



CHÂTEAU LA COSTE

Provence



Francesco Clemente, *Wings of Desire* (2022)/ Courtesy of the artist and Château La Coste

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

Wings of Desire

Oscar Niemeyer Auditorium

13th March – 10th May 2023

This Spring, Château La Coste is delighted to present *Wings of Desire*, a new body of work by Italian contemporary artist Francesco Clemente. Unveiled in the recently launched Oscar Niemeyer Auditorium, the new series features six unseen large-scale paintings by the artist centred around the iconography of angels and inspired by Clemente's ongoing fascination with Islamic mysticism through the writings of Henry Corbin and his personal encounters with Sufi teachings and music.

Drawing upon Clemente's ongoing use of esoteric themes of sexuality and spirituality, the imagery in *Wings of Desire* has arisen from a diverse and complex range of cultures, remote legends and forgotten ages, alluding to English poet and painter William Blake, Shiism, and the Swedish Christian theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Both concise and contemporary, Clemente's work is an expression of the artist's quest to ponder the arcane and fully understand life as non-linear.

Reflecting on the iconography of angels which have inhabited his work over the years, Clemente says: "Angels are indifferent to cultural climates and so am I. Painting is my modest and megalomaniac attempt to recover the hearing of the soul." Whilst angels are a recurring theme in his oeuvre, the divine spirits in this latest series have been depicted in the form of just wings – they carry lovingly the weight of a single memory and act as talismans, offering a calm expanse of the horizon to the viewer, and inviting them to 'fly'. The paintings come together to sit in perfect harmony with the surrounding vines and rolling Provençal hills.

Taking the organic curvature and the large, glazed elevations of Niemeyer's architecture into consideration, *Wings of Desire* echoes the space with its soft composition and ephemeral, earthen grey-green palette. The works are hung side by side, to mimic a fresco-style format, further emphasising the sense of tantric lore and mythology alluded to in Clemente's work, but also referencing the gallery's ceramic mural based on a drawing by Niemeyer which adorned the wall for its inauguration. "Niemeyer is an architect of light and softness, no one has bended concrete into a loving form as he has done", says Clemente.

Clemente first embraced organic motifs and earthly scenes during an era when such figuration was not in vogue. Viewers in Rome (where the Naples-born artist studied architecture and mounted his first solo show in the 1970s) and New York (where he relocated in the 1980s) were habituated to the dramatic colours of Abstract Expressionism, the explosive imagery of Pop art, the avant-garde installations of Arte Povera, and the formidable ideas of Conceptual art. By contrast, Clemente disregarded the conventions of the new. His paintings are subtle in hue, sensual in form, and meditative in tenor; they require sustained observation to register their luminescence. Introducing such nuanced portrayals to the late 20th-century canon, Clemente refocused the public's eye on a more transcendent visual landscape.

NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

Francesco Clemente was born in 1952 in Naples, Italy. He studied architecture in Rome in 1970, before turning his focus instead to art.

After gaining prominence in the 1970s, he participated in the 39th edition of Venice Biennale in 1980 and became closely associated with both the Transvanguardia movement in Italy and Neo-Expressionism in the United States. Clemente chose 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. Seeking alternatives to western consumerism, Clemente travelled extensively in the East studying Sanskrit, Hindu and Buddhist literature, folk art, and Indian contemporary sign painting. 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. Major retrospectives of his work have been organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1990); Royal Academy of Arts, London (1991); Centre Pompidou, Paris (1994); Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo (1994); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1999); Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Naples (2002); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2004); Madre – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples (2009); Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2011); and the Rubin Museum of Art, New York (2014). Clemente's works are found in the public collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Kunstmuseum Basel; and Tate, London, among many others.

Francesco Clemente lives and works in New York, Chennai (formerly Madras), and Varanasi, India. The artist is represented by LGDR and inaugurated the gallery's Paris space with exhibition *Francesco Clemente: again, again and again* in January 2022.

ABOUT CHÂTEAU LA COSTE

Situated in one of the oldest winemaking regions of France, between the historic city of Aix-En-Provence and the Luberon National Park, Château La Coste is a vineyard where wine, art and architecture co-exist in harmony. Since it opened to the public in 2011, Château La Coste invites visitors to discover over forty major works of contemporary art installed in the open air and five gallery spaces dotted across the 500-acre site.

Each year artists and architects are invited to visit the domain and discover the unique beauty of this Provençal landscape, with its famed cypresses, stone pines, olive trees and ancient oaks. They are given the freedom to create a site-specific work in an area of the site that inspires them, so Château La Coste continues to evolve as new projects and installations are developed. Artists and architects who have created permanent works at Château La Coste include Frank O. Gehry, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Louise Bourgeois, Richard Rogers, Sophie Calle, Tracey Emin and Jean Nouvel.

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