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| Klee, Paul (1879-1940) |
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| Paul Klee was one of the most important and inventive figures in the development of modernism in the visual arts. The Swiss-German artist's unusual oeuvre drew on the work of other modernist painters while also challenging foundational tenets of modernism in painting.  The son of a music teacher, Klee was a talented violinist. As an adolescent growing up in Berne, Switzerland, Klee was interested not only in the visual arts but also in poetry and music. After graduating from the Berne *Gymnasium* in 1898, Klee moved to Munich to study art at the academy.  In 1906, Klee married the pianist Lily Stumpf; their only child was born the next year. Relatively isolated from AVANT-GARDE art, Klee undertook a prolonged artistic self-education, attempting to break down pictorial art into its elements—line, tone, color—and master them one by one.  In 1911 and 1912, Klee became friendly with the artists of DER BLAUE REITER, including VASSILY KANDINSKY, FRANZ MARC, and August Macke, who accompanied Klee on a trip to Tunisia in 1914. Through these new connections, Klee became familiar with a broad spectrum of modernist art. In 1916, Klee, a German citizen, was drafted; he served as a clerk in Bavaria, far from the front. During the war, the Berlin dealer Herwarth Walden energetically promoted Klee's work. By 1920, many in the German AVANT-GARDE acknowledged Klee as a major artist, and Walter Gropius invited him to join the faculty of the newly established BAUHAUS. |
| Paul Klee was one of the most important and inventive figures in the development of modernism in the visual arts. The Swiss-German artist's unusual oeuvre drew on the work of other modernist painters while also challenging foundational tenets of modernism in painting.  The son of a music teacher, Klee was a talented violinist. As an adolescent growing up in Berne, Switzerland, Klee was interested not only in the visual arts but also in poetry and music. After graduating from the Berne *Gymnasium* in 1898, Klee moved to Munich to study art at the academy.  In 1906, Klee married the pianist Lily Stumpf; their only child was born the next year. Relatively isolated from AVANT-GARDE art, Klee undertook a prolonged artistic self-education, attempting to break down pictorial art into its elements—line, tone, color—and master them one by one.  In 1911 and 1912, Klee became friendly with the artists of DER BLAUE REITER, including VASSILY KANDINSKY, FRANZ MARC, and August Macke, who accompanied Klee on a trip to Tunisia in 1914. Through these new connections, Klee became familiar with a broad spectrum of modernist art. In 1916, Klee, a German citizen, was drafted; he served as a clerk in Bavaria, far from the front. During the war, the Berlin dealer Herwarth Walden energetically promoted Klee's work. By 1920, many in the German AVANT-GARDE acknowledged Klee as a major artist, and Walter Gropius invited him to join the faculty of the newly established BAUHAUS.  Klee taught at the BAUHAUS until 1931, when he took a position at the Düsseldorf academy. When the Nazis took power, the academy suspended Klee, who moved back to Switzerland. In the mid-1930s, Klee began to suffer from scleroderma. Despite this debilitating disease, the last years of his life in exile were highly productive.  Most of Klee's oeuvre consists of intimate, small-scale drawings (a medium especially important for Klee), watercolors, and oils. Often his works involve unusual combinations of media and unusual supports, resulting in layered, complex surfaces that invite close examination. His play with materials and procedures is one of the most distinctive aspects of his art.  File: KleeCarpetOfMemory1914-1922.jpg  Figure *Carpet of Memory*, 1914-1922  Source:  Klee's art is distinguished as well by his abiding fascination with making works that trouble the opposition between the visual and the verbal. Many of his works play with writing as a visual phenomenon.  File: KleeVillaR1919.jpg  Figure 2 *Villa R*, 1919  Source:  Closely related is Klee's interest in all sorts of notational systems and in visual signs that signify by convention rather than by resemblance (such as the hearts and stars that often appear in his art). Klee's art works against any strict divide between the visual and the verbal on another level as well, in the way his works often suggest fragmentary narratives.  File: KleeConcentratedNovel1916.jpg  Figure *Concentrated Novel*, 1916  Source:  Klee's interest in narrative may be connected to his insistence that his works demonstrate how they are, as he wrote, made not ‘at one stroke’ but rather ‘constructed bit by bit, just like a house,’ and that likewise the viewing of his pictures must take time. In his writing, teaching, and art, Klee argued against the traditional distinction between the spatial visual arts and the temporal arts of poetry and music. This set him apart from many of his fellow pioneers of modernist ABSTRACT ART.  Klee's art and writings have fascinated critics and philosophers from Walter Benjamin and Carl Einstein to Martin Heidegger to Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. His complex and diverse body of work has influenced artists as unlike one another as Kurt Schwitters, JOAN MIRÓ, and Kenneth Noland, as well as composers, including Pierre Boulez, Gunther Schuller, and Sándor Veress. |
| Further reading:  (Franciscono)  (Glaesemer)  (Greenberg)  (Lanchner)  (Bätschmann and Helfenstein)  (Werckmeister) |