

## ALLOCUTION À L'OCCASION DE L'EXPOSITION CHIRICO

ON-STAGE PRESENTATION OF GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S  
 PAINTINGS BY PAUL GUILLAUME AT  
 THÉÂTRE DU VIEUX-COLOMBIER, NOVEMBER 3, 1918

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The unpublished document *Allocution à l'occasion de l'exposition Chirico* is part of the Jean Walter et Paul Guillaume Collection at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.<sup>1</sup> The text, composed of four type-written sheets, was written to accompany the on-stage presentation of works by Giorgio de Chirico at *Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier*. In the opening sentence a handwritten correction: “*Vous allez assister*” to “*Vous assistez*”, changes the verb tense from the future to the present. And today, by way of this unique document, it is the past which makes its way forward into the present. Ninety years ago, on Sunday November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918, nine of the artist's paintings were presented on stage at the *Vieux-Colombier* theatre in Paris in the intermission between two acts of a matinee music and poetry show. Giorgio de Chirico's 'speed of light' solo-exhibition was curated by Paul Guillaume within a program organized by the association “Art et Liberté” presided by Edouard Autant and his wife Louise Lara.<sup>2</sup> Guillaume, the most avant-garde art dealer of the day, proposed the event by describing it in these terms: “I would like to make a presentation that has never before been done. I will have de Chirico's paintings brought on stage. Nine important [paintings] will be presented while I read a brief text that I have prepared. This could be a small interval of five minutes in addition to your program. If you accept, would you kindly let me know by pneumatic dispatch? I see no problem if you wanted to have the canvases on display in the entrance while the people arrive.”<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the post-1915 period, when de Chirico left Paris to enrol in the army in Italy, the on-stage exhibition at the *Vieux-Colombier* theatre is unfailingly referred to as an original and important event organized by Paul Guillaume with the paintings by the artist in his possession. Despite the recognised singularity of the presentation, very little is known about it due to a lack of documentation. The only existing document consists in a manuscript entitled: *A propos de Giorgio de Chirico* signed “Paul

<sup>1</sup> Presumably written by Paul Guillaume, the unsigned document is exhibited in a display case with no heading or archival reference number in a room of the museum with various documentation regarding the *Jean Walter et Paul Guillaume Collection*.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Lista, *De Chirico et L'avant-garde*, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne 1983, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, P. Guillaume to E. Autant, letter dated 'Monday, October 1918' written on letterhead paper 'Les Arts a Paris. Revue d'Actualités Critiques et Littéraires des Arts et de la Curiosité. Directeur Paul Guillaume', p. 260. A review of the exhibition states there were eleven paintings. See below.

Guillaume, October 27, 1918. Preliminary presentation of works by Giorgio de Chirico organized by 'Art et Liberté' at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, on November 3, 1918". The manuscript was published, probably as a supplement, the following month on December 15<sup>th</sup> in "Les Arts à Paris", a periodical founded by Paul Guillaume and Guillaume Apollinaire in the spring of the same year (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> In the same issue of the periodical, a discrepancy concerning the date of the presentation appears in the column "Échos – Actualités" where the event is reviewed as such: "An unprecedented manner of presenting paintings was kicked off at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier by Paul Guillaume on November 10<sup>th</sup> during a session organized by "Art et Liberté". Paintings by Mr. Giorgio de Chirico, the most unique painter of the young generation, were brought on stage while Paul Guillaume presented their melancholic titles in an interesting commentary and facts regarding the complex and profound disquiet perceivable by a painter of today. The applause of the elite audience was largely compensated by the tumultuous interruptions of an unleashed Mme. Rachilde."<sup>5</sup> Paul Guillaume's text could not be clearer: signed October 27<sup>th</sup> for the presentation scheduled on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. After the initial letter of proposal, Paul Guillaume wrote again to Edouard Autant on November 1<sup>st</sup>: "Dear Sir, the leaflet to distribute at the entrance is at the printer's and there is no time to substitute the signature. In point of fact, the signature "Art et Liberté" would have been more logical, but it didn't even occur to me. You will have to decide in compliance with your committee, if it is the case to distribute the notice or not. Personally, I adhere to a perfectly fair rule [...]"<sup>6</sup> It is presumable that *A propos de Giorgio de Chirico* was the text destined for distribution as its content perfectly suits the objective of providing the public with a brief communication before the show. The fact the message was presumably only signed "Paul Guillaume" would have had the effect of tying the event to his gallery of the same name. Obviously, as the manifestation had been predisposed within a theatrical program curated by an association, the reference, which may have been interpreted as being of a commercial nature, would have been considered inappropriate. It is therefore plausible that the "Art et Liberté" committee subsequently decided against notice's distribution at the theatre entrance, as it lacked reference to the association. This would explain Paul Guillaume's reasoning behind publishing the manuscript text in his periodical the following month and adding, under his signature: "Preliminary presentation of works by Giorgio de Chirico organized by '*Art et Liberté*' at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, on November 3, 1918". With this, two results were achieved: firstly, the event was rightly accredited to "Art et Liberté", as well as registered historically, and secondly, Paul Guillaume's thoughts on Giorgio de Chirico's art were made public. This last motive (bearing in mind how the reception was received), was not something he was able to do during the exhibition, due to both the non-distribution of the preliminary presentation to the spectators and to the clamour raised by the public in the theatre during his presentation. A review published in the weekly satirical magazine "Le cri de Paris" the following Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, settles the issue of the date and illustrates the event clearly:

<sup>4</sup> See Paul Guillaume, *A propos de Giorgio de Chirico* in "Les Arts à Paris" (Actualités Critiques & Littéraires des Arts & de la Curiosité), no. 3, December 15, 1918. Cfr. anche C. Giraudon *Paul Guillaume et les Peintres du XXe siècle*, La Bibliothèque des Arts, Paris 1993, pp. 43-45. The consecutively numbered figures pertain to images found in the Italian text *Discorso introduttivo per la presentazione di opere di Giorgio de Chirico sulla scena de Le théâtre du Vieux-Colombier* in this periodical, see pp. 371-382.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul Guillaume *A propos de...*, cit., *Échos – Actualités*, p. 5. For the transcription of the original French text see note n. 5 in *Discorso introduttivo...*, cit., in this periodical.

<sup>6</sup> G. Lista cit., P. Guillaume to E. Autant, November 1, 1918, p. 260.

### A Tempest in front of Paintings<sup>7</sup>

On Sunday, the associations *Musique* and *Art et Liberté* held a session at the *Vieux-Colombier* theatre. The crowd was literally crushed at the ticket check while serious ushers announced “There are no more places for ticket holders”. And Mr. Nozière remarked on how noteworthy “the uproar services” were. The crowd wanted to applaud Mrs. Ida Rubinstein, whose famous legs are the success of a show. But Mr. Sébastien, author of *Tragédie de Salomé*, in which she was to appear, calmly informed his friends:

“I know very well that Mrs. Ida Rubinstein will not be ready before January.” Music calmed the hearts of the audience, consoled by Mr. Decaux’s *Minuit passe*, in which 12 strokes of the clock mark the crime time, together with Igor Stravinsky’s lively *Napolitana*. But a new kind of exhibition triggered uproar.

For the first time ever, paintings *were exhibited* on stage. Eleven paintings by the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, held captive on the frontline between a battle and the armistice, were positioned on the stage.

These canvases are of a clear design on a background of pure blue. They were not of the public’s taste. And suddenly a dominating woman’s voice pierced through the ironic laughter:

“To Austria! To Austria! Take them away! Viva Italy! This is an insult to youth!”

It was Mrs. Rachilde. And the members of *Art et Liberté* were stupefied to hear the avant-garde of yesterday heckling the avant-garde of today.<sup>8</sup>

(figs. 2 and 3)

Another important testimony is found in Jean Cocteau’s acute observations in *Le mystère laïc*<sup>9</sup>, where he writes of a screaming audience that understood nothing of the canvases presented to them by Paul Guillaume and of the “laughter of a crowded room of intellectuals in front of a deserted city of de Chirico’s”. Considering the debacle of the presentation, at this point one may ask oneself if the credit offered to “Art et Liberté” in the art dealer’s periodical in December was indeed appreciated and perceive in its publication a sophisticated touch of humour on Paul Guillaume’s behalf, after the association had refused to distribute the “instruction leaflet”. The day after the event, Gino Severini

<sup>7</sup> In the column “Lettres et Arts”, in “Le cri de Paris”, n. 1128, November 10, 1918. A special thank you to S. Summers for locating a copy of this issue.

<sup>8</sup> Marguerite Eymery, French novelist known as *Rachilde* (1860-1953).

