



Released February 24, 2011

## MSCC to Host George Hunt Art Exhibition; Opening Reception Set for March 4

“Back to Arkansas,” an art exhibition by nationally-renowned painter George Hunt, will be unveiled Friday, March 4, at Mid-South Community College.

The College will host an opening reception, 5:30-7 p.m., in the Donald W. Reynolds Center for Educational Excellence on the South Campus. There is no admission fee, and everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend.

Presented by the Rockie Smith Endowment for the Arts and MSCC, the exhibition is sponsored by Papa John’s Pizza (Jana and Philip Neri), Fidelity National Bank, and Ford of West Memphis.

Regular exhibition hours will begin on Monday, March 7, and will be 7:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.

Monday-Thursday and 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Friday. Viewing hours may vary during the college’s observance of Spring Break (March 21-26), so call (870) 733-6722 for the most accurate scheduling information. The exhibition will continue through Friday, May 13.

“George Hunt is acknowledged as one of the most important African-American artists in the South, and his colorful work is well known throughout the region and the



nation,” said Diane Ayres, College Events Coordinator. “He has spent his life learning, watching, growing, creating, and translating his artistic visions into striking, unforgettable images.”

Hunt paints from the his Southern African-American experience, especially the folk tradition, civil rights movement, the mythic heroism of Black manhood, and, of course, blues music and culture.

“My work is always characterized by images which relate my emotions and experiences,” Hunt said. “My style is expressionistic. I love color and I am always experimenting with it. I try to use bright, primary, powerful colors. I also love to create different textures, textures that are not only visual, but are tactile as well.”

Born in rural Louisiana, Hunt showed a keen eye for the arts at an early age. His grandmother noted that he had a special power to “see things.”

The artist said he can’t recall a time when he wasn’t interested in the blues.

“Blues is the alpha and omega of American music,” he explained. “I started painting in response to the music around me. I was a sickly child, and my grandmother gave me crayons to keep me busy. I began painting chickens and such, but ended up painting what I heard.”

In addition to large doses of indigenous music, one of the things he saw was the civil rights movement, and that experience became a painting which eventually became a 2005 postage stamp as part of the United States Postal Service series, “To Form A More Perfect Nation.”

Hunt also earned recognition for his painting, “America Cares/Little Rock Nine” at ceremonies in Little Rock and Memphis. Originally commissioned for the Central High School Museum, the painting spent its first five years in the White House in Washington, D.C.

First Lady, Hillary Clinton, in a personal note to Mr. Hunt, wrote, “we are grateful that our visitors and staff have such a powerful image of hope and freedom to greet, inspire and inform them.”

In 2002, the U.S. Congress brought attention to America’s indigenous music by officially declaring 2003 as the “Year of the Blues.” Hunt was named the Official Artist

for the “Year of the Blues,” and he created a new body of work, “Conjuring the Blues, The High Cotton Tour,” for a national tour.

Hunt appeared at great length in many segments of the 13-part “Year of the Blues” PBS radio series telling vivid stories of his experience with blues music, rooted deep in the rural south. Later in 2003, the Blues Foundation honored him with the coveted “Keeping the Blues Alive” award.

Hunt grew up in Texas and Hot Springs, Ark., and enrolled at the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff after high school. He attended UAPB on a football scholarship and studied art as a career. After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1960, Hunt did postgraduate studies at the University of Memphis and at New York University.

He spent three decades teaching art education and coaching at George Washington Carver High School in Memphis before dedicating all of his time to painting. He now works in a studio overlooking world-famous Beale Street.

Hunt’s name and images have become synonymous with The Memphis In May Beale Street Music Festival. For 15 years, he has been selected to paint an original blues image for the festival posters.

His work has become definitive images for posters and promotion of many other blues festivals around the country including Chicago Blues Festival, Telluride Blues Festival, the Ultimate Rhythm & Blues Cruise, and the Arkansas Blues Festival. Hunt was selected to create a painting for the 25th Anniversary of the Blues Foundation’s prestigious Handy Awards.

The painter’s work has been exhibited in both individual and group shows nationally, and it is part of the permanent collections of museums as well private collectors such as Steve Wynn, Anthony Quinn, Eddie Murphy, Steven Seagal, Justin Timberlake and David Simmons. He has been featured and written about in many publications.

For information on the Hunt exhibit or other special events at the college, please call Diane Ayres at (870) 733-6777.