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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Editorial

Shalini Ganendra

BA, MA Hons (Cambridge.), LL.M.

Director, SGFA

Guest Editor

INTRODUCTION

The 'Contemporary' embraces the dynamic of the current. Thus, contemporary thought should also ideally encourage multidisciplinary curiosity, encounter and engagement. This multidisciplinary dynamic, fuelled by creativity, is the platform for the Vision Culture Lecture program ('VC Lectures'), launched in 2010 by Shalini Ganendra Fine Art ('SGFA'), in Malaysia, with the endorsement of the UNESCO Observatory. Over this short and enriching period, the VC Lectures have developed an informing presence in the region, fostering meaningful global discourse and cultural encounter, to inform the Contemporary.

SGFA is a pioneering cultural organization, embracing an eclectic and quality sensibility for collecting, consideration, capacity building and place making. We value new visuals - whether for materiality, concept or culture - and multidisciplinary processes in their creation. In addition to the VC Lectures and exhibition program, SGFA has: an artist residency program (the 'Vision Culture Art Residency'); an arts management residency for university students (the 'Exploring East Residency'); and the PavilionNOW project which celebrates local architects, contemporary design and materiality. Through these programs and a growing interest in emerging regions, we delight in the increasing international engagement with our represented areas of South East Asia and Sri Lanka.

Over twenty three speakers have participated in the VC Lectures since their inception, each invited because of eminent reputations and notable contributions within respective fields. The lecture module involves free public talks at the SGFA's award winning green space (designed by Ken Yeang), Gallery Residence, with external lectures often hosted by other local institutions and organized by SGFA. Participating curators generally conduct portfolio reviews with local artists, learning more about regional geopolitics and art practices. Strong press coverage enables outreach beyond the urban populace, as does active social and digital media. Speakers stay at the Gallery Residence and enjoy vernacular space that embraces natural ventilation and cooling systems, elegant aesthetic and greening philosophies. The VC Lecture program is as much about cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary encounters as it is about content – all defining platforms for SGFA's exhibition programming as well.

The eleven luminaries published in this peer-reviewed UNESCO Observatory journal were selected for a variety of reasons including expertise. They are: Sir Roy Calne (award winning surgeon and artist, UK); Christopher Phillips (Curator, International Center of Photography, NYC); Anoma Pieris (Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, University of Melbourne); Susan Cochrane (curator and authority on Pacific Art); Volker Albus (Professor of Product Design at the University of Arts and Design Karlsruhe, Germany); Michiko Kasahara (Chief Curator at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Japan); Matt Golden (Artist/Curator); Gregory Burgess (Architect, Order of Australia); Beth Citron (Curator, Rubin Museum NYC); Oscar Ho (curator and academic, HK); and Brian Robinson (Torres Island artist and curator, Australia).

Sir Roy Calne speaks of personal experiences using art to nurture empathy in his medical practice and his own passion for creating. Christopher Phillips, the pioneering curator credited with introducing Chinese contemporary photography to the United

States, writes about an important exhibition that he curated at the International Center of Photography. Anoma Pieris considers the impact of modernism on architecture in South Asia, and analyses supportive political and social ideologies, while Gregory Burgess tackles the place of architecture in creating a sense of individual and community belonging. Volker Albus, playfully but seriously asks us to consider the role of designers as technical and social mediators. Michiko Kasahara adeptly reviews challenges faced by successful contemporary Japanese photographers in addressing and reflecting Japanese culture, real and perceived. Susan Cochrane explores cultural ownership of Pacific Art through the use of terminology and context. Brian Robinson writes about his personal cultural narrative as a Torres Island artist. Beth Citron shares insights on Francesco Clemente's acclaimed '*Inspired by India*' exhibition which opened at the Rubin Museum in 2014. Oscar Ho speaks to the challenges of curatorship and requirements to sharpen its impact and discipline. Matt Golden shares the visual journey of his art alter-ego, Juan Carlos, with special focus on experiences in Malaysia. We bring to you a wonderful mix of multi-disciplinary and cultural discussions that show the exhilarating impact of this program.

The Vision Culture Program enters its sixth year and we look forward to its continuing impact as a pivotal program to foster meaningful global discourse. We have forged strong friendships and benefitted from cross cultural discovery thereby building platforms for more informed understanding and appreciation of our world.

Many thanks to Lindy Joubert, Editor-in-Chief of the UNESCO Observatory journal, and her marvelous team, for supporting this project from its inception; to SGFA's Exploring East Residents who assisted with editing these texts and most importantly, the amazing Vision Culture Lecture participants who have fostered knowledge, encounter and consequently, the Contemporary.

