

PAUL KLEE AND COMIC MODERNISM

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

November 2015

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ABSTRACT

Paul Klee tends to resist stylistic classification, since his style and materials varied widely over the course of his career. Klee participated in and was influenced by a range of artistic movements including surrealism, cubism, and expressionism, but was not faithful to any one particular movement. The one element that is consistent throughout his work is his use of comic themes. My research revolves around the evolution of comedic theater techniques used as formal elements in the works of Paul Klee. While many scholars comment on Klee's sense of humor, and his use of irony and wit, comedy, as a set theatrical conventions, has not been thoroughly analyzed. There is a strong presence of the theater in Klee's work that has been addressed in recent scholarship but not in terms of the comedic. The 2006 exhibition, *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere* chronicled his wide-ranging references to theater, but it did not analyze the role of comic theater's particular traditions and the pictorial conventions derived from them. In this study, I will assess Klee's application of comic theatrical traditions as innovative strategies for constructing visual compositions. Separating his works into cohesive study sets that include: early satirical works, masks, puppets, and performers, theatrical landscapes, hand puppets and small stage sets, and Klee's years at the Bauhaus. While Klee used satirical and cathartic devices that date back to classical Greek theater, I will concentrate on the ways that Klee used the technical apparatuses of modern theatrical comedy as formal devices for his two-dimensional compositions. I am specifically interested in his use of the alienating techniques of Bertolt Brecht's "epic theater" and the relief-like stage of the Künstlertheater. As consistently as his work changes through his development as an artist, comedy is a factor that consistently carries through.

INTRODUCTION

Paul Klee tends to resist classification in terms of style, since his style varied widely over the course of his career. Klee participated in and was influenced by a range of artistic movements including surrealism, cubism, and expressionism, but was not faithful to any one particular genre. Klee kept meticulous records of his production, from 1911 until his death in 1940, even gathering drawings from his childhood. Klee was an artist who was particularly self-aware. His archive contains close to 10,000 drawings, prints, watercolors, and oil paintings documented in chronological order, and accompanied by his writings and pedagogical sketchbooks. This makes Klee appealing to researchers because of the wealth of information available. From my experience, however, many scholars write about Klee in an appreciative manner. He is often praised for his pedagogical explorations and considered to be one of the most influential painters of the twentieth century. His prolific writing has led scholars to a focus on his “creative confessions” that have contributed to an outdated model of an artistic genius, but it is my goal to look more critically, engaging with themes of comic theater in his work that have been overlooked and under analyzed. There are many theatrical practices that will be explored in the length of this paper but most important are Brecht’s epic theater and the Künstlertheater. Specifically, I will look at the role of satire, alienation effects, and Klee’s intimacy with materials and objects. This study will assess Klee’s application of comic theatrical traditions as innovative strategies for constructing

visual compositions. While Klee used satirical and cathartic devices that date back to classical Greek theater, I will concentrate primarily on the ways that Klee used the technical apparatuses of modern theatrical comedy as formal devices for his two-dimensional compositions.

I am not the first to have noticed Klee's use of theatrical motifs. In 2006 the Zentrum Paul Klee assembled the exhibition *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere* that focused on the artist's love of the theater.¹ According to the director, Dr. Juri Steiner, the subject has remained largely untouched despite the fact that it was the ambition of the exhibition to establish new interdisciplinary horizons for Klee's scholarship. Steiner's forward for the catalog explained that:

The work of Paul Klee was deeply influenced by his passion for the theater. Throughout his life the artist fervently attended theatrical performances, from the opera to puppet shows. Characters from plays or operas—Hamlet, Falstaff, and Don Giovanni, for example—populate his cryptic visual world. Various types of characters and theatrical elements, such as clowns and masks, were firmly established themes in his visual repertoire. Primarily, though, Klee created connections between the theater and life, taking up the topos of the world as a stage: people became actors or marionettes and theatrical events touched upon scenes from everyday life.²

I would like to accept this invitation to establish a new disciplinary horizon and take this notion of the theater one step farther by examining the role of the comedic. Klee's attitude towards art was marked by an intense absorption and a desire to depict the internal life of objects and to bring himself into a resonant relationship

¹ The exhibition catalog separates the illustrations into several categories; Actors, Stars and Celebrities, Marionettes and Figurines, Children's Games and Scenes of Natures, Dancers, The Circus: Acrobats and Clowns, Theater at the Bauhaus, and Plays and Scenic Fantasies.

² Juri Steiner, Forward in *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere* (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz. 2006), 6.

with the object. This entailed going beyond just optical foundations that he explained in detail in Volume II of his published *Notebooks*, “The Nature of Nature.”³

Klee was a comedian at heart. This is apparent formally in his joyously frenzied lines, but also in his production of satirical grotesques, and fantastical beings. Klee combated oppressive social situations with laughter produced by using highly constructed formal elements as comedic tools. I will assess Klee’s employment of comic theatrical conventions as innovative strategies for constructing visual compositions. Borrowing techniques from the epic theater tradition and the relief-like stage of the Künstlertheater, Klee constructs an intimate setting in which the viewer must engage, acknowledging the artificiality of the scene and thus making the viewer address their position in society. His intimacy is not the kind of familiarity or friendship, but rather an intimacy with materials and surface textures. There are at least two constants in the work of Paul Klee: his continual stylistic change, and his consistent use of theatrical and comic devices. Klee not only used comedy as a type of cathartic device, but also as a satirical device for social commentary. As I hope to demonstrate through this paper, theater really is everywhere in the works of Paul Klee and in particular, the overarching element of comedy. Klee created his own vision of the *comédie humaine*, which takes the world as its stage, and where everyday subjects are actors, methodically constructed,

³ For further reading see “The Nature of Nature” Paul Klee Notebooks, Volume 2.

deconstructed, and refigured into Klee's very own comedic act.⁴ There is more than just theatricality in Klee's works but also a focus on classical traditions and the use of comedy as an apparatus to establish his visual conventions.

There is a daunting amount of information and debate regarding the history of comedy and its theories.⁵ This paper will not attempt a comprehensive history. In cataloging Klee's use of comedy, however, I will touch briefly on the origins of comedy and Klee's attention to the classical tradition. For the most part, I am looking at comedy from an anthropological standpoint; viewing the comedic through the lens of Klee as a social being and assessing the way in which he applied comedic techniques in order emphasize to the viewer's constructed reality.⁶

Comedy is interdisciplinary: it transgresses the boundaries between literature and sociology, anthropology and psychology. However, this interdisciplinary quality makes the subject extremely difficult to access in a coherent manner. This difficulty has long dogged studies of dramatic comedy. Many

⁴ *La comédie humaine* (*The Human Comedy*) is the title of Honoré de Balzac's (1799-1850) multi-volume collection of interlinked novels depicting French society in the period of the Restoration and the July Monarchy. It is considered an allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, though its title indicates the worldly, human concerns of a realist novelist.

⁵ For a complete review of theory and criticism see Evan's *Comedy an Annotated Bibliography of Theory and Criticism*.

⁶ The fundamental assumption of practice theory is that culture, in the broadest sense, constructs people as particular kinds of social actors. The main idea of practice theory is analyzing the relationship between established structures of culture and how the people act in reality within that structure. Practice theory focuses on the idea that people are not only influenced by their social structure, but influence their social structure as well. This idea of a circular relationship between people and society is a founding aspect of practice theory and one of the main aspects within its practice is the power shift. This power shift is evident in the nature of comic theater. Characterized by a changing view of power, this shift transitions from defining power as the dominance of one class over the other to power relationships between every individual.

scholars choose to adopt a literary historical methodology, which tends to classify and categorize and in turn fails to capture the very fluidity of the comedic mode.⁷ For this reason, there is currently very little critical material that adopts a holistic approach to the topic. Specifically, criticism has often failed to integrate the social and psychological functions of the medium with its manifestation in drama, providing practical tools for analysis.

Theoretical positions on the comic need to address the way in which its social and psychological functions, both in terms of those generalizations which are possible and in terms of specific societies and cultures. An ambitious construct is required, which will not ignore the insights generated by traditional theories of the comic and of comedy but which will move beyond them to offer a synthesis of psychological, psychoanalytical, social, and the textual. Gillian Pye's highly original synthesis of the post-structuralist comedic theories of Susan Purdie and the psychoanalytical theories of Jerry Palmer, argues that ambiguity is comedy's essential quality: the comic functions, she argues, precisely as a reflexive process in which social norms are both marked and played with, constructed and deconstructed, a symbolic manipulation of the structures by which subject identity is maintained.⁸

⁷ For further reading and specific examples of methodological problems in Literary History see Jerzy Pelc's *New Literary History*.

⁸ Gillian Pye graduated from the University of Sheffield in 1992 with a B.A. in Modern Language. In 1998 she was awarded a Ph.D. for her study on Comedy and German Drama. Palmer's theory aims to rectify a fault in Freudian logic by revising the well-known premise that a mixture of the incongruity of sense and non-sense identifies comedy. Palmer is less interested in a psychological model of the comic process, and looks for one that accurately

Through my analysis of the comedic in the works of Paul Klee, I will focus on this quality of ambiguity. In order to critically approach comedy, the relationship between the comic and non-comic needs to be addressed. The comic must be understood not in opposition to the non-comic, but in a contiguous relationship to it. An important part of this analysis must be the interaction between the comic and non-comic narrative where comedy becomes a psychological phenomenon and its role is defined by human function. I am interested in the social functions that Klee intended for these comedic elements. His work is an example of introspective art, an art that is seeking and self-exploratory. Klee had no interest in what he referred to as a 'formal end' but purely in the motivating forces that give rise to pictorial form, whether that may be a means of social commentary or emotional release. His experiments with pictorial form have the sole purpose of searching for the most profound degree of expression, giving his objective consent to the shape, still undefined, still floating between abstraction and representation. Even though his art is one of introspection, the final product requires a social being in order to be complete.

identifies the strategies employed in the production of the 'minimum unit of comedy.' For further reading see Palmer's *Taking Humour Seriously*.

Like Palmer's theory, the great value of Purdie's work consists partly in its attempt to identify 'a unifying thread that can be recognized as present, to some extent, whenever any element of funniness is identifiable in our response to anything.' She develops a methodological approach to comedy, which suggests the possibility of overcoming the redundancy of genre categorizations and of closing the gap frequently perceived between the comic instance and the comedy in text. For further reading see Purdie's *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*.

This intersection between Klee's internal forces, their methodical application, and the comedic expression constructed for the social being is where I will situate my analysis. Separating Klee's work into sections that align with different stages of his career I applied Pye's holistic method of comic theory—considering the psychological, psychoanalytical, social, and textual in relation to the ambiguity of the comic and non-comic. This method was extremely helpful for a thorough comedic analysis but overall its application had limitations for this study. First of all, such analysis has been formulated to analyze comedy in German drama in the form of theatrical productions. Like Klee, I adapted theatrical mechanisms and translated them towards two-dimensional works but this type of analysis did not strengthen my argument. Another aspect that limited holistic analysis is the fact that types of comedy (i.e. satire) has already been subdivided and categorized. Comedy is judged in terms of social and moral worth as either uplifting or derogatory. It is clear however, that this type of separation, common throughout the history of criticism, has particular consequences for critical perspectives. In particular, it has contributed to the plethora of subdivisions of the comic genre such as satire, romantic comedy, farce, slapstick, and so on. The resulting diversity of categorization has served as a bar to holistic approaches to the medium, often focusing attention away from comic processes and structures and towards artificially imposed genre divisions.

Theories that try to make universal claims about how comedy works fall short due to the fact that, while laughter may be universal, there is no doubt that

comedy and humor are culturally specific and historically contingent, varying from culture to culture and across class, gender, ethnicity, and age. Theories that try to define comedy as a static literary form also fail to capture the fluidity of the comedic because comedy works in part by transgressing the boundaries between literature, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. Terminology is at the root of the problem; therefore I will layout precise definitions. In doing so, my goal is clarity because confusion with definitions is not something that can be easily resolved. This study aims to prove that Klee used mechanisms of comic theater provide strategies that engage the viewer to look closer, recognizing the artifice of the constructed reality that leads to a type of alienation effect.

TERMINOLOGY

One of the chief difficulties in the discussion of comedy relates to the wide array of terminology. This is true for concepts associated with the comic in the German language as well as English language distinctions. In English, the two terms that are necessary to define are comedy and humor. Comedy is a dramatic work of light or amusing character in which the main character motivates and triumphs over adversity. It is the humorous aspect of life or events and relies on the contextual. Humor, on the other hand, is the quality of being funny. It can be a state of mind (i.e. good humor or ill humor) or the ability to appreciate or express that which is humorous.⁹

Generally, comedy seems to be applied to formal works that aim to amuse, while humor refers more broadly to the intrinsic funniness of an object or person, as well as the ability to appreciate the ludic. The nature of humor's role then carries a social function as an interactive skill. Notice that there is an overlap between the concepts of formal comedy and social humor or funniness. This is a clear indication of the interdependence of the social and aesthetic, as well as underlining the broad tolerance and usage extended towards these terms in the English language. I will often use the term comedic, which is of or relating to comedy, the comical. Here the comical encompasses humor as the quality of being funny.

⁹ Gillian Pye, *Approaches to Comedy in German Drama* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 2002) 23.

The German language has two general translations of the term comedy; *Komödie* and the Germanic form *Lustspiel*, where *lust* translates to “pleasure” and *spiel* is “game.” Both however refer principally to dramatic comedy and do not have the broad scope of meaning as the English term. Hans Joachim Schrimpf documents the debate concerning the difference between these terms in a detailed article, in which he argues that *Komödie* and *Lustspiel* had diametrically opposed definitions.¹⁰ Schrimpf considers *Komödie* as a more expansive term, while the other, *Lustspiel* is more restrictive. On the one hand, these nuances demonstrate that the question of comedy has played an important role in German cultural debates. On the other hand, it seems somewhat unproductive, constructing barriers for the reception of comedy in German literature and creates a sense of hierarchy in which one form of comedy is valued over another. In fact, the polarity asserted between the emotionally liberating and the objective-intellectual forms is evident in almost all theories relating to the comic. For this paper, I will use *Komödie* and consider *Lustspiel* to be the more formal, bourgeois dramatic comedy. This seems to be how Paul Klee approached the distinction, by using the freer term but in a traditional way. Klee’s sense of tradition seems to be classical rather than that of realism, educated in classical *Literarschule*, a literary second school with an interest in Greek poetry and music.¹¹

¹⁰ Hans Joachim Schrimpf, “Komödie und Lustspiel: Zur terminologischen Problematik einer geschichtlich orientierten Gattungstypologie,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 97, 1978 (Sonderheft), 152-82.

¹¹ G. di san Lazzaro, *Klee*, (Fernand Hazan: Paris, 1957), 12.

Klee in fact used the old German term *Komoedie*, which is quite similar to *Komödie*. This term is derived from the Greek word *Komoidia*, meaning “song of the gay parade in honor of Dionysus.”¹² Comedy originates from the Dionysian cult, specifically from the phallic hymns that peasants would sing in festival processions. As in modern times many ancient cultures had public occasions on which people pretended humorously to be somebody other than themselves, and comedy, so defined existed among the Greeks.¹³ This Greek element of costume and impersonation was important to Klee’s comedic interest in terms of a long-standing tradition essential to human experience but Klee does not directly reference Dionysian ritual himself. Through the length of this paper I hope to illustrate what this comedy or *Komödie* means to Paul Klee.

The terms *Komik* and *Komische* are common in German texts concerning comedy and appear in the titles of Klee’s works. Both suggest the English translations “the comic” or “comedy” while versions of *das komische* also reflect the potential to mean “strange” or “unusual.” These terms clearly refer to the more generalized version of comedy, which must be distinguished from the relationship with the specific theatrical tradition. Klee is a traditionalist. His version of the comedic uses specific mechanisms from traditional comic theater as technical and formal devices that are applied in two-dimensional form. The transition from three-

¹² Margarete Bieber, Introduction to *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 2d ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), xii.

¹³ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3d ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

dimensional physicality of such techniques into his paintings is apparent in the ornamental design and surface textures of his work.

Through my investigation of the comedic in the work of Paul Klee, I have discovered that he uses the tradition of comedy in a specific way. Klee was traditional in a classical sense. His interest in theater was a long-standing interest in mechanisms that construct human experience dating back to ancient Greek theater. He used techniques established by modern theater but adapted and applied them in a traditional manner. The role of comedy changes throughout Klee's career but its application is intentionally traditional and highly constructed. At the heart of Klee's work is a constant, visible tension between his skepticism and his desire for the ideal form.

EARLY SATIRICAL WORKS

Paul Klee began his explorations of comedy with satire and it is quite common in his earliest works. Satire does not create an absurd nonsensical world, but shows the absurdity of the world as it is. It uses irony as a means to portray private or public institutions as ridiculous or corrupt, thus alienating their audience from the object of humor. The genre of satire has the intent of shaming individuals or groups in hopes of improvement. Parody is a related form of comedy that can also be found in Klee's work. Parody subverts popular genres and forms by using imitation and exaggeration as a method to trivialize a particular social form or public individual. As I hope to illustrate, Klee's aesthetics have a lifelong concern with the satirical possibilities of parody and wit. Satire moves by content, therefore its application as a theatrical apparatus for constructing compositions is not as strong of an argument than others, but I think it is necessary to discuss because it is a theme that continually situates itself within Klee's work.

