

Amy Werbel. *Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp. xii, 194, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$55.00.)

Amy Werbel's *Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* traces how Thomas Eakins dedicated himself to portraying the human body as realistically as possible and how this devotion conflicted with nineteenth-century cultural and artistic norms. Werbel's creativity is inspiring. She employs primary sources skillfully in order to contextualize Eakins in his time and place. She clearly shows that Eakins held fast to his artistic and cultural values despite their being in conflict with social and cultural standards of the day.

Eakins devoted himself to an accurate portrayal of the body. This dedication took him into the dissection halls of Philadelphia medical schools and made physicians and medical educators some of his closest colleagues. Eakins' attachment to the body made the nude a primary object of study for him and for his students. This stress on the naked body meant that Eakins employed nude models in his classes, photographed the nude in various poses, and was willing to appear nude before his students. However, his emphasis on the body conflicted with nineteenth-century artistic, social, and cultural norms. Eakins' portraits, including *The Agnew Clinic* and *The Gross Clinic*, met with criticism due to their graphic imagery. Likewise, Eakins' artistic works met with disapproval from critics, as well as those who commissioned the pieces, because Eakins remained true to the uniqueness of individual bodies and was willing to show the blemishes and physical imperfections of his subjects. The artist's incorporation of nude models, including his own body, in his classes also upset his critics, some of his students, and some of his relatives. Eakins' response was to affirm the primacy of the human body to artistic study and to assert that his male and female students needed to be exposed to the same education. Werbel plainly demonstrates that the importance Eakins attached to the human body opened him to criticism from a variety of individuals.

The author supports her examination of Eakins' art and life with an amazing variety of primary sources. Werbel, of course, scrutinizes Eakins' well-known paintings, but also considers his lesser known bronze casts and photographs, and compares his works with compositions created by other artists. Werbel complements her investigation of visual and material sources with written sources including correspondence, newspaper reports, articles from scientific and art journals, and trial transcripts. The book's fine set of illustrations and

Werbel's superior integration and analysis of written primary source evidence clearly show the connections between Eakins' art, nineteenth-century medicine and science, and Victorian notions of sexuality. Werbel's use of a tremendous array of primary sources enables her to place Eakins in the time in which he lived. She concludes her work by asserting that "our historical subjects deserve the same common courtesies we hope for the living—the privilege of self-definition to the extent feasible, an effort to understand context and point of view, a presumption of innocence, and finally, not to be neutered, outed, demonized, or similarly categorized to suit the intellectual fashions of our own times." Werbel maintains, "no historian or critic can have the last word on a consummate artist ... that privilege will reside with Thomas Eakins for as long as his art compels viewers to look deeply" (161).

Werbel also does a fine job placing Eakins in the city in which he lived and worked. First of all, the author compares Eakins to other Philadelphia artisan-artist-scientists, specifically Benjamin Franklin and Charles Wilson Peale. The three men came from the middle class, called Philadelphia their home, and embraced invention and science. Secondly, Werbel analyzes Eakins' associations with and contributions to several important Philadelphia institutions, including the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and various Philadelphia medical colleges. Finally, Werbel analyzes Eakins' values in relation to a religion, Quakerism, which had profound effects on Philadelphia. In particular, Werbel documents Eakins' family connections to the faith, his persistent call for equal education for men and women, and his desire to portray his subjects plainly and accurately. Werbel's determined analysis of Eakins and Philadelphia showed how Eakins "negotiated issues of class, gender, and sexuality while making ... unique contributions to the cultural history of Philadelphia" (2).

Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia will appeal to a wide and diverse audience. Art historians will appreciate Werbel's analysis of Eakins' art. Historians of medicine and science will value the author's examination of nineteenth-century scientific and medical developments. Scholars interested in gender studies will find a fine assessment of nineteenth-century gender relations, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. Finally, scholars of Philadelphia history and culture will discover an intriguing look at Eakins and the city where he lived and worked.

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