

The Renaissance Studies Program  
“Renaissance Cultures in Transit” Lecture Series  
Presents the sixth lecture by

# JULIE HOCHSTRASSER

*Circulating Visual Knowledge in the  
Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium:  
Maria Sibylla Merian’s Brush with the Truth*

**4:00 p.m., Friday, November 11, 2011**  
**College Arts and Humanities Institute (CAHI)**  
**1211 East Atwater Avenue (corner of Ballantine and Atwater)**



In the seventeenth century, the vast network traversed by the Dutch trading companies facilitated a truly global circulation not only of commodities, but also of people. In the process it enabled embodied, eyewitness accounts that conveyed important new knowledge about far corners of the earth. Maria Sibylla Merian’s pioneering field research in Suriname and the artwork with which she recorded it offer a prime example that made a major contribution to the history of natural science. Such visual imagery was uniquely capable of conveying certain information—yet analyzing the mechanisms of its transfer clarifies and qualifies significant dimensions of its accuracy, reliability, and value. This talk draws conceptual tools from historians and philosophers of science and cognition (including Bruno Latour—and a recent critique), to better apprehend this particularly visual mode of knowledge transfer—one of the key conduits for the circulation of culture in the early modern period.

Julie Hochstrasser is Associate Professor of  
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