

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S NEOMETAPHYSICAL PAINTINGS THE FOUNDATION'S RESPONSE TO GERD ROOS' ARTICLE: *WHEN DID GIORGIO DE CHIRICO RETIRE?**

Paolo Picozza

In order to safeguard Giorgio de Chirico's oeuvre and reputation, the Foundation feels it must take a firm stance against Gerd Roos' article published on occasion of the recent exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, dedicated to the works of several great artists in the final period of their lives.

With regard to the exhibition, Foundation sincerely appreciated the theme chosen by the curators, feeling it to be of considerable interest, all the more so since an exhibition curated by Laurent Busine entitled *Giorgio de Chirico. Les dix dernières années. 1968-1978* had been held at Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi in 2001.¹

The show at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt included a large section on the works of Giorgio de Chirico's final years, known as his Neometaphysical period (1968-1976) with eight paintings executed when the artist was over 80 years old (figs. 1-8).²

Upon reading Gerd Roos' article on Giorgio de Chirico in the exhibition catalogue³ we were greatly disconcerted that the author had taken the opportunity offered by the curators Esther Schlicht and Max Hollein (the museum's Director) to develop a false theory, one that is seriously offensive to the artist, his widow Isabella Pakszwer Far and the Foundation that inherited Giorgio de Chirico's legacy. Having read the text, which lacks in academic value and is removed from the theme of the exhibition, one is struck, above all, by the fact that it could have been accepted and published by the curators without their realising the objectives the author intended to achieve and that go as far as to make an accusation that the works in the exhibition are fakes. When the Director became aware of what had happened he sent the Foundation a letter of apology.⁴ We are unfortunately faced with a rash text by a

* Published in the exhibition catalogue, *Letzte Bilder. Von Manet bis Kippenberger*, curated by E. Schlicht and M. Hollein, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 28 February-2 June 2013, Hirmer Verlag, Munich 2013.

¹ *Giorgio de Chirico. Les dix dernières années. 1968-1978*, catalogue edited by L. Busine, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, 4 February-13 May 2001, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, 2001.

² The loan of works to Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt was granted by Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The eight paintings – *The Return of Hebdomerus*, 1968, *Italian Piazza with Sun Turned Off*, 1971, *Warriors of Marathon*, 1971, *The Return of Ulysses*, 1973, *Antigone the Consoler*, 1973, *Mysterious Baths with Duck*, 1973, *The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses*, 1975 and *Head of Mysterious Animal*, 1975 – form part of the Bequest of the artist's widow, Isabella Pakszwer Far, to the Municipality of Paris in October 2011, comprising 61 sculptures, paintings and drawings from the Foundation's collection.

³ G. Roos, *Wann setzte sich Giorgio de Chirico zur Ruhe?* in *Letzte Bilder. Von Manet bis Kippenberger*, cit. pp. 109-111.

scholar who seeks to make himself known in Germany, above all, through the expedient of Giorgio de Chirico's name.⁵

In his brief text Gerd Roos cultivated two aims, the first was to disparage the works of Giorgio de Chirico's Neometaphysical period, which lasted ten years and of which Roos does not supply even a brief definition. The second, linked to and backing up the first, consists of insinuating that the artist's Neometaphysical works – at least those after 1970 – might not be executed by his own hand, and that those subsequent to 1974 certainly were not. In this way, Roos declares, albeit implicitly, that of the eight paintings on show at least two – *The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses* (1975) and *Head of Mysterious Animal* (1975) – are fakes. The theory is put forward without any substantiating proof, whilst Roos demonstrates that he is incapable of backing up his statements from an artistic viewpoint.

From this premise, Roos saves himself the effort of tackling an actual study of the artist's late period by commenting instead, with allusions and suspicions, on the painting of the last ten years (of a 70 year-long career) of the greatest Italian artist of the 20th century. In the first place, he carefully avoids examination of the pictures on show – works that are extraordinary for their conceptual and poetic range –, an assignment normally expected of one who is called upon to comment on an artist's work in an exhibition, possibly in a perspective that makes the most of the work and facilitates an understanding of it. Whereas Roos seeks to contextualise the artist's late works strictly from the standpoint of the historical prejudice that originated with Breton, who declared de Chirico dead as an artist in 1918, a judgement that smeared the artist's historiography during his lifetime but has been widely discredited by studies published over the last 40 years. Roos' accusatory expressions and allusions with regard to de Chirico go far beyond any critical reality, as for example using the term "posthumous work" for

⁴ Letter from M. Hollein, 11 October 2013: "Dear Professor Picozza, I am writing in response to your letter dated 8 October 2013, regarding the text written by Gerd Roos for the catalogue of our exhibition *Letzte Bilder. Von Manet bis Kippenberger*. First of all, the curator of the exhibition, Esther Schlicht, and myself would like to express our deep regret for you feeling offended by the content of our publication and we would like to affirm that this has never been our intention. As you can imagine, we are great admirers of de Chirico's oeuvre, also of his late work, which we only discovered through the exhibition held at the Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris in 2009. The late paintings presented in *Giorgio de Chirico. La Fabrique des rêves* were one of the starting points for the idea of our exhibition on 'Final Works'. We were therefore more than happy for having been able to present these works in Frankfurt, not least because they were doubtlessly an intriguing discovery for most of our visitors. In preparation of the exhibition catalogue, we were searching for an expert on the work of Giorgio de Chirico in the German-speaking world who would be willing to write also on the late work, which as you are certainly aware of has only a few art historians sharing our admiration for this particular phase of de Chirico's oeuvre. We therefore naturally came upon Gerd Roos, whose publications, to be honest, by no means seemed suspicious to us. Of course, I must admit that we were not aware of Mr. Roos' activities at the Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica and of the difficulties between the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, represented by you, and the archive in Milan. On the other hand, we did not receive any hint in regard to all of this when we were contacting your Foundation requesting illustrations for the catalogue and mentioning Gerd Roos as an author for our publication. In fact, ourselves not being experts on de Chirico, we would have difficulties to involve ourselves in the dispute and to argue about the details brought up in the text. For us, the contribution written by Gerd Roos, although being unconventional, gives a certain introduction to the late work of de Chirico and an original viewpoint on the question of the 'Last Works'. Of course, we are aware of its critical potential but did – unfortunately – not foresee its being part of a larger controversy as explained by you. I can assure you, that from our side there has never been any intention to harm you and the Fondazione de Chirico. Hoping for your understanding and asking you to accept my apologies, I remain, with kindest regards, Max Hollein, Director."

⁵ On occasion of the museum's request to the Foundation (copyright holder), to authorise reproduction of the works, the Frankfurt museum had indicated that the article in the catalogue regarding de Chirico's work on show had been assigned to Gerd Roos. The Foundation made no objection, notwithstanding Roos' highly critical attitude towards Giorgio de Chirico, trusting he would express himself in a professional manner. Indeed, it was inconceivable that he would go to such extremes as the insults found in the article. It is regretful to point out that the exhibition curators should not have allowed publication of a text wholly off subject that discredits an intelligent and remarkable exhibition.

paintings done in the early 1970s.⁶ If Roos pre-dates the artist's death by eight years, dismissing the elderly painter at one of his most fertile and innovative creative moments – the Neometaphysical paintings are the result – he also manages to anticipate de Chirico's *first* "death" decreed by Breton as 1918. He in fact quotes Werner Schmalenbach's incredible opinion: "Breton was wrong. It was not towards the end of 1918 but at the beginning of 1915 that de Chirico had said all he had to say."⁷

Standing on the shoulders of anti-Dechirican patriarch André Breton Roos defines de Chirico's entire oeuvre from 1918 to 1978 as the "late period", altering with rare insolence the theme set by the curators. To the question posed by the article's mocking title *When did Giorgio de Chirico Retire?*, the author sets out from the presupposition that the "late" work of Giorgio de Chirico includes everything following his youthful work, thus a period of over 60 years. In an exhibition dedicated to the work of mature artists, this might be considered worthy of praise: the longest late period in the history of art (!), but we do not think that such an acknowledgement was the curators' intention. We believe that they sought an occasion for in-depth appreciation of the work of great artists in the last years of their lives and for promotion of studies under a different light, including the human aspect, which such testimonies offer us. Considering, as Hollein points out, that the discovery of de Chirico's Neometaphysical work was one of the springboards for the very conception of the exhibition.⁸

⁶ It is not clear whether he intends the Neometaphysical works dated after 1970 or, as he points out later, the Neometaphysical works dated after 1974.

