



Edvard Munch

EDUCATION RESOURCE



Edvard Munch: The Frieze of Life

We want more than a mere photograph of nature. We do not want to paint pretty pictures to be hung on drawing-room walls. We want to create, or at least lay the foundations of, an art that gives something to humanity. An art that arrests and engages. An art created of one's innermost heart.

Edvard Munch

Edvard Munch, Norway's greatest painter, began his long career in 1880 at the age of seventeen. He brought art and life together by communicating his own personal experience passionately. His intense expression of raw human emotion and his exploration of psychological states have a universal appeal which still speaks to us today.

The scream, Munch's iconic work, has come to symbolise the angst of modern man in today's frenetic society and, like the *Mona Lisa*, is one of the most frequently reproduced images in the world. Munch worked in a variety of media, repeatedly exploring the same themes in painting, drawing, etching, lithography, photography and woodcuts.

Potent imagery and dramatic use of heightened colour, both radical in their time, combined with his innovative studio techniques, have secured Munch's reputation as one of the most revered and influential artists of the twentieth century.

Disease and madness and death were the black angels standing over my cradle.

Edvard Munch

Munch was born in 1863 into a poor but well educated, middle-class Norwegian family. His father, Christian Munch, an intensely conservative and religious man, worked as a doctor with the army whilst his mother, Laura, looked after their children.

Munch's early life was scarred by a series of traumatic events which profoundly shaped the development of his work. Apart from being plagued by illness himself, his suffering was compounded when his mother died of tuberculosis (he was then five years old), causing his father to develop a religious fervour which brought him to the verge of insanity. Nine years later, Munch lost his older sister Sophie, also to tuberculosis. His brother, Andreas, also died young in 1895. Interestingly, Munch conceded as an adult that the depression caused by this very pain and suffering was the driving force behind his creative life, saying, 'I would not cast off my illness for there is much in my art that I owe to it'.

In 1880, Munch entered the School of Design in Kristiania (now called Oslo) and studied drawing under one of the leading sculptors of the day. His early works reflect the influence of Christian Krohg who trained him in the schools of Naturalism and Plein Air, and who became a great advocate of Munch's work when initially it was savagely rejected by Norwegian society.

By the mid 1880s, Munch had become part of an anarchistic group of artists and writers led by the philosopher Hans Jaeger, whose book detailing his sexual exploits and Bohemian lifestyle was considered so shocking in the prevailing puritanical society that he was sent to prison. Jaeger's belief that art should be inspired by one's personal experience and inner life guided Munch towards expressing the emotional turmoil he was experiencing.

At the age of twenty-two, Munch had a tumultuous affair with a married woman, Milly Thaulow, known in his diaries as 'Mrs Heiberg', the first great love of his life. His adulterous behaviour was so contrary to the strict moral upbringing enforced by his father that he was haunted by overwhelming feelings of guilt.

Munch's lucid and evocative writings are as expressive as his art, and about this time he started to write what later became known as his literary diaries, where he described love scenes, childhood tragedies and impressions of Kristiania café society.



Self-portrait on his trunk in his studio in 82 Litzowstrasse in Berlin 1902. Collodion silver photograph. Munch-museet, Oslo

I began as an Impressionist but it was limited and I had to find another way of expressing the emotional turmoil I experienced during that Bohemian period of my life ... 'The Sick Child' was the first break from Impressionism – I was searching for expression.

Edvard Munch

When Munch's early works reflecting his intense personal pain, such as *The sick child* (exhibited under the title *A study* in 1886), were exhibited in Kristiania, the unashamedly raw application of the paint and the 'unfinished' quality caused a storm of protests from the press and public. Despite this initial hostile response, his one-man exhibition in 1889, which was more optimistic in tone and featured a monumental portrait of Hans Jaeger, secured him the first of a series of state scholarships which allowed him to study in France for three years.

At this time, Munch stayed in a house in Åsgårdstrand, a seaside retreat to which he returned almost every summer for twenty years and which was the setting for numerous paintings.



Death in the sickroom (Døden i sykevoerelse) 1896. Hand-coloured lithograph. Munch-museet, Oslo

Angst, Love, Death

While studying in Paris and in Nice in the south of France, Munch was influenced by the Impressionists' fascination with light and by the growing Symbolist movement which inspired his symbolic use of colour and simplification of form. He saw the work of Gauguin and van Gogh, whose *Starry night* he paid tribute to in his own painting of the same name thirty years later. These influences, together with the curving, sweeping lines of Art Nouveau, were rapidly melded into his highly individual style.

Just as Leonardo studied human anatomy and dissected corpses, so I try to dissect souls.

Edvard Munch

Munch's first exhibition in Berlin in 1892 caused a scandal mainly due to the very personal subject matter which was not considered acceptable, and it was closed after a week. The torrent of publicity which followed made Munch instantly famous and offers of exhibitions flooded in. Munch stayed in Germany for the next three years, where his pioneering ideas flowered in the stimulating company of a radical group of adventurous writers, critics, poets and artists.

