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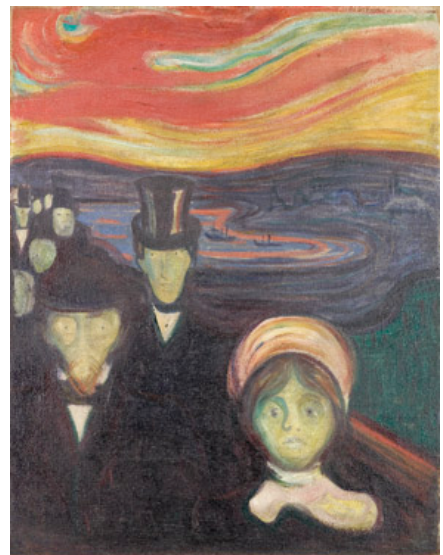
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ART INSTITUTE REFRAMES ARTIST EDVARD MUNCH
IN MAJOR EXHIBITION ONLY ON VIEW IN CHICAGO

Artist Behind *The Scream* Explored Through Works By European Contemporaries

*** *Becoming Edvard Munch* Opens February 14, 2009 ***

The Art Institute of Chicago is pleased to announce the opening of ***Becoming Edvard Munch: Influence, Anxiety, and Myth***, a remarkably comprehensive and contextual exploration of the Norwegian artist behind the iconic composition *The Scream*. On view **February 14 through April 26, 2009**, *Becoming Edvard Munch*, which will be presented solely at the Art Institute, will showcase extraordinary loans from Norway, private collections, and leading museums in America and abroad. It brings together approximately 150 rarely seen works, including 75 paintings and 75 works on paper by Munch and his contemporaries. By considering Munch's oeuvre in relation to his fellow artists—including **James Ensor, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Max Klinger, and Claude Monet**—*Becoming Edvard Munch* challenges the myth that Munch was an artist crippled by his own neuroses and instead presents him as a canny self-promoter, deeply aware of the artistic trends around him. Many of Munch's iconic works will be on display, including *Anxiety*, *Kiss by the Window*, and *Ashes*. Although the painting *The Scream* will **not** be on view, as the two versions do not leave Oslo, Norway, **the Art Institute's own lithograph of *The Scream* will be featured in the exhibition.** *Becoming Edvard Munch* is exclusive to the Art Institute and will not travel to another venue.



“I am thrilled to have this opportunity to present a new view of Edvard Munch to museum visitors,” said Jay Clarke, curator of the exhibition and associate curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute. “On my first research trip to Oslo, I went through hundreds of unpublished letters between Munch and his contemporaries. I kept waiting for the ‘crazy Munch’ to reveal himself in all these private papers. But I never found him. Instead, the letters reveal a man very much in control of his career, even acting as his own dealer and organizing complex exhibitions and negotiations. Indeed, far from an independent, the artist was like a sponge, soaking up painting styles, motifs, and technical tricks from his contemporaries. Whereas most Munch exhibitions have tended to take Munch at face value, displaying works that reinforce the myth of his tortured persona, *Becoming Edvard Munch* will consider his rich and varied production within the context of his peers, those whose works Munch could have seen and been inspired by.”

Through this provocative exhibition, a very different picture of Edvard Munch emerges. The artist has been defined by myths surrounding his mental instability and his distance from Norwegian and Scandinavian artistic influences. These myths have been perpetuated for decades by art historians, critics, the artist himself, and our own collective fascination with his representations of self-torment. However, Munch’s largely unpublished letters and reviews by contemporary commentators reveal an artist intimately connected with the art of his time and cogently able to promote his own career. Seeing these works of art together for the first time in light of these documents helps us to understand Munch’s life and art in relation to his peers in Scandinavia, France, Germany, and Belgium.

While there is no doubt that Munch was influenced by his childhood exposure to sickness, depression, and death, producing deeply subjective and introspective artwork throughout his life, this exhibition reveals that this influence is but one aspect of a deeply complex artistic personality. He pursued an education in Norway and Paris, where he experimented with the three dominant, yet significantly divergent, artistic styles of the day: Naturalism, Impressionism, and Symbolism. So while Munch did indeed create and rework many images that addressed the theme of melancholy, he did so drawing on a wide variety of visual sources, including the works of avant-garde French artists such as Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh. Munch, like Gauguin, adopted biblical, historical, and mythic subject matter, reenergizing it for contemporary audiences.

