

## GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND THE "RETURN TO CRAFT" THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTISTIC TRAINING BETWEEN ATHENS AND MUNICH

*Salvatore Vacanti*

### Introduction

The importance of material substance in art was undoubtedly felt by Giorgio de Chirico since his early artistic experiences, realised during his initial apprenticeship undertaken in Greece between [attending] Athens Polytechnic and private lessons with artists whom his father entrusted him to from time to time. Later on, his maturation as an artist in Munich and, in particular, his studies at the Academy (which was the best in Europe at the time, and a custodian of Old Master technical knowledge) must have significantly strengthened his interest in the "fine craft" and Old Master techniques. As some studies which were published at the end of the 1990s have highlighted, the history of artistic techniques has been the subject of fervid interest by numerous scholars and painters close to that environment. However, de Chirico's careful consideration of technique and painting skill started to articulate itself in a systematic and complex way in a series of programmatic essays at the time of his collaboration with Mario Broglio and his magazine «Valori Plastici» from 1918 to 1922. This interest was to become all the more central to the artist's actions, causing indisposition amongst critics who, recognising him as "reactionary", were all the more adverse to him. However, the years of Metaphysical Art (1910-1918)<sup>1</sup> have not been noted with any particular research on the material substance of paint nor accompanied by programmatic studies of any type, least of all regarding the "problem of technique" and "craft".<sup>2</sup> When de Chirico started to write about Metaphysical Art, he was already involved in his new research (which saw him involved with Broglio), allowing him to arrive at a type of painting that was, by now, distant from that of his Parisian years (1911-1915) and his time in Ferrara (1915-1918). The «Valori Plastici» years were to also become characterised by his experimentation with oil tempera, in the quest to emulate past masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the intention of recovering both style and technique. This process was accompanied by

<sup>1</sup> For de Chirico's early metaphysical period, see M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico, il tempo di Apollinaire - Paris 1911/1915*, Rome, 1981. For his subsequent Ferrara period, see M. Calvesi, *La Metafisica schiarita*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> The paintings of this period use the common technique of oil with a rather sleek and smooth painted material. See P. Montorsi, *Una teoria del restauro del contemporaneo*, in *Conservare l'arte contemporanea*, L. Righi, Nardini, Florence, 1992, pp. 9-58.

the complex theoretical observation which the artist carried out through his essays which were mainly published in Broglio's magazine, as well as in other sorts within the "return to order" climate in Italy, a period specifically known as the "return to craft". Having borne the definitive break with the Surrealist group, this was a journey which was to lead Giorgio de Chirico into writing and publishing *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* (Small treatise on painting technique) in 1928, which was written in manuscript form and encouraged by the Milanese editor Giovanni Scheiwiller. In light of the aforementioned studies regarding the Munich environment and the research on techniques and the material substance of paint, carried out there between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it seems right to search for the roots of such a phenomenon in de Chirico's early training. This took place in his native Athens and Munich of Bavaria where, above-all, he must have matured his technical-painting culture, having stayed there (even if only occasionally) from 1906 to 1909.

### From Athens Polytechnic to the Academy of Munich

The technical apprenticeship undertaken by Giorgio de Chirico consists of two phases that take place in two different places which were geographically very far away from one another. The first backdrop is Greece where the artist was born and lived until 1906<sup>3</sup>, when he left in order to go, together with his mother and brother, to Germany, about a year after the death of his father. He had been the one (having noticed his son's precocious interest in drawing) to ask a young railway employee to give young Giorgio his first lessons, when they still lived in Volos, as recalled by the artist in his *Memorie* (Memoirs).<sup>4</sup> Giorgio's increasingly clear vocation for drawing and painting convinced his parents that he should attend the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, where they transferred to in the meantime. As the artist explains in his *Memorie*, this institute was called the Polytechnic at the time and did not correspond to current academies, allowing enrolment at just twelve years old and comprising of several areas: engineering, maths, chemistry, geometry, drawing, painting, sculpture, decoration and xylography. In the meantime, his father, who saw him progress as a draughtsman, often entrusted him to private lessons with a few artists of various artistic extraction who were active in Athens.<sup>5</sup> It was, however, at Athens Polytechnic that de Chirico undertook his first complete technical apprenticeship, a course that he also refers to in his *Memorie*.<sup>6</sup> The artist followed courses in drawing and black and white sketching for four years before going on to join a painting class which was run by Professor Jacobidis. Born in Lesbos in 1852, he had studied first in Athens and then in Munich (1877-

<sup>3</sup> Joseph, Maria, Albertus, Georgius de Chirico was born on 10th July 1888 in Greece, at Volos, the capital of Tessaglia. His father, Evaristo, who belonged to an aristocratic family, was a railway engineer and head of the Franco-Italian firm which was involved in the construction of the Tessaglia railway at that time. It was for this reason that the de Chirico family moved several times between Volos and Athens, often changing house. For the reconstruction of these movements, see G. dalla Chiesa, *Verso i luoghi della formazione. Atene: scenario dell'anima - Monaco: strumento della Bildung*, in *De Chirico nel centenario della nascita*, exhibition catalogue, Milan-Rome, 1988, pp. 50-58. For the biographical events of the artist, see also M. Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La vita di Giorgio de Chirico*, Allemandi, Turin, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> "My master Mavrudis came three times a week to give me drawing lessons". See G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, Bompiani, Milan, 1998, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> The first teacher was an Italian called Barbieri, who came to the house to correct his drawings. Afterwards, de Chirico was sent to the Swiss-French painter called Gilléron, who had a drawing and painting school of sorts at home. Then, once again thanks to his father, he showed his drawings to an Italian artist called Bellincioni. These experiences must have occurred around 1899, the year that the de Chirico family established itself permanently in Athens, and 1900, when Giorgio enrolled at the Polytechnic of that city. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

1883), remaining in the Bavarian capital to practice his profession for about twenty years. With his return to Greece, he first became the director of the museum in Athens, then professor and finally, the director of the capital's Polytechnic.<sup>7</sup> De Chirico comments about him: "[...] he drew very well and, one day in his studio, he showed me some charcoal nudes he had done when he was young at the Academy of Munich; I was impressed by the perfection of the drawing and the relief and finesse of the modeled form. He was an excellent professor and was very demanding with regard to execution and form".<sup>8</sup>

Athens was linked to Munich of Bavaria from 1832 onwards, following the assassination of the first governor of Independent Greece, the protector powers (England, Russia and France) decided to offer the hereditary monarchy to Prince Frederick Otto of Bavaria. Thanks to Otto I of Bavaria's interest in the organisation of public institutions, Athens (which had been elected the capital of Greece in 1834) quickly saw the founding of the Polytechnic in 1836 (fig. 1) and the University in 1837. The best students were awarded and thus went on to complete their studies abroad and principally in Munich of Bavaria. Therefore, the Munich school had a particularly strong influence amongst the main teachers at the Academy of Athens, whilst the influential orbit of German painting broadened with the new generation of Greek artists.<sup>9</sup> The second phase of de Chirico's artistic formation took place – not by chance – at the same Academy in Munich. This happened at the same time as the maturation of his philosophical and aesthetic culture which, as one sees, was also the fruit of his visits within the Florentine environment of the time.<sup>10</sup>

After his father's death in 1905, Giorgio continued to work at the Polytechnic's painting school, although he did fail his end-of-year exam. The following year, his mother made the decision to leave Greece and move to Munich in Germany as her sons could continue their studies in a more stimulating cultural environment there. Munich was a big cultural and artistic centre. The image which it put out (above-all confirmed in the provinces as in the case of Greece in those days) was that of "the Athens of central Europe", the capital of figurative arts and, thanks to Wagner's presence, also of music.<sup>11</sup>

The reconstruction of the events in Munich is fundamental with regard to both the Academy and the studies which the artist undertook there and, even more, the research environment centered on the material substance of paint and its stability in context with the studies on ancient technique taking place at the time, in order to understand the maturation of de Chirico's interest for the problem of technique, which blossomed with the "return to craft" after 1918, and finally came to fruition in 1928

<sup>7</sup> See G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti: Monaco, Milano, Firenze 1906-1911, Bora, Bologna, 1999*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> See G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit. p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> See G. dalla Chiesa, op. cit. A link was also testified by architectonic events if one considers that Munich was built as a true and real Attic illusion during that period by the same Bavarese architects who simultaneously attended to Athens' urban system, the new capital of Independent Greece.

<sup>10</sup> It was during his stay in Munich that de Chirico started to study German philosophy and in particular, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Weininger. However, Calvesi has explained that it was more the Florentine environment (gravitating around Giovanni Papini) which urged him to read the works of these philosophers. During his years at the Academy, the artist often went to Florence, where all those stimuli came together in the execution of his early metaphysical paintings in 1910, straight after leaving Munich. See M. Calvesi, *La Metafisica schiarita*, cit., pp. 15-62; F. Poli, *Considerazioni sulla prima formazione di de Chirico: fondamenti estetici e riferimenti di cultura artistica*, in «Rivista di estetica», 1983, n. 13, pp. 91-126; M. Calvesi, *L'universo nella stanza*, in *Giorgio de Chirico Pictor Optimus*, exhibition catalogue, curated by F. Benzi, M.G. Tolomeo Speranza, Carte Segrete, Rome, 1992, pp. 15-45.

<sup>11</sup> The artist remembers: "Everyone advised us to go to Germany, to Munich, as I could continue to study painting and my brother music. Munich was then a bit like Paris is now." G. de Chirico. *Memorie*, quoted on p. 64.

with the writing of the *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*.<sup>12</sup> This research was pursued both by public institutions and by individual scholars in a distinctive manner. In fact, it was this type of research which persuaded Böcklin to incessant (at times rather unorthodox) experimentation which undoubtedly inspired Giorgio de Chirico who was already influenced by the Swiss artist on a stylistic and philosophical level.<sup>13</sup> The technical knowledge that came to light in the hotbed of those studies must have strongly influenced him since he returned (sometimes with precise style) to the ideas set out in *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* and, even earlier, in the programmatic text *Pro technica oratio*<sup>14</sup>.

De Chirico's departure from Greece took place between August and September 1906. He reached Munich in the autumn after having visited Venice and Milan, and a brief stay in Florence with his paternal uncle, Baron Gustavo de Chirico. The intermittent presence of Giorgio de Chirico in Munich of Bavaria is testified by various dates between the end of October 1906 and the spring of 1909. In the documents<sup>15</sup> that have been found, de Chirico's name is registered at the Academy of Fine Arts for the first time on 27th October 1906 (fig. 2), the date prior to which he had to sit the entrance examination<sup>16</sup> which he talks about in his *Autobiografia* of 1919<sup>17</sup>. After this, his presence at the Academy is recorded from 1st May 2007. Calvesi has suggested that the artist could have returned to Florence in the meantime<sup>18</sup> whilst there are those who sustain that de Chirico remained in Munich together with his mother and brother, who had instead left for Italy without Giorgio around March 1907.<sup>19</sup>

The German art schools were amongst the best during the 19th century. In particular, the academies of Düsseldorf (which was the most important one in the mid-nineteenth century). Munich and Dresden all exerted a great influence over European art but above-all, over Scandinavian, Russian and American art.<sup>20</sup> The Academy of Düsseldorf, founded in 1767, was advantaged by its close link with the city's collection of paintings which was then one of the main collections in Germany whilst that of Munich, founded in 1770, was a modest institute, starting off with just two teachers and about forty students. When the Elector of the Palatinate came to Bavaria's throne, Düsseldorf's collections were transferred, together with the court, to Munich. As such, a period of decline started for that Academy.<sup>21</sup>

During this early stage (despite Schelling being nominated the Head Secretary of the Academy of

<sup>12</sup> See the recent edition: G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, edited by J. de Sanna, Scheiwiller, Milan, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> De Chirico could have studied Böcklin's work both in Munich and Florence where the Swiss artist settled for a long time and where he died (Fiesole, 1901). However, it was probably de Chirico's predilection for the Florentine artistic environment that directed him towards Böcklin, persuading him to also research his tracks in Munich. See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Böcklin e de Chirico - La pittura letteraria*, in *Arnold Böcklin e la cultura artistica in Toscana*, exhibition catalogue, curated by C. Nuzzi, De Luca, Rome, 1980, pp. 174-215; M. Calvesi, *L'universo nella stanza*, cit., 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Published in «La Bilancia» in two parts (March and April issues) in 1923, it can be found in: G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero. Critica, polemica, autobiografia, 1911-1943*, M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, Einaudi, Turin, 1985, pp. 238-244.

