PICTURING THE ARTIST’S WIFE, A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS BY THOMAS EAKINS AND ALFRED STIEGLITZ

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PICTURING THE ARTIST’S WIFE, A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS BY THOMAS EAKINS AND ALFRED STIEGLITZ

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ABSTRACT

Extensive literature examines the photographs taken by Alfred Stieglitz of his wife, Georgia O’Keeffe. On the other hand, less scholarly interest has focused on Thomas Eakins’ photographs of his wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins. This thesis examines both artists’ photographs of their wives and concludes that they reflect the profound feelings both men held for their spouses.

In order to demonstrate the intimacy between artist and wife, this thesis will examine photographs Eakins took of other men and women and compare them to ones he took of Macdowell. Similarly, this thesis also examines the photographs Stieglitz took of other women and contrasts them to ones he took of O’Keeffe. In so doing, this thesis demonstrates that many of the unique attributes of the wives’ portraits are not evident in Eakins’ and Stieglitz’s work with other subjects. By comparing Stieglitz’s and Eakins’ portraits of their wives in such a manner, this thesis will demonstrate that both artists revealed in their work a deep affection and admiration for their wives.

In addition, this thesis will examine the lives of both artists. Their backgrounds prove important in studying the development of their methods and practices in their art.
work. Their personal histories affected their approach to photography and women. They shared several common traits in their backgrounds. They both were influenced by their time in Europe. Further, both artists would become absorbed in the possible linkages between photography and art. They both were unyielding in their own ideals. Eakins and Stieglitz were important in the development of American art and this thesis will broadly underscore this view.

By way of further background, this thesis will also touch upon the prevailing societal views of women and art during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. This will provide a solid foundation from which to examine the photographs of the artists’ wives and how their portraits fit into the prevailing views of women at the time.

While this paper focuses on the photographs of Stieglitz and Eakins, there is important reason to mention the artists’ wives as individuals. Their wives were artists themselves. While one put her career on hold after marriage in keeping with Victorian mores, and the other continued to make her own mark artistically after marriage as befit a twentieth-century woman, they both played special roles in their artists-husbands’ lives, personally and professionally. In fact, Susan Macdowell Eakins and Georgia O’Keeffe provided the support, encouragement and inspiration that their husbands most needed to continue with their work in pioneering new art forms in America. The wives truly were muses and made it possible for their husbands to create beautiful and enduring works. Even though Stieglitz and Eakins had different approaches to their
work, they had a number of striking similarities, particularly in representing their wives in an affectionate, loving way.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Extensive literature examines the numerous photographs of Alfred Stieglitz and the portrayal of his wife, Georgia O’Keeffe. Less scholarly interest has been focused on Thomas Eakins’ photography of his wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins. Instead, art historians have emphasized the men in Eakins’ photographs, using this material as evidence for examining Eakins’ attitude toward men. Much less has been written on the photographs of the women in Eakins’ life, with much of that literature supporting the opinion that Eakins had a condescending attitude toward females.\footnote{Amy Werbel, \textit{Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 82.} This thesis examines the work of both artists in their portrayal of their wives. By comparing Stieglitz’s and Eakins’ portraits of their wives we will see that both artists revealed in their work the affection and admiration they had for their wives.

First, we will examine the lives of both artists. I will summarize their backgrounds to see how and when they became artists and how their personal histories affected their approach to photography and women. They shared several common traits in their backgrounds. Both artists were influenced by their time in Europe. Both Stieglitz and Eakins studied science before taking up art. These artists’ European teachers placed a firm foundation of knowledge and skill on their students which would influence both artists throughout their careers. By the time Stieglitz had begun his work as a photographer, he had already invested much effort in trying to prove that photography was actually a form of art. While Eakins started as a painter, later in his
career he too would become absorbed in the possible linkages between photography and art.

This thesis will also discuss the beliefs of society regarding women and art during the time these photographs were taken. This will give us a better understanding in which to examine the artists’ portraits of their wives and show how these images fit into the prevailing notions about women at the time.

Both Stieglitz and Eakins used photography in their artistic work. Accepted opinion suggests that Eakins used photography more as a tool for making his paintings rather than as an art form itself. To the contrary, much of Stieglitz’s life was spent trying to gain recognition for photography as actual art form. Ultimately, Stieglitz employed photography as art. Both Stieglitz and Eakins took “pictures” of their families and friends, including beautiful pictures of their wives. This thesis examines some of these photographs to establish a context to better understand these attractive and alluring pictures.

In this thesis, I also detail the personalities of Stieglitz and Eakins with the intention of recognizing and appreciating the different paths they chose in their careers, and the different techniques they used to express their art. These two men were in some ways very different, but they also had many similarities. They both were unyielding in their own ideals. Stieglitz and Eakins were steadfast individualists, rebels, teachers, mentors, husbands and more. As this thesis attempts to demonstrate, these two artists
both used photography involving their spouses as a means of conveying affection and admiration for their wives.
CHAPTER 2: COMPARATIVE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ARTISTS

When we look at the lives of both Stieglitz and Eakins, we find many similarities: in their personalities, in their backgrounds and circumstances and in their works. In this paper, we will begin by examining Stieglitz’s life, and then compare Eakins to Stieglitz, although chronologically Eakins lived nearly a generation before Stieglitz. Their lives and careers overlapped, as Eakins was born in 1844 and Stieglitz in 1864.

Stieglitz’s Personal background/education

Stieglitz lived from 1864 until 1946. He was born in Hoboken, New Jersey. Stieglitz’s parents were German-Jewish immigrants. His father, Edward Stieglitz, owned a successful business that provided woolen cloth to stores all over the eastern part of the country. In 1871, that business expanded dramatically after Edward was sufficiently shrewd to foresee the need to stock up on cloths and sell them to Chicago stores following the great fire in October of that year.\(^2\) That same year, the Stieglitz family moved to a luxurious brownstone in Manhattan with all the amenities of the time, such as gas lighting and cold running water.\(^3\)

Stieglitz attended The Charlier Institute, the best private school in New York and then attended Grammar School Number 55. In 1879, Stieglitz entered City College

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of New York (CCNY). Later that same year Stieglitz’s family moved to Germany where he would complete his studies.

During their time in New York, the Stieglitz family took trips for summer vacations. Among the places visited were locations where the Hudson River School’s members had painted some of their landscapes. Once he became financially secure, Edward began to dabble in painting. He would take trips for the purpose of seeing some of the sights already recorded by these well-known American artists at the time.4 The Stieglitz home was filled with artwork, some indeed from the hands of their own friends. Edward and Hedwig, Stieglitz’s mother, had weekly get-togethers with their artistic and literary friends; so, from an early age, Stieglitz was widely exposed to the influence of art and of artists.

After several yearly visits to the Adirondacks, the family settled on a permanent summer home near Lake George. A recent biographer noted the following: “Until his death, Alfred Stieglitz’s personal and creative life would have two geographical centers, two opposite poles: New York City and Lake George.”5 Similarly, Eakins’ “personal and creative” life had a geographical link to his hometown of Philadelphia. Despite Stieglitz’s German heritage and his more than decade-long stay during his studies in Germany, his ties were to an American place, New York. It seems appropriate that Stieglitz’s last gallery in New York City was called An American Place.

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4 Whelan, Alfred Stieglitz, 35.
5 Ibid.
It is not clear exactly when Stieglitz met his first photographer, however, one biographer noted that Stieglitz met his first photographer in 1873 at Lake George. This is how he described the moment:

The boy had invented a horse-race game and went with his playmates to the booth of the local photographer to have him make a tintype of it. He arranged the toys carefully. The man took the photograph and disappeared behind a dark curtain. Alfred, fascinated, left his playmates and followed him. For the first time, he watched the strange and magical process of development. He kept coming back, haunting the primitive darkroom and asking questions. One day he found the photographer putting carmine on the cheeks of the tintyped faces. He was shocked. The man explained that it made them look more natural; Alfred insisted stubbornly that it did not. At nine he was convinced the crude daubs of unnatural color spoiled the dark clarity of the images.\(^6\)

Given Stieglitz’s now well-known ideas of “straight-photography” this moment seems to foreshadow the mature photographer’s work. However, this may not have been his first introduction to photography. The prior year he and his siblings were taken to a photographer in New York for their portrait.\(^7\) Further, Stieglitz became a frequent visitor to Mr. Irish’s, the abovementioned photographer in the Lake George studio. Looking back, the artist intimated that even then he had “an intuition that the integrity of the photographic image should be respected.”\(^8\)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Stieglitz adopted the Pictorialist style in photography creating soft-focus pictures with a moody effect, in an effort to reveal a painterly image in a

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\(^7\) Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 40.

\(^8\) Ibid, 41.
photograph. In the second decade of the twentieth century Stieglitz had become a “straight” photographer, refusing to manipulate his photographic images in any way.\(^9\)

This included using a sharp focus lens. As we will see, Stieglitz used the straight photography style in his O’Keeffe photographs.

**Engineering Student**

Edward would uproot the entire family in 1881 when he decided to sell his business for $400,000\(^10\)—a lavish sum—and move to Germany. There, the children would be schooled. His father’s financial success would play no small role in supporting his son in his career.

Stieglitz first studied at the Realgymnasium in Karlsruhe. It offered courses in physics and chemistry that helped prepare him for his studies at the Royal Technical High School in Berlin where he enrolled in the mechanical engineering department in the latter in the fall of 1882.\(^11\) Stieglitz had no interest in the field of mechanical engineering and, while he did not want to be a failure in his course of study, he did have thoughts of leaving school.\(^12\)

Fortunately for him, Stieglitz met a person at the Royal Technical High School who would guide his studies in a new and different direction. It is unclear which came

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\(^11\) Ibid., 63.

\(^12\) Ibid., 67.
first, Stieglitz’s initial use of the camera or his meeting with Doctor Hermann Wilhem Vogel. Vogel was a professor in the department of chemistry and metallurgy. He taught Stieglitz his first photography course. Sometime between 1882 and 1885, Stieglitz’s interest in photography took flight. From that moment on, Stieglitz took his camera around Berlin and everywhere else he traveled in Europe. Stieglitz’s time in Europe, particularly his tutelage under Vogel, had a tremendous influence on Stieglitz, helping the young man to choose a career in photography. Spurred by the challenges Vogel brought to the classroom, Stieglitz immersed himself in his assignments. He even created a makeshift darkroom in his home in order to complete his projects after the classroom was closed. In 1887, Stieglitz received first prize in an exhibition promoted by The Amateur Photographer, a London magazine. It would be the first of more than 150 awards for Stieglitz.

Even at a young age Stieglitz fought for photography to be treated as an art form. During his time at the Royal Technical High School Stieglitz met some artists from Berlin who had been shown some of his photographs by Professor Vogel. The photographs were so “artistic” it was hard to tell that they were really photographs. Stieglitz became furious after one of the artists said: “Why, young man, if those photographs of yours had been made by hand they would be art, but not having been

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13 Ibid., 75.

14 Homer, Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde, 12.
made by hand, wonderful as they are, they are not.”15 This pushed Stieglitz to fight for photography to be viewed as an art form. It was a drive as strong as his passion at the time for photography to also be treated as a science. For two years, Stieglitz worked closely under Vogel experimenting with different chemical processes.16 When his studies were exhausted at the Royal Technical High School, Stieglitz attended lectures at the University of Berlin presided by organic chemist August Wilhelm von Hofmann.17 In this regard, Stieglitz was, in effect, a scientist who developed into an artist.

**Stieglitz’s Art and Legacy**

In 1888, Stieglitz went home to New York for the occasion of his sister Flora’s wedding. His parents encouraged him to find work, settle down and get married. However, Stieglitz returned to Berlin in October that same year. The next year, the family was devastated when his sister died in childbirth. Stieglitz was still in Europe at the time and wanted to remain there and use work to allay his grief; how he often would deal with difficult times in his life. Pressure from his family, however, compelled him to return home in 1890. He experienced further pressure from his father who stated he would be unable to provide him with the generous allowance to which Stieglitz had become accustomed.

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 94.
Before returning home, Stieglitz took a photograph of a woman he was close to in Berlin, perhaps another reason he did not want to return at the family’s request. (See fig. 1.) Looking at this photograph helps us to better understand the later photographs of his wife, O’Keeffe. The Berlin photograph was taken of a girl named Paula, with whom Stieglitz had asked to live toward the end of his stay in Berlin. She was a

prostitute but, later in his life, Stieglitz was quoted stating that she was “as clean as his mother.”

The portrait is titled “Sun Rays, Paula, Berlin” and it expresses a feeling of longing or perhaps even love. The photograph is interesting in both technical and aesthetic ways as Stieglitz biographer Whelan noted:

> It is rather disturbing to realize that, for all the layers of personal meaning in his photograph, Alfred may well have been more concerned with its technical than with its artistic aspects. To capture equal detail in sun and shadow was the kind of tour de force in which he still delighted, and in those terms the picture was an astonishing triumph over the usual limitations of emulsions and processing.

Even at a young age, Stieglitz was as concerned with the technical aspects of photography as he was with the artistic aspects; he was a scientist before he was an artist. A cursory look at the photograph reveals that there is something more in the portrait than just technical accomplishment, however. It was an artistic achievement in and of itself to create this poignant portrait of a woman caught in her thoughts as she sits at the writing table. Stieglitz also wanted to find truth in his pictures. He achieved that here by making the viewer feel as if he is looking into the room and feeling the warmth of the light as it is cast through the blinds. Not only was art his passion, but the truth in art was also his passion. Stieglitz once wrote: “I was born in Hoboken. I am

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an American. Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession.”21

When we examine the photographs of Stieglitz’s wife, O’Keeffe, a connection between truth and love will be more clearly identified.

Ultimately bowing to his father’s wishes and financial pressure, when Stieglitz returned to New York, he was becoming an artist. Back in New York, Stieglitz started an engraving business, with his father’s financial help. A lack of clients allowed Stieglitz time for taking photographs and more experimentation with photographic techniques. He began exhibiting at all of the famous salons where he received recognition for his budding art. He also was acknowledged for his writing following his contributions to several publications including The American Amateur Photographer. Soon, he became editor of the magazine and used his printing press at work to print the magazine’s images.

In 1893, Stieglitz married Emmeline Obermeyer, a family friend and the sister of a close business associate and friend. He was not quite ready for marriage, but he felt pressured by family and friends. Stieglitz married Emmy hoping that she would become a good companion. Perhaps she was hoping for the same. Unfortunately, they both were wrong, enduring a long and unhappy relationship. She found his work in photography boring and he felt she was too materialistic. One factor in Stieglitz’s decision to marry Emmy was that she had received an inheritance from her father and

21 Edward Stieglitz Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, quoted in Whelan, Stieglitz, 18.
would be able to provide a financial contribution to the family, allowing him more freedom in his work. Although Stieglitz’s father would help his son financially when he could, the marriage would ease the burden on his father. While Emmy helped Stieglitz financially in his work, what Emmy would not do was pose nude for Stieglitz, something the photographer had counted on after the marriage. In fact, he alleged that Emmy did not permit consummation of the marriage for over a year.23

Stieglitz did, however, take clothed photographs of Emmy and their only child, Katherine. The many photographs of Katherine are cheerless, however. (See figs. 2 and 32.) The several photographs of Emmy and Katherine, particularly of Katherine, display a lack of love or devotion by the artist for his subjects, instead showing a


23 Ibid., 126.
coldness and a distance between the photographer and his family. Perhaps this was in part due to both her and her mother feeling abandoned as Stieglitz spent most of his time on photography and its promotion as an art. Work became his passion. Only later would Stieglitz find a subject he adored, one not threatened by his dedication to his life’s work; and he would reflect that devotion to his second wife passionately in the photographs he took of O’Keeffe.

