

Caroline Leaf

Short film bio

In 1984, at the time of the summer Olympics in Los Angeles, the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences organized a mammoth event with 50 critics and filmmaker judges from all over the world. All animated films ever made were judged in this international 'Olympic' competition, and Caroline Leaf's film 'The Street' came in second, winning comfortably over Disney and all other commercial productions.

Caroline Leaf's animated story telling films are known for their emotional content and graphic style, closely tied to the innovative animation techniques that she has invented. Her films flow fluidly with a handcrafted sensibility. They are made by manipulating beach sand on a lightbox or fingerpainting on glass under the camera lens, and scratching directly into film emulsion.

Leaf began to make animated films as a student at Harvard University in Boston in 1968. Her first film, 'Sand or Peter and the Wolf', was made with a bucket of local beach sand poured out onto a lightbox and lit from below to create a world of moving shadowy figures. Her subsequent films are refinements and extensions of this handcrafted under-the-camera technique.

In 1972 Leaf moved to Montreal at the invitation of the National Film Board of Canada, a publicly funded Canadian production centre which allows its filmmakers considerable creative freedom. It is famous for its animation. There she worked as a staff animator/director until 1991. She also became a naturalized Canadian citizen. Her major animated films from these years are: 'The Owl Who Married a Goose', 'The Street', 'The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa', 'Interview', and 'Two Sisters'.

Leaf was designer, story adaptor and/or scriptwriter for all of her films, and worked closely on the sound and editing.

As well as doing animation, she made short documentary and live action films at the Film Board. She made several set designs for a Montreal theatre company, Bouffon de Boullion. She constructed large moving wind sculptures, and kept her drawing skills honed by actively drawing on the side. She also travelled worldwide showing her films and giving workshops. Honours include: being a jury member for international animation festivals in Cracow Poland, Annecy France, Varna Bulgaria, and Ottawa Canada. She had a Cineprobe retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art, has been a guest of the Israel Film Archive and Cinemateque in Jerusalem, and, as a guest of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers, toured the former Soviet Union with her films. She and her films were featured at the American Film Institute Lanz Seminar of Animation in Los Angeles, and her films ran for 2 weeks at the Film Forum in New York. She was honoured with a Guardian Lecture at the National Film

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Theatre in London and her sand animation technique was on display at London's Museum of the Moving Image. In 1996 she received a Life Achievement Award from Zagreb International Animation Festival. In 1999 The British Film Institute, under the Connoisseur art label, released a commercially available compilation video of her animated films. In 2010 The National Film Board of Canada released a dvd compilation of her animation films.

Her film awards include: Academy Award Nomination (1977) for 'The Street', Grand Prix at the Ottawa International Animation Festival (1976) for 'The Street', Grand Prix at the International Festival of Short Films Cracow, Poland (1978) for 'The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa', Grand Prix at Melbourne (1980) for 'Interview' and Grand Prix at the 4th Los Angeles International Animation Celebration (1991) for 'Two Sisters', which also won the Grand Prix at Ottawa International Animation Festival (1992).

Leaf's teaching experience includes many hands on workshops in many parts of the world. Her main teaching experiences have been from 1996 - '98 when she taught the animation course at Harvard University, from 2002 - 2005 at Konstfack, Sweden, and from 2005 - 2009 when she was part time senior tutor at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield near London.

Leaf has had commercial animation affiliations with Colossal films in San Francisco and Acme Filmworks in Los Angeles. In Montreal she worked commercially for Pascal Blais Productions.

Today Leaf lives in London, England, where she maintains a studio and is establishing herself as a fine arts painter in oils.