

Paul Klee

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An Interview with Felix Klee

By Sabine Rewald

What do we know of the life and work of Paul Klee? Quite a lot. Fortunately for the researcher, Klee was a compulsive record keeper. He kept a catalogue of his works, confided to paper his thoughts on art, prepared his Bauhaus lectures word for word, wrote a diary from 1898 to 1918, and was a great letter writer.

Thus, if we have questions concerning the title, date, medium, or authenticity of a picture, his work catalogue will supply the answer. This unique and precious book is kept by the Paul Klee Stiftung in the Kunstmuseum Bern. For his theories on painting, color, and art, we can turn to his published Bauhaus lectures and to his articles. Most of the latter, together with Klee's music criticism, can be read in Christian Geelhaar's 1976 compilation of Klee's writings. We can also consult the artist's mostly unpublished pedagogical writings, stored in the Klee Stiftung, which comprise more than 3,000 pages of notes, drawings, and diagrams, all accumulated during his ten years of teaching at the Bauhaus from 1921–31. If we cannot go to Bern, we can consult the two volumes by Jürg Spiller in which he published parts of these documents.

In addition, many fine studies on Klee and on his work have been written. They cover topics as varied as Klee's relationship to Cubism, music, nature, Romanticism, the Blue Rider group, Tunisia, America, the Bauhaus, primitive art, childhood, World War I, poetry, color, technique, and so on. These books and essays fill several bookshelves, thanks to the pens of Franciscano, Geelhaar, Glaesemer, Grohmann, Haftmann, Hausen-



Hans Klee, Paul Klee's father (*third from left*), as a seminary student in Altdorf (near Nuremberg), Germany, 1866. Collection Felix Klee



Ida Marie Klee, née Frick, Paul Klee's mother, 1873. Collection Felix Klee

stein, Haxthausen, Jordan, Kagan, Kersten, Felix Klee, Lanchner, Suter-Raeber, Verdi, Werckmeister, Wittrock, and others.

For matters of a more personal nature, we can turn to Klee's letters and his diary. The latter spans the years of his youth and young adulthood, from 1898 to 1918, and, written with a glance toward posterity, gives a vivid, if somewhat formal account of how he became an artist. It was published in 1957 by his only son, Felix Klee. The more down-to-earth and informal Klee appears in the hundreds of letters and postcards that he wrote to his family between 1895–1940. Alternately erudite and facetious, they often describe minute details of his everyday life. Filling two thick volumes, these letters appeared in print in 1979, thanks once more to Felix Klee. No longer young, with a grown-up grandchild, Felix and his wife, Livia Meyer-Klee, live in Switzerland. Because Felix Klee has inherited his father's thoroughness, sense of humor, and has an excellent memory, it was this writer's good fortune that he agreed to a series of interviews. Their purpose was to fill in, if possible, some gaps in our knowledge about the artist, by bringing to light things not mentioned in the vast literature on Paul Klee or in the artist's own writings. And this is how in February 1986 Felix and his wife graciously received me every day for a week in their comfortable apartment. Winter can be very cold on the Swiss plateau, and every morning at 10 A.M. sharp a bottle of Marc de Champagne, Felix's choicest brandy, would be brought out to revive me. Seated side by side on a little Biedermeier sofa, we would sip, while Felix would kindly answer my many questions and reminisce about life with his father to whom he was especially close. In the following pages I have tried to sum up chronologically the salient points of our conversations, which were conducted in German and which I have translated into English. The names of people mentioned in the interview are listed in the Index of Names.

Sabine Rewald: We know from Klee's letters that you spent some time with your father's parents. How do you remember them and what do you think were the most striking facets of their characters?

Felix Klee: My grandfather, Hans Klee, was a talented music teacher who could play seven instruments. He was a great teacher, but as he was also very authoritarian and feared nobody, he got into quarrels wherever he went. As a result, he had to quit jobs in three dif-



Schoolhouse in Münchenbuchsee, near Bern, the birthplace of Paul Klee.
Collection Felix Klee



Paul Klee (*right*) with his older sister
Mathilde, Bern, 1890. Collection Felix Klee



Ida Marie Klee in Leissingen, Lake Thun, October 1902.
Photograph Paul Klee. Collection Felix Klee



Paul Klee as a senior at the gymnasium in Bern, 1898. Collection Felix Klee



Paul Klee in 1900. Collection Felix Klee

ferent localities in Switzerland—Wätzenhausen, Altstetten, and Basel—before coming to Bern in 1879. The Bernese, fortunately for him, are not too serious about their quarrels, which usually end up in a good laugh. Consequently, he taught music in Bern, and what is more, in the same school for fifty-two years, until he retired in 1931, much against his will.

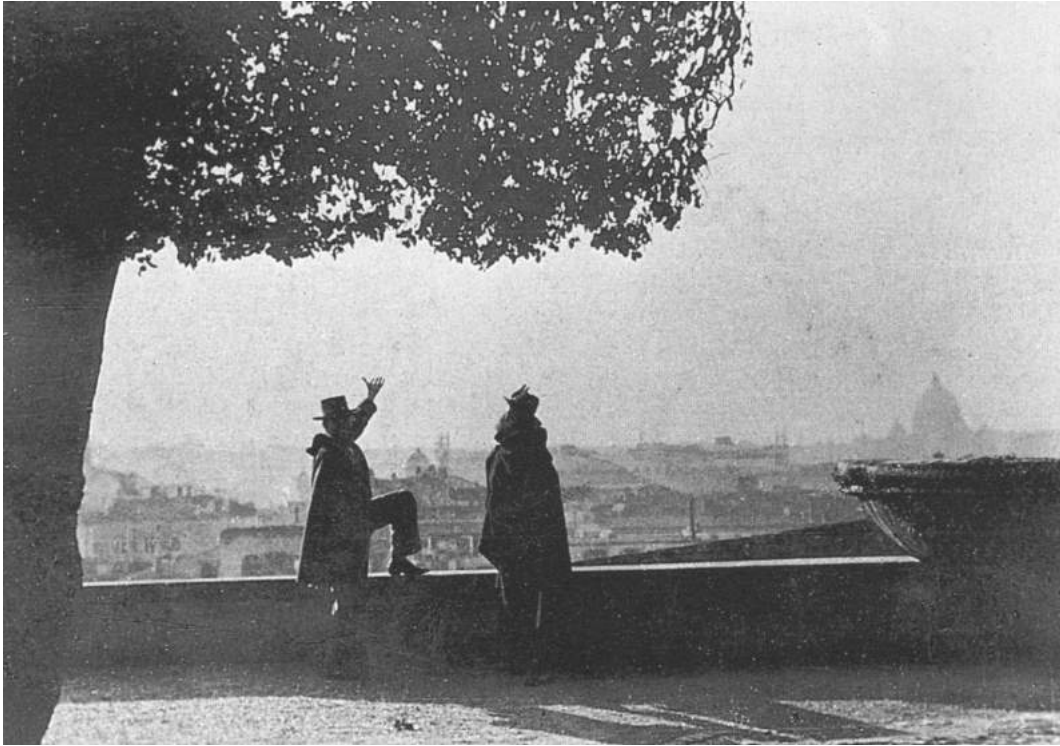
As a child, he grew up in modest circumstances in Würzburg, Germany. Trained as an elementary-school teacher, he first taught in Armorbach, a small village near the Odenwald, in Baden-Württemberg. There, at the castle of Armorbach, he would play the violin for the princess of Leiningen, who was fond of chamber music. She thought he could do better than teach in an elementary school and offered him a scholarship at the conservatory in Stuttgart to become a music teacher. There he met a young Swiss girl, Ida Frick, who was studying singing. They married, and it was she who persuaded him to move to Switzerland. She was the only person he was afraid of. My grandmother Ida came from a very colorful family. Her mother had innumerable children by her husband, at least twelve I believe,

though not all of them survived. After her husband got into trouble with the law for making a lethal liqueur from absinthe, which had become illegal, she left him and moved to Besançon in France. There she had two more children, one being my grandmother Ida. Nobody knows who the father was, but many thought at the time he might have been of Algerian origin.

Then something tragic happened. In 1899, when she was only forty-three years old, my grandmother became completely paralyzed. I knew her only as an invalid in a wheelchair, cared for by the entire household. Also I remember that she was really hard on her husband, always putting him down.

On the other hand, she was very partial to her son, Paul, and she collected everything he made: his beautiful childhood drawings, and all his exercise books, including his geometry exercise book, containing some three hundred caricatures in the margins. I still have them.

She was instrumental in having the seven-year-old Paul take violin lessons. And when Paul decided to paint, she supported his idea of going to study in



Paul Klee (*left*) and Hermann Haller in Rome, February 1902. Photograph Karl Schmoll von Eisenwerth. Courtesy Felix Klee

Munich. My grandfather, however, could never see why his son did not become a professional musician, especially since, thanks to his early training, he had become such an accomplished one. He did not understand Paul's pictures and did not want something that bizarre to turn into a profession. However, my grandmother always had her way, and so my grandfather had to come up with the money for his son's art training. He never complained, nursed his sick wife, and took a second mortgage on his house to pay for Paul's studies in Munich.

I often visited my grandparents in Bern. Their house at Obstbergweg 6 was modest but decent, though badly proportioned. The garden was small but beautiful, and I remember many cats, who practically owned the place.