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No Other Ground

AUTHOR

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Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art
Rubin Museum, New York

ABSTRACT

Over the course of a life spent moving across continents and cultures, including significant periods in India, the Italian-born artist Francesco Clemente has found discipline in itinerancy. His work bears a rare sensitivity to the relationship between local and universal, a key dynamic in the evolution of global contemporary art. Figural forms, including self-portraiture and abstracted ideas of the body, have become the most local frame of Clemente's nomadic explorations. This intent is not simply representational, but also an extension of the artist's body into space, one that attempts to critically dissolve the conventional art historical hierarchy of figure over ground. With these concerns in mind, this essay, written to accompany the exhibition Francesco Clemente: Inspired by India at the Rubin Museum of Art (New York) in 2014, traces specific episodes and examples of Clemente's artistic production at sites across India over the course of his career, and examines the diverse styles, mediums, and visual languages that he has absorbed and adopted in places as varied as Madras and Jodhpur.

KEYWORDS

Francesco Clemente, India, contemporary art, painting, Rubin
Museum of Art, New York

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Beth Citron is the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Rubin Museum in New York. In 2014 she organized the exhibitions *Francesco Clemente: Inspired by India and Witness at a Crossroads: Photographer Marc Riboud in Asia*. For the museum, she also organized a three-part exhibition series, *Modernist Art from India* (2011-13), and with Rahaab Allana of the Alkazi Foundation, co-organized *Allegory and Illusion: Early Portrait Photography from South Asia* (2013). She has contributed to Artforum, ArtIndia, and other publications, and published Bhupen Khakhar's 'Pop' in India, 1970-72 in the Summer 2012 issue of ArtJournal. She completed a Ph.D. on Contemporary Art in Bombay, 1965-1995 in the History of Art Department at the University of Pennsylvania in 2009, and has taught in the Art History Department at New York University, from which she also earned a B.A. in Fine Arts.

This essay was originally published in a catalog accompanying *Francesco Clemente: Inspired by India*, an exhibition held at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York from September 5, 2014 - February 2, 2015.

Over the course of a life spent moving across continents and cultures, *Francesco Clemente* has found discipline in itinerancy, along with a rare sensitivity to the inexorable concurrence of local and universal. In parallel to the development of this existence and worldview, the artist developed figuration—both the intense individualism of the portrait (often self) and the abstracted impression of a body (sometimes his)—as a central concern of his painting practice. In this way the figural has become the most local frame of Clemente’s explorations, a physical intersection between the illusion of the self and the other, inside and outside, here and there. This intent is not simply representational, but also an extension of the artist’s body into space, one that attempts to critically dissolve the conventional hierarchy of figure over ground.

Art historically, Clemente’s focus on figuration connects him to a long and unbroken heritage in Indian art, and to a European historical tradition interrupted by two generations of modernism that chiefly valued abstraction. Because of Clemente’s study of the figure and his nomadic nature, his artistic project has often been described as a bridge between Eastern and Western traditions,¹ with India somewhat monolithically representing the East in this construction.² While this conceit adequately acknowledges the artist’s deep dedication to India for more than forty years, Clemente has resisted such binary categorizations on philosophical grounds since the onset of his career.³ Moreover

it reduces the seemingly never-ending pluralities and cultural complexities of the South Asian subcontinent to a single or fixed idea. In the context of the exhibition *Francesco Clemente: Inspired by India*, and as a way to move beyond the dualities that have marked Clemente's reception, this essay traces specific episodes and examples of Clemente's artistic production at sites across India over the course of his career. It also examines the diverse styles, mediums and visual languages that he has absorbed and adopted in places as varied as Madras and Jodhpur. In conversation with the people and environments of these sites, Clemente lyrically integrates elements of the traditional fine arts, religious architecture, craftsmanship, urban visual culture, and daily life of each place so that the consistent thread of his art becomes an engagement with material, process, even *terroir*. Examining Clemente's India work in relation to the city-scale sites where it was created allows one to map his art by space rather than time, critical for a body of work that resists linear chronology and certain norms of art historical inquiry (rooted in periodization, iconography, and theoretical constructs.)⁴ In addition to revealing a subtle understanding of Indian visual cultures, Clemente's varied vocabulary of expression also defies an expectation of style, meaning both the signature hand of the artist and artistic movements to which he has been attached; this is particularly true of Neo-Expressionism⁵ and its capitalistic implications⁶.

Clemente first traveled to India in 1973, lured by myth of the subcontinent's difference from a corrupt, fractured Italy. The artist's three-month stay, mostly spent in an Ashram in Delhi, radically shifted his metaphysical and epistemological understanding of the world around him, particularly through his simultaneous cultural, psychic, and visual experiences of India. Clemente traveled east again—to Afghanistan—the next year with Alighiero Boetti, a leading artist in the Arte Povera movement. They spent a significant amount of time in the capital of Kabul and in outlying regions of the country. Clemente

observed Boetti's way of working with traditional embroiderers on his canvases, a process Clemente would later adapt in India. Clemente returned to India in 1976 and again in 1977, staying for five months in Madras. He later noted, "My work really came together [on this trip]."7 It was during this time that Clemente began the practice of working in series, which has remained an important structure for him, in part evoking a tension between repetition as measure of artistic rigor and spiritual discipline.

