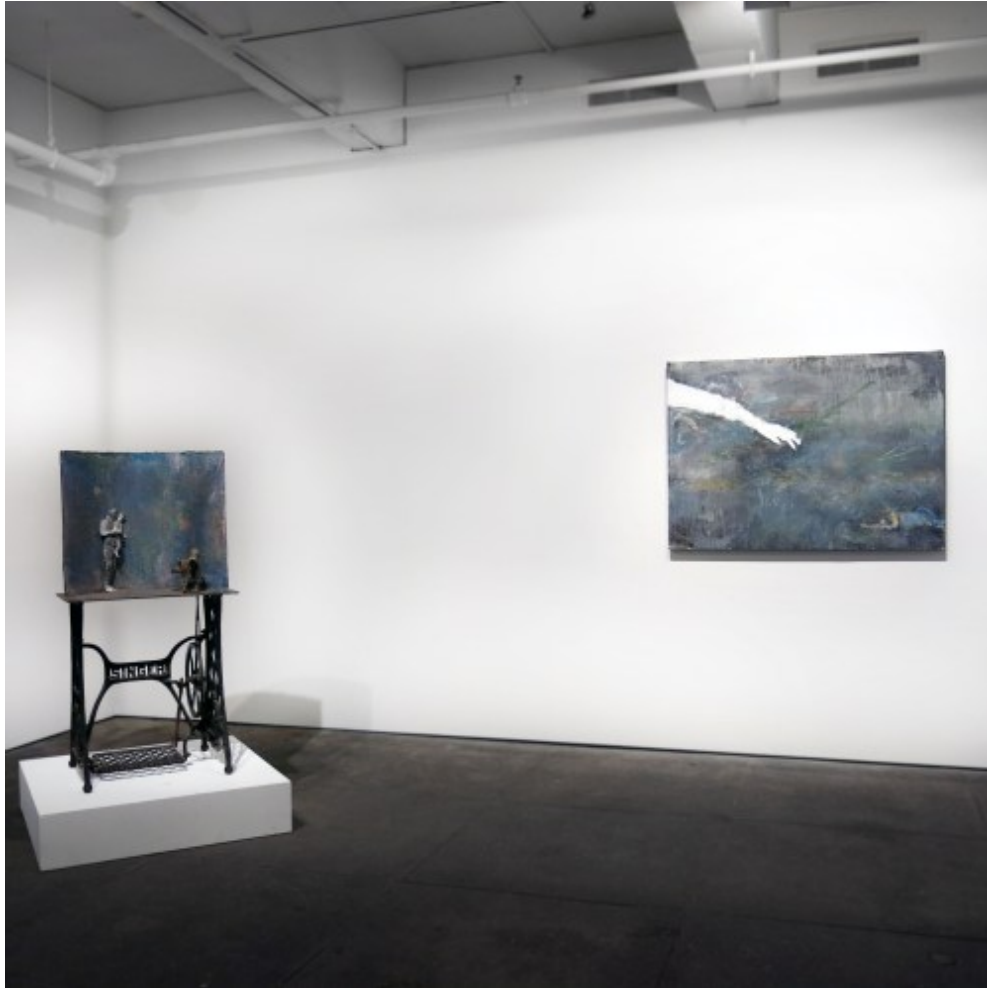


# June Leaf

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Installation Shot of June Leaf's "Recent Work" at Edward Thorp Gallery, New York.

June Leaf is an enigma in the contemporary art world. Her career spans more than six decades and crosses the boundary between Post-WWII Modernism and today's contemporary scene, yet she is still greatly under recognized. Leaf was making art that embodied feminist ideas and imagery before there was a critical discourse on feminist issues in art. However, while distinct connections can be made, Leaf is not often referenced as a key influence when mentioning her renowned successors like Kiki Smith, Daisy Youngblood, and Marlene Dumas. However, it's the pioneers like June Leaf and her Chicago contemporaries Nancy Spero and Mary Beth Edelson who paved the way for many of today's great female artists.

June Leaf began her artistic career in Chicago during the 1940s. She studied at the Institute of Design, Roosevelt University, and the New Bauhaus Institute of Design. Leaf was a part of a group of figurative socio-political artists who are known as the Chicago Imagists. The Imagists were the mid-west incarnation of post-WWII American Figurative Expressionism, influencing generations of Chicago painters including the **Hairy Who**. This faction of artists, which was loosely formed in the late 1940s will be the subject of a **major exhibition** at the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago next year.



*Rose Land*, c. 1970s, oil on canvas, 39 x 55 in.

Leaf moved to New York City in the 1960s and for a short period during the early 1970s she exhibited with the Rhino Horn group, many of whom she knew from Chicago. Leaf gave the Rhino Horn Group a powerful voice with regards to issues of gender and identity. Many of her paintings from this era like *Rose Land* depicted cartoonish scenes of domesticity. Today she and her husband, the photographer Robert Frank, spend their time between the remote environment of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and the bustling New York City metropolis.

Leaf is represented by **Edward Thorp Gallery** in New York. The gallery has mounted a current exhibition of Leaf's recent work, aptly titled *Recent Work*. Her latest works include sculpture, painting, drawing, and mixed media that combines all three of those mediums. Leaf has

remained consistent in her use of narrative figuration, which is distinct and personal to her and her surroundings. Her paintings and sculptures, whether large or small, have poignant and grand psychological affects. Leaf draws on classical mythology, fantasy, ancient art, gender issues, and existentialist philosophy. Her work often portrays the figure under “crisis.” This existential crisis is universal. Leaf creates subtle narratives about the human condition, which results in an impactful emotional reaction on our end. These works speak to our individual and collective psyche, which is a rare occurrence in contemporary art. We don’t get bombarded with heavy narrative or allegorical meaning. The glimpses into each of her vignettes are incredibly revealing without being literal or conceptual.



*Woman Drawing Man*, 2014, tin, wire and acrylic, 26h x 19w x 14d in. Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery

The show at Edward Thorp Gallery is full of stirring imagery. The artist’s hand is clearly visible in these expressive objects. There is a strong theme of creation/human origin seen in

works such as *Woman Drawing Man* (2014), *Artist's Hand* (2015), and *Turning Pages* (2012-2015).



*Studies*, 2015, 4 mixed media on paper, 9.5h x 12w in. Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery

Studies give us a uniquely personal glimpse into the mind of an artist in the midst of their creative process. In this exhibition there are four studies on paper that combine imagery and text in a way that feels like a personal diary. In four mixed media studies, Leaf exposes the moment of realization that form becomes a figure. She embarks on a drawing from within her subconscious letting the composition unfold and reveal its true intent.

In June Leaf's world, we are simultaneously in flux and stagnation within a vast existential landscape. There is both strength and futility in these images. Where do the stairs lead to in *Woman Carrying Child up the Stairs* (2011), if anywhere at all?



*Woman Carrying Child Up the Stairs*, 2011, acrylic on paper on tinfoil, 13h x 11w in.

The amazing part about these works is the way they interact with the viewer. Standing before these images with their earthy tones and organic form will envelop your senses, and lead your mind on a journey.

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June Leaf *Recent Work* is on view through June 6th, 2015 at Edward Thorp Gallery, 210 Eleventh Avenue, 6th Fl, New York, New York 10001