



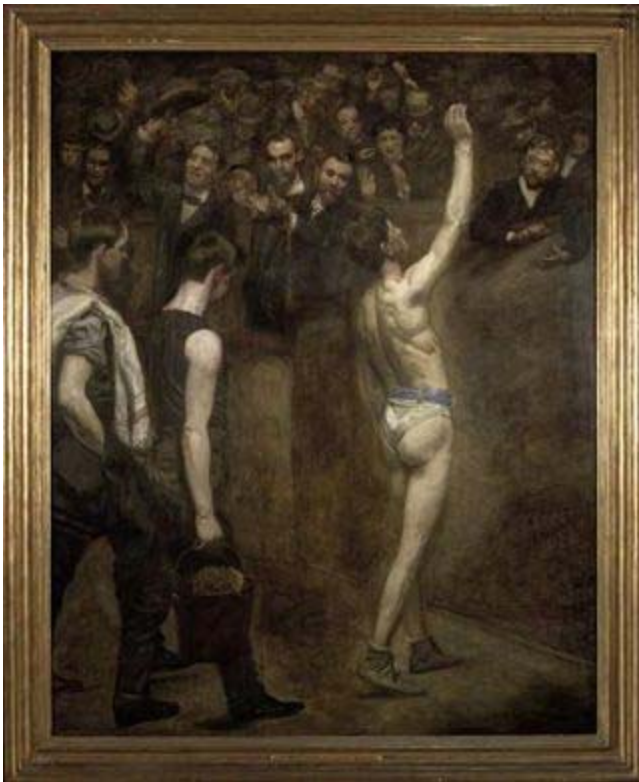
# Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

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## Gay desire and American art

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In 1989, the private Corcoran Gallery of Art, battered by threats from Congress and worried about future federal grants, canceled an exhibition by photographer Robert Mapplethorpe that included male nudity and homosexual scenes. The banning made the Washington art establishment seem philistine, intolerant and spineless.

Times and attitudes change. Now, a Washington museum is pioneering a show that celebrates gay and lesbian art and delineates its place in the history of American painting and photography. The museum is as Washington establishment as any can be: the federally funded Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery, a museum noted more for exhibitions about presidents than shows on the cutting edge.

David C. Ward, one of the two curators, calls the show "a groundbreaking, epochal exhibition." "Amazingly," writes Washington Post art critic Blake Gopnik, "this is the first major museum show to tackle the topic." Titled "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," the exhibition will be featured at the gallery through Feb. 13. There are no plans for it to travel anywhere else.

The show offers almost 100 pieces, including major works by George Bellows, Thomas Eakins, Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Mapplethorpe and Andy Warhol. Since Ward, a National Portrait Gallery historian, and his co-curator, Jonathan Katz of the State University of New York at Buffalo, are trying to show how same-sex themes have entered the mainstream of American art, not all the artists are homosexual.

For the full Arts & Books preview article, [click here](#).

-- Stanley Meisler

*"SALUTAT," by Thomas Eakins (1898), part of the Washington exhibition.*

*Credit: Addison Gallery of American Art*

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