

**Paul Keene**

**Date of Birth:**

08/24/1920

**Place of Birth:**

Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania



**Jazz Series #4,  
Chicago Blues, 1983**

pencil on paper  
H. 22 x W. 29.5  
inches  
Group I



**Orpheus I, 1997**

collage on paper  
H. 24 x W. 29.75  
inches  
Group I

*“Through deeply personal pictures Paul Keene brings together the painter's visceral love of color with the mystery of memory and the subconscious mind. Mr. Keene is a quiet man who chooses to speak with line, shape, and most passionately- with color. Always avoiding the didactic, he gives us hints and suggestions, then leaves us to discover our own meaning in his work.”*

—Bruce Katsiff

Color serves as the compositional key in the works of painter Paul Keene. Working primarily with acrylic paints on paper, Keene describes his painting as “abstract realist.” His window scenes and landscape studies demonstrate his skillful manipulation of scale, color, light, and atmosphere. Keene often utilizes grid compositions, juxtaposed against the concentric circles of radiating color that he considers his “unconscious” personal symbol.

Keene has explored the iconography and symbolism of African-American life and culture. In his work, he has created new icons of black urban life with his anonymous portraits of jazz musicians and documented the movement and vitality of city life.

Keene was born, grew up, and went to school in Philadelphia, first at the Museum School of Arts and then at Tyler School of Art. From 1949 to 1951, he studied in Paris under the G.I. Bill. While in Paris, he was part of a group of artists who exhibited at Gallery 8, where he met Romare Bearden, another African-American, who later became one of the United States’s twentieth-century masters.

Keene’s love of art extended to a love of teaching; he began to teach at Tyler School of Art in 1948. He also traveled to Haiti and taught at the Centre D’Art in Port-Au-Prince. From 1954 to 1968, he taught painting, drawing, collage, and design on the faculty of the University of the Arts. After moving to Bucks County, Keene taught painting and drawing at Bucks County Community College from 1968 to 1985, serving as the Art Department’s chairperson for three years. He has exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the James A. Michener Art Museum, the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Keene has also received numerous prestigious awards.