

Francesco Clemente

Emblems of Transformation

Blain | Southern
4 Hanover Square
London, W1S 1BP

29 April – 27 June 2015
Private view: Tuesday 28 April, 6 – 8pm



Emblems of Transformation 44, 2014, watercolour on paper, 29.6 × 20.9 cm

*"There are 108 beads in the japa mala Hindus and Buddhists use to meditate.
This is a meditative series, and it powerfully conjures India, where at one time,
artists were often pilgrims, even secular-minded ones..."*

Kiran Desai

Blain | Southern is delighted to present an exhibition of new watercolours by Francesco Clemente. Bringing together 108 works on paper, all of which are delicately and intimately scaled, *Emblems of Transformation* continues the artist's long-standing relationship with the medium of watercolour, and also with India.

Clemente first travelled to India in 1973, and has lived and worked there at different phases of his life. Drawing from the contemplative traditions and urban visual culture of India, his practice is characterised by a syncretic approach and the constant revitalisation of sources, mediums and formats. The featured paintings include miniature elements chosen and suggested by Clemente, and executed by a family of Indian miniaturist painters from a workshop from Rajasthan. This continues the artist's long-history of working with Indian craftspeople.

The 108 paintings in the suite reference the number of beads in the *japa mala*, commonly used by Hindus and Buddhists during prayer. Like the beads of the mala the paintings are linked and flow seamlessly from one to the next. Each is like a fragment of a whole and yet presents a space or context in its own right; they drift through the worlds of waking and sleeping, becoming fluid and interchangeable as symbols and images of love, war, landscape and personal mythology recur and interact.

Alongside the often sumptuous colours of these watercolours – where at times rainbows fill the picture plane, offset by gold and silver fragments – a small group of works are notably muted, a monotone mood of rich sepia or ochre tones recalling faded photographs. Here, again, one form flows into another and ambiguity surrounds the subjects. Fish and humans might be kissing or devouring one another; a woman either penetrates the jaws of a monster or possibly explores the cavity within its body.

Francesco Clemente aims to reconcile all apparent oppositions – life and death, earth and water, light and dark, internal and external – and in doing so he looks at timeless questions of the self. He is interested in the objectivity of

imagination, as opposed to sentimental fantasy, and he takes a descriptive stance rather than a prescriptive one. His stories therefore stand as reminders of the transformative power of art making and of the imagination.

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-colour exhibition catalogue including essays by the Man Booker Prize winning author Kiran Desai.

For further information on the exhibition, please contact Toby Kidd

T: +44 (0) 20 7493 4492

M: +44 (0) 7824 336 852

E: Toby@blainsouthern.com

Notes to Editors:

Francesco Clemente (b.1952) studied architecture at the University of Rome, and began to exhibit his drawings, photographs and conceptual works in Europe throughout the 1970s, many of which reflected his interest in the contemplative traditions of India, where he lived in Varanasi for several years. His work seeks to convey a direct, unmediated experience of images as seen in the mind's eye. Incorporating both figurative and abstract tropes, his paintings and drawings from the 1970s to the present day have often transcended the corporeal to explore the existential, intangible and fragmentary nature of being. He first received international critical acclaim at the 1980 Venice Biennale, where his use of the figure and traditional materials departed from the conceptualist aesthetic that was prevalent in the art of the late 1960s and 70s. His subjects are drawn from a transhistorical and transcultural web of styles and cultures, and reflect Mediterranean, Indian, and American influences. In 1981, Clemente moved to New York with his wife, Alba, and their four children. He collaborated with close friends, most notably the poets Allen Ginsberg and Robert Creeley and became associated with what was termed the Neo-Expressionist movement. In reacting against a wave of anti-painting sentiment among critical circles, Clemente initiated a series of collaborative paintings with Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol.

His works were featured in shows at numerous international venues including the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1983); the Nationalgalerie, Berlin (1984); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1985); the Art Institute of Chicago (1987); and the Dia Center for the Arts, New York (1988). Through the 1990s, surveys of his works were exhibited by the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1990); the Royal Academy of Arts, London (1990); the Pompidou Centre, Paris (1994); and the Sezon Museum, Tokyo (1994). In 1999–2000, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Guggenheim Bilbao organised a major retrospective of Clemente's work. More recently, his works were exhibited by the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2004); The Rose Art Museum, Massachusetts (2004); Museo Maxxi, Rome (2006); Museo MADRE, Naples (2009); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2011); Uffizi Gallery, Florence (2011); *Mandala for Crusoe*, Blain|Southern, London (2012); *Tents*, Blain|Southern, Berlin (2013); Palazzo Sant'Elia, Palermo (2013); and The Rubin Museum of Art, New York (2014–2015). In 2015–16 he will have an exhibition of his 6 *Tents* at MASS MoCA, Massachusetts. Clemente is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.