

BO BARTLETT

FORTY YEARS OF DRAWING



30 Bartlett

BO BARTLETT

FORTY YEARS OF DRAWING

Bo Bartlett
Forty Years of Drawing

Curated by Jordan Sokol

Florence Academy of Arts US, Jersey City, NJ
Bo Bartlett Center, Columbus, GA
Flint Institution of Arts, Flint, MI

In 1873, a British ethnographer named Joseph Orpen was led through the South African Maloti mountains by a local Bushman guide named Qing. They visited ancient caves covered with rock drawings made by the San people over a period of about 4,000 years. On one particular panel were images of three men, partially transformed into antelope. When Orpen asked what the drawings of the men with antelope heads meant, Qing replied, “They are men who have died, and now live in rivers, and they were spoilt at the same time as the eland and by the dances of which you have seen paintings.” Qing is describing these images as depicting men in a state of trance. We now understand that, for the San people, “dying,” “spoiling,” and a sense of being underwater are all associated with the experience of the spirit world.

But what compelled these remote hunter-gatherers to create such images? What purpose did they serve? Though the intentions behind cave paintings have mystified art historians and anthropologists for over a century, what the existence of these pictures suggest is that the act of creating them in some way deepened the connection between the artists who made them and the worlds they were depicting.

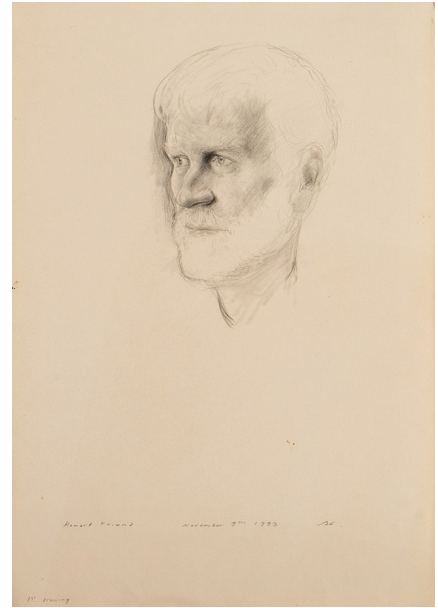
Art has always been an essential part of human life. Whether it’s to tell a story or simply to record an observation, the images we weave together are our attempts to reconcile the tension between our interior world and the world we live in; the objective experience and the subjective perception of our experience. This is the starting point of art, and drawing is the first visible pictorial manifestation of the union between these worlds.



Will - Bo Bartlett

The collection of works gathered in this show mark the first major exhibition of Bo Bartlett’s drawings. These works span 40 years of the artist’s career, revealing an intimate peek into a side of his life and oeuvre rarely seen by the public. The exhibition contains not only drawings in graphite, but also more colorful works in gouache. As much as some of the drawings may reveal the embryonic stages of larger ideas, they are not just studies intended solely as a means to an end. They are autonomous records, existing as their own articulations and representations of movement in time.

Obsessively drawing and doodling since early childhood, Bartlett continues to use the medium as his lifeline to the world. However, his drawings strike a potent counterpoint to the larger-than-life paintings that have defined his career. His work has always asked big questions about life, death, love, memory, and time. The monumental scale of his paintings reinforce the grandeur of his themes, but they also swallow us in. We become part of the dreamlike worlds that Bartlett constructs, worlds that iconify his own personal histories and reveal the mystery and meaning in the everyday.



Howard - Bo Bartlett

Bartlett's drawings by contrast are quieter, strikingly personal and almost voyeuristic in their intimacy. They are like diary entries, private stories of his life with specific people, at specific moments. Still, Bartlett brings a sense of illumination to his subjects. He understands that drawing is more than just mimicry, or the detailed rendering of every wrinkle or fold. It's a process of distilling the most essential information in service of a larger vision. This form of visual selection is key to differentiating truth from fact. Andrew Wyeth reinforced this idea, "...a detail should be there and it should be carried far, but the picture's got to be bigger than that. Otherwise, it doesn't hang together and it doesn't give you the force of the thing. It's got to be abstracted through your vision, your mind. It's a process of going through detail in order eventually to obtain simplification and cutting out ... And with less sometimes to work with, you gain more."

