

BETRAYING DE CHIRICO: THE FALSIFICATION OF GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S LIFE HISTORY OVER THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS

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*Fighting against the evidence
is an inane as well as
embarrassing effort*

1. The Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910

a) *Introductory Statement*

In the preface of the exhibition catalogue *Giorgio de Chirico - Betraying the Muse*, published on occasion of the exhibition held at the Paolo Baldacci Gallery in New York in April-May 1994, Wieland Schmied described the relationship between Giorgio de Chirico and the Surrealists as "a tragic story" to be numbered amongst Art history's great twentieth century tragedies, pointing out how the "mis-interpretation" of de Chirico's art had proved "very productive" for the Surrealists. According to Schmied, the negative effect on de Chirico was very serious, since his "contemporaries learned to know de Chirico – at least outside Italy – through the eyes of the Surrealists".¹ In his presentation of Paolo Baldacci's essay, *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists*,² Schmied notes: "In his essay on the relationship between the Surrealists and de Chirico, Paolo Baldacci demonstrates that their way of

¹ W. Schmied, preface *Giorgio de Chirico, Betraying the Muse - De Chirico and the Surrealists*, Paolo Baldacci Gallery, New York, 21 April-28 May, 1994, exhibition catalogue, pp. I-III.

² P. Baldacci, *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists*, *ibid.*, English translation pp. 11-120, original Italian text pp. 214-240.

seeing and interpreting the painter's work was not the only possible one, and that other equally justified ways of looking at it may be assumed." For the reader, it is quite natural to understand this suggestion as a positive and constructive one: the idea of breaking the Surrealist shell in order to further research on the artist was, without doubt, seen as auspicious at the time.

Unfortunately however, after fifteen years of studies and essays by Baldacci containing serious errors regarding the interpretation of historical documents, reckless affirmations and his condemnation of Giorgio de Chirico, one realises, with indignation and sadness, that the plunder of Giorgio de Chirico's *œuvre* carried out by the Surrealists was "not the only possible one". Today's tragedy resides in the fact that *this generation* runs the risk of seeing de Chirico through Paolo Baldacci's erroneous and arbitrary renditions.

b) *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists*

The essay *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists* written by Baldacci on occasion of the exhibition that inaugurated his New York gallery, marks a period – thanks to the accuracy of the information presented – that can be called "The early Baldacci", thus defining a moment whereby Paolo Baldacci engaged in constructive studies that were pleasurable to read.

The essay in question illustrates, in a precise and thorough manner, the maniacal torment suffered by de Chirico at the hands of the Surrealists during the second half of the 1920s. In a tight chronological record of events, the author reveals the Surrealists' persistent manipulative attitude towards the artist: 1) material (ownership of as many paintings as possible); 2) theoretical (redefining who de Chirico was and changing the titles of his works; 3) moral (declaring the artist to be of unsound mind and even declaring him "dead and buried"). Baldacci explains how this mechanism of appropriation led to the production of the first forged de Chirico paintings³ – ranging from Max Ernst who executed a copy of *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, which must be considered a forgery due to the fact he produced a precise rendering of the signature⁴, to Paul Guillaume who also painted a number of compositions "à la Chirico", right up to Oscar Dominquez's commercial production of fakes⁵ –. The facts are clearly presented in a classical journalistic style and the author's judgement is well balanced. Although the issue requires further development, this essay will remain a fundamental contribution regarding this period and the problem of forgery of Giorgio de Chirico's *œuvre*.

It is important to note, however, that on occasion of this exhibition Baldacci planted the seeds of a serious mistake. Since then, unfortunately, a noteworthy decline in the quality of his studies dedicated to the artist has, in my opinion, taken place. This decline is undoubtedly due to this initial mistake, the offshoots of which have enclosed the author in a labyrinth of justifications in order to defend it.

³ Baldacci states in the opening paragraph: "Without question one of the century's greatest artists, de Chirico has been so profoundly misunderstood that at this very moment he is still represented by forgeries in several major museum collections. He is also the only artist that has been treated by the critics in such a reductive and misleading way." [The second affirmation, present in the original Italian essay, was omitted in the English translation. It has been purposely translated here. *Ed.*] *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also footnote 2 (for a list compiled by the author of museums with fake de Chirico paintings in their collections).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵ See P. Baldacci, *ibid.*, p. 92: "However what the Surrealist painter Oscar Dominquez carried out from 1939 to 1945 was outright falsification for commercial ends." See also footnote 44 that deals with the production of fakes in the Belgian Surrealist circle.

c) *Paolo Baldacci's Mistake*

As is widely known, Paolo Baldacci's mistake consists in changing the date and place of execution of the masterpiece of Metaphysical Art, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, declaring that the painting was painted in 1909 in Milan, instead of 1910 in Florence (as de Chirico has always maintained). Such initiative, possibly driven by a desire to be the first to proclaim the discovery of the Giorgio de Chirico – Fritz Gartz epistolary (which Wieland Schmied had recently informed him of), entailed a radical rewriting of the artist's biography as well as one of the most important artistic events of the twentieth century: the birth of Metaphysical Art, with this painting acting as its manifesto.⁶ The impulsive decision to formally date the painting "1909" in the aforementioned exhibition catalogue – a decision which seems to have been made when the catalogue was already going to press⁷ –, is the first trace of "Giorgio de Chirico's new life story", which Baldacci proceeded to develop. In addition to disputing the artist's account of events, as well as the entire historiography regarding de Chirico's artistic debut, it is important to point out that the rudiments of academic research – documentation, analysis, evaluation and verifiability – have been, in my opinion, systematically violated on the path that Baldacci has chosen to follow.

In addition to a number of grave inconsistencies resulting from Baldacci's tailoring and re-tailoring of the theory of the "birth of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909", what comes to light today is the author's ambitious effort to defend an idea that he has dedicated many years to, one that has been nourished through numerous forms of promotion: an idea upon which, at this point, his scholarly reputation depends.

The issue at hand deals not only with the macroscopic error in predating (without undertaking the necessary historical research) the event of the invention of Metaphysical Art by one year (even if the thought that Futurism and Metaphysical Art came into being at the same time could be appealing), but with the arbitrary considerations, deductions and moral condemnations Baldacci has made against de Chirico, in the form of appalling, unjustifiable and ill-founded accusations on the artist's behalf.

The most serious accusation that Baldacci has made (which is also the most absurd), is that de Chirico intentionally lied in his autobiographical writings (1912, 1929, 1945) and throughout his entire life (even in television interviews), with regard to the place and the year in which the invention of Metaphysical Art took place. De Chirico apparently implemented this "falsification" of his life story with the principal objective of appearing as "the sole inventor" of this new art form, to which

⁶ See P. Baldacci, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, information caption, *ibid.*, p. 122: "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, 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 [our italics, ed.] 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)." Baldacci, who had heard about the existence of the letter (which is part of a group of twelve letters) from Wieland Schmied, hastened to publish the news in the catalogue of the exhibition held in his gallery. Wieland Schmied and Gerd Roos' publication *Giorgio de Chirico, München 1906-1909* (in German) came out four months later in July 1994 (Akademie der Bildenden Künste, München, Band 5).

⁷ The decision to backdate the painting by one year in the catalogue *Betraying the Muse – De Chirico and the Surrealists*, cit., seems to have been hastily taken due to the fact that the new date appears only in the Italian section at the back of the catalogue where the painting is reported as dating "1909", whilst in the English information caption, which possibly escaped Baldacci's attention, the painting is correctly dated 1910. *Ibid.*, pp. 122 and 252. A *corrigendum* slip was later added to the catalogue to "correct" the painting's date in the English section.

end he would have systematically concealed the decisive influence his younger brother Andrea (Alberto Savinio) had in constructing the “theoretical foundations of the poetics of Metaphysical Art”, thus depriving Andrea of the credit he deserved and claiming the merit of the discovery for himself.⁸

Having established the motive behind that which Baldacci considers to be the “misrepresentation” of the truth in de Chirico’s autobiographical texts, his condemnation of the ignoble theft as published in his elaborate (and controversial) monograph of 1997 was: **“The Myth of Florence and the Denial of Savinio’s Influence”**.⁹ With this rewritten chapter of the artist’s life story, Baldacci has caused serious damage to Giorgio de Chirico and his *œuvre*, as well as elicited grave offense to his dignity.

In order to formulate such a serious accusation, with its ensuing consequences, it was obviously necessary to be in possession of a historical document upon which to base his accusation. What could be more suited for this purpose than a letter written by Giorgio de Chirico himself which, at first sight, appears to alter the year (and the place) of the birth of Metaphysical Art?

Baldacci’s revolutionary and misleading theory is, in fact, based on a single source, which the author calls the “prime document”¹⁰: a letter de Chirico wrote in Florence and sent to his friend Fritz Gartz (a classmate at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts), enthusiastically relating his artistic revelation and the execution of the first three/four metaphysical paintings. The letter in question is part of an epistolary of twelve letters in German, ten of which were written by de Chirico (1908-1911). The correspondence was discovered in the early 1990s by Gerd Roos, a young German scholar. Baldacci, who holds the date “26 January 1910” that appears on this letter (of which only a poor-quality photocopy image is available that is difficult to decipher), as correct and “unequivocal”, executed an immediate, automatic backdating of the painting *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* to 1909. In doing so, he seemed to have forgotten the first rule that a historian must respect (in order to avoid unpleasant surprises), is that of verifying the real date of a document. Furthermore, one must verify its correlation to other documents belonging to the same period, should they exist, as was the case here where such documentation formed part of the same epistolary.

It is essential to clarify, *beyond any reasonable doubt*, that the letter in question was, in fact, written in Florence by de Chirico at the end of 1910 (the artist was still living in Milan on 26 January), and the paintings referred to in the letter were actually executed during the course of 1910 whilst in Florence, where the artist had moved with his family in March. The epistolary sheds light on a number of circumstances regarding personal matters as well as the professional careers of de Chirico and his brother Andrea (Alberto Savinio). It also includes a letter by their mother Gemma (in French, 1908) and one by Savinio (in de Chirico’s handwriting, 1911). The last six letters of the correspondence date

⁸ See Baldacci: “Perhaps the most dramatic of all the deliberate obfuscations practiced by de Chirico is his nearly total negation of the role played by his younger brother in formulating the theoretical foundation of the poetics of Metaphysical Art. As we have seen, his minimising of the Milan period, during which the influence of Savinio was decisive, is a direct function of a desire to appear the sole inventor of the new aesthetic sensibility.” In *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919*, Bulfinch, New York 1997, p. 100.

