Papers from the
X. AICA-Congress at Munch-Muséet
Oslo, Norway 29th August 1969.
Theme: "Edvard Munch et l'Europe".
Lecture 3.

Edvard Munch and the Munch Museum

by
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Only two Scandinavian artists have reached such a position of eminence that their names appear in every reference book on the history of art: Bertel Thorvaldsen and Edvard Munch.

When considered from a Scandinavian point of view it may appear unreasonable that in leading circles within the history of art, post-medieval art in the five Scandinavian countries has been relegated to provincial status. The Danish School from N.A. Abildgaard to C.W. Eckersberg and I.T. Lundeby had some influence on the Romantic School in Germany and cannot be swept aside as if it were an inferior reflection of trends in the leading countries. Neither is Norwegian romantic landscape art from I.C. Dahl and Thomas Fearnley to Hans Gude provincial in the above sense, but a vital school of individual artists with a common set of problems. Considered against the background of neo-classical sculpture on the Continent after 1750, T.Sergel, the Swede, was a sculptor of the first rank.

That critics and historians outside Scandinavia have canonised Thorvaldsen and Munch as the only Scandinavian artists of European statur, can be attributed to their having lived outside Norway and Denmark for most of their creative years. Even before the death of Canova, Thorvaldsen was the leading figure in Rome, a friend of Pius VII and responsible for his mausoleum in St. Peter's. Much of the sculpture of Europe in the nineteenth century has come into being in the wake of this overshadowing personality. Munch was not resident in Norway during the years 1889-1909, and lived regularly in France and Germany, where he was well-known amongst the avant-garde and in progressive critical circles. In the theatre Lugne-Poe and Max Reinhardt made use of his gifts, and to claim that the painters were influenced by him in "Die Brücke" and "Der blaue Reiter" is commonly supposed to-day. His influence on Picasso up to the blue period is often emphasised and a special study of this would be well worth while. His exhibition in Prague in 1905, was of marked significance for the advent of modernism in Czechoslovakia. (This exhibition will be reassembled at the Munch museum this autumn, when its influence on Bohemian art will be illustrated.)

The early recognition of Munch in certain exclusive circles on the Continent is nevertheless accorded an exaggerated importance in most surveys of art history. Never in his lifetime did he enjoy the reputation in Europe which fell to the lot of Thorvaldsen, and he never came to influence art in Scandinavia to anything like the same extent as did Thorvaldsen's school.

In 1896 he exhibited his paintings in Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau and was represented in Vollard's first "Album des peintres graveurs". The year after he was represented in an exhibition at "Salon des Indépendants". He did not show his pictures again in France after this, except for insignificant guest appearances at Indépendants in 1906, 1910 and 1911. In spite of his almost annual exhibitions in Berlin, München, Bremen and in Hamburg where he was sponsored by . Commeter and Cassierer, Munch was a comparatively new discovery for the young Hugo Perls at the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne in 1912. It was not until after the first world war that Munch first obtained the established position in the German-speaking countries that he has held ever since, but in Paris his posthumous exhibition in 1952 was a moderate success. In England, where the events of the year 1066 still have a decisive influence on the critics of this century, Munch has first achieved recognition through the exhibition held in the Marlborough Fine Art Gallery in July of this year; Nigel Gosling's review in The Observer was as vigorous an attack on the British attitude to Munch as was that of René Cogniat under the title "Méconnaissance de Munch" in Le Figaro about the exhibition in Musée des Arts Décoratifs earlier this year on the traditional French attitude. The new trends in the art of the sixties have undoubtedly contributed to the new receptivity towards Munch. Active art dealers of German derivation have contributed to the same extent, to an awakening interest for Munch in the USA, France, Great Britain. In 1969 His Holiness the Pope has also decreed that Munch is to be represented in the museums of the Vatican, certainly the highest sanction a modern artist can receive of his belonging among the classics of European art.

Thorvaldsen and Munch have one remarkable thing in common. Their work is collected in museums which are both called after the artist. Both the museums have come into being on the initiative of the artists. The collections have not been bought out of public funds, but are donated by the artists, to the municipalities of Copenhagen and Oslo respectively. Both the museums contain all those works of art that were in the artist's possession at his death.

