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Hilla Rebay Lecture: “Paul Klee and German Romanticism” by Jürgen Gläsermer, 1986

VIVIAN BARNETT

— Barnett, curator of the Guggenheim. And on behalf of Tom Messer, the director of the Guggenheim Foundation and the trustees of the Hilla von Rebay Foundation, I’m very happy to welcome you here tonight for the seventh annual Hilla Rebay Lecture. It’s a great pleasure to introduce tonight’s speaker, Dr. Jürgen Gläsermer.

The Hilla Rebay Foundation established the lecture series several years ago so that we could bring distinguished speakers to the museum, one speaker each autumn, to elucidate significant art historical problems and to really consider theoretical and questions involving criticism of twentieth-century art. Hilla Rebay was, of course, the first director of the Guggenheim Museum, and as the enlightened friend and the dynamic energy behind Solomon [00:01:00] Guggenheim, she was really responsible for bringing many of the works by Paul Klee into the museum collection. Since tonight’s lecture is about Paul Klee, it’s particularly appropriate that it is under the auspices of the Rebay Foundation that we bring together one of Hilla Rebay’s favorite artists, Paul Klee, whom she knew, from whom she bought works. During the time that she was director of the museum, many of his most important works entered our collection.

Dr. Jürgen Gläsermer is the curator of the Klee Stiftung and of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Kunstmuseum in Bern. As really the leading Klee authority, he has written many scholarly, really essential volumes on Paul Klee. To be specific, a book on Klee’s Bauhaus teaching notes, three volumes [00:02:00] on Klee’s drawings from different periods of his career, and another volume on the colored works and watercolors, all in the collection of the Kunstmuseum in Bern. He’s also organized many Klee exhibitions, not only in Switzerland, but also in Germany, in Denmark, in Japan, and most imminently, in New York, where he will be the consulting curator of the Museum of Modern Art’s Klee retrospective, which opens in February.

Dr. Gläsermer is not only a Klee expert. His knowledge extends from the Baroque to the Romantic and to the very contemporary. He has written on Josef Werner, on Adolf [Gottlieb?]. He has organized an exhibition of Picasso’s early work, and has also organized a series of performances at the Kunstmuseum in Bern. During the summer of 1985, [00:03:00] he presented a superb exhibition called *Traum und Wahrheit*, which consisted of works from the German Romanticism that belonged to museums in East Germany.

Dr. Gläsermer’s lecture this evening, on Klee and German Romanticism, will draw upon his knowledge of the older art of the Romantic Germany period, his perceptions about contemporary art, and of course his great expertise on the work of Paul Klee. It’s a great pleasure to welcome Jürgen Gläsermer to the Guggenheim. (applause)

JÜRGEN GLÄSEMER

Dear ladies and gentlemen, I’m very honored and pleased to speak to you tonight on Klee and German Romanticism. I have to excuse that I have to read this [00:04:00] lecture. English is not my real language, and unfortunately, I have to use this manuscript. So I hope you won’t get bored. Could I have the two first slides, please?

In the vast literature on Klee, there is scarcely a writer who has not at least touched on the

connections between the artist and Romanticism. Viola. I hope it's... [00:05:00] Okay. In the vast literature on Klee, there's scarcely a writer who has not yet at least touched on the connection between the artist and Romanticism. It is all the more surprising, then, that a full study of this subject has yet to be written. Romantic elements, as we find them in these two paintings — one on the left, the *Villa R* from 1919, from the collection in Basel, and on the right, the *Golden Fish* from 1925, in Hamburg, which was attacked a few years ago by a visitor in the museum, and also completely destroyed, which shows how even emotional this kind of Romantic art can be for certain people. Romantic elements, [00:06:00] like in these two paintings, are generally seen and also described as fairytale-like, magical, poetic, playful, childlike, spooky, [miniaturistic?], and so on. Even Klee himself has defined his style as Romantic. In 1914, at the beginning of the First World War, he writes in his diaries, "[Anger?] is said to have given order to repose. I want to go beyond emotion, to give order to movement. The new Romanticism." Not long after that, he writes, also in his diaries, "The cool Romanticism of my style, without pathos, is unheard of. The more terrifying the world, as it certainly is today, the more abstract the art, whereas a happy world brings forth an art of the here and now."

