

# Aesthetic Investigations

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The challenge of the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy. The Munch Museum’s authenticity problem owing to the interpretation and preservation of Edvard Munch works.

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**Abstract:** Despite the controversies surrounding the artistic concept known to Edvard Munch scholars as the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy (leaving paintings outdoors to become weathered), this paper argues that this practice is an integral part of his artistic identity and must therefore be considered in conservation strategies and treatment choices. Starting with a brief overview of Munch’s experimental painting techniques and use of materials, this paper introduces several challenges confronting scholars tasked with conserving Munch’s works. To date, conservators’ treatment of Munch’s ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy as an artistic concept has dominated and shaped the way conservators mediate and preserve his art. This paper shows how changes in conservation philosophies, as well as aesthetic and art historical theories, influence conservation treatments; ultimately affecting the public’s perception and appreciation of Munch’s art. Surface irregularities caused by Munch’s ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy are not only a central theme in Munch’s work, but are especially relevant as marks of authenticity.

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**Figure 1:** Munch's studio at Ekely. MM.B.02853 Photo: Anders B. Wilse © Norsk Folkemuseum

## I. INTRODUCTION

Oslo's Munch Museum is home to the largest monographic art collection of works by Edvard Munch (1863-1944). In addition to owning two versions of one of the world's most recognizable images – *The Scream* (1910?), the collection comprises 45,000 other objects, including 1150 paintings, 25,500 works on paper, 145 lithographic stones, 21 sculptures, 13,000 various pages (texts, letters, books, the artist's own photographs, and films), plus materials from Munch's studio in Ekely, where he spent his last 27 years. Among the studio materials are approximately 900 paint tubes, palettes, and bottles filled with binding media, pastels, and pigments.<sup>1</sup>

When the Ekely estate was bequeathed to the City of Oslo in 1944, following Munch's death, many of the artworks were discovered to be in poor condition. This was partly due to the lack of suitable storage facilities and the artist's own negligence. Another important factor was Munch's experimental use of painting materials, several of which he routinely tested on his works.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this collection's considerable size and Munch's experimental practices, art conservators have been searching for ways to preserve a sense of authenticity, as if the collection was in primeval state, just as the artist left it.

Despite the controversies surrounding the artistic concept known as the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy, this paper argues that this practice is an integral part of his artistic identity and must therefore be considered in conservation strategies and treatment choices. Starting with a brief overview of Munch’s experimental painting techniques and use of materials, this paper introduces several challenges confronting conservators tasked with conserving Munch’s works. By taking a closer look at the Munch Museum’s treatment history, we gain insight into earlier conservation approaches, allowing us to formulate the evolution of attempts of conservators and art historians at the Munch Museum at interpreting his artistic intentions. Finally, we explore the challenges related to the interpretation of *authenticity* in the decision-making process when preserving and treating Munch paintings.



a. *Stanislaw Przybyszewski*  
(1894) © Munchmuseet



b. *Brothel Scene* (1897-99) © Munchmuseet

**Figure 2:** The role of the ground layer

## II. EDVARD MUNCH’S PAINTING TECHNIQUES

Until the 1880s, artists were generally trained based on a set of academic rules, which followed established academic methods and provided detailed instruction on the painting process.<sup>3</sup> Artists’ handbooks, treatises, and manuals were not only consulted, but were used as references for solving practical problems regarding recipes, palette systems, methods for paint application and so forth.<sup>4</sup> Although Munch attended art school, his oeuvre is not the product of an academic tradition, even though his earliest oil paintings from the beginning of the 1880s stylistically fit that era’s naturalistic tendencies. Munch soon began to experiment with painting materials and methods, leading him to develop his individual style and technique. This development is

evident in his paintings from the second half of the 1880s. Technical examination reveals that he occasionally used several types of media within a single painting. A famous example of his unorthodox approach is *The Scream* (1893) owned by Norway's National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design. With this painting, Munch used oil, casein, egg-tempera, and crayons directly on unprepared cardboard.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3:** *Alma Mater* (1911/1925-27) © Munchmuseet

