

Francesco Clemente

Francesco Clemente (b.1952 Naples, Italy) is an American-Italian artist whose work investigates philosophical questions about the nature of consciousness and the self. Initially recognised as a principal figure in the Italian Transavanguardia movement of the 1980s and then for his unique vision for a truly multicultural art, Clemente embraces a nomadic strategy, living and working between India and the USA for over four decades. He became a well-known figure in the art scene of 1980s New York, collaborating on numerous paintings and projects with his peers Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and illuminating poetry by Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, John Wieners and Rene Ricard.

Dividing his time between New York and Varanasi, Clemente's practice crosses both intellectual and geographical borders. This nomadic approach is reflected in his recent large-scale installations, hand-painted tents that combine myriad cultural and art historical references with every aspect of the exteriors, interiors, walls and roofs covered with a variety of painted motifs. Six tents formed the centrepiece to Clemente's major 2015-16 museum exhibition, *Encampment*, at MASS MoCA, USA.

Clemente often draws on the traditional art and contemplative traditions of India and he has explored erotic imagery inspired by the Tantra traditions of India and Tibet. This recently includes his *Emblems of Transformation* watercolour paintings, presented in a suite of 108 that references the number of beads in the japa mala commonly used by Hindus and Buddhists during prayer.

Stylistically varied, Clemente aims to defy expectations of style and linear narrative, embracing diverse mediums and material including: oil on canvas, pastel, watercolour, fresco, print making amongst others. As a general rule, his work depicts symbolic motifs and the human form (in its entirety or metamorphosing between human and animal) but resists iconographic reading in its evocation of the body, and of spiritual and mythological symbols. He is also well known for his distinctive approach to portraiture through which chronicles New York intellectual and social life.

Influenced by thinkers as diverse as G. Bateson, J. Krishnamurti and William Blake, Clemente's work develops in a nonlinear mode, not defined by a style but rather by his recording of the fluctuations of the self as he experiences it. His goal is to embrace an expanded consciousness, and to witness, playfully, the survival of the ecstatic experience in a materialistic society.

His paintings, drawings, prints and illustrated books have been featured in shows at numerous international venues including Dia Center for the Arts, New York, US (1988); the Art Institute of Chicago, US (1987); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, US (1985); the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, DE (1984) and the the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK (1983)

Through the 1990s, surveys of his work were exhibited by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, US (1990); the Royal Academy of the Arts, London, UK (1990); the Pompidou Center, Paris, FR (1994); and the Sezon Museum, Tokyo, JP (1994). In 1999/2000, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Guggenheim Bilbao organised a major retrospective of Clemente's work.

Recent museum exhibitions include; Springs Art Center, Beijing, CN (2016); Mass MoCA, Massachusetts, US (2015); The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, US (2014-2015); Palazzo Sant'Elia, Palermo, IT (2013); Uffizi Gallery, Florence, IT (2011); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, DE (2011); Museo MADRE, Naples, IT (2009); Museo Maxxi, Rome, IT (2006); The Rose Art Museum, Massachusetts, US (2004); the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, IE (2004).

Clemente is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.