We are particularly pleased to present the work of Richard Hamwi, chair of the Art Department, not only within this fine catalog but also in the companion solo exhibition Journey, running from December 1, 2011, to January 8, 2012, at the Freedman Gallery. As a distinguished member of our faculty, it is meaningful and important to share the work of this successful and practicing artist with our students and academic community as well as our art patrons. The presentation of Dr. Hamwi’s work in this solo exhibition enhances our long-standing tradition of quality and historical importance as a premiere art gallery in the region.

This collection reunites Dr. Hamwi’s early works done in preparation for his dissertation with the most recent work completed during his sabbatical in the fall of 2010 and the summer of 2011. Vibrant watercolors and torn-paper collages comprise the bulk of this exhibition and demonstrate his mastery of color and composition.

We offer this publication in honor of Dr. Hamwi’s life’s work as an artist and art educator and in celebration of Albright College’s designation by Newsweek as one of the “Top 25 Most Artistic Colleges.”

Andrea E. Chapdelaine, Ph.D., Provost
David M. Tanner, Director, Center for the Arts
There is a palpable refined hybridity to Richard Hamwi’s paintings. Throughout his career, he has gracefully combined two seemingly opposed worlds: one, of traditional naturalism and the other, abstraction. Positioned between artistic influences as diverse as Winslow Homer, Andrew Wyeth, Morris Louis, Paul Jenkins and Richard Diebenkorn, he has, for more than three decades, built a substantial body of work that expresses his interest in the dynamic interactions and relationships between color and form, representation and non-representation.

At his core, Hamwi is a skilled colorist who has consistently pushed the boundaries of his medium. In addition to his exploration of color, the artist has been highly innovative and has broken free from the traditional limits of “watercolor on paper.” In his free-form, dynamic collages such as the crisply cut and geometrically grounded Chime (1983), and more recently, Downstream (2010), the artist enlists deconstructed elements from other paintings, which he carefully reconstructs in new compositions. Some of the shreds or pieces used to create these colorful collages retain their white edges, which both delineate and soften the relationships between colors and add an element of implied perspective to his abstract landscapes. In several of his recent paper collages, the layering, arranged on oblique angles, establish visual rhythms that suggest hills, mountains and sky. Intricate patterns, formed by the intermingling of both watercolors and inks, suggest trees and geological formations.

Works such as Sandslope (1983) and Rotunda (1983) are built up through pointillist-inspired brushstrokes that elicit the distinctive textures and patterns of woven textiles. Here, line is implied through tiny dabs of the brush. The overall impression is not of hard edges defined by bold contrasts of color but of quiet undulation and gently billowed forms. The delicacy of his technique permits the viewer to interpret the forms as rippling water, waving fields or rippling sand.

While Hamwi has always been interested in exploring dualities and juxtapositions in his work, his more recent paintings make the point even more explicitly. His pairings of smaller sheets of paper joined together to make a whole composition are ablaze with color and seem to the viewer, a window, or more appropriately, a portal, into another realm. This peep-hole into another world is especially true of Simple Gifts I (2011), a composition that implies rather than demands a reading as a conventional landscape with discernible terrestrial and heavenly realms. The visual implication is that the Fauve colors, including brilliant green hues, enriched by Hamwi’s technique of adding ink to his watercolors to achieve a depth and saturation not possible with the watercolors alone, represent the earthly landscape, while the saturated orange and red “sky” looms above, contained by the swirling purple cartouche or circular framework.

In many of his recent paintings — including some arranged as triptychs — the concentric circles inscribed on the sheets do not always align precisely in either color palette or the angle of the arc. Vortex II (2010) is one such painting. In it, the joined half circles — suggesting a sunset or rainbow reflected in water — are defined by the movement of his brush, and reveal the artist’s enduring interest in gesture and repetition. The origins, perhaps, of the artist’s exploration of the mismatched union of two sides of the composition can be traced to much earlier paintings such as Rotundus (1983), where Hamwi achieves a central line by shifting his color palette mid-stream. This technique also adds a layer of depth to the painting, with one half-circle cloaked in an implied shadow.

While Hamwi has transitioned from works characterized by the precision of hard-edge abstract forms beginning in the late 1970s, to much more painterly expressions enriched by vibrant colors and alluring elements of naturalism in recent compositions, the dual nature of his approach to painting has remained consistent. The artist has found a harmonious balance between color and form, between the real and the imagined, that has enduring appeal and visual potency.