When Klee produced the majority of his satirical work, Germany was under the rule of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941), King of Prussia. Wilhelm damaged his political position in many ways, meddling in German foreign policy on the basis of his emotions and resulting in the incoherence and inconsistency in Germany's relations with foreign nations. Klee depicted the Kaiser's high emotions in *Kaiser Wilhelm Raging*, 1920, 206 (Fig. 1). The laws of press and publishing for the time were fairly liberal. General speech, thought, and avant-garde art flourished in

Imperial Germany. Education was universally available and illiteracy was a rarity. The politics of Munich and Dresden, where Klee frequented during this period, consisted of disputes about schools and the arts, the right to vote and the hope for jobs.¹⁴

Within his diaries, Klee does not comment much on the politics of the time but we can assume that his commentary lies within his satirical representations. He claimed to be uninterested in politics, which we will see may be part of his detached façade. As for his psychological state, Klee was dealing with some dark thoughts during his years as an art student. Suicidal entries in his journal note his struggle with the outside world. “The feeling of responsibility toward my fiancée and parents and unsuccessful attempts to paint often brew a kind of suicidal mood.”¹⁵ This darkness seems to intervene in Klee’s overall psychic state and one might assume that he used comedy as a type of cathartic device in order to cope with some of these dark times.

Until about 1913 Klee was primarily a draftsman. This is in contrast to the majority of his contemporaries who were studying in Munich. Early twentieth-century modernism in Germany was largely based on the symbolic and expressive qualities of color and the manipulation of the paintbrush. Members of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter including Kandinsky, Kirchner, and Marc, just to name a few,

¹⁴ Peter Putzler, “The Citizen and the State of Modern Germany” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern German Culture*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20-25.

¹⁵ Diary entry from 1903, #469 in *The Diaries of Paul Klee*. Translation by Felix Klee. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 132.

all developed their styles from a fundamental interest in painting and especially color during their study in Munich.¹⁶ The works of Julius Diez, Alfred Kubin, and Félicien Rops relate closely to Klee's work in terms of style and imagery.¹⁷ These artists referenced, like Klee, the graphic, the grotesque, and the fantastical. They also gave him hope to exercise his graphic abilities as a potential profession.

In 1896 the publication of the first issues of the satiric periodicals *Simplicissimus* and *Jugend*, along with more benign and long-established *Fliegenden Blätter*, had made Munich a leading center for comic illustration.¹⁸ When Klee first came to Munich in October 1898, he brought two distinctly different sets of drawing with him. First, his carefully hatched lyrical Bernese landscapes, with their intimate, delicate, and precise tonal vignettes. The second set of drawings included caricatures from his school notebooks (Fig. 2). These caricatures exhibit some essential traits of Klee's artistic personality in their range of references and in their expression. His impartial reduction of figures into characters with a comical self-regard and his absence of psychological tension, we begin to gain a sense of Klee's

¹⁶ Die Brücke (The Bridge) was a group of German expressionist artists formed in Dresden in 1905. They had an interest in primitivism and expressing extreme emotion through high-keyed color that was very often non-naturalistic. They employed crude drawing techniques and had a distaste for complete abstraction. Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) was formed in Munich, active from 1911 to 1914, and was fundamental to expressionism. Artistic approaches and aims varied from artist to artist but there was a common desire to express the spiritual truths through art, especially through the use of color.

¹⁷ Julius Diez was one of the caricaturists of *Jugend*, a German art magazine that featured many Art Nouveau artists, whose work Klee admired. Alfred Kubin was a friend to Klee and the semi-pornographer, Félicien Rops, whose work Klee copied as a student.

¹⁸ For a further description of Klee's caricatures in relation to the work of illustrators featured in these periodicals see Marcel Franciscono, *Paul Klee: His Work and Thought*. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21.

detached sense of the ridiculous. Klee's caricatures most likely began by observing his fellow classmates, emphasizing their comical character attributes in a manner that looks very theatrical. These costumed classmate characters are an example of how Klee turned his everyday events into a theatrical representation. In doing so, Klee was able to detach himself from his surroundings in a manner that allowed his creativity to flourish without inhibition. After his arrival in Munich, the praise of his school friends led Klee to believe that these distorted caricatures were his only work of value. A letter shows that he had previously defended his comical drawings against his parents' liking of his more serious landscape studies: "It's what I've often told you: they (the caricatures) are my best work, because they are completely modern and original."¹⁹

Klee seemed to recognize the value of his caricatures during his trip to Italy in 1901-2, where he was introduced to the drawings of Rodin. Here he attempted to classify his caricatures as high art, since they realized pictorial form in a rigorous and developed way, unlike his unsuccessful painting practice. What followed this trip to Italy and this combination of the comedic and ideal, were his well-known etched *Inventions* of 1903-5 (Fig. 3-6). These are the first works that Klee regarded as significant.

Through the development of the *Inventions*, Klee claimed the discovery of his "relief style." In these etchings, he rendered volume in low-relief in order to give a

¹⁹ Letter of November 5, 1898, *Briefe an die Familie, 1893-1940*. Edited by Felix Klee. 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 28.

modern two-dimensionality to pictorial space while allowing his forms more substance than they usually had in the flat, reductive outline style seen in the works of Matisse or the Art Nouveau movement. According to his contemporary Adolf Hildebrand (1847-1921), art consisted exclusively in the representation of spatial relationships; and the laws by which that representation attains its necessary clarity and order required a relief-like image.²⁰ This remarkable conception of style in which receding and overlapping forms are to be clarified by being brought forward and pressed against the picture plane creates a relief style that is essential when discussing Klee's *Inventions*. This relief style will also prove evident in Klee's theatrical landscapes. Klee was interested in the sculptor's idea that the distinctive property of relief lies in its presentation of corporeal bodies as a unified phenomenon, as a flat image. Klee was to give Hildebrand's image of a figure-pressed-flat a literal representation in his etched *Inventions*. This three-dimensional representation on one plane, which Klee really does seem to have discovered for himself, raises the questions of what he might have known of his contemporaries such as Hildebrand. Marcel Fransiscono points out that Klee's life before 1907-8, when he became acquainted with the work of Ensor and Van Gogh, is usually assumed to have been led in a provincial vacuum as far as modern concepts of form were concerned.

²⁰ Adolf Hildebrand, "The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts". *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, (Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 227-280, 329-30.

Born October 6, 1847-January 18, 1921, German sculptor who insisted upon the aesthetic autonomy of sculpture from painting.

The conventionality of most of the motifs of the *Inventions* was essential to Klee's aims, because as satires their effects depended on a fairly immediate recognition of subject. The subjects were not so identifiable as to distract us from their originality, which was a combination of their form and of Klee's personal invention. Klee's relief style is integral to his aim of creating moral and psychological complexity within his satires. It is this peculiarly flattened and distorted style that allows Klee to create the comedic oppositions of expression and character. It is this distortion that lends itself to the comedic nature in the form of the grotesque; an odd or unnatural shape, appearance or character that is fantastically ugly, absurd, or bizarre.

It is also this relief style that facilitated a symbolic relationship between parts. For example, the irrational union of masks and faces in the three versions of *Komiker* (*Comedian*) in which as Klee describes it, laughter is intimately joined with pain and art with the man, in a manner he hoped would approach the seriousness and complexity of Gogol's dark humor.²¹ Klee's description of the *Komiker* (Fig. 3) is especially revealing of the symbolic use that he makes of the linear relationships within his *Inventions*; "the mask signifies art, and behind it hides the human being.

²¹ Briefe no. 607, 618; on Gogol, *Briefe an die Familie, 1893-1940*. Edited by Felix Klee. 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 496.

Nikolai Gogol was one of the preeminent figures of the natural school of Russian literary realism. His works are fundamentally romantic with strains of Surrealism and the grotesque. A main characteristic of his writing is his impressionist vision of reality and people. He saw the outer world romantically metamorphosed and his pictures of nature are strange mounds of detail that result in an unconnected chaos. His characters are caricatures with exaggerated salient features, like that of Klee, that represent a truthfulness of an unexpected reality that calls upon the visible world.

The lines of the mask are paths to the analysis of the work of art. The duet of the worlds (of) art and man is organic, as an invention by Johann Sebastian.”²² Looking at the *Komiker*, it as though the mask and face are completely united, with no illusion to the space between the mask and human face. The textures that Klee created with his hair-like hatch marks are the same for the human’s skin and that of the mask, only diverting to a new mark in order to express the mask’s beard. This unity of the figures seems to reference man’s reliance on the mask, in order to hide or alienate himself from the outside world.

Of the best-known *Inventions* is the humorously titled *Virgin in a Tree* (Fig. 4). Klee’s *Virgin* asserts herself as the satirical version of the familiar late-nineteenth century symbol of female wantonness and abandon, the seductive tree nymph that lures and teases out the beast of man. Rather than the flat, reductive outline style that was popular in etching at the time, Klee renders volume as relief, giving a modern two-dimensionality to his pictorial space allowing his forms more substance. In his etching *Zwei Männer* (Fig. 5), we see two Neanderthals hunched over in opposition. He has many prints from this period, inspired by his travels to Italy and viewing Renaissance works, which were critiques of bourgeois society. This type of social criticism is quite literal in Klee’s early works and becomes more and more subtle as his career matures. The translation of this piece is *Two Men Meet*,

²² Briefe no. 618, *Briefe an die Familie, 1893-1940*. Edited by Felix Klee. 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 496.

Each Supposing the Other to be of Higher Rank, which says a lot about how Klee felt about the class aspirations of the newly powerful bourgeoisie.

Der Held mit dem Flügel (The Hero with a Wing) (Fig. 6) in his maimed form seems to be a parody of ancient sculpture, like that of Polykleitos' *Doryphorus* (Fig. 7). Much of his rueful meaning depends on the ironic contrast between the ideal and the actual as it is displayed by the ruined condition of ancient statuary. The grotesque, bird-like Icarus who, as the inscription on the plate informs us, "specially provided by nature with one wing . . . has conceived the idea that he was destined to fly and has crashed to earth." The comedic force of this image depends on the viewer's recognition of ancient statuary and all the ubiquitous winged geniuses and fallen angels that decorated the walls of galleries and art journals of the time. The formal developments in the last few *Inventions* suggest a more illustrative three-dimensionality compared to the first etchings. It is no longer the contours of forms that establish the figure in the surrounding space but its torsion. With one foot literally planted on the ground like *Doryphorus*, we seem to see the figure resisting his winged side, twisting back towards and emphasizing his deformity. The figure remains in Klee's relief style but has a rich modeling, unlike the previous *Inventions*, they are rendered with minute precision and detail using an exacting technique, that creates a greater effect of plasticity, engaging the viewer in a more intimate experience, that, as we will see in the length of this paper, directly relates to the comedic as a means of close looking that leads to an alienation effect.

The comedic strength of Klee's *Inventions* is in his willingness to see complexities of strength and weakness in human behavior and a refusal to divide praise from blame where there is equal moral responsibility. *Virgin in a Tree* was meant as a mockery of the superannuated virgin who acquires virtue by means of her virginity but is also a critique of bourgeoisie society that brings about her distorted condition. During this period Klee commented on his cultural surroundings through means of satirical representations. Klee's satire worked in the way of his recognizable and distorted relief-like imagery. This relief quality will be an important aspect in constructing his later works in which the viewer must engage in order to decipher the space of the composition. This type of engagement creates a more intimate experience between the work and the viewer. The surface textures that Klee created aid this experience in the acknowledgement of the artifice of the work thus leading to a detached state or alienation effect. Within these etched *Inventions* it is not the space that is affected by Klee's relief style, but rather the figures themselves. Stretched into one picture plane, distorted and displayed, they comment on Klee's interest in the grotesque as a form of social commentary and depend on content rather than a comical apparatus.

The satirical content of Klee's early works may be partially due to his lack of success in painting during his formative years as an art student, but can also be traced to an introspective tendency within his contemporaries. Klee's claimed to be alienated from his surroundings but we know that comedy often creates interconnectedness through boundary transgression. Klee's satire tended to be

ambiguous. He remained avowedly detached, unwilling to lend his art to any cause except that of his own creative freedom. After his 'famous' trip to Tunisia in 1914, where Klee became enamored of color as an expressive tool, the satirical caricatures of his graphic days no longer seem to suit his creative interest in form and color.

MASKS, PUPPETS, AND PERFORMERS

Paul Klee's work is full of references to his experiences at the theater. The clown, the marionette, and the mask are firmly established motifs in his visual repertoire. As documented in his diary, Klee was an avid reader and theatergoer. He frequently attended and critiqued musical performances, whether a choral performance, the theater, opera, or symphonic concert. Between the years of 1902 to 1913, diary entries 411-924, we can cite close to half of them as pertaining to some sort of performance. Typical of Klee's densely interconnected work, he did not turn the theater into an isolated thematic field; sometimes the references are literal and visible but more often, they are not. Some theatrical themes are closely linked with his thoughts on art theory and philosophy. The tightrope walker and the acrobat, for example, are linked to Klee's theory of balance.²³ Others are existential metaphors, like the marionettes and jointed puppets, in whose fragmented bodies Klee saw his fears of bodily decay reflected at the end of his life.²⁴ Paul Klee was not an illustrator of the theater. Instead he was an artist for whom the theater was a source of visual metaphors. These subjects not only illustrate Klee's affinity for the theater but they represent the comedic technique of alienation effects.

Klee always had a preference for operatic performance. He began playing the violin at age 7, and was active in the Bern symphony for many years. Some of the

²³ See Klee's "Theory of Balance" in *Notebooks Volume 1: The Thinking Eye* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers Limited, 1961)

²⁴ Christine Hopfengart "Theater Everywhere You Look" in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere* (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 12.

very first performances he saw were operas, and it seems that over the course of his life, opera remained the standard by which he judged all kinds of theater. Early on Klee seemed to understand the artifice of the opera without any difficulty and so on recognized its comic potential. "I quickly felt home in the pathetic style. I began to like the raving Leonora, and when her hands fumbled wildly about her mouth, I thought I recognized in this gesture a desperate grab at her denture."²⁵ The opera was melodramatic with its excessive emotions and it is obvious to see that Klee picked up on this self-deprecatingly referring to its 'pathetic' style. He was particularly interested in comic operas. Klee illustrated the *Sängerin der komischen Oper* (*Singer in the Comic Opera*) (Fig. 8) in three different versions; 1923, 118. 1925, 225, and in 1927, 10. Going back to his school notebooks, we can see how much his youthful mind was preoccupied by the operatic and theatrical experiences and fascinated with this realm of pathos and passion.

Klee must have seen close to 300 opera performances in his lifetime. In Bern and Munich, but especially in Weimar and Dessau, he seems not to have missed a single production.²⁶ To understand what the opera meant to Klee, it is important to point out that it was not just a fondness for bourgeois theater. Klee, for instance, did not enjoy seeing plays. Felix, Klee's son, had reported that his father preferred

²⁵ Diary entry no. 32 in *The Diaries of Paul Klee*. Translation by Felix Klee. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964) 10.

²⁶ See Dirk Hesserer's essay for a complete analysis of Klee at Munich's Theaters. "Stage Landscape: From Wagner to Wedekind Paul Klee at Munich's Theaters" in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere*, (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz. 2007), 251-260.

reading plays rather than seeing them performed on stage.²⁷ He did not like it when people and relationships were portrayed 'realistically' on stage. At the opera, however, the participants sang their roles making it fundamentally artificial. It could not compete with reality because it was so far from it that it created its own kind of plausibility. The opera was a synthesis of human drama and artificial form that bestowed pleasure and critical distance and was thus exemplary of modern theater. Expressionists in the theater also sought to distance themselves from the common imitative principles by turning against the realistic paradigm of the bourgeois theater and applying anti-realistic devices such as mass choreography and other alienating effects that are discussed in the next section. Klee's explicit attitude towards these developments remained conservative. He did not claim to be interested in this new expressive theater. Nevertheless, his paintings indicate that he clearly was. Again, seemingly in denial of how his surroundings really did affect him in that ambiguous space of his claimed alienation. He was committed to the idea that the theater was a place for dramatizing human questions and characters in the form of traditional opera and classical theater and combined these ancient theater traditions with the alienation effects of the modern theater.

Another aspect of the theater, which I find relevant in Klee's work is the *Commedia dell'arte*. Klee among other artists was influenced by the spontaneity of the *Commedia dell'arte* and the strategic use of costumes and masks. The title refers

²⁷ Felix Klee, "Paul Klees Marionetten," in *Theater, Bühne, Bild*, exhibition catalog Kunstwoche Kömiz (Wabern, 1983), 112.

to the comedy of professional artists, which is characterized by improvised dialogue, and a cast of colorful stock characters that emerged in northern Italy in the fifteenth century and rapidly gained popularity throughout Europe. The Harlequin was one of the principal stock characters of the *Commedia dell'arte*. This character was considered a wily and envious comic servant; cowardly and superstitious he managed to extricate himself by cleverness and irrepressible high spirits. He was amoral without being vicious and unlike his fellow commedia servants he did not hold a grudge or seek revenge against those who tricked or cheated him.²⁸ His costume was traditionally covered in many triangular colored patches and a half mask. In *Senecio* (Fig. 9) painted in 1922, the human face emerges from a mask schematically divided into colored boxes. These colored boxes and triangles that divide the face are reminiscent of the Harlequin. This work belongs to Klee's series that explored the world of the actor and the stage, the boundaries between reality and fiction, and modernist theater, which saw a thematic revival in the *Commedia dell'arte*. The influence of Harlequin in modernist painting is undeniable especially when considering artists such as Picasso and Klee. The Harlequin's costume allows for the body to be turned into a play of forms with flat patterns and color. Picasso featured the Harlequin in many of his works (Fig. 10). Picasso's Harlequins are quite different than Klee's. Picasso's Harlequin stood as a clear symbol whereas Klee's reference is somewhat ambiguous, possibly hinting at the Harlequin's clever comedic character rather than just the recognizable costume.

