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.

*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 Nothing, co-published by New Directions and Christine Burgin. The Gorgeous Nothing 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

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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.