In later works, Munch experimented with variations between matte and glossy surfaces, and between thin washes of paint and thick impasto brush strokes. There are also examples of under-bound (lean) paint applied over oily saturated paint layers. Another characteristic feature in his works is to let the ground layer – and even the raw canvas – play a substantial role in the finished painting. This practice can be seen in several paintings, such as the portrait *Stanislaw Przybyszewski* (1894), *Brothel Scene* (1897-99), *Alma Mater* (1911/1925-27), see figures 2a, 2b, and 3. Throughout Munch's life, he strived towards creating his own artistic expression through an experimental approach in his material language. Munch's own words from 1928 offer insight into the particular dilemma befalling his artworks. He stated that the most well executed painting often fails to enthuse viewers, while

[...] A charcoal drawing on a wall can be a greater work of art than the most accomplished painting (sic) Many painters work so cautiously and meticulously with the primer – and with the execution of the painting – in order to preserve it for eternity – that they lose their flame (sic) And it happens that the painting becomes so tedious and poor that it ends up in a dark attic.

In this same note, Munch goes on further:

Even if a bright expressionist picture fades in colour with time – it can retain its soul and intensity – even if only one line remains it at least dies in a beautiful state – It has at least brought new aims for painters with other ambitions.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 4:** Munch stands beside The Sun, which is partly covered by snow.  
MM.B.02394 © Munchmuseet

These quotes convey Munch’s reluctance to believe that great art could ever be created through a set of rules. For him, artistic expression took prominence over durability, as emphasized by the academic tradition.

### III. ‘KILL-OR-CURE’ REMEDY: INTENTIONAL DESTRUCTION AS AN ARTISTIC CONCEPT

Historical photographs and statements made by friends who visited Munch’s studio offer proof that he occasionally placed some of his paintings out in the garden.<sup>7</sup> In fact, a photograph of *The Sun* hanging from a hook in the snow in his outdoor studio presents a striking illustration of his efforts to stage an artwork in the process of its making. (See figure 4). Jan Thurmann-Moe, former head of conservation at the Munch Museum, and art historian Dieter Buchhart propose 1893 or 1894 as the time when Munch first began subjecting his works to this process. For Buchhart, this “remedy” is a technique *per se* used by artists to achieve a certain aged and worn appearance.<sup>8</sup>

Munch himself never actually referred to this practice as the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy, yet it has been a topic of recurring curiosity among conservators and Munch scholars, who wonder exactly how many of his known paintings were subjected to this “remedy” – and what this “technique” could have meant for him. Despite the photographic evidence that document his paintings’ being situated outdoors, many conservators question its relevance for Munch’s artistic practice. Munch’s patron, friend, and fellow Norwegian Rolf Stenersen was the first to write about this remedy.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy has been expanded to include secondary accretions such as water stains and bird droppings. When discussing the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy, one does not need to distinguish between weathered surfaces resulting in matte surfaces, chalky paint, and paint loss on the one hand, and secondary deposits on the other hand. However, even layers of accumulated surface dust and dirt have become issues for discussion. For some conservators and Munch scholars (art historians), such accretions carry meaning and value – as if the artworks were never touched or interfered with other than by the artist himself.

In a series of articles, conservator Mille Stein questions whether Munch actually employed weathering as part of his artistic repertoire or whether such signs of deterioration and deposits are merely the result of neglect and lack of suitable storage spaces.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, when Munch was asked by puzzled contemporaries why he left his paintings outdoors in the snow, he told them not to worry, ‘... They are used to it!’<sup>11</sup> Painter Chrux Dahl, his neighbour at Ekely, wrote that Munch was deeply satisfied with the way the weather affected his paintings’ colours, since it made the painted surfaces matte, even though weathering simultaneously often resulted in severe flaking and paint loss.<sup>12</sup>

Stein remarks that the interpretation of weathering marks by Munch scholars has been inconsistent, which is particularly evident in the application of



**Figure 5:** *Self-portrait under the Mask of a Woman* (1893) © Munchmuseet

contradictory conservation treatments at the Munch Museum over the years. She argues that it's not worthwhile to preserve visual marks such as bird droppings and water stains, since in her opinion, they can't possibly be the outcome of some deliberate artistic practice. Since Munch didn't leave behind an artistic manifesto, clearly stating his intentions, any decision concerning conservation treatments requires Munch scholars to interpret his intentions, based on each artwork's individual expression and aesthetics, as evidenced by photographic and written records.

