



The Water Works with the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the background.

Thomas Eakins' Philadelphia

Beneath the current art scene, the heart of the city's most famous native painter still beats. **BY CATHLEEN MCCARTHY**

A tour of the places Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) lived, worked and wandered in search of subject matter brings art history to life and lends new dimension to aspects of Philadelphia often overlooked, even by resident connoisseurs. Many of the artist's favorite haunts remain surprisingly unchanged by the passage of time. Though he had a difficult relationship with many in the Philadelphia art community, Eakins loved the city and captured every facet. You can find Eakins' representations of the city's vibrant culture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art: sculling on the Schuylkill River ("The Pair-Oared Shell," 1872), sailing on the Delaware ("Sailboats Racing on the Delaware River," 1874), buggy rides in Fairmount Park ("A May Morning in the Park," 1879–80), hunting and fishing in the surrounding marshes ("Mending the Net" and "Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River," both

1881), boxing matches ("Between Rounds," 1898) and a cast of local characters from singers to surgeons.

Step outside the museum and you'll find the Schuylkill River itself, where scullers still row their shells beneath arched stone bridges. At the base of the museum is the renovated Water Works, nearly two centuries old, where a restaurant recently opened looking out over the river and Boathouse Row. In May 1872, Eakins joined some 30,000 spectators here to watch the boat races. He was so caught up in the excitement of competitive rowing that he produced 19 rowing scenes between 1870 and 1874.

Before he became a painter, Eakins studied anatomy at Jefferson Medical College. For more than a century, viewing his most famous paintings required a pilgrimage to two different medical colleges. The Eakins Gallery at Jefferson had the artist's masterpiece of sur-

gical theater, "The Gross Clinic" (1875) and two well-known portraits, while the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania had "The Agnew Clinic" (1889), another surgical drama. Both are enormous canvases depicting the heads of rival medical colleges demonstrating groundbreaking surgeries before students in their respective auditoriums. Unlike "Gross," the portrait of Dr. Agnew was commissioned and includes individual portraits of students, including Eakins, watching as he performs a mastectomy. (Jefferson also sold both portraits recently, so there is no Eakins left at the Eakins Gallery.) But the PMA now has "Agnew" on renewable loan and is sharing "Gross" with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, which Eakins attended and where he taught, a few blocks away.

When "The Gross Clinic" was unveiled in 1876 at the Centennial Exposition in Fairmount Park, viewers and critics were horrified



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Thomas Eakins, "The Gross Clinic," 1875, oil on canvas.

by its bloody scalpel and open wound. Jefferson alumni purchased it for \$200 and gave it to the college, where it remained tucked away until Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton (in partnership with the National Gallery of Art) attempted to buy it last year for her new Crystal Bridges museum in Arkansas. The news met with outrage. Some 3,400 people donated \$68 million to keep the painting in Philadelphia.

You will find "The Gross Clinic" at the Academy through June 2008, between an evocative portrait of Walt Whitman, photographs (including a few by Eakins) of Eakins' classes and anatomical casts and models he used to teach students there for a decade. After June, the painting moves to the PMA, between the Agnew Clinic and the remarkable portrait of Dr. Benjamin Howard Rand, pensively reading while stroking his cat. Dr. Rand will relocate to Arkansas in 2009. (Walton did not go away empty-handed.) One benefit of this recent flurry of sales was to centralize the city's Eakins holdings.

The academy now proudly displaying "The Gross Clinic" actually forced Eakins to resign in 1886, after he caused a scandal by removing the loincloth from a male model in a women's drawing class. Eakins was a revered but controversial teacher who believed in a scientific approach to art, insisting that his students photograph and paint each other nude and dissect cadavers to learn anatomy. They also dissected horses, cows and, on one occasion, a lion that died at the Philadelphia Zoo. Their casts of disintegrating body parts are displayed at both the Academy and the PMA. After his dismissal, Eakins fell into a depression and stopped painting for a couple of years. After his death his widow left the bulk of his estate to the PMA.