Led by the writer August Strindberg, who wrote psychological plays and prose, they met regularly at The Black Pig café in Berlin where they discussed Symbolism, psychology, eroticism and death. It was here that Munch began his series of paintings known as *The frieze of life*, and to which he returned at the end of his life. These images, which in Munch's words came from 'the reverse side of the eye' and where colour was used emotively and not descriptively, were intended to be displayed together as a symbolic celebration of the 'poetry of life, love and death'.

In 1898 he began a turbulent relationship with Tulla Larsen, a wealthy, middle-class, Norwegian woman who became infatuated with him. The affair ended dramatically in 1902 when, during an argument, he was wounded by a gunshot, damaging the middle finger of his left hand. Munch became obsessed with the injury which made it painful for him to hold his palette and was a constant reminder of the agony of the ill fated relationship. This traumatic incident, combined with excessive drinking and exhaustion, eventually caused him to suffer a nervous breakdown, and in 1908–09 he spent several months in a psychiatric clinic in Copenhagen.

After his recovery he settled permanently in Norway, moving to an isolated estate in Kragerø on the southern coast. Munch never fully abandoned his darker themes, returning to them throughout his life, but from this time onwards his work reflected a more peaceful chapter in his life. He concentrated on external subjects such as landscapes, portraits and figure studies which were soft and lyrical compared with the intense, anguished works of previous years.

Munch's expressive brushwork and uninhibited colour profoundly influenced the German Expressionists, and in 1913 he and Picasso were the only two foreign artists to be invited to exhibit at the Autumn Exhibition in Berlin, in appreciation of their importance to young German artists.

In 1916, Munch bought the Ekely property at Skøyen near Oslo where he lived a simple, reclusive life surrounded by his paintings which he regarded as his children.

During World War II, his art was labelled 'degenerate' by the Nazis and removed from German museums. He continued to work defiantly until his death at the age of eighty in 1944, when he left over 1000 paintings, 3000 drawings and water-colours, and 17,000 prints to the city of Oslo.

Munch's decision, at the age of seventeen, to become a painter was driven by the profound emotional experiences of his childhood. Munch expressed the importance of communicating the emotional and psychological aspects of his experiences as early as 1888, when he was twenty-four:

*We want more than a mere photograph of nature ...
We want ... an art created of one's innermost heart.*

Edvard Munch



Angst (Anxiety) 1896. Colour woodcut. Munch-museet, Oslo

Drawing on his own experience, the themes of love and death became the recurring and interrelated subjects for his art. The emotional states of anxiety and melancholy, the complex aspects of sexual love – attraction, separation, jealousy – and the trauma of sickness and death were the themes that Munch returned to over and over. In 1892 he conceived of these works as a series. 'I placed them (the paintings) together and found that various paintings related to each other in terms of content. When they were hung together, suddenly a single musical note passed through them all. They became completely different from what they had been previously. A symphony resulted.' (Munch in 1933). This series became known as *The frieze of life*.

The scream is Munch's best known painting. Describing the experience which led to this image he wrote:

I was walking along a path with two friends. The sun set. I felt a tinge of melancholy. Suddenly the sky became a bloody red.

I stopped, leaned against the railing, dead tired [my friends looked at me and walked on] and I looked at the flaming clouds that hung like blood and a sword [over the fjord and city] over the blue-black fjord and city.

My friends walked on. I stood there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature.

From Reinhold Heller, *Munch. The Scream*, New York, 1972

Munch's experience of profound anxiety and emotional turmoil is given visual form in the waves of intense colour, distorting the natural world. The screaming figure is swept into and becomes part of the distorted world. In portraying his own *personal* experience, Munch found a language to communicate the overwhelming anxiety experienced by many people.

A similar phenomenon is evoked in *Anxiety*, 1894. In this case however the dark figures with their mask-like faces seem to be experiencing the sense of isolation and alienation that was to become increasingly an element of life in the modern urban environment. Munch reinterpreted the painted version of this image as a woodcut two years later. As a woodcut, the subject has an even greater rawness and starkness, and may suggest why Munch experimented with representing similar subjects in a variety of media.

The themes of sickness and death reflect the experiences of Munch's early life. 'Disease and madness and death', he wrote, 'were the black angels standing over my cradle'. In the lithograph *Death in the sickroom*, 1896, Munch's family is gathered in the room, aware that Munch's sister Sophie is dying. The weight of her loss is simply and powerfully portrayed by her absence in the painting: she is sitting in the chair and is the only one not visible to the viewer. The ongoing experience of grief is conveyed by the fact that Munch's family is shown at the age they were when the work was created, rather than at their age when Sophie died eight years earlier. Munch's father stands before Sophie, his hands clasped in prayer. Munch's aunt Karen gestures consolingly towards her. In the foreground group, Munch's sister Laura sits with her head bowed; behind her, Inger, the third sister, stares out from a mask-like face. Munch himself stands immediately behind her, and their brother Andreas turns blankly away. The absolute isolation of grief is underlined by the seemingly vast spaces separating the figures in the room.