[00:07:00] German Romanticism signifies far more than a historical style dating from 1800. It is the expression of *Weltanschauung*, the constant balancing of expansive optimism and a sense of defeat. To attempt to convey the nature and meaning of Romanticism to someone unprepared to enter into areas of perception beyond the limits of what can be grasped by reason alone is futile, as hopeless as trying to explain the expressive and communicative possibilities of music to a person who is tone-deaf and unreceptive to it. But if, for some reason, one were to resist coming to terms with the express element of Romanticism in Klee's work, then it would not be all together out of place to expose his definition [00:08:00] of cool Romanticism. Let us, for the sake of argument, state this case, which cannot be ignored in examining Klee, the Romantic.

Couldn't it be said that Klee, with all his fairytale scenes, moonlight, sensitive flowers, animals, children, geniuses, and angels in his pictures was merely responding to a sentimental Romantic culture of sensibility, found increasingly among culture [avid?] intellectuals and [athletes?] at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially during and immediately after the First World War? After all, to withdraw as far as possible from the bitter realities, instead of facing up to them, is not an uncommon tendency of a socially privileged class in times of great crisis. Couldn't it be even documented that Klee's Romantic style was, at heart, a shrewd, [00:09:00] deliberate response to contemporary conditions in the art market, and to the demands of his potential clientele, which came primarily from well-situated middle-class circles? Such an argument cannot be refuted merely by counterarguments. The positions one takes must be based on thorough investigation of what Klee defined as his Romantic style, and placed in the context of his view of life as a whole.

When Klee defined his style as cool Romanticism in 1914, he was obviously not only talking about the Romantic motifs in his pictures. Like all German Romantics, he was concerned, in a much more complex way, with an [00:10:00] individual view of the world. The most programmatic formulation of his ideas, in existential terms, occurs in the well-known aphorism, which I show you here in his handwriting, from a catalog from 1920, from his first one-man show he had in Munich. This text can be translated as "I am not at all graspable in this world."

He says, "Diesseitig bin ich gar nicht fassbar." In connection with this lecture, I have to tell you that this word *diesseitig* is really the main purpose of what I am trying to communicate, and it's almost impossible to translate. This is typical. This is typical for the German expression of Romanticism. [00:11:00] *Diesseitig* is the contrary of *jenseitig*. It means "on this side" in contrast to "the other side," but the German doesn't locate it like "here" and "there." For the German *diesseitig* means the here and now, as well as the earth, or the life in which we are, in contrast to eternity or to the heaven, to the upper world.

So, "I am not at all graspable in this world" means in the here and now. "For I live as much with the dead as with the unborn, somewhat closer to the heart of creation than usual, but not nearly close enough. Does warmth emanate from me? Coolness? Beyond all order, there is nothing to discuss. I am most devout when I'm furthest away. In this world, [00:12:00] sometimes a little malicious about the misfortune of others. These are merely nuances. The priests just aren't devout enough to see it, and they are a bit offended, these authorities of scripture." We must first ask what Klee meant when he wrote that he was not graspable in this world, what there is in this attitude that can be called Romantic, and what the consequences were for him as a person and for his work.

A comparison of two pictures will help to make clear where the perceptions of the Romantics of 1800 touch those of Klee. At first glance, Caspar David Friedrich *Wandered of the Sea of Fog*, which you see here on the left, from around 1818, a typical work [00:13:00] of German Romanticism, seems to have nothing in common with Klee's watercolor *Mural From the Temple of Longing "Over There"* from 1922, which now belongs to the Metropolitan Museum, as a gift from Mr. Berggruen. Klee's composition, on the right, is a complicated, restless construction, with lines that seem to have been drawn with a ruler and compass. The objects in Friedrich's picture, instead, are immediately recognizable. The title is almost unnecessary. A man, seen from the back, stands like a monument atop a cliff. He gazes out over a mountain landscape, covered by a sea of fog, which stretches out before him as far as the horizon. The dark silhouette of the figure, like a [00:14:00] paper cutout, stands in marked contrast to the highly lit background.

