

EN

30.11.2012 - 01.04.2013

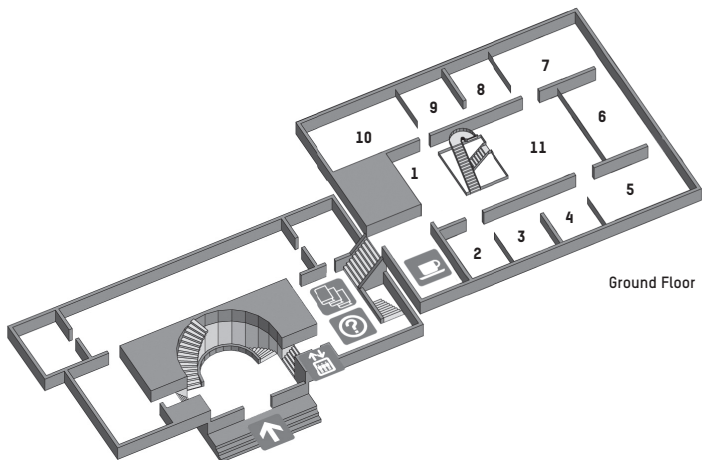
cosmos
of
color

itten
klee

KUNST
MUSEUM
BERN

EXHIBITION GUIDE

Floorplan



- 1 Academy and Studying from Nature
- 2 Discovering Color
- 3 Color Theory
- 4 Color and Abstraction
- 5 Dynamization of Color
- 6 Rationalization of Color
- 7 Color between Abstraction and Realism
- 8 Esoteric Meaning of Color
- 9 Autonomy of the Elements of Art
- 10 Elementarization and Order of Colors
- 11 The Universe of Color

Introduction

Johannes Itten and Paul Klee are leading figures in 20th century art due to their famous and far-reaching theories about color. Both of them firmly believed that the order of colors presents a self-contained universe that obeys set principles. Newly discovered documents show that both artists drew on a mutual source of intellectual history and that they shared, to a degree, an interest in esoteric teachings, while reciprocally inspiring one another too. Both developed their ideas on color over decades of reflection and work, exploring and applying them comprehensively in their art as well. The lives and careers of Paul Klee who was born in Münchenbuchsee near Bern and Johannes Itten who grew up in the Bernese Oberland converged at many points: For example, Paul Klee's father was the first to inspire Johannes Itten in his artistic pursuits, and conversely, Paul Klee acquired a teaching appointment at the Bauhaus in Weimar chiefly through Itten's support. Well-nigh simultaneously in 1914/1915, both artists began their lifelong investigation of color theory and the order of the universe of color – in Klee's case on a trip to Tunisia, in Itten's while in Stuttgart through Adolf Hölzel's art theory. Over many years, both artists took an interest in each other's art and even exchanged works.

The exhibition maps out Itten's and Klee's thematic focus on color in art chronologically and in eleven sections grouped around key works by both artists. The choreography of the presentation takes up Klee's and Itten's idea of gray as the middle point of the color cosmos by mounting the works on gray walls. And, additionally, the background colors used for the different room numbers are from

Itten's color disc, so that our visitors pass through the whole range, so to speak, during their visit.

Academy and Studying from Nature

His unforgettable experience of nature during his youth was vital for Itten's development. His art in fact began with depicting landscapes. But already in these early works a preoccupation with architectural principles can be discerned, as is the case in *Landschaftsstudie* (Landscape study) from 1908. Often the pictures are built out of a clearly defined and proportioned grid of dominant lines, such as in the painting *Haus mit Treppe* (House with stairs) from 1912. The study for the painting reveals the tectonic structure of the composition. In his first large-format oil painting *Vorfrühling an der Rhône* (Early spring on the Rhone) we can clearly perceive the artist's intensive study of post-impressionist treatment of color in painting, especially of Vincent van Gogh's and Ferdinand Hodler's work. With this artwork Itten committed himself to the vocation of painter at the Christmas Exhibition of the Kunstmuseum Bern. His years at the art academy in Geneva left surprisingly little impact on his art. The few academic studies of heads, hands, and bodies that he drew in 1909 and 1910 represent little more than a short episode in Itten's artistic career. He left the academy already in 1909, although he shortly afterwards resumed studying art in Geneva. Nature's strong impression on a youth – who grew up in the country – noticeably and lastingly influenced his choice of subject matter: Nature and landscapes, mountains, mountain ranges, valleys, trees, flowers, and fruit still lifes. His very early landscape studies as well as numerous entries in his diary are proof of Klee's affinity to nature in the years of his youth too, of the fact that nature for him was a sanctuary. Subject matter such as landscapes, gardens, mountains, and flowers remained

