

Review Essay: Grappling with “Big Painting”: Akela Reason’s *Thomas Eakins and the Uses of History*

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Thomas Eakins made news in the summer of 2010 when *The New York Times* ran an article on the restoration of his most famous painting, *The Gross Clinic* (1875), a work that formed the centerpiece of an exhibition aptly named “An Eakins Masterpiece Restored: Seeing ‘The Gross Clinic’ Anew,” at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.¹ The exhibition reminded viewers of the complexity and sheer gutsiness of Eakins’s vision. On an oversized canvas, Eakins constructed a complex scene in an operating theater—the dramatic implications of that location fully intact—at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. We witness the demanding work of the five-member surgical team of Dr. Samuel Gross, all of whom are deeply engaged in the process of removing dead tissue from the thigh bone of an etherized young man on an operating table. Rising above the hunched figures of his assistants, Dr. Gross pauses momentarily to describe an aspect of his work while his students dutifully observe him from their seats in the surrounding bleachers. Spotlights on Gross’s bloodied, scalpel-wielding right hand and his unnaturally large head, crowned by a halo of wiry grey hair, clarify his mastery of both the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. Gross’s foil is the woman in black at the left, probably the patient’s sclerotic mother, who recoils in horror from the operation and flings her left arm, with its talon-like fingers, over her violated gaze.

The Gross Clinic is undoubtedly a great painting—one of the greatest in American art history—and worthy of our ongoing attention for many reasons. It is, as Elizabeth Johns explains in a 1983 study of the artist that serves as a model for Akela Reason’s new book,² a “heroic” portrait of one of

¹ Karen Rosenberg, “Deft Surgery for a Painting under the Scalpel,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 2010, p. C28. The exhibition could be seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the repository for much of Eakins’s work, from July 23, 2010 to January 9, 2011. Unfortunately, the *Times* ran a picture of the *unrestored* painting with their review, an oversight that they noted in a subsequent correction.

² Akela Reason, *Thomas Eakins and the Uses of History* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

the artist's greatest contemporaries.³ Indeed, Gross, who achieved considerable success as one of the leading surgeons of his day, also advanced the cause of medicine. After receiving his degree from Jefferson Medical College at age twenty-three, he proceeded to translate various European texts on surgery, to teach in medical colleges around the country, and to conduct and publish research on wounds of the intestines that would prove invaluable in the treatment of injuries during the U.S. Civil War. He championed "conservative" surgery, a philosophical approach applied primarily to diseases of the limbs that favored waiting for the patient's body to heal itself and that saw amputation, the then-standard course of action, as a sign of the surgeon's failure. Gross also developed a reputation for his compassion and geniality; he bore his achievements without vanity and inspired countless young doctors in his circle. *The Gross Clinic*, then, celebrates not only the achievements of its protagonist but also America's decisive role in transforming surgery from a mechanical skill into a sophisticated practice during the nineteenth century.

The Gross Clinic also reflects Eakins's lifelong study of anatomy. A Philadelphia native, Eakins plunged into the sciences—natural history, chemistry, and physics—while still in high school. Johns informs us that students in Eakins's circle were "encouraged to supplement their scientific instruction at the high school by attending anatomical and surgical clinics in the many medical facilities"; such training was essential for the well-educated young man.⁴ Eager for additional instruction, Eakins enrolled in the anatomical lectures that were part of his drawing classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1862. Shortly thereafter, he studied with the surgeon Joseph Pancoast at the Jefferson Medical College, an opportunity that allowed him to attend lectures on anatomy by none other than Dr. Gross. As an art student in Paris from 1866-69, Eakins observed surgical clinics at Paris hospitals and at the École de Médecine. His anatomical studies after his return to Philadelphia led to his role as chief preparator/demonstrator for the surgeon W. W. Keen, M.D., who lectured at the Pennsylvania Academy, and to his own lessons in anatomy and dissection over the next several years.⁵ Given this larger context, then, *The Gross Clinic* transcends its ostensible subject and more broadly reflects Eakins's life-long desire to understand the human body not only from its exterior appearance but also from within. It links him to Leonardo da Vinci, Théodore Géricault, and other European Old Masters, whose preoccupation with the body drew them to extensive anatomical study.

