Bulletin of
The Detroit Institute of Arts
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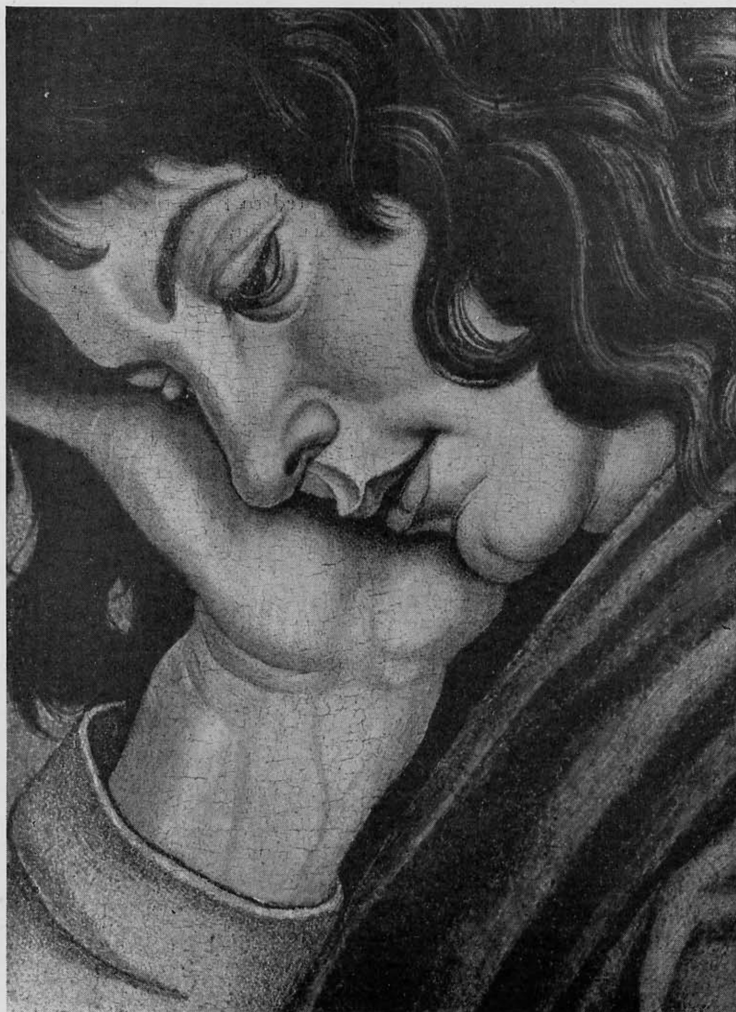

HEAD OF ST. JOHN
DETAIL OF PAINTING BY ANDREA DEL CASTAGNO
FLORENTINE, 1423-1457
GIFT OF EDSEL B. FORD

Vol. XVI. MAY, 1937 No. 8

ST. JOHN, BY ANDREA DEL CASTAGNO

The personality of Andrea del Castagno, one of the great figures of fifteenth century Florentine painting, has fascinated early writers as well as modern art critics. Vasari devotes a whole chapter to him, elaborating at great length upon him as an example of how bad a character even an excellent artist could be. He speaks of Castagno's wild temperament and accuses him principally of murdering his companion Domenico Veneziano after he managed to extract from his victim the secret of painting in oil. It has been an easy task for modern writers to disprove Vasari's story, since Domenico died four years after Castagno, and the technique of neither one seems different from the usual tempera painting of the period. In the effort to exonerate Castagno, some critics (Crowe and Cavalcaselle) have gone even so far as to say that he must have been quite a good-natured fellow, because his contemporaries gave him the nickname of Andreino (little Andrea). This is, however, a questionable conclusion, since a document[1] has been found showing that the artist had already acquired this name at the age of six. Judging from the character of his works, we are inclined to believe that Vasari was right in describing Castagno as a violent personality, even if some of the anecdotes about him may have been exaggerated.

