

For Immediate Release

NYU's Grey Art Museum Presents
June Leaf: Shooting from the Heart, September 9–December 13

The exhibition features more than 120 drawings, paintings, and sculptures representing 75 years of work by the idiosyncratic artist



June Leaf, *Threading the Story Through the Eye of a Needle* (detail), c. 1974.
Acrylic, ink, and graphite on paper, 18 3/4 x 24 in. Estate of June Leaf. Courtesy
Hyphen, New York © Estate of June Leaf. Photo: Alice Attie

(NEW YORK, NY, July 16, 2025)—NYU's Grey Art Museum hosts the traveling exhibition, *June Leaf: Shooting from the Heart*, the first comprehensive retrospective of the artist June Leaf (1929–2024) in more than thirty years. Running from September 3 through December 13, 2025, at the Grey Art Museum at 18 Cooper Square, the exhibition explores the legacy of this influential artist, who had studios in New York City and Nova Scotia.

The exhibition spans Leaf's artistic career, which began in the late 1940s and continued until her death in 2024. An artist, storyteller, dancer, and engineer, Leaf worked across genres, predominantly creating figurative paintings, drawings, and multimedia kinetic sculptures that the *New York Times* has described as "idiosyncratic and intuitive," blending "expressionism and primitivism . . . with a childlike sense of play."

The sweeping exhibition, which first opened at the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy in March of this year, includes drawings, paintings, collages, and metal, wire, and wood sculptures. These works are arranged thematically, highlighting the artist's sustained engagement with such motifs and themes as the human drama, theater, dance, performance,

motion, gender, and interpersonal relationships. Many of the works have not been shown since 1991, when they were part of a Washington Project for the Arts survey hosted by the Addison, where Leaf was an artist-in-residence.

Organized by the Addison Gallery and the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, with the collaboration of the artist, the exhibition is curated by the Addison's Allison Kemmerer, Mary Stripp and R. Crosby Kemper Director, and Gordon Wilkins, Robert M. Walker Curator of American Art; and the Allen Memorial's Sam Adams, Ellen Johnson '33 Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art.

The Grey Art Museum is honored to celebrate the work of an acclaimed artist and longtime neighbor, says Michèle Wong, Interim Director. "This exhibition is a unique opportunity to showcase the inventive creations of a singular artist who maintained several studios in Lower Manhattan for more than five decades," Wong says. "With a bold and adventurous spirit, Leaf explored essential aspects of human existence. This show offers a truly unparalleled look at her diverse practice and is a powerful testament to her contributions to contemporary American art."

Born in Chicago, Leaf studied dance before turning to visual art at the New Bauhaus (now the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago). After two influential stints in Paris, she settled in New York City, where her first solo exhibition *Street Dreams* opened in 1968 at Allan Frumkin Gallery. Shortly thereafter, she began spending significant time in the remote town of Mabou on the island of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, Canada. Overlooking the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the views from her home and studio were influential—and were represented in many of her paintings and drawings.

For more than seven decades, Leaf created a recurring cast of characters, compositions, and stories that blended outside influences with symbols from her own rich self-mythology. Her figures wobble, jostle, climb, and spin as they engage in a timeless struggle for agency and power within metaphysical spaces that evoke seedy bars, dollhouses, and theatrical stages. As Leaf herself once articulated, her lifelong artistic drive stemmed from an intrinsic force: "I seem to have some kind of high-tension spring inside of me, coiled tightly. Every day, like on a trampoline, I just shoot off. I get tired jumping on that spring, I go to bed. The next morning the tightly coiled spring just Powww . . . sends me up again. I must have done something right in my long life as an artist because the wind is behind me." (*June Leaf: A Survey of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper, 1948–1991*, Washington Project for the Arts, 1991).



