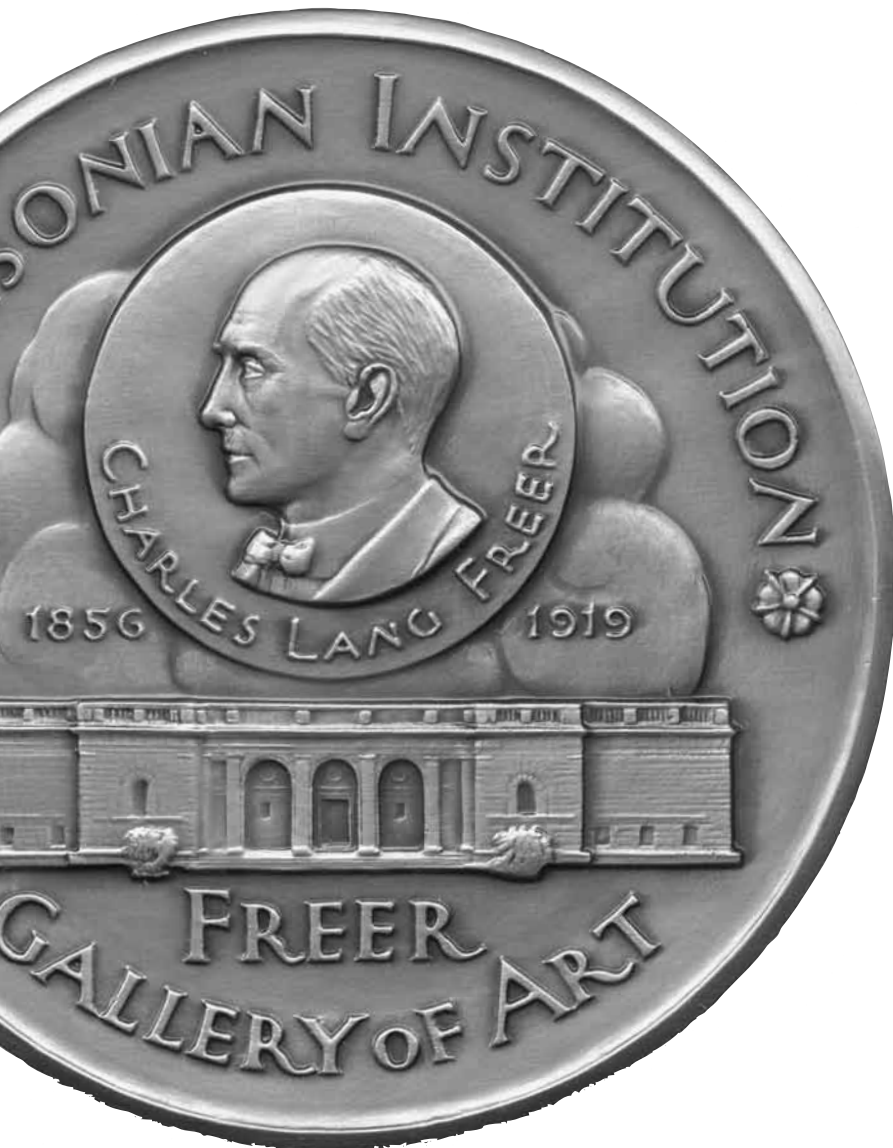


Twelfth Presentation of the
Charles Lang Freer Medal

November 18, 2010



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Dwelling in Seclusion in the Summer Mountains, by Wang Meng (ca. 1308–1385); Yuan dynasty, 1354; hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; Purchase F1959.17

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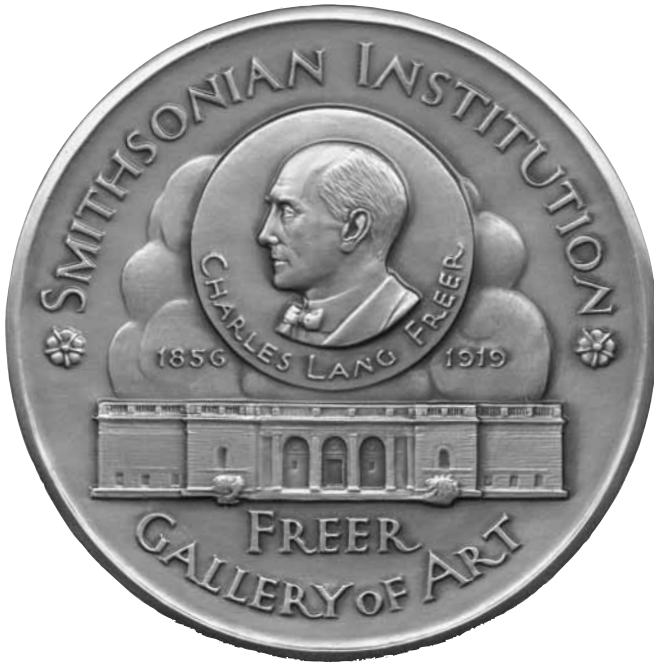
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History of the Freer Medal

