

The Museum of Modern Art

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FRANCESCO CLEMENTE: THE DEPARTURE OF THE ARGONAUT
November 6, 1986 - February 10, 1987

The Italian painter Francesco Clemente began to work on lithographs to embellish the first English translation of Alberto Savinio's wartime diary, The Departure of the Argonaut, in 1983. FRANCESCO CLEMENTE: THE DEPARTURE OF THE ARGONAUT opens on November 6 at The Museum of Modern Art. Organized by Riva Castleman, director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, the exhibition presents the entire contents of the large-scale volume that was published in 1986 by Petersburg Press, London and New York.

Clemente has illuminated all of the forty-eight text folios of Savinio's autobiographical saga with splendid images that often parallel as well as directly illustrate the narrative. The character of his compositions changes in every chapter, reflecting the mood and geography of the text. By covering the words with washes of brilliant color or opposing them with ominous compositions in deep blacks from which his portrait often emerges, the artist creates an energy and rhythm to augment the author's expansive musings. Fascinated by the technical aspects of printmaking when he began working on Savinio's text, Clemente relied upon an extensive range of lithographic techniques including stones, aluminum plates, and acetates. He drew with standard litho crayons and tuesche, but also used graphite and graphite washes, rapidographs and pen and ink, transfer paper and various blotting techniques, achieving a remarkable variety of visual effects.

In 1917-18 Savinio first published his diary of his journey from northern to southern Italy aboard a troop-filled passenger train during World War I. The pattern of his tale was inspired by the third century B.C. Argonautica, which chronicles the heroic voyage of Jason and the Argonauts in quest of the Golden Fleece. For Savinio, heroism is related to the battle against the

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boredom, tedium, and futility of military life. The brother of artist Giorgio di Chirico, Savinio was born in Athens in 1891. He studied musical composition and wrote operas while living in Paris, where he became acquainted with Picasso, Picabia, and Brancusi. During his life he wrote numerous novels, plays, and stories, and composed, painted, and designed for the stage. His most lasting contributions to twentieth-century Italian arts and letters, however, were made in the teens, when he played a part in the development of Metaphysical Painting and wrote this story.

Francesco Clemente, who was born in 1952 in Naples, traveled extensively and read classical literature and philosophy avidly in his early youth. In 1970 he briefly studied architecture in Rome. He first exhibited his paintings in Rome in 1975, and since then has had numerous exhibitions in New York, London, Cologne, Zurich, and Tokyo. Clemente's works are in many leading public and private collections throughout the world. The Ringling Museum of Art recently organized the exhibition, Introducing Francesco Clemente, which is currently touring the United States. Clemente divides his time between New York City and Madras, India.

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE: THE DEPARTURE OF THE ARGONAUT, which will remain on view through February 10, 1987, is sponsored by the Associates of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books.

The exhibition is accompanied by a complete reproduction of The Departure of the Argonaut, with covers specially designed by Francesco Clemente for this edition. The book, 100 pages, fully illustrated in color, and published by Petersburg Press, New York and London, is available in the Museum Store for \$25.00. The artist has also created a large-scale, three-paneled poster for the exhibition, available for \$75.00.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750