central to his art throughout his artistic career. Hundreds of drawings in the margins of his school exercise books testify to Klee's further passion – a passion for the grotesque and the bizarre. Many of his early works contain such elements, such as in *Weib und Tier* (Woman and animal): «An animal, the creature in man, chases after a woman, who does not appear to be entirely impervious to his advances.» As early as 1902 during a trip to Italy, Klee discovered that architectural motifs were fundamental for his art: «During my stay in Italy, I learnt about the art of architecture and, in doing so, gained insights that I straight away found highly profiting. [Architecture's] easily recognizable structural forms and its precise organic structure qualify it much more as a teacher than all the studies of heads, nudes, and attempts at composition.» Back in Bern, he found his initial artistic training at the art academy in Munich terribly inadequate – because he felt a new artistic drive propelled by «linear rhythms» and «planar rhythms» that now dominated his work: «Everywhere I see only architecture.» The transformation of his art from simple and straightforward representations of nature to architectural visual structures is paradigmatically demonstrated in the contrast between the drawing *Aus dem Daehlhoelzli* (Daehlhoelzli view, 1898) and the watercolor *Haus in der Schlucht* (House in the ravine, 1913). Color increasingly played an independent and major role in his work.

Discovering Color

On a trip to Tunisia in 1914 Paul Klee deepened his conviction about the significance of architecture for his art. At the same time, however, color too began to play a major role therein. «Color has me in its power. I need not go out after it. It has captured me forever, that I know. And the happy result is: Color and I are one. I am a painter.» In Tunisia Klee developed a freer use of paint and grew more abstract in his art. On returning he resolutely pursued this approach. In his works such as *mit d. braunen Spitzen* (With the brown points) and *<mit dem braunen □>* (With the brown □), Klee began to develop a visual concept that was much more abstract than his art had hitherto been – leading him to concentrate entirely on finding solutions for the problem of «synthesizing urban architecture and the architecture of pictures.» In his watercolor *Der Niesen* (The Niesen), architectural principles again underlie the composition. The work was probably executed during Klee's summer vacation at Lake Thun in 1915. Against a strongly geometric background, the artist arranged colored rectangles one over the other, echoing the colors of the landscape, and thus translated the mountain countryside into an abstract vocabulary. Through the highly contrasting interplay of different color fields, the composition of the picture has a dynamic and rhythmic architectural structure. The pyramidal construction of the mountain and the much abbreviated symbols used for the sun, moon, and the star – much like children's drawings – imbue the picture with a fairytale-like quality.

A visit to the Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne in May 1912 inspired Johannes Itten to intensively study Paul Cézanne's style of painting:

He demonstrated his indebtedness to Cézanne even in his choice of colors in the ***Mann mit blauem Kittel*** (Man in a blue overall coat). Itten not only referred to Cézanne's «rich color modulation» and his ability in using color to create, in paint, a «harmony parallel to that in nature.» Equally Itten was paying homage to the older artist's rhythmic and tectonic construction of the visible. Perhaps the most complex example during these years in which Itten delved into Cézanne's art is represented by the work ***Barmherziger Samariter*** (The good Samaritan) from 1915: The picture is made up of geometric forms that merge into bodies and landscape elements by uniting planes through the over-arching coloration. In this work Itten was very obviously inspired by the curvature of the figures and the triangular composition of Cézanne's *Bathers*. The facial forms, however, Itten found in his studies after El Greco. He executed the painting after witnessing wounded troops being evacuated, confronted directly with the sufferings of the First World War. He noted in his diary that «the yellow triangle is a lament that floats through the sky in a resounding rhythm.»

Color Theory

Johannes Itten's color-theoretical reflections in regard to rhythm, seven color contrasts, and methodologies for coordinating colors were based on the color-contrasts theory of his teacher in Stuttgart Adolf Hölzel. Itten remained true his lifelong to the tenets of Hölzel's theory of color contrasts while pursuing it further. Contrary to Hölzel, whose color theory «as the basso continuo of painting» was analogous to that of Goethe, Itten was in quest of a cosmology of color theory. With this new orientation in mind, Itten preferred the model of the color sphere to the color circle diagram – and thereby picked up the thread of Philipp Otto Runge. Intent on an ideological and universal color theory, Itten sought to also include theosophical, astrological, and other symbolical color-order principles. Based on the theosophical tenets of a color aura, Itten developed in his «color-type theory» a «human model» of color contexts of individuals. He believed that in color perception one had to differentiate between different types, that is, between «blue and yellow and red people». In 1921, Itten published his first theoretical color model in the almanach *Utopia*, which was a color sphere divided into «7 light values and 12 tones.» In *The Art of Color*, which was originally published in 1961, he conclusively put together findings from decades of research.