Munch moved to Paris in 1889, and from then on constantly traveled between France, Germany, and Norway. Many of his works treating the subjects of anxiety and alienation, as presented in this exhibition, can be seen as reimaginings and transformations of the brightly colored daytime streets of Impressionism into a nightmare of staring faces, darkened avenues, and isolated Norwegian settings—another instance in which Munch was actively responding to works by his peers rather than focusing solely on his own interior life. His years in Berlin—from 1892 to 1895—were occupied by extensive, almost frenetic, exhibition activity that was fraught with both scandal and artistic ambition. Munch's letters during this period reveal that he was a savvy businessman, planning exhibitions with a careful eye to both his place in the market and his posthumous reputation.

The image of Munch presented in this exhibition thus challenges the popular view of him as an artist imprisoned by his sometimes turbulent emotional life. In fact, this display demonstrates that his iconic works, including *The Scream* and *Anxiety*, can equally be seen as the products of an artist very much in control of the personal image projected through his art. Indeed, Munch was well aware of and encouraged the notoriety created by such images.

Another point central to the exhibition is the role of Norwegian and Scandinavian influences in his work. The artist has been characterized as eschewing such regional expressions, but when viewed in the context of his Scandinavian contemporaries, his art reveals a decidedly Nordic sensibility. Munch's use of blue-violet tonalities and his frequent depictions of lone, contemplative figures were signature tropes in Modern Norwegian painting. His *Kiss by the Window*, which depicts a couple locked in a passionate embrace, is a case in point.

Organized around a number of themes that were central to Munch's work—including melancholy, the street, love and sexuality, bathing, and death and dying—*Becoming Edvard Munch* offers a unique opportunity to re-examine this enigmatic artist, his near-mythic reputation, and the powerful, complex images he created.

Catalogue: Presenting this compelling, revisionist approach to Munch, the 232-page catalogue *Becoming Edvard Munch* features beautiful color reproductions of approximately 150 works, including 75 paintings and 75 works on paper by Munch and his peers. *Becoming Edvard Munch* is distributed by Yale University Press and will be available February 16, 2009, in the Museum Shop of the Art Institute.

Tickets: Special dated tickets to *Becoming Edvard Munch* are required, and advance tickets are strongly recommended. Tickets went on sale to the public **January 15, 2009**—call **312-930-4040** or purchase them at the museum. For online purchases, visit the Art Institute’s Web site: www.artinstituteofchicago.org.

Bank of America is the Exclusive Corporate Sponsor of *Becoming Edvard Munch: Influence, Anxiety, and Myth*. Major funding is generously provided by the **Harris Family Foundation** in memory of Bette and Neison Harris. This project was partially funded by a grant from the **Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism**. The project is also supported by an award from the **National Endowment for the Arts**, which believes a great nation deserves great art. An indemnity for the exhibition has been granted by the **Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities**.

IMAGE CREDIT: Edvard Munch. *Anxiety*, 1894. Munch Museum, Oslo, MMM515. © 2008 The Munch Museum / The Munch-Ellingsen Group / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

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MUSEUM HOURS

10:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday
10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Thursday
10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE EVENINGS THURSDAY AFTER 5:00 p.m.

Free all day, every day in February.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.

Please check <http://www.artinstituteofchicago.org> before your visit.

Admission: Adults, \$12.00; Children 12 and over, students, and seniors, \$7.00; Children under 12 free; members always free. Target Free Evenings are free to all, except for certain special exhibitions that may require full or extra admission fee. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a “Check Us Out” card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago. Members can always have free, unlimited access to the museum, including ticketed exhibitions. Join today at www.artic.edu/aic/joinnow.

To reach the Art Institute on the World Wide Web, contact us at <http://www.artinstituteofchicago.org>

The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago’s Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.