



Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

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**Fwd: GDAS October 2020 Newsletter**

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**Greenwich Decorative Arts** <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>  
To: Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

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GREENWICH  
*Decorative Arts*  
SOCIETY



Letter from President Cyndy Anderson

Dear GDAS Members,

Here is marvelous Halloween piece from Karen Handal.

During this pandemic year, we are thinking of other special treats (no tricks!) for our members. On January 25, 2021, we will offer a zoom webinar appraisal program discussing 10 items submitted by our members. The items will be vetted and appraised by experts. This is for members only. Further details will be outlined in an email arriving mid-November.

Due to the current situation, the Board has agreed that all programs through June 2021 will be virtual. This is subject to change in conditions, yet our primary goal is your safety.

I look forward to seeing you virtually on Monday for the wonderful program on Ocean Liners. Until then, Happy Halloween!

Cyndy



GDAS Newsletter October 2020  
*Paintings for a Halloween Eve*



*The Lovers*, René Magritte, 1928

Perhaps you have seen a lot of these surrealist images by Magritte during the pandemic.

These haunting paintings are a little spooky - yet mesmerizing.

They have something to convey - but what is it?

MoMA comments on these paintings:

"Frustrated desires are a common theme in René Magritte's work. Here, a barrier of fabric prevents the intimate embrace between two lovers, transforming an act of passion

into one of isolation and frustration. Some have interpreted this work as a depiction of the inability to fully unveil the true nature of even our most intimate companions."



*The Lovers II*, René Magritte, 1928

Whatever Magritte's intent, and whatever the viewer's interpretation of these amazing surrealist paintings, we see them differently in the time of COVID.

Before COVID, I might have mused that the paintings signify hidden and unknown aspects of the relationship that the two people themselves cannot see. They cannot see each other in the literal sense.

Perhaps the draped cloth symbolizes that they are blind to the true intentions and

feelings of each other.

The lovers press together fondly, almost like for an Instagram shot. But their hoods obscure each to the other, and to us. Perhaps Magritte is portraying that we never truly know our partners. Perhaps he is illustrating how we willingly blind ourselves to a relationship's true nature.

Before COVID, the paintings have a somewhat jarring impact. Why are they covered and hooded? Why do they seem completely comfortable with it?



Looking at these paintings during COVID, I have a different response.

Perhaps the paintings convey a love which endures during an outside threat. Masked to protect the virus from entering through the vulnerable bodily entries, the two people share their protected love. They love despite risks. Their features are hidden by their masks, but they know each other's hearts.

The most primary human need for love and companionship finds a way to coexist with a possibly fatal virus. We know why they accept the hoods. Perhaps we too are gazing at them while wearing masks.



*René Magritte and Le Barbare, ("The Barbarian" ) 1938*

*Wearing a bowler hat, Magritte is in front of one of his favorite Fantômas paintings. The painting was destroyed during a London bombing in World War II.*

Enshrouded faces were a common motif in Magritte's art. The artist was 14 when his mother committed suicide by drowning. He witnessed her body being fished from the water, her wet nightgown wrapped around her face.

As he said, he never found out "whether she had covered her eyes with it so as not to see the death she had chosen, or whether she had been veiled in that way by the swirling currents."

Some have speculated that this trauma inspired the series of works in which Magritte obscures his subjects' faces.





*The poster for the first Fantômas film was produced by Gaumont studios. 1913*

The arch villain Fantômas was a fictional French character in books and movies. He was a man of many disguises who used an array of masks. The Surrealists were obsessed with Fantômas and his few distinguishing features and malleable identity as he constantly changed his appearance. His image inspired some of Magritte's paintings.