Paul Klee too sought to understand the universe of color as a comprehensive system. His color universe has a gray core at the center of a color sphere. Its poles are black and white respectively, and at the equator we find the entire scale of pure colors, which combine

to form the different tones as we proceed step by step towards the poles. The gray core is the touchstone for all harmonic color combinations. Harmony of tones and colors can be verified on the grounds of their passage through the gray center of Klee's universe of color: If colors opposite one another at the periphery meet at the core to form gray they create color harmonies. Klee's «elementary color star» or «totality star of the hue gradation» of 1922 palpably demonstrates the value he attributed to gray. We do not do justice to Klee's universe of color if we see it as just a direct derivative of Goethe's color disc, because Goethe neither included gray nor all the other neutral colors. Klee's theory seems to be much more in line with Philipp Otto Runge's sphere of color in which gray builds the center of all colors and is therefore the center of a color universe as well as the touchstone for harmonic color combinations. Klee indeed goes way beyond Runge's conception by reinterpreting the order of color as the result of a dynamic process. This can be discerned in his sketch for the «Canon of Color Totality», in which the individual color areas overlap in moon-shaped movements and in this way merge.

Color and Abstraction

With his interest in color theory, as early as 1915 Itten began creating totally abstract pictorial compositions such as ***Horizontal-Vertikal*** (Horizontal—vertical) or ***Tiefenstufen*** (Gradations of depth). Both paintings are pioneering examples of early purely abstract composition in 20th-century art. Whereas ***Tiefenstufen*** still gives the impression of spatiality, ***Horizontal-Vertikal*** appears entirely abstract as a complex structured network of colored fields. Based on Adolf Hölzel's theory of color contrasts, the stripes of clearly calculated proportions in Itten's painting are precisely structured at right angles to one another around a center of light colors. Of course, in Hölzel's work at the time we find no such abstract compositions. Itten's studies reveal how he, to a great degree, sought in these paintings to also link the mathematical proportions of ordered fields of color with color order and thereby likewise drew on music theory. Each of Itten's early paintings seems to have been made as a model in which he tried out the respective fundamental principles underlying the form and color order of his abstract visual vocabulary. Each of these pictures is paradigmatic. In the painting ***Begegnung*** (Encounter), Itten created a structure of horizontal stripes as light radiant colors that, at the center, dynamically break out of this order in a double spiral motion. In his late work, Itten again took up experimenting with abstract geometrical color-field compositions, such as in ***Horizontal-Vertikal*** (Horizontal—vertical) and ***In der Nacht*** (In the night), both from 1963.

Dynamization of Color

Itten experimented with the representation of movement and the impression of acceleration in painting. In conjunction with such an interest he sought inspiration in Robert Delaunay's circular motion of colors, in futuristic representation of movement, and in the faceting of objective reality in cubism. Consequently he executed highly complex and colorful compositions such as *Ländliches Fest* (Rural festivities), *Vogelthema* (Bird theme) or *Aufstieg und Ruhepunkt* (Rising and resting point). With finely nuanced gradations of color contrasts and different hues he implies pulsating crescendos or circular rhythms. Due to the multidimensional lattice of forms and colors, Itten keeps the spectator's eyes active and thereby creates the impression of infinite motion and richness. «I have the feeling that I must simultaneously depict all things on earth and in the sky and the infinitude of their forms and relationships in one gargantuan artwork. Perhaps in wanting to do so I don't wish to portray things but the feeling of infiniteness.» Johannes Itten wrote down this comment while working on *Aufstieg und Ruhepunkt*. The painting is a kaleidoscope of multifold forms and colors and comes very close to the artist's vision of infinity and totality in representation. His paintings of this period can be interpreted in a figurative way despite their abstract shapes. The composition *Ländliches Fest*, for example, easily reminds us of the exuberant spinning motions of a country dance around a figurative type of symbol that can be read as a face. According to Itten, he named the painting only after finishing it. The rhythm of the work *Bänder* (Belts) conjures up a very different effect: the beholder feels that with breathtaking speed the belts seem to

spatially interlace with a mechanical framework.

During this time Klee too consistently explored color dynamics in interplay with rhythmic principles as key compositional determinants. In contrast to Itten, Klee sought to represent motion and rhythm by combining contrasting graphic qualities and elements of forms such as lines, curves, circles, and triangles. In works such as *Farbenwinkel* (Colored angles) and *Farbig gebaut mit schwarz-graphischem Gegenständlichen* (Color construction with black figurative drawing), the jagged lines and colored stripes as well as a latticework of color planes give the viewer the feeling of movement and rhythm. Klee's attempts to visualize dynamism and rhythm go hand in hand with an increasingly abstract visual language and a novel autonomy for color. In *Mondauf-Sonnenuntergang* (Moonrise and sunset) the architectural elements are enmeshed to such a degree that the spatial impression is dominated by an ornamental and two-dimensional effect. The moon and the sun shine like cosmic symbols over a cityscape bathed in darkness. *Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht...* (Once emerged from the gray of night...) – with its perfect interplay of lines, light and shade, and colors – is a good example for demonstrating how important poetic devices were for Klee's ideas on art and artistic methods.

Rationalization of Color

During his years at the Bauhaus, Klee researched comprehensively the rules of color composition and design. His investigations included gradations of color and scales of values. Whereas in nature the transition from light to shade is continuous, Klee comprehended it as a measurable entity with clearly structured gradations. This is demonstrated in the painting ***Wachstum der Nachtpflanzen*** (Growth of nocturnal flowers). By ordering leaf, lozenge, square, and circular shapes one over the other together with a distinct gradation from dark to light colors, the beholder perceives structured motion. The plant-like objects seem to very slowly really grow from an indeterminate dark plane. Klee spoke also of «fugues» in regard to such scales of tones ordered according to dark and light values. Following the musical structure of fugues, color gradations were supposed to represent the temporal dimensions of development and progression. In his endeavors to visualize musical structures and simultaneous visual sounds, that is, to find visual forms that correspond to musical structures, Klee continually worked on improving his technical proficiency in watercolors. The continual blending of gradations of transparent hues using a wash technique has in ***Genien (Figuren aus einem Ballet)*** [Genii (Figures in a ballet)] the semblance of motion, music, and dance. In the watercolor picture ***vor dem Blitz*** (Prior to the lightning flash), different directions of movement are suggested by color gradations as well as arrows. In his many works from the 1920s, Klee takes the viewer to an imaginary site with puzzling buildings, rock formations, animals, and symbols. Often they are gardens and landscapes that provide clues to neither temporal nor spatial orientation and thereby seem to have sprung

from a dream or fairytale world, such as ***Vogel Pep*** (Pep the bird) and ***Tor im Garten*** (Gate in the garden). Other works such as ***Gebirge im Winter*** (Mountains in winter) and ***Krähenlandschaft*** (Crow landscape) are reminiscent of Klee's trip to Egypt with their pyramid-like mountains. In ***Monument im Fruchmland*** (Monument in crop acreage) the reference to Egypt is obvious. It is one of his so-called «stripe pictures» based on bands and layers offset through the horizontal thrust of color fields. Klee drew on his visual impressions gained in Egypt, on the characteristic geometric scenes of field subdivision on the Nile flood plains and the intensity of light and color. Thereby he reduced his representations to the basic essentials: geometrical structures and intensive colors. In ***Gemüsegarten*** (Vegetable garden), with its «chessboard» composition, Klee merely suggests plants with symbolical sketches in favor of overall color resonance in the painting. In ***Alter Klang*** (Ancient sound) color resonance dominates to the extent that it ousts figurative motifs altogether.

Itten created such abstract compositions of resonating color-tones already during his Stuttgart years in the 1920s in abstract carpet designs, taking this style up again in his late work, for example in ***Leuchtendes Rot*** (Bright red) from 1955.

Color between Abstraction and Realism

Itten, on acquiring a teaching position at the Bauhaus, gave up the abstract and geometrical style of his early pivotal works. During his three years at the Bauhaus he did not execute a single picture in a strictly abstract style. Instead, in the few paintings he did paint between 1919 and 1922, Itten returned to a figurative and representational approach in art, such as in **Vasen** (Vases). During this period Itten was preoccupied with the philosophical and conceptual issues of forming «a new kind of man and woman» through art education.

As early as 1928 a Japanese teacher taught ink drawing at Itten's art and architecture school in Berlin. Pictures such as **Der Berg** (The mountain) from 1929/30 illustrate how spontaneously Itten could integrate the characteristic loose and sketchy quality of East-Asian ink painting in his color compositions, and he began again to develop a more abstract visual language. At the same time, the fact that Itten was made director at the Fachschule für textile Flächenkunst (College for two-dimensional textile arts) in Krefeld left its marks on his painting style. From 1935 onwards he began to integrate textile patterns and ornaments in his artworks. A key work of this period, **Vögel am Meer** (Birds at the seaside) shows how closely he ornamentally entwined color and figuration. Early summer in 1938, Itten created the most fervent and simultaneously monumental conflation of textile ornament and the rich imagery of painting: it was the work that is referred to as **Velum** and was designed and made to span, as a transparent cover, the ceiling over the staircase at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Today only designs and studies of it have survived. Itten's inclination to two-dimensional and ornamental art can also

be discerned in the works he executed in the 1940s, for example in *Frau mit den Vögeln* (Woman with birds). Until the mid-1950s Itten's painting swings between abstraction and a realistic style. Color is a significant tool in his designs and compositions.

In contrast to Itten, Klee continued on experimenting with abstract and geometrically structured color compositions as a teacher at the Bauhaus, and went on doing so later in Düsseldorf as well. His great interest in geometry and structures is manifest in numerous planimetric designs and in artworks like *Segelnde Stadt* (Sailing city). In this work Klee overlaps transparent square shapes in a space that defies rational principles. The weightlessness of the spatial construction again takes up the recurrent theme in Klee's work of flying and balance. In conjunction with his teaching at the Bauhaus, Klee also researched simultaneous and complementary contrasts. The ideas and findings thereof he translated at a practical level in a series of works comprising approximately seventy pointillist pictures in 1931 and 1932. His *Bildnis einer Complicierten* (Portrait of a complicated woman) is built up out of numerous small areas of color like a mosaic. The obvious outlines of the portrait bring the artwork to oscillate at the threshold between abstraction and figuration. In comparison, paintings like *Emacht* amalgamate color and form to create architectonic structures that have almost discarded representational associations altogether.

