

June Leaf  
The Cape Breton Works, 1970-1990:  
“A Place/From Away” – “The Place/From Here”

Judith Hayes

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Art History

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## Abstract

June Leaf  
The Cape Breton Works, 1970-1990:  
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Judith Hayes

This thesis addresses selected “Cape Breton” works by the American artist June Leaf within the context of identity, and contemporary theories of landscape imagery. As a person “from away,” Leaf’s works from 1970 to 1990 speak of her displacement and relocation and of her particular relationship with the isolated community in her adopted country. The works are divided into two categories: “A Place” and “The Place.” “A Place” refers to an ambiguous landscape which acts as an allegorical site for Leaf’s biographical narrative, and “The Place” which are the works that specifically refer to the topography and geography of Cape Breton, in particular Mabou Mines, where a reference can be made to the historical and social context of its people. The content of her images through its reference to “A Place” and “The Place” have been positioned in relation to the ideas of “from away”/ “from here.”

Chapter I is a biography of Leaf’s life and an exposition of selected examples of her work before coming to Cape Breton. Chapter II is an historical overview of the island and provides a framework for the community in which Leaf lives and works. Chapter III discusses Leaf’s images within the context of a personal myth in relation to issues of identity when she settled in Mabou Mines. Chapter IV examines a group of paintings that address landscape in relation to the specific space and place of Cape Breton. The concluding chapter presents a summary of the arguments that I have brought forward and a synopsis of Leaf’s later work from 1990 to the present.

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## Introduction

June Leaf (b. 1927) is an American artist who left New York City to take up permanent residence in the coastal community of Mabou Mines, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in 1970 with her partner, photographer Robert Frank (b. 1924) (fig.1).<sup>1</sup> Since then, they have called Mabou home. Leaf embraced her new surroundings and over the last thirty-five years has produced a body of work that discloses her particular relationship with this isolated rural community in her adopted country. However, she also continues to maintain a studio on Bleecker Street in the Village where she works periodically, as part of her still requires the excitement and electricity offered by a metropolis such as New York.

The intent of this thesis is to examine selected “Cape Breton” works by Leaf from 1970 to 1990. Leaf has produced an enormous body of work since she moved to Nova Scotia; however, I have limited my study to specific works selected from the first twenty years of her life in Mabou, because they reflect her initial struggles and then her reconciliation with her Canadian surroundings. Images from this period reflect the alienation and separation of the migrant, and the reality of living between cultures. For this I have drawn on the writings of such literary theorists as Leona English, Maran Sarup, Gillian Rose, and Dan P. McAdams. At the same time, several of Leaf’s works reflect her desire to adapt to her new surroundings and establish her “sense of place.” She sees the landscape as a “lived space” and not just as an aesthetic subject to be viewed for

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Stevens writes in his review of the exhibition *Richard Avedon: Portraits* that this portrait evokes the bohemian mood of Greenwich Village in the sixties. He says she “knots her arms around her body in a kind of despairing existential hug. At the same time she conveys the spiritual warmth of an earth mother.” Mark Stevens, “The View from Here,” *New York Metro.com*  
[http://newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/arts/art/reviews/n\\_7760/](http://newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/arts/art/reviews/n_7760/)

its own intrinsic meanings. Her images reflect a society which strives to maintain a sense of community and culture amidst a history of economic exploitation. I draw on the writings of landscape theorist W.J.T. Mitchell, as well as those of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja to support my argument.

The works will be divided into two categories: “A Place” and “The Place.” “A Place” in Leaf’s work can be defined as an imaginary landscape. It is an implied place, one that is not a narrative landscape in that it is not overtly referential to a specific place; its references to Cape Breton could thus be considered as covert. It is also the place where identity is constructed and reconstructed. “The Place” in Leaf’s work is used here specifically in terms of images of Cape Breton and their more direct references to its topography and its geography. Of course, there are always some works which could move easily between these constructed and imposed boundaries; and even more important, the strength of Leaf’s work rests in the two concepts of place co-existing. However, we can create the category of “The Place” because of its importance for her as “her place” and it demonstrates how her empathy with Cape Breton is visualized in the work. It is her biography.

Within the scope of this thesis, these two categories will be examined in relation to two other phrases: “from away” and “from here.” “From away” or “comes from away” are expressions used by Nova Scotians and they bespeak the defining of community within the region. “From away” creates two communities: one perceived as legitimate, the other made up of people not born in Nova Scotia – as though they were bounders and carpetbaggers. At the same time, the content of her painting and sculpture through its reference to “A Place” and “The Place” could be positioned within the

dichotomy of the concepts of “from away”/ “from here.” This layering of the borderless concept of “A Place” with the geographical specificity of “The Place” allows Leaf’s work to cross boundaries, and to make narratives “from away” and “from here.”

I initially encountered June Leaf’s work while researching the subject of American and Canadian artists settling in Cape Breton either permanently or on a seasonal basis. Having a personal connection to Cape Breton, I was intrigued as to why so many had chosen this remote part of Canada to escape from the demands and tensions of urban living. I first saw Leaf’s work reproduced in an issue of *Border Crossings*, and felt that her landscape painting, *Mabou Mines*, 1992/95, more than any other image I had ever seen, captured the spirit and soul of the island which I call “home (fig.2).”<sup>2</sup> I was immediately drawn to her work. I soon realized that these images not only gave the viewer a sense of place, but they were also personal narratives that helped her negotiate a sense of self in an alien environment that looked upon her as an outsider – one of those people “from away.”

Leaf, at the age of 77, has had a long and serious career since the late 1940s. However, it seems that it is only in the last decade that Leaf is beginning to receive the acclaim she rightfully deserves. Christopher Youngs attributes this “to an art world which all too often confuses artifice with art, fashion with substance, and icons with ideas.”<sup>3</sup> The fact that she was a woman certainly would have been a factor in those early years; as well as that, Leaf has resisted being pigeon-holed into any one particular approach to art. After Leaf migrated to Canada in the early 70s, she continued to exhibit in galleries in New York and Chicago. In the mid 1980s she began an association with

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<sup>2</sup> “Home” for me is a rather ambiguous term because most of my life was spent in Montreal.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Youngs, *June Leaf* (Reading PA: Albright College, Freedman Galley, 1997), 3.

the Edward Thorp Gallery in New York that continues to the present. Reviews of her solo exhibitions have suggested her work to be “eccentric and fantastic.”<sup>4</sup> Although her work is eclectic in style, and she remains predominately a figurative artist who continues to maintain her expressionistic tendencies, Leaf remains on the margins of the art world establishment.

Nevertheless, Leaf has a substantial critical bibliography. In addition to exhibition reviews, Leaf’s work has been the subject of several feature-length articles: Lucy Lippard in *Art in America* in 1978, Canadian curator Susan Gibson Garvey in *Arts Atlantic* in 1989, John Yau in *Arts Magazine* in 1991 and the Canadian cultural critic Robert Enright in *Border Crossings* in 1997. A catalogue accompanying the exhibition in 1991 *June Leaf: A Survey of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper 1948-1991* organized by the Washington Project for the Arts includes essays by Philip Brookman and Lucy Lippard. The Canadian critic Christopher Youngs contributed an essay in the exhibition catalogue for the 1997 show *June Leaf* organized by Freedom Gallery, Albright College, Reading, PA that focused on works she had made during the 90s, and in many ways he captures the essence and spirit of the artist. He writes: “True, there is certainly a strong sense of self in the work of June Leaf, but rather than impose herself on a situation, she allows herself to be mediated by her surroundings.”<sup>5</sup> Petra Halkes published an essay on Leaf in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Cape Breton Modern* that was organized by Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery in 2001. As recently as 2004, Robert Enright published a text “Emphatic Beauty – The Art of June Leaf” in the catalogue that accompanied Leaf’s most recent exhibition held at the Tinguely Museum in Basel, Switzerland in the

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<sup>4</sup> “Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York: Exhibit,” *Arts Magazine* 51 (Dec. 1976): 36.

<sup>5</sup> Youngs, 7.



fall of 2004. The general consensus in the writing on Leaf is that much of her artwork, including the work in Cape Breton, is autobiographical and her paintings and sculptures are placed within this framework. Her images of the Cape Breton landscape have been referred to as “epic narratives” or “strange and ultimately inexplicable” alluding to some unknown mystifying drama.<sup>6</sup> It is my intention to demonstrate more directly how Leaf’s images disclose her relationship to Cape Breton Island, and in particular Mabou Mines. Several of the works that I have chosen to discuss have never, to my knowledge, been critically reviewed. Paintings such as *Bird and Journal*, 1971 and *Cigarette Girl*, 1977/78 are seminal works in Leaf’s production and should be included in any discussion within this context.

On a personal note, my own relationship is like, but unlike Leaf’s, relationship to Cape Breton. I have lived in Montreal for most of my life, but I was born in Cape Breton and over the years have spent much time there. My empathy with the island is at the core of my being. However, I too feel between-cultures. The major difference between us is that although Leaf has lived there for over thirty years, much longer than I have, she is still to a certain degree considered “from away.” Ironically, even though I have spent most of my life in another place, the locals still consider me as one of them – “from here.” Therefore, my position is such that this interpretation of the works will be informed by my particular relationship with the island and therefore speaks, to a certain degree, from a place from within, but also from without.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I– “The Early Years” is a biography of Leaf’s life and an exposition of selected examples of her artwork before coming to Cape Breton. I have relied on the writings of Dennis Adrian and Franz Schulz

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<sup>6</sup> Barry, Schwabsky, “R.L. Kaplan/Gregory Crane/June Leaf,” *Arts Magazine* 60 (September 1985): 37.

to explain the artistic environment in Chicago and New York in which Leaf developed as an artist. In order to see the Cape Breton works it is necessary to go back to Leaf's early days. Certainly she was a mature artist by the time she came to Cape Breton, her technical and painterly skills already established. A look back to the early works however, enables us to see the development of a personal mythology that carries through to the present.

Chapter II – “Cape Breton Island” is first an historical overview of the island. In order to discuss Leaf's images within the context of “A Place” and “The Place” knowledge of its geography/history/culture is essential. The chapter discusses the society and its culture and how economics and politics have figured into its history and its effect on more recent conditions. This study provides the framework for the community in which Leaf lives and works in the county of Inverness, on the north-western part of Cape Breton Island.

Chapter III – “A Place”/ “From Away” discusses Leaf's images within the context of a personal myth in relation to issues of identity. I draw especially on the work of Don P. McAdams who suggests that a personal myth is a special kind of story we construct to make sense of our lives. These images have been grouped under the category of “A Place.” I am also suggesting that as a type of displaced person, Leaf creates a “third space,” a space that is “in-between” where she works through the changes in her life. The concept of “third space” is used by many contemporary theorists such as Leona English and Homi Bhabha to address the notion of identity. Basing my assumptions on the writings of both of these writers, the argument will be made that Leaf's third-space is a productive space where she addresses those feelings of alienation and separation as a

result of being displaced. Also, “A Place” in Leaf’s work is an imaginary landscape – that can be best read as an allegorical site for Leaf’s own biography.

Chapter IV – “The Place”/ “From Here” examines a group of paintings discussed within the context of contemporary landscape theory that suggests that we should address landscape in relation to space and place.<sup>7</sup> The works discussed are those where the topography and geography of Cape Breton, in particular Mabou Mines, is defined and where a reference can be made to the historical and social context of the people who live there. I am suggesting that by including the Mabou coastline repeatedly in her work, she is reassuring her place within it. Not only is it possible to construct narratives “from here” but her images suggest a landscape “replete with human histories and memories.”<sup>8</sup> The concluding chapter presents both a synopsis of the arguments I have brought forward in the preceding chapters, and a brief discussion of some of Leaf’s later works from 1990 to the present, as they indicate the direction Leaf has taken within the continued narrative of “from away to “from here.”

When I first meet June Leaf at her studio in New York in April 2004 she seemed genuinely pleased to meet me; I sensed a connection. We talked about Cape Breton and when she found out that I had actually been to Mabou Mines and knew the landscape, she seemed delighted to have found a knowing viewer. She showed me several of her paintings from the seventies; in particular she wanted me to see *Blue Sculpture in a Cave*, 1976 because she believed it was this painting above all the others that spoke directly of her connection to the people of Mabou (fig.3). It is in this work, she said, where she discovered the mythology of the land. She thought I would understand what it was all

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<sup>7</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape & Power* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), viii.

<sup>8</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1977), 7.

about without referencing words. Later she invited me upstairs to their home to meet her husband Robert Frank.<sup>9</sup> The three of us chatted around the kitchen table about Mabou and North Sydney (the place of my birth), which brought more conversation as many years ago they had discovered an old second-hand store, Blue Star Traders (Bluefarb's), on Commercial Street in North Sydney that became one of their favourite spots to visit. Later that day she was to meet with a representative from the Tinguely Museum in Basel, Switzerland to talk about an exhibition that was still in the planning stages. She invited me to go along. During the subway ride we chatted; she got real enjoyment out of the fact that I had given up my initial plan to write my thesis on Robert Frank's Mabou photographs when I discovered her own paintings of Mabou. She said she always thought it was interesting that so much was made of Frank's work in Cape Breton, his attachment to the place etc., because she said if it had not been for her there is no way they would have ever settled there permanently. When we met up with the people from Switzerland, she introduced me as her friend from Cape Breton! As I took my leave from June Leaf that afternoon, I realized how fortunate I was to have had the opportunity to spend time with such a caring individual and exceptional artist. I looked forward to our next meeting.

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<sup>9</sup> Leaf and Frank were married in 1975 in Reno, Nevada .

## Chapter I

### The Early Years

June Leaf was born on August 4, 1929 to immigrant Jewish parents and her childhood was spent on the west-side of Chicago where she lived in an apartment over the tavern her father owned and operated. As a young girl, Leaf was fascinated with daily urban living; the Chicago Loop, junk shops, joke stores, the penny arcades and amusements at Navy Pier, all of which fired her imagination. She has stated that: "I decided to be an artist at the age of three. I was sitting under my mother's sewing machine watching her put the pieces together when it came to me."<sup>1</sup> She first began painting when she was about 15: "I bought a little box of oil paints and two canvas boards. I remember them so clearly: one had a pebble surface. I have them still....And I painted this woman face down, rump up, asleep on the bed....That was my first painting. But I remember it just went 'tap' and then out flowed this language. Then I made a second painting, again without any knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Leaf was one of the few women accepted into Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus at the Institute of Design, in Chicago; she was eighteen years old.<sup>3</sup> However, after three months, she was ready to leave school as she felt that what she needed now was to work hard; she went to Paris.

In Paris, Leaf has said that all she wanted to do was look at the sidewalks: "I saw that all the art in the world that I wanted to see was on the sidewalks, in the cracks. I was

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<sup>1</sup> "June Leaf Chronology," *June Leaf: A Survey of Painting, Sculpture, and Works on Paper 1948-1991* (Washington: Washington Project for the Arts, 1991), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Enright, "This to This, This to This: The Interconnected World of June Leaf," *Border Crossings* 17 3 (July 1998): 25.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Gibson Garvey, "Head & Heart: A Celebration of June Leaf," *Arts Atlantic* 34 (Spring/Summer 1989): 42.

influenced by Paul Klee and Robert Nickle. That was my path. I just had my head down all the time, looking.”<sup>4</sup> She was discovered by a group of people who gave her a space to work out of what used to be Picasso’s studio.<sup>5</sup> However, she felt pressured, believing her patrons expected to see something in her work that she was unable to give: “I got very depressed because I felt I was being watched. Something froze up and it took me several years to get that joy back.”<sup>6</sup> She left Paris and returned to Chicago after only four months. Leaf then pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Art Education from Roosevelt University and a Masters degree in the same field from the Institute of Design in 1954. Meanwhile she had solo exhibitions in 1948 at the Sam Bourdelon Gallery and in 1951 at the Momentum Gallery, and participated in the Annual Exhibition of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1948, ’50, and ’51. She also took part in the *Exhibition Momentum*, organized as a protest by students at the Art Institute because of their exclusion at the Chicago artists’ exhibition at the Institute in 1952.<sup>7</sup>

In 1951, Leaf worked for the summer for Alan Frumkin at his art gallery in Chicago. Several of Joseph Cornell’s works were on display at the gallery. Leaf was thrilled to finally have the opportunity to see first-hand some of his work, as she had always been a great admirer. Frumkin suggested she take one of the works home for awhile. Leaf was thrilled as that summer she got to live with a Cornell!<sup>8</sup> In speaking with Robert Enright in 1997 Leaf commented: “Cornell was a breakthrough for me because he was working with the subconscious. I didn’t know there was this strange

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Brookman and Debra Singer, “June Leaf: In Her Own Words,” *June Leaf: A Survey of Painting, Sculpture, and Works on Paper 1948-1991* (Washington: Washington Project for the Arts, 1991), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Enright, 19. The group of people who took Leaf under their wings were an art critic for the magazine *l’Art*, a poet, and an expatriate art historian.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Peter Selz, “Surrealism and the Chicago Imagists of the 1950s: A Comparison and Contrast,” *Art Journal* 45 (Winter 1985): 305.

<sup>8</sup> Telephone conversation with June Leaf, 24 Jan. 2006.

other part of your mind that you could explore.”<sup>9</sup> By this time, Leaf had become associated with a number of young artists from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, who would eventually become known as the “Monster Roster Group.”<sup>10</sup> She was the only one of them that had not attended the Art Institute and most of the group, like Leon Golub and Cosmo Compoli were ex-G.I.’s who were profoundly changed by the war. Franz Schulz writes that many, including Leaf, were Jews, “for whom the Holocaust had an enormity that no artistic outlook conventional to the Midwest could begin to measure.”<sup>11</sup> Barbara Tannenbaum suggests that “their artwork expressed a search for meaning and for answers to the seeming irrationality of human behaviour.”<sup>12</sup> They turned to Primitive art, German Expressionism, Surrealism and the art of the psychotic and insane. As Leon Golub commented in 1977, they wanted “to get a raw, natural, primitivist, therefore basic – which relates to psychoanalysis, too – notion of how reality is seen, not so much on the surface of things but in terms of instinct, urges, action, violence, myth.”<sup>13</sup> This brought them to study the collections of the Oriental Institute of

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<sup>9</sup> Enright, 19.

<sup>10</sup> “Monster Roster” seems to have been first applied in print in Franz Schulze’s review of H.C. Westermann’s works in “Chicago Letter,” *Art News* (February 1959): 49-50.

<sup>11</sup> Franz Schulz, *Fantastic Images: Chicago Art since 1945* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, Chicago, 1972), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Tannenbaum, *The City and Its Artists: 1945-1978* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1978), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Leon Golub, New York, October 8, 1977. Quoted in Barbara Tannenbaum, *Chicago: The City and Its Artists: 1945-1978* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1978), 18. After World War II Chicago art was both “eccentric and idiosyncratic.” Reacting against a tradition of American parochialism, young Chicago artists were interested in exploring primordial memories through symbolic representation. Because of their geographical isolation in the Midwest the young Chicago artists did not come in contact with the European artists that had settled in New York after the War. Consequently, they did not come first hand to the mainstream of modern art and the move to abstraction. There was little interest in such artists as Picasso, Matisse and Mondrian; instead, they turned to the German Expressionists and Surrealists and the works of Ernst, Nolde, Klee, and more latterly, Dubuffet, Giacometti and Bacon. Franz Schulze writes that the answer follows from the fundamental notion of what, in the eyes of most of these Chicagoans, art was for. “Almost every one of them saw it as an activity of some essential and serious existential import....*What* a painting said, moreover what it said about the artist’s grip on basic reality, counted for much more than how it said it in plastic or pictorial terms....They saw utterly no sense in painting a picture for the picture’s sake”. Franz Schulze, “The

the University of Chicago and the ethnological sections of the Field Museum of Natural History as well as the galleries of the Art Institute for inspiration.<sup>14</sup>

Leaf, on the other hand, had already been exposed to Primitivist art by the time she met up with the Art Institute crowd. While in Paris, she had discovered the Musée de l'Homme and her imagery began to depict the "primitive" stylized female forms as in the "flattened, frontalized and starkly iconic" *Butterfly Lady*, 1949 (fig.4).<sup>15</sup> Schulz suggests that she was doing this type of work before Leon Golub and George Cohen had begun to follow similar paths, and even before Dubuffet's *Corps de Dame*. Schulz goes on to say that although Leaf was closely connected to the young post-war expressionists from Chicago, she eventually rejected their approach and began to draw in a careful, naturalistic, and severely analytical way, having looked closely at the work of Delacroix, Gericault, and Daumier.<sup>16</sup> Leaf said learning to draw was like a lifeline and James Ensor was the artist that influenced her the most: "When I looked at his work he intimated the same things from his past that I did. I saw the high voltage of his memories, the fear, the love, the passion."<sup>17</sup> By the mid 1950s, she was again:

producing paintings whose spatial and organizational complexity reflected the lessons she had learned during her interlude with classical drawing. She often depicted lumpy, anonymous people (fat ladies with preposterous picture hats, especially) in eerily incongruous settings (arcades, plazas, carnivals, etc.). Often these settings teemed with frenzied lines that suggested vibrations of the figures and gave an overall hallucinatory effect.<sup>18</sup>

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Expressionist Strain," *Art Journal* 45 (Winter 1985): 307. For further reading see Peter Selz, "Surrealism and the Chicago Imagists of the 1950s: A Comparison and Contrast," *Art Journal* 45 (Winter 1985): 303-306.

<sup>14</sup> Schulz, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Franz Schulz, "June Leaf" *Fantastic Images: Chicago Art Since 1945* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, Chicago, 1972), 90.

<sup>16</sup> Schulze, "June Leaf," 90. See Appendix for image of *Operation*, 1951, pencil on paper, 20x 12 cm.

<sup>17</sup> Brookman, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Schulz, "June Leaf," 90.



Although she shared the Monster's spirit, Dennis Adrian suggests that unlike many of her fellow Chicago artists whose imagery was a fresh incarnation of the ancient archetypes of mythological imagery and seemed to have a universal application to the state of human existence, Leaf drew more from the particularities of her individual experience as a woman and an artist.<sup>19</sup> Her personal mythology evolved from transformed memories (but not reconstructions) of childhood and adolescent experience.<sup>20</sup> For Leaf and the rest of her circle, the expression of emotion was not found through any abstract configuration of paint strokes, but was tied to imagery, because the figurative was seen as more psychologically basic and more the source of expressive meaning. The Monster Group was interested in magic and "abnormal" states of mind—irrationality and neurosis, especially the psychic crisis,<sup>21</sup> and Peter Selz suggests that: "It was the Surrealists' glorification of the absurd and the irrational that seemed like a logical and rational response to the world-out-of-joint."<sup>22</sup> The artist in the group who most shared affinities with Leaf's work was Seymour Rosofsky (1924-1981) whom she had met in San Francisco in 1952. When she was working on the canvas that was to become *Arcade Woman* she said she was just absorbing what he had done.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dennis Adrian, *June Leaf: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1978), 4.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis Adrian, *Sight Out of Mind: Essays and Criticism on Art* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Schulz, *Fantastic Images*, 15. Schulz believed that these artists "saw it as the source of strong feeling in a de-sensitized world, and so far as they could, they cultivated its tensions in their own work." Dennis Adrian suggests their idea that art should come from within was deeply rooted in the disturbing world of elemental feeling that usually centered on awareness of birth, death, time, desire, expression and fear. He said, "It is this particular emotional climate which inspired the critical tag 'Monster' for this sort of work."

<sup>22</sup> Selz, 303.

<sup>23</sup> Brookman, 14. Leaf said, "I thought he was a magnificent, intelligent artist. He simply knew how to do things. He could live first and draw later and that made sense to me." Leaf was in love with Rosofsky for awhile: "Then came the adjustment. I would have to give up this man for my work. I knew then I wouldn't have both, because you couldn't have both." For further reading on Seymour Rosofsky see *Homage to Seymour Rosofsky 1924-1981: Paintings and Works of Paper*. Chicago: R.S. Johnson Fine Art, 1996.

In the late 40s Leaf had begun to develop the characters of her personal dramatic mythology where the primary subject was images of women. Moving from her primitivistic, stylized female forms that recalled the ancient Venus of Willendorf, Leaf's images in the fifties began to display matronly figures whose origins can be found in her memories of her grandmother – a strong matriarchal figure in Leaf's life.<sup>24</sup> Three major paintings, *Red Painting*, *Rocking Horse Woman*, and *Arcade Woman* were conceived of and begun between 1954 and 1957 in which this maternal figure is the principal image (fig.5, 6, 7).<sup>25</sup> Adrian suggests that: "each of the three paintings springs from a similar emotive concern in that each presents manifestations of what the artist calls the 'grandmother-navigator' persona."<sup>26</sup> Of the three paintings only *Arcade Woman* was completed within the duration of the initial stylistic impulse that generated it, and is fully reflective of her work before Cape Breton. *Arcade Woman*, 1956, depicts seated matronly figures, wearing large wide-brim hats; faces are either obscured or turned away. This reference to the image of an anonymous woman, seen from the back, does continue in the Cape Breton work if not in form, then in spirit. *Arcade Woman* is thought to be one of Leaf's most important works from the mid-fifties. The figures are placed within a clearly structured perspectival space of gridded orthogonals, verticals and horizontals. They occupy an interior space that is intersected by the slashes of the linear perspective construction and further controlled by a reduced palette dominated by primary colours.<sup>27</sup> Because of the placement of the figures in *Arcade Woman*, John Yau suggests that: "This

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<sup>24</sup> MJJ, "June Leaf," *Selections from the Dennis Adrian Collection* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1982), 24.

<sup>25</sup> *Red Painting* was begun in 1954 and completed c.1970, and *Rocking Horse Woman* was started in 1956 and worked on until the early sixties.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Adrian, *June Leaf*, 6. In the *Red Painting* large fields of dark red colour are contained by defining lines and contours of black and white.

use of mirroring, a process that both multiplies and dissolves the forms, becomes a way of staying time, of trying to direct its flow within infinity's cacophonous immensity. And within this direct flow, the self is able both to encounter its mirror image as well as to extend beyond its own parameters."<sup>28</sup>

Leaf said that when she started developing this work she was deeply puzzled about how to connect the figures in the painting: "I still didn't know what to do, but it was tormenting me. In my sleep I painted this little connection between these two figures. I woke up and ran to this piece of canvas I had. I made the small *Study for Arcade Woman*, and I locked these two figures together."<sup>29</sup> Leaf's work is intuitive; she begins with a form or a shape and it evolves from there. In conversation with Philip Brookman she spoke of her process of making *Red Painting* that covered a period of almost sixteen years. She said:

In the *Red Painting* I found my alphabet. It was my archaeological zone. I felt something was there under me, a language. So that meant I had better start digging. I hacked and hacked. And then one day these blocks of red appeared that I knew formed the chest of a human being. I started from the chest, which is funny since it's where the heart is, and a life-sized figure grew around it on the right side of the canvas. I asked *Who sits next to him?* I didn't know who it would be. And one day I caught it. It was the hair, but it wasn't hair, it was a map and it was mysterious. Then I started feeling it, and I realized it was a woman. It was the center, the sun almost. And then I moved on. It's the most mysterious thing I've ever done. I let it sit for about two years, came back, worked on it for another four or five years. It took ten years. And I finally made the figure on the left. By then I could draw better. I tied the whole thing together one day, ten years later.<sup>30</sup>

The method by which her images evolve, progress, and return over time, introduces the elemental questions of both what to paint and how to paint, essential questions that continue to lie at the core of her Cape Breton images.

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<sup>28</sup> John You, "Original Desire," *Arts Magazine* 66 (November 1991): 42.

<sup>29</sup> Brookman, 14. See Appendix for image of *Study of Arcade Woman*, 1956, oil on canvas, 53x 64 cm.

<sup>30</sup> Brookman, 10.

