

# Smithsonian and Berlin museums join forces to investigate Asian art provenance

The programme includes webinars examining dealers and collectors

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10th December 2020 11:17 GMT



The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, houses more than 42,000 items of Asian art including this Qing dynasty scroll

© Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The Smithsonian Institution and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the organisation which runs Berlin's museums, have joined forces to

establish an international network of provenance researchers focussed on Asian art, including expert exchanges, webinars and a public programme of events.

Starting this year, the two organisations are hosting a series of webinars called *Hidden Networks: the Trade in Asian Art*, examining important dealers and collectors. The first, on 3 December, focussed on the Chinese dealer C. T. Loo, who maintained galleries in Paris and New York and—according to an article published in the *Financial Times* in 2014—“almost single-handedly ransacked China of its patrimony over a 40-year period, buying a fantastic array of artworks from dubious sources at dubious prices.”

The webinar was organised by the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, Berlin’s Museum of Asian Art, and the Museum Rietberg in Zurich. A second webinar, scheduled for March 2021, will focus on Yamanaka & Co., one of the most significant dealers in Asian art and antiquities operating in the US and Europe in the first half of the 20th century. The series will conclude with a major symposium on new research in Asian art provenance in Washington in 2022.

The new programme follows a three-year cooperation between the Smithsonian, SPK and other US and German museums focussed on provenance research for Nazi-looted art that ran from 2017 to 2019.

“Research on objects from the Asian region has so far been overshadowed by other focal points of provenance research, but the first seminar already showed there is great interest in the topic,” Hermann Parzinger, the president of the SPK, said in a statement.

The Freer and Sackler galleries together house more than 42,000 items of Asian art dating from the Neolithic period to the modern day. Berlin’s Museum of Asian Art is moving into the Humboldt Forum, a new museum complex in a reconstruction of the Prussian royal palace in the middle of the city, where it is scheduled to open to the public in autumn 2021.

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