THE YOUNG MUNCH:
MAX KLINGER’S IMPACT
ON HIS IMAGERY

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Max Klinger and Christian Krohg were close friends during the formative years of their youth. Christian Krohg’s importance is unquestioned: he was the foremost artist in Kristiania in the 1880s and, not least, Edvard Munch’s teacher. Nevertheless, Max Klinger has been virtually ignored by recent art-historical research in Norway. A veil of oblivion has been drawn over his connections with Norwegian artists in the first and crucial phase of Realist painting in this country, a period that is often called the Golden Age. In what follows I shall endeavour to lift this veil a little, and analyse why Klinger has incurred such a damnatio memoriae in Norwegian art history.

The close friendship between Max Klinger (1857–1920) and Christian Krohg (1852–1925) while they were students in Karlsruhe and Berlin during the 1870s is in fact well known and is mentioned, usually briefly, in both Norwegian and German art-historical literature. But neither in Norway nor in Germany has an attempt been made to investigate the effect this contact may have had on the two artists’ development or on other artists of the day. No one has asked whether Klinger had any influence on the Kristiania Bohemians. What is the relationship between Edvard Munch’s range of subject-matter and Klinger’s etched series of the 1880s? How much of Klinger’s work would have been familiar to Munch before he visited Berlin for the first time in 1892?

There are several reasons why this interesting area has not been more thoroughly scrutinised. Though Max Klinger has received considerable, renewed attention in Germany over the last thirty years, the language barrier is partly to blame for German art historians’ reluctance to tackle Norwegian and Danish material. Little work has been done on the subject in Norway, with the result that the unpublished material here has not been rendered accessible to Norwegian or foreign scholars. This lack of attention to Klinger in Norway is no doubt due to the fact that his art was long considered not exactly reputable, so that any influence he may have had on Norwegian art was passed over in silence, denied, or at best played down. This is, it will be realised, particularly true in the case of the influence Max Klinger may have had on Munch’s artistic development. Otherwise, given Krohg’s links with Munch in the 1880s as both teacher and friend, this question would have been raised long ago. But, since Norwegian art historians did not think highly of German Symbolist art, they recoiled from the disturbing notion that there could be a connection between Munch’s art of the 1880s and Klinger’s series of etchings.

It is time for some biographical details. Munch had paid a brief visit to Paris in 1885, and he stayed in France from 1889 to 1892 on a bursary. He was, therefore, well versed in French art, and it is this French connection that the official line in Norwegian art history has emphasised. In 1892 Munch went to Berlin for the first time, and any contact with Klinger’s art has tended to be associated with this stay, in other words dated to the early 1890s. Admittedly the point has frequently been made that Munch could have become familiar with Klinger’s work earlier, as a result of his links to Christian Krohg. But, as
discussed above, the matter has never been pursued. Now, however, material is available that makes it possible to show exactly how much of Klinger’s art Munch saw and – of crucial importance – when he first encountered it.

In the spring of 1878, Georg Brandes wrote a review for the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet of an exhibition at the Berlin Art Union of Klinger’s drawings for his series of etchings «Ein Handschuh» (A Glove). This is the first mention ever of the now so well known series, and the first of many references to it by Brandes. In his 1878 article he gives a full description of every sheet. At the time there were eight; two were added later. Even more significant in our context is the fact that Klinger’s first series of prints, «Radierte Skizzen» (Etched Sketches), was exhibited at the Kristiania Art Society in the spring of 1880, followed by his «Eva und die Zukunft» (Eve and the Future) that autumn. Since reference has not been made to these exhibitions by Norwegian art historians, no one has examined their effect on radical circles in Kristiania at that time. A few scholars have, it is true, been aware that etchings by Klinger were exhibited in Kristiania «in the 1880s», but this awareness had no impact on their research into painting in the 1880s.

