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Ordering the Artist's Body

Thomas Eakins's Acts of Self-Portrayal

Sarah Burns

Thomas Eakins's obsession with the body is well known and much studied. But what of the painter's obsession with his own body? On several occasions early and late in his career, he inserted himself into his paintings of modern life. In photography too he was ever-present, appearing in scores of images—candid or posed, clothed or naked. So antithetical are some that we might want to ask which one represents the “real” Thomas Eakins. Any search for the real Eakins is doomed to futility, however. There are as many Thomas Eakinses as there are biographers, interpreters, and critics of his life and art. I offer here an examination of the artist's acts of self-portrayal that is intended to amplify the Eakins others have made. My account complements and sometimes contradicts theirs. Rather than emphasizing such issues as the artist's class status, professional identity, sexuality, or sociocultural milieu, which have been fruitfully investigated elsewhere, I explore Eakins's body as the site where we can catch glimpses of the anxieties that haunted him from an early age and that underlay the elaborate systems of control by which he sought to achieve in art the order that persistently eluded him in life.¹

Thomas Eakins was born in Philadelphia in 1844, the first child and only

surviving son of Benjamin and Caroline Eakins. Of his early years we know little. Only a few childhood photographs remain. One of these is a daguerreotype of six-year-old Thomas and his sister Frances (frontispiece). The gender coding here is conventional. Frances sits demurely, one hand gently tugging at the off-the-shoulder neckline of her full-skirted dress. Her hair is in ringlets and she wears a necklace. Thomas, his curls slicked back, stands tall in baggy trousers and tight roundabout jacket. His collar, a narrow frill of lace, adds a soft touch (not unusual at that time) to the otherwise almost military severity of his outfit. Yet the outsize bow and arrow he clutches so proudly hint of the high value the adult Eakins would place on being unquestionably and aggressively male. The photograph dates to about 1850, the year baby brother Benjamin came into the world—only to leave it four months later. We might wonder if this death left any mark on Thomas, and—even more so—how it affected his mother, Caroline, whose mental health was later to come disastrously undone.

After graduating from Central High School in 1861, Eakins took classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and studied anatomy at Jefferson Medical College. In 1866 he embarked

Unknown photographer, *Thomas and Frances Eakins*, ca. 1851. Daguerreotype, 4 3/8 x 3 1/4 in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



1 Frederick Gutekunst, *Thomas Eakins at about Age Twenty-four*, ca. 1868. Gelatin silver print, 9 ¼ x 7 ⅝ in. Charles Bregler Archival Collection, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

for France, where he studied for several years under the academic painter Jean-Léon Gérôme. As a young man in Paris, Eakins cultivated a boyishly Bohemian persona. His Philadelphia acquaintance Earl Shinn, also studying art there, described an afternoon at the apartment of the Moore family, whose deaf-mute son, Harry, was Eakins's classmate at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. "They fool with him [Eakins] and treat him like a little child," reported Shinn, "thee- and thouing him in fun. He converses in Italian, French, and German with the manners of a boy. Restricts his conversation pretty much to stories of the Schuylkill boating club. Is the son of the writing master, tall, athletic, black hair and splendid eyes. Look out, young widow [Harry Moore's

recently bereaved sister], treating the dangerous young Adonis like a boy." Shinn's account suggests that for all his linguistic sophistication, Eakins lacked polite conversational skills and at the age of twenty-two was immature, socially naïve, and in general rough around the edges.²

His sartorial manners were equally rough-hewn. Frances Eakins, who traveled to Europe with father Benjamin in 1868, wrote home that her brother was "the same old Tom . . . and just as careless looking. His best hat (I don't know what his common one can be) is a great big grey felt steeple, looks like an ashman's; his best coat is a brown sack, and his best pantaloons are light, with the biggest grease spot on them you ever saw." Despite that, he was still "the finest looking fellow" Frances had seen since leaving Philadelphia.³ In an 1868 photograph (fig. 1), the handsome young Tom, with his "splendid eyes," starched collar and neat bow tie, cuts quite a spiffy figure—at first glance. But on closer inspection, we discover that the third button of his vest is missing or undone, and the button at the bottom broken or thrust only halfway through the buttonhole. These signs are subtle but significant: Eakins appears almost defiantly indifferent to the details of his outfit. Clothes, in his book, clearly did not (and never could) make the man. But what did?

To probe this question, we need to consider the traumatic illness and demise of his mother, Caroline Cowperthwait Eakins (fig. 2), who died in 1872 of "exhaustion from mania." The bare bones of this story are known. About the time of Eakins's return home from Europe in 1870, Mrs. Eakins succumbed to a mental disease so severe that it compelled the care and unceasing vigilance of the entire family (Benjamin, Thomas, and daughters Frances, Margaret, and Caroline) for two long years, during which time whatever passed for normal life in the household became impossible. What it was like there we can guess from

one telling glimpse in a letter written by a family friend: “Since early autumn [Tom] has never spent an evening from home as it worried his Mother & since her return home [presumably from a mental hospital] they never leave her for a minute.”⁴

In nineteenth-century medical writing, “mania” presented a specific set of symptoms clearly distinguished from hysteria, melancholia, and other mental conditions. The hallmark of mania was intense and often violent excitement accompanied by delusions or even hallucinations. In extreme cases, as the alienist Edward Charles Spitzka wrote, “these patients rave, tearing and breaking everything within reach, besmear themselves with their excrement or even devour it, and shout at the top of their voices. They yell

. . . that they are being murdered, that they wish to get out . . . or threaten their attendants with the vilest and most cruel punishments.” So fierce were these paroxysms that—as in Mrs. Eakins’s case—they led almost inevitably to exhaustion and death. Other contemporary writings on mania show remarkable consistency with Spitzka’s. John Bassett Chapin, for example, noted that acutely manic patients tended to be garrulous, out of control, filthy, obscene, and delusional; they would swing from “immoderate laughing mingled with tears” to “exhilaration, anger, affection, lewdness, frenzy, and revenge.” If Caroline Eakins’s behavior in any way resembled such period clinical descriptions, then it is little wonder that the family could never leave her alone, even momentarily. She must have been a danger to herself, if not to others. Before her breakdown, Mrs. Eakins was a gentle and yielding character, “ruled” by her domineering son as well as her strong-willed husband. The transformation from mild-mannered wife to raving maniac must have been both painful and terrifying to those around her.⁵

The photograph titled *Acute Mania* (fig. 3) accompanied Chapin’s description quoted above. To twenty-first-century eyes the image is almost laughably without merit as a diagnostic tool. But it fully represents the physiognomy of mania as coded, and gendered, by nineteenth-century science, which relied on an elaborate taxonomy of facial cues to determine the nature of mental maladies. If we examine the face alone, we could interpret this woman’s expression as lively, engaged, and curious: she raises her eyebrows as if in response to some fascinating or surprising news. Her hair, however, tells a different story. Wildly tangled and out of control, it functions as an eloquent signifier of her abandoned reason, transforming an innocuous face into the mask of a dangerous madwoman. In equating madness with a combination of disorder and femininity, this photograph suggests

- 2 Edward R. Morgan, *Caroline Cowperthwait Eakins*, 1863–69. Albumen carte de visite, 3 7/8 x 2 1/4 in. Charles Bregler’s Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust



what might have been so disturbing to Caroline Eakins's son.

Her illness exhausted the entire family, and her death—however much a relief—undoubtedly left all of its members devastated. It must have shaken the stern self-restraint of Benjamin Eakins, though no records survive to tell us how he coped during that grim time. Nor do we know how in the long run Caroline's mania might have affected Eakins's three sisters, though subsequent events suggest that the family remained a chronically troubled one. A key question here is whether Caroline Eakins's madness and death took on acute and problematic meaning for Thomas in particular.

Eakins may have worried that he would fall victim to the same disease. As a young man, he was intensely moody, swinging so regularly between highs and lows that, as his father put it, he was "either in the garret or the cellar" and seldom, presumably, in between. Indeed, scholar Theodor Siegl suggests that Eakins must have been at times "quite deeply depressed." Given such predispositions, it is conceivable that he felt himself at risk, especially since nineteenth-century scientists generally endorsed theories of hereditary insanity. The eminent authority

Henry Maudsley, for example, stated that "alternating phases of mania and melancholy" lent a "Janus-faced character" to some forms of madness. In all such cases of "faulty mental fabric," he wrote, "we may feel pretty sure of a morbid heredity; they are so many notes of a mental degeneracy in the stock."⁶ Thomas Eakins certainly had reason to fear.

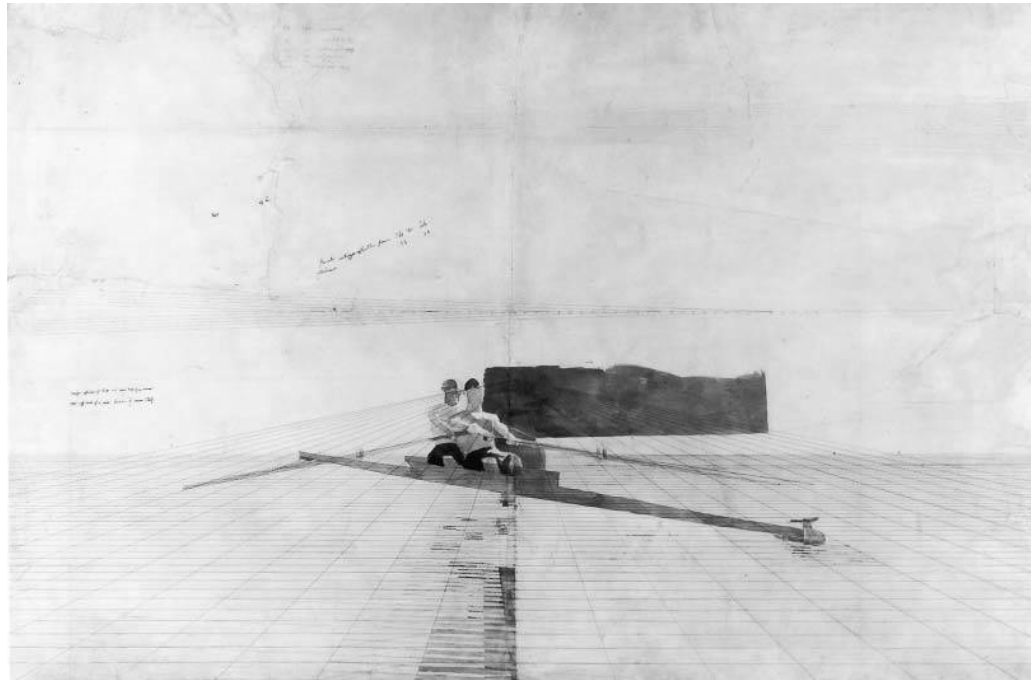
How then might he have attempted to fend off the threat? For Eakins, sanity lay in the rigorously methodical pursuit of knowledge. Eakins had developed this compulsion before his mother's descent into madness: his earliest drawings are impersonal renderings of mechanical objects. We can only wonder whether his mother had earlier debilitating manic episodes or as a younger woman suffered from the same mood swings that affected her son. Whatever the case, patterns in Eakins's own life clearly indicate that he associated femininity with weakness, and in this his mother surely played no small part. As symbol, then, Caroline's disintegration—her disordering—at some level acted to reinforce her son's obsessive reliance on order and his faith in unambiguously masculine mathematical and mechanical systems. The man was made, or unmade, by his success—or lack of it—in holding the feminine at arm's length or (as in Eakins's domination of his mother) subduing it to masculine will. That stance to some degree structured his marriage, in that Eakins was the dominant figure there as well, demanding the selfless devotion of his wife, Susan MacDowell, a fellow painter he wed in 1884.⁷ His unusually close lifelong relationship with his father further suggests Eakins's undying compulsion to ward off femininity and keep it symbolically at a distance.

Through the decades, Eakins sought security and stability in the hypermasculinity of rational, material science as the bedrock of his art. He was intensely interested in the construction of objects and loved fine tools; those early drawings,



3 *Acute Mania*. Halftone reproduction from John Bassett Chapin, *A Compendium of Insanity* (Philadelphia: WB Saunders, 1898), facing page 116

- 4 Thomas Eakins, Perspective drawing for *The Pair-Oared Shell*, 1872. Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper, 31 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund



indeed, would not be out of place as illustrations in a technical manual. He read mathematical textbooks and did logarithms and calculus, both for relaxation and to ward off what he called “silliness.” He worked mathematical problems “for fun” as well with professional mathematicians or physicists. He plotted pictorial space and rendered objects in perspective using mechanical drawing and complex mathematical formulas guaranteed to minimize any risk of error and leave nothing to chance. Eakins’s precisely calculated grids were like nets that could be deployed to snare the most fleeting phenomena. Even water, with its wavering reflections and scintillating dots of light, could thus be fixed, immobile, on a graph (fig. 4). He urged his students to study higher mathematics, because it was “so much like painting.” All sciences as well as mathematics, he told them, reduced the “complicated things . . . to simple things. So it is in painting. You reduce the whole thing to simple factors.”⁸

Eakins approached the human body in much the same fashion. Reportedly, he once claimed to care more about

the character of the muscles than the character of the person he portrayed. He mastered anatomy and dissected corpses as a mechanic might disassemble an engine, reducing the machinery of the body—joints, muscles, tendons, and sinews—to its basic components and comprehensible parts. He subjected his students to a rigorous curriculum of dissection and anatomical study, and during several years teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy he made some seventeen casts of dissected body parts as study aids. In the 1880s Eakins made significant technical improvements to the revolving-disk camera in order to freeze, study, and comprehend split-second images of the bodily machine in motion. Only the body’s mechanical parts concerned him: he paid no attention to the viscera, let alone the squishy, undifferentiated brain. The body’s structural systems were for Eakins the all-important medium of containment and control over its messier and infinitely more mysterious functions.⁹

But those structural systems must be at all times in peak running order: Eakins was obsessed with the perfect body. Any

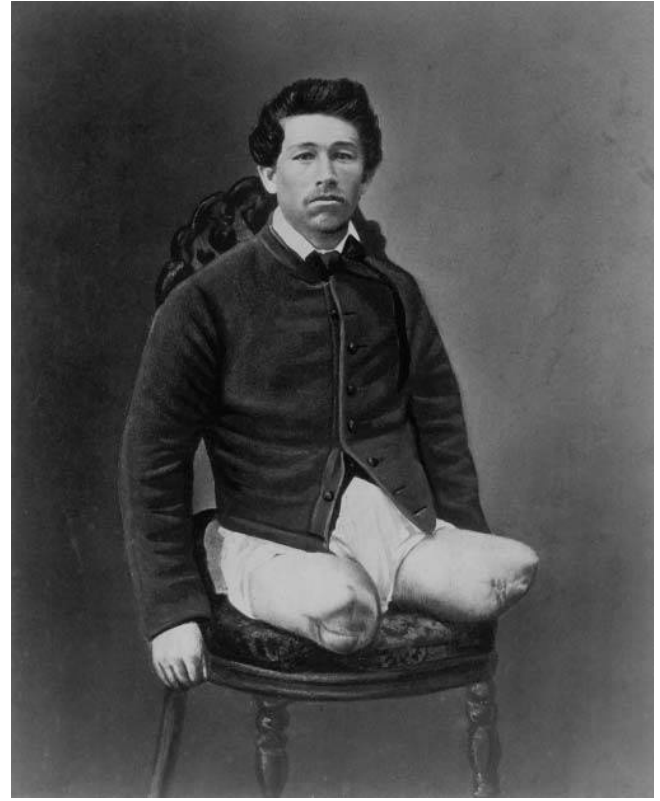
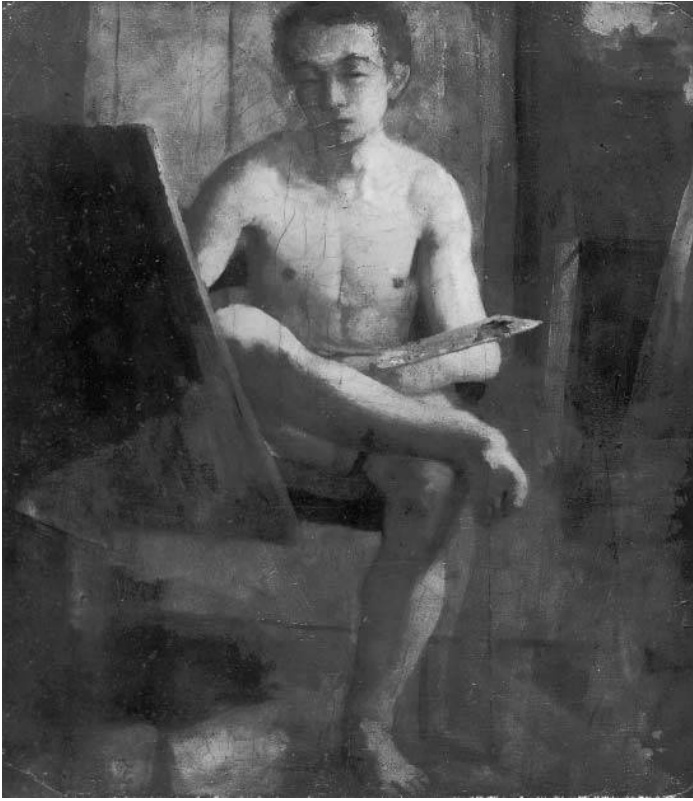
sort of bodily imperfection and disease aroused violent disgust and repulsion. Writing from Spain in 1869, Eakins fulminated against Peter Paul Rubens as the “nastiest and most vulgar painter who ever lived.” He found Rubens’s modeling “crooked and dropsical” (that is, edemic), his men twisted to pieces, his figures boneless. Rubens’s paintings reminded the indignant Philadelphian of chamber pots, fit only for the bonfire. In the Swiss Alps, the inbred mountaineers with their bulging goiters repelled him, too: “If I was a military conqueror,” he wrote, “I would burn every hovel and spare nobody, for fear they would contaminate the rest of the world.” Bodily perfection remained the supreme standard of judgment later on. At the Pennsylvania Academy, he objected to the recruitment of models from “low houses of prostitution,” because such sources yielded “models coarse, flabby ill formed and unfit in every way.” Eakins’s student Adam Emory Albright (father of Ivan) believed that the artist’s “admiration for fine physical specimens to some degree decided his friendships, for I never knew him to take a liking to any but tall, well-built people. The fat ones and the small ones like myself had to be content with academic recognition.”¹⁰ Many of his paintings, accordingly, celebrated the beautiful, fit bodies of athletes—rowers, swimmers, wrestlers, and boxers.

