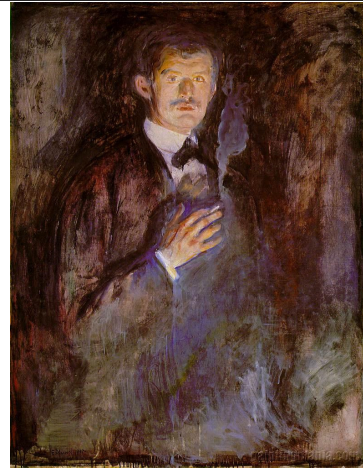


Edvard Munch



The Scream, 1893.
oil and tempera on board, 35 ¾" x 29".
National Gallery, Oslo.



Self-Portrait with Burning Cigarette, 1895.
oil on canvas, 43 ½" x 33 ⅔".
National Gallery, Oslo.

The Artist

Edvard Munch

Born in Loten, Norway 1893, died in Ekely, Norway 1944

Edvard Munch's childhood was tragic: his mother died of tuberculosis when he was only five and his beloved sister died when he was fourteen. Munch was a sickly child, often missing school, and as a young man, he had to face the death of his father as well. Munch went to Paris in 1889, where he came into contact with Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. The combination of Symbolist content with Post-Impressionism was particularly well suited to Munch's character. His mental suffering, similar to van Gogh's, was so openly expressed in his imagery and statements that is unavoidable in considering his work. His pictures conform to the Symbolist theory, in that they depict states of mind, emotions, or ideas, rather than observable physical reality. The style, in which Munch's mental states are expressed, however, is Post-Impressionist in its expressive distortions of form and its use of non-local color. He developed an exciting, violent, and emotionally charged style that is recognized as being of primary importance in the birth of German Expressionism. During the 1890s, Munch's most productive period, he made powerful and shocking woodcuts, developing a new technique of direct and forceful cutting that served to revive creative activity in this medium. Among his strongest and best-known works are *The Scream* (1893), *Vampire* (1894), and *The Kiss* (1895). Reaction to his stark, fearsome images caused the closing of an important Berlin exhibition of 1892. In 1909, after a severe mental illness, Munch returned from Germany to Norway, where he painted murals for the University of Oslo and for an Oslo chocolate factory. His paintings became brighter of palette and less introverted until the 1920s, when he again was moved to portray his dreadful anguish. Munch's work is in leading collections everywhere. Munch died in Ekely, near Oslo, on January 23, 1944. He left many of his works to the city of Oslo, which built a museum in his honor.

Art Movement

Expressionism

Expressionism is a term used to describe works of art and literature in which the representation of reality is distorted to communicate an inner vision. The expressionist transforms nature rather than imitates it. The paintings aim to reflect the artists' state of mind rather than the reality of the external world. The term *Expressionism* was first used at the 1911 Fauvist and Cubist exhibition in Berlin.

The Artwork

The Scream

This famous autobiographical painting is an expressionistic construction based on Munch's actual experience of a scream piercing through nature while on a walk, after his two companions, seen in the background, had left him. Fitting the fact that the sound must have been heard at a time when his mind was in an abnormal state, Munch renders it in a style which if pushed to extremes can destroy human integrity. Beginning at this time, Munch included art nouveau elements in many pictures but usually only in a limited or modified way. Here, however, in depicting his own morbid experience, he has let go, and allowed the foreground figure to become distorted by the flow of nature; the scream could be interpreted as expressing the agony of the obliteration of human personality by this unifying force. Significantly, although it was Munch himself who underwent the experience depicted, the protagonist bears no resemblance to him or anyone else. The creature in the foreground has been depersonalized and crushed into sexlessness or, if anything, stamped with a trace of the femininity of the world that has come close to assimilating it.

Within the picture, he has set up a defense, in the form of the plunging perspective of the roadway and its fence, which preserves a rational world of three dimensions, holding at bay the swell of art nouveau curves. Safe in this rational world, the two men in the distance remain unequivocally masculine. In the foreground, unified nature has come close to crossing the fence; close enough to distort the form and personality of the protagonist. The fence still protects it from total absorption into subjective madness.

The Scream has been the target of several high-profile art thefts. In 1994, the version in the National Gallery was stolen and was recovered several months later. A version of the painting was also stolen in 2004 from Oslo's National Gallery, but was recovered three months later. The 1895 pastel-on-board version of the painting was sold at Sotheby's for a record-breaking \$120 million at an auction on May 2, 2012.

Discussion Suggestions

Discussing the Painting:

- *Have you ever seen this painting before? What was your first impression of it?*
- *What do you think is making the man scream? Why do people scream?*
- *What colors do you associate with fear, anger, or pain?*
- *How would his face have looked before he screamed? After? Note that the most obvious facial changes are seen in the eyes and mouth.*
- *What does expression mean? What would you expect of the art of someone who is called an expressionist?*
- *Who do you think the person in the painting is supposed to be?*
- *Does the person look like any particular person? If not, why?*
- *What do you think Munch was trying to tell us?*
- *Why has this person covered his or her ears?*

Activity Idea

Clay Facial Expressions

- Work a large lump of modeling clay until it is smooth and elastic.
- Mold it into an oval face shape.
- Try making different facial expressions with the clay.

Materials Needed:

- Playdough, clay, or other modeling compound
- Work area for clay

Alternative Activity Ideas:

- Paint different facial expressions
- Make crayon versions of *The Scream*
- Ask students to draw what makes them scream