

James Barron Art

Dawn Clements: That Feeling of Necessariness

December 11, 2020 - January 23, 2021

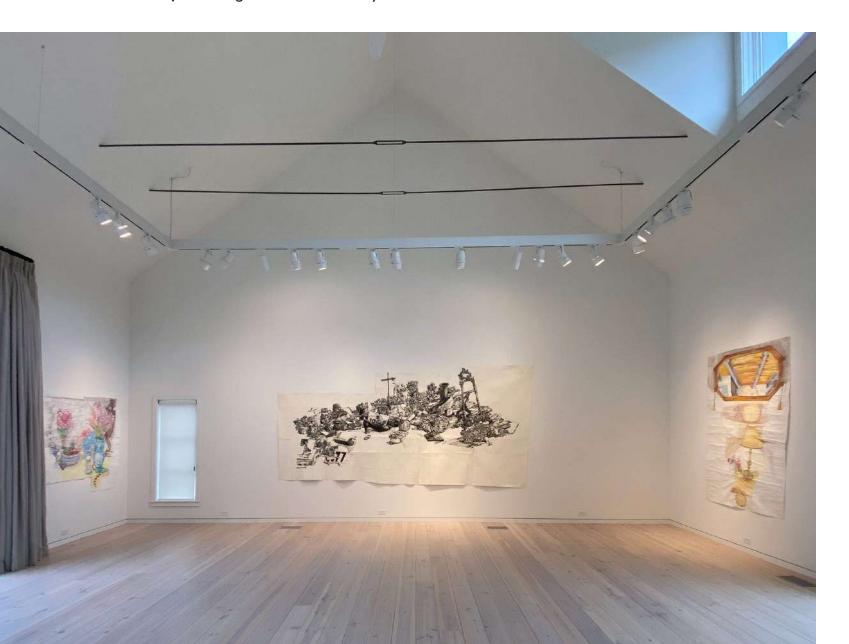
James Barron Art



Dawn Clements 1958 - 2018

Our upper gallery features an expansive Sumi ink on paper work, *Untitled (B&W Tabletop)*. The tabletop is overflowing with objects from Clements' life.

This work, created in 2010, contains shoes that had been given to her from a tiny second-hand store in Rome called Miss France, which was open from midnight until three or four in the morning, and only occasionally. The artist loved the story of the shoe and the form, and it appears five times throughout this drawing. In the middle is a cross, which appeared seemingly out of nowhere, and for the first time. It wasn't until later that the artist realized it commemorated the tragic death of her father who had died in a bicycling accident just months prior. This work is an homage to one of her favorite still life painters, Pieter Claesz. Clements was interested in perspective, and she paid equal attention to everything in a work. Here we see Bergdof Goodman tickets with fruit and shoes brimming with costume jewelry and trinkets, balls of thread, and, as always, writing. Tabletops are a recurring subject throughout Clements' body of work.











Also featured in the upper gallery is a large watercolor from 2011 that incorporates writing such as "that feeling of necessariness." Looking at *Paper Flowers* one becomes lost in the detail of three floral bouquets and various vases, and the background, which must be wallpaper behind the yellow table.

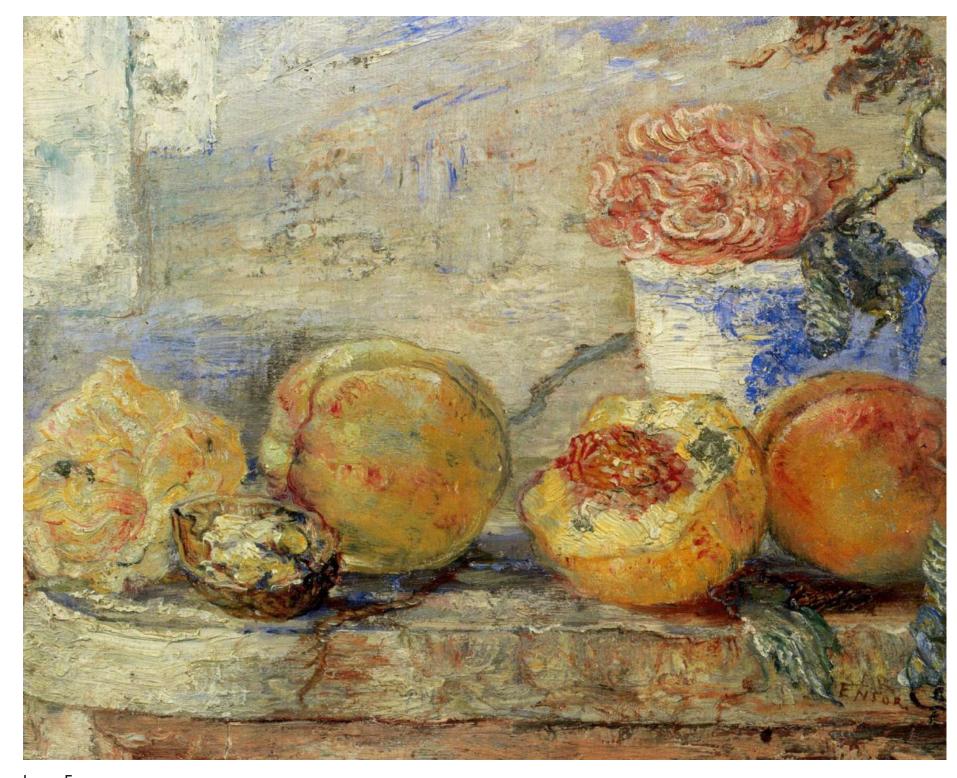
On the right wall is a large vertical watercolor done in Aven during an artist's residency in France. As always, she stayed in her room and painted what was right before her eyes. An ornate lamp sits on a table, a vase with three peonies beside it. We travel up the wall with the light refracted on the wall and up to the apex of the wall and ceiling, where a large mirror with braided ropes on the sides reflects the old wooden ceiling, with i-beam supports and track lights above the artists' head. Clements continued to explore how the eye scans from one surface to another. From the top of the lamp to the mirror might be a much greater distance, but she was intrigued with the cinematic sweep of the camera, and how she could record that in her own pictorial space.





