

The Scream

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The Scream (Norwegian: *Skrik*; created 1893-1910^[1]) is the title of expressionist paintings and prints in a series by Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, depicting an agonized figure against a blood red sky. The landscape in the background is Oslofjord, viewed from the hill of Ekeberg, in Oslo (then Kristiania), Norway.

Edvard Munch created several versions of *The Scream* in various media. The Munch Museum holds one of two painted versions (1910, see gallery) and one pastel. The National Gallery of Norway holds the other painted version (1893, shown to right). A fourth version, in pastel, is owned by Norwegian billionaire Petter Olsen. Munch also created a lithograph (1895, see gallery) of the image.^[2]

The Scream has been the target of several high-profile art thefts. In 1994, the version in the National Gallery was stolen. It was recovered several months later. In 2004, *The Scream* and *Madonna* were stolen from the Munch Museum. Both paintings were recovered in 2006. They had sustained some damage and went back on display in May 2008, after undergoing restoration.^[1]

The Scream

Norwegian: *Skrik*



Artist	Edvard Munch
Year	1893
Type	Oil, tempera, and pastel on cardboard
Dimensions	91 cm × 73.5 cm (36 in × 29 in)
Location	National Gallery, Oslo

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Sources of inspiration

The original German title given to the work by Munch was *Der Schrei der Natur* (The Scream of Nature). The Norwegian word *skrik* is usually translated as *scream*, but is cognate with the English *shriek*. Occasionally, the painting has been called *The Cry*.

In a page in his diary headed *Nice 22.01.1892*, Munch described his inspiration for the image thus:

“ I was walking along a path with two friends—the sun was setting—suddenly the sky turned blood red—I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence—there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city—my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety—and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature. ”

One theory advanced to account for the reddish sky in the background is that Munch had observed a powerful volcanic eruption of Krakatoa in 1883: the ash that was ejected from the volcano left the sky tinted red in much of eastern United States and most of Europe and Asia from the end of November 1883 to mid February 1884.^[3] This explanation has been disputed by scholars who note that Munch was an expressive, rather than descriptive painter, and was therefore not primarily responsive to literal rendering. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the proximity to the site of the painting of both a slaughterhouse and a madhouse may have offered inspiration.^[4]

The person in the foreground may be the artist himself, not screaming but protecting himself or itself from the scream of Nature. Thus, the position in which he portrays himself could be considered a reflex reaction typical of anyone struggling to keep out distressing noise, whether actual or imagined.

The scene was identified as being the view from a road overlooking Oslo, the Oslofjord and Hovedøya, from the hill of Ekeberg. At the time of painting the work, Munch's manic depressive sister Laura Catherine was interned in the mental hospital at the foot of Ekeberg.

In 1978, the Munch scholar Robert Rosenblum suggested that the strange, sexless creature in the foreground of the painting was probably inspired by a Peruvian mummy, which Munch could have seen at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. This mummy, which was crouching in a fetal position with its hands alongside its face, also struck the imagination of Munch's friend Paul Gauguin: it stood model for the central figure in his painting *Human misery (Grape harvest at Arles)* and for the old woman at the left in his painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*. More recently, an Italian anthropologist speculated that Munch might have seen a mummy in Florence's Museum of Natural History which bears an even more striking resemblance to the painting.^[5]

Depersonalization disorder

The environment of *The Scream* is often compared to that of which an individual suffering from Depersonalization disorder experiences, such a feeling of distortion of the environment and one's self.^[6]

Thefts

On February 12, 1994, the same day as the opening of the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, four men broke into the National Gallery and stole its version of *Scream*, leaving a note reading "Thanks for the poor security".^[7] The painting had been moved down to a second-story^[8] display as part of the Olympic festivities, and the presence of international media covering the games made the theft a sensation.^[9] An early claim of responsibility by a Norwegian anti-abortion group turned out to be false. After the gallery refused a ransom demand of USD \$1 million in March 1994, Norwegian police set up a sting operation with assistance from the British Police (SO10) and the Getty Museum, and the painting was recovered undamaged on May 7, 1994.^[10] In January 1996, four men were convicted in connection with the theft, including



Thieves taking paintings from the Munch Museum in Oslo on August 22, 2004. Photo taken by unidentified bystander.

Pål Enger, who in 1988 had been convicted of stealing Munch's *Vampire*.^[11] However, they were released on appeal on legal grounds: the British agents involved in the sting operation had entered Norway under false identities.^[12]

Another version of *The Scream* was stolen in 2004. On August 22, during daylight hours, masked gunmen entered the Munch Museum in Oslo and stole two paintings: *Scream* and Munch's *Madonna*.^[13] Remarkably, a bystander photographed the robbers as they escaped with the artwork to their car (shown at right). On April 8, 2005, Norwegian police arrested a suspect in connection with the theft, but the paintings remained missing and it was rumored that they had been burned by the thieves to destroy evidence.^{[14][15]} On June 1, 2005, with four suspects already in custody in connection with the crime, the City Government of Oslo offered a reward of 2 million Norwegian kroner (roughly USD 313,500 and €231,200) for information that could help locate the paintings.^[16] Though the paintings remained at large, six men went on trial in early 2006, variously charged with either assisting to plan or execute the robbery. Three of the men were convicted and sentenced to between four and eight years in prison in May 2006, and two of the convicted, Bjørn Hoen and Petter Tharaldsen, were also ordered to pay compensation of 750 million kroner (roughly USD 117.6 million or €86.7 million) to the City of Oslo.^[17] The Munch Museum itself was closed for 10 months for a \$6 million security overhaul.

On 31 August 2006, Norwegian police announced that a police operation had recovered both *Scream* and *Madonna*, but did not reveal detailed circumstances of the recovery. The paintings were said to be in a better-than-expected condition. "We are 100 percent certain they are the originals," police chief Iver Stensrud told a news conference. "The damage was much less than feared."^{[18][19]} Munch Museum director Ingebjørg Ydstie confirmed the condition of the paintings, saying it was much better than expected and that the damage could be repaired.^[20] *The Scream* had moisture damage on the lower left corner, while *Madonna* suffered several tears on the right side of the painting as well as two holes in Madonna's arm.^[21] Before repairs and restoration began, the paintings were put on public display by the Munch Museum beginning 27 September 2006. During the five-day exhibition, 5500 people viewed the damaged paintings. The conserved works went back on display on May 23, 2008, when the exhibition "Scream and Madonna--Revisited" at the Munch Museum in Oslo displayed the paintings together.^[22] Some damage to "The Scream" may prove impossible to repair, but the overall integrity of the work has not been compromised.^{[2][23]}

In popular culture

In the late twentieth century, *The Scream* acquired iconic status in popular culture. It was used on the cover of some editions of Arthur Janov's book *The Primal Scream*.^[24] In 1983–1984, pop artist Andy Warhol made a series of silk prints of works by Munch, including *Scream*. The idea was to desacralize the painting by making it into a mass-reproducible object, though Munch had already begun that process himself, by making a lithograph of the work for reproduction. Furthermore, characteristic of post-modern art is Erró's ironic and irreverent treatment of Munch's masterpiece in his acrylic paintings *The Second Scream* (1967) and *Ding Dong* (1979).^[25]

As one of very few works of modern art that are instantly recognizable to a broad audience, *Scream* has been used in advertising, in cartoons such as *The Simpsons* and has likewise fascinated film and television. Ghostface, the psychotic murderer in Wes Craven's *Scream* horror movies, wears a Halloween mask inspired by the central figure in the painting. Reproductions of this mask are now very popular and common masks in the real world. The work's reproduction on all kinds of items, from t-shirts to coffee mugs, bears witness to its iconic status as well as to its complete desacralization in the eyes of today's public. In that respect, it is comparable to other iconic works of art, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and American Gothic. Popular American situation comedy *Wizards Of Waverly Place* had the famous work portrayed in one of its episodes (along with many

other renowned works); the episode depicted Selena Gomez's character bringing several legendary paintings in a museum to life.