<sup>15</sup> From the documents tracked down in Munich by Giovanna dalla Chiesa in 1984-85, de Chirico's movements during those years have been reconstructed. Cf. *Giorgio de Chirico*, exhibition catalogue edited by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, G. dalla Chiesa, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, 1985, pp. 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> This date has always been interpreted as de Chirico's entry into the Academy. But, as it has more recently been noted, as the entrance examination was planned, according to the rules, during the second week of the month, it is more likely that it was only the date of enrolment, following the positive outcome of his exam which could have taken place around 8th October 1906. This presupposes that de Chirico arrived in Munich at the beginning of October (See G. Roos, op. cit., pp. 50-51).

<sup>17</sup> G. de Chirico, *Autobiografia*, 1919. As part of the Edita Broglio Archive, it is consultable in: G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 74-76.

<sup>18</sup> See M. Calvesi, *Periodo pre-metafisico*, in *Giorgio de Chirico Pictor Optimus*, cit., pp. 95-96

<sup>19</sup> See G. Roos, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> See H. Althöfer, *Il restauro delle opere d'arte moderna e contemporanea*, translated into Italian by M.C. Muncidi, Nardini, Florence, 1991, pp. 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> For the reconstruction of events regarding the system of German artistic teaching during the nineteenth century, see N. Pevsner, *Le Accademie d'arte*, Einaudi, Turin, 1982.

Literature in Munich and having a hand in the new establishment of the Academy of Fine Arts), when one notices the first effects of the new classical-romantic theory of art, details of the re-organisation were still inspired by the old regime. As a result, the teaching remained “academic”. Amongst the greatest opponents to this system of artistic teaching in the academies of the time were the so-called Nazarene group<sup>22</sup>, whose main representatives were to play an important part in its reform.

Friedrich Overbeck, the head of the confraternity, maintained that “every noble sentiment, every thought of some value was repressed and thrown out”<sup>23</sup> in the academies. The new concept of an intimate and friendly relationship between teacher and pupil was at the heart of the reform which they ushered in. The Nazarenes, who established themselves in Rome around 1810, drew from nature and called this “academy”, adopting the original Italian meaning of the term. At a later date, the painter Pieter von Cornelius<sup>24</sup> joined the confraternity and became the strongest personality of the circle following the death of Pforr. It was Ludwig I, the hereditary prince of Bavaria (who was fascinated by national cause and antiquity) who decided to put Cornelius forth as First Painter for the decoration of the new Glyptotech in Munich. This building was intended to house his collection of Greek and Roman sculptures.<sup>25</sup>

In 1819, Cornelius left Italy to move to Düsseldorf where he had been called to run the academy (with the idea of moving it to Munich during the summer months in order to work on the fresco for the Glyptotech). His presence in the history of the German artistic teaching system was to play a fundamental role, particularly for the Academy of Munich where he became the director in 1824.<sup>26</sup> However, in 1826 Cornelius' job at Düsseldorf was taken over by Wilhelm Schadow, who also came from the Nazarene circle. Thanks to these two men and their pupils, that academy became one of the most accredited centres of art in Europe.<sup>27</sup> It was Schadow who succeeded in obtaining a new type of order in 1831 which, although subdivided into three classes, allowed for the introduction of the *Meisterklassen*.<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Gartner, Cornelius' successor, was the one to bring this innovation to Munich. It was also thanks to King Ludwig I who was, amongst other things (as will be explained), the supporter of research regarding ancient painting techniques and scientific studies regarding the industrial production of materials which could recreate or indeed better their characteristics of stability. Once this step had been completed, the XIX century artistic educative system in Germany was fulfilled. The other German academies soon adjusted and after the middle of the century, this

<sup>22</sup> The movement had its origin in Franz Pforr and Friedrich Overbeck's opposition to the Academy of Vienna. Deluded by this famous Academy and struck by the revelation created by primordial Germans found in the imperial collection, they formed the S. Luca Confraternity which united other young artists, giving rise to the S. Luca Order. In around 1810, they established themselves in Rome in the abandoned monastery of S. Isidoro on the Pincio hill, from where the nickname derived for devoted life which they practiced there. The confraternity's main principle was “truth” in contrast to “academic style”. Their great examples were the Medieval masters and primordial Germans and Italians. See: *I Nazareni a Roma*, exhibition catalogue, curated by G. Piantoni, S. Susinno, De Luca, Rome, 1981.

<sup>23</sup> See N. Pevsner, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>24</sup> Pieter von Cornelius (1783-1867) trained at the Academy of Düsseldorf which he in turn then left in order to set up a small community (whilst the Order of S. Luca was being founded in Vienna) which assumed the Medieval German spirit. See *I Nazareni a Roma*, cit., pp. 78-81.

<sup>25</sup> Together with Ludwig I, Baron von Niebuhr was also amongst the first to trust in the Nazarenes and particularly Cornelius to bring back a type of academy aimed in the direction of creating a “Neo-Germanic” art. Von Niebuhr was the Ambassador of Prussia as well as a historian, and was one of the first pupils to attend the new University of Berlin. See C. Heilmann, *Il principe Ludwig di Bavaria e il movimento Nazareno*, in *I Nazareni a Roma*, cit., pp. 78-81.

<sup>26</sup> See N. Pevsner, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>27</sup> Arnold Böcklin, a Basilean Swiss, studied there from 1845 to 1848. See *Arnold Böcklin e la cultura artistica in Toscana*, cit., pp. 85-86.

<sup>28</sup> See N. Pevsner, op. cit., pp. 236-237.

innovation also spread to other academies in Europe. The history of the academy from 1830 to the twentieth century reflects, therefore, the history of art in this period, with a delay which varied from country to country.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the century, the German academies enjoyed, therefore, an elevated prestige, offering an excellent level of technical preparation and, despite the fad of Impressionism spreading everywhere, was still the destination of study for most foreign artists. In particular, the Munich Academy is seen as being the most important one at the end of the nineteenth century, just as the Secession seemed decisive. Franz von Stuck (who had been the head of Munich's Secession) taught there from 1895 and stayed there until his death in 1928. It was the Secession which eradicated the modernist movement (*Jugendstil*) from the entire nation. Prior to de Chirico, Kandinsky, Jawlensky and Klee were all attracted by the Academy's fame and arrived in Munich at the end of the 1890s. All three followed von Stuck's courses, after having been admitted (and not without difficulty) to the Academy in 1900.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore the de Chiricos arrived in Munich at the beginning of October 1906. The Academy's entrance exam started during the second week of the month. The pupil introduced himself at reception and handed in several examples of work which had to be approved by a special commission. They then subjected the candidate to an examination which consisted of drawing a head and nude from living models. De Chirico refers to this in his fundamental text on the *Ritorno al mestiere* (Return to craft): "[...] and perhaps [the Academy of Munich] is the best organised of all and offers its pupils the most lavish means of learning the complicated and difficult art of drawing and painting. In that academy, one was admitted after a practical test which consisted in coping a head or nude of small dimensions in charcoal or lapis. Such a copy was made directly from nature. If the test is deemed good, one enters a class of one or another professor and immediately start to copy living models in colour"<sup>31</sup>.

The planned duration of the academic course in Munich was eight years: four semesters of drawing, four of painting technique and eight of composition. Having passed the entrance examination, de Chirico registered himself at the drawing school of Professor Gabriel Ritter von Hackl (1843-1926), a conventional artist for the most part who was an expert in anatomy and specialised in historical genre and battle-scene paintings<sup>32</sup>. Having not completed the mandatory four semesters in drawing, the artist entered Carl von Marr's<sup>33</sup> painting class (another rather conventional artist) at some unspecified moment during the second half of 1907.

De Chirico remained at that Academy, between frequent travels within Italy, until May or June of 1909 when he left Munich to join his mother and brother in Italy, even if his definite departure is

<sup>29</sup> Later on, as well as eliminating the method of elementary drawing and raising the enrolment age from twelve to sixteen or eighteen years old (in order to reach university level), painting classes and classes dedicated to landscape were also introduced. Female models, however, who were banned in the middle of the century in almost all public art schools, were introduced to real-life classes after 1870. See N. Pevsner, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

<sup>30</sup> See *La nascita della modernità. L'universo delle arti a Monaco dalla Secessione alle Avanguardie 1896/1914*, exhibition catalogue, curated by G. Cortenova, H. Ottomeyer, J. Waibel, pub. Palazzo Forti, Verona, 1996, p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> G. de Chirico, *Il ritorno al mestiere*, in "Valori Plastici", n. 11-12, 1919. The essay is available in the collection of works: G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit. pp. 93-99.

<sup>32</sup> See P. Baldacci, *De Chirico 1888-1919. La metafisica*, Leonardo Arte, Milan, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Carl von Marr (1858-1936) was born in Milwaukee in Wisconsin to emigrants from Silesia. He was considered a master of monumental decorative painting. According to Baldacci, it was probably from this artist that de Chirico acquired the taste for the accentuated outline of figures which he then develops above-all in Paris (See P. Baldacci, op. cit., p. 41).

registered as 9th April 1910 and is specified as Greece.<sup>34</sup> This leaves us to suppose a certain impatience on his behalf with the cycle of courses, which he interrupted before finishing after having followed them irregularly.<sup>35</sup>

However, the experience within this institution was decisive for de Chirico. The research undertaken by artists and scholars who taught there, as well as by other researchers who gravitated towards the Munich artistic environment (which we will analyse later on), established the basis of his technical-artistic culture.

### The research on techniques and painting materials in Munich

Ludwig I's accession to the Bavarian throne in 1825 marked the start of Munich's develop as the European cultural capital. And with the growth of cultural infrastructure, it also created a strong local interest in materials and artistic techniques. The Bavarian monarchs, an enlightened sort, patronised research into painting materials which started to take place in Munich during that period and culminated in 1937 with the founding of the Doerner Institut. This is still active today as one of the main centres of scientific investigation in the artistic field. Already by 1819, with his nomination of Pieter von Cornelius as First Painter for the decoration of the new Glyptotech in Munich<sup>36</sup>, Ludwig I had shown his interest in antique art, and particularly towards the technique of fresco painting in the Italian tradition (which this artist was well acquainted with).<sup>37</sup>

What's more, Cornelius was also called to London by Prince Albert in 1842 in order to advise British artists on the technique of fresco painting before the commissions for the decoration of Parliament were assigned. This last episode was of key importance. They had to restore the paintings which had been lost during the 1835 fire which had caused the destruction of a large part of the Houses of Parliament. To this end, a special commission entrusted a group of artists and art historians with the task of studying the techniques involved in fresco and oil painting, dating from their origins up until XVII century.<sup>38</sup> It was as a result of this that the fundamental research studies and systematic translation of sources by M.P. Merrifield<sup>39</sup> and C.L. Eastlake<sup>40</sup> were written. These were accompanied by the direct observation of works and the collection of information from contemporary painters and restorers.<sup>41</sup> It dealt with a real turning point in editorial production (not only in English) of artistic tech-

<sup>34</sup> Thanks to the correspondence between de Chirico and his friend Fritz Gartz, this document has been reinterpreted. The hypothesis is that the note on the register showing his departure as 9th April 1910, with the false destination of Greece, was entered by someone other than de Chirico. Toward the end of May 1909, the artist would have gone instead to Italy to visit the Venice Biennale, and then established himself in Milan with his mother and brother, without returning to Munich. Cf. G. Roos, op. cit., pp. 246-256.

<sup>35</sup> In the aforementioned *Autobiografia*, one reads: "For three years he worked tirelessly, dividing his day between systematic study at the Academy and the study of antique painting at the Bavarian capital's art galleries. At twenty-one years old, tired of Munich and already in possession of uncommon painting possibilities, he returned to Italy where he spends another couple of years between Florence and Milan [...]". G. de Chirico, *Autobiografia*, op. cit., pp. 74-76.

<sup>36</sup> The new building was specially erected to house Ludwig I's collection. Equally fascinated by national cause and antiquity, the young prince had started to acquire Greek and Roman sculpture since 1808 (See C. Heilmann, op. cit., pp. 78-81).

<sup>37</sup> It has already been noted that Cornelius was in Rome from 1810 to around 1818. He was a leading representative of the Nazarene circle and also went to Naples and Pompei (See *I Nazareni a Roma*, cit., pp. 96-97).