Figure 1
SUN
India; 1980
Gouache on
twelve sheets
of handmade
Pondicherry
paper joined with
handwoven cotton
strips
95 x 91 in.
Philadelphia
Museum of Art

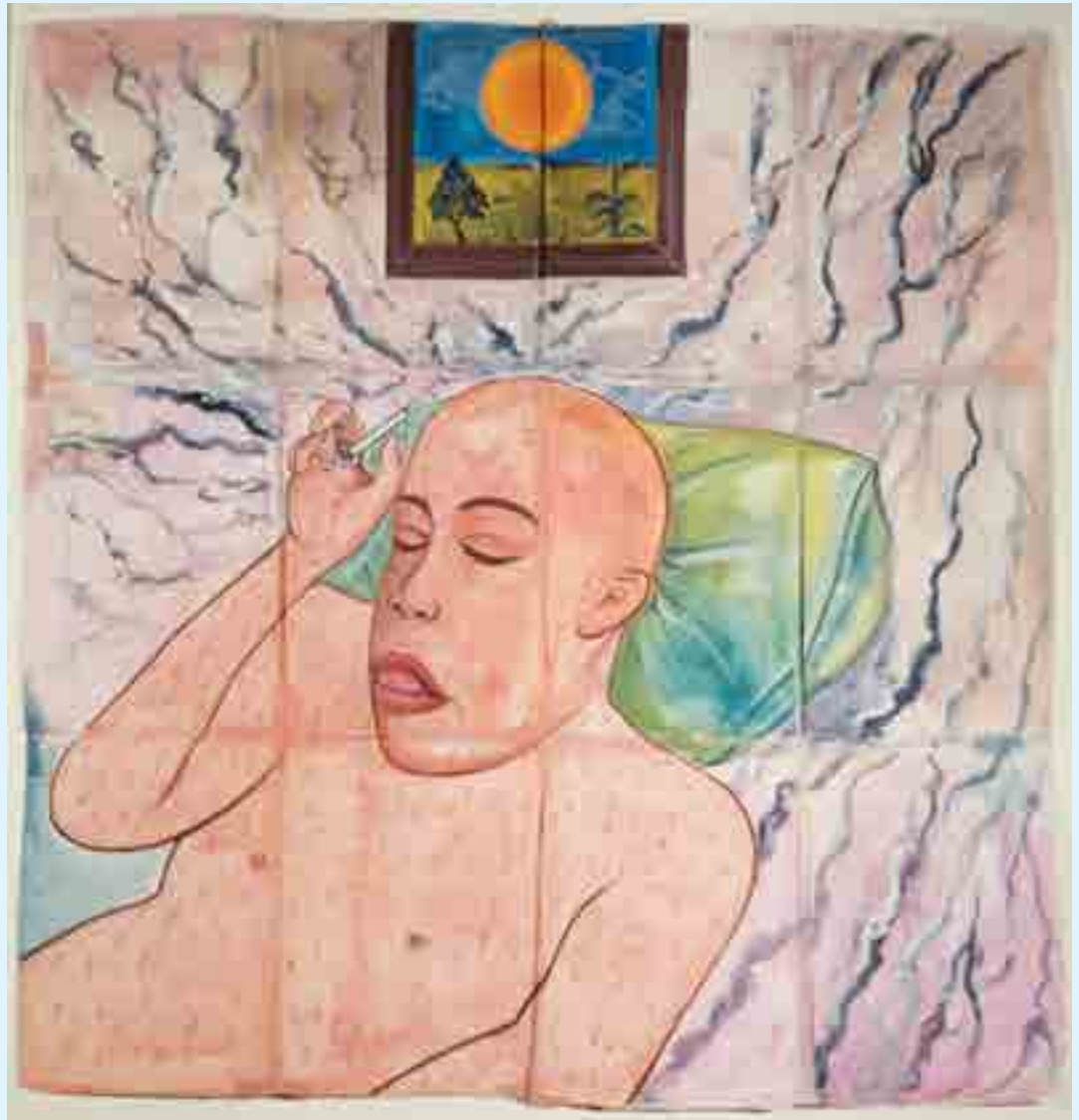


Figure 2
MOON
India; 1980
Gouache on
twelve sheets
of handmade
Pondicherry
paper joined
with
handwoven cotton
strips
96 ¼ x 91 in.
The Museum of
Modern Art,
New York