Clements often incorporated text in her work; a small section of *Paper Flowers* includes "that feeling of necessariness" in the artist's hand.







Detail view of Paper Flowers

James Ensor Peaches, 1890 Oil on panel

Clements was influenced by the Belgian painter and printmaker James Ensor, known for his elaborate tableaux and still life works.

Pont Aven, 2005 gouache on paper 83 x 60 inches







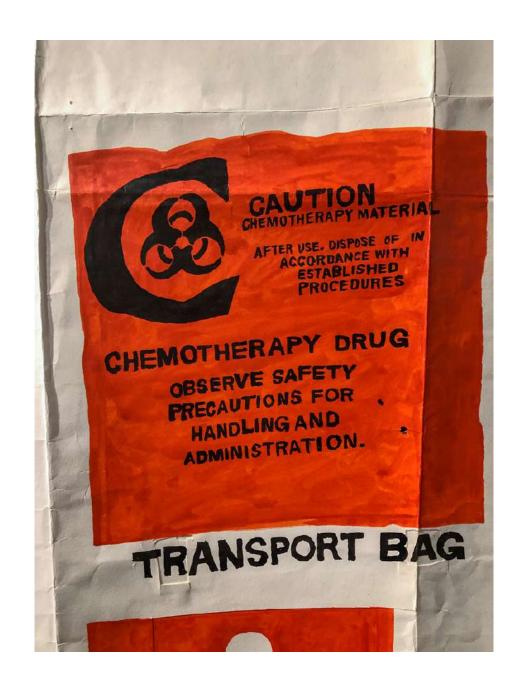
In the lower gallery are a selection of the last works Dawn Clements created, during her residency at MacDowell. Not only do they contain the ephemera of all of her work up until her cancer treatment, but also chemotherapy packets, hospital wristbands, daily memos about infusions and group therapy. They a testimony to her bravery as she traveled through the landscape of cancer treatment, and serve as a startling record for all those who have either gone through cancer treatment, or those who have shared the journey with someone they love – meaning nearly everyone.

The artist was at first reluctant to incorporate mementos of her treatment, but she eventually realized it was not only necessary for her artistic process, but urgent for her as an artist.





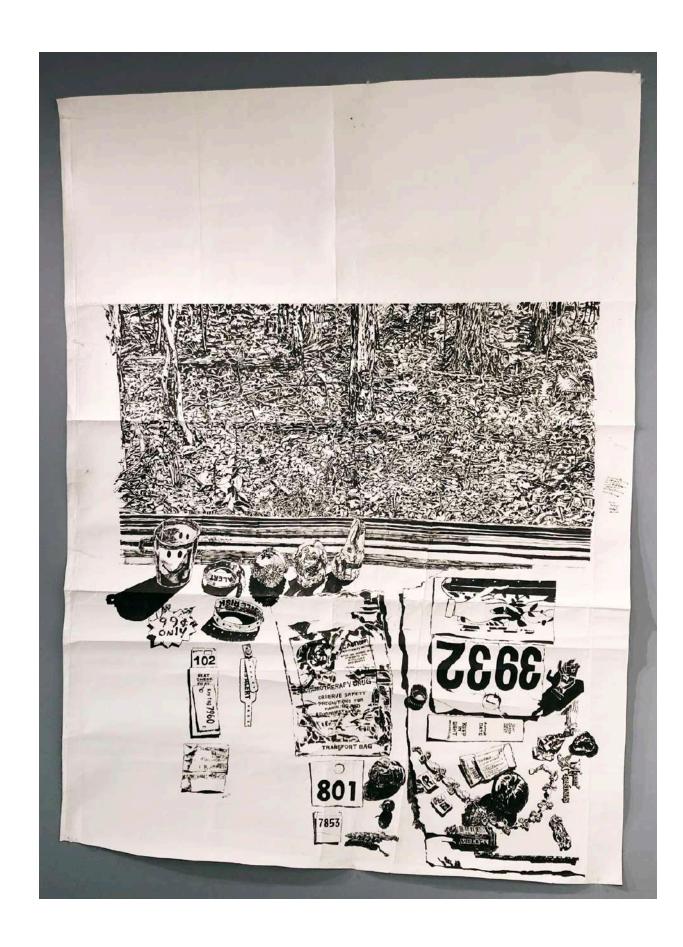






MacDowell Triptych, part 1/3, detail views





"Like cinema, [my work] moves and the experience takes time, and that maybe is slower. Some works of art are slow; they walk instead of run. I think a lot of my work is slow."

Dawn Clements



Installation photo of the works in progress at MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, NH. The artist worked on all three drawings concurrently; they are different depictions of the same tabletop using three different methodologies. To be added were: additional hospital bracelets and numbers, a mug, the windowsill and reflections in the window, the view out of the window, blank paper, and writing.

On the right hand side of the black and white piece, Clements added lyrics from the song "The Best Thing for You (Would Be Me)," written by Irving Berlin and featured in the Broadway musical *Call Me Madam*:

"I ask myself, what's the best thing for you? And myself and I seem to agree, That the best thing for you would be me."

