

THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE PRESENTS A MAJOR EXHIBITION DEDICATED
TO UNKNOWN SIDES OF THE NORWEGIAN PAINTER EDVARD MUNCH

EDVARD MUNCH

THE MODERN EYE

February 9 – May 28, 2012

Press preview: Wednesday, February 8, 2012, 11 a.m.

Edvard Munch (1863–1944) is acclaimed for his emotional Symbolist painting and regarded as a pioneer of Expressionism. The exhibition in the Schirn, which has been prepared together with the Centre Pompidou in Paris, offers a new view of his work: Edvard Munch was a modern artist to his core – thus the hypothesis of the show that comprises about one hundred and thirty works. “Edvard Munch. The Modern Eye” gives the little-researched late work until 1944 special emphasis and proves that Munch was not only an artist of the nineteenth, but also of the twentieth century. The presentation focuses on Munch’s engagement with modern techniques like photography and film or the intimate theater stage. A study of his works reveals the degree to which the artist adopted specifically photographic or filmic forms of composition and narration, poses, and even effects in his painting. Besides the approximately sixty paintings and twenty works on paper, two chapters of the presentation are reserved for Munch’s own production as a photographer and filmmaker. Fifty vintage photographs as well as four films will be included in the show. A further dimension of the exhibition highlights how the artist dealt with one and the same motif in drawing, photography, painting, the field of graphic art, and even sculpture and shows that the frequent return to certain motifs constitutes an important key for understanding Munch’s oeuvre.

Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mette Marit of Norway will be present at the exhibition opening on Wednesday, January 8, 2012, at 7 p.m.

Edvard Munch was born in Løten in the Norwegian county of Hedmark in 1863. His mother died of tuberculosis at age thirty-three, when Munch was five; his elder sister Sophie fell victim to consumption in 1877. Throughout the artist’s life, death and illness accompanied his family and would bear a decisive influence on his work as would his chronic manic-depressive disorder. At his father’s request, Munch began to study at a technical college in Kristiania, today’s Oslo, but enrolled at the Royal School of Art and Design only one year after. Several stays in Paris resulted in Munch’s break with the Impressionist style from 1885 on. After his father’s death in 1889 and a deep depression, Munch developed metaphors and pictorial formulae for inner experiences in an emphatic Symbolism and became a pioneer of Expressionism. Munch’s growing success as an artist in the early twentieth century was accompanied by restless visits to Paris and Berlin and increasingly serious alcohol problems and mental conflicts. After a nervous breakdown and a several-month treatment in the late summer of 1908, Munch took up residence in Norway again for good. In 1916, he purchased the estate of Ekely near Kristiania, where he would live a withdrawn, yet very productive life until his death on January 23, 1944.

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Contrary to received opinion, which describes Munch as a tormented and reclusive man in the last three decades of his life, the exhibition “Edvard Munch. The Modern Eye” shows the artist abreast of his day’s aesthetic debates and demonstrates that he was involved in an ongoing dialogue with the most recent forms of representation in his production. Presented in eleven rooms and unfolding in nine thematic groups, a rich selection of important paintings and works of paper illustrates how Munch’s visits to the movies, his reading of the illustrated press, and his scientific interest informed his practice as a painter no less than his own experiments with photography and film. Likewise, his stage sets for the modern theater led to a new relationship between viewer and pictorial motif in space. Further trademarks of Munch’s late work are the numerous repetitions of subjects and the reduction to a concise form of expression frequently connected with them.

Repetitions

In copies, revisions, and variations, Munch often returned to certain subjects after years or even decades. Six versions of *The Sick Child*, seven of *Girls on the Bridge*, and ten of the *Vampire* reveal repetition as one of the crucial constant factors in Munch’s work. With a special kind of urgency, Munch dedicated himself to the motif of a weeping woman standing naked in front of a bed: between 1906 and 1930, he produced six paintings, several drawings, a photograph, a print, and a sculpture dealing with the theme. This reiteration across the whole range of different media available to him not only shows an almost manic obsession with this subject, but also reveals that Munch was the artist of his generation who addressed the issue of the reproducibility of works of art so fundamental in the twentieth century with the greatest acuity.

Self-portraits

Self-portraits run through Edvard Munch’s oeuvre like a thread. From his beginnings to his death, the artist intensely explored his persona in more than seventy paintings and graphic works as well as in over one hundred drawings, watercolors, and sketches and thus left us a visual autobiography, as it were. While he produced only five self-portraits in the course of the nineteenth century, their number increased to more than forty in the years from 1900 to 1944 – not to mention the many drawings, engravings, and photographs. Several important examples of these merciless investigations into his own self, in which Munch frequently depicts himself as a suffering outcast, are to be seen in the exhibition.

