



CENTER FOR  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS  
SANTA FE

1050 Old Pecos Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87505 [www.ccasantafe.org](http://www.ccasantafe.org)

## **Stuart A. Ashman**

**Executive Director & Chief Curator, Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe**



From starving artist, to museum director, to Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, Stuart Ashman has served many roles in the Santa Fe arts and culture community over the past four decades.

From Cuba to Santa Fe to California, his experience ranges from grassroots jobs to high-level executive, governmental, and advisory positions. He has helped launch new arts institutions and taken established organizations to new heights of excellence, most recently serving as President and CEO of the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, California.

Ashman now brings his broad local, national, and international leadership and experience back to Santa Fe as Executive Director of the Center for Contemporary Arts—an organization he became familiar with in one of his earliest art jobs, as visual arts coordinator of the Armory for the Arts from 1978 to 1980.

“It was a classic type of job for a young artist wanting to get involved in the arts community,” Ashman recalls. “I did everything from painting the walls to hanging the art to cleaning the bathrooms to getting the cookies for the opening.”

Ashman was born in New York but spent 12 early years in Matanzas and Havana, Cuba. He later returned to New York to pursue bachelor’s and graduate degrees in photography and fine art. In the late 1970s, he made his way to Santa Fe. “As a wannabe artist, it was a cool place to live,” he says. “Anything was possible.”

While working for the Armory for the Arts, and waiting on tables at the iconic downtown Palace Restaurant, Ashman began teaching art in places ranging from Santa Fe Preparatory School to the New Mexico State Penitentiary. He also undertook several artist residencies in photography and sculpture with the New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs, then an arm of the New Mexico Arts Division. In 1990, he entered the nonprofit arts world as director of the Art with Elders program of Open Hands.

He was named director of the Governor’s Gallery under former Governor Bruce King. Although the gallery is situated at the New Mexico State Capitol, its operation falls under the Museum of

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New Mexico, specifically the New Mexico Museum of Art (known as the Museum of Fine Arts when Ashman began the job). This eventually led to his appointment as Museum of Fine Arts director, a position he held from 1995 to 2000.

In July 2000, Ashman was tapped by the private nonprofit Spanish Colonial Arts Society to be the Executive Director of the new Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, which he oversaw through its planning, fundraising, construction, and grand opening in July 2002.

He left the museum a year later to return to state government. There, with State Rep. J. Paul Taylor, Governor Bill Richardson, and the New Mexico State Legislature, he helped create legislation to elevate the Office of Cultural Affairs to the cabinet-level Department of Cultural Affairs.

Ashman served as Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs from 2003 to 2010. The role gave him responsibility for an annual budget of \$46 million, more than 500 employees, and oversight of a complex group of statewide cultural institutions that includes eight museums, seven state monuments, the State Library, the Office of Archaeological Studies, the Historic Preservation Division, and two administrative divisions. During his tenure, he guided the capital projects for new state cultural institutions, including the New Mexico History Museum and El Camino Real International Heritage Center. He also forged a vital state partnership with the nonprofit Santa Fe International Folk Art Market.

Ashman left the Secretary's post at the end of the Richardson administration in December 2010. In 2011, he began serving as director of Latin American programs at the Richardson Institute for Global Engagement and as an expert advisor on international artisan programs for the United States Peace Corps. Ashman's longtime ties to Cuba served him well in these and other positions and opened doors of opportunity and collaboration among artists, arts administrators, and other international cultural affairs advocates in Cuba and the U.S.

Finally, in late 2011, Ashman moved to Long Beach, California, to begin a role as President and CEO of the private Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA). During his tenure at MOLAA, he succeeded in securing Accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums. The Museum also revised its policies to include the entire Latino/Chicano diaspora, resulting in increased attendance, membership, and acclaim from the community. While at MOLAA, Ashman began a campaign to raise funds for the purchase of a museum school bus in order to offer free tours to students in underserved communities. The result was an increase of 5,000 children attending museum programs annually. He left the museum in summer of 2016 to begin his tenure at CCA.

While Ashman comes to CCA with a distinguished record of leadership and innovation, perhaps his most valuable credential is his deeply-rooted knowledge and love of the local and statewide arts community.

“Having been out of here for five years, in a lot of ways I returned to a different town,” he says. “But a lot of young people are returning here in the same way that my generation of artists was coming here. And a lot of the artists who made Santa Fe great are here, too. Santa Fe has always been, and still is, a town that loves art. This bodes well for the future of CCA.”

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