At this time, in 1896, Stieglitz helped to form the Camera Club of New York. It was born out of the two existing clubs, the Society of Amateur Photographers and the New York Camera Club. He became Vice President, hoping to steer the group toward a more progressive view of photography. It was agreed that Stieglitz would have full control over its publication, Camera Notes. However, Stieglitz met with criticism in 1900 for his “personal battle for an advanced cause that seemed far removed from the interests of the club’s rank and file.”

Stieglitz and his followers later abandoned the group and the publication and formed the Photo-Secession group. Stieglitz was asked to organize a show of Pictorial photography at the National Arts Club Show. Shaping it in his idealistic way he called the show, “American Pictorial Photography Arranged by the ‘Photo-Secession.’” This allowed him to “secede” from the traditional concepts of photography that he had

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24 Whelan, Stieglitz, 141.

fought against at the Camera Club of New York and Camera Notes.\textsuperscript{26} Camera Work was the new group’s publication, becoming widely recognized for its photographic efforts. In 1905, the group held its inaugural show at the “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession” (simply called, 291).\textsuperscript{27} All of these efforts to organize exhibitions and circulate photographs helped Stieglitz, as well as his circle, gain prominence in the art world.

Edward Steichen was an important participant in opening the galleries at 291. It was agreed by both Stieglitz and Steichen that 291 would include non-photographic works in its exhibitions. This decision reflected Stieglitz’s interest in the European avant-garde. With Steichen’s help, Stieglitz promoted numerous European artists. He brought Rodin, Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso to the attention of the American public by holding exhibitions for them at the 291 galleries.\textsuperscript{28} Stieglitz was a staunch supporter of modern artists—painters, sculptors and photographers—until the end of his life. The artists he supported were creating “various non-realist, individually expressive styles.”\textsuperscript{29}

Though Stieglitz had already brought many modern artists to the attention of Americans, it would be the Armory Show in 1913 held in New York City that created a turning point in the modern art world and it helped make popular what Stieglitz had

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 164.

been fighting hard to prove: the integrity of modern art. Although, he deplored the idea of making art popular. With regard to Stieglitz and the Armory Show, a prominent art historian and biographer noted the following:

More and more, he rejected commercialism, especially the kind he found in the New York galleries established in the wake of the Armory Show. The keynote of 291 thus became “purity,” an unspoiled dedication to honesty and idealism in all aesthetic endeavors.³⁰

Stieglitz was as discriminating in whom he supported in photography as he was when he began to focus support on the work of a group of American painters. The most talented were John Marin, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and O’Keeffe. Stieglitz would continue to organize shows from 1913 until 1917 when 291 closed. Before the galleries at 291 closed, Stieglitz was even able to give O’Keeffe a one-person exhibition. Not until O’Keeffe returned to New York for good in 1918 would Stieglitz begin photographing her passionately.

After the galleries closed, Stieglitz had no place to go, no place to spend time away from Emmy, and so he found a room to rent in the same building where 291 had been located. At this point, his life was grim. Stieglitz recalled the following:

. . . I walked up and down in my overcoat, my cape over the coat, hat on, and still I would be freezing. . . . I had nowhere else to go—no working-place, no club, no money. I felt somehow as Napoleon must have felt on his retreat from Moscow.³¹

³⁰ Homer, Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde, 173.

Although small, this room became a place away from home where he would have visitors.

For several years after the closing of 291, Stieglitz worked behind the scenes in the New York art world assisting with exhibitions for members of his circle. After organizing an important exhibition of seven Americans’ work that took place in March 1925, Stieglitz opened the Intimate Gallery in December that same year. In this regard, he continued to promote the work of American artists whose work he felt was promising. In December 1929, Stieglitz was encouraged to open his last gallery, An American Place, where he continued his work in promoting American modern art until he died in 1946. Throughout this time, while promoting modern art, Stieglitz continued his own art work, that of creating photographs.

Alfred Stieglitz is probably best known for his drive and his determination in helping develop a broader understanding of art for Americans, including advocating recognition of photography as an art form. His photographs, such as the ones cited in this piece, are among the most renown in the art world. Like Stieglitz, Eakins had an uncompromising idea about how art should be created and so helped in his own way to develop a steadfast program at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts which encompassed his style of painting and instruction which emphasized studying from the

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32 Whelan, Stieglitz, 469.

33 Ibid., 480.

34 Ibid., 523.
nude. He too used photography, albeit in a generally more utilitarian manner.

Although, many of Eakins’ photographs can also be viewed as singular art works as we will discuss later.

**Eakins’ Personal background/education**

Thomas Eakins lived from 1844 to 1916. He spent most of his life in Philadelphia where he was born. Eakins graduated from Central High School, a prestigious school in Philadelphia, with what we would call today a baccalaureate degree. In his early studies, he excelled in drawing classes, receiving a score of 100 in that course each year in school. This type of drawing included mechanical and perspective drawing, preparing the artist with the skills and technique he would use throughout his artistic career. These skills required tedious work and accuracy. Eakins used that same attention to detail in preparing studies for and creating his paintings. It may also have helped his interest in the use of photographs as studies for his work. Later in his career, Eakins used photographs in place of preparatory sketches or drawings for his paintings.

The young Eakins also was familiar with calligraphy as his father was a fine practitioner in the art of writing. Eakins’ knowledge of calligraphy proved to be a useful skill that, like painting and photography, required attention to detail.

Eakins also studied anatomy at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, which may be the reason the subjects in his paintings appear so life-like. He was

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familiar with the bone structure, musculature and flesh tones of the human body.

Eakins in a sense could see what was under the skin of his sitters. While his studies in anatomy helped Eakins in painting the human body, the scientific skills he learned in high school later complemented his use of photography. The young Eakins may have been planning to be a doctor, but soon after high school he began studying at the Pennsylvania Academy. Thereafter he seemed to have found his calling, travelling on to Paris to continue his studies. Eakins, like Stieglitz, would be profoundly influenced by his time abroad.

One of the first American artists to attend the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Eakins acquired a different way of creating art from what he had previously learned at the Pennsylvania Academy. Eakins had been taught drawing from plaster casts at the Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia. In Paris, he studied under Jean-Léon Gérôme, an esteemed artist at the École at the time who encouraged a different approach. Eakins was instructed by Gérôme to draw from the live nude. This made a tremendous impact on the way Eakins learned, created and taught art as he placed great emphasis on studying from the nude model. In addition, what was acceptable in the Paris salons and academies was far different from what was acceptable in American Victorian society in whose art scene he had matriculated.

Upon returning to Philadelphia, Eakins felt no need to fit into the rigid ways of such a society. As such, his behavior prompted much criticism toward him and his work that involved drawing, painting and photographing the nude model. When Eakins
returned from Paris, he imported the idea of studying from the nude and applied this form of study to his own art. Ultimately, his use of nudes and his methods of teaching would prove damaging to his career and his life. However, these innovative teaching methods not only left a tremendous body of work but drew the interest of a future student of Eakins who would one day become his wife and staunch supporter, Susan Hannah Macdowell.

Eakins also learned the importance of photography from Gérôme. Gérôme made many trips abroad and while traveling took photographs that he would later use as studies for his art. As Gérôme once wrote:

The photograph . . . has compelled artists to divest themselves of the old routine and to forget the old formulas. It has opened our eyes and forced us to gaze on that which we have never before seen, an important and inestimable service it has rendered to Art. Thanks to [the photograph], truth has finally emerged from its well. It will never go back again.\(^{36}\)

Although Eakins treasured his tutelage under Gerome, he adopted a style much different from his mentor. Eakins made a trip to Spain before returning home from France. There he was profoundly moved by the painters he saw in the Prado, particularly Velasquez and Ribera. As one scholar has noted, “The work of these men has a directness and a psychological penetration that more than one historian has found closely parallel to Eakins’.”\(^{37}\) Eakins also made another stop in the south of Spain, in Seville, where he completed his first painting.

Eakins initially struggled in his work, though today he is recognized as one of the great American painters. He would later struggle as a teacher as well as his methods were thought to be too unconventional for Victorian Philadelphia. Moreover, his subjects were not always acceptable to his contemporaries. Even so, his work left an important mark on the nineteenth-century art world and is today appreciated for both the technical merit and the truth he elicited from his subjects. As art historian Hendricks has noted about Eakins: “Photography, in its uncompromising honesty, had an especial appeal for a painter who was himself uncompromisingly honest. So uncompromising, in fact, that he was rejected again and again by friend and foe alike.”\textsuperscript{38} Walt Whitman, a friend of Eakins later in his life, said of Eakins’ work that it is “not a remaking of life, but life. . . just as it is.”\textsuperscript{39}

**Eakins’ Contribution to American Art**

Many art historians see Thomas Eakins as an artist who made a unique contribution to American art. One prominent author concluded the following:

Into the remnant shell of academic realism Eakins injected modern science, technology, and his own remarkable talents, generating likenesses of extraordinary and compelling intensity. His work was as truly American as the ten-ton Baldwin steam engines and locomotives


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
that were produced in a Philadelphia factory several blocks from his home.  

Lloyd Goodrich has also lauded his work. He observed the following in his monograph:

[T]he dominant artistic viewpoint in America was a combination of romanticism in subject matter and literal representation in style. The Hudson River School was picturing the wild and spectacular features of the continent. Genre painters were depicting old-fashioned rural life with nostalgic sentiment. But so far the American city and the lives of city dwellers had found little reflection in established art.

It was Eakins who took the city of Philadelphia as his subject and used it to paint with a new realism. As Stieglitz did with the camera in New York, so did Eakins with the brush in Philadelphia. He painted the people close to him, the local sports in which he took part, and the people he admired. Sadly, in his time most people did not appreciate the realism Eakins demonstrated in his paintings nor did they like his subjects. In fact, it was this very different view of life and his choice in subjects, such as the rowing paintings, that contributed to an American art. He was presenting images from his own “modern” life in Philadelphia, a place he knew well. The American public was not ready for realistic pictures of these everyday subjects. They still wanted beautiful, idealized portraits, something Eakins was not known for. However, as we will see in the photographs of Macdowell, and unlike his usual style, Eakins idealized his wife in some of the images.


41 Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, 1:1.
Eakins’ Contribution to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Eakins began teaching soon after he returned from Europe. He worked at the Philadelphia Sketch Club, providing critiques for male students.\(^\text{42}\) Earl Shinn, the student who had originally asked Eakins to teach at the Sketch Club, later noted the following:

Mr. Eakins at once demonstrated not only that he was a thorough master of his subject, but that he had a distinct genius for teaching. His pupils developed that enthusiastic regard for him which zealous learners always feel for a master whose superior attainments they unqualifiedly respect, and such was the credit which the class obtained that the applications for admission soon far exceeded the capacity of the rooms.\(^\text{43}\)

Eakins taught at the Sketch Club for two years. During this time, the Pennsylvania Academy had been closed for remodeling. In September 1876, the Pennsylvania Academy re-opened and Eakins volunteered to assist the Academy’s head professor of drawing and painting, Christian Schussele. Eakins also assisted with instruction on anatomy.\(^\text{44}\)

For a brief period in 1877, however, Eakins was relieved of his assistant teaching duties at the Academy.\(^\text{45}\) In response to the Academy’s decision to let Eakins go and its overly conventional teaching methods, a group of his students created the Art-Students’ Union in Philadelphia, modeled after the one in New York. Eakins had

\(^{42}\) Ibid, 167.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 168.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

been at odds with the directors of the Academy and with Schussele regarding their
traditional teaching methods. At the beginning of his career, Eakins strongly
emphasized studying from the nude from the beginning of a course of study, when
traditionally the Academy required long studies and drawings of antique casts prior to
nude studies. Further, Eakins permitted students to start painting much earlier in their
studies than the Academy’s standard rules allowed.

Even at this early time in his career at the Academy, there were accusations that
Eakins engaged in lewd and unbecoming behavior with his students. However, it seems
that many students admired him and his teaching abilities. One such female student
went so far as to petition the Academy’s directors, explaining to them the need for “life
classes” for women at the Academy. She specifically requested they invite Eakins to
look over their work along with Schussele:

We desire to submit the enclosed petition for an additional life class. . . .
Our desire in having this class, is to offer an additional opportunity of
studying from life at a very convenient time, for those students whose
private work prevents them from having the full benefit of the early
morning class, added to this the great advantages to all the students of
having more opportunity to study from the nude.

On presenting our petition to Mr. Claghorn (president of the Academy)
we learned that Mr. Thomas Eakins has no longer a position as instructor
in the Academy. We are sorry for this, as, his good work of last winter
at the Academy, proved him to be an able instructor and a friend to all
hard working students.

Professor Schussele’s work at the Academy is already heavy. Therefore
if this extra class be granted us, we desire the privilege of inviting both
Professor Schussele and Mr. Eakins to overlook our work, using their own judgement as to the amount of instruction necessary. This enterprising student was Macdowell, his future wife. Macdowell was also one of several students who would later form the Art Students’ League. This relationship of teacher and student would blossom into a life-long relationship as husband and wife.

Eakins was not reinstated following Macdowell’s letter; however, an additional life class was added. Not until March 1878 was Eakins allowed back, when Schussele’s health had so deteriorated that the school felt it needed Eakins’ expertise. Then, following Schussele’s death in 1879, Eakins was named Professor of Drawing and Painting at the Academy.

Eakins devoted a good deal of time to the Academy. In 1882, he became Director of the Schools. He was deemed to be a great teacher to some and helped increase the enrollment of the Academy. As noted by Goodrich, in “a large majority of his students he aroused enthusiasm and devotion.” Goodrich also pointed out that, while Eakins was aware of the value of artistic principles, he had a different method for training as follows:

. . . he did not believe that they could be taught; the most that school could do was to provide thorough naturalistic training. But actually his teaching had deep if not consciously expressed artistic content: its insistence on form, so unusual in America at this time. Within a few years the Academy school had become the most popular in the country,
and he had played a part in changing the direction of American education.\textsuperscript{49}

However, Eakins’ teaching methods were viewed as radical by some. From the beginning of his tenure at the Academy he strongly held to the idea of studying from the nude. At the Academy he assisted in the life studies classes. By the time he became Director, he provided instruction almost solely on the human body. He gave lectures on anatomy, including dissection. He provided instruction on perspective and allowed students to paint from the nude without having any prior drawing studies.

