

REVIEW: *Connecticut*

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE: WORKS 1978–2018

The Brant Foundation Art Study Center • Greenwich, CT • brantfoundation.org • Through April 1, 2019

Francesco Clemente: *Works 1978–2018* collects frescoes, drawings, hand-painted tents and more from around the globe, spanning 40 years of the Italian-born artist's career. Beginning on the second floor, viewers enter a small room where over 80 selections from *The Pondicherry Pastels* series (1979–1980) are hung salon style. The imagery sets the tone: two drawings show what seems to be Clemente picking his nose, two more have him scratching an ear. He has often chosen self-portraiture as a means to represent the Buddhist view of the self as “continuity of discontinuity.”

The room to the left is furnished decadently with a bright violet velvet sofa, two matching



Francesco Clemente, *Devigarh VI*, 2017, watercolor & miniature on paper, 18 x 24". Courtesy of the artist.

chairs and three crystal chandeliers. From all the walls, large eyes stare out from Clemente's portraits. The sharp gray eyes of Stephanie Seymour, the American model and the wife

of Peter Brant, are especially exaggerated in a pastel portrait from 1996. Clemente captured the likenesses of Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat (with whom Clemente had collaborated) in pensive states, hands supporting their heads. A dozen flags from *The Society of the Spectacle* (2014)—titled after Guy Debord's eponymous 1967 text—peer

through the windows. Embroidered in gold thread, one large, triangular flag states: “The spectacle feels at home nowhere because the

spectacle is everywhere.” The spectacle is markedly present inside this opulent room.

The exhibition continues into a bright, open room with several, large paintings. Two self-portraits positioned next to each other stand out. *Name* (1983) depicts a large head with smaller heads emerging from the eyes and mouth with agitated brushwork. The overall softness and sunny background of *Porta Coeli* from the same year contrast with its sexual scene: in the foreground, Clemente exposes his genitalia. One hand lifts his shirt and his two eyes lock with the viewer's gaze.

Downstairs, *Standing with Truth* (2012–2013), one of Clemente's tents, shares a room with his fresco paintings. The most stunning space inside the show contains 11 of Clemente's vibrant watercolor paintings on gigantic sheets of paper. *A History of the Heart in Three Rainbows* (2009) is Clemente at his best, unflinching in his examination of love—even its rough or sexual forms—but refined in execution.

—Jacquelyn Gleisner

PREVIEW: *Connecticut*

THE TONGUE IS AN EYE: POETRY, THE VISUAL ARTS, AND WALLACE STEVENS

Art Museum, University of St. Joseph • West Hartford, CT • usj.edu/arts/art-museum/ • January 11–March 17, 2019

In *Pastorale* (1953), a screen print by Grace Hartigan (1922–2008), royal blues pop like bells serenading a lush landscape; white, black and red slashes define pathways around the picture plane. By the time she created *Pastorale*, on view in *The Tongue is an Eye*, an exhibit of over 50 artworks from the University of St. Joseph's collection paired with poems by Wallace Stevens (1879–1955), Hartigan was a player alongside Helen Frankenthaler and Willem de Kooning in New York City's abstract expressionist scene. *The Tongue is an Eye*, pointing to an act of synesthesia, is titled after a Zen-like aphorism by Stevens, master of lyrical, abstract lines often stimulated by his emotional response to the visual arts.

Recently graduated from Harvard and living in Manhattan at the start of the 20th century, Stevens gravitated toward avant-garde art, particularly surrealism and cubism. He befriended modernist poet William Carlos Williams, and went to the landmark 1913 Armory Show; soon



Grace Hartigan, *Pastorale*, 1953, screenprint, 17.9 x 25.7 cm. © Grace Hartigan.

after, he began writing the poems published in *Harmonium* (1923), his first poetry collection. Even after decamping to Hartford for an insurance career (his rise to vice president paralleled his rising stature as a poet), Stevens kept up with the visual arts.

Writing in 1935 to a friend, Stevens extolled

the “instinct of joy” he found in viewing a Van Gogh exhibition; such ecstatic emotion, if rare in life, is more easily realized, Stevens wrote, in poetry and painting. Stevens published “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” his poetic statement on art and the imagination, not long after Pablo Picasso's *The Old Guitarist* was shown at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum.

In *The Tongue is an Eye*, *Pastorale* is paired with “The Man with the Blue Guitar.” Dennis Barone, a poet, professor and Stevens scholar and poet James Finnegan, president of the Hartford Friends and Enemies of Wallace Stevens are co-editors of *Visiting Wallace: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Wallace Stevens*. They co-curated this exhibit, inviting contemporary Connecticut poets to both select a Stevens' poem and choose a complementary artwork from the collection. These are hung side-by-side, revealing connections both contemplative and scintillating.

—Susan Rand Brown