Both series belonged to Christian Krohg, and it was he who ensured that they were exhibited at the Art Society’s gallery. The press took due note of them, and it is unthinkable that young Munch did not go and see them. There were not many exhibitions in Kristiania in those days, and Munch was just in the process of deciding to become an artist. He enrolled for the Royal School of Drawing’s evening class in December 1880, and in the winter of 1882 was a pupil of Christian Krohg’s. He remained part of Krohg’s circle, the so-called Kristiania Bohemians, well into the 1880s. Since Krohg owned a considerable number of etchings by Klinger, Kristiania’s radicals must already have been familiar with these works early in the 1880s. In 1891 the Norwegian National Gallery bought 53 etchings from Krohg’s collection. All of them date from before 1884, in other words from the years during which Munch was most closely associated with Krohg. They could be seen by all who were interested, and Andreas Aubert wrote about the collection in his review of Klinger’s little book Malerei und Zeichnung (Painting and Drawing) of 1891. But by then Klinger’s etchings had been accessible to Krohg’s circle for a decade. Presumably financial straits prompted Krohg to sell Klinger etchings to the National Gallery, and we must not exclude the possibility that his collection comprised more than he sold. «Ein Leben» (A Life) (1884) and «Eine Liebe» (A Love) (1887) were not, for instance, among the series the National Gallery acquired on that occasion.

German art historians have tended to consider Krohg’s Albertine, both the painting (1885–87) and the novel (1885–86, published on 20 December 1886), as precursors of Klinger’s etchings «Ein Leben» (A Life). In fact the relationship is the reverse: Klinger’s important and revolutionary series of etchings on the subject of free love and the consequences it could have for women saw the light of day before Krohg began toying with the idea of Albertine. And yet it would be wrong to ignore Krohg’s significance in this context. From 1875 to 79 the two young artists had spent years of dissipated fun together in Berlin, years that left their mark on both of them. Brandes’s vivid depiction of life in the flat-cum-studio they shared and called their Hungerturm (hunger tower) provides a good insight into their lifestyle and their artistic taste, as do a number of letters dating from that time. Curiously enough, no one in Norway or in Germany has paid attention to Krohg’s short novel En Duel (A Duel) of 1888. Not only is the dedication on the title page to Max Klinger; the work is a roman à clef whose main theme, an imagined duel, can in fact be documented in letters and memoirs. Krohg is obeying the Bohemians’ first commandment «Thou shalt write thine own life». This little book contains an admirable description of Klinger’s and Krohg’s Bohemian existence in their studio flat at Hohenzollernstrasse 9 in Berlin in the autumn and winter of 1876/7. Calling him Georg Schirm, Krohg portrays the young, restless visionary Max Klinger, who sketches furiously with his pen one moment and hammers out a symphony on his piano the next. The pensive and irresolute character Ferdinand Holst is Krohg himself. This story is not only an autobiographical work; it is also an attack on the author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, his nationalism and his hypocrisy regarding morality. It is in other words an important and hitherto neglected document relating to the Bohemians and dating from a hectic decade in Norwegian artistic history. It tells us that not merely the artist but even the person Klinger must have been known in Norway, since the initiated will have understood who lurked behind the pseudonyms. Munch was of course familiar with the book and its content. His aunt wrote to him while he was in Paris in November 1889 and told him that Krohg’s novel was then on sale in Kristiania.
The fiery speech made by Christian Krohg in March 1886 to the then newly established Liberal Students’ Union provides a striking illustration of how central Max Klinger was in the Bohemians’ perceptions. Entitled «The visual arts as an element in the cultural movement», it has been considered the clearest manifestation of the influence radical French Naturalism had exerted on Norwegian cultural life. Krohg used his large, as yet unfinished, painting of Alberine in the Police Doctor’s Waiting Room as his concrete example of what contemporary art should be concerning itself with. Nevertheless, in the midst of his praise of modern French literature and painting he was capable of asking:

What, one wonders, becomes of the imagination in all this… what place does it have in Impressionism? I know of two great visionaries in modern art, namely Böcklin and Max Klinger. I have brought along one of the latter’s etchings which depicts our present and ambitious time. It is as Impressionistic as anything can be. Max Klinger and Böcklin are more filled with the disquiet of our day than anyone else, they stand out as singularly touched by the times, and express the feeling better than anyone else.
In this context it is important to note that Andreas Aubert, the leading art critic in Kristiania, drew attention to the similarity between Munch’s paintings and the art of Klinger and Böcklin. He did this as early as in his review of the 1888 Autumn Exhibition, in other words four years before Munch set foot in Germany. He wrote:

It is more difficult to make up our minds about Munch. Few have been capable of greater sensibility to colour than was evident in his «Evening». The use of colour there was in effect a kind of idealising; it would have been more appropriate in an ideal landscape by Böcklin or Max Klinger than in such a laboured and crudely chopped off snippet of reality with such a mediocre figure.14

