

F R O N T P A G E

Eakins Painting to Stay in Philly

Civic pride was apparent in Philadelphia last fall when city officials, business and cultural leaders, and residents rallied to prevent losing a cultural icon. In November, Thomas Jefferson University, owner of the work since 1878, announced that, in order to finance an expansion and renovation and to support research and education, it was selling Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* (1875) to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the newly established Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Ark., currently under construction. The two museums were to share own-

ership, shipping the piece back and forth for extended stays. As part of the deal, brokered by Christie's, local institutions were given 45 days to match the record-breaking \$68-million price and keep the painting in Philadelphia.

The news sparked a frantic effort to keep the work in its home city. A committee was formed by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and led by William J. Marrazzo, chairman of public broadcasting station WHYY, to raise funds and to inform the public of the work's importance to the city. In late December, though fundraising was not complete, the two museums announced they would jointly purchase the painting, thanks to backup financing provided by Wachovia Bank, which will cover any remaining portion of the price.

The Dec. 26 deadline was extended to Jan. 31, allowing more time for fundraising to decrease the potential debt of the two institutions. At this writing in early January, more than half of the \$68 million had been raised. The Annenberg Foundation has contributed \$10 million, while cable billionaire H.F. "Gerry" Lenfest, Aramark Corporation CEO Joseph Neubauer and the Pew Charitable Trusts have each given \$3 million. More than 2,300 donations from 30 states have been reported.

The Gross Clinic is an 8-by-6½-foot canvas that depicts Dr. Samuel Gross, the first chair of surgery at Jefferson, demonstrating a procedure on an adolescent male as students look on. The work was rejected by the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, but subsequently



Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875, jointly purchased by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

purchased by Jefferson alumni and given to the school in 1878. Eakins, who studied anatomy under Gross, was twice fired from Philadelphia

Hartley's Nova Scotia Tragedy on Screen

Currently making the rounds of art-film houses throughout the country and also available on DVD, *Cleophas and His Own: A North Atlantic Tragedy* is a film interpretation of Marsden Hartley's epic autobiographical verse narrative of the same name. Michael Maglaras, a Connecticut-based actor and sometime insurance consultant, produced, directed and starred in the movie, using as a screenplay the complete 13-part poem. Hartley never intended to publish this soulful threnody. It was found tucked away in his Maine studio after his death in 1943 at age 66, and was not published until 1987, when it appeared in a catalogue for a Hartley exhibition in Halifax.

Deeply moved by the piece, which he first read in 2003, Maglaras at first made an audio recording of it before deciding to adapt it to film.



Above: Marsden Hartley, *Cleophas: Master of the Gilda Gray* (1938-39); right: scene from the film, with Michael Maglaras as Hartley.

At the core of the 2 ½-hour movie is Maglaras's monologue—basically, a dramatized reading of the verse. Shot in black and white, these scenes show Maglaras in close-up as Hartley, wearing a prosthetic nose as he convincingly evokes the look and posture of the artist, much in the manner of Hal Holbrook's one-man show as Mark Twain, albeit without the biting humor. Staring straight into the camera, often puffing on a cigarette, Maglaras tends to linger on words and phrases, aiming for an emotional resonance. Some of the most vivid and poignant scenes in the narrative are reenacted outdoors with the backdrop of the spectacular Maine coastline, where the film was shot. Here, nonspeaking supporting roles are played by local actors in period costumes. Interspersed throughout the film are images of 24 paintings and works on paper from the well-known series that Hartley made toward the end of his life, recounting his time in Nova Scotia.

At first the languid presentation, which recalls the glacial pace of certain films by Bergman or Antonioni, makes the story seem icy and remote. However, the carefully gauged approach eventually serves to establish a dreamlike mood, effectively underscoring the

nuances of a tragic tale. In addition, it goes a long way to explicate Hartley's final works, in which he explored the human figure and portraits in depth for the first time.

The film focuses on the Maine-born artist's extended stays in 1935 and '36 on East Point Island, Nova Scotia, in a remote village of 90 inhabitants. During this time, which Hartley describes in the poem as the emotionally richest of his life, he lodged with the family of a poor fisherman, Francis Mason, his wife, Martha, and their four sons and three daughters. He bonded almost immediately with the hardworking patriarch, whom he renames Cleophas, idealizing him as the paragon of masculine strength and forbearance both in the verse and in such artworks as the iconic portrait *Cleophas: Master of the Gilda Gray* (1938-39). Hartley saw the family's constant struggle to eke a living from the sea and the barren coast as a metaphor for humanity's will to survive.