The impulse that motivated the San rock drawings thousands of years ago isn't any different from the impulse that drives us to make pictures today. The desire to understand our place in the world around us, and to feel in communion with it. Joseph Campbell said, "...what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality." The act of drawing sanctifies the here and now. It transforms the everyday transitory moments of our lives into a sense of at-onement with the world. It teaches us to think, see and feel at once. And it reminds us that every moment is holy if we awaken to it. It is through this lens that we can truly begin to grasp the deeper nature of Bartlett's work.

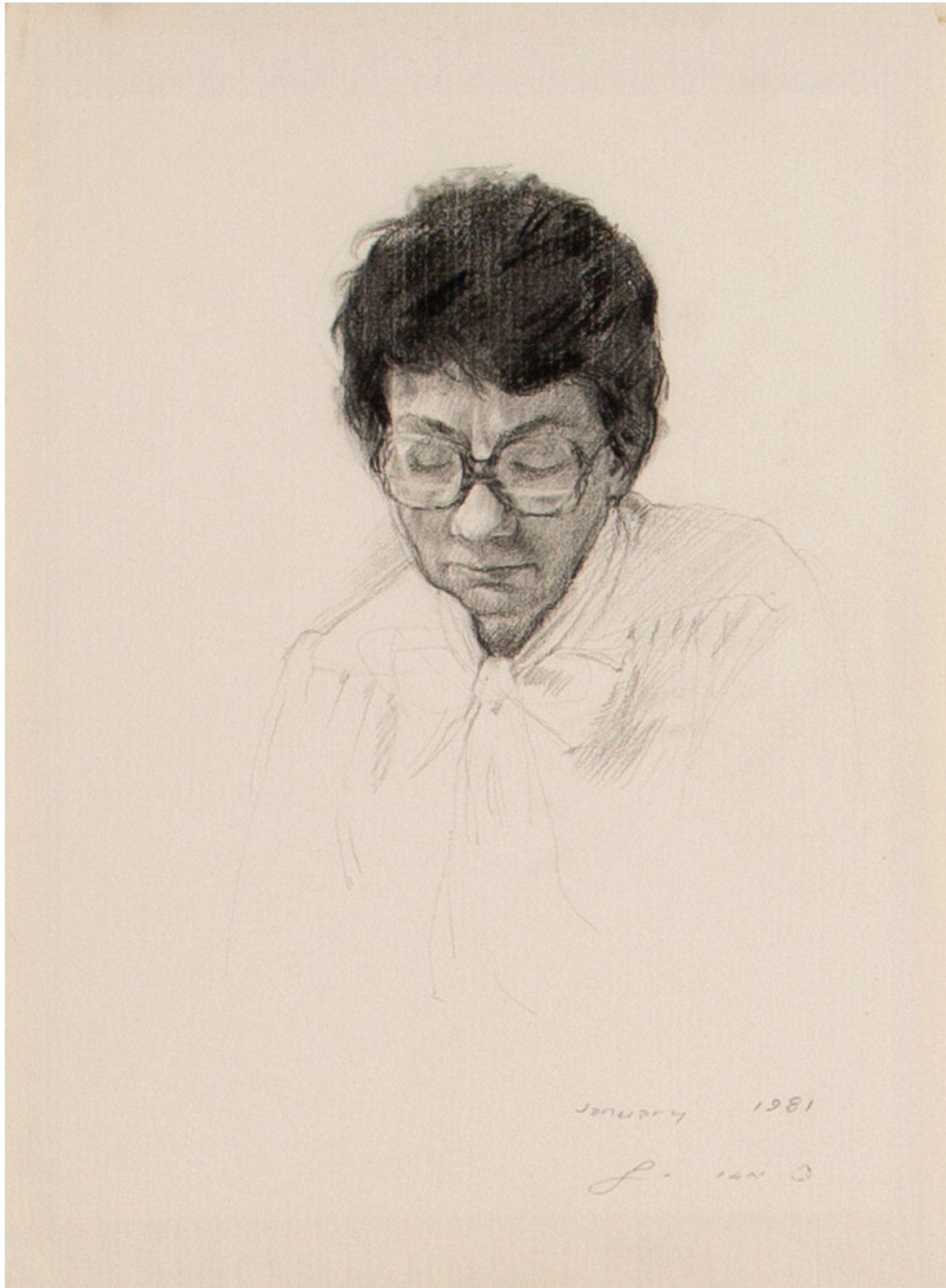
Jordan Sokol
New York, NY
2019

“The purpose of art is to wake us up - to wake us up to the numinous now, to the great unfolding of the mysterious universe that we are one with.”

