Expanding Art History’s Border: Steffen Kverneland’s Munch

Clarence Burton Sheffield, Jr

Chip Sheffield is a Professor of Art History in the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences, as well as a Faculty Affiliate, School of Individualized Study, at Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY; he held the inaugural Eugene H. Fram Chair in Applied Critical Thinking (2012–2015). His research and scholarship focus primarily on Scandinavian Modernism, including art, architecture and design.
cbsfaa@rit.edu

ABSTRACT
This article provides a critical analysis and interpretation of Steffen Kverneland’s comic Munch (2013). The book offers new, important insights and an expanded context for Munch’s life and work. Kverneland regards Munch’s penchant for wit, irony and caricature as a kind of proto-comics. Kverneland’s own presence in the narrative, along with Lars Fiske, helps to problematize a single, authoritative voice in the comic. It also compels the reader to reflect on the challenges and limits of art historical interpretation. Above all, Munch demonstrates the unique power of comics to express and materialize history and to engage the reader’s active participation.

Keywords
Edvard Munch, Steffen Kverneland, Lars Fiske, comics, biography

SAMMENDRAG

Nøkkelord
Edvard Munch, Steffen Kverneland, Lars Fiske, tegneserier, biografi
There is no shortage of traditional biographies of the famed Norwegian artist Edvard Munch. A comic book devoted to him, however, creates a new possibility that is unavailable to the traditional art historical biography. In 2013, Steffen Kvernland published *Munch*, a graphic narrative based primarily on proper quotes by Munch himself. It combines irony, humor, zaniness, and irreverence along with deep insight into its complex subject. Awarded the prestigious Brage prize for the best new work of Norwegian nonfiction, it demonstrates the power of comics to reframe and synthesize a variety of different sources, styles and modes, to reject a standard linear narrative, as well as to critique the process of art historiography itself. Kvernland acknowledges several such standard sources in a list of key works and primary references in his conclusion. Yet, he deliberately aims to avoid their pitfalls and clichés. *Munch*, the comic, warrants serious critical attention in my opinion. It provides fresh, new insights by examining the artist’s satirical drawings as a kind of proto-comics. It emphasizes his penchant for wit, irony and caricature, and also argues that this was a common feature of many of his contemporaries. In addition, it argues that the word/image opposition played a fundamental role for Munch. Kvernland’s *Munch* forces the reader/viewer to hopscotch back and forth within its pages, acknowledging the blurred line between objective fact and subjective feeling/emotion. It demonstrates an expanded border for art history by placing the artist within a new, non-traditional narrative, and constructing an expanded context for his life and work, including contemporary developments. By including himself in the narrative, Kvernland compels the reader to reflect on the challenges and limits of art historical interpretation, and the fact that a biographer always inevitably shapes the biography.

**ORIGINS AND WORKING PROCESS**

Kvernland decides to embark on the project during a visit to the Munch Museum at Tøyen in Oslo on November 18, 2005. Accompanied by his friend, fellow artist and frequent collaborator, Lars Fiske, they discuss the exhibition they have just seen, while seated at the museum’s outdoor café (ill. 1).

1. An earlier version of this paper was delivered in April 2016 at the 106th annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies in New Orleans, LA for a special session, “Nordic Comics: Formal and Narrative Explorations,” organized by Øystein Sjåstad. I am very grateful to him for his perceptive comments and encouragement, as well as the questions from the moderator, Margareta Wallin. I am grateful to my fellow panelists and the audience for their helpful remarks, and especially the constructive feedback of the two blind peer-reviewers.

2. For more on the exceptional possibilities of graphic storytelling to convey visual narrative, see Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1996).
Sparked by a mutual disgust at the naïveté of the general public which has flocked to the museum, and their blind acceptance of a romantic, overly dramatic Munch myth, which all too often has cherry-picked from original sources, as well as a monolithic, master narrative, Kverneland exclaims “What if I were to create a Munch comic which was a collage of his actual words.” In this Eureka moment, Kverneland realizes that Edvard Munch is the “perfect subject for a comic” (ills. 2 and 3).

