

JOHN LEES





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OCTOBER 23 – NOVEMBER 28, 2015

BETTY CUNINGHAM GALLERY  
15 RIVINGTON STREET NYC | 212.242.2772 | BETTYCUNINGHAMGALLERY.COM



*Polka Dots and Moonbeams*, 1978; 2001; 2015  
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches

## INTRODUCTION

“Long Ago and Far Away,” written by Jerome and Ira Gershwin and sung by Jo Stafford, was playing when I recently visited John Lees’ studio to select the works for this exhibition. Lees characteristically works on his paintings and drawings for many years – sometimes for decades. On the wall, floor and easel were several works that shared the title *Man Sitting in an Armchair* (the artist’s father). Some heavily painted, others scraped down to raw canvas. Memories and media piled up and pared down. Another painting, *In the Park*, hung nearby, reveals two figures merged: the artist himself and that of the 1930/40’s Jazz saxophonist, Lester Young. Also on the floor were two of the four paintings titled *42nd Street*. The text, a quotation from the 1933 film, *42nd Street*, provides the background in these paintings. Here, the older actress expresses her resentment as she must pass on her roll to the younger actress.

In this exhibition, Lees pulls the past into the present. Time past and time spent are central to his working process as well as to the work itself. We are most grateful to John Lees for once again giving us a deeply felt and beautiful exhibition.

— Betty Cuningham



*In the Park/Early Morning*, 2015  
graphite, ink on paper, 11 x 9 1/8 inches



*Enter DOROTHY BROCK (on crutches)*

DOROTHY: They told me I'd find you here.

PEGGY: Why Miss Brock!

BILLY: You can't talk to her. Nobody can. It's Marsh's orders.

DOROTHY: I want to see her alone, Billy.

PEGGY: It's all right, Billy

BILLY: I know, but... (*BILLY exits. DOROTHY closes door with crutch*)





42nd Street (Main Title and Dialogue), 2015  
Oil on canvas, 24 x 32 inches

DOROTHY: You're nervous, aren't you? Well, don't be. The customers out there want to like you. Always remember that, kid. I've learned it from experience. And you've got so much to give them – youth, and beauty, and freshness. Do you know your lines, and your songs and your dance routines? (PEGGY *nods, "yes" to each*) Well! You're a cinch!

PEGGY: But... but it's tough on you, Miss Brock.





DOROTHY: Come here. (*Orchestra has begun to play "You're Getting to be a Habit With Me" in the background*). Peggy, isn't it? You know, Peggy, when I started out for the theatre tonight I wanted to tear your hair out. But then I started thinking: Well after all, I've had my chance, and now it's your turn. I've had enough. For five years it's kept me away from the only thing I've ever wanted. And a funny thing – a broken ankle was the thing that made me find it out. You know, Peggy, most anyone can have success with the proper break. As for me, I'll take Pat, and vaudeville, or whatever goes with him. We're being married tomorrow.





*42nd Street (I)*, 2014  
Oil on canvas, 15 x 19 inches

PEGGY: Oh, I'm so glad! (*Enter WARDROBE MISTRESS, followed by STAGE HANDS*)

WARDROBE MISTRESS: You've got to hurry up Miss. Come right in, boys. Right over here.

(*MARQUEE; ORCHESTRA Overture – "Young and Healthy" theme; Backstage montage – bustle of STAGE HANDS, CHORUS GIRLS, ETC.*)

I think it's fitting nice now.

PEGGY: Do you think I look alright?

DOROTHY: You look adorable! Now go out there and be so swell – you'll make me hate you!

