

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND JOLE DE SANNA

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In relation to his metaphysical painting, Giorgio de Chirico wrote: “It is beside the fact that no-one has ever understood a thing about it, neither then, nor now,” (The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico); and: “Only two or three people in the whole world have understood those paintings, and even that I could not swear to.”

Jole de Sanna, the extraordinary de Chirico scholar, is certainly the only person who the great metaphysician could have sworn by.

The depth of her thought, her ingenious intuition, the mysterious symbiosis (“It is fascinating. You would never tire of it. It’s thrilling to understand the way he was thinking. It is an immense pleasure for me”) that united her to Giorgio de Chirico across time and allowed her to enter de Chirico’s inextricable labyrinths, exiting them with some of the enigma revealed. Although she wrote: “a mystery that can be revealed, solved by explanation, was never really a mystery in the first place”. She solved many mysteries and understood many others without disclosing them. These she has taken with her, and the curtain she dared to raise has now been abruptly lowered.

Her studies on de Chirico, though not monographic (she put off the publication of a systematic study to a future date), have the great value of having closely examined all of the most important and complex aspects – some of which had never previously been treated – of Giorgio de Chirico’s thought and work, not only pictorial, but also philosophical and literary.

The essays on sculpture and drawing (2004) add to the academic corpus on de Chirico, whilst *Metaphysical Mathematics* (in this publication p. 111-200) opens a window that throws light on de Chirico’s metaphysical painting, consenting at least a partial understanding of this work. In other words, this essay sets one on a path towards the comprehension of the mystery, though it must be noted that it “merely

endeavours to indicate where the enigma resides”.

The greatest merit attributed to Jole de Sanna is that of reinstating Giorgio de Chirico's place at the apex of Art History – a position which is most often denied him and which he fully deserves –, not only as the greatest artist of the 20th Century, along with Picasso (although with a few stronger points), but as one of the greatest painters in all of Art history: *Le chant d'amour* is among the most incisive and immensely beautiful works ever painted, not only the 20th Century, but of all of Art history.” It is not by chance that she compared de Chirico with Michelangelo, for the depth of his thought that was open to all fields of knowledge and for the strength of his artistic expression, and with Leonardo in whom she saw “his source of inspiration as the topmost theoretician of painting as a liberal art”.

This reinstatement contradicts the clichés that were purposely built up around Giorgio de Chirico by historians and even important critics, starting with Breton – and by a market environment interested exclusively in the economic exploitation of the Maestro's work. This change could only come about by means of a highly scientific analysis that investigated fields of research that are yet to be cultivated as well as the extremely difficult battle¹ against falsification, both old and new, which has plagued de Chirico throughout his life, concerning false ideology and artwork of the great Maestro. With regard to this, consult the essay *Mysteries surrounding de Chirico's signature* by Jole de Sanna (in this publication p. 362-364).

The restoration of de Chirico's due could not have come about without a radical change in the research methods. At a meeting of the publication's editorial committee, regarding the presentation of the first issue at the Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, Jole de Sanna's reasoning resounded in the simplicity and candidness of her choice of words.

In fact, she wanted to make the Foundation's research program on Giorgio de Chirico's work and thought clear in the press release.

It is fitting to listen to that which sounds like a last testament indicating precisely how to proceed: “Like all the artists who are preserved in the memory of the 20th Century, Giorgio de Chirico has now become a kind of fetish, around which is constructed a legend composed of concepts, which, in themselves, are to be considered correct and valid, but which lack in proportion compared to the vastness and concrete dimension of the work, to the development of thought and the construction of the image that de Chirico represents for both the past and the present centuries”. It must be said that while there is no lack of tributes to Giorgio de Chirico as artist and creator of a number of model images such as

¹*Giorgio de Chirico – André Breton: “Duel à Mort”* is the title of Jole de Sanna's essay published in the first double edition of this periodical (n. 1-2).

those of Metaphysics – and such occasions continue to multiply, the need has arisen to enter the perimeters formed by the images de Chirico left us in order to assess the meaning, significance, and reason behind them.

In order to gain a better understanding, it is necessary to establish a more scientific analysis and not merely retrace ideas that have been imparted for over a century, in order to begin to really evaluate the magnitude of de Chirico.

This is not how things are presently done. I would therefore like to stress the difference between the way we would like to present, deal with and communicate the work of an artist of this kind, measure and importance and the way he has generally been treated.

Today, de Chirico has become a discipline of study for those who are truly committed to the issue of art. Whilst the usual approach to studying an artist is within the disciplines of Art History and Art Criticism, **de Chirico has become a discipline in himself**, which helps us understand the difference that exists between present art criticism and that of the past – that is to say, the way in which one looks at the social, artistic, cultural and philosophical context etc. and Art History itself. In other words, de Chirico lends himself as an apparatus of analysis for the context and system of investigation. This inverted order has made the situation such that a single publication is hardly sufficient to cover the entire breadth of change that this approach demands. A great deal of work is required, and there is full intention to fulfil this work.

With regard to de Chirico, it appeared that everything had been already been done. However, through a systematic analysis, we have realised that Archives have not been touched, relationships have not been looked into and actual relationships between de Chirico and other major artists of the 20th Century have not been investigated. There is, therefore, an enormous amount of work to be done in order to fully explore these deposits of information as well as to reconnect de Chirico with **all the various disciplines of study of the 20th Century**. Hence, the involvement of specialists from fields of research that are not strictly historic and artistic is required. The studies undertaken to date validate the general image of this artist, who can not be simply be defined as an artist but who is a true keystone holding together a system of thought – the system of thought of the 20th Century”.

The more than twenty essays written by Jole de Sanna, covering the whole of Giorgio de Chirico's work, give witness to how high she aimed and how widely she explored fields of knowledge into which no-one before her had ever ventured.

The hope and aspiration is that this research, so abruptly interrupted, be taken on by new scholars who are unaffected by the market etc. and are capable of not simply retracing the ideas of the past, but to embark upon new research processes, which will surely prove more difficult but also more fruitful. Jole de Sanna's writings, which will be united in a single volume and will undoubtedly serve as a source in which new scholars may find the seeds for future study. As such, this will prevent the loss of the intuitive ideas and discoveries she has left us and permit the continuation of this unfinished work through new acquisitions and discoveries.

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Translated by Katherine Robinson