Paul Klee.
About Technical Frenzy
3.9.22 – 21.5.23
Introduction

“The immense development of technology and of the big cities has increased the capacity of our perceptual organs for simultaneous acoustical and optical activity. Everyday life itself affords examples of this: Berliners cross the Potsdamer Platz. They are talking, they hear simultaneously: horns of the motor-cars, the bells of the trams, the tooting of the omnibuses, the greeting of the coachman, the roar of the underground railway, the shouts of the newspaper sellers, the sounds of a loud-speaker, etc.” László Moholy-Nagy, 1925

Paul Klee is one of the most important modern artists. But what is modernity? The term refers to the great upheaval that began with industrialization in Europe around 1900. It was accompanied by modern inventions such as electric light, the telephone, radio, and the automobile, which radically altered people’s lives. Scientific discoveries, such as X-rays, microscopy, and Einstein’s theory of relativity, called into question what was supposedly known about the world. At the same time, the traditional social order was shaken up: Monarchies were replaced by democracies; workers fought for better conditions and women for their rights.

In the frenzy of these rapid developments, the accelerating pace of life unleashed euphoria and fear alike. Themes such as globalization, terrorism, and “shattered nerves” were already dominating the media. Artists reacted differently to
these changes: Some embraced this progress wholeheartedly while others took a critical stance against it.

Paul Klee was not the withdrawn artist he is often described to be. He followed these developments with a watchful eye and was confronted with the possibilities of technical achievements like film and photography, particularly during his time at the progressive school of design, the Bauhaus, in the 1920s. This exhibition shows how Klee took up the themes of his day in a variety of ways and singularly transformed them in his work – thoroughly interested and open, and at the same time critically distanced and ironic.
In the intoxication of rapid economic and technological development, the new speed of industry became the admired but also feared driving force for millions of human lives. The new dynamism of a world propelled by buses, trams, cars, and airplanes, acted like an intoxicating drug for some, while others reacted to the challenges of an accelerated technological age with psychological problems that were referred to as “New York-itis” or “neurasthenia,” and which today would simply be called “burnout”.

The highly technologized First World War led to terrible experiences, including the bombing of trenches from airplanes. Klee found himself likewise drafted into the military. During his deployment at air bases, his duties included reporting and photographing airplanes that had been crashed by trainee pilots. Although Klee seemed to have had little interest in aviation technology, he was nevertheless fascinated by the phenomenon of flying or hovering, in contrast to our earthbound existence. As a result, a series of semi-abstract works featuring crashing planes and birds, or a mixture of both in his airplane-birds, emerged from his
experiences at the flight school. Arrows frequently featured in his work, evoking to an extent the fléchettes (flying arrows) that were dropped from airplanes on enemy forces. For Klee, however, arrows soon became the ultimate symbol of dynamism, power, and energy.

Dynamism was a central aspect of Klee’s own work and his teaching at the Bauhaus. According to Klee, movement was the basis of all becoming. A successful design therefore always had to be dynamic. He devoted an entire chapter of his teaching materials to “pictorial mechanics,” placing design and mechanics in context. He nevertheless retained a critical distance from the credo that art and technology should form a unit, as propagated by the Constructivists and also at the Bauhaus. His constructions frequently remained in a volatile balance, enabling them to express uncertainty and a search for a stable balance, successfully visualizing the fears engendered by technological acceleration.
Human-Machine: Robots and Cyborgs

At the beginning of the 20th century accounts of human-machines were as fascinating and threatening as they are today. Utopian novels and plays like the drama R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots, 1920) by Karel Čapek as well as such films as Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (1927) depicted a future in which humans and machines would merge. Either people would become part of machines or machines would commandeer the work of humans completely, prompting fear among many workers. Promises of technological advances made the robot simultaneously irresistible. In Europe during the First World War many injured bodies were provided with support by such technological aids as prosthetics, enabling the interconnection between humans and machines to become a reality.

Putting their faith in progress, such artists as the French painter Fernand Léger, the Futurists in Italy, and Constructivists in Russia celebrated the merging of human and machine in their works. Dadaists however, regarded the development somewhat critically. Surrealism deliberately robbed technology of its function and reduced it to absur-
dity. Paul Klee was aware of all these movements and reflected them in such drawings as *Automaton* (1922).

