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THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS EAKINS.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS EAKINS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
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BY
TOMMY CARROLL WILLIAMS
Norman, Oklahoma
1973

THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS EAKINS

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Thomas Eakins as a Young Student

THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS EAKINS

CHAPTER I

THE STUDENT

In a film entitled The American Image narrator E. G. Marshall refers to Thomas Eakins as a man "on the threshold of the modern world." What Eakins did to warrant this appellation was to rivet his attention and energies on the people and events of his time. This dissertation deals with Eakins the teacher, a man who encouraged his students to investigate, to love art, and to be true to themselves.

Eakins' personal misfortune occurred when he found himself entangled in a web of nineteenth-century American prudery. Unwilling to compromise his personal set of values, he stood accused of flagrant impropriety.

The legacy left by Thomas Eakins to art education lies in one man's rejection of arbitrary social whim for a devotion to free inquiry and artistic integrity. As a member of the vanguard Eakins helped pave the way for future generations of art students who could assume a true spirit of professionalism.

On a late winter day in 1886 Eakins wrote a brief letter of resignation to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

For the previous seven years he had carried the title of Professor of Drawing and Painting. He had almost single-handedly lifted that august institution from provincial near-obscurity to a position of unprecedented eminence in the field of American art education.¹ Now, pressured out of his office, Eakins was about to enter the last three decades of his life spurned by the Philadelphia society he had antagonized and ignored by a majority of his fellow artists.

This study is designed to clarify the role that Eakins played in the development of art education in the United States. It also seeks to answer certain questions: Did Eakins' methodology represent a significant change from the practices of his contemporaries or the established educational practice of his day? To what extent did Eakins' educational and aesthetic philosophy help shape post-Civil War American culture? How did Eakins come to be recognized as an innovative teacher? Inasmuch as Eakins was closely associated with the Pennsylvania Academy, an understanding of that institution's traditions can clarify his relationship to it.

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is the oldest institution of its kind in the United States, having been founded in Philadelphia in 1805. More than seventy men, all of them civic leaders, had signed Articles of Agreement, promising "to promote the cultivation of the Fine Arts in the

¹Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work (New York: Whitney Museum, 1933), p. 14.

USA, by introducing correct and elegant copies from works of the first Masters in Sculpture and Painting. . . ."2 Practically all of the men on the original governing board of the Academy were professional men, including a substantial number of lawyers. Only three were artists: Charles Wilson Peale, inventor and scientist as well as guiding light of the new institution; Peale's son, Rembrandt, a popular portraitist; and William Rush, a sculptor. The highly respected jurist Joseph Hopkinson lent his prestige to the new effort, as did George Clymer, who had been one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Clymer subsequently served as President of the Academy until his death in 1813, at which time Hopkinson succeeded him.³

From its inception the Academy had clearly stipulated that institutional support and control would stem from Philadelphia's business and professional leaders. This control was to be questioned many times hereafter, but usually only by a few isolated liberals. The average critic or patron recognized an artist as a person dependent upon the protection of the rich and powerful. More than a century later a very different attitude would make itself known. Speaking upon the then recent death of Thomas Eakins, one observer admitted

²Oliver W. Larkin, Art and Life in America (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 114.

³Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1971), p. 3.

that "without the artists Academies would not exist."⁴

Philadelphia had been generally considered the art capitol of the United States since colonial times. It was here, as one historian notes, that art became an important part of community life.⁵ It was in Philadelphia that Gilbert Stuart had painted President Washington's portrait. And it was in Philadelphia that Charles Wilson Peale had exuded his robust positivism. When Peale died in 1825 Philadelphia was forced to relinquish much of her status as cultural center of the nation. The vitality and urbanity that Peale had inspired was quickly displaced by money and social demands.⁶ The rationalization of Calvinism is nowhere more explicit than in the example of the Reverend R. H. Conwell, a contemporary of Eakins, who reputedly delivered the same sermon some six thousand times. He called it "Acres of Diamonds" and in it he assured prosperous Philadelphians that they were justified in desiring wealth and power "because you can do more good with it than you could without it."⁷ For the businessmen, physicians, and lawyers who controlled the Academy of Fine

⁴Letter, Helen Henderson to "Mr. Lewis," November 6, 1917, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

⁵E. P. Richardson, Painting in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1956), p. 54.

⁶Sylvan Schendler, Eakins (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), p. 7.

⁷Ibid., p. 281.

Arts, art was merely an instrument of middle- and upper-class morality. Bland portrait painting, as an example, was based on the eighteenth-century English idea of elegance and genteel decorum. Works of art were considered "the precious products of an art, the tendency of which is to refine the mind, enrich the imagination and soften the heart of man."⁸ A limited analogy may almost be drawn to the Italian Renaissance--in which the personal fortunes of merchant princes supported and patronized the arts.⁹

George Biddle and Nathaniel Burt were two men, however, who left records of a less than ideal relationship between artists and laymen in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. In the thirties Biddle had complained that the city "has relentlessly hated ideas and consequently disliked artists."¹⁰ He further observed that the result had been a significant exodus of painters and sculptors.

A passion for realism and hard fact, which some insist is American art's most distinguishing characteristic, was anything but widely accepted in the first half of the century.¹¹

⁸Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁹Roger B. Stein, John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1967), p. 256.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 260.

¹¹E. A. Carmean, Nature and Focus: Looking at American Painting in the Nineteenth Century (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1972), pp. 13-14.

Currier and Ives, for instance, found its market not in the official, or "high," art of the academies, but at a more popular level and in the medium of lithography rather than oil painting. George Caleb Bingham, an alumnus of the Pennsylvania Academy, was unable to find patrons for his pictures of contemporary subjects among the refined citizenry of Philadelphia.¹²

Into such an artistic and cultural climate Thomas Eakins was born. Ironically, he lived practically all of his life in this milieu and contributed to the beginnings of a new era--one promising greater tolerance and more freedom for artists.

Eakins' father had settled in Philadelphia sometime after 1830, bent on establishing himself socially and professionally. The elder Eakins became a writing master, thus encouraging the son to inherit a tradition of craftsmanship and a sense of draftsmanlike form.¹³ Young Eakins became his father's assistant, lettering legal documents and diplomas at the rate of forty cents a page. This early experience in penmanship served as a christening for Eakins' artistic future.¹⁴

¹²Schendler, Eakins, p. 8.

¹³Jules D. Prown, American Painting (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1955), p. 91.

¹⁴Fairfield Porter, Thomas Eakins (New York: George Braziller and Co., 1959), p. 15.

Father and son were apparently close, often hunting and fishing together. Throughout his life Thomas Eakins was to be closely involved with nature. He loved animals, particularly horses and dogs. He enjoyed swimming and sailing and watching fishermen pulling in their nets.¹⁵

Even as a teenager Eakins knew he wanted to be a painter. He graduated from Philadelphia's prestigious Central High School in June of 1861, at the age of sixteen. He had concluded his studies in the top fourth of his class and had been awarded a baccalaureate degree.¹⁶ Central High was an institution greatly respected for its high academic standards and its emphasis on science. As a student Eakins had excelled in languages, science, and mathematics. He was somewhat indifferent to literature, and what little art he studied was limited to perspective drawings of machinery.¹⁷ Upon completing high school Eakins immediately enrolled in drawing classes at the local Academy of Fine Arts.

The Academy at that time had an extensive collection of plaster casts, most of them copies of the Parthenon friezes. Since academic art placed so much importance on ancient, "classic" composition, perspective, and proportion, art

¹⁵ Roland McKinney, Thomas Eakins (New York: Crown Publishers, 1942), pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Virgil Barker, American Painting (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1950), p. 651.

¹⁷ Schendler, Eakins, p. 13.

students were required to laboriously reproduce the finest treasures of Greece and Rome. The art of the classical world was considered the epitome of sound aesthetic principles, and no prospective painter or sculptor could thus represent nature "correctly" unless technique were wedded with a sound understanding of the structure of objects he was attempting to draw or model.¹⁸ Certainly a positive result of this approach to teaching was the fusion of theoretical knowledge and consistent performance on the part of pupils.

The period in America extending from the last quarter of the eighteenth century through most of the nineteenth is generally regarded as a period of intellectual transition. It represents that time and circumstance when America sought to free itself from the European notion of an aristocratic, narrowly defined education for only a select few. The lessening influence of social distinctions, the new demands of enlarged social and economic activities, the increasing forcefulness of the democratic spirit, the requirements for more practical training, and the onrush of new scientific knowledge--these factors began to affect Eakins' generation.

Despite a certain homage to the past, the school in Philadelphia offered its students something unique in art education for that era: the opportunity to work from live

¹⁸Edmund B. Feldman, Becoming Human Through Art (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 87.

models. This was indeed unusual in a city that tended to look upon art as something less than a truly serious undertaking.¹⁹

Eakins supplemented his studies at the Academy with courses in anatomy and dissection at Philadelphia's Jefferson Medical College. Such detailed analysis of the human body as he was introduced to here prompted the young student at one point to consider making surgery his profession.²⁰ He successfully completed a demanding physician's course under one of the country's most brilliant surgeons, Joseph Pancoast; and he so impressed the Dean of Dissecting Studies, Dr. John Deaver, that the old physician proclaimed Eakins' knowledge superior to that of "ninety percent of the doctors that Jefferson graduates."²¹ This expression of Eakins' nonconformity through such an individualized study program represented in itself the nemesis of the old academic system.

In 1866 Eakins, with the encouragement and financial support of his father, decided to go to Paris for further training in drawing and painting. His professor at the Academy, aging Christian Schussele, had himself been a product of the Ecole de Beaux Arts and had excited his young pupil about the prospects of European study and travel. That fall Eakins arrived in Paris with letters of introduction and after only a month was admitted to the class of Jean Leon Gerome, the most respected master of the Beaux Arts.

¹⁹Schendler, Eakins, p. 13.

²⁰Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 13.

²¹Homer S. Saint-Gaudens, The American Artist and His Times (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1941), p. 179.

Until almost the middle of the twentieth century it was generally expected of American artists that they would make a pilgrimage to Europe. Furthermore, since the days of Louis XIV, and the establishment of the French Academy in 1648, Paris had been recognized as the art capitol of the continent. Her School of Fine Arts had been philosophically rooted in the dictum of Dominique Ingres, who reputedly had said, "Drawing is the Truth of Art."²²

One of the somewhat progressive elements in the Beaux Arts' program was a subdivision into two major traditions: an emphasis on linear design (ala Gerome) and a focus on painterly methods, the latter espoused by Leon Bonnat, a man usually considered more flexible than his colleague.²³ Gerome indeed followed Ingres' advice and taught his students to paint in flat color only after they had rendered careful, precise drawings.

Gerome was clearly impressed by the young American from Philadelphia, admitting to the staff at the Beaux Arts that Eakins revealed great promise. The conservative Ecole masters were particularly delighted in his record at the Pennsylvania Academy and the Jefferson Medical School. Years later Eakins was to speak often and affectionately of Gerome, referring to

²²Ibid., p. 177.

²³Frank J. Mather, "Thomas Eakins's Art in Retrospect," International Studio, XCV (January, 1930), 45.

him as "the greatest painter of the nineteenth century,"²⁴ in spite of the fact that the American's mature style reflects little of the older man's doctrine. Eakins undoubtedly saw in Gerome the great tradition of Western culture. Beyond that, the two men possessed similar temperaments and agreed with regard to the principal directions that art should take. If their means differed, the end they viewed together.

Everything at the Ecole de Beaux Arts was based on formula: a painting was always to be completed in the studio because of its diluted light and sharp contrasts; accents were created by definite shifts from light to dark; form was always arrived at through a meticulous blending of tones. Eakins was taught that vibrant color had no place in his palette other than as a minute highlight. The considered approach of the revered Dutch masters was one of lingering over a subject, reflecting upon it, correcting a place here or enriching another one there. According to academic logic the accomplished artist was one who disdained the unstable appearance of things--he painted what he conceived rather than what he perceived. The foundation of academic art was one of draftsmanship more than painting, and the painting that was taught came out tight and frigid. These schools actually taught artists to avoid working from nature. But

²⁴Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1970), p. 17.

as Walt Whitman was to reflect years later, "I never knew of but one artist, and that's Tom Eakins, who could resist the temptation to see what they thought rather than what is."²⁵

Gerome in his teaching method insisted upon careful drawing and perspective and attention to classical composition. He continually warned his students of the danger of relying upon picturesque anecdotes. Many a Gerome picture, however, is a contrived mythological scene or a well-known historical event. He felt a special delight for Oriental genre executed in a highly polished technique. The man's reputation was international, and while an occasional critic wrote off Gerome as merely a clever illustrator, many more accepted him as a great composer of pictures. Henry James once remarked upon examining a Gerome nude, "The man has an indefinable hardness in the soul of his work."²⁶

Almost from the beginning Thomas Eakins asserted marked individuality. Writing home he confessed that he had labored over a drawing "according to Gerome's directions. . . then he said not bad, that will do, now I will mix your colors which you will put on."²⁷ This youthful resentment of his teacher's heavy-handed manipulation was to remain with Eakins and be echoed in his own teaching career. He insisted that

²⁵Daniel M. Mendelowitz, A History of American Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 313.

²⁶Schendler, Eakins, p. 283.

²⁷Letter, Eakins to his father, November, 1867, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Gerome "aside from overthrowing completely the ideas I had got before at home. . . has never been able to assist me much, and often bothered me by mistaking my troubles."²⁸ Despite these frustrations Eakins was to submit a brief resume a generation later, the gist of which contained a proud account of his tutelage under the Ecole master:

I was born in Philadelphia July 25th, 1844. I had many instructors, the principal ones Gerome, Dumont (sculptor), Bonnat.²⁹

The slavish attention to antique art and plaster casts at the Philadelphia school had bored Eakins. Now he was experiencing a liberation in that the Beaux Arts pupils were not required to "correct" their figure studies by referring to classical statuary. Also, Gerome used the nude model. It was in the life studio that Eakins' professional future was inaugurated, and his drawing classes proved to be the most fruitful of all for him. Gerome certainly did not abolish the study of classical art; what he stressed above all else were the relative merits of one era--the classic phase of Greek sculpture, for example--over another. Beyond a doubt he directed his students to more profound depths at the Ecole than they could have discovered in New York or Philadelphia at the time. The board members of the Pennsylvania Academy would

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Letter, Eakins to James Morris, April 23, 1894, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

undoubtedly have been shocked and dismayed by the indecencies of Gerome's rhetoric.

Nineteenth century academicians taught their students to shun unbridled naturalism in art. They demanded idealism, controlled technique, and strict allegiance to observation. Gerome was no exception. He abhorred what he termed "eccentricity." He cautioned his pupils to relate an accurate imitation of nature to personal vision and imagination. Such strong assertiveness was bound to produce a few students who, lacking what the master called "ideas simply comprehended and powerfully expressed," were content to mimic their teacher. But others--like Eakins--found inspiration in Gerome's aggressive intensity and his insistence on accomplished drawing. Gerome's standards complemented the young American's fascination with scientific fact.

As a teacher Gerome was dictatorial. Eakins, in spite of this, felt that the man was fair in his judgments. And he liked Gerome's dignified bearing. In essence, Eakins came to pattern much of his own teaching philosophy on his Ecole master. Like Gerome he was to discourage exaggerated statements. He was to urge his own students to express themselves as individuals and to "go to the full extent of things" in their search for artistic understanding. The future teacher again wrote his father, "A teacher can do very little for his pupil and should only be thankful if he don't

hinder him, and the greater the master mostly the less he can say."³⁰

Eakins rarely mentioned his other instructors, the portrait painter Leon Bonnat or the sculptor Augustin Dumont. The little work he did as a student of sculpture was mainly to enable him--as a painter--to better comprehend three-dimensional form, particularly as it could be applied to anatomy.³¹

It could almost be said that Eakins went to school in order to learn what not to do. During his student days in Paris he independently trained himself in memory drawing. Whether he consciously realized it or not he was developing a working philosophy of art and teaching, divorced in its broader applications from that of the Beaux Arts faculty.³² His idea of art involved a painter observing nature, not to reproduce robot-like what he sees before him, but to recreate. Eakins insisted that the true artist never relied merely on copying a thing; rather, he observed nature, particularly noticing light and the way it defines form. Eakins also stressed the importance of relating a painting's subject to

³⁰F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London: Oxford University, 1941), p. 605.

³¹McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 11.

³²Barker, American Painting, p. 652.

the emotional fabric of the painter himself, while in the same breath cautioning against trying to "outdo" nature.³³

The qualities that Eakins did embrace as a result of his Parisian studies were increased attention to bold draftsmanship and a keener awareness of painterly structure. The sense of craftsmanship inherent in the young Philadelphian was enhanced at the Beaux Arts.³⁴

It was while Eakins was in Paris that the ferment of realism and impressionism erupted. Yet in none of his letters home did he mention Courbet or Manet or Degas. One might find this a bit strange inasmuch as the young student obviously shared many of these revolutionaries' points of view. Eakins' fellow Americans and contemporaries Mary Cassatt and James Whistler not only empathized with artists such as Degas and Renoir, but they eventually became expatriates. Cassatt was even originally from Philadelphia; still there is no mention of her in Eakins' correspondence.

Apparently Eakins cared little for aesthetic debate; though possessed of definite conviction he balked at such philosophic considerations as artistic liberty versus absolutism. To him art did not belong in a politicized arena. Virtually the only indication from the young student that he

³³Ibid., pp. 606-607.

³⁴Henry McBride, "Critics Again Evaluate the Art of Eakins," The Art Digest, V (January 1, 1931), 17.

was even aware of the battle between the Salon and the liberal element is one brief allusion to Delacroix.³⁵

But what is somewhat typical of Eakins is his excitement over the locomotives on display at the Paris Exposition of 1867. So stimulated by literal truth was he that upon seeing the machinery housed in the American pavilion he promptly forgot to visit the art exhibitions. Eakins remained all but oblivious to the influences of other artists.³⁶ The major exception to this was his tour of Spain and Italy toward the end of his European experience.

Despite Eakins' relative passivity to the subject, the strife between an established academic system and the emerging dissidents was to soon reach a climax. Adolphe Bouguereau was one of the leading symbols of official art in France. The venerable old academician had exhibited at the annual Salon for over half a century and taught at the Ecole des Beaux Arts for more than a quarter of a century. He so commanded the art scene in Paris that Cezanne once spoke of the Salon as the "Salon of Bouguereau." When the traditional system came under severe attack the old warrior eloquently defended neo-classical art. At the same time he steadfastly denied a need for curricular reform in the Academy:

³⁵McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 11.

³⁶Royal Cortissoz, American Artists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 78.

I hold that theory should not enter into an artist's elementary education in a tyrannical fashion. (The undogmatic Eakins would agree.) In the impressionable years of youth it is the eye and the hand that should be exercised. When pupils know how to draw and to make use of the material processes of their art, when they have chosen the style towards which their taste and talent directs them, they will feel the need of making those special studies which their work demands, and they will make them much more profitably. One can always acquire the additional knowledge and information that go into the production of a work of art, when they have chosen the style towards which their taste and talent directs them, they will feel the need of making those special studies which their work demands, and they will make them much more profitably. The first organization of the Institute was distinguished by a prudent separation of its studies into different "academies," and by further subdivision of each academy; a method wise in its conception. . . . So it was not without regret that I saw the Ecole des Beaux Arts react against this necessity of our time; it wants to free itself from what some consider the narrow prejudices of our forerunners, and, finding that the initial difficulties of studying painting, sculpture, or architecture alone are not enough, it demands of its students proof of their worth in the three arts at once, and further complicates the competition by an examination in history. I fear the mental fatigue that this innovation will cause. . . .³⁷

This, then, was the philosophical setting in which Eakins worked for some three years. But there was dissent concerning the importance of classical training in the arts. One of Bouguereau's countrymen, Theodore Gericault, had cautioned against a total reliance on institutional instruction:

Italy is an admirable country to know, but one need not spend as much time there as is usually urged. One year seems to me sufficient, and the five years

³⁷Letter, Adolphe Bouguereau to the Ecole des Beaux Arts, October 24, 1885, in Artists on Art, ed. by Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), pp. 278-288.

granted to the students at the Academy are more harmful than beneficial, because it prolongs their studies at a time when they would be better off doing their own work. They thus become accustomed to living on government money, and they spend the best years of their lives in tranquillity and security. They come out having lost their energy and no longer knowing how to make any effort. And they end, as mediocre men, lives whose beginnings had given much cause for hope.

This is burying the arts instead of helping them grow, and the institution of the Academy at Rome could, in principle, only have been what it is today. Many go, and few return. The real and proper encouragement for all these clever young men would be pictures to carry out for their country. . . but not five years of good family cooking that fattens up their bodies and destroys their souls. . . .³⁸

In 1851 the American sculptor Horatio Greenough had returned to his native New York after an extensive residence in Italy. At twenty-five he had been the first American sculptor to study in Rome. Greenough had some of the most profound thoughts concerning the role of the artist of anyone in the nineteenth century. He felt that a prolonged contemplation of antique art served only to stifle creativity. His substitute for such a tradition was nothing less than unbridled originality.³⁹ Upon his return from Europe Greenough was invited to lecture throughout the northeastern United States. While in basic agreement with what Gericault had stated more than a generation before, the sculptor was considerably less dramatic in his prose:

³⁸Letter, Theodore Gericault to an unknown correspondent, November 23, 1816, in Artists on Art, ed. by Goldwater and Treves, pp. 301-302.

³⁹Mendelowitz, A History of American Art, pp. 232-233.

The friends of art in America looked to Europe for an example; and with the natural assumption that experience had made the old world wise, in what relates to the fine arts, determined upon forming academies, as the more refined nations of the continent have ended by doing. We might as well have proposed a national church movement. . . . If Europe must furnish a model of artistical tuition, let us go at once to the records of the great age of art in Italy, and we shall there learn that Michael Angelo and Raphael, and their teachers also, were formed without any of the cumbrous machinery and millhorse discipline of a modern Academy. They were instructed, it is true; they were apprenticed to painters. Instead of passively listening to an experienced proficient merely, they discussed with their fellow students the merits of different works, the advantages of rival methods, the choice between contradictory authorities. They formed one another. . . . In these latter days, classes of boys toil through the rudiments under the eye of men who are themselves aspirants for the public favor, and who, deriving no benefit, as masters from their apprentices, from the proficiency of the lads look upon every clever graduate as a stumbling-block in their own way. Hence their system of stupefying discipline, their tying down the pupil to mere manual execution, their silence in regard to principles, their cold reception of all attempts to invent.⁴⁰

Eakins, then, lived in a period of transition for art as well as education. American art was just on the verge of developing a distinctive native genre, divorced from the sentiment and elegance of European salons. Eakins came to be acknowledged as a realist because of his penchant for living "close to the earth and people."⁴¹ It was he who would eventually lay the groundwork for that element of American painting sometimes referred to as "the American Scene."⁴²

⁴⁰Lecture, Horatio Greenough, Newport, Rhode Island, 1852, in Artists on Art, ed. by Goldwater and Treves, p. 305.

⁴¹McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 9.

⁴²Ibid., p. 10.

America's very soul was destined to be probed by early twentieth-century artists like New York's Ashcan School and the mid-western Regionalists. Long after Eakins' death Edward Hopper described him as an artist who "in the nineteenth century used the methods of the seventeenth."⁴³

Eakins had tasted the best--and the worst--of both worlds. He had experienced the suffocating discipline of the academies, and yet he had been introduced by them to the great art of the past. More than that, he had come to agree with Michelangelo that the human body was the most wonderful of God's creations.

On the other hand, Eakins' humanism was an individual thing. The precedent he helped to set was the serious consideration of familiar objects or themes as subjects for works of art. He wanted art to speak in the direct physical language of pigment, color, texture, and form. He felt most of all the physical existence of things, seeing nature as a solid, tangible reality. In that sense perhaps Eakins was indeed "that most American of painters."⁴⁴ An eventual duality resulted in Eakins' art and teaching. Canvases such as The Concert Singer, which was not painted until 1892, indicate his sympathy with late-century academicism along with a regard

⁴³Sam Hunter, Modern American Painting and Sculpture (New York: Dell Books, 1959), p. 115.

⁴⁴Henri Dorra, The American Muse (New York: Viking Press, 1961), pp. 14-15.

for motifs employed by the French post-impressionists.⁴⁵ To a drawing class Eakins once said,

Did you see those charcoal drawings by Degas? I saw one of a Ballet Girl putting on her tights. He had that wriggle of the foot. The action was good. It was done with a few strokes of charcoal. That fellow knew what he was about.⁴⁶

Still another aspect of Eakins' formative years is revealed in his disdain for raw sentiment. To his mother he described a dinner party he had attended in Paris in the company of some former Philadelphians, "They are all very fine people and their only fault so far as I know is their intense love for relics."⁴⁷

Eakins readily acknowledged the greater opportunities for serious art study in Paris. But what always lay at the back of his mind was the prospect of returning to America to paint and teach. Writing to a friend he revealed youthful affection for the city that would one day reject him:

You say you had a slight sensation somewhat resembling pride in your native city. I feel like scolding you for such a weak avowal of your real sentiments. You should hear me tell the Frenchmen about Philadelphia. I feel six feet and six inches high whenever I only say I am an American; but seriously speaking, Emily, Philadelphia is certainly a city to be proud of, and has advantages for happiness only to be fully appreciated after leaving it. I am very comfortable here, and like Paris much more than I expected to when I left home. Many young men after living here a short time

⁴⁵Patrick McCaughey, "Thomas Eakins and the Power of Seeing," Art Forum, IX (December, 1970), 57.

⁴⁶Charles Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," The Arts, XVII (March, 1931), 384.

⁴⁷Letter, Eakins to his mother, November 8, 1866, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

do not like America. I am sure they have not known the many reasonable enjoyments to be had there. . . .⁴⁸

The feelings expressed here were directly related to Eakins' passion for the world that he saw around him, of which he intimately felt a part. To the same young woman he wrote: "What I hate is imposition and hypocrisy and affectation."⁴⁹ This concern for honesty would be transferred to his art and teaching.

In the summer of 1868 Eakins' father and sister met him in Paris and together the three of them toured Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Eakins liked the Swiss countryside--and the Swiss people--least of all. After a few months Benjamin Eakins and his daughter accompanied Thomas back to Paris and then father and daughter returned to Philadelphia.

The following year the young student set off on his own for Spain. He felt the need to get away from fellow students and teachers for a while, to sketch and paint alone and at a leisurely pace. The Spanish trip was to be a major eye-opener for Eakins, instilling in him "more of a conviction than a manner of painting."⁵⁰ He was now equipped with just

⁴⁸Letter, Eakins to Emily Sartain, November 16, 1866, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

⁴⁹Letter, Eakins to Emily Sartain, December 20, 1867, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

⁵⁰Francis H. Taylor, "Thomas Eakins--Positivist," Parnassus, II (March, 1930), p. 21.

enough sophistication and maturity to allow the "big painting" he discovered to temper his own outlook. It was in Madrid that he saw the Velasquez and Ribera canvases--vastly different from the art he had been surrounded with at the Beaux Arts. After digesting Gerome and Bonnat and Couture for three years, Velasquez proved to be a new world. Still, the Spanish artist exemplified the reserve, dignity, and strong feeling for visual fact that Eakins appreciated. Velasquez' paintings focused on low-keyed action. There was a pronounced lack of exaggeration in them. And the Ecole advice constantly echoed in the young American's memory: "Gerome says that every attempt at finish on a bad design serves only to make the work more contemptible."⁵¹

Caught up in the fervor of the Spanish mood, Eakins painted his first composed picture--as distinct from sketches or studies. This was in 1870 and he titled his painting Street Scene in Seville. It was a fairly large canvas showing a family of street dancers performing in front of a wall. Competently done, it vaguely recalled French genre art and was conventional in its handling of light and shadow. Nevertheless it represented a major move away from Gerome's influence. It is through this examination of his artistic development that we see Eakins' evolving educational philosophy. He quickly established a relation to the realities of his age;

⁵¹Letter, Eakins to Emily Sartain, November 16, 1866.

he managed to grasp the character of a subject; he had a command of three-dimensional space and a sense of design. Eakins' innate disposition to picture his own world through the representation of natural forms prompted him years later to teach his students to do likewise.

Eakins' positive reaction to the Spanish and Dutch traditions is to be contrasted with his rejection of Rubens. That Flemish painter, Eakins felt, was ostentatious. He explained at length in a letter:

. . . I left Paris Monday night in a pouring rain. All my friends came to see me. If it had not been winter time and if I had not known and feared the Atlantic voyage, not being well, I would have come home straight, but since I am now here in Madrid I do not regret at all my coming. I have seen big painting here. When I had looked at all the paintings by all the masters I had known I could not help saying to myself all the time, it's very pretty but it's not all yet. It ought to be better, but now I have seen what I always thought ought to have been done and what did not seem to me impossible. O what a satisfaction it gave me to see the good Spanish work so good so strong so reasonable so free from every affectation. It stands out like nature itself. And I am glad to see the Rubens things that is the best he ever painted and to have them alongside the Spanish work. I always hated his nasty vulgar work and now I have seen the best he ever did I can hate him too. The best picture he ever made stands by a Velasquez. His best quality that of light on flesh is knocked by Velasquez and that is Rubens' only quality while it is but the beginning of Velasquez's. Rubens is the nastiest most vulgar noisy painter that ever lived. His men are twisted to pieces. His modelling is always crooked and dropsical and no marking is ever in its right place or anything like what he sees in nature, his people never have bones, his color is dashing and flashy, his people must all be in the most violent action, must use the strength of Hercules if a little watch is to be wound up, the wind must be blowing great guns even in a chamber or dining room, everything must be making a noise and tumbling about there must

be monsters too for his men were not monstrous enough for him. His pictures always put me in mind of chamber pots and I would not be sorry if they were all burnt.⁵²

Eakins' dedicated search for "big painting" had been unfulfilled even in Gerome's studio. The young student's conception of "big work," as he called it, was rooted in a fusion of bold form and character so that the painter's resulting product was an oeuvre that revealed intelligence, acute observation, and accomplished technique. Rubens' excited forms and coloration offended the quiet Philadelphian, and he found unquestioningly more delight in Velasquez, Ribera, Rembrandt, and Vermeer.⁵³ These he considered "big works," greatly admiring their breadth and freedom--a freedom nonetheless under the control of insight and organization.

While in Madrid Eakins studied the paintings of Titian. Remarkably, the only reference in his notes to the Venetian master is an observation that Titian's shadows had no cracks in the paint surface. Eakins was becoming enthralled with oil painting, and he admired the academicians' deft handling of the brush, their mechanical solutions in solving representational problems, their attitude with regard to art as the making of objects in a skillful fashion. All of this was

⁵²Letter, Eakins to his father, December 2, 1869, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

⁵³Eakins' palette was probably more like Rembrandt's than that of any other old master, it relying chiefly on yellow ochre and dark sienna. Lewis Mumford discusses this in The Brown Decades (New York: Dover Books, 1955), p. 8.

attuned to Eakins' post-Civil War American provincialism. And it was to be carried years later into his teaching, when he would advise students to not avoid "picture making."⁵⁴

Eakins discouraged spontaneous attacks of the canvas, urging instead that students work from "studies."⁵⁵ Unlike the French impressionists Eakins did not appreciate light as an end in itself, but only as a device to define form.

For the most part Eakins discarded traditions. The instructor at the Ecole des Beaux Arts that he had personally elected to study under, Gerome, was an honored member of the French art world and Parisian society, but he was himself outside of the mainline tradition. To Eakins tradition came to be viewed as a less than adequate foundation for art. He would set the pace for an entire generation of artists and art students who would themselves reject academic standards.⁵⁶ The American Civil War itself had represented a violent break with tradition. Prior to that conflict art had relied upon a style dating all the way back to colonial times, and before that the Italian Renaissance. Thomas Eakins typified the "new" American painter.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 17.

⁵⁵Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 607.

⁵⁶Sidney Finkelstein, Realism in Art (New York: International Publishers, 1954), p. 161.

⁵⁷Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 10.

But it was not this rejection of artistic tradition that provided strength for Eakins' own iconography; it was his dependence upon logic and disciplined science. For Eakins the natural sciences were practical. To his students he said mathematics were "so like painting"; therefore, they should study them.⁵⁸

Eakins' youthful experiences had revealed some important discoveries for him: First, of all the old masters, Velasquez' naturalism and love of character more than ideal beauty were closest to his own viewpoint. The Spaniard's mastery of light and its subsequent effect on color, the depth and richness of his technique, and his command of the brush--these probably answered most of the problems with which the young student had been struggling. Second, Baroque color and agitated movement he could not accept. Finally, in the Prado he came to realize the limitations of the Beaux Arts method as presented by Gerome.

⁵⁸Lloyd Goodrich, "Thomas Eakins Today," Magazine of Art, XXXVII (May, 1944), 163.

CHAPTER II

THE ARTIST

Thomas Eakins returned to Philadelphia in the summer of 1870, determined to establish himself as an artist. In such a bustling metropolis, and with his newly-acquired credentials, the young painter was excited and confident. Because he associated his kind of art with an active outdoor life, he started going on fishing and hunting trips again, and rowing on the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers. He had always believed firmly in the theory of a "sound mind in a sound body," revealed in his frequent bicycle rides to the St. Charles Seminary at Overbrook to chat with the Roman Catholic clergymen there. Eakins was himself an agnostic, but he so dearly admired the life of the mind that he quickly befriended these priests and spent hours debating with them.

Eakins also resumed a serious study of anatomy at the Jefferson Medical College. In general he returned easily and comfortably to the old life. He began work on a series of family portraits, emphasizing the distinct character of each member.

By the 1870's his hometown was the world's largest city in area. It was the second most populous city in the

United States, with a citizenry totaling more than eight hundred thousand. At this time Philadelphia exceeded even New York City in its number of factories. Commercially speaking, it was proudest of its railroads and banks.

On March 3, 1871, the Congress of the United States approved an act making Philadelphia officially the site of America's centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The nation's first capital was to further distinguish itself "by holding an International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and products of the soil and mine."⁵⁹ This was truly Mark Twain's gilded age.

Philadelphia was beginning to point toward industry rather than agriculture as the future of America, and the 1876 Exhibition provided plenty of machinery for its visitors to examine. The Centennial Exhibition took place in Fairmont Park. It exceeded in size any previous World's Fair, costing several times over what London's Great Exhibition of 1851 had cost. The Main Exhibition Building set a record as the largest building in the world. It was further estimated that at least ten million visitors attended the Exhibition before it closed.⁶⁰ Perhaps a few Philadelphians were aware of John Ruskin's maxim that "life without industry is guilt. . . industry without art is brutality" because the real center of interest proved to

⁵⁹Schendler, Eakins, p. 59.

⁶⁰John A. Kouwenhoven, The Adventures of America, 1857-1900 (New York: Harper and Bros., 1938), p. 169.

be Memorial Hall, where some thirty galleries contained pictures by American artists. Almost two and one-half miles of landscapes, portraits, and history paintings were displayed.