<sup>38</sup> See S. Bordini, *Materia e immagine: fonti sulle tecniche della pittura*, Leonardo-De Luca, Rome 1991, pp. 180-182.

<sup>39</sup> In 1844, the first English edition of Cennino Cennini's *Trattato* was published, followed by *The Art of Fresco Painting* (1847) and *Original Treatises on the Art of Painting* (1849).

<sup>40</sup> C.L. Eastlake, *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*, 1847.

<sup>41</sup> See S. Bordini, op. cit., pp. 221-222.

niques and conservation. Westminster's new decoration generated a climate of research into primordial techniques which had a great relapse on the artistic culture of the time.<sup>42</sup> As has already been said, the same climate of interest in primordial techniques was also generated in Munich already by around 1825, which was also partly due to Cornelius's presence as director at the Academy. This resulted in the study of important historical sources on the techniques of painting and their publication into the German language during the second half of the century.

In order to satisfy Ludwig I's interests, a series of royal commissions were dedicated to the investigation of specific problems regarding artistic materials. As such, an approach to the problem was established based on the interchange of ideas between artists and scientists which would later become a tradition in Munich. During the second half of the century, institutions that focused on the study of painting materials grew up from the foundations laid down by these commissions. It was the German chemist A.W. Keim who founded the Research Institute of Painting Technique in 1881 (Versuchsanstalt für Maltechnik). With this, he started a standardisation process of industrially produced materials in Munich, in order to guarantee their durability, which went on until the Second World War. And it was also he who founded the «German Magazine of Painting Technique» («Deutsche Zeitschrift für Maltechnik»)<sup>43</sup>.

But Keim's most important undertaking was the foundation of the «German Society for the Development of Traditional Painting Technique» (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Beförderung rationeller Malverfahren), of which he remained the main member for years. It included Max von Pettenkofer<sup>44</sup> and the painter Franz von Lenbach amongst its founders. In 1892 this initiative also received support from the State. Keim is also remembered for his research into the field of chemistry applied to artistic materials. This led him to develop a painting medium with a base of potassium silicate, which was conceived with the aim of achieving permanent colours. This achievement can be considered the first synthetic binder in history.<sup>45</sup> In aid of the Rational Painting Technique's development, the German Society organised the first «Painting Technique Exposition» (fig. 3) in 1893 at the Glaspalast (the Glass Palace) of Munich. This featured the organisation of a section entitled «Historical Developments in Painting Technique from Antiquity to the End of the Roman Empire».<sup>46</sup> Ernst von Berger (fig. 4), who was a painter and

<sup>42</sup> Ford Madox Brown (who participated in the selection of those to take part in the group of artists involved in the works at Parliament) was, for example, in Rome in 1845 where he studied with the Nazarenes, Overbeck and Cornelius. He later acted as a link between that movement and the Pre-Raphaelite group, of which he became the eldest representative without ever becoming a permanent member of the Confraternity (See M.T. Benedetti, *Nazareni e Preraffaelliti: un nodo della cultura del XIX secolo*, in «Bollettino d'Arte», 1982, 14, pp. 121-144).

<sup>43</sup> This prestigious magazine is known today as «Maltechnik Restauro». In 1886, the title was changed to «Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei» (Technical notes on painting). It was published bimonthly until 1941, when it then entered a turbulent editorial history during the War years (See B. F. Miller, *Painting materials research in Munich from 1825 to 1937*, in *Painting Techniques History, Materials and Studio Practice*, A. Roy - P. Smith, Contributions to the Dublin Congress, London, IIC, 1998, pp. 246-248).

<sup>44</sup> He is also a figure of great importance in the history of conservation in the nineteenth century. Active in Munich as a chemist from 1827, he demonstrated through his investigations that the whitening of colours which altered many oil paintings was not produced by mould but was rather the result of molecular bond decomposition. He ascertained that it could react well to alcohol vapours and patented the method, together with his collaborator Karl Vogt. They exported it to the most important European art galleries (See S. Rinaldi, *Il metodo Pettenkofer in Italia (1865-1892): cause ed effetti della rigenerazione delle vernici*, in «Bollettino d'Arte», 2000, n. 112, pp. 117-125).

<sup>45</sup> Experimentation with sodium and potassium silicates had already started in Bavaria by the first half of the century with the work of J. N. von Fuchs and J. Schlotthauer (both Professors at the Academy of Munich). The technique which they developed, called the «stereo-chromatic method», was also used by D. MacLise and J. R. Rogers at Parliament in London (after Prince Albert had sent the former to Germany to learn the technique in 1859). Keim further refined the method in order to arrive at a more paint medium. And through his discoveries, it was possible to industrially manufacture Keim Mineral Colours - products which are still in use today (although they are almost exclusively used for mural painting). See B. F. Miller, op. cit., p. 246.

<sup>46</sup> See R. H. Wäckernagel, <...Ich werde die Leute...in öl und tempera beschwindeln...>. *Neus zur Maltechnik Wassily Kandinskys*, in «Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung», 1997, vol. 11, pp. 97-128.

Viennese scholar, was responsible for this section. He is also of fundamental importance in the history of artistic technique. During his stay in Munich, he was one of the artists most involved in the research of ancient art, with a fervid interest in painting processes. To this end, he kept solid examples in order to imitate them. This led him to take an interest in ancient sources regarding painting techniques, translating and publishing them with detailed critical comments.<sup>47</sup>

But above-all, we must remember here that in this vast production, there is Böcklin's book on technique which Giorgio de Chirico reports to have read, indicating it amongst the sources of his research into oil tempera emulsion.<sup>48</sup>

In the section conceived by Berger and directed at the Glaspalast, it gave information on the "methods of painting by the ancients", from the time of Plinio and Vitruvius to primordial Flemish and Italian artists. Amongst the paintings of the ancients which artists of the time looked to in order find answers, there were also products from Ancient Egypt – paintings, murals, painted fragments of mummies – as well as other work. For the most part, these had been found and valued by French archeologists.<sup>49</sup> Amongst Berger's goods (guarded at the Deutsche Museum from 1906-07) were, along with some ancient fragments, a series of experimental panels painted "in the style of the ancients" (figs. 5-6), which imitated the Egyptian examples of Fayum.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, an exhibition in Munich of Bavaria was dedicated to these portraits in the early 1880s to which the well-known Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin also visited.<sup>51</sup> Amongst the artists of that period Böcklin was the busiest with the study and experimentation of ancient painting techniques, with a particular predilection for tempera<sup>52</sup>, shared by Franz von Lenbach<sup>53</sup> and Hans von Mareés<sup>54</sup>.

A spark ignited within Böcklin in 1862 following his visit to the Archeological Museum of Naples and the excavations at Pompei. Establishing himself again in Rome in 1863 and stimulated by ancient painting, he abandoned oil painting in order to start work with a technique that had a resin and wax base – one that would give greater transparency and luminosity to the colours –.<sup>55</sup> With his next stay

<sup>47</sup> Ernst Hugo von Berger (1857-1919), initially a pupil of Hans Makart in Vienna, was the author of different studies regarding sources of painting techniques. Amongst these, we recall in particular: *Quellen und technik der fresko-, oel- und tempera-malerei des Mittelalters. Von der Byzantinischen zeit bis einschliesslich der "erfindung der oelmalerei" durch die brüder Van Eyck*, G.D.W. Callwey, Munich, 1897. For Berger's output, see S. Bordini, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>48</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 140. The exact references from the book are: E. Berger, *Böcklins Technik. Mit dem Bildnis des Meisters nach einem Relief von S. Landsinger*, G.D.W. Callwey, Munich, 1906.

<sup>49</sup> An interest in Egypt was already aroused in Germany by the end of the eighteenth century, as was the interest in the excavations at Pompei. Ludwig I had sent J. Schlothauer (a painter and Professor at the Academy) there to study the Encaustic technique – the intention being to reanimate mural painting in Germany, parallel to Cornelius' being called back to Munich in 1819 (See B.F. Miller, op. cit., p. 246).

<sup>50</sup> See R.H. Wäckernagel, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>51</sup> See H. Kühn, *Technische Studien zur Malerei Böcklins*, in R. Andree, *Arnold Böcklin Die Gemälde*, Basel-München, 1977, p. 112.

<sup>52</sup> The artist lived in Munich from 1858 to 1859. After having taught for several years at the art school in Weimar, (where he met Franz von Lenbach), he returned to Italy (where he had already been from 1850 to 1857) in 1862. To chart Böcklin's movements between Switzerland, Italy and Germany, see: *Arnold Böcklin e la cultura artistica in Toscana*, cit., pp. 85-86.

<sup>53</sup> Considered by painting technique experts as an "eminent practitioner", it was he who presided over the commission of the first "Painting Technique Exposition". As such, he had the possibility of organising a personal room which he filled with ancient works from his collection (amongst which were several paintings attributed to Holbein and Cranach), which were adopted as demonstrative examples of the "perfect state of conservation" (See R. H. Wäckernagel, op. cit., pp. 100-101).

<sup>54</sup> With regard to his technique, see: H. Falkner von Sonnenburg, *Die Maltechnik des hans von Mareés*, in *Hans von Mareés*, exhibition catalogue, curated by C. Lanz, Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1987, pp. 105-126. Mareés formed part of the circle of German artists who gravitated towards Arnold Böcklin during his Florentine period.

<sup>55</sup> Rudolf Schick, his assistant in Rome, speaks about "Encaustic effect" in his notebooks, comparing it to the process described by Plinio and Vitruvius. In fact, the process is similar: after having ground the colours with incense, sandrac and water and executed the painting, upon which, once dry, a layer of wax which had been dissolved in turpentine essence was spread on top (after heating the painting's surfaces with a red-hot pipe) and rubbed with a hot cloth. In Plinio's use of Encaustic, however, the wax already made up the colour binder (See H. Kühn, op. cit., pp. 111-112).

in Munich from 1872-74, he dedicated still more study to the techniques of the great masters, working often with Lenbach. During this period, he was involved in the systematic reading of treatises, mainly those of Cennino Cennini<sup>56</sup> and Teofilo<sup>57</sup>, and bringing him still closer to tempera which he had started to use during his Roman years, experimenting with different variants.<sup>58</sup> On such a subject, it is important that amongst the various technique and tempera recipes suggested by de Chirico in his *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, there are some which recall the master's recipes in an almost identical way, for example, those with a cherry gum base.<sup>59</sup>

Towards the end of the century in Munich, the majority of painters, scholars and chemists' attention was mainly concentrated on tempera. Tempera was, in fact, the first to have been described by the French archeologists nearly a century before as it was present in the Fayum portraits, together with the Encaustic effect technique. It was during this period that the interpretation by German scholars regarding the technique of fifteenth century German, Flemish and Italian masters as "oil tempera emulsion" (or an oil-protein emulsion) was generated.<sup>60</sup> The controversy had started at the end of the eighteenth century when Lessing, publishing some passages from *Schedula di Teofilo* (The Schedule of Theophilus)<sup>61</sup>, highlighted that the introduction of oil as a binder in the history of painting preceded the Van Eyck brothers by several centuries. This brought the information supplied by Vasari<sup>62</sup> into question who had attributed to them the invention of this technique.

It was above-all Ernst Berger who, armed with Lessing's writings, the edition of *Schedula*, (Vienna, 1874) in the German language and the lengthy study of other sources regarding painting techniques, placed the problem in historical perspective. In his main work (1897), he outlined the possibility that the Flemish had only perfected the use of oil, using it with tempera which had not yet faded away – that is, in an emulsion with egg and/or other substances –. As such, they would have given rise to "oil tempera emulsion" (*oeltempera*), the true secret behind the beauty and solidity of their painting which was brilliant and glazed.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Cennini and Teofilo's<sup>64</sup> tempera was defined as "tempera in the

<sup>56</sup> *Il libro dell'arte* by Cennino Cennini, who was Agnolo Gaddi's pupil in Florence, appeared at the end of the XIV century. It is one of the most important manuals on artistic technique. As a precious documentation of the practices of Medieval workshops and the technique used by Giotto, it was well-known by artists, as testified by quotes by Vasari, Armenini and others. A. Ilg produced the first edition in German which was published in Vienna in 1871. See S. Bordini, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

<sup>57</sup> The first complete German translation of *Schedula Diversarium Artium* by the monk Teofilo was presented in Vienna in 1874 and edited by A. Ilg (See S. Bordini, op. cit., pp. 27-28; 234).

