

(born 1961)
ERIC RHEIN

"Artist Eric Rhein's wire *Leaf Project* has been shown all over the world. It is a tribute to the friends who have died – and a reminder that AIDS is still a part of our lives."

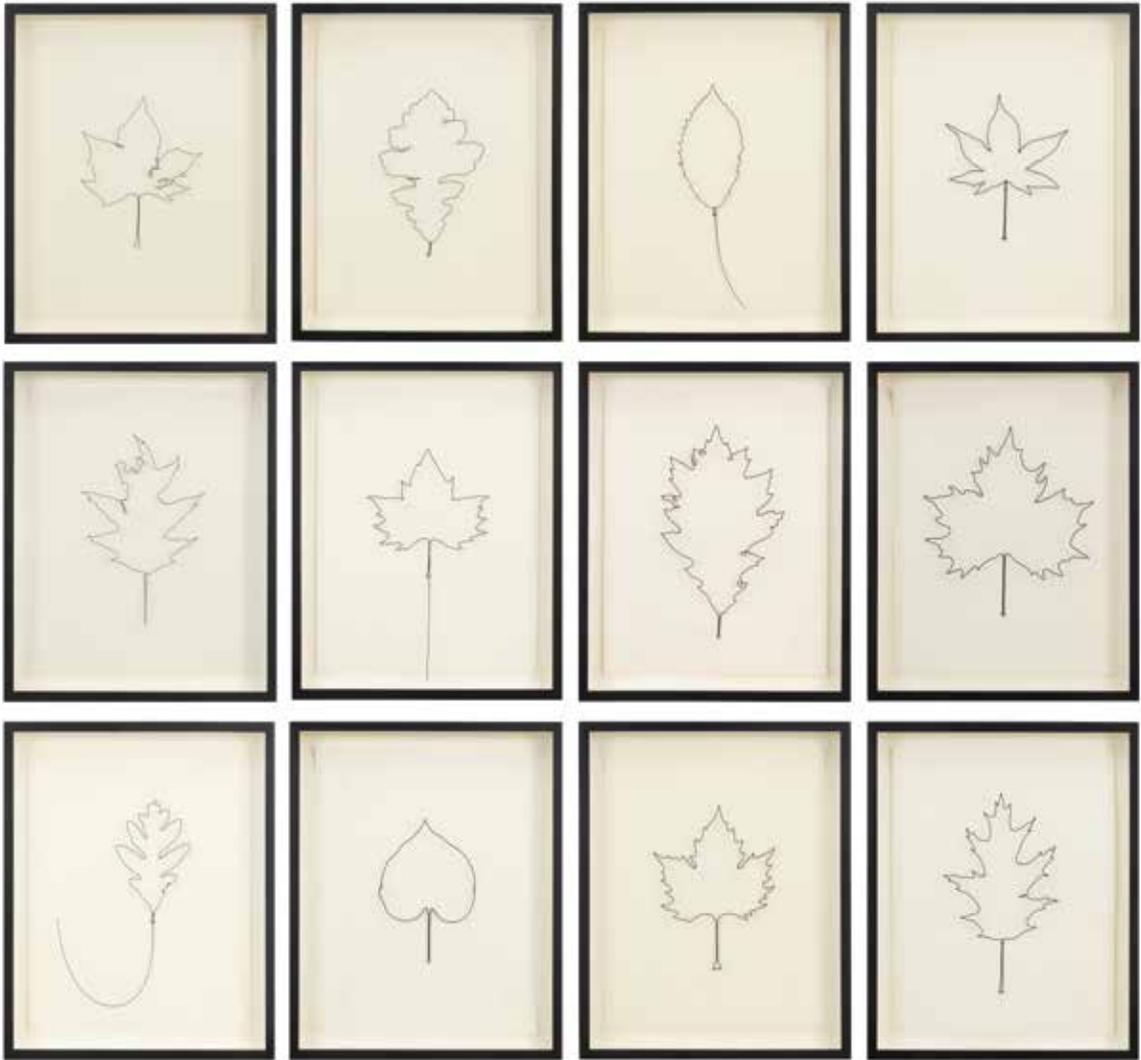
–Richard Walsh

Leaves, which Rhein conceived in the fall of 1996 while an artist in residence at the McDowell Artist Colony, is a series of wire leaf "portraits" paying tribute to more than 180 people whom he knew who died of complications from AIDS. The "portraits" along with their accompanying titles like *Frank the Visionkeeper*, *Life Altering Spencer*, and *Fashion Meteor Willi*, symbolically reflect the essence of each individual.

Rhein was diagnosed with HIV when he was twenty-seven, almost three decades ago. In autumn of 1996, during a fellowship at the MacDowell Artist Colony in New Hampshire, his health restored with the help of new protease inhibitors – Rhein walked the grounds gathering leaves, and his *Leaf Project* was born. "One by one," says Rhein, "I picked up leaves until a host of kinsmen was gathered in my arms. [To me] the leaves recalled the qualities of those who had left their physical form."

Eric Rhein, a native of New York's Hudson Valley, spent his childhood summers in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky. This experience instilled in him a love of nature and mountain lore, both ongoing influences on his work. Rhein explains: "What matters to me is the interconnectedness, sympathetic relationships, and sensual commonalities of all things in the natural world. Images of nature are used as a metaphor for the cycles of human experience: birth, life, death, and regeneration."

Rhein's work has been widely exhibited in both national and international museums and exhibition spaces, including: Sculpture Center; White Columns; Artists Space; Art in General; Lincoln Center, Morris Museum, New Jersey; Portland Museum of Art, Oregon; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall, England; Pera Museum, Istanbul; Permanent Collection, U.S. Embassy, Malta; Yale University; and the Smithsonian Institution's Traveling Exhibition for the Millennium.



Leaves – Installation of 12, 1996-2013

Wire and paper, 6 ⁵/₁₆ x 5 ¹/₈ x ¹³/₁₆ in. (16 x 13 x 2 cm) each – Set of 12
 Courtesy of the artist, New York, New York

Top Row

Life Altering Spencer
(Spencer Cox)

Provocative Stephen
(Stephen Gendin)

Open-Hearted Larry

Robert the Time Traveling Artist
(Robert Farber)

Center Row

Frank the Visionkeeper
(Frank Moore)

Dr. Bellman's Cinematic Juan
(Juan Botas)

Embracing Dan
(Daniel S. Maynard)

Fashion Meteor Willi
(Willi Donnell Smith)

Bottom Row

Brazilian John
(João Teixeira)

Iris the Poet and Activist
(Iris De La Cruz)

Warm-Hearted Michael-Fire Keeper
(Michael Knapp)

Don of Many Worlds
(Don Silvey)