Scott Schweigert, Curator of Art and Civilization, Reading Public Museum
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My approach to painting and collage explores variations on themes derived from nature and experience. Each image evolves from a feeling or concept, which asks to be communicated visually.

My primary visual concerns are the relationships among shape, tone and color. The interaction of these elements is the primary focus in my work.

I also find inspiration in the work of other artists as the result of the originality of the image, the sense of color, the formal clarity, the calligraphic expressiveness, or the compositional structure. As a teacher, I find that there are times when my students' work is inspiring as well.

The use of collage often provides the means by which I am able to find more meaningful formal relationships. I have the same sentiment as Matisse, who said, "Collage is drawing with scissors."

That I maintain a sense of adventure is central to the life of my work. I find challenge and joy in creating images that may imply sources of inspiration, such as landscape, architecture, music and poetry.
Leama, 1979, 14"x11"
(The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., Permanent Collection, on loan to exhibit)

Rising, 1979, 14"x11"
(The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., Permanent Collection, on loan to exhibit)

Baby Blue, 1980, 24"x24"
Whirlwind, 1983, 24"x24"

Sanddune, 1983, 24"x32"
I have lived with Chime since 1986. At that time, a friend recommended attending a one-man show at a university gallery in the Lehigh Valley. The artist was Richard Hamwi. It was the first time that I had seen Richard’s work. With my initial look at Chime, I was transported. The aesthetic pleasure I derived from his image, the shape and movement and color, drawn in a unique paper collage construction, would have been enough to capture me. But what I saw in the work conceptually challenged my very idea of how to visually depict unseen space and time. Waves of tonal air leapt from the canvas. I purchased the painting on the spot and in the ensuing 25 years, it has always had a place of primacy in my home. It has never failed to cause comment. It has never failed to thrill and inspire. To me, Chime remains a perfect visual representation of swirling music on the wind.

David Richards, A.W.S., September 2011
Convergence, 1987, 32"x24"

Nest, 1989, 22"x22"

(Collection of Dr. Carl Djerassi, on loan to exhibit)
Vines of Indigo, 1990, 24"x32"

Overflow, 1990, 4"x32"

Unfolding, 1991, 24"x32"
Sandtrails, 1992, 24"x32"

Island Moors, 1992, 24"x32"

Distant Radiance, 1992, 24"x32"
Valley, 1993, 18”x24”

Vermont, 1993, 24”x18”
Blue Mountain Lake, 2007, 30"x37"

Joy, 2007, 30"x37"

From a Distance, 2009, 37"x30"

Nocturne, 2009, 37"x30"
BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., Richard Hamwi received a bachelor of arts degree cum laude from Queens College, CUNY, a master of arts from the University of New Mexico, a master of fine arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a doctorate from the Pennsylvania State University.

His first one-person exhibit in New York City was in 1976 at the Parsons-Dreyfuss Gallery. Since then he has had more than 30 solo exhibits including galleries and museums in NYC, Washington, D.C., and State College, Pa. His work has also been shown extensively in juried group exhibits including “Art of the State: Pennsylvania, 2005,” State Museum of Pennsylvania; The Chautauqua National Juried Exhibition; Rocky Mountain National Watermedia Exhibition; “The Art of Drawing,” Staempfli Gallery, NYC; “American Abstract Drawings: 1930-1987,” a traveling exhibition organized by the Arkansas Arts Center and “Works on Paper: College,” at the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Hamwi’s work is included in several permanent collections including the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; The Phillips Collection; and The Italian Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

He has had residencies at several artists’ colonies including the Yaddo Colony, the Millay Colony and the Vermont Studio Center.

Hamwi has written papers on various aspects of the teaching of studio art and art education, which have been presented at national conferences.

His academic career includes teaching at the Pennsylvania State University, Cumberland College, Mansfield University, Mercyhurst College and his current appointment at Albright College in Reading, Pa., where he is chair and associate professor of art.

A special thanks to those individuals and organizations who loaned artwork to the exhibition: Dr. Carl Djerassi, San Francisco, Calif.; David Richards, Palmer Museum of Art, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa.; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian American Art Museums, Washington, D.C. Thanks also to Ms. Heidi Derstler and Mr. David Tanner for their thoughtful input relative to the design of this catalog.

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Back cover: Simple Gifts II, 2011, 28”x34”