The Civil War likely played a critically important role in shaping Eakins’s obsession with the perfect, and perfectly intact, body. Although Eakins himself avoided the draft, the city of Philadelphia, with some 26,000 hospital beds, served as one of the chief trauma centers of the North during and after the four-year conflict. Many of the doctors Eakins knew and revered worked in the local hospitals as army surgeons under the grimmest conditions, patching wounds, extracting bullets, and performing radical amputations. Samuel Gross, for example, was for several months in charge of the surgical

ward at George Street Hospital, sawing off legs and resecting shoulder joints.¹¹

Given his medical interests and acquaintances and living in a wartime hospital city, Eakins could hardly have remained ignorant of the suffering and mutilation around him. Did the horrible disfigurement inflicted on legions of young men horrify Eakins? He left no record of his feelings. But that may help to explain the artist’s lifelong need to exhibit his own bodily integrity, his own wholeness. A portrait of Eakins nude (fig. 5), painted in about 1865 by fellow student Charles Fussell, suggests an early and timely genesis for that compulsion if we compare it with a contemporary medical photograph of a double amputee (fig. 6). Eakins and Private Columbus G. Rush are about the same age. Both seated, they are otherwise a study in macabre contrast: the veteran, decently uniformed on top but exposing those naked, dreadful stumps below; Eakins, fully undressed, exposing his unmarked and unimpaired anatomy, crossing one leg over the other as Rush (like so many mutilated veterans) would never again be able to do.

Unfitness—both physical and mental—was for Eakins the cause of perennial unease; weakness in any form was anathema. Yet however much he sought control and masculine mastery, Eakins was not always or entirely master of himself, exhibiting in his behavior a pattern of striking inconsistencies. His anxiety about what he clearly perceived as the taint of femininity—that is, anything that struck him as weak, delicate, or pretty—was nearly phobic. He professed contempt for “hen-pick” men and “weak sickly color,” and heaped withering scorn on the feminine taste for light fiction and the tame copying of “nice little plaster busty wustys.” (The latter was a reference to the artist Emily Sartain, with whom Eakins had a brief romance that ended when she refused to let him dominate her.) He likened poetic effusion to a bad case of intestinal worms—it had to be



- 5 Charles Fussell, *A Young Art Student (Portrait of Thomas Eakins)*, ca. 1865. Oil on paper on canvas, 15 x 13 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Seymour Adelman
- 6 Unknown photographer, *Private Columbus G. Rush, Amputation of Both Thighs for Gunshot Injury*, 1866. Albumen print, 7 x 5 in. National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington, D.C.

flushed out with a good dose of vermifuge. He lost interest in painting a fanciful scene from Longfellow's poem *Hiawatha*, telling Earl Shinn that he guessed his hair had been getting too long, because on having it cropped he could not be induced to finish the picture. Socially maladroit, he exhibited flagrant disregard for the polite discipline of everyday decorum and was often reported to be taciturn, truculent, or intrusive. He sometimes poked female sitters in the chest to "feel for bones" or, according to one source, asked them if they needed to "pea." As antidote, perhaps, to everything excessively romantic and feminine, François Rabelais—the earthy, bawdy, and scatological sixteenth-century writer—was Eakins's favorite author. Even more tellingly, the painter carried a revolver, less for self-defense perhaps than to brandish as an extravagant sign of aggressive manliness.¹²

Often, nonetheless, Eakins succumbed to the very "feminine" traits that so

repelled him in others. Music so deeply moved him that "he would sit in a corner and sob like a child," no matter who might be looking. He was sentimental about animals although he had no compunctions about dissecting them. When his dog, Harry, accidentally killed Bobby, a pet rabbit, Eakins, in a rage, "ran out with tears streaming and gave Harry a whipping." He was contradictory in every way. As biographer William Innes Homer has noted, there were certain traits on which all agreed: Eakins was hardworking, intense, persistent, and honest to a fault. But beyond that some found him "gentle, kind, helpful, and honorable" while others considered him sex-driven, "brusque, immoral, vindictive, and capable of prejudice and intense hatred." His body too was contradictory—at times hypermasculine, fit, and muscular, at times soft and graceful, as in one nude studio photograph (ca. 1883, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts)



7 Thomas Eakins, *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*, 1871. Oil, 32 ¼ x 46 ¼ in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift

8 Detail of *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*

in which Eakins, seen from behind, lounges like a sensuous odalisque. Even the voice of this obsessively manly man was contrary: high and thin, it reminded singer Weda Cook of cold lemon juice.¹³

With those contradictions and anxieties in mind, it is worthwhile asking how and why Eakins represented himself in painting during the anguished years of his mother's mania and its aftermath. Like every social creature, Eakins wore various public masks and assumed various poses,





9 Thomas Eakins, *Thomas Eakins Leaning against a Building*, 1870–76. Wet-plate collodion negative, 4 x 3 ¼ in. Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust

albeit with striking inconsistency, and his self-representations display dramatically different facets, some of them momentary poses, others idealized or fictionalized versions of the self. My readings of these images necessarily take a speculative turn. I do not claim that they are reliable indicators of Eakins's "true" state of mind, which (in its entirety) was and is unknowable. In aggregate, however, they do hint at complex patterns of emotional pathology that—along with compulsively systematic, scientific rationalism—made up the fabric of Eakins's life and art.

Eakins inserted self-portraits in several outdoor scenes of the early 1870s. We see him about 1874 propelling the boat in

which his father stands, rifle at the ready, hunting reedbirds in the marshes. We see him off in the distance, sitting in the stake boat and waving with one huge paw in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* (1873). Most memorably, we see him in *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)* (fig. 7). In this crystal-clear riverscape, champion sculler Schmitt sits squarely in the foreground, marking the center axis of the picture. Beyond, Eakins rows energetically away from his friend, his own name and the date 1871 boldly inscribed on the stern end of his shell so that the viewer recognizes beyond a doubt that the artist is this vigorous, broad-shouldered, muscular young athlete (fig. 8). Focused, coordinated, and powerfully propelling his craft, he is in all respects in perfect control—of his body as well as the swift rowing-machine he so deftly commands.

A different Eakins appears in a photograph taken sometime between 1870 and 1876 (fig. 9). This is not to say that it represents an Eakins any more "real" or "authentic" than the rowing Eakins in the painting: he could be clowning or striking a pose. But the contrast between the two is striking. Rather than gliding along an open expanse of water, Eakins here is slouching against a wall, hemmed in by wood, brick, and cobblestones. His cocked elbow points to the crossbar that keeps the gate behind him firmly shut. His body is gangly and awkward, his clothes ill fitting, his expression hangdog. His shoulders are narrow and tense; he clutches at the placket of his coat with one hand and grips a squashy hat with the other. His legs bend and bow in opposite directions. This Eakins seems at odds with himself. Perhaps the photograph postdates his 1873 bout with malaria, when the artist—worn out by his mother's protracted ordeal—lay bedridden for two months and remained weak for some time thereafter. Or it could have been taken before her death. But we do know that when Eakins

inserted himself into *Max Schmitt*, his mother was alive—and incurably deranged. Desperately wanting and needing to be in control yet helplessly awash in familial trauma, Eakins projected an ideal bodily image into the painting. Eakins in the photograph, by contrast, is manifestly an imperfect and less coherent version of himself. We see that “version” in other images as well: a later photograph (1880, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts) attributed to Susan Macdowell shows a haggard Eakins in a similarly tense pose, leaning awkwardly against a wall in a weedy backyard.

These three outdoor paintings and the two photographs show Eakins at the edges, in back alleys, or in a subordinate role. In none of them does Eakins hint at his own artistic identity. This is also true of his self-portrait in *The Gross Clinic* (fig. 10), where the artist depicted himself huddled at the right-hand edge, a fringe figure intently observing and recording the surgical procedure under way in the operating theater of Jefferson Medical College. In this imposing work, surgeon Samuel Gross lectures to tiers of attentive students as he performs an operation to remove a piece of diseased bone from the thigh of a young, anesthetized patient whose radically foreshortened body is famously difficult to read. Holding a bloody scalpel, Gross turns from the operating table to address the class. A team of black-suited assistants surrounds the comatose, jumbled body while on the other side an old woman in black (perhaps the patient’s mother) shields her eyes from the gory sight with one bony claw.¹⁴

In this painting, Eakins deposited his own acute anxieties about bodily disintegration and loss of control. A clue lies in the signature, which he inscribed along with the date, 1875, in block capitals on the end of the operating table, just as he did on the stern end of his shell in the 1871 painting of *Max Schmitt*. Clearly, the radically foreshortened body

on the table is not that of Eakins; we know he is watching from the sidelines. But the signature subtly insinuates some sort of uneasy identification or dialogue with that unconscious body, so utterly deprived of agency and will. That body in turn complements the woman in black who (like a patient in the grip of manic excitement or frenzy) in every line of her body expresses surrender to overwhelming emotion. Together, those two figures conjure up a threatening spectacle of physical debility and emotional abandon that must at all costs be reined in and brought to order. In this context we might see Gross as the artist’s alter ego, a bastion of maleness standing firm and tall against the mental and bodily chaos all around him. By no accident does Eakins keep his eyes glued on the surgeon, as if his own life and integrity depend on the patriarchal doctor’s power.

