

# The Twenty-Four Indian Miniatures

Stella Kramrisch

The twenty-four Indian miniatures by Francesco Clemente were painted in gouache in 1980–81 on sheets of handmade Indian rag paper, about two hundred years old, that were originally the pages of an old book. The book no longer exists. The text that appeared on the pages of the book was wiped off, its easily soluble ink offering no more resistance than does the white chalk on a blackboard. Wiping off the writing of such old manuscripts considered of no particular value and then reusing the cleaned paper has been a common practice. The lines that once framed each panel of text, however, were preserved and reused as the borders of Clemente's miniatures; the wide margins of the pictures have the sheen of old ivory.

Clemente's use of this antique paper authenticated the paintings it was to receive as "Indian." The paintings themselves were to substantiate this claim further if only in accepting the original margins of the pages as their own. The Persian writing still visible in the margins repeats the last word of the text of the respective page and the first word of its continuation on the next page. This was done for the sake of continuity in reading the original manuscript. Clemente's miniatures function as a kind of stepping-stone into the past, since from about the fourteenth century handmade rag paper had served as the ground for book illustrations in India.

The paintings have no name, although one bears an inscription. Two of Clemente's paintings suggest that they are the front and back covers of a book, with the one on the "front" declaring the authorship of the twenty-four miniatures in bold, Roman characters: francesco clemente pinxit. No name, however, is given to the entire series of paintings nor to the single miniatures with their invented landscapes, charismatic youths, and abstract patterns. The last are also contained in schematic panels between the heavy lettering and a flower border of the introductory painting. The trompe l'oeil perspective at the top of this image demonstrates that the "book" is a heavy one.

Numerically its twenty-four paintings equal the number of letters in the Greek alphabet, from which the Roman alphabet is derived. All words consist of letters; they transmit the meaning of the text. There being, however, no text to the book, the twenty-four miniatures take its place.

The twenty-four paintings are ideograms. They are not illustrations, and there is no narrative to which they refer. The ideograms each present a situation in a setting of its own. The situation is that of human figures, whole or in parts, in a planar area that evokes either a landscape or a pictorial space construct. The colors mostly are cool and soft, blues, gray, mauve, green, maize, with occasionally a carrot-red or black accent. The figures in the spaces are those of young males.

They are mostly naked, lithe of limb. Their faces are bland, dispassionately attractive; they are part of the body. The proportion and physiognomy of the figures are different in each miniature, conveying the sensation, emotion, mood, and thought consonant with the form of each painting. The gestures of the figures carry the action. Precise outlines define each of the figures of the charismatic adolescents, whole or maimed. This definition of the bounding contours of their figures was an abiding trait of Indian miniatures of the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. In Clemente's paintings, its elastic tenseness isolates the pallor of the naked bodies from the planar ground. Resuscitation, transformation, and reintegration have been at work in Clemente's creations. Landscape and the perspective of Mughal painting as well as the planar spacing of other Indian schools are remembered in his miniatures. Their genealogy is one of conscious choice.

The perspective of the European Renaissance was directly imported to India in the later years of the reign of Emperor Akbar (1556–1605), to whose imperial studio Mughal art owes its splendor. While accepting the complexity of Mughal painting for the settings of his ideograms, Clemente instills into them as the occasion may demand his own rendering of Renaissance perspective that intensifies the spatial suggestiveness of some of the miniatures. The Mughal landscapes and buildings are appropriated in a new context in which they play their part as an accompaniment, a kind of drone to the melody of the new compositions.

The stereotype of the landscape that Clemente has taken over from Mughal paintings consists of a very high horizon line that allows the painted field to retain its planar character. Above this the suggestion of a setting recessed in space, which creates the illusion of three-dimensional reality, is obtained by the introduction of two kinds of schemata in the shape of rocks and buildings. The formula for rocks in Mughal painting had been inherited from Persian paintings, where it had been in turn assimilated from Chinese precedents. The buildings, including fortresses, sanctuaries, and other architectural units, create the illusion of being situated high in the background. Their perspective obeys formulas at home in the tradition of painting in the Eastern churches that were adopted from medieval Western antecedents and that ultimately go back to classical antiquity.