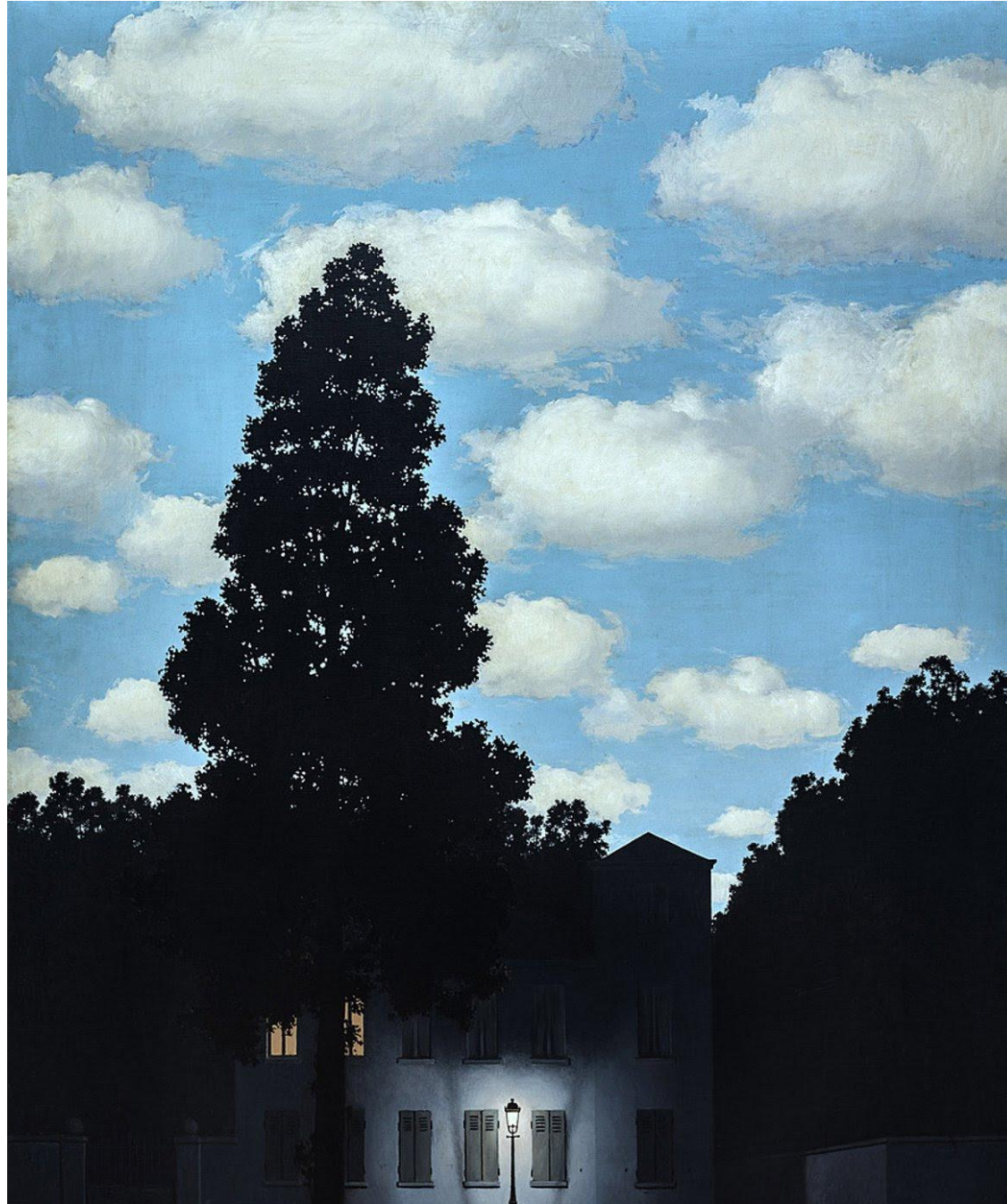


The cover of *Le Mort qui tue*, *The Dead Man Who Kills*, an early Fantômas novel  
The shrouded villain with his black hood mesmerized Magritte.

Magritte himself disliked explanations which diffused the mystery of his images. He disagreed with interpretations which involved his personal life, denying any relation between his paintings and his mother's death.

“My painting is visible images which conceal nothing,” he wrote, “they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question, ‘What does it mean?’”

It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable.”





In Magritte's painting *Empire of Light*, numerous versions of which exist, a dark, nocturnal street scene is set against a pastel-blue, light-drenched sky spotted with fluffy cumulus clouds.

The luminosity of the sky makes an unsettling contrast with the impenetrable darkness. The slightly bizarre and paradoxical combination of day and night contributes to a sense of mystery.

All this needs for Halloween is...a **Witch**.



*Albrecht Dürer, A witch riding backwards on a goat, with four putti, two carrying an alchemist's pot, a thorn apple plant, circa 1500. Engraving.*

Aptly coinciding with Halloween, in the fall of 2014 the British Museum opened its "Witches and Wicked Bodies" exhibition.

The exhibition portrayed the early origins of the Witch in all her manifestations, from classical sorceress to temptresses, sirens, she-devils, Weird Sisters and harpies.

Dürer's influence on the portrayal of witches and witch iconography was dramatic. A witch riding backwards on a goat depicts how witchcraft was thought to reverse the natural order of things, so the hair of the witch streams out in one direction, while the goat and the trail of drapery indicate the opposite direction.



*A Witch Riding Skeleton (circa 1520). Engraving.  
Agostino Veneziano (circa 1490-1540)*

Historically, men, women and children have all been accused of sorcery, but the majority of those punished for witchcraft have been women. Many early images depict

macabre and fantastical scenarios. In this nightmarish scene, a witch rides a skeletal beast, making away with a plunder of captured infants.



Jan Van Der Velde's engraving *The Sorceress* 1626

Witches were also shown as bewitching seductresses intent on ensnaring their victims, or makers of powerful potions which could drug them.



Messotint made by John Raphael Smith, after Henry Fuseli (1741-1825)  
The Three Weird Sisters from *Macbeth* (1785)

Generations were influenced by Fuseli's paintings of the three witches from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The three women are seen in profile with their left arms outstretched and pointing, their right to their lips, looking expectant. Above their outstretched hands on the far left hovers a death's head hawkmoth with the face of a skull - an actual species and the largest moth in the British Isles.

...What are these,

So wither'd and so wild in their attire,

That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth,

And yet are on't?

*Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 3*







*Witches' Sabbath, El Alquedarre, Francisco Goya 1798*

Goya's *Witches' Sabbath* depicts crone-like witches bringing infants to sacrifice to their satanic goat-like master. The painting satirized the superstitious beliefs rife in Spain during a period when tales of witches and the devil were commonplace among the rural populace. It reflects the artist's disdain for medieval superstition and fears.

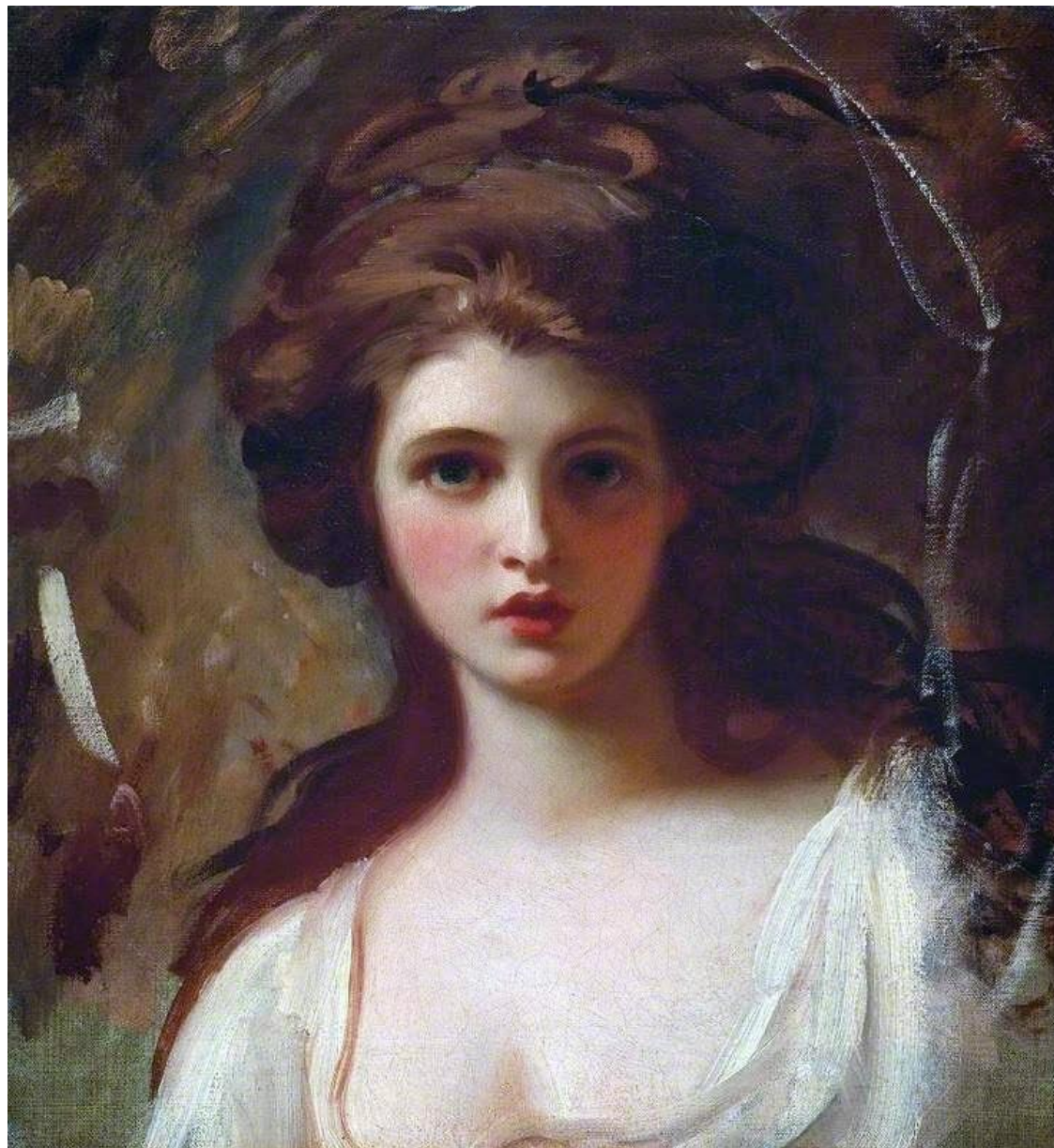




*The Magic Circle, John William Waterhouse, 1886*

By the end of the 19th century, hideous old hags with distended breasts and snakes for hair were increasingly replaced by sexualized and mysteriously exotic sirens.

Note that in *The Magic Circle*, the ravens and frog, symbols of evil and witchcraft, are outside the protective circle. Within the confines are flowers and the woman herself, striking and exotic. The painting was extremely successful for the critics and the public alike and the Tate Gallery purchased it for a substantial price.



*George Romney's portrait of Emma Hart, later Lady Hamilton, as Circe.  
Circa 1782*

Perhaps no one influenced the evolution of the depiction of witches and

sorceresses more than Emma Hamilton, one of the most famous international celebrities of her time. Now largely remembered as the woman who captured the heart of the nation's hero, Admiral Horatio Nelson, Emma was an extraordinary woman in her own right.

As you can see from this luminous portrait, we are far from hags and crones in the witch department. A blacksmith's daughter, the lovely Emma captivated the painter George Romney with her beauty, intelligence and sexual attraction, and she became his favorite model. He painted her innumerable times in classical and fanciful disguises, including the witch Circe.

