

Francesco Clemente

(Naples, 1952)

A natural nomadic inclination led Francesco Clemente from his birthplace, Naples, to live and work in Rome, Madras, and New York, alternating stays in these cities with numerous journeys. Accordingly, the artist uses multiple techniques, including drawing in pen or ink, oil painting, miniatures, fresco, and watercolor. Since the 1980s, his interest in the figurative and his close relationship with numerous local cultural traditions related with the place where he finds himself working have made Clemente one of the principal exponents of the Transavanguardia movement.

Within the broad iconographic repertory that the artist has produced to date, the human body –strong, fragile, erotic, male, or androgynous and spiritual – is an unavoidable element, as are the orifices through which it relates to the world. Clemente regularly turns his attention on himself, and has produced innumerable self-portraits. While the pictorial tradition suggests the use of the mirror as a tool for reproducing one’s own features, *Autoritratto senza specchio (Self-Portrait without Mirror)*, 1979, emerges in clear opposition to the academic method. In this work, the artist concentrates his attention on the self-perception, committing “to memory” the image of a disjointed body, perhaps engaged in a metaphorical somersault that leaves his arms and shoulders in a direction that contradicts his anatomy.

The fertile intersection between different cultural traditions is evident in *Il cerchio di Milarepa (Milarepa’s Circle)*, 1982. The work evokes the figure of a Tibetan “yo-gi,” whose biography, after a youth stained by tremendous offenses, is marked by his conversion to Dharma, and who finally attains the state of Buddhahood. Painted in Italy, it is one in a series of twelve paintings that were created in dialogue with another series dedicated to the Stations of the Cross. Treated as sources of free poetic inspiration, the themes evoked in the work come together to form the image of two faces, perhaps a father and a son, indissolubly united in a symbolic circular form that separates them from a flow of energetic pictorial matter. (MB)