It must be emphasised that not all works in the collection are decayed or weathered. Moreover, surfaces that currently exhibit water marks and bird droppings were not necessarily intentionally subjected to weathering. From the conservator's point of view, the artworks history and storage conditions are of importance when considering which surface phenomena to preserve or not. This is often the point of divergence between museum professionals who privilege aesthetics and those who privilege authenticity, when approaching the conservation of artworks. For these reasons, conservators must balance considerations between art historical theories, inferred artistic intentions, and measures taken to help artworks endure over time.

#### IV. THE 'KILL OR CURE' REMEDY AS MARKS OF AUTHENTICITY?

The issue of *authenticity* in art has been in focus for centuries. With the issue of Article 9 of the *Charter of Venice* from 1965, it also became an explicit overarching goal in the field of conservation. As articulated by one of the charter's articles, the aim of restoration is to preserve and maintain both the inherent aesthetic and historical values of monuments, which in this case are equally important. The development of current conservation policies poses a reaction against earlier concepts of restoration mandating that an object's condition be restored to some presumably original state. The *Nara Document* (1994) and *Burra Charter* (1999) build upon the Charter of Venice. These three charters define authenticity as an inherent value in each art object, which conservators must take care not to violate, leading conservators to preserve artworks' *immaterial* properties as well.

Deriving a universal approach to conservation treatment has proven particularly difficult, since some art historians and conservators argue that Munch meant his work as an exploration of the realm of ephemerality, disintegration, and immateriality. We also need to consider the fact that Munch employed several different techniques that emulate the disintegration of painted surfaces. For example, his scraping and abrading the surface to reveal the underlying support and/or paint layers. As opposed to a more traditional use of local colours, he dissolved the colour from the form to create a vibrating colouristic effect. A good example of this is the painting *Self-portrait under the Mask of a Woman* (1893), for which Munch scraped the already



dry paint to create the effect of highlights by exposing the light-coloured wood of the support.<sup>13</sup> (See figure 5). Unfortunately, the visual appearance of Munch's scraping technique resembles the incidental effects caused by the 'kill-or-cure' remedy. The fact that the line between intended and coincidental effects caused by the weathering process in Munch's art is blurred only adds to the complexity when interpreting how to treat each painting's surface. This dilemma is particularly relevant to discussions of restoration meant to authentically accommodate the 'kill-or-cure' remedy.

## V. THE EVOLUTION OF THE MUNCH MUSEUM'S CONSERVATION POLICY

Before Munch's estate was bequeathed to the City in 1944, conservators surveyed the entire Ekely collection *in situ*. As early as 1949, Ole Dørje-Haug, the Munch collection's first painting conservator, noted the state of degradation, fragility, and poor condition of many of the collection's artworks:

[...] the advanced deterioration clearly calls for special attention, and [...] there is a general reluctance among conservators to treat the paintings because the artist has done nothing to prevent his work from deteriorating.<sup>14</sup>

At this time, Dørje-Haug also noted Munch's experimental techniques and aesthetics, adding that he considered the damage and decay of some of his works intentional.

As a result, during the first conservation campaign, Dørje-Haug and Johan Langaard, the collection's first director, treated both the fragmentation of colour and form and the paintings' actual physical conditions as part of Munch's artistic intention.<sup>15</sup> They were thus reluctant to compromise their characteristic features in any way by retouching areas of paint loss. This suggests an early awareness of surface quality as a creative entity, and a determination not to modify his material language. In this early period, conservators used varnish in lieu of other more suitable methods to consolidate areas affected by powdery paint.<sup>16</sup> Such treatments were applied as a last resort to remedy unstable and flaking paint – and were not meant as aesthetic "improvements." However, this procedure has implications for those who later interpreted Munch's aesthetics. Furthermore, poor documentation of these early conservation treatments has created a challenge for those wanting to keep secondary additions separate from the artist's experimental processes. Back then, conservation materials were basically the same as those originally used by the artist to create the work. However, the relatively short time-frame between an artwork's creation and its subsequent conservation treatment made it impossible to use the painting's overall state of degradation to distinguish what is original from what transpired since.

