



# Paul Klee biography

## SYNOPSIS

Paul Klee was born in Münchenbuchsee, Switzerland, on December 18, 1879. Klee participated in and was influenced by a range of artistic movements, including surrealism, cubism and expressionism. He taught art in Germany until 1933, when the National Socialists declared his work indecent. The Klee family fled to Switzerland, where Paul Klee died on June 29, 1940.

### EARLY LIFE

Paul Klee was born in Münchenbuchsee, Switzerland, on December 18, 1879. The son of a music teacher, Klee was a talented violinist, receiving an invitation to play with the Bern Music Association at age 11.

As a teenager, Klee's attention turned from music to the visual arts. In 1898, he began studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. By 1905, he had developed signature techniques, including drawing with a needle on a blackened pane of glass. Between 1903 and 1905, he completed a set of etchings called *Inventionen* that would be his first exhibited works.

### RISE TO PROMINENCE

In 1906, Klee married Bavarian pianist Lily Stumpf. The couple had a son, Felix Paul. Klee's artwork progressed slowly for the next five years. In 1910, he had his first solo exhibition in Bern, which subsequently traveled to three Swiss cities.

In January 1911, Klee met art critic Alfred Kubin, who introduced him to artists and critics. That winter, Klee joined the editorial team of the journal *Der Blaue Reiter*, co-founded by Franz Marc and [Wassily Kandinsky](#). He began working on color experiments in watercolors and landscapes, including the painting *In the Quarry*.

Klee's artistic breakthrough came in 1914, after a trip to Tunisia. Inspired by the light in Tunis, Klee began to delve into abstract art. Returning to Munich, Klee painted his first pure abstract, *In the Style of Kairouan*, composed of colored rectangles and circles.

Klee's work evolved during World War I, particularly following the deaths of his friends Auguste Macke and Franz Marc. Klee created several pen-and-ink lithographs, including *Death for the Idea*, in reaction to this loss. In 1916, he joined the

German army, painting camouflage on airplanes and working as a clerk.

By 1917, art critics began to classify Klee as one of the best young German artists. A three-year contract with dealer Hans Goltz brought exposure as well as commercial success.

Klee taught at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1931, alongside his friend Kandinsky. In 1923, Kandinsky and Klee formed the Blue Four with two other artists, Alexej von Jawlensky and Lyonel Feininger, and toured the United States to lecture and exhibit work. Klee had his first exhibits in Paris around this time, finding favor with the French surrealists.

Klee began teaching at Dusseldorf Academy in 1931. Two years later, he was fired under Nazi rule. The Klee family moved to Switzerland in late 1933. Klee was at the peak of his creative output during this tumultuous period. He produced nearly 500 works in a single year and created *Ad Parnassum*, widely considered to be his masterpiece.

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#### How to Cite this Page:

##### Paul Klee

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### QUICK FACTS

**NAME:** Paul Klee

**OCCUPATION:** Educator, Painter

**BIRTH DATE:** December 18, 1879

**DEATH DATE:** June 29, 1940

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Münchenbuchsee, Switzerland

**PLACE OF DEATH:** Muralto, Switzerland

### BEST KNOWN FOR

Paul Klee was a prolific Swiss and German artist best known for his large body of work, influenced by cubism, expressionism and surrealism.

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