In *The dance of life* (the first version of which was painted in 1899 or 1900) we see a charged image of womanhood and sexuality. The central couple refers to Munch himself with his first and true love, 'Mrs Heiberg'. Munch is swept up in the emotions of sexual desire, suggested by the woman's red dress engulfing his feet and the contour wrapping around the couple. The women on either side, looking on, represent two aspects of Tulla Larsen, the woman with whom Munch had a troubled relationship. The youthful figure in white looks on, eager to participate in the dance; the one in black shows the jealous and rejected Tulla, mourning the death of their love.



Vampire, 1893–94, originally simply titled *Lovers*, can be interpreted as a woman's loving and comforting embrace. In a more sinister reading, the woman can be seen as a *femme fatale* trapping the man and sapping his creativity. Munch used the image of a woman's long hair as cords or ties which bind and trap in a number of images exploring relationships between men and women. The dark cavernous shadow echoing the form of the woman adds to the sinister feeling of the work.

The essential loneliness experienced by all people at some time is portrayed with great power and simplicity in the 1899 woodcut, *Two human beings. The lonely ones*. Although the two people are not alone, they are lonely and unable to communicate. The isolation of the man and the woman from each other is emphasised by the technique Munch chose to use for this image: just as the figures are separated by their inability to

communicate, the wood block is physically cut into three separate sections, each inked up in a different colour and rejoined for printing.

Jealousy, 1907, is one of a series of works relating to Munch's turbulent affair with the wealthy Tulla Larsen. Munch resisted her pressure to marry but was consumed with jealousy when, after their relationship ended in great bitterness, she commenced an affair with the painter Arne Kavli, eight years her junior. The bitterness experienced in a state of jealousy is communicated not just through the facial expression, but through the acidic colours, particularly the green wallpaper, and the broken, nervous lines of the brushwork. The raw, aggressive style, and the almost deliberate 'bad taste' of the work, underscore Munch's own aggressive feelings and parallel the work of the French Fauve painters.

Vampire (Vampyr) 1893–94. Oil on canvas. Munch-museet, Oslo



Self-portraits

My art has allowed me to bare my soul.

Edvard Munch to K.E. Shriener, his doctor

Self-portraits constitute a large and fascinating part of Munch's oeuvre from the earliest stage of his career to the last years of his life.

His self-portraits often depict him in intimate situations and give us notable insight into the life and self-knowledge of the painter. As a young artist, Munch was part of the radical Bohemian group centred on the painter Christian Krohg and the writer Hans Jaeger, who were influenced by the novels of the French author Emile Zola and who adopted his Naturalism as their ideology. This affiliation with the anti-bourgeois ideology is apparent in Munch's portraits and other paintings.

Whilst many of the works which show Munch in intimate scenes (such as with his models) were not exhibited at the time, Munch's readily identifiable figure and facial features recur frequently in many of the paintings forming *The frieze of life*.

In 1895, when Munch was residing in Germany and was a member of an intellectual circle of writers, he painted his *Self-portrait with a cigarette*, revealing a Bohemian in revolt. Shown half-length, the artist emerges from a darkened room, wreathed with smoke and with only his face and his hand distinguishable. Standing in the smoky atmosphere, the artist shows himself as both self-assured and contemplative.

During the last decades of his life, Munch created a series of self-portraits which traced his mental and physical progression towards death.

The most remarkable of these is *Self-portrait. Between the clock and the bed*, 1940–42, which reflects upon how his life has run its course and he has become an old man. Showing himself in the doorway in a brightly coloured room, Munch stands rigidly between the grandfather clock and his bed which is covered with an embroidered rug from his childhood home. With brilliant painterly technique, Munch reverts again to using symbols as he did in his youth. The doorway indicates that he is on a threshold in his life; time running out and death are symbolised by the vacant clock-face and the bed. Behind him we see the presence of his life's work, including a painting of his favourite model, Birgit Prestøe, hinting towards his reflection on past relationships.



ABOVE
Self-portrait with a cigarette
(*Selvportrett med sigarett*) 1895
oil on canvas
Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo



LEFT
Self-portrait. Between the clock and the bed
(*Selvportrett. Mellom klokken og sengen*) 1940–42
oil on canvas
Munch-museet, Oslo



... all my portraits are exaggerated – it cannot be otherwise ...

Edvard Munch



Munch was already painting portraits by the early 1880s. Under Christian Krohg's influence, Munch carefully observed the sitter's character and physical features to create objective portraits in keeping with the demands of Realism. He progressed very quickly in finding his own means of expression within this traditional genre.

Naturally members of his close family were his first sitters and early portraits included the half-length figure of his sister, *Inger in black*, 1884. Shown at the World Exhibition in Antwerp in 1885, the picture gave Munch the opportunity to travel from Antwerp to Paris where he absorbed many influences that were crucial to his artistic development.