As we ask ourselves what the idea is being expressed, the two pictures begin to look remarkably similar. Friedrich places his wanderer monumentally, in the center of the picture. He stands at the top, where the various horizontal and diagonal X's intersect. All parts of the composition come to focus on this wanderer, who, with his back to the viewer, has turned away from the outside world. We, the viewers, thus become unobserved observers, not unlike a psychiatrist standing behind a patient on the couch. If we are willing to continue this game of roleplaying, we will ask ourselves what the perceptions and feelings of this figure might be, and we will try to [00:15:00] enter into the experience that moves this wanderer as he looks over the broad fog-bound landscape.

Friedrich's setting of the scene, with his central figure seen from the back, corresponds to Klee's invitation to find the intended meaning in his language of geometric ciphers and symbols. Klee's title is the necessary vehicle of this meaning, and it is, therefore, an inseparable part of his representation, like the captions under a cartoon, which delivers the point of the joke. The title of the watercolor is *Mural From the Temple of Longing*, quotation mark, "Over There." To be

absolutely sure that no one will misunderstand, Klee adds an arrow, a pedantic little [00:16:00] joke, at the second part of the title in quotation marks, "Over There." You can't see it, I think, but you have to believe me, it's here at the end of the title. As you may know, Klee's watercolors and drawings are all signed and titled by him on the cardboard on which they are mounted.

Friedrich's wanderer gazes at nature, which spreads out before him, just as it might have looked at the first day of creation. He stands, transfixed by the infiniteness of nature, but his desire to become part of that infiniteness goes against reality. The wanderer remains prudently at the edge of the [evers?]. His thoughts and feelings are thus in opposition to his physical existence, just as the dark foreground is in contrast [00:17:00] to the light, ethereal expanse of the landscape.

Students of Friedrich have assumed that, in his statue-like figure of the wanderer, the painter is paying homage to a friend who died in the German wars of liberation of 1813-1815. The political background of the painting is not unimportant to our understanding of the development of German Romanticism as a whole. The conclusion of the wars of independence from Napoleonic rule at the Congress of Vienna destroyed all the hopes of the Romantics for revolutionary change in Germany, and for the realization of their intellectual and political ideals. It put the final seal on the typical Romantic dilemma of powerlessness.

What does all [00:18:00] this have to do with Klee? It is my contention that his watercolor makes the same point as Friedrich's painting. Its poetically heightened title, *Mural From the Temple of Longing "Over There,"* informs us that a temple has been dedicated to longing. This typically German leitmotif, *Sehnsucht*, longing, is the driving force behind German Romanticism, forging the bonds between the opposite posts of earthly constraint and cosmic, unrestricted freedom of movement. It is a feeling at once alluring and tormenting, a striving for imagined, not clearly defined, perhaps physically unrealizable goals. What is desired is inherently unattainable. [00:19:00] Klee's arrows symbolize thoughts and feelings filled with this longing, with scenes of it. They move weightlessly over there, toward the infinity of the stars.

I found a commentary on this watercolor that Klee himself wrote in its owner's guestbook, dated Braunschweig, October 1, 1923. You see that here. It summarizes, in a few sentences, the basic elements of the artist's Romantic view of the world. Klee begins by drawing a perpendicular line and adding the words. You see here the line. "We stand erect and rooted in the earth." Does this not at once recall Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer [00:20:00] of the Sea of Fog?* Friedrich's figure is a very epitome of erect stance in Klee's sense. In the language of *Temple of Longing*, that figure is replaced by perpendicular lines, the lower end of which are rooted in the earth, as Klee describes it, by broad bends of shadow. You see these lines here and here, the shadows.

Next, Klee draws a small pendulum, with the explanation — see it here — with the explanation, "Currents move as lightly back and forth." By this, he meant that our freedom of movement in the physical realm of Earth is [an inhibit?] dynamics, and a mere reflection of free movement. In keeping with his remark, [00:21:00] the vertical lines in *Temple of Longing* seem to move lightly, gently, back and forth. You see these movements here, also directed by the arrows.

