

Lecture Notes, by James Cahill

Note: The image numbers in these lecture notes do not exactly coincide with the images onscreen but are meant to be reference points in the lectures' progression.

Lecture: Addendum 1A: Freer Medal Acceptance Address

On November 18, 2010, I was in Washington DC at the Freer Gallery of Art, where I started out my career as a Chinese art specialist sixty years ago. This time it was to receive the Charles Lang Freer Medal, which is given intermittently since 1956 to honor notable scholars of Asian art.

Photo: James Cahill and Julian Raby, director of the Freer

I will be the twelfth recipient, the sixth for Chinese art. The ones in Chinese art before me begin with Osvald Siren, someone I have a great admiration for. But the others are my teachers and my heroes: Laurence Sickman, Max Loehr, Alexander Soper, and Sherman Lee.

Photos: front and back of bronze Freer Medal, designed by Paul Manship

[Begins reading lecture]

If this prose sounds familiar, it is because I wrote the English version of Yukio Yashiro's 1965 acceptance speech. He was the third recipient of the Freer Medal.

1950 (exactly 60 years ago): had finished a B.A. in Oriental Languages at UC Berkeley and, on the advice of my teacher, Edward Schafer, applied for and received the Louise Wallace Hackney Scholarship for cataloguing Chinese paintings at the Freer. I worked with Archibald Wenley, the director of the Freer at the time.

1951–1953: M.A. program at University of Michigan, studied under Max Loehr.

1953: Metropolitan Museum of Art Fellowship to study museum practice, where I worked with Alan Priest, Aschwin Lippe (full name: Ernst Aschwin Prinz zur Lippe-Biesterfeld), others at the Met, and C.C. Wang.

1954: Fulbright Scholarship to Kyoto, Japan; worked with Shimada Shujiro. He took me to visit the notable collections of Sumitomo, Takashima, and Kawabata Yasunari (photo shown).

See also: Responses and Reminiscences #44: Kawabata Yasunari

<http://jamescahill.info/the-writings-of-james-cahill/responses-a-reminiscences/166-44-kawabata-yasunari>

1955: Worked with Osvald Siren in Stockholm. Photo shows Siren and Shimada examining paintings at the Kurokawa Institute. Siren is *not* one of my heroes; he never developed the connoisseur's eye for Chinese painting.

Continued travelling around Europe and meeting with collectors such as Jean Pierre Dubosc. Felt like the Buddhist pilgrim Sudhana. After returning to the Freer, finished my dissertation on the theories of literati painting (*wenrenhua* 文人畫/ 文人画).

1958: "Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting": my contribution to the symposium series set up by John Fairbank. It was in this context that I got to know the great historian, Joseph Levenson.

Photo: Group photograph of the Freer staff, including Liz West, myself, George Kuwayama, Richard Ettinghausen, Harold Philip Stern, Archibald Wenley, Burns A. Stubbs (who was really indispensable to the Freer, retired in 1956), and the technical, installation, and library staff.

1960–1961: Laurence Sickman (1907-1988, director of the Nelson-Atkins from 1953-1977) brought my onto the team that catalogued the Crawford Collection.

Zhang Daqian 張大千/ 张大千 (1899-1983): met during my Fulbright year in Japan; we conversed in Japanese and he advised me on my first painting purchase: *Fishermen* handscroll by Wu Wei. 1958 photograph shows us on the steps of the Freer along with his family. I was already familiar with Zhang's forgeries while in Japan and detected his work among the Freer purchases:

Zhang Daqian, *Three Worthies of Wu* (20th c.), ink and color on silk, 50.3 x 284.8 cm. Freer, F1957.15a-b.

Late 1950s and 1960s: Worked on the National Palace Museum collection, stored in Taichung 台中.

1955: visited collection to see Yuan paintings for dissertation

1958–59: with C. C. Wang to choose paintings for reproduction for *Chinese Painting*.

1961: Exhibition *Chinese Art Treasures* at the National Gallery, with corresponding catalog

1962: See: CLP 2: 1963 "Post-mortem Symposium on Palace Museum Exhibition."

transcript of an event I organized, the first grand get-together of Chinese painting specialists,"

<http://jamescahill.info/the-writings-of-james-cahill/cahill-lectures-and-papers/221-clp-2-1963-qpost-mortem-symposium-on-palace-museum-exhibitionq-transcript-of-an-event-i-organized-the-first-grand-get-together-of-chinese-painting-specialists>

We began with *Emperor Ming-huang's Journey to Shu*, which Loehr dated to the 8th c., and Soper to the 18th c.

Winter 1962–1963: Project to photograph the collection

Mid–1960s: worked on catalog, *The Freer Chinese Bronzes* (1967), writing section on style and dating. See also:

Max Loehr, “The Bronze Styles of the Anyang Period (1300–1028 BC),” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, Vol. 7, (1953), pp. 42–53.

Robert Bagley, *Max Loehr and the Study of Chinese Bronzes: Style and Classification in the History of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Main theme of this talk: Sinology or Art History? Verbal or Visual?

I argue that the great theorists and critics, such as Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), spent a great deal of time *looking* at the paintings about which they wrote.

Qiu Ying 仇英 (early 16th c.), detail from painting of scholars looking at antiquities.

