

LETTERS BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO
TO GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE
PARIS – FERRARA 1914-1916¹

1. Letter [January 21, 1914]² addressed to Guillaume Apollinaire, 202 Boulevard St. Germain, E.V.

Wednesday night

Dear Sir,

I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you the day after tomorrow, on Friday, at my studio: 9 rue Campagne-Première.

I would like very much for you to see a few of the works I have painted recently. As my studio is very little and very dark, I would ask you not to come too late, as after 4 o'clock there is almost no more light. I will wait for you until 5 o'clock in any case.

I hope you will give me the pleasure of coming to dinner.

In happy anticipation of the pleasant hours I will spend with you, I shake your hand cordially,

Yours,

Giorgio de Chirico

¹ The letters are kept at Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Site Richelieu-Louvois, Département de Manuscrits occidentaux, NAF 27148, NAF 27158. Original letters transcribed by Silvia Tusi.

² This date and the following dates in square brackets were written on the letters by the person responsible for archiving the letters based on the postage stamps.

2. Letter [January 26, 1914] addressed to Guillaume Apollinaire, 202 Boulevard St. Germain, E.V.

Dear friend,

I greatly regretted not having seen you on Friday. I received your little note; I will be sure to come to see you next Friday at 3 o'clock. I hope to have the pleasure of spending the afternoon and evening with you. My mother and brother would very much like to meet you and this is why I would like to ask you to come to dinner at our house. I would like to know what kind of foods you prefer to eat. I will try to come to your house on Wednesday, but if for some reason I can not make it, would you kindly write a little note to let me know if you accept the invitation to dinner and what it is you most like to eat. It is very important, as Nietzsche observed in "Ecce Homo", and I would in no way want to prepare something you might not like.

I have constructed paintings recently that have given me a very pure kind of joy.

There is one especially which I'm thinking of showing at the "Indépendants" and with which I believe I have reached a very distant goal. So distant indeed, that when I look at it now that it is done it gives me the impression that it was painted by someone else, in another time, or in another world and other, even stranger and more bizarre impressions; well, you will see for yourself. The title of this painting is "The Enigma of a Day".

I am certain that your friendship will be valuable to me in life. Of all the men whom I've met, here in Paris as in Italy and Germany, you are the most intelligent; I use the word intelligent in its most ample meaning, be it well understood. You are the only person with whom I can speak freely and say things which a certain sense of modesty inhibits me to speak of with others and it is painful for me to have to hold these thoughts within. It is true that painting speaks, but...

Goodbye my dear friend. See you on Wednesday, and in any case, on Friday.

Devotedly yours,
Giorgio de Chirico

3. Letter

Saturday evening

Dear friend,

I began work today on the large painting, the drawing of which you saw yesterday. Seeing the image on the large canvas like that produced an even stranger and unforeseen impression on me. I am thinking of holding an exposition in my studio of paintings I made this winter from February 10 to 16. The interest and profound comprehension you have for what I do encourages me on a thousand and one paths and opens many horizons for me.

I will bring "The Enigma of a Day" to you one of the next few days. I thought of a title for Miss Laurencin's painting today "Mystery of a Moment", because the various things represented in it appear with the same suddenness that occurs at certain times when the intimate essence of objects appear to us in their full metaphysical reality. The look of the things I see in my imagination and how these things appear in life can be compared to the physiognomy of a person seen in a dream and the physiognomy of the same person in reality; at the same time it is and is not, the same person.

I am therefore convinced to have shown a new direction in art.

Since I've known you I feel more confident and my hope for success is stronger.

I feel the same as a young legionnaire must have felt setting off on a long campaign and meeting a comrade in arms, stronger and more hardened than he.

In exchange for the paintings I gave you, which I will be very proud to see hanging in your home, I would like to ask you to dedicate me one of the poems which, as you mentioned, are soon to be published in a volume.

I am waiting impatiently for the arrival of the dealer whom you told me about. He could be very useful to me at this time and would help the development of my work.

I would like very much to make the acquaintance of Miss Laurencin.

I will come to see you on Wednesday.

I shake your hand cordially,

Yours,

Giorgio de Chirico

4. Letter

Sunday

Dear friend,

I am sending you the comment Mr. André Salmon wrote about my paintings in the review Montjoie. "G. de Chirico's painting is certainly better than his literature: Melancholy of an Autumn Evening (what a slow waltz!) His titles are dreadful!"

