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PAUL KLEE

MARCH 13, 1930 - APRIL 2, 1930

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
730 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The exhibition has been made possible primarily through the generous co-operation of the artist's representatives, The Flechtheim Gallery of Berlin, and the J. B. Neumann Gallery of New York. The following have also generously lent pictures: Mr. Philip C. Johnson, Cleveland; The Gallery of Living Art, New York University; The Weyhe Gallery, New York.

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Note—On the front cover of this Catalog is a simplified zinc cut of Klee’s Portrait of an Equilibrist. The back cover is taken from Pages 6 and 7 of Klee’s Pedagogical Sketch Book. The diagrams illustrate variations on an "active" line.
INTRODUCTION

His father a Bavarian, his mother Southern French, Paul Klee was born, with singular appropriateness, in Switzerland near the town of Berne, in the year 1879. His childhood was passed in an atmosphere of music for his father was a professional musician and conductor of the orchestra in which his son at an early age played the violin. His mother, too, came of a musical family so that for a time he expected to become a musician. However, after much debate, he was finally sent in 1898 to Munich to study drawing, at first at the Knirr school, and then with Franz Stuck at the Academy. Stuck was an academic painter of bizarre and macabre subjects, at times coarsely banal, but with considerable imaginative power. In 1901 Klee made the orthodox journey to Italy, but quite unorthodoxly he preferred early Christian art to that of the quattrocento, Baroque to High Renaissance painting, and the Naples aquarium to the classical antiquities of the Naples Museum.

For the next few years Klee lived with his parents, producing very slowly a remarkable series of etchings which he exhibited in Switzerland and Munich. Though he visited Paris he did not at first become aware of the post-impressionist and fauve revolutions. He found himself more concerned with drawing and caricature than with painting. Goya’s fantastic Caprichos interested him as did the other-worldly engravings of Blake and Fuseli. Of more recent draughtsmen he found Kubin’s weird humor, the quaint pathos of James Ensor, and Redon’s visionary lithographs most to his taste. He read the tales of Hoffmann and of Poe, the prose and poetry of Baudelaire. His admirations both in graphic art and literature were clearly fantastic.

He moved to Munich in 1906. In the next four years he came to know through exhibitions van Gogh, then Cézanne, and finally Matisse, who opened the eyes of the young artist to the expressive (as opposed to the descriptive) possibilities of color and to the charm of the apparently artless and naïve.

In Munich he became acquainted with three other young painters, Kandinsky, a Russian who had also studied under Stuck, Franz Marc, and August Macke, the last two, both of them men of great promise, lost to German art during the war. The four formed the famous group of der Blaue Reiter which raised the banner of revolt in staid academic Munich and won a considerable success even in Berlin. It was the Blue Rider group which first made the word Expressionism known throughout Europe. Marc painted compositions of animals, using brilliant, pure color, a line of great style and a somewhat cubistic technique. Kandinsky’s abstract Improvisations were among the first to disregard entirely all vestiges of representation. But
Klee, while he experimented with abstract design, continued his researches in the realm of fantasy.

In 1912 Klee visited Paris, where he stayed for over a year. Guillaume Apollinaire, Picasso, Delaunay, became his friends. A journey to Tunis (Kairuan) in 1914 seems to have been equally important in discovering himself to himself.

Shortly after the war the town of Weimar had formed an extraordinary institution called the Bauhaus Academy, placing at its head the architect, Walter Gropius. It was primarily a technical school devoted to the study of materials and design in architecture, furniture, typography, and other modern industrial arts. As a "spiritual counter-point" to these scientific-utilitarian activities Gropius invited three painters to live at the Bauhaus and give instruction in drawing and painting. They were the Russian Kandinsky, the American Feininger, and the Swiss Klee, three of the most gifted as well as most radical artists at work in Germany. Since 1920 Klee has been at the Bauhaus, moving with it to Dessau in 1926.

In the same year Feininger, Javlensky, Kandinsky, and Klee, formed the Blue Four which sent exhibitions throughout Germany and even to America. Klee also sent paintings to the Société Anonyme exhibitions in New York and Brooklyn.