A third motif, ubiquitous in Mughal paintings and faithfully rendered in Clemente's miniatures, is the tufts of vegetation, be they grass, flowers, or shrubs, that are sprinkled in varying density and combinations all over the plane of the paintings, up to the high horizon line. Besides this Mughal landscape with its historical components Clemente has introduced various contemporary components as the building elements in the space constructs of many of the twenty-four miniatures. Although these mainly Islamic idioms were not lying as readily available as was the now-defunct tradition of Indian painting, they were transmuted and adopted from the ancient but still-present patterns of perforated screens, tiled walls, and woven textiles.

In these two kinds of scenarios, whether Mughal landscape or abstract construct, readied from the past of Indian art, the charismatic youths move with grace and decorum, single or in multiples, whole in body or amputated and fragmented, embodiments of apprehensions and sensations of the artist who lavished on them his resources of experience, memory, humor, and grace. The figures move with an elegant spontaneity that does not suggest the next phase their evolution is likely to take. As if under a spell, stasis has ceased them as soon as they were envisioned. Their movements are timeless; they are the last of their respective forms; they are conceptual, abstracted from performance. They are inherent in the cast of the figures in the ideogram presented on the respective page.

These charismatic naked youths of fair complexion, their smooth limbs bounded by sharp yet flowing outlines, are the actors in most of the paintings. Always—with scant exception—naked, never aroused sexually, integer in body and limbs or mutilated, the figure of man is pervasively part of the ideogram. Only once does a bovine animal grace the landscape; only once again the figure of man has grown a tail, snugly extending as a serpentine appendage that curves from its somnolent owner's body. He is oblivious of the world around him and into which he emits his potential animality while he remains self-contained.

The adolescents who people Clemente's compositions are unlike any figures depicted in the Indian miniatures from which their setting is appropriated. They are the agile actors in most of the paintings, their bland faces are cast in conformity with and as part of the physiognomy of the body; their features carry as much expression as the other parts of their bodies. Where more than one figure is found in a painting, their features resemble one another; they are multiples of one type. Two types of body shapes appear in the scenes. The maimed bodies and their amputated parts are either comparatively chubby, or they are assimilated to the more slender and unfragmented types that inhabit the landscapes of their Mughal antecedents. In one scene, their diverse features and proportions from a larva-like childhood to maturity dramatize their common lot in a gust of activity, an unrelenting square dance of their common fate. As puppets on a prepared stage, they have been created by Clemente. They play their parts obeying an invisible command.

With the fluid precision of outline akin to that of the figures in illuminations of medieval Indian manuscripts from Bengal or Nepal as well as Mughal and Rajput miniatures, Clemente's figures are set off against the landscape of Mughal provenance in one-half of the paintings. Their trim, thin outlines delimit the figures against their planar ground, in total contrast to Clemente's gouaches, which float on and melt into the surrounding ground.

The settings in which the figures appear, inasmuch as they are appropriations from preexisting works of art, establish a mood of security out of which the pictures emerge as ideograms of utterly new concepts. They are precipitations of visions, experiences, and sensations of Clemente. Their camouflage—their resemblance to Indian miniatures—is a security measure that allows hitherto visually unrecorded

experiences to gain a preexisting ambiance. What prompted Francesco Clemente to adopt artistically defunct scenery to function as a backdrop for the play of his figures in a preestablished setting? The Mughal and Rajput conventions of Indian miniature paintings are resuscitated elements for new creations, thematically as well as formally.

A visit to the Jaipur workshop of a contemporary maker of copies and versions of Mughal and Rajput miniatures allowed Clemente to see the method by which this craft was practiced. Here he has also found young apprentices, not more than twelve to fifteen years old, who expertly and repetitively filled in the typical details that enliven the traditional landscape setting that is the planar ground in Clemente's miniatures. For heightened credibility the ancient paper with all its blemishes was left untouched, forming a framing margin of the paintings.

The apprentices added these small tufts of vegetation—be they grass or flowers and blossoming trees—in rhythmical sequence according to the needs of the miniature. Clemente chose the size, shape, and spacing of the tufts from the repertory of Mughal painting, and then adjusted them to the context of each of the ideograms he had conceived. In this way the setting over which Clemente's visions would range was prepared. In each case it captured themes hitherto unknown, supporting each in its unique form. Whereas Mughal and Rajput paintings illustrate given themes familiar to their artists, Clemente's mythology is his own; he creates the theme in the form of his vision. His paintings are not illustrations, they are not posterior to any text, although at times they may resonate with the presence of an Indian god or recall a scene in the *Satyricon* of Petronius. Such latent or conscious memories leave their aroma in the paintings of which they have become ingredients.