By the end of 1956 Leaf felt that she was in control over what she wanted to articulate in her work. But she also said that in order to present this imagery with the forcefulness and clarity she desired, she needed to refine her command of form through a disciplined confrontation with the visible.<sup>31</sup> Leaf began a program of self-study which included producing a series of traditionally conceived studio-set portraits as well as an active sketching program to perfect her drawing skills.<sup>32</sup> Her sketchbooks include many finished drawings – portraits, studies from the model, still life compositions of objects of daily life, street scenes, ordinary people caught unawares in cafes and buses, as well as landscapes and often elaborate composition drawings for paintings done in watercolour, gouache, pencil, pen and coloured pencil. Adrian writes that the result of this intense period of study was a “move away from the earlier emblematic ‘area’ compositions of a largely two-dimensional nature toward a style which involved a full range of complex color, fully plastic form and a clear unambiguous spatial construction.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1958 Leaf received a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Paris. This was her second trip and she saw it as an opportunity for growth, to find a bridge in her work. Giacometti inspired her but that was not enough: “He keeps the texture and the warmth and the tactile quality of paint, but it’s a little bridge that barely gets people across.” When she looked at Manet’s work she thought: “*Ah ah, that’s good. This is my kind of guy. Kind of stuffy, but he’s my kind of guy.*” Manet to Pissaro – “the artist that satisfied me the most,” led her back to Delacroix; “I went back to the things they had to know how to do in order to be where they were.”<sup>34</sup> She did sketches of their work and drew from

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<sup>31</sup> Adrian, *June Leaf*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix for image of *Three Standing Models*, 1957, oil on canvas, 51 x 51 cm.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian, *June Leaf*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Brookman, 12.

models and nature, and then she started copying Goya, Vermeer, and Puvis de Chavannes. Leaf always seemed to choose those artists who maintained a perfect and enigmatic balance between the actual, physically two-dimensional nature of the process of composing and making a picture on a flat surface, and the visual construction of fully articulated spaces with evident plastic volumes.<sup>35</sup> It was at the Louvre when she first saw *Grace at Table*, 1740, Chardin's painting of the two young girls being served food by their mother in middle-class surroundings; and it helped her make the connections with rooms in her own memory. She felt now that if she knew how to draw those rooms she could enter into and live her life; she had found her bridge. It finalized in her mind while copying the Goya portrait in the Louvre: this was not her dream, it was Goya's. She quit! She started making drawings that went directly back to her childhood as she wanted to bring forth her own troupe of characters from her own past.<sup>36</sup>

Leaf returned to the United States in 1960 and settled in New York. She joined several Chicago artists who had already moved to the city because of their frustration with too few venues to exhibit their work and the limited coverage of their work by the Chicago press. The New York art community included ambitious artists, art editors and critics, directors and curators drawn to the large institutions, private dealers, and knowledgeable collectors: "This scene emanated an aura that inspired artists to engage difficult ideas, drove them to work to the utmost of their abilities, and provoked them constantly to question and extend their styles...."<sup>37</sup>

When Leaf arrived in New York "painterly painting," the dominant avant-garde style of the fifties was under attack by younger artists who no longer felt the need to

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<sup>35</sup> Adrian, *June Leaf*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Brookman, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Irving Sandler, *American Art of the Sixties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 106.

make art that drew directly from life experiences, the psyche, or private visions. To achieve an art that was devoid of any expression or sensitivity, it had to look cool, clean, mechanistic, and distance from the self.<sup>38</sup> The two movements that exemplify this change in aesthetic sensibility were Minimalism and Pop epitomized by Frank Stella and Andy Warhol respectively, who rejected artists like Willem de Kooning, whose brushstrokes denied pictorial flatness, suggested illusionistic space, and denoted passion. By 1962 it was clear a fresh new American art had arrived.<sup>39</sup>

Within the New York milieu Leaf still continued to make expressionistic art and shared an affinity with Abstract Expressionist artists like de Kooning and Philip Guston in her handling of paint. She said that De Kooning made it worthwhile to approach the figure again.<sup>40</sup> Her imagery, clearly established before she went to Europe, and resurfaced while she was there, now took the form of images of low-life women, and depictions of the streets of New York in all its vulgarity and excitement.<sup>41</sup> At night Leaf would take long walks to 42<sup>nd</sup> street from her home on 33<sup>rd</sup> where she lived with her then husband, the musician Joel Press: “I have to see the evil, I confess it. And for me it evokes the beauty and the passion I felt in those terrible joke stores in Chicago.”<sup>42</sup> She combined her inner vision from the fifties with crowds of recognizable street types that

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>39</sup> The Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, which represented many of the leaders of Abstract Expressionism, staged an exhibition *New Realists* that Harold Rosenberg said “hit the New York art world with the force of an earthquake.” Harold Rosenberg, “The Game of Illusion: Pop and Gag,” *The Anxious Object* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 63.

<sup>40</sup> Brookman, 11.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix. *The Beauty Parlor*, 1966, Etching with Drypoint (black). Edition of 10. Image: 10 x 15 cm. Sheet: 16 x 25 cm.; *Woman with a Dagger in Her Mouth*, 1966. Etching with Drypoint (black). Edition of 2. Image: 15 x 10 cm. Sheet: 23 x 16 cm.

<sup>42</sup> Grace Glueck, “42<sup>nd</sup> Street Dreams,” *New York Times*, 22 Dec. 1968

were transformed by costume and action into a garish world which was both familiar and allegorical.<sup>43</sup>

John Yau suggests that in the sixties Leaf extends her earlier use of mirroring in ways that both dissolve the images and engage the viewer's participation.<sup>44</sup> The first of these constructions *The Vermeer Box*, 1966 is a collage of mirrors, wood, glass, metal, and tin, measuring 61 x 61 x 61 cm. where a hag-like figure sits at a table telling fortunes in a room that glitters with metal and mirrors (fig.8). Leaf uses wood and mirrors not only to echo Vermeer's art, which is itself about mirroring, but also to dissolve solid form to become an echo chamber of reflected images.<sup>45</sup> Joseph Cornell's box constructions obviously come to mind. Some years later, Leaf said after she returned to Mabou from a trip to New York and a visit to the Metropolitan Museum to see Dutch paintings, she realized why she was drawn to these calm and peaceful scenes: "The exterior is peaceful and somehow I could deposit my 'earthquake-feeling women' into rooms of order and calm."<sup>46</sup> Lippard refers to Leaf as the "earthquake-feeling woman par excellence." She writes: "Her art has the sensitivity of a seismograph and its content is the continuous upheaval humans make of the world."<sup>47</sup> Leaf has said the *Vermeer Box* came from something she saw at Navy Pier: "In one of the arcades, I first saw a box with mirrors and a claw that comes down. You put in a penny, and maybe you get a prize. It was the same feeling I had with Cornell. I put a penny in the box and an arm came down. I almost fainted and I thought. *Life. Treasure. Life. Treasure.* I was like a moth drawn to a

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<sup>43</sup> Adrian, *June Leaf*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> You, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Lucy Lippard, "June Leaf: Life Out of Life," *Art in America* 66 (March-April 1978): 115.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

flame.”<sup>48</sup> The concept of mirroring, the contradiction between seeing and imagining, the real and the imaginary, would not abandon her when she relocates to Cape Breton.

In 1968 Leaf had her first one-person show in New York, at the Allan Frumkin Gallery.<sup>49</sup> Robert Pincus-Whitten writing in *Artforum* at the time, said that it was unfortunate Leaf was so reticent to show because had she exhibited on her return from Paris a decade earlier, there was little doubt she would have been greeted as a master of what was still waiting to be called Pop Art.<sup>50</sup> The exhibition *Street Dreams* is theatre; many of the works in the show were either constructed as stage sets or consisted of figures out of an imaginary performance. They were painted, stuffed and sewn canvas figures and constructions that included a life-sized harlequin, a tight-rope walker, beefy carnival strippers, and a circus horse.<sup>51</sup> Leaf believed in learning to do everything herself; to sew, to do carpentry, and even how to install motors. She has commented that: “By making everything yourself, you find out basic principles. And the more you know about life the less befuddled you’re apt to be.”<sup>52</sup> Hilton Kramer, in his *New York Times* review of the exhibition, suggests that for Leaf, the theatre is a metaphor of the interior of life – “the life of the mind overcome by its own fantasies.”<sup>53</sup> The most famous work in that exhibition is the tableau *Ascension of Pig Lady* – “a giant fantasy of characters from

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<sup>48</sup> Brookman, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Leaf participated in the group exhibition: *Human Concern and Personal Torment* at the Whitney Museum, New York in 1969. She continued to exhibit in Chicago throughout the sixties. She had one-woman shows at the Allan Frumkin Gallery in 1966 and in 1970; Illinois Institute of Technology in 1968; Society for Contemporary Art, Chicago Art Institute. She participated in one group show in 1967 at the Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Pincus-Witten, *Artforum* (Feb 1969): 67. He writes: “She would have shared the dais with George Segal for her splintered view of a grim, at times sordid, but deeply felt human comedy.”

<sup>51</sup> See appendix. Installation shot of *Street Dreams*.

<sup>52</sup> Glueck,

<sup>53</sup> Hilton Kramer, *New York Times*, 14 Dec. 1968.



the 'Human Comedy' (fig.9)."<sup>54</sup> An installation piece in acrylic on canvas with stuffed figures, wood, tin, it measures 314 x 444 x 8 cm and is in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. A roughly painted and crafted work, its life-size figures are set within a proscenium placed against a nocturnal riverfront scene that both caricatures and mythologizes the uniquely American street life it portrays.<sup>55</sup> Yau suggests that the figure of the woman with strings attached to her arms is a puppet waiting to be brought to life.

He writes:

By providing a way for the viewer to become an activating agent, Leaf dissolves the barrier between art and life, between the zone of frozen time and the flux of the here and now. The viewer, in turn, recognizes two parallel though not always intersecting measures of time: the self-contained "meanwhile" and the limitless, changing 'now'. This consciousness returns the viewer to an awareness of his or her mortality, which is the final manifestation one's life takes. It is the deepest origin of the desire to speak and shape, to articulate the self through both sound and form.<sup>56</sup>

The work is also autobiographical, as she explained to Philip Brookman in 1991:

"There's a little girl in there with a Buster Brown hat and suit running with a hoop. That's the lust I had to go into the world, innocent, with a little stick and a little hoop. There's the big world in the painting; the Brooklyn Bridge, the street, the lovers, and the sky. My sister is in the back as she looked when she was turning into a woman. Then there's the pig lady."<sup>57</sup> The pig lady is based on a waitress working behind the counter at the Thalia Restaurant near Fifth Street that Leaf saw from a Second Avenue bus in New York: "She turned out to be a religious fanatic and said she was possessed by demons."<sup>58</sup> The waitress reminded her of a fat lady that used to sit on a stool in her father's tavern,

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<sup>54</sup> Gibson Garvey, 43.

<sup>55</sup> "Selections from the MCA Collection," *Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago*.  
<http://www.mcachicago.org/search/detail.asp?ID=77>

<sup>56</sup> Yau, 43.

<sup>57</sup> Brookman, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Glueck,

drinking and peeing. In the work, the pig lady is about to be pulled up to heaven by a man and a woman hanging over the top of the proscenium arch. Leaf explains: "If there was going to be another Messiah, it would appear in someone who would never expect it, like a waitress, and she would turn into a pig. A big pink pig." Why a pig? "Because maybe a pig is the image of our century."<sup>59</sup> Lucy Lippard suggests that Leaf "is trying to make myths of the commonplace," a consideration that can be well applied to her paintings from Mabou.<sup>60</sup>

Leaf's decision to leave New York in 1969 was simply because she was in love with a man and she wanted to be with him; that man was the photographer Robert Frank. Frank had decided he wanted to leave New York and move to Cape Breton, having become disillusioned with the New York art community and urban living: "I don't want to die here. Not here. This is not going to be where the end comes."<sup>61</sup> Leaf had thrived on city life and certainly would regret losing the excitement and chaos of urban life. However, the politics of the "art establishment" was something that she would not miss. By the time she left New York, she still had not received the recognition she deserved, perhaps because her work was seen as too eclectic in style, too personal and too "out there" for the art market. Leaf remained a solid figurative artist throughout the sixties even though it went against some of the prevalent attitudes of the day.

In the fall of 1969 Leaf and Frank moved to the small rural community of Mabou Mines, a place they discovered by chance. She was now 40 years old and had been making art for over twenty years. Leaf kept her studio on Bleecker Street in Greenwich

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<sup>59</sup> "Carnival of Grotesques," *Time*, 10 Jan. 1969: 44.

<sup>60</sup> Lippard, 112.

<sup>61</sup> Silver Donald Cameron, "Five Immigrant Artists in Nova Scotia," *Terra Firma: Five Immigrant Artists in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University, 1993), 6.

Village so that she could maintain a connection with the city and its art community.

Lucy Lippard suggests that up to now the fantasies that nourished her work were in a sense public – “more concerned with projection and performance than with introspection, more with how people acted than why.”<sup>62</sup> The move to Mabou, Cape Breton would change all of that. Now that her world “was bound by sea and sky and her relationship with a much-admired man, she turned to inner mechanisms.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Lippard, 112.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter II

### Cape Breton Island

The town of Mabou is located in Inverness County in the north western part of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Cape Breton is bounded on the north-east and south-east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the south-west by St. George's Bay and the Strait of Canso, and on the north-west by the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Its length from north to south is one hundred and ten miles, and its width from east to west is eighty-seven miles, on the south it is separated from the mainland of Nova Scotia by the narrow Strait of Canso, and Cape St. Lawrence; its farthest northern point is approximately seventy miles from Newfoundland. The coast of the island is indented by deep bays and inlets and several harbours, while a good portion of the interior is taken up by an estuary, the famous Bras d'Or Lakes connected by the narrow Strait of Barra and occupying an area of four hundred and fifty square miles in the very heart of the island. To the north are the Highlands – a vast table-land elevated in some places to more than 1,000 feet above sea level and stretching from St. Ann's and Margaree to Cape North. In contrast, the south-eastern part of the island is the main area where industrial development has occurred.<sup>1</sup> In 1954 the Canso Causeway was completed joining mainland Nova Scotia to the island (fig.10).

The Mi'Kmaq were the original inhabitants of the Island; although part of the Algonquin nation, it is not known actually how long they have inhabited the place they refer to as their ancestral homeland. Because of their position along the northern Atlantic seacoast, they were one of the first indigenous people to come in contact with Europeans,

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<sup>1</sup> C.W. Vernon, *Cape Breton Canada* (Toronto/New York: Nation Publishing Company, 1903), 5-8.

as Norse fishermen are thought to have visited these shores as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Colonization began with the “discovery” by John Cabot on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1497 of the cod-rich waters of the north-west Atlantic, and Basques fishermen first encountered Mi’kmaq in 1504. Richard Brown writes that it was the Basques who gave Cape Breton its name, in remembrance of their home “Cap Breton” near Bayonne.<sup>3</sup> Soon after, European fishermen began offering the Natives a variety of commodities in exchange for pelts, opening the door to a massive international fur trade. By 1600 European contact had a devastating effect on Mi’kmaq society; population had gone from an estimated thirty-five thousand in the Maritimes to approximately three thousand five hundred.<sup>4</sup> The majority had died of diseases contracted from Europeans, and the survivors transformed from seasonal hunters into market hunters and middlemen in the fur trade. The fur trade led to full-scale colonization and a continued fight for settlement between the French and English.<sup>5</sup> Harold E.L. Prins writes: “For two centuries these newcomers battled for Mi’kmaq trade, land, and souls. When the smoke cleared, Mi’Kmaq and other Indian groups along the Atlantic seaboard found themselves landless or confined to small reservations.”<sup>6</sup>

The War of the Spanish Succession ended with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 that saw France recognizing British sovereignty over Newfoundland, cede Acadia (mainland Nova Scotia) but retain Île Cap Breton (renamed Île Royale) and

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Brown, *A History of the Island of Cape Breton* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1869. Reprinted Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing Company, 1979), 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia P. Miller “Aboriginal MicMac Population: A Review of the Evidence,” *Ethnohistory* 23 2 (Spring, 1976): 117.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel N. Paul, *We Were Not the Savages* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2000), 53-56.

<sup>6</sup> Harold E.L. Prins, *The Mi’kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 2.

Île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island).<sup>7</sup> By maintaining possession of Île Cap Breton, France would ensure some degree of control over the navigational routes to Canada. Acadians were given a choice; they could stay in Nova Scotia and accept British rule or they could move to Île Royale. Because they had established some of North America's most productive agriculture communities, the majority of Acadians chose to stay; only sixty-three families (approximately five hundred Acadians) made the decision to go to Île Royale where they were joined by most of the French settlers of Placentia, Newfoundland.<sup>8</sup> Between 1713 and 1758 the colony grew rapidly; but continued warring between France and Britain ended with the fall of the Fortress of Louisbourg in 1758. Britain took final possession of the island and deported most of the Acadian inhabitants. Of the approximate five thousand Acadians living on Île Royal (Cape Breton) and Île Saint-Jean, thirty-five hundred were shipped to France.<sup>9</sup>

A land survey conducted by Samuel Holland in 1763 for the British revealed rich coal resources in Cape Breton. Not wanting to jeopardize its own coal resources and industries, Britain banned permanent settlement on the island and annexed Cape Breton to Nova Scotia. However, the American Revolution (1775-83) which ended two hundred years of British rule resulted in Loyalists pouring into all parts of the Maritimes except Cape Breton. Pressure mounted and in 1785 the Colonial Office declared Cape Breton a colony and appointed a lieutenant-governor, an executive council, and a House of Assembly; but the assembly was not to be called until the population of the island

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<sup>7</sup> The name Acadie refers to the first French-speaking colony in North America. It is thought to be Native in origin. The Mi'kmaq, at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans, used the word 'cadie' to identify a settlement or a fertile place. For further reading see Naomi Griffiths. *The Acadians: Creation of a People*. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1973). John G. Reid et al. *The 'Conquest' of Acadia, 1710: Imperial Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Margaret R. Conrad & James K. Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara LeBlanc, *Postcards from Acadie* (Kentville, N.S.: Gaspereau Press, 2003), 47.

warranted it. As a result, no taxes could be collected and no public improvements could be made. Another factor that further retarded economic development was the lack of capital. The chief taxable resource of the island was the government-owned coalfields; but Great Britain saw this resource as competition and the coal fields were not developed efficiently. All of these factors had a negative impact on settlement. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century population and prosperity did start to increase and a movement began for the calling for a House of Assembly. However, the British Colonial Office looking to simplify colonial management and save money decided Cape Breton should get their assembly as part of Nova Scotia. On October 9, 1820 Cape Breton Island was re-annexed to Nova Scotia.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century twenty-five hundred people lived on the island; most of whom were French-speaking Acadians, descendants of those who survived the Expulsion; the rest were Loyalists, Irish from Newfoundland, Scots from mainland Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and Mi'Kmaq Indians who were located in the interior. By 1851 fifty-five thousand Highland Scots were living on the island. The tide of emigration to the island in 1802 began when the first Scottish Gaels landed at Sydney Harbour, Cape Breton.<sup>11</sup> The exodus of Gaels to the Maritimes occurred in two phases; the first phase took place between 1770 and 1820 led by the clan lieutenants (called tacksmen) and tenants who were wealthier than the rest.<sup>12</sup> However, it was not

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Morgan, *Early Cape Breton: From Founding to Famine 1784-1851* (Wreck Cove: Breton Books, 2000), 2-6 & 104-105. For a further discussion of the organization of the colony of Cape Breton, see R.J. Morgan, *Orphan Outpost: Cape Breton Colony 1784-1820* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J. Hornsby "Scottish Immigration and Settlement in Early Nineteenth Century Cape Breton," in *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Fredericton/Sydney: Acadiensis Press/University College of Cape Breton Press, 1990), 49-50.

<sup>12</sup> Glen Graham, "Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition," M.A. thesis, St. Mary's University, Halifax, 2004. 26. For further reading see J.M. Bumsted. *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP; Winnipeg:

until the collapse of the kelp industry in Scotland when crofters became a “redundant population,” that the massive exodus of Highlanders took place. Between 1820 and 1840 an estimated twenty thousand mainly Gaelic-speaking Highland Scots settled in Cape Breton.<sup>13</sup> Referred to as “The Highland Clearances,” this second phase of forced emigration was guided by lairds with the cooperation of the British government.<sup>14</sup> Stephen Hornsby has written that the population of the island in 1820 was made up mostly of Scots; by 1871, two-thirds of the seventy-five thousand Islanders were of Scottish origin, outnumbering by two to one the descendants of Acadian, Irish, and Loyalist families who had settled in Cape Breton before 1800. “In large part, Cape Breton had become a Scottish island.”<sup>15</sup>

The early settlers depended on farming and fishing for their livelihood. Most settled along the western coastal region securing the most promising farmland, the “intervals” as they are called by the locals, those level and lush slopes bordering on river, lake, or sea. The later settlers had to venture inland to settle in the rear lands and the mountain sides.<sup>16</sup> As the 19<sup>th</sup> century advanced, many of the interior farmlands were unable to sustain even subsistence farming and men began to go into the mines to provide for their families. Coal mines operated on a small scale until the industrial expansion began to take hold in 1890. By the end of the century thirty coal mines were operating in the province of Nova Scotia. In 1892, H.M. Whitney, a Boston financier, formed a

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University of Manitoba, 1982). J.M. Bumsted suggests that this exodus was different than the succeeding one, because it was “on the whole executed at the initiative of the common people through the medium of emigration rather than at the conscious instigation of the landlords.” He refers to this phase as the ‘people’s clearance.’

<sup>13</sup> D.C. Harvery, “Scottish Immigration to Cape Breton,” *Dalhousie Review* 21 3 (1941): 314.

<sup>14</sup> Graham, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteen-Century Cape Bretony*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Charles W. Dunn, *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Cape Breton and Eastern Nova Scotia* (Toronto: 1953; Wreck Cove, Cape Breton: Breton Books, 1991, 2003), 124.



syndicate with capital of eighteen million dollars. Incorporated in 1893 as the Dominion Coal Company, the company was granted a ninety-nine year lease on the operations and coal leases for the south side of Sydney Harbour in exchange for an annual fixed royalty paid to the provincial government.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the coal royalty paid to the government of ten cents per ton was increased to twelve and a half cents. Whitney had also purchased the rights to the bulk of the Bell Island, Newfoundland iron ore deposits. With the iron ore from Newfoundland, the coal and limestone from Cape Breton, and the tidewater at Sydney, a perfect location for an industrial steel-making site was established. In 1899, the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, a subsidiary of the Dominion Coal Company, was established with Whitney as its president. Towns began to spring up; Sydney Mines, Glace Bay, Dominion and New Waterford were built around individual coal mines. With the expansion of the coal industry and the opening up of the steel plants a new flux of immigrants arrived in Cape Breton. Labourers and tradesmen came from Eastern and Southern Europe. Their numbers grew from 458 in 1901 to 6,892 in 1931.<sup>18</sup>

During this period, an out-migration from rural Cape Breton and eastern Nova Scotia to the industrial area of Cape Breton, other parts of Canada and the “Boston States” was taking place. Patricia Thornton suggests that this was the result of two economic forces; they are what she refers to as the “push” and the “pull” factors.<sup>19</sup>

Kenneth E. Nilsen suggests out-migration was the result of [“pull” factors] an attraction to economic improvement, city life, and a sense of “other directedness.” However, this

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<sup>17</sup> The Dominion Coal Company did not control the operations and coal leases for the north side of Sydney Harbour which were retained by the General Mining Association. For further discussion see David Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation\*,” *Atlantic Canada After Confederation: The Acadiensis Reader: Volume Two*, ed. P.A. Buckner and David Frank Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy W. Jabbra, “Ethnicity in Atlantic Canada: A Survey,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XX 3 (1988): 11.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia A. Thornton, “The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look.” *Acadiensis* 15.1 (1985): 3.

exodus created new economic realities that triggered ['push' factor] further emigration.<sup>20</sup> Although Montreal was a Canadian city, it was regarded as predominately French-speaking and seemed foreign and uninviting, so emigrants from Cape Breton and Nova Scotia headed south to Boston instead.<sup>21</sup> Nilsen suggests that during this period eastern Massachusetts could lay claim to several thousand Gaelic speakers, and emigrants to the area found jobs as domestics, seamen, and carpenters.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately by the 1920s the economic depression had taken its toll on industry on the island. The postwar decline in demand for goods such as coal and steel, which were the mainstays of the Cape Breton economy affected jobs and labour unrest became intense, bitter and violent.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cape Breton suffered from a depressed economy; the coal mines and the steel plants finally closed. Fishing which was once a respectable livelihood for many has also become a defunct industry. Because of the over-fished waters and the ban on cod fishing, many of the processing plants have closed. Unemployment continues to rise, the exodus of the young continues but now heading westward to Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Although Cape Breton was annexed to Nova Scotia in 1820, the character of the island remained and continues to remain quite distinct. As expected, the island is rich in terms of cultural diversity including Mi'Kmaq, Acadian, English, and Scottish. However, it is the Scottish Gaelic influence that continues to maintain the strongest cultural

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<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Nilsen, "The Nova Scotia Gael in Boston, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*. 5 6 (Cambridge, MA: The Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures Faculty of Arts And Sciences, Harvard University, 1986), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Dunn, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Nilsen, 83-88.

<sup>23</sup> Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance, "Introduction," in *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia c.1700-1990*, ed. Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing; Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1999), 27.

presence throughout both rural and industrial Cape Breton. From the first Highland immigrants to settle on these shores, the Scottish character has left its mark.

The Scottish Highlanders are descendents of the Irish Gaels who settled the west part of Scotland some fourteen hundred years ago and established their own Gaelic culture. The Lowlanders, on the other hand, are descendents of English-speaking people, the Angles of Northumberland, who worked their way northward from England into the eastern section of Scotland.<sup>24</sup> When the Highland clans were defeated by the English armies at the Battle of Culloden on April 16, 1746 it spelled the end of a traditional way of life.<sup>25</sup> Over time the influence of the Gaels was narrowed; their monasteries gave way to the church system of Britain, their clan organization and legal code submitted to the rule of the Lowlander, and their art lost its vigour.<sup>26</sup> However, their Gaelic language still survives in Scotland and there remains a strong heritage of Gaelic music and literature. The character of the Scottish Highlanders (Gaels) can be understood by looking at the environment in which they lived in relative isolation in Great Britain. The Cape Breton author Alastair MacLeod suggests that because of this isolation the Scottish Highlanders were forced in upon themselves. "Perhaps, because there were fewer alternatives, people in isolation look carefully at themselves and at their surroundings. Their attitudes, their knowledge, and their sensitivities although perhaps not the widest in scope, are often of considerable depth. Isolation causes an intensification and a refinement of that which already exists and is familiar and well known."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dunn, 3

<sup>25</sup> E.J. 'Ned' MacDonald, *Governed by the Whistle: A History of Inverness Town:1803-2004* (Inverness, N.S.: J. 'Ned' MacDonald, 2004), 3

<sup>26</sup> Dunn, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Alastair Macleod, "Inverness County: From Highland to Highland and Island to Island," in *Mabou Pioneer II* (Mabou, N.S.: Mabou Pioneer Committee, 1977), VIII.

Much of the history written about the Scottish Highlanders suggests a society peopled by “illiterate semi-barbarians.” This assessment of the character of the Gaels in Scotland is suspect because it has historically been made by English scholars who, as Michael Kennedy suggests, did not understand their language and were not very familiar with the Gaelic literary tradition. It stands in marked contrast to the conclusion drawn by North American folklorist MacEdward Leach when he speaks of their Canadian descendents: “Cape Breton was settled by a superior people who came from a rich cultural background of story, poetry and song. The beauty, the imaginative power, the dramatic quality, the richness of detail of the old Celtic lore is unsurpassed in Western Europe.”<sup>28</sup> MacLeod suggests that the differences between the Cape Breton Highlanders and their cousins who settled in the rest of Canada was that they alone came to land that was hauntingly familiar. Because of the familiar landscape there was once more that feeling of isolation and lack of commercial industry. He goes on to say that for longer than any other Scottish settlement the people of Inverness County continued to live as they might have lived had they remained in Scotland.<sup>29</sup>

In Cape Breton, the rich culture of the Scottish Gaels was kept alive. Gaelic folk tales, especially as reflected in the folk song was allied with every activity. Whether it was the fishermen singing as they tended their nets or women churning butter or participating in a milling frolic, the appropriate occupational songs were sung. Many of these songs were centuries old and never written down as everyone knew them by heart.<sup>30</sup> In the evening when the tasks of the day were abandoned, the people gathered at the

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Kennedy, “Lochaber No More,” in *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*, ed. Marjory Harper and Michael E. Vance (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing; Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Limited, 1999), 276. MacEdward Leach, quoted in “Lochaber No More,” 276.

<sup>29</sup> MacLeod, IX.

<sup>30</sup> Dunn, 39.

home of one of the local entertainers. The “Ceilidh” has always played an important role in the preservation of the Gaelic culture. Ceilidh (pronounced “kaylee” in English) is the Gaelic word for “visit.” It is an informal gathering, a house party. Hector MacNeil suggests that the older form of the house “Ceilidh” was the “main social institution that provided a venue for the transmission of tradition.”<sup>31</sup>

Often performance was followed by discussion. The history behind a story or a song, the meaning and nuances of a particular word or line, bowing styles, fingering techniques – these and other topics might be discussed and even debated. In this way, people shared their collective knowledge, for a Gaelic audience at its best is an informed audience capable of truly appreciating the individual style and talents of the performer within the parameters of the wider tradition. Even the person who might never “perform” participates in a valuable and valued way through his or her knowledge of the tradition.<sup>32</sup>

The ingredients of long term integrity in cultural expression were securely planted in Cape Breton.<sup>33</sup> Dunn suggests that the Cape Breton Highlanders had an attitude towards life that demanded only a meagre standard of living as long as there was ample opportunity for amusement and happiness – the Highlander was more of an artist than a labourer: “There was something of the artist’s zest for songs and music and leisure in every Highland settler, and even if the happy-go-lucky philosophy may have produced some slovens, yet it also produced those well-rounded and genial spirits who refused to become so entirely immersed in the everyday care of the world as to forget the graces of life.”<sup>34</sup> Communities and the Gaelic culture were transplanted to Cape Breton, bringing the traditional fiddle style of the Highlands and Islands with them.<sup>35</sup> When the early settlers left Scotland, it was at the end of the heyday of Scottish fiddling, the so-called

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<sup>31</sup> Hector MacNeil, “Our Living Celtic Culture,” n.d. <http://www.celtic-colours.com/culture.html>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Graham, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Dunn, 110.