The Exhibition released printed material that sought to identify American art a century after the nation's birth:

The American people exhibit to a large degree a high appreciation of works of art, and in the United States is found one of the best picture markets in the world. With the increase of wealth, a corresponding desire for the possession of paintings and statuary is found to exist. The cultivation of the aesthetic instincts of the masses is becoming daily more apparent, and the Centennial Exhibition will do more to elevate in a brief period the tastes of our citizens than could be possibly accomplished during many years of ordinary exertion.⁶¹

Bankers and industrialists, it is true, were spending large sums of money for oil paintings, engravings, and etchings. But most of these works were the product of Europeans, notably French impressionists. Mary Cassatt for one had done much to increase the patronage of the "modern French school" on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1876 Philadelphia was still nostalgically looked upon as the cradle of American art and culture. With such a pronounced tone pervading its society what other major city could be as appropriate for a major exhibition of art? A leading newspaper defended the current vogue:

Philadelphians like to see the work of Philadelphians especially when the artist was of the old quiet modest families that have done so much to build up our good

⁶¹Guide to the Centennial Exhibition of Art (Philadelphia: [1876]), p. 2.

city and maintain its highest standard for integrity and persistent but unobtrusive work.⁶²

The task of art was plainly to lend enjoyment and to instruct. Aesthetic satisfaction was secondary.

True American specimens of Art, no matter how much there might be to deplore about them, would at least be in keeping with our appreciation and advancement, and this should satisfy all reasonable needs.⁶³

A reporter at the Exhibition commented that the old American masters were still entrenched on their pedestals and that "the social position of the artist never was higher." He further observed that "in what is termed high art, it cannot be said that American soil discloses the footprints of a coming man."⁶⁴ This attitude is echoed in America's approach to the teaching of art at this time. The rationale was that since the "old masters" couldn't possibly be improved upon, students of art should content themselves with copying the masterpieces of the past. Thomas Eakins' work reflected his dissident educational philosophy and his preference for the physical realities of his own time.

Eakins was represented at the 1876 Art Exhibition by five canvases, one of them--The Chess Players--given honorable mention in the genre class. The Gross Clinic was hung in the medical section of the pavilion along with artificial limbs

⁶²Editorial, Philadelphia Press, July 1, 1876, p. 4.

⁶³Weekly Guide to the Exhibition (Philadelphia: [1876]), p. 1.

⁶⁴Edward C. Bruce, The Century, Its Fruits and Its Festival (Philadelphia, 1877), p. 67.

and ear cleaners. The guardians of genteel squeemishness had denounced the painting as a "degradation of art."⁶⁵ Certainly it reflected elements of Courbet, Manet, and Velasquez--artists who were still fresh in the young American's mind.

One critic remarked of The Gross Clinic,

The more one praises it the more one must condemn its admission to a gallery where men and women of weak nerves must be compelled to look at it, for not to look at it is impossible.⁶⁶

Another critic wrote that

. . . the public of Philadelphia now have, for the first time, an opportunity to form something like an accurate judgment with regard to the qualities [of Eakins]. We know of nothing in the history of portraiture that has been attempted in this city, or indeed in this country, that in any way approaches it.⁶⁷

The much-discussed Gross Clinic had been Eakins' first major commission. Originally rejected by the Exhibition jury, the Jefferson College authorities, for whom it had initially been painted, did not accept it until 1878. A core of sardonic critics labeled Eakins "the Butcher," and even Dr. Gross himself resented the blood portrayed on his hands. It was Eakins' first bitter disappointment, a step in the recurring contrast between his own uncompromising masculinity and the feminine refinements of his milieu. Philadelphia still

⁶⁵Horst Janson considers The Gross Clinic the most imposing work in all of nineteenth-century American painting. See his History of Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969), p. 502.

⁶⁶McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 12.

⁶⁷Schendler, Eakins, p. 24.



Thomas Eakins at the time he painted The Gross Clinic

preferred to keep its definition of art as delicate needlepoint or drawing room portraits.⁶⁸

Of all American cities, Philadelphia is the least given to radicalism, and sure always to be found safe, prudent, moderate, and what is known in England as liberal conservative.⁶⁹

The local newspapers were particularly given to defending the moral purity of the arts. Alex McClure, publisher of the Philadelphia Times, continually advocated high moral responsibility in the arts. He considered most of the theaters of his time "indecent, obscene, and disgusting." A critic in the Bulletin savagely attacked the operetta "La Jolie Parfumeuse" as "glorifying filth" and "the depths of obscenity." Even Shakespeare caught it when the Press found that his Measure for Measure was "utterly unfit for presentation."⁷⁰ It was also generally recognized that the art schools of Philadelphia grew significantly in the years immediately following the Centennial.

⁶⁸Mather, "Thomas Eakins's Art in Retrospect," 44.

⁶⁹North American, (Philadelphia: [Feb. 14, 1876]), 17.

⁷⁰Schendler, Eakins, p. 59.

CHAPTER III

THE TEACHER

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts opened its new headquarters on the corner of Broad and Cherry Streets on April 22, 1876. It was the most progressive art school for its time in the United States.⁷¹ The building itself was a dome-roofed rotunda fifty feet in diameter, with an oculus like the Roman Pantheon. It was a temple erected to the art of the Gilded Age.

By the time of its reorganization in 1876 the Academy had foresaken its dependence on gray plaster casts in the drawing studios and begun to employ live models so that pupils could work directly from the nude.⁷² The models were required to be masked in order to hide their shame and an older lady or chaperone was always present to insure propriety.

Since 1868 Christian Schussele, half-paralyzed, had served as Superintendent of Schools at the Academy. His reputation lent stature to the institution as a professional art

⁷¹Richardson, Painting in America, p. 319.

⁷²Jerome Mellquist, The Emergence of American Art (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 81.

school. From 1876 until 1878 Thomas Eakins was an unpaid volunteer instructor. After that he became Schussele's official assistant in the painting classes.⁷³ He then bought and furnished a nearby studio at 1330 Chestnut Street.

Schussele died in 1879 and Eakins assumed full professorship of drawing and painting. He brought to the Academy an unprecedented wealth of background and interests.

Eakins has often been referred to as a "born teacher."⁷⁴ He had interests unusual for a painter or a teacher of art, interests such as mathematics and science. His knowledge of perspective and anatomy was extensive to say the least. Such credentials as Eakins possessed were impressive for the nineteenth century: a liberal arts degree from one of the country's more prestigious high schools, a master of perspective by his mid-teens, and years of study abroad.

Eakins' beginning salary was six hundred dollars per year. As Professor of Drawing and Painting his duties included responsibility for the antique class and the life class. His contract also stipulated that he deliver lectures on perspective. He was allowed the month of September each year for vacation.⁷⁵

⁷³Letter, Mrs. Barbara Roberts to E. P. Richardson, July 5, 1951, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

⁷⁴Lloyd Goodrich, "Eakins, Thomas," Encyclopedia of World Art, 1961, Vol. IV, 137.

⁷⁵Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Minutes of the Committee of Instruction (Philadelphia, September 3, 1879), p. 4.

As an artist himself Eakins found it exciting to work from live models. He often constructed basic forms in clay before transferring them to paint and canvas. His personal passion for anatomy led him to experiment with the principle of motion. He loved all kinds of animals, especially dogs and horses. He enjoyed equestrian sports and became a keen student of animal motion. He made diligent drawings of the muscles of dogs, cats, and horses. He dissected them, insisted that his students do so as well, and even made casts of certain bodily parts. In a scientific manner he tested all hypotheses and accepted little on authority. While studying in Paris he insisted that he had learned more about human anatomy from watching other students wrestling than by drawing from posed models.⁷⁶

Eakins felt that nothing in nature compared with the naked human body for sheer beauty. This, coupled with his fascination for animals, an interest in movement, and an amateur's preoccupation with most things scientific led him to experiment with photography. However, the camera did not interest him because it accurately copied nature, rather because it was simply another tool to work with, like the mechanical drafting instruments that he had so often used. Tools, to Eakins, were more reliable than the unassisted hand or eye. Considering the fact that his art was itself based on the

⁷⁶John Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 314.

factual and the observable, it becomes understandable that he should turn to the mysteries and challenges of photography, knowing full well that the finest tools and the most exacting techniques can never substitute for pure intelligence. He on more than one occasion reminded his students, "Strain your brain more than your eye."⁷⁷

By the 1880's Eakins had developed into a fairly capable photographer. During the years 1884 and 1885 he was involved in a series of studies which proved to be a significant milestone in the history of motion photography. In essence he arrived at some basic principles concerning motion picture making.

Intrigued by a photographic experiment conducted by Eadweard Muybridge, Eakins began a correspondence with the imminent photographer and subsequently began work on a theory of his own. Eakins' approach was somewhat more scientific than that of Muybridge, consisting of a device with two revolving disks in front of the camera lens. The disks, one moving considerably faster than the other, produced several images on a single photographic plate. Such an apparatus made it possible for a cameraman to take one picture of a moving object and in turn produce a whole series of distinguishable images.

In the spring of 1885 Eakins delivered lectures on the movements of horses and athletes at the Pennsylvania Academy.

⁷⁷Feldman, Becoming Human Through Art, p. 87.

He demonstrated a zoetrope, an ancestor of the modern motion picture projector. This marked the unofficial end of his involvement with photography, and his contribution to the field went virtually unnoticed until long after his death.

The kind of versatility Eakins thus displayed rather quickly provided him with a reputation for eccentricity. This controversial new art educator, affiliated with one of Philadelphia's most proper institutions, soon became the object of a detailed scrutiny by a leading publication. In 1879 Eakins was interviewed by W. C. Brownell, a critic for Scribner's Magazine. Brownell avowed that, despite the provinciality of Philadelphia, its Academy of Art was "conducted upon a much more elaborate scale than. . . the National Academy of Design" in New York.⁷⁸ The writer contended that the city fathers of Philadelphia, who actually operated their art world like a private amusement park, were "unselfishly interested in the progress of art. . . ." Furthermore he felt that provisions made by the city's cultural leaders were advantageous to students, for, after all, weren't they considerably better off than their fellow students at other institutions? For most

⁷⁸W. C. Brownell, "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," Scribner's Monthly Illustrated, September, 1879, p. 737.

Other than the Academy of Fine Arts, there existed in Philadelphia at this time a normal school, a Women's Industrial Art School, the Museum School of Industrial Art, and something called the Spring Garden Street Institute. All in all, around two thousand individuals were enrolled as students pursuing some facet of the visual arts. See George P. Lathrop, "A Clever Town Built by Quakers," Harper's New Monthly, February, 1882, p. 336.

purposes the various art schools of Philadelphia were maintained like business establishments. Artists were considered too competitive or too frivolous to have any real voice in the management of their own affairs. Indeed, such institutions as the Academy of Fine Arts did not belong to either instructors or students but to the mercantile leaders of the city.

Brownell observed that both male and female models were provided at the Academy, alternates being employed every other week or so. Dissecting and Modelling were taught along with more conventional subjects for an art school like drawing and painting.

By the 1870's the Academy had perhaps the nation's largest single collection of antique plaster casts. One large studio contained nothing but casts of the Parthenon friezes. There was also an extensive collection of photographs of European masterpieces. The print collection and library were available to students at all hours. The full-time faculty consisted of two professors of drawing and painting plus one lecturer on artistic anatomy. Brownell labeled the situation a "family affair."⁷⁹ He felt that the intimacy of such a school was more desirable than a large university like Amherst, Princeton, or Harvard.

⁷⁹Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 738.

Another distinct mark in the Academy's favor, the critic noted, was that such a school could concentrate on its specialization without having to answer for slighting other fields of endeavor. And he praised the competent system of organization at the Academy, even though such order had been in existence for no more than a decade. Before the late sixties loose fraternities of artists had merely banded together and used the building and equipment. Models had usually been paid from the funds of the local Artists' Society.

When Schussele was hired in 1863 he definitely improved the instructional quality at the Academy. As a retired painter he had emphasized nature, rather than ancient Greek art, as a model for students. By 1876 a private organization calling itself the Sketch Club had allied with the Academy. The school was growing up.

For the academic year 1878-1879 there were in attendance two hundred and thirty students, almost half of which were enrolled in Eakins' life classes. To become a member of the life class each applicant had to submit a drawing, painting, or model of a complete human figure. Furthermore, the figure had to be fashioned in the Academy from an antique or anatomical cast. A committee of artists decided on the work (which had to be first submitted to the school janitor, who would then pass it on to the Committee) and issued a ticket of admission. Aspiring professional artists could study at the

Academy free of charge, but dilettantes were required to pay ten dollars each term--unless they had an exhibition record at some accredited art gallery.

Brownell was impressed with the new Academy building, especially the classrooms. He believed that they were noticeably better than anything in New York. The entire physical plant exceeded in size that of the National Academy. The latter, however, had been designed chiefly for exhibitions rather than class instruction. On the other hand, almost the entire ground floor of the Philadelphia school was reserved for studio space.

A large skylight illuminated the Hall of Antiques, which was located in the center of the building. Small groups of students could usually be seen clustered around casts of Greek statuary or sketching from the numerous colonial paintings on view.

The antique class was the first in a sequence of studio courses offered the beginning student. To be admitted he had to present an acceptable drawing from a cast, usually just a hand or foot.

The model for a drawing class was ordinarily a young woman, fully clothed with a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders and assuming a pensive position in a straight-backed armchair. She was, more often than not, a student who would relinquish her duty to another after half an hour of

posing.⁸⁰ Models customarily sat atop a turntable so that they could be turned easily for the sake of the class's observation.

The life drawing studio was equipped with dressing rooms and was considerably larger than the other studios--even the painting rooms. At the time Eakins assumed his responsibilities at the Academy the classes were separated according to the sexes of the students, the men's working at different hours from the women's.

A typical life class looked something like this: a score or more young men formed a semicircle around a model.⁸¹ As much time as was necessary was devoted to posing the model, something the students themselves were required to do. The instructor supervised but rarely interfered. If the model were male he was invariably young and muscular and nude. Each week a different model was provided. Both Schussele and Eakins insisted on variety in models and poses.

Eakins also insisted that his students use brushes to arrive at the basic form of the figure. Weaker pupils invariably relied on outline drawings in charcoal, which proved

⁸⁰Such a modeling procedure was typical at all of the notable art schools, including the National Academy and the Art Students' League. See Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 739.

⁸¹Brownell noted that the Philadelphia student was younger on the average than his counterpart at the National Academy. (Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 740.)

to be laborious and resulted in stiff-looking studies.

Brownell found it curious that the majority of art students he observed were actually painting, at least in wash.

Schussele was more conservative than Eakins in that he assigned a lengthy session of drawing with charcoal or pencil as prerequisite to painting. He also suggested that his students work from Greek casts for a time before picking up the brush. Eakins, however, from the first had lectured on the virtues of direct painting.⁸² "Mr. Eakins, who is radical, prefers that the pupil should paint at once, and he thinks a long study of the antique detrimental."⁸³

Somewhat surprisingly, the two instructors harmonized their divergent methods, both of them feeling that such flexibility benefitted the students. "But, as is noted with ambitious students, most of these take Mr. Eakins's advice. That advice is almost revolutionary, of course."⁸⁴

Being aware that Eakins himself had been nurtured on the virtues of preliminary drawing at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Brownell felt compelled to question him concerning his rejection of a system that was all but universal: "Don't

⁸²The practice of drawing in class and painting later at home appears to have dated from at least the eighteenth century. (Letter, E. P. Richardson to Mrs. Barbara Roberts, August 22, 1951, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.)

⁸³Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 740.

⁸⁴Ibid.



A Class at the Pennsylvania Academy

you think a student should know how to draw before beginning to color?" Eakins willingly explained his position:

I think he should learn to draw with color. The brush is a more powerful and rapid tool than the point or [charcoal] stump. Very often, practically, before the student has had time to get his broadest masses of light and shade with either of these, he has forgotten what he is after. Charcoal would do better, but it is clumsy and rubs too easily for students' work. Still the main thing that the brush secures is the instant grasp of the grand construction of a figure. There are no lines in nature as was found out long before Fortuny exhibited his detestation of them; there are only form and color. The least important, the most changeable, the most difficult thing to catch about a figure is the outline. The student drawing the outline of that model with a point [pencil] is confused and lost if the model moves a hair's breadth; already the whole outline has been changed, and you notice how often he has to rub out and correct; meantime he will get discouraged and disgusted long before he has made any sort of portrait of the man. Moreover, the outline is not the man, the grand construction is. Once that is got, the details follow naturally. And as the tendency of the point or stump is, I think, to reverse this order, I prefer the brush. I don't at all share the old fear that the beauties of color will intoxicate the pupil, and cause him to neglect the form. I have never known anything of that kind to happen unless a student fancied he had mastered drawing before he began to paint. Certainly it is not likely to happen here. The first things to attend to in painting the model are the movement and the general color. The figure must balance, appear solid and of the right weight. The movement once understood, every detail of the action will be an integral part of the main continuous action; and every detail of color auxiliary to the main system of light and shade. The student should learn to block up his figure rapidly, and then give to any part of it the highest finish without injuring its unity. To these ends, I haven't the slightest hesitation in calling the brush and an immediate use of it, the best possible means.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," pp. 740-741.

Eakins' rationale was that, since a mature painter naturally relies on a brush as his most important tool, he will most efficiently acquire knowledge of that tool and develop proficiency in painting by using the brush at the outset of his studies.⁸⁶

Taking a large plaster cast of a torso out of the Academy's collection, Eakins painted it to correspond to the dissection of a cadaver. This was not used very long before several commercial casts showing muscular structure were ordered from Paris.⁸⁷ This insistence on the student going directly to nature prompted another critic to mention Eakins' "unwavering objectivity and. . . sense of fact. . . ."88

I don't like a long study of casts, even of the sculptors of the best Greek period. At best, they are only imitations, and an imitation of imitations cannot have so much life as an imitation of nature itself. The Greeks did not study the antique: the Theseus and Illyssus and the draped figures in the Parthenon pediment were modelled from life, undoubtedly. And nature is just as varied and just as beautiful in our day as she was in the time of Phidias. You doubt if any such men as that Myron statue in the hall exist now even if they ever existed? Well, they must have existed once or Myron would never have made that, you may be sure. And they do now. Did you ever notice, by the way, those circus tumblers and jumpers--I don't mean the Hercules? They are almost absolutely beautiful, many of them. And our business is distinctly to do something for ourselves, not to copy Phidias. Practically, copying Phidias endlessly dulls and

⁸⁶Barker, American Painting, p. 658.