Esoteric Meaning of Color

For the Bauhaus Portfolio of 1921, Itten illustrated a comment by O. Z. A. Hanish, the founder of the Mazdaznan movement: «Greetings and hail to all the hearts inspired by the light of love, and may neither hope of heaven nor fear of hell guide them into confusion.» In this illustration calligraphy, color, and esoteric ideology have been programmatically enmeshed. Another sheet with calligraphy quotes from the German mystic Jakob Boehme «Einatmen, Ausatmen» (Breathe in, breathe out), which Itten links to the breathing methods of the Mazdaznan movement. Stronger than ever and thereafter, philosophy and ideology were the dominating factors for Itten's art during the 1920s. At this time he had already spent longer sojourns in the Mazdaznan community at Herrliberg on Zurich Lake. Mazdaznan is an Avestan word and means «master of divine thought» or the «the beneficial idea that masters all things in the best way possible.» Through references in theosophy and Mazdaznan teachings, Itten came to also study astrology from 1919 onwards. In his diary he links the Zodiac signs not only with the planets, but assigns to each a specific color that, in his system, corresponds to specific human characteristics and types. These ideas are manifest in the 1924 *Teppichentwurf* (Carpet design). In his tendency to increasingly conflate various esoteric teachings with the search for a universal visual language in art, Itten's quest was to fulfill the programmatic motto of the Bauhaus, not to «train» but «educate artists to form a new kind of man and woman» – as coined by Walter Gropius.

At the Bauhaus, Itten's exertions to introduce esoteric modes of living did not only meet with approval. In *Seiltänzer* (Tightrope performer)

from 1923, Paul Klee represented the confrontation between the «spiritual» fraction that followed Itten and the «rational» fraction that followed Walter Gropius and Oskar Schlemmer as a balancing act. As the tightrope walker, Klee manages to «maintain his balance» in the conflict, and with the white cross shape alludes to Itten's ***Gruss und Heil den Herzen*** (Greetings and hail to all the hearts). The profile outline of the head on the right-hand side of the lower half of the composition is a reference to Schlemmer's Bauhaus seal. Klee was very multifaceted in his response to esoteric teachings: He often took up then popular esoteric motifs in his works, as we can find in, for example, ***Die Heilige vom innern Licht*** (The saint of inner light) or in ***Narretei*** (Folly). But at the same time Klee maintained a mostly rather ironic reserve toward all panacean doctrines. His comments on the ideas and figures of theosophy and anthroposophy were not without humor. Nevertheless, he too adopted esoteric ideas for his color theory. Especially Klee's ideas about numbers were spiritual. His geometrically stylized pictures with compositions divided into horizontal areas of color were based on mathematical number sequences, and show that he studied the Neo-Pythagorean theories of the Swiss musicologist and philosopher Hans Kayser. In ***Rechnender Greis*** (Old man doing sums), Klee is apparently satirically reflecting his own soft spot for speculations on numbers.

Autonomy of the Elements of Art

In the 1930s, a new autonomy of the elements of painting became manifest in Klee's art: In works such as *Kleiner Blauteufel* (Small blue devil), *Ruhende Sphinx* (Resting Sphinx), *Scherben-Stilleben* (Broken-fragment still life), and *Enzianisches Stilleben* (Gentian still life), the artist combined colors and forms in different ways, sometimes contrasting, sometimes forming a synthesis. By and large the subject is only visible via the title of the work. Klee increasingly seized the opportunity to illustrate the events and natural processes addressed in the artworks by means of a transparent painting practice. Thus, in the watercolor *Diana im Herbstwind* (Diana in autumn wind), the forms not only heave and sway over one another, but the nervous hatching in all directions over the whole picture suggest the blustery motion of the wind. In general, the issue of the systematization of color was becoming subordinate to the expressiveness of color and its impact.

In *Legende vom Nil* (Legend of the Nile) Klee resumed painting in the style of the square compositions of the 1920s and also again referred to the visual impressions he took back from his trip to Egypt. Fish, plants, and a manned boat are merely abstract symbols in the picture and reveal Klee's fascination for different systems of script and symbols. The brown symbols contrast strongly with the bright blue and green tones of the background, and are indicators for Klee's late style during the last years of his life, when he preferred to use thick black lines and bright areas of color.

