

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES

MAJOR KANDINSKY PAINTING AND MUNCH PRINT SERIES

WASHINGTON, D. C. September 27, 1978. Improvisation No. 31 (Sea Battle), a major work by Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and five rare impressions by Edvard Munch (1863-1944) of his woodcut Two Women on the Shore have been acquired by the National Gallery of Art, it was announced today by J. Carter Brown, Director of the Gallery. These works are on view in the newly installed upper level galleries of the East Building devoted to aspects of twentieth-century art.

The Kandinsky painting is the first to enter the Gallery's collection by this artist, widely regarded as a crucial figure in the history of twentieth-century art. It was acquired through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

The Munch prints of Two Women on the Shore, acquired through the Rosenwald Print Purchase Fund and the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, will also be included in the National Gallery's special exhibition Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images, on view November 11 through February 19, 1979, the most comprehensive exhibition by this turn-of-the-century Norwegian expressionist ever held in the United States. This acquisition brings to the National Gallery's graphics collection a crucial dimension of Munch's art, which up until now has been possessed only by the Munch Museum in Oslo.

Improvisation No. 31 (Sea Battle) was regarded by Kandinsky as one of his most important works. He sent it to the Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon at

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Galerie der Sturm, Berlin in 1913, the major exhibition of modern German art at that time. Dated 1913, it is one of three extant that Kandinsky painted on the theme of battle. One of the largest of his Improvisations (55" x 47 3/4"), the painting is a spontaneous combination of formal invention and abstraction using the fluid washes of Kandinsky's luminous watercolor technique and more crisply drawn linear elements. Images are enclosed in a free-form oval, which appears here for the first time and remained a compositional and thematic element in his painting.

The sea battle represents one of Kandinsky's themes probably drawn from medieval legends and his native Russian fairytales. On a red-orange lake which fills the center of the composition, two boats with raised sails confront each other diagonally across the canvas. Other certain scenic elements emerge in the painting: splashes of water, suggestions of cannon smoke and the walls, towers, and domes of a city located in the distance behind the boats. Unlike many of Kandinsky's paintings, two watercolor studies exist for the Gallery's work. The initial watercolor is still owned by Madame Nina Kandinsky and a refined study is now in Munich.

Kandinsky was, perhaps more than any other painter, identified with the transition, early in the second decade of the twentieth century, from representational to abstract painting. His idea of spontaneity, which he developed in his series of thirty-five Improvisations, became one of the central principles of later twentieth-century art.

Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky became a painter after abandoning a successful law career. He began to study modern painting in Munich and, by 1907, had emerged as a leader in German modern art. In 1911, he founded, with Franz Marc, Der Blaue Reiter ("The Blue Rider"), a group which quickly

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became the center of the German expressionist movement. It was also during this time that Kandinsky published his famous Concerning the Spiritual in Art, the influential work of his theories of art. At the outbreak of World War I, Kandinsky was forced to leave Germany and return to Russia, where he also had considerable influence on the emergence of abstract art there. Kandinsky later returned to Germany to teach at the recently established Bauhaus school, created by architect Walter Gropius. Kandinsky's second style--geometric--emerged during this period. He stayed in Germany until 1933, when the Bauhaus was disbanded by the Nazis. He fled to Paris where he spent the rest of his life.

The five impressions by Edvard Munch, plus a sixth one now promised to the National Gallery from a <sup>private</sup> collection, were produced over a thirty-year period beginning in 1898. In this unique series, Munch's thirty years of development as an artist is presented as he experimented with color and mood, developing the same image coloristically and technically. Five of the six were most likely printed by Munch himself and kept in his collection for study.

All six impressions depict an old woman and a young woman on an open shoreline against the sea and sky. Munch, over that thirty-year period, worked with these basic elements, altering the coloring and the compositions of the impressions. By these variations in tone he was able to change the visual conception of the women and their hair, of the shoreline and the sea and sky as well as of the various compositional elements such as the peninsula, the moon and its reflections in the water. These impressions were made from a sectioned woodblock. Subsequent revisions were cut in the original block and additions were made to the block from paper cut-outs and from a sectioned block of linoleum.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela J. Driscoll, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202-737-4215, ext. 224.