

# THE CONSTANTS OF HISTORY – OLD AND RECENT FALSIFICATION OF GIORGIO DE CHIRICO’S ARTWORK PAOLO BALDACCI: A CASE STUDY

**1. Judgement of the Court of Appeal of Milan; 2. The Melancholy of the Forger: Die Melancholie der Abreise “1913”; 3. Paolo Baldacci’s Research Methodology: the Drawings said to be from “Valori Plastici”; 4. Physical Material on which Artwork is made as its sole Criteria of Authenticity; 5. The Foundation’s Commitment in Defence of Giorgio de Chirico’s Work and Name; 6. Paolo Baldacci: A Case Study – Origins and Background; 7. The “Sabatello” Italian Piazza**

## 1. Judgement of the Court of Appeal of Milan

The article, *The Constants of History – Old and Recent Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico’s Artwork*, published in the previous issue of “Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals” (n. 9/10, 2011), provided a brief overview regarding the problem of the forgery of Giorgio de Chirico’s artwork. Featured in the article was the Judgement of the Court of Milan (7<sup>th</sup> Criminal Section, n. 2946 - 09.03./03.06.2009), constituting the outcome of the first instance criminal proceeding in which Paolo Baldacci was the prime accused.<sup>1</sup> For the sake of completion, images of the fake paintings dealt with in the judgement were included along with other paintings considered fake by the Foundation. The various channels and methods used by forgers for the manufacture and promulgation of fakes in the cultural milieu were also described, such as the creation of what is known as an artwork’s “pedigree”, as well as the inclusion of such works in exhibitions, monographs and auction house catalogues.

The judicial process was brought to conclusion with the recent judgement of the Court of Appeal of Milan, *res judicata*, which confirmed the guilt of the accused and the non-authenticity of the seven confiscated paintings, all of which had been dated to the decade 1922-1932. The seizure order for the fake paintings (issued during the first instance proceedings), as well as part of the auxiliary sanctions regarding the reimbursement of damages and legal expenses were confirmed (4<sup>th</sup> Criminal Section n. 3539 of 20.5.2013). The Statute of Limitations was ruled in effect, a legal provision that all

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<sup>1</sup> *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. 393-416; Judgment of the Court of Appeal of Milan, pp. 417-437.

of the accused involved in the case deemed in their best interest to accept, thus forgoing further opportunity to defend their innocence.

The Court responded to the various motivations put forth by the defence in the Act of Appeal, particularly the extensive and analytical motivations presented on behalf of Baldacci, who had contradictorily requested a new assessment [of the paintings, *ed.*] without relinquishing the application the Statute of Limitations. The Court reiterated the accurateness of the technical and artistic collegial expertise carried out by the technical consultants appointed by the Court in the first instance, who proved with absolute certainty that the paintings attributed to Giorgio de Chirico were forgeries. The judgement of guilt was based on: interrogations, facts and circumstances surrounding the origin of three works from persons who had died in the meantime, the changing of hands and commercialisation of the fake works, the exchange of communication between the various parties involved, as well as spontaneous declarations made by Baldacci in the courtroom during the reconstruction of the various transitions. Additionally, the expertise that had been issued for the paintings weighed in as decisive proof of the accused's full knowledge with regard to the non-authenticity of the works they commercialised. After having tenaciously defended the indicted paintings' authenticity during the first instance proceedings, once these had been confirmed as absolute fakes, Baldacci went on to defend himself against the Court's adage that it was "absurd to consider that he could not not have known". The equation is quite simple: if one is unable to recognise the difference between an authentic work and one "made with inadequate materials, poor and rushed techniques, with a style not adequately interpreted", it would be better not to act as an expert or art dealer: "[...] I was and still am the greatest de Chirico expert in the world. I'm sorry, I hate to sing my own praises, but I'm afraid that's the way it is". The incautious declaration (which probably contributed in convincing the judges of the speaker's guiltiness) was made at the Court of Milan during a first instance hearing.<sup>2</sup> It was proved during the judicial hearing that the first person to introduce a number of the incriminated works onto the market was indeed "the greatest de Chirico expert" himself, who later based his defence on his actions having been made in "in good faith", thus turning the question around as if *he* was the one who had been swindled! Baldacci's second ground for Appeal further affirmed: "all paintings had indisputable elements of de Chirico and therefore should they be forged works they would be forgeries of the highest quality and consequently deceptive". Such works could possibly be deceptive to unknowing buyers but not to *the greatest de Chirico expert in the world* who chose to commercialise "indisputable elements of de Chirico".

The Court of Milan's Judgement convincingly and logically details what actually happened. Written in a clear and comprehensive manner, it reads easily without need for further comment (published herein, pp. 346).

Baldacci went on to criticise the judges who, in his opinion, "know nothing of painting, art or painting technique" and who would have refused his specific request for a new assessment and, with it, a reopening of the debate. He blamed the technical consultants appointed by the Court who were

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<sup>2</sup> Minutes of hearing, criminal proceedings n. 650/07 R.G., hearing 5.5.2008, pp. 23-24.

supposedly biased against him and seemingly damaged him.<sup>3</sup> After declaring himself a victim of a judicial aggression by the Foundation (maybe because it did not remain silent and became a civil plaintiff), he is currently re-enacting the court case on his own (obviously in his own way), on the Archivio dell'arte metafisica website under the heading "My Lawsuits", whilst omitting the sections of the judgement that regard him even though he stated the contrary (in a letter of 13 September 2013). It is unknown if he will go on to demonstrate that the paintings, which he now calls "little pictures", are authentic or that he acted in good faith when he acquired them and later sold them. We wish him all the best in successfully and singlehandedly absolving himself. This is, however doubtful, considering the number of contradictory declarations made throughout of the legal proceedings.

The publication of *The Constants of History*, as well as an article by Paolo Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico – The Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Life Story over the Last Fifteen Years* (pp. 28-60) which deals with Baldacci's historiographic alteration of the artist's biography<sup>4</sup>, caused a somewhat uncontrolled and aggressive reaction on his part. This resulted in the publication of a lengthy 'open letter'<sup>5</sup> that, despite a number of questionable affirmations, further broadens the topic of the falsification of the artist's work with important clarifications. These, together with his written work and the evolution of previously and currently held stances, convince us that we stand before a very particular situation in the field of art history, which can quite simply be called: *Paolo Baldacci: A Case Study*. We will limit ourselves to presenting only a few essential elements, whilst postponing further analysis of other aspects that are of unquestionable interest for a later date such as the Italian Piazza formerly owned by Von Thyssen Bornemisza that Baldacci dates 1913 or early 1930s depending on who asks him, whilst encouraging the Foundation to take on a clear stance with regard to the date (which would he prefer?) as well as a number of issues regarding another painting.

<sup>3</sup> P. Baldacci, 13 September 2013, letter "to the associates and members of the Scientific Council". In the Act of Appeal on behalf of Baldacci, whose lawyer is one of the greatest experts in his field, Baldacci asked "for new technical consultants to be named". The fact that he did not renounce the application of the Statute of Limitations made such a request impossible. Even if the Court of Appeal had wanted to carry out any new technical analysis, this would have gone against the applicable code of criminal procedure. Baldacci is well aware of this and therefore can neither accuse the judges nor complain today that as a result of his own free and advantageous choice, he was not condemned, at least from a strictly juridical viewpoint, despite the ascertainment of his guilt.

<sup>4</sup> Through the erroneous interpretation of a few letters written by the artist, Baldacci, together with Gerd Roos, ideated, wrote and promoted a false historical reconstruction regarding the birth of Metaphysical Art (altering the historical date and physical place of this event). Their theory goes to the extent of questioning that the invention of Metaphysical Art was even ascribable to de Chirico. Indeed, they identify the theoretical basis of metaphysical painting to the artist's brother Andrea (aka Alberto Savinio), who was an 18 year old musician at the time, who, according to them, has never been fully acknowledged for his key contribution. The theory disqualifies de Chirico as an artist, author of this discovery, and as an honest man. It is interesting to note that the theory they put forth consists of two basic concepts, both of which are offensive to de Chirico's dignity and the quality of his art: 1) Giorgio de Chirico did not invent Metaphysical Art, but rather stole the idea from his brother Alberto Savinio; 2) Giorgio de Chirico is a liar who lied his entire life in order to hide this appropriation. As one can see, the prime material with which the two authors narrate their theory, consists in the basic ingredients that define all that is fake: stealing and lying. These qualifications, degrading as well as untrue, have effectively served to boost a valueless critical apparatus. See P. Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico: The Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Life Story over the last Fifteen Years*, in "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals", n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 28-60.

<sup>5</sup> P. Baldacci, 1 March 2012, open letter to Paolo Picozza, President of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico.



fig. 1 Non-authentic painting: *Die Melancholie der Abreise* (The Melancholy of Departure), 1913, oil on canvas, 81 x 60 cm, signed and dated at bottom right "g. de Chirico 1913" exhibited in *Die Andere Moderne - De Chirico-Savinio*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, 15 September-2 December 2001, reproduced in the exhibition catalogue n. 25, p. 214

## 2. The Melancholy of the Forger: *Die Melancholie der Abreise* "1913"

A fake painting attributed to Giorgio de Chirico entitled, *Die Melancholie der Abreise* (The Melancholy of Departure) and dated "1913" (fig. 1), was included in the exhibition *Die Andere moderne. De Chirico-Savinio*, curated by Paolo Baldacci, Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Wieland Schmied and Gerd Roos at Dusseldorf's Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in the autumn of 2001.

Following the publication of a colour reproduction of the non-authentic painting in the previous issue of "Metaphysical Art"<sup>6</sup>, Baldacci was compelled to acknowledge in his 'open letter' that the painting was a fake. This followed his strenuous defence in support of its authenticity during the lawsuit in Milan, even though the painting did not form part of the proceedings. Baldacci writes: "*The Melancholy of Departure* is a non-authentic painting which I assume full responsibility for having included it in the exhibition in Germany in 2001. I made a mistake, *I thought I had made a discovery* and that the stiffness on

the right hand side was caused by cleaning and restoration"<sup>7</sup> [italics, *ed.*].

The fake painting of recent execution – although painted on an old canvas – had certainly not undergone any restoration. The only thing to be "fixed-up" was its title, which was borrowed from an unidentified painting exhibited in the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1913. The work is marked "(n.i)" – *not identified* – in Baldacci's monograph published four years earlier (late 1997) (figs. 2-3).<sup>8</sup> Those who possess even the fairest sense of perception, despite not being thoroughly acquainted with de Chirico's work, could have no difficulty in noticing the visual jarring of the fake hung next to the artist's authentic work in one of Germany's most important museums, which, moreover, conserves as many as three early period works by de Chirico in its collection: *The Great Tower*, 1913, *The Silent Statue*, 1913 and *The Two Sisters*, 1915. Depicting a portico on the left and a train billowing smoke in the shape of the male sexual organ, the painting *Melancholy* is an unequivocal eyesore painted in a lurid chromatic combination of the complementary colours orange and blue<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals", n. 9/10, 2011, p. 408.