Elementarization and Order of Colors

Paul Klee's last years were overshadowed by his illness, although he was still full of creative will and power. In his late works, tension arises from the way colors, forms, and lines interrelate as they struggle between convergence and contrast. In a novel and radical approach, Klee experimented with the phenomenon of radiant areas of color free of representational color tones. His application of paint is often very rough, and the palette ranges from earthen colors to bright primary colors. Dark lines were mostly drawn with a large brush and sometimes created abstract forms or outlined ambiguous figures, faces, or objects. For example, in three paintings executed in 1940, *dieser Stern lehrt beugen* (This star teaches us to bow), *Flora am Felsen* (Flora at a rock), or *In Behandlung* (In treatment), color is a freely shaped counterpoint to the strong black lines. Color and line here refer to one another in elementary and reduced combinations. Klee's «late style» can be easily recognized in this group of paintings through the mixture of glowing background colors and a symbolic language of dark stripes.

Johannes Itten's work during his last years is characterized by a distinct interest in investigating the «art of color.» This can be noticed in his art-theoretical reflections as well as in his painting. Itten's return to purely abstract painting, as we find in his chessboard and right-angle color-field compositions, seems to be connected directly with the artist's increased focus on the elementary impact of color. In the latter half of the 1950s – and thereby parallel to the art-theoretical groundwork for the publication *Kunst der Farbe* (The Art of Color) – his renewed interest in the principles of color is reflected in his

artistic work, as can be witnessed in *Gelb-Orange-Rot* (Yellow-or-ange-red). With these geometrical and abstract works he came full circle to the abstract pictorial language of his Stuttgart and Vienna years.

Itten was most concerned with two basic aesthetic problems: the analysis of contrasting relationships of colors and their compositional synthesis to form an overarching harmony. Analogous to Adolf Hölzel – although with minor deviations – Itten listed seven contrasts: The «contrast of hue», the «contrast of light and dark», the «contrast of warm and cool», the «contrast of complements», the «simultaneous contrast», the «contrast of saturation», and «the contrast of extension». Using these cornerstones of his color theory, Itten investigated the impact of colors and how they were perceived in varying combinations. Thus he would in one case restrict color harmony to single color tones such as in *Dreiklang-Modulation* (Three-tone modulation), or in another expand it to incorporate the entire range of colors, as in *Festlich* (Party mood). Whereas works such as *Adieu* were based on light and dark contrasts of color – by light colors seeming to radiate due to the surrounding dark tones – the colors in paintings such as *Concerto Grosso* appear illuminated like stained glass windows.

The Universe of Color

The first artwork Johannes Itten began after being appointed at the Bauhaus in Weimar was also his most ambitious: the *Turm des Feuers* (Tower of fire) project. The meanwhile lost original sculptural piece first got its title decades after it was executed. The exhibit in the show is a faithful reconstruction, displayed in conjunction with photographs of the original and the artist's designs for the sculpture. Documents of the time prove that the original tile was *Turm des Lichtes* (Tower of light). Itten transposed the motif of spiraling movement into a three-dimensional monumental representation. The tower was conceived, in particular, as a symbolical work, as a sculptural and architectonic «philosophical artwork»: «My tower is a symbol of light / of truth / with musical chimes.» Originally small chimes were visible in the upper ranges. Itten's drafts and notes for the work document that he constructed the tower according to specific mathematical proportions. In the twelve-step gradation of spherically formed glass fans, Itten strived to bring the universe of colors into a universal cosmic symbol for the world in its entirety. The plan behind the work included gauging, in twelve subdivisions, by ascent the lineage from minerals via plants, animals, humans through to the sun. The sculpture is also replete with allusions to astrological constellations of the twelve signs of the Zodiac or the four elements. In the artwork immaterial «conceptual architecture» has replaced the work of the sculptor.

Paul Klee's 1932 painting *Ad Parnassum* is likewise a programmatic picture on color theory and constitutes, to an extent, Klee's «legacy to color theory in paint.» With the title *Ad Parnassum* Klee alluded

to the mythical home of the Muses, to Mt. Parnassus, which was regarded for many hundreds of years as a metaphor for perfection in art. On the other hand, the title may also refer to Johann Joseph Fux's well-known counterpoint theories in music, *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725), or equally to the etudes of Muzio Clementi (1817-1826), of which Klee owned a copy. In the painting Klee has arranged color according to music in a strictly composed visual cosmos, to a polyphonic overlapping of color fields, and mosaic-like dabs of color. *Ad Parnassum* is the last painting of a group of some good seventy «pointillist works». More than any other work in the group, with *Ad Parnassum* Klee comes very close to Seurat's separation of colors, while, however, also taking the method further by embedding it in his own ideas about color and exploring its potential for his notions of art. The interplay of the fields of color in the wash background of tiny mosaic-like brushstrokes produces diverse color contrasts that build the basis for the distinct «coloristic force» of *Ad Parnassum*.

