

6/30/10

Paul Klee uses the language and terms of music as a means of defining his visual language. What is of value to me as an instructor and an artist is not necessarily his work (which I do admire) but the visual structural thinking that goes into his work. Klee's thoughtful works (visual thinking) can be used as a structured compositional basis for my own work as well as for my students work. It is my belief that the understanding of art comes from the study of multiple sources rather than just one aspect or discipline of art such as the visual arts. What is necessary to understand art is to experience great music, literature, visual and performance art. With the appreciation of these varied disciplines one can begin the Socratic process of determining what the essence of each of the disciplines are and in turn begin to understand the essence of the idea referred to as art. What is the essence or what is essential and the same in each of the disciplines of art? To understand art's essence is to understand what art is in your chosen medium. In defining visual art in musical terms I believe Klee is pointing to what is fundamentally the same or similar and necessary for the production of a work of art. A work of art has fundamental elements and these element/structures are the same for each of the disciplines of art.

The musical terms most often used by Klee either by title or elucidation of his work are fugue, polyphony, counterpoint and contrapuntal. They are all similar in meaning and could fit into a larger universal idea know as duality. They are largely opposites working in conjunction, separate and in opposition to create an overall structural harmony. This requires many separate voices/elements working in opposition to create a harmonic whole.

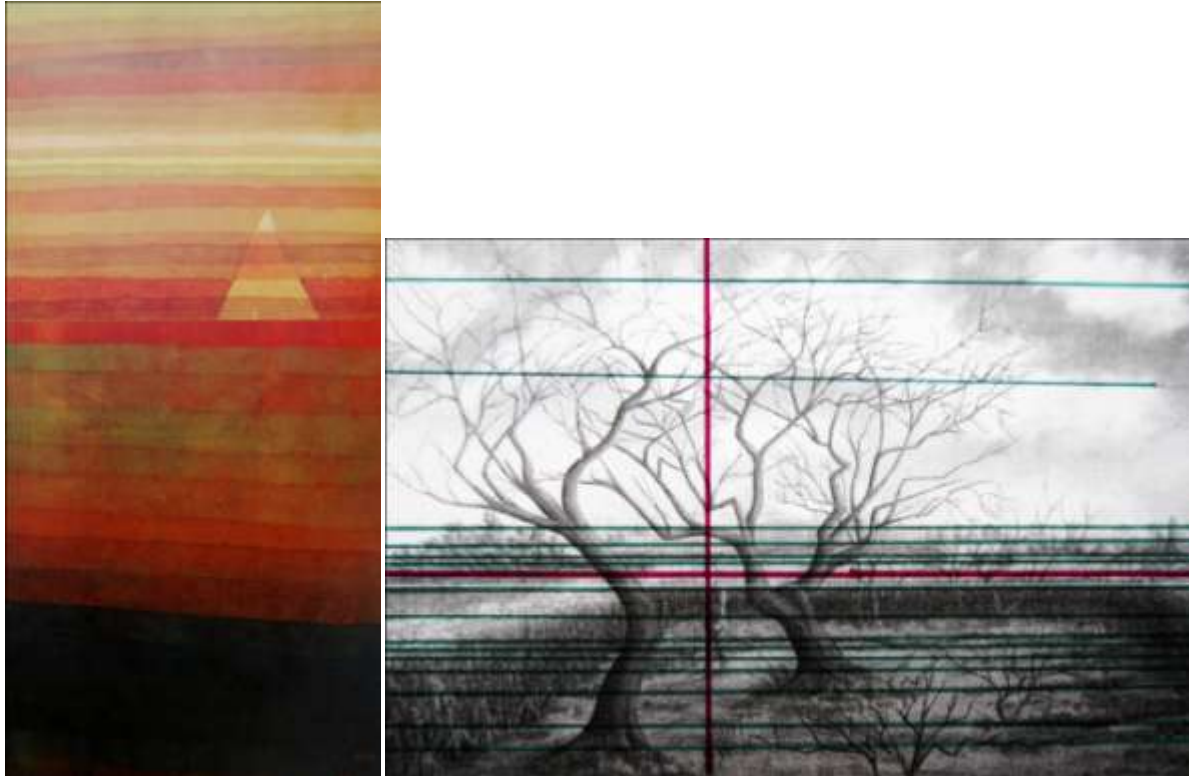
Klee uses imagery defined as abstract which I define as visual art reduced to its purest structural form. I also maintain that this same structure present and more visible in abstraction is also present and the essential element in figurative object based visual art. In my understanding of brain hemispheric function I understand the abstract, geometrical structured imagery to be essentially a product of right brain hemisphere thinking/seeing and the addition of pictorial objects to be left brain hemispheric thinking. What I have found in my study of art is that it is not the representation of the objects that makes or produces art but it's underlying, subliminal or substructure that makes the art just as the individual notes do not make the music but its underlying structure/composition that makes art of music. So the structure is the same for abstract and figurative visual art just as it is the same for music, literature and visual art.

