

Echoing the Scream: Andy Warhol Prints After Edvard Munch

An ASF exhibition of Warhol's take on four Munch paintings coincides with the 150th anniversary of the great Norwegian artist's birth.

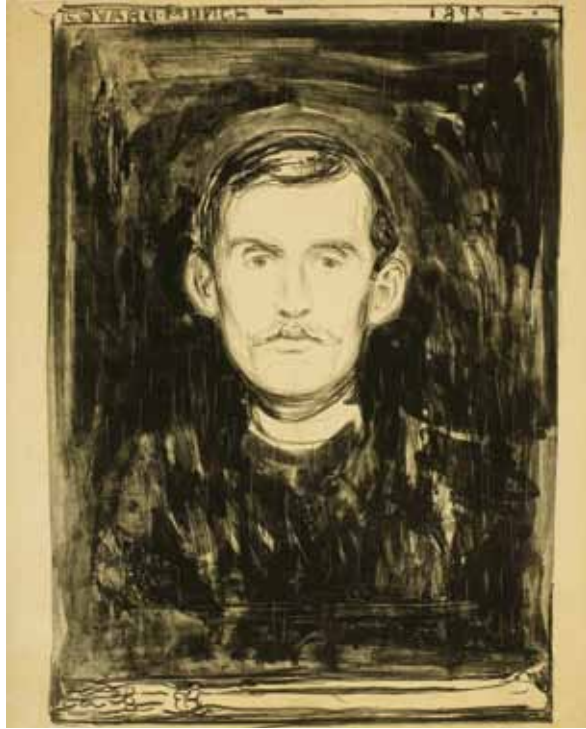
By Pari Stave



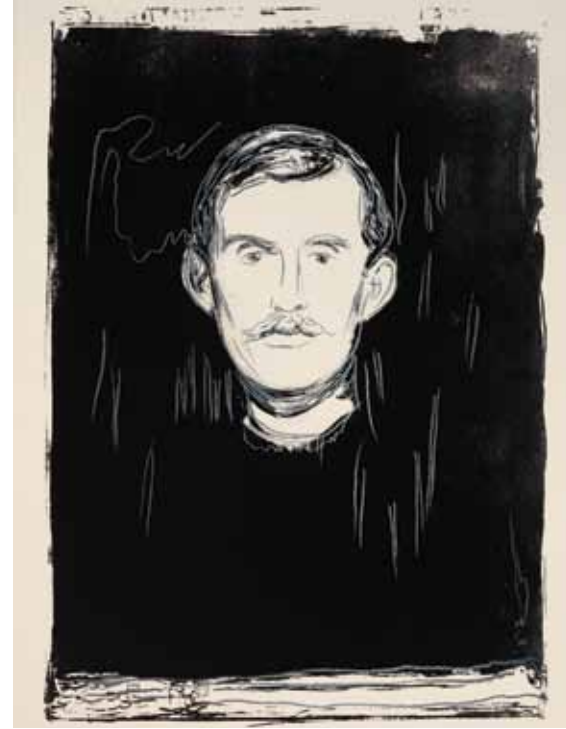
Edvard Munch working on a drypoint etching in Dr. Linde's garden.
Photographer unknown. © The Munch Museum.



Warhol Holding Marilyn Acetate I, 1964. Photographed by William John Kennedy.
Gelatin silver print. © William John Kennedy. Photo: Courtesy of KIWI Arts Group, Miami.



Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait*, 1895.
Lithograph in black, 18 x 14 ½ in.
Munch Museum.



Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait with Skeleton's Arm (After Munch)*, 1984.
Screenprint on Arches Aquarelle (Cold Pressed) paper, 29 ¼ x 40 in.
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Founding Collection.
Contribution of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE AN ODDER COUPLE THAN THE existentialist-expressionist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) and the detached, dispassionate Andy Warhol (1928-1987), yet an exhibition at Scandinavia House reveals remarkable affinities between the two unusually prolific and inventive artists. Comprising more than thirty works, *Munch/Warhol and the Multiple Image* offers a close examination of four motifs in Munch's lithographic prints and their reformulation in a series of screenprints created by Warhol in 1984.