⁷ Roos reports this smarting opinion – which can neither be denied nor confirmed since Schmalenbach passed away in 2010 – as having been made after visiting the exhibition *Die Andere Moderne. De Chirico-Savinio* (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2001). It is quite inconceivable that this art expert, an internationally famous author of many publications and the illustrious founding director of the Kunstsammlung NWD itself, which hosted the exhibition, could have expressed such a negative and amateurish assessment. Wieland Schmied, asked to comment, stated that he did not agree with Schmalenbach, his predecessor at the head of Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hannover, pointing out that he had never said those words in the former's presence. It is difficult to imagine that the 80 year old scholar to whom Roos attributes such an opinion, having seen a group of absolute masterpieces by Giorgio de Chirico in the museum he himself had founded, whose collection boasts three works from de Chirico's first period (*La grand tour*, 1913, *La statue silencieuse*, 1913 and *Les deux sœurs*, 1915), should express in a comradely manner to Roos, half his age and with no museum or academic track record, such a reductive opinion with, as Roos eagerly points out, a complaisant "ironic little smile." To this incredible and unverifiable circumstance we may link another disturbing element. The exhibition, of which Roos himself was curator with Wieland Schmied, Paolo Baldacci and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, included – among the "pre-1915" pictures so celebrated by Schmalenbach – a fake Italian Piazza of very recent making, dated "1913" and entitled *Die Melancholie der Abreise* (The Melancholy of Departure) (See exhibition catalogue p. 214). The fake, a real eyesore depicting a portico on the left and a small train on the horizon puffing out a cloud of smoke in the shape of the male sexual organ (See image on p. 324 of these Journals), was a true scam at the expense of visitors, especially Germans, who have great respect and admiration for Giorgio de Chirico's early metaphysical period. It was not difficult for those who saw the show, even without knowing de Chirico's art well, to notice the strangeness of that painting, which appeared to be of recent creation due to the sharp colour, hanging next to the artist's extraordinary works on show. The picture, without origin and with the "inherited" title "La mélancolie du départ" and date of birth "1913" from an unidentified work exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris, 1913, would have merited the distinction of a "rediscovered masterpiece" though it was not promoted as such. One wonders if Schmalenbach, who had "an infallible eye for artistic quality" and curated the acquisition of 200 art works for the same museum which now boasts a collection appreciated at international level, *had become aware of it* and did not know what to say to Roos to avoid embarrassment, since the latter, curator and cicerone, was proud of the overall result of the show.

During the inquiry by the investigators who had requested seizure of the fake, Roos indicated his co-curator Paolo Baldacci as the sole person responsible for its inclusion, declaring tautologically: "Painting number 12 was shown at the exhibition on de Chirico-Savinio in Düsseldorf: *with regard to its colour, it differs from the group of works on show of the same genre; nevertheless it can be included in the context when put next to another work of the same period as the others: same tonality.* [italics, ed.] It was a painting that was unknown to us curators prior to that exhibition. None of us had seen the original. Only Baldacci, who was also curator, had seen the original before the exhibition as he was the one who had proposed it for the exhibition. I repeat that concerning this work there is and will be a historical debate amongst us art historians. I don't remember who the owner of the work is. It may have come from Israel: I think it was then sold to a New York gallerist [who] by email made me understand that it is currently in Switzerland". (Minutes of preliminary testimonial information, 7/5/2003 [proceedings 02/008864 rngn. Public Prosecutor's Office of Verona, pp. 595-596]). Wieland Schmied, also curator, has recently confirmed that it is a fake and was included in the exhibition without his knowledge.

On this serious attack on the iconography of Giorgio de Chirico's first metaphysical period, see *The Constants of History – Old and Recent Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Artwork*, in "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals", n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 507-528, and the second edition of the feature, *The Constants of History – Paolo Baldacci: A Case Study*, in these Journals, pp. 321-345.

⁸ Letter from M. Hollein, cit.: "As you can imagine, we are great admirers of de Chirico's oeuvre, also of his late work, which we only discovered through the exhibition held at the Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris in 2009. The late paintings presented in *Giorgio de Chirico. La Fabrique des rêves* were one of the starting points for the idea of our exhibition on 'Final Works'. We were therefore more than happy for having been able to present these works in Frankfurt, not least because they were doubtlessly an intriguing discovery for most of our visitors."

With this myopic vision, Roos interweaves the grouping of a series of theories developed in collaboration with his mentor Paolo Baldacci, the self-styled “world’s greatest de Chirico expert”⁹ which portray de Chirico, artist and man, in the worst possible light. In their written work de Chirico is denied paternity of his own inventions – which are moreover among the most innovative of the 20th century – and their merit assigned to whoever was close to him. For the last 20 years Roos and Baldacci have been spreading the objectively defamatory theory that de Chirico stole the idea of metaphysical painting from his younger brother Andrea (aka Alberto Savinio) and lied throughout his life to manipulate his own biography and appear as “the sole inventor” of Metaphysical Art.¹⁰ Roos’ criticism on occasion of the exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is a pure pantomime of the programme they have been following for years, seeking to destroy de Chirico’s reputation in a context of critical shabbiness, inadequate analysis and Freudian imagination which they actually expect to pass off as serious historiographic work.¹¹

Roos tackles de Chirico’s late period as if it were the Wild West, a dangerous territory which, in his view, “art historians have scarcely commented on”, with absolutely false statements such as the one referring to the catalogue of the first great exhibition devoted specifically to the late de Chirico, *The New Metaphysics* (1995): “In foregoing a text that illustrates the works on show and their context it is clear that the publishers (*sic!*) did not feel duty-bound to proceed with a historical-artistic analysis.”¹² Edited by Maurizio Calvesi, the leading Giorgio de Chirico scholar, the catalogue is based on an extraordinary study which presents and contextualises a body of 90 Neometaphysical works.¹³

If Roos’ reluctance to reflect on the artistic quality of the works on show in Frankfurt can be felt

⁹ The quotation is taken from the Minutes of the trial in which Paolo Baldacci was sentenced to 20 months in prison. (Minutes of Hearing, criminal proceedings n. 650/07 R.G., hearing 5/5/2008, pp. 23-24). On Appeal, his guilt for having knowingly sold four fake Giorgio de Chirico paintings was fully confirmed, however, he will not serve the sentence inasmuch as the Statute of Limitation was applied (Milan Court of Appeal, fourth criminal section, n. 3539 of 20-5-19.7.2013).

¹⁰ The two authors have split de Chirico’s Metaphysical Art into various elements, distributing sources of influence left and right, including: that the “poetics” was the idea of his brother Andrea, the “concept” of the Italian Piazza came from Ardengo Soffici in 1914 (four years after the birth of Metaphysical Art with *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* in 1910); lastly, the “spatial setting” *à plat* was taken from Matisse. As for the latter, Baldacci contradicts no less than Apollinaire himself, whose statement that de Chirico owed nothing to the young French school “does not in any way correspond to the truth of the facts”. See P. Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico e il Novecentismo. Alcune riflessioni*, in *Novecento. Arte e vita in Italia tra le due guerre*, exhibition catalogue, Silvana Editoriale, Milan 2013, p. 371.

¹¹ The most serious damage caused by Roos and Baldacci to the historiography of Giorgio de Chirico’s art consists in the historical alteration of the birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence, 1910, and the date of the first two metaphysical works – *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle* – both painted in Florence, dated and signed “Giorgio de Chirico 1910”. Through a reading and interpretation, as distorted as it is erroneous, of certain letters, the two authors changed the place and the year and the event, maintaining that it took place in Milan in 1909 and explain that the discrepancies between their theory and the artist’s autobiographical testimony are due to the fact that he was a liar. In their numerous publications over the last 20 years the two works fundamental to the origins of Metaphysical art are dated “1909” instead of their real date of 1910. The Foundation, through careful analysis of the letters in question (Giorgio de Chirico-Fritz Gartz correspondence 1909-1911) and exposure of the various phases of development and promotion of that erroneous theory, has succeeded in re-establishing the historical truth, recently acknowledged by the academic community. On this subject, see P. Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico: The Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico’s Life History over the Last Fifteen Years*, in “Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals”, n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 28-60. For an analysis of the birth of Metaphysical Art from a theoretical/artistic viewpoint, see R. Dottori, *From Zarathustra’s Poetry to the Aesthetics of Metaphysical Art*, “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico”, n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 117-138.

¹² It should be noted that the use of the term “publishers” instead of “curators” is intentional and extremely disparaging of the work of exhibition curator Maurizio Calvesi whom Roos and Baldacci disapprove of owing to his valid criticism of Baldacci’s 1997 monograph, with regard to which he appreciated only the aesthetic aspect and, justly, not the content of the book. Roos, describing the San Marino catalogue as “splendidly illustrated”, reprises the same expression used by Calvesi. What seems to be a compliment is actually a petty and highly personal dart. If Calvesi can be defined as a “publisher”, we are at a loss as to how to define Roos’ work today.

