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The Animated Art of Caroline Leaf

The films of Caroline Leaf dramatically expand a tradition of artistic and artisanal animation that flourished in Canada and, to a lesser extent, the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Although she has made few films, Leaf pioneered important new aesthetic and technical approaches to narrative animation which have remained deeply influential over later artists such as William Kentridge. Made while she was an undergraduate at Harvard, Leaf's very first film *Sand, or Peter and the Wolf* immediately revealed her talent in "direct animation," working without any kind of image background or structural armature but here instead "drawing" live by manipulating and sculpting sand on glass, a painstaking and elusive technique with truly magical results. Movement, character and environment are fused in a truly unique fashion in Leaf's films, rendered with a startling immediate and intimate poetry. Made by painting directly on a pane of glass, *The Street*, for example, powerfully evokes a post-WWII tenement neighborhood from the point of view of a young boy coming of age, with Leaf's swirling, ever shifting figures delicately intertwining his actual and imagined point of views. Leaf's skills in adapting literature reached a further high point in her poignant Kafka adaptation, *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* where the shape-shifting logic of her animation found an ideal and arresting subject. One of her darkest and most moving films, Leaf's most recent work *Two Sisters* was a notable departure – her first time working with an original story of her own and her first to embrace the technique of scratching directly onto the emulsion of 70mm film stock. Leaf's career has special meaning for the Harvard Film Archive and the Carpenter Center which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, and within which Leaf made her initial steps as an animator, studying under the visionary head of the Harvard's vibrant animation sector Derek Lamb.

The Harvard Film Archive is proud to welcome Caroline Leaf for a retrospective of her animated films, screened on new prints and including the HFA's own preservation of *Sand, or Peter and the Wolf*.

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