⁹ See P. Baldacci, *ibid.*: “In this point in the narrative we are compelled to inquire as to the origin of the widespread belief that Metaphysical painting was born in Florence, and we will not be surprised to find that the precise point of origin is de Chirico himself who, by conscious choice, first created and then continued to fuel this myth, intentionally obscuring the intellectual debt to Savinio accrued during the Milan period.”

¹⁰ P. Baldacci, *Metafisica 1909 o 1910?* In the column *Dear Sir* in “Il Giornale dell’Arte”, February 2010.

between 28 December 1910 and 28 January 1911 and pertain to de Chirico's request to his friend Fritz Gartz (who was living in Munich at the time) to help with the organisation of Alberto's concert at Munich's Tonhalle on 23 January 1911. A second date, "24 July 1910", appears in Gemma de Chirico's handwriting on the letter in question ("26 January 1910"). Apart from the lack of an in-depth study regarding the letters' contents and the order in which they were written, this peculiar fact should have been fully examined before any conclusions were drawn. In reality, an analysis of this group of letters in its entirety is something that Baldacci has never undertaken, and indeed has been careful not to undertake. It seems, rather, that he has preferred to work in a selective manner, picking through the correspondence and selecting only those elements that are useful to his hurried conclusions.

When Baldacci published the "extraordinary news" in April 1994 that Metaphysical Art was invented in 1909 instead of 1910, he anticipated Wieland Schmied and Gerd Roos' studies that were published in July of that year.¹¹ Such action was taken before he had read the letter in question, or any of the other letters in the correspondence. As we shall see, proof of this circumstance is found in the fact that in the exhibition catalogue he wrote that de Chirico, at the end of 1909, painted the first metaphysical paintings "*after he had been in Florence for several months*".¹² When he finally read the entire epistolary,¹³ he made a second, inexcusable mistake. Once he became aware that de Chirico had, in fact, written to Gartz on 27 December 1909 from Milan – proving that the artist was living in Milan at that time – he had no choice but to correct what he had previously stated. At this point, instead of undertaking due research into the contextual reality of the correspondence as a whole, he continued to hold the date "26 January 1910" on the other letter as true and insist on his new "1909" dating of the painting. In order for this to make any sense, he then "moved" the place of execution of the painting *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* from Florence to Milan. For a scholar who had previously proved himself capable as a historian, this initiative bears witness to the incredible. In order to sustain the painting's new "1909" date, Baldacci, who initially may not have realised the implications of his action, was then forced to assign an earlier date – in a sort of chain reaction – to all other standing information on the artist's life, bringing it forward by one year (regarding historical events that no one had ever challenged). An extraordinary example of this initiative regards a painting entitled *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* that de Chirico executed in Milan which bears the Latin inscription and Roman numerals *Mediolano M.CM.X*, literally meaning: "painted in Milan in 1910", which Baldacci then arbitrarily pre-dated to the summer-autumn of 1909. Another all-important metaphysical painting, *The Enigma of the Oracle*, 1910, was also pre-dated to 1909.¹⁴ The same action was

¹¹ The scoop was repeated on the front page of the December issue of "Il Giornale dell'Arte": "News on the de Chirico front: Metaphysical Painting was invented in Milan in 1909 and not in 1910". P. Baldacci, book review of *Giorgio de Chirico, München 1906-1909*, by W. Schmied and G. Roos, "Il Giornale dell'Arte" December, 1994.

¹² See P. Baldacci: "De Chirico painted his first metaphysical works in Florence between October 1909 and July 1911" and "The letter, written by de Chirico after he had been in Florence for several months, describes the paintings completed during the preceding autumn." *Op. cit.*, 1994, pp. 13 and 122. The following year Baldacci corrected his statement: "Giorgio de Chirico paints his first metaphysical compositions, most probably in Milan: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle*." P. Baldacci, *Alberto Savinio, Musician, Writer and Painter*, exhibition catalogue, Paolo Baldacci Gallery, New York 1995, p. 16.

¹³ On 27 May 1994, Baldacci came into possession of Roos' manuscript containing the entire epistolary and his research (an event which I myself witnessed).

¹⁴ The paintings, *Portrait of the Artist's Brother* and *The Enigma of the Oracle*, were assigned an earlier date in a more gradual manner. In the 1995 catalogue, *Portrait* was dated 1909-1910 (*ibid.*, p. 16), whilst the 1997 monograph refers to the portrait as: "although dated 'Milan 1910' [the painting] was

applied to the vast majority of the “Böcklinesque” paintings executed in Milan in 1909, which were newly dated to 1908 and to the period when the artist was studying at the Munich Fine Arts Academy. Yet, the gravest consequence of the entire operation is indeed the downgrading suffered by Giorgio de Chirico himself, an artist who has been denied the power of speech regarding his own biography and the invention of Metaphysical Art.

On 27 May 1994, Gerd Roos gave Baldacci the voluminous typescript draft of his research that contained the complete epistolary.¹⁵ Baldacci used this correspondence (the contents of which is extraordinary), to fabricate a scoop with all the elements common to scandalous news stories: a previously unknown primary source of great interest (the letters); a famous person to sling mud at (de Chirico); and the noble act of reparation of a silent victim (Savinio). Instead of hitting the newsstand in “The Daily Mail” or “True Stories” – where the story would have received the attention it merited – it was published under the authoritative framework of diligent historical research in elegant volumes and exhibition catalogues. Over the years, the extensive bibliography of essays produced hammers home a clear and constant message: Giorgio de Chirico is not credible and his art is not solely his.

d) *The Ongoing Mistake and Scholarly Reaction*

Considering that the parties who are directly involved in this matter – Giorgio de Chirico (who died over thirty years ago) and Alberto Savinio (who passed away in 1952) cannot have their say, nor can their mother Gemma (who died in 1937) and who had certainly witnessed the events –, the Foundation feels obliged, once again, to speak up in the Maestro's defence. The intention is that of bringing an end to the false historical reconstruction implemented by Paolo Baldacci, and by Gerd Roos, who, after showing caution in drawing conclusions in his first analysis of the epistolary¹⁶, went on to join Baldacci in his fictitious and labyrinth-like reconstruction of de Chirico's biography. A series of essays, conferences, exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles have been produced by the two scholars over the years to this end, the sole focus of which has been the untenable theory of “Metaphysical Art originating in Milan in 1909”, supported by a variety of ramified and convoluted deductions. In the end, the real risk is that their “historical reconstruction” be accepted as correct. In his essay published in the catalogue of an exhibition held in Winterthur in 2008, *Giorgio de Chirico-Werke 1909-1971 in Schweizer Sammlungen*, Baldacci stated, with presumption and evident self-satisfaction, that (his) theory of Metaphysical Art originating in Milan in 1909 had been accepted by the majority of scholars.¹⁷ One of the reasons that has permitted this theory to stand, regardless of its inaccuracy, for

undoubtedly executed between the summer and autumn of 1909” (original Italian publication, *De Chirico 1888-1919 - La Metafisica*, Electa, Milan 1997, p. 64). [In the English translation, which also came out in 1997, the passage is different]: “In the summer of 1909, de Chirico painted his great *Ritratto del fratello* (Portrait of the Artist's Brother)...” (*op. cit.*, p. 64). For that which concerns *The Enigma of the Oracle*, in the 1994 exhibition catalogue it was dated 1909-1910 (*op. cit.*, fig. 116, p. 119), the following year its date appears as 1909 (*op. cit.*, 1995, p. 16).

¹⁵ Baldacci published excerpts from the letters in his 1997 monograph, two years before Roos' book came out in 1999, the draft of which served as the basis for Baldacci's volume.

¹⁶ See G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico, München 1906-1909*, cit. In this essay, Roos poses serious questions in an attempt to integrate the new information contained in the letters with the artist's established historiography, questions that would later be put to one side in favour of Baldacci's superficial formula.

¹⁷ See P. Baldacci, *Zum Gemälde L'énigme d'un après-midi d'automne*, in *Giorgio de Chirico - Werke 1909-1971 in Schweizer Sammlungen*, exhibition catalogue edited by G. Roos and D. Schwarz, Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 2008, ed. Richter Verlag, Düsseldorf 2008, p. 23.

such a long time is due to the fact that in the fifteen years of its promotion Baldacci did not publish translations of the letters in Italian or English, making it impossible for scholars to verify the validity of this “new account” concerning de Chirico’s history and the serious accusations aimed at the inventor of Metaphysical Art.¹⁸

The renowned dechirican scholar Maurizio Calvesi and the Foundation itself have both firmly challenged the manipulation implemented by Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos with regard to the Maestro’s biography.¹⁹ In last issue of “Metafisica” (2008), I carried out an in-depth and logical analysis of Giorgio de Chirico’s letters to Fritz Gartz (1908-1911) which lay at the heart of the controversy, in order to confirm a simple truth: Giorgio de Chirico’s discovery of Metaphysical Art took place in Florence in 1910.²⁰ The entire epistolary was published for the first time in the addendum to the article in order to allow scholars to freely consult the letters, and thus enable them to form and autonomously express their own judgement. This material includes: reproductions of the original manuscripts, transcriptions of the letters in the original German and translations in both Italian and English.²¹ A reading of this correspondence is recommended to those interested in becoming familiar with the thoughts of de Chirico who, twenty-two years old at the time, enthusiastically informed his friend in Munich of his studies and of the extraordinary discoveries he had recently made in Florence. With youthful surety and presumption, the young artist goes as far as declaring that he was the only man who had understood Nietzsche and that Michelangelo was “the stupidest of all artists”.

Baldacci expressed his reaction to this initial article in a rather uncontrolled manner, accusing both Maurizio Calvesi and myself of “false ideology”. His response was conveyed both directly, as well as through an article that he signed with Gerd Roos’ name (!).²² In reference to my analysis, Baldacci wrote: “Now, we do not understand (or maybe we understand all too well) why it is necessary to waste so much energy misinterpreting and imposing incorrect readings of documents”. In order to remedy the situation, he then announced that a conference would be held in October 2010 in Milan: “In any case, since the date of Metaphysical Art seems to have become a national issue, we are organising a scientific conference in which everyone will be able to sustain their own point of view with facts and documents in front of a public comprising of real scholars, instead of the unsuspecting, obliging public of official inaugurations”. Controversy apart, at the conference, as we shall see, it was the documents themselves that had their say – and without need for further comment –,

¹⁸ The letters were published in German without Italian translation in Roos’ monograph *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti Monaco-Milano-Firenze 1906-1911*, ed. Bora, Bologna 1999, pp. 422-430. It is important to note that although Roos’ book was listed in Baldacci’s monograph as having been published in 1997, it was not actually published until 1999. Consequently, the correspondence was not available for consultation even by German-speaking scholars, should they have wanted to verify the accuracy of Baldacci’s affirmations. This circumstance continued even after 1999 as Roos’ book enjoyed a limited amount of distribution.

¹⁹ See M. Calvesi, *De Chirico dall’Arno alla Senna* in “Ars” April 1999, pp. 44-63.

²⁰ P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910*, in “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico” n. 7/8, Le Lettere, Florence, Pictor O, Rome 2008, pp. 56-92.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 521-567. Transcriptions of the letters in German and translations in Italian and English are available for complimentary download from the Foundation’s website: www.fondazionedechirico.org.

²² P. Baldacci, *Metafisica 1909 o 1910?*, cit. and P. Baldacci, signed “Gerd Roos”, *La nascita e i primi passi dell’arte metafisica a Milano e Firenze tra il 1908 e il 1911*, in *De Chirico – Max Ernst – Magritte – Balthus. Uno sguardo sull’invisibile*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, exhibition catalogue Mandragora, Florence 2010, pp. 28-43 (see Notice, *ibid.*, p. 42; published here, see footnote 32); and “*La nostra poesia metafisica: Genesi, cronologia e fonti di una estetica globale*”, in the Published Acts of the conference *Origini e sviluppi dell’arte metafisica – Milan e Firenze 1909-1911 e 1919-1921*, Scalpendi Editore, Milan 2011, pp. 25-53.

resulting in a definitive end to the theory of “the origin of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909”, a theory that was fabricated by Baldacci’s own misinterpretation and incorrect reading of documents, issued to the public over the last fifteen years.

With this current article, I intend to take stock of the erroneous tale trumped-up to the detriment of Giorgio de Chirico and re-establish his true life story (which is none other than that told by the artist himself in a simple manner). The problem does not only concern the harm done to Giorgio de Chirico’s reputation, but also the wider context of historical research and the interpretation of documents. In my opinion, such principles have been violated in practically every proposition that has been made. The “new story” of de Chirico’s life, written and asserted over the years, has damaged the reader, student, exhibition visitor and cultural apparatus in general, including various scholars, cultural attachés and museum directors – in all probability serious professionals –, who have been involved in cultural events promoted by Baldacci. It is also true that a measure of responsibility must be attributed to those who have indiscriminately accepted Baldacci’s “revolutionary” theory (an indiscretion partially justified by the fact that the de Chirico-Gartz letters were not available for consultation), and who have embraced Baldacci’s self-qualification as being the greatest expert on Giorgio de Chirico, instead of recognising, regardless of the unavailability of the documents, the numerous inconsistencies that such a theory presented. The acrimony shown by Baldacci towards de Chirico also constituted a clear sign of a lack of objectivity on his part, since the work of a historian involves reporting facts and their correct contextualisation, and does not allow the assignment of moral judgements, especially ignominious ones.

In order to facilitate an understanding of the issue, the principal factors that emerged from my study of 2008 will be briefly summarised here. The contextual analysis regarding the correlation of the twelve letters has qualified the letter in question, even if apparently marked “26 January 1910”, to be dated, beyond any shadow of doubt, as December 1910. This letter is the most important and significant in the entire epistolary as it is the letter in which the artist announces the birth of Metaphysical Art.

e) *Brief Analysis of the Letter announcing the Birth of Metaphysical Art*

1) The original place and date “Florence 24 July 1910” is written at the top of the letter in de Chirico’s mother’s handwriting (fig. 1). The month has been cancelled out and a new date (day and month) was added by de Chirico, whilst the year remains untouched.²³ As mentioned above, the name of the month is difficult to read. I personally interpreted the name of the month as “Januarii” (in Latin), whilst Baldacci read it as “Januar” (in German). Whatever the case may be, it is absolutely irrelevant since the letter could logically only have been *written after* 24 July 1910. More specifically, it is indeed

²³ See P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910*, cit., p. 76: “Gemma de Chirico, who had already been in Florence for some time, took pen in hand on 24 July 1910 and began to write a letter to an unidentifiable French-speaking person [...] on letterhead paper bearing the family’s coat of arms. For unknown reasons she abandoned her writing and saved the sheet of paper, with only the date marked on it [...]. When Giorgio de Chirico sat down to write to Gartz he took the sheet of paper his mother had started to use, and this could only have occurred after 24 July 1910”.

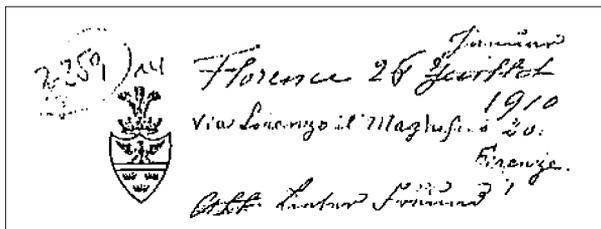


fig. 1 Detail of letter by Giorgio de Chirico to Fritz Gartz, 26 December 1910, on letterhead paper bearing the de Chirico family coat of arms:

"Florence 26 [24 Juillet cancelled]
Januarii [or Januar] 1910
via Lorenzo il Magnifico 20 Firenze
Lieber Freund! [Dear Friend!]"

the content of the letter and its correlation with the other letters in the epistolary that place it in the month of December 1910, and precisely on the "26th", the day of the month written in de Chirico's hand. In this letter, in fact, the artist announces paintings executed in the summer-autumn of 1910.

2) In the letter, de Chirico explicitly refers to paintings executed in 1910. He speaks of the size of the works he has just painted specifying that they are small and that the biggest one (or ones) measures (measure) "50-70 cm".²⁴ This specification was made in order to convey a new concept of size and profundity to his friend: "as I understand it, and as Nietzsche intended it", in which profundity does not depend on the size of the painting but on a different kind of quality. He describes the uniqueness of these works, the fruit of his new understanding, by the fact that even though they are small "each one of them is an enigma, each contains a poem, an atmosphere [*Stimmung*] and a promise that you cannot find in other paintings".

In order to reinforce the concept of the reduced size of his new paintings (also compared to his previous Böcklinesque period in which he worked on a decisively larger scale), de Chirico makes a comparison regarding size within this group of paintings: seeing that the biggest among them is no bigger than 50 x 70 cm, they could all therefore be considered as small. His specification of the smallest of these leads us to *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* (45 x 60 cm) and *The Enigma of the Oracle* (42 x 61 cm), both painted in Florence in 1910. The indication regarding the largest painting (or paintings) necessarily points to one or two specific works: *The Enigma of the Hour* (54.5 x 70.5 cm) painted in Florence in 1910 and *Self-portrait* in a Nietzschean pose (70.5 x 54), which was also painted in Florence in 1910 (and later dated 1911).

Throughout the entire historiography of Giorgio de Chirico's *œuvre*, there is no doubt over the date and place of execution of the latter two paintings. The measurements "50-70 cm" therefore constitute precise and unailing proof that the letter refers to paintings executed in 1910 in Florence.²⁵

²⁴ Due to a grammatical error in German it is not clear if de Chirico is referring to one or more paintings. In my essay, I preferred to use the more prudent hypothesis in translating the passage "the biggest [is]" and provided the grammatical analysis of the sentence in a footnote: "Both de Chirico's handwriting and the photocopy quality of the letter, make it difficult to read the artist's affirmation regarding the size of his paintings: 'My paintings are small (the biggest [is] 50-70 cm)' could also be read as 'My paintings are small (the biggest [are] 50-70 cm)'. In German: 'Meine gemälde sind klein (die grosste 50-70 cm)'; or 'Meine gemälde sind klein (die grossten 50-70 cm)'. In the first case, the article is feminine singular and thus it would be a mistake by de Chirico as the word *gemälde* in German is neutral (while the word 'painting' in Italian *pittura*, is feminine). De Chirico's written German was good, but he did make mistakes such as this one. The other possibility concerns as to whether the last letter of the adjective *groessten* is a 'n', in which case the sentence would be grammatically correct, although to the detriment to the affirmation's logic'. *Ibid.*, p. 90 (footnote 34).

²⁵ Confronted with the irrefutable evidence that the measurements 50 x 70 refer to works de Chirico painted in 1910 in Florence (*The Enigma of the Hour* and the *Self-portrait* in Nietzschean pose), Baldacci seems to prefer to remain silent, shifting the reader's focus instead to the issue of grammar. In his full Italian translation of the letter (finally published in 2010), he translated the passage in question as: "the biggest paintings" affirming, as such, that the artist meant more than one painting, which must necessarily be inferred as: *The Enigma of the Hour* and the *Self-portrait* in Nietzschean pose.

Therefore, the letter in question could only have been written at *the end* of 1910. In particular, the *Self-portrait* evokes de Chirico's intensive understanding of Nietzsche mentioned in the letter: "I am the only man who has understood Nietzsche – all of my paintings demonstrate this", inasmuch as de Chirico represents himself, in an almost ideal symbiosis, in the same pose as Nietzsche's famous photograph.

3) De Chirico wishes Gartz a Happy New Year at the beginning of the letter and once again at the end. This circumstance further strengthens the dating of the letter to December 1910, instead of the hypothetical date "26 January 1910", for two main reasons: a) it is not customary to offer New Year greetings at the end of January; b) seeing that de Chirico had already offered Season's greetings to the Gartz family in December 1909 by sending them a panettone from Milan's Cova pastry shop, it was not necessary to do so again at the end of January.²⁶ The greetings in the letter obviously refer to New Year 1911. Even today it is customary to offer New Year's greetings before the end of the outgoing year.