If we consider the intensity of dramatic feeling expressed in every one of his compositions and the care with which they are designed, it seems remarkable that the artist was able to accomplish so much in the short span of his life (he was born in 1423 and died in 1457). He must have been passionately and feverishly active from the beginning to the end of his career. If we add to the works still in existence those known to us only from documents, it seems that he produced even more than certain of his contemporaries, such as Domenico Veneziano or Paolo Uccello, whose activity was longer by twenty years. A special museum, the former convent of S. Apollonia in Florence, has been devoted to his art. It contains, among other things, large frescoes of the *Last Supper* and of the nine heroic men and women famous in history (from the Villa Legenaia), but even so it preserves only a part of the work still existing in his native city. There are, besides, known to every visitor of Florence, the portrait of the condottiere Niccolo da Tolentino in the Cathedral, and the frescoes of the *Trinity* with the strange foreshortenings and those of S. Giuliano, including the Apollo-like figure of Christ in the Annunziata. Yet Florence was not the only city of his activity. He began his career with frescoes and designs for mosaics in Venice when he was nineteen years of age, and seems to have worked towards the end of his life in Rome. Before he went to Venice, as a boy of eighteen, he painted on the facade of the palace of the Podesta in Florence the portraits of the dead bodies of the conspirators against the government, who were hanged in 1440. From this brutal representation he acquired the name *Andreino degli impiccati* (Andrea of the hanged).[2]

[1] G. Poggi, *Rivista d'arte*, 1929, p. 61.

[2] Hitherto there were only three paintings by Castagno in this country, all in private collections: the shield with the representation of David killing Goliath (in the Widener collection); the portrait of a man (formerly in the Morgan, now in the Mellon collection); the small *Resurrection of Christ*, reproduced by L. Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, N. Y., 1933, Vol. II, p. 236.

All of his works are filled with the realism, power and monumentality of style characteristic of the epoch of Uccello and Donatello, whose younger contemporary he was. He was the son of a laborer in the country outside of Florence, where Bernardetto de' Medici, the constable of Florence, discovered him and brought him to town and had him educated.[3] Vasari praises him as master of extraordinarily bold and expressive design, but calls his colors crude and brutal. But his color combinations are entirely in agreement with his style of drawing, and speak if anything for the supposition of the violence of his nature. The great composition of the *Assumption of the Virgin* (in the Berlin Museum) stands out among other Quattrocento paintings by reason of its accumulation of glaring reds and oranges which seem to explode upon the spectator like a fiery volcano.

We are similarly struck first by the mass of red in the painting reproduced here, representing St. John mourning under the cross, which as the gift of Mr. Edsel Ford is a new and important acquisition of our museum.[4] The carmine mantle, almost completely covering the figure, contrasts with a small stripe of yellow on the undergarment and the sleeves. This disturbing combination of red and yellow reminds one of certain Spanish fifteenth century textiles and of paintings of the same school whose representations full of horror and cruelty are consistent with this harsh color effect. Brutal scenes were less in favor with the patrons of art in Florence than in Spain. Castagno's lost fresco of the hanged men is a proof rather than an exception, for it was painted by order of the government as a warning, not as a representation for art's sake. Castagno's violence does not express itself so much in his motive as in his treatment of his subject. The depiction of The Last Supper in S. Apollonia is characteristic; every figure is possessed of a peasantlike strength and shows an almost barbaric expression quite contrary to the spirit of the bible story, while Christ hardly differs in type from Judas. Such characters are more in place in other subjects, such as portrayals of condottieri. How convincingly he describes these mercenary soldiers in their isolated individualism, in their pride of being independent and responsible only to their own will. Every figure of Castagno forms a world in itself, a spiritual and bodily unit, uncommunicative and self-centered. He pours so much of his own passionate self into these figures, follows his own visions with so much concentration and intensity, that we can well understand how his balance was at times lost under the nervous strain when he was disturbed at his work. Vasari says that when a child shook the ladder on which he stood while depicting Niccolo da Tolentino in the Cathedral, "Andrea like the brutally violent man he was, got down and ran after him to the corner of the Pazzi palace."

