Performing the Female Artistic Self: Layers of Identity in Cecilia Beaux's Portraits

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Performing the Female Artistic Self: Layers of Identity in Cecilia Beaux's Portraits

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Abstract

As a successful woman painter in *fin-de-siècle* America, Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) represented a notable exception, an unexplored creature belonging to a shifting social and cultural scenario that continuously redefined assumptions on personal identities and public roles. American artists strove to construct their public façade as well as their art in compliance with dominant modes of thought, vision, and behavior. Working in alliance with the critics, they sought to respond to public expectations on the nature of artistic identity as much as on their adherence to culturally approved notions of masculinity, femininity, and Americanness. This thesis will explore how Beaux navigated the late-nineteenth-century re-definition of artistic identity by way of a consistent and visible performance of femininity. The critical reception of her work will be re-considered with respect to the gendered language used to code it as "feminine," and to the tendency of assessing it by way of comparison with the "masculine" work of John Singer Sargent (1856-1925). The critical construction of Beaux's paintings as "feminine" will be understood as an intended response to the artist's conscious enactment of a feminine-evoking pictorial mode. I will analyze how Beaux forged a prominent public façade by incorporating in her outward appearance and behavior a set of traits that latched on to shared notions of exemplary womanhood. More specifically, I will argue that Beaux manipulated the protocols of fashionable portraiture both formally and thematically. *Mother and Daughter* (1898) and *Portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel* (1902) provide particularly interesting cases to witness Beaux's enactment of a feminine pictorial sensitivity. In the portraits, Beaux detected and recorded the sitters' specific psychological and social circumstances, extrapolating from their individualities larger narratives of female experiences that are embedded in, and also augmented by the distinct operations of self-aggrandizement entailed in each commission.

Γένοιο οἷος εἶ.

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Introduction

This thesis explores some of the ways in which Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) negotiated her womanhood in presenting herself as a female portraitist in the Gilded Age. It focuses on the ways in which Beaux created an individual idiom for her art out of recognition and manipulation of cultural elements that structured contemporary notions of femininity.

While efforts have been made to study Beaux as the object of masculine-dominated cultural activities of the turn of the century, less interest has been directed towards Beaux's role in situating herself consciously and strategically within these same activities. This thesis wants to bridge the different components that went into Beaux's formation of an artistic female individuality, looking for the way in which she imaged herself as a woman artist primarily through the formal and thematic syntax of her portraits.

Beaux lived in and painted an era of intense transformations of identities- social identity, gender identity, artistic identity. At a time when selfhood and subjective experience were dispersed in the "unreality of modern existence," a series of strategies were activated with the desire to recuperate a centralized, homogeneous consciousness for the modern individual and for culture at large. An emphasis on individualism emerged as a compensation to the lack of an external structure of moral authority; definitions of gender roles were altered and increasingly systemized to counteract the blurring of traditional assumptions on femininity and masculinity both in the private and public realm.[1] Similarly, artistic identity underwent a process of

[1] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5-6.

reorganization and authorization aimed to steadily incorporate the figure of the artist in this renewed system of coordinates.

As a character of the art world, Beaux engaged fully in the dynamic between artists and critics that largely framed the restructuring of artistic identity at the turn of the century. She actively participated in the construction of her own image, embracing in her outward appearance a set of traits that reached out to contemporary notions of exemplary femininity. In turn, she lent herself to be structured by these representations, incorporating desires and expectations on her artistic personality in an uncompromising statement of individuality: in this way, she both facilitated and exerted control over attempts to regulate her presence in the intensely mass-mediated public arena of *fin-de-siècle* America.

Beaux's autobiography *Background with Figures*, a romanticized account of the artist's personal history and forty-year-long artistic career, provides with a first set of evidence to look at how she consistently and strategically represented herself as a uniquely gifted, intellectually independent and socially prominent woman painter.[2] Some scholars have approached Beaux's biography in the context of the shifting social dynamics that brought to the professionalization of a large number of women at the turn of the century. Tara Leigh Tappert has analyzed Beaux's personal "choices" and the role of her familial situation in determining her rise to success; more recently, Alice A. Carter has pieced together the available amount of information on Beaux's professional and private life, drawing upon descriptions of her contemporaries and the artist's personal records to reconstruct the profile of a strong-willed, ambitious New Woman.[3]

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[2] Cecilia Beaux, *Background with Figures: Autobiography of Cecilia Beaux* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), http://archive.org/details/backgro00beau.

[3] Tara Leigh Tappert, "Choices - The Life and Career of Cecilia Beaux: A Professional Biography" (Ph.D. dissertation, The George Washington University, 1990), American Doctoral Dissertations; Alice A. Carter, *Cecilia Beaux: A Modern Painter in The Gilded Age* (New York: Rizzoli Intl Pubns, 2005).

Beaux's artistic career has been also framed in terms of the artist's connection to her hometown Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where she served as the first female faculty member.[4] It was this institution, in fact, that originally took pains to resurrect the artist's reputation by organizing the 1974 exhibition "Cecilia Beaux: Portrait of an Artist."[5] More than thirty years later, a retrospective exhibition conceived by Sylvia Yount for the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, largely contributed to the repositioning of Cecilia Beaux as a prominent figure of American art, and an artist fully involved with the shaping of the aesthetic trends of late-nineteenth-century international portraiture. In the accompanying catalogue, a series of essays addressed the stylistic and thematic aspects of Beaux's paintings, tracing their conscious connection with the cultural dynamics of *fin-de-siècle* America.[6]

The critical construction of Cecilia Beaux was also the object of systematic analysis inasmuch as it seemed to provide an exemplary case of the workings of late-nineteenth-century strenuous redefinition of artistic identity. Sarah Burns has examined trends and motifs in the critical reception of the artist, identifying in the tendency to read her works as "feminine" a desire to define her art as inherently second-rate. For Burns, the emphasis on femininity as an indelible form of inferiority is ultimately thematized in the recurrent tendency of placing Beaux in comparison, or rather in competition, with John Singer Sargent (1856- 1925).[7] The critical assessments of her works have been considered arbitrary in their consistent attribution of feminine values; the repeated use of a gendered language has been read as a way to remind the

[4] *Cecilia Beaux: Philadelphia Artist*, in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 124, no. 3, (2000). JSTOR.
[5] Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., and Elizabeth Bailey. *Cecilia Beaux: Portrait of An Artist* (Washington, D.C.: Museum Press, Inc., 1974).
[6] Sylvia Yount, et al. *Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter* (London: California University Press, 2007).
[7] Sarah Burns, "The 'Earnest, Untiring Worker' and the Magician of the Brush: Gender Politics in the Criticism of Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent*," Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1992): 36–53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360487; Sarah Burns, "Outselling the Feminine," in *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 159-185.

woman painter of her womanly nature, and thereby reaffirm her subordination to the male genius. Art critics, however, systematically and analytically looked at the surface of Beaux's paintings and beneath for signs whereby to define her art as "feminine." They ascribed to her pictorial marks, their material characteristics and emotional impact, a set of connotations- sympathy, charm, sensitivity- that coincided with the most desirable traits of womanhood. In generating their attribution, they were enforcing categories of meaning-making that cannot be reduced to the perpetuation of demeaning stereotypes on women's art, nor can be simply traced back to a systematic attempt to categorize and neutralize Beaux as 'feminine.'

Critics were primarily seeking to articulate verbally a series of signs that existed visually. Since gender largely structured discourses on individuality, society, and culture at large, works of art could be given a meaningful role in reality based on the relation they seemed to hold with notions of masculinity and femininity. Critics relied on the widespread understanding of gender-specific attributes to conflate the visual aspect of works of art with the private identity of their maker: this operation gave artists a tool to shape themselves and their work in a way that aligned them with culturally-sanctioned values, and ultimately determined their success.

The argument of this thesis relies the assumption that nineteenth-century art critics were right: Beaux's paintings are intentionally and screamingly feminine. In restoring credibility to this element of the work, I replicate their semiotic approach, separating the layers compiled in Beaux's portraits to find signs of the feminine feeling that run through them. Despite the hopeless sexism of the critics and their failure to disguise a certain anxiety towards a successful female artist, they were consciously and accurately responding to a series of inputs that Beaux was generating in her paintings, and whose correct reading she carefully controlled. This thesis

analyzes how Beaux created a recognizable badge of feminine artistic identity by sensitively responding to the specific self-representational desires of her female sitters.

To what extent did Beaux manipulate the socially- and culturally-constructed inferiority of her womanhood in creating a strategic model of artistic identity? How did the construction of a recognizably feminine pictorial idiom work to accommodate diverse circumstances of commission and simultaneously advance Beaux's own proclamation of identity? In posing these questions, my aim is to focus on Beaux as a maker of images that reflected on specific phases of female experiences, engaged with the larger dynamics active in the formation and imaging of ideas on womanhood, and that are also continuous with the statement of artistic individuality the painter generated for herself.

Griselda Pollock's study of the American expatriate Mary Cassatt has informed my understanding of the layers of identity inscribed in Beaux's portraits. Pollock restores the feminine element of Cassatt's works by examining them in terms of "pictorial analysis of human relations," and specifically of mother-child relations.[8] In Cassatt's pictures, the figures are subtracted from the objectifying and sentimentalizing gaze of the viewer, and made present in their psychological interiorities; their "psychological processes" become visible through the staging of specific spatial organizations and compositional arrangements, as well as through an expressive manipulation of oil, pastel, and etching. [9] Cassatt participated in the revolution of formal languages of modernism, and moved away from conventional ways of representing women: in this way, she foregrounded her own exclusive knowledge of the world of female experiences, creating images that reflected on specific social and historical situations.

[8] Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 20.
[9] Ibid., 16-23.

As a portraitist of the Gilded Age elite, Cecilia Beaux coded her own investigation of human interiorities in the protocols of fashionable portraiture. Despite Beaux's depictions of mother and daughter conform to the emphasis on surfaces and material beauty of the portraiture of her age, they are equally designed to perceptively record the psychological and social circumstances of the sitters. Beaux did experiment with the conventions of the genre, creating non-commissioned "figure pictures" in which feminine types are isolated and their psychological dimension thematized. Even when painting to accommodate the requests of her patrons, however, she performed her female identity in legible pictorial terms, creating a stylistic trademark that granted her recognizability and suited the sensitive understanding of the human experiences of her subjects.

As a "most womanly woman," Beaux created a public façade of intensely performed femininity that harmonized with the character of her works.[10] Chapter two analyzes Beaux's cultivation of a feminine appearance and manners that conformed to sanctioned types of modern womanhood, and also followed the contours of the most up-to-date models of artistic identity. Chapter three departs from the recognition of Beaux's performance of womanhood in her lived experience to identify how it translated into the pictorial logic of specific paintings. In this chapter, Beaux's *Mother and Daughter* (1898) [Figure 4] and *Mrs. Roosevelt and daughter Ethel* (1902) [Figure 5] are analyzed in terms of a complex arrangement of performances of feminine identity: that of her sitters both as separate individuals and mutually related-actors, who drew on culturally-sanctioned forms of womanhood in forging their public self-representation; and that of Beaux, who superimposed to the subjects' performance of identities the enactment of her own artistically-mediated personality.

[10] Lorado Taft, "The Work of Cecelia Beaux," *Chicago Record*, December 21, 1899, Cecilia Beaux Papers, Archives of American Art, box 3, folder 15, images 60-61.

Portraits are sites where processes of identity formation are set up and continuously activated in their ability to conflate personal meanings with shared beliefs. The painter takes up the role of mediator between the personal and the public dimension of the image, situating his or her own subjectivity as a magnifying filter that transforms a catalogue of physical features into an emblem of cultural and social values. Beaux painted a class of people – the American elite of professionals of capitalism and cultural leaders- who as private individuals and social characters actively grappled with, and contributed to, the re-definition of identities that took place in the late nineteenth century.

1. "So masculine in the strength, so feminine in the sentiment of her work:"[11] reconsidering gender narratives in the critical reception of Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent

When Bernard Berenson enthusiastically declared Cecilia Beaux's portraits as the "best" pictures of the exhibition and dismissed John Singer Sargent's as "ordinary," Beaux rejected his praise as "nonsense in more ways than one."[12] The contest between the two seemed to preoccupy less the painters themselves and more those who struggled to come to grips with their work individually. Throughout her career, Beaux forged her artistic identity in overtly autonomous terms. In her autobiography, she proudly recalls her first accepted picture at the Paris Salon as having "no allies; I was no one's pupil, or protégée; it was the work of an unheard-of American."[13]

As a young painter seeking artistic training in Philadelphia, Beaux kept herself away from the "magic circle" of Eakins, fearing to disavow her own nature under the overbearing influence of his "formidable personality."[14] She managed, instead, to paint herself out of a corner by applying a "strong personal approach" to the eager assimilation of the aesthetic modes of her time.[15]

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[11] Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "The Great Portrait Exhibition," *New York World*, November 11, 1894, Cecilia Beaux Papers, Archives of American Art, box 3, folder 14, image 56.
[12] Beaux Papers quoted in Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., introduction to *Cecilia Beaux: Portrait of an Artist* (Washington, DC: Museum Press, Inc., 1974-75), 17.
[13] Beaux, 99.
[14] Ibid., 98.
[15] Sarah Burns, "Painting Herself out of a Corner: The Woman Artist in American Society," review of *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870- 1930*, by Kirsten Swinth, and review of *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America*, by Laura R. Prieto. *American Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2002): 681, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041946; Goodyear, Jr., 17.

Beaux's desire to assert her individuality manifested itself inside and outside the canvas: she cultivated recognizability in her pictorial marks as much as she publicly safeguarded the uniqueness of her status as "the one woman in a thousand who has no man standing between herself and her productions."[16] Men, however, had certainly stood in her way. As organizers and dominators of the structures of the art world, they formed a virtual barricade against women that sought access to artistic professionalism. Beaux skillfully circumvented them; she structured a recognizable artistic self precisely around that which was regulated to ensure her subordination: her womanhood.

