

Correggio, Rubens, the Pre-Raphaelites, Rodin, Courbet, and Renoir. All of these we appreciate as art. Kieran rejects as well the notion that we cannot take a personal interest in the subject in whom we take a pornographic interest: "In order for sensuous thoughts and arousal to arise, far from being uninterested, we must usually be interested in the subject in some way."

So what's a contemporary example of pornographic art? Nicholson Baker's novel of phone sex, *Vox* (1992), measures up nicely, Kieran says: "The arousal both portrayed and solicited from the reader is symbiotically enhanced by the literary features of the work." The book is a kind of triumphant, unholy grail for Kieran—"a novel which aims to be and is only appreciable as pornographic art."

Traces of Trouble

"Doubting Thomas" by Richard B. Woodward, in *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life* (Oct. 2001), Academic Partners LLC, 135 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

The celebrated American painter Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) had troubles enough, especially of a sexual sort, while he was alive. Now, 85 years after his death, he's in hot water again, but for an entirely different reason. Woodward, an editor at large at *Double Take* magazine, writes that Eakins has been caught in what "even he himself seems to have regarded as a scandalous act." What's worse, "art historians have scientific evidence of guilty behavior."

"For many years," reports Woodward, "the artist celebrated by at least one contemporary critic as 'the greatest draughtsman in America,' and now generally ranked among the towering artists of his age, painted some of his most celebrated canvases from photographs." It's not that the photographs were the raw material by which Eakins was inspired to do hand-drawn work. Rather, the scientific evidence shows that, for some 14 years, from 1872 to 1886, the artist "projected glass-plate negatives or positives onto canvases and paper, using those projected images to dictate the outlines and the details of his painted compositions. . . . He used photographs as stencils. He traced." And because he never acknowledged doing so, it's assumed that Eakins wished to conceal the practice and cover his tracks.

How was the tracing discovered? While preparing an Eakins retrospective for the Philadelphia Museum of Art this past fall, conservators Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman began to clean Eakins's *Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River* (1881). They noticed, through the use of infrared reflectography (IRR), penciled outlines of figures and portions of the landscape. "IRR," Woodward

explains, "uses television cameras that are sensitive to near-infrared radiation to detect what's hidden beneath the surface of things. When hooked up to optical scanners . . . IRR can see through layers of pigment and reflect back traces of freehand markings or ruled grids under the surface of the picture." The markings on the Eakins canvas were continuous. That is to say, the artist sketched entire contours without lifting the pencil from the canvas. That prompted the conservators to look at other paintings and watercolors, and led them to conclude that Eakins employed "some kind of projection technique"—a magic lantern, which projects glass transparencies, or a catoptric lamp, which projects photographic prints, or perhaps both. Woodward describes the "painstaking" process the conservators assume Eakins followed: "He projected, traced, painted, checked the results against the projected image, marked the outlines of a hand or an arm with a stylus, painted, checked, and so on across the canvas, building up the surface, always being sure in the end to cover the stylus marks."

Should any of this matter? Art historians will debate whether the findings alter Eakins's high reputation. For some, Woodward notes, the discovery of his use of technology will be of no great consequence; he will seem to have anticipated conceptual art or photorealism, long before their time. But Marc Simpson, an art historian at Williams College, admits to dismay: "We want to believe that a painter like Eakins creates his realistic illusions with skill, hard work, or natural genius, not with any kind of technological trickery." The paintings, of course, remain what they have always been.