Finally, Klee explains the drawing of a curved line, an arrow and a circle, symbolizing the stars. You see here the curved line for endless lines, and here, the circle. The only free longing is the longing to go over there, to moons and suns. He alludes to the many circular signs he inserted time and again in the upper part of the pictures to symbolize the cosmic regions of moons and suns. The [00:22:00] motif runs through all his work. It appears to the same Romantic longing for the infinite that Friedrich visualized, as a distant expanse of foggy landscape, and that is reflected in the many references to infinite nature — the blue flower, the cosmos, the stars — found in the German Romantic poetry of Jean Paul, Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, or Joseph von Eichendorff. The essential difference between Friedrich's and Klee's picture is, therefore, in their conceptual form. The content they convey is similar. Klee, who composes in a language of symbols and signals, with the help of title and supplementary explanation, charts a course in the Romantic perception of the world and the culture of sensibility. Now, we [00:23:00] also gain a certain insight into what he meant when he said that he is not graspable in this world, and in what way he covered up this attitude with his abstract pictorial language.

The comparison of the Romanticism of around 1800 with Klee's in the first half of the twentieth century makes sense only if we grant the concept of timeless aspects going beyond its historical, limited definition. To attempt to define historical Romanticism in the time of profound economic, political, and religious upheaval around 1800 can, to a degree, also provide a basis for understanding the Romantic view of life 1914, or even today. Changes in the religious viewpoint [00:24:00] at the end of the 18th century were not the least of the course of the Romantic temper and attitude of mind. Belief in the divine was supplanted by knowledge. Idea and reality were no longer synonymous, and, as a consequence, the direct communication with heaven was broken off once and for all. In contrast to the followers of the Enlightenment, who opposed scientific knowledge to the subjectivity of human sensibility, the Romantics experienced the decline of faith as a heavy loss. The decisive point of departure for the Romantic view of life has always been the totality, the cosmos, and the interrelationship within nature, natural [00:25:00] creation.

Klee's concept of Romanticism, which he defined at the outbreak of the First World War in terms of a style and an attitude toward life, was the result of a long personal development in which both individual and external circumstances played their part. It began during his childhood in Bern. You see here on the right side, a photo of Klee, the young Klee, in the year 1900. And on the left side, a photo of his father, his mother, and his sister from 1908, which really looks to me always like a scene from an Ibsen play. The atmosphere in which Klee grew up [00:26:00] was imbued by the late Romantic Biedermeier culture of the Swiss middle-class, against whose narrowness he began to rebel during the time of his etched inventions, that is, between 1902 and 1905.

In his etching of *The Hero with the Wing* from 1905, which you see here on the left side — it's five years after this picture was taken of him — he succeeded in expressing the condition he describes in a form that what remained valid for him through his life. The longing for a free, dynamic movement toward the infinite goes counter to reality. The hero with the wing has only a very limited capacity to fly. Klee commented on this [00:27:00] etching in his diary. I quote, "The hero with the wing, a tragic comic hero. This human being, born with only one angel's

wing, in contrast to divine beings, staunchly tries to fly. In doing so, he breaks his arm and leg, but still manages to bear up under the banner of his ideas."

Thus, Klee's Romantic stance as an artist was already defined at the beginning of the century. The attitude embodied in the 1905 *Hero with the Wing* can be distinguished from Klee's formulation, some 20 years later, in the *Mural of Temple of Longing "Over There"* by its pathos, which is retained, tragically, in the figure's ruined condition. What is really new in [00:28:00] Klee's definition around 1914 is not, therefore, the idea of Romanticism, but the discovery that the pathos of its basically tragic mood could be sublimated by putting it in quotes. Contemplation of the tragic is moved to a distance. Through abstraction, the ruined hero is made into a symbol, a marionette, a little stick figure, or, like in this watercolor, non-objective signs charged with meaning

Romantic inwardness was so much a part of Klee's temperament that it is apparent even in the way he carried himself. You see [00:29:00] two self-portraits from 1909. The dreamy yet penetrating look, the head leaning pensively on a hand, like in the manner of (inaudible), this is the pose in which he repeatedly portrayed himself in the years between 1908 and 1911. There is one funny photo from the early Bauhaus period where he even looks like that. In the lithograph *Absorption* from 1919, the German title is *Versunkenheit*, which also could be translated as "lost in thoughts." However, inwardness becomes its very trademark. [00:30:00] It is a self-caricature, both ironic and earnest, as if to say, "I am Buddha." *Absorption* is an artistic construction, as well as a mask and an identity. The fact that sentimental schoolgirls worshipped Klee ecstatically as the Bauhaus Buddha didn't seem to bother him. You see a caricature from 1930, from one of his friends in the Bauhaus.