Mr. André Salmon misread the title in the catalogue as the painting is entitled Melancholy of a Beautiful Day, and neither the evening nor the autumn have anything to do with it. I hope dear friend that you will write a few words about this in the next issue of "Soirées de Paris". This would give my name some exposure and at the same time might change Mr. Salmon's opinion of my intelligence.

I haven't brought the painting to you yet because I will be showing it in my studio for four days (from Saturday to next Tuesday) with the other new paintings I have.

I hope, my dear friend that you will write something in L'Intransigeant and in "Soirées de Paris" about these paintings. In fact, I hope you will come to my studio to see the little exhibition because there are still three paintings you haven't seen yet.

I hope to see you on Wednesday.

Please don't forget, if the Düsseldorf dealer should need to come to my studio, let me know with a note, which I ask you to kindly address to 43 rue de Chaillot.

In thanking you, dear friend, for the interest you show me, I shake your hand cordially.

Yours,

Giorgio de Chirico

5. Letter [February 21, 1914] addressed to Guillaume Apollinaire, 202 Boulevard St. Germain, E.V.

Saturday

Dear friend,

I took three paintings to the "Indépendants" yesterday. I did not take the large one for fear it be poorly placed due to its size.

I hope, my dear friend, you will use your influence with the exhibition set-up commission so my paintings will not be overly sacrificed and are united together as much as possible alongside works which are not too ridiculous. They are in room IX at present, but I don't know if this is the room they will be hung in.

Are you planning to write something about the paintings you saw in my studio in L'intransigeant?

If you see Mr. [illegible], I beg you to tell him that he shouldn't play hard to get with people who have no intention whatsoever of getting him. In any case, I find him more rude than difficult to get.

You are my only consolation these days.

I say this to you, as I would to a woman with whom I was in love.

Last night my brother and I spoke a long time about you.

I shake your hand cordially.

Yours,

Giorgio de Chirico

6. Letter

Ferrara 11-7-916

My very dear friend,

It has been almost two years now since I've seen you. The Ephesian teaches us that time does not exist and that on the great curve of eternity the past is the same as the future. This might be what the Romans meant with their image of Janus, the god with two faces; and every night in dream, in the deepest hours of rest, the past and future appear to us as equal, memory blends with prophecy in a mysterious union. Despite of this, or possibly because of this, there are times when we become sad while thinking of dear friends we haven't seen for a very long time; you are among those, my dear Apollinaire, who my thoughts most often evoke, who I most ardently desire to meet again one day. This I hope will be soon perhaps.

During the past two years I have followed from afar the events of your noble life. I heard of your promotion to officer.

Guillaume has always spoken of you in his letters to me; it is he who told me of your glorious wound, your decoration and your convalescence. It is time now for you to live tranquil hours of virile rest and of serene happiness. You deserve this and even more.

In Florence, I read something of yours at Papini's, an admirable poem in "Voce" which you wrote at the front. I would also like to read what you wrote in "Voce".

I am very happy that you like my drawing. I hope Guillaume will show you the paintings I sent him recently. I am working a lot, despite military life. We have rented for almost nothing, a big house in a park full of oak and poplar trees and at night, Savinio and I work until dawn. I think I will be able to organize an exhibition of my paintings this fall in Florence, with Papini, at the "Voce" gallery.

I would be very grateful, my dear friend, if you wanted to encourage Paul Guillaume a bit with his business. He is an intelligent young man; he always helps me and takes care of me with great zeal. He will soon be showing some of my paintings, maybe you could write something in a newspaper or speak to the people you know so well how to influence and persuade. What I mean to say, is that I have trust in you.

Savinio is also working a lot. He has written marvellous things. Extraordinary music too. Have you read his poems and articles in "Voce" ?

I will soon send a drawing to you, which I will make especially for you. I hope to receive a word. This would bring me great joy, and joy, the daughter of happiness, is as rare as he is.

Veniet felicior aetas!

Your very faithful friend,
Giorgio de Chirico

Ferrara
Via Montebello 24

7. Postcard addressed to: S. Lieutenant G. Apollinaire Hôpital du Gouvernement Italien 41 Quai d'Orsay Paris France

Via Montebello 24
Ferrara 27-8-916

My very dear friend,

I hope you have received my drawing. I am working a lot; I am waiting for Paul Guillaume to return to Paris in order to send 11 new paintings to him.

An eminently cubist city, Ferrara has become for me a source of inspiration and of revelations. The drawing I sent to Paul Guillaume is to be reproduced in "L'Elan" but I don't think anything has been done about it yet. I ask you, my dear friend, to speak to the director of the magazine about this, if you wouldn't mind; he could publish your drawing.