3. Steffen Kverneland, Munch (Oslo: No Comprendo Press, 2013), 7. All translations are mine and are based on the 2013 Norwegian edition. «Hvis eg sko lagt ein Munch-serie sko manuset vært ein collage av reine sitater!»
4. Ibid., 8. «Munch e’ ein perfekte tegneseriefigur!»
They discuss various possibilities, including earlier scholarship and speculate how long this proposed book might take. Kverneland suggests that it will only require a year at most, while Fiske responds that he is certain that it will take much longer. An image of an old man, presumably, Kverneland seated at a desk and sketching, then follows in the next panel with the ironic caption “seven years later” (ill. 4). This sets the tone for what is to follow – a comic book interspersed with proper quotes by Edvard Munch, which combines satire and deep insight. Reminiscent of the gonzo journalism of the American writer Hunter S. Thompson, especially in terms of their frequent intoxication and passionate enthusiasm, it resists truism and mere hagiography. Kverneland and Fiske appear randomly throughout as protagonists, fueled by cigarettes and booze, in a kind of meta-narrative romp through the Munch oeuvre, its origins, as well as more recent events and controversies regarding
it. While Kverneland receives sole credit as the author on the title page, Fiske’s collaborative role is no less significant. The irreverent, offbeat pairing of Kverneland and Fiske recalls other classic slapstick duos (e.g. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Laurel and Hardy, Groucho and Harpo, Abbott and Costello, Lucy and Desi, Penn and Teller, Salt and Pepper, etc.) from popular culture.\footnote{On zaniness as an aesthetic category and the significance of such pairs see Sianne Ngai, \textit{Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).}
At the outset, Kverneland posits a set of “dogma-style rules” for the project. He acknowledges that this will be his own “subjective account of Munch, which places most weight on a visual interpretation to determine what he chooses to include and exclude.” Kverneland likens it to a “monumental jigsaw puzzle” (et monumentalt puslespillarbeid) that eschews a strict, linear chronology. Instead, the narrative is non-linear, randomly

6. Dogma refers to contemporary Danish cinema and the manifesto written in 1995 by its key members Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg.
7. Kverneland, Munch, 10. “Mitt bidrag blir min subjektive versjon av Munch, og det ligge mest i den visuelle tolknings og utvalget av ka som ska’ med eller ikkje.”
assembled “hulter te bulte” (p. 9), a wacky kaleidoscope that is interspersed with speech bubbles containing Munch’s most salient remarks, along with hypothetical reconstructions of many of his most canonical works. First and foremost, it aims to dispel and recast many of the myths, anecdotes and clichés regarding Munch: the excessive drinking, years of exile, his strong sex appeal and many purported romantic relationships, his ties to the Kristiania bohème, especially Hans Jæger, his conflict with his father, his family tragedies, the scandalous success, artistic rivalries, relationships to his models, as well as the lofty ambitions of his monumental frieze of life. While Kverneland recognizes the strong literary quality of Munch’s texts, he also aims to avoid burdening the reader/viewer with excessive scholarly footnotes and academic references. A primary motivation, Kverneland contends, is to allow Munch’s words to have a life of their own.

Munch is clearly an obsession. Kverneland’s mastery of the artist’s corpus, state of research, and historiography is impressive. He builds upon the work of previous scholars such as Pola Gauguin, Rolf Stenersen, Jens Thiis, Arne Eggum, Gerd Woll, Poul Erik Tøjner, Bodil Stenseth and Hans-Martin Frydenberg-Flaaten, who are duly acknowledged. Kver-
neland is also respected and admired by several renowned Munch authorities. Gerd Woll, for instance, makes an appearance (in the Norwegian edition), and Arne Eggum’s work is frequently cited. Rolf Stenersen’s biography serves as a kind of touchstone. Almost every contemporary Norwegian artist has faced the dilemma of coming to terms with Edvard Munch and how to live and work in his shadow. Kverneland is not alone, in other words. At times, Munch, the comic, is as much an autobiography, and a personal confession of his complex relationship to the famed artist. For example, in one panel Kverneland describes his own brother Tore’s death in 2000, its impact on his artistic process, and his complex, evolving appreciation for Munch (ill. 5). The titles and dates of two earlier comics by Kverneland that featured his brother along with two small illustrations are included. Kverneland remarks that

Every time that I begin to draw the young Munch I “see” my brother Tore. In fact, they don’t look alike, except in my rough sketch. There seems to be something in common in their noses and the way they comb their hair.9