The Gross Clinic highlights Eakins's affiliation with the European Old Masters in other ways. Gross's scalpel-wielding right hand echoes the

³ Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 46-81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

brush-wielding right hand of Diego Velázquez in *Las Meninas* (1656), an allusion that implicitly raises the surgeon's work to the level of artistry. Eakins studied the Spanish masterpiece during a brief trip in December, 1869, to Madrid, where he developed a new appreciation for the power of expressive brushwork.⁶ His assimilation of the lessons of Velázquez, which Johns superbly describes in her monograph, re-emerges in the expressive brushwork of his late works, particularly in his portrait of Walt Whitman (1887) and in *William Rush and His Model* (ca. 1908).

The Gross Clinic serves as prolegomenon to Reason's study by conveying many of the key themes that she addresses: Eakins's celebration of a heroic historical figure, his sense of the importance of life study to artists and to art history, and his desire to affiliate himself with the Old Masters. Instead of rehearsing the chronological overviews of Eakins's life and work, Reason offers new interpretations of Eakins's use of historical themes to advance, as she puts it, "some of his most deeply held professional aspirations" (p. 4). She views Eakins's aesthetics as highly deliberative, a project constructed by the artist throughout his life and periodically re-shaped by his shifting identities and positions within Philadelphia society. Steeped in history during his four years at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, Eakins absorbed the values of the Old Masters and honed his sense of the importance of creating work, as the artist Cecilia Beaux put it, "outside of fad or fashion" (p. 1).

Eakins's training at the *École* also taught him that the greatest artists, including the ancients, created images of the human body not by copying plaster models but by working directly from life. Indeed, Eakins took the principle to heart. He would insist that his students at the Pennsylvania Academy—men and women alike—not only draw from models but also *serve as* models in his photographic studies of the nude. In a gesture of supreme self-confidence, Eakins himself modeled in some of the photographs. Not surprisingly, the practice generated a variety of reactions. Some praised Eakins's candor and the depth of his commitment to his subject matter, likening his motion studies to those of Eadweard J. Muybridge and praising them for their anticipation of cinema. Others, however, looked skeptically at images of the nude Eakins, particularly the one set in his studio in which he transports the inanimate body of an equally nude woman, ostensibly one of his students. Moreover, Eakins wrapped his female models' heads with dark cloths, thereby nullifying their identities, a detail that seems particularly aggressive and disturbing to the modern viewer.⁷ Still, in all of these efforts,

⁶ In a talk at the Annual Meeting of the College Art Association in 1979, Elizabeth Johns pursued affinities between the portrait of Gross and the position of the figure in Velázquez's *Portrait of Juan Martínez Montañés* (1635-36; Prado, Madrid).

⁷ Did Eakins treat his models in this way for practical purposes, that is, to focus attention more squarely on their bodies during life study, or was he driven by more personal motives? The topic has been cause for debate. For example, the contemporary

Eakins sought to prepare himself to paint what he termed “big paintings,” works that would have lasting historical value for his own reputation and for American art as a whole.