<sup>7</sup> P. Baldacci, open letter, *cit.*, p. 8. Baldacci's affirmation does not explain anything, whilst he remains silent with regard to a fact of prime importance, as we shall see.

<sup>8</sup> P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919*, Bulfinch, New York 1997, p. 430.

<sup>9</sup> In 1994, in describing fakes produced within the surrealist milieu, Baldacci specified: "Dominquez more cunningly gets closer to de Chirico's colors that Ernst does, but then he gives himself away, introducing violets or oranges that de Chirico never used". The use of colour orange in *Melancholie*

That is not all: the forger must have been a true connoisseur of the surrealist's interpretation of de Chirico's work as he made the painstaking effort to paint the smoke of the locomotive in phallic form with the obvious aim of confirming Breton's theory (inherited by his followers who delight in seeing phallic symbols everywhere, starting with smokestacks).

The sophisticated forger and his client (unknown at present) and Paolo Baldacci, who included the painting in the exhibition, have done nothing other than offer a true obscenity to the Dusseldorf public. On occasion of its debut appearance, the enthusiastic exhibition goers had a chance to admire a 'rediscovered masterpiece': although the painting was not described in these terms in the catalogue, as it not wise to overtly attract the public's or the academic community's attention. The only reference to the work can be seen in the caption accompanying the painting's reproduction in the catalogue, which is devoid of any study or critical/historiographic analysis. Indeed, it was a true case of 'no-comment' with no mention made of the provenance of this 'rediscovered' painting. In fact, during an initial phase such as this, it suffices to legitimise a fake by means of its publication in order to dupe the potential buyer. In this case, the painting did not even appear as a full-page reproduction, which a rediscovered metaphysical painting of 1913 would have certainly warranted. Instead, it appeared side by side with another metaphysical work of 1913, whose title ends with the same words: *The Melancholy of Departure*, 1913; *The Anxiety of Departure*, 1913.

We are witness to a fake discovery, a true historiographic and material crime against the artist's oeuvre and an unprecedented offence to the academic community. It is distressing to think that *no-one*, either during the exhibition or in viewing the catalogue, had the courage to raise any doubt about the painting. Even the museum director hosting the show, whom the Foundation notified – in vain – prior to the catalogue's publication, did not object to this violation of his exhibition space.<sup>10</sup>

The problem is one that de Chirico himself once raised: the "great expert" or self-appointed "great expert", is a figure who replaces the liberal judgement of the individual. The King is naked but everyone remains in pious silence.

1913 (1) Paris  
Société des Artistes Indépendants  
13 March–30 April  
Works exhibited:  
627. La mélancolie du départ (n. i.)  
628. L'énigme de l'heure (cat. no. 12)  
629. L'énigme de l'arrivée et de l'après-midi  
(cat. no. 17)

fig. 2 List of paintings exhibited at *Salon des Indépendants*, Paris, 1913, published in P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period, 1888-1919*, Bulfinch New York 1997, p. 430; *La mélancolie du départ* is indicated as "(n.i.)" – not identified

is a strong clue as to the painting's non-authenticity. Years earlier, in 1955, the "lurid purple" colour of a fake mannequin's bust once owned by Éluar caused alarm bells to ring for Thrall Soby when John de Menil sent him a photograph of the painting asking that it be published in a potential third edition of his monograph. Sidney Janis had bought the fake by Dominquez entitled "Mannequin métaphysique" one week after Éluar's death and later sold it to Menil (a photograph of Éluar with the painting hanging on the wall of his apartment exists). See James Thrall Soby Papers, Series VII Subseries II: Postpublication Material: Correspondence folder VII.II.6, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. For the quote from Baldacci, see *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists*, in *Giorgio de Chirico, Betraying the Muse - De Chirico and the Surrealists*, exhibition catalogue, Paolo Baldacci Gallery, New York, 21 April-28 May 1994, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Vastano, together with Jole de Sanna, were the first to point out the problem of the painting's non-authenticity based on a simple examination of a photograph sent to the Foundation for the authorisation of reproduction rights prior to the catalogue going to print.



### The Exhibitions of 1913 and the Critical Response

De Chirico exhibited his works three times in the course of 1913—twice in official Salons, and once in his own studio on Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs.

At the “Salon des Artistes Indépendants” (13 March), he showed three works: *L'énigme de l'heure*, the masterpiece of 1911; *L'énigme de l'arrivée et de l'après-midi* of early 1912, and a third work, now lost, entitled *La mélancolie du départ*.

Since the 1914 painting of the Gare Montparnasse is also known by this latter title, we might hypothesize that the lost work was an early version of the surviving one. It is impossible to know whether the painting was lost through unfortunate circumstance or if de Chirico was simply unsatisfied, perhaps even painting another composition on top of it, though it seems unlikely that he would have submitted to the Salon of painting of whose merit he was not convinced.

De Chirico recalls his second Parisian exhibition in his *Memorie* (De Chirico 1962, p. 73):

Guillaume Apollinaire advised me to participate in the “Salon des Indépendants,” and so the following spring I submitted four paintings [the official catalogue lists only three]. Two painters were responsible for the installation that year: Dunoyer de Segonzac and Luc Albert Moreau; contrary to that which invariably happened to me in Italy, my works were always presented very well in the group shows and official Salons in Paris. Before the opening of the “Indépendants,” I took a walk through the various rooms and de Segonzac and Moreau complimented me on my paintings, saying that they were very “decorative,” or rather scenographic, and that I would have been an excellent set designer; from which I deduced that they, whether they had intended to be a bit malicious or not, had not understood at all the extraordinary solitude and profound lyricism of those paintings.



Catalogue of the “Salon des Indépendants,” March 1913.

fig. 3 Reproduction of the page *The Exhibitions of 1913 and the Critical Response* with hypothesis regarding the unidentified painting *La mélancolie du départ*, in P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period, 1888-1919*, Bulfinch, New York 1997, p. 195 [highlighting, ed.]

Baldacci affirms: “I had my first doubts when I saw it beside other paintings of the same period” on the occasion of the exhibition (2001). One may ask if the doubts regarded the authenticity of the painting or how risky it was to include it in the show. The painting was not removed from the exhibition regardless of Baldacci’s concerns. Today, he speaks of the incident as a simple “oversight”.<sup>11</sup> In consideration of the incident’s gravity, this kind of justification is truly ridiculous and certainly does not relieve his moral and legal responsibility regarding the exhibition of such a fake as this. Further removing himself from any responsibility, Baldacci added a decidedly interesting piece of information: “*I have never had any economical interest in this painting, I never bought it or sold it*”.

<sup>11</sup> Baldacci continues: “It’s not the first time that errors have been made in important de Chirico exhibitions: at MoMA in 1982 there was a fake Dominguez, for example, without mentioning many other cases, almost always ignored or tolerated by you, which I have a hard time explaining to myself. I have no intention to free myself from blame more than is necessary. Indeed it was a serious error but I don’t know a single art historian who hasn’t made mistakes (if you know of one, tell me). James Thrall Soby himself considered a few fake de Chirico’s as authentic. Thanks to his certification, these made their way into important collections and museums” (see, open letter, *cit.*, p. 8). Baldacci refers to the exhibition *De Chirico* curated by William Rubin that was held at two other venues, Haus de Kunst, Munich and Centre Pompidou, Paris. As shown in the vast correspondence conserved in the MoMA archives, Soby turned to the surrealists, particularly Breton, Éluard, Paulhan and Mesens, for information, manuscripts and photographs of works by de Chirico for the second edition of his monograph, published in 1955. Although Soby was meticulous in his methodology and had a discerning eye, he depended on these sources and also embraced the surrealist’s prejudice and malicious gossip about the artist. One cannot exclude the possibility that he made some errors owing to the photographic reproduction of paintings or drawings sent to him by the surrealists. The same risk applies to art collectors when the provenance for artworks is unreliable or is driven by people with personal interests. See *J. T. Soby – Paul Eluard Correspondence*, in “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico”, n. 1/2, 2002, pp. 157-160.

In response to Baldacci, errors can certainly be made, however, the question is somewhat delicate in this case, as Baldacci had included the painting in the exhibition unbeknown to Wieland Schmied. It is also customary that once an evaluation error has occurred, the scholar who made it is the first to denounce it and set the record straight, in order to safeguard the truth and defend their credibility. The fact that Baldacci admitted the painting on show at Dusseldorf was fake 11 years after the exhibition and then only after a reproduction of the fake was published in the Foundation’s Journals, prompts one to question his actions. Two other fakes were included in the exhibition Baldacci mentions (Munich and Paris, 1982-1983), and were works that he co-owned, “Prometheus, 1925” and “Forest in a Room, 1926”. He discusses this in the open letter 30 years after the fact (following the seizure of the fake *Prometheus*), and only after the Foundation published the reproduction of the fake (see *The Constants of History*..., *cit.*, p. 414).

The fact that he refers to a forgery makes the statement somewhat extraordinary. However, he contradicted this same affirmation during an interrogation that took place on 5 May 2008 before the Criminal Court of Milan during a discussion centred on art market dynamics, regarding the fact that one of the fake paintings dealt with in the lawsuit had been bought by Baldacci for 40 million Lira and sold by him shortly afterwards for 105 million Lira. Baldacci answered the judge's question thus: "No, it was an absolutely normal price. Just imagine, I once advised someone to buy a painting by de Chirico that was coming up to auction in Paris, a **completely unknown metaphysical painting of 1913**. I didn't even see it. I only saw it in the catalogue. I sent this person to Paris and told them 'call me and tell me what is written on the back'. This person called me and I told them 'buy it'. They paid 250 million for it. A year later I sold it for a billion. It was a **painting exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1913**."<sup>12</sup>

It goes without saying that no auction in Paris took place that included an unknown painting dated and signed "g. de Chirico 1913"; a circumstance of this kind would have made headline news. Put simply, Baldacci – in 2008 – used the judge's question to proliferate inexistent elements in order to further strengthen the painting's authenticity... which he had doubted since 2001. He also extolled his own ability as an "expert" capable of identifying an important painting without even seeing it, relying on the description or verification of an element found on the painting's back, a fitting situation in this case, as we shall see further on. The indication of the sale price is also ridiculous. An authentic metaphysical painting of 1913 would be worth several million Euro today (billions in old Italian Lira); the sale of a fake for a billion Lira was undoubtedly a good deal for the seller.

Baldacci continued to defend the painting exhibited at Dusseldorf during the first instance trial (which concluded with the judgement of 9 March 2009). It is important to note, however, that it did not form part of the proceedings, but was subject to a confiscation order issued by the Public Prosecutor at the Court of Verona during the investigation. Baldacci specified that the painting "was chosen and approved for the exhibition"<sup>13</sup> by *at least six* people, including his fellow exhibition curators, Wieland Schmied, Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Gerd Roos and others.<sup>14</sup> Wieland Schmied recently confirmed that the painting **Die Melancholie der Abreise is a fake that was included in the exhibition without his knowledge**.

