



ARTS & CULTURE

Norwegian Museum Solves the Mystery of 'The Scream'

February 28, 2021

Norway's National Museum says a sentence written on Edvard Munch's 1893 painting "The Scream" was put there by the Norwegian painter himself.

The famous painting shows a **figure** holding its head in its hands with its mouth wide open. The art work has become an internationally recognized **symbol** for the expression of human fear and concern.

The sentence written on the painting says, "can only have been painted by a **madman**." It was written with a pencil in the top left-hand area of the painting.

The painting is being prepared to be shown at the new National Museum of Norway, which will open in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, in 2022. The painting has been the subject of a lot of careful research.

In a recent statement, Mai Britt Guleng, head of the National Museum, said, "The writing is without a doubt Munch's own." Guleng added the writing was compared to the painter's writing in letters. "The handwriting itself, as well as events that happened in 1895, when Munch showed the painting in Norway for the first time, all point in the same direction," Guleng explained.

The writing was added after Munch had completed the painting. But for years it has been a mystery, the museum said in a statement.

Guleng said the writing was likely done "in 1895, when Munch exhibited the painting for the first time." Exhibit means to make something, such as a painting or photograph, available for people to see.

At the time of its first showing, the painting caused many people to wonder about Munch's mental state. During a discussion night when the artist was present, a young medical student questioned Munch's mental health and claimed his work proved he was not sound.

"It is likely that Munch added the **inscription** in 1895, or shortly after, in **response** to the judgment on his work," the statement read.

Munch was hurt by the accusations. He wrote about them many times in his letters. Both Munch's father and sister suffered from mental issues.

Munch was put into a hospital after a nervous breakdown in 1908. A nervous breakdown is an inability to live normally in daily life because of extremely strong feelings of worry or tension.

The National Gallery was temporarily closed in 2019 to secure a safe moving process to the new National Museum. The museum will show 400,000 objects, from ancient times to the present day. It will have paintings, statues, drawings and many other art objects.

I'm John Russell.

John Russell adapted this story from a report by the Associated Press. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.

Words in This Story

figure – *n.* a person or animal that can be seen only as a shape or outline

madman – *n.* a man who has severe mental illness : an insane man

inscription – *n.* words that are written on or cut into a surface

response – *n.* something that is said or written as an answer to someone's comments, opinions or statements