Such poignant personal connections and his infectious enthusiasm for Edvard Munch recur throughout the book. They lend it an openness, playfulness and a non-dogmatic spark which stands in sharp contrast to more traditional art historical narratives. The inclusion of previous work within this new book also underscores his highly self-reflective approach. This is not the first occasion that Kverneland has published a comic that included Munch. This book builds and expands upon the comics which Kverneland and Fiske first published in Kanon 1-5 (2006–2012), where Munch had appeared. Munch also shares many structural similarities with their other collaborative artist biographies, Olaf G. (2004), devoted to the Norwegian illustrator, Olaf Gulbransson, and Hr. Merz (2014), on the avant-garde German artist Kurt Schwitters.10

In a brief afterword, art historian and curator Gerd Woll remarks, perhaps, a bit too light-heartedly that “to give a serious analysis of Kverneland’s Munch cartoon series is impossible.”11 Her own descriptions of his imagery and creative process, however, are deeply perceptive and very illuminating. While she seems to admire Kverneland and to recognize his achievement, she is reluctant to consider it to be rigorous art history. A close critical analysis of Munch is warranted, I contend and it can prove to be very meaningful.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE COMIC

Most notably, the comic book format allows Kverneland to compress past and present, as well as to collapse places, persons and events. He effectively uses the graphic frame to organize the story elements into meaning and narrative, as well as to posit transitions between characters, places, and temporal events. Occasionally, a meta-narrative, abrupt point of view, or detail and jump are used. This technique of pictorial disjunction, or a frequent shift in the stylistic and narrative registers recalls film and video editing. In several places, an asterisk is employed to refer to earlier pages and previous incidents. When followed, this forces the reader to reverse the narrative direction. Arrows and numbers are also used to identify people and places, as well as for amplifications and ancillary details. Sometimes an iconic symbol is used. A diagram with arrows in between two cities on a European map represents a letter being sent, and in another drawing a series of handshakes placed beside the names of major European cities refers to financial agreements with respective art dealers. An oil lamp within a drawing symbolizes a sudden creative spark, a trigger, or source of inspiration.

Kverneland also uses color in order to differentiate distinct historical periods, and to “flash back” to an earlier time period. For example, an aged Munch is juxtaposed with and comments upon his earlier life and work in several places. These realistic portraits are rendered in a shade of gray. The format of the pages also plays an important role. Most are divided into four panels. In some instances, a page is split into two panels, and there are a few that consists of a single panel. Panels are also occasionally split and subdivided in order to focus on specific details (e.g. Sick Child, p. 155). In the earliest scenes from Munch’s life, a dark mustard-brown ground that resembles aged cardboard is used, whereas a bold, red tint and full color on bright paper is employed for the later scenes of the bohemians in Christiania and Berlin. The full pages featuring Kverneland and Fiske are typically drawn very loosely in black ink on a spacious white ground. Some of these also include photographs of them within the composition. Occasionally, Munch refers to himself in the third person. In one image, an elderly Jens Thiis stands next to Munch’s Portrait of Hans Jæger with a thought bubble in which the elderly art historian and museum director remarks “It is Munch’s best portrait.”12 The aged Thiis stands in sharp contrast to the images of him in his youth in Berlin. Sometimes, other paintings appear like small postage stamps in the background of a given panel. In addition to photographs, sometimes, other ephemera are used as a part of the jigsaw puzzle composition. For example, the Norwegian One Thousand Kroner banknote which features Munch is included in one panel.

CAMARADERIE AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN KVERNELAND AND FISKE

One of the most appealing and entertaining aspects of the comic is the camaraderie between Kverneland and Fiske. They embark on their irreverent jaunts, almost always with cigarettes and flasks in hand, in a pilgrimage to the major Munch sites (Åsgårdstrand in Vestfold, Oslo, Paris, and Berlin). Photographs and drawings, in a rich variety of styles,
document their journey and stylistically disrupt the narrative. Architecture and urban space play a vital role and serve to emphasize this strong sense of place. Kverneland and Fiske retrace and revisit many of the same locales and places where Munch had been. They pose on the steep hillside at Ekeberg, along the eastern shore of the Oslofjord, where *The Scream* allegedly was inspired. At Åsgardstrand, they visit Munch’s small cottage, stroll along the rocky beach and re-enact the pose of *Girls on the Pier*. In Oslo, at Vår Frelsers Gravlund, they pay their respects at the artist’s grave, or they sit in their own favorite winebar. Furthermore, Kverneland and Fiske also sometimes appear within smaller bubbles in certain key pages providing additional commentary. Their constant banter and repartee is conducted in Kverneland’s westcoast (Haugesund) dialect. He recounts his fascination with various motifs, the occasional additions, changes, and creative modifications, as well as the key sources.