What did my grandfather hang on his walls? Only minor things, such as reproductions. He loved pictures of fine old Bernese farmhouses that looked like palaces. My father had an older sister, Aunt Mathilde, who acted as a servant in the house and also as its manager. She rented the top floor to various people. Below, on the second floor, were three rooms. In the smallest, my fa-

ther had lived as a child. From his window he had painted little landscapes in oil on the tiles of the façade. They are still there. My grandfather also had his room on this floor. You can't imagine the state of that room. A chain smoker, he would, every two months or so, suffer from nicotine poisoning, which did not prevent him from reaching the age of ninety-one.

Downstairs were two more rooms. One belonged to my grandmother, the other was the dining room, which contained a grand piano. Here my grandfather gave singing lessons to his many private pupils, all of whom happened to be girls.

SR: You, too, like your father, grew up in a musical family. Would you care to comment on that?

FK: While I was growing up, it was my mother, an accomplished pianist, who made money by giving piano lessons, because, for a long time, my father could not support us. We then lived in a three-room apartment in Munich. As it was on the third floor of a building on a courtyard behind a larger one, we never saw the sun. It

was always dark. In the large dining room there was a grand piano, on which my mother used to give her lessons. Then came a living room stuffed with heavy dark furniture. Here stood another piano on which my mother, by pushing a silencer, could play noiselessly late into the night. Finally, there was the communal bedroom in which, when I was a child, we slept as follows: I was on one side, my father was in the middle where the two beds had been pulled together, and my mother was on the other side. When I was eleven years old, they fixed up a bed for me under my mother's grand piano in the dining room. Only the kitchen, on the other side of the building, received a fair amount of light. That is where my father cooked and painted.

How did my parents meet? My father took his violin along with him when he went to Munich to learn to

draw. He worked a lot and, as he said later, also lived quite a wild life and drank a lot. All the while he played the violin and went to all the operas and concerts. One day, at a chamber-music evening, he met my mother. In a letter to his friend Hans Bloesch in Bern, he describes in detail their first encounter and how music brought them together. They played duos, but apparently my father also played solos and my mother a great fugue by Bach. The strong bond thus created between them soon cast a shadow on his other flirtations.

They became secretly engaged in the summer of 1901. However, because of her strict and rough-edged Bavarian father, Ludwig Stumpf, a doctor who looked down upon artists, they had to wait until 1906 to get married. Incidentally, my mother never visited her father again after her marriage.



Munich at the turn of the century (Odeonsplatz with Ludwigstrasse in the background).
Photograph Roger-Viollet, Paris

During their five-year engagement, as my father had returned to Bern, my parents hardly saw each other. Only through their correspondence and brief vacations two or three times a year, did they keep in touch. In Bern, my grandparents received my mother as their own daughter, whereas in Munich, my parents had to meet secretly in hotels. My mother was no prude, and pretty soon bobbed her hair, threw off her corset, and smoked.

True, their engagement lasted surprisingly long, but it seems their commitment to each other did not limit them in any way. Both were devoted to their work. My mother would go to the opera alone, sometimes every week. As it appears to me now, in retrospect, they probably had a good relationship, both before their marriage and after, although each remained his own person.

As a child, I had little contact with my mother. Her lessons often took her out of the house, and when she returned, she was tired and did not wish to be disturbed. I mainly knew my father until the time when he had to go to war in March 1916. He brought me up, played with me, and built all my toys: a puppet theater, a train, a farm, and boats that did not float. What talents he had! The titles of his works and his wonderful letters to my mother show he was also a fine poet. Klee's earlier letters, those to his writer friend Bloesch, for instance, were not yet as polished. One realizes when reading them, that he felt, somehow, in competition with Bloesch, and that is perhaps why he started to write poems and aphorisms.

My father also wrote reviews for the various newspapers that Bloesch published in Bern. He wrote on the musical scene in Bern (1904–6) and later on the art exhibitions and musical events in Munich. Also, with his violin, he substituted in the Bern Orchestra and even went on tour with it!

I always say his taste in music started with Bach and ended with Mozart. However, he also grappled with Wagner and bought his collected works. As for the theater, he never cared for it. He would say that one can change a play, but one can't do the same with the music of an opera.

My father's other talents? He was a great cook. As a young man, he would spend entire days in the kitchen of the hotel that two of his aunts owned in Beatenberg, above Lake Thun. There he learned many great recipes because they always hired the best Italian and French chefs.

The only dish that my mother could cook was a vegetable-and-meat casserole. When we were alone



Lily Klee, née Stumpf, Paul Klee's future wife, in Oberhofen, Lake Thun, 1904. Photograph Paul Klee. Collection Felix Klee



Lily Klee, Bern, August 1903. Photograph Paul Klee. Collection Felix Klee



Hans, Lily, and Paul Klee in the garden of Hans Klee's house at Obstbergweg 6, Bern, September 1906. Collection Felix Klee

during the war, my mother and I would eat in a vegetarian restaurant because the food was better there than at home.

Excellent at arithmetic, my father also had a very precise bookkeeping system for our household. Every day he recorded all receipts and expenses in a big book. When he bought a pencil for twenty pfennigs, the expense would be listed in that book.

SR: Your father once said, "Bookkeeping is fun and whiles away the time." Can you say more about his love of keeping records of everything?

FK: Yes, when I was very ill as a child, he established a fever chart, taking my temperature three times a day for two months. During my first two years, he also recorded my weight, what I ate, my first words, my moods, my reactions, and my gestures. Just as precisely, from 1911 on he recorded all his works in an oeuvre catalogue. It was truly scientific!

Klee divided his works into panel paintings, polychromatic sheets (watercolors, gouaches, temperas, pastels), monochromatic sheets (drawings), graphics,

and sculptures. Also, until 1924, he numbered all his works, starting anew each year with number one. From 1925 until his death in 1940, however, he replaced these numbers with a combination of letters and numbers for several reasons. His dealer in Munich at the time was Hans Goltz. Originally from Prussia, Goltz had the typical Berlin outspokenness. In 1924, for instance, Goltz said to my father: "Listen, Mr. Klee, one always knows exactly how many works you have painted in the course of one year. That doesn't look so good when one wants to sell them. When a painter produces three hundred works a year, they are just not worth that much anymore." Since the clients made a fuss, and then the dealer made a fuss, my father said: "It's simple. I will just add letters, then nobody will be able to find out."

It even happened that in 1939, when he recorded 1,239 works consecutively in his work catalogue, he ran out of simple letters and had to use double letters and numbers.

He did not record his works daily, but waited until he had collected a group of about ten to give them inventory numbers in his oeuvre catalogue, so that the chronological sequence is not always strictly observed.



Mathilde, Paul Klee's sister, and Ida Marie and Hans Klee at Obstbergweg 6, Bern, August 1908.
Photograph Paul Klec. Collection Felix Klee

Even as a child, he had kept a work catalogue that listed 300–400 works, and he discontinued it only when he left Bern in 1898. This book does not exist anymore. In his new work catalogue, started in 1911, he listed only those works from his childhood that he still felt worthwhile. He described each work's technique, the components of his colors, and the kind of paper he had used. However, he also guarded certain secrets, as when he had painted with his fingers. First recorded in simple exercise books and then in regular file folders, this work catalogue adds up to more than ten volumes. The Klee Stiftung in the Kunstmuseum Bern stores this catalogue, and as long as I am alive, it will not be published because between his techniques and his numbering, fakers would have too easy a time.

My father established a very precise standard regarding the monetary value of his works, classifying them with Roman numerals from I to X. A watercolor I would cost 200 marks, and a watercolor X would cost 500 marks. In addition, there was the Special Class "S.Kl." (or "S.Cl."). This abbreviation took precedence over the Roman X. When unexpected visitors wished to buy a Klee, my father was not caught unawares and could

readily say: "Oh, there is an X, this costs 500 marks."

From his output of approximately 10,000 works, he recorded somewhat more than 9,000 in his work catalogue. The other thousand he forgot. Over 5,000 of his works are drawings. Klee did not like to sell drawings because they were always cheaper than his watercolors. Besides, drawing was the backbone of his art. Very few of his works are purely painterly, without any trace of something graphic. Since he hated to part with his drawings, he devised a "transfer method." Actually, it is the carbon-copy principle—only he did not care for the blue or red brands of carbon paper one could buy in stationery stores at the time. So he made his own by covering a thin piece of paper with a special black paint. By retracing one of his drawings through his homemade carbon paper, and by touching up the new drawing with watercolor, he could keep the original drawing and at the same time earn more money by selling a watercolor.

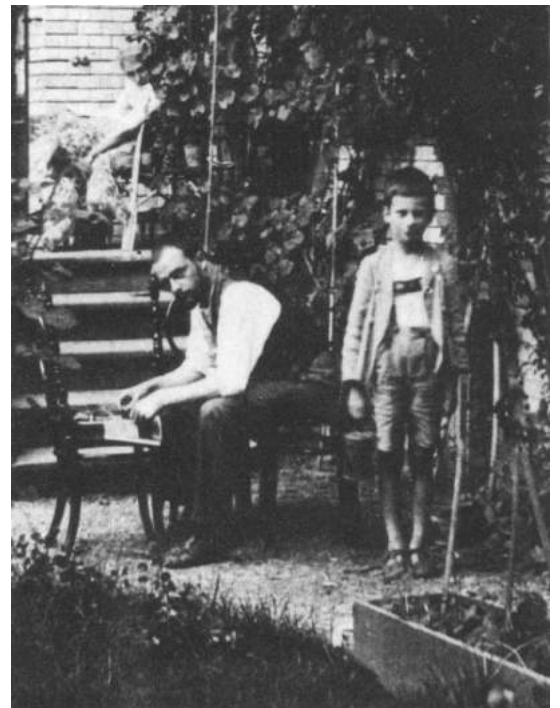
My father was very thrifty as well as a good craftsman. Whenever possible he made things himself. He also prepared his own glue with flour. With this glue he mounted all his drawings and watercolors on fine card-



View of Bern from the Rosengarten. 1909. Photograph Paul Klee. Collection Felix Klee



Mathilde and Lily Klee with Paul and Lily's son, Felix (detail), at Obstbergweg 6, Bern, August 1908. Photograph Paul Klee. Collection Felix Klee



Ida, Paul, and Felix Klee (left to right) in the garden at Obstbergweg 6, Bern, Summer 1914. Collection Felix Klee

board. He never used passe-partouts. Considering the enormous quantity of his production, they would have cost too much time to make and too much money. When he was not satisfied with a picture, he turned it over and painted on the back of the sheet or canvas. I have never seen him tear up any work. He had no use for wastebaskets.