Given the facts presented above, it is reasonable to assume that the habitual playing down or even negation of Klinger’s significance for Norwegian art has been due not so much to ignorance as to an unwillingness to accept it. The eminent art historian Jens Thiis, who held the commanding position of Director of Norway’s National Gallery from 1908 to 1940, describes Klinger in favourable terms in his 1907 work on Norwegian art, where he writes about him in the context of Christian Krogh.15 Thiis concentrates in particular on Klinger’s early series of etchings and the social criticism of their content, i.e. on the works Klinger produced just after Krogh had left Berlin. In later surveys of Norwegian art published up to 1983 Klinger is hardly mentioned. His name reappears in 1983, and in the revised and reprinted section on painting, published in 1993 as Norges malerkunst (Norwegian Painting).16

Thiis’ great work on Edvard Munch, marking the artist’s 70th birthday, was published in 1933. It contains no reference to Klinger.17 Though Thiis does not name Klinger, or Arnold Böcklin for that matter, we have no difficulty in recognising a number of references to their artistic movement in the course of the biography, references in a strongly negative vein. Of Munch’s Frieze of Life, exhibited in its earliest stage in Berlin in 1893, he writes:

These works were painted at Åsgårdstrand before or just after 1890 and before the artist set foot on German soil, consequently they can have nothing to do with German thought…. Little by little the theory has emerged that his stay in Germany and contact with poets and literati there was not beneficial for his art. It led him, apparently, in the direction of their Gedankenmalerei (painting of ideas) and Symbolism, and his friendship with the Polish poet [Przybyszewski] was particularly to blame. Let us put an end once and for all to this irresponsible nonsense! The situation was quite the opposite, namely that the Polish philosopher-poet, the poet Richard Dehmel, the critic Meier-Graefe – then more of a novelist – and several other German writers and artists were extraordinarily impressed by the ideas contained in Munch’s art. They looked on him as a kind of prophet, and what with Ibsen, Strindberg and Munch the adage was coined — The light comes from the North now!

A little further on, Thiis sums up by saying that Munch himself felt that the artistic milieu in Berlin did not enrich him.18 This view seems still to be accepted, as we will see below when considering Arne Eggum’s contribution to the discussion about the influences on Munch’s art. Here it is worth repeating that when Thiis, writing in 1933, repudiates German Gedankenmalerei so strongly he is suppressing the memory of the interest he himself had shown in Klinger early in the 1890s, when he, too, belonged to the group who met regularly at the Zum schwarzen Ferkel tavern in Berlin. In 1891 he had written enthusiastically to his professor, Lorentz Dietrichson:

I have had the good fortune to see a quite comprehensive exhibition here of Max Klinger’s etchings and paintings. It has impressed me greatly, and if only time permitted I should like to gather my impressions in a short article about this – in my opinion – the only genius among the young German artists.19

It is understandable that enthusiasm for Klinger cooled apace with the growing dominance of modern French painting. The publication in 1905 of Julius Meier-Graefe’s epoch-making book Der Fall Böcklin had meant that anyone who pretended to advanced taste — even up here on the fringe of Europe — found it was impossible to maintain sympathy and respect for 19th-century German art. But for Thiis to deny the interest he and his friends had shared during their youth in that naturalistic and yet symbol-laden art is a different matter altogether. Thiis’ veneration of French art caused him to disavow his personal knowledge of the milieu he and Munch had frequented in their younger years.
Munch’s inclusion of Symbolist borders in some of his pictures has not appealed to art historians. Thiis recounted that Munch’s famed Madonna had, when exhibited in Berlin in 1894, «a border of symbols, sperm and embryos, that is also repeated on the first version of the colour lithograph; later this tasteless border was removed». One of the striking similarities between some of Klinger’s and Munch’s prints is exactly this use of a Symbolist surround to add a new dimension to the work, not merely physically but also in terms of content. The reason Thiis was later to dislike intensely this feature of Munch’s art of the 1890s and reassure us that the nasty things were in due course eliminated is not least the fact that such elements would inevitably be associated with German Symbolism in general and with Klinger in particular. As we are about to see, this energetic repudiation of Munch’s Symbolist margins around his images became established as a bizarre and recurring theme in the literature about him, right up until 1960. If the Director of the Norwegian National Gallery could promote such an ahistorical point of view in 1933, it comes as no surprise that the fresh graduate Leif Østby, who was later to be a senior curator at that museum, should develop the same line of thought. His thesis, entitled *Fra naturalisme til nyromantik* (*From Naturalism to Neo-Romanticism*), and published the following year, is a pivotal work in Norwegian art history, and covers the period when Max Klinger was at the height of his fame. Nevertheless Østby mentions Klinger only twice, and on both occasions it is in rather general statements and together with a string of other artists. But even though Østby does not dwell at all on Klinger’s art, he expresses very clearly the prevailing attitude towards German Symbolism:

