



Francesco Clemente, *Angelus Novus VII*, 2022, pigments and gold leaf on panel, 78 x 66 inches (198.1 x 167.6); Photo by Matt Grubb; Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery

**FRANCESCO CLEMENTE**  
**ANGELUS NOVUS**  
**MARCH 2 - MAY 20, 2023**

**VITO SCHNABEL GALLERY**  
**43 CLARKSON STREET**  
**NEW YORK, NY 10014**

Beginning March 2nd, Vito Schnabel Gallery will present *Francesco Clemente: Angelus Novus*, debuting paintings from a new body of work by the renowned New York-based artist. With these twelve large-scale canvases, Clemente mediates the realms of the astral and the earthly and charts their evolution as the wheel of history turns to shape human experience. Returning to a subject he has probed over the years, Clemente here draws inspiration from Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint *Angelus Novus* (New Angel), an icon of the Swiss-German artist's oeuvre that was owned by his friend, the philosopher Walter Benjamin. Of Klee's angel, Benjamin wrote:

"A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that

the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

Over the past five decades, Francesco Clemente has unfurled a wholly unique visual poetry to untangle the chains of history and propose a profound mingling of the secular, religious, and spiritual. With his new *Angelus Novus* series at Vito Schnabel Gallery, the artist depicts in each painting a pile of rubble comprised of familiar objects and symbols from contemporary culture. Through their combination of bold repetition and subtle variation, these canvases together achieve an atmosphere of levity and joy—a sort of sublime defiance of the dark times in which we live, a retort to their unrelenting illusions of 'progress'.

*Francesco Clemente: Angelus Novus* will be on view at the gallery's 43 Clarkson Street location from March 2 through May 20. The exhibition is Clemente's sixth with the gallery and his third presentation with Vito Schnabel in New York City.

**About the exhibition**

Strongly influenced by mythology, philosophy, and literature, and influenced by his nomadic sojourns and immersion in different cultures, Clemente's distinctive figuration and lexicon of metaphorical imagery are the vehicles for his ongoing exploration of spirituality and identity, of mystical experience and shifting consciousness. Travel has always been central to the artist's life and practice: through geography, he engages with different cultural practices, spiritual traditions, and intellectual thought. Moving fluidly between Eastern and Western perspectives, Clemente observes and contemplates the world through a highly individual and dualistic aesthetic ideology that straddles contemporaneity and the antique. In his quest to ponder the arcane, he manifests visual narratives that are fluid, non-linear and expansive. "I'm a believer in synchronicity," Clemente has remarked. "There's a worldview where everything is cause and effect – it is a closed universe... You never look at something as if it is not talking to you. Everything you look at is looking at you back."

For the works in *Angelus Novus*, Clemente looks at the world with a sense of wonder. Striving to view the present from a distance, he reflects on the nature of lightness as a quality unique to human experience, and levity as a guiding force on the spiritual path toward grasping our own metaphysical existence. In 2015, Clemente created a watercolor drawing of *Angelus Novus* that was based on the philosophies of Benjamin and the painting of Klee: of the mystical evocation of the angel and the myth surrounding an image

that absorbed the minds of the 20th century's most prominent thinkers. Dark and brooding, the work emulated the fatalistic view of the world that Benjamin described as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet."

While the language of history is grim, charred, and heaving beneath the unflinching weight of failures, Clemente finds redemption in the act of contemplation. Glistening in a palette of celestial blue and burnished gold, the paintings in his *Angelus Novus* series vibrate with a sense of the sacred. The objects and "things" which Clemente stacks and piles into mountains evoke a kind of familiar nonchalance. They are symbols, and references— a ladder, a butterfly, arrows, a rose, a pair of lips, swallows in flight, bells, and scissors— drawn from his own rich archive of motifs that the artist has deployed in different forms and mediums over the years. Silhouetted by a delicate white line, the radiant blue forms in his new paintings achieve weightlessness and simplicity. They are precariously stacked and balanced as if floating, rising from the pile to stretch hopefully toward the sky.

Clemente's jumbled and fragmented scenes are allegorical. He has created a cornucopia of images illuminated within a golden realm, symbols of abundance and prosperity that celebrate the implements of human invention: an airplane, a sailboat, the home, a guitar, an umbrella. These objects and the experiences they make possible are among the advancements of mankind. No longer fixed to a rising pile of rubble and wreckage, the *Angelus Novus* is presented with hopeful, encouraging evidence of humanity's creativity and innovation in their pure state before they can be burdened by the turbulence of history and the ravages of time.

### About the Artist

Francesco Clemente was born in 1952 in Naples, Italy. He studied architecture at the Università degli Studi di Roma, La Sapienza in Rome in 1970, before turning his focus instead to art.

In 2002, Clemente was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Clemente's work has been presented at numerous international institutions, including Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo; Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli; and Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

His work is featured in many prominent museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Miami Art Museum; Kunstmuseum Basel; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao and New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Clemente lives and works in New York, Chennai (formerly Madras), and Varanasi, India.



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