

ON GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S ALLEGED BÖCKLINESQUE PAINTINGS¹

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Introduction

In the preface to a recently released book,² and in two essays that later appeared in the journal “Studi online”,³ Paolo Baldacci has added further elements to a thesis he had advanced in a book published twenty years ago, which we can summarise as follows, whilst also introducing our own counter-arguments:

1) Andrea, Giorgio de Chirico's brother [in art, Alberto Savinio], had been the driving force of their initial cultural collaboration since 1908, when he read a review of *Ecce Homo* in the Ticino journal “Coenobium”, thereby introducing his elder brother to Nietzsche (as if Giorgio had not attended the Munich Academy of Fine Arts for three years, where everybody was familiar with Nietzsche and where Kurt, brother of his friend and fellow painter Fritz Gartz, had not professed Nietzschean ideas, and Giorgio, who was fluent in German, had not discussed these with him).

2) Alberto's decision to mix together archaic history and autobiography in his *Poema fantastico* was a decisive move that Giorgio strictly followed and found inspiration in (as if Giorgio himself had not been born in Greece, and raised in Volos and Athens until he was sixteen, and had not considered the world of Greek mythology as his own, and as if Böcklin had not caught his attention already by 1906-1907, as we read in his *Memoirs*).⁴

3) When Giorgio left Munich to spend a few days vacationing with his mother and brother on Lake Garda in late July 1908, making a stopover in Milan where his mother had rented a flat in Via Petrarca, he allegedly began working under his brother's aegis, strictly applying his brother's ideas in his own paintings, that is, that mix of myth and autobiography Alberto was

¹ Article published in the original Italian, *Sui presunti quadri böckliniani di Giorgio de Chirico*, in “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico” n. 14/16, 2017, pp. 29-55.

² N. M. Mocchi, *La cultura dei fratelli de Chirico agli albori dell'arte metafisica: Milano e Firenze 1909-1911*. Scalpendi Editore, Milan 2017. Baldacci's preface is entitled *La pittura e la musica “più profonde”. Conferme sulla cronologia 1909-1910 e la nascita dell'arte metafisica* (pp. 7-22).

³ P. Baldacci, *Note in margine alla cronologia metafisica 1908-1909*. I. *Waldemar George, i Pelasgi, il Poema fantastico e le origini della poetica metafisica* (pp. 4-7); *Note in margine alla cronologia metafisica 1908-1909*. II. *Procession on a Mountain e i “cammini tortuosi attorno ad alcuni artisti moderni”*, in “Studi online”, III, 5-6, 2016 (published March 2017), pp. 8-10.

⁴ This is how de Chirico speaks of his life and interests while in Munich: “While I busied myself in drawing and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, my brother took private lessons in harmony and counter-point from the composer and organist Max Reger, who at that time was considered the modern Bach. I accompanied my brother to the counterpoint lessons to act as interpreter in a small way because my brother did not know German well enough. When I did not have to translate the teacher's remarks into Italian, I looked through a large album containing splendid reproductions of Böcklin's paintings”; see G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, Astrolabio, Rome 1945; II ed. Milan: Rizzoli, 1962; English translation, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, Peter Owen, London 1971, p. 57. Attracted also to the works of Max Klinger, de Chirico was a frequent visitor of the museums in Munich, where he could study the original works of both artists, places such as Alte Pinakothek, Neue Pinakothek, the Schack Collection and Staatliche Graphische Sammlung.

developing in his *Poema fantastico*.⁵ In fact, Giorgio gave a different account of his early career as a painter, which began when, tired of the Academy in Munich, he decided to move to Milan: “I decided to return to Italy. My mother and my brother, after the sudden fiasco in Rome when they failed to see Mascagni, had gone to Milan. [...] I also went to Milan. I believe it was the summer of 1909. We went to live in an apartment in a middle-class district of Milan, in Via Petrarca. I was painting canvases of a Böcklinesque flavour.”⁶ Therefore, Giorgio de Chirico began his career as a painter, not as his brother’s helper, but as a Böcklinesque painter.

Baldacci advances two final theses in the article:

4) To his rhetorical question “How can the absolute impossibility of dating the birth of Metaphysical Art, therefore the first painting, to the autumn of 1910 be demonstrated?”, we obviously answer that it is absolutely impossible to date the birth of Metaphysical Art to 1909.

5) “In the complete lack of paintings ascribable to that period, how can we ‘fill’ de Chirico’s Florentine period, which lasted just over fifteen months?” Without realising it, Baldacci himself has answered this question by dating to 1908 the works de Chirico painted in 1909, and dating to 1909 those executed in 1910, Baldacci himself has “emptied out” the year 1910, which was, in fact, de Chirico’s most intense year of activity.

The answer Baldacci gives to this last question is that de Chirico did not paint during 1910 because he was too busy reading books in order to help his brother Alberto with his musical composition. To this absurd explanation, openly contradicted by de Chirico’s letters to Fritz Gartz of 1909-1911, we reply: instead of putting a three-decade long effort into studying de Chirico

⁵ Baldacci writes: “De Chirico’s decision, certainly inspired by Alberto, taken toward the end of the summer of 1908 to mix childhood autobiographical elements with the heraldic and mythic history of Hellas, along the same lines as what his brother was doing in his melodrama *Poema fantastico*, was productive.” To corroborate his point, Baldacci quotes the chronology written by de Chirico and published in the 1962 edition of his *Memoirs*, where he writes: “In 1908 he is in Milan. Still thinking of the paintings of Arnold Böcklin, which in Munich had impressed him with their poetic arid narrative content and plastic qualities, he painted a series of works with a Böcklin-like flavour, portraits of his mother and brother and also self-portraits. Then he went to Florence, where he visited the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace. He painted a few more Böcklin style paintings, but under the influence of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, of whom he was at that time a fervent admirer, he began that series of paintings which form a prelude to the Metaphysical painting. In 1911 he left for Paris.” De Chirico’s source of inspiration is clear: Böcklin (mentioned three times!). Indicating his brother Andrea as a catalyst serves Baldacci’s purpose of rearranging the chronology of de Chirico’s works painted between 1909 and 1910, including three 1909 paintings: *Triton and Siren*, *Prometheus* and *Sphinx*, which are pre-dated to 1908-1909 in Baldacci’s 1997 monograph, where for the first time he advanced the thesis that the real inventor of Metaphysical Art was Alberto Savinio. As of today, two of the three paintings, *Triton and Siren* and *Prometheus*, are explicitly dated to 1908. The chronology includes the works of the Florentine period, including self-portraits and the portraits of de Chirico’s mother (that of his brother was painted in Milan). The divested chronology needs to be integrated with further details from de Chirico’s biography, such as the 1929 biography’s reference to 1909 and his return to Germany: “He spent his first Italian year in Milan. During this period he painted works in which the influence of Böcklin was still all too evident.” De Chirico may have painted in this style as early as 1908, but this is more likely to have happened in Munich rather than in Milan. The reference to Milan helps Baldacci frame de Chirico’s works under the decisive influence that his brother allegedly exerted over him during the short time they spent together with the family first on Lake Garda and then in Milan in the summer of 1908.

We know that de Chirico often mistook dates. The reality is quite simple: in the brief chronology he provided, de Chirico was certainly referring to 1909, the year that marks his definite return to Italy, after his time in Munich. This is another, harmless, instance of his mistakes in dating, obviously in relation to what he was talking about. Therefore, the date 1908 should be read as 1909, as confirmed by his *Memoirs*, when he writes: “I also went to Milan. I believe it was the summer of 1909.” It should also be noted that in the chronological chart there is a dating mistake regarding de Chirico’s stay in New York (“1935-1937” instead of 1936-1938). I hope that this simple truth shall not lead to an interminable debate, like what happened with the letter to Fritz Gartz dated 26 December 1910.

⁶ See G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, cit., p. 78. The year is erroneously indicated as “1910” in the English translation (*The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, cit., p. 60).

– something he can well boast about – why hasn't Baldacci studied Alberto Savinio, if he was the master of both de Chirico and Metaphysical Art? This would give him much more satisfaction, if he really cared for Metaphysical Art. Even if we appreciate that his 1997 book contained reproductions of many early Metaphysical Art works,⁷ we cannot forgive Baldacci's devaluation of de Chirico in favour of his brother.

Chronology of the Works

In order to address Baldacci's theses, we would like to begin not, as on other occasions, from the correct and universally accepted dating of the birth of Metaphysical Art but from the moment immediately preceding it, namely, the evolution and development of de Chirico's painting starting with the works known and referred to as Böcklinesque. In reference to these, de Chirico wrote, under the pseudonym "Angelo Bardi", that they had been destroyed by their own author who felt Böcklin's influence was too evident.⁸ Indeed, if we focus on the development of de Chirico's art, we shall be able to identify the moment in which he distanced himself from Böcklin to enter the path of Metaphysical Art.

Two facts are ascertained: in the summer of 1908, de Chirico visited Lake Garda and then Milan, to eventually return to Munich where he stayed until June 1909. To what extent the two brothers collaborated together on the *Poema fantastico* in 1908 is rather difficult to establish: first, because Giorgio stayed in Munich until the summer of 1909;⁹ second, because the texts of this literary and musical output went lost, and what is left are only a number of titles that can be related to those of de Chirico's paintings. There is no doubt that in 1909 the two brothers lived, studied and worked together. They would read, compose music, and paint, but their interests were different: Giorgio chiefly devoted to painting, Alberto to music. There is too little evidence to speak about an elaboration of a shared poetics: this is not just a matter of themes, thoughts, and ideas, but of how these themes are treated in the creation of a work of art. It is when they become the object of painting that what we call "poetics" – from ancient Greek *poièin*, "to make" – is born and develops. It is through this "making" that they become "poetry".

In fact, what interests us here is to answer the following questions: which paintings did de Chirico execute in Milan between the summer of 1909 and March 1910, when he left Milan to move to Florence together with his mother and brother? What do these paintings represent in the development of his poetics?

⁷ We must take note of the concern expressed by Maurizio Calvesi regarding some works reproduced in Baldacci's book, which are forgeries or paintings of dubious attribution (P. Baldacci, *De Chirico 1888-1919: The Metaphysical Period*, Bullfinch, New York 1997).

⁸ G. de Chirico, *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico*, in *Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique*, VIII, signed "Angelo Bardi", Éditions Sélection, Antwerp 1929, pp. 20-26; English translation in "Metaphysical Art" n. 5/6, 2006, pp. 496-499.

⁹ Concerning de Chirico's visit to Milan and his relationship with his brother Alberto, Gerd Roos limits himself in speculating: "Is it possible that the intellectual exchange with Savinio may also have played a central role?" As we can see, Roos' speculation is considerably far from Baldacci's assertive statements. Roos continues: "The time de Chirico spent in Milan was too short to allow such a large output as reported in the chronological chart. By the end of September, the family members parted once again" (G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti: Monaco, Milano, Firenze, 1906-1911*, Bora, Bologna 1999, pp. 190-191).



fig. 1 G. de Chirico, *Triton and Siren*, 1909



fig. 2 G. de Chirico, *Prometheus*, 1909

a) *The So-called Böcklinesque Paintings*

According to what de Chirico tells us in his *Memoirs*, and to what he reiterates in *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico*, written, as mentioned, under the pseudonym of Angelo Bardi (1929), he painted Böcklinesque canvases which he then destroyed as he felt that this influence was too evident. Therefore, one cannot ask which paintings these are, given that the artist destroyed them. Yet, besides these, there are paintings from this period that have survived and that Wieland Schmied initially dated as follows: *Nereids on a Beach*,¹⁰ *Procession on a Mountain*, both executed in 1908; *Triton and Siren* (fig. 1), *Battle of Centaurs*, *Dying Centaur*, *Prometheus* (fig. 2), *Sphinx* (fig. 3), of 1909; then *The Departure of the Argonauts* and *Serenade*, 1909-1910, which he believes were executed during the first part of de Chirico's stay in Florence, that is, in spring 1910.¹¹ To 1910-1911, Schmied instead ascribes eminently Metaphysical canvases such as *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, *The Enigma of the Oracle* and *The Enigma of the Hour*.¹²

We agree with him that these last three paintings belong to the Florentine period (*The Enigma of the Hour* is certainly datable to 1910, while *Self-portrait* [in Nietzschean pose] to 1910-1911).

¹⁰ Painting attributed to de Chirico by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco. See Id., *L'opera completa di de Chirico, 1908-1924*, Rizzoli, Milan 1984, p. 79.

¹¹ W. Schmied and G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico, München 1906-1909*, Munich: Akademie der Bildenden Künste, 1994, Band 5, p. 42.

¹² Schmied also adds *La meditazione mattinale* (*ibid.*, p. 43). In this book, published in 1994, he confirms the 1910 dating of de Chirico's first metaphysical paintings. Although Schmied is very familiar with the letters de Chirico sent to Gertz, as he had reported their content to Baldacci, it seems that he does not believe at all to backdating these works to 1909. Baldacci writes: "According to de Chirico this was the first metaphysical painting he executed in Florence on an autumn afternoon, following a trip to Rome when he conceived a way to transcend symbolism. The new date relocates the painting, although signed and dated 1910, to late October or November 1909, a radical change recently acknowledged and accepted as the artist's beginning. The evidence confirming this fact can be found in a letter, dated January 1910 [sic!] and sent from Florence to his friend, Fritz Gartz, a school-mate from the Academy in Munich. The letter, written by de Chirico after he had been in Florence for several months, describes the paintings completed during the preceding autumn. It will be published by W. Schmied and G. Roos, along with other very recently discovered documents which modify the chronology of de Chirico's activities when moving between Munich and Florence (I have been advised of this letter by Professor Wieland Schmied and am indebted to him for its inclusion here)." See *Giorgio de Chirico: Betraying the Muse. De Chirico and the Surrealists*, exhibition catalogue, 21 April-28 May 1994, Paolo Baldacci Gallery, New York 1994, p. 122. Schmied and Ross' book was published in July 1994.

Still, we have to make a distinction between the first part of 1910, when de Chirico painted and completed *The Departure of the Argonauts* and *Serenade*,¹³ and the following summer and autumn, when he executed the first three Metaphysical paintings. In fact, we believe that there is a significant difference between the first two canvases and the other three



fig. 3 G. de Chirico, *Sphinx*, 1909

paintings that are undoubtedly of the second half of 1910. To the early Florentine period I would also assign *Procession on a Mountain*, which I refuse to date to 1908. Recently, Nikolaos Velissiotis has indicated, as part of de Chirico's corpus of works, a canvas entitled *The Path* (fig. 4) that for its subject and style certainly belongs to the period of *Triton and Siren*.¹⁴

Schmied has also referred *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* to 1910, a painting that has raised date-related issues, but is believed to have been begun in 1909 and finished in 1910.¹⁵ This large and important work poses a question: does it belong to de Chirico's Böcklinesque period?

Of course, to answer this question, first we have to define what we mean for Böcklinesque paintings. From a purely pictorial standpoint *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* is indeed perhaps the only painting that can be defined as such. To explain what we mean for Böcklinesque, let us quote an excerpt from an essay that de Chirico devoted to Arnold Böcklin in 1920:

“Proof of the strength and intelligence of his craft can be seen in a few of the solid and clear portraits found at the Museum of Basel. Executed according to classical painting procedures, these well-polished portraits have the same strength as some of the paintings of Dürer and Holbein”. And: “Böcklin's spirit is at the antipodes of that of Wagner. Whilst in Wagner everything is undefined, everything whispers and gets mixed up [...] Böcklin's Metaphysical strength always springs from the exactness and clearness of a specific apparition. Never did he paint the fog, never did he trace an uncertain outline; in this is found his classicism and his greatness.”¹⁶

¹³ Perhaps, these two paintings were conceived and commenced after de Chirico's trip to Rome, as we can infer from a letter to Fritz Gartz, dated 27 December 1909, in which he writes: “I took a trip to Florence and Rome in October and in the spring I will probably go to Florence to live as it is the city I like the most. I have been working and studying a lot and I now have *very different goals than before*.” [Author's italics, ed.].

¹⁴ See N. Velissiotis, *La nascita della "Metafisica" nell'arte di Giorgio de Chirico*, Centro ellenico di cultura, Milan 2011, p. 61, photograph n. 10.

¹⁵ This work was wrongly titled *Autoritratto* [Self-portrait] in the journal “Letteratura”, 4, (1 April 1931-IX).

¹⁶ See Arnold Böcklin, in “Il Convegno”, 1, 4 May 1920, pp. 47-53.



fig. 4 G. de Chirico, *The Path*, 1909

These lines, written to celebrate Böcklin's art, seem to fit in perfectly with *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* (fig. 5). The features which de Chirico speaks of, and which can in fact be seen in this portrait, have little in common with other works of 1909, with the exception of *The Path*. This portrait is by all means faithful to the spirit of Böcklin, from the clarity of colours, so effectively studied and applied, to the beautiful sky dominating the view from the window open onto the world, up to the Hellenic, mythical lyricism animating the whole canvas. De Chirico's brother Alberto, who went by the name Andrea until 1914, stands in front of a window overlooking a landscape where we can see, at the bottom of a mountain, a centaur with the hands tied behind his back.¹⁷ The mountain is Mount Pelion, in Thessaly, near the town of Volos, where the painter and his brother were raised, and that in the Greek world was believed to be a land inhabited by centaurs. Near the centaur, we can see a *tholos*, a tomb or little temple, which will appear in de Chirico's later works. His brother is wearing a black outfit, with collar and cuffs edged with lace, so that it has been thought that he was portrayed in Hamlet's attire.¹⁸ It is also likely that a lace outfit was commonly worn in aristocratic households in the 19th century. The black beautifully harmonises with the green, making the red and the yellow of the two apples sitting on the table stand out. A mixture of black and red is also used to render the windowsill and its base. Although the defining lines and architecture are precisely drawn, with this painting de Chirico is already giving us a taste of that estrangement effect of details and figures that will dominate his later Metaphysical paintings.

What is the meaning of the two apples sitting on the table? What is the relationship among the tied centaur, the tholos, Mount Pelion, and the Shakespearian hero, as per Baldacci's interpretation, so neatly outlined against the window? Their meaning is explained by a sentence reported in de Chirico's novel *Hebdomeros*, which is worth quoting. The sentence is found in a passage within a series of fantastical stories that, like in a Buñuel film, abruptly break off:

“Close by there was a cool, clear spring, pouring over a few earthenware jugs filled with amber-coloured wine. This was more than enough to arouse the enthusiasm of Casca, the painter who hailed from the South. Addressing himself to Hebdomeros, he expressed his emotion simply but lyrically: ‘Now *there's* happiness for us artists,’ he said. ‘What do we need, after all, to be happy? A couple

¹⁷ Velissiotis informs us that the centaur with the tied hands is a reminiscence of a painting by the Greek artist Nikolaos Gizis (*La nascita della "Metafisica"*, cit., p. 61).

