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OUR WEIRD UNCLE EAKINS

WHAT MUST THE GREATEST NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN PAINTER HAVE FELT—SITTING ALONE IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE, DRINKING MILK—WHEN THE MODERNIST REVOLUTION ARRIVED?

DISCUSSED: *The "Loincloth Incident," Rowing, Shooting, The 1876 Centennial, The Gross Clinic, Optimistic Boosterism, Linear Perspective, Eadweard Muybridge, Motion Studies, Naked Sailing, Marcel Duchamp, The Zoetrope, Chuck Close*

1.

Did the painter Thomas Eakins—regarded by many as the greatest American artist of the nineteenth century—drink too much milk? The inquiring mind of art historian Henry Adams, author of the controversial biography *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist*, wants to know. And that is the least of his inquiries. As one concerned reviewer put it: “Adams accuses Eakins of, to list some charges alphabetically, anti-Semitism, bestiality, exhibitionism, incest, lying, poor writing skills, sadism, sexism, sodomy, peeping-



Tomism and unattractiveness. Oh yes, and he was shift-eyed, became overweight in old age and didn't speak French as well as he let on.”¹

It's not too surprising that, in the midst of the debate surrounding this biography last spring, hardly anybody paid attention when a drawing manual by Eakins himself was published, for the first time, 120 years after he wrote it. A book about how to take pains drawing is going to lose out every time, press coverage-wise and otherwise, to a book about a man who took down his pants. Eakins worked on the manual while teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia,

¹ George Fetherling, writing in the *Vancouver Sun*, June 4, 2005.

but after he was famously forced to resign in 1886—for removing the loincloth of a nude male model in a class that included female students, apparently to show the origin of a muscle—he abandoned plans to publish it. (The text and illustrations got separated after his death and were later given to two different institutions, the Pennsylvania Academy and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which have now brought them back together.)

At first glance, *A Drawing Manual* might appear merely to underscore the ideas we already have about Eakins: that he was an uncompromising realist, an artist who believed utterly in the accurate portrayal of the world around him, an engineer of sorts who didn't give a jot about, or rather abhorred, what he called "picture making" of the pretty, romantic, idealized sort. People love Eakins's light-filled paintings of rowers on the Schuylkill river, his sailing and shooting pictures, his penetrating humanist portraits, his baseball players and his worthy citizens.² And if they do not love *The Gross Clinic*, Eakins's explicit portrayal of the progress and reality of science, they generally respect and admire it.

But some of these Eakins appreciators (and yes, I include myself) have perhaps also secretly wished he *wasn't* America's greatest nineteenth-century painter. Look at what all those Europeans were

² One nice place to see these paintings is the Metropolitan Museum of Art website: metmuseum.org. Go to "September 2002" in "past exhibitions" within "special exhibitions."

doing at the same time! Breaking with tradition. Breaking down the elements of the representational image. Paying attention to and even pointing out the two-dimensional plane of the canvas rather than creating false, frozen illusions of three-dimensional space. After all, Eakins, who died in 1916, lived and painted from the time of Manet right through to the time of Duchamp. While these artists were challenging notions of how to portray reality in art and even what *counted* as art, Eakins, we assumed, ignored these questions, churning out, with slow scientific exactness, his rowers and his doctors and his concert singers.

Or did he? Instead of dismissing Eakins's drawing manual on the one hand because we assume it doesn't tell us anything new, and dismissing Adams's biography on the other because it appears to tell us too much, maybe it's worth taking a closer look at both.

2.

The classic take on Eakins goes something like this: The son of a respected writing master in Philadelphia, he was trained in mechanical drawing, perspective, and anatomy as a young man before his father sent him to Paris in 1866 at age twenty-two.³ He studied the human form with the classical master Jean-Léon Gérôme at the Écoles des Beaux

³ He was seventeen when he graduated from Central High School in 1861, at the start of the Civil War, but his father paid a fee to avoid his conscription. I wonder if the experience of the

Arts, though he was a bit more attracted to the style and technique of more naturalistic painters. Famously, his letter home about the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867 doesn't say whether he visited the private pavilion in which Manet had been forced to show his rejected work, but waxes on about the American appliances and agricultural machinery on exhibit. After several months in Spain, looking at Velázquez and others, he returned home to Philadelphia in 1870 and started painting.

