

A SEMINAL FOUR-METRE-LONG PAINTING BY EDVARD MUNCH EXPLORING LOVE, LIFE & DEATH ON THE OSLO FJORD

From the Walls of Max Reinhardt's Avant-Garde Berlin Theatre to a Luxury Cruise Liner & Hidden from the Nazis in a Barn Deep in the Norwegian Forest

**"Dance on the Beach" to be Offered at Sotheby's London in March
From the Renowned Olsen Collection
As Part of a Restitution Settlement with the Family of Leading Jewish Patron
Curt Glaser**



LONDON, 16 January 2023 – Edvard Munch's singular vision resulted in vivid, psychological artworks as he battled his demons and the eternal pull between life and death on canvas. In 1906, at a turning point in his life, Munch was commissioned to paint what is now known as "The Reinhardt Frieze", installed on the walls of impresario Max Reinhardt's avant-garde theatre in Berlin with twelve major canvases – in an immersive installation that was one of the first of its kind, and trailblazed the relationship between performance and art.

At just over four metres wide, *Dance on the Beach* is the monumental culmination of the series. In the foreground of the canvas are two of the artist's great loves, affairs with both of whom ended in heartbreak. It is the only example from the Reinhardt series remaining in private hands, with all of the others held in German museum collections.

As part of a tumultuous journey in the lead up to and during the Second World War, the painting was last on the market 89 years ago, when it was acquired at auction by Thomas Olsen – who assembled an unmatched collection of around thirty works by the artist, including one of four versions of the infamous *The Scream*. Having been identified as once having belonged to Professor Curt Glaser, a major cultural figure in 1930s Berlin who was forced to flee, it is being sold by agreement between the two families.

The work will be offered as a highlight of Sotheby's Modern & Contemporary Evening Sale in London on 1 March, with an estimate of \$15-25 million. Prior to the sale, the painting will go on public view for the first time since 1979, with an exhibition in London (22 February – 1 March), as well as digital installations of this frieze in Hong Kong (5-7 February) and New York (11-15 February).

"Munch was the ultimate rebel, and every brushstroke on this frieze is utterly modern and purely expressive. This composition reimagines one of Munch's greatest images, the Dance of Life, which was the culmination of the artist's Frieze of Life and places love at the centre of the artist's 'modern

life of the soul'. His first version dates from 1899-1900 and hangs alongside the iconic Scream in Oslo's National Gallery. This work is among the greatest of all Expressionist masterpieces remaining in private hands — its shattering emotional impact remains as powerful today as in 1906."

Simon Shaw, Sotheby's Vice Chairman, Fine Arts

"This exceptional painting is made all the more special due to its extraordinary provenance, a history that has unfolded since it was painted 115 years ago. Intertwined in the story of this painting are two families – both leading patrons of Munch. Indeed, so important were the Glasers and the Olsens to Munch, that he painted both Henrietta Olsen and Elsa Glaser (wives of Thomas and Curt). We are proud to play a part in the painting's next chapter, whilst celebrating the legacy of the patrons who were integral in supporting the vision of such a great artist."

Lucian Simmons, Vice Chairman and Sotheby's Worldwide Head of Restitution

The Origins & Journey of the Painting

Dance on the Beach was originally commissioned by world-famous film and theatre director Max Reinhardt, whose productions were deeply influenced by Munch's works. In 1906, as part of a move towards theatre in the round, Reinhardt asked Munch to create a frieze for his avant-garde theatre in Berlin. Placed in a hall on the upper level of the theatre, audience members were immersed in Munch's vision – which he titled '*images from the modern psyche*' - before stepping into Reinhardt's performance space.

This energetic and rhythmic work was the culmination of the cycle – by far the most important of the works that make up the frieze, executed on the largest scale and the only one signed in full. There is a tangible sense of movement that is unique to this work, with whirling couples dancing across the canvas. It is also the only part of the frieze cycle remaining in private hands, with nine of the pieces held in the collection of Berlin's National Gallery, one in the Hamburg Kunsthalle and one in the Folkwang Museum, Essen.

When the theatre was refurbished in 1912, the frieze was split up and this work was acquired by leading art historian and curator Professor Curt Glaser, who was a friend and biographer of the artist, and at the time was at the epicentre of Berlin cultural life, holding a position as the director of the Berlin State Art Library. Together with his wife, Glaser assembled an outstanding art collection that included works by Munch, Henri Matisse, and Max Beckmann along with important Old Master paintings. In 1917, Glaser published the first German monograph on Edvard Munch.

Persecuted by the Nazis for his Jewish background, Glaser fled Germany in 1933, and was obliged to sell this work, along with many others. Glaser's legacy is currently being celebrated by an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum in Basel, who are displaying 200 works together for the first time since they were dispersed in 1933. The exhibition is open until 12 February 2023.

Dance on the Beach found its way to an auction house in Oslo in 1934 and was purchased by another friend and patron of Munch's – his neighbour, Thomas Olsen. Olsen hung the painting in the First Class lounge of his passenger liner the MS Black Watch – which travelled between Oslo and Newcastle – from January to September 1939. After Britain declared war on Germany, Olsen removed the artwork and laid the vessel up in anticipation of the German invasion. Thomas Olsen took his Munch pictures, including *The Scream*, into hiding in a barn in the Norwegian forest for the duration of the conflict. The boat was later seized by the German U-boat squadron. Recovered from its hiding place after the war, *Dance on the Beach* has remained in the Olsen family ever since.

Testament to the Olsen family's support of Munch is the Ramme Art Gallery at Hvitsten, Norway, which exhibits national Golden Age art from the locality. The recent past appears there through the art of Munch and other artists. From May 2023, the opening of Munch's home at Ramme will make it possible to experience his motifs in the landscapes and in the very rooms they were painted. For the first time, visitors can rent the authentically restored property for functions and even sleep in the artist's room.

Munch's Frieze of Life Series

"I who came into the world sick, in sick surroundings, to whom youth was a sickroom and life a shiny, sunlit window — and out there I wanted so much to take part in the dance, the Dance of Life" —
Edvard Munch

Munch had an immensely sad childhood, starting with the death of his mother when he was five years old, followed by the decease of his older sister, nine years later – both from tuberculosis. His elder sister spent much of her life in a mental hospital, while his father suffered from severe depression. This trauma meant that Munch felt divorced from life, instead watching "the dance of life through a window".

Dance on the Beach captures that sense of life playing out before his eyes. In the foreground, two of his greatest loves haunt the canvas – Tulla Larsen and Millie Thaulow. The former was a turbulent affair that would end in Munch shooting his own hand in the heat of passion, and the latter was his cousin's wife, and Munch's first love.

The commission was painted whilst the artist was in the grip of addiction and would prove to be his very last before an acute breakdown in 1908 that resulted in a stint at a 'nerve' clinic in Copenhagen. On his return, Munch's art shifts, as he moves back to Norway and focuses on his surroundings, the landscape and local characters.

Also confirmed for Sotheby's Modern & Contemporary Auction on 1 March, is a monumental masterpiece from Gerhard Richter's celebrated cycle of abstract painting. Of spectacular proportions, spanning four metres across, *Abstraktes Bild*, 1986 will be offered with an estimate in excess of £20 million.

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