If Baldacci had doubts – as he claims today – about the painting's authenticity back in 2001, why would he still insist that the painting was authentic in 2009 (and in 2008), and involve these other people in support of his affirmations?

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of hearing, criminal proceeding n. 650/07 R.G., hearing 5 May 2008. In reference to the exhibition in Dusseldorf, Baldacci affirmed that the Foundation had raised doubts about ten paintings (the majority of which were works de Chirico had disputed, whilst the others remained very dubious in terms of authenticity) and that only one was removed from the exhibition "due to an photograph mishap" (this was a fake neometaphysical painting that Baldacci himself had declared fake), "but nine were good [including the painting in question, *ed.*] and we published them" (p. 29).

<sup>13</sup> In a memoir dated 2 March 2009 written in his defence, *The Melancholy of Departure* was described as: "a work belonging to a foreign collection and not to Baldacci and had never appeared on the market. The work was chosen and approved for the exhibition by a scientific committee comprising of, in addition to Baldacci, Wieland Schmied (curator together with Baldacci and the greatest German expert on de Chirico's work), Pia Vivarelli (previously a colleague of Baldacci in the committee of the Foundation), Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Armin Zweite (Director of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen), Hemut Friedel (Director of the museum in Munich), Gerd Roos and others."

<sup>14</sup> Both Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Pia Vivarelli have since passed away and are therefore unable to deny this. Armin Zweite and Helmut Friedel could still be called on to comment on this matter. It is not specified who "the others" were who chose and approved the painting.

Testimony given in 2003 by Gerd Roos, who was certainly aware of the situation, fully confirms the facts set out here. In response to the investigators' questioning, Roos answered in an incoherent and reticent way that: "Painting number 12 was exhibited in the exhibition on de Chirico-Savinio in Dusseldorf: *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*. 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".<sup>15</sup> [italics, *ed.*]

If, Gerd Roos still feels up to studying the painting, he might do so today from a perspective of it being a fake. A document regarding the painting, carefully prepared by Paolo Baldacci (fig. 4), could be an interesting element to begin with:

### ***Description of the material support and technical and stylistic analysis***

The painting is composed vertically on a 25 point French "landscape" canvas (a "25" stamp partially hidden by the protection paper appears on the upper bar). On the back of the canvas there is an oval-shaped manufacturer's stamp (fig. 1) perfectly conserved and legible: PAUL FOINET / (VAN EYCK) / 54 RUE N.D. DES CHAMPS PARIS / TOILES COULEURS FINES in an upper central position. The stretcher is of the fixed kind, nailed at the four sides with a central blockage bar. De Chirico used fixed stretchers fairly frequently, which were more economical than those with adjustable screws, during the Parisian period of 1911-1915. Even though many of the original stretchers have been destroyed and substituted, paintings executed on fixed stretchers still conserved today can be listed as such: B 26 (1913); B 35 (1913); B 40 (1913); B 41 (1913); B 64 (1914); B 70 (1914); B 79 (1914); B 80 (1914); B 86 (1915); B 87 (1915). The 25 "landscape" format, which does not appear to have been used for other paintings at the time, does however coincide with those habitually used during the same period. In fact, it just so happens that the first two vertical metaphysical compositions are painted on 25 point "portrait" canvases: B 20 (1912) e B 21 (1912), each measuring circa 81 x 65 cm (the slight measurement differences are due to relining and adaptation onto new stretchers). In actual fact, de Chirico mainly used non-standard sizes which were unavailable for sale and thus specifically ordered. The use of standard sizes, in addition to those indicated above, is quite rare: B 26 (1913), 30 point "portrait" canvas and B 37 (1913), 40 point "landscape". Therefore, including this one, a total of five cases exists. The canvas is in good condition, without breakage except for some very small abrasions found in the four corners, and is fixed to the stretcher with the original nails that don't seem to have ever been removed. Looking through the canvas from the back, one notices a certain degree of absorbed paint and varnish especially in areas where the layers of pigment are thinner allowing the composition to be seen be in a symmetrical image from its back. On the upper and lower parts, on the canvas area folded

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of preliminary testimonial information of 7 May 2003 (proc. 02/008864 rgng. Procura della Repubblica di Verona, pp. 595-596).



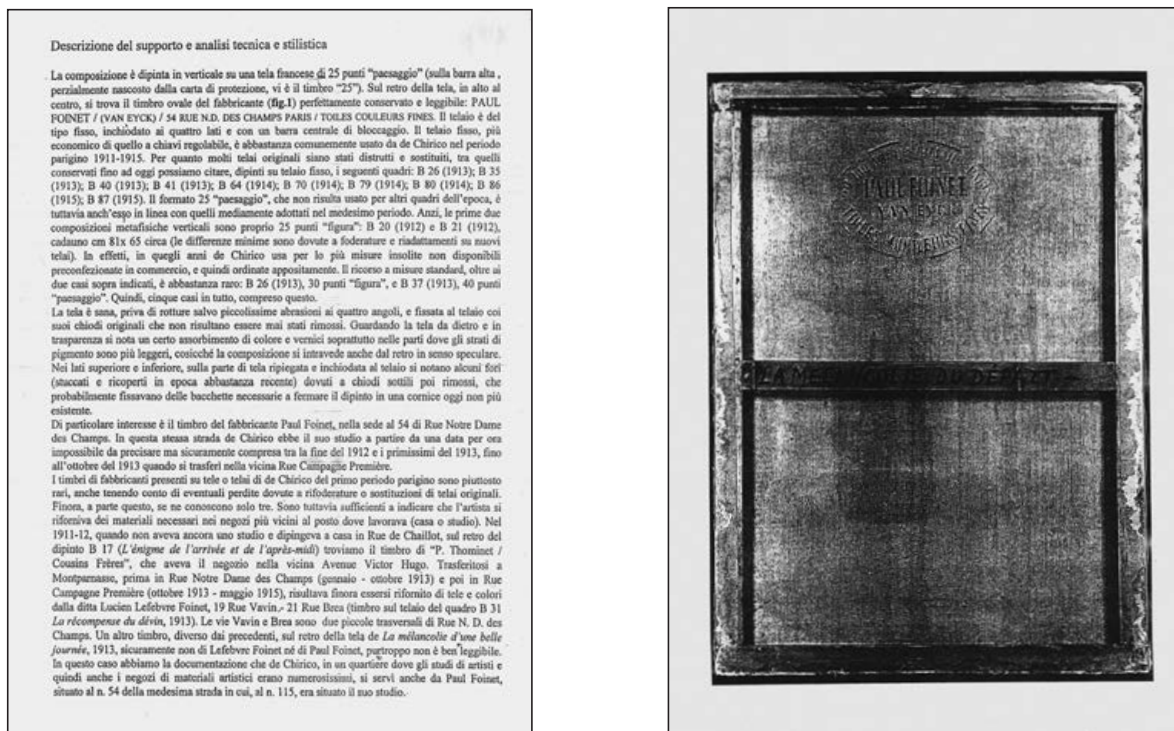


fig. 4 Two-page photocopy of the first part of the document "Description of the material support and technical and stylistic analysis" of the non-authentic work "Die Melancholie der Abreise, 1913" including an image of the back of the painting indicated as "fig. 1" in the document. The manufacturer stamp "Paul Foinet" on the canvas and the title "La mélancholie du départ" written in block letters on the central support bar, are visible on the back

and nailed to the stretcher, one notices a number of holes (fairly recently plastered and covered over) caused by thin nails that were later removed, which probably once held support strips needed to fix the painting into a frame that no longer exists.

The manufacturer's stamp, Paul Foinet, of the 54 Rue Notre Dame des Champs branch, is of particular interest. De Chirico's studio was located in this same street from a specific date that is impossible to specify but certainly between late 1912 and early 1913, up until October 1913 when he moved to Rue Campagne Première close by.

Manufacturer stamps on canvases or stretchers of de Chirico's first Parisian period are quite rare, taking into account eventual losses owed to relining and original stretchers being substituted. So far, beside this one, only three are known. These, however, amply prove that the artist acquired his supplies from stores close to where he worked (home or studio). In 1911-12, when he did not yet have a studio and worked from home in Rue de Chaillot, on the back of the painting B 17 (*The Enigma of Arrival and of the Afternoon*) one finds the stamp "P. Thominet / Cousins Frères", whose shop was once located in nearby Avenue Victor Hugo. Having moved to Montparnasse, first to Rue Notre Dame des Champs (January-October 1913) and then Rue Champagne Première (October 1913-May 1915), until now it had appeared that he supplied himself with canvases and paints from the Lucien Lefebvre Foinet company, 19 Rue Vavin - 21 Rue Brea (stamp found on the stretcher of painting B 31 *The Soothsayer's Recompense*, 1913). Vavin and Brea streets constitute two small crossroads of Rue N. D. des Champs. Another stamp, different from the previous ones, on the back of the canvas of *The Melancholy of a Beautiful Day*, 1913, is unfortunately not very legible but surely does not belong to Lefebvre Foinet or Paul Foinet. In this case this proves that de Chirico, also shopped at Paul Foinet, situated at n. 54 of



fig. 5 Fake drawing executed on the back of “Valori Plastici” letterhead paper, “Sketch from *Il condottiero* (The Condottiere), 1918-1919”, published in P. Baldacci, 1997, p. 401

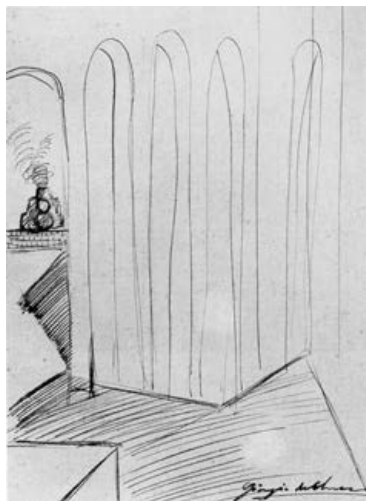


fig. 6 Fake drawing with apocryphal signature “Study related to *Le voyage émouvant* (The Anxious Journey), spring-summer 1913”, published in P. Baldacci, 1997, p. 179



fig. 7 Fake drawing with apocryphal signature “Manichino femminile (Female Mannequin), winter 1918-1919”, published in P. Baldacci, 1997, p. 393

the same street where his studio was located at n. 115 in a quarter where there were numerous artists' studios and therefore also art supply shops.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Paolo Baldacci's Research Methodology: the Drawings said to be from “Valori Plastici”

Correlation between information provided in Baldacci's aforementioned ‘open letter’ (1 March 2012) and material published in his earlier written contributions is revealing. It is of interest to mention the case of 21 fake drawings published in his 1997 monograph that originated from the Broglio Archive or, more specifically, were drawn on “Valori Plastici” letterhead paper. Even in this case, Baldacci chose only to refer to the problem in 2012 after the group of drawings had been described as fake in the last issue of the Journals.<sup>17</sup>

