

Caroline Leaf through the Eyes of Fyodor Khitruk

translated by Yuri Mikhailin

Of the few works she managed to create, every single film has made history. I first saw one of her films before I even knew her, and I was astonished. It was a graduation project—perhaps even a term paper—that the young student Caroline Leaf was completing at the National Film Board of Canada. The film was called *Peter and the Wolf*, based on Prokofiev. It was made using a "powder" technique that was completely unknown to us at the time. Black powder was scattered over glass, and Caroline Leaf used her fingers to gather this powder into specific figures and images. By moving the powder in this way, she told the story of *Peter and the Wolf* to Prokofiev's music. Moreover, she didn't choose powder by accident; it was this specific technique that allowed her to maximize the transformation of the material. And her entire film was built upon transformation. The thing is, according to her plot—she based it on Prokofiev's music but invented the story herself—the wolf was constantly turning into other objects. One moment it's a wolf, and suddenly it turns into a Christmas tree... with those eyes! And this transformation happens right before our very eyes.

But she achieved true fame and world renown, earning a place on the list of the "Ten Best Directors of All Time," thanks to the film *The Street*. This film was made in the technique of so-called "paint-on-glass" (or "living painting"). This is also not classic animation where movement is built on one drawing replacing another. Here, the painting lies under the camera, and the animator changes the image stroke by stroke, creating the complete effect of painting coming to life. It is an amazing film in its form and technique, but it is also amazing in its spirit. A Jewish boy tells the story of his family. The film is based on a novella by the famous Jewish writer Mordecai Richler. It breathes such warmth, such simplicity, and such depth of acting insight that I believe it is for good reason the film

is recognized as one of the best in the entire history of animation.

Caroline Leaf also has the films *Interview* and *Two Sisters*, in which she continues to experiment with new techniques. She is a born seeker. And while this questing nature helped her create stunning films, it also did her a disservice. She didn't stop at the inventions she displayed in *The Street* or *Peter and the Wolf*. She could have created many more masterpieces in those techniques. No, she was concerned with something else entirely; she easily abandoned what she had acquired and developed—"golden sand," as they say—and moved on to something else. She began making films that had no direct relation to animation, films with large puppets. And frankly speaking, these films are much less interesting. After that, I don't know what happened to her.

Ah! I forgot to mention that Caroline Leaf also made a striking film called *The Owl Who Married a Goose*. This was also done using black powder. It is a wonderfully beautiful and warm film! It is funny and sad at the same time. There is something Chekhovian about it, just as there is in Yuri Norstein's *The Heron and the Crane*. But this film is made in a completely different technique. Here is an amazing, strange thing: you forget, you stop wondering how powder can acquire such concrete acting functions; you simply follow the story, and you are captivated by the emotions shown by the owl and this timid goose. When you forget how it was made—that it was even "made" at all—and you are immersed only in the experience, then you can say: "This is an act of true art."