



### **Close-Up on Art**

By Robert Barrett,  
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Artist: June Wayne (1918 – 2011)  
Title: The Sanctified  
Date: 1951, Los Angeles  
Medium: Oil and Wax on Canvas  
Donor: Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin B. Smith  
Category: Modern

### ***“The Art of anything is the art of everything.” June Wayne***

During June Wayne’s prodigious career, she was inspired by themes as diverse as DNA structure, atomic fusion, the songs and sonnets of John Donne and the writings of Franz Kafka, justice, feminism, family history and cosmic space. Her oeuvre includes drawings, paintings, tapestries and a great number of lithographic editions. During her 70-year career she produced over ten thousand works. Yet it is difficult to categorize her work as part of any movement or style of the 20<sup>th</sup> or early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This challenge to art historians and curators amused the artist and is a key to understanding her unique position in the Los Angeles art scene and beyond as an iconoclast with a fierce determination to shape her story and work and its place in the annals of history. She referred to her style *Quantum Aesthetics*.

June Wayne was born in Chicago to a working and activist single mother. Passionately independent, she dropped out of school at fifteen to dedicate herself to becoming an artist. She took factory jobs to support herself. She worked in the WPA. She had her first exhibition at seventeen. During World War II she became certified to produce production illustrations for the aircraft industry. This experience produced a lifelong impact and interest in the graphic aspect of image making. During the late 1940s and 1950s when Abstract Expressionism was the dominate force in America art-making June Wayne instead focused on the aesthetics of narrative, optics and symbol systems. Rejecting the immediacy and emotionalism of Expressionism June Wayne was drawn to printmaking and lithography in particular – a medium of arduous complexity. Her interest and involvement in printmaking ultimately lead her to found, in 1960, the Tamarind Lithographic Workshop\*. Over a ten-year period, during which she set aside her own studio career to manage the atelier, it produced over 3000 editions with the leading artists of the time. June Wayne is credited for playing a major global role in the restoration of the art of Lithography.

June Wayne was an ardent feminist and beloved by generations of women artists for her support. She was an intellectual and enjoyed a wide circle of associates and friends in the highest levels of science, the arts, politics and the humanities. Though she was a high school

drop-out she was awarded five honorary doctorates from prestigious universities. During her lifetime her work was exhibited in over one hundred solo exhibitions and countless group shows. She produced a film, *Four Stones for Kanemitsu*, that was nominated for an Oscar in the category of Best Documentary, Short Subject. She was in great demand as a lecturer and commentator on the state of the arts.

*The Sanctified* is an example of the artist's work from her second mature thematic series. The series addresses the theme of Justice. Produced in Los Angeles, between 1950 and 1956, the series is comprised of six paintings, eight lithographs and thirteen known drawings. In this body of work the artist emphasizes, from a Kafkaesque perspective, an arbitrary almost sinister point of view of the judicial process. About this piece the artist stated: "*I made the standing figure very obvious, didn't I? His gesture, of course, refers to the Trinity. It was also a sanctimonious gesture. The robe is a deliberate pun, and the feet are quite brutal. I intended the figure to be a spoof on Rico Lebrun, because the posture and dramatic sort of gesture are straight Lebrun\*\*.* Very often my work makes personal references. I'll put in something to give me something to laugh at, a private joke. The two lovers in the tessellated floor are the opposite of religion. So, there are both sacred and profane implications. The two angels could be voyeurs, as well as angels. They're certainly eavesdropping or 'eaveslooking.'"

The artist's mindset used to produce *The Sanctified* is deliberate and intellectual. The approach is graphic and the technique utilizes dry medium in hard-edged pixilated triangles and squares to fill the picture plane with a luxurious visual spectacle. Wax was used to give the large triangular up-tilted plane, that forms the foreground for the work, weight and a textural enrichment. Cool blues, comprise the setting and predominately warm reds, pinks and brown, the players. Theatrical, even operatic, *The Sanctified*, tackles the enduring and destructive human trait to judge, condemn and castigate the other, the outsider, the different and perhaps the woman artist that dared to create her own way in the male dominated mid-20<sup>th</sup> century world of art.

June Wayne was a dear friend of mine. In 1988 I curated a major exhibition of her work and directed the publishing of a catalogue for the exhibition.

To learn more about June Wayne and see more of her work visit <https://www.junewayne.gallery/>

\* In 1970 The Tamarind Lithographic Workshop was transferred to the University of New Mexico and renamed the Tamarind Institute. The Institute continues June Wayne's work to this day.

\*\* Rico Lebrun (1900 – 1960) was born in Naples Italy. He immigrated to the United States in 1924 where he immediately received recognition for his work, many significant commissions and museum exhibitions. In 1947, Lebrun became a master instructor at the Jepson Art Institute in Los Angeles. He was a charismatic and popular teacher, frequently lecturing to standing room only crowds. From 1947 to 1950, his style became increasingly abstract and gestural. By the end of the decade Lebrun had garnered a significant reputation on the West Coast, both as an artist and as a teacher.

#### References

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