To a certain extent, the mystical, religious aftertaste was unavoidable with the form of inwardness Klee was striving for. Klee's attitude toward life, and his concept of art, are Romantic not only in his [00:31:00] absorption as such. What links him closely to the Romantics of 1800 is his claim to an inward observation of objects. As a Romantic, he wants to bring the ego and the object into a resonant relationship that goes beyond optical formations. In 1923, he summed up his ideas in his essay "Ways of Nature Study" with a schematic diagram, which you see on the right side. It shows the artist's eye, the object as you, and the three ways of relating, of the relation of these two things, directly optically, through the earth, and the third way, [00:32:00] through the cosmos, as it's mentioned here, through the world. The center and recipient of all impulses emanating from the earth, the cosmos, and the object is the artist's eye. By his work, he creates, in resonance with the universe, a parable of God's work. In Klee's view, art as a parable of creation is itself a rebirth of nature.

Klee's late painting *Intention* — the German title is *Vorhaben*, [00:33:00] also to have before you — from 1938, which belongs to the Klee Foundation, and is, for the moment, as a loan in the Museum of Modern Art. Klee's late painting *Intention* is a good illustration of the deliberate separation between the internal and the external. It has the clear elements of a self-portrait. A counter-figure with head and eye divides the left half of the picture from the right. In the narrow left-hand part, a stick figure, a dog, a tree, and other elements, painted in a sign-like shorthand, are crowded together outside the figure as images of the external world. You can possibly recognize, here, this figure with the head, the arms, and the legs here, [00:34:00] a dog-kind of

thing, and some tree symbols.

In the right field, inside the figure — okay, you see it here, too. This area. That is, within the creative realm of imagining or intention, a dynamic play of non-objective signs takes place over a lively, fleshly colored ground. Fate prescribes different path for the inwardly turned Romantic. He either runs tragically around on the rocks of eternal reality as a visionary individualist, or he tries to find a balance between poles [00:35:00] as a humorist. Klee chose to look at reality with the abstracting help of humor, satire, and irony. In this respect, he has a good deal in common with Jean Paul, who was a peripheral, individualistic figure from the period of German Romanticism. Both turned their eyes toward infinity, but without losing touch with the ground under their feet. Jean Paul's comparison of the humorist with the ancient bird Merops, which flies backward, with its tail pointed upwards in direction toward eternity, so that its gaze from the distance remains fastened on the things below, surely applies to Klee.

Humor, satire, and caricature are the very heart of Romanticism, and reach their culmination [00:36:00] in the concept of Romantic irony. The concept remains ambiguous. Romantic irony can be defined as a form of self-knowledge. It presupposes the cool aloofness to external reality, and the venture of individual intellectual freedom. The well-known definitions of Romantic irony by Schlegel, Schelling, Tieck, and Novalis read like subtle descriptions of Klee's concept. Of being as free as possible in the here and now, without losing sight of either the real or the ideal, either the *diesseits* or the *jenseits*. It is curious that in the entire literature on Klee, scarcely anyone has seriously attempted to define his humor, his satire, and his irony, [00:37:00] yet his art is completely unthinkable without them. Grotesquerie, farce, comedy, playfulness, and the wittily unfathomable: these are the perspectives through which Klee relativized not only the external world, but himself and his own activity.

Caricature as a medium is especially suited to a formal representation of distanced reflections on reality. It is one of the most important sources of Klee's art, and he directed all his intellectual and creative talent toward shaping its compositional principles into a style of his own. Klee's form of pictorial thinking could not have been achieved without the particular combination of visual and linguistic elements [00:38:00] it afforded, picture and title. As a further abstraction, caricature was an altogether unacademic genre, the special quality of which lay in the experimentation it allowed with markedly individual styles of drawing. Klee raised caricature to a broader, higher level of artistic expression by freeing it from its bondage to a momentary theme, and by giving limitless extension to its pictorial possibilities.