Before the Munch Museum opened in 1963, treatments carried out were done mainly to prevent further deterioration. This entailed standardised

methods such as consolidating flaking paint, patching holes, and mending tears in the support. Since Munch had removed most of the paintings from their original stretchers (in preparation for an evacuation during WW II), conservators had to remount the stacks of loose canvases onto new stretchers.<sup>17</sup> Problematically, some paintings were fitted with slightly different dimensions than before. About one-third of the collection was glue-paste lined, using variations of a glue paste lining with a press, though without heat.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 6:** *Vampire* (1893) © Munchmuseet

In general, this invasive treatment was successfully executed, without obvious visual impact. However, a few paintings exhibited flattened impasto brush strokes and local deformations. Traditionally, lining entailed attaching a secondary canvas to the back of the original support with either glue-paste or a mixture of wax and resin. The aim of this treatment was to stabilise the paintings – and it often served a twofold purpose: to reinforce the original canvas and to consolidate the paint. In light of today's standards, many of these paintings would not have required such invasive structural reinforcements, but that era's restoration procedures recommended such treatments be performed as preventative measures. Today, lining would only be undertaken if the canvas is in such poor condition that it cannot support the pictorial layers.

Despite the strong influence of the artistic concept known as the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy and statements that described particular artworks as ‘intentionally damaged,’ and thus justified the presence of losses; more invasive treatments with the aim of restoring the artworks started to occur in the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> During this period, any notion of the ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy seemed temporarily overlooked. National Museum conservator Trond Aslaksby blames one reason for this shift on the opening of the Munch Museum at Tøyen in 1963: ‘One easily assumes that the torn and blotched canvases seemed oddly out of place in the elegant interiors of the new museum, signalling a painful lack of resources and expertise.’ Moreover, many of the strong voices, who initially advocated the conservation of the ‘remedy,’ had passed away.

Echoing Aslaksby’s prosaic statement, professor Salvador Muñoz Viñas proffers the ‘newness value’ to explain the changes in conservation strategies that took place once the Munch Museum opened.<sup>20</sup> In some paintings, these invasive treatments involved varnishing previously unvarnished paintings. This was primarily applied locally either to saturate colours or to adjust surface gloss, but several were entirely varnished. Treatments at this time also included reconstruction of large losses of the motif. Examples of this can be seen in paintings such as *Vampire* (1893) and *The Murderer* (1910), figures 6 and 7.



**Figure 7:** *The Murderer* (1910) © Munchmuseet

A second shift in conservation strategy at the Munch Museum occurred in the beginning of the 1980s, with a halt on restoration – probably as a consequence of the conservation conference in Greenwich in 1974 entitled *Comparative Lining Techniques*.<sup>21</sup> This conference was the first international

consortium where conservators discussed lining treatments and their consequences, with special emphasis on the value of un-restored paintings. From this point onward, the conservation work carried out on Munch's paintings could be characterised as adhering to a strictly minimal intervention practice. This entails limiting conservation treatment to a *required minimum* in order to stabilise the paintings, without any aesthetic interventions.<sup>22</sup> Central to this strategy is preserving context and authenticity by acknowledging and giving prominence to the historical and documentary values of the object – which includes signs of ageing. Despite the fact that some of the paintings in the museum's collection underwent restoration treatments such as varnishing and retouching as already mentioned, it is evident that most of the artworks still retain losses, as well as fragile, dry, and matte surfaces.

Paint loss that stems from the artist's lifetime and are visible on historic photographs have largely been left un-retouched. At present, most secondary deposits have been left on the surfaces. As 19th Century art historian Alois Riegl once observed, the characteristics of age value are revealed in imperfection, a lack of completeness, and a tendency to dissolve shape and colour.<sup>23</sup> Riegl characterised his era's art lovers as those who:

[...] particularly enjoy the perception of the purely natural cycle of growth and decay. Thus every work of man is perceived as a natural organism [with which] man may not interfere; the organism should live its life out freely, and man may, at most, prevent its premature demise.