<sup>35</sup> Graham, 27

“Golden Age.” Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg suggest that while fiddle music suffered a decline in Scotland after that era, the music flourished in its new home across the ocean:

Conditions in nineteenth-century Cape Breton were ideal for the preservation and development of the transplanted Gaelic culture. The displaced Scots found freedom and potential in the unexploited land of Cape Breton. Because they had a common background and were by far the major ethnic group on the island, their traditions and lifestyles were maintained. For many years the island remained isolated enough from outside influences to require virtual self-sufficiency in almost every aspect of life, including entertainment.<sup>36</sup>

Another important factor in the successful transfer of the language and culture to Cape Breton was the pattern of immigration followed by the initial settlers. This tendency has been called “chain migration” and as Hector MacNeil explains:

Thus, the Barra people coming to Cape Breton settled mainly in the Christmas Island – Iona area; Lewis and Harris people in that area that we call the North Shore; Lochaber people in Mabou, and so on. This grouping of people according to their place of origin in Scotland allowed for the transfer, whole and intact, of localized dialects, of music, song and dance traditions, and of patterns of religious adherence.<sup>37</sup>

With the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century major changes began to affect the life of rural communities throughout the island. Pioneer settlement to the island had ceased. Out-migration, the connection of the island to the rest of the country by rail, and the growing identification of English as the language of success contributed to the decline of the Gaelic speakers. The rural traditional way of life was changing; the isolation the island once knew was rapidly disappearing.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton: The Dungree Collection* (Toronto: Dungree Music, 1996), 3.

<sup>37</sup> MacNeil, “Our Living Celtic Culture,” <http://www.celtic-colours.com/culture.html>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. The Gaelic speakers had dropped from eighty-five thousand to approximately seventy-five thousand by 1900.

Cape Breton Island has been an attraction to outsiders (or as Cape Bretoners refer to them as “come from aways”) since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Bras d’Or Lakes became a favourite haunt of Americans, some of whom were well-known writers whose publications first provided wide-spread awareness of the Island. One of the most popular accounts published during this period was Charles Dudley Warner’s *Baddeck and that Sort of Thing*, which appeared in instalments in the *Atlantic Monthly* throughout 1884.<sup>39</sup> It is believed that Warner’s essays influenced the inventor, Alexander Graham Bell from Boston to select Baddeck as the location for his summer residence. Charles H. Farnham’s article in the March 1886 issue of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* titled “Cape Breton Folk” writes of a walking trip he made with some companions along the Atlantic shore, by St. Ann’s Bay, over Cape Smoky to Ingonish, and on to Cape North, the north eastern point of the island, returning along the Gulf of St. Lawrence shore by way of Cheticamp, Margaree, and Lake Ainslie: “This walk of about two hundred miles would take us through some of the most secluded as well as the most populous settlements of the peasantry.”<sup>40</sup> Articles such as these enticed not only the American adventurer but also the sportsman and the artist.

The completion of the Intercolonial Railway in 1876 linking Quebec to the Maritime Provinces enabled Canadians to begin to explore their new country and was no longer restricted to the well-to-do. The railway was extended to Cape Breton in 1886. In 1889 a traveller from central Canada writes of his visit to historical ruins in Cape Breton in *The Week*, and emphasizes the “picturesque” qualities of Cape Breton:

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<sup>39</sup> Shirley B. Elliott “A Nineteenth Century Tourist in Cape Breton,” *Journal of Education* 19 4 (June 1970): 37.

<sup>40</sup> C.H. Farnham, “Cape Breton Folk,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 72 430 (March 1886): 608. Cornell University Making of America Online Database: <http://cd1.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABK4014-0072-70>

In Canada a respectable ruin is not to be passed over lightly, for it is a rare one. For this reason, among others, the traveller ought to visit Louisburg... Louisburg was dismantled and its fortifications blown up, but among the grassy mounds of this deserted site, the traveller can still trace the contour of the old battlements, or perhaps, unearth some rusty memorial of the sanguinary.<sup>41</sup>

Three decades later, the provincial government under Angus L. MacDonald developed a strategy to increase tourism to their economically depressed region. MacDonald was committed to a particularly romantic reading of Scottish history and aimed to make Nova Scotia “Scottish;” they purposely and politically embraced and celebrated Scottish lineage as its common ancestry.<sup>42</sup> This was done even though the 1921 census showed Nova Scotians of Scottish origin represented only twenty-eight percent of the province’s total population, whereas those of English origin represented about thirty-nine percent.<sup>43</sup> Ian McKay suggests that the tartanization of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton resulted in travel writers like Gordon Brinley and Dorothy Duncan focusing on “ethnic essentialism.” Cape Breton once constructed as a progressive and industrial hive of coal mines was now described as a “haven of simple folk.”<sup>44</sup> MacKay goes on to suggest that the crowning moment of tartanism in Nova Scotia was in 1937 with the opening of the Cape Breton “Highlands” National Park. At the unveiling of the tablet at the newly constructed “Lone Shieling,”<sup>45</sup> a piper played “The Skye Boat Song:” “It represented the full naturalization of the new truth of the province’s inherently Scottish nature.”<sup>46</sup> In 1953 the Province of

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<sup>41</sup> Viator, *The Week* (Toronto), June 1889. Reproduced in *Journal of Education* 19 4 (June 1970): 37.

<sup>42</sup> Judith A. Rolls, “Culture for Sale” in *The Centre of the World at the Edge of A Continent: Cultural Studies of Cape Breton*, ed. Carol Corbin and Judith A. Rolls (Sydney: UCCB Press, 1996), 79.

<sup>43</sup> Harper and Vance, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Ian McKay, “Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954. *Acadiensis*, XXI (Spring 1992): 23. For further reading see also Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queens’s University Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> A ‘lone shieling’ is a shepherd’s lodge.

<sup>46</sup> MacKay, “Tartanism,” 34.



Nova Scotia invented its own official tartan.<sup>47</sup> Provincial tourist sites were given Scottish names and a Scots piper was stationed at the Nova Scotia border with New Brunswick.<sup>48</sup> “‘Tartanism’ – the reading of Nova Scotia as a sort of Scott-land across the waves – triumphed; this concept of the Scottish essence (or ‘Highland Heart’) of Nova Scotia was accepted even by Nova Scotians who did not claim Scottish descent.”<sup>49</sup>

Even though there has been a push to promote the province’s “Scottishness” the Gaelic language, once spoken by thousands of Nova Scotians but predominately in Cape Breton, continues to disappear. In 1900 Gaelic was the first language of about eighty-five thousand people in Cape Breton, it is now the first language of perhaps only five hundred.<sup>50</sup> MacKay suggests that tartanism exploited Gaelic as one of its raw materials, but “It did not sustain it.”<sup>51</sup> Norman MacDonald in his article “Putting on the Kilt: The Scottish Stereotype and Ethnic Community Survival in Cape Breton” contends that in Cape Breton today “authentic” culture and “stereotypes” of culture co-exist. Authentic culture, which is mostly rural based, uses Gaelic language as its core component, and is neither affected by outside influences, nor receives any tourist attention. Stereotypes of culture, usually urban-based, usually portray the romantic Highlander which originated around the court of Queen Victoria and has become entangled in a romantic mixture of fact and fiction, history and legend, event and image. MacDonald contends that these

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<sup>47</sup> Ian McKay, “Handicrafts and the Logic of ‘Commercial Antimodernism’,” in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 123. For further discussion see again Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queens’ University Press, 1994). The Nova Scotia Tartan was invented by an Englishwoman, Bessie Murray working in the Handcrafts Division of the Department of Tourism.

<sup>48</sup> McKay, “Handicrafts,” 125.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>50</sup> Graham, 61.

<sup>51</sup> McKay, “Tartanism,” 34.

stereotypes shape our perception of the Scottish past and of the Cape Breton present, and do so with federal and provincial funding in the name of Scottish culture.<sup>52</sup>

Since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the island of Cape Breton has been experiencing a “cultural revival.” Although distinct cultural communities continue to exist on the island, there is amongst all a commonality in that they are Cape Bretoners regardless of cultural background. Kenneth Donovan writes:

Cape Bretoners have grown up knowing the genealogy of their friends and the people around them. Committed to their sense of place and their personal relationships, many Cape Bretoners have sacrificed the affluent incomes of more wealthy regions of the country to remain on the island. Of 100 cities in Canada, Sydney ranks at the bottom in terms of per capita income. Yet, in spite of such economic difficulties and chronically high unemployment (currently 19 percent), there is a sense of energy and vitality in the arts....Thousands of individuals are participating in endeavours ranging from the visual arts to theatre, crafts, heritage, music, dance and language classes in Micmac, French, and Gaelic.<sup>53</sup>

The Alexander Graham Bell Museum (1956), the reconstruction of the Fortress of Louisbourg (1961), and the opening up of the Miner’s Museum, Glace Bay in 1967 are but a few of the historical sites that have been established. Annual festivals celebrating both Gaelic and Acadian customs and traditions attract thousands of islanders and tourists each year. Gaelic began to be taught in Inverness County schools in 1975 and also in that year the Beaton Institute was established at the University College of Cape Breton in Sydney with a mandate to collect and conserve the social, economic, political, and cultural history of the island.<sup>54</sup> The first Mi’kmaq-controlled school opened in Eskasoni in 1980 and University College of Cape Breton began a Mi’kmaq program of studies in

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<sup>52</sup> Norman MacDonald, “Putting on the Kilt: The Scottish Stereotype and Ethnic community Survival in Cape Breton,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XX 3 (1988): 140.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Donovan, “Reflections on Cape Breton Culture: An Introduction,” in *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton’s History: 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Fredericton/Sydney: Acadiensis Press/UCCB Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>54</sup> The Beaton Institute is a research and archival centre open to scholars and the general public.

1986. In 1989 a Gaelic language council was established.<sup>55</sup> The University College of Cape Breton Press and Breton Books have published and/or printed hundreds of books and short stories by Cape Breton authors. Noted authors Hugh MacLellan, Alastair MacLeod, and Ann Francis MacDonald have published best-sellers about the lives of Cape Bretoners. Several films such as the seminal work by director Don Shebib, *Goin' Down the Road* from 1970 and more recently *Margaret's Museum*, based on Sheldon Currie's novel *The Glace Bay Miners Museum* have received international critical acclaim.

The visual arts community on the island is active and many artists are earning an income from their work. The University College of Cape Breton Art Gallery was established in 1980 with a mandate to promote and exhibit local Cape Breton artists. Beryl Davis, the Director of the gallery has been instrumental in the promotion of the visual arts, in particular the work of artists from the local community. Since the opening of their new gallery in 1997, there has been a significant increase in awareness of the quality of art work being produced in Cape Breton and greater recognition of the artists working here.<sup>56</sup> The gallery is the first public art gallery in Cape Breton. It has one of the finest permanent art collections in the Maritimes due to the generosity of its patron Dr. Reuben Abramowsky from Montreal. The collection is international in scope and includes such works as a Picasso sketchbook of 1897-1903. Other artists represented in the collection are L.L. Fitzgerald, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Jacques Hurtbuisse, Jack Bush, Sam Borenstein, and Betty Goodwin and of particular importance in this context,

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<sup>55</sup> Donovan, 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> "Visual Arts in the Cape Breton Economy," <http://www.lupinworks.com/lct/tsc99/arts/overview.htm>

the works of Robert Frank and June Leaf.<sup>57</sup> In 2003, The Inverness County Centre for the Arts opened, offering another venue for artists to exhibit their work.

In the late 1960s, thousands of people moved to rural areas intending to live simply, self-sufficiently and close to nature. By the 1970's, this phenomenon, known as the back-to-the-land movement, had grown to include approximately a million people across North America.<sup>58</sup> In Cape Breton, the 'back to the landers' congregated on the western side of the island in Inverness and Victoria Counties, a mountainous area 2,415 miles square and 110 miles long with lush farmland along the river valleys. Not defined by their ethnicity, back to the landers shared a common identity – “come-from-aways.”<sup>59</sup> While they were defined by their own common interests, they were also defined by their relation to the surrounding community. As “come-from-aways,” they shared an identity as outsiders<sup>60</sup> Taft writes: “Almost all Americans I have spoken with mention the fact that they are forever strangers. On an island where introductions begin with the question, ‘Who’s your father?’ Americans can never claim local citizenship”<sup>61</sup> Amish Morrell suggests that not everyone who arrived in Cape Breton saw themselves as back-to-the-landers. Although they aspired to similar practices, they did not necessarily identify themselves in this way even though as each person or couple migrated into rural communities, they found others who had done the same thing. “As outsiders, or come-

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<sup>57</sup> “Information Pamphlet,” University College of Cape Breton Art Gallery. Sydney, Nova Scotia.

<sup>58</sup> Amish C. Morrell, “Imagining the Real: Theorizing Cultural Production and Social Difference in the Cape Breton Back to the Land Community.” M.A. University of Toronto, 1999. 1

<sup>59</sup> Michael Taft, “Ethnic Americans and American Ethnicity on Cape Breton Island,” *Canadian Folklore Canadien* 13 (1988): 40.

<sup>60</sup> Morrell, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Taft, 40. Morrell writes that this is a common preface to conversation in Cape Breton when the person being addressed is not known. “While it serves to locate the subject within a patriarchal social order, it serves a more obvious function to indicate who one’s father is (who the person asking is likely to know) which will then reveal the subjects location in the community, physically (where one lives), culturally (as either Acadian, Irish, English, Scottish, or as an outsider) and one’s social status (which is largely defined by one’s parents),” 19.

from-aways in tightly knit rural communities, they formed a common identity and created what Heather Holm calls an ‘unintentional community’.<sup>62</sup>

Since the late 60s, this community within a community has flourished. Many were involved in the productive tasks of self-sufficient living; others were able to make their living as writers, editors, photographers, painters, or teachers. Many have contributed to the well-being of the island and its natives. They are involved in local organizations and founding members of organizations such as craft guilds, cooperatives, a sheep farmers’ association, heritage and preservation associations and local publishing ventures.<sup>63</sup>

Ronald Caplan is one who came to Cape Breton and made an immense contribution to the preservation of the culture of the island. Disenchanted with life in the United States, he moved his family to the small community of Wreck Cove in 1971. In his search to understand and learn about Cape Breton and its culture he created *Cape Breton’s Magazine* devoted exclusively to that task. The first issue appeared in 1972 and after over thirty years of publication it is considered to be the most extensive oral history project undertaken on the people of Cape Breton.<sup>64</sup> With the younger generation leaving their rural communities to go to large urban centres, the political and social activists

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<sup>62</sup> Morrell, 19. For further reading see: Heather Louise Holm, “Unintentional Community: Alternative Community in the Annapolis Valley,” MA thesis. Acadia University, 1998; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. (London/New York: Verso, 1983), 1-7. Anderson defines the nation as an “imagined political community” that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. Within the context of Anderson’s imagined community, “come-from-aways” can be defined as a community of people who have come together and share the same common identity.

<sup>63</sup> Taft, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Ken Aucoin, *20 Years! Cape Breton’s Magazine: Photographs by Ronald Caplan*. (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1992). Aucoin writes: “By fusing oral history with photographic portraiture in a popular format, Ronald Caplan has provided the people of Cape Breton with the means to contribute to their own ‘history, natural history and future’.”

native to Cape Breton had, in effect, traded places with their activists counterparts from the United States and other parts of Canada.<sup>65</sup>

June Leaf was one of the many artists from Canada and the United States who has settled either permanently or on a part-time basis in Inverness County since the 1960s, especially in and around coastal communities such as Mabou, Inverness, Margaree and Cheticamp. Robin Metcalf writes that for these recent immigrants to the area, the Mabou hills are “Paradise Found:” “There is gold of a cultural variety in these hills; a remarkable community of visual artists hidden away along the coast north of Mabou...Names from the honour roll of heroic postwar modern art. Their unexpected appearance in north-western Cape Breton is the local flowering of a hardy plant whose roots extend all the way back to New York.”<sup>66</sup> The “come from aways” are mostly from urban centres: New York, Toronto and Montreal. New Yorker sculptor Richard Serra spends at least five months of the year on the island, doing much of his planning for his sculptures while he is here.<sup>67</sup> New Yorkers including the composer Philip Glass, writer Rudy Wurlitzer, actor Joanne Akalaitis, and Montreal photographer Angela Grauerholz also spend part of the year; while Quebec painter Jacques Hurtubise, photographer and film maker Neil Livingston, Robert Frank and June Leaf made Cape Breton their home permanently. These artists crave anonymity and solitude, and Inverness County, Cape Breton, gave them the time and the place “to regroup, rest, and work in a setting so beautiful and a culture so refreshingly different that it seems exotic.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Taft, 40.

<sup>66</sup> Robin Metcalf, “Gold Coast,” *Canadian Art* (Summer 1997): 60.

<sup>67</sup> Calvin Tomkins, “Man of Steel,” *The New Yorker* 5 Aug. 2002: 52.

<sup>68</sup> John DeMont, “Manhattan, N.S.: Cape Breton Island is a Sanctuary for New York Artists,” *MacLean's* 14 Aug. 1995: 51.

Many of these artists have helped put the island on the map. The longest-running collective theatre troupe in the United States is the New York-based Mabou Mines Theatre group which Joanne Akalaitis helped form in 1970 during her first visit to Cape Breton. Rudy Wurlitzer and Robert Frank collaborated on a film in 1987 called *Candy Mountain*, the story of a search for a legendary Cape Breton guitar maker. A retrospective of Robert Frank's work in 2001 travelled Europe and North America, and this past year The Tate Modern organized a retrospective of Frank's films, videos and photographs titled *Robert Frank: Story Lines* which included many photographs of Cape Breton's desolate bleak beauty. A feature length documentary *Leaving Home, Coming Home: A Portrait of Robert Frank* was produced in 2004 by Gerald M. Fox and shot in New York and Mabou, Cape Breton. This past winter June Leaf participated in an exhibition *Three Islands: Richard Lax, Richard Stankiewicz, June Leaf* held at the Tinguely Museum in Basel Switzerland where over one hundred of her paintings, sculptures and works on paper inspired by life in Mabou were exhibited.

### Chapter III

#### “A Place”/ “From Away”

When June Leaf moved to Mabou Mines, Cape Breton, with the photographer Robert Frank, they bought an old farm house with seventy acres of land, overlooking the sea, along the old Mabou Mines road about five kilometres outside the village of Mabou.<sup>1</sup> It was an isolated location and was approximately one kilometre from the only other house along the road which belonged to a family with twelve children. It was Frank who had initiated the move in 1969; disillusioned with urban living and the New York art scene he suggested they leave New York and head north to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia as one of Frank's friends had told him how beautiful the island was. Neither Leaf nor Frank had ever been to Cape Breton before. Philip Glass, who had property in Dunvegan, gave Leaf the name of a lawyer to contact regarding real estate and his wife Joanne Akalaitis told her which airport to use. In March of that year, Leaf flew to Sydney, Cape Breton by herself to look for a place to rent for the coming summer. She could not believe how warmly people reacted to her; after all, here she was an American woman on her own from New York City knocking on doors, looking to rent a house for the summer. After leaving notes with her name and phone number, she finally found a house in Tarbotville; she and Frank returned for the summer. Just before they were supposed to go back to New York they heard of a place in Mabou Mines that was up for sale. The rest is history.

Once Frank saw the Mabou Mines property overlooking the sea he fell in love with it. Leaf said that Frank, being Swiss, has always loved being close to the sea while she, on the other hand, never felt the draw to that type of landscape as for her it was all

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<sup>1</sup> Jo-Anne MacDonald, “Homes Away From Home: Celebrities Find Nova Scotia a Good Place to be Anonymous.” *The Daily News (Halifax)*, 4 Feb. 2001.



about the people.<sup>2</sup> It seems unlikely that Leaf would have left a cosmopolitan city for an isolated community on an island situated in the far eastern part of Canada had she not been with Frank. When I met June Leaf for the first time at her studio in New York City in April of 2004, she told me the move was traumatic: “It was a shock to see so many Christmas trees. As a Jewish girl growing up in Chicago I never had a Christmas tree in the house and now I was completely surrounded by them.”<sup>3</sup>

When Leaf arrived in Mabou she knew she would be looked upon as an outsider, as one of those “people from away.” As mentioned earlier, the phrase “from away” refers to anyone not born in Nova Scotia or the Maritimes. In Cape Breton however, the term is even more exclusive. “Capers,” because of their history and relative isolation, think of themselves first and foremost as Cape Bretoners and at times even mainland Nova Scotians are regarded as being “from away.” Unlike the many outsiders who come to spend the summer, Leaf did not see this as a seasonal refuge; it was to become her full-time home. She was an immigrant looking for a new beginning and as she has commented, she never likes to do anything half way.<sup>4</sup> At forty years old Leaf had been making art for over twenty years and her imagery had centered on the chaos of urban living. The move to Mabou changed all that; her work became more introspective and now her imagery dealt with the adaptation of her “own flamboyant personality to rural life and new spaces.”<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter my intention is to examine Leaf’s paintings and works on paper within the context of a “personal myth” in relation to issues of identity: displacement,

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<sup>2</sup> This recounting of events is derived from a telephone conversation with June Leaf, 24 Jan. 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Conversation with June Leaf at her New York Studio, 10 April 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Brookman and Debra Singer, “June Leaf: In Her Own Words,” *June Leaf: A Survey of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper 1948-1991*. (Washington: Washington Projects for the Arts, 1991), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Lippard, “June Leaf: Life Out of Life,” *Art in America* 66 (March/April 1978): 113-114.

relocation, and the space “in-between.” Dan P. McAdams writes: “A personal myth is a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole.”<sup>6</sup> As a person “from away,” Leaf had to integrate herself into a close-knit community that looked upon outsiders with apprehension. Diana Barabas in her MA thesis on “Artists Experiencing Immigration” suggests that such displacement can be defined as an identity crisis, and relocation as integration and identity resolution.<sup>7</sup> Identity, Gillian Rose suggests, is how we make sense of our selves: “It refers to lived experiences and all the subjective feelings associated with everyday consciousness, but it also suggests that such experience and feelings are embedded in wider sets of social relations.”<sup>8</sup>

Leaf’s apprehension about moving to Cape Breton is expressed in many of her works from this early period. As a type of displaced person she had to negotiate a “sense of self.” Through her artwork Leaf creates what has been termed a “third space,” a space that is “in-between,” where she is able to work through the anxieties that result from a drastic change in one’s life. “Third space” is a concept used by many contemporary theorists to address the notion of identity. Leona English writes: “Third space is where we negotiate identity and becomes neither this nor that but our own. Third is used to denote the place where negotiation takes place, where identity is constructed and re-constructed, where life in all its ambiguity is played out.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York/London, 1993), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Diana Barabas, “Artists Experiencing Immigration: How We View Our Artistic Expression in the Context of Dramatic Change,” MA Art Education. Concordia University, 2000. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Gillian Rose, “Place and Identity: A Sense of Place,” in *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*, ed. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>9</sup> Leona English, “Third Space: Contested Space, Identity and international Adult Education,” *21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference (May 30 to June 1, 2002) L’Association canadienne pour étude l’éducation des adultes (ACEEA) Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) Proceedings*. St Frances

In this chapter Leaf's images have been grouped under the category that I refer to as "A Place," which is the place in Leaf's work where the construction and reconstruction of identity is made. It is also a "third space," where identity is in flux.<sup>10</sup> Leaf is neither inside nor outside, rather she is located in what Homi Bhabha calls a "position of liminality."<sup>11</sup> It is a productive space where Leaf addresses those feelings of alienation and separation as a result of being displaced. Secondly, "A Place" is an imaginary landscape. It is an implied place, one that is not a narrative landscape in that it is not referential to a specific location of either New York or Cape Breton. The works are ambiguous, but Leaf's use of horizontal planes tends to support our cultural tendency to read the shape as a mark of the land or the horizon. At the same time, it is also a pictorial strategy for composing the image and bringing the abstract and the representational together in one "place." In many of her works the ambiguity of what defines place is one of its most compelling attributes; it is a landscape but one that can best be read as an allegorical site for Leaf's own biographical narrative. In Leaf's artwork lived experience is expressed through her story-telling; the narrative is about her adjustment to life in Mabou. Guy A.M. Widdershoven suggests that "from a narrative perspective personal identity is related to the activity of structuring one's actions and presenting them as part of a lived narrative."<sup>12</sup>

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Xavier University, Antigonish, N.S., 109.

[http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/2002\\_Papers/21st\\_ACEEA-CASAE\\_Proce....3](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/2002_Papers/21st_ACEEA-CASAE_Proce....3)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Homi Bhabha. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 1990), 209.

<sup>12</sup> Guy A.M. Widdershoven, "Identity and Development: A Narrative Perspective," in *Identity and Development: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed Harke A. Bosma et al. (Thousands Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc., 1994), 111.

*Bird and Journal*, 1971 is the first major painting Leaf completed when she came to Cape Breton (fig.11).<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that this work has never been included and critiqued in any literature review on Leaf. *Bird and Journal* is insightful because it sums up the early feelings of being “from away,” as it addresses the anxiety and apprehension from living in the isolated community of Mabou, so far removed from the city of New York. The image is dominated by a centrally positioned black crow perched on a table edge and looking down at an open journal in which actual written pages have been collaged onto the surface. To the right of the open book, Leaf has included a small half-length image of Robert Frank. In the centre left background are five schematic figures who suggest the local villagers and are all enclosed within the “Mabou” landscape.

This is Leaf’s new reality; by pasting pages of her intimate thoughts onto the canvas she acknowledges the importance of her own story. Katherine Hoffman reinforces Clement Greenberg’s principle that collage could be seen as a quintessential twentieth-century art form with multiple layers and signposts that point to a variety of forms and realities, and to the possibility or suggestion of countless new realities.<sup>14</sup> Leaf’s journal is the focal point of the work as it is centrally placed and occupies over one-third of the canvas. The tilted pasted pages stop the eye at the first plane of the surface, suggesting that everything else is relegated to the background. The table and book have a three-dimensionality but the collaged white pages intensify the flatness of the frontal plane. At the same time, Leaf anchors the journal to the whole image with shots of colour splashed over the written word. The immediacy of the diary and the angular placement of the book on the table reinforce the concept of autobiography. The

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<sup>13</sup> An installation shot provided by Andres Pardey, Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland. The Tinguely Museum gave me permission to photograph the artworks included in the exhibition.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Hoffman, *Collage: Critical Views* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 1.

viewer seems to almost occupy the space of the writer/painter, or at least, as if looking over her shoulder to read the open pages. In that way, the viewer also parallels the position of the crow. The image is made of two spaces – the far and the near, symbolic of Leaf's own occupation of two places. Its duality is made obvious through the flattened foreground, with its specificity of the opened book, and the open boundless landscape that only suggests a general topography and mere outline of the people who occupy that place. The disruptions between the two spaces are somewhat over-ridden by Leaf's use of colour and tonal repetition and contrasts of light and dark that are conceived and applied in terms of the overall composition, rather than its individual parts, giving a harmony to the image.

More specifically, the washes of colour give a transparency and a unity to the work. Throughout the image Leaf plays with the push and pull of tones of orange, yellow, and red in contrast to shades of green, black and grey. This play of tonalities allows the landscape and the silhouetted figures to reinforce the foreground images, despite the various factors that keep them apart. Leaf has achieved what Clement Greenberg suggests is a “constant shuttling between surface and depth, in which the depicted flatness is ‘infected’ by the undepicted. Rather than being deceived, the eye is puzzled; instead of seeing objects in space, it sees nothing more than – a picture.”<sup>15</sup>

In this “picture” Leaf's imagery tells her story. The pages from her daily journal reveal her new life: the left sheet is filled with three small drawings of the view from her window – that of the Mabou coastline, images of herself, Robert, and some of the local villagers. At the top of the page are Leaf's notes with the words “[illegible] you see. – this place is forsaken.” The right side seems to be a complete diary entry. Her words tell

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<sup>15</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Collage,” *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 74.

of the beauty of the landscape however, at the same time she writes of her seeming frustration at being so far removed from major art centres. Leaf continued to exhibit in Chicago and New York after moving to Mabou, however planning the shows from the distance of Nova Scotia created difficulties. In the diary, she writes of one of her paintings not being good and says: “Damn it! I should have written immediately. It was in my mind when I walked our [illegible] path to the house [illegible] and the ocean was so everlasting [illegible] beautiful! – they [illegible] mg.” The journal entries are “leaves” of her biography; possibly a play on her own name.

The black crow and the journal are the same relative size and scale. Although black crows are a common sighting along the Mabou coastline, here the significance of the crow is obviously autobiographical as a bird is traditionally a metaphor for migration. Maran Sarup defines a migrant as “a person who has crossed the border. S/he seeks a place to make ‘a new beginning’, to start again, to make a better life.”<sup>16</sup> Leaf is a migrant; she has left her native country for Canada, forsaken the urban for the rural, celebrity for anonymity. Like Leaf’s own position as a migrant, there is a suggestion of ambiguity in the way the crow is depicted, because the bird is semi-transparent. As a symbol for Leaf, the crow is not planted solidly in the landscape; it is as if at any time it would be ready for flight. The tips of its wings are painted with washes of red which draw the eye to the journal entry and the words “I knew that it [illegible] good to go away today.” The crow symbolically separates Leaf’s interior and exterior worlds and represents that place in-between where identity is in flux. McAdams suggests that a personal myth delineates an identity; and in *Bird and Journal* Leaf begins the process of

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<sup>16</sup> Madan Sarup, “Home and Identity,” in *Travellers’ Tales*, ed. George Robertson et al. (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 94.

constructing and defining her identity within this alien environment by piecing together and exploring the various parts that make up her particular story.<sup>17</sup> The use of collage to construct the image creates a visual parallel to the layering process of defining her new identity.