¹³ *De Chirico, La nuova Metafisica*, catalogue edited by M. Calvesi, 27 April-27 September 1995, RTV headquarters, formerly Palazzo dei Congressi, Republic of San Marino, Edizioni De Luca, Rome 1995.

at the beginning of the essay, his inability to do so comes out at the end: "Against a background such as we have delineated, in considering the theme of the current exhibition we must draw a conclusion that allows no room for illusions: it is obvious that late paintings by Giorgio de Chirico exist. Unfortunately however we shall never know which ones they are." Admitting in a word his incapacity – and on this point we fully agree with him – to distinguish an authentic de Chirico from a fake aped by one of the numerous forgers of the past or by those who unfortunately are still active today.¹⁴

Roos' legend, which is pure autosuggestion, consists in declaring that the Neometaphysical paintings of the late period were not created by the artist but by a "workshop" operating within his studio "run by the artist's wife and later widow". To use more explicit language, they are fakes, works neither conceived nor executed by Giorgio de Chirico. The climate that Roos rants about in de Chirico's house during the mid 1970s is one of closed doors, secrets and manipulations in which de Chirico is portrayed as a dotard controlled by people around him. Anyone who knew the artist personally in his last years¹⁵ will confirm the exact opposite, as recently borne out by Wieland Schmied, who commented that in his old age de Chirico was extremely lucid and displayed an engaging sense of humour and irony. Not to mention a great and boundless creative ability and desire to work. In his last years he painted more than in his youth. And the present writer, who knew the artist well in his final years, can also confirm this from direct experience.

This freedom of expression can in fact be appreciated in the Neometaphysical pictures painted at the time, such as the eight works shown in Frankfurt which include, *The Return of Ulysses* (1973), *The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses* (1975), *Mysterious Baths with Duck* (1973) and *Head of Mysterious Animal* (1975), the very titles of which evoke enigmatic and fantastical events, stories and settings. An exceptional demonstration of the artist's innovative abilities at the age of 85 is again found in the planning and execution of the monumental polychrome sculpture *Mysterious Baths Fountain* in 1973 for the *Contatto Arte/Città* event at the 15th Triennial at the Sempione Park in Milan, an extraordinary "Pop" artwork wholly synchronized with the artistic feeling of the day. The theme of "water-parquet" in which the bathers are immersed originates from his childhood memories of

¹⁴ Due to his professional closeness to Baldacci, Roos was interrogated by the Italian investigators with regard to the paintings confiscated during the Milan trial and on that occasion stated: "I saw the works indicated at numbers 1-2-3-4-5 at the exhibitions in which they were shown (Arona-Arezzo-Turin): they are not paintings that I – as curator – would exhibit in a de Chirico exhibition." (Minutes of preliminary testimonial information, cit. pp. 595-596). This means that he declared the pictures to be authentic but not of good quality and therefore not to be included in an exhibition. Additionally, on this occasion, as with the fake painting exhibited in Dusseldorf, Roos erroneously considered the incriminated paintings authentic due to lack of knowledge, or to cover Baldacci's doings. This last hypothesis seems to emerge from the report by the Italian Revenue Guard Corps (p. 685 of folder n. 5061/04 – Public Prosecutor's Office of Milan) which states: "ROOS Gerd, who does not hesitate to express doubts about the authenticity of some of the confiscated works (in particular 'Archaeologists [by the sea]' and 'Still Life' confiscated from Zocca, 'Still Life [...] Against the Sky', confiscated at the de Chirico Foundation in Rome [...] admitted that the painting in question [*Die Melancholie der Abreise*] was a picture which..." (See footnote 7 for the full citation).

¹⁵ Angela Carpentieri, who was secretary in de Chirico's house from 1958 to November 1977 when she moved to Brussels with her husband, recalls that she personally saw de Chirico painting the Neometaphysical works published in the San Marino catalogue, as she had daily access to the artist's studio. She further confirmed that the artist painted continually until May 1977, when he had serious cardiac decompensation and was taken to the Mater Dei clinic in Rome. Discharged from the clinic after heart surgery he painted significantly less, whilst remaining perfectly lucid, with his usual melancholic irony, up to his death on 20 November 1978. During his stay in hospital he also did a small pencil drawing of his nurse, signed and dated 19.6.1977, the execution of which makes it clear he was lying in bed. This drawing is registered in the Foundation's archive of authentic works by Giorgio de Chirico. Not to mention the last extraordinary 1977 interview with de Chirico, still in perfect health at 89, as may be seen from the film conducted by Franco Simongini in his studio surrounded by finished works and work in progress. In his succinct replies we can admire the artist who, highly lucid and with fine irony, speaks of some recent paintings. This interview, with some images, is published as an appendix to this article, in order to give a visual response to the statements of Roos who went so far as to say that the artist "perhaps considered his work as an artist concluded in 1974". Giorgio de Chirico in lapidary style declared: "[I am] a normal man who has been a painter and is still a painter."

Greece which de Chirico evokes in an imaginary setting pervaded by an atmosphere of gentle suspension of time. It is a theme that still retains its sense of mystery and on which scholars are increasingly focussing attention. It is also probable that Roos is not familiar with de Chirico's creations of two years later, executed at the age of 87, of the costumes and set design for *Lauda per la Natività del Signore*, a one act opera by Ottorino Respighi performed at the Teatro Olimpico in Rome on 29 October 1975. The scene, intensely spiritual, is set in a nocturnal desert illuminated by a comet; two angels with a surprised expression, winged and bodiless, fly above the open and tranquil setting which is contrasted on the left by the dark entrance of a cavern. The costumes, coloured and full of symbols, are equally dense in meaning.

Expecting Gerd Roos to comment on the masterpieces exhibited in Frankfurt – as may be gathered from the article he wrote – is like asking someone to review a book written in a language that he neither writes, reads nor speaks. In fact, Roos circumnavigates the artist's expressive motives and instead goes rummaging around in de Chirico's relationships of the day: his wife, art dealers, critics and friends, even bringing up “a private ‘flaw’”, meaning “the now elderly artist's platonic love for a young woman”, the wife of a well known Roman political figure. He does all this to demonstrate that de Chirico lacked ideas and initiatives, and that his work and life were orchestrated by others. In a word, sheer gossip worthy of a scandal rag. In fact, the piece is based on “hearsay”, with questions asked and left in suspense, alluding to compromising replies, in what for Roos apparently constitutes historical-artistic analysis.

Since Roos does not possess firsthand information, the Foundation is more than willing to answer his question: “Why did de Chirico – or perhaps Isabella – break with Antonio and Ettore Russo in the mid 1960s?” The decision, wisely inspired by Isabella, was aimed at releasing her husband from a contract which (albeit economically advantageous) that bound him to Galleria Russo in Rome. The contract stipulated the monthly production of paintings classic subjects of his oeuvre – the Italian Piazza, Troubadours, Horses etc. – which were in great demand of the art market at the time. In order to dissolve his obligations the artist was ordered by the Court of Rome to pay a considerable sum to Galleria Russo for breach of contract.¹⁶ Once he had regained tranquillity in his work the 80 year old de Chirico was able to paint what he wanted, marking the origin of his new “Neometaphysical” research – an extraordinary period of painting, which actually did not find favour with the public or the art market due to the brusque change from his previous, essentially commercial work. As a result, the new pictures remained mainly unsold and stayed in the artist's own collection, and are now a significant part of the collection of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico. A number of Neometaphysical paintings also form part of the artist's widow's donation to Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, and her bequest to Musée d'Art Moderne de la

¹⁶ Roos also mentions the collaboration between the artist and the gallery owner Bruno Grossetti in 1967 for the production of 25 replicas of subjects from the 1910s. The project, which he describes as “interesting”, envisaged a fixed format of 80 x 60 cm in which de Chirico, according to Roos, would recapitulate and interpret “genuinely metaphysical” subjects. The only thing that could result from such creative constriction was a group of mute paintings, graceless and without significant artistic interest. And what Roos perhaps does not know is that such repetitive production to order was strongly criticised by many at the time, first and foremost de Chirico's friend the gallery owner Ettore Gian Ferrari, to such an extent that the artist did not complete production and had to compensate the gallery owner in this case as well.



Giorgio de Chirico in the studio of his home in Piazza di Spagna 1974 ca.
Photo Aurelio Amendola

moderna. Few people at the time fell for de Chirico's playful concealment and I am afraid that today's drama staged by Roos is even less credible.

The most devastating criticism is his portrayal of de Chirico as being unable to create. Breton refuted the new painting of the 1920s but never said that de Chirico did not conceive it. When Roos seeks in others the ideas and the execution of the Neometaphysical paintings, it is clear that he considers de Chirico incapable of creating or, even worse, that he should not have innovated at all! In Roos' view de Chirico would have done well to carry on making copies of his youthful pictures (Galleria Russo, Galleria Grossetti).

In the introduction to the catalogue of the great anthological show *La Fabrique des rêves*, Fabrice Hergott writes: "The clash between Breton and de Chirico played a fundamental role in the perception of the latter's subsequent oeuvre, to the point that certain exhibitions and art enthusiasts refused to consider it. De Chirico suffered for this [...]." Asked to write a text for an exhibition dealing specifically with the late period, one wonders why Roos accepted.