Munch spent time in the small coastal town of Åsgårdstrand, where the scenery provided a starting point for the composition of many of his best known works before he set off for Paris after receiving a government scholarship. At Åsgårdstrand, he painted the beautiful *Summer night/Inger on the shore*, 1889, depicting a lonely figure sitting on a rock in front of a motionless sea, in the light of a Nordic summer night. The

profile outlined against the sea, the pale blue colours and inward mood suggest the influence of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. The painting marks an important stage in the development of Munch's art of the time. Overtones of Symbolism are evident with the merging of the human figure and the landscape into a single entity.

Simplification of form, soft contours and decorative effects indicate that he is now rejecting Realism and its objectivity in favour of the subjective expression of inner personal experiences.

Munch painted portraits of friends and patrons, many of which were discovered after he died. Generally speaking, portraiture demands a certain amount of likeness and characterisation. However, some scope remains for subjective interpretation and the artist's relationship with the sitter. Munch often used photography to assist with these portrait commissions.

Munch's imposing portrait of *Consul Christian Sandberg*, 1901, was the first of a series of male portraits. Sandberg, a



Portrait of the painter Aase Nørregaard (Portrait av kunstneren Aase Nørregaard) 1895. Oil on canvas. Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo

Portraits CONTINUED



Under the chestnut tree. Hanna Brieschke (Under kastanjetreet. Hanna Brieschke) 1937. Oil on canvas. Munch-museet, Oslo

colourful personality, was a former naval officer who acquired wealth and influence when he turned to trade. A personal friend of Munch, Sandberg is portrayed informally with hands in pockets, as a likeable middle-class character.

The portrait was begun on a canvas that was not big enough to include the man's left foot. When originally exhibited in Oslo and Copenhagen in 1903 and 1904, Munch rolled up the lower – unfinished – section so that it seemed to be a half-length portrait. In 1909, Munch extended the canvas to include the foot, strategically painting a pattern on that part of the floor to conceal the sewn-on strip.

Munch also painted a number of portraits of women, one of whom was the artist Aase Nørregaard, with whom he maintained a warm relationship. He painted several portraits of her; in *Portrait of the painter Aase Nørregaard*, 1895, she is dressed in a beautiful evening gown, portrayed with an

intense gaze in an open-mouthed, smiling face, and posed as if she is about to say something. Munch also used the figure of Aase Nørregaard as a full-length image in *The women on the pier*, 1903.

Munch painted several formal portraits of professional models whom he worked with in the latter part of his career, in addition to their appearances in figure studies and model paintings. Munch's last professional model, who posed for him from 1932 to 1942, is depicted in *Under the chestnut tree*. Hanna Brieschke, 1937, under a blossoming horse chestnut tree, wearing a coat with a flamboyant lynx collar. Hanna Brieschke's face looks frankly out at us. Demonstrating Munch's reference to Matisse, the decorative leaves and flowers of the tree, which suggest a mandala, are painted with the new painterly effects that he was seeking in his later years.

Landscape



Moonlight (Måneskinn) 1895. Oil on canvas. Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo

From his early paintings influenced by French Naturalism through to his later Expressionist styles, it is clear that landscape was an important part of Munch's imagery.

Elements of the landscape were used by Munch as a backdrop for his figurative compositions from the 1890s. In *The frieze of life* images from this time, the characteristic waterfront from Åsgårdstrand

runs like a thread linking these paintings. In this series the connectedness of human nature to the Norwegian landscape and its extremes of climate can be clearly perceived.

Moonlight, 1895, a painting with no human figures, evokes the mood and mystery of a summer night. Munch has stylised the landscape, combining soft beautiful colours and elegant lines in this simple composition

made up of three erect tree trunks, a pillar of moonlight on the water, and the softly curving shoreline.

In *Loneliness*, 1906, Munch depicts the blanketed stillness of a snow-covered landscape. The feeling of desolation is accentuated by a single vertical line depicting a small tree isolated from the rest of the forest in the background. This is one of a series of beautiful winter landscapes that Munch created around the turn of the century, characterised by the elegant lines of Art Nouveau.

In 1916 Munch settled at Ekely on the outskirts of Kristiania where he completed a series of paintings inspired by a small forest of ancient elm trees. In *Spring in the elm forest III*, 1923, Munch conveys the impression of the old forest of gnarled trees waking up after a long winter. In the foreground the paint is applied in short, broken brushstrokes in different directions, contrasting with the long, elegant brushstrokes in different hues in the background. As with other works by Munch, the interconnection of man and nature can be perceived. The brown bark and weathered, leafless trees can be associated with change and the evolution of generations. Spring flowers and fresh grass grow from dead leaves in the foreground, a symbol of new life and hope.

Spring in the elm forest III. (Vår i almeskogen III) 1923. Oil on canvas. Munch-museet, Oslo



Loneliness (Ensomhet) 1906. Oil on canvas. Bergen Kunstmuseum, Bergen. Stenersen Collection.