... If the aesthetic effect of a monument, from a standpoint of age value, arises from signs of decay and the disintegration of the work's completeness through the mechanical and chemical forces of nature, the result would be that the cult of age value would not only find interest in preservation of the monument in its unaltered state, but would even find such restoration contrary to its interests.<sup>24</sup>

In the last decade, the wider application of advanced multi-spectral imaging and microscopy, and other high precision instruments used to characterise surfaces have made it possible to explore Munch's painted surfaces in ways that were previously not possible. Artist materials undergo degradation processes regardless of painting techniques and/or past treatments. Recent research focused especially on chemical changes in paints that can reveal its impact on each work's visual appearance, further complicating interpretations of artworks.<sup>25</sup> Conservators face predicaments when paintings age beyond the documented and aesthetically-appreciated appearances that they have been charged with safeguarding. As Munch's paintings indicate, the line demarcating intentional damage from natural decay is hardly rigid. In fact, it is often conflicting and shifting.

When it comes to conservation, the tolerance level for damage seems to vary quite broadly. This is closely linked to the artist's level of technical execution. The artistic intention will also have an impact on the ethical and philosophical framework that guides the conservation of modern works. And in the case of paintings presumed to have been subjected to the 'kill-or-cure' remedy, it is precisely signs of intentional decay or 'a notion of creative destruction' that conservators aim to preserve.

The Munch Museum is currently revisiting its non-interventionist conservation approach, which has dominated its policy since the early 1980s. The museum aims to rework its conservation policy in order to create one that not only allows more flexibility, but can be tailored to each specific case. The objective is to perform any intervention within an ethical framework, thus reducing the risk of altering an object's *inherent* value.<sup>26</sup> Another important principle in contemporary conservation is *retreatability*.

For conservators working with Munch's art, the interpretation of the concept and consequences of his 'kill-or-cure' remedy have engendered a greater awareness of and particular attention to certain aspects of deterioration that a conservator normally would treat. For example, the Munch conservator tasked with cleaning a painting might remove accumulated dust, yet leave traces of bird droppings. Intentional wear, such as holes in the canvas and paint loss left during the artist's lifetime are not usually repaired. We now explore several case studies in greater detail, so as to tease out the imperative for flexible conservation policies.

## VI. CASE-STUDIES IN SUPPORT OF THE MUNCH MUSEUM'S NEW CONSERVATION POLICY

*Separation* (1894) is a prime example of Munch's experimentation with materials and is known to have been subjected to the 'kill-or-cure' remedy with the consequence that large painted areas have been lost. Fragile matte surfaces, soiling, loss of paint, and cracks are easily observed with the unaided eye. Water stains running across the entire surface have partly washed out the binder and parts of the motif. This has resulted in a matte fresco-like surface. The condition of the support and pictorial layers, as well as signs of weathering exhibited by the painting, were central to the decision concerning its conservation.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the conservation treatment was carried out with the aim to stabilise the colour layers without changing gloss or colour-saturation in the paint structure and the exposed parts of the canvas. Since the paint loss is primarily due to the artist's having left the painting outdoors for some time, it was also decided that no paint loss would be retouched. It was decided that any aesthetic intervention would be very difficult to defend from an ethical perspective, since its overall condition could ultimately be considered to be a part of Munch's aesthetic, but also because the paint loss is so extensive that it would be impossible to know for sure what had been painted in these areas. (See figure 8).