Although at the beginning of their relationship, as borne out by a letter of the mid 1930s, Isabella suggested subjects such as female nudes and bathers (also suggesting the technique) which in her view corresponded to public taste, they were, in any case, themes that the artist interpreted and developed according to his sensitivity.¹⁷ The extraordinary bathers and nudes of the 1930s, in the painting of which de Chirico made an in-depth study of Renoir's use of colour and achieved greatly

Ville de Paris (2011), plus a bequest of five paintings on the theme of *Mysterious Baths* which have been on show at Bern Kunstmuseum since 2002.

What emerges clearly is Roos' difficulty in tackling an artistic discourse on Neometaphysical painting and a valid historical contextualisation of the period. He also seems to have some problems in understanding the creative process therein. Roos indicates the artist's wife as the "mind" behind the Neometaphysical images and commander of the "choice of themes and motifs". This privilege was reserved to the artist who in 1945 attributed half of his theoretical essays to the "author" Isabella Far in the collection of texts published in *Commedia dell'arte*

¹⁷ I. Pakszwer, letter sent from Florence at the end of August 1936 to G. de Chirico who was in New York for an exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery. "The most important thing is that you should go on working and create fine new pictures in the tempera genre. Prevalently in the tempera genre. Don't waste time in inventing. Believe me, develop the theme of women because I'm convinced that it will be greatly appreciated. Draw warriors and

advanced discoveries, bear witness to this. Whereas it is impossible even to imagine that Isabella (or the gallery owner Jolas whom Roos accredits with having suggested the *Mysterious Baths* theme)¹⁸, could have suggested the artist's new artistic direction. It would really be a sort of artistic double-act, as in the *Commedia dell'arte moderna*.

The iconography of Neometaphysical Art is based on themes, some of which are completely new, and motifs of the painting and graphic work of the 1910s, 20s and 30s. It is not the *choice* of themes and motifs but the *way* in which these subjects, figures and objects were brought together and given their own expression, set in space amidst an atmosphere light-



Giorgio de Chirico in the living room of his home in Piazza di Spagna 1974 ca.
Photo Aurelio Amendola

-ened of the load of mystery of his youthful painting, expressive elements that contribute to giving Neometaphysical Art its wholly special visual poetry. The “naturalism” to which the mannequin is subjected in this moment, from abstract figure comprised of geometrical elements to a figure with a body, arms, legs and back incarnate, which nonetheless retains its smooth, ovoid head... is this Isabella's idea, as Roos maintains? Likewise, did Isabella come up with the motif of the great hand of Jupiter emerging from the blue sky above the heads of the nine Muses, standing all in a row in their multicoloured clothing?¹⁹

horses or even groups of horses and listen to me for once. We'll be better off with more money, and you can then go back to doing heads etc., but for the moment it's best that you do other pictures like the temperas...” [Isabella's underlining, *ed.*].

¹⁸ Roos: “It appears that Isabella's friend and confidant played a fundamental role in the development of the fantastical, sometimes almost surreal iconography of the Neometaphysical works: in effect de Chirico was always highly receptive in terms of his dealers' wishes. And who knows if the abundance of new works dedicated to the old theme of *Mysterious Baths* (ill. on p. 112) with their evident homosexual background, was not due to a personal predilection of Jolas?” Here Roos, who once more seems to prefer gossip, ends up in disagreement with Baldacci who has chosen the theme of *Gladiators* in reference to de Chirico's presumed latent homosexuality. It would be appropriate if the two of them clarified their lack of agreement, being the only ones to give this interpretation. Since nothing of the kind emerges from the *Mysterious Baths*, and even less from the sentimental and intimate life of the artist, who was famously susceptible to feminine charms even at an advanced age.

¹⁹ Roos' inability to understand de Chirico's Neometaphysical artwork, dates from 1995 on 27 May during the opening of *La Nuova Metafisica* exhibition in San Marino (*cit.*), curated by Maurizio Calvesi, on which occasion he expressed irreverent comments about some of the paintings on show: “considering them in some cases of poor quality and even of dubious authenticity (for example *The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses*)”. On that occasion Gerd Roos visited the exhibition with Susanna Misiano, an art historian of the Municipality of Rome who had collaborated on the editing of the catalogue. Amazed by his behaviour, Susanna Misiano considered it her duty to make a written report to the Foundation of that unpleasant episode (the report is held on file). Unfortunately the present writer gave no particular importance to the occurrence, attributing it to the exuberance and inexperience of the scholar who was then 34 years old, had only recently approached de Chirico's oeuvre and was seeing the works on show for the first time. Such an attitude might have reflected instead the opinion of someone, who disagreeing with Calvesi, and had not approved of the Foundation's decision to appoint him as curator of the exhibition.

In 1976, noting the exceptional occasion of the simultaneous opening of three de Chirico exhibitions – in London, Brussels and Rome – Giuliano Briganti commented on the great difference in quality between the copies of youthful works and the artist's recent Neometaphysical painting:

[de Chirico] has revisited the world of his youthful images like someone who returns from afar and after a long time to beloved places full of recollections; he has been able to rediscover moments of real poetry and new images and a new way of painting. Without ever copying but by recalling, that is, by reviewing the world of 'troubadours' of 'gladiators' and 'archaeologists' in the affective and transfiguring dimension of memory.²⁰

A few words by Maurizio Calvesi also give an idea of the meaning behind the artist's Neometaphysical work, fruit of his relationship between art, destiny and immortality:

The mind of the elderly de Chirico is packed with memories of his own metaphysical images and, as often happens in memory, the things remembered are evaluated with a different judgement, seen from a viewpoint that has meanwhile been transformed. [...] His characters, his mannequins, his objects and architectures have actually become toys, and the sense of play – which was also secretly latent in a corner of his early Metaphysical art – now triumphs as a wholly new creative key, vitalised by an absolute awareness of freedom and mastery of his own poetical and even physical life; by which he is longer overcome but of which he has become the undeceived director; or, if you like, the puppeteer of a show rich in surprises; the conjuror of well known secrets.²¹

According to Roos' defamatory and outlandish theories, the Neometaphysical works, many of which are large format, were not done by the artist but by "helpers" because de Chirico, noting that these works did not find favour with the art market, soon returned to working on smaller formats to be sold. Let us try to follow Roos' reasoning: a workshop set up to produce non-commercial pictures of innovative subjects (Neometaphysical) that did not sell, whose actual makers turned to Isabella for the "ideas" to be painted, whilst the artist, who was over 80, after his break with the Galleria Russo dedicated himself once more to small paintings of repetitive subjects to be sold. Elementary Watson!

The business plan, signed by the malicious hand of Gerd Roos, does not stop here: "we intend the production of pictures created up until the *end of the 1980s* [italics, ed.] in de Chirico's studio under the direction of his wife and subsequent widow."²² According to Roos, Isabella had fake works created for no less than 12 years after the artist's death in 1978²³, an activity that ceased with the

²⁰ G. Briganti, *Quando copia le Muse il maestro è felice*, "la Repubblica", 28 April 1976.

²¹ M. Calvesi, *La nuova Metafisica*, cit., p.16.

²² We underscore the studied ambiguity in seeking to confuse the period before the artist's death with the subsequent period.

²³ With reference to the problem of fakes Wieland Schmied stated: "The fakes are a very special chapter. The artist, actively supported by Isabella Far-de Chirico, struggled all his life against them. To the point of exasperation. And he wore himself out in this battle. The struggle against fakes became an actual 'obsession'. Just to suggest that the artist's 75 year old widow took advantage of his death to commission fake artworks is incredible and surpasses even the most fervid imagination. With such a grave accusation Roos demonstrates serious deficiencies both at the level of historical knowledge of de Chirico's art – in which he has invested his career as a scholar – and at the level of civil and professional behaviour. After her husband's

ineluctable fact of her own death at the age of 87 on 19 November 1990.²⁴ This statement, at once the most serious and grotesque, is firmly denied by those who regularly frequented de Chirico's home and studio, like Angela Carpentieri.

In comparison with such an accusation, Roos' insinuation about the dubious authenticity of the Neometaphysical pictures created after 1970 seems almost comical. This interpretation is based on the positive judgement Wieland Schmied made around 1974-1975: "The spirit of the artist is still working", referring, as the writer specifies, to the full vitality and active presence of de Chirico in his life and work at the time. Schmied puts it this way: "In any case, at least for me, the spirit of de Chirico hovered in every square metre of his flat and seeped from the walls."