The work has also been used in political humor and advertisement. During Bush senior's administration a popular poster showed the painting with the caption "President Quayle." Bumper Stickers were sold in 2004 with the image paired with the caption of "Four More Years?" In August 2006, Masterfoods USA, the maker of M&M's candies, began using *Scream* in ads for its dark chocolate variety of candies and offered a reward of two million of the candies for the painting's return. Shortly after the promotion was announced, the painting was recovered. Masterfoods has announced its intention to honor the reward once the recovered painting is authenticated.^[26]

Gallery



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External links

- The National Gallery of Ireland (<http://www.edvardmunchprints.org/>) will host a major loan exhibition from the Munch Museum 19 September - 6 December 2009
- Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway (<http://www.munch.museum.no/?id=&mid=&lang=en>)
- Gallery Munch - Løten, Norway (<http://www.gallerimunch.no>)

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Why the sky was red in Munch's 'The Scream'

Wednesday, December 10, 2003 Posted: 10:28 AM EST (1528 GMT)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- For those who have ever wondered why the sky was a lurid red in "The Scream" -- Edvard Munch's painting of modern angst -- astronomers have an answer. They blame it on a volcanic eruption half a world away.

In the first detailed analysis of what inspired the painting, an article published Tuesday in *Sky and Telescope* pinpointed the location in Norway where Munch and his friends were walking when the artist saw the blood-red sky depicted in the 1893 painting, and offered an explanation for why the sky seemed to be aflame.

Donald Olson, a physics and astronomy professor at Texas State University, and his colleagues determined that debris thrown into the atmosphere by the great eruption at the island of Krakatoa, in modern Indonesia, created vivid red twilights in Europe from November 1883 through February 1884.

The local newspaper in what is now Oslo reported that the phenomenon was widely seen, the astronomers said.

Olson and his colleagues suggest that Munch drew his inspiration for the sky in the painting from these volcanic twilights, and not from his own imagination.


The most famous version of "The Scream" was painted in 1893 as part of "The Frieze of Life," a group of works derived by Munch's personal experiences, including the deaths of his mother in 1868 and his sister in 1877. These works were created in the 1890s, but have established origins in earlier decades.

To reach their conclusion, the astronomers determined Munch's vantage point in the painting.

"One of the high points of our research trip to Oslo came when we rounded a bend in the road and realized we were standing in the exact spot where Munch had been 120 years ago," Olson recalled in a statement.

"It was very satisfying to stand in the exact spot where an artist had his experience," he said. "The real importance of finding the location, though, was to determine the direction of view in the painting. We could see that Munch was looking to the southwest -- exactly where the Krakatoa twilights appeared in the winter of 1883-84."

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 The Krakatoa eruption created vivid red twilights in Europe at the time Munch is thought to have painted this masterpiece.

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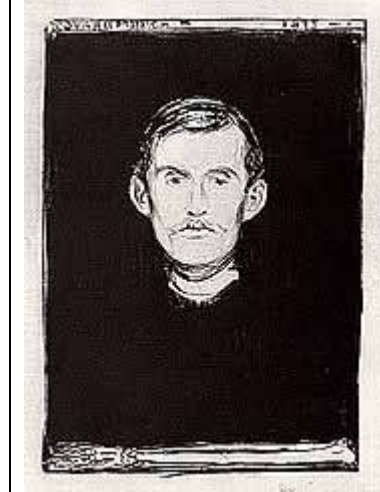
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Artist Biography:

Edvard Munch was born in Ekely, Norway on December 12, 1863 - the son of a military doctor. As a youngster, the tuberculosis deaths of both his mother and his teenage sister, left a profound mark on Edvard - the youngest of the Munch family. At the age of seventeen, after beginning to pursue a career in engineering, young Munch decided to give it all up to devote himself to painting. After studying at the Oslo Academy and under leading Norwegian artist Christian Krohg, he began showing his work - at times causing quite a stir. Spending summers in Norway and dividing the rest of his year between Paris and Germany, Munch attended literary circle meetings, exhibited regularly and experimented with woodcuts and etchings (in addition to paintings). As with most artists, much of Munch's subject matter came directly from his life experiences. From the death of family members to love lost, the images in his art were at times too much for the general public to bear. Often called the first of the expressionists, Munch left an indelible mark on the history of art.