Emma wears loose white drapery exposing her throat and chest, her auburn hair piled high in a top-knot, with loose hair trailing over her bare shoulder. She stares directly outwards, her face tilted slightly downwards and her sensuous mouth opened a little. Her personal charms beguiled powerful and creative men who were drawn to her affection, loyalty and ability to turn adversity to her advantage.





*Circe, George Romney, 1782*

*Here she is in the guise of Circe, in the Odyssey. She strides forth with her arm raised to cast a spell and a commanding presence, engaging the viewer. She has turned the sailors into pigs, and she holds a wand or stick to herd the pigs to their sties. To her left are the heads of two guardian wolves, to her right is Ulysses' boat at anchor.*

The story of Emma Hamilton is one of female power and achievement in a man's world, against all odds. Born into poverty in 1765, she rose to be a muse for famous artists, an influential ambassador's wife, a European cultural icon and Nelson's mistress - before facing a wretched end to a vivid life.

Emma had a complex and extremely public love life, most famously her later romance with Admiral Nelson while married to the aged Sir William Hamilton.

The three-way bond between Sir William, Emma and Nelson was complicated and highly nuanced. When a wounded Nelson came to convalesce in Naples, Sir William and Lady Emma took care of him.

As the frail, injured and battle-weary Nelson was nursed back to health and joyfulness by an attentive Emma, the two fell passionately in love. Instead of throwing her out and challenging Nelson to a duel, her husband remained on affectionate terms with both of them.



Emma developed what she called her "Attitudes" or poses in which she played charades

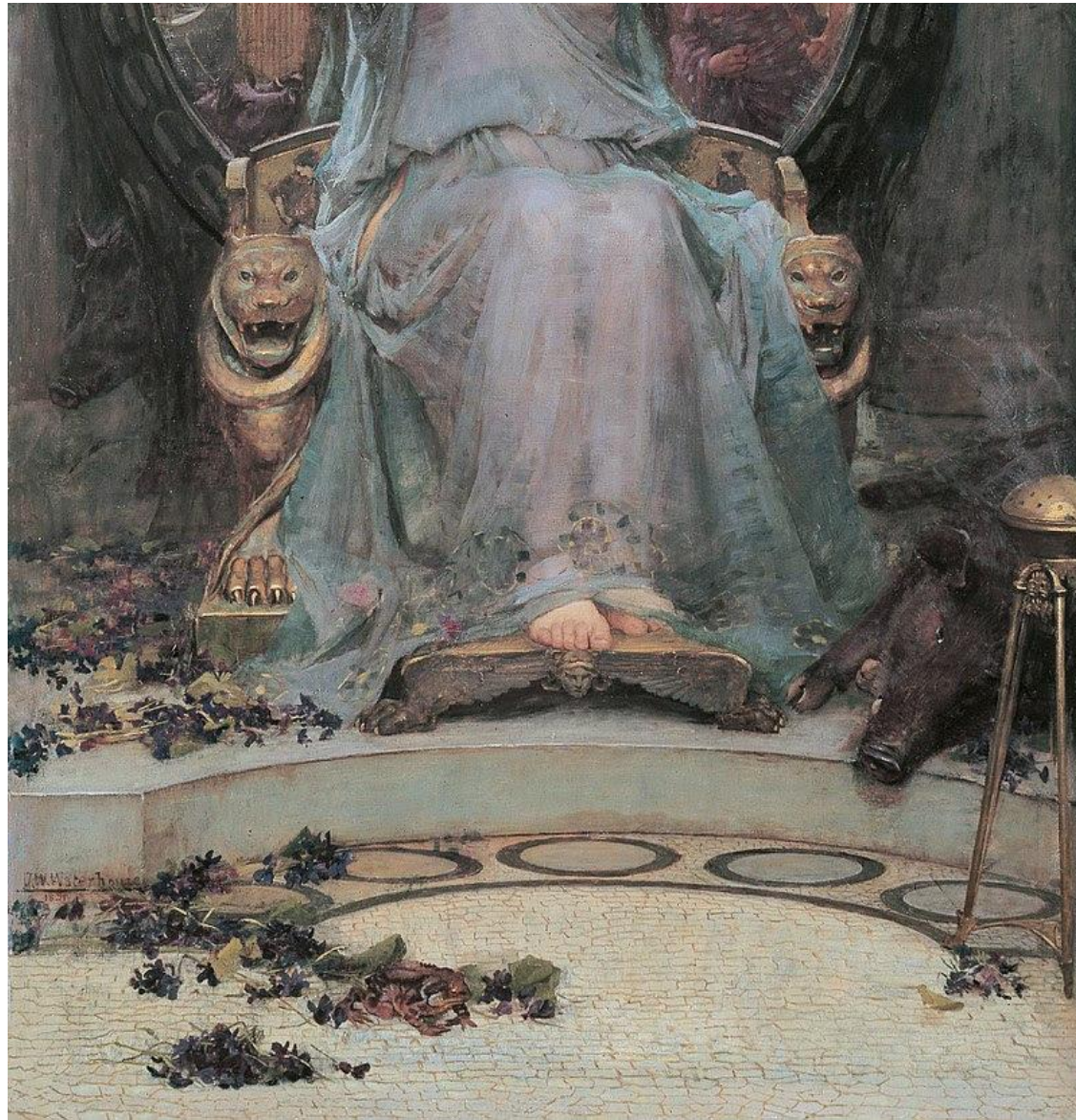
of classical characters. Specially designed, loose-fitting tunics were paired with large shawls or veils as she posed in such a way as to evoke figures from classical mythology. These tunics disguised that by 1801 she was secretly carrying Nelson's child - Horatia.