⁸⁷Dr. W. W. Keen, Annual Report to the Board of Directors, Philadelphia, April 7, 1877 (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1877), p. 7.

⁸⁸Holger Cahill, "Thirty Canvases by Eakins in New York Show," The Art Digest, VII (February 1, 1933), 9.

deadens a student's impulse and observation. He gets to fancying that all nature is run in the Greek mold; that he must arrange his model in certain classic attitudes, and paint its individuality out of it; he becomes prejudiced, and his work rigid and formal. The beginner can at the very outset get more from the living model in a given time than from study of the antique in twice that period. That at least has been my own experience; and all my observation confirms it.⁸⁹

Brownell was struck by these major distinctions between the Pennsylvania Academy and its sister institutions--that of direct drawing with the brush and a rejection of any prolonged study of ancient art. Had not even Emerson in "Self-Reliance" encouraged a forsaking of forms of the past? "And why need we copy the Doric or the Gothic model? Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought and quaint expression are as near to us as to any. . . ."90

The Pennsylvania Academy was also one of the few art schools in America to instruct in modelling; it was not in the curriculum of the Cooper Union nor of the National Academy. New York's Art Student's League did encourage its students to work in clay but did not relate such three-dimensional work to the principles of painting.

Eakins preached against what he called "flat" painting, believing that it reflected an ignorance of plastic construction. He admonished his students to get a feel for the

⁸⁹Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 742.

⁹⁰Randall Stewart, Theodore Hornberger, and Walter Blair, The Literature of the United States (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1957), p. 464.

roundness, solidity, or weight of an object.⁹¹ In order to assure this, he made his drawing classes work with clay for several weeks each semester. The official modeling class was little more than half as large as the drawing class or painting studio, primarily because sufficient space for individual maneuvering was lacking. Models, however, were used on the same bases as for other classes: periodic rotation, clothed and unclothed poses, and alternation of both sexes.

Proof of the positive results of Eakins' teaching methods, Brownell reasoned, was evident in the observation that relatively few pupils were preoccupied with classic Greek statuary. They seemed to resist the impulse to idealize. Apparently most of the students were learning to concentrate on observing and using their materials rather than on slick or eclectic stylization. Eakins' own search for truth cost him something, though. Disgruntled clients more than once refused portraits he had painted. Even Walt Whitman disliked the craggy face that Eakins saw and recorded. His portraits rarely flattered, perhaps, but Eakins preferred nature's gifts to any artificial ones an artist might bestow. He once remarked to a fellow painter, "How beautiful an old lady's skin is. All those wrinkles!"⁹²

Eakins changed the models at the Academy as often as possible so that his students would be reminded of the

⁹¹Richardson, Painting in America, p. 319.

⁹²Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 27.

individuality of bodies and faces.

It is only by constant change that pupils learn that one model does not look at all like another. There is as much difference in bodies as in faces, and the character should be sought in its complete unity. On seeing a hand one should know instinctively what the foot must be. . . . Nature builds harmoniously. I grant that you can't instinctively apprehend unnatural distortions, or argue from a man's hand that he has lost a toe.⁹³

⁹³Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 742.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADMINISTRATOR

Thomas Eakins was convinced that traditional artistic training had been directed at the dilettante and the "Sunday painter" rather than the professional painter or draftsman. His attempts to counteract this by creating a professional atmosphere led him to introduce numerous innovations at Philadelphia's Academy, one of which was the creation of a dissecting laboratory. Each winter term more than twenty-five per cent of the school's enrollment learned the basics of anatomical dissection. Eakins himself supervised this. Twice each week a Dr. Keen lectured exhaustively on human anatomy. Keen readily defended his own academic philosophy:

In teaching the artistic anatomy of the human body I have deemed that actual demonstration on the dead body of the living model were essential. But much as may be learned by seeing an experiment or a dissection, the actual and personal performance by the student himself is the only way to learn it thoroughly.⁹⁴

Keen placed great emphasis on a comparative analysis of the human skeleton. The local Academy of Natural Sciences

⁹⁴Keen, Annual Report, April 7, 1877.

had loaned Eakins and Keen "a number of skeletons of the most important lower animals from their valuable collection."⁹⁵

No other American school for training in the visual arts had approached the Pennsylvania Academy in its pursuit of excellence in the field of anatomy. Roughly ten per cent of a student's total learning was in dissection, anatomy, and figure drawing. Each winter Eakins took his classes to a suburban bone-boiling establishment where they witnessed workmen in a slaughterhouse dissecting the carcasses of horses. Summers were devoted to trips to the farm of Fairman Rogers, chairman of the Academy's board of directors. Here students worked from live animals, first noting a horse's movements and then modeling or painting the animal. Eakins received some publicity as an eccentric when he brought a live horse into his classroom in order to point out its muscular structure. Brownell was admittedly shaken when he was ushered into the dissecting room where students were drawing quietly from a cadaver.⁹⁶ A few mischievous pupils capitalized at least once on the school's growing notoriety by throwing the body of a horse down the stairwell at a Masonic dinner.⁹⁷

At times Eakins experienced difficulty with students--some of the young ladies were reluctant to work from a

⁹⁵Dr. W. W. Keen, Annual Report to the Board of Directors, Philadelphia, May 10, 1879 (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1879), p. 3.

⁹⁶Mellquist, Emergence of American Art, p. 81.

⁹⁷"Thomas Eakins," Life, May, 1944, p. 72.

cadaver. The same problem plagued medical schools of the day. And there were the occasional complaints regarding men students who liked to play pranks on the girls. Eakins' own sister-in-law asked permission to separate the male and female students in the dissecting room. She felt that the women were getting unfair treatment.

Dear Tom:

I write to know if the mornings of our days in the dissecting room can be secured to us exclusively at once. Up to the present the boys have worked on the new subject, while we were at ours; but now beside the fact that ours is dried up completely, they have cut off the head, arms, and scapulae so the back, about the freshest part, is about useless. . . . The boys monopolize the alternate mornings too, leaving us no opportunity to see the new subject. . . . There are some who are. . . making it very unpleasant.⁹⁸

Eakins was always reluctant to compromise with any attitude that demeaned the purpose and high calling of art. He kept a watchful eye on potential troublemakers, as evidenced by one of his letters to the Academy's actuary:

Sovy and Co. begged plaster of me last week. Last night at 6 o'clock happening into the modelling room, I saw them casting antique gems. I most strongly suspect them of using those casts belonging to the Academy collection which are in the drapery room. These casts are I believe valuable and would be much damaged by smearing with wax. Find out quietly if you can. . . . You must catch them in the act or they will probably steal or destroy those they have injured. It would be no great harm to art or to the school if the blackguard Sovy should follow his friend Gaertner.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Letter, Elizabeth MacDowell to Eakins, January 31, 1882. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

⁹⁹Letter, Eakins to George Corliss, February 9, 1879. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File. There exist no other references to the person "Gaertner" in Eakins' correspondence or in the files of the Academy.

Despite his personal aversion to the practice of dissection by artists, the reporter Brownell admitted to his readers that his prejudice was largely the result of his own conditioning. After all, didn't Philadelphia stand virtually alone in this regard? One point he did clarify in his article was the contrast between Eakins' specific requirement and the "haphazard" manner of presenting such knowledge in European classrooms. In nations that represented the very core of western artistic heritage, the presentation of human anatomy on a scientific level was, at best, optional for the student. Brownell was indeed a vivid product of his own milieu. His reaction upon witnessing Eakins' students at work merely echoed the public's revulsion upon seeing the bloodied hands of Dr. Gross:

. . . the atmosphere of the dissecting room; the ugly, not to say horrible, "material" with which it is of necessity provided; its arsenal of dread-looking implements; its tables and benches, disclosing only too plainly their purpose, and finally, the dead and dismembered semblance of what was once a human being. All one's feeling in regard to this is accentuated and emphasized by the thought that it is all to an end distinctly not utilitarian but aesthetic; and thus one's physical revulsion is re-enforced by an intellectual notion that it is, in its nature, paradoxical and absurd.¹⁰⁰

There is almost a spark of humor in the critic's overblown romantic style and naivete. His Gothic tone contrasts sharply with Eakins' own whimsical remark to a black student regarding a cadaver the boy was laboring on:

¹⁰⁰Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 744.

"That's how you'll end up." The student never returned to Eakins' class.¹⁰¹

Eakins frankly admitted that he certainly felt no relish in cutting into a corpse.

I don't know of anyone who doesn't dislike it. Every fall, for my own part, I feel great reluctance to begin it. It is dirty enough work at the best, as you can see. . . . We had one student who abstained a year ago, but this year, finding his fellows were getting along faster than himself, he changed his mind and is now dissecting diligently.¹⁰²

Not completely convinced, Brownell interviewed a student and was informed that dissecting was "intensely interesting." Eakins readily defended his academic program:

About the philosophy of aesthetics, to be sure, we do not greatly concern ourselves, but we are considerably concerned about learning how to paint. For anatomy, as such, we care nothing whatever. To draw the human figure it is necessary to know as much as possible about it, about its structure and its movements, its bones and muscles, how they are made, and how they act. You don't suppose we pay much attention to the viscera, or study the functions of the spleen, I trust.¹⁰³

Eakins obviously recognized an intimate relationship between art and science:

If beauty resides in fitness to any extent, what can be more beautiful than this skeleton, or the perfection with which means and ends are reciprocally adapted to each other? But no one dissects to quicken his eye for, or his delight in, beauty. He dissects simply to increase his knowledge of how beautiful objects are put together to the end that he may be able to imitate them. Even to refine upon natural beauty--to idealize--one must understand what it is that he is idealizing;

¹⁰¹Saint-Gaudens, American Artist and His Times, p. 179.

¹⁰²Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 744.

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 744-745.

otherwise his idealization--I don't like the word, by the way--becomes distortion, and distortion is ugliness. This whole matter of dissection is not art at all, any more than grammar is poetry. It is work, and hard work, disagreeable work. No one, however, needs to be told that enthusiasm for one's end operates to lessen the disagreeableness of his patient working toward attainment of it. In itself I have no doubt the pupils consider it less pleasant than copying the frieze of the Parthenon. But they are learning the niceties of animal construction, providing against mistakes in drawing animals, and they are, I assure you, as enthusiastic over their "hideous" work as any decorator of china at South Kensington could be over hers. As for their artistic impulse, such work does not affect it in any way whatever. If they have any when they come here they do not lose it by learning how to exercise it; if not, of course, they will no more get it here than anywhere else.¹⁰⁴

Dr. Keen was complementary of Eakins' assistance with the dissecting sessions. He specified certain advantages that Eakins' professionalism had engendered, namely that the artistic taste of the students had improved and thus helped to contribute to a cultural maturation of the community at large:

Every person who is attracted to the Academy and especially every one who is brought in direct contact with its work of instruction will appreciate more strongly what it is doing in the work of public education. Unexpected friends and patrons may thus be found whose benefactions as well as their personal interest may be most opportune.

I have good reason to believe that the course [of anatomy] might not only be self-sustaining but even become a source of revenue.¹⁰⁵

Keen officially named Eakins his "Chief Demonstrator." He asked Eakins for permission to make "a large table of the proportions of about 30 parts of the body at birth and at 30 years of age."

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 745.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

Mr. Eakins also from the dissections made a number of extremely valuable casts showing not only the surface of the dissections but also the cross-sections of the muscles. As gelatine moulds were made of these casts they can be furnished very readily and very cheaply to the students, many of whom have availed themselves of the opportunity.

I can but see that the only way really to know the anatomy of the human figure is to dissect it.¹⁰⁶

Keen's own measure of thoroughness can be seen by his concern for guaranteeing the students' education.

On another point I speak with reserve since it involves the whole question of the policy of the academy. I have felt that while the opportunity of information in my department is given by the free lectures, that there is no test of the amount of actual knowledge gained from the lectures. It is true that the drawing from the model. . . serves [as] a test but I feel quite sure that were there some sort of recitation or examination. . . the incentive and stimulous for study, accurate study, would be greater.¹⁰⁷

Eakins was in support of a versatile curriculum and a varied student clientele. To one of his pupils he said,

You ought to make a picture [landscape] this summer. Your work in the life class is as good as some good painters. And you can tell some very interesting facts. Picture making ought not to be put off too long.¹⁰⁸

Both Keen and Eakins were anxious to build a respectable library for the Academy on the subject of anatomy. Keen wrote:

My own idea of an art library in such an institution as the Academy is that it should contain every book on the subject, whether good or bad, so that anyone who desires to consult any author who has ever written an article in any of its branches can find it here.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Keen, Annual Report, May 10, 1879.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Charles Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," The Arts, XVIII (October, 1931), 35.

¹⁰⁹Keen, Annual Report, April 7, 1877, p. 9.

Some of the volumes Keen specifically recommended were: Gray's and Cruveilhier's Anatomy, Darwin on Expression, Harless's Plastic Anatomy, Marshall's Artistic Anatomy, Gerdy's Anatomy of External Forms, and Duchenne's Physiognomy.¹¹⁰

Eakins felt that Keen's lectures were an indispensable part of the Academy's curriculum: "I am particularly anxious that the lectures on anatomy should not lose their popularity."¹¹¹ These lectures consisted of: one introductory speech, eight sessions devoted to the skeleton, twelve lectures on the muscles, one on the nose, one on the ear, one on the eye, two on the skin, one on the hair, one on postural expression, and two lectures on the influence of sex in bodily development.¹¹² "The comparative anatomy of the muscles of the face was. . . illustrated by dissection of the heads of several quadrupeds."¹¹³

Eakins' instruction was likewise exhaustive.

At each lecture I have had the skeleton and a number of plaster casts, partly my own and partly those from the antique collection of the Academy. When treating the muscles I have had the dissected subject and have thus shown the muscular attachments on the bones and

¹¹⁰Dr. W. W. Keen, Annual Report to the Board of Directors, Philadelphia, April 2, 1878 (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1878), p. 6.

¹¹¹Letter, Eakins to James Claghorn, May 28, 1880, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹¹²Keen, Annual Report, April 7, 1877, p. 4.

¹¹³Keen, Annual Report, May 10, 1879, p. 8.

their actual appearance on the subject. On one side the muscles were completely dissected for their minutest study while on the other the overlying tissues only were removed and their natural relations to other parts have thus been demonstrated. At most of the lectures I have also had an excellent male model and after showing the parts on the skeleton or the subject I have then at once demonstrated them on the living model, calling the muscles into play by using dumb-bells, weights, rings, etc. I have also had a large number of drawings, hung on a very conveniently-arranged bar over the stage. These drawings showed very many points in detail and on a large scale and especially were useful when studying the muscles of the face and the various facial expressions. When occasion required I have used the Galvanic Battery to call special muscles into contraction and thus illustrate their function.¹¹⁴

Eakins marked each cadaver for the convenience of his students in learning the different anatomical parts: muscles were painted red, tendons blue, and bones white. The student could then more easily see the inherent relationships of sinew and skeleton.

Brownell eventually came to the conclusion that, "After all, it is the province of an art school to provide knowledge and training, and not inspiration."¹¹⁵

After a day spent in dissecting, evening lectures were reinforced with illustrations and diagrams prepared by Dr. Keen. He usually began by describing the structure and function of the leg, dramatized through the use of a skeleton, a manikin, and finally the living model. Models demonstrated various movements which had previously been explained. Lectures generally lasted two hours. Keen was an unusually

¹¹⁴Keen, Annual Report, April 7, 1877, p. 5.

¹¹⁵Brownell, "Art Schools of Philadelphia," p. 746.



Eakins' Anatomy Class at the Academy



Eakins' Students in a Burlesque of The Gross Clinic

cogent man and customarily commanded the attention of his audience. The real value of such exhausting instruction, Eakins thought, was that it would contribute to the student's power of observation. "The closer his observation is the better his drawing will be."¹¹⁶

Keen's educational philosophy was inherently linked to Eakins'. He presented his subject "not to make anatomists but artists." In order to do this varied means of presentation were used--a complete and mounted skeleton, small manikins, charts, and a blackboard. Comparisons were made between the muscles of a cadaver and those of a living model, the arms or legs of the latter sometimes attached to weights in order that muscles could be brought into play for close examination. While actual dissecting was done only by advanced students--some six or eight at a time--less experienced students were given opportunities to study the cadaver and to draw from it. Eakins gave at least thirty lectures on anatomy each academic term: introductory remarks on the relation of anatomy to art, methods of studying artistic anatomy, bones of the body, and muscles of the body. A majority of these lectures were devoted to the muscles. Superficial muscles were emphasized, and during dissections of the human head, those of horses, cats, dogs, and sheep were also examined to point out similarities and variations.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

The Academy annually provided two cadavers for its dissecting labs. Keen and Eakins each used one in conjunction with lectures and demonstrations. At the conclusion of each lecture series the cadavers were turned over to students for their use.