4) Immediately after having written this letter (26 December 1910), a fervent exchange of comments took place between de Chirico and Gartz caused by a provocative statement de Chirico had made in it. Having described his new paintings as "profound", he then went on to illustrate his affirmation with a comparison to Michelangelo: "When I told you my paintings are profound, you must have thought they were gigantic compositions, with many naked figures, trying to overcome something, like those painted by Michelangelo, the stupidest of all painters." In response to Gartz's perplexed reaction, de Chirico found himself having to explain what he had meant: "You misunderstood my words when I said that Michelangelo was a stupid artist. – I find him so because I now know a new world and everything else seems too coarse and too insignificant. As I have drunk from another source and a new and marvellous thirst burns my lips – how can I still believe in such artists?!" This response was written on 5 January 1911. It is impossible to think that de Chirico's provocative statement was written in a letter *eleven months earlier* ("26 January 1910"). If this was the case, then we would have two illogical circumstances: a) either Gartz had waited almost an entire year to ask de Chirico for an explanation²⁷; b) or contrarily, Gartz had reacted at the time, but de Chirico had

One can only imagine that he chose this interpretation – absolutely counterproductive to his thesis –, in order to contrast against my more prudent interpretation of just one "biggest painting". In any case, whether we are dealing with one or more paintings, the essence remains the same: de Chirico is explicitly speaking about a work (or works) painted in Florence in 1910. Baldacci's comment is as follows: "De Chirico's German is not completely precise. In fact, he writes 'die grösste 50-70 cm', but in order to say 'the biggest [paintings]' he should have added an 'n' at the end of the word (that we have added in our text: 'die grössten'). One could imagine he wanted to say 'the biggest [painting]', forgetting that *Gemälde* is neutral (das *Gemälde*), but we feel this error was impossible for a painter who had studied for two years in German at the Munich Academy. Therefore, Picozza's line of reasoning (2007-2008, *cit.*, pp. 37-38) regarding the identification of the 'biggest painting' as *The Enigma of the Hour* is unfounded." Even if Baldacci states that "De Chirico's German is not completely precise", he maintains that such a mistake was "impossible". The comment, published in the addendum of an article signed "Gerd Roos" but entirely written by Baldacci, as he himself declared (*op. cit.*, p. 47), actually confirms the reference to two larger paintings within the group of paintings executed in Florence during the autumn of 1910. Additionally, Baldacci (who speaks German well), must have realised that the measurements of the paintings indicated by de Chirico posed a problem that was difficult to resolve. He freely translated the passage in his 1997 monograph (*op. cit.*, 52), changing its meaning to "The paintings are small (from 50 to 70 cm), but each one is an enigma, each one..." With respect to de Chirico, who provided the correct height/width relationship of a two-dimensional object – in this case a painting –, Baldacci substituted the specification in brackets "the biggest, 50-70 cm" with "from 50 to 70 cm", which has no meaning, neither from a geometric point of view, nor with respect to the logic of de Chirico's affirmation in which he referred to the measurement 50 x 70 cm in order to emphasise that *all* his new paintings were small.

²⁶ See G. de Chirico, letter to Gartz, 27 December 1909: "The day before yesterday I sent your honoured and kind wife a Milanese specialty from the Cova pastry shop. I hope you received it and that you liked it." Picozza *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 69 and 88 (footnote 22).

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 78: "It would be indeed quite strange, if one were to think the date of the letter was written on 26 January 1910 (as Baldacci and Roos

then allowed a year to pass before clarifying the issue with his friend. Their exchange has the air of a passionate and intense theoretical dialogue between two young artists. Therefore, no doubt remains that de Chirico's first letter, Gartz's enquiring response and de Chirico's second letter, were all exchanged by rapid return of post (and thus at the end of 1910).

A simple reading of the contents of these letters clearly reveals their logical and sequential order, thus demonstrating that the letter in question could not have been written in January 1910, but was indeed written in December of that year. The only remaining doubt regards the word that looks like the name of the month "January" in Latin, as mentioned above.²⁸ Other than a natural curiosity to understand why, it is an absolutely non-influential factor regarding the analysis of the epistolary.

The letter of 26 December 1910 is reproduced in full here, together with the principal passages from the letter of 5 January 1911.

f) *The Documents conserved at the Braidense Library, Milan*

Even though I am convinced that my previous study (2008) has fully proven the incorrectness of the theory created *in primis* by Baldacci, I feel it advantageous to present some substantial evidence that has recently come to light, thus putting **a definite end to this theory**. As mentioned previously, Baldacci and Roos' theory is exclusively based on the fact that de Chirico would have written and sent a letter from Florence on 26 January 1910. This circumstance is impossible, for the simple and irrefutable fact that in January 1910 de Chirico was living in Milan. Recent research conducted by Paola Italia²⁹, presented at the conference organised by Baldacci in Milan in the autumn of 2010³⁰, includes an undeniable technical detail that finally brings this long epic to a close.

Through her research into the loan records of Milan's Braidense Library, Paola Italia has documented the de Chirico family's presence in Milan on 24 January 1910. On this day, in fact, the brothers took out a number of books from the library, which they (Giorgio or Alberto) returned on 15 February 1910.³¹

have proposed), since, Gartz, who would have still have been in a state of shock and upset due to the tragic death of his younger brother, would have found nothing better to do than raise a question regarding the theoretical content of a letter, which would have been written and received by Gartz eleven months earlier, at the beginning of 1910." [Fritz's younger brother Kurt Gartz died tragically on 23 December 1910 in Berlin. *Ed.*] See also N. Velissiotis, *La nascita della metafisica nell'arte di Giorgio de Chirico*, Ed. Centro Ellenico di Cultura, Milan, pp. 31-36.

²⁸ Whether the name of the month is written as "Januar" (in German) or "Januarii" (in Latin - genitive case), I am personally prone to believing that de Chirico used the word with symbolic meaning. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72: "[...] the month dedicated to Janus, the two-faced god (*ianua*: door), symbolically indicates the passage between one year coming to an end and a new year about to begin. It is for this reason that de Chirico offers New Years greetings, as even today it is customary to send New Years greetings before the new year actually begins." Another, possibly more banal hypothesis, is that de Chirico may have simply made an error and written January instead of December. What is important here is that the correlation of the letter with the other letters in the epistolary shows that it could not have been written in Florence in January 1910 for the simple reason, as we shall now see, that the de Chirico family was still living in Milan at the time.

²⁹ See P. Italia, *"Leggevamo e studiavamo molto": Alberto e Giorgio de Chirico alla Braidense (1907-1910)*, Published Acts of the conference, *Origine e sviluppi dell'arte metafisica...*, cit. pp. 11-23.

³⁰ *Origini e sviluppi dell'arte metafisica - Milano e Firenze 1909-1911 e 1919-1921*, Study conference, 28-29 October 2010, Palazzo Greppi, Milan.

³¹ Regarding the library books borrowed on 24 January 1910 and returned to the library on 15 February, Baldacci wrote: "This does not mean that the de Chirico's stayed on in Milan until mid-February or longer, but only that they had planned to take the books with them to Florence and return them later. It would, in fact, be illogical to think that on 24 January 1910, when Alberto [...] took the two books on Maeterlink out, he did not know that the next day he would have been leaving for Florence and he would not have had time to read them." *Op. cit.*, p. 32. Staunch and steadfast in his dogmatic hold on the date, Baldacci transforms every fact or circumstance to fit into his established theory.

Letter by Giorgio de Chirico on letterhead paper bearing the de Chirico family's coat of arms
[26 December 1910]

Florence 26 [24 Juillet cancelled] Januarii [or Januar] 1910

Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 20 Florence

Dear friend!

Firstly, I want to wish you and your kind wife a Happy New Year. I have not been able to write until now due to my many engagements and also my health, which has unfortunately not been very good this last year. Please be patient, as I will now tell you a bit about myself. What I have created here in Italy is neither very big nor profound (in the old sense of the word), but formidable. This summer I painted paintings that are the most profound that exist in the absolute. Let me explain these things somewhat, because surely you have never heard anything like it. Do you know for example what the name of the most profound painter who ever painted on earth is? You probably do not have an opinion on this. I will tell you: his name is Arnhold Böcklin, he is the only man who has painted profound paintings.

Now, do you know who the most profound poet is? You will probably say right away Dante, or Goethe or yet others. - This is totally misunderstood - the most profound poet is Friedrich Nietzsche. - When I told you my paintings are profound, you must have thought they were gigantic compositions, with many naked figures, trying to overcome something, like those painted by Michelangelo, the stupidest of all artists.

No, my dear friend, it is completely another matter - profoundness as I understand it, and as Nietzsche intended it, is elsewhere than where it has been searched for until now. My paintings are small (the biggest 50-70 cm), but each of them is an enigma, each contains a poem, an atmosphere [*Stimmung*] and a promise that you cannot find in other paintings.

It brings me immense joy to have painted them - when I exhibit them, possibly in Munich this spring, it will be a revelation for the whole world. I am studying a lot, particularly literature and philosophy and I even intend to write books in the future (now I will whisper something in your ear: I am the only man who has understood Nietzsche - all of my paintings demonstrate this).

I have many other things to tell you, for example that now, my brother and I have composed the most profound music. I will sign off now, as I have already said too much. You will see and hear for yourself and will be convinced. Won't you take a trip to Rome this spring to see the exhibition? Even here in Florence an exhibition will open in April. If you come to Florence, we will be very happy to host you and your kind wife - the room is already ready.

I would be very happy if you wrote me a letter. [? illegible-cancelled] Give your wife my regards. [? cancelled] My mother and brother say hello and wish you a Happy New Year.

G. de Chirico

Letter by Giorgio de Chirico [undated; datable to 5 January 1911]

Florence

Dear friend!

The news of your brother's death hurt me very much [...].

