



Elena Climent

Re-encounters

May 25 - June 23, 1995

Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art

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24. **Saint Michael with Votive Candle**, 1994

Cover illustration: 23. **Table with Photos and Menorah**, 1995

Ordering Objects: Acts of Time

Sarah M. Lowe

Elena Climent's delicate, evocative still lifes—pictures of accumulated objects she painstakingly collects, arranges and reproduces—may be seen as performances, that is, as representations of the act of ordering. Climent is exceptionally deliberate about precisely what objects appear in her work, despite the seemingly vast array of things that populate her canvases. Her willful selection is the subject of her art: vases, candles, books, dolls, plants, birds, fruit, keys, photographs, letters, and the detritus of everyday life at the end of the twentieth century, all hold meaning for the artist.

For Climent, her paintings “symbolize feelings through objects” and she thinks of them as stories, and although the viewer is not necessarily cognizant of the specific narrative she has in mind, the intense realism of her formal style and the sheer accumulation of “facts” are riveting. We scrutinize these dazzling, detailed, and tightly painted still lifes for clues, messages, meanings. The evocation of the mystical in works such as *Red Devil with Broken Angel* and *Catalogue of Bosch*, as well as their small

size, reveals their lineage from the Mexican ex-voto. A paraphrase of Diego Rivera's observation regarding the subject matter of the retablo is eminently applicable to Climent's work: miraculous events are made ordinary and everyday things are turned into miracles.



5. **Flowers with Wristwatch**, 1994

Climent is motivated by the acute knowledge that things from her past have been lost to her, and that through the act of reproducing her inheritance she can claim it for herself. Never far from her mind is the idea of heritage, of coming to terms with who she is. This decidedly Mexican pre-occupation is evident especially in the vanguard movements in the early part of this century. In rejecting European influences, the artists of the Mexican mural movement and the

Estridentistas (Mexico's answer to the Futurists) self-consciously sought to advance a specifically Mexican art, and in so doing, they honored the multi-racial ancestry that is the heritage of virtually all Mexicans.

Climent's search is not quite as literal as that of her Mexican progenitors. Rather, her paintings now emanate the poignancy



10. **Red Devil with Broken Angel**, 1994



3. **Kitchen Objects with Flowers**, 1995

of the expatriate, in part because she is no longer living in Mexico where she was born and raised, the daughter of two exiles (her mother was an American Jew and her father a Spanish liberal). After six years of living in New York City, there are noticeable if subtle changes in Climent's work. Mexican middle-class household scenes of a family's altar with a tattered reproduction of the Virgin of Guadalupe or a kitchen shelf stacked with packaged foods were predominant in her work before leaving Mexico. Unequivocally anti-folkloric, her pictures were, nevertheless, reminders of her childhood and were

steeped in a nostalgia for a past at odds with the standards of "good taste" which was part of her upbringing and which she was expected to uphold. Once abroad, Climent continued this theme, painting from photographs she had taken during visits home. Often she copied a casual snapshot completely or took it as a setting to structure items she imported from Mexico such as votive candles and brightly colored plastic tablecloths.

With the recent death of her mother, Climent's exploration and forging of her



7. **Catalogue of Bosch**, 1994



21. **Three Cactus Plants**, 1994

own history have taken a more dominant place as a subject of her art. In her current work, the domestic sites and altars are no longer anonymous: *Kitchen with Black Candle*, for example, is a scene of her mother's kitchen. Climent has also been painting still lifes that she creates in her studio with items chosen specifically for their associations. These objects, with their personal meanings, inevitably carry with them the sign of time. A particular object recalls its owner and echoes its previous existence; it has a history and so bridges



26. **Hair Salon**, 1995

the present with the past. In *Flowers with Wristwatch*, the watch, with its unavoidable reference to the passage of time, twists as if energized by the memory of its owner (her mother). The bookshelves in *Bookshelf* hold a wealth of information that has been carefully choreographed by the artist to create a modern *vanitas* painting. A photograph of Climent as a young girl watches over the action figures that belong to her own son, while the lower shelf holds two *memento mori* (literally, a reminder of death). The traditional skull is replaced with a paper skeleton, a typical Mexican artifact, and the hourglass becomes a battery-run clock.

The presence of Mexico in some of Climent's recent paintings has altered and become, in a sense, more conceptual.