Eakins was supported by his father, and he lived in his father's house virtually all his life. Early on, he made portraits of family members and the sporting life scenes—including great rowing paintings like *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*. Then, in anticipation of the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, he began to paint what he believed was his masterpiece, *The Gross Clinic*.⁴ A graphic eight-by-six-foot depiction of the eminent surgeon Dr. Samuel D. Gross performing an operation before a gallery of students, the work was rejected for exhibition in the art pavilion and then hastily hung among the medical exhibits, where it repulsed and shocked viewers. Following this disappoint-

Civil War alone—the more than 600,000 killed in his own country, Matthew Brady's photographs of bloated bodies—and the experience of not serving in it, might have had some impact on Eakins's realism, making him feel that he should try not to avert his eyes from life.

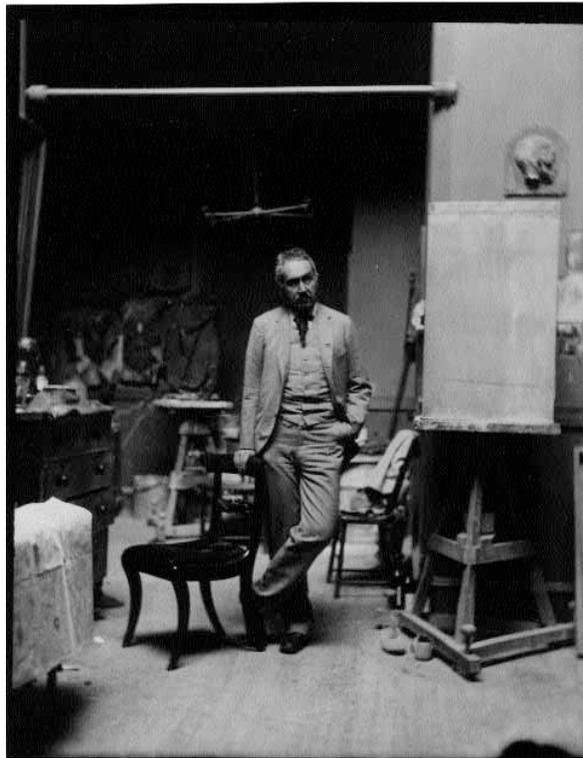
⁴ Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic of the *New York Times*, says *The Gross Clinic* is the finest American painting of the nineteenth century, "hands down."

ment, Eakins started teaching at the Philadelphia Academy, became its director and revamped the curriculum to focus on the human form through the use of live models, dissection, and photography. After the loincloth scandal and the loss of his position, he continued to paint landscapes and some sporting scenes (wrestling and boxing, for the most part), but later in life increasingly turned to portraits: of his wife, of himself, of friends, of scientists, scholars, artists, and physicians. These late portraits are commonly seen as laden with human emotion.

It's often said that Eakins received very little acclaim in his lifetime, when actually he received *some*. As most twentieth-century art histories have had it, Eakins was an unsung hero pursuing truth in the face of rejection and against the repression of Victorian society. "His portrait of America does not flatter," the painter and critic Fairfield Porter wrote in *Thomas Eakins*, a hagiography published in 1959. "But did Eakins find it flattering, or did he find it beautiful because it was in accordance with nature?"

Henry Adams⁵ admits that he

⁵ Before we go too far: Yes, Henry Adams is the namesake and the direct descendant of the nineteenth-century historian and Eakins contemporary Henry Adams, who was grandson of John Quincy Adams and great grandson of John, and whose important work, *The Education of Henry Adams*, which is in part about the transition to the modern age, is one I confess I've tried and failed to finish twice.



Susan Macdowell Eakins, *Eakins in the Chestnut Street studio*. Dry-plate negative. 1891-2. Courtesy the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Museum.

started writing *Eakins Revealed* in reaction to this kind of "optimistic boosterism"—which comes in part, he believes, as an apology for Eakins's refusal to go the modernist route. Actually, some sense of Eakins's darker side—the mean stubbornness of his devotion to realism, the torturous treatment of his portrait subjects as he tried to capture them, the homoerotic quality of paintings and photographs of nude men swimming, wrestling, and laying about—has been acknowledged for a while now. A hoard of documents and other material, including the bulk of his photographic work, was discovered in 1984 and, as a result, a different Eakins emerged

from the exhibition that traveled from Philadelphia to Paris and New York during 2001 and 2002.⁶

