

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**HALE WOODRUFF'S MONUMENTAL TALLADEGA MURALS
TO TOUR NATIONALLY**

*Murals to be Restored by and Presented at High Museum of Art, Atlanta;
First Time Murals Will Ever Leave Talladega College*

*“Rising Up: Hale Woodruff’s Murals at Talladega College” Will Provide Fresh Look at
Murals Depicting Key Moments in African American History*

ATLANTA, February 23, 2011 – The High Museum of Art, in collaboration with Talladega College in Alabama, today embarked on a two-year project to restore, research and exhibit Hale Aspacio Woodruff’s renowned Talladega murals. Commissioned in 1938 to both commemorate the 1867 founding of Talladega College and celebrate its success as one of the nation’s first all-black colleges, the murals have been on continuous view at the college since their installation in the lobby of Savery Library.



The Talladega murals, which are considered among Woodruff’s greatest achievements, will undergo conservation at the Atlanta Art Conservation Center under the auspices of the High Museum of Art and will then be presented to a national audience for the first time. “Rising Up: Hale Woodruff’s Murals at Talladega College” will be on view at the High from June 2 to September 2, 2012, before traveling to the Indianapolis Museum of Art and other museums to be announced.

Comprising six monumental canvases arranged in two cycles of three, the vibrant murals portray heroic efforts to resist slavery as well as moments in the history of the college, which opened in 1867 to serve the educational needs of a new population of freed slaves. The first cycle depicts the uprising on the slave ship *La Amistad*, the trial that followed and the subsequent freedom and return to Africa of the captives on that ship. The companion murals show themes of the Underground Railroad, the founding of Talladega College and the construction of Savery Library, for which the murals were commissioned. The restoration process will address the effects of aging on the works.

The exhibition at the High Museum of Art will include works that span Woodruff’s career, with a particular focus on his important work as a muralist. In addition to the Talladega murals and studies, this exhibition will feature examples of Woodruff’s other mural commissions as well as smaller-scale paintings he made while in Mexico, where he went in 1936 to study mural painting with Diego Rivera. The project also explores Woodruff’s impact on the arts and the opportunities he provided for artists of color in his role as the first chair of the newly established art department of Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University) from 1931 to 1946. The exhibition project will be accompanied by a catalogue that will include essays on the artist, the murals, Talladega College and American mural painting in the decades surrounding the Talladega project. A descriptive photo essay on the findings of the conservation work will

also be featured. After the murals are restored and exhibited nationally, they will return to Talladega College in 2013.

“Preserving and exhibiting these murals holds a particular relevance for the people of Atlanta,” said Michael E. Shapiro, the High’s Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr. Director. “Hale Woodruff was of central importance to the burgeoning art scene here in the ’30s and ’40s and an integral figure in the history of public art in the Southeast. Seeing Woodruff’s newly restored Talladega murals in the context of his other works will be a significant experience for both local and national audiences.”

“This is a very historic event for Talladega College, not only getting the murals restored, but to share them on tour throughout the country in the next two years,” stated Dr. Billy C. Hawkins, President of Talladega College. “The tour will give the institution great exposure and help in our fundraising and recruiting efforts.”

Hale Aspacio Woodruff

Hale Aspacio Woodruff (1900–1980) was born in Cairo, Illinois. He studied art at both the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis and the Fogg Museum of Harvard University. Woodruff contributed to the development of African American art not only as an artist, but also as a distinguished arts educator. Woodruff’s first mural project was a collaboration with Wilmer Jennings in 1934. The four-panel mural, titled “The Negro in Modern American Life: Agriculture and Rural Life; Literature, Music, and Art,” was part of a public works project and a teaching project that involved both Woodruff’s students and a local junior high school. In 1935, Woodruff worked on Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals for the Atlanta School of Social Work. Between 1931 and 1946, he served as the first chair of the newly established art department of Atlanta University. During the summer of 1936, Woodruff studied mural painting in Mexico under the mentorship of Diego Rivera. In 1946, he became a teacher at New York University, where he taught art for more than 20 years until his retirement in 1968. During the mid-1960s Woodruff and fellow artist Romare Bearden were instrumental in starting the Spiral Group, a collaboration of African American artists working in New York. The Studio Museum in Harlem presented a retrospective of his work titled “Hale Woodruff: 50 Years of His Art” in 1979, and the High presented “Hale Woodruff in Atlanta” in 2004, the first solo exhibition of Woodruff’s paintings in Atlanta since his death in 1980.

Exhibition Organization and Support

“Rising Up: Hale Woodruff’s Murals at Talladega College” is organized by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, in partnership with Talladega College, Talladega, Alabama. This exhibition is made possible by generous support from American Express. The conservation project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

High Museum of Art

The High Museum of Art, founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association, is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 12,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists and is distinguished as the only major museum in North America to have a curatorial department specifically devoted to the field of folk and self-taught art. The High’s media arts department produces acclaimed annual film series and festivals of foreign, independent and classic cinema. In November 2005, the High opened three new buildings by architect Renzo Piano that more than doubled the Museum’s size, creating a vibrant “village for the arts” at the Woodruff Arts Center in midtown Atlanta. *For more information about the High, please visit www.High.org.*

The Woodruff Arts Center

The Woodruff Arts Center is ranked among the top four arts centers in the nation. The Woodruff is unique in that it combines four visual and performing arts divisions on one campus as one not-for-profit organization. Opened in 1968, the Woodruff Arts Center is home to the Alliance Theatre, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art and Young Audiences. *To learn more about the Woodruff Arts Center, please visit www.woodruffcenter.org.*

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Image: Hale Aspacio Woodruff (American, 1900–1980), “Scenes from the Underground Railroad,” 1940, oil on canvas, overall: 72 x 120 inches.