You misunderstood my words when I said that Michelangelo was a stupid artist. - I find him so because I now know a new world and everything else seems too coarse and too insignificant. As I have drunk from another source and a new and marvellous thirst burns my lips - how can I still believe in such artists?! I know what you are thinking when you ask me: 'isn't David a superman?' This is how I used to feel, this is what I used to think. The majority of the world's great spirits thought it so. - The young hero who has overcome everything, a free spirit, without dogma - certainly this is better than all the stupidity of modern life and of life in the past - but now a new air has entered my soul, a new song has reached my ears and the whole world appears totally changed - the autumn afternoon has arrived, the long shadows, the clear air, the serene sky -, in a word: Zarathustra has arrived, do you understand?? Do you understand the enigma this word holds - the great creator has arrived, he who speaks of eternal return, he whose song has the sound of eternity. - It is with a new magnifying glass that I now examine the other great men and many appear small and coarse, some even smell bad - Michelangelo is too coarse - I have thought about these issues at length and can no longer be mistaken. - It is only with Nietzsche that I can say I have begun a real life. -

Believe me, my dear friend, when I say it would be a great pleasure for us if you and your kind wife would come to visit us in the spring. - We have enough room in this house and it would be a great pleasure for my mother to have such pleasant company. - If you like, we could go to Rome and visit the exhibition, as my mother would also like to see it. Give my regards to your very kind wife and take care.

G. de Chirico Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 20 / Florence

If there was still a need for documentation constituting absolute proof – in order to re-establish Giorgio de Chirico's right to his own biography and to the truth of the origin of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910 –, the documents conserved at the Braidense Library, serve just that purpose.

The matter should therefore be considered by all as definitively settled and thus closed. However, a few diehards will surely persist regardless of the evidence, unconcerned about appearing ridiculous with the ludicrous arguments formulated in defence of their theory according to the necessity of the moment.

Whilst Gerd Roos has remained in an absolute and meaningful silence with regard to Paola Italia's discovery³², Baldacci (who organised the conference to see his theory reinstated after my confutation), has gone beyond himself this time. Rather than recognise the simple truth, which would, however, invalidate his theory, he has chosen to elaborate a new, incredible addition to the story. Baldacci has now gone to the point of sustaining that, even if the de Chirico family was in Milan on 24 January 1910, this does not mean that they could not have moved the next day, 25 January, to Florence where – in the space of one day – they managed to settle into an available and ready rental apartment, unpack their luggage, with sufficient time left over for Giorgio to unroll his paintings and reflect upon the great revelation of Metaphysical Art and write a letter to communicate his discovery to his friend Fritz Gartz on 26 January.³³

Considering the date entered in the Braidense library loan register (24 January), this entire movement would have had to have taken place in less than forty-eight hours.³⁴ No worries about return-

³² If Gerd Roos' important discovery of the de Chirico-Gartz correspondence initiated Baldacci's elaboration, Paola Italia's discovery is no less important, inasmuch as it put an end to the distortion of truth formulated by Baldacci. It is indeed very strange that Gerd Roos made no comment about the discovery of the Braidense library document. The fact that he did not publish an article in the Published Acts of the conference (...for that matter, neither did Baldacci in Gerd Roos' name), is also worthy of attention. Further concern is provoked by Baldacci's article *La nascita e i primi passi dell'arte metafisica a Milano e a Firenze tra il 1908 e il 1911*, written in response to my essay, and that he signed "Gerd Roos". This article was published in the exhibition catalogue *De Chirico - Max Ernst - Magritte - Balthus. Uno sguardo sull'invisibile*, cit., with the following note (*ibid.*, p. 42): "This essay was conceived by Gerd Roos regarding a subject regarding which we have always shared our point of view. For reasons beyond his control, Roos was unable to complete the article in the precise way that he had intended. Having worked side by side for years, and having discussed all details with him, I used his notes to write the Italian text, an undertaking during which we were in continuous contact and the results of which were read, corrected and approved by him. Paolo Baldacci. "First of all, why did Baldacci not sign the article he had written with his own name, seeing that it was he who formulated the theory of "Metaphysical Art being discovered in Milan in 1909" at least in its initial phase? And why was it important to him to specify that Roos had read and approved it? Could it be that Baldacci wanted to be assured of Roos' support in underpinning a theory that no longer stands up? It must be noted that in his first essay (1994), Roos was very far from Baldacci's position, even if he would go on and adopt the same position in time. Most probably, Roos recognised the mistake that the theory was based upon, an error that has totally invalidated their successive elaborations. At this point, it is his duty to take a personal position on what I have written and on the documentary evidence discovered by Paola Italia, especially since he stated in the abovementioned essay: "This is not the place in which to refute, point for point, the desperate and confused protests (sic!) that have come up against the chronological, logical and historical reconstructions put forth by Baldacci and myself", announcing that "a detailed discussion of the chronological issue [...] signed by both Baldacci and myself, has been entrusted to an international art magazine in order to bring awareness to the academic community of the serious phenomenon of degeneration that has been carried out on behalf of an institution that bears the artist's name in the attempt to dictate a false reading of documents that are extremely clear". He also announced a book dealing with the issue of "the chronological order of the letters to Gartz". That is not all! The reason that drove Baldacci to constitute the Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica in 2009, as one can read on their website, regards the "defence of accurate information", or rather, the defence of "the fundamental principle lying at the heart of academic activity that requires the absolute respect of documental evidence". In other words, it seems that the Archive was founded... in order to defend Paolo Baldacci's colossal error with regard to *documental evidence* that he has not been able to understand and which he has stubbornly insisted upon for over fifteen years.

³³ In the letter, de Chirico makes no mention about a "recent arrival" in Florence (which, according to Baldacci, occurred the day before).

³⁴ De Chirico told Gartz about his intention to move to Florence in a letter dated 27 December 1909: "I took a trip to Florence and Rome in October and in the spring I will probably go to Florence to live as it is the city I liked the most." It is important to note the time period specified is "the spring" as well as the use of the term "probably", from which it can be deduced that the idea of moving the family to Florence was still in the planning phase, and in any event, a sufficient quantity of time was being allotted to the project's realisation. Baldacci, instead, maintains that the typically "spur-of-the-moment" move was actually planned: "Even though it may seem strange, the relocations undertaken by the de Chirico's are always spur-of-the-moment, and there is no reason to hypothesise the taking of hasty and unplanned decisions (sic!). The domicile in via Lorenzo il Magnifico was *without a doubt* [our italics, ed.] found during the trip to Florence in October 1909, and then confirmed by a letter [regular or registered post? Ed.] in order to allow for

ing to the library the books borrowed and consequentially taken to Florence. Baldacci has an explanation ready: the books were sent by post or returned to the library by another painter on 15 February of 1920 (sic!).³⁵

One thing is for certain: had de Chirico kept to objective reality, he would never have crossed the threshold of Metaphysical Art. However, as mere scholars of his work, we ourselves can hardly operate without a certain degree of objective reality. With his theories, Baldacci shows instead a definite taste for Surrealist-style absurdity and nonsense; light-years away, however, from the pure and illuminated non-sense of Giorgio de Chirico's vision.³⁶

g) *The Revelation of the Painting* The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon

If Giorgio de Chirico is the only person who can truly bear witness to the extraordinary act of awareness that gave rise to Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910, today, thanks to Paola Italia's discovery, we can all bear witness to the *reinstatement* of the historical truth of the origin of Metaphysical Art, an event that did actually occur in Milan: on an autumn afternoon in 2010, after "a long and painful illness" that has lasted over fifteen years.

Those who are familiar with de Chirico's biography will grasp the ironic meaning held in these words, which derive, in fact, from his written account of the circumstance that brought about the discovery of Metaphysical Art:

I will explain how I had the revelation of a painting which I exhibited this year at the Salon d'Automne entitled: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*.

On a clear autumn afternoon, I was sitting on a bench in the middle of Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. Indeed, it was not the first time I had seen this square. I had just recovered from a long and painful intestinal illness and found myself in a morbid state of sensitivity. All of Nature surrounding me, even

an extremely quick move on 25-26 January." See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 31 (footnote 15). Besides the absurd affirmation that the relocation to Florence was both "spur-of-the-moment" and "planned" the family indeed had an uncle and aunt living in the city, upon whom they could count on for assistance. As Savinio later recalled, they went directly to Uncle Gustav and Aunt Aglae's home upon arriving in Florence. (See Roos *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 354). Furthermore, de Chirico would not have used the term "probably" when he wrote to Gartz in December, if he had already searched for, found and confirmed the rental of an apartment in Florence. It is evident that Baldacci's reasoning once again functions for *his own* need to have de Chirico be in Florence in time to write the letter to Gartz on "26 January".

³⁵ Even if Baldacci thinks it is "more likely" that the books were returned to the library by post, he offers another brilliant solution to the problem, resulting from further research: "An enquiry in this regard, undertaken by Nicol Mocchi, has shown that other residents in via Petrarca frequented the library in the same period. Among these, Edoardo Ximenes, a well-known painter and illustrator, who lived in the same apartment building as the de Chirico family at n. 15 (the building has two entrances), is recorded as having visited the library precisely on 15 February 1920 (sic!). According to Baldacci, the two brothers must have been acquainted with Ximenes seeing that they lived in the same building and went to the library in the same period. Therefore, if someone returned the books for them, it was most likely done so by Ximenes." *Ibid.*, p. 32 (footnote 16). One must ask oneself if Baldacci is suggesting that Ximenes went to Florence to pick up the books in order to return them to the library? And is it indeed possible that the books were returned to the library ten years later? (I actually hold that the date "1920" is an obvious *error calami*, but if I were to subscribe the same punctilious importance this author affords to records of this kind, and thus immune from human error, I would have to take the year written as correct.)