Do not forget me in your talks. You, who have been through it, know how long and hard the fight for recognition is. I had the misfortune of having my work interrupted by this never-ending war just when the road was opening up for me and my hope had been ignited. But I have confidence in myself and in those who esteem me.

Write to me when you have time.

Your very faithful friend,
G. de Chirico

Written at the top of the postcard:

All the "Voce" members are dispersed. We couldn't manage to get the issue you wanted.

8. Postcard addressed to: S. Lieutenant G. Apollinaire Hôpital du Gouvernement Italien 41 Quai d'Orsay Paris France

Ferrara 19-10-1916

My dear friend,

A small monograph on my work is in preparation, with reproductions of my paintings and a text written by a very intelligent young man whom I had the luck to meet. Would you, my dear friend, be good enough to write something, whatever you like (not an introduction), two verses, a piece of prose, it doesn't matter what, with a dedication and your signature, so that I can have it printed at the front of the monograph. Your name is well known and your poetry is greatly admired among intelligent youth of Italy. If you answer my request, you will be doing me a precious favour.

In exchange, I will send you one of my recent paintings, which I ask you to accept.

I will try to have the publication of the monograph coincide with the exhibition of my paintings of Italy, which Papini will be organizing in Florence soon.

I read your very pretty poem in André Derain's catalogue. I felt profound pleasure, also because it had been a long time since I had read one of your verses. I hope you will send me the piece I ask you for. Thank you in advance and believe me to be your very faithful friend.

G. de Chirico

Ferrara

Vicolo del Carbone 4

9. Postcard addressed to: S. Lieutenant G. Apollinaire Hôpital du Gouvernement Italien 41 Quai d'Orsay Paris France

Ferrara 6-11-1916

My very dear friend,

Thank you for your very pretty poem. I will send you the painting, together with the monograph, when it is printed. I sent Guillaume some new paintings and I will be sending more.

Don't forget me, when the occasion comes along; facilitate my forward-march.

I shake your hand brotherly,

Yours,

G. de Chirico

Vicolo del Carbone 4

Ferrara

10. Postcard addressed to: S. Lieutenant G. Apollinaire Hôpital du Gouvernement Italien 41 Quai d'Orsay Paris France

Ferrara 21-11-916

My very dear friend,

This morning I received a letter from Paul Gullaume telling me that he sold 3 of my paintings to Serge. I immediately understood to whom I owed this sale, and I do not want to waste any time in thanking you, my dear friend, for the precious support you give me and which you have never denied me since the first day I met you. You were the first to help me decipher the terrain surrounding me, and show me how to push forward using my elbows in the hostile and indifferent crowd. I will send you the painting I have promised you. I don't know precisely when, as I am working on a number of paintings right now. I work at night, like Demosthenes, and if my paintings don't smell of oil, they certainly smell of electricity.³ You will have the painting before the end of the year. Savinio received your note; he is very happy you are publishing his "ATLAS".

I shake your hand very affectionately, my dear friend.

Yours

G. de Chirico

11. On a four page letter written by Helène [d'Oettingen], additional messages are signed by Picasso, Serge [Ferat], Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. The letter is erroneously dated 1913 in pencil. The correct date is the end of 1914.

Notes written by de Chirico and Savinio are on one page:

I wish you a happy year and wartime-poetical laurels on you strategic lyre; your very devoted disciple and lazy servant, who is afraid to admit his lack of vigour.

Giorgio de Chirico

My dear friend,

As you see, we are visiting your charming friend, and all we can do is think of and speak of you.

Yours, Albert Savinio

Translated by Katherine Robinson

³ De Chirico used this exceptional expression in a letter to Giovanni Papini a few days later, on November 24th: "I would like you to see my latest paintings. I manage to work almost as much as I worked *ante bellum*. And I think that if my paintings don't smell of oil, they at least smell of electricity". The letter is published in M. Calvesi, *La metafisica scbiarita*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1982, p. 145.