<sup>58</sup> During the period spent in Rome, he mostly used tempera for the background layers. Now, he carried out works entirely in tempera, at first only using egg yolk (adhering, as such, to Cennini's precepts) and later devoting himself to oil tempera emulsion (made by means of adding oil or varnish to the egg yolk).

<sup>59</sup> Böcklin experimented with temperas using cherry gum (on the basis of Teofilo's precepts) from around 1880 onwards. A recipe for lean tempera containing a cherry gum base is suggested by Giorgio de Chirico. See G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, cit., pp. 34-36.

<sup>60</sup> Medieval tempera had a base of protein substances (egg, casein, animal glues) or polysaccharides (vegetable gums) which were therefore soluble in water. The mix of protein substances (or polysaccharides) with oils is, instead, an emulsion – a heterogeneous system in which an unmixable liquid is dispersed in the form of very tiny drops (dispersed phase) into the other liquid called the disperser or vehicle. The emulsion is therefore characterised by a decisive instability which can be partially contained by a colloidal stabilising substance and called, therefore, an emulsifier. Such emulsifiers are, for example, casein, Arabic glue or egg yolk. The latter is itself an emulsion of fats and protein and the most stable one in nature. It is therefore the best emulsifier for a paint binder based on the mix of protein and oily substances. See M. Matteini, A. Moles, *La chimica nel restauro*, Nardini, Florence, 1989, pp. 61-76.

<sup>61</sup> G. E. Lessing, *Von Alter der Oelmalerei aus dem Teophilus Presbyter*, Brunswick, 1774. Teofilo's treaty dates back to XI-XII century a.c. Lessing published some passages concerning linseed oil with the aim of refuting Vasari's theory regarding the fifteenth century origin of the oil technique (See S. Bordini, op. cit., pp. 118-124).

<sup>62</sup> See G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*, edited by L. Bellosi - A. Rossi, Einaudi, Turin, 1986, pp. 67-69.

<sup>63</sup> See E. H. von Berger, *Quellen und technik der fresko - oel und tempera - malerei des Mittelalters. Von der Bizantinischen zeit bis einschliesslich der "erfindung der oelmalerei" durch die brüder Van Eyck*, G.D.W. Callwey, Munich, 1897, pp. 221-260.

<sup>64</sup> In the respective treatises, tempera has a base of egg (Cennini) and gum (Teofilo).

old sense", the true and real tempera, made with an aqueous binder (and therefore thin), whilst the tempera which came into use in the fifteenth century thanks to the Van Eyck's, became known as "tempera of the new sense" or oil tempera emulsion or emulsion tempera. In a chapter of the aforementioned volume, it supplies a series of "modern" tempera recipes, all emulsions with a base of egg, casein, vegetable gums, animal glues and mixed with wax, oil and resins.<sup>65</sup> The recipes are put forward in order to rediscover the effects created in ancient painting but their historical authenticity is obviously in doubt, above-all in light of more recent historical and scientific studies on art of that period.<sup>66</sup>

The wide debate on tempera also involved scientists, amongst whom we remember Alexander Eibner in particular. He dedicated about twenty years of study to painting, intended to give a scientific foundation to such research.<sup>67</sup>

In this way, the tendency to identify tempera with emulsion spread amongst painters, chemists and German treatise writers. They simply defined the binder of medieval painting as "painting with glue" or "with gum" and objected to the use of the term "tempera" exclusively for the paint binder introduced in the fifteenth century or oil tempera emulsion (*oeltempera*).

These elements which also come to light in Max Doerner's important manual (published in 1921) who was the last (but only chronologically so) of the heavy rank of German scholars interested in painting techniques. As a teacher of painting technique at the Academy of Munich from 1911 onwards, he compiled ten years of teaching into the book *Malmaterial und seine Verwendung im Bilde* (Artistic Materials and their Use in Painting) - a text which, for years, was the basis of learning for all artists of the German language. Due to its importance, it was also translated into Spanish and English.<sup>68</sup> The research undertaken by Doerner at the Academy of Munich was of such importance that in 1937 the German State entitled him with the very new State Board for the Figurative Arts (Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, Werkprüfungs - und Forschungsanstalt für Maltechnik: Doerner Institut). This institute is today still one of the greatest centres for the scientific study of works of art.<sup>69</sup> Even Doerner put forth a series of emulsion recipes, perpetuating the tradition started by Berger and sustaining, like him that the Van Eyck's technique was not based on the use of a simple oily binder.<sup>70</sup>

The interest in these presumed emulsions used by the Flemish, Germans and Italians of the fifteenth century, above-all for their settled solidity, urged some young entrepreneurs to try and reproduce and to manufacture them on an industrial level or in small tubes, as was already done for oils.<sup>71</sup> Even artists

<sup>65</sup> E. H. von Berger, *Quellen und technik der fresko*, cit., pp. 257-260.

<sup>66</sup> The hypotheses formulated in that environment were not completely unfounded but given the lack of detailed analysis on the paintings (due to the insufficiency of means at the time), they still prove to be inaccurate and sometimes misleading. The most accredited theory at the moment is that the Flemish used a binder whose main component was oil, combined with resins, and at times, also with protein substances (whose nature and proportions vary according to their pigments). See M. C. Galassi, *Il disegno svelato*, Illisso, Nuoro, 1998, pp. 61-69.

<sup>67</sup> Eibner was the son of a painter and chemist who worked at the Polytechnic of Munich, studying egg yolk (the most stable emulsion) as his point of departure for the definition of tempera. It was during such investigations that the existence of lecithin was learned of, ascertaining that it was the emulsifying agent in egg yolk rather than vitelline, as had been believed up until then. See A. Eibner, *Entwicklung und werksstoffe der Wandmalerei vom Altertums bis zur Neuzeit*, G.D.W. Callwey, Munich, 1926.

<sup>68</sup> M. Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and their use in Painting. With Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters (1921)*, Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, 1934.

<sup>69</sup> See B.F. Miller, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>70</sup> Specifically, he favoured a mixed technique which alternates underlying layers of tempera with upper finishes of oil, possibly enriched with the addition of resin. Furthermore, according to Doerner, the Flemish had developed background layers by substituting them with emulsions at a later stage. See M. Doerner, op. cit., pp. 237-243, 327-343.

<sup>71</sup> In particular, one is reminded of "Synthonos" colours, manufactured by the painter Wilhelm Beckmann which extolled characteristics of luminosity.

such as Kandinsky, Klee and Jawlensky experimented with modern tempera once they had arrived in Munich during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century - attracted by the Academy's fame and their fascination in the Secession, lead by Franz von Stuck.<sup>72</sup> But that which should be highlighted here is the influence this vivacious climate of research (with the theories that emerged) could have had on Giorgio de Chirico, who lived in Munich between 1906 and 1909, to attend [like these artists had] the Academy of Fine Arts. It can not be by chance, in fact, that the "tempera" recipes suggested in *Piccolo Trattato di tecnica pittorica* in 1928 are all emulsions. Nor can it be by chance that his theories on the technique of the Van Eycks, Antonello, the Germans (Dürer, Holbein) were already expressed in the peculiar text *Pro technica oratio* of 1923<sup>73</sup>, before appearing in the aforementioned paragraphs of the *Piccolo trattato*, and the fact that they reflect precisely those of Ernst Berger. He had started to experiment with tempera from 1920, dedicating himself to making copies in museums. To be more precise, he experimented with oil tempera emulsion which he believed was the technique used by the Renaissance masters and with which he worked almost exclusively until 1924 at least.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, in his *Memorie*, he explains that he started this practice especially after reading the already mentioned text by Berger on Böcklin's technique.<sup>75</sup> Thus the hypothesis that de Chirico had read the other works by Berger, mainly *Quellen und technik der fresko - oel und tempera - malerei des Mittelalters* (1897), is a theory that is confirmed if one observes the standpoints (which derive from Berger) therein expressed by the painter in a precise manner, first in *Pro technica oratio* and then in *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*. We can also consider it possible that at the moment of working out of the latter, he had already read Doerner's treaty which was published in 1921. The historical convictions and the technical precepts expressed in *Piccolo trattato* (in the section dedicated to tempera) are therefore fully referential to German culture, as much as (for other reasons) his philosophical formation. And one could also add the "conservative spirit" which, after the specifically metaphysical phase, led him to a systematic "return to craft". With this, he re-proposed a journey similar to that of many German artists of the nineteenth century, from the Nazarenes to Böcklin (his undisputed master under many aspects), up to von Stuck. An event which, moreover, linked itself to the inside of a greater phenomenon which involved all of Europe at the end of the First World War: the "return to order".

### De Chirican theory and practice of the "return to craft", 1919-1928

"Return to craft! It will not be an easy thing. It will take time and hard work"<sup>76</sup>, thundered Giorgio de Chirico at the end of 1919 in the pages of «Valori Plastici», a year after the magazine's first circula-

He sustained that Lenbach had also used them, although this has never been proven. However, already during the first "Painting Technique Exposition", they had already fallen into disrepute (See R.H. Wackernagel, op. cit., p. 105).

<sup>72</sup> Finally, it seems that August Macke also experimented with tempera (*Ibid.*, pp. 97-128).

<sup>73</sup> It appeared in «La Bilancia» in 1923 in two parts. See G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 238-244.

<sup>74</sup> During the period between 1919 and 1924, he concentrated on the return to craft, making copies in museums and experimentation with tempera.

<sup>75</sup> See G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., p. 140.

<sup>76</sup> G. de Chirico, *Il ritorno al mestiere*, in «Valori Plastici», Rome, n. 1-2, November-December, 1919 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 93-99).

tion, directed by Mario Broglio.<sup>77</sup> That process of "restoration" of formal values which started with the figurative arts in all of Europe straight after the First World War, found expression in Italy in this magazine, a place of convergence and comparison of the liveliest forces in art and critique during those years. Since the first issue, it accommodated the most varied names of artists and critics, who sometimes came from contrasting cultural situations. However, what they did have in common was their assertion about the modernity crisis, just as it had been expressed in the avant-garde's experience and the research of a style and language expressed by means of eternal formal rules. This was translated with the desire of reaffirming the conception of art as an experience of tradition, specifically the Italian tradition, and to support, as an alternative, a renewed classicism, which is sometimes mentioned as "artistic Italianism". This typically Italian intellectual climate and the intention of defining "the character of art" distinguish the "climate of Valori Plastici" with the general tendency of "rap-  
pel à l'ordre" which spread throughout Europe in the same years.

The poetic fragment *Zeusi l'esploratore* (Zeusi the Explorer)<sup>78</sup>, which Giorgio de Chirico sent to Broglio from Ferrara for it to be published in the first issue of «Valori Plastici» (although its publication was postponed until November for various reasons) is dated April 1918. The first issue of «Valori Plastici» opens under the sign of Metaphysical Art, bearing Carrà's *Ovale delle apparizioni* (The Oval of Apparitions) of 1918 on the front cover. As such, it was accredited as being the official magazine of Metaphysical Art, presenting itself principally as a platform of expression for de Chirico and Savinio even if, in Broglio's mind, there was neither a precise programme nor the intention of launching manifestos. Instead, Broglio had wanted it to arouse confrontation within a common circle. During the same period, he published Carlo Carrà's volume *Pittura metafisica*.<sup>79</sup> Between 1918 and 1919, one still spoke about Metaphysical Art which had finally been explained with the early theoretical writings of the artists themselves, just as they were evolving in new directions.

There were six essays in total published by de Chirico in the Roman periodical issues directed by Broglio, if one excludes the editorial<sup>80</sup> prepared for the first issue which was then rejected. It is in this period, therefore, that the artist carried out his most active and coherent theoretical activity, expressing himself not only in «Valori Plastici» but also in other papers (especially once his exclusive tie with Broglio expired).<sup>81</sup> The magazines that published his writings after the war came into being in the "return to order" cultural environment, the principal publications of which were «La Ronda»<sup>82</sup>,

<sup>77</sup> The magazine's first issue came out on 15th November 1918. The issues, fifteen in total, were distributed between 1918 and 1922. See: P. Fossati, «Valori Plastici» 1918-1922, Einaudi, Turin, 1981; *XIII Quadriennale - Valori Plastici*, exhibition catalogue, curated by P. Fossati, P. Rosazza Ferraris, L. Velani, Skira, Milan, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> Reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 81-82.

