



## Possible Munch painting recovered, investigation opened

By **George Arbanas** - October 11, 2018

Edvard Munch might not be a household name, but his most famous work, “The Scream” – which sold at auction for nearly \$120 million in 2012 – is known across the world.

Far fewer people knew about another work attributed to Munch which was, until recently, hanging in President David Anderson’s dining room at St. Olaf College. Once deemed inauthentic, recently-unearthed records have opened an investigation into the painting’s authenticity.

Author Rima Shore discovered an “obscure reference in a footnote” to an unfinished portrait by Munch of violinist Eva Mudocci while conducting research for her upcoming book on Mudocci, titled “Lady with a Brooch.” Shore then followed the painting’s trail to St. Olaf.

The portrait – now known as “Eva” – was brought to St. Olaf in 1999 as a bequest from Richard Tetlie, a 1943 alumnus and art collector, who donated his collection to the school in his will. Although the portrait was thought at the time to be possibly Munch’s work, the curators at the Munch Museum in Oslo could not determine a clear chain of possession – the gold standard for art authentication – between Munch and Tetlie. Based on the lack of evidence, it was determined “Eva” was most likely not painted by Munch.

“That’s why it hung in the president’s house as a conversation piece – it was alleged to have been painted by Munch, but we certainly don’t know ... so it was just a sort of quirky mystery,” said Jane Becker Nelson, director and curator of the Flaten Art Museum.

Rima had a lot more information about “Eva” when she came to the College with interest in the painting, Becker Nelson said. That information corroborated the possibility that the painting may have been a Munch original,

Shore recounted happening upon an article that contained a photograph of the painting while doing research on Mudocci at the Munch Museum.

“Nobody knew where it was – everyone said it was bought by an anonymous person,” Shore said. “And then I came across a reference to it in a book [that] talked about a painting of Eva Mudocci that had been bought by Richard Tetlie.”

Once Shore discovered Tetlie had donated his collection to St. Olaf, she searched the Flaten Art Museum’s digital collection to no avail. Shore then reached out to Becker Nelson, who located the painting.

“It wasn’t there because it was hanging in the President’s house, so it hadn’t been photographed [for the digital collection], and that’s why I couldn’t find it,” Shore said.

Armed with Shore’s new information, Nelson called on experts Drs. Jennifer Mass and Adam Finnefrock of the Scientific Analysis of Fine Arts organization (SAFA), who visited St. Olaf to analyze “Eva” in hopes of determining its authenticity.

“We hope to see first indications in about eight weeks,” Finnefrock said at a talk on Tuesday about the methods used to authenticate and preserve paintings of decades and centuries past.

In the meantime, the College remains hopeful that the tests done by SAFA will determine “Eva” to be an authentic Munch original.

“This work has so many different applications [in the classroom],” Becker Nelson said. “Analytical chemistry [can] simulate the same kind of testing that the SAFA folks are using.”

As Munch was a Norwegian artist, he was in contact with “Norwegian literary folks like Ibsen,” Becker Nelson said. She said she has been in conversation a St. Olaf Norwegian professor about looking at Munch’s Romantic expression and how that aligns with literary expression around the same time period.

“There’s also interest from music, because of course Eva Mudocci was a violinist,” Becker Nelson said. “So we could do some historical analysis there.”

Even with the wait for an authentication, the campus is abuzz with the thought of a Munch painting being rediscovered at St. Olaf. In a press-release given by the College, Anderson expressed his enthusiasm at the prospect.

“It’s exciting to think that we may have lived our everyday lives in the company of a painting by a master,” Anderson said.

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