

## Part 5

# Horology *in* Art

by Bob Frishman (MA)

As if “The Scream” by Edvard Munch (1863-1944) were not already one of the world’s best-known art images, the recent Sotheby’s sale of the only version ever to come to auction brought the artist even more public attention when it sold for nearly \$120 million.

Munch produced this disturbing image four times between 1893 and 1910 (the other three examples hang in Oslo museums). The scene shows a terrified man, hands gripping his bald head, standing at a popular suicide location in that city where screams could be heard from a nearby insane asylum. The artist’s parents and two siblings died during his youth; he accidentally shot his own hand after a failed reconciliation with a lover, and his early artistic themes were misery, illness, and death.

Also on view in Oslo’s Munch Museum is “Self Portrait Between Clock and Bed,” painted between 1940 and 1943. The Norwegian symbolist/expressionist then was elderly and, after intervening years of painting bold colorful local landscapes, he produced several somber self-portraits addressing his thoughts on mortality.

Despite this oil painting’s cheerful colors and intimate sunny bedroom setting, Munch’s depiction of himself as an old man staring toward us, hands hanging limply, implies that here he is facing death and questioning how his remaining time should be spent. The sunlight and shadow form a cross at his feet. Standing between two symbols of death, the clock and the bed, he is surrounded by his own familiar artifacts, past artworks, and an open door. Yet he appears unhappy, perhaps wondering whether, with the comfortable bed beckoning, he should continue working at all.

The clock itself is not clearly rendered, but we recognize its traditional flat-top arch-dial English styling when we might have expected a more curvaceous and brightly painted Swedish case in that Scandinavian bedchamber. And as with some other twentieth-century clock images in my collection, Munch’s tall clock has no numbers or



HTTP://WWW.MUNCH.MUSEUM.NO/WORK.ASP?X?ID=17&WID=29#IMAGETOPS

hands, using a symbolic gesture that points to the unimportance of that particular moment.

Edvard Munch is considered a father of Expressionism, which through nonrealistic exaggerations and distortions hopes to convey the artist’s emotions and evoke them in the viewer. Clearly, as in so many of the artworks in this Horology in Art series, the clock plays a serious role in achieving the artist’s intentions.

## About the Author

Bob Frishman has restored and sold vintage clocks since 1980 and is a past-president of New England Chapter 8. He is a frequent contributor of articles and newsworthy items to the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*. His “Clocks in Art” program was presented at the 2011 NAWCC National Convention. Bob can be reached at [www.bell-time.com](http://www.bell-time.com).