Not only his drawings, but many of his paintings as well, can be interpreted as subtle caricatures. Thus, his *Revolution of the Viaduct* from 1937, which you see on the left side, which belongs to the museum in Hamburg, with its [hatless?] architectural forms, constructed [00:39:00] according the geometric rules, unmistakably caricatures mass movements, which Klee comments on in 1937, a few years before the First World War, without allowing his playful expression to spill over into pathos. In *Everything Comes Running After*, from 1940, which you see on the right side, which belongs to the Klee Foundation, painted shortly before his death, in a caricature manner like that of the *Revolution of the Viaduct*, Klee depicts the constraint placed on the inwardly turned individual by external things. The here and now, dripping on little legs, pursues the figure, which has escaped to the right edge of the picture and tries to defend itself against the

onslaught with an [00:40:00] exclamation mark. In works such as these, Klee succeeds with self-irony in reaching the highest plateau of expression in the media of caricature

As quoted before, he says about himself, “I am most devout when I am furthest way. In this world, sometimes a little malicious about the misfortunes of others. These are merely nuances.” Devoutness or maliciousness? Longing to go over there or Romantic irony? Abstraction and color or figural ciphers and drawing? Essentially, the expressive qualities of these poles are distinguished for Klee only by a shift of view [00:41:00] between the distance and the here and now, as if this bird, *Merops*, by Jean Paul, just turns around 180 degrees. Figures like the *Angel Still Female* from 1939, which you see here, which belongs to the Klee Foundation in Bern, too, dwell in Klee’s own elevated domain. With one eye, the angel gazes upwards in direction of heaven. Here, this eye, you see. With the other, it glances suspiciously at what is left of its breasts, all that remains of its former sexual existence on earth as it goes on its way over there. In pictures such as these, Klee still found enough humor to caricature his own dying only a [00:42:00] few months before his death.

The tense polar relationship between the levels of the here and now and the beyond serves as a philosophical system determining Klee’s entire pictorial thought and creation. In 1902, he set down a scheme in his diary that would serve as a framework for his view of the world until the end of his life. The poles of the here and now and the transcendent were further ordered into the following pairs of antithetical concepts. Antiquity and Christianity; physicality and psyche; objective vision, subjective vision; worldly orientation, spiritual orientation; architectural emphasis and musical emphasis. Later, he added other concepts [00:43:00] to these opposing pairs, the most important being static in the terrestrial realm, and dynamics in the creative expression of the transcendental.

Klee, with his concept of polarity, and the dissoluble bond between art and reality, is not the only late Romantic among twentieth-century German artists. Also the work of Joseph Beuys was based on a pervasive way of thinking in polarities. It reveals how deeply rooted Romanticism is, even today, in the culture of German-speaking countries. Like Klee, he saw art as a genesis, as the making visible of a dynamic process. His idea of an all-powerful creative [00:44:00] movement in life and in art was realized for him in the polar opposites of warm and cold, liquid and solid, active and passive, vacuum and mass, chaos and form. You see here, on the left side, one of his performances from the early ’70s in Cologne, which had the title *Vacuum and Mass*.

For Beuys, art and life were even more seamlessly, and above all, more actively knit together than they were for Klee. He never stopped arguing against all elitists claim for art as an integrated, comprehensible part of life. In contrast with Klee, Beuys consistently tried to break down the [00:45:00] barriers of exclusive individualism in his political actions as an artist. In this respect, he clearly resembles the artist whom Ludwig Marcuse, drawing on comparable examples from the nineteenth century, defines in his essay “Reactionary and Progressive Romanticism” — “*Reaktionäre und Progressive Romantik*” — as a progressive Romantic. Klee was not exactly a representative of a revolutionary avant-garde among the artists of his generation. The protective framework of middle-class family life gave him an important social reserve.

A biting caricature of the young Klee family, made in Munich in 1908, by his friend [Hans Zondager?] speaks for itself. [00:46:00] Klee, strutting about arm-in-arm with his sturdy wife of two years, striking a pose with its chest out, utterly preoccupied with himself and his status as an up-and-coming bourgeois artist, asks his friend, "Well, now, are you drawing much from nature?" Still, it was the same [Zondager?] who wrote the following sincere and admiring remarks to Klee in 1931. I quote from a letter from [Zondager?]. "Scarcely anyone can equal you in the way you have gained such a firm foothold in the transcendental, as if you were standing on the most solid tradition."