The idea of human-machines was also repeatedly addressed by Klee’s fellow artists at the Bauhaus, such as Oskar Schlemmer, who developed his ground breaking *Triadic Ballet* during the First World War. He was injured twice during military service. In his peculiar figures, flesh becomes invisible. The bodies are garbed in geometric forms reminiscent of armour. Powerful robot-like humans – today we would speak of cyborgs – also populated such futuristic operas as *Victory over the Sun*. It was Kazimir Malevich who designed the set and costumes for the premiere. In the drawing *Ascent* (1923), Klee would seem to be alluding to the robotic humans attempting to tear the sun from the sky in *Victory over the Sun*.

One important representative of Constructivism was the Russian artist El Lissitzky, who travelled to the Bauhaus on numerous occasions between 1922 and 1928. In his technoid figures that featured in such paintings as *Dispute* (1929), Klee was reacting to El Lissitzky’s depictions of the “new human,” in which Lissitzky succeeded in synthesizing human and machine.

In *Apparatus for Mechanical Music* (1921), Klee – himself a gifted violinist – parodied notions of machine music as had been played by automatons since the 18th century. Klee apparently tinkered with small machines himself, as Lyonel
Feininger reported from a visit to his studio: “Then there were small contraptions, little machines, playfully tinkered together from wood, wire, and god-knows-what during idle moments, which Klee showed off with an expression of infinite satisfaction, and it seemed that he frequently found more pleasure in being praised and admired for them than his ‘serious’ work. Everything was movable, either to be wound up somehow, or they stood on the long window sill, where the draft was used to turn the little things and enable the strangest dances to be performed.” Unfortunately, examples of such machines by Klee have not survived.
Artist-Engineer: Geometry and Construction

Radio towers, train stations, and factories are the resulting structures of industrial modernity. The aesthetic value in the technical construction of such architecture could now also be appreciated – as demonstrated by the Eiffel Tower in Paris for example. In Western modernism, construction no longer remained concealed behind a façade, but was openly displayed. A similar phenomenon was apparent in the visual arts, where a strict Constructivism was developed from purely geometric forms. The artist became an engineer.

The significance of technology in design was discussed intensely at the Bauhaus, where Klee taught from 1921 to 1931. Theo van Doesburg, co-founder of the Dutch De Stijl movement, called for a rationalized form of art and design that was limited to primary colours and right angles. He was critical of the professors at the Bauhaus, especially of Klee as a representative of an individualized Expressionism. Klee reacted in his teaching and warned: “... against a schematism attempting to implement unadorned rules in practice. Such misunderstandings lead to construction for its own sake. They haunt the minds of narrow-chested asth-
matics who make rules instead of works. Who have too little air in them to understand that rules should only provide the basis so that the work can flourish.” Klee was clearly rejecting dogmatic schematism here. In his square paintings he seized on such trends, while simultaneously distancing himself from them. His squares are not constructed with a ruler and he mixed the primary colours red, yellow, and blue into variegated tones.

There are many allusions to technical construction drawings, such as the ones found in architects’ plans, in Klee’s output of the 1920s and early 1930s. In contrast to architects, Klee frequently takes the fixed positioning of perspective to the point of absurdity. Many of his constructions appear as if floating in space, blurring foreground and background.

In 1931, Klee employed handmade mobiles of wood and wire as a source for several series of construction drawings. Each series is based on a model that Klee depicted from different perspectives, combining it with other models or distorting it. Klee even built a mobile that, according to the description in the handwritten catalogue of his oeuvre, was composed from the simplest of materials, such as a flower pot, a straight stick, bent wire, and veneered wood and a cord, and which served as the source for model 41. d. (1931).
Abstract Film: Rhythm and Polyphony