Baldacci confirmed the drawings as fake, adding that “over 40” of them actually exist. He went on to specify that “in 1999 a second wave of these drawings – much uglier –, including some Morandi and Carrà”, came up for auction and how this event “completely clarified the doubts I already harboured about the first batch or at least the greater part of them”. Even though he had doubts about

<sup>16</sup> First part of a document comprising of the “Description of the material support” and the image of the canvas' back (both reproduced here) delivered in the form of a photocopy by a co-defendant in the same lawsuit, possibly in an attempt to convince the Foundation of the painting's authenticity. One can see the title of the painting written in block letters on the central support bar: “La mélancolie du départ”. The second part of the document regarding the “technical and stylistic analysis” (as seen in the title) was not consigned. The indications “B 26 (1913)” etc., refer to works published in P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period...*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> See P. Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico...*, cit. p. 49 footnote 71: “[...] In addition to the erroneous dating of the early metaphysical paintings and the reworking of de Chirico's biography, the volume contains a number of fakes, as Calvesi immediately pointed out, and according to Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, a series of forged metaphysical drawings, executed on the letterhead paper of the periodical ‘Valori Plastici’”. It should be specified that said monograph includes other drawings, in addition to those mentioned, that are considered non-authentic.



figg. 8-9 Apocryphal signatures on the fake drawings “Manichino femminile, 1918-1919” e “Studio in relation to *Le voyage émouvant*, 1913”

their authenticity – doubts that were later confirmed – he included them in his monograph with the following note at the back of the volume:

Note: A group of 21 sketches on paper (cat. nos. D 4, D 23, D 32, D 54, D 60, D 66, D 67, D 68, D 86, D 98, D 105, D 112, D 113, D 114, D 115, D 116, D 117, D 118, D 119, D 120, D 121), not all signed, were discovered 1976 (sic!) following the indications in the will of Edita Broglio, widow of Mario Broglio, editor of the magazine *Valori Plastici*. The provenance, and the fact that some of these sketches are drawn directly on *Valori Plastici* letterhead stationery, has led all who have published them to date them to a period corresponding or following the winter of 1918-19, and to treat them as works done after paintings of the same subjects (sketches used as notes or used in the design of a monograph on de Chirico which *Valori Plastici* published in 1919). If this is true for the drawings on letterhead paper, it is improbable for others. The fact that among them there is a sketch (cat. no. D 60) for an unfinished painting of 1915 demonstrates that many are studies for paintings that were to follow. It is not possible in fact that sketches *d'après* were made of paintings that had just been started.<sup>18</sup>

Uncertainty regarding the authenticity of this group of drawings is implicit in the very fact that a specific note was added. The illogical nature of seemingly preparatory sketches to be dated after the execution of paintings of the same subject, immediately gives rise to doubts about their authenticity (this would have been an unusual method of artistic production, at least for Giorgio de Chirico). Baldacci noticed such an incongruence but chose to dedicate attention to something else, more specifically, to the possibility that the dating “1918-1919” might be interpreted in a different way. As such, the problem of the potential non-authenticity of the group of drawings took a backseat in favour of clarifying their date of execution.

The dates that Baldacci was so concerned about were indeed established by the forger through his implementation of letterhead paper that dated to 1918 on which he aped a few metaphysical figures in pencil and pen. What better material/historical support than a block of sheets of “Valori Plastici” letterhead paper left in an archive, comparable to a book of blank checks in the eye of the forger? What could be easier to execute and to situate historically?

In his monograph, Baldacci placed ten of these drawings next to the paintings from which they derive their subject matter and dated them between 1909 and 1917, with information captions such as “study in related to” and “study for” (figs. 5-7). As a result, the drawings – never seen before or

<sup>18</sup> P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period...* cit., p. 426.

documented prior to 1976 – became tokens of the ideation of some of the great masterpieces of de Chirico's youth, thus substantially improving the forger's original idea. The note concludes:

The group of Broglio sketches, furthermore, included works from the 1909-11 through the 1918-19 period. Studying them individually and comparing them with the sketches from the Eluard-Picasso notebook, I have attributed them with the dates that seem more probable and correct.

The iconography of archways, piazzas and chimneys found in the Éluard-Picasso drawings are typical of the artist's early period in Paris and use subject matter that was not used again post-spring 1914. As the majority of the so-called "Valori Plastici" drawings bear different subject matter, (mainly mannequins and troubadours), the exercise of comparison Baldacci describes can only refer to 4 of the 21 drawings. The reference to the Éluard-Picasso manuscripts serves to enhance his discourse but nothing more. At this point, doubt arises as to whether any background research on the works was ever carried out. The process, in fact, consists simply in attributing to each drawing the same date of the de Chirico painting it takes its subject matter from. In addition, no consideration or analysis seems to have been made regarding the absolutely apocryphal signatures found on 8 of the drawings (the others are unsigned) (figs. 8-9).

The drawings are *evidently* fake, a fact that no historiographical reconstruction, document or careful weaving of words can rectify. A number of these were sold to unknowing collectors by the gallery that Baldacci was partner to, a situation that places him in a somewhat delicate position. In his 'open letter' he says that he was convinced that the drawings were fake in 1999. Why then, after all these years has no statement be made regarding their non-authenticity? To date no official communication that would benefit the academic world and collectors has been made. Similarly to the Italian Piazza "Melancholy" exhibited at Dusseldorf, which was simply excluded from the second venue of the exhibition *Die Andere moderne* (after which it disappeared into the hands of an unaware collector whose nationality remains unknown and the confiscation order issued by the magistrate was not carried out), Baldacci has shrugged the problem of the drawings off with similar ease. He states: "sure enough, they won't be published in the second edition of my monograph (which is almost ready)."<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Physical Material on which Artwork is made as its sole Criteria of Authenticity

In both cases described above, the endorsement of the artworks' authenticity was based solely on the age of their material support – "Valori Plastici" letterhead paper and French canvas bearing an oval-shaped stamp 'PAUL FOINET' –, at the expense of various elements that contribute to the acknowledgement of truth. No analysis was carried out on the artistic quality of the work: composition, the interpretation of the subject, quality, volume, form, line, brushstroke... No documentation

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<sup>19</sup> Open letter, *cit.*, p. 11.



regarding previous ownership of *Die Melancholie der Abreise* since it came into existence over 80 years ago was given to back-up its legitimate provenance. And it could not be otherwise, considering the painting's recent execution. It is very hard to imagine that an artwork of such historical importance, as well as monetary value, could remain forgotten about for almost a century in a private collection by the heirs, never exhibited, never spoken of. The 'works' in question were obviously fabricated over three-quarters of a century after their material support, be it canvas or letterhead paper.

If the painting *Melacholie* had been confiscated, a chemical analysis of the paint could have provided interesting results about the year of its fabrication.<sup>20</sup> However, this would only provide supplementary proof to an unquestionably fake painting that screams fraud. The *tour guidé* around the Montparnasse quarter where de Chirico lived in 1913, dictated step by step by in Baldacci's manic reconstruction of the artist's habits in supplying himself with the "necessary materials", is nothing less than exhilarating.

Compelled to acknowledge the non-authenticity of the "1913" metaphysical painting and the drawings in his 'open letter', Baldacci continues to defend another two markedly fake works, *Still life with pineapple*, c. 1933, and *Poires et oranges [et clémentines] sur un fond de draperie*, c. 1933, the latter of which has had a confiscation order issued for it that has not been carried out.<sup>21</sup> We will wait patiently for him to change his point of view.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth reading Jole de Sanna and Paolo Picozza's report on the painting: "Piazza d'Italia *Mélancolie du départ* (Die Melancholie der Abreise) oil on canvas, 81x60 cm, signed lower right g. de Chirico 1913.

Bibliography: cat. *Die andere moderne. De Chirico-Savinio*, Museum Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2001, p. 214 reproduced n. 25. Seen on wall 2001.

It is assumed that this work is non-authentic due to the following technical and iconographic reasons:

Technical: the painting is thought to have been executed during a period of time forthcoming to the hanging of the exhibition at Düsseldorf and, in any case, very recently owing to the similar painting technique compared to other non-authentic paintings that Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico has recently conducted technical analysis on. It is similar to such non-authentic paintings due to the paint layer's plaster-like surface, which is lacquered and smooth, as if subjected the encaustic painting method. It is probable (as can be observed by looking straight at it) that it was artificially aged through heating. From a technical point of view, a gradual layering of preparation was involved in its execution, followed by a sizeable deposit of plaster and then the actual paint. De Chirico did not employ this type of preparation nor laying down of the paint during the supposed execution period. In fact, during the early metaphysical period, he always applied a rather thin preparation, resulting in the canvas's weave being seen. Additionally, the passages and movement are not like those of his early period. This particular orange, ochre and brown were not used by de Chirico (a sample of the paint would confirm this) for a simple reason: during the early metaphysical period, mineral and earth pigments were used, whilst these were commercially produced.

Design: evident compositional errors in the drawing show that the painting's author possessed scarce training in drawing and a total ignorance as to the quality of de Chirico's structural system.

To show how the composition lacks all analytical aspects common to de Chirico's use of shadow, one observes how the shadow's contours are placed in a way that conveys literal meaning rather than structural meaning: a high white rectangle in the foreground; on the side, a triangle or pentagon representing the house's façade and roof, coloured brown to represent shadow; what appears to be a shadow projected by the building, painted brown colour, extends over the ground and low wall; a shadow seemingly projected from the back of the house extends behind the corner of the shaded side of the building. Light strikes the front white wall and statue of the politician. As such, if both the shade and light coincide where is the source of light? The scissor-shaped shadow at the base of the statue is awful.

A complete ignorance of the laws of perspective is evident, as seen in the green window under the frontal archway. This green corresponds to a level of brightness seen lower down on the horizon.

The forger's inability to describe the figure is evident in the outlines of the figure and the stone base: the shoulders present a bidimensional cut-out form, the legs are depicted as two cylinders and the head is stuck onto the shoulders. The cracks found on the base are drawn as mechanically-crossed markings. One cannot tell if the openings in the archways are shadows or black holes.

The most serious perspective error is seen in the superimposition of the statue and train, lacking in an evocation of a temporal relation between the two that represents an indispensable aspect of metaphysical art.

Iconography: the painting is quite obviously copied from *L'arrivée*, 1912 (see photocopy attached), a painting that is part of the Barnes Foundation, Merion, U.S.A. The treatment of the lower area of the horizon with yellow spotting on a veiled paler area presents these as two separate things instead of working together. The train is practically inexistent, whilst de Chirico's trains are always portrayed clearly outlining their constituting elements (locomotive-wagon rapport).

The real signature of this fake is actually seen in the train's smoke, which, if it had been by de Chirico, would correspond to the locomotive. Here, however, it assumes the form of a phallic symbol. This in itself reveals that the forger was convinced of Freudian content and erotic symbols as an underlying aspect of metaphysical art (see P. Baldacci, *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919*, New York, 1997, p. 143). Symbolism such as this is inexistent in de Chirico's work and no such fall from grace occurs either. Professor Jole de Sanna – Professor Paolo Picozza.