¹⁸ See P. Baldacci: “According to a tradition maintained among Savinio's descendants [...], he is depicted here in the costume of Hamlet, a close-fitting black jersey with lace at the cuffs and collar” (*De Chirico*, cit., p. 66).

of apples on a table with salt and pepper, a ray of sunlight on the floor, a sweet, faithful woman to lighten the burden of life; and last and most important' – and here he paused for a moment to look round the circle of people listening to him – 'last and most important, a clear conscience'¹⁹.

We can see a stylised ray of light reflected on the windowsill and the base of the wall painted with a mixture of red, yellow, and black that confers an estrangement effect to the composition. The passage from *Hebdomeros* undoubtedly sheds new light on the whole canvas. The artist's brother is portrayed here as a prince or hero that in Renaissance paintings is outlined against a window overlooking the world that he shall conquer and dominate: not as a tragic hero, but as an artist who finds happiness in a simple and tranquil life and, especially, in his awareness of being an artist.

Now that we have seen what de Chirico means for Böcklinesque style in the portrait of his brother, let us return to the paintings of which we spoke earlier. The question we should ask about their style is: can the other paintings that Schmied has counted among the Böcklinesque ones, be called such? As we have said before, the point of this question is to reconstruct the development of de Chirico's poetics. Given the stylistic discrepancies existing among these 1909-1910 paintings, to reconstruct a common poetics and conduct a critical analysis aimed at assessing if they are Böcklinesque or not, is difficult, but not impossible. Therefore, we must address the problem of their interpretation to try and orient ourselves in studying the development of de Chirico's art in these early years, by looking at the themes treated, the colour and the composition, with the avail of historical information and documents.

Schmied assigns two works to 1909. The first, *Triton and Siren*, is taken directly from Böcklin's imagery, whilst the subject and style of the second one, entitled *The Path*, also certainly date it to this period. As for the others, we believe that *Procession on a Mountain*, which Schmied dates to 1908, does not fall in the period de Chirico defines as Böcklinesque. In fact, it belongs to the period when he painted *The Departure of the Argonauts* and *Serenade* in Florence. All of these three paintings are grouped by the theme of Myth and still under the influence of Böcklin's romantic legacy, but seen from a different angle, more personal and religious. On the basis of stylistic considerations, which we shall make later, we believe that the three canvases belong to a later moment of de Chirico's career, in fact, to the Florentine



fig. 5 G. de Chirico, *Portrait of the Artist's Brother*, 1910

¹⁹ G. de Chirico, *Hebdomeros*, Éditions du Carrefour, Paris 1929; English translation, The Four Seasons Book Society, New York 1966, pp. 113-114.

period. We also exclude the possibility that the other allegedly Böcklinesque paintings, namely *Triton and Siren* and *Prometheus* (for Roos and Baldacci) and *Triton and Siren* (for Schmied) were painted in 1908 in Milan. In fact, de Chirico stayed in Milan for less than two months, until the end of the summer. Baldacci and Roos have advanced this dating only to support the obsessively reiterated thesis that the Metaphysical painting executed after these works actually originated in Milan in 1909. I cannot accept this thesis because, even if I ignored the documental evidence concerning this issue, a stylistic analysis allows us to see the development of de Chirico's painting over time.

To truly be able to consider the paintings of 1909-1910 in a shared poetic one must engage in a critical analysis that is not easy due to their stylistic differences, with the objective of establishing whether or not they are indeed Böcklinesque paintings. It all depends on the analysis and the interpretation of six paintings that need to be studied, seeing that a stylistic analysis on these has not yet been made, that is, a proper inquiry into their content that could reveal their profundity and foster their understanding. The lack of such a study has caused a painting like *Serenade* to be considered as not yet understood or, according to Baldacci, a fiasco. Let us now begin this analysis so that we can establish what is, or is not, Böcklinesque in them.

The problem of the interpretation of these paintings must be addressed in order to find one's bearings with regard to the development of the artist's poetics during these initial years. Such consideration needs to examine what is taking place in these paintings, the themes treated, the colours used, their composition, in correlation to historical information and documents. The letters de Chirico sent to Fritz Gartz, his friend and fellow student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, provide important testimony for the development of the artist's style after his returned to Italy in 1909. These letters were published for the first time in the original German in Gerd Roos's book and later translated in Italian and English in the Foundation's periodical "Metafisica".²⁰

This is the first letter to take into consideration:

Mediolano
Anno Domini M.CM.IX.
Poseidione XXVII

Dear friend!

The day before yesterday I sent your honoured and kind wife a Milanese specialty from the Cova pastry shop. I hope you received it and that you liked it.

Do you still have your old studio or do you now work in your new apartment? I would be very happy to receive news of your work.

I took a trip to Florence and Rome in October and in the spring I will probably

²⁰ Letters by Giorgio de Chirico, Gemma de Chirico and Alberto de Chirico to Fritz Gartz, Milan-Florence 1908-1911, in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 551-567.

go to Florence to live as it is the city I like the most. I have been working and studying a lot and I now have very different goals than before.

I intend to exhibit in the next springtime Secession exhibition, and therefore I would like to ask you a favour, if you could send me the Secession regulation form and if you could ask if foreign artists can exhibit without being invited? When will you be coming to Italy? I will probably come to Munich in the autumn of 1910 to exhibit a couple of paintings.

Take care.

My best regards to your wife.

G. de Chirico²¹

As Paolo Picozza has already noted, according to the Attic calendar, the month of Poseidon can vary as it changes according to the lunar phases. In 1909, 27 Poseidon corresponded to 27 December.²² We also have an Italian postcard with two stamps: Florence 11.4.10.11 / Arrivals and Departures:

Dear Friend!

I received your postcard and the documentation regarding the Secession and I thank you for this.

I probably won't use it though... because I have decided not to exhibit after all, as I would like to hold a personal exhibition later on... and also because the works I am creating now are too profound and would appear out of place in a Secession hall.

Florence is very pretty in the spring... I have found a beautiful studio... please give your wife my greetings and take care.

G. de Chirico²³

This second letter fits perfectly with the first one. On the basis of the first letter, dated 27 December 1909, it is easy to establish that de Chirico wished to exhibit at the Secession held in Munich the paintings he had executed until that moment, that is December 1909. Which paintings are these? It is clear that these cannot be the paintings that he later went on to destroy as he considered them too Böcklinesque. For these would indeed have been suitable to show,

²¹ Letter by G. de Chirico to F. Gartz, in G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio*, p. 423 (English translation in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 560-561). The complete translation of the first group of de Chirico's letters to Gartz was published together with a critical response to Roos and Baldacci's thesis by Paolo Picozza entitled *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in 1910*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 58-92. In the same issue one can also find my own critical response to Roos and Baldacci's theses, based on a shared discussion with Paolo Picozza, entitled *From Zarathustra's Poetry to the Aesthetics of Metaphysical Art* (pp. 93-116), stemming from my interpretation of the group of figures around the fountain of Janus in *Serenade*.

²² See P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in 1910*, cit., p. 69, and note 21, p. 88, on the basis of di E. J. Bickerman, *La cronologia nel mondo antico*, La nuova Italia, Firenze 1963.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 561.



fig. 6 G. de Chirico, *Battle of Centaurs*, 1909

they can be easily traced back to Böcklin's *Triton and Nereid*: the colours of the water and the bodies are the same, and they treat the same theme, namely, that of the blessed life of the mythical beings impersonating the forces of nature. The same can be said for *The Path*, now rediscovered, where Klinger's theme of a walk is set in an idyllic, mythological landscape: there, at the end of a path that runs next to a pond, a woman dressed in white leans softly against her man who wears a short red robe, while outside the path, in the middle of the scene, we see another female figure, although we cannot tell if she is a real woman or a statue. In the background, we see the rocks siding the narrow entrance of the temples between Olympus and Ossia,²⁴ which almost touch each other and are smooth like veils, in harmony with the greenery in the foreground. The same cannot be said if we compare de Chirico's *Battle of Centaurs* (fig. 6) with Böcklin's *Battle of the Centaurs*: the theme is the same, but de Chirico treats it in a more gloomy tone. Here, indeed, the focus is not on the blessed life narrated by mythology, but the struggle between the two native and mythical peoples of Thessaly, symbolising the primeval forces of nature. Furthermore, in this as well as in another painting, *Dying Centaur* (fig. 7), the mythological idyllic nature has given way to harsh realism, as we can see in the dark green of vegetation and the ochre of the earth, as well as in the rendering of the surfaces, which are not smooth and immaculate, but constantly rippled and rough, both in the lines and contours of the figures, whose outlines are endlessly segmented.