**Eakins’ Emphasis on the Use of the Nude Model in his Studies**

Eakins’ use of the nude model and his noticeable indifference to any embarrassment brought on by his methods of instruction was a problem for some of his students and their parents. While use of the nude model was not uncommon in art schools, particularly in Europe, it was Eakins’ stubborn commitment to this method of teaching which some found disturbing. A minority of students and their parents found his behavior unacceptable. At times, the Academy did not have the funds for models, or models simply were not available. In these cases, Eakins tried to find his own models. He had some of the female students model for the female class of life studies. In the men’s class, he had some of the students model for one another, and in some cases Eakins himself modeled. On a rare occasion a female student posed for Eakins, with

her mother’s consent.50 Further, Eakins sometimes photographed his models for his students to study at a later time. In Eakins’ mind, this was the only thorough way to study the nude and to become a great painter. Despite Eakins’ expertise in the field of art, Eakins’ unconventional and unwavering attitude toward teaching led to complaints.

Parents were concerned and one, in particular, wrote to the President of the Academy, James L. Claghorn, admonishing Eakins’ direction of the nude life studies classes which caused a female student to lose her “chaste and delicate thoughts!”51 The board of directors of the Academy grew concerned about losing control of its organization to its radical Director. To complicate matters further for Eakins, a small opposition group of his former students also complained about his methods. One incident stood out though: “Eakins’ exposure of the completely nude male model in the women’s life class.”52 All of these factors contributed to the forced resignation of Eakins as Director of the Academy in 1886.

After his dismissal in 1886, the Art Students’ League was formed and Eakins served as its instructor for several years. As the league was student run, they were able to continue their work in photography of the nude figure. Thirty-eight students resigned from the Academy to form the Art Students’ League of Philadelphia.53

51 Ibid., 283.
52 Ibid., 285.
Eakins’ Contribution to Photography as an Art

Photography in Philadelphia

As an industrious city with many residents already interested in the latest technology, Philadelphia was at the center of science and art. Photography as a science had been introduced and was already being used by artists when Eakins began teaching at the Academy. As early as the 1850s, the Academy was hanging works of local photographers as well as Europeans in the galleries among paintings and sculptures in the exhibitions each year. Philadelphia was just another field of the photography world, and not unconnected to Stieglitz. Interestingly, Stieglitz was asked to judge a show of photography in Philadelphia in 1898, which included a work by Macdowell. This shows the widespread reputation that Stieglitz enjoyed at the time.

As Eakins’ hometown was a place full of invention and creativity, it is no wonder he had plenty of friends and teachers to influence him in the burgeoning field of photography. In 1862, the Photographic Society of Philadelphia was formed.\(^5^4\) Coleman Sellers, Eakins’ next-door neighbor and a founder of the Amateur Photographic Exchange Club and the Photographic Society, would have been a great influence on Eakins.\(^5^5\) Gérôme, Eakins’ teacher in Paris, was also an avid supporter of


\(^5^5\) Ibid., 240.
the use of photography as a tool in painting.56 Gérôme offered criticism and advice through correspondence with Eakins after he finished his studies in Paris.

One of Eakins favorite subjects to paint was the sport of rowing. Two of his models for this subject also became an influence on his work. Eakins painted two brothers rowing on the Schuylkill River.57 The Schreiber brothers owned a photographic studio and Eakins became close with Henry, one of the brothers who also would influence him in photography.58

Providing further support for the notion of a growing movement of photographers in the city, as Susan Danly has noted, “in Philadelphia there was an active group of photographers who ardently believed that photography also had an aesthetic component that was closely allied with painting.”59 These ardent photographers believed, similar to Stieglitz’s views, that photography “should be artfully composed and printed.”60 Simply put, photography was becoming widespread and the Philadelphia artists and friends surrounding Eakins included a wide range of inspiration and influence.

56 Ibid.

57 The Oarsmen (also known as The Schreiber Brothers) by Thomas Eakins, dated 1874, Yale University Art Gallery, Hartford, Connecticut.


60 Ibid.
Eakins began using a camera in the 1880s. His first known photographs appear as snapshots from a family album. Even these earlier shots, however, show that he was using them as devices to assist in his paintings, while others show an artistic eye making art itself. In some instances, Eakins even used the method of projecting an enlarged image of a photograph onto a larger canvas before painting a picture.61 In this vein, Eakins helped develop the use of photography as a tool in making art as well as its use as a medium to create art in itself.

Eakins was zealous in his use of photography in producing his art. He took scores of photographs with the ease of the newly created hand-held camera. Eakins photographed his students, his friends and his family. Some of his photographs were preparatory and took the place of studies for his final works in paint. Many of these have been studied meticulously by art historians. Some of the photographs are of nudes in the studio and outdoors. Some of the outdoor nude scenes have a natural and classical feeling to them. A recent art historian has noted the following: “For Eakins, such images established a close relationship between nudity and nature and they evoked the idealism of the classical past.”62 Further, as classical nudes became a signifcant

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subject of American Pictorialist photographers, Eakins’ work can be seen as an important influence on those artists.63

While the photographs of nude males have received a great deal of attention in the academic literature, there has been little discussion on the photographs that Eakins took of Macdowell. Yet before interpreting the photographs, however, it will help to explore the relationships between the artists and their wives for Eakins and for Stieglitz.

The Artist’s Relationship with his Wife

Stieglitz/O’Keeffe – Teacher/Student – Husband/Wife – Artist/Artist

To understand any relationship from the perspective of an outsider is difficult, but from the outset it is easy to recognize that the relationship between Stieglitz and his second wife, O’Keeffe, was complicated. It is apparent that Stieglitz found his muse in O’Keeffe. Not long after they met, O’Keeffe became an important subject for Stieglitz in many of his photographs. The “Portrait” is a series of Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe that express a deep emotional quality. Looking at the photographs by Stieglitz of O’Keeffe is almost enough on its own to perceive that there was a love affair between the two; nonetheless it will help to first study the background of their relationship.

O’Keeffe first encountered Stieglitz at an exhibition of Rodin drawings at 291 in 1908.64 She would go back to see Picasso-Braque and Picabia in 1915, Marion Beckett

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63 Ibid.

64 Homer, Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde, 236.
and Katherine Rhoades in 1916, and Marsden Hartley in 1916.\textsuperscript{65} However, it was probably O’Keeffe’s friend from art school, Anita Pollitzer living in New York at the time who brought Stieglitz and O’Keeffe together. O’Keeffe had sent Pollitzer some of the charcoal drawings she had been working on in Columbia, South Carolina. Pollitzer showed them to Stieglitz, who was quite taken by the works. He wasted no time in exhibiting O’Keeffe’s works and put them up along with works by Charles Duncan and Rene Lafferty at 291 in May, 1916.\textsuperscript{66}

When O’Keeffe found out about the exhibition of her works, she apparently was upset that Stieglitz had not asked her permission. O’Keeffe was in New York, studying under Arthur Dow at the time and, when she heard the news of Stieglitz’s presumption, she went directly to him to demand the works be taken down. At first O’Keeffe was upset, but since she held the highest respect for Stieglitz’s gallery she was persuaded by him to leave the works as they were. Stieglitz saw something of himself in her works. As Belinda Rathbone has pointed out, “... Stieglitz saw an unabashed expression of female sexuality. This woman was unafraid of self-expression and unafraid of her range in a way that Stieglitz had never encountered in a visual artist.”\textsuperscript{67} He admired her from the start and they quickly formed a relationship through correspondence over the next two years until O’Keeffe travelled back to New York in 1917 to 291 where

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 237.

Stieglitz had given her her first exhibition. O’Keeffe returned to New York again in 1918, when the couple moved in with each other but the two did not marry until 1924, after Emmy agreed to a divorce. O’Keeffe’s and Stieglitz’s relationship brought about a huge scandal for the couple. Their relationship lasted some thirty years, though at times they were not always living together.

Unlike the quieter relationship that existed between Macdowell and Eakins, the relationship between Stieglitz and O’Keeffe was often tumultuous. It was competitive but there always remained a mutual respect for one another. Their love for each other was evident in some of their works of art, particularly in some of the photographs that Stieglitz made of O’Keeffe which we will discuss later in this paper.

Stieglitz financially supported O’Keeffe for the first year they were together in New York and she, of course, brought him inspiration. At the time, she was creating works of abstraction which moved him deeply. He said of O’Keeffe, “I never realized that what she is could actually exist—absolute Truth—clarity of vision to the highest degree.” The connection between O’Keeffe and the idea of “Truth” is important in discussing the works of Stieglitz. Stieglitz and O’Keeffe certainly had a spiritual connection, for they influenced each other tremendously. O’Keeffe came to Stieglitz as he was advocating for American art; she was new and exuberant and utilized a freedom.

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68 Homer, *Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde*, 239.

of expression which enthused him. She was creating unique works influenced by her feelings and not merely copying another modern artist’s work. These were special works and Stieglitz knew it. He did what he could to help this American artist.

**Eakins/Macdowell – Teacher/Student**

Like Stieglitz and O’Keeffe, the relationship between Eakins and Macdowell was a complicated one, although more conventional. Fellow classmates at the Pennsylvania Academy said of her, “She gave up her life and career for Tom.”\(^{70}\) Like O’Keeffe, Macdowell was an artist herself. She later became a student of Eakins, and finally, became his wife, continuing her interest in art by assisting him in his work in a variety of ways, including modeling. However, Macdowell put her own work on hold once the two were married whereas O’Keeffe continued her work as an independent artist throughout her life.

The first time Macdowell saw Eakins was in 1876, when she attended the Haseltine Galleries in Philadelphia to see his scandalous painting, *The Gross Clinic* (see fig. 3). The painting portrayed the prestigious Dr. Gross in the act of surgery and was an image at the time thought to be too realistic for the public to witness. It was deemed a shocking picture as it depicted blood on the tip of the doctor’s scalpel. Further, the enormous size of the canvas made it, in the eyes of contemporary critics, unbearable to view. Eakins entered the gallery while Macdowell was there but she was too shy to

approach him at the time.\textsuperscript{72} Looking back on the moment when she finally did meet Eakins, she recalled he gave a bow and then helped clasp a button on her glove, “That was it . . . I fell in love with him right then and there.”\textsuperscript{73}

Eakins and Macdowell were married on January 19, 1884.\textsuperscript{74} A recent Eakins’ biographer noted the following:

Eakins’ love for Macdowell came as no surprise to anyone who knew the couple. In addition to Susan and her family spending time together with Tom and his sisters on the New Jersey shore, they enjoyed afternoon picnics with Tom’s nieces and nephews at the Crowell farm in Avondale.\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{73} Kirkpatrick, \textit{The Revenge of Thomas Eakins}, 217.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 279.
Eakins was devoted to his wife. Macdowell’s niece recalled the following: “His life was really for her and hers was for him; both were devoted to one another and only secondly to painting.” Though they had no children, the couple seemed to be content with each other’s company. Without children, they did, however, fill their life together with family, friends, and pets in the home. They had cats, dogs, rabbits and even a pet monkey. Until Eakins and Macdowell had a dreadful falling out with his sister, Frances, they spent much of their free time at the Avondale farm just outside of Philadelphia, where his sister, her husband and their children lived.

There are many endearing photographs which Eakins took from their excursions to the Avondale farm and to the New Jersey shore. Some of the photographs from Avondale which Eakins took of Macdowell, which we will look at later, generate a feeling of love and admiration for his subject.

Macdowell became a staunch supporter of her husband and he would need that support because of his tumultuous career and personal life, which is described in part below. As noted, even before Eakins and Macdowell were married, she wrote a letter to the Pennsylvania Academy asking that Eakins’ position be restored and commending his ability as an art instructor. Macdowell would advocate even more fervently in the future in defense of her husband’s character, both in the professional and private realm.

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75 Ibid., 278.
An important aspect of their relationship aside from their mutual love and respect for one another was their shared interest in art. They both loved painting. It is evident that she admired his work, as she was a student and follower, but he also admired her work. Macdowell’s nephew recalls that Eakins felt that, “She was a better painter than he was—if only she kept at it more often . . . She was as good a woman painter as he had ever seen and she knew more about color than he did.” Further, Eakins was quoted as saying that Macdowell was the best female painter in America.

Macdowell painted noteworthy realistic works. Similar to Eakins in style and subject matter, she painted many of the people close to her, such as family and friends. It is intriguing to think of what more she could have achieved artistically had she not married Eakins. Similarly, what would Eakins’ life have been like? In this regard, Seymour Adelman said the following:

Without her steadfast faith in his art, one wonders whether Eakins, ignored decade after decade by critics and collectors, rejected by his fellow townsmen, riven by family tragedy, pursued indeed by all the demons of ill-luck, would have continued to paint the many masterworks of his later career.

Even with few existing letters and recorded interviews, we can still read between the lines to interpret the kind of relationship Eakins shared with his wife.

Regarding the lack of recorded evidence, a recent biographer of Eakins noted quite

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78 Adelman, Susan Macdowell Eakins, 24.


80 Adelman, Susan Macdowell Eakins, 8.
fittingly that some of the most important historical evidence of their marriage “is to be found in their paintings and sketches of each other.”\textsuperscript{81} As an example of this, the same historian pointed out a telling Eakins portrait of his wife done in 1884-1885 (see fig. 4):

Eakins produced what can only be described as a lovely painting of his wife sitting demurely in a blue dress, looking thin, even fragile—which she was not. What he achieved in the portrait is the effect of an affectionate exchange between the sitter and the artist.\textsuperscript{82}

That “affectionate exchange between the sitter and the artist” is at the core of this study, as it is manifested not only in Eakins’ painting of Macdowell but also in many of the photographs he took of wife. That same principle is evident in the photographs Stieglitz took of O’Keeffe.

The reciprocal nature of the Eakins-Macdowell relationship is manifested in Macdowell’s own artwork. For instance, Macdowell painted a portrait of Eakins so similar in style to her mentor/teacher, that it also imparts the same feeling of devotion between the artist and the sitter. (See fig. 5.) Not only is there a feeling of devotion revealed by the piece but the painting, like much of Eakins’ work, leaves the viewer with a sense of honesty, integrity and truth, characteristics associated with Eakins’ own work. Macdowell reveals a deep empathy for, and familiarity with, Eakins. This is exhibited in part by the hand placed on his head. Macdowell was searching for truth in her work as well.

\textsuperscript{81} McFeely, Portrait, 103.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
Figure 4. Thomas Eakins, *The Artist’s Wife and His Setter Dog.*

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Macdowell supported her husband in many ways after their marriage, including assisting him in his photography. Macdowell may have owned a camera even before Eakins. Adelman noted, “I remember Mrs. Elizabeth Kenton, a sister of Mrs. Eakins, telling me that Susan had been a capable photographer even before she met Eakins.”\textsuperscript{85} He further noted how Charles Bregler, a former student of Eakins and a collector of his work, “recalled that he had often seen Mrs. Eakins assisting her husband in the then cumbersome business of taking photographs.”\textsuperscript{86} It is difficult to know how far Macdowell took her interest in photography, but we do know that she was one of the


\textsuperscript{85} Adelman, \textit{Susan Macdowell Eakins}, 12.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
first members of the Philadelphia Photographic Salon, an organization established by
the Academy and the Photographic Society of Philadelphia in 1898. The following
was proclaimed by the Salon’s first show that fall:

. . . the possibilities of photographs as a method of artistic expression . . .
[and showed] . . . only such a picture produced by photography as may
give distinct evidence of individual artistic feeling and execution. For
the first time in this country is presented a photographic exhibition
confined exclusively to such pictures, rigidly selected by a Jury, whose
certificate of acceptance is the only award.

