



Giorgio de Chirico, *Adam*, late 1950s, charcoal and watercolour on cardboard, 24x22 cm., signed "g. de Chirico (da Michelangelo)", private collection, Rome

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO FORTY YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH: LIGHT AND SHADOW

Paolo Picozza

*“No one raised a voice in defence of reality
with regard to art or to life itself”.*

Giorgio de Chirico
Desecrated Realty, 1945

Forty years have passed since Giorgio de Chirico left us, yet he remains present through the immensity of his art.¹ It has also been 20 years since the Foundation opened the doors of the Maestro's home, making it a true House-museum, an authentic location of thought and painting, visited by those sensitive people, national and international, who respond to his art. And there is a reason: the Giorgio de Chirico House-museum is the only place where 60-70 of the artist's masterpieces can be admired in the place where many of them were created; thus, bringing to life the atmosphere surrounding their conception and realisation, an atmosphere of work that echoes in the silence of the studio on the top floor of the apartment, among easels, brushes, bottles, canvases, objects and his reference library. It could be said that de Chirico still lingers in the house he so loved, sometimes giving rise to a metaphysical sensation in visitors.

An editorial is not the place for taking stock forty years after the artist's death. Certainly, our knowledge of him today is much better and much more profound than when he was alive, and, above all, we know unprecedented and extraordinary aspects of his thought and his art, which further increase our appreciation of him. Forty years of study, research and in-depth analysis have led to knowledge on Giorgio de Chirico's life and art that is considerably different from the one painted – in recent years – with a brush dipped in toxic and poisonous paints, soaked in surrealist-inspired clichés, shielded and stoked by unscrupulous critics and art dealers who have found in de Chirico an opportunity for their unsavoury dealings, which, unfortunately, did not end with his death. Clarifying the true figure of the artist has been possible, not only through the discovery of important historical documents, but also thanks to the destruction of these clichés, which have damaged

¹ The House-Museum in Piazza di Spagna was indicated in a number of magazines as one of the places in Rome not to be missed, while others offered their readers photographic documentation on the artist's life and the place where he spent the last thirty years of his life (1948-1978).

his image: meaningless commonplaces spread for commercial reasons or due to simple ignorance.

The “clarified” image of Giorgio de Chirico, to use a term coined by Maurizio Calvesi in his seminal book, *La Metafisica schiarita* (1982), reveals a different de Chirico – simple, ironic, a true *monomach*² – who, until the end of his life, defended his thought, his art, and particularly the unique and true art of “great painting”, with absolute consistency and resolution. The important role he played as an observer of 20th century phenomena, of the art and life of men, is increasingly recognised. In the words of Nobel Prize winner, Salvatore Quasimodo, de Chirico was “a reserve that is not only cultural but also sentimental, acting almost as a support of our knowledge of the history of the spirit” (1966).

The work tenaciously pursued by numerous and authoritative scholars whom the Foundation has brought together has contributed to revealing a dimension of the artist that was almost unknown previously. It is to our advantage to acknowledge those who, each in their own way, have contributed, beginning with Maurizio Calvesi, Jean Clair, Jole de Sanna, Willard Bohn, Fabio Benzi, Riccardo Dottori, Claudio Strinati, Elena Pontiggia, Achille Bonito Oliva, Vincenzo Trione, Ester Coen, Lorenzo Canova, Vittorio Sgarbi, Katherine Robinson, Victoria Noel-Johnson, Ara Merijan, Nikolaos Vellisiotis and many more, and I apologise for not mentioning them all.