<sup>9</sup> See J. Cocteau, *Le Mystère Laïc*, in which he makes a comparison between the presentation at the *Vieux Colombier* theatre and a show he had seen the previous night at the Empire theatre, in which, in front of the audience, a magician built a small box, put a bell in it and then ordered the bell to ring. At the sound of the bell, the audience, sure they revealed the trick yelled: “There’s someone in there!” instead of marvelling at the incongruence between the box’s size and the physical presence of a person. “The cruel and stupid audience was unable to focus its attention on what made the trick an enigma. They were hypnotized by human presence, encouraged by mediocrity and by the muddle of their minds [...] / Where had I heard those heavy laughs, that elegant laughter, those “enough! enough!” of clever spirits who won’t be fooled? I asked myself. And all of a sudden I remembered: it was in 1917, at the *Vieux Colombier* theatre, where one of de Chirico earliest supporters, Paul Guillaume, presented a number of the painter’s canvases. “There’s someone in there! There’s someone in there!” These cries illuminated me on the laughter of a crowded room of intellectuals in front of a deserted city of de Chirico’s.” Cocteau mistakenly dates the event 1917, instead of 1918. Éditions des Quatre Chemins, Paris 1928.

resigned from his position on “Art et Liberté”’s operational committee where he had acted as the *trait d’union* between the association and the Italian avant-garde.<sup>10</sup>

If the mix-up regarding the signature on the preliminary presentation had not happened, the Sunday afternoon audience, as they entered the theatre hall and settled into their places, would have read on the leaflet they had been handed: “A Propos of Giorgio de Chirico. The Art of Giorgio de Chirico is based on revelation. Even though the appearance of modern painting’s plastic form has changed, it continues nevertheless to be based on the faithful copy of objects and on a more or less deformed organization of these objects within the composition. As opposed to de Chirico, who only paints when a sudden and fatal vision presents itself before his spirit... This is outside of the sphere in which that which is criticisable can be understood. We delve into a metaphysical space where common sense and even the intellectual meaning of life no longer exist, where only rare and unexplainable emotions continue to live...”<sup>11</sup> Not having read this brief introduction, the audience was unprepared for the sudden and fatal vision of de Chirico’s paintings positioned on easels upon the stage. And therefore, the spectators were unable to grasp such a vision in any other way than by using their common rather than their spiritual sense. From the racket that the spectators raised, it is also certain that not a word of Paul Guillaume’s speech was heard – that is if he was indeed able to get a word in edgewise –.<sup>12</sup> Today, after ninety years, those words can finally be heard in the document *Allocution*:

#### **Address on the Occasion of the de Chirico Exhibition**

– 1 –

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are witnessing the first ever presentation of works of modern painting on the stage of a theatre. The paintings are those of Giorgio de Chirico, who is presently enrolled in the army in Italy.

While these canvases are on stage, I will allow myself to read to you some notes, which are inevitably fragmentary and are, to some extent, general considerations regarding the spirit which has brought into being the movement which we define by the name modern art; a movement in which Giorgio de Chirico’s work participates and which “Art et Liberté” has the noble mission of defending. Giorgio de Chirico has been along melancholic paths.

His restless nature has lent a vigil ear to the many signals that have reached him... Then, his path became pure once he found no trace of anyone preceding him.

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<sup>10</sup> See Lista, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>11</sup> For the transcription of the original French text see note n. 11 in *Discorso introduttivo...*, *cit.*, in this periodical.

<sup>12</sup> In all likelihood this is the text Paul Guillaume mentions in his first letter to Autant.

– 2 –

An artist who conceives a discovery in demoniacal joy, raises himself to the level of a Creator. From there, his oeuvre is fatally devoted to the impervious memory of the Ages.

Thus, the artist, in virtue of an occult force, acquires prescience and is transformed, becoming a prophet and a magician.

Everything around us is nothing but ignorance. The goings-on that occupy the world teach us no other beauty than that of heroism. The work of men is indifferent to the vast majority of other men. Everything that touches humanity is alien to the inner SELF of the creative being.

Artists live in the isolation that their superiority requires them to. Superior, as they surpass politicians; they surpass men of the Church. They surpass all those upon whom ART has not placed its mark.

– 3 –

It is not rare that they also become very pure.

How could the hands of an artisan not be pure while he works?

Art is a mystery as profound as life itself.

Artists are new Ulysses: having stuffed their ears with small balls of wax, they pass by the singing voices that tempt and vanquish other men.

By not apprehending the call of these mortal songs, since they resort to these small balls of wax, they can hear more clearly that which their own voices sing, strange songs that no man has ever heard.

– 4 –

Owing to a distant reflex, men are heirs to the eras that precede their own. The memories of past ages make an impression on these successors who apply themselves to translating them into their own time. Although, there are very few who, having recognized the abyss that separates them from their congeners, take on the superhuman audacity of creation.

And if a late desire to imitate tempts once again these creators while in their withdrawal, it is nothing but a desire to imitate that which is greatest. (so the verse of a luminous philosopher says). But just what is this 'greatest'?

In many of his paintings Giorgio de CHIRICO has shown a new Italy. His compatriots may be grateful to him for this one day. It may also be that his name will become eternal.

The corners of the buildings cut into a green coloured sky, like the arched

bow of a trireme adorned with a proud figurehead, wounding the space of an unexplored sea.

These images hide a mystery that de CHIRICO has brought from his land, the land of Italy.

The painted image, if profound, is tranquil and clear. The structure that gives it its form is strong. The spirit that emanates from it is fatal. But this serenity is only apparent; the apparent calm of this surface hides depths that harbour innumerable unsuspected things. Secret things all saturated with an intense charm, mysterious things of which we can only have a premonition, without ever being able to explain them.<sup>13</sup>

This presentation speech has found, once again, its original voice with which to express itself (fig. 4). The document consists of four sheets of square-shaped light-weight paper typed in blue, on which the title "Address on the Occasion of the de Chirico Exhibition" and a few hand-written corrections are marked.<sup>14</sup> After a very long time, it constitutes an authentic 'announcement', not as a presentation of Giorgio de Chirico's paintings this time, but rather, as a source which sheds light on a historical event of which little information remains. The document re-establishes Paul Guillaume's point of view and allows access to his words which, having been misunderstood at the time, have been overlooked for almost a century. The discovery of the document situated in the display case of the museum that houses his collection, evokes the "simple" mystery of the hiding place in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*: in plain view and therefore invisible.

The exhibition occurred at a time when important historical events were taking place. The following week, on Saturday November 9<sup>th</sup>, the artistic milieu of Paris mourned the sudden loss of Guillaume Apollinaire, who died from the Spanish flu. Two days later, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the French capital burst with joy at the news of Germany's signing of the Armistice, putting an end to the First World War. As the document *Allocution* states, Giorgio de Chirico was in Italy at the time. In his memoirs we read that, still stationed in Ferrara, he too had come down with the Spanish flu, from which he was in the process of recovering.<sup>15</sup> Paul Guillaume's poignant eulogy entitled *Guillaume Apollinaire è mort* was published in the same issue of "Les Arts à Paris", along with the exhibition review and Paul Guillaume's manuscript. It begins as follows: "The poet Guillaume Apollinaire died on November 9<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. I learned of the painful news the next day, Sunday while leafing through "Intransigeant". I was baffled. I never expected anything like it". He adds that it is impossible to list all the artists for whom Apollinaire has been the "the radiant sun" and specifies that "it was through him that I met the enigmatic painter Giorgio de Chirico".<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For the transcription of the original French text see note n. 13 in *Discorso introduttivo...*, cit., in this periodical, p. 377.

<sup>14</sup> A drawing of a woman's bust, presumably by Paul Guillaume, is visible on the back of the third sheet.

<sup>15</sup> See G de Chirico, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, in which he recalls the moment in Ferrara when he learned of the Armistice: "All at once the door opened and my brother came in, shouting that the war was over; Germany had asked for an armistice. I put down my brushes and ran to the window. The crowd was getting bigger: groups of men went by singing; soldiers embraced each other and danced in the middle of the street. Although I was still very weak I could not resist going down into the street. I put a woollen scarf round my neck and wrapped up well in a coat, throwing one end over the left shoulder, unconcerned with military discipline, and went out." Peter Owen, London 1971, p. 86.

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Guillaume *Guillaume Apollinaire est mort* in "Les Arts à Paris", n. 3, cit., p. 2.