<sup>21</sup> Non-authentic paintings published in *The Constants of History*, 2011, cit., pp. 411-413 and 409. In reference to the latter, one must note that clemen-

## 5. The Foundation's Commitment in Defence of Giorgio de Chirico's Work and Name

His inability to carry out a logical critical/historical analysis on the works and a total lack of professionalism in carrying out the role of expert (as highlighted in the two cases illustrated which are not isolated cases), deprive Baldacci of credibility and authority in the field of historiography relating to de Chirico's oeuvre. As an art dealer, it suffices to read the Court of Milan's judgement.

Thanks to its assistance to the magistrate during their investigation, the Foundation contributed substantially to stemming a 'colossal scam'. It is rumoured that about 30 fake de Chirico works dated to the 1920s and 1930s were about to be introduced to the art market, in addition to those already in commercial circulation. The fact that the paintings dealt with in the judgement have been confiscated and cannot be reintroduced on the market, is an additional and very positive result for the Foundation. These fakes will be used as a base of comparison with regard to other fakes dating to the same period, should someone attempt to introduce such works onto the market in the guise of newly discovered masterpieces.

As de Chirico's early metaphysical period is the best known (and consequentially the most studied and documented), it is almost impossible to introduce an unknown painting from the 1910s onto the art market today, that is, if it does not first pass through a 'route of least resistance' such as an exhibition appearance. The episode reported here regarding the Italian piazza included in the exhibition at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen of Dusseldorf (2001), is a good example. The 1920s and 1930s are also a well considered period and therefore of high enough economic value to attract forgers' ambition for easy gain. The attempt for 'big gain' is replaced by an endeavour for a series of smaller ones that are, however, significant if multiplied. The possibility that these attempts will succeed is also greater. As seen in the judgement cited, falsification has recently focused on these very periods that are the most in demand in terms of the art market.

With regard to the new fakes introduced to the market at the beginning of the century, the most serious risk for de Chirico's art consists in the iconographic and stylistic contamination his oeuvre suffers. It suffices to look at the delicate still lifes or 'silent lifes' as de Chirico poetically renamed them, painted in tempera in the early 1920s, an extraordinary thematic group undercut by two crude still-lifes dated "1922", described in the judicial expertise as appearing "like the table of a morgue" for the harsh coldness of their execution. Other subjects that formed part of the scam exposed by the Criminal Court of Milan include *Archaeologists at the Seashore* and *Horses at the Seashore*, the latter of which (not referable to Baldacci), was a print painted over with a thin layer of tempera!<sup>22</sup>

The non-authentic work *Archaeologists at the Seashore* is an example of the complete corruption of a certain subject. The Court's evaluation provides an in-depth critique regarding the poor quality of the painting's technical execution. Furthermore it attacks the anatomic abnormality of the two figures

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tines were only produced in agriculture from the mid-1960s onwards, whilst they appear in a painting dated 1930s. This is a typical chronological-historiographic error that forgers are prone to make.

<sup>22</sup> The seven indicted paintings and a number of other works considered non-authentic are reproduced in colour in "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals" n. 9/10, 2011, pp. 401-416.

bent over incongruent cubic-shaped objects inserted in their bust creating an effect that has nothing to do with this solemnly graceful Dechirican theme. Pulled by their neck, the heads are shaped in the form of an inverted raindrop or certain cheeses such as scamorza. Following the negative evaluation of both the Court and the Defence, and further to the Court of Appeal's confirmation of the painting's non-authenticity in July, Baldacci still insists that it is authentic. He has expressed this opinion in rather strange terms: "My line of defence was very simple and I still stand by it now. Two paintings, 'Horses, Horseman and Temple' and 'Archaeologists at the Seashore', *were* authentic paintings"<sup>23</sup> [*italics ed.*].

## 6. Paolo Baldacci: A Case Study – Origins and Background

Baldacci's involvement with the Foundation dates back a long time, starting with the constitution of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico in 1986, at which time he was asked to take part. He resigned two or so years later due to differences of opinion with Claudio Bruni Sakraischik.

The Foundation's authentication commission ceased to operate after Claudio Bruni's death in 1991 at which point both Maurizio Calvesi and Giovanna della Chiesa expressed their decision to no longer participate. The committee was newly established on 17 May 1993.

Those asked to be a part of the new commission included: Antonio Vastano (considered the most reliable and authoritative expert of Giorgio de Chirico's oeuvre and member of the Section for the artist's *Catalogue of Works* from the Foundation's start), Pia Vivarelli (former director of Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, as well as curator of an important exhibition on de Chirico held at the Galleria in 1981), Mario Ursino (an official from Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, who had been present during the drawing up of inventory and economic estimation of the artist's works after de Chirico's widow passed away in 1990) and Paolo Baldacci (although at that time did not yet enjoy the recognition that his involvement in the Foundation would later provide him, he seemed a promising addition for furthering study of de Chirico's art).

Despite the fact Baldacci operated in the art market and therefore could find himself faced with a potential conflict of interests, he publically guaranteed that he would keep his commercial activity absolutely separate from his position at the Foundation. Unfortunately, he went on to do the exact opposite.<sup>24</sup>

The new committee was structured into two sections: the first comprised of Baldacci, Vastano and Pia Vivarelli (for works executed prior to 1940), whilst the second comprising of Baldacci, Vastano and Mario Ursino (for post-1940 works).

<sup>23</sup> P. Baldacci, letter 13 September 2013, cit. In the letter dated 1 March 2012, in reference to *Archaeologists on the Seashore* Baldacci stated: "even this work was authenticated by Maurizio Fagiolo". He must have still have had some doubts, as he wrote: "I am inclined to think it is authentic, although not with absolute certainty".

<sup>24</sup> Baldacci answered Judd Tully's questions regarding "his dual roles as a dealer and a member of the Foundation" in the interview, *Real and Unreal: The Strange Life of Chirico's Art*, in "Art News", summer 1994, pp. 154-159: "I keep my commercial activity absolutely separate from my position in the foundation, which means that I do not buy or make any kind of business transactions with the paintings submitted to the authentication committees." The journalist's question on how it was possible for Baldacci to make his mercantile activity compatible with his presence in the authentication committee, deals with the conflict of interest, an issue that is taken particularly seriously in the United States.

The commission's guidelines specified that it would express an opinion regarding the authenticity of a work only having examined the original. The end opinion was to be unanimous. Although Baldacci has claimed the contrary, he had no right to anticipate judgements on behalf of the Foundation outside of his role in the commission and prior to the examination of the artwork in question. It is obvious that if Baldacci had been authorised, as he maintains today, to provide an opinion regarding the authenticity of a work (that auction houses would then reproduce in the catalogue), a later, contradictory judgement given by the committee following the examination of the artwork in question would have proved extremely embarrassing for the Foundation.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that Baldacci purchased works by the artist lacking certification and then authenticated them in his capacity as a committee member, thus substantially increasing their commercial value, confirms that he certainly did not keep "his dual roles as a dealer and a member of the Foundation"<sup>26</sup> separate and how he, in fact, operated in a complete conflict of interests. As if completely normal, Baldacci would go on to illustrate his *modus operandi* during questioning at the Court of Milan on 5 May 2008.<sup>27</sup>

It must also be noted that it was Antonio Vastano who, basing his judgement on a simple photographic examination, immediately pointed out the non-authenticity of the works that appeared at the beginning of the century, only to find out later that they had been introduced onto the art market by Baldacci.

Despite this and Baldacci's practice of dictating his personal cultural choices over others, to the extent of criticising the important Neometaphysical Art exhibition curated by Professor Maurizio Calvesi in 1995, his presence in the Foundation was carried out in a positive manner. In particular, this is true with regard to his activity with the authentication committee, even though he took great advantage of "his dual roles as a dealer and a member of the Foundation" in terms of fame and fortune.

<sup>25</sup> Baldacci attempted to justify himself with the false affirmation that he was authorised to provide verbal judgements of authenticity on behalf of the Foundation and that certification was issued only after the original artwork had been examined because, "in the meantime they could have made a copy of anything" (minutes, 5 May 2008, p. 50). It is impossible to think that the two major auction houses in the world could do such at thing. In the 1994 interview, he declared: "I can say unequivocally that I am not able to pass judgment on a de Chirico painting without the support of my foundation committee members and would not act alone – but only as part of the committee. Obviously, if you reject a painting, people are not going to be happy."

<sup>26</sup> J. Tully, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> In response to the judge's questioning about the painting *Horses, Horsemen and Temple* (the subject of the investigation), Baldacci stated: "So, I took the photograph of this painting to the Foundation. I can't prove it, because a long time has since passed and I don't remember, but I'm sure, as this is what I always did. I took the stuff I bought, I put it there, showed it, this stuff was then included in the archive" (minutes, 5 May 2008, p. 21). During the same hearing, he handed in a file containing "a selection of de Chirico works I bought and sold while I was a member of the Foundation's committee", adding that these were authenticated by the Foundation's committee of which he was a member, in the self-proclaimed capacity of "having the greatest responsibility and authority with regard to the pre-war period" (*ibid.*, p. 19).

And to think that in the aforementioned open letter he wrote that his behaviour "has always been crystal clear and disinterested." [underlining, *ed.*]

In a recent interview with Cristina Ruiz for "The Art Newspaper" (*Challenge to the De Chirico Authentication Board*, September 2013, n. 249, Art Market, p. 3), Baldacci completely overturned his earlier declaration to Judd Tully, saying that he: "never sold any work that he had authenticated himself", thus shifting the question as if it was a matter of competition between his issuing of certification and the activity of the Foundation's authentication committee. One would be tempted to ask just who was he trying to fool? Since it was he himself who bought and sold works that he proceeded to authenticate as the self-proclaimed most important member of the authentication committee, he certainly had *no need* to issued his own certification. Although, except for the case of *Horses, Horsemen and Temple*, which, contradictorily to the aforementioned affirmations, he did not bring to the Foundation as it would not have passed the committee's examination, especially Vastano's. As one reads in the judgment: "save for the last contested painting 'horses, horsemen and small temple' which carries the authentication of Baldacci notwithstanding that in those years (1995) the defendant was part of the Foundation and therefore he should have requested the authentication of the paintings to the Foundation" (judgment of the Court of Appeal of Milan, 2013, cit., p. 14). Ironically, the first painting, *The Disquieting Muses*, which he bought with a partner *after* having authenticated it in this case, turned out to be a recently-made fake. Rather than assuming responsibility Baldacci instead placed the blame on the Foundation during the ensuing lawsuit. Due to constraints of space here, we shall return to this disturbing episode that includes rather amusing elements, in the Journals' next issue.



The Italian and international art markets mainly wanted certification, whilst Baldacci aspired to take over Claudio Bruni's role, both as expert and as a key art dealer for de Chirico's work.