²⁸ Giacomo Oreglia, *The Commedia dell'Arte*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

The mask was another major influence for modernist painters like Klee and Picasso. Klee has close to 80 works where mask is included in the title; this does not include work regarding the theater or the opera, which also included masks, but simply the mask as a singular subject. I have included only four examples of masks within this study. The masks, puppets, and performers are so apparent in Klee's repertoire that it is difficult to talk about them collectively because they are depicted in the wide range of styles that Klee took on over his career. Firstly, these subjects comment on Klee's affinity for the theater but more importantly they point to the theme of alienation so important to Brechtian thought, which will be examined in the following section. Masks serve to disguise. As previously quoted in discussion of his work *Komiker*, "the mask represents art, behind hides man." Going back to ancient Dionysian ritual, the mask is not just a disguise but it functions as a device that enables the bearer to express his true desires. The mask permits its wearer to act out yet still maintain his or her dignity in secret. In some of Klee's masks, the subject becomes a personage rather than a disguise illustrating a type of persona rather than hiding.

Klee created three images of masks consecutively in 1912 that have a rather expressively dark persona. Looking back to this time, we know what Klee was struggling with some depressive feats and these masks illustrate such hidden darkness. *Maske (Mask)* 1912, 58 (Fig. 11) was the last of this set and appears to be crying out for help. With his mouth open and eyes wide, he is trying to be heard over the noisy composition. His *Maske (Mask)*, 1921, 115 (Fig. 12) is quite different

exhibiting a joyous grin with squinting eyes. The figure almost seems as if it were engulfed or possibly made of flames. The fiery character does not seem to be bothered by the flames or is that just the impression he wants to give us, hiding behind the happy mask?

Klee's *Maske der Angst* (*Mask of Fear*), 1932, 286 (Fig. 13) was painted on the eve of Hitler's assumption of power in Germany. This curious personage, with four spindly legs that support a large, oval head with stunned eyes and a curious smirk or moustache, offers a satiric take on the work's grim title. This figure is inspired by a Zuni war god sculpture that Klee saw at an ethnological museum.²⁹ The two sets of legs suggest that there may be figures hiding behind the monumental mask in fear that a Nazi war god has now come to power over Germany. The burlap that this work is painted on speaks to Klee's interest in materials and the tactile texture of the weave tends to draw the viewer in closer to inspect the surface texture thus alienating through intimacy. Alienation does not only situate itself within the intimacy of surface textures but also in the concept of the mask and puppets themselves.

Puppets and Marionettes were influential for modern artists other than Klee. Ferdinand Léger (Fig. 14) and Giorgio de Chirico (Fig. 15) are just a few examples of the ubiquitous meta-physical figures from the era. These figures echo the lay figures

²⁹ Cécile R. Ganteaume, "Respecting Non-Western Sacred Objects: An A:shiwi Ahayu:da (Zuni War God), the Museum of the American Indian–Heye Foundation, and the Museum of Modern Art." *The National Museum of the American Indian*. Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, 15 Apr. 2013. Web. 27 Oct. 2015.

that many artists would find in their studios. Such figures allowed for a wide range of associations. They are figures to be played with, distorted, deformed, reconstructed, refigured, and repurposed. Klee could use them to express political leanings, eroticism, and towards the end of his life - existential issues. *Puppe an violetten Bändern (Puppet on Violet Ribbons)*, 1906, 14 (Fig. 16) is from Klee's evidently satiric period. This image is quite disturbing, with its monkey-like feet and long fingers, and a closely delineated anus where its sexual organs should be. Klee conceives his puppets closer to magical beings or daemons rather than humans. Puppet and daemon for Klee have in common that they are both under the control of higher forces, the vessels of will not their own. This theme of possession, or inspiration, is especially prominent in Klee's many figures of performers, figures that like the masked players in ancient ritual that serve as outlets for supernatural powers.³⁰

One of the most explicit representations of Klee's puppet-actor-daemons is the seemingly harmless watercolor *Bauchredner und Rufer im Moor (Ventriloquist and Crier in the Moor)* 1923, 103 (Fig. 17). Imaginary beasts float within the transparent ventriloquist who appears to be all belly, except for a pair of legs, tiny arms, and a sort of balloon-like head. The little creatures inside the ventriloquist might symbolize the odd noises and voices that seem to emanate from him and give the ventriloquist the essence of a nature spirit. His inflated body makes it clear that

³⁰ Marcel Franciscono, *Paul Klee: His Work and Thought* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 193.

it serves mainly to project their voices; it is a passive being, whose transparent body offers no interruption to the plaid patterns of the moor. As if attracted by the animal sounds above him, a stray fish is about to enter a net dangling from the lower part of the ventriloquist's anatomy, perhaps to join the wild animals within.

Klee created a series of work made up of drawings that explored portraits of contemporary celebrities from the theater, cinema, and cabaret. These drawings, nicely laid out in *Theater Everywhere*, were a reaction to the rapid development of celebrity worship that began in the 1920's due to the prosperous entertainment industry.³¹ Some of these drawings illustrate a satirical tone that Klee cannot seem to escape but for the most part, they are not of value to this particular study. For this study I want to establish that, for Klee, actors were not just professional performers on stage but in his eyes, anyone could be an actor. Klee observed how his fellow human beings presented themselves to the world, which was a common theme in his paintings. He did not distinguish his theatrically dramatic works from his portraiture or scenes of everyday life, because everyone was a subject of his own comedic act. Due to this distinction, or lack of, I have not included specific performer images but note that they are very apparent throughout all his works. The masks, puppets, and performers act as archetypes for artifice, displaying a public persona different from their true self that illustrates a form of alienation.

³¹ See "Stars and Celebrities" in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere*, (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007) 80-93.

THEATRICAL LANDSCAPE

As we have seen, Paul Klee frequently composed his images as theatrical spaces containing depictions of characters and props. Another important theatrical motif that Klee employed is the use of a curtain. By using the curtain as a motif, Klee successfully created a theatrical gesture on any scene, especially landscape. In this section I will illustrate Klee's notion of the image as stage by exploring the curtain as a constructed motif in his theatrical spaces. In creating these spaces, Klee used alienation effects contrived from epic theater and aspects from the *Künstlertheater*, that make the viewer no longer an unseen spectator but an active participant in viewing the composition. Klee was known to have created three works, each from different periods, under the title *Bühnenlandschaft* (Stage Landscape). Here, again Klee demonstrated Hildebrand's conception of relief-like style but in cubist form.

"Epic theater" as Bertolt Brecht called it, arose in the early to mid-twentieth century out of the political climate following WWI. Brecht coined the term "epic theater" to distinguish his own practice from what was previously called "dramatic theater." Dramatic theater replicated the view of a single individual at one point in time and space, a tradition that had dominated Western theater since the Renaissance.³² Brecht contended that dramatic theater was incapable of representing larger realities beyond the illusory world of the play. He wanted to

³² Sarah Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theater: The Brechtian Legacy*, (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2000), 2.

create a theater of naturalism where the stage would become a type of sociological laboratory.

The ideological basis of epic stage practice was based in Marx's historical materialism in which stage events would be related to the material situation of the spectators and characters so that the theater could demystify the operation of the social, economic, and political forces by demonstrating how certain orders of reality had developed historically and were perpetuated.³³ In the materialist model, plays should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally (i.e. passively) but rather evoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on stage. Rather than experience the climatic catharsis, audiences should adopt a critical perspective to recognize social injustice, leaving the theater to effect change in the outside world. Epic theater techniques remind the spectator that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself and by highlighting the constructed nature of the theatrical event, hoped to communicate that the audience's reality was equally constructed and, as such, changeable. Klee, much less political than Brecht, used this same technique by exaggerating the surface textures of his works, therefore engaging the viewer to recognize the artificiality of its construction.

³³ Historical materialism is a methodological approach to the study of human societies and their development over time first articulated by Karl Marx (1818-1883) as the materialist conception of history. It is principally a theory of history according to which the material conditions of a society's mode of production—its way of producing and reproducing the means of human existence—fundamentally determine its organization and development. Historical materialism looks for the causes of developments and changes in human society in the means by which humans collectively produce the necessities of life. Social classes and the relationship between them, along with the political structures and ways of thinking in society, are founded and reflect contemporary economic activity.

In order for a successful demonstration of such theater, actors and spectators need to be armed with disillusionment, not as a helpless state of mind but as an active critical principle. This requires a technique called the alienation effect. In German the term is *Verfremdungseffekt* which is rooted in the Russian Formalist notions of the device of *making strange*, which Viktor Shklovsky claimed is the essence of all art.³⁴ This effect is achieved by the annihilation of the fourth wall. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event. The use of direct audience-address is one way of disrupting stage illusion and generating alienation. By making the mechanical devices and the fictive qualities of the medium obvious, which is a technique that Klee applied in his paintings, the actors alienate the viewer from any passive acceptance and enjoyment of the play as merely entertainment. Instead, the viewer is forced into a critical, analytical mind frame that serves to free the viewer from the notion that what they are watching is a self-contained narrative. This effect of making the familiar strange serves a didactic function as it teaches the viewer not to take the style and content for granted, since the medium itself is highly constructed and contingent upon many cultural and economic conditions.

In German theater, the function of comedy is used strategically, just like we see in Klee's work. Performances constantly push at the extremes of tragedy and comedy, increasing the intensity of the response at each abrupt shift. The purpose

³⁴ "Art as Device", translated by Benjamin Sher in Shklovsky, *The Theory of Prose* (Bloomington, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991).

and effect are a complete disorientation of the spectator who, through the fresh, abstracting lens of comedy, is given the opportunity to come to terms with the tragedy's heavy themes. The viewer cannot be absorbed, and thus rendered passive, by the narrative. Brecht used comedy to distance his audience from the depicted events on stage. Even if the message itself was serious, he realized that comedy could be a way of engaging the audience and forcing them to think about the issues. Brecht needed to break the rising tension so that the audience members would not relate to the emotions of the characters and he did this through a comedic break. Often in the form of a comic song, slapstick, or a stand-up routine, its effect of silliness makes a strong social commentary in the way it is used in the treatment of a serious subject.³⁵ Klee also used the alienation effect as a means of silliness to make social commentary. Klee constructs his images in a manner that makes the viewer think about their position and acknowledge the artificiality of the work.

We know that Klee followed the contemporary theater scene in Munich with great interest, especially the Künstlertheater. One of the special features of the Künstlertheater was the relief stage that combined the fore, middle, and background into a single unit. The concept was to create the best possible spatial design for bodies in motion, to move them rhythmically and at the same time encourage sound to move toward the audience. Another important aspect of the relief stage was the active role played by the audience. Since the conditions of space on this type of stage

³⁵ Slapstick comedy is based on deliberately clumsy actions and humorously embarrassing events.

were not fixed, like they were with a traditional proscenium theater, space was always supplemented and created by the audience. “On the proscenium stage—as any sort of panorama and panoptic—the eye is deceived and duped; our stage, like any other work of art, takes advantage of the creative power of the eye in order to achieve the effect of three-dimensional form and distance.”³⁶

I believe that Klee’s work *Bunte Menschen (Colorful People)*, 1914, 52 (Fig.19) best illustrates the concept of the Künstlertheater’s relief stage. Various, undefined figures are chaotically crowded into a tent-like space. Semi-human forms distinguish themselves in warm colors of yellow, orange, and brown while the cool background recedes in greens and blues. The puzzle-like composition makes it difficult to distinguish the figures from the background and we must rely on color, though it still does not give us much evidence. The central yellow figure seems to flee towards the left side of the composition that is seemingly less chaotic in comparison to the right populated by amorphous creatures. Osamu Okuda has hypothesized that this work may be part of the Euripides’ play *The Bacchae*.³⁷ According to Hugo Ball’s 1927 book, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit (Flight Out of Time)*, Klee was supposed to contribute designs for *The Bacchae* by Euripides.³⁸ Although there is no direct corresponding scene, Klee’s composition reflects the basic theme of Euripides’ piece—the confrontation between Dionysian irrationalism and the rationalism of

³⁶ George Fuchs, *Revolution in the Theatre: Conclusions Concerning the Munich Artists’ Theatre* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959), 117.

³⁷ Osamu Okuda, “The Image as Stage: Paul Klee and the Creation of Theatrical Space” in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere* (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 245.

³⁸ See Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* 1927, edited by Bernhard Echte (Zürich, 1992), 20.

Pentheus, King of Thebes. Klee noted that, "I would desire to put on a lot of historical theater: I would loosen periods of time from their epochs; it would make laughable confusion."³⁹ Klee is clearly interested in classical theater traditions and gives evidence to his personal comedic twist as well as addressing the idea of time, which is often altered in epic theater to emphasize the constructed reality.

Klee began making his artificial landscapes in which the curtain becomes an established motif in 1916, the same year he made his first hand puppets. Among many of the compositions that feature a curtain it seems easiest to imagine *Einsiedelei (Hermitage)*, 1918, 61 (Fig. 19) as a theatrical space. The solidity of the blue background makes the fore, middle, and background appear to be one unit like that of the relief stage. The rhythmic use of complimentary colors guides the viewer's eye across an expressive horizon line while receding red lines create an illusionistic depth. The curtains that decorate the boundary of the composition invite us in, becoming an active participant along with the yellow birds in the bottom left corner. The trees and foliage seem to be the actors set within the theatrical landscape reminiscent of a churchyard as the black sun radiates its golden beams. By drawing the viewer in, Klee is using his own version of the alienation effect. When speaking generally about such effect it may seem difficult to associate the intimate with alienation. Klee uses the alienation effect different than Brecht in the epic theater. Brecht wants to push the viewer away so they are not emotionally

³⁹ Diary entry no. 929 in *The Diaries of Paul Klee*. Translation by Felix Klee. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964) 307.

involved with the characters by emphasizing the mechanics and artificiality of the theater. Klee rather than distancing the viewer draws them in; eliminating the fourth wall and making them not only acknowledge their presence in the work but also the works artificiality. Klee creates intimacy through the use of his surface textures and ornate techniques that require a sort of close looking.

In Klee's later works the curtain motif is often reduced to a symbol. Its function is the same, mediating between the fictional space of the image and the viewer's space outside the composition. The curtain can be acknowledged in the transformation into other figures but it still serves its function, acting as a formal cornerstone marking the boundaries of the composition. His latest *Stage-Landscape (Buehnen-Landschaft)*, 1937, 212 (Fig. 20) sets the stage for the abstracted curtain scenes to come. The symbolic curtain is also present in the dramatic work while Klee painted in exile titled *Uebermut (High Spirits)* 1939, 1251 (Fig. 21).

Wolfgang Kersten's publication on this painting summarized:⁴⁰

"Klee still pursued the precarious goals of modern art in critical times, using symbolic figures from the theater and the world of the circus—actors, jugglers, acrobats, and a tightrope walkers . . . In 1939, after the start of World War II, he once again questioned the aim of his art. In this context, he again took up the figure of the tightrope walker and created the painting *Uebermut* as an allegory for his life as an artist. The historical troubles and the memory of his own development as an artist were equally significant in weight."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Kersten is a Modern and Contemporary Art Historian and the Senior Research Associate at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Zürich.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Kersten, *Paul Klee. Uebermut: Allegorie der künstlerischen Existenz*, third revised edition (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 8.

In this image we see the symbolic curtain in the green surface of the upper right hand corner. In the left foreground we see an animal-like figure, possibly a dog or a deer, that places the observer inside the image. Max Huggler supposes that while working on *Uebermut*, Klee had the most contemporary public figure of the time in mind, namely Hitler.⁴² It is not uncommon for Klee to place various political features in his theatrical sets, making Huggler's suggestion quite possible. Osama Okuda interestingly compares the composition and political message of Klee's *Uebermut* to Daumier's *M. Chose, premier saltimbanque d'Europe (Mr. Thingamabob, Leading Tightrope Walker of Europe)* from 1833 (Fig. 22).⁴³ Although Klee may have adopted a few motifs and props from Daumier's lithograph, Klee's scene is timeless as an imaginary theatrical landscape. Eliminating the narrative elements made his statement of the visual motif ambiguous and as we know, the comedic lives in the space of ambiguity.

It is important here to address how this section is related to comedy and not just the theater. Theater is absolutely present but the underlying notion of comedy may not be as apparent. There is more to Klee's comedy than just humorous images. First, he uses effects from the traditional comic theater and translates them in order to create an alienation effect within his paintings. We see this technique used to emphasize the artificial through the materiality and surface textures of his works.

⁴² Max Huggler (1903-1994) was a Swiss art historian, curator, professor, and one of the leading interpreters of Klee's work.

Max Huggler, *Paul Klee: Die Malerei als Blick in dem Kosmos* (Frauenfeld and Stuttgart, 1969), 200.