Johannes Itten's color scheme comprises four basic colors, which he named after the four seasons. This concept of his color theory was widely accepted and not only influenced art and art theory, but also popular culture, such as cosmetic and color consulting. Itten was convinced that, based on everyone belonging to one of the four color types, «every person perceives colors in a very personal way,» and that this affected even the coloristic disposition of artists. He classified each color type according to specific color-tone segments of the color wheel: Whereas the «youthful and radiant state of nature in

the making during spring ... are expressed by light and bright colors,» so that yellow, yellow-green, light-pink, and light-blue determine the timbre or distinctive character, in fall faded and autumnal colors are dominant, «dull brown and violet», orange and olive-green. «In summer the forms and colors of nature are at their peak and strongest, have the greatest density, plasticity, vividness, and power. The warm and dense active colors» orange, red, and blue «are a natural choice for a coloristic impression of summer.» In contrast, the palette of winter is pervaded by passive colors «that are introverted, cold, with inner depth that transparently glows with a spiritual quality», which means cold blues, blue-green, white, and violet. Itten applied these different color schemes in an exemplary way in his series of the four seasons *Frühling*, *Sommer*, *Herbst* and *Winter* (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter).

Biography Johannes Itten

- 1888** born November 11 in Südern-Linden (Bernese Oberland), his father a farmer and teacher and his mother a farmer's daughter.
- 1908–1909** An elementary school teacher in Schwarzenburg near Bern.
- 1909–1910/** Studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Geneva.
- 1912–1913**
- 1911** Participated in an exhibition for the first time (Kunstmuseum Bern).
- 1912** Traveled throughout Europe, visited, among others, the Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne, was fascinated by Cézanne's art.
- 1913–1916** Moved to Stuttgart and studied at the art academy there under Adolf Hölzel. Began to make notes on art theory in his diary. Executed his first non-representational compositions. Gave lessons in painting.
- 1916** Solo exhibition at Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin.
- 1916–1919** Founded a private art school in Vienna. Studied theosophy and mysticism. Developed a comprehensive form and color theory.
- 1919** Visited Paul Klee in Munich. Married Hildegard Anbelang.
- 1919–1923** Taught at the Bauhaus in Weimar and built up the preparatory course on the elements of artistic design. Abstract and figurative paintings, sculptures, and architectural designs.
- 1923–1926** Joined Mazdaznan Temple Community in Herrliberg on Zurich Lake. Foundation of the Ontos-Werkstätten für Handweberei und Teppichknüpferei (Ontos handweaving and carpet-making studios). Taught art at the affiliated art school.

- 1926** Foundation of the Modern Art School Berlin (Itten School), trained painters, printmakers, photographers, and architects.
- 1932** Head of the Staatliche Höhere Fachschule für textile Flächenkunst (College for two-dimensional textile arts) in Krefeld.
- 1934** Itten School in Berlin closed down.
- 1937** Works by Itten were shown in the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art).
- 1938** Closure of the textile two-dimensional arts school in Krefeld. Emmigrated to Holland.
- 1938–1953** Director of the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Design) and Kunstgewerbeschule (College of applied arts) in Zurich.
- 1939** Married Anneliese Schlösser.
- 1943–1960** Head of the Textilfachschule der Seidenindustriengesellschaft (The silk industry society college of textile sciences) in Zurich.
- 1948** Solo exhibition in New York.
- 1949–1956** Museum Rietberg built. Director until 1956.
- 1957** Solo exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
- 1961** *Kunst der Farbe* (The Art of Color) published.
- 1964** Retrospective at the Kunsthau Zurich.
- 1966** Represented Switzerland at the 33rd Venice Biennial.
- 1967** Johannes Itten died on March 25 in Zurich.

Biography Paul Klee

- 1879** Born December 18 in Münchenbuchsee near Bern, his father a music teacher and his mother a singer.
- 1898–1899** Moved to Munich. Was refused at the art academy due to lack of experience in drawing figures. Studied at Heinrich Knirr's drawing school. Began to keep a diary.
- 1900–1901** Studied briefly under Franz von Stuck at the art academy in Munich. Gave up study.
- 1901** First trip to Italy. Doubted his art after confrontation with antiquity and the Renaissance.
- 1902–1905** Returned to Bern. Self-taught study, visited museums, a brief sojourn in Paris.
- 1906** Participated in an exhibition for the first time (annual exhibition of the Munich Secession). Married Lily Stumpf. Moved to Munich.
- 1907–1908** Life as an artist and house husband. Self-taught study and visited exhibitions.
- 1909** Viewed works by Cézanne in Munich, recognized in him his «teacher par excellence».
- 1910** Solo exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern.
- 1911** Met artists of Der *Blaue Reiter* organization.
- 1912** Participated at the second exhibition of Der *Blaue Reiter* organization. Visited Robert Delaunay in Paris. Participated at the Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne.
- 1913** Klee translated Delaunay's «La Lumière» for *Der Sturm* journal.
- 1914** Trip to Tunisia with Louis Moilliet and August Macke. Artistic breakthrough in his use of color.