This special way of communicating art, - to gather the work of an artist in one museum, from the earliest sketches to the finished works - , is of symptomatic interest. The donation tells us something of the artist's conception of himself and his work. The society receiving the donation discloses something of its attitude to art in the way in which it reacts to the offer.

Thorvaldsen put forward his proposal in 1828. The museum was completed in 1848, with the artist's grave as the centre of the building. The museum is a characteristic expression of the romantic concept of the creative artist, "Gott gleich" to use Goethe's phrase. An indication of how widespread the cult of the artist's personality was, was given by the erection of Thorvaldsen's museum which was the first building to be erected in Scandinavia to house a public collection of works of art.

It is misleading to regard Thorvaldsen's museum as a special Scandinavian phenomenon, whereby a small country confirms its opinion of its own importance by glorifying one of its great sons. Canovas sculptures and maquettes were assembled in one building in Possagno, - and this building too, had a temple-like appearance, which brings to mind Hoelderlin's metaphor about the museum: "an esthetic church". In Prussia Rauch was given his own museum in 1895. In England Turner erected a gallery of his own and began to buy back his chief works as early as in the 1820s. When he bequeathed his great collection of his own work to the nation in 1852, it was on the express condition that they should be placed in a separate building. The fate of the Turner collection is an eloquent example of the Victorian conception in Britain of the rôle of the painter.

Such a special phenomenon as the one-man-museum is a striking testimony to a profound change in the conception of art. It would have seemed absurd to their contemporaries if Raphael, Caravaggio, Rubens, Bernini or Tiepolo had wished to draw attention to the identity of the creator of their works by proposing that these should be collected in a single museum. The thought was acceptable to the Romantics, and striking examples can be found in other branches of the arts that artist's emphasis the identification of the work with its creator. Under the works of Bach we are used to the signature BWV - Bach Werk-Verzeichnis - which have been prepared by a later generation; the brave Dr.Köchel has made himself immortal by his cataloguing of the works of Mozart. Beethoven numbered his works himself. In the same year as Thorvaldsen put forward his offer, Goethe began his edition of "Gesammelte Werke letzter Hand", where he edited his lifework in the form in which he wished posterity to receive it.

The one-man-museum is nevertheless the most telling manifestation of the Romantics' new conception of the personality of the artist, because its realisation demands a collective effort on the part of society. A community does not bring an idea to fruition unless there is general support for it amongst those who administer public money.

In the Romantic period we also find another characteristic example of an artist's wanting to arrange his work in a continuity which gives it meaning: P.O. Runge's "Tages-Zeiten" was conceived as a cycle placed in an architectural milieu where each single work complements the others. The cycle was not a response to a commission, but an artist's ambitious attempt to give an overall impression of human existence by means of an iconography of his own formulation.

Those monuments which this congress has seen yesterday and to-day can ostensibly be placed in the lengthening of this tradition which was established by the Romantic movement. In the same way as Thorvaldsen's grave is the centrepiece of his museum, Gustav Vigeland's mausoleum dominates, from its position in the tower, the museum he himself took the initiative in building, and which contains his life-work. In order to enter the hall with his brother Emanuel Vigeland's fresco-cycle, one has to bow down under the artist's urn. Both of them worked on ambitious cycles which were to give a comprehensive image of human existence. Emanuel in his frescoes, Gustav Vigeland in the two cycles round the fountain, the tree groups and the reliefs, in the granite groups and the monolith column of figures. In Edvard Munch's museum parts of his Frieze of Life are collected together, and this museum too, has come into being on the initiative of the artist: at his death in 1944 he left the city of Oslo all those of his works in his possession. Merely numerically it was an impressive donation: 1.100 canvases, 16.000 graphical sheets and 4.000 drawings. (Munch did not make it a condition of the donation that a museum should be built, but he expressed his conviction that when all his works could be studied in continuity, form the first sketches to the finished works, their meaning would become clear.)

These monuments in Oslo are examples of how every minor society accepts the artist's wish to see his life-work as a continous whole. Gustav Vigeland in 1922 signed a regular contract with the municipality of Oslo: - the municipality was to have his works, with the addition of those yet to take shape, and the artist was given the museum which was to serve as his atelier during his lifetime. Emanuel Vigeland had his mausoleum built from funds which were collected by the Swedish Archbishop, Nathan Söderblom: it will perhaps surprise some people to hear this. Munch's museum was built from the surplus of the Oslo municipal cinemas. The cost of Vigeland's fountain was covered by proceeds of the public sale of spirits.

