

Dickinson/Walser: Pencil Sketches

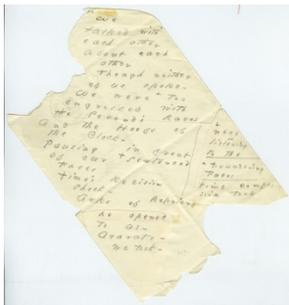
November 15, 2013–January 12, 2014

Drawing Room

Opening Reception: Thursday, November 21, 6–8pm

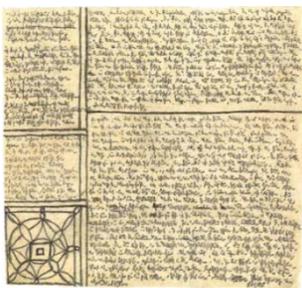
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November 14, 2013



Emily Dickinson, *We | talked with | each other*, c. 1879. Amherst Manuscript # 514; Franklin # 1506; Johnson P # 1473. 1 sheet, Pencil on envelope, 5 1/10 x 7 9/10 inches (13 x 20 cm). Courtesy the Emily Dickinson Collection, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

New York – The Drawing Center presents *Dickinson/Walser: Pencil Sketches*, bringing together Emily Dickinson’s original poem manuscripts and Robert Walser’s microscripts for the first time in an art museum setting. Although Walser, who was born shortly before Dickinson died, was most likely unaware of the latter’s work, both writers were obsessively private as well as peculiarly attentive to the visuality of their texts. Walser wrote in tiny, inscrutable script on narrow strips of paper using an antiquated German alphabet that was long considered indecipherable. Only recently have these scripts been shown to consist of early drafts of the author’s published texts. Similarly, Dickinson fitted her multifarious poetic fragments to carefully torn pieces of envelope, newspaper and stationery that were discovered among her posthumous papers. (Walser once referred to himself as a “clairvoyant of the small,” and this description might apply to Dickinson as well.) In both cases, the form of these texts affects the language itself as both writers crafted their words in response to the form at hand. Rarely in literature has the manner in which words are made been so integral to the way in which they might be read.



Robert Walser, *Microscript 215*, October– November 1928. Pencil on paper, 4 1/16 x 3 13/16 inches (10.3 x 9.6 cm). Courtesy Robert Walser-Zentrum, © Keystone / Robert Walser-Stiftung Bern.

Dickinson/Walser: Pencil Sketches includes a selection of over 80 works culled from the Swiss National Library/Swiss Literary Archive, which houses Walser’s original manuscripts and first editions, and The Emily Dickinson Collection at Amherst College. In addition, photographs of Walser and a facsimile of the one extant daguerreotype of Dickinson will be displayed on the gallery walls. Among the many works in the exhibition by Walser are: *Microscript 9* (1932), written on a card received from a literature editor at the newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* who wrote to

inform Walser that two prose texts would be published; *Microscript 337* (1926), a story written on a sheet of a tear-off calendar that was later published in the newspaper *Prager Presse*; and *Microscript 54* (c. 1930–33), written during the period of Walser's voluntary residence in the Waldau Sanitarium near Bern. Dickinson's works include poems and letters written on pieces of envelope such as *Twas Later When the Summer Went* (c. 1873) and *The Ditch is Dear to the Drunken Man* (c. 1885); and scrap paper such as *If It Had No Pencil* (c. 1861), a passionate poem about wearing a pencil down to a stub by writing so many unrequited letters to a man she loves. Curated by Claire Gilman, Curator.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830–1886) was an American poet born in Amherst, Massachusetts. She produced almost 1,800 poems and letters throughout her mostly solitary and reclusive life. After studying at the Amherst Academy for seven years, she spent a short time at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary before returning to her family home in Amherst. With a few exceptions, her poetry remained virtually unpublished until after her death, brought to the attention of a wider audience through the efforts of her family members and close acquaintances. Dickinson's poems are unique for the era in which she wrote; they contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation. Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality, two recurring topics in letters to her friends.

Robert Walser (1878–1956) was born in Switzerland and worked as a bank clerk, a butler in a castle, and an inventor's assistant while beginning what was to become a prodigious literary career. From 1899 until he was misdiagnosed as a schizophrenic in 1933 and institutionalized for the rest of his life, Walser produced nine novels and more than a thousand stories. Though he enjoyed limited popular success during his lifetime, his contemporary admirers included Franz Kafka, Hermann Hesse, Robert Musil, and Walter Benjamin. Today he is acknowledged as one of the most important and original literary voices of the twentieth century, his work the subject of essays by W.G. Sebald, J.M. Coetzee, William Gass, and Susan Sontag. In the latter years of his career, Walser struggled with a paralyzing writer's cramp that he combated by composing his texts in a miniscule pencil script written on small slips of paper that he carefully cut to size. This handwriting was so small that his guardian Carl Seelig mistook it for a sort of secret code. After his death in 1956 while out on a solitary walk, a collection of these papers were found among his belongings and preserved, but many years passed before they were transcribed and published.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Saturday, November 23 from 3–5pm

Book launch for *Emily Dickinson: The Gorgeous Nothings*, co-published by New Directions and Christine Burgin. *The Gorgeous Nothings* is the first full-color publication of Emily Dickinson's envelope writings in facsimile from her visually stunning manuscripts.