Reason constructs her study around such “big paintings”—though not the obvious ones, such as *The Gross Clinic*—and the specific ways in which Eakins used them to construct his story of American art. She begins with *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1876-77). As a student in Paris, Eakins had learned that sculpture, specifically High Classical Greek sculpture, represented the pinnacle of art history. Back at home, he found that most American sculptors, particularly those who sought to emulate the Greeks, had emigrated to Italy, where marble was plentiful and studio assistants were plentiful, skilled, and inexpensive. Determined to stay in Philadelphia, he needed a role model and found one in the unlikely figure of Rush. A Federal sculptor who mainly carved ships’ mastheads, Rush had fallen into obscurity; Eakins set out to re-cast his identity as an American hero. The process would entail some creative thinking, even some manipulation of historical facts. For example, although Rush would never have considered using nude models for his carvings of “allegorical figures,” Eakins pictured him working in his studio with a nude model as his reference. This little piece of fiction allowed Eakins to convey some points about the value of working directly from life—the practice, according to his Parisian mentors, of the ancients. Ultimately, Eakins hoped to fashion an artistic enfilade inhabited at one end by Phidias (the artist responsible for the major sculptural programs of the Parthenon), some of the Old Masters in the middle, and Rush at the other end.

To underscore Rush’s devotion both to his forebears and to his own work, Eakins directed the artist’s gaze not at the nude before him (an option full of lascivious implications) but, instead, at his own sculpture. Envisioning the model—again, an entirely fictitious character—took some ingenuity. Reason contrasts Eakins’s solution to the idealized (and, somewhat paradoxically, more libidinous) representations of Phryne, the model for the fourth century BCE Greek sculptor Praxiteles, painted by such nineteenth-century artists as Gustave Boulanger, Jean-Léon Gérôme, and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. These distinctions reveal that Eakins fabricated a “professional and therefore chaste” view of Rush’s relationship to his (imaginary) model (p. 43). Conveyed in this light, Rush’s unblemished professionalism would make

artist Philip Pearlstein (b. 1924) recently chastised certain “postmodern art historians” who view Eakins’s nude studies as evidence of his “conflicted sexuality.” As one who has spent many years drawing and painting the nude, Pearlstein appreciates the care and attention that both Eakins and Muybridge gave to their examinations and called for them to be recognized as “among the most influential artists on the ideas of 20th-century art.” See Philip Pearlstein, “Moving Targets,” *ARTnews* 109, no. 11 (December 2010), accessed online at: http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art_id=3148.

him the logical inheritor of the view of the history of sculpture that Eakins creatively constructed.

Although Reason occasionally rehearses points, even phrases, somewhat excessively (see, for example, pages 27, 31, and 32 for iterations of the idea that Eakins “placed Rush at the beginning of a native sculptural tradition”), she greatly enriches our understanding of the social contexts of Eakins’s work. She shows how Eakins’s interest in the history of American art coincided with a broader exploration of that history in contemporary art criticism and art exhibitions. For example, the decade preceding the Rush painting witnessed the publication of Henry T. Tuckerman’s *Book of the Artists* (1867) and an increasing number of articles on the arts in *The Nation* and *Lippencott’s Magazine*. It coincided, too, with more opportunities to see and study works of American art, such as the “First Chronological Exhibition of American Art” at the Brooklyn Art Association in 1872 (although this exhibition was neither comprehensive nor chronologically structured). When considered together, the articles, exhibitions, and the Rush painting could evoke a new appreciation for the history of American art. In short, through this deliberate enterprise of illusion-weaving and historical revisionism, Eakins could re-craft Rush’s identity into that of an American Old Master.⁸

In previous essays, scholars have interrogated the place of Eakins’s “historical series” paintings—such as *In Grandmother’s Time* (1876) and *Home-spun* (1881)—within the broader context of the artist’s work. With their scenes of women seated at spinning wheels while dressed in lacy caps and gauzy gowns, they seem out of character for an artist so closely attuned to contemporary developments in the arts, especially photography. Why would Eakins paint images evocative of late-eighteenth-century America? Barbara Weinberg argues that *Home-spun* reflected “nostalgia for simpler times” and served as an antidote to the Industrial Revolution’s aggressive eradication of home manufacture.⁹ She sees the same nostalgia in Eakins’s *Arcadia* (ca. 1883), with its three nude boys, two of whom play musical pipes, in an open

