

# James Barron Art



## *Dawn Clements: Nothing Happens Fast*

Opens May 3, 2023

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# *Dawn Clements: Nothing Happens Fast*

Opens May 3, 2023

“Part of deciding to draw the flowers every day was that, instead of me moving my point of view, the flowers are going to be constantly moving before my eyes. I said, ‘I want to do one every day because I want to see the change, to see how they live and die before my eyes.’”

Dawn Clements



DAWN CLEMENTS

*Untitled, 2013*  
sumi ink on paper  
12 1/4 x 6 inches (31.1 x 15.2 cm)





DAWN CLEMENTS

*Paper Flowers*, 2011  
gouache on paper  
58 1/4 x 64 inches (148 x 162.6 cm)





DAWN CLEMENTS

*Hyacinth, Camellia, and Sugar Egg, 2014*  
watercolor on paper  
62 1/2 x 44 inches (158.8 x 111.8 cm)



DAWN CLEMENTS

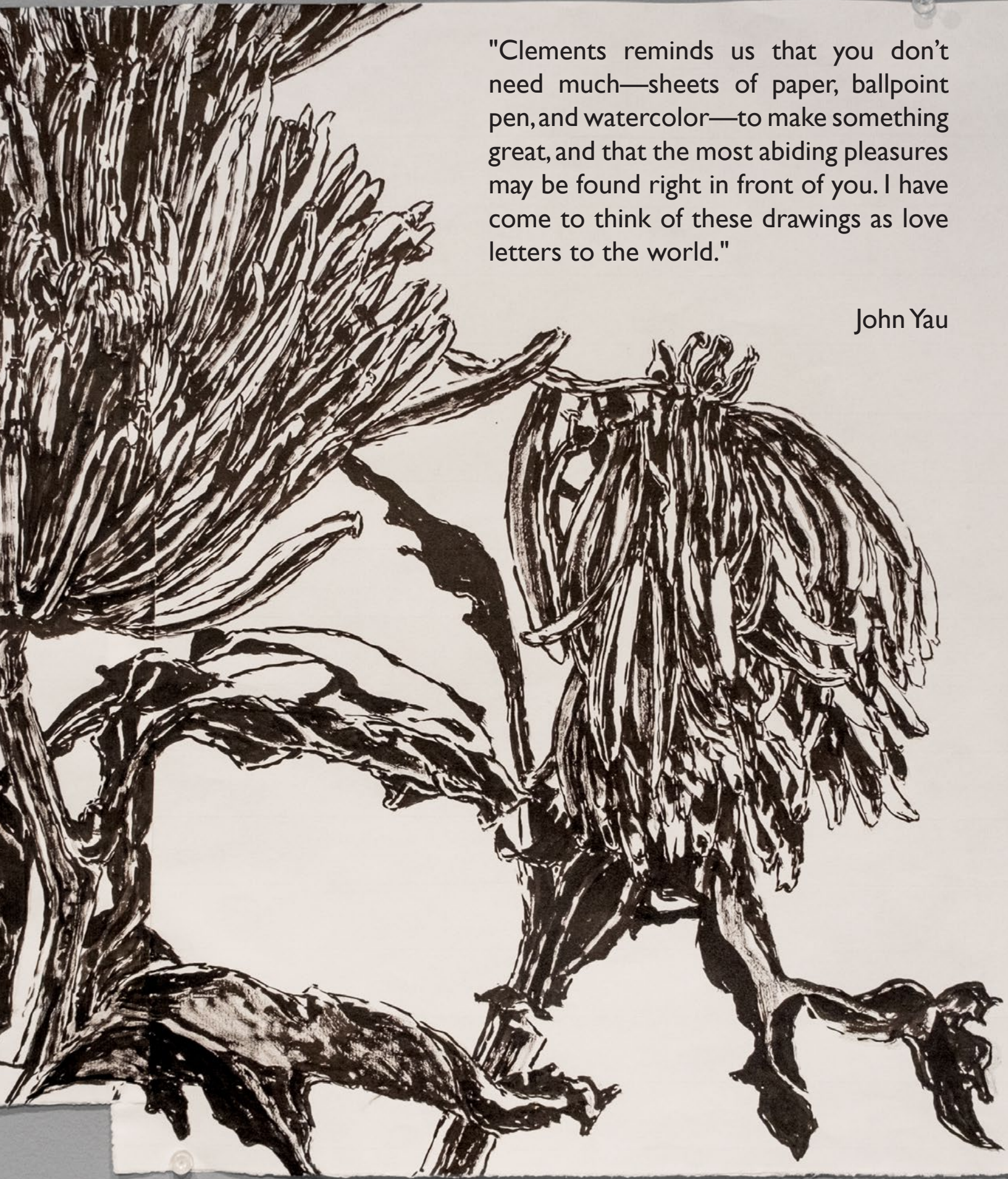
*Chrysanthemums 2*, 2014  
sumi ink on paper  
18 x 31 1/2 inches (45.7 x 80 cm)





"Clements reminds us that you don't need much—sheets of paper, ballpoint pen, and watercolor—to make something great, and that the most abiding pleasures may be found right in front of you. I have come to think of these drawings as love letters to the world."