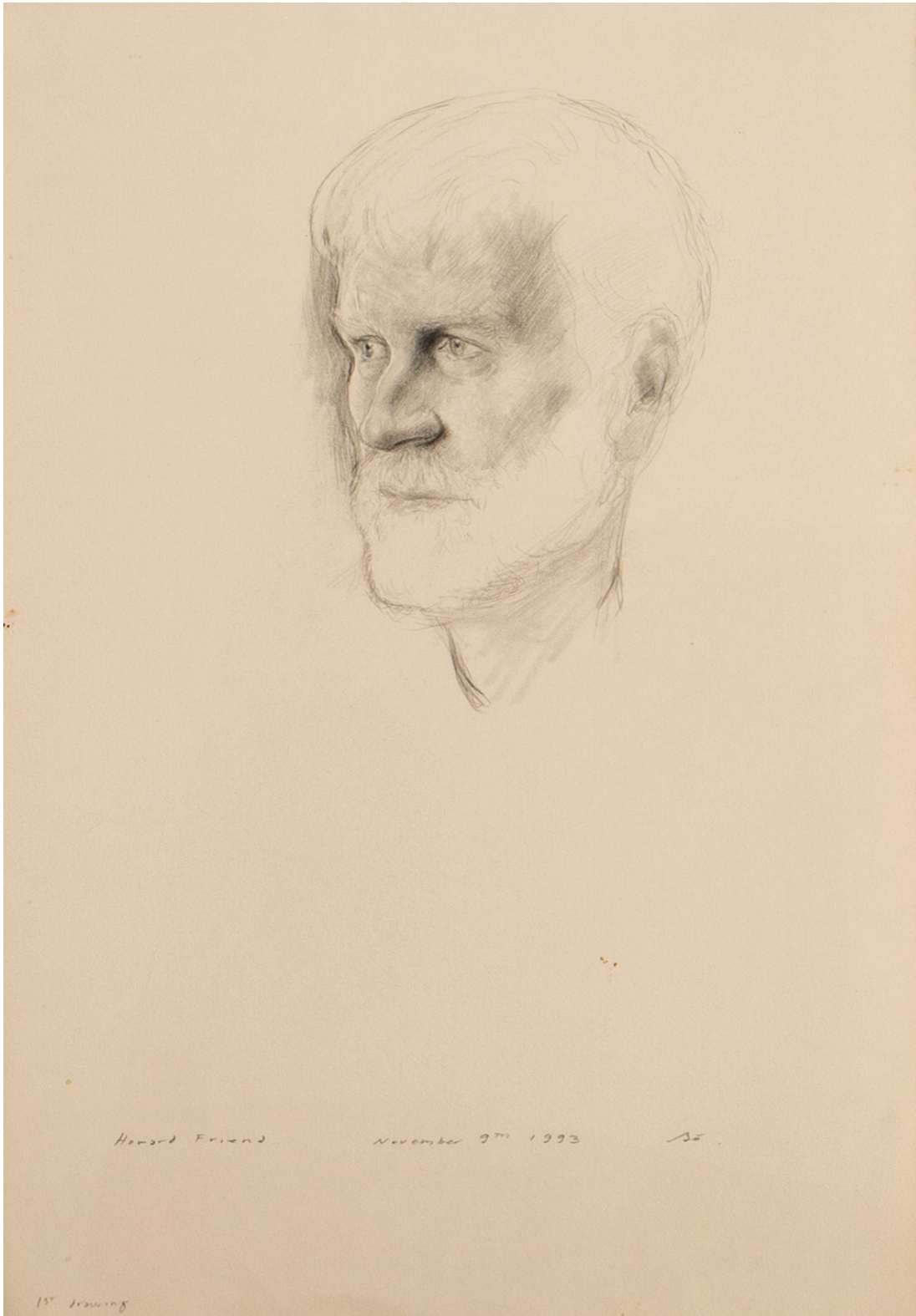
- Bo Bartlett



Will, 1976, pencil on paper, 11.75 x 8.5 inches



Bebe, 1981, pencil on paper, 13 x 9.5 inches



Howard, 1993, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 19 x 13 inches



A Moment in the Studio, 1995, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 18.5 x 16 inches



Hannah, September 20, 2000, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22.25 x 15 inches



Charlotte Cohen, 2004, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 11.25 x 9.5 inches



