

THIRTY YEARS OF SAFEGUARDING GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S ART AND INTELLECTUAL WORK

Paolo Picozza

Founded in 1986, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico is currently celebrating its 30th anniversary of safeguarding and furthering knowledge on Giorgio de Chirico's art and intellectual work, whilst the current issue of "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals" marks its 15th year of publication.

Over the years, the significant body of unpublished documentation and the numerous articles by scholars published in this periodical have contributed to opening up new and multiple avenues of study. The Foundation's intention is to create a constellation of information, material and archival sources in order to strengthen future research, which now more than ever, must be based on the accuracy of documentary sources. This intention is also aimed at countering the inaccuracies and futile gossip that scholarship on de Chirico has been subject to in certain circles in Italy in recent years. To this end, in early 2015 the Foundation established its specific Scientific Council, information on which can be found in the appendix of this issue.

In order to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of the work of Giorgio de Chirico – an artist who "embodies a century" – , the periodical's first issue (n. 1/2, 2002) offered the metaphor of an "artist-tree" to illustrate the manifold cultural ramifications and the enormous influence his work had on the artists of his day, an influence that continues to grow today. More than ever this tree can be seen as an evergreen flourishing in all latitudes: a true cold-climate conifer and a maritime pine thriving "*sur le doux méridien*". Over and above de Chirico's plastic and visual work, the ramifications of his thought touch on philosophy and on literature with fertile and fundamental theoretical scope.

An extensive body of written work has always accompanied the artist's extraordinary pictorial oeuvre. Writing is an activity in which de Chirico has always excelled and which has often fascinated (*Hebdomeros*, 1929) or provoked his contemporaries (*Considerations on Modern Painting*, 1942). With his literary work, de Chirico has left posterity an immense and precious corpus of material to examine and study. These writings, with their ability to refine the parameters of our vision and understanding, will be a focal point for future research especially at an international level where there is a growing interest in all manifestations of the artist's work and thought. The upcoming Italian publication of the second volume of de Chirico's writings (1946-1978),¹ including interviews, autobiographical texts and a large collection of newspaper articles, will undoubtedly arouse further interest in less studied aspects of his work whilst contributing to a fuller understanding of this great, unheeded prophet who defended the immortality of the art of painting.

The English version of the Italian periodical "Metafisica" cast off its moorings two editions ago with the publication of a separate English language volume (n. 9/10, 2011 and n. 11/13, 2014). Today, it is increasing

¹ The first volume was published in the original French and Italian language texts in 2008; G. de Chirico *Scritti/1 (1911-1945). Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici*, edited by A. Cortellessa, Bompiani, Milan 2008.

the range of material offered by presenting international readers with an unprecedented tool of research in the form of the English translation of de Chirico's *Commedia dell'arte moderna* [The Comedy of Modern Art] (1945). This seminal collection of theoretical and critical articles written between 1918 and 1945 was published after the war signed with the dual authorship of Giorgio de Chirico (author of all the texts) and Isabella Far (his wife and future cofounder of the Foundation that carries on his legacy). In the 1950s, a few years after the *Commedia* was published in Italy, de Chirico commissioned an English translation of this important collection of essays, which to all effects constitutes a treatise on his own art and on art history. He did this with the intention of spreading his work and thought to a vaster international public. In line with the artist's original idea and setting out from the translation done in the 1950s, which remained unpublished, this issue of "Metaphysical Art" presents 39 essays from the *Commedia* of which 24 appear in English for the first time. My thanks go to Katherine Robinson for her careful revision of the original translations and for having curated this copious and significant contribution to Dechirican studies.

A number of scholars have recently focused their attention and talent on the translation of de Chirico's corpus of poetry. Thanks to their skill and commitment, the present issue also presents the artist's complete collection of poems in English for the first time, for a total of 90 poems and poems in prose. From one of the lyrics of his first Paris period, "*Vie, vie, grand rêve mystérieux!*", to the artist's own Italian version dating to the 1970s, "*Vita, vita, gran sogno misterioso!*", we can now read "Life, life, great mysterious dream!", a poetic canto that demonstrates the transversal nature of language and of human experience itself. Our sincere thanks go to Willard Bohn, member of the Foundation's Scientific Council and translator of the French poetry, and to Stefania Heim of Duke University, North Carolina, for her translation of poems written in Italian. Both scholars have further contributed with technical analyses of the artist's poetic oeuvre, from which a surprising and enigmatic aspect emerges. Similarly to de Chirico's painting, in which he breaks away from renaissance perspective in order to create a new visual experience of space, his poetry goes beyond the compositional rules of metre and syntax, creating, in this way, new and unexpected effects. Analogously to his visual work where the beholder becomes bewildered by the juxtaposition and "collision" of incongruous objects, the position of an adjective in relation to the noun in a sentence's structure may be, as Heim points out: "the poetic equivalent of inviting someone for a walk and planting a surprise around the corner". In his careful examination of the artist's earliest poems written in French in Paris (1911-1915), in concomitance with development of the Italian Piazza theme, Bohn notes: "Shortly after inventing Metaphysical Art, therefore, de Chirico began to experiment with Metaphysical Poetry", also revealing a subsequent development in the artist's writing towards a more personal and traditional style in parallel with his interest in classical art.