Munch’s art is Impressionism of the soul, not of the senses. His greatness lies in the fact that he as a rule manages to express his emotional state when he painted the picture without resorting to the Symbolists’ artificial hints, combinations, their violation of nature, and without sacrificing painterliness. Munch squeezes nature into an iron grip of rigorous line and expressively simplified colour, but mutilates it only rarely (though that does happen, as in *The Scream*), and never does he become entirely dependent on purely intellectual symbols (the Symbolistic borders round several of his images of the 1890s, the *Self Portrait with Skeleton Arm*, the portrait of Strindberg, *Madonna*, the *Sick Girl*, are only loosely connected with the image itself, and can be safely removed). That is why the designation «Expressionist» suits Munch much better than «Symbolist». It should be noted that all the works about which Østby maintains it is possible to remove the borders with impunity are prints, in other words works in which the influence of Klinger could have been seen to be direct. Østby’s view was adopted by Ingrid Langaard, though in a less extreme form, when in 1960 she wrote...
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her major work on Munch’s formative years. We can read that

At that time Munch was not above making exaggerated use of Symbolistic details now and then. One need only mention the «frames», in Madonna, The Girl and Death and a number of other pictures, that are basically unimportant for the pictorial content and do not contribute to the symbolic-expressive impact.25

Elsewhere she claims that these borders are a «typically neo-Impressionistic element», and their use in the work of German artists such as Hans Thoma and Max Klinger is «far removed from Munch».26

Like Thiis, Ingrid Langaard emphasises the French influence on Munch’s painting of the 1890s. However, she is the first to make a thorough study of the possible influence on him of contemporary German art, though, admittedly, she concludes that this influence was minimal and without lasting effect. Langaard felt obliged to tackle this sensitive subject because new and disturbing source material had emerged – which pointed in the direction of Germany. In 1950 Henning Gran had published two letters written by Munch to a friend, the Danish painter Johan Rohde (1856–1935). Munch wrote from Berlin in the spring of 1893, a few months after arriving there.27 The letters contain statements which enabled Gran to conclude his introduction to them as follows, «Their interest lies not least in Munch’s remarks about art in Germany in the year 1893. His perception did not remain unchanged, but it will nevertheless give specialists something to think about.» For our purposes, the following, by now well known, passage from one of the letters is the most important:

However wretched the state of art in general here in Germany may be, I should nevertheless like to say one thing. It has the advantage that it has produced some artists who tower so far above all others and stand supreme – for example Böcklin, who I almost think surpasses all other painters of today – Max Klinger – Thoma – Wagner among the musicians – Nietzsche among the philosophers. France has art that outclasses German art, but no greater artist than those I have named. Write me a little about Gauguin, and the other pictures that were recently exhibited.28
Ingrid Langaard is the one who has given these letters most thought, and she deserves praise for having brought important artists such as Klinger and Böcklin into the discussion about the possible sources of inspiration for Munch’s art of the 1890s. The fact that she, in common with her Norwegian contemporaries, dismissed the idea of such a connection is a different matter. Her comparisons of Klinger and Munch show how difficult it still was at the time to accept not only the sensuality but also the seriousness of Klinger’s art.

When comparing Klinger’s series of prints «Ein Leben» (A Life) (1884) with Munch’s Frieze of Life as first exhibited in Berlin in December 1893, she writes:

In his work Klinger has concentrated on depicting base sensuality... if one considers Munch’s The Kiss and compares it with Klinger’s Verführung (Seduction), one is immediately struck by how different they are in their artistic perception. Klinger’s picture has lewd overtones, clearly symbolised by the mythical creatures’ pig’s snouts and a slimy snail extending its horns. There is something nauseating and lascivious about it, very different from the virile sensuality in Munch’s The Kiss (Fig. 2), in which the ecstasy of passion has generated an exalted feeling of self-effacing abandon.29

It would really have been more appropriate to compare Munch’s The Kiss with a motif that corresponds more closely, as does Im Park (In the Park) (Fig. 3), from the series «Eine Liebe» (A Love), 1887. Whereas Verführung (Fig. 4) is allegorical, we find in this other kiss by Klinger a physical abandon which, though different, is as «self-effacing» as that depicted by Munch.

Ingrid Langaard’s conclusion is that there is no significant influence of German art to be found in Munch’s work:

In terms both of ideas and of its entire execution it is far removed from German «art of fantasy»... Munch’s art of the 1890s is usually described as «literary» – in the derogatory sense of the word... However, if one considers Munch’s production during his Berlin period and compares it with the most important of his German contemporaries, with Klinger for instance, there is no longer any foundation for claiming that Munch is «literary».30
The letter from Munch to Rohde quoted earlier forced Ingrid Langaard into a corner from which the only escape was to show that Munch did not actually mean what he wrote. To this end she could find support in statements made later by the artist himself, in which he denies having been influenced at all by German Gedankenmalerei (painting of ideas). In 1929 he wrote, ‘...the spiritual aspect of my art. It has wrongly been called literary, and even more wrongly called German Gedankenmalerei.’ There was, however, no denying that Munch in 1893 had expressed admiration for Thoma, Böcklin and Klinger. Ingrid Langaard therefore saw no reason to doubt ‘the relative truth of Munch’s utterances at that time.’ But she continues: ‘Nor must one underestimate what he wrote at the same time about French art. ‘France has art that outclasses German art, but no greater artists than those I have named.’ That letter ended, ‘Write me a little about Gauguin, and the other pictures that were recently exhibited.’ Once again French art was the winner, and this point of view has been upheld in all subsequent research on Munch.

Though she was relatively thorough, Ingrid Langaard’s treatment of the subject was too one-sided to stimulate fresh debate. She is therefore not only the first but so far also the last to have devoted much attention to the question. Ragna Stang mentions briefly that Max Klinger’s series of etchings «Eine Liebe» (A Love) may have been the inspiration for Munch’s Frieze of Life – which was then called Die Liebe (Love) – or at least for its original title. She also envisages the possibility that Munch could have become familiar with Klinger’s art via Christian Krohg, as it happens a possibility already mooted by Ingrid Langaard.

The most recent to have touched on this subject is Arne Eggum, in his biography of Edvard Munch. He continues in the Thiis tradition insofar as he emphasizes the French influence on Munch’s art during the 1890s, but adds that Munch «clearly received certain stimuli in Germany.» One such stimulus was apparently called Arnold Böcklin — but not Max Klinger. Eggum sees the direct influence of Böcklin in a number of landscapes Munch painted in 1893, a plainly correct hypothesis. Munch’s interest in Böcklin is obvious, and can also be substantiated in the written sources. But when Eggum gives prominence to Böcklin, he disregards the two other artists Munch named in his letter to Rohde. He cuts off his quotation from that famous letter just after the mention of Böcklin, so that Klinger and Thoma no longer appear in this significant context.

Some of the motifs in Max Klinger’s graphic series may be said to have points of similarity with some of Munch’s pictorial ideas, if only on a relatively superficial plane. Klinger’s series «Eine Liebe» (A Love) has been singled out as an example. Munch was quite familiar with Max Klinger’s work before he came to Berlin, partly because the artist’s works were widely published and partly because his teacher,
Christian Krohg, had been a good friend of Klinger during the time he spent in Berlin in the late 1870s.38

The passage is indicative of the status quo in Munch research to this day: Munch encountered Klinger’s art before he arrived in Berlin, that is agreed, but the encounter is not examined in any detail, nor is it considered particularly important. Eggum does not delve more deeply into the matter presumably because, as he writes, he finds the similarity between the two artists relatively superficial. Nor does he consider Klinger when he discusses the range of Munch’s subject-matter. The passage quoted above is in fact all that is said about Klinger in the best-known monograph on Edvard Munch. In his book of 1990 about the Frieze of Life, Eggum mentions Klinger a few times, but the relationship between the two artists’ imagery is not examined.39