This equestrian portrait and the nine heroic figures from the Villa Legnaia, among whom are three con-

[3]We do not know who Castagno's teacher was, but his works prove that he was influenced by Donatello and Uccello, as Berenson pointed out. The *Enthroned Madonna* from the Castello Baldo di Trebbio, now in the possession of Count Contini in Florence, seems in composition, although of course not in style, to be derived from Fra Angelico (compare for instance the altarpiece in Perugia).

[4]The painting was published for the first time and well characterized by A. Venturi, April, 1936. Panel, 46¾" x 17⅝".

MOSAIC IN THE BASILICA OF SAN MARCO, VENICE, DETAIL.

dottieri, Niccolo Acciauoli, Farinata degli Uberti and Pippo Spano, are quite rightly his most popular works. With the possible exception of Piero della Francesca, no other painter of this period was able to give so much power to one isolated figure. Although our St. John originally formed a part of a Crucifixion, balancing a Virgin on the side of the cross,[5] he is as complete in himself as a statue by Donatello. The plastic quality of the figure is extraordinary. Arms and feet are held so firmly to the body that the figure forms a solid column-like mass. Yet there is a continuous movement of lines streaming across the figure and leading the eye around it, as if it were a free-standing piece of sculpture. These lines lead backward from the hand on the face towards the elbow, to be taken up by the other hand which grasps this elbow. From there the movement runs down through the folds in a great sweep towards the left foot, which is drawn back so that its curve points inward into the depth of the picture. The almost Düreresque lines of the mantle, with their angular turns and twists, are imbued with a strange organic life.

The same intensity of feeling gives expression to every curve of the face, with its sadly ravaged cheeks, and to the beautiful ringlets surrounding it like the locks of the Gorgon's head. The position of the hand, supporting the cheek as an expression of deeply felt sorrow, is a motive used by the artist at the same time for a formal purpose, to give a light frame and a relief to the profile. The motive occurs more than once in Castagno's compositions. We encounter it twice in mourning figures, once in the Deposition of the Cross in one of the stained glass windows of the Florentine cathedral, for which the artist designed the cartoon. Still nearer our figure are the mourning apostles by the bier of the Virgin, in a mosaic in S. Marco at Venice, reproduced here. This mosaic, which was once attributed to Castagno by Thode and Gamba, is now generally considered as a work under the influence of Mantegna; but I believe unjustly so. It is so closely connected with our painting that if we consider this as Castagno's work—and who could doubt it?—we must accept him also as the designer of this remarkable mosaic composition,

[5]While the crucifix is lost, the Virgin may possibly be recognized in a figure sold in Paris (Sale Gabauriod, June 25, 1929, No. 44) and attributed in the catalogue to Masaccio, but according to Dr. Deusch (Pantheon, 1934) probably an early work by Castagno.

which seems to have had a strong influence on Mantegna. It is one of Castagno's first works, executed in 1442, while he was painting the frescoes in S. Tarasio in Venice. And, indeed, our St. John also has the character of being the work of a youthful artist. Although Castagno's style did not change much during his short life, to earlier works seem to belong the elongated forms with small heads, the more pleasing types and more restrained sentiment, which our figure shows, in comparison with the broader, heavier and rougher types of his later period.

That it was possible to attribute an early work by Castagno to Mantegna or his school, proves how advanced his style was. His emaciated forms and much of his linear rythm were taken over by the Florentine masters of the second half of the fifteenth century; and it speaks for the greatness of his art that so independent a master as Botticelli followed closely in his footsteps, as may be seen from a detail of the head of our picture. We may measure to some degree the greatness of an artist by the influence he exerted.