With the English translation of such a substantial body of literary work, the Foundation looks forward to a considerable increase in scholarly interest in all avenues of de Chirico's multifaceted vision.

In accordance with the periodical's consolidated editorial proposal, this issue also presents a collection of essays by various authors, some of whom are regular contributors such as Riccardo Dottori, who since 2002 has been examining the philosophical dimension of de Chirico's work and thought. His current investigation takes us into the territory of dream, presage and the disquieting in Metaphysical Art. Dottori reveals how the origin of the disquieting is found in that which is everyday and familiar and not in the strange and unknown. Years before Freud and Heidegger dealt with this same theme, de Chirico rendered in image the alienated

condition of modern man with regard to the deceptive tranquillity of the everyday, thus anticipating by a few years a fundamental philosophical inquiry.

Lorenzo Canova takes a look into how the surprising does, indeed, dwell in the everyday, by dealing with subject of ghosts and revenants in the artist's late Neometaphysical period paintings (1968-1976), where the characters of his early metaphysical period – mannequins, archaeologists, gladiators and heroes of myth – come together in bright settings that trigger new visions and sensations in a Nietzschean dimension of the Eternal Return.

Fabio Benzi's essay leads the discussion on Metaphysical Art's initial stages into a new arena, perhaps the one that counts most: the quality of the painterly execution of an artwork. Benzi opens up a perspective on the Florentine cultural scene at the start of the century's second decade – the decisive year of 1910 – and singles out an article by Ardengo Soffici on Henri Rousseau published in "La Voce" on September 15th, which young de Chirico could not have failed to read and which must have elicited "careful and significant reflections" stimulating the important technical turning point in his painting that marked the beginnings of Metaphysical Art.

For the Foundation, Professor Benzi recently curated the exhibition *Giorgio de Chirico: The Enigma of the World* at Pera Museum in Istanbul in which he introduced the Turkish public to the world of de Chirico through an anthological exhibition that also touched on the artist's family origins as de Chirico's father Evaristo was born in 1841 in Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

Loirella Giudici retraces the unusual and unpublished chronicles of Raffaello Giolli's critical work on de Chirico in Milan between the two world wars. Published in connection to her article are the interviews Giorgio and his brother Savinio gave to the French periodical "Comœdia" in late 1927 that created long-lasting clamour in Italy and negatively influenced the art critique milieu towards them.

Two contributions, distant one from the other with regard to method and objective of inquiry, actually deal with the same element: the distinguishing markings traced by de Chirico's hand. In his essay, Davide Spagnoletto examines *Arrival in Autumn* a 1913 pencil and ink drawing conserved in the Estorick Collection of Modern Art, London. Perhaps one of the most unusual studies ever published in the periodical, the graphological analysis by Cristina Hesse and Piergiuseppe Mecocci of de Chirico's handwriting (1911-1971) offers an intimate glimpse at the Maestro's intellectual, moral and emotional character: an "autobiography" that traces 60 years of his life, thought and work.

The current issue also includes an article in which I make my position clear with regard to a number of incidents that have recently taken place in the world of art history regarding de Chirico's oeuvre, in which Gerd Roos played a principal role and concerning which I contest both the method used, consisting in the backdating of a few texts (an event fully illustrated in my article), and their content.

Ferrara: a Centenary

The year 2015 marked the 100th anniversary of de Chirico's arrival in Ferrara and the beginning of a new phase in his painting: the Ferrara Interiors, a theme which to this day remains one of the most enigmatic of his oeuvre.

The recent exhibition at Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara offered the public a considerable collection of Giorgio de Chirico's works of the period. Passing through the various rooms the effect was one of stepping

into an actual Metaphysical Interior consisting of dozens of masterpieces from the years 1915-1918 in which colour turned out to be a special bearer of Dechirican marvel and enchantment.

In his review published herein, Claudio Strinati puts forward considerations on the exhibition's significance as well as enlightening observations on de Chirico's painting also with regard to the work of his contemporaries on show, particularly that of Carlo Carrà, an artist who attempted to claim Metaphysical Art as his own invention.