Eakins’s obsession with the whole, fit body only intensified as he grew older, as did his desire to display his own in the altogether. In the 1880s he was the driving force behind an extraordinary corpus of nude photographs of himself, his students, and other associates. Most of these photographs functioned either as mementos of Arcadian idylls or as aids to anatomical study, like the example showing Eakins in the *Naked Series* (fig. 11), an extended sequence in which many different models, young, old, male, and female, assume the same standardized set of poses. Intended for private use, such photographs were nonetheless very much of a piece with Eakins’s provocative insistence on the more public use of stark-naked models in both male and female life classes. The scandal over one incident in which he removed the loincloth from a male model before a class of female students led to his resignation from the Pennsylvania Academy in 1886, but it was only the grand climax of numerous episodes involving nudity on the part of Eakins and members of his circle.¹⁵



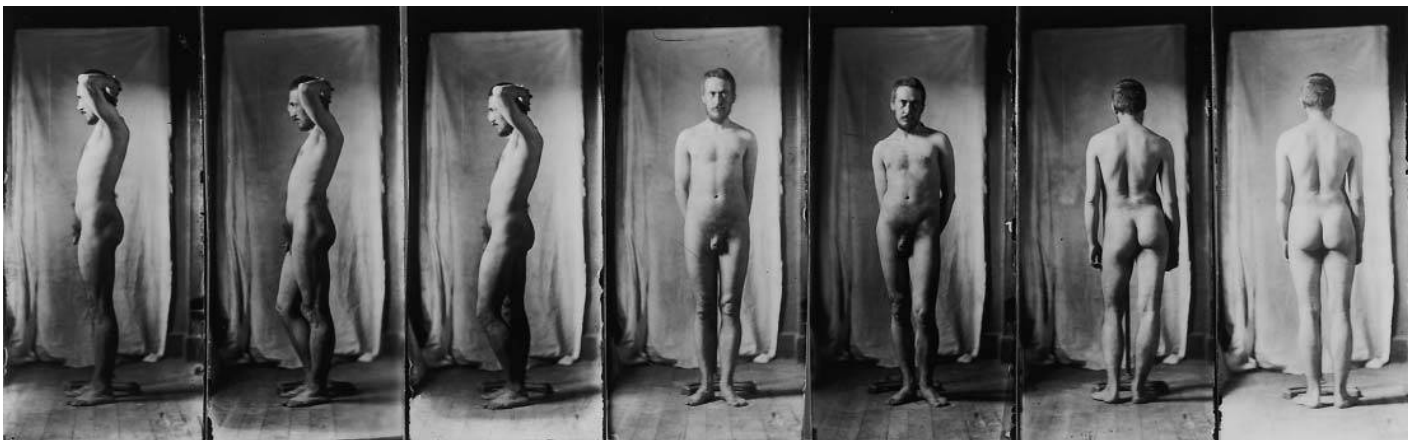
10 Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875. Oil, 96 x 78 in. Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia

Although technically not self-portraits, the nude photographs of Eakins were taken at his instigation. He rationalized his self-display as a matter of principle: he would not ask his student-models to do anything he was unwilling to do himself. There was more to it than principle, however. At some point he gave lantern slides to his friend James Mapes Dodge and Dodge's wife, including one or more sets taken in a studio interior and showing the naked Eakins hoisting an equally naked woman in his arms (fig. 12). Mrs. Dodge later passed them to her son, declaring them "not the kind of thing for a respectable widow" to have in her keeping. On another occasion, Eakins reportedly entered the studio where his protégé Samuel Murray was sculpting the portrait of a young woman. Stepping into an adjoining room, he stripped down to the buff, came back out, and presented himself to the sitter, saying, "I don't know if you ever saw a naked man before; I thought you might like to see one." He shed his clothes in front of his student Amelia van Buren on yet another occasion, purportedly to answer a question about the movement of the pelvis. And in *Swimming* (1884–85), the painting commissioned but then rejected by the Pennsylvania Academy's chairman of the Committee on Instruction, Edward Hornor Coates, Eakins once

again inserted himself on the fringe of the group, respectably submerged but by unmistakable implication as naked as his companions (for the most part lean young men, his students). Many similar anecdotes are still in circulation, and it is safe to hazard that other such incidents were never reported.¹⁶

Were Eakins alive today, many would classify him without hesitation as an exhibitionist whose acts of exposure went beyond the limits of artistic justification. To be sure, men did swim in the nude in private, but how many other art teachers of that time stripped, posed, and frolicked nude in student company—regardless of whether that company was male, female, or mixed? And how many artists were in the habit of sending titillating photographs of themselves disrobed to friends? Whether we want to think of Eakins as an exhibitionist per se or not, it cannot be denied that he loved to show himself—over and over again. Complementing that, he had an equally powerful and insatiable desire to look. Tales of Eakins's scopophilia—the lust to see all—abound. The Naked Series alone is evidence of that, in the way it systematically lingers over the unclothed forms of males and females alike. When women sat for their portraits, Eakins would press them to pose nude.¹⁷ On one occasion, reportedly, he declared that he would like to see everybody go nude. Even dissection—the

11 Thomas Eakins, *Naked Series: Thomas Eakins in Front of Cloth Backdrop, Poses 1–7*, ca. 1883. Seven dry-plate negatives, each 4 x 1 3/4 in. Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust



penetrating scrutiny of naked, utterly defenseless bodies—can be regarded as scopophilia taken to an extreme.

Eakins's actions fit a pattern identified in psychoanalytical literature as the “looking-showing” modality, which pairs exhibitionism with scopophilia, defined as the sexual (or other) gratification derived from looking. The psychologist David W. Allen theorizes that within this modality, hidden injuries—physical or emotional (such as early object loss)—motivate endless attempts to repair the image of the self. Repairing the self-image in turn involves an attempt to repair the image that is being exhibited to others. As Allen puts it, the utterance “You see that I am all right or worthwhile” is an unconscious step in the progression to “I see that I am all right and unimpaired.” We might, therefore, see Eakins's acts of exposure as assertions of his hoped-for self-worth, intact, unblemished, and complete. This would be consistent with his earlier acts of self-portrayal as a robust young athlete during a time of intense emotional trauma.¹⁸

- 12 Thomas Eakins, *Thomas Eakins Nude, Holding Nude Female in His Arms, Looking at Camera*, ca. 1885. Dry-plate negative, 4 x 5 in. Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust

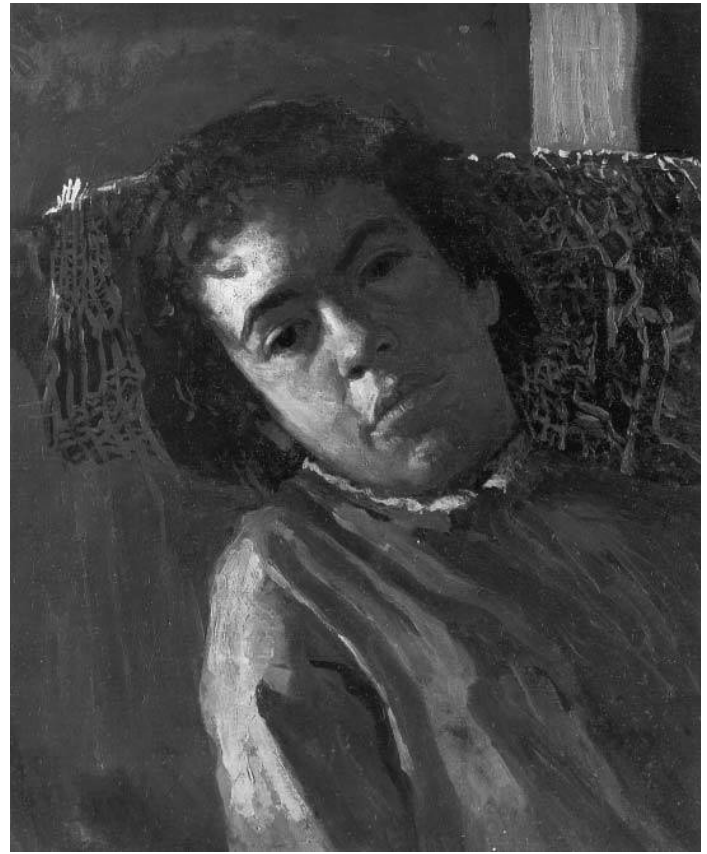


When we get to the question of hidden wounds, we are entering slippery and treacherous territory. If Eakins had a hidden wound, whether physical or psychological, real or imaginary, its very hidden-ness prevents disclosure. Nonetheless, it is safe to suggest that Eakins nursed a lifelong sense of lack—of power, perhaps, or of sexual prowess or self-esteem—that impelled repeated attempts to prove himself.¹⁹ He positioned himself on the fringe of social acceptability—as he is always at the edges in his embedded self-portraits—and cultivated the status of misfit. A bachelor until the age of forty, he lived nearly all his life in Philadelphia under his father's roof and to a large degree remained dependent on his father's money. His need for aggressive self-assertion was correspondingly pronounced. Disrobing, posing, and exhibiting himself time and again, Eakins sought reassurance and validation. This is not to discount the purely provocative nature of his exhibitionism: doubtless at some level Eakins relished the shock value of his actions even while rationalizing his conduct as a bold gesture against the prudish hypocrisy of nineteenth-century Philadelphia.