Nevertheless, Adams wants to go further, and he takes his cue from his personal response to the artwork. "Something about the way that he was portrayed as a heroic and moral figure," he writes, "did not quite jibe with the troubled mood that I sensed in his paintings." He explains his rather startling approach to biography this way: "A logical approach to understanding Eakins... is to gather facts about everything unusual in his behavior, and to see if they can be organized into a coherent pattern." Thus, you have the investigations into excessive milk drinking and his penchant for sitting on the floor and the rest of it. His

implementation of this approach leaves no peculiar stone unturned, no familiar take on Eakins unchallenged, and no Freudian analysis undone. So, for instance, in *The Gross Clinic*, Dr. Gross is "at once a reassuring father figure and an agent of castration," and the exposed buttocks of the patient seem to "suggest anal penetration."

Ultimately, Adams identifies two umbrella themes: The first is Eakins's "fixation on the nude" in

⁶ At least in the tagline of a PBS documentary produced in conjunction with the exhibition, there was a hint that this darker side had some marketability: "He was defiant. He was inflexible. He was self-righteous. He was undiplomatic and inconsiderate. He was never boring."

the classroom and in his photographic work—he didn't actually *paint* many nudes—and in his day-to-day life. And he shows that Eakins was in fact fairly obsessed with nakedness. Evidently, he even liked “naked sailing.” And therefore, “the loincloth incident, which has always stood at the center of the mythology that has developed around Eakins, in a very striking manner dramatizes the central features of Eakins’s psychological disorder.” Adams concludes with a complete conjecture: that Eakins was a clinically diagnosable exhibitionist—a condition that, he conjectures, stemmed from some conjectured sexual contact with his mentally ill mother as a young boy.

One way to respond to this is to concede some of it; not necessarily the conclusion but the evidence, the information (the dirty laundry?) gathered in what is undeniably an extensively researched work. Do the bizarre battles and the sometimes creepy strangeness between his relatives suggest a dysfunctional family? Yes. Do Eakins’s apparently frequent attempts to get female portrait subjects to disrobe, combined with his own penchant for taking his clothes off, suggest some sexual issues? Yes. Do the number and kind of nude photographs—including one in which Walt Whitman’s young companion Bill Duckett is shown on his stomach, examining a long, thin, tubular vase—suggest more and other kinds of sexual issues? Yes, they do.

Some of Adams’s accusations are

quite serious. He does indeed accuse Eakins of incest, or at least asks whether something went on between Eakins and his older teenage niece, and it’s disturbing. I don’t want to make light of everything. But there’s no evidence that Eakins took the events of his life lightly, either. And this is where Adams’s second theme comes in: depression. It turns out, for instance, that after his dismissal from the Academy, which involved a fierce public battle fought over many months, Eakins suffered a nervous breakdown and was sent on a “camp cure” to Dakota Territory. Even as a young man, Eakins was intense. Fairfield Porter quotes a letter he wrote home from Paris: “What I arrive at I have gained with hard plodding work. My studies and worries have made me thin. For a long time I did not hardly sleep nights.”

The main picture we get is one of struggle—in his personal life, sure, but in his life as an artist as well. And in the period leading up to his dismissal, when Eakins was preparing his drawing manual, more was happening in his artistic life than during any other.

3.