Susan Macdowell had one photograph accepted that year, *Child with Doll*, the last
known and only instance of her exhibiting at the Salon. Several of Eakins’ students
also exhibited that year along with Macdowell: Elizabeth Macdowell, Susan’s sister,
Alice Barber, and Amelia Van Buren. Stieglitz was one of the judges of this
exhibition, an interesting coincidence. In examining Macdowell’s work, it would be
helpful to know if Stieglitz had any specific comments on her work. In any event, this
is evidence of Macdowell’s interest and her contribution to photography.

While Susan and Thomas Eakins’ relationship seems to have been one-sided in
the overwhelming support she gave to her husband, it also represents a compromise in
the relationship between a husband and wife—both artists. It may also represent the

87 Ibid., 29.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
satisfaction Macdowell felt in participating in the work of her husband, by posing as a subject in his paintings and photographs, as well as assisting him in painting and photography. Later, I will examine the photographs which Eakins took of Macdowell, which illustrate not only the mutual adoration the two felt for one another, but also the adoration the artist felt for his subject, an emotion that comes forth by way of the photograph.
CHAPTER 3: LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY BELIEFS

General History and Beliefs

Despite the fact that Stieglitz’s and Eakins’ careers overlapped, their respective social contexts were distinct, separated both chronologically and geographically. While Eakins lived in Victorian Philadelphia, a relatively restrictive society, Stieglitz’s life and his surroundings in New York City were quite different. Stieglitz lived at the end of the Victorian era where some small groups, the Stieglitz circle for one, were interested in modern art and the New York avant-garde.

In addition, while Stieglitz had a hand in bringing forth a new kind of art in both photography and painting, Eakins himself transformed the Pennsylvania Academy into a huge success, despite the prevailing view of some of the school’s more conservative students and their parents as well as board members. Both men had a tremendous impact on American art and education in their times.

By the turn of the century, artists’ views were changing. Their work had moved away from the traditional idea of art and likewise that changed our way of looking at art. The progressive art movement and its supporters, such as Stieglitz with his own gallery of modern art, introduced new artists to the public and gave them the opportunity to see new kinds of art. Although the monumental 1913 Armory Show provided great exposure for American viewers to look at avant-garde art because of its scale and variety, Stieglitz in no small part had a role in introducing modern art to the American public. For he already in the previous decade had shown works by many of
the artists included in the Armory Show. Despite the revelation of the Armory show, the understanding and acceptance of modern art was a gradual change, involving many artists and critics, and Stieglitz had an important role in this evolution due to his writings and leadership in the art world. Eakins, too, played a large part in the development of modern art in America, as many of his works used unconventional subjects. Eakins’ own art did not always conform to the social beliefs of the day and only looking back do we appreciate more fully his contribution to the field. We will later examine the photographic works of Eakins and Stieglitz and the representation of their wives in the nude and clothed. This chapter, however, will preface that discussion by illustrating the social contexts in which these photographs were made as well as the prevailing image of women at the time.

_Nineteenth-Century Victorian Views—Women and Nineteenth-Century Photography_

After the Industrial Revolution, gender roles in America were carefully defined with the man, or husband, leaving home for work and the woman, or wife, taking care of the home. The home in America became “a refuge from the desecrations of the modern business world, a place where spiritual values could be cultivated.”¹ As Chadwick noted, many middle-class women tried to broaden this cultured influence of domestic life by becoming involved in Christian reform movements. These

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undertakings supported the abolition of slavery, temperance and universal suffrage.²

Becoming more independent by securing rights as equal citizens helped change the image of women over time.

In the nineteenth century, a woman was usually portrayed as a beautiful and ideal image. Reflecting attitudes of the Victorian mind, sculptors in the nineteenth century looked to classical art and filled their works with attributes of “beauty, nobility, serenity, fortitude and temperance.”³ However, within the Victorian mindset, there were two extreme ideals for the image of a woman:

Generally speaking, at opposite poles were the concepts of woman as an example of Christian virtue and woman as the object of sensual allure. Portrayals of a woman nude, partially clothed, or with clothing that revealed every contour of her body were the most common manners of expression, yet something about the sculpture always implied the proper Christian intentions which, in effect, excused the subject’s nudity.⁴

The Victorian period epitomized a patriarchal society and it is reflected somewhat in the lives of the Eakins family in Philadelphia. “The central fact in the life of Macdowell was, of course, her marriage to Thomas Eakins.”⁵ Women in the nineteenth century who were married had little chance of pursuing a career. As a result, they were often forced to choose between marriage and a career. Macdowell seems to have found comfort in the existing culture. She had a loving family who supported her

² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Adelman, Susan Macdowell Eakins, 8.
through her studies at the Pennsylvania Academy and she found a loving husband in Eakins. Accordingly, she dedicated her life to their marriage. That involved housekeeping (that she complained about) as well as taking care of house guests, which were many. For most of their lives together, Thomas Eakins and his wife resided in the house where Eakins grew up. For a time, they lived with his father, with his siblings and even other extended family. In addition to caring for others, Macdowell assisted her husband in his work, often times modeling for the artist for paintings and photographs. Shown in their day, the nude images that Eakins created of his wife made some viewers cringe—viewers who adhered to the prevailing notions of Victorian propriety. As noted above, a mother of a student at the Pennsylvania Academy expressed her grave concern about Eakins’ teaching methods. Nonetheless, Eakins created some beautiful nude portraits of his wife that we will examine later in this paper.

Despite his unconventional teaching methods, Eakins was a traditional painter. However, as one art historian has noted, Eakins rejected “the notion, taken for granted at the time, that the portrait of a woman, especially a commissioned portrait, must be flattering in order to be successful.”6 On the other hand, the photographs of Macdowell discussed in this paper show the opposite, demonstrating her beauty and reflecting the affectionate manner in which she was held by the artist.

Image versus Beauty

In his book on the subject of Victorian America, one author observed the following:

Two ideals of feminine beauty developed over the period 1870-1920. The earlier model was voluptuous and plump, with a full, almost round face; her hair style was termed à la Madonna (when pulled back and often braided on each side of her head) or chignon (when braided and coiled into a large roll at the back of the head) to balance the backward thrust of her full skirt’s bustle. The actress Lillian Russell, first lady Lucy Hayes, and, of course, Queen Victoria herself helped spread this ideal. After 1900, notions about beauty changed as the Gibson Girl offered another model—tall and commanding, slender and athletic. This “new” woman wore her hair à la pompadour (a full but not ornate style that emphasized the front rather than the back of the head).7

Interestingly, neither Macdowell nor O’Keeffe, the subjects of their husband’s works, fit into either ideal image of a woman. They were however natural beauties. From the close-up photographs we have of O’Keeffe we see no makeup or extravagant hairstyle. With no makeup or fashionable hairstyle, her glamour was present in her attitude, not her outward appearance. O’Keeffe shows a certain confidence which made her images attractive. Photographs of Macdowell, too, show a woman of natural beauty (though we have fewer extant photographs to view of Eakins’ wife, and those we can view are of much less clarity than the O’Keeffe shots). Macdowell wore no makeup either and usually wore her hair up in a simple bun. The idea of a classical beauty comes to mind when viewing photographs of Macdowell. With her hair up in a bun, she seems to be the proper lady. When posing in the nude in the grass, her body

appears like she is a part of nature. We will discuss this in more detail later in this paper. These characteristics of integrity shown in the O’Keeffe and Macdowell photographs are revealing in terms of the artists who made them, since truth and nature were qualities inherent in their husbands’ works. Stieglitz was always in search for the upper-case “Truth,” and Eakins strove to replicate nature in all its beauty, be it a landscape on the Delaware River or the unclothed body of his lovely wife.

The ideal image of a woman in the late nineteenth century also involves another aspect, one that is not entirely about external attractiveness and one that neither O’Keeffe nor Macdowell fit. Although they seemed to be proper ladies, they were unconventional. They were well-read and, as one historian noted, that did not fit into the ideal image of a woman at the time:

Anatomy, physiology, and Biblical authority were repeatedly invoked to prove that the ideal of modest and pure womanhood that evolved during Queen Victoria’s reign (1837-1901) was based on sound physiological principles. . . Not only was it widely believed that too much book learning decreased femininity, exposure to the nude model was thought to inflame the passions and disturb the control of female sexuality that lay at the heart of Victorian moral injunctions.8

O’Keeffe and Macdowell, of course, took part in nude modeling: Macdowell as both artist and model and O’Keeffe modeling for Stieglitz. This notion of a Victorian ideal woman was prevalent during the time Eakins and Macdowell were at the Academy. Not without struggle, these views would change.

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Women and Photography of the Early Twentieth Century

By the turn of the century, images of women were changing. Despite the many photographic images of women taken in the nineteenth century which reflected a woman’s place in the home, by 1900, several women photographers were linked to progressive reform politics that could identify them as feminists. Gertrude Kasebier was one such woman. Kasebier created artistic images of women in domestic spaces, and as a recent writer noted, “Her photographs present women in very physical ways, yet always as having procreative, maternal, and nurturing bodies that are neither the

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subjects nor the objects of heterosexual sensuality.”\textsuperscript{11} Even though these images show a certain domesticity with regards to the subject matter and interior scenery, “Nonetheless, Kasebier’s photographs, produced at the time of the first development of modern feminism, from 1890 to 1920, suggest a subtle tempering of the power over women’s bodies asserted by the Victorian cult of domesticity.”\textsuperscript{12} To bring that point home, in her photographs, Kasebier’s mothers allow their children independence as opposed to the close knit depictions of mother and child as seen in other photographers’ work of the same period.\textsuperscript{13} (See fig. 6.)

In the first few decades of the twentieth century sexual freedom was emerging, particularly for women, and it is illustrated in the photographs of nudes from this time.\textsuperscript{14} In a new spirit of identity, photographer Anne Brigman turned the Victorian ideal image of women upside down. For a decade after 1903, she made a series of nude photographs that has been described as follows:

Her photographs offered a sense of physical freedom for the female body, one connected with the reform movement in women’s clothing, which set aside tight dresses and rib-bruising corsets for loose, flowing gowns worn with a minimum of undergarments. She also photographed the female body in wild, uncultivated landscapes.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 49.
By the end of the nineteenth century, several novels had been written with the female heroine having a new presence. As twenty-first century writer Chadwick noted, “Flaunting convention, the New Woman drinks, smokes, reads books, and leads a healthy athletic life.” Chadwick continues, “By 1900, feminists were demanding not just voting rights for women, but their right to higher education and the right to earn an income, and the modern woman had appeared.”16

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By the second decade of the twentieth century, when O’Keeffe was in her twenties, women had more opportunities than in the previous century. Also, the ideal image of a woman had been gradually changing. O’Keeffe, herself, was a “modern woman.” She was independent, attended school away from home, and supported herself while living on her own. This “New Woman” was confident and O’Keeffe epitomizes that confidence in the photographs that Stieglitz made. By looking straight back at Stieglitz, or the viewer, O’Keeffe demonstrates confidence and strength as we will examine later in this paper.

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New York Avant-Garde of the 1920s

Apart from the fact that Stieglitz is a central figure in this study, it would be difficult to describe the history of the New York avant-garde art scene of the 1920s without full mention of Alfred Stieglitz and the groundwork he laid for developing a new understanding and appreciation for art. A recent biographer noted that Alfred Stieglitz:

. . . is perhaps the most important figure in the history of the visual arts in America. That is certainly not to say that he was the greatest artist America has ever produced. Rather, through his many roles—as a great photographer, as a discoverer and promoter of photographers and of artists in other media, and as a publisher, patron, and collector—he had a greater impact on American art than any other person has had.18

In addition to his own photographic work, Stieglitz mentored and exhibited the works of, and even helped support (financially as well as intellectually) some of his favorite artists of the time. Of course, Stieglitz was not the only supporter of modern artists during this time. However, he was the first to show works by Rodin, Picasso and Matisse in America. These European artists were important influences on Stieglitz and the American avant-garde. Stieglitz supported these modern artists even before the famous 1913 Armory Show that brought to America and, most importantly, to New York City, the first large group showing of the modern art works from both Europe and America. Beginning with the Armory Show and for five years after, the American modern art world rivaled that of the European modern art world. “A reexamination of

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surviving documents—catalogs, [sic] critical reviews, records of dealers and collectors—reveals that the quantity and variety of exhibitions of progressive native and foreign art increased after the Armory Show, especially in New York City where numerous avant-garde art shows were held.”¹⁹ After the 1913 Armory Show, several galleries opened up in the city with works by modern artists. None, however, played as significant a role as Stieglitz’s in revolutionizing art in America.²⁰

Using the progressive views of the American avant-garde, Stieglitz would create some of his most provocative images, those of Georgia O’Keeffe in the nude. With the growing thoughts of modern art in the early part of the twentieth century and the freedom of expression that came with it, Stieglitz created some compelling photographs of O’Keeffe that show the beauty of the human body in a new way. They also express the adoration the artist had for his subject. Like Stieglitz, Eakins made nude photographs of his wife, Macdowell. Unlike Stieglitz, Eakins’s photographs of his wife illustrate a more traditional image of a woman, something acceptable in Victorian Philadelphia. Both artists presented images that fell within the social contexts of the times. As we know, Eakins had always adored nature and the human body, but these photographs add other elements, those of admiration, love and respect for the subject, his wife.


CHAPTER 4: PORTRAITS OF THE ARTISTS’ WIVES

In this section, we will analyze a selection of photographs which Eakins and Stieglitz took of their respective wives. Through a description-based analysis, we will find in the selected photographs that these images provide the viewer with an indication of how each artist felt for his subject. In addition, as noted in the previous segment we will see how the photographs reflect the changing roles of womanhood at the time. Through that analysis we also will find that the choices each artist made in creating these images will bring us to an understanding that each artist felt a strong closeness to his subject, a love and respect for her as well.

The Wife and Model

If being a wife, in itself, meant modeling in the nude for your husband, it certainly did not apply to Stieglitz’s first wife, Emmy. Stieglitz took clothed photographs of Emmy, but most of them reveal a sense of detachment, as do the photographs of their daughter, Kitty (see fig. 2) and the photograph of Emmy and Kitty together (see fig. 32). On the other hand, O’Keeffe gladly took part in the art of Stieglitz by modeling both clothed and nude. O’Keeffe, in appreciation for the art of Stieglitz, collaborated with her husband as a model during most of their lives together. Similarly, Eakins’ wife, Macdowell, in appreciation for his work, modeled for her husband both before and after they were married.

Macdowell always assisted her husband in his work and unlike Emmy she was an artist herself and therefore understood the role she had undertaken as a model. She
was a devoted wife and modeling for husband was just another part of being a good wife. It is easy to forget that she also was an artist; in this regard, it was one way in which she could take part in continuing to make art. Macdowell willingly posed for her husband in the nude and became a part of some compelling photographs. The photographs of Macdowell portray her as a woman in an accepted subject matter in art. As noted earlier, many of the customary works of art at the time show a woman connected to nature and the nude portraits of Macdowell fall within that tradition.