From the first presentation of the Freer Medal on February 25, 1956:

This medal is established in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the founder of the Freer Gallery of Art. The late Charles Lang Freer was born on February 25, 1856, at Kingston, New York. For many years he was a devoted and discerning collector and student of Oriental art. He believed that more is learned concerning a civilization or epoch from the art it has produced than from any other source. With this idea in mind, he presented his collection, a building to house them, and an endowment. The income was to be used "for the study of the civilization of the Far East," and "for the promotion of high ideals of beauty" by the occasional purchase of the finest examples of Oriental, Egyptian, and Near Eastern fine arts. This gift was offered to the Government during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, to be given in trust to the Smithsonian Institution. The deed of gift was executed on May 5, 1906. Ground was broken on September 23, 1916, and the building was completed in the spring of 1921, about eighteen months after the death of the founder in New York City on September 25, 1919.

The medal, designed by one of our leading sculptors, Paul Manship, will be presented from time to time "For distinguished contribution to the knowledge and understanding of Oriental civilizations as reflected in their arts."



Previous Recipients

- Osvald Sirén (1956)
- Ernst Kühnel (1960)
- Yashiro Yukio (1965)
- Tanaka Ichimatsu (1973)
- Laurence Sickman (1973)
- Roman Ghirshman (1974)
- Max Loehr (1983)
- Stella Kramrisch (1985)
- Alexander Soper (1990)
- Sherman Lee (1998)
- Oleg Grabar (2001)



James Cahill, ca. 2009

Opening Remarks

Julian Raby, Director, Freer Gallery of Art
and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you this morning as we present the Charles Lang Freer Medal to James Francis Cahill, the twelfth recipient of the award that was established by the Smithsonian Institution to recognize extraordinary scholarly contributions in the field of Asian art. Perhaps not coincidentally, his professional career began at the Freer in the inaugural year of the Freer Medal in 1956. In that year, the recipient was the prolific Swedish art historian Osvald Sirén (1879–1966), whom Dr. Cahill had just assisted on his landmark seven-volume *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles* (1956–1958). Today's ceremony is not designed to recognize Cahill's collaborative work with other scholars, which is legendary. Instead, it commemorates his own singular contributions to the field, which began during his ten years at the Freer (1956–1965), followed by his long, remarkable career as professor of the history of art at the University of California, Berkeley (1965–1994), and his more recent work, completed since retiring from active teaching more than fifteen years ago. Unlike any other current scholar, James Cahill has richly expanded our understanding of classic topics that lie at the heart of the Chinese art field. At the same time, he has energetically tugged at the fringes, thereby expanding the entire notion of the art historical canon. We celebrate these and other achievements today.

Like many others in his generation, Cahill was introduced to East Asian studies courtesy of World War II. After his freshman year in college at the University of California, Berkeley, he chose to enroll in the United States Army's Japanese language school in Ann Arbor,

Michigan, for two years. That led to his posting in Japan and Korea immediately following the war (1946–1948). Returning to Berkeley to complete his undergraduate degree in Oriental languages, he subsequently received a Louise Wallace Hackney Fellowship, which brought him to the Freer Gallery of Art in 1950 for his first experiences at the institution. During this initial stint at the Freer, he earned credit towards his graduate degree work in Asian art history at the University of Michigan, where he was studying under Max Loehr (seventh recipient of the Freer Medal in 1983). Despite his teacher's work at the time on the classic "Chinese Bronze Styles of the Anyang Period" (1953), Cahill chose to write his dissertation (1958) on the fourteenth-century painter Wu Zhen, which made use of his training in stylistic analysis while a Fulbright Scholar (1954–1955) at Kyoto University under Professor Shujiro Shimada. (A prize named in honor of Professor Shimada has been awarded to outstanding publications in the field of Chinese and Japanese painting and calligraphy by the Freer and Sackler Galleries and by the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies in Kyoto, Japan, since 1992. Patricia Berger, a former student of Professor Cahill, recently received the award.)