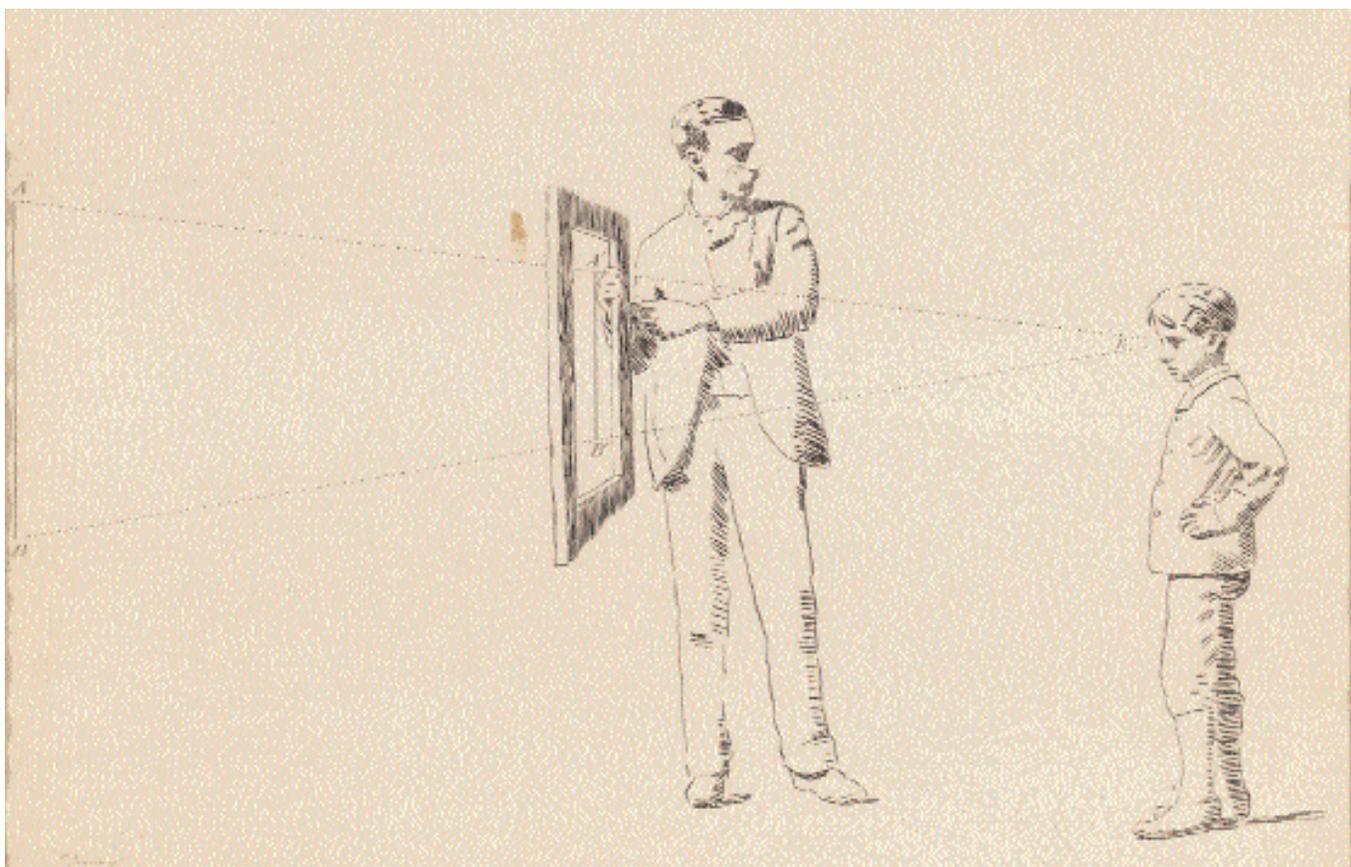
When I first got my hands on Eakins’s handsomely published manual,⁷ I admit I was a little disappointed. As someone who used to draw and paint a bit, I imagined myself following ol’ Tom along as

he led me through plain-talk exercises that would not only help me draw, but help me see the world around me. I cockily thought I might come across some tidbits about drawing I already knew: the human form is eight heads high, for instance. But it turns out that this manual by an artist who was so focused on study of the human form doesn’t include chapters on how to draw the human form. In her introductory essay, Kathleen Foster, the volume’s editor and an Eakins scholar at the Philadelphia Museum, suggests Eakins’s view: while some things could be learned through a book, the human form took a lifetime of direct study. The manual was meant as supplement to that study.

The manual focuses on linear perspective, mechanical drawing, and isometric drawing, and also includes chapters on “Reflections in Water” and “Sculptured Relief.” As an appendix, Foster provides another one of Eakins’s writings from the period: “Notes on the Construction of a Camera.”

I started randomly scanning the “Reflections on Water” chapter. “There is so much beauty in reflections,” he writes, “that it is generally well worth while to try to get them right.” But turning the pages, I began to feel a paralyzing chill start at the back of my neck, one I’m not sure I’ve felt since Father Galvin’s high-school math class: There were all sorts of geometric diagrams on the page, and all sorts of *letters*, the *different* kind of letters:

⁷ Published by Yale University Press.



Thomas Eakins, *The Law of Perspective*. Pen and ink over graphite on cream wove paper. Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection. Purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust and the John S. Phillips Fund.