42nd Street (Warner Bros., 1933)

Peggy Sawyer played by Ruby Keller  
Dorothy Brock played by Bebe Daniels"





*Untitled (Clown)*, 2009-2012  
Pencil, watercolor and ink on paper, 14 x 7 inches



*Man Sitting in an Armchair*, 2015  
ink on paper, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches





5/5/15  
2/13/09

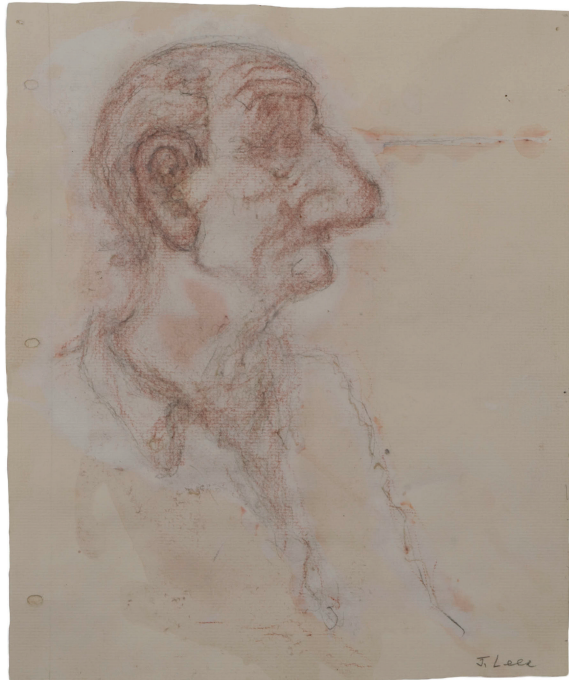
J. Leez '15.

..Nerval confessed in one of his progress reports to his editor: the more he wrote, the more he crossed out... only in erasure does the true image or our desire take shape.

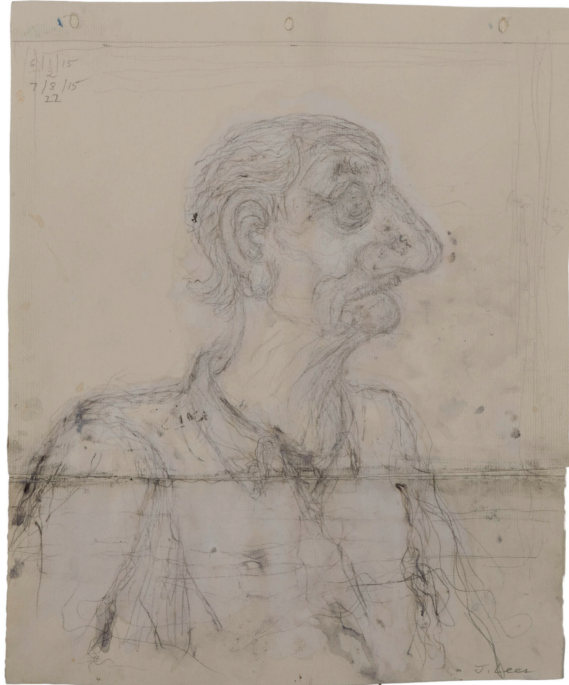
Introductory note to  
“Angelique” and “Sylvie” by Richard Sieburth  
Gerard de Nerval, *Selected Writings* – Penguin Classics, 1999)



*Man Sitting in an Armchair*, 2008-2015  
Oil on canvas, 14 3/4 x 12 1/2 inches  
(in process)



*Profile III (Man Sitting in an Armchair)*, 2015  
graphite, conté, sanguine, ink on paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/4 inches



*Profile I (Man Sitting in an Armchair)*, 2015  
graphite, ink on paper, 13 1/2 x 11 1/8 inches



*Profile II (Man Sitting in an Armchair)*, 2015  
Graphite and ink on paper, 11 1/4 x 9 1/8 inches



*Man Sitting in an Armchair*, 2008-2015  
Oil on canvas, 42 x 36 inches  
(In Process)







*Man Sitting in Armchair (Blue Lamp)*, 2012  
Oil on canvas, 15 1/4 x 14 inches



*Man Sitting in an Armchair (Red Dog)*, 2008-2015  
Oil on Canvas, 8 1/8 x 8 inches  
(In Process)

*Man Sitting in an Armchair*, 2015  
graphite, ink on paper, 11 1/8 x 12 1/4 inches