With regard to the historiographical study of the artist's oeuvre, Baldacci seemed earnest in this interest in re-evaluation of Giorgio de Chirico and his art. In 1994, on the occasion of the opening of his gallery's new location in New York, he curated an exhibition dedicated to de Chirico<sup>28</sup>, with the declared intention of shedding light on what he called: "the hypnosis exercised by the surrealists on the entire international intelligentsia" with regard to de Chirico's oeuvre.<sup>29</sup> The surrealists' influence had proven particularly effective in America. The contact between the surrealists and James Thrall Soby was a determining factor in this. The title of the exhibition, *Betraying the Muse*, the introductory essay, *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists*, and specifically chapter VIII, *Art and artifice; conflict and misappropriation*, set an appropriate tone. The exhibition, which was well received, included a number of splendid neometaphysical works executed by the artist between 1969 to 1975 on loan from the Foundation.

To date, Baldacci's essay in the catalogue is without doubt the best thing he has ever written on de Chirico and still merits being read for its accuracy, documentation and well-contemplated analysis. One would have expected a continuation of the discourse, as a couple of brief references the author made seemed to imply that he possessed further information regarding the falsification of de Chirico's artwork from the mid-1920s onward. Such clarification did not follow through; on the contrary, Baldacci later overturned what he had written, as shall be shown.

Regrettably, Baldacci made a grave mistake, possibly owing to his quest for a scoop. Wieland Schmied informed him (presumably on confidential terms)<sup>30</sup>, that a letter had been found in which the artist mentioned having painted his first two metaphysical works "last summer"<sup>31</sup>, thus announcing the discovery of Metaphysical Art. With the exhibition catalogue going to press<sup>32</sup>, Baldacci backdated the birth of Metaphysical Art from 1910 to 1909 without verifying the date of this letter.<sup>33</sup> The first two metaphysical works, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle*, both of which were painted in Florence in 1910 and signed by the artist "Giorgio de Chirico 1910" were indicated by Baldacci as being painted in Florence, but in the summer-autumn of 1909.<sup>34</sup> Without taking into

<sup>28</sup> *Giorgio de Chirico, Betraying the Muse*, cit.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Wieland Schmied, who had contributed to the catalogue by writing the introduction, was about to publish a book on the Giorgio de Chirico-Fritz Gartz correspondence (including the letter), together with Gerd Roos who had discovered it.

<sup>31</sup> The date "26 January 1910" that appears on the letter was written by mistake. The real date of the letter is 26 December 1910. Even Baldacci agrees with this today.

<sup>32</sup> Baldacci *had not read the letter* when he published the catalogue. The decision to announce the news must have been too tempting as it represented a true scoop in the United States. It was made not having read the correspondence, the existence of which he had merely been informed of. This was the real reason behind his mistake. Unlike Baldacci, Wieland Schmied and Gerd Roos were cautious in their interpretation of the letter (although they did not address the issue of its date) and the temporal order of the artist's initial activity, in their publication, *Giorgio de Chirico München 1906-1909*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122, Baldacci actually announced: "The new date relocates the painting, although signed and dated 1910, to late October or November, 1909, a radical change recently acknowledged and accepted as the artist's beginning. [erroneous translation from the original Italian; the sentence should read: 'a radical change in what has been acknowledged and accepted until now regarding the artist's origins', ed.] The evidence confirming this fact can be found in a letter, dated January 1910 and sent from Florence to his friend Fritz Gartz, a schoolmate from the Munich Academy. The letter, written by de Chirico after he had been in Florence for several months describes the paintings completed during the previous autumn. It will be published by W. Schmied and G. Roos, along with other very recently discovered documents which modify the chronology of de Chirico's activities when moving between Munich and Florence (I have been advised of this letter by Professor Wieland Schmied and am indebted to him for its inclusion here)."

<sup>34</sup> When he later gained access to another letter de Chirico had written to Fritz Gartz on 27 December 1909 in Milan – proving the artist's presence in

consideration the repercussion that such a change would have on the artist's biography and the historiography of his work, the 'discovery' was published as pure fact with a brief comment.<sup>35</sup>

Without verifying the actual date of the letter, Baldacci's deduction was too simplistic: if de Chirico discussed paintings executed "last summer" in a letter dated "26 January 1910" it is clear they must have been painted during the summer of 1909. Such deduction, indeed, proved all too simple, and unfortunately, this inattentiveness persisted thereafter for many years.<sup>36</sup>

The following 27 May 1994, Baldacci came to Rome in order to attend an authentication committee meeting. It was on this occasion that he first met Gerd Roos, who had discovered the de Chirico-Gartz correspondence. Roos, who had previously collaborated with Professor Schmied, had been introduced to the Foundation as a young researcher interested in de Chirico, had been introduced to the Foundation by Carmine Siniscalco and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco. He arrived with a voluminous typescript draft in German regarding de Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio's time in Munich and later in Milan and Florence. His study of the early period contained the de Chirico-Gartz correspondence, including the letter in question. Having deemed the young researcher trustworthy, the Foundation acquired the rights to the manuscript. Baldacci, who is very proficient in German, took the manuscript away with him, promising to translate it into Italian, something that he did not do, as shall be made clear below.

Parallel to the authentication committee's biannual meetings, Baldacci hurriedly set to work on his sizeable monograph (1997, published in three languages), thus outdoing Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco who had expressed his desire to write a book on de Chirico's early metaphysical period.<sup>37</sup> At the time, the Foundation had awarded a scholarship to a young researcher, Ilaria Uzielli, whom Baldacci had indicated. The researcher was allowed full access to the Foundation's archive. The documentary research, including written requests for colour photographs sent to various museums (at the Foundation's expense) and individual catalogue entries prepared by the young scholar, was completed in a relatively short amount of time.<sup>38</sup> In parallel to the archival research undertaken on his behalf, Baldacci endeavoured to completely rewrite the history of the birth of Metaphysical Art, distorting historic and biographical facts, as well as the artistic concept behind his invention. He based his work on Roos' manuscript, which he had borrowed. In the resulting monograph, he extraordinarily referred to Roos' work as already published (Roos' book would only go to press in 1999 at the expense of the Foundation, who commissioned its translation into Italian<sup>39</sup>). Upon its publication in November 1997, Maurizio Calvesi (an academic voice of great authority), heavily criticised Baldacci's monograph.<sup>40</sup>

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Milan at the time –, Baldacci solved the incongruence in an ingenious way, by simply "moving" the place of execution of the paintings from Florence to Milan.

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>36</sup> In order to maintain "26 January 1910" as the date of the letter de Chirico wrote in Florence, Baldacci resorted to a series of historiographic acrobatics, including the lightning speed move of the whole family from Milan, where they lived at the time, to Florence in the space of 48 hours between 24–26 January 1910. See *La nostra poesia metafisica. Genesi, cronologia e fonti di un'estetica globale*, in *Origine e sviluppi dell'arte metafisica*, Scalpendi Editore, Milan 2011, p. 31, footnote 15.

<sup>37</sup> P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, the original Italian, *De Chirico 1888-1919. La metafisica*, Electa, Milan 1997; French translation, *De Chirico – La Métaphysique 1888-1919*, Flammarion, Paris 1997 and the English translation, *cit.*

<sup>38</sup> After seeing Baldacci's publication, Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco renounced his plans, stating that a monograph of this size could not be written in six months.

<sup>39</sup> G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti, Monaco, Milano, Firenze 1906-1911*, Edizioni Bora, Bologna 1999.

<sup>40</sup> At the time, the Foundation did not take a stand. Such a choice is the only reproach that could be directed at Jole de Sanna, who observed the fol-

One can safely assume that the correct chronological sequence of the letters did not escape escaped Baldacci (who had previously taught Ancient History) as he had access to the entire de Chirico-Gartz correspondence for three whole years prior to publishing his monograph. Consequentially, he must have realised that his pre-dating of Metaphysical Art (and the first two metaphysical paintings) from 1910 to 1909 was incorrect. The error could have easily been put right with the simple explanation that not all of the correspondence had been consulted at the time. Instead, Baldacci preferred to blame de Chirico for the incongruence between the new date and the artist's own indication that he had discovered Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910. He insisted that that de Chirico had lied *in all* of his autobiographical writings. One presumes that this constitutes the sole case in all of art history whereby an artist's biography has been rewritten in order to substantiate a single date.

Whatever his reasoning might have been, either to avoid admitting his error or through a desire to achieve effect, Baldacci consciously chose to completely rewrite de Chirico's life history both in his monograph and later written work. The negative impact his action can still be felt today. He did not stop there but went on to make further accusations against de Chirico and the Foundation, who had indicated (albeit belatedly) his historical errors. It seems to be a case of true obsession that is difficult to understand from a rational point of view and, perhaps, constitutes a unique episode in the field of Art History.

In 1997, Baldacci resigned from the Foundation's executive committee and authentication committee due to an increasingly evident conflict of interests, which had caused the Foundation a number of problems. Unbridled from collegial restraint, he immediately informed the main auction houses that he was prepared to issue certificates of authenticity. Indeed, he began to do just this but stopped upon realising that he had authenticated a work that had recently been declared fake when he was still an active member of the authentication committee. As is well known, he then chose to ask Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco to issue the authentication certificates he required for his commercial activity<sup>41</sup>, whilst continuing to declare himself as the "greatest expert" on de Chirico's historic masterpieces.

Due to the closure of his New York gallery that very same year, Baldacci soon found himself in serious financial difficulty.

During mid-1997 to 2000, the temporary suspension of the Foundation's authentication committee meetings caused many art dealers and galleries to contact Fagiolo dell'Arco. Fagiolo dell'Arco was a very prestigious art historian and author of key studies dedicated to the Great Metaphysician, his preferred choice of name for the artist whom he so admired. Unfortunately, Professor Fagiolo dell'Arco did not have a predisposition for judging the authenticity of artwork. Driven by a passion for discovering unpublished works, he ended up authenticating a significant number of forgeries. It

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lowing: "the book's structure is the same as that of a soap opera. Hunting for a scoop, dramatic turns of events and trumpeted findings almost always pertaining to something to do with Savinio; it is like garbage TV. Roos is the author's alter ego. Given subordinate treatment, he is named but the source is a bluff, there is no such thing as '(Roos 1997)'" . De Sanna believed that getting polemic about something of this kind would be bad publicity. However, this proved a mistake as unfortunately many people have preferred a melodrama that has continued, uninterrupted, for 20 years, just like a television series.

