



Every character in June Leaf's work is always in motion, as is the artist herself. Untitled (Coastline with Figures), circa 1980.

DOES ART KEEP YOU YOUNG?

At the end of last year I visited the artist June Leaf in her studio. She is a person with a magical aura, and there is something magical about her work too – the landscapes and portraits, part real, part fictional, her drawings or her wire sculptures, which seem to be in constant motion and seem to have a life of their own. Leaf was the life partner of the famous Swiss-American photographer Robert Frank until his death, and although she is 93 years old, she has been working on her art every day for over seventy years now .

There are no statistics I'm aware of on how old artists live, but my impression is that many live to an exceptionally old age and then , like Leaf, look surprisingly young . At some point I started asking these young people in their eighties what keeps them fresh. The answers include some general explanations such as exercise or good nutrition. Luchita Hurtado, she was 99 years old, gave up sugar completely. However, most of the answers were more or less directly related to the artistic work.

Curiosity, as many say , is what keeps them fresh. Constantly trying out new things and always standing in front of the white canvas, at a zero point, that challenges her and is enormously invigorating. When I asked June Leaf what kept her so young, she thought for a while and then said something very nice: "Lucky hands". Happy hands mean two things to her: that she is lucky enough to have gifted hands that can draw, paint and model the most unbelievable things . *Lucky hands* also because it makes the hands and their owner happy that they stay so active and moving.

June Leaf's work is truly extraordinary – and there is still so much to discover in her oeuvre . For example the old, iron Singer sewing machines, which she integrates into her mechanical, flexible sculptures. Or her characters, who are always on the move, who balance, climb stairs, sometimes even fly . Or the small metal objects that are meant to be held in your hand. If you press a trigger, they start moving. When I tried such a movement, my hands were extremely happy.

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