During his years at the Freer, Cahill established a strong foundation in research, publication, and all things curatorial. He thoroughly studied the Gallery's collections. In fact, generations of curators and visiting researchers after him have been extremely grateful for his detailed observations and notes on individual works in the Freer. Not only are his comments still widely consulted to this day, but sometimes they are also the only scholarly annotations in the research files. Expanding upon his established commitment to important monographic publications dedicated to individual masters such as Wu Zhen, Cahill finished important studies of the Yuan dynasty artist Qian Xuan (circa 1235–after 1301) in 1958 and the early Qing dynasty painter Yuan Jiang and his school (1963/1966). At the same time, he tackled broader topics, such as those presented in *Chinese Album Leaves in the Freer Gallery of Art* (1962), in which he convincingly



Taking photographs for Cahill's 1960 Skira book *Chinese Painting* in the storage area of the Palace Museum outside Taichung, 1959. (Left to right) C. C. Wang, Li Lin-ts'an, Director Chuang Yen (T'an Tan-chiung), Henry Beville (photographer), and James Cahill.

redated or reattributed many of the Gallery's smaller paintings using characteristically clear stylistic arguments.

Perhaps his most important undertaking during his Freer years was the now-famous book *Chinese Painting*, first published by Skira in 1960. It is now more widely available in multiple editions in a variety of languages, from French to Chinese. As Howard Rogers has commented:

[This volume] remains in print and is still one of the finest single-volume introductions to the full sweep of Chinese painting history, intended for a general audience but a text that can be read to great profit by specialists in the subject. One is immediately struck by the eloquent and graceful language of the text, the fluency of presentation which adds its own beauty to the content, in which style, history, art history and biography are interwoven into a most compelling whole.

To prepare this book, Cahill helped organize the first of his pioneering photographic projects. Rogers continues:

The [illustration of *Chinese Painting*] demanded uniform high quality for each illustration and this in turn required that each work be photographed by a specialist, in this case Henry Beville of the National Gallery of Art. Permission was granted to include paintings in the National Palace and Central Museums, then still in Taichung, Taiwan, giving them the unprecedented privilege of making fifty color transparencies of paintings in that great collection, many of which had never before been published. In a striking departure from standard practice, some paintings were illustrated only by details of significant passages rather than by the whole in which characteristic brushwork would have been lost.



James Cahill with Aschwin Lippe (Ernest Aschwin Prinz zur Lippe-Biesterfeld), Henry Beville (photographer for the National Gallery of Art), and John Pope, director of the Freer Gallery of Art, at the opening of the National Gallery's exhibition *Chinese Art Treasures* in 1961.

In the years that immediately followed, Cahill's leadership in major photographic projects featuring works in Taiwan expanded. While preparing for the landmark *Chinese Art Treasures* exhibition that toured the United States in 1961 and 1962 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; and M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco), photographs and color slides were made while the works were at the National Gallery, and those sets were shared with all teaching institutions with programs in Chinese art in the United States. Even more ambitious, the Freer and its partner, the University of Michigan, subsequently organized the creation of a photographic record of virtually all the important paintings in the Palace Museum in 1963 and 1964. For decades this archive, including roughly 2,500 black-and-white negatives and color slides, provided the basis for the training of generations of graduate students at major American universities.

Jim Cahill's final major publication directly associated with the Freer Gallery of Art is echoed in the reinstallation of the Gallery's collection of antiquities, which we celebrated last night. As noted in John Pope's preface to *The Freer Chinese Bronzes* (1967), "The basic research and most of the writing for the section on Style and Chronology was done by Dr. James Cahill while he was still on the Freer Gallery staff, and he has continued to be helpful since his departure in the summer of 1965 to join the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley." No doubt drawing on his training with Loehr, Cahill provided eloquent entries that are still both insightful and a joy to read.

Moving to UC Berkeley, Cahill joined the constellation of luminaries in the field of Chinese studies that made the university such a powerhouse. They included Peter Boodberg, Edward Schafer, and Chen Shixiang. By all accounts, he embraced his new teaching role wholeheartedly. Remembered by his many students, he expanded his

commitment to sharing visual and other research materials by establishing the “Chinese Art Seminar Room” next to his office in Doe Library, filling it not only with his own personal books but also with cabinets of his photographs, research notes, and copies of his scholarly manuscripts in active preparation—all freely available to students.

At Berkeley, Cahill fostered generations of students, among them many current leaders in the field, and in the process he garnered a number of teaching awards. In response to one such award, from UC Berkeley in 1985, he stated:

My “philosophy of teaching” is fundamentally Confucian: A belief that knowledge and wisdom transmitted from generation to generation is the basis for human society and culture; that minds can be improved, mostly through self-cultivation but also with some help from outside; that educated people make up a community that should be mutually supportive and respectful.

My strengths are probably in having a real liking and respect for students, letting them realize that we are involved in a collective enterprise, trying to learn about and understand Asian art, and that although I’m farther along in that enterprise, we are on the same track.