**MUNCH’S BROADER ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL MILIEU**

Kverneland makes the most of the motley cast of characters: August Strindberg, Christian Skredsvig, Christian Krohg, Ludvig Karsten, Hans Jæger, Ludvig Ravensberg, Jens Thiis, Sigbjørn Obstfelder, Jappe Nilsen, Gustav Vigeland, Dagny Juel and Stanislaw Przybysewski, Gunnar Heiberg, Henrik Ibsen and Olaf Gulbransson play important roles. Strindberg plays such a prominent role, in fact, that he nearly eclipses Munch. There are almost as many images of Strindberg, for example, and their friendship and rivalry is a thread that runs throughout the book. In some respects, the Munch–Strindberg rivalry parallels the relationship between Kverneland and Fiske. Even when Strindberg isn’t directly portrayed, he is often mentioned by Munch or someone else. Kverneland has consulted the major Strindberg biographies as well, widening his research beyond Munch to encompass his broader artistic and cultural milieu. He discusses Strindberg’s misogyny, paranoia, and interest in the occult and supernatural. Strindberg’s innovative artistic process, which emphasized chance, is also mentioned, and several of his paintings are reproduced. Kverneland’s drawings of Strindberg emphasize his bulging eyes, furrowed brow and frenetic facial expression. This relationship is also an occasion for humor such as when Strindberg claims to be “the greatest living Nordic painter,” and Munch responds, without hesitation, “then I’m its greatest living poet.” Even in Munch’s later years, Strindberg continues to haunt him. Munch also doesn’t shy away from weighing in on his artistic contemporaries and bitter rivals such as Gustav Vigeland.

13. This act of retracing is examined by Rikke Platz Cortsen in «Kverneland og Fiske på sporet: Re-tracing som værktegn for kunstnerbiografien i tegneserier» in this issue of *Kunst og Kultur*.

This article is downloaded from www.idunn.no. © 2017 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC-BY-NC 4.0 License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).
SELF-REFLEXIVITY AND THE LIMITS OF TRADITIONAL ART HISTORY

Kverneland’s *Munch* is often self-reflexive and ironically self-aware. In other words, it is a comic about comics, alert to the process of making comics, and other famous comics artists. Munch’s highly experimental approach to his diaries, which combined image and text, is characterized as a form of “proto-comics,” as well as a sort of artistic precursor of the famed American comics artist and musician Robert Crumb. In recounting the controversial recent thefts from the Munch Museum and National Gallery in Oslo, Kverneland directly references a cartoon by Inge Gredum that appeared in *Aftenposten*, July 6, 1994 (ill. 6). It showed Knut Berg, then director of Norway’s National Gallery holding a newspaper with the ironic caption “Record number of visitors to the National Gallery. 32,000 in June! Actually, there were a few more who used the main entrance!” Kverneland’s rendering of the burglar is almost identical to the figure in the newspaper (ill. 7). Kverneland’s self-reflexivity is further amplified by the appearance of Olaf Gulbransson, the famed Norwegian illustrator whose satirical illustrations for *Simplicissimus* in Munich made him a major European celebrity. Gulbransson was also the subject of an earlier comic book collaboration by Kverneland and Fiske in 2004. Gulbransson appears here for the

*Ill. 6*


funeral of Christian Krohg in 1925 in Oslo. Kverneland acknowledges Gulbransson as the source for this anecdote. According to Gulbransson, he and Ludvig Karsten met in a favorite bar beforehand, where Munch unexpectedly joined them. They became so absorbed in drink and personal recollection that they lost track of time and failed to make it to Krohg’s funeral. Upon realizing this, they remark that it is too late and that his body has already been cremated.

While Kverneland’s primary focus is Munch, he also doesn’t shy away from criticizing other recent historical narratives that have engaged in speculative “hearsay” and “sensational conjecture.” The 2004 biography of the Norwegian Royal family by Tor Bomann-Larsen is cited as one such example.

Kverneland draws Munch and the other figures in an angular, faceted style, that emphasizes Munch’s striking facial features, especially his dark, blue-gray eyes, his fine, straight nose, and slightly pointed chin. The classic photographs of Munch by Anders B. Wilse, Ragnvald Væring, and Munch himself appear to have been an important source for Kverneland. Furthermore, several of the precepts which grounded Munch’s personal artistic philosophy are repeated several times (e.g. “I paint not what I see, but what I saw”), which helps to underscore their importance.