Several still lifes, *Three Cactus Plants* and *Flowers with Wristwatch*, for example, include envelopes edged in green, red, and white, that is, letters sent from home by friends and family. These *trompe-l'oeil* letters signify their foreign origins, and they recall the faithful transcriptions of two dimensional objects in the work of American nineteenth century painters William Harnett and John Frederick Peto. Climent, like them, constructs her still lifes in shallow spaces, thus accentuating the illusionism of the work and creating an intimacy that further intensifies her work.

Photographs too, are more evident in her current work and also speak to her past, to her legacy. Climent is especially challenged by trying to reproduce photographs in her work, but she has always



33. **Green Altar**, 1994

pushed herself to conquer the formal rules of anatomy, perspective, composition and color. Much of her training was self-imposed: she copied works of art, imitated artists, studied anatomy in books, sketched obsessively, visited museums, experimented with color, and in the end, taught herself these very techniques that were regarded with suspicion by artists of her generation. Her father, also an artist, discouraged her from attending art school, fearing a traditional education would do more harm than good. Thus while the younger Climent is virtually self-taught, her isolation created an anxiety about what she might be missing; by overcoming the

technical hurdles, she is now allowed the freedom to reproduce what she sees and express the emotional charge the objects have for her.

Climent's works reverberate with a tension between their emphatic realism and the opacity of their meaning, between knowing they are painted and wanting them to be real, between their anonymity and the implication that their presence is vitally important. Climent thinks of her paintings as "windows on memories" and the viewer never ceases to enjoy the exquisite fissure between perception and comprehension that these paintings arouse.

April 1995



28. **Kitchen with Black Candle**, 1994



29. Bookshelf, 1994



30. **Still Life with Bimbo Bread**, 1994



32. **Altar of the Dead with Menorah**, 1995



Elena Climent in Tepoztlán, summer 1993

Elena Climent

Born in Mexico City, March 6, 1955

ONE-WOMAN SHOWS

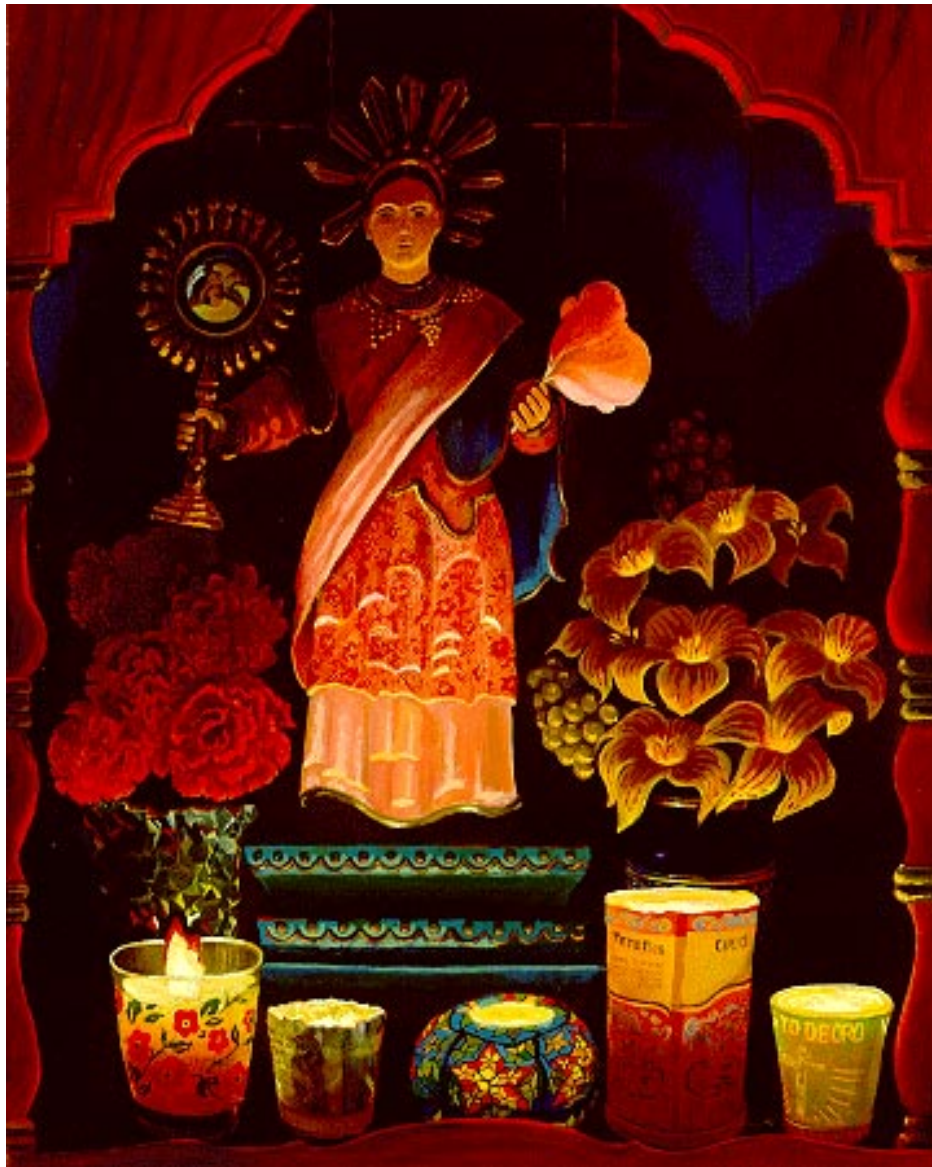
- 1995 Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art, New York, *Re-encounters*
- 1993 Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City, *Elena Climent, En Busca del Presente*
- 1992 Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art, New York, *Elena Climent, In Search of the Present*
- 1988 Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City
- 1982 Galería Metropolitana, Mexico City
- 1978 Galería San Angel, Mexico City
- 1977 Galería Helen Lavista, Mexico City
- 1976 Galería Casa de las Campanas, Cuernavaca, Mexico
- 1972 Galería Helen Lavista, Mexico City