From the few reports that exist, the temporary exhibition could not have lasted longer than a few minutes amidst the chorus of catcalls and booing from the worked-up crowd. Re-enacted in Jean Cocteau's eloquent illustration ten years later, it has since been wrapped in a veil of mystery. To use a term coined by Allan Kaprow in 1959, the event orchestrated by Paul Guillaume could be defined as the first "happening" in art history, considering the intense participation and energy expressed by the audience. The title *Vieux-Colombier* has reverberated in a strange and empty echo over the years; cited in monographs and on lists of de Chirico's exhibitions, but nothing more. The date of the presentation was erroneously recorded despite it being one of the only factual pieces of information in existence. Jean Cocteau remembers it as taking place in 1917. In *Painting in France, 1895-1949*, Giovanni di San Lazzaro recorded it as such: "...in 1916 or 1917, in the middle of the war, he [Paul Guillaume] got up an artistic-patriotic afternoon party at the Vieux-Colombier at which he put on show the pictures de Chirico had left behind in Paris when he went to Italy to join up. The exhibition aroused lively interest."<sup>17</sup> Over the years, the exhibition has continued to arouse the interest of art critics and historians alike, but without ever managing to shed light on the event itself.

In 1949, when James Thrall Soby, the eminent specialist of de Chirico's early period, learned of the exhibition by reading the reference in *Painting in France*, he wrote to the author asking for further information, saying that he would like to find a catalogue or description of the event in order to identify and define which paintings de Chirico left behind in Paris when he returned to Italy in 1915.<sup>18</sup> At the time, Soby was preparing the second edition of *The Early Chirico*<sup>19</sup>, and besides being concerned with the identification of paintings not included in the 1941 edition, he was also interested in finding manuscripts by the artist to include in the new edition. He tells di San Lazzaro that he had already written to many friends, critics and collectors, including Jean Paulhan<sup>20</sup> and René Gaffé, for news about the *Vieux-Colombier* theatre exhibition, but without success. Di San Lazzaro answered his letter, offering some clarification concerning the event, and explained that the paintings de Chirico left in his studio in rue Champagne Première in Paris in 1915 were subsequently sold by Giuseppe Ungaretti (for a few hundred francs, to pay the rent) to Jean Paulhan who, in turn, sold a number of them to André Breton. He defined the event, saying it was not exactly an exhibition, but rather, that some of de Chirico's paintings were shown during an afternoon conference. He suggested that Soby write to André Breton, and also added that he had just spoken to Mrs. Severini who remembered having attended the conference and seeing a painting with a "red glove", although she was unable to say whether there had been other paintings or not.<sup>21</sup> Soby then sent a letter to André Breton with the same request for information, specifying that he had already searched everywhere for news on the event.<sup>22</sup> He also took the initiative of writing to Simone Gille-Delafon at the "Association International des Critiques d'Art", asking whether she knew of anyone specialized in art research whom he would hire

<sup>17</sup> G. di San Lazzaro *Painting in France 1895-1949*, The Harvill Press, London, 1949, p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> J. Thrall Soby to G. di San Lazzaro, March 21, 1950, copy of typescript letter, James Thrall Soby Papers, VII.III.B.2.b.i. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

<sup>19</sup> J. Thrall Soby *The Early de Chirico*, Dodd, Mead & Company, New York 1941.

<sup>20</sup> J. Thrall Soby to J. Paulhan, December 27, 1949, copy of typescript letter, JTS, VII.III.B.2.b.iv. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>21</sup> G. di San Lazzaro to J. Thrall Soby, March 28, 1950, typescript letter in French, JTS, VII.III.B.2.b.i. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>22</sup> J. Thrall Soby to A. Breton, April 3, 1950, copy of typescript letter in French, JTS, VII.III.B.2.b.ii. MoMA Archives, NY.

for a couple of weeks to conduct research on the event in various Parisian libraries. In the same letter, Soby briefly outlined the *Vieux-Colombier* problem as such: "I am desperately anxious to find some references to this exhibition in magazines or newspapers of the time, and if possible, of course, a list of the pictures shown."<sup>23</sup> When The Museum of Modern Art published the second edition of his monograph *Giorgio de Chirico* in 1955, strangely, Soby made no mention of the *Vieux-Colombier* theatre and even left it off the exhibition list.<sup>24</sup> A choice that may have been made due to the unsuccessful search for the titles of the paintings exhibited – an area of specific interest for the scholar –, or possibly due to the fact that the event had been defined a conference and not a regular exhibition. Soby might have thus concluded that the presentation was not of historical importance.<sup>25</sup>