After Sir Hamilton's death in 1803, Emma and Nelson lived together as husband and wife. When news was brought to her of his death in action at Trafalgar in 1805, she screamed and fell back, comatose. She wrote, 'Life to me is not worth having. I lived for him. His glory I gloried in ... But I cannot go on. My heart and head are gone.'

In his will, Nelson entrusted Emma's care to the nation but this was ignored by George III. Left unsupported, she died in destitution in Calais. Her funeral was attended out of respect for Nelson by the captains of every English ship in Calais harbor.

Ultimately, it is Romney's many portraits which capture the legendary Emma's beauty and vivacity and change the presentation of the female sorceress in art.





*Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses, John William Waterhouse, 1891*

Waterhouse's depiction of Circe as a woman with an empowered position reflects the changing times of Victorian Britain as we entered the 20th century. Note the mirror behind her is used to capture Ulysses himself, while making sure that she retains the



main focus. The pig or boar seen by her feet is a member of Ulysses' crew who has already fallen victim to her magic.



*Circe, Wright Barker, 1889*

Above is another painting of the powerful and sensual Circe with bold open arms and bare breasts, here depicted as a musician who might seduce you with her songs and beauty. Barker was a celebrated painter of hunting scenes, horses, cattle, hunting hounds and other dogs, and his expertise shows in the realistic lions, tigers and wolves in her thrall. The poppies strewn on the steps suggest passion - and perhaps, blood.



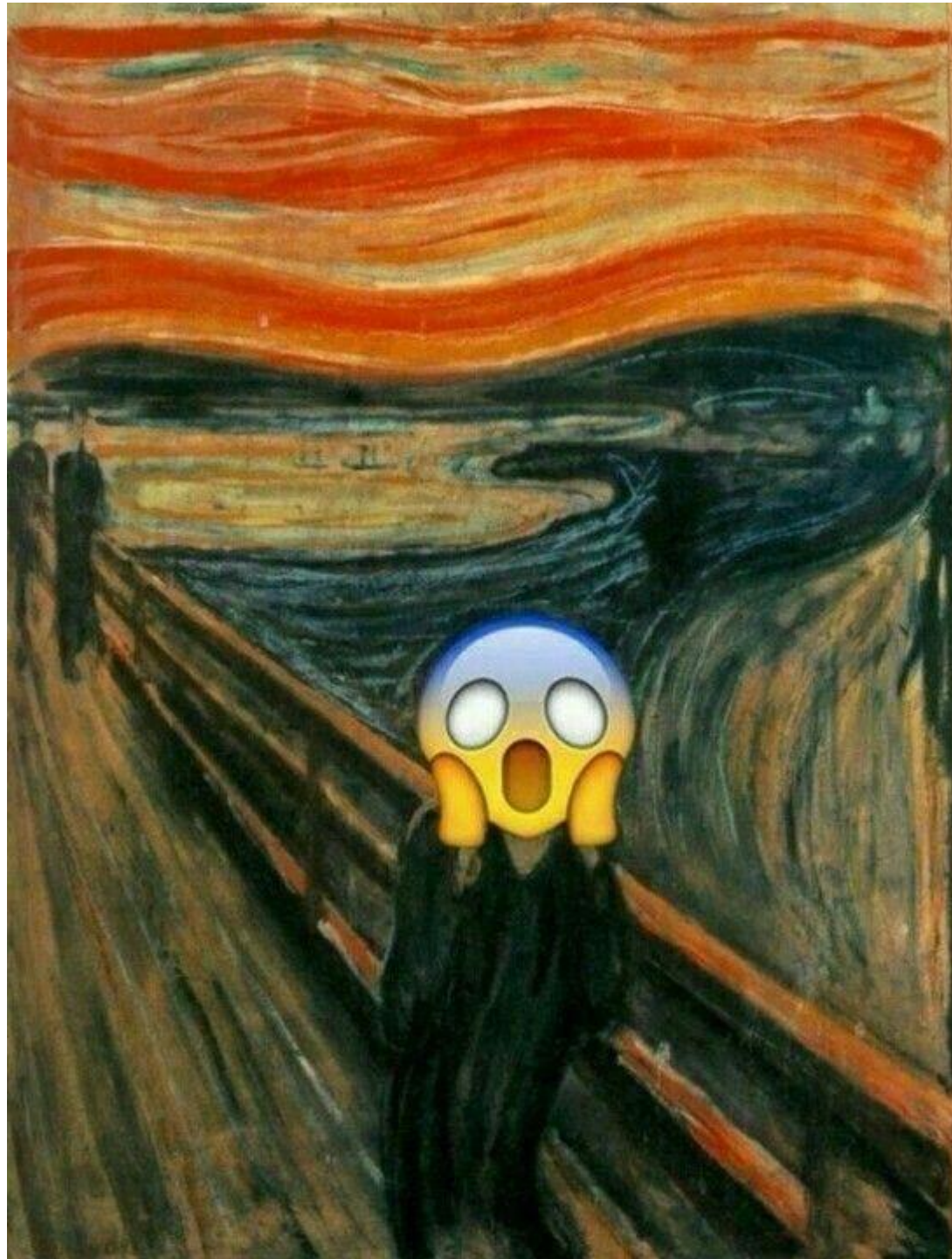
‘Circe and the Swine’ N. C. Wyeth illustration for *The Odyssey of Homer*(1929)

