

The first page of an art history assignment on the psychological emphasis behind the art of Thomas Eakins. This involved psychological and philosophical analysis based on artistic endeavors.

The excerpt "Modern Psychological Selfhood in the Art of Thomas Eakins" by David M. Lubin from *Inventing the Psychological: Towards a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America* edited by Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog argues that Eakins was a pioneer in portraiture that depicted the psychological complexities of society, specifically the white bourgeois, that were essentially not embraced until more recently. It is stated that he does so through the use of dour facial expressions and attention to detail, as Eakins extensively studied art as well as medicine to make his portraits as realistic as possible. Throughout the chapter, Lubin shows how Eakins's work was viewed and how perceptions of his portraits changed with the times. There was often speculation as to whether he was rejecting French positivism, a philosophical system that was entirely fact based, or going along with it. Lubin argues that Eakins's later works go against positivism but do not entirely reject it. People did not like the fact that Eakins could portray the inner workings of their mind as well as their physical attributes. As he began his career under positivism, Eakins's style of painting did evolve over time. He began his career as a seemingly more neutral observer of everyday life in America. Over the course of his career, he began to create another form of realist painting in which there was a sort of psychoanalysis of his subjects. Though he was interested in the medical advances of the time, he began to "reject a strictly mechanistic view of individuality" (Lubin 135) and delved into another scientific area, psychology, when depicting the people he painted.

There are references to many paintings by Eakins throughout the article. One work specifically mentioned is



Professor Henry A. Rowland, 1897, in which Eakins paints Rowland holding some sort of wand in a "ghostly or phantomlike" (Lubin 137) nature due to the lack of light that is surrounding Rowland. He is portrayed as being stiff and emotionless. There are also symbols along the frame of the painting that step away from strictly scientific ideas into something that is reminiscent of a necromancer or wizard. Lubin states that it is not entirely clear as to what Eakins's intentions may have been, but it is apparent that there is something more to this man shown than what the viewer can see. There are underlying secrets within him, whether they deal with his moral character, emotions, or social relationships, that Eakins suggests may never be fully exposed. Ironically, people did not want to be painted by Eakins because they stated that he gave away too much of their inner thoughts. Artist Edwin Austin Abbey would not sit for Eakins because he said that "he would bring out all the traits of my character that I have been trying to hide from the public for years" (Lubin 138). Eakins often portrayed his subjects as haggard and worn, sitting with one part of the body hidden from view to show another side of them and how they truly lived. It is

stated that these white bourgeois people were being portrayed similarly to their subalterns, namely female mental patients, African Americans, and American Indians, to show that the white middle class was worn, which is a more modernly embraced idea.