Two human beings: *The lonely ones* (To mennesker, De ensomme) 1899. Colour woodcut with pencil stencils. Munch-museet, Oslo

Technique

A good picture never disappears ... Most of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings are ruined but still live – a brilliant idea never dies ... Many painters work so carefully with the priming and the execution of the picture to preserve it for eternity, that they lose their fire ... Even if a bright expressionistic painting fades in colour over time, it can still keep its soul and power even if there was only one line left. At least it dies with beauty. And in all events it will have set up new goals for painters with other intentions.

Edvard Munch

Munch's experimentation with media and techniques was driven by his expressive needs. He was not limited by tradition. He mixed media and techniques to express a particular mood or psychological state, and explored the different effects he could achieve by reinterpreting the same theme in

a different medium. Compare the oil painting *Anxiety*, 1894, in the exhibition with the woodcut of the same theme, *Angst*, 1896.

In the 1890s Munch experimented with adding pastel to his oil and tempera paintings. The four 'painted' versions of *The scream* (there is also a lithograph) reveal this mixing of media. Three of the four are painted on cardboard rather than canvas, using water-based paint (tempera or gouache) and either crayon or pastel. Throughout his career he adapted his brushwork to suit the expressive needs of the subject, as, for example, the short, nervous brushstrokes seen in *Jealousy*, 1907. For expressive purposes, Munch would sometimes scrape back or score the surface of his paintings, or allow paint to drip, or leave the canvas in an apparently 'unfinished' state. His experimental approach led to his works being very fragile and difficult to conserve. He actually took pride in the poor condition of his paintings, preferring them to slick and technically well-prepared paintings without energy, meaning or soul. 'A good painting with ten holes', he wrote, 'is better than ten bad paintings with no holes.'

As a printmaker Munch made drypoints, etchings and lithographs in the traditional manner. However he developed his own unique technique for colour woodcuts. In the woodcut *Two human beings*. *The lonely ones*, he used a fretsaw (jigsaw) to cut the block into parts that could be inked separately and then put them together again, like a jigsaw, for printing in one step. This not only made the process simpler, but the visible lines of white paper between the sections serve to accentuate the theme of separation and loneliness.

Munch used photography to assist him when painting portraits, but he soon became fascinated with the technical and expressive possibilities of the medium, exploiting the accidental effects of blurring the image or using double exposures.

Despite Munch's mastery of a variety of techniques, his technical experiments were 'never a means unto themselves'. For Munch, 'the message was the important thing'. (Gerd Woll, 'A good picture never vanishes. The artist and his use of media', in *Edvard Munch: The Frieze of Life* (exh. cat.), National Gallery of Victoria, 2004).



Model undressing I (Modellen kler av seg I) 1920. Watercolour & crayon. Munch-museet, Oslo

Ideas for further discussion and research

'In my art I have tried to explain to myself life and its meaning. I have also tried to help others clarify their lives.'

Edvard Munch: *The Frieze of Life* (exh. cat.), National Gallery, London, p. 52

ART

Can you describe the many human emotions revealed in Munch's work? Choose one work by Munch and discuss which art elements he has used to convey an emotion or feeling effectively.

- Create your own artwork which uses one or more of the art elements to express love, death or a powerful emotion that you have experienced.
- Compare an early Munch self-portrait with a late self-portrait. Describe the changes that have taken place.
- Munch was known for his experimental techniques. Identify one of these and explain how it contributes to the expression of his ideas.
- Consider the Munch landscapes which reflect the seasons. Apart from describing the landscape and seasons, what else could these paintings mean?
- Using images of people from magazines and newspapers, create a collage to portray human emotion in today's society.
- Find out how other twentieth-century international artists such as Pablo Picasso have depicted love and death. Describe the similarities and differences.
- Munch experimented with several radical styles of his time. Can you find the influence of van Gogh and Gauguin in his work? Can you think of any other artists who may have influenced him? Research the work of the French artist Henri Matisse. What similarities can you find between this artist and Munch?
- Why do you think Munch's *The scream* has been reproduced repeatedly to promote such a wide range of social, political and gender issues? Imagine you are an advertising copy writer or a graphic designer – what cause would you publicise using this image?

ENGLISH

- Choose your favourite work by Munch. Describe how it makes you feel. Find adjectives and other descriptive language that match the feelings, atmosphere and colours. Write a poem based on these words in response to the painting.
- 'Guess the Munch!' Describe one of Munch's works by 'painting' a picture with words so that it can be imagined by someone who has never seen it before.
- Munch wrote expressively, with the same passion as he painted. His writings were often the starting point for his pictures. Imagine you are writing a page in your own literary diary which records a memorable time in your life. Translate this writing into a work of art.

Can you think of a poem or part of a book which reminds you of one of Munch's works?

PHILOSOPHY

- Love, death, hate and jealousy are experienced by most of us during our lives. Discuss the many kinds of human emotions and ways of coping with their sometimes overwhelming effects.

- What is art? Munch felt very strongly about the purpose of art and is known to have said:
'In my art I have tried to explain to myself life and its meaning. I have also tried to help others clarify their lives.'