As we have seen, from his early days as a student Munch had ample opportunity to become familiar with parts of Klinger’s production. We noted in particular Krohg’s large collection of Klinger etchings. But even at that early stage Munch was able to study quite carefully one of Klinger’s paintings, namely his Der pincklende Tod (Death Peeing) (Fig. 5). Among Munch’s drawings is a sketch based on this picture (Fig. 6). The drawing is rather primitively executed and has been dated to early in his career, to about 1880.40 But there has been some confusion as to the date of the painting. German art historians used to date it to c. 1900, but a drawing of the subject dated November 1880 has now been discovered in Leipzig. Whether this is a preparatory study or a copy of the painting is difficult to determine.41 Yet it makes a date of c. 1880 for the painting more plausible. Moreover, the presence of the painting in Norway in the mid-1880s can be documented. It presumably arrived in Norway in around 1880, and first belonged to Christian Krohg. Krohg may have brought it with him from Berlin when he left there in 1879, or perhaps it was sent to him in 1880 along with the series of etchings exhibited at the Kristiania Art Society that year. He later presented the painting to his writer friend Hans Jæger, the leader of the Kristiania Bohemian movement. In the autumn of 1886 Jæger had to serve a prison sentence because he had published his book Fra Kristiania-bohemen. He decorated his cell with several female nudes by Munch and Hans Heyerdahl. Death Peeing also spent some time in prison. This is evident from Jæger’s article written there and entitled Fra distriks-fengselet, in which he describes his cell and its contents.

My friend Death with his scythe, who stood on the white sand-spit letting water before resuming his work – while the summer night still slumbered, silent and tranquil over the woodland and the shore and the calm water there, and also over the distant sea, the vast eternal sea.42

Munch was a friend and unfailing admirer of Jæger’s, and the nude that gave Jæger so much pleasure during the time he spent in prison was doubtless a gift from the artist. It is an amusing coincidence that Munch and Klinger first «exhibited» together in such captivating circumstances!43
We have already noted that Aubert, in a review he wrote in 1888, felt that Munch’s randomly truncated subjects and rough draughtsmanship contrasted strangely with his perception of landscape, which reminded Aubert of Klinger’s and Böcklin’s ideal art. At this juncture it may be appropriate to refer to an article by Georg Brandes, in which he discusses the relationship between reality and temperament – naturalism and idealism – in Émile Zola’s work. It was printed in 1887, and, given its topicality, we are justified in assuming that Aubert would have read it with enormous interest. Aubert had already referred to Zola’s latest book *L’Oeuvre* (printed in April 1886) when writing about Munch’s *The Sick Girl* in the course of his 1886 review of the Autumn Exhibition. In his opinion the painting, which was originally called *Study*, was an «abortion», an unfinished painting, just like the picture that is the subject of Zola’s novel. Brandes had asked a question, one that was highly relevant for Aubert, too:

Is a piece of nature that has been transformed by temperament still nature, I mean nature for others? When does transformed nature cease to be nature?

When I paint a naked male figure, I paint nature. If I represent mountain scenery I paint nature. When I (as does Böcklin) paint the punished giant Prometheus reclining high up in the mist that stretches across the mountain peaks, is this nature or not? When I paint a skeleton, I paint nature. When I (as does Max Klinger) paint Death relieving himself early one morning in a lush summer landscape, has nature been killed by temperament?

One sees how easily nature becomes fantasy. These were relevant questions in the circles in which Munch moved, even before his stays in France and Germany. Klinger’s etchings and his *Death Peeing* formed part of Munch’s surroundings during his youth in Kristiania. Moreover the above quotation shows that Brandes was familiar with Klinger’s painting of the peeing skeleton. We do not know whether he had seen it in Berlin, or whether he first saw it when he came to Kristiania in 1886, invited to the Liberal Students’ Union. At any rate he obviously found that this unconventional painting made an interesting and topical contribution to the discussion of the relationship between Naturalism and ideal art, the art of fantasy. We remember Krohg drawing attention to this question in his lecture of 1886, when he wondered about the fate of the imagination as he watched Naturalism gain ideological ground. The closest he came to an answer was to say that Max Klinger’s art (and that of Böcklin) were both Impressionistic — «more filled with the disquiet of our day than anyone else» and also «singularly touched by the times, and express the feeling better than anyone else.»