[00:47:00] One cannot speak of Klee as a Romantic without at least touching upon the subject of music. Even in his daily life, he found it a necessary element of his well-being. That his wife was a trained pianist, and that he himself regularly played music with his friends until the end of his life, has a decisive influence in his Romantic attitude toward life, as well as in his understanding of art. On the right side, you see a photo from beginning of the century with some artist friends, where they play quintet. You see the Staffelei [easel], where they put the notes on. On the left side, I show you a watercolor from 1930, which is a good example [00:48:00] of how Klee tried to transform musical ideas into a pictorial language. The title is *Polyphon gefasstes Weiss*. He tries to transform the idea of polyphony into the picture in putting these different layers of color, one over the other, so that you can see it as a chord.

Music was a reliable means for gaining access to realms of feeling, and it provided him with a measure of exploring the rules of composition, and the precision of execution involved in the creation of a work of art. There is no question that Klee arrived at the profound understanding of Romanticism by way of his musicality [00:49:00] and his knowledge and love of music from Bach, Mozart, and Schubert to Wagner and Jacques Offenbach. The ideas of Romanticism are more obviously embodied in music than in any other artistic genre, for the content of music is unrestricted, and its expression is directed entirely toward feeling. Its dynamics are without weight.

I am showing you here another comparison between a famous Romantic painting, Runge's *Kleine Morgen*. It's a part of a cycle of daytimes, which he planned to execute in large paintings to show them as one of the first *Gesamtkunstwerke*, total artworks in a room which should have been construed specially for that, where [00:50:00] music should have been played all the time. I compare it with this watercolor by Klee, which title is *Eros*, which again shows this way from the here and now to the other world, in the development of colors with this arrow.

Important, though, the stimuli of painting, poetry, or past and present philosophy, undoubtedly where the final standard of perfection in art, for Klee, was music. Beside, no academic aftertaste clung to its inspiration. No one has recognized and defined the influence of music on Klee's artistic development and on his Romantic idealism more clearly than Wilhelm Hausenstein, the first monograph on the artist from 1920. I quote from Hausenstein — [00:51:00] and Hausenstein really experienced Klee personally. "It is precisely in the impartibility of the person that its origin lies. In the shutting out of influences, in the deflection of tradition and community, in the completeness of isolation. It is music that joined the painter draftsman Klee and his idealism to tradition. Others derived what was traditional in their painting from painting." This deflection of community, this search for the completeness of isolation, also had social

consequences, which, in Klee's case, were expressed as much in his ironic, reflected flight [00:52:00] into the bourgeois ideal as in his wanderings on the edge of the [evers?] of madness.

I am just, at the end, comparing here two other works, one by Klee and one painting by Caspar David Friedrich. The swing back and forth between aloofness and madness constitutes yet another topos of Romanticism and the history of its interpretation. After all, no less a figure than Goethe stated, I quote, "I call the classical healthy, the Romantic sick." And in this context, went so far as to set the notions, classical — strong, fresh, joyous, and healthy — in opposition to Romantic — weak, sickly, and [00:53:00] sick. In the final analysis, such utterances always imply a deep personal dismay. The fact that the National Socialists in Germany used similar criteria when they denigrated Klee as a degenerate artist speaks for the sincerity of his Romantic attitude. He never made a secret of his personal weaknesses, his loneliness, his fears, and his illusions.

In a tiny drawing, a caricature of a little stick figure from 1912, with arms raised in complaint, Klee added the following poem, which can also be taken as a highly personal interpretation of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Over the Sea of Fog*. I will read it at first [00:54:00] in German, and then the translation.

[Weh mir unter dem Sturmwind, 1912]

Weh mir unter dem Sturmwind / ewig fliehender Zeit / Weh mir in der Verlassenheit / ringsum in der Mitte allein / Weh mir tief unten / auf dem vereisten Grunde Wahn.

[translation of Weh mir unter dem Sturmwind, 1912]

Woe is me in the stormy wind / of eternally fleeing time. / Woe is me alone, / ringed in by isolation. / Woe is me. Far below, / on the ice-encrusted ground, is madness.

In view of such perceptions is the argument that Klee's Romanticism is nothing but a flight from reality into a world of fantasy, finally not unnecessary. The consequence of his aloofness with respect to this world was a profound isolation. The result in his work, in contrast, [00:55:00] was an inexhaustible wealth of inner movements, and of transitions between the formal elements of artistic production and his conceptual statements. Working with spontaneity and deliberation at once, Klee created, under a Romantic concept, a new world from within, in which the outside world was mirrored. Thank you very much. (applause)

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