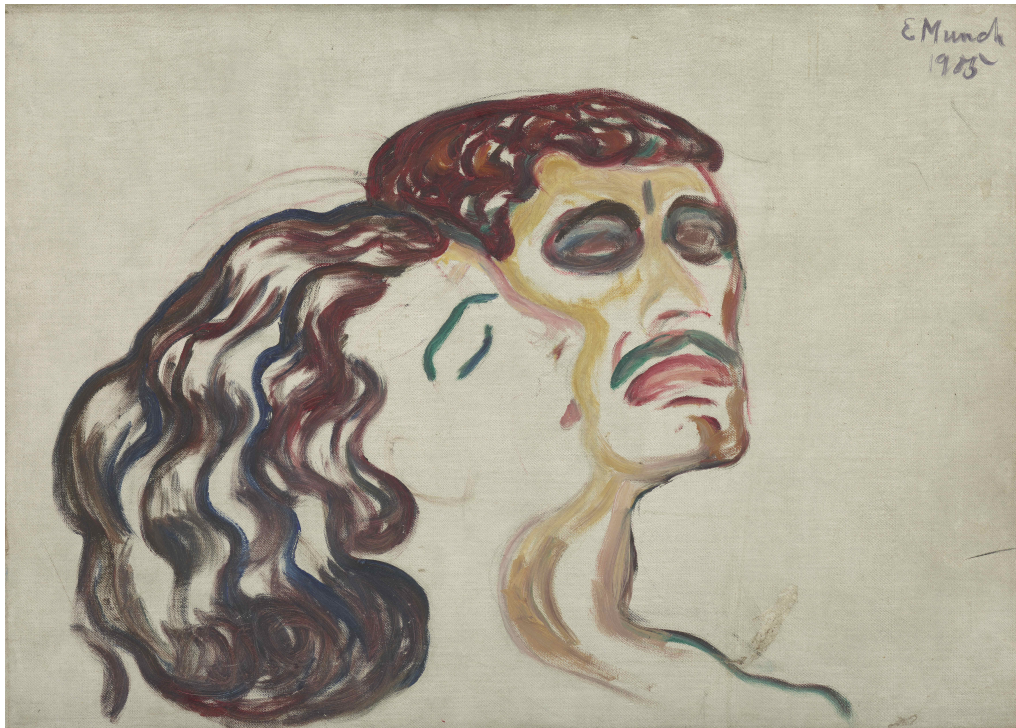


**Figure 8:** *Separation* (1894) © Munchmuseet

The recently treated *Head by Head* (1905) had accumulated layers of greyish dust, which were removed from its surface. There are also bird droppings to the lower right of the depicted couple. The conservators and art historians discussed whether or not this deposit should be removed before treatment, but they agreed to keep it, since it is visible on a photograph taken in 1906. The fact that Munch did not trouble himself to remove it suggests that he accepted this accretion on the surface. (See figure 9).

The conservation of *The Scream* (1910?) and *Madonna* (1894) propose case-studies for illustrating the variety of available treatment options and recent conservation philosophies. Violently yanked in 2004 from the walls during museum hours, these two were returned two years later. Not surprisingly, both bore signs of violent handling and unsuitable storage. Initially it was thought that conservation should conceal any and all traces owing to the robbery, but their differing damages and changes to material structures necessitated different approaches. The overall condition of the artworks prior to the theft and the nature of the damages played an important role in the decision-making process. Some felt that leaving the damages visible would serve as a testament of their theft.

Given today's reversible treatment methods, which allow for *retreatability*, the conservators opted to fully restore *Madonna*. Retouching the damages owing to its theft was not considered a major ethical dilemma in this case,