In molding a distinctive artistic identity, Beaux perceptively responded to, and interacted with, those larger pictorial tendencies that Sargent more indelibly than others had helped to shape.[17] The preconditions for her success, in fact, were rooted in the aesthetic climate of American society portraiture that Sargent's intense eastern American portrait tours had reinvigorated. Upon her return from Paris in 1889, Beaux found in portraiture a convenient opportunity to reconcile her recent artistic training with the solid mastery of portrait painting that granted her initial public recognition; like many painters during the last decades of the nineteenth century, she was drawn to portraiture by an equal combination of "aesthetic interest and commercial judgement."[18] Taking her first steps in the realm of fashionable portrait painting, Beaux looked at Sargent's work as a natural point of reference, as she found herself dealing with the aesthetic tastes and desired modes of self-representation that the expatriate painter so successfully accommodated.

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[16] Homer St. Gaudens, "Cecilia Beaux," *The Critic* 47 (1905): 39.
[17] Nina Auerbach, "The Queen Stands Alone," in *Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter* (London: University of California Press, 2007), 82; Goodyear, Jr., 17.
[18] Kevin Sharp, "Cecilia Beaux and the Rise of American Portraiture in the 1890s," in *Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter* (London: University of California Press, 2007), 59-60.

Beaux was as aware as the critics of the benchmark of artistic excellence, commercial and critical success that Sargent embodied. It is not surprising then, that in articulating her first deliberate statement of artistic identity Beaux decided to create a portrait that called for direct comparison with Sargent and virtually aligned her with the tradition of European Old Masters. *Cecil Kent Drinker* (1892) [Figure 1] was configured as a charismatic response to Sargent's *Portrait of Miss Beatrice Goelet* from the year before [Figure 2]. Both Cecil and Beatrice are depicted full-size, pushed to the foreground of a painterly undefined, dark interior, which they dominate and enliven with their distinctive individualities. Beaux's four-year-old nephew, sporting a multicaped brown greatcoat embellished by a black fur cap and collar, candidly declares to the viewer the unhappiness with being portrayed.[19] Cecil's sulky expression echoes Beatrice's more timidly manifested, yet equally charming reluctance in posing before the artist's and the viewer's eyes.

Cecil holds a cane decorated by a red ribbon, a prop that enhances his self-assured attitude and situates him in the fashion of his times.[20] Exquisitely dressed and bejeweled, Beatrice is further adorned by a sensuously rendered dusky-pink parrot, which overlooks her from inside its gilded cage. A warm range of rusty reds and golden browns emanates from the embroidered red and silver dress of the fair-haired little girl, enhancing the surrounding space. Similarly, Beaux treats the setting of her portrait as a gradation of browns and blacks closely related in value that pick up on the chromatically restrained attire of the child.

Beaux carefully maneuvered for enhancing the visibility of herself and *Cecil Kent Drinker*: she withdrew it from the 1892 Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition and instead debuted

[19] Ibid., 64-65.
[20] Ibid., 65.

with the picture at the National Academy of Design in New York.[21] One critic promptly picked up on the references that informed Beaux's conception of the portrait. He remarked on its striking similarity with Manet's *Boy with a Sword* "in its easy and certain apprehension of character and in the boldness and felicity of its execution […]. There is nothing like it in the whole collection, and there could not be unless Mr. John Sargent had been in the competition. It looks as if he had had a pupil who learned his master's art."[22] Sargent's widely discussed portrait of Beatrice Goelet from the year before was certainly vivid in the mind of the critics when they approached the pictorial and psychological dimension of *Cecil Kent Drinker*.

This is the first evidence of a critical comparison between a single painting by Beaux and Sargent's work.[23] The acknowledgement of Beaux's debit towards Sargent was both subordinating and desirable. In describing her as Sargent's "pupil," critics were in fact responding to Beaux's "bid of supremacy, or at least parity" with the unchallenged master of American portraiture, negotiating for her a promising position within the competitive world that Sargent intensely dominated.[24] Beaux embraced Sargent's reference with highly individual stylistic approach; in doing so, she fully integrated her production in the aesthetic modes of contemporary portrait painting while securing a place of distinction that was unmistakably her own.

Throughout the 1890s up to the first decade of the twentieth century, critics occasionally continued to use Sargent as reference and measurement of Beaux's work. Sarah Burns has drawn upon evidence of this comparison to reconstruct the workings of gender ideology within late 19th

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[21] Ibid., 64.
[22] Unidentified review, 1892, Beaux Papers, AAA, microfilm 428, frame 1694, quoted in Sharp, 64.
[23] Sylvia Yount, "Family Pictures," in *Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter* (London: University of California Press, 200), 25.
[24] Sarah Burns, "Under the Skin: Reconsidering Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 124, no. 3 (2000): 322, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20093368.

century art criticism.[25] She argues that critics fashioned the relationship between Beaux and Sargent by polarizing their modes of artistic creation as quintessentially feminine versus quintessentially masculine. With her showcase of emotional involvement and human understanding, Beaux represented in the critics' imagination the embodiment of notions of proper femininity; at the same time, Sargent was guaranteed undisputable superiority over her by the possession of masculine qualities of objective vision, clear thinking and detachment. The critical insistence on the feminine qualities of Beaux's work automatically posed the female artist as fundamentally and inevitably inferior to Sargent, who, as the male genius, represented an unattainable model of artistic greatness. Burns describes this operation as a "manufacturing" of "gender differences and hierarchy:" in doing so, critics were reinforcing "male domination of painting practices" in a moment when the growing presence of professional women in the arts jeopardized masculine cultural authority.[26]

Descriptions of Beaux's paintings are played upon a finely-tuned combination of masculine-evoking external traits and thoroughly feminine inner characteristics. This co-existence was negotiated as an "order of layering"[27]: while strength and vigor emerged from the free and bold manipulation of the paint, in the character which lies beneath, and irradiates out, the picture surface, Beaux proved to be indisputably a woman. For the critics, Beaux manifested feminine sensitivity in engaging emotionally with her sitters in the moment of artistic creation. The bond of intimacy that she seemed to create naturally with women and children translated into profoundly sympathetic representations. Human interest, on the other hand, was rarely accounted as a determining factor in Sargent's acute depictions of fashionable society: instead,

[25] Burns, "'Earnest, Untiring Worker';" Ibid., "Outselling the Feminine," 159-185.
[26] Ibid., "'Earnest, Untiring Worker'," 36.
[27] Ibid., "Outselling the Feminine," 176.

his unerring faculty of vision guaranteed a relation of total control over his subject, which resulted in scarcely flattering and unsympathetic portrayals.

In his *History of American Painting*, Samuel Isham regarded the comparison between Beaux and Sargent as fundamentally unfruitful.[28] At least on a technical level, however, critics found that the commonalities between the two were more conspicuous than the discrepancies, and articulated them with similar linguistic formulations. The vibrant quality of Beaux's painted surfaces, the swift juxtaposition of vigorously applied brushstrokes that revealed and constructed the substance of textures prompted critics to define her brushwork as "virile" and "masculine." Sargent's strokes, too, were characterized as "virile," the "direct and immediate expression of a powerful impulse:" in their finished appearance, however, his surfaces never showed "any traces of labor and fatigue" and presented to the eye "vigorous spontaneity" and "vitality," which the direct accord of mind and hand had effortlessly recorded on the canvas.[29]

Despite the shared associations they seemed to evoke, Sargent's and Beaux's paintings declare quite obviously the different conditions of their manufacturing. Freedom and brilliancy emerge equally from their handling of the paint: the visual appeal of their surfaces and the relation of brushwork to the overall conception of the portrait, however, show different hands at work. Sargent pursues showy surface effects with a swift, luscious brushwork, achieving a scintillating and sensuous painted façade that accommodates textural differentiation as much as the acute delineation of his sitters' human qualities. Beaux achieves luminosity and surface richness by way of a gestural, thick brushwork and the juxtaposition of strong highlights with

[28] Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: MacMillan, 1905), 530, http://archive.org/details/historyofamerica00isha.
[29] Charles H. Caffin, "Some American Portrait Painters," *The Critic* 44 (June 1904): 42-43, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.11920022?urlappend=%3Bseq=38; Charles H. Caffin, "John Singer Sargent: The Greatest Contemporary Portrait Painter," *The World's Work* 7 (November 1903): 4104-4109, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101075886117?urlappend=%3Bseq=69.

deep, colored shadows and usually flat, empty backgrounds. She manipulates the fluidity and thickness of the paint to construct solidly the heads of her sitters and describe surfaces: by adding touches of orange, green and lavender tones in disparate areas of the canvas, she exploits the optical possibilities of the paint to achieve modulated tonal harmonies and luminous effects as well as to energize her sitters' presented expression. While sobriety and moderation transpire from Beaux's highly controlled painterly realism, flashiness and "nerviness" emerge from Sargent's impulsive bravura brushwork.[30] In describing such different handlings in similar terms, critics desired to make visible to the readers the fluid and vigorous gestures performed by the painters in front of the canvas, creating an automatic connection between the artist's body and personality with the visual appearance of their work.

Commentators regularly rushed to offset these masculine technical qualities with some softening, feminine traits that included sympathy, sentiment and emotional involvement. For William Walton, Beaux illuminated her portraits of "fairer younger women and the small children" with an "atmosphere of sympathy and right feeling;" such was the approach that brought the "detective work of the true artist" beyond merely scientific rendering into the "spiritual . . . That to a woman's hand should be given this power to portray sympathetically the souls of her neighbors, their strength, their intelligence, their charm, is most fit and admirable . . ."[31] As a female painter of women and children, Beaux shared the biological and socially-constructed sphere of her sitters. In this respect, the emotional intensity she managed to portray was understood as a product of this affiliation and a natural, appropriate performance of gender.

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[30] Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the 1890s*, vol. 2 of *John Singer Sargent: Complete Paintings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2002), 82.
[31] William Walton, "Cecilia Beaux," *Scribner's Magazine* 22, no. 4 (October 1897): 485.

In his glorifying article for *The Critic's American Artist Series,* Homer St. Gaudens praised Beaux for possessing "a capacity for strength without that brutality so common to women in search of masculine qualities." In fundamentally sexist terms, he was praising the woman artist that complied with her womanly nature, never stepping outside the normative, comforting boundaries of her naturally-given sphere of action and avoiding that the vigor of technique and thought of her pictorial conception inappropriately unsexed her. St. Gaudens too admired the abundance of sympathy Beaux expressed in her "intimate conceptions," which displayed "the softness and peace of her constructive force, and the sanity and repose of her sober feeling . . ." To conclude his panegyric, he wanted to dismantle superficial labels that defined Beaux as a mere follower of Sargent, pointing out at the profound individuality that she stamped her works with. In Charles H. Caffin's nonconformist view instead, the difference between the two lay in their fundamentally different quality of vision. This determined not only the appearance and character of their paintings, but their artistic value, ultimately proclaiming Sargent as superior.

In his survey of American portrait painters, Caffin observed that Beaux was "so inevitable in her comprehension of the female . . ." that "the traits which she represents, while they come to us from a man like Sargent, for example, with all the piquancy of a discovery, have in her representation an obviousness which is apt to be a little dry and prosaic . . . If one's reasoning is correct, it explains why her portraits of men are less satisfactory."[32]
Beaux's *Portrait of the President of Bryn Mawr* (1903?) [Figure 3] included in the article illustrates his comment. Seated in a large wooden arm chair, the woman addresses the viewer with great intellectual poise. She is soberly dignified in her dark brown academic gown, with the

[32] Caffin, "Some American Portrait Painters," 43.

scarf elegantly stretched out across her chest and hanging in a large piece of fabric on the right foreground. The frankness of her facial traits, which suggested the critic commonplaceness, conveys the composed assertiveness that is a quality of virtuous womanhood.

Caffin recast the ordinariness of Beaux's women in decisively negative terms in his review of the Pan-American Exposition. He accused *Mother and Daughter* (1898) [Figure 4] of creating a meeting that was "sterile of any human interest." In their mere display of "elegant, well-bred manner," Mrs. Griscom and her daughter failed to "woo (the viewer's) intimacy." He defined the portrait "positively callous," ascribing its ultimate failure to the "lack of intimacy" that the sitters manifested.[33] On the other hand, the critic considered Beaux's portrait of *Mrs. Roosevelt and daughter Ethel* (1902) [Figure 5] superior to many other pictures precisely because it revealed, more than usual, the painter's sympathy with her subject. In Caffin's judgement, the degree of sensitivity that Beaux demonstrated towards her subjects affected the expression of the most ennobling traits of their personality. With her softly rendered facial features and glowing quality of the flesh tones, Mrs. Roosevelt offered "a most winsome type of beautiful, good womanhood."[34] More soberly illuminated and stiffly posed, Mrs. Griscom was far away from Mrs. Roosevelt's abundantly affectionate example of motherhood.

In approaching Beaux's work, Caffin, like other critics, set out to find traces of the painter's female sensitivity at work, and recorded with discomfort when he did not witness any. Accordingly, he was generally relieved when womanly affection and understanding of female nature informed Beaux's pictorial conceptions. In dealing with Sargent's paintings, however, the critic turned admiringly to the unconcerned detachment that the painter maintained from his

[33] Charles H. Caffin, "The Picture Exhibition at the Pan-American Exposition," *The International Studio* 14 (1901): xxviii, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044108094004?urlappend=%3Bseq=27.
[34] Charles H. Caffin, "Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy," *The International Studio* (1903): cxvi, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044108093980?urlappend=%3Bseq=14.

sitters. Sargent's comprehension of the human being, Caffin argues, limited itself to an intellectual reflection on the artistic potential of the sitter's external traits. When confronted with the subject, Sargent manifested less interest in the "individual than in the type which he or she represents," and engaged in the "analysis of characteristics rather than of character."[35] This translated into a manner of representation that was "seldom sympathetic and oftentimes callously indifferent," which revealed his "unconcealed superiority" to his sitters. Caffin declared this superiority, and its related absence of personal involvement, the most "distinguished characteristic" of Sargent the man and the painter, and a fundamental factor in his greatness.[36] He praised the artist for "holding aloof from society" and announcing with clearly legible attitude his immeasurable indifference "to the class of people whom he represents."[37]

Unlike Beaux, who impassionedly shared point of view with her sitters, Sargent contemplated "the 'passing show' with complete detachment and undisturbed scrutiny." His uncompromising portrayals were the outcome of the "entirely professional" relationship he established with his sitters, a "peculiar intimacy" that corresponds to the analytic approach of a physician diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of his client.[38] The unsentimental treatment of Beaux's women, on the other hand, was ascribed to either her natural knowledge of the female condition or a lack of human interest in her subjects; in the latter case, the bond of sympathy she failed to create in the moment of artistic creation affected irremediably the viewer's emotional relationship with the subject depicted. Absence of sympathy and intimacy could determine the success of Sargent's depictions while disturbingly compromising the human quality of Beaux's.