As is presumably now evident, Thiis was seriously mistaken when he maintained that Munch’s *Frieze of Life* could in no way be connected with German Gedankenmalerei, basing his view on the fact that the embryonic stage of the cycle predated Munch’s 1892 visit to Berlin. For we have seen that Munch had ample opportunity in his youth to study Klinger’s art. But did Klinger influence Munch’s early development – or was it only after Munch renewed his acquaintance with Klinger’s art in Berlin that we can trace any influence, particularly after he took up printmaking? Here it is important to distinguish between form and content. Let us consider two well-known paintings by Munch: *Puberty* and *The Day After* (both in the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design – The National Gallery, Oslo). According to the literature on Munch, both these works were painted before 1890, when they...
were destroyed in a fire. The earliest versions known to us today are repeats made by Munch in the mid 1890s.48 In *The Day After*, Munch takes up a subject very close to Klinger: the young woman who had slept with someone while drunk during the night’s merrymaking and wakes to find herself abandoned. In *Puberty* (page 160), the composition seems to derive directly from Klinger’s etching *Erwachen* (Awakening) (Fig. 7) in the series *Eine Liebe* (A Love) (1887). But the content has been altered, to a young girl’s sexual awakening. The subject is no longer a woman left pregnant and on her own. However, though Munch was far more influenced by Klinger than has been acknowledged in the past, it is important to stress that he evolved his own style in the 1890s, modelled on Christian Krohg on the one hand and contemporary French painting on the other. The content, the ideas behind his imagery, must also be seen in historical context, and here Max Klinger assumes a vital and long ignored role. In particular his series *Vom Tode Erster Teil* (On Death, Part I) (1889) would appear to have provided fertile soil for the growth of new imagery in Munch’s art during the 1890s. I have in mind both his use of Symbolist borders to concentrate and elaborate his pictorial content, and also certain of his ideas for pictures. The best-known example of the latter is the striking similarity between Klinger’s *Nacht* (Night) (1889) (Fig. 8) and Munch’s *Melancholy*, both print and painting (first version 1891) (Fig. 9). In fact

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Fig. 9 Edvard Munch, *Melancholy*, 1891, Bergen Art Museum, Norway, The Rasmus Meyer Collection. Photo: Werner Zellien © Munch Museum / Munch-Ellingsen Group / BONO 2007

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when the painting was shown at the Autumn Exhibition of 1891 its title was *Evening*, an even closer parallel to Klinger’s *Night*.

As we have witnessed, a distinct unwillingness to see a connection between Munch’s art and the imagery of Max Klinger has prevailed in Norwegian art history. Several foreign art historians have, though, drawn attention to the influence Klinger obviously had on Munch’s development in the 1890s. My intention in this article has been to demonstrate that Munch was familiar with Klinger’s art from his student days, and that this alien imagery was a major impetus to his evolution already in the 1880s.

**English translation: Joan Fuglesang.**

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**NOTES**


5. In his (unpublished) M.A. thesis, Christian Kroghs sosiale tendenskunst, Oslo 1895 note 25, p. 125, Oscar Thue (1928–1994) makes rather vague reference to Klinger exhibitions in Kristiania during the 1880s. As far as I can see, this is the only place Klinger exhibitions in Kristiania are mentioned at all. In his book Christian Krogh, published posthumously in 1996, Thue refers to my research, for which see note 1.


7. The National Gallery of Norway’s old accession records are incomplete, and some information concerning this purchase is lacking. The question of provenance was clarified in my work for my study «Max Klinger und Norwegen», see note 1. The 53 etchings came in two batches in 1881, and both of these included sheets with handwritten dedications by Max Klinger to Christian Krogh. This shows they must derive from Krog’s collection.


9. The book appeared in the bookshops on the very day Hans Jæger was released from prison after serving his sentence for immorality resulting from the publication of his novel *Fra Kristiania-bønneren* (1885). As is obvious, this had been carefully planned, and Krogh’s book was immediately sequestered.

10. Bjørnson’s son Bjørn Bjørnson, later well-known as a theatre director, is one of the principal characters in the book, under the pseudonym «der løsere». He is unflatteringly depicted as a conceited youngster, for ever in love, not least with himself. In his memoirs, *Bare ungrad*, Oslo 1934, which also cover the years he spent in Berlin at the age of 17–18, Bjørnson mentions that Krogh wrote a little book about this rather ignorable episode in his life, but adds that he himself had not read it.


12. Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo: 211 x 326 cm.