SR: Do you remember any of the artists of the Blue Rider group?

FK: Yes, I remember many because at that time in Munich my parents saw a great deal of them. Franz Marc dropped in sometimes in the evening. On these occasions, as I had already gone to bed in the next room, I could hear through the wall my parents playing chamber music. Marc's wife came by more often because she took piano lessons from my mother.

Despite the fact that Kandinsky had been our neighbor for many years, living two houses away from us in the Ainmillerstrasse in Munich, it was only in 1911 that my father got to know him. Until that time Paul Klee had lived quite an isolated life, working hard and exhibiting now and then at the annual New Secession exhibition. His contacts with dealers and the art market came later. He actually met Kandinsky through Louis Moilliet, a schoolfriend from Switzerland. Moilliet, who was well-off and well traveled, mentioned one day that he had discovered a great and strange painter: Kandinsky. The latter, by profession a lawyer, had come to Munich from Russia in 1891, and he was already thirty years old by the time he started to paint in the Impressionist style. Then came his Fauve period, and in 1909–10, he made his first abstract pictures. My father felt somewhat overwhelmed by this Kandinsky, who introduced him to all the artists of the Blue Rider group. Also very important for my father was the fact that Kandinsky showed an interest in his work. It made him realize that he was not all alone, and that other artists had the same goals. He also was eager to have some of his works included in the Blue Rider almanac that Kandinsky and Marc were compiling at the time. However, only one of his small black-and-white watercolors ended up in it.

Kandinsky, who had no children, was always very friendly to me. He lived with Gabriele Münter, and whenever I made too much noise, my parents dropped me off at their place. What fun I had there! They were better off than we were, and Kandinsky's apartment was much more elegant. Everything was in Art Nouveau, and the doors were painted white. I would draw pictures



The art dealer Hans Goltz, before World War I, Munich. Collection Martina Bochow-Goltz, Munich



Alfred Kubin, c. 1903. Collection Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich



Wassily Kandinsky's balcony at Ainmillerstrasse 36, Munich, 1912. (*Left to right, back row*): Cuno Amiet, Kandinsky, Helmut Macke, Heinrich Campendonk, Louis Moilliet. (*Left to right, front row*): Amiet's wife and August Macke. Photograph probably Gabriele Münter. Collection Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Munich



Wassily Kandinsky on the balcony at Ainmillerstrasse 36, Munich, 1912. Photograph probably Gabriele Münter. Collection Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Munich



Gabriele Münter in Dresden in a dress designed by Kandinsky, 1905. Collection Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Munich

in Kandinsky's studio, leaving many of them with him. They are all deposited now, along with Kandinsky's estate, at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris.

As I remember him, Kandinsky had quite a loud laugh, always wore glasses, and was nattily dressed. Between him and my father existed a true friendship. My parents also saw Marianne von Werefkin, who lived with Alexei von Jawlensky, and to whose house the entire intellectual and artistic society of Munich would flock weekly.

August Macke visited us rarely, but Alfred Kubin came often. My father had already met the latter in 1910, one year before his contact with the Blue Rider group. Kubin had a bald head, a pointed nose, and unforgettable piercing eyes. Also, he seemed the only one to recognize my father's unique talent and appeared to fear that Klee would become the better artist of the two. Perhaps in order to keep a tab on my father's development and to stay in close touch with his singularity, he bought many of Klee's drawings. Today they are in the Albertina in Vienna.

On the walls of our apartment in Munich my father hung mostly his own works and the pictures that he had traded with his friends Marc, Kandinsky, or Jawlensky. In the bathroom we had an engraving of Munch's *The Kiss*, 1895. This Munich period ended abruptly when World War I was declared on August 1, 1914. Marc and Macke went to war. Kandinsky, Jawlensky, and all the other foreigners fled to Switzerland on the last train.

SR: Did you see your father during the war?

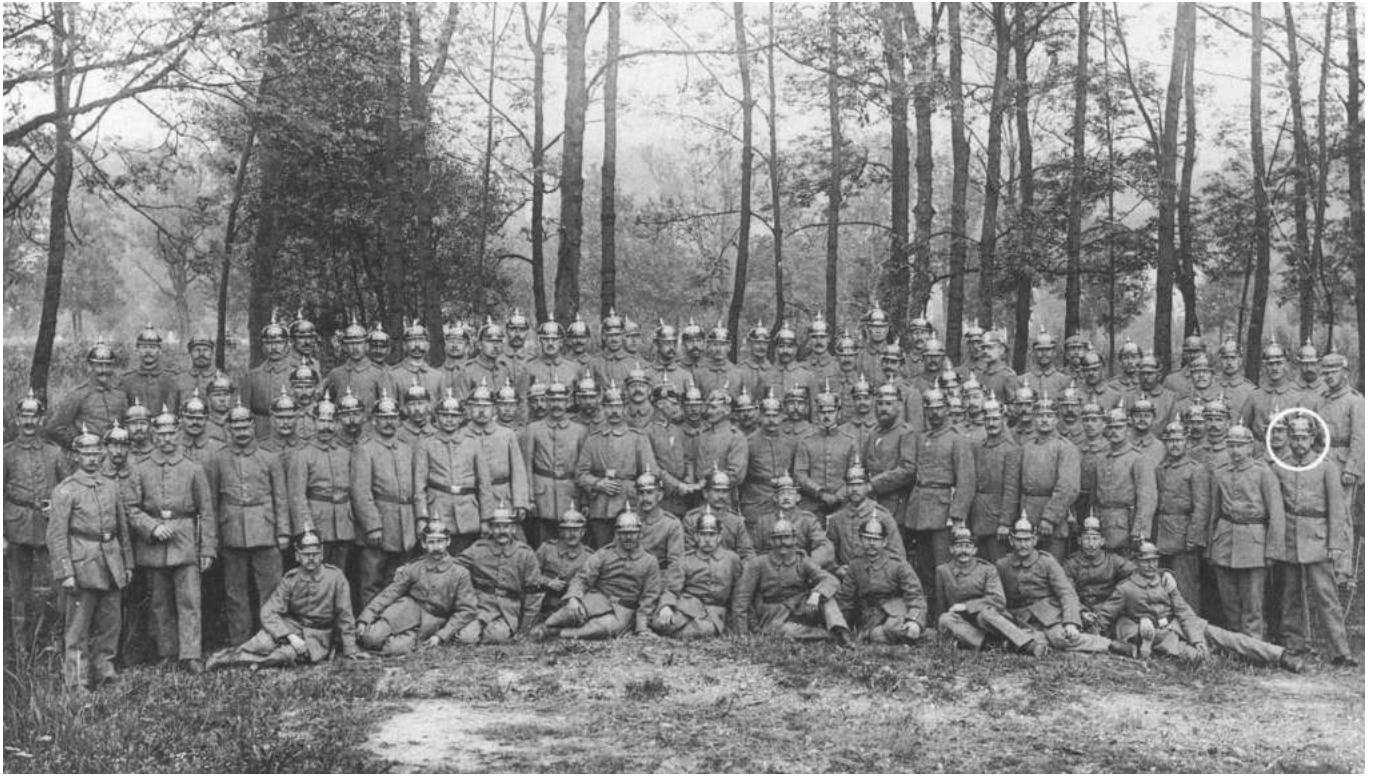
FK: As my father was never stationed far away from Munich during World War I, he would come home on leave every two or three weeks. When he could not come, we would visit him—for instance, in Landshut, where he was posted as a recruit in 1916, right after being drafted. I shall never forget his room there at Klötzelmüllerstrasse 16, which he had rented in order to play the violin and to paint in his free time.

My father was nearly sent to the front, but, by pulling various strings, my mother prevented that from happening. Instead, he was transferred to the flying school at Schleissheim, near Munich, where he rented a room in a farmhouse. Having taken along stacks of his lithograph *Destruction and Hope*, 1916, he touched them up there with watercolor, adding colored triangles, circles, stars, and moons.