W. R. VALENTINER.

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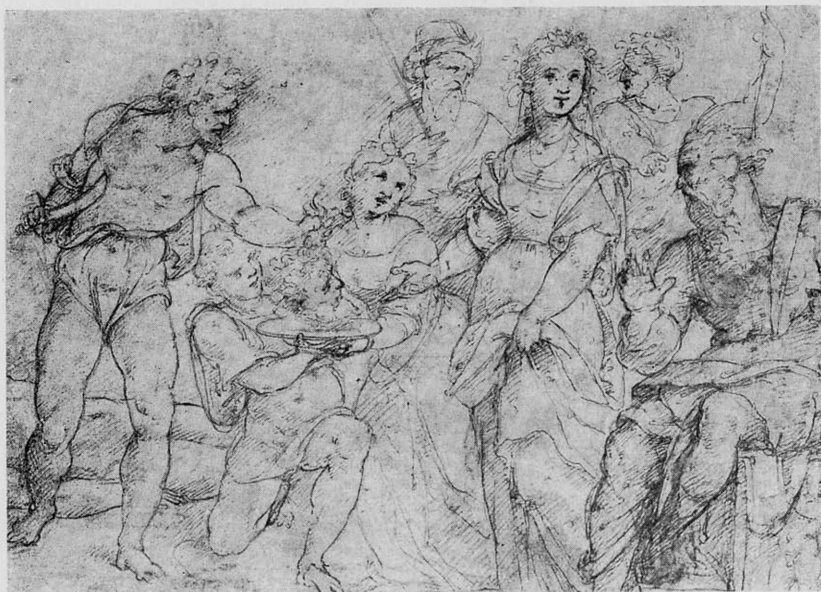


SALOME, DRAWING IN RED CHALK AND PEN BY CESARE DA SESTO
ITALIAN, 1477-1523
FOUNDERS SOCIETY, WILLIAM H. MURPHY FUND

DRAWINGS BY CESARE DA SESTO

Leonardo da Vinci, who was such a magnificent draftsman himself, seemed also to have based the education of his pupils upon the thorough instruction in the use of the drawing implements. A great number of drawings of the Leonardo school have come down to us, many of them originally ascribed to the master himself, which show with clarity the great influence exerted by Leonardo upon his pupils. New research work has made it a matter of special care to discriminate not only the hands of master and pupils from each other but also to differentiate between the drawings of the Leonardo disciples. The first was the much easier task. There exists a criterion, which never has been proven wrong; all Leonardo drawings are done with the left hand, and so the shading invariably runs down from left to right.

As to the ascribing of drawings of the Leonardo school, the better knowledge of the paintings of the different artists — Ambrogio de Predis, Boltraffio, Cesare da Sesto, Melzi and Luini —has given the best clue to the attribution of their drawings also, many of which turned out to be studies of their pictures. Among the drawings of the mentioned before artists, those of Cesare da Sesto were most easily recognized. First of all there is a sufficient supply of authentic drawings still to be found together in Cesare's sketchbook in the Morgan Library, New York,[1] which permitted a study of the peculiarities of his drawing style; furthermore Suida's work on *Leonardo and His Pupils*[2] and lately

Nicodemi's monograph[3] on the artist have made us familiar with a sufficient number of Cesare's studies for his paintings.

To that complex of drawings by Cesare da Sesto, established with certainty as done by the artist, a sheet of importance has been added by a recent acquisition of the Detroit Institute of Arts, presented by the Founders Society through the William H. Murphy Fund. It is a sketch done in red chalk and pen for Cesare's painting of *Salome,* of which the two best versions can be found in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and the National Gallery, London. The small sheet (7⅝" x 5⅛") shows on the back an old inscription in ink "Cesare da Sesto" (probably 18th century) but even without that hint, the comparison with the paintings of the like-named subject and the study of Cesare's technique of drawing would have left no doubt about the right attribution.

SALOME, PAINTING BY CESARE DA SESTO
KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM, VIENNA

The figure of Salome, in both painting and drawing, so far as posture, drapery of the garment and gesture of the right hand are concerned, is absolutely identical, but otherwise the composition is entirely different. The painting gives only two of the seven figures represented in the drawing, and these two, Salome and the executioner, in a different arrangement. The painting has the effect of a detail from the more comprehensive composition of the drawing, by means of which the artist attained a greater concentration of the scene. And indeed, the painting belongs to a period in the master's career (1512-1516) in which he tried to free himself from outer influences and find his own style, concentrating upon a simpler composition of few figures and upon the handling of the chiaroscuro.