Despite the benefit of important paintings on loan, curators Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos' interpretation of de Chirico's oeuvre was lacking especially for that which concerns their catalogue contributions. The occasion, in our view, thus constitutes a missed opportunity for the furthering of study on this period of de Chirico's work. On the one hand, the term "metaphysical school" historically used to indicate the interaction de Chirico had with other artists in Ferrara was at last done away with, although, on the other, the curators' work is marred by their wilful insistence on once more putting forward a conscious historiographic error in their continuous insistence on erroneously dating to 1909 the first two fundamental Metaphysical Art paintings, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle*, both executed in Florence in autumn 1910 in significant and relevant historical circumstances. This outlandish alteration which, it is worth pointing out, originated in Baldacci's examination in 1994 – as hasty as it was mistaken – of a number of de Chirico's letters to his friend Fritz Gartz. Rather than acknowledging the error committed, he later bolstered his erroneous speculation with a purposefully designed defamatory hypothesis stating that de Chirico was a fraud and had lied about his biography in the aim of concealing the role of his brother Savinio who – according to Baldacci – was the effective creator of Metaphysical Art.² In a forceful and justifiable reaction, numerous art historians specialising in de Chirico's oeuvre carried out in-depth analyses of the relative historical documents, from which this mistaken theory was rigorously confuted and the historical truth re-established beyond the shadow of a doubt: Metaphysical Art was invented by Giorgio de Chirico in autumn 1910 in Florence. The false and historically untenable date "1909"³ indicated next to the reproductions of the two works in the Ferrara exhibition catalogue at the curators' request is detrimental to de Chirico's legacy and also to the unquestionable professionalism of the many art historians who took part in the event, not to mention that of institutions such as exhibition hosts Fondazione Ferrara Arte and the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie, and all those who loaned the masterpieces on show, of which, to name only a few, MoMA, Metropolitan, Tate and Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna e contemporanea of Rome.

The question must also be asked how it is possible that an exhibition of this importance could have been entrusted – a truly surrealist event never before seen – to Paolo Baldacci who has been sentenced *res*

2 Baldacci's defamatory theory harks back to 1997, in P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period*, Bulfinch, New York 1997. In addition to the erroneous dating of the first metaphysical paintings and the arbitrary rewriting of de Chirico's biography, the volume presents a number of fake paintings and a series of fake "metaphysical" drawings executed on "Valori Plastici" letterhead paper.

3 In the catalogue *Giorgio de Chirico a Ferrara. Metafisica e avanguardia*, Ferrara Arte, 2015, p. 21, Baldacci writes: "From a few letters [translation and underlining, ed.] of December 1909 we understand that a great change had occurred in him and that between the end of the summer and the end of the autumn of that year the first two paintings saw the light with completely new and typical characteristics of the new style that would take on the name of metaphysical painting: *The Enigma of the Oracle* and *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*". If the year had been indicated as "1910" here, this sentence would correspond to the truth, as de Chirico announced the creation of his new works to his friend Fritz Gartz in a letter written at the end of 1910 (date verified as 26 December, sent from Florence). The way in which Baldacci constructed the sentence is symptomatic of the constant and extensive falsification he has undertaken of de Chirico's life story. The de Chirico-Gartz epistolary does not contain "a few letters from December 1909", but only *one letter* (27 December 1909, sent from Milan) and this letter is *not* the one in which de Chirico speaks of his new paintings.

judicata by the Italian Magistrate for knowingly selling fake de Chirico paintings.⁴ The seizure order issued by the Magistrate prevents these forgeries from ever circulating again on the art market. Unfortunately, the falsification of the history of the invention of Metaphysical Art continues to spread.

It was ingenuously hoped that Baldacci, on occasion of the exhibition in Ferrara, would have seized the opportunity and in a moment of penitence and intellectual honesty finally re-established the true story of de Chirico's art that the artist himself has always proclaimed. Having closely followed the various stages of Baldacci's theory – completely lacking in historiographic methodology and based on pure gossip –, the Foundation has come to the realisation that the ideological falsification of an artist's oeuvre is as damaging as its material forgery. In pursuing its institutional objective of safeguarding de Chirico's art and intellectual work, the Foundation places essential value in the following means: research, the verification of documentary sources and communication.⁵

In conclusion, a brief observation on the exhibition's second venue held at the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie is duly offered. With the absence of almost half of the artworks exhibited in Ferrara the event was reduced in form. The bizarre inclusion in the German catalogue (also reduced in content) of artworks not on show – complete with catalogue number –, is quiet misleading and is a situation easily perceived in the museum halls. A problem emerges in both exhibitions (also evident in Baldacci and Roos' publications over the years), in which Savinio is continuously and arbitrarily associated to de Chirico, who is constantly denied acknowledgement for the specificity of his ideas and thought as well as his independence of action. A study of the true interchange taking place between the brothers could bring concrete and useful material into the research arena. Lacking in historical and artistic elements, the repeatedly proclaimed binominal de Chirico-Savinio gives the illusion of an established historical condition that has been confirmed through research. However, no mention is ever made as to what this collaboration would actually consist in, its specific concepts, its bibliographical references or an actual exchange of ideas. By taking this easy road, these authors benefit from two advantages, the first being that of giving the impression that the question has been fully researched, and the second, of achieving the program of diminishing the importance de Chirico who in this circle of study is never acknowledged the real value his work deserves.

