

Senecio: Head of a Man by Paul Klee

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on primed gauze on cardboard
- Date: 1922
- Size: 40.5 x 38.4 cm (approximately 16" by 15")
- Location: Kunstmuseum (art museum in Basel, Switzerland)
- Period: Bauhaus
- Style: Cubism
- Genre: Portrait

Artist Facts

- Paul Klee (Pronounced: Paul Clay)
- Born in Switzerland in 1879. (About the same time as the invention of the automobile.)
- Died in Switzerland in 1940 (age 60)
- more than 9,000 paintings, drawings, and etchings
- training at Academy of Fine Arts, Munich
- German/Swiss Nationality
- Periods: Expressionism, Bauhaus and Surrealism
- Styles: Expressionism, Cubism, Abstract Art, Surrealism
- Quote: A line is a dot that goes for a walk. - Paul Klee
- Paul Klee's was a Swiss born painter, with a unique style that was influenced by expressionism, cubism, surrealism, and orientalism.
- Although Klee is now considered a master of color theory, he spent a long time in his search for his sense of color. At first, Klee drew in black and white, saying he would never be a painter. But as an adult, after a visit to Tunisia, in which he was impressed by the quality of light, he had found his sense of color and began experimenting with his newfound decision to be a painter.
- His parents were musicians. As a boy, he played the violin. He also loved art and his grandmother taught him how to draw and paint.
- When he grew a little older, he had to choose between becoming a musician or an artist. In the end he chose to be an artist.
- He married a concert pianist and while his wife worked out of the house, Paul became a "stay at home dad" and worked on his art.
- Klee's art is very colorful and fun. He really liked art that was done by children and sometimes he tried to make his art look like it was done by a child. Klee was considered a Modern artist, that means he went against tradition-he wasn't afraid to paint blue cows or purple trees.
- Paul liked to paint a lot and sometimes more than one painting at a time. He could have up to 12 paintings in his studio, all halfway done.
- At the height of his career, Paul became a very respected artist and went on to teach art in German Universities.
- Klee spent much of his adult life teaching at universities and art schools, including the German

Bauhaus School of Art and Düsseldorf Academy. During his tenure at Düsseldorf, he was singled out as a Jew by the Nazi party. The Gestapo searched his home and he was fired from his job.

- In 1933, the German government said his art was "below standards" and locked most of it away in museum cellars. Luckily, many of them were found so we can enjoy them today.
- The Klee family emigrated to Switzerland in late 1933.
- Paul Klee's father was a German citizen; his mother was Swiss. Swiss law determined citizenship along paternal lines, and thus Paul inherited his father's German citizenship. He served in the German army during World War I. However, Klee grew up in Berne, Switzerland, and returned there often, even before his final emigration from Germany in 1933. He died six days before his application for Swiss citizenship was processed.
- Paul Klee's artwork is seemingly quite simple. Klee intentionally mimicked children's artwork and used forms and shapes that are ambiguous; he once compared his art to a tree's root system that "collects what comes from the depth and passes it on."
- You can also see that his paintings are inspired by the paintings of children.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Shape** is a two-dimensional line with no form or thickness. Shapes are flat and can be described as being geometric or organic. Geometric shapes have hard, defined lines and angles. Often man-made things have these kinds of forms, which usually must be measured to come out correctly. Circles, squares and rectangles are geometric shapes. Organic shapes have no set form, and no geometric lines or angles. Things found in nature are often organic shapes such as clouds.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Shape

- What shapes did the artist use to create this face? Are they organic shapes (cloud shaped) or geometric (squares, triangles, circles etc.)?
- Are the shapes repeated or always different?
- Can you find circles? Squares? Triangles?
- Do they flow? Do they work together?
- A shape is two-dimensional. Draw a circle and a square on the board. Point out that they are flat, two-dimensional shapes. Then show a ball and a Rubik's Cube (or something similar). Point out that they are three-dimensional forms. Ask students if the picture is 2-D or 3-D. It is two-dimensional because the shapes are all flat.

Keywords

- Portrait, abstract, two-dimensional, shape, warm colors, analogous colors, tertiary colors

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What do you see in this picture?
- This painting is a portrait. Do you think it is a portrait of a man or a woman?
- What is missing from this man's head and face?
- Where do you think his mouth is? Is it made of the two squares whose corners are touching?
- Where do you see hard, straight edges?
- Where do you see soft, blurry edges?

- How many different colors do you see? Are they mostly dark or mostly light colors? (mostly light)
- What colors do you see the most? Would you describe them as bold/shy/weak or strong?
- Where are the colors repeated? Repetition keeps the viewers eye moving around the painting.
- How does the artist use color to show what's important? (red moves forward – eyes)
- Is this painting primarily warm or cool? (warm)
- Do you see patterns in this painting? What are patterns? (repeated lines, shapes, colors or designs) Show me.
- What lines do you see? Are they thick or thin? Straight or wavy or curved?
- Why do you think the artist painted a face like this one?
- How do you think this painting was made? (Show gauze on cardboard in packet. Let students feel the texture and talk about how artists like to experiment with what they paint on – they don't always just use a plain piece of paper. Point out on the print where Klee let the texture from the gauze show through.)