

the Whitworth

Audio Descriptions transcript

April 2021

AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Audio descriptions of artworks from the collection of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.



AUDIO DESCRIPTION 3: Two People - the Lonely Ones. Print, 1899. Edvard Munch (1863-1944), Woodcut. Presented in 1989 by H. M. Treasury in lieu of inheritance tax from the Estate of the late Mrs. Ann Carol Kroch. Her Majesty's Treasury (gift, 1989). © The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

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Two People - the Lonely Ones, Edvard Munch (1863-1944), 1899

Two figures are set in a nordic landscape. The pair are directly in our eyeline, they are shown full-figure, and take up most of the height of a landscape scene. The details of this relief print are simplified, leaving thick, more stylised lines, typical of a wood block print. This relief print is almost full width and height of the page, leaving a thin white border on the paper.

The skyline is cropped out from the scene, we can only see two elements of the background: water and rocky shoreline. The print is made up of black and white ink, apart from the water which is composed of a crisp turquoise ink. This water is serene, lapping gently into the shore where the figures are stood, and scattered with thin, horizontal streaks, evoking ripples. These ripples curve gently into the black ink of the shoreline, which is textured with white marks where the paper shows through. The marks indicate where the wooden block has been chipped and carved away, capturing the texture of rocks and pebbles on the coast.

In the centre foreground, two figures face away from view, a woman and a man. The figures in the scene are standing apart from each other, they are together at the shore, but their body language is disconnected. We approach the pair from behind, witnessing a private moment of reflection.

In the centre left, the woman is standing on the shoreline, looking wistfully over the water. She is dressed in early nineteenth century

costume: a simple, floor length dress tucked in at the waist. Her long, inky hair falls down her back finishing just above the waist. Her dress is snow white, with stylised black lines making up the pleats in her skirt, and outline of her figure. Whilst the man at her right stands a couple of steps behind her. His stance is turned very slightly towards her, his left leg is turned out in her direction. He is dressed in a black suit of the same ink as the shore. White scratches, bring out the texture and shape of his trousers against the landscape. His black suit jacket contrasts crisply against the turquoise water. Hairline cracks of white also surround both figures, making their edges appear crisp and clean.

The Norwegian coastline was a powerful inspiration for Edvard Munch, particularly the fishing village of Asgardstrand, about seventy miles south of Oslo. He first rented a small cottage there in the summer of 1889, then bought a cottage in 1897 and kept it for the rest of his life. He shared many emotional experiences in this setting with his friends, and these events were the inspiration for a series of powerful shoreline paintings and prints such as this. Munch made *Two People* by cutting the large single block into three separate pieces around the main shape of the design. These pieces were inked separately and rejoined for printing. He elegantly combined form and content by cutting the female figure as a separate block, thus ensuring that her printed image would be surrounded by an isolating white line.

Woodcut is the earliest of all printmaking processes. Printing in relief from woodblocks originated in China around the ninth century; it then spread westwards through the Islamic world, being first used in Europe in the thirteenth century for stamping designs on textiles, before the first prints on paper were made in Germany and the Netherlands between 1350 and 1400. It is a technique in which the lines of the design are left standing in relief on a hard, polished block of wood after the background has been cut away using knives, gouges and chisels. Ink is then dabbed or rolled over the surface of the block, where the relief areas take the ink and the impression is printed under light pressure onto a sheet of paper. Japanese colour woodcuts are produced by cutting a key block with a design based upon an initial pen and ink outline drawing, and then making a separate block for each colour.

Printing is done manually by rubbing the back of the paper (placed on the block) with a baren, a disc made of wound hempen cord covered with a bamboo leaf.