Timed to coincide with *Munch 150*, the yearlong celebration marking the sesquicentennial of Munch's birth, *Munch/Warhol* will be on view from April 27–July 27, 2013. Both the exhibition and accompanying catalogue were organized by The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF) and co-curated by Dr. Patricia G. Berman, a leading authority on Munch, and Pari Stave, ASF consulting curator. Together, the exhibition and catalogue illustrate the ways in which both Munch and Warhol used printmaking as an experimental

medium, exploring abiding motifs through seriality, variation and permutation. At the same time, the comparison reveals Munch and Warhol as marketing strategists who employed prints to augment their respective commercial enterprises.

Munch's four motifs—*The Scream*, *Self-Portrait*, *Madonna* (all 1895) and *The Brooch. Eva Mudocci* (1903)—all date from his symbolist period, when he first began making prints. They show the artist's early use of printmaking as an experimental tool through which to develop his meditations on anxiety, alienation, mortality, eroticism and ideal beauty. Among the rare images included in the exhibition is a unique trial proof for *Self-Portrait*, showing the subject's head and shoulders in a vaguely defined space. The enigmatic image can be compared with the more widely known version in which only the artist's head is shown, silhouetted against near-total blackness—an effect that Munch achieved through the heavy application of tusche, a black liquid



Edvard Munch, *Madonna*, 1895/1896.
Lithograph printed in black with hand-coloring,
on light gray-green cardboard, 25 ½ x 18 ½" in.
Courtesy Kunsthandel Kaare Berntsen, Oslo.



Andy Warhol, *Madonna (After Munch)*, 1984.
Screenprint on Arches Aquarelle (Cold Pressed) paper, 59 ½ x 40 in.
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Founding Collection.
Contribution of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

“ . . . In color, facture, stylization and scale, they are signature ‘Warhols’ . . . ”

employed in drawing on the lithographic stone.

In Warhol’s *Self-Portrait with Skeleton Arm (After Munch)*, Munch’s print has been blown up more than fifteen times its original size, and Warhol has added his own lines to the composition, in gray. In Warhol’s other iterations of *Self-Portrait*, the image is united with Munch’s *Madonna*, and the pair is printed in an assortment of color combinations that further alter the visual effect and meaning of Munch’s elegiac self-image.

By copying and manipulating Munch’s prints Warhol made them his own. As Berman describes in the exhibition catalogue, the “dazzling colors transform Munch’s intimately scaled paints, with their integral surface patterning and stark value contrasts, into decorative and cheerful echoes of the angsty ‘originals’. The printed versions are vibrant with DayGlo colors and improbably amplified details. In color, facture, stylization and scale, they are signature ‘Warhols,’ the products of a long-recognized stylistic and technical branding.”

BUT, AS BERMAN NOTES, THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION and brand-building had started with Munch himself. “Munch’s prints had already been the object of his own repetition and appropriation as he reinterpreted, amended and reshaped their motifs for new creative ends and for the marketplace. . . . One of his great legacies is the way in which he produced multiple and multiplied originals, works that issued from a particular matrix but were made singular through hand amendments, manipulations for the matrices and stencils or through unusual selections of paper. In this way, Munch subverted the notion of the accountable, editioned print.”

The event that gave rise to Warhol’s *After Munch* series took place at New York’s Galleri Bellman, which in late 1982 presented an exhibition of 126 paintings and prints by Munch that Warhol visited on several occasions. The exhibition was not Warhol’s first encounter with Munch’s work: he had been to Oslo in 1971 at the invitation of Per Hovdenakk, then director of the Henie-Onstad Art Centre, where he viewed Munch’s work at the National Gallery and the Munch Museum. According to Hovdenakk, Warhol was especially impressed by Munch’s technical innovations in printmaking, admiration that was later reiterated to Roland Augustine, the director of the Galleri Bellman at the time of the Munch exhibition, who recalls that when Warhol viewed the Munch exhibition, he expressed more interest in the prints than the paintings. Indeed, Warhol was something of a collector of Munch’s prints: the catalogue of his estate when sold at Sotheby’s in 1989 listed five prints by the Norwegian artist, including, notably, the *Self-Portrait* lithograph.

