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“Borrowed Remedies and Hidden Histories”

Free public lecture presented by the Museum of Health Care



(KINGSTON, ON) – On Thursday, October 16th at 7pm, the Museum of Health Care will present its annual Margaret Angus Research Fellowship Lecture. Rebecca Benson will deliver a lecture titled “Borrowed Remedies and Hidden Histories” in Watson Hall 217, 49 Bader Lane, Queen’s University. Refreshments will follow. Admission is free.

Named in honour of local historian Dr. Margaret Angus, the fellowship supports the study of history of health and health care, as they relate to the Museum’s collections. This year’s recipient, Rebecca Benson, will be graduating with her M.A in Art History from Queen’s University this November. Her Master’s dissertation articulated and analyzed the paradoxes created by the

production, display and dissemination of participatory art works.

Blackhawk's Blood and Body tonic canister, Collection of the Museum of Health Care, 1900-1930, 1974.16.1

The lecture will present the research findings regarding two bodies of objects from the Museum of Health Care’s collection: nineteenth and early twentieth century patent medicines which used aboriginal imagery and ideology in their marketing; and a collection of herbs used by Canada’s indigenous people that were grown, packaged and sold by the Parke, Davis & Co. pharmaceutical company. These two case studies will be used to contextualize aspects of pharmaceutical history within indigenous worldviews and approaches to medicine and healthcare.

“The Museum of Health Care’s collection provided a unique chance to study pharmaceutical history through late nineteenth and early twentieth century artefacts.

Products like “Blackhawk’s Blood and Tonic” or “Indian Woman’s Balm” used aboriginal imagery, slogans, and tribal names as marketing tools,” Benson stated.

“The Museum’s artifacts were engaged to illuminate the history of some of North America’s aboriginal medicines and their appropriation, to tell an important story in the history of Canada’s indigenous people, and to highlight a new aspect of the Museum’s collection. I wanted to use them as a catalyst to create insight into traditional aboriginal approaches and ideas regarding healthcare and medicines, both historically and today,” Benson concluded.

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Bio: Rebecca Benson is of mixed Scottish, German and Indigenous descent. She completed an Undergraduate Degree with Honours in Philosophy and Art History at the University of Guelph, and will be graduating with her Master’s in Art History from Queen’s University this November. While at Queen’s she was inspired by the work of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, was an Aboriginal QSuccess Mentor, and a member of both the Kaswenthwa Indigenous Knowledge Initiative and the Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Programming Working Group. She is passionately committed to the revitalization of indigenous culture and languages throughout Turtle Island.