

Title: Surgical Theatre: Thomas Eakins' Exposition of Medical Practices in the Nineteenth Century

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Thomas Eakins went to great lengths to visually communicate the activities that went on in the medical rooms of the 19th century. Being a medical student taking courses in anatomy at the Jefferson Medical School and University of Pennsylvania, his talent in art allowed him to share details of the inner circle of medical practice with the rest of the world. Eakins painted two major works on the subject of medical practices. The Gross Clinic painting is a portrayal of Dr. Samuel Gross of Jefferson Medical College with his students and medical colleagues. Fourteen years later, Eakins did a portrait of Dr. Agnew of the University of Pennsylvania in an amphitheatre with a crowd of students and colleagues. These paintings represent a realistic perception of the medical profession of the nineteenth century while showing its differences at the end of the 19th century.

As an academic professor, Eakins' paintings were constantly at the center of attention and controversy. His teaching practices, choice of subject, methods and behavior created a havoc in the realism movement. His uncommon behavior also led to the disapproval of The Gross Clinic at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Comparing the first portrait of Dr. Gross in 1875 and the second of Dr. Agnew in 1889 exactly fourteen years apart, many aspects had changed, thus educating Eakins' viewers of developments in medical procedures.

Works Cited

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