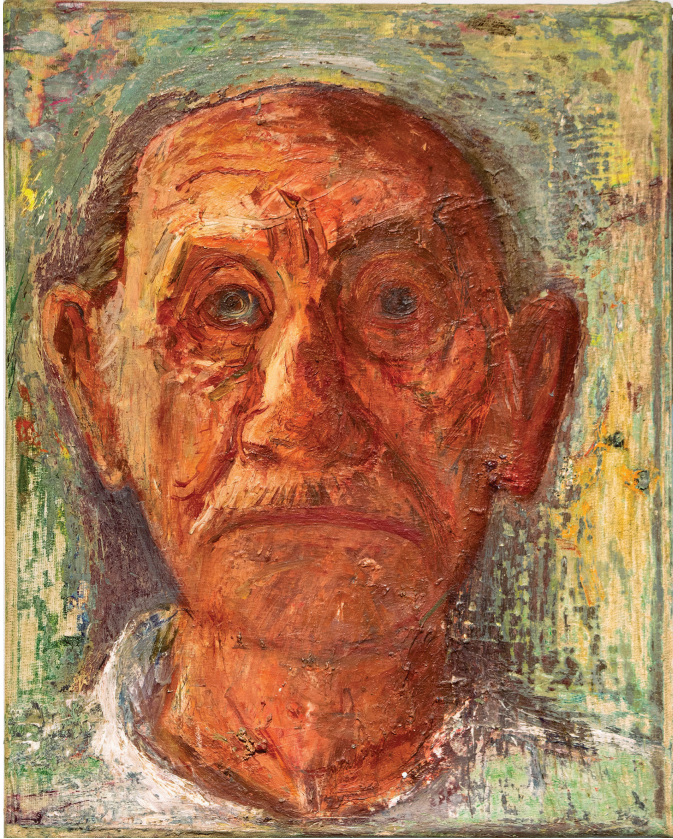


*Still Life*, 2015  
Oil on canvas, 6 5/8 x 7 7/8 inches  
(In Process)



*Portrait*, 1972; 2005  
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches







*Ghost of Dilly Dally*, 2007  
watercolor on paper, 5 1/4 x 3 1/2 inches



We never really know too much, not really. We need to be humble about that. But we do get to know certain things and we have to do the best with them. Right now, I know what I got from Coleman Hawkins, from Ben Webster, from Dexter Gordon, from Don Byas, from Charlie Parker and all the other guys who gave their lives to this music. I know that without a doubt. From childhood I've known this. All the way from back then, when it was on the stage at the Apollo, when it was on the new records coming out. So now, after all those years, it's pretty clear to me finally. All I want to do is stand up for them, and for the music, and what they inspired in me. I'm going to play as long as I can. I want to do that as long as I can pick up that horn and represent that music with honor. That's all it's about, as far as I can see. I don't know anything else, but I know that.

— Sonny Rollins, from “The Colossus” by Stanley Crouch  
(New Yorker, May 9, 2005)







Emil Jannings in *The Way of all Flesh* (Paramount 1927), 2008  
Ink and graphite on paper, 16 x 5 inches

## JOHN LEES

- 1943 Born in Denville, NJ  
1950 Moved to Los Angeles, CA  
1961-63 Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles, CA  
1963-67 Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA, B.F.A., M.F.A.,  
Lives and works in New York State

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *John Lees*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, NY  
2013 *John Lees: Painting*, John Davis Gallery, Hudson, NY  
*John Lees*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, NY  
2011 *John Lees*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, NY  
2009 *John Lees: Works on Paper*, with Gordon Moore, Betty Cuninghams  
Gallery, New York, NY  
2008 *John Lees*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, NY  
2007 *John Lees, Selected Drawings 1992 - 2006*, Nicole Fiacco Gallery,  
Hudson, NY  
2005 *Johann's Castle*, Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA  
2003 *Wisps*, Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA  
2000 Galleria I.S.A., Montecastello di Vibio, Italy  
1999 Revolution, Ferndale, MI  
Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
1998 Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
1997 Galleria I.S.A., Montecastello di Vibio, Italy  
Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA  
1996 Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
1993 Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
1992 Genovese Gallery, Boston, MA  
1990 Compass Rose Gallery, Chicago, IL  
1989 Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
The Mayor Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
1986 Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
1983 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY  
1982 Feigenson Gallery, Detroit, MI  
1981 Ruth Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco, CA



- 1980 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1979 Feigenson-Rosenstein Gallery, Detroit, MI
- 1977 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1976 Ellie Blankfort Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1975 Edward Thorp Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1971 Unitarian Center, First Unitarian Church, San Francisco, CA
- 1969 San Bernardino Valley College, San Bernardino, CA

