

Biography

February 29, 1908

Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski) is born in Paris. He is the second son of the German-Polish art historian Erich Klossowski and the German-Jewish artist Else (or Elsa) Klossowski, née Spiro. The children grow up in a sophisticated artistic environment. Balthus's brother, Pierre Klossowski, three years his senior, will become a notable writer and artist.

1914 At the outbreak of World War I, the Klossowskis, as German citizens, have to leave Paris, and move to Berlin.

1916 Balthus moves with his mother and brother to Switzerland, first to Bern and then to Geneva, where he attends the Lycée Calvin.

1920 Else, who will henceforth call herself Baladine, becomes the muse and lover of poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who recognizes Balthus's artistic talent and encourages him to develop it.

1921 Publication of Balthus's pictorial narrative *Mitsou, quarante images*, with a foreword by Rilke.

1924 The family returns to Paris. Balthus develops a taste for the art of the Old Masters and copies pictures by Poussin in the Louvre.

1926 During a stay in Tuscany he copies paintings by Piero della Francesca and Masaccio. The influence of both artists will often be apparent in his later work.

1930 He falls in love with Antoinette de Watteville from Bern, the younger sister of a friend of his youth. She plays an important part in his art as a model, but at first rejects him as a partner for life.

1934 His first solo exhibition, which includes such major paintings as *La Rue*, *La Toilette de Cathy*, and *La Leçon de guitare*, takes place at the Galerie Pierre, Paris, and causes an outcry.

1935 He begins to receive increasing numbers of portrait commissions from affluent patrons. He designs the sets and costumes for Antonin Artaud's play *Les Cenci*, the first of many contributions to theatre productions. In October he moves into a studio on the Cour de Rohan in Paris.

1936 Balthus starts work on series of paintings featuring a girl called Thérèse Blanchard as model. The motif of the girl becomes a principal focus of his art.

1937 He marries Antoinette de Watteville.

1938 The Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, shows work by him for the first time in the U.S.A. Matisse becomes one of his principal gallerists.

1940 Balthus and Antoinette escape the German invasion of France in World War II by moving to Champrovent in Savoy.

1941 Picasso acquires Balthus's painting *Les Enfants Blanchard* from the Pierre Colle Gallery in Paris.

1942 Balthus and Antoinette continue to flee from the war, settling in Switzerland, first in Bern, then in Fribourg and Geneva. Their first son, Stanislas, is born.

- 1944** A second son, Thadée, is born to Balthus and Antoinette.
- 1946** The artist returns to Paris without his family.
- 1952** Starts work on *Passage du Commerce-Saint-André*, his largescale chef d'oeuvre.
- 1953** Financial assistance from a group of collectors and patrons, including Pierre Matisse, Claude Hersaint and Alix de Rothschild, enables Balthus to move into the Château de Chassy in Burgundy, where he completes *Passage du Commerce-Saint-André* and produces many new works. On occupying the château, he adopts the title of Comte Klossowski de Rola.
- 1961** He becomes director of the Académie de France à Rome. During his time in Rome he paints little, concentrating his efforts on restoring the Renaissance building housing the Academy, the Villa Medici.
- 1962** On a diplomatic trip to Japan he makes the acquaintance of Setsuko Ideta, who becomes his partner and model.
- 1967** Balthus and Setsuko marry.
- 1968** A major retrospective of the artist's work is mounted at the Tate Gallery in London.
- 1970** Balthus purchases the Castello di Montecalvello, near Viterbo, north of Rome.
- 1973** A daughter, Harumi, is born to Balthus and Setsuko.
- 1977** The artist settles with his family in the legendary Grand Chalet at Rossinière in the Swiss canton of Vaud, a huge wooden building dating from the eighteenth century. He continues painting in the studio there at a great age.
- 1983** The Centre Pompidou in Paris organizes a large-scale retrospective of his work that subsequently travels to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- 1991** He is awarded Japan's Praemium Imperiale for his life's work.
- February 18, 2001**
Balthus dies in the Grand Chalet at Rossinière, a few days short of his 93rd birthday.