Repeated throughout the triptych is the line "I Pancake, I Bacon," possibly a reference to daily meal options at MacDowell, along with various schedules for ferries, doctors' appointments, and meetings for a group of other metastatic cancer patients. One of her schedules references the artist Mary Temple, who accompanied her for many of her hospital visits. Other writing includes song lyrics from "When You Wish Upon a Star" from Walt Disney's 1940 animated musical *Pinocchio*.





Juan Sánchez Cotán Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber, 1602 Oil on canvas

Dawn Clements was influenced by the work of the Spanish Baroque painter Juan Sánchez Cotán. Known primarily for his still life "Bodegón" paintings, Cotán often painted everyday objects, including fruits and vegetables. The objects in his paitings were often arranged so that they were close to each other, but did not actually touch. Clements was particularly inspired by this technique and employed it in works such as *MacDowell Triptych*.



On the adjacent wall are two rainbow-colored mirrors, which reflect an empty wall. Before the mirrors are an assortment of objects, none touching each other. They range from entwined rings, fruit and vegetables, flowers, twine, a piece of coral that had been given to her by the artist Angela Dufresne, and a laundry ticket with the number 0729. Words that floated through her space while she created this work include "write in a book what you now see / it had another sense, like all dreams, shadows touch / I burst shamefully into sobs."

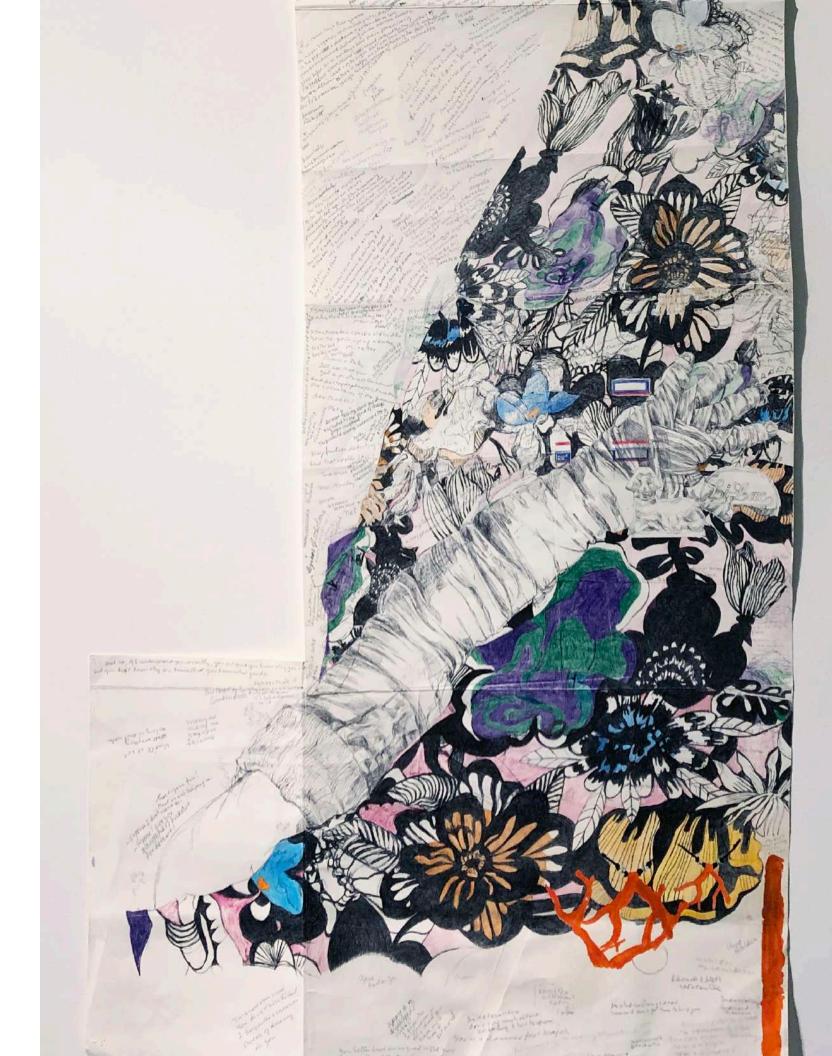
Another of her major last works hangs opposite these. It is a visual description of looking down her body at her bandaged arm and her leg, wrapped in a floral cloth. Always, she was concerned with her foot and shoes. The remarkable amount of writing in this work would take hours to unwind. There are quotations from melodramas, from movies, of words that intrigued her. Within this enormous body of words are phrases such as, "production of death / the line between medicine and poison is very fine / the macabre operation of the body"

