

PRESS RELEASE

DR. TARA LEIGH TAPPERT TO LECTURE AT SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY ON AMERICAN PORTRAIT PAINTER CECILIA BEAUX

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On Thursday, Oct. 26, 2006, Dr. Tara Leigh Tappert presents a public lecture, "Out of the Background: Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture" at 7 p.m. in Hester Auditorium, Henkel Hall, on Shenandoah University's main campus. Dr. Tappert's overview of this fascinating late 19th and early 20th century American artist will show how painting became Cecilia Beaux's life work. During her lifetime, Beaux's sumptuous, high-style portraits of America's elite brought her recognition on both sides of the Atlantic. Her paintings were favorably compared to those of John Singer Sargent. Her reputation exceeded that of Mary Cassatt, and William Merritt Chase pronounced her "the greatest woman painter of modern times." The lecture, a component of a Shenandoah course "Art 216: American Art," is generously supported by a gift from Virginia-Wojno Forney. Admission is free and open to the public.

Philadelphia-born portrait painter, teacher, lecturer, and writer Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) was the youngest daughter of Jean Adolphe and Cecilia (Leavitt) Beaux. Twelve days after her birth, her mother died of childbirth complications, and her father, who was French and deeply shocked at the loss of his wife, gave Cecilia and her older sister to their maternal grandmother to raise. He returned to his family in France. The loss of both her mother and father deeply affected Cecilia, and she came to realize she needed to make a mark in the world. Beaux found her profession in the arts, a choice she later described as a sacred calling made at the exclusion of marriage. At every turn, Beaux used her talent, intelligence and beauty to place her and her artwork in the limelight. Beaux's paintings of upper-class men, women and children represent the finest examples of turn-of-the-twentieth-century grand manner portraiture. Known for her bravura brushwork, lush color and consummate ability to combine likeness and genre, Beaux's paintings garnered awards and accolades at the exhibitions to which she regularly sent her work, including the international exhibitions at the Carnegie Institute, where Willa Cather reviewed Beaux's work. Even Beaux came to view herself as uniquely gifted, and believed most women did not have the strength or stamina to meet the demands of an art career.

By the turn of the 20th century, Beaux was balancing an active career of teaching, lecturing and painting, with a busy social life divided between her winter residence in New York City and her summer home and studio, *Green Alley*, in Gloucester, Mass. In 1895, Beaux was the first woman artist appointed to a full-time faculty position at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, a hiring not repeated again until the 1950s. In 1935, at the end of Beaux's career, the American Academy of Arts and Letters organized the first major retrospective of her work, an exhibition that prompted art critic Henry McBride to describe Beaux as "the Georgia O'Keefe of [her] period." A few years later, as the result of an unusual gift bequeathed to the Pennsylvania Academy shortly after Beaux's death in 1942, eight of her gold medals were melted down to establish the Cecilia Beaux Memorial Prize, for "the best portrait painted during a school year by a student." Thus the artist's legacy continues.

Beaux made complex life choices in order to have a career at the pinnacle of American art. Dr. Tappert will explain some of Beaux's choices, which reflect roles for women in the late 19th century, the status of portraiture during this time period and what was required to sustain an active arts career.
