

Bergren Forum to focus on 19th century India opium trade

4/11/12

The Alfred University Bergren Forum presents "The Art of Opium in 19th Century India," a discussion by Hope Childers, assistant professor of art history at AU. The program begins at 12:10 p.m. in Nevins Theater, Powell Campus Center on Thursday, April 19 and is open to the public free of charge. "The 19th-century opium trade is popularly thought of as a China-based phenomenon," said Childers. "However, the opium that the British shipped to China originated from India, where the drug has a long cultural history alongside other psychoactive substances, including cannabis." "Traditional attitudes and practices towards these drugs shifted drastically during the colonial period, shaped by modern discourses of commerce, medicine, and law," she continued. "From mind-altering medicinal plant, to major revenue source, then to public health menace and social evil, the very idea of opium was inflected by a range of spiritual, popular, and governmental impulses, and the visual culture surrounding the drug is correspondingly rich in meaning. "The talk will focus on selected images from the 16th century to the present, to highlight the complex trajectory of such drugs in India," Childers noted. Childers is currently teaching courses in the arts of India and in modern and contemporary Asian art and is working on a book manuscript about the visual culture of opium and cannabis in modern South Asia. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California-Los Angeles, as well as a bachelor of fine arts degree in ceramics from Louisiana State University. The Bergren Forum, sponsored by the Alfred Division of Human Studies and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, meets Thursdays during each academic semester at the University. Participants are encouraged to bring a lunch: coffee and tea will be available.