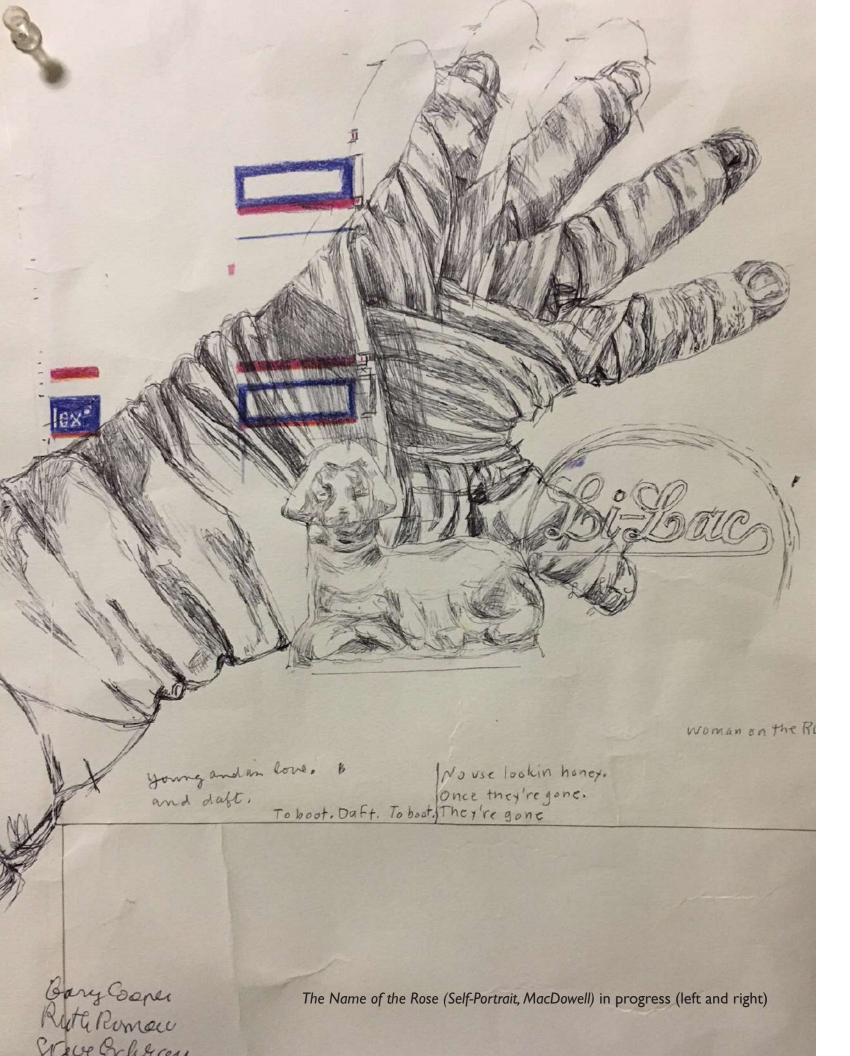




The Name of the Rose (Self-Portrait, MacDowell), 2018 ballpoint pen ink, watercolor, and colored pencil on paper 72 $1/2 \times 29$ inches







"Text is fragments from Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Dawn was listening to this audio book while drawing.

Before MacDowell, she started the piece by drawing her fingertips below her elastic bandage wrapped arm. Then she felt like she had enough energy to draw her whole bandaged arm. She ran out of room on the paper when she got to her shoulder, and so she added that piece of paper at the bottom left.

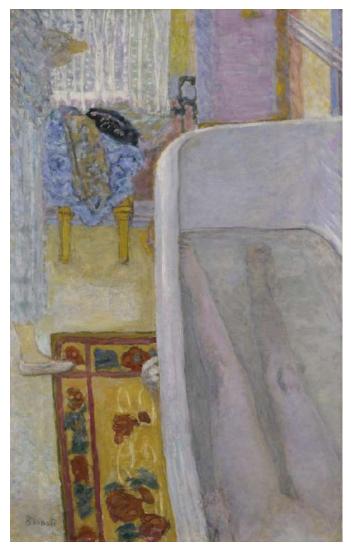
Then she decided to draw her body and decided she needed something patterned/floral behind it. She wore a Marimekko sleeveless dress with big flower pattern. The patterns gets paler, more translucent toward the top where there is more text, so the text is not completely blocked out."

Susan Swenson



Don't laugh within the walls. Laughter does not enjoy a good reputation.

Fragment of text from The Name of the Rose (Self-Portrait, MacDowell)



