THE ARTIST’S COMPELLING desire to draw what he or she observes of life, particularly the kind of drawing found in sketchbooks, has a parallel in the writer’s urge to describe. As Christopher Isherwood put it: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.”

Drawing has been part of my life since early childhood. However, it was not until I moved to New York City from the Midwest, at the age of twenty, to study at the Art Students’ League that my sketchbook habit began in earnest. Life as I had never seen it unfurled about me, and I wanted to draw all of it, especially the people: street vendors, gaggles of elderly women and men convening on benches in Riverside Park, children swarming over José de Creeft’s Alice in Wonderland sculpture in Central Park while their nannies looked on, restaurant patrons, theater-goers, subway riders, the homeless, the forgotten, the famous—I recorded them all.

My first efforts were tentative, self-conscious, and clumsy, but I continued to carry a small sketchbook and fountain pen every day, determined to create a visual diary of New York as I experienced it. Twenty-five years later, I look at these drawings with great pleasure from time to time, to see what they now reveal to me.

Because pages bound within the covers of a sketchbook imply a certain privacy, it is here, perhaps, more than anywhere else that an artist’s work

1 Christopher Isherwood, Goodbye to Berlin (New York, 1963), 1.
reveals secrets, either consciously or unconsciously. One finds an artist’s response to the physical world reflected in the very choice of subject matter and how it is interpreted. It is also possible to gauge an artist’s training and degree of comfort with the chosen drawing materials, to see a record of small successes and failures. There is something tender and vulnerable about peering into these personal works, and for that reason it should be accorded due respect. That is also precisely why sketchbooks are so fascinating to study: they provide an intimate view of the person whose work they contain.

In this vein, I would like to discuss several drawings in the sketchbooks of Cecilia Beaux from the perspective of one who has maintained a diligent sketchbook habit for over two decades. The drawings are from two sketchbooks in the Pennsylvania Academy’s collection. Sketchbook #2, dated roughly 1879–86, contains landscape, nature studies, and figure compo-
Fig. 2. Beaux, Landscape inscribed “Roadside, August 4.” Graphite on cream wove leaves, from Sketchbook #2, ca. 1879–91.

Sketchbook #3 contains drawings apparently made “on the spot” during her 1888 summer in Concarneau, France. It was during this trip that Beaux broke off her relationship with Edwin Swift Balch, thus enabling her to commit herself more deeply to a life in art.

One of Beaux’s landscape studies, probably drawn during a summer trip to Washington, Connecticut, depicts an expansive view of rolling hills, typical of the area (fig. 1). A conifer stands out in the left foreground, against a sensitive tonal rendering of the trees and hills behind. One imagines the artist enjoying her surroundings, the sunshine, perhaps a cool breeze, the scent of pine, while happily, yet diligently, working on this sketch. This type of drawing, which evokes the tranquility of the moment, is unhurried,

2 This sketchbook may also have been used by members of her family, as several pages suggest a hand other than Beaux’s.
Fig. 3. Beaux, Landscape at Concarneau. Graphite on buff wove leaves, from Sketchbook #3, 1888.

meditative, and serene. It stands in contrast to the pressure of drawing in an urban environment, such as New York's Central Park, where the passing scene is filled with people, and one must quickly capture the moment before it vanishes.

Another small nature study worth noting is inscribed by the artist "Roadside, August 4" (fig. 2). It amused me that Beaux noted the day but not the year of this sketch. It is a useful habit to note the location and date, and any other thoughts or information about the experience. While filling page after page, book after book, with drawings, I have discovered the benefit of this habit only years later, when the memory of a moment I swore I would never forget has faded. By noting at least the place and date, the artist can identify the sketch not only for herself, but for others who one day may encounter it.

"Roadside" is similar in handling to the landscape study in figure 1, and remarkable for its small scale. The entire drawing is held together by sensitive application of tone, which is varied to describe foliage and create a sense of light striking the surface of leaves and wildflowers. Everything is in
perfect balance. In like manner, a landscape drawing in the Concarneau sketchbook also achieves this balance (fig. 3). Here, one is led into a beautiful, assured drawing via bold, confident strokes in the foreground, a calm middle ground, and just enough background detail and tonal variation to keep one's eyes traveling across the page.

Also in the Concarneau sketchbook is a drawing of a man and woman in traditional Breton costume (fig. 4). Although clearly made in haste, it has a confident, lively line. One sees Beaux's interest in recording the unusual dress of her subjects in the two views of the gentleman in his charming hat and billowy shirt and vest. There are, unfortunately only a few drawings in the Concarneau sketchbook. I would like to see more pages like this one.