A Collection of Excellence: 227 artworks by the Pictor Optimus

The Foundation continues in its commitment in safeguarding and promoting the artist's oeuvre, both for the future of de Chirico research and against all misinformation aimed at undermining his inestimable artistic and cultural legacy, which it has the honour and the responsibility to defend.

Over the course of last 30 years, the Foundation has not only kept its collection intact but has even

⁴ Judgement by the Court of Appeal of Milan, Fourth Criminal Section, n. 3539, 20 May-19 July 2013, to which the Statue of Limitations was ruled in effect and the seizure of the fake paintings confirmed. See *Judgement of the Court of Appeal of Milan*, in "Metaphysical Art - The de Chirico Journals" n. 11/13, 2014, pp. 346-368 and *The Constants of History - Old and Recent Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Artwork: Paolo Baldacci - a Case Study*, ibidem, pp. 321-344.

⁵ On this problem, see R. Dottori, *From Zarathustra's Poetry to the Aesthetics of Metaphysical Art* in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 117-138; P. Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico: the Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Life Story over the Last Fifteen Years*, in "Metaphysical Art - The de Chirico Journals" n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 28-60; K. Robinson, *Florentine Period 1910-1911 - Biographical Chronology and Documentation*, ibidem, n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 129-136; V. Noel-Johnson, *De Chirico's Formation in Florence (1910-1911): The Discovery of the B.N.C.F. Library Registers*, ibidem, pp. 137-177.

succeeded in strengthening it by means of specially-chosen acquisitions over the course of time.

The Italian State has recently acknowledged the exceptional importance of the entire arc of de Chirico's artistic production. In 2015, the Italian Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Tourism instituted a safeguard for 227 artworks in the Foundation's collection in recognition of the important artistic and historical significance they hold within Italy's cultural patrimony.

The formal safeguard instituted distinguishes this group of artworks as a unique and exceptional collection. Dating from 1926 to 1975, the group of works comprises of paintings, sculptures and works on paper, and includes masterpieces such as *Portrait of Isa in Pink and Black Dress* (1934), *Bathers (with Red Drape in the Landscape)* (1945) and *Self-portrait in the Park in 17th Century Costume* (1959). The inclusion of artworks realised less than 50 years ago from the artist's Neometaphysical period (1968-1976), is quite extraordinary in that, as a rule, artworks of less than 50 years of age are not considered for safeguarding by the State. Among the paintings from de Chirico's late period that have been recently safeguarded are masterpieces such as *Orpheus the Tired Troubadour* (1970), *The Meditator* (1971) and *The Prodigal Son* (1975).

Alcestis – A Ferrara Love Story

Among the Foundation's recent publications, the English edition of *Alcestis: a Ferrara Love Story – Giorgio de Chirico and Antonia Bolognesi* is worthy of note. Through a rediscovered correspondence of over 100 unpublished letters, the book recounts the relationship between the artist and a young lady from Ferrara during and immediately following his stay in the city as a soldier (1915-1918). The story of their relationship came to light almost a hundred years later when Antonia's great-grandson, Eugenio Bolognesi, found among his family documents a copious correspondence dating to 1919 between the artist and "Alcestis", as he liked to call her referring to the mythological figure who represents the ideal wife. From this relationship, and their unfulfilled plans to marry, new information emerges about de Chirico's professional situation immediately after the war. Fabio Benzi makes the following observation in his essay in the volume: "This wholly exceptional event highlights how much there is still to discover concerning our early 20th century artists as well as the importance of archival sources. [...] an event that makes us aware of just how many historical events still remain unknown".⁶

⁶ See F. Benzi, *Unpublished correspondence by Giorgio de Chirico sheds new light on the Artist's Activities from Metaphysical Art to the Return to Craft*, in E. Bolognesi, *Alcestis: a Ferrara Love Story*, Maretti Editore, Falciano 2016, p. 187. In addition to E. Bolognesi's text, the publication includes the transcription of the epistolary in its entirety, an introduction by Paolo Picozza and a text by V. Noel Johnson.