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1995 Milwaukee Art Museum, *Latin American Women Artists 1915-1995* (This exhibiton is scheduled to travel to the Phoenix Art Museum, The Denver Art Museum and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.)
- 1994 Housatonic Museum, Bridgeport, CT, *Paper Visions V*
- 1994 Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Aguascalientes, Mexico, *Miradas Femininas*
- 1994 Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami, *Art Miami '94*
- 1993 Liège (Belgium), Musée d'Art Moderne, *Regards de femmes* (As part of the *Europalia Biennial '93*)
- 1992 Contemporary Museum, San Diego
- 1991 Los Angeles County Museum of Art
- 1991 Parallel Project Gallery, Santa Monica, *The Earth Itself* (Part I of *Mexico: Thirty Centuries Later*)
- 1991 Centro Cultural de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, and Museo de Monterrey, *La Mujer en México*
- 1990 National Academy of Design, *Women in Mexico*
- 1989 New York, MOCHA, *Current Arrivals*
- 1988 Chicago, Nicole Gallery, *Latin American Group Show*
- 1984 Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, *Bienal de Dibujo*
- 1984 Galería Metropolitana, Mexico City
- 1980 Galería San Angel, Mexico City
- 1974 Galería Helen Lavista, Mexico City

LITERATURE

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- Herrera, Hayden. "Elena Climent at Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art," *Art in America* (October 1992), p.151, illus.
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- Sullivan, Edward, Linda Nochlin, et al. *La Mujer en Mexico/Women in Mexico*. Exh.cat., The National Academy of Design, New York; Centro Cultural de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; Museo de Monterrey, 1990-1991, pp. xci-xciii and pp. 68-71, illus.
- Saavedra, Manola. *Elena Climent: Flor de asfalto*. Exh.cat., Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico, 1988
- Torres Martínez, José. *Elena Climent: El tiempo detenido*. Exh.cat., Galería Metropolitana, Mexico City, 1982