But they are not unique monuments. A number of artists of the same generation as Munch and the Vigeland brothers have been given their own museums in Scandinavia . In Finland there are Ville Vallgren and Aksel Gallen-Kollela, in Sweden Carl Milles, in Denmark J.F. Willumsen and Kai Nielsen.

But similar examples are also to be found in Europe: in England, G.F.Watts, in France Gustave Moreau and Auguste Rodin, in Germany W. Lehmbruck, in Spain Joaquin Rolla y Bastida.

On the Continent we also find some obvious parallels with Runge's 'Tageszeiten': Hans Thomas in Karlsruhe, Claude Monet in the Orangery of the Garden of the Tuileries. That the idea of a one-man-museum took root in Scandinavia in the 20th Century is not due to Bertel Thorvaldsen, but to impulses from France: Gustave Moreau's museum and Rodin's ateliers; as early as 1904 the Hotel Biron was referred to as "the museum", 13 years before Rodin's donation to the French state. The idea of the great monument was also formulated on the Continent: Dalou, Meunier and Rodin all wanted to create a 'Monument du Travail' and Rodin's 'Porte d'enfer' had a decisive influence on Scandinavian art. To-day there is a plaque of one-man-museums: Toulouse-Lautrec has got his museum at Albi long ago; van Gogh's collection is getting its own building on Museumplein in Amsterdam; Fernand Léger has got his museum several years ago, and anyone can guess what will happen to Picasso's Picassos. When Carl Henning Pedersen held his great retrospective exhibition at the Louisiana last winter, it was with the expressed intention that the municipality of Copenhagen should erect a building for the collection. Asger Jorn has been working on his for some time.

It is not entirely a matter of chance that a one-man-museum can come into being during a romantic age and is left without successors in ages of realism and naturalism. Neither is it a matter of chance that this phenomenon is widespread amongst those artists whom we can loosely call symbolists: the expression must then be understood to cover the whole gamut from Gustave Moreau and Emanuel Vigeland to Rodin and Munch. These artists found themselves anxious to shape intelligible illustrations of the lot of mankind, and to give their illustrations general validity, actuality and effectiveness they had to hold themselves at a distance from the Christian or Olympian mythology; they had to create their own pictorial language and formulate their iconography. Seen in this context a one-man-museum will be something different for the generation of symbolists than for the artists of the Romantic period. In the Romantic period a one-man-museum is a symptom of a new conception of its creator's importance; for the generation of symbolists it is a means of communication.

In the case of Edvard Munch the one-man-museum is one attempt amongst many to communicate by means of the message his pictures give. Even as a young man he felt it important to reach many people through his pictures;

25 years old he arranged the first one-man-show in Norwegian art-history; at the age of 28 he had his first one-man exhibition abroad in Berlin; at the age of 29 he for the first time arranged his paintings as a cycle. From 1893 he displayed hectic activity in arranging exhibitions of his work, an activity unequalled by any of his contemporaries. He held at least one one-man-show a year and showed his pictures from Chicago to St.Petersburg, in Vienna, Prague, Paris, Brussels, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Kristiania, and regularly in all the larger German art centers of the period. At the age of 30 he started his career as a print-maker, and the idea suggests itself that his entire graphic oeuvre, consisting of 800 numbers, were an answer to the dilemma he expressed two years earlier: he wanted to do something more than to produce "small pictures in gold frames to be sold to adorn the walls of the bourgeoisie".. He planned to publish the Frieze of Life as a graphical cycle, but difficult working conditions made it impossible for him to realise this idea. A note written by him in his later years makes it reasonable to assume that he would have reacted against the record prices paid to-day for his attempts to reach a wide public: "The small format with its handsome, often large frame, is more of an art-dealer's work of art. It is bourgeois and has arisen out of the bourgeois victory after the French Revolution. Now it is the workers'. I wonder if art will again become public property as in the old days?"

Edvard Munch dreamed of getting new official assignments after his decoration of the University Hall in Oslo: "Architecture is new, with simple surfaces and rooms. The small pictures are not required any more ... I wonder if new wall paintings will be created as at the time of the Renaissance? Art will then become the property of the people - the art belongs to all of us. - A painter's work need not disappear like a patch into a home where only a couple of people see it."