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[35] Caffin, "John S. Sargent," 4116.
[36] Ibid., 4100.
[37] Ibid., 4116; Caffin, "American Portrait Painters," 31.
[38] Caffin, "John S. Sargent," 4116.

For Sarah Burns, Caffin's contradictory judgement is exemplary of a larger critical "manoeuvre" intended to negotiate "Beaux's slightly yet firmly subordinate status." The policy of this double standard, she argues, boils down to the impact of the painters' gender in shaping expectations of their artistic mode. "In the contemporary construction of femininity," sympathy was in fact considered "a 'natural' outgrowth of womanliness," while objectivity and scrutiny were inscribed in the province of masculinity.[39] Commentators generally associated Beaux's sympathetic approach with the enforcement of the "special gift and training" she received as a woman; consequently, Caffin was appalled at the lack of emotional involvement that she seemed to demonstrate.[40]

In line with the separateness of gender-based faculties, the critic never attributed the aseptic quality of Beaux's paintings to an analytical mode of vision; her quintessentially feminine point of view was incompatible with the "impersonal, penetrating, and masterful gaze" of Sargent.[41] Instead, her inability to harmonize emotionally with her sitters was considered a disturbing deviance from normative performances of womanliness, and the ultimate cause of failure of her paintings. Qualities of analytical vision and scientific scrutiny intrinsically contained claims of autonomy, control and authority that automatically consigned the male possessor a dominant position within his sphere of action. This, coupled with the insistence on Beaux's necessarily sympathetic behavior, ensured that female painters were circumscribed within the accepted boundaries of a defective, emotionally-driven, feminine mode of artistic self-definition.

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[39] Burns, "The 'Earnest, Untiring Worker'," 40.
[40] "News and Notes of Art and Artists," *The Evening Star*, March 2, 1912, http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1912-03-02/ed-1/seq-21/.
[41] Burns, "Outselling the Feminine," 177.

Burns's analysis pertinently draws attention to the socio-cultural implications of Caffin's judgement. The critic's ambiguous position on the issue of sympathy provides insight into how characteristics of female artistic identity were shaped by, and intersected with, constructions of womanhood in the wider social realm. With a feminist point of view, we may add that Caffin had grasped and involuntarily exposed the socially-constructed impossibility for the female artist to exercise dominance through her faculty of vision, and to possess and enforce authority over the subject she intends to represent. She was entitled to compensate this fundamental lack with an outpour of womanly affection and maternal sentiment; this ensured her the most appropriate performance of socially-assigned sets of behaviors, while automatically assigning her inferior artistic status.

To single out excerpts of critical reception from different authors and sources and reassemble them according to common narratives and themes can be as limiting as it is productive. On one hand, it illuminates larger patterns of thought and vision that encompass and transcend single individuals and objects, revealing their position with respect to those sets of aesthetic values that formed themselves in indissoluble connection with specific historic circumstances. On the other, it tends to shrink, as it happens with Burns' argument, the larger interpretive framework in which these single judgements and their objects acted, failing to emphasize equally articulated narratives and themes. More significantly, it risks making the objects that elicited such observations disappear beneath this reassembled ideological structure.

I propose to relocate the meaning of these gendered-readings from the ideological-specific aims of art criticism to the pictorial characteristics of Beaux's paintings. To do so, the order of observation which informed Burns's analysis will be reversed: Beaux's paintings will be considered first as artistic statements that bear and actively produce meaning in significant

relation with the material circumstances in which they were created; the critical terms employed to describe them will be analyzed as responses to, and mediators of, these inherent meanings.

In recovering a specific correspondence between critical observations and painted objects, I intend to point out at the strategies whereby Beaux consciously and deliberately reworked in form and content some traditionally feminine prescriptions. By doing so, she created a distinctively feminine artistic identity that tapped into culturally-sanctioned notions of womanhood and allowed her immediate recognizability. The critics' acknowledgment of such display of artistic womanhood or lack thereof will be explored in relation to single paintings that present in themselves peculiar constructions of female identity. In their activity of not only revealing, but also adding layers of significance to the works, such critical observations declare their relation to socially determined mode of thought, vision, and behavior. I aim to expose the nuances of this relation, trying to re-evaluate the narrative of female artistic inferiority that is largely emphasized in art historical interpretations of Beaux's criticism.

This is not to say that gender does not present itself as a crucial element in the critical construction of Beaux. It certainly does. As a woman claiming professional status in the male-dominated arena of American art, her 'femaleness' was the first issue critics needed to address. Women themselves had to negotiate the gender component in gaining access to art institutions, overcoming the separatism of the art world and validating their role as art professionals. To do so, they enacted strategies on a private and public level that proved that their feminine roles could be reconciled with professional art making.[42] The critics' emphasis on the feminine qualities that Beaux succeeded or failed to display is certainly a sign of a larger preoccupation with sorting out the role of womanhood in her artistic practice. The fundamental sexism that such

[42] Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2-3.

critical approach implies, however, does not need to be borrowed as the exclusive and most meaningful framework of interpretation in the reception of Beaux's work.

Critics approached Beaux creating a carefully calibrated balance of traits that harmonized with the feeling of sobriety and restraint of her canvases as well as with the aura of her public persona. Burns argues that the critics' gender-based reading of Beaux's work stand in arbitrary relation with the actual appearance of her paintings, revealing a shared attempt to wrap her up in the comforting layers of artistic femininity and neutralize the possible threat she posed to male domination in the arts.[43] However, when considered in their larger context of appearance, those characterizations emerge as a quieter subtext, which speaks of larger cultural anxieties and desires as much as of personal points of view and object-specific observations.

Even so the comparison with Sargent remains a sporadic yet significant framework of evaluation of Beaux's work. Critics seem to shape their observations according to larger aesthetic criteria that often declared Sargent's superiority as a self-evident fact; the assessment was then to be reworked in the binary play of gendered language, which so effectively operated the conflation between artist and picture that contemporary criticism continuously strove to achieve. Despite the competition with Sargent, which any American portrait painter was likely to have lost, Beaux's prestige was ensured by her distinct individuality. Critics remarked on the "simplicity, directness, and unconventionality" of her personal style, and the "discrimination and vigor" she infused her works with.[44] As an American trained in Paris, she was praised for having her individuality triumphed "over suggestions of her foreign masters" by creating a "combination

[43] Burns, "The 'Earnest, Untiring Worker'," 36; Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 185.
[44] Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy D'Anvers], "The Work of Cecilia Beaux," *The International Studio* 8 (1899): 215, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015086590133?urlappend=%3Bseq=306; St. Gaudens, 39.

of strength and refinement" which was "altogether her own."[45] Observations on the distinctive quality of her style usually insisted in positive terms on the peculiarly American nature of her art, a trait which instead represented Sargent's "least conspicuous characteristic."[46]

Her vigorous technique, the charming humanity of her subjects and the sober refinement of her compositions all participated in creating a recognizable stylistic trademark that suffered little from the comparison with Sargent. Therefore, the female connotations that critics attributed could hardly be incompatible with Beaux's struggle to carve out a prominent, unrivaled place for herself in the arena of American portraiture. They were, instead, a set of desirable traits to embrace and perpetuate, and a key factor in presenting her own identity in contrast with that of Sargent and his male peers. On one hand, critics responded to her works by representing her in purely feminine terms; at the same time, Beaux fed the critical construction of herself by perpetuating the performance of femaleness that was expected from her. In the crowded arena of American portraiture, the feminine core of Beaux's portraits generally afforded her distinction and dominance, and rarely reverberated negatively on her career.

To understand this twofold dynamic between artist and the media, I would suggest that we turn to her paintings with the following questions in mind: which pictorial characteristics evoke feminine qualities of sympathy, tenderness, and intimacy that critics identified in Beaux's pictures? In which aspects do these elements bear evidence of the painter's conscious enactment of a feminine sensitivity? The operation is even more revealing when this enactment was denied, or failed to present itself, as Charles H. Caffin noticed in relation to Beaux's *Mother and Daughter (Portrait of Mrs. Clement A. Griscom and Her Daughter Frances).*

[45] H., "The Century's" American Artist Series. Cecilia Beaux," *The Century Illustrated Magazine* 48 (1894): 798, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106006239054?urlappend=%3Bseq=811.
[46] Caffin, "American Portrait Painters," 31.

In which elements of the portraits do the callousness and lack of human interest that Caffin identifies present themselves? Why is Beaux denying Mrs. Griscom the sympathetic treatment that she abundantly demonstrated with Mrs. Roosevelt? Both portraits are pictorial constructions of the bond between mother and daughter. Only *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel*, however, seemed to send through the warmth and intimacy of this purely female relation. Mrs. Griscom and her daughter stand stiffly and loftily one next to each other. The restrained palette and tonal harmony of the portrait sharply contrast with the brilliant and warm highlights of *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel*. In the latter, maternal sentiment and a sense of protection permeate the likenesses of the sitters as well as the rarified atmosphere of their setting.

Caffin's remarks on the relative abundance or absence of sympathy in these paintings appeared in separate pieces that commented on separate displays. He did not engage in a reflection of the types of relationship depicted: his observations were mainly concerned with the role of Beaux's pictorial treatment in instilling human feeling in the figures. He implicitly, however, drew the portraits together by situating them at diametrically opposed ends in the spectrum of pictorial expressiveness. When considered as a pair, Beaux's paintings provide in themselves justification for the antipodal effect they seem to produce. What type of relationship between the sitters is Beaux constructing in each painting? How did Beaux differentiate such relationships pictorially? In which aspects did *Mother and Daughter* suggest Caffin a disturbing lack of humanity compared to the other pair? In which ways do these elements bear evidence of Beaux's defective performance of sympathy, and therefore of artistic womanhood?

2. “A most womanly woman:” femininity as artistic identity

If we were to find a visual record of who is who in American art at the turn of the century, an historical document, for example, as vivid and descriptive as the group photo of the Abstracts Expressionists painters appeared fifty years later in *Life* magazine, the photograph of the Carnegie Institute jury from 1899 would dramatize the situation for us [Figure 6].[47] The picture immortalizes the ten members of the jury as they prepare themselves for a group portrait, untidily lining up in front of the Carnegie Institute building in Pittsburgh. In the back row, the likenesses of Walter Elmer Schofield, Anders Zorn, and Frank Duveneck can be identified; in the front, John Wellesley Beatty, William Merritt Chase, Cecilia Beaux, Edmund Tarbell, Julian Alden Weir, and Charles Harold Davis complete the lineup.

Beaux’s slender figure inevitably jumps out as the only female member of the group; in the general disorganization of the exuberant male members of the jury, taking their hats and coats on and off, unable to stand still and pose in the direction of the camera, only she seemed to have assumed the necessary composure that a formal picture requires. Beaux sports a dark velvet, hip-length coat and flared skirt that wrap around and mold her slim figure; the precious fur stole and hat, the leather gloves and shiny, pointy, low-heeled shoes speak of the latest fashion in women accessories. She holds a small book and pulls the stole to her chest with the same gesture; she looks away from the camera with a serious expression, the head slightly tilted three-quarter as to accompany the movement. The men of the group showcase equal grooming and an air of elegance in their choice of dress and accessories: derbies, top-hats and dark suits, mustaches and cigars make the dress uniform of the male members of the jury. Located at

[47] Cecilia Beaux Papers, AAA, Photographs 1888-1919, box 3, folder 30, image 3.

Beaux's left, William Merritt Chase presents a vaguely eccentric variation on this unchanging dress code: his pince-nez and boutonniere tastefully match with the long, carefully styled mustaches and short, neatly trimmed full beard, marking him as recognizable without disrupting the homogenous façade of the group. Similarly, Beaux's soberly dignified figure calls for individual attention while blending seamlessly with the gentlemen surrounding her: her taste in dress and controlled bearing display an aura of self-control, seriousness and competence as pronounced as that of her male colleagues, and a cultivation of appearance as carefully carried out as that displayed by Chase.

Taken together, the artists of the picture present us with a comprehensive catalogue of the characteristics that defined the modern American artist. Beaux and her male colleagues share a code of external signs that make evident specific modes of artistic and social behavior: they represent themselves publicly as acting an individually assigned role of a collaboratively written scenario, with Beaux foregrounded as the prominent exception. For middle- and upper-class individuals, the formation of identity was a matter of sorting out one's position in the system of coordinates where hegemonic, referential modes of selfhood were fixed. Gender was, and still is, a crucial component in processes of identity formation, and one systematically subjected to regulation and codification for its unstable nature. Dress, manners and behaviors are fundamental constituents in the individual's generation and performance of a recognizable gender identity that stands in legible and significant relation with the available, sanctioned modes of selfhood of the system in which he or she acts.[48] Within the widespread preoccupation with the division and rigid structuring of sex roles of the turn of the century, the success of the bourgeois individual heavily depended on his or her ability to conform to codified modes of masculinity and

[48]Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40 (4): 519–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893.

femininity.[49] In all its fluidity and variability, male artistic identity provides us with a site to witness the intersection and careful combination of the different traits and tendencies that went into the configuration of *fin-de-siècle* masculinity.

If we look at redefined patterns of artistic identity in the late nineteenth century, there emerges a significant relation with operations of restructuring and "revitalization" of selfhood in general, and of masculine selfhood in particular, that were activated both against and in conjunction with new forces of modernization and their effects in the private and cultural spheres.[50] Male Victorian bourgeois were encouraged to take up masculine force and aggressiveness in their public activities and nurture feminine tendencies like emotional depth and tranquility in their private, domestic settings.[51] For the male American artist, this translated into a careful incorporation and combination of a wholesome version of maleness, made of activism, forcefulness, and proficiency, with typically artistic traits that overlapped with "feminized" values of emotionality, sensitivity and passive retreat from the public sphere. Male individuals who pursued an intellectual career in the arts located themselves automatically outside the masculine world of practical affairs, and perilously at the fringe of domineering masculine ideals.[52] While in their artistic personality male artists seemed to gravitate towards feminized tendencies, they concurrently struggled to recast their public façade and professional endeavor as fully compliant with modes of triumphant, vitalized modern masculinity.

