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Contact: Pamela McLaughlin  
Phone: (315) 443-9788  
[pwmclaug@syr.edu](mailto:pwmclaug@syr.edu)

## **Critical Connections lecture on plastics by Robert Friedel**

Robert Friedel, Professor of Technology & Science at the University of Maryland, will present *Is it Real? Imitation and Style in the First Plastics* on September 26 at 5 p.m. in the Peter Graham Scholarly Commons on the first floor of Bird Library. His talk is the second in this year's Critical Connections Lecture Series organized by the Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) at Syracuse University Libraries.

Our identification of plastics with the imitative and the ersatz goes all the way back to the introduction of the first plastics in the 1870s. The first successful one, celluloid, rapidly came to be identified, for example, with the imitation of ivory, an effect that it could pull off successfully. Friedel's lecture presents a larger re-examination of our deep-seated perception of plastics as inherently artificial.

Robert Friedel has written several monographs in the history of technology, focusing largely on the nature of invention (*Pioneer Plastic*, *Edison's Electric Light*, and *Zipper: an Exploration in Novelty*). His latest book, *A Culture of Improvement: Technology and the Western Millennium*, is a wide-ranging survey of Western technology since the Middle Ages. In addition, he has published numerous articles and shorter works on material culture and on the history of technology, ranging from the history of materials to changes in the engineering profession. Friedel teaches courses at the University of Maryland in history of technology, science, and environment. Before coming to Maryland, he was a historian at the Smithsonian Institution and Director of the IEEE Center for the History of Electrical Engineering.

Friedel will also present a companion mini-seminar on September 27 from 10 a.m. to noon in the Special Collections Research Center on the sixth floor of Bird Library. The mini-seminar is free and open to the public, however advance registration is required. To register, contact Barbara Brooker at [bbbroke@syr.edu](mailto:bbbroke@syr.edu) or at 315-443-9763.

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