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TRIBECA

June Leaf

Through Dec. 21. Ortuzar Projects, 9 White Street, Manhattan; 212-257-0033; ortuzarprojects.com.



June Leaf's "Two Women on a Jack," from 2001, at Ortuzar Projects. via June Leaf and Ortuzar Projects, New York

June Leaf's memorable new show at Ortuzar Projects rounds up decades' worth of work by the 93-year-old artist. There are unframed drawings of shadowy figures confronting existential dilemmas. There's an expressive, rainbow-colored painting of what looks like a sounding whale. And there are evocative, Torah-like devices constructed from old sewing machine parts and mesh, as well as loads of dashing little figures cut from tin. But "drawing, painting and sculpture" hardly seem like the right words for any of this, because the pieces all come across less as objects than as urgent gestures, thoughtful but intuitive, that Leaf just happened to make with charcoal or sheet metal instead of with her body.

The best work is in the figures, which are deceptively precise despite their rough edges. They hide funny, unnerving details like thumbtacks for breasts or a hinge-like pin sticking down between two legs. Leaf sends her little avatars up and down spiraling staircases and has them walk along thick, kinky strands of wire as if they were in the circus. One little figure flies with hollow wings while a pair of larger ones, in "Two Women on a Jack," ready their drumsticks to play an empty circle of wire — as beautiful a metaphor for the self-willed quality of art as I've ever seen. *WILL HEINRICH*