Paul Klee and Imagination

Workshop Goals

• Discuss Klee’s musical connections, and how to find those connections in his paintings
• Create some simple musical instruments and discover some of the science behind instrument construction
• Examine some of Klee’s paintings from a composer’s perspective
• Create and perform simple group compositions based on works of Klee
• Explore possibilities for connections to literacy and the Common Core State Standards

Father: Hans Klee - Music Teacher
Mother: Ida Marie (nee Frick) - studied singing in conservatory

Early Artworks

Lady with Parasol, age 4
Carousel, age 10

Age 13

Or?
By around late teens Klee decided to become a painter, but music remained one of the most important things in his life. Klee marries Lily Stumpf, a pianist, in 1906. For 6 years as a young struggling artist, Klee and his wife live off their musical skills - Klee as a professional violinist, Lily as a piano teacher.

Music inspires Klee throughout his career as a visual artist. Shapes of Instruments

- Bernese Symphony Orchestra
- The Kettledrum-Organ - 1930
- Nocturne for Horn - 1921
Abstract Trio - 1923

Notation

Heroic strokes of the bow - 1938

Instrument for New Music - 1914

Klee’s own music notation

Conducting

Bauhaus lectures

1932 – At Anchor

The Basics of Music

Rhythm

Melody

Harmony

Form
In his paintings Klee connects to each of these musical concepts in visual ways.

Rhythm

In 1921 Klee moved to a studio at the Bauhaus in Weimar. One day, a fellow artist, working in the studio below his, heard a strange rhythmical banging. Curious, he asked Klee what it might have been when they next met. Klee explained, ‘I was painting and painting and suddenly, I don’t know why, I had to dance!’

What is Rhythm?

- The basic beat (pulse) of a piece - the thing you tap with your feet

- The different length notes that can be shaped into patterns

Rhythical - 1930

Pastorale (rhythms) - 1927

Dance of the red skirts 1924

detail of Pastorale (rhythms)
Melody

What is Melody?

A succession of sounds and silences. Each sound usually has:

- A pitch component - high/low
- A rhythm component - long/short

In his lectures at the Bauhaus school in 1921-22 Klee examined the connections between music and art. He created this graph of J.S. Bach’s Sonata no. VI for violin and piano.

Harmony

What is Harmony?

- Literally, two or more notes sounding together
- Also, a structure by which certain notes are chosen by the composer that “sound right” together. Almost like the rules in a game.
Harmony in color

When two melodies play at the same time, they make a kind of harmony called polyphony - “many-sounds”

Music that has more than one note playing at a time is called “polyphonic music”

Klee invented what he called “polyphonic painting” by using color to layer large bold lines and shapes on top of tiny mosaic structures - almost like pixels...

Finding Musical Inspiration

- Time – narrative of painting/music?
- Rhythm – hints in visual motifs?
- Pitch – melodic lines anywhere?
- Color – can be interpreted as emotion?
- Verticality - instrumentation – like a score?
- Density – in painting motifs and music notes?
- Motifs – melodic/rhythmic hints?
- Ostinati - repeating patterns or motifs?
- Volume or Dynamics - as shown by physical size and color of visual motifs?
Acquiring Sound Sources

- Building Musical Instruments from repurposed materials
- Gradual accumulation of unusual sound sources
- Acquire old musical instruments
- Remember that not all things that make sound have to be "instruments"
- Remember voice, and body percussion

So, how can we find inspiration for creating musical compositions in the works of Paul Klee?

Time

Music (like dance, theater, cinema, etc.) is a time-based event

Art can also be seen as time-based (as your eyes flick from place to place on the artwork), but everything happens much faster.

Where to start?!?

- Examine the work for an obvious narrative trail - or timeline - of visual motifs that can be translated to musical events. Not necessarily linear!
- Look at each of the visual elements of a painting and assign musical events to those elements. Shape it into a time-based narrative.
- Read it like a musical part (i.e. single line L-to-R)
- Read it like a score (i.e., multiple lines L-to-R)

This will give you an idea of where to start your piece.
**Reading a music score:**
If the music is for a solo (i.e., one) instrument, you read the music like a book - left to right, jumping to the beginning of the next line.

Start here, go to end of line.

**SOLO MUSIC FOR CLARINET**

To next line.

To next line.

To next line.

To next line.

etc.

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This is a page of the orchestra score of Beethoven's 6th Symphony (in his own handwriting). Since it has more than one instrument - actually ten - you read it straight across and then go right to the next page.

Start here.

go to next page.

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Can we play it now like a score?

What 7 instruments should play this music?

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**Notating our Rhythms:**

| x_x_x_x | x_x | x_x_x | x_x_x | x_x_x | x_x_x |

Rhythm Rows:

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We____ will we____ will
rock you

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| X | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |

Tube Trumpet:

| o | o | o | o | o | o | o | o |

Shaker:

| o | o | o | o | o | o | o | o |

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If you are transforming a Klee painting - Pastoral (rhythms) - 1927 - to a piece of music with a single instrument you might consider the same strategy.

So there would be 7 lines played L-to-R one at a time by one instrument.
Notating Melody

So how do we turn this painting (The path into the blue - 1934) into a piece of music?

How about this one?

Curtain - 1924

One last try:

Still life with animal statuette - 1928

Carrying out the composing exercise

- Learn about Paul Klee
- Collect materials
- Build instruments
- Compose Music in groups of 5-6
  - Chart paper
  - Markers
  - Instruments
  - Printout of a painting by Paul Klee

Brainstorm:

- Is there a “narrative flow” to the painting? Can you start in one spot and move through the painting, assigning sounds to the visual elements?
- Are there indications of what instruments should play, and where?
- Are there indications of how loud or soft the instruments should be?
- Does the painting tell a story? Can you retell that story in music?
- Can you see rhythms in your painting? If so, can you write those rhythms down on your paper so that everyone can play them?
- Can you see melodies on your paper? What instruments can play those melodies? Can you write those melodies down on your paper using invented notation?
- Can you see places where more than one instrument might be playing at the same time to create harmony?
Form your piece/write your music

- Begin to string your ideas together into a short and simple performance
- Not everything on the painting has to show up in the music – we’re getting inspiration from the painting
- Create a score for your piece – don’t just “play the painting”
- A conductor may make playing your piece easier
- Rehearse/Perform/Assess

Alternate Literacy Exercise:
Creating stories inspired by Klee’s paintings

- Gather appropriate “story” paintings
- Getting story inspiration from a painting – Characters, setting, plot, mood, dialogue
- Model using Arrival of the Jugglers
- Individual or group writing assignment

Klee was a musician who became a painter who used music in his paintings. He carefully examined what it is that makes music unique, and then was able to translate those ideas into his artwork - he was literally painting with music…

Closing the circle:
Look at the score that your group created for your music.
Consider all that you have seen of Paul Klee’s paintings.
Don’t your scores actually start to look like Klee’s artworks?
Just like Klee, you have taken your musical ideas, and translated them into visual ideas.
Your next step is to take your scores and transform them into paintings…
…but that takes another kind of teaching artist, not me!

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