

# Exhibition guide



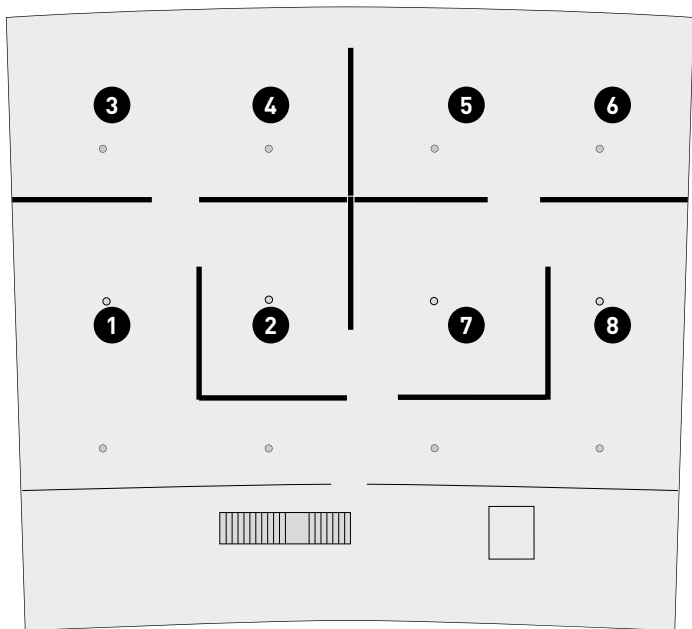
Founded by  
Maurice E. and Martha Müller  
and the heirs of Paul Klee

Zentrum Paul Klee  
Bern

## Paul Klee. Humans Among Themselves

28.08.21 – 22.05.22

# Floorplan



# Introduction

*“Come! Your presence will either give me life or kill me with pleasure.”*  
Voltaire, *Candide, or the Optimist*, Ch. 22

Paul Klee is often perceived as a withdrawn artist who created imaginary worlds. The exhibition *Humans Among Themselves*, however, reveals that often, a social or political dimension lies beneath Klee’s child-like pictorial language.

Klee, in fact, rarely commented on specific political events. Yet his works often address social or political themes: How do we live together? How do we get along with one another? What does community mean? What underpins power and authority?

The title *Humans Among Themselves* refers to Klee’s belief that, as an artist, he would be able to adopt an “otherworldly” perspective and distance himself from everyday life. Klee observed humans and their activities with ironic detachment and a “zoological gaze” – as if he were watching an unknown species.

Klee’s interest in people and human society is primarily evident in his drawings, which make up most of his work. Klee did not see his drawings as mere sketches but rather as finished works of art. For Klee, drawing was not only a means to process what he saw and experienced but also a way of thinking in images and creating worlds on paper.

# BewegGrund

BewegGrund is a company of dancers with and without disabilities from Bern. On invitation of the Zentrum Paul Klee, choreographers Lucía Baumgartner and Susanne Schneider, joined by 33 participating dancers, developed a set of six choreographies that engage in dialogue with Klee's drawings.

Many of Klee's works have a distinctly theatrical character. Indeed, the artist often creates theatrical scenes where people stand in complex and ambivalent relationships to one another. The work of BewegGrund responds to these scenes. They documented their work in the form of six choreographically and cinematically staged "tableaus" that are shown alongside Klee's works as video projections.

The work of BewegGrund is characterized by an experimental approach to the body, movement, and dance as well as a reduction to the essential. The diversity of the participating individuals finds its counterpart in Klee's oeuvre.

BewegGrund was founded in 1998 and is committed to self-determination, equal opportunities, and integration in cultural projects. BewegGrund both performs its own productions in Switzerland and abroad as well as organizes the bi-annual BewegGrund Festival in Bern. Its goal is the self-evident coexistence of disabled and non-disabled people.

[www.beweggrund.org](http://www.beweggrund.org)

# 1 **Candide**

## The “Best of All Possible Worlds”

*“If this is the best of possible worlds, what then are the others?”*

*Voltaire, Candide, or the Optimist, Ch. 6*

Over the course of his career, Klee rarely worked as an illustrator. He did not wish to follow existing texts and instead aimed to create independent, stand-alone works. Nevertheless, in 1911, he enthusiastically illustrated the novel *Candide, or the Optimist* by the French philosopher and poet Voltaire (1694 – 1778).

Klee’s notes on his working process suggest that he was not simply interested in a faithful reproduction of the novel’s content. Rather, he was inspired by the novel’s simplified, poetic, and satirical language and strove to develop a signature artistic style from it.