Given his interest in Munch’s graphic work, it comes as no surprise that

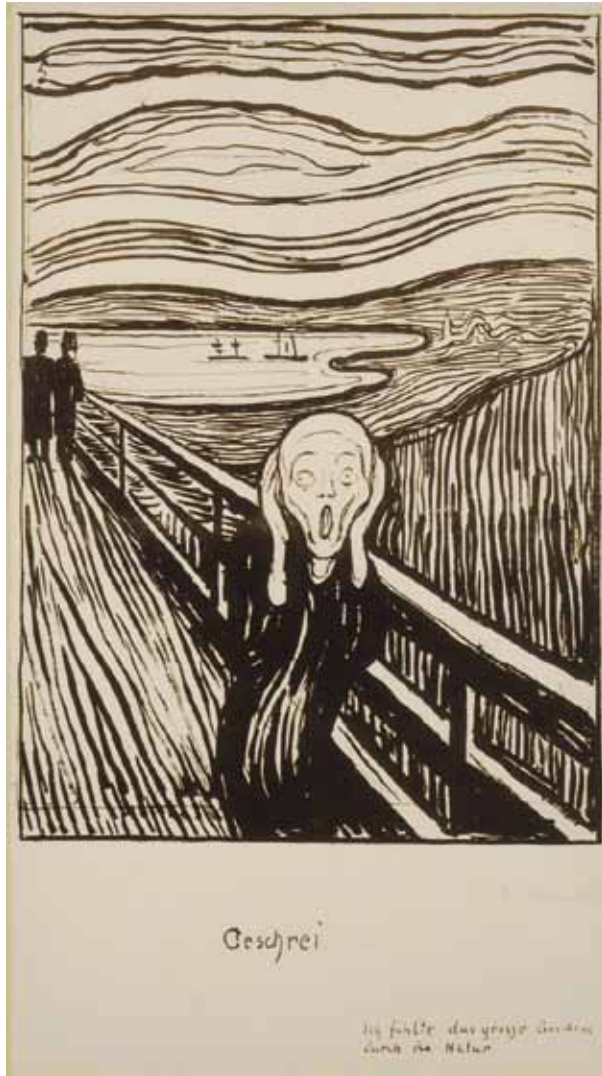


Andy Warhol, *Madonna and Self-Portrait with Skeleton's Arm (After Munch)*, 1984.
Screenprint on Lenox Museum Board, 32 ¼ x 40 in.
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Foundation Collection.
Contribution of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

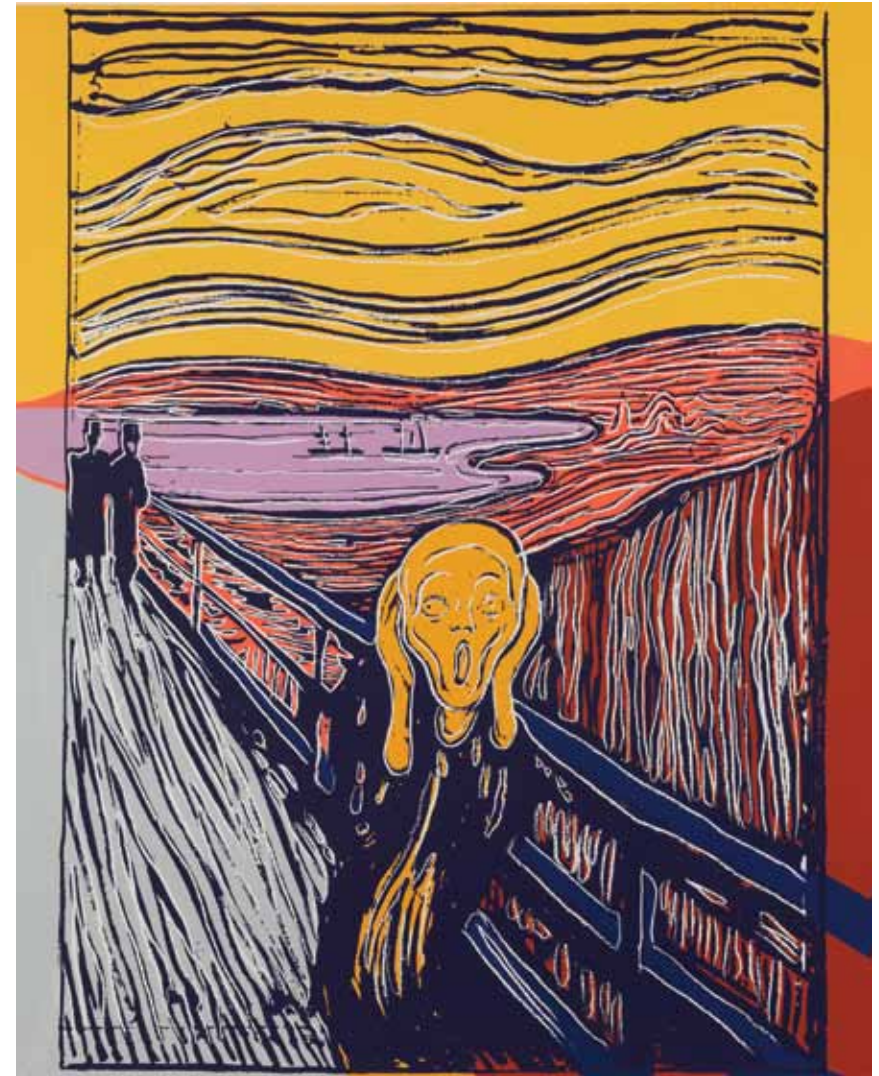
when in 1983 Galleri Bellman’s owners, Bernard Hodes, an American, and Tor Arne Uppstrøm, a Norwegian, approached Warhol with a commission to create a series of works after Munch, Warhol chose four prints from the exhibition as the basis for the new works.

