



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Susan MacDowell Eakins (1851-1938)

Well-known as the wife of American artist Thomas C. Eakins, Susan MacDowell Eakins was an artist in her own right and a portrait painter of note. She was born Susan Hannah MacDowell in 1851 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was one of eight children born to Hannah and William H. MacDowell, a prominent engraver.

In 1869, MacDowell spent a year of study at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women.¹ In 1876, she began studying under Thomas Schussele at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The following year she began studying under Thomas Eakins who later became her husband.²

While a student in 1879, MacDowell contributed 7 works in oils, watercolor, and modeled wax to the 50th Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her oil paintings included *Portrait of a Gentleman and a Dog*, *Portraits—at home*, *The Watchful Guardian*, and *The Rehearsal*. Another oil entitled *Anatomical Lecture—Dr. Keen on the facial muscles* was lent to the exhibit by the academy. She was awarded the academy's first Mary Smith prize for her contribution of *Portraits—at home*.³ Her *Portrait of a Gentleman* and *Anatomical Lecture* were published that year in *Scribner's Monthly*.⁴

In 1882, MacDowell exhibited *The Old Clock on the Stairs* at the 53rd Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy. A critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* said that MacDowell's finely painted figures "display[ed] a noticeable degree of freedom and confidence..."⁵ The same year she was awarded the academy's Charles Tappan prize.⁶

In 1884, MacDowell married her former instructor, Thomas Eakins. Although childless, MacDowell spent less time painting during her marriage. She instead devoted herself to domestic tasks and supporting the career of her husband. Eakin's had tremendous respect for his wife's artistic abilities. In 1889, she added Eakin's portrait to his painting *Agnew Clinic*. She collaborated again with her husband in 1913 on his portrait entitled *Dr. Spitzka*.⁷

¹ *Prospectus of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women: with a Catalogue of Art Studies in the Possession of the Institution* (Philadelphia: E.C. Markley & Son, Printers, 1870) 5.

² Delia Gaze, *Dictionary of Women Artists Vol. I* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997) 485.

³ *Catalogue of the Fiftieth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Philadelphia, Collins, Printer, 1879) 19-21

⁴ "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," *Scribner's Monthly*, Volume XVIII, May, 1879 – Oct, 1879 (New York: Scribner & Co., 1879) 745, 749.

⁵ "Local Intelligence," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Tue, Nov 7, 1882, 3.

⁶ Delia Gaze, 485.

⁷ Ibid



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In 1905, MacDowell contributed a portrait of her former instructor Christian Schussele to the 100th Anniversary Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy.⁸ In 1930, she gifted much of her late husband's work including bronze reliefs and watercolor sketches to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.⁹ In 1936, MacDowell organized an exhibition of her work, along with her sister Elizabeth, and the artist Charles Bregler at the Philadelphia Art Club. The exhibit also included the work of Thomas Eakins and artists Charles Fussell and David W. Jordan.¹⁰

Susan MacDowell Eakins died in 1938. She was 85 years old. Today her work can be found in major collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among others.

⁸ *Catalogue of the 100th Anniversary Exhibition, January 23 to March 4, 1905* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1905) 11.

⁹ "Eakins Art Objects Presented to Museum," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) · Mon, Apr 14, 1930, 2.

¹⁰ "News of the Art World," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Sun, Oct 11, 1936, 81.