The businessman appearance that the artists in the picture of the Pittsburgh jury exhibition sport was one strategic mode of self-representation in the male artist's struggle to blatantly relocate his artistic, potentially-feminized self in the world of masculine, public affairs.

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[49] Lears, 220-221.
[50] Ibid., 107-108.
[51] Ibid., 220-221.
[52] Ibid.

This "corporate style," made of dark, sober business suits and manly elegance, bestowed to those who sported it an aura of professionalism, know-how and financial success that suited to the new role of the artist as entrepreneur of himself[53]; by assimilating his image and practice to that of the professional, competent, gentlemanly businessman, the American artist was able to produce a public self-representation that worked successfully in the highly commercialized structures of the art world as well as in modern society.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of available models of artistic selfhood was Bohemia: long hair, velvet jackets, and an eccentric behavior, a taste for the theatrical display of self and the rejection of social conventions were the recognizable signs of the artist who thought of himself as bohemian. The image of competent, socially integrated artist who put on the clothes, manner and mindset of a businessman had grown in part to eradicate signs of Bohemia from the imagined construction of the American artist; despite attempts to create an appealingly up-to-date, normalized façade in reallocating the artist a role of active producer of modernity, Bohemia maintained its strong associations with artistic identity, serving as both negative reference and authorized model in continuous attempts of re-imaging the American artist.[54]

For the man who wanted to showcase his acculturation, refinement and social stature, material possessions could be used as equally communicative and expressive vehicles of identity; they were presented in his domestic habitat in specific arrangements, creating an intensely individualized façade that complemented the regulation of physical appearance through dress and manner.[55] For the artist, the idea of exploiting the "symbolic, communicative possibilities" of objects, furnishings and elements of interior décor translated into the accumulation and artful

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[53] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 23.
[54] Ibid., 22-24; 222-225.
[55] Katherine C. Grier, "Symbols and Sensibility," in *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), Kindle edition.

display of antique and exotic objects in his studio.[56] As middle-class individuals manipulating personal possessions to construct a legible self-representation, artists of the eighties and nineties used their studio as a setting for the dramatization and enhancement of their social status.[57] Moreover, the shift from the studio as a utilitarian workspace, "comprising discarded furniture, props, inspirational objects, travel souvenirs, and the artist's own paintings," to object-filled, spectacular interiors of the late 19th century was cause and effect of the practice of exhibiting and selling art from the artist's studio.[58] Artists established their studios in specifically-designed facilities in the cultural centers of America, like the Tenth Street Studio building in New York, and spacious, favorably lit rooms in the upper floors of tall buildings, making these spaces the fulcrum of their professional, commercial and social activities.[59] They turned the studio into a sphere of commerce and self-promotion in which to build networks of social peers and attract perspective clients, procure commissions and gain visibility.

Starting from midcentury, the studio became the setting for widely-sponsored public receptions: wealthy patrons, art critics and the general audience flocked to this artistic sanctum to view and purchase the works that the artist had put on display. This dynamic of self-promotion relied on the deployment of an image of success, taste, and specific class values that was analogous to that created by the group of patrons that the artist wanted to entice.[60] In designing a private space as an arena for self-visibility and social interaction, *fin-de-siècle* artists did with their studios what their bourgeois patrons did with the parlors of their houses: they presented their visitors with an "expressive social façade" made of carefully selected furnishings, unique

[56] Ibid., "Symbolic Languages: Furnishings as Rhetorical Statements."
[57]Ibid.; Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists* (Southampton, N.Y.: Parrish Art Museum, 1997), 51; 60, http://archive.org/details/tenthstreetstudi00blau.
[58] Ibid., 60.
[59] Ibid., 14-15.
[60] Ibid., 105.

and mass-produced items and other elements of décor that were orchestrated to project a series of shared cultural and social traits that they desired to incorporate in, and communicate as part of, their identity.[61]

Works of art circulated as yet another beautiful object in this visually intense plethora of material possessions. On one hand, the "artistic ambience" staged in the studio operated as a strategic marketing framework that served the artist's commercial ends, engendering desire and stimulating the visitor-consumer in the purchase of the artistic product on sale; on the other, through the engagement with the "feminized" occupation of beautifying the studio interior, the artist was locating himself temporarily within the uncorrupted, genuine and serene world of domestic experiences. In this way, he also shielded himself from accusations of materialism and spiritual aridity that his intense participation in the public sphere and activities of self-promotion implied.[62] The display of "feminized" traits not only successfully responded to expectations on the artist's artistic personality, but coincided with notions of authentic selfhood that were forcefully desired and strenuously sought after as alternative mode of being to de-personalizing modern existence.[63]

To look at the way in which Beaux engaged with regulators of artistic identity - dress, behavior, and studio décor- is to investigate the specific strategies whereby she negotiated her gendered self in constructing a professional and personal self-representation. The image of elegant and self-assured femininity that emerges from Beaux's photographic portrait in the Pittsburgh jury picture enables us to glimpse those ideas that pervasively and systematically found their way in Beaux's self-presentation and mass-mediated understandings thereof. The

[61] Grier, "Symbols and Sensibility."
[62] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 49-65.
[63] Lears, 6-8.

regulation, codification, and sanction of Beaux's appearance took place within a larger effort of bringing order to the proliferation of identities that took place in modernity. The preoccupation with appearance that emerged during the early 1890s and 1900 was specific to the needs of the artist of creating an effective persona to deploy in the public arena as much as it was part of the general preoccupation of a society unable to discern, recognize, and classify things.[64]

The signs inscribed on Beaux's female body were read according to shared paradigms that allowed to solidly and permanently locate her into one or the other type of culturally recognized womanhood, or more specifically, of artistic womanhood. Martha Banta has analyzed visual and literary representations of women that emerged in American culture at the turn of century, tracing through these representations the succession, evolution and generation of categorized models of womanhood that were shaped by women's lived experience and in turn shaped women's construction of their real identities. A tendency to typify Beaux into available, culturally familiar categories of womanhood reveals itself in critical constructions of Beaux, providing insight into the desire to safely sort out her gender identity in authorizing her presence on the public stage. Beaux initiated the process by embracing a recognizable mode of feminine selfhood that combined modern and traditional ideals of bourgeois womanhood. The media made clear for the public the cultural categories that Beaux was consciously integrating in her presentation of a public self, and simultaneously offered an elaborated and sanctioned image of womanhood by which she could consequently shape her identity.[65]

Beginning with her earliest *Self-Portrait* (1894) [Figure 7], Beaux imaged herself as the embodiment of an exemplary type of American womanhood, presenting a catalogue of physical

[64] Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 6-7.
[65] Ibid., xxxvii.

and intellectual features that would be continuously picked up on and romanticized by the critics. She painted her twenty-nine-year old self in a bust format, her head slightly turned three-quarter to deflect the gaze from the viewer and redirect it into the distance. A source of light illuminates her broad forehead, further sculpting her finely-chiseled bone structure and creating rusty-colored shadows on her prominent jawbone and straight nose. The firm mouth and luminous grey eyes speak of impassible concentration, a self-absorbed mood that conveys self-assurance and intellectual intensity; the unelaborate, centrally-parted hairstyle and turtleneck striped dress, only adorned by "leg-of-mutton" sleeves and a bow in the center, give her an air of restrained, unfrivolous sophistication.[66]

In addition to the obvious construction of an appealing outward appearance, Beaux used the self-portrait to thematize the main aspects of her style. A visually interesting tension emerges between the solidity of the head and the flatness of the background and dress, a juxtaposition that, as we shall see, recurs repeatedly in Beaux's canvases to dynamicize the relation between different areas of portraits. Not only are the light brown background and creamy dress modulated chromatically to harmonize with Beaux's fair skin and hazel brown hair; in the dress, Beaux uses brushwork very specifically to suggest the striped pattern as much as to pursue surface effects, stretching out bold, elongated strokes of violets, dark golds and brown in multiple directions.

In trying to feed the desires of an audience obsessed with celebrity culture, journalists and art critics created a focus on the physical appearance of American artists, their peculiar tastes and attitudes. In the case of Beaux, reviewers lingered on her womanly figure, her unassuming character and the moderate aesthetic taste that her material possessions testified, reading the signs of her outward appearance and personal objects as qualitative counterparts to her own

[66] Joel Shrock, *The Gilded Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 78-79.

artistic product. In a long article appeared in *Harper's Bazar,* Anne O'Hagan contributed a detailed description of Cecilia Beaux the woman that closely recalls the painter's self-portrait. Beaux was "tall, slender, straight, with luminous, direct, dark grey eyes, clear skin and a dazzling smile and the gifts of illuminating and witty speech and ready laughter." By dwelling on her pleasant physical traits and demeanor, sophisticated taste in dress and radiant personality, the journalist was creating for an essentially female readership the image of a "pre-eminently attractive woman:"

> More than it is permitted most women, she suggests the good word "lady" . . . She suggests . . . the fine mind, the deep intuitions, the poise, the delicate reserves of the woman of the highest breeding, the woman who has lived in the broadening and uplifting society of other fine minds, of fine books, fine thoughts and activities. It would be an impossible feat of the imagination to picture her practicing the licenses allowed genius, dropping into slipshod or bizarre habits of dress, speech or intercourse with her fellows. . . . She stands before you, the embodiment of the reward art sometimes gives to those who have yielded everything- tall, splendid, in the ripeness of early maturity, in the fullness of her powers, and the charm of delicate, yet vigorous and intellectual womanhood.[67]

Not only Beaux did not indulge in the extravagant tastes, theatrical attitudes and inappropriate social exchanges that were the province of the bohemian artist; in the description, Beaux also took on a combination of the most desirable traits of the different types of womanhood in circulation. Beaux had the spiritual clearness, intellectual maturity and sense of duty that marked the type that was classified as the "New England Woman."[68] In the lineaments

[67] Anne O'Hagan, "Miss Cecilia Beaux," *Harper's Bazar*, March 1911, 119, Cecilia Beaux Papers, AAA, box 3, folder 25, image 51.
[68] Banta, 53-55.

that made her arresting beauty- the fair skin, regular facial features and slenderness- she presented herself as a woman of the highest breed, a fine-looking "WASP Princess."[69]

A critic for the New York Journal wrote an analogous description of Beaux as "a young woman, well bred, dignified, and of pleasing personality. Her coloring is fair and her features strong, particularly her broad, firm mouth. Her hand is characteristic of the woman. It is not small, but is white, well formed and strong."[70] Beaux's exquisitely feminine hand was responsible not only for an excellent feminine artistic product, but also for the attractive decoration of her studio interior. In her studio on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia [Figure 8], few functional objects were tastefully integrated within a visually pleasing environment which bespoke of the simplicity and integrity of her painting practice. In remarking on its beautiful essentialism, minimal décor, and uncomplicated luminosity, the critic was making an inverted reference to the bombastic, object-filled, effect-seeking studio interiors of contemporary American artists:

> It consists of two tiny rooms that have been thrown into one. It is lighted by a wide skylight and two small windows that look out on the street. It is an attractive room and a veritable workshop. There are a few casts about, a fine old piece of tapestry on the wall, an old carved chest, one or two bits of drapery and the necessary paraphernalia of the artist's work. There are no useless knickknacks, no "odds and ends."[71]

In keeping the decoration of her studio restrained and functional, Beaux was distancing herself from the material exaggerations of the studios of many contemporary artists, shunning the ambiguous readings that a sensational environment could have generated. In a woman's artist

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[69] Ibid., 104-105.
[70] "A Successful Woman Artist," *New York Journal*, Cecilia Beaux Papers, AAA, in Carter, 108.
[71] Ibid.

studio, the accumulation of visually pleasing objects would have bespoken of frivolousness and a desire for seducing the visitor through purely feminine trickery, which would have automatically condemned Beaux's artistic endeavor as unserious, flippant and unwholesome. On the contrary, Beaux's studio was the natural continuation of the sane and intellectually mature version of femininity that she embodied, and the appropriate context for her disciplined painting practice. If the male artist's commitment to the beautification of the interior temporarily situated him in the realm of domesticity and outside the world of commerce and public affairs, Beaux automatically and permanently belonged to the unspoiled domestic sphere by virtue of her sex. Her studio showed an unaffected, moderate, unostentatious performance of aesthetic sense, mediated not simply by an acute artistic sensitivity, but especially by her innately tasteful womanly nature: by emphasizing the restrained arrangement of Beaux's "veritable workshop," the critic was making the studio interiors of celebrity painters like Chase look completely and inappropriately overcrowded, theatrical spaces marked by the signs of the owner's extravagance and fakery.[72]

In a review by sculptor and writer Lorado Taft, the continuity between Beaux's virtuous womanhood, the value of her work and the atmosphere of her studio was clearly established. In reviewing *The Dreamer* (1894) [Figure 10], Taft highlighted that the "superb painting" was rendered "the more notable by the fact that it bears a woman's signature," further noticing that "in doing such excellent work Miss Cecelia [*sic*] Beaux has not only distinguished herself, but has accomplished a great thing for her sex." He then turned to a digression on the lack of historical evidence of great women artists whose examples could back up the present enthusiasts of many young women who aspired to succeed on a professional level. To add to this discouraging situation, Taft found that "these women who have won some meed of distinction in

[72] Ibid.

art have often been most manlike in characteristics." Female artists who proved themselves capable of exceeding the merely imitative power that their sex has allocated have also disturbingly eschewed the prescriptions of womanhood, transforming themselves into gender-hybrid creatures: this is the case of Rosa Bonheur, whose "trousers were not her only masculine attributes," and Harriet Hosmer, who "still prides herself on having been a veritable tomboy and never having gotten over it." Cecilia Beaux, on the contrary, has shown none of her female colleagues' deviations from the appearance and behavior of a woman, achieving excellence precisely in the ability to embrace the lineaments of ideal womanhood in her body and soul.

