

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Celebrating a Century of Watercolor Frederic Whitaker and Eileen Monaghan Whitaker

2011 is an anniversary year for two distinctive artists, Frederic Whitaker, N.A. (1891-1980) and Eileen Monaghan Whitaker, N.A. (1911-2005) whose careers were synonymous with the development of American watercolor. Their work is to be honored in a special anniversary exhibit, *The Whitakers, the Southwest, and Mexico* at the Athenaeum Music and Arts Library in La Jolla, California from September 23 through November 4, 2011.

**Location:** La Jolla Athenaeum Music and Arts Library, 1008 Wall Street, La Jolla, CA 92037

**Dates:** September 23 – November 4, 2011

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The professional successes of artists Frederic Whitaker and Eileen Monaghan Whitaker, the first married couple to be elected to the National Academy of Design, are extensive, including exhibits, awards and recognition nationwide. The art historian, watercolor specialist, and former museum director and curator Donelson Hoopes, who describes watercolor as the ‘American medium,’ says of the Whitakers: “Each is truly an exemplary advocate for ‘the American medium.’”

About the Whitakers’ time in Southern California, the art critic, Robert Pincus writes: “Together, the Whitakers helped to further the climate for California as a lively center for watercolors. He applied his considerable gifts and range to figures, landscapes and architecture; Frederic had a great affinity for Baroque-inspired architecture, for which he could locate excellent sources in San Diego as well as Mexico. She established her own considerable role with keen intuition for pictorial design, a sharp eye for color and a poet's appreciation for the ordinary object, for nature, and for the human form.”

Often referred to as “Mr. Watercolor,” Frederic Whitaker won more than 150 awards for his watercolors, served as president of the American Watercolor Society for seven years, and organized and served on the boards of numerous other national and regional art societies. He was elected to the National

academy of Design in 1945 and went on to become vice president and chairman of the watercolor society, a job he took over from Andrew Wyeth. He was also a recipient of the Horatio Alger Award as “someone who rose from humble beginnings to make a significant contribution to society.” Frederic Whitaker’s paintings are found in major museums nationwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Fine Arts Museum in Boston.

Frederic Whitaker began his creative career at the age of sixteen as an artist for the W. J. Feeley Company, manufacturers of ecclesiastical metal ware in gold, silver, bronze and brass. He went on to great success in business even as he was developing into a most accomplished and recognized artist. In his essay about Frederic Whitaker in *Contrasts That Complement*, respected art critic and painter, Theodore Wolff, writes:

*For someone who spent the early years of his working life as a successful silversmith, Whitaker was wonderfully free and spontaneous in his watercolors. Or so it seemed. In actuality, the path from initial sketch and color study through detailed preparatory drawing to final application of paint, was as carefully planned and executed as a military campaign. Only Whitaker didn't want it to appear that way. As he said, "My aim in watercolor is to make something that looks absolutely effortless, as if I had left it wet and it had accidentally dried into a perfect picture."*

Eileen Monaghan Whitaker was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts and graduated from Massachusetts College of Art. Her work in watercolors began in the early 1950s and in 1953 she was elected to membership in The American Watercolor Society. In 1978 she became an Academician in the National Academy of Design, the second woman to be elected to the watercolor division. She won more than 80 awards for her paintings and created the illustrations for her book, *Eileen Monaghan Whitaker Paints San Diego*. Her paintings are in several museums, including the National Academy of Design in New York.

On Valentine’s Day in 1943, Eileen Monaghan, the young artist, met Frederic Whitaker, the established watercolor painter at an opening of his work in New York City. They married in 1950. In 1965, after being New Yorkers for sixteen years, the Whitakers moved to La Jolla, California. Their new regional identity made possible more frequent trips throughout the Southwest as well as to Mexico and these experiences are vividly represented in their work over the next 15 years and reflected in the upcoming exhibition, ***The Whitakers, The Southwest and Mexico***. After Frederic Whitaker’s death in 1980, Eileen Monaghan Whitaker added Guatemala to her travels, creating the largest

cohesive body of work of her long career. She continued to paint until her death in 2005 in La Jolla, CA.

Although she maintained membership in a variety of art societies, received many competitive awards, and was listed in a number of Who's Who publications, Eileen Monaghan Whitaker was uniquely independent in her painting. "I've never followed any rules in my work, never consciously thought about technique. Each painting is merely a result of trying to put on paper, with pigment, water and brushes, an image of the emotion that stirred within me the urge to create," she said in the book *Contrasts That Complement* by Jan Noreus Jennings.

The Whitaker Foundation was established as a non-profit arts foundation on October 28, 1987 to preserve and promote the work of Eileen Monaghan Whitaker and Frederic Whitaker. This mission was later expanded to include the promotion of watercolor as a medium and watercolor artists in general. The Whitaker Foundation has awarded money for prizes for exceptional watercolors in competitive exhibitions, including those of the National Academy of Design in New York. It has contributed funds to the Massachusetts College of Art and underwrote a watercolor exhibit at San Diego Museum of Art.

Since 1965, Syracuse University in New York has held the Frederic Whitaker Manuscript Collection, which has grown to include more than 100 paintings and documents. With Eileen Monaghan Whitaker's death in September of 2005, the remainder of Fred's papers and other memorabilia, as well as the nucleus of Eileen's life's work, was donated to Syracuse University.

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