De Chirico's physical absence from Paris at the time of the exhibition is compensated by the clear presence of his ideas in Guillaume's discourse. Terms such as 'mystery', 'melancholic paths', 'revelation' and 'fatality' as well as concepts such as "the depth of the art work hidden below its apparently tranquil surface" and "the inner SELF of the creative being", clearly relay the basic principles of the artist's thought process and convey the enigmatic quality of his painting. An art dealer and business man, Paul Guillaume was gifted with great sensitivity and a marked sense of intuition, which allowed him to form close professional as well as amicable relationships with artists (fig. 5). From Ferrara, de Chirico wrote to him: "I received your vibrantly enthusiastic and heroically encouraging letter. I am very happy to know that in the world there is a man like you who is both a friend and a colleague; the fact that you get excited about things that are so metaphysical, as it were, you my dear friend, must have an intelligence that is rare, very rare, because the more I live, the more I know people, and the more I realize to what extent this gift of God (intelligence) is a very unusual thing."<sup>26</sup> Their mutual accord continued regardless of the distance and the uncertainty of war time. However, it is almost impossible that, while stationed in Italy, de Chirico would have been aware of Guillaume's intention of presenting his work during the intermission of a theatre performance. It is unlikely there would have been sufficient time between the conception of the idea and the actual manifestation to inform the artist, and even less to involve him in the preparation of a discourse based on the artistic theory of his work, in support of the presentation. Nevertheless, de Chirico's ideas are clearly evident in Guillaume's words and in the images he evokes. His familiarity with de Chirico's thought-process can be attributed in part to conversations held with the artist during the period of their initial collaboration, when de Chirico lived in Paris. This close attention is something the art dealer continues to afford the artist, while reading the letters sent from Ferrara: "As far as I am concerned, I am sufficiently happy in this beautiful and melancholic Ferrara where life's destiny has brought me. For men of fate, all events, even the saddest, and it could be especially these, are necessary for the devel-

<sup>23</sup> J. Thrall Soby to S. Gille-Delafon, March 31, 1950, copy of typescript letter, JTS, VII.III.B.2.b.i. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>24</sup> J. Thrall Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955.

<sup>25</sup> A list of the paintings exhibited has not been found. The discrepancy between the number of paintings – nine – in Paul Guillaume's letter (P. Guillaume to E. Autant, October, 1918) and the exhibition review, in which eleven paintings are mentioned, could be due to Guillaume having added an additional two paintings to the group, or to a journalistic error. The painting with a "red glove" which Mrs. Severini remembers, could be either *The Song of Love*, or *The enigma of fatality*, both painted in 1914. In addition to paintings of the Parisian period, Guillaume also possessed works executed in Ferrara which de Chirico had sent to Paris.

<sup>26</sup> G. de Chirico to P. Guillaume, letter dated "the 16<sup>th</sup>", presumably September 1916. The letter is published in the exhibition catalogue *La pittura metafisica*, Palazzo Grassi, Neri Pozza Editore, Venice 1979, pp. 118-119.



opment of the mysterious forces that dwell within them and that then appear in their artwork; and I now feel that my departure from Paris, the separation from the environment in which I was living, and the apparition of this city of destiny in which I find myself, are all things fatefully necessary to my creative self; does this not suffice to be happy?"<sup>27</sup> Guillaume assimilates the profoundness of these words, conceptualizing them in his discourse: 'mysterious forces', 'apparition'. He lends particular attention to de Chirico's personal circumstances at that time: the 'fatality' of the detachment from the life he knew, the 'isolation' into which destiny has forced him, things necessary to "the inner SELF of the creative being". It is almost as if he saw de Chirico's destiny and present remoteness, as a question of necessity and an experience inherent in the very act of artistic creation.<sup>28</sup> Guillaume demonstrates not only a thorough knowledge of de Chirico's poetics, but also of the connection between these poetics and the mysterious phenomenon of creation itself, made visible and intelligible through his images. He is clear about the fundamental aspect of 'revelation', in which the artist's work is the fruit of a "sudden and fatal vision" which "presents itself before his spirit".