WARHOL’S *AFTER MUNCH* SERIES SHOULD BE SEEN WITH-IN the larger context of other commissions produced by the artist at the suggestion of dealers and other patrons in the late 1970s and early 1980s—in particular the body of work based on old and modern masters Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Botticelli, Picasso and de Chirico, among others. Yet as Berman points out, the prints after Munch “are among Warhol’s few appropriations of old masters that leave the overall compositions intact rather than fragmentary. . . . Warhol, moreover, did not merely appropriate Munch’s motifs, but in reproducing them, he cannily scrutinized and in some cases decoded their compositional strategies and, in that way, found affinity with the experimental and exploratory Munch.”

The *After Munch* project proceeded in two stages. Initially, the gallery owners commissioned fifteen paintings, which, when completed, were sent to sister galleries in Stockholm and Oslo and sold within a few months. Later,



Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1895.
Lithograph in black on heavy white wove paper, 14 x 10 in.
Collection of Catherine Woodard and Nelson Blitz, Jr.



Andy Warhol, *The Scream (After Edvard Munch)*, 1984.
Screenprint on Lenox Museum Board, 40 x 32 in.
Collection of Henriette Dedichen, Oslo.



Andy Warhol, *Madonna and Self-Portrait with Skeleton's Arm (After Munch)*, 1984.
Screenprint on Lenox Museum Board, 32 x 40 in.
Collection of Henriette Dedichen, Oslo.

in 1984, Warhol was commissioned to produce a second series, this time of prints, but the project fell apart shortly thereafter, when the gallery's owners had a parting of ways. By this time, trial proofs had already been made, so a deal was struck between Warhol and the gallery for the artist to retain right of ownership to the prints.

ULTIMATELY, THE PRINTS IN WARHOL'S *AFTER MUNCH* SERIES were never signed or editioned, and the exact number of works is not known, though what is clear is that each impression is a unique color variant. The print series falls into two categories based on size. The first group comprises the large-scale, single images of *Eva Mudocci*, *The Scream*, *Madonna* and *Self-Portrait with Skeleton's Arm*, printed on Arches Aquarelle paper measuring approximately 60 x 40 inches. In the second group, of which there are many more known examples, 42 x 30 inch Lenox Museum Board was used in printing just three motifs: single images of *Eva Mudocci* and *The Scream*, and a new motif that combined *Madonna* and *Self-Portrait* together into one work. Additionally, a few prints on brown paper have appeared on the market and in private collections, as have Warhol's pencil drawings from which some of the silkscreen matrices were made.

The *After Munch* screenprints (or silkscreens—a printing technique

Warhol's Madonna is rendered . . . as a wide-eyed, spectral femme fatale.

that uses a framed mesh as an ink-blocking stencil) were made in close collaboration with master printmaker Rupert Jason Smith (1953-1988), who from 1977 until Warhol's death in 1987 directed all printmaking activities at Warhol's studio, The Factory. Various layers of stencils were produced by first photographing the Munch prototypes, which would later be blown up to the desired size, depending on the dimensions of the canvas or paper substrate on which they were to be printed. Clear acetates with the positive image were used to make negatives, which were then transferred onto the framed mesh stencil. In the printing process, ink would pass through the negative areas of the stencil onto the substrate. In the *After Munch* series, Warhol also made graphite drawings, emphasizing and embellishing passages in the Munch prints in his own hand. The drawings were in turn photo-mechanically reproduced and enlarged into stencils, in register with the Munch reproductions. Thus, going to press involved the layering of ink through screens, in this reverse order: Warhol's lines; the photo-reproduction of the Munch original (sometimes altered); and, at times, rubyliths, stencils that allowed for creating defined zones of underlying color.

