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12 × 17" / 315 × 435 mm
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List price: CHF 1,500.– / EUR 1,250.– / USD 1,650.00
Pre-publication price: CHF 1,125.– / EUR 935.– / USD 1,235.00
Valid until end of September 2013
Postage and handling included
VAT & import taxes excluded
EUR price for Germany,
USD price for USA only
ISBN 978–3–318–02246–9

www.karger.com
Medical Principles and Practice

International Journal of the Kuwait University Health Sciences Centre

Founded and edited by Mustafa Khogali in 1989; continued by Basil Al-Nakib (1990–1993); Naji S. Al-Zaid (1994–1998, and 2006); Farida Al-Awadi (1999–2005)

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ISSN Print Edition: 1011–7571
ISSN Online Edition: 1423–0151
Journal Homepage: www.karger.com/mpp
Publication Data: ‘Medical Principles and Practice’. Volume 22 with 6 issues appears in 2013.
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A fascinating approach to the artist and his work

Hans Suter

Paul Klee and His Illness
Bowed but Not Broken by Suffering and Adversity

Contents

- Preface Aljoscha Klee
- Foreword Hans Christoph von Tavel
- Introduction
- Paul Klee's Life – Major Milestones
- Paul Klee's Illness
- Paul Klee's Personality
- The Effects of Adversity and Illness on Paul Klee's Mind and Work
- Klee's Late Work as a Reflection of His Personality, Social Environment, Illness and Proximity to Death
- Summary and Conclusion

In 1933 Paul Klee's work was branded as 'Entartete Kunst' (Degenerate Art) by the National Socialists and he was dismissed from his professorial post at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts. This led him, together with his wife Lily, to return to his 'real home' of Bern. Here his avant-garde art was not understood and Klee found himself in unasked for isolation. In 1935 Klee started to suffer from a mysterious disease. The symptoms included changes to the skin and problems with the internal organs. In 1940 Paul Klee died, but it was only 10 years after his death that the illness was actually given the name 'scleroderma' in a publication about Klee. However, the diagnosis remained mere conjecture.

Since his adolescence, the dermatologist and venereologist Dr. Hans Suter has been fascinated by Paul Klee and his art, and more than 30 years ago this fascination spurred him to commence research into the illness and its influence on the art of Paul Klee's final years. It was due to Dr. Suter's meticulous investigations that Klee's illness could be defined as 'diffuse systemic sclerosis'. In this book the author assembles his findings and describes the rare and complex disease in a clear and comprehensible way. Further, he empathetically interprets more than 90 of Klee's late works. The point of view of a dermatologist renders a unique source of information. It provides, on one hand, new insights into everyday medical practices at the University of Bern in the 1930s, which will fascinate doctors and local historians alike. While, on the other hand, art historians and art lovers will be absorbed by the newly discovered links between Paul Klee's work and his illness.

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Prices subject to change
EUR price for Germany, USD price for USA only
ISBN 978–3–8055–9381–6
e-ISBN 978–3–8055–9382–3

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Contents

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Selected contributions
- Troponin for the Estimation of Infarct Size: What Have We Learned? Hallén, J. (Oulu)
- Phenotype and Genotype Characterization and Twin Association in Patients with Anderson-Fabry Cardiomyopathy: Gomez, M.; Molina, L.; Cidellias, M.; Ascoeta, S.; Soler, C.; Ble, M.; Ramirez, A.; Bruguera, J. (Barcelona)
- Elevated Proportion of Small, Dense Low-Density Lipoprotein Particles and Lower Adiponectin Blood Levels Predict Early Structural Valve Degeneration of Bioprostheses: Shetty, R.; Girerd, N.; Côte, N.; Arsenault, B.; Després, J.-P. (Québec, Que.)
- The Right Ventricle in Health and Disease: Insights into Physiology, Pathophysiology and Diagnostic Management: Apostolakis, S.; Konstantinides, S. (Athens)
- Copeptin Level and Copeptin Response to Percutaneous Balloon Mitral Valvuloplasty in Mitral Stenosis: Günebakmaz, O.; Kastamonul; Celik, A.; Elazgi; Inanc, M.T.; Duran, M. (Kayseri); Karakaya, E.; Keserihil; Tulmac, M.; Kırkkale; Akpek, M.; Sarli, B.; Ergin, A.; Tapsakal, R. (Kayseri)
- Influence of Myocardial Fibrosis on Left Ventricular Hypertrophy in Patients with Symptomatic Severe Aortic Stenosis: Golia, G.; Milano, A.D.; Dodonov, M.; Bergamini, C.; Faggian, G.; Tomezzoli, A.; Vassanelli, C. (Verona)
- Cardioprotective Effect of a Hemoglobin-Based Oxygen Carrier on Cold Ischemia/Reperfusion Injury: Wei, L.; Wu, R.-B.; (Guangzhou); Yang, C.-M.; (Tianjin); Zheng, S.-Y.; Yu, X.-Y.; (Guangzhou)
- Intracoronary Compared to Intravenous Abciximab in Patients with ST Segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction Treated with Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention Reduces Mortality, Target Vessel Revascularization and Reinfarction after 1 Year: Iversen, A.Z.; Galaitis, S.; Abildgaard, U. (Copenhagen); Gallo, A. (Rokilde); Hansen, P.R.; Pedersen, S.; Engstroem, T.; Jensen, J.S. (Copenhagen)

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Cardiology
2013: Volumes 124, 125, 126
4 issues per volume
Language: English
ISSN 0008–6312 (print)
ISSN 1421–9751 (online)

Cardiology is listed in bibliographic services, including Current Contents/Research & Industry, MEDLINE, Biological Abstracts, EMBASE/Excerpta Medica.

