

The *Alpha and Omega* Series

Edvard Munch created these four images as part of a series of 18 lithographs to accompany his version of the Adam and Eve story titled *Alpha and Omega*. Their names “Alpha” and “Omega” mean the first and the last.

In Munch’s version, their perfect love turns to tragedy when Omega is seduced first by the snake and then other animals on the island creating a race of half-human, half-animal children. For a time she escapes the island, leaving Alpha to care for the children. When she returns, he murders her in a rage and is in turn killed by her children. In both the text and images, this drama plays out on the shore of the sea, that borderline for Munch between man and nature, known and unknown.

The image, *Alpha’s Despair*, returns again to the main motif in his famous work, *The Scream*, a figure clutching his face in pain, the lines of the landscape radiating with his grief.

The *Two People* Series

Edvard Munch used this motif of a man and a woman looking out to sea to explore the duality of relationships where, although connected, people are still separate individuals, ultimately alone. He created a number of variations of this image using different print techniques to subtly shift mood and meaning in each.

In the two etchings seen here, darker shading ties the male figure to the shore while the white column of the woman's dress echoes the sea beyond. They stand together on the same rocky beach but a dark shape along the shore divides them. In the later woodcut, Munch makes this separation even more apparent through landscape elements and his use of color.

These changes in the relationships of the figures also create different moods in each work. In one, the figures suggest a couple looking out to sea, in another they seem two lonely figures, and in the third two people painfully divided.

Girls Bathing, 1895

Aquatint and drypoint

State 5 of 15

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Rosenwald Collection, 1944, 1944.14.49

Lovers at the Seaside, 1895

Drypoint and aquatint

State 6 of 6

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Rosenwald Collection, 1943, 1943.3.9024

Summer Evening, 1895

Aquatint and drypoint

State 2 of 3

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Rosenwald Collection, 1944, 1944.14.53

Shoreline Sketch, 1920–23

Purple crayon

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
The Epstein Family Collection, 2011, 2011.84.4

Attraction II, 1896

Lithograph

State 1 of 2

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the
Epstein Family Collection, 2013, 2013.10.1

Moonrise, 1908–09

Lithograph

State 1 of 1

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
The Epstein Family Collection, 2002, 2002.10.6

***Omega's Flight*, 1908–09**

Lithograph

State 1 of 1

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
The Epstein Family Collection, 2002,
2002.10.13

***Alpha's Despair*, 1908–09**

Lithograph

State 1 of 1

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
The Epstein Family Collection, 2002, 2002.10.3

***Omega's Death*, 1908–09**

Lithograph

State 1 of 1

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
The Epstein Family Collection, 2002,
2002.10.11

***Girls on the Bridge*, 1903**

Etching

State 2 of 2

Epstein Family Collection, EFC 186.0

***On the Waves of Love*, 1896**

Lithograph

State 1 of 5

Epstein Family Collection, EFC 073.0

Separation II, 1896

Lithograph

State 1 of 2

Epstein Family Collection, EFC 071.0

For Edvard Munch and his contemporaries, a woman's hair carried many symbolic meanings. Tamed, it could be a sign of virtuous love; unruly, it suggested lust and sin. Its color, style, and thickness could express a variety of emotions. In the 19th century people often gave locks of hair as both tokens of affection and reminders of the dead.

In this image and the related prints titled *Attraction*, the hair binds the couple together even as they turn away from each other. The curving lines of the woman's tresses echo the shapes of the waves behind her.

***Two Human Beings. The Lonely Ones*, 1899**

Color woodcut

State 3 of 8

Epstein Family Collection, EFC 119.77

Though Edvard Munch repeated this motif of two figures standing on the shore in numerous works, he used a variety of techniques to convey different meanings. In this variation, Munch wanted to strongly emphasize the division between the two figures. He took a saw to the woodblock on which the image was carved and cut the two figures apart, literally dividing them. He then reassembled it for printing. The vertical line created by the saw prints as part of the image separating the man from the woman.