Not only does Leaf have to cope with the pain of separation, she has to learn to integrate into a society that looks sceptically at people “from away.” As Robert Frank said, “People want to see you spend a winter, they want to know you’re serious. Then after you’ve been here three or four winters they accept that you’re really here, and things change.”<sup>18</sup> The local men and women of the community figure prominently in Leaf’s world. Here the flattened figures with broken silhouettes are given only the vaguest, almost caricature-like appearance. The vagueness of their specific identity is reiterated by the delicate washes of colour that delineate their clothing. The figures at the left form a kind of audience, but they also seem to move forward towards the absent painter/author. It is almost as if they are emerging from the landscape – looking to see if this couple “from away” have the fortitude to live in their desolate, windswept coastal community. In contrast, the figures at the right seem oblivious to her, concerned with their own conversation. It is possible that this is a small vignette of Leaf and Frank walking along their pathway. The image of Frank is the largest and most densely painted figure in the work. He shares her experience by the close position of his body to the diary and his gaze seems to be directed at the absent Leaf, as well as toward the viewer. The contrast in scale between Frank and the book, and Frank and the peopled landscape, his proximity

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<sup>17</sup> McAdams, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Frank, quoted in Silver Donald Cameron, “Five Immigrant Artists in Nova Scotia,” *Terra Firma: Five Immigrant Artists in Nova Scotia* (Halifax, N.S.: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 1993), 5.

to and apart from the rest of the image reinforces his own position in Mabou – like but unlike the space occupied by Leaf.

Their early years were difficult. The old farmhouse they bought was half-ruined and roofless and the next two or three years were spent making it habitable.<sup>19</sup> Frank was away much of the time teaching and making films, but Leaf was in Mabou full-time.<sup>20</sup> She found the desolate vastness of the sea disheartening and struggled to come to terms with the feeling of isolation.

Then came the question of why isn't nature marvellous to me? See, Robert would look out the window and he'd say *Oh, it's nature*. And I'd think *What nature? I don't like it. I wish I lived by a brook with a big shady chestnut tree. It's too open. It's too vast. The ocean's cold*. I'd watch him looking out the window. He'd be swooning over all this stuff, and I'd think *I must be the world's most insensitive lover of the land that ever lived*.<sup>21</sup>

It is at this period that Leaf starts to develop her “cast of characters” that will feature prominently in her story-telling. The figures could be identified as those that McAdams has identified as ‘imagoes.’ He states:

An imago is a personified and idealized concept of the self. Each of us consciously and unconsciously fashions main characters for our life stories. These characters function in our myths as if they were ‘persons; hence, they are “personified.” And each has a somewhat exaggerated and one-dimensional form; hence, they are ‘idealized.’ Our life stories may have one dominant imago or many. The appearance of two central and conflicting imagoes in personal myth seems to be relatively common.<sup>22</sup>

Leaf now creates an imago of herself in *Still Point of the Turning World*, 1975 (fig.12). She is a cartographer who maps her way within unknown territory. Stripped bare and in the final process of removing her mask, she hovers in the middle of two worlds. As Leaf

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<sup>19</sup> Cameron, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Frank made *About Me: A Musical* in 1971 and in 1972 *Cocksucker Blues*, the film he made of the Rolling Stones when he traveled with them on their 1972 North American tour.

<sup>21</sup> Brookman, 18

<sup>22</sup> McAdams, 122.



would say almost fifteen years later, “In Mabou, you have your inner resources and nothing else. It’s not the Loop and it isn’t Broadway.”<sup>23</sup> Leaf defines her identity in relationship with her husband Robert and he holds a prominent position within the frame. Leaf, as cartographer, looks directly at Robert as she removes her mask. Like in *Bird and Journal* the proximity to and apart from the rest of the image reinforces his position within Mabou; similar but different from her own.

*Scientist Astonished*, 1972/73 is one of a series of paintings and works on paper where the narrative is about the process of literally understanding the way the land had been shaped and to see it as a living organism in order for a rootedness to take place (fig. 13). The work was recently exhibited in *The Expressive Figure: Selections from the Permanent Collection of the Art Department Eastern Michigan University 1950-2000*, and in its accompanying catalogue, Julie Myers suggests:

Leaf contrasts the forms of the man-made objects with the forms of the man and his environment. Whereas the mechanisms are made of precise, straight, black lines on a white ground, the surrounding area is ill-defined, an evanescent spray of warm colors. The Scientist himself is florid and abundant, his form defined by a line which is by turns thin and sharp, thick and messy, and even smeared.<sup>24</sup>

A botanist friend of Leaf’s from Boston sent her several books on microbiology and Leaf herself bought two microscopes: “*I’m just going to see what’s at the bottom of this* I said. I remember when I looked in the microscope and saw what was there. I thought *It’s the Loop! It’s the Loop! It’s the same thing! They’re mean! And they’re eating each other! And they’re shitting all over everything! They’re fighting. It’s war. It’s what I know.*”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Brookman, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Julie R. Myers, *The Expressive Figure: Selections from the Permanent Collection of the Art Department Eastern Michigan State* (Michigan: Ford Gallery Eastern Michigan University, 2005), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Brookman, 18

The image of the scientist sitting at a table looking in amazement at a collaged object that looks somewhat like a microscope, is placed against an implied landscape. The ambiguity of “place” is again expressed through use of colour and brushstroke. This landscape, defined only by the horizontal lines in the foreground and a faint suggestion of a coast at the lower left of the image, denies the implication of an interior space. Leaf’s imago, the scientist, is searching for a connection. Growing up in Chicago, Leaf travelled the Loop on a regular basis and it gave her a real sense of place. In Cape Breton it became paramount that she feel “her feet on the ground.” In *Microscope Head*, 1973 the ambiguity is not as ill-defined (fig.14). The horizon line and the spattering of what looks to be trees are suggestive of an exterior setting. The scientist’s head has now been replaced by a microscope. She holds what could be a spruce needle in her right hand; her left finger points to the opened book for verification, perhaps suggesting that she is an imago for Leaf’s own looking for the connection to “place.” Leaf told me when we met in her New York studio that it was her decision to make Mabou their permanent home and although it was Robert who fell madly in love with the place, it would not have come to be without her determination and resolve to adopt this alien land as their own.<sup>26</sup>

*Scientist Astonished* and *Microscope Head* metaphorically represent Leaf in control of her own destiny; she is the only one who can make sense of the unfamiliar world around her and in turn make sense of herself. Silver Donald Cameron, a writer who has been living in D’Escousse, Cape Breton since 1971 suggests that Leaf’s work is “primarily a ground on which an extraordinary charged person can form, and perhaps control, her responses to the world she simultaneously finds and creates.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Conversation with June Leaf in her New York Studio, 10 April 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Cameron, 14.

Leaf's works are always open-ended, and occupy the "third space." They certainly are susceptible to more than one interpretation; the narrative never clearly defined. She constructs these stories to link various events in her life into a unified and understandable whole. In several works, Leaf's titles suggest the main subject of the work is someone other than herself. However, this is sometimes deceptive as they are also self-portraits. Leaf uses photographed fragments of her body, symbols, and imaginary characters as ways to signify that this is her narrative. *Albert, 1973* is a montage that includes drawings and Polaroid photographs in addition to the acrylic surface (fig.15). There are two stories being told here: to the left, Leaf constructs a male portrait, possibly one of the local fishermen. The head of the figure is a closely cropped photograph whose facial features contrast with the generalized treatment of the rest of the body, even as it repeats the tonalities of the black and white photographs. He sits at a table his back against a window, and the view could be from her own work place, looking out onto the house of her neighbour and the Mabou landscape. The placement of *Albert* within her own interior space indicates a friendship has formed between Leaf and the local fisherman. It appears he is holding a cup, more than likely filled with tea, since tea is the ritual by which people in Cape Breton socially interact and also reflects their maintaining of tradition brought by their ancestors from Scotland. Carol Corbin of the University College of Cape Breton and a "come from away," writes that tea was the medium through which she got to know Cape Bretoners.

Sitting in spotless kitchens that are steamy warm in the middle of winter, I made friends gathered over the teapot....The activities of eating and sipping our tea are only preoccupations for the hands. The real purpose of tea is to engage in the ritual of social interaction; to talk, to yarn, to be in the presence of a friend. Ostensibly taking tea is the reason for getting together, as if we might perish from hunger or thirst without the tea break. But the connection among people, sharing

space and sharing time, is the real meaning of tea. It is a purely social institution.<sup>28</sup>

With the generalized Mabou landscape behind him Albert occupies the middle ground, literally and figuratively. However, by adding an actual photograph of Albert's face Leaf flattens the image and reinforces the spatial ambiguity of the painted surface and it is at the surface that the two stories are revealed. Albert looks directly out at the viewer; he represents the men of Mabou who have fished the waters around this area for centuries, but now he has time on his hands. Because of over-fishing by Europeans since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, fish stocks along the coast have been depleted and fishing has been reduced to a subsistence level. Leaf has said there was nothing flamboyant about the people of Mabou: "They were very reserved and modest."<sup>29</sup> Corbin suggests that Cape Bretoners in general have a sense of humour that endures despite the economic hardships that "bedevil" the island.<sup>30</sup> These are the people who now share Leaf's world.

To the right the second story unfolds. The viewer is allowed into Leaf's intimate space, the space where she constructs and reconstructs a "sense of self." A drawing of a bird, possibly the crow of *Bird and Journal*, made from several overlaid sheets, hovers overhead as if ready for flight. Below a "mad scientist" appears ready to pull a "starting pedal," and above, pasted to the surface of the drawing, is another page from Leaf's journal that reads "To create life out of life!! That's what I want to do!!" The spatial areas of the painting are now more integrated than in *Bird and Journal* and without the overt divisions between her space and the space of Mabou. Leaf's use of rectangular

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<sup>28</sup> Carol Corbin, "An American Takes Tea," in *The Centre of the World at the Edge of a Continent: Cultural Studies of Cape Breton Island*, ed. Carol Corbin and Judith A. Rolls (Sydney, N.S.: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1996), 74-75. When my husband and I visited June Leaf this past summer at her home in Mabou we sat at the kitchen table and chatted over a cup of tea. The ritual continues.

<sup>29</sup> Brookman, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Corbin, 15.

shapes such as the pages of her sketchbooks and the panes in the window conflate the pictorial spaces, are banded together by the rectangular surface of the wall and the tables and serve to frame the image. Furthermore, the indication of her own work table blends seamlessly with the kitchen table where Albert takes his tea. The pictorial, especially the spatial strategies that Leaf uses, reflect her growing adjustment to her situation. Leaf's hands, a collage of photographs and paint, are then seen in the act of creating; as creator, she is also constructing her own destiny. Hovering overhead, the bird is again a metaphor for Leaf, the migrant, who wants to stay, who wants to find a sense of self within a culture so different from anything that she had previously experienced. Life was no longer as she knew it; it was her own responsibility to make the most of this change of direction, rebuild and go forward: "Maybe it's fate. Maybe I've used up my living in New York, at least for the time being."<sup>31</sup>

Leaf includes her partner Robert Frank in several of the works from the early seventies: *Robert Says*, 1973, *Robert Enters the Room*, 1976, and *Robert and the Model*, 1976. In this transitional period of her life, it is as though Leaf is constantly reminding herself that Frank is the reason she is here. Here again, in *Robert Enters the Room*, 1976 Leaf makes a clear but integrative distinction between her interior space and the exterior world around her (fig.16). Her arms are outstretched over what appears to be a blank canvas; the left hand is a photo, probably one of Leaf's own, pasted on to the surface. In front of her to the left is the Mabou Mines landscape and an outline of a window is drawn over the landscape, which creates an illusion of depth and automatically separates exterior from interior. The tonalities of the "landscape" are carried through to the right side of the canvas where her interior space is specifically defined. The two spheres are of

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<sup>31</sup> Cameron, 3.

equal physical size and symbolic weight. Doors lead out of the room and to the left a small black and white photograph of the exterior part of the house with the window that faces the desolate coastline is pasted on to the surface. Leaf framed the photograph in such a way as to suggest a door that leads out to the harsh reality of winter in Mabou. To the right a photograph of Robert about to enter her work space is attached on to the other doorway. Representing Robert by a photograph also distinguishes their professional identities.

Again, Leaf uses the medium of collage to highlight the reality of her daily existence. She juxtaposes a painted image of the scenic Mabou coastline with a photograph that gives a glimpse of the realities of winter survival. The fact that the photograph of Robert is positioned in such a way as to suggest that he is outside Leaf's interior space, could suggest that Leaf is alone in dealing with the turmoil of relocation. Frank easily embraced his new lifestyle: "I was overwhelmed. It was a very big change for me, to really love a place. In New York you're there to survive, you're there to fight, to do your thing. Here it was really to enjoy something, and to possibly become a different person and maybe a better person."<sup>32</sup> However, the foreground is about Leaf. She states her place within the frame through the collaged photograph of her own hand, clasping onto the edge of the canvas, while the other rests in anticipation. Looking at the scene before her, it suggests that Leaf is ready to assume the role of self-narrator. It is this space where Leaf will again tell her story; where she will continue to reconstruct her self. The canvas becomes a metaphor for her "third space." Mika Hannula suggests that the third space "creates opportunities which promote something different, new and

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<sup>32</sup> Cameron, 3.

previously unidentified. In other words it offers different alternative ways to perceive who you are, where you are, who you are with and where you want to go.”<sup>33</sup>

In the same year Leaf painted *Robert and the Model*, 1976 (fig.17). Although the work has not been reproduced in colour, it is still worthwhile discussing as it confirms Leaf’s continued constructing of her personal identity and introduces the reader to a major work done in the following year. *Robert and the Model* presents a panoramic view of the Mabou landscape by using vertical lines that divide the canvas into distinct places. In doing this, Leaf creates an interior space where the carefully delineated portrait of Robert is anchored to the ground and the edge of the canvas. He is relaxed and appears to be in his element, positioned against both his domestic place and its rural setting. The nude model, who I would like to suggest is Leaf, sits on a bench with head in hand looking forlorn and deep in thought; a closed-in figure, her body is expressing a psychological state. To the left, Leaf has included a semblance of one of her paintings, *Cigarette Girl*. One can still see the traces of the isolated barren Mabou landscape through the washes of paint in the picture within a picture. The contrast of an icon of New York City living within the Mabou landscape is abrupt. The raised position of *Cigarette Girl*, unlike that of Robert who is rooted to the land, suggests a sense of floating. Madan Sarup suggests that identity is changed by the journey: “In the transformation every step forward can also be a step back: the migrant is here and there.”<sup>34</sup>

A working woman artist, who lived in New York throughout the tumultuous sixties, had given it all up to go off to some remote part of Canada and live by the sea.

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<sup>33</sup> Mika Hannula, “Third Space – A Merry-Go-Round of Opportunity,” *Kiasma* (12-01). <http://www.kiasma.fi/www.viewresource.php?id=3LoHin6PkQfTgv09&lang=en&previe...>

<sup>34</sup> Sarup, 98.

What happens now when the city girl becomes country girl? Her connection to the city remained through her exhibitions in New York during this period, and she continued to maintain a studio in the Village. However, in 1973 Leaf became a Canadian Landed Immigrant and Mabou Mines, Cape Breton became her permanent home. Relocating into a community struggling to maintain their traditional way of life had its challenges, as did being isolated from a community that had fed her creative imagination.

The ambiguity of Leaf's position is addressed head-on in *Cigarette Girl*, 1978/79 (fig.18). Using gestural brushstrokes, the landscape is defined by the pale horizontal plane that separates the cyan sky and occupies approximately two-thirds of the space. Although the Mabou coastline is not readily definable, Leaf's open brushwork gives the faint suggestion of a coastal view. Leaf's imago of the *Cigarette Girl* is front and center and because of the low horizon, gives the impression that she floats above the landscape. This placement of the figure indicates Leaf's own personal dilemma.

*Cigarette Girl* is an emblematic portrait of the women who worked in New York night-clubs during the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Leaf identifies her by her large tray, her long legs and only the scantiest suggestion of a costume. However, she is placed within a desolate landscape devoid of any sign that would connect the figure to her occupation.<sup>35</sup> Leaf uses black and white to depict the figure that metaphorically represents New York, a city of stone and concrete, and her extraordinary long legs read like sky-scrapers. Emphasizing the silhouette, the figure is described through a minimal of colour which gives a transparency to the image, suggestive of being neither here nor there. It also

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<sup>35</sup> The image calls to mind many of the works done in the late seventies and into the eighties loosely referred to as New Image Painting with its representation of things that are real and familiar but are isolated and removed from associative backgrounds and environments. For further reading see David Salle, "New Image Painting," *Flash Art* (April/May 1979) and Richard Marshall, *New Image Painting* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978).



reiterates the vagueness of place, suggesting it is the space where identity is not fixed.<sup>36</sup> Similarly the lack of specificity of the landscape, is again a metaphor for Leaf's own internal distance from her new identity in Cape Breton, and made more emphatic by the cigarette girl's own lack of integration to the setting.

Another image of the single frontal female figure, *Woman on Back of Striding Horse*, 1978 does contain more overt references to the rural landscape (fig.19). However, the ambiguity of the image is made quite clear. While the horse moves towards the landscape, the body of the high-heeled nude woman faces the viewer. But then her masked face is turned to the right, creating a shape not unlike the silhouette of the landscape. The witch-like mask and the rear-view of the horse suggest a turning away from the basic, almost primordial existence suggested by the simplified landscape and the figure's exposed skin.

Leaf's draftsmanship and expressionist use of colour are reflective of the work of Willem de Kooning. Like his images of women of the early fifties, Leaf's *Cigarette Girl* commands the viewer's full attention through its frontality. While De Kooning's women are placed within a chaotic background inferring New York, Leaf positions the figure *on* rather than *in* a symbolic geographical setting. A signifier for Leaf herself, the "Cigarette Girl" can be read as a type of/implied self-portrait. Leaf studied dance as a young girl in Chicago but gave it up because she thought she did not have the temperament of a dancer. Leaf was aware however, that often dancers augmented their salaries by selling cigarettes at the clubs where they performed. *Cigarette Girl's* physique is that of a dancer, with a similar build to that of the long-legged Leaf herself. As well, she has always been fascinated by the look of a women's foot in a high heel and the first drawing

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<sup>36</sup> English, 109.

she ever made was of her mother's own shoes.<sup>37</sup> Such shoes confer a cosmopolitanism upon the figures in *Cigarette Girl* and *Woman on the Back of Striding Horse*, suggesting that references to New York in Leaf's paintings create a continuing subtext. The motif is also present in several of the three-dimensional works of the late seventies and early eighties.<sup>38</sup>

In this series of images, whether paintings, drawings, or sculptures the women are nude except for the shoes on their feet and the theme of the nude woman suggests Leaf's new beginning – a desire to start afresh, without any protective layering. Despite similarities in the use of gesture, the nude figure in Leaf's work at the time is not like that of de Kooning, whose paintings imply a forceful sexuality. Her nude figures are more withdrawn, retaining an anonymity, universalism, and agelessness. At the same time, the nude women suggest Leaf's new beginning, as the transplanted city girl. In the small drawing *Sphinx*, 1978, Leaf sketched the outline of a desolate landscape (fig.20.). A sphinx-like monument in the form of a buxom blonde with painted red lips and wavy blond hair is in the process of being set into place within the barren landscape. Although she is missing her high heels, this depiction of a "Marilyn Monroe" figure is also suggestive of autobiography and a reminder of another life. Here again, one senses apprehension, perhaps resistance as the sphinx-like figure is being "pulled" into place.

While the nude figure became a significant motif throughout the seventies, Leaf continued to be fascinated by one particular aspect of the body – the head.

The isolation in Nova Scotia gave me a "Big Head" filled with hungers; so I'm a voracious creature when I come to the city. But it's the pencil's fault. The mind

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Enright, "This to This, This to This: The Interconnected World of June Leaf," *Border Crossings* 17 3 (July 1998): 18.

<sup>38</sup> See appendix for images of following works. *Woman Walking*, 1978, tin, rod, springs, wire, 3 x 24 x 1 cm.; *Shooting from the Heart*, 1980, tin plate, rods, springs, gears, 20 x 20 x 5 cm.

(even a pedestrian mind such as mine) is uncharted. Give anyone a pencil and have them face the line of the ocean day after day, and you will find something happening. The mind (thoughts? must move. There is little resistance to deep interior probing. Something vital is lacking, of course, and that is society in one form or another (fig.21).<sup>39</sup>

The “big head” has been a recurring theme in Leaf’s work since she saw the reflection of a boat mooring in the water while taking a ferry across Little Narrows, Cape Breton and thought it resembled a woman’s head.<sup>40</sup> When Lippincott Inc. in Connecticut offered Leaf the use of their foundry to make whatever she wanted she could not believe it. “My head just blew up inside.... It’s just that my head blew up and became pregnant.”<sup>41</sup> *The Head*, 1980 is the culmination of many drawings, paintings and toy-like sculptures that deal with the theme of Leaf as “Thinker (fig.22).” It exemplifies Leaf’s love of making things, for even as a child she would take toys apart just to see how they could be put back together. She started making small three-dimensional kinetic sculptures in 1976 using whatever materials she found around her Mabou home. Like many of her paintings from this period the sculptures reflect her reactions to the dramatic changes in her life.<sup>42</sup>

*The Head* is a mechanical bust of a woman, operated by a crank at its side. Leaf made the simple transmission that is located inside the head and can be seen through the perforations in the back. When one turns the crank, the bellows at the neck force air through the mouth and the tongue wags up and down in a frozen half-smile. It breezes

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<sup>39</sup> June Leaf, “Artist Statement,” *Alternative Realities in Contemporary American Painting* (Minnesota: Studio Arts Department and the Katherine Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> Brookman, 23. See Appendix for examples of *Untitled*, 1978, ink on paper, 25 x 20 cm.; *Study for the Head*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 203 x 119 cm.; *Letter to David Lippincott*, 1979, pen and coloured pencil on paper, 25 x 20cm.

<sup>41</sup> Brookman, 22.

<sup>42</sup> For images of the following works see appendix: *The Lover’s*, 1976, tin, rods, tin plate, spring, 17 x 41 x 8 cm.; *The Kick*, 1976, tin, plate, spring wire, 18 x 17 cm.; *The Tantrum*, 1978, tin, clockspring, chain, wire, 30 x 22 cm.; *Big Head Fights Back*, 1981, tin plate, spring, rods, 4 x 29 x 1 cm.

and wheezes, the tongue clicks and the eyes flash.<sup>43</sup> Lippard comments that Leaf *makes* people, as opposed to *depicting* people; metaphorically and literally she gives them breath.<sup>44</sup> The severity of the simplified forms suggest a universalized female, reminiscent of ancient Egyptian and Greek sculpture, at the same time that it has ties to Giacometti, Picasso, and the modernist sculpture movement. The toothy smile and the overt mechanical devices take the female down from her pedestal and provide a sense of the iconic that is there in Leaf's painted images of high-heeled women.

*The Head* was Leaf's reaction to the feminist movement of the seventies as she felt at odds with aspects of its ideology. She had spent her entire career successfully making her way in a predominately man's world and managed to do what she set out to do: "I didn't like it that the women's movement blamed people for what they didn't do. And I didn't like it that they downgraded what women did do."<sup>45</sup> Instead, *The Head* was her way of honouring and celebrating women. Judith Kirshner suggests that Leaf wants to both control and give form to her own frantic mental inventions and, at the same time, prove that a woman can make a powerful machine.<sup>46</sup>

*The Mooring*, 1980 is the image of a large "pregnant head" – Leaf's own head (fig.23). The head is over-powering in its size and colour and most importantly, in its distortion and disembodiment. At first glance the head seems to float within a suggestive landscape. Leaf uses quick gestural brushstrokes to render a landscape that is both imaginary and real and creates a tonal tension between the broader marks of the head.

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<sup>43</sup> Judith Russi Kirshner, "June Leaf: Young-Hoffman Gallery," *Artforum* 19 (Summer 1981): 99.

<sup>44</sup> Lucy Lippard, "June Leaf With the Wind Behind Her: A Conversation," *June Leaf: A Survey of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper 1948-1991*. (Washington: Washington Projects for the Arts, 1991), 27.

<sup>45</sup> Brookman, 20.

<sup>46</sup> Kirshner, 27.

The background has no logical relation to the head itself except for the single important coil-shape that comes out of the circular motion Leaf uses to create the big head and connect it to the landscape below. The “pregnant head,” like some of her other females is shown in profile, but in *The Mooring* it looks inward towards the land with the facial expression engaged in an acknowledgment of place. Furthermore, the head in *The Mooring* is positioned more securely within the landscape, rather than above it. The generalized shape of the head and its dark tonalities reiterate the simplified coastal cliffs to the left. While she continues to float over the landscape, she contrasts with the *Cigarette Girl* who looks beyond the landscape with a gaze that is neither here nor there. In *Woman on Back of Striding Horse*, the masked woman looks away from the land out to sea. It could be suggested that Leaf invents and manipulates her “cast of characters” to now indicate that as her stay in Mabou lengthens, the feelings of alienation and isolation wane.

Robert Enright suggests that the head in *The Mooring* can be traced back to an *Untitled* drawing from 1978 in which a figure of a seated woman with a bulbous head turns to look back at the viewer (fig.24). He goes on to suggest that the drawing could be read as a portrait of the “artist as thinker.”<sup>47</sup> Leaf herself had said: “One day, I put the key in the door and I thought the mind is infinite and I knew that the water and the horizon line had taught me that. I love the idea that the horizon sliced my head open.”<sup>48</sup> Enright comments: “It’s as if Leaf were giving us, not a woman with her throat cut, but

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Enright, “Emphatic Beauty – the Art of June Leaf,” *June Leaf* (Basel, Switzerland: Benteli Verlag, Museum Tinguely, 2004), 95-96.

<sup>48</sup> June Leaf, quoted in “Emphatic Beauty,” 96.

the woman artist with her mind cut open, a Caesarean performed on a head pregnant with thought.”<sup>49</sup>

The painting *Bernetta*, 1988 is derived from the metal sculpture of the same name that Leaf had made in 1983 (fig.25). In this painting her own story continues to unfold as Leaf continues to wrestle with issues of identity and a sense of belonging. Leaf met her neighbour Bernetta when she moved to Mabou in 1969. Because Leaf’s portraits of Bernetta in a hoop shirt could be read as a reference to her womb (as she had twelve children) Robert Enright suggests “Leaf was able to personalize a stand-in for the archetypal nurturer.”<sup>50</sup> Bernetta, unlike Leaf’s nude females, is not within the category of self-portraiture; however, she is a symbolic projection of all that Leaf is not – a settler and a mother. As “archetypal nurturer” Bernetta strolls along a pathway, arms folded behind her as she takes in the landscape, wearing her (inappropriate) high heels. This is her home; she is the protector of the ancestral land; she will ensure that the traditions and culture of her society will be passed on. Her position is secured by the fact that the horizon line coincides with the waistline of her dress. Nevertheless, Leaf’s image of the landscape is ambiguous, for despite Bernetta’s “symbolic” ownership of the land, it has little sense of a specific place and the figure itself has its ambiguities. The thin layers of paint, almost resembling watercolour, and its hushed tones give an atmosphere of the early evening and an aura of meditation that evokes 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape painting. Bernetta’s face is obscured as she walks away from the viewer towards the horizon. Although the rest of the body conflates a frontal and rear view, she occupies a separate and isolated place. This further reinforces her symbolic role in a world detached from

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<sup>49</sup> Enright, “Emphatic Beauty,” 95-96.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 84.

both that of the audience, but more emphatically the space that occupied by Leaf as she speaks for her own ties to her new community. The body has a loneliness about it; her shoulders exaggerated and her upper body top heavy, as if she carries a load on her shoulders. The skirt is a motif that Leaf repeatedly uses in her work as hoop skirts are, as Leaf says, “big protective domes that are almost houses for the world.”<sup>51</sup> The figure is a painted replica of the sculpture *Bernetta* that was made of tin plate, rods, spring, and wire and measures only 27 x 20 x 20 cm. (fig.26). When Leaf develops a character for a painting she first wants to know how it feels. “I want to feel the weight of it in my hands. So I make these things to feel the place where she is. I live inside her. I have to know who she is and how she feels.”<sup>52</sup>

Leaf’s archetypal nurturer is seen in various images throughout the course of her career. Her earliest paintings depicted primitive, stylized female forms, calling to mind such ancient goddesses as the *Venus of Willendorf*. In the 50s, memories of her strong and protective grandmother took the form of matronly figures as in *Arcade Woman*, 1956.<sup>53</sup> In the sixties the image of *The Pig Lady*, in the form of a waitress, appears as a mythical composite of all the “blowsy biscuit-fleshed ladies” that had paraded and danced happily through Leaf’s paintings during this period in New York.<sup>54</sup> In the 70s, the female warrior enters Leaf’s vocabulary as an “imago” suggested by her towering female figures positioned well above the horizon line. *Red Archer*, 1978 calls to mind Artemis, the goddess of hunting and archery, who paradoxically not only defended all

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<sup>51</sup> June Leaf, Quoted in “Emphatic Beauty,” 85.