Similarly, in the other two canvases, *Sphinx* and *Prometheus*, which, like Schmieid, we assign to 1909, the mythical aspect seems to be enriched with extra-narrative meaning: both the sphinx fallen on the rocks, and Prometheus chained to them, seem to have turned into rocks themselves, anticipating the theme of metamorphosis of life into stone treated by Max Ernst, who made a copy of the first metaphysical painting entitled *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*. In *Sphinx*, the rocks – and here there is nothing but rocks – are painted in a fairly strong ochre, and the ground is all “crushed” into small pebbles; the sky is also painted in ochre with a little white,

²⁴ See N. Velissiotis, *La nascita della "Metafisica"*, cit., p. 61.

while the sea has a very dark black colour. In this complete solitude, the body of the petrified sphinx stands straight but slightly bent forward, with the cursing and rebellious demeanour of the defeated.²⁵ In *Prometheus*, the rocks, which have a lighter and more pleasant colour, are arranged into large blocks serving as a bed and cushions on which the titan lies down. A little house is built in a recess of the mountain, while other white houses are placed at its feet. On the left, the bell tower of a church is visible. The titan's body lies completely abandoned on the ground, and on his backward-tilted head are even more evident marks of defeat, helplessness, and melancholic resignation. Such was de Chirico's psychological state between the autumn of 1909 and 1911, as he himself tells us in his *Memoirs*: a condition due to intestinal disorders from which he could not heal and had caused in him "severe crises of black melancholy".²⁶ Therefore, the point here is not the celebration of myth or one's personal elevation to the glory of myth: myth serves the sole purpose of describing one's own spiritual situation. The portrait of Prometheus lying chained on the rocks is the portrait of the painter who lies chained to his bed by depression.



fig. 7 G. de Chirico, *Dying Centaur*, 1909

We can affirm, then, that the paintings we have described are the "so-called Böcklinesque paintings" painted in Milan, with the exception of the first two canvases, which are not Böcklinesque works, but can be considered as documents to de Chirico's activity. He did not destroy them, unlike he had done with his other works, and indeed wished to exhibit them at the Secession.

In this spiritual condition, de Chirico took a trip to Florence and Rome in October 1909. After visiting these two cities he felt that Milan no longer satisfied him and wanted to leave. For the intellectual vivacity of the city and the fervent discussions among its artists and intellectuals, Florence was his chosen destination, a city where he could cultivate his interests and embrace new paths in his painting.²⁷ Thus, he began to make arrangements to move Florence, which occurred on an unspecified date, but sometime in the middle of March 1910. Until that date,

²⁵ Here I am not following the interpretation Ester Coen has given in her article *Mannequins and Vaticinators* in "Metaphysical Art" n. 11/13, 2014, pp. 33-42, in which she identifies the character of Böcklin's Ulysses, which will eventually become the icon symbolising Dante-Heraclitus-Zarathustra. As a matter of fact, the sphinx's face is turned upward, and not inward, toward its soul, as Coen argues (p. 39). More persuasive is the parallel she makes between the sphinx and the prophetising speaking horse that Neptune had presented to Argos, about which de Chirico speaks in his Parisian manuscripts (1911-1915). In this regard, de Chirico says that he imagined it "crouching on his hind legs like a sphinx, in his eyes and in the movement of his white neck all the enigma and the infinite nostalgia of the waves" (G. de Chirico, *Scritti/I Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici: 1911-1945*, edited by A. Cortellesa, Bompiani, Milan 2008, p. 625; see the full English translation of the Parisian manuscripts in this periodical). But the upward gaze defying the future is not that of the melancholic, hunched man who pensively stares into his soul.

²⁶ See *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, cit., p. 61.

²⁷ The fact that a sister (Aglæ) and a brother (Gustavo) of de Chirico's father lived in Florence may have influenced his decision.



fig. 8 G. de Chirico, *The Departure of the Argonauts*, 1910 fig. 9 G. de Chirico, *Serenade*, 1910

de Chirico was in Milan, where he completed the portrait of his brother Alberto, his last truly Böcklinesque work.

At this point, it is necessary to report, with some emphasis, the aforementioned chronological chart that de Chirico wrote for the 1962 edition of his *Memoirs*.²⁸ The chart clearly and precisely illustrates the order of the type of the works he had executed: first the Böcklinesque paintings and then the Metaphysical ones. De Chirico wrote: “In 1908 he is in Milan.²⁹ Still thinking of the paintings of Arnold Böcklin, which in Munich had impressed him with their poetic arid narrative content and plastic qualities, he painted a series of pictures with a Böcklin-like flavour, portraits of his mother and brother and also self-portraits. *Then he went to Florence, where he visited the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace.* [Author’s italics, *ed.*] He painted a few *more* Böcklin style paintings, but under the influence of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, of whom he was at that time a fervent admirer, he *began* [in Florence, *A/n*] that series of paintings which form a prelude to Metaphysical painting. In 1911 he left for Paris.”³⁰

On 11 April 1910, de Chirico wrote the second letter to Gartz, previously quoted, in which he told his friend that he had found a new studio for himself. At this point, de Chirico began to pursue the goals he had spoken about to Gartz at the end of 1909, as he was leaving Milan. As he wrote in his *Memoirs* and in the Angelo Bardi biography, the Böcklinesque period was over; now in Florence and stimulated by the city’s vivacious cultural milieu, he could commence a new phase of his painting. The paintings he executed during this period are “too profound” and they would be “out of place” at the Secession. What are these “too profound” paintings?

It is clear that these cannot be thought of as the Böcklinesque paintings that de Chirico said he had destroyed, for these would not have been too difficult for the public to grasp, but rather, as paintings in which he began to distance himself from Böcklin and which represent an

²⁸ Manuscript held in the Fondazione Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Archive in Rome.

²⁹ The specific dating (1908 or 1909), which is very likely to be a mistake on the part of de Chirico (see note 5) does not affect his artistic development.

³⁰ G. de Chirico, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, cit., pp. 245-246.

attempt at the creation of a personal style. The works he considered “too profound” cannot be identified with the first Metaphysical paintings either, because the tone of the letter tells us that he was still working earnestly to achieve other goals than those he had in Milan, something he had not yet accomplished at the time, causing him to postpone the exhibition of his paintings to the following autumn. De Chirico never called the paintings he executed under the influence of the reading of Nietzsche, namely *The Enigma of the Oracle*, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Hour*, “too profound”. He also never said these were works he was unprepared to show. In fact, he affirmed that the day they would be exhibited, would be an event and a surprise for the whole world, so much so that the first two, along with his self-portrait, were later shown in his first exhibition in Paris.



fig. 10 G. de Chirico, *Procession on a Mountain*, 1910

As far as we are concerned, the works de Chirico was indicating and that he had painted at the time are *The Departure of the Argonauts* (fig. 8), *Serenade* (fig. 9) and *Procession on a Mountain* (fig. 10). In comparison with his first attempts, their innovative content breaks even more with his Böcklinesque works. We are dealing here with only a few paintings – just three – but, after all, de Chirico was suffering from an intestinal illness at the time that had begun to affect him in Milan and almost prevented him from working. As we shall see later, the content of these works is not as simple as it seems, but is, in fact, rather complex. Therefore, it is very likely these were the works he had in mind when he said that he no longer wanted to exhibit them at the Secession, because they would not be understood. Besides, the stage of intellectual and artistic maturity to which he had arrived kept him from considering works that were still partly Böcklinesque. It was better to wait for an extensive solo show; three paintings were too few for an exhibition, so the very idea of it was postponed.

We would be gravely mistaken if, based on this letter, we suppose that de Chirico executed his first Metaphysical paintings in 1909 (and *The Enigma of the Oracle* even prior to his trip to Rome), as Roos and Baldacci do, reason for which they have pre-dated the so called Böcklinesque canvases to 1908. All the more so given that neither scholar can explain how it is possible that he did not produce any paintings over the course of 1910, jumping to the nonsensical conclusion that during the summer and autumn of that year he only read books to help his brother compose his *Poema fantastico* and proceeded along a musical course, that of “the most profound music” that was not his and in which he did not even believe, so much so that when Gartz asked him what profound music is and how could profound music exist, he replied: “you’ll have to ask my brother”.

Roos and Baldacci make this mistake because they have failed to acknowledge the various

stages of development of the artist's work. They assume de Chirico suddenly switched to his new style of painting as a result of a revelation he had as he passed by Piazza Santa Croce in Florence, whereas painting is an art that follows an artist's intellectual maturation and his technical and stylistic means, the colours used and their harmonic arrangement, that is, all that makes up the reality of a canvas. It is on the basis of these considerations that we should analyse the three canvases that are deemed as Böcklinesque, and ask whether they really are so, or rather display, in addition to new themes, a new style that is no longer that of Böcklin's, but is not yet that of the new Metaphysical paintings.

b) Paintings which could not be Understood at the Secession

Let us now examine the most innovative paintings. The first, in chronological order, is *The Departure of the Argonauts*, where the author's biography clearly identifies with a mythological narrative. From Volos, the place of departure of the Argonauts, the de Chirico brothers left for Europe. We see them together on the shore: the first, taller, dressed in white, looking at the lyre he holds in his hands, is Alberto; the second, dressed in black, is Giorgio. They are portrayed as the two Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, awaiting the Argonauts' ship to enter the port. On the right, surrounded by trees, we see a little white house, typical of Greek villages, while on the left, behind tall trees, there is a round temple, a feature also present in *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* as well as in several other paintings of the first Metaphysical period, inspired by mythology and reflecting the painter's personal history. Below, on the left side, there is a statue of Pallas Athena, at whose feet are laid the animals for the propitiatory sacrifice to be performed before the journey. Once again, we can find a connection between mythology and autobiography: the brothers' father, Evaristo de Chirico, who at that time was directing the construction of the railroads for the king of Greece, had erected a statue of Athena at the Volos train station, where it still stands today.³¹ At the centre of the painting a thin stream of water, like that of a fountain, flows down into a marine cave: perhaps a reminiscence of the goddess Thetis dipping her son Achilles in a spring so to grant him immortality (the painting is set in Thessaly, where Achilles was brought up by the centaur Chiron), that very immortality the Dioscuri are seeking as they set off. It is apparent that the point here is not to elevate one's biography to the level of mythology; it is not self-glorification or self-mythisation. Rather, it is to use mythology as an explanatory principle of one's personal history, a sign of Man's need to live surrounded by myths, of which Nietzsche speaks in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In the end, it is the myth that conquers the individual, not the individual that disposes of the myth at his own will.

