

Noted professor to discuss medieval art and stories during annual Lefkowitz Lecture

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Professor Marc Michael Epstein of Vassar College will deliver the 2013 Leonard and Saradona Lefkowitz Lecture in Jewish Studies at Alfred University (AU) on Monday, Oct. 28, at 5:15 p.m. in Nevins Theater, Powell Campus Center. The lecture is free and open to the public with a reception to follow.

Epstein's presentation, entitled "Old Haggadot for New Audiences: Art, Story-telling, and the Religious Imagination," will examine the art, stories, and religious imagination that contribute to illustrations in medieval Haggadahs, the ritual texts that guide participants during Passover Seder suppers and remind them about the events of the Exodus. Epstein will discuss how these deceptively quaint pictures found in illustrated Haggadahs address significant political and moral dilemmas for medieval as well as post-modern audiences.

Epstein, who has written on various topics in visual and material culture produced by, for, and about Jews, notes that "Jews over the centuries have invested huge amounts of time and money upon the creation of beautiful Haggadot, and have lavished much attention on their decoration."

In conjunction with this year's Lefkowitz Lecture, AU's Herrick Library has on display an exhibition of Haggadahs from its collection.

Epstein's expertise as a scholar of religion, Jewish studies, and art history with a special focus on medieval times, as well as his experience as a curator, appraiser and consultant, uniquely qualify him to address this topic. Mary McGee, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at AU, has known him since they were faculty members together at Vassar, Poughkeepsie, and called him an eloquent and engaging scholar.

"He is a popular teacher at Vassar and, as a knowledgeable and entertaining interpreter of Jewish art and traditions, he is in great demand as a speaker," said McGee.

Epstein received his undergraduate degree from Oberlin (Ohio) College and completed his master's and doctoral degrees at Yale University, New Haven, CT. Currently a professor of religious studies at Vassar and the Corcoran Visiting Chair of Jewish-Christian Relations at Boston College, Epstein has also served as director of the Hebrew Books and Manuscripts Division of Sotheby's Judaica Department. He continues to serve as consultant to

various libraries, auction houses, museums and private collectors throughout the world, including the Herbert C. and Eileen Bernard Museum at Temple Emanu-El, New York City.

Epstein's most recent book, "The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination" (Yale, 2011), which is available from the AU bookstore, was selected by the London Times Literary Supplement as one of the best books of the year.

The annual Lefkowitz Lecture in Jewish Studies at Alfred University began in 2010 as a result of a gift from Leonard and Saradona Lefkowitz. Dr. Leonard Lefkowitz is a 1957 graduate of the University. Following medical school, a residency in pediatrics, and service in the U.S. Air Force, he established a private practice in pediatrics in Montgomery County, Maryland. After 32 years, he retired from his private practice, choosing to work part-time as a clinician at the George Washington University Student Health Clinic. Dr. and Mrs. Lefkowitz have had a lifelong devotion to Jewish heritage, culture, and study. Their shared devotion to Jewish heritage and to Alfred University led to the creation of the endowed Lefkowitz Lecture in Jewish Studies, which provides the opportunity for the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences to bring distinguished scholars and speakers to campus to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of Jewish cultural and historical experiences.