

Six rare paintings by Edvard Munch go on show at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, West Palm Beach



Installation view. Photography by Jacek Gancarz.

WEST PALM BEACH, FLA.- Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, West Palm Beach is presenting Munch: The Formative Years, an exceptional exhibition bringing together six paintings by Edvard Munch (1863–1944). Representing an unprecedented moment in which this number of works by the artist is made available at once, the exhibition offers an opportunity unlikely to be repeated in our lifetime. Rarely exhibited outside Norway and recently re-documented by the Munch Museum, these extraordinary works were painted between 1881 and 1883, a pivotal period during which Munch was actively shaping his artistic language. Presented together, they offer a rare glimpse into the emergence of a vision that would go on to redefine modern art.

Of the 1,789 paintings Munch created over the course of his career, the vast majority remain permanently housed in Norwegian public collections, including the Munch Museum in Oslo, the National Museum and KODE Museum in Bergen, and are seldom accessible outside these institutions. The six works in this exhibition originate from a single private collection – the largest grouping of Munch's early paintings in private hands, which took some 11 years to amass – making this presentation not only exceptional in scale, but historically improbable. A further work from this same group has already entered a UK museum collection, underscoring the rarity of opportunities such as this.

Munch made just 76 works between the years 1881–83, and the paintings on show here are among the most intimate, revealing thematic threads that would come to define his practice while offering insight into his close personal relationships. Among the most compelling is a portrait of Karen Bjørstad, who was Munch's aunt and adopted mother after his birth mother died from tuberculosis when he was five years old. Bjørstad's face is rendered with careful attention, while her dress remains loosely sketched, leaving the work partially unresolved. The contrast provides an intriguing insight into Munch's working methods as well as his admiration for a figure who played a central role in his upbringing.

Another notable work, Landscape with Waterfall and House, is an evocative portrayal of the Norwegian countryside, previously known only publicly through black-and-white photographs in the Munch Museum's archives. Thought to have been painted around the same time as the Bjørstad portrait, this work, along with two other landscape paintings featured in the exhibition, speaks to Munch's profound connection to the rugged, natural beauty of his homeland.

The painting The Errand Boy, meanwhile, depicts, as Munch wrote in his diary, 'one of those little errand boys you see at market with a basket on his back.' Yet his pose and dress do little to suggest his lowly status. Munch's careful observation conveys a quiet dignity, revealing an attentiveness to everyday life that would remain central to his practice.

The exhibition also brings together an exquisite portrait of Inger Marie Munch, Munch's youngest sister, alongside two still life paintings of her own. A recurring presence in his early work, Inger was not merely a muse but a creative counterpart, providing Munch with a means to explore mood, introspection and the expressive potential of colour and landscape. Encountered side by side, these works reveal the depth of their personal and artistic bond while offering an unusually intimate perspective on Munch's private world.

To encounter these extraordinary works together is to meet Munch at a moment of becoming, before his imagery entered the collective imagination and secured his place as one of the most revered artists of the Western canon.

Reference: Edvard Munch: Complete paintings: catalogue raisonne: vol. I-IV

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