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# TimeOut

NEW YORK

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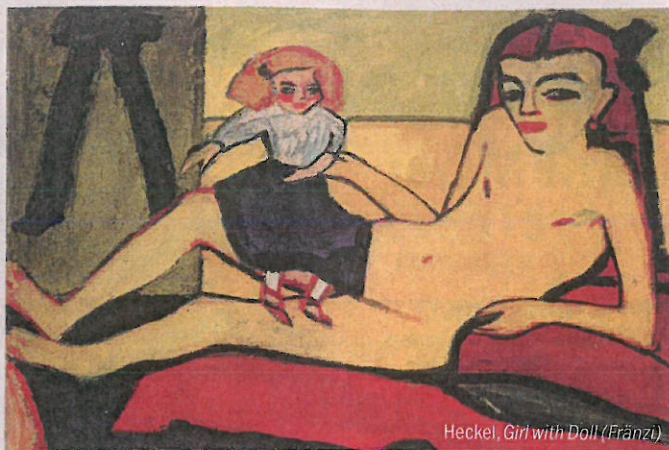
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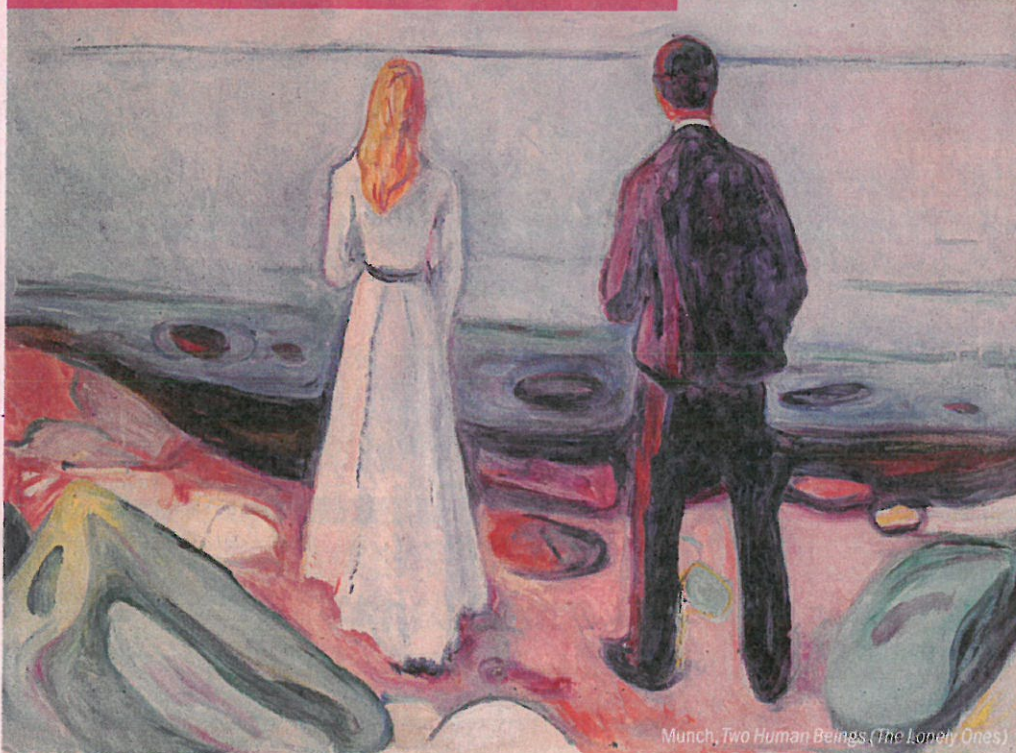


# Art

Edited by Howard Halle  
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Heckel, *Girl with Doll* (Fräulein)



Munch, *Two Human Beings (The Lonely Ones)*

## “Munch and Expressionism”

Edvard Munch's followers cemented his legacy as a linchpin of art history. By **Howard Halle**

**EDVARD MUNCH'S *The Scream*** is the *Mona Lisa* of anxiety, an eye worm in the collective consciousness speaking to the existential dread that's been with us since the days when becoming a big cat's meal was a daily prospect. These days, fear is as likely to be ginned up as real—a way to sell adult diapers, for instance, or win the White House—but that doesn't lessen

the allure of the work anchoring the Neue Galerie's superb new exhibition. Putting Munch (1863–1944) in the context of the artists who followed him, the exhibition goes beyond the star power of a single piece to note his role in transforming avant-garde art at the turn of the 20th century.

Munch is generally acknowledged as the precursor

to Expressionism, influencing artists such as Egon Schiele, Erich Heckel and Max Beckmann. Less understood is the larger issue of his break with Impressionism and what that entailed.

Impressionism's prismatic splintering of light into discernible brushmarks invests emotional resonance in color, eschewing drama for a tone that is usually serene if not buoyant.

Its art-for-art's-sake formalism prevailed for much of the 19th century's latter half, until Munch shattered the calm. Death, melancholia and alienation became staple themes of his work, and while the Symbolist artists who sprang up alongside Impressionism toyed with the same ideas, they did so through decadent, dreamlike imagery. Munch borrowed style points from Symbolism, but he painted anomie as a feature of modern life, a condition that would become increasingly prevalent as the terrible events of the next 50 years unfolded.

The exhibit pairs Munch's work with the Expressionists whom he shaped, revealing how they distilled his ideas into rawer and more agitated forms. One gallery features Munch's depiction of a nude adolescent girl, haunted by the amorphous shape of her shadow while perched on a bed. It hangs near Heckel's creepier view of a naked young girl holding a doll: Limned in acid yellow, she stretches out before the viewer like a diminutive odalisque from a nightmare. In another smaller room, drawings by Schiele flank *The Scream*; among them is a self-portrait in which he forms his mouth into an O, like Munch's distressed apparition.

Munch's relationship with his Expressionist followers varied. When the Die Brücke (The Bridge) artist group invited him to join their ranks, he declined. On the other hand, a Beckmann study of bathers inspired Munch's own versions of the subject.

In any case, by the 1930s, Munch had become associated enough with the Expressionists to be branded a “degenerate” artist by the Nazis. In time, his vision for *The Scream* would become real enough.

★★★★★  
**WHY GO...**  
 There's more to Edvard Munch than just *The Scream*.

→ Munch Neue Galerie New York, through June 13