Candida (Study for Sietso), 2004, gouache on paper, 11 x 10.75 inches



Serena Sleeping, 2004, gouache on paper, 14 x 17 inches



After Brain Surgery, 2007, graphite and gouache on paper, 11.25 x 8.5 inches



Howard, 2006, pencil on paper, 11 x 15 inches



Betsy, 2006, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 11 inches



Betsy, July 23, 2007, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 14 x 21.25 inches



Cruel Fair Study, 2007, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22 x 30 inches



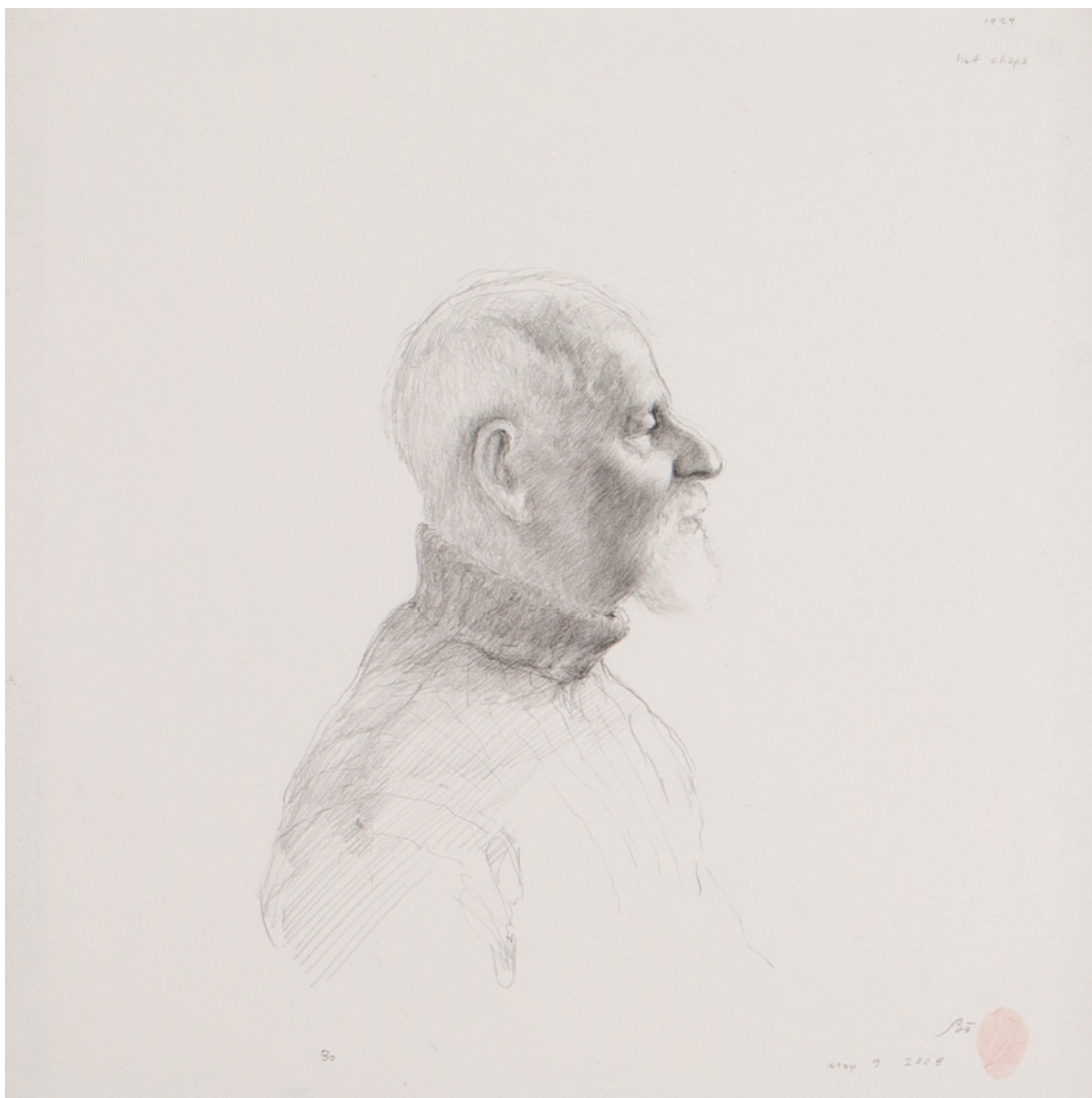
Betsy, May 28th, 2009, pencil on paper, 15 x 22 inches



