

PEYTON WRIGHT

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JAMES HILLEARY and the Washington Color School

For immediate release: June 4, 2012

Peyton Wright Gallery is pleased to announce "James Hilleary and the Washington Color School" an exhibition featuring the work of James Hilleary along with Washington Color School members Tom Downing, Paul Reed and Gene Davis.

The exhibition commences with an opening reception on **Friday, July 7th, 2012** from **5:00 to 8:00 p.m.**, and continues through **August 1st, 2012**.



No. 58B Coptic Series
Acrylic on canvas, 1965-1966, 48" x 38"

Hilleary's education was interrupted by the advent of World War II and three years of service in the army. Following the war he returned to his architectural studies and eventually established his own practice. The possibility of a career as an artist was never a serious consideration.

Architecture and art are closely related disciplines and Hilleary never lost his early interest in drawing and painting. His father had studied painting with C. Law Watkins at the Phillips Collection and the art that Hilleary had been exposed to at that venerable institution left a lasting impression. Always interested in the artists of his day, Hilleary had aspirations to

Born in 1924, James Hilleary is a native of Georgetown, Washington, D.C. Despite his vocation as a practicing architect he has had a sixty-plus year career as an artist. He studied at the Catholic University of America in Washington, receiving his degree in 1950. Best known for his paintings in oil and acrylic, he has produced an extensive body of works on paper as well as sculptures in plexiglass. Hilleary lives and works in Bethesda, Maryland.

The influence of Hilleary's father, who was both an amateur artist and musician, played a significant role in his early life and in his youth he gave serious thought to becoming a professional pianist. An interest in architecture eventually came to the fore but



Grey Ground No. 115
Acrylic on canvas 1970, 57" x 84"

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No. 93
Acrylic on canvas, 1972, 64" x 64"

become a serious collector but lacked the finances to acquire work by the painters whose work he admired. Much in the manner of the academic model of an earlier era, he began to emulate their work in his own studio, steadily developing his confidence and technique. Hilleary's efforts were rewarded when he realized that he had executed a painting of genuine originality. Inspired by this breakthrough he decided to dedicate himself to the development of his personal style.

Hilleary recalls that "Living in the suburbs and busy supporting a family, I was somewhat isolated from the city [Washington, D.C.] art scene and was completely unaware of the art school that Leonard Berkowitz and his first wife founded as a gathering place for emerging artists. I am sure that attending the school would have hastened my development."

Dispiriting though such isolation may be, it likely worked to

Hilleary's eventual benefit. In 1960 his paintings came to the attention of Adelyn Breskin, Director of the Baltimore Art Museum, who pointed out that Hilleary's independent development paralleled that of the group that became to be known as the Washington Color School. Following on the heels of the New York-based Abstract Expressionist movement, in the late 1950s the Washington Color School artists were beginning to dominate the local art scene and to gain significant national recognition. Hilleary began to make contact with various of the Color School artists, several of whom (Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, and Howard Mehring among them) were represented at the Henri Gallery in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1967 the gallery relocated to 21st Street in Washington, near the Phillips Collection, and Hilleary became the architect for the renovation of the building. He had his first solo exhibition at the Henri in 1968, thusly launching what Hilleary referred to "an unplanned and unexpected second career."

Hilleary has exhibited his work steadily ever since, and in 2003 a forty-year retrospective of his work was presented at the Edison Place Gallery in Washington, D.C. Acknowledging the artist's early musical aspirations, Donald Kuspit wrote of that exhibition, "Hilleary's abstract paintings have their sophisticated place in its ["musical abstraction's"] history. Indeed, they civilize the primitive musical painting with which 20th century abstraction began, making it harmonious with no loss of drama. Inner conflict is unresolved in Kandinsky's visual music—from the beginning, abstract painting was an emotional breathing space in an everyday world which had none—but Hilleary's visual music resolves it in the act of revealing it, which is why music is said to be healing."

For more information, please contact:
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