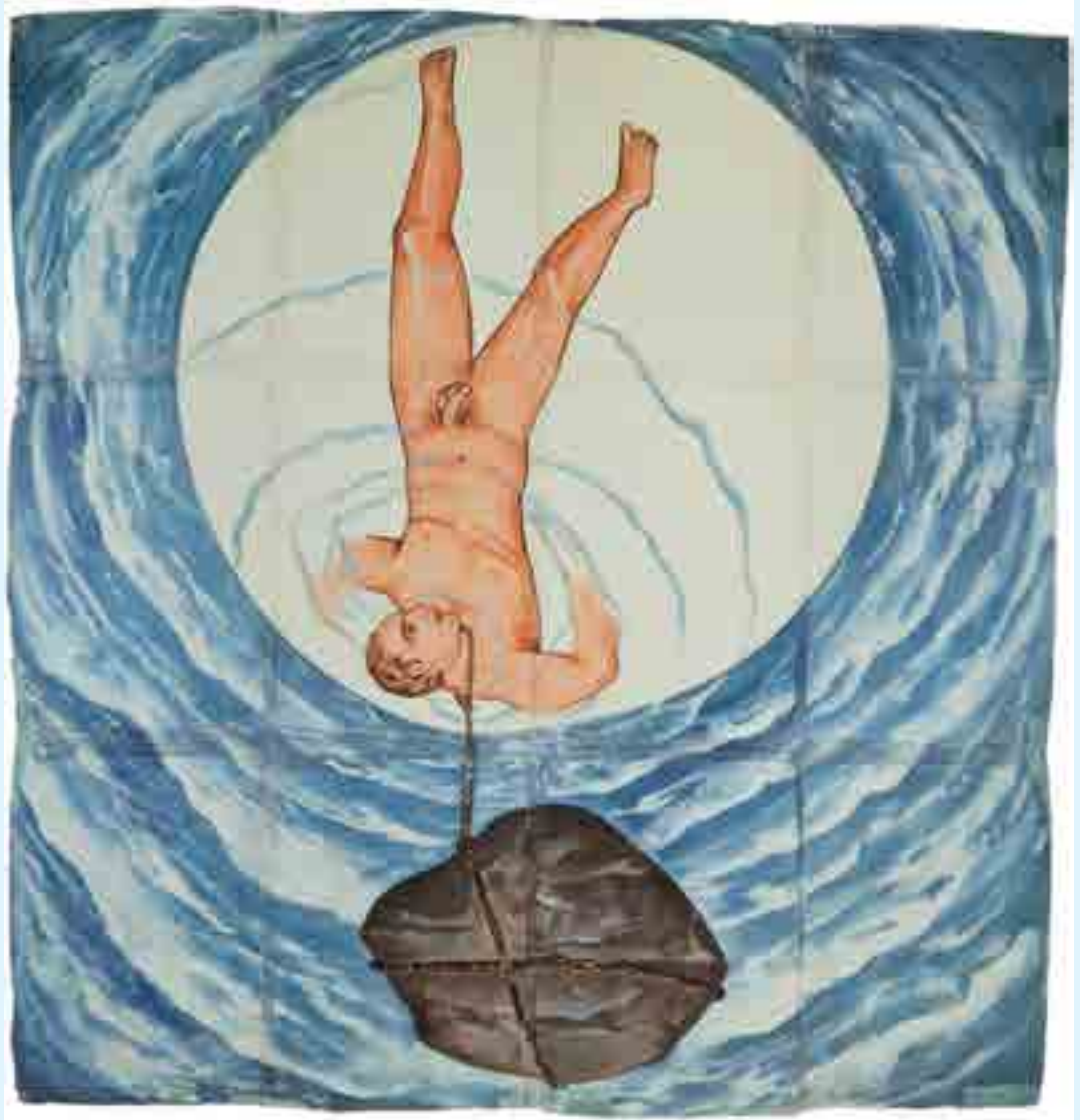


Figure 3
HUNGER
India; 1980
Gouache on
twelve sheets
of handmade
Pondicherry
paper joined
with
handwoven cotton
strips
93 ½ x 96 ½ in.
Philadelphia
Museum of Art



Figure 4
THE FOUR
CORNERS
India; 1985
Gouache on
twelve sheets
of handmade
Pondicherry
paper joined
with
handwoven
cotton strips
96 x 94 ½ in.



Figure 5
TWO PAINTERS
India; 1980
Gouache on nine
sheets
of handmade
Pondicherry
paper joined
with
handwoven
cotton strips
68 x 94 ⅛ in.
Collection of
Francesco
Pellizzi, New
York City



From the late 1970s through the 1980s Clemente's main base in India was Madras, where he found practical working conditions, as well as spiritual and intellectual enrichment in the southern city.⁸ Inspired by the abundance of brightly painted billboards around Madras, in this period Clemente developed one of his most important bodies of work with the assistance of Tamil signboard painters. Among the critical works representing this set, included *Francesco Clemente: Inspired by India, are Sun, Moon, Hunger, The Four Corners, and Two Painters* (Cat. Nos. 1–5). For these large-scale works Clemente created the ground by joining individual sheets of local handmade paper with handwoven cotton strips. As pointed out by Jyotindra Jain, “The checkered grid that resulted from this technique also bore visual similarity with the method of billboard painters who create such a checkered grid on a sketch or a photograph, which they enlarge, square by square, into a giant-sized billboard.”⁹ In Clemente's paintings the visible axes and irregular lines of the grid serve to maintain the forms of the individual sheets of paper. This creates a balance that weights each section of the composition almost equally, decentralizing the main figural image.