Munch's steps in the direction of a one-man-museum were nevertheless hesitant. His first wish was to see the Frieze of Life in one place. The last time it was exhibited in one place with its original components was in Prague in 1905. In 1909 and 1910 some of the important individual paintings were sold to the National Gallery in Oslo and to Rasmus Meyer's Collection in Bergen. In 1918 he exhibited new versions of these motives, and in the 1920s he worked on plans for a remarkable open-air museum where the Frieze was to be set up in the open. When in the 1930s the Director of the National Gallery, his old friend and champion Jens Thiis wanted to build a new wing on to the museum building to make room for Munch's later works, Munch refused the offer and argued that his large decorative works would not have enough space. He had at that time already made a will in which he left his works to the municipality of Oslo

on condition that a special building for them be erected. In 1940 he revised his will and left out this condition. The reason for this was possibly that he never managed to complete the final version of the Frieze of Life.

All painters want to reach a public. When Munch so clearly disassociated himself from the wish to reach an indiscriminating public, and evidently looked upon the ordinary commercial channel of communication as an obstacle (at a time when he could not live from the sale of his pictures) it is tempting to read something more than normal self-assertion into this wish.

On a number of occasions he has described how he looked upon his work. At the age of 70 he declared: "In my art I have sought to get life and its meaning clarified for me. It has also been my intention to help others to clarify life for themselves -". Before the Frieze of Life had taken shape, in 1891, it was his wish to "lay the foundation for an Art that is given to Humanity - An Art that grips and moves - Art that is created with one's life blood". "Basically, Art comes from one person's need to communicate himself to another". He knows that an unsympathetic public opinion will dismiss the pictures as "Humbug", "Slapdash" or "Madness" - They cannot get it into their heads that these pictures have been created in seriousness, in suffering - that they are the result of sleepless nights - that they have cost blood - because in these pictures the painter gives all he has - The picture gives its sould - its sorrow, its joy - it gives its heart's blood". But the attempt must be made and it will succeed: "These pictures will, they must, be able to move more deeply, - first the few, then the many, then everyone". When at a mature age he reflected over a wall painting's possibilities he had definite ideas about its function: "It is said that there was religion in art before. - There is always religion amongst people - new forms and different art. For a large wall panel must show the whole of one's soul if it is not to be just decorative".

Munch's art was a reaction to a situation which was not only personal. At this stage I should, perhaps, bore you with some dates:

Munch was born in 1863, or 5830 years after the creation of the world, according to the almanack; we may add, five years after the publication of "The Origin of Species". Before his death it had been calculated that the world must be two billion years old. The Universe was of a tractable size when Munch was born: he was almost 60 when galaxies beyond the Milky Way were seriously taken into account. It became a mission for his generation to create pictures which would make a world without God into a world fit for human beings.

The picture which the Vatican has acquired clearly shows Munch's point of departure in this situation. His father, who was a doctor, lost his wife after a few years of marriage, Edvard himself was only 5 years old when he lost his mother. The eldest child - whom Munch wanted to immortalize in "The Sick Child", died when Edvard himself was 13 years old. His father became a pious, brooding Christian, with an ingrained faith in fundamental truths. Munch himself has recounted a harrowing discussion they had on eternal damnation, - the argument ended with the son rushing out of the house: the picture of the man at prayer is the son's recollection of his father when he came back home later that night.

When his father died whilst Munch was living in Paris - in December 1889 - he wrote some oft-quoted lines in his diary. They must be understood in the light of the pious letters he received from his family who believed in a reunion on the other side, and in the light of his own painting of his father with his newspaper and his aunt and sisters with their knitting: he wanted to paint man and woman "at the moment when they are not themselves, but just one link in the thousands of generations that bind the generations together -

People should understand the holiness, the power in it, and should bare their heads as in a church. - I should like to create a number of pictures like that. Interiors should no longer be used as subjects, people reading and women knitting. They should be of living people who breathe and feel, suffer and love".

It came about, first in the embrace between "The Girl and Death" - framed in an embryo and spermatazoa, later "Woman Loving" ("Madonna") that he gave pictorial form to his conception of eternal life. He gave a written commentary on "Madonna": Now life offers death its hand. The chain that binds the thousand dead generations to the thousand generations to come is linked together".