Pierre Bonard

Nude in the Bath, 1925

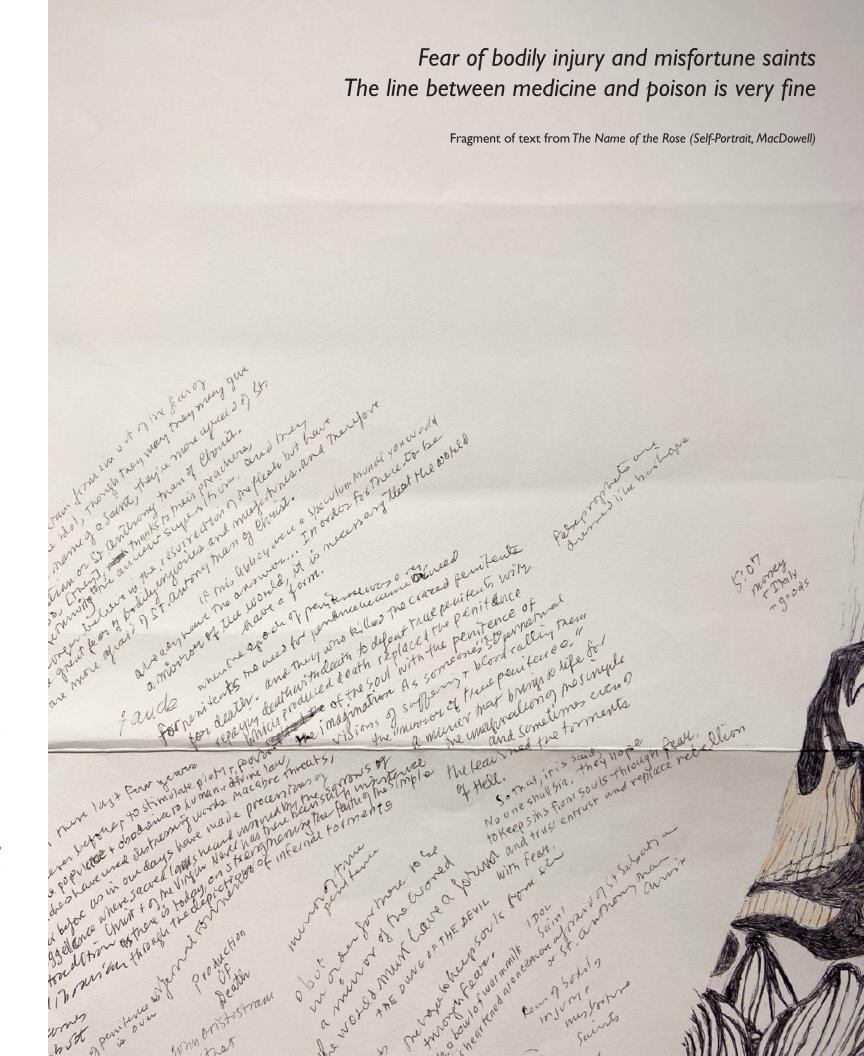
Oil paint on canvas

"Clements often spoke of her admiration for Bonnard. In particular, she loved the perspective of Bonnard's wife Marthe in her bath. The perspective was of a viewer looking down at the tub, and yet, as in *Nude in the Bath*, 1925, at the Tate, there is an odd shift with the standing figure at the left moving into the chair, and the drapes of the windows straight ahead and on the left.

Clements would say, with a gleeful laugh, 'It's all wrong, and yet, it's exactly how the mind's eye perceives such a scene. I just love Bonnard!'

In The Name of the Rose, there seems something of an homage to Bonnard, even in the recording of the fabric on the blue chair and of the figure on the left."

James Barron





Also featured in the lower gallery is a watercolor of hyacinths from 2014, before she was diagnosed with cancer. This work was first exhibited in Clements' 2015 solo show *Mother's Day* at Pierogi Gallery, Brooklyn, NY. Clements realized that this piece marked the beginning of her return to working in color after several years of working only in black and white following the death of her father.

In the corner of the gallery is a small watercolor, measuring approx. 9 x 10 inches, featuring a clementine. Just two days after she received notice from her doctors that she had terminal cancer with only one to five years to live, she and James Barron took a train from Rome to Naples, where they ate clementines that had been grown on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, just miles away. In this back alley, she marveled at the fullness of flavor, and kept one so she could create a watercolor. She did two versions of the clementine this size: one which expanded into 283 inches, for Three Tables, Rome, in which she added paper to the core watercolor of the clementine for two months while she was in residency at the American Academy in Rome. The monumentality and span of that watercolor as it scanned her surrounding studio is arguably one of the greatest works of her career, and it is interesting to see its inception as a small watercolor of one of her favorite pieces of fruit, a bit of an homage to one of her favorite artists, Chardin.



The Conversation February 7, 2011

James Barron: You mentioned that you don't like drawing flowers – which is odd because this entire series is about drawing flowers.

Dawn Clements: No, I don't like drawing flowers. It's funny because it's not something that I draw ordinarily. When I got to Rome, I sat down and I drew what was in front of me and there were flowers, beautiful hyacinths that were already there. I drew them just to get started. I went to bed think that I'd finish the drawing the next day. The next day, I couldn't find my place in the drawing. I realized they were growing fast; they were completely different. Hyacinths grow fast and die quickly, too.

JB: Your work has a lot to do with temporality.

DC: That's for sure. Instead of me moving my point of view, the flowers were constantly moving before my eyes. I said to myself, I only want to do one drawing a day. I want them to change and I want to be able to see how they live and die. I want to see the whole lifespan, like in a vanitas painting.

The drawings could be a response to all the strata of years in Rome, but from a personal point of view. I'm at a time in my life when I'm starting to think about age in a very strong way. I am thinking about young people and old people and life and death. So I think these flowers really spoke to me.

JB: You seem almost like Proust in the sense that you could put Proust in a war zone and he would probably write about the trench that he's in and the tea he's drinking. I felt the same about you—that you came to Rome and there are incredible distractions, but you focused on particular projects. What in Rome left an impression on you?

DC: Seeing Livia's room at the Palazzo Massimo was huge for me. It's a Roman fresco of a painting of a garden that fills an entire room. I knew before I came here that I was interested in the fresco paintings. Something really funny happened to me here regarding time. I'm American and in America nothing is very old. We think of things as being old, but they are maybe from 1900. That's old to us. My idea was that the Renaissance and Baroque seemed old, but after coming to Rome it didn't feel old anymore. There is the visible presence of the ancient everywhere. Because of all the strata of life that I found, the Renaissance and the Baroque felt modern. Renaissance perspective suddenly became a sort of technology.

JB: Can you tell us more about the placement of the viewer in relation to this work, *Smoking Room, Titanic?*

DC: Well, that's sort of getting involved, but with that drawing, instead of traditional Albertian linear perspective, I was interested in crawling through the space. I was thinking about the disheveled breakfast tray as the focal point, and the vanishing point would move back from that. I had just read Norman Bryson.

JB: Will you talk about why your works often have so many folds?

DC: Yeah, I know it's a mess [she laughs] but it's part of my process. Actually, this piece (Hyacinths, Rome) is quite clean in relation to most of my work. It's wavy because I drew each section and then glued them together – which is not the way I ordinarily work.

JB: You hadn't been to Rome since 1993. What surprised you?

DC: It's a beautiful city and I love the people. One thing that struck me is the color and the colors that people wear. In New York, everybody wears black. It's really funny, I remember being on a bus in Brooklyn and every single person was wearing black from head to toe. I thought, Wow, this is New York. I mean, people don't only wear black in America, they wear a lot of awful colors, too [laughs from crowd].