Roos turns the sentence around to make it negative, interpreting it as proof of de Chirico's lack of creative and executive ability in his studio, as if his "spirit" managed to "work" through the ideas and hands of others. To underscore its importance, he declares that Schmied coined an "unforgettable maxim" with those words. With this we note just how much that sentence must have brought him a sense of exaltation in the form of justifying his theory whose validity dates back to 1990. By means of this interpretation Roos demonstrates more than anything, his own unfamiliarity with the working methods of artists, inasmuch as he attributes the patent of non-authenticity to any works carried out with the aid of studio assistants. For Roos' and his myopic way of seeing things, such works are dubious or fake.²⁵

Whereas Schmied confirms that he did say these words and, as well as correctly contextualising them, he points out that the meaning was far broader and wholly positive in comparison with Roos' insinuation. Schmied, in fact, believed that the artist, due to his advanced age, might have had helpers in his final years. He nevertheless makes it clear that the use of assistants cannot be used to the detriment of de Chirico whose works were creations of his own spirit and fully acknowledged by him. And if he did employ assistants in their execution, one wonders what does this demonstrate, what

death, Isabella went first to France and then Egypt, Athens and Lugano where she stayed a long time. Here she intended to set up a Foundation and received a warm welcome from the local authorities, which explains the bequest to the Bern Kunstmuseum. What Roos ignores is that long before the artist's death his wife had gradually sent most of his works abroad, first to France then to Switzerland, as they intended to leave Italy due to both the political climate of the time and the fact that the country had shown itself to be totally indifferent to the artist. Exportations of the works are documented by delivery notes. In view of the widow's absence from Rome, and following several articles in the press (see I. Vincenti in the weekly "Oggi", *Ci hanno trafugato de Chirico!*, 11.4.1980, p. 13) the works remaining at home were reported and a specific inventory was made, with numerous photographs, by the Carabinieri Unit for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage. Lastly, the works exported and the ones subsequently re-imported correspond precisely. And when Mrs. de Chirico died on 19 November 1990 the Magistrate of Rome immediately affixed seals and an inventory of all the remaining works was made by a notary in the presence of a functionary of Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna who also made an estimate of them. The artist's legacy is therefore fully documented, including the Neometaphysical works which trouble Roos so much and give rise to his doubts, perhaps because he does not understand them, and which fortunately, as he writes, only the Foundation possesses (apart from the other institutions already mentioned). What Roos has written would certainly be punishable by law. For us, it is enough to repair the damage inflicted by Roos on Giorgio de Chirico's image and to supply readers with the historiographic truth about the artist's oeuvre, as well as offering some interpretive keys to understanding Neometaphysical Art, since this was not done on occasion of the exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. The opinion art historians will afford Roos is quite another issue: someone seeking, in this way and with this method, to establish himself as one of the few de Chirico scholars in Germany.

²⁴ Isabella Pakszwer was born in Warsaw on 14 June 1903.

²⁵ Insinuating doubts about the Neometaphysical paintings dated after 1970, Roos extends his negative judgement to all subsequent Neometaphysical Art, an opinion which, as we shall see, becomes peremptory from 1974 onwards, also inventing a tale of "posthumous production" lasting 12 years. It is evident that, with a technique which may be described as dismantling, Roos tries to wholly disparage Neometaphysical Art as a period in itself.

importance does it have?²⁶ Schmied refers to the high quality of the pictures that emerged from the artist's studio in the final years: "In fact they are works of genius," he says. "I saw a number of them at the time and they left me very enthusiastic."

With regard to the traditional and contemporary role carried out by assistants,²⁷ de Chirico expressed himself quite clearly, with arguments that enrich this particular human activity of Art, carrying this topic of reflection to levels that it seems Roos seemingly did not even contemplate. Referring to the Renaissance in his 1920 text *Mestiere e tradizione* [*Craft and Tradition*] de Chirico wrote:

In those days the master trained the disciple, but the disciples also collaborated more than a little in the master's progress; with this I am not alluding to the material help that in many cases pupils gave to the master, but to moral help. Today, although there are many groups and many sects, artists are all terribly isolated; nobody can help his neighbour and nobody can ask for help, because nobody is sure of what he's doing or what he wants, and everyone ends up in great misery.

He adds something that is especially useful for understanding the true meaning of Neometaphysical Art:

The work of genius, the result of progressive effort, a human and real work, at the same time stands above the invisible limits of eternal things. Therefore, as Schopenhauer justly observes, the artist of mere talent is one who achieves an objective apparent to all but achievable by few, whereas the artist of genius achieves an objective that nobody sees.

Neometaphysical Art is an objective that *none* but de Chirico could see.

Roos proceeds undaunted, seeking additional support for his theory of falsification which he has managed to extend to encompass *20 years* (from the Neometaphysical pictures dating from 1970 through to 1990). The keystone year is 1974. He gives great importance to the fact that Claudio Bruni Sakraischik's *Catalogo Generale* documents paintings up to that year.²⁸ The new Breton feels authorised to establish a definite date concerning de Chirico's second artistic death. The first was 1918 (or perhaps 1915? thanks to the new Roos-Schmalenbach assessment); the second marks the definitive closure "of the late decadent work" in 1974. At this point, however, Roos was inspired by

²⁶ De Chirico himself reflected on the late work of artists, in this case Gustave Courbet's: "It seems that Courbet was also assisted by his pupils, especially in the last years of his life when, suffering from liver disease and oppressed by the displeasure caused by the politics of the Commune and the envy of certain colleagues such as Maissonier, he could no longer work with his earlier security and ardour. In fact, it was through the collaboration of three painters, Marcello Ordinaire, Cherubino Pata and a certain Cornu, that the master of Ormans was able to intensify his artistic production shortly before his death." G. de Chirico, *Mestiere e tradizione*, 1920, in "Il Primato Artistico Italiano", a. I, n. 2, March 1920, with the title *Le scuole di pittura presso gli antichi*. Now in *Giorgio de Chirico, Scritti/1 (1911-1945). Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici*, edited by A. Cortellessa, Bompiani, Milan 2008, pp. 383-389.

²⁷ Schmied himself brought the subject into a contemporary key by citing artists like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, saying that both have hundreds of assistants.

²⁸ If it is true that the few Neometaphysical paintings done in 1975 and 1976 were not published in the *Catalogo Generale*, it is also true that these were outside the logic of commerce and a market that in any case did not want them, and therefore also outside the commercial logic of Bruni, who was obviously interested in selling the catalogue to collectors who bought it as it reproduced works they owned.

bon ton to bring the artist's own considerations into the discussion for the first and last time in his text. Unfortunately he misses his chance and falls flat into absurdity, wondering whether "even de Chirico himself – who actually went on drawing and painting occasionally" – considered his work finished in 1974.²⁹

For Roos, this statement is a necessary preliminary to what he writes immediately afterwards and which constitutes the real purpose of the article: "After all we evidently owe a real miracle to his [Bruni's, *ed.*] strictness: it appears that outside the Foundation³⁰ there are practically no works dated later than 1974". With this, he tries to suggest that the works of the late Neometaphysical period owned by the Foundation, and certainly those after 1974, are not authentic, which would consequently include two of the eight works on show in Frankfurt (*The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses*, 1975, and *Head of Mysterious Animal*, 1975).

This clarifies the objective Roos had set himself right from the beginning of his libel: the Foundation itself, whose purpose is to "safeguard the artistic and intellectual personality" of Giorgio de Chirico, conserves as part of its patrimony, fakes attributed to the Great Metaphysician. Roos believes to have achieved a splendid result, by what we would call mudslinging. In the first place, by denying that the Neometaphysical oeuvre was a historical period in itself ("the late work includes everything subsequent to the youthful work"). In the second place, by hypothesising that the Neometaphysical works were chiefly done by others. This hypothesis serves to underscore the first statement. If Roos thinks he has succeeded in discrediting Giorgio de Chirico and the Foundation that safeguards his legacy, all we can say is that he has succeeded in discrediting himself alone.

Lastly, Roos' revaluation, as unexpected as it was late in coming, of Claudio Bruni's work and his *Catalogo Generale*, must have cost him a lot, and Baldacci too, after having written all possible evils about it. Clearly they too felt obliged to acknowledge that, irrespective of a few errors (such as are found in every large catalogue), it acts a point of reference for knowledge about de Chirico.³¹

²⁹ He certainly did not see *De Chirico '77*, the last extraordinary interview the artist granted to Franco Simongini for RAI TV in 1977 (see footnote 15).

³⁰ The large-format Neometaphysical paintings created by the artist in 1975-76 and owned by the Foundation are: *The Poet and the Painter*, 1975; *Metaphysical Vision of New York*, 1975; *The Archaeologists*, 1975; *The Prodigal Son*, 1975 (on the cover of the present issue); *Gladiators in the Arena*, 1975 (See p. 185 of these Journals); *The Harmony of Solitude*, 1976 and *The Contemplator*, 1976. These paintings are invaluable testimony to the last years of Giorgio de Chirico's life.

