



Edvard Munch (1863-1944), the Norwegian artist who was born in Oslo, had a hard life when he was young. Death and illness seemed to surround him:

- At five, he lost his mother (to tuberculosis);
- At 14, he lost his favorite sister (Sophie);
- At 25, he lost his father.
- Soon thereafter Laura, his sister, lost her mind and was committed to an asylum.

His painting, *The Scream*, seems a way to sum-up what he must have been feeling through it all.

Was there some event which inspired Edvard Munch to create this painting? The answer is "yes."

The event occurred in Oslo, during 1892. Munch, himself, tells us what happened:

One evening I walk down a hillside path near Kristiana [as Oslo was formerly known] - together with two comrades. It was a time during which life had ripped open my soul. The sun went down. The sea dipped quickly under the horizon. It was [as] if a flaming sword of blood cut open the firmament. The air turned to blood - with cutting veins of flame. The hillsides became a deep blue. The fjord - cut in a cold blue - amongst yellow and red colors. That shrill, blood red. On the road and the fence.

The faces of my comrades became a garish yellow-white. I felt a huge scream welling up inside me - and I really did hear a huge scream. The colors in nature - broke the lines in nature. The lines and colors quivered with movement. These vibrations of light caused not only the oscillations of my eyes. My ears were also affected and began to vibrate. So I actually heard a scream.

What happened to the friends with whom Munch had been walking?

I was walking along the road with two friends - then the sun set. The heavens suddenly turned a bloody red and I felt a shiver of sadness. A clutching pain in my chest. I stopped - leaned against the fence, for I was deathly tired. Over the blue-black fjord and town lay blood in tongues of flame. My friends continued walking - and I was left trembling in fear. And I felt a huge endless scream course through nature. It felt as if a scream was coursing through nature - I seemed to hear a scream. (Quotes, by Edvard Munch, included in *Panic: Origins, Insight, and Treatment* edited by Leonard J. Schmidt and Brooke Warner at pages 239-40.)

As a young artist, searching for meaning, Munch discovered the Russian writer Dostoevsky. Of him, Edvard said:

No one in art has yet penetrated as far [as Dostoevsky] into the mystical realms of the soul, towards the metaphysical, the subconscious ...

Dostoevsky, of course, had a profound reason for serious soul-searching. He had once been sentenced to death, by firing squad. After he was in position, waiting for the bullet to strike him, he was reprieved—at the last second—by the Tsar himself (who had never intended for the condemned young men to die).

Munch painted several versions of *The Scream*. One was stolen, in 1994, and recovered (undamaged) three months later. Another was taken, at gunpoint, from the Edvard Munch Museum, on August 22, 2004. Norwegian police recovered that stolen treasure during a raid which occurred on August 31, 2006.

Munch had a life filled with sadness. He was often afraid to leave his home.

Although best-known for the painting depicted in this image, Munch was actually a very prolific artist. After he died at his [estate outside Oslo](#), during World War II, people were stunned to learn how productive he'd really been during his 80 years of life.

On the second floor of his home known as Ekeley, authorities found a most-unexpected treasure trove of Munch's art. Locked away, behind closed doors, [they discovered](#):

- 1,008 paintings
- 4,443 drawings
- 15,391 prints
- Plus ... woodcuts, etchings, lithographs, lithographic stones, woodcut blocks, copperplates and photographs.

Munch had a very good reason for locking-up his paintings: In 1940, [the Nazis invaded Norway](#), thereafter taking-over the country's government. Munch already knew that Hitler did not like his paintings.

The Nazi leader, who wanted to be an artist himself but failed in the endeavor, lashed-out at modern artists on the 18th of July, 1937. Opening the "Great German Art Exhibition," in Munich, Hitler said:

From now on we are going to wage a merciless war of destruction against the last remaining elements of cultural disintegration.