Stieglitz’s photographs illustrate an innovative approach. To document an intimate relationship with O’Keeffe in photographs was unusual at the time.\(^1\) Unlike Eakins who used Macdowell’s photographs particularly for studies, Stieglitz exhibited the nude photographs he took of O’Keeffe. There was something special in their relationship from the start and Stieglitz wanted to translate that into his photographs of O’Keeffe. The “Portrait” of O’Keeffe was also innovative because Stieglitz was really creating a study of O’Keeffe. As Sarah Greenough has noted, Stieglitz became fascinated, “with seriality and the possibility of photographing the same subject day after day, often in only slightly different poses, mining each arrangement and expression for its greatest potency.”\(^2\) That study became Stieglitz’s ideal woman; he found the universal “Woman.” In the many studies/poses and close-up images, Stieglitz

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believed by photographing the individual parts of O’Keeffe’s body, he would convey his knowledge of O’Keeffe’s character.³

Compared to the Macdowell photographs, the O’Keeffe photographs are much more sensual. Some are openly sexual. O’Keeffe herself confirmed that a number of these photographs were taken after the artist and subject had made love.⁴ It is not difficult for one to believe that statement after looking at some of the photographs we will examine below as they reveal what could be understood as some extremely intimate moments between the photographer and his subject. Whether sensual or sexual, in either case, the photographs show adoration for the subject. Interestingly, as much as the photographs suggest a power and strength on the part of O’Keeffe, when asked if she actively collaborated with the photographer she modestly said, “... You had to sit there and do what you were told.”⁵

**Portrait versus Portrait Series**

**Portrait**

Eakins appears to have taken the nude photographs of his wife with the intention of private use. With our knowledge of how Eakins used photography of the nude in his classes, it also is evident that he used photographs as preparations for some of his paintings. In addition, some of Eakins’ photographs can be viewed as individual works

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⁵ Georgia O’Keeffe, as recorded by Perry Miller Adato in footage filmed in the early 1980s and incorporated into “The Eloquent Eye: Alfred Stieglitz and Modern Art in America,” 2001.
of art. In order to gain an understanding of his feelings for his subject, we will begin by examining some photographs which Eakins composed of his wife.

**Traditional/Classical Theme**

In the first photograph, Macdowell is posed in an idyllic setting. The artist placed his subject in a clearing, most likely at the Avondale farm in Pennsylvania. Eakins made Macdowell look like a mythological or classical figure from history. (See fig. 8.) As the previous section discussed, in traditional art, a nude female image was often represented as being a part of nature or connected to it in some way. It was an accepted way to see a woman presented in the nude. In the same way, the female nude was usually depicted as young.

Macdowell appears youthful in the photograph. In the image, Macdowell is seated on a blanket on the ground with her knees bent. She is not looking at the artist, thereby minimizing the connection between the artist and the subject, and the connection between the viewer and the subject. Macdowell is posed in profile looking away from the camera. Her right arm is resting on her right leg which is bent at the knee at an angle to the ground. Her right hand wraps around the upper part of her shin. Bending forward just a bit, Macdowell seems to be holding her leg inward toward her body, which might indicate a sense of vulnerability. However her left leg is bent in a way at the hip and knee so that it is flat to the ground with her knee pointing away from
her body. This leads one to believe that she does not feel vulnerable in the pose, but instead is comfortable. It could also indicate that she is opening up to her husband as her pose is relaxed and at the same time she is exposed. Also, Macdowell makes no overt gesture to cover her private areas, even though they are covered by her arm and leg by the angle of the camera.

To the viewer Macdowell appears to be neither in deep thought, nor daydreaming because she is not looking up in the air toward some faraway place. She

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seems very much in the present. Still, Macdowell makes no contact with the artist, or
the viewer, and looks straight ahead as if she is awake and alert in the situation.
Macdowell seems perfectly content in this image taken by her husband. She is in total
control of her body similar to an image we will see later of O’Keeffe in a kimono.
Though not looking straight at the photographer/artist/husband, Macdowell reveals in
her pose that she is at peace in the setting. That sense of comfort reflects an element of
husband-wife intimacy.

For his part, Eakins has created an artistic image of his wife choosing to place
her in a natural setting. Not only does she look natural in the setting but she is in a
natural state, her body bare. In the picture, Eakins placed Macdowell in the
middleground of the picture. She is sitting in a partly shady, partly sunny area, almost
as if the shade were some sort of ordinary cover for her unclothed body. While the
shadows cover most of her, there is a bit of light shimmering over the right side of her
body, on her back, hip and leg. Eakins is known for his use of light in his paintings and
that comes through in this photograph of Macdowell as well. Her dark hair, which
appears to be up in a bun, is also dappled with a slight shred of sunlight. However, the
dark hair on her head blends in with the shade from the trees surrounding her. Aside
from the blanket she is sitting on, Macdowell has become a part of nature. In Eakins’
eyes, she was nature, her image melding in seamlessly with the forest cover. The image
calls to mind the admiration that Eakins had for nature, and in this case, his subject and
his wife.
Eakins’ love of nature is evident from his various outings with family and friends. He visited the New Jersey shore where he went fishing with his father; boated and rode bikes with his father and his good friend, Samuel Murray; and he spent time on the Avondale farm, where this photograph is thought to have been taken. Eakins also demonstrated his love of nature in a letter home from Paris to Emily Sartain, his girlfriend at the time: “I envy you your drive along the Wissahickon among those

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beautiful hills with which are connected some of my most pleasant reminiscences.”
In Eakins’ portrait of his wife, his love of nature and his wife blend effortlessly together in this image.

In the second portrait of Macdowell, Eakins posed his wife standing next to Billy, the horse he kept at the Avondale farm. (See fig. 9.) Macdowell is leaning on Billy with her arms bent at the elbows, reaching her right arm over his right shoulder, her left arm bent so that her head can rest on her forearm and hand. Billy’s head is turned toward her with his nose not far from her right hip. The photograph is endearing in its connection between the two figures. The setting is outdoors in a wooded environment, also at the Avondale farm similar to the photograph above. Aside from posing alongside an animal, what makes the image so natural looking is the lush foliage surrounding the figures. Eakins chose to present his wife in a peaceful, dreamlike setting. His decision to show Macdowell appearing to step out of the leaves, which reach up to her thighs, gives this image an otherworldly feeling. The image is mythic in the embrace between the human and the animal. Again, as in the first picture we examined, Eakins chose to represent his subject as a part of nature, something he adored as much as his wife.

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9 For a further discussion on the legend, see “The Legend of Lady Godiva” by H. R. Ellis Davidson in Folklore, Vol. 80, No 2 (Summer, 1969), 107-121. The photograph brings to mind the legend of Lady Godiva riding naked on her white horse. The legend was very popular in the Victorian classroom.
In both pictures, Macdowell is represented as the classical nude, an accepted form of traditional art. Eakins admired classical art and had a particular appreciation for Phidias, the Greek sculptor. In this photograph, Macdowell is placed on a pedestal, much like a mythological figure or goddess would be. In this way, the artist reveals his respect and adoration for the subject while at the same time honoring the classical form he so valued. In both photographs, Eakins chose to represent her looking away from the viewer, not engaged with the viewer, giving evidence of the feelings of respect he had for his wife. In the same way Eakins allowed Macdowell to be in control of her body, to appear disengaged with the artist and to shed any vulnerability.

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11 Homer, Eakins at Avondale, 18.
In the first two photographs, there is no other human figure but Macdowell. Despite the apparent distance the artist has created between himself and his subject, one can still imagine the presence of the artist just outside the picture frame. Perhaps Eakins himself was even unclothed at the time, which might have made Macdowell feel more at ease. This would not have been out of the question as Eakins had no problem with being nude himself. There is a nude photograph of Eakins sitting astride the very same horse, Billy, in what appears to be the same setting.\textsuperscript{12} (See fig. 10.) For the artist to share with his subject this moment in an idyllic setting makes it easy for us as viewers to recognize the affection Eakins had for his wife, as well as the love he had for nature and the human body.

In the third figure of Macdowell, Eakins posed her in a more dramatic and openly sensual way (see fig. 11). This is one of the more crisply focused pictures Eakins made of Macdowell in the nude and it is striking in its contrasts: in the composition of a bright figure with a dark background as well as in the forms and lines making up the composition. Not only is this a more dramatic picture, it is a much more appealing photograph of Macdowell. The shape of her back is not only sensuous in the form and its outlines, but in the way the dark outlines contrast completely with the lightest tone of her fair skin. In the image, unlike the first two, Macdowell

\textsuperscript{12} Homer, \textit{Eakins at Avondale}, 19.
is out in the open and there is no foliage or shadows covering her. The photograph is a much closer, more intimate shot indicating the closeness between the model and artist.

In examining the photograph, we see an almost hour-glass shaped figure created by Macdowell’s pose and by the artist in his composition. As we know, she had a thin and petite figure. However, in the way she stretches one arm to the right while leaning on it, and curves the left side of her body while holding the left leg with her left arm, this pose creates a beautiful form of her back torso. In this form, one can sense Eakins’ appreciation of Greek statuary. In this sense, we can see Eakins as the sculptor.

Further, one can also imagine Eakins’ love for the beautiful image he created in the photograph because, like the photographs examined previously, Macdowell appears to

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be a part of nature. Although she is uncovered by foliage, she is sitting on the ground that is scattered with leaves and grass. She is not sitting on a blanket, which makes her connection even closer to nature than the other two photographs.

Despite the close connection to nature in the photograph, Macdowell has more prominence in the way her body strongly contrasts with her environment. Her body is smooth, soft and pale, while her surroundings are the opposite. The leaves are mostly dark, the greenery and branches are in crooked shapes, and the ground is an earthy color with an uneven texture. The light is dappled on the foliage surrounding Macdowell. All of these elements are in contrast with the bright light as it shines fully on the skin of her back making her body look as if it is lit from within. This creates a strong contrast with her and her surroundings. In spite of this, Macdowell still appears comfortable there.

Eakins’ use of natural light in the photograph is similar to the way he used light in his paintings, creating a natural image of truth and nature. The light is reflected in ways that create a high contrast that denotes the strong lines and form of the body in the image.

Even though Macdowell is looking away from the artist and viewer—her face is in profile—we still sense that she may have been able to see Eakins in her peripheral vision. One can easily envision the connection there must have been between the artist and his sitter, possibly by the natural pose and by the sense that she could easily have
seen the artist from her position. The proximity between the artist and model emphasizes the closeness between the two.

In another image of Macdowell, Eakins photographed her in a white empire dress (see fig. 12). Sitting on a platform in an Academy studio she is posed in a semi-reclined position with her body leaning on her right hand again. Here the viewer might sense a feeling of detachment from the way she looks demurely away from the camera, but that can be explained by the location of the setting as Macdowell could well have been in the company of other students as the photograph was taken at the Academy. This is an example of a traditional pose for a woman in art, acceptable at the time, particularly as she looks away from the photographer. Looking away gives her a demure and quiet attitude adhering to Victorian sensibilities. However, as we have seen, Eakins did not always adhere to prevailing beliefs of the time.

Eakins’ use of light is also apparent in this photograph as it appears to be coming in from the front and right side of the picture, giving light to Macdowell’s face and left arm. The contrast of the light in the front and the shadow in the background is significant in that it creates a stage-like setting. Eakins cropped the photograph in an effective way centering the subject and at the same time using the shadow and light in the background to balance the composition. While Macdowell looks away from the viewer down toward the ground, she also looks at her own body asserting the command she has over the pose. Still, there is a softness to her pose and costume that adds a gentle muse-like quality to the image. Macdowell’s dress gives the photograph a
classical feel that can again be attributed to Eakins’ own predilection for Greek art. Despite the fact Macdowell looks away from the viewer, the photograph reveals Eakins’ affection for the subject in its similarity to a scene from antiquity, a quality to which Eakins aspired in his art, and in the way the photograph reveals a softness and affection for Macdowell. Macdowell is idealized in this portrait. Again, as Eakins was not known for idealizing his subjects, this emphasizes the adoration he felt for Macdowell. This photograph by Eakins is quite different from another he took of his

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female students at the Academy, reflecting his singular admiration for his wife as a model.

In the photograph of three female students suggestive of *The Three Graces* in classical mythology (see fig. 13), Eakins makes another study of the students at the Academy. There is a sense of coldness among the subjects in the photograph. The students are posed as if they have no connection or warmth toward each other which is unlike some of the traditional images of *The Three Graces*. There is also a sense of shame as each of the figures is either looking away or looking down, as is the case of the lady in the mask. Despite the fact she is looking down, we cannot identify her because she is wearing a mask. Her left arm crosses her body with her hand in her lap covering her private area. However, her front torso is exposed which may be the reason for her modesty and unease. The two other students are facing away, one with her back and the other with her side to the camera. This also suggests a feeling of coldness toward the viewer, and the photographer. Eakins created the photograph with both a sense of detachment, and an apparent coldness toward his sitters; the same feeling that is produced from the sitters themselves. The plain interior setting contrasts with the classical and natural setting of some of the Macdowell photographs, which in the latter three works create a lack of warmth and a distance in the image. Unlike the photographs of Macdowell which show affection, these photographs demonstrate an apathetic, anonymous feeling, if not dislike. The same apathetic feeling is apparent in another image of a female student, Laura, represented in the “Naked Series.”
Eakins created the “Naked Series” with the study of anatomy in mind; he took photographs of each figure in seven different poses. Laura, the subject here (see fig. 14), is also masked like the individual in the previous photograph. Here, the subject wearing the mask, again, adds to the sense of impersonality. She does not appear to be

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ashamed, but seems indifferent. There is no sense of affection illustrated here by the model or the artist. The subject seems objectified. Despite the fact the photographs are nude, there is no sense of eroticism or sensuality to them. Each of the poses is stiff and uninviting which detracts from any alluring quality. The “Naked Series” photographs are a scientific study and this cold objectivity pervades the photographs, including figure 14. Again, the background is a cold and pedestrian interior, not a lush natural setting or a classical setting.

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As mentioned earlier, much has been written on the photographs of Eakins’ male students and how he focused mainly on these pupils in his work. Interestingly, there was almost the same number of male and female students who modeled for classes at the Academy.\textsuperscript{17} In many of the Eakins photographs of male students, there is also a feeling of indifference toward the models, particularly those represented in the “Naked Series.”

In the photograph set of G. Agnew Reid (see fig. 15), the student is represented in seven poses on a card as in the previous photographs of Laura. Like the photographs of Laura, the images in this set clearly represent a study and do not evince any emotional attachment by the photographer at all. They too have a clinical quality to them. It has been suggested that there were some homoerotic elements to the photographs of the male students of Eakins.\textsuperscript{18} This photograph, however, does not illustrate any sexual feeling such as a gesture, pose or facial expression. In each of the positions the subject has taken, there is no eye contact with the photographer, or the viewer, especially the full frontal images, where the subject is

\textsuperscript{17} Dr. Ellwood C. Parry, III and Dr. Robert Stubbs, introduction to \textit{Photographer Thomas Eakins} (Philadelphia: Olympia Galleries, Ltd., 1981).