However, Munch decided early in life to abstain from that form for eternal life that is assured by bringing a new generation into the world. The thought that his own work would outlive him and represent him in posterity was therefore of great significance to him. In the drawing "Art" he has used metabolism in nature to illustrate how art grows out of the artist and acquires its own independent life. In "The Flower of Pain" he has given this symbolism a clearer individual character: the bleeding figure which fertilises the flowering lily has Munch's own features. The theme can presumably be interpreted thus: letting his life be bared through his art, the artist lives and suffers for others.

The theme is taken a step further in the picture "Golgothá"; it has acquired an emblematic unity in the vignette with the nail-pierced hand which implies both an identification with Christ and a reference to a shot which had one wounded Munch in the hand.

Munch wanted to reach many people through his pictures and stressed the importance of being understood. He had to create his own form of picture and formulate his own iconography, and for him, as for many of his contemporaries, the artist became a theme in his art. The Christ identification is not unique: one finds it in Nietzsche, in Strindberg and Paul Gauguin: and the suffering self-portrait we find again in Porte d'Enfers' multitude of figures. When Munch wanted to give a comprehensive picture of human life, he used not Hell but Purgatory as his starting point. In "The Human Mountain" there is one figure that does not join in the journey upwards, the figure facing forward in the foreground with Munch's own scrutinizing features. As a self-portrait it is remarkable, for the artist has the anastolé of "Madonna" and marked breasts. This became Munch's final interpretation of his rôle as artist: the human being who creates in pain, visualised as a woman at that moment when she is not herself, but just a link in the chain that links generation to generation. The depiction contains perhaps a reference to Maupassant's formulation: "I am the world's wet nurse", but is also the artist's answer to the fundamentalist cosmology with which he grew up.

We will not, however, reduce the scope of Munch's art by losing our sense of proportion in concentrating so hard on his reaction against the pious, protestant Christianity in his home, or on his attempt to formulate the artist's mission in an age when the traditional types of picture had lost their power of communication and pictorial art was looking for a new social function. Munch's art is an answer to a concrete situation. Roughly, we could call that situation: the place of the individual in a growing urban community.

I must be permitted to bore you again with some figures: Munch was born in 1863. Kristiania had at that time about 50.000 inhabitants. By the end of the century the number had risen to 224.000. As a child and young man Munch experienced in miniature that explosive growth of a town that characterises 19th century Europe. In the years during which he completed the pictures in the Frieze of Life, the population was more than quadrupled, and Kristiania grew from a little, sleepy town to a modern industrial town. It was a densely populated area: to-day fewer people live in the area that held 224.000 in 1900: on the other hand those who live there now are spread in twice as many flats. The street scene was lively,

communications poor, and pedestrians filled the streets. It was a young town, more than half were under the age of 23, - the age of marriage 27.

I.P. Hodin has aptly remarked that Munch's art is about nature, in those two spheres where it still confronts those who live in an urban community: through death and love. But we are never in doubt that it is in the town that these forces confront us. "The Sick Child", "Death in the Sickroom" and "The Deathbed" are interiors from middle class town homes, inhabitated by citizens clothed in the fashion of the time. Even out in the open it is the young, dressed sons and daughters of the middle class who make love, and if we come across two naked people, the wallpaper, the curtains and the glimpse through the window tell us immediately that we are among town dwellers.

Through Munch's work on the Frieze of Life pictures in the 1890s his consciousness of living in a town is made more keen. "The Shriek" shows someone living through a situation his two companions are incapable of understanding; it is a picture on loneliness. In "Fear " all are alone, all isolated, all shut in with their fears and lacking the ability to communicate with others. "Fear" is the first formulation of the lonely crowd. Munch's eye embraces all facets of the urban community. He paints workers in the street, an artless symbol of the inevitable in the progress of a whole class. He depicts the uncertain Europe of the post-war period. As a visitor to London for the first time, he jots down some simple lines of Westminster Abbey and manages to convey at the same time the contrasts in the great city: in the foreground he is confronted with a motif he knows from Berlin, from the Kristiania of his childhood: the outsider. In "The Rag and Bone Man" the images of the outsider and the artist are fused.

Munch was born in 1863. He was thus ten years younger than van Gogh, and nine years older than Mondrian. James Ensor was born three years earlier, Kandinsky three years later than Munch. Toulouse-Lautrec was the same age.

