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Contact [Freddy Rodríguez](#)
Phone 718-939-9614
Email freddy@freddyrodriguez.com
Website www.freddyrodriguez.com

FREDDY RODRIGUEZ AWARDED 2016 SMITHSONIAN ARTIST RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP



This summer, artist Freddy Rodríguez heads to Washington DC and Cambridge to begin his research into the use of gold in art and society. Rodríguez is one of 20 artists awarded a 2016 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (SARF). This unique program makes available the Smithsonian vast holdings and experts to practicing artists exploring subjects related to their current artistic projects. While Rodríguez is largely known as an abstract painter who came of age during the apogee of minimalism and hard-edge painting in New York City, his practice has always involved historical research. Over his lengthy forty year career, Rodríguez has used geometry and color to reference historical, emotional and political subjects often deemed antithetical to pure formalism. His interest in gold as material and symbol has been on-going. His SARF Fellowship will allow him to devote focused attention on understanding the use, meaning and history of this precious artistic material.

Rodríguez's project will take him to the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian American Art Museum, the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of American Indian, the

National Museum of African Art, the Freer and Sackler Galleries and Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He will also conduct research at Dumbarton Oaks, which has a collection of pre-Colombian gold artifacts. Rodríguez's project advisor is E. Carmen Ramos, curator of Latino art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The artist noted: "Gold is part of every human culture. Its brilliance, natural beauty, luster, malleability and resistance to tarnishing made it enjoyable to work and play with. The earliest history of human interaction with gold is long lost to us, but its association with the gods, with immortality, and with wealth itself are common to many cultures throughout the world. Gold has always been powerful stuff. In the quest for gold by the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Indians, Hittites, Chinese, and others, prisoners of war were sent to work the mines, as were slaves and criminals. And this happened during a time when gold had no value as 'money,' but was just considered a desirable commodity in and of itself. What's very exciting to me is the recent discovery of the origin of gold through the collision of neutron stars in the universe, something I'll be researching with Harvard's professor of Astronomy Edo Berger, Ph D. After the fellowship, I would like to explore the possibility of creating paintings and installations related to the new theory about the origin of gold through a neutron-star collision and the history of gold.

Born in 1945 in Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros, Dominican Republic, Rodríguez moved to New York in 1963 as part of the first major migration of Dominicans to the United States. He studied painting at the Art Students League and the New School for Social Research with painters Carmen Cicero and John Dobbs. Rodríguez studied textile design at Fashion Institute of Technology where he created some of his earliest geometric abstractions. His work is in the collections of Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Newark Museum, the Queens Museum of Art and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, among others. Rodríguez is the subject of a forthcoming *A Ver Revisioning Art History* monograph to be published by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum and research complex, with 19 museums and galleries and the National Zoological Park. On July 1, 1836, Congress accepted the legacy bequeathed to the nation by James Smithson and pledged the faith of the United States to the charitable trust. The total number of objects, works of art and specimens at the Smithsonian is estimated at nearly 138 million, including more than 127 million specimens and artifacts at the National Museum of Natural History.

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