June Leaf, *Two Women on a Jack* (detail), 2001. Metal, tin, wire, wood, and ratcheting jack components, 94 1/2 x 34 1/2 x 13 1/2 in. Elyse and Lawrence Benenson Collection. Courtesy Estate of June Leaf and Ortuzar, New York © Estate of June Leaf. Photo: Dario Lasagni



June Leaf, *The Vermeer Box* (detail), 1966. Mirrors, collage, wood, glass, metal, and tin, 25 1/4 x 24 x 25 1/4 in. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago. Gift of Joel Press © Estate of June Leaf

Among the pieces on view at the Grey is *The Vermeer Box* (1966), which, while inspired by her childhood experience with theme-park arcades and amusements at Chicago's Navy Pier, also speaks to the complex and theatrical dynamics of power and violence that structure the relationships between men and women. One of many works depicting couples and lovers caught in precarious balancing acts, *Two Women on a Jack* (2001), also demonstrates Leaf's ongoing interest in power dynamics and opposing forces. Created in her Bleecker Street studio, *Untitled (Theater)* (2010–11) is among several works by Leaf that use treadle-style sewing machines paired with painted scenes or tin cut-out figures to make kinetic theaters. These intricate objects were originally designed to be animated and "worked," ideally by the artist herself or a designated individual, bringing her miniature worlds to life.

Leaf's work is part of many private and public collections, including the Addison Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Yale University Art Gallery. Leaf received a National Endowment for the Arts grant and a Fulbright award, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2024.

Tour

June Leaf was on view at the Addison Gallery of American Art from March 31 through July 31, 2025. After its presentation at the Grey, it will open at the Allen Memorial Art Museum on January 27, 2026, and remain on view through May 24, 2026.

Publication

June Leaf: Shooting from the Heart is accompanied by a 208-page publication that provides a revelatory look at the singular artist, best known for her deeply personal and poetic, visceral, and often allegorical works. Co-published by the organizing museums and Rizzoli Electa, it features new essays by curators Sam Adams, Allison Kemmerer, and Gordon Wilkins, with contributions from the artist's peers, Joan Jonas and Kara Walker. The volume will be available for purchase at the Grey Art Museum bookstore, \$60 retail, and [online](#).

About the Artist

June Leaf (b. 1929, Chicago; d. 2024, New York) lived and worked between New York City and Mabou, Cape Breton Island, Nova



Cover of *June Leaf: Shooting from the Heart*. Courtesy Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and Rizzoli Electa, New York

Scotia. Leaf's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including solo presentations at the Inverness County Centre for the Arts, Nova Scotia, Canada (2022); Ortuzar Projects, New York (2022); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2004); Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia (2001); Freedman Gallery at Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania (1997); Chicago Cultural Center (1995); Addison Gallery of American Art (1991); College of Cape Breton, Sydney, Nova Scotia (1985); North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks (1983); and a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1978), among others. The artist's work is held in collections including, in addition to the Addison, Art Institute of Chicago; DePaul Art Museum; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Canada; Smithsonian American Art Museum; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; University of Southern Illinois at Carbondale; Whitney Museum of American Art; and Yale University Art Gallery. Leaf received numerous prestigious awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts grant (1989), a Fulbright grant (1958), as well as honorary degrees from DePaul University and Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. In 2024 Leaf was elected as a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Sponsorship

June Leaf: Shooting from the Heart is co-organized by the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio. Major support for this project has been provided by the Estate of June Leaf with additional funding provided by The June Leaf and Robert Frank Foundation (formerly the Andrea Frank Foundation), John and Sally Van Doren (PA 1980), and the Allen Memorial Art Museum's John H. '29 and Marjorie Fox '29 Wieland Current-Use AMAM Support Fund.

The presentation at the Grey Art Museum is made possible in part by generous support from the Charina Endowment Fund; the Ann B. Ritt Charitable Foundation; an anonymous donor; Arthur Cohen and the Terra Foundation for American Art; Susan Harris; Carol Lutfy and Henk-Jan Brinkman; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Grey Art Museum

Over the last five decades, the Grey Art Museum at New York University has organized exhibitions that have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the museum hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York. In conjunction with its exhibitions, the Grey produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide and sponsors public programs, including lectures, symposia, panel discussions, and films.

General Information

Grey Art Museum, New York University
18 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003

(Mailing address: 20 Cooper Square, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003)

Tel: 212-998-6780, Fax: 212-995-4024

E-mail: greyartmuseum@nyu.edu Website: greyartmuseum.nyu.edu

Hours

Tuesday: 11 am–6 pm

Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Thursday: 11 am–6 pm

Friday: 11 am–6 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

Admission

Suggested donation: \$5; free of charge to NYU students, faculty, and staff

Press Contact

Sofeia Eddy | sofeia.eddy@nyu.edu | 212-998-6782