Since 1986, when it was established, the Foundation has curated 45 exhibitions in Italy and abroad, including, to cite only a few of these, the historic *De Chirico. La nuova Metafisica* (San Marino 1995), *De Chirico and the Mediterranean* (Taranto 1998, Milan 2000), *Nature According to de Chirico* (Rome 2010), and the exhibitions currently in progress, *Giorgio de Chirico: The Face of Metaphysics* (Genoa 2019) and *Giorgio de Chirico: Back to the Future* (Turin 2019), and internationally, in countries in which the artist had never been exhibited: *Giorgio de Chirico – The Enigma of the World* (Istanbul 2016), *El mundo de Giorgio de Chirico – Sueño o realidad* (Barcelona, Madrid, Saragossa, Palma di Mallorca, 2017-2018) and *Metaphysical Visions* (Moscow 2017), without omitting mention of the exhibition *El siglo de Giorgio de Chirico: Metafisica y arquitectura* (Valencia 2007), dealing with de Chirico and architecture.

There have also been many collaborations with national and international institutions, in which the Foundation has participated through the lending of artworks. Of these, it is incumbent on us to name the retrospective, *Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves* (Paris 2009), due to its exceptional contribution to knowledge of de Chirico’s work in its entirety, and the current exhibition *Giorgio de Chirico, aux origines du surréalisme belge*, in Mons, Belgium.

Since the release of de Chirico’s posthumous novel, *Il Signor Dudron*, in 1998 on the 20th anniversary of his death, the publication of which I curated, particular care has been taken to publish re-editions of his historical written work for large-scale distribution as well as in English translation in “Metaphysical Art”. These include previously unpublished texts and hundreds of previously unknown letters, as well as innumerable documents, invaluable testimonials and interviews, which

² A Greek epithet meaning “he who fights alone”.

attest to the journal's function as an indispensable instrument in the Foundation's pursuit of historical and theoretical knowledge of de Chirico's work. Over the years, the Foundation has exponentially enriched the corpus of previously unpublished documentation freely available to scholars.³

A number of recent publications have been fundamental to illustrating more thoroughly and organically the artist's thought and activity as a writer and poet, first and foremost *Giorgio de Chirico: Lettere 1909-1929*, edited by Elena Pontiggia (Silvana Editoriale, 2018), fruit of a decade of research that includes more than 450 letters which are absolutely compulsory to understanding the development of de Chirico's art. Riccardo Dottori's *De Chirico: Immagini metafisiche* (La nave di Teseo, 2018) provides us with a stimulating visual reading of the Maestro's works that helps us understand his philosophy. Furthermore, Fabio Benzi's monograph, *Giorgio de Chirico: La vita e l'opera* (La nave di Teseo, 2019), exhaustively introduces the public for the first time to a comprehensive understanding of the full course of his artistic career.⁴ The publication has the virtue of doing justice to Giorgio de Chirico through its definitive clarification of who he was as a man and as an artist, thereby eradicating deeply rooted clichés.

Lastly, there is the publication of four volumes of *Giorgio de Chirico: Catalogue of Works* (Maretti Editore, 2014-2018) which, together with the previous eight volumes edited by Claudio Bruni Sakraischik (1971-1987), provide exhaustive knowledge of de Chirico's body of artworks.

As occurred with the English translation of de Chirico's *The Comedy of Modern Art* and his *Collected Poems*, published for the first time in issue n. 14/16 of "Metaphysical Art" (2016), the present issue includes his *Theoretical and Lyrical texts* written in Paris between 1911 and 1915, also known as the Éluard-Picasso manuscripts, in the original French version and in English translation. These extremely important theoretical writings were partially published by James Thrall Soby in 1955, but a complete English translation edition purposely intended for international scholars was lacking. For those who truly wish to penetrate the mysteries of his painting, I am convinced that direct study of de Chirico's writings, even in their translated version, is indispensable. Additionally, there are two texts of particular interest for lovers of de Chirico's prose: the original full length version of *Zeuxis the Explorer*, recently discovered by Valentina Malerba a hundred years after it was written in March 1918, and "You will be Somebody", a fascinating tale published in Waldemar George's monograph of 1928, both of which are translated in English for the first time.

De Chirico accustomed us to enigmas that, truth be told, have remained such, even when one believes their significance has already been grasped. This is the case of the recent discovery of the extraordinary book, *A propos de peinture*, or, *On the Subject of Painting*, published in France in December 1945, which had been lost in time and has reappeared today as if awakened from a long sleep. Published under the pseudonym "E.G. Benito" in parallel with *The Comedy of Modern Art*,

³ The periodical "Metaphysical Art" is available for download free of charge in pdf format at www.fondazionechirico.org.