⁴³ Osamu Okuda, "The Image as Stage: Paul Klee and the Creation of Theatrical Space" in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere* (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 248-49. See

Painted on cardboard, fabric, or a burlap sack the surface textures of this works draw the viewer in close, acknowledging the medium and material, thus addressing the artificial nature of the painting. Klee also alienates the viewer by translating aspects of the relief stage into his works. The viewer must again engage in order to decipher the space. Curtains and characters often sit along the boundaries of the image reaffirming the viewer's presence in viewing the work.

HAND PUPPETS AND PUPPET THEATER

On the border between artworks and toys, Paul Klee's puppets are ambiguous creations. They do not pretend to be great artworks, but in terms of a refined artistic fantasy they are. I think that it is important to shed light on these hand puppets for this particular study of the comedic because they mark an important transition, moving from Klee's two-dimensional work into the three-dimensional. Thus far, I have analyzed how Klee has transformed comedic techniques of the theater into formal elements within his compositions. Now, with these puppets and their respective stage settings, we can see Klee engaging in the true theatrical and comedic practice, especially that of the Künstlertheater's relief stage and again, using alienation effects. The strategies have an unremarked impact on the spatial organization common to Klee's paintings.

The puppets originated between 1916 and 1925 in several groups. The first set of presumably eight figures was given to Felix, Klee's son, on his ninth birthday. The second set followed in 1919 after an interruption due to the war. From then on new figures were added every year accumulating to fifty puppets of which thirty survive (Fig. 23). The idea of Klee's puppet theater originated at a flea market in Munich. The Auer Dult was a traditional Munich flea market that took place twice a year. Klee would go there in search of old picture frames while Felix, would watch the Kasperl and Gretl shows that were one of the main attractions at the Auer Dult.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Also known as Punch and Judy shows.

The repertoire that makes up the traditional Kasperl and Gretl stage were basically farces in which the comical individual, Kasperl, was always the protagonist, despite the variations of plays, who had to fend for his life. His opponents were Death and the Devil, a Policeman, a Crocodile, and sometime his wife Gretl.⁴⁵

The first set of puppets made in 1916 corresponds with the figures of the flea market theater. There was Kasperl, his wife Gretl, his friend Sepperl, Death, a Devil and his Grandmother, a Policeman, and a Crocodile. Of all the puppets of the first group only *Mr. Death* has been preserved. *Kasperl*, *Devil*, and *Sepperl* are documented in photographs (Fig. 24) and the remaining figures are only documented in writings. Felix would play with these puppets with a makeshift construction stage; a picture frame hung in the doorway serving as the stage front with an attached curtain so the puppet player could not be seen. Paul Klee also made stage sets documented by Felix. The first of his constructions was made of little pictures taken from the *Blaue Reiter*. Klee was in close contact with the two initiators of the *Blaue Reiter*, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, and was actively involved in the production of their programmatic almanac. In this almanac an idea of future artwork was propagated that included experiments in contemporary art and also traditional folk art, the art of primitive peoples, and children's drawings. Klee felt an affinity to the *Blaue Reiter* not only because it allowed him to come into contact with artistic movements outside of his Munich circle but also confirmed his

⁴⁵ Christine, Hopfengart. "Hybrid Creatures – Klee's Hand Puppets Between Art and Kasperl Theater" in *Paul Klee Hand Puppets* (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz. 2006), 11.

idea of renewing art through the pictorial production by children. Thus, when Felix would put on a puppet show with the collaged almanac as his stage setting, it situated a venue where child's play and artistic avant-garde came together, complimenting each other as a practical realization for Klee. The productive connection between art and childhood flourished through the puppet theater scene that went well beyond Klee and his living room to a larger spectacle found among the Munich avant-garde circles.

Another stage set documented by Klee showed an architectural village scene with a church-like steeple in the center and a large dial. This stage setting is reminiscent of architectural representations in Klee's watercolors of the time.⁴⁶ These stage constructions were a mixture between painting and a collage of fabrics. It is interesting to note that Klee used the same elements in his stage setting of the village landscape and in the design of the stage border as he did in the garments of several puppets. Most distinct is the patchwork application of pieces of fabric in the same manner as he often applied patches of color within his painted compositions. This patchwork is also reminiscent of the familiar Harlequin. The stage and figures are thus closely interconnected optically; making it no doubt difficult for the audience to separate the two areas and adding to the intimate quality of close looking that one must access in order to obtain detail and dimension. The effect of a collage of different fabrics appears to have interested him more than the figural presence of the individual puppets and the spatial organization of what was

⁴⁶ See *Cacodemonic*, 1916 for watercolor example.

happening on stage. In essence, we can relate this type of spatial organization to the Künstlertheater. Back, middle, and foreground are blended together while the puppet juxtaposes itself optically against the constructed set. It takes the viewer's creative power to achieve the effect of three-dimensional form and distance. The viewer must acknowledge his or her presence, recognizing that they are now an active participant in the constructed reality.

We tend to see this same type of spatial organization within Klee's almost folk-like style paintings. Clement Greenberg states, "Most pictorial design to which we are accustomed is spatial; that is, the eye travels continuously along the line or a passage of color. But in Klee's painting design is almost *temporal* or musical."⁴⁷ Klee does not create unity of design in a large scheme that the eye takes in at a glance but his feeling for design is rather ornamental. Working in a small format for private possession, his pictures, most, modest in dimension, hung upon the walls of a personal and familiar interior. His paintings often require close scrutiny, concentrating our visual attention rather than dispersing it into the complicated, just like that of his stage sets and puppets. We seem to be more conscious of our experience in terms of succession and simultaneity because we are not shocked by the transition between foreground and background. This is the same effect of the Künstlertheater's relief stage. Klee's line plays an important part in this because it is not a line in which the eye feels its way around, rather it defines relations, directs,

⁴⁷ Clement Greenberg. "Art Chronicle: On Paul Klee (1870-1940)" in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume I Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 68.

and connects. This line is evident in the facial design on his puppets as well as their costume. Klee's unity of design is realized by relations and harmonies rather than by structural solidity. This design unity is illustrated through his puppets and their relation to the stage. Their presence must be examined more closely than that of a traditional puppet theater making one's experience inevitably more intimate. This type of intimacy relates to the comedic experience by the acknowledgement of the works constructed artificiality and thus alienating of the spectator.

As a master at the Weimar Bauhaus from 1920 to 1925 he had two rooms on the second floor at his disposal where he could work undisturbed. There he tired out all sorts of surface textures for his pictures, coating cardboard and canvas with plaster and stretching gauze or newspapers over it, and painting on burlap. Over the radiators hovered strangely shaped papers. He often used paper so thin and of such poor quality that the surface wrinkled with every wet brushstroke, and has now become somewhat of an issue in terms of restoring and protecting some of his works. These wrinkles or questionable concoctions were an important part in Klee's work. It was about his process, which thanks to his pedagogical sketchbooks and diaries is well documented.⁴⁸ There is a prominent connection that can be made between the materiality and surface textures of Klee's work in regard to the idea of intimacy and alienation effects.

It seems as though Klee created his works with two types of intimacy in mind. He, for one, was intimate with his work as a type of process. He and his work

⁴⁸ For further reading see *Pedagogical Sketchbooks* and *The Diaries of Paul Klee*

were one; absorbing his surroundings, observing the objects internally, and creating a relationship that went beyond just a formal end.⁴⁹ The second type of intimacy is one with the surface textures that engages the viewer. The materiality of his work and the ornamental detail draws the viewer in close in order to look closely and observe the works artificiality. During these years at the Weimar Bauhaus is where Klee was able to let his imagination run free, not that is was not freed before, but now he had the uninterrupted space and support to create his last puppets.

The puppets from the Bauhaus period were more demanding and complex in their design and in terms of their content. In some cases the puppets from this period drew on stimulation from other areas of the Bauhaus and in others they were probably unacknowledged portraits of members, either teachers or pupils. For example, in *Big-Eared Clown* (Fig. 25) reference is made to Constructivist tendencies while at the same time alluding to Oskar Schlemmer and his plays and theater masks. In *Electrical Spook* (Fig. 25) we can recognize the impact of Dadaist assemblage techniques as well as the material experiments from Itten's preliminary course that Felix was enrolled in at the age of fourteen. According to Leah Dickerman, Itten's basic pedagogical premise was a type of radical formalism that "all art could be understood as a series of oppositions, of color, texture, material, or graphic mark."⁵⁰ What was new about the puppets from this period was Klee's

⁴⁹ For further reading and explanation of process see *Notebooks Volume 2: The Nature of Nature*, (London: Lund Humphries Publishers Limited, 1961).

⁵⁰ Leah Dickerman, "Bauhaus Fundamentals" in *Bauhaus 1919-1933* (New York: Museum of Modern Art) 17.

playful treatment of the materials in his use of found objects and in terms of their formal utilization.

Klee worked differently with found objects than the Dada artists. They made assemblages by fitting together foreign, pre-fabricated objects; objects were left the way they were found, including logos and functional details. That was the idea behind Dada assemblage, to document their triviality, which initially contributed to the provocative appeal of their artistic technique. For Klee, he used insignificant devices such as matchboxes, electrical sockets, and tin can lids but did not leave them as they were found. Giving these objects a newly adopted significance he adapted the forms of these found objects to serve a new purpose. From a socket he made a primitive mask in *White-Haired Eskimo*, in *Devil with Ringed Gloves* we see that he assembled two slim fitting women's gloves to create a mask with pointed ears, and in *Specter of the Matchbox* and *Specter of the Socket*, their title alludes to the material. Klee had developed an extraordinary awareness of materials in his mixed media techniques from the beginning of his artistic career but within the Bauhaus his technical experiments were of great interest to him. Not only did he have the studio space but also the emphasis on technology and the fact that there was simply not a hierarchy of mediums within the school and allowance for him to experiment freely and have the opportunity to gain critical feedback.

Some hilarious performances were held at the Weimar Bauhaus with Klee's puppets, during which various confidential matters were aired in an unsparing and sarcastic way, vexing those concerned and highly amusing to the others. Felix Klee

documents a scene played with the hand puppets in 1922, during the solstice holiday, as a memorable success. It featured Emmy-Galka Scheyer trying to coax Klee into buying a picture by Jawlensky (Fig. 26). Klee kept saying no and remained unyielding. Finally, working herself into a fuss, Galka took the picture and smashed it to pieces over Klee's head.⁵¹ Blending child's play with serious adult activity, performances could serve both as entertainment and as psychological ventilation.⁵²

⁵¹ Felix Klee, *Paul Klee: Puppen, Plastiken, Reliefs, Masken, Theater* (Berne: Galerie Suisse de Paris, 1979, 21.

⁵² For further reading see Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York: The Norton Library, 1960).

BAUHAUS THEATER WORKSHOP

Another area of the Bauhaus that was essential to Klee's work was the theater. The aim of the Bauhaus was to find a new and powerful working correlation of all the processes of artistic creation to culminate in a new cultural equilibrium of our visual environment. There was no hierarchy of mediums at the Bauhaus and teachers and students worked together as a community of vital participants of the modern world, seeking a new synthesis of art and modern technology. This way of working provoked a reimagining of the relation between fine art and design that offered technical knowledge that was complemented by aesthetic ambition. The theater, or stage shop, became a splendid place for learning including all departments and workshops.

The aim of the theater workshop was to investigate systematically the basic principles of stage performance in order to develop a new form of theater. Students were focused on the idea of mechanical theater performance with abstract figures and technical elements interested in collapsible sets and light effects. Viewed in terms of the experimental intensity that took place in the theater workshop and compared to the formal strictness of its design principles, Klee's puppets and handcrafted stages give the impression of a charming almost old-fashioned alternative. Klee's puppet theater stands in contrast to the mechanical designs of the Bauhaus theater. With their handmade imprecision, individually crafted features, and their relationship with their stage, they are intimate. An intimacy that lends

itself to the comedic nature of the alienation effect, inviting the view for a closer look in order to acknowledge their construction. Proudly bearing the marks of their maker's hands, these puppets embodied the drive to unify art and craft that governed the Bauhaus in its early years.

Early in 1921, around the same time Klee began working at the Bauhaus, he added an explicitly theatrical work into his catalog, *Bartolo: La Vendetta, Oh! La Vendetta!* 1921, 5 (Fig. 27). Bartolo is a robot-like figure made of geometrical shapes and one eye. Given the modernity of the figure's construction, we are likely to think that he may be a figure from the Bauhaus theater but rather, he is a character from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*.⁵³ Klee's *Bartolo* looks very reminiscent of Lothar Schreyer's characters, combining human elements in geometric form (Fig. 28). Klee's Bauhaus *Bartolo* is a theatrical figure that illustrates Klee's interest in the modern theater but also establishes himself in his traditional values in terms of subject matter. Klee's intention was not without irony, as we will see in other works relating to Schreyer's late-expressionist theater techniques. The character may have a contemporary avant-garde appearance but his foundation is that of the traditional opera that Klee was so fond of.

The extent of Klee's interest in the future of the theater at the Bauhaus is evident in his support for the theater in the years 1922 and 1923. He repeatedly emphasized the importance of the theater in the school's training and educational

⁵³ For Bartolo as an opera character see Christine Hopfengart, "Oh la vendetta! Klee, Mozart und die Liebe zum pathetischen Stil," in *Paul Klee: Melodie und Rhythmus*, exhibition catalog Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (Ostfildern, 2006), 137-38.

system. This can be most clearly seen in a drawing by Klee which illustrates a diagram of the Bauhaus's teaching program (Fig. 29). Klee places the preliminary courses in the outer circle while the inner circle consists of materials training and workshop lessons. In the center, where all the branches of teaching converge, we see the "Bau" (building) and "Bühne" (stage).⁵⁴

In 1923, Lothar Schreyer's position at the Bauhaus had become insecure and he left following student protests. The reason was that Schreyer's late-Expressionist conception of the theater as a form involved practices of sacred consecration that was rejected by most students. They were more interested in newer conceptions of parody and satire. Klee, who had evidently followed the developments of Schreyer's resignation closely, made reference to his fate in two separate watercolors. *Der Marsch zum Gipfel (The March to the Summit)* 1922, 146 (Fig. 30) shows a man at the foot of a high mountain, which he is about to climb. Blocky little wings attempt to help him on his ascent but he is confronted with a beastly animal who threatens to peck him with his sharp beak. The work is about the tension between visions and goals and the obstacles you must face to reach them. This can be read as Klee's gesture of moral support for his colleague. Another Schreyer related work is *Mondspiel (Moonplay)*, 1923, 153 (Fig. 31). Here, again we see the subject of a mountain but this one is referring to Schreyer's failed theatrical debut in which his resignation followed.

⁵⁴ Christine Hopfengart, "Yes and No: Paul Klee and the Bauhaus Theater" in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere*, (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 236.

Oskar Schlemmer became the new director in 1923, shaping the stage department and giving it the historical significance that we associate the Bauhaus theater with today. Interestingly enough, Klee had left absolutely no information regarding his relationship with Schlemmer or the theater workshop after 1923. The only reference we have of how Klee felt about Schlemmer's work is from Felix, who claimed his father described Schlemmer's work as "clichéd."⁵⁵ It seems so bizarre, considering the amount evidence we have from Klee's journals and letters, that there is no account of Schlemmer. We know that Klee and Schlemmer both looked to the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann for reference and that masks and theatrical characters were central elements of the respective practices. E. T. A. Hoffmann inspired Klee, with his grotesque humor from the Hoffmann's tales and the opera Offenbach.⁵⁶ In his stories Hoffmann skillfully combined wild flights of imagination with convincing examinations of human characteristics and psychology.⁵⁷ Often related to ideas of horror and the uncanny, his weird and mysterious atmospheres intermingle with realistic narratives; illustrating his struggle between the ideal world of his art and his daily life as a bureaucrat. Klee drew many subjects from these works.

Hoffmaneske Geschichte (Fig. 32) appears to be loosely based on the poet's best-known lyrical tale "The Golden Pot," (1814) a magical story that switches back and forth between high fantasy and everyday life in Dresden. It recounts the trials of

⁵⁵ Christine Hopfengart, "Yes and No: Paul Klee and the Bauhaus Theater" in *Paul Klee Theater Everywhere*, (Zentrum Paul Klee Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 239.

⁵⁶ Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) was a German writer, composer, and painter known for his stories in which supernatural and sinister characters move in and out of men's lives, ironically revealing tragic or grotesque sides of human nature.

⁵⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/biography/E-T-A-Hoffmann>. Accessed Oct 26, 2015.

the pure and foolish young Anselmus and his efforts to gain entry into the heaven of poetry, Atlantis. The tree in the left of the composition may be the tree from which Anselmus first heard the fateful voices speaking to him and the tube-like contraption on the right could perhaps be the glass bottle in which Anselmus was imprisoned. The two clocks represent the tales repeated references and the vessel in the center is thought to illustrate the golden pot that gives the story its name.⁵⁸ Hoffmann seems to make a socialist distinction between community and society that Klee could relate to.

Schlemmer used his figures to explore the relationship between body and costume through the visual expression of formal relations. In contrast, Klee was concerned with expressing human drama through the use of puppet-like figures. His masks and fragmented figures were not free artistic inventions but hybrid representations of art and reality, whereas Schlemmer constructed an autonomous system focusing not on the individual's expression but rather the universal.

Klee's ten years of teaching at the Bauhaus resulted in over 3,300 pages of notes, drawings, and diagrams for direct use in his lectures, destined for an announced but never published treatise.⁵⁹ His images from this period seem to be less about ordinary experience and more about an emphasis on principles of order. His works have less satire that had previously dominated his work and exhibited a

⁵⁸ <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/483143>. Accessed Sept 20, 2015.