Cesare da Sesto, born 1477, probably in Milan, must have joined the Leonardo workshop in the same city at an early time, supposedly in the eighties, but his work and life are not traceable with certainty before the year 1506, a year in which a "Cesare Milanese" was active in the Rocca d'Ostia, as we know from Vasari. Shortly afterwards we meet our master in Milan, in collaboration with a painter, Bernazzone, a Netherlandish landscapist working in Joachim Patinir's style, who commissioned Cesare da Sesto to paint the figures in his beautiful landscapes. The chief work of that period (dated by Suida 1507-10) is a *Baptism of Christ* in the Gallarati Scotti Collection at Milan, an interesting mixture of a typical northern imagination (the depiction of foliage and flowers, birds and butterflies) and the Italian feel-

ST. GEORGE, PEN DRAWING BY CESARE DA SESTO
SKETCH BOOK IN THE MORGAN LIBRARY, N. Y.

ing for beautiful form and design in the almost entirely nude figures of St. John the Baptist and Christ.

We do not know the reason for the final separation of the two artists, the immediate consequence of which was that landscape backgrounds for the next period completely disappeared from Cesare's pictures. We find instead a neutral, dark background, from which the figures emerge in different degrees of light and shade, truly following Leonardo's formula in originating such effects. The Viennese *Salome,* especially in the figure of the executioner, is a fine example for Cesare's chiaroscuro style.

The sketch may have been done several years before the picture was executed. We come to that conclusion not only because the composition is richer and less concentrated, but because it reveals a greater dependence upon Leonardo's own drawing of figures. The executioner, and the man in profile between the heads of Salome and Herodes at the right, are both Leonardo types, although we are not able to give the exact prototype in Leonardo's drawings. The attitude of the executioner especially seems to belong to the stock of ideas with which Leonardo's workshop furnished its pupils.

During his stay in Leonardo's workshop, Cesare may have noted in one of his sketchbooks that standard type, so to speak, and then made use of it several times later. We find a half-nude figure in almost exactly the same posture in a study for Cesare's painting "Adoration of the *Magi*"[4] (done about 1520). More general resemblance of our drawing to drawings by Leonardo da Vinci may be seen in the soft, lyrical character of the scene, which is so contrary to the cruel subject matter, the enigmatic smile of Salome (also characteristically a standard theme of the Leonardo school), and the use of red chalk which Leonardo was one of the first to employ in drawings.

But in a higher degree than the dependence upon his master, the drawing reveals the peculiarities of Cesare's own handwriting. There is, first of all, a great simplicity in composition and tracing of the outlines, which has a certain relation to Raphael's drawings and indeed it is Raphael who, during Cesare's stay in Rome about 1520, had the greatest influence on our artist. The artist employs only a parallel hatching of short strokes in order to model his figures. These short, parallel running strokes are so characteristic of the style of Cesare's drawings that from this peculiarity alone we should be able to recognize his hand.

We mention finally as one of Cesare's characteristics, demonstrated in the Salome drawing, his predilection for the rendering of scenes in

relief as a means of decoration. We find in our drawing the marble throne of Herodes, ornated with a frieze of putti of whom only one is visible. Cesare usually decorated the architecture in his paintings lavishly with friezes in relief.