<sup>52</sup> Brookman, 24.

<sup>53</sup> MJJ, “June Leaf,” *Selections from the Dennis Adrian Collection* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1982), 24.

<sup>54</sup> Lippard, “June Leaf: Life Out of Life,” 112.

wild animals but also the weak and the young (fig.27).<sup>55</sup> In Greek mythology woman warriors [Amazons] had their right breast burnt off to enable them to bend the bow and shoot arrows more freely; in contrast Leaf's women warriors keep their gender identity in tact.<sup>56</sup> In some ways, *Red Archer* is Bernetta's alter ego – or the other side of the personality projected in *Bernetta*, the painting. Here she is the active, not meditative defender of her home, her past and her present. Visually, Leaf continues the motifs of *Cigarette Girl* and most obviously *Woman on Back of Striding Horse*; but, *Red Archer* is also autobiographical in her defence of Leaf's own family and her place in the world.

Leaf came from a matriarchal family as her mother and grandmother were strong and pragmatic women. It would seem that Leaf saw in *Bernetta* and the anonymous figure of the *Red Archer*, the same qualities that she respected and admired in the two women she loved most in the world. McAdams suggests that one's personal myth is an "act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future."<sup>57</sup> Leaf's grandparents were from Ukraine in Eastern Europe,<sup>58</sup> in fact her birth name is Lifschitz.<sup>59</sup> Many of their family never returned from the concentration camps after World War II.<sup>60</sup> As a child in a Jewish neighbourhood in Chicago, she was aware early on of what it meant to be an "outsider." Speaking of her reaction to James Ensor's work she said it brought her in touch with where she grew up:

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Grant & John Hazel, *Who's Who in Classical Mythology* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 50-51.

<sup>56</sup> The word a-mazon means "without breast." It has also been said that the Amazons allegedly fed their female infants on horse's milk to prevent the enlargement of their breasts thus they denied the social function of Attic women as nurturers of their children. Although this myth has been recorded there is nowhere among the extant remains of Greek art a representation of a single-breasted Amazon.

<sup>57</sup> McAdams, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Conversation with June Leaf at her home in Mabou, 9 July 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Guido Magnaguagno, "Forward," *June Leaf* (Basel, Switzerland: Benteli Verlag, Museum Tinguely, 2004), 13.

<sup>60</sup> Brookman, 22.



“the neighbourhoods, the Jewishness, the ghetto feeling of being cut off from the world...”<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Cross suggests the irony of the position of Jews in Diaspora: “Represented as a perennially landless, homeless wanderer, an exiled nomad, the Jew is both familiar with, yet excluded (and estranged) from the cities, the cultures, and the communities within which he or she circulates.”<sup>62</sup> By 1988 Leaf had now been living in Mabou for close to twenty years; her female images suggest that despite her imposed identity as someone “from away,” there was identification now with the women in her immediate community despite the societal alienation of being an artist, a woman, a Jew, and “from away.” While she was coming to terms with her new reality, the tensions were still there on the surface of the paintings, and in her life.

McAdams suggests that we come to understand ourselves through an understanding of the characters that dominate our story and push the narrative forward.<sup>63</sup> While Leaf works through the imposed identity of being “from away,” a second identity emerges which incorporates a parallel situation of being “from here.” Identity is a construction; it is the result of the interaction between people, places, and practices. In her search of “self,” Leaf moves through time and her artworks from this early period in Mabou are the vehicles of narrating her biography. At the same time, her migration was her inspiration and her pleasure of discovery. As Madan Sarup wrote: “Identity is changed by the journey...identity is not to do with being but with becoming.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Brookman, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Cross, “Judaism and Exile: The Ethics of Otherness,” in *Space & Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, ed. Erica Carter, James Donald & Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), 60.

<sup>63</sup> McAdams, 123.

<sup>64</sup> Sarup, 98.

## Chapter IV

### “The Place”/ “From Here”

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Leaf produced a body of work between 1970 and 1990 that can be addressed within the context of identity. The landscapes which have been grouped under the category of “A Place” are ambiguous and open-ended as to their interpretation. However, there is an underlying narrative that runs through these works that confirms and challenges Leaf’s position within her new environment as a person “from away.” On the other hand, within this same time frame several of Leaf’s works speak of her search to actively come to know and understand her new surroundings in order to establish a sense of belonging. These landscapes have the same kind of unbounded territory as the works previously discussed, however they relate more specifically to the actual physical landscape of Mabou and the people who live there and are grouped under the category of “The Place.” It is in these works that narratives of “from here” will be found.

When Leaf moved to Mabou Mines she did not see herself as one of those American artists, who are tagged with the label of “expatriate-art-colony member” that is used to describe summer residents on the island.<sup>1</sup> She believed that in order to feel a sense of place it was necessary for her to better understand the landscape, and she felt this could be attained most directly by actually painting their new environment. For Leaf the landscape is not just what we see before us, but it is the place where memories and histories are made. The phrase “a sense of place” is often used to emphasize that

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Gibson Garvey, “Head & Heart”: A Celebration of June Leaf,” *Arts Atlantic* 34 (Spring/Summer, 1989): 43.

places/locations are significant because they are a focus of a person's feelings and that they can develop from every aspect of an individual's life experience.<sup>2</sup> Gillian Rose suggests that "although senses of place may be very personal, they are not entirely the result of one's individual feelings and meanings; rather, such feelings and meanings are shaped in large part by the social, cultural and economic circumstances in which individuals find themselves."<sup>3</sup> Through Leaf's search for a sense of the place, her paintings document a landscape rooted in a strong sense of social and cultural history.

Leaf's landscape paintings of Cape Breton can be seen within the framework of contemporary landscape theory that suggests that landscape is not just an object to be seen or a text to read, but a process by which social and subjective identities are formed, as W.J.T. Mitchell suggests; and that when we look at landscape, "we not just ask what landscape 'is' or 'means' but what it *does*, how it works as a cultural practice."<sup>4</sup> It is in these paintings that Leaf negotiates her transformation "from away" to "from here." In many of the images, the degree of specificity to the place will vary but even in its most abstracted form, it is there. The Mabou coastline is an anchor to Leaf's discovery of "a sense of place" and reconstructing her own identity in this rural community as suggested in the previous chapter. It is as if by painting the site repeatedly in her work, she is reassuring her place within it. By examining Leaf's early work in Cape Breton within this category of "The Place," it is possible to construct her personal narrative of "from here" and at the same time reveal that her images of Cape Breton are not only sites of visual appropriation, or focuses for the formation of identity, but that they can "circulate as a

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<sup>2</sup> Gillian Rose, "Place and Identity: A Sense of Place," *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*, ed. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, 89.

<sup>4</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

medium of exchange.”<sup>5</sup> As a medium of exchange, Leaf’s landscape images reveal that underneath the aesthetic idealization of the Cape Breton landscape there does exist a society whose environment, culture and history have been shaped and managed by both capitalist and political agendas.

In recent years the federal and provincial governments, in concert with the Nova Scotia Tourist Industry, have increasingly marketed Cape Breton Island for its breathtaking landscape and as a “haven for simple folk.” This myth of the land conjures up a romantic view of its inhabitants but it ignores the realities that have faced many generations of people who have struggled with harsh climates and the vicissitudes of the land and the sea. Ellison Robertson, a native Cape Bretoner, writes in *New Maritimes*: “The image of the picturesque peasant that appeared at the end of the ‘peasant era’ and the beginning of the Industrial one was a precursor to tourism’s latter-day image of the fisherman, the farmer, and finally the industrial worker, all inhabiting a landscape completely lacking both in conflict and historical or social context.”<sup>6</sup>

W.J.T. Mitchell writes that for the most part landscape has always been perceived as an aesthetic framing of the real properties of space and place. He suggests that landscape should be considered as a conceptual totality:<sup>7</sup> “One might think, then, of space, place, and landscape as a dialectical triad, a conceptual structure that may be activated from several different angles. If place is a specific location, a space is a ‘practiced place,’ a site activated by movements, actions, narratives, and signs, and a

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<sup>5</sup> Mitchell, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ellison Robertson, “‘How’s She Goin’ B’ys?’: Cape Breton Culture: A Critical Look,” *New Maritimes* (September/October, 1991): 10.

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell, viii.

landscape is that site encountered as image or ‘sight’.”<sup>8</sup> Within the framework of Mitchell’s dialectical triad the Mabou Mines landscape can be looked at within many different frames. Mabou Mines is a specific location – a place. As a space it is a “practiced place” – it was the site of a working mine. It has been and still is a community, and has also become a popular tourist site, thereby incorporating use by two distinct groups. Finally as a landscape, it has been “consumed” – as many artists have painted and photographed this picturesque desolate coast.

Mitchell’s dialectical triad - space, place, landscape - is loosely based on Henri Lefebvre’s notion of a spatial triad: the perceived, the conceived, and the lived. For Lefebvre perceived space can be described as: “a ‘room’ in an apartment, the ‘corner’ of the street, a ‘marketplace,’ a shopping or cultural ‘centre,’ a public ‘place,’ and so on.... These terms...correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute.”<sup>9</sup> Catherine van Ingen suggests that Lefebvre’s understanding of spatial practice (perceived space) extends beyond the physical or material places to include daily routines within the everyday: “Daily routines are the performances or activities that occur or literally ‘take place’ with relative continuity in material space. In other words, spatial practice includes the operation of an established spatial economy characteristic of each social formation (place) and demonstrates the ways in which bodies interact with perceived or real space.”<sup>10</sup>

Lefebvre suggests that conceived space is the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, engineers, and architects etc., all of whom identify what is lived and what is

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>9</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford/Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine van Ingen, “Unmapping Social Space: The Toronto Frontrunners, Lefebvre and Geographies of Resistance.” PhD. University of Alberta (Canada) 2002. 18.

perceived with what is conceived – it is the “dominant space in any society.”<sup>11</sup> It is the dominant space because it is how we intellectually or discursively work out or negotiate space.<sup>12</sup> Lived space, Lefebvre suggests is “space as directly *lived*,” and signifies what Lefebvre refers to as the space of “inhabitants” and “users.” This is the space “which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”<sup>13</sup> For Lefebvre this space is where perceived and conceived spaces are blended and lived. It is both a dominated space, which is experienced passively, and the space where bodies, through both imagination and action, generate social change.<sup>14</sup>

Mitchell is less interested in forcing a correspondence of this sort, than in taking Lefebvre’s more general advice to triangulate the whole topic and to resist the temptation to binarism.<sup>15</sup> Lefebvre believed that “Relations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms.”<sup>16</sup> Van Ingen explains.

In an effort to move beyond dualisms and Manichaeic concepts, Lefebvre adheres to the dialectical relations that exist within the triad and deliberately advances what Edward Soja (1996) calls ‘trialectical thinking’. Trialectics is a term coined by Soja (1996) which follows Lefebvre’s ‘une dialectique de triplicite’ or ‘dialectics of triplicity.’ Lefebvre insisted on the deconstruction of binary logic in thinking about space. By engaging in a process of Thirthing, a way of thinking is created that is not based on binarisms, where there is only an *either/or* choice. Trialectic thinking opens up the possibility of a *both/and/also* logic that interjects an-Other set of choices. Thinking trialectically is not about dismissing binaries entirely but is a ‘process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives.’<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Van Ingen, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Lefebvre, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Van Ingen, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, x.

<sup>16</sup> Lefebvre, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Van Ingen, 22.

Mitchell suggests that by beginning with a triangulation of “our topic (understood literally as place) then dictates a process of thinking space/place/landscape as a unified problem and a dialectical process.”<sup>18</sup> Leaf’s imagery opens up a similar triangulation in terms of ways of looking at landscape within this relation to space and place. Examining her works within Mitchell’s concept of a dialectical triad, it can be demonstrated how these three terms resonate together within the form and context of Leaf’s Cape Breton images. It also encompasses that possibility of *both/and/also* in relation to her multiple positions within Mabou and within her own artistic production.

*Still Point of the Turning World, 1975* exemplifies Leaf’s apposition/position within her new community and as such can be addressed through the framework of Lefebvre and Mitchell (fig.12). Leaf places the figures on the same plane as the *landscape*. She positions herself directly in front of this symbolic *space*, and as she focuses on Frank, holding a mask very similar to holding a camera, identifies herself with the *place* Mabou and ensures a view “from here.” In that way, Frank remains a type of outsider unlike Leaf. The abstracted drawing on the table looks like a kind of distorted map of the United States, representative of another place. If this is so, it reinforces the notion that Frank still remains as a type of visitor to Cape Breton, and retains an identity as a person “from away,” because of his proximity to the map. The spatial distance between Leaf and Frank, which at the same time is linked by the table apparatus that becomes a positioning seat for Leaf’s imago, tends to measure the space between “from here” and “from away.”

However, the painted collage rightfully fits within the category of “The Place” in terms of looking at it within the context of Mitchell’s concept of a dialectical triad: space,

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, x-xi.

place, and landscape. In this work Leaf uses collage to integrate “contrasting values, opposing ideas, and emotional tensions.”<sup>19</sup> She juxtaposes Mabou Mines as “sight” with Mabou Mines as “site.” As “sight” the viewer is directed to the desolate beauty of the landscape, but one that contains no signs of a past – no old mine shafts or discarded equipment. However, her use of quick, loose brushstrokes and thinly applied paint give energy to the landscape, so that “sight” becomes a “site” of active movement and change. Landscape as “sight” is actually a space – a “site” where actions are taken and narratives are made. As part of the definition of site, in the sense of “the place” and the notion of an active landscape, Leaf juxtaposes a stark image of three men who look to be worn-out miners covered in dust. The figures are placed at the foreground of a landscape that is the colour of blood. This symbolically references Leaf’s comments that she feels this land has blood on it and the history of the island bears this out. Colonization resulted in dramatic changes to the environment and eradication of native inhabitants. With the arrival of industrialization and the opening of mines, numerous men endured extreme hardship and sometimes death. Near the crown of the hill, Leaf has inserted the black crow which carries the same inherent meanings as it did in *Bird and Journal* from four years earlier.

The use of collage in this image denotes layering, not just as a pictorial strategy but as a reference to the context of the image. Mabou Mines itself has many layers of realities to its history. Leaf uses what C.M. Judge explains is, “a method which juxtaposes different realities which combine to form an unexpected new reality.”<sup>20</sup> This

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Newman, “Reflections on Collage/Assemblage: A Personal View,” in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman. (Ann Arbor/London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 328.

<sup>20</sup> C.M. Judge, “Celebrating Intimacy,” in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman. (Ann Arbor/London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 289.



layering reinforces the notion that landscape is not just something to look at; it illustrates that landscapes can be deceptive, and juxtaposes the play of “sight” and “site.” John Berger states: “Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place.”<sup>21</sup> Mabou Mines was an active coal mining community in the late 1800s and early 1900s (fig.28). The Mabou coal district was geologically complex and it never fully developed like other areas around the island. Even in 1961, the Scotian Coal Company Limited attempted to develop a mine at this location but abandoned the project in 1964. Nevertheless, the rocks exposed in the coastal cliffs of Mabou are among the most picturesque exposures of coal-bearing strata in the province.<sup>22</sup>

In this work Leaf attempts to make appearances the “language of a lived life.”<sup>23</sup> She is creating what Edward Soja suggests is a “Thirdspace,” a “strategic opening and rethinking of new possibilities.”<sup>24</sup> Thirdspace to Soja is equivalent to Lefebvre’s “lived space.” He writes. “Lived social space combines the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other *a priori*, these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of ‘counter spaces,’ spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning.”<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the myth of the land promoted by the federal and provincial governments as well as the Nova Scotia Tourist Industry, Leaf’s landscape image acts as a cultural medium in that it reveals the landscape as a totality; a *landscape*

<sup>21</sup> John Berger & J. Mohr, *A Fortunate Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 12-13.

<sup>22</sup> For further reading see: J.H. Calder et al, “One of the Greatest Treasures – The Geology and History of Coal in Nova Scotia,” Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. Mineral Resources Branch. Information Circular ME 25, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> John Berger & J. Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Vintage International, 1982), 288.

<sup>24</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden, Mass/Oxford, 1996), 81.

<sup>25</sup> Soja, 68.

seen within its relation to *space* and *place*. It is not just an aesthetic object but an image that gives “cultural expression.”<sup>26</sup> Leaf’s *Still Point of the Turning World* embodies Mitchell’s statement that “landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.”<sup>27</sup>

Raymond Williams writes in *The Country and the City*: “A working country is hardly ever a landscape.”<sup>28</sup> He contends that although landscape painting, landscape writing, landscape architecture, and landscape gardening may be important histories in their own right, that in the final analysis we must relate these histories to the common history of a land and its society.<sup>29</sup> Leaf’s images of Cape Breton represent landscape as a “lived space,” a blending of conceived and perceived spaces, and are reflective of the experiences and knowledge of those who inhabit it.<sup>30</sup> Leaf has said: “I decided *I’m just going to find out what’s here. I’m going to find out what I don’t see.* I started to draw. I drew garden hoses, old chairs, studio windows, clotheslines, children. I just kept drawing and drawing and talking to people and working until I began to see the people.”<sup>31</sup>

One of Leaf’s earliest images of the people of Mabou Mines was not a portrait painting but a small totemic sculpture. The sculpture *Mabou Giant*, 1971 is the culmination of an intense period of drawing in those first few years after she arrived in Mabou (fig.29). Its scale is far from gigantic, measuring 69 x 66 x 38 cm, although it

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<sup>26</sup> Mitchell, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 120.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Daniels, “Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape,” *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology*, ed. John Agnew, David N. Livingstone & Alisdair Rogers. (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 336.

<sup>31</sup> Brookman, 18.

symbolically references the magnitude of the meaning of Mabou Mines and its community to Leaf on a grand personal scale. To make the sculpture she used the tin from the Old Nova Scotia Gold apple juice cans and when the tin was heated, it became pliable enough that she could stitch pieces together with wire to make this “little man”: “I remember my neighbour Johnny White and I worked together on the roof of my house. Every night I’d sit down and work on the little man, and Johnny would ask *How’s the little man?* So I felt a tremendous rapport with him. I knew the Mabou Giant was a portrait of one of these men from Mabou village.”<sup>32</sup> *Mabou Giant* pays homage to the men of the community whose strong sense of family and tradition have helped them survive economic hardship and a whittling away of their traditional way of life. In recognizing Mabou as a “practiced place,” Leaf could make sense of the circumstances and attitudes of the community in which she now lived. Robertson suggests that the task of culture “is to propose in the present an understanding of the relationship between the past and the future.”<sup>33</sup>

The *Mabou Giant* has the simplicity, geometry, and nakedness that one finds in early Greek sculptures, particularly the *korous*. The squared shoulders, cupped hands and slightly tilted head suggest a trapped moment in time that also implies the iconic, while the roughness of his metal skin gives the figure an immediate materiality and places him firmly within the present. Also, the base of the sculpture looks to be a piece of the landscape, like the rocks that make up the coal-bearing cliffs of the Mabou coastline, suggestive of the rough and tough terrain of a mining community.

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<sup>32</sup> Brookman, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The people of Mabou are fishermen and woodcutters by day and musicians by night.<sup>34</sup> Many of Leaf's works on paper from the early 70s are portraits of the local residents of Mabou Mines; *Young Rankins, Mary Ann Beaton, Marguerite Gillis, and Peter MacPhee* to name a few. In acknowledging their existence, Leaf captures the character of a people who, Robertson suggests, have maintained their sense of "uniqueness and community against the history of economic exploitation and the substantial loss of language and forms of culture."<sup>35</sup>

The names Rankin, Beaton, Gillis and MacPhee are descendents of the first settlers who arrived in Mabou Mines some 200 years ago. It is here in communities such as Mabou Mines that legitimate Highland ancestry can be claimed as this tiny coastal corner of North America has been called "the greatest cradle of Scottish culture in North America."<sup>36</sup> In Mabou, generational memory has produced an emotional powerful sense of place that at times is hard to comprehend by the outsider. The interconnectedness between people and land is at the heart of Cape Breton's "sense of place." Peter MacPhee was a well known local Scottish fiddler and is but one of many who are descendants of a long line of Cape Breton highland fiddlers (fig.30).<sup>37</sup> Leaf told me that the exposure to Cape Breton fiddle music was one of the wonderful discoveries about coming to Cape Breton, and that she even took lessons. She thought it was another way

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<sup>34</sup> Silver Donald Cameron, "Five Immigrant Artists in Nova Scotia," *Terra Firma: Five Immigrant Artists in Nova Scotia*. (Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 1993), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Robertson, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Glenn Graham, "Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition," MA thesis, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2004. 156-157.

<sup>37</sup> This is one of two likenesses by Leaf of this well known Cape Breton Highland fiddler and is reproduced in Allister MacGillivray's *The Cape Breton Fiddler*. The other (acrylic and graphite on paper) was hung in the Victoria County Hospital in Baddeck, C.B. After visiting this summer, I discovered that the original hospital had closed and reopened at the new location. Unfortunately, the portrait of Peter MacPhee is nowhere to be found.

the local people could relate to her.<sup>38</sup> Silver Donald Cameron writes that “when she was away from Cape Breton she craved and hungered for it. For her, the music is literally wonderful, full of wonder....<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this connection she felt to her new community in Mabou could relate to her sense of displacement from her own earlier history and the search for a new home, in all the meanings of that word. Lucy Lippard suggests that “the search for homeplace is the mythical search for the *axis mundi*, for a centre, for some place to stand, for something to hang on to.”<sup>40</sup>

Leaf made several works on paper of the local villagers; however, there are only two large portrait paintings that I have been able to document: *Portrait of Pat Clavier*, c. 1972 and *Ann Harder & Ron Gerard Beaton*, 1976 (fig.31, 32).<sup>41</sup> Both images are only publicly available in black and white reproduction. Leaf’s portraits, both drawings and paintings, call to mind James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, (1941), in which he and photographer Walker Evans documented the daily existence and environment of tenant farmers on cotton farms in the United States, lives which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Her images of the men and women of Mabou, while without the same intentions, provide a glance onto lives that too had previously been almost invisible.

It is possible that in the painting *Ann Harder & Ron Gerald Beaton* Leaf is addressing the drastic effect, emotionally and economically, on rural communities like Mabou because of the “push” and “pull” factors of out-migration.<sup>42</sup> The duality of the condition of Cape Breton is perhaps first acknowledged by the spatial division of the

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<sup>38</sup> Conversation with June Leaf at her studio in New York, 10 April 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Cameron, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Sense of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>41</sup> I do not know who Pat Clavier is. The painting was reproduced in Gabriel, Barry. *June Leaf*. Sydney: UCCB Art Gallery, 1985.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia A. Thornton. “The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look,” *Acadiensis* 15.1 (1985): 3.

image. In the right background is a close coastal view of Mabou Mines; framed by the landscape, Ron Gerald Beaton is seated on a bench with his arms folded. He is a descendant of an important musical family from Lochaber, Scotland that has lived in this area since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> To the left of Beaton is the wall of a house, a place where culture is made and traditions are passed down through generations. It is connected visually to Beaton through the horizontal lines of the clapboard wall repeated in his bench. His self-containing static pose represents the past, present, and future of a defiant culture that has resisted the local wearing-away of the community and like his forefathers he will continue on with life as he knows it. In the foreground, the figure of Ann Harder takes up three-quarters of the picture space and Leaf has aligned her body with the two distinct backgrounds of the house and the Mabou landscape. Harder was a student from NASCAD who had come to model for Leaf.<sup>44</sup> Through the positioning of Harder's right forearm and the angularity of her right leg, the figure reinforces her control of the foreground, or the present. But at the same time, the diagonal lines of the floor boards run parallel to Harder's left arm and thigh and seem to be drawing her back to the middle ground tightly connecting Harder to the land and culture of Cape Breton. A further reference to her past is suggested through the angled pose of her arm and leg, mimicking that of Beaton. The symbolic closeness of the two figures is further enunciated through the alignment of their heads.

The figures are frontally positioned in a manner representative of the compositional strategies of traditional double portraiture. Both gaze at the artist, watching her process of working and appearing slightly wary of their becoming portraits and

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<sup>43</sup> Graham, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Leaf knew little about Harder and never saw her again. Telephone conversation with June Leaf, 24 Jan. 2006.

assuming another identity as paintings. Compositionally this work relates to *Robert and the Model*, but the difference is that in *Robert and the Model* the work is autobiographical. There, Leaf included herself both as the model and as her imago – the Cigarette Girl. The image of *Ann Harder and Ron Gerald Beaton*, on the other hand, could be looked at within the context of a cultural document acting as a medium of exchange. Harder metaphorically represents the youth on the island, who were drawn to mainland cities in pursuit of jobs and the excitement of urban living. Technology has also changed their lives. As a result, in the seventies traditional modes of entertainment were not all that appealing to the younger generation; fiddle playing and step-dancing were seen as old fashioned and a move away from traditional customs began to erode this haven of “Scottish culture.” Seasonal jobs and dependency on government handouts in the form of unemployment insurance had become a fact of life for many. The “pull” to other parts of the country and beyond where opportunities to make a decent living could be realized left many with the difficult decision to leave Cape Breton. It was becoming apparent that because of the interconnectedness of economics, culture and ecology, the notion of an internally generated “uniqueness of place” was becoming harder to sustain.<sup>45</sup>

Leaf has indicated that the painting *Blue Sculpture in a Cave*, 1976 was an important work for her as it signified her early encounter with the people of Cape Breton (fig.3).<sup>46</sup> When I visited with her in her New York studio this was the one painting in particular she wanted me to see. She pulled it out to show me and it was quite clear that

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<sup>45</sup> Doreen Massey and Pat Jess, “Introduction,” *A Place in the World: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, ed. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1995), 6.

As discussed previously in Chapter 2, a cultural revival began to take place in Cape Breton in the early eighties. Music, in particular fiddle playing and the return to Gaelic music saw a resurgence in popularity especially amongst the younger generation. Groups such as the Rankin Family and the Barra MacNeils were instrumental in revitalizing a dying musical tradition.

<sup>46</sup> In conversation with June Leaf at her studio in New York, 10 April 2004.

she was deeply attached to this work. Leaf is a story-teller in images; her “cast of characters” reappear in drawings, paintings, and sculptures throughout her life’s work. Lucy Lippard suggests that “her art is only subliminally narrative. The images are dreamlike in their intensity rather than in the juxtapositional Surrealist sense.”<sup>47</sup> In conversation with Lippard, Leaf suggested that this may not be quite so simple: “I don’t use dreams, my dreams use me...I’m really a choreographer. First I have to learn the dances of these individual characters, like in a novel, I have to get to know them until I think I am them. And the next day I realize I’m now the choreographer and I know the dances of both sides. Perhaps now I can put them together into a good mix.”<sup>48</sup>

In *Blue Sculpture in a Cave*, Leaf incorporates her mythical figures amidst a landscape that is both imaginary and real. At the lower edge of the canvas are the people of Mabou, joined hand-in-hand as they gather at the shoreline looking out towards the sea. The silhouette of the coastline at the horizon is perhaps a metaphor for their ancient homeland. The elongated Giacometti-like figures emerging from a vast imaginary cave float across the water are the mythical figures from the past.<sup>49</sup> A large elongated figure stands like a sentry at the left, spear in hand, overlooking the event; it is as though he was commanding or choreographing their release from the cave. He is the heroic ancestor of Leaf’s “little man.” Leaf’s mythical world is rendered in tightly controlled tonal colour, the atmospheric surface loosely painted, providing an ethereal other worldly atmosphere. Light filters through various layers of paint giving the effect of an opening in which the

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<sup>47</sup> Lucy Lippard, “June Leaf: With the Wind Behind Her: A Conversation. *June Leaf: A Survey of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works of Paper 1948-1991* (Washington: Washington Project for the Arts, 1991), 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Leaf made several drawings relating to this painting which shows men on stilts with long sinister spears and women with elongated, fused legs. See appendix. *Untitled*, 1975, silver paint, acrylic and pencil on paper, 28 x 55 cm.; *Study for Woman Monument #3*, 1976, ink, gouache and pencil on paper, 49 x 42 cm.



great warriors of the past appear and reveal themselves. It is as if the people of Mabou, positioned in the foreground, are spectators, seeing their past unfold before them. An epic narrative - is this Leaf's retelling of the great stories and myths of the men, women, and children who fought to maintain their ancestral ways? It is as if Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Highland clansmen are returning from battle. Forced to change their way of life, many left their native shores to come to Cape Breton. As Leaf suggests, the Mabou landscape is constructed out of memories of the past and as such reinforces what Mitchell suggests is a different way of looking at landscape; what it *does*, how it works as a cultural practice. Landscape, Mitchell states, is "embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication, a body of symbolic forms capable of being invoked and reshaped to express meanings and values."<sup>50</sup>

Like the great storytellers of Cape Breton whose goal is to engage the imagination of its listeners, *Blue Sculpture in a Cave* entices the viewer to use their imagination to create new narratives. In John Shaw's introduction in *Joe Neil MacNeil's Tales Until Dawn: The World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller* he writes: "Among Gaels and other story-telling cultures, the tales formed a 'bridge from reality to illusion, from the state of wakefulness to that of the dream, as many folklorists have pointed out."<sup>51</sup> The *Blue Sculpture* is Leaf's tradition bearer. Leaf reinforces Mitchell's dialectical triad of space, place, and landscape, in that she approaches the landscape as both a "sight" and a "site" – a "practiced place," one that conjures up memories of a community's historical and cultural traditions. For centuries story-telling has been the means of transmission of a

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<sup>50</sup> Mitchell, 14.

