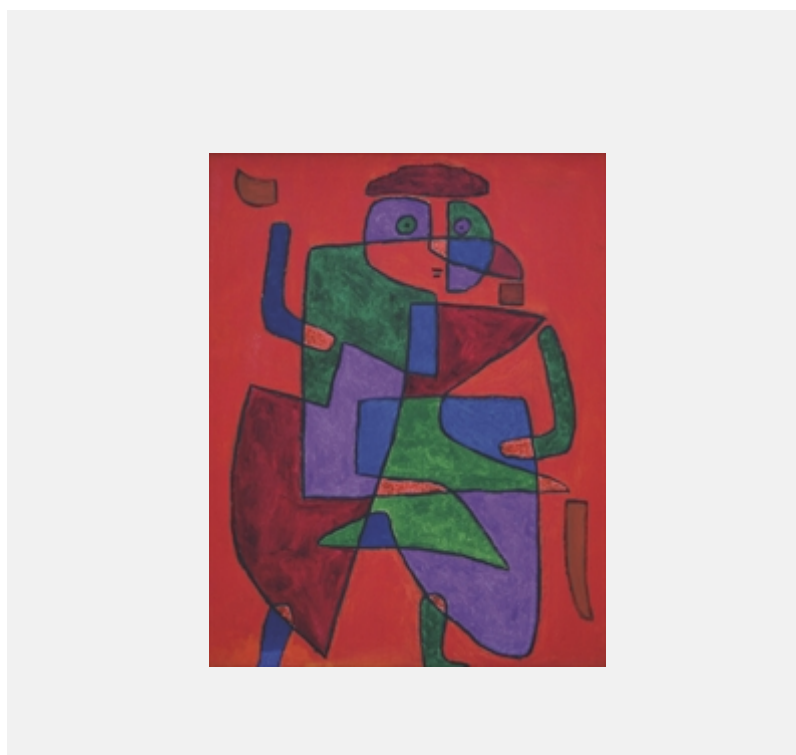

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Sale 2311

Impressionist/ Modern Evening Sale

4 May 2010, New York, Rockefeller Center



Lot 56

Paul Klee (1879-1940)

Der Künftige

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Price realised

USD 3,330,500

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Estimate**USD 2,000,000 - USD 3,000,000**

Paul Klee (1879-1940)

Der Künftige

signed 'Klee' (upper right)

oil on canvas

25½ x 19½ in. (61.1 x 49.5 cm.)

Painted in 1933

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Lot essay

The *Künftige*--"The Man of the Future"--is Klee's response to the call of totalitarian pseudo-utopian ideologies in the 1930s for the evolution of a "New Man," a heroic, super-powerful human being who derived his strength for work and will for self-sacrifice from an unshakable belief in the good of the collective and the infallibility of its leaders, who were, of course, Mussolini (Il Duce), Hitler (Der Führer) and Stalin (The Father of the People). These dictators and their minions formulated the "New Man" as the ideal human product of industrial technology, genetic science and thorough indoctrination. And Klee was probably referring as well to those with inflexible ideologies on the opposite side of the political spectrum--anyone who placed the abstract concept of a perfect utopia above decent human sympathies, and a respect for individual life.

Klee's parodic version of this superman strides forth in his uniform cap, jacket, flared breeches and boots, with a zombie-like stare, and waving in the air what may be some sort of directive or manifesto, in the shape of a tiny banner. The looping and overlapping planes of *Künftige* describe a vision of modern man in disarray and spinning out of control. In 1933 the man of the hour, the "Man of the Future," was an Italian fascist, a Spanish falangist, a Soviet commissar, or most sinister of all, a German storm trooper, a member of the National

Socialist (Nazi) paramilitary organization known as the S.A., the "brownshirts." When Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933 and assumed emergency powers, this army of thugs served as his enforcers, and began the widespread persecution of all those who did not fit their leader's conception of the "New Man."

Klee had his own run-in with the S.A. in March 1933, when some brownshirts suddenly showed up at the door of his Dessau apartment. Felix, the artist's son, recalled that the men "subjected our house to a humiliating search; they stole things, turned everything upside down, and what was far worse, confiscated our entire correspondence" (F. Klee, *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents*, New York, 1962). On 21 April the newly appointed Nazi director of the Dusseldorf Academy suspended Klee from his teaching post.

Since his participation in the abortive left-wing revolution that took place in Munich at the end of the First World War, Klee had--in his disillusionment--avoided politics, and he remained aloof from the fray during the 1920s as contending political forces tried to gain the upper hand in the fledgling Weimar Republic. While Klee did not yet believe that Hitler could accomplish much of what he ominously promised in his ranting speeches, he suddenly felt the tide of history sweeping over him once again. He responded in his art, creating in early 1933 a series of what are known as his "Historical Drawings," pencil sketches in a Daumier-like, even Goyesque manner of scenes inspired by recent events as the Nazis imposed their ideology on everyday life in Germany.

Künftige may have been painted around this time, or possibly in the wake of the storm troopers' invasion of Klee's home. The artist's whimsical but mordant sense of humor is very much in evidence here. There is, moreover, perfect irony in the fact that Klee has depicted the "Man of the Future," not in the kind of classical realist style that the Nazis embraced as being suitable for the expression of their Aryan ideals, but in the nearly abstract, color-driven modernist style that the Nazis vilified and tried to expunge from public consciousness. Klee had already been singled out as a degenerate artist, and doubts had been raised in some quarters about his racial purity, on account of North African ancestry on his mother's side. He knew his situation in Germany was untenable. On 23 December 1933 Paul and Lily Klee left Germany, and took refuge in Switzerland, where the artist spent his remaining years.

Cataloguing & details

Provenance

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Paris (by 1939).
Karl Nierendorf, Berlin (1939).
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Chicago (by 1949).
Lora Marx, Chicago (acquired from the above, 1949).
Anon. sale, Sotheby's, London, 3 April 1990, lot 54.
Jeffrey H. Loria & Co., Inc., New York.
Acquired from the above by the present owner, 1998.

Pre-Lot Text

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Literature

K. Nierendorf, *Paul Klee, Paintings, Watercolors 1913 to 1939*, New York, 1941.
B. von Armitage, ed., *5 Essays on Klee*, New York, 1950, p. 91.
J. Glaesemer, *Paul Klee. Die farbigen Werke im Kunstmuseum Bern. Gemälde, farbige Blätter, Hinterglasbilder und Plastiken*, Bern, 1976, p. 143.
The Paul Klee Foundation, ed., *Paul Klee: Catalogue Raisonné 1913-1918*, Bern, 2000, vol. 6, p. 467, no. 6428 (illustrated).
V.E. Barnett, *The Architect as Art Collector*, exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2001, p. 111 (illustrated in color).

Exhibited

Kunsthalle Bern, *Paul Klee*, February-March 1935, no. 81.
Kunsthalle Basel, *Paul Klee*, October-November 1935, no. 66.
Kunstmuseum Lucerne, *Paul Klee, Fritz Huf*, April-June 1936, no. 107.
New York, Nierendorf Gallery, *Paul Klee. An Exhibition in Honor of the Sixtieth Birthday of the Artist*, February 1940, no. 41.
Saint-Paul-de-Vence, Fondation Maeght, *Paul Klee*, November 1977, no. 120.