³¹ Velissiotis has identified this statue as a copy of Phidias' Athena Nikephoros [Athena of Victory], of which there is the Varvakeion copy. Nearly all other scholars (including Baldacci, *De Chirico*, p. 57 and Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio*, Appendix) believe it to be Athena Parthenos, also by Phidias. The statue that de Chirico's father, Evaristo, had built in Volos is Athena Promachos, protector of war (it is worth noting that the Turks would have soon invaded Thessaly). As indicated by Roos, the source of de Chirico's statue is to be found in Anton Springer's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1907), which he must have bought and studied while in Munich. De Chirico needed a source he could physically look at while painting, so he did not copy the Athena Promachos erected in Volos. For Baldacci, this statue has the same function that later will be played by the train, that is, an image associated with the memory of the painter's father. Baldacci's statement is correct, but cannot mean that this association represents the switch from Symbolism to Metaphysical Art, intended as the transfiguration of one's personal history into mythology. This is because the canvas executed six months earlier lacks *Stimmung*, the very atmosphere of a Metaphysical painting, which is the question of the meaning of life and the universe as a whole.

As regards to its colour, this canvas is quite sober: the light ochre of the earth, the white and black of the clothes, the statue, and the temple, the very light green of the water, the dark green of the trees that contrasts with the clear pale blue of the sky. The trees cast dark spindly shadows, which appear almost like drippings of colour, giving the impression of something precarious. In this painting, we no longer find the bright colours of the previous paintings: everything is rather dull. As a result, there is no exaltation of the scene of the departure and its ensuing glory, no glorification of myth. If we want to understand the meaning of this painting, we have to look elsewhere and consider elements hitherto neglected. One of these, on the left, halfway up the hill, is a small church, very similar to a tholos, which we will find again in *The Enigma of the Arrival and of the Afternoon* of 1912. The two strange human figures in this work also seem to match the characters referred to as Argonauts in the other painting: in fact, they have arrived at their destination. Another important structural element of *The Departure of the Argonauts* are the steps leading down from the hill to the landing area. The symbolic meaning of the steps is, of course, well known. But here the point is not the ascent, but the descent from the hill and the church toward the landing where the scene of the departure occurs, that is, next to the fountain and the cave from which immortality flows. This descent into the depths of the cave is the descent into the depths of one's soul, both the origin and the point of departure of the journey of our need for immortality. The point of arrival is the church, the tholos from where the descent into the soul had begun, as we can see the following year in *The Enigma of the Arrival and of the Afternoon*. Not by chance de Chirico chose the tholos as the beginning and the end of a journey: a tholos was, indeed, both a church and a tomb, the eternal mausoleum of our soul.

The same theme is treated in another painting, *Serenade*, that is also imbued with 19th century symbolism. It is inspired to a sonnet by the German poet Eduard Mörike, *Antike Poesie*. De Chirico quotes the second stanza of this poem at the beginning of his essay *A Discourse on the Material Substance of Paint*, where he addresses a topic that would become very important to him from the 1920s onward, although this text was published even more later on.³²

The lines of the second stanza, which certainly de Chirico knew by heart and, similarly to other poems or Nietzschean prose he kept in his memory, can truly help us explain this painting, hitherto misunderstood. Hereby follows the English translation of these lines:

*Here in a dark green valley the sacred wellspring
Speaks of the favour of chase muses;
Who is he who dips the sacrificial bowl,
As they once did, to fetch pure dew of art past?*

³² Giorgio de Chirico, *Discorso sulla materia pittorica*, in "Il Corriere Padano", 5 April 1942, illustrated with *Autoritratto in costume*; see also "L'illustrazione italiana", 26 April 1942, pp. 403-405; published in English for the first time in "Metaphysical Art" n. 5/6, 2006, pp. 541-547.

It is exactly what we see in this poem.³³ The painting is quite complex and without the help of these lines it would be impossible even to attempt an interpretation. Baldacci goes so far as to speak of a failed painting. It is useful to quote the whole sonnet, as it helps identify the various elements present in the painting.

I saw Helikon midst hazy clouds
 Hardly touched by the first rays of sun:
 But look! Now at once there it stands,
 Its peaks tinged in reddish dawn.

Here in a dark green valley the sacred wellspring
 Speaks of the favour of chase muses;
 Who is he who dips the sacrificial bowl,
 As they once did, to fetch pure dew of art past?

How so? Shall I never behold a master?
 Does no one wish to pluck of the old laurel?
 Then I saw Iphigenia's poet standing there:
 He it is, at the sight of whom these heights
 So charming, so sun-warmed come to life.
 He departs, and frosty raw winds set in.³⁴

The landscape that we see in front of us is, in fact, that of a mountain at the first light of dawn. On the valley floor, on the right, there is a fountain, to which the sonnet refers as the fountain of the Muses; in the foreground, on the left, we can see the three Muses: the first from the right, in a white dress, is at the centre of the painting; close to her, on the left, stands the second Muse, dressed in ochre, and the third one wearing blue, but almost entirely covered by a red cloak. The first two Muses are holding a violin and a mandolin respectively, whilst it is not sure if the third is carrying a musical instrument in her hand as it is concealed by the second Muse. On the right, at a certain distance, near the fountain, we can see another female figure, holding no instrument, with her arms and hands folded, wearing a white dress with a blue veil that covers her head entirely and almost her whole body. It is a well-known figure in mythology and ancient art: the veiled Aphrodite,³⁵ symbol of the chaste woman. The Muses stand on the dark valley

³³ The Italian translation of this stanza is by E. Peterich. De Chirico might have read it in one of the journals Peterich collaborated with during the Fascist era with various contributions and translations, as with "Rinascita".

³⁴ Translation by Charles L. Cingolani <http://www.cingolani.com/151em.html>.

³⁵ It is Aphrodites Sosandra, a bronze work executed by Kalamis around 465-460 BC. According to the Greek writer Lucian, it was located by the Propylaea, in the Acropolis of Athens. In Roman times, this statue was much admired, becoming a symbol of modesty, and was reproduced several times.

floor. In the painting, the perspective vanishing point coincides with a bell tower standing out over the mountain, not visible from the valley floor. From there, a paved-stone pathway leads to a house with well-lit windows and two unusual arches on the upper floor: an anticipation of de Chirico's future arcades. The two large windows stand out on the ochre and green colour of the hill, thus capturing our gaze: perhaps a reference to dark night lit by the light of asceticism? The colour of hills and trees is a dark ochre mixed with green, while the sky is light blue with greenish glares at the top of the painting. On the left are depicted some ruins with three pillars rising upwards, a memory of the past and almost a double of the Muses portrayed below.

In fact, the pathway is nothing other than the representation of the two-fold path of art, the descent into the interiority of one's soul, and the ensuing asceticism. The silhouette of a man painted in a pale blue, the colour of the sky, is walking up toward the lighted house. That man is indeed the poet of Iphigenia, Sophocles, mentioned in the third and fourth stanza of the sonnet, climbing toward the top of the hill.

This man ascends in reverse the path that is the descent toward the source of art. Similarly, in *The Departure of the Argonauts*, the descent toward the source of immortality is symbolised by the steps going down to the landing, the point from which the Dioscuri will depart in search of immortality on the incoming ship. In that painting, we saw how the water (of that which was identified as the fountain in which Thetis immersed Achilles) flows down into the cave. It is therefore not unlikely that de Chirico was familiar with *De antro nympharum*, the famous work by Porphyry, the disciple of Plotinus, where the cave of the nymphs is precisely the image of the soul. But if de Chirico did not know this work, Eduard Mörike certainly did: in the lines that we have quoted, the source of art is certainly the soul.

Therefore, for the interpretation of this painting we must look at the fountain at the bottom right, the source of the art about which the sonnet speaks. This is the real centre of the painting, not that of its perspective or structure, but the conceptual centre of the composition as a whole. Indeed, the fountain is not a natural source springing from the earth, as in *The Departure of the Argonauts*. Here, instead, as with many other fountains, the water flows from a stone upon which the image of the veiled Aphrodite is set, almost as to protect it: the sweet and virtuous woman who is the symbol of the mother. At the centre of the stone is the image of the two-faced Janus;³⁶ a staff is engraved on the left side of the image of the god and on the right, a key. The staff, which we will find also in *Autumnal Meditation* (1912), is a *lituus*, the shepherd's curved staff later adopted as the crook of Catholic bishops, the symbol of the spiritual guide of our life journey, an object that in the 1912 painting is left abandoned behind a statue on the seafront.³⁷ The staff

³⁶ The image of two-faced Janus could originally be found engraved in the reverse side of Axes, bronze Roman coins commonly coined during the Republic starting from the IV century.

³⁷ The *lituus* was an auspicious stick, used by the priests, already in use among the Etruscans, and inherited by the Romans. It appears on various coins, as a hallmark of the office held by the magistrate issuing the series, and is therefore a sign of authority. A *lituus* in the shape of the spiral handle adorned with three circles was given to the Christian bishops on the day of their investiture and therefore was considered a symbol of spiritual authority.

and the key are two symbols closely related to god Janus, that is, to the door. The key is indeed the symbol of the entry to the door, as the staff is something we carry with us when we walk out of the door and set out on our way. Janus is the god of the door, *janua* in Latin. Its nature is essentially double, being both an exit and an entrance, and can therefore be seen as the image of the double direction of the soul's journey, of the re-entering into oneself and the externalising of oneself. Of course, Janus can also be interpreted, as de Chirico later does, as a point in time from which one can either go backwards toward the past or project one's awareness toward the future.