Of the paintings in this group, *The Four Corners* (Cat. No. 4) most strongly evokes the main conceptual concerns of Clemente's practice. The painting depicts an open hand with the thumb pointed to the bottom knuckle of the pinkie finger, representing the number one in a system of traditional Indian finger counting.¹⁰ The palm emerges from a cresting ocean into a night sky, and on its surface is an impressionistic representation of a world map highlighting Africa and parts of Asia, effectively shifting Europe and America to the periphery. There is significant fluidity, and sometimes distortion in the forms, locations, and names of selected countries and territories, suggesting a rejection of traditional iconographic mapping, and also showing that the nation was not necessarily the geographic element with which Clemente identified. The effect of Clemente's decision to mislabel and misshape countries and

continents resonates with current scholarly concerns that tie the visualization of national borders to belonging. As Sumathi Ramaswamy has noted, “Years ago, J. R. Hale observed that without a map, ‘a man could not visualize the country to which he belonged ... If it were not for the map, the nation’s geobody would remain an abstraction, leaving its citizen-subjects without any material means to see the country to which they are expected to be attached. Patriotism in modernity requires peculiarly novel technologies of persuasion. Maps of the national territory are among the most intriguing—and compelling—of these.”¹¹ Clemente’s revision of the world map resists this form of attachment and nationalism, a natural outgrowth of his early relationship with Italy. Further, rendering the palm as a canvas for this map supports Clemente’s loosened distinction between figure and ground. This hand is literally and conceptually both elements; the body becoming landscape.

Figure 6
*FRANCESCO
CLEMENTE
PINXIT,*
1980–1981
Gouache on
antique paper
8 ¾ x 6 in.
Virginia Museum
of Fine Arts,
Richmond



In Jaipur within the same period, the artist produced *Francesco Clemente Pinxit: 24 Miniatures* (Fig. 1), a series of Mughal-style miniatures executed on two-hundred-year-old paper, formerly the pages of an old book. The contrast between this body of work and the Madras paintings is remarkable, and both series reflect collaboration with local artisans. Whereas the Madras paintings reflect contemporary urban bazaar culture in southern India using a “poverty of materials,”¹² the form and aesthetic of the *Pinxit* series refer directly to a mode developed in the elite, early modern court culture of the north. Clemente undertook this ambitious series with the assistance of a group of young painters apprenticed in an atelier, performing the role of the traditional senior artist from whom the boys would learn to copy for years before becoming masters themselves. The text that originally appeared on these book pages was easily removed, but the historical margins, and the Persian text outside those margins, were retained as framing devices. Indeed the *Pinxit* series sought to “[build] a new image on the cancelled remains of the past.”¹³ Clemente developed sketches drawn from an iconography of his own imagination, which the apprentices executed and filled with patterns—trees, architecture and geometric decorations—that they chose. Though the boys were not surprised by the odd configurations of Clemente’s whimsical mythology and asked no questions (this may have been for practical reasons, as there was no common language between them and Clemente), it took around two months to persuade them to undertake the project, after which Clemente remained with them for several weeks.¹⁴ As they did not like Clemente’s line when he drew the figures, they replaced his renderings with more stylistically conventional Mughal figures. It should be noted, however, that these figures remain iconographically idiosyncratic and identifiably Clemente’s work, particularly in their nudity and dismemberment. As suggested by the eminent scholar of Indian art Stella Kramrisch in an essay on the iconography of *Pinxit*, Clemente’s series critically appropriates three motifs of Mughal miniature painting; first, the Mughal interpretation of European

perspective that surfaced in India toward the end of the reign of the emperor Akbar (1556–1605); second, the “stereotype of the landscape that...consists of a very high horizon line that allows the painted field to retain its planar character” and details like the rendering of rocks; third, the vegetation.¹⁵ Through these features, *Francesco Clemente Pinxit* becomes identifiable with the tradition of miniature painting specific to historical Rajasthan along with its legacy in contemporary Jaipur.

One sees a more muted contrast when comparing the related series *Early Morning Ragas* and *Evening Ragas*, respectively completed in Pushkar, Rajasthan, from 1996–1997 and in Varanasi in 1992. Referring to a particular melodic mode in Indian classical music, each *raga* expresses a distinct mood and is associated intrinsically as well as linguistically with concepts of color. In both series Clemente sought to develop his expression of *raga* through watercolor. When working in this medium Clemente has not sought assistance from artisans; he has noted, “You can paint in watercolor the most precise lines. The finest, most accurate lines.”¹⁶ For these reasons the artist’s works in watercolor reveal his hand, and perhaps also his subconscious, at its purest.