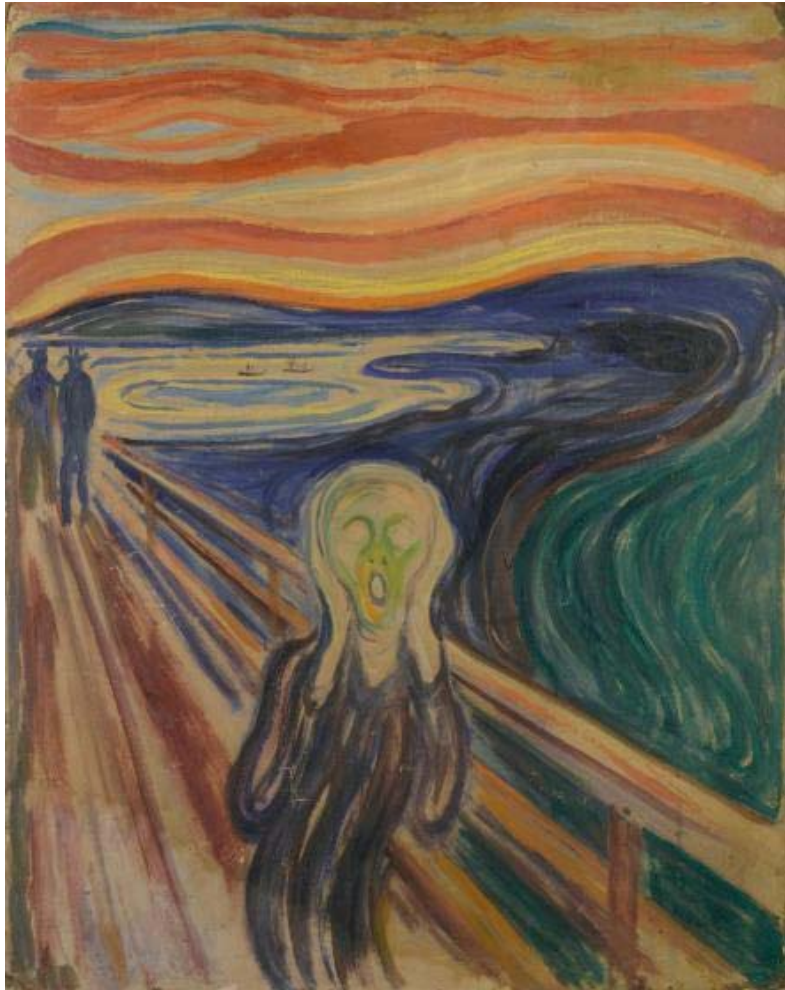
Angst, 1896

Color lithograph

State 2 of 2

Epstein Family Collection, EFC 061.0

This image was created a year after Edvard Munch's famous work, *The Scream* and repeats many of its motifs. The setting is the same—the Åsgårdstrand pier at sunset—and the earth and blood red sky pulse with emotion. The screaming figure, however, is replaced with a crowd of figures with mask-like faces. Munch said: "I saw through them and there was suffering...pale corpses who without rest ran...along a twisted road at the end of which was the grave." Both images are raw expressions of Munch's lifelong battles with anxiety, grief, and loneliness.



The Scream, circa 1910
Oil on board
Collection of the Munch Museum

***The Woman II*, 1895**

Drypoint, etching and open bite

State 5 of 8

Epstein Family Collection, EFC 031.0

For Edvard Munch, this trio of women represented different stages of life. As he described them: “The dark one who is standing in the tree trunks by the naked woman—is the nun—sort of the woman’s shadow—sorrow and death—the naked one is a woman with a zest for life. Finally beside them—the pale fair cheerful woman who is walking out toward the ocean of longing.” This common 19th century artistic motif also was used to symbolize three stereotypical views of women: the innocent, the corrupt, and the elderly hag.



The Dance of Life, 1925

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Munch Museum

***Washing Clothes at the Shore*, 1903–18**

Color woodcut

State 2 of 2

Private collection

Woman Looking Out to Sea, not dated

Pen and brown ink on buff laid paper

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton,
Massachusetts. Bequest of Selma Erving,
class of 1927, SC 1984:10-42

The image of a lone figure standing on the shore appears throughout Munch's body of work. It is often used in art as a universal symbol of contemplating life and its mysteries. Often for Munch, it also represented melancholy and loneliness.

The rocky shoreline resembles that of Munch's longtime home in Åsgårdstrand, Norway, on the southeastern coast. He used it as the backdrop for most of his images set near the sea.

***Two People (The Lonely Ones)*, 1895**

Drypoint and roulette printed in black on
wove paper

State 3 of 6

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton,
Massachusetts. Gift of Selma Erving,
class of 1927, SC 1972:50-70

Edvard Munch created this image using an etching technique called drypoint, where he scratched the image directly onto the printing plate with an etching needle. He also used a roulette, a tool with a small textured wheel. The tool is rolled across the plate leaving a textured pattern that holds ink and adds detail to the printed image. He used other techniques in the second drypoint on view here and the woodcut of the same motif.

***Landscape, Kragerø*, 1912**

Oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Bequest of Scofield Thayer, 1982,
1984.433.20

***Neutroalia (Girls Picking Apples)*, 1916**

Color lithograph

State 2 of 2

Memorial Art Gallery of the University of
Rochester, Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 72.12

The brightly colored, light-hearted motif of nudes picking fruit in the sunshine radiates exuberance and suggests the joys of spring. But like most of Munch's work it also carries a subtle message. Munch designed the image to protest Norway's neutrality during World War I. While things prosper in Norway, as represented by the idyllic scene on the shore, out on the sea a ship representing Europe is caught in a storm and heading towards shipwreck.

Woman, 1899

Lithographic crayon, tusche, and scrapers

State 2 of 3

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum purchase, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts Endowment Fund, 1965.68.38

Lithographic tusche, the material Munch used for this image, is the liquid ink used to create lithographs; it also comes in the form of a crayon. Instead of using it to draw lines, here Munch used it like paint to create areas of dense black color.