Remarks by Marta Werner and Jen Bervin, editors, at 3:30pm. Renowned poet and Dickinson scholar Susan Howe will introduce the editors and, following their remarks, esteemed Robert Walser translator Susan Bernofsky will speak about her work with Walser and New Directions/Christine Burgin.

Thursday, December 5th at 6:30pm

Susan Howe and composer David Grubbs will perform a selection from their celebrated multidisciplinary concert *Frolic Architecture*.

Monday, January 6th at 6:30pm

Poet Charles Bernstein will introduce Robert Grenier, who will present and interpret a series of his handwritten “drawing poems.”

PUBLICATION

To accompany *Dickinson/Walser: Pencil Sketches*, The Drawing Center will produce a fully illustrated edition of the *Drawing Papers* series that will include an introduction by curator Claire Gilman and an essay by artist Josiah McElheny.

CREDITS

Dickinson/Walser: Pencil Sketches is made possible by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Consulate General of Switzerland in New York, and New York Council for the Humanities.



ABOUT THE DRAWING CENTER

The Drawing Center is the only not-for-profit fine arts institution in the country to focus solely on the exhibition of drawings, both historical and contemporary. It was established in 1977 to provide opportunities for emerging and under-recognized artists; to demonstrate the significance and diversity of drawings throughout history; and to stimulate public dialogue on issues of art and culture.

HOURS & ACCESSIBILITY

Gallery hours are Wednesday-Sunday 12pm–6pm, Thursday, 12pm–8pm.

The Drawing Center is wheelchair accessible.

AT THE DRAWING CENTER

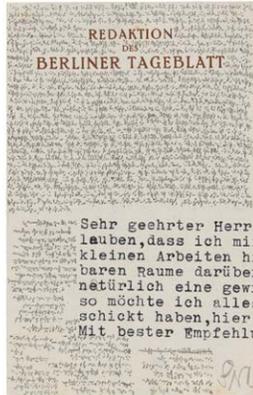
<i>Drawing Time, Reading Time</i>	November 15, 2013–January 12, 2014
<i>Dickinson/Walser: Pencil Sketches</i>	November 15, 2013–January 12, 2014
<i>William Engelen: Falten</i>	November 22, 2013–January 12, 2014
<i>Ferran Adrià: Notes on Creativity</i>	January 25–February 28, 2014
<i>Deborah Grant: Christ You Know It Ain't Easy!!</i>	January 25–February 28, 2014
<i>Rashaad Newsome: FIVE (The Drawing Center)</i>	March 6–11, 2014
<i>Andrea Bowers and Suzanne Lacy (title TBD)</i>	March 15–26, 2014
<i>Lebbeus Woods: Architect</i>	April 16–June 15, 2014
<i>Len Lye: Motion Sketch</i>	April 16–June 15, 2014

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Images Available for Reproduction

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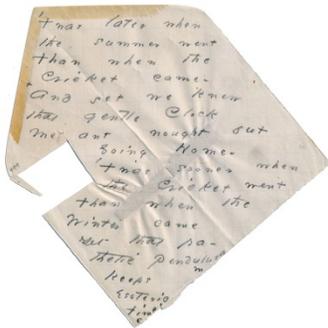
Robert Walser, *Microscript 107*, September–November 1928. Pencil on *Berliner Tageblatt* stationery, 4 5/16 x 2 3/4 inches (10.9 x 6.9 cm). Courtesy Robert Walser-Zentrum © Keystone / Robert Walser-Stiftung Bern).



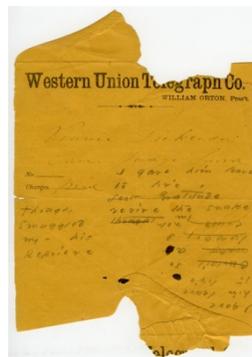
Robert Walser, *Microscript 131*, April 1926. Pencil on envelope from the Ernst Rowohlt publishing house, Berlin, 6 11/16 x 5 1/16 inches (16.9 x 12.8 cm). Courtesy Robert Walser-Zentrum



Robert Walser, *Microscript 419*, 1927–1928. Pencil on envelope, 5 3/4 x 3 9/16 inches (14.6 x 9 cm). Courtesy Robert Walser-Zentrum © Keystone / Robert Walser-Stiftung Bern.



Emily Dickinson, *'Twas later when | the summer went*, c. 1873. Amherst Manuscript #499; Franklin #1312; Johnson P #1276. 1 sheet (partial slit envelope), Pencil on envelope, 4 7/10 x 5 7/10 inches (12 x 14.5 cm). Courtesy the Emily Dickinson Collection, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.



Emily Dickinson, *Glass was | the Street — / It came his | turn to beg* Amherst #s 193/194; Franklin #s 1518/1519; Johnson P #s 1498/1500, c. 1880. 1 sheet (slit envelope), Pencil on envelope (writing on recto and verso), 5 1/2 x 7 9/10 inches (14 x 20 cm). Courtesy the Emily Dickinson Collection, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections



Emily Dickinson, *Not to send | errands by John*, c. 1880, Amherst # 865; Johnson PF # 93, Pencil on envelope, 3 3/10 x 2 4/5 inches (8.5 x 7 cm). Courtesy the Emily Dickinson Collection, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.