

Francesco Clemente

ITALIAN ARTIST

WRITTEN BY: James W. Yood

LAST UPDATED: Mar 19, 2020 [See Article History](#)

Francesco Clemente, (born March 23, 1952, Naples Italy), Italian painter and draftsman whose dramatic figural imagery was a major component in the revitalization of Italian art beginning in the 1980s.

Clemente moved to Rome in 1970 to study architecture at the [University of Rome](#) and soon started working as a visual artist. His intense and expressive portrayals of the human body—sometimes his own—have a stark and moody quality that helped define what critics came to call [Neo-Expressionism](#), a movement away from the intellectualization and abstraction that had characterized much of European and American painting of the 1970s. Bold and confrontational, often with sexual content and allegorical [aspirations](#), Clemente’s work—together with that of artists such as [Georg Baselitz](#), [Anselm Kiefer](#), and [Sandro Chia](#)—fed a renewal of international interest in European art during the 1980s. Although his imagery was representational enough to be always identifiable, Clemente combined elements in poetic and [ambiguous](#) ways. He was an inveterate traveler—maintaining residences in Rome; New York City; Taos, [New Mexico](#), U.S.; and Chennai (Madras), India—and he traveled regularly to each. His explorations of the [cultures](#) of those places and others lent him a rich trove of allusive imagery that was at once suggestive and mystical. His fascination with [Hinduism](#) also gave him an unusual perspective on European cultural traditions.

Clemente often worked in large cycles or series, and in one such series, *Francesco Clemente Pinxit* (1981), he [collaborated](#) with Indian artists trained in [miniature painting](#) traditions on a series of 24 works that combined [indigenous](#) Indian imagery with more-contemporary subject matter. He also worked collaboratively with other artists such as [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#) and [Andy Warhol](#) and worked with or created images to accompany the texts of modern poets such as [Gregory Corso](#), [Robert Creeley](#), and [Allen Ginsberg](#).