Letters to Guillaume Apollinaire, Paris – Ferrara 1914-1916

In the middle of Paris's cultural renaissance in the autumn of 1913, Guillaume Apollinaire was taken up by the still and strong vision of Giorgio de Chirico's painting, like the eye in the tornado of the intense movement of modern art at the time. The collection of letters written by Giorgio de Chirico addressed to Guillaume Apollinaire, conserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, provides precious information regarding the commencement of the artist and poet's collaboration at the beginning of 1914 and relates details concerning the work in progress at the time.¹ A significant addition to what is already known of this relationship, these letters also reveal de Chirico's feelings and his interest for Apollinaire on a personal level, giving new form to the poetical quality evoked both in the poet's portrait, as well as in the eulogy the artist wrote in honour of Apollinaire after his death in 1918. Together with other references found in the artist's Memoirs and in various other self-presentations, these letters will occupy a noteworthy place in the study of this important rapport. The epistolary series can be divided in two periods: the first, consisting of five letters written in January and February 1914, and a second part, composed of five letters sent from Ferrara covering the period from July to November 21, 1916. The suspension of correspondence from August 1914 to July 1916 is undoubtedly due to the outbreak of the war at the end of July 1914 and Apollinaire's enrolment in the French army. Only one letter, signed by the hand of a number of artists, is datable to this interval. The absence of letters during the spring and summer of 1914 instead, could be attributed to the possibility that at the time de Chirico and Apollinaire were seeing each other on a regular basis, such that written correspondence was no longer necessary. The closeness of the poet and artist's relationship is discernable in an article by Apollinaire published in "Paris Journal" on May 25, 1914. Speaking of de Chirico, he states: "Let's hope he soon snaps out of the apathetic state that the planting of a few small trees in the Place de Rennes has put him. Mr. de Chirico is an enemy of trees and a friend of statues. The Place de Rennes, which has no statue, but which marvellously frames the Montparnasse station, infinitely pleased the young painter, who is the brother of Savinio, the musician. The city gardeners have ruined everything by destroying the harmony of one of the most beautiful modern piazzas, thus conferring a deplorable woody look to it."² After knowing de Chirico for only a few months, Apollinaire expresses intimate knowledge of the artist's state of being regarding his upset for the piazza and the train station, sources of his inspiration.

The letters written in January reveal the consecution of de Chirico and Apollinaire's first appointments for the poet to view the artist's work. On Monday January 26th de Chirico invited Apollinaire to dinner at his house the following Friday, specifying "my mother and brother would very much like to meet you"³. It is therefore probable that it is on this occasion that Savinio made

¹ In October, 1913, Apollinaire reviewed the exhibition de Chirico held in his studio at 115 rue Notre Dame des Champs in the column *La Vie Artistique* in "L'Intransigeant". Although artist and poet may have met each other before this date, the review constitutes Apollinaire's first commentary regarding de Chirico's painting. See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco *Giorgio de Chirico. Il tempo di Apollinaire, Paris 1911/1915*, De Luca Editore, Rome, 1981.

² Unsigned article, undoubtedly written by Apollinaire, entitled *Giorgio de Chirico* in "Paris Journal", May 25, 1914. See *La pittura metafisica*, exhibition catalogue edited by G. Briganti, E. Coen, Palazzo Grassi, Neri Pozza Editore, Venice 1979, pp. 111-112.

³ G. de Chirico to G. Apollinaire, January 26, 1914, date in pencil, not written by de Chirico. Handwritten letter conserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Apollinaire's acquaintance for the first time.⁴ In his letters, de Chirico offered specifics on work in progress, speaking of preparatory drawings, paintings freshly started and others recently terminated, referring to the titles of paintings and sharing with the poet the sensations and impressions his canvases have provoked in him. These indications allow us to witness the creation of some of the moment's masterpieces: "In this last period of time, I have constructed some paintings that have given me a very pure feeling of joy", wrote the artist. With the word 'construct', the sentence illustrates de Chirico's particular approach to painting. He also makes clear the impression a particular painting has produced on him, like an autonomous entity capable of surprising even its own creator. He continued: "when I look at it now that it is done, it gives me the impression that it was painted by someone else, in another time, or in another world and other, even stranger and more bizarre impressions; well, you will see for yourself. The title of this painting is *The Enigma of a Day*."⁵ Happy to have finally found someone with whom he can "speak freely" de Chirico shared the intimate sensations he was experiencing with his work, passionately describing them to Apollinaire: "I began work today on the large painting, the drawing of which you saw yesterday. Seeing the image on the large canvas like that, produced an even stranger and unforeseen impression on me."⁶ It is possible that the painting he refers to is *La Gare Montparnasse* which, with *The Enigma of a Day*, is the other painting of large dimensions executed at the time. In the last letter, dated February 21st, the artist informed Apollinaire that he had taken three paintings to the *Indépendents*, specifying that he did not take the big one as he was afraid that it be poorly exhibited due to its size. De Chirico expressed his reborn optimism since Apollinaire had become interested in his work: "The interest and profound comprehension you have for what I do encourages me on a thousand and one paths and opens many horizons for me." In the same letter, while delineating his motivation for the title of a painting, the artist revealed the principle approach to his work: "because the various things represented in it appear with the same suddenness that occurs at certain times when the intimate essence of objects appear to us in their full metaphysical reality. [...] I am therefore convinced to have shown a new direction in art." During the intense period of work and his collaboration with the poet over the course of the spring, the artist painted the well-known *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire*.

