"Should all be known? oh, I think not!" – Sollte alles denn gewusst sein? ach, ich glaube nein!, wrote Paul Klee on one of his very last works. “Paul Klee. Poet and Thinker” takes a fresh look at Klee, the painter who was also a poet, word acrobat, philosopher – and much more besides. At the heart of the exhibition stands Klee’s personal library to provide visitors with tangible, visible and readable evidence of the artist’s passion for literature and philosophy. Complemented by a series of fringe and educational events, the exhibition also highlights the impact of Klee’s work on thinkers and philosophers such as Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and Michel Foucault.

The artist’s mental and spiritual universe will be explored alongside recent research findings and educational approaches to an œuvre whose extraordinary complexity and sheer number constitute the physical expression of Klee’s “artistic thinking”, as he called it. The interplay of language and image inspired Klee to create new script-like symbols that reach beyond the confines of (hand-)writing. Unsurprisingly, Klee’s œuvre was studied by Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and Michel Foucault. They were among the notable twentieth-century thinkers and philosophers who considered Klee’s works to be the most inspiring and thought-provoking.

An avid reader, Klee assembled a library. Its core consists of writings that formed part of the literary canon of his day, and includes classical Greek and Latin writers. The two German literary giants, Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe are represented, the latter with his Complete Works, and so are (German) Romanticists. Klee was particularly keen on the satirists, however: Voltaire, Laurence Sterne, Edgar Allan Poe, E.T.A. Hoffmann.

Alluding to literary genres, many of Klee’s visual works provide the stage for fairy tales, tragedies and comedies. The artist specifically refers to Goethe’s narrative œuvre, for example, in a lithograph of 1912 whose title, “Vignette to Goethe: The Eternal Feminine”, quotes the last line of Part Two of Faust, Goethe’s tragic play.

For the first ever public display of Klee’s entire book collection, Bernese designer Beat Frank has created a reading lounge where the actual books from the artist’s personal library are on display. Meanwhile, visitors are encouraged to read and enjoy Klee’s books in second-hand editions, and to embark on a “brief journey to the land of better knowledge” (Klee).

A focal point of the exhibition will be Klee’s study of poets, thinkers and a wide range of literary genres – from fairy tales to tragedies – from which he drew much of his inspiration. Klee’s creative and imaginative linguistic talent reveals itself in the deep connections between visual work and choice of title. Many of Klee’s neologisms with their irony and subtle humour can prompt viewers to reach surprising and associative interpretations, and to access previously unsuspected dimensions.

Alongside his poems, Klee’s poetic predilections come to the fore in his titles. Usually the artist only named works once they were completed, finding his titles in an associative process he referred to as “the baptism of his children”. A title would sometimes occur to him in conversation with a friend, student or acquaintance. While Klee’s titles form an integral part of his visual work, most can also stand for themselves, be that as metaphors or in complement to the respective piece. Klee uses titles as signposts, albeit rather unreliable ones; they can be conventional, sardonic, satirical, fantastical. Some allude to music; others are inspired by the Bible and world literature such as myths as well as Romantic and other fiction; yet other titles contain puns and neologisms.
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Exhibition
Should all be known? Paul Klee. Poet and Thinker
20.01.–26.11.2017

Visitors who wish to uncover the connections and relationships between Klee’s works and their titles are warmly encouraged to delve into their own hoards of knowledge and experience.

“For to be a poet and to write poetry are two different things”
Paul Klee, Diary I, no 172, 1901

Exhibition launch: 19 January 2017, 6pm

Curator:
Dr. Michael Baumgartner, Director Collections Kunstmuseum Bern – Zentrum Paul Klee

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Maria-Teresa Cano, Head of Communications and Public Relations Kunstmuseum Bern - Zentrum Paul Klee,
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Fringe and educational events,  
20 January – 26 November 2017

Every Sunday, 12pm  
Guided tours of the exhibition

Every Tuesday, 12:30–1pm  
Art at Lunchtime / Kunst am Mittag

For Guided tours in English, French or Italian, please visit www.zpk.org

Wednesday, 1 February 2017, 2–3:30pm  
Introduction for teachers  
By Dominik Imhof, Head of Art Mediation

Thursday, 16 February 2017, 6pm  
The Friends of ZPK / Freunde ZPK  
Guided tour with Michael Baumgartner, Curator

Sunday, 26 March 2017, 3pm  
Guided tour  
Inclusive guided tour for visitors with and without disabilities; a feast for the five senses

Four Sundays in 2017, 3pm: 27 August / 10 September / 22 October / 12 November  
Literary guided tour  
Guided tour with Michaela Wendt, who will read literary texts that relate to works on display

Sunday, 29 October 2017, 3pm  
Art and Religion in Dialogue / Kunst und Religion im Dialog  
Beat Allemand (Reformed Church) in conversation with Dominik Imhof (Zentrum Paul Klee)  
Conversation and tour of the exhibition

Art education for families

Every Sunday, 10:30 – 11:45am  
Family Morning  
... in the exhibition and at Creaviva Children’s Museum

Tuesday to Sunday, 12pm / 2pm / 4pm  
Open Studio  
Use paint to create colourful poetry

Every Saturday, 9:30am – 12pm  
Children’s Forum  
Think with your hands/ Denken mit den Händen  
www.creaviva.org