John Yau



DAWN CLEMENTS

*Untitled, n.d.*  
gouache on paper  
23 x 45 inches (58.4 x 114.3 cm)





12204

ALTA  
GENY - Côte d'Or.

Côte d'Or

CLUSE

“Clements has re-created domestic interiors while also skillfully re-creating the inner workings of her own mind.”

Jillian Steinhauer



“Everything is offered to the eyes’ delectation, as if it too could smell and touch...The artist’s ethics and aesthetics are evident throughout: she wants to honor the existence of whatever she is looking at.”

John Yau

DAWN CLEMENTS

*Johnson, VT, 2010*  
sumi ink on paper  
22 1/2 x 36 inches (57.2 x 91.4 cm)



DAWN CLEMENTS

*Amaryllis*, 2014  
watercolor on paper  
55 x 71 1/2 inches (139.7 x 181.6 cm)





Teloid  
Broadstar

DAWN CLEMENTS

Untitled (Nan Goldin Geno in the Lake,  
Bavaria, 1994 Photograph), 2007  
sumi ink on paper  
10 x 9 1/2 inches (25.4 x 24.1 cm)

*Nan Goldin Geno in the lake, Bavaria 1994 photograph  
July 9, 2007*





DAWN CLEMENTS

*Untitled (Anonymous (French ca 1840) Nude Woman*  
oil/canvas Cleveland Museum of Art), 2007  
sumi ink on paper  
10 x 18 inches (25.4 x 45.7 cm)



June  
16, 2007

*Anonymous (French ca 1840) Nude Woman oil/canvas Cleveland Museum of Art*



Woman (Enoch ca 1840) Nade Woman oil canvas

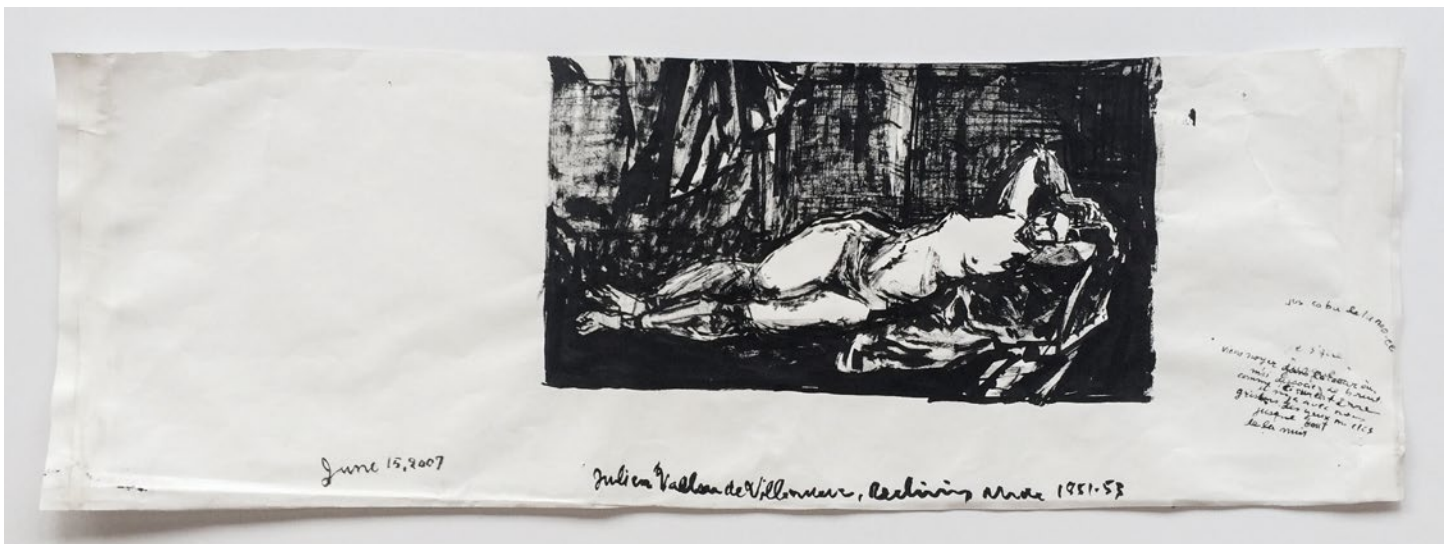
DAWN CLEMENTS

*Untitled (Pygmalion + Galate a Jean-Léon  
Gerome c/c 1824-1904 Metr. Mus), 2007*  
sumi ink on paper  
17 x 9 inches (43.2 x 22.9 cm)