JB: What about the color struck you?

DC: In Rome, the color is saturated. When you do purple, it's just purple. There is such a feeling for the senses here. I noticed this about fabrics, too, there is something so tactile about them.

JB: In your Rome works, everything is in equal focus. It feels as though you're in a state of amazement, almost a meditative state. Do you feel that when you're creating your art?

DC: This kind of goes back to the movies a little bit. I remember once a long time ago a film history teacher was talking about Citizen Kane. There was a cinematographer, Gregg Toland, who had ground a special lens so that the background would have a very deep focus and in the foreground you'd have the same clarity.

I thought it was such a wonderful thing, not just so you could see foreground and background, but also all the stuff. All the material in the life of Citizen Kane became a big part of the subject matter of the movie. One filmmaker talked about it as being a more democratic way for the viewer to read the frame. You weren't just focusing on a face so everything would go soft in the background. Instead, your eye really had to look at every single part of it and decide to travel on its own.

From December 20, 2010 through February 6, 2011, Dawn Clements was an artist in residence in Rome. The work she created was exhibited at Piazza dei Caprettari, Rome. This interview was conducted in front of a group of collectors, curators, and journalists.

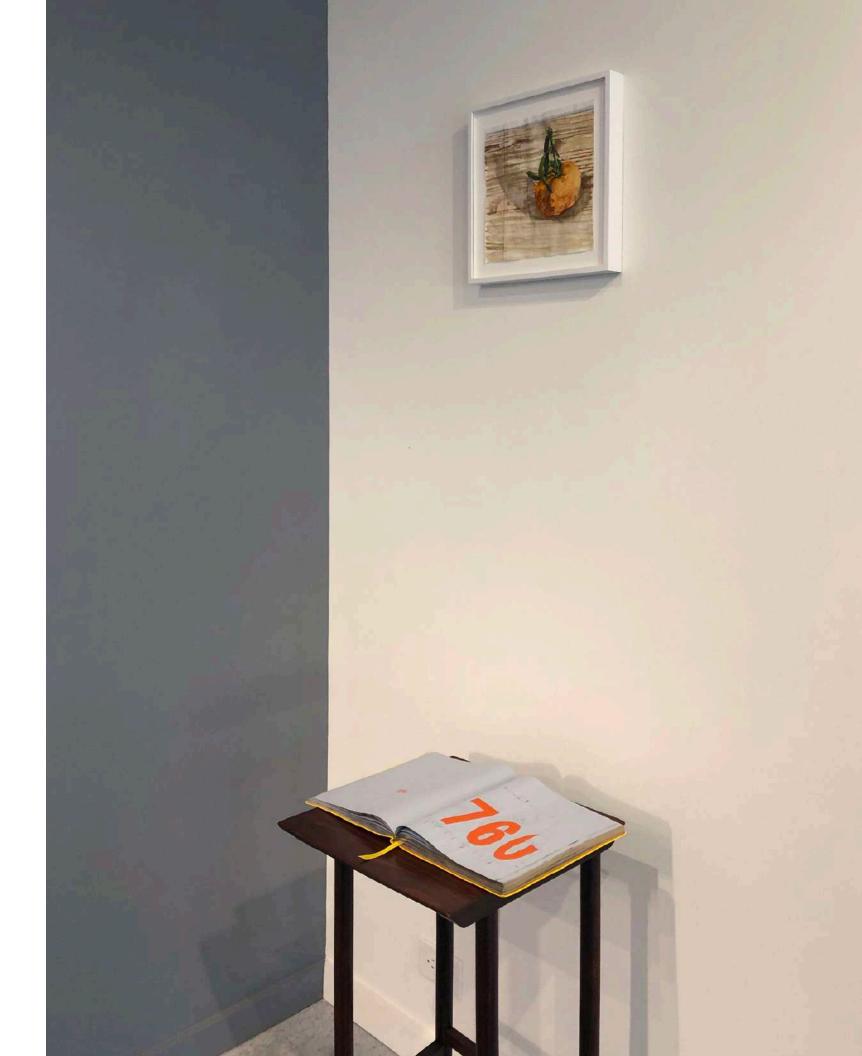
Numbers Notebook

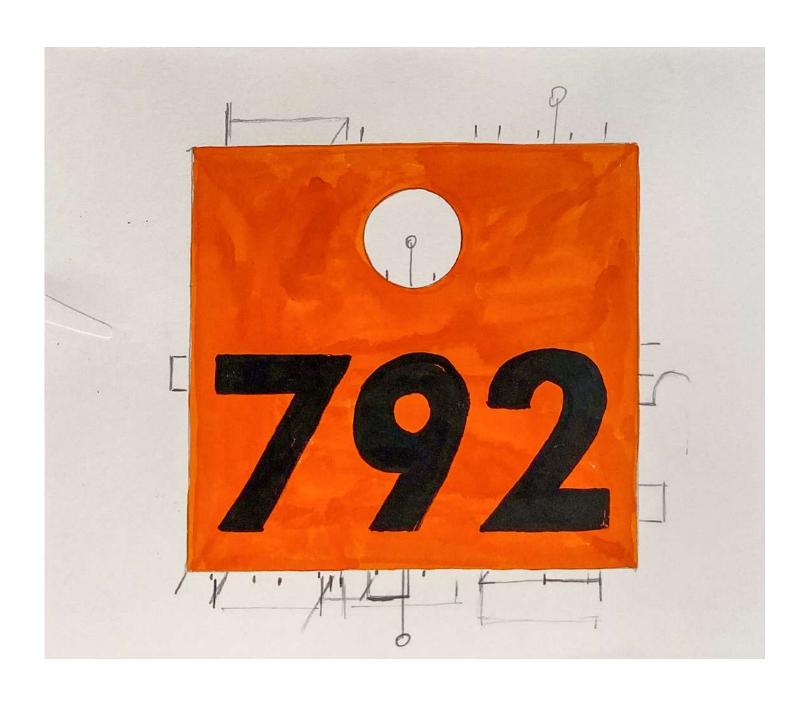
A simple Smythson of Bond Street notebook, blue pages, gold-leaf edges, canary-yellow ochre. It begins with the number 362 and on the verso is dated June 17, 2018. There is hope and firmness in the way she records these numbers. Flipping through this book, one sees a work nearly every day, sometimes more. As her world was filled with nearly indecipherable numbers of tests and blood counts, she turned her focus to objects she cherished: laundry tickets, car tickets, stubs with numbers that had little value to anyone else that she would often find discarded on the sidewalk or friends sent them to her.

