

A CENTURY AFTER THE BIRTH OF METAPHYSICAL ART 1910-2010

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I then had the strange impression that I was seeing everything for the first time.
Giorgio de Chirico, 1912

Anniversaries seem to follow one after the other. While the celebrations of 2008 entitled *Immortality to Giorgio de Chirico* in honour of the 30th anniversary of the Maestro's passing and the 120th anniversary of his birth (organised by Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, the Municipality of Rome and Achille Bonito Oliva), are not quite over, we now find ourselves commemorating the most important anniversary of all: **The Centenary of Metaphysical Art**. A century ago, Giorgio de Chirico painted his first metaphysical painting in Florence: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, a work which contains *in nuce* all of Metaphysical Art's subsequent themes. This historical occasion was recalled in the young artist's detailed account, which specifies both the time and place of the event: the autumn of 1910 in Florence. The painting's title reveals the very heartbeat of this new form of art: the *Enigma*. The image subtly reveals its revolutionary power: Florence's Piazza Santa Croce transformed through the mystery of *revelation*. For the cover of this issue, which also marks the 10th anniversary of the Periodical itself, it would indeed be difficult to choose a painting that more fully represents the profound and enigmatic vision Giorgio de Chirico introduced to the world.

Claudio Strinati's essay *Metaphysics - The Revelation of All* offers us a chance to return to this key moment by presenting the event of de Chirico's artistic revelation from an intimate, insightful perspective, rather than from an intellectual standpoint. By evoking de Chirico's state of convalescence at the moment of his revelation, Strinati makes us conscious of the fact that Metaphysical Art came into existence in conjunction with "de Chirico's return to physical well-being" and that "Metaphysics aligns itself in the artist's mind in the supreme form of health of Spirit". As Strinati observes, at the heart of this state of renewed harmony between Mind, Body and Spirit, is found "the almost unexpressible and sublime idea of *All*. Metaphysics is, in fact, the expression of *All*; in other words, of that which cannot be expressed through single entities, which, when identified, constitute its very negation". This simple yet comprehensive definition captures the essence of an event that marked the Twentieth Century as no other, by portraying both the mystery and the intrinsic richness of possibility held within.

It is important to note that although these recent commemorative events have, in fact, contributed to the delay of this issue's publication, they have proved to be valuable occasions for a deepening of knowledge of many unexplored aspects of the Maestro's *oeuvre*. In particular, the extraordinary exhibitions *Giorgio de Chirico. La Fabrique des Rêves* curated by Jacqueline Munck at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2009, and *Nature According to de Chirico*, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, in 2010, both served as important catalysts for de Chirico's art. Although very different in concept, both exhibitions presented a truly exceptional *corpus* of works. Whilst the Paris exhibition, a "Factory of Dreams", constituted a vast retrospective, Rome's *Nature According to de Chirico* was a conceptually-specific exhibition, comprising of seven thematic sections. In their own way, both succeeded in creating an image of de Chirico's work as a whole or *All* – beyond the single painting or period –. From the artist's first metaphysical masterpieces, through to the multiple experiments and inventions of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, up to the extraordinary adventure of the Neo-metaphysical works dating from the late 1960s, the visitor was able to view the various periods of de Chirico's art: sixty years of extraordinary painting, which left an indelible mark on the Twentieth Century.

The comprehensive shows included a striking collection of paintings (some of which had never been exhibited before) and offered an opportunity to touch upon some truly unusual aspects of de Chirico's work. A valuable occasion was thus provided for an unfolding of ideas through innovative study and research. The juxtaposition of the Great Metaphysician's early works with those from his last period constituted an unprecedented event that resulted in a stimulating reconsideration of long-established ideas and beliefs. A path was traced across the wide-ranging course of the artist's work in which each step appeared to incorporate and surpass the former, encouraging a renewal of thoughts and ideas. Through this intense collaboration, one of the Foundation's principal intentions (that harks back to its very beginnings) was fully realised: the promotion of de Chirico's art as a *discipline of research*. Such an approach was clearly manifested in the intellectual exchange that took place between the scholars (belonging to different fields of expertise), who contributed to these and other initiatives; a result that reflects the Foundation's dedication to facilitating an open and constructive dialogue between scholars. As is true to the logic of genuine research, this approach does not resolve or conclude its objective, but rather kindles a continuous and propulsive force which goes on to open new areas of exploration.

It is with this spirit in mind that the present issue of the Periodical embarks upon innovative areas of research such as the study of the artist's painting technique by a restorer of the Maestro's work, which encourages us to examine his paintings in ever-closer detail: through the eye of the microscope. Under and above the painting's surface, we are taken closer to its chemical and physical substance, thus learning to recognise the signs and markings, as well as the wavy and fluid movements through which it was generated. This exercise of observing things under different light, things we believe we already know, is an undertaking the *Pictor Optimus* himself would have undoubtedly appreciated. As an evocative compliment to this study, we have included seventy of

de Chirico's painting formulas. Jotted down in the heat of the moment onto torn bits of paper stained with paint, these formulas are testimony to the exquisitely artisanal aspect of the much-loved "craft" chosen by de Chirico.

In line with this discussion on the physical realm in which Art manifests itself, the recent restoration of de Chirico's *Mysterious Baths Fountain* in Milan's Sempione Park, constitutes a significant event. Initially encouraged by Jole de Sanna in 1997, this restoration project has been recently completed. The original sculptures of the two *Bathers* and the *Fish* are currently exhibited in Milan's recently-opened Museo del Novecento. The *Fish*, acquired by the Foundation in 2004 from a Parisian auction house, has been lent to the Municipality of Milan as a permanent loan.

The Italian version of this issue includes two important translations from the original French to Italian: de Chirico's poems by Valerio Magrelli, as well as the play *Le Ballet - Comédie en quatre actes* (published for the first time in the n. 3/4 issue), translated by Gioia Costa. In addition to the artistic and cultural content, the play includes the portrayal of an assortment of human behaviour. It is, in fact, the Foundation's aspiration to bring this *pièce* to the stage one day in a production that respects both the play's spirit and its capacity to shed light on the passions and weaknesses of an epoch.

With this issue, a new format has been adopted for the Periodical with the publication of separate Italian and English issues: a choice made in order to facilitate consultation and include text illustrations in the English translations. The new English publication will go by the name: "Metaphysical Art. The de Chirico Journals – Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico".

True to the Foundation's firm belief in the necessity of making important information and historical documents accessible to the public and scholars alike, recent archival research has produced noteworthy results. Following the previous issue's publication of de Chirico's letters (1925) to Rosenberg (with an essay by Michele Tavola), the current issue furthers research by including all of de Chirico's letters (1925-1939) conserved in the Parisian art dealer's important archive. This issue also presents New York art merchant Jacques Seligmann's complete epistolary, which allows for a detailed reconstruction of the artist's professional and personal affairs during a moment of delicate transition as were the closing years of the 1930s. This historical reconstruction is further developed by the correlation of the second and final part of the Julien Levy Archive (1938-1948). In addition, the contract signed by de Chirico's mother, Gemma de Chirico Cervetto, and Ricordi music publishers on 21 May 1908 for the rights concerning the publication of the opera *Carmela*, written by de Chirico's younger brother Andrea (Alberto Savinio, who was 17 years old at the time), is presented here for the first time.

Research has also taken a further step forward thanks to the recent renewal of the Foundation's website (www.fondazionede chirico.org), an undertaking which demanded significant editorial input from the Foundation's staff. As well as offering a wide range of original documents and images, one

of the website's most innovative features regards the online publication of all previous issues of «*Metafisica*» with over 250 complimentary downloadable articles (in pdf format).

Work on the second volume of de Chirico's "*Scritti*" (Complete Written Works) edited by Andrea Cortellessa for Bompiani publishing house is underway. In addition to *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico* and a vast collection of interviews from various periods, the publication (in Italian) will provide further opportunities to discover the treasure held within the words de Chirico left us, by offering the reader a never-ending and invaluable source of artistic, cultural, physiological, and social considerations.

The up-coming publication of the Maestro's letters (1909-1929), edited by Elena Pontiggia, will provide additional historic material for the study of Giorgio de Chirico's ideas and art.

The Foundation continues, with impartiality, in its endeavour to identify authentic works by Giorgio de Chirico, a task that recently implicated a conscientious reconsideration of specific negative judgements expressed by the Maestro himself for paintings such as *Le Revenant* and *Manichini guerrieri*. These works, among others, shall be examined more fully in the next issue of the Periodical.

Despite the substantial effort spent in stemming the phenomenon of forged de Chirico works, the appearance of both new forgeries as well as the reappearance of historic fakes on the art market remains relentless. The Foundation considers the publication of a recent sentence released by the Criminal Court of Milan to be a useful contribution in furthering awareness about the problem, a subject which was dealt with previously in issues n. 1/2 and n. 5/6. The sentence pertains to the final judgement by the Criminal Court of Milan regarding a case (which the defendants have taken to the Court of Appeal) in which the works were been determined as forgeries and confiscated.

The phenomenon involves paintings that have appeared in exhibitions (even important ones) and represents, according to the Foundation, only the tip of the iceberg of a recent trend of forgery of de Chirico's art, *specifically concerning early works*. Although a number of these forgeries have been identified, the judicial authorities have, as yet, been unable to execute confiscation, as for example a fake metaphysical painting entitled *Die Melanchonie der Abreise* dated 1913 that appeared in an important exhibition in Germany in 2001. When paintings, which have never been seen before suddenly appear on the market or in prestigious exhibitions, or indeed in elegant, voluminous publications (and the phenomenon, as those who work in the art market know all too well, does not affect just de Chirico), a large measure of prudence is advised. Therefore, the Foundation vigilantly continues to dedicate attention to this delicate problem in its endeavour of safeguarding the Maestro's art, as well as protecting the collector.

Above and beyond the material falsification of the artist's patrimony, there exists a trend – of equal or even greater harm – that regards the falsification of the historical and theoretical content of Giorgio de Chirico's intellectual and personal patrimony. Set within the confines of scholarly research specific to the Maestro's *œuvre*, this manipulation has taken form in recent studies and essays whereby the date of origin and place of execution of de Chirico's first Metaphysical paintings have been altered, an incident which has significantly polluted the knowledge surrounding Metaphysical Art, and which goes as far as questioning the sole authorship of Metaphysical Art to Giorgio de Chirico. The Foundation, which I represent, intends once and for all to clarify this problem, which indeed, was perfectly clear from the start. To this end, I have dedicated an essay which specifically deals with this matter in the present issue.