Klee’s illustrations for *Candide* are simplified, contoured pen-and-ink drawings, in which the novel’s plot is reduced to its essence. He shows the moments in which the action comes to a dramatic head. Background and context are almost completely absent – and the characters seem like marionettes with their theatrical gestures and attitudes.

It is no coincidence that the illustrations for *Candide* sometimes resemble children’s drawings. While creating them, Klee repeatedly grappled with the question of the “origins” of art and his own artistic beginnings. Klee also turned towards puppet theatre and cabaret for inspiration.

# Voltaire

## *Candide, or the Optimist* (1759)

The short novel *Candide* was written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and deals with the question of human suffering in a world supposedly created by God. The hero of the fast-paced story is the young Candide, who grows up sheltered in a castle, but is expelled from this worldly “paradise” for having an illicit love affair.

Bitterly disappointed, Candide joins various groups that promise him redemption and a return to earthly paradise. In the process, he is driven from one country to the next, and witnesses harrowing disasters, political and religious fanaticism, and senseless violence.

Time and again, he encounters the philosopher Pangloss, a steadfast optimist. Even in the face of the worst atrocities, Pangloss maintains the increasingly absurd claim that, despite everything, we live in “the best of all possible worlds.”

A key text of the Enlightenment, *Candide* remains relevant with respect to today’s catastrophes and threats. With *Candide*, Voltaire rejected the doctrine of salvation in any form, took aim at the authority of the church and state, and tried to encourage his audience to think and act for themselves.

## 2 “Connected to the Stars”

### The Search for Community

Klee lived in a time of dramatic political and social change: the First World War, the collapse of the German Empire, the emergence of revolutionary movements, the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism.

During Klee's lifetime, revolutionary and utopian ideas gained strong influence in art. Avant-garde artists wanted to radically renew society through their art and free people from the conventions they rejected as outdated.

In 1919, Klee participated in the attempt to establish a communist soviet republic in Bavaria. The revolution failed, however, and Klee had to temporarily flee Germany before he was able to assume his revolutionary post.

From 1921, Klee taught as a master at the Bauhaus. There, an international, avant-garde, “starry-eyed” community of artists aimed to reshape the world from the ground up after the catastrophe of the First World War. And yet, Klee maintained a certain distance to the everyday-life of the community and ironically (but affectionately) compared the artistic community with a circus.

## Curt Corrinth

***Potsdamer Platz*** (1919)

Klee probably created his illustrations for the Expressionist novella *Potsdamer Platz* by Curt Corrinth during the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic. This novella, which had been written during the First World War, tells the story of a young man from the countryside, who moves to Berlin and abandons himself to a hedonistic life.

Within a short time, the protagonist becomes the prophet of a revolutionary sexual liberation movement, which draws increasing numbers of followers. Men and women from all over Germany flock to the brothels on Potsdamer Platz to fully indulge in their lust and leave their worries behind. Ultimately, the sexual revolution is crushed by foreign troops – a parallel to the suppression of the November Revolution (1918/19).

Corrinth's narrative is full of grotesque exaggerations and absurd escalations. It can also be understood as a satire of revolution or even as a caricature of Expressionism. Klee created a series of 12 illustrations for the text, in which he translated the story's spirit in drawings that are exuberantly playful and noisily chaotic.



### 3 Whining Creatures

#### The Animal in Man

A prevalent theme in Klee's oeuvre is the relationship between humans and animals. Particularly in his early work and during his late period, Klee ironically depicted people with the traits of animals and animals with human characteristics.

Since the Enlightenment, the relationship between humans and animals has ranked among the most important and controversial questions in both the humanities as well as the natural sciences. What differentiates humans from animals? What are the consequences of this distinction? And what does it mean to be human?

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, with the insights of evolutionary theory and psychoanalysis, the animal origin and libidinal character of humans increasingly came to the fore in philosophical debates and artistic representations. New scientific findings shattered the image of humans as rational beings.

We know from Klee's diaries that as a young man and budding artist, he was often conflicted about his own drives. Especially in his early works, Klee addressed the animalistic nature of man in satirical images. He thereby called into question the idea that humans are fundamentally different from animals because they possess the gift of reason.

## 4 “I Listen and Obey”

### The Question of Power

In the broadest sense, the term “politics” refers to the organization of the community. How is a society structured? Who holds the power? What is it based on? How is it limited? Who commands, and who follows? How are decisions made and conflicts resolved?

Klee is not known as a political artist, and he rarely made concrete statements about political events. Nevertheless, he made numerous drawings that address political situations and power relations.

