

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS PREVIEW:

Thursday, November 9, 1978
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

MAJOR MUNCH EXHIBITION TO OPEN
AT NATIONAL GALLERY NOVEMBER 11

WASHINGTON, D. C. October 30, 1978. The most comprehensive exhibition ever held in the U. S. of the work of the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) will be shown at the National Gallery of Art November 11 through February 19, 1979. Entitled Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images, the exhibition will be on view in the Gallery's East Building special exhibition galleries on the concourse level.

Two hundred forty-five paintings, prints, drawings, watercolors, woodblocks, and Munch's hand-made illustrated book The Tree of Knowledge have been lent from major collections in Norway, and public and private collections in Europe and the United States. Over ninety percent of Munch's art resides in Norwegian collections, including the Munch Museum and the National Gallery, Oslo, and the Billedgalleri and Rasmus Meyers Samlinger, both in Bergen. Many of the works in the exhibition have never before been allowed to leave Norway and very few of his paintings exist in American public collections.

Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Harald and Crown Princess Sonja of Norway are the honorary patrons of the exhibition.

The exhibition has been organized by the National Gallery in close

(more)

collaboration with a Norwegian working committee of museum directors and with the American Munch specialist Lionel Epstein, who has also served as guest curator of the major prints section of the exhibition. Earl A. Powell of the National Gallery served as overall Coordinator of the exhibition.

The exhibition has been supported in part by a grant from the Mobil Oil Corporation and by a Federal indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery, writes, "The greatness of Munch's achievements and the significance of his contributions to the traditions of modern art have been, we believe, underappreciated in America...Munch's reputation achieved international stature during his lifetime; however, in this country many still associate him with a few singular, haunting images. It is the purpose of this exhibition to provide viewers an opportunity to experience the full range of Munch's genius, both in painting and also in graphic work, in which he was one of the virtuosos of his age. In doing so, we hope to provide the viewer insights into the emergence of expressionism in northern Europe, and allow him to explore the relationships that recent scholarship has shown to exist between expressionism and the stylistic imperatives of impressionism and the School of Paris."

The catalogue also contains eight essays on Munch and his work by both Norwegian and American scholars.

The installation of the exhibition, designed by Gaillard F. Ravenel and Mark Leithauser of the Gallery's Installation Design department, concentrates on the cycles and themes Munch pursued throughout his career. It will begin

(more)

with seventeen paintings from the "love" cycle, devoted to an exploration of love and death, which Munch began in 1893 and which he exhibited in Berlin in 1895. Among this group will be Starry Night, Ashes, Evening on Karl Johan Street, The Scream, and Anxiety. The second section, "The Mirror," contains twenty-six lithographs and woodcuts paralleling the "love" cycle, and is an installation based on an exhibition of Munch's work held in Paris in 1897.

Fifty-five paintings, prints, and drawings will be on view in a chronological survey, beginning with Munch's early training in Norway and later study in Paris, where he was influenced by the impressionist and post-impressionist movements in art and the Symbolist movement in art and literature. His mature works--dating from 1890-1910--reflect his explorations of melancholy, fear and impending doom. After 1910, living alone and isolated in Norway until his death in 1944, Munch sought to overcome his anxieties by returning to nature for his later motifs.

Twenty self-portraits from throughout his life will also be shown, as well as nine watercolors of female nude figures, none of which has been exhibited outside Norway. The chronological survey of Munch's art will end with his incompleated cycle The Tree of Knowledge.

The next eight sections in the exhibition will feature the various themes Munch pursued throughout his career in paintings, prints, and drawings: the Voice, the Kiss, the Madonna, Melancholy, the Sick Child, Fever/the Deathbed, Death in the Sickroom, and Metabolism.

The exhibition will end with a group of thirty-five exceptional and rare lithographs, woodcuts, and mezzotints, plus five woodblocks for major prints. Among them will be five impressions of the color woodcut Two Women on the Shore, recently acquired by the National Gallery through
(more)

the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund and the Rosenwald Print Purchase Fund. A sixth impression is being lent to the exhibition and is a promised gift from a major private collection. These impressions, produced over a thirty-year period, show Munch's development as an artist as he experimented with color and mood.

In conjunction with the exhibition, a ballet, Summernight, inspired by the paintings and prints of Munch and danced to Schoenberg's "Five Pieces for Orchestra," Opus 16, will be performed by the North Carolina Dance Theatre in the National Gallery's East Building Auditorium on Friday, November 10 (at 5, 6, and 7 p.m.) and Saturday, November 11 (at 2, 3, and 4 p.m.). The ballet was created by Dutch choreographer Job Sanders for the North Carolina Dance Theatre, and later performed in Oslo by the Royal Norwegian Ballet to critical acclaim.

END