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Award-winning and Globally Renowned Artist and Author Mary Whyte to Speak at Converse College's 2021 Commencement on May 23

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (April 19, 2021) – Award-winning and globally renowned American figurative artist and author Mary Whyte will be the 2021 commencement speaker at Converse College.

Known internationally for her watercolors of contemporary people, Whyte is also the author of seven books including *We the People: Portraits of Veterans in America*. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the Portrait Society of America's Gold Medal, the Carolinas Freedom Foundation's Freedom Award, and the South Carolina Governor's Award for the Arts, South Carolina's highest honor in the arts.

Whyte's works are in public, private, corporate, and university collections nationwide, and have been featured in numerous media outlets including CBS Sunday Morning, PBS, and NPR. Her work has been showcased in many international publications, including periodicals and books in China, Russia, France, Germany, Canada, and Taiwan. In 2013, Whyte was one of ten artists worldwide invited to travel to China and exhibit her watercolors at the Nanning Art Museum in Nanning, Guangxi.

"Mary Whyte's art provides an exquisitely rendered and poignant perspective on the American experience that touches the heart, head, and spirit of each person who sees it," said Krista Newkirk, Converse president. "Converse advances a culture of belonging and collaboration that ignites creativity, innovation, and transformation, and we are excited to recognize at our 2021 commencement Mary Whyte's leadership and contribution to art, education, and our collective sense of community as Americans."

In 2007, Whyte established the Mary Whyte Art Educator Award to highlight a visual art teacher in the state of South Carolina who has demonstrated superior commitment to their students and to their craft. The award is accompanied by a prize of \$5,000 and is administered and presented annually by the South Carolina Art Education Association.

"It is my great honor to be the commencement speaker for such an innovative and distinctive college," said Mary Whyte. "Converse graduates represent the very best of America's leaders and, in them, our country's path forward holds a brighter and more promising future."

In 2019, Whyte founded the Patriot Art Foundation as a means to honor and inspire veterans through the arts as well as to educate the public about patriotism and leadership. What began as a touring exhibition of paintings called *We the People: Portraits of Veterans in America* soon turned into an initiative dedicated to giving veterans themselves a means of self-expression and creativity. Through hands-on workshops and online classes, the mission of the PAF is to better serve veterans through art and to tell their stories.

Whyte received the National Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Medal of Honor and the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) Women in the Arts Award in 2020. The DAR Medal of Honor is the most prestigious award given by the organization. The recipient must have made unusual and lasting contributions to our American Heritage by selfless giving to their community, state, country, and fellowman. Former recipients include Barbara Bush and Tom Brokaw. The Women in the Arts Award was created to recognize women who have exhibited excellence in their chosen field beyond mastery of technique. Innovative design work, featured exhibitions, publication, research, and technique development are major components of the strict criteria for this award.

Converse's 2021 commencement ceremony for both undergraduates and graduates will take place on Sunday, May 23 at the Spartanburg High School Stadium. In-person attendance is limited to Converse graduates and their families. A live stream of the ceremony will be available beginning at 8:00 A.M. on May 23 on www.converse.edu.

About Converse College

Converse empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers. Effective July 1, 2021, Converse will acknowledge its university status under the name Converse University.

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