

DE CHIRICO. THE DARK SIDE¹
 RETROSPECTIVE OF THE ITALIAN ARTIST
 THAT EMBRACES HIS “CLASSIC” PAINTING AND HIS “METAPHYSICAL” WORKS

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Giorgio de Chirico. La Fabrique des rêves

The Italian Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) is a strange monument to Art History. A little like those represented in his famous “metaphysical” paintings. For example, *The Enigma of a Day II* (1914): the monument is a military statue, seen from behind, that reigns from atop his pedestal on a deserted piazza. Imposing yet stricken, it seems he is about to leap into the void, a rope around his neck, like a hanged man. A strange, premonitory image of an artist whose career took the same route, because it is commonly accepted that de Chirico, who was a genial inventor during his first years, then went beyond the point of no return by returning to classical figuration – a true artistic suicide –, as Max Ernst would later say.

Perhaps a planned burial, the Surrealists considered him as God the Father and then the last person on Earth. For decades, following the same notion, exhibitions of the Italian artist’s work have presented only that which is judged as “showable”, that is, a brief period from 1909 to the 1920s. The exhibition at Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris chose to reconsider the artist’s entire production; a dangerous exercise for a painter who loved to hide his tracks.

Situated in an architecture worthy of the most enigmatic of his settings (Palais de Tokyo’s Art deco columns and curving rooms), the exhibition presents one hundred and seventy works dating from 1909 to 1975. Starting with a fulminating display of Metaphysical Art: fixed stares, featureless mannequins, massive chimneys, closed shutters, motionless trains, small breads, huge bananas... De Chirico mixes the incongruously known with the conceivably unknown, thus creating the disquieting feeling of an unresolved *déjà-vu*. Familiar, out of context, infinitively re-usable, these true-false reminiscences are right on target, since they draw upon the patrimony of the common psyche – childhood, the sky, voyage, technology, fear, darkness, reclusion, escape –, like pieces of Meccano of the collective subconscious.

The exhibition continues through to the most extensive part of the artist’s *œuvre*, in the exact opposite direction. The artist closes the door on his universal and magical combinations and takes back his freedom – instead of giving it –, retaining from that sampling of objects (ruins, furniture,

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horses...) only that which lends itself to a plastic configuration congruous to the essence of classical painting, which he moulds according to his will, and not without humour and provocation. In order to better concentrate on his craft, de Chirico copied the Old Masters, copied himself, portraying himself just as he was (nude, old and worn out, as splendid as a Lucian Freud), or exhilaratingly raising himself immodestly to the rank of a hero of classical painting. Self-cannibalism, vampirism, duplication: at the end of his life, the ogre played his first cards once again, returning to a metaphysical kind of painting, but this time faded – and apparently on purpose –. Genius artist or egotistical trickster, de Chirico remains Master, right until the end, of his own mysteries.