

Alumnus to receive honorary degree from Alfred University

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Nathan Lyons, a 1957 graduate of Alfred University who founded the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, will receive an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from the University at its annual commencement, scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday, May 13, in McLane Center on the AU campus. The degree will be conferred upon Lyons "for the creativity, and vision, and organizing genius that have inspired so many." At Alfred University, Lyons majored in English, with minors in theater and art. He wrote and directed plays, established a poetry workshop, was editor of the *Fiat Lux* and the literary review. He also studied photography with John Wood, who was a professor of photography and printmaking, beginning Lyons' interest in the medium to which he devoted his career. After graduation, Lyons joined the staff of the George Eastman House in Rochester, advancing to become associate director and curator of photography. While at the Eastman House, he was curator for photography exhibitions and editor of publications that are pivotal in the critical history of photography. When he left the Eastman House in 1969, Lyons founded the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, and continued as director until his retirement in 2001. The Workshop, one of the nation's oldest alternative arts organizations, offers a graduate program, an archive, a research center, and a press. The Visual Studies Workshop has hundreds of graduates who are making major contributions in the field as artists, curators, writers and media specialists. The graduate program at the Visual Studies Workshop resulted from a unique collaboration with the State University of New York, which honored Lyons in 1999 by naming him a Distinguished Professor. Lyons has been involved in founding three major arts organizations. In 1963 he initiated the first invitational conference for teachers of photography. From that initial meeting came the Society for Photographic Education, with Lyons elected as its first chairman. Today the SPE national conferences attract thousands of teachers, artists, curators, writers and graduate students. In 1997, the Society for Photographic Education named him an Honored Educator. He is also a founding trustee of the New York Foundation for the Arts, which he chaired from 1976 to 1993, and founder of ORACLE, an annual meeting of curators and directors of photographic institutions that began in 1983. During the more than 40 years he spent as a curator, editor and educator, Lyons continued to make his own art. He has had more than 50 solo exhibitions; his work is in the permanent collections of more than 60 museums; and he has published four books, including *After 9/11*, which was published in 2003, and *Riding 1st Class on the Titanic* published in 2000. He received the Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement from the International Center for Photography in 2000 and the Champion of the Arts Award from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 1988, as well as two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and a medal from the Czech Republic in recognition of his extraordinary contributions in the sphere of photography. He has received honorary degrees from the Rhode Island School of Design and the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. It was also at Alfred University that Lyons met his wife, Joan Fischman Lyons, also a 1957 graduate who earned a BFA degree and who was founder and coordinator of the Visual Studies Workshop Press. In addition to her work with the Workshop, she has also continued her own work in a variety of media including silver-gelatin prints, artists' books, archaic photographic processes, pinhole photography, offset lithography, photo-quilt-making and computer-based work. Their daughter, Elizabeth Lyons, received her BFA degree from Alfred University in 1982. Elizabeth Lyons is an art teacher, glass artist and founder of More Fire Glass Studios in Rochester.