

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-

conomic theory has always been flawed. It has taken the nation rather than the city as the basic economic unit. Certain types of cities—what she terms “import-replacing” cities—are, along with their surrounding regions, the true engines of prosperity and growth. Jacobs’s explanation of what makes an import-replacing city—including a base of industrial and entrepreneurial “skills,” a network of ties with the surrounding region—draws on the experiences of specific cities, ranging from 14th-century Venice to 20th-century Tokyo. She distinguishes these wealth-generating centers from cities that enjoy a false prosperity: The last 30 years saw Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, go from boom to bust, as the world market for leather collapsed—a pattern typical of cities dependent on a single source of wealth. Cities that depend on transplanted industries, such as the U.S. Sun Belt cities, are equally fragile. Jacobs’s theory has wide ramifications: It helps explain why the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) failed to produce long-term economic prosperity (the region never developed an import-replacing city), and why capital cities, such as London, often prosper during periods of national economic decline.

**THE CROWDED EARTH:
People and the Politics
of Population**
by Pranay Gupte
Norton, 1984
349 pp. \$17.95

The grim statistics of overpopulation have been recorded in countless studies and reports, but Gupte, a former *New York Times* reporter, does what no mere chart or table can do: He brings his readers face to face with the problem. He also shows, in the course of his five-continent tour, how the pressure of too many people affects health care, migration, education, urbanization, and the environment. Everywhere the focus is on people. A Nigerian, oblivious to the fact that Africa has—and can ill afford—the world’s highest birthrate, describes his 15 children as a “matter of his manhood.” A cab driver in Mexico City complains: “We are choking to death here. It is not just the pollution but also the sheer boredom of being in traffic jams all the time.” (The three million autos in this metropolis of 17 million people combine with