

Adorn the Halls: History of the Art Collection at Thomas Jefferson University

Julie S. Berkowitz



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Adorn the Halls: History of the Art Collection at Thomas Jefferson University Julie S. Berkowitz On March 11, 1871 Samuel D. Gross, M.D., the internationally celebrated surgeon and author, entreated fellow Jefferson alumni to "adorn the halls" with portraits of those who had "devoted their lives to the service of the school," and thus "inspire the pupil with ambition to excel in great and noble works." This clarion call to emulate European medical and scientific institutions by memorializing their great men was taken up almost immediately.

Thomas Eakins's masterpiece, "The Gross Clinic," is the crown jewel of the Jefferson collection. The monumental painting depicts Dr. Gross pausing during an operation in the surgical amphitheater to supervise assistants and to instruct the medical students watching from above.

One hundred and twenty-five years later, Thomas Jefferson University is still securing portraits, accepting art donations and bequests, and exhibiting art works effectively. By manifesting an appreciation for the power of art to teach, inspire, and enlighten, the university continues to honor Gross's profound idea. The Jefferson collection is diverse enough to trace a meaningful history of public portrait trends in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century Philadelphia.

"ADORN THE HALLS" begins with an analysis of the art collection and its significant effect on the Jefferson spirit. This is followed by an historical survey tracing the collection's chronological development. Highlights include Ms. Berkowitz's discoveries about Thomas Eakins's connections with Jefferson Medical College and historical aspects of "The Gross Clinic," especially while on exhibit at the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876. The final chapters treat nonmedical art objects, and European medicine featuring selections from the rare book collection.

The 725-page book contains black and white photographs of 429 paintings, sculptures, decorative arts, architecture, prints, drawings, and photographs (several with closeup details), and full color illustrations of 28 art objects. The hard cloth cover is stamped in gold, and the dust jacket features "The Gross Clinic." There are indices of portrait subjects, nonportraits, and artists and makers.

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