

June Leaf



IT'S FAIR TO say that June Leaf hasn't gotten the recognition she deserves, especially compared to Louise Bourgeois, the art world's officially designated feminist artist *avant la lettre*. Art history, of course, is written with a male bias, limiting the number of woman artists allowed in the narrative, so this pocket survey of Leaf's sculptures and works on paper seems all the more overdue.

Born in 1929, Leaf got her start in Chicago, where exposure to the 1950s group *Monster Roster* made an impression. Leaf assimilated its synthesis of postwar existentialism, Symbolism and Expressionism, bringing it with her to New York in 1960, just as the



nascent Pop Art scene would make her work seem retrograde.

Nevertheless, Leaf stuck to her guns. The advent of '70s Feminist Art brought her some recognition, but her darkly whimsical, intimately personal approach wasn't well suited to social messaging.

The show—installed to suggest a studio centered around

a work table scattered with small quixotic objects that look like hand-cranked toys and a single canvas propped on an easel—bears this out. Love, sex, family, death, feeling—these are the themes filtered through her decidedly female yet universal sensibility. Humane and humanistic, Leaf's work evokes qualities too often missing in contemporary art discourse. ■ *Howard Halle*

→ Whitney Museum of American Art, through July 17