<sup>41</sup> Baldacci made another interesting declaration during the 5 May 2008 hearing: "So, let me say that, if I only needed to sell a painting, it [Fagiolo's expertise, ed.] was sufficient. If I would have had to give my own judgement, perhaps it would not have been enough..." (sic!). Minutes of hearing, *cit.*, p. 74. In fact, three out of the four paintings he sold were accompanied by Fagiolo's certificates of authenticity.

was precisely during the period in which the Foundation's authentication committee had suspended its activity that the first early-period fakes (1920s and 1930s) started to surface, at the same time as the aforementioned "Dusseldorf fake" dated 1913. Regrettably, many of these works carry the expertise of Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco. Despite the fact that the magistrate had issued a seizure order for his archive during the investigation, which was also requested by the judge during the hearing, his archive was never located. As such, one is unable to determine just how many fake works authenticated by him appeared on the art market.<sup>42</sup>

As seen in both the judgement of the first instance trial and that of the Court of Appeal, the judicial investigation was initially concerned with a forged Campigli and then the fake de Chirico works. During the investigation, it came to light that the first person to introduce the fake de Chirico paintings onto the art market, was Baldacci (who had held a prestigious role at the Foundation). It was at this point that the Foundation decided to become a plaintiff, a decision made less as an act against Baldacci, but rather, as a way of ascertaining that the paintings in question were fake. Against all evidence, Baldacci continued to maintain that these paintings were authentic (and, in part, still does so today). During the appeal, he hid behind the fact that three out of four paintings were accompanied by certificates of authenticity issued by Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco. He had certified the fourth himself (in the form of a declaration of sale).

This brief summary regarding the historical case of Baldacci has been done in an attempt to clarify that: **a)** once an expert working for the Foundation, he lowered himself to knowingly selling fake works of art, as determined by the magistrate; **b)** once a serious academic scholar initially committed to re-evaluating de Chirico's moral and artistic persona, later became his greatest detractor (to the point of even denying him the intellectual property right to the discovery of Metaphysical Art).<sup>43</sup> Baldacci has portrayed de Chirico under the worst light possible, resorting to full blown insults to the extent of defining his posthumous novel *Il Signor Dudron* (published by the Foundation in 1998) as such: "The failure of Dudron as a literary exploit is parallel and analogous to the story of the existential failure of de Chirico as a man".<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> In the Milan court case, six out of seven works were authenticated by Professor Fagiolo dell'Arco. The Court of Appeal of Milan highlighted how: "One should lastly recall that from the acts of the proceeding to Fagiolo dell'Arco results to have been the person having incredibly acknowledged as authentic all the seized paintings" [except one, authenticated by Baldacci, *ed.*]. Despite everything, the Foundation has no reason to believe that Fagiolo did not act in good faith, even if he demonstrated incredible naivety in authenticating a "reproduction of a painting by the artist on which tempera diluted with greasy and oil material was passed on". See the judgement of the Court of Appeal of Milan, *cit.* (published herein). An "authentication" of this kind, which would not have survived even the first test, should be interpreted as the result of incompetence and superficiality rather than acting in bad faith. Furthermore, one notes that the aforementioned enthusiasm in discovering unpublished works by the artist and his propensity to look upon artwork submitted by close acquaintances with "indulgent eyes", caused him to make some clamorous errors. In the immediate wake of his death in May 2002, an artful rumour circulated that the Foundation's authentication committee would immediately declare works with Fagiolo's certification as fake without even examining them. The evidently stupid affirmation served the purpose of making sure the Foundation would not be given the chance to examine works that Fagiolo had certified as authentic de Chirico works dating to the 1920s and 1930s (certification he had issued at the turn of the century). In addition, the Foundation was contacted to verify the possibility of an amnesty regarding Fagiolo dell'Arco's expertises, aimed at having the Foundation acknowledge his certifications, or at least not challenge them, in an attempt to avoid problems that would have seriously damaged the art market.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>44</sup> P. Baldacci, *Paure, segreti e maschere in de Chirico scrittore 1911-1940 (dai manoscritti parigini a Il sig. Dudron)*, published on the Archivio dell'arte metafisica website in the "Opinions" section, without date, but 2009, *cit.*, p. 18.



## 7. The “Sabatello” Italian Piazza

The Foundation has spent much time and energy – and successfully so – on reinstating the truth that Baldacci and Roos had historically manipulated. Following the dismantling of their colourful tale that Metaphysical Art had been invented in Milan in 1909 (based on the erroneous interpretation of a number of important historical documents [de Chirico's letters to Fritz Gartz]), the two authors have recently abandoned theoretical/artistic research on the artist's oeuvre and restricted their attention to an area of studies closer in line with Baldacci's true area of interest, that of the market. Their recent studies have been published by the association that Baldacci founded in April 2009, just one month after his conviction in first instance by the Court of Milan: *L'Archivio dell'arte metafisica*. Sporting a new look, clear-cut objectives, and armed with the nominal participation of a number of esteemed university professors (whose academic independence was illustrated by Baldacci with the disrespectful expression according to which they were not “trained dogs who act upon my orders”<sup>45</sup>), they have launched a new series of publications entitled: *Contributions to the de Chirico Catalogue*.

Due to the vulgar tone and language employed, the recent publication *Piazza d'Italia (Souvenir d'Italie, II) 1913 (July-August 1933)*<sup>46</sup> does not merit comment, other than a brief observation regarding its underlying objective. According to their theory, a painting once owned by Dario Sabatello and declared fake by the artist in 1946, is actually authentic. From a historiographic point of view, Baldacci and Roos currently present themselves as critics, not of de Chirico the artist, but rather, de Chirico as ‘art dealer’. As such they have carved out a specific area of studies never previously addressed by scholars for the simple reason that such an area has little to offer on a cultural/artistic level. Their accusation of the artist being a fraudster surfaces without delay, a fact that comes as no surprise and bears further witness that their condemnation of de Chirico is the prime focus of all their research.<sup>47</sup> The focus on psychological aspects regarding de Chirico continues with the consequent moral judgement of the man which characterises the work of the two authors, who have even gone to the extreme length of consulting a psychiatrist (!) in order to substantiate their theories.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Commento di Paolo Baldacci*, ibid., May 2012, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> P. Baldacci, G. Roos, *Piazza d'Italia (Souvenir d'Italie, II) 1913 [July-August 1922]*, English translation E. Hedley, Scapleni Editore, Milan 2013.

<sup>47</sup> In order to give the reader an idea of the tone of the insinuations made about the artist, here follow a few extracts from the volume: “all of de Chirico's lies regarding his relationship with the gallery and the Ghiringhelli brothers” (p. 75); “The artist's distorted description of these facts in the 1945 edition of his *Memorie* is littered with serious lies” (p. 79); “de Chirico's *Memorie* offer a completely skewed version of events” (p.81); “the hatred and desire for revenge that transpires from the artist's *Memorie*” (p. 82); “a distinctly altered version of the facts”, “his vitriolic criticism of Modern art” (p. 94).

<sup>48</sup> The method of investigation employed by Baldacci and Roos involved having their text read by a psychiatrist (sic!), who then provided his opinion of Giorgio de Chirico (it remains unknown to what extent this could be in line with deontology), based obviously on what the two had written. Following are a few examples from their book: “the artist's belligerent mood” (p. 50); “the sole victim of a cruel, hostile world” (p. 59); “regress into an infantile state that is seemingly immune to the perception or assumption of any kind of responsibility” (p. 73); “unprovoked acrimony” (p. 76); “and indeed, would all fall victim to his trickery sooner or later” (p. 82); “soon this resentment would turn into a sentiment of profound hate – be it sincere or only for show – for those who were passionate about or desired Metaphysical painting” (p. 85); “This childish, immature character, with his persecution and victim's complexes, impulsive nature and in ability to reflect when necessary and control his behaviour, are the remaining ingredients of the fatal cocktail that created the enigma – or better the ‘hash up’ that was de Chirico” (p. 86); “increasingly narrow-minded decisions and many errors would lead him into a downward spiral” (p. 97). A number of these examples could easily be made in reference to Baldacci himself who seems to suffer from the same persecution mania when he said that the judges did not understand anything, the experts had it in for him and damaged him, not to mention the Foundation that launched a judicial aggression against him.

The fake painting “Souvenir d’Italie II” or so-called “Piazza Sabatello” was the subject of a decade-long lawsuit won by de Chirico with a definitive judgement by the Court of Appeal of Rome in 1955. The Court confirmed the non-authenticity of the painting and an order was issued to remove the artist’s forged signature by abrasion. The painting miraculously reappeared on the art market in 2000 in an auction, sporting a brand new signature “g. de Chirico” and an estimate of 500 million old Italian Lira.<sup>49</sup> During the first instance criminal procedure that resulted from the attempt made by someone to reinstate the painting with a freshly forged signature of the artist, Baldacci was called to testify (he was not accused in the case). On this occasion he took the grave initiative of writing a personal letter to the judge – at their home address (!) – in which he described the Piazza Sabatello case as “the mother of all battles”<sup>50</sup>. It is not difficult to understand that the battle embarked upon at the time (and which now takes the form of their recent publication) attempted to create a precedent, unequivocally establishing that de Chirico’s opinions are not to be trusted, thus taking the artist’s word away from him and substituting it with Baldacci’s *own* (a man who is both objectively and subjectively the least qualified or legitimate person to formulate trustworthy judgements about de Chirico’s work, as previously shown). In what seems like an upside-down world, Paolo Baldacci, who underhandedly commercialised fake de Chirico paintings as confirmed *res judicata* by the magistrate, seems to have made a bid, together with Gerd Roos, to take on this very difficult assignment.

It is not difficult to understand how the axiom “de Chirico is not trustworthy” serves the purpose of re-integrating into the *corpus* of the artist’s oeuvre, not only all the paintings on which he had given a negative judgement, as well as all the recent works ‘dating’ to before WWII that he could not express an opinion on as they appeared on the market after he passed away, including the paintings introduced to the market at the beginning of the current century and ascertained as fake by the judgement *res judicata*. Bearing to this, the two authors firmly sustain that prior to 1939, no falsification of de Chirico’s work took place. Consequentially, all works dating to the pre-war period or attributed to that period do not need to be authenticated as they are all authentic, as for example, *Archaeologists on the Seashore* (a fake of recent making) that carries the date “1926”.

As in the past, the Foundation will continue to make its presence felt in safeguarding the artist’s work. Indeed, as has already occurred, it has no difficulty in acknowledging the truth in those few cases where de Chirico did make a mistake in judging his works. Pertaining to this, Baldacci’s grim wish for those who defend the artist to “depart this life”, in order to put things back into their proper place (obviously in the way he wants) assumes greater meaning.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> By reaffirming that the work in question was not executed by the artist’s hand, the Foundation would like to merely recall that de Chirico declared it an outright fake. “The painting’s execution is so fragmentary and weak that it seems to be the work, not of a mediocre painter, but not even of a dilettante” (letter by G. de Chirico to V. Barbaroux, 11 November 1947). Far back in 1955, the painting’s falsity was ascertained in the lawsuit filed against the artist. The judgement was confirmed in the Court of Cassation. Even though the Italian Civil Law Code provides for a motion for reconsideration, such was not requested at the time. Nor could any such a request be made of late as no new proof in support of the painting’s authenticity had come to light (further to the evidence already examined by the magistrate at the time). Those who attempted to reintroduce the painting onto the market with the artist’s forged signature in 2000 were aware of this. Baldacci is hypocritical in raising this question as he knows all too well that this course is no longer open as the painting has since been confiscated. In order to fully understand de Chirico’s concern, the letter to Barbaroux must be read in its entirety (as well as Barbaroux’s answer provided the following 13 November). These are also helpful in understanding why any such revision proceeding would produce a negative result.