As a youth, Klee rebelled against his domineering father and caricatured teachers and other authority figures. But it was only at the beginning of the First World War that the topic became especially relevant to Klee. Many of his friends longed for the advent of the war, volunteered for service, dreamed of a great cultural “purification” – and died on the front.

Klee did not share his friends’ enthusiasm for the war and satirically portrayed it in numerous works as “soldier games.” In the 1930s, when the National Socialists seized power, this theme once again took on great significance for Klee.

## 5 “Family Disagreement”

### Domestic relationships

Compared to other avant-garde artists, Klee led a relatively conventional, bourgeois family life as a husband and father of a son. In his diaries, he expressed negative views about the debauched lifestyles of his artist friends relatively early on.

Before Klee achieved his first significant successes as an artist, he assumed an unconventionally modern role within the nuclear family as a stay-at-home father. His wife, Lily, earned the family's livelihood as a piano teacher while Klee tended to the household, their son Felix, and his work as an artist. With his increasing recognition, however, these roles were reversed.

Life in the nuclear family frequently appears as a motif in Klee's work. He presented the family as a tragicomic community of fate, distinguished not only by intimate friendship and attachment but also contradiction, farcical eroticism, and an element of tragedy. Some of the drawings on this theme have an autobiographical character.

## 6 “The Game Gets Out of Hand”

### Children Among Themselves

Childhood is a central theme in Klee's oeuvre. Klee sought ways to renew art and wanted to liberate it from historical ballast and academic conventions. Children's drawings, including his own, made a key contribution to Klee's artistic development.

At the same time, children also play an important role as pictorial motifs. Especially in the 1930s, which were marked by the National Socialists' rise and seizure of power, the establishment of a totalitarian dictatorship, and the outbreak of war, Klee frequently depicted scenes of children. Klee's drawings show groups of children at play in ambiguous situations. Seemingly peaceful playing children turn into aggressive hordes, ball games degenerate into quarrels, and strange “accidents” disturb the tranquil activity.

Klee shows how children are disciplined and set straight. At the same time, Klee also portrayed children as petty dictators and willing accomplices. Klee's representations of children express his increasingly pessimistic view that the propensity toward violence and war is part of human nature.

## 7 “Manhunt”

### 1933 and Its Consequences

In 1933, the National Socialists came to power in Germany. Institutions were brought into line and Jews, minorities, and political opponents were brutally persecuted. Klee was disparaged as a “Galician Jew,” “degenerate artist,” and “cultural Bolshevik,” and dismissed from his professorship at the Düsseldorf Art Academy.

Unlike other artists who tried to come to terms with National Socialism, Klee had no illusions and viewed these developments with resignation. Ultimately, he emigrated back to Switzerland. From the end of 1933, he lived as a German citizen in exile in Bern.

Although Klee almost lost his livelihood in 1933, he was determined to continue making art. Over the course of the year, he produced a cycle of approximately 300 pencil drawings, in which he processed his observations about daily life in National Socialist Germany.

The drawings show circumstances of everyday violence, stigmatization, militarism, and persecution. Whereas propaganda heralded a national “renewal” and “reconstruction,” Klee depicted these events as the decay and brutalization of society, a break from civilization, and a descent into barbarism.

## 8 In the Garden

### **“Il faut cultiver notre jardin”**

*“I know also,” said Candide, “that we must cultivate our garden.” – “You are right,” said Pangloss. – “Let us work,” said Martin, “without disputing, it is the only way to render life tolerable.”*  
*Voltaire, Candide, or the Optimist, Ch. 30*

Voltaire’s novel *Candide*, which Klee illustrated in 1911, ends with the hero’s realization that only a modest life and daily work in the garden can promise happiness and fulfilment. “Il faut cultiver notre jardin” (we must cultivate our garden), Candide reasons after a global odyssey that led him from one catastrophe to the next.

It is not known whether Klee personally identified with this realization. The motif of the garden is prevalent in his work, especially during the last years of his life between 1933 and 1940. In these pieces, poetic representations of imaginary gardens, parks, and plants unfold. Klee depicted gardens as paradisiac refuges from an increasingly hostile world. The motif of the withdrawn hermit or ascetic also appears repeatedly.

Klee saw the garden as a site of education and self-discovery and often found artistic inspiration in the study of nature. The pictorial motif of the garden can also be interpreted in relationship to Klee’s life circumstances after 1933. During his exile in Bern, Klee lived in relative seclusion and maintained only a few contacts in the art world. Furthermore, his progressive illness increasingly restricted his ability to move and his radius of activity to the home environment.