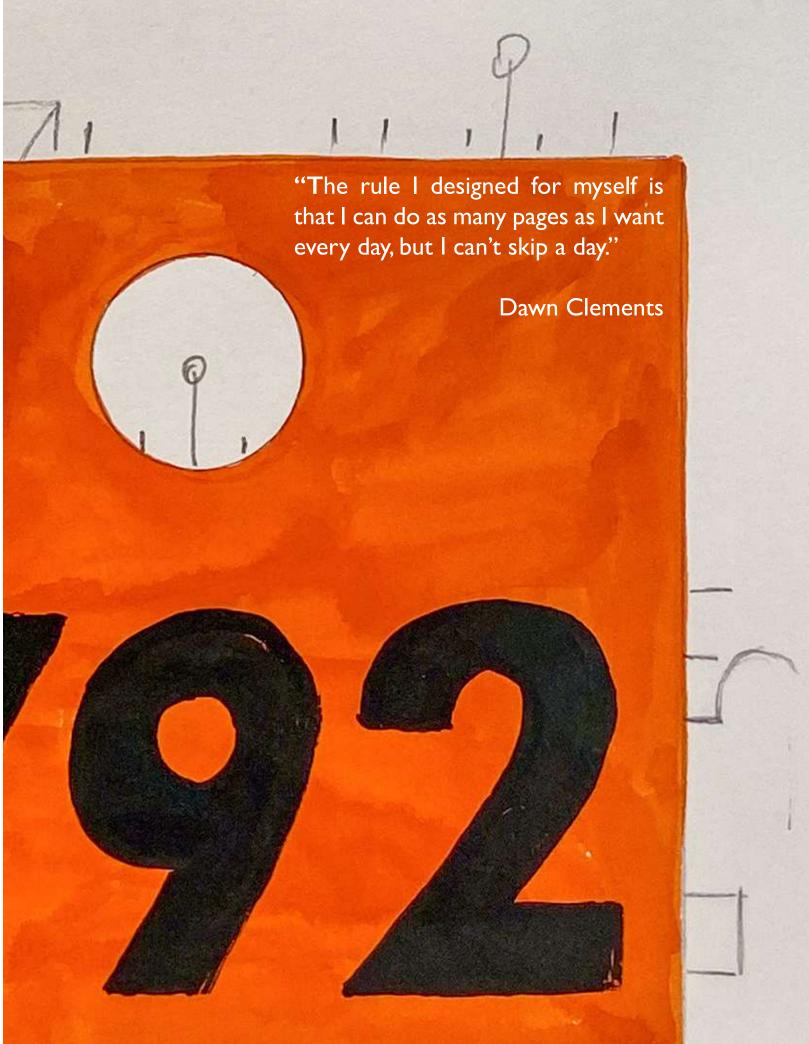
We see the artist's determination as she writes 7381 on November 22, 1388 on Thanksgiving Day, and her final number, 1386, on November 25, 2018, just nine days before she died.

"I understand the value of a diamond is worth more than a paper laundry ticket from getting shirts laundered, but to me they're equally important when I draw them."

Dawn Clements







Interview October 28, 2018

James Barron: Tell me a little bit about the architecture around the signs.

Dawn Clements: They're measurements. I have an object, which is almost always a parking valet ticket, and I put the object down on the paper and trace it, because I want to make it life-sized. I usually make things too big, so I wanted a book where everything was the size of the object I was drawing. I trace the object in pencil, and the notes in the margins are measurements of the numbers — every measurement is indicated so I can paint it "freehand" in the middle in ink. Those serve as my guide. It looks more complex than it is. There's a system.

JB: I liked its architectural feel, like a plan. If you look at an architectural plan of a church, you can envision the interior. This reminds me of that. How did this come together as a project?

DC: The rule I designed for myself is that I can do as many pages as I want every day, but I can't skip a day. In the past, I've restricted myself to one a day. In the beginning you can tell when I did several in a day, but then it became just a daily commitment.

JB: And that is a structure that is comfortable for you, moving through life in general?

DC: Yeah. In fact, I started it when I was having a cancer treatment with Dr. Kalinsky that was going pretty well. Not long into the book, the treatment stopped working and I wasn't doing well. I was glad I had started when I was well, because I still felt committed to it even when I was sick. Or – not sick, but sometimes not so well.

IB: When you have a graph with a downward trajectory from eight to one, what is that about?

DC: That is the graph of the number you see below, 8351. The truth is that this is a book of exactly what it is. Just valet parking tickets. And then there are marginal notes, just things I've overheard or have seen on TV, or my own personal thoughts. As I continue to work on my book, everyone asks me what the numbers mean, and I just say, "They're the numbers on the tickets."

