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Ned Rifkin

Under Secretary for Art

Ned Rifkin is the Smithsonian's Under Secretary for Art. In this position, he oversees the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, which together form the national museum of Asian art; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; the National Museum of African Art; the National Portrait Gallery; the Archives of American Art; Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum; the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Renwick Gallery. From February 2002 to August 2005, he also served as director for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and is serving presently as interim director for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art (since October 2005).

Rifkin formerly was director of the Menil Collection and Foundation in Houston, arriving at the Menil in February 2000. Rifkin's extensive experience includes serving as director of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta (1991 to 1999) and as chief curator of the Hirshhorn (1986 to 1991).

Rifkin moved to Atlanta to head the High Museum of Art, serving as the Nancy and Holcombe T. Green Jr. director until 1999. While at the High, Rifkin oversaw such nationally visible projects as "Five Rings: Passions in World Art," a broad-reaching thematic exhibition for the 1996 Olympics, and "Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People," a traveling exhibition that broke attendance records at every venue, co-organized and launched by the High Museum in 1999.

As the Hirshhorn's chief curator, Rifkin helped strengthen the museum's commitment to contemporary art by re-casting "Directions" biennials to focused one-gallery solo shows and introducing a site-specific series called "WORKS," in which artists were invited to intervene in the Hirshhorn's distinctive architecture. At the Hirshhorn, Rifkin also curated a major touring retrospective of Robert Moskowitz' paintings in 1989-1990.

He served as curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington

from 1984 until 1986. There he launched a new-art series called “Spectrum” and organized the 40th Corcoran Biennial Exhibition of American Painting.

After three years teaching art history at the University of Texas at Arlington, Rifkin switched to museums to focus on emerging art and artists, first as curator and then assistant director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (1980-1984).

Rifkin was born in 1949 in Alabama and raised near New York City. He received his bachelor’s degree in fine arts, with a minor in philosophy, from Syracuse University in 1972 and a doctorate in art history from the University of Michigan in 1977, specializing on the films of Michelangelo Antonioni.

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