

Giorgio de Chirico today: The Discipline of Research

by
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The long years that de Chirico spent in defending the meaning of his work was not enough. More recently however, the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation has been carrying out a mission to establish the total and simple truth about his Metaphysical phase, which has many elements that are still left unexplored and still have to be revealed. As directed by Isa de Chirico in 1986 and Claudio Bruni Sakraischik, the Foundation has the aim of establishing the correct interpretation of Giorgio de Chirico's writings and paintings. However, the interpretation and guidance of a system of cultural relationships is not so easy, and it is not advisable to rush into conclusions that are sometimes perceived, sometimes glimpsed at and certainly sometimes only intuited. We do know about the functional relationships at the basis of artistic, literary and philosophical traditions that inform the 20th century in general in which de Chirico worked. However, commentary on de Chirico does not always take these relationships into account. In fact, more often than not, the guidelines to poetry, writing and structural culture are used to explain de Chirico's work. Reasoning on the metaphysics of beauty, with regards, for example, to the hermeneutics and Platonic inheritance of Hans Georg Gadamer – to begin with the those more abstract levels of thought – must be seen in concomitance with the metaphysical journey undertaken by de Chirico while he was still young. As is known, he defended tooth and nail de Chirico throughout the course of

sixty years, in the apparent incomprehension of various expressions of cultural power and in perfect adherence with the official artistic beliefs of the cultural community.

The reasoning of concomitant structures that support the activity of the psyche – another example – was already consecrated by theorists and witnesses of metaphysics as a showcase of the unconscious. Here we are talking of André Breton's Surrealists who nowadays still draw on and defend the first phase of de Chirico's metaphysical period with reference to his years spent in Florence (1910), Paris (1911-1915) and Ferrara (1915-1918). In 1936, Julian Lévy, wrote in his memoirs that, from the point of view regarding the modern notion of the unconscious, de Chirico was, along with Sigmund Freud, the first explorer of this concept. The fact of the matter is, however, that de Chirico who was dedicated to an exploration of the internal workings of the human conscience never ceased in his investigations and thus, his cultural matrix includes all the categories of intuition. As an artist, he creates reality through a vision and through his experiences in as much as they represent a vision for his philosophical cohorts: in "the fullness of time" as Saint Paul would have said. Even the comparative study of Heidegger and de Chirico, as already outlined by scholars, is a typical type of investigation for de Chirico's ideas. The knowledge that art provides, and not only via theory, is de Chirico's philosophical offerings to his masters, who include the philoso-

phers Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, in concatenation with the older masters such as Raffaello, Leonardo, Nicolas Poussin, P.P. Rubens, Eugène Delacroix, etc.

The library in the Piazza di Spagna is one of the most efficacious instruments started by de Chirico to realize this project. It is now conserved in the de Chirico museum inaugurated by the Foundation in 1998. The house itself is one instrument as well, situated as it is in the historical centre of Rome, with the artist's studio gives onto the French Academy, Villa Medici and Bernini's Fountain along with all the creations of human genius that are gathered together in Rome. Taken together, they are a validation of the image of a man who tried to profit as much as possible from the extremes of in-depth studies undertaken in art and the history of art of his epoch so that he could realize a supreme dialogue between science and the letters of his time. Metaphysical painting is one instrument that art posits at the apex of civilized values and that provides an intellectual dialogue of quality with Metaphysics: art, as Art and not as a mere representation of aesthetics. This is because the moral frontier that de Chirico represents speaks of a humanity that deserves this name, without the complacent satisfaction had from aesthetics alone.

Metaphysics is a many-sided building of human sciences that de Chirico spoke of as a ship travelling and crossing the world, and finally, ourselves; it is anchored in the present, in history itself. It is not a question of documentation. We are speaking of an artist who incarnates a century, meaning that in the future we will not only discuss de Chirico, but also his influences, who he followed and who has been influenced by him, and the line of thought he left us and so on.

