Lecture summary:
In 1906 the Smithsonian Institution in Washington accepted the gift of Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919) to the nation. The gift comprised thousands of works of art from many cultures across the world, a selection of the best of the acquisitions Freer had made. Perhaps the most famous work is Whistler’s Peacock Room (on permanent display), although today the name Freer is synonymous with the finest examples of many traditions of Asian art. Freer paid for the building that houses his collection, as well as leaving an endowment fund for the future acquisition of art, books, and research. Freer's wealth came from building rail cars, but he retired in 1899 to devote himself to collecting.
By all accounts Freer was a fastidious man, meticulous in his assessing and recording of the works he acquired. He was a model connoisseur: knowledgeable and discerning with an intrepid determination to acquire – at a good price – those works he wanted. His was a conservative taste, defined in many instances by a love of subtle colour harmonies and a belief in the aesthetic moment as a mystical experience. His network for acquisitions was spread widely amongst top dealers, collectors and living artists he admired, most notably James McNeill Whistler and American tonalists such as Thomas Dewing. He travelled widely, visiting museums, dealers, and the international exhibitions that captured the changing times. He went to Asia five times (1894/95, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910).
Freer looked and listened, receptive to the views of many, although the two to whom he was closest were Whistler and Ernest Fenollosa. It was Whistler who advised Freer to travel to Asia to see the art himself, while Fenollosa worked closely with Freer on developing his collection from 1901 to his death in 1908, and honing ideas about the fusing of East and West into a new world culture. Both Fenollosa and Freer recognised three parts to the collection: works by Whistler; ancient glazed pottery from Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, China, Korea and Japan; and masterpieces by Chinese and Japanese painters of all ages. Freer lived at a time of shifting religious, political and artistic values when many quality collections could be bought.

Slide list: (all in Freer collection unless specified otherwise)
1. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, by Charles Adams Platt (1861-1933)
2. Etchings by James McNeill Whistler from Howard Mansfield, 1849-1938; Grolier Club
3. Images of Charles Lang Freer and connoisseurs
4. Dwight William Tryon, 1849-1925, The rising moon: autumn, 1889, oil on wood panel
5. Ming painting Herons and waterplants; Japanese fan painting; Japanese Satsuma ware bottle, acquired from New York Fifth Avenue dealer Tozo Takayanagi in 1893, 1887 and 1892
6. Freer's House in Ferry Street, Detroit, built 1892 by Wilson Eyre,1858-1944; exterior and interiors
7-8. James McNeill Whistler 1834-1903, Photo in Paris studio 1890s; Caprice in purple and gold: the golden screen, c1864, oil on wood panel
9. Variations in Flesh Colour and Green - The Balcony, 1864-1870, oil on wood panel
10. The Princess from the Land of Porcelain,1863-1865, oil on canvas
11. Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room,1876-1877, oil paint and gold leaf on canvas, leather, and wood; H: 421.6, W: 613.4, D: 1026 cm, Freer Gallery
13. Portrait of Ernest Fenollosa 1853-1908; Katsushika HOKUSAI, 1760–1849: Thunder god, 1847, ink and colour on paper, F1900.47, ex Fenollosa; AND Woman holding a tobacco pipe, i.& c.o.silk; F1898.107 Ex Edward S. Hull Jnr (Fenollosa’s lawyer)
14. Lin Tinggui, China, act. 1160–1180, Luohan laundering, 1178, ink and colour on silk, ex Fenollosa and Daitokuji temple, Japan
15. Kanō HŌGAI, 1828-1888, Hibo Kannon 1883, ink, gold and colour on silk; Hashimoto Gahō, 1835-1908, Bodhidharma seated in meditation, c 1885, ink on paper; both ex Fenollosa collection
16. Gakutei HARUNOBU, 1813-1868, Murasaki Shikibu composing the Tale of Genji at Ishiyamadera, ink and colour on silk, ex Fenollosa collection. In Fenollosa’s Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art, first published 1912; Roy de Maistre 1894-1968, (Court lady and seascape), oil, gold and silver paint on linen, AGNSW, purchased with funds from the Art Gallery Society 1992
17. Palace of Fine Arts, 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition
18. Moon Over a Moor, c 1600, four-panel screen; colour and silver on paper; Ex Yamanaka
20. Maruyama Okyo, 1733-95, Geese over a beach, ink on paper, four-panel screen (originally fusuma (sliding doors), acquired from Matsuki Bunkyō (1867–1940)
21. Paris Exposition 1900
22. Siegfried [Samuel] BING, 1838-1905, Le Japon Artistique, 1888–; Korea, mid 1300s, Water-Moon Avalokitsevara, i.c.and gold o.s., Ex Yamanaka,Charles Gillot (French, 1853 - 1903) & Bing
23. Sotatsu school, Landscape of the four seasons, six-fold screen, Metropolitan Museum of Art
24. Jewellery by Henri Vever (1854–1942), one of the Paris group Les Amis de l’Art Japonais
25. Photo of Hara Tomitaro, 1868-1937, and part of his architectural museum Sannotani, Yokohama
26. Tawaraya Sōtatsu, act. c.1600, Moon Avalokitsevara, f 1898.107 Ex Edward S. Hull Jnr
27. Islamic works on paper from Dikran Kelekian, 1868, Ink and colour on paper, four-panel screen (originally fusuma (sliding doors), acquired from Matsuki Bunkyō (1867–1940)
28. Rama and Laksham battle demons, from a Ramayana manuscript, dated 1587-98, gouache, Ex Collection Colonel Henry Bathurst Hanna, 1839-1914
29. Selection of Freer’s contacts in China for acquiring art
30. Detail, Chinese workers at Longmen; by Yūtai, Nov 1910, Silver gelatin photo
31. Chinese, mid-12th to mid-13th century, Nymph of the Luo River, handscroll, i.c.o.s.
32. DETAIL: Li Gonglian, c 1049-1106, Shu River, handscroll, ink on paper, Ex collection Emperor Qianlong
33. Charles Despiau, 1874–1946, Head of Agnes Meyer, 1928; Constantin Brancusi, Agnes E. Meyer, marble, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer; 1967
34. Arthur M. Sackler (1913-87) and his Gallery, founded 1982

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Smithsonian Institution, The Peacock Room comes to America, 2013, AND Charles Lang Freer: Collecting Korea. Both available in iTunes, free apps designed for iPad and iPhone

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