

## FAKE PAINTINGS

The ancient and sadly current subject (as the title of this section shows) of fakes is multifaceted.

In this number of the Periodical, the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation feels the need to give the word directly to the Maestro through the publication of a few of his many manuscripts and typescripts, both published and unpublished, although not before highlighting a few central aspects of the problem.

A very interesting typescript in draft form and without a title, kept in the Foundation's archives, contains an envelope on which Isa de Chirico wrote "Report for the Head of Police". The note is written in the third person and most probably was written in collaboration with or at least inspired by Giorgio de Chirico who corrected the text and added improvements by hand. The text, datable to 1967, touches on the subject not only with regard to de Chirico but to the problem of falsification in general (a situation which the greatest Italian artists were victim to), as well as the insufficiency of Italian legislation in dealing with the problem. For that which concerns de Chirico, it delineates what is already amply known, that is, that the falsification of his work "**dates back many years. It began in France between the years 1926 and 1930**"<sup>1</sup>, and did not originate in the Forties, as some continue to insist. It is opportune to remember that in the mid '40s Giorgio de Chirico was subject to an unprecedented attack aimed at degrading his painting. This attack, unparalleled in the history of art, was organised by the Surrealists who used one of their painters as the forger: Oscar Dominguez. The critics of the time, at least those who counted or thought they counted, were not only totally hostile to Giorgio de Chirico, but spread word that he was crazy and no longer able to identify his authentic works, or worse, stubbornly determined to negate them in order to boost his present painting.

The terms of this case are highlighted in another writing, of an uncertain date, which reaches us incomplete: *Fake de Chiricos*, in which the Maestro describes the context and substance ("a psychological preparation") that allowed and favoured the proliferation of fakes: in the Paris of the 20s in which the Surrealists set about creating, to their advantage, "the Chirico case", or rather the de Chirico legend, "duly inflated in the interest of the Breton gang". (And rightly so, as de Chirico affirms, the first and most insidious falsifications are precisely from that period).

---

<sup>1</sup> See what de Chirico says in the *Report to the Head of Police* (in this Periodical, p. 585): "In the first place, it should be noted that this forgery dates back many years. It began in France between the years 1926 and 1930 when his work had already reached a significant market quotation due to the attention it received by merchants such as Paul Guillaume and Leonce Rosenberg. At this time a number of fakes, often fairly well executed, were fed onto the market, fakes which today, after many years, are imported from France and validated as authentic for having been part of one or another collection."

But this was only the beginning: the artist had to fight this battle on various fronts and throughout his entire life, against the most disparate enemies, from merchants to Institutions. In the 1960 edition of the Larousse encyclopaedia, we see reproduced (fig. 1) under the entry de Chirico (Vol. III) the reproduction of a painting exhibited at the Musée National d'Art Moderne of Paris (fig. 2), attributed to de Chirico, but by the hand of Dominguez, (which had been shown at the Galleria Allard) and that also appears in the Rosenberg Archive inventoried at number 132. The same painting is published in *Dictionnaire de la peinture Moderne*<sup>2</sup>.

Fake Paintings is an article (text for a conference) which is appreciable for its scope of vision. It is datable to the '60s and does not limit the discourse by speaking only of Giorgio de Chirico but tackles the theme of the development of fakes in a historic perspective.

The artist retraces the events within art commerce in general and that of antiques in particular, performing an interesting in-depth examination with regard to the market for primitive artwork and fondo-oro works, which were in fashion starting from the second half of the Nineteenth Century, a mode that reached disquieting proportions in the first decades of the Twentieth Century and therefore became an example. We include another two interesting articles: in one the Maestro gives the definition of a fake painting and in the other, demonstrates the falsity of a particular painting.

Lastly, in a letter written with regard to the baleful Biennale of 1948, the artist felt under obligation to denounce with distain the grave error ("enormous") committed by the organisation and the examining Commission (with Robert Longhi in its ranks), in the exhibiting, among the presumed metaphysical works of the Maestro, a "ridiculous fake" by the hand of Dominguez himself.

What is striking in this unending battle is once again the depth of perception with which Giorgio de Chirico faces the phenomenon: together with an understandable dose of controversy in the texts proposed here, what surfaces is a clear intent to carry out an exacting analysis of the various aspects and characters involved in the marketing of fake art, and to pragmatically individuate conditions and modalities by examining the most common systems used in forgery (the double canvas, fake notary authentication), in order to shed light on the conceptual and legal elements of the problem (for example, the conflict existing between copyright and property rights, etc).

But not even this was enough for the Pictor Optimus, in fact to the *pars destruens*, in his attempt to resolve the question the artist's utopia always counterpoises a *pars construens*, which presents feasible propositions that go from the Police action of filing counterfeiters, to a request for the collaboration of the Merchants Syndicate, which at the time was presided by incorruptible Ettore Gian Ferrari, a long-time friend of Giorgio de Chirico, to the verification of the artwork dealers' licences, as well as a change in the legislation in force, in an array of hypotheses the scope of which is testimony to the vastness of a problem that still today, the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation finds itself faced with.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Hazon, Paris, 1954, p. 60.