Portrait of Dong Qichang

Mountain landscape attributed to Wang Wei 王維/ 王维 (699–759)

Yukio Yashiro's Freer Medal paper, concerning Charles Lang Freer's second visit to Japan in the summer of 1907. Freer stayed at the villa of the notable collector, Hara Tomitaro, and also met with the collector Matsuda Takashi. Both were instrumental in introducing Freer to the loftier levels of taste.

Japanese tea bowls: Koetsu bowl, 1899 (left), Shino ware, 1902 (right)

Though some credit goes to Ernest Fenellosa, the summer of 1907 was more crucial to Freer's development of a connoisseurial eye for Chinese painting, with an emphasis on Song masters.

Examples from Hara and Matsuda's collections:

Attributed to Emperor Huizong, *Dove on Peach Branch*

Jiao Lingrong (??), *Crows Roosting in the Evening*. Yamato Bunkakan

Some of Freer's early purchases:

Mi Fu 米芾 (1052-1107), *Hills in Fog (Pavilion of Rising Clouds)* 雲起樓圖, ink on silk, 150 x 78.8 cm. Freer, F.1908.171.

Xia Gui, *Misty Gorge*

Zhou Wenju 周文矩, *The Double Screen: The Emperor Li Ji Watching his Brothers Play* *Wei qi* 重屏圖 (14th c.), ink and color on silk, 37 x 400.2 cm. Freer, F1911.195.

Attributed to Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (c. 345-406), *Nymph of the Luo River* 洛神圖 (mid-12th–mid-13th c.), handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.2 x 310.9 cm. Freer, F1914.53.

Attributed to Guo Xi 郭熙 (ca. 1001–1090), *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys* 谿山秋霽圖 (mid-11th–early 12th c.), handscroll, ink and color on silk, 26 x 206 cm. Freer, F1916.53.

Attributed to Li Gonglin 李公麟 (ca. 1049–1106), *The River Shu* 蜀川圖 (13th c.), handscroll, ink on paper, 32.3 x 751.1 cm. Freer, F1916.539.

Anonymous, scene from *The Story of the Western Wing*, hanging scroll mounted as panel, ink and colors on silk, 198.5 x 130.6 cm. Freer Gallery, F1916.517. Reproduced in *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, Pl. 5.1.

Exhibitions at Berkeley:

Restless Landscapes (1971)

Shadows of Mt. Huang (1981)

Teaching at Berkeley:

Always took students to see paintings in the university collection

They also read landmark works of scholarship, such as Soper's articles "Early Chinese Landscape Painting" (1941), and "Life-motion and the Sense of Space in Early Chinese Representational Art" (1948) on the Nelson-Atkins' sarcophagus, both in *Art Bulletin*, and also articles by Sickman, Loehr, and Michael Sullivan.

Learning from my Western Art colleagues at Berkeley: Svetlana Alpers ("Is Art History? [1977]), Michael Baxandall, and T.J. Clark. Importance of long and analytical looking at a piece of art.

My contentious nature has led me to challenge, for example, the attribution to Li Tang of the pair of Koto'in landscapes, and also to argue that Chinese painters were *not* free to paint whatever they pleased, but subject to socio-economic pressures.

Gong Xian 龔賢/龚贤 (1618–1689), *1000 Peaks and 10,000 Ravines* (1670), ink on paper, 62 x 102 cm. Clear example of 17th c. Chinese painters being influenced by European pictorial art, such as pages from Ortelius' (1527–1598) atlas.

My latest contention resulted in my newest book, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (2010, where I ask why Chinese painting studies continue to talk and write as if the dogma of literati painting were a central truth, instead of a self-serving rhetoric. What about the rest of Chinese painting?

Sherman Lee (1918–2008): former director of the Cleveland Museum of Art; possessed a wide breadth of knowledge on both Western and Asian art; only museum person who could compete with Laurence Sickman in terms of painting connoisseurship. He chaired the Chinese Archeology Expedition of 1973, first delegation of U.S. scholars of Chinese art to enter mainland China. The group included myself, Sickman, and Lawton, among others. On this trip, Lee demonstrated excellent organizational skills, as well as playing a fierce game of ping-pong.

The *Riverbank* Controversy: The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired a large landscape painting titled *Riverbank* (L1997.24.1), supposedly by the artist Dong Yuan 董源 or 董元 (d. 962). I had long contended that it was a forgery by Zhang Daqian, but supporters of the painting included Wen Fong and Barnhart. The only one openly on my side was Hironobu Kohara, until Sherman Lee heard of the situation and came out of retirement to support me. During the symposium, “Issues of Authenticity,” Lee argued that *Riverbank* could not possibly be a 10th c. landscape by comparing its depiction of water to:

Zhao Gan 趙干/ 赵干 (act. ca. 960–75), *First Snow along the River*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 25.9 x 376.5 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

As I gave my presentation at the symposium, Qi Gong, Yang Shin, and C.C. Wang vehemently disagreed with me. How would such prominent Chinese scholars have been so wrong? Traditional Chinese connoisseurship, based on recognizing personal style and brushwork, worked best for later Chinese painting, but not for Song and earlier paintings. Zhang Daqian exploited this weakness in his forgeries.

Final image: A painting of me as a traditional Chinese scholar.