So far, I have examined only Eakins's acts of physical exposure, ranging from the display of muscular prowess to complete and absolute nudity. But given Eakins's moody mentality and the traumatic impact of mental disease not only on his mother but also on others around him, it is worth asking whether we might find in his later acts of self-portrayal any psychological exposure equivalent to his performances of bodily display. In *The Agnew Clinic* (1889), the artist stands once more on the shadowy edge of the operating theater, his form probably painted in on this occasion by Susan Eakins. In Eakins's last version of *William Rush and His Model*, of 1908, the burly sculptor's body, seen in profile though with face averted, resembles Eakins's own. In their emphasis on



13 Thomas Eakins, *Self-Portrait*,
1902. Oil, 30 x 25 in. National
Academy Museum, New York



- 14 Conrad Frederic Haeseler, *Thomas Eakins*, 1905. Black-and-white photograph, 7 ⁷/₈ x 7 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Museum appropriation
- 15 Thomas Eakins, *Margaret Eakins*, 1871. Oil, 18 ³/₈ x 15 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn

marginalization and on corporeality, both pictures fit the patterns established years before.

A 1902 self-portrait (fig. 13) seems to bring us face to face with and up close to Eakins at last. As required for election to the National Academy of Design, he submitted this self-portrait to the academy on his belated nomination to associate membership, which was soon followed by promotion to full membership. With good reason scholars have pointed out the slightly petulant cast of the features, which seem to reproach the academicians for making him wait until the age of fifty-seven for admission into their prestigious club.²⁰ The face that gazes out at us, with its red-rimmed, glistening eyes and knotted brows, seems to be an unvarnished and unflinching record of the marks of age.

Yet this is a painter who habitually aged the faces of other sitters; there is no reason

for us to trust him to come clean about his own. In a 1905 photograph (fig. 14), Eakins's face and expression are almost the same, but less dramatically ravaged—even though three years older. With one eyebrow cocked, he stares out gravely but impassively. The brow is smoother, the lips less droopy, the head set squarely on the shoulders rather than wearily tilted. Again, I am not suggesting that the photograph is somehow more truthful than the painting; both are posed, constructed. Rather, I am interested in measuring the significance of the differences, which are subtle but telling.

The most significant of these is the cant of the head in the painting. This is an expressive and symbolic device rather than a documentary notation. We see it time and again in Eakins's portraits, as far back as the 1871 portrait of his sister Margaret (fig. 15), painted in the same house that sheltered a Caroline Eakins well along in her terrible descent into insanity.

Closely confined in a shadowed space, Margaret's harshly lit head, tilted far to the side, conveys weariness, anxiety, and gloom. The tilted head signifies mental unease in other portraits, most famously that of Amelia Van Buren (1890), whose pose, as scholar David Lubin has shown, parallels that of a religious melancholic in an asylum photograph by Hugh Welsh Diamond.²¹ We can take this iconography all the way back to Albrecht Dürer, whose famous engraving *Melencolia I* (1514) is the ancestor of those later figurations. Ironically, Dürer's figure, toying with a pair of dividers, is in gloom because of protracted and unresolved mental labors, whereas Van Buren, holding only a fan, is unoccupied, vacant. The signs of melancholia mark Eakins's portraits of men as well, a case in point being *Franklin Schenck*, painted the same year as the Van Buren portrait. All this suggests that Eakins's melancholy 1902 self-portrait could be as much a mask as mirror image. What does it show? And what, if anything, does it conceal?

A review of Eakins's emotional and social history shows that, from the 1870s on, he was a troubled, and troubling, man. Following the scandal at the Pennsylvania Academy, he suffered a complete nervous breakdown and in 1887 spent several months undergoing the rugged, outdoor "camp cure" at a ranch in the Dakotas. By the mid-1880s nervous exhaustion, or neurasthenia, was so widespread among the middle classes that it was nicknamed the "American Disease."²² Eakins knew at least two doctors—S. Weir Mitchell and Horatio Wood—who were leading and much-published experts on the subject. Mitchell's 1877 essay, "Clinical Lecture on Nervousness in the Male," pinpoints exactly what may have terrified Eakins when he lost his grip. Nervousness came in many forms, but common to all was the loss of emotional control. "Normal" men, Mitchell wrote, succumbed to their

emotions only under extreme duress, whereas the slightest provocation would send the nervous man into an emotional spiral of mood swings, anxiety, and fear accompanied by physical manifestations such as trembling, spasms, and weakness. Weir stated that the chief peculiarity of the disease lay in "over-excitability. . . . The patient is too easily moved, too readily excited. The strong man becomes like the average woman, the woman like the unschooled child."²³ Nervousness, in short, was for men at least tantamount to a sex change. Given Eakins's morbid aversion to the feminine, his nervous breakdown must have reduced him to utter confusion stemming from the fear that his own worst nightmare was coming true.

The breakdown was the centerpiece of an established and ongoing pattern: grief and emotional crisis beset Eakins time and again. His mother's death, his debilitating bout with malaria, the virulent public response to *The Gross Clinic*, and the death in 1879 of his longtime fiancée, Kathrin Crowell, severely tested his equilibrium. In the 1880s his Aunt Eliza—his mother's sister and the resident elder female in the Eakins household—lost her mind (perhaps exacerbating Eakins's anxiety about insanity as a family taint). His favorite sister, Margaret (source of considerable moral and practical support to her brother), died of typhoid fever late in 1882. In addition to being forced out of the Pennsylvania Academy, Eakins after the loincloth incident was hounded relentlessly by his youngest sister, Caroline, and her husband, Frank Stephens, whose gossip about the artist's purported incestuous and bestial sexual habits (with Margaret, among others) spurred Benjamin Eakins to banish the couple from the family home. Caroline, never reconciled with her brother, died of typhoid fever in 1889.²⁴

Later in the decade a young student, Lillian Hammitt, pursued Eakins as

the object of a delusional romantic fantasy involving her eventual marriage to the painter once he had divorced his wife. Hammitt became insane and was institutionalized in 1892. On her release in the mid-1890s the police found her wandering the streets of Philadelphia wearing a bathing costume and identifying herself as Eakins's wife. Most tragic of all, Eakins's niece Ella Crowell (fig. 16) broke down and was confined to an insane asylum. A student of nursing, Crowell had attempted suicide by swallowing an overdose of the same drug she had mistakenly, and almost fatally, administered to a patient. Released into her family's care, she shot herself to death on July 2, 1897. Accused by Ella's furious and distraught parents of corrupting and sexually molesting the young woman when she studied with him in the early 1890s, Eakins was banished for good from the Crowell circle.²⁵ Two years later, his father died.

These tales have been told and retold. Nearly always, Eakins is cast as the hapless victim of cruel fate, malicious gossip, and crazy women—or, on occasion, as more or less inadvertent provocateur.²⁶ It is impossible to tell at this remove what motivated the tale-tellers; what really happened; whether whatever Eakins did or how he reacted aggravated the insanity of Hammitt or Ella Crowell. Certainly in some cases he had every reason to feel paranoid, as when his hostile brother-in-law, Frank Stephens, led the movement to oust Eakins from the Philadelphia Sketch Club. But surely Eakins's own uneven mental equilibrium, social ineptitude, and sheer intransigence were instrumental in creating a turbulent emotional climate that perversely elicited or encouraged erratic, aggressive, and delusional behavior in others. Wherever the blame lay, Eakins in the 1880s and 1890s was a tormented man haunted from within and without by the dreaded specter of feminine, and feminizing, insanity.