Around this fountain, the true source of art from which the poet must draw his own song, several symbols convene. First of all, the fountain is in direct correspondence with the house above it, with the two windows lit on the ground floor and the two open, dark lodges. This is the paternal house, where the two floors and the two windows represent the duality from which the painter took his origin, namely, his father and his mother, in turn symbolised by the veiled Aphrodite and the lituus close to the fountain. As to its meaning, Janus is not yet a Nietzschean reference, but pertains to the Roman symbol of the door and the path that was codified in coinage. As to the philosophical wisdom, we must not look to Nietzsche here but to Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher de Chirico most cherished. One of Heraclitus' pronouncements illustrates the dialectic of the spiritual path: "The way up and the way down is one and the same".

In *The Departure of the Argonauts*, with the central steps descending to the coastal landing, as well as in *Serenade*, we find signs that indicate both the descent into the depths of the soul to draw upon the source of art and immortality, and the ascent, the asceticism produced with the composition of the work. This proves the close proximity of the two paintings, on both a stylistic and pictorial level, as well as on that of the elaboration of ideas. What is true for the path and the steps, also applies to the image of Janus, the two-faced god placed on the city gate architrave, which stands for both the entrance and the exit. Janus is placed there as a reminder that the path descending deep below and leading to the source of art is the same path that leads us to elevation. We must descend into the depths of the dark valley of our soul, so as to be able to hear the singing of the chaste Muses and draw with pure hands from the ancient source of art. In a letter to Apollinaire of 11 July 1916, de Chirico himself speaks of the coupling of Janus with Heraclitus:

"The Ephesian teaches us that time does not exist and that on the great curve of eternity the past is the same as the future. This might be what the Romans meant with their image of Janus, the god with two faces; and every night in dream, in the deepest hours of rest, the past and future appear to us as equal, memory blends with prophecy in a mysterious union".³⁸

³⁸ G. de Chirico, letter to Apollinaire, 11 July 1916, in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 7/8, 2008, p. 616.

So, if these two canvases were executed in Florence, then our interpretation explains what de Chirico wrote to Gartz on 11 April 1910, namely that what he was painting at that moment was too profound to be exhibited at the Secession; in that context, his paintings would be out of place.

We still have to examine the last of the three paintings that precede the actual Metaphysical period, *Procession on a Mountain*. Its subject is strictly linked to that of *Serenade*, but is much simpler with regards to conception and composition. It certainly cannot date to 1908 as it no longer presents any Böcklinesque features, and may be dated either slightly earlier, or slightly later than *Serenade*. It is a painting that emanates a strong sense of asceticism: the mountain's mass is an intense ochre and is divided by a road that leads to the church at the top, of which we can see, as in *Serenade*, only the bell tower. Surmounting it, there is an Eastern orthodox cross whose arms have inverse proportions compared to ordinary crosses: its upper section, placed above the head of the crucifix, which should normally consist of a wooden plank bearing the inscription "I.N.R.I.", is wider than the lower section, that is the crossbar on which Christ's arms are nailed. It would certainly be a true enigma, but Nikolaos Velissiotis, born in Volos, has told us that there is, in fact, a church with a bell tower and cross like this in the village of Goritza near Volos.³⁹ Thick lines of dark colour trace both mountain top and the edges of the road, where, in pairs, women in dark brown clothes, similar to masses of shadow, walk uphill toward the church, whilst other women in sombre clothes stand next to the church. Beyond these dark masses a glorious sky appears, striped with white clouds, in the tradition of Renaissance art, and sparse flying crows.

While in the previous paintings the texture of the plants, earth and figures appears rough, marked by the fragmented outline with which the clods of earth, pebbles and waves are painted, here everything tends to become smoother, more uniform, anticipating the absence of detail and the large patches of colour seen de Chirico's later works. The motive of the ascending road, of asceticism, which in the first painting is expressed through the image of the steps, is common to all of the three paintings that we have commented on so far and which we can undoubtedly assign to the spring of 1910 in Florence. Nonetheless, they differ both from the early Böcklinesque works that the painter claims to have destroyed (except for *Triton and Siren* and *The Path*), and from those in which he continues to adhere to the mythological themes of his master, but distances himself in terms of style, namely: *Battle of Centaurs*, *Dying Centaur*, *Prometheus*, and *Sphinx*. The overly Böcklinesque canvases that he destroyed are therefore not those we have examined here. Nonetheless, these are still considered as such by those who do not miss the opportunity to say that de Chirico lied in his *Memoirs*: that he not destroy these works but exhibited them in 1930 in Argentina. As we said earlier, the real and perhaps only Böcklinesque painting executed in this

³⁹ See N. Velissiotis, *La nascita della "Metafisica"*, cit., p. 61: "Those who live in Volos will easily recognise the procession taking place in the early morning of 15 August, toward the little church dedicated to Παναγίας Ζωοδόχου Πηγής ("Virgin Mary, Source of Life") on a hill in south-east Goritza. The population as a whole celebrates the festival on this date, which, we should not forget, is also Andrea de Chirico's date of birth."



fig. 11 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Oracle*, 1910



fig. 12 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, 1910

period is *Portrait of the Artist's Brother*, a work he could not destroy, as it portrayed his brother and was a valuable painting. This work, painted in 1909 and finished in 1910, before leaving Milan, is de Chirico's real great farewell to the painter of Basel.

The interpretation we have just given of both *The Departure of the Argonauts* and *Serenade* on the basis of the similarities they have with de Chirico's later paintings, shows the tight connection between the 1910 paintings and the Metaphysical ones, which followed as their natural development, so much so that the latter cannot be explained except as the development of the former. Consequently, what de Chirico himself has always affirmed cannot be denied, namely, that later paintings such as *The Enigma of the Oracle* (fig. 11) and *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* (fig. 12), were executed in the summer and autumn of 1910 and followed by *The Enigma of the Hour* (fig. 13). The element of novelty, or what was added in these later canvases, is the atmosphere, the Nietzschean *Stimmung* that de Chirico admirably described in the famous double-dated letter to Gartz: the date 24 *Juillet* is cancelled and later redacted as 26 *Januarii* 1910, that is the 26th day of the month of the god of doors, Janus, the month in which, simultaneously, one exits the year just passed, 1910, to enter the new one, 1911. Janus is indeed depicted with a double face because the door from which one leaves is the same from which one arrives. The letter, in fact, is to be considered to have been written on 26 December 1910.⁴⁰

Continuing to uphold the thesis that *The Departure of the Argonauts* and *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* represent the conclusion of *Poema fantastico* is to look upon these from a completely foreign point of view which is that of Savinio's art. The same applies to *Serenade*, which is held to be an unsuccessful anticipation of Nietzschean themes. *Serenade* is actually linked to Roman

⁴⁰ Baldacci has finally acknowledged that the letter that he defined as the "key document" to support his thesis, is dated 26 December 1910. This is also the consequence of the fact that greater attention has been paid to this issue, especially after Paolo Picozza requested that the scholars at the Archivio dell'arte metafisica apply more stringent philosophical criteria to the question. The Archivio has agreed that the letter dated "26 *Januarii*" was, in fact, written on 26 December 1910. Therefore, since de Chirico wrote: "This summer I painted the most profound paintings that ever existed", the logical consequence is that the first Metaphysical canvases were executed necessarily in 1910.

symbolism, family relationships, and the dualism between man and woman as the origin of the work of art – something we already know from de Chirico's reading of Schopenhauer – and, lastly, the Romantic and sacred concept of the work of art as purification and asceticism. Those who consider these paintings failures or express similar judgments not only fail to provide an explanation regarding their stylistic elements, they indeed show themselves to be lacking historical knowledge and an understanding of the deep narrative contents held in the painting's details. Only those who fail to understand these features in their totality can consider these paintings as failures.



fig. 13 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Hour*, 1910

c) *The Most Profound Pictures ever Painted*

And now we come to the two final theses by Baldacci, starting with the first one, “How can the absolute impossibility of dating the birth of Metaphysical Art, therefore the first painting, to the autumn of 1910 be demonstrated?” along with our counter-thesis.