Betsy, August 3rd, 2008, pencil on paper, 15 x 22.25 inches



January 8, 2008, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 25.5 x 20 inches



Bo Bonow, May 9, 2008, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 14.5 x 14.5 inches



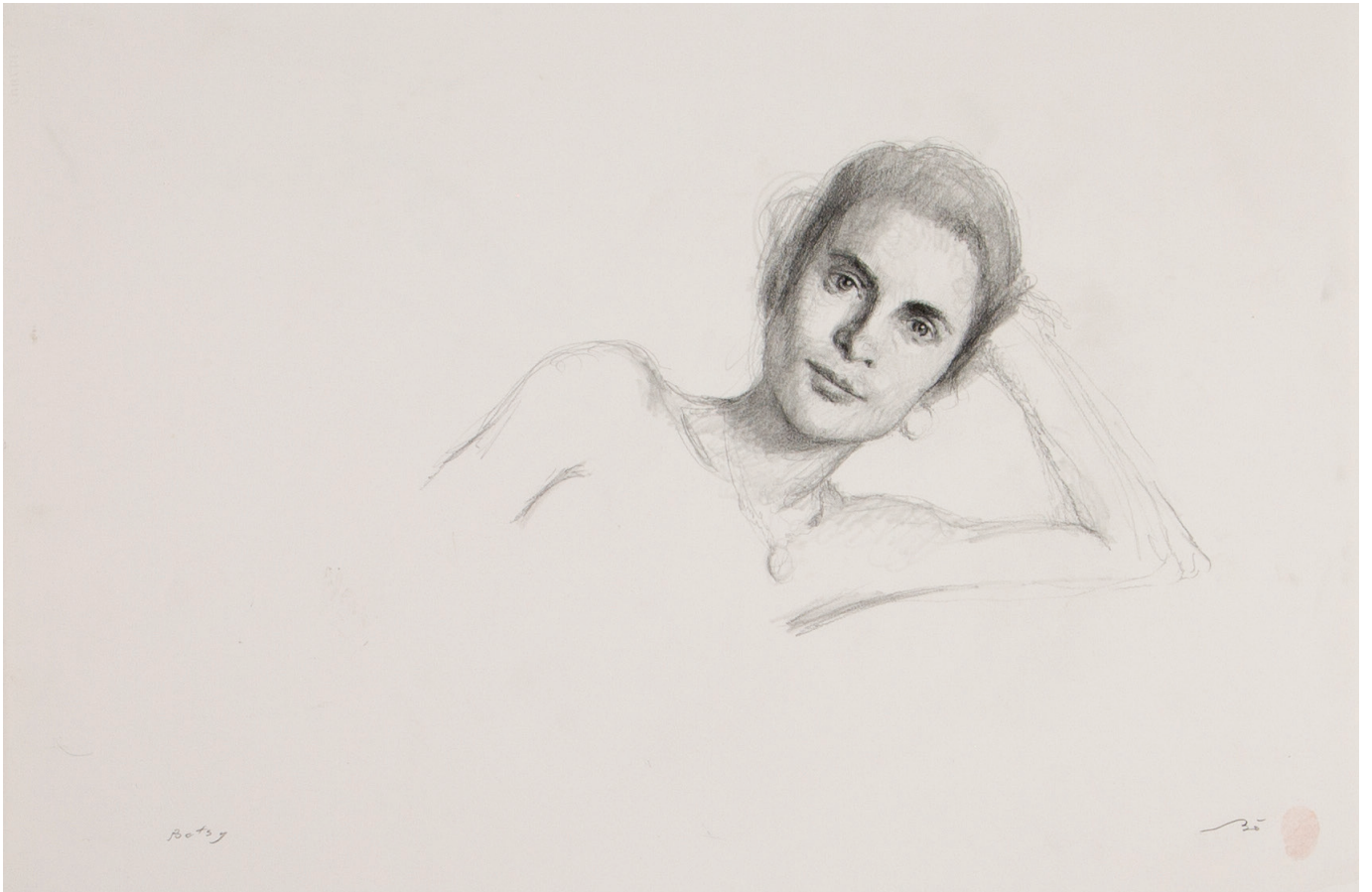
Betsy at the Window Wheaton Island Maine, 2009, pencil on paper, 22 x 15 inches