By no mere happenstance did Eakins repair to Maine less than three weeks after the trauma of Ella's suicide to paint the portrait of the eminent physicist Henry Rowland (fig. 17). As curator Kathleen Foster has written, "the work of the mind" preoccupies Rowland and Eakins's other "grand sitters."²⁷ This kind of mental process was safe, since it exercised the constructive machinery of the brain, rather than its wayward passions. Dr. Rowland, so solid, crisp, and monumental, holds a luminous diffraction grating, with his ruling machine (for measurement of the spectrum) on the table beside him and his mathematical formulas carved into the frame. His faraway gaze clearly signifies the brainwork going on underneath that lofty dome. In contrast, Ella Crowell, huddled against a tree in an open field, peers out at us uncertainly, face and form so blurry that the visual rhetoric of the image seems the embodiment of her turbulent and dangerous



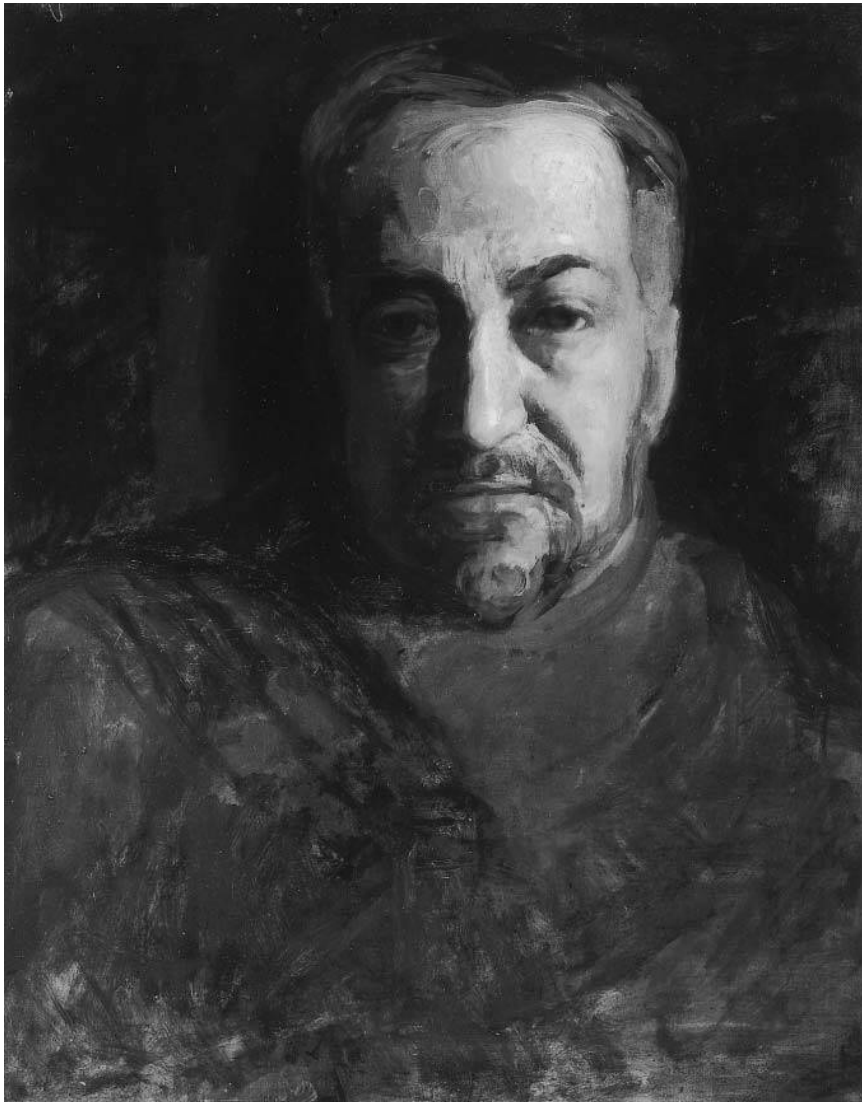
16 Thomas Eakins, *Ella Crowell*, ca. 1897. Gelatin silver print, 3 7/8 x 2 3/8 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Purchased with funds donated by the Pennsylvania Academy Women's Committee

17 Thomas Eakins, *Professor Henry A. Rowland*, 1897. Oil, 80 ¼ x 54 in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, Gift of Stephen C. Clark, Esq.



mental confusion. Painting Rowland was at least in part a form of therapy by which Eakins reinscribed himself into the tough-minded, masculine security of rational science.

Yet even that refuge did not always keep the demons at bay. It is true—and needs mentioning—that Eakins maintained a strong network of colleagues and friends in both Philadelphia and



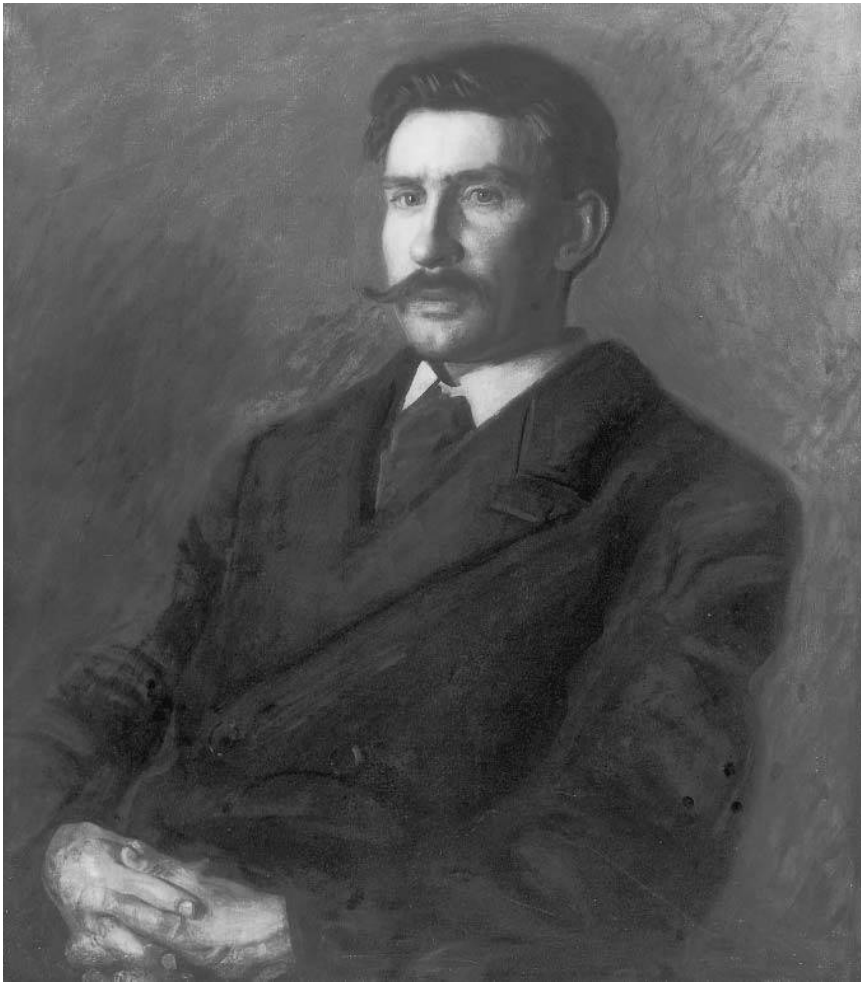
18 Thomas Eakins, *Self-Portrait*, 1902. Oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard, 20 x 16 1/8 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn

New York. He socialized and exchanged ideas with fellow artists, musicians, doctors, scientists, and clerics, many of whom he also painted. He was a disciplined and productive artist. He attracted students such as Samuel Murray who became lifelong friends. Indeed, by Murray's account, Eakins in his company was unfailingly jolly. Eakins played pranks and enjoyed dressing up as Little Lord Fauntleroy or a kilted Scotsman at masquerade balls. Later in life, he finally began to receive recognition, and honors began to come his way.²⁸ However, that is not the Eakins we see in the 1902 self-portrait. By Eakins's own reckoning,

he was a lifelong martyr and victim of harsh injustice whose "sad old face," as he described it, bore the scars. When Harrison Morris, managing director of the Pennsylvania Academy, requested biographical information in 1894, Eakins (making no bones about his embittered feelings) provided the stingiest outline of facts, stating in conclusion, "My honors are misunderstanding, persecution, and neglect, enhanced because unsought." On receiving the prestigious Temple Gold Medal from the Pennsylvania Academy in 1904, Eakins in a rage at the "impudence" of that gesture took his prize to the United States Mint, where he sold it for seventy-three dollars. Nourishing undying resentment, Eakins constructed a martyr-victim role, cast himself in it, and played it to the hilt. It was this Eakins—neurasthenic, martyr, victim, and human wreck—that he portrayed in the painting of 1902.²⁹

If we compare the "official" National Academy portrait with an earlier 1902 study (fig. 18) for the academy painting, we see a somewhat different Eakins. While clearly middle-aged and careworn, this Eakins looks less woebegone. Head erect, he gazes pensively off to the side, gravely aloof. The pathos is understated: the image projects dignity and even hauteur. It is also instructive to compare the "official" portrait (see fig. 13) with Eakins's portrait of Edward Redfield, painted for the National Academy at the time of the younger artist's election to membership (fig. 19). The dimensions of the two pictures match almost to the inch, but otherwise they have little in common. Redfield sits stiffly upright, hands clasped, gaze remote. He guards his inner feelings, and—most significantly—his distance from the picture plane prohibits intimacy. Eakins, by contrast, thrusts his naked woe upon us.

