

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Deborah Ziska
Liz Kimbell
(202) 842-6353

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART RECEIVES GIFTS
FROM EPSTEIN FAMILY COLLECTION

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 22, 1990 -- The National Gallery of Art has received two major prints by Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) to found The Sarah G. Epstein and Lionel C. Epstein Family Collection at the National Gallery of Art. The two gifts, The Kiss, a color woodcut, and Madonna, a color woodcut combined with lithograph, will be on view in Edvard Munch: Master Prints from the Epstein Family Collection in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art, May 27 - September 3, 1990. The exhibition, which includes ninety-two additional prints on loan from one of the foremost private collections of Munch prints in the world, is made possible by Statoil, the national oil company of Norway.

"We are very grateful to the Epsteins, who have been friends of the National Gallery since the 1960s. The family's generous gift of these two outstanding prints will enhance the Gallery's holdings of works by Munch, which was started in 1943 with the donation of works from Lessing J. Rosenwald," said J. Carter Brown, director, National Gallery of Art.

-more-

munch gift . . . page two

Munch, the most influential of modern Norwegian artists, created etchings as well as woodcuts and lithographs that were revolutionary for their combination of subtlety and powerful expressive technique. The Kiss, Munch's best-known woodcut, went through a process of abstraction over five years, which resulted in the stark image in its most familiar form, a color edition of 1902. Munch sawed the shape of the two intertwined figures from a block of wood to separate them from the rest of the image. He inked that piece of wood and then printed it over a wood grain background to create a unified image.

Munch's conflict in love is evident in Madonna, this version of which was also printed in 1902. The print depicts a woman surrounded by a halo-like aura, portrayed in a state of ecstasy. The woman can be viewed as an upright icon -- as a holy woman or a saint, or as a woman lying on her bed as her partner might see her in the midst of lovemaking.

According to Andrew Robison, senior curator and curator of prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Art, the new gifts "are two of the finest color prints in the Epstein Family Collection." Robison is also curator of the exhibition.

Washingtonians Sarah Epstein and Lionel Epstein began collecting Munch prints in the early 1960s. Sarah Epstein is known for her writings and lectures on Munch, and her former husband, Lionel Epstein, was a guest curator of the master print section of the National Gallery's 1978 exhibition, Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images.

-more-

munch gift . . . page three

The Epsteins' renowned collection has continued to expand in recent years with the involvement of their five children -- David, Jim, Richard, Miles, and Sally Anne -- who share their parents' avid interest in collecting.

Eventually more than two hundred works from the Epstein Family Collection will come to the National Gallery of Art. At that point the Gallery would have the largest public repository of Munch's work outside the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway.