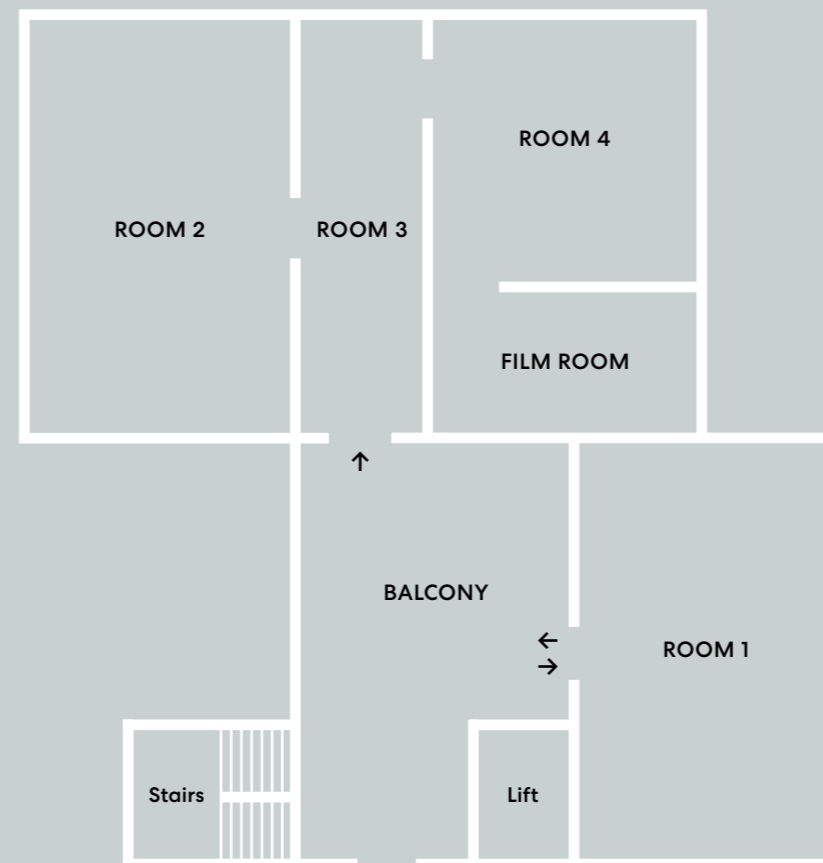




Turner Contemporary

25 May – 1 September 2024



Clore Learning Studio
(Leap Then Look and
Children's Art Library)

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Ed Clark Supporters' Circle

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Credits

Ed Clark, *Untitled* 1957
Oil on canvas and paper,
on wood, 116.84 × 139.70 cm.
The Art Institute of Chicago.
Restricted gift of an anonymous
donor, Samuel A. Marx
Endowment (1999.243) Photo:
The Art Institute of Chicago.

Ed Clark, *Untitled* 1978-1980
Acrylic and mixed media
on canvas, 167.6 × 195.6 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, 2018.13.
© The Estate of Ed Clark.
Photo: Gunter Lepkowski,
Berlin via Weiss Berlin.

Untitled 1976. Pastel on paper,
71.1 × 106.7 cm. © The Estate of
Ed Clark. Courtesy the Estate
and Hauser & Wirth.

Paris Series #2 1987
Acrylic on canvas,
222 × 288 × 4 cm.
Manizah and Danny
Rimer Collection
© The Estate of Ed Clark.
Image: Dan Bradica.

Clark in his studio, early 2000s
© The Estate of Ed Clark.
Courtesy the Estate and
Hauser & Wirth.

Clark in his Louisiana studio, c.1987
© The Estate of Ed Clark.
Courtesy the Estate and
Hauser & Wirth.

Clark in his studio, c.1987
© The Estate of Ed Clark.
Courtesy the Estate and
Hauser & Wirth.





Untitled, 1957

Room 1

THE SELMAN GALLERY

In 1952, 26-year-old Ed Clark arrived in Paris to study at the prestigious Académie de la Grande Chaumière. Already, he had taken evening classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where his family had migrated from New Orleans. Like many WWII veterans, Clark used the benefits of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or GI Bill, to support his further education at home and abroad.

The Institute had grounded Clark in a formal, more traditional approach to painting. But Paris brought new freedom and new inspirations. Absorbing influences from Impressionist artist Paul Cézanne to his contemporary Nicolas de Staël, he went 'beyond

the point of copying' to embrace abstraction. As a Black artist, among a network of American and European expats, Clark also found a certain liberation – and critical attention – he had not experienced in the States. He began to exhibit his work in salons and solo exhibitions.