After nine months he was transferred to another flying school in Gersthofen, near Augsburg, where he worked in the paymaster's office. As the paymaster



Franz Marc (*left*) and Wassily Kandinsky with the woodcut for the cover of their *Blaue Reiter* almanac. Munich, 1911–12. Private collection



Paul Klee's army unit in Landshut, Germany, 1916. Collection Felix Klee



Schösschen Suresnes in Munich, at the turn of the century. Photograph Stadtarchiv München

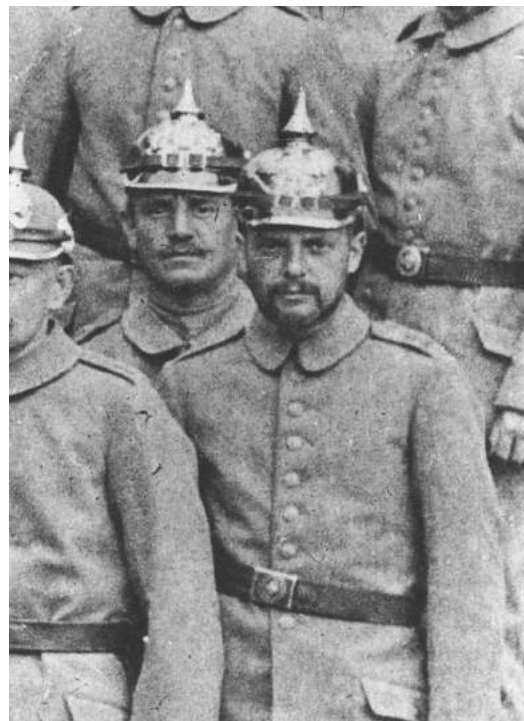
could not count, my father did most of the work. This made him indispensable and enabled him to paint whenever he found a moment, storing his works in his desk drawer. At that time he began to paint on airplane linen. After a plane had crashed and the dead had been removed, my father, armed with scissors, would rush to the field and cut off pieces of the linen with which the planes were then covered. After the war my father rented a studio in the beautiful, though completely neglected, eighteenth-century Schösschen Suresnes in Schwabing, the artists' quarter of Munich. This move had been arranged by Hans Reichel, a very interesting man and painter who also occupied a studio there. Incidentally, Reichel's sister took piano lessons from my mother. She was a friend of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who lived briefly in the house just in front of ours in the Ainmillerstrasse. My father knew Rilke well, but, not being a night owl, he did not care for his large parties.

This Suresnes period was most productive because my father started to paint in oil, something he had done only intermittently before. I should add that it was the time of the Räterepublik. There were street fighting, shootings, unrest, and a curfew after dark. Strangely enough, my father managed to get hold of a pass that permitted him to stay in his studio until 9 P.M. and to come home after the curfew hours. As for Suresnes, it was there that for three weeks during June 1919 Hans Reichel hid the revolutionary Ernst Toller, one of the founding fathers of the Räterepublik. When Toller was discovered and sent to prison, Reichel and his wife were arrested. Toller had earlier taken refuge at Rilke's. The police also searched our house but did not find anything.

SR: Klee's letters to his wife, after joining the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1921, convey the impression of a man who is not quite attuned to its fervent ideology. Could one compare him to a poet in a toolshop?

FK: Not quite. He somehow felt at home there, even if many of its forces and currents went against his grain. As early as November 1920, when he first went to Weimar to see what the Bauhaus was all about, his visit turned out to be most agreeable as he knew many of the people there, such as Lyonel Feininger, Oskar Schlemmer, and Johannes Itten.

When he arrived for his job in 1921, his reaction was rather more housewifely than euphoric. Walter Gropius, the director, had asked Oskar Schlemmer to pick



Paul Klee as a soldier, Landshut, Germany (detail), 1916. Collection Felix Klee



Felix Klee in Munich, 1919. Photograph Paul Klee. Collection Felix Klee



View of Weimar, c. 1920. Photograph Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin



Goethe's house in Weimar, c. 1920.
Photograph Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin



Goethe's summerhouse in Weimar during the winter, after 1900.
Photograph Louis Held, Weimar. Courtesy Volker Wahl,
Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Weimar

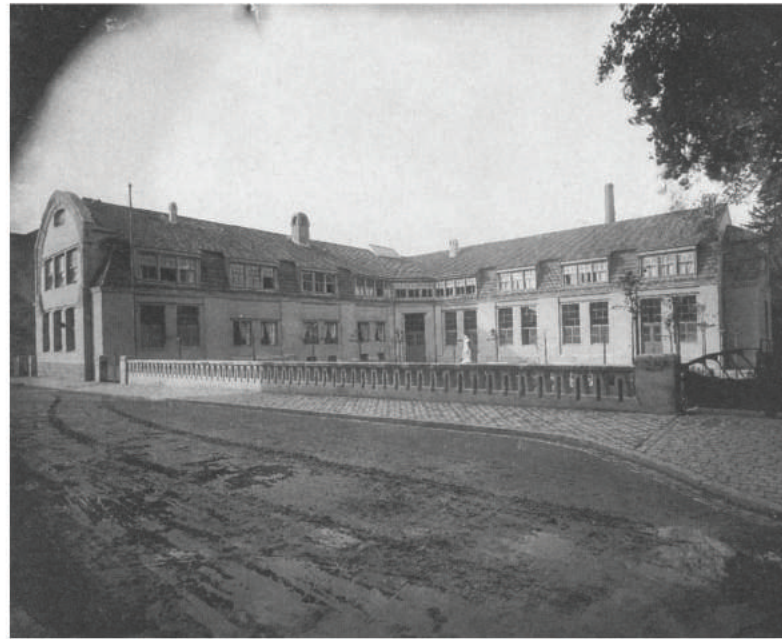
Klee up at the train station. Schlemmer, wearing his best dark suit, welcomed Klee, whose first question was: "Tell me, Mr. Schlemmer, what is the price of meat here in Weimar?"

During his first six months at the Bauhaus, my father traveled between Weimar and Munich, remaining always fourteen days in each city. He adopted this way of life because he did not want to give up his Munich residence before having established a new one in Weimar. During his fourteen-day-long absences, he would keep his pupils busy by giving them exercises to do.

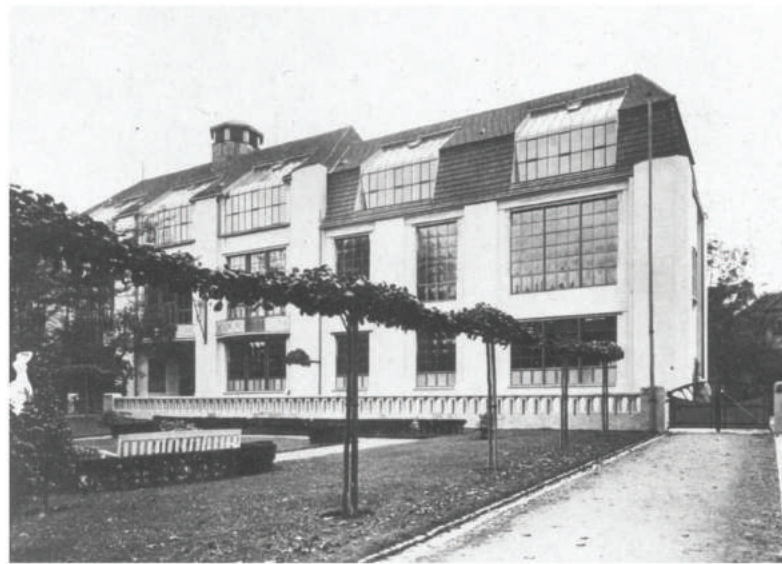
I arrived at the Bauhaus in October 1921. Being fourteen years old, I was the youngest student, the others being between seventeen and twenty years of age. To be admitted to the Bauhaus school, one had to submit proof of one's creative talent as regards drawing, painting, or design. The trial period for every student was then the compulsory preliminary course, lasting from September until Easter. How lucky I was to take this course as it was then given by Johannes Itten! He owed his success as a teacher to his talent at loosening up his students because most of them were tense. In his youth Itten had been a student of my grandfather, Hans Klee, in Bern. Itten's course was superbly yet tightly structured, consisting of three subjects lasting two hours each: "Analyses of the Paintings of Old Masters," "Drawing after the Nude," and "Studies of Materials" in the experimental workshops. He would give us exercises to perform, such as: "Imagine a globe being attacked from the outside." We had to express it visually, with the help of huge sheets of foil, paper, and charcoal. Afterward we looked a mess. In "Analyses of the Paintings of Old Masters," for example, he would project a slide of the famous Christmas picture *The Adoration of the Three Magi*, 1424, by Master Franke and have us reproduce it.

I remember Itten always wearing the same red violet suit, which gave him a monklike appearance. Itten was a Mazdaist, a follower of a strict religious sect whose disciples did not eat meat or milk products. He attracted quite a few Mazdaist students to the Bauhaus. For them the hard times of rampant inflation and lack of the most essential foods were catastrophic because they found little besides carrots to eat and they nearly starved to death.

During the preliminary course, or trial period, we would sit around and observe the various craft workshops, the better to choose the one in which we would like to work during the following three years. There were workshops for many subjects: weaving, printing,



The Bauhaus in Weimar, Workshop Building (former Grand Ducal School of Arts and Crafts, built by Henry van de Velde in 1904). Photograph Louis Held, Weimar. Courtesy Volker Wahl, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Weimar



The Bauhaus in Weimar, Administrative Building (former Grand Ducal Saxon Academy of Art, built by Henry van de Velde in 1904). Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Johannes Itten in Weimar, early 1920s.
Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Walter Gropius in Weimar, 1920.
Photograph Hugo Erfurth.
Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Lyonel Feininger in Weimar, before 1925.
Photograph Hugo Erfurth.
Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Oskar Schlemmer during the Bauhaus years, 1920s.
Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin

typography, wall painting, cabinetmaking, metal, stone sculpture and woodcarving, stained glass, bookbinding, pottery, and the stage. Using this craft later on a professional basis was never really the goal.