Self Portrait with Skeleton Arm, 1895

Born 12 December 1863

[Ådalsbruk](#) in [Løten](#), Norway

Died 23 January 1944 (aged 80)

[Oslo](#), Norway

Nationality Norwegian

Field [Painting](#)

Movement [Expressionism](#)

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The Scream

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The Scream (1893)

Painted in 1893, *The Scream* is Munch's most famous work and one of the most recognizable paintings in all art. It has been widely interpreted as representing the universal anxiety of modern man.^[45] Painted with broad bands of garish color and highly simplified forms, and employing a high viewpoint, the agonized figure is reduced to a garbed skull in the throes of an emotional crisis. With this painting, Munch met his stated goal of “the study of the soul, that is to say the study of my own self”.^[46] Munch wrote of how the painting came to be:

I was walking down the road with two friends when the sun set; suddenly, the sky turned as red as blood. I stopped and leaned against the fence, feeling unspeakably tired. Tongues of fire and blood stretched over the bluish black fjord. My friends went on walking, while I lagged behind, shivering with fear. Then I heard the enormous, infinite scream of nature.^[47]

He later described the personal anguish behind the painting, “for several years I was almost mad... You know my picture, “The Scream?” I was stretched to the limit—nature was screaming in my blood... After that I gave up hope ever of being able to love again.”^[48]

In summing up the painting’s impact author Martha Tedeschi has stated:

Whistler's Mother, Wood's *American Gothic*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Edvard Munch's *The Scream* have all achieved something that most paintings—regardless of their art historical importance, beauty, or monetary value—have not: they communicate a specific meaning almost immediately to almost every viewer. These few works have successfully made the transition from the elite realm of the museum visitor to the enormous venue of popular culture.^[49]

⁴⁹ Margaret F. MacDonald, ed., *Whistler's Mother: An American Icon*, Lund Humphries, Burlington, Vt., 2003, p.80, [ISBN 0-85331-856-5](#)

Objectives:

Students will:

- Learn about the artist Edvard Munch and his famous painting "The Scream".
- Learn about the connection of the explosion of Krakatoa and "The Scream" painting.
- Create a drawing of the screaming man and draw items that make them want to scream.

What You Need:

- Copies of the Scream for students
- 8x12 drawing paper
- Fat black Sharpie markers
- Colored pencils
- Web story of the correlation of "The Scream" to the explosion of Krakatoa.
See CNN article attached.

What You Do:

1. Spend the first day teaching about "The Scream" by Munch and the relationship of the background to the astronomical theories of Krakatoa's explosion. (see CNN article attached to read to your class).
2. Talk about why the man was screaming, and what causes one to well up into a scream, of fear or another emotion.
3. Lead your students through the drawing of the head and hands of the screaming man in Munch's work. Explain as you work, how this painting has inspired Hollywood: i.e. "Scream" movie mask, the famous scream Macaulay Caulkin did in "Home Alone", etc.
4. Once students finish the drawings, have them outline the "screamer" with a black sharpie marker.
5. Using items (not people) that make the students want to scream, have the students do drawings of things around the screaming man (i.e. needles, broccoli, brussel sprouts, etc.). Emphasize the importance of this being personal (I got some very creative responses!) and how to NOT use people, etc. The students picked terrorism and other political topics as well.
6. When they are finished tracing, have the students add color. I chose colored pencils, but any colorful media would work. Remind students to color heavy, dark and to fill their page.



I displayed these in the hallway with a sign that said, "Things That Make Us Want To Scream!" and the faculty and students loved it! I also tied it in during Halloween week for added fun!

