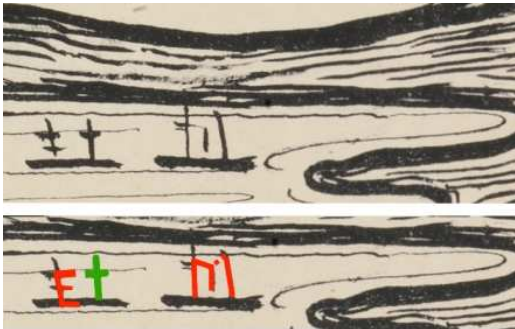


Munch's The Scream (1895)

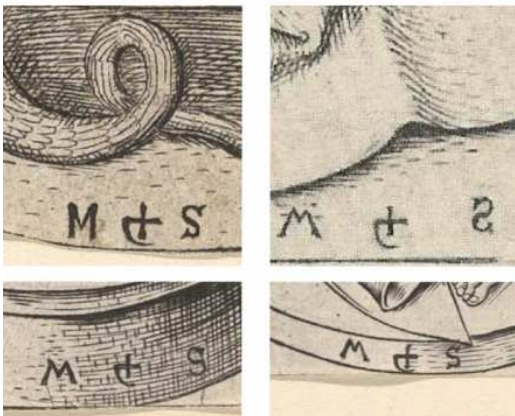


In 1893 Edvard Munch created four similar versions of his famous *Scream* in oil and pastel. A year or so later he made a print of it but altered, among other features, the two ships in the fjord. As a whisper in *The Scream*, this detail has been ignored.



The masts of the ships in the prior versions are largely indecipherable but in the print he drew emphatic lines. The mizzenmast of the ship on the left holds two yards, its foremast one. The other is three-masted with, oddly, the mainmast shortest. That nautical curiosity is a give-away. Notice how in doing so, Munch forms an **E** on one ship and an **M** on the other, his two initials joined by a Cross in between (diagram.) That form then refers to the 15th-century printmaker Martin Schongauer who was a major influence on Munch's style.

Detail and diagram of Munch's *The Scream*



In his monogram Schongauer, like Munch here, joined his initials with a Cross. (See examples.) One of art's core principles is that we are all unified and divine; in Christian art that means God or Christ. Indeed Munch once said that people should understand the holiness of art and take off their hats to paintings "as if they were in church."¹ Now note how one of Schongauer's monograms has an **S** inverted (top right).

Four examples of Martin Schongauer's monogram



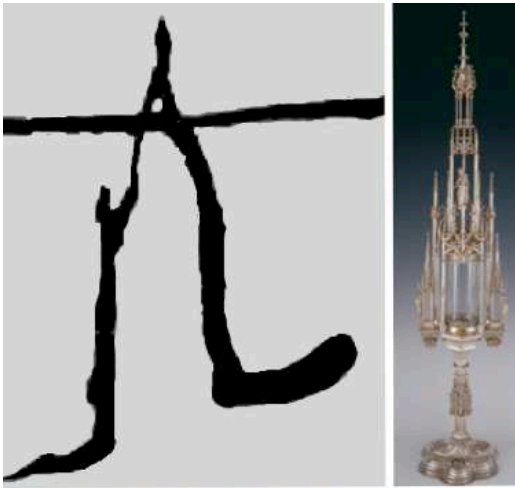
Inversion is meaningful. The mind has long been likened to a mirror and is linked in our language to thought as a *mental reflection*. So Munch, depicting his mind as ever, inverted a second **E** in the shape of the fjord. His **M** is there too in two little hills with his initials again joined by a Christian symbol: a steeped church in place of the Cross. This second set seems to suggest that Munch is again depicting the creative process.² His initials emerge out of the landscape like a vague mental image out of the sub-conscious. The letters then become more precise on the fjord just as a mental image becomes more precise in an artwork. Even the meandering outline of the church becomes in the ship's mast the distinct form of the Cross. The church, though, is fascinating. Despite its apparent vagueness, we can identify it without major effort.

Detail and diagram of Munch's *The Scream*



A monstrance is a transparent receptacle for holding the Host at Mass. Around 1490 Martin Schongauer's goldsmith-son created one of the most beautiful Late Gothic examples using, for the most part, designs from his father's prints. But - here's the marvel of Munch's artistry- this monstrance by Schongauer is *The Munch Monstrance* because it bears the coat-of-arms of the Munch family. Whether they were Edvard's ancestors or not does not really matter and I don't know the answer.

Jörg Schongauer, *The Munch Monstrance* (c.1490-93) Silver embossed, cast. The Treasury of Basle Munster.



Munch, I believe, turned the monstrance into a church to deepen his identification with Schongauer. Three details suggest this. [The church in top left image was enlarged and photoshopped to make the relevant lines clearer]. The walls of the tower blend so emphatically into the ground that they join to it like the monstrance to its base, both slightly concave. Out of its left side a line shoots upwards like Schongauer's Gothic spires. Lastly Munch drew a ground line *right through* the steeple as though it was transparent. A great artist would not make that 'mistake' unless he intended it. To me, his reason is apparent. The monstrance is transparent by its very nature. Thus, so is his church. As Munch's symbols for the purity of his own creative mind, the two objects are both see-through and clear.



Top L: Photoshopped detail of the church in *The Scream*
 Top R: The Munch Monstrance
 Bottom: Munch's *The Scream*, detail

Notes:

1. Cited in Poul Erik Tøjner, *Munch In His Own Words* (Munich: Prestel) 2003, p.60
2. See EPPH's explanation of [Munch's Old Man Praying](#) (1902)

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[Munch's Old Man Praying](#) (1902)



[Munch's Coastal Landscape](#) (1918)