

**FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES:
PAUL KLEE (1879-1940)**

Supplies needed:

ART BIN:

- Pre-cut water color paper (approx. 6"x9" sheets, 1 per student)
- Project example

CFA CLOSET:

- Plastic cups (1 per student)
- Paper towels
- Watercolor paint sets (1 per student)

CLASSROOM SUPPLIES:

- Pencils, rulers, compasses

AHEAD OF TIME NOTE:

- Cut watercolor paper sheets in half to approx. 6"x9" (1 per student).

PRESENTATION (30 minutes):

Today we are going to talk about a 20th century modern artist named Paul Klee who was known for his *originality* and *individuality*. (**Ask: What do these two words mean to you?**)

Throughout his life, Klee kept a detailed diary, which gives us great insight into his works. His goal with his art was to ***"make the invisible visible"*** by combining concepts of music and poetry into his paintings in an almost magical way. He was a *prolific* artist – which means he made a lot of art, creating almost nine thousand pieces of art over his lifetime!

Paul Klee was born in Switzerland in 1879 – about 140 years ago! Klee came into a world full of music: his father was a music teacher, his mother was a singer. Paul Klee learned to play the violin at a young age and became a professional musician as a young adult. He played in a symphony orchestra where he met his wife Karoline (married in 1906 at age 27) who was a piano teacher.

Present - Paul Klee:

Klee considered himself both an artist and a musician until he traveled to Tunisia, Africa with other artists in 1914. Klee was so inspired by the rich colors and the unusual natural light in Tunisia, that he decided he wanted to spend the rest of his life as an artist. This is what he wrote in his diary: *"The color has seized hold of me. Color and I are as one. I am a painter!"*

During his two-week stay in Tunisia, Klee painted outdoors creating a series of small watercolors. In his diary he wrote: *"In the mornings, facing town, I paint in a delicately dispersed light, which is both clear and gentle."*

Watch - first 2 minutes featuring Kairouan, 1914.

Present - Motif from Hammamet, 1914:

- *Point out that original paintings were only 6 ½"x 8" and that the reproductions are enlarged.*
- *Klee used the words "delicate, clear, gentle" to describe the light and colors he was seeing. How do these words apply to his paintings? What time of day do you think these paintings were done? Why?*
- *Klee attempted to create space by organizing colors into geometric blocks. Look at the slanting lines and large shapes in the foregrounds of these paintings. See how they convey the huge, open desert that Klee saw in Tunisia? The shapes at the top of the paintings are smaller and more structured, depicting the buildings of the city on the horizon, farther away.*
- *These small (6 ½"x 8") quickly sketched watercolor paintings of Tunisia were visual "notes" from which Klee drew inspiration for later oil paintings.*

Klee's style is known as *abstract-realism*: his subjects are usually a recognizable place, object or person (representational or figurative), but they look different from the way they look in real life (abstracted)

Present - Soon an Old Man, 1922/#181, oil painting, 15"x18":

- *Sometimes the title of a painting can give clues about the artist's meaning:
"Senecio" -- the botanical name of ragwort, a plant with round yellow flowers (note round head!), pointed petals (eye shape!) and red seed heads (red pupils!).
"Soon an Old Man"-- Some think this is a self-portrait of the artist. Perhaps he is feeling the effects of middle age (43 years old)?*
- *This is considered a "figurative" picture because we recognize it as the head of a person. Is the portrait realistic or abstract?*
- *Look at the beautiful mix of tonal colors. ("Tonal" means many shades of the same color family.) Are the colors warm or cold?*
- *This picture has been referred to as a "geometric picture puzzle." Look at the relation of the different shapes: circles, squares & triangles.*

From 1921-1931, Klee was an instructor at the Bauhaus School, which taught about the unity of function and design. During this time he became famous as both a teacher and painter. Klee's own words and teachings help define his abstract art:

"It is not my task to reproduce appearances... for that there is the photograph. I try to look beyond the surface and get to the roots of things."