Divide this sine of the angle of incidence into 4 equal parts and take 3 of these 4 parts & lay them on AB from O towards A for a measure of the sine of refraction, and drop from the end of the third division a vertical, parallel with the normal Y intersecting the circle at R . RF is then three fourths of ED , or the sine of the angle of refraction is $3/4$ ths of the sine of the angle of incidence, and OR is the refraction in water of the incident ray SO .

Uh-oh. The whole book is full of this stuff. Of course, to some ex-

tent, Eakins's hard-line approach fell in with the larger tradition of academic art schooling; this was a reminder of the kind of thing serious students of art actually had to deal with in the old days—and that some young students were backing away from. (Here's a new take on Impressionism: it was easier.) The mathematic rigor here also helps debunk the idea that representational work was less cerebral than its more experimental counterpart. But mainly it showed just what a freak Eakins was for exactitude.

When I backed up and started from the beginning, I had almost

abandoned hope that this manual was going to reveal anything else. But then right at the top of Chapter 1 on "Linear Perspective," Eakins asks students to do something simple but remarkable. First, imagine someone in front of a window, tracing what he sees on it. "He could if he looked out of one eye only and kept his head still, trace upon a window glass a correct perspective drawing of the opposite houses or other objects outside." But then, "if he moved his head ever so little, his tracing would no longer fit the real things." Move it up and the tracing would go down

too low. Down, too high. And so on. If the objects themselves could move, similar changes would occur. And then if the *glass* could be taken in the hands and moved around, tilting it at various angles, new views and new distortions to the drawing would take place.

Eakins uses the exercise to establish a basic rule of proportion—that if an object is twice as far from the eye as the picture plane, then it should be half as big in the picture itself. (He “dogmatically assert[s] the law in this case is sufficient to cover the whole science of perspective.”) But the window-glass exercise, the very first thing Eakins says about art in his manual, showed that he and artists working like him weren’t complete dunces when it came to the very ideas that spurred the Modernists to abandon three-point perspective: the primacy of the two-dimensional plane, the falsity of a fixed-time and -space illusion, and whatnot. They were looking at two sides of the same coin. If you followed Eakins’s suggested movements with respect to the drawing on the glass—changing your position or moving the glass or the objects around—but you stopped each time to trace a new line or two, in the end you’d have something like... a cubist drawing. And the reception it might get from Eakins is: “Big whoop. That’s a mess.” The other thing is that when he talks about moving the glass around, it sure *sounds* as if he’s talking about the glass or lens of a camera.

4.

In fact, while Eakins was working on the drawing manual, and while he was championing the study of the human form at the Pennsylvania Academy, he was also, in part, turning away from these things. “His passion for camera studies in the early 1880s,” writes Foster, “had inspired his use of a new method based on composite photographs, which had largely superseded drawings in his preparatory work.”

During this time Eakins was an extremely prolific photographer. He based several paintings on photographs or photographic information, sometimes using a grid system to transfer image elements from photos onto the canvas.⁸ He brought photography into the classroom as an aid to anatomy study. Often in sequences showing the body in rotating positions, he photographed nudes. He photographed his students nude, his students photographed him nude. And then they went outside and photographed each other nude. But he also photographed a wide range of other subjects—por-

traits, landscapes, horses, trees, dogs, and cats. Many of these photographs are extremely fine.