Kverneland especially aims to problematize the scholarship about the origins of canonical paintings, such as *The Scream*. He argues that it is absurd and overly reductive to emphasize a single locale, impulse, or influence for any one motif such as the hillside at Ekeberg southeast of Oslo (*pace* Arne Eggum’s theory). In other words, Kverneland argues that Munch absorbed many different sources, including his own imagery, as well as a wide range of literary impulses, and that Munch was constantly experimenting. He also examines some of the questionable sources and speculative conjectures in Munch scholarship (e.g. the trustworthiness of Rolf Stenersen’s account of the Karsten incident), in addition to the recent thefts of canonical works (from Munch Museum in 2004 and National Gallery in 1994). Furthermore, Kverneland includes new events, such as the recent record-setting auction price for Petter Olsen’s version of *The Scream* set at Sotheby’s in New York City in 2010, as well as the surprise discovery of a new work in 2005. The recent conjecture that Munch’s blood-red sky might be based on the volcanic eruption of Krakatoa in Indonesia is discussed, as well as a poem by Vilhelm Krag as another feasible alternative source for the image.
Sex is another recurring theme also used for humor. In an early panel, Munch’s mysterious, alluring power over women is noted (ill. 8). Munch is subsequently shown in a series of compromising horizontal positions in support of this. Later Fiske questions Kverneland about the enormous lighthouse (fyrtårnet), and Kverneland acknowledges that his drawing of Munch’s erection might be “a slight exaggeration”18 (ill. 9).

While this conversation occurs on p. 95, the image in question appears in a preceding sequence which is cited on p. 57. While in Berlin and sharing a room, Munch and Vigeland are said to share the same prostitutes. There are many other such perceptive and amusing details. For example, in one panel Munch’s St. Bernard dog “Bamse” competes with a nude model for his attention. The dog eventually devours a platter of food that was resting on the table beside his easel but which Munch has ignored due to his absorption in his work.

Kverneland’s Munch provides many new insights. He convincingly proposes that Munch’s many satirical drawings are a kind of proto-comics. Kverneland’s approach therefore succeeds where words alone might fail, since comics integrates and incorporates multiple modes, styles, signs and symbols. Scott McCloud, the noted historian, theorist, artist and author of the groundbreaking Understanding Comics has underscored this aspect. He argues

Comics is a great balancing act. An art as subtractive as it is additive. But nowhere is the balance between the visible and the invisible more conspicuous than in pictures and words.19

18. Kverneland, Munch, 95. «Ja, det e’ basert på ein etsning fra 1913, Katten. Men med ett lite tillegg: eg tenkte ung mann + naken dama = ereksjon.»
Likewise, Hillary L. Chute has cogently argued for the unique ability of comics “to traffic in expressing history.”20 Her penetrating analysis examines the special relationship between comics, visual witnessing, documentary and depictions of war and trauma. According to her

One reason comics can address itself powerfully to historical narrative is because of its ability to use the space of the page to interlace or overlay different temporalities, to place pressure on linearity and conventional notions of sequence, causality, and progression.21

In short, Munch, the comic, creates many new possibilities that are unavailable to the traditional art historical biography with its strict linear narrative and commitment to a single, authoritative voice. By synthesizing and colliding several different stylistic and temporal registers, engaging the reader’s active participation, as well as incorporating the narrator’s own perspective, it suggests a possible expanded border for art history.

Another recent example of such an expanded approach is the poignant psycho-biography of the Norwegian painter Lars Hertervig, Melancholia I and II (1995–96), by the Norwegian writer Jon Fosse.22 While Munch is a work of nonfiction, Fosse uses fiction to explore and probe the artist’s troubled psychic space, combining historical facts with speculative subjective details. Repetition and stasis, along with an extended interior dialogue, play a key role in Fosse’s narrative which also combines several different temporal registers. Likewise, Ketil Bjørnstad’s fictionalized biography of Munch, while not strictly a work of art history, also suggests a similar expanded approach.23 Bjørnstad has also set Munch’s words to music in a collaborative recording with the Norwegian vocalist Kari Bremnes, and he has written extensively about other members of Munch’s bohemian circle.24

It is not surprising that Munch’s sketches have a comics-like aspect, especially given his voracious reading habits.25 He too was often the subject of satirical imagery in the Norwegian popular press during his lifetime. Munch would have been aware of such contemporary cartoonists as Ragnvald Blix in Tyrihans, Olaf Krohn in Vikingen, Tyrihans, and Humoristen, in addition to Olaf Gulbransson and Theodor Kittelsen. In fact, there were an exceptionally large number of Norwegian comic and satirical publications in the previous century as Norwegian literary critic Eirik Vassenden has recently noted.26 Such ephemeral works played a key role in shaping Scandinavian modernism he argues, and they warrant further critical study.