In the etched version of this image (also on view here) Munch used lines to define his figures and the landscape features. The image is lighter in both tone and mood. By contrast this work seems more ominous and confrontational.

Attraction I, 1896

Lithograph

State 1 of 1

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The William B. Jaffe and Evelyn A. J. Hall

Collection, 1968, 1176.1968

***Summer Night. The Voice*, 1894–95**

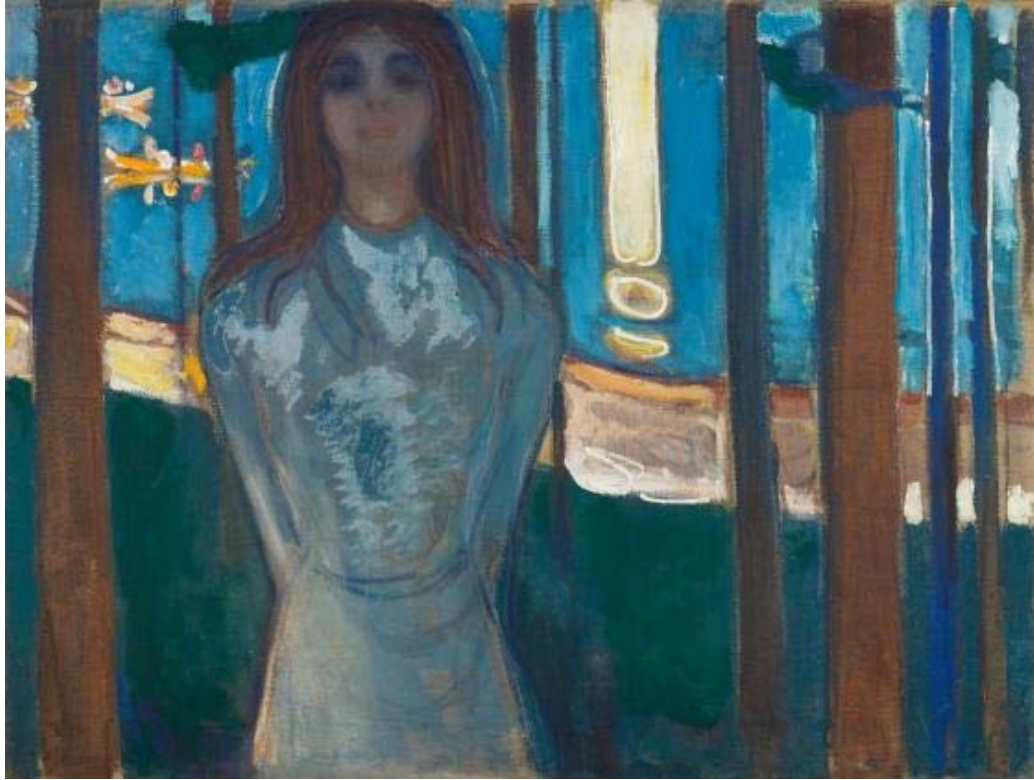
Drypoint and etching

State 3 of 3

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Louise G. Harper, 1968, 1162.1968

Edvard Munch considered both the paint and print version of this image part of his series titled *Love*.

A young woman stands enraptured in the moonlight that spills across the water and through the trees behind her. The moon and its reflection merge into an "i"-shaped symbol that for Munch stood for the union of male and female. Munch chose the moment when spring becomes summer suggesting that the young woman too is on the verge of some personal transition, perhaps the awakening of love.



The Voice / Summer Night, 1896

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Munch Museum

Seascape, 1899

Hand-colored woodcut on gray paper

State 1 of 5

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Felix Juda, M.66.87

Madonna, 1895

Lithograph on buff wove paper

State 1 of 7

Private collection

Madonna, 1902

Color lithograph on chine volant

State 2 of 7

Private collection

Madonna was one of the first lithographs Edvard Munch created and amongst his first experiments with adding color to his prints.

The image represents the cycle of life from conception to birth to death. Munch said of this image: "Now the hand of death touches life. The chain is forged that links the thousand families that are dead to the thousand generations to come." He described the image as both a radiant lover and corpse and surrounded her with wave-like forms, linking the sea with the universal human experience.

Andy Warhol

Born Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1928

Died New York, New York, 1987

The Scream (After Munch), 1984

Screenprint on paper

Private collection



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On this computer:

Link to the website for the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway to learn more about the artist.

Watch videos demonstrating various printmaking techniques. Videos courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art.

On view in the Haub Orientation Area adjacent to the museum's main lobby:

Edvard Munch—An introduction

By Lasse Jacobsen, Munch Museum, 2015.

Voice: Eirik Bøhn

Run time 18:56

Or access the video on your mobile device at
<http://munchmuseet.no/en/filmprogram>

On view in continuous loop are two videos:

Edvard Munch—An introduction

By Lasse Jacobsen, Munch Museum, 2015.

Voice: Eirik Bøhn

Run time 18:56

and

*An Introduction to the Haub Family Collection of
Western American Art at Tacoma Art Museum,
2014.*

Run time 10:00