Even if Klee is not known as a big fan of film, he nevertheless addressed the new genres in film. Klee was certainly aware of popular science documentaries employing such new techniques as slow-motion and time-lapse photography, as well as microscopic and X-ray imagery. Klee must have been particularly interested in experimental artists’ films. In May 1930, Hans Richter organized a weekend seminar on the subject at the Bauhaus, screening Viking Eggeling’s *Diagonal Symphony* (1924) and his own films *Rhythm 21* (1921) and *Rhythm 23* (1923), films involving moving abstract forms. In Eggeling’s work, linear-abstract forms moved diagonally across the screen, while Richter employed geometric planes evoking a varying spatiality. While some Bauhaus residents, such as tutors Georg Muche and Lyonel Feininger, felt threatened by the new medium of film, Klee reacted with a certain degree of composure. He did not regard film as a competitor but rather as an art form in its own right. In a letter to his wife Lily Klee from 1930 he commented on the film evening: “We’ve had film lectures at the Bauhaus by Richter with screenings, and then I finally saw Eggeling’s film, which I had seen being made in Zurich when Zurich was still a cen-
Unfortunately, Eggeling died early. Otherwise, we would have the art film. The other examples offered insights into the area, and I took the opportunity to get involved with a subject which basically for me goes against the grain, sacrificing two evenings. Film could be art, but then nobody would care about it anymore, just as nobody cares about the others that already exist, beautifully formed.”

The art film was already a subject of discussion at the Bauhaus long before this event. In 1922, Kurt Schwerdtfeger performed his *Reflective Plays of Coloured Light* a precursor to abstract film, for the first time in Wassily Kandinsky’s house. The plays of coloured light consisted of a large cuboid device housing a lighting system and cut-out shapes made of cardboard that could be moved rhythmically back and forth. It enabled a complex, abstract shadow play to be projected onto a screen as a painting of changing light.

The aspect of movement in these new art forms, which Klee considered central to artistic creation, was probably what primarily interested him. Klee, too, strove to overcome the static through the use of lines and such pictorial symbols as the arrow. However, this did not occur through actual sequences of movement as in film but through a visual illusion of possible dynamics. He achieved it, for example in alluding to the play of light, employing gradations of colour, which he employed in a watercolour technique.
Perceptual Apparatus: Photography, Microscopy, and X-rays

During the first decades of the 20th century, photography continued to develop in a variety of directions, which Klee was keenly aware of. He had already been involved in photography as a young man. In addition to numerous photographs of cats, which were frequently blurred because the animals were unable to stay still, he sent photographs of his works to his fiancée Lily Stumpf. He also addressed questions relating to exposure in a series of black-and-white watercolours and reverse glass paintings.

At the Bauhaus, it was above all the Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy who propagated photography and film as art forms that would replace painting. Klee countered Moholy-Nagy’s views with scepticism when he wrote in a text in 1923: “... today’s artist is more than a refined camera, he is more complicated, richer, and more spatial.” Nevertheless, during the 1920s, he became involved with ideas inspired by photography. Photograms in particular, where an object is placed directly on the light-sensitive paper, seem to have stimulated Klee. However, his solution to creating the effect
of immaterial light on paper employed a spraying technique, transposing forms using stencils or objects.

Klee was not only interested in photograms, but also in such new techniques as microscopy and X-rays that are able to penetrate the surface of an object. They expanded the concept of seeing to include imagery imperceptible to the human eye. This is altogether consistent with Klee’s motto, expressed as early as 1920, that art does not reproduce what is visible, but makes visible. He stated in a 1924 lecture: “So the artist is addressing microscopy? History? Paleontology? But only to an extent! Just for the movement. And not in the sense of being scientifically verifiable, of being true to nature!” Klee was fascinated by how science dissolved the seemingly solid world of objects, reinterpreting it as states of energy in constant motion.

There are many examples in his work demonstrating analogies to the new medium of photography, even if that did not mean that the photography of the 1920s was providing him with fundamentally new ideas. But he was nevertheless able to discover much in photography that corresponded perfectly with his own thoughts concerning art, some of which had occupied him for a long time. Klee should not, therefore, be termed an unworldly fantasist. Rather, he was a well-informed contemporary who was not only knowledgeable about the modern world from his own experiences, but also from contemporary mass-media.
**Biography Paul Klee**

1879  
Paul Klee is born in Münchenbuchsee near Bern on 18th 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 15th 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\textsuperscript{th} November.

1908  Exhibition at the Munich and Berlin \textit{Secession}.

1910  Participation in a group exhibition with 56 works at the Kunstmuseum Bern, moving on to Zurich, Winterthur, and Basel.

1911  Klee starts with the illustration of Voltaire's \textit{Candide}.

1912  Participation in the second \textit{Blue Rider} exhibition in Munich with 17 works. In April, he travels to Paris and visits the artists Robert and Sonia Delaunay.