Edvard Munch: *The Frieze of Life* (exh. cat.), National Gallery, London, p. 52

- Other artists working at the same time defined art in different ways:
'Art is not for decorating walls. Painting is an instrument of war, of war to be waged against brutality and darkness.'
Pablo Picasso, 1881–1973

'Art should be something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.' Henri Matisse, 1869–1954

'Art is meant to disturb.' Georges Braque, 1882–1963

Think about what these artists have said. Do you agree with their views?

- ***'A good painting never disappears ... Most of Leonardo's paintings are ruined – but still live – a brilliant idea never dies.'*** Edvard Munch

What did Munch mean by this statement? Can you think of other examples in the world where this concept applies?

- Munch once said, ***'Without fear and illness, I could never have accomplished all I have'***.

Discuss the argument that it is necessary to experience extreme mental suffering in order to create 'great' works of art with a universal quality.

- When Munch's work *The sick child* was first shown, it was regarded by the public as outrageous because of its direct subject matter and supposedly crude technique. – Can you think of examples of art in today's society which have caused a similar reaction?

FILM AND THEATRE

- Which of Munch's works remind you of a film you have seen, and why?
- Munch's contemporary, the playwright Henrik Ibsen, was radical in his time for writing about difficult aspects of emotional life. He was inspired to write *When We Dead Awaken* after seeing Munch's *The woman/Woman* in three stages. Choose a work by Munch and explain what sort of play it would inspire you to write.

The Influence of Edvard Munch on Australian Art

Twentieth-century Australian artists Albert Tucker and Joy Hester discovered the work of Munch, probably during their visits to The State Library in Melbourne, and Tucker is known to have actually copied one of his works.

- Compare the following works of these Australian artists with the works by Munch in the exhibition.
- Discuss how they may have been influenced by Munch's practice.

Edvard Munch *The voice/Summer night*, 1893, charcoal



Joy Hester
Girl holding turkey (Vera),
1957
synthetic polymer paint, brush and
ink,
gouache on card



Edvard Munch
Self-portrait
1895, printed in 1915
lithograph



Albert Tucker
Self-portrait,
1945,
oil on cotton on cardboard



Edvard Munch
The Scream
1895
hand-coloured lithograph



John Perceval
Soul singer at Luna Park,
1942-43
oil on composition board.

- Brent Harris, a contemporary artist, says that his work *Swamp* expresses an emotionally charged outpouring of sadness which has been influenced by Munch's practice of exploring feelings. Compare *Swamp* with Munch's *In the man's brain*.
- Australian contemporary artist Julie Rrap appropriated images of women created by Munch for her series of works entitled *Persona and shadow*. *Conception* refers directly to *The day after*, 1894–95, by Munch. Investigate Julie Rrap's work. Why might she have chosen Munch's images of women to use in her own work?

- Mike Parr has also indicated that Munch has influenced his artistic practice. Search art journals and the internet to find examples of his art and this influence.