³¹ The *Catalogo Generale* edited by Claudio Bruni Sakraischik consists of eight volumes in which 2638 works are reproduced in three books divided by period: 1909-1930; 1931-1950; 1951-1974. The sixth volume dates to 1976 and was the last published while the artist was alive, and which he assented to its being printed. The works intended for publication were examined by Giorgio de Chirico on the basis of photographs. The artist then wrote his opinion on the back of the photographs with the word "authentic" or "fake" followed by his signature and that of Bruni. He sometimes asked to examine the original artwork. Realising that he had made some errors, de Chirico asked Bruni to desist in publishing the *Catalogo Generale*. At the time there was a clamorous inquiry under way by the Magistrate concerning an extensive traffic in fake artworks (not only de Chirico's) that emerged following an investigation by the Unit for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage, led by the then sergeant Antonio Vastano. Bruni, who knew his contractual rights well, refused and went on to publish – though only in 1983 – the seventh volume of the *Catalogo Generale* against the wishes of de Chirico and his wife, expressed formally through de Chirico's lawyer Giuseppe De Luca, with a precise reference to the case (submitted for assessment under Italian Jurisprudence at the Court of Florence). In the mid 1970s, the collaboration between the artist and critic had come to an end, which made Bruni's work much harder inasmuch as he did not have the artist's support. Bruni, in a pure spirit of revenge, decided to seal the catalogue at the year 1974. For subsequent volumes he not only used photographic material formerly examined by de Chirico and bearing the word "authentic" but also material which Bruni himself examined and authenticated personally. At the time the present writer obtained a legal provision from the Court of Rome, (25 July 1984), which ordered that the recently published seventh volume of the *Catalogo Generale* should bear the following information: "publication of this material took place without the consent of artist Giorgio de Chirico and his widow Isabella Pakszwer de Chirico and the autograph statement contained therein cannot be referred to the seventh volume of the catalogue". For completeness of information it should be pointed out that the judicial authority, after the outcome of the Florence trial, ascertained the presence of five fake paintings in the *Catalogo Generale* (among the works published in the first six volumes). The amendment was published in the eighth volume, tome III. The absence in the catalogue of works subsequent

Lacking in even the slightest logical foundation or documentary evidence, Gerd Roos' defamatory theories concerning Giorgio de Chirico and his wife Isabella are fruit of a method of writing as "reprisal" with regard to the artist, and of Roos' animosity towards the Foundation and its representatives, for reasons that we shall certainly have occasion to come back to. This is strange gratitude from Roos who has benefited – over and above the proceeds of author's rights – from no less than three research grants and the translation from German to Italian of his 450 page monograph and its publication at the total expense of the Foundation in 1999.³² In any case, if not gratitude, one would expect him to produce serious research that is in-depth and methodologically correct, carried out in full freedom, rather than the scandal rag gossip described above. It is a great pity that Roos exploited the opportunity offered him by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt for a personal outburst and demonstration of scant professionalism which insulted, if not his own, then certainly the intelligence of his readers.

It should, nonetheless, be noted that Roos' text is full of "good intentions". In fact, he admonishes no less than six times that "one needs to analyse" Neometaphysical painting's role, collaboration, execution, inventory... A task he obviously did not feel up to when he wrote the text for the Frankfurt exhibition catalogue, either that or it took second place to his more impelling need to speak badly about the artist's work – not only the late period but the *entire* oeuvre, which he distributes with an approach similar to differentiated waste disposal, saving the saveable and drawing some benefits from the discards he has selected to bear out his role as a "scholar" of Giorgio de Chirico.

Among Gerd Roos' appeal of "one needs to" the following is of particular consequence: "One needs to analyse, or rather, systematically verify the quantitative dimension of the Neometaphysical oeuvre: the Archivio dell'arte metafisica, in Milan, is constantly dedicated to completing its archive of images, gouaches and drawings".

We know all too well how much work is done by the Archivio, where Roos is vice-president and Paolo Baldacci president.³³ We need only point out that this association was set up in April 2009, the month after Baldacci was sentenced to 20 months in prison for having knowingly sold four fake de Chirico paintings (dated between 1922 and 1932). The fact that the Archivio dell'arte metafisica includes university teachers of proven academic ability, independent of commercial art market concerns, serves as a shield for Baldacci and also helps Roos to make a name for himself, who, as far as we know – although we are ready to acknowledge anything to the contrary – after graduating in Berlin has not gained any academic qualification.

to 1974 does not suggest, as Roos would have us believe, that these works present problems of authenticity. The Foundation's archival service exists precisely to respond to requests for expertise on works not published in Bruni's *Catalogo Generale*. Both the authentication Committee consisting of Vastano and Baldacci (1993-1997) and subsequent ones have issued expertise certification for works executed after 1974.

³² The volume *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti Monaco-Milano-Firenze 1906-1911*, Edizioni Bora, Bologna 1999, was published by the Foundation without any censure (except a clarification by the President) and notwithstanding the errors contained therein. It had in any case the merit of making public extraordinary historiographic material fortuitously discovered by Roos, material which, as has been demonstrated, has been subjected to a reading and interpretation as distorted as it is erroneous (see footnote 11).

³³ On the Archivio dell'arte metafisica's website, under "Newsletter" no less than 23 articles are featured, most of which are polemical with regard to Giorgio de Chirico or the Foundation. Furthermore, under the heading "Opinions", five of the six articles constitute violent attacks against the Foundation, such as "A stroll through recent exhibitions" in which we read: "At this point, it may be necessary to wait for the demise of those involved in order to see things be put back into their proper place". The discourses in various other publications are even more widely destructive with regard to the artist's life and art.

What is certain is that if Gerd Roos believes he is continuing along the line of study of the great scholar Wieland Schmied* (author of numerous serious studies of the artist with whom he had a long relationship and whom he sincerely esteemed – not only as an artist but as a man –), then we must fear for the future of the study of Giorgio de Chirico's art in the German cultural milieu, be they connected with museums, academics or the exhibition-going public and genuine admirers of Giorgio de Chirico's art.³⁴ After all, Germany was the point of departure for the young artist's adventure: from the age of 18 to 21 he studied at the Munich Academy (1906-09). It was there that he grasped the unsurpassable notion of *Stimmung*, a German term that is untranslatable in words but which he transmitted in painting. When de Chirico created the first two metaphysical paintings in Florence in autumn 1910 – *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle* – he described them as follows: "each one is an enigma, each one contains a poem, an atmosphere (*Stimmung*), a promise [...]. It is a tremendous joy for me to have painted them – when I exhibit them, maybe in Munich this spring, it will be a revelation for the whole world."³⁵

The immense legacy that the Great Metaphysician has left to European culture deserves much more.

* * *

In spite of this unpleasant occurrence, we are convinced that visitors to the exhibition appreciated the eight Neometaphysical paintings on show in the room dedicated to Giorgio de Chirico, in the elegant setting supplied by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, which we were able to see in a video-interview with the curators on the museum's website. When the camera passes before *Warriors of Marathon*, 1971, and *The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses*, 1973, the curator remains silent, leaving the late works of the Great Metaphysician to speak for themselves.

Translated by David Smith

* Professor Wieland Schmied passed away on 22 April 2014 at 85 years of age.

³⁴ On occasion of the great 1970 retrospective in Milan, Wieland Schmied wrote: "As in youth, so he is also alone now: against every current. He has always known that the consequence of acknowledgement of part of his work signified the refutation of the subsequent part. He may be satisfied by the fact that even all those who, as he knows, do not understand him, contribute to reinforcing his fame: the worldwide fame of the oeuvre of a genius whose vitality has not abated. De Chirico may interpret it as an anticipation of the immortality for which he has always longed." *Giorgio de Chirico*, exhibition catalogue, Edizioni dell'ente manifestazioni milanesi, Milan 1970, p. 23.

