

PEOPLE
ARE
TALKING
ABOUT

ART

Chiara Clemente was never a big fan of New York. “Growing up there, you either can’t imagine ever

living anywhere else, or you can’t wait to get out,” the 31-year-old director explains over lunch in SoHo, near the artist’s loft where she spent much of her childhood. “I definitely fell into the latter category.”

How is it, then, that her first feature-length documentary, the forthcoming **Our City Dreams**—an intimate portrait of five women artists who live in New York—celebrates the metropolis as a cauldron of creativity? In response, Clemente quotes sculptor Kiki Smith: “In the film, Kiki says, ‘I’d love to go somewhere else. But where else am I going to have it so good?’”

The film follows each woman through a year of invention and acclaim. We watch the young graffiti artist Swoon go



CAMERA READY
CHIARA CLEMENTE
PHOTOGRAPHED
AT NANCY SPERO'S
STUDIO, IN A KATY
RODRIGUEZ DRESS

street
scenes

*Chiara Clemente
chronicles the lives
of five women
artists—and the
city they love.*



PIECES OF YOU
A DETAIL FROM
SWOON'S
INSTALLATION
SWIMMING CITIES
OF SWITCHBACK
SEA, 2008.

from pasting up her prints on the streets of Red Hook to being feted at her first opening in SoHo. We see Egyptian-born provocateur Ghada Amer visiting her parents in Cairo and enjoying the fruits of success: her very own Harlem brownstone. There are public triumphs, like Marina Abramovic’s performances at the Guggenheim, and private moments, such as painter Nancy Spero’s eightieth-birthday

celebration in Paris. Through it all runs the women’s endless energy of creation. “I had six lives for the three years I worked on this film,” says the director, tiny but seemingly iron-willed in her uniform of Earnest Sewn jeans and a handmade shirt from India. (The delicate enamel skull earrings are by her boyfriend, actor and jewelry designer Waris Ahluwalia.) “I was like a doctor on call, checking in with them,” she recalls. “And then, New York is connected

to so many different parts of the world. So the film became very international, as well.”

Clemente is no stranger to the artist’s life. Eldest daughter of the painter Francesco Clemente (“La Vie en Pose,” page 324), she moved between Italy, where she was born, and India until age five, when her family arrived in downtown Manhattan. (The smell of oil paint always reminds her of home, she says.) Summers were spent at the childhood home of her mother, Alba, on the Amalfi Coast. “In my heart, I always felt Italy was where I belonged,” recalled the director, who moved to Rome after studying film at Pasadena Art Center. “It took me four years to realize that I was much more of a New Yorker than I thought.”

Making the movie was also a way of coming home. “There were things that I wanted to understand, having grown up with an artist father,” she explains. “And then, the fact that they were women made it more personal to me. It wasn’t just an academic need to have some questions answered. It was a real curiosity.”

—LESLIE CAMHI *pata* >257