

## PORTRAITS

By the latter nineteenth century, portraiture had become closely associated with the art style called realism. This was true in the United States as well as Europe doubtless because so many of America's leading portraitists—including John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), and Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942) represented in the Morse Museum's collection—studied and worked abroad.

Unlike the romantic portraits earlier in the century or the idealized examples of neoclassicism, realist portraits were designed not to aggrandize the sitter or awe the viewer. Rather they were intended to communicate something interesting and significant about the basic reality of a subject—the true psychology of the sitter. This attribute of painted portraits helped distinguish the painter and oil portrait from growing competition from the photographer and the photographic portrait.

The Morse's portrait collection illustrates not only the path to realism in American portraiture but the Museum's basic interest in people—in their unique character, individual personality, and humanity. Portraiture is a particularly social genre and perhaps appeals most strongly to collectors such as Hugh and Jeannette McKean who like people. The McKeans acquired a compelling selection of American portraits from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presenting American subjects that ranged from powerful business executives to lovely girls, both of genteel and working classes. Their personalities have been evoked by a fine selection of very talented and well-known American painters. The Morse continues to acquire good portraits that enhance the collection the McKeans initiated.