

MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE

Friends of the **FREER HOUSE**

**WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY**

PRESENT:

Pretty Women: Freer and Feminine Beauty

A LECTURE BY:

Dr. Kenneth John Myers

CURATOR OF AMERICAN ART AND HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN ART
DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

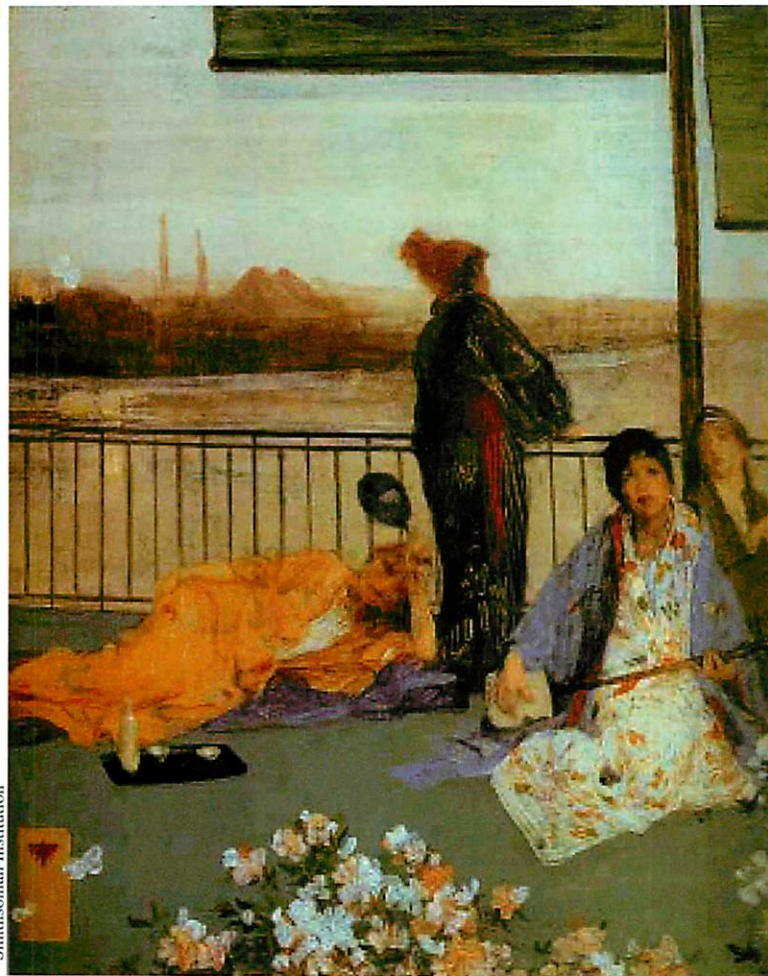
**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009
2:00 PM**

CHARLES LANG FREER HOUSE
71 EAST FERRY, DETROIT
LECTURE & LIGHT RECEPTION
TOURS OF THE FREER HOUSE

Lecture Overview

Charles Lang Freer did not become a serious art collector until 1890, and most of the major paintings he acquired between 1890 and 1905 feature beautiful women being refined. Examples include major works by James McNeill Whistler, Thomas Dewing, and Abbott Thayer. In his talk, Dr. Kenneth Myers will argue that Freer identified with the refined women in these paintings, understanding them as symbols for the kind of life he hoped to live in his beautiful new home on Ferry Street.

Gender roles and stereotypes were unusually extreme in late nineteenth-century America. Middle-class and wealthy Americans assumed that men were naturally materialistic and competitive, while women were thought to be naturally spiritual and nurturing. Men had to make themselves hard in order to succeed in the Darwinian jungle of the modern workplace. Genteel women were largely excluded from paid labor outside of the home, but were expected to



James McNeill Whistler, *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony* (1864)
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
Smithsonian Institution

assume primary responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of a nurturing home. The sexual division of labor encouraged and often required that women take the lead role in the inculcation of self-discipline, morality, religious faith, and the appreciation of all the “finer” or “higher” things in their children, husbands, and themselves. Given the ubiquity and coercive power of these gender roles and stereotypes, it is not surprising that during this period many artists used images of beautiful young women doing something refined to represent an ideal to which they believed that all truly cultured people—men as well as women—should aspire.

*****SPACE IS LIMITED--RSVP REQUIRED (313) 872-1790*****

COMPLIMENTARY ADMISSION TO FRIENDS OF FREER HOUSE MEMBERS

GENERAL ADMISSION \$10.00/STUDENTS \$5.00

About the Speaker

Kenneth John Myers is curator of American art and head of the Department of American Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Before joining the Detroit Institute of Arts, in 2005, he was curator of American art at the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Dr. Myers is a cultural historian specializing in nineteenth-century American paintings, drawings, and prints. He received his B.A. from Cornell University, and his Ph.D. from Yale. While at the Freer, he co-curated the exhibition *Mr. Whistler's Galleries: Avant-Garde in Victorian London* and wrote the accompanying book, *Mr. Whistler's Gallery: Pictures at an 1884 Exhibition* (Washington, D.C. and London: Freer Gallery of Art in Association with Scala Publishers, 2003). Other publications include *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820–1895* (1986); “Frederic Church’s Memorials to Thomas Cole” in Marco Goldin and H. Barbara Weinberg, eds. *Pittura Americana del XIX Secolo* (2008); “Thomas Cole and the Popularization of Landscape Experience in the United States: 1825-1829,” in Marco Goldin ed., *America!: Storie di pittura dal Nuovo Mondo* (2007); “Whistler in Venice: The Freer Gallery of Art Pastels,” in Eric Denker, ed., *Whistler and His Circle in Venice* (London: Merrell, 2003); “Art and Commerce in Jacksonian America: The Steamboat *Albany* Collection” in the *Art Bulletin* (September 2000); “The Public Display of Art in New York City, 1664–1914,” in David Dearing, ed., *Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics, 1826–1925*(2000); and “On the Cultural Construction of Landscape Experience: Contact to 1830,” in David Miller, ed., *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (1993). Dr. Myers is currently developing a major traveling exhibition tentatively titled *Frederic Church in the Holy Land*, and completing essays on Henry Peter Gray’s painting *Truth*, and on the history of landscape painting in the Shawangunk Mountains of New York State.

Acknowledgements

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The **Americana Foundation** supports educational and advocacy programs that address the conservation of natural resources and the protection and presentation of expressions of America’s heritage.



Friends of the FREER HOUSE

The Friends of the Freer House is devoted to raising awareness of the history of Charles Lang Freer and support for the preservation and restoration of the C.L. Freer House.

The group is a membership organization affiliated with the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, Wayne State University and is open to the public.

For membership information call (313) 872-1790



Mark Your Calendar

Sunday, May 3, 2009

Dr. Ann Gunter

Art History Department
Northwestern University

“Freer and Egypt”