Edvard Munch *In the man's brain*, 1897. Woodcut



Brent Harris
Swamp (no. 2)
1999
oil on canvas

Edvard Munch *Street scene from Åsgårdstrand*, 1902. Oil on canvas



Danila Vassilieff
Young girl (Shirley)
1937
oil on canvas on board

Edvard Munch *The day after*, 1894–95. Oil on canvas



Julie Rrap
Conception 1984
cibachrome photograph

1863	Edvard Munch is born at Løten, Norway.	
1868	Munch's mother, aged thirty, dies of tuberculosis.	
1877	Munch's favourite sister, Sophie, dies of tuberculosis.	
1879	Leaves engineering studies to become a painter.	
1881	Commences study at the School of Design in Kristiania.	
1884	Becomes part of Kristiania's Bohemia.	
1885	Travels to Europe to study. On return has an affair with Milly Thaulow, whom he later refers to as 'Mrs Heiberg'.	
1889	Resided in cottage at Åsgårdstrand. Has first solo exhibition in Kristiania. Sees works by van Gogh, Seurat, Signac and Toulouse Lautrec. Studying in Paris when he learns of his father's death.	
1890	Lives at Saint-Cloud, outside Paris. Deeply depressed and ill.	Henrik Ibsen writes <i>Hedda Gabler</i> .
1892	Exhibition in Berlin creates an uproar and is closed. Becomes a celebrity in artistic circles in Berlin.	
1893	Paints portrait of playwright August Strindberg.	
1893–95	Living in Berlin, joins cosmopolitan circle of writers. Brother, Andreas, dies.	
1897	August Strindberg (1849–1912) writes <i>The Inferno</i>	
1896–99	Travels and exhibits widely. Meets Tulla Larsen.	
1900		Sigmund Freud publishes <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i> .
1902	Relationship with Tulla Larsen ends in bitterness. Designs set for <i>Hedda Gabler</i> .	
1904	Sells 800 prints, exhibits paintings at Salon des Indépendants; labelled a Fauvist. Member of Berlin Secession; influences Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka.	
1906	Designs murals based on <i>The frieze of life</i> for Kammerspiel Theatre, Berlin.	Die Brücke group of German Expressionists forms; Fauvism emerges in Paris.
1907	Paints The green room series.	Picasso paints <i>Les demoiselles d'Avignon</i> .
1908	Nervous breakdown in Copenhagen.	
1909	Returns to Norway and settles in Kragerø in southern Norway. Works on murals for University of Kristiania.	
1910–13	Continues painting and exhibiting in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Munich, Kristiania and Gothenburg.	
1914		World War I: Norway remains neutral.
1916	Buys property at Ekely on the outskirts of Kristiania, where he lives for the rest of his life.	
1919	Exhibits in Kristiania and New York.	
1920–22	Travels to Berlin, Paris, Wiesbaden and Frankfurt.	
1923	Member of German Academy of Fine Art.	
1925		Kristiania is renamed Oslo.
1926	His sister Laura dies.	
1928	Oslo City Hall devotes a room for a mural by Munch.	
1931	Munch's aunt, Karen Bjølstad, dies.	
1932–33	Receives many awards, including the silver Goethe Medal, the Grand Cross of the Order of St Olaf, and the French Legion of Honour. Suffers near blindness as a result of a broken blood vessel in his eye.	
1936	First solo exhibition in London.	
1937	Eighty-two of Munch's paintings labelled 'degenerate' by the Nazis.	
1939–45	Munch refuses contact with Nazis or Norwegian collaborators.	World War II. Norway remains neutral but is occupied by German forces.
1944	Munch dies on 23 January, aged eighty. Bequeaths all of his works of art to the city of Oslo.	
1963		Munch-museet, Oslo, is opened.



Norway

Norway is a rugged country in northern Europe celebrated for its meandering coastline indented with deep fjords, and its wild scenery of mountains, glaciers and carpets of rich green forest. It is sometimes known as 'the land of the midnight sun' due to its long summer days when the sun hardly sets and even in late evening the sky is bathed in a luminous blue.

In the nineteenth century, Norway was still unified with Sweden but was starting to develop a sense of national pride after four centuries of Danish rule. The capital city at this time was known as Kristiania, named after a Danish king, but it has since been renamed Oslo (1925). In 1905, Norway was finally granted full independence.

EDVARD MUNCH: THE FRIEZE OF LIFE

Anxiety (Angst) 1894
oil on canvas
94.0 x 74.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 515)
© Munch-Ellingsen Group/BONO 2004

Self-portrait on his trunk in his studio in 82 Lützowstrasse in Berlin 1902
collodion silver photograph
8.0 x 8.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo

Death in the sickroom (Døden i sykevoerelse) 1896
hand-coloured lithograph
30.3 x 55.8 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (G 215-7)

ANGST, LOVE AND DEATH

Angst (Angst) 1896
colour woodcut
45.5 x 37.2 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (G 568-12)

The dance of life (Livets dans) 1925–29
oil on canvas
143.0 x 208.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 777)
© Munch-Ellingsen Group/BONO 2004

Vampire (Vampyr) 1893–94
oil on canvas
91.0 x 109.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 679)

SELF-PORTRAITS

Self-portrait with a cigarette (Selvportrett med sigarett) 1895
oil on canvas
110.5 x 85.5 cm
Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo (NG.M.00470)

Self-portrait. Between the clock and the bed (Selvportrett. Mellom klokken og sengen) 1940–42
oil on canvas
149.5 x 120.5 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 23)

PORTRAITS

Summer night / Inger on the shore (Sommernatt / Inger på stranden) 1889
oil on canvas
126.4 x 161.7 cm
Bergen Kunstmuseum, Bergen
Rasmus Meyer Collection (RMS.M.240)

Consul Christen Sandberg (Konsul Christen Sandberg) 1901/1909
oil on canvas
214.5 x 147.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 3)

Under the chestnut tree. Hanna Brieschke (Under kastanjetreet. Hanna Brieschke) 1937
oil on canvas
116.5 x 119.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 31)

Portrait of the painter Aase Nørregaard (Portrett av kunstneren Aase Nørregaard) 1895
oil on canvas
131.0 x 109.0 cm
Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo (NG.M.01793)

LANDSCAPES

Moonlight (Måneskinn) 1895
oil on canvas
93.0 x 110.0 cm
Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo (NG.M.02815)

Loneliness (Ensomhet) 1906
oil on canvas
70.0 x 91.0 cm
Bergen Kunstmuseum, Bergen
Stenersen Collection (SS.M.43)

Spring in the elm forest III (Vår i almeskogen III) 1923
oil on canvas
109.0 x 130.0 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 18)

TECHNIQUE

Two human beings. The lonely ones (To mennesker. De ensomme) 1899
colour woodcut with pencil stencils
39.4 x 55.2 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (G 601-30)

Model undressing I (Modellen kler av seg I) 1920
watercolour & crayon
35.3 x 25.7 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (T 2464)