<sup>51</sup> John Shaw, "Introduction," *Joe Neil MacNeil, Tales Until Dawn: The World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller*, trans. and ed. by John Shaw (Kingston/Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), xxv.

strong cultural heritage. In Cape Breton, especially in the small rural communities like Mabou, Inverness, and Big Pond, “reciters” have continued to be the bearers of the Gaelic past.

With the declining use of the Gaelic language, the risk of losing this oral tradition is a reality, and at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Joe Neil MacNeil of Big Pond and Lauchie MacLellan of Dunvegan, Inverness County were part of only a handful of Gaelic reciters on the island. However, recently a concerted effort has been made to record these Gaelic folktales. Since the 1970s several collections of folktales have been recorded and placed in the archives of the Beaton Institute at the University College of Cape Breton in Sydney and St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. The descendents of the Scottish Gaels tend to be rather reserved and modest. Many performers, singers, bards, reciters, fiddlers, and step-dancers believe their gift of performance is part of a shared cultural store, rather than the property of gifted individuals.<sup>52</sup> David Harvey suggests that places acquire much of their permanence as well as much of their distinctive character from the collective activities of people who dwell there, who shape the land through their activities; and Leaf as story-teller acknowledges and participates in the strong oral culture of the Scottish Gaels.<sup>53</sup> She becomes a part of what Lefebvre refers to as “lived social space.”

By the mid 1980s Leaf had been living in Cape Breton for approximately fifteen years – she identified herself with Mabou and now called it home. Several painted landscapes from this period exemplify Leaf’s growing connection to Mabou and the people who live there. In works such as *The Golden Steps*, 1985 and *The Bridge*, 1986,

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<sup>52</sup> Shaw, xxii.

<sup>53</sup> David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), 310.

one gets a sense that Leaf has finally become part of the landscape (figs.33, 34). It is no longer the backdrop to a narrative but the narrative itself – Leaf’s narrative of “from here.” The landscape is all encompassing; the place is the central image in these paintings. In *The Golden Steps* a faint suggestion of a human face completely engulfed by a “jewel-like” landscape calls to mind the face of Leaf’s imago in *Still Point of the Turing World*, 1976 (fig.11). Leaf no longer sits between two worlds; the steps metaphorically represent Leaf’s journey into the *space* and the *place* of Mabou. Like the image of *The Golden Steps*, *The Bridge* has a primordial, raw nature that speaks to the urgency of nature stripped bare. But here, the modern technological world has imposed itself on the landscape. Seen from a distance, the faint outline of what could be the Seal Island Bridge has altered this uninhabited landscape. The Seal Island Bridge is located approximately 100 kilometres from Mabou. It joins the main part of the island to the small inner island of Boulanderie. Lippard suggests that *The Bridge* seems to be about going from here to nowhere, from here to an invisible, visionary destination. She writes. “A stunning painted apocalyptic sky, punctuated by an orange-outlined sun blooming behind mists, looms over a lacy, fantastically high bridge arching dreamlike to an unseen shore.”<sup>54</sup> However, within Leaf’s own narrative of “from here” both *The Bridge* and *The Golden Steps* suggest that the Cape Breton landscape has become her “lived space.” From a position from within, she looks at the landscape “trialectically.” Traditionally, landscape has been seen as an aesthetic framing for space and place; however, seeing and understanding it as a totality, Leaf is able to create “counter spaces” where she can attempt to “change assumptions and prejudices.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lippard, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Mika Hannula. “Third Space – A Merry-go-round of Opportunity,” *Kiasma Magazine* 12 01.

*Northern Bird*, 1985 suggests Leaf's concern and support for the environmental issues that have plagued Cape Breton Island in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (fig.35). Paul Klee, in the 1920s, described the relationship between a viewer and a work of art as "space-in-between." Mika Hannula elaborates on Klee's concept as a third space. She writes:

The essential point about an encounter is that both parties influence each other. In such a case, as you look at a work of art, it stares back at you. And, if you can enter this interaction, a connection is created between the two parties. A movement that leads to the third space. A relationship has been created. A mark has been made on the wall, something has changed. The work of art has become a part of the viewer.<sup>56</sup>

Perched on an embankment is a solitary metamorphosed figure – a "birdman" beak opened, wings outstretched ready for flight. Leaf's imaginary figure is grotesque in that its body is distorted – thin and emaciated with stomach extended, wings ravaged and darkened by pollution. The "birdman" is perhaps a metaphor for the savagery bestowed on the local wild life and the community since industrialization. Here again, the recurring motif of the bird first seen in *Bird and Journal* appears. However, now it acts as an encounter or counter space; the grotesqueness of the image is used as a means of arousing shock and anger over the havoc done to the local environment. Robert M. Doty suggests: "To those artists whose work is based upon a social context, the grotesque is a trigger for blasting complacency and causing greater awareness of the impending threat of chaos and destruction."<sup>57</sup> But at the same time there is a specificity to this landscape image. The setting for Leaf's imaginary figure is the skyline of what I suggest is the city of Sydney with the smoke stacks of the Sydney Steel Plant spewing toxins into the atmosphere.

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<http://www.kiasma.fi/www.viewresource.php?id=3LoHIn6PkqfTgv09&lang=en&previe...>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Robert M. Doty, *Human Concern/Personal Torment: The Grotesque in American Art' Revisited* (New York: Phyllis Kind Gallery, 1990), 5.

Once again Leaf's red sky signifies cause and effect, for as mentioned earlier, she sees Cape Breton as a political place: "I felt this land had blood on it." The red misty sky is gradually being engulfed by thick dark coal smoke although a small ray of sunshine does seep through. Leaf's loose brush strokes and layered use of colour renders a look of beauty, reminiscent of the sublime, to this vision of modernity. Much like Turner, Leaf uses her technical mastery and imagination to turn atmospheric pollution into a beautiful sunset.<sup>58</sup> Successive long horizontal brush strokes give the dark murky waters of the "harbour" the appearance of encroachment upon the open sea and the evening sunset. A sense of foreboding prevails, as the *Northern Bird*, standing on a blackened landscape, looks woefully over his outstretched wings towards the source of his own destruction.<sup>59</sup>

W.J.T. Mitchell suggests there is a "dark side of the landscape," and that one must see not only the aesthetic idealization of landscape, but that one must also look at the economic and material considerations of the particular landscape.<sup>60</sup> As discussed in a previous chapter, Cape Breton Island, the coastal landscape along the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the countryside with its many rivers and streams, and the Bras D'Or Lakes have attracted artists, tourists, and outdoorsmen since the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Cabot Trail which hugs the northern coastal shore of the Cape Breton Highlands is considered one of the most picturesque landscapes in the world, and in 2004 the National Geographic Traveller Magazine named it second to the fjords of Norway as

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<sup>58</sup> Katherine Lochnan, "Turner, Whistle, Monet: An Artistic Dialogue," *Turner Whistler Monet*, ed. Katherine Lochnan (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto/Tate Publishing, 2004), 15.

<sup>59</sup> Although I have chosen to discuss *Northern Bird* within the context of contemporary landscape theory and "The Place," it should be noted that this work, as is the case with many of Leaf's works, be discussed within the context of identity and "A Place." There may also be inherent references to New York but the duality of meaning in Leaf's work is one of its most significant factors.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, 6.

the best place to visit in the world.<sup>61</sup> However, as Leaf suggests in *Northern Bird*, there is a “dark side” to this picture that has had a devastating effect on both the local environment and the people who live there. The Cape Breton landscape is not just a “sight” to be consumed, but it is a “practiced place,” a site that has been controlled and manipulated by a capitalist agenda.

The hard facts are that Cape Breton today is one of the most economically depressed areas in Canada. Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the industries that supported the economy of the island were coal, steel, and fishing but by the late sixties these industries began to collapse. The federal and provincial governments took over the coal mines and ownership of the Sydney Steel Company respectively, marking what many believe to be the beginning of Cape Breton’s economic decline.<sup>62</sup> Besides leaving thousands of steel workers and coal miners unemployed, the decades of large volumes of water and air pollution that the plants’ old furnaces and coke-ovens produced spelled serious health problems for the local residents. Toxic wastes collected in an estuary called Muggah Creek and flowed into Sydney Harbour with the result that the ground and surface water was contaminated with arsenic, lead and other toxins and the accumulation of 700,000 tonnes of contaminated sludge of which 40,000 are PCB’s. The locals have come to refer to the area – the size of three city blocks – as the “Tar Ponds.” Many of the side effects are still unknown; however, it is important to note that Cape Breton has one of the highest rates of cancer, birth defects and miscarriages in Canada. The effects on the environment have also been severe. In 1980 chemical by-products from the coke-

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<sup>61</sup> “Destinations React to Traveler Magazine’s Scoreboard,” *National Geographic News*  
[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/07/0709\\_040709\\_destinationscorecard.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/07/0709_040709_destinationscorecard.html)

<sup>62</sup> Scott MacAulay, “The Sweat in the Tar Ponds,” *Labour/Le Travail* (Fall 2002): 390-6.  
<http://0-web1.infotrac.galegroup.com.mercry.concordia.ca/itw/infomark/306/984/64160>.

oven process were found in lobsters and because of this, the federal government shut down lobster fisheries in the area in 1982.<sup>63</sup> The “Tar Ponds” and its clean-up continue to be a major issue with local residents and environmentalists. Various proposals have been studied over the last several decades, but still nothing the government has done to date has successfully removed the toxic waste that haunts this Cape Breton community.<sup>64</sup>

Leaf would have been fully aware of the much publicized outcry over the toxic waste spewing into Muggah Creek and Sydney Harbour. In the past Leaf had produced works that could be construed as political statements; in the sixties she took issue with the American government with works such as *LBJ as a Cornerstone for a New Theatre*. Now as a permanent resident on the island she produced works that questioned the political and environmental decisions made by governments and big business that drastically affected the lives of the island residents. *The Pencil Bird*, 1985/86 reinforces that concern (fig.36). A lone thin emaciated bird pecks away at the brown barren landscape in search for food and a suitable nesting site; his ravaged outstretched wings have metamorphosed into the wings of an airplane appear ready for flight, to continue its search for a new habitat.

The Cabot Strait is one of North Atlantic’s most sensitive sea bird habitats. It is approximately 60 miles wide between south-western Newfoundland and Cape Breton Island and connects the Gulf of St. Lawrence with the Atlantic Ocean. But it is also one of the busiest shipping routes in the world; hundreds of ships pass through the waters of the Canadian Atlantic coast daily. A major fear for environmentalists and local residents

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<sup>63</sup> Terra Taillerur and Andrea Sellinger, CBC News Online. June 2001. Updated 26 May, 2003. [http://www.cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/tar\\_ponds.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/tar_ponds.html)

<sup>64</sup> “Ottawa Orders Full Review for Tar Ponds Plan,” *Guardian* Charlottetown (P.E.I.), 3 May 2005. A.5 <http://0-proquest.umi.com.mercury.concordia.ca/pqdweb?index=9&did=83262991&Src...>

is an oil spillage, because of the amount of traffic through the Strait. However, it is not just accidents of oil spillage that pose a threat; an equally common occurrence is the illegal dumping of oil bilge waste into the sea by some ships under the darkness of night. In Cape Breton, as well as other parts of the east coast, beaches are combed throughout the year for oil covered birds that have washed up to shore.<sup>65</sup>

*Little Johnny Dougal*, 1987 is another of Leaf's works from this period that could possibly be interpreted as politically motivated (fig.37). Despite the specificity of his name, the figure is most important seen as a mythological figure.<sup>66</sup> He is a symbol for the human reaction to what has happened to the local environment. Represented as an angel, he sits in what could be a life-guard's chair hunched over, arms folded, head hung low, and his back to the sea. His angel wings look like fallen bird wings. There is a look of resignation about this solitary figure; he has no one to watch, no reason to be there anymore. He sits within a barren landscape. There is something ominous about this landscape: the blue sky is chaotic and Leaf's brushstroke is quick and frenzied; the sea is calm yet dark and sinister, and appears to be engulfed by a long swirl of what could be oil, calling to mind the spillages along Canada's east coast that threaten wildlife throughout the region.

In a similar work, *Dawn*, 1988 the crestfallen angel in *Johnny Little Dougal* now appears in horns – his wings lost in the dead of night (fig.38). The figure no longer sits in resignation; he appears more defiant, firmly seated on a chair that now has transformed into what could be the outline of an oil rig. As dawn begins to break, the red devil-like

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<sup>65</sup> "A Ray of Hope in the Murky Mess of Marine Oil Pollution,"  
[http://www.spaceforspecies.ca/meeting\\_place/news/features/oil\\_pollution\\_main.htm](http://www.spaceforspecies.ca/meeting_place/news/features/oil_pollution_main.htm)

<sup>66</sup> Little Johnny Dougal was part of the Beacon clan of Mabou Mines. He was an elderly man when Leaf first met him.



figure, now with his back to the desolate sea and the dark foreboding sky, gazes accusingly at the barren shoreline signifying the damage caused to the local environment during the darkness of night.

John Yau has suggested that Leaf's landscapes from this period are atmospheric fantasy-filled landscapes which pictorially evoke affinities with the radiant worlds of Turner, Odilon Redon, and Louis Eilshemius. However, he says, Leaf's world is colder and bleaker. "While the pale blues swirling through these paintings reflect a barren physical landscape, they also embody the metaphysical weather suffusing her interiorized world."<sup>67</sup> I would suggest that they also go beyond the self-referential in their concern for the mutilated Cape Breton landscape.

In the painting *Pleading Angel*, 1987 the figure of an angel stands rooted within a cold barren landscape, arms outstretched, head looking up to the heavens as if pleading for understanding, reminiscent of the Biblical statement "Father they know not what they do (fig.39)." The sea and the sky are inscribed with loose brushstrokes, light filters through the many layers of paint providing an ironic counterpoint to the despairing angel. Within the swirls of blue paint, the shape of a lone fisherman hauling in his catch seems to rise out of the sea, but in comparison to the angel, he seems almost erased in the way that his livelihood has been taken away. This small figure calls to mind Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* and its image of the Boatman Charon, who ferries the dead (spirits) across the river Styx to the underworld. Perhaps Leaf's lone fisherman, based on the image of Charon, symbolizes death: the death of an industry, an end to a livelihood that has sustained many generations on the island.

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<sup>67</sup> John Yau, "June Leaf: Edward Thorp Gallery," *Artforum International* 27 (September 1988): 137-38.

*Hake*, 1986/87 is a bold stark image of a solitary hake, hanging lifelessly from a hook lodged in his mouth, gasping for air as it waits to be hauled out of the black icy sea into a fishing net (fig.40). The contrast of Leaf's realistic rendering of the fish against an enigmatic black background pushes the image forward and causes the viewer to take a step back, almost in recoil from its deathly immediacy. Hake can be found throughout the Southern Gulf of the St. Lawrence along the western Cape Breton coastline, and weigh anywhere between one to eight pounds. Between 1992 and 2002 hake catches have decreased by approximately forty-six percent across Atlantic Canada.<sup>68</sup> There is a sense of alarm in both these images and they call to mind Leaf's early work *Albert*, 1973 in which the fisherman sits "with time on his hands." (fig.14).

As an artist and a member of this coastal community, Leaf's paintings from this early period "circulate as a medium of exchange" heightening awareness to the plight of many Cape Bretoners who continue to struggle because of political and economic exploitation; she contributes to the ongoing effort to bring about change. Leaf has come to feel a part of the cultural identity that defines Cape Breton. Stuart Hall writes: "Sharing the same 'maps of meaning' gives us a sense of belonging to a culture, creates a common bond, a sense of community or identity with others."<sup>69</sup> Leaf will no doubt always be considered "from away" for the simple reason that she is not a native. However, the extent to which she is considered an outsider depends on whether she has met the criteria the community has set out for belonging.<sup>70</sup> Leaf was here to stay; she and Frank were not drawn to the island because of a job. They were drawn here because of

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<sup>68</sup>"State of Canada's Fisheries – 2002: Ground Fishery – Hake Fishery," Fisheries and Oceans Canada. [http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/media/infocus/2003/20031205/hake\\_e.htm](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/media/infocus/2003/20031205/hake_e.htm)

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Hall, "New Cultures for Old," in *A Place in the World: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, ed. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1995), 176.

<sup>70</sup> Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 42-43.

“its unknown potential, its remoteness from their old lives, and its wraith-like promise of personal and artistic renewal.”<sup>71</sup> Leaf soon realized that the most extraordinary thing about the island was its people.<sup>72</sup> She did not remain “detached and disinterested.” Unlike many people “from away,” she embraced the community and she too became part of the fabric of the community. Over time her feelings of alienation dissipated and a sense of belonging was felt - she became “from here.”

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<sup>71</sup> Cameron, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 3.

## Conclusion

This thesis is the narrative of a person “from away” attempting to integrate into a close-knit rural community. Leaf’s work from 1970 to 1990 in both form and context, speak of her particular relationship with the Cape Breton landscape. The images have been grouped under two categories: “A Place” refers to an ambiguous landscape which acts as an allegorical site for Leaf’s biographical narrative, and “The Place” which are the works that specifically refer to the topography and geography of Cape Breton, in particular Mabou Mines, where a reference can be made to the historical and social context of its people. The content of her images through its reference to “A Place” and “The Place” have been positioned within the ideas of “from away”/ “from here.”

As a kind of displaced person Leaf had to negotiate a “sense of self,” and I have suggested that through her artwork she has created what Leona English refers to as a “third space.”<sup>1</sup> It is that space “in-between” where Leaf works through the feelings of alienation and separation caused by the drastic changes in her life when she left New York City to take up permanent residence in the rural community of Mabou. “A Place” in Leaf’s work is the space where negotiation takes place, where she constructs and reconstructs an identity in her new adopted home.

At the same time that Leaf’s art addresses issues of identity, several of her images have been discussed within the context of a cultural practice. W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that landscape should not be seen solely as an aesthetic framing of the real properties of

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<sup>1</sup> Leona English, “Third Space: Contested Space, Identity and international Adult Education,” *21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference (May 30 to June 1, 2002) L’Association canadienne pour étude l’éducation des adultes (ACEEA) Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) Proceedings*. St Frances Xavier University, Antigonish, N.S. 109.  
[http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/2002\\_Papers/21st\\_ACEEA-CASAE\\_Proce....3](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/2002_Papers/21st_ACEEA-CASAE_Proce....3)

space and place; but that it should be considered in relation to space and place.<sup>2</sup> What I am suggesting is that Leaf's images portray the Cape Breton landscape as "lived space." In search for a sense of belonging Leaf documents a landscape that is rich in historical and social context. The images that reference "The Place" reveal a society that struggles to maintain their strong cultural heritage and sense of community against a history of economic exploitation.

Leaf's landscape images from this period are narratives that she has constructed to make meaning of her life and her surroundings. Identity is a construction; a result of the interaction between people, places, and practices. In grouping the works within the categories of "A Place" and "The Place," the work defines Leaf's position within her new environment. While she struggles with the imposed identity of being "from away" she constructs narratives "from here" which reinforce a sense of belonging. The narratives "A Place"/"From Away" and "The Place"/"From Here" are Leaf's personal myth which she has constructed to bring together the different parts of herself and her life into a purposeful and convincing whole.<sup>3</sup> However, it should be noted that there are works which move between these constructed boundaries and it is the strength of Leaf's work that the two concepts of place can co-exist. For the purpose of this thesis I have restricted the discussion to mainly Leaf's painted landscape images of Cape Breton from 1970 to 1990. However, Leaf is both a painter and a sculptor as indicated by the brief discussion of *Mabou Giant* and *The Head*. Her tiny hand-held sculptures constructed during this early period in Mabou could also be addressed within the context of a personal myth. However, that is a study unto itself.

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<sup>2</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), viii.

<sup>3</sup> Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York/London, 1993), 12.

While Leaf is represented in major private and public collections in the United States, in Canada the only public institutions that hold Leaf's work in their collections are the University College of Cape Breton Art Gallery: *Red Archer*, 1978, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia: *Sketch for Hand Sculpture*, 1986, and Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick: *Small as a Way of Working*, 1996. Since she has been in Canada for over thirty years and calls Cape Breton home, it is difficult to comprehend why her work has not been acquired more widely in this country. Leaf continues to make art today and since 1990 has had several solo exhibitions and participated in a number of group exhibitions in Canada, the United States, and Europe. She received an Honorary Degree from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax in 1996 and in 1998 was an artist-in-residence at the school. I feel it appropriate that I close this analysis with a short discussion of this later work.

Leaf has said she is a painter and that sculpture is her anatomy lesson.<sup>4</sup> She continues to see her sculpture as exercises in working out the problems she encounters in her paintings; for example the sculpture *The Instrument (For Robert)*, 1992/93 ended up in the large painting *Embarking*, 1994 (fig.41, 42).<sup>5</sup> That same year Leaf published a book on the sculptures she had produced since moving to Mabou. *People* was conceived, edited and designed by June Leaf. She had the sculptures photographed in black and white against canvas backdrops at her studio in New York and they take up approximately three quarters of each page in the publication. She felt strongly that the photographed images should be large enough for the viewer to get a sense and feel for the

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Brookman and Debra Singer, "June Leaf: In Her Own Words" (Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C., 1991): 24.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Enright, "This to This, This to This: The Interconnected World of June Leaf," *Border Crossings* (July 1998): 22.

work.<sup>6</sup> The single text is placed at the end of the book and Leaf writes: “Now it is 1994 and I work every day in my studios in either NYC or in Nova Scotia. These sculptures are a segment of my work since 1970. I consider myself primarily a painter; where I learn that all things have a hidden mechanical system.”<sup>7</sup> Leaf’s forge, where Leaf constructs her small sculptures, continues to be a source of great pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

In the fall of 1994 Leaf participated in a group exhibition *Déplacements* at Optica Gallery in Montreal. The exhibition was the outcome of a summer workshop in 1992 where six invited sculptors from Quebec, Ontario, the Maritimes and the United States came to work at the Ateliers de sculpture de Saint-Jean-Port-Joli.<sup>9</sup> Leaf’s contribution to the exhibition was *Sleeping Figure*, 1993, reinforced canvas over wire, measuring 244 x 107 cm (fig.43). During her stay in Port-Jolie she wrote to Jock Reynolds of the Addison Gallery and sketched a woman sleeping over what looked to be water. Below she wrote: “I make a sculpture of this large woman dangling over the St. Lawrence river – still dreaming.”<sup>10</sup> When I was going through the contents of the artist’s file from the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University, I came across several drawings and letters from her to the curator Barbara Carter, as Leaf had been asked to participate in the group exhibition *Small as a Way of Working* at the Gallery in 1996. When replying to accept Ms Carter’s invitation, she sketched out some ideas on the piece that she would contribute. These letters and several watercolour sketches are works of art in themselves. Here we see Leaf’s process at work as she writes: “I am making a small bubble pipe but

<sup>6</sup> Conversation with June Leaf at her studio in New York, 10 April 2004.

<sup>7</sup> June Leaf, *People* (Andover, Mass: Addison Gallery, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with June Leaf in her studio in New York, 10 April 2004. Leaf built her forge with the help of a neighbour in 1982. Up until this past summer Leaf got her coal for the forge right on the island. Now she must order from St. Jacob, Ontario. It seems ironic that an island with such a supply of coal deposits, Leaf has to go elsewhere to get her supply.

<sup>9</sup> “Déplacements,” Press Release. Optica File HA 1062. Concordia University Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Jock Reynolds from June Leaf. n.d. Artist File. Addison Gallery, Andover, Washington.

whatever is to happen hasn't yet fully happened or I am not ready to part with the whisper of the idea so I send this to you as the idea and recipient play together."<sup>11</sup> The piece Leaf entered in the exhibition *Woman as a Bubble Pipe*, 1996, and the original drawings and watercolours suggest a reconsideration of the sculpture *Sleeping Figure* she had made in Saint-Jean-Port-Joli in 1992 (fig.44, 45a,b). However, in these later works the female figure's left arm, in the process of stretching upwards, forms the base of the bubble. The woman rests again within the surrounding landscape; reinforcing that Leaf has accomplished a sense of place. The inclusion of Leaf's own hand in the sketches also calls to mind earlier works such as *Albert and Robert Enters the Room*; again she is in the act of creating. Petra Halkes writes that Leaf's "thought processes are channelled through her hands."<sup>12</sup>

Drawing has always been an essential aspect of Leaf's artistic production. In 2004, the Edward Thorp Gallery in New York held a retrospective exhibition devoted entirely to her works on paper. Sixty drawings, spanning a period of fifty years, were presented. Many of these works stand alone, while many are part of the process of working through an idea for one of her paintings or sculptures and others, at times, connecting the two. The skilled draftsmanship that Leaf mastered in the early years combines with her expressionist brushstrokes to communicate her imaginative and creative ideas. Ken Johnson in reviewing her exhibition at Thorp last year writes. "But

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to Barbara Carter from June Leaf. Dated. 26 Jan. 1995. Artist File. Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, N.S.

<sup>12</sup> Petra Halkes, *June Leaf: Cape Breton Modern* (Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 2001), 7.



whatever the style or form, Ms. Leaf's visionary ideas always emerge from a compellingly sensuous engagement with processes and materials."<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the 90s Leaf spent most of the year living and working in Mabou, but she would return for periods of time to her studio in New York. However, even when away, the desolate coast of Nova Scotia still fed her creative imagination. Several of her landscapes of Cape Breton from this decade, although devoid of any human physical presence, continued to suggest a "lived space." *Mabou Coal Mines* is much like the vibrant, atmospheric paintings of Turner; but there is also a sense of foreboding in the work (fig.2). Christopher Youngs suggests that "after spending some time sensing their atmosphere...it becomes evident that there is also an edge to this scene."<sup>14</sup> After all, this was at one time a working coal mine – a hellish existence for many.

As recently as 2000, Leaf was still voicing her concerns over economic and environment issues plaguing the island. She was one of over seventy artists, musicians, scientists, celebrities, and writers who call themselves "Friends of Cape Breton," and threw their support behind the local communities and major fisheries organizations in the Maritimes in their bid to stop oil and gas exploration and development along the Cape Breton coast. A petition was sent to Prime Minister Chrétien on November 14, 2000 asking to rescind the exploration permits granted to two companies: Halifax-based Corridor Resources and Texas-based Hunt Oil. The group of petitioners, which included Leaf, also called for a fifty-mile buffer zone to protect sensitive fisheries, whale

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<sup>13</sup> Ken Johnson, "June Leaf: 'Drawings: Past and Present'," *New York Times Art in Review* 26 March 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Youngs, *June Leaf* (Reading, Penn: Freedman Gallery, Albright College, 1997), 7.

migration routes and tourism values along the Cape Breton coastline.<sup>15</sup> However, the protesters and petitioners voices have gone unheard. In March 2003, The Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board ruled that the two oil companies that had been given licenses to pursue oil and gas exploration, could begin seismic testing within ten kilometres of Cape Breton's shore. This past November, Hunt Oil began testing off north-eastern Cape Breton and as Julie Collins of the *Cape Breton Post* reported: "The two-week seismic survey will be carried out beyond a 10-kilometre buffer zone of the coastline from off Glace Bay in a westerly direction."<sup>16</sup> Fishermen's groups and environmentalists continue to pressure the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to intervene.

At the same time that Leaf was painting landscapes of her familiar surroundings, she was also producing works that were rather more ambiguous and open-ended. In *Angel on Stairway*, 1999-2000, Leaf's use of colour and gesture gives the illusion of a landscape: the dark blue of the sea, the dark earthy tones on the left suggesting land and the chaotic pinks and blues of the sky (fig.46). The ambiguity is there, a landscape is alluded to – but takes a subordinate role to Leaf's personal mythology. Leaf brings back the motif of a stairway introduced in *The Golden Steps*, 1985. In the earlier painting the steps acted as a metaphor for Leaf's journey into a new reality – a new existence. However, in *Angel on Stairway*, Leaf's brushstrokes and colour render an atmospheric surface in which the stairway is suggestive of another journey, that of a spiritual journey; the angel with wings outstretched, possibly Leaf's imago, seems to float above the stairway towards the heavens.

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<sup>15</sup> "A Galaxy of Stars Come Out to Support Atlantic Fishermen," *SOS2 Letters Correspondence* [http://www.gulfsherring.ca/SOS/sos2\\_letters.htm](http://www.gulfsherring.ca/SOS/sos2_letters.htm)

<sup>16</sup> Julie Collins, *Cape Breton Post*, 2 Nov. 2005.