16. Klinger is not mentioned by Henning Alsvik, Reidar Revold and Leif Østby in Norges kildedokumenter i det niitte og tiende århundre 1–2, Oslo 1951–53, nor in Norges kunsthistorie, 1–7, Oslo 1981–83. In his contribution to Norsk kunsthistorie, Oslo 1927, Thiis mentions him in passing in connection with Krogh and Diriks. In 1993 Norges malerkunst was published in two volumes, a revised edition of the chapters devoted to painting in Norges kunsthistorie as cited above. A few references to Klinger have been inserted, but there is no discussion of his significance, in relation to Munch, for instance.

17. Jens Thiis, *Edvard Munch og hans samtid*, Oslo 1933. Munch is said to have called the book Thiis’ «autobiography about me».


21. Østby’s study; see note 22, was first presented as a history thesis at the University of Oslo in the spring of 1933 (Ms.4460, U.H.S. University of Oslo Library). It was published the following year, and there are only a
few differences between the thesis and the book. The most important is
that all references to literature and sources (which were added to the
thesis by hand) were omitted from the book. Østby graduated in the
year this biography of Munch was published. This was one of his
examiners, and in his book he referred to this thesis, which he had
«recently» read, p. 153. He felt it deserved a broader audience, and it
was indeed published the following year.

Leif Østby, Fra naturalisme til nyromantikk, Oslo 1934 (Kunst og Kultur

Whereas Norwegian scholars fail to see the link, J. Kirk T. Varnedoe
writes as follows about these borders of Munch’s: «…we can see that
these are important not only as formal elaborations, but also, and in fact
primarily, as devices for increasing the meaning of the plates; they tell a
second story, extending the narrative in time or reinforcing the emotion.
When Munch adopted this practice of Klinger’s in such prints as
«Madonna», he was not simply borrowing a form, but taking over a
method of augmenting the impact, spiritual and visual, of the image.»


The quoted letter is not dated, but it was sent from the Hotel Hippod-
trom, Hardenburgerstrasse, Charlottenburg, Berlin. Munch asked to be
told about the Gauguin paintings, recently exhibited in Copenhagen.
They were shown at «Den frie Udstilling», which opened on 25 March
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Langaard 1960, p. 258.

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Langaard 1960, p. 258.

Letter to Dr. Ragnar Hoppe, dated Oslo February 1929, here quoted from
Langaard 1960, p. 269 and note 72, p. 426.

103. Though she mentions Klinger a few times, she does not mention
Böcklin or Thoma.

Ibid. p. 103; Langaard 1960, p. 270.

Letter to Dr. Ragnar Hoppe, dated Oslo February 1929, here quoted from
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Ibid. p. 103; Langaard 1960, p. 270.

Arne Eggum, Edvard Munch. Paintings, Sketches and Studies, London
1984, p. 96.

Arne Eggum, Edvard Munch. Paintings, Sketches and Studies, London
1984, p. 96.

Ibid. pp. 97–98.

Ibid. p. 98.

To speak of the «publication» of Klinger’s work is somewhat misleading
in this context. The etchings were printed in a limited edition, see Hans
W. Singer, Max Klingeres Radierungen, Stiche und Steindrucke, Berlin
1984, p. 16 (the year 1886) and 19 (1890). There is some doubt as to
which paintings were destroyed in the fire at the Kristiania Fugleyder-
magasin in January 1890. Under the heading 1886 Langaard and Revold
(p. 16) claim that the first versions of The Day After and Puberty were
printed that year, and that both were destroyed. But it is unlikely that
both were painted in the same year as The Sick Child, which was
shown at that year’s Autumn Exhibition. In connection with the fire of
1890 (p. 19), five pictures are named. They include The Day After but
not Puberty. Whether Puberty went up in flames is still uncertain.

See Johan Langaard and Reidar Revold, Edvard Munch fra år til år, Oslo
1961, p. 16 (the year 1886) and 19 (1890). There is some doubt as to
which paintings were destroyed in the fire at the Kristiania Fugleyder-
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See Varnedoe 1977, pp. xvi–xx; Gösta Svenaeus, Idé och inbåll i
Edvard Munchs konst, Oslo 1953; idem, Das Universum der Melancho-
lie, Lund 1968. Both authors point out that Munch was influenced by
Klinger, but date this influence to after Munch’s arrival in Berlin in
1892.