Upon paying a visit to Beaux in her New York studio, Taft expressed his relief in finding that the "gifted artist was in no sense mannish; on the contrary, she gives the impression of a most womanly woman." He then goes on to describe for the reader how Beaux's exquisitely ladylike appearance and attitude have greeted him in the room: a stunning and modest hostess, she introduced Taft into her world of beauty, where other women appearing in canvases grace the interior with their dignity and elegance:

> She (Beaux) meets one cordially but with dignity and grace. She has the air of distinction and of cultivation, which is easier inherited then acquired- one does not put it on like a garment. She is strikingly handsome: tall, with hair turning gray, but the face young and finely chiseled. The modest yet interested way in which she showed her works, some of them of international fame, made the call most entertaining. It was my good fortune to see there the preliminary drawing upon the canvas which was destined to win the first prize of the Pittsburg exhibit this fall, the serenely beautiful "Mother and Daughter,"

standing figures of admirable delicacy of treatment. The poses were dignified and the arrangement simple.[73]

In the critical discourse of the late nineteenth century, the portrait painter who put himself to the services of an intensely superficial and materialistic upper class irremediably tainted himself and his artistic product with the spiritual debasement of those he portrayed.[74] Rarely, however, was Beaux object of accusations of spiritual aridity and materialism. The intellectually-poised and unfrivolous version of womanhood she put on worked to disguise the amount of commercial calculation that went into the success of her painting enterprise. If Beaux's studio proclaimed the painter's distrust for material opulence, the character of her portraits bespoke coherently of truthfulness and authenticity. Critics admired her for the veracity of her artistic feeling: in an era of intensely artificial and superficial painters depicting spiritually empty people, her portraits were praised for their honesty, which derived from a "compound of sincerity, of intelligence, of absolute freshness of feeling, of an entirely healthy taste."[75]

Even Sargent, whose artistic genius had mesmerized American high society and critics alike, was at times found guilty of capitalizing on and augmenting the obsession with material wealth of his upper-class patrons. His analytic scrutiny of the sitter's external qualities, unmediated by personal sympathy or the desire to create the viewer's emotional attachment with the individual portrayed, generated ambiguous feeling about the spiritual significance of his works.[76] Unlike his male colleagues, Beaux could eschew the doubts on the truthfulness of artistic inspiration of the society portraitist by creating a focus on the profound sensitivity to

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[73] Taft.
[74] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 62-63.
[75] "The Mancini Pictures- Some Portraits by Miss Cecilia Beaux," Beaux Papers, AAA, box 3, folder 25, image 60.
[76] Charles H. Caffin, "John Singer Sargent" in *American Masters of Painting* (London: Richards, 1903), 61-64. http://archive.org/details/americanmasterso1903caff.

human feelings that was inherent to her womanly nature. As chapter three will show, Beaux visibly and intensely performed her womanhood in her lived experience as much as in her paintings; in so doing, she successfully defended herself and her work from criticisms on the lack of spiritual component in portraiture and the society it memorialized, comforting her sitters and viewers about the permanence of feeling that the portraiture of their age could achieve.

Beaux reorganized the weaknesses she inherited from her female condition as points of strengths to incorporate in a desirable alternative model of artistic identity. To successfully act in modern reality, artists embraced codified modes of appearance and behavior that latched on to the notion of the highly individualistic, intellectually engaged and disciplined modern man, in which the idiosyncrasies of their artistic self could be normalized and productively channeled into a highly functioning model of modern masculinity. Beaux embodied notions of being a modern woman in America which subsequently entered the sphere of art as a winning formula and desirable alternative to often contradictory models of male artistic identity. Her femininity was yet another form of individuality that positively stood out within multiplying, often derivative artistic selves as an intensely authentic and unparalleled mode of being artist.

If it is true that the exceptionality of her case- a uniquely gifted woman professional that ranked among the 'greatest' in her field- was stressed in contemporary discourses to allow her to exist as a nonthreatening exception to the rule, it is equally relevant to notice that she installed herself firmly and prominently in existent male dominated structures without suffering discrimination or disadvantage. She did not simply embody a safely circumscribed artistic otherness: she turned her otherness into a mark of individuality that would have coexisted recognizably but harmoniously with other versions of artistic selfhood that were being produced at the time.

Beaux did not, unlike many other women artists at the turn of the century, participate in networks of artistic sisterhood that allowed women to professionalize themselves, find a clientele and gain visibility outside the discouraging male-dominated world of academies and art institutions. Beaux pursued a path of education, professionalization and rise to success that closely replicated that of contemporary male artists, as well as of her virtual rival in the contention for the title of "greatest American woman artist," fellow Philadelphian Mary Cassatt.[77] Cassatt's social and economic background–her family belonged to the old Philadelphian landed gentry, her father working as a financier and capitalistic entrepreneur- allowed her to construct an expansive artistic education through a four-year stay in Paris and subsequent trips throughout Europe, and to pursue her artistic experimentations without having to reconcile them with a need for financial sustainment.[78] For Beaux, on the other hand, the modest study abroad experience at the Academie Julian was soon to be put at service of the pressing need of earning a living out of her artistic practice.

Beaux was a member of a generation of portrait painters that fed off the new craze for society portraiture that Sargent's American portrait tours had stimulated. Sargent had brought to America a style that was flashy, vigorous and theatrical, a combination of modern, effect-seeking brushwork and solid realism that suited the glamourous and showy tastes of American high society.[79] Beaux's first executed portraits after the Parisian sojourn were deliberately cautious in embracing this latest fashion in portraiture: if Sargent constructed his American success on the

[77] Tara L. Tappert, "Cecilia Beaux: A Career as a Portraitist," *Women's Studies* 14, no.4 (February 1988): 388-391, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1988.9978710; Nancy Mowll Mathews, "'The Greatest Woman Painter': Cecilia Beaux, Mary Cassatt, and Issues of Female Fame," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 124, no. 3 (2000): 293–316, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20093367.
[78] Pollock, *Mary Cassatt*, 68-90.
[79] Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: The Early Portraits*, Vol. 1 of *John Singer Sargent: Complete Paintings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Center for Studies in British Art, 1998), 19

ability to express the phantasmagorical façade of modernity, Beaux built her own by giving the old Philadelphian elites a manner of portraiture that confirmed their inveterate social and cultural authority.

During the nineteenth century, portraiture had dominated the practice and exhibition of art in Philadelphia, perpetuating its appeal also through new technologies of printmaking and photography. After 1870, Thomas Eakins had become Philadelphia's most distinguished portraitist and painter. Eakins explored in his works a category of people that embodied the intellectual, aesthetic and physical excellence of his age; he celebrated the achievements of men of science, athletes, and musicians, professionals whose engagement with the highest ideals of modernity was not necessarily matched by social standing and economic power. For those modern individuals who measured progress and personal success on the basis of material accumulation, Eakins's committed portraiture was highly incomprehensible to the point of disturbance.[80] Beaux catered to that large segment of Philadelphian capitalistic elite who wanted their image to be packaged as a celebratory statement of social and economic status, a meaningful emblem of self that held recognizable references to the portraiture of the past. The portrait was not only a familiar, historically-sanctioned way to pay tribute to the endeavors of these self-made man; it was a way to express an imagined continuity between the men that had made the city's golden age and the "new heroes of modern life," those who belonged to the city's gilded present.[81] Beaux's patrons were industrialists, financiers, bankers, merchants, railroad entrepreneurs, professionals of money-making that established themselves in the narrowed

[80] Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins, the Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 156-15, ACLS Humanities E-Book.
[81] Ibid., 7-8; 154-155.

public arena of a city that by 1870 had lost its centrality in the political, intellectual, and financial life of America.

The portrait of Henry Howard Houston Jr. (1895) is exemplary of a series of memorial likenesses that Beaux executed from photographs of the deceased sitter [Figure 9]. The portrait was to commemorate the son of Philadelphian railroad investor, philanthropist, and University of Pennsylvania trustee Henry Howard Houston, who died during his post-graduation grand tour of Europe in 1879.[82] Houston Jr. is depicted three-quarter, his handsome youthful head and broad figure set against a painterly undefined cloth of honor; his flesh is transparent and smooth, his distant gaze halfway between the dream-like absorption of youth and the clear vision of a businessman. Beaux's brushwork is polished and brilliant in creating the luminous smoothness of the skin, freer in the rendering of the background and the black, heavy coat of the sitter. The minimal use of shadow, the emptied, flattened out background and the idealizing quality of the figure give the portrait a timelessness that suits the specific memorializing purpose of the picture, and evoked the heroic spirit that Philadelphians were seeking in the portraiture of their age.

In parallel to these lucrative commissions, Beaux engaged in a series of non-commissioned portraits and "figure pictures" with the desire to pursue her artistic experimentations beyond the unstimulating requests of the aesthetically conservative and self-preoccupied Philadelphian gentry. Beaux produced formally daring and psychologically insightful likenesses of friends and family members, distilling from the particularities of her sitters their fundamental human qualities. The stiff poses and formulaic format of her formal Philadelphian portraits gave way to daring cropping and simple, uncontrived poses, staged with an interest in capturing figures in movement or stopped motion; the flat, uninteresting

[82] Sharp, 66.

backgrounds grew into a significant part of the picture in the form of dark backdrops made texturally appealing by the thick, broad brushwork. In these pictures, Beaux's faculty of observation found colored shadows in the flesh of her sitters, made lively and expressive by the addition of touches of green, orange, and yellow unmixed paint; the textures and surface effects of the fabrics are made substantially present through different thickness of paint and size of the strokes, their interaction with light rendered with indigo and lavender tones. Starting with these pictures, Beaux's brushwork acquires unprecedented freedom, and a quality between fluidity and solidity that will become her stylistic trademark.

In portraits like *Reverie* (1893) [Figure 10], *Sita and Sarita* (1893) [Figure 11], and *Ernesta (Child with Nurse)* (1894) [Figure 12] Beaux sought to penetrate the mysteries of childhood and girlhood. She created pictures that were stylistically up-to-date in their painterly brushwork, aesthetically charming in their tonal harmonies and surface brilliance, and thematically attractive in their psychological depth. Most importantly, these paintings were understood as statement of an inimitable artistic individuality: in their appealing recognizability, they opened for Beaux the doors of prestigious exhibition venues and monopolized the attention of the critics. As early as 1895, she was consecrated a painter specialized in the depiction of children and women. For Royal Cortissoz, Beaux displayed a "taste" that in its "sensitive, delicately emotional quality" animated the subject depicted with forceful individuality. If her brushwork showed an assurance of technical ability and the workings of a clever mind, Beaux's real talent lay in the ability to preserve with such bravura "a certain finesse, a certain elegance" that leaves the viewer that encountered her subjects with an "impression of warmth combined with discretion." Through the ability to merge "her own idiosyncrasies in those of her subject," she gave life to compelling

depictions of her sitters' inner realities.[83] As one critic effectively summarized in discussing the Women's Exhibition at Earl's Court, Beaux's works displayed "true feminine qualities of invention and handling:" these were not only the hallmarks of her style, but determined, when present, the excellence of any woman artist.[84]

The Gilders were prominent among the network of friends and contacts that Beaux established as fundamental support structure for her professional and social advancement. Richard Gilder, general editor of the magazine *The Century*, and her wife Helena de Kay acted as organizers of the American cultural elite, introducing Beaux to their circle of artists, writers, art dealers and collectors, and firmly sustaining her throughout her career by procuring commissions, exhibition venues, social and professional visibility. Thanks to her intimate friendship with the Gilders, she expanded her clientele to New York, permanently settling her studio practice in a building on Washington Square by 1899. Throughout her career, Beaux won the friendship and admiration of fellow artists and critics, conducted an intense social life attending events at other artists' studios and organizing luncheons at her own; she worked and exhibited regularly, served as instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, received prizes, awards, served as juror of international competitions and was elected member of the National Academy of Design and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.[85] She acted in the same institutions, addressed the same class of patrons, moved in the same social spaces, and shared the same venues of visibility and commercial income as her contemporary male peers.

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[83] Royal Cortissoz, "Cecilia Beaux. Her Portraits of Children and Women," *New-York Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1895, 25, http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1895-06-16/ed-1/seq-25/.
[84] "Studio-Talk," *The International Studio* 11 (1900): 182-184, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044039107057?urlappend=%3Bseq=236.
[85] Alison Betchel Wexler, "Cecilia Beaux: A Chronology," in *Cecilia Beaux: American Figure Painter* (London: University of California Press, 2007), 174-185.

John Singer Sargent's appearance and rapid rise to success in the American art scene had similarly relied on the cultivation of a network of friends and contacts, and the careful manipulation of opportunities for self-promotion: an essay by Henry James published in *Harper's Magazine* largely contributed to the creation of a heroic aura around the returning expatriate even before Sargent's arrival in the autumn of 1887; a commission to portray Isabella Stewart Garden dramatically increased his visibility; the connection with the Bostonian art patron put him center-stage in the world of Bostonian elite circles, who flocked to admire his first solo-show exhibition at the St. Botolph Club. In New York, it was the architect and tastemaker Stanford White who championed Sargent's work in the name of his dazzling modernity, largely helping him to secure new patrons and install himself firmly as the leading portrait painter of fashionable American elite. [86]

By the end of the nineteenth century, Beaux and Sargent were working as the favored portraitists of a common basis of high society clients, each one benefiting from a series of opportunities for publicity, visibility, and financial profit offered by the "modern art world support structures."[87] They were both included in the American pavilion of the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris, had their solo shows and exhibited extensively along with European and American colleagues, featured regularly and prominently in the art sections of newspapers, specialized and popular magazines. While critics accentuated their rivalry, moved by a desire to reaffirm built-in gender hierarchies in the arts as much as to find evidence of a school of American portraitists, competition was substituted in real life by mutual feelings of admiration and emulation of two professionals sharing the top of their field.[88]

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[86] Ormond and Kilmurray, *The Early Portraits*, 195-196.
[87] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 8.
[88] In *Background with Figures*, Beaux recalls her own timidity and excitement in meeting for the first time in London a man whose paintings she had seen repeatedly and whose "power" she had "keenly felt." In narrating the

A series of double portraits executed between the end of the of 1890s and first decade of the 1900 testifies to Beaux's widened basis of patronage as well as to her continuous experimentation with the portrait form for the unveiling of human subjectivity. In these paintings, Beaux worked out with considerable originality the formula of full-length, double portraits of fashionable society like those which Sargent had championed in the late 1890s. Second of the series is the portrait of *Dorothea and Francesca (the Dancing Lesson)* (1898) [Figure 13], a picture of the daughters of Helena de Kay and Richard Gilder captured in the playful, intimate moment of performing a dance that they themselves invented.[89]

In *Dorothea and Francesca*, Beaux experimented with compositions to enact a study of the relationship between the figures, expanding the boundaries of portraiture to create pictures that reflected on universal human bonds.[90] She set the composition in an indefinitely deep dark space, from which the white-dressed figures of the sisters stand out and dynamically project forward. Sixteen-year-old Dorothea guides ten-year-old Francesca by the hand in performing a dancing step, the younger sister studiously looking down as she timidly puts forward her foot in following her sister's example. Their bodies and demeanor evoke specific phases of female experience that the Gilder sisters not only exemplify, but most significantly perform: gracious and monumental at the same time, adolescent Dorothea guides her younger sister's hesitant steps towards a mature femininity that she herself has not yet fully achieved.[91] In their gesture, gaze,

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encounter, she stresses the correspondence of artistic and human feeling that established itself between them, an affinity based on a shared conception of how to be, and to look, an artist. Both Sargent and she did not, in fact, belong "to the group who thought it necessary to carry about with them the labels of their profession. There were fewer cigarettes at that time, but many of the devotees of painting thought grimy velveteen, and a slouch, the proper uniform for artists, male and female." Beaux, 224-226.