The profound familiarity of the artist and his work that Guillaume shows seems to indicate that he had read and taken into careful consideration de Chirico's theoretical writings of 1911-1915, and in particular the *Testi teorici e lirici*.<sup>29</sup> The theoretical base of a number of concepts which Guillaume focuses on can be found in these manuscripts. Two of such theories include the contraposition of de Chirico's art and modern painting in general, as well as the necessary detachment from common sense in order to attain a new vision. The word '*chemin*', way or path, is a term de Chirico uses in *Testi teorici e lirici* as a metaphor for the journey an artist undertakes in his research. Guillaume applies this general concept to de Chirico's own research: "Then, his path became pure once he found no trace of anyone preceding him." His words closely echo those of de Chirico's: "To have the courage to renounce everything else. This is what the artist of the future will be like; someone who renounces something every day; whose personality becomes purer and more innocent every day."<sup>30</sup> Even the focus on the profundity of art and the mystery of life is a shared characteristic of Guillaume's commentary and de Chirico's theoretical writing: "And yet, visions inhabit our spirit: they are nailed to eternal foundations. On the square piazzas the shadows lengthen in their mathematical enigma; behind the walls senseless towers appear covered in little flags of a thousand colours; and everywhere there is the infinite and everywhere, mystery."<sup>31</sup> De Chirico's concept of immortality is clear: "for a work of art to be immortal it must go completely beyond human limits"<sup>32</sup>, whilst

<sup>27</sup> Excerpt of a letter to P. Guillaume dated Nov. 1, 1915. The letter is published in *ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> With regard to de Chirico's relocation to Italy in 1915, see the author's study in *Hidden Harmony. The King's Game* in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico", n. 5-6, Rome, 2006, pp. 134-136.

<sup>29</sup> A sincere thank you to S. D'Angelosanto for her assistance in the theoretical analysis. Formerly part of Paul Eluard's collection, the *Testi teorici e lirici* subsequently went to Picasso, hence their acquired title *Manoscritti Eluard-Picasso*. It is very likely that Paul Guillaume consulted these writings as this 1918 presentation contains similar concepts. The text *Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir* (which is found within the group of writings entitled *Méditations d'un peintre* in the *Manoscritti Paulban*), is considered a parallel version of the *Testi teorici e lirici* and contains similar theories. The manuscript was owned by Jean Paulhan, who acquired paintings and personal effects which de Chirico had left in Paris in 1915. See *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, edited by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, Turin 1985, Xb, pp. 428-437. Republished in Giorgio de Chirico, *Scritti/1 (1911-1945). Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici, Manoscritti Eluard, Manoscritti Paulban*, edited by A. Cortellessa, Bompiani, Milan 2008, pp. 575-648, 649-659.

<sup>30</sup> *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., Xb, p. 18. Now in Giorgio de Chirico, *Scritti/1...*, p. 614

<sup>31</sup> *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., *Deuxième partie. Le sentiment de la préhistoire*, p. 24. Now in Giorgio de Chirico, *Scritti/1...*, p. 622.

<sup>32</sup> *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., VIII, p. 15. Now in Giorgio de Chirico, *Scritti/1...*, p. 607.

Guillaume announces that “An artist who conceives a discovery in demoniacal joy, raises himself to the level of a Creator. From there, his oeuvre is fatally devoted to the impervious memory of the ages” and “In many of his paintings Giorgio de CHIRICO has shown a new Italy. His compatriots may be grateful to him for this one day. It may also be that his name will become eternal.” Guillaume amplifies de Chirico’s intimate considerations on art, conferring immortality, not only to his oeuvre, but to the artist himself.

Guillaume’s ambition and commitment are stratospheric considering that he obviously deemed it necessary to first introduce the audience to the very concept of Modern Art, before presenting de Chirico’s paintings to them! There on the wooden planks of the stage, Guillaume took the helm of de Chirico’s *‘paquebot’*, cutting through the “green coloured sky” and “wounding the space of an unexplored sea”, presenting the artist’s paintings thus: “These images hide a mystery that de CHIRICO has brought from his land, the land of Italy.” It is possible that, in provoking the strong reaction of the crowd, the idea of Modern Art was amplified by the powerful image of the Italianate spirit evoked by de Chirico’s paintings and Paul Guillaume’s words and, instead of arousing the artistic spirit of the intellectuals who were surely present in the crowd, the combination may have struck a cord of nationalism and awakened age-old Franco-Italian rivalries. During the artistic-patriotic matinee session at the *Vieux-Colombier* theatre, in a moment of nationalistic expression and a week before the Armistice, Giorgio de Chirico’s paintings came to the rescue of Modern Art.

*Translated by Katherine Robinson*