I can't really explain them more than that; that's just what they are. I think with numbers and letters, people read them and try to find meaning in them. I also wonder if something doesn't have meaning, what's the purpose in doing it? But I love these parking tickets just the way they are, so I just do them.

But then as I was working and drawing these numbers every day, [I realized that] in my life as a cancer patient, there are a lot of numbers: numbers of blood test results, body scans and so forth, and sometimes they're charted on a graph. This day, when I was drawing the 835 I, I started wondering what that would look like on a graph, just like my health numbers. That's how that graph came to be.

It's not that this book has changed, really. Of course, it changes with me, but really the book is still exactly what it always was: a book of still life objects, which happened to be valet parking tags with numbers on them. That's what it is.

But sometimes when you're working on something in your own head as an artist—I'm not saying the viewer has to see this—things accumulate meaning, and my thinking about medical numbers and things like that made me see numbers in a new way. But they're still only what they are.

JB: Do you have an intention when you put a little quote in like, "Jesus's girlfriend got a real good point"? Do you hear it and put it down as something that was part of the flow of making the work?

DC: While I work, I listen to the radio or TV shows or movies, and that particular quotation was Pennsatucky from Orange is the New Black. It struck me, so I just jotted it down.

JB: This is cool here, this text: "That's why youthful works are always full of... errors. Life is too short for art. We need much more time to harden our shell. Hard and shiny—ironically, it's often shiny, rarely hard."

DC: It's from a movie called The Bronte Sisters. Roland Barthes actually appears at the end of the movie as a theatergoer. He might have actually spoken those words. Les sœurs Brontë.

JB: I like this one: "That's what he does to you. It makes a man careless."

DC: That's from an old Western show called Laramie.

JB: I like this quote from Gunsmoke: "No man's life is worthless, and yet the killing goes on." What is it with you and Westerns?

DC: I love Westerns. I really see them as a male melodrama. They always talk about melodramas as being women's pictures, often set indoors, often about family and crisis. Westerns, on the face of it, almost look like the opposite. There might be a woman in there, but the story usually isn't hers. And then Westerns primarily take place outdoors, so on the face of it they look like opposites. But they're dealing with very strong bonds and love and hate between men and families and crisis, and the language is very heartfelt and pretty sentimental, even though it's pretty rough and violent sometimes. It's still really sentimental and heartfelt. I love that about Westerns.

It's funny, you think about those vast deserts, and people are always encountering each other, either as strangers or people they met long ago... It's all about land and power and possession – well, it's not all about that. It's about love, too.

JB: They're always talking about morality, even though they're gangsters.

DC: There's a code, yeah. There's betrayal and deep heart, so the revenge sometimes is almost generational. Families try to hold onto a kind of power that they had in the past, but in a changing world.



"I think with numbers and letters, people read them and try to find meaning in them. I also wonder if something doesn't have meaning, what's the purpose in doing it?

But I love these parking tickets just the way they are, so I just do them."

Dawn Clements





DAWN CLEMENTS

Party Cups, 2015 watercolor on paper 41 3/4 x 32 inches



Born in 1958 in Woburn, Massachusetts, Dawn Clements was primarily known for her use of Sumi ink, watercolor, and ballpoint pen to construct both small and large-scale drawings, which she constructed by adding additional paper as she worked. Domestic interiors and movie scenes were frequent subjects of her work, which she described as "a kind of visual diary."

Clements' work has been widely exhibited and was featured in the 1993 Venice Biennale and the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Her works are included in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art; The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; the Saatchi Collection, London; Brown University's David Winton Bell Gallery; the Princeton University Art Museum; the Rhode Island School of Design Museum; and The Tang Museum.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 Dawn Clements: In Memorium and Celebration of, Pierogi, New York, NY
- 2017 Tables and Pills and Things, Pierogi, New York, NY Tables and Pills and Things, James Barron Art, Kent, CT Women's Rooms, Barbara Walters Gallery, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY
- 2015 Drawings/Watercolors, John Davis Gallery, Hudson, NY Mother's Day, Pierogi, Brooklyn, NY
- 2012 Dawn Clements, New Work, with Sculptures by Marc Leuthold, Pierogi, Brooklyn, NY
- 2011 Dawn Clements: Sint-Trudoabdij, Maele Castle, Bruges, Belgium
- 2010 Still Life, Hales Gallery, London, England Home Sick, Acme Gallery, Los Angeles, CA Boiler, The Boiler, Brooklyn, NY
- 2009 Portrait Rooms, Mark W. Potter Gallery at the Taft School, Watertown, CT
- 2008 Conditions of Desire, Pierogi, Leipzig, Germany
- 2007 Conditions of Desire, Pierogi, Brooklyn, NY Movie, John and June Allcott Gallery, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill,
- 2006 Art Now: Dawn Clements, Middlebury College Museum of Art, Middlebury, VT

 Dawn Clements: Recent Drawings, Herter Art Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA
- 2004 Drawing, Pierogi, Brooklyn, NY
 Feigen Contemporary, New York, NY
 2003 Drawing, Pierogi, Brooklyn, NY
- 2002 Drawings, Greene Gallery, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY
- 1995 Albany Center Galleries, Albany, NY

Selected Public and Museum Collections

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
The Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY
Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
Brown University Art Collection, Providence, RI
RISD Museum, Providence, RI
Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ
University Art Museum, University at Albany, SUNY, Albany, NY
Colecção Madeira Corporate Services
The Deutsche Bank Collection
The Saatchi Collection, London
Various private collections