Photography

Like Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, and Alfons Maria Mucha, Munch was one of a generation of artists that took up photography at the turn of the century. In 1902, he bought a small Kodak camera in Berlin and started to take pictures not only of paintings and places associated with certain memories for him, but also increasingly of himself. Long exposure times yielded impressive transparency effects. More than to the painters of his generation, it is to the writer photographers of the period that Munch may be compared, though. Like the pictures taken by such authors as August Strindberg or Émile Zola, Munch’s photographic works reveal a fascination with the self-portrait, a will to render his life in pictures. In Ekely, he made further photographic portraits from 1930 on: in a gesture that has since become common, Munch held the camera at arm’s length, turned toward his face like a mirror.

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The Cineaste

In the early decades of the twentieth century Munch was a regular visitor to the cinema, viewing newsreels and feature films like Charlie Chaplin movies. In 1927, while visiting France, the painter purchased a small amateur movie camera and began to undertake his own studies. The five minutes and twenty-seven seconds of his four surviving films testify to the artist's passionate interest in urban life. The pictures show pedestrians, a passing tram, a wooden open-framed cart, a woman waiting at a street corner. He photographed his aunt and his sister unbeknownst to them or positioned the camera in his studio. Munch's painting was deeply influenced by photography and film. Established by the illustrated press and the cinema, spectacular and dynamic modes of composition involving crowds in motion and horses or people moving toward the camera were enthusiastically incorporated into his paintings.

Staging

From the 1890s on, Munch frequently endowed the scenes he depicted with a theatrical dimension by means of a head-on arrangement of his figures and their rigid posture. Under the influence of August Strindberg, whom he had got to know in Berlin in the 1890s, and of Max Reinhardt, for whom he produced stage designs and a decorative frieze in 1906 and 1907, this tendency intensified. Strindberg and Reinhardt stood for the intimate chamber play, a dramatic form in which the distance between actor and audience is reduced to a minimum to encourage emotional empathy. For them, the stage had to suggest a room from which one wall had been removed to open it to the public. It is precisely this setting that Munch adopted in the series *The Green Room* – begun in 1907, immediately after his collaboration with Reinhardt – in order to suck the viewer into the pictorial space.

Sight Defects

In the summer of 1930, Munch suffered a retinal tear caused by high blood pressure, which led to a hemorrhage in the right – his “good” – eye. In the weeks of his convalescence, he systematically recorded the visual impressions as received with his torn retina in pictures. “A big dark bird moved slowly in front of me,” Munch jotted down on June 2, 1930, “a bird with dark brown plumage from which a bright blue radiation emanated, turning into green and finally transforming into a magnificent yellow ring.” This approach brought forth a series of vivid watercolors and drawings showing dazzling vibrating concentric circles. By painting what he saw, Munch depicted his view, looking as such, or, to use a phrase coined by Max Ernst at the same time, “the interior of sight.” This also evidences Munch's extraordinary modernity.

The exhibition “Edvard Munch. The Modern Eye” is organized by the Centre Pompidou – Musée national d'art moderne in Paris, in cooperation with the Munch Museum in Oslo and in association with the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. After its presentation at the Schirn, the exhibition will be shown at the Tate Modern in London from June 28 to October 12, 2012.

VENUE: SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, D-60311 Frankfurt.

EXHIBITION DATES: February 9 – May 28, 2012. **OPENING HOURS:** Tue, Fri – Sun 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Wed and Thur 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. **INFORMATION:** www.schirn.de, e-mail: welcome@schirn.de, phone: (+49-69) 29 98 82-0, fax: (+49-69) 29 98 82-240. **ADMISSION:** 9 euros, reduced 7 euros, family ticket 18 euros; combination ticket also admitting to the exhibition “George Condo. Mental States” 14 euros, reduced 10 euros; free admission for children under eight years of age. **GENERAL GUIDED TOURS:** Tue 5 p.m., Wed 7 p.m., Thur 7 p.m., Fri 11 a.m., Sat 5 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. **CURATORS:** Angela Lampe and

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Clément Chéroux. **PROJECT MANAGEMENT:** Dr. Ingrid Pfeiffer (Schirn). **ASSISTANT:** Lisa Beißwanger. **PATRONAGE:** The exhibition is presented under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway. **SPONSORED BY:** Willy Robert Pitzer Stiftung. **MEDIA PARTNERS:** Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Hit Radio FFH, Journal Frankfurt, VGF – Verkehrsgesellschaft Frankfurt am Main. **MOBILITY PARTNER:** Deutsche Bahn. **KULTUR-TICKET-SPEZIAL:** Use the German Railways' Kultur-Ticket-Spezial for only 39 € (2nd class) or 59 € (1st class) to get to the exhibition and back within one day; for further information please see www.bahn.de/kultur. **ONLINE MAGAZINE:** www.schirn-magazin.de.

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