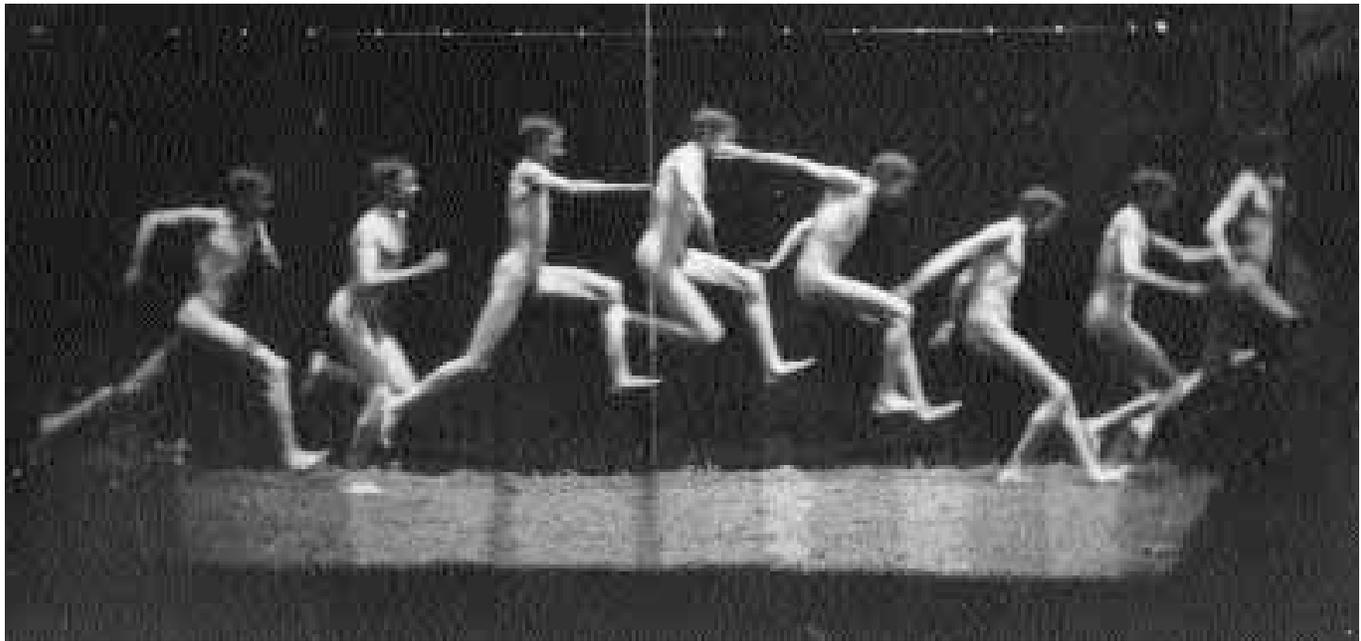
Why did it start? Photographic printing processes had been around for decades, and Philadelphia was a leading city in the field (a home to photographic societies and publications), so he would have been familiar with the technology. One reason, perhaps, is that with the commercial introduction of dry plate negatives in 1879, photography got a lot easier. But even earlier, in 1878, Eakins was struck by the published results of Eadweard Muybridge’s experiments in California—in which he used multiple cameras along a track to settle a now famous question for Leland Stanford:⁹ if at some point during a horse’s gallop, all four of its hooves are off the ground. (They are.) Eakins began a correspondence with Muybridge, making certain suggestions and requests for improving the work.¹⁰ And when Muybridge began to photograph humans in motion in 1879, “he was perhaps prompted by Eakins,” writes Rebecca Solnit, in her excellent book, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*.¹¹

⁸ Twentieth-century imaging technology has shown this is the case. But for years after Eakins’s death, his wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins, a painter and photographer in her own right, downplayed the role of photography in her husband’s work, apparently fearful it would tarnish his reputation. Eakins used the same system to transfer his drawings to canvas as well. And Chuck Close uses a similar technique today. Painters have always used available means to convert the three-dimensional world into two dimensions. See Eric Fischl’s essay on page twenty-one for more about the longtime controversy surrounding the practice of painting from a photograph rather than from life.

⁹ Gold Rush millionaire, railroad baron, former Governor of California, and the founder of Stanford University.

¹⁰ He also started working on a painting of four carriage horses based on the motion photos, which caused him trouble, and which epitomized the issues of perception these stop-motion images created: the horses’ legs were portrayed clearly, as in the photos, but his clear rendering of the spokes of the carriage wheels made them look stationary; in the end, he blurred them.

¹¹ Muybridge started using himself as a nude model in his studies before Eakins did.



Thomas Eakins, *Motion Studies: Male nude, running jump to the right*, 1884. Dry-plate negative. Courtesy Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Eakins was at least partly responsible for bringing Muybridge to Philadelphia in 1884 for the continuation of his motion studies at the University of Pennsylvania. (Nearly 30,000 individual photographs taken there resulted in the 781 sequences published in *Animals in Motion* and *The Human Figure in Motion*.) Eakins joined Muybridge on the project in Philadelphia and they worked together for a while; then they diverged in approach. Muybridge continued using a bank of cameras that took individual images. Eakins made several significant enhancements to the “camera gun” developed by Étienne-Jules Marey, which captured multiple images on a wheel. (A French physiologist and inventor, Marey had also turned to photography after seeing Muybridge’s work. Among other things, Marey put people in

black suits with buttons at the joints and white stripes painted down the arms and legs, and photographed them against a black background. The resulting chronophotographs are among the first *graphical* representations of live motion produced. Marcel Duchamp used them as the basis for *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* in 1912.)

