

Freer | Sackler: Fact Sheet



ABOUT THE FREER | SACKLER

The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, located on the National Mall in Washington, DC, together comprise the Freer | Sackler, the Smithsonian's museums of Asian art. The Freer | Sackler contains one of the world's most important collections of Asian art, featuring more than forty thousand objects dating between the Neolithic period and the present day. Included are especially fine groupings of arts of the Islamic world and the ancient Near East, as well as Chinese jades, bronzes, and paintings. The Freer | Sackler also contains important masterworks from Japan, ancient Egypt, South and Southeast Asia, and Korea, as well as the Freer's noted collection of works by American artist James McNeill Whistler.

The Freer | Sackler is part of the Smithsonian, the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, which is dedicated to the increase and diffusion of knowledge.

Visit freersackler.si.edu 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 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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Since his death, Freer's legacy of approximately seventy-five hundred works of Asian art has grown to over twenty-five thousand 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 lacquerwares, 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 museum'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.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Freer|Sackler houses one of the finest Asian art research libraries in the United States. Open to the public five days a week (except federal holidays; no appointments necessary), the library contains approximately eighty-six thousand volumes, including nearly two thousand rare books. Half of the volumes are written and catalogued in Chinese and Japanese.

The Freer|Sackler 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 public events, including films, performances, conversations, symposia, and celebrations. Public tours are offered daily except Wednesdays and federal holidays (subject to docent availability). There are special activities for children and families and workshops to

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help teachers incorporate Asian art and culture into their curriculum. Many programs are enhanced by activity guides, program notes, brochures, and other materials.

PUBLICATIONS

For nearly a century, the Freer | Sackler has produced its own publications to share our collections, exhibitions, and research with audiences worldwide. Along with award-winning exhibition catalogues, the museums publish collection guidebooks and a wealth of scholarly publications, including the renowned academic journal *Ars Orientalis*. Printed publications are complemented by a rich assortment of digitized books and online catalogues. Together these works offer expert insights on a full spectrum of Asian art, culture, and history, as well as on American art and the history of the museums themselves.

BY THE NUMBERS

Acting director: Richard Kurin

Total full-time employees (2018): 107

	OBJECTS (2018)	VISITORS (2015) <small>LAST FULL YEAR OPEN BEFORE RENOVATIONS</small>	GALLERY AREA <small>SQUARE FEET</small>	TOTAL AREA <small>SQUARE FEET</small>
Freer	26,340	389,099	22,171	213,021
Sackler	15,471	149,653	24,329	52,237
Total	41,811	538,752	46,500	265,258

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