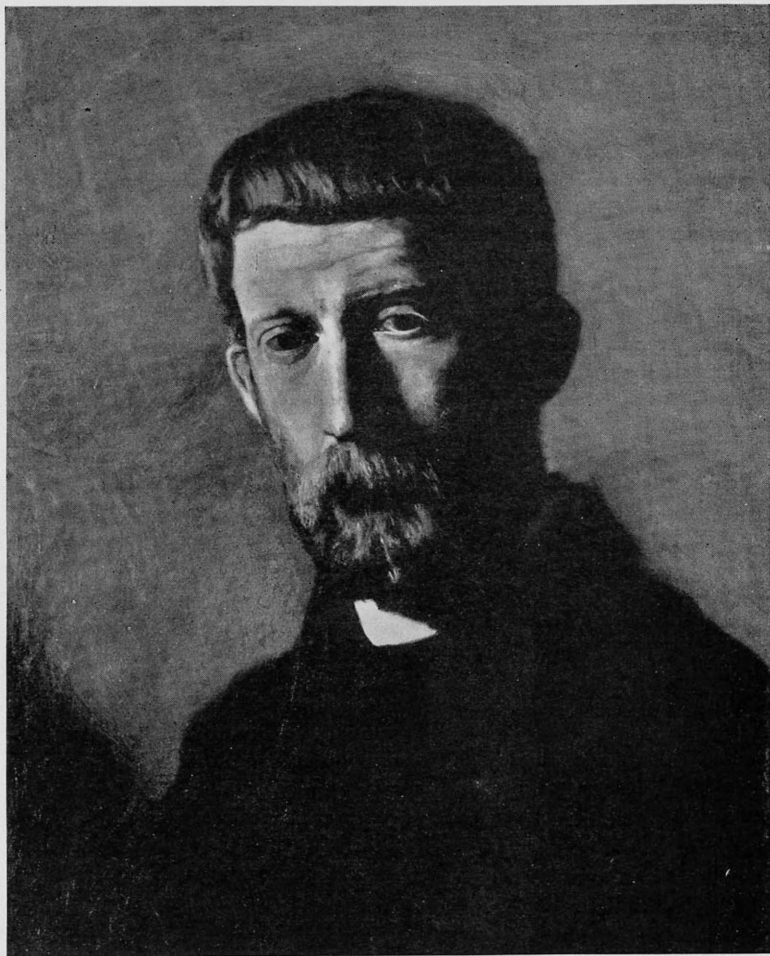
Whereas our drawing gives the impression of the first writing down of an idea, rather sketchily thrown on paper, it seems to have been the artists's habit to draw exact detailed studies of the more difficult parts of the composition before executing his pictures. The Royal Collection in Windsor preserves several detailed studies, among which that of a left hand with clenched fingers[6] has a special importance in connection with Cesare's painting representing Salome. Kenneth Clark has already attributed that drawing to Cesare da Sesto as a study for the hand of the executioner in the pictures in London and Vienna, and the study of waist, thighs and loin cloth of the man on the same sheet as belonging to the same figure. We recognize the same simple and easy technique as in our sheet, the same parallel hatching.

Cesare's drawing style does not undergo great changes during the short time of the artist's activity. He died young, at the age of 46, in 1523. That is proved by a drawing in the sketchbook of the Morgan library which Suida connects with Cesare's last work in the altarpiece of the Church San Rocco in Milan, commissioned in the year of his death, 1523. This altar-piece is the work in which he definitely surrenders to the new ideas of the Roman school, especially to that of Raphael. The drawing represents St. George killing the dragon. The prancing horse, given in a daring diagonal foreshortening, is worthy of Leonardo himself, but the scene in its general atmosphere and technical simplicity is again reminiscent of a Raphael drawing.

It is in this middle position between the Milanese and the Roman school, between Leonardo and Raphael, that Cesare's importance to art history may be found. His drawings also give us an opportunity of studying the development of that process which finally made Rome the dominating center among other rival Italian cities such as Florence and Milan in the 16th century.

ERNST SCHEYER.

[1]Collection, J. Pierpont Morgan. Two Lombard Sketch books privately printed, London.
[2]Wilhelm Suida, *Leonardo und sein Kreis*, Munich, 1929.
[3]Giorgio Nicodemi, *L'Opera e L'Arte di Cesare da Sesto*, Milan, 1932.
[4]Reproduced in Giorgio Nicodemi, p. 12.
[5]Reproduced in Kenneth Clark, *Windsor Drawings*, Vol. 1, p. 12, No. 12559, Vol. 2, No. 12559.



PORTRAIT OF A. B. FROST
THOMAS EAKINS, AMERICAN, 1844-1916
GIFT OF DEXTER M. FERRY, JR.

