



Ira Licht

DEC 24, 1938 - DEC 29, 2023



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Ira Licht died on December 29, 2023. His beloved wife Carol died on Christmas day, 2020 and he was disconsolate every moment thereafter. He stayed alive to finish estate matters for his grandchildren and to give away some of his collections. Finally, he couldn't live another day without Carol's love and laughter.

Ira was born in New York December 24, 1938 to Louis William Licht, lawyer and real estate broker, and Rae Price Licht, legal secretary. From his father he learned ethical conduct, love of learning and Jewish culture. From his mother he received unquestioning love [for better or worse].

He was educated in the then excellent New York school system, attended Columbia College and received a Columbia University Fellowship for graduate study in art history. He was appointed assistant professor of art history at the University of Rochester before becoming curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago where his Bodyworks exhibition received a certain amount of notoriety and, later, influence. Then, at the National Endowment for the Arts, Ira directed the Art in Public Places program where he was responsible for placing important works by Andre, di Suvero, Oldenburg, Rauschenberg and Serra among many others in the public sphere.

In 1978, in a dubious career move that he never regretted, Ira declined the offer of curator of modern art at the Detroit Institute of Arts to become Director of the Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami. He undertook the challenging task of reestablishing the Lowe's reputation and expanding its renown nationally. To those ends he rapidly had the museum reaccredited, became a member of the Association of Art Museum Directors and secured state and national grants. He programmed over one hundred twenty exhibitions in eleven years and revitalized the acquisitions program. Notable among his purchases were the Chimu disc, Ribera's St. Onofrio, 16th century Yoruba ritual ring and early 19th century Seminole beadwork objects.



Ira gave and bequeathed many works to the Lowe including Andre, Calder, Duchamp, Mucha and Schwitters and left a substantial endowment for acquisitions. His donations of art to the Israel Museum, Williams College Museum, North Miami Museum of Art, and of some of his Judaica library to the Beth Torah Benny Rok Campus, of objects to the Smithsonian Museum of American History, Archives of American Art, Stockbridge Historical Society, Melville Collection of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Jacob's Pillow, Cuban Heritage Collection, Kurt Weill Foundation and the American Jewish Historical Society suggest the scope of his interests.

During his career, he identified an early Monet which had gone missing from a gallery, a Harnett painting in an English country home and a Duchamp object which the artist had forgotten about.

Ira loved music perhaps more even than art. Early on he heard the great conductors Toscanini, Monteux, Walter, Stokowski. Beecham et al. and he told of red letter days like attending Oistrakh's American debut, with every violinist he could recognize including Fritz Kreisler in the audience. preceded by an Elman recital and Milstein later that evening. During a memorable year in Vienna, he attended Klemperer's Beethoven cycle [and Fidelio in London] and Mravinsky's Tchaikovsky. He heard much of the operatic repertoire at four cents for standing room and was invited to Brendel and Mehta's recording session of the Emperor Concerto and dinner after. He talked himself into house seats at Salzburg and free accommodations at a building overlooking the entire town- until the mayor called to complain about his underwear drying on the parapet.

Ira leaves his loving and beloved sister Judith Denowitz and adored grandchildren Rochi, Hana, Rivka, Shimon, Dasi, Suri, Miri, Ayala, Yael, Yakov, Avraham, Naftali, their spouses and children. He left with many regrets, of love not shared, of art not seen, of music not heard or heard again, of wrongs not righted. If you knew Ira and happen to see Keaton's The General or Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky or when you listen to Schubert or Mahler, perhaps you might think of him. Services were private.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Ira by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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