I had chosen the cabinetmaking workshop in which Marcel Breuer was also an apprentice. Many years later I heard he had become an architect. At the time I was in New York and was told of a museum that he had built without putting any windows in it [Whitney Museum of American Art]. This surprised me a bit. I never went to see it.

Every workshop was taught by a master craftsman as well as by an artist. The latter, called the "form master" (artistic advisor), might breeze through the workshop about once a month, offering advice and suggestions. There were no real final exams at the Bauhaus. Each student took an examination, first as journeyman and later as master craftsman. From 1928 on, however, when a student completed his courses, he received a Bauhaus diploma without having to pass any tests. Classes lasted from 8 A.M. until 2 P.M. There were never more than about 150 students, about one half of whom

were girls. About 30 to 40 students enrolled every year in the preliminary course, and some would always drop out.

One heard about the Bauhaus through word of mouth. Many students had been soldiers in World War I and had served on the front. Also, many came from Russia, Switzerland, France, England, and Holland.

I should mention that we wore our hair in rather extravagant ways, either very long or completely shaven off. Nobody had any money. The tuition amounted to a negligible sum, and the materials were free. When in Weimar, the Bauhaus was subsidized by the state of Thuringia and later in Dessau by the city itself. In Weimar we lived in rented furnished rooms. The older students, among them Marcel Breuer and Herbert Bayer, lived in the Preller Haus, a small boarding house. They could cook there, while the rest of us, for a small fee, ate in the students' mess.

At the Bauhaus we were completely isolated from the rest of the world; even if from 1923 on, people would come to see our exhibitions, it was mainly to poke fun at them. No, I never attended my father's lectures. He had



Paul Klee in Weimar, April 1925.
Photograph Felix Klee.
Collection Felix Klee



Wassily Kandinsky in Weimar, before 1925.
Photograph Hugo Erfurth (?).
Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Woodcarving workshop at the Weimar Bauhaus, c. 1923.
Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Metal workshop at the Weimar Bauhaus, c. 1923.
Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



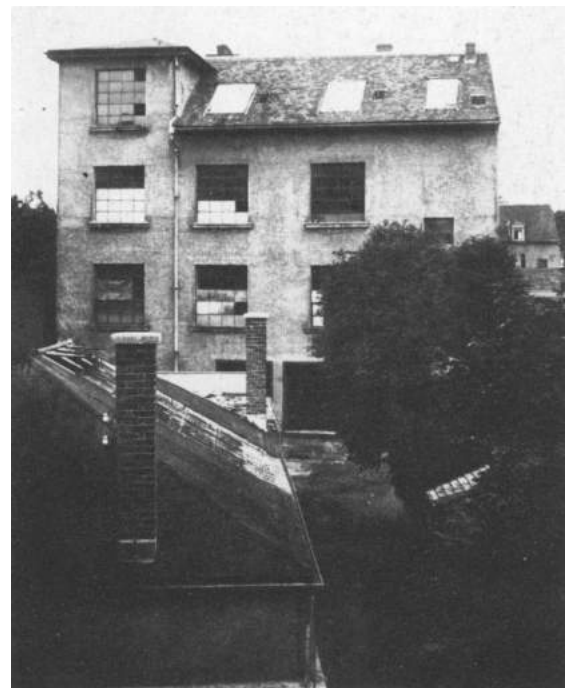
Paul Klee in his studio at the Weimar Bauhaus, 1925.
 Photograph Felix Klee. Collection Felix Klee

only a small circle of enthusiastic followers, those who could understand him. Not everyone could. In the beginning many came out of curiosity and then quit.

Every Saturday we had a dance, complete with orchestra, at which we frolicked and did our special Bauhaus dance. We worked quite a bit preparing these events, sewing costumes and putting on disguises; it was all on a shoestring. Neither my father nor Kandinsky danced. As my mother loved to dance, however, she would say to me: "Come dance with me." Kandinsky's Russian wife, Nina, also loved dancing and would remain on the dance floor until midnight.

The Bauhaus period was the happiest time of my life. What I liked about it was that one worked on one's own and as one pleased; it was not a compulsory education. Also it was the time of first loves, and it was romantic, in harmony with Weimar's own past, its park, Goethe's summerhouse, and the artificial ruins.

It was because of his admiration for Gropius that my father followed the Bauhaus's move from Weimar to Dessau in 1925. Although some of the other masters had already left, the governing body (Council of Masters) still consisted of all his good friends—Feininger,



The Prellerhaus, Weimar, the living quarters of older Bauhaus students, 1920.
 Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



The building at Am Horn 53, Weimar, 1978. Klee's apartment was on the second floor.
Photograph Sadao Wado. Courtesy Felix Klee



Klee's dining room, Weimar, 1925.
Photograph Felix Klee.
Collection Felix Klee

Kandinsky, and Schlemmer. Once more my father traveled to and fro. This time he stayed seven days in Weimar and then seven days in Dessau until he had found a permanent apartment in the latter city. In the interim keeping two studios proved healthy; each time he took a fresh look at the works he had left behind for a week.

In Dessau we were in close contact with the other Bauhaus masters, and that was fun. The masters, like my father, lived in the three two-family houses that Gropius had built in the Bergkühner Allee. We shared ours with Kandinsky, but only the laundry facilities in the basement were used by both families. Kandinsky's apartment had a definite Russian flavor. In one of his rooms, a wall was completely covered with gold leaf, while another room was all black. I did not see many pictures on his walls, and as for his furniture, he owned some old pieces and then had Breuer build him some new ones. I saw Kandinsky every day. Our paths would cross. Just as he would drive to the Kühnauer Lake, I would return from it. He would sit on his bicycle, a pre-World War I model, like a proud Russian general. When I passed, he would nod graciously.

Only in Dessau did I learn to swim and to ride a bicycle. You must realize that we were a totally unsportive family. In fact, my father always made fun of sports, saying that in sports one did not exercise one's head.

Unfortunately, by 1923 Johannes Itten had already left the Bauhaus, and László Moholy-Nagy took over Itten's preliminary course. Moholy-Nagy cut a comical figure at the Bauhaus. Elegant and a little coquettish, he would flutter around like a butterfly without ever hewing to a straight line. We poked fun at him, while the older "Bauhäusler" were very critical of Moholy-Nagy.

My father called Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus, "the silver prince," meaning it figuratively. Married to Alma Mahler, the former wife of the composer Gustav Mahler, he and his wife kept a fine house. Alma was a first-class hostess and had kept a "salon" while in Weimar. Everybody was very sorry when Gropius left the Bauhaus in 1928, although we were all very fond of his successor, Hannes Meyer. Meyer, however, had very different ideas, and the Dessau Bauhaus became very stiff and regulated. Everything now was geared toward architecture. A rigid schedule of ten hours a day kept people busy from early in the morning until late at night, and on top of that came emphasis on gymnastics and sports. It all was in complete contrast to the founding ideas of the Weimar Bauhaus.



Felix, Paul, and Mathilde Klee in Klee's apartment in Weimar, Autumn 1922.
Collection Felix Klee

Meyer's Communist leanings led to his downfall in Dessau. Meanwhile, after his dismissal, Dessau's mayor, Fritz Hesse, was able to appoint Mies van der Rohe in his place, and thus save the Bauhaus for a little while. In Dessau, Meyer's six-year-old daughter, Livia, would sit in the audience when I gave my puppet-theater performances. We never lost sight of each other, and in May 1982, my first wife, Efrossina Greschowa, a Bulgarian singer, having died, we were married.

My puppet theater turned me into a magician, equally popular with young and old. In Weimar, I gave a performance every fourteen days for the children and adults, while later in Dessau I performed only for the children. My love of the theater dates back to those puppet-theater days, which led me to take a job as an assistant director at the Friedrich Theater in Dessau, where I worked from 1926 to 1928. In the early days of the Weimar Bauhaus, the stage workshop was mostly for the students' own fun, and only later, after Oskar Schlemmer took it over from Lothar Schreyer, in 1923, did it turn into something more structured. Even then the theater group lived more or less from hand to mouth, and it had no fixed repertory. Schlemmer conceived mainly pantomimes for the Bauhaus stage and



A room in Klee's apartment in Weimar, 1925.
The large painting is Kandinsky's *Sketch I for Composition 7, 1913*.
Photograph Collection Felix Klee