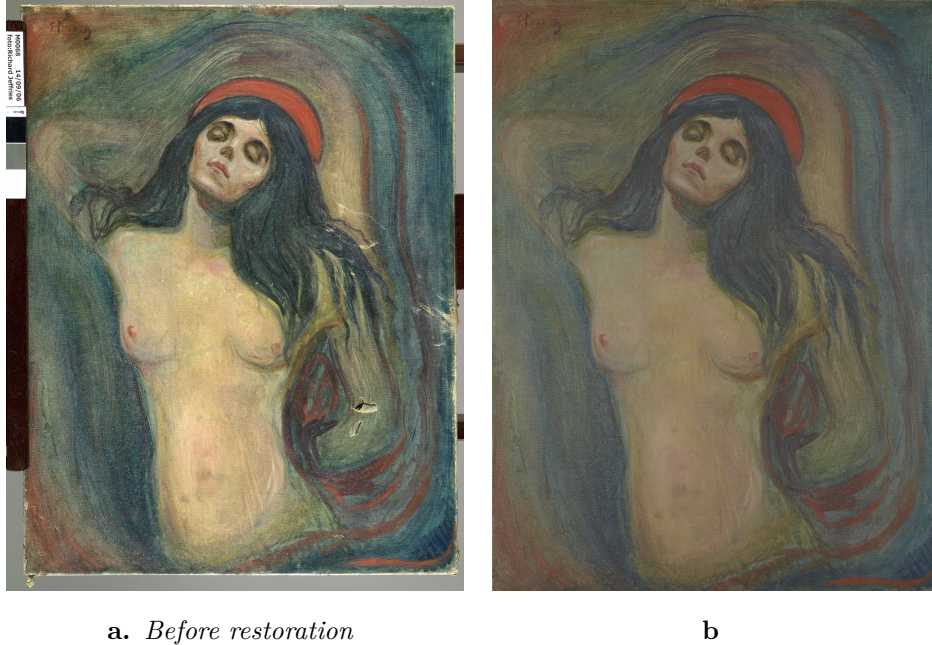


**Figure 9:** *Head by Head* (1905) © Munchmuseet

because it was in pristine condition prior to the heist. The treatment options for *The Scream*, which is painted on cardboard, were considered way more complex and challenging in terms of *reversibility*.<sup>28</sup> Conservators thus repaired scratches on the painted surface and stabilised the cardboard support of *The Scream* to prevent further loss. Original water marks and scratches, however, remained un-retouched. In retrospect, it is interesting to note how over the years, conservators, museum professionals, and visitors have changed their perception of and reactions to surface irregularities. One's initial shock at noticing a painting's degradation seems to cause less distress over time. As the colours fade in the left bottom corner, scratches and tide lines (stains) seem like minor disturbances. (See figures 10 and 11).

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

The Munch Museum's conservation approaches have – at least partly – been committed to preserving signs of age. This sense of an untouched artwork is perhaps the key point that the Munch Museum aimed to convey. But today's public, like Riegl's a century earlier, anticipates that the surfaces of exhibited paintings will attract secondary deposits. Moreover, numerous works in this collection bear marks of past conservation treatments that have physically altered some of these artworks, though there is little analysis of how this contributes to their visual impact today. Degradation of the artist's materials combined with marks left over from past treatments have often been



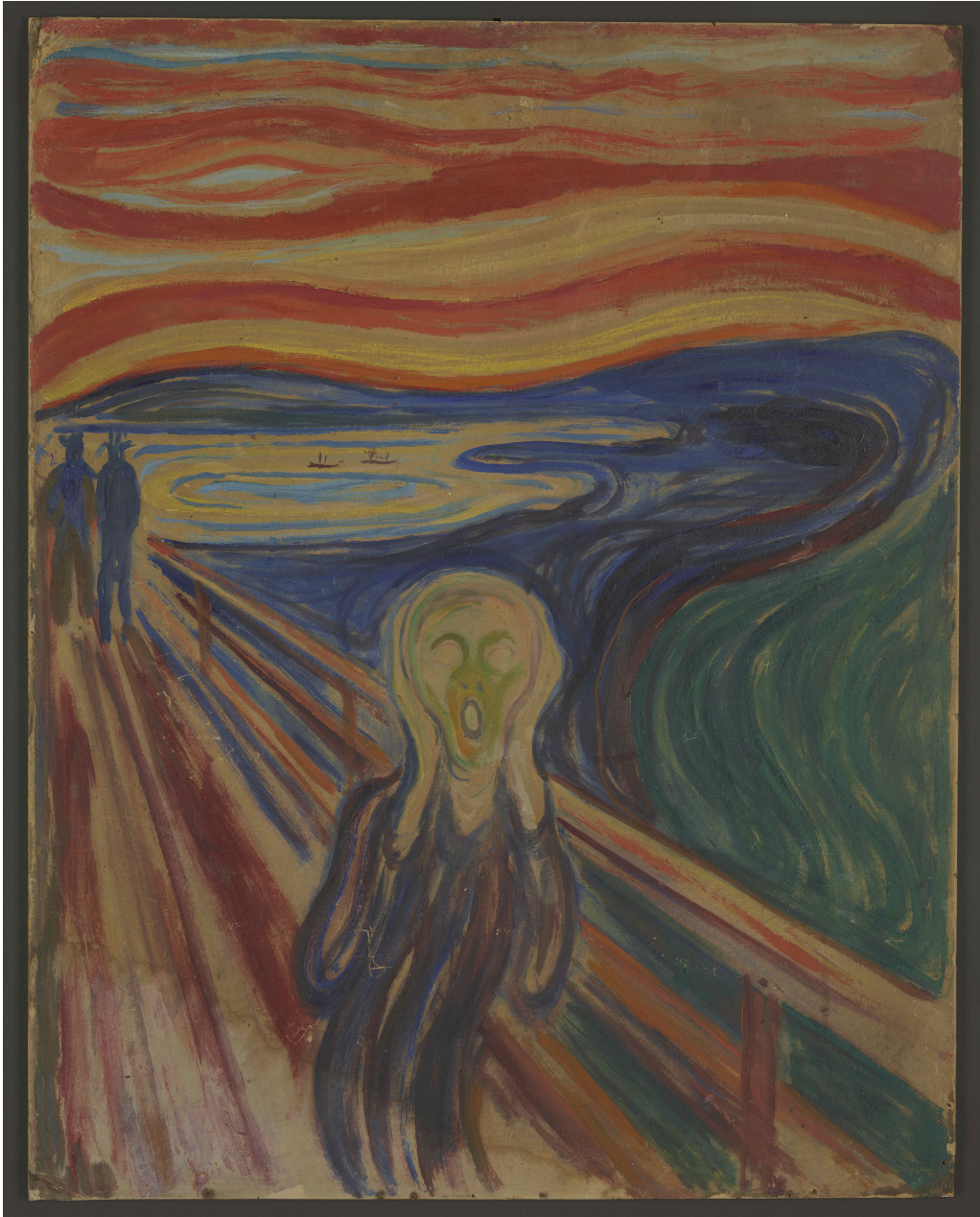
**Figure 10:** *Madonna* (1894) © Munchmuseet