1913  Klee exhibits in Berlin at the \textit{First German Autumn Salon} in the gallery \textit{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 \textit{Neue Münchener Secession}.
On 11\textsuperscript{th} 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.

He becomes a cult figure of the new artscene in Germany due to his exhibitions at the Berlin gallery Der Sturm.

Klee’s artdealer Hans Goltz organises a first retrospective in Munich with 362 artworks. On 29\textsuperscript{th} October, Walter Gropius calls Klee to the Bauhaus in Weimar.

On 13\textsuperscript{th} May, Klee commences his academic teaching career at the Bauhaus and moves with his family from Munich to Weimar.

The first exhibition in a German museum takes place in Berlin at the Nationalgalerie in the Kronprinzen-Palais.

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.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>The Bauhaus moves to Dessau. Participation of Klee at the first Surrealist exhibition <em>La peinture surréaliste</em> in Paris together with Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso and others.</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>Trip to Egypt.</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>To Klee’s 50th birthday several exhibitions take place such as in Berlin, Dresden, New York or Paris.</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>Klee takes up a professorship at the Düsseldorf Academy on 1st July.</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>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.</td>
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1936  Due to his poor health his output for the year is just 25 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 29th June Paul Klee dies in Locarno-Muralto.
**Führungen**

Sonntags, 12:00

**Öffentliche Führungen**

Dienstags, 12:30 – 13:00

**Kunst am Mittag**

Sonntags, 15:00

und auf Anfrage

**Fremdsprachige Führungen**

English: **September 18/ October 9 2022**

Français: **11 septembre/ 18 décembre 2022**

Italiano: **25 settembre 2022**

Mittwoch,

**7. September 2022, 14:00**

**Einführung für Lehrpersonen**

Mit Dominik Imhof, Leiter Kunstvermittlung

Samstag,

**10. September 2022, 10:30 – 12:00 Bilderclub**

Entdecken Sie gemeinsam mit anderen Besucher:innen ein Werk der Ausstellung mit Ramona Unterberg, Kunstvermittlerin

Sonntag,

**23. Oktober 2022, 15:00**

**Kunstgespräch**

Werkentdeckung und Kunstgespräch zu ausgewählten Werken der Ausstellung mit Ramona Unterberg, Kunstvermittlerin

Samstag,

**19. November 2022, 13:00**

**Sinn-Reich**

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

Donnerstag,

**8. Dezember 2022, 18:00**

**Freundeskreis ZPK**

Führung für die Mitglieder «Freundeskreis ZPK» mit Kuratorin Fabienne Eggelhöfer und Expert:innen des Hauses
Digitale Angebote

Mittwoch, 21. September 2022, 17:30
Kunst am Abend
Zoom-Führung live aus der Ausstellung mit Dominik Imhof, Leiter Kunstvermittlung

Dienstag, 8. November 2022, 17:00
Kunst und ich
Zoom-Präsentation im Dialog mit den Teilnehmer:innen rund um ausgewählte Werke der Ausstellung mit Ramona Unterberg, Kunstvermittlerin

Angebote für Familien

Dienstag bis Freitag, 14:00/16:00
Samstag und Sonntag, 12:00/14:00/16:00
Offenes Atelier
Stündige Workshops mit Verbindung zu den Ausstellungen im Zentrum Paul Klee
Für Familien mit Kindern ab 4 Jahren (bis 8 Jahre in Begleitung Erwachsener)

Dienstag bis Sonntag, 10:00 – 17:00
Fünfliber-Werkstatt
Frei zugängliche Werkstatt mit einfachen Anleitungen zu wechselnden Themen
Für Familien mit Kindern ab 4 Jahren

Samstags, 9:30 – 11:45
Kinderforum – samstags im Labor
Kunst unter Gleichaltrigen mit wechselnden Themen pro Quartal
Für Kinder und Jugendliche ab 7 Jahren

Sonntags, 10:15 – 11:30
Familienmorgen
In der Ausstellung und im Atelier des Kindermuseum Creaviva für die ganze Familie
Für Kinder und Jugendliche bis 16 Jahre kostenlos
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The Zentrum Paul Klee is open to all and offers inclusive events.

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Open on 26./31.12.22 and 1./2.1.23, 10:00–17:00
Closed on 24./25.12.22

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