Curator Darrell Sewell writes that Eakins's self-portrayal here has more in common with his portraits of women made about this time, which—like the



19 Thomas Eakins, *Edward W. Redfield*, 1905. Oil, 30 x 26 in. National Academy Museum, New York

portrait of his wife, Susan (fig. 20)—“suggest the existence of profound emotional life.” Like Thomas, Susan Eakins confronts us, close up, with tilted head and brimming eyes. Eakins likewise “shows himself as a vulnerable being, capable of deep emotion,” as Sewell asserts. If emotion in Eakins’s universe was something that connoted loss of control portending disastrous mental disarray, we might ask what the painter was attempting to tell us in this portrait. In 1891 Eakins exhibited five portraits designated by “type” rather than the individual’s name: artist, student, lady, engineer, and poet. If we read the 1902 self-portrait as a “type,” rather than an individual, what type might it represent? Tilting, Eakins looks as if he is about to slide out of the

picture. He is off-center and off-balance, old, sad, defeated, and worn.³⁰

If we compare both of Eakins’s self-portraits (especially the study) to the “diagnostic” photograph *Chronic Mania with Fixed Delusions: Homicide* (fig. 21), from Chapin’s book *A Compendium of Insanity*, striking parallels emerge. Chapin’s maniac looks out with a wary, questioning gaze under hooded lids. A frown crimps the flesh between the lowered brows; bristly whiskers frame the sullen, compressed lips. Of course, absent evidence that Eakins saw this (or some similar) photograph and modeled his own visage along the same lines, we can only conjecture on the meaning of the resemblance. It is possible that any resemblance is fortuitous, and I admit that here I am teetering at the edge of a speculative abyss. However, I suspect that, given Eakins’s wide medical acquaintance—including local experts on neurasthenia and mental disease—he may well have been familiar with studies in which drawings or photographs of the mentally ill appeared as guides to types of insanity. Indeed, his friend S. Weir Mitchell owned a sketchbook containing drawings portraying the insane that had been commissioned by his father, John Kearsley Mitchell, in the late 1820s. Since Eakins was obsessed with bodily mechanics, it is not too far-fetched to suggest that he might also have been interested in the structural anatomy of mania, its outward signs. He probably did not mean to portray himself literally as a madman. But in my view the specter of insanity subtly and elusively haunts the picture.³¹

As we have already seen in the case of female lunatics, one of the classic signs of mental imbalance or madness in visual culture was disorder in various forms. The same extended to men. Although Eakins has all of his buttons properly fastened in the self-portrait of 1902, his hair is conspicuously unruly. A gray tuft sticks out on the right, and on the left a matted brown wisp has wandered out of



20 Thomas Eakins, *Susan Macdowell Eakins*, ca. 1900. Oil, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn

21 *Chronic Mania with Fixed Delusions: Homicide*. Half-tone reproduction from John Bassett Chapin, *A Compendium of Insanity* (Philadelphia: WB Saunders, 1898), facing page 130

22 Thomas Eakins, *Dr. Edward Anthony Spitzka*, ca. 1913. Archival photograph of oil painting, originally 84 x 43 1/2 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn



line; the top of his head, too, is ruffled. His mustache is crooked and his beard ungroomed. Eakins is unkempt, ever so slightly out of kilter, and more than a little pathetic. His outer disorder hints at inner disarray.

Why would Eakins choose to assume this mask to represent himself in the august company of his fellow academicians? I believe that it is entirely consistent with his modes of self-presentation as a maverick figure perpetually in defiance of prevailing norms. In life, he assiduously acted the bum. Morris described Eakins during a portrait sitting in 1896: "I watched his large underlip, red and hanging; his rather lack-luster eyes, with listless lids; his overalls of blue . . . and his woolen undershirt, the only upper garment." Eakins's negligent costume played a cardinal role in another episode, when he greeted the socially prominent Elizabeth Gillespie wearing nothing but an old pair of trousers and an undershirt. Gillespie marched out, refusing to go near Eakins again. The elite critic Mariana Van Rensselaer found him so disconcertingly different from her idea of an artist that she fancied herself talking to an imposter—sooner or later the real

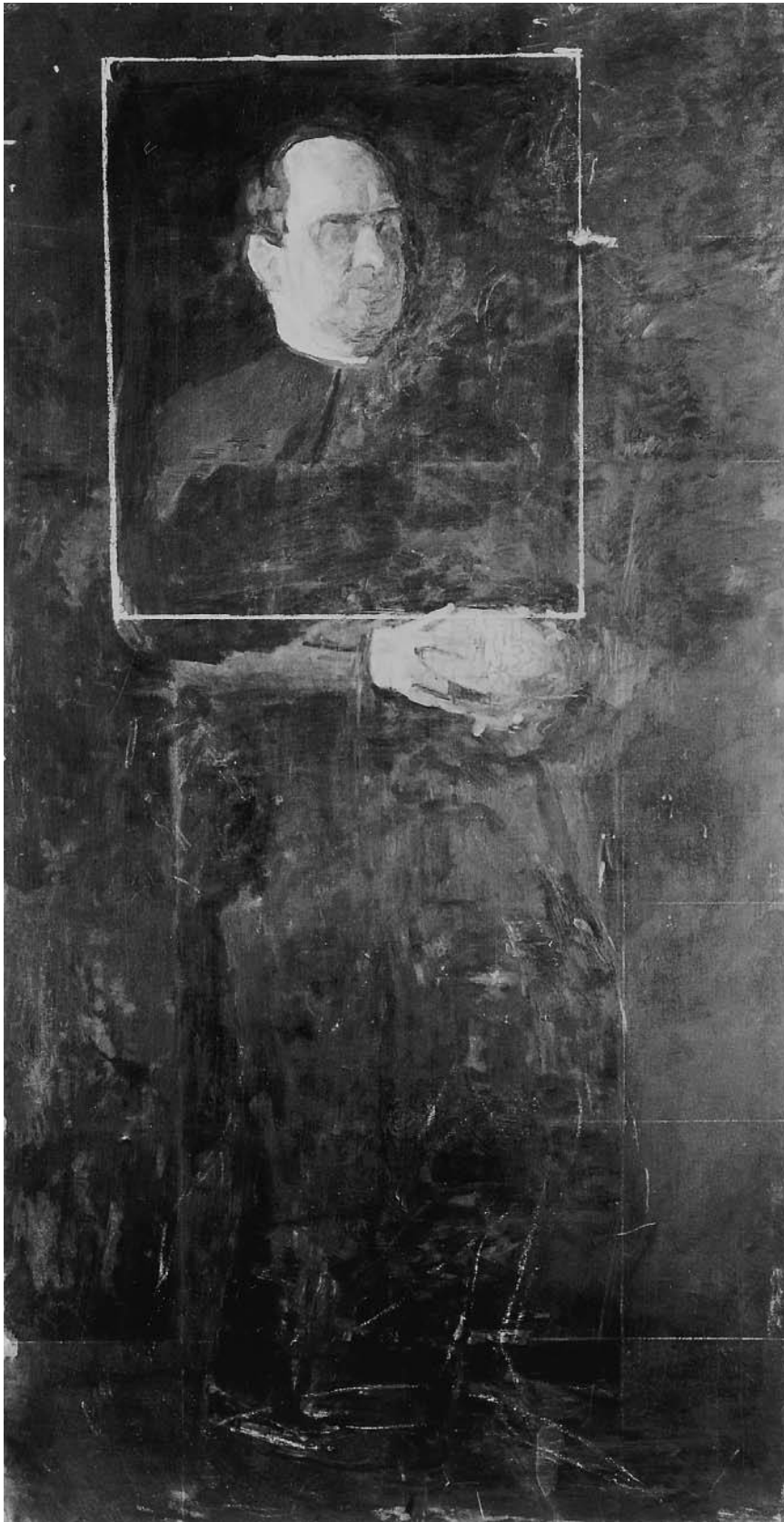
Eakins would burst in and put an end to this charade. Undoubtedly this untidy, ill-bred, lower-middle-class lout could never be an artist! Many others who came into his orbit also found him perplexingly crude, with the style of a mechanic and the manners of a large, ungainly child. Surely Eakins got some satisfaction in the knowledge that among all those reserved and gentlemanly artist mugs in the National Academy, only his own (however much a mask of his own devising) would appear naked and emotionally exposed.³² How much of this self-representation was performance and how much was the "authentic" Eakins we can never know.

In 1912 Eakins commenced what would be his last portrait. The subject, Edward Anthony Spitzka (son of the alienist), was a noted anatomist best remembered today, if at all, as chief suspect in the disappearance of poet Walt Whitman's brain, which was to have taken its place among the brains of the eminent men that Spitzka subjected to anthropometric scrutiny in the hopes of discovering the physical basis of genius. Spitzka held a chair in anatomy at Jefferson Medical College, where Eakins had long-standing ties. Figure 22 shows the portrait in its original form, representing Spitzka cradling a human brain in his hands. The head, sharply illuminated against the dark background, is strongly modeled. Yet it is disconcertingly blank: where the eyes should be are only thick, grayish daubs of paint. Ill and weak, Eakins had been unable to finish the painting, even with Susan's help.³³ Spitzka is a blind man holding a brain. Eyeless, he can neither see it nor read it. He can do nothing more than heft its weight and palpate its dense ovoid mass between tensely splayed fingers. For all its physicality, the brain remains an unfathomable enigma, its egglike shape all too evocative of the feminine.

The Spitzka portrait, which closes the book on Eakins's career, also stands as metaphor for his life and art. Eakins too

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84, 97 (right), 101, 103, 105, Photos by Lee Stalworth; 87, 89 (left), Photos by Graydon Wood; 89 (right), SP-132, National Museum of Health and Medicine; 90 (both), © 1994 Metropolitan Museum of Art; 100, All rights reserved, Addison Gallery of American Art



was a “blind man” as far as the brain was concerned. He could probe the machinery of the body, but the brain’s mysteries and moods eluded him. The cast of a dissected arm showed clearly how bone, muscle, and sinew worked to move the limb; the cast of a brain showed nothing but illegible surface convolutions. What were its inner workings? What caused it to break down? How could an organ capable of solving complex mathematical problems also be the seat of nerve storms so wild as to threaten reason? How could it be controlled? For Eakins, the key to control lay in exercising the rational, “masculine” faculties, the bones and muscles of the brain: doing math problems, as he put it, to keep from (implicitly “feminine”) silliness. The silliness, though, was always threatening to break out and run amok.