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *The Presence of Form*, New York Studio School, New York, NY  
*Extreme Surfaces*, Greene County Council on the Arts,  
Catskill, NY
- 2014 *The Age of Small Things*, Dodge Gallery, New York, NY
- 2013 *Aquatic: A Day at the Beach*, Peninsula Fine Arts Center,  
Newport News, VA  
*Dark Eye Glances: Romantic Impulse in Landscape*, Rutgers Camden  
Center for the Arts, Camden, NJ  
*PAINT*, Betty Cuninghame Gallery, New York, NY
- 2011 *Refocusing the Spotlight: 21 American Painters*, curated by Michael  
Walls, Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
*The Gun Show*, Woodstock Byrdcliff Guild, Woodstock, NY
- 2010 *Myths of the Near Future*, Nicole Fiacco Gallery, Hudson, NY  
*The Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts*, American Academy of  
Arts and Letters, New York, NY
- 2009 *Core: Berthot, Forrest Bess, Alfonso Fratteggiani Bianchi, Suzan Frecon,  
John Lees, Robert Therrien, Alison Wilding, Christopher Wilmarth, Betty  
Cunningham Gallery*, New York, NY  
*Works with Paper*, Nicole Fiacco Gallery, Hudson, NY
- 2007 *East Coast Contemporary Painters*, Center for Contemporary Art,  
Sacramento, CA
- 2006 *Against the Grain, Contemporary Art from the Edward R. Broida Collection*,  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
- 2005 Kleinert/James Art Center, Woodstock, NY
- 2005-03 Nielsen Gallery, Group Exhibitions, Boston, MA
- 2002 *More Than Skin & Bones – Portraits Invitational*, Nielsen Gallery,  
Boston, MA

- In the Spirit of Landscape VII*, Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA  
*John Lees and Ruth Leonard*, Catskill Mountain Foundation, Hunter, NY
- 2001 Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA  
*Silver*, Albany Center Galleries, Albany, NY
- 2000 Greene County Council on the Arts, Catskill, NY
- 1999 *Peripheral Vision*, The Painting Center, New York, NY
- 1998 *Portraits*, Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA  
*The Edward R. Broida Collection, Selection of Works*, Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, FL  
*The Tsagaris / Hilberry Collection, A Sustaining Passion*, The Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, - Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Dubuque Museum of Art, Dubuque, IA
- 1997 *In the Spirit of Landscape*, Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1996 Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY  
*Still Life Still Alive*, Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1995 *The Horse Show*, Sylvia White, Contemporary Artists' Services, Los Angeles, CA and New York, NY
- 1994 *Artists' Nature*, Greene County Council on the Arts, Catskill, NY  
Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, KS  
School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
- 1993 *Drawings III*, Koplin Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- 1992 *Art on Paper*, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, NC
- 1991 Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, KS  
*The Painted Landscape: Seen, Translated, Apprehended and Eulogized*, Genovese Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1989 *Belief in Paint: Eleven Contemporary Artists*, Usdan Gallery, Bennington College, Bennington, VT  
*Rugged Terrain: Toby Kahn, John Lees, David Lowe and Yishai Jusidman*, Shea & Beker Gallery, New York, NY  
*Direct Response - American Landscape Tradition Today*, Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY  
New York Studio School, New York, NY
- 1987 *Still Life Painting*, University Gallery, Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Amherst, MA

- Contemporary View of Nature*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT
- 1986 *Objects Observed*, Summit Art Center, Summit, NJ  
*Intuitive Line*, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, NY
- 1985 *Minimal Representations*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
*Views: Interior and Exterior*, Koplín Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
*American Still Lifes*, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, NY
- 1984 *A Decade of New Art*, Artist's Space, New York, NY  
Oscarsson-Hood Gallery, New York, NY  
*Selections from the Merry and Bill Norris Collection*, University of California, Irvine, CA
- 1984-83 *American Still Life*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX;  
Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH  
Newberger Museum, Purchase, NY; Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1982-83 *Shift: LA/NY*, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1981 University Art Gallery, California State University, Dominguez Hills, CA  
*Five Figurative Painters*, Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, AL  
*California: A Sense of Individualism*, L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice, CA  
*Painters' Painters*, Siegel Contemporary Art, Inc., New York, NY  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1980 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1979 *American Portraits of the Sixties and Seventies*, The Aspen Center for Visual Arts, Aspen, CO  
Faculty Exhibition, Mount San Antonio College, Walnut, CA  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1978 *Traditions/Five Painters*, Artists Space, New York, NY  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1977 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1976 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY

- 1975 Faculty Exhibition, Mount San Antonio College, Walnut, CA  
*24 from L.A.*, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery at Barnsdale Park, Los Angeles, CA
- 1975 Ellie Blankfort Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
 Janus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
*Stretching It*, Pasadena Artists Concern Gallery, Walnut, CA
- 1974 Edward Thorp Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA  
*Word Works*, Mount San Antonio College, Walnut, CA
- 1973 Ellie Blankfort Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
 Faculty Exhibition, Mount San Antonio College, Walnut, CA
- 1971 *American Portraits Old and New*, Long Beach Museum of Art,  
 California Faculty Exhibition, Mount San Antonio College,  
 Walnut, CA
- 1970 *Temple Street Artists*, Long Beach Museum of Art,  
 Long Beach, CA  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Rental Gallery,  
 Los Angeles, CA
- 1969 *Microcosm '69*, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA  
 Jewish Community Center, San Diego, CA  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Rental Gallery,  
 Los Angeles, CA
- 1968 *Artists Who Make Boxes*, Palos Verdes Art Association,  
 Palos Verdes, CA  
 Lytton Center of the Visual Arts, Los Angeles, CA  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Rental Gallery,  
 Los Angeles, CA
- 1967 Horizon Gallery, Venice, CA
- 1963 Los Angeles Art Association, Los Angeles, CA
- 1962 The Blue Couch, Los Angeles, CA
- 1960-61 Venice West Cafe, Venice, CA
- 1960 The Gashouse, Venice, CA

#### AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2010 American Academy of Arts and Letters, Hassam, Speicher,  
 Betts and Symonds Art Purchase Award
- 2005 Francis J. Greenburger Award

- 1993 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Grant  
1989 National Endowments for the Arts Fellowship Grant

#### TEACHING AND VISITING ARTIST POSITIONS

1988-

present New York Studio School of Painting, Drawing, and Sculpture,  
New York, NY

1987-2005 School of Visual Art, MFA Fine Arts Department,  
New York, NY

2000-03

1989, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY

2000-02 Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT (visiting critic)

1997, 2000 International School of Art in Umbria, Montecastello de  
Vibio, Italy (visiting artist)

1996-2000 State University at New Paltz, NY

1995 School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

1978 Wayne State University, Detroit, MI (visiting artist)

1971-81 Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut, CA

#### PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, AK

Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI

Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA

The Kemper Collection, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO

Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

The New Museum, New York, NY

Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

International School of Art in Umbria, Italy

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA

Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ

#### REVIEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

- 2013 Kohler, William Eckhardt. "John Lees at Betty Cuninghame –  
Paint, Memory and Emotion" *The Huffington Post* (online),  
June 17  
Radell, Thaddeus. "John Lees: Exhuming the Numinous,"