Some of the criticism of Eakins' teaching method was based on his seeming preoccupation with anatomy. As a scientific realist, did he not stand in danger of neglecting the message of his own emotions? Shouldn't a painter respond to color as much as structure and form? The ever-present argument was that an equally important aspect of art was poetry or beauty. An art based solely on "correct" rendering at the expense of intuitive perception robs art of its inherent character, causes it to intrude on science. Naturally Eakins was aware of his opposition, and he answered it:

Of course, one can waste time over anatomy and dissection. I did myself, when I began to study; I not only learned much that was unnecessary, but much that it took me some time--time that I greatly begrudged--to unlearn; for a time, my attention to anatomy hampered me.¹¹⁷

Brownell summed up his evaluation of the Pennsylvania Academy and with it the teaching methods of Eakins and his faculty:

It is of course of no interest to the reader whether the present writer sympathizes with the art and the teaching of Mr. Eakins, whether he thinks that Mr. Eakins is a little too hard upon the Greeks, and a little too enthusiastic about the beauty of circus tumblers; that his realism, though powerful, lacks

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 750.

charm; that in his care for the complete equipment of his pupils he forgets to give them any sailing orders, sealed or otherwise; that he is a trifle too unclassic, so to speak, too unacademic in his ideas, (not in his expression); that he is too skeptical concerning the invisible forces that lie about us, and now and then, as when in the spring the buds burst into blossoms, give tokens of their existence; and that his opinions and his feelings must inevitably be shared to a greater or less degree by his pupils. The distinguishing features of the Philadelphia art school and of the instruction there given--these are what should interest the reader.¹¹⁸

Anatomy was not the only subject that Eakins stressed in his teaching. He felt so strongly the importance of artists mastering perspective that he once volunteered to teach an extra class for the benefit of those students who had irregular hours.¹¹⁹

An exercise he reserved for advanced students was that of painting a boat under sail. The class made use of mechanical drawing instruments, rendering the vessel as a three-dimensional oblong and showing its three planes: to the picture plane, to the direction of the wind, and to the waves. Eakins compared such a boat to the human body. This study essentially combined in a single lesson most of the problems that Eakins felt a painter would likely encounter--anatomy, perspective, and reflections.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Letter, Eakins to Fairman Rogers, April 14, 1881, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹²⁰Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 12.

To Eakins a painting was a deliberately constructed thing. His own pictures of scullers and boats were based on observations from nature later carefully assembled in the studio. He sometimes fashioned figures from clay so as to get some "plastic feeling" for what he would subsequently paint. Models were posed in front of a grid placed vertically against a wall. A spot on the opposite wall secured the model's attention. Sometimes Eakins attached colored ribbons at strategic places on the model's costume that corresponded to intersections on the grid. He placed his canvas perpendicularly to the floor and at a right angle to his eye. The painting thus became a projection of the subject on a vertical plane. This approach resembles an architect's elevated blueprint. Such exacting measures indicated Eakins' great dependence on logic and articulation. Of course his students were taught the same procedure. Perhaps recalling his own student days in Paris, Eakins requested that the Academy purchase a pair of fencing foils so that his students might experience directly their own bodies in tension.¹²¹

In order to keep their points of observation consistent Eakins suggested that his students place in front of the painting subject a screen laced with strings, like a translucent grid. To doubly insure precision he sometimes stuck

¹²¹Letter, Fairman Rogers to George Corliss, January 17, 1882, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

tacks in the floor to remind models where to place their feet. Such exacting methods prompted some to ridicule him.¹²²

Perhaps Eakins' masterpiece, The Gross Clinic, actually stands as a contradiction of all he taught in regard to composition. It is meticulously ordered but too complex to be perfectly agreeable. Eakins has been soundly criticized for designing weak compositions.¹²³ The objection probably stems from his paintings' informality--"a slice of life rather than a problem in beauty."¹²⁴ The artificial and the contrived are all but absent, even in his portraits.

Eakins' art was as controlled and finely composed as a Renaissance work. Gestures and contrasts of forms, colors, or linear directions were always carefully studied until the best solution could be discovered.¹²⁵ If Eakins had a genius it was that of discoverer and observer. His originality was based on an old world craftsmanship, an honest acceptance of the thing seen, and a truthfulness of statement. His experimentation was not groping but probatory and disdainful of novelties.

Of all the conclusions of nineteenth-century art none is more fundamental than the idea of perception being the

¹²²Saint-Gaudens, American Artist and His Times, p. 180.

¹²³Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 27.

¹²⁴Eugen Neuhaus, The History and Ideals of American Art (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1931), p. 174.

¹²⁵McCaughey, "Thomas Eakins and the Power of Seeing," 58.

basic fabric of painting: "I see therefore I paint." Ways of perceiving, however, are always as varied as the men doing the perceiving. Eakins' manner of seeing was different from that of his European contemporaries. For most of them the message that the eye recorded was just a starting point for theoretical development. Organizing a visual feast was the hallmark of their efforts. Eakins rejected decorative nuance, concentrating instead on an "ordinary" or "neutral" style which relied on the visual experience. In Eakins' art, style is revealed as perception.

While Fairman Rogers was chairman of the Academy's Board of Directors he proved to be a valuable friend and supporter of the program initiated by Eakins. Nevertheless, in a letter to a fellow board member regarding an expansion of the school's life study program, Rogers expressed caution:

When it was decided to establish the modelling class, my idea was that it would be for the purpose of giving an opportunity for the students of the life class to model as an assistance to their other life class work; I did not think that any special instruction was absolutely necessary. Although no doubt it would be desirable if we could afford it. . . .

I supposed that this class could run itself pretty much as the other classes practically do, for the instructors in them visit them at intervals, only for the purposes of criticism, and do not take any other charge of them. . . .

I have always laid very little stress upon the value of instruction in the life classes, especially. I believe that the most important thing for the Academy to do is to furnish facilities for drawing from the life; after that if it can furnish good criticism and instruction so much the better, but it is of secondary importance. I understand why Mr. Eakins should hesitate about. . . taking charge of a class which used to belong to another person. . . . I say let the modelling class

go on. . . without any instructor for the present. It is certainly much better that way than to have no modelling class from the life.

I think that we can trust the students, most of whom are grown men, not to waste their time or to make disturbances. . . .¹²⁶

Class enrollments were increasing, night sessions had been introduced, and still the Academy's authorities were holding a tight rein.¹²⁷

Rogers was interviewed by a leading magazine and in explaining some of the workings of the Academy he answered certain charges that had been levelled at the school:

One peculiarity of the school, which has been somewhat unfavorably criticized, is that in one sense there is little variety in the instruction; that is, the student works first from casts which are almost universally of the nude human figure; he then enters the life class and continues to work from the nude human figure, usually in simple poses, and he works in the dissecting room. . . . He does some work in the sketch class from a draped figure, and in the portrait class from the head and face; but the main strength is put upon the nude figure. It may be considered somewhat narrow, but the difficulties of attaining that knowledge that is necessary to a successful career as a producer of pictures and sculpture, are so great, that the four or five years of a professional life which are represented by the school work, have to be devoted to steady grinding application to that one thing. The objection that the school does not sufficiently teach the students picture

¹²⁶Letter, Fairman Rogers to George Corliss, October 7, 1878, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹²⁷Letter, George Corliss to Christian Schussele, May 15, 1877, and

Letter, Eakins to Board of Directors, March 22, 1878, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

making, may be met by saying that it is hardly within the province of a school to do so.¹²⁸ It is better learned outside, in private studios, in the fields, from nature, by reading, from a careful study of other pictures, of engravings, of art exhibitions; and, in the library, the print room and the exhibitions which are held in the galleries, all freely open to the student, the Academy does as much as it can in this direction. Loan collections of the best pictures obtainable, American and foreign, are among the most useful educators of this kind. It must not be supposed that broad culture is unnecessary; on the contrary, it is of the greatest importance, but it should be attained as far as possible before and after this particular period of work. The accurate knowledge of anatomy obtained through lectures and dissections forms a strong basis for the intelligent rendering of. . . character. . . . Conventionalizing, or imposing on the model, is discouraged, as the object is study and not picture-making; and the use of a variety of models familiarize the student with many different types. . . . The anatomical study is so much more complete than in other schools, that it requires special notice. . . the cadaver is used in preference to manikins, since it is the original material. . . . Mr. Eakins teaches that the great masses of the body are the first thing that should be put upon the canvas in preference to the outline. . . . The students build up their figures from the inside rather than fill them up after having lined in the outside. . . .¹²⁹

Actually, while studying under Gerome Eakins had constructed a detailed line drawing and filled in the spaces

¹²⁸This would be in harmony with Eakins' point of view. Truth is more important than picture making. Scientific analysis and uncompromising perception preclude emotional spontaneity. Such adherence to perceived reality left Eakins very little room in which to trust his feelings. He told his students, "You can copy a thing to a certain limit. Then you must use intellect." (Larkin, Art and Life in America, p. 277.)

Eakins has been criticized for having no imagination. One writer contends, however, that he merely "held it in check." See Rilla Evelyn Jackman, American Arts (New York: Rand McNally, 1940), p. 125.

¹²⁹Fairman Rogers, "The Art Schools of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts," The Penn Monthly (June, 1881), 453-462.

with color. But his introduction to the Spanish masters had convinced him that the Beaux Arts approach was static; it lacked the fluidity necessary for a "big" painting. Eakins' style naturally contradicted European academicism and its subsequent familiarization with "historical styles"--an approach advocated by most other American schools.¹³⁰

Eakins always had disdain for what he called "respectability" in art. Whistler's style of painting he called "cowardly"; on the other hand, Winslow Homer was the finest living American painter in his estimation.¹³¹

Eakins' own students tended to feel that their teacher's paintings were proof of his instructional logic. His disgust of "clever" brushwork managed to reach the consciousness of most of them.

I cannot urge you too much to paint little simple studies. Take a lump of sugar, a piece of chalk, and get the texture. These things can be gained with paint. To get these things is not dexterity or a trick. No,--it's knowledge. Get the texture of things.

Take an egg or an orange, a piece of black cloth, and a piece of white paper, and try to get the light and color.

Paint an egg, as it teaches you to paint well. You know the form, and it's only painting. These simple studies make a strong painter.

Paint three eggs--one red, one black, one white. Paint the white and black ones first, then paint all three together. I turned myself some wooden ones, this shape and I painted these in sunlight, in twilight indoors--working with the light, and the light just skimming across them.

¹³⁰The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Seventy-ninth Annual Report (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1886), p. 13.

¹³¹Barker, American Painting, p. 653.

If I had known what I know now, I would have been a painter in half the time it took me.

You notice a little boy learning to skate. They play, they pitch into a thing, and they learn much quicker than a big fellow. A boat is the hardest thing I know of to put into perspective. It is so much like the human figure, there is something alive about it. It requires a heap of thinking and calculating to build a boat.

To study anatomy out of a book is like learning to paint out of a book. It's a waste of time. Get life into the middle line. If you get life into that the rest will be easy to put on.

Get the foot well planted on the floor. If you ever see any photograph of Gerome's works, notice that he gets the foot flat on the floor better than any of them.

Draw the chair first and put the figure on the chair. It will be a guide to draw the figure. Model a foot or a head and finish as fine as you can.

There is too much of this common, ordinary work. Respectability in art is appalling.

Think of the big factors.

The more planes you have to work by, the solidier will be your work. One or two planes is little better than an outline. You can't compare a flat thing with a round thing. You have to get it round as quickly as possible. Always think of the third dimension.

There is no intermediate between the highest finish and a start.¹³²

Eakins considered the ideal painting one that enabled the viewer to see

What o'clock it is, afternoon or morning, if it's hot or cold, winter or summer, and what kind of people are there, and what they are doing, and why they are doing it.¹³³

His idea of coordinating hand and eye was predicated on the youth and flexibility of the learner. He insisted that the younger a person was when he began his training as an artist the better would be his mature work.¹³⁴

¹³²Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," March 1931, 383.

¹³³John A. Kouwenhoven, Made in America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949), pp. 179-180.

¹³⁴Saint-Gaudens, American Artist and His Times, p. 179.

By drawing with a brush Eakins' students were forced to think in terms of mass and weight rather than line. In addition, the masses of an object, the form comprising distinct volume, could thus be more readily conceived as a unit. Movement could more easily be understood and more convincingly depicted. Eakins used certain words almost interchangeably--for example, "think" and "feel": "Think of the third dimension or of the weight. Feel the swing or the slant."¹³⁵

Eakins wanted his students to think in paint, to make the mind respond while the hand was involved in physical manipulation. And though he could respect perspective as a demanding science he considered it, along with anatomy, simply a by-product secondary to intellectual comprehension. As one of his students was to reflect years later, "As I survey his life-time work, he stands out an intellectual giant among artists. I know of no other artist who possessed the. . . mental equipment that he had."¹³⁶

Eakins uniquely combined the painter's concern for materials with the logician's knowledge of structure and three-dimensional form.¹³⁷

¹³⁵Barker, American Painting, p. 661.

¹³⁶Charles Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," March 1931, 379.

¹³⁷James House, "Eakins Horrified Fine Art Academy by Being Natural," review of Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work, by Lloyd Goodrich, in The Philadelphia Ledger, March 4, 1933, p. 10.

You ought to take up the study of higher mathematics. You are young yet, and ought to learn it--it is so much like painting. All the sciences are done in a simple way. In mathematics the complicated things are reduced to simple things. So it is in painting. You reduce the whole thing to simple factors. You establish these, and work out from them pushing toward one another. This will make strong work. The Old Masters worked this way.

Get the character of things. I detest this average kind of work. There is not one in the class that has the character. It is all a medium between the average models. If a man's fat, make him fat. If a man's thin, make him thin. If a man's short, make him short. If a man's long, make him long. I'd rather see an exaggeration, although it is a weakness, than not enough. Go to the full extent of things.

Get the forms flowing into one another, not jerky and disconnected. When finishing paint a small piece, then don't go and finish another beside it. If you do you lose your drawing. But finish a piece some distance from it and then keep working the two points. For example, if I were painting an arm I would finish the elbow and then the wrist, then I would finish in between until the two ends met. Joints are always a good thing to start from.

You want to go at a thing as simply as possible. It's hard enough to paint without making it more so by working in a complicated way.

You want to establish points of departure so that you can push your work on.

You don't try to get anything right at first. You guess at it, then correct it.¹³⁸

Eakins insisted on relating all elements in a composition. Details were expressed in a way that would enhance the medium itself. Above all he wanted plastic suggestion. In this he comes closest to Velasquez.¹³⁹

Feel the model. A sculptor when he is finishing has his hand almost continually on the model. I want to see this class do good work, for if you do good modeling it follows that you will do good painting.

¹³⁸Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher, March, 1931, 384.

¹³⁹Mather, "Eakins's Art in Retrospect," 46.

To make up a part, draw the lines in direction of the fibers of the muscles. If I were to model a standing leg I would draw a line down the center of the thigh.

Think of the cross sections of the parts of the body when you are painting.

Don't paint when you are tired. A half an hour of work that you thoroughly feel will do more good than a whole day spent in copying.

Don't copy. Feel the forms. Feel how much it swings, how much it slants--these are big factors. The more factors you have, the simpler will be your work.

Think of the weight. Get the portrait of the light, the kind of day it is, if it is cold or warm, gray or sunny day, and what time of the day it is. Think of these separately, and combine them in your work. These qualities make a strong painter. Paint a little piece of still life, paint hard. A half an hour is worth more than a whole week of careless work. It will push you ahead.

There is mystery in shadow. Get the thing built up as quickly as possible before you get tired. Get it standing, and in proportion in the first two days. Don't go at it as if you had four weeks ahead of you. Then model up a part as far as you can and take up another part. If you don't do this you keep going on correcting this part by that, and you get no further. You keep going around a ring.¹⁴⁰

Eakins' attention to the little details of life revealed itself at an early age. While in Paris he had described his living accommodations in detail.¹⁴¹

Eakins differed most radically from Gerome in the matter of drawing with paint. His own students would learn to begin with the main masses of a subject and then enlarge on the form from the inside, rather than outlining and filling in.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," March, 1931, 385.

¹⁴¹Letter, Eakins to his mother, Nov. 8, 1866.

¹⁴²Richard McLanathan, The American Tradition in the Arts (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 342.

Eakins once said that a painter's picture of a hot day was the distillation of all the hot days he could remember.¹⁴³

. . . as the sunlight studies that is difficult. . . .
The white of the tones have to be transposed into
another key. . . so that what you do out-of-doors
must look like out-of-doors only when in doors. . . .
You will hear a lot about sunlight from . . . the
crowd that went sketching. . . . So don't get the
blues. . . .¹⁴⁴

Eakins' customary procedure at the beginning of each day was to enter the classroom and immediately critique each student's work. With the class forming a semi-circle in the room, the "Boss," as he was affectionately called by his students, started at one end.¹⁴⁵

He was sometimes attended by his dog, a Gordon setter named Harry. The dog customarily lay down in one corner of the room and stayed there until Eakins left.

Many of the students took it for granted that Eakins was a great master, even though some of his fellow painters considered him mediocre and insisted that his drawing surpassed his painting.¹⁴⁶ He rarely engaged in small talk with others. His working philosophy centered around the giving of

¹⁴³Larkin, Art and Life in America, p. 277.

¹⁴⁴Letter, Eakins to Harry Barnibe, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

"The daylight is very precious to the art student, especially in the short days of winter." (Letter, Eakins to James Claghorn, May 28, 1880.)

¹⁴⁵Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," March, 1931, 380.

¹⁴⁶Harper's Weekly, XXV (December 10, 1881), 495.

advice, showing students where they erred in their work and then letting them reason out their own goals. For the serious student this had the effect of making him more self-reliant. The frivolous student was encouraged to give up the study of art.

Poor or mediocre work rarely got stiff criticism from Eakins. Rather than reprimand the student he would simply say nothing. Sitting down with the errant pupil in front of his work, a pall of disappointment would cloud Eakins' face. Presently he would rise and go on to another easel. Such silence gave more than one student food for thought.

On one occasion a student had produced an especially fine study, technically proficient but weak in composition. Eakins examined the picture silently for several minutes, then gestured for his student's palette. Dipping a brush in white, black, and burnt umber oil paint he blocked the composition and handed the young man's tools back to him. This was usually as close as Eakins came to graphic demonstration in the classroom. The more astute class members seemed to profit by this kind of assistance; a few, however, were annoyed, insisting that Eakins had ruined their work.

Eakins did not believe in using sarcasm. He almost never displayed anger, preferring to either silently count to ten before speaking at all or whistle softly as a means of letting off steam.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷Alan Burroughs, "Thomas Eakins, the Man," The Arts, IV (December, 1923), 308.