³⁶ When new documentation comes to light, Baldacci alters previous affirmations in order to integrate new information into his established theory, instead of re-examining the theory under the light of new facts. Faced with the Braidense library loan records testifying the family's presence in Milan on 24 January 1910, it was necessary to simplify their relocation to Florence, as now, this would have had to have taken place in the space of forty-eight hours. To this effect, he writes: "I believe that the tradition I spoke of in 1997 (Baldacci 1997, *cit.*, p. 23 and 32 footnote 60) with regard to the mother's custom of travelling with furniture and household fittings must be drastically reduced." Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 31 (footnote 15). From the documentation discovered by Paola Italia, it seems that instead of furniture and household fittings, the family took library books with them on their moves, an action which would be considered strange even by today's standards. Italia justifies this in her essay by adding the following in brackets: "it was possible that the books were returned by post or personal intermediary, seeing that Alberto was in Florence on 26 January". See P. Italia, *op. cit.*, p. 21. Once again, an explanation aimed at protecting the dogma of the date from any shadow of doubt.

the marble of the buildings and the fountains, seemed to me to be convalescing also. In the centre of the square stands a statue of Dante cloaked in a long robe, hugging his œuvre to his body, thoughtfully bowing his pensive laurel-crowned head slightly toward the ground. The statue is of white marble, to which time has given a grey tinge that is very pleasing to the eye. The autumn sun, lukewarm and without love, lit the statue as well as the facade of the temple. I then had the strange impression that I was seeing everything for the first time. And the composition of my painting came to me and every time I look at it, I relive this moment once again. Still, the moment is for me an enigma, because it is inexplicable. And I like to define the resulting work as an enigma.³⁷

De Chirico's account of his artistic illumination constitutes a very rare case in the history of Art. The event was recorded in writing two years later in 1912 on occasion of the Salon d'Automne where the painting was exhibited.³⁸ In the brief passage, the artist conveys the sensation of the strange symbiosis between the visible world and his psychophysical state of acute sensitivity. This is done with enlightening clarity, whilst, by the tone with which he describes it, he himself seems to be still in awe of the experience. In the two years that followed this discovery, de Chirico painted a series of unique works, impregnated with a sense of mystery that he alone perceived. The letter to Gartz written at the end of 1910, in the heat of the moment when he created his first metaphysical paintings, is another precious testimony of this event. De Chirico speaks to his friend of the "immense joy" he felt in having painted these works. The letter is full of theoretical references regarding the transformation that had occurred in the twenty-two year-old's way of thinking, with specific regard to his profound communion with Nietzsche's thought: "I am the only man who has understood Nietzsche – all of my paintings demonstrate this."³⁹

It is indeed a shame that instead of taking the letter's theoretical contents into consideration or recognising, in the artist's elation, the verve of genius – and his self-awareness of being exactly that –, a true act of defamation of the artist has, on the contrary, taken place; an artist who has been labelled a "fabulist" and a "liar"⁴⁰. Once the sentence was pronounced, Baldacci felt authorised to *rewrite* de Chirico's life story in his own words, creating something he has called "a completely new story"⁴¹. In his 1997 monograph, in which the "new story" fully unfolded, Baldacci described de Chirico's autobiographical method: "The reader will have already gathered that, when speaking of himself, de Chirico is not concerned so much with factual truth as with the construction of a con-

³⁷ G. de Chirico, *Méditations d'un peintre. Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir*, in Giorgio de Chirico, *Scritti/1 (1911-1945). Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici*, edited by A. Cortellessa, Bompiani, Milan, 2008, pp. 649-650.

³⁸ De Chirico signed and dated the painting 1910 on occasion of the exhibition, which was the first in which he participated. There exists a second de Chirico-Gartz epistolary (also discovered by Roos) conserved in Munich's Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, which contains five letters dating from 8 October 1912 to 18 May 1914. Writing from Paris, de Chirico informs Gartz of the start of his professional career that came about thanks to his participation in the Salon d'Automne, where, in addition to *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, he also exhibited *The Enigma of the Oracle* and *Self-portrait* in Nietzschean pose. In the first letter, de Chirico wrote: "I am very happy now. What I was waiting for is coming to pass. I exhibited three paintings at the Salon d'Automne exhibition, which is the most interesting exhibition I have seen until now. Much more interesting than the Secession. My paintings [two words cancelled] were noticed and praised by the art critics. I think I will be very famous here in a few years time." The letters were published for the first time in "Metafisica", n. 7/8, *cit.*, pp. 576-579.

³⁹ G. de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 26 December 1910, *ibid.*, pp. 561-562.

⁴⁰ Both terms "fabulist" and "liar", as well as "levantinism", are quoted from Baldacci's article *Metafisica in discussione*, "Ars", August 1999, p. 76: "he indeed had a good dose of levantinism in him and the pretence of being beyond good and evil, ready to take anyone he could for a ride, united with a childlike sense of irresponsibility, of which he was the number one victim".

⁴¹ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 27.

scious mixture of edited reality, manipulated meaning and pure invention, the proportions of which vary according to his rhetorical exigencies⁴². Would this not be instead the method used by Baldacci himself through his application of a different chronology ("false but seemingly precise"), according to his own beliefs and in changing at will the execution date of the paintings according to necessity, as well as by filling in the missing pieces with tautological affirmations, promoted as proof?

2. The Fabrication of the "New" Life Story and the "Trial" against Giorgio de Chirico

a) Alberto Savinio's Decisive Influence and Giorgio de Chirico's "Lies"

The leitmotiv found throughout Baldacci and Roos' extensive body of written works is that Giorgio de Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio were inseparable theorists and researchers and that everything they did for twentieth century Art, they did together. It is difficult to distinguish their respective merits in this intense collaboration, especially those of Giorgio, the older brother. Whilst it is possible to make an allowance for the initial erroneous interpretation of the date of the letter to Gartz⁴³, this is much more difficult to do after a careful analysis of the correspondence, as we have seen. In any event, the manner in which the epistolary has been handled is just the tip of the iceberg of the elaborations generated in support of this theory, which are important to analyse today. Once Baldacci and Roos established the barriers de Chirico "artfully" constructed, in their opinion, in order to diminish the importance of his younger brother (in the form of "deliberate obfuscations"⁴⁴ of his autobiography), they then equated the theoretical element of the younger brother's intellectual patrimony, as well as the brothers' combined proficiency, whilst attributing greater importance to Savinio. A quote from Baldacci's essay *De Chirico e Savinio, la parabola di una fratellanza intellettuale* (A parabola of intellectual fraternalism), is explicative: "Even though our reconstruction is based on solid documentation, it may seem strange inasmuch it assigns a dominant role to Savinio and a rather passive role to his brother, which does not seem to fit a painter who from mid-1909 onwards created so many extraordinary masterpieces. The explanation for this is sought in the brothers' personalities and possibly in those of their family in which mental disturbances were not infrequent (sic!)." ⁴⁵ We shall take the cue from the assertion "solid documentation" and for the time being leave the extravagant psychological theories proposed to the side, in order to "test" the solidity of the documents that Baldacci bases his theory on.

Prior to this examination, a legitimate question needs to be asked. Why does Baldacci place such importance on the Milanese period rather than the Florentine one? At a closer look, the essential, decisive role regarding the discovery of Metaphysical Art that Savinio is claimed to have had, could have

⁴² See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 100: "this mask behind which the author changes costume is his own 'constructed' truth, designed to give a particular meaning to a particular aspect of his own life." (*ibid.*) In 1999 Baldacci insisted again: "Later on de Chirico did everything possible to affirm and make people accept (sic!) a chronology in which his works influenced by Böcklin were assigned to Milan and metaphysical works to Florence, but what pushed him into creating what I call 'The Myth of Florence', I explained (pp. 100-101) with considerations that Calvesi disregards completely and which are instead fundamental: that the documents of the time and de Chirico's later writings demonstrate that Giorgio intentionally decided (sic!), in subsequent phases, to construct a biography to suit himself, a biography that negated Savinio's role, especially in Milan, in determining a new artistic course. It's not my fault if the *Pictor Optimus* was a fabulist." In "Ars", August 1999, pp. 71-72.

⁴³ I believe this to be the case with Wieland Schmied, who proved however to be very prudent in drawing his conclusions. *Op. cit.*, 1994.

⁴⁴ See footnote 8.

⁴⁵ P. Baldacci, *De Chirico e Savinio, la parabola di una fratellanza intellettuale*, in *Alberto Savinio*, exhibition catalogue, Mazzotta, Milan 2002, p. 62.

taken place even in Florence. An answer to this query can be identified in the need to “square up” the date “26 January 1910” with the contents of the letter. Baldacci has placed primary importance on the date and neglected the contents of the letter without realising that the true “scoop” was indeed the extraordinary theoretical concepts expressed by de Chirico, more so than the chronology of events. If the date were indeed correct, one would necessarily have to assign de Chirico's first metaphysical paintings to the autumn of 1909 in Milan rather than the autumn of 1910 in Florence. Attesting the real date (late 1910, Florence) would have made the story less interesting, in that it would have confirmed what was already known. Furthermore, Baldacci did not have any elements in hand with which to prove a fundamental contribution by Savinio during the Florentine period (nor, for that matter, during the Milanese period either), other than what de Chirico himself wrote about the younger brother's activities in his *Memoirs* of 1945.⁴⁶ However, the events de Chirico spoke of were not sufficient in themselves to substantiate the theory Baldacci went on to develop. These events assumed greater importance in relation to Baldacci's grave and unfounded accusation that de Chirico had actually lied.

Baldacci's “revolutionary” theory on the birth of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909 radically contradicts all accounts de Chirico made over the course of his life regarding the discovery of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910. Therefore, it must be deduced that de Chirico purposely lied. At this point, one must ask oneself what brought him to alter the truth over the course of his entire life. And here, as previously mentioned, Baldacci dons the unlikely robes of a prosecutor who, after a brilliant investigative operation, “discovers” the underlying motive: de Chirico lied for the sole purpose of hiding the essential contribution his brother Savinio had made towards the discovery of Metaphysical Art. Armed with Baldacci's reasoning, one is led to believe that without this contribution, Metaphysical Art would never have been invented. The syllogism is thus completed in a coherent manner (although clearly mistaken in its assumptions as well as its conclusion) with regard to the “accused” Giorgio de Chirico, who must therefore be found guilty in front of the tribunal of History. Then, as if sorry for the pronounced sentence and almost in self-justification, Baldacci states: “It's not my fault if the *Pictor Optimus* was a fabulist.”⁴⁷

Giorgio de Chirico, certified as a “liar” and thus deprived of his authority, is subject to an additional grave consequence, which is the following: his written accounts are no longer credible, except, as we shall see, those very passages he did not “obfuscate” that deal with the common activities, studies and interests the two brothers had in Milan.⁴⁸ These references have been misinterpreted by Baldacci who, reading into them more than they actually say, then elected them as incontestable proof of the reiterated confabulations made by de Chirico. De Chirico becomes thus a man guilty of

⁴⁶ See G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, Astrolabio, Rome 1945; II ed. Rizzoli, Milan 1962; English translation *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, Peter Owen, London 1971, pp. 57-61. I have had the chance to observe that when de Chirico spoke about his life or his family, he did so in a precise manner. The recent discovery of a document conserved in the Ricordi & Co. Archives is proof of this: a contract stipulated on 21 May 1908 by Gemma de Chirico and music publisher Ricordi for the opera *Carmela* (comprising of three acts) composed by Alberto. In his *Memoirs*, de Chirico wrote that Ricordi “had even begun to print the opera *Carmela*” (p. 60). I would like to thank N. Velissiotis for this discovery. The contract is published here in the section Yesterday and Today.