DAWN CLEMENTS

Untitled (Julien Vallou de Villeneuve Reclining  
Nude, 1851-53), 2007  
sumi ink on paper  
10 x 30 inches (25.4 x 76.2 cm)





Illenau, Aachen, made 1951-53

DAWN CLEMENTS

Untitled (detail Gustave Courbet *The Studio of the Painter* 1854-55 oil/canvas), 2007  
sumi ink on paper  
11 3/4 x 14 1/2 inches (29.8 x 36.8 cm)



Detail Gustave Courbet *The Studio of the Painter* 1854-55 oil/canvas  
June 21, 2007

## Interview / Dawn Clements

### Rome 2013

**JB:** When you were a child, you were first assigned the dining room. Eventually you were moved from the dining room into your own bedroom, and you had a dormer that your parents let you draw on – is that right?

**DC:** Well, they didn't really give me permission to draw on the walls, but it was a very small house, and there were my parents, my three brothers, and me, and when I reached a certain age, as the only girl, they decided I needed a room of my own. So they gave me a room up in the attic. It was a nice attic, but it was old, and it wasn't really that finished. The wallpaper was a little bit water-stained. To tell you the truth, I just started drawing on the walls, from things I heard on the radio, based on the time of day, but no one really noticed. By the time they noticed I was drawing on the walls, they didn't mind too much. My father was an artist.

**JB:** When they moved out of the family home, didn't your mother call you to see if you wanted part of that wall?

**DC:** That's true. It's just one of those things that I did as a teenager, and then twenty years later my parents were moving out of the house. At that point I was drawing still lifes, but I would also incorporate ambient text into my work – sound from the radio. My mother called me up and said, "You know, Dawn, we're moving. Do you want the walls?" And I said, "The walls?" And she said, "Yes, it seems to me that the walls are very much like the work you're making now." And it's interesting because this graffiti that I did as a child became a big part of my work as an adult as well. We're always growing as human beings and changing, but there's always some kind of core that remains the same.

**JB:** Your father had a studio in the basement, which I saw many years ago. He made a huge impression on me when he said, "I do ten drawings a day. I don't do nine, I don't do eleven..." I thought of him recently because the genesis of this piece *Hyacinths* is reminiscent of that in a certain way. I had bought a tiny little hyacinth bulb that started to bloom, and Dawn did one tiny little vertical panel at the bottom, and then did the panel above it, connected them, then did the panel beside it...She made a sort of promise to herself that she would do one a day the entire time she was here. It seems reminiscent of your father in a sense.

**DC:** I think it's true. My father just passed away a couple of years ago. I remember growing up with him, how he went to a job every day, a job he didn't like very much, but he would come home at night, go down to the cellar, and he wasn't a very social man, so one way for me to visit with him was to sit on the cellar steps and just watch him painting and drawing. I was quiet; I wasn't there to play with him, just sitting on the steps.

And there was a certain moment in my father's life when he was somewhat depressed, particularly about the job he didn't like, and he decided to quit painting, but he felt that he someday might want to paint again, so he decided to make ten drawings every morning before he went to work. They weren't big, elaborate drawings, not what you might consider highly finished drawings. They were really just repetitive sketches that maybe took twenty seconds each. But somehow to him it was very important to stay in his practice.

Every day for thirty-five or forty years, until the day he died, he made ten drawings. Every day. In a funny way, what the drawings were didn't matter to him; it was just a matter of keeping that motion going. And he did return to painting. I did think about that when I started doing this, because this is a strange drawing. I started drawing this and got sick of doing it very quickly because it was a lot of detail, and I experienced a lot of fatigue while I was doing it – I was really kind of lazy – I thought, I gotta find some way to change the energy. So I said, "I'll start every day by doing one drawing." And that's how this started.

**JB:** Hyacinths bloom and die so quickly, so for the longest time I couldn't understand what you were doing or how it related to Rome, but I thought about it, and it really is about decay. If you look at the bottom, the plants are in full bloom. As you move up, they really are dying. It seems your work has a lot to do with temporality.

**DC:** That's for sure.

**JB:** You seem almost like Proust in that sense that you could put Proust in a war zone and he would write about the trench that he was in, and the tea he was drinking. You came to Rome, and there were all these incredible distractions, but you focused on these particular projects. What made the greatest impression on you in Rome? Palazzo Massimo? Seeing Livy's room?

