

MOUSSE

Francesco Clemente "Twenty Years of Painting: 2001-2021" at Vito Schnabel Gallery, Santa Monica

January 12, 2022



Francesco Clemente, *Father*, 2006-2007.
© Francesco Clemente. Courtesy: the artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York/St. Moritz/Santa Monica

"Painting is an ideal medium to return to the sources of imagination. Imagination seen not as an arbitrary faculty, but as a way to know reality."

– *Francesco Clemente*

Vito Schnabel Gallery presents Francesco Clemente "Twenty Years of Painting: 2001-2021" in the Old Santa Monica Post Office. The internationally acclaimed artist's first Los Angeles solo exhibition in nearly two decades, "Twenty Years of Painting" features thirty works that reveal Clemente's remarkable mastery of the many mediums that fall within the tradition of painting- from fresco on plaster panels and watercolor on paper, to oils and mixed media pigments on canvas, linen, and glass- and bring viewers along on his journey through themes both metaphysical and sensual. The exhibition includes a suite of monumental new paintings created during the course of the pandemic.

The exhibition uses as its foil the classic Art Deco features of the historic 1938 Post Office building. A striking example of the Federal New Deal era Public Works Administration (PWA) Modern architectural style that emerged in the 1930s, the site offers 15,000 square feet of exhibition space- a sprawling interior with raw industrial beams, exposed walls and original end-grain wood floors that complement and contrast with the powerful lyricism of Clemente's boldly expressive large-scale works.

Non-linear and expansive, Francesco Clemente's oeuvre has drawn influence over the past four decades from divergent geographies and cultural contexts. The New York-based, Italian-born artist first travelled to India in the 1970s and has since maintained a defining dialogue with its rituals, practices, and philosophical thought. His artistic vision and lexicon of metamorphic and symbolic imagery have been informed and shaped by a nomadic lifestyle and a deep spiritual relationship to the contemplative traditions of different cultures. Clemente's focus on figural representation and visual narrative manifests in his artistic quest to ponder the arcane, address the human condition, and explore the manifold aspects of our physical body and metaphysical existence.

Clemente's paintings are rich with mysticism and sensuality, and reflect the fluidity and fragmentation that characterize much of his oeuvre. Traversing ineffable states of consciousness and experiences of being, the artist anchors his artistic practice in an understanding of life as non-linear, and grounds his imagery in a resounding pictorial commitment to the here and now. By surveying the sweep of his work, Francesco Clemente "Twenty Years of Painting: 2001-2021" reveals a cross-cultural synthesis of visualized ideas and meditations on concepts of time, identity, the sacred, and notions of the self.

The exhibition will also debut a group of four new large-scale watercolor paintings. These works, created over the course of the pandemic, embrace the theme of reconciliation. Here, Clemente considers the meeting point of a daily, mechanical life bound by time, and an experience of timelessness achieved through self-awareness. Deeply personal and vivid, the familiar and recognizable figurative language of Clemente's tableaux manifests as hallucinatory in these paintings with their dream-like apparitions. A radiating body of light surrounds a Harlequin figure in the center of one composition. Below, a child's toy train chugs across the canvas as a cloud of black steam rises from its locomotive engine. In another painting in the series, red roses fall from a cerulean blue sky, while blue roses rise from a bed of red earth. Ominous but alluring, the images rendered by Clemente's brush skirt across the vast expanse of the paper, achieving a balance between artistic control and creative renunciation.

At Vito Schnabel Gallery, Santa Monica
until January 16, 2022