[89] Ibid., 217-218.

[90] Goodyear, Jr., 30.

[91] Angela Miller et al., "Exploration and Retrenchment: The Arts in Unsettling Times, 1890-1900," in *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008), 370-371.

and clasped hands, the two sisters mirror each other: Dorothea sets a model of blossoming womanhood for Francesca, who in turn recalls her older sister's just abandoned childhood.

Beaux acutely staged *Dorothea and Francesca* as a narrative of female roles, giving her sitters intense subjectivity and space for self-definition as much as a symbolic role of exemplary embodiments of crucial phases of female life. She gave the portrait a complex compositional arrangement and carefully-studied pictorial structure, juxtaposing luminous color harmonies with a dark background in a rhythmic idea of space that makes the figures seem to project forward. In doing so, Beaux achieved expressiveness while avoiding sentimentality, creating an episode of intense humanity that earned unanimous choirs of praises before and after the turn of the century.[92] As we shall see in chapter three, Beaux's double portraits of mother and daughter were similarly configured to point out at the sympathetic understanding of female experiences, a comprehension negotiated pictorially by the enactment of the artist's own feminine identity.

[92] Yount, "Family Pictures," 35-36.

3. Performing womanhood: Beaux's *Mother and Daughter* and *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel*

In her autobiography, Beaux recorded with richness of details the circumstances in which the *Portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt and her daughter* (1902) was painted. She described the commission as "an episode of highly varied importance," as it brought her "into close relation with [Mrs. Roosevelt's] fascinating family, as well as with her charming self." She lingered on the atmosphere of familial unity and symbiotic participation that surrounded the making of the picture, and ultimately determined its profound human quality:

> . . . the portrait was painted in the White House. It was to have been of Mrs. Roosevelt only, but her daughter Ethel consented to literally 'jump in', greatly enlivening, I hope, her mother's hours of attention to posing. This attention was constant and sympathic [*sic*], but not static, and did not need to be. They generously devoted the Red Room to me for a studio . . . But it was no less a meeting-place for morning affairs of the family, since 'mother' was to be consulted by every member before beginning the day, not to say after, when desired . . . The warmth of the Red Room got somehow into the picture . . . I understood from the first that it was not to be an official portrait, and I think every one was satisfied that, as it was created among intimate circumstances, its spirit might be the same.[93]

Beaux situated herself as the passionate spectator of this domestic world of affection and harmonious vivacity. The whole family cooperated in the creation of the portrait. The President

[93] Beaux, 227.

visited during painting sessions, and demonstrated his "power as a collaborator" in never charging "with super-dynamic propositions, or inquiries" the atmosphere. The children's collaboration was "in a special form of entertainment" that included the recitation of poems and performance of dramas. Mrs. Roosevelt was "entirely unruffled by the noise and spirited commotion," but engaged with and directed promptly all the activities the situation entailed. This coming and going of children's voices did not interfere with Beaux's exclusive engagement with picture-making, nor caused changes in Mrs. Roosevelt's mood and expression.[94] In the creation of the portrait, Beaux and the sitters shared a self-contained, exclusively-female space of absorption and intellectual intensity, which received vitality from the surrounding atmosphere of domestic harmony as much it kept itself separate from it.

In a letter to Dorothea Gilder, Beaux declared even more emphatically her idea to transpose on canvas this emotional environment with overtly expressive effect. She envisioned her picture as "a drama" in which "modest-fearless little daughter impelled by mingled curiosity and affection, enters and plumps herself down beside Mama, who takes her little hand into her own lap to insure quiet and communicate maternal sympathy." She also described her intention to manipulate forms, colors and light to add vitality to the anecdote depicted: "A pale blue velvet bow pins the eye to the middle of the canvas, and around it these various animations vibrate, and are finally lost in the ruby depths of the private dining room wall-paper."[95]

In another double-portrait, Beaux made equally specific choices in terms of composition, color and form in giving visual substance to the very different range of ideas and feelings that pertained to Mrs. Griscom and her daughter Frances. *Mother and Daughter* (1898) was a portrait of the wife and the daughter of Philadelphian shipping magnate Clement Griscom,

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[94] Ibid., 228.
[95] Cecilia Beaux to Dorothea Gilder, October 20, 1902, quoted in Carter, 134.

commissioned to celebrate Frances 'Pansy' Griscom's debut into society.[96] Mother and daughter are portrayed standing erect and frontal with absolute parity and dignity. Wrapped in soberly opulent evening cloaks, they are depicted in the moment of entering a dimly lit ballroom, rendered as a flattened-out backdrop of greys and blacks that tonally harmonize with their costumes.

At the level of the painted surface, these portraits testify Beaux's ability to adapt style and technique in charging the representations of her sitters with different degrees of emotionality, and answering accordingly to the different demands that each commission entailed. While *Mother and Daughter* was made as an additional platform of self-display that augmented the public prestige of Frances's society debut, Mrs. Roosevelt's portrait was intended to humanize the sitter's official, public façade in presenting her as performing the private, yet simultaneously universal role of mother. The differences in terms of sitter's identity, circumstances of commission and their corresponding pictorial execution are so pronounced that a comparison between the portraits would seem unjustified. Obviously, the operation of social aggrandizement that the portrait of Mrs. Griscom and Frances carried out was not nearly comparable to the cultural agency of Mrs. Roosevelt's self-representation. A common dynamic, however, is at work in signifying the portraits, a dynamic that aligns sitters and painter in constructing a narrative of female individuality both in the artistic and social realm.

In identifying signs of a feminine core in Beaux's painting I am not trying to revive the obsolete argument of the "essentially" feminine character of women's art, which relies on the perceived continuity between the lived experiences of women, as biologically-determined and socially-codified beings, and their artistic outcomes. Nineteenth century critical observations

[96] Elizabeth Bailey, "Catalogue from the Exhibition," in *Cecilia Beaux: Portrait of an Artist, 93.*

repeatedly characterized female artistic accomplishments as "graceful, delicate, decorative," pointing at the existence of a visual grammar of feminine artistic expression that was intimately correlated with a set of socially-valid and culturally-shared beliefs and expectations on women's role.[97] Female artistic creation was based on a set of aesthetic assumptions that could be reworked in Beaux's project of making a specific feminine identity recognizable through pictorial signs. *Mother and Daughter* and *Mrs. Roosevelt and daughter Ethel* show Beaux manipulating in different ways these characteristics to foreground her own femininity as well as that of her sitters. To do so, Beaux put her artistically-mediated gender identity at the service of prominent women's self-representational desires, presenting her feminine self as the qualifying trait of her artistic practice.

Judith Butler's phenomenologically-informed discussion of the notion of gender provides a theoretical framework that allows us to disentangle the different levels in which the feminine core of Beaux's paintings unfolds. For Butler, the individual constitutes his or her gender identity by reiterating in time "performative acts," understood as the sum of "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds" compelled by socio-cultural "sanction and taboo." Central to her argument is the distinction between "expression" and "performativeness:"gender is not a continuous expression of an essential, a priori notion of masculinity or femininity, but exists to the extent that it is dramatized through a series of "sustained social performances."[98] We can borrow Butler's specific formulation of the "performative" nature of gender to rethink the feminine core of Beaux's portraits not as an expression of a feminine artistic sensitivity but rather as a performance thereof. In *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel* and *Mother and*

[97] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Critical Stereotypes: The 'Essential Feminine' or how Essential is Femininity?" in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013): 1-49, http://search.ebscohost.com.jcu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=596692&site=ehost-live.
[98] Butler, 519-523.

Daughter, Beaux used a set of pictorial signs evoking specific feminine qualities to augment the performance of femininity that the sitters carried out in the real world. Therefore, two performative acts conflate in the space of the canvas: that of Beaux, who showcased her gender identity in cultivating a recognizable, feminine-associated artistic mode, and that of the sitters, who strove to project themselves as the embodiment of notions of exemplary American womanhood.

The likenesses of Mrs. Griscom, Frances and Mrs. Roosevelt constitute the most obvious level of the performed feminine core of the portraits. The amount of different materials, fabrics and textures included in these canvases make evident the sitters' desire to perform their status and identity through a set of material signs like dress, jewels and hairstyle, which were to be read as designating a specific upper-class womanhood. Beaux showcased and enhanced this intrinsic surface richness with technical virtuosity. Flooded with light, Mrs. Roosevelt's white silk dress presents a variety of fabric patterns and transparencies that Beaux sensuously delineated and further enrichened with the brilliant detail of the light blue bow pinned at the center of her neckline. Such rich handling is balanced by the glowing smoothness of Mrs. Roosevelt's chest: a conspicuous touch of white paint draws attention to the gold necklace, which speaks of refined simplicity as much as the unadorned, sophisticated chignon hairstyle. In using a glowing palette of golden tones to sculpturally model Mrs. Roosevelt's facial features, Beaux achieves textural softness that heightens the idealized quality of her likeness without abstracting it.

In *Mother and Daughter*, the heads of the sitters capture the luminosity of the interior. As with the white highlight that animates Mrs. Roosevelt's neck, a blotch of orange-pink paint blushes Frances's cheeks. The textural softness and solidity of Mrs. Griscom's face, even more brightly illuminated than her daughter's, transform signs of age into the expression of matronly

experience: her bone structure visibly echoes that of Frances's face, which is however plumper and gentler if equally haughty. As it is typical of Beaux's style, orange tonalities appear as minute brushstrokes and underlying layers of paint to strategically enliven different textures of the canvas: the white ruffled collar of Mrs. Griscom and the bright yellow lining of her satin black cloak; the silvery, fur-embellished coat of Frances and the broadly painted hems of both gowns; the back of the wooden chair and the transparent, reflecting surface of the floor. With what seems a general desire for emphasizing obvious emblems of status, Beaux showed her ability to appropriately transpose the sitters' socially-regulated, performed female role through the virtuoso manipulation of the medium that pertained to the celebratory terms of fashionable portraiture.

Beaux achieved a very specific emotional impact in the portraits by presenting the sitters' single individualities as they manifest themselves in the human relation that tied them as a pair. Beaux intended *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel* and *Mother and Daughter* as ideal depictions of different stages of mother-daughter relationship, and of the opposite phases of female experience that each of these stages frames. Compositional formulae initiate with immediate legibility the unfolding of Beaux's perceived narrative. Other formal and stylistic devices- the dramatic versus subdued manipulation of light, the use of a warm, luminous palette versus restrained, monochromatic tonal harmonies, the painterly brushwork that exquisitely describes surfaces and creates vitality of facial expression, sense of movement or arrested action –come in support to the composition to additionally define the nature of the bond that each pair of mother and daughter constructed in their lived experience.

Mrs. Roosevelt and twelve-year-old Ethel mingle symbiotically in a continuous, interruptible flow of maternal affection inside the unassailable sphere of domesticity. As she

consciously described to Dorothea, the portrait owed its expressive impact to the staging of an emotionally compelling episode in their domestic life as much as to the beauty of the painted surface. Beaux dramatizes it as to have light, forms and colors participate in the desired feeling of affection and tenderness. A warm, glowing palette works with the golden luminosity that invests Mrs. Roosevelt and permeates the dark red interior in beautifying the different textures of her dress as well as her physical appearance. The relation between Mrs. Griscom and Frances, on the other hand, was to be captured as it unfolded in the socially-mediated ritual of passage in a woman's life that was her debutante ball, a ritual that ultimately gives way to separation and individuality rather than intimacy and mingling. In entering the world of adult womanhood, in fact, Frances was necessarily removing herself from her role of daughter and putting an end to the symbiotic relationship with her mother. Beaux strategically orchestrated the portrait as to narrate this situation of liminality, using the sitters' internal dynamic as the force that held each part of the canvas together.

Patches of greys and blacks subtly differentiated by the interior's subdued luminosity map out the fundamental forms of the canvas, visualizing a sobriety of feeling that synchronizes with the solemnity of the moment recorded: the mother is escorting nineteen-year-old daughter out from the emotionally comforting mother-daughter bond into the unexplored social world. The figures' rigidly dignified appearance and sculptural solidity speak of the indissoluble nature of their relation as much as of individuality. Mrs. Griscom and Frances stand as self-sufficient, ideal embodiments of different stages of female experience, sharing a complicity between nearly equals that also implies ambiguity of feeling and precariousness. They are close together, but their internal involvement is made illegible as they look in different directions, Frances proudly demanding the attention of the viewer, her mother looking away into the ballroom. The

emotional gap that is opening between them is externalized in the lack of physical exchange as much as in the irreconcilable surface differences of their costumes' fabrics and materials: the fluffiness of Frances's fur stole contrast with the rigidity of her mother's ruff, and her softly textured, fluently rendered silver satin coat hardly mingles with the large, flat patch of brilliant black that stands for her mother's cloak.[99]

It is in Beaux's ability to correspond to different emotional situations an appropriate pictorial mode that the continuity of female feeling between painter and sitters revealed itself, and the recognizability of a feminine sensitivity was ensured. In achieving this correspondence, Beaux proved herself capable of carrying through her natural gift of discretely penetrating human character, understanding it and embracing it. By performing her feminine self, Beaux elevated the status of her portraits from mere recordings of female members of fashionable society to collectively-meaningful studies of different phases of women's lived experience. In its tasteful formal choices and matching emotional subtlety, "Mother and Daughter" was the paramount example of Beaux's refined artistic vision, a refinement that appropriately suited the social stature of the subjects and their invisible intimacy. In appropriately humanizing and heightening Mrs. Roosevelt's figure, Beaux proved that through the filter of her artistic sensitivity the First Lady's ideal qualities could express themselves in the most meaningful way. Therefore, both portraits were configured as the place of a double operation of self-representation: not only did Beaux enable her sitters to project an appealing public image, but also presented herself as the most qualified to negotiate the encounter with their private, yet simultaneously universal aspects of woman and mother.