Early Morning Ragas is a family of twenty paintings. In several subtle ways this series evokes Rajasthan’s sixteenth-through eighteenth-century *ragamala* paintings, which are arguably the most important genre from the region. These historic paintings are “a formally catalogued series of relationships between a man and a woman” that, as their name suggests, are principally concerned with the expression of *raga*.¹⁷ Traditional *ragamala* paintings use architectural divisions to suggest narrative and relationships between figures, and in Clemente’s *Ragas* the composition of each work is ordered by a grid of nine nearly equal rectangles, with these geometrical borders creating structural relationships among the ideograms in each cell. Some traditional *ragamala* paintings carry several lines of explanatory text in Braj Bhasha (medieval literary Hindi) even as they

offer simple and descriptive visual compositions. Clemente reinterprets this component by fashioning one of his *Raga* paintings (Fig. 2) with Sanskrit words as the iconography in each rectangle, though several of these are not fully legible and become abstractions. Though the washes in Clemente's series are softer and more transparent than the opaque watercolors of traditional Rajput painting, his palette seems to echo the bright colors of the historical painting style.

Figure 7
EARLY MORNING
RAGA
 1997
 Watercolor on
 paper
 24 x 29 in.
 Private collection



Evening Ragas is a suite of seventy-nine variably sized works. Each painting confronts the viewer with immediacy through a single figural image—a fish, an angry face, an amorphous body—abstracted from any context and flattened at the fore of the picture plane. As Clemente has remarked on this series, “The overall theme was metamorphosis—activities of the mind connected with dreams and sleep—nonconscious decisions. The images work on variations of this theme, and each group is kept together by a mood, a flavor that you keep in mind. There are given elements that stay the same—color combinations, usually two colors.”¹⁸ What is most striking about Clemente's palette

in this body of paintings is the consistency of a particularly bold blood-orange-red hue that evokes the Hindu god Shiva, bound mythologically to the founding of Varanasi and to its continuous role as the holiest sanctum of Hindu pilgrimage sites. The connection between Clemente's *Evening Ragas* and the visual culture and character of Varanasi appears most powerfully in those paintings where the red is not modulated or contrasted by an equally bold value. Painted in this color and isolated from narrative, the figural images in the series appear iconic, and a few works even suggest Shaivite iconography; the most potent of these is Figure 3, in which the rendering of a sexual act mirrors Shiva's trident.



Figure 8
EVENING RAGA
1992
Watercolor on
handmade
Indian paper
8 ¾ x 9 in.
Private collection

Figure 9

THE BLACK BOOK
Orissa, India;
January 1989
Watercolor on
paper
11 ½ x 5 ½ in.



A third series of watercolors reveals how markedly Clemente's hand and approach adapt to context and site. While traveling alone in the eastern state of Orissa early in 1989, the artist painted three sets of sixteen watercolors based on his impressions of the erotic sculpture marking the Hindu temples in the region, particularly the thirteenth-century Sun Temple at Konarak. The relationship between temple sculpture and Clemente's work is most pronounced in *The Black Book* (Cat. No. 6), which depicts intense acts of sexual congress through compositions that often

are based on the Konarak reliefs. The vertical format of this series enables Clemente to elongate the limbs of many of the figures so that their proportions are parallel to the figures on the platform walls of the Orissan temple. In this way Clemente's composition and stylistic approach diverge substantially even from other series of watercolors developed in India, including *Early Morning Ragas* and *Evening Ragas*. Indeed Clemente has noted the specificity of the connection between this body of work and where it was created, remarking, "This is my hand, but only in Orissa."¹⁹ Kramrisch, too, understood the immediate link between Orissa's temples and *The Black Book*, telling the artist, "If there is any spirit left in Konarak, you've got it."²⁰ Featuring painted bodies whose contours move toward a formless ideal, these works also evoke another strategy toward the integration of figure into ground, and Jain has pointed out that these works "express [Clemente's] concern for the margins of the body."²¹

Figure 10

MOON

India; 2014

Aluminum, poster
paint,

found object

86 x 29 ¾ x 19 in.

Photographs by

Neil Greentree



Figure 11

HUNGER 1

India; 2014

Fabric,
embroidery,
bamboo,
aluminum, iron
100 x 64 ³/₄
x 53 ³/₄ in.

Photographs by
Neil Greentree



Figure 12

HUNGER 2

*Photographs by
Neil Greentree*



Figure 13

EARTH

India; 2014

White metal,
aluminum,
paint (red
industrial)

97 x 30 x 30 in.

New York

Photographs by

Neil Greentree



After a period in which he spent less time in India, Clemente's production there has revived over the past two years. During the winter of 2013–2014 he created a series of four sculptures with metal artisans in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, broadly revisiting ideas explored in the Madras paintings through forms that are simultaneously architectural and figural, representational and abstract. *Moon, Earth, Sun, and Hunger* (Cat. Nos. 8–12) are each positioned on a four-legged, cast-metal base (called a *ghora* in Hindi) that evokes the seemingly precarious bamboo or wooden scaffolding seen across India. While the metallurgy and frame of the pedestals are part of a universal Indian visual culture, the

materials and processes used to create the sculptures atop them are local to Rajasthan and, in certain cases, specific to Jodhpur.²²

Moon (Cat. No.8) is composed of a copper-patinated stereo box atop a military trunk, an object that has long interested Clemente. The artist's only alteration to the trunk is a partial representation of a moon in one corner, covering some of its otherwise legible lettering. He found the box in Jodhpur, a military base and market for such goods, and chose it for its unusual pink color, a contrast from the more commonly available green version. The pink in this work metonymically substitutes for a particular Rajasthani sandstone that Clemente had visually surveyed, and reference to that source material is reinforced by the tone of the copper stereo.