<sup>79</sup> C. Carrà, *Pittura metafisica*, Vallecchi, Florence, 1919 (reproduced in: C. Carrà, *Tutti gli scritti*, edited by M. Carrà, V. Fagone, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1978, pp. 113 and ff). In the book, Carrà does not mention de Chirico amongst the metaphysical painters which aroused resentment and gave way to a long controversy of claim over the paternity of that poetic art form.

<sup>80</sup> Reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 109-111. This text perhaps remained unpublished as it was deemed too controversial. Fagiolo dell'Arco has put forth the hypothesis of a contribution by Savinio (See G. de Chirico, *Ibid.*, p. 450).

<sup>81</sup> De Chirico had signed a contract on 23rd October 1919 which exclusively bound him to collaborate with Broglio and «Valori Plastici» for a year. He also had to consign a canvas every month and sell Broglio everything he produced. See *Giorgio de Chirico: il tempo di Valori Plastici 1918-1922*, exhibition catalogue, curated by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, De Luca, Rome, 1980, pp. 83-86.

<sup>82</sup> Directed by Vincenzo Cardarelli, it was founded in Rome in April 1919. It has a chronological course almost identical to that of «Valori Plastici», active from 1919 to 1923. It also put forth themes, intentions and reasons which were in fact coincidental, constituting a real literary pendant. De Chirico had his important essay *Pro tecnica oratio* published here in 1923.

«Il Primato Artistico Italiano»<sup>83</sup> and «Il Convegno»<sup>84</sup>. The theory of de Chirican art reflected the trajectory of his painting. Immediately after *Zeusi l'esploratore* in «Valori Plastici», the essay *Sull'arte metafisica* (On Metaphysical Art) appeared<sup>85</sup>, in which he elucidated on his Ferrara period, defining the parameters of its poetics. But just a few issues on, he reached a turning point with the text *Il ritorno al mestiere* (The Return to Craft). Between the end of 1919 and 1920, Metaphysical Art had therefore turned a corner - a new desire for restoration and stylistic discipline had taken over. In this way, if the "return to order" was at first able to combine with metaphysical poetry, it now acquired the more categorical meaning of a call to tradition. This was also intended as an iron-strong painting discipline or a technical orthodoxy in the practice of this craft.

The de Chirican text on *craft* in 1919, clearly show the programmatic elements of this new climate: "Returning to craft, our painters will have to be extremely careful with regard to the improvement of [their] means [...]. It would be good if painters rediscovered the excellent habit of making canvases and colours themselves [...]. When it comes to matter and skill, Futurism has given the final blow to Italian painting [...]. With the downfall of the hysterical, more than one painter will return to craft, and those who have already understood will be able to work with freer hands [...]. As far as I am concerned, I am calm, and I am the proud holder of three words which I want to be the seal for each one of my works: *Pictor classicus sum*"<sup>86</sup>.

In an anecdote quoted in *Memorie*, published in 1945, the artist speaks about his new meditation on past masters in terms of a true "revelation": "Whilst my solo exhibition was on at Bragaglia's, I had started to visit museums. I experienced a particular sympathy for the museum at Villa Borghese [...]. It was at the museum of Villa Borghese, one morning in front of a painting by Titian, that I had the revelation about Great Painting [...]"<sup>87</sup>.

The mention of the exhibition at Casa d'Arte Bragaglia in Rome immediately links the episode to the winter of 1919<sup>88</sup>, allowing us to reconstruct the chronology of events. Exactly as his first Italian solo show took place, where his metaphysical works were exhibited, de Chirico started to visit museums and returned to meditate on ancient painting which prompted a new turning point. During that winter, therefore, the artist matured the idea of copying works by the Renaissance masters and started to shuttle between Rome and Florence in order to also work at the Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti. With regard to his activity as a copyist in the museums, we once again refer to his *Memorie*: "It was the summer of 1919. It was very hot in Rome [...]. I had decided to copy a painting by Lorenzo Lotto at

<sup>83</sup> Founded in Milan in October 1919 with Guido Podrecca as director, it also had offices in Rome and Naples. It was a monthly publication which dealt with all of the arts: music, archeology, theatre, painting and cinema. De Chirico published four articles in it between 1920 and 1921 (See *Giorgio de Chirico: il tempo di Valori Plastici*, cit., pp. 13-17).

<sup>84</sup> Directed by Enzo Ferrieri, the magazine was founded in Milan in 1920 and announced itself as a "magazine of literature and all the arts". Amongst the collaborators were Croce, Palazzeschi and Savinio. De Chirico published some of his most important essays in it (See *Giorgio de Chirico: il tempo di Valori Plastici* op. cit., pp. 17-21).

<sup>85</sup> G. de Chirico, *Sull'arte metafisica* in «Valori Plastici», Rome, n. 4-5, April-May 1919 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., p. 83).

<sup>86</sup> G. de Chirico, *Il ritorno al mestiere*, cit.

<sup>87</sup> Id., *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>88</sup> As his first one-man show, the exhibition opened in Rome on 2nd February 1919. Having worked promptly between November and December to prepare it, de Chirico exhibited his main works from 1917 to 1919 as well as some from his early metaphysical period. It was accompanied with the text *Noi metafisici* (We Metaphysicians) which mimicked the Futurists in the title and constituted the first programmatic text on Metaphysical Art. The exhibition was put down, as is well-known, by Robert Longhi (See P. Baldacci, op. cit., pp. 400-412).

the museum of Villa Borghese. Beforehand, I had never made copies in museums [...]. It was not very easy to start since I did not have either diplomas or permits, absolutely no degree and one needed one of these degrees in order to obtain permission from the Museum management. Luckily, Spadini, who knew the director Professor Cantalamessa, accompanied me to him [...]. He also smiled at the idea that a "futurist" wanted to execute copies of ancient paintings [...] but then, after this small outburst, he was very kind and he accompanied me round the museum rooms, illustrating the works to me".<sup>89</sup>

Yet again, de Chirico's declarations allow us to date with precision the start of his work as a copyist, as well as the cited painting *Copia del "Gentiluomo con San Giorgio" di Lorenzo Lotto* (Copy of "Gentleman with Saint George" by Lorenzo Lotto)<sup>90</sup>, placing this painting at the top of a list of copies executed during his "return to the museum". The reconstruction of this de Chirican digression highlights, furthermore, how *Il ritorno al mestiere* published in «Valori Plastici», was nothing other than the latest stage or written theorization of the experience matured from the winter of 1919 onwards. In approximately February he started to visit the museum at Villa Borghese. In the summer, he got hold of copyist permits and started to move between Rome and Florence. And finally, conscious of his new needs, he expressed the renewed course of his reflection on painting in Broglio's magazine, in the November issue. At the end of the essay on *craft*, de Chirico proclaims himself "a classic painter". During these years, many artists (more or less consciously) returned to the museums, whilst Mario Broglio, for his part, planned a collection of monographies on the masters of painting within «Valori Plastici».<sup>91</sup> The process of revisiting the "classic tradition" culminated in the publication of the volume *Du cubisme au classicisme* (From Cubism to Classicism) by Gino Severini in Paris in 1921.<sup>92</sup> In reality, the thread of continuity with tradition was never really interrupted, since different appeals for classical antiquity during the course of the first two decades of the century have been revealed, which had been forgotten or perhaps undervalued by the majority of successive historiography.<sup>93</sup>

In de Chirico's painting, it is clear that the classical element was already present. Its first appearance (the pre-Metaphysical Art phase), was strongly influenced by German painting, having trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and in particular, by Arnold Böcklin, from which the definition of the "Böcklin period" derives. The following metaphysical phase, although characterised by a distortion of perspective canons (unexpected combinations and obvious un-naturalistic intentions, which quite rightly place it amongst avant-garde experiences), is also full of classical elements. The artist's classicist interests progressively strengthened and in the "return to order" climate, he matured the idea of returning to museums, looking to the Renaissance (initially Italian and then also German and Flemish) with particular attention. He turned down this "new classicism" in terms of a true "return to

<sup>89</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., pp. 120-121.

<sup>90</sup> The technical data of the painting is unknown as is its location. See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa di de Chirico 1908-1924*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1984, p. 106, n. 52.

<sup>91</sup> He suggests to de Chirico, for example, that he write an essay on Signorelli which ended up not being published. In reality, only *Giotto* by Carrà (1924) was published in this collection. See P. Fossati, op. cit., pp. 277-289.

<sup>92</sup> G. Severini, *Dal cubismo al classicismo e altri saggi sulla divina proporzione e sul numero d'oro*, edited by P. Pacini, Florence, 1972.

<sup>93</sup> The "new classicism" took root mainly in Paris, at the beginning of the century where it connected with the symbolism of the Nabis, Puvis de Chavannes, "re-constructor" Impressionists such as Cézanne and Renoir, reaching back to Corot and Ingres. However, analogous classicist tendencies which can be found in Germany (Von Mareés, Klinger and above-all Böcklin) were not any less important. See *L'idea del classico 1916-1932. Temi classici nell'arte italiana degli anni Venti*, exhibition catalogue, curated by E. Pontiggia - L. Cavallo, Fabbri - Bompiani - Sonzogno, Milan, 1992.

craft" which critics have considered academic and reactionary at times. One deals with a specifically de Chirican proclamation which had a certain echo with contemporary painters – and not only those who gravitated towards «Valori Plastici» – increasing the attention towards tradition and the discipline of painting. The “return to craft” phenomenon is therefore an “invention” of Giorgio de Chirico since no other artist in Italy in the twentieth century and the 1920s in particular, insisted so resolutely about the necessity of re-learning the grammar of art and re-appropriating painting technique.<sup>94</sup>

For him, craft required the return of the human figure as it is above-all in this that we see de Chirico's classicism. This is why he outlined the need to patiently practice with anatomical atlas models, and insisted on making copies from plaster figures. His meditation on fifteenth century art constitutes, therefore, a way to return to the human figure – the study of the nude for the mediation on classic statuary –. The comparison allowed the artist to discover the essential value of drawing and making copies of antique sculptures, which he had experimented with during his Academy years. In *Il ritorno al mestiere*, he suggested, therefore, to painters to return “[...] to statues in order to learn the nobility and religion of drawing [...]”<sup>95</sup>, criticising the academies of the time and weaving, instead, the praise of the Munich Academy where he had studied, which was undoubtedly one of the most conservative.

The critique directed at the official art schools during these years was equal and contrary to that of the Futurists. Whilst they attacked the schools for their academicism, which suppressed the creativity of young [artists], they themselves were now rebuked for not being “academic” enough, of not having any secrets left to pass on.

The subject is taken up again by de Chirico the following year on the pages of «Il Primato Artistico Italiano» in his text *Le scuole di pittura presso gli antichi* (The painting schools of the ancients). Here, the painter outlined the corporate spirit of artists in the past and, once again, the assiduous practice of craft: “With ancient painters, the master’s school was a real family [...]. The young [artist], eager to learn art, entered such schools (often in the middle of childhood) to learn the *primi rudimenta* and the main secrets of the trade [...]. He started to carefully study the way of grinding colours [...], of spreading chalk onto panels in accordance with all the rules of art, or the damp fresco on the space of large walls [...]. Having acquired this basic knowledge, the pupil looked for more knowledgeable masters [...]”<sup>96</sup>

This account also suggests an interesting similarity with the Nazarenes episode in the previous century. As has been seen, they had a decisive role in reforming the German artistic training system, leading it to the introduction of the *Meisterklassen*, for example, which later was nothing other than an attempt to revive the practices of a close relationship between pupil and master (looking to the

<sup>94</sup> The idea of the classical which spread in the 1920s, mainly through the debate which took place in magazines («Valori Plastici», «Il Convegno», «La Ronda», «Il Primato» and «Rete Mediteranea»), Elena Pontiggia has identified three areas, definable as “traditionalism”, “modern classical antiquity” and “new classicism”, as well as different ways of achieving them. Severini and de Chirico's poetry can be traced to “new classicism”. Both, in fact, place the accent of their arguments more on ancient and eternal laws of art than on a desire to modernise them, reactivating, therefore, continuity with the past. However, the roads chosen were different: Severini insisted on the revival of building laws (forgotten after the Renaissance) whilst de Chirico was more interested in establishing the priority of the figure over other pictorial subjects (See *L'idea del classico 1916-1932*, pp. 38-43).

<sup>95</sup> G. de Chirico, *Il ritorno al mestiere*, cit.