The artifice of the reshaped Mughal landscape is but one of the scenarios in which Clemente's figures are at home. The other is an abstract setting, a space construct in which the figures are set performing their assigned roles against frames replete with the contradiction of indefinitely extensible repeat patterns such as those of Islamic tiles and textiles, which create the effect of superimposed transparencies and alternating identities. By the stasis of their gestures, even at their liveliest the figures incorporate the motionless, immovable units of pattern in front of which they manifest.

Just as there are these two kinds of settings—the transposed “naturalistic,” open-air space of the Mughal type on the one hand, and the abstract space construct on the other—there are also two types of figures—those who are whole in body and those who are fragmented, truncated, amputated. Both types are at ease within their condition; unimpeded, the dance of the amputated is joyous. Their bland, nearly identical faces take no cognizance of the mutilation of their bodies, and the dance goes on, its rhythmic ease choreographed on the geometrical pattern of the painted field. Or the amputated parts exist by themselves, each having a movement or position of their own in the complex web of pattern of one of the paintings.

Multiple ambiguity connects the figures with their abstract ground. Planar, it is the backdrop behind the performance of the manikins whose evolutions are directed by an invisible puppeteer. Overlaid by strips and planes, it is the space in which their gyrations are playful impossibilities acted out in a vacuum on treacherous planks threatened with immediate collapse although upheld, it would appear, from above by the flagstuffs held by the figures. Ambiguously and precariously the staffs seem to rest on the patterned planks on which the figures perform. The three large flags fluttering vehemently high above the performers are inscribed *Naufragium est* (The shipwreck is [everywhere]),<sup>1</sup> *abiit ad plures* (He is gone to the many),<sup>2</sup> and *homo bulla* (man [is] an ephemeral bubble).<sup>3</sup> While the fourth flag carries no message, its operator appears on his way to “the many,” where he is seen once more, collapsing further down.

The anguished commotion of the wavers of the flags with their macabre inscriptions is such that it makes the carriers leap and soar. They are young, jumping as they hold on to their flagstuffs with one hand while the other wields a gun. The gun is the inalienable attribute of each of the flagholders, but only one of them triggers it.

The life-death tension of the shipwreck keeps the merry-go-round moving. It is the ambiguity of this painting that determined its spatial structure. The figures swing along in the ambiguity of their entanglement as they hold on to the staffs that they also hold aloft, their ambiguous performance whirling in the direction of the one who has “gone to the many.” Sinking, he bends over a fallen flag.

In another painting beautiful figures perform in front of a patterned ground, mastering their movements. Although they are all alike, each is motivated specifically by the lack of either one limb, or two, or three. The precariousness of the single dancer, bereft of one limb or the other, is absorbed in the arabesque of rhythmically repeated identical movements that identifies each figure as being also the other. Each balding manikin dances with the same grace in a composition of intersecting diagonals of which each dancer, although not whole, is wholly part, unaware of his fragmentation. If fragmentation and lack of completeness are conditions inwardly experienced in contemporary life, they are here neatly delineated. In contrast to this introspective provenance, a painterly origin of the incomplete limbs equally carries visual momentum. In some of Clemente’s works, the completeness of the composition is carried by the position of the truncated limb, which is suggested by only as much of the limb as needed to convey the impetus of the gesture. An explicitly drawn limb would in this case be redundant. Fragmentation is thus both an inwardly experienced state of awareness and a pictorial device that combine in this painting of the dancers.

In another miniature, the amputated limbs and the truncated body as well as the severed head are seen finding their places in a conjunction of three indefinitely expandable patterns. The interlinked hexagonal pattern in the middle of the composition suggests the movement of the waves of a river. It flows between

shores of patterned fabric where severed limbs, including trunk and heads, float, disappear, and emerge; there is no hold anywhere. It seems easy to check the amputated parts, which are scattered in readiness for being assembled. Caprice and wit present them as if in motion. They are parts of an ideogram swiftly passing through the mind, seen while being painted on the backdrop curtain of more than one layer and thickness.