During the two stays, lasting six or seven weeks each year, Hartley developed feelings of love and devotion for each member of the Mason family. He had a particularly strong homoerotic attraction to Francis's son Alty (renamed Adelard). Hartley describes him as a vivacious, strapping young man, beloved by men as well as women in the vicinity, who "lives utterly for the consummate satisfaction of the flesh, the kind of flesh making no difference." Hartley immortalized the youth in the paint-

ing *Adelard the Drowned, Master of the Phantom* (1938-39), which portrays its stocky subject with bushy dark hair, wearing a delicate pink flower behind his ear.

In one of the most suggestive scenes, Adelard enters the house after a hard day's work, goes to the sink and strips off his shirt. He invites the older man, who is sitting nearby, to wash his broad muscular back. Hartley obliges, slowly and tenderly caressing his rippling muscles as he does the job, but any sexual interaction between the two men is only speculative.

Hartley's days of rapturous contentment with the family were suddenly shattered in the fall of 1936 when Alty, his brother Donny, and a cousin disappeared in a small boat during a storm. The final segments of the film describe in moving detail the search for the bodies, the circumstances of their discovery and the double funeral of the beloved brothers.

The simplicity of Maglaras's vision is most effective here as the tone of the film flawlessly matches that of Hartley's elegiac lines: "By now everyone had gotten themselves into the key of the wretched and broken heart and a deadness of soul was over everyone." With a spare budget and using a simple, straightforward cinematic approach, Maglaras manages in the end to bring to life a hitherto obscure literary curiosity. In the process, he illuminates the late work of this enigmatic artist.

—David Ebony

Cleophas and His Own, 2006, produced and directed by Michael Maglaras, is distributed by 217 Films. More information about the film may be found online: www.two17films.com.



▶ teaching posts, most memorably from the Pennsylvania Academy in 1885 after he removed a loincloth from a male model in a coed class.

The National Gallery and Crystal Bridges issued a joint statement in response: "We are disappointed that Eakins's *Gross Clinic* will not be coming to the nation's capital or America's heartland. However, we are pleased for the city of Philadelphia." Crystal Bridges, founded by Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton, also made news in 2005, when it bought Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits*, set in the Hudson River Valley, from the New York Public Library in a secretive sealed-bid auction at Sotheby's [see "Artworld," Sept. '05]. In that case, New York institutions were not given the opportunity to match the \$35-million sale price, though the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery had jointly offered \$25 million.

In advance of the sale's conclusion, *The Gross Clinic* went on view at the Philadelphia Museum on Jan. 5 (lent by the university). It will move to the Academy in early March and then rotate over extended periods between the two institutions, a much shorter commute for the work than Washington/Arkansas. Questions have been raised as to whether the two museums might deaccession other works in order to raise funds for the purchase.

Herbert Riband, vice chairman of the Academy's board, told the press that this is a possibility, while Anne d'Harnoncourt, director of the Philadelphia Museum, declined to comment. —Stephanie Cash

MAC @ MAM in Miami

In a city full of collectors with their own exhibition spaces, one private venue recently joined forces with the Miami Art Museum. Miami Art Central and the museum have formed MAC @ MAM, for which MAC will produce exhibitions and programs to be seen at MAM. The first project, however, featuring works by Peter Friedl and Tacita Dean, appears in MAC's existing space in South Miami [through Apr. 15].

MAC was founded in 2003 by Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, whose Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO), established in 2002 by her and her family, funds the center. With 20,000 square feet of gallery space, MAC is located in a 1940s building renovated by Italian architect Alessandro Fiorentino, which Fontanals-Cisneros will continue to use for her office and other purposes. She also operates the CIFO Art Space, which opened in the downtown area

in late 2005 and features new commissioned works and those by CIFO grant recipients. Selections from her collection were on view there in December and January during the Art Basel Miami Beach and Art Miami fairs.

The Miami Art Museum is in the process of building a major new facility, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, scheduled to open in Museum Park in 2010. It remains to be seen if other private collectors in Miami will follow Fontanals-Cisneros's lead and rally behind their city's major museum.

Public Art Goes Green

An environmentally minded public artwork by Mary Ellen Carroll is currently on view in Jersey City, N.J., through Apr. 7. Called *indestructible language*, it consists of a rather oblique text—"It is green thinks nature even in the dark"—spelled out in 8-foot-tall neon letters spread across the windows and wrapping around a



Mary Ellen Carroll's text piece *indestructible language* in Jersey City, N.J.

corner, of five buildings of the former American Can factory. The work is visible at night to commuters on the Pulaski Skyway and the New Jersey Turnpike, and to passengers flying in to Newark Airport, though it is uncertain whether they can fully read the text, or decipher its meaning, while zooming past or navigating traffic. Adhering to its environmental tone, the piece is made using low-wattage, energy-efficient transformers and lead-free glass tubing, and is sponsored by the Precipice Alliance, a new nonprofit organization, co-founded by photographer Joel Sternfeld and Donna Wingate, former director of publisher services at D.A.P., that collaborates with artists to raise public awareness of global warming.