

James Ulak, PhD

Senior Curator of Japanese Art
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

A specialist in the history of narrative painting production in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Japan, Dr. Ulak received his PhD from Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, Ohio) in 1994. In 1995, Dr. Ulak joined the staff of Freer | Sackler as Curator of Japanese Art (1995-2003). He has also held the positions of Head of Collections and Research and Chief Curator (2002-2003) and Deputy Director (2003-10).

Dr. Ulak served as a researcher at the Cleveland Museum of Art (1982-85), Associate Curator of Asian Art at Yale University Art Gallery (1987-89), and Associate Curator of Japanese Art at the Art Institute of Chicago (1989-1994).



In administrative capacities at Freer | Sackler, Dr. Ulak has supervised curatorial, research, archival, library, design, conservation, conservation science activities, and fine arts collections management. He has been extensively involved in the development and funding of programs for research in East Asian painting conservation and collections digitization, and he has published on a wide range of topics in Japanese art. In addition to his interest in medieval Japanese narrative painting, he has written on eighteenth-century “eccentric” painters and on Japan’s artistic encounters with modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He has developed and produced numerous exhibitions, often in conjunction with Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs. Recent exhibitions organized by Dr. Ulak include *Masters of Mercy: The Buddha’s Amazing Disciples* (2012), the first extensive Western venue exposition of the *arhat* paintings of Kano Kazunobu (1816–1863) from the collection of Zōjō-ji, Tokyo; *Kiyochika: Master of the Night* (2014), which featured the woodblock print images of a modernizing Tokyo of the 1870s by Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847–1915); and in partnership with the Japan Foundation, *Sotatsu: Making Waves* (2015–16), an international loan exhibition exploring the paintings and decorative projects of Tawaraya Sōtatsu (died circa 1640).

In addition to his work at Freer | Sackler, Dr. Ulak serves as an advisor to a number of museums, private collections, and foundations in the United States, Europe, and Japan. He has served on the United States Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Program since 2009 as a member of the Advisory Panel for International Indemnification and as chairman of that panel since 2015. On April 29, 2010, the Government of Japan conferred on Dr. Ulak the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, in recognition for exceptional achievement in strengthening Japan-US bilateral relations in the area of cultural exchange.

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