⁴ The volume is due for publication in English.

The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico and 1918-1925: Ricordi di Roma [Memories of Rome] – all three in the same year –, *On the Subject of Painting* is a “surprise” book of exceptional importance for the additional knowledge that it offers of de Chirico’s thought. Not least is the original initiative it represents, inasmuch as it surprises us like a gift hidden in time and that we can open and read today thanks to a small clue de Chirico himself left us in the form of a laudatory book review published in “La Fiera Letteraria” in December 1946 that led me to the discovery of the book. With extraordinary eloquence, in thirty-five short chapters, the artist presents a summary of his thoughts on painting and on the concept of art in a very unusual “underground” book, that constitutes a passionate and dramatic appeal for Art. If it is not up to this writer to solve the enigma, but instead to contextualise the initiative and the motivations of the artist in his surprising undertaking, Katherine Robinson’s text, *From The Comedy of Modern Art to an Enigma*, offers well-argued references intended to prove that the author can be none other than Giorgio de Chirico himself. Through this book, the artist passionately hopes for the recovery of the true art of painting by recalling the work of more than eighty of the greatest artists of all time who have shaped human civilisation through art and particularly through the art of painting.

Two important essays by philosophers Riccardo Dottori (*On Giorgio de Chirico’s Alleged Böcklinsque Paintings*) and Massimo Donà (*Form Delivered*) complete this issue of the journal, while de Chirico’s affection for man’s best friend – the dog –, frequently represented in his paintings, is depicted by Lorenzo Canova in an interesting essay that includes a previously unpublished text written by the artist.

While the effort made to expand and to better clarify the story of de Chirico’s life and work is abundantly compensated by newly acquired knowledge, the constant commitment to defending the truth of the artist is a cost that the Foundation is well aware must be paid. Thus a great deal of clarity has been achieved through knowledge, but there also exist heavy shadows cast by those who, not truly interested in de Chirico’s work, vainly attempt to keep alive a number of clichés of surrealist origin, resulting in serious damage to the artist’s true historical legacy. Indeed, disinformation that deeply distorts the truth is constantly pushing at the limits of historiography. When false information about de Chirico’s life story is promulgated by an important Italian publisher like Giunti, the purview of Italy’s cultural apparatus fails. A recent issue of “Art e Dossier”, promoted as a general-knowledge publication on de Chirico’s art, actually contains an overview of truly impressive fabrication and falsification. The booklet included in issue n. 354 of this Italian magazine (May 2018) is an act of defamation organised by its author, Paolo Baldacci, art historian and, above all, art dealer. Conceived as a re-edition of the original written by Gioia Mori (2008), the booklet promises a “new approach”. However, the criterion used is the same the author has been promoting for years, which consists of altering the date of the origin of Metaphysical Art and of denigrating the painter personally, with Freudian insinuations and veritable manipulations of the

