

## 5090

### Thomas Eakins, *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River*

**Dominic Carter:** In this striking and somewhat mysterious painting by Thomas Eakins, the back of the model seems to light up this scene of artist William Rush at work on a wood sculpture. For Eakins's public, moral issues and the artist's scandal-ridden reputation would have colored their thoughts about this picture.

Eakins taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which Rush had helped establish many years before. Eakins was eventually fired for allowing women students to take part in classes with nude models.

Note the woman seated on the left. She seems to be a chaperone, there to uphold propriety between the artist and his naked subject—no small issue in the conservative atmosphere of the early 1900s.

You might have noticed that the figure William Rush is sculpting is wearing clothing. Is Eakins making some kind of joke about modesty?

**Barbara Gallati:** It's not a joke.

I think what Eakins is doing here emphasizes Eakins's beliefs in the way art should be taught. That even though we end up painting portraits of people with their clothes on, or making sculptures with drapery, that in order to get the sense of the body right, one had to have a thorough understanding of the way it works.