TWO PORTRAITS BY THOMAS EAKINS

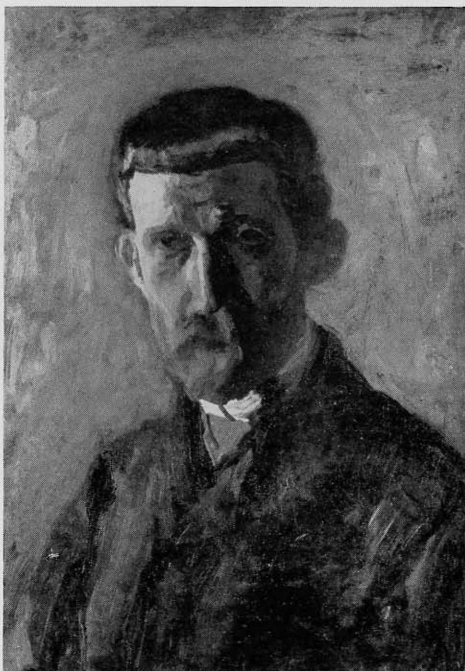
The retrospective exhibition of Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins held at the Art Institute during the past month, was built around three new acquisitions: a marine by Homer and two portraits by Eakins. All three are the gifts of Mr. Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., to whose generosity the museum owes so many of its most important American paintings. The Homer will be described in another article. Eakins' portrait of the famous illustrator, Albert B. Frost, together with a preliminary sketch of nearly the same size and of equal importance as a work of art, are hitherto unknown works, which were in the possession of the sitter's family until they passed into the art market this spring and were acquired by the museum. It was appropriate, therefore, to exhibit them with a selection of Eakins' work; and all who saw the exhibition will understand our pleasure in this acquisition.[1]

That Eakins was not solely a portrait painter was sufficiently evident in the exhibit. He should rather be described as one of the best pair of eyes that the United States have produced, an observer who took as his subject the whole life of his city of Philadelphia. He painted not only the people but the homelife and the sports, even some of the artistic history of the city, and the life also of the two rivers upon which (in those days before long summer vacations and easy travel) Philadelphians then found much of their diversion. But the bulk of his fame rests upon his paintings of people—of which these acquisitions are excellent examples—while his connection with Frost represents also his career as the teacher who founded the most important teaching tradition in nineteenth century American art.

Both sketch and portrait of Frost are examples of the penetrating, unadorned statement of character which was typical of Eakins' portraiture. Frost was the opposite of handsome, with carrot red hair and weak eyes (he eventually went blind). Eakins painted the reddened eyelids of a man who habitually overworked his sight, the slight stoop of one accustomed to work over a drawing board, the unkempt look of a man who spends no thought on his appearance. It is in no sense a flattering portrait and its plain-spoken soberness is emphatic. Yet how clearly these two portraits, and the others like them, bring to mind today the qualities of that older American world—serious, hardworking, thoughtful, a little narrow perhaps and lacking in the superficial tailoring of sophistication, yet with the virtues of the Puritan stock which still formed the predominant American character. It was not a character that attracted either Sargent or Whistler, the other leading portrait painters of the day, and one would gather no hint of its existence from their work. One must go back to Copley for a comparable understanding of the unassuming American type.

The sketch has a piercing melancholy which in the finished portrait becomes a gentler and more human mood. One of Eakins' real contributions to American art is represented by his sketches and it is interesting that we can now show two preliminary

[1]The portrait is on canvas, H. 26½, W. 21 inches; the sketch is oil on cardboard, H. 26, W. 18 inches. A second sketch is owned by the Pennsylvania Museum of Art (Goodrich No. 210). According to the family tradition, our two were done while Frost was a student at the Academy, 1879-81.



SKETCH FOR THE PORTRAIT OF A. B. FROST
GIFT OF DEXTER M. FERRY, JR.

studies beside the complicated work. (We own also the sketch for the *Print Collector*). He did not believe in academic pencil or charcoal drawing as a preparation for painting, but trained his pupils to draw directly with the brush: he believed that this led to seeing a figure simply and strongly, to studying it from the beginning as a mass in light and shadow, in other words, to a sense of form. "Paint your figure so that it looks as if you could walk around it," he said to Horatio Shaw, a Michigan student in his life class.