At the Zentrum Paul Klee, we are also cultivating our garden!  
As part of the “paul&ich” project, our neighbours and staff are growing a community garden. You are welcome to join at any time.

For more information, visit: [www.paulundich.ch](http://www.paulundich.ch)

# Biography Paul Klee

- 1879** Paul Klee is born in Münchenbuchsee near Bern on 18<sup>th</sup> December to the music teacher Hans Wilhelm Klee (1849 – 1940) and the trained singer Ida Maria Frick (1855– 1921).
- 1898** He finishes his secondary education with a Matura. After wondering whether to become a musician or a painter he decides to go to Munich where he attends the private drawing school run by Heinrich Knirr.
- 1899** Klee meets his future wife, the pianist Lily Stumpf (1876 – 1946) at a musical soirée.
- 1900** At the Munich Academy he studies painting under Franz von Stuck.
- 1901/1902** Klee and the Bern sculptor Hermann Haller leave for a six-month period educational journey to Italy. The overwhelming richness of Rome's classical art plunges Klee into an artistic crisis.
- 1902–1906** To find himself and to mature he withdraws at his parents' home in Bern, where he makes his first reverse glass paintings and etchings.
- 1906** On 15<sup>th</sup> September, he marries Lily Stumpf in Bern. Two weeks later, the couple moves to Munich.



- 1907** Felix, the son and only child of Paul and Lily Klee, is born on 30<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1908** Exhibition at the Munich and Berlin *Secession*.
- 1910** Participation in a group exhibition with fifty-six works at the Kunstmuseum Bern, moving on to Zurich, Winterthur, and Basel.
- 1911** Klee starts with the illustration of Voltaire's *Candide*.
- 1912** Participation in the second *Blue Rider* exhibition in Munich with seventeen works. In April, he travels to Paris and visits the artists Robert and Sonia Delaunay.
- 1913** Klee exhibits in Berlin at the *First German Autumn Salon* in the gallery *Der Sturm* of Herwarth Walden.
- 1914** In April Klee travels to Tunisia with his artist friends August Macke and Louis Moilliet. The impulses to abstraction and treatment of colour that Klee received in Paris are confirmed and further plumbed during this journey.  
Klee belongs to the founding members of the *Neue Münchener Secession*.
- 1916** On 11<sup>th</sup> March, he is drafted into the German army as a soldier. After his training in the infantry he is transferred to the maintenance company of the air corps in Schleissheim near Munich and afterwards to Gersthofen. In spite of his service at the army he continues his artistic work.

- 1916–1918** He becomes a cult figure of the new artscene in Germany due to his exhibitions at the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm*.
- 1920** Klee's artdealer Hans Goltz organises a first retrospective in Munich with 362 artworks. On 29<sup>th</sup> October, Walter Gropius calls Klee to the Bauhaus in Weimar.
- 1921** On 13<sup>th</sup> May, Klee commences his academic teaching career at the Bauhaus and moves with his family from Munich to Weimar.
- 1923** The first exhibition in a German museum takes place in Berlin at the Nationalgalerie in the Kronprinzen-Palais.
- 1924** First solo exhibition in New York.  
The artists group *The Blue Four* with Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Alexej Jawlensky and Paul Klee is founded by the artdealer Galka Scheyer.
- 1925** The Bauhaus moves to Dessau.  
Participation of Klee at the first Surrealist exhibition *La peinture surréaliste* in Paris together with Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso and others.
- 1926** Klee and his family move to Dessau. There they live with Wassily and Nina Kandinsky in one of the three duplexes built by Gropius for Bauhaus master craftsmen.
- 1928** Trip to Egypt.

- 1929** To Klee's fiftieth birthday several exhibitions take place such as in Berlin, Dresden, New York or Paris.
- 1931** Klee takes up a professorship at the Düsseldorf Academy on 1<sup>st</sup> July.
- 1933** Klee is suspended from his position as a professor by the National Socialists.  
At the end of the year 1933 he emigrates to Switzerland initially living in his parental home in Bern.
- 1935** Klee falls ill, first with bronchitis followed by a pneumonia. In November the illness is diagnosed as measles. But actually it is a not detected scleroderma.
- 1936** Due to his poor health his output for the year is just twenty-five works – an all-time low.
- 1937** The National Socialists defame Klee's art as "degenerated" and seize 102 of his works in German museums. 17 of them are presented at the exhibition Degenerated Art.
- 1939** Despite of his bad health the year 1939 with 1253 registered works is Klee's most productive year ever.
- 1940** On 29<sup>th</sup> June Paul Klee dies in Locarno-Muralto.

