

GRAZIA

The Return of Clemente

by Tita Naidenova
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© Francesco Clemente; *Father*. Photo by Elon Schoenholz;
Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery

In 1998, an extraordinary film saw its release on the big screen - an adaptation of Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*. Besides the remarkable tandem of Ethan Hawke and Robert De Niro and the gentle presence of Gwyneth Paltrow, the production also enjoyed a subtle intervention by the American artist Francesco Clemente. He was the creator of the drawings presented as the works of Hawk's character - Finn in the film. The beautiful portraits had large eyes which emphasized the human soul. Clemente had been interested in this stylistic and philosophical direction from the beginning of his artistic career in his native Naples. In fact, this is apparent in his current exhibition presented by Vito Schnabel Gallery in Santa Monica, California, which is open to visitors until the 16th of January.

Clemente's collaboration with Vito Schnabel was destined to be, as Vito is the son of his great friend and colleague - the artist and director Julian Schnabel. Francesco and Julian's friendship goes back to the early 1980s New York art scene and presently continues as a professional engagement with Vito Schnabel. The children of the two artists have also been great friends since they were young and have had the good

fortune to grow up in the company of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, as mentioned by Nina (Clemente's eldest daughter) in an interview with *Vanity Fair* magazine. Basquiat, the child prodigy of the New York art scene at the time, loved painting children of his friends and also his then-girlfriend Madonna. As a result of growing up in the art world, Clemente and Schnabel's scions have chosen to be associated with art in one way or another. Julian Schnabel's two daughters are artists, and his son Vito successfully runs three galleries around the world. The same can be said about Clemente's children - Nina is a famous chef, Chiara is a film director, and his two sons - twins Pietro and Andrea, are art consultants. Art seemingly passed down genetically is a common thread shared by Schnabel and Clemente, as well as the trust and friendship built over the years. Hence, it is not surprising that Vito organized the exhibition.

Twenty Years of Painting: 2001-2021 is the thematic framework of the exhibition, in which Clemente returns to his roots in art practice. Strongly influenced by Arte Povera, he experimented in different directions throughout the years of his artistic maturation. However, in the early 2000s, Clemente (Gwyneth Paltrow's favorite artist) made a sharp turn to his first great love as an artist - painting. And like his first attempts in this direction, in this exhibition one can feel the conscious search for harmony with the inner and outer world, so characteristic of Clemente. Some art critics find that his works are meditative forms of communication with a viewer and with himself, while others find that, like Pablo Picasso, he tries to find the purest form of drawing. "Painting is the most direct way to the sources of imagination. But not the imagination as an attempt to hide from reality, but on the contrary - a more direct path to it," Francesco Clemente commented in the exhibition catalogue. With the radiance of a pastor, with a kind and noble gaze illuminating his warm blue eyes, he is a source of inspiration not only for many artists, but also for members of his large family. His granddaughters, his wife Alba - his permanent muse, and his beloved colleague and friend Julian Schnabel visit his studio in Greenwich Village, New York. More than six years ago *Harper's Bazaar*, inspired by his work, organized a special photo shoot in his studio featuring a group of models who posed as subjects for his paintings. The result surprised many, including top model Christy Turlington who, following the photo shoot, bought Clemente's portrait of her.

Translated from Bulgarian