<sup>96</sup> G. de Chirico, *Le scuole di pittura presso gli antichi*, in «Il Primato Artistico Italiano», Milan, n. 2-3, February-March 1920 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 127-131).

practice of the Medieval and Renaissance workshop) inside the academies. In the same text, the painter also revealed a close reading of Vasari's *Vite* (Lives), as well as of other lesser well-known treaties of that period, undertaken with the aim of tracing an accurate map of past artistic practice.

The following essay appeared in «Valori Plastici» and is entitled *Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica* (Architectonic Sense in Ancient Painting)<sup>97</sup>, the first part of a discourse based on the architectonic structure of the image which the artist later concluded in «Il Convegno». The importance of precise and defined drawing is the subject of the following article, published in «La Ronda»: *Classicismo pittorico* (Painting classicism).<sup>98</sup> It is here that de Chirico traced a digression from Greek art to the Italian Renaissance, giving rise to the notion of "classicism" with a predominance of linear drawing, and spoke in terms of a true "mysticism" of line. Once again, the idea model of reference was the fifteenth century, and in particular Tuscany which is characterised by its "linearism" compared to Venice where the chromatic element dominated. De Chirico's painting classicism was shown the same year in the painting *La partenza degli argonauti* (The Departure of the Argonauts)<sup>99</sup> (fig. 7), fifteenth century in style with its perspective set-up, just as in the iconography of the buildings and the figures nervous linearism (where an interest in Signorelli is recognisable<sup>100</sup>). With de Chirico, theory always crosses over with practice. In the text on *Classicismo pittorico* (Painting classicism), de Chirico adds: "The last great Italian in whom classicism lived with all its signs and mysterious symbols was Michelangelo. [...] Raphael, whose spirit was incredibly assimilatory, also knew intuitively about classicism and the mystery of the line. Less than Michelangelo, however [...]"<sup>101</sup>

The painting *Copia dal "Tondo Doni" di Michelangelo* (Copy of Michelangelo's "Doni Madonna")<sup>102</sup> (fig. 8) belongs to the same year of 1920 and was executed during his visits to Florence where he often went in order to make copies at the Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti, a guest of his friend and collector, Giorgio Castelfranco.<sup>103</sup>

Both works were exhibited in the important solo show which was held the following year in Milan at the Galleria Arte.<sup>104</sup> In the catalogue's preface, de Chirico leaves us to guess the new and decisive turning point in his painting during these years:

"In my latest works such as *Edipo* (Oedipus), *Autoritratto* (Self-portrait), *Ritratto di Signora* (Portrait of a Woman), *Niobe*, *Saluto degli Argonauti partenti* (Farewell of the Departing Argonauts) and two versions of *Statua di Mercurio che rivela ai metafisici i misteri degli dei* (Statue of Mercury who reveals the Mysteries of the Gods to the Metaphysicians), one finds that tendency of bright painting and transparent colour, that dry sense of the material substance of paint which I call Olympic and

<sup>97</sup> G. de Chirico, *Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica*, in «Valori Plastici», Rome, n. 5-6, May-June 1920 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 100-103).

<sup>98</sup> G. de Chirico, *Classicismo pittorico*, in «La Ronda», Rome, n. 7, July 1920 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 225-229).

<sup>99</sup> Tempera on canvas, 54 x 73 cm, 1920, private collection (See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa*, cit., p. 107, n. 159).

<sup>100</sup> De Chirico was to have written a monography on this artist for the publication «Valori Plastici» but it was then not carried out.

<sup>101</sup> G. de Chirico, *Classicismo pittorico*, op. cit.

<sup>102</sup> The painting bears this caption in the catalogue edited by Bruni: oil on canvas, ø x 116 cm, 1920, Bruno Pagliai collection, Mexico City (See C. Bruni Sakraichik, *Catalogo Generale Giorgio de Chirico*, vol. IV, part I, Milan, 1974, n. 263). However, Fagiolo dell'Arco records it as tempera on canvas, ø x 116 cm, 1920, private collection (See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa*, cit., p. 106, n. 153).

<sup>103</sup> See G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., p. 139.

<sup>104</sup> The exhibition (which exhibited more than twenty-four paintings and forty drawings) was held from 29th January to 12th February in 1921 (See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico: il tempo di Valori Plastici*, cit., pp. 56-61).

which finds its highest achievement in the work of Botticelli and Raphael's Perugino period".<sup>105</sup>

These apparently cryptically-natured declarations allude to the use of a new but ancient painting technique by the artist. From an iconographical point of view, these works are linked to fifteenth century Tuscan art and were all painted in tempera which is often indicated as "oil mixed emulsion" (or mixed tempera with an oily binder which created transparent veiling)<sup>106</sup>. The start of a new practice of painting is recorded in *Memorie* coincidentally with the episode of the Michelangelo copy: "During the numerous visits I made to Florence between 1919 and 1924, once, whilst I was copying the *Sacred Family* by Michelangelo at the Uffizi museum, I met the Russian artist Nicola Locoff who explained how many ancient paintings which seemed to be oil paintings, were in fact varnished "oil tempera emulsion" works. Tempera tempted me. I started to look for recipes for this technique and for several years I painted in tempera".<sup>107</sup>

De Chirico, therefore, pushed his attention beyond the iconographic call. His interest in "craft" now led him to investigate the secrets of the material substance of the paint of the early Renaissance which he and his contemporaries believed consisted in a mixed oil-tempera binder rather than a more skilled use of oil. These beliefs were not altogether mistaken but at the time, they were based on empirical recipes and were therefore still of a conjectural state. The complexity of the procedures and the variety of materials used in that period has been dealt with, with greater scientific adequacy during the second half of the XX century. Today, there are still aspects that need to be clarified.<sup>108</sup>

The idea that the Flemish secret (and that of the Germans and Italians in the XV century) was oil tempera emulsion, was formed in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in Munich with Ernst Berger's studies. By that time, these ideas had probably been generalised by artists and restorers, as de Chirico's anecdote testifies in his *Memorie*. Despite the narrated episode, it seems plausible to sustain that the artist's theories regarding oil tempera emulsion could be traced rather to his training at the Academy of Munich during the period 1906-1909 and therefore pre-existed the episode itself.

That which is recounted in the *Memorie* would attest, in any case, to the start of de Chirico's practice of oil tempera emulsion in 1920, documenting the *Copia dal "Tondo Doni"* (Copy of the "Doni Madonna") as his first painting executed in this technique. In reality, this can not be held as certain, as it is not analytically demonstrable. Furthermore, the work is mentioned by de Chirico in *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* in the part dedicated to painting in oil.<sup>109</sup> The ambiguity generated by cross-reading certain passages of the *trattato* with the passages previously cited from his *Memorie*, brings us to hypothesise that this work could be one of the first paintings in oil tempera

<sup>105</sup> See G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 223-224.

<sup>106</sup> They appear, at least, with this technique in the catalogues relating to his pictorial production during the period 1919-1924. Specific data drawn from scientific analysis on de Chirico's paintings are almost absent due to their international dispersion, as well as their situation in private collectors, as well as the scarce general interest in carrying out scientific investigations on his works when not finalized toward specific restoration requirements.

<sup>107</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., p. 139.

<sup>108</sup> One can consider the period from the middle of the fifteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century as a period of transition as one sees the gradual passage from panel to canvas and from tempera paint to oil paint. Within this passage was an intermediate phase of "oil tempera" in which artists often made emulsions with egg and oil, but mostly elaborated a sophisticated succession of layers of tempera and of oil. (Cfr. M. C. Galassi, *Considerazioni sugli aspetti tecnici della pittura italiana tra il 1475 e il 1550*, in *Studi di storia delle arti*, 1984, n. 5, pp. 195-243).

<sup>109</sup> Exact citation: *Dipingere un quadro con toni luminosi simili all'affresco*. See G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, cit., pp. 46-48.

emulsion or one of the last in oil, before dedicating himself to new research. In such a case, the anecdote regarding his meeting with Locoff occurred at the moment when the work on the Michelangelo copy was coming to an end.

It seems, therefore, that he executed copies in museums with oil tempera emulsion during those years, as well as all the other paintings with classicism-inspired subjects, searching for that "brilliant painting" and "Olympic" effect well-exemplified in *Il saluto degli argonauti partenti* (Farewell of the Departing Argonauts). The importance of tempera was programmatically theorised only in 1923 in his text *Pro tecnica oratio*, which was published in the magazine «La Bilancia».<sup>110</sup>

In 1921, another crucial essay appeared in «Valori Plastici» whose title was openly provocative: *La mania del Seicento* (Seventeenth Century Mania)<sup>111</sup>. The occasion had been provided by an announcement for an Italian art exhibition of seventeenth and eighteenth century art which was held in Florence in mid-1922.<sup>112</sup> During these years, both he and Savinio did not appear to love the painting of this century, which de Chirico negatively identified in his text as a fad and tradition (in the negative sense of the term). He limited his profession of faith in art prior to Caravaggio – who was guilty of having started the decadence of painting –.<sup>113</sup> Caravaggio's dismissal eventually opened into the exaltation of tempera painting, with de Chirico maintaining that the exclusive and slaphappy use of the oil technique by modern painters led to a decadence in tradition. One needs to note that it was the first time that painting in tempera was explicitly called into question, unlike the cited *Preface* where, with allusive but still slightly obscure tones, he spoke about "Olympic" painting. Now, he spoke clearly about oil tempera emulsion, considering it the true and unique technique of the Renaissance painters, in opposition to the use of oil. Here, he anticipated themes which would be dealt with extensively and programmatically two years later in the text *Pro tecnica oratio*.

De Chirico's journalistic activity followed with the article *Riflessioni sulla pittura antica* (Reflections on Ancient Painting)<sup>114</sup> which appeared in April 1921 in «Il Convegno». This closed his discourse on architecture which he had started the previous year in the pages of «Valori Plastici» with the text *Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica*. But as at the start of the 1920s, particularly during his collaboration on Broglio's magazine, de Chirico wrote and published articles as never before – crossfire arguments with ever-present controversial tones – which developed into a very coherent theoretical programme. With his participation in the exhibition Primaverile Fiorentina (Florentine Spring) in

<sup>110</sup> G. de Chirico, *Pro tecnica oratio* in «La Bilancia», March and April 1923 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 238-240). In reality, the content had already been mentioned (even if only in part) in the text which remained unpublished, *Pro tempera oratio*. It was probably written in 1920 and was intended for «Valori Plastici».

<sup>111</sup> G. de Chirico, *La mania del Seicento* in «Valori Plastici», Rome, n. 3, March 1921 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 104-106).

<sup>112</sup> The exhibition was organised by Ojetti together with Dami and Tarchiani at Palazzo Pitti, with a wide collaboration of experts – amongst which Longhi also stood out. With this text and its particularly controversial tones, de Chirico opened up a huge cultural dispute which set the pages of «Valori Plastici» and other periodicals of the time alight. See F. Mazzocca, *La mostra fiorentina del 1922 e la polemica sul Seicento*, in «Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa», series III, vol. 2, 1975, pp. 837-901.

<sup>113</sup> With his condemnation of the seventeenth century as a whole (which he defined as "the smoky century of bitumen and cracking"), the painter only excludes Poussin and Lorrain. The two French painters had already appeared in his essay *Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica* («Valori Plastici», 5-6, 1920) and return in *Riflessioni sulla pittura antica* («Il Convegno», 4-5, 1921) but as examples of classical antiquity.

<sup>114</sup> G. de Chirico, *Riflessioni sulla pittura antica*, in «Il Convegno», Milan-Rome, n. 4-5, April-May 1921 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 196-200). German painters are cited here, amongst which Holbein (for his full-bodied painting and perspective solidity in the construction of his images) and Dürer (for the colour and cleanness of mark).

1922, during which the «Valori Plastici» group was reunited for the last time<sup>115</sup>, de Chirico's "classical period" finished. It was marked by the proclamation ("Pictor classicus sum") which had provoked noticeable scandal in 1919. Nevertheless, he maintained his interest in tradition and skill, continuing to work in tempera but now turning attention towards new iconographic and stylistic models. Recuperating the influences of Böcklin and moving closer to Courbet, he entered what he himself would define as his "romantic period" (1922-1924).