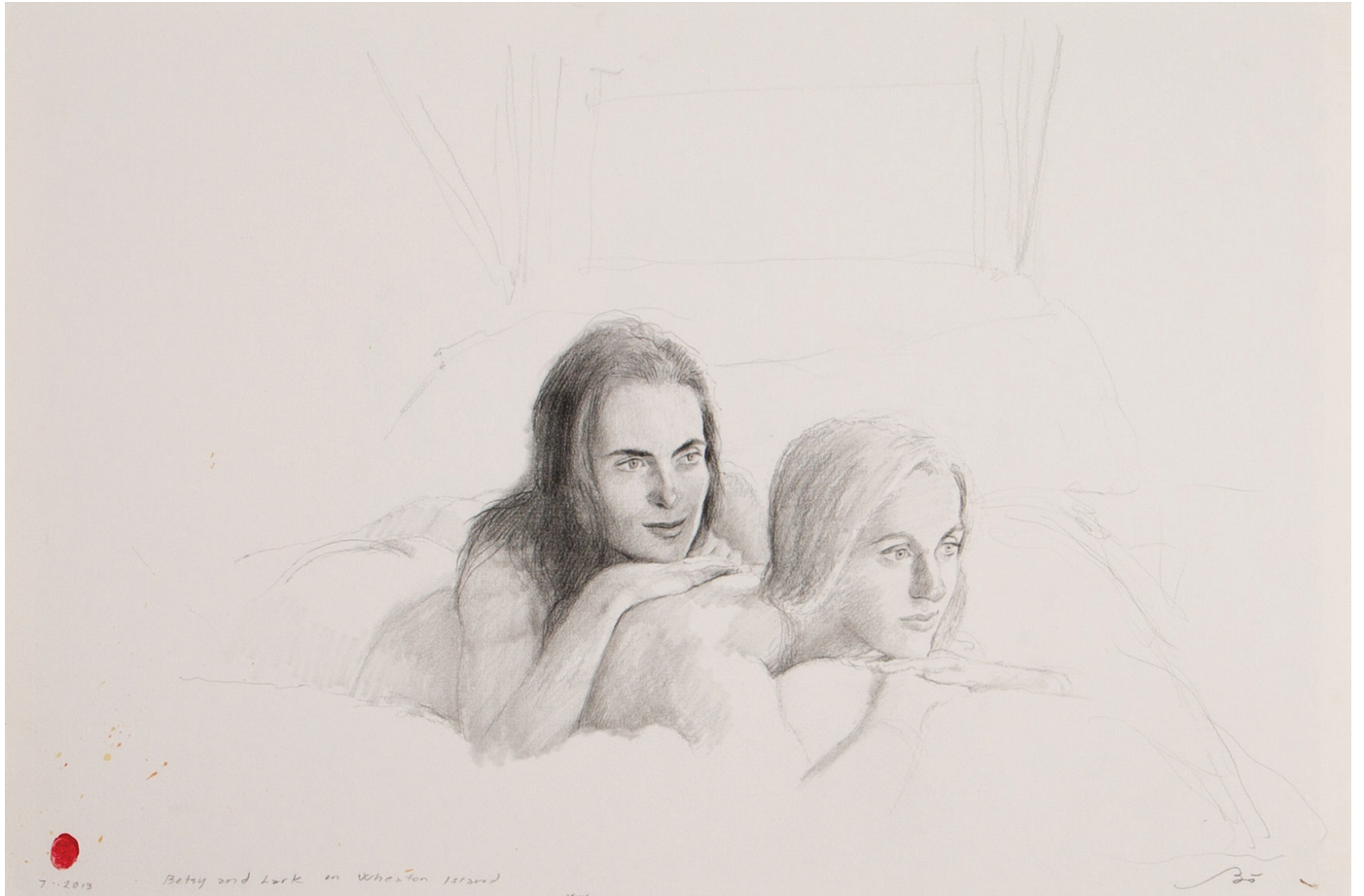
Betsy Sleeping, 2012, pencil on paper, 15 x 22 inches



Betsy, 2011, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22 x 30 inches



Betsy, 2015, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Betsy and Lark on Wheaton Island, 2013, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Lark and Betsy, 2013, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