In order to define the issue, let us hear what the painter himself says in his *Memoirs*:

“In Florence my health grew worse. Sometimes I painted small canvases. The Böcklin period had passed and I had begun to paint subjects in which I tried to express the strong and mysterious feeling I had discovered in the books of Nietzsche: the melancholy of beautiful autumn days, in the afternoon in Italian cities. It was the prelude to the Italian Piazzas painted a short time later in Paris and then in Milan, in Florence and in Rome.”⁴¹

In the autobiography signed “Angelo Bardi”, Giorgio de Chirico says the same thing about the immediate aftermath of his return to Italy:

“He spent his first Italian year in Milan. During this period, he painted works in which the influence of Böcklin was still all too evident. He destroyed these paintings himself. He then moved to Florence where the influence of the masters (whose work was gathered in the city's museums), his attraction to the Tuscan landscape and the natural evolution of his personal faculties, allowed Giorgio

⁴¹ G. de Chirico, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, cit., p. 61.

de Chirico to start discovering his path. It is to this Florentine period that works such as *The Enigma of the Oracle*, or *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, belong. We speak of two works that, by their poetic power and their element of ‘discovery’, are worthy, even if dated 1910, of being placed on the same level of any of his later works”.⁴²

Therefore, according to what the artist tells us, it is not difficult to establish whether *The Enigma of the Oracle* was painted before or after *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*. Moreover, although the two canvases are very close in time, a rigorous analysis of their composition and iconography shows the fundamental reasons why de Chirico switched from an earlier poetics, very close to Böcklin, to his own poetics, more precisely defined in *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*. Further on, in his *Memoirs*, regarding his first exhibition at the Salon d’Automne of 1912, he affirms:

“I submitted a self-portrait and two small compositions, one inspired by Piazza Santa Croce in Florence and containing that exceptional poetry I had discovered in the books of Nietzsche, while the other, entitled *The Enigma of the Oracle*, contained the lyrical quality of Greek prehistory.”⁴³

De Chirico’s explicit double sources of inspiration, the spirit of Nietzsche and Greek prehistory respectively, entail stylistic, poetic, and chronological differences between the two paintings. It is clear that the lyrical quality of Greek prehistory is chronologically closer to the mythological “moment” of Böcklin, which the painter eventually abandoned to turn to the Italian city square and the atmosphere of Nietzsche’s poetry that will dominate all his later paintings.

Baldacci and Roos, instead, argue that *The Enigma of the Oracle* and *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* were painted in the summer and autumn of 1909 and that these are the canvases de Chirico refers to in his letter to Gartz dated “Anno Domini M.CM.IX. Poseidione XXVII”, that is, 27 December 1909, where he says he wants to exhibit some of his works at the Secession. In a later letter, dated 11 April 1910, he changes his mind, finding that they are too profound to be understood in an event such as that. Baldacci and Roos give for granted that in the 11 April letter de Chirico is referring to the paintings he executed in Milan in 1909. In fact, de Chirico writes: “the works I am creating now [that is in April 1910 in Florence] are too profound”. This is by no means a small oversight!

To solve the question, let us move on and analyse the later letters, starting with the more problematic one, an often-quoted document that has been creating major date-related issues:

⁴² Id., *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico*, cit.

⁴³ Id., *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, cit., p. 65.

Florence 26 [24 *Juillet* cancelled] *Januarii* 1910
Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 20

Dear friend!

Firstly, I want to wish you and your kind wife a happy new year.

I have not been able to write until now due to my many engagements and also my health, which has unfortunately not been very good this last year.

Please be patient, as I will now tell you a bit about myself.

What I have created here in Italy is neither very big nor profound (in the old sense of the word), but *tremendous*. This summer I painted paintings that are the most profound that exist in the absolute. Let me explain these things somewhat, because surely you have never heard anything like it. [...]

It brings me immense joy to have painted them, when I exhibit them, possibly in Munich this spring, it will be a revelation for the whole world.

I am studying a lot, particularly literature and philosophy and I even intend to write books in the future (now I will whisper something in your ear: I am the only man who has understood Nietzsche, all of my paintings demonstrate this.)

I have many other things to tell you, for example that now, my brother and I have composed the most profound music. I will sign off now, as I have already said too much. You will see and hear for yourself and will be convinced. [...]

My mother and brother say hello and wish you a happy new year.

G. de Chirico⁴⁴

The main issue that came to light regarding this letter concerns its date: “24 *Juillet*” was cancelled and replaced with another date. And what date exactly? Roos, who published the document, identified the date as “26 *Januar* [January in German] 1910”. This is another oversight, because, although the letter was written in German, the date is in Latin and reads not “*Januar*”, but “26 *Januarii* 1910” or “*Januarius*”. So, when was the letter actually written?

It has been observed that if “24 *Juillet* 1910” was cancelled, the moment when the letter was written is certainly posterior to that date, so it cannot be 26 January 1910. An explanation must be searched for elsewhere and is very likely to be found in the unusual way in which de Chirico dated his letters, as he did with the letter dated “M.CM.IX. Poseidione XXVII”, written exactly one year earlier and, also in this case, containing greetings for the New Year!

While the correction into “26 *Januarii*” is written in de Chirico’s hand, Paolo Picozza has demonstrated that “24 *Juillet*” was instead written by the painter’s mother. It is sufficient to compare the letter we are examining with her letter to Gartz, of 7 July 1908 (the first letter of the

⁴⁴ See G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio*, p. 424; English translation in “*Metafisica*. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico” n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 561-562.

epistolary, written in French) from Abano Terme where she asks him for news about her son: the handwriting of the word “*Juillet*” is practically identical in the two letters.⁴⁵ So, the point now is to identify the exact date of the letter. The German dating “26 *Januar*” upheld by Roos cannot be correct. As Maurizio Calvesi has argued, the month is actually written “*Januarii*” or “*Januarius*”, where “*Januarius*” does not correspond to the German “*Januar*”, January, but means the month of Janus, the god of doors. The letter was written to wish a happy new year to the Gartz family. Now, one does not wish a happy new year on 26 January, but, as de Chirico had done in the previous year, at the end of December. Why, then, was it thought that the letter could be dated 26 *Januar* 1910? The date must certainly be posterior to July 1910; therefore, it cannot be January 1910. We have to find another explanation for the “*Januarii*” 1910 date.

As previously mentioned, this difficulty can be surpassed inasmuch as day 26 fell in the month of *Januarius*, the god of the doors. Janus, appearing in the form of a fountain in *Serenade*, is the two-faced god that brought 1910 to a close and inaugurated 1911; therefore, the days of *Januarius* or *Januarii*, are the last days of 1910 and the first of 1911, and they include 26 December. So, while 1910 is coming to an end, de Chirico, after completing his “most profound” paintings over the summer, wrote to Gartz to wish him a happy new year. The painter was enthusiastically satisfied with the work he was able to complete in the summer and, wishing to be as eccentric and enigmatic as when he dated his earlier letter “M.CM.IX. Poseidione XXVII”, wrote “26 *Januarii* 1910”. This dating refers to the 26th day of the god of doors of the year 1910, namely 26 December 1910. So, here we have two instances of letters with greetings for the new year, written on 27 December 1909 and 26 December 1910 respectively.

This re-enactment is confirmed by de Chirico’s subsequent letters to Gartz in the first days of 1911. The exchanges intensify as Savinio was organising his concert in Munich, which eventually took place on 23 January 1911. As Savinio did not speak German, Giorgio helped him negotiate, with the help of Gartz, the fee for the cultural association Tonhalle, as results from two letters by de Chirico of 28 December 1910 and 3 January 1911, respectively. In neither letter did de Chirico allude even vaguely to wishes for the new year: this means that he had already done so in the letter of the 26th day of Janus, similarly to what he had done at the end of 1909 when he wished Gartz a happy new year and sent a panettone to his wife.

After the 3 January letter, de Chirico received a letter from Gartz who, as we can infer from the painter’s answer, informed him of the death of his brother Kurt and responded to the negative criticism that Giorgio had expressed on Michelangelo: this could not have happened a year later, which would be instead the case if de Chirico’s letter had been actually written on 26 January 1910. Indeed, it would be absurd to think that Gartz, in informing de Chirico about the death of his brother, also responded to the criticism on Michelangelo that the painter had expressed the year before. Moreover, in his immediate message of condolence, de Chirico apologised to Gartz for having asked him to speak with the director of the Tonhalle in such a tragic circumstance and came back to what

⁴⁵ See P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910*, cit., p. 57.

he had said with regard to Michelangelo in the 26 December letter and Gartz's ensuing criticism. Once again, this confirms that the letters dated "26 *Januarii*" (26 December), 28 December 1910, and 5 January 1911, all belong to the same moment of transition from 1910 to 1911, and develop themes related to the reading of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* of when he had created his new paintings. As for his judgment on Michelangelo as "the stupidest of all painters", in the letter of 5 January 1911, de Chirico wished to point out that his words were misunderstood. Basically, he meant to distinguish the classical conception culminating with Michelangelo's *David*, in which he saw the "super-human" as the highest development of the potentialities of art, from Nietzsche's conception of the "super-human" as he who has looked at the abyss of nothingness and of the Eternal Return and achieves a despairing victory, a victory as sweet as the melancholy of the autumn. So, by reading *Zarathustra*, he was able to win over his own melancholy and understand a new concept of eternity:

"a new air has entered my soul, a new song has reached my ears and the whole world appears totally changed – the autumn afternoon has arrived, the long shadows, the clear air, the serene sky, in a word: Zarathustra has arrived, do you understand?? Do you understand the enigma this word holds – the great cantor has arrived, he who speaks of eternal return, he whose song has the sound of eternity. It is with a new magnifying glass that I now examine the other great men and many appear small and coarse, some even smell bad – Michelangelo is too coarse – I have thought about these questions at length and can no longer be mistaken. It is only with Nietzsche that I can say I have begun a real life."⁴⁶

Everything de Chirico wrote and the brief time-lapse between the series of letters to Gartz demonstrates not only that the letter in question was written on 26 December 1910 as a happy new year greeting, but also proves that de Chirico's enthusiasm for Nietzsche, after reading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is to be dated to the summer of 1910 and that this very enthusiasm and confidence in his own abilities are at the origin of the first Metaphysical paintings.⁴⁷

Let us now examine Paolo Baldacci's theses. If things were not as we have just described them, that is, if the letter had in fact been written in January 1910, the most profound paintings like *The Enigma of the Oracle* and *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, would have been executed in the summer of 1909.