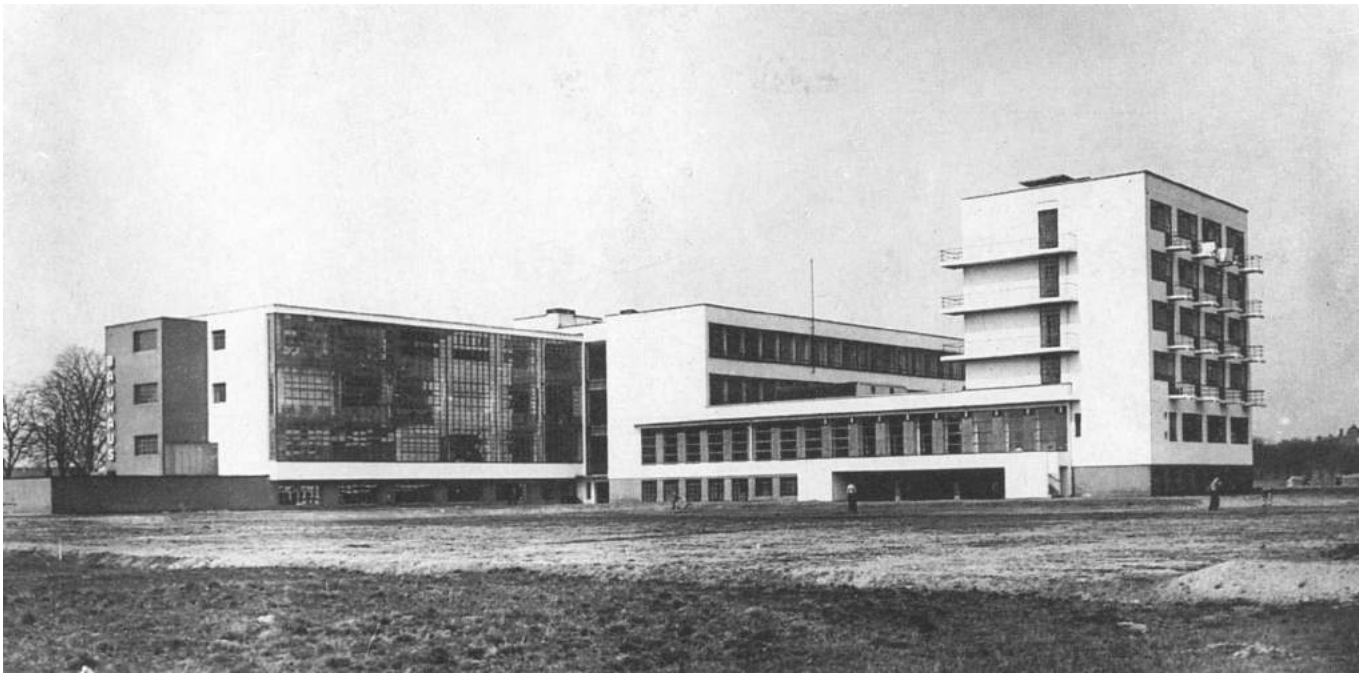
Dessau before World War II (Kavalierstrasse with the theater and the Leopolddankstift).
 Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



The Masters' houses in Dessau, built by Walter Gropius in 1926. Photograph Lucia Moholy-Nagy. Courtesy Felix Klee

also the now-famous Bauhaus dances, such as the Pole Dance, the Metal Dance, and many others.

I remember Schlemmer as a very amusing and thoughtful man. Perhaps one might criticize him for working in too many media at once. He was a painter, sculptor, draftsman, and dancer, as well as form master in the woodcarving and stonecarving workshop. In Weimar, from 1923 on, he directed the stage workshop, and later in Dessau he also directed the Bauhaus stage, which Gropius had designed. I came to know Oskar Schlemmer more intimately later on. I worked as an assistant director at the Breslau Stadttheater from 1930–32, and he, having accepted a teaching job at the State Academy for Arts and Crafts in 1929, came and stayed at my apartment. In some ways he seemed to have always remained a student, a person fond of pranks. Had I been on my own, I would have joined the stage workshop at the Bauhaus. However, my father rejected this idea outright, saying categorically: “No, you won’t go into the stage workshop, that is a class for

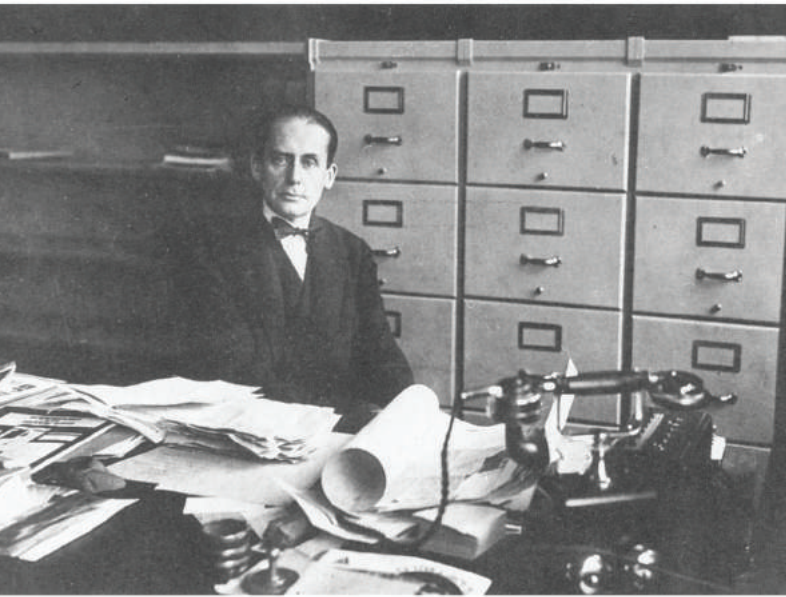


The Bauhaus in Dessau, built by Walter Gropius in 1925–26. View from the southeast. Photograph Keystone. Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Faculty of the Dessau Bauhaus, 1926. (From left to right): Josef Albers, Hinnerk Scheper, Georg Muche, László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, Joost Schmidt, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer,

Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Gunta Stözl, and Oskar Schlemmer. Collection Felix Klee



Walter Gropius in his office at the Dessau Bauhaus, c. 1927.
Photograph Deutsche Photothek, Berlin. Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Hannes Meyer, Gropius's successor as director of the Dessau Bauhaus, after 1928.
Photograph Umbo (Otto Umbehr). Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Marcel Breuer in Dessau, before 1928.
Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



László Moholy-Nagy during the Bauhaus years, 1920s.
Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin

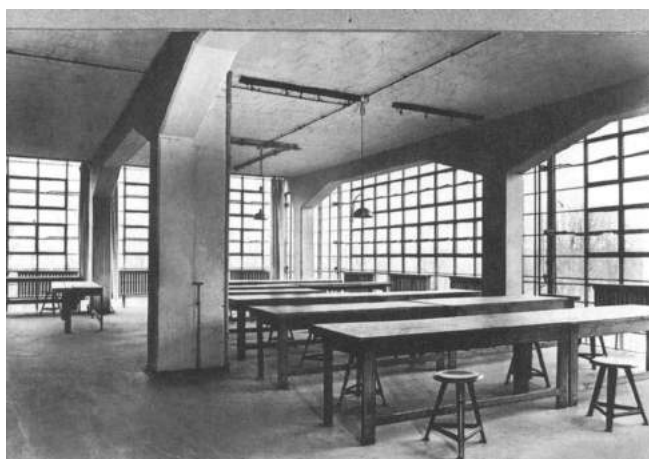
the lazy.” He would never have vented such sharp criticism against anybody else, and today I still wonder why he did so.

I remember the performance of Schlemmer’s *Triadic Ballet*, which, after its premiere in Stuttgart in 1922, Schlemmer staged for a few weeks in August 1923 at the Weimar Bauhaus. Everything about it was then improvised, and much was left to chance. However, this improvisation made a lot of sense because it added an appealing liveliness. Recently I saw on television the new Stuttgart production of the *Triadic Ballet* that now tours the world with great success. Today the performance is highly polished with a technical savoir-faire

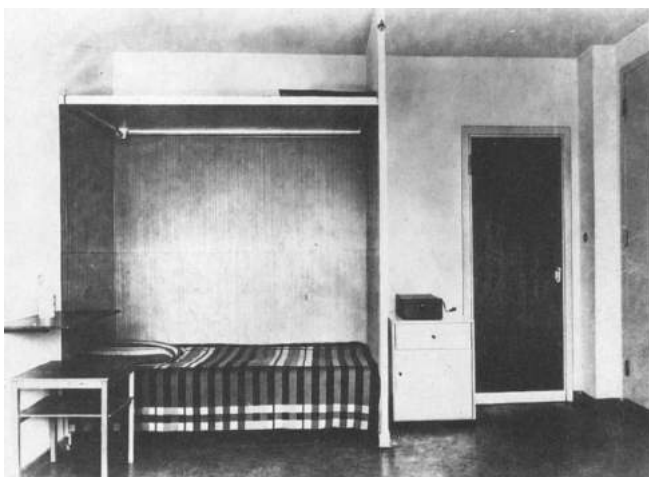
that was completely unknown at the time. Also today it is accompanied by percussion and drums, while in our day the background was classical music. For those of us who knew it in the 1920s, today’s version is not the same.

Apropos the theater, my father went to every performance given in the theaters of Weimar and Dessau. It was his main source of amusement. He must have seen Moussorgsky’s opera *Boris Godunov* at least six times and Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* just as often.