I will now compare one of my recent Night Journey's work with the work and terms of Paul Klee. I will begin by displaying the finished painting and the beginning drawing. From the drawing I will then break the image down to its different Polyphony voices and compare them directly with Klee's work.



Night Journey painting and drawing

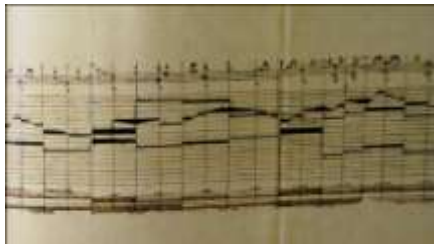
In the drawing you can see the basic objects of trees, fields and figure placed in a geometrical structure. Klee defines base structures which form the basis for polyphony and eventually counterpoint as “dividuals” which he further defines as a series of parallel line that can be divided. These form the counterpoint of what he refers to the individual which is that which cannot be repeated or divided.



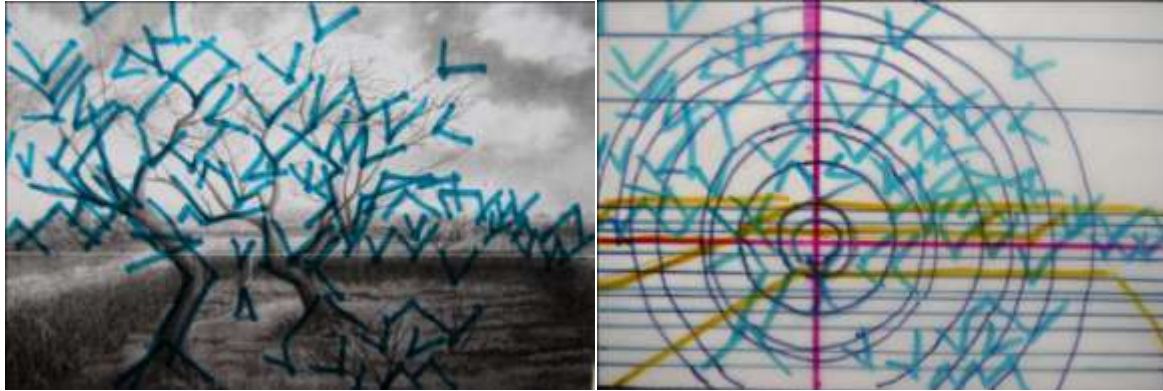
On the left is a simple illustration of Klee's use of the parallel dividuals and individual. The triangle is in opposition (counterpoint) to the horizontal structure of the painting. The horizontal dividual structure also forms the structuring on the temporal and special elements of the art work. It becomes the framework for the application of color which progressively moves back and forth in space through the use of chromatic scale. The progression of space is the progression of time and in abstraction that combination becomes relative and not restricted to standard progression that is often required in figurative work. Music in particular is a progression in time and space through sound and in the progression of time for its content to be realized/heard. In my picture on the right two opposing red line divide the picture plane establishing the first polyphonic voice and counterpoint. They are based on the mathematical formula of the golden mean or golden section. They will begin to establish the structure of the dividual and individual, the rhythm and clarify or emphasize the dominant voice/subject/melody. The green lines begin to set up one of the dividuals that is largely responsible for the special and temporal elements of the painting. They are the lines/structure that set up the chromatic scale that allows space to be represented through color. The color will diminish as it recedes or moves upward on the picture plane to the horizon and then increase in chroma as it moves upward to the top of the painting. It is through the traversing of space that time is created. Vision must now move from one spacial sector of the painting to the next creating a progression of time.



In Klee's work on the left you once again see the horizontal dividural structure but this time it is being divided by vertical lines also becoming a counterpoint dividural and counterpoint voice that becomes representational of space through their converging and expanding proximity to one another and often converging similar to the way we visually experience linear perspective. In my figurative work on the right I add the linear perspective squares of the fields to the structural dividural horizontal line heightening the sense of space.



The image on the left is Klee's direct referencing to music as he devises a bar/measure similar to music and charts sound to different levels creating a rhythm. In my work on the right I create another counterpoint dividural of parallel circular lines originating from the beginning intersection of the golden mean. This in a sense forms the bar/measure that sets the primary theme/expressed mood of the composition. Also sound waves are represented in concentric circles emanating from its point of origin. This will become the dominant theme/melody/sound and voice of the composition.



Added to the circular individual are the angles or triangles forming another polyphonic voice with new rhythm creating tension/counterpoint to the more relaxed structures of the other individuals. This is also heightened by the fact that the trees and figure are also in sharp contrast to the largely horizontal elements of the landscape. All of these polyphonic voices/melodies are combined on the right to form the structure/composition that will allow the painting to communicate to the viewer. Without this structure a work of art could not exist. This structure is largely subliminal which means it cannot be consciously viewed but is seen as part of the right hemisphere subconscious field of vision. Most people only see and recognize the object/subject of the visual art. The structure on the right could have color applied to create space, time, mood to its existing and essential structural elements and in the hands of the skilled artist could achieve what the figurative has accomplished in the figurative painting. The abstract artist simply chooses to express art in its most elemental format which they often consider the purest form of art.

