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Art, Ophelia in spotlight for Women's History Month

By Christine Miller Ford
Special to The Winchester Star

Winchester — A Roanoke art professor will focus on Shakespeare's Ophelia and the popular character's depictions in art at 7 p.m. today during a Women's History Month event at Shenandoah University.

The free lecture in Hester Auditorium at Henkel Hall features Hollins University art department chair Kimberly Rhodes, whose forthcoming book is "Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture: Representing Body Politics in the 19th Century."

"We're very fortunate here to have a Women's Studies program that is alive and well — an extremely lively program, in fact," said Geraldine Kiefer, assistant professor of art history at Shenandoah since 2003.

She teaches history and women's studies as part of the school's interdisciplinary program and organizes the Women's History Month events. "This lecture series, I believe, is a testimony to the openness of the university."



Kimberly Rhodes



Christine Carr

Rhodes, who has a doctorate and a master's degree in art history from Columbia University, joined Hollins nearly a decade ago. An expert in Victorian-era art and feminism and contemporary art, she formerly taught at New York's Long Island University.

Rhodes is a veteran lecturer across Virginia, at venues ranging from Virginia Tech and Randolph-Macon Woman's College to James Madison University and the

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Art Museum of Western Virginia.

Ophelia from William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" is a noblewoman of Denmark who is the title character's love interest. She is seen as a dutiful daughter and a victim of her love for Hamlet.

Kiefer believes Rhodes's talk will attract not only Shenandoah students, but also a cross-section of area residents interested in British art, literature, and changing ideas about the female body.

"High school art students and their teachers would see a huge benefit from the lecture," said Kiefer, adding that she also expects to see area residents taking continuing education courses turn out tonight.

It's the fourth year for Kiefer's Women's History Month program, sponsored each March by Shenandoah's Women's Studies program and funded through a gift from Kiefer's mother, Virginia-Wojno Forney, and the Willa Cather Institute.

The Institute became involved as an acknowledgment of Cather's allusions to Hamlet's Ophelia in "A Lost Lady."

Rhodes also will deliver a lecture on campus this morning — primarily geared toward students, but open to anyone interested. The free talk, called "Models, Muses and Makers: Finding Feminism in Fiction," begins at 11 a.m. in Ruebush Hall's Room 128.

In this presentation, Kiefer said, Rhodes will outline the ways in readers of historical fiction get a dose of feminist art history in popular novels of the past decade, including "Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper," "The Incantation of Frida K.," and "Mary Gordon's Spending."

A second Women's History Month speaker is planned this month Photographer Christine Carr, an assistant art professor at Hollins, will present a lecture at 7:30 p.m. March 27. That free talk, also in Hester Auditorium, is co-sponsored by the Virginia Wojno-Forney Art Lecture Fund and the Shenandoah Arts Council.

For more information, call 545-7323.

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