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National Gallery of Art



Release Date: May 15, 2020

In Memoriam: Alan Shestack (1938–2020)



Alan Shestack. Photo © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art mourns the loss of retired deputy director and chief curator Alan Shestack, who passed away on April 14 at his home after a series of illnesses. A highly

regarded scholar and connoisseur of Northern European prints and drawings of the Renaissance period, Shestack led several US museums before his final tenure at the Gallery.

Shestack was born on June 23, 1938, in New York City and grew up in Rochester, New York. He received a BA from Wesleyan University in 1961, an MA from Harvard University in 1963, and an honorary DFA (doctor of fine arts) from Wesleyan University in 1978. His distinguished museum career began in 1963 when he was awarded the David E. Finley Fellowship by the National Gallery of Art, which enabled him to travel in Europe for two years and to study at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London and the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich. He became a museum curator of graphic art in 1965, responsible for the Gallery's Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

In 1967 and 1968 he was named associate curator and then curator of prints and drawings at Yale University Art Gallery, and from 1971 through 1985 he maintained a joint appointment there as director of the gallery and adjunct professor at the university in the history of art department. During his tenure at Yale one of his many scholarly publications—*Hans Baldung Grien: Prints and Drawings*, coauthored with James H. Marrow—received the prestigious George Wittenborn Award from the Art Libraries Society of North America. He became director of the Minneapolis Institute of Art in 1985 and served for two years before being appointed director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

In 1993 Shestack returned to the National Gallery of Art, assuming the role of deputy director and chief curator until he retired in 2008. His connections to the Gallery were long and deep, and he made lasting contributions to the growth and safekeeping of the collections while he respectfully fostered the work of curators and program officers alike.

Shestack mentored many aspiring curators who went on to important careers of their own. This role was especially critical in the early decades of his career when scholarship was often seen as incompatible with museum stewardship, when many who thought themselves "true scholars" were hesitant to trade academia for a museum setting. The idea that scholarship would be nurtured, even furthered, in a museum was not the given that it is today.

"Alan was an extraordinary example of a museum administrator who was also a productive scholar—an incredible connoisseur of Renaissance prints and drawings. We were at the helm of the National Gallery of Art for nearly two transformative decades in the museum's history and his support of scholarship has a lasting impact throughout the institution," said Earl A. Powell III, director emeritus, National Gallery of Art.

Shestack is predeceased by his wife of 49 years, Nancy Jane Shestack (2016), and by his brother Melvin (2005). He is survived by his brother's wife, Jessie Shestack, of New York City; by his foster daughter Lisa Yi Lu Feng, her husband Ningguo Feng, and children Alexandra and Christopher of

Cupertino, California; and by two nieces, Victoria Shestack Aronoff and children Brad and Solomon of Maplewood, New Jersey, and Lisa Shestack and children Zachary and Hannah of Franklin, Massachusetts.

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