As regards all the new materials in the Foundation's archives, years of work are needed in order to study them all, not only from a point of view of the materials alone, but also all the new perspectives that have been opened up. While a journal dedicated to an artist may discuss of the morphology relative to that artist in the first place, in this case, instead, we have an object of study in de Chirico whose nature can be

said to be like that of a tree. He is an artist who branches off not only towards the plastic arts, but also in other directions that are extensive and manifold.

The first branch relates to philosophy, thus with literature, which also means with nature. His rapport with German philosophy is the one that has been commented upon to now, but it is a direction that has been superseded for more appropriate ones. It would be better to see de Chirico in his relationship to classical philosophy and at the same time that of modern philosophy, including Phenomenology and modern Hermeneutics, along with Linguistic theory. If Conceptual Art has been posited as having been preceded by Metaphysics, it is because Metaphysics is not to be seen in a philosophical key alone, but also as a linguistic key to communications. In this regard he has also joined the elaboration of a technique and the relative theory with which de Chirico bases his pictorial language on as a science. One of de Chirico's works that is central to his life and activity is to be seen in his *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* (*A Small Treatise on Pictorial Technique*) – this has just been republished – and his tireless pictorial research that still must be brought to the fore. Related to this, there is also the grand work of de Chirico the drawer, which constitutes an unlimited amount of work still waiting to be studied. Although seemingly contradictory, the initiation of a pictorial science as a linguistic code is only such if it is not linked coherently to the direct relationship with mathematics as a science and physics, where the “tree” of de Chirico is connected to the principle of Metaphysics.

This is discussed in Ralph Schiebler's study that follows here. However, this relationship requires even more study. De Chirico, as an art historian, is not to be separated from the outlined systemic framework, when seen in the context of his complete immersion in all aspects of the History of art.

All these “branches” taken together lead to an image of the quality that de Chirico intended. Essentially, de Chirico as an artist requires another type of in-

vestigation more original than that which has already been done.

More light is needed concerning his relationship with his brother Alberto Savinio, not only to give each their due merit with regards to their acts of creativity and artistic precedences, but also to establish who is responsible for what. This is a venture that has turned recent publications and shows into "obstacle courses". If we do this we will also see their individual originality for the first time. It is here that de Chirico's interviews are illuminating. If this were not true, we will never understand the bond between de Chirico's originality and not only Savinio's originality, but also that of all those artists linked to de Chirico in his own generation and those who followed him. This would include an investigation of the links to the themes of Andy Warhol's Pop Art, rather than Giulio Paolini and Luciano Fabro. This has already been recognized and outlined, but a greater study must be undertaken in order to understand more clearly the exact influence that architecture had on de Chirico, and vice versa, which has not been assimilated by rationalist canons. So far it seems that this has been impossible since there are two positions in complete opposition, that of the rationalists, and that of the classicists, both of whom have been more interested in their own ideologies, before, and despite these conflicts. In the meantime, one only needs to see Milan or Rome nowadays to catch the aura of his Metaphysics. However, we still need a reconstruction of de Chirico's influences and those who influenced him with regards to the urban psyche, along with those of the builders. Until a few years ago it was possible to publish a book on the E42 in Rome without even mentioning de Chirico. Finally, de Chirico himself took the initiative in his ironic *Gladiatore nell'arena* of 1975, which uses the Palazzo della Civiltà Italica at EUR as its setting, and in which he recognizes his own influence. It is a real shame that successive studies are inhibited by a sense of terror with regards to current lines of dominant thinking, rather than seeking openness of cultural visions.