⁵⁹ Letter of May 19, 1912 in *Briefe an die Familie, 1893-1940*. Edited by Felix Klee. 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 83.

new and growing preoccupation with quantification and method that he was demonstrating in his lectures. It is clear that his stricter means of working was reinforced by the climate at the Bauhaus and by his own need to explain his art to his students. It was also due to his growing vision of a world in which the commonplace is in some sense in union with the transcendental, or at least displays the idea basis for existence.⁶⁰ By 1925 Klee was beginning to feel the burden of his teaching. The date of his final resignation April 1, 1931 was due to his fatigue and his belief that his Bauhaus duties interfered too much with his painting.

⁶⁰ Marcel Franciscono, *Paul Klee: His Work and Thought* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 262.

KLEE'S FINAL YEARS

Klee began teaching at the Düsseldorf Academy on October 21, 1931 and with that, his theoretical projects came to an end. Whether it was due to the economic depression which began to make itself felt in Germany towards the end of 1929, the lack of sponsorship from the Bauhaus, or his own disinterest, after 1932 and the accession to power of the National Socialists publication was increasingly unlikely. The new Nazi director dismissed Klee from the Düsseldorf Academy in 1933. The same year the Gestapo searched his home and he was forced to leave Germany, without an assured source of income, back to his birthplace of Switzerland.

In the first years after his return to Bern, Klee found it difficult to work. Events in Germany, his forced emigration, his uncertain finances now that he could no longer teach or participate in the principal art market, and what must have been equally troublesome was the loss of community of like-minded artists. In 1935 Klee's work was interrupted again by something far worse; the severe onset of what would prove to be his fatal illness, scleroderma.⁶¹

There are relatively few letters Klee wrote between 1936 and 1940, in which there is almost nothing spoken of his illness. His expression of it went entirely into

⁶¹ Scleroderma, or what is now called, progressive systemic sclerosis, is an autoimmune disorder in which the connective tissues become fibrous. It may be accompanied by any or all of the complications Klee is reported to have had: general muscular weakness, digestive and respiratory problems, glandular disturbances, heart trouble, skin rashes, and eventually the loss in the ability to swallow due to the loss of elasticity in the esophagus.

his art. The non-material universe of Klee's late works and its withdrawal of libidinal investment in the body and its derealization of the exterior world had a therapeutic function that cannot be overlooked.⁶² Lois Oppenheim suggests looking at the context of Klee's late style as a life force reflected in the motivational drive and pleasure seeking aims. Making 1654 works within 16 months, Klee's output was not limited to a metaphorical expression of the preoccupation of his own mortality but a form of self-preservation. Klee's late work is concerned with often-ambiguous topics that were marked by his political and personal situation. On one hand he had to endure the defamation of his paintings by the Nazis living in exile and on the other he was diagnosed with an incurable disease. Most scholars conclude that the style of Klee's late work has little to do with his illness and more with contemporary art.

The last mask I have included in this study is Klee's *Maske Lapul*, 1939, 737 (Fig. 33). The only translation that I have been able to find for Lapul is from the Hungarian word meaning to lie low. From my interpretation of the painting, such a translation fits the title. Looking at this jumbled and monstrous figure, I believe that this mask represents many of the masks that Klee was wearing to disguise his fatal illness. Beady reptilian eyes peer out from a lobed head. A beak protruding from the right side seems to compliment the rooster-like headdress atop the creature's head. The painted stripes of color allude to a type of tribal paint that we can relate to the

⁶² See Lois Oppenheim's *A Curious Intimacy: Art and Neuro-psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 89-120.

masks of ritual for primitive peoples. The ambiguity of features in the mask relates to the Klee's anthropomorphic style of his later works.

In the last years of Klee's life his puppets and figurines became metaphors for physical decay. In *Sich Sammeln (Compose Oneself)*, 1939, 10 (Fig. 34) we see a fragmented figure; fingers, toes, and an ear float about the shapeless body. With hollow eyes and an expressionless mouth, we are left with the title to aid us in the interpretation. Towards the end of his life Klee saw his fears reflected in the mutilated and fragmented bodies of puppets and marionettes and I believe that this particular image is a message for Klee's self; even though death and decay are surfacing he must compose himself and keep creating.

Klee's later drawings are not sculptural but they belong to the tendency in the thirties best represented by, Henry Moore and Jean Arp; to achieve monumentality they make fluid contours and swollen volumes suggestive of generalized organic forms in states of transitions or like a metamorphosis. This drawing style, used by Klee in earlier studies, is often referred to as "baroque." These features do not describe Klee's later work in its entirety but it does classify a good portion. Klee's reductive settings and lack of fine detail assert their monumentality and reinforce it by titles drawn from ancient myths and angels.

Mephisto as Pallas (Fig. 34) painted in 1939 combines the ancient war goddess Pallas Athene with the devil figure Mephisto. This image refers to Klee's tragicomic view of art. Pallas represents the established conformist art while Mephisto symbolizes the embodiment of artistic creation, which stands above the

opposition between good and evil. It is the evil glitter of the eyes that betrays the devil hidden behind the helmet of the Greek goddess of the arts. Klee's figures, overlaid with myth, rarely lose sight of ordinary human experience. His *Urchs* series for example, are relative to Picasso's minotaurs but they seem quite domesticated in comparison. In his *URCH From the Heroic Age* (Fig. 36), the beast stands with a human posture. With his right hand raised in motion and his downward gaze, we do not feel intimidated by the beast but rather a silly form of friendship with the monster.

There seems to be a heightened sense of intimacy in Klee's later works, not in the surface textures that we have seen previously but in the relation to human sentiment. In his late figural works, we see a study of physiognomy, deformed, sometimes completely abstracted, but nonetheless dependent on their content on the human form with their ordinary gestures and expressions. The distinctive character of their titles increases their sense of intimacy. Klee's late titles differ from his earlier ones in two ways; they are less specific in their references to external things, and they draw us closer to the emotions, moods, and behaviors of the figures depicted.

In *Insula Dulcamara*, 1938, 481 (Fig. 37) we see death itself personified. There are many interpretations of this work but relative to the date, Klee's illness, and the subject of death that was frequenting his images, I read this work as the *Bittersweet Island*. The head of death dominates the calligraphic form of the lyrical island. Undefined, undirected shapes drawn with thick black lines keep the

composition balanced between melancholy and cheerfulness. Chris Pike's wonderful analysis of the semiotics and language concludes that the lines are symbolic of Klee's signature.⁶³ This is his final signing off in a clear meditation on his approach of death. The subject of death, or rather, dying is prominent in Klee's later works. He illustrates death as an ambiguous creature, portraying it with a range of allusion and expression. He creates a familiar presence within these compositions sharing human sentiments. He was not focused on the psychological but more on the morals of humanity. Klee's death was a constant companion, wearing many guises and apart of his everyday life, opposed to the traditional allegories, where death comes as the grim reaper to snatch its victims away.

Klee's humor in this later works tends to be good-natured and reflective rather than satiric. For the first time it is genuinely possible to call his comic pictures humorous rather than merely witty. In 1939, Klee composed twenty-nine works that feature angels. His angels were not the celestial kind but hybrid creatures beset with slight human characteristics and whims. Suffering from an incurable illness and sensing himself hovering between life and death, Klee possibly felt a kinship with these outsiders. Looking at his images of angels, we can see that Klee is addressing issues of death but their characteristics are rather funny. Despite their wings, his angels retain the traits and weaknesses of the living and many of the same human feelings. Their feelings tend to be hopeful but are filled with an

⁶³ Chris Pike, "Signing Off: Paul Klee's *Insula Dulcamara*," *Word & Image*, 2014, Vol. 30(2), 117-130

uncertainty as seen in the *Angel Applicant* (Fig. 38). In this work, he covered a sheet of newspaper with black gouache on which he then drew the outlines of the figure and of the crescent moon with a thick, soft graphite pencil. Then he filled in these forms with a thin white wash. It is the black ground peeking through the white pigment that gives this creature its ghostly shimmer. We can see here, with these humorous angels that a central aspect to Klee's aesthetics is his lifelong concern with the possibilities of parody and wit.

In *Tod und Feuer (Death and Fire)*, 1940, 332 (Fig. 39) a smirking skull is in the middle of searing reds and oranges in which the German word for death, *tod*, seems to be spelled out for us. The image carries a subtle expression of pain and regret but it is mostly comical. As we see in *Insula Dulcamara*, the expressive power of the skulls comes not from the usual imagery of horror but from their solemn dominance over other forms that are similar. Klee's representation of the stages of dying comes to fruition in his series of sixteen drawings from 1939, *Der Inferner Park* (Fig. 40-42). As the title indicates this is Klee's version of hell and makes reference to the Inferno of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.⁶⁴ The hell of these drawings is unlike Dante's transcendent realm where the dead suffer for their sins on earth. Klee's hell is comprised of a transitional region, only just within life, in which painful leave is taken of this world and it's suffering without compensation of a certain

⁶⁴ *Inferno* is the first part of Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) 14th century epic poem *Divine Comedy*. It is an allegory telling Dante's journey through Hell, guided by the Roman poet Virgil. In the poem, Hell is depicted as nine circles of suffering located within the Earth. The *Divine Comedy* represents the journey of the soul toward God, with the *Inferno* describing the recognition and rejection of sin.

afterlife.⁶⁵ The series may be as filled with despair as Dante's, where all hope is lost, it is perhaps even more sorrowful. Dante's hell reflects the passions and vitality of life whereas Klee's evacuated park conveys sentiments of regret, fear, loss, and uncertainty.

The individual titles of the works allude to these sentiments but their translation does not due them justice. Klee's ironic use of the word "zu(r)" meaning *at or to the place of*, suggests that they are a place to visit, like that of the park. This series of metamorphosing drawings assume a more explicit meaning than the previous. Here the subject of life and death finds its formal correlative in the indeterminacy of the forms themselves. The extreme lack of detail drains them of substance; the figures, or what we can see of them, have lost virtually all of their defining characteristics as figures. The figures blend into the landscape, dissolving into something larger, less defined, the ambiguity and dissolution of death.

Klee's pictures of death, taken all together in his later years, alleviate the terror of the subject by ambiguity of their forms and most of all by the inclusion of humor; by distancing themselves ironically. Klee makes us believe, through his use of human sentiment, that death has a human face and like everything in life, it too is both tragic and comedic. Klee illustrates fate and human emotion, though often ambiguous and ironic, in a manner that relates to a level of ordinary human experience. It seems that his long-practiced detachment gave him the inner strength

⁶⁵ Marcel Franciscono, *Paul Klee: His Work and Thought* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 317-19

to turn the vicissitudes of his life to an account of artistic creation. The awareness of his condition left no room for artistic doubt or inhibition but that he needed to take full advantage of the time he had and create every minute that he could.

CONCLUSION

Paul Klee is an artist that tends to resist classification, constantly experimenting and pushing stylistic boundaries it has been challenging to find the consistent link that threads his work together. I believe that this common thread is comedy and its application, although ever changing, is undeniable. It is my hope that this work will open up a new avenue for Paul Klee scholarship. Looking at Klee as the comedian, he created his own vision of the *comédie humaine*, which takes the world as its stage, and where everyday subjects are actors, methodically constructed, deconstructed, and refigured into Klee's very own comedic act.

Gillian Pye's work has helped me immensely in trying to logically interpret the comedic. If the essence of comedy lies in its ambiguity, its reliance on inconsistency and incongruity, then it ought not to come as a surprise that it will prove resistant to logical investigation. Demonstrating how Klee has used techniques from comedic theater and transforming them into formal elements within his compositions has been the primary goal of this research. This study has aimed to prove that mechanisms of comic theater provide strategies that engage the viewer to look closer, recognizing the artifice of the constructed reality that leads to alienation.

Beginning with satire, Klee quietly hides behind his caricatures claiming to be unaffected by his social surroundings but his satirical works make it clear that he has something to say. His social commentary is not always explicit but his

willingness and ability distort our reality is where the comedic lies. Klee's history with the theater has much to do with his subject matter. Not only are characters from the theater firmly established in Klee's works but he also turns subjects of everyday life into theatrical interpretations. The opera especially influenced Klee because it was fundamentally artificial. This artificiality is where I have found much evidence for Klee's work in relation to the comedic and is apparent in his transformation of Brecht's alienation techniques.

When speaking generally about such effects the connection between intimacy and alienation seems far-fetched, but the evidence in terms of close looking is there. Klee uses the alienation effect different than Brecht in the epic theater. Brecht wants to push the viewer away so they are not emotionally involved with the characters by emphasizing the mechanics and artificiality of the theater. Klee, rather than distancing the viewer draws them in; eliminating the fourth wall and making them not only acknowledge their presence in the work but also its artificiality. I find the artificial materiality of Klee's work interesting in comparison to the fact that he was a claimed transcendentalist. He believed that our material world was only one reality among many open to human awareness. I think that Klee used comedy as a means of expressing his transcendent nature by using comedy as a means of communication.

Russell Meares's psychological study *Intimacy and Alienation* proposes that the two work in conjunction in the theory of human consciousness and

communication. William James⁶⁶ conceived self as an awareness of the flow of inner life; the 'stream of consciousness' as he called it. James viewed all self-experience as 'partly known (me), partly knower (I), partly object and partly subject'. To this 'duplex structure' Meares adds a third term, a quality of self that comes to life in the space between self and other. In this space 'conversations' occur between two people where the most intimate is simultaneously self-revealing and self-creating and the alienating is anything that hinders personal growth.

The self is understood as a special form of conversation. This idea depends upon a distinction between two forms of human language and conversation. One of these conversations is seen as essential to the sense of self. It is nonlinear, associative and Meares claims it to be apparently purposeless. The experience of self develops in a conversation, showing the shape of this language, which has the form of the stream of consciousness. It is the language of inner life. The second kind of language is logical, linear and clearly purposeful. It is directed toward the main events of the world and is a language of coping and adaption.⁶⁷

I would like to suggest that Klee's artwork is a combination of both forms of this language. Developed as a stream of his consciousness, formal elements work as a means of communication in order to comment, comedically, on these worldly

⁶⁶ William James (1842-1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist considered to be one of the major figures in the philosophical school of pragmatism and one of the first educators and founders of functional psychology.

⁶⁷ Russell Meares, *Intimacy and Alienation: Memory, Trauma, and Personal Being*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

events as a means of coping mechanisms. Most conversations involve a mingling of these two language forms. Embedded in the linear language built for coping with the outer world are elements of another kind of speech, which is related to inner life. An increasing amount of this latter language is associated with intimacy. Seen in this way, intimacy depends upon the development of inner experience, which can be shared with another. An intimate conversation is associated with a heightened feeling of being 'myself'. Klee's intimacy, displayed through pictorial means, is a representation of his self-alienation.

Klee masks and puppets are another sign of alienation. Constructed methodically to illuminate the concept that the man hides behind the mask and that the puppets stand as the inanimate object, present for the projection of someone else's thoughts but not having one of their own. These masks and especially the puppets create a strong sense of psychological ventilation as a form of a cathartic device. The ability for Klee to again, quietly hide behind these representations, distanced from his surrounding, allowed him to express what he felt internally. This is apparent in the majority of his works from the Bauhaus period as well.

It is important for me to reiterate the fact that the material quality and surface textures of Klee's work is what draws the viewer in and creates his intimacy. Klee's intimacy is not one with others but one with surface textures and materials. This is evident especially in his hand puppets in conjunction with their respective stage settings, the relief stage qualities of his theatrical landscapes, and the experimental quality of many of his two-dimensional works. Painted on burlap

sacks, crusty cardboard, or his famous ink-transfer drawings, there is always an element of the materials that seems mysterious or unknown and draws the viewer in to question how and what is it made from? This ability to draw the viewer is the relation to Brecht's alienation techniques. Rather than experiencing some climatic catharsis, which we do see in some of Klee's works, the spectator adopts a critical perspective in hopes of recognizing social injustice and walking away from the work wanting to make change in the outside world. Highlighting the constructed nature of Brecht's theater and Klee's works communicates that the audience's reality was equally constructed and therefore able to be changed.

The majority of Klee's late works have a very different feel to them. Overly simplified with few human characteristics it is apparent that Klee was not only influenced by contemporary art at the time but working through some issues himself. Exiled to Switzerland as a German citizen, away from his Munich artist circles, considered a degenerated artist, and diagnosed with a fatal illness, Klee spent all his time producing works. These works tend to be images of death but executed in a humorous way. Klee did not seem afraid of death but rather contemplative of its possibilities.

In conclusion Paul Klee is a comedian at heart. Borrowing techniques from the epic theater tradition and the relief-like stage of the Künstlertheater, Klee constructs an intimate setting through his ornate design and surface textures in which the viewer must engage, acknowledging the artificiality of the scene and making thus them address the issues at hand. Klee not only used comedy as a type of

cathartic device, but also as a satirical device for social commentary. As consistently as his work changes through his development as an artist, comedy is a factor that consistently carries through.