An unusual letter signed by a number of people was sent to the poet at the frontline. The letter is erroneously dated 1913 in the archival papers, although, by its content it is evident that the letter was written at the end of 1914, when Apollinaire had already been absent five months from Paris. The letter of greetings for the poet-soldier, far from his friends and the Paris art milieu, is signed by Hélène [d'Oettingen], Picasso, Serge [Ferat], Giorgio de Chirico and Alberto Savinio. The missive written by de Chirico gives an indication of the letter's correct date: "I wish you a happy year and wartime-poetical laurels on you strategic lyre; your very devoted disciple and lazy servant, who is

⁴ After being introduced to Apollinaire it is likely that Savinio started to attend the *Les Soirées de Paris* meetings with de Chirico, who presumably already attended these meetings at that time. De Chirico subscribed to the "Les Soirées de Paris" review in November 1913, as documented in the subscription record book of this review, under the letter 'C' ("Les Soirées de Paris" subscription record book, Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris).

⁵ G. de Chirico to G. Apollinaire, January 26, 1914, cit.

⁶ Letter dated "Saturday night", the content of which seems to date it to January 31st.

afraid to admit his lack of vigour. Giorgio de Chirico". Courageous or not, six months later de Chirico would also make the decision to enroll and leave Paris to return to Italy.

The second group of de Chirico's letters from Ferrara, two years after his last encounter with Apollinaire, reveals the intense consideration the artist held for the poet. These letters enrich existing historical information by adding and confirming a series of indications found in letters written by de Chirico and Savinio to Paul Guillaume, Ardegno Soffici and Giovanni Papini, during their military service in Ferrara. With this precious addition of letters to Apollinaire, one can retrace the course of communication between the various protagonists taking place at the time, regarding publications, exhibitions and the sale of paintings. However, what most clearly emerges from these letters is the immense esteem the artist felt for Apollinaire and his hope for the continuation of their collaboration, an event which, although reduced due to the circumstances of war, was still on-going. In an attempt to express how the poet's absence was affecting him, and his desire to see him again one day, de Chirico offered Apollinaire an extraordinary elucidation on the structure of time by connecting the Heraclitus' ideas and the image of Janus, the god with two faces, in a fascinating letter dated July 11, 1916. In the same letter he announced that he had dedicated a drawing to him, which he would soon send. In October, Apollinaire sent a poem in response to the artist's request for him to write something for a monograph on his painting that was being prepared. It is likely that the monograph was never published. A comparison of de Chirico's letters to Paul Guillaume of the same period, reveals the diversity of the artist's attitude toward the poet and the art dealer.⁷ In the autumn of 1916, infuriated and made jealous by the André Derain catalogue including a presentation by Apollinaire, which Paul Guillaume had sent him, de Chirico openly vented his disappointment with the gallery owner in a letter, while to the poet, he commented on the catalogue with seeming detachment: "I read your very pretty poem in André Derain's catalogue. I felt profound pleasure, also because it had been a long time since I had read one of your verses," avoiding mention of the poet's introduction. From this it can be understood to what extent de Chirico considered Paul Guillaume a peer, someone with whom he could deal passionately, sharing his ideas on life and business on an equal level. De Chirico has, in fact, referred to Guillaume as a brother at times. His friendship with Apollinaire, instead, seems to have touched his spirit on a profoundly spiritual level, deeply nourishing his reflections on himself, his arte and his future.

With aspiration and hope for the future, the correspondence from Ferrara offered continuation to a relationship which would be tragically interrupted by Apollinaire's death on November 9, 1918. From their initial acquaintance at the beginning of 1914, until Apollinaire left for the war, the artist and poet actually shared little more than six months of their lives together. It is very significant that de Chirico painted, in the bright light of early summer at the height of their collaboration, the absolute masterpiece *Song of Love* with its bust of Apollo. Inadvertently, the painting announced a moment of change in which destiny would have it that the two would never meet again.

Katherine Robinson

⁷ The letters to Paul Guillaume are published in *La pittura metafisica*, cit., pp. 113-121.