A student who did good work could expect to be greeted with a pleasant expression and something like

You are now there; with an effort you will do good work. A fellow will stay in this stage for a couple of years, if he does not make an effort. You must try hard. You want to push things. Before you commence again, get your palette in good shape, come here one half hour earlier.¹⁴⁸

One student was working on a life-size study of the foot. Eakins told him,

Match some of the main tints, for instance, there [pointing to the light, and the shadows]. And this, the darkest, the line under the foot. And this [pointing to the light part of the floor]. Then you have your scale you are working with.¹⁴⁹

Eakins understood how tones of gray can create an effect of three-dimensional reality on a flat surface. Such vision has been called a "camera eye outlook."¹⁵⁰

Gerome always mixes two or three rows of colors when he begins to model; he can then model very fast.

Get the profile of the head, then see how far back the cheek bone is, then paint the eye socket, then the eyeball, then the thin eyelashes on top of the eyeball. Always think of things in this way and you will do good work.¹⁵¹

Eakins often put in extra hours at the Academy, assisting students in the manufacture of plaster casts from life, made from the face, the entire head, even the hair.

¹⁴⁸Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," October, 1931, 33.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 35.

¹⁵⁰Burton Wasserman, "The Photronic Vision," Art Education, XXIV (May, 1971) 41.

¹⁵¹Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," October, 1931, 35.

He also encouraged students to work outside of their regular school hours, usually meeting with them at his private studio when they did so.

His workshop was actually the fourth-floor attic of his house. There he had lathes for turning wood and metal as well as other varieties of tools. His studio was located behind the house. It was a large, rectangular room with windows on three sides. A small skylight measured approximately two by three feet. The only furnishings were an easel and several chairs. When Eakins was at work he was all concentration; he refused to engage in conversation. His speech was rather slow, his voice high-pitched; nevertheless, he had that rare gift of being able to make his lectures interesting--even exciting--to most students.¹⁵²

For a while Eakins marked especially good student work with a large "E." This letter identified the painting or drawing as a commendable study and also as the official property of the Academy. However, it eventually became such a coveted prize that competition, and even resulting hostility developed in the classes. He eventually abandoned this practice of "branding" student work, probably realizing its potential harm.

Eakins thought very little of the formal custom of awarding merit prizes at art exhibitions. As one indication

¹⁵²Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, "Thomas Eakins," Dictionary of American Biography, 1930, Vol. III, 67.

of his disdain for medals he submitted one of his own to the United States Mint and received seventy-five dollars for it.

One thing Eakins was never accused of was tyranny; he never tried to dogmatize or impose his personal beliefs on a student.

His own work served as inspiration for his students. His preliminary sketches were painted in full-color oil. His palette was arranged systematically, with pure white at either end of a range of earth colors--the brightest being cadmium yellow. Eakins deliberately painted in a low key and used only the best materials since he firmly believed in permanency. Preliminary studies generally ran no larger than eight by ten inches. The Swimming Hole was planned by making a small color sketch, then creating separate studies representing the landscape, the figures, and various planes incorporating the overall composition.

Eakins was a thematic painter, preferring to concentrate on a single figure or motif.¹⁵³ Particularly difficult figures of complex groups he would model in wax or clay. He reduced an object to its simplest form by laying in the basic masses and tones, then adding planes and building up structural relationships with translucent layers of paint. The play of light on solid forms always intrigued him.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³Lloyd Goodrich, "Thomas Eakins, Realist," The Arts, XVI (October, 1929), 83.

¹⁵⁴McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 14.

Eakins carefully worked out all major compositional problems in his head so that in the actual process of painting he could proceed directly and step by step to a logical conclusion. In The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand he made individual studies of the landscape background, the coach's occupants, the horses, and the coach itself. In addition, each horse was formed in wax.

If possible he liked to take an active part in the subject he painted. He included himself, for instance, in The Swimming Hole. He thought it reprehensible to leave art to chance. He constantly reminded his students of how much he detested guesswork.¹⁵⁵ To Eakins, the artist must know and understand completely any subject he contemplated painting.

To relax his mind after an especially trying day, Eakins customarily worked out problems in logarithms or calculus. In spite of this logical bent he was little concerned with theory, what he called "poetical" mathematics.¹⁵⁶ A scientist once engaged in conversation with him regarding the speculative fourth dimension. Eakins astonished him with "You can't tie a knot in the fourth dimension!"¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Charles Bregler, "A Tribute," A Loan Exhibition of the Works of Thomas Eakins, (New York: Knobler and Co., 1944), p. 24.

¹⁵⁶Goodrich, "Thomas Eakins, Realist," 74.

¹⁵⁷Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 12.

Eakins didn't like to use terms that he considered pretentious; he used "workshop" instead of "studio," "painter" instead of "artist," and "naked" rather than "nude."¹⁵⁸

He rarely read fiction, disliking in particular French novels. Aside from mathematics his favorite reading material was Dante, Rabelais, the Bible, and the poetry of his friend Walt Whitman.

Eakins had a special love for facts. And for tools. He spoke French and Latin fluently, but he expressed a passion only for the structure of languages, never for the cultures they represented. The letters from his student days had been filled with newly-acquired French idioms and locutions; and once, visiting a monastery with some friends, he had amazed them by conversing with the monks in Latin.

Eakins' professionalism can be seen in the systematic procedure he used with beginning students: making casts, then having them work from the nude model, and finally, dissecting the cadaver.¹⁵⁹ Advanced students had to work from the nude two days a week for a total of six hours.¹⁶⁰

The Academy had specific formats for each academic subject; they were in the form of syllabi posted in plain view in the building:

¹⁵⁸Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 606.

¹⁵⁹McLanathan, American Tradition in the Arts, p. 342.

¹⁶⁰Letter, Eakins to James Claghorn, May 28, 1880, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Rules of the Class
for the
Study of the Living Model
of the
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

1. The evenings for drawing from the life model are on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, from 7 to 9 1/2 o'clock.

2. The Members of the Class will have their seats determined by lot on the first evening of each new pose.

3. Each pose to continue [for] Six successive sittings; and the Model may claim a rest of five minutes or less every half hour, according to the difficulty of the position.

4. Each successive position of the Model to be arranged by the Committee of Artists, in turn; and in the order their names may stand as decided by lot.

5. No conversation is permitted between the Model and any member of the Class.

6. No person admitted to the Room during study hours, except registered members of the Class coming to draw.

7. No smoking allowed, nor any kind of defacement of the walls. Strict order is enjoined, and any flagrant violation of it will subject the offending member to Expulsion.

8. No one under the age of twenty-one years can be admitted to draw from the Female Model without first obtaining the written consent of his parent or guardian.

In addition Eakins had his own circular printed to explain the functions of the Academy:

Object of the School

To furnish facilities and instruction of the highest order to those intending to make painting or sculpture their profession.

Secondarily. To extend as far as practicable the same benefits as a foundation for those pursuing or intending to pursue industrial art. Such persons are engravers, diesinkers, illustrators, decorators, wood carvers, stone cutters, lithographers, photographers and have always been largely represented in the school. No other benefits whatever but those of pure art education are extended to them, they learning outside with masters, or in the workshop, or in technical schools the mechanical part of their art or trade.

Lastly. To let amateurs profit by the same facilities.

In case of crowding, the third class will first give way to the second class and the second to the first.

The course of study is purely classical, and is believed to be more thorough than in any other existing school. Its basis is the nude human figure.

In the anatomical department the advanced students themselves dissect, and the demonstrators use largely in the dissecting room the nude living model for comparison.

A course of 30 anatomical lectures is given, and also a complete series of lessons in perspective.

Domestic animals are also dissected from time to time, and a living horse is put in the modelling room each season for a pose of six or eight weeks.

Sculpture was taught three nights a week, and Eakins once offered to give a class "a few lectures on perspective" in exchange for permission to expand his life classes.¹⁶¹ Later that same year eighteen students petitioned for an additional life class, specifying Eakins as their instructor.¹⁶²

By 1880, then, Thomas Eakins had arrived at a mature style of painting and teaching. Administrator of the most progressive art school in the country, admired by students and colleagues, living comfortably in the most gracious of American cities--he was a man to be envied. What remained was for his educational policies to be held suspect and his classroom innovations misconstrued. Now at the peak of his career, he would soon be challenged and brought down by the very community he sought to enrich.

¹⁶¹Letter, Fairman Rogers to John Sartain, April 30, 1877, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹⁶²Letter, Fairman Rogers to John Sartain, November 2, 1877, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

CHAPTER V

THE OUTCAST

In 1882 a young woman student wrote a fervent letter to the Academy's president, James Claghorn. It personifies the shock and discomfort felt by the mainstream of late-nineteenth century Philadelphia society at such indignities that Eakins, that "young firebrand from Paris," had imported.¹⁶³

Dear Sir,

I know you will be surprised and perhaps astonished at the courage of a lady to address the "President of the Academy of Fine Arts" in reference to a subject which just at this time seems to be so popular and to which the President and Directors of the Academy are giving their earnest support and aid. This is an age of progress I know, and especially of great improvements in Arts and Sciences, and I acknowledge that every effort should be made and sustained with enthusiasm that promotes true art. By true Art I mean, the Art that ennobles and purifies the mind, elevates the whole intellect, increases the love of the beautiful, and as nothing can be beautiful that is not pure and holy, that so elevates humanity that it becomes better fit to enjoy that purity and holiness, that belongs to immortality. Now I appeal to you as a Christian gentleman, educated amidst the pure and holy teaching of our beloved Church, and where the exhortations to purity of mind and body were amongst your earliest home teachings, to consider for a moment the effect of the teaching of the Academy, on the young and sensitive minds of both the male and female students. I allude to the Life

¹⁶³Edward Alden Jewell, "Thomas Eakins, America's First Great Realist at the Easel," review of Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work, by Lloyd Goodrich, in The New York Times, March 26, 1933, p. 10.

Class studies, and I know where of I speak. Would you be willing to take a young daughter of your own into the Academy Life Class, to the study of the nude figure of a woman, whom you would shudder to have sit in your parlor clothed and converse with your daughter? Would you be willing to sit there with your daughter, or know she was sitting there with a dozen others, studying a nude figure, while the professor walked around criticising that nudity, as to her roundness in this part, and swell of the muscles in another? That daughter at home had been shielded from every thought that might lead her young mind from the most rigid chastity. Her mother had never allowed her to see her young naked brothers, hardly her sisters after their babyhood and yet at the age of eighteen, or nineteen, for the culture of high Art, she had entered a class where both male and female figures stood before her in their horrid nakedness. This is no imaginary picture. I know at this time two young ladies of culture, refined families, enthusiastic students of painting, whose parents, after earnest entreaties of patrons of Art and assurances that Art could only be studied successfully by entering such a class, consented, with the assurance from their daughters that if they found the study as improper as their parents feared they would desist. They entered, and from their own lips I heard the statement of the terrible shock to their feelings at first, how they trembled when the professor came, one stating she thought she should faint. Her fellow student, who had been in the class for some time, assured her that she would soon get over that, and not mind it at all! She persevered, and now "don't mind seeing a naked man or woman in the least." She has learned to consider it the only road to high Art, and has become so interested she never sees a fine looking person without thinking what a fine nude study they would make! What has become of her womanly refinement and delicacy? Do you wonder why so many art students are unbelievers, even infidels? Why there is often so much looseness of morals among the young men? Is there anything so effective in awakening licentiousness as this daily and nightly study of woman's nudity! Can it be helped! Can Christian men, members of the church, deliberately aid in demoralizing the young in this manner and not be guilty! There is not a young woman who has been a member of the life class for any length of time, but has become more or less coarse in manner and word. I have been thrown with them and know of what I speak. A young gentleman, a very promising artist, who studied at the Academy for a time, does not hesitate to say that it is impossible to study in the life class and retain your purity of thought!

Now, Mr. Claghorn, does this pay! Does it pay, for a young lady of a refined, godly household to be urged as the only way of obtaining a knowledge of true art, to enter a class where every feeling of maidenly delicacy is violated, where she becomes so hardened to indelicate sights and words, so familiar with the persons of degraded women and the sight of nude males, that no possible art can restore her lost treasure of chaste and delicate thoughts! There is no use in saying that she must look upon the study as she would that of a wooden figure! That is an utter impossibility. Living, moving flesh and blood, is not, cannot, be studied thus. The stifling heat of the room, adds to the excitement, and what might be a cool, unimpassioned study in a room at 35 degrees, at 85 degrees or even higher is dreadful.

Then with this dreadful exposure of body and mind, not one in a dozen could make a respectable draped figure. Where is the elevating enobling influence of the beautiful art of painting in these studies? The study of the beautiful in landscape and draped figures, and the exquisitely beautiful in the flowers that the Heavenly Father had decked and beautified the world with, is ignored, sneered at, and that only made the grand object of the ambition of the student of art, that comes unholy thoughts with it, that the Heavenly Father Himself covered from the sight of his fallen children. Pray excuse this liberty in writing to you but I have been made to feel that the subject is one of such vital importance to the morals of our young students I could not refrain.

Very truly yours,
R.S.¹⁶⁴

The letter was read at a regular meeting of the Committee of Instruction, then filed. Its tone reflected the unappreciative student, the student with a cultural background insufficient to recognize what Eakins was trying to accomplish in his teaching.

¹⁶⁴Letter, "R.S." to James L. Claghorn, April 11, 1882, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Although believing that an understanding of the nude was essential to art, Eakins used it infrequently in his own work. His few pictures of sporting events, particularly The Swimming Hole, served to establish him as a capable American painter of nudes.¹⁶⁵ Of the various versions of his William Rush Carving the Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River, the best is that of 1877.¹⁶⁶ In it Mrs. Rush modeled for the chaperone inasmuch as the sculptor had found it difficult to secure models. A local debutante had finally consented to pose as the nude; she was the only major female nude Eakins ever painted.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, in a letter from Europe the young Eakins had formulated part of his working philosophy regarding the nude: "I can conceive of few circumstances wherein I would have to paint a woman naked."¹⁶⁸ He went on to specify that his respect for the beauty of the female body was exceeded only by that for the male. Eakins merely recognized the fact that one rarely encounters unclothed figures under ordinary, day-to-day circumstances. His use of the nude was entirely predicated on the demands of his chosen subject.

After Eakins had been officially granted the Directorship in 1882, a position of even more authority at the Academy, he set about to teach art as he felt it should be,

¹⁶⁵"A Force," Time, June 19, 1944, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶McLanathan, American Tradition in the Arts, p. 344.

¹⁶⁷Mather, "Eakins's Art in Retrospect," 90.

¹⁶⁸Letter, Eakins to his father, November, 1867.

and to transform a refined, sterile hobby house into a professionally active institution--an authentic training ground. He was extremely fortunate for a while in that he had the presence and support of Fairman Rogers. This urbane landowner proved to be an excellent middle man in that he could explain with firmness and tact the views of the Academy's new Director. Rogers was an engineer, a dilettante, an amateur scientist, even an athletic coach. In short, he shared most of Eakins' interests. A member of both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society, he enjoyed wealth and prestige. He was also a member of the University of Pennsylvania's Board of Trustees. Ten years older than Eakins, he was a staunch defender of the younger man's principles.

The assumption of the school's new policy was that "broad culture" could be attained by students engaged in off-campus activities as well as in the classroom. The art instruction of the Academy was purposely designed not to represent an absolute educational experience but rather one important step in a series of many and varied steps.

Eakins' good faith can be seen in his attempt not to attack the complacency of his constituency, but to make the artist's use of the nude more respectable than it had been heretofore. To the Academy's Committee of Instruction Eakins had written a plea:

Gentlemen,
 The Life Schools are in great need of good female models. I desire that an advertisement similar to the following be inserted in the Public Ledger: "Wanted. Female Models for the Life Schools of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Apply to the Curator at the Academy, Broad and Cherry at the Cherry St. entrance. Applicants should be of respectability and may on all occasions be accompanied by their mothers or other female relatives. Terms \$1 per hour."

The privilege of wearing a mask might also be conceded and advertised.

The publicity thus given in a reputable newspaper at the instance of an institution like the Academy will insure in these times a great number of applicants among whom will be found beautiful ones with forms fit to be studied.

The old plan was for the students or officers to visit low houses of prostitution and bargain with the inmates. This course was degrading and would be unworthy of the present academy and its result was models coarse, flabby, ill formed and unfit in every way for the requirements of a school, nor was there sufficient change of models for the successful study of form.¹⁶⁹

Use of the nude model at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts had begun in the early eighteen hundreds, when Charles Wilson Peale used a plaster cast of the Venus de Medici in a drawing class. The statue was kept locked in a case and shown to outsiders only upon request, since public opinion prevented its open display. As Peale could find no model who would consent to pose in the nude for his students, he stripped himself to the waist and served as model.¹⁷⁰ For the most part, classical statuary in Peale's time was publicly displayed only with drapery affixed to it.

¹⁶⁹Letter, Eakins to the Committee on Instruction, January 8, 1876, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹⁷⁰Helen Henderson, The Pennsylvania Academy (Boston: By the Author, H. Revere St. Place, 1911), p. 33.

The only art school that rivaled the Pennsylvania Academy's use of the nude under Eakins' progressive direction was the then new Art Students' League in New York City.¹⁷¹ Academic or sentimental nudes were by no means novelties at Eakins' school. The institution's collection had more than a few examples of "Venus," or "Musidora," and such sculpture was exhibited frequently.¹⁷²

It seems that as early as 1879 there had begun an undercurrent of hostility toward Eakins. Some of his major work had been rejected for exhibition; his salary, fixed that year at six hundred dollars, had still not been paid in full six years later.¹⁷³ Eakins complained to the Board of Trustees, stating that his promised salary had been a significant factor in his decision to remain in Philadelphia.

Gentlemen,

At the reorganization of the school as a pay school of which I was made the director, my salary was fixed at \$2500, but as there were many doubts as to the probable number of scholars under the pay system, I was asked to temporarily serve at a much-reduced salary. The Chairman of the Instruction Committee Mr. Rogers, confident of the success of the new plan, assured me he believed my temporary salary would be much raised during the first year and probably paid in full thereafter, and that it was not contemplated that the expenses of the whole school would be paid by the pupils, the price for tuition being kept very low.

