

James Ulak, PhD

Senior Curator of Japanese Art

A specialist in the history of narrative painting production in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Japan, James Ulak received his PhD from Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, Ohio) in 1994. In 1995, 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 (2002–3) and deputy director (2003–10).



In addition to his interest in medieval Japanese narrative painting, Ulak has written on eighteenth-century “eccentric” painters and on Japan’s artistic encounters with modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He has developed and produced numerous exhibitions, often in conjunction with Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs. Recent examples include *Masters of Mercy: The Buddha’s Amazing Disciples* (2012); *Kiyochika: Master of the Night* (2014); and in partnership with the Japan Foundation, *Sōtatsu: Making Waves* (2015–16).

Before joining the Freer|Sackler, 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 addition to his current work, Ulak serves as an advisor to several 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, which he has chaired since 2015. On April 29, 2010, the Government of Japan conferred on 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.