⁴⁷ P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 72.

⁴⁸ If Baldacci's theory according to which de Chirico obfuscated the role played by his brother (who supposedly provided him with important theoretical assistance in the form of an opera which he had written entitled *Poema Fantastico*), it is very strange that de Chirico, instead of ignoring his brother's opera, spoke of it abundantly in his *Memoirs* (p. 60).

not having recounted the story Baldacci wanted to hear: “an examination of the documents of the time and de Chirico’s later writings demonstrate that Giorgio intentionally decided (sic!), in successive periods, to construct a biography that suited himself, a biography that negated Savinio’s role, especially in Milan, in determining a new artistic course.”⁴⁹ It is indeed very difficult to understand what he means by *examination*.

Since de Chirico is no longer to be trusted, the necessity arises for someone else (who has gained authority by having disclosed the artist’s lies) to take his place as the self-accredited biographer and re-write with great dedication, and evidently with a different chronology, the *Pictor Optimus*’ life story. In answer to Calvesi’s protest in 1999, Baldacci commented on the result he had obtained: “My effort, and those who read attentively will comprehend, has been to straighten out an extremely complicated tangle of truth and fiction and thus offer a credible and logically consistent historical account. This account can be partially modified, improved or made more precise, but I don’t think it can be overturned.”⁵⁰

Today, more than a decade later, and after hundreds of pages written with the same identical presumptions and assertions aimed at proving a theory hastily circulated in 1994, we find Baldacci stubbornly defending his “fixed points of reference”, which he himself has elected as “incontestable or modifiable without the emergence of new and demonstrative documents.”⁵¹ The comment appears on the first page of his essay in the Published Acts of the conference organised in Milan in 2010, in which the discovery of the *demonstrative* document from the Braidense library was announced, and which has clearly disproved his theory.

At this point, it is necessary to examine the “fixed points of reference” from which Giorgio de Chirico’s appropriation of his brother’s intellectual property supposedly arose.

b) *The Opera “Poema Fantastico”*

As stated at the start of this article, the first trace of de Chirico’s “new biography” dates back to 1994, to the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Baldacci Gallery in New York, in which the painting *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* was backdated to 1909. The following year, the gallery held an exhibition of Albert Savinio’s work.⁵² Following a brief introduction, Baldacci’s essay introduced the new biography of the de Chirico family in synthetic form, from which a fuller understanding can be gained by quoting a few passages: “In 1908: From July to September, Giorgio visits his mother and brother in Milan, and vacations with them at Lake Garda. During this period, de Chirico’s knowledge of Alberto’s research deepens.”⁵³ The vacation on Lake Garda is documented in the first letter of the de Chirico-Gartz correspondence, in a brief, anxious letter from Gemma dated 7 July 1908, in which she asks Gartz for news of her son. De Chirico, twenty years old at the time and living in Munich, had not responded to his mother’s enquiries. After various attempts to contact her son, Gemma found no better solution than to involve his best friend: “Dear Mr. Gartz Please be kind enough to write

⁴⁹ P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1999, pp. 71-72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 25.

⁵² *Albert Savinio, Musician, Writer and Painter*, *cit.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵³ P. Baldacci, *Alberto Savinio*, exhibition catalogue, *cit.*, pp. 15-16.

and let me know the reason why Georges has not answered [...]. Please write the whole truth to me.”⁵⁴ Aware of the strong influence that Gemma exercised within the family, it is likely that she subsequently obliged her older son to leave the capital of Art with its mid-summer beer cafés and their attractive *kellnerin*, in order to spend time with her and his younger brother at the lake. In any event, irrespective of whether de Chirico joined or did not join his family in Milan or on Lake Garda, the affirmation that he deepened his knowledge of his brother's work at the time is arguable to say the least. Baldacci maintains that an opera Savinio composed at the time entitled *Poema Fantastico* (now lost), made a strong impression on de Chirico. Starting with an indication from de Chirico's *Memoirs* – which even Baldacci holds as true – in reference to 1909: “My brother continued to compose music and write libretti. He had finished a long opera with the title *Poema Fantastico*”⁵⁵, Baldacci postulates that the melodrama in question (1907-1909) was abandoned unfinished “like many of Savinio's early works” and that he began work on “what we can call the second *Poema Fantastico*” in 1909-1910.⁵⁶ One must take note of just how pronounced Savinio's self-criticism must have been at the time in abandoning this first version, regardless of the strong impression it “would have made” on his older brother during their vacation at Lake Garda in 1908. The second version, according to Baldacci, was executed at the concert held in Munich in January 1911 (for which Giorgio had asked Gartz's help in organising). Baldacci attributes the invention of an “autobiographical” method to this specific work, which would constitute the basis of Metaphysical Art. It is difficult to understand what he bases this idea on, seeing as neither the first nor the “second” version of the *Poema Fantastico* have survived, and therefore are unavailable for examination. In the very same catalogue (1995), Roos specifies: “The sources are so scarce, that they allow neither an established formal nor a contextual analysis of *Carmela* or the *Poema Fantastico*.”⁵⁷ Baldacci uses the titles of the various episodes of the Munich concert as published in the concert programme (the only surviving document), to define this “autobiographical method”.⁵⁸ The contents of the *Poema*, which have not survived and therefore cannot be studied, take on the form of the sought-after pea in the three shell game, constantly escaping the spectators' gaze. Like a skilled illusionist, Baldacci gathers the cards of both brothers and, solemnly and dogmatically, concludes: “[What has been said thus far] serves as confirmation that Savinio's work on the *Poema Fantastico* [was the] theoretical and ideological foundation which informed de Chirico's contemporaneous pictorial activity.”⁵⁹

The concept Baldacci delineates consists in the fusion between classical mythology and the memories of the brothers' childhood in Greece. In the paragraph regarding 1909 (Savinio exhibition catalogue 1995), he states: “This ‘autobiographical’ method, a hidden structure, is the basis of all the

⁵⁴ Gemma de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 7 July 1908 on the letterhead paper of a hotel in Abano Terme: “Dear Mr. Gartz, Please be kind enough to write and let me know the reason why Georges has not answered the letters I wrote him a week ago. I telegraphed him on Sunday and he answered that he ‘was fine’ but he continues not to write to me. Please write the whole truth to me. Address your letter to ‘Villa Berta’ Gardone Lago di Garda, I thank you in advance. My affectionate compliments to your wife, and my devoted friendship to you, G.[Gemma] de Chirico.” Published in “Metafisica”, n. 7/8, *cit.*, p. 559.

⁵⁵ G. de Chirico, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, *cit.*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 56.

⁵⁷ G. Roos, *Alberto Savinio*, exhibition catalogue, *cit.* p. 52.

⁵⁸ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 44.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57. [The English translation differs from the original Italian text and has been corrected here accordingly. *Ed.*]

works by both brothers". The only thing that is indeed hidden is evidently the *Poema* itself, since it has not survived. In the recent Published Acts of the conference held in Milan, emphasis is placed once more on the vacation at Lake Garda, during which time, according to Baldacci, de Chirico "had the chance to learn more about his brother's musical opera entitled *Poema Fantastico*"; he remarks on the strong impact the opera made on de Chirico: "The structure and the contents of the *Poema Fantastico*, which we are able to reconstruct today with a certain measure of precision, and not merely by inductive reasoning, struck him in a profound way" (sic!).⁶⁰ The only "reconstructions" seem indeed to be out-and-out "constructions" formalised by Baldacci over the last fifteen years, in such a way that all of de Chirico's work is supported by foundations that were built by Savinio. We are witness to a constant devaluation of de Chirico's merit against that of his brother's.⁶¹ The game, however, is clear enough: by acknowledging the younger brother as the author of the very ideas with which the older one (improperly and without recognising such a contribution) would have used to found Metaphysical Art, Savinio gains relevance. Considering the extraordinary importance Savinio holds in twentieth century culture and history, such promotion is unnecessary in my opinion. Through this act of endorsement, Baldacci does not realise that he is actually depriving Savinio of his own specificity, which Savinio had indeed defended when the Surrealists attempted to include him in their movement.⁶² Within the family economy, it seems like an attempt to clothe the older brother with the younger brother's garments. It must be pointed out that the mythological-autobiographical work that suited Savinio, is extremely tight-fitting on de Chirico, whose Metaphysical Art is *anything but* autobiographical. One of the most striking elements of his painting, which he defines as "formidable"⁶³, is indeed the portrayal, in the form of image, of an eternal and universal atavistic memory – *of the human being himself* –. Images that have nothing to do with Savinio's autobiographical reflection at age seventeen which supposedly led to his creation of the *Poema Fantastico* based on childhood memories in Greece. Whilst mythological elements can be identified in de Chirico's Böcklinesque paintings executed in Milan, there is very little trace of what could be called an autobiographical method in paintings like *The Dying Centaur*, *Triton and Siren* or in *Prometheus*. Just as de Chirico cannot wear his younger brother's garments, the power of Metaphysical Art broke all the "autobiographical" confines of the Böcklinesque paintings he executed in Milan, whilst creating artistic concepts that had never existed before, concepts that would go on to nourish generations of artists.

If anything, further questions arise which are impossible to answer in this essay, such as: where are the elements of Savinio's thought in de Chirico's work? And, what can be called metaphysical in Savinio's work? What did Savinio mean by "metaphysical"? As we can see, rather than being treated as a compelling news item, these are questions that require serious theoretical research.

⁶⁰ See Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 26.

⁶¹ Baldacci goes so far as to say: "Giorgio realised that the Munich Academy and his classmates were unable to provide him with the same stimulus he had experienced at his brother's side." *Op. cit.*, 2011, p. 27.

