

MESTREPROJECTS

Press Release:

Mestre Projects is pleased to present "Windows", a solo exhibition of recent works by Francesco Clemente. The exhibition is comprised of seven oil paintings (*Windows I-VII*) and 10 watercolors (*Flags for the Terreiro I-X*).

'A note by the artist, written in the third person.'

Giorgio De Chirico used to name his still lives 'vite silenti', silent lives.

Like his brother Savinio, he often painted rooms inhabited by images of furniture and by heterogeneous objects who seem to be animated by their own inner life, just as vivid as our own or as the inner life of the sky or of the sea imagined in antiquity. Giorgio Morandi painted landscapes observing them through a binocular from the window of his studio, calm landscapes filtered through the viewpoint of domestic safety. A century later the experience of landscape as a silent and living thing, a projection of the soul and an object of longing is still resonant.

The group of paintings simply named *Windows* is the most recent chapter of the varied, fragmented and yet coherent inner monologue being recited for half a century by Francesco Clemente, a monologue not unlike a song, joyful and sad, relentlessly indifferent to contemporaneity.

But is what Clemente says to himself a monologue? Or is it a dialogue with the past and a reaching out into the future of an artist who refutes the materialistic premises of our time and its inherent nihilism? Ultimately the artist's convictions and reasons fade in front of the main event: painting, painting which cannot be harnessed to a cause, or a hope, or a need. In *Windows*, we witness incomprehensible events happen in the glowing warmth of rooms-wombs. We glimpse the Sea, the Trees, the Mountain, through symmetrical windows or, in the last painting of the group, through a crack in the ceiling: here, escape can only happen in the verticality of contemplation and timelessness.

Escape is the only serious choice.

Escape from an ancestral Fort, the Castel dell'Ovo in Naples, reflected in a splash of water, escape from the life-boat-love-

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boat stranded on the reefs of lovers misunderstandings, escape from the tenderness of Milk and Cloth, from the felled Christmas Tree, from a Japanese painting of a Mystic Fox, from the embrace of a Giant Fish caught in a Net, emblem of the inevitability of life, life which, as our own wrist, our hand can only touch lightly but never grasp.

From the windows of these eventful and silent rooms we watch the sea best described by Fernando Pessoa when he wrote:
'God placed danger and the abyss in the sea.
But he also made it heaven's mirror.'

Manhattan, New York
December 2023

artist bio:

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.

Clemente came to prominence in the late 1970s and cemented an international reputation with his participation in the 39th edition of Venice Biennale in 1980. He is most closely associated with the Transavanguardia movement in Italy and recognized as an influential figure of Neo-Expressionism in the United States. Clemente's generation came of age amidst the politicization of Italy, where conceptual artistic strategies and the dogmatism of Arte Povera prevailed. Against this background of conflict, Clemente chose to concentrate on painting as a model of inner reconciliation and went on to explore a contemplative and symbolic mode of painting that revolved around images of the body as the boundary between inner and outer self.

Surrounded by anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist activities in Rome, social and cultural upheaval, and the dogmas of consumerism that plagued Western Europe, Clemente fiercely sought alternative narratives and images of contemporaneity, and found creative refuge in the philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic ideologies of the East. Clemente travelled to India for the first time in 1971 and later visited Afghanistan with his friend and mentor Alighiero e Boetti. Before settling and establishing his studio in New York in 1980, Clemente lived on and off for ten years in India, where he studied Sanskrit as well as Hindu and Buddhist literature, educating himself in the

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Library of the Theosophical Society in Chennai (formerly Madras). There he absorbed the culture, craftsmanship, and folk-art traditions, while learning first-hand from Indian miniaturists and sign painters who were making billboard advertisements for Bollywood films. In New York, Clemente continued to collaborate with creative lights across disciplines, painting with such artists as Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and illuminating manuscripts with writers Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, John Wieners, Rene Ricard, Vincent Katz, and Salman Rushdie. With Raymond Foye, Clemente published The Hanuman Books.

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 Albertina Museum, Vienna; 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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