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FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

Bruno Bischofberger

Zurich

For two decades, Francesco Clemente has been exploring imagery derived from sources that are mythological, mystical, or of his own imagination. In this show of new paintings and watercolors, images of mundane objects made a stronger impact than those works depicting more arcane iconography.

For his large-scale pieces (seven feet square, for example), Clemente used a rare fresco-like medium, *cera punica*, in which a wax emulsion is painted onto a plaster surface, effecting a light wash of nuanced colors. It works well in *The Sky*, an image of a pink-hued dress hung by its spaghetti straps on a clothesline. It billows and sways, as if moved by a breeze. A similar motif appeared in *Vanitas*, a small watercolor portraying a dark-hued shirt hanging on a clothesline above a pair of shorts. In both works, the body seems barely absent.

Images that seemingly refer to some enigmatic source were less captivating. The seven-foot-square *Moon*, with three enormous trumpet lilies surrounded by the four lunar phases, and the nearly six-foot-square *Parabola*, with four figures stacked atop each other at different angles, all holding a tropical fruit, never transcend their obscure symbolism. These works pose mysteries but offer no incentive to solve them.

More impressive was the large-scale *cera punica* titled *Origin*. A doe is shown hog-tied and hanging upside down by her fettered hooves, her fear-filled eyes as large as grapefruits. In the watercolor version, *Nodo*, a bloody ochre haze surrounds the point where the animal's hocks are tethered. The pungency of that distilled scene imbued it with all the power that the show's more overtly arcane works lacked.

Marc Spiegler