A letter of the same pupil gives a glimpse of the relationship between Eakins and Frost at the time this portrait was done (1881). Frost was already at this time a successful illustrator, sending work to Scribner's and Harper's Magazines, but he was still working occasionally in the life class. "I must tell you about Frost. You recollect I described him to you once. Well, when Eakins came around last night, he sat down and looked at Frost's work, then he began to point out where his figure was out of drawing and as a special favor I suppose, for they seemed to be old friends, he took his brush and painted the figure over, made the body longer and put more action into it. Such a complete change made a smeary mess of it. That was just before a rest. After the rest, when Eakins was gone, Frost sat down and shoved his hands down into his pockets and sat and looked at his picture. Finally, he said, 'Well, that looks encouraging, don't it!' I haven't laughed so hard

in a long time. The next victim was myself . . . "[2]

In spite of this occurrence, Frost was one of the best of Eakins' pupils. The vein of sport which Eakins had opened up in his rowing and boxing pictures, was developed by Frost, who became our most famous sporting artist of the end of the century. But Frost's best work was his pen-and-ink illustration. His illustrations for *Uncle Remus* and for Frank R. Stockton's *Rudder Grange* are among the best things produced by the golden age of American pen-and-ink drawing during the '80's and '90's. A fine impressionist style of light and shadow, an eye trained in Eakins' school, together with a dry humor, made him the perfect illustrator not only for Joel Chandler Harris and Stockton but for H. C. Bunner, Thomas Nelson Page, and all the group of genial, quiet humorists in whom that generation of American literature was so rich.

On the other hand, it is not difficult for us today to understand why Eakins was never a popular painter during his lifetime. Many of his portraits were, in fact, left upon his hands by dissatisfied sitters and remained in his studio until his death in 1916. This was not wholly caused by the lack of penetration of his contemporaries. Eakins was one of the first Americans to study in Paris. He received a severe academic grounding under Gérôme and returned in the '70's as one of the first of our figure painters to have assimilated the disciplined sense of form which is the heart of French painting. But immediately after his return there spread to this country the suave, decorative manner of the Munich School, followed shortly by the novel brilliancy of palette introduced by the French Impressionists. Public interest went toward brilliant brush-work and charm of color. Eakins developed in his portraits a style of Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro that was as simple and concentrated as the brushwork style was diffuse, and was warm and deep in tone while Impressionism was fascinating all eyes by its high-keyed color.

Moreover, he was one of the most uncompromising artists that could be imagined. Half a scientist in temperament, he applied a rigorous honesty to his study of character that is of great interest and importance to us today, but which could not fail to be disconcerting at times to his sitters.

Eakins was too frank for his generation. And in an age of strong conventions he was unconventional, in a robust and masculine way, without making the effort of Whistler to show the conventionally-minded how daring and attractive his unconventionality was. Independent and rooted to his own soil in an age that admired an international style, sober and penetrating in a period of brilliant superficiality, he was born to misunderstanding and disappointment. Yet the very qualities which set him against the current of his age, were those which make him important to us today.

E. P. RICHARDSON.

[2] I am indebted to Mr. Wilfred B. Shaw, of Ann Arbor, for the knowledge of these unpublished letters.

BR'ER RABBIT
ILLUSTRATION FOR "UNCLE REMUS"
A. B. FROST

SUMMER SCHOOL COURSES AT THE INSTITUTE

Two graduate art history courses, sponsored by Wayne University and conducted by members of the Institute staff will be given in the lecture hall during the summer. Mrs. A. C. Weibel will lecture on "Great Epochs, Great Artists," beginning June 30 every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1:00 to 3:00 p. m. until August 4. Also on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 10:00 to 12:00, Dr. Ernst Scheyer, author of the Institute's new guidebook to the drawing collection, will offer a course on "The History and Appreciation of Drawings," based on the Institute's collection. Students who do not wish to take the courses for credit may enroll in the classes upon payment of the regular ten dollar fee for each course. The fee is the same for those who receive graduate credit.

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All friends of the Museum will mourn the loss of Otis G. Baker, Foreman of Building Maintenance, whose death on April 14 ended 34 years of loyal service to the Detroit Institute of Arts.

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