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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jack Gallery is pleased to release unique limited edition prints of the “Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas” sign hand-signed by designer Betty Willis and photographer William Hannapple

Launch event featuring Willis and Hannapple planned for June 21st from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Jack Gallery Mandalay Bay

LAS VEGAS - After almost 50 years, lovers of Las Vegas will at last be able to walk away with fine artwork of the famous icon that greets visitors at the southern end of the Las Vegas Strip, complete with the signature of its designer. S² Art Group/Jack Gallery is delighted to announce the release of limited edition prints of the fabled “Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas” sign, hand-signed by designer Betty Willis and image photographer William Hannapple. The artwork is mixed media consisting of a 12-color giclée plus 4-color serigraphy. The prints are available at Jack Gallery at Mandalay Bay, Jack Gallery at the Venetian and the S² Art Atelier located at Charleston and Main. **To celebrate the release of this unique work of art, Betty Willis and William Hannapple will be in attendance at Jack Gallery at Mandalay Bay on June 21 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.**

Each of the 975 prints of the composite photograph was created through classic lithographic and serigraphic printing techniques, resulting in a soft, vibrant and three-dimensional appearance. The photographic image was taken by William Hannapple, a close friend of Willis’, in 1998, and features the famous sign against the backdrop of a dark twilight and the busy lights of Las Vegas Boulevard. Hannapple, who regularly exhibits his photographs of Las Vegas landmarks, is no stranger to design himself as he helped to design the sign for the Las Vegas Convention Center.

Betty Willis was working at Western Neon in 1959 when she designed the iconic sign at the request of salesman Ted Rogich, who asserted that the city needed a welcome sign to usher in the bright and busy neon age. In addition to the necessary neon component, Willis worked a number of memorable elements into her design, such as a distinct and enduring diamond shape and seven silver dollars as homage to Nevada’s repute as the “Silver State.” “We knew the sign would be recognizable because of the odd shape,” Willis said in a 2005 interview for the *New York Times*. “We wanted people to remember the town and come back. The circles were expensive. So we put in a lot of them.”

After the 25-foot-tall sign was completed, Willis and Rogich sold it to Clark County for \$4,000. At that time, the sign was located in a desolate area well south of much of the vibrant activity of Las Vegas Boulevard. Today, the sign stands on a median awash in the glow of the millions of lights for which the city is famed.

Desiring that the image be used freely for objects as diverse as coffee mugs and T-shirts, Willis never copyrighted the sign. As a result, the money gained from the sale of these limited edition prints constitute the first money that Willis has ever received for the work since she originally sold the design. This is surprising, especially considering her important contribution to Las Vegas' famed neon legacy. Willis, who grew up in a Las Vegas without neon, remembers encountering the uniqueness of the medium while traveling to California with her father, Steve Whitehead, who became the city's first tax assessor. "I saw all this flashy neon and said, 'Dad, why can't we have all this flashy neon, too?'" she said in an interview for the *Las Vegas Sun*.

Willis often refers to her most famous creation, which is easily one of the world's most famous signs, as "the little sign that could." Situated on a street that often changes appearance drastically within the space of a few years, Willis' sign is still standing after many of the Strip's legendary casinos have fallen and scores of other neon signs have found their way into the city's neon "boneyard." That longevity may also be reflective of its creator, who, at 85, has witnessed Las Vegas' rise from a tiny desert community to the bustling entertainment capital of the world. Her stamp can be found elsewhere in the city as well: Willis also created the sign for Las Vegas' Moulin Rouge Hotel, the nation's first desegregated hotel and casino, and various ads for the Flamingo, Thunderbird and Rancho.

A world leader in limited-edition fine art lithography, Jack Gallery exhibits paintings, works on paper and meticulously crafted hand-signed lithographs by internationally renowned artists.

High-resolution images are available for use in print publications.

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