A seminal work on this theme of coming to terms with one's own mortality is *Bird and Skelton*, 2004 (fig.47). The allegorical figure of the skeleton begins to appear in Leaf's work at the end of the 1990s. In the exhibition catalogue accompanying the exhibition *June Leaf: Cape Breton Modern* held at the Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery in 2001, Petra Halkes suggests:

The reclining skeleton that appears in several of the works in this exhibition, suggests in its coital – or perhaps birthing – posture, an element of renewal. But since this element of hope comes forth from a *skeleton*, it remains irrevocably entangled with death. The skeleton painted on tin (*Untitled*) presents the most mournful version of this theme. Its mouth wide open to an oppressive, white, formless sky, it can be read as Leaf's answer to Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, that paradigmatic image of engulfment of the self in the totality of death. But death's totality is subverted here by dribbles of white paint from the skeleton's crotch; death leaks life (fig. 48).<sup>17</sup>

Robert Enright suggests Leaf draws inspiration for these works from Mexican folk art in which the skeleton is not about death but about its opposite.<sup>18</sup> In *Bird and Skelton* the canvas is divided in two by the thinly painted splashes of white which are suggestive of clouds. Below the clouds is the Mabou landscape, which has been the mainstay of Leaf's existence for the past thirty-five years. In the upper half of the painted metal surface a story unfolds. To the left, sketched in charcoal, a birdman stands with arm extended facing a rather large skeleton. To the right it appears the skeleton has taken his hand. The bird, first seen in *Bird and Journal*, 1971, reappears as one of Leaf's imagoes. As a migrant, Leaf has long ended her search for a homeplace – her centre; she is home. Now Leaf has entered a new stage of life and many of these works, like *Bird and Skeleton*, acknowledges her coming to terms with death, dying and life thereafter.

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<sup>17</sup> Halkes, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Enright, "Emphatic Beauty – The Art of June Leaf." *June Leaf* (Basel: Benteli Verlag/Museum Tingley, 2004) 98.

In the fall of 2004, the Tinguely Museum in Basel, Switzerland paid June Leaf a major and deserving tribute by honouring her with a solo exhibition dedicated to the artwork Leaf made since she had moved to Mabou, Cape Breton thirty-five years ago. Over one hundred works were included in the show; paintings, works on paper, and sculptures filled the rooms that were laid out to look like rooms of a house. Visiting the exhibition I entered “the house” from the second floor. The upstairs room held several works relating to the subject of woman as “thinker” or “creator.” Included were a series of early drawings, a sketch book and several large canvases such as *The Mooring*, 1980, *Study for the Head*, 1978, as well as one of Leaf’s many sculptures of *The Head*. Also on display were several recent works such as the small sculpture *Bird Feeder*, 2004 as well as works on paper of the same theme (fig.49a). I left the room and went down a metal staircase that led to the main exhibition space below. Above the doorway leading into this area was the painting *Cigarette Girl*, 1978/79. Inside, a specially constructed circular space was filled with acrylic landscapes, works on paper, and sculpture, including many of Leaf’s tiny metal figures. Within this space was another room with more recent paintings such as *Spiral*, 1999-2000, *Figures Being Hoisted*, 1999-2000, and the small metal *Step Dancer*, 1999-2000 that suggest Leaf’s contemplation not just with death but with rebirth – spiritual rebirth (fig.49b). I left the exhibition space through its second doorway. On the wall to the right was the painting *Mabou Mines*, 1992/95, the view that she saw every day as she looked out her window; on the left wall, the tiny metal sculpture *The Painter*, 1980 – Leaf as “Creator.” (fig.50)

At age 77 Leaf still divides her time between Mabou and New York (fig.51). The harsh reality of winters in this remote area of Cape Breton has become difficult for both

she and husband Robert Frank to remain in Mabou as long as they once did. Heating by woodstove is now hard work, so they close the house for the winter months and move back to Bleecker Street and away from the view from their old farm house along the dirt coastal road overlooking the sea. She misses life in Mabou and once the warm weather arrives she and Frank head north to Cape Breton. When I visited Leaf this past summer in Mabou we talked about her recent exhibition at the Tinguely Museum in Basel, Switzerland. She was pleased with the presentation and selection of works and thought the installation gave a true sense of the importance of Mabou to her life and work. Leaf said she had not done much work since the exhibition and she thought it marked the end of a chapter. She asked me if I remembered seeing the two works *The Head*, 1976 and *Mechanized Scroll*, 2004 in the show (fig.52). I said yes, and that when I saw her in the spring of 2004 in New York she was still trying to figure out what type of material to use for the scroll. These two works were installed side by side in the exhibition space, and Leaf thought this said it all. *The Head*, 1976 is a seascape that includes a large head floating on the surface of the water and to the left is a small image of a man and woman in a boat, the man standing with spear in hand out on the open sea (fig.52a). To the right of the painting and resting on a base was the *Mechanized Scroll*, 2004, the image not unlike the one Leaf had painted some thirty years before (fig.52b). However, in this later work there is no big head, only the solitary image of a man and woman sitting looking towards each other as their boat hugs the shoreline.

Leaf's priorities have changed now; she and Robert Frank are older and health issues are part of their day-to-day reality. When I left June Leaf that summer day I wondered if and when she would start working again. My answer was not too long in

coming. Her letter of July 27<sup>th</sup> said that she had received coal from St. Jacob's, Ontario. She wrote: "Thanks for sending information about coal. I did finally contact the place in St. Jacob, Ont. They'll send coal soon and then we'll see. New work is ahead; I have a scent."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> June Leaf, "Postcard to Judy Hayes." 27 July 2005.

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## Figures



Fig.1. Avedon, Richard. *June Leaf, Artist*, 1976, photograph.



Fig.2. *Mabou Mines*, 1992/95, acrylic on canvas, 127 x 91cm. Collection of the artist.

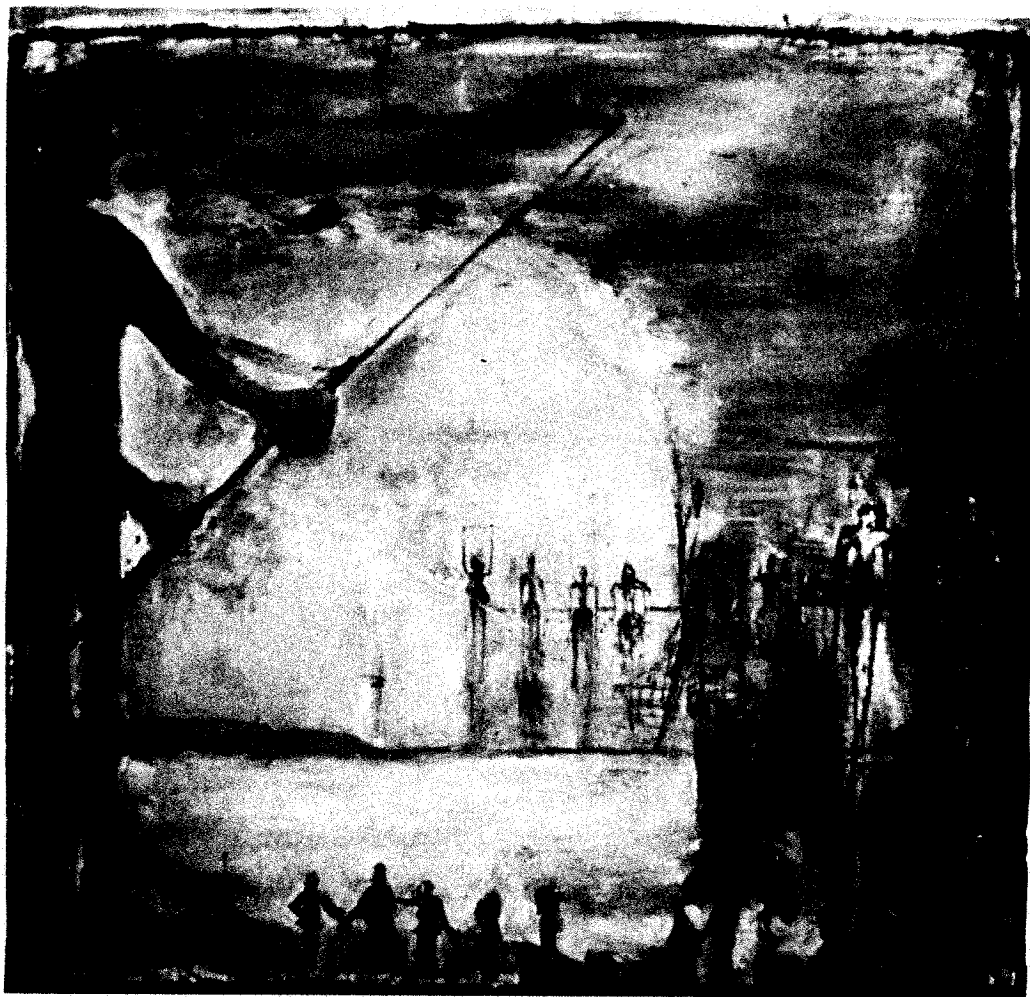


Fig.3. *Blue Sculpture in a Cave*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 152 x 152 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.4. *Butterfly Lady*, 1949, collage, charcoal on paper, 60 x 44 cm. Collection of Joel Press, Newton, Massachusetts.

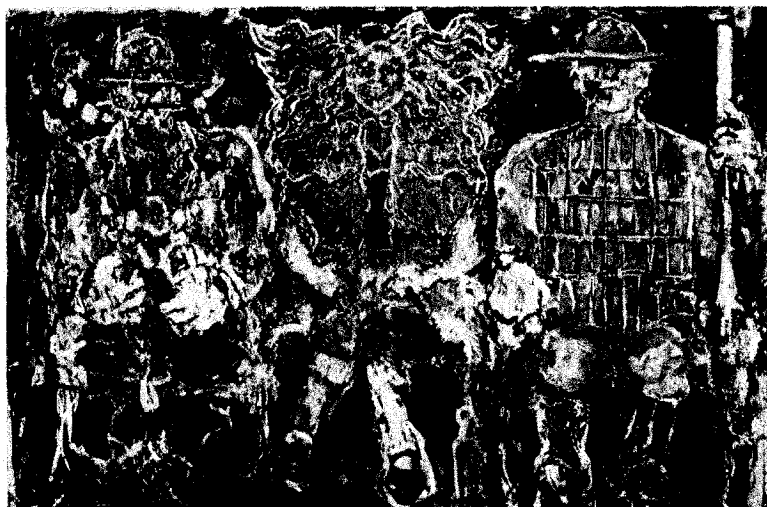


Fig.5. *Red Painting*, 1954, oil on canvas, 183 x 274 cm. Collection of Stuart Katz, Laguna Beach, California.

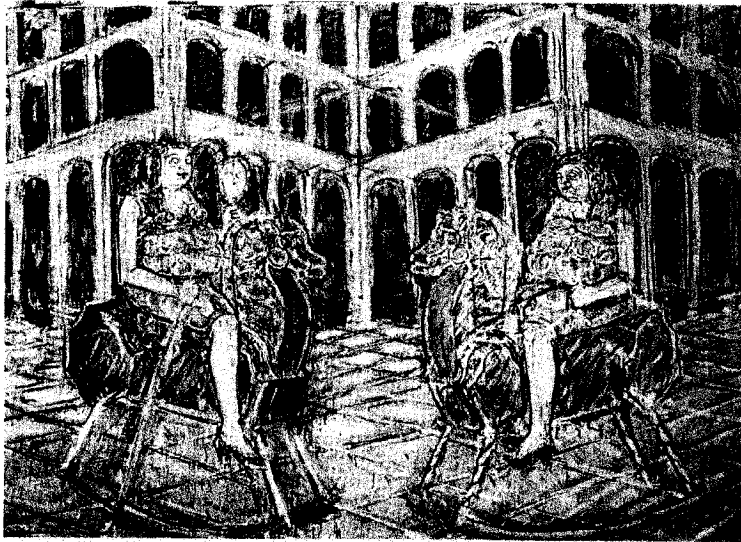


Fig.6. *Rocking Horse Women*, 1956-1960s, dimensions and whereabouts unknown.

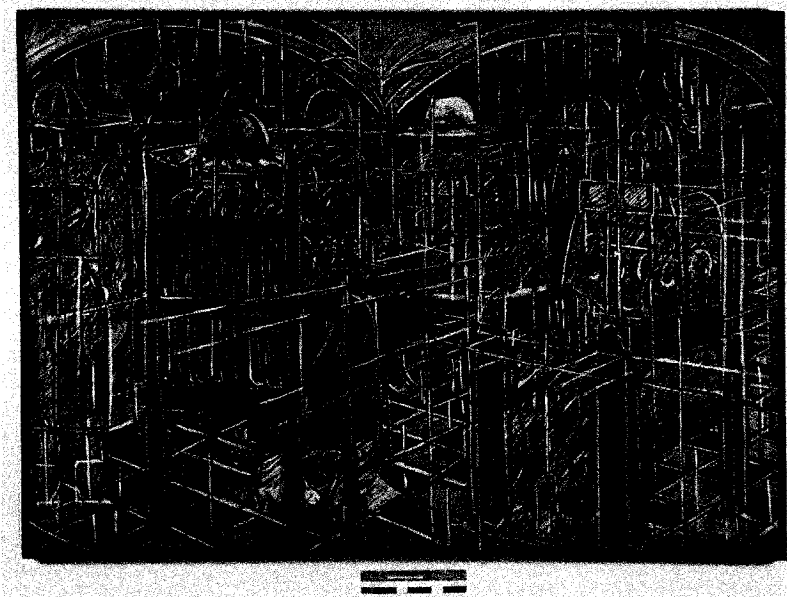


Fig.7. *Arcade Women*, 1956, oil on canvas, 178 x 251 cm. Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

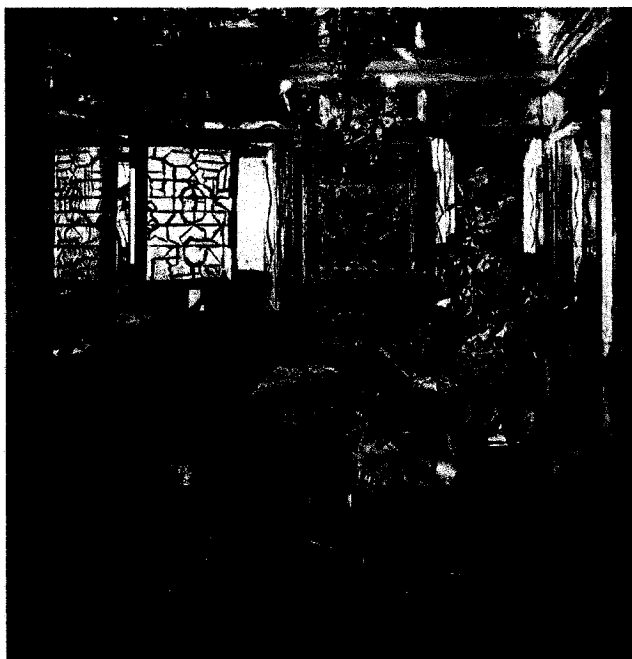


Fig.8. *Vermeer Box*, 1966, mirrors, collage, wood, glass, metal, tin, 183 x 61 x 61 cm.  
Collection of Joel Press, Newton, Mass.



Fig.9. *Ascension of Pig Lady*, 1969, acrylic on canvas with hand sewing and stuffed figures, wood, tin, 206 x 518 cm. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.



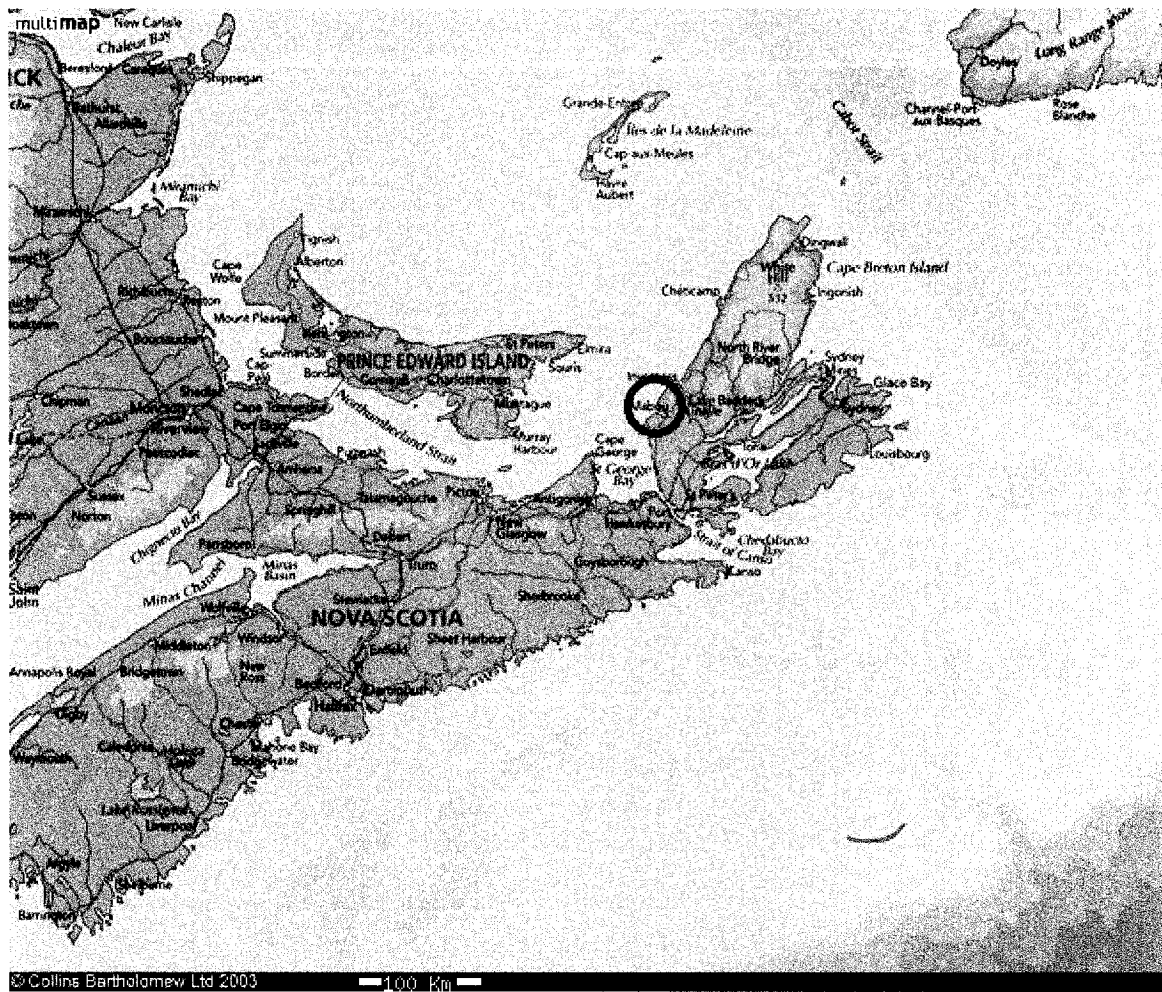


Fig.10. Map of Nova Scotia highlighting Mabou, Cape Breton. *Multimap.com*. London, England.

<http://www.multimap.com/map/gif.cgi?client=print&icon=336=206+X&client=print&fil...>



Fig.11. *Bird and Journal*, 1971, acrylic and collage on canvas, 81 x 86 cm. Collection of the artist.

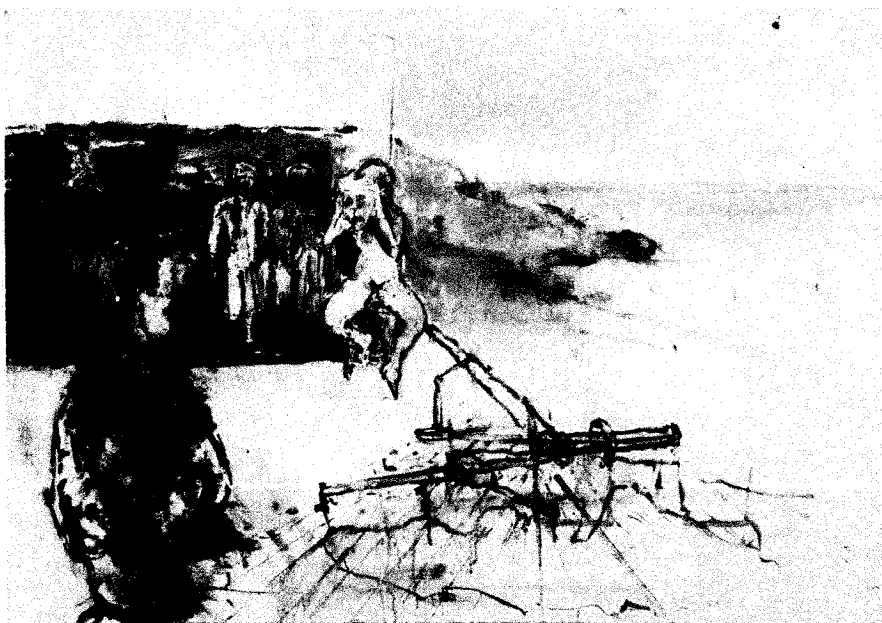


Fig.12. *Still Point of the Turning World*, 1975, acrylic and collage on canvas, 84 x 114 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.13. *Scientist Astonished*, 1972/73, collage, acrylic and ink on muslin, 24 x 28 cm.  
Collection: Permanent Collection of the Art Department Eastern Michigan University.



Fig.14. *Microscope Head*, 1973, mixed media on canvas, 128 x 86 cm. Private Collection.



Fig.15. *Albert*, 1973, acrylic, collage, Polaroid photographs on paper, 57 x 76 cm.  
Collection of Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin.



Fig.16. *Robert Enters the Room*, 1976, collage and acrylic on paper, 57 x 73 cm.  
Collection of the artist.



Fig.17. *Robert and the Model*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 78 cm. Collection of the artist.



Figure.18. *Cigarette Girl*, 1977/78, acrylic and collage on canvas, 78 x 61 cm. Private Collection.



Fig.19. *Woman on Back of Striding Horse*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 127 x 81 cm.  
Private Collection.

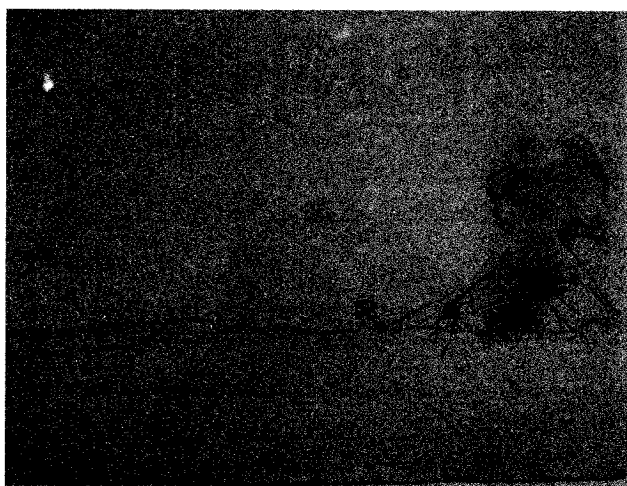


Fig.20. *Sphinx*, 1978, coloured pencil and graphite on paper, 22 x 28 cm. Collection of  
the artist.

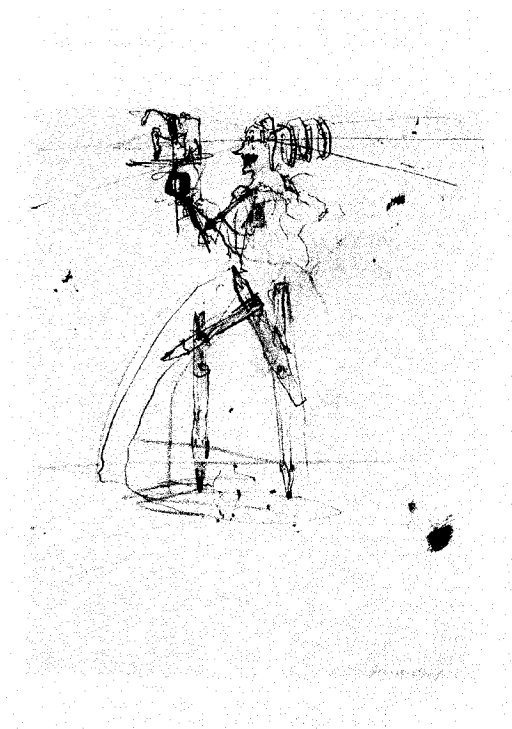


Fig.21. *Pencil Legs*, 1980, coloured pencil, graphite on paper, 20 x 25 cm. Collection of the artist.

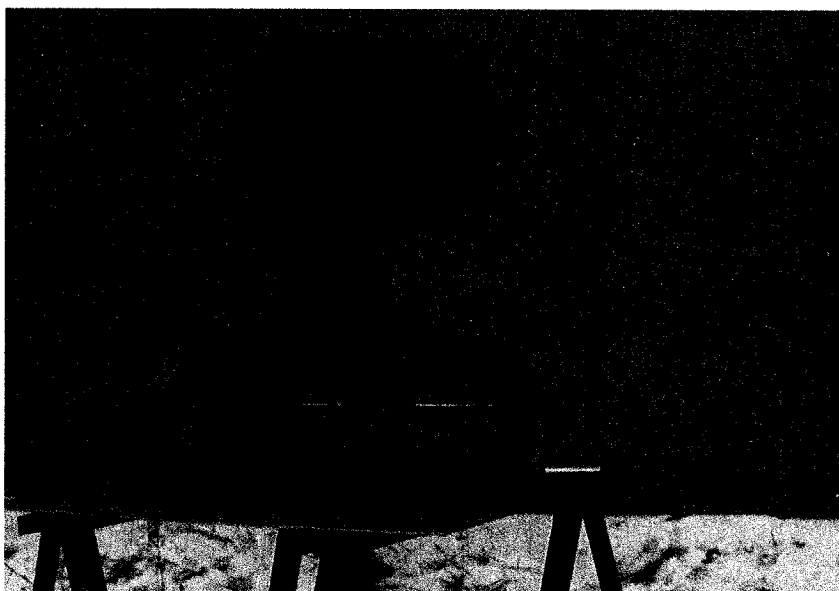


Fig.22. *The Head*, 1980, polychrome aluminium, stainless steel, 99 x 112 x 91 cm. Collection of Art Enterprises, Ltd., Chicago, Illinois.



Fig.23. *The Mooring*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 89 x 132 cm. Collection of the artist.

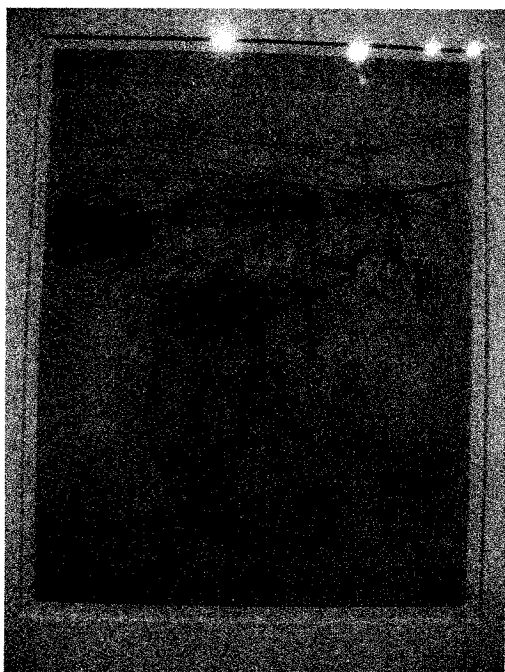


Fig.24. *Untitled*, 1978, ink on paper, 25 x 20 cm. Collection of the artist.





Fig.25. *Bernetta*, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 134 x 155 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.26. *Bernetta*, 1983, tin plate, rods, spring, wire, 26 x 10 x 11 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.27. *Red Archer*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 83 x 119 cm. Collection of University College of Cape Breton Art Gallery, Sydney, Nova Scotia.



Fig.28a. *Mabou Mines*, c. 1900-10, photograph, photographer unknown. Beaton Institute Archives, UCCB, Sydney, Nova Scotia. Photography Collection: 836514-13814.

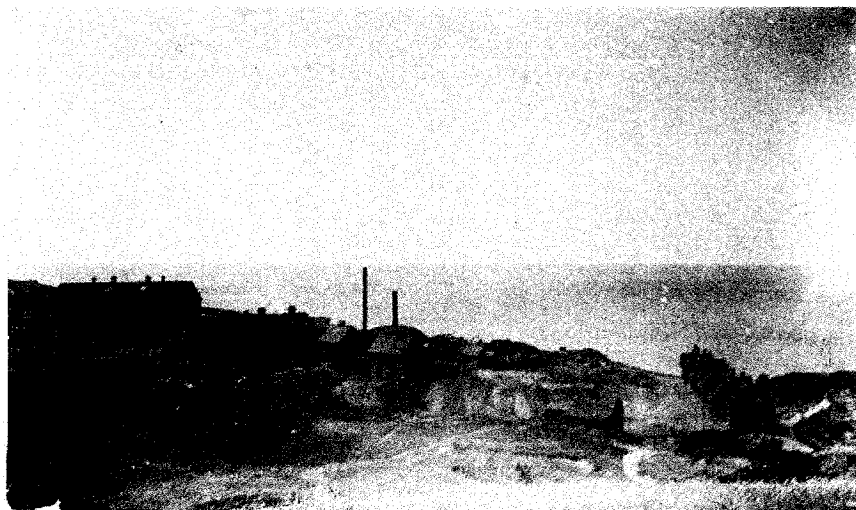


Fig.28b. *Mabou Mines*, c. 1900-10, photograph, photographer unknown. Beaton Institute Archives, UCCB, Sydney, Nova Scotia. Photography Collection: 83-6351-12651.



