

Former faculty member to give lecture, curate exhibit of pioneer women artists

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Dr. Ezra Shales, former Alfred University (AU) assistant professor of art history, will present the University's Fifteenth Dorothy Wilson Perkins Ceramic History Lecture at 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 10 in Nevins Theater, Powell Campus Center. The lecture series honors the memory of Perkins, a 1939 AU alumna who pioneered ceramic arts throughout the 20th century.

Shales, associate professor in the History of Art Department at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, will speak on "Pioneers of American Ceramics." The program is open to the public free of charge.

In conjunction with his visit to campus, Shales is guest curator for "O Pioneers! Women Ceramic Artists, 1925-1960" at the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum at Alfred University, which opens Sept. 10 and runs through Nov. 20. There will be a public opening reception from 6:15 -7:30 p.m. that evening. The exhibition is coordinated by Susan Kowalczyk, collections manager at the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum.

The exhibition revisits important contributions of women to American art history on several levels as artists negotiating modernism and as educators paving new roles in the academy. Drawing from collections at the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum; the Everson Museum, Syracuse; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; and the archives of Cranbrook Academy, Bloomfield Hills, MI; as well as private collections, "O Pioneers!" includes more than 100 works ranging across functional pottery and figurative sculpture.

While it often surprises many students to learn that American art schools only began to encourage female students to shape their own pottery on the wheel in the 1920s, and not simply to paint and ornament pots, it was the same decade when women first gained the right to vote in the United States.

The ceramic art in "O Pioneers!" presents a complex narrative of global influences, a diverse cast, and illuminates a time when an imaginative reverence toward historical form, clay, and glazes permeated both the academy and the gallery. Ceramics might not have been considered a field of discipline outside of a few schools in America, but it was a vocation many women embraced as a new way to imagine their lives.

The exhibition was inspired by the memory of Marion Fosdick, who taught studio art at AU's College of Ceramics for three decades and whose works were purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among other galleries.

Shales has authored essays on diverse topics ranging from Victorian toys and the role of artisans in building the Empire State Building to contemporary practices. He is currently working on a book exploring the ways drinking vessels in North America are culturally loaded talismans that brim with political and social power while also completing a manuscript titled "Common Craft," to be published by Reaktion Books.

Shales is also author of numerous peer-reviewed articles and has lectured in the United States, Canada, Norway,

Finland, and Denmark. He is the recipient of over a dozen professional awards and accolades, including a Massachusetts College of Art and Design Foundation Faculty Fellowship; an Exhibition Research Grant from the Center for Craft, Creativity, and Design; and a Joseph Kruson Award for Excellence in Teaching from AU.

He has served as an external examiner for the Glass and Ceramics Division at the Royal College of Art, London, England; a juror for the Pew Charitable Trust Foundation; vice president of the Design Studies Forum; and nominator for the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Awards. He is a member of the College Art Association, American Studies Association, Design History Society, and American Alliance of Museums.

Shales holds a bachelor of arts degree from Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT; a master of fine arts degree from Hunter College and a Ph.D. from Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture, both in New York City.

Kowalczyk holds a bachelor of fine arts degree for the College of Ceramics at AU and a master of fine arts degree in ceramic arts from Wichita State University.

The Dorothy Wilson Perkins Ceramic History Lecture Series was established in 1998 through a gift from Dr. Lyle Perkins, AU Class of 1939, given in memory of his wife, Dr. Dorothy Wilson Perkins. Dorothy Perkins's many accomplishments in ceramics last to this day; her ceramic work can be found in numerous collections, including at Ohio State University and the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum.

The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum is housed within the College of Ceramics at AU and features both permanent and rotating exhibits of historical ceramics, contemporary pieces, and applications of advanced ceramics to science and technology. The museum is open Wednesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; the museum is closed Saturday-Tuesday and some holidays.