In 1956, Clark adopted the use of a 48-inch push broom to drive paint across the canvas, a technique he called 'the big sweep'. Later that year after settling in downtown New York, his experiments with collage resulted in pioneering shaped canvases that appeared to break out of the frame. Their energy and innovation was a sign of what was to come.

Room 2

Clark's innovations with the broom and collage positioned him among a group of New York artists who were challenging ideas about Abstract Expressionism. In the 1960s, he again broke with convention by introducing circular and oval-shaped canvases designed to mimic the shape of the eye. 'I'm interested in the expanding image, and the best way to expand an image is an ellipse,' he said.

Soon after, Clark integrated the oval into controlled, linear expanses of colour. For many reviewers, these paintings conjured the experience of being in nature: 'The subtlety of the colours [...] result in harmonies that suggest the vastness of the sea when it mirrors the vastness of the

sky', observed Lawrence Campbell in *Art News* in 1972.

Recognition of his work was growing. Yet, for all his success at home, Clark found inspiration further afield. In 1971, a trip to visit artist Jack Whitten in Crete unconsciously inspired a completely new colour palette. From then on, he 'deliberately sought out the light and atmosphere of certain places [and] tried to open my work up to their influences'.

In the years and decades that followed, excursions abroad – including to Nigeria, Mexico, Brazil, Egypt, China, and Japan, as well as regular trips to Paris – became a defining feature of Clark's practice.



Untitled, 1978-80



Untitled, 1976

Room 3

IRENE WILLETT GALLERY

Works on paper

Working on paper allowed Clark to respond to his environment wherever he was. He used pastel, dry pigment – or, as in Nigeria, ground-up rocks mixed with paint – to reflect the atmosphere around him, from the quicksilver light of Louisiana to the earth tones found in life.

As the photographs displayed in the archival vitrines show, this process was as physical as that of his paintings. Working on the floor, Clark used his hands to rub the pulverised colour into the surface.

These works, from a series made in the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico, reflect his ongoing concern with the horizon line, as well as his preoccupation with the floating oval that he continued to resolve during this period.

Archive display

Ed Clark's archive, now held by The Estate of Ed Clark and the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, documents the artistic networks, friendships, and landscapes that shaped his life and work. It also testifies to his experiences as a Black artist forging a career in postwar Europe and America, from creating his own exhibition opportunities as part of the Brata Gallery artist cooperative in 1950s New York, to refusing to have his work interpreted through the lens of race.

The correspondence and critics' reviews offer insight into the complexity of being recognised for his innovation, while also being ignored, on the whole, by an art establishment who persisted in aligning abstraction only with white artists.

Room 4

In 1980, Clark received his first retrospective, *A Complex Identity*, at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Many of the works seen in the previous three rooms were exhibited. In the catalogue's introduction, curator Anita Feldman noted his 'distinctive stylistic integrity, formal clarity, and expressive force.'

In the period following this exhibition, this expressive – and restless – force manifested in new ways. The oval was broken up into tubes; later, the horizon line, long a feature of his work, would loosen into splashes and waves. As well as employing the push broom, Clark poured paint, brushed water into dry pigment, and used a small-sized brush.

Clark's work had evolved, but at its heart was the conviction that had guided his work since the early

days: that the truth of the painting was in the material and making, not what it represented. As he described it to poet Quincy Troupe in 1997: 'The real truth is in the stroke [...] large, bold strokes that do not refer distinctly to seen nature. The paint is the subject. The motions of the strokes give the work life.'

Film Room

Ed Clark: A Brush with Success

2006, 29' 20"

Direction and stills photography:

Charles Martin

Producers: Mark Hammond

and Charles Martin

© Charles Martin

The film shows on the hour, and half past the hour, throughout the day.



Paris Series #2, 1987

Learning Programme

Holidays and weekends

Clark-inspired interactive activities for families in Clore Learning Studio

Fridays and Saturdays

Family and adult tours of the exhibition

26 May, 3pm

Melanca Clark and Allie Biswas in conversation

22 June, 10.30–12.30pm

Gesture Life Drawing Session hosted by People Dem Collective in collaboration with artist Geoffrey Chambers

29 June, drop in 2–4pm

Big Sweep Workshop. A collaborative and playful art-making activity using push brooms inspired by Clark's technique. This session is aimed at families.

24 July, drop in 12–4pm

Zine Icon Workshop in collaboration with People Dem Collective. This session is aimed at families.

30 August, drop in 5–9pm

Ed Clark Late: Live DJ sets, bar and drop-in talks

Resources

Sensory bags and toolkit incorporating Clark-inspired sensory materials and resources for all visitors. Please ask staff for details.

Visit turnercontemporary.org/whats-on/ for timings and to book where required