

# Fact Sheet



## Freer | Sackler

### Smithsonian Institution

#### ABOUT THE FREER | SACKLER

The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, located on the National Mall in Washington, DC, comprise the Smithsonian's museum of Asian art. The Freer | Sackler contains one of the most important collections of Asian art in the world, featuring more than 40,000 objects dating from the Neolithic period to the present day, with especially fine groupings of Islamic art; Chinese jades, bronzes, and paintings; and the art of the ancient Near East. The museum also contains important masterworks from Japan, ancient Egypt, South and Southeast Asia, and Korea, as well as a noted collection of American art. The Freer | Sackler is committed to expanding public knowledge of the collections through exhibitions, research, and publications.

As of 2016, the Freer building is closed for renovation. It will reopen in 2017 with modernized technology and infrastructure, refreshed gallery spaces, and an enhanced Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Auditorium. Visit [asia.si.edu/future](http://asia.si.edu/future) for more information.

#### BACKGROUND AND COLLECTIONS

Charles Lang Freer, a self-taught connoisseur, began purchasing American art in the 1880s. With the encouragement of American artist James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), Freer also began to collect Asian art, assembling a preeminent group of works. In 1904, Freer offered his collection to the nation, to be held in trust by the Smithsonian Institution. The Freer Gallery of Art opened to the public in 1923—the first Smithsonian museum dedicated to fine art.

The Freer's collection spans six thousand years and many different cultures. Besides Asian art, the Freer houses a collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American art, including the world's largest number of works by Whistler. Freer believed in the universality of beauty, and he delighted in finding aesthetic affinities among the art of such divergent cultures as Neolithic China and nineteenth-century America.

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**Office of Public Affairs and Marketing**  
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery



**FREER | SACKLER**  
THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUMS OF ASIAN ART

Since his death, Freer's legacy of approximately 7,500 works of Asian art has grown to 25,000 objects through purchases and gifts. The collection includes art from China, Japan, Korea, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Central Asia, and small but important groups of early Christian and Egyptian art. The single permanent exhibition is the Peacock Room, an opulent interior that Whistler created for a London townhouse in 1876–77 and that Charles Lang Freer later brought to the United States.

In 1971, New York City medical researcher and publisher Arthur M. Sackler (1913–1987) and S. Dillon Ripley, then secretary of the Smithsonian, began discussions about Sackler donating his Asian art collection to the institution. In 1981, Sackler invited Thomas Lawton, then director of the Freer, to select works from his vast collections to form a new gallery. Lawton chose one thousand objects to become the cornerstone of Sackler's gift; these objects were exhibited for the gallery's opening in 1987 and have formed the core of many exhibitions since. Highlights of Sackler's inaugural gift include early Chinese bronzes and jades, Chinese paintings and lacquer wares, ancient Near Eastern ceramics and metalwares, and sculpture from South and Southeast Asia.

Founded to share the Freer's historical focus, the Sackler has increased the range of Asian art activities at the Smithsonian, developed an active program of international loan exhibitions, and embraced contemporary art and a wide range of media and artistic practices. Since the gallery's opening, its collections have expanded through purchases and gifts to include an important assemblage of the arts of the Persian book from the eleventh to the nineteenth century; nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japanese prints and contemporary porcelain; Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and South Asian painting; and sculpture and ceramics from Japan and South and Southeast Asia.

## RESEARCH AND ARCHIVES

The Freer | Sackler houses the largest Asian art research library in the United States. Open to the public five days a week (except federal holidays) without appointment, the library contains more than 80,000 volumes, including nearly 2,000 rare books. Half of the volumes are written and catalogued in Asian languages.

The archives is a manuscript and photograph repository dedicated to the study of Asian and Middle Eastern art and culture, as well as turn-of-the-century American art. It collects, preserves, and makes available documentary materials that support the Freer | Sackler's holdings and research. In addition, the archives house more than 140 collections—amounting to more than 1,000 linear feet of materials—dating from the early nineteenth century to the present.

## CONSERVATION

Conservation at the Freer | Sackler began with hiring Japanese painting mounters and establishing the East Asian Painting Conservation Studio in 1932. This facility remains one of the few in the United States that specializes in conserving Asian paintings. The technical laboratory was established in 1951, becoming the first Smithsonian facility devoted to using scientific methods to study art. Throughout the years, the work of the technical laboratory has expanded to include objects, paper, and exhibits conservation. In 1990, the technical laboratory and the East Asian Painting Conservation Studio merged, creating the Freer | Sackler Department of Conservation and Scientific Research.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

As part of its educational mandate, the Freer | Sackler presents a full schedule of free public events, including films, lectures, symposia, concerts, and discussions. Many of the programs are enhanced through activity guides, brochures, and other materials. There are special activities for children and families, as well as workshops to help teachers incorporate Asian art and culture into their curriculum. Public tours are offered daily except on Wednesdays and federal holidays (subject to docent availability).

Director: Julian Raby, the Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art

Total full-time employees (2014): 100

<b>OBJECTS (2016)</b>	<b>VISITORS (2015)</b>	<b>GALLERY AREA</b>	<b>TOTAL AREA</b>
Sackler 15,095	149,653	20,900	89,000
Freer 26,204	389,099	52,000	181,200
<b>Total</b> 41,299	538,752	72,900	270,200