21. Ibid., 235.
25. For Munch’s extensive personal library see Olav Myre, Edvard Munch og hans boksamling (Oslo: N.W. Damm, 1946).
CONCLUSION: “THE PERFECT SUBJECT FOR A COMIC!”

Munch’s humorous and playful side has rarely been discussed. Kverneland thereby provides an important counter-narrative to the established Munch clichés and stereotypes (e.g. the misanthropist, misogynist, melancholic, alcoholic, and eccentric genius). He reminds us that Munch was a real, living, human being, possessed of a remarkable humor, irony and wit, as well as an indefatigable work ethic. A recurring image in *Munch* is the artist feverishly painting at his easel or sketching intently (ills. 10 and 11). Munch’s sketchbooks amply demonstrate his tendency toward caricature, especially in the depictions of his enemies (e.g. Gunnar Heiberg, Henrik Lund, and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson).²⁷

Occasionally, Munch also turned this upon himself in a very self-deprecating manner. Perhaps, the best instance of this is his satirical drawing of Dr. Jacobsen in Copenhagen “applying electricity to the head of the famed artist Munch and using masculine/positive and feminine/negative forces to heal his sick brain.” Munch also recognized and praised the same traits in his artistic precursors such as Daumier and Goya, as well as the poet Charles Baudelaire. By incorporating himself into the narrative, and retracing many of Munch’s footsteps, Kverneland acknowledges his own positionality and the inevitable limits of historical objectivity. Ironically, his eyewitness experiences and firsthand evidence is never used to support an authoritative position or a final, definitive interpretation.

While Kverneland is not the first to satirize Munch, his achievement is noteworthy and exceptional. He provides a subtle and extremely robust context for Munch’s life and work, signaling an expanded art historical border. Because he is an artist, Kverneland is also more alert to Munch’s innovative working processes such as the scraping and spray technique, the variety of mediums he employed, Munch’s reworking and reuse of earlier motives in a serial format, as well as the playful, ephemeral and ludic aspects. Furthermore, as a fellow artist Kverneland clearly respects and admires Munch’s deep commitment to his art. This does not preclude Kverneland, however, from creating a tremendously entertaining, complex and important contribution to Nordic comics, and to current Munch scholarship.

III. 11


Occasionally, Munch also turned this upon himself in a very self-deprecating manner. Perhaps, the best instance of this is his satirical drawing of Dr. Jacobsen in Copenhagen “applying electricity to the head of the famed artist Munch and using masculine/positive and feminine/negative forces to heal his sick brain.” Munch also recognized and praised the same traits in his artistic precursors such as Daumier and Goya, as well as the poet Charles Baudelaire. By incorporating himself into the narrative, and retracing many of Munch’s footsteps, Kverneland acknowledges his own positionality and the inevitable limits of historical objectivity. Ironically, his eyewitness experiences and firsthand evidence is never used to support an authoritative position or a final, definitive interpretation.

While Kverneland is not the first to satirize Munch, his achievement is noteworthy and exceptional. He provides a subtle and extremely robust context for Munch’s life and work, signaling an expanded art historical border. Because he is an artist, Kverneland is also more alert to Munch’s innovative working processes such as the scraping and spray technique, the variety of mediums he employed, Munch’s reworking and reuse of earlier motives in a serial format, as well as the playful, ephemeral and ludic aspects. Furthermore, as a fellow artist Kverneland clearly respects and admires Munch’s deep commitment to his art. This does not preclude Kverneland, however, from creating a tremendously entertaining, complex and important contribution to Nordic comics, and to current Munch scholarship.

III. 11

as well. It demonstrates the fine line between fame and satire, and that truly great works of art have often incited caricature and parody in the popular press. Munch, the comic, underscores the power of drawing to express and materialize history with great felicity and verve, while thereby suggesting an expanded border for art history.