Figure 1. Paul Klee, *Kaiser Wilhelm Raging*, 1920, 206

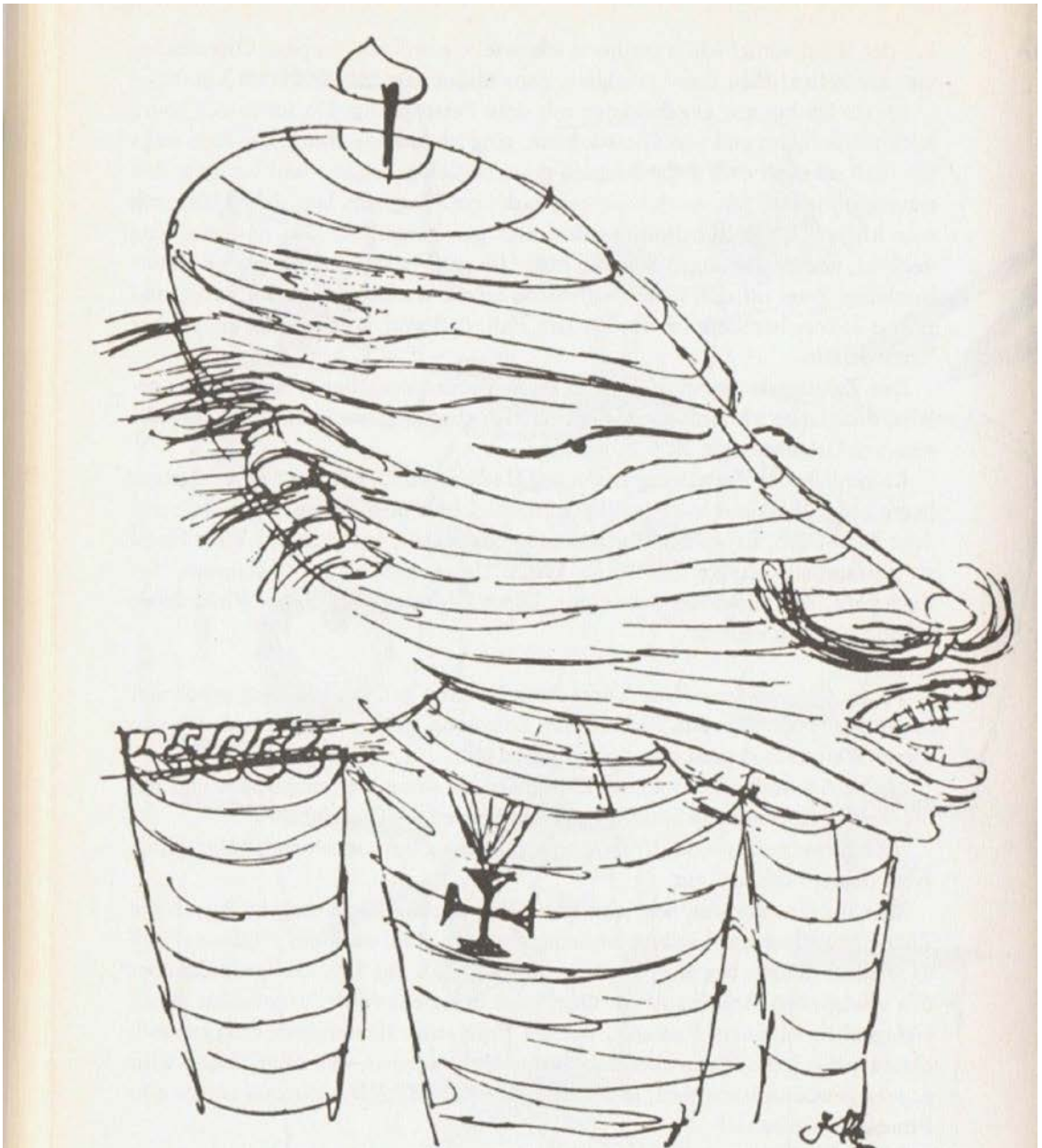


Figure 2. Paul Klee, Illustrated schoolbook

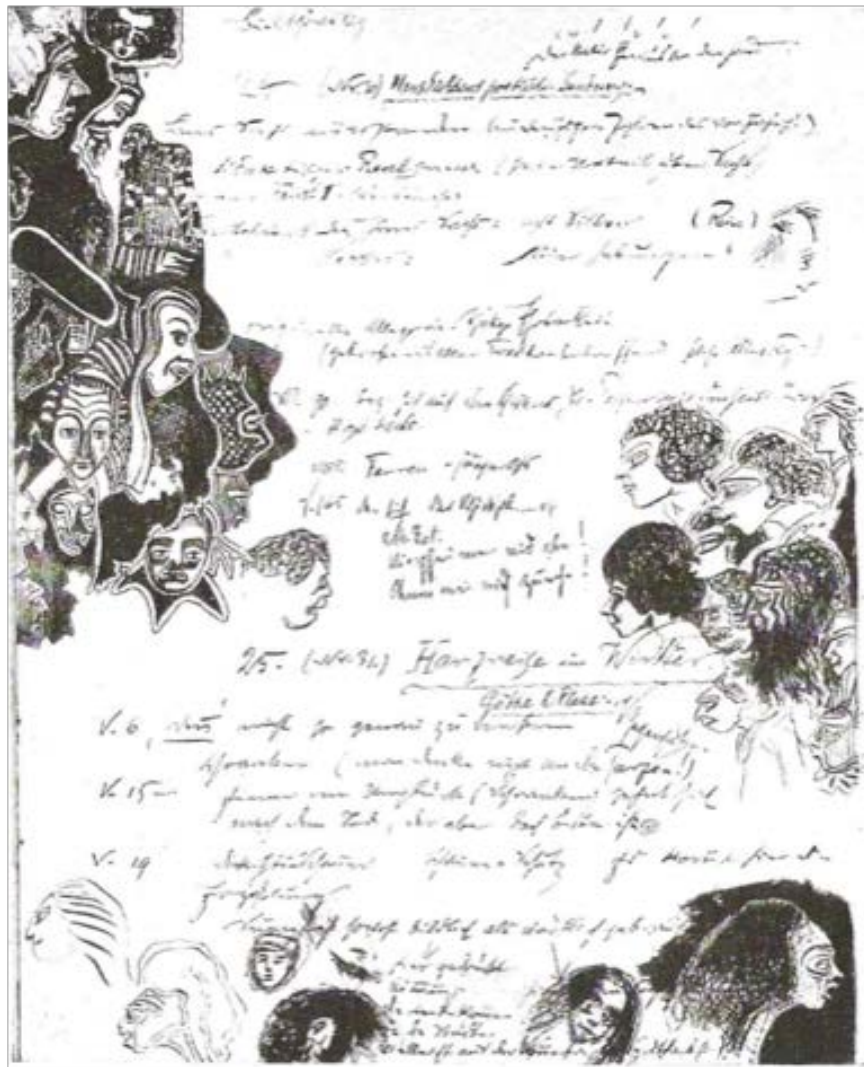


Figure 3. Paul Klee, *Komiker (Comedian)*, 3rd Version, 1904, 14



Figure 4. Paul Klee, *Jungfrau in einem Baum* (Virgin in a Tree) 1903,2



Figure 5. *Zwei Männer (einander höherer Stellung vermutend)*, 1903, 3
Two Men Meet, Each Believing the Other to Be in a Higher Rank



Figure 6. Paul Klee, *Der Held mit dem Flügel* (*The Hero with a Wing*), 1905, 38.



Figure 7. Polykleitos, *Doryphoros*, ca. 450-440 BCE



Figure 8. Paul Klee, *Sängerin der komischen Oper* (*Singer of the Comic Opera*), 1923, 118.

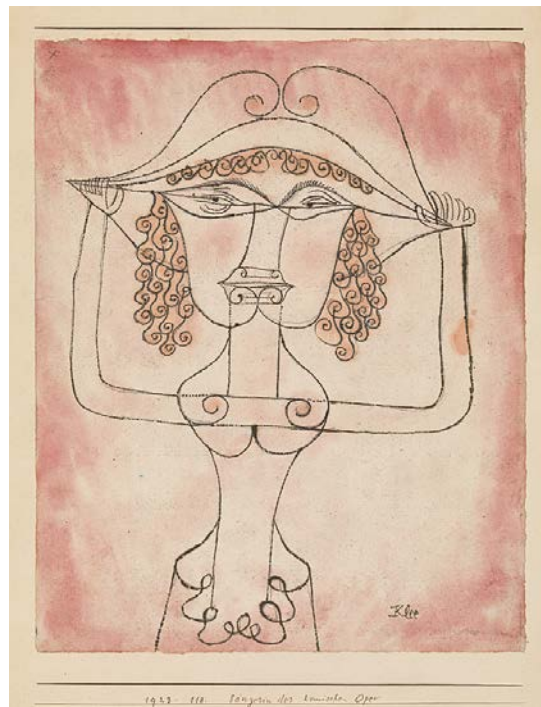
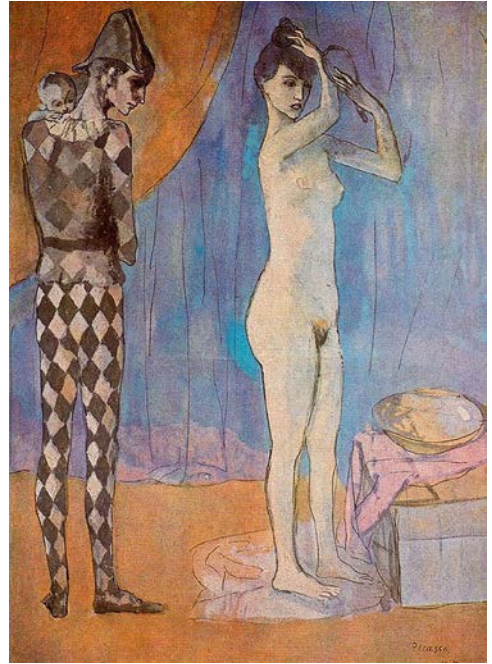


Figure 9. Paul Klee, *Senecio*, 1922



Figure 10. Pablo Picasso, *Acrobat and Young Harlequin* and *Harlequin's Family*, 1905



Harlequin with a Glass, 1905



Paul as Harlequin, 1924



Figure 11. Paul Klee, *Maske (Mask)*, 1912, 58

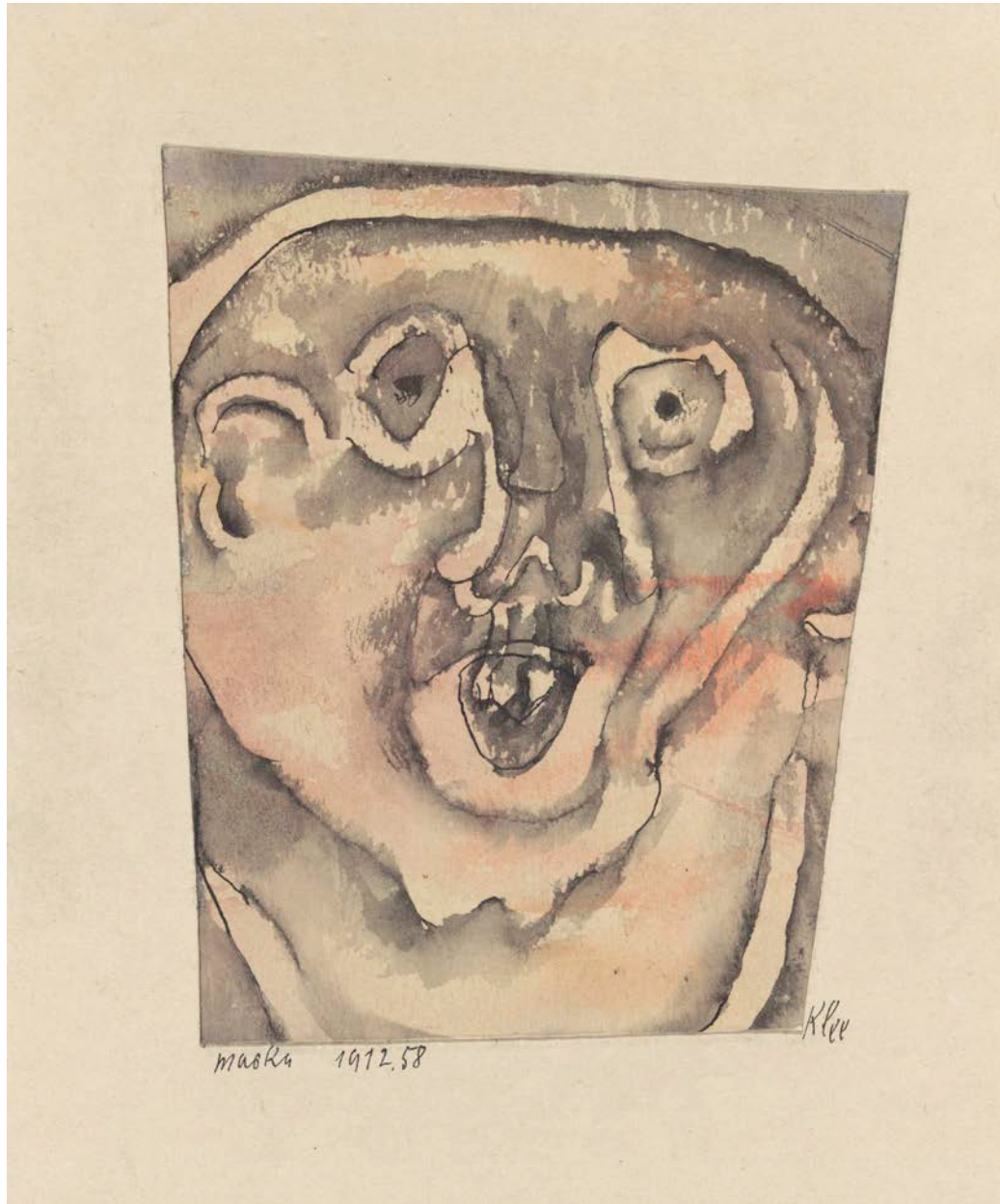


Figure 12. Paul Klee, *Maske (Mask)*, 1921, 115



Figure 13. Paul Klee, *Maske der Angst* (*Mask of Fear*), 1932, 286

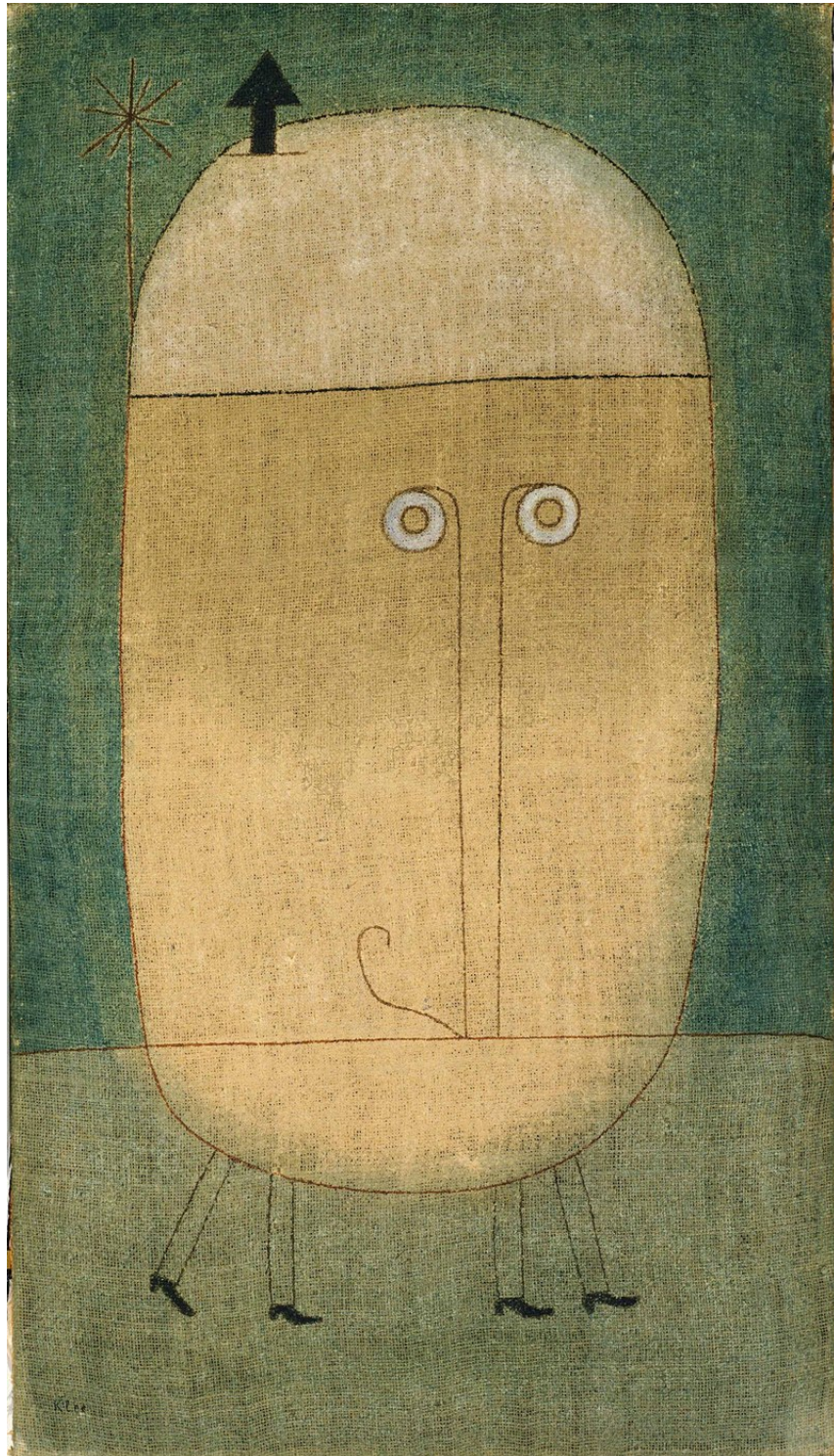


Figure 14. Ferdinand Léger, *Three Figures*, 1921



Figure 15. Giorgio de Chirico, *Hector and Andromache*, 1912



Figure 16. Paul Klee, *Puppe an violetten Bändern* (*Puppet on Violet Ribbons*), 1906, 14

