

THOMAS EAKINS DEAN OF ARTISTS

Lived Retired Life for Several Years Before His Death

Masterpiece "The Clinic of Dr. Samuel D. Gross" Hangs in Jefferson Hospital

Among the tragedies of the times in which we live, the significance of the removal from our material consciousness of such a powerful figure in art as that of Thomas Eakins is hardly grasped.

In the turmoil of the present, confronted daily with news of fresh disaster, our senses dulled to a keen sense of the individual, personal loss becomes merged in prevailing calamity. It is only after calm has been restored after raging storms that one can count and appreciate the loss of the mighty oaks that have gone down before the tempest.

The death of Henry James and the consequent gap in literary annuals is noted but hastily, the loss of Kitchener is news, but for a day, tremendous as was each in his special field, and so the passing of a giant figure in American art, the loss of the dean of American painters seems engulfed in the general destruction all about, its true import sinking into the consciousness of but few.

It is true that Mr. Eakins lived so retired a life since his health began to fail some years ago, and he was personally so indifferent to the plaudits of the crowd, that many doubtless passed daily the dignified portals of his quiet home on Mt. Vernon street, without realizing the importance of the painter there enjoying in peace and tranquility his declining years, surrounded by his faithful intimates, his innumerable canvases, the souvenirs of a life of more than ordinary activity, and shielded from every anxiety by a devoted wife, herself an artist, and by his loving friend and pupil, Samuel Murray, sculptor.

Though Mr. Eakins' health had been failing gradually for several years, he was only confined to his room in the end and for ten days. He died on Sunday last, June 25, one month short of his seventy-second birthday, and was cremated the following day at the Chelton Hills Crematory, where he was followed by six of his oldest friends, who acted as pall bearers, and Mrs. Eakins' two brothers, William and Walter MacDowell. The pall bearers were H. Humphreys Moore, Louis Huson, Thomas Egan, Dr. Frederick Milliken, Samuel Murray and Gilbert Parker.

Mr. Moore was a boyhood friend of Mr. Eakins, a fellow student in art, both at the Pennsylvania Academy here, and at the *Beaux Arts*, in Paris. He is a mute, and Mr. Eakins learned the mute language in order to converse with his friend and during their student days acted as interpreter for him in the classes. Mr. Huson is a French photo-engraver; Mr. Egan is a pupil, and Dr. Milliken appears in the Agnew portrait.

During his last years these men had figured much in the daily life of the artist, especially Mr. Murray, the sculptor, who saw Mr. Eakins or communicated with him daily, and who was with him constantly for days before he died and at the bedside when the end came.

The friendship between the two was very extraordinary and Mr. Murray stood to the painter in the light of a son. They shared their work and their pleasures, and for years had a studio together, when Mr. Eakins assisted Mr. Murray in the modeling of the colossal figures of the prophets, which adorn the Wither- spoon Building in this city.

Thomas Eakins was born in Philadelphia, July 25, 1844, the son of Benjamin Eakins and Caroline Cowperthwaite Eakins. The house, 1729 Mt. Vernon street, in which he died was the childhood home, and the door bears his father's name plate, "B. Eakins" to this day. The old gentleman was a writing master, well-known, well-loved and well respected in the Philadelphia of his day, and he lived to enjoy a good old age, dying in his eighties from an attack of grippe.

Thomas Eakins commenced the study of his profession as a youth in the old Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, when the institution was located at Tenth and Chestnut streets, in the building afterwards Fox's Theatre and now the Chestnut Street Opera House.

He afterwards, about 1868, went to Paris, where he entered the "Imperial Schools," now the "Ecole des Beaux-Arts," studying sculpture under Dumont, Chapu and Barye and painting under Gerome and Bonnat. The souvenir of his years in Paris was indelibly fixed upon his memory, he spoke excellent French, as well as Spanish and no Frenchman ever knocked at his door in vain, for he felt and ineffable debt of gratitude to the nation which had so cordially received him in his formative days.

He studied animal sculpture with Barye, going with him to the Jardin des Plantes or Zoological Garden in Paris. But it was Gerome whom Mr. Eakins especially honored as his teacher, and the bond between them seems to have been strong, for Gerome during his latter life never failed to ask after his American pupil when Americans came to him, and after his death Mr. Eakins never wished to visit Paris. The influence of Bonnat one finds also a marked quality in his work as a painter.