Perhaps these paintings influenced Wyeth's bare-breasted, commanding and dramatic Circe. Browsing through the hundreds of depictions of this sorceress gives insight into her transformations and her evolution in art.



After contemplating enshrouded faces, witches and sorceresses,  
we can't overlook art's most iconic and haunting face.

Here are a few things you may not know about *The Scream*,  
first painted by Edvard Munch in 1893.



It even has its own emoji, which limited paintings do. In 2016 MoMA acquired 176 original Japanese emoji characters by the artist Shigetaka Kurita for an exhibition about emoji, art and the relationship between them. Think of emoji as a primitive language born of the digital age and adding nuance. It's clear *The Scream* speaks across cultures.



*The Scream* is a best-selling mask. How better to express your feelings about COVID?





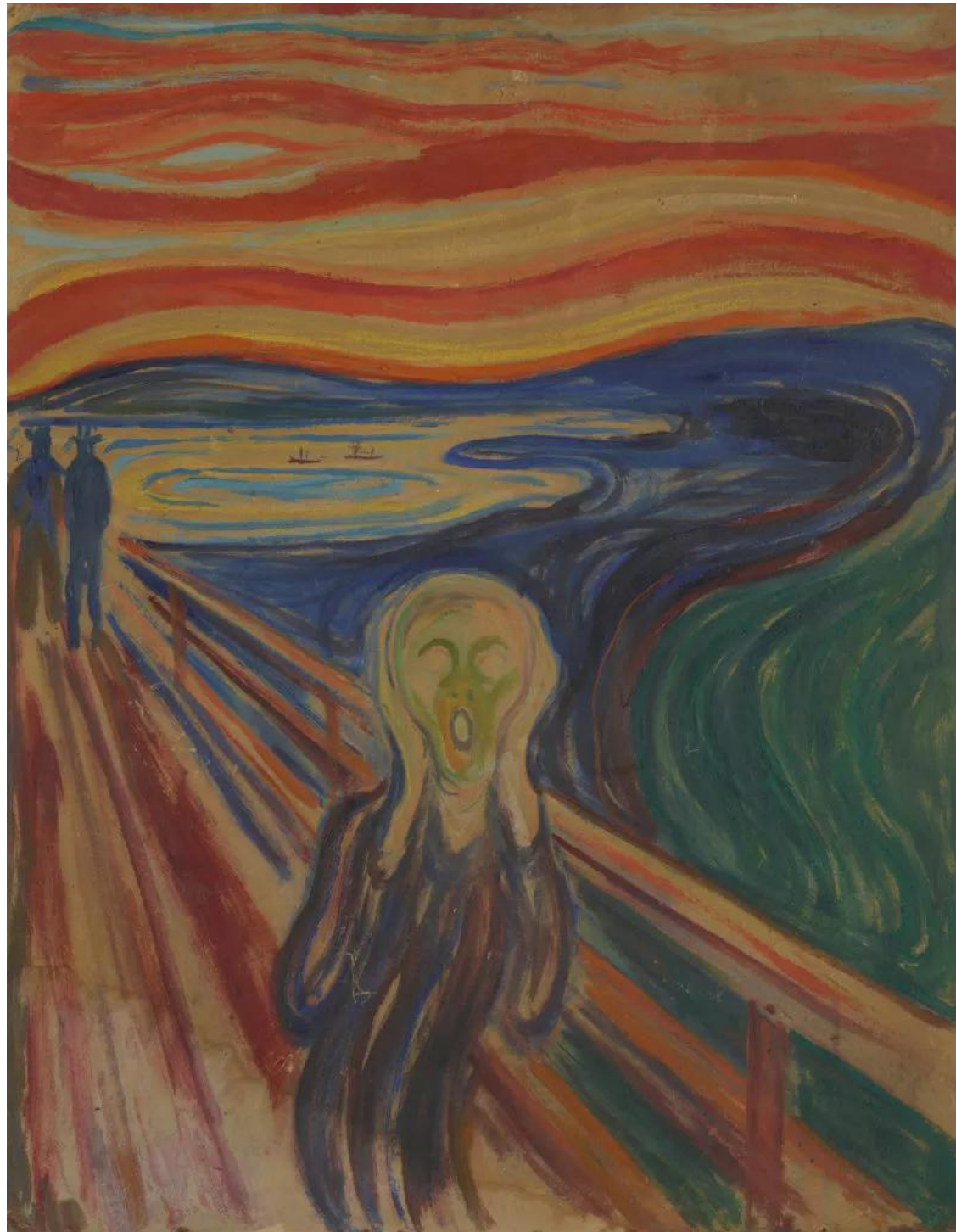
Pastel version of *The Scream* on display in the Munch Museum in Oslo.  
Edvard Munch

There is more than one version of *The Scream* - at least three paintings, two pastels and a number of sketches. A pastel is among the most expensive pieces of art ever sold.

