



# Restoration of the *Bagni Misteriosi* Fountain in Sempione Park in Milan

by  
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The first phase of restoration of the Fountain (see attached) was carried out by Restauri Formica in 1997 for the City of Milan and by the company MARGRAF (owner: Paolo Marzotto): These initial works included the following interventions: a) the rebuilding of the statues of the swimmers and of the swan that were vandalized, along with their restoration; b) the edges of the tub were restored, and during this work a pictorial draft was discovered representing long patterns of waves in a parquet style - of the same style seen in the paintings entitled *Bagni Misteriosi* by Giorgio de Chirico, after 1930. The statues were removed so as to be able to work on them in a protected environment at the Triennale of Milan, and in order to make copies to insert in the tub to substitute the original sculptures.

Up until the deliberation of the completion (Dec. 2001) of the restoration for the City of Milan, much serious reflection was given as to the correct way to make the copies from the originals. The discussion centred round three essential factors:

1. The type of materials used for the Fountain is the most problematic factor especially within the context of where the Fountain is located and the interaction it affords with the public. The second problem was resolved by assigning that part of the park where the opera rests to the Triennale of Milan, until they can assure the work's "safety", whereas the first problem - the materials - still remains the most important factor. Vicenza stone is a soft, sandy and delicate and it does not tolerate the harshness of Milan's weather well, nor the pollutants present in the city's air. From the beginning of the restoration to the present we can see the positive effects the restoration has had on the on the Swimmer statues since they have been kept in a safe environment. However, the tub, the swan and the other elements that remained in their original location have regressed to their previous state with regards to the integrity of the materials and the shapes of these elements. The coloured film layer that used to look like parquet has completely degraded, however an exact graphic copy of the same dimensions has been carried out.

2. The second most important factor under discussion by the authorities responsible for the restoration work concerns its artistic and philological meaning. When we consider the Fountain within its historical context as a prototypical example of

“public” art, we can see it as an object that was realized to adorn the city so as to provide cultural relief from the routine life of the city’s inhabitants. This said however, we are immediately reminded of the finished statues of de Chirico, along with the complete structure of the Fountain which de Chirico did not obviously execute - this was left to the industrial marble company MARGRAF and Swimming Pool International - but which de Chirico had planned in its entirety. What is to be the future of the parquet-style painting on the tub’s bottom, whose safeguarding (from the rain) was a concern of de Chirico’s? Whatever final decision is made with regards to protecting the painting “originally sculpted by de Chirico” begs also the question of what is to happen to the rest of the Fountain as originally planned in its entirety by de Chirico.

3. The third dilemma to resolve concerns the idea of the opera within its geographical-artistic context. The Fountain is part and parcel of the park and its position is directly related to the Triennale palazzo. The fountain represents “a pictorial detail” for the park, positioned as it is within a framework of trees, while the park itself takes on the image of a “painting” done in stone, thereby assimilating the materials in its context which is its image as well. Behind the Fountain lies the horseshoe-shaped Triennale palazzo that opens out onto and encloses the Fountain in a gesture that attests to the relationship de Chirico had with the Triennale in the same year (1933) that the fountain was built and in which the artist executed the celebrated fresco, *Cultura d’Italia*, in the Salone d’Onore. The idea to remove the entire complex of the fountain and to place it elsewhere should take into the account the geographical context and concept of the original fountain.

#### *The Bagni Misteriosi Fountain*

Realized in 1973 by Giorgio de Chirico for the show *Contatto Arte Città* under the curatorship of Giulio Macchi for the City of Milan and the Triennale of Milan, the Fountain was built in the laboratories of MARGRAF in Vicenza and donated to the city by Paolo Marzotto. It is composed of seven elements: two swimmers, a swan, a ball, a cabin, a trampoline and the fountain in Vicenza stone. The bottom of the tub has a curved profile and is covered with a pictorial image in parquet style that was designed to imitate the movement of waves along a current. In 1994, a public demonstration was held that included the artists of the Casa degli Artisti of Milan, solicited by Hidetoshi Nagasawa, Jole de Sanna and the Accademia di Belle Arti of Brera in order to request from the City of Milan for the official restoration of the Fountain. From that date on, the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation has followed and supported the restoration effort whose responsibility lies with the City of Milan, the Superintendence of Monuments and Fine Arts, the Environmental and Architectural Works Office and the Centro Gino Bozza of the C.N.R. under the directorship of Professor Giuseppe Basile of the Central Institute for Restoration.