³⁵ G. de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, Florence 26 December 1910. The entire correspondence of 12 letters is published with reproductions and transcription of the original German with translations in Italian and English in "Metafisica Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico", n. 7/8 2008, pp. 521-567 (also available on the website www.fondazionechirico.org and downloadable in pdf format).



fig. 1 G. de Chirico, *Antigone the Consoler*, 1973, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

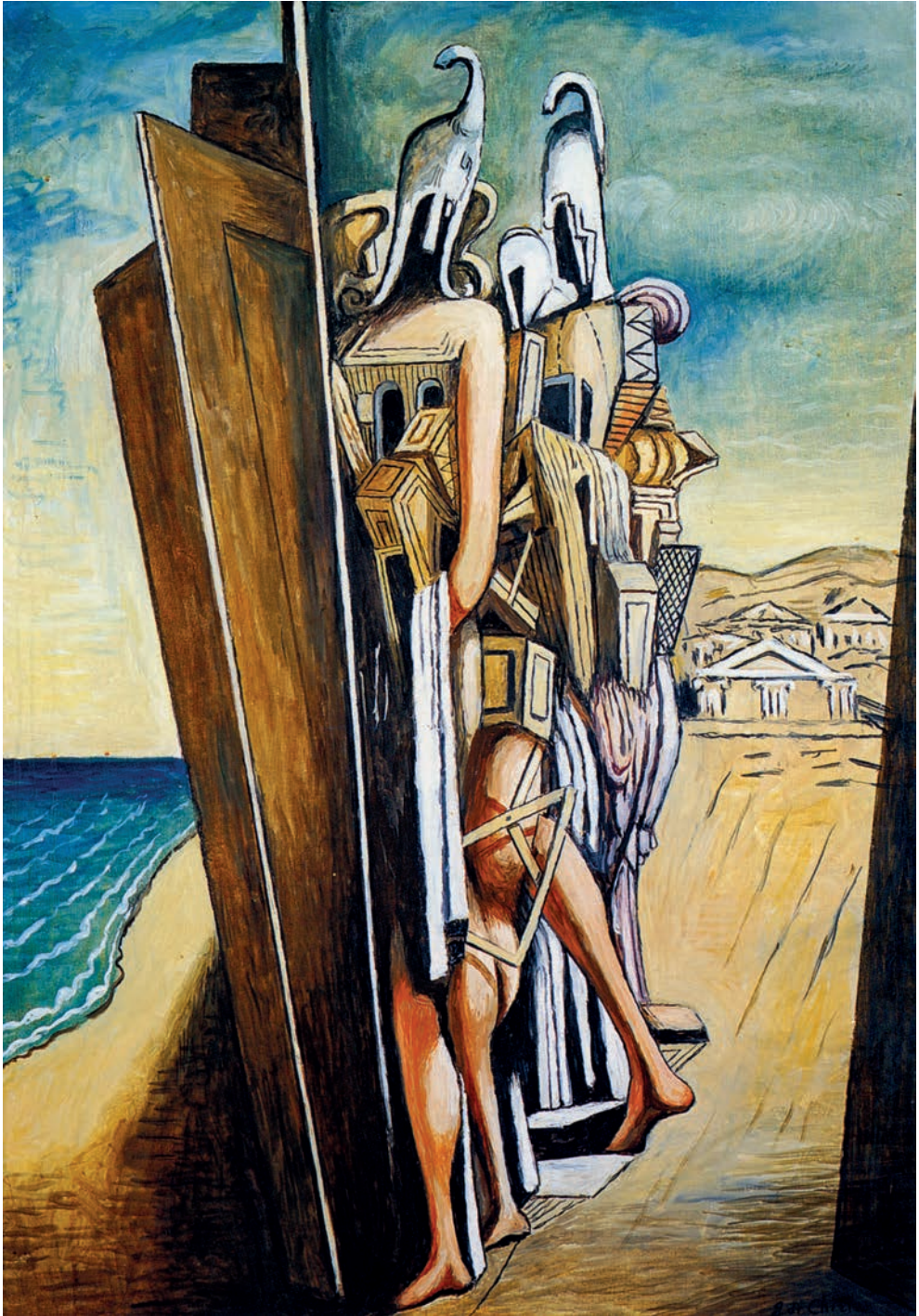


fig. 2 G. de Chirico, *Warriors of Marathon*, 1971, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome



fig. 3 G. de Chirico, *The Hand of Jupiter and the Nine Muses*, 1975, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

Opposite page:

fig. 4 G. de Chirico, *Italian Piazza with Sun Turned Off*, 1971, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

fig. 5 G. de Chirico, *The Return of Ulysses*, 1973, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome





fig. 6 G. de Chirico, *Mysterious Baths with Duck*, 1973, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

Opposite page:

fig. 7 G. de Chirico, *The Return of Hebdomeros*, 1968, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

fig. 8 G. de Chirico, *Head of Mysterious Animal*, 1975, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, previously Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome



APPENDIX
THE SEVENTIES – INTERVIEWS
HOW A WORK OF ART IS BORN
DE CHIRICO '77

What follows are two late testimonies by Giorgio de Chirico, both taken from a series of interviews granted to Franco Simongini for RAI TV in July 1973 and April 1977 respectively (the latter is transcribed in full below). The artist's studio-home at 31 Piazza di Spagna, Rome, where he lived for the last 30 years of his life, provides the setting.

In the documentary *Come nasce un'opera d'arte* (How a Work of Art is Born)¹, the 85 year old de Chirico responds to the interviewer's questions while painting a characteristic Neometaphysical work: *Sole sul cavalletto* (Sun on the Easel), which appeared as a theme for the first time in his lithographs for Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* in 1930. "It is a subject related to suns; the sun turned off in the sky and lit up again in a room", he says while he begins drawing on the blank canvas. They continue to talk while the artist paints the sky green-blue and the undulating rays of the two suns, one black, the other yellowish, after which he sets down his tools and the interview continues on other topics (figs. 1-2). At the start of the second day's shooting the canvas is found in a more advanced state than de Chirico had left it the previous evening (fig. 3). Indeed, it appears that some colour had been added to the background in areas that the artist had not completed during the first day's shooting.² The artist explained to Simongini, on whom this development had not been lost, that he was taken by the "anxiety to create". Their exchange is highly entertaining. On de Chirico's opening comment, Simongini follows suit by proposing another stereotype of artistic creation by asking if a demon had tormented him during the night and if he was often "taken by inspiration". De Chirico goes along with it, giving increasingly witty replies as he finishes the picture, complete with date and signature (fig. 4).³ Simongini concludes the interview by asking the artist what painting means to him and receives the reply: "An amusement, a pleasure, a satisfaction, an amusement of a superior order". In response to his last question, "but are you a painter outside time?", the answer is: "Yes".

¹ F. Simongini, *Come nasce un'opera d'arte*, documentary filmed for RAI TV over two days in the artist's studio, 31 Piazza di Spagna in July 1973.

² De Chirico suffered from spending too much time under the strong lighting needed for the television cameras and complained about it during the interview. In this case, one may advance the hypothesis of an assistant, or that the artist himself preferred to carry on working during the interval.

³ If we wished to follow the logic of Gerd Roos, should we consider this work a fake? A painting which moreover is part of the Foundation's collection?



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4

figs. 1-3 Giorgio de Chirico during the various phases of work on *Sun on the Easel*, painted during the interview with Franco Simongini, *How a Work of Art is Born*, in July 1973

fig. 4 G. de Chirico, *Sun on the Easel*, 1973, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

Four years later, in 1977, Simongini resumed his conversation with the artist with a view to updating the item “de Chirico”, as one does for encyclopaedias. In his brief replies we can appreciate the artist, highly lucid, as he talks about himself and comments on some recent paintings such as *L'oro nero* (Black Gold) of 1976, a work that is testament to de Chirico's inventiveness towards the end of his life (fig. 8). Set against the background of a naturalistic landscape, black objects in the form of blocks overflow from a sort of altar-fountain. Like a small, orderly army they seem alive in their ordered chain of descent to the ground. The strange “apparition”, together with the delicate pictorial execution of trees and the sky with clouds in the background, unites nature and imagination, technique and poetic quality. In one of the very rare moments when the artist revealed the meaning of a work, in response to Simongini's question, he identified the objects, as “solidified petroleum”.

He would not give the interviewer similar satisfaction regarding another work with a truly original subject, not specifically Neometaphysical. This work is published with the title *Fin de siècle* (End

of the Century) in the monograph *Conoscere de Chirico* which includes the interesting essay «*Pictor classicus sum*» *il ritorno alla tradizione dei Maestri* by Wieland Schmied (fig. 7).⁴ Dated 1977 in the book, the work was actually painted in December 1976 and bears the artist's dedication to his wife: "To Isa, with very best wishes for 1977". The title given by the artist was in fact *Uomini e statue* (Men and Statues) as seen in the autograph writing on the back. This title was reaffirmed during the interview when Simongini referred to it as "men looking at statues". De Chirico merely points out: "Ah yes, no. But they are not looking at the statues. The title of that watercolour is *Men and Statues*. There are men there and there are statues there..."

The present writer had the honour of receiving an explanation regarding the socio-political content of this painting from the artist himself. Set within the virtual enclosure created by the statues of the "powerful", stand the masses obliged to remain within the enclosure. Those who stand outside are the questioners, or free spirits, those who do not look at the statues but elsewhere, free of all conditioning.

De Chirico, as creator and man, remains well outside the "enclosure". This freedom of spirit is manifested throughout his entire oeuvre.⁵

⁴ I. Far and D. Porzio, *Conoscere de Chirico*, Mondadori, Milan 1979.

⁵ Upon viewing works of this kind we realise that Roos' statements that Isabella suggested the subjects or that they were executed by someone else – and should therefore be considered fake – could not be farther from the artist's true spirit and the personal and professional circumstances regarding his working method.

DE CHIRICO '77*

Interview by Franco Simongini

Thank you Maestro. Let's resume our interrupted conversation. Do you remember?

Yes.

It was April 1973, now it's...