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[99] Auerbach, 81.

Critics, however, generally failed to recognize the emotional complexity that Beaux had carefully visualized in representing Mrs. Griscom and Frances's on the occasion of the daughter's society debut: instead, they understood the portrait as yet another statement of social status and fashionable femininity that joined the parade of upper-class women rivaling for the attention of the audience in the many portraits of elite society executed at the turn of the century. In viewing the "picture that won for an American woman such a distinguished honor at the Universal Exposition," a critic noticed with moderate enthusiasm that in the portrait "attention fixes itself more on the black satin cloak of one and the long gray fur wrap of the other, though the faces are comely and intelligent."[100]

In *Mother and Daughter*, however, Beaux had striven to minimize possible distractions to the emotional intensity of the moment depicted by choosing to hide the sitters' brilliant gowns beneath their dark and grey cloaks. In showing them wearing their outer garments not only Beaux placed the bond between mother and daughter as still intact and unthreatened by the new world of social relations unfolding in the ballroom, but also appropriately put aside the frivolousness of the fashion parade that the society debut was all about. In emphasizing the chromatic sobriety and overall plainness of the cloaks, Beaux used them as an appropriate prop to surround the figures with an aura of solemnity that befits the seriousness of the moment depicted, inviting the viewer to appreciate their poise and intellectual gravity as they consciously approach Frances's passage into adulthood. If anything, the lavishness of Frances's long fur stole, boldly standing out from the richly textured multicaped coat, guides the viewer to concentrate his gaze exclusively on the debutante daughter rather than on the mother,

[100] Unidentified Clipping, 1903, Cecilia Beaux Papers, AAA, box 3, folder 25, image 33.

anticipating in so doing what will be Frances's task throughout the evening: to attract the audience's attention.

On both sides of the ocean, the elegantly imposing figures of Mrs. Griscom and Frances were seen as showcasing the "physical and economic health" of the American upper-class.[101] The portrait structured its meaning around the presentation of gender and class values, relying on the shared participation of sitter, viewer, and painter in these values to present the figures recognizably as the embodiment of well-bred American femininity. When French critics saw Beaux's works at the Paris Exposition in 1900, they considered them, along with those by other Americans like Whistler and Sargent, as products of the intellectual depth that characterized the American school of painting. More specifically, they recognized in Mrs. Griscom and her daughter the traits of a dignified, sober type womanhood of distinctively American matrix. [102] Similar observations on the true American character of Beaux's feminine subjects had welcomed the painter's first exhibited group of portraits in Europe at the Champ de Mars in 1896. Writing to his friend St. Gaudens, Paul Bion praised Cecilia Beaux for having revealed to the Parisian viewer to the most pleasing characteristics of American girlhood. For the critic, the significance of Beaux's portraits lay in the truthful representation of the American feminine spirit in its aspects of profundity of thought, refined beauty and amiability:

> This is then, what she (Beaux) has to tell us- that all the American girls have not the assurance- I would not venture to say the impudence-to thrust themselves before the

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[101] Yount, "Family Pictures," 11.

[102] Diane P. Fischer, "Constructing the "American School" of 1900," in *Paris 1900: The "American School" at the Universal Exposition*, ed. Diane P. Fischer (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 49; Weisberg, Gabriel P., "The French Reception of American Art at the Universal Exposition of 1900," In *Paris 1900: The "American School" at the Universal Exposition*. ed. Diane P. Fischer (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 149-153.

> world that they might laugh in its face . . . no, they do not all chatter like a flock of parakeets; the bicycle and the tandem, which perhaps are not of their invention, are not their sole delights. Madame Cecilia Beaux demonstrates to us that they have, among themselves, thoughtful moments- the most natural and the most graceful, something almost like timidity, even when they are not before the world, and with this a surrounding atmosphere of gayety, freshness, and smiling, just like a ray of sunlight coming through the window. Pretty as plums on the tree, Madame Cecilia Beaux presents them to us as the 'fruits of the garden'- is not that it? truly American.[103]

Beaux's sitters positively impressed the European viewer as they proved to be completely and appropriately young women. Bion's comment provides insight into the set of ideas and stereotypes that informed the European conception of American womanhood as much as into the "cultural work" that Beaux's portraits performed in shaping them.[104] At home, Beaux's success was similarly linked to the appropriate representation of noble American femininity. She was called a "veracious historian" for her ability to give in her "domestic portraits" a faithful representation of "the native American."[105] Caffin himself had said that Beaux's "ladies are always ladies," as they revealed a "sympathy with the subject's personality, something more than the interest of the painter, and a woman painter at that."[106] *Mother and Daughter* is the manifesto of Beaux's ability to integrate the narration of a multifaceted emotional situation with a largely readable statement of social status and culturally-approved values.

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[103] Paul Bion to Homer St. Gaudens, quoted in Walton, 482.
[104] Yount, "Family Pictures," 11.
[105] "American Studio Talk," *The International Studio* 2 (1898): xiv.
[106] Charles Caffin, "Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition," *The International Studio* 25 (1905): ii, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015086590430?urlappend=%3Bseq=128.

Mrs. Roosevelt's portrait was equally received as a triumph of feminine ideals, transpiring from the sitter's real-world identity into the augmented version that Beaux's magnifying feminine vision had managed to create. In Beaux's relentless quest for distinction and recognizability, the President's wife was a desirable subject not simply for the obvious public resonance that derived from the commission; more specifically, she gave Beaux the opportunity to partake in the conversation about the appropriate representation of ideal femininity that Mrs. Roosevelt championed as the first woman of America. Beaux filled the picture with visual clues of a feminine sensitivity energetically performed: the dramatic use of highlights and the choice of a warm palette, the decorative treatment of surfaces and the overtly sentimentalizing role of the composition indicate Beaux's desire to openly conform to traditional formulae of mother-daughter depictions as well as to a recognizably feminine pictorial mode. In the portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt, the delicate, emotional and graceful side of typically feminine matrix are very obviously presented to ensure the legibility of the sitter's outpour of maternal affection and protection as she performs her mother role before the viewer's eyes. In doing so, Beaux managed to reconcile the portrait's intended emotional impact with its emphasis on female intimacy and affection, and the advancement of a corresponding operation of self-aggrandizement and recognizability, which the performance of a feminine-associated pictorial mode carried on.

In both *Mother and Daughter* and *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel*, Beaux invited the viewer to associate her own virtuously performed femaleness with the equally virtuous qualities of womanhood and motherhood that her sitters presented. Mrs. Roosevelt in particular constituted for Beaux a desirable model for self-identification and a prestigious parallel to claim. Beaux's admiration for and fascination with the First Lady, as they emerge from her

autobiography, play a large part in her effort to enact the portrait's intended purpose. Beaux situated herself as the magnifying lens that turned the sitter's individuality into an ideal image of motherhood that could collectively appeal to the American audience. As first women in their respective fields, Beaux and Edith Roosevelt had an exemplary role to perform: each maintained and strengthened this role by overtly dramatizing it within the space of the portrait. No other woman but Mrs. Roosevelt could function as a model onto which Beaux might project shared expectations of ideal womanhood; through her carefully cultivated self-representation, the First Lady simultaneously contributed to shaping and fostering those notions that she was expected to embody. Similarly, Beaux worked out a strategy of self-definition that turned the indelible inferiority of her feminine identity into an element of distinction, pushing her artistically-mediated gender identity to the front of her pictorial practice instead of sidestepping it.

Mrs. Roosevelt's portrait was yet another piece in Beaux's project to take away from her male colleagues the responsibility of interpreting correctly the female world. Even the least enthusiastic admirer of Beaux like Caffin sanctioned the success of this operation, praising the exemplary model of womanhood that the sitter offered and the hand that rendered this with great sensitivity.[107] On the occasion of the portrait's display at Durand-Ruel Galleries in New York, a critic described it as "a sympathetic bit of work in which the mother of children rather than the mistress of the White House is portrayed with great felicity." The lack of any indication that the "picture was painted in the White house" enabled the viewer to get a glimpse of the First Lady's humanity beyond the official façade.[108] Despite the sentimental nature of the picture, Beaux avoided "the faintest suspicion of flattery or of pose," making Mrs. Roosevelt look "if anything, older than she does." Considerably un-idealized, yet deeply intimate and heightened, the

[107] Caffin, "Pan-American Exposition," xxviii.
[108] Unidentified Clipping.

representation of Mrs. Roosevelt appealed to the viewer as it reconciled the official and private dimension of her persona. In this respect, Beaux's conception of the portrait was undoubtedly "correct:" it was, in fact, "with such simplicity of dress and pose, such an expression of motherliness and benignity, that the vast majority of Americans would prefer to think of any consort of a President."[109]

The overall positive remarks on *Mother and Daughter* and *Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel* sanction the success of Beaux's ability to give readable and appropriate pictorial status to the world of female relations. In doing so, Beaux enacted a specific artistic approach that served to accommodate commission-specific requirements as much as to foreground her own artistic individuality. She superimposed the constitution of her own gender identity through recognizable performative acts onto the sitters' self-representational desires, cleverly assimilating the portraits' larger implications in her own operation of self-definition. Caffin found that in the forms of Mrs. Griscom and Frances's portrait Beaux's feminine sentiment was wanting: the portrait's sober palette and the rigid solemnity of mother and daughter disturbingly eschewed standardized pictorial vocabulary associated with a feminine artistic subjectivity, deflecting the possibility of finding human interest in the sitters into an emotional void. If anything, however, Caffin's judgement testified the existence of a very precise fabric of psychological interest, and one intimately concerned with female experiences. His was the anxious response to the acute depiction of the all-female affair of a girl's initiation into adulthood, an event that, despite its social and public resonance, remained obscure and illegible in its psychological implications to masculine eyes.

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[109] Ibid.

Mrs. Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel was a comforting, plain image of maternal affection that confirmed the viewer's imagination of a woman-made representation of motherhood and daughterhood, and one that befitted the modern goodwife of a nation. Masculine blindness, however, did not prevent *Mother and Daughter* from unfolding its own narrative of motherhood before the general viewer, and speaking comprehensibly through a recognizable idiom of undisputable feminine matrix to those who shared the sitters' situation in real life. Mrs. Griscom and Frances stood for any mother and daughter stranded between the desire of preserving their natural bond intact and the awareness of having to part themselves in the sphere of social relations: they are inseparable and yet deeply self-sufficient in their sober dignity, captured as if they were not at the moment focused on the triviality of social life yet aware of the necessity of showcasing the paraphernalia of fashionable femininity in stepping into the public showground. It is with the transparency of feeling of *Mother and Daughter* that Beaux performed her feminine artistic self to its fullest: she utilized her established knowledge of female types to turn the ideal, monolithic qualities the sitters took on as separate individuals into the expression of the uncertain, yet emotionally intense nature of the human relationship that linked them as a pair.

Conclusions

Cultural historian Martha Banta has argued that "It would take luck and stamina, surely, for women to choose to be objects representative of the desires of others that were also commensurate with the significance they tried to create for themselves."[110] Banta's remark addresses the late-nineteenth-century creation of visual and verbal depictions of women as ideal types that responded to, and stood for the values and desires of a whole nation. Beaux's portraits came into being when this diversification of female identities was being continuously and relentlessly pursued. In this respect, they document a process of production and propagation of notions of femininity that encompasses larger dynamics at work in the redefinition of categories of female identity.

Beaux interposed her own performance of a feminine self to create images that externalized the inner realities of her sitters while also articulating a culturally-valid statement of feminine values. To do so, she created a pictorial language that incorporated a feminine vocabulary of artistic expression; she enacted it carefully to ensure the recognizability of a feminine sensitivity while still abiding by the aesthetic parameters of late-nineteenth-century portraiture. In applying an expressly feminine pictorial mode, she responded to the specificity of her sitters' private and public concerns, calibrating the formal structure of her portraits to express different ranges of ideas and feelings that constituted their lived experience.

Beaux's participation in the structures of the art world was unwavering. Her success largely depended on the allegiance between artist and the media that fundamentally structured

[110] Banta, 37.

the artist's role in the cultural reality of the turn of the century. She forged a distinguished public self-representation by accepting and showcasing the badge of femininity as the characterizing element of her artistic individuality. Beaux manipulated the enactment of feminine-evoking traits in her canvases as much as she did in her own life; in doing so, she aligned her own work with her own persona by virtue of a feminine identity intensely performed. The critics responded to Beaux's created juxtaposition by establishing continuous correspondences between the character of her works and her physical appearance, describing both as the embodiment of feminine ideals. If the fluid and vigorous style she adopted brought on virile and masculine associations, Beaux chose to reassure the viewer about the feminine nature of her pictorial conceptions, treating their subjects with that sympathetic understanding of character that her sex had naturally allocated her. The critics perceptively assimilated Beaux's performance of feminine artistic feeling, emphasizing its role in the successful deliverance of the portrait's emotional dimension.

Beaux's portraits and public façade testify to the strategies whereby she structured an artistic individuality in meaningful continuation with sanctioned artistic and social modes of selfhood. She regulated the potential dangers of her female identity by adhering to shared prescriptions of womanhood, and to a recognizable version of artistic identity that was quintessentially modern and socially prominent. In doing so, she comforted her viewers about the wholesomeness of her womanly nature, situating her artistic practice within the prescribed boundaries of a culturally-approved and artistically-sanctioned female identity. Beaux is the case of a woman with the "luck and stamina" to create a self-representation which satisfied the desires and expectations of others, and also carried the stamp of her own individuality; by crafting a pictorial mode aimed to encode the world of female relations, she created significant images of

self also for her sitters, projecting their individualities as insightful representations of psychological realities as much as in the form of recognizable cultural emblems.