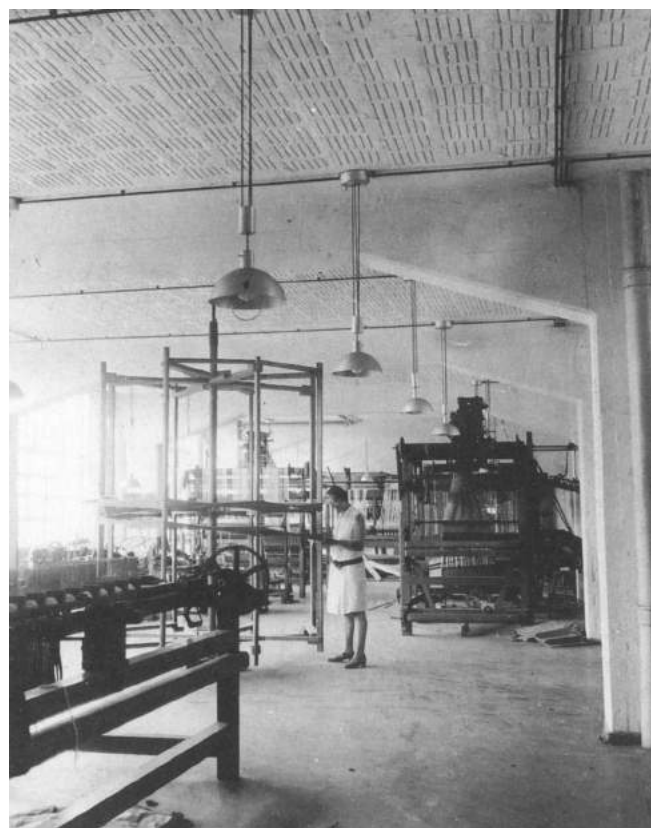
As for social life at the Bauhaus, my father carefully avoided it after having had his fill of Bauhaus parties. Nobody could tie him down. Apart from his teaching



Workroom and drawing studio for students in the preliminary course at the Dessau Bauhaus, c. 1929.
Photograph Walter Peterhans. Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Student apartment at the Dessau Bauhaus, c. 1926.
Photograph Walter Peterhans. Courtesy Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Weaving workshop at the Dessau Bauhaus, 1920s. Gunta Stölzl (?) in foreground. Photograph Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin



Paul Klee (*left*) and Alfred Kubin in Klee's apartment in Dessau, December 1931. Collection Felix Klee



Wassily Kandinsky (*left*) and Paul Klee as "Goethe and Schiller" on the beach in Hendaye, France, August 1929. Collection Felix Klee

assignments, he was just like a civil servant, going to his studio on the dot at 9 A.M., taking a lunch break at noon, and returning to his studio in the afternoon.

Everybody at the Bauhaus received a small salary. In order to keep abreast of inflation, which was then in its final stage, the masters were paid every two days. Then, in 1924, after the currency was stabilized, my father received a salary of 3,000 Reichsmarks per year.¹ Without additional income from the sale of his pictures, my father would not have been able to cover the household expenses, pay for his materials and occasional trips, or afford my mother's periodic stays in a sanatorium. My father spent very little money on himself. Once in a while he went on a trip to Italy or France, which he paid for from a Swiss bank account specially kept for travel purposes. He never owned a car or a radio and only acquired a gramophone later. As for a telephone, he only agreed to have one after pressure from my mother. In Dessau the shops were at least thirty minutes away from the Bauhaus, and she wanted to order her groceries by phone. My father, however, would say: "This devil's box won't enter the house." She insisted,

¹ 3,000 Reichsmarks, about \$750 at the time, is equivalent to about \$15,000 today.

and he finally had to give in, but he wanted it installed deep down in the basement, which could only be reached by a dangerously steep staircase. As a compromise the telephone ended up in a box reserved for the fuses in a corridor between the dining room and the kitchen on the first floor. Anyway, sometimes he just had to use it, as when my mother was in a sanatorium and he had not written for a day or so. Her complaints would arrive via the telephone: "Why have you not written today? I am without any news." Then he would go to the fuse box, and he ended up quite enjoying talking with her long distance.

My mother's nerves had probably suffered from the days when she gave all those piano lessons and felt under great stress. She had become impatient and unstable, and she began to like spending long periods in sanatoriums, where she had time to read the paper, write letters, and distance herself from her usual life. She was always interested in Anthroposophy—Rudolf Steiner's movement—knew the literature on it well, and had like-minded friends. She also went in for astrology and wrote many horoscopes for herself.

My father was called "der liebe Gott" at the Bauhaus, probably because he was always right, never mingled in anybody's disputes, and kept carefully aloof, although in his earlier days he had been sometimes exalted and hot-tempered. He was exclusive in his relationships. When he did not like someone, he would never invite this person to our house. His most outstanding characteristics, I would say, were that he never acted hastily and he talked little, least of all about his work.

SR: The two years your father spent as a professor at the State Academy in Düsseldorf from 1931 to 1933, after he left the Bauhaus in 1931, seemed to have been happy ones. Can you explain why?

FK: My father felt very much at home in Düsseldorf. He liked the pleasant and fair climate of the Rhineland, and he appreciated the easygoing attitude of the people there, which contrasted with the difficult character and stubbornness of the Germans in the rest of the country. Actually, my father never felt completely at ease in a German atmosphere, even less so after the rise of the National Socialists. Also the weather in Dessau was usually a little cold and windy, the landscape was boring, and the surroundings were bleak. Anyway, at that time, the Bauhaus had started to fall apart because so many of the masters were leaving. Moreover, my



Paul and Lily Klee in Lucerne, Switzerland, 1930.
Collection Felix Klee



Paul and Lily Klee in Dessau, 1933.
Photograph Bobby Aichinger. Courtesy Felix Klee



Paul Klee in his studio at the Dessau Bauhaus, 1928. Photograph Lucia Moholy-Nagy. Courtesy Felix Klee

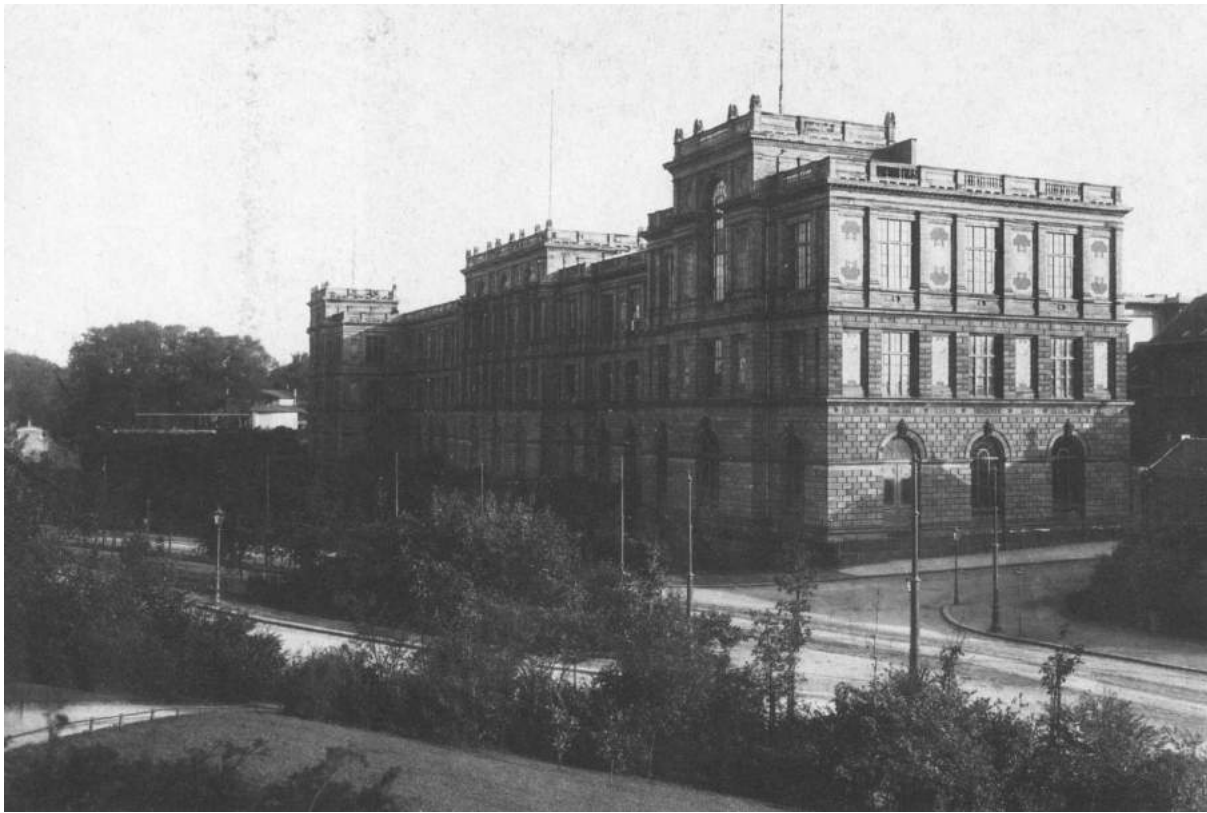
father had always coveted a professorship at a traditional academy, and in Düsseldorf he was now part of one.

For the third time in his life, he traveled between two cities and two studios, staying fourteen days in Dessau and fourteen days in Düsseldorf. My mother remained in Dessau because he had difficulties finding a suitable apartment in Düsseldorf. He continued to paint his more or less Constructivist pictures in Dessau, but in Düsseldorf he started the Pointillist ones. In both of his studios he was pleased to see again the works he had left behind fourteen days earlier. In Düsseldorf the National Socialists never bothered him. In Dessau, however, during his absence in March 1933, they had searched his house and had confiscated his entire correspondence with my mother. She had kept every one of his letters and postcards. So my mother, a sturdy and energetic Bavarian, went straight to the S. A. headquarters in Dessau and demanded them back. Victoriously, she carted them away.

My father felt very comfortable at the Düsseldorf Academy, where he had nice colleagues and only about nine students in his painting class. Every day on his way

to the Academy, he would stop and buy food for the delicious meals he then prepared on two spirit stoves in his studio. He never went to a restaurant or ate in the Academy's mess.