Disordered in life, Eakins enshrined order and measure in his art. Haunted by the amorphous specter of disintegration—physical and mental—he sought refuge within the complex and comprehensible structures he built and rebuilt to keep himself safe. Science, mathematics, perspective, anatomy, and mechanics were his scaffolding and his building blocks. Yet time and again, they threatened to crumble and collapse, leaving him exposed like a hermit crab without a shell—or a brain without a skull. Many other factors—institutional, cultural, social, local—played into the shaping of Eakins’s work, and his patterns of production. We cannot and perhaps should not expect to unmask pathological traces in every painting. That is why Eakins’s acts of portrayal so richly reward our scrutiny. However subtly and elliptically, his self-portrayals, early and late, incorporate signs of the tensions and the traumas that underlay them. From those tensions and traumas came the vigor and the strangeness of Eakins’s art, its ambiguous character as something systematically and objectively “real” but at the same time intimately, elusively, and perhaps even pathologically personal.

Notes

This essay was initially presented as a paper at the first Edgar P. Richardson Symposium on Portraiture, organized by the National Portrait Gallery in November 2003. I thank curator Wendy Wick Reaves for inspiring me to investigate Eakins's self-portraits and the anonymous readers for *American Art* for their many helpful and constructive suggestions.

- 1 The most recent and comprehensive work on Eakins is Darrell Sewell et al., *Thomas Eakins* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001); also see Kathleen Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997). The present essay represents an expansion on and rethinking of certain issues touched on in the chapter on Eakins's *Gross Clinic* in Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 188–220. Cheryl Leibold, "The Many Faces of Thomas Eakins," *Pennsylvania Heritage* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 4–9, analyzes photographic images of the painter and discusses the contexts in which they were made and used.
- 2 Earl Shinn to Elizabeth Haines, March 1867, Earl Shinn Jr. Papers, reel 3580, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- 3 Frances Eakins to Caroline Cowperthwait Eakins, July 7, 1868, Thomas Eakins Research Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art; quoted in Sewell, *Thomas Eakins*, xvi.
- 4 Rebecca Fussell to her daughter Molly, April 2, 1871, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1982), 1:76.
- 5 Edward Charles Spitzka, *Insanity: Its Classification, Diagnosis, and Treatment* (New York: E. B. Treat, 1887), 204; John Bassett Chapin, *A Compendium of Insanity* (Philadelphia: WB Saunders, 1898), 106–7. On Eakins's relationship with his mother, see Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (privately printed, 1946), 29.
- 6 Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, October 26, 1866, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Theodor Siegl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978), 27; Henry Maudsley, *The Pathology of Mind: A Study of Its Distempers, Deformities, and Disorders* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 294.
- 7 Siegl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection*, 23.
- 8 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2:13; McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, 103. For the quote on advice to students, see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), 40. McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, 22, may have been the first to make the connection between Eakins's mathematical obsessions and the need for security.
- 9 McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, 61. See William Crary Brownell, "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," *Scribner's Monthly Illustrated Magazine* 18 (September 1879): 737–50, for Eakins's philosophy and practice of dissection.
- 10 Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, December 2, 1869, and n.d. [ca. August 15, 1867], Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Thomas Eakins, note to the PAFA Committee on Instruction, January 8, 1877, quoted in *Thomas Eakins, Susan Macdowell Eakins, Elizabeth Macdowell Kenton* (Roanoke, Va.: Progress Press for the North Cross School Living Gallery, 1977), 17; Adam Emory Albright, "Memories of Thomas Eakins," *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1947, 184.
- 11 Samuel Gross and A. Haller Gross, *Autobiography of Samuel Gross, M.D.* (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1887), 1:133. See Burns, *Painting the Dark Side*, 207–8, for a more detailed discussion of the medical climate in Philadelphia during the Civil War.
- 12 Thomas Eakins to Frances Eakins, April 1, 1869, quoted in Gordon Hendricks, *Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1974), 53; Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, late November 1869, quoted in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 1:53; Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, October 29, 1868, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Eakins to Earl Shinn, January 30, 1875, Earl Shinn Jr. Papers, reel 3580, Archives of American Art; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2:90–98; Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), 134n9 for the need to "pea." See Patricia Likos Ricci, "'Bella, Cara Emilia': The Italianate Romance of Emily Sartain and Thomas Eakins," in *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy*, ed. Katharine Martinez and Page Talbott (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2000), 120–37.
- 13 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2:12; William Innes Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville, 1992), 179; Weda Cook cited in Homer, 21.
- 14 This painting has been the subject of much study. For two very different interpretations, see, for example, Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), 46–81, and Jennifer Doyle, "Sex, Scandal, and Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*," *Representations*, no. 68 (Fall 1999): 1–33.
- 15 See Kathleen A. Foster, "Writing about Eakins," in Foster and Leibold, *Writing about Eakins*, 69–79, for a methodical examination of the loincloth scandal and its aftermath.
- 16 On his willingness to pose nude himself, see Thomas Eakins to Edward Hornor Coates, September 11, 1886, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. For Mrs. Dodge's comments, see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2:96. On stripping for Murray's model and on Amelia Van Buren, see Homer, *Thomas Eakins*, 178, 167. For compendia of the various anecdotes about Eakins's habits of stripping and other relations with women, see Foster, "Writing about Eakins," 79–90; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2:90–98; and Homer, *Thomas Eakins*, 173–80.
- 17 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2:91.
- 18 David W. Allen, *The Fear of Looking, or, Scopophilic-Exhibitionistic Conflicts*

- (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1974), 109–23.
- 19 Martin A. Berger also argues that Eakins suffered from failure to be manly according to Victorian prescriptions for middle-class masculinity; see his *Man Made: Thomas Eakins and the Construction of Gilded Age Manhood* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000).
 - 20 See, for example, Darrell Sewell's catalogue entry on the self-portrait in John Wilmerding, ed., *Thomas Eakins* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 156.
 - 21 David M. Lubin, "Modern Psychological Selfhood in the Art of Thomas Eakins," in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a History of Emotional Life in America*, ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 149.
 - 22 For an overview of this important subject, see George Frederic Drinka, *The Birth of Neurosis: Myth, Malady, and the Victorians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).
 - 23 S. Weir Mitchell, "Clinical Lecture on Nervousness in the Male," *Medical News and Library* 35, no. 420 (December 1877): 179.
 - 24 See Foster, "Writing about Eakins," 79–90, and William and Frances Crowell's affidavit to John V. Sears, June 5, 1886, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.
 - 25 Again, the most reliable and balanced guide to these traumatic events is Foster, "Writing about Eakins," 95–122.
 - 26 See, for example, Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2:97–98, which lays all the blame for the incident involving Hammitt on her unbalanced mind.
 - 27 Foster, "Portraits of Teachers and Thinkers," in Sewell, *Thomas Eakins*, 312.
 - 28 For Murray's anecdotes and reminiscences, see McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, 102–35.
 - 29 Eakins to Edward Hornor Coates, February 15, 1886; Eakins to Harrison Morris, April 23, 1894, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.
 - 30 Sewell in Wilmerding, ed., *Thomas Eakins*, 156. The five paintings were James Wright as *The Artist*, Samuel Murray as *The Student*, Letitia Wilson Jordan as *The Lady*, Professor William D. Marks as *The Engineer*, and Walt Whitman as *The Poet*.
 - 31 On the sketchbook, see Norma Lifton, "Thomas Eakins and S. Weir Mitchell: Images and Cures in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Psychoanalytic Perspectives in Art*, vol. 2, ed. Mary Matthews Gedo (Hillsdale, N.J.: The Analytic Press, 1987), 263–66. Also see Lynn Gamwell and Nancy Tomes, *Madness in America: Cultural and Medical Perceptions of Mental Illness before 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press for Binghamton Univ. Art Museum, 1995), 119–67, for an excellent survey of the visual and material culture of insanity during the period; for broader coverage, see Sander L. Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982). Also see Kathleen M. Spies, "Figuring the Neurasthenic: Thomas Eakins, Nervous Illness, and Gender in Victorian America" (MA thesis, Indiana Univ., 1994), for a detailed discussion of the iconography and meaning of neurasthenia in a number of Eakins's portraits of both women and men.
 - 32 Harrison S. Morris, *Confessions in Art* (New York: Sears Publishing Co., 1930), 32; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1933), 192–93; Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer to S. R. Koehler, June 12, 1881, S. R. Koehler Papers, Archives of American Art.
 - 33 On the Spitzka portrait, see Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 211–12. At some point in the 1930s, the portrait was cut down to bust length. On Spitzka, see Brian Burrell, "The Strange Fate of Whitman's Brain," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 20, nos. 3–4 (Winter–Spring 2003): 107–33. Felicitously, that "feminine" brain in Spitzka's hands was the work of Susan Eakins; see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1933), 206.