

# Analysing the gross clinic essay examples

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



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In 1875, the renowned American artist Thomas Eakins presented the world with one of the finest specimens of arts- ' The Gross Clinic' or ' The Clinic of Dr. Gross' (Floryan, " Eakins's The Gross Clinic"). It is basically a portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross with his students in a clinic and includes a self-portrait of Thomas Eakins himself and Dr Franklin West to the right of Dr Gross (Floryan). The artwork has been recognised as the finest 19th century painting by The New York Times in 2002 (Kimmelman, Art Review: A Fire Stoking Realism). It definitely deserves all the appreciation and recognition. This essay elucidates Thomas Eakins's ' The Gross Clinic' in terms of its beauty, precision, realism and impression from a personal, creative point of view.

## **First Response**

As one looks at the fine painting, the first thing which strikes the mind is its absolute realism. It is a brilliantly painted portrait where every character has

been sketched with life-like features and facial expressions. The centre of attraction, Dr Samuel D. Gross is teaching or guiding a group of medical students, obviously about a surgical procedure and related issues. There is a patient lying on a platform, surrounded by few students trying to examine him. There are several students seated in the background, including Thomas Eakins on the front who seems to be writing something. The whole scenario very accurately represents the undertaking of a 19th century clinic where surgery is being learnt and practised, both.

## **Technicality**

In terms of the media and processes of art, 'The Gross Clinic' is a two-dimensional one which uses oil painting on canvas (Floryan). It has been very patiently and skilfully painted to depict the facial contours on several faces, the position of bodies and silhouettes of clothes. There are several fundamental elements of art like line, shape, texture, colour etc (Art Fundamentals). A perfect balance has been maintained between each element of art in this painting. The use of dark and hazy figures in the background to show the pupils sitting farthest from lecturer, using bright colours to depict the faces of Thomas Eakins, Dr Gross and Dr Franklin West (to the immediate right of Dr Gross) and fine use of shapes to represent the patient's body, instruments and coats- the artist has taken into account each fine detail while making this legendary painting.

## **Personal view**

In a personal view, the painting is a masterpiece. Without any knowledge of the famous people being portrayed here, if a layman sees the painting to

judge it, there is no way for not getting impressed. When I beheld the painting for the first time, it told a story to me. Very evidently, it becomes clear that it's a sort of surgical procedure being taught or shown to medical students. The lecturer (who happens to be Dr Gross) seems very serious as he demonstrates the surgery. A knife-like instrument is visible in his hand; the touch of realism comes with the red paint depicting blood. An immediate eye-catcher which introduces the viewer's focus to the astounding realism of the portrait! As a layman would not recognise Dr Gross, Dr West or Thomas Eakins, they seem to be just another student in the clinic. The patient lying on the table seems to have an injured high on which the students are performing the surgery. A woman sitting on the floor in noteworthy here, she seems to be either crying with her face covered or extremely tense. On one hand, she seems to be a female student who could not comfortably see the surgical procedure. But then, one looks around and finds no female student in the clinic. And then, it seems that she is either a relative of the patient or a woman present there for some nursing work. A very interesting and humorous aspect of this painting which appealed to me the most is the depiction of various students in the lecture. While some are attentively listening to the doctor or writing something in their notebooks, but many of them are either sleepy or sleeping. Two particular students are so fast asleep that they are leaning over the desk and railing respectively. This feature brings 'The Gross Clinic' even closer to reality. The platform or table on which the patient is lying has Eakins's name written on it. Every aspect of this enriched painting deserves an in-depth analysis.

## **The perfect depiction of human body**

One cannot escape from noticing how brilliantly human body has been painted here. The facial expressions, especially that of Dr Gross and a student performing surgery directly over the thigh of the patient are so natural that they convey the exact emotion. Dr Gross is serious, trying to teach diligently. The student is focused on performing the surgery. The various figures in the background- sleepy students leaning over desks and chairs have been very accurately painted. The woman covering her face with her hands, one of the students in the background sitting cross-legged with his right arm spread out, the reluctant man standing behind the students and many finer details make for an amazing watch. Another aspect to be applauded here is the silhouettes of clothes which complement the bodily shapes and positions of each character in the room very precisely.

## **Is it successful conveying a meaning?**

Yes, it surely does. It represents a 19th century surgical classroom as well as small clinic very effectively. The various aspects- faces, body, colour, texture, shapes, ratios and brightness or darkness have been very naturally adjusted with the correct stroke of brushes. It is more than just a boon to the history of surgical sciences. It is a specimen of realism at its best through a painting.

## **Conclusion**

I personally adore this artwork. It has been one of my all time favourite paintings. A world where legendary artists and sculptors like Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci and Nicola Pisano are considered as the Fathers of Art for

their specimens based on religious themes, there is Thomas Eakins who presented a great artwork based on modern, medical theme and made history with it. This artwork, according to me, has equal right to be called as one of the best paintings in history like the paintings from Renaissance, Gothic and other periods. It's surpassing realism and perfect depiction of emotion, physical features and body contours makes it legendary. I not only appreciate how the artist has used his own classroom as a source of inspiration but also respect the fact that he has made a remembrance of a surgery in the 19th century with such fineness.

## References

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