

MUNCH: His Life and Work
by Reinhold Heller
Univ. of Chicago, 1984
240 pp. \$39.95



"I do not believe," said Norway's greatest painter, Edvard Munch (1863–1944), "in an art which is not forced into existence by a human being's desire to open his heart." Coming from most people, the utterance would sound melodramatic. From Munch, whose devotion to his art helped him overcome the loss of loved ones, alcoholism, and the threat of insanity, it rings true. Heller, an art historian at the University of Chicago, mixes straightforward narrative, critical commentary, and the artist's own jottings, or *optegnelser*, to present the life and work of a 20th-century master whose densely symbolic paintings helped spawn the expressionist movement. Munch was a death-haunted man; as a child, he had seen first his mother and then his sister die of tuberculosis. He came to see the specter of mortality almost everywhere—particularly in the act of artistic creation and in that of sexual procreation. Both acts enervated; both consumed; yet both were equally capable of generating life. Indeed, believing that art and sex tapped the same wells of creative energy, Munch increasingly withdrew into a solitary world. He abandoned the erotic adventures of his early bohemian days to devote himself to his painting. In his monumental works (*The Sick Child*, *The Kiss*, *Jealousy*, *The Scream*), Munch gives a troubled rendering of the human cycle of birth, love, death, and rebirth. His last works were often compulsive replications of earlier images, notes Heller, emptied of their "demonic power." But to the end, they expressed one of Munch's most famous jottings—"I was born dying."

Contemporary Affairs

CITIES AND THE WEALTH OF NATIONS: Principles of Economic Life
by Jane Jacobs
Random, 1984
257 pp. \$17.95

Why is macroeconomic theory, whether Keynesian or monetary, incapable of explaining, much less solving, such current economic tangles as "stagflation"—inflation combined with growing unemployment? According to Jacobs, a Toronto-based author of books about urban decay and revival, eco-