In Gerome's studio were working at the same time with Mr. Eakins, a number of French painters who have since become famous, including Dagnan-Bouveret and Louis Cure Sargent and Mr. Eakins were fellow students under Bonnat.

Upon the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Mr. Eakins left Paris and spent about eight months in Spain. As a souvenir of this time Mr. Eakins preserves a large canvas of a Spanish woman and Mr. Jordan owns a portrait of a gypsy type.

Upon his return to Philadelphia Mr. Eakins painted what may still be considered his masterpiece, certainly the masterpiece of his youth, the picture known as "The Clinic of Dr. Samuel D. Gross," which hangs on the wall of the west lecture room at the Jefferson College, at Tenth and Walnut streets.

This was done in 1875, when the painter was but thirty-one years of age. It is signed and dated across the lower right hand corner of the picture. Mr. Eakins was a student in Jefferson College, taking a special course in anatomy in connection with his art studies, and it was while in attendance at the college that he saw Dr. Gross in action and placed upon canvas the impression of what he saw.

In the painting Dr. Gross is seen standing in the centre, scalpel in hand talking to the class as was his custom during an operation. His great head upon which is a growth of bushy grey hair, worn rather long, catches the full light from the windows, and the figure strongly dominates the picture, though the canvas contains many figures.

We cannot see the Gross nor the Agnew portraits without being reminded of Rembrandt's masterly canvases dealing with similar subjects, but these by Eakins are so strikingly done from his own point of view, so thoroughly sincere and true impressions of what he saw, so faithful to the least detail, so free from any consciousness, that the comparison goes no further than subject.

The surgeon and his assistants wear their ordinary street clothes, including their coats, which seems strange to modern eyes, and gives character and flavor to the picture. The surgeon's costume is careless and convincing. The patient is a man from whose thigh is being removed a piece of dead bone.

Seated directly in front of Dr. Gross is Dr. Charles S. Briggs, while in the front rows to the right of the professor, is the clinic clerk, Dr. Franklin West.

Dr. W. Joseph Hearn, now Professor Emeritus of Clinical Surgery, is seated at the end of the operating table nearest the entrance to the amphitheatre,

administering chloroform, the anesthetic employed by Dr. Gross.

Dr. James M. Barton is seen on the opposite side of the operating table, directly across from Professor Gross, probing in the incision made, while Dr. Daniel Apple, seated on Dr. Barton's left, is holding a tenaculum. Dr. Samuel W. Gross, son of the professor, who succeeded his father in the chair of surgery, is seen leaning against the side of the entrance way into the room. The individual just faintly distinguishable in shirt sleeves to the rear of the professor, is "Hughey," the janitor, who was well known to every Jefferson student of those times. Mr. Eakins has included his own portrait, which is that of the man who leans, pencil in hand, upon the side of the entrance to the arena to the right.

Just beside the doctor to the left is the mother of the patient, in the attitude of shielding her eyes from the horror of what is taking place. This figure is a very powerful one and makes a fine balance to the picture, by introducing this note of human tragedy into a scene regarded by the other spectators as of purely scientific interest.

The picture was exhibited at the Centennial of 1876, in the government collection. The subject was advanced for its time in Philadelphia and the canvas was refused a place in the public art gallery. It has been exhibited at the expositions in Chicago, Buffalo and St. Louis, where in 1904 it was awarded a gold medal.

The portrait of Benjamin Howard Rand, who occupied the chair of chemistry from 1864 to 1877, hangs in the same room with the Gross and was painted by the artist in 1874. It is thus a very early portrait by Eakins and must have been done immediately upon his return from Europe.

The canvas is in need of some attention, though on the whole well preserved, and it hangs in a poor light. It may, however, be considered as a very important work by the painter, comparable with his best. It shows Dr. Rand seated behind his work table, littered with his materials and petting a large gray cat, which stands amongst the disorder.

The Jefferson College owns also a much more recent work by Thomas Eakins in the portrait of Dr. William Smith Forbes, painted in 1905. This picture was presented to the institution by Dr. Forbes' students in the classes from 1905 to 1908.

After his return to Philadelphia from Europe in 1876, Mr. Eakins became the chief instructor in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he remodelled the schools after the French system of instruction and established the regime that still obtains there. Under his guidance the schools flourished to a memorable degree, and he was at this time an instructor whose personality swept all before it.