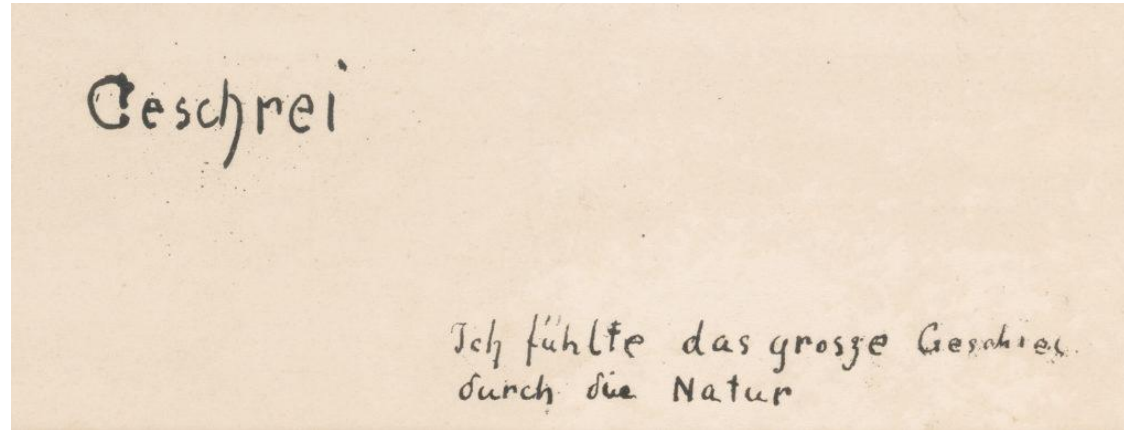
It was stolen not once, but twice

The first time was in 1994, when the thieves broke in through a window and made off with a painting of *The Scream* from the National Gallery in Oslo. Luckily, it was found and returned within three months.

Armed gunmen broke into the Munch Museum in 2004, stealing a different version of *The Scream*. It remained missing until 2006.



It is not intended to be a depiction of an individual screaming,  
The figure is trying to block out the 'shriek' that they hear around them  
(the work's Norwegian title is actually 'Skrik' and in German, 'Geschrei').  
The figure appears featureless and ungendered, and is perhaps one of the reasons why it  
has become a universal symbol of fear and anxiety.



Detail of Munch's German inscription from the 1895 *The Scream*

The actual scream, Munch claims, came from the surroundings around the person.  
Munch had an intense experience in which he felt a scream "rip through nature."

The artist printed 'I felt a large scream pass through nature' in German at the bottom of  
his 1895 piece. Munch's original name for the work was intended to be  
*The Scream of Nature*.





*Autumn Leaves, Yokoyama Taikan  
1931 color on paper / pair of six-panel screens*

Leaving anxieties and fear behind us, we will close with thoughts of the brilliant farewell of fall as we head into the season of Thanksgiving. Rather than a scream of nature, let's enjoy a dream of nature.