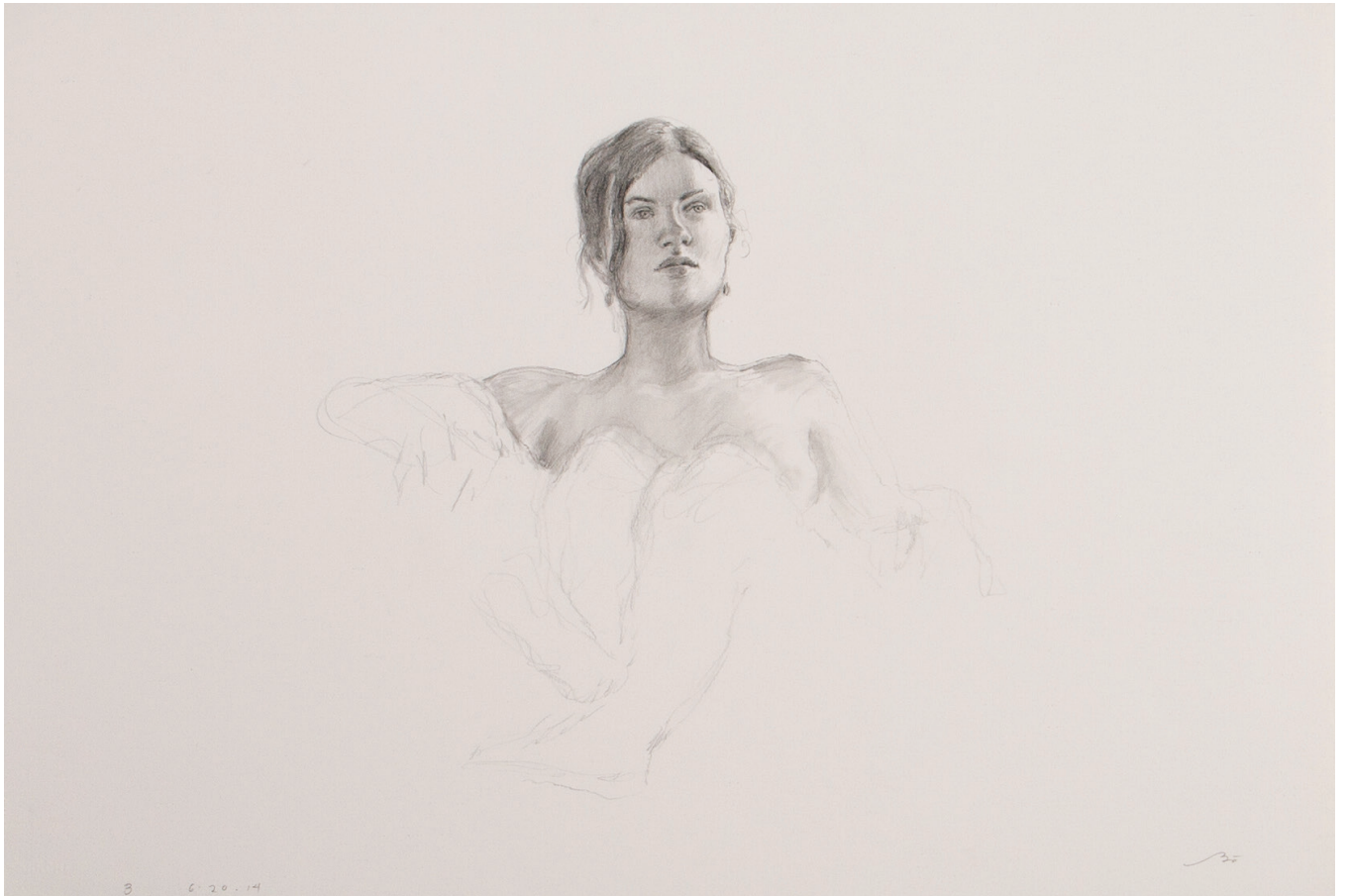
Resting, 2011, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Alyssa Monks with Betsy Eby in Bed in Georgia, 2014, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22 x 30 inches