The scurrilous activity of the amputated body parts drowning and emerging is remedied by the ingenuity of the planar layout and its associated thought allowing for several conjunctions: of firm land on both banks, the farther bank, however, also rising abruptly, with a corporate building encroached upon by truncated body parts searching for help and being trapped. In their dehumanization the several body parts are part of an outcry made visible.

Of special importance to Clemente is the theme of the hand, its fingers in particular. Its index finger raised, the thumb bent in a strident angle over two other bent fingers, draw attention to the little finger whose tip is amputated, a triple stream of blood gushing from it. Below the hand and on the same backdrop with its minutely granulated allover floral pattern, the amputated tip hovers horizontally. A stream of blood gushes from the wound and finds its way down to earth in a pool.

The gesture of this large, enigmatic hand is known to no ritual, neither Indian nor Christian.<sup>4</sup> The harsh angle of the bent thumb augments its portentous character. It would seem as if the nemesis of amputation has raised a warning finger that refers to the actual practice—by the Mafia—of severing the tip of the little finger as a punishment for and deterrent of fraudulent action.

The theme of the cut-off finger recurs in Clemente's gouache *One*. There the forefinger is similarly maimed, while in *The Four Corners*, the entire hand, its fingers intact, exhibits the whole world extended over the palm and fingers. The play of the numbers from one to five has its support in the fingers of the hand, whether they are whole or amputated in part. It would seem that the number of fingers, whole or fragmented, is associated with the number of sense organs and the wholeness of the five-fingered hand comprising the entire world. The hand, most ancient of body symbols in the world of art, is varied by Clemente with portentous actuality.

Different from the solitary weightiness of the hand is a busy landscape in which a maimed torso strides across a landscape under a radiant moon and star-studded sky. There is also a large fish—as if abandoned by Klee—surpassing in size a kite-fish that the spool-child or cocoon-child in its kiosk lets fly; the kite-fish is no rival to the big fish, yet is capable of soaring higher than the large fish, the flag, and the moon. This celebration of childhood is guarded in the four directions by four cranes or storks (it is the stork that in European folklore delivers the child into the world) where it will grow and—amputated—stride along to enjoy the luscious fruits that nature keeps ready for him in a basket. Or, having lost his left arm, man in all four

directions eagerly holds up a telescope to scan the luminary that appears thrice, if only to be an easier target, amidst a galaxy of stars sprinkled over the amputated trunk of Cosmic Man laid out gigantically above the plant-tufted ground of the earth. The visionary power of the cosmic torso rules over the eager concentration of the four star watchers from an imperfect world that does not provide for all. Star-spangled Cosmic Man truncated forms the ground on which one-armed astronomers direct their telescopes like the players on a billiard table on which the luminaries are the billiard balls. Superimposed ideograms, seen in a flash and abiding as an image, create a new perspective of above and below.

Cosmic Man, star studded like the Milky Way in Clemente's miniature painting, has a powerful antecedent in a preparatory study of about 1950 by Marcel Duchamp, done in gouache on transparent plexiglass.<sup>5</sup> It represents a truncated female body studded with dotlike perforations that define and enhance the modeling of the majestic female body in motion. Yet even when man is in possession of his unmutated self he is exposed to vicissitudes for which he may or may not be prepared.

Man as an integer stands erect, looking up to a large and ambiguous umbrella transparently open in a context in which the strong vertical of its handle acts as a measuring stick of a world of ambiguity. It is paper thin, deceptively planar, a construct of overlapping patterned, transparent fields whose density ambiguously shifts from picture ground to object. The sharp-edged corner of the folded-over, paper-thin patterned ground heralds the game being played by the unfurled umbrella exchanging inside and outside, coalescing them as they overlap. In this precarious situation man—perhaps holding a double whisk—stands firm and erect in three-quarter back view, his noble head in profile looking up to the balance of incongruous moieties.

Abstract planar patterns asserting themselves one against the other are assigned their roles by the handle of the umbrella held high with unswerving attention by the naked figure of man. As a sheer construct of patterned planes, the painting is a symbol of man in the universe. Figures like the fish or the hand represent verbal, conceptual symbols. Their ancient, established meaning is drawn into a pictorial context, conceived by Clemente, that shows forth further, specific significance.

Different from these preexistent and universal figurative symbols are the nonconceptual forms arising from the craft of drawing itself, patterns without a name ordered according to the dynamism of becoming symbols in their own context, engendering patterns that act on one another as they fill the page in a context peculiar to the particular page and not repeated elsewhere.

Resorting, however, to the chosen ambiance of an extinguished Mughal scenario, this background is resuscitated, appropriated, and charged with new contents. They provide a setting that distances sensorial experiences from the embarrassment of their immediacy. Sensations and memories drift across or commingle in the ideograms that have the Mughal landscape setting for their actualization.

Near the top of a flower-tufted plane of the ground and on its horizon line a man practices a kind of *shirsha āsana*, the yogic headstand. In it, according to tradition, the subtle, vital breath is carried toward the head by the movement of the blood. The process awakens the subtle, vital, coiled energy (*kun.d.alini*). The yoga practitioner in the painting relaxes; his legs do not rise straight, they are crossed. Another figure standing higher up on the horizon line bends in a scissor-sharp angle from the hip point, while he sniffs at the toes of the yoga practitioner's right foot, gazing at his left foot that holds up a flower. Both men wear shorts, the only pieces of garment worn by any figure in a landscape painting. The playful crossing of the representation of an embodied concept (yoga) with an enactment of sensory experience is made possible by the artifice of the landscape in which it takes place.

A more comprehensive amalgam of traditional Indian themes within Clemente's version is achieved in a picture of spring, where, according to traditional Indian poetry, black bees and parrots are messengers of both the season and love.<sup>6</sup> Besieged with a swarm of oversized bees, their victim protects himself in a nearby grove that with its densely foliated trees shields him, on whose head a parrot—another symbol of vernal love—has perched for good measure, as he relieves himself from this onslaught of love symbols by throwing up a mighty jet of vomit. Above all this misspent bounty a solitary cow paces along on the verdant, flower-speckled ground. These scenes of humorous assimilation of given Indian concepts are as full of new thematic conjunctions as they are of pictorial consistency.

Other paintings fill a richer Mughal landscape setting with emotion rather than with sensory experience. Thus the paraphernalia of the readjusted Mughal scenario become witness of a scene of frustration in which a youth pleadingly addresses a school of fish who steadfastly and heedlessly swim away with staring eye. (The fish are here in their element, the water, where their silent criticism is on the social and psychological plane. Moreover, in Clemente's work, the fish has cosmic dimension, functioning as the *axis mundi* while also retaining its sociological implications.) Although there is no witness near the pond, where the youth addresses the fish, high up on the distant mountains a stalwart trumpeter blows forth the news for the inhabitants of the fortified castle across the hills to hear.

This scene of frustration and apprehension gives way in another painting to a riverine idyll. A river flows calmly at the foot of a low mountain range crested by dark buildings. On the further bank of the river a long-limbed youth reclines. A spurt of water springs forth in a wide arch from his head and ensconces his slender, lying body. The jet of water falls into the broad stream that it has engendered for a youth, his alter ego and like himself, to bathe in, as fish frolic around his refreshed person. There is no greater joy than to be immersed and carried by the waters of creation, one's own creative power flowing from one's head with calm assurance. This ideogram recalls an Indian myth in visual terms that entirely become Clemente's own.

Shiva, the Great God, received on his head the onslaught of the celestial river Ganges as she descended from the empyrean down to earth. She rested for a while in the ascetic god's matted strands of hair, and then flowed to earth to fertilize its lands and minds.

In some Indian miniatures that have the Descent of the Ganges for their theme, the River is shown at the moment of leaving her divine although temporary station on Shiva's head, the preceding part of the myth being implied but not illustrated. Clemente's reclining youth allows the River to originate from his head, relaxedly recapitulating the myth in his own person.

The great mythical themes of India reverberate in other of Clemente's ideograms. God is an archer when his name is Desire (*ka-ma/eros*). In Clemente's miniature he is singled out from the landscape receding far into the distance. He occupies the center of the painting, with his arrow ready to fly but his target unshown. Alone, his noble figure commands the wide terrace. Outside in the distance two identical youths appear in a landscape in which the hillside has burst into flowers and the distant mountain ranges skirt high sanctuaries under a sky astir with delicate swirls of clouds that have traveled from the Far East. The youths stand ready, phantomlike, raising an arm as if saluting, while they seem to be carried on the spokes of an invisible Ferris wheel. They are recurring, ready targets, as are the flowering branches in front of them. They are the ever-renewed victims of the god, but he does not aim at them. He is an emblem of their destiny. His taut bow is timelessly about to be discharged.

Visual impressions stored in different moments of experience and activated from their state of latency commingle with recollections and recognitions. They crystallize and emerge as one coherent theme sanctioned by tradition and brought to life once more. The large tree, the cosmic axis, the world tree, the tree of Jesse, the nameless tree, spontaneously grown and somewhat off center, rises here from the supine body of man as a naked youth, resting his head on his right arm. He looks up from the flowery ground of this world and raises his left arm to point to the top of the tree where *ecce homo*, his alter ego, reclines on his side, his head similarly supported as that of his double below, and his left arm resting on his body. Man below is both the place of origin of the tree and the support of man above resting in its dense foliage. The tree growing from the middle of the body of supine man in medieval Western art is a symbol of transformation, of birth following death.

In a purely Indian synthesis of conceptions, the images of the cosmic axis and the myth of the fish incarnation of god Vishnu combine as an elegant fish-amphora risen from the terrace. Man as above so below has here assumed different gender and allure. The seductive figure below is that of an elegant woman reclining with the supporting help of a tabouret, while her body is traversed by the stem of the amphora. Her disinterested counterpart in the shape of a man—older than the youthful performers in the other mythic contexts—is shown above absorbed in

practicing a yoga exercise near the corner of the gaping mouth of the fish-amphora. The bleak stare of the one jutting eye of the fish, its stiff fin-shaped handles, the spreading drapery of its tail, and the scales of its body seem to define the vessel as made of porcelain, opening its huge mouth in agonized emptiness. The world of the idle rich sustained by accepted concepts of the culture that enable them to hold their position graces the complexity of this hieratic—and humorous—composition. It extends upward to a rich architectural assortment above a horizontal mountain screen, most distantly descended from its Mughal antecedents.

Whole or maimed, Clemente's figures of man as gently playful adolescents, either wholly engaged in their presence or whimsically complaisant in their afflictions, know no violence except in one instance, where a form so large that it practically exceeds the size of the painting bursts forth emitting glowing, red-hot darts and twisted flames or petals. The violence of this sunburst has no end; it emanates from a circle bounded by a ring of unmelting metal around a stippled flowery plane undisturbed by the explosion around it. With great speed the small figure of a burly youth comes running, wielding scissors larger than himself. Undaunted, he is about to cut the shooting darts and flames, a superhuman task. But as yet the scissors are still open, and the twisting flame-petals dart undisturbed. In its power this vision surpasses the tranquil introspection that makes the other miniatures spirited or serenely scurrilous ideograms. The heroic-pathetic self-set task of the wielder of the scissors, his figure almost unnoticeable against the formidable burst of flames that fills the entire painting, wants to be seen as opposite to that of the holder of the umbrella, the master over ambivalence, the upholder of balance in this world.

However, these are not the only possibilities for action within the human condition. Attentively, leisurely, and not far from sleep, the time has come in the well-being of a summer afternoon for a tail to grow unseen and barely felt by the now somnolent youth. Below, his awakened figure sits up on a carpet in a state of wonderment. (Clemente has said that he first intended to equip this figure with the tail.)

At such times, in fact at any time, bodily sensations may take over, and their images are recorded in the landscape and buildings in which Clemente's figures dwell. An act of hitherto unrecorded hermaphroditism or procreative bisexuality has its exponent in the figure of man, seen in back view, heavy of body and coarse of mien, no longer a youth, who is capable of having emitted an egg that he can cook and serve without a change of position, leaving it not uncertain from which orifice the egg was produced. The body of this burly man seated on the floor of the terrace is a boiler whence he gathers and serves the egg—hot—on a spoon, while his still-hot body spurts from the mouth a hissing jet of liquid across the balustrade of the terrace and into the landscape. The emissions from the body's orifices thus enrich the terrace as well as the landscape. On the left, the man's glance in profile vaults over the spurt of liquid; on the right, his arm reaches backward to serve the

egg from the spoon into the empty bowl ready to receive it.

Furthermore, a surrealistic conflation with its anal implication is rendered in another painting, where the cut-off lower half of a squatting male body—on top of the world—fills the flower-dotted hillside with its invisible gaseous emission that has made the flowers on the world hillside recede. Only the hardy, small tufts of grass could stay put. The Mughal floral pattern denoting and evoking nature, a convention of courtly painting, has been disturbed by the unprecedented subject matter of this painting. The emission is inhaled in ecstatic distortion by two acolytes, whose bodies it inflates at the foot of the hill.

The privilege of the male emitting an egg is further extended by having the egg placed at his feet. It now has also the shape of a fruit or lotus bud, as the man holds it in each of his hands surmounting his shoulders, alike to *Su-rya*, the Indian sun god whose icon holds lotus flowers in a similar gesture. The man's legs are stretched inordinately as if in the process of growing from the egg shape below toward the two egg-buds flanking his head. The landscape behind this man on the terrace leads into a depth that is barely Mughal, the tiled rather than carpeted terrace emphasizing the tension between nature and culture that is resolved by the figure of man as the bond in common.

Standing on the terrace of his house, thinking, undecided, insecure, and on stiff legs, man holds a long-stemmed flower. But instead of smelling it he appears to close his nostrils, for as shown in another miniature, the inhalation of smell shapes and distorts body physiognomies into those of bizarre characters.

Even so, and however maimed and ambivalent, his arms amputated, his feet like those of a specter facing back, man undergoes an apotheosis. Standing high up on the vast verdant mountain slope of the world, snow-capped by distant Himalayan ranges, he commands the scene as he turns his head in profile. Bundles of rays of high tension sprout as wings from his averted, armless chest, and an enormous stream colored deep carrot-red flows from his penis. As its waves traverse the acid-green mountainside, the stream takes its course behind a preternaturally large telephone and, forming a loop, passes out of the painting.

However, no message will be heard by one whose ears and mouth are muzzled, and whose eyes are shielded. All these aids for closing off and protecting the sense organs add to the sterility of fully clothed and burly man, loaded with the paraphernalia of office. Behind and above him naked man strides on stilts, his phantom presence almost about to enclose the muzzled man in the pincerlike grip of the stilts.

The painting on the back “cover” of the “book” is divided into two halves of contrasting colors. Each half has also an indefinitely extensible design that covers its entire extent. In the middle the two halves interlock. Color and design of the upper rectangle fill also the half-circle of the lower half. For good balance the meeting of rectangle and half-circle appear once more within the field of each half of the page. There, at the upper and lower edge respectively of each of the

rectangular half-pages, a small rectangle is inserted, capped by a circular device. Both together form a new unit patterned by one or more indefinitely extensible designs. The entire small complex appears like a domed building rising from its own ground in monumental simplicity. It brings to a close the multifaceted contents of the book.

The front and back “covers” of the “book” show a ponderous sobriety that has its figurative exponent in the muzzled man. In painting the spirited stilt walker, naked, phantomlike, and yet *integer vitae* although stilt borne, is twice unseen by the voluminous muzzled man, who faces away from the apparition on the flowery mountain meadow but could not, his eyes being covered, see the soaring apparition even if he tried.

The telephone, the muzzled man, the front and back “covers” are metaphors of the outer world, which, in its present concrete actuality, is a heavy load to bear.

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1. From the lament over the shipwrecked body of Lychas and the frailty of man as told by Petronius in his *Satyricon* (12.115).
2. *Satyricon* (5.42).
3. Ibid. The actual phrase in the text is *nos non pluris sumus quam bullae* (We are nothing but bubbles).
4. The hand is of greatest importance in Clemente’s works; many paintings with the theme appear in publications that were issued after the writing of this essay, which occurred in 1987 without any verbal communication with the artist.
5. See Anne d’Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, *Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage: Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia, 1973), reissued as a revised edition of the *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 64, nos. 299–300 (April–September 1969), p. 10, fig. 3, and esp. p. 62, fig. 41.
6. Daniel H. H. Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 113, no. 157.