- 1916–1918** Called up for service in the depot for recruits in Landshut in Lower Bavaria.
- 1920** Large solo exhibition in Munich, three monographs.
- 1921** Commenced teaching at the Bauhaus Weimar. Further developed his color theory based on work and research from 1911 to 1914.
- 1924** Exhibition in New York. Foundation of the exhibition team *Die Blaue Vier* (The blue four).
- 1925** The Bauhaus moved to Dessau. The *Pädagogische Skizzenbuch* (Educational sketchbook) was published.
- 1928** Trip to Egypt left lasting impressions and inspiration for the use of color.
- 1930–1932** Left the Bauhaus, taught at the Düsseldorf Art Academy.
- 1933** Was fired from his Düsseldorf teaching position. Returned to Bern.
- 1935–1936** Retrospective at the Kunsthalle Bern. Contracted scleroderma.
- 1937** Works by Klee shown in the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art). 102 works confiscated from public collections by the Nazis.
- 1939** The most productive year of his artistic career with 1253 artworks.
- 1940** Retrospective at the Kunsthaus Zürich.
Paul Klee died on Juni 29 in Locarno.

Agenda

Wissenschaftliches Symposium, in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Zentrum Paul Klee: «Die Entdeckung der Farbe: Johannes Itten, Paul Klee und Otto Nebel»:

Freitag, 30. November, 10h–18h im Kunstmuseum Bern. Eintritt: ganzer Tag CHF 50.00 / halber Tag CHF 30.00 / Studierende gratis. Anmeldung nicht erforderlich. Bei Abgabe des Eintrittstickets: Gratiseintritt in die Ausstellungen *Itten-Klee, Otto Nebel und Meister Klee!* (Zentrum Paul Klee), Angebot gültig während der Ausstellungsdauer. Mit der Unterstützung der Fondation Johanna Dürmüller-Bol.

Öffentliche Führungen

Sonntag 11h: 2./9./16./23./30. Dezember, 6./13./20./27. Januar, 3./10./24. Februar, 3./10./17./24./31. März

Dienstag, 11h: 1. Januar

Dienstag, 19h: 4. Dezember, 22. Januar, 19./26. Februar, 5./12./26. März

Public Guided Tours in English:

Tuesday, 19h30, January 22

Sunday, 11h30, March 17

Visite commentée publique en français

Mardi, 19h30, 11 décembre

Dimanche, 11h30, 10 février

Einführung für Lehrpersonen

Dienstag, 4. Dezember, 18h

Mittwoch, 5. Dezember, 14h

Anmeldung erforderlich: T 031 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch
Kosten: CHF 10.00

Ein farbiger Sonntag im Museum für die ganze Familie

Sonntag, 20. Januar, 17. Februar, 17. März
jeweils 11h00 – 12h30

Erwachsene und Kinder ab 6 Jahren.

Anmeldung / Info: T +41 31 328 09 11 oder vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Kino Kunstmuseum

«Die Tunisreise»

Schweiz 2007, 76 min. OV/DF, Farbe, Regie: Bruno Moll

Dienstag, 18. Dezember, 18h30

Sonntag, 30. Dezember, 14h

Weitere Filme zur Ausstellung im Februar und März, www.kinokunstmuseum.ch

Catalogue

Itten – Klee. Kosmos Farbe. Hrsg. von Christoph Wagner, Monika Schäfer, Matthias Frehner und Gereon Sievernich für das Kunstmuseum Bern und den Martin-Gropius-Bau Berlin. Deutsch, ca. 384 Seiten, ca. 300 Abbildungen. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012. ISBN 978-3-7954-2646-0. CHF 39.00

Exhibition

| | |
|---|--|
| Duration | 30.11.2012 – 01.04.2013 |
| Opening | Thursday, November 29, 18h30 |
| Admission fee | CHF 18.00/red. CHF 14.00 |
| SBB RailAway-Offer | Benefit from 20 % savings on train tickets and entrance fee. The RailAway-offer is available at all train stations and at the Rail |
|  SBB CFF FFS | Service on 0900 300 300 (ChF 1.19/min). |
| RailAway Offer | More information: www.sbb.ch/exhibitions |
| Opening hours | Monday, closed Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Wednesday – Sunday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. |
| Public holidays | 24./25./31.12.2012: closed 01.01./02.01./01.04.2013: 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. |
| Private guided tours | T +41 31 328 09 11, F +41 31 328 09 10 vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch |
| Curators | Monika Schäfer (Kunstmuseum Bern) Christoph Wagner (University of Regensburg) |

In collaboration with:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Martin Gropius Bau | where the exhibition will be shown from April 25 until July 29, 2013 |
|-----------------------------------|--|

With the support of:



Artephila Stiftung
Alfred Richterich Stiftung



Partner of the Kunstmuseum Bern

Kunstmuseum Bern
Hodlerstrasse 8 – 12, CH-3000 Bern 7
T +41 31 328 09 44, F +41 31 328 09 55
info@kunstmuseumbern.ch
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch