**Belle of the Books**

A play by Juliane Hiam /Performed by Andi Bohs

**October 12-13, 2011, 7:30 p.m.**

**Actors Studio, Yulman Theatre, Union College, Schenectady, NY**

**Open to the public**

**Free but ticketed event; reserve tickets at the Yulman Box Office 518-388-6545**

**Box Office will be open one hour before the performance**

A one-hour, one-woman show based on the life of Belle da Costa Greene, Librarian to J.P. Morgan and first director of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City, 1905/06-1948.

**Background:**

Belle da Costa Greene, 1879-1950, was charismatic figure in the book and art world during the first half of the twentieth century and a world-renowned expert in illuminated manuscripts and incunabula. Her elegance and beauty enhanced her public image and relations with a wide variety of artists, intellectuals, and social leaders in the United States and Europe; combined with her professional position and expertise, they gave her a degree of influence and power rare for a woman of her day. Yet, while da Costa Greene’s development of the legendary collections of the Morgan Library involved her directly in the preservation of some of the best expressions of the human experience ever created, her own background was a carefully kept secret, and she destroyed nearly all of her personal records before her death. Only afterwards did it become widely known that her adoption of Portuguese ancestry covered her birth as the daughter of prominent African American Richard Theodore Greener, the first black student and first black graduate of Harvard, later the Dean of the Howard University School of Law. **Belle of the Books** explores the contradictions and challenges as well as the accomplishments of this remarkable woman’s life. It also reveals aspects of J.P Morgan’s life at the time he was dealing with the great economic “Panic of 1907.”

**Belle da Costa Greene at Union College:**

Among the correspondence of John Bigelow (Union Class of 1835) in the Special Collections of Schaffer Library are several letters from da Costa Greene to Bigelow from her early years at the Morgan. Her letters, which will be on display in the library during the run of the play, acknowledge Bigelow’s various gifts to the Morgan as well as the personal encouragement da Costa Greene received from Bigelow as she undertook her new role there. As part of a celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of Schaffer Library at Union College in the fall of 2011 (which is also the centennial of John Bigelow’s death), **Belle of the Books** is being performed on campus with residencies by the playwright and the performer and with campus-wide discussions of the themes suggested by the play. **Co-sponsored and produced by the Department of Theater and Dance and Schaffer Library.**

**Other Contributing Programs and Departments:**

*Africana Studies; Breazzano House; Economics; English; History; Modern Languages; Friends of the Union College Library; Office of Campus Diversity; UNITAS; Women’s and Gender Studies*

**Previous Performances of the Play:**

- Ninth Annual Summer Play, Ventfort Hall, Lenox, MA, June-September2010 [Premiere, under the title *Revels and Revelations*]
- Harlem Renaissance Festival, Metropolitan Playhouse, New York City, January 2011