mistaken for original features of the work, and thus risk guiding viewers to misinterpret Munch’s artistic expression and intentions. (See figure 12).

Conservators working with the Munch Museum collection have always had to bear in mind the artist’s ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy. Should this concept be regarded as an integral part of the artist’s method for certain paintings – an intentional creative destruction? Did Munch only explore the effect of weathered surfaces with a matte and chalky aesthetic – or did he also accept damage in the form of paint loss, accumulation of surface dirt, and bird droppings? Recent approaches to conservation treatment of paintings in the collection accept the removal of both surface dirt, accumulated over several decades; and paint layers added by conservators, who erroneously obscured the artist’s intent. Conservators no longer use in-painting to conceal damages, such as paint loss caused by Munch’s creative process. In some cases, conservators retouch paint loss that happened after Munch’s death or were caused by conservation treatments, whose visual impact is intrusive. These practices are regarded as keeping within contemporary conservation philosophy, which emphasises the importance of all the inherent values in an artwork. As the above case studies indicate, contemporary conservators weigh values differently depending on the condition, art-historical significance, history, and artistic style of the different works.

Following our review of and reflection upon the Munch Museum’s conservation history, it’s clear that this collection’s conservation history resists any attempt to simplify treatment methods, let alone some unifying policy. This





**Figure 11:** *The Scream* (1910?) © Munchmuseet



**Figure 12:** *The Sun* (1910-13) © Munchmuseet

is due to the large array of material conditions owing to Munch's painting techniques and past conservation treatments, and storage condition before the museum opened in 1963. Museum professionals must be cognisant of the ethical implications of their actions before undergoing any restoration act. They must also acknowledge that ongoing discussions are vital for keeping the distance necessary to see all of the available factors necessary to make decisions.

In an attempt to learn from the past, today's conservators are expected to identify and take into consideration the inherent multi-dimensionality of meanings that are bound up in the materiality of artworks. Picasso's quote 'The painting lives by its legend and by nothing else' epitomises the authenticity challenges when interpreting Munch's art and preserving his aesthetic identity, which he developed over time. One imagines the challenges concerning the artist's intention and authenticity being reached through a consensus-based, decision-making process that engages both scientific disciplines and humanities to find a balance in the treatment choices. What is clear is that authenticity is not a static feature. In fact, authenticity remains in a slow, but constant transition. Conservators must recognise that their treatments reflect their interpretations, and thus cannot be deemed neutral deeds.

This paper is a result of our having reassessed and reflected upon the state of the Munch Museum's collection, including how we conservators have learned to approach its conservation challenges by considering each artwork's conservation history and the artist's known contributions. Our knowledge of Munch's unorthodox practices has not only shaped our perception and mediation of Munch's art, but it has forced conservators to reflect upon a whole host of

This paper is a result of reassessments on the state of the Munch Museum collection, with the aim of developing a holistic approach to conservation challenges surrounding the border between 'intended damage' and 'natural decay.'

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