**Eakins, Thomas**

**Eakins, Thomas** (1844-1916). American painter. Eakins is regarded by most critics as the outstanding American painter of the 19th century and by many as the greatest his country has yet produced.

Born in Philadelphia, he passed the major part of his life there with the exception of a period of training in Europe, 1866-70. He studied in Paris with Gйrфme, but learnt most from the Spanish painters Velбzquez and Ribera, absorbing a precise and uncompromising sense for actuality which he applied to portraiture and genre pictures of the life of his native city (boating and bathing were favorite themes).

He began teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1876 and was attacked for his radical ideas, particularly his insistence on working from nude models. In 1886 he was forced to resign after allowing a mixed class to draw from a completely nude male model. Eakins's quest for realism led him to study anatomy and make full use of Muybridge's photographic researches, but the scientific bent in his work is of less importance than his honesty and depth of characterization. His portraits are often compared to Rembrandt's because of their dramatic play of sombre lighting and sense of inner truth. The most famous of his paintings is The Gross Clinic (Jefferson Medical Coll., Philadelphia, 1875), which aroused controversy because of its unsparing depiction of surgery, an experience that was repeated with The Agnew Clinic (University of Pennsylvania, 1889).

Because of financial support from his father, Eakins could continue on his chosen course despite public abuse, but much of his later career was spent working in bitter isolation. It was only near the end of his life that he achieved recognition as a great master, and in the first two decades of the 20th century his desire to `peer deeper into the heart of American life' was reflected in the work of the Ash-can School and other Realist painters.

As well as being a painter and photographer, Eakins also made a few sculptures. His wife, **Susan Hannah Macdowell Eakins** (1851-1938), whom he married in 1884, was also a painter and photographer, as well as an accomplished pianist.