Klee was "claimed" by the Sur-réaliste group in Paris but found (as did Picasso, Braque, and Chirico) that he was not especially interested. His work is, however, perhaps the finest realization of their ideals of an art which appears to be purely of the imagination, untrammeled by reason or the outer world of empirical experience.

Klee, when one talks with him, seems the opposite of eccentric, in spite of his amazing art. He lives in Dessau in a house designed by Gropius as a machine à habiter near the factory-like Bauhaus building. He is a smallish man with penetrating eyes, simple in speech and gently humorous. While one looks over his drawings in his studio one can hear his wife playing a Mozart sonata in the room below. Only in one corner are their curiosities, a table littered with such ornaments as shells, a skate's egg, bits of dried moss, a pine cone, a piece of coral, fragments of textiles, a couple of drawings by the children of his neighbor, Feininger. These serve to break the logical severity of the Gropius interior and Bauhaus furniture—and perhaps also serve as catalytics to Klee's creative activity.

Very much has been written in German and French about Klee's art. Indeed few living painters have been the object of so much speculation. For a work by Klee is scarcely subject to methods of criticism which follow ordinary formulae. His pictures cannot be judged as representations of the ordinary visual world. Often they defy the laws of design and cannot be
judged as formal compositions, though some of them are remarkably interesting to the aesthetic purist.

Their appeal is primarily to the sentiment, to the subjective imagination. They have been compared, for this reason, to the drawings of young children at an age when they draw spontaneously from intuitive sources rather than from observation. They have been compared to the fantastic and often truly marvelous drawings of the insane who live in a world of the mind far removed from circumstantial reality. Klee’s work sometimes suggests the painting and ornament of primitive peoples, especially palaeolithic bone carvings, Eskimo drawings and Bushman paintings, the pictographs of the American Indian. Drawings made subconsciously or absentmindedly or while under hypnosis occasionally suggest Klee’s devices. In fact Klee has himself at times made “automatic” drawings with some success. The child, the primitive man, the lunatic, the subconscious mind, all these artistic sources (so recently appreciated by civilized taste) offer valuable commentary upon Klee’s method.

But there are in Klee’s work qualities other than the naive, the artless, and the spontaneous. Frequently the caricaturist which he might have been emerges in drawings which smile slyly at human pretentiousness. Often he seduces the interest by the sheer intricacy and ingenuity of his inventions. At times he charms by his gaiety or makes the flesh creep by creating a spectre fresh from a nightmare.

Of course he has been accused of being a “literary” painter. For the person who still insists upon regarding painting as decorative, or surface texture, or merely formal composition the accusation is just. But Klee defies the purist and insists as do Chirico and Picasso upon the right of the painter to excite the imagination and to consider dreams as well as still life material for their art.

For those who are not acquainted with Klee’s work, notes on a few characteristic pictures may not be amiss.

Klee’s abstract designs have little to do with cubism for they are pure inventions rather than abstractions of things seen. Variations (No. 20) is a title drawn from musical terminology. The “theme” is stated in the center square of the picture and varied in the adjoining squares, the original center plaid becoming simpler and more horizontal nearer the edges of the design. In Artificial Rock (No. 18) patterns in red lines emerge ominously from a smoky chiaroscuro. Steps (No. 48) and Monuments (No. 50) are studies in horizontal banding. The Sacred Island (No. 17) in which architecture is suggested, is more subtle and more poetic in sentiment.

Klee has made a study of masks in theatrical and ethnographic museums, and has experi-
mented with their power to startle and bind the imagination. Actor’s Mask (No. 12) reminds one of Melanesian ceremonial masks in its startling, uncanny effect. Similar is The Second Glance (No. 60) with its spiral eyes and sinister fascination. Comparable in its psychological power is the extraordinary Cat and Bird (No. 39). The bird is placed symbolically between the eyes of the cat. A few minutes’ exposure to this hypnotic stare very nearly reduces the spectator to the condition of the bird. And who can look at the Goat (No. 9) without suspecting a devil?

