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## **Robert Pincus-Witten 1935-2018**

### **In Memoriam**



Portrait of Robert Pincus-Witten by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders © Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

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Published 1 February 2018 in [Other Insights](#)

The legendary critic and art historian Robert Pincus-Witten died this week on 28 January. There is much to say about Robert. He was a very special man and I already miss him terribly.

Robert was one of the seers of art historians. He coined the term Postminimalism in 1971 in an article about the work of Eva Hesse in *Artforum*, a magazine he contributed criticism to for more than five decades. He was its associate editor, senior editor and then contributing editor.

In 1977, he published a collection of essays, *Postminimalism*, which he followed with the groundbreaking manifesto, *Post-Minimalism into Maximalism: American Art 1966-86*, in 1987.

A native New Yorker born in 1935, Robert gained his undergraduate degree from Cooper Union in 1956 before heading to Paris. In the 1960s, he obtained his master's and PhD degrees from the University of Chicago.

I've always thought that, if anyone was witness to the coronation of New York as the new capital of the art world, it was Robert. He was part of a generation of art historians including Robert Rosenblum and Linda Nochlin who seemed to sense that they were on the vanguard of something unprecedented.

Pincus-Witten, as he was often referred to, retained a cool remove from the traditional rigors of an art historian, even though he had been a founding member of the doctoral faculty at the City University of New York (CUNY). His remove came from his loving artists and being enchanted by the new in art.

Robert always made me laugh. Even when he fell ill at the end of last year, he was still cracking art history jokes when I visited him in the hospital. The shades in his room were drawn so I asked him whether he would like me to open them. He said, "No, I can't. There is something outside that is so wildly disturbing and upsetting." I looked out of the window: it was a bad copy of a Sol LeWitt mural.

Robert was always interested in the people and art of the present. His range was incredible. The series of diary entries he wrote about the art world and published in *Arts Magazine* between 1976 and 1990 chronicled the period with his trademark wit, always underpinned by his deep art historical knowledge. With his twinkly blue eyes and impish manner, Robert always seemed youthful—everyone saw him as a peer.

He was unafraid. Robert was one of the first people to cross over from the lofty towers of academia to the commercial world. From 1990, he began curating exhibitions at Gagosian Gallery before joining C&M Arts (now Mnuchin Gallery) as director from 1996 to 2007. It was a big deal at the time.

With his death, one of the giants has fallen.