Eakins’s motion photographs of men and women walking, running, and jumping are more elegant than Muybridge’s. But Muybridge’s had the advantage of being animated more easily (he had been showing animations of the horse pictures to special audiences since 1879 with a device he developed, the zoopraxiscope). In 1885, Eakins himself used Muybridge’s horse sequences in a zoetrope¹² and presented the mov-

ing images in a lecture at the Academy. So in one sense, anyway, while Seurat was using little dots to render a Sunday afternoon in the park, and Cézanne was beginning to break up the curves of apples into little flat shapes, Eakins was participating in the development—and the presentation—of motion pictures. But as with his work on the drawing manual, Eakins’s work with motion photography was curtailed by the upheaval over the loincloth matter.

In an essay contribution to *Eakins and the Photograph*, art historian Mary Panzer writes that Eakins’s work with the medium highlights the “paradox of his career: that America’s exemplary modern artist

meant that moving images were not completely unfamiliar to people in the nineteenth century. An early version of the zoetrope was invented in 1834 in Belgium and was somewhat available in the U.S. in the 1860s.

¹² To be fair, various optical toys and devices

failed to produce modern art.” But maybe this paradox can only be seen—or might really only exist—in hindsight. A much more theory-minded historian, Jonathan Crary, says that while the “myth of modernist rupture depends fundamentally on the binary model of realism vs. experimentation,” the truth is that the break with the representational image was actually “inseparable from a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capabilities of the human subject.”

It takes a theoretician, who speaks as little as possible about “people” in the usual sense, to remind us that we’re talking about a person, an artist, dealing with “massive” change in his lifetime. (Here’s a bit of context on the “paradoxical” nature of industrial-age America of the late nineteenth century: Although the railroads, the telegraph, and general mechanization were transforming society, Henry Adams tells us that Eakins’s house was without plumbing for most of his life, and never had electricity.)

Was Eakins a premodern man who lived into the age of modern art? A modern man making premodern work? Perhaps he was a man trying to sort out the complexities of his life, his work, and the work and world around him.

5.

I went back several times to the drawing manual. In the third chapter, which has to do

with the theory of vanishing points, Eakins seems more entrenched than ever in old traditions. He explains how, on a canvas or paper, to “construct a view of the surface of the floor all covered with squares a foot each in size, checkerboard fashion.” It’s on this foreshortened floor space that “the construction of objects in the picture can take place.” He keeps using words like “erect” and “construct” and “build,” as though he is talking about *actual* if scaled-down space and *actual* if scaled-down objects. There’s no looking at a box or a table, and trying to see it as a set of two-dimensional shapes or lines. There’s no looking at all. There’s only measuring. And indeed he doesn’t tell us anywhere in his drawing manual how to *drau*, the way we use the word today. That part, the “picture making” part, was evidently obvious—child’s play—and required no rigor.

In contrast, needless to say, drawing and painting the way Eakins did it was incredibly difficult. And it’s likely that he—in his American way, with his Quaker background and given his rather obsessive nature—thought that with harder work came better results. Unfortunately this was not always the case, as Henry Adams seems happy to point out. Complex approaches can sometimes lead to trouble. Eakins worked on *The Gross Clinic* for a full year. And it’s a tour de force by an enormously skilled artist. But look on the left side at the patient’s cringing mother; as others have pointed out, she

doesn’t seem to be the right size given her distance away from us—an awkward mistake Eakins must have recognized and that must have caused him distress.

An hour or so with the manual suggests that this awkwardness might actually result from the complexity of Eakins’s method. Some of the rowing and hunting paintings seem utterly synthetic in a way that is unfortunately consistent with the fabrication process discussed above. Don’t get me wrong; *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* is perhaps my favorite American work of the nineteenth century,¹³ a beautifully existential painting. But his subsequent rowing paintings were not greater and greater successes; in the fourth and last of these, *Oarsman on the Schuylkill*, the rowers are almost bizarrely out of proportion with the river they’re rowing in. This kind of error must have killed him.