Fig. 15. Thomas Eakins, “G. Agnew Reid, seven photographs,” 1883.  

looking down, seeming to look away from the camera in shame. The poses are devoid of any feeling except perhaps the impression of shyness in the way the sitter in the frontal poses is looking down, away from the photographer. The cold aspects of this sequence contrasts sharply with the warm intimacy of Eakins’ photographs of Macdowell.

In another photograph taken at the Academy Eakins poses three men, one is Frank Stephens and the other two are unidentified, though the figure on the right is possibly Eakins himself (see fig. 16). In figure 16, the three men seem disengaged. Eakins posed them in different positions so that he could study the body, just as he did in the “Naked Series.” In the photograph, not only are the figures disengaged with each other, they also are disengaged with the photographer. They are mannequin-like and there is no feeling expressed one way or the other among the three. The viewer sees the

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backs of two figures so there is no evidence of a facial expression which might indicate the subject’s attitude or feeling. However, there is some expression emanating from the pose of the figure on the right suggesting, possibly, boredom or impatience. He is standing with his right leg on the floor, his right arm held akimbo and the other leaning on the knee of the left leg which is bent and resting on a platform. He also looks away from the camera making no connection with the viewer/photographer. The reasons for the photograph are evident in that Eakins used photographs as studies for later drawings or paintings because without the photograph the poses of the figures in many

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cases would simply be too difficult to hold for any length of time. Unlike the other two figures, the figure on the left appears to be in an unbalanced position revealing an apparent unease. He also seems removed from the other models.

In addition to the nude male photographs at the Academy, Eakins captured both male and female students in costume, similar to the photograph of Macdowell in the empire dress. In a photograph of two male students, Eakins posed one standing and one sitting in front of a plaster cast of Aphrodite (see fig. 17). Having dressed the figures in Greek costumes with clothes, sandals and head wreaths, Eakins created yet another

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classical image. The two male figures in the photograph are engaged in an exchange as one appears to be writing on the floor and the other is watching carefully. It is a staged dramatic scene as the figures in the image have no contact with the photographer or viewer. In this sense, Eakins has again distanced himself from the male figures. The distance created leaves the viewer with no feeling of emotion on behalf of Eakins. Moreover, there is a wooden quality to the men’s interaction. Further, there is again a sense of coldness in this image of the male figures that is not the case in the Macdowell photograph in the empire dress. The statuary in the background creates a lack of feeling and a formality, which contrasts with the Macdowell image where she seems life-like and warm.

In another image of his female students, Eakins created a more engaging portrayal of the figures. In this composition of the female models, the photograph reveals a connection between the figures, as well as a connection between one of the models and the photographer (see fig. 18). The standing figure on the right is holding an alluring pose as she faces the viewer with her back arched. Both figures show an intimacy toward each other by their close proximity, natural body language and the fixed gaze of the figure on the left toward the figure on the right. Still, Eakins distanced the figures in the composition from the viewer and himself as the artist as they also are staged to represent a classical theme similar to the male students in the previous photograph. Despite the alluring pose of the figure on the right, she actually looks as if she is caught off guard, demonstrating a sign of apprehension at the viewer’s approach.
It looks as if the viewer has interrupted the two women in their conversation. The image is not inviting. The body language particularly of the subject on the right is excluding the viewer. Neither does the photograph reveal an intimacy or affection as the Eakins photographs of Macdowell do though they are less wooden than the photographs of the male models.

On the other hand, the Macdowell photograph in the empire dress is affectionate. While Macdowell appears demure or wistful, the photograph is not uninviting. It reveals a warmth for the subject compared to the photograph here which

Fig. 18. Thomas Eakins, “Unidentified Models in Greek Costumes,” c. 1883, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.  

is cold and uninviting and disengages with the viewer. Further, Eakins has given Macdowell prominence in her photograph as she is not placed next to any statuary but is the focus of the composition. This is in contrast to the figures here that are placed next to a relief on the table, similar to the male figures in Greek costume that are placed among the plaster casts.

In addition to the photographs taken at the Academy, Eakins also took nude photographs of his male students outdoors. One conveys the impression of friendliness and male-bonding among the students, but none reveals a sexual feeling on the part of the subject or the photographer (see fig. 19). In figure 19, two students are boxing, with the rest of the group members posed in a reclined, upright manner in various positions; all of them on the ground in their own connection to nature. They seem to be focused on watching the sport and at the same time all of them are nude. Here Eakins captured the figures in a moment of action. It appears likely he planned to use the photograph later for purposes of drawing or painting the nude as it would have been impossible to paint such an action in real life. In addition, Eakins has distanced the viewer, making him the interloper, similar to some of the indoor scenes. All the boys are looking away from the viewer, many of them with their bodies also oriented away from the photographer. Still, the photograph reveals Eakins’ friendliness toward his students; he captures perfectly the boyish exuberance of the group. However, this does not take away from the affection that Eakins demonstrated in his photographs of Macdowell.
Macdowell’s photographs illustrate a sensuality and attraction that is not present in the photographs of the male students. In some of Eakins other photographs taken outdoors, it is clear that Eakins used them as studies for specific paintings as we will examine next.

The Arcadian paintings (see figs. 20 and 21) are particularly reminiscent of ancient Greece. As mentioned earlier, Eakins had a great appreciation for Greek art and

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this is evident in his thoughts, his methods of teaching, and his art. As Homer has pointed out, “he [Eakins] warned his students not to copy it; he suggested that they create art in that same spirit, using the experiences of the present day as their point of departure.”25 As Eakins was influenced by classical art, he also was drawn to the region

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in central Greece, Arcadia, which had been idealized by classical authors, such as Virgil. Despite Eakins’ approach to achieve the most realistic image of a person or place, he took the idea of a romantic Arcadia and used the classical theme to create his own Arcadian pictures based on contemporary settings and figures.

In the painting, *An Arcadian* (see fig. 20), it is apparent the painting is made based on a photograph of Macdowell (see fig. 11). Even though Eakins used the photograph as a basis to create *An Arcadian*, the photograph can be seen as a form of art in itself. Further, rather than paint the image of Macdowell as it was in the photograph,

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Eakins chose to depict her draped in cloths emphasizing a more classical feeling. This gives the effect of distancing the viewer as the scene is classical. Further, the identity of the subject is not clearly recognizable, hiding Macdowell in anonymity. Still, Eakins idealized his subject as he placed her in a natural setting and distanced her by dressing her in classical attire, showing her a form of respect as a figure in art. By giving Macdowell anonymity both as a figure from the past by her dress and by creating the image of her from behind, Eakins distanced Macdowell from the viewer. In this way, Eakins showed respect for her by allowing her anonymity and therefore freedom from the possible scorn which might have developed in viewers if they were able to identify Macdowell as the subject in the photograph.

In another work, however, Eakins chose to portray all three figures in the painting, *Arcadia*, without clothes (see fig. 21). Here, Eakins created photographic images for each of the figures in the painting. The boy playing the panpipe is thought to be Ben Crowell, Eakins’ nephew (see fig. 22). The standing young man playing the flute is an unidentified student (see fig. 23). The figure on the left is Macdowell (see fig. 24). After reviewing the photographs, it is apparent that the figures in the painting are closely based on individual photographs and have been merged together on canvas. The figure representing Macdowell appears to be androgynous, but one can see a bun in her hair which distinguishes the figure as a woman. Androgynous figures are also reminiscent of classical Greek art where it was accepted to portray a boyish female nude.
in some circumstances. Despite Eakins’ fondness for studying the nude figure, the ambiguous depiction of Macdowell could also be the outcome of a conscious decision by Eakins again to conceal the true identity of Macdowell in order to save her from any scandal, had she been identified by one of the members of their prim Philadelphia society.

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The painting shows Eakins’ love of the nude image in the classical sense, but he took an innovative approach by asking a family member, a friend and a student to each model for the image. As mentioned earlier, Eakins made every effort to use the tools of the Greek artists and apply them to the present day. The individual photographic images of the male figures do not reveal any sense of eroticism. Their poses do not suggest any desire on the part of the artist or subject, because the subjects are occupied in their music and make no connection with the viewer or to each other. Eakins created a sense of detachment in the painting as well by his use of the historical context of the

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classical or mythological scene, as he generally did in his nude paintings. In this way, Eakins minimized any sexual inferences that might have been drawn by his Victorian audience. Eakins created an acceptable art form in the painting through the respectful treatment of the models, including his wife. Further, the multi-figural composition was composed of the individuals in the same positions they held in the photographs. This shows that Eakins did not take the composition and try to create a feeling other than the idyllic setting where they had been posed initially in the individual photographs.

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However, the photograph of Macdowell (fig. 24) upon which he painted the female figure in *Arcadia* is alluring, despite Eakins’ attempt to portray her in a more idealized and classical way in the painting. In the photograph Eakins revealed a desire for his subject as her pose is reclining and appears inviting. Even though she is facing away from the camera and there is no visual connection by the subject with the viewer, there is a sense of attraction toward the image. Her callipygian region is at the center of the photograph appearing to be the closest part of her body to the viewer. Again, posing Macdowell in the light of outdoors, in a clearing, Eakins created a sensuous muse-like figure. Thus, he showed his desire and affection for his wife.

Eakins created many photographs of nude images: many are of his students at the Academy and the Art Students’ League; many are of friends and some are of relatives. In this paper, we studied several images of his wife Macdowell, both clothed and nude, to show the particular affection Eakins had for her. Several of the photographs we studied here are of Macdowell outdoors in the nude. We studied images of the male and female students at the Academy, both clothed and nude to show the detachment and indifference apparent in those photographs, in marked contrast to those of his wife. We also studied photographs of male students taken outdoors to show that the images reveal a sense of friendly camaraderie but nothing more. They lack the intimacy, the one-on-one aspect of his photograph of Macdowell. Photographs of other individuals, nude women, also lack the same quality. It seems that Macdowell is the
only female Eakins photographed outdoors in the nude,\footnote{Sidney D. Kirkpatrick, \textit{The Revenge of Thomas Eakins} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 276.} which shows the closeness and trust between the two. While Eakins’ images of Macdowell in the nude outdoors show a deep affection for her, the clothed image of Macdowell also reveals a sense of fondness in her pose and in the composition. We also studied photographs of his wife in a classical context and men and women in a similar setting. Again these lack that special intimacy evinced in his photographs of Macdowell.

What stands out in these photographs is Eakins’ love of nature. That connection to nature is further emphasized with the love that Eakins had for the human body. As the outdoor photographs reveal both the connection to the natural world and to the human body, they show a particular warmth in the images of Macdowell. To create a photograph of his wife, representing the beautiful form of her body is telling in that it reveals the love that Eakins had for this particular human body, that of his wife. The feeling is further accentuated by his obvious love of nature. Just as Eakins photographed his wife revealing his affection for her, Stieglitz did the same in his portrait series of O’Keeffe.

**Portrait Series**

We will only examine a select number of photographs from Stieglitz’s portrait of O’Keeffe, which is comprised of several hundred pictures. The idea of the portrait came before O’Keeffe, however. Stieglitz wanted to create a composite series of photographs that would cover the life of someone, beginning at birth. O’Keeffe
recalled the way in which Stieglitz saw the “portrait”: “His dream was to start with a child at birth and photograph that child in all of its activities as it grew to be a person and on throughout its adult life. As a portrait it would be a photographic diary.” The project started with his daughter, Kitty, but was unsuccessful. What began as a loving reflection of her youth changed as Kitty developed into a young lady. A recent photography historian noted the following:

Later on, as Kitty matured, the portraits shifted from sentimental records to hostile confrontations. As the father persisted in perceiving his daughter as a child of nature, draping a branch of flaming red maple over her lap (in autochrome), or tucking a potted plant under her arm, she resisted him with her gaze. Compared with her flirtatious and engaging cousins, Kitty was no easy collaborator, and her expression had no repertoire. Torn between his search for truth through photography and his disappointment in Kitty’s limitations, Stieglitz ran aground.

Later, he would have another chance. Of course, he did not know O’Keeffe when she was an infant, but he nonetheless created a full study of her during their thirty years together. Some of the images were shocking as they were sensual, alluring and openly sexual. They were modern and defied the traditional ideal portrait of a woman in the history of art.

34 Georgia O’Keeffe, introduction to Georgia O’Keeffe, A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997).


36 Ibid., 51.
Portraying Sensuality

In the first image, O’Keeffe appears half-dressed wearing a white robe. (See fig. 25.) The portrait reveals an almost three-quarters full frontal pose. O’Keeffe looks directly at the camera stressing an intimate connection with the artist. O’Keeffe holds her left arm across her body as the right arm clutches her robe and her hand gently rests on her right breast. The robe appears to be a cover to a summer nightgown, sheer, with needlework appearing on the left shoulder and sleeve of the gown. It has no buttons or fasteners and is left open just enough so that her chest is exposed. O’Keeffe’s hair is disheveled and does not hang around her shoulders but appears tucked underneath the neck of the robe. O’Keeffe’s gaze is intense, but not harsh. She looks totally satiated and relaxed in her expression. In her face, the eyebrows are not furled or tightened, illustrating any kind of deep reflection, but loose and relaxed. Her eyes are open, but not very widely, because the lids look like they are squinted in a way to clearly focus back at the person on the other side of the camera: Stieglitz. Her lips are not parted but rest together in their fullness. Even a little dimple shows revealing a sense of bliss in her expression. Again, there is no glimpse of tension apparent in her lips but a softness which reveals calmness. Other than the gesture of her right hand clutching her robe there is no obvious expression other than contentment.
Stieglitz’s achievement in the photograph can be seen in the composition of the image. The artist made several choices that resulted in a non-traditional portrait. For example, the choice to bring the object/subject so close to the viewer in this close-up, intimate shot reveals a natural moment in time between lovers. In so doing, Stieglitz challenged the traditional idea of the female nude subject in nineteenth-century images by having O’Keeffe, the object, confront the viewer directly and this she does emphatically. She is not idealized or allegorized as the female nude traditionally had been prior to the advent of realism in the mid-nineteenth century. She could be the object of desire but if she is, she certainly takes an equal part actively in her pose and,

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by extension, expresses her own desire toward the artist. O’Keeffe gazes confidently in
her stance. While she is half-dressed with the robe not quite covering her body, she has
no concern about being seen or even that she is being photographed in this way.
O’Keeffe returns the gaze back toward the artist/viewer without reservation. Not only
has O’Keeffe turned the gaze away from her, but she has taken part in the mutual
adoration between the artist and subject. Stieglitz had taken the image of his lover and
his feelings for her and transferred them onto the print.

