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Biden picks rising star at the Smithsonian to head presidential arts committee dissolved by the Trump administration

Tsione Wolde-Michael, director of the Center for Restorative History at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, is the first Black leader of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities

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Helen Stoilas

Wolde-Michael studied at Macalester College and Harvard University before beginning her museum career at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)—where she helped produce the inaugural exhibition *Slavery and Freedom*. She has also been involved in the NMAAHC's [Slave Wrecks Project](#), a multi-pronged marine archaeology research endeavour to identify and study sunken ships involved in the transatlantic slave trade. She is the youngest and first Black person to lead the PCAH.

In her new role, Wolde-Michael will lead a 25-person committee of leaders from the museums, libraries, arts and humanities sectors whose names will be announced by the White House in a few weeks. The committee will advise the president on policy goals, partnership opportunities and programmes to increase support for libraries, museums, humanities and the arts. She will work in league with the chairs of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Maria Rosario Jackson and Shelly C. Lowe (Navajo), respectively, as well as Institute of Museum and Library and Services (IMLS) director Crosby Kemper.

“Through her work for the Smithsonian, Wolde-Michael has shown herself to be an extraordinarily talented curator and historian with an ability to engage communities through innovative and impactful exhibitions and public history projects that illuminate the ways history shapes both our country and daily lived experience,” Lowe said in a statement. “She brings to the position a deep understanding of the issues of vital concern for museums, archives, historic sites and other cultural institutions, and a passion for using the humanities to help build a more just and equitable society.”

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The PCAH was created in 1982 under president Ronald Reagan to advise the White House on arts and humanities policy in consultation with the three main federal agencies interfacing with those sectors, the NEA, NEH and IMLS. At the time of the committee’s mass resignation in 2017, its acting executive director

was John Abodeely, who now serves as the executive director of the Houston Arts Alliance, and the honorary chairman was first lady Melania Trump (who did not resign).

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