

art fact

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Paul_Klee, View of St. Germain, Watercolour, 1914

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Paul Klee - *On the Search*

Philipp Grieb

In November 2017, I met several Indian artists on the ArtsAcre Foundation campus. Among them was Prabhakar Kolte, eminent painter, graduate and teacher of the Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay. It was noteworthy to hear him say that he was particularly inspired by Paul Klee, when he was searching for his own visual language. Many years earlier, Paul Klee was also a young man on a quest. We try to track his ways.

Musical Talent

Paul Klee was born on 18 December 1879 as the son of a German music teacher and a Swiss singer near Bern, the Swiss capital, and enjoyed an intense musical education. He took violin lessons from the age of seven and four years later was playing professionally enough to perform with the Bern Music Association. Young Paul had a wide range of interests, drew and wrote poetry. His parents encouraged his musical skills, which he kept throughout his life. After leaving school, he moved to Munich in 1898 to study art against



Paul Klee as a schoolboy, 1892

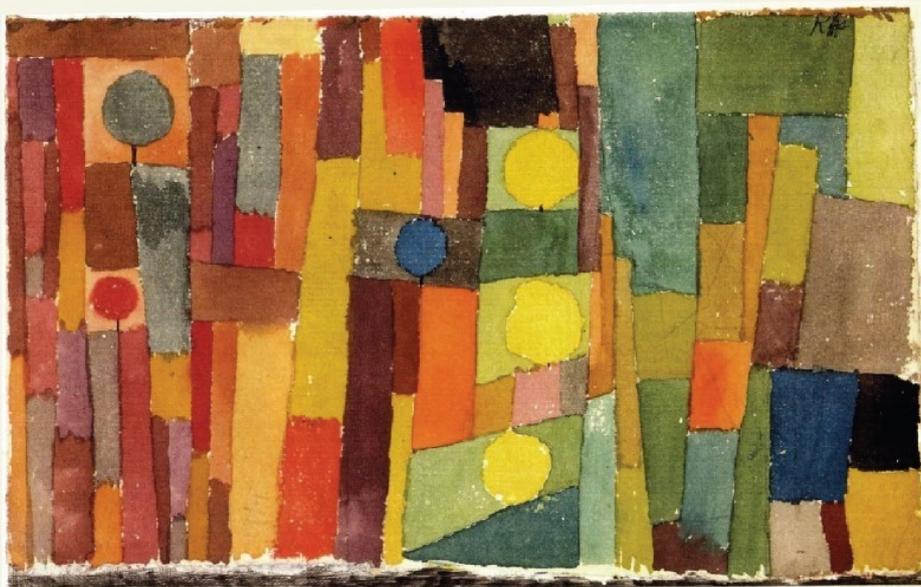
his parents' wishes. In the visual arts he expected more new and exciting developments.

Studies in Munich

Paul Klee first studied graphic art at a private school in Munich. He learnt the techniques of etching and enjoyed the freedom he had as a student. In February 1900, he moved into his own studio and in October was accepted into Franz von Stuck's painting class at the Academy of Fine Arts, where Wassily Kandinsky was also studying at the time. He attended classes sporadically and went his own ways. In autumn 1901, he met a fellow student from Bern, the future sculptor Hermann Haller, at the academy. With him,



Paul Klee, Sister Mathilde 1903



Paul Klee, *Kairuan*, Watercolour, 1914

he embarked on a seven-month study trip through Italy, from which he gained three important insights: He learnt to see Renaissance architecture as a synthesis of the arts, with its constructive elements, structural numerical secrets and proportional relationships. In the aquarium in Naples, he was impressed by the splendour of colours, natural forms and the imagination of marine fauna and flora, and in Siena he admired the sensitivity of the very unique Gothic panel painting. Back from Italy, he lived with his parents in Bern, earning his living as a violinist and review writer for the Bernese Music Association. He also attended anatomy courses, studied the illustrations of masters such as Aubrey Beardsley, William Blake and Francisco de Goya at the Copperplate Cabinet in Munich and created a series of etchings. With friends he travelled to Paris in May and June 1905, where he devoted himself to the older art in the Louvre and in the gallery of the Palais du Luxembourg. It was there that he first became aware of the Impressionism. In the following year, Paul

Klee moved to Munich for the long term and married the pianist Lily Stumpf. Their son Felix was born a year later. Paul took on a large part of the child-raising and household work in their flat in Munich's artist quarter Schwabing, wrote reviews of musical events and took part in various group exhibitions. Lily earned a living by giving piano lessons.

Der Blaue Reiter and Delaunay

In autumn 1911, Klee met with August Macke and Wassily Kandinsky and joined their exhibition and editorial group 'Der Blaue Reiter'. Other members were Franz Marc, Gabriele Münter, Marianne Werefkin and Alexej Jawlensky. With his experience as an author, Klee quickly developed into an important and independent member and took part in an exhibition of the group at the Galerie Golz in February/March 1912 with 17 graphic works. During a second stay in Paris in April 1912 with wife Lily, Klee saw works by Georges Braque, André Derain, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau and Maurice de Vlaminck, among others, met Robert Delaunay in his Paris studio and started a closer connection with him.

It was there that he became acquainted with Delaunay's "Fenêtres" (windows) paintings and saw in them "the type of an independent visual work that exists in completely abstract forms without motifs from nature ...", as he wrote in an exhibition review in 1912. Klee's



language, moving away from representation towards a rhythmic harmony of colour. Here he met Klee's way of thinking.

Paul Klee, View of Kairuan, Watercolour, 1914

perception of light and colour then changed fundamentally. He tried to implement the new ideas in his paintings, giving them more colour and achieving effects purely through contrasts and differences in tone. Paintings of the Blaue Reiter group and Delaunay made up the main part of the First German Autumn Salon in Berlin in September 1913. Delaunay's Orphism - a term coined by the author and poet Guillaume Apollinaire also influenced Marc and Macke. Apollinaire saw it as path to a poetic and more musical visual



Robert Delaunay, Simultaneous Windows, 1912

Tour of Tunisia

In April 1914, Klee undertook the legendary three-week tour to Tunisia with August Macke and Louis Moilliet, a school friend and painter from Bern. They had met in the Blaue Reiter circle, discovered common interests and inspired each other in their aquarelle painting along the way. Sensitised by colour, the light and the colours of the south, Klee painted a series of watercolours that he felt were important for his future painting. 'Colour has me... It has me forever... I am a painter,' he wrote euphorically in his diary at the time. After their return, the first exhibition of the 'Neue Münchner Secession' was opened in May 1914. Klee had been involved in the founding of this new group the year before, as a member and secretary.

World War I

In the following months, the World War I broke out. It brought four years of heartbreaking suffering, death and destruction to Europe. Paul Klee and his family survived the big disaster. We'll be looking at their life afterwards in the next issue of the ArtFact Bulletin.