One crucial fact goes against this interpretation: in his Paris *Manuscripts*, dated 1911-1915, de Chirico affirms to have had his first "revelations" *after* his trip to Rome. Since this trip took place in the autumn of 1909, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle* could not have been painted in the summer of 1909, when he was still living in Milan. This

⁴⁶ *Letters by Giorgio de Chirico, Gemma de Chirico and Alberto de Chirico to Fritz Gartz, Milan-Florence, 1908-1911*, cit, p. 565.

⁴⁷ For an in-depth analysis of the time line of the letters, see P. Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico: The Falsification of de Chirico's Life History*, in "Metaphysical Art" n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 28-60.

would mean that he would have painted them in the summer, only to have his revelation in October, which would be absurd. If, instead, they were executed in the summer-autumn of 1910, as his letters say, then everything adds up.

Baldacci is well aware of this, and in order to justify his absurd reconstruction in his essay *Conferme sulla cronologia 1909-1910 e la nascita dell'arte metafisica*, he provided some clarification, although limited to *The Enigma of the Oracle*. Even though he has always argued that de Chirico executed the Metaphysical paintings after his trip to Rome in October 1909 and the revelation he had while in Florence, now, on the basis of his Paris *Manuscripts* (n. XII in particular) and their chronology, which was established by Giovanni Lista, Baldacci affirms (p. 10) that *The Enigma of the Oracle* was executed after de Chirico left the Academy in Munich and before his trip to Rome [sic!]. He writes: “familiarity with the chronology of these texts allows us to identify the correct order in which Giorgio executed his works at that time and confer a more precise meaning to the manuscript of the beginning of 1912 (manuscript n. XII according to the temporal sequence delineated by Giovanni Lista) where the painter speaks of his experience in Milan ‘after I left the Academy in Munich’ and before the trip to Rome and Florence.”⁴⁸

This entails that *The Enigma of the Oracle* was conceived between the summer of 1909 and 22 September of that same year. Now, manuscript XII, which begins with de Chirico leaving the Academy in Munich and describes the tortuous paths he took while he was under the spell of Böcklin and Klinger, does not provide the indication that Baldacci thinks it does, namely the phrase “before the trip to Rome and Florence”. In fact, the text reads:

“Then during a trip I made to Rome in October, after having read the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, I became aware that there is a host of strange, unknown, solitary things which can be translated into painting. I meditated a long time. Then I began to have my first revelations.”⁴⁹

Baldacci’s thesis is that *The Enigma of the Oracle* was painted in the summer of 1909 before the trip to Rome of the following October. But this means to argue that de Chirico painted it before his revelation, something that is untenable because, since the painting is an enigma, it would have been based on a revelation. As for *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, Baldacci holds that it was executed in October or November 1909 after the trip to Rome, but does not provide any proof other than indicating that in the *Manuscripts* de Chirico says to have conceived it after a revelation in Piazza Santa Croce on an autumn afternoon. Actually, the *Manuscripts* never detail to which year this afternoon must be assigned. Nonetheless, the year can be clearly inferred from what de Chirico said in his explanation of the revelation that led him to execute the painting: “In a clear autumn afternoon, I was sitting on a bench in Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. Indeed, it wasn’t the first

⁴⁸ P. Baldacci, *La pittura e la musica “più profonde”*. *Conferme sulla cronologia 1909-1910 e la nascita dell'arte metafisica*, cit., pp. 7-22.

⁴⁹ G. de Chirico, *Éluard-Picasso Manuscripts, 1911-1915*; now in *Scritti/1*, cit., pp. 611-612.

time I had seen this square”.⁵⁰ As Calvesi has noted, from de Chirico's words we know that at the time of the revelation, he had been living in Florence for some time, so the year must be 1910.⁵¹

Now, if the letter dated 26 *Januarii* 1910 were to be assigned to January 1910 rather than December 1910, given that de Chirico writes here that the “most profound” or “tremendous” paintings were executed in the summer, then he should have created *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* in 1909 as well, which is Baldacci's original thesis. Therefore, also in this case, the painter had the revelation and then executed the painting without having seen Piazza Santa Croce, which is absurd. In conclusion, the counter-thesis we advanced at the beginning of the present essay remains valid: it is absolutely impossible to argue that Metaphysical Art came into being in 1909.⁵²

Baldacci has also challenged the members of the de Chirico Foundation who believe what de Chirico says, that is, that the painting dates to October 1910: “Now someone at the de Chirico Foundation – where no one dares to contradict the dogma according to which the first Metaphysical painting was executed in Florence in 1910 following the well-known phenomenon of the ‘revelation’ – should explain to us how it is possible that, given that autumn begins on 22 September, Giorgio could have managed to compose, by mid-October, musical works bearing the same titles of the famous painting inspired by the enigma of the Nietzschean autumn; that his brother Alberto could have composed seventeen music pieces on the same theme; and that both could have entitled the whole of these musical compositions as *Rivelazioni dell'eterno ritorno*”.⁵³

Baldacci's challenge is so nonsensical and biased that we cannot even take it up. It is based on the assumption that de Chirico was too busy helping Savinio with his seventeen musical pieces for the *Poema fantastico* to paint his own first Metaphysical works; therefore, he would have had to execute them much earlier than autumn 1910. Baldacci's tenet is so convoluted that it takes more effort than usual to untie its deceiving knots. Maybe he intends to say that the amount of Savinio's work was so massive that de Chirico was not able to free himself by 22 September (the beginning of the autumn) and allow some time for himself to paint. Or his logical deduction is that before completing the musical compositions, it was necessary to have a final, comprehensive title, and that de Chirico had to finish his work hastily so to have a title ready for use.

⁵⁰ G. de Chirico, *Méditations d'un peintre. Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir*, in *ibid.*, pp. 649-652.

⁵¹ See also, V. Noel-Johnson, *De Chirico's Formation in Florence [1910-1911]. The Discovery of the B.N.C.F. Library Registers*, in “Metaphysical Art” n. 11/13, 2013, pp. 137-177. The study demonstrates how in 1910 de Chirico's regular frequentation of Florence's Central National Library, situated a brief distance from Piazza Santa Croce, substantiates the statement: “Indeed, it was not the first time I had seen this square”.

⁵² Baldacci's words are astonishing when he states that: “when in December 1910 [de Chirico] says ‘This summer I painted the most profound paintings that exist in the absolute’ he is referring to *The Enigma of the Hour*, but ideally [sic] he is also including the other two [enigmas, *Aln*] and drawings”, see Baldacci's preface to N. Mocchi, *La cultura dei fratelli de Chirico*, p. 15 note 21. The German original text reads: “*In diesem Sommer habe ich Gemälde gemalt die die tiefsten sind die überhaupt existieren*”. The real problem is not the translation – even if between “in general” and “in the absolute” we find a significant difference – but the fact that Baldacci, in not accepting the historical truth supported by de Chirico's own words, written in December 1910, further manipulates the matter, suggesting which canvases the painter was actually referring to, and adding “drawings” (but of which drawings is he speaking about, since in the de Chirico-Gartz correspondence drawings are never mentioned?) and using the word “ideal” in reference to this. But between “ideal” and historical truth, substantiated by documentary evidence, I prefer the latter.

⁵³ P. Baldacci, *Una parola (quasi) definitiva sulla cronologia 1908-1910*, in “Studi online”, IV, 7-8, 2017, pp. 14-15.

There is no doubt that music and painting can be complementary for that which concerns variations of the tonality of the notes and the tonality of the colours, as well as to do with the contrasts, narrations and descriptions that are the product of their combinations. Still, if all depends on music, then we can just leave aside de Chirico and focus on Savinio as the master of Metaphysical Art and forget about the epiphenomenon represented by painting. That said, I can only suggest Baldacci quit studying and publishing on de Chirico.

Conclusions

At this point, we can draw a number of conclusions concerning the earliest stage of de Chirico's career, which spans from 1908-1909 to April 1910:

1) In December 1909, de Chirico wrote to Gartz, expressing his wish to participate in the Munich Secession with canvases he had painted during the course of that year. In his *Memoirs* and in other autobiographical writings, de Chirico defines these paintings as Böcklinesque and affirms to have destroyed them at a later time. Therefore, with the exception of two or three canvases, those executed in that period and carried down to us are not Böcklinesque. He decided to leave Milan on the basis of the new experiences he had had during a trip to Rome and Florence in the autumn.

2) In the spring of 1910, de Chirico refused to exhibit at the Secession the works he had executed in 1909, as he was thinking of organising a solo show at a future date and because at the time he was painting works that would seem out of place in a Secession hall; these can be identified with *Serenade*, *The Departure of the Argonauts* and *Procession on a Mountain*. During this period, he read Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, Plato, Kant, and other works of relevant cultural interest.

3) In December 1910, exactly one year after the end of the Böcklinesque period and that of transition, a new phase of de Chirico's painting had already begun. He calls it not only "the most profound", as he did in April 1910, but also "tremendous". The letter dated 26 *Januarii* 1910, which is, as we have seen, dated 26 December 1910, shows a more and more enthusiast de Chirico, because through his paintings and readings he is progressively approaching the state of excitement he felt following his reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Zarathustra*. At the end of 1910, his painting has taken a completely new path. The profound and obscure paintings of which he speaks in April 1910, imbued with a Romantic and sacred conception of the work of art, give way to the "tremendous" canvases begun in the summer after the painter's encounter with Nietzsche's nihilism. These new canvases are the product of visionary art, an art that looks into nothingness and destiny: a Metaphysical Art.

Translated by Francesco Caruso