Stieglitz transferred his feelings onto print by way of his lover’s image in
several ways. First, he took the traditional ideal image of a woman of beauty and nature
and placed her outside of nature presenting her as an unadorned, unglamorous genuine
woman. Taking her out of the idealized natural or mythological setting made it an
unconventional picture at the time and made the image of O’Keeffe personal on several
levels. In a discussion of nineteenth-century-artist Georges Seurat’s choice to represent
the nude prostitute in his Poseuses, a recent art historian noted that Seurat chose not “to
represent the subject as a natural and timeless one, a position which secures the
traditional politics of the body. . .”38 Nochlin has described what she means by the term
“body politics” that it “can be understood on one level as being a politics of gender,
specific to a certain period and certain practices in the history of art, rather than being a
universal given of the creative act.”39 In this sense, Stieglitz portrayed O’Keeffe

outside the traditional politics of the body, or the traditional ideal of the nude woman. Stieglitz portrayed O’Keeffe as partly the object of his desire but also partly the possessor of desire for him, showing the mutual love the two had for each other. For Stieglitz to represent his lover in this way, shows how strongly he felt for his subject and lover.

The idea that O’Keeffe herself had some part in the making of this photograph and others is telling in itself. As we know, O’Keeffe was an independent woman. In this photograph, Stieglitz represented her totally composed. One of the things Stieglitz loved about O’Keeffe was that she was free in the way she approached her painting and her life. Stieglitz reflected that love and respect for O’Keeffe’s art by posing her in front of one of her charcoal drawings, No. 15 Special, 1916.\(^{40}\) Stieglitz felt that there was an emotional quality to O’Keeffe’s art and that she had revealed a strong connection between nature and her work. O’Keeffe was not afraid to let her feelings go in her art and in that way she evinced a self-assuredness that Stieglitz admired.

For the artist to portray his lover in a self-composed way shows the love he had for her. The characteristics Stieglitz portrayed in the photographs of O’Keeffe show her individuality and her sense of self, just a couple of the reasons why he loved her. Not only did Stieglitz want to represent his love for her, he wanted to show how she opened up to him. We reinforce these ideas by looking at a close-up shot which reveals the sense of self and individuality of O’Keeffe.

The next photograph is an image of O’Keeffe’s torso (see fig. 26). It is a close-up shot where the identity of the figure is completely disguised in the print. What we see is the exposed frontal nude body of O’Keeffe, cropped so much so that no shoulders, hands, neck or hips show. The arms stretch toward each other at an angle with hands meeting outside the picture frame. As a result, O’Keeffe’s breasts are pressed together by her arms creating an alluring picture. Stieglitz exposed the navel and the beginning of the pubic area at the bottom corner of the picture. It is hard to analyze the feelings of O’Keeffe without any facial expression although her arms appear to make her hands clasp firmly outside the picture, revealing a little tension. Despite the slight tension from the arms, the photograph gives the impression of O’Keeffe in a state of repose or joy from a private moment with her lover. Further, the diagonals created by her arms draw the viewer’s attention down toward the lower region of her torso creating sexual tension or excitement for the artist and/or the viewer.

We can surmise that Stieglitz may have recently made love to O’Keeffe because of the intimacy in the portrait. He even said as much in a general way: “When I make a picture, I make love.”[41] It surely applies in this image. Stieglitz portrayed O’Keeffe in a cropped shot to emphasize her femininity. He represented O’Keeffe in a straightforward way. Although O’Keeffe’s body may appear abstracted by way of the close cropping, the image still demonstrates Stieglitz’s ability to photograph O’Keeffe in the most intimate and honest way.

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As the artist behind the camera, Stieglitz must have seen O'Keeffe in just this sensual way. His choice to represent her in a natural and personal way, and put that image on paper has much more meaning. Stieglitz wanted to express the feelings he had for his lover in a photograph.

By presenting these images to the public, Stieglitz made a bold statement.

Stieglitz was not known for holding back his opinions in words or photographs and this

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was another way he did just that. He was expressing his love for this human, this woman, this body. Essentially, he celebrated O’Keeffe in the series of photographs.

This image symbolizes the new relationship of Stieglitz and O’Keeffe, when they first learned intimately about each other. We know that within a month after Stieglitz began photographing O’Keeffe, they fell in love. This photograph is a record of one moment at the beginning of their time together. Despite the fact that we see only O’Keeffe in the image, she does not take the passive side but shows her strength. She squeezes her breast with her upper arms and by doing that shows the muscles in her forearms that rest on her stomach. Her veins even show on her right arm, emphasizing her strength. A recent biographer noted that while some of the images Stieglitz made of O’Keeffe show her as naïve or childlike, “the O’Keeffe who emerges from the portraits in the key set made between 1918 and 1921 is primarily a strong, powerful, and extremely sensual woman.”

This photograph gives no clue as to where the photograph was taken as with the first image we examined. One can only assume that it was a private place, perhaps in their apartment/studio in New York. In that private place, one can also easily imagine what it would have felt like for Stieglitz to touch the image, or at least the person represented in the image. Stieglitz’s decision to crop the image in this way could be symbolic of Stieglitz’s wrapping his own arms around this sensuous body representing his own desire. In creating this image of a woman, Stieglitz emphasized the tone of

43 Greenough, Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set, 1:xxxvii.
O’Keeffe’s skin and its inherent beauty. A noted biographer emphasized the effects that O’Keeffe’s body had on Stieglitz by the following:

Stieglitz’s understanding of this larger concept of woman and his feelings for O’Keeffe more specifically are seen in his celebration of the beauty of every facet of O’Keeffe’s body and in his sensual depiction of its texture, smoothness, and suppleness. These are photographs that speak about the intoxicating desire Stieglitz felt for O’Keeffe, the allure of her physical presence, and the profound, palpable impact that one person can have on another.44

The intimacy of the photograph focusing on O’Keeffe’s body shows us the clear desire and love Stieglitz had for her. As Stieglitz was known for his straight photography, we can assume that he was actually only inches away when he took the photograph emphasizing the closeness to his subject.

In another photograph of O’Keeffe in a black jacket and black bowler hat, Stieglitz focused on her hands, eliciting a sense of touch and a desire on the part of the artist (see fig. 27). Some scholars believe that it was O’Keeffe’s personality he was documenting in the photographs.45 In this sense, Stieglitz’s closely-cropped images focusing on different aspects of O’Keeffe’s body, such as her hands, head or torso can be understood to reveal different parts of O’Keeffe’s personality. Further, O’Keeffe was often admired for the beauty of her hands. Stieglitz seems to have shared this admiration for O’Keeffe’s hands as they played a large role in creating her own art.

44 Greenough, Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set, 1:xxxix.

Stieglitz emphasized O’Keeffe’s hands and fingers and their tactile quality by showing them carefully handle a button on her jacket. O’Keeffe’s hands were the focus of many of Stieglitz’s photographs. Rathbone noted, “Stieglitz photographed O’Keeffe’s hands with as much interest as he photographed her face.”47 In another sense, Stieglitz’s photograph seems to symbolize the desire he had for the touch of the hands of O’Keeffe. As Rathbone has pointed out, “In doing so he suggested both his own intimacy with her touch, and the sensuality at the source of her painting.”48


48 Ibid.
Stieglitz not only focused on the hands and his desire for their touch, he also emphasized what those hands had created. Here Stieglitz posed O’Keeffe, again, in front of one of her drawings, *No. 15—Special*, 1916-1917. In this way, he reflected on what those hands were capable of, and thereby demonstrated further his admiration and respect for O’Keeffe.

In another photograph of O’Keeffe, Stieglitz focused on her hands touching a tree, symbolizing a clear connection between Woman and tree (see fig. 28). Similar to Eakins, Stieglitz in this manner demonstrated his subject’s connection to nature. From

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O’Keeffe’s art Stieglitz found her sensitivity to “Nature” remarkable. In her stance alone there is a huge sensation of O’Keeffe’s role in nature; her stature is large and she stands tall, as the large tree does which she stands against.

In such a context, Stieglitz chose to represent O’Keeffe’s strength, using the tree as a kind of equivalent. Surely, Stieglitz longed for the touch of O’Keeffe’s hands, but at the same time he recognized her hands as tools in her art, as mentioned above. Also, as he saw nature in her art, Stieglitz has given honor to O’Keeffe as a woman being both an artist and close to nature. Using the strength and firmness of a tree as a comparison, Stieglitz revealed his respect and admiration for O’Keeffe as a strong woman. Rathbone described O’Keeffe as the woman Stieglitz had been looking for: “. . . a woman who not only moved with the grace of a tall reed in a gentle breeze, but whose emotional immersion in nature was a match for his own.”

As we know, Stieglitz photographed many women in his life, and as much as he adored O’Keeffe, she was not the first woman in his life that he photographed, but his depiction of her is unique in its expression of great admiration for her. As was the case also with Eakins, other female subjects did not elicit the same warmth and admiration from Stieglitz that his true soul mate did. An example is one of the first photographs we

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studied in this paper, “Paula, Sun Rays, Berlin.” As will be remembered, his depiction of her is thoughtful; much different from the admiring portrayals of O’Keeffe we have just seen. To examine further, we will study several more photographs of other women in Stieglitz’s life.

A Stieglitz biographer noted that before Stieglitz knew O’Keeffe, he was in love with Katherine Rhoades (see fig. 29) even though he was married to Emmy at the time. Rhoades was a painter and a poet. Whelan noted, “She was so young, so tall, and so

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strong that beside her he felt old, small, and weak." In the photograph, Rhoades looks as if she were longing for something, maybe something that was not there. Stieglitz exposed a gentle expression from Rhoades as she looks into the camera. Even though Rhoades is facing the camera indicating a connection with the photographer, her eyes appear to look right through Stieglitz, or the viewer, with an empty expression, as if her mind and emotions were elsewhere. She looks as if she is taking no enjoyment out of being his subject. Her lips are pursed impatiently as if she wishes she were elsewhere doing something else. Stieglitz took several photographic portraits of Rhoades and other women, including his daughter Katherine, all which laid the groundwork for the O’Keeffe “Portrait” series. Despite the closeness of the shot, the Rhoades photograph in figure 29 demonstrates a sadness and longing. The emptiness of Rhoades expression displays a feeling of distance. There is no feeling of intimacy like that evident in the O’Keeffe photographs.

Another woman Stieglitz was smitten by was Rebecca Salsbury Strand. Stieglitz took several photographs of Strand as she summered at Lake George with O’Keeffe and him while her husband, Paul Strand, was working elsewhere. Paul Strand was a photographer and follower of Stieglitz. The nude photograph of Strand is playful in its composition (see fig. 30). As she stands, Strand leans on her right leg

54 Whelan, Alfred Stieglitz, 340.
while her left leg stretches back enough so that only her toes touch the ground. Her body twists one way while her face looks back over her left shoulder. She clutches her towel and glances back in a taunting semi-coquettish sort of way. Despite the pose, the figure is not graceful and is even somewhat masculine. As Strand looks back, she looks uncomfortable, as if she were out of place. Strand appears to be in the middle of a clumsy dance move. Unlike the photographs of O’Keeffe, she is not relaxed. The reason for this could be Strand’s inelegant pose which gives the impression of

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awkwardness. Stieglitz emphasized the shape of Strand’s body in the image as he created deep tonal contrasts between her light skin and the dark background which makes her body strikingly stand out against the background. Still, as alluring as the photograph could be, the viewer does not get the sense of intimacy and adoration on behalf of Stieglitz as can be seen in the O’Keeffe photographs. Strand appears to be caught off guard perhaps in the middle of a walk. Unlike the Strand photograph, we will study another photograph of O’Keeffe portrayed as if she were in the middle of a dance where she is in total control of her movement. While the Strand photograph suggests a feeling of unease, in contrast the O’Keeffe photograph evokes the feeling of effortlessness.

In another image of O’Keeffe in a kimono, she stands in a window, her back arched with one arm stretched forward so that her right hand is flat against the window frame and the other stretched back behind her at an angle (see fig. 31). The sleeve of the kimono robe hangs straight down from her right arm with the rest of the robe hanging down behind her as if it were drapery. O’Keeffe’s body is sideways, her face in profile with her head tilted back slightly giving her a noble look. In spite of her nude body, the kimono hangs majestically, reinforcing her dignified appearance. It also adds drama to the image as if O’Keeffe were taking part in a performance dance. In addition, the light from the window comes through the window shade and the white kimono giving the photograph an ethereal feeling. The image is light and airy giving the photograph a liberating feeling, as well. In the photograph, O’Keeffe is represented by
Stieglitz as a goddess. Stieglitz reveals his love for O’Keeffe passionately in this photograph.

Compared to a photograph of Emmy and their daughter, Katherine (see fig. 32), O’Keeffe appears larger than life in figure 31. In contrast, the photograph of Emmy and

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Kitty, displays a feeling of discomfort and even agitation. The viewer can detect a sense of dislike from the figures in the photograph. That sense of dislike also suggests a distance between the artist and his sitters. In spite of the direct gaze by each figure, particularly Emmy, into the camera, there is no hint of intimacy. There seems to be only tension. Emmy appears brooding and this is in direct contrast with the photograph of O’Keeffe who is completely liberated while virtually nude in the window. Certainly, one would not expect a photograph of a mother and daughter to be sexually provocative, however, at least one would expect a sense of contentment. Instead, both figures in the photograph appear unhappy, as neither one is smiling but both gaze with intensity at the camera. Not only are they unhappy with the photographer, they do not seem comfortable together. Further, in direct contrast to the O’Keeffe photograph of her standing in the window looking free and liberated, Emmy and Kitty appear

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imprisoned in the window. This comes despite Kitty’s position seated on the window frame. Her position seems to indicate a desire to escape from her space. Stieglitz must have felt containment in his relationship with Emmy and he demonstrated it here in the photograph. The photograph of Emmy and Kitty leaves the viewer with a sense of disrespect on the part of the artist, as well as a lack of affection.

In the last photograph of O’Keeffe, we can sense yet again a deep respect for the model on behalf of Stieglitz. In the image, O’Keeffe is again standing tall (see fig. 32). In fact, O’Keeffe, like Macdowell, was petite and it is a testament to Stieglitz’s work in that he was able to make her appear larger than she really was in many photographs. O’Keeffe is holding the painting, My Shanty, as she looks intently at the camera. She appears confident and regal. Her intense gaze reveals a strong connection between the model and artist. Although she is looking straight ahead, it appears she looks slightly down at the camera yet with her chin tilted upwards giving the effect that O’Keeffe is in a higher position, in her stance and in her person. The perspective is telling in the photograph because it shows O’Keeffe larger than the viewer. She also appears above the artist, reflecting Stieglitz’s admiration for O’Keeffe. There are no large trees in the background to contrast with her; she stands alone with her painting against the vast prairie and hills.

She is also posed with one of her paintings, representing her as an artist. As we have discussed, Stieglitz respected her as an artist but, more importantly, Stieglitz respected O’Keeffe as her own person and that is evident here in the photograph of
O’Keeffe holding her painting. Stieglitz does not appear challenged by her painting. In fact, he seems to have embraced it in this photograph.

In our limited study of Stieglitz’s photographs, it is apparent that he photographed many women during his career. Many were taken before he met O’Keeffe and many were taken after. Some were provocative in that they were nudes or provocative in the actual pose by the model, as in the photograph of Rebecca Strand. Many were images of beautiful women whom Stieglitz admired greatly, like Katherine Rhoades, and Paula. Still, none reveals the intensity and intimacy shown in the

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photographs of O’Keeffe. As he supported her in her work, she supported him and opened herself up to him as a model. Their love for each other and their passion for the arts made them an exceptional couple. Their intense love for each other, and particularly Stieglitz’s love for her, is evident in the photographs he created.

