

The Museum of Modern Art

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FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION PAUL KLEE

DATES February 9 - May 5, 1987

ORGANIZATION Carolyn Lanchner, Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

CONTENT The first major retrospective in twenty years devoted to the work of the pioneering twentieth-century master, the Swiss-German artist Paul Klee (1879-1940), will contain approximately 250 paintings and watercolors and about fifty drawings and prints. Although Klee's name and art have long been known to the American public, no previous exhibition has presented the full range of his art in all its unparalleled diversity.

Through a unique agreement with the Klee Foundation in Bern, Switzerland, a large group of rarely lent works, including many of the prophetic, large-format paintings of his late period, will be brought together with those borrowed from collectors throughout the world. While extensive, the retrospective will be highly selective, featuring the artist's masterpieces together with representative and experimental works. These juxtapositions will demonstrate Klee's astonishing inventiveness, as well as offering insights into the creative process itself.

THE ARTIST Paul Klee was born in 1879 in Munchenbuchsee near Bern, to a German father and Swiss mother, both of whom were musicians. In 1880 the Klee family moved to Bern, where Paul attended school until 1898. For the next three years he studied painting in Munich under Heinrich Knirr and at the Academy of Fine Arts under Franz von Stuck. In 1899 Klee met the pianist Lily Stumpf, who would become his wife after a six-year courtship. In 1906 they settled in Munich, where their son Felix Paul was born a year later.

Klee was prodigiously talented both as a draftsman and a musician, having played with the Bern orchestra at the age of ten. In his youth he hesitated between a career in music and his inner drive to become an artist. But Klee's vacillation was brief, resolved by his decision that art held the greater challenge to his creative powers. Despite his immense natural talent, Klee subjected himself to a long, rigorous period of

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apprenticeship. Between 1902 and 1913, he devoted himself to exploring the means of his craft. Not until 1914 during a trip to Tunisia did he feel that he had mastered color. Thereafter his work ranged freely between the linear and the chromatic.

Klee's early associations with artist colleagues were important to the development of his ideas as well as in the exhibition of his work. In 1911 he met Kandinsky and Franz Marc and participated in the second Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) exhibition at the Hans Goltz Gallery in Munich. He spent the years 1916-18 in the German army.

In 1920 Klee had an extensive exhibition at the Goltz Gallery, and was invited by Walter Gropius to become a professor at the Bauhaus. There he advised his students that a path to art is "exactitude winged by intuition." He believed so strongly in the force of intuition and spontaneity that the Surrealists would later see him as the father of automatism. But the free flight of the imagination depended on the mastery of pictorial means; during Klee's years at the Bauhaus, he formulated a theory of the dynamics of art so far-reaching that it is inevitably compared with the investigations of Leonardo. Like Leonardo's, Klee's analyses of creative principles reflect his profound knowledge of music, science, nature, philosophy, and literature. In 1923 Klee's "Ways of Studying Nature" was published by the Bauhaus. A year later he participated with Kandinsky, Feininger, and Jawlensky in founding the Blue Four and had his first exhibition in the United States.

In 1931 Klee left the Bauhaus and became a professor at the Dusseldorf Art Academy. Two years later he was accused by Hitler's new National Socialist regime of representing the Jewish-controlled, artistic avant-garde. His house was searched and he was dismissed from his position. Obligated to leave Germany, he went back to Bern where he lived for the remainder of his life.

In 1935 Klee was stricken with sclerodermia. In spite of his frail condition and an isolation from other artists that was broken only by rare visits from old friends such as Arp and Kandinsky and the unexpected appearance of Picasso in 1937, Klee was immensely productive during these last five years. The freedom that had made him the only artist of his generation able to range without constraint between the figurative and the abstract, the organic and the geometric, became concentrated in the development of a radical new style. Characterized by boldly disjunctive, all-over composition, and the use of line as independent element, the work of this last period directly announces American Abstract Expressionism and European Informel. Klee died in a sanitarium in Muralto-Locarno in 1940.

LECTURE SERIES A series of four lectures will be presented in conjunction with the exhibition (speakers and dates to be announced).

PUBLICATION Paul Klee. Foreword by Richard E. Oldenburg; preface and acknowledgements by Carolyn Lanchner. Essays: "Klee and the Modern Tradition," by Ann Temkin; "From Revolution to Exile," by O.K. Werckmeister; "Klee and German Romanticism," by Jurgen Glaesemer; and "Klee in America," by Carolyn Lanchner. 125 color and 175 black-and-white illustrations. 416 pages. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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