

Art: The Life of Paul Klee

Paul Klee is regarded by many people as one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. His work is characterised by abstracted representations of objects, in a variety of mediums and styles. These range from the childlike 'taking a line for a walk' images that Klee completed at the beginning of his career, to the 'pointillist' paintings that Klee began to paint, closer to the end of his life.

Klee was born in the town of Munchenbuchsee, in 1879, near Bern, Switzerland. His father was a German musician, who taught music at a college in Bern. His mother was an Austrian singer. Due to his parent's professions, Klee had a childhood dominated by music. This is evident in much of the artwork that he produced, which could be interpreted as musical 'graphic notation', and Klee was a talented musician in addition to his artistic skills.

Klee attended school in Bern, and became a skilful violinist. During much of his school life he was undecided as to whether to become an artist or a musician. However, he began to decide that painting was the career that he should take '*the conviction that painting is the right profession grows stronger and stronger in me*'. When he left school, Klee had decided: '*I wanted to become a painter and devote my life to art*' '*the only choice I have to make is between Paris and Germany.*'

Training and Inspiration

In 1898, Klee moved from Switzerland to Germany. He initially studied art at Edwin Knirr's private drawing school, but later began to study at the 'Munich College of Fine Art'. He was taught by Franz von Stuck, who was known for his 'gloomy classicalism.' However, although Klee had the ability to produce accurate realistic images, he developed his own style of strong colours and stylised images. During his time at the college he met Lily Stumpf, his future wife. She was another musician, a German pianist, and they eventually married in 1906.

In 1901, Klee had completed his studies and toured Europe. This was a source of much inspiration, and Klee observed a variety of styles of artwork. These ranged from the classic works, to the roman frescos of Pompeii. He also visited operas and museums, experiencing the varied culture of the European cities that he visited. After visiting Italy, Klee concluded that '*the main thing now is not to paint precociously but to be or, at least, to become an individual.*' Klee achieved this, by creating many distinctive styles of artwork. However, he was not entirely independent. Many of his paintings contain inspiration from artists such as:

Paul Cézanne (1839 – 1906)	Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954)
Wassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944)	Frans Marc (1880 – 1916)
Alexei von Jawlensky (1846 – 1941)	Josef Albers (1888 – 1979)
Georges Braque (1882 – 1963)	Robert Delaunay (1885 – 1941)
Lyonel Feininger (1871 – 1956)	Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973)

Klee Travelled around Europe and North Africa, being particularly influenced by the architecture of Tunisia. He visited the Tunisian cities of Hammemet, Kairouan and

Tunis, and it is thought that it was there that he began to experiment with colour and light within images.

When in North Africa, Klee commented that *'The sun has a dark force. The colourful clarity of the landscape is full of promise'*

However, Klee did not spend his entire life painting. In 1916 he was called up to join the German army to fight in the First World War. He was not sent to the front line, but was appalled by the horrors of the war.

Paul Klee, diary entry (6th December, 1916)

A battalion from the Somme marches up with music, an overwhelming sight. Everything yellow with mud. The unmilitary, matter-of-fact appearance, the steel helmets, the equipment. The trotting step. Nothing heroic, just like beasts of burden, like slaves. Against a background of circus music.

After the war, Klee returned to Germany, and continued to paint. He frequently had his work displayed at Exhibitions across Europe. He began teaching at the Balthaus state school of art and design. While teaching, as the director of the stained glass workshop, Klee continued to paint. In a letter to his wife, he wrote *'Here in the studio I work on half a dozen paintings and I am drawing and I am thinking about the course.'*

It was during this time that he produced many of his 1,253 recorded works, and he also became friends with Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky produced work similar to that of Klee, but his influence came primarily from Russia, and not the Mediterranean and North Africa.

In 1929, Klee was fifty, and exhibitions of his work were displayed in Rome, Paris and Berlin.

However, Klee could not continue his life as an artist and teacher. In 1935, the Nazis closed the Bauhaus, where Klee was teaching, and some of his work was destroyed.

In 1939, the Second World War began, and Klee left Germany. His work was regarded as degenerate by the Nazis, and was displayed again in exhibitions dedicated to this disapproved art. Perversely, this exhibition preserved much of the German artwork that it was designed to bring an end to, and much of this is now displayed in the 'Haus der Kunst' in Munich.

Paul Klee died in 1940, after being diagnosed with the rare disease called Scleroderma. Klee was diagnosed with this four years before his death, and over this time he knew that he was unlikely to survive for very long. It was during this time that he created one of his best known works, 'Death and Fire'. This painting is dominated by a skull, flanked by two humanoid figures.