Many of our more famous of the older artists of the city and elsewhere were students of Mr. Eakins.

After he left the Academy Mr. Eakins founded the "League" for the study of art whose classes were first held at 1238 Chestnut street and afterwards at 1816 Market street. During this time Mr. Eakins was more than a teacher, he financed many of his struggling pupils. Indeed, money never seems to have entered into the calculation of the artist. It is well known that he gave many of his best paintings away. The houses of his friends are filled with them. His pleasure and interest was to paint, he never concerned himself further than that.

The portrait of Dr. Agnew, or the "Dr. Hayes Agnew Clinic," one of Mr. Eakins' most celebrated canvases, is owned by the University of Pennsylvania, to whom it was the promised gift of three undergraduate classes of the medical department at the 115th annual commencement held May 1, 1889, the students having selected Thomas Eakins to be the painter.

The canvas is eleven by seven feet and represents the distinguished surgeon at a clinic, where before him is shown the subject upon which an operation has just been performed, and those who have taken part in it, while in the background are portrayed about thirty students to whom Dr. Agnew is lecturing and a portrait of the artist himself.

The picture was finished about 1892 in the very height of the artist's career.

Mr. Eakins has painted many distinguished men. One of his finest portraits is that of Rudolph Hennig, or the "Cello Player," done in 1896. It is owned by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, who bought it for an absurdly low figure. The Academy also includes in its permanent collection on deposit an admirable portrait of Charles L. Fussell, a fellow student of Mr. Eakins.

A study of the figure of Dr. Agnew for the great portrait was recently shown at the Pennsylvania Academy and bought by Dr. Barnes, of Overbrook. About the same time Mr. Eakins exhibited for the second time a number of his older canvases, including a portrait of Mrs. Talcott Williams, unfinished, but of great beauty and distinction; a portrait of a youth, a "Head of an Artist;" a portrait of Wedia Cook, Mrs. Stanley Addicks, and others.

The last exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy included four: "Music," "Pair Oared Shell," "Pushing for Rail" and "Starting Out After Rail." In 1914, he showed a portrait, of "Dr. Leonard, Martyr to Science," the sketch for the Agnew portrait and a portrait of Charles E. Dana.

The Panama-Pacific Exposition contained several canvases, including his "Crucifixion," which is retained in San Francisco, pending possible purchase. His portrait of President Hayes is in the National Gallery, in Washington, and he is represented in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, by several canvases.

Mr. Eakins received the usual amount of medals accorded a painter of distinction in this country, and to which he attached no importance whatever.

Among the many important canvases hanging in the artist's home is a powerful full length portrait of Prof. Rowland, of John's Hopkins University, the celebrated scientist, whose work with the spectrum brought him fame. He furnished the Central High School of this city with the grating for spectroscopic work that is one of the most prized treasures of the astronomical department of that school.

The fame and distinction of Mr. Eakins' life as an artist is held perhaps in higher repute in Europe, especially in France, than in his own country. There his extreme simplicity of life, his unswerving sincerity of purpose, his absolute ideals of truth and honesty were understood to contribute to the greatness of his character as a man, and to be the index to his qualities as a painter.

He had in a way the misfortune to live in advance of his time. He brought with him from Paris the essence of the traditions then in vogue in that most modern of cities, and though he implanted them firmly in his native land, it was not himself that always profited of them from the worldly point of view.

At the time when he was painting most vigorously, his work was often criticized for what was thought its "ugliness." This was at a time when Manet was promulgating his remarkable paradox "Le beau c'est le laid" (beauty is ugliness) which revolutionized the whole attitude toward art in his day, especially towards portraiture. Eakins could not flatter his sitters, and some of his finest portraits were refused, like that of Mrs. Talcott Williams, because the painter had not made the sitter other than she was. We know now that he caught all she had of a rare distinction and elegance, and a very great inherent beauty.

That his work will live when most of that produced by his contemporaries is forgotten has always been the firm conviction of those who know. Already he had begun to reap some of the fruits of his industrious and honorable life and work.

The loss of such a figure in the history of American art cannot be reckoned. The effect upon the growing students is incalculable. Such an influence standing almost a solitary figure in the present state of commercialism, was greater than we knew.