

EDITORIAL

Obituary for Leonardo Honorary Editor Ernst Gombrich

by Roger F. Malina

E-mail: rmalina@alum.mit.edu

Leonardo Honorary Editor Ernst Gombrich died in London on 3 November, 2001. An art historian perhaps best known for a series of influential books, including "The Story of Art" and "Art and Illusion," he joined the Leonardo editorial board in 1979. He was a frequent reviewer and was active in Leonardo projects, such as "The Meaning of Order in Art in Science."

Gombrich was born in 1909 in Vienna and fled to London in 1936, joining the Warburg Institute. "The Story of Art" first appeared in 1950 and is still in print, with more than 15 updated editions. With "Art and Illusion," he elaborated a number of propositions that sought to use contemporary psychology in understanding the power of visual images. This topic continues to be an ongoing strand of research and inquiry appearing in the pages of Leonardo.

I remember Gombrich's presence at a Leonardo Editorial Board meeting in the early 1990s, when we were discussing the use of the still nascent Internet medium to work with the growing Leonardo professional community. He was enthusiastically supportive of this initiative and remained strongly supportive of the Leonardo mission to discuss the contemporary arts within the context of science and technology and to draw on the international community of researchers, scholars and artists that are preoccupied by these issues.

He published a number of texts and letters in Leonardo, most notably discussions with Rudolf Arnheim and James Gibson around the topic "The Meaning of Order in Art and Science," a discussion that prefigured new sources of ideas on this topic arising from network theory and the science and mathematics of complexity and chaos.

A particular strength of the Leonardo network, a network that has supported Leonardo publications since 1967, is the bridging of generations. For example the generation of Gombrich built, in the pre- and post-Second World War era, the theoretical bases of many of the discussions that are now current in the Leonardo community among researchers and practitioners born in the 1980s.

The passing of Gombrich is far more than the turning of a page in the history of the Leonardo community, and his influence will continue to be evident. We can only encourage current practitioners and researchers to be more aware of the long discussions and historical bases that nourish current excitement in our field.