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What’s New

311 What’s New in the Pathophysiology of Sickle Cell Disease?
Adekile, A.D. (Jabriya, Kuwait)

Reviews

313 Current Recommendations for Cervical Cancer Screening: Do They Render the Annual Pelvic Examination Obsolete?
Kauffman, R.P.; Griffin, S.J.; Lund, J.D.; Tullar, P.E. (Amarillo, Tex., USA)

323 Clinical Errors and Medical Negligence
Oyebode, F. (Birmingham, UK)

Original Papers

334 A Retrospective Radiographic Study of Coronal-Periapical Status and Root Canal Filling Quality in a Selected Adult Turkish Population
Ureyen Kaya, B.; Kececi, A.D.; Guldas, H.E.; Orhan, H. (Isparta, Turkey)

340 Novel Actions of Oxazolidinones: In vitro Screening of a Triazolyloxazolidinone for Anticonvulsant Activity
Kombian, S.B.; Phillips, O.A. (Safat, Kuwait)

346 Outcomes of Different Surgical Procedures in the Treatment of Spinal Tuberculosis in Adults
Cui, X.; Ma, Y.Z.; Chen, X.; Cai, X.J.; Li, H.W.; Bai, Y.B. (Beijing, China)

351 Effects of Plum Extract on Skeletal System of Fetal and Newborn Mice
Monsefi, M.; Parvin, F.; Farzaneh, M. (Shiraz, Iran)

357 Chemopreventive Effect of Ardisia crispa Hexane Fraction on the Peri-Initiation Phase of Mouse Skin Tumorigenesis
Hamid, R.A.; Othman, F.; Anthony, J.J.; Ting, Y.L. (Selangor, Malaysia)

362 The Morbidity Rate of Chronic Disease among Chinese Rural Residents: Results from Liuyang Cohort
Huang, X.; Chen, M.; Tan, H.; Xiao, S.; Deng, J. (Changsha, PR China)

368 Inhibitory Activity of Green Tea (Camellia sinensis) Extract on Some Clinically Isolated Cariogenic and Periodontopathic Bacteria
Araghizadeh, A. (Bandar Abbas, Iran); Kohanteb, J.; Fani, M.M. (Shiraz, Iran)

373 Acute Single-Stage Reconstruction of Multiligament Knee Injuries Using the Ligament Advanced Reinforcement System
Tao, J.; Li, X.; Zhou, Z.; Zhu, Z. (Shanghai, China)

379 Quality of Life of Children and Adolescents with Type 1 Diabetes in Kuwait
Abdul-Rasoul, M.; AlOtaibi, F.; Abdulla, A.; Rahme, Z.; AlShawaf, F. (Kuwait, Kuwait)

385 Level of Empathy among Medical Students in Kuwait University, Kuwait
Hasan, S.; Al-Sharqawi, N.; Dashi, F.; AbdulAziz, M.; Abdullah, A.; Shukkur, M.; Bouhamed, M.; Thalib, L. (Jabriya, Kuwait)

390 The Impact of Shift Work on Brazilian Train Drivers with Different Chronotypes: A Comparative Analysis through Objective and Subjective Criteria
de Araújo Fernandes Jr., S.; Steiner Antonietti, L.; Saba, A.; Paulino de Faria, A. (São Paulo, Brazil); Maculano Esteves, A. ( Limeira, Brazil); Tufik, S.; Túlio de Mello, M. (São Paulo, Brazil)

397 Direct and Transdentinal (Indirect) Antibacterial Activity of Commercially Available Dental Gel Formulations against Streptococcus mutans
Tüzuner, T. (Trabzon, Turkey); Ulusoy, A.T. (Samsun, Turkey); Baygin, O.; Yalçinoglu, G.; Yalçin, I.; Buruk, K. (Trabzon, Turkey); Richardson, I. (Chatham, UK)

Case Reports

402 Right Hepatic Artery Pseudoaneurysm Complicating Acute Pancreatitis: A Case Report
Shiozawa, K.; Watanabe, M.; Ikehara, T.; Mukozo, T.; Kamata, I.; Kishimoto, Y.; Mimura, T.; Ito, K.; Okano, N.; Igarashi, Y.; Sumino, Y. (Tokyo, Japan)

405 Pheochromocytoma Mimicking both Acute Coronary Syndrome and Sepsis: A Case Report
Lee, T.-W.; Lin, K.-H.; Chang, C.-J.; Lew, W.-H.; Lee, T.-I. (Taipei, Taiwan)

408 A Case of Severe and Recurrent Painless Thyroiditis Requiring Thyroidectomy
Ishii, H.; Takei, M.; Sato, Y.; Ito, T.; Itô, K.; Sakai, Y. (Matsumoto, Japan); Yumita, W. (Ina, Japan); Suzuki, S.; Komatsu, M. (Matsumoto, Japan)

Short Communication

411 Health Education Materials for Arab Patients: Content and Design Preferences
Hashim, M.J.; Mustafa, H.; Al Abdouli, A.O.; Abdulla Al, R.A.; AlQahtani, S.M.; Almajed, S.A.; Alzaabi, S.S.; Alkaabi, M.S. (Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates)