



HOLLY SEARS:  
HUDSON RIVER EXPLORERS

ISBN 978-094365142-2

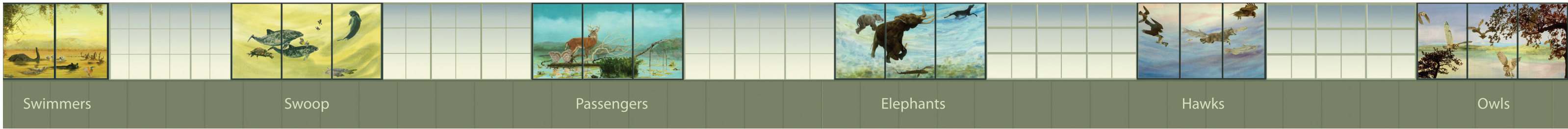
50995>



9 780943 651422







SOUTH OVERPASS

# HOLLY SEARS: HUDSON RIVER EXPLORERS

Catalog printed on the occasion of the laminated art glass installation of *Hudson River Explorers* at Metro-North Railroad Tarrytown Station, New York and the exhibition *Holly Sears: Hudson River Explorers* at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York, June 9 - October 14, 2012

Essay by Bartholomew F. Bland © Hudson River Museum

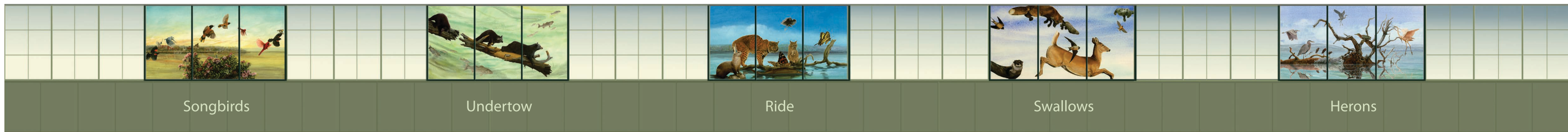
© 2012 Holly Sears www.hollysears.com

ISBN 978-0-943651-42-2

front and back cover - *Hawks*, South #5  
 top - South Overpass Layout  
 bottom - North Overpass Layout

MTA ARTS FOR TRANSIT AND URBAN DESIGN \* HUDSON RIVER MUSEUM

NORTH OVERPASS



# About Hudson River Explorers



Elephants, South #3 image 10.25 x 20.5 inches, paper 13 x 21.875 inches giclee print, edition 18 2012

*In the fall of 2010, I was commissioned by the MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design, to create the artwork for eleven windows to be installed in the newly renovated Overpass corridors at the Metro-North Railroad Tarrytown Station in Westchester County, New York. Funding for the project was provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. I did extensive research on the plants and animals in the Hudson Valley, and the Hudson River itself, and then developed the artwork for each individual panel. These original paintings were digitally reproduced, enlarged, combined, and then layered together to create the laminated art glass panels that were fabricated by Tom Patti Design. Each art glass window is comprised of an object or "creature" layer, and multiple atmospheric background layers, fused together to create the final piece.*

**Exhibition of original artwork at the HUDSON RIVER MUSEUM, June 9 - October 14, 2012;  
Laminated art glass installation at MNR Tarrytown Station - Summer 2012;  
Limited edition prints from the multi-layered original artwork created Summer 2012**

*Hudson River Explorers* is inspired by this great river's majesty and eloquence, and informed by the region's rich history of discovery, exploration, and travel, and features six above-water and five under-water riverscapes, each populated by groups of creatures and flora. The scenes are fantastic, magically real, yet firmly grounded in naturalism. From east to west, the panels in each overpass create the experience of one day – from dawn to dusk – with light, color and subject. The plants and animals depicted in the various panels are largely native species, many threatened or endangered, who guide an array of exotic visitors through the watery realm.

Each commuter's trip down the length of the corridor is one of discovery, and an analog to the explorers' experience depicted in the scenes. The viewer will experience the passage of time through the transition of light and color in the sky and river, and will be intrigued as well by the plants and animals (likely and unlikely) that inhabit each scene. Children (and those with an adventurous spirit) in particular will be drawn to the imagery, and it is hoped that these scenes will in some way help instill an awareness of and a sensitivity to the natural world. The inclusion of exotic species in this local geography enhances interest in the native species and speaks to the possibility of our dreams and imagination.

*The flora and fauna in Hudson River Explorers includes: Asiatic Elephants, Bobcats, common Cat, Polar Bears, Black Bears, Green Frog, White-Tailed Deer, Ducks, Eurasian Kingfisher, Harbor Porpoise, Spotted Turtle, Yellow-Breasted Chats, Shad, Karner Blue Butterflies, Spatterdock and Pickerelweed, African Elephant, Lined Seahorse, Sturgeon, common Horse, Peregrine Falcons, Osprey, baby Chick, Coyote, Red-Tailed Hawk, Catfish, Barn Owls, Short-Eared Owls, Great Horned Owl, Red-Winged Blackbirds, Chickadees, Blue Jay, Baltimore Orioles, Cardinals, Nuthatch, Goldfinch, Common Yellowthroat, Black Bears, Striped Bass, River Otter, Bobcats, Sturgeon, Crow, Swallowtail Butterfly, Painted Lady Butterfly, Barn Swallows, River Otters, Red Fox, Great Blue Herons, Reddish Egret, Green Heron, Great Egret.*





*Passengers, South #3* image 10.25 x 20.5 inches, paper 13 x 22 inches giclee print, edition 18 2012  
*Songbirds, South #1* 60 x 112 inches, laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov



**Project Notes:** Laminated glass, the material used to fabricate the images for the Tarrytown commission is an amazing medium. Not unlike the oil glazes I use in my paintings, glass seems to emit its' own inner luminescence, and gives the material a living, breathing presence. Many approaches to creating imagery are available when working with laminated glass, but I was particularly attracted to the possibilities that could arise from the layering of grounds and imagery within the laminate structure. This inspired me to create the images I used to make the glass as multiple paintings. As the project progressed and I worked with the fabricators, the way that I had originally envisioned the separate layers had to change somewhat to fit the parameters of the project, and even though the layers were not used as I had originally planned them, this approach still yielded very interesting results. And aside from the project itself, I produced a group of paintings that I would not have typically made in more normal circumstances. These eleven paintings, in oil on primed paper with the creatures floating on stark white backgrounds, were exhibited at the Hudson River Museum. The separate, atmospheric layers were done as watercolor paintings, many of which were abstract compositions (a return to my early forays as an abstract artist). Also, for several years I had been thinking of producing giclee prints where the final image would be comprised of multiple printings or layers, thus creating a gestalt image in the final print. So when I began working on this commission all this pondering on methodology began to manifest itself in this project. Since the complete images only exist in the final laminated glass pieces I decided to also put together the images into limited edition giclee prints.

- Holly Sears



# A Hudson River Menagerie

by **Bartholomew F. Bland**

Director of Curatorial Affairs, Hudson River Museum

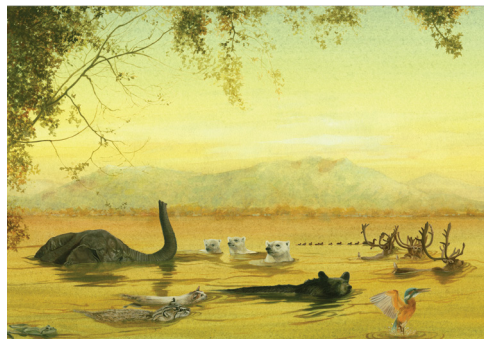
Commuting is the opposite of exploring. Predictable and routine, it would seem to offer few opportunities for surprise. But a dash of drama has been added to the prosaic with the recent installation of magnificent laminated glass artworks at the Tarrytown train station, in suburban Westchester County. Now every commuter's trip to New York City or points up and down the Hudson Line becomes a place of discovery and a notable point of arrival and departure. The traveler journeys, in two separate overpasses north and south, through the passage of time and its sequences of changing light and color, as he sees Sears' fanciful menagerie of animals, native and exotic, all set within the backdrop of the Hudson River Valley's glorious scenery.

Holly Sears has designed 11 laminated art glass windows collectively titled *Hudson River Explorers* as part of the 2011-2012 renovation of the Metro-North Railroad Station in Tarrytown. This installation marks the 25th artwork placed in the Metro-North system. Tom Patti Design fabricated the laminated art glass panels to her specifications. Sears created an extensive series of studies for the project that includes more than 40 background watercolors. Eleven final studies in oil on paper, mounted on panel show the animals against plain white backgrounds. The Hudson River Museum displayed this final grouping in the summer of 2012 in conjunction with the opening of the Tarrytown Station artworks.

Public art is a notoriously difficult genre in which to work. The laminated art glass that the MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design chose for several of the Metro-North station renovations allows for considerable artistic latitude but contains compositional challenges. The five-inch mullions that run through the windows of Sears' composition demand a bold design that withstands and complements the strong elements of the station's architecture. Its relatively narrow passageways make the art difficult to observe from a fully panoramic viewpoint, prompting Sears to incorporate myriad interesting details that make her art viewable near and far, and with strong impact.

While beauty has been critically suspect in much of the contemporary art world, it is an essential element in public art commissions where work is subject to repeated viewings that ideally should not lead to eventual irritation, but rather uplift and counter the rigors of the day. Public art should be bold, hold attention, and beautiful enough to raise the spirit. Sears embraces this aesthetic wholeheartedly. Her work accords with that of a number of contemporary artists inspired by Hudson River School painters and by the flora and fauna painted by John Audubon, Pierre-Joseph Redouté and Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

Sears designed her backgrounds to evoke a range of feeling for the Hudson Valley without being direct representations of a single site. As the artist said, "I didn't want to do a literal translation when the magnificence of the landscape is all around you." The location of Tarrytown's station, at the point where the Hudson River widens into the surrounding vista, creates a panoramic counterpoint from the windows of the Overpass. Sears did not want to reproduce existing paintings



*Swimmers, South #1* - sequence showing preliminary paintings, oil on paper and watercolor, giclee print, laminated art glass and art glass detail photographs, Holly Sears





*Owls, South #6* image 10.25 x 21 inches , paper 13 x 21.875 inches giclee print edition 18 2012  
*Swoop, South #2* image 10.25 x 19.125 inches , paper 13 x 21.25 inches giclee print edition 18 2012

of this most famous of America's river valleys. She consulted many books of Hudson River landscapes, though, because she wanted to convey the variety of the Valley's terrain as well as to expand the experience of being here and traveling here.

In Sears' original plan for the cycle, she considered conveying not just the times of the day but creating four distinct seasons as well, since she has long had an interest in seasonal painting cycles. Instead, to make a visually cohesive work, she chose to create more generalized views that could be interpreted in a multi-season context, highlighting some seasonal variety, but concentrating the viewer's focus on the changing times of day. Within these changing backgrounds, the very lushness of her landscapes and animals suggests historical "tree of life" Edenic archetypes.

Although each panel reads as a complete composition, Sears depicts the animals in all the panels heading, seemingly, in the same direction as the morning commuter, painted animals and real people sharing a sense of urgent propulsion forward, melding the commuter's own sense of hurry with the art. The 11 panels divide into two distinct sets, six in the South Overpass and five in the North Overpass. Although Sears' format is a panoramic, cohesive whole, her individual panels can stand alone and are installed with their backs to the south, ensuring the maximum amount of light most of the day. Because the panels are translucent and not artificially backlit, the glowing light shining through them changes with the lengthening day and cloud cover. A spectrum of color emanates from the panels, yellow to pea soup green, pure blues to the blue gray and violet of dusk, so that the commuter seeing the backgrounds change hue, is reminded of time passing from dawn to dusk, even as he observes the fauna changing in each panel.







*Herons, North #5* image 10.25 x 20 inches, paper 13 x 21.5 inches giclee print edition 18 2012

### The South Overpass

The first panel in the South Overpass, *Swimmers* (page 6), is the sole diptych, rather than a triptych, made necessary by the complex geometry of the long hallway in which it is installed. The tree on the left of the composition forms a leafy pendant with the tree in *Owls* (page 8) at the other end of the hall with a similarly enclosing tree, a stylistic device used by many Hudson River artists to frame a picture and first developed by the 17th-century French artist Claude Gellée. The vegetation Sears drapes from the sky at the top of the panel is reminiscent of the wisteria that Louis Comfort Tiffany used in a number of his stained glass windows.

The framing creates a strong illusion of looking through a window that the mullions enhance. The window's almost shocking yellow is reminiscent of the golden haze in works by 19th-century Hudson River School painters such as Sanford Robinson Gifford. A phenomenon created by atmospheric conditions and one noted by other painters and writers, this yellow hue is a quality of the so-called "Indian Summer."

*Swimmers* is the most densely populated, and for the traveler mounting the staircase the sense of fantasy surprises because the first creatures Sears shows are an elephant and a trio of polar bears in the water, along with other more expected fauna of the area. The viewer is immediately cued to the idea that Sears will have interesting surprises to come, in the surrealist manner of Salvatore Dali.

While *Swimmers* is a fantasy interpretation of a Hudson River School painting, the second panel, *Swoop* (page 9), is a radical shift to an underwater level. The background becomes more painterly and abstract, the colors of proverbial pea soup, and the creatures are indeed those one would expect to see underwater.

The panel *Passengers* (page 4) introduces the blue background with an animal familiar to the local suburbanite, a deer, but one that is magically poised on water and surrounded by fantastical, huge butterflies. This panel, with its dead tree branches and perilously poised deer and butterflies as passengers on the log, creates a mood of uneasy stillness.

*Elephants* (page 3) is the single most dramatic panel of the south group. The elephants are abstracted and shadowed. Their huge forms seem to be devolving back into the water habitat of ancient mammals. While the elephant in the water in *Swimmers* is a surprise, these elephants, underwater, shock. In the way that Walt Disney created his sequence of famous flying elephants, Sears creates equally incongruous elephants that are at home with the sturgeon swimming below. While the elephants seem to be simply bobbing, the horse top right swims with strong forward movement, furthering the sense of hurry common to the viewing commuter. The presence of the dark horse is also a subtle tip of the hat toward the famous steed in Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," given Tarrytown's location. Sears plays with scale: while the sea horse appears tiny in comparison to the elephants, a quick check of proportion demonstrates that there is no sea horse as large as an elephant's leg.

In *Hawks* (cover), Sears blends streaks of blue gray and pink, so that whether the panel is in the sky or in the water is ambiguous. Predator meets prey, although each feigns disinterest as the animals hurtle forward. The coyote does the dog paddle and the hawks swoop, in water or air, toward the unknown. In a subtle pun, "flying fish" compete to keep up with flying hawks.





*Swallows, North #4* 15 x 29.125 inches oil on paper mounted on board 2011  
*Owls (Detail), South #6* 60 x 122 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov

Approaching twilight is the setting for *Owls* (page 8). Quiet compared to the frenzied rush of the animals in *Hawks*, this panel shows owls in the evening before launching their night flights to hunt. The owls, like nocturnal commuters, counterpoint rushing day travelers. The composition of the tree on the right brings this first cycle to a close, balancing the foliage scene in the first panel *Swimmers* and suggesting the romantic highlands of the Hudson Valley.

### The North Overpass

Birds have long been favorite creatures of artists because of their infinite variety and wide range of colors. In *Songbirds* (page 5) Sears creates a music-like rhythm punctuated with notes of color. The apex formed by Sears' birds is a composition common to Romantic painting: a pyramidal design that creates stability, here further supported by the heavily blooming bush. The background landscape is most suggestive of the cliffs of the Palisades that rim the Hudson. Birds of stunning hue illustrate the breaking dawn and awakens the commuter. Martin Johnson Heade, a second generation Hudson River School painter, showcases hummingbirds in his "Gems of Brazil" series, which Sears references with her many brilliant birds.

In *Undertow* (page 17), surrealism reappears: the bears are clearly out of their element, whether the background is river or sky. The logs have separated, the bears cling on to them, and the bass, seemingly smug in their own watery element, are nearly the size of the bears. There is a charming pun here about bears scooping salmon, since this panel clearly shows bass swimming freely in triumph over the bears. The sense of hurtling forward reappears again, suggesting to the viewer that panels in this cycle would make wonderful kinetic sculptures or scrolling panoramas.

*Ride* (page 14) forms a tableau of stillness. The animals are poised in a brief moment of quiet before acting. The butterflies have just landed, one of them riding the back of the sturgeon. All the animals wait for the crow, and when it lands, it will break the stillness of the others. *Ride's* composition is similar to *Passengers*, with its beautiful blue background and its native fauna, and both reference with their titles the traveler through the station.







*Ride, North #3* image 10.25 x 19.75 inches , paper 13 x 21.75 inches giclee print edition 18 2012  
*Ride (Detail), North #3* 60 x 113 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov

Stillness and action balances see-saw like throughout the panels, varying the rhythm and texture of Sears' work. Created late in the cycle, *Swallows* (page 12) introduces new compositional boldness. The animals appear ready to leap from the picture frame in a helter-skelter frenzy similar to that of crazed commuters running for a late train, suggesting a snapshot of action caught on the go. The deer bounds through the open sky, and the fox soars as though it has lost control of its moving forward. The panel is named after the smallest creatures of the composition, the swallows, because they are the only animals shown in their natural habitat, while the others are no longer land or water bound, but are being "swallowed" by the sky.

In *Hérons* (page 10), the final panel in the cycle, Sears returns to a quiet evening composition we saw in *Owls*. Perching and alighting, the birds symbolically enact what is poetically called "l'heure bleue," the quiet period just before dusk when calm reigns.

Animals attract and intrigue but the animals who inhabit traditional Hudson River School paintings occupy secondary place to the magnificence of the terrain. By contrast, in *Hudson River Explorers*, the animals are central, their place prominent in this ecologically attuned age. Despite the difference in focus, nearly 200 hundred years after Thomas Cole originated Hudson River School landscape painting, Sears is today's heir to the tradition she tweaks, as she mixes the plants and animals of the Hudson Valley with a menagerie all her own, drawn from her bright and discriminating imagination.

Bartholomew F. Bland

**Bartholomew F. Bland** is Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Hudson River Museum, where his survey exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues for the museum include *Paintbox Leaves: Autumnal Inspiration from Cole to Wyeth*; *Westchester: The American Suburb*; *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture* and the upcoming *The Panoramic River: the Hudson and the Thames*. Other recent projects include *American Dreamers: Reality and Imagination in Contemporary Art*, which appeared at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, Italy; *Susan Wides: From Mannahatta to Kaaterskill*; and *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, which is currently on a national tour. Bart has served on public art panels for the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority/Art in Public Spaces Program; New York State Council on the Arts; Westchester Arts Council; and the New York City Percent for Art Program.







North Overpass long views featuring -  
*Songbirds*, North #1 60 x 112 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov  
*Swallows*, North #5 60 x 117 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov  
*Undertow*, North #2 60 x 113 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Holly Sears





South Overpass long views featuring - *Elephants*, South #4 60 x 118 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov  
*Hawks*, South #5 60 x 100 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Michael Hnatov  
*Owls*, South #6 60 x 122 inches laminated art glass 2012 photograph, Holly Sears







#### HOLLY SEARS BIO

Holly Sears was born and raised in a small college town in the mountains of southwestern Virginia where she often explored the countryside with her father's Argus range finder camera, capturing the scenes that she found fascinating. She received a BFA and MFA in painting and lithography from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va. where she lived for many years. Sears moved to Brooklyn, NY in the early 1980's where she continues to live, work, and explore the waters in and around the city, and considers herself a New Yorker. Sears is known for her highly realized naturalist paintings of unnatural combinations of flora and fauna where she meticulously studies and examines her subjects and rearranges them into pointed, almost believable settings.

In the spring of 2012 Sears received *The Basil H. Alkazzi Award for Excellence in Painting*, and in 2010 she received a commission for the Metro-North Railroad Tarrytown Station, NY from MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design. Sears' work has been in numerous solo, two person exhibitions, and group shows in New York City and New York State along with exhibitions throughout the US, as well as the UK and Israel, including shows at the Hudson River Museum (Yonkers, NY), Herron Gallery (Indianapolis, IN), Virginia Museum of Fine Art (Richmond, VA), New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, Bergen Museum of Art and Science (Paramus, NJ), Wave Hill Glyndor Gallery (Bronx, NY), and the Art in Embassies Program, U.S. Department of State (Tel Aviv, Israel), Tria Gallery (New York, NY), Metaphor Contemporary Art (Brooklyn, NY), Joyce Goldstein Gallery (Chatham, NY), Ruth Siegel Gallery (New York, NY), Anderson Gallery (Richmond, VA), ROCA (Nyack, NY), Edward Hopper House (Nyack, NY), Kenise Barnes Fine Art (Larchmont, NY), The Gallery at Pfizer Learning Center (Rye Brook, NY).

Sears has taught art at the Herron School Art-IUPUI, Princeton University, the Printmaking Workshop, Virginia Commonwealth University, has given lectures about her work in various venues such as New York Academy, Southern Connecticut State University and Virginia Commonwealth University, is a three time recipient of the Virginia Center for the Arts fellowship, and is included in the collections of the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, the Bank of America, Sidney and Frances Lewis of Richmond, Va., American Telephone and Telegraphy, Illinois, among numerous other public and private collections.

#### MTA ARTS FOR TRANSIT AND URBAN DESIGN:

Since 1985, MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design ([mta.info/art](http://mta.info/art)) has commissioned public art that touches the lives of millions of city-dwellers as well as national and international visitors. As the MTA rehabilitates the subway and commuter rail stations in New York City and its suburbs through its Capital Programs, it uses a portion of the funds for the installation of permanent works of art. To date, Arts for Transit has installed more than 230 artworks that create unique visual links to neighborhoods that echo the architectural history and design context of the individual stations. Both well-established and emerging artists contribute to a growing collection of works that utilize the materials of the system—mosaic, ceramic, tile, bronze, steel, and glass. *Hudson River Explorers* marks the 25th installed artwork in the Metro-North system. The station was rebuilt as part of the MTA Capital Program with funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

#### HUDSON RIVER MUSEUM:

Overlooking the Hudson River and the Palisades, the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, NY ([www.hrm.org](http://www.hrm.org)) is home to contemporary galleries, Glenview, an 1876 Victorian home on the National Register of Historic Places, a Planetarium, and a permanent environmental learning gallery. Founded in 1919, the museum is dedicated to broadening the cultural horizons of its visitors through exhibitions and educational programming with interests that connect art, history and science. With a focus on art from the 19th to the 21st century and contemporary art, the Museum presents exhibitions throughout the year.

#### THANK YOU

My gratitude to Sandra Bloodworth, Amy Hausmann and Katherine Meehan from the MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design, for their guidance, oversight, energy, efforts and ideas with this marvelous and unique program; Tom Patti, Marilyn Patti, and Leo Quiles at Tom Patti Design for all their patient, diligent and insightful work in the fabrication of the laminated art glass panels; Michael Botwinick, Bartholomew Bland, Linda Locke, Jennifer Rabley and the Hudson River Museum for putting together a lovely exhibition of the original artwork from *Hudson River Explorers*; and my husband, Jim Luton, for continuing critical guidance and production support. It has been an adventure! - *Holly Sears*



*Swallows* (Detail), North #4  
60 x 117 inches laminated glass 2012  
photograph, Jim Luton

*Undertow*, North #2  
60 x 113 inches laminated glass 2012  
photograph, Michael Hnatov