I also worked and lived in Düsseldorf at the time, and I visited him nearly every day in his studio, a large room with three windows. It was his realm, and he was happy in it. Having been categorized by the National Socialists as "subversive" and his art as "degenerate," my father was given notice on April 21, 1933, of his immediate suspension as of May 1. He never set foot in the Academy again. Ironically, just then he had rented an apartment at Heinrichstrasse 36, on the outskirts of Düsseldorf, and the move from Dessau to Düsseldorf had been arranged. The furniture from Dessau arrived on May 1, and from that day until December 23, 1933, he lived at that address. My wife and I lived on the upper floor, directly above my parents. There, in complete peace, working furiously, he created a large number of drawings and paintings. I don't believe he sold any works in Düsseldorf, but he did not care. Walter Kaesbach, the director of the Düsseldorf Academy, had also been dismissed from his post. He wanted Klee to move with him



The Düsseldorf Academy, built by Hermann Riffort between 1875 and 1879, c. 1950.
Collection Staatsarchiv Düsseldorf, Fotosammlung Söhn

to the German side of Lake Constance, where he had bought a house. He envisaged it as part of a future artists' colony. In fact, the painters Otto Dix and Erich Heckel did live there at some later date. My father was sure of his ground, however, and did not want to leave Düsseldorf. Far from wanting to emigrate to Switzerland, he always said: "I can very well remain here." But my mother, repeatedly, like a Bavarian trumpet, would insist: "You must leave Germany, there is nothing left for you to do here." As always, she had the wit to sense the way the wind was blowing, went to the authorities, and arranged a smooth emigration to Switzerland. Their possessions and all his pictures were put in a big moving van, which arrived safely in Bern a few weeks later. The van caught fire and was completely destroyed on its way back to Germany.

SR: How did Paul Klee spend his last years in Bern?

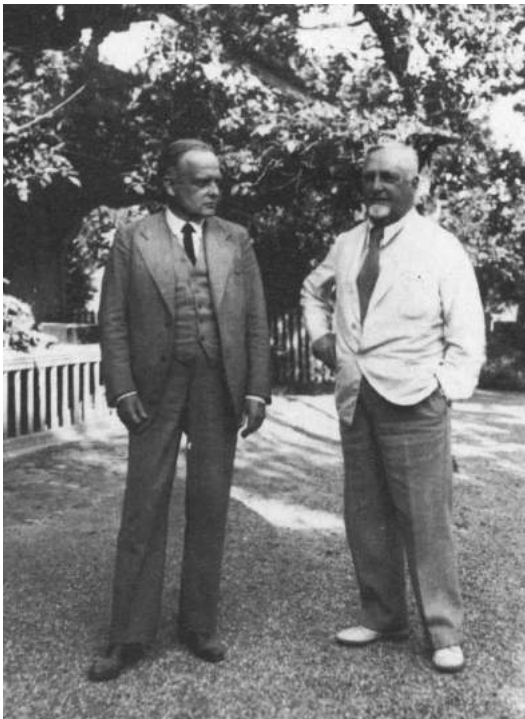
FK: My father's last years in Bern were difficult ones, even though a few Bern collectors, such as Hermann Rupf and Hannah Bürgi-Bigler, more or less looked after him and made sure that he did not starve to death.



Klee's apartment at Kistlerweg 6, Bern, 1936.
Collection Felix Klee



Hans and Paul Klee in Bern, 1935.
 Photograph Lily Klee. Collection Felix Klee



Paul Klee (*left*) and Cuno Amiet in Amiet's garden
 in Oschwand, Switzerland, 1935.
 Collection Felix Klee



Hans Klee's house at Obstbergweg 6, Bern,
 1935. (*At the top*): Mathilde and Hans Klee.
 (*Center*): Will Grohmann and his wife.
 (*Bottom*): Paul and Felix Klee.
 Photograph Lily Klee. Collection Felix Klee

When my parents arrived in Bern at the end of December 1933, they lived briefly with Hans Klee, his father, in the house at Obstbergweg 6. Apparently, Hans Klee smiled ironically, insinuating that Hitler had not been too wrong in rejecting the art of his son, as if to say: "See, I was right all along." Well, by then Hans Klee had become pretty obstinate. Retired, he lived for another seven years, until 1940, almost exactly as long as his son, Paul.

My parents found it impossible to stay with my grandfather, especially since my mother was very protective of my father and sensitive to any criticism of him. They moved to a furnished apartment in which my father felt uncomfortable. But, later, after their belongings arrived from Düsseldorf, they rented, in early spring 1934, a three-room apartment in Elfenau, a residential section of Bern. As always, my parents lived very simply. Everything was neatly arranged. His studio, which had a balcony, measured only about twenty square meters. It served as his headquarters. A large drawing board, which could be tilted at different angles like that of an architect, filled most of the room. He painted his large pictures on this drawing board. By then he was too frail to stand at his easel, and therefore painted mostly sitting down. In 1935 my father came down with the measles. Then he was diagnosed as having scleroderma, an incurable illness. We thought it had been brought on by the measles, but all the doctors rejected this idea. Scleroderma, which causes the gradual drying up of the body's fluids, exhibits ever new and different symptoms. Some victims suffer from paralyzed hands, but luckily for my father, this did not happen. In his case his esophagus had lost its elasticity. He could no longer swallow solid food—not even a grain of rice—and had to live on a liquid diet. Since he had difficulties whenever he swallowed, he always ate alone. His heart got weaker, and he had to give up smoking and playing the violin. Also he lost weight, his skin tightened, and his appearance changed. You can see these changes in the photographs of him made in 1939 and 1940.

Even though he looked different, my father remained gentle and serene in manner. Since his illness progressed irregularly, with alternate high and low points, there were periods during which he felt better. When he felt ill, as for example in his worst year, 1936, when he produced only thirty-five works, he would take cures in sanatoriums at Tarasp or Montana, above Sierre in the Valais.

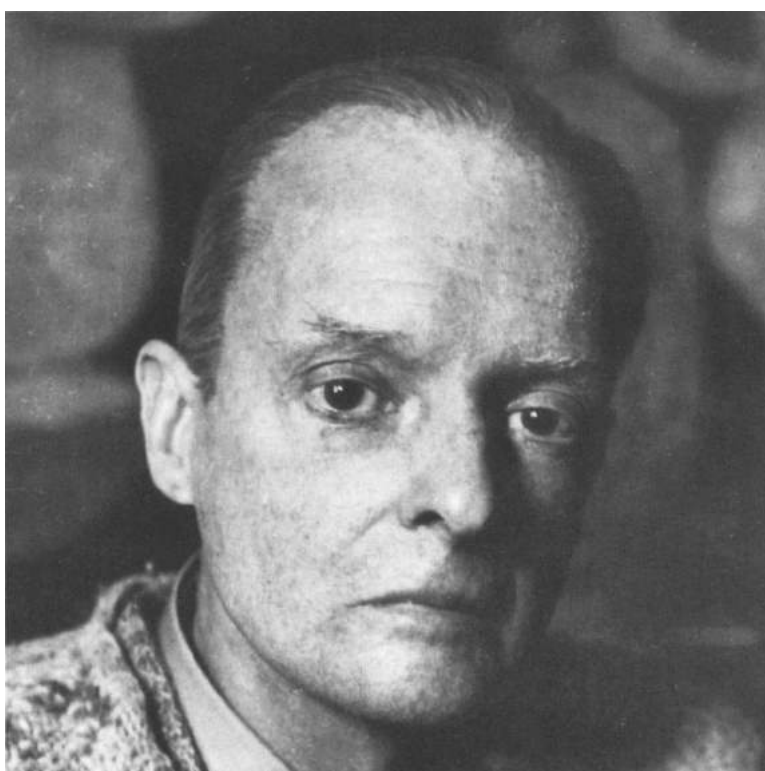
Then, all of a sudden, during the last three and a half years of my father's life, between 1937 and 1940, he



Paul and Felix Klee and Hermann Rupf and Margrit Rupf-Wyss on the steps of the cathedral in Solothurn, 1938. Collection Felix Klee



Paul and Felix Klee on the balcony of the apartment at Kistlerweg 6, 1934. Photograph Bobby Aichinger. Collection Felix Klee



Paul Klee in Bern, 1939.
Photograph Fotopress Zürich. Collection Felix Klee

created an amazingly large number of works in a completely new style. More than 1,200 in the single year of 1939! Lines turned into bars, and his colors became strong and vibrant, unknown elements of his art until then. This late work is the least accessible, but in my opinion it is his most important. When I visited my father during the summers of 1937 to 1939, it was usually just for a month. I would sleep in the guest room, which, filled to the brim with all the works he could not sell, looked like a storeroom.

Of course, I remember Picasso's visit, a very unpleasant incident. Picasso had visited a friend in Geneva. He then came to Bern to see Bernard Geiser, who was preparing the second volume of the oeuvre catalogue of Picasso's graphics and who had also arranged a visit by Picasso to my father. Picasso and Geiser lost track of time, and instead of coming at 3 P.M., as had been

arranged, Picasso finally turned up at 5 P.M. After waiting for two hours, my father was so upset that he did not want to have anything more to do with Picasso.

Klee's application for Swiss citizenship is quite another saga! When he returned to Bern in 1933, it was as a German citizen. Then, like all foreigners who wanted to become Swiss, he had to wait a certain time. His first application, soon after his return, was turned down for technical reasons. In 1939 my father applied again. The war and bureaucratic delays slowed things down, and his death on June 29, 1940, a few weeks before his case was to be acted upon, cancelled everything.

In conclusion, let me say how pleased I am that Mr. Berggruen should have given so many of my father's works to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. I visited it several times, trying in vain to see all it has to offer. For me it is a house of dreams, but such a labyrinth.



Klee's studio at Kistlerweg 6, Bern, 1938. Photograph Felix Klee. Collection Felix Klee

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