# Begleitprogramm

Samstag

**18. September 2021 14:00**

## Hinter den Kulissen

Mitglieder von BewegGrund und Martin Waldmeier, Kurator Zentrum Paul Klee, geben in der Ausstellung Einblicke in ihre Arbeit

Sonntag

**07. November 2021 15:00**

## Live-Performance

### BewegGrund

Tänzerinnen und Tänzer mit und ohne Behinderung reagieren auf die Werke von Paul Klee.

Sonntag **06. März 2022 15:00**

## Kunst und Religion im Dialog

Thomas Fries, Katholische Kirche Region Bern, im Dialog mit Dominik Imhof, Leiter Kunstvermittlung Zentrum Paul Klee

Sonntag **16. Januar 2022 15:00**

Freitag **06. Mai 2022 14:30**

## Fokus: Technik und Material

Restauratorin Myriam Weber führt anhand der Ausstellungswerke in die maltechnische Entwicklung von Paul Klee ein und gibt Einblick in seine Materialien und Techniken.

Weitere Veranstaltungen 2022 nach Ansage. Informationen laufend unter [zpk.org](http://zpk.org)

Neu

## Digitales Angebot

Mittwoch

**08. September 2021 17:30**

Mittwoch

**26. Januar 2022 17:30**

### Kunst am Abend

Zoom-Führung mit Präsentation von Werken aus der Ausstellung mit Dominik Imhof, Leiter Kunstvermittlung Zentrum Paul Klee

Freitag **18. Februar 2022 17:00**

Freitag **08. April 2022 17:00**

### Bildlektüre

Zoom-Führung mit Präsentation zu einem ausgewählten Thema der Ausstellung mit Andreas Jahn, Kunstvermittler Zentrum Paul Klee

Dienstag

**16. November 2021 17:00**

Dienstag **03. Mai 2022 17:00**

### Kunst und ich

Zoom-Führung im Dialog mit den Teilnehmer:innen rund um ein Werk der Ausstellung mit Ramona Unterberg, Kunstvermittlerin Zentrum Paul Klee

## Führungen durch die Ausstellung

Sonntags 12:00

### Öffentliche Führung

Dienstags 12:30 – 13:00

### Kunst am Mittag

### Fremdsprachige Führungen

Französisch, Englisch, Italienisch siehe [zpk.org](http://zpk.org)

Mittwoch

**01. September 2021 14:00**

### Einführung für Lehrpersonen

Mit Dominik Imhof, Leiter Kunstvermittlung Zentrum Paul Klee

Donnerstag

**09. September 2021 18:00**

### Freunde ZPK

Führung für die Mitglieder «Freunde ZPK» mit dem Kurator Martin Waldmeier sowie Expert:innen des Hauses

Sonntag 15:00

**03. Oktober 2021**

**20. Februar 2022**

**03. April 2022**

**15. Mai 2022**

### **Kunstgespräch**

Werkentdeckungen und Kunstgespräche mit Ramona Unterberg, Kunstvermittlerin Zentrum Paul Klee

Samstag

**09. Oktober 2021 13:00**

### **Sinn-Reich**

Eine alle Sinne ansprechende Führung für Gäste mit und ohne Behinderung. Mit Gebärdendolmetscher:in und induktiver Höranlage

## **Kunstvermittlung für Familien**

16.09.21 – 09.01.22

### **Interaktive Ausstellung**

#### **«formenspiel»**

Kreativer Brückenschlag von den Ateliers des Kindermuseum Creaviva in die Ausstellungen des Zentrum Paul Klee

Dienstags bis Freitags

14:00/16:00

Samstags und sonntags

12:00/14:00/16:00

### **Offenes Atelier im Kindermuseum Creaviva**

Stündige Workshops zu einem monatlich wechselnden Thema in Verbindung mit den Ausstellungen im Zentrum Paul Klee

Sonntags 10:15 – 11:30

### **Familienmorgen**

In der Ausstellung und im Atelier des Kindermuseum Creaviva für die ganze Familie

Samstags 09:30 – 11:45

### **Kinderforum**

Für Kinder ab 7 Jahren



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**Der Bund**

The Zentrum Paul Klee is open to all and  
offers inclusive events.



## Zentrum Paul Klee

Monument im Fruchtländ 3

3006 Bern

Tel +41 (0)31 359 01 01

info@zpk.org

www.zpk.org

## Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10:00 – 17:00

Find us on



Zentrum Paul Klee  
Bern

Founded by  
Maurice E. and Martha Müller  
and the heirs of Paul Klee