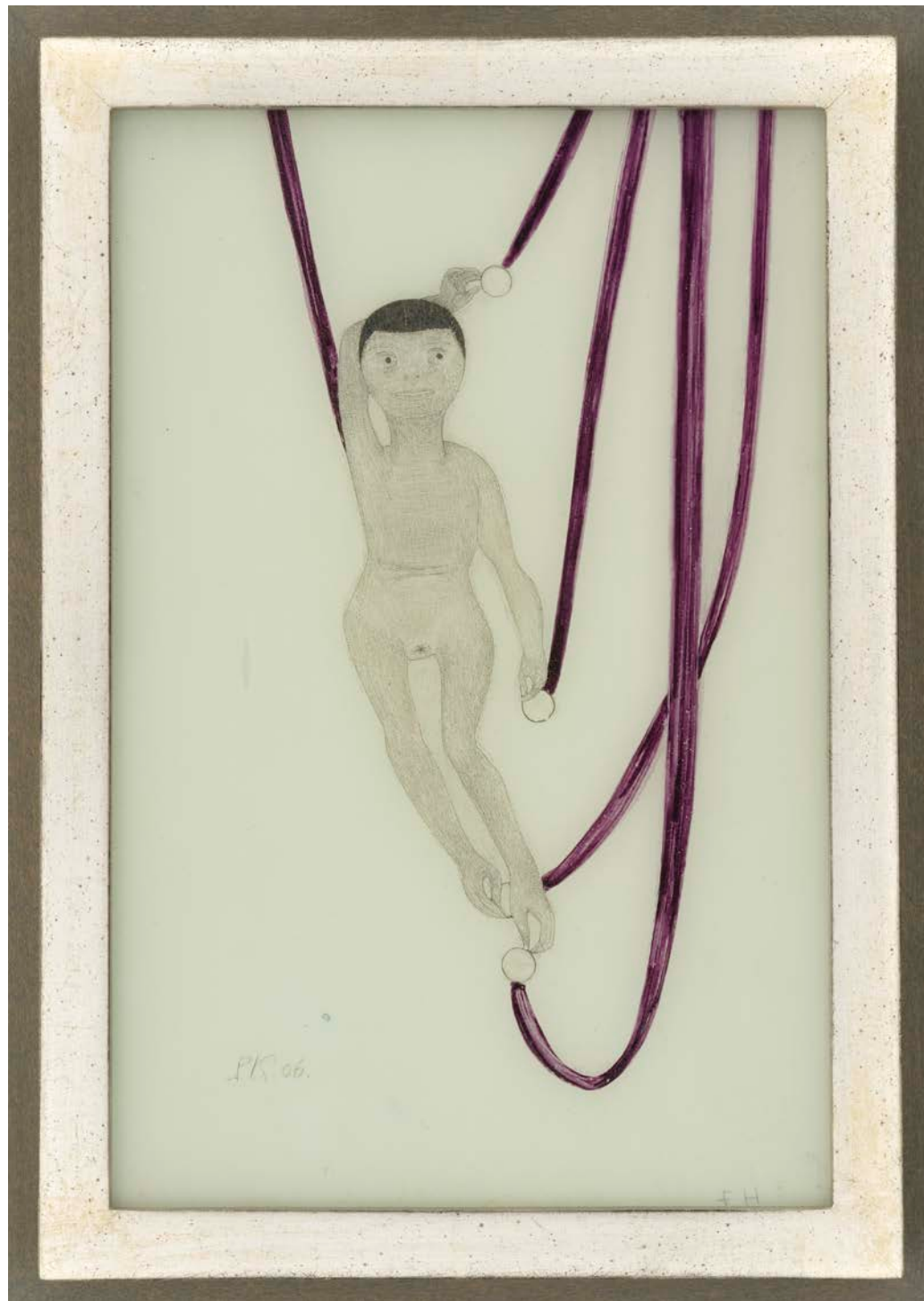


Figure 17. Paul Klee, Bauchredner und Rufer im Moor (*Ventriloquist and Caller in the Moor*), 1923, 103

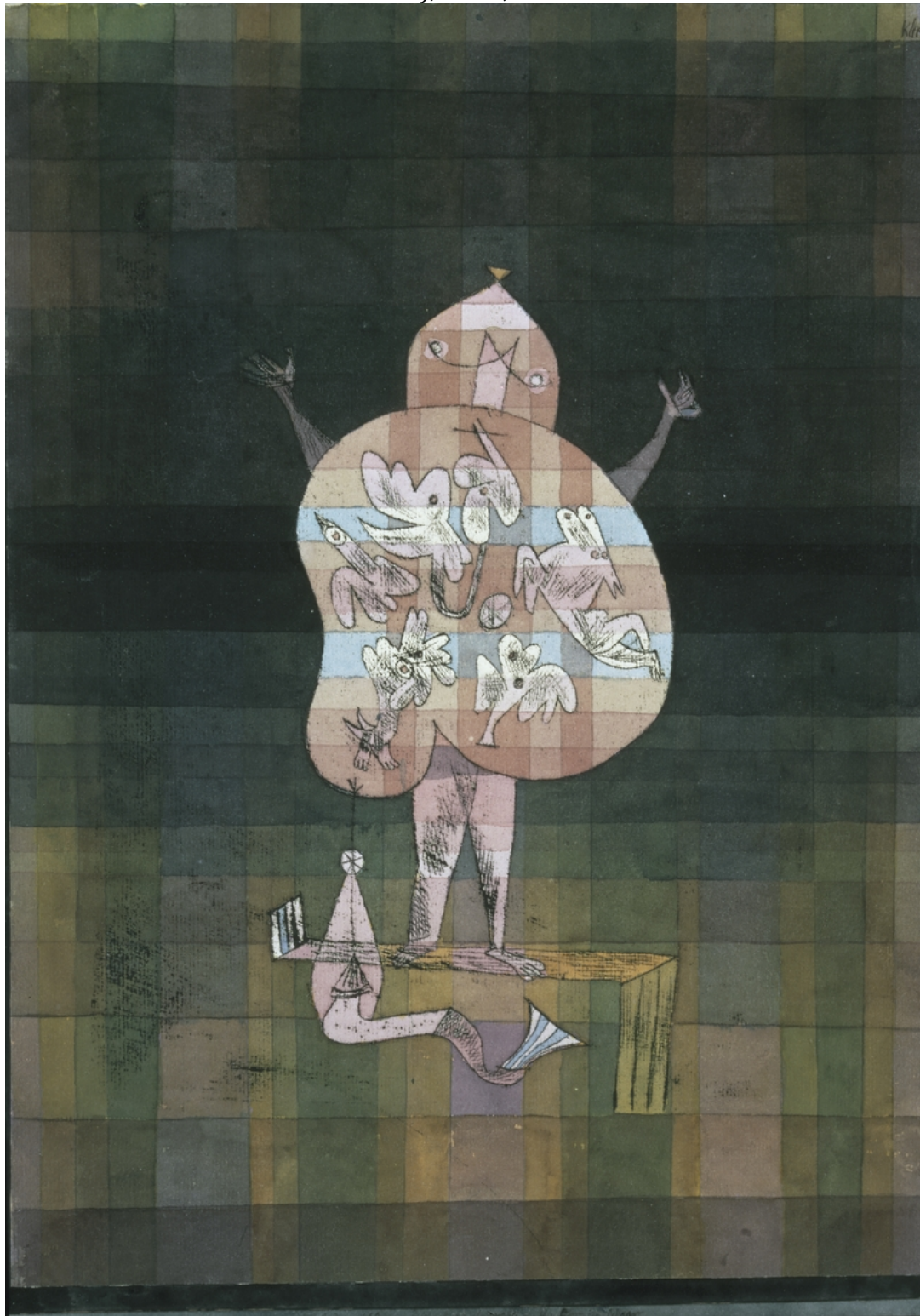


Figure 18. Paul Klee, *Bunte Menschen (Colorful People)*, 1914, 52



Figure 19. Paul Klee, *Einsiedelei (Hermitage)*, 1918, 61



Figure 20. Paul Klee, *Buehnen-Landschaft (Stage-Landscape)*, 1937, 212



Figure 21. Paul Klee, *Ubermut (High Spirits)*, 1939, 1251

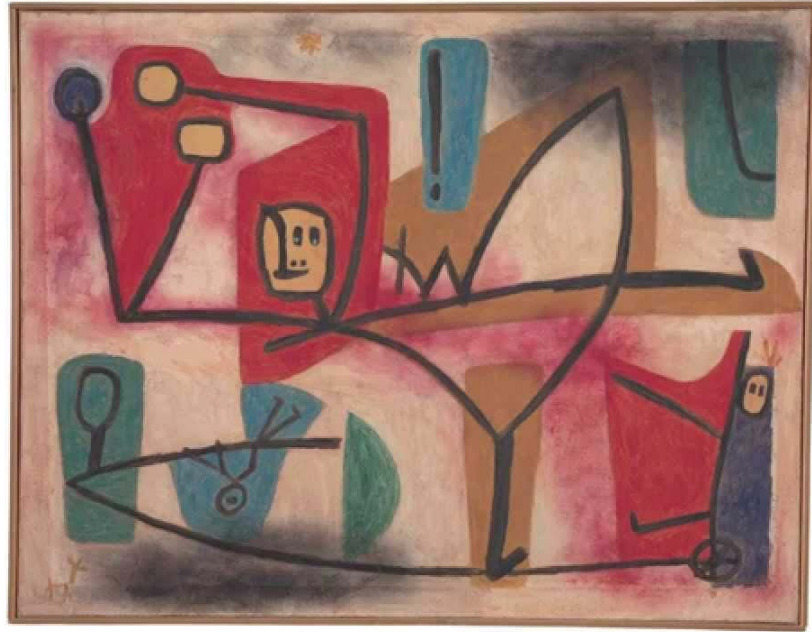


Figure 22. Daumier's *M. Chose, premier saltimbanque d'Europe (Mr. Thingamabob, leading tightrope walker of Europe)*, 1833

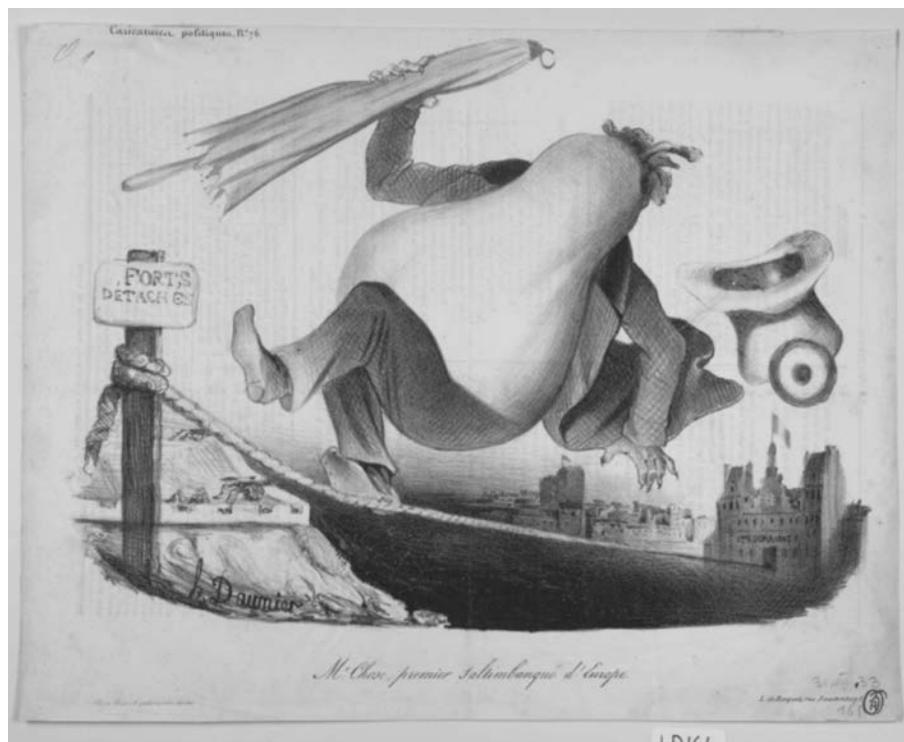


Figure 23. Thirty surviving puppets of fifty made by Paul Klee between 1916-1925.



Figure 24. Felix Klee's puppet theater, ca. 1924, with *Kasperl* and *Devil*. The stage frame of 1916 with glued-on patches of material is here built into the stage box from the Bauhaus period.



Felix Klee's puppet theater, ca. 1924, with *Mr. Death* and *Sepperl*.