In the end de Chirico is always ignored, whether he is being cited unjustly or simply ignored. In every instance de Chirico is demonized by both the right and the left, politically speaking. His relationship to architecture is fundamental and he has direct links to the history of civilization and that of history in general. Cliché after cliché has been attributed to de Chirico with regards to Fascism and the post-war period too. Up until the 70's de Chirico found no particular avenue of his own and he inserted himself wherever he could, including in questionable newspapers. Ideologically, this has little significance, since de Chirico is impossible to pin down. But it is here that de Chirico must be seen: in his relationship with culture and literary circles, even if he was rather impatient himself with such comparisons.

Here, then, are some guidelines of the context in which de Chirico should be seen: in his art that was free of simplicity - even if he was sometimes a little puerile in his desire to seduce his viewers - he created a state of physical pleasure, as well as in history. In this regard, de Chirico depicts Italy in his first official image of the state: the *Piazzas of Italy (Piazze d'Italia)* of the then newly born State of Italy.

Diverse perspectives in the interpretation of de Chirico have renewed the old, repeated problem of counterfeits. We are now witnessing a renewed outburst of this unpleasant phenomenon that has dogged de Chirico. We are still hearing the leitmotiv that de Chirico supposedly invented a series of counterfeits on purpose. Instead, these were authentic paintings as is documented in house collections in the 1920's, such as the Doucet's *Revenant*, or in magazines of the same years ("Selection" 1929), along with some in the 40's (*Almanacco Bompiani* 1941). Fortunately, research is revealing the true circumstances of these affairs. In this issue, Jole de Sanna study touches on this problem. The emergence of counterfeits, however, is not to be underestimated and will be investigated in depth in subsequent issues of the magazine.

The counterfeits, or fakes, are not only a legal problem or a question for the courts. De Chirico's experi-

ences in the XXth Century and yet again in the XXIth Century constitute an interesting phenomenon which, when properly examined, could cast light on our present culture. The legal question is the least interesting aspect of this affair. Certainly, there are legal questions to resolve with regards to questions of collections, the marketing of paintings, and thus, in the end, the defence of de Chirico's reputation. However the larger problem is a cultural one: we must know and establish, once and for all, which de Chiricos are authentic and which are not, and what has happened to interfere with the artist's reputation. This will involve a true philological investigation in order to recognize authentic de Chiricos.

The problem came out in the mid 1920's and carried on throughout the entire 1900's and include not only the later fakes, but also more recent ones. This is part of the Foundation's responsibility. De Chirico is emblematic of that type of artist who has been stereotyped, where everything centres around his first Metaphysical phase. Afterwards, everything had to follow this designation, pinioned intellectually as he was by various groups of persons who may have even been acting in good faith. These people have made de Chirico become something that he was not interested in. Nowadays images of de Chirico are posited that speak of Metaphysics for "how it should be" in the minds of surrealists, for example. We can also include the fascist culture as another example. All of this has been done with reference to earlier and more recently discovered fakes. The intensity of this

phenomenon in the cultural imagination emerges from the initial research undertaken and for which this issue provides documentation. This is an old phenomenon that is not only linked to the lower, common denominators of the marketplace. A counterfeit, in this sense, is a cultural object that speaks of a formal line of thought in terms of "attributions" instead of taking on the role of formulating a true and proper line of thought. It is true that certain people have profited from this, but they would have anyway in other ways. Unfortunately de Chirico is seen as a totem figure, one that can be appropriated. The artist was well aware of this, and in the tenderness with which he held as the "son" he would never have, we see that de Chirico let this phenomenon go unchecked for a long time. It was only in 1946 that he decided to put a stop to it when he issued his famous "excommunication" of the counterfeits exhibited at the Allard Galerie in Paris.

All this has endowed the studies on de Chirico with a somewhat culturally sociological (of the XXth Century) character. In my opinion, this is a task that requires more than just a short or medium term study, but one that will be long term. But it could provide the opportunity for scholars to open up a real field of interest, even if the clichés that hound de Chirico will be with us for a long time to come. Further studies may take into account the legal aspects, or juridical elements, but this would be a waste of time. To win the battle and lose the war is not what we need. What is needed is clarity.

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