PAIRING MUNCH'S *MADONNA* AND WARHOL'S *MADONNA (AFTER Munch)* provides an excellent point of comparison between the two artists' working methods. Munch's print, drawn on lithographic stone and printed in black, is an example of the earliest state of a motif that evolved over time as Munch either added drawing to the stone or transferred the image to other stones to create new variants. It is also one of several prints to which Munch added thin washes of watercolor, indicating a desire to both experiment with color and create unique impressions. In Warhol's version of the motif (reproduced from another, later state of *Madonna*), the detail and line of Munch's original have been suppressed, and the whole has been printed in a single tone of greenish gray. A second screen overlaying the Munch reproduction is printed in black and shows Warhol's lines. Warhol's *Madonna* is rendered not as Munch's image of a woman with eyes closed in a state of sexual ecstasy, but as a wide-eyed, spectral femme fatale, or a clownish parody of one.

All the subtleties of Munch's swirling, indeterminate background have been replaced by flatness and monotone, and the delicate gradations of fine to bold lines articulating the woman's face and breasts have been replaced by hard outlines. At nearly five feet tall, it is a striking, even confrontational image. Munch's iconoclastic *Madonna* in its many painted and printed versions caused a sensation when it was first exhibited, and it was immediately parodied in the press. Here, Warhol takes both shock and parody to a new level.



Edvard Munch, *The Brooch. Eva Mudocci*, 1903.
Lithograph, 27 1/8 x 18 1/2 in.
Munch Museum.



Andy Warhol, *Eva Mudocci (After Munch)*, 1984.
Screenprint on Lenox Museum Board, 40 x 32 in.
Collection of Henriette Dedichen, Oslo.

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Even as Warhol transformed Munch's *Madonna* from alluring to predatory, he took an entirely different approach to the portrait of the British-born violinist Eva Mudocci, whose real name was Evangeline Muddock. In the manner of his many portraits of feminine archetypes like Marilyn Monroe and Liz Taylor, Warhol plays with color and line to enhance, as if glorifying a product, the beauty of the subject. Using silvery tones and employing the technique of "rainbow roll" printing (multi-colored inks applied to the line stencil to create an iridescent effect), Warhol seems to give the fin de siècle beauty a 1980s makeover.

Not surprisingly, Warhol's *The Scream (After Munch)* is the most highly sought-after image from the *After Munch* series, and it may be the image for which there is the greatest number of color variants. As Berman notes, the prospect of reenvisioning "one of the most recognizable and appropriated motifs in the history of art . . . must have seemed particularly magnetic to Warhol." The comparison between Munch's relatively diminutive print and Warhol's many versions of it printed in epic proportion, is telling. For all their super-sized scale, vibrant, and at times jarring colors, and sly, out-of-register manipulations, Warhol's *Screams* do not succeed in diminishing the power and aura of Munch's original vision.

WHERE WARHOL'S IMAGES SUCCEED IS IN THE WAY THEY mask the artist's intentions, just as Warhol himself "hid in the glare of publicity," to quote art critic Mark Francis. In writing about the late work, Francis offers this assessment; "[T]he power of Warhol's best work resides in his ability to focus without distraction on an apparently banal or clichéd image—Mao's portrait from his widely-distributed *Little Red Book* or Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and *Last Supper*—which have been debased through indiscriminate repetition, and reinvigorate the image so that it is simultaneously "vernacular" and slightly altered so it becomes impossible to determine whether the artist's attitude is celebratory, dismissive or ironic."

Ultimately, whether Warhol's canny interpretations on Munch's themes are seen as reverent or irreverent, ambivalent, or utterly neutral, the comparison of his work with Munch's originals literally enlarges and enlivens our appreciation for the enduring power of Munch's achievement.

Pari Stave is a New York-based freelance curator whose recent exhibitions include, for Scandinavia House, *Wave Finland: Contemporary Photography from the Helsinki School* (co-curated with Timothy Persons), and *Unnatural Formations: Three Contemporary Photographers*; and for Wave Hill, *Propagating Eden: Uses and Techniques of Nature Printing in Botany and Art*.

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