When Eakins pursued photography, he did it with the same kind of intensity he pursued the studies of perspective, anatomy, and the human form—with the ostensible purpose of making better paintings. We don’t know if Eakins felt his paintings were improved by the use of photography. We do know that with time, in his later years, he essentially gave up photography, and he made fewer and fewer paintings that involved the kinds of calculations his manual describes. Mainly, after this, Eakins went to the por-

¹³ Followed very closely by Rembrandt Peale’s *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*, which was painted in 1801 and therefore just squeaks into the competition.

trait. It's as if, as David Hockney would say, he went back to the hand, eye, and heart—back to the basic act of drawing and painting.¹⁴

According to one historian, despite Eakins's troubles, he had, by the mid-1890s, "come to be regarded as an elder statesman in the art world."¹⁵ That didn't stop many of the sitters for his late portraits from being disappointed by their likenesses. "The poignant thing is that pictures in Eakins's studio late in life showed that the studio space was actually smaller and smaller," Eakins's scholar Elizabeth Johns has said, "because stacked against the walls were the portraits of those he had painted of whom he had found worthy, but who found the portraits not worthy of being taken home."¹⁶

Many of these painted figures seem depressed or, in some cases, just weary—or laid bare. Many portraits carry an incredible sense of emotional intimacy. Some are unsurpassed. Some of them, including one of Walt Whitman looking like Father Christmas, are awful. There are experiments with different kinds of brushwork. And a couple of slightly simplified heads and faces, painted around 1908 and

1909, that look a *bit* like... Matisse or Picasso.

Remember the "excessive milk" question? Adams says that Eakins "drank a quart of milk with every meal, hardly a standard practice." Why? Evidently because it was a remedy for depression that had been prescribed back when he went to the Dakotas to cure his "nervous disease." What must have unhappy, aging Eakins felt—sitting in his father's house (no electricity, no plumbing), drinking his milk—when the real Modernist revolution arrived?

6.

In March 2003, I went to a symposium in New York: "Was Eadweard Muybridge the Father of Us All?" Muybridge has long been called the father of the motion picture by virtue of his motion studies and other technologies that contributed to the birth of cinema. But since cinema led to media, and we were all products of media culture, it seemed fair to increase the scope of his parentage. On the panel, Rebecca Solnit, Lawrence Weschler, Oliver Sacks, Chuck Close, and Simon Schama all discussed the question and, in different ways, conceded that yes, Muybridge was not merely the father of cinema, but our father, too.

In this context, I wonder if we couldn't think of Thomas Eakins as our uncle, our weird uncle—our very weird uncle, if it would please Henry Adams. The effect of Eakins's work with Muybridge and on

the Marey camera might be important, though it's hard to calculate. But at least in terms of the visual arts or arts practices or visual culture or whatever we're calling it now, Eakins's place is secure. No one new is going to take away his status as the greatest nineteenth-century American painter—and Winslow Homer doesn't have the gravitas. His photographs, unseen for decades, are nevertheless among the finest of his time. He may have "failed" to produce modern work, but it can hardly be said that he wasn't investigating, in his own way, some of the issues of "the image" for which Modernism is known. He didn't fail to experiment and, in the end, in the late portraits, the failure was made in favor of looking hard at the life, and into the eyes, of human beings.

There's no doubt Eakins's influence extended to twentieth-century American realists like Edward Hopper, Robert Henri, and Reginald Marsh. Hopper alone takes you straight to film noir and pulp fiction and Ed Ruscha's gas stations. Frankly, I'll never be able to look at the stagey space of Surrealist landscapes by Dalí and Tanguy again without thinking of *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*. And for that matter, the other way around. The same kind of thing goes for the nude photographs of Man Ray, who was born in Philadelphia in 1890 but probably never saw an Eakins photo. Nevertheless, he was there: milk-guzzling, sexually ambiguous, obsessed, depressed, premodern, modern, heroic, weird Uncle Eakins. ★

¹⁴ See the Dec/Jan 2004 issue of this publication.

¹⁵ Carol Troyen, in her essay "Eakins in the Twentieth Century" from the massive 2002 exhibition catalog, *Thomas Eakins*, edited by Darrel Sewell. By the way, after the loincloth crisis, Eakins did find other places to teach—but then was let go from the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia in 1895 for a similar incident.

¹⁶ Actually, this comes from the website for the PBS documentary that I made a bit of fun of in note 6. It has a lot of good stuff. See pbs.org/Eakins.