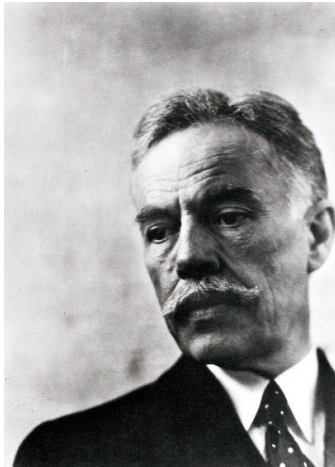


John Ellerton Lodge

1876–1942

First Director of the Freer Gallery of Art



John Ellerton Lodge was born into a prestigious family as the younger son of Henry Cabot Lodge (1850–1924), a longtime Republican Congressman from Massachusetts. Lodge began his studies at Harvard University in 1896, but he soon quit due to severe vision problems. He also attended the New England Conservatory of Music for a time (1899–1900). Through the influence of William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1926), a family friend and an early proponent of Japanese art, Lodge joined the Asian art department at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1911.

Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919), the founder of the Freer Gallery of Art, met Lodge in 1915 and was immediately impressed by his connoisseurship. Freer asked him to consider becoming the first director of the museum he was planning in the nation’s capital. Lodge held that position with great distinction for more than two decades: from 1920, in advance of the museum’s official opening in 1923, until his death in 1942.

As director, Lodge hired Grace Dunham Guest (1872–1964) as assistant curator—she had worked with Freer’s collection in Detroit, Michigan—and Carl Whiting Bishop (1881–1942) as associate curator to represent the museum’s expeditions to China for archaeological study. Unfortunately, the uneasy political situation in China in the 1920s made it difficult for Bishop to find a stable government agency with which to collaborate.

Lodge not only oversaw the grand opening of the Freer Gallery of Art on May 1, 1923, but he also established the museum’s priorities of research, international cooperation, and acquisition of exceptional Asian art that would meet Charles Lang Freer’s directive “for the promotion of high ideals of beauty.” In the 1946 memorial catalogue that showcased fifty-six Chinese bronzes that were acquired during his tenure as director, Lodge was celebrated as the one who set the bar for future directors of the Freer Gallery.

Literature

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February 29, 2016