In a letter addressed to Breton in 1922, which was published in the March issue of «Littérature»<sup>116</sup>, de Chirico writes: "You must have noticed that for some time now, something has changed in the arts, we do not speak of Neoclassicism, of return [...]. But for nearly three years, a problem torments me: the problem of craft. It is due to this that I started making copies in museums"<sup>117</sup>.

Between March and April 1922, an important retrospective at the Galerie Guillaume in Paris took place.<sup>118</sup> Amongst the more than fifty works exhibited, which spanned his entire metaphysical production, were four works of his most recent classical period (executed between 1920 and 1922). The solo show aimed to make his latest meditations known whilst the introduction, written by André Breton, gave them a Surrealist-style interpretation. De Chirico, who was in written contact with Breton and Eluard since 1920, wrote to them now in order to make them fully understand the new research which he was busying himself with as they tended to pigeonhole him with the unique definition of "metaphysical".

In the text, the artist reaffirmed how the use of oil in art was deleterious, since oil tempera emulsion was the base of the Renaissance masters' fine painting. In this way, he took up arguments again which had already been put forth in the controversial text *La mania del Seicento* of 1921<sup>119</sup>. This time, the close examination went even further, telling of the historical misunderstanding which had led one to believe that Antonello da Messina had brought the secret of oil painting from Flanders to Italy. He continued by explaining that the Flemish, above-all the Van Eyck brothers, had not painted with an oily binder but an emulsion of oil and tempera (oil tempera emulsion). At times, this was also mixed with other substances (resins, honey, casein, fig latex etc.). Dürer, Holbein, Raphael, Perugino and even Rubens and Titian would have also painted in this way. Such reasoning certainly could not be understood by the Surrealists who continued, however, to consider him important for their research for still a few more years.

Meanwhile, the use of oil tempera emulsion acquired the character of a true "conversion" for de Chirico. A year after the letter written to Breton, the same issues were re-proposed in a wider manner in the fundamental text called *Pro technica oratio* which was published in two parts in the mag-

<sup>115</sup> The exhibition was held in Florence at Palazzo del Parco di San Gallo, from 8th April to 31st July 1922. Wanted by the Società delle Belle Arti and entrusted to Sem Benelli, the exhibition, with its "Italian" character, aimed to contrast with the contemporary Venice Biennial. De Chirico exhibited 21 paintings and some drawings (Cfr. M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico: il tempo di Valori Plastici*, cit., pp. 72-77). The exhibition is recalled in *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* under *Tele, tavole e cartoni*, in which he maintains that his works were almost all tempera on cardboard.

<sup>116</sup> The magazine was founded in March 1919 by André Breton together with Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. Its activity concluded in 1924 when Breton published the *Manifesto of Surrealism* and the group devoted itself to the new magazine «La Revolution Surrealiste».

<sup>117</sup> G. de Chirico, *Une lettre de Chirico*, in «Littérature», Paris, n. 5, March 1922 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 234-235).

<sup>118</sup> The solo show organised by Paul Guillaume at his gallery, in de Chirico's absence, took place from 21st March to 1st April 1922.

<sup>119</sup> G. de Chirico, *La mania del Seicento*, cit.

azine «La Bilancia». As such, it concluded a question which started back in 1920, setting it out with the value of a programmatic manifesto. It is important to note that the theoretical nucleus of this essay does not deal just with oil tempera emulsion but more widely with the problem of technique and matter – attributing an almost “ethical” meaning to these –. This discourse on the decadence of painting from the sixteenth century onwards, which had already been mentioned in *La mania del Seicento* of 1921, as well as the oil tempera emulsion question, were put forth again in the second part of the essay: “It is common opinion today to believe that Antonello da Messina had brought over the secret of oil painting from Flanders to Italy [...]. Instead, it is very likely that Messina’s famous oil painting had nothing to do with oil painting today and also that of yesterday. [...] It is well-known by all that the brothers Hubert and John Van Eyck are considered the founders and discoverers of oil painting. Such oil painting was instead probably tempera, that which is called oil tempera emulsion. [...] With this oil tempera emulsion (which was mixed with oil and also with resin), Holbein, Dürer, Pietro Perugino, Antonello da Messina, Raphael and Michelangelo undoubtedly painted (....) and it is also indubitable that the most beautiful canvases of Paul Rubens and the Venetians are varnished oil tempera emulsions”.<sup>120</sup>

His discourse is articulated in an identical manner to the one developed in *Lettera a Breton* (Letter to Breton) in 1922 which included the historical misunderstanding dating back to Vasari which dealt with the episode of Antonello’s life. Unlike previous writings, here the artist also supplied more punctual practical details relating, for example, to the conservation characteristics of oil tempera emulsion, making a distinction between it and lean tempera and describing the practice of veiling. The text, purposely divided into two parts, probably set out to confront all aspects of the problem and hence also the practical side. In reality, that systematically happened only five years after *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittura*, just when the artist had “reconverted” to oil painting in the meantime.

De Chirico’s meditation on tempera was therefore articulated according to a precise path: it had its first moment in the Preface to the Milanese exhibition of 1921 where the artist still spoke enigmatically about “Olympic painting”, following with *La mania del Seicento* of 1921 and the *Lettera a Breton* (1922). The 1923 essay *Pro tecnica oratio* constituted the defining stage in the journey. However, one needs to explain that the nucleus of arguments dealt with in these writings had already been formulated by de Chirico in a manuscript called *Pro tempera Oratio* which had almost certainly been written in 1920 for «Valori Plastici» and then remained unpublished.<sup>121</sup>

The revelations of some painters and restorers at the time of his “copyist” days in Florentine museums (1920), as featured in the artist’s accounts, motivated and shaped what was to become a true passion. However, returning to those records, besides the anecdote relating to his meeting with Nicola Locoff at the Uffizi at the time of his *Copia dal “Tondo Doni”*, we also find another episode which is linked to the rediscovery of oil tempera emulsion: “The painter Nicola Locoff, whom I visit-

<sup>120</sup> G. de Chirico, *Pro tecnica oratio*, part II, in «La Bilancia», Rome, n. 2, April 1923 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 241-244).

<sup>121</sup> The manuscript (composed of sixteen numbered pages measuring 21 x 16 cm) belongs to the archive at of the Fondazione Primo Conti, in Fiesole (Inv. FC/VP Ms 4.5). Some passages are transcribed in: *XIII Quadriennale - Valori Plastici*, op. cit., p. 281. The study, which was reworked and amplified by de Chirico in his later text *Pro tecnica oratio*, is published here in its entirety for the first time. Ivi, pp. 475-480.

ed in his studio, showed me some copies which he had executed [...] I remained amazed [...] but when I tried to ask Locoff for his recipes [...] he always responded in a confused way [...]. However, I did succeed in finding out something more positive from the Florentine painter Enrico Bettarini who was very able in tempera painting. Also of great help to me was a book written by a German called Berger which dealt with Böcklin's technique. The great Basilean painter had, in fact, always painted in tempera and was a passionate researcher of all secrets regarding this way of painting".<sup>122</sup> Therefore, another core element at the heart of de Chirico's passion for oil tempera emulsion comes to light. The influence of Arnold Böcklin on de Chirico's painting culture is well known, from his initiation in Munich of Bavaria where the Swiss artist had stayed many times, leaving important traces behind. The painter and scholar of artistic techniques, Ernst Berger (author of the monography on Böcklin's technique which de Chirico mentioned in his *Memorie*<sup>123</sup>) also lived and worked in the same city. In the nineteenth century, Böcklin was one of the artists most involved in the study and experimentation of Old Master techniques, systematically reading sources such as Cennini and Teofilo. He dedicated himself to tempera between the 1870s and 1880s – the same period in which some scholars and scientists who were active in Munich (amongst whom Berger) started to investigate this technique –. It was in this environment that the firm belief of how the Flemish had not "discovered" the technique of oil but had only perfected its use with the addition of egg or other protein substances (painting, therefore, with so-called oil tempera emulsion or *oeltempera*) matured at the end of the century. De Chirico's presence, even if irregular, in Munich between 1906 and 1909 for his studies at the Academy, at the time when these theories were spreading, persuades us to think that the arguments developed within the impenetrable net of his theoretical writings analysed here, made use of those studies. This hypothesis is confirmed by the mentioning of Berger's book. De Chirico had also probably read his main work in which the discoveries of these scholars and scientists were ordered.<sup>124</sup> This leads one to also believe that such close examination was undertaken to legitimate his "own" theories about the Flemish contained in the text *Pro technica oratio*: "In a part of Vasari's *Life of Antonello da Messina*, one reads: "these oils which are their tempera".<sup>125</sup> It is without doubt that the author is alluding to Flemish oil tempera emulsion here. To confirm the opinion that Flemish oil painting was oil tempera emulsion, it is sufficient to quote the following words by Michel Angelo Biondo who, in the XXIII chapter of his Treaty, speaking about the different systems of painting on canvas or panel, says: "*lavora et penge con tempera d'oglio*" ("to work and paint with tempera of oil"). It is clear that Biondo's *tempera d'oglio* is the same as that alluded by Vasari: "these oils which are their tempera"<sup>126</sup>. This dispute which recurs identically in *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*<sup>127</sup> (Small treatise on painting technique), is very similar to that one established by Berger in the aforementioned volume,

<sup>122</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., p. 140.

<sup>123</sup> E. Berger, *Böcklins Technik*, cit.

<sup>124</sup> E. Berger, *Quellen und technik der fresko-, oel- und tempera-malerei des Mittelalters*, cit.

<sup>125</sup> G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*, edited by L. Bellosi, A. Rossi, Einaudi, Turin, 1986, p. 69.

<sup>126</sup> G. de Chirico, *Pro technica oratio*, cit., n. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Exact citation: *Pittura a tempera* (See G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, cit., pp. 27-28).

*Quellen und technik der fresko-, oel- und tempera-malerei des Mittelalters* of 1897. In order to refute the belief that the Flemish painted in oil, the same passages from Vasari's account in *Vite* (which attributes them with its paternity<sup>128</sup>), were quoted. The identification of the argumentation confirms the hypothesis that de Chirico obtained these theories from that volume, which he owned (perhaps from his Academy days) just as with the rest of the book on Bocklin – something which seems rather plausible with the latter being published in Munich in 1906 –. Moreover, Michel Angelo Biondo's text (mentioned above by de Chirico<sup>129</sup>) was translated and commented on in German for the first time by Ilg in Vienna in 1873 and for the second time by Berger in 1901.<sup>130</sup> Even in this case, one is led to believe that de Chirico could have known of the text through the filter of this Viennese scholar during the years spent in Munich. The theories developed in his writings from 1920 to 1923, and then put forward again in *Piccolo trattato* in 1928, would therefore trace back to the studies of Munich researchers (Berger above-all) rather than to secrets gleaned from restorers known during those years.<sup>131</sup> Without diminishing the value of the artist's records, one could suppose that the episodes regarding Locoff and Bettarini had simply reactivated a pre-existing interest, leading him to dust down the books which he almost certainly owned since his time in Munich in order to provide a foundation to his research. It seems unlikely that during his stay in Munich (1906-1909), de Chirico could have remained unaware of an area of research which had been hotly debated for twenty years in the Bavarian capital, where "competitions of painting technique" even took place. Research undertaken in Munich resulted in, for example, the German Association for the Promotion of Traditional Painting Techniques announcing an evening conference on 4th December 1907, the subject of discussion being the duties of the State and private organisations with regard to the question of technical-painting problems.<sup>132</sup> At this conference, speeches by Carl Von Marr (an Academy professor of whom de Chirico had been a pupil) and Professor Eibner (the chemist who led studies into the definition of Medieval tempera) were scheduled. Even if Giorgio de Chirico's presence in Munich at that time is not attested by documents, similarly – there is no proof that shows the contrary – (a fact that would, almost certainly, negate the hypothesis of his participation in this conference).

Finally, it would be useful to consider that Jacobidis, of whom de Chirico had been a pupil at Athens Polytechnic, had lived in Munich between the end of the 1870s and the end of the 1890s (after having carried out his studies at the Academy from 1877 to 1883). The fact that Jacobidis also later became the director of Athens Polytechnic (perhaps bringing with him that conservative spirit which the German academies owed to the presence of some important representatives of the Nazarene movement) deserves further reflection. The return to craft in the ways in which de Chirico had postulated in his writings during the early 1920s leads us, as has been seen, to also formulate paral-

<sup>128</sup> At the end of the previous century Lessing was the first to initiate the controversy by demonstrating that oil was already used much before the fifteenth century.