Born as he was at the great divide, he would appear equally well to have had the possibility of becoming a pioneer of 20th-century art, orientated towards method, as a perfectioner of a 19th-century art of human expression, fastened on the object.

That Munch, Lautrec and Ensor became the bearers of a highly expressive sensitive art and never launched out into lack of form or into abstraction, is the result of their having found whilst they were young the style that we associate with them. Munch's place within the tradition he chose, can best be explained by his early maturity.

At the age of 30, an age when Kandinsky had not yet laid law studies aside, Munch had already his chief works in the Frieze of Life behind him, "The Sick Child", "By the Deathbed", "Death in the Sickroom", "Fear", "Attraction", "Evening", "Melancholy", "Kiss", "Vampire", "Woman", "Madonna", and "The Voice", and he was actively engaged in transferring the motifs to graphical techniques. Munch thought that he was destined to die young - at the age of 31 he made a lithography of himself with a skeleton arm - and the conviction that he was to be one of those who die young must have been one cause of his concentration and tempo.

Gauguin, van Gogh and Lautrec had all died by the time Picasso painted Les demoiselles d'Avignon in 1907. Munch on the other hand, to his own great surprise, lived till he was eighty, long enough to see two world wars.

In many ways Munch's development from 1906/07 until his death in 1944 is a unique theme within European art of this century. When he regarded the works of his youth he claimed they were borne by a rebellious urge, a rebellion against fate and oppressing heritage. With few exceptions, the public with whom he wished to communicate reacted negatively to his rebellion.

During the first decade of this century, Munch and the survivors of the symbolist generation, experienced a situation that is really normal, but just as unexpected to each new generation. They saw themselves outdistanced by the young. A new guard had matured. They accepted the new universal picture and the previous generation's reaction to this new world, without it raising any particular problems for them. They set their sights on new fields and embarked a stretch farther along the way than where their elders continued to be engrossed in their own activity.

This is always a painful situation. Munch's contemporary, Gustav Vigeland, exemplifies this generation's dilemma: from now on he wavered between the ideals of his youth and the style of the young, and never found himself again. Ensor slid into unproductivity, Bernard became his own copyist.

Did Munch feel outdistanced by the young? Some of them solemnly regarded the talk of plane surfaces during the 90's, but treated them with greater inevitability, others accepted seriously Cézanne's bon mot regarding cubes and cones, shattered linear perspectivity and bade farewell to half a millennium of European tradition.

Munch's reaction to the situation was noteworthy. During the years from 1900 his figures had been given constantly greater plasticity, while at the same time his picture space became deeper and more open. In order now to give

structure to his new open pictures, he reached back to the classical effects afforded him by the European tradition: linear perspective. In "Shriek" he temporarily made use of a manieristic perspective, now he organized his pictures symmetrically, with long, clearly defined lines in towards a vanishing point.

This unsnobbish use of an effect that was becoming unfashionable made his later pictures characteristically dynamic. The effect is most forceful when he introduces movement in the opposite direction. Just as energetically as the lines reaching in towards the vanishing point, one or more figures stretch towards the foreground. We have mentioned his large painting of the workmen. As unaffectedly and with the same effects, he elevates his presentation to a symbol,in the paintings of the horses before the plough, the workmen in the snow and the horse emerging from the cleft in the rocks, the man in the cabbage field and "The Sun" in the Oslo University Aula.

It would be misleading to interpret this style as a stand against cubism. It would also be wrong to interprete it as a return to tradition. The opposit: Munch claimed to be a pioneer of cubism, for example in the shifting of plane surfaces in "Sick Child", but there is hardly reason to take him literally on this point. His accentuation of dynamic perspective did not, in fact, reflect Masaccio, but Munch's own impressions of moving pictures, which were becoming more and more popular in the USA and Europe. During this period Munch was a passionate movie fan, and he could see the same programme at the cinema, evening after evening, the same horse, in an average Western, that gallops about and frightens those who are not familiar with the new medium, or the same locomotive that rushes through a narrow gorge right towards the audience.

During his youth Munch had been engaged in the challenge the camera represented, even though he brushed it aside with the remark: "The camera cannot compete with paintings as long as it cannot be taken into heaven or hell". The linear perspective paintings were his answer to the challenge the moving pictures represented. The large paintings of the workmen is more a study of movement than of the Labour movement; in one detail he has painted a leg marching and the cobblestones the leg evidently was meant to hide. As early as 1896 he had anticipated a futuristic solution to the problem of movement, in the lithographic print "Tingel-tangel".