¹⁷¹Goodrich, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work, p. 74.

¹⁷²American Paintings: A Catalogue of the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: [1955]), p. 3.

¹⁷³Letter, Walter Shirlaw to the Board of Trustees, May 1, 1879, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

The number of classes has increased, the school is full, probably as full as it should be, its pupils are become known, its reputation is wide, and its standard of work is very high. . . .¹⁷⁴

At the time that Eakins sought to reorganize the Academy, tuition was set at forty-eight dollars per term, or eight dollars per month. For students enrolled in only one class the fee was four dollars. All enrolled students were granted free passes to the Academy's exhibitions. Lectures on anatomy and perspective were conducted at irregular times and were free to Academy students.

In his lectures Eakins scarcely mentioned the works or ideas of controversial or radical artists. The few that he did recommend to students were Velasquez, Ribera, and Rembrandt. Of the moderns he most admired Gerome and Homer.¹⁷⁵

Eakins' lack of discomfort in the presence of a nude model, his sometimes blunt speech, his disdain of social amenities when they threatened to hamper scientific or artistic work--these were aspects of his personality that offended more than one conservative student or patron. Such persons could at times enlarge a story, or slant it; some of the friction created within the school eventually broke out into the streets of the city.

Eakins apparently had begun by criticizing the students' work. Evidently feeling that words alone were insufficient

¹⁷⁴Letter, Eakins to the Board of Trustees, April 8, 1885, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹⁷⁵Goodrich, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work, p. 83.

and that a demonstration was called for, he asked one of his female students to strip to the waist so that he could better explain the anatomical intricacies of the spine. The young woman burst into tears and fled the room. Her father summarily complained to the Academy authorities and Eakins was almost fired.¹⁷⁶ There were other rumors, as when a model for the women's life class failed to appear. Eakins eventually decided to carry on without her by getting his students to take turns posing themselves. The class was soon visited by a concerned parent.¹⁷⁷ Again the Academy apologized and the commotion subsided.

But there were other incidents. Some of the female students agreed to be photographed in the nude. Male and female models were posed side by side for purposes of anatomical comparison. And Philadelphia really screamed its dismay when Eakins deliberately touched the models, pointing out specific areas or manipulating the skin and muscles.¹⁷⁸ These were all examples of the man's intellectual devotion--concentration so directed and intense that all polite convention was forgotten.

Eakins also offended his fellow citizens. One elderly lady tired of posing for her portrait after only a few sittings

¹⁷⁶Forbes Watson, "The Growth of a Reputation," The Arts, XVI (April, 1930), 38.

¹⁷⁷Burroughs, "Thomas Eakins, the Man."

¹⁷⁸Goodrich, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work, p. 86.

and informed the artist that she would pay him and he could do with the picture as he wished. Eakins penned her a note: "I cannot bring myself to regard the affair in the light of a business transaction, but rather as a trespass upon your complacency."¹⁷⁹

He further courted trouble when he asked a prominent matron to pose in the nude.¹⁸⁰

In another incident he tapped a sitter's stomach and asked her not to be so tense.¹⁸¹

Eakins even disgusted some people by daring to paint in an undershirt. And when he received a commission to paint President Rutherford Hayes' portrait he went so far as to represent the Chief Executive in everyday working attire--shirt sleeves.

Finally, he committed the unpardonable: he removed the posing strap from a male model to allow students an unhindered view of the pelvic region.¹⁸² The students were all women. This was early in 1886, and on February eighth of that year Edward Horner Coates, who three years before had succeeded Fairman Rogers as head of the Academy's governing board, demanded Eakins' resignation as Director of the Schools of the Pennsylvania Academy. Eakins had never expected to enjoy

¹⁷⁹Larkin, Art and Life in America, p. 277.

¹⁸⁰Richardson, Painting in America, p. 319.

¹⁸¹Schendler, Eakins, p. 289.

¹⁸²Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 22.

the support from Coates that he had had under Rogers' tenure, and on the following day he wrote an agonizingly brief note to Coates:

Dear Sir,
In accordance with your request just received, I
tender you my resignation as director of the schools
of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Yours truly
Thomas Eakins¹⁸³

Eakins' injunction that "respectability in art is appalling" had been put to the acid test. Just shortly before his encounter with Coates he had painted The Swimming Hole. The figures--Eakins and some of his male students--were of course recognizable people; however, if the artist had conceived a composition "filled with academic nudes and entitled it The Genius of America Presiding over the Marriage of the Atlantic and the Pacific probably all would have been well."¹⁸⁴

It is generally conceded that the conflict between Thomas Eakins and his native city stemmed in large part from an American reaction to the liberal European outlook which the painter had brought back with him from Paris.¹⁸⁵ Several weeks after his resignation Eakins sent a curious letter to Emily Sartain, the daughter of John Sartain and a woman some

¹⁸³Letter, Eakins to Edward H. Coates, Feb. 9, 1886, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹⁸⁴Barker, American Painting, p. 657.

¹⁸⁵Burroughs, "Eakins, the Man," 312.

years older than himself.¹⁸⁶ With the letter was an urging that she use it "in any way she thought proper."

In pursuance of my business and professional studies, I use the naked model.

A number of my women pupils have for economy studied from each others' figures, and of these some have obtained from time to time my criticism on their work. I have frequently used as models for myself my male pupils: very rarely female pupils and then only with the knowledge and consent of their mothers. One of the women pupils, some years ago gave to her lover who communicated it to Mr. Frank Stephens a list of these pupils as far as she knew them, and since that time Mr. Frank Stephens has boasted to witnesses of the power which this knowledge gave him to turn me out of the Academy, the Philadelphia Sketch Club, and of his intention to drive me from the city.¹⁸⁷

Frank Stephens had been an Academy student and was Eakins' own brother-in-law, having married Caroline Eakins only the year before, in 1885. Stephens had convinced Caroline that her brother was engaging in sexual relations with his students and models. Frances, Eakins' other sister, felt that Stephens' charges were unfounded and thus there developed such a strained family relationship that Eakins was eventually blamed for the suicide of Ella Crowell, Frances' mother-in-law. In reality Mrs. Crowell had been insane for a number of years before taking her own life in 1897.

¹⁸⁶John Sartain was an engraver and architect of considerable accomplishment. He had designed the Academy's galleries and had pioneered in the introduction of pictorial illustration in American periodicals, such as Graham's magazine and Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art, both published from 1849 to 1852.

¹⁸⁷Letter, Eakins to Emily Sartain, March 25, 1886, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Years before, Eakins had been assailed by the press upon his entry in the annual Philadelphia Art Exhibition, and this incident was resurrected by his enemies. "Mr. Eakins is an artist who is apt to astonish and to irritate by his assertion of a most unique individuality. . . this able but eccentric artist. . . ."188

Years before, when Eakins had just begun his studies in Paris John Sartain had written a letter of recommendation for him. But soon after that any affection the two men might have felt for one another cooled appreciably. During that first year abroad Eakins had written Emily a number of letters that implied a close relationship with her. Years later, after his return to Philadelphia, Eakins sent a brief letter to Susan Macdowell, his wife-to-be:

I learned this morning that the Directors on the recommendation of the Committee on Instruction have appointed me Professor of Drawing and Painting.

They did this last night and Mr. Rogers wanted me to wait here so as to give the first lesson. I found four antique fellows whom I instructed and introduced to Billy Sartain whom I substitute [sic] till I come back.

When old Sartain learns not only that I have the place, but that the other young firebrand Billy is keeping it for me, I fear his rage may bring on a fit.¹⁸⁹

John Sartain had been Chief of the Bureau of Art for the Centennial Exhibition and it was he that had recommended hanging The Gross Clinic in the medical section of the

¹⁸⁸Harper's Weekly, 496.

¹⁸⁹Letter, Eakins to Susan Macdowell, September 9, 1879, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Exhibition rather than with the other art works. He was also one of the Academy directors at the time of Eakins' resignation.

With his dismissal the career of Thomas Eakins suffered a jarring blow. After his departure from the Academy he found himself even more isolated from the "respectable" elite of his world. When a Philadelphia hostess asked John Singer Sargent whom he would like her to invite to a dinner party, that fashionable portraitist suggested Eakins. "Who's Eakins?" she asked.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps now Eakins recalled the intellectually-toned letters he had exchanged with Emily Sartain two decades before:

If by politeness then is meant goodness, it is appreciated by me as I trust it always has been, but if it is to mean the string of ceremonies generally used for concealing ill nature, and which have been found necessary to the existence of every society whose members are wanting in self respect and morality, I detest it more than ever.

My prominent idea of a polite man is one who is nothing but polish. It is an unenviable reputation. If there was anything else in him the polish would never be noticed. He is a bad drawing finely worked up, and Gerome says that every attempt to finish on a bad design serves only to make the work more contemptible.¹⁹¹

On February 13, 1886, the Academy's Board of Directors formally accepted Eakins' resignation. On February 15 a number of his students petitioned the board to reinstate him:

¹⁹⁰Porter, Thomas Eakins, p. 23.

¹⁹¹Letter, Eakins to Emily Sartain, November 16, 1866, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Gentlemen

We the undersigned students of the Academy of Fine Arts have heard with regret of the resignation of Thomas Eakins, as head instructor of the school.

We have perfect confidence in Mr. Eakins' competency as an instructor, and as an artist; and his personal relations with us have always been of the most pleasant character.

We therefore respectfully and earnestly request the Board of Directors to prevail upon Mr. Eakins to withdraw his resignation, and continue to confer upon us the benefit of his instruction.¹⁹²

The letter was signed by fifty-five individuals.

A generation later the Academy was still smarting as a result of this incident, and its provincial attitude continued to be severely challenged:

I believe that there is nothing that the Academy can ever do to wipe out the memory of its negligence in this particular instance--as well as in many others. . . . What I do hope is that the big lesson of such a disgrace will not utterly escape. . . .¹⁹³

The only response of the board to their students' petition was to send it to the Committee on Instruction for reply. The Academy's reaction was largely disgust for what it considered an insolent demand; in the face of a critical financial deficit these presumptuous students had the gall to attempt a dictation of school policy. Most of the local newspapers hastened to defend the board's decision.

For some time there has been trouble brewing in the life class in the Academy of Fine Arts, and it

¹⁹²Letter to the Board of Directors, Feb. 15, 1886, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

¹⁹³Letter, Helen Henderson to "Mr. Lewis," Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

culminated on Saturday in the resignation of Professor Thomas Eakins, one of the best known artists in the country and head of the school, who, for a long time has conducted the class. The resignation was presented at a meeting of the Board of Directors and was accepted. The difficulty began some time ago, it is said, through some objection of Prof. Eakins' method of instruction. There was a difference of opinion in the class over the matter and after it had been brought to the notice of the directors a special committee was given charge of the affair.

"The whole thing, in my opinion," said one of the directors, last night, "is rather a tempest in a teapot. Professor Eakins is an excellent teacher. He is a pupil of Gerome's and a thorough artist. He loves art for art's sake. But you know artists never agree among themselves. He had a number of enemies who made trouble for him and the committee thought it best for the interests of the class that he should resign.

The resignation will not result in the cessation of the life class. There are between eighty and one hundred students connected with it, and it will be continued to the end of the term, which is in May."¹⁹⁴

A great irony here was that Eakins as a young student in Europe had been all but oblivious to art circle debates; now he found himself the heart and center of an artistic and educational battle. He was an artist who had never really wanted to go beyond his immediate environment.¹⁹⁵ His reluctance to transcend the corporeal and the familiar was demonstrated by the fact that he lived almost his entire life in the same house in the same city.

The real dilemma here lay in the artistic effort of Eakins to reveal something beyond material fact. The people of his world insisted on the sentimental and the mundane.

¹⁹⁴Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, February 16, 1886, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 17.

Eakins' attitude of recognizing art in the commonplace was to them an act of utter barbarity. What made his warfare so tragic was that it was almost single-handedly fought.

Diplomacy and great art have seldom been good companions. Rubens, Leonardo, Raphael and a few other masters possessed something of that rare combination, but the men who broke most forcibly with the established order of thinking and execution--Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Goya, El Greco--paid dearly for their loyalty to progress. Yet today it is such men whose views mold the spirit of art advance, and to their number, in America, may be added Thomas Eakins.¹⁹⁶

Eakins was never interested in assuming the image of a distressed Bohemian painter. Neither did he fancy the decor of a European Salon teacher. More than an individualist, he was simply an individual. He made no cult of iconoclasm. He wrote no textbook or autobiography. His personal approach to teaching remained constant, experiencing no significant remodeling. To some this would suggest a limited outlook, a narrowness of vision. It almost certainly portrays an intrepid thinker.

The intellectual travail that plagued Eakins somewhat paralleled the experiences of men such as Darwin, Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and Matthew Arnold. They too had presented problems with which people of their time had had to wrestle. Most of them, including Eakins, came far closer to understanding their own generations than did the majority of their contemporaries and critics.

¹⁹⁶Dorothy Grafly, "Battle of Ideas and Dogmas as Strong Today as in Past," review of Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work, by Lloyd Goodrich, in The Philadelphia Ledger, March 5, 1933, p. 16.

The hostility that Eakins met because he was a seeker after truth, and desired to start literally with the naked truth, has confronted virtually every innovator in this land who has had something to project that would bring a new order, and destroy the old.¹⁹⁷

Probably the best example of Eakins' fortitude expressed in his art is that of The Thinker, a painting illustrating the introspective nature of an intellectual. It is a grave picture, reflecting the solemnity of Eakins himself. The singular subject is typical of Eakins' style, full of a sense of individual worth and independence of mind. Eakins had, more than any other American artist, ennobled the life of the mind.¹⁹⁸ Dr. Gross had been the triumphant man of science, and the Catholic clergy were men who had substituted cloudy theology for a logical explanation of life. Eakins idealized a creative culture, rejecting the comparatively empty life of the drawing room.

Eakins' contribution outlived him. His insistence on the validity of the commonplace eventually realized fruition in the work of early twentieth-century painters like Robert Henri, a one-time student at the Academy. Henri spoke years later of the reverence some of his students had felt for the ousted master: "It was an excitement to hear his pupils talk of him."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Bernard S. Myers, Art and Civilization (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 359.

¹⁹⁹Schendler, Eakins, p. 20.

One month after Eakins had submitted his resignation a letter was sent to the Board of Directors. The intrigue was not yet dead.

Gentlemen:

In the absence of any official statement as to the cause of Mr. Eakins' resignation from the Academy rumors have spread. . . resulting in the general belief that he has suffered without cause. This is unjust to those who have brought Mr. Eakins' offenses to the notice of your Board and still more to those who come under his influence now, or may hereafter, believing that he is, as he claims, the innocent victim of a conspiracy. We who are acquainted with the case cannot defend ourselves except by detailing the facts and that being in every other sense undesirable we bring the matter to the attention of your Honorable body and appeal, most earnestly, for an official statement from your Board to the effect that Mr. Eakins' dismissal was due to the abuse of his authority and not to the malice of his personal or professional enemies.²⁰⁰

It was signed by five men, including Frank Stephens.

Three-quarters of a century later details of the incident were still difficult to separate.

The whole discussion of why he was asked to resign has always been a confused one, particularly because until late years the Academy would have been glad to draw a veil over the whole matter. . . . I am inclined to believe that. . . it was an accumulation of incidents and a general disapproval of his methods by the Academy Board rather than a particular incident which caused them to ask for his resignation.²⁰¹

Thomas Anshutz was another one of the authors of the letter to the Board denouncing Eakins' actions. Curiously

²⁰⁰Letter to the Board of Directors, March 12, 1886, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

²⁰¹Letter, Barbara Roberts to E. P. Richardson, August 24, 1951, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

enough, he succeeded Eakins as Director. Anshutz had been raised in Kentucky and had studied at the Art Students' League as well as under Eakins at the Academy. At the time of the older man's resignation Anshutz was being allowed to teach extension courses in New York City. He was generally well-liked by students but he was painfully inarticulate. Having been on the Academy staff for many years, Anshutz was an erratic painter. He did agree explicitly with Eakins' sense of plastic form and his rejection of cast drawing; however, Anshutz lacked Eakins' keen intelligence. Sometime during the eighteen-nineties he was to take a leave from the Academy to study in Paris, gravitating toward the aging and conservative Bouguereau.

Several men were considered as successors to Eakins. There was also mention of major curriculum revision. One person by the name of Thomas Hovenden was recommended for his "common sense and abilities."²⁰²

At the conclusion of the spring term the Board happily announced a shakeup in its faculty:

Mr. James P. Kelley has been appointed an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Eakins' resignation. . . . Mr. Kelley is regarded as one of the strongest men who received their training at the Academy. . . . and the promotion of Mr. Anshutz to the position of director.²⁰³

²⁰²Letter, W. J. Clark to Edward H. Coates, February 22, 1886, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

²⁰³Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Seventy-ninth Annual Report. Kelley had also been opposed to Eakins.

This same report mentioned a deficit plaguing the institution:

The regrettable feature of the report is the statement that, in spite of retrenchment, the year 1885 again shows an excess of expenditures over receipts. . . .²⁰⁴

This contrasted rather sharply with an eager newspaper reporter's observation of the school's state of affairs at the time of Eakins' departure:

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is now upon a more solid foundation than it has been for some time past. The classes are in a flourishing condition. . . . At the annual meeting held on the 1st much stress was laid upon the harmonious relations existing between the institution and the artists of Philadelphia.²⁰⁵

One positive outcome of the entire affair surrounding Eakins' ouster was the Academy's retention of his established tradition of drawing directly with the brush.²⁰⁶

Several of Eakins' male students marched one evening from the Academy to the artist's studio, singing and shouting. Many of them had attached large E's to their hats. They grouped in front of Eakins' house and cheered him; but if he was at home he gave them no notice.