Figure 13

SUN

India; 2014

Aluminum

93 x 60 ¼ x

49 ½ in.

Photographs by

Neil Greentree



Hunger (Cat. Nos. 9 and 10), in a certain sense, is even more local, as its flag is constructed of recycled fabric fragments from the tent factory where Clemente works in Jodhpur. A contemporary and practical incarnation of spolia, the final form of this sculpture embodies both the preeminence of this tent factory in Indian military history and the innovative nature of its collaborations with Clemente today. (The artist has also recently produced a series of painted tents and standalone flags in the factory.) Further, the tie-dye textiles composing the front of this flag are identifiably from the region, as is the embroidery on both the front and back of an Ouroboros snake (featured in the artist's 1980 painting of the same name, Cat. No. 3) encircling quotations from Guy Debord's critical Marxist text *The Society of the Spectacle*.²³

Earth (Cat. No. 11), whose surface was rendered by delicately beating white metal onto a wooden cube, and *Sun* (Cat. No. 12), a cast-aluminum *matka* water pot reflecting the great coloration of Indian metalwork, reveal the conceptual craft of the series of sculptures. As they show less of themselves than *Moon* and *Hunger*, their forms, surfaces, and potential meanings become slippery as they begin to seem both celestial and figural. Representation gives way to abstraction and, already physically larger than life-size, they define the surrounding space and shape the viewer's perceptions. Indeed Clemente believes that "sculpture should have at least as much presence as a person."²⁴ If Clemente and his works are ever in motion, certain aesthetic and philosophical concerns have remained constant. Chief among these are the artist's dismissal of traditional art historical norms, like the development of a signature style and his leveling of visual and organizational hierarchies. These act as a proxy for his rejection of the identity of the self and of the dualism that separates the self and the other. This position is introduced unexpectedly in two paintings that appear at first sight as almost conventionally representational; *Two Painters* and *Sixteen Amulets for the Road (VII)*. In both of these works,

the first from the early Madras period and the second painted recently in Delhi, Clemente uses distinct stylistic languages to create an unusual tension between figure and ground. *Two Painters* (Cat. No. 5) presents two nude figures reaching for each other in a kind of existential combat. The flattened, Pop-style figures stand within two realist landscapes—one lush and expansive, the other barren and contracted—defining their points of view. Both figures' identities seem marked by locale; their bodies' edges and shadows dissolve into the landscapes, which then become mirrors of both the self in that setting and the other gazing upon it. Clemente articulates more details in the landscapes than in the two figures, negotiating the two spaces in a somewhat unnatural way that privileges ground over figure. This is a particularly potent choice because the figures are identified as painters (and the left one might just bear a canny resemblance to Clemente). Further, three of the nine panels that compose the painting represent only forest, reinforcing the weight of landscape in this composition.

Figure 14

*SIXTEEN
AMULETS
FOR THE
ROAD (VII)*

*India; 2012–2013
Watercolor on
paper
19 ¾ x 22 ½ in*



Amulet VII (Cat. No. 7), one of a series of sixteen works with four repeating subjects, depicts a silhouette of a seated man locked down and defeated by massive chains. Behind this composition, and seemingly independent of it in time and space, is a detailed Mughal architectural drawing along with clusters of finely rendered Mughal figures in the margins. As in *Two Painters*, the juxtaposition of markedly different formal vocabularies in the same painting, and the decision to include fine detail in the background but not the foreground, suggest a challenge to the relationship between body/inside and landscape/outside. After cutting through its seductive beauty and sublime lyricism, the work begins to unearth essential questions about place and personhood. Indeed—through Clemente’s approach to art and life—image, style, and even the ground beneath us seem to become illusions. In the end there remains no other ground, with only the self left to sacrifice.

ENDNOTES

1

For example, the sponsor statement on page 11 of Lisa Dennison's catalog to Clemente's 1999 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum begins, "The artist *Francesco Clemente* is a traveler between two worlds. His paintings and drawings combine a mysterious Eastern symbolism with elements of Western cultural tradition." It might be noted that writers have sometimes used this binary to suggest other structural relationships in Clemente's work without explication of their paradoxical nature. For example, Dennison writes: "His method is contemplative, meditative, and indulgent. He maintains a fantastical, exotic vision, even when dealing with the commonplace. The paradoxes in his work ... are what sustain its interest for us most deeply, and what continually open up its possibilities for the future." Lisa Dennison, "*Francesco Clemente: Once You Begin The Journey You Never Return*," in *Clemente* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1999), 35.

