

Paul KLEE (Münchenbuchsee 1879 - Muralto 1940)

Landscape in the Lower Alps (Voralpine Landschaft)
Oil on paper.

A study of a horse or donkey(?) drawn in ink on the verso, backed.

Faintly signed *Klee* in brown ink at the lower left.

180 x 280 mm. (7 1/8 x 11 in.) [sheet]

'For Klee, making an art of landscape was not…an exclusive category…He did not seek to challenge nature but to learn from its methods, he did not approach the external landscape as matter for interpretation but as a matrix of experience – landscape meant a certain scale, certain modes of color, an atmosphere, a tracing of memories, a sense of community, a metaphor for even wider spaces.' (David Burnett, 'Paul Klee: The Romantic Landscape', Art Journal, Summer 1977, p.323).

In the autumn of 1935 Paul Klee began suffering from the debilitating skin disease scleroderma; an autoimmune disorder that left him unable to paint or draw for long periods of time. Although in the course of the following year he made a number of visits to mountain clinics for treatment that helped to alleviate his condition, he was only able to produce a total of twenty-five works during the whole of 1936. By February of 1937, however, Klee's health had improved to the extent that he was able to work prolifically again, with the result that 1937 and 1938 were among the most productive of the final years of his career; in 1937 he created 264 works, and the following year the number rose to 489. As one scholar has noted of these late paintings and drawings, 'Klee seems to have derived a paradoxical vitality from the conscious, profound process of coming to terms with disease and the approach of death, a vitality that significantly transformed his art.' Characterized by a vigour and inventiveness, Klee's works of the late 1930s also often display his experimentation with various techniques and combinations of oil, chalk and watercolour.

Previously known only from a black-and-white photograph, this vibrant oil sketch on paper of 1937 depicts an Alpine landscape with pine trees, and recalls the time that the artist spent in spas and health clinics in the Swiss mountains during the previous months. Although drawn the same year that Klee was being publicly disparaged in Nazi propaganda, with his work shown at the Entartente Kunst exhibition and his paintings removed from museum collections, the present sheet displays no trace of any reference to this tumultuous period near the end of the artist's life. Klee's characteristic serpentine line,

dividing the composition and directing the viewer's eye to the cluster of pine trees at the top, and the use of complimentary pastel colours, serve to highlight the artist's ever-present imagination and his undying sense of optimism.

The ink drawing of what seems to be a horse or donkey with a disproportionally large head, visible beneath the backing on the verso of this alpine landscape, has remained unpublished until now. It may be likened to a charcoal drawing entitled by the artist Esel, aus der Hand fressend ('Donkey, Eating out of the Hand'), of the same date and apparently drawn shortly before the present sheet, in the collection of the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern.

As one modern scholar has written, 'Klee was a gardener in a little piece of paradise. Under his direction his charges blossomed beautifully, full of harmony and grace. His motifs seem to develop with consummate ease, almost – it would seem – of their own accord, and whatever basic note he strikes, his colours contrast in such a way that their sound blends in inevitable harmony. Even when he compresses his pictorial resources to the utmost, he never slips into anything uncontrolled or random. Klee formulates subtly sensitive offerings for the viewer's eye, offerings so cautious and gentle that they readily elide consumption in this day and age. Paul Klee's art demands undivided attention – and it is also capable of opening one's eyes to something that lies beyond the image itself.'

The present sheet was among several works by Paul Klee sold in New York by the expatriate German art dealers J. B. Neumann and Karl Nierendorf, who from 1938 onwards actively promoted the artist's work in America. Landscape in the Lower Alps (Voralpine Landschaft) was purchased by Dr. Eric Ponder, a distinguished American haematologist who assembled a small but choice collection of works by Klee.

Exhibitions

Paris, Galerie Simon, *Paul Klee: oeuvres récentes*, 1938, no.38; New York, Nierendorf Galleries, *Exhibition Paul Klee*, November 1938, no.58 (as *Alpine Foothills*); Geneva, Galerie du Perron, *Paul Klee: Exposition*, 1965, no.26; London, Brook Street Gallery, *Klee*, 1966, no.31 (as *Alpine Foothills*).

Literature:

Paul Klee, *Oeuvre-Katalog*, MS., 1937, no.11; Bern, Paul Klee Foundation, *Paul Klee. Catalogue Raisonné*, Vol.7 1934-1938, 2003, p.219, no.6947 (1937.11), as location unknown; Bern, Zentrum *Paul Klee, Jahresbericht 2018*, 2019, p.12.

Artist description:

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A painter, draughtsman and writer, Paul Klee was born near Bern and studied in Munich under Franz von Stuck. His first independent works date from around 1903, and three years later he settled in Munich, where he met Wassily Kandinsky and became a member of the Neue Künstlervereinigung (New Artist's Association) and the Blauer Reiter (Blue Rider) group. He had his first one-man exhibitions at Herwarth Walden's Berlin gallery Der Sturm in March 1916 and February 1917, the success of which established his reputation. Shortly after leaving military service in 1919, Klee signed an exclusive sales contract with the Munich dealer Hans Goltz. In May and June of 1920 Goltz mounted the first substantial exhibition of Klee's work in his Galerie Neue Kunst in Munich. This was followed in 1923 by another major exhibition of Klee's work, numbering 270 works, at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin. Appointed to a teaching post at the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1920, Klee continued to work there with the move of the school to Dessau in 1925.

An exhibition of Klee's work at the newly opened Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1930 cemented the artist's reputation outside Germany. In 1931 Klee resigned from the Bauhaus to take up a position as professor of painting at the Düsseldorf Akademie, a post he only held for two years before being banned from teaching - as a 'degenerate artist' - by the Nazis in 1933. By the end of that year he had moved to Bern in Switzerland. Although Klee produced relatively little work between 1934 and 1936, another large exhibition was mounted at the Kunsthalle in Bern in 1935. The same year he began showing signs of scleroderma, the disease that would eventually kill him five years later. Klee died in June 1940 at the age of sixty-one, three months after the closing of a final major solo exhibition, devoted to his late work of the previous five years, at the Kunsthaus in Zürich.