



Zentrum Paul Klee

Bern

Press release

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Exhibition

KLEE & KANDINSKY

19/06—27/09/2015

ZENTRUM PAUL KLEE, BERN

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Press conference & pre-view on 18/06/2015 at 10am

Never before has such an outstanding selection of works from these two masters ever been united in one exhibition. Paul Klee (1879–1940) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) count as the founding fathers of abstract art and at the same time had one of the great friendships in the history of art. The exhibition reveals a great deal about the narrow division between friendship and rivalry, between mutual artistic inspiration and personal distinction, but also between success and condemnation. Besides preciousities from their own collections, the Zentrum Paul Klee and their partner, the Municipal Gallery in the Lenbachhaus in Munich, have assembled altogether 150 pictures from the most famous museums in the world, from the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the National Gallery in Berlin to the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

The exhibition covers the time span from 1900 until 1940 and is grouped into eight thematic areas, which provide emphases on the content of the chronology of the works. The first section is dedicated to the very different artistic development of the two artists on the path towards the avant-garde between 1900 and 1910. Kandinsky went back to take models from Russian folk art, while Klee discovered his own childhood drawings. Thematically, Klee's satirical scepticism stands opposite Kandinsky's idealism. The first high point of the exhibition is the period of the Blue Rider from 1910 until 1914, which is characterised by a great imbalance: Kandinsky had reached the first peak in his career with his revolutionary, abstract paintings in large format – the famous «Improvisations» and «Compositions» – Klee was still a searcher, experimenting with colour.

The second section of the exhibition is dedicated to the mutually very productive period for both artists at the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau between 1922 and 1931. After the interruption caused by the First World War, when Klee and Kandinsky met again at the beginning of the 1920's in the Bauhaus,

their status with regard to each other had changed. Klee had developed into an important artistic figure in the Weimar Republic, while Kandinsky had to make a new start. Artistically seen, Klee's work from the Weimar period is pluralistic and stretches from narrative scenes up to almost abstract works. Kandinsky on the other hand was striving for a «Generalbass / Thoroughbass» for painting on the basis of permanent relationships between colour and form. The years at the Bauhaus in Dessau make up the actual highlight of the exhibition and show the mutual approach between Klee and Kandinsky in the years from 1925 until 1933, which went so far, that even some contemporaries mistook their works. While with Klee it is possible to register a formalisation and geometrisation, with Kandinsky his strict pictorial vocabulary begins to loosen. The presentation is being grouped here according to subject and in exciting comparisons between pictures such as «Gleichgewicht und Balance», «Abstraktion und Figuration», «am Rande der Natur», «Bewegung und Kosmos» as well as illustrating the theme of how to depict «Music» pictorially which was so important for both artists. An oppressive perspective is opened by the section with the title «Key year 1933», which is dedicated to the far reaching consequences the assumption of power by the National Socialists had for both artists. Klee was dismissed from his post as professor, Kandinsky was confronted with the closure of the Bauhaus. Both also reacted artistically to the repression.

The third section of the exhibition under the title New Beginning is dedicated to work created after the assumption of power by the National Socialists. Both Klee as well as Kandinsky go already in 1933 into exile and have to establish themselves in their places of residence: Klee in Bern, Kandinsky in Paris. Both rediscover themselves in these years as artists once again: Kandinsky's works with their biomorphic forms have a playfulness in comparison with his Bauhaus period, while Klee becomes the painter of large format, wonderfully colourful pictures.

The collaboration between the Zentrum Paul Klee and the Lenbachhaus in Munich is an ideal constellation for this large international project, since both museums count as Competence Centres for both artists with regard to the content of their collections as well as their research background. Remarkable is that while this perhaps most interesting combination of artists in the history of art has always been highly regarded, it has never up to now been presented in an exhibition or properly examined in a publication. The degree of importance attributed to this exhibition has been proven by the willingness of the most important museums and collections in the world who were ready to send key works by Klee and Kandinsky to Bern and Munich.

The exhibition will be on show afterwards in the Municipal Gallery in the Lenbachhaus in Munich from 21.10.2015 until 24.01.2016.

The exhibition is curated by Michael Baumgartner, Annegret Hoberg and Christine Hopfengart. A catalogue will be published.

The exhibition is supported by: Die Mobiliar, SWISSLOS/Kultur Kanton Bern, the Paul Klee Foundation of the Burgergemeinde Bern, Artephila Foundation.

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