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## A Brief Chronicle of the Palladium Frescoes

### By Luca Marenzi

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In May of 1985, the Palladium night club opens on 14<sup>th</sup> Street in New York. Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, former owners of Studio 54, hire the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki to design an enormous club in the old Academy of Music. They commission Henry Geldzahler to select a group of young painters to decorate the interior. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf participate in the project alongside Clemente. Geldzahler later states that "Enormous interest was piqued in New York by (Clemente's) wholly appropriate decision to paint frescoes in place at the Palladium, the night-club that was a favourite in 1985" and "For an American watching him and his two assistants brought over from Rome to help with the preparation of the walls is blink behind the veil that separates us from the Renaissance". Rubell goes on record saying "The rock stars of the '80s are the painters." The Palladium fresco is executed with the technical support of Claudio di Gianbattista. Clemente chooses to use tempera calda, a hot rabbit glue based paint with natural pigments directly on the gesso of the interior, the only fresco by done by Clemente in this medium to date. Paolo Malfi works tirelessly as an assistant buffing the surface of the fresco with a small bone. In 1997 the Palladium building is purchased by New York University, which prepares to tear it down to make way for student accommodation. Quickly arrangements are made to remove Clemente's work. It is divided and called to a new life as individual works by the artist. While in Italy in early 2000 the artist completes a group of 11 water colours with iconography linked to the Palladium frescoes. The individual works from the Palladium and the related water colours, shown in a two station exhibition in Augsburg and Trento, are documented in this catalogue.

Fresco is an important medium in Clemente's art. In 1980 he contributes *Coi sentimenti insegna alle emozioni* to the Venice Biennial of that year, a three-part fresco. Besides the Palladium there are three site-specific frescoes that Clemente has completed to date. In 1982 the artist is commissioned to paint his first site-specific fresco around a private indoor swimming pool in St. Moritz. In 1983 Clemente paints a large fresco on one of the walls at Julian and Jacqueline Schnabel's loft on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, a work which is subsequently removed to West 11<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1999 Clemente completes a site-specific fresco in the new house of Bruno Bischofberger in Meilien, Switzerland, which is designed by Ettore Sottsass. In September 2000 Clemente is asked to

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decorate the ceiling of the bar in Ian Schrager's new Hudson Hotel in New York, designed by Phillippe Starck.

*Sources: Francesco Clemente in an interview with the author, November 2000. Henry Geldzahler in Francesco Clemente Affreschi, Fundacion Caja de Pensiones, Madrid, 1987, pg. 22, Rene Ricard in Clemente, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1999, pg. 44 ff*

*From: Luc Sante et al, "Francesco Clemente Palladium ", Verlag fuer Moderne Kunst, Nuernberg, 2000*