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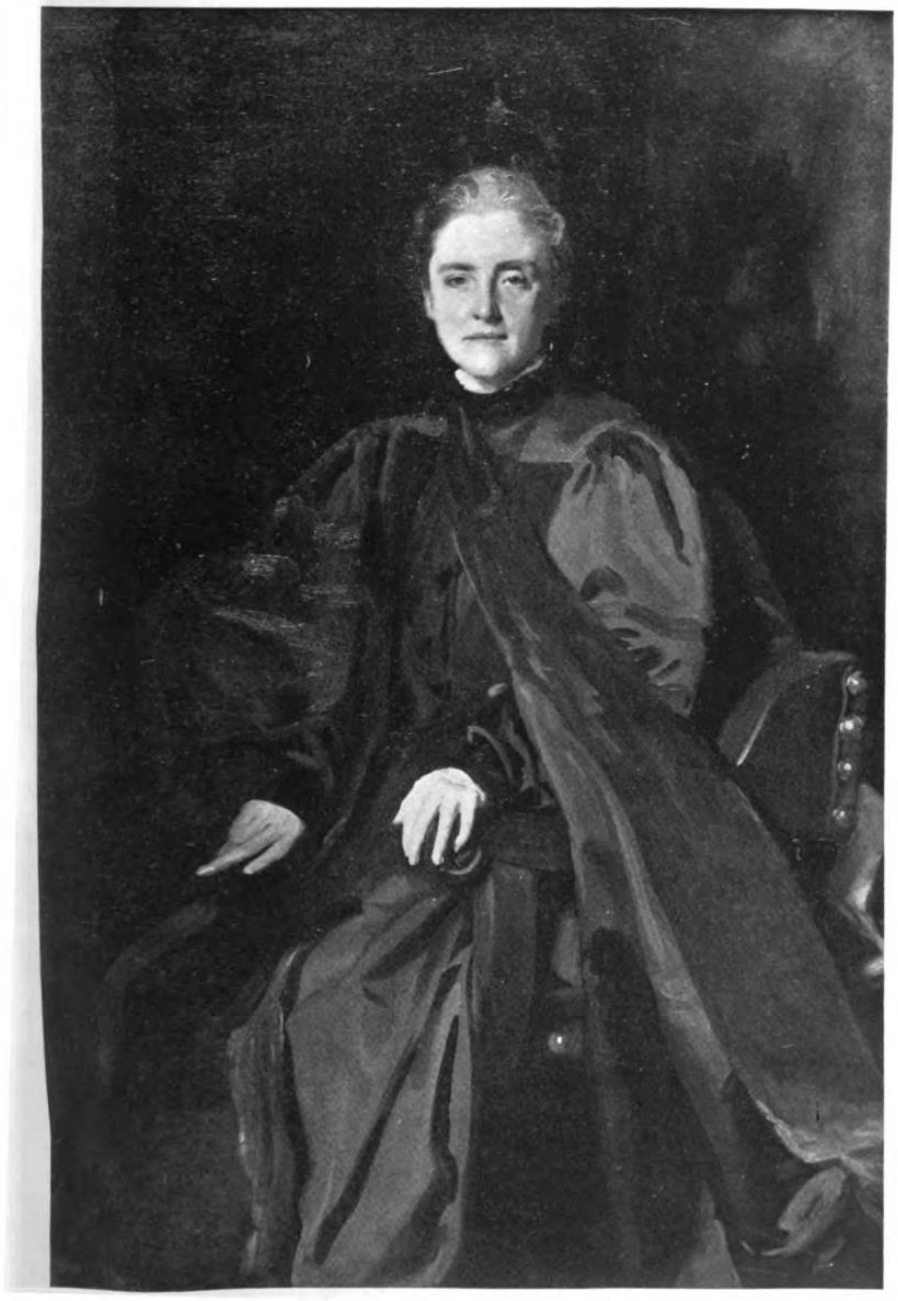
Figures

Figure 1 Cecilia Beaux, *Cecil Kent Drinker,* 1891, oil on canvas, 64 x 34½ inches.

Philadelphia Museum of Art; purchased with the Joseph E. Temple Fund, 1966. (Yount et al., 126).

Figure 2 John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Miss Beatrice Goelet,* 1891, oil on canvas, 64 x 34 inches. Private collection. (Dayer Gallati et al., 159).



THE PRESIDENT OF BRYN MAWR
By Cecilia Beaux

37

Figure 3 Cecilia Beaux, *The President of Bryn Mawr*, 1903?, oil on canvas.

(Reproduced in Caffin, "Some American Portrait Painters," 37).

Figure 4 Cecilia Beaux, *Mother and Daughter (Mrs. Clement Acton Griscom and her daughter Frances Canby Griscom),* 1898, oil on canvas, 83 x 44 inches.

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Frances C. Griscom. 1950.15. (Yount et al., 147*).*

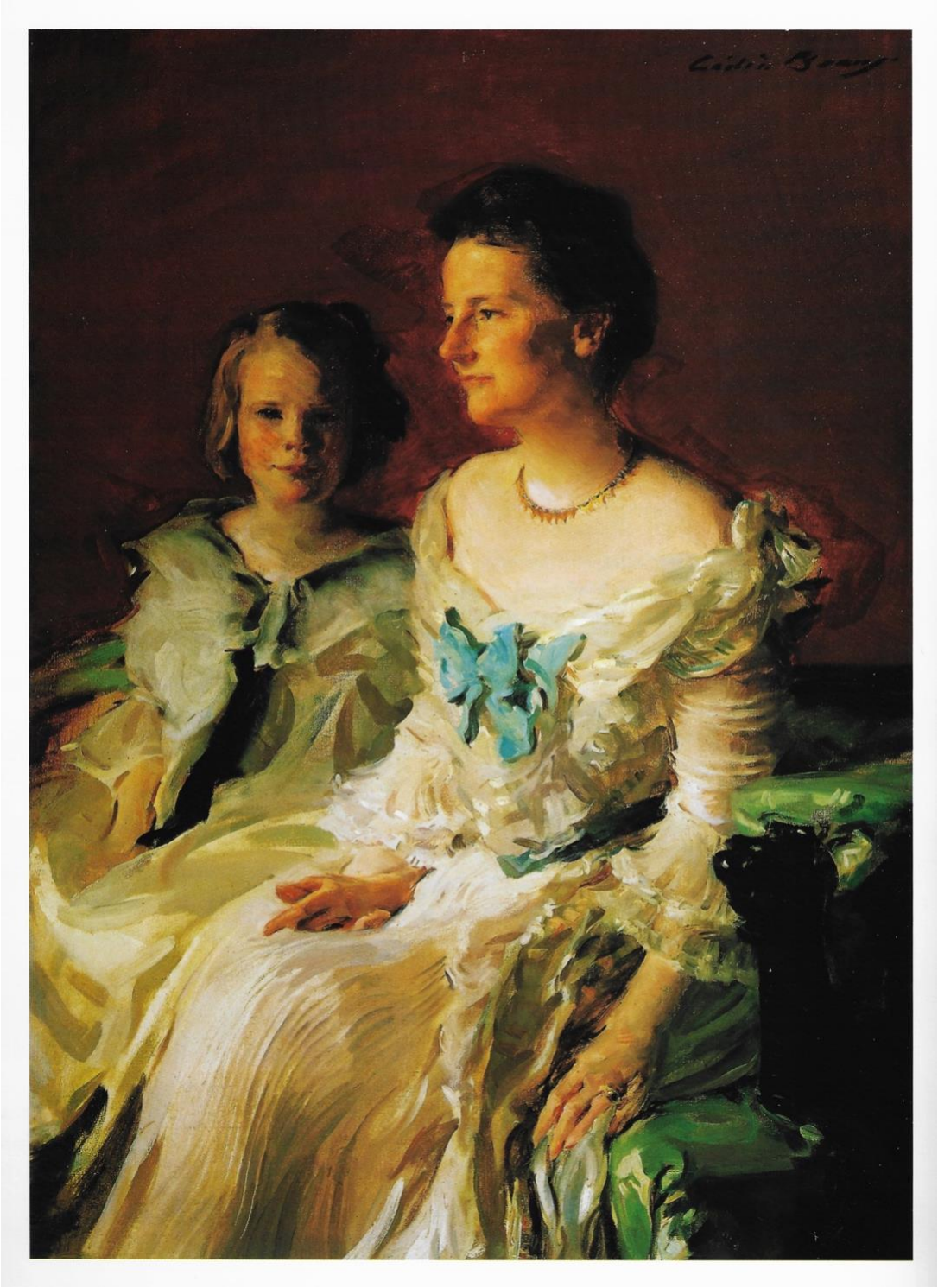


Figure 5 Cecilia Beaux, *Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt and Daughter Ethel*, 1902, oil on canvas, 41½ x 31½ inches. Collection of Sarah Chapman. (Carter, 136).

Figure 6 Carnegie Institute Jury, Pittsburgh, 1899

Top (L. To R.): W. Elmer Schofield, Frank Duveneck and Anders Zorn

Bottom (L. To R.): Beatty, William Merritt Chase, Cecilia Beaux, Edmund Tarbell, J. Alden Weir, English and Unknown.

(Cecilia Beaux Papers, AAA, Photographs 1888-1919, box 3, folder 30, image 3)

Figure 7 Cecilia Beaux, *Self-Portrait,* 1894, oil on canvas, 25 x 20 inches.

National Academy Museum, New York. (Carter, frontispiece).

Figure 8 Interior of Cecilia Beaux's studio at 1710 Chestnut Street, 1889-90.

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. (Carter, 108).

Figure 9 Cecilia Beaux, *Henry Howard Houston Jr.,* 1895, oil on canvas, $33^{3/4}$ x $25^{3/8}$ inches.

University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, Philadelphia. (Sharp, 66).

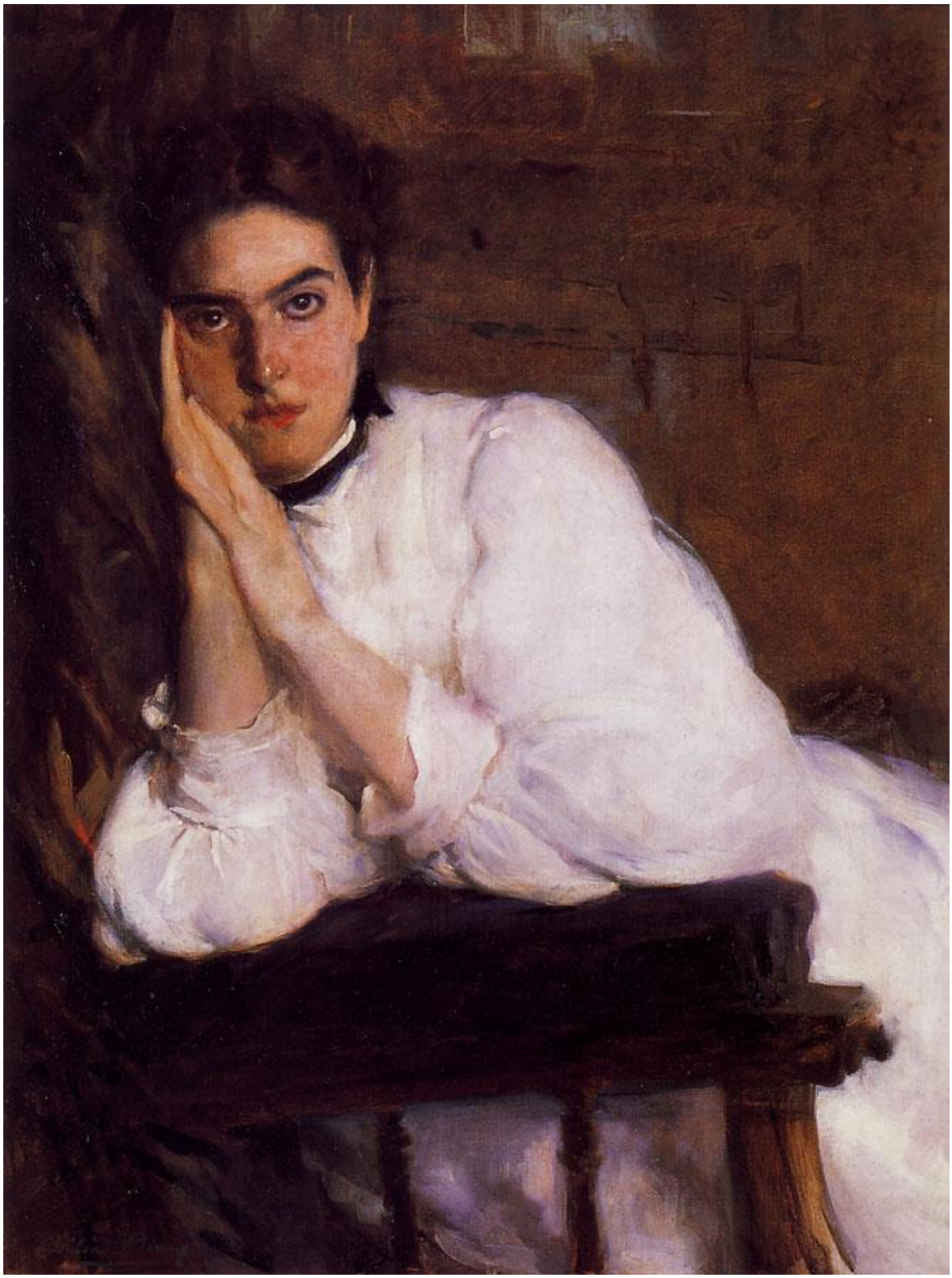


Figure 10 Cecilia Beaux, *The Dreamer (Reverie),* 1894, oil on canvas, 33 x 25 inches.

The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio.

Figure 11 Cecilia Beaux, *Sita and Sarita,* 1893, oil on canvas. $37^{3/8}$ x $25^{1/8}$ inches.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris. (Yount et al., 131).

Figure 12 Cecilia Beaux, *Ernesta (Child with Nurse),* 1894, oil on canvas, 50 ½ x 38 1/8 inches.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Maria DeWitt Jesup Fund, 1965, 65.49. (Yount et al. 134).

Figure 13 Cecilia Beaux, *Dorothea and Francesca Gilder (The Dancing Lesson*), 1899-1900, oil on canvas. 80 1/8 x 46 inches.

Art Institute of Chicago. A.A. Munger Collection, 1921.109. (Yount et al., 55).