Paul Klee

(1879 - 1940)

Paul Klee’s work is difficult to categorize. He was known for incorporating inspiration from a vast number of genres, such as primitive art, surrealism, cubism, and children’s art.

Paul Klee was born on December 18, 1879, in Münchenbuchsee, Switzerland. He was raised in a family of musicians, and Klee himself was a violinist. His childhood exposure to music will remain influential in his future art.

Torn between his two passions, Klee decided to study art, not music, at the Munich Academy in 1900.

Between 1901-02, Klee toured Italy, where he was influenced greatly by its art. He was mostly in awe of Early Christian and Byzantine art.

Klee settled in Bern in 1902. During the next few years, the artist produced some of his early works. These mostly consisted of etchings and ink drawings. Two of the best-known works created in 1903 are Virgin in a Tree and Two Men Meet, Each Believing the Other to Be of Higher Rank. Klee was well known for his strange and evocative titles.

He settled in Munich in 1906, after his marriage to pianist Lili Strumpf. Here he gained exposure to Modern Art. During this same year, Klee also had his first exhibition. He showed a series of satirical etchings at the Munich Secession.

Other exhibitions were soon to follow. His work was shown at the Kunstmuseum Bern in 1910 and at Moderne Galerie, Munich, in 1911.

Because of his friendships with such prominent painters as Wassily Kandinsky and August Macke, Klee joined the expressionist group The Blue Rider. This group aimed at contributing to the development of abstract art.

In 1914, Klee’s style and technique were greatly influenced by a trip he made to Tunisia. Overwhelmed by the intense light there, he swore always to incorporate great color into his own works. He proceeded to paint such works as the watercolor Red and White Domes (1914).

Also apart of Klee’s stylistic innovation was his incorporation of letters, numerals, and lines into the artwork.
1920 was a successful year for Klee. A major exhibition of his work was held at the Galerie Hans Goltz in Munich, his Schöpferische Konfession was published, and he was also appointed to the faculty of the Bauhaus, a state-sponsored school of art, architecture, and design.

His most notable exhibitions, however, were to take place in the years to come.

His first exhibition in the United States was at the Société Anonyme in New York in 1924. He had another one in Paris the following year at the Galerie Vavin-Raspail, and an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1930.

He began teaching at Dusseldorf Akademie in 1931, but the Nazis dismissed him as they termed his work "degenerate." They also proceeded to close the Bauhaus.

In 1933, Klee went to Switzerland. There he came down with the crippling collagen disease scleroderma. Klee was forced to change his lifestyle, yet he continued to paint. His late works are interpreted as reflections on death and war.

Paul Klee died on June 29, 1940, in Muralto-Locarno, Switzerland.