



But when was it painted?

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The Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway, is dedicated to the visual works of the famous Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863 – 1944). Edvard Munch was a symbolist, expressionist painter and printmaker from Oslo, Norway. He was regarded as the pioneer of the amazing Expressionist movement. His art work from the late 1800's is the most well known, but his later work is gradually attracting more attention and is quite an inspiration of many of today's artists.

The Munch Museum catalogue for 2008 contains about 1700 paintings of which virtually very few have a precise date. Even when the artist has written the year on the painting itself, there may be a significant uncertainty about this date, and partly due to unclear writing making it difficult to interpret the numbers. This means that other sources need to be applied to verify an accurate date.

The climatologist at the Norwegian Meteorological Institute can help dating paintings of Munch. E. g. the painting "Standing Woman with Arms Folded". The painting shows a woman in front of a hill with much snow. The location is almost certainly Grimsrød on Jeløya, a property Munch began renting on March 1, 1913. Jeløya is an island at the southeastcoast of Norway near the town Moss. Jeløya has usually not so much snow because it is near by the sea and windy.

The last digit in the date is unclear and has been read as both '3' and '5'. The woman in the portrait, Ingeborg Kaurin, was Munch's model up to the beginning of 1915, so both dates are possible.

The year written on the painting has been read as both 1913 and 1915, and since 1974 it has usually been interpreted as 1913 (Stenersensamlingen's catalogue 1974). In the project "But when was it painted?" disclose that it could be another year. One way to reconsider when a painting was painted is to study geophysical characteristics and consider historical observations of snow. The method that is used here is to study daily meteorological snow data from this period from the meteorological station at Jeløya which has information about the precipitation and snow. The artist date "1913" is compared with meteorological snow data from the neighbouring years. The winter of that year 1913 was unusually mild with little snow, and it seems unlikely that there was this much snow lying in March. The winter of 1914 was similarly mild, with little snow in the area around Moss, while there was heavy snow in January 1915 (source: the Norwegian Meteorological institute). It therefore seems most likely that this was one of the last pictures Munch painted of his young model in the winter of 1914–15, before she married the painter Søren Onsager on January 28, 1915. The research for the catalogue raisonné implies that this date 1913 is probably wrong since the 1913 has less snow. This later examination concluded that in fact 1915 was more likely.