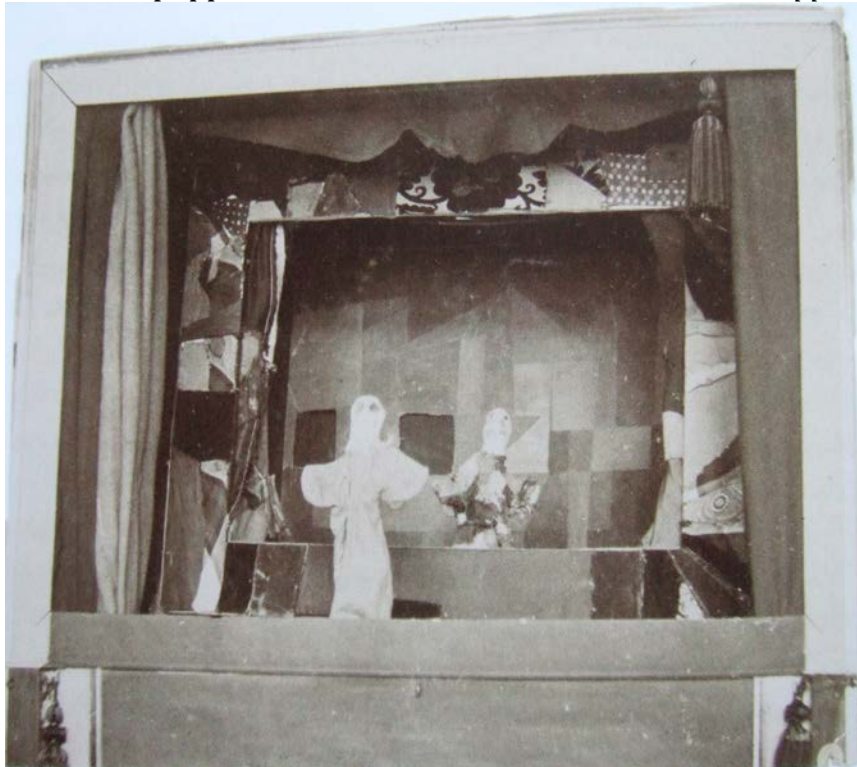


Figure 25. Paul Klee, *Big-Eared Clown*, 1925 and *Electrical Spook*, 1923



Figure 26. Paul Klee, *Self-Portrait*, 1922 and Emmy "Galka" Scheyer, 1922



Figure 27. Paul Klee, *Bartolo: La vendetta, oh! la vendetta!*, 1921, 5

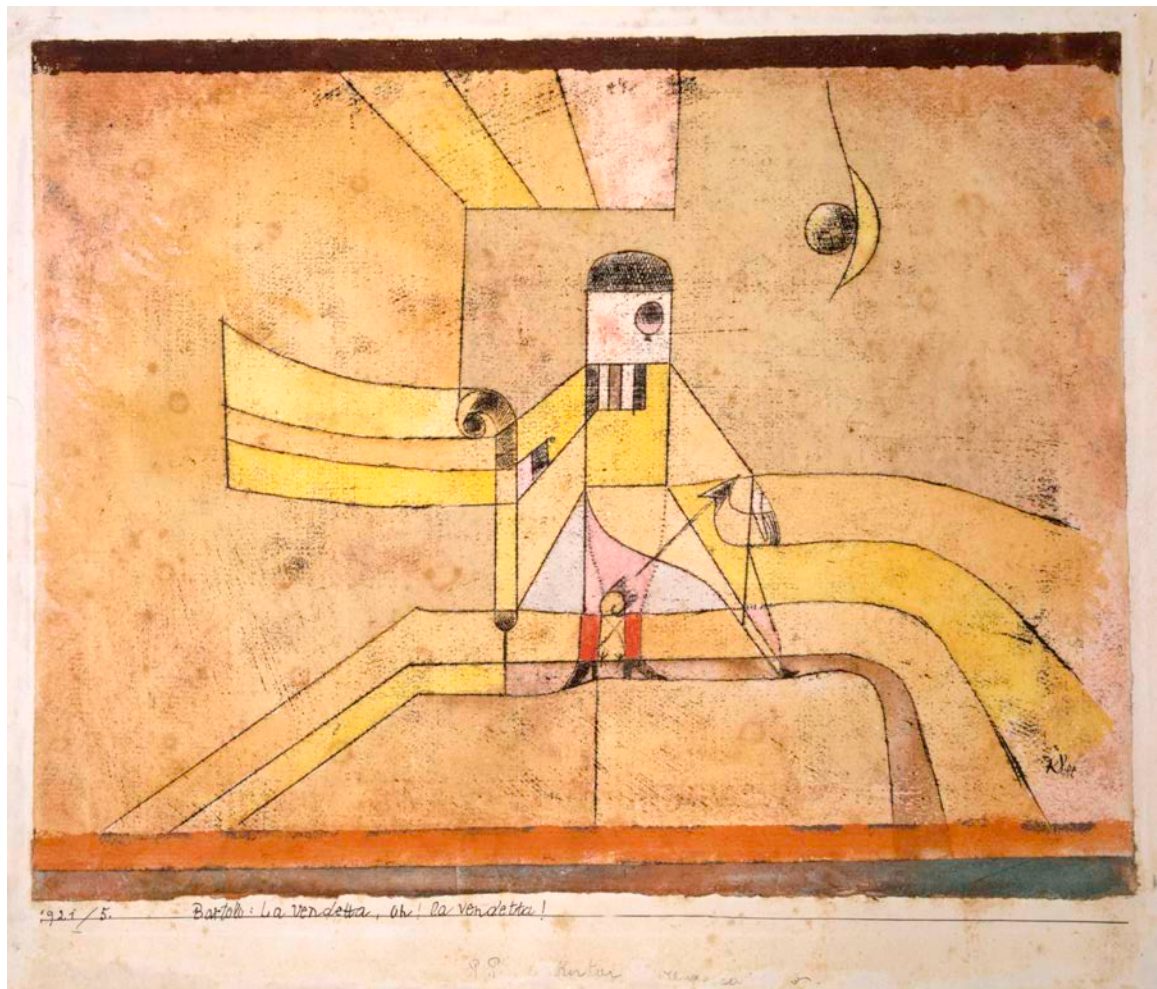


Figure 28. Lothar Schreyer, *Costume Design 1 for the play "Mann"*, 1923



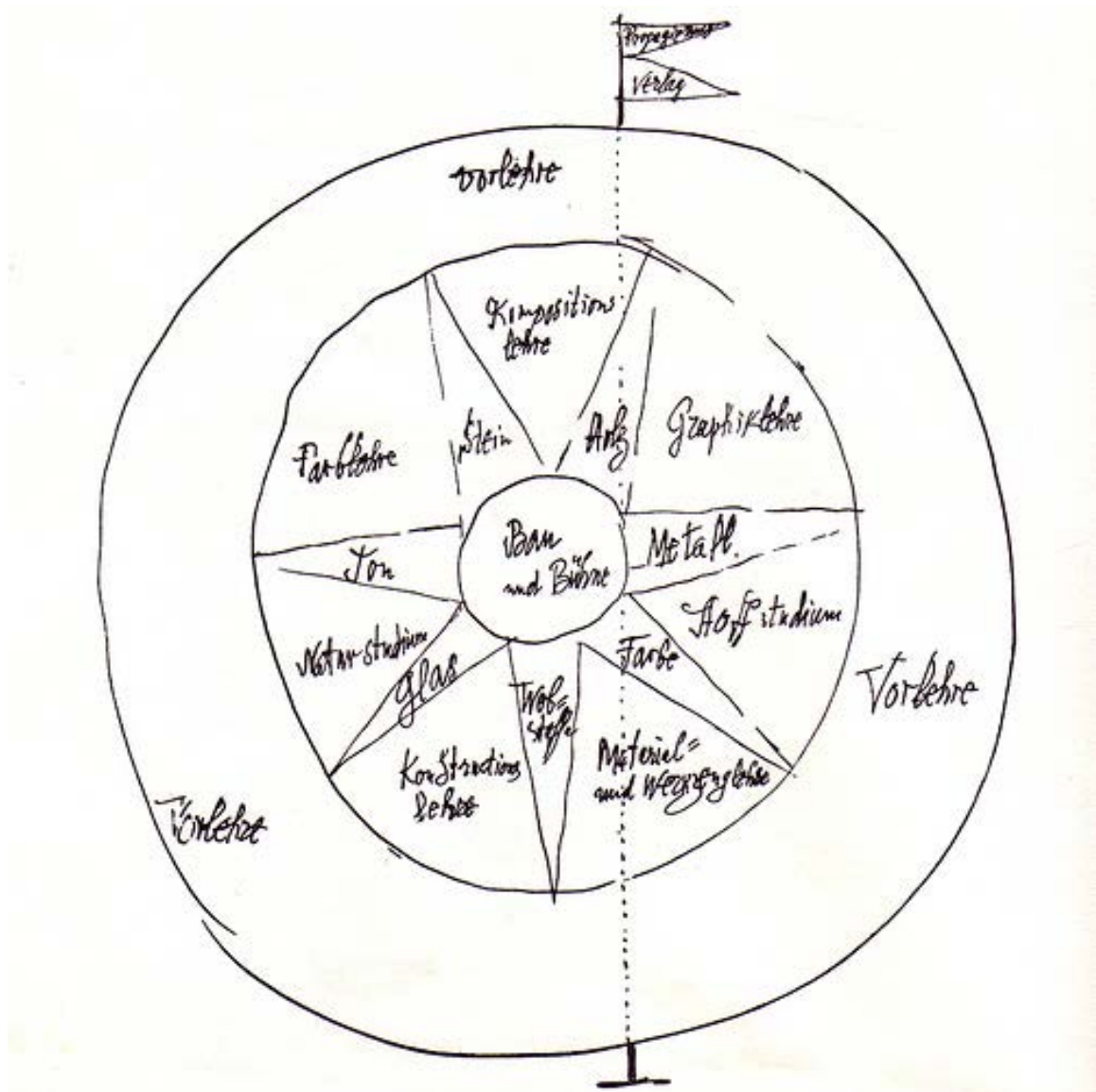


Figure 30. Paul Klee, *Der Marsch zum Gipfel* (*The march to the summit*), 1922, 146



Figure 31. Paul Klee, *Monspiel (Moonplay)* 1923, 153.



Figure 32. Paul Klee, *Hoffman's Geschichte*, 1921, 18



Figure 33. Paul Klee, *Maske Lapul*, 1939, 737



Figure 34. *Sich sammeln (Compose oneself)*, 1939, 10



Figure 35. Paul Klee, *Mephisto as Pallas*, 1939



Figure 36. Paul Klee, *URCHS aus dem heroischen Zeitalter (From the Heroic Age)*
1939, 1058



Figure 37. Paul Klee, *Insula Dulcamara*, 1938, 481



Figure 38. Paul Klee, *Engel Antragsteller* (*Angel Applicant*), 1939

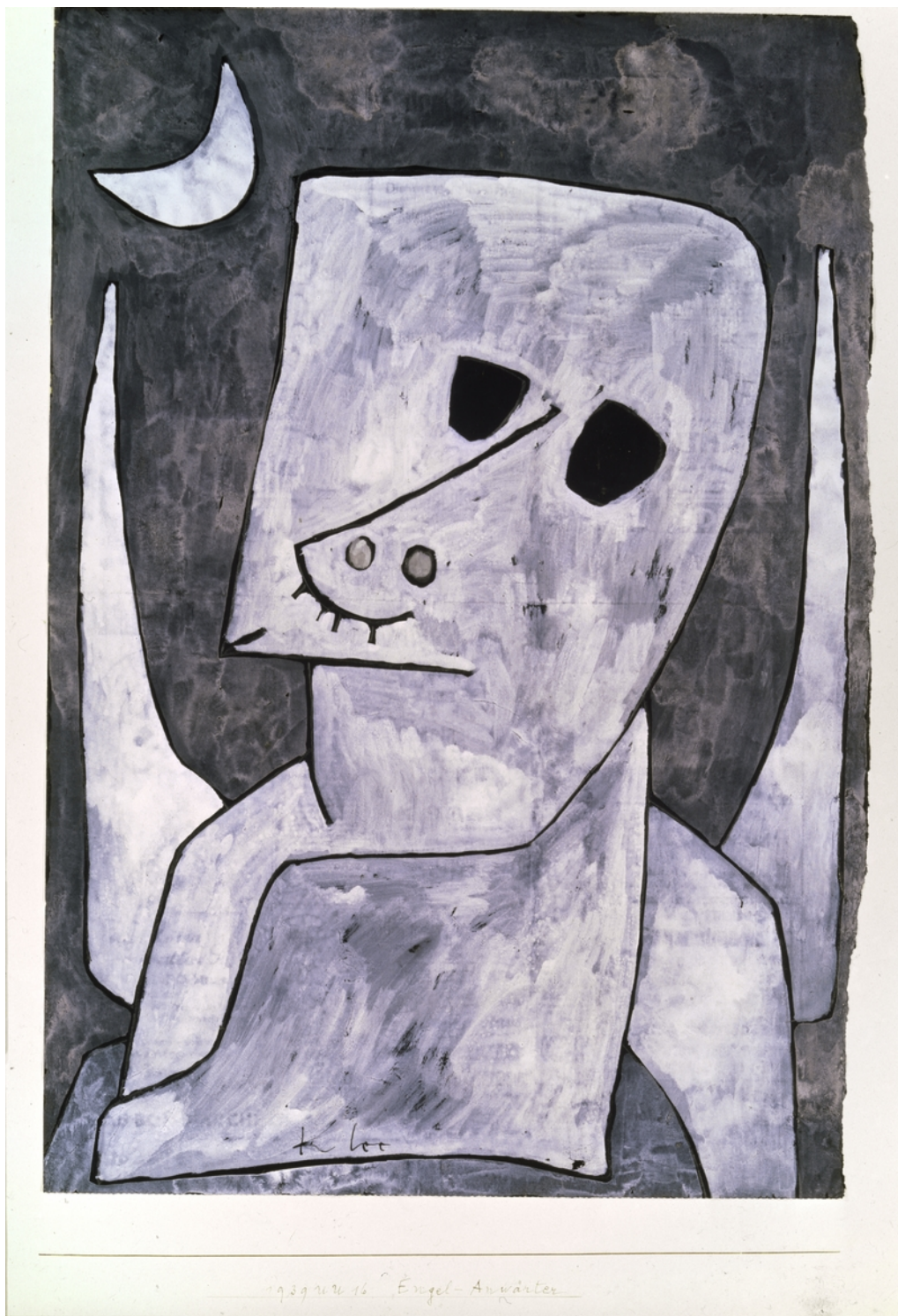


Figure 39. Paul Klee, *Tod und Feuer* (*Death and Fire*), 1940, 332



Figure 40. Paul Klee, *Der Inferner Park "At the Beginning,"* 1939, 238

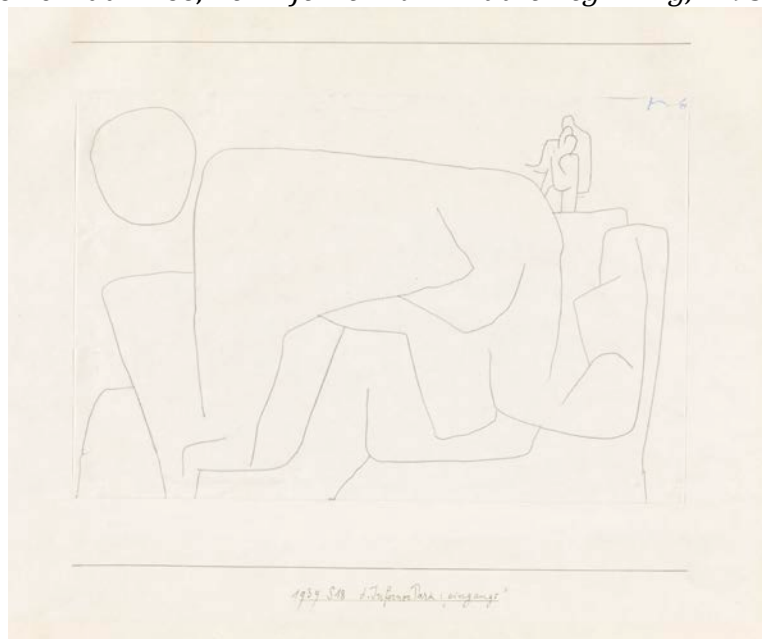


Figure 41. Paul Klee, *Der Inferner Park: "At the Place of Superabundance,"* 1939, 241

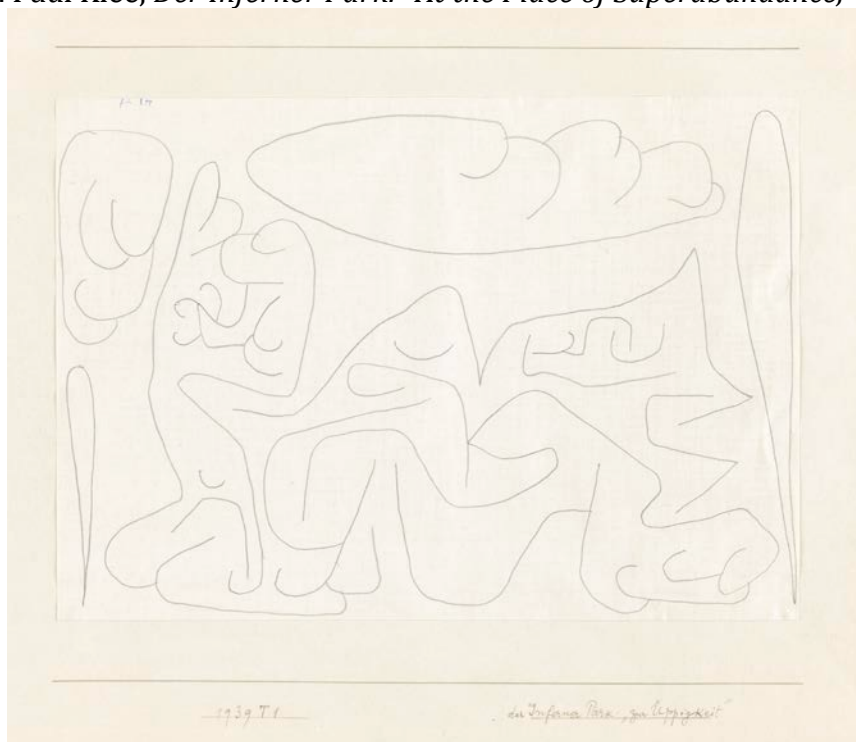
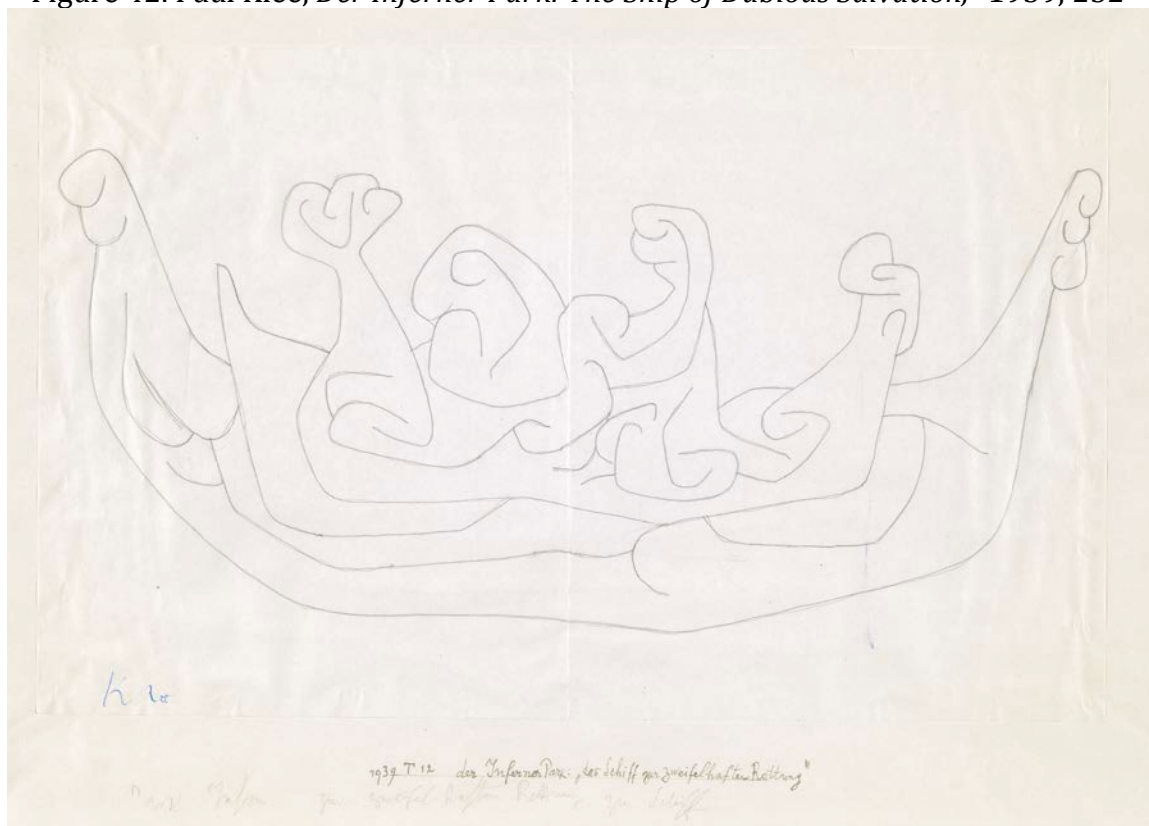


Figure 42. Paul Klee, *Der Inferner Park: The Ship of Dubious Salvation*, 1939, 252



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