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Notes & Comments

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Ernst Gombrich, 1909-2001

In homage to the art historian.

When we ask upon what the survival of culture depends, we immediately think of those individuals whose careers exemplify the commitment to the values of high culture. It is curious to what extent the health and vibrancy of a culture depends upon the leavening activity of a few individuals. An institution, Emerson said, is but the lengthened shadow of a man. The death last month of the great art historian E. H. Gombrich provided a melancholy reminder not only of how thin the ranks of genuinely cultivated individuals have become but also to what extent the pulse of cultural life is bound up with the contributions of particular talents.

A transplanted Viennese who had lived in Britain since 1933, Gombrich was one of those individuals who become an institution. As director of the Warburg Institute in London, a post he held from 1959 to 1976, Gombrich was in the best sense what T. S. Eliot (somewhat disparagingly) had ac ...

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