Built in 1862 and now containing an inn with five restaurants, the Union League has an art collection that was long restricted to members or guests but tours of the 189 art works displayed throughout the regal French Renaissance building on Broad Street now can be arranged by appointment. Eakins scored his first major commission from the Union League: a painting of its then-president, Rutherford B. Hayes. Members were dismayed by the portrait he produced of a flushed, perspiring Hayes—the chief executive was a well-known teetotaler—and the

painting soon vanished, never to be seen again. Eakins scholar Kathleen Foster, curator of American Art at the PMA, has long hoped the portrait would turn up someday. “If it wasn’t destroyed, it seems likely it would be here somewhere,” says Union League curator David Cassidy. “The Union League has a lot of attics.” Until it does, however, you won’t find any Eakins works among the many political portraits.

Eakins’ fascination with science and technology led him to experiment with photography, first by secretly projecting images onto his canvases, and ultimately as an end in itself, using a stop-motion camera he invented. You will occasionally find examples of his early experiments in rotating photography in the new extension of the PMA opening this month in a renovated Art Deco building across the street. Though the museum won’t have any Eakins works up in September, the visitors can schedule an appointment to see anything from storage that’s not on view, says Foster.

Eakins willed his Mount Vernon Street townhouse to the city of Philadelphia to be used for public art purposes, but it sat abandoned until the Mural Arts Program set up offices there six years ago. Unfortunately, there is nothing left to see of the artist’s home or studio except the façade, but you can stop by to reserve a trolley tour of the city’s murals. Established in 1984 to “redirect the creative impulses” of the city’s graffiti artists, MAP has produced more than 2,700 murals, paying tribute to local legends Patti LaBelle, Wilt Chamberlain and William Penn, but, so far, not Eakins.

It’s tempting to wonder what he would make of the murals—would he see them as in some sense successors of the grand-scale portraits and slice-of-life realism he practiced? “If America is to produce great painters and if young art students wish to assume a place in the history of the art of their country, their first desire should be to remain in America to peer deeper into the heart of their country,” he told a reporter in 1914. “Americans must branch out into their own fields. ... Only by doing this will they create a great and distinctly American art.”

Cathleen McCarthy covered subjects ranging from ancient gold to contemporary design Art & Antiques, she has.

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David David Gallery

260 S. 18th St. 215.735.2922. Carries works by Eakins’ contemporaries, such as Renoir and Childe Hassam.

Gallery 339

339 S. 21st St. 215.731.1530.
www.gallery339.com

Locks Gallery

600 Washington Square South
215.629.1000. www.locksgallery.com

Mural Arts Program

1729 Mount Vernon St. 215.685.0750.
www.muralarts.org/tours

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

118 North Broad St. 215.972.7600.
www.pafa.org

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Benjamin Franklin Pkwy. at 26th St.
215.763.8100. www.philamuseum.org

Rittenhouse 1715 (hotel)

1715 Rittenhouse Square St.
215.546.6500. www.rittenhouse1715.com

Schmidt Dean Gallery

1710 Sansom St. 215.569.9433.
www.schmidtdean.com

Schwarz Gallery

1806 Chestnut St. 215.563.4887.
www.schwarzgallery.com.
Carries works by Eakins as well as contemporaries such as wife Susan MacDowell Eakins, Childe Hassam, William Merritt Chase, Cecilia Beaux, Mary Cassatt and Thomas Anshultz.

Seraphin Gallery

1108 Pine St. 215.923.7000.
www.seraphingallery.com
On Antique Row, carries works by Sidney Goodman who is, like Eakins, a lifetime Philadelphian, PAFA instructor and famous for painting local characters.

Snyderman-Works Galleries

303 Cherry St. 215.238.9576.
www.snyderman-works.com

The Union League

140 S. Broad St. 215.563.6500.
www.unionleague.org

Water Works Restaurant and Lounge

640 Water Works Dr. 215.236.9000.
www.thewaterworksrestaurant.com

Woodmere Art Museum

9201 Germantown Ave. 215.247-0476.
www.woodmereartmuseum.org