2

An important exception to this was the landmark 1990 exhibition and excellent catalog *Francesco Clemente: Three Worlds*, organized by Ann Percy at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. That exhibition, focused on Clemente's works on paper, was organized by the three main cities—New York, Rome, and Madras—where Clemente had lived and worked until that point. An excellent introductory note, "Locale" by Raymond Foye, describes the importance of Clemente's itinerancy and the importance of place to the artist's work. See Ann Percy and Raymond Foye, *Francesco Clemente: Three Worlds* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1990).

3

Raymond Foye notes: "It is dangerous if not impossible to demark the differences between the 'East' and the 'West,' and Clemente has often stated that such artificially contrived terms have no meaning for him." In Percy and Foye, *Francesco Clemente*, 50.

4

In 1999, as curator of the retrospective *Clemente* at the Guggenheim Museum, Lisa Dennison explained her decision not to organize the artist's work chronologically: "Remaining true to the artist's vision, the works are ordered not by chronology but rather through the various systems of metaphysics, numerology, mythology, and astrology that form the basis of his singular language ... As Clemente says: 'Certain constellations of work[s] are formed even at a distance of years...If you were to show my work chronologically, you would have a discontinuous representation since the same formats disappear for years and then return, then disappear and then return again.'" Dennison, *Francesco Clemente*, 19–20.

5

As pointed out in Percy and Foye, *Francesco Clemente*, 117.

6

This was suggested by *October* critics, who derided Neo-Expressionism, and also by Craig Owens, a senior editor at *Art in America* in the early 1980s. For example, in an essay that analyzes a painting by the Italian Neo-Expressionist Sandro Chia, one of Owens's criticisms is the artist's "extraordinary prosperity." See Craig Owens, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women," *Art in America* 71 (January 1983): 7–13.

7

Interview with Rainer Crone and Georgia Marsh, May 1986; this quote is taken from the unedited transcripts that were later published in Crone and Marsh, *Francesco Clemente: An Interview with Francesco Clemente* (New York, 1987); quoted in Percy and Foye, *Francesco Clemente*, 53.

8

Foye notes, "Clemente's reasons for settling in Madras were largely due to the fact that it was a city where space, supplies, labor, and shipping could all be secured with a reasonable amount of perseverance. His reasons for staying were its proximity to several dozen temples and holy sites scattered across the state of Tamil Nadu; its wealth of classical musicians and dancers and the yearly Carnatic music festival; and its long tradition of philosophical learning centered around the Theosophical Society and the neighboring Krishnamurti Foundation." Percy and Foye, *Francesco Clemente*, 55.

9

Jyotindra Jain, *Clemente: Made in India* (Milan: Charta, 2011), 110.

10

I am grateful to the writer Alexander Keefe for pointing out to me the likely meaning of this gesture.

11

Sumathi Ramaswamy, "Visualizing India's Geo-Body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes," in *Body.City: Siting Contemporary Culture in India*, eds. Indira Chandrasekhar and Peter C. Seel (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2003), 219.

12

Quoted phrase from *Francesco Clemente*, meeting with Beth Citron, Rubin Museum of Art, April 16, 2014.

13

Ann Percy, from an unpublished note documenting a conversation between *Francesco Clemente*, Ann Percy, Raymond Foye, and Stella Kramrisch, November 24, 1986, Philadelphia Museum of Art archives.

14

Ibid.

15

Stella Kramrisch, "The Twenty-four Indian Miniatures," in Percy and Foye, *Francesco Clemente*, 88–89.

16

Francesco Clemente, *Two Horizons* (Tokyo: Sezon Museum of Art, 1994), 23; quoted in Jain, *Clemente*, 82.

17

Milo Cleveland Beach, *Rajput Paintings in Bundi and Kota* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1974), 6.

18

Francesco Clemente, *Evening Raga & Paradiso* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 14.

19

Francesco Clemente, meeting with Beth Citron, Brooklyn, November 17, 2013.

20

"FRANCESCO CLEMENTE, Artist & JYOTINDRA JAIN, Art Historian," YouTube video, 58:17, from a conference organized by the Aesthetics Project at the India International Centre, New Delhi, January 25, 2014, posted by "theaestheticsproject," March 6, 2014, <http://theaestheticsproject.com/speakers/francesco-clemente-4.php>. Accessed June 13, 2014.

21

Jain, *Clemente*, 137.

22

All observations and details about the materials and process of these sculptures were provided by *Francesco Clemente*. Interview with Beth Citron, New York, July 2, 2014.

23

The quotation on the front of the flag reads: “The more his life is now his product the more he is separated from his life.” The back reads: “The spectator feels at home nowhere because the spectacle is everywhere.”

24

Francesco Clemente, meeting with Beth Citron,
Jodhpur, India, March 6, 2014.