



Paul Klee
1879-1940

Many of the artists we study in GSWA 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"*)

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.

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. 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. One of the reasons they did not like art is because Adolf Hitler (who loved art) did not understand the new abstract and modern art. Why? He could not understand it and therefore he could not explain it and look smart. He always wanted to seem correct so rather than learn about it – he just said it was horrible. 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.

Art Elements of "Sinbad the Sailor"

Klee, 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?
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.

The Sea and Sinbad's Ship

Once upon a time, there was a young man named Sinbad. Sinbad's father had died leaving him a lot of money. Sinbad had a good time with his money. He bought fancy clothes, expensive food and fast horses. He did not spend it wisely. This went on for a long time until finally Sinbad realized he would be quite poor and would have to get a job.

So, he decided to sell what was left of his land and possessions and buy a ship and goods. He was going to go from island to island and sell his merchandise. He had many exciting adventures. One day, he and his crew landed on the most beautiful island that they had ever seen. Having been at sea a long time, they decided to dock their ship. They went ashore and lit fires, washed their clothes and had a good time.

But, soon the island shook and quaked. Do you know what they had done? They had docked on a whale!!! The whale had been floating; sand had settled on the whale's back and trees had grown. The sailors ran for their lives and left everything behind. Sinbad floated at sea for days and days in a wash tub. He was blown by the winds, tossed by the waves and bitten by fish. On he drifted until at last he was washed up on another island.

This island had people on it so he knew it wasn't another whale. It also had fresh fruit and water. Sinbad became a friend to everyone, including the king, on the island. He, being a storyteller himself, told many tales of the wondrous sights he had seen on his sea travels.

After a long stay, Sinbad became homesick and began longing for news of his home, Baghdad. One day while checking the ships at the waterfront he found the captain of his old ship! It turned out the captain had escaped from the whale and saved Sinbad's ship and merchandise. Sinbad gave some of his goods as gifts to his friend, the king, and sold the rest of the goods and returned to Baghdad a rich man.

Sinbad was so happy being home; he was rich with his profits and was able to buy a fine house and farmlands. His old friends rejoined him and life was very pleasant. After awhile, Sinbad began to forget about his hardships and plan for his second voyage.

And that is the story of Sinbad the Sailor and his First Voyage!