

November 2001

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## OBITUARY

SIR                      ERNST                      GOMBRICH                      DEAD

Sir Ernst Gombrich, a major art historian, died in London on November 3rd 2001 at 92.

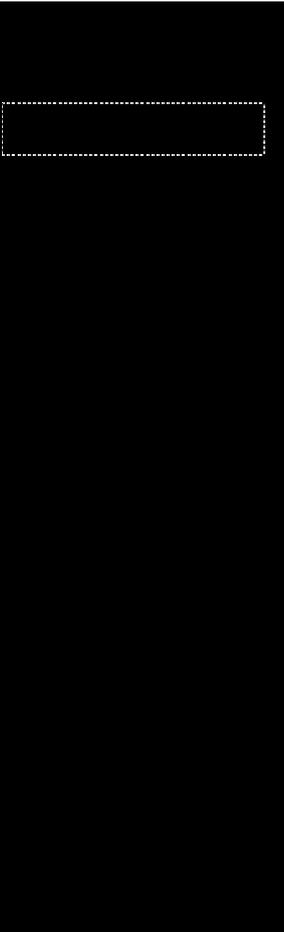
Born in Vienna into a well-off assimilated Jewish family (his parents had eventually converted to Protestantism), Gombrich was considered as the most read art historian of the 20th Century following the release of his famous *"History of Art"* best-seller in 1950.

A noted specialist of the Renaissance period, especially of Leonardo da Vinci, Gombrich introduced the notion of psychology in the study of art and tackled many aspects of this domain going as far as analysing shadows in paintings.

Like his fellowcountryman Sigmund Freud, Gombrich was born in Vienna and despite the faith adopted by his parents described himself as an Austrian Jew. After marrying a musician in 1936 he fled Nazism and settled in London.

He had first studied art with Julius von Schlosser, head of the department of Applied Arts at the Vienna Museum, before obtaining a doctorate with a thesis on Giulio Romano.

In order to earn a living he wrote a story of the world intended for children with the belief that anything could be explained in a simple manner. He then started to explore the art of caricature with Ernst Kris, a psycho-analyst, in a book that served as the basis of his work titled *"Art and Illusion"* published in 1960, in which he adopted a psychological approach vis-à-vis forms distantiating himself from other art historians who were more attached to the notion of style.



Working in 1936 in London for the Warburg Institute, a Jewish foundation formerly based in Hamburg, Sir Ernst Gombrich published the works of Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and collaborated with the BBC before embarking on his monumental *"History of Art"*, which led him to teach at Oxford and Harvard.

Head of the Warburg Institute between 1959 and 1976, Gombrich published several books based on the many conferences he gave.

During half a century he resolutely fought against the rather accepted notion that the spirit of time was an explanation for artistic changes. Instead, he tried to demonstrate that aesthetic perception was equivalent to a scientific initiative as it simply tested reality especially as an artist was going through several experiments with a view to restoring relief or movement in his works without forgetting to pay attention to the factors of order or disorders.

Living in the North-West London district of Hampstead, not far from Freud's Museum, Gombrich had been working for the past ten years on a book relating to primitive paintings in Italy showing once again that the 15th and early 16th Century periods remained what he loved most.