Fig.28c. *Mabou Mines* c. 1900-10, photograph, photographer unknown. Beaton Institute Archives, UCCB, Sydney, Nova Scotia. Photography Collection: 83-6352-13652.



Fig.29. *Mabou Giant*, 1971, wood and tin, 69 x 66 x 38. Collection of Herbert Lust, Greenwich.



Fig.30. *Peter MacPhee*, c.1973, work on paper, dimensions unknown. Whereabouts unknown.



Fig.31. *Portrait of Pat Clavier*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 81 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.32. *Ann Harder and Ron Gerard Beaton*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 132 x 86 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.33. *The Golden Steps*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 144 x 142 cm. Collection of the artist.

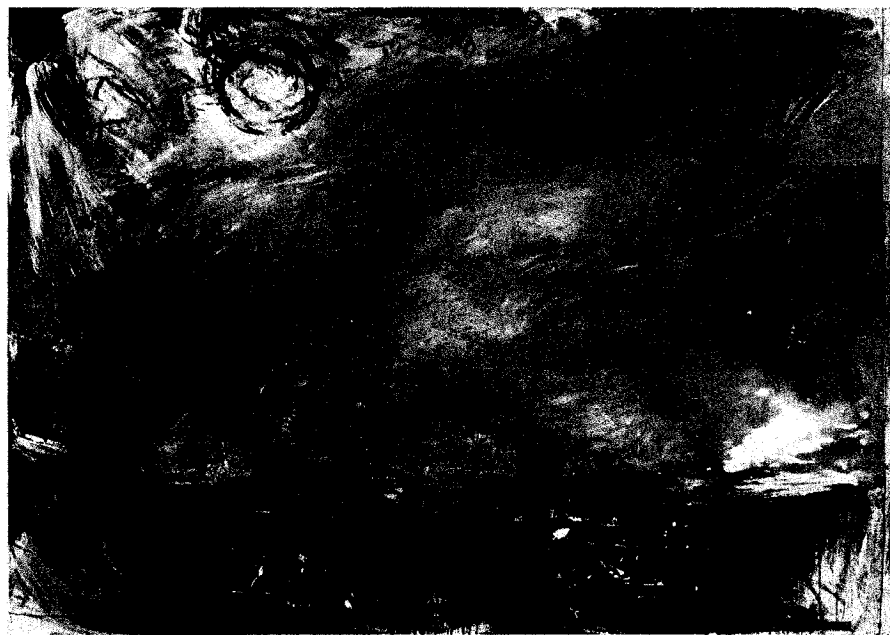


Fig.34. *The Bridge*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 127 x 178 cm. Collection of the artist.

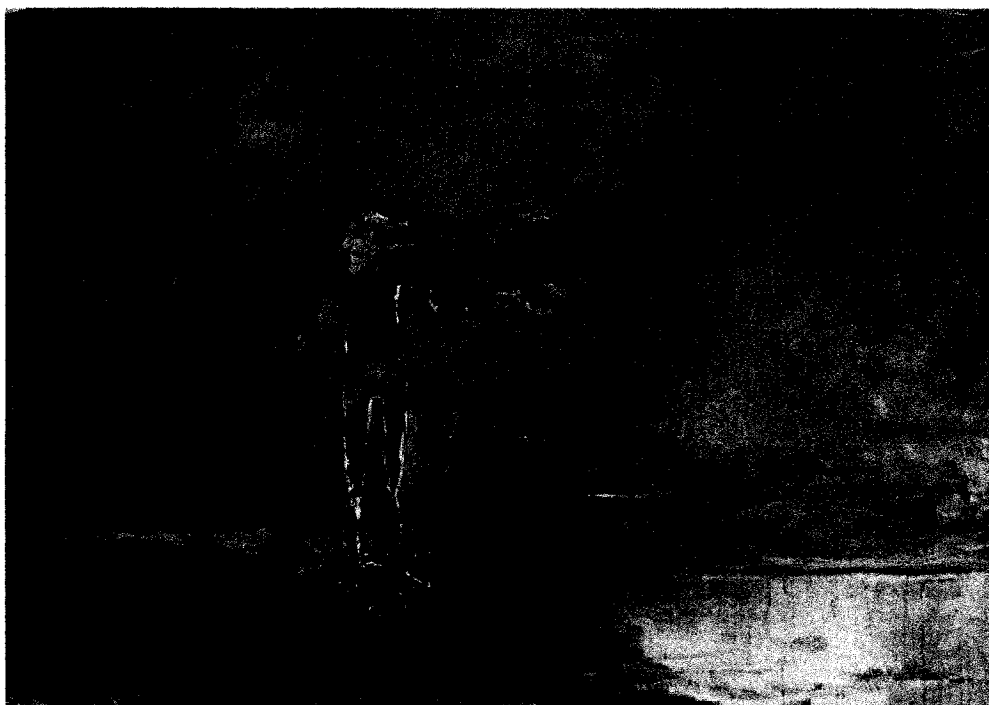


Fig.35. *Northern Bird*, 1985, mixed media on canvas, 127 x 178 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.36. *The Pencil Bird*, 1985/86, acrylic on canvas, 193 x 205 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.37. *Little Johnny Dougal*, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 178 x 127 cm. Collection of the artist.

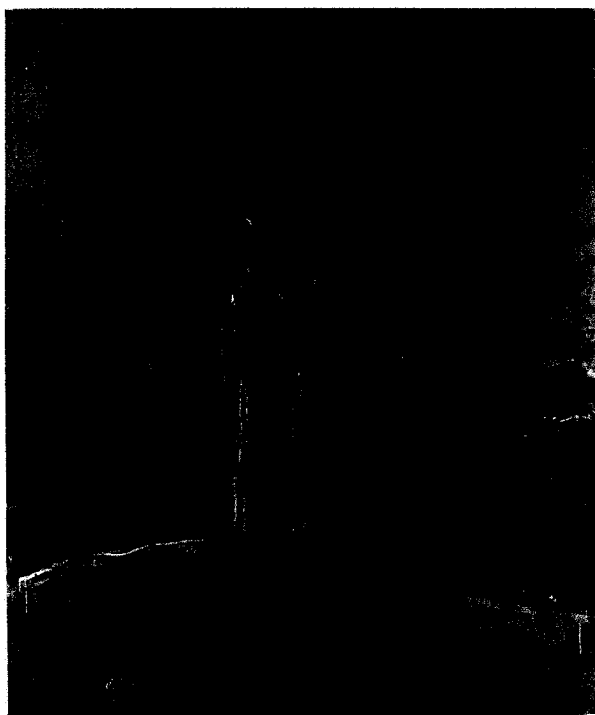


Fig.38. *Dawn*, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 218 x 184 cm. Collection of the artist.





Fig.39. *Pleading Angel*, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 147 x 173. Collection of the artist.



Fig.40. *Hake*, 1986/87, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 71 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.41. *The Instrument (For Robert)*, 1992/93, wood, polyester resin, guitar strings, 91 x 43 x 29 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.42. *Embarking*, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 142 x 241 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.43. *Sleeping Figure*, 1993, reinforced canvas over wire, 244 x 107 cm.  
Collection of the artist.

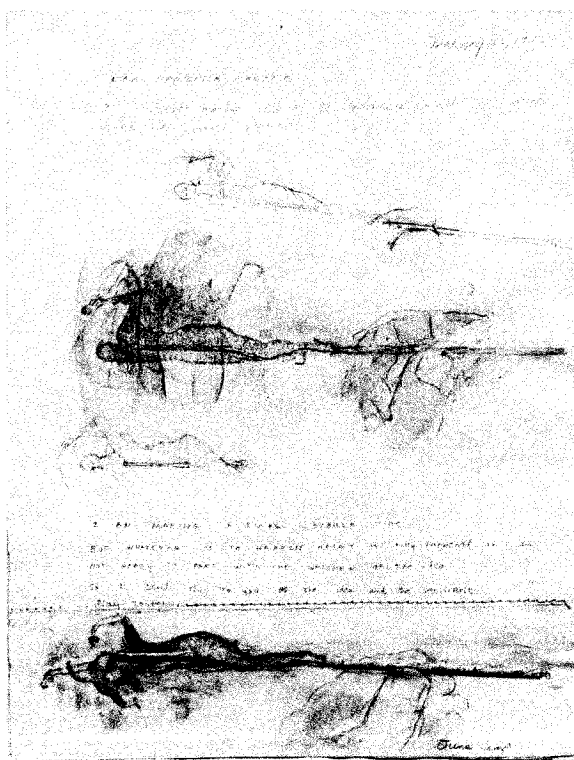


Fig.44a. *Sketch for Woman as a Bubble Pipe*, 1995, pencil, watercolour on paper.  
Artist File. Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B.

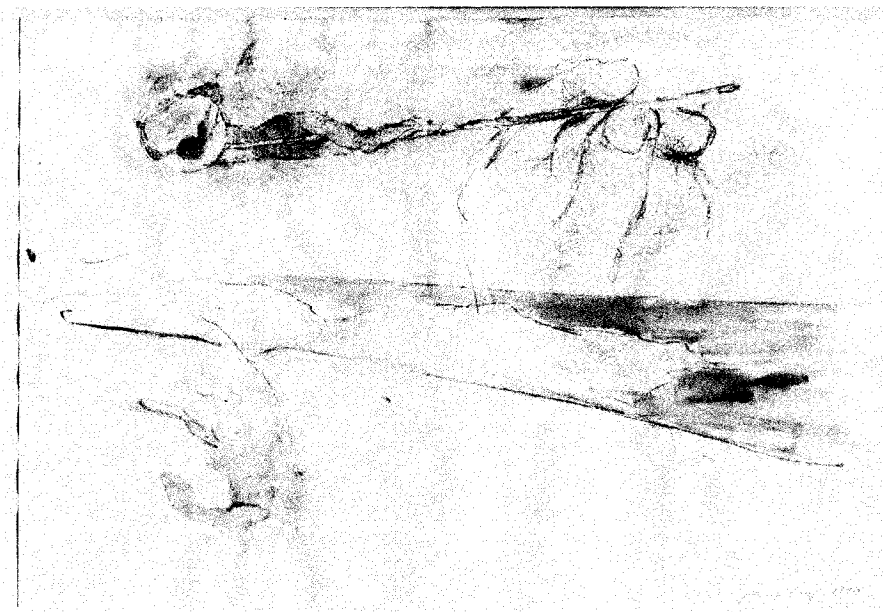


Fig.44b. *Sketch for Woman as a Bubble Pipe*, 1996, pencil, watercolour on paper.  
Artist File. Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B.

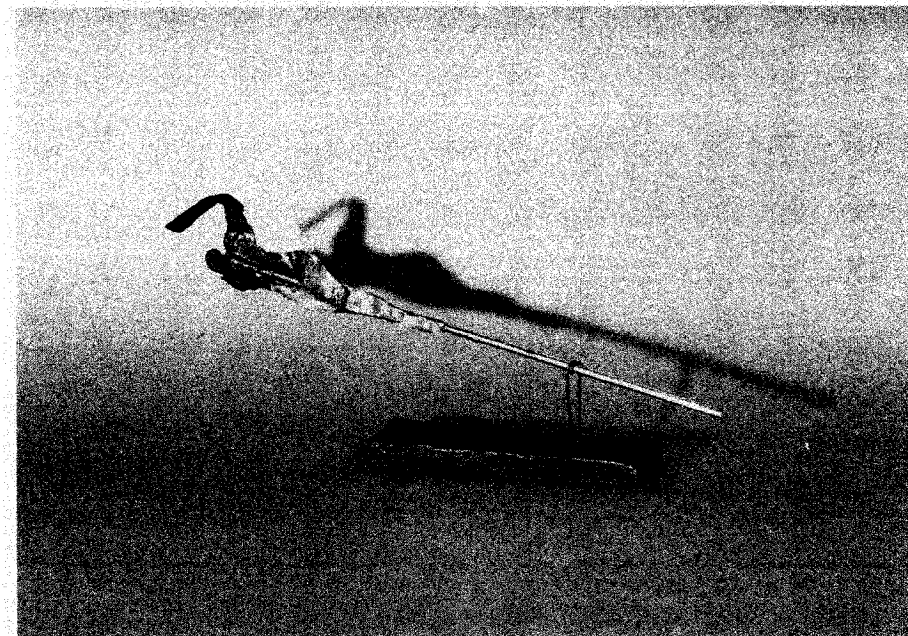


Fig.45. *Woman as a Bubble Pipe*, 1996, galvanized tin, brass rod-wire, 7 x 16 x 3 cm.  
Collection of the Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B.

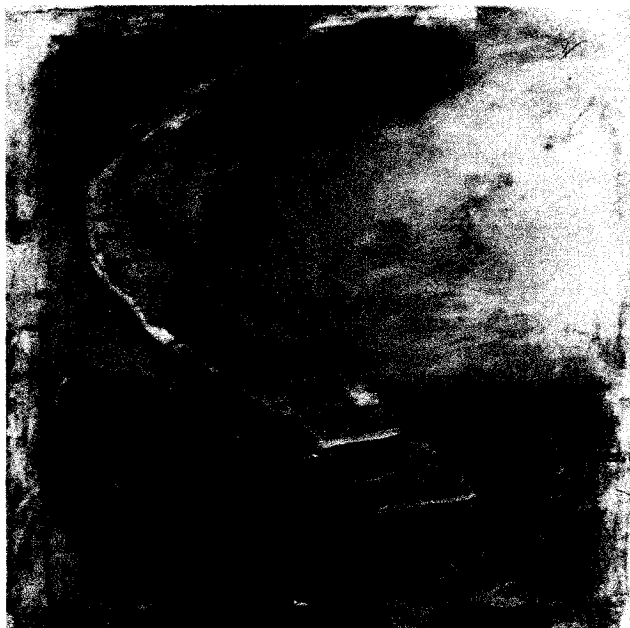


Fig.46. *Angel on Stairway*, 1999/2000, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 130 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.47. *Bird and Skeleton*, 2004, charcoal, acrylic on paper on tin, 92 x 96 cm. Collection of the artist.



Fig.48. *Untitled*, 1999/2000, acrylic on tin, 50.8 x 66.06 cm. Collection of the artist.

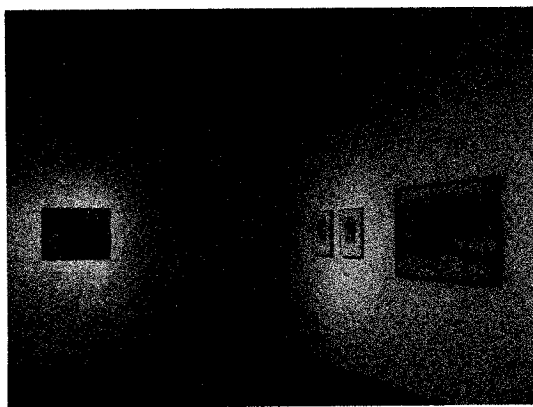


Fig.49a. Installation Shot. *June Leaf: Three Islands*. Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland. 19 Sept. 2004 – 16 Jan. 2005.

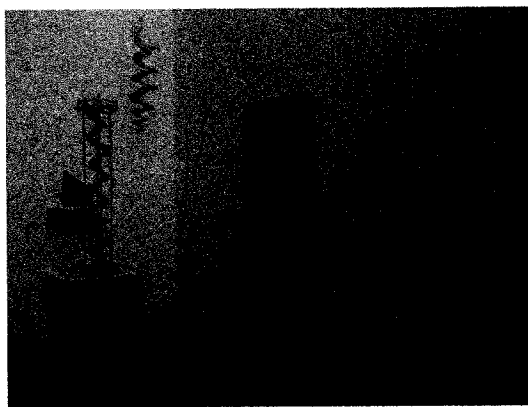


Fig.49b. Installation Shot. *June Leaf: Three Islands*. Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland. 19 Sept. 2004 – 16 Jan. 2005.



Fig.50. *The Painter*, 1980, tin, wire, lead, 18 x 10 x 4 cm. Private Collection.

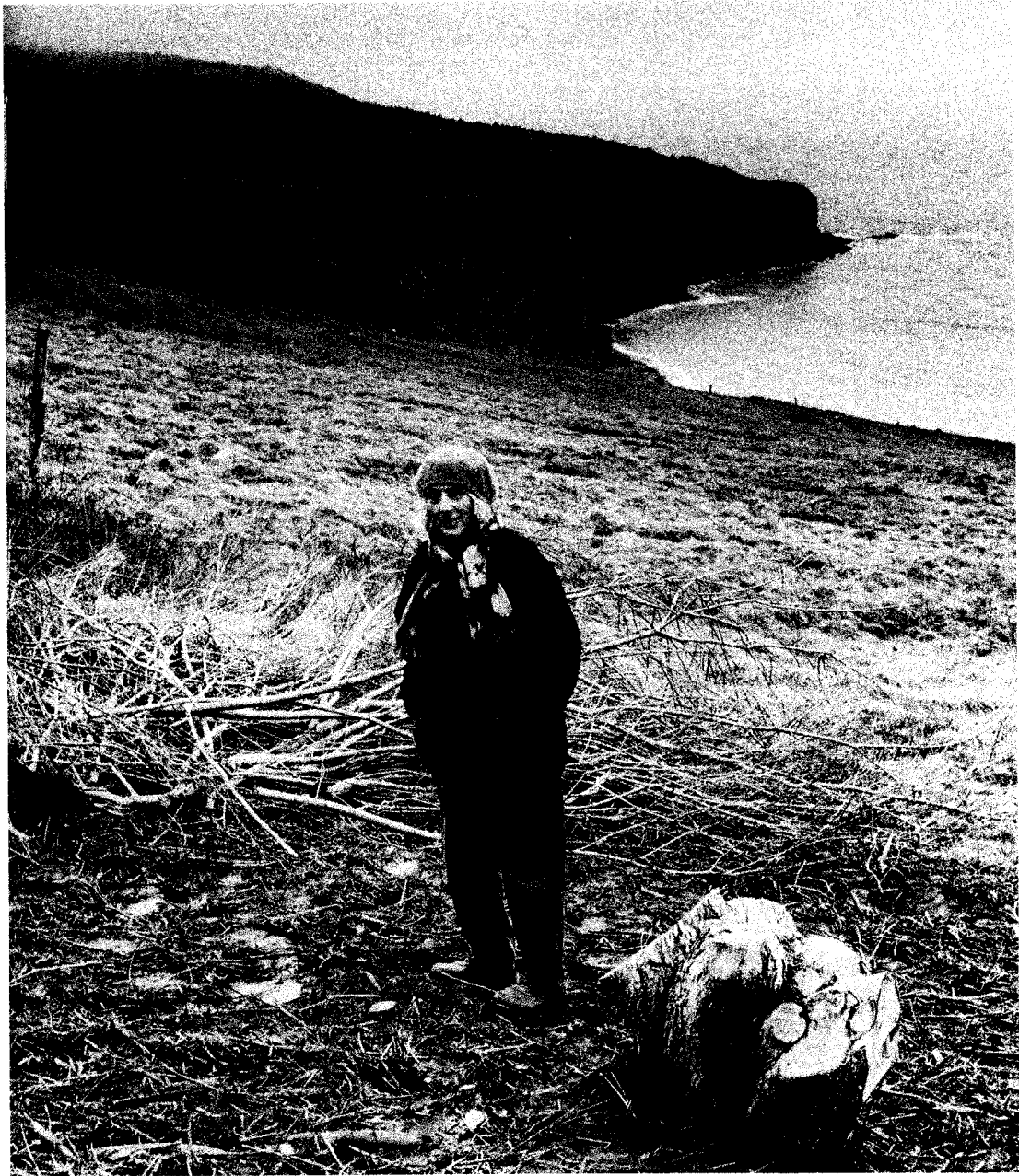


Fig.51. Pardey, Andres. *June Leaf*, 2003. Photograph.



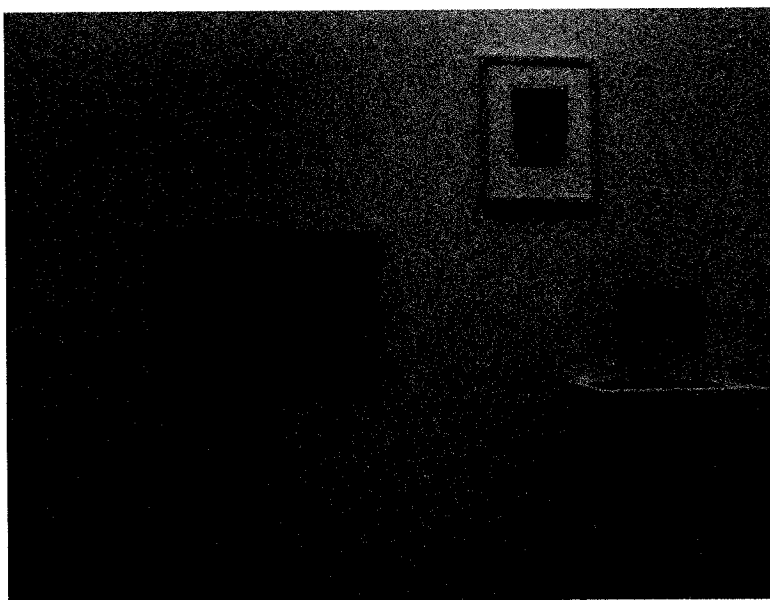


Fig.52. Installation Shot. *June Leaf: Three Islands*. Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland. 19 Sept. 2004 – 16 Jan. 2005.



Fig.52a. *The Head*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 46 cm. Collection of Wylie Rogers, Zurich.

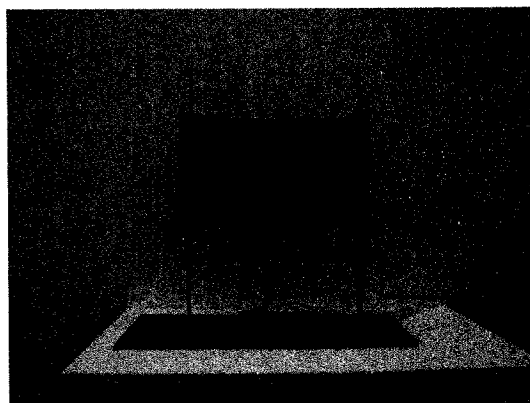
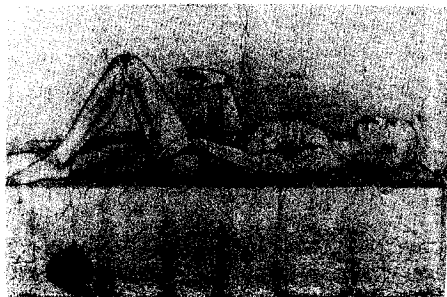


Fig.52b. *Mechanized Scroll*, 2004, mixed media, 38 x 36 x 18 cm. Collection of the artist.

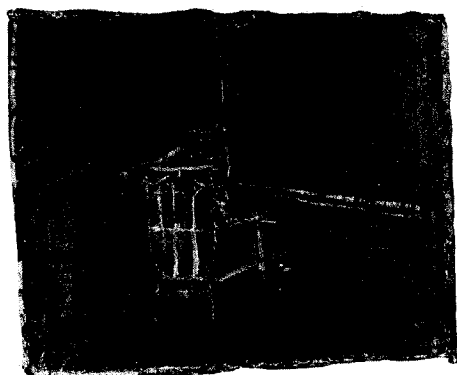
## Appendix



*Operation*, 1951, pencil on paper, 20x 13 cm. Collection of the artist.



*Three Standing Models*, 1957, oil on canvas, 53x 53cm. Collection of Denis Adrian



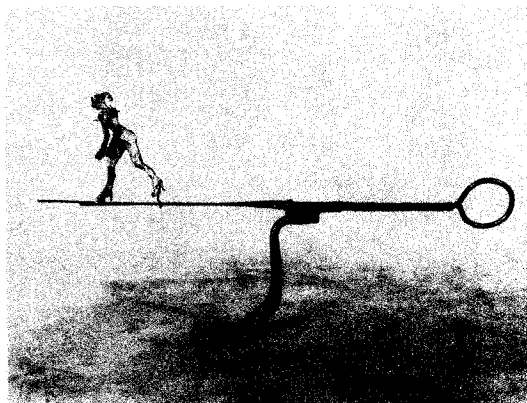
*Study for Arcade Women*, 1956, charcoal on paper, 53x 56 cm. Collection of the artist.



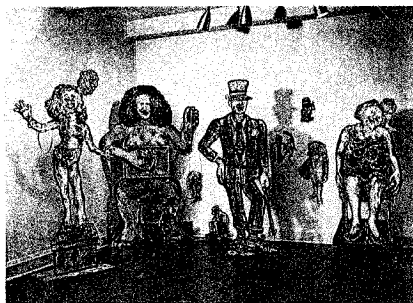
*The Beauty Parlor*, 1966, etching with drypoint (black). Edition of 10. 10.16 x 14.61 cm. Sheet: 15.88 x 25.08 cm. Printworks Gallery, Chicago, Illinois



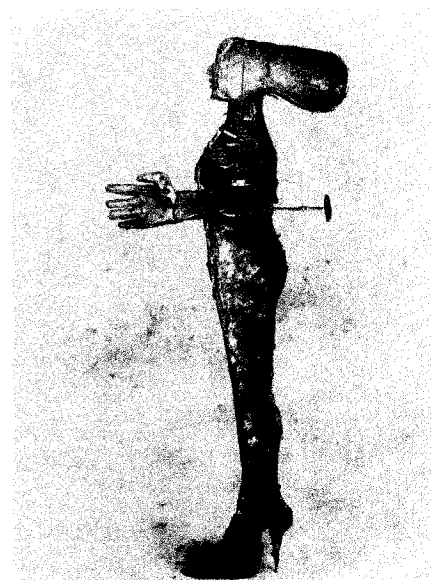
*Woman with a Dagger in Her Mouth*, 1966, etching with drypoint (black).  
Edition of 2. 14.61 x 9.84 cm. 22.54 x 16.19 cm. Printworks Gallery, Chicago, Illinois.



*Woman Walking*, 1978, tin, rod, springs, wire, 2.43 x 24.13 x 1.27 cm. Private Collection.



*Sweat Dreams*, 1968. Left to right *Woman with Hoop*, *Woman Theter*, *Man with Top Hat*, *Fat Lady* and wall pieces from Buster Brown Series, 1968, painted wood; installation at Madison Art Center, 1973-74.



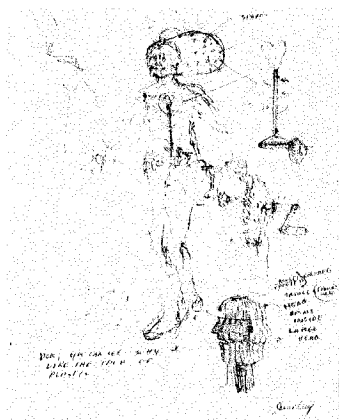
*Shooting from the Heart*, 1980, tin plate, rods, springs gears, 45.72 x 20.32 x 5.08 cm. Collection of the Addison Gallery, Andover, Mass.



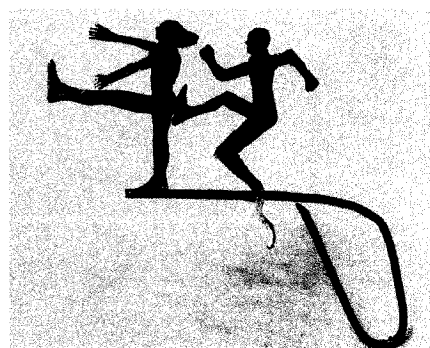
*Study for the Head*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 203.2 x 119.38 cm. Collection of the artist.



*The Lovers*, 1976, tin, rods, tin plate, spring, 16.51 x 40.64 x 7.62 cm. Private Collection.



*Letter to David Lippincott*, 1979, pen and coloured pencil on paper, 25.4 x 20.32 cm. Collection of the artist.



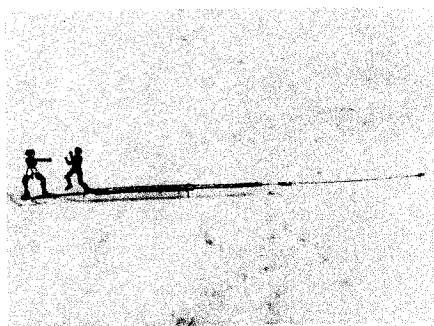
*The Kick*, 1976, tin, plate, spring wire, 17.78 x 17.15 cm. Private Collection.



*The Tantrum*, 1978, tin, clockspring,  
chain, wire, 30.48 x 22.23 x 3.18 cm.  
Private Collection.



*Study for Woman Monument #3*, 1976,  
49.53 x 41.91 cm. ink, gouache and  
pencil on paper. Collection of the artist.



*Big Head Fights Back*, 1981, tin plate,  
spring, rods, 3.81 x 29.21 x 1.27 cm.  
Private Collection



*Untitled*, 1975, 27.94 x 55.25 cm. silver  
paint, acrylic and pencil on paper.  
Collection of the artist.