<sup>50</sup> See *The Constants of History*..., cit., pp. 394-395.

<sup>51</sup> *Una “passeggiata” nelle ultime mostre*, published on the Archivio dell’arte metafisica website.

The historiographic/artistic lean of the recent publication dedicated to the so-called “Piazza Sabatello” revolves around the issue of backdating, a practice that de Chirico carried out on a number of metaphysical paintings executed in the 1930s. Such a practice is well known. It neither raises an alarm to potential errors in the dating the artist’s overall oeuvre<sup>52</sup>, nor signals commercial exploitation since paintings of this kind were sold at prices similar to those of the same period. If anything, such a historically well known issue can help our understanding of the artist’s rebellion (especially on a historic and theoretic level) against the cataloguing of his metaphysical work carried out by the surrealists *in primis* and later by art critics and the art market.<sup>53</sup> In fact, it was often the actual buyer who, influenced by the critics, insisted that the artist add a date next to his signature that corresponded to 1910-1918, the only decade of recognised value of his work.

Following the debacle of Baldacci and Roos’ own backdating exercise which they carried out on Metaphysical Art (from 1910 to 1909), de Chirico’s practice of backdating has become an enthralling and all-important issue for them (even if this topic was already dealt with by Baldacci back in 1994). The authors specify in the publication’s introductory note: “The painting that constitutes the subject of this study is not particularly important in terms of its artistic value, however, it does hold great historical significance, and for two reasons in particular. This *Piazza d’Italia (Souvenir d’Italie, II)* documents the beginnings of de Chirico’s large scale production of backdated pseudo-Metaphysical paintings – a practice that would hold devastating consequences for his public reputation –, while the legal dispute that animates its history represents the keystone of the artist’s theory on the ‘surrealist conspiracy’, a theory that has continued to evolve since its first mention in the 1945 edition of his *Memorie*”.<sup>54</sup>

The real objective of the book, in fact, deals neither with the painting’s date, nor its artistic merit, but rather, is aimed at establishing that the Sabatello Piazza is authentic. By achieving this, they could disprove the 1955 judgement of the Court of Appeal of Rome<sup>55</sup>, thus establishing that the courtroom is not the place to discuss the authenticity of artwork. In line with Baldacci’s way of thinking, the judgement expressed by the Court of Appeal of Milan (2013) regarding the falsity of the paintings in the lawsuit he was involved in, would automatically be discounted.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See C. Ruiz, *op. cit.*, 2013: “Backdated paintings are treated as later works; redated following advice from the foundation and priced accordingly, says Olivier Camu, the deputy chairman of Christie’s Impressionist and Modern art department. Paintings made before 1920 are rare, ‘they come up once every five years or so’, Camu says, adding that the artist, who was a major precursor of Surrealism, is still undervalued in relation to the movement. And when it comes to authentication, ‘the market absolutely trusts the foundation’, Camu says”.

<sup>53</sup> See the interview with “L’Europeo” magazine, 1970 (published herein), in response to the question: “people reproach you for returning to metaphysical painting after abandoning it, for financial speculation since paintings of this kind have reached extremely high prices. Is this true?”, de Chirico answered: “They reproach me because, the fact that I continue to paint metaphysical paintings annoys those, who, do effectively want to speculate in them. If not, why would they reproach me? Since we’re talking about this, I want to clarify two things. The first is that I have always made metaphysical paintings, so there are no returns or departures, as the critics or dealers who invent these stories claim and that I have always done what I wanted to do, independent of those who do with the history of modern art what they may. If you come to my house one day, you will find metaphysical paintings from every period. The second is that a painting isn’t a postage stamp, and giving it a value not for what it is worth spiritually and historically but for the year it was made means giving it the value of a stamp. In this case, I advise those who think this way to take up stamp collecting”.

<sup>54</sup> P. Baldacci, G. Roos, *op. cit.*, 2013, introductory note, p. 5. Baldacci would do well to re-read what he wrote in 1994.

<sup>55</sup> The judgment ascertaining the falsity of the painting was published in issue n. 1/2 of these Journals [in Italian only, *ed.*]. See also P. Picozza, *Origin and Persistence of a tópos about de Chirico*, in “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico” n. 1/2, 2002, pp. 334-341.

<sup>56</sup> P. Baldacci, letter of 13 September 2013, *cit.*, In direct reference to the judgement of the Court of Appeal of Milan (2013), Baldacci states: “History

The book's scarce present day relevance (in terms of subject matter), is redeemed by Baldacci and Roos' future program of studies. As stated at the end of the volume – thus anticipating several conclusions that will be made in the forthcoming publication, *The true story of the falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's oeuvre*, they state:

1) none of the cited episodes prove that the forgery of de Chirico's works started before the Second World War; 2) all of the works dating to the years 1910-1939 that de Chirico declared to be forgeries after the war are in fact authentic.<sup>57</sup>

In their eyes, the alleged “absence of documentation” proves that what they affirm is true. According to Baldacci and Roos, the lack of evidence proving the activity of pre-WWII forgery (regardless of what de Chirico repeatedly stated and wrote as well as proof to the contrary), they draw the conclusion that no falsification took place. *The true story of the falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's oeuvre* that they are endeavouring to write, promises to be either a “half story” or a “half truth”. The reader will be left to draw their own conclusions.

The author's claim goes against the artist's testimony, who specified that the falsification of his work: “dates back many years. It began in France between the years 1926 and 1930” when his work attracted the attention of forgers with the high prices that it commanded.<sup>58</sup>

Baldacci cites the solo-exhibition of the artist's work held at Galerie Allard back in 1946 when 20 fake metaphysical works by the surrealist painter Oscar Dominquez were exhibited. Such an event is proof of an industrial-level of falsification that cannot have taken place over night. By alluding to this historic and unequivocal episode, Baldacci simply acknowledges an undeniable historic event.

By setting out such a clear-cut chronological criteria over the issue of fakes - before/after, white/black, true/false – based on completely illogical and hollow analysis – it appears that they wish to say that one should abandon all research relating to important historiographical issues. Baldacci seems to have forgotten that he clearly highlighted the ideological issue found at the heart of the surrealist's outlook of de Chirico's art, quoting Breton in his 1994 essay: “de Chirico has neither merit nor responsibility for what he did when he was younger. He made his extraordinary voyage for us.” Baldacci commented on Breton's essay with the following: “Biblical and apocalyptic tone aside, and despite the copious falsehoods and insults, also directed against Barnes and Guillaume, with which the text is crammed, this essay forms the basis for the modern critical betrayal of de Chirico's work. From this point on, and in obedience to incessant Stalinist-like propaganda lies of the surrealists, almost everyone fell into line. Instead of carrying out a philological investigation of

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teaches us, especially for that which concerns works of art, that often the Courts have not known how to decide for the right and acknowledge the truth. The archive's latest work, edited by Gerd Roos and myself, regarding the Piazza d'Italia Milione/Sabatello, demonstrates this. I have sufficient experience to know just how evanescent certain counsel is, even if expressed in good faith, and therefore even how useless many certifications with stamps and lofty signatures are, compared to time and to serious research that, slowly and surely, put things in their place”.

<sup>57</sup> P. Baldacci, G. Roos, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 95.

<sup>58</sup> G. de Chirico, *Fake Paintings (Report to the Head of Police)*, circa 1967, in “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico”, n. 5/6, 2006, p. 585.



the artist's ideas and works, it became easier and more convenient to give in to this blackmail so as not to appear 'reactionary'. Breton decided to dispossess de Chirico of his own work. De Chirico, he proclaims, we are the Surrealists [erroneous translation from the original Italian; the sentence should read: 'We surrealists are de Chirico', *ed.*]. We are the interpreters of his ideas and we represent what he, without being responsible, miraculously said in his youth. We have the right to use his writings and to change them and edit them as we wish. We have the right to change the titles of his paintings to give them the surrealist meaning – or the non-meaning – that interests us.<sup>59</sup> He puts forth the following conclusion: "Here, amid this climate of contempt and wrongful appropriation of the work of others, first the route to the copy opened up, then the route to falsification."<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, Baldacci closed the window of opportunity that he had opened regarding the important historiographic issue with his 1997 publication and began his own campaign against the artist, which has proven limitless and eagerly adopts the same misguided surrealist theorems: 1) Metaphysical Art is the only worthwhile thing that de Chirico did<sup>61</sup>; 2) By repeating a number of his iconographic themes, de Chirico forged his own work. The latter conclusion is an incredibly stupid contradiction in terms that has unfortunately been widely divulged.<sup>62</sup>

Such absurdities are once again conveyed by Baldacci and Roos with renewed energy. If Baldacci had previously only required a single document to support an erroneous theory (the de Chirico-Gartz letter), or a single physical element to affirm an artwork as authentic (the canvas of the Dusseldorf fake or the "Valori Plastici" archive letterhead paper), it seems that such fragile elements are superfluous today.<sup>63</sup>

It is evident that this new fantastical theory firstly aims to invalidate de Chirico's own indisputable historic testimony, and secondly liberate their new theories from all documentary evidence. Such a 'new' choice of methodology, theoretical reflection and eventual means of authenticating de Chirico's artwork, could produce extraordinary results. In other words, academic research is replaced by works of pure fiction.

*Translated by Katherine Robinson*

<sup>59</sup> P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>61</sup> In addition to this, Baldacci maintains that de Chirico did not even invent Metaphysical Art, but rather, took the idea from his brother Savinio (see footnote 4).

<sup>62</sup> In point of fact, in 1994 Baldacci wrote: "It is amazing, the rage with which the surrealists, and then all the formalist and neo-historicist critics assailed de Chirico's habit of returning to some of his earlier subjects. It was as if Boecklin, Van Gogh, and so many others had not done likewise. And as if this hadn't been a common practice in art since antiquity, when qualitative judgement was prevalent. It is even more amazing if we think that de Chirico made a practice of copying Raphael, or himself, but the surrealists copied de Chirico." *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88. In the corresponding footnote he added: "In addition to copies by M. Ernst and forgeries by Dominguez, there are the 'de Chiricos' produced in Belgian surrealist circles. The name of E.T.L. Mesens is often mentioned, but in this regard objective proof is still insufficient" (n. 44, p. 88).

<sup>63</sup> This seems to be the exact opposite of what Baldacci wrote on the Archivio dell'arte metafisica website in the "Opinions" section, under "Our motivations". In reference to the polemic regarding the dating of the de Chirico-Gartz letter, which Baldacci once called the "key document", he affirms: "the fundamental principle lying at the heart of academic activity dictates the absolute respect of documental evidence". He has evidently changed his mind.