

Nobel Prize-Winning Chemist to Deliver Lecture at AU

2/21/00

Alfred, NY -- Dr. Roald Hoffmann, professor of chemistry at Cornell University and recipient of the 1981 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, will deliver the second annual Samuel R. Scholes Jr. Lecture at 8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 28, in Nevins Theatre, Powell Campus Center, Alfred University. Hoffmann, whose work in applied theoretical chemistry has earned accolades, including the Nobel Prize that he shared with Kenichi Fukui, will deliver a talk entitled, "One Culture, or the Commonalities and Differences between the Arts and Sciences." "The rift between scientists and technologists on one hand, and humanists on the other, is criticized on several grounds," Hoffmann says. Using examples from chemistry, poetry, painting and ceramics, he will make a case for an underlying unity of science and the arts. "The common elements of these human activities are creation with craftsmanship, concisely communicated, in a cross-cultural and altruistic way, with aesthetics figuring importantly in a search for understanding of the universe around and within us," explains Hoffmann. Born in Zloczow, Poland, in 1937, Hoffmann survived the Nazi occupation during World War II and moved to the U.S. in 1949. He was graduated from Stuyvesant High School and Columbia University before earning a Ph.D. degree from Harvard University. Since 1965, he has been on the faculty at Cornell University, where he is now the Frank H.T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters and professor of Chemistry. "Applied theoretical chemistry" is the way Hoffmann characterizes the blend of computations stimulated by experiment and the construction of generalized models, of frameworks for understanding, that is his contribution to chemistry. In more than 450 scientific articles and two books, he has taught the chemical community new and useful ways to look at geometry and reactivity of molecules, from organic through inorganic to infinitely extended structures. Among his numerous awards and honors, Hoffmann has the distinction of being the only person to have received the American Chemical Society's awards in three different specific subfields of chemistry - the A.C. Cope Award in Organic Chemistry; the award in inorganic chemistry and the Pimental Award in Chemical Education. In addition to his scholarly work, Hoffmann is either the presenter or narrator in all 26 segments of "The World of Chemistry," a series developed at the University of Maryland that has been frequently aired on PBS since 1990. He is a poet whose work has been published in various literary magazines, and in three collections, "The Metamict State," "Gaps and Verges," and the most recent, "Memory Effects," published in 1999 by Calhoun Press of Columbia College, Chicago. In 1993, the Smithsonian Institution published "Chemistry Imagined," a collaboration by Hoffmann and artist Vivian Torrence. A series of 30 collages by Torrence is accompanied by short essays, personal commentary and poems by Hoffman that both evoke the magic of chemistry and the "mysterious confluences of science and art." In 1995, Columbia Press published Hoffmann's "The Same and Not the Same," a book that highlights the dualities that lie under the surface of chemistry and create tension. "Old Wine, New Flasks: Reflections on Science and Jewish Tradition," by Hoffmann and Shira Leibowitz Schmidt, published in 1997 by W.H. Freeman, looks at how science and religion both lead to eternal and important questions of authority, purity, identity, the natural and the unnatural. Dr. Joshua Fierer, a 1959 graduate of Alfred University, last year created the Samuel R. Scholes Jr. Lecture in honor of his long-time mentor and friend. Scholes came to Alfred in 1932 when his father joined the faculty of the College of Ceramics at Alfred University. A 1937 graduate of Alfred University, the younger Scholes earned a Ph.D. degree from Yale University. He returned to Alfred in 1946 as a member of the faculty in the chemistry department, where he taught until his retirement in 1980.