In this study, it evident that both Stieglitz and Eakins created portraits of their wives that showed the affection they had for them. In Eakins’ photographs and paintings, he portrayed his wife in classical themes indoors and out. Outdoors the images show Macdowell’s connection to nature or a classical theme, something Eakins admired as much as his wife. Indoors she also is presented in a classical theme in her empire dress and Eakins revealed the warm quality he must have felt for her. Eakins showed affection for his wife in contrast to the other photographs of students and models, which reveal a distance and coldness, as in the “Naked Series” photographs. This contrast is evident even when these photographs reflect the use of the same themes used in Macdowell’s photographs: classical themes, nudity and female models. A partial exception is found in the photograph of the male students outdoors, which demonstrates the affection Eakins had for the outdoors, sports and his students. However, this photograph, while reflecting boyish exuberance, lacks the intimacy of Macdowell’s portraits. The trend is that most of the photographs, when compared to Macdowell’s, show an indifference or coldness. Eakins displayed his love for Macdowell in the photographs as he revealed her beauty, gentleness and warmth.
As discussed, the Stieglitz photographs of O’Keeffe show an admiration for his wife as well. In all of the photographs of O’Keeffe, nude or clothed, Stieglitz reveals the respect and adoration he had for her in demonstrating her beauty, individuality, strength and liberation. Stieglitz too represented O’Keeffe in nature. However, Stieglitz did not find the need to photograph O’Keeffe outdoors (although he did at times such as the image of her and the tree), because he believed that O’Keeffe as a woman had a special connection to nature that did not require her to be photographed outdoors. The contrasting photographs of other women reveal a distance, as in the photograph of Stieglitz’s first wife and his child or the image of Katherine Rhoades; or they reveal an awkwardness, as in the case of the photograph of Rebecca Strand.

As both Stieglitz and Eakins revealed their love for their wives in their photographs of them, it is fitting that both O’Keeffe and Macdowell revealed their love for their husbands too, however, in different ways. Both wives took great measures to make certain their husbands’ art and reputation would carry on as we will discuss next.

The role of Georgia O’Keeffe and Susan Macdowell Eakins in promoting their artists’/husbands’ posthumous reputation.

Both Georgia O’Keeffe and Susan Macdowell outlived their artists-husbands by many years and both were left with the enormous task of what to do with the works they inherited from their husbands. With much care, and a great deal of time, they each helped to ensure that their husband’s reputation would be preserved. After their husbands died, O’Keeffe and Macdowell proved their support by caring for the works
themselves and undertaking administrative tasks relating to the art. Both O’Keeffe and Macdowell gave large donations to important institutions that today are the custodians of the works of Stieglitz and Eakins.

O’Keeffe spent three years settling Stieglitz’s estate after he died. One problem was the volume of work that he had owned: 850 works of art, thousands of photographs, and 50,000 letters to and from different institutions. O’Keeffe found guidance from her own financial consultants. She also had an assistant, Doris Bry, handle many of the administrative tasks, which included writing letters to various institutions and museums, and distributing the art. O’Keeffe took great care with Stieglitz’s works, however, as Bry recalled:

When we were trying to sort out the master set of Stieglitz photographs, she’d hold up two photographs that looked exactly alike to me, and ask which I thought was better. Then she’d show me the difference. Working with this extraordinary material every day was my education.

Handling the Stieglitz’s estate left little time for O’Keeffe to do her own work but with Bry’s help she was able to go back to Abiquiu, New Mexico in April 1948. New Mexico was a place that gave O’Keeffe a great deal of inspiration to paint.

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 426.
64 Ibid., 428.
O’Keeffe took immeasurable care in the handling of Stieglitz’s works. She knew that not only was the negative important, but the final prints were, too. Stieglitz methodically worked to get just the right contrast on the paper to create the best finished piece of work. Once Stieglitz felt that he had won the fight for photography as modern art, a recent biographer noted, Stieglitz began to edit his work to exemplify this new understanding of modern art: “The process was “self-torture,” he told O’Keeffe in the early 1930s, noting that he had filled one room of his gallery, An American Place, with boxes of his photographs and was “looking at every print. It’s an awful order—so few are really complete.”65 He wrote to O’Keeffe, “Some day when I’m thro [sic] you can go through all of them and see what you think of my job.”66 O’Keeffe taught Bry to use the same care that Stieglitz had initiated. Further, Stieglitz made clear that his works were mounted according to the size of the picture and not just to fit a standard size of matting. O’Keeffe worked with one of the recipients of his works, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and insisted that they not change any of the mountings. The head of the print department wanted to change all of them so that they would fit into a standard filing drawer for storage. O’Keeffe prohibited that from happening.67

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65 Greenough, Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set, 1:xii.

66 Ibid.

67 Drohojowska-Philp, Full Bloom, 425.
While she made several gifts to institutions, one great gift would be the key set, given to the National Gallery of Art. O’Keeffe noted the following:

Since his time, much has happened in photography that is sensational, but very little that is comparable with what Stieglitz did. The body of his work, the key set—I think—is the most beautiful photographic document of our time.68

O’Keeffe worked hard to preserve Stieglitz’s legacy and the integrity of his work.

As with O’Keeffe, Macdowell strove to achieve the highest regard for her husband’s works and reputation. Shortly after Eakins died, Macdowell endeavored to establish a public collection of Eakins’ work. Macdowell spent a significant portion of time in her later years advancing her husband’s reputation.69 Soon after his death she provided three-quarters of the paintings for the first major retrospective exhibition of Eakins’ work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.70 Under pressure from supporters of Eakins, the Pennsylvania Academy agreed to mount the exhibition as well, exhibiting more than twice the number of works shown in New York.71 Macdowell worked regularly with dealers after that and also asked her husband’s friend,

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71 Ibid., 278.
Clarence Cranmer, to assist in selling Eakins’ paintings.\textsuperscript{72} Later, she added the help of Charles Bregler, who was a former student of Eakins.\textsuperscript{73}

Shortly after the Philadelphia Museum of Art opened in 1928, its first director, Fiske Kimball, sought a visit with Macdowell. The museum purchased a painting by Eakins, which was followed by a gift to the museum. The bequest to the Philadelphia Museum included fifty oils, one watercolor, nine drawings, five wax models and five bronze reliefs.\textsuperscript{74} It was made in the name of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Adeline Williams (companion to Macdowell and long-time Eakins family friend). When asked about how she made her decision, Macdowell said, “Other museum directors came and admired the pictures. Fiske Kimball came and bought one.”\textsuperscript{75}

The work that O’Keeffe and Macdowell did to build and continue their husbands’ legacies in the art world is reflective of the love and admiration they themselves had for their artists-husbands. The love and admiration the artists had for their wives in a sense is mirrored by the love their wives displayed in these efforts to preserve their husbands’ reputations.

\textsuperscript{72} Lloyd Goodrich, \textit{Thomas Eakins} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:279.

\textsuperscript{73} Werbel, \textit{Thomas Eakins}, 159.

\textsuperscript{74} Goodrich, \textit{Thomas Eakins}, 2:282.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS: TRUTH, NATURE AND LOVE

As most artists strive to do, both Stieglitz and Eakins had a strong belief in the need for depicting what they believed to be the truth in their art. Although each artist’s idea of the truth was similar, each artist chose different ways to illustrate their conceptions of the truth.

Eakins dedicated himself to the “unrelenting pursuit of artistic truth” as Susan Danly has noted, and it is possibly “best seen in his study of the human nude.” Eakins had a strong personal belief in the connection between the nude body and nature. These images parallel the idealism of the classical past. As a recent art historian explained, “photography afforded him the best means by which to achieve the delicate balance between realism and romanticism that lay at the very heart of all of his artistic endeavours.” She also noted, “[i]t is the romantic mood of these portraits that distinguishes them from family snapshots and ultimately makes them works of art.”

Eakins used the same artistic approach in his photographs as he did in his paintings.

When comparing Eakins’ paintings to his photographs, one scholar noted: “The best of them show the same revealing sense of character, the same command of light,

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2 Ibid., 186.

3 Ibid., 191.

4 Ibid.
and even the same psychological penetration.”

The command of light is certainly revealed in the photographs we examined of Macdowell. Specifically, in the last image of Macdowell where her back is highlighted by the brightest tones, the image makes her back contrast strikingly with the natural green and darker tones of the background setting.

A twentieth-century photographer stated his view of the truth in a portrait in words that could just as easily be applied to Stieglitz and Eakins. See the following:

Some of us, however, prefer attempting a simpler, less formal, less formulated, more straightforward [sic] portraiture. Our intention is not to offend, not to soothe, charm, flatter, or cajole anyone either, but to portray each person in a manner that intimates something deeply true about him or her as an individual. It is common, too, for subjects to be watchful for clues as to the quality of our procedures.

Stieglitz chose to use a sharply-focused lens in his portraits of O’Keeffe, rather than using a soft-focus lens as he did in some of his early works. Stieglitz was the creator of the final product, regardless of whether these photographs were planned in a studio, as indeed they were, or that they seem to record a moment accidentally or spontaneously. As in the images we examined in this paper, Stieglitz chose to make sharply-focused photographs which depict a reality and truth in what he saw as the artist/photographer.

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As both Eakins and Stieglitz created images of their wives, they also created images depicting their own beliefs of the ideal woman. Just as Eakins created the nude images of Macdowell in the classical settings he so loved, Stieglitz made images of O’Keeffe depicting his sense of idealized womanhood.

Stieglitz never reached for the biblical or mythical account of womanhood. But this is not to ignore the fact that he harbored his own idealized vision of the feminine. He was forever dedicated to the notion that woman was in closer touch with nature than man, that through the workings of her body she had an implicit understanding of nature’s mysteries. As such she was a medium between man and nature that he could hardly live without. In particular she could connect him more closely to the core of his creative and feminine self.7

Eakins portrayed his wife as a part of nature, but Stieglitz found a different way to make a connection to nature. Even though Stieglitz placed his subject in close-up views without much background as Rathbone observed, he still had the belief that a woman is the closest connection to nature. As his photographs reveal, Stieglitz felt the connection between a woman and nature was spiritual, not physical. When he began photographing O’Keeffe, Stieglitz wrote a letter to photographer Anne Brigman addressing that spiritual connection to nature:

I’m photographing . . . I wish you could see. – I know you would greatly enjoy. – no tricks. – no fuzziness. – no diffusion. – no enlargements. – clear cut sharp heartfelt mentally digested bits of universality in the shape of a woman – head – torso – feet – hands – Even some trees too. – just human trees – new ideas all.8


8 Ibid., 54.
The idea of the “universality in the shape of a woman” can be seen in the torso shot of O’Keeffe (see fig. 26) that we studied earlier. Further, the first kimono shot of O’Keeffe (see fig. 25) also gives evidence of Stieglitz’s “no tricks” manner in his work. It is a natural view of a woman without any manipulation of the photograph.

Stieglitz thought his wife was not only the ideal image of woman but also that she was the embodiment of truth and nature. He wrote to Arthur Dove in 1918: “O’Keeffe is a constant source of wonder to me. . . like Nature itself.”9 For Stieglitz, O’Keeffe represented the abstract ideal of nature. On the other hand, he did not feel the need to pose her outside with nature surrounding her, but instead felt that she represented nature itself. Stieglitz found in O’Keeffe “the Truth” he was so obsessed with finding in his art.

Stieglitz did not usually position O’Keeffe in a field of grass or surrounded by leaves as Eakins had photographed his wife. Eakins made a tangible link to nature in his works as demonstrated in his nude portraits of Macdowell in a natural setting. For Eakins, his ideal image of nature also had a spiritual side. The spiritual side for Eakins was his belief in the strong connection to the idealized figure in classical art. However, for Eakins that idealized figure in art was not just a copy of a figure from ancient art, it was a contemporary picture, a painting or even a photograph that was modeled from a real human body. This was extremely important to Eakins and, as mentioned earlier, it

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9 Ibid., 56.
was that persistent attitude regarding the human body which forced him to resign from the Academy. Eakins described it this way:

The Greeks did not study the antique; the *Theseus* and *Illyssus* and the draped figures in the Parthenon pediment were modeled from life undoubtedly. And nature is just as varied and just as beautiful in our day as she was in the time of Phidias.¹⁰

Eakins not only admired the human body but more specifically the woman’s body. As one art historian noted, “Eakins regarded the female body as the most beautiful of nature’s creations.”¹¹ In fact, he loved all forms of nature, particularly the female body. He also loved his wife, and to depict her in the nude, or “naked” as he might say, is a testament to the feelings he had for her. All the photographic images studied in this paper portray her in a classical and/or idealized way, attributes we know Eakins admired in antique works, showing the admiration he had for his wife as the sitter in the photograph. The last nude image (see fig. 11) might be the most revealing, with its sharp focus, its close-up view, and its strong contrasts in the tones highlighting the back of her body. All of these elements produce a sense of attraction which the artist certainly had for his sitter. The attractive image suggests the sense of love which Eakins had for his wife. This is in stark contrast to the nude images of the other male and female students, which for the most part show an emotional detachment by the artist.


For Stieglitz, O’Keeffe was the very definition of woman. The idea of this universal woman was transformed into O’Keeffe, as a person whom Stieglitz admired and loved. This was manifested in his photographs, revealing the true emotions the artist felt for his wife, and the love and admiration he had for this purely female figure.

Both Eakins and Stieglitz portrayed their wives in their own ideal image of what a woman was, or what each thought should define a woman. Both had strong beliefs in nature and an image true to nature’s form in their art. They used straight photography with little or no manipulation in their work, allowing the artists’ own view to construct the composition. Eakins used natural light in an outdoor setting conceiving his version of the ideal image of a woman, while Stieglitz used artificial and natural lighting in order to make his indoor portraits of O’Keeffe, creating his version of the ideal woman. Both artists believed in a true and honest expression in their art, and that comes through in their portrayal of their wives. In each case, the wife represented the ideal image of a woman for the artist making the photograph. The connection to nature that both men felt in their art and their desire to express a true image in their works was essential to the final images. For Stieglitz, O’Keeffe defined the ideal image of a woman. For Eakins, Macdowell represented the ideal image of a woman in the classical sense. The opportunity to have the women in their lives model for them and to fulfill each artist’s desire to express a true and natural image was important to the integrity of their work. The love and respect that the artists felt for their wives are exemplified in the photographs studied in this paper.
After analyzing the selected works and the lives of both Stieglitz and Eakins, it is hard not to look at their wives, too, as individuals. Their wives were artists themselves. While one put her career on hold, in keeping with Victorian mores, and the other continued to make her own mark as befitting a twentieth-century woman, they both bestowed a special component in their artists-husbands’ lives, personally and professionally. In fact, Susan Macdowell Eakins and Georgia O’Keeffe provided the support, encouragement and inspiration that their husbands most needed to continue with their work in pioneering a new art for America. The wives really were muses and made it possible for their husbands to create beautiful and enduring works. While both Stieglitz and Eakins had different approaches to their work, at the same time they had a number of striking similarities, particularly in representing their wives in an affectionate, loving way.
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