Another mask, the Portrait of an Equilibrist (No. 24) is most ingeniously contrived. At the bottom of the design are the steps and taking-off platform. The delicate displacement and adjustment of weights in balancing are suggested by the verticals which swing from the fulcrum in the center. The two balls at the end of the tight-rope walker’s rod seem to roll along beneath the horizontal line like drops of water on the under side of a wire. The whole makes a face.

The arrow is a motive which frequently occurs in Klee’s compositions. It is used to indicate the movement and direction of forces as in the diagram on the title-page. In Slavery (No. 14) a heavy red arrow points down. In Mixed Weather (No. 47) it sweeps along the earth like a tempest beneath the dripping moon. In Just Missed (No. 36) it is more literally a missile.

Klee is a master of a line which seems negligent but is curiously expressive. The Harbor of Plit (No. 29) is at first glance a child’s scrawl but upon study gives a remarkable effect of ships dancing on water, seen through hazy moonlit atmosphere. The flower Quadrupula Gracilis (No. 30) is suggested by the most sensitive calligraphy. The Zoo (No. 37) presents no earthly animals but creatures of the imagination drawn with the finality of hieroglyphics. The humor of She moos, we play (No. 35) is evident. But more important to the Klee enthusiast are such pure inventions as the figures in the Abstract Trio (No. 3). Here are forms which live and breathe with convincing actuality, though their like has never been seen. In such conceptions Klee appears in his most personal style.

Nothing is so astonishing to the student of Klee as his infinitive variety. But variety is naturally to be expected of one whose forms and compositions are born of the mind.

A. H. B., JR.
CHRONOLOGY

1879  Born near Berne, Switzerland. Father a Bavarian music teacher and conductor. Mother of southern French stock.
1898  To Munich. Studied drawing at the Knirr school and at the Academy under Franz Stuck.
1901  To Italy with Hermann Haller.
1906  Settled in Munich where he lived until the war.
1908–11 Came to admire the work of van Gogh, Cézanne, and especially Matisse.
1912  Formed with Kandinsky, Franz Marc and August Macke the group called Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider) which held exhibitions in Munich and Berlin.
1914  Tunis.
1915–19 The war.
1920  Invited by Walter Gropius to become a professor at the Bauhaus Academy, Weimar, together with Kandinsky and Feininger.
1924  First one-man exhibition, New York, Société Anonyme.
1926  Moved with the Bauhaus to Dessau. Formed with Feininger, Jawlensky, and Kandinsky the group called the Blue Four which exhibited in Germany and America.
1928  Visit to Egypt. First one-man show in Paris.
1929  Fiftieth birthday exhibitions in many German and Swiss Museums.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PAUL KLEE by H. v. Wedderkop, Leipzig, 1920
PAUL KLEE by Leopold Zahn, Potsdam, 1920
KAIRUAN ODER EINE GESCHICHTE VON MALER KLEE by W. Hausenstein, Munich, 1921
PÄDAGOGISCHES SKIZZENBUCH by Paul Klee, Bauhausbücher, No. 2, Munich, 1925
PAUL KLEE by Will Grohmann, Paris, 1929
IN OTHER MUSEUMS

Paintings and drawings by Klee are in collections of the following museums. The number of works, if known, follows the name of the museum.

BARMEN, RUHMESHALLE (4)
BERLIN, NATIONAL GALLERY (2)
BERNE, ART GALLERY
COLOGNE, WALLRAF-RICHTZ MUSEUM (8)
DETROIT, INSTITUTE OF ARTS (2, LOANS)
DRESDEN, PICTURE GALLERY (5)
DUSSELDORF, ART MUSEUM (4)
ESSEN, FOLKWANG MUSEUM (5)
FRANKFORT, STÄDEL INSTITUTE (6)
GENEVA, MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY
HALLE, MUSEUM (7)
MANNHEIM, ART GALLERY (9)
MOSCOW, MUSEUM OF MODERN WESTERN ART (2)
NEW YORK, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, GALLERY OF LIVING ART (1)
STUTTGART, ART GALLERY (10)
WEIMAR, STATE ART COLLECTION (11)
WIESBADEN, NEW MUSEUM (12)
ZURICH, ART GALLERY
CATALOG

The pictures are arranged chronologically regardless of medium. The painter uses such various media that the catalogers have little confidence that they have given a correct description in every case. The original German title follows the English translation except when the two would be nearly identical. An asterisk before a title indicates that the picture is illustrated by the half-tone reproduction which bears the same number. Unless otherwise indicated the paintings belong to the artist and are exhibited by arrangement with his representatives.

1 ESCAPEMENT
   Tempera on canvas, 1919
   Collection E. Weyhe, New York

2 LANDSCAPE WITH THE BLUE BIRDS
   Gouache, 1919
   Collection Gallery of Living Art, New York University

3* ABSTRACT TRIO (Abstraktes Terzett)
   Ink drawing and watercolor, 1923

4 SCENE PLAYED TO A HAND ORGAN (Kleine Handlung zur Drehorgel)
   Ink and watercolor, 1923

5 UPPER AND LOWER CASE (Buchstabenbild)
   Color on paper strips on board, 1924

6 PORTRAIT OF MRS. P. IN THE SOUTH (Bildnis der Frau P. im Süden)
   Gouache and watercolor, 1924

7 COOKIE PICTURE (Lebkuchenbild)
   Oil on fibre-board with wax reliefs, 1925

8 PERSPECTIVES (Perspective Figuration)
   Tempera (?) on cardboard, 1925

9* GOAT (Bock)
   Pen and air brush with watercolor, 1925
   Private Collection, New York

10 CATHEDRALS, II (Kathedralen, II)
    Oil on canvas on board, 1925

11 STILL LIFE WITH FRAGMENTS (Stilleben mit Fragmenten)
    Air brush on waxed cardboard, 1925
*12 ACTOR'S MASK (Schauspielermaske)
    Oil on canvas on fibre-board, 1925

13 THE BIRD FEEDS WITH THE SNAKE (Vogel füttert mit der Schlange)
    Ink drawing and gouache, 1925

14 SLAVERY (Sklaverei)
    Ink drawing and gouache, 1925

15 PALACE PARTIALLY DESTROYED (Palast teilweise zerstört)
    Watercolor, 1926

16 SNAILS (Schnecken)
    Ink drawing and air brush, 1926

17 THE SACRED ISLAND (Heilige Inseln)
    Ink drawing and watercolor, 1926
    Collection: Philip C. Johnson, Cleveland

18 ARTIFICIAL ROCK (Künstlicher Fels)
    Oil on fibre-board, 1927

19 LIGHTNING (Blitz)
    Gesso (?) on fibre-board, 1927

*20 VARIATIONS (Variationen)
    Oil on canvas, 1927

21 THREE GOBLETS AND OTHER THINGS (Drei Gefässe und Anderes)
    Oil on cardboard, 1927

22 PASTORALE
    Tempera on canvas on board, 1927

23 DEPARTURE OF THE SHIPS (Abfahrt der Schiffe)
    Oil on canvas, 1927

24 PORTRAIT OF AN EQUILIBRIST
    Oil on fibre-board, 1927

*25 DRAGON OF THE AIR (Luftdrache)
    Oil on canvas, 1927

26 MEGANTHEMUM
    Oil on wood panel, 1927

27 A PHANTOM BREAKS UP (Ein Phantom bricht zusammen)
    Ink drawing and gouache, 1927
28 FIGURINE "THE OLD WOMAN" (Figurine "die Alte")
Oil on canvas on paper, 1927