⁸ For another useful perspective on this painting, one that Reason does not address in her study, see Alan C. Braddock, “Bodies of Water: Thomas Eakins, Racial Ecology, and the Limits of Civic Reason,” in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, ed. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), pp. 129-50. Here, Braddock suggests that Eakins used the white female personification of the Schuylkill River, which is distinctly more manicured in Philadelphia than the nearby polluted marshes and fisheries south of the city, as “an epitome or meta-representation of his racial ecology in art,” that is, as a means of encoding his “creative detachment from troubling social and environmental realities that were beyond the pale of representation, even for his realism”; see *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁹ H. Barbara Weinberg, “Thomas Eakins and The Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (1994), p. 25.

patch of bucolic landscape.¹⁰ Focusing on *In Grandmother's Time*, Marc Simpson addresses its “perplexing” sense of “locution.” Seen from the artist’s perspective, if the “time” represented is, indeed, the turn of the *previous* century, then the elderly woman represented would not be Eakins’s grandmother but, instead, his “great- (or great-great-) grandmother.”¹¹ Simpson also points to discrepancies in the dating of the objects represented, for while the woman wears a late-eighteenth-century dress, the spindle and toys around her date to the mid-nineteenth century. For Simpson, the conflict between the “firm figural constructions and solid placement in space” and the “purposeful indeterminacy of genre, time, and even objects portrayed” in the painting stimulates the viewer’s engagement and invites us to “provide as much of a chronological envelope as necessary” for the appreciation of the work. Ultimately, these contrasts and dislocations infuse the “historical” paintings with their sense of “vitality.”¹²

Reason offers a new perspective. She situates the works in the context of the burgeoning field of psychology and the study, more specifically, of women’s health. She argues that Eakins viewed the colonial era as an idyllic one for women, a time when they were called upon to perform stress-free domestic work. She describes the friendship that Eakins shared with two physicians, Horatio C. Wood and Silas Weir Mitchell, whose area of expertise was “mental exhaustion,” or “neurasthenia,” a condition nearly always associated with women. Wood and Mitchell championed the idea—preposterous to the modern mind—that access to education caused women to suffer psychological breakdowns, a theory that quickly led to harrowing claims about the end of motherhood and the extinction of civilization. Reason does not address the folly of these ideas or the fact that Wood, Mitchell, and their colleagues grossly idealized the lives of colonial women. (Most women of the period, especially the poor, suffered under exhausting working conditions in the home.¹³) Instead, she places them in the context of the growing interest, during Reconstruction, in the colonial period, one that culminated in the display of colonial artifacts at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. The fact that Reason’s analysis of Eakins’s colonial revival works remains somewhat dissatisfying may be a product of what she describes several times as the “ambivalence” that Eakins himself felt about the

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹ Marc Simpson, “Eakins’s Vision of the Past and the Building of a Reputation,” in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. Darrel Sewell et al. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), p. 215.

¹² Ibid., p. 216.

¹³ For a brief but cogent overview of this topic, see Mary Beth Norton, “The Myth of the Golden Age,” in *Women of America: A History*, ed. Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), pp. 37-47.

role of women in society. For while he was, in fact, an advocate for women's education and fought to include women in his classes at the Pennsylvania Academy, he seemed, through his friendships and his "historical" paintings, to idealize more submissive social roles for women. Ultimately, the paintings, steeped in nostalgia, fail to rival his best works, that is, paintings and photographs that embody his deep-seated engagement with the complexities of the modern era.

The public revelation in 1985 of a large collection of Eakins's photographs fundamentally transformed our understanding of his work.¹⁴ These photographs revealed figures and objects (trees, boats, etc.) that reappeared, almost line for line, in Eakins's paintings. Scholars could no longer argue that Eakins imagined those painted arrangements or created them spontaneously. Moreover, infrared photographs of the paintings, which revealed extensive preparatory underdrawings, confirmed this surprising assessment. Seen together, the photographs, both old and new, proved that Eakins constructed some of his paintings by projecting and tracing forms from the photographs onto his canvases. For example, he projected several clusters of figures to create *Mending the Net* (1881). He ensured the correct placement of the figures by inscribing reference marks, sometimes as many as sixty tiny lines in a figure measuring no more than 4-3/8 inches high. He proceeded faithfully to reproduce the images in oil. While the practice had been used by some artists in the past, it had never before been detected in Eakins's work.