In contrast, the ink over graphite drawing of a man in a beret and wooden shoes is stiff, unsure, and tentative (fig. 5). The drawing, which is comprised of many short, broken lines that are not descriptive of form, betrays a lack of knowledge of anatomy, a failing noted by her Parisian art teacher, Tony Robert-Fleury, in his comment about Beaux's figure drawing: "[she] should have showed the construction of the figure as well as the outside forms
A figurative artist can learn much by looking at a drawing like this. It serves as a reminder of the importance of honing one's observational and drawing skills, and deepening one's understanding of structure and anatomy. Cecilia Beaux worked diligently to become a successful painter, and her sketchbook correctly, that is, not treat the body like a shell with an irregular surface."³ A figurative artist can learn much by looking at a drawing like this. It serves as a reminder of the importance of honing one's observational and drawing skills, and deepening one's understanding of structure and anatomy. Cecilia Beaux worked diligently to become a successful painter, and her sketchbook

³ Cecilia Beaux to her family, [Feb.–Mar., 1888], Cecilia Beaux Papers, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art (hereafter, Beaux Papers, AAA).
Centered on a page in Sketchbook #2 is a graphite drawing of a man, head in his hands, seated in a rocking chair (fig. 6). Is this a gesture of weariness, contemplation, or grief? Surrounding this figure are four charming drawings of young women in classical gowns. Beaux obviously drew the male figure first, then the female figures around him. They do not seem to relate in any way to the central male figure, except that they occupy the same page in this sketchbook. Perhaps we will never know what compelled Beaux to draw these figures, and that is part of the charm of this page. As it stands, the male figure appears to have been bedeviled by this quartet of muses.

I could not help but note the dearth of nude studies among the sketchbooks and drawings by Beaux in the Academy's collection. Before studying in Paris, Beaux had very little training in life drawing and did not choose to study anatomy with Thomas Eakins. Could it be that her strict
Fig. 7. Beaux, Bust portrait of an unidentified man in three-quarter view. Charcoal on buff paper, after 1905. 23 7/16 x 18"  

and somewhat sheltered upbringing made her uncomfortable with the nude as subject matter? Did this contribute to her decision to focus exclusively on portraits? Beaux wrote to her uncle Will Biddle in 1888: "People seem to me more interesting than anything else in the world and that is the bottom of my success in heads." Her choice of the words "people" and "heads" is very telling. It was not the human form, but individual people, with distinct

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4 Cecilia Beaux to William Biddle, Aug. 10, 1888, Beaux Papers, AAA.
characteristics and personalities, that appealed to the artist. She once described a Breton model, Marguerite, as "the broad, rough type, eyes very far apart. She looks like a cow, but when you come to draw her you find her 'bony structure' sound and fine and that she is distinguished."

In his lovingly written book, *The Art Spirit*, Robert Henri stated: "Everything depends on the attitude of the artist toward his subject. It is the one great essential." Cecilia Beaux's portrait drawings are very accomplished and facile. Her attitude toward a subject is evident in several virtuoso head studies in the Academy collection, all executed in charcoal with sensitivity, sureness, and economy. In *Unidentified Man in Three-Quarter Profile* (fig. 7), the drawing is held together by the broadly massed shaded area of the head. Its simplicity is the very thing that gives evidence of the artist's experience and joyful facility. A few carefully placed lights reflecting off the white shirt of the sitter help to describe structure and facial expression.

On the other hand, Beaux's portrait drawing of Theodore Roosevelt, in the Academy's collection, and that of Henry James as well (see Burns, fig. 1), betray the effort, as opposed to the joy of the effort seen in *Unidentified Man*. Her anxiety and excitement at these wonderful opportunities are palpable in the use of short broken strokes to describe form. Her tension about the session with James is recorded in her diary: "... too occupied to draw and also to express. Hope for better tomorrow when he comes again."

It is both a joy and a privilege to study the Academy's wonderful collection of sketchbooks, drawings, and oil studies by Cecilia Beaux. As an ambitious and independent woman, she made her way as one of the most successful portrait artists of her time. These private drawings are evidence of her commitment, conviction, and determination to take the road less traveled.

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5 Cecilia Beaux to her family, Sept. 24, 1888, Beaux Papers, AAA.
7 Beaux papers, AAA. See Burns in this volume for the full text of Beaux's comments on the James sittings.