COMPARATIVE IMAGES

Edvard Munch
The voice / Summer night (Stemmen / Sommernatt) 1893
charcoal
50.0 x 64.7 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (T 2373)

Joy Hester
Australia 1920–1960
Girl holding turkey (Vera) 1957
synthetic polymer paint, brush and ink, gouache on card
74.8 x 49.8 cm (image)
National Gallery of Victoria
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria from the Bequest of Violet Dulieu, Founder Benefactor, 1997 (1997.119)
© Joy Hester, 1957/Licensed by VISCOPY, Sydney 2004

Edvard Munch
Self-portrait (Selvportrett) 1895, printed 1915
lithograph
45.5 x 32.5 cm
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
South Australian Government Grant, 1978 (787G55)

Albert Tucker
Australia 1914–1999, lived in Europe and United States 1947–60
Self-portrait 1945
oil on cotton on cardboard
75.7 x 60.5 cm
National Gallery of Victoria
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Ms Rita Avdiev, Governor, 1982 (A2-1982)
© Courtesy of Barbara Tucker

Edvard Munch
The scream (Skrik) 1895
hand-coloured lithograph
35.5 x 25.4 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (G 193-3)

John Perceval
Australia 1923–2000
Soul singer at Luna Park 1942–43
oil on composition board
124.0 x 90.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr John Perceval, Founder Benefactor, 1986 (A10-1986)
© Courtesy of the artist's estate

Edvard Munch
In the man's brain (I mannens hjerne) 1897
woodcut
37.3 x 56.5 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (G 573-9)

Brent Harris
born New Zealand 1956, arrived Australia 1981
Swamp (no. 2) 1999
oil on canvas
274.0 x 133.7 cm
National Gallery of Victoria
Allan R. Henderson Bequest, 1999 (1999.357)
© Courtesy of the artist

Edvard Munch
Street scene from Åsgårdstrand (Gateparti i Åsgårdstrand) 1902
oil on canvas
74.6 x 89.2 cm
Bergen Kunstmuseum, Bergen
Rasmus Meyer Collection (RMS.M.258)

Danila Vassilieff
born Russia 1897, arrived in Australia 1923, lived in South America and West Indies 1929–34, died 1958
Young girl (Shirley) 1937
oil on canvas on board
79.2 x 69.8 cm
National Gallery of Victoria
Purchased with a donation from the National Gallery Society of Victoria Century Fund, 1986 (A8-1986)
© National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Edvard Munch
The day after 1894–95
oil on canvas
Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo
(Not in the exhibition)

Julie Rrap
born Australia 1950
Conception 1984
cibachrome photograph
213.2 x 127.0 cm (image and sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria
Michel Endowment, 1984 (DC16-1984)
© Courtesy of the artist

Cover image:

The scream (Skrik) 1895
hand-coloured lithograph
35.5 x 25.4 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (G 193-3)

Back cover image:

Jealousy (Sjalusi) 1907
oil on canvas
89.0 x 82.5 cm
Munch-museet, Oslo (M 573)

Naturalism – a general term to describe art or literature in which the artist aims to represent natural objects as they appear, without stylising or idealising them.

Realism – similar to Naturalism, but in nineteenth-century French art, realist art often had a specifically political or social content.

Impressionism – refers to a group of French painters working in the second half of the nineteenth century who painted scenes from contemporary life, often *en plein air*, using colour to record particular effects of light and atmosphere.

Symbolism – an art movement in the late nineteenth century which was closely connected to French Symbolist poetry. Images were used as symbols to express abstract or mystical ideas.

Art Nouveau – an international decorative style expressed in art and architecture of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It was characterised by stylised forms which reflected the curvaceous, flowing outlines found in nature such as leaves and flowers.

Expressionism – an early twentieth-century art movement, especially strong in Germany, in which reality was distorted and form and colour were used to express feelings and emotions.

Fauvism – a French art movement of the first decade of the twentieth century characterised by use of raw, sometimes aggressive brushwork and extremely intense colour. The French term *fauve* means 'wild beast'.

Further reading

Edvard Munch: The Frieze of Life (exh. cat.), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2004

Edvard Munch, The Frieze of Life, The National Gallery, London, edited by Mara–Helen Wood, National Gallery Publications, London, 1992

Reinhold Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1984

Reinhold Heller, *Edvard Munch: The Scream*, The Viking Press, New York, 1972

Elizabeth Prelinger, *The Late Paintings of Edvard Munch*, printed by Yale University Press in association with Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2001

Ragna Stang, *Edvard Munch, The Man and the Artist*, Gordon Fraser Gallery, London, 1979

J. P. Hodin, *Edvard Munch*, Thames and Hudson, London, reprinted 1985



This resource refers to the exhibition *Edvard Munch: The Frieze of Life*. Written for teachers, this material relates to the Middle Years of Schooling and the curriculum areas of Art, English, Philosophy, Film and Theatre. It is highly suitable for Essential Learning, in particular thinking, social and communication skills.

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