As Paul Klee developed his painting style, his love of music always showed in his paintings through his soft, tonal colors and repetition of shapes and rhythmic lines. In Klee's art there seems to be little distinction between the real and the imaginary – similar to the spontaneous creations of children and primitive people.

Present - Sinbad the Sailor (aka: “The Seafarers”), 1923, 15”x20”, watercolor and oil drawing:

- This painting is called “representational” or “figurative” because we recognize its subject. Ask: *What do you see?* (fisherman on a boat, harpooning large fish in the sea, blue sea, big white wave, dark sky)
- *Do the subjects and setting look the way they look in real life?*
 - *How is this painting “abstract”?*
 - *Bodies of man & fish are simplified into geometric shapes.*
 - *Sea and sky are broken into blocks of tonal colors,*
 - *Flat light shown in blocks of brighter/lighter colors – no shadows.*
 - *Forms are almost childlike in simplicity. Primitive subject matter*
 - *Imagine music: Repetition of shapes and colors give a sense of energy and movement. Colors step from one block to the next like notes in a musical score.*

Many influences enhanced Klee’s use of color and light throughout his career, culminating in this large-scale, peaceful painting called Ad Parnassum.

Present - Ad Parnassum, 1932:

Influences:

- *Byzantine mosaics: pictures made-up of tiny pieces of colored ceramic tiles. (Klee took two trips to Italy to see mosaics in 1902 and 1926)*
- *Pointillism or Divisionsism: form is created with tiny dot-like brushstrokes. (Influenced by Georges Seurat’s concept of Pointillism in painting around 1900)*
- *Egyptian images: pyramid shape and soft, reflective colors. (1928 trip to Egypt)*

Musical qualities –

- Klee wanted this painting to be like a multi-voiced musical composition.
- *He tried to do this by layering colors in melodic, harmonious “tones”.*
- *Point-out the multi-colored groupings of dots painted upon a background of multi-colored checks. Fluctuation of colors from light to dark conveys vibrations of light.*

In 1933 when the Nazis came to power in Germany, Klee moved away in protest to Bern, Switzerland. He had a very productive year, creating 482 works of art in 1933 alone. He became ill in 1935 with progressive scleroderma, a painful disease that eventually killed him in 1940.

During his illness, in the late 1930’s, Klee’s painting style changed. His paintings were bigger and bolder with black borders and thick paint.

SUGGESTED PROJECT (at least 30 minutes):

Supplies needed per student:

One sheet watercolor paper (approx. 6"x9")

Pencil, ruler, compass

Set of watercolor paints

2 paper towels

Cup of water

Show examples of projects.

Like Paul Klee's small sketches of Tunisia, you are going to create your own small-scale watercolor "sketch".

When making your picture, think of Paul Klee's **playful, fantasy-like images** (like in "Sinbad the Sailor") and colorful landscapes made-up of **simple blocks of colors** (like the Tunisian watercolors) and try to build your subject out of different shapes: circles, squares & triangles like a **"geometric picture puzzle."** (like in "Senecio")

Like Klee you may want to create a grid-like background then fill in the blocks with **tonal colors** to define the space. You may want to leave spaces of white as a color unto itself.

- First draw your picture with a pencil. Remember to build your subjects with geometric shapes. *You may want to use your rules & compasses to make the geometric shapes.* Then fill-in the forms with the watercolor paint. This is a small picture, so fill the entire space! (Give kids about 10 minutes to complete pencil sketches, then get them painting!)
- Here are some watercolor tips:
 - To keep colors *clear*, be sure to clean your brush between colors. Regularly rinse the brush and blot on a paper towel.
 - To get *brighter* colors, keep the brush a bit drier so it picks-up more paint.
 - To get *softer* colors, use a bit more water on the brush.
 - Use the lid of the paint set as your palette for mixing colors.
 - Experiment by mixing colors to get several *tones* of the same color family.
For example, blue tones: make a small puddle of blue, then add a little bit of one other color (i.e.: purple) to get a tone of blue. To get another tone of blue, start again with a clean puddle of blue, then add a little bit of another color (i.e.: green).