On February twenty-second Eakins' admirers rented a three-story house and set about to establish an art school to rival the Academy. Both day and evening classes were announced,

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, February 15, 1886, p. 4.

²⁰⁶Richardson, Painting in America, p. 319.

Eakins agreeing to teach them but without remuneration.²⁰⁷ He even paid some of the models out of his own pocket. He came twice each week to critique the morning painting class and once each week for the modeling class. He also critiqued a painting class meeting at night once a week.²⁰⁸ The new school was called the Art Students League of Philadelphia, and over the ensuing half-dozen years it was to be housed in four different buildings. For awhile interest was high, but by 1892 the enrollment had begun to dwindle. Some students returned to the Academy. From a peak enrollment of forty members, the school eventually weakened and late in 1892 it completely disintegrated. One of the best experiences for Eakins during this period was the friendship of a young student by the name of Samuel Murray. He and Eakins shared a studio for more than ten years, and he became almost a substitute son for the older man.

In 1888 Eakins began teaching at the National Academy of Design in New York City. He commuted for a total of six years, lecturing as well at the Art Students League, the National Academy of Design, the Cooper Union, and the Brooklyn Art Guild.²⁰⁹ He also gave demonstrations on dissecting at the Jefferson Medical College along with lectures on anatomy,

²⁰⁷McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 16.

²⁰⁸Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," March, 1931, 380.

²⁰⁹McKinney, Thomas Eakins, p. 17.

perspective, and the principles of reflection and bas relief.²¹⁰
Ironically, as a result of his dismissal from the Academy,
Eakins' influence was considerably broadened.

²¹⁰Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," March, 1931,
380.

CHAPTER VI

THE LEGACY

In spite of Eakins' partial recovery from his tussle with the Academy personnel, and his professional activity, one is almost inclined to pity him. Middle-aged and paunchy, rejected by his own kind, his personal call to honesty was that of an isolated man battling intrenched authority. He had offended those who were concerned only with the decorous life. His former role as administrator of a public institution had been incompatible with that of cultural subversive. He had chosen his own path and it had magnificently failed to coincide with the shallowness of a Victorian elite. Eakins had a choice of submitting to the demands of his own mind or the passing convention of an age. He chose his own mind. As he himself reflected,

I taught in the Academy from the opening of the schools until I was turned out, a period much longer than I should have permitted myself to remain there.

My honors are misunderstanding, persecution and neglect, enhanced because unsought.²¹¹

²¹¹Letter, Eakins to Harrison Morris, April 23, 1894, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

Eakins desired only to introduce students to an exciting, inexhaustible world of artistic and intellectual resources. If he was guilty of anything, it was a naive presumption that the average person would willingly sacrifice custom and acquired morality for the headier experience of learning.

After the Philadelphia Art Students League had disbanded, and Eakins had forsaken his itinerant teaching in New York City and Washington, D. C., he continued lecturing regularly to various groups and institutions, even though he was now in his sixties. He joined the faculty of Philadelphia's Drexel Institute for a brief period but was forced to resign when he attempted to use a nude model in his life class. In an explanation to a defending critic, Eakins said in obvious exasperation, "I have never discovered that the nude could be studied in any way except the way I have adopted. All the muscles must be pointed out. To do this all the drapery must be removed."²¹² Once again his reluctance to compromise was predicated on a professional's recognition of certain basic necessities.

None of his students excelled, or even equalled, him. His standards were too demanding for even the strictest academicians of his day. Anshutz was a politician, banal in artistic conception and eclectic in execution. Murray was a

²¹²Schendler, Eakins, p. 134.

loyal companion, but he never exemplified any particular strength as an artist. Only Robert Henri represented the promise of a succeeding generation sustaining in American art a legacy of realism that accepted completely the realities of American life--its limitations and its potentialities. It was in part Eakins' misfortune to have been born in a time that held little respect for the unqualified thinker. The heroes of his generation were more "practical" men like merchants and inventors. America's ideal of the Gilded Age was long on commercialism and short on inspiration.

Eakins had never been a demagogue in teacher's clothing. He had probably never stirred a single soul with fiery oratory or swash-buckling gestures. He had simply possessed admirers--not disciples.²¹³ The instructional methods that brought ridicule to Eakins were eventually echoed in the careers of John Sloan, Robert Henri, and William Glackens. Eakins' tenure at the Academy saw the teaching there raised "to a level it never had [before]."²¹⁴

In retrospect one could say that Eakins' philosophy closely paralleled that of his era's greatest novelists. Like Hamlin Garland he never really saw himself as a rebel; he merely wanted to present life truthfully. As with Stephen Crane, craftsmanship stands out in his work. Like Frank

²¹³E. M. Benson, "The American Scene," American Magazine of Art, XXVII (Feb., 1934), 55.

²¹⁴House, "Eakins Horrified Fine Art Academy."

Norris Eakins believed that life was actually superior to art. Along with Theodore Dreiser he was branded "immoral." In fact, as one writer has suggested, Eakins could almost qualify for a chapter in An American Tragedy.²¹⁵

Henry James had already described the distraught American intellectual of the age, and his excitation could well include the experience of Thomas Eakins:

We're the disinherited of art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle! The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit! Yes we're wedded to imperfection! An American, to excel, has just ten times to learn as a European! We lack the deeper sense! We have neither taste or tact or force! How should we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely conditions, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile.²¹⁶

In a way rather startling in its parallelism, Eakins' master, Gerome, had experienced something quite similar to what he had undergone and to which James had addressed his lines. As an old man Gerome came increasingly to feel ostracized from the world of fashionable art and high culture:

We are living in an age that is out of joint, in which we see the strangest things. Simplicity, naturalness, truth are no longer in fashion. We are living in a fictitious and ugly world, and I am glad that I am at the end of my career, as I would never enter those ways of which I disapprove.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ McCaughey, "Thomas Eakins and the Power of Seeing."

²¹⁶ Henry James, The Madonna of the Future, 1879, p. 269.

²¹⁷ Letter, Gerome to Eakins, 1897, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

The old academician's creed seemed to mirror Eakins':

Things are seen that make reason and art shudder. . . . It might be thought that we are in an insane asylum, for it is evident to me that a breeze of insanity is blowing upon us. And works that cannot be named seem to find admirers. The more stupid a thing is, the more welcome it appears. But there is no cause to be uneasy about such productions, as they will soon pass away, for only works founded on reason are lasting.²¹⁸

Although Gerome had represented the Salon world with his coy nudes and elaborately painted dramas, Eakins had been partly influenced by his emphasis on the transcendence of eclectic concepts of beauty. One writer has insisted that Eakins used the eye of a disciplined scientist rather than that of a "mere observer," conceding that he was to painting what Whitman was to literature.²¹⁹ More severe critics view the man as a coldly objective analyst.

He studied and painted many branches of sports, but enjoyed none; attended concerts to watch the performers, visited clinics and dissected corpses--and the sight of flowing blood left him unperturbed.²²⁰ In brief, he viewed the world as an educated observer looking for material data. Painstakingly he acquired a technique commensurate with his habits of severe calculation, and succeeded in painting, if not with passion and energy, then with extraordinary solidity and objective truth.²²¹

²¹⁸Letter written by Eakins, 1898, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

²¹⁹Kouwenhoven, Adventures of America, p. 178.

²²⁰Another writer observes that Eakins was "an athlete of unusual prowess. . . ." See Charles Cunningham, "Boston Buys Works by Two Famous Masters," The Art Digest, X (Feb. 1, 1936), 11.

²²¹Thomas Craven, A Treasury of Art Masterpieces (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), p. 95.

A good example of Eakins' exhausting and original research methods can be seen in his scrutiny of a horse's leg muscles while the animal was pulling a horsecar. He noticed that the muscles did not perform according to a description in some then-current works on muscular action. Therefore he constructed "a model of the entire limb with flat pieces of half-inch pine board, catgut for tendons and ligaments, and rubber bands for muscles, all attached to their places and properly restrained."²²²

With this mechanism in hand and having dissected the leg of a dead horse, he demonstrated the correct muscular action and showed how they are constructed, "but with relation to the whole movement of the animal."²²³

In a lecture delivered by Eakins to the Academy of Natural Sciences he summed up his credo of painting and teaching:

One is never sure he understands the least movement of an animal, unless he can connect it with the whole muscular system, making, in fact, a complete circuit of all the strains. The differential muscles once understood, it is less difficult to connect nearly all the other great muscles with the principal movement of the animal, that of progression in the horse, and to understand, roughly, the combinations necessary for other movements.

On the lines of the mighty and simple strains dominating the movement, and felt intuitively and studied out by him, the master artist groups with full intention, his muscular forms. No detail contradicts. His men and animals live. Such is the work of

²²²Kouwenhoven, Adventures of America, p. 179.

²²³Ibid.

three or four modern artists. Such was the work of many an old Greek sculptor.²²⁴

Eakins' last years were filled with nominal recognition and decelerated activity. He lost much of the bitterness he had come to associate with the Academy; and the institution in turn accorded him a certain degree of honor. More than once he was invited to Academy functions.

Dear Sir,
I have most carefully considered your invitation to act on the jury this year, but feel that I must respectfully decline.²²⁵

Today Eakins is generally regarded as having been a courageous spokesman for the life around him. A retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970 hinged on Eakins as an uncompromising realist. It revealed his eagerness to use any means that would aid him in arriving at a profound knowledge of the human form. It chose to ignore Eakins' craftsmanship in favor of a portrait of controversial realism at the height of its powers. An admiring pupil stated that "if truth is the basis of the artist's creed, then Eakins rates with the greatest painters of the past."²²⁶

Eakins' brand of reality was a unique vision. He possibly understood America's "growing pains" in the quarter

²²⁴Lecture delivered by Eakins to the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, 1894, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

²²⁵Letter, Eakins to Harrison Morris, July 29, 1900, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

²²⁶Charles Bregler, "A Tribute."

century between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War better than any other artist-teacher. His realism was not the realism of the French school; rather, it has been referred to as a "realism of conviction."²²⁷ Probably the best-educated artist that America produced in the nineteenth century, Eakins saw the world through the eyes of a renaissance man. He avoided the philosophical or the theoretical, and like Comte he was attracted only to facts, knowable things, natural phenomena. Eakins' positivism, like Comte's, was a reconditioning of eighteenth-century doctrine in order to fill the needs of nineteenth-century science. It was partly a reaction to romantic sentimentalism and the lauding of empiricism. For Eakins positivism was a system of operation; it necessarily became involved with sociology as well as science. Eakins' art may have begun with a strict recording of the thing seen but it climaxed with corrections based on logic and knowledge. Such a painter considered tangible properties like weight and dimension, light that could be measured, time capable of being verified.

The art critic Frank Mather believed that Eakins' own time was responsible for both his positivism and the grain of doubt that Mather saw in the artist's work.²²⁸ Lewis Mumford called Eakins "the mirror of his period."²²⁹

²²⁷Taylor, "Thomas Eakins--Positivist," p. 21.

²²⁸Sam Hunter, Modern American Painting and Sculpture, p. 19.

²²⁹Mumford, Brown Decades, p. 212.

In the same year that Eakins was born Ralph Waldo Emerson published his Essays Second Series. In one of these essays, "The Poet," Emerson sought to establish the ethical and intellectual foundation for an entire generation of American artists and literati. Such an artist, Emerson conceived, would be capable of a whole new imagery--one reflecting the universal human condition. He could introduce a more vibrant realism, one penetrating the surface of things. In harking back to the past for precedents, Emerson came up with Raphael, Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. But in looking at his own epoch he found no counterparts:

I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not with sufficient plainness or sufficient profoundness address ourselves to life, nor dare we chaunt our own times and social circumstances. . . . We have as yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw in the barbarism and materialism of our times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer: then in the Middle Age: then in Calvinism.²³⁰

For Emerson the supreme mission of the artist was "to create an ideal world better than the world of experience." Such a higher truth excludes "example and experience." His philosophy was rooted in the genteel tradition--an outlook that is quick to recognize the value of experience when it comes to practical matters. The role of the artist, however, is something else again. Emerson was all for honesty in the

²³⁰Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in The Literature of the United States, ed. by Stewart, Hornberger and Blair, p. 454.

arts. But he insisted that Art was unmerciful, calling for sacrifices yet assuring no material rewards.

There is a degree of parallel in Eakins' faith and the intellectualism of Emerson. As a youth the painter had been idealistic, certain that his ideas would be welcomed and rewarded. But he chose to ignore authoritarianism and defy arbitrary decorum. If he became a somewhat bitter iconoclast it was chiefly because he insisted on remaining loyal to his own personal and professional convictions. His friend Walt Whitman recognized this trait as a powerful "force,"²³¹ and Henri Dorra has chosen to identify Eakins as "that most American of painters. . . ." ²³²

Henry James' greatest admiration was directed at any artist who could immediately perceive and then create a dramatic mood in his work. The writer's summation of painterly quality was based on a thorough understanding of the chosen subject, an identification with all underlying realities, and a keen proficiency with materials, that is, technical mastery. All of these elements had been present in Thomas Eakins' art and teaching.

One explanation of Eakins' individualized style of painting and instruction is that he had considerable time in which to work it out.

²³¹Prown, American Painting, p. 96.

²³²Dorra, American Muse, pp. 14-15.

Not being much courted by officialdom he had the leisure in which to develop his Americanism. . . . He wished to show what people were like in Philadelphia, not how they painted pictures in France.²³³

Eakins' consistency provided a key to his lifestyle as well as to his professional point of view. He had strong recommendations for his students:

If America is to produce great painters and if young art students wish to assume a place in the history of the art of their country, their first desire should be to remain in America, to peer deeper into the heart of American life.²³⁴

Late in 1917, a year after Eakins' death, the Pennsylvania Academy hosted an exhibition of his work. In 1930 the Museum of Modern Art included Eakins in a memorial exhibition honoring the three men who had exerted the greatest influence on American painting. The other two were Winslow Homer and Albert P. Ryder.

The most recent criticism concerning the impact made by Eakins is practically unanimous: ". . . the greatest artist of the nineteenth century in America."²³⁵ And when is a prophet ever appreciated before his death?

One wonders if the present mood of America with its large enthusiasms for synthetic emotions and merchandized pieties glorifying distractions and avoiding issues may be any more auspicious for Eakins than his own time. He may be still too thoroughgoing, too radical, too genuine. The nation that produced him may one day catch up with him.²³⁶

²³³McBride, "Critics Again Evaluate the Art of Eakins."

²³⁴Larkin, Art and Life in America, p. 279.

²³⁵Letter, Helen Henderson to "Mr. Lewis."

²³⁶Leslie Katz, "Thomas Eakins Now," Arts, September, 1956, p. 36.



Thomas Eakins in his Middle Years

A decade before his death Eakins had responded to an inquiry concerning the wisest course of action for someone interested in studying art:

Dear Sir,

I am sorely puzzled to answer your letter. If you care to study in Philadelphia, you could enter the life classes of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and I could give you advice as to your work and studies, or you might go to Paris and enter some life classes there. Nearly all the schools are bad here and abroad.

The life of an artist is precarious. I have known very great artists to live their whole lives in poverty and distress because the people had not the taste and good sense to buy their works. Again I have seen the fashionable folk give commissions of thousands to men whose work is worthless.

When a student in your evident state of mind went to Papa Corot for advice, the old man always asked how much money he had. When the boy offered to show his sketches and studies the old man gently pushed them aside as being of no consequence.

Yours truly
Thomas Eakins

P. S. I am not connected with the Pennsylvania Academy and my advice would be contrary to nearly all the teaching there.²³⁷

Eakins had encouraged his students to strive for honesty in their work. Convinced that the artistic and philosophic values of his generation were impotent, he denied his contemporaries' eclecticism and affirmed instead his own empirical position.

His serious professionalism had contrasted sharply with the shallow drawing-room ethic of a Victorian elite. Denying ephemeral modality, Eakins succeeded in establishing

²³⁷Letter, Eakins to George Barker, February 24, 1906, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives, Eakins Letter File.

an educational foundation for America's artists equal to the best that Europe had to offer. His ambitious reorganization of an established institution assured him an important niche in the history of art education. And his challenge to a generation of closed minds was almost repeated two-thirds of a century later, when the novelist Henry Miller penned his critique of American society:

Nothing comes to function here in America except utilitarian projects. You can ride for thousands of miles and be utterly unaware of the existence of the world of art. . . . Most of the young men of talent whom I have met in this country give one the impression of being somewhat demented. Why shouldn't they? They are living amidst spiritual gorillas. . . food and drink maniacs, success mongers, gadget innovators, publicity hounds. . . . Who beside a handful of desperate souls can recognize a work of art? What can you do with yourself if your life is dedicated to beauty? Do you want to face the prospect of spending the most of your life in a strait jacket?²³⁸

The art faculties of today's institutions enjoy a freedom of which Eakins could only dream. While his philosophy of art is now considered conservative by many standards, his desire to expand students' consciousness remains his most significant contribution. Modern, professional schools of art appreciate the importance of students working from primary experiences. Today's demands on the art school require a thorough capability in anatomical construction. While no institution requires its art students to learn dissection, many medical-related vocations make requisite a

²³⁸Henry Miller, The Air Conditioned Nightmare (New York: New Directions, 1945), pp. 174-175.

sophisticated understanding of the human body so that illustrators may accurately perform their tasks.

The effects of Eakins' contributions are presently realized in the philosophy of university art departments and professional schools of design: work from nature; learn to rely on the visual phenomena of one's own environment as a starting point for art; concentrate on understanding the subject in depth. Eakins' respect for a thorough base of knowledge and his own versatility are echoed in the popularity and universal support of liberal arts programs for artists in colleges and universities.

The greatest legacy bestowed by Thomas Eakins on subsequent generations of American artists can be summarized in this duality of breadth and depth. His entire philosophy as an artist and as a man might be this: Only by depending on one's own developed resources can happiness and fulfillment be realized; individuality and truthfulness are tantamount to success.

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