- Painting Perceptions* (online), June 12
- Greenwald, Xico. "Inside the Artist's Studio" *The New York Sun* (online), May 23
- 2009 Goodman, Jonathan. "John Lees" *Art in America*, February, pp. 132, 133
- 2008 Cohen, David. "Deliciously Distressed" *The New York Sun*, March 13, pp. 15, 20
- Corbett, William. "John Lees: Ol' Brown Eyes is Back" (exhibition catalogue) Betty Cuninghame Gallery, New York, March
- 2007 Genocchio, Benjamin. "Obsessive Compulsions: Intense Mark-Making and a Recurring Theme Characterize John Lees's Art", *The New York Times*, May 13
- 2006 Elderfield, John, "Against the Grain, Contemporary Art from The Edward R. Broida Collection", Museum of Modern Art, Catalogue Essay.
- 2005 Smart, Paul, "Scraping Down to the Core of a Memory", *Ulster Publishing's Almanac*, October 13
- Cuninghame, Betty, "Holding Time Within the Frame", Francis J. Greenburger Awards 2005, Catalogue.
- 2001 Barrett-Fender, Pam. *Hudson Valley Daily Mail*, January 6
- Corbett, William. "All Prose, Selected Essays and Reviews", Zoland Books
- 1999 Klein, Michael. "John Lees at Hirschl & Adler Modern," *Art in America*, January
- 1998 Corbett, William. "John Lees: Mountains and Stream," *arts Media*, May
- "Edward R. Broida Collection/A Selection of Works", Orlando Museum, Orlando, FL
- Shirey, David. "Masters of the Masters," Butler Art Institute. "The Tsagaris/Hilberry Collection, A Sustaining Passion", The Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA; Dubuque Museum of Art, Dubuque, IA
- 1997 Corbett, William. "John Lees," *artsMedia*, June
- 1996 Frank, Elizabeth. "John Lees at Hirschl & Adler Modern," *Artnews*, April

- Cotter, Holland. *The New York Times*, March 15
- 1994 Jaeger, William. "Artists' Nature," *Albany Times Union*, March 12
- 1990 Johnson, Ken. *Art in America*, May
- Kalina, Richard. "John Lees," *Arts Magazine*, March
- Zinsser, John. "John Lees." *New York: Hirschl & Adler Modern*
- Yau, John. *Eskimo Villanelle*. Chicago: Compass Rose Gallery
- 1989 Yau, John. "Radiant Silhouette", *Black Sparrow Press (Eskimo Villanelle)*
- 1987 Yau, John. "A Contemporary View of Nature". Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art
- 1986 Adams, Brooks. *Art in America*, October
- Larson, Kay. *New York Magazine*, April 7
- Yau, John. *John Lees*. New York: Hirschl & Adler Modern
- 1985 Knight, Christopher. *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 11 August
- Clothier, Peter. *L.A. Weekly*, 26 July – 1 August
- 1984 Colby, Joy Hakanson. *The Detroit News*, 24 January
- A Decade of New Art*. New York: Artists Space
- Wortz, Melinda. *Selections from the Merry and Bill Norris Collection*. University of California, Fine Arts Gallery, Irvine, CA
- 1983 Storr, Robert. *Art in America*, May
- Westfall, Stephen. *Arts*, May
- Raynor, Vivian. *New York Times*, February 18, p. C24
- Wortz, Melinda. "The LA/NY Shift: For Some Artists, The Fast Lane Heads East," *Art News* January, pp. 67-71
- Cathcart, Linda. *American Still Life, 1945-83*. Houston: Contemporary Art Museum
- 1982 Wilson, William. "Integrity Fails to Shift from LA to NY," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17
- Miro, Marsha. "The Romantics Magical Touch," *Detroit Free Press*, January 10
- Schimmel, Paul. "Shift: LA/NY". Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Museum.
- 1981 Danieli, Fidel. "Mainstream California Individualism," *Art Week*, September 12
- Muchnic, Suzanne "A Louver Celebration of the Nonconformist," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3



- Yourgrau, Barry. *Arts May*, p. 30
- 1980 Karmel, Pepe. *Art in America*, May, p. 155
- 1979 Neher, Ross. "Mentalism Versus Painting," *Artforum*, February
- 1978 Cathcart, Linda. "Traditions\Five Painters". New York, Artists Space
- 1977 Lubell, Ellen. *Arts*, June
- 1976 Frank, Peter. *Art News*, December
- Muchnic, Suzanne. *Art Week*, December 11
- Ratcliff, Carter. "New York Letter," *Art International*, Summer, pp. 28-29
- 1975 Wilson, Barbara. "John Lees: An Old Fashioned Painter," *Art Week*, March 8, p. 3
- Santa Barbara News Press*, March 1
- "24 From L.A". Los Angeles: Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery at Barnsdall Park
- 1974 Ballatore, Sandy. "Ironic: L.A. Artist Course Wraps Up," *Art Week*, December 21, pp. 13-14.)
- 1969 Secunda, Arthur. "Microcosm '69". Long Beach, CA: Long Beach Museum of Art, I

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