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The Art of Handwriting

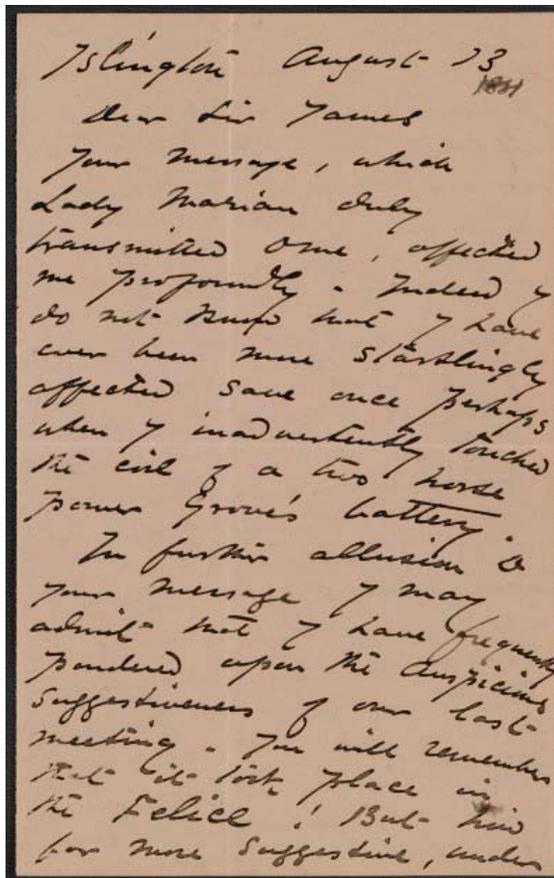
July 2 to October 27, 2013

Exhibited in the Lawrence A. Fleischman Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Writing a letter in one's own hand can be an artistic act. Handwriting animates paper. The bold flairs of calligraphic script shout for attention, while elegant flourishes of cursive sashay across the page. Free-spirited scribbled letters trip over each other, and distinctive dashes help direct traffic. Some crossed t's and dotted i's stand alert, and others slump or sway into their neighbors. Every message brims with the personality of the writer at the moment of interplay between hand, eye, mind, pen, and paper.

The letters here, from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, show that an artist might put pen to paper just as he or she would apply a line to a drawing. For each artist, a leading authority interprets how the pressure of line and sense of rhythm speak to that artist's signature style. And questions of biography arise: does the handwriting confirm assumptions about the artist, or does it suggest a new understanding?

VIEW ITEMS FROM THE EXHIBITION



Harriet Goodhue Hosmer letter to Sir James, 1881 Aug. 13

Creator: Harriet Goodhue Hosmer

Harriet Hosmer's independence, gregariousness, quick wit, and keen intelligence are evident in this letter. She oscillates between flirtatious playfulness and addressing Sir James as an equal, quoting Latin (*Verbum Sapienti*—a word to the wise) and finding metaphors in batteries and brakes. To make her acclaimed Neo-classical sculptures, Hosmer started by modeling wet clay with her hands, refined her designs on plaster casts, and ultimately carved large blocks of marble. Sculpture was almost exclusively about the sense of touch, so it is surprising how Hosmer's handwriting economically skims across the page. Since Neo-classicism aspired to the perfection of idealized balanced forms, inspired by ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, it is curious to see her script slanting consistently downwards. Hosmer's large scrawling script, covering four pages, sheds light on her sense of self-worth as a woman in the world and speaks to her ambition with regard to the monumentality of her sculptures.

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