This scholarship serves as the point of departure for Reason's examination of Eakins's relationship to ancient art, another of his "uses" of history. The chapter entitled "Reenacting the Antique" refers to Eakins's belief that the ancient Greeks carved their sculptures—specifically, of nude figures—from life. As no drawings exist to prove this point, theorists have long offered their own ideas on the subject. Reason's strongest contribution to her study may be her introduction to this debate of the nineteenth-century French theorist and artist Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran. Lecoq believed that the ancient artist engaged in "memory training," which is not, as it might first seem, about studying motifs—be they works of art or scenes from nature—so

¹⁴ After the death in 1938 of Eakins's wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins, Charles Bregler, one of Eakins's most devoted students, took possession of a large number of the artist's works—paintings, drawings, photographs, letters, sketches, plaster casts, and so on. His collection remained hidden until Kathleen Foster and Elizabeth Milroy discovered it in 1983. (Susan Eakins had indicated that she intended to have the items destroyed, so while Bregler's legal right to the works has been questioned, his efforts undoubtedly saved them from destruction.) For an in-depth examination of the collection, see Kathleen Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1997). See also the excellent examination of the relationships between the photographs and paintings in Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman, "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. Sewell et al., pp. 225-38.

intently that you can mimetically reconstruct them from memory. It is, instead, about learning these motifs so well that you can recreate them according to your own visual language. (Reason would have done well to clarify this point.) The artist would begin by observing and drawing motifs based on memory; he would then transcend memory to produce a composition that is, in Lecoq's words, "original, because it comes entirely from himself" (p. 110).

Eakins studied with Lecoq at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Although Lecoq had nothing to say about the use of photography in "memory training," his theory inspired Eakins to translate the process through his own aesthetics. After returning to Philadelphia, he acquired a camera and began taking photographs. Using the projection and inscription process described above, he put some images from photographs to use when creating his paintings. Reason sees *Swimming* (1885)—a scene of six nude men arrayed around a rocky outcropping in front of a pond—as "the fullest integration of Lecoq's theories into [Eakins's] art" (p. 90). The man at the far left, who assumes the reclining pose held by numerous figures at the ends of classical pediments, embodies Eakins's allegiance to memory; the man who dives into the pond at the far right embodies the artist's interest in the freshness of photography. The painting, then, synthesizes memory and imagination, old and new, antique and real. Unfortunately, the Academy's Committee on Instruction did not view it through this theoretical lens. They cast their more prosaic glance on the work and saw that Eakins used his students as (nude) models and then pictured himself as the (nude) swimmer in the lower right corner. Having already balked at the artist's use of nude models in the classroom, they now had sufficient cause, in February 1886, to dismiss him from the Academy.

The case of the *Crucifixion* (1880), the next praxis in Reason's study, reveals how scholars can arrive at very different interpretations of the same painting. The subject, of course, is grim and highly realistic: the figure of Jesus nailed to the Cross, his head cast deeply in shadow, his rib cage distended, his bloodied hands constricted. The rocky outcropping of the setting blatantly underscores the violence of the theme. In their work on the painting, art historians Lloyd Goodrich, Henry Adams, Jane Dillenberger, Joshua Taylor, Martin Berger, and others emphasize the peculiar absence of spiritual overtones; for example, there is no halo surrounding Jesus's head.¹⁵ Many have linked the work to the nearly concurrent—and widely influential—theory proposed by Ernest Renan, author of *The Life of Jesus*

¹⁵ An exception to this interpretation is one by David Lubin, who underscores the religious overtones of the work: "But [*The Crucifixion*] is as religious, in its own way, as Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), in as much as both are *cri de coeur*, expressions of human solitude, loneliness, abandonment. This is what it means, literally, to stand alone." See David Lubin, "Thomas Eakins and the Strains of Modern Life," in *Pittura Americana del XIX secolo: Atti del convegno*, ed. Marco Goldin and H. Barbara Weinberg (Treviso: Linea d'ombra Libri, 2008), pp. 145-46.

(1863, *Vie de Jésus*), that Jesus was a remarkable preacher but not the son of God. To underscore this reading, Reason cites Eakins's view of Jesus as God's "human prophet," though not part of a Trinity. She asserts that "Eakins acknowledged Jesus's exemplary status, even while limiting his powers to the terrestrial sphere" (p. 130).

Why would Eakins choose this topic? Scholars have offered various theories. For example, Sidney Kirkpatrick argues that Eakins, who in 1880 was at a high point in his relationship with the Academy, selected a subject familiar to the Old Masters and, by extension, associated himself with them as an American "modern master." Reason provisionally accepts but is ultimately dissatisfied with this line of reasoning. In seeking to understand what *The Crucifixion*—which Eakins identified as his "best painting"—meant to him, she refocuses her interpretive lens to 1886, the year in which Eakins sent the work to the Southern Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky. In this context, it did not celebrate the artist's career within the Academy but, instead, reflected its derailment. She argues that Eakins, having recently been fired, felt "crucified" by the Directors. She notes that for the Louisville exhibition, he changed the title of the work from "The Crucifixion" to "Ecce Homo," or "Behold the Man"—in short, Behold Eakins. In an alignment that one can only view today as histrionic, if not borderline megalomaniacal, Eakins viewed himself as Jesus, a teacher who challenged orthodoxy and who suffered injustices at the hands of those who failed to understand and appreciate him. He saw his ouster as a martyrdom, a process of physically suffering for one's beliefs, and reflected it in his painting.

The final major chapter in Reason's discerning study is her examination of two of the most explicitly historical pairs of sculptures in Eakins's *oeuvre*: two bronze panels on the Brooklyn Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch (1891-95), the largest Civil War monument of the period, and two on the Trenton (New Jersey) Battle Monument (1893), which commemorate Revolutionary War heroes. The works are steeped not only in American history but also in the history of art, for Eakins used them to explore his affiliations with William Rush, the Federal sculptor whom he had immortalized in an earlier painting, and Phidias, the Greek mastermind behind the Parthenon marbles. He viewed these public commissions as opportunities to create, like his heroes, "enduring public sculptures" (p. 147).

Eakins cultivated his appreciation for Phidias's work in Paris through such teachers as Lecoq. As a teacher himself in Philadelphia, he encouraged his students to explore sculpture as a means to understand the "solidity, weight, and roundness of the figure" (p. 151). He teased out the inherent complexities of relief sculpture, where forms can project up to three-quarters in the round from a flat back panel. Artists working in relief must therefore grapple with the exigencies of linear perspective, vary the depths of their figures, and account for visual distortions through the perspective of the viewer, that is, someone standing on the ground below and looking up. In his characteristically diligent fashion, Eakins prepared for the Brooklyn commission by studying. Working with a collaborator, William R.

O'Donovan, on two scenes—*Abraham Lincoln on Horseback* and *Ulysses S. Grant on Horseback*—and responsible for representing the horses of both men, he searched for correct equine models. Settling on “Billy” (for Lincoln) and “Clinker” (for Grant), he took photographs and spent an enormous amount of time making wax models of the horses in the field. He seemed, at last, to envision himself as Phidias preparing to carve the frieze of the horseman in the Panathenaic Festival. He then created quarter-size models of the horses for transfer to life-size versions.

