

Many of the artists we study in F.A.M.E. are pioneers. Can anyone tell me what a pioneer is? (*A person who does something first, preparing the way for others.*) The artist for today was one of the pioneers of modern art. His name is Paul Klee (*pronounced "Clay"*), and this is how he looked as an adult (*show portrait*).

Modern art was a dramatic change in the art world. Modern art parted from the idea that art had to reflect the real world. Artists were given the freedom to use their imaginations to create wonderfully diverse and abstract (or not real) compositions.

Biography

Paul Klee was born in Switzerland in 1879. His family was very musical: Paul's mother was a concert pianist, and his father was a professor of music as well as the conductor of the Bern Symphony. He had one sister who was devoted to him. Klee had a happy childhood. Besides having a supportive family, he was well liked in school.

Paul had an unusual talent. He was ambidextrous, meaning he could use either hand equally well. Generally he would draw or paint with his left hand and write with his right hand—sometimes at the same time! Klee showed equal talent for music (he played the violin), art, and singing. (*Show cartoon on p. 13 of Paul Klee paperback book.*) After much thought Klee decided to study art in Munich. He felt art presented the best opportunity to express himself.

When he was 27 he married Lily Stumpf, a pianist whom he had been in love with for many years. Early on, Lily supported the family by teaching piano lessons while Klee stayed at home caring for their son Felix. An only child, Felix was entertained for hours by his father's hand-made, imaginative puppets. Klee was a fun dad.

Klee eventually went to work teaching art in Germany after two years in the army. In 1933, the Nazis came into power in Germany. They considered Klee's art degenerate and confiscated many of his sketches and paintings. The Nazis later sold the paintings for their own profit. Klee was able to escape to Switzerland. In 1940, Klee died of paralysis of the heart after several years of being ill. It is estimated that he produced over 9,000 pictures during his lifetime of 61 years.

Artistic development

All of Klee's early artwork was in black and white (pencil or ink). His goal was to learn all he could about the element of line. In 1914, he took a trip to Tunisia, a country in Northern Africa, and he became excited about light and color. He felt color could add energy to a painting. His paintings after that trip were primarily in oil and watercolors. He also experimented with a variety of art materials or media besides ink, watercolors and oil paints: pastel, chalk, torn paper, wood, wax, crayon, burlap, paper, gauze, newsprint, tissue and anything else he happened to think of. He had an unlimited imagination. Klee's work has a child-like quality, and he frequently used geometric

forms. Very creative, he continually re-examined themes and forms resulting in varied and complex works; all were rooted in nature. Klee loved birds and animals. He believed art was the mirror of creation.

(Show “Twittering Machine” on page 31 of little book and p. 192 of big book) At first glance this picture may seem silly. Drawn in 1922 around the time of the Industrial Revolution, it is a commentary on man’s faith in mechanical contraptions to produce marvels such as bird song.

Art Elements of “Sinbad the Sailor”

Klee, like Rimsky-Korsakov, was very interested in the story of Sinbad. This is the piece Paul Klee created to illustrate the seafarer Sinbad (*show painting*). “Sinbad the Sailor” was painted in 1923 as an illustration of Klee’s comic opera, “The Seafarer.” It depicts Klee’s fantasy of Sinbad and the sea monsters described in the story (one with a head like an owl, one 200 feet long). The painting is a watercolor on paper, mounted on cardboard. At first glance it appears child-like, but is in fact quite complex.

Art is made up of many elements to create a mood or tell a story.

1. Light helps focus attention: This painting looks like a stage set; it is very theatrical: dark background, spotlight on central figure. What does the artist want you to notice first? (Sinbad and the sea monsters) (*Show the big pink sea monster.*)

(*Show “Elements of Art” posters one at a time with topics below.*)

2. Color helps establish mood. Klee uses high contrast in dark and light colors to focus attention on Sinbad and the monsters. Darker colors usually create a serious or somber mood. Light colors create a lighter, happier mood. What type of mood do you think Klee was creating? How does this painting make you feel?

3. Line also sets the mood. What shapes does Klee use in “Sinbad the Sailor?” (triangles, rectangles, geometric shapes) The shapes help create the unreal appearance, setting the mood for fantasy. If these figures of the fish and the boat were more realistic, would that change the mood of Klee’s painting? Would it make the piece scarier? (*Yes*)

4. Shapes of different sizes and types also help to focus attention on Sinbad and the sea monsters. Klee uses large rectangular shapes for the big ocean and smaller, more intricate shapes to draw your attention to the characters.

Conclusion

Both Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Paul Klee chose to take the story of Sinbad and tell it in a different way: Rimsky-Korsakov through music and Klee through his imaginative painting. Sinbad was an inspiration for them both.

Art project—each child receives one 6” x 9” piece of black construction paper and some geometric shapes. Ask them to create a fantasy animal by gluing the shapes on the paper. Allow 15 minutes, and play “Sinbad at Sea” while they work.

Anyone who finishes early may carefully page through the color plates in the big library art books on Paul Klee.