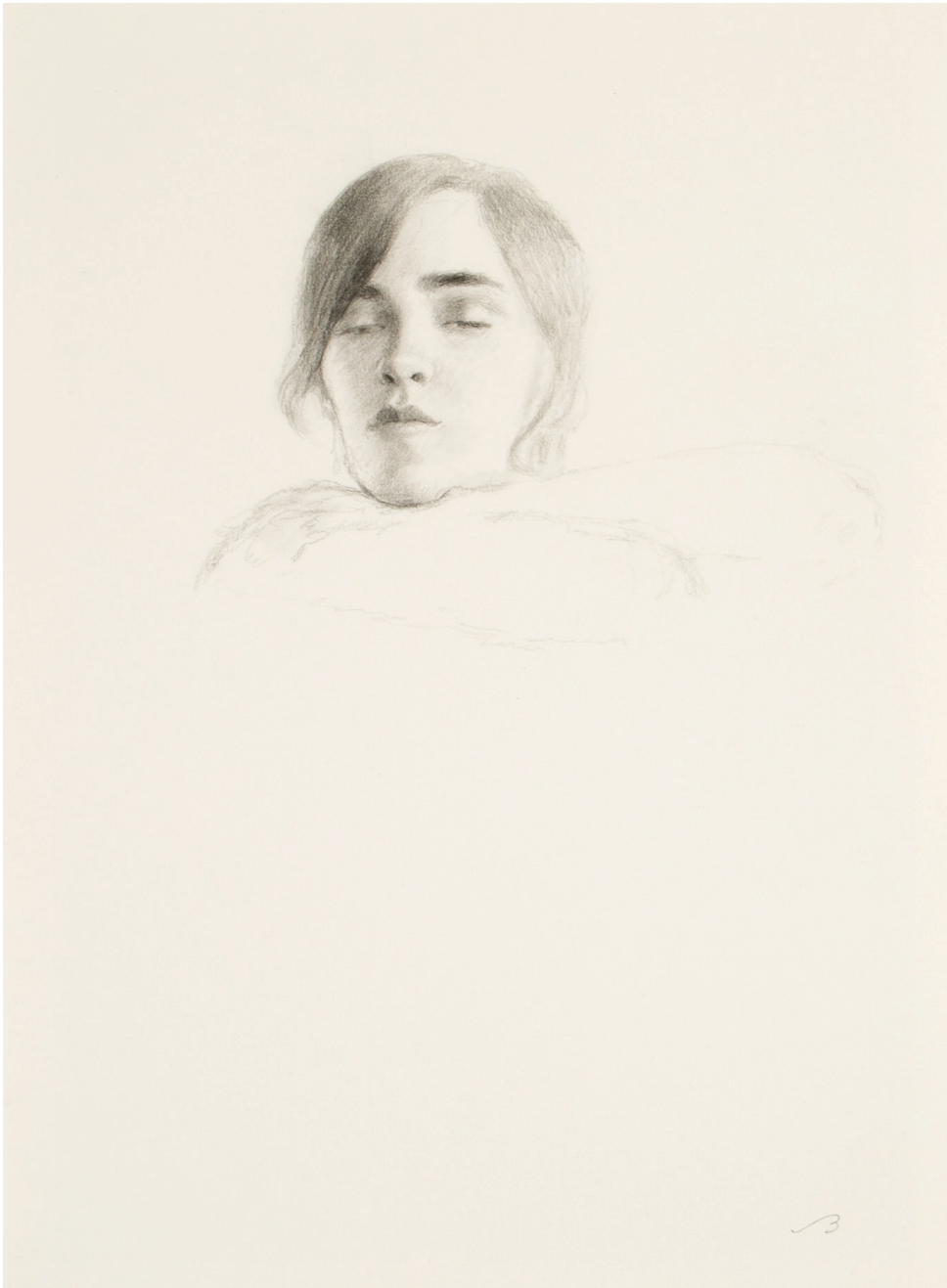
Britney Resting, 2014, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Britney Sitting, 2014, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Britney, 2014, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22 x 15 inches



Rachel, 2016, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 11.4 inches



Bobby, 2016, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22.5 x 15 inches



Boots, 2014, gouache on paper, 15 x 22 inches



Alexandra Joy Goodrich, June 10, 2015, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Alexandra, June 10, 2015, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22.25 inches



Cora King, 2015, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Cora Taking a Break While Posing, 2016, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22.25 inches



Charlotte, 2019, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22.25 inches



Charlotte, 2019, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 15 x 22 inches



Corset, 2019, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22 x 15 inches



Charlotte, 2019, pencil on Arches Hot-Pressed paper, 22.5 x 15 inches



Bebe, 2017, pencil on paper, 22.5 x 15 inches



Bebe, 2018, graphite and gouache on paper, 9 x 11 inches

The Bo Bartlett Center would like to thank
Pat S. & Thelon A. Hamby III and Amandah S. & John T. Turner
for their gracious sponsorship in the underwriting of the
40 Years of Drawing Catalogue.