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**Smithsonian Institution**  
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## Smithsonian reshuffle elevates status of art museums to that of scientific and historical study

The five art museums run by the federal body are now overseen by just one senior manager, Hirshhorn director Ned Rifkin

**Jason Edward Kaufman**

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The Smithsonian Institution's chief executive Lawrence Small has created a new senior position in the organisation to oversee the five art museums that are run by the federal body. Ned Rifkin, director of the Hirshhorn Museum, has been appointed to the post. Mr Rifkin will also continue to lead the Hirshhorn.

The Smithsonian's art museums have previously been overseen by two under-secretaries, and the science museums by a third. Now, for the first time in its 168-year history, the Smithsonian's vast art collections, research, public and outreach programmes have been brought together under one manager, and art has gained a measure of parity with science and history, the Smithsonian's traditional areas of focus.

The change is part of a reorganisation, approved by the Federal Office of Management and Budget, the Congressional Appropriation Subcommittee, and the Smithsonian's Board of Regents, intended to "improve coordination, cooperation, and communication throughout the institution" and allow Mr Small to focus on fund-raising.

The restructuring also creates a new deputy secretary and chief operating officer. Mr Small has appointed Sheila P. Burke, former chief of staff to Senate majority leader Bob Dole, who was Under-Secretary for American Museums and National Programmes for the last three years.

The senior management now consists of a secretary, a newly created deputy secretary, and two under-secretaries—art and science—as well as a chief operating officer for Smithsonian Business Ventures. All report directly to Lawrence Small.

Sheila Burke and the two under-secretaries oversee their museum's operations, review the performance of the directors who report to them, and coordinate inter-museum projects. They do not manage the budgets, but advocate for funding from the Smithsonian's central office.

The new under-secretary for art, Mr Rifkin, says he plans to meet with his museum directors to review their missions and policies: "I'm not going to force collaborative projects on anyone, but there are opportunities for sharing collections, purchases, and exhibitions heretofore not facilitated. My job is to create a forum in which we explore the value added to the visitor of having this confederation of museums." He says he will coordinate purchases to make sure museums do not buy works similar to those in other Smithsonian museums. And he says long-term loans between museums is another likely outcome. "I have no compunction about sending the Hirshhorn's Hoppers or Eakinses to the National Museum of American Art, for example, if that would create the best representation of American art."

On the horizon is completion of the \$200-million renovation of the building shared by the National Museum of American Art and National Portrait Gallery, which have been closed since 2000 and will reopen in 2006.

A pan-Smithsonian project to make use of the 13 million photographs in the institution's 15 museums is also in the works. Led by curator Merry A. Foresta, the initiative will examine possible ways of providing access to this massive resource—something more than an exhibition, perhaps a cable channel—to demonstrate the interrelationship of the Smithsonian's various disciplines through photography. "We will think about all the art in the Smithsonian

Institution as a more identifiable critical mass rather than an archipelago,” he says. “The door is open for so many possibilities,” he adds, and having the ear of the secretary should give the art museums “a little more leverage and visibility.”

The Smithsonian’s federal budget for fiscal year 2004 is \$599.8 million, up from \$559 million for fiscal year 2003. The figures for fiscal year 2005 are not yet available, but a spokesperson says the Smithsonian will request an increase. She insists that the reorganisation is not a cost-cutting measure.

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