

Friends of the **FREER HOUSE**

PRESENT:

The Blue Room: Whistler's Peacock Room in Detroit

A LECTURE BY:

Dr. Linda Merrill

*Former Curator of American Art
Freer Gallery of Art Smithsonian Institution*



The Peacock Room by James McNeill Whistler (American, 1834-1903). 1876-1877. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington

The famous Peacock Room, decorated by James McNeil Whistler, considered a masterpiece of American Art.

In 1904, Charles Lang Freer purchased the celebrated Peacock Room in London and moved it to his Detroit home. Whistler scholar and art historian Linda Merrill will recount the facts and fictions surrounding the creation of *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* (1876-7), the extravagant interior decoration by James McNeill Whistler, and tell the more unfamiliar story of the room's brief life in Detroit.

Frederick Leyland, the affluent ship owner who had been Whistler's primary patron, commissioned the original project for the dining room of his London home, which resulted in an acrimonious quarrel between artist and patron. Whistler immortalized their differences on one of the walls, compelling his erstwhile patron to look at it every evening during dinner. Leyland, to his credit, maintained the Peacock Room just as Whistler painted it.

Charles Lang Freer, the Detroit industrialist who had built an incomparable collection of Whistler's work, purchased the room from a subsequent owner of the Leyland house and transported it to America. Despite Freer's efforts to subdue public attention, the Peacock Room attracted enormous publicity and countless art lovers made the pilgrimage to Detroit to see the room installed in his Ferry Avenue home. To downplay its glamorous (and scandalous) associations, Freer called Whistler's decoration simply the "Blue Room." After Freer's death in 1919, it was moved with his other treasures to the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. which he had bequeathed to the nation.



Peacock Room, Freer House

Sunday, October 25, 2009
2:00 pm

Detroit Institute of Arts
Lecture Hall
5200 Woodward Avenue, Detroit

Post Lecture Reception & Tours
at the Charles Lang Freer House
71 East Ferry, Detroit
(one block north of the DIA)

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Lecture at the DIA is Free with Museum Admission

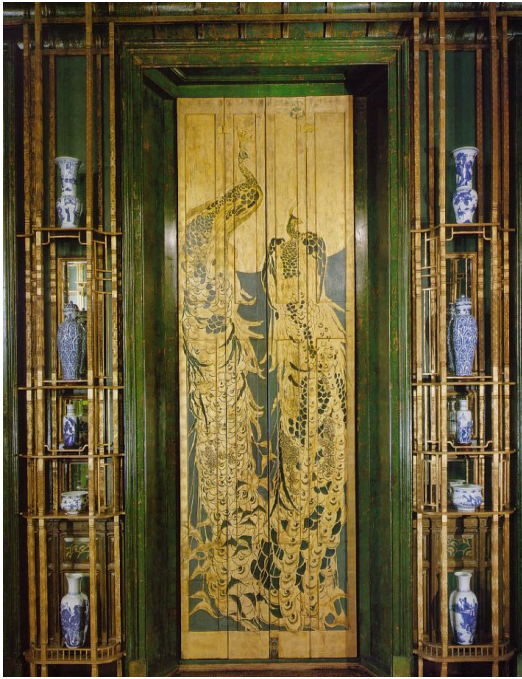
Reception at the Freer House \$10.00/person (Complimentary to the FOFH Members)

Proceeds benefit Freer House Restoration



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About the Speaker

Linda Merrill was curator of American art at the Freer Gallery of Art for twelve years. During her tenure, she oversaw the conservation of the Peacock Room and wrote an exhaustive history of Whistler's project, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography*. Dr. Merrill's other publications include books on the *Whistler v. Ruskin* libel trial of 1878 and an edition of the Whistler-Freer correspondence. As the Margaret and Terry Stent Curator of American Art curator at the High Museum in Atlanta, she organized *After Whistler: The Artist's Influence on American Painting* (2003), an exhibition subsequently shown at the Detroit Institute of Arts as *American Attitude*. She now teaches art history at Emory University in Atlanta.

Acknowledgements

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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 and volunteer information contact: Rose Foster
(313) 872-1790 or
email: mpsi@wayne.edu



Detail of the South Wall, *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room*. By James McNeil Whistler (American, 1834-1903), 1876-77; Oil paint and metal leaf on leather, canvas, and wood; Freer Gallery, Washington