*29 THE HARBOR OF PLIT (Der Hafen von Plit)
Ink drawing, 1927

30 QUADRUPULA GRACILES P. K.
Ink drawing, 1927

31 PORTRAIT OF A RATHER EXTRAORDINARY MAN (Geringer Ausserordentlicher, Bildnis)
Ink and brush drawing, 1927

32 FIGURINE "DEATH" (Figurine "der Tod")
Oily ink spattered on paper, 1927

33 A LITTLE FOOL IN A TRANCE (Kleiner Narr in Trance)
Ink drawing, 1927

34 CITY AND SUN (Burg und Sonne)
Tempera and oil on canvas, 1928

35 SHE MOOS, WE PLAY (Sie brüllt, wir spielen)
Oil on canvas, 1928

36 JUST MISSED (Fast getroffen)
Oil on canvas on board, 1928

*37 ZOO (Tiergarten)
Oil on wood panel, 1928

38 RADIATING LANDSCAPE (Landschaft im Drehpunkt)
Tempera on cheese cloth on board, 1928

*39 CAT AND BIRD (Katz und Vogel)
Oil on canvas on wood, 1928

40 GIFTS FOR T. (Gaben für T.)
Tempera on gesso on canvas on wood, 1928

41 GROUP FROM A PARK (Gruppe aus einem Park)
Ink and watercolor, 1928

42 FLOWERS IN A ROOM (Blumen im Zimmer)
Oil on canvas on paper, 1928

43 AEOLIAN RACE (Aeolisches Rennen)
Oil on canvas on paper, 1928

44 SCENE WITH FOUR FIGURINES (Handlung mit vier Figurinen)
Pencil drawing, 1928
45 BEFORE AND BEHIND THE BRIDGE (Vor und hinter der Brücke)
Ink drawing, 1928

46 HAPPY MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE (Heitere Gebirgslandschaft)
Tempera on fibre-board, 1929

47 MIXED WEATHER (Gemischtes Wetter)
Mixed medium on canvas, 1929

48 STEPS (Stufen)
Oil on canvas, 1929

49 NECROPOLIS
Tempera on wood panel, 1929

50 MONUMENTS NEAR G. (Denkmäler bei G.)
Oil on canvas, 1929

51 HURRYING SPIRIT (Fliehender Geist)
Oil on canvas, 1929

52 ARROW IN A GARDEN (Pfeil im Garten)
Tempera on canvas, 1929

53 DISPUTE (Disput)
Tempera on canvas, 1929

54 SOLITARY RIDER (Versprengter Reiter)
Tempera and gesso on canvas, 1929

55 LOADED DOWN (Beladene)
Tempera and gesso on panel, 1929

56 LEMON ORCHARD (Citronengegend)
Gouache, 1929

57 NEAR THE HARBOR (Stadtteil am Hafen)
Watercolor, 1929

58 LANDSCAPE WITH A WHEEL (Landschaft mit dem Rad)
Gouache, 1929

59 FEMALE DWARF (Zwergin)
Gouache, 1929

60 THE SECOND GLANCE (Der andere Blick)
Oil on canvas, 1930
61. IN THE GRASS (Im Gras)
   Oil on canvas, 1930

62. DESERT TOWN (Wüстendorf)
   Gouache, 1930

63. FURNACE-MURDERER (Mordbrenner)
   Gouache, 1930
ABSTRACT TRIO, 1923
Ink and watercolor, 13 x 17 3/4 inches
GOAT, 1925
Gouache, 8 1/2 x 11 inches
Private Collection, New York
ACTOR'S MASK, 1923
Oil, $13\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{3}{4}$ inches
VARIATIONS, 1927
Oil, 16 x 15 3/4 inches
DRAGON OF THE AIR, 1927
Oil, $14\frac{3}{4} \times 16\frac{3}{4}$ inches
THE HARBOR OF PLIT, 1927
Ink, 12 1/4 x 18 1/4 inches
ZOO, 1928
Oil, 16 x 23 3/4 inches
CAT AND BIRD, 1928
Oil, 15 3/4 x 21 inches
MIXED WEATHER, 1929
Mixed Medium, 19\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 16\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches
HURRYING SPIRIT, 1929
Oil, 35 x 25 inches
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Eine aktive Linie, die sich frei ergiebt, ein Spaziergang um seiner selbst willen, ohne Ziel. Das ägens ist ein Punkt, der sich verschiebt (Fig. 1):

Die mehrere Linie mit Begleitstörmen (Fig. 2 und 3):

Zwei Nebenlinien, die Hauptlinie imaginär (Fig. 5):

Dieselbe Linie, sich umschreibend (Fig. 4):