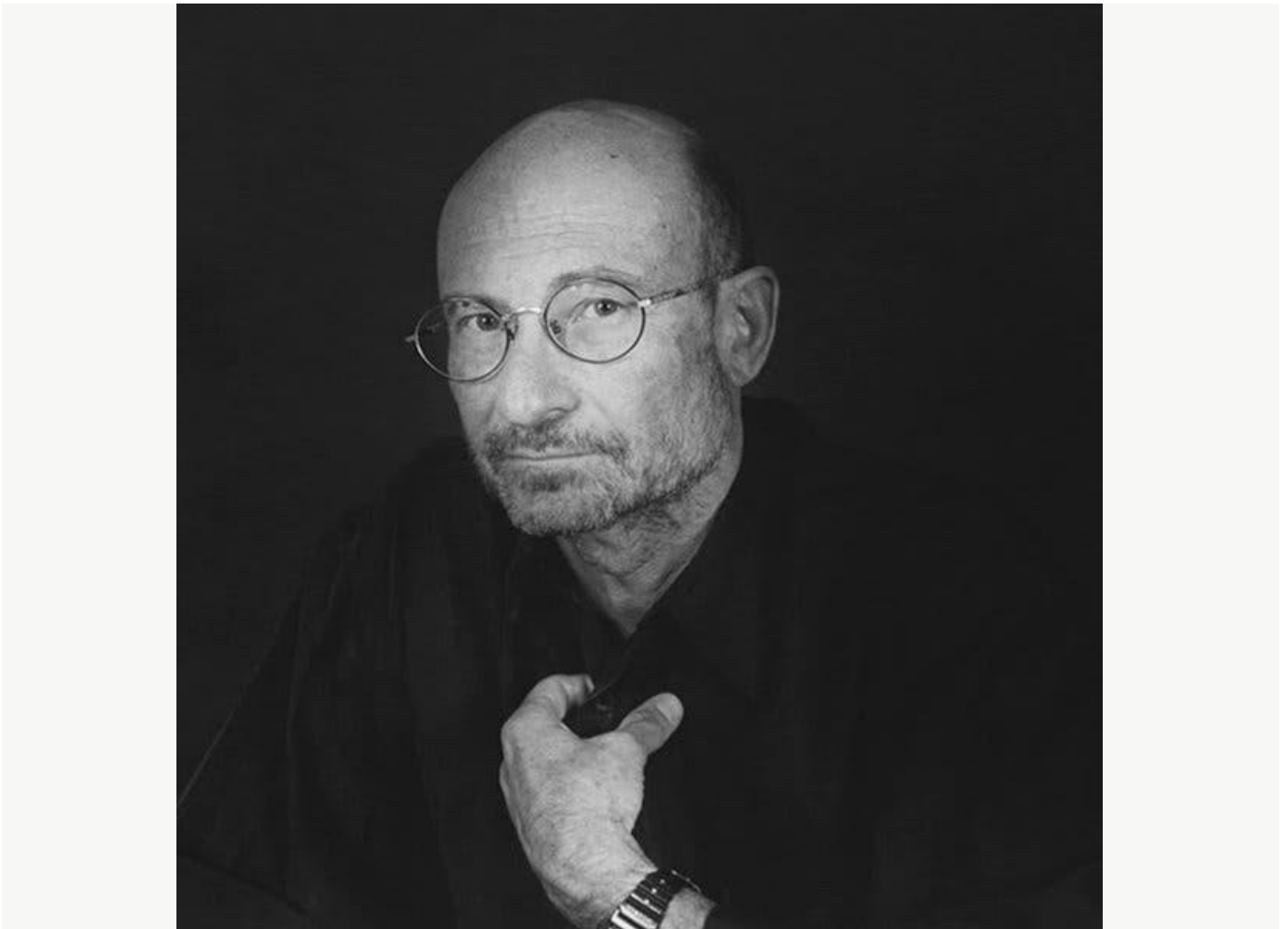


Ronald Feldman, Risk-taking Gallerist, Retires After Nearly 50 Years

"We're going to continue to try to push boundaries, and continue Ron's legacy," his eldest son, Mark Feldman, said.



Ronald Feldman founded the gallery with his wife, Frayda Feldman, in 1971. Credit...Peggy Jarrell Kaplan and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

By Sophie Haigney

Ronald Feldman, the pioneering contemporary art dealer, has stepped down from his role of director at the [Ronald Feldman Gallery](#) after nearly 50 years at the helm, for health reasons.

Mr. Feldman, 82, founded the gallery with his wife, Frayda Feldman, in 1971 on East 74th Street. In 1982, the gallery moved to SoHo, establishing an early beachhead in Lower Manhattan that seemed to suit an institution that broke boundaries and championed a wide range of risk-taking artists and their (often political) works. Some of his early partnerships included the German conceptual artist [Joseph Beuys](#), the performance artist [Chris Burden](#), the feminist artist Hannah Wilke, and [Mierle Laderman Ukeles](#), the longtime unpaid artist-in-residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation. He and Ms. Feldman also developed a friendship with Andy Warhol in the 1980s, and Mr. Feldman commissioned Warhol to do portfolios of paintings and prints.

“He is so passionate about championing ideas-based work, and advancing and creating platforms for artists that truly engage with the widest range of social issues and political causes in our world,” said Mark Feldman, his eldest son, who has taken over the gallery’s operations. “He supported artists who were really groundbreaking and willing to take risks.”

Mr. Feldman came to art after a career as a corporate lawyer, which made him “miserable,” Mark Feldman said in an interview on Thursday. He quit and pursued his passion for fine art. In addition to his work in the gallery, Mr. Feldman was politically engaged, eventually serving on the National Council on the Arts under President Bill Clinton for five years.

The gallery has remained in SoHo even as many others have migrated to Chelsea. “This is home for this community of artists,” Mark Feldman said. In addition to Mark Feldman, Frayda Feldman will continue to stay active in its next phase. “We’re going to continue to try to push boundaries, and continue Ron’s legacy,” Mark Feldman said.

Right now, that includes a solo exhibition of works by [Hannah Wilke](#), titled “[Force of Nature](#),” which includes more than 50 of her so-called “Performatist Self-Portrait” images, many of which make use of her body as a medium. In many ways, it’s the kind of work that Mr. Feldman sought to encourage and promote through his life — idea-driven, pioneering and politically engaged. Though Mr. Feldman played a large part in shaping many notable careers, his son said, he was often in the background. “It was really about the artists and the work,” he said. “He didn’t necessarily want to be part of their story; he wanted to be part of their journey.”