<sup>129</sup> M. Biondo, *Della Nobilissima pittura et di la sua arte, et dil modo di conseguirla agevolmente di Michel Angelo Biondo. Utile et breve dottrina*, Venice, 1549.

<sup>130</sup> See S. Bordini, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>131</sup> For the same conclusion regarding a "German formation" of de Chirico's theories on oil tempera emulsion, see also: C. Compostella, *La tecnica di Giorgio de Chirico 1919-1925*, in *Bollettino ICR*, 2001, n. 3, pp. 2-38. The essay is interesting above-all for its scientific investigations (reflectographies and ultraviolet fluorescence) which the author was able to carry out on some paintings.

<sup>132</sup> G. Ross, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

lelisms with the venture of this confraternity, active in Rome at the start of the previous century. Arnold Böcklin's painting, which had also been de Chirico's favourite, remained, in any case, one of the main stimuli during the artist's journey, systematically dedicated himself to the study of Old Masters and the practice of oil tempera emulsion. Even the Swiss artist had started to experiment with tempera, producing a kind of "conversion" from painting in oil. Such an emphatic process was completed with a new iconographic and stylistic revival by the Maestro between 1922 and 1923. In 1920<sup>133</sup> when de Chirico started (according to his writings) to paint in tempera, he was still interested in making copies in museums. Until 1921-22, the years were spent programmatically learning Renaissance art, as shown with both the themes and titles of his paintings. When, in around 1922, his enthusiasm for Böcklin's painting was rekindled, it was not his centurions, nor nymphs or fauns which interested him as in his youthful years<sup>134</sup> but rather the architecture in the various versions of *Villa sul mare* (Villa by the sea) or *Villa italiana in primavera* (Italian villa in the spring) of 1870.<sup>135</sup> This new phase, connoted by an almost osmotic link to the Basilean painter for technique, iconography and style (which de Chirico himself defined his "romantic period") was officially established at the Quadrennial of Turin in 1923<sup>136</sup>, triumphing once and for all the same year at the second Roman Biennial.<sup>137</sup> Eighteen works were exhibited here (two metaphysical works and sixteen more recent pieces) amongst which were those that belonged to the *Ville romane* (Roman villas) series.<sup>138</sup> Other than the renewed interest in Böcklin and Klinger, his "romantic" period is also characterised by his discovery of Courbet's realism. It is not of small importance that the French painter's epigraph "*Savoir pour pouvoir*" appeared at the beginning of both his text *Il ritorno al mestiere* of 1919 and *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* of 1928 (figs. 9-10). This resulted in joining (and chronologically so) the two extremes of a reflection on craft, technique and the material substance of paint perhaps even more programmatically. The paintings executed during this period (1922-1924) marked by the influence of Böcklin, Klinger and Courbet, are remembered by de Chirico in *Piccolo trattato* in the section dedicated to lean tempera as executed examples of glue-based tempera.<sup>139</sup> The last stage of this period was marked by his participation in the XIV Biennial of Venice in 1924<sup>140</sup> with *Ottobrata*<sup>141</sup> and *I Duelli a morte* (Duels to the Death)<sup>142</sup> – two unusually large canvases of complex iconography which were also perhaps the last to be painted in oil tempera emulsion –.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>133</sup> However, in the year, he dedicated a text to him: G. de Chirico, *Arnoldo Böcklin*, in «Il Convegno», Milan-Rome, n. 4, May 1920 (reproduced in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 166-171).

<sup>134</sup> These subjects characterised his paintings during the first moment of Böcklin's influence, the so-called pre-metaphysical period (1908-1909) which constituted de Chirico's artistic debut (See *Giorgio de Chirico Pictor Optimus*, cit., pp. 95-96).

<sup>135</sup> See W. Schmied, «*Pictor Classicus sum: Il ritorno al mestiere*», in I. Far, D. Porzio, *Conoscere de Chirico*, Mondadori, Milan, 1979, pp. 106-107.

<sup>136</sup> The exhibition which de Chirico participated in (urged on by Felice Casorati) took place between 14th April and 31st July 1923. See *Giorgio de Chirico. Gli anni Venti*, cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>137</sup> *Ivi*. The exhibition was founded in 1921 to contrast the new "Italian" artistic culture (which was maturing in Rome) with the Venice Biennial, the "adorer of foreign things". It opened on 4th November 1923 and finished on 30th April 1924.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>139</sup> The painter speaks about "landscapes with a strict study of foliage and branch anatomies" (See G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, cit., pp. 29-36). However, one must explain that de Chirico's "lean tempera" is not really that. With the addition of an emulsion based of crude linseed oil and egg, it also ends up being "grassa" or "fat".

<sup>140</sup> This was the first Biennial for the painter who was invited to the greatest Italian artistic event at the age of thirty-six years old. The two paintings, which finish the cycle of seven *Roman Villa's*, were yet again met unfavourably by critics.

<sup>141</sup> Tempera on canvas, 135 x 183 cm, 1924. See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa*, cit., p. 118, n. 252.

<sup>142</sup> Tempera on canvas, 131 x 188 cm, 1924, *Ibid.*, p. 118, n. 253.

<sup>143</sup> For example, Fagiolo dell'Arco sustains this, *Ibid.*, p. 118.

Shortly afterwards, he decided to leave Italy and return to Paris to live after having become more and more embittered by the hostility of critics. His second stay in Paris became characterised by his return to the technique of oil, accompanied as well by a change in subject matter and style, the fruit of re-elaborations of metaphysical themes. In fact, he confirms in his *Memorie*: "When I left for Paris in 1925, I had [already] abandoned tempera for nearly a year and returned to painting in oil".<sup>144</sup>

On the basis of such declarations, one should then backdate the *Autoritratto* (Self-portrait)<sup>145</sup> to 1924 (figs. 11-12) which is today at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, signed and dated "G. de Chirico 1925". This work presents, through examination, all the characteristics of oil tempera emulsion. Finally, it shows how (while the use of tempera had been accompanied by an impenetrable and coherent theoretical elaboration) its sudden abandonment was not justified by any of his subsequent writings, thus remaining an inexplicable choice.

The new Parisian period was however marked by his breaking off from the Surrealists for reasons of aesthetic order, with them not being able to completely understand the new "pictor classicus" de Chirico, who was interested in "craft" and research in the figurative roots within the museum.<sup>146</sup> Paradoxically, the painter showed himself to be more surrealist than ever at that time: changing technique and style again by returning, in fact, to his metaphysical iconography and forgetting the "Old Master" subjects which had characterised his classical and romantic period in Italy (1919-1924). New mannequins appeared amongst his themes during these years, now known as *Filosofi* (Philosophers) or *Archeologi* (Archeologists), followed by *Nus antiquae* (Old Master nudes), the series of *Trofei* (Trophies), *Mobili nella valle* (Furniture in the valley), the series of *Interni in una stanza* (Interiors in a Room) and finally, *Cavalli* (Horses) and *Gladiatori* (Gladiators) – the latter two certainly being amongst the most recurrent of these themes –.<sup>147</sup> Having abandoned tempera and taken up oil painting again, the palette of these paintings appears lighter and more vivid, just as the pictorial drafting of surfaces seems altered (figs. 13-14).

The main referent of his new Parisian iconographic tradition (particularly for the paintings of horses) was *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* by Salomon Reinach.<sup>148</sup> An interesting and direct testimony regarding this relationship is provided by the painter Antonio Fornari<sup>149</sup>, de Chirico's assistant in his Paris studio: "During 1926 in Paris, I was at the service of de Chirico for several months. Our work consisted of preparing canvases according to a particular procedure, washing the paint-

<sup>144</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., p. 140. Scholars have explained that the definitive move happened during the autumn of that year (See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *La vita di Giorgio de Chirico*, cit., p. 145).

<sup>145</sup> Tempera on cardboard, 62 x 46 cm, 1924, Rome, GNAM (See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa*, cit., p. 117, n. 240). Fagiolo dell'Arco also suggests backdating it. The painting would have therefore been executed at the end of 1924 and exhibited at the III Biennale in Rome in March 1925, where it was bought by the Italian State (See *Giorgio de Chirico nelle collezioni della GNAM*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, GNAM, 1994, pp. 42-43).

<sup>146</sup> There were perhaps not just aesthetic reasons behind such radical opposition: "My arrival in Paris with a stock of new paintings, my relationships with local dealers and my exhibitions of a different [kind of] painting to that which they possessed and inflated, brought confusion to the plans of Breton's gang and they broke the egg in the basket. Therefore, the Surrealists decided to embark, on a vast scale, upon a type of a great boycotting of my new output [...]" G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, cit., pp. 143-144.

<sup>147</sup> With regard to this period of iconographic production, see P. Baldacci - M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico. Parigi 1924-29, dalla nascita del Surrealismo al crollo di Wall Street*, Daverio-Mondadori, Milan, 1982, pp. 118-121.

<sup>148</sup> S. Reinach (1858-1932) was a professor and populariser of archeology and well-known for his numerous catalogues and repertoires which were greatly consulted during the first third of the twentieth century. The volume mentioned was published in 1898-1906 and was re-published several times. Reinach's name already appears in Savinio's and de Chirico's writings before 1919 (See P. Baldacci - M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, op. cit., pp. 87-88).

<sup>149</sup> This painter is now almost forgotten about. From him, we know that he had been to Giacomo Balla's studio during the First World War. Furthermore, at the end of the 1920s, he participated in the group exhibitions of *Italiens de Paris*.

brushes, cleaning the palettes. The task was not difficult but it required a lot of attention; the smallest of errors would not have escaped him [...]. Giorgio de Chirico lived then with his wife Raissa at No. 30 Rue Bonaparte in an apartment where a vast living room acted as a studio. Entering this studio on a warm spring afternoon, we caught sight of a painting on the easel which did not portray the usual and very pensive robed mannequins. The painting had a slender white horse [...]. An open book was placed on the Maestro's chair. With the [kind of] curiosity for the secrets of masters that all creatures have, we stuck our noses in the book's pages [...]. The book was no other than *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* by Salomon Reinach [...]. It was one of the books that his wife Raissa, a pupil of Prof. Picard at the Sorbonne, studied".<sup>150</sup>

This testimony is precious as, apart from documenting the use of repertoires, it brings us back to the problem of technique. Having abandoned research on tempera and the craving for imitating subjects and techniques of past masters now gone, de Chirico had not lost interest in fine matter and technique – he continued to prepare his canvases himself despite the conspicuous production of paintings of this second Parisian period –. Such interests (which had never cooled) persuaded him to write *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* in 1928 in that same city, urged on by the Swiss editor Giovanni Scheiwiller who published it at the publishing house run by himself in Milan.<sup>151</sup>

This event does not mark the end of de Chirico's careful consideration surrounding the "problem of craft", the material substance of paint and technique, aspects destined to become a salient factor in his artistic activity to come. De Chirico speaks further on these questions on a theoretical level in a number of writings published at the beginning of the 1940s<sup>152</sup>, at a time when his "romantic and baroque" period of painting was well underway, an influence that would characterise his production up until the 1950s. In these texts he argues openly against the entire art world which for its part, seems to ignore him.

*Translated by Victoria Noel-Johnson*

<sup>150</sup> A. Fornari, *Quarant'anni di cubismo. Cronache, documenti, polemiche*, Capriotti Ed., Rome, 1948, p. 94.

<sup>151</sup> It must have been written between February and April 1928, as shown in the correspondence between the artist and the editor, published by Jole de Sanna. See G. de Chirico, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, cit., pp. 95-123.

<sup>152</sup> G. de Chirico, *Considerazioni sulla pittura moderna*, in «Stile», Milan, January 1942; republished in «Il Corriere Padano», Ferrara, 1st March 1942; published in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 391-407 and in G. de Chirico, I. Far, *Commedia dell'Arte Moderna* (1945), edited by J. de Sanna, Abscondita, Milan, 2002, pp. 145-163. See also: G. de Chirico, *Discorso sulla materia pittorica*, in «Il Corriere Padano», Ferrara, 5th April 1942; republished in «L'Illustrazione Italiana», Milan, 26th April 1942; published in G. de Chirico, I. Far, op. cit., pp. 164-173 and republished in this Periodical, translated for the first time in English, *A Discourse on the Material Substance of Paint*, pp. 541-547. In the volume cited, *Commedia dell'Arte Moderna*, de Chirico attributed both articles to his wife Isabella Far, who constitutes his double.