Along the way, he also shared the excitement of curatorship, collaborating with students on numerous important exhibitions that publicly demonstrated key topics in their shared research. Julia Andrews, one of his students, commented, “Seeing Jim in the guise of curator, with his incredibly good eye and unflagging energy, was inspiring.” Through the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, a series of important Berkeley-generated exhibitions exemplified a moment when academics and the museum world were intimately engaged, richly contributing to both disciplines.

- 1967 *Fantastics and Eccentrics in Chinese Painting*
- 1971 *The Restless Landscape: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Period*
- 1972 *Scholar-Artists of Japan: The Nanga School*
- 1981 *Shadows of Mount Huang: Chinese Painting and Printing of the Anhui School*
- 1982 *Sogenga: 12th–14th Century Chinese Painting as Collected and Appreciated in Japan*

During what must have been an almost sleepless decade for him, Cahill also produced three magisterial surveys dedicated to Chinese painting during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, including *Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368* (1976), *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368–1580* (1978), and *Distant Mountains: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty, 1570–1644* (1982). As extensions of his general *Chinese Painting* of 1960, these more focused volumes continue to provide the



A delegation to China in 1973, with James Cahill in the center back. Previous Freer Medal awardees Sherman Lee (1998) in the center front and Laurence Sickman (1973) to right of Lee are also pictured. Others in the group include Arthur Wright, Thomas Lawton (former director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries), and Richard Rudolph, with Chinese colleagues.

foundation for training current specialists in the field. Also at this time he released *An Index of Early Chinese Painters and Paintings* (1980), which contained biographic references on all known Chinese painters through the Yuan dynasty. Accompanied by annotated listings of surviving paintings ascribed to these artists, it provides a more comprehensive research tool than Sirén's *Chinese Painting*, to which Cahill had contributed some twenty-five years earlier.

By this point in his career, Dr. Cahill had certainly made his mark, and many universities tried to lure him away from Berkeley by offering university professorships, which are widely considered the pinnacle of the academic profession in the United States. Cahill turned them all down, including an offer from Harvard, where his former professor, Max Loehr, had taught until his retirement in 1974. According to Sydney Freedberg, then chairman of Harvard's art history department, such a rejection had not occurred since the time of Galileo!

Committed to Berkeley, Cahill chose to experience different academic settings through various university lectureships. From his Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1978 and 1979 (where he followed such luminaries as T. S. Eliot, Igor Stravinsky, Leonard Bernstein, and Erwin Panofsky), which resulted in *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in 17th-Century Chinese Painting*, to his 1994 Getty lectures at the University of Southern California, which were recently published as *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China*, his notable lectures have yielded additional resources for the field.

In 1995, the year following his retirement, Cahill received the Distinguished Teaching of Art History Award (1995) from the College Art Association (CAA). To celebrate his eightieth birthday in 2007, he was awarded the CAA's Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing on Art. The citation presented on that occasion reads in part:

Cahill is the acknowledged leader of his discipline: the history of painting in China. Though scholarship on this vast subject

has a long and distinguished past, Cahill has spent his career remaking the study of Chinese painting for new generations of students. He is widely praised for his sensitive incorporation of innovative methodologies from European art history which he sensitively modifies and translates for use in their appropriate context for China.

The combination of a curator's eye and an academic's methodological range has continued to inform Cahill's scholarship from his earliest Skira volume, *Chinese Painting* (1960; still in print) to his participation in later exhibitions and the compilation of *An Index of Early Chinese Painters and Paintings: T'ang, Sung, Yuan* (1980).

He is perhaps best remembered by students in his field for his magisterial three-volume survey of major artists from the Yuan to Ming dynasties, handsome and lasting volumes whose very names are redolent of Chinese painting subjects and whose sensitive readings of individual artists and pictures set new standards for informed clarity.

The CAA Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing on Art should be given to someone whose leadership goes beyond his or her own field to speak to the discipline as a whole. Cahill exemplified this productive dialogue across periods and geographical regions. All art historians have benefited and continue to benefit from his insights into Chinese art and from his sensitivity to the general problems of studying artists, artworks, and cultural questions.

Knowing the importance of East Asian cycles of time, it is appropriate for the Freer and Sackler to welcome you back some sixty years after you finished your first period of residency with us. This award not

only celebrates the range of your past achievements, from important work on archaic Chinese bronzes to later Japanese painting, but it also invites further contributions yet to come. It serves as a reminder to all of your unique contributions to the field and to this institution, which you continue to enrich through the gift of your archive. Unlike previous recipients of the Freer Medal, you are truly a member of the Smithsonian family, and I am delighted to welcome you back on this memorable occasion.



Sheep and Goat, by Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322); Yuan dynasty, ca. 1300; handscroll, ink on paper; Purchase F1931.4

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