Eakins's Achilles' heel was his inability to uphold deadlines. While O'Donovan was still struggling with the figures of Lincoln and Grant, Eakins began to work on the life-size versions of the panels, that is, before he received approval for his quarter-size models. To make matters worse, he was offered, in the meantime, the commission for the Trenton monument—one scene of troops preparing for the battle and another of the Continental Army crossing the Delaware. Although Trenton required his immediate attention, he refused to set aside the Brooklyn project. He would not begin the Trenton reliefs for another seven months, well behind schedule. Reason describes the intricacies of Eakins's work on all these reliefs in detail—perhaps slightly more than they warrant, for they can hardly be described as compelling works of art. Indeed, when the Brooklyn panels were finally installed in December 1895, they received scant attention. A few press reports criticized the awkwardness of Eakins's and O'Donovan's work. Corroborating these reactions, Reason points out a major flaw in the panels: by using very high relief, both Grant's and Lincoln's bodies were truncated on the sides attached to the panels. When looking from below and from a specific angle, the viewer receives the impression that Lincoln's left arm and Grant's right have been amputated, an “unpleasant association,” Reason wryly observes, “for a war memorial, especially as the war had left so many soldiers maimed and disfigured” (p. 168).

A terracotta statue of Moses on the Witherspoon Building in Philadelphia, done in 1895-97 with Samuel Murray, his chief pupil, would be Eakins's last collaborative work and nearly his last work in sculpture.¹⁶ It is somewhat telling that Eakins was concurrently producing one of his greatest portraits, that of the brilliant American scientist Henry Rowland (1897). (The frame alone, which Eakins also created, deserves and has received much appreciative attention.) While Reason attributes Eakins's lack of success in his relief sculptures to his inability to collaborate successfully with O'Donovan and others, it may also reflect the fact that his artistic strengths and perhaps also his enthusiasm resided elsewhere—that is, in painting and, specifically, in portraits, especially during the final two decades of his life.

Readers looking for a (nearly) comprehensive overview of Eakins's life and work will want to turn to the multi-authored book published to

¹⁶ He executed a final relief sculpture, a portrait of Mary Hallock Greenwalt, which is unlocated; see Reason, *Thomas Eakins and the Uses of History*, p. 179.

accompany “Thomas Eakins: American Realist,” an exhibition that opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in October 2001.¹⁷ Those eager for a more intimate, informal exploration of the artist’s life will enjoy Sidney D. Kirkpatrick’s biographical study *The Revenge of Thomas Eakins*.¹⁸ Written by a documentary film producer and colored with the somewhat breathless tone of the biopic, this book provides readers with a wealth of information on Eakins the Man—for example, the fact that he was fluent in seven languages, constructed his own cameras, and studied logarithms and etymology for fun. With these and other studies readily available, Reason wisely avoids the standard, chronological overview. Instead, she puts forth a fresh theoretical construct in which to examine works that have been overlooked or insufficiently analyzed. Her study sheds new light on Eakins’s deliberate effort to construct what he viewed as a proper historical setting for the appreciation and reception of American art. Reason supports her claims with meticulous, thorough research into both the existing published literature and unpublished archives. By situating her claims so often within the context of American history, she extends the appeal of her work deep into American Studies, a field that will greatly benefit from her careful attention to details of works of art. Finally, while we still need a compelling examination of the artist’s late portraits, Reason’s study has made a superb contribution to the literature on Eakins, one that invites kindred explorations of the “uses” of history in the works of other American artists.

¹⁷ The exhibition was organized by Darrel Sewell, with the assistance of W. Douglass Paschall, and traveled to the Musée d’Orsay (February 5-May 12, 2002) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (June 28-September 18, 2002). The book, which contains essays by Kathleen A. Foster, Nica Gutman, William Innes Homer, and others, was published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Although it is organized chronologically, it contains thoughtful essays on various aspects of Eakins’s life and work, such as his relationship to the Academy (by Foster), his treatment of photographs (by Mark Tucker and Gutman), and his life as a writer (by Homer).

¹⁸ Sidney D. Kirkpatrick, *The Revenge of Thomas Eakins* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