... Should there be someone among [the artists] who still believes in a higher destiny - well now, he has had four years' time to prove himself. These four years are sufficient for us, too, to reach a definite judgment.

From now on - of that you can be certain - all those mutually supporting and thereby sustaining cliques of chatterers, dilettantes, and art forgers will be picked-up and liquidated.

For all we care, those prehistoric Stone-Age culture-barbarians and art-stutterers can return to the caves of their ancestors and there can apply their primitive international scratchings. (Quote included in *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, edited by Harry James Cargas, at [pages 183-84.](#))

Munch knew that Hitler included him in the "art forgers" category, producing "degenerate" art. The Nazi leader had ordered German museums to remove at least 82 of Munch's paintings from their collections.

Thomas Olsen, one of Munch's neighbors—and a friend—decided to do something about the paintings which Hitler had ordered removed from all federal and state museums in Germany. He was able to recover 74 of the works, including a colorful version of "The Scream," then save them by hiding the paintings in a hay barn until Germany left Norway at the end of WWII.

But ... as the war dragged on ... what if Hitler's troops decided to raid Munch's Norwegian home, looking for more "barbaric" art? What would they do if they found his life's work? The famous artist protected his creations—which he considered his children—from troops following the orders of a madman. He hid them, in his home, behind locked doors.

After Munch died, the city of Oslo received a wonderful bequest from the artist: all of his unsold work. The city opened a museum, in 1963, to display Munch's art (including the version of "The Scream" depicted in this image).

Then ... in 2012 ... Thomas Olsen's son, Petter, put his saved-from-the-Nazis version of "The Scream" up for sale. In a 15-minute auction, Sotheby's sold the 1895-created painting to an anonymous phone bidder for \$119,922,500. Petter used the proceeds to build a new Munch museum (coinciding with the 150th anniversary of Munch's birth).

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image, described above, online courtesy Wikipedia.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Edvard-Munch-The-Scream0>

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Edvard-Munch-The-Scream0>

Questions 2 Ponder

How Does Edvard Munch Express Personal Tragedy in His Paintings?

Late in the 19th century, Edvard Munch created a series of paintings which reflect tragedy and the personal anguish of his subjects. One glance at any of these works, and the viewer instantly understands that something really awful has just happened to the people in the scenes.

What does “The Scream,” a still-famous work which Munch painted in 1893, convey to you?

There is an actual story behind the scream, which Munch relates, but does that story matter to the viewer’s experience with the painting? Why, or why not?

Spanish Flu was not-yet a threat to anyone when Munch painted “Death in the Sickroom,” in 1895, but it was eerily prophetic of difficult days ahead. What does that painting tell you? Are different people experiencing different emotions?



Does it make a difference to you that “Death in the Sickroom” reflects a personal time in Munch’s life - when his sister died? Why, or why not?

If you didn’t know the back story of the painting, would you have any reason to believe that Munch knew the person who had just died? Explain your answer.

What does “The Dead Mother,” which Munch created between 1899-1900, tell you about the loss of a loved one?



Does Sadness Contribute to Great Art?

Edvard Munch, a brilliant Norwegian artist, endured much sadness when he was young. After his mother died, when he was five, he lost his sister Sophie (when he was 14) and then his father (when Edvard was 25).

When "Spanish Flu" spread like wildfire throughout Europe, during WWI, Edvard also contracted the illness. It ravaged his body.

After the Nazis invaded Norway, Edvard's work—and the artist himself—were at serious risk. The madman at the helm of Germany had already declared that artists like Munch were "cultural-barbarians" and "art stutterers" who would "be picked-up and liquidated." Despite such threats, Edvard continued to create amazing art.

Do you think that sadness is a factor when an artist creates? How would that work?

Have you ever been motivated by sadness to create something? What was the sadness and what did you create?

Would you have created the art but-for the sadness? Would the end result have been different if you had not been sad at the time you worked on the art?

Edvard Munch viewed his art as his children. Why do you think he felt that way?