artist's biography.⁵ As if that were not enough, the proclaimed first volume of thirty-eight volumes – almost as lengthy as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – was published in March 2019, of what is intended, or better, aspires to be, a catalogue raisonné of Giorgio de Chirico's work, edited by Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos. Notwithstanding the bombastic declarations of scientific merit, the book is objectively anything but scientific. Their familiar errors are repeated like a mantra – in evident bad faith, we can assert – in order to avoid admitting a philological error committed twenty-five years ago regarding the place and date of the birth of **Metaphysical Art**, incorrectly stated as having taken place in Milan in 1909, **instead of in Florence in 1910 where it actually occurred**, and regarding the paternity of the discovery of Metaphysical Art, which is attributed, without foundation, to Savinio. The inclusion in the volume of a de Chirico painting of which no image exists is cause for disquiet. I refer to an alleged second version of *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* of 1910 that was exhibited in Milan in 1921, of which nothing is known other than the title at present.⁶ Through an acrobatic line of reasoning, the authors of the volume describe and date this painting to the summer of 1910 (to match it with the letter de Chirico wrote to Fritz Gartz on 26 December 1910 “this summer I painted...” [in which he actually refers to the original painting]).⁷ One must presume that the elusive painting “executed in the summer of 1910” (which, according to the two authors' fantasy is a servile copy that de Chirico painted and never mentioned, having given however due emphasis in his written work to his first metaphysical painting), could soon make its appearance as an important discovery. One may advance this hypothesis, as what happened with the “discovery” by Paolo Baldacci in 2001 of an important metaphysical painting exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants, *The Melancholy of Departure*, that in his 1997 monograph he had given for lost. A mere four years later the painting surfaced, brought to light by the same “discoverer” and presented at the exhibition *Die Andere modern de Chirico-Savinio* (Düsseldorf 2001).⁸ It is a shame that the painting, *executed on a canvas dating to the early 20th century*, was macroscopically fake and, unfortunately, also obscene (the smoke of the locomotive having a phallic form in derision of de Chirico's art). On top of this, it was included in the exhibition (with the acquiescence of the other curators Gerd Roos and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco), unbeknownst to the important art historian and de Chirico expert Wieland Schmied (also a curator in the exhibition) who, before passing away, gave written confirmation to the Foundation, directly through me, of the unprecedented event of this fake painting being included in the exhibition without his knowing it. It took more than ten years for Baldacci to

⁵ For an in-depth discussion on this subject, see P. Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico: The Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Life History over the Last Fifteen Years*, “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico”, n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 28-60.

⁶ On this subject, see F. Benzi, *Catalogo ragionato dell'opera di Giorgio de Chirico. Vol. I. Tomo 1: 1908-1912* (edited by Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos), in this issue's Book Review section.

⁷ G. de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 26 December 1910, published in “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico” n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 561-562.

⁸ The painting entitled “Die Melancholie der Abreise” (The Melancholy of Departure) and dated “1913”, oil on canvas, 81x60 cm., signed and dated at bottom right “g. de Chirico 1913”, was exhibited and published in the exhibition catalogue *Die Andere Moderne: De Chirico-Savinio*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen of Düsseldorf, 15 September-2 December 2001, n. 25, p. 214.

acknowledge that the painting was a fake. He did this, however, only after it was repeatedly denounced as such and published by the Foundation, and after the Italian Magistrate issued a confiscation order, which, however was not carried out as the painting had shrewdly disappeared.

This is not the proper forum for a critical analysis of the abovementioned catalogue raisonné, which regardless of its real objective, gives rise to legitimate and insurmountable doubts as to its reliability, specifically since the book is edited by Paolo Baldacci, who has knowingly placed fake paintings on the market that were purported to be by Giorgio de Chirico and was consequently convicted by the Italian judiciary.⁹ As concerns Gerd Roos, he was questioned by order of the judiciary authority and ambiguously let it be thought that the works his associate, Paolo Baldacci, had put on the market were authentic (even if of such low quality that they were unworthy of being exhibited).¹⁰

If the opening quotation to this article de Chirico warns that “no one raised a voice in defence of reality with regard to art or to life itself”, we can proudly say that the Foundation raises its voice when it deems it necessary.

Translated by Kristy Davis

⁹ Sentenced by the Milan Judiciary at the Ordinary Court of Milan – 7th Criminal Section, March 2009 - Judgement n. 2946, and later in a *res judicata* sentence issued by the Court of Appeal of Milan – 4th Criminal Section, May 2013 Judgement no. 3539, to which the Statute of Limitations was ruled in effect.

¹⁰ Although summoned to testify at the Milan Courthouse, Gerd Roos took advantage of his foreign nationality to evade his civic and moral responsibility. See *The Constants of History: Old and recent Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Artwork: Paolo Baldacci - A case Study*, in “Metaphysical Art” n. 11/13, 2014, pp. 321-345.