*Autumn on the Seine at Argenteuil, Claude Monet, 1893*

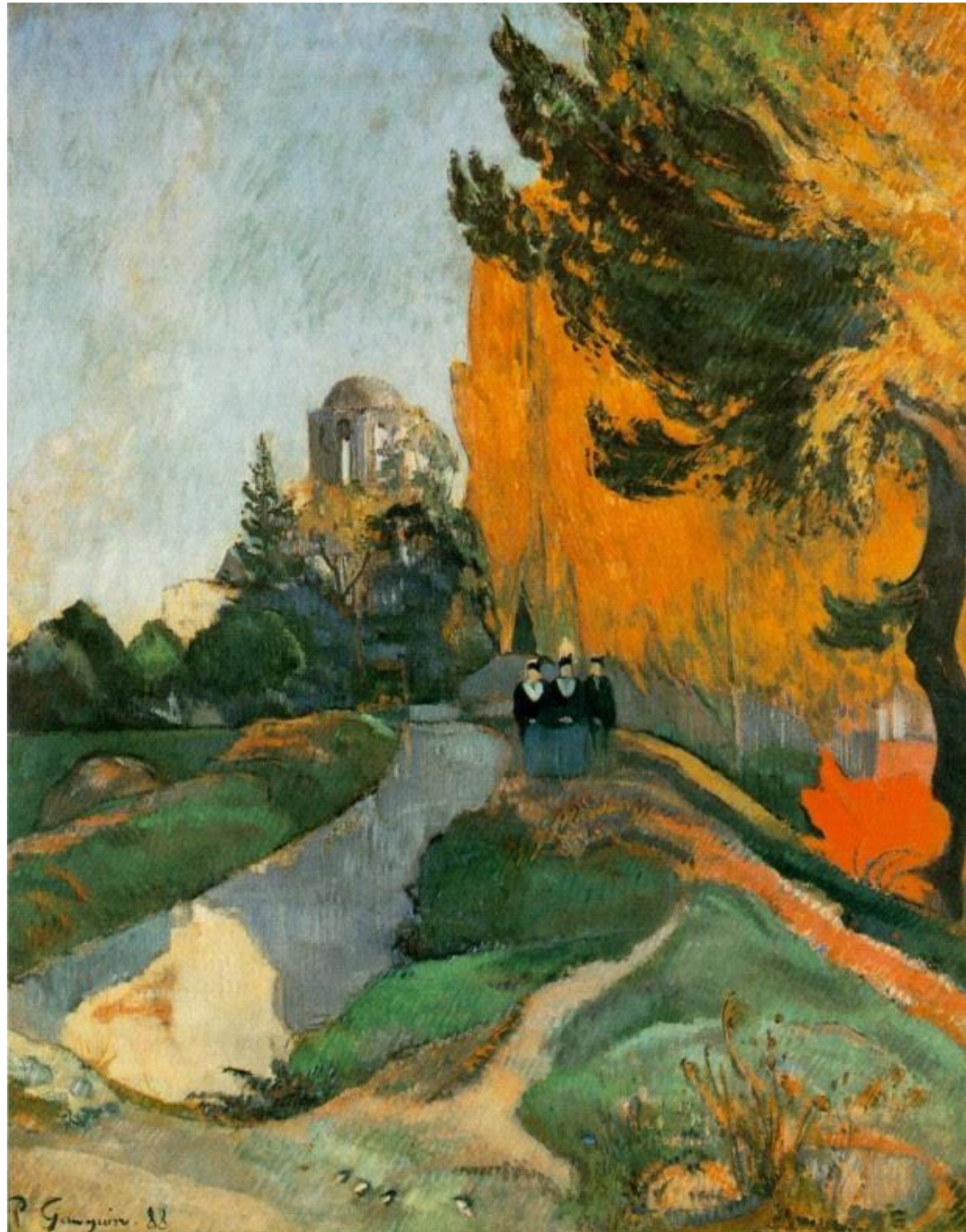
Maybe you have had a chance to be out on the water before it is time to put boats away,  
or maybe you have walked by the water.

“These landscapes of water and reflection have become an obsession for me. It is  
beyond my strength as an old man, and yet I want to render what I feel.” *Monet*



*Catskill Mountain House, Thomas Cole, 1845 - 47*

Maybe you have enjoyed the sight of sunlight on the tapestry of colors.



*Autumn Landscape in Arles near the Alyscamps, Paul Gauguin, 1888*

Maybe the spectacular flames of color give you hope.



*Autumn Leaves, Georgie O'Keefe, 1924*

Fall gives us gifts of beauty.



*Autumn Landscape with Trees, Vincent Van Gogh, 1881*

Fall gives us a time for contemplation.

"Sometimes I long so much to do landscape, just as one would for a long walk to refresh oneself, and in all of nature, in trees for instance, I see expression and a soul, as it were. *Vincent to his brother Theo, 1882*



*Birch Forest, Gustav Klimt, 1902*

We can enjoy meditative walks in the woods.





*Woldgate Woods, David Hockney, 2008*

We will get through the tunnel of COVID.



*Autumn Woods*, Alfred Bierstadt, 1886

I have had the poignant pleasure of watching autumn arrive in the Maine woods as the vermillion reds, chromium yellows, atomic oranges and deep ochres back against a pure-blue sky.

Later the leaves turn what my dear husband Don and I call Renaissance Colors, russets, bronzes, deep terracotta, even shades of gold - old gold. Surely Bierstadt must have been swept by the beauty of this autumn foliage as he tried to capture it.

How wondrous and curious is this final resplendent phenomenon of fall. The burst of beauty is heartbreaking. The season brings complex sensations of melancholy, beauty mixed with loss, remembered joys and sorrows, of gratefulness for being alive.



*The Terrace, Autumn La Terrasse, Automne, Victor Charreton, 1894*

In my imagination we are sitting outside and drinking tea and discussing art and life  
on a perfect autumn afternoon.

Karen Handal

*Musings on the Decorative Arts*

Greenwich Decorative Arts Society,

October, 2020



Gensou Okuda, Oirase Ravine: Autumn, 1983

*Thank you*

~ MoMA Learning: René Magritte

~ Malcolm Gaskill, "The Fear and Loathing of Witches," in *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2018)

~ British Museum "Witches and Wicked Bodies" Exhibition, 2014

~ *Emma Hamilton: Seduction and Celebrity*, edited by Quintin Colville and Kate Williams for the Royal Museums Exhibition, Greenwich, England

~ *Circe's Transformations*, R. L. Cunningham

~ British Museum 2019 Special Exhibition of *The Scream*

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