**DC:** Yeah, seeing Livy's room at the Palazzo Massimo was really something, that room that is a garden – a Roman fresco of a garden. I took a lot of photographs when I was there, not just of that room but of other Roman



wall-paintings that really moved me. I kind of knew before I came here that I was really interested in fresco paintings. Something funny that happened to me here was that – I'm American, and in America nothing is very old. We think of things from 1900 being old, you know? My idea coming to Rome was the Renaissance and the Baroque – "sixteenth-century" to me sounded very old. But coming to Rome, it was strange, because that didn't feel old anymore. There's just this visible presence of the ancient everywhere here, all the strata of life. I found that after just moving through Rome, the Renaissance became very modern. Perspective became something of a new technology.

**JB:** Speaking of perspective, this piece in the front is almost a baroque vanitas. Can you talk about the placement of the viewer in relation to the object viewed?

**DC:** With this particular drawing, I was thinking about perspective. In traditional Albertian linear perspective, you keep going back to a small point on the horizon, but I was interested in crawling through the space in a way. I was thinking about this sort of tray, this disheveled breakfast tray, as being the focal point, my vanishing point, and I move back from that. It doesn't really add up in this particular drawing, but it's something that I'm starting to think about a lot. I had just read Norman Bryson.

**JB:** For those who don't know, this is the smoking room from the film *Titanic* from 1953, and Dawn stitched together various scenes. You never see the entire smoking room in the film, but you do here... Can you talk about why this piece has so many folds?

**DC:** I know, it's a mess, but really, it's just part of my process. Actually, this piece is quite clean.

[Laughs] It's actually not folded, but wavy, because of the way that I glued it. It's actually tidy in a lot of ways. It's because I drew it piece by piece, separately, and then glued it together in the end. It's not a way that I ordinarily work. This piece here is much more typical of the way that I work. I start with one small thing – for instance, in this particular drawing, I started drawing this in red ink, and then on top of it I drew with this dark grey ink, and the piece was only this big. So I thought, *This is sort of nice. Maybe I'll draw the whole thing.* And I just kept adding on. When I got to this, I thought, *Why don't I draw the hyacinth. I just keep adding on as I go.* I'm working on a little tabletop, so I have to fold up the drawing in order to work on it, because I don't work on the wall, I work flat on a table, and sometimes on my lap.

**JB:** It's also a way of not being intimidated by the overall piece, is that right?

**DC:** To be honest, that's true. Sometimes when I start on a piece and I know that it's going to be big from the get-go, I find that a little intimidating. It seems to work every time – I'm always able to trick myself into thinking I'm making a small piece, and then it grows.

**JB:** You hadn't been to Rome since 1993. Was there anything that surprised you this time around?

**DC:** Well, the weather. I feel so lucky. For some reason, when I travel, I love going to gardens, even though I'm not a gardener at all. I really love it here so much. I remembered that I loved Rome from many years ago, but I didn't remember it this way. I love the people. One thing that really struck me was the color in Rome, and the colors that people wear. You know, in New York everyone wears black. I remember getting on a bus in Brooklyn and riding the whole trip, and every single person on the bus was wearing black from head to toe. But in Rome, I noticed that the color here just seems very saturated. Also, I just think there's such a feeling for the senses here. There seems to be something so tactile about the fabrics...I don't know what to say other than I really love it here.

**Audience member:** You mentioned that you don't like drawing flowers.

**DC:** I don't like drawing flowers. It's really funny, because it's not something that I draw ordinarily, but when I got here, I sat down and drew what was in front of me, and it was these beautiful hyacinths that James had put in my room. I drew them just to get started and said I'd finish the drawing the next day. But when I got up the next day, this hyacinth had grown, and I couldn't find my place in the drawing. They just grow so fast. Part of deciding to draw the flowers every day was that, instead of me moving my point of view, the flowers are going to be constantly moving before my eyes. I said, I want to do one every day because I want to see the change, to see how they live and die before my eyes, kind of like a vanitas painting. Part of it 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 start to think about age in a very strong way. I think about young people and older people and life and death, so I think these flowers really spoke to me in a personal way.

**JB:** It looks as though you're in an amazed, meditative state. Do you feel that when you're creating works like this?

DC: Well, this kind of goes back to the movies. Years ago, a film history teacher was talking about *Citizen Kane*, and how there was a cinematographer, Gregg Toland, who ground a special lens so that in the background you would have a very deep focus and in the foreground you would have the same clarity. It really let you see all the stuff, all the material in the life of Citizen Kane; that became part of the subject matter of the movie, too. This one filmmaker also talked about it as a more democratic way for the viewer to read a frame as well. You aren't just focusing on a face with a soft background; instead, your eye has to look at every part of the picture and decide to travel on its own. That really appealed to me personally.