27. **Saint with Mirror**, 1995

Checklist of the Exhibition

1. **White Canary, 1993
(Canario blanco)**
signed and dated '93
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5³/₈ x 7¹/₈ inches (13.8 x 18 cm)
2. **Votive Candle, Photos and Flowers, 1995
(Veladora, fotos y flores)**
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5³/₈ x 7¹/₈ inches (13.7 x 18.1 cm)
3. **Kitchen Objects with Flowers, 1995
(Cosas de cocina con flores)**
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5¹/₂ x 8 inches (14 x 20.3 cm)
4. **Objects with Art Book, 1994
(Objetos con libro de arte)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5³/₁₆ x 7¹⁵/₁₆ inches (14.1 x 20.2 cm)
5. **Flowers with Wristwatch, 1994
(Flores con reloj)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
8 x 5⁵/₈ inches (20.3 x 14.2 cm)
6. **Canary in Red Cage, 1994
(Canario en jaula roja)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5⁵/₈ x 8 inches (14.2 x 20 cm)
7. **Catalogue of Bosch, 1994
(Catálogo de Bosch)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5³/₈ x 8 inches (14.3 x 20.3 cm)
8. **Cactus with Blue Wall, 1994
(Cactus con muro azul)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
5⁵/₈ x 8¹/₁₆ inches (14.2 x 20.5 cm)
9. **Clowns, 1994
(Payasos)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
6³/₈ x 10 inches (16.2 x 25.4 cm)
10. **Red Devil with Broken Angel, 1994
(Diablo rojo y ángel roto)**
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
7¹⁵/₁₆ x 5⁵/₈ inches (20.1 x 14.2 cm)
11. **Tabletop with Pre-Hispanic Figure, 1994
(Sobremesa con figura prehispánica)**
signed and dated '94
watercolor
7¹/₈ x 10¹/₄ inches (18.2 x 26 cm)
12. **Shooting Gallery, 1994
(Tiro al blanco)**
signed and dated '94
watercolor
7¹/₈ x 10¹/₄ inches (18.2 x 26 cm)
13. **Leaves on a Stone Wall, 1994
(Hojas sobre muro de piedra)**
signed and dated '94
watercolor
7¹/₈ x 10¹/₄ inches (18.2 x 26 cm)
14. **Flowers on Green and Blue, 1994
(Flores sobre verde y azul)**
signed and dated '94
watercolor
7¹/₈ x 10¹/₄ inches (18.2 x 26 cm)
15. **Parrots, 1995
(Pericos)**
signed and dated '95
watercolor
7¹/₈ x 10¹/₄ inches (18.2 x 26 cm)
16. **Flowerpots, 1995
(Macetas)**
signed and dated '95
watercolor
7¹/₈ x 10¹/₄ inches (18.2 x 26 cm)
17. **Bricks and Cans, 1994
(Latas y ladrillos)**
signed and dated '94
watercolor
10¹/₄ x 7¹/₈ inches (26 x 18.2 cm)
18. **Bird Cage with Sparrow, 1993
(Jaula con gorrión)**
signed and dated '93
oil on canvas mounted on panel
8 x 11¹/₈ inches (20.2 x 28.3 cm)

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19. **Red Cardinal**, 1994
(**Cardenal rojo**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
8 x 11¹/₈ inches (20.3 x 28.2 cm)
 20. **Nativity Scene**, 1994
(**Nacimiento**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
8 x 11¹/₄ inches (20.3 x 28.5 cm)
 21. **Three Cactus Plants**, 1994
(**Tres cactus**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
8 x 11³/₁₆ inches (20.3 x 28.4 cm)
 22. **Impatiens**, 1994
(**Chinitas**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
9¹/₈ x 13¹/₈ inches (23.1 x 33.2 cm)
 23. **Table with Photos and Menorah**, 1995
(**Mesa con fotos y menorah**)
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas mounted on panel
9⁵/₈ x 14 inches (24.4 x 35.6 cm)
 24. **Saint Michael with Votive Candle**, 1994
(**San Miguel con veladora**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
11¹/₈ x 15 inches (28.3 x 38.2 cm)
 25. **Ledge with Ex-Voto**, 1995
(**Repisa con ex-voto**)
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas mounted on panel
11 x 16⁷/₈ inches (28 x 42.9 cm)
 26. **Hair Salon**, 1995
(**Peluquería**)
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas mounted on panel
11¹/₁₆ x 16⁷/₈ inches (28.1 x 42.9 cm)
 27. **Saint with Mirror**, 1995
(**Santo con espejo**)
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas mounted on panel
18⁷/₈ x 14¹/₂ inches (46 x 36.8 cm)
 28. **Kitchen with Black Candle**, 1994
(**Cocina con vela negra**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
14¹/₄ x 23¹⁵/₁₆ inches (37 x 60.7 cm)
 29. **Bookshelf**, 1994
(**Librero**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas
18¹/₈ x 24¹/₁₆ inches (46 x 61 cm)
 30. **Still Life with Bimbo Bread**, 1994
(**Naturaleza muerta con pan bimbo**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas mounted on panel
18¹/₈ x 24¹/₁₆ inches (46 x 61 cm)
 31. **Kitchen with View of the Viaducto**, 1995
(**Cocina con vista al Viaducto**)
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas
18⁷/₁₆ x 24¹/₈ inches (45.9 x 61.3 cm)
 32. **Altar of the Dead with Menorah**, 1995
(**Altar de muertos con menorah**)
signed and dated '95
oil on canvas
28 x 36 inches (71.1 x 91.4 cm)
 33. **Green Altar**, 1994
(**Altar verde**)
signed and dated '94
oil on canvas
42¹/₈ x 54 inches (107 X 137.2 cm)



6. **Canary in Red Cage**, 1994



9. **Clowns**, 1994

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Back cover: 4. **Objects with Art Book**, 1994



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