

Klee - Melotti

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Artists' Biographies

Paul Klee

Paul Klee was born on 18 December 1879 in Münchenbuchsee, a small town near Bern. His father taught music and his mother was an opera singer. Klee grew up in a cultured and refined family environment, and was encouraged to study music, drawing and literature. He played the violin and when he was just eleven he was already an associate member of the orchestra in Bern.

In 1898, having completed secondary school, he moved to Munich, his aim being to study drawing and painting. A point of reference of Mittel-European culture, *fin de siècle* Munich was a place where intellectuals and artists from the various European countries converged, as well as being a centre for the dissemination of the Jugendstil. In 1900 Klee was accepted at the Academy, where he attended the classes taught by Franz Von Stuck. In 1901-1902 he took his first trip to Italy.

Between 1903 and 1905 Klee began the cycle of etchings entitled *Inventions or Opus I*, in which ideas stemming from caricatures and popular prints were combined with the exploration of a new formal synthesis. In 1906 he married Lily Stumpf. Their son Felix was born in 1907.

Klee held his first solo show at the Kunstmuseum of Bern in 1910 (after which it travelled to other Swiss museums).

In 1911 Klee embarked on his first journey to Paris, where he met Robert Delaunay, a key figure in the development of an early exploration of „pure painting“. That same year he came into contact with Kandinsky, Marc and Macke, and in 1912 he joined Der Blaue Reiter.

Of essential importance in the artist's path to abstract art was his journey to Tunisia in 1914, after which he wrote: „Color possesses me. I don't have to pursue it. It will possess me always, I know it“. In the series of watercolours he made while in Tunisia and upon returning to Munich, a pivotal role is played by the dialectic that is established between interior sensitivity and exterior world, that is, the artist's experience involving nature, landscape and light. That was the moment when the artist's poetic was determined, whose ineffable area of research was balanced on the edge, forever wavering between figuration and abstraction.

In 1917 Klee's work – which until then had been largely ignored by the market and the critics – started to obtain its first significant reactions. He held a successful exhibition at *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin. This was followed by shows in Munich and Zurich, where he was especially appreciated by the Dadaists.

Between 1921 and 1931 Klee taught at the Bauhaus. It was through teaching that he became more conscious of some of the aspects of his research and was able to delve more deeply into its theoretical side: in the writings dated to those years Klee dealt with crucial issues related to form and the relationship between art and nature.

The Bauhaus period was also a prolific one from a creative standpoint. In those years Klee travelled



a great deal, choosing as his destination Mediterranean locations, where he could come into contact with the traces of an ancient past, the art forms and the languages that belonged to archaeology and prehistory. In 1925 he participated in an exhibition of the Surrealist artists in Paris. In 1931 he left the Bauhaus and accepted a teaching position at Düsseldorf Academy, although the experience lasted a very short time.

In 1933, due to the Nazi repression of artists, Klee's home in Dessau was searched and ransacked, and he was forced to leave Germany and return to Switzerland. He returned to Bern, to the places of his childhood. In 1935 the Kunsthalle in Bern dedicated a major retrospective to the artist's work. Later, with a few variations, the show travelled to the Kunsthalle in Basel. During that same period the first signs of a rare and untreatable skin disease appeared, scleroderma. In spite of his failing health, Klee's output peaked during the last years of his life. Klee passed away during the night between 28 and 29 June at a clinic in *Sant'Agnese* in Muralto.



Fausto Melotti

Fausto Melotti was born on 8 June 1901 in Rovereto. It was within his family environment that Melotti learned to love music. It was a passion that brought him close to his sisters and cousins.

In Rovereto he frequented Gino Pollini, Adalberto Libera and Fortunato Depero, thanks to whom he came into contact with avant-garde art. He became familiar with Futurism, the work of Cocteau, Picasso and Stravinsky, as well as the metaphysical sphere. When World War I broke out, Melotti and his family moved to Florence. He continued his studies at the University of Pisa, which he then completed in Milan, where he was awarded a degree in Electrotechnical Engineering at Milan Polytechnic in 1924.

Between 1925 and 1926 he moved to Turin. He enrolled at the Accademia Albertina and devoted himself to sculpture in the sculptor Pietro Canonica's studio.

In 1928 he moved to Milan. He studied at the Accademia di Brera and attended courses taught by Adolfo Wildt. It was there that he met and became close friends with Lucio Fontana. Melotti drew from Wildt his respect for and dedication to the sculptor's trade, the need to maintain absolute control over the execution.

Starting in the early 1930s Melotti began to collaborate with the Rationalist architects, extending to architecture the horizons of his own artistic investigation. Some of his sculptures were included in the *Casa Elettrica*, designed by Figini and Pollini for the 4th Triennale Monzese di Arti Decorative in 1930, and in *Bar Craja*, designed by Baldessari, Figini and Pollini, with the assistance of Nizzoli. In 1930 Melotti met Gio Ponti and through him began to collaborate with the Richard Ginori company, making small sculptures and objects in ceramics and porcelain. In 1932 Melotti began to teach a free course on Modern Plastic at the *Scuola Professionale del Mobile* in Cantù.

In 1934 Melotti joined the group of abstract artists that gravitated around the Galleria *Il Milione*. In 1935 he showed his work at the *Prima mostra collettiva di arte astratta italiana* held at the Turin studio of Felice Casorati and Enrico Paolucci, and immediately after he had his first solo show at the *Il Milione*. That same year he and Fontana embraced the Abstraction-Création movement. In 1937 he travelled to Paris where he visited the Exposition Universelle and met Kandinsky, who expressed appreciation for the artist's works which he was familiar with through reproductions.

Between 1937–38 and 1943 Melotti was involved in some large public commissions, such as the decorations for the Palazzo delle Forze Armate, designed by Figini and Pollini as part of the work being done for the E42—the Esposizione Universale di Roma wanted by Mussolini to celebrate fascism's twentieth anniversary.

In 1943 the artist's studio in Milan was bombed. In 1944 Melotti began to produce his "*Teatrini*" (Small Theatres), works made up of a house-cum-frame on the inside of which objects, figures and characters breathe life into intensely evocative stories featuring metaphysical atmospheres.

Melotti and his wife Lina Marcolongo's first daughter, Cristina, was born in 1945, followed by Marta in 1946. After the war ended the artist's work with ceramics intensified. During this period he executed his cycle of "bas-reliefs". During the 1950s Melotti executed some major decorative work in public locations. Over the course of the decade Melotti participated in some major events, such as the Venice Biennale, the Triennial in Milan and the Quadriennial in Rome. In addition to his work with ceramics, he began to paint and make slender, thread-like sculptures of welded brass, which paved the way for a remarkable new season.

In the 1960s his work was the focus of the critics and his abstract production from the 1930s was the object of an important rediscovery. Many collections of his writings were published and he received ceramics and sculpture awards. Starting in the 1970s a series of major anthological and retrospective exhibitions were held at the Museum am Ostwall in Dortmund (1971), Galleria Civica in Turin (1972), Palazzo Reale in Milan (1979), Forte del Belvedere in Florence (1981), and the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome in 1983.

Melotti died on 22 June 1986 in Milan. The following day the Venice Biennale opened, and a commemorative plaque was placed at the entrance of the hall where his works were on display. The jury awarded him a *Leone d'Oro* in memoriam.