1977

And four years have gone by. Has anything important happened during these four years?

Events that struck you in a particular way?

No. Nothing...

Now, last year I think, you were elected to the French Academy of Fine Arts.

Yes, I'm a member of the French Academy, I'm a French academician, the so called Immortals, but they die the same anyway.

Did you dress as an academician?

Yes, in a very warm and heavy suit; but I had to wear it for the reception.

But tell me the truth: but were you pleased to wear the suit?

Yes, of course.

Ah, because there's a photo where you have a slightly ironic little smile...

Well the face, you know, doesn't mean anything.... one doesn't really understand...

Yes but you were smiling ironically...

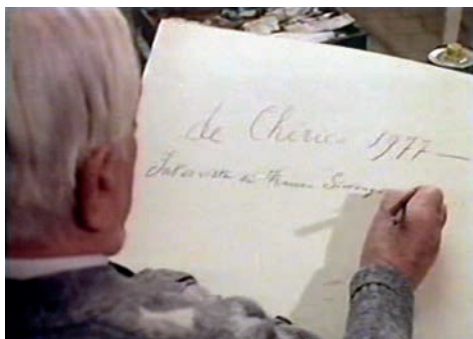
One may have a look that doesn't correspond to what one feels.

And manage to live peacefully and untroubled...

Right, precisely.

Even though they are discovering all these fakes now?

* F. Simongini, *De Chirico '77*, documentary filmed for RAI TV in the artist's studio at 31 Piazza di Spagna, April 1977.



Giorgio de Chirico writing the title *de Chirico 1977 – Interview with Franco Simongini* and during the encounter in April 1977

Well, yes! The fakes are a bit tiresome, but there you are!

Now, have you been working over the course of these four years?

Yes, I've been working.

At your usual pace? From two in the afternoon until seven in the evening?

Yes.

And what is this? Horses?

This is a picture I'm painting at the moment, I'm about to finish it.

Are they old themes you're taking up in a different way, Maestro? With different colours?

Yes, two horses by the seashore.

And this one? This horse full of ruins?

It's a composition...

And what's the title?

It's called the Horse of Bellerophon.

And who is Bellerophon?

An ancient Greek character. I really can't remember what he was: whether a king or a hero...

And how come you chose this title?

Because I liked it.

So it doesn't have any meaning?

No.

You liked the word "Bellerophon"

Bellerophon, yes.

And what other words do you like? Which character in Greek myth do you like?

Oh! I couldn't say off the cuff.

Orestes? Pylades?

Yes, Orestes, Pylades.

But do you find Mars likeable?

Yes, Mars is likeable. Mercury is likeable too...

Isn't there anyone you find unpleasant? Jupiter? Jupiter maybe?

But I couldn't say on the spur of the moment! I've never wondered whether or not I find the ancient Greek gods unpleasant...

But tell the truth: You don't find Jupiter very likeable!

Jupiter not very likeable? I don't know...

He's too dominating, don't you think?

Yes, well, neither likeable nor unpleasant...

And then the Muses, right? Are these ones disquieting or otherwise?

No, they are Muses in a room.

So they aren't disquieting?

Not overly...

And are they looking at one another? Speaking to one another?

Yes...

And then there's an interior... it's Venetian. (fig. 5)

Yes, in fact I got the idea in Venice in a hotel where I was staying.

But aren't you slightly afraid of these rooms? Of these hotels?

Ah! It depends: there are rooms that scare me a bit, others that don't.

But here, for example, were there curtains? Chinese style screens?

That's it, I'm not so keen on curtains.

Because you think there's someone hiding behind them, don't you?



fig. 5 G. de Chirico, *Mystery in a Hotel Room in Venice*, 1974, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome



fig. 6 G. de Chirico, *Two Tenors Singing above a City*, 1970, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

No...! [laughs]

But do you look under the bed before going to sleep?

Hub! If the bed's very high, yes...

And do you open the wardrobes?

I also look in the wardrobes.

And then you lock the door carefully?

Yes, before going to sleep.

How come?

But I think you should lock the door too [laughs].

Yes, yes...

Ah! You do close it?

Yes, yes... I lock it!

So we're in agreement.

You painted a lot in Venice, didn't you?



fig. 7 G. de Chirico, *Men and Statues*, 1976, private collection

I painted a fair amount: yes, I did some things.

Look! Vincenzina has brought this sea monster, what is it?

It isn't a monster, it's a kind of seahorse, the triton...

And then I noticed you've also done some drawings. Here we have a group of houses with two figures...

These drawings are called "Two Tenors Singing above a City". (fig. 6)

But the city is imaginary because there are more or less all the elements you've done: the tower...

It's an imaginary city, all in all.

And why on earth are they singing? Are they happy?

They're content.

But you generally do characters who are always somewhat mysterious, yet they're generally happy...

Generally they're doing fine and are happy.

Because horses are always horses...

The horses are doing fine too.



fig. 8 G. de Chirico, *Black Gold*, 1976, private collection

And then there are men looking at statues, another picture done in the last four years.

Ah yes, no. But they aren't looking at the statues. The title of that watercolour is "Men and Statues". Yes, they're men who are there and statues that are there ... (fig. 7)

Then there's another picture, Maestro, that you painted in the last two or three years. It's a pedestal from which pieces of coal appear to be rolling down...

I don't know...

Yes.

Is it a nightmare?

No, no. It isn't a nightmare, it's an idea that came to me just like that.

And what does this idea represent?

Ah! nothing... yes, I called it Black Gold. Because... (fig. 8)

Oil?

It could be oil, yes... solidified!

Oil that now costs...

Costs the same as gold.

But your pictures Maestro are also valuable, aren't they?

Well yes, I believe they are valuable...

You have visions at dawn, isn't that so?

Well yes, sometimes... but rarely! I'm not usually a visionary.

You don't believe in inspiration... fine, we know this.

But it's not that I don't believe in it! But there you are, inspiration might be an idea that comes to mind... this might be considered an inspiration.

Now you must excuse me if I ask all these questions, but as this is a brief note to the documentary film we did four years ago, as you'll recall, you are a somewhat important item, as in an encyclopaedia, so we are now updating the item "de Chirico", aren't we? Updating from '73 to '77. You must excuse me. I've tried everything but you don't want to talk about your life... you always

hide behind your ironic smile. But how come you are so reluctant to talk about yourself?

But how should I talk? I don't know.

You don't try to explain...

But explain what?

Not the secrets of your work, because those are professional secrets, but I don't know..., about certain aspects of your life, I don't know, you skip over them ...

But my life is very simple. I live with my wife in a flat in Piazza di Spagna, I work and I see a few people, we have a few friends, and that's it...

And you work...

And what am I supposed to do? I do what everybody else does...

You are always slightly too modest, Maestro. After all, you're considered the world's greatest painter, you're now on Olympus if we may say so. You have fought so many battles, taken part in many controversies against modern art...

Well I haven't really fought any battles.

Well yes! The polemics against the surrealists, with Breton who...

Yes but those are polemics, I said what I thought... if I felt something was wrong I said it was wrong.

But now they've admitted you were right, that is, first they said only the metaphysical period was important, then also the Archaeologists, and now all of de Chirico is appreciated.

Yes, it is.

Are you pleased?

Better this than otherwise.

So from the heights of the Olympus of your wisdom, how do you see the today's world? I'm not talking about art.

Hub! I don't see it as very brilliant, it's pretty boring...

Ah! It's boring?

Yes, fairly.

But do you read the papers?

Every morning.

Do you watch television?

Yes.

Do you like it?

I do, but it's been going downhill for a few years, it seems to me...

Television is boring too?

It seems to me it was better a few years ago.

But in certain aspects today's world is better, I mean the scientific aspect, discoveries...

Yes, well, there haven't been any great scientific discoveries.

What about the field of medicine though?

Medicine yes, I don't know... I really haven't been very involved...

But human stupidity, mediocrity and envy still remain, don't they?

Yes, and then they always will.

So you arm yourself with good luck amulets [Laughs...]

[Laughs...] *Ah, all right! those are slight forms of superstition, yes.*

And to conclude... Maestro, you are now 89 years old. How do you see Giorgio de Chirico?

What is he to you?

I don't define myself in the least!

Yes, but you've said "I'm a normal man"!

A normal man who's been a painter and continues to be a painter.

Who has seen success though! Great success!

Yes, he has seen success...

But are you satisfied with your work? with your whole life?

Yes, I'm satisfied.

No regrets? Remorse?

No, nothing...

So you have reached your full potential?

That's it, I've reached my full potential.

May we say that Giorgio de Chirico is a tranquil and happy man?

You may say it... [laughs] it doesn't change anything.

Yes, but do you feel you're a happy man?

Yes I feel happy! Not madly happy but, well, fairly happy.

Maestro thank you!

Not at all. Thank you for your interest in me and my life.

Translated by David Smith