His later years were filled with three primary missions: He wanted order in his environment, and he formed landscapes around his residences into a series of plastically lucid landscape pictures. He wanted to edit his life's work, and painted new versions of Frieze of Life, where he finally

placed humans mysteriously naked in a luxuriant landscape. He wanted to study himself, and in a long series of self-portraits he created the last, completely genuine representation of the human being in European pictorial art.

Munch's development during the last 30 years of his life was beyond the mainstream of European art after Les Demoiselles d'Avignon. He discovered a new starting point for his painting, but never crossed the threshold into abstraction or deformation. His human subjects never bore the stamp of expressionism's sinister bizarreries. His suffering humans have been experienced from within, not distorted and debased by a nonparticipating jester.

A daring parallel can be drawn between his historic position and that of Theotocopuli. Like el Greco he came from a fringe area. As a young man he met the fashion-setting currents in the large metropoli, gave them character and coloured them with his own experiences. As an elderly man he remained steadfast to his own form language. The hermit at Ekely must have understood the old master in Toledo, who survived Caravaggio by four years.

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When Munch came to Berlin in 1893, he wrote a friend about the impression German art made on him. "Although art in general here in Germany rates poorly, I will say one thing. It has one advantage that it has produced individual artists who rise above all the others and thus stand alone - e.g. Böcklin who I almost believe stands above all contemporary painters - Max Klinger - Thoma - Wagner among musicians - Nietzsche among philosophers. The art of France rates higher than that of Germany, but they have no greater artists than those mentioned."

The similarity between Munch and the three artists he mentioned has often been indicated. Even putting it strongly, we are still permitted to claim that today this German symbolism has historic interest, while Munch's works with his related thematics, have a current and existential significance. A task for the critics and historians is not to be satisfied with this observation but to produce grounds for such an evaluation.

It is not my ambition to explain current judgement in taste. But it is possible to formulate in words two factors that definitely differ Munch's art from the traditional and historically orientated symbolism. It is his relationship to the motif, and his interest in the craft of the painter. Munch's pictures, often labelled "Expressionism" are not random projections of a harrowed mind, but a visual artist's endeavour to reproduce reality as he had experienced it

through the eye. It is still possible to point out the spot on Mosseveien, south of Oslo, where Munch heard the great shriek through nature, and in the landscape in the paintings "Shriek" and "Fear ", a portrait of Kristiania and environs from the 1880's is presented. One can stand on the spot in Aasgaardstrand where the young man and the young woman whose mutual attraction stole the marrow from their backbones, and see the street, the fiord, trees just as they are reproduced in the painting. These and other pictures will confirm that this happened there and then.

Munch's loyalty to the actual reality is a sustaining element in his art. "The Voice" is a result of an intelligent oberver's efforts to convey a tension-filled situation: that is why the forest is just as one usually see it - a space with trunks that have no roots or crowns. "Madonna" is a visual artist's experience of a situation where not all use their eyes. Munch has reproduced that which was within sight.

It is not always acknowledged that Munch's paintings are just as much a journey of discovery into the artist's metier as into the human mind. His professional curiosity is stronger than any of his contemporaries'. As early as "The Sick Child" from 1886, he moulded the paints into a mass; tore, scratched and scraped the paint mass. He began early to paint directly with the tube; he allowed himself to go so far in terpentine thinning that the colour ran down the canvas. He plashed the paint on by flicking the brush, or filled the fixative sprays with paint and sprayed it on the picture. His professional curiosity resulted in his bringing renewal to the graphic media: he printed with oils from zinc plates, he sawed wooden blocks into pieces; "Madonna" and "Vampire" are a combination of stone, wood and metal.

This restless experimentation did not have the creation of sophisticated effects as a primary purpose. Munch sought spontaneous and direct expression, which is not always as easy to attain after months and years working on a theme. His unconventional way of applying paint to the canvas was intended to evoke a spontaneous impression. His inquisitiveness and ingenuity as a craftsman are expressions of his will to allow the pictures to convey an experience. Therefore they should preferably not have any noticeable similarity to a completed painting or print according to time-honoured concepts. Munch will avoid having the picture encountered as art, he will force the observer to identification and revivification, and out of his studied rôle as a viewer of art.

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