⁶² See A. Savinio, *Tutta la vita*, Bompiani, Milan 1945, pp. 5-6.

⁶³ G. de Chirico letter to F. Gartz, 26 December 1910, *cit.*: "What I have created here in Italy is neither very big nor profound (in the old sense of the word), but formidable [*furchtbar*]."

c) *The Drawing "The Oracle"*

Let us examine what Baldacci wrote in the synthetic biography published in the exhibition catalogue *Savinio* (1995) with regard to the period November 1909 – January 1910: "Giorgio de Chirico paints the first metaphysical compositions, in all probability in Milan: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle*. A drawing by Alberto (untitled, but generally referred to as *The Oracle*) bears a strong resemblance to de Chirico's painting. This is the only surviving work by Alberto and bears witness to the fact that he painted alongside his brother before 1914-15."⁶⁴ Baldacci published the drawing with the date "1909" on p. 17 of the catalogue. At the end of the First World War, Savinio gave the drawing as a gift to the Signorelli, who were collectors. In 1978, it appeared for the first time in an exhibition of Savinio's work curated by Pia Vivarelli in Rome with the date "1918"⁶⁵. This date was assigned to the drawing by the curators, including Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Angelica Savinio herself, thanks to Filippo De Pisis' recollection of the period the brothers spent in Ferrara during the war: "[...] Savinio was already painting. I remember certain drawings done in pen, in an almost Pre-Raphaelite or Böcklinesque style, with Greek temples and robed figures standing by the seashore"⁶⁶. The drawing was stolen during the 1978 exhibition⁶⁷ and has yet to be recovered, hence, it cannot be examined, nor can technical analysis be undertaken. Two years later, in 1980, Fagiolo dell'Arco backdated the drawing to "1909", together with a group of similar drawings and collages. When he later realised, in 1989, that the backdating of the drawing was incorrect, he re-established the date of the drawing as "1918".⁶⁸ The fact that Savinio gave the drawing to the Signorelli's just after WWI, lends further support to such a dating.

Baldacci affirms – with some confusion regarding technique – that this drawing is proof that Savinio "painted" alongside his brother and goes on to question the originality of de Chirico's iconography in his later 1997 monograph with specific reference to this drawing: "It is equally impossible to determine which of the two brothers was the first to arrive at this new iconography, in this case appropriating Böcklin's figure of Ulysses (which would become a recurrent motif) and conceiving a spatial context of classical architecture of primeval taste"⁶⁹. With this inverted logic, he then establishes "with relative certainty" that the drawing dates to the end of 1909⁷⁰, celebrating it as the source of de Chirico's iconography.

⁶⁴ P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Alberto Savinio*, 18 May-18 July 1978, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; catalogue De Luca, Rome 1978.

⁶⁶ See P. Vivarelli, *Savinio: Catalogo generale*, 1996, p. 230 and F. De Pisis, 1938, p. 257.

⁶⁷ See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. La tragedia dell'infanzia*, Casimiro Porro, Milan 2001, p. 24.

⁶⁸ In the general catalogue edited by Vivarelli, *Savinio: Catalogo generale*, 1996, she provided reference to the drawing's date as having been published in various books: Rome catalogue, 1978 (1918); Stocchi, 1978 (1924); Fagiolo, 1980 (c. 1909); Fagiolo, 1981 (1909); Roche-Pézar, 1986 (1918); Baldacci, London catalogue, 1989 [date not indicated in Vivarelli's footnote; in the catalogue in question it appears as 'c. 1909'. *Ed.*]; Fagiolo, 1989, (1918); Poli, 1989 (1918); Baldacci, 1995 (1909). In the catalogue *Alberto Savinio*, cit., 2002, Baldacci expands upon De Pisis' recollection as such: "When, in 1938, Filippo De Pisis stated, in reference to the war years spent in Ferrara, that 'Savinio was already painting' and mentioned Böcklinesque drawings with 'Greek temples and robed figures by the seashore' [...], he may have been evoking something Savinio himself or de Chirico had confided in him with reference to drawings painted many years earlier" (sic!).

⁶⁹ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 61.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

d) *In Breton's Footsteps*

It is less difficult to establish whether Baldacci or Roos first formulated the hypothesis of de Chirico's dependency upon his brother Savinio's ideas. Baldacci began laying down the story in 1994 and, in 1995, held the Savinio exhibition in his gallery. At this point, the triad of elements supporting his theory were already in place:

- 1) Historical: de Chirico's letter dated "26 January 1910".
- 2) Theoretical: Savinio's *Poema Fantastico*.
- 3) Iconographic: Savinio's drawing *The Oracle*.

In order to reveal just how unfounded the whole theory is, it is sufficient to attribute to each of these elements their true condition: 1) incorrect date; 2) inexistent material; 3) incorrect date and inexistent material.

In 1997, Baldacci hurriedly published his voluminous monograph on Metaphysical Art, basing its theoretical content on the Gartz letters. The publication, containing large reproductions of paintings from de Chirico's first period, was translated into English and French and thus enjoyed wide distribution.⁷¹ The entire first part of the volume is a collage of excerpts from the letters commented on by Baldacci. When Roos finally published his book in 1999 it contained no trace of the prudence initially shown in his first article of July 1994. From this point on it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish the independent thought of the two authors.

From what has been illustrated so far, it seems that after an initial love-affair for de Chirico – as was also the case for André Breton –, Baldacci followed in the footsteps of the founder of Surrealism, albeit in a different way. Over the years, from the exhibitions held at the Paolo Baldacci Gallery (de Chirico 1994, Savinio 1995), up until the recent publication of the Published Acts of the conference held in Milan, there has been no real advancement in the theoretical study of the Maestro's work. Instead, the visual, conceptual and intellectual value of his *œuvre* has been continuously undermined. A disturbing animosity becomes apparent in Baldacci's writings on de Chirico, an artist whom he seems to want to destroy on a personal level and whose artistic importance he endeavours to diminish, up until the recent attempt of subtracting the invention of the Italian Piazza theme from de Chirico and attributing it instead to Ardegno Soffici.⁷²

Following objections raised by dechirican scholars, the two authors have spent their time defending their theory and, in an impossible attempt at "squaring the circle", have endeavoured to accom-

⁷¹ The fact that this is currently the only monograph on de Chirico's early Metaphysical period, following James Thrall Soby's outdated 1955 publication, is even more dangerous. 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".

⁷² In the essay *La nazionalizzazione della Metafisica e la nascita delle "Piazze d'Italia"* (The Nationalisation of Metaphysical Art and the Birth of the "Italian Piazza" Theme), published in the catalogue of the exhibition held at Palazzo Strozzi in 2010, Baldacci went as far as to doubt that de Chirico had actually created the Italian Piazza theme, postulating that the subject matter had been suggested to the artist – in 1914 – by Soffici who, on occasion of the Salon des Indépendants, described a painting by de Chirico as a: "big deserted piazza in an Italian cityscape". Baldacci writes: "Right or wrong as it may have been, Soffici's judgement was destined to enjoy great success and influence de Chirico himself". *Op. cit.*, 2010, p. 52.

moderate the numerous inconsistencies that have come to light in their historical reconstruction. Such work has been carried out through a constant re-tracing and reaffirmation of the same theory, without ever delving into a true analysis of the de Chirico-Gartz letters, the reading of which remains the same as it was in 1994-1995. For the sake of completeness, I would add that neither Baldacci, nor Baldacci-Roos, have managed to contest what I have written and documented, but have clung to the issue relating to the symbolic use of the word *Januarii* that appears on the letter.⁷³ Nor have they responded to the incoherencies regarding the theoretical and philosophical questions raised by Riccardo Dottori.⁷⁴ They seemingly believe that it is sufficient to concentrate on historical-narrative aspects, neglecting in this way a true artistic discussion. Moreover, they have never countered the resolute contestation Jole de Sanna addressed to them and to Armin Zweite, Director of Dusseldorf's Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen museum in 2002. In de Sanna's review of the *Die Andere Moderne – De Chirico und Savinio* exhibition, she justly criticised the museum direction in holding a show that presented a ground-breaking theory – that of the “double paternity” of Metaphysical Art – as a signed and sealed fact, without offering theoretical and explanatory information to the visitor: “The visitor's task is to trace the methods of influence exercised on Giorgio by Andrea [Alberto, ed.]. Not even the usual posters giving us an outline of the artist's culture come to one's aid in this endeavour. The documentation of Andrea's [Alberto, ed.] theoretical contribution to Giorgio is in fact missing. Whilst recalling the first attempt in 1919 by Carrà to subtract the title of creator of the “intellectual bomb that was Metaphysical Art” from Giorgio de Chirico, de Sanna continues: “In reality, curator Baldacci's assumption is more pronounced than Zweite's: Giorgio de Chirico would never have conceived Metaphysical Art without his brother by his side. A sensational discovery that seems to be the reward of years of research, but this is not the case”⁷⁵. De Sanna emphasised the absurdity of the situation: Baldacci's affirmations, undocumented (and for that matter impossible to demonstrate) were passed on to the Director of one of the most important museums in Germany, who indiscriminately accepted the theory and offered the public an exhibition that, instead of widening the scope of understanding on the particular qualities of each artist, had the effect of diminishing their respective works. As aforementioned, this can be seen as an astounding example of the type of damage an unverified theory can cause the cultural apparatus.

⁷³ See P. Baldacci, signed “Gerd Roos”, *La nascita e i primi passi...*, cit., 2010, p. 37.

⁷⁴ Riccardo Dottori examined the philosophical implications of the term “metaphysical poetics” coined by Baldacci in reference to a “method” or secret formula applied to Art that Baldacci believes the brothers were ambitiously trying to devise. By clarifying the difference in meaning between the terms “poetic” and “aesthetic”, Dottori points out: “An artist's poetics do not consist of a devised and established method or a set of rules, as is true for technical works. [...] This is an important point to establish in order to resolve the much-debated issue regarding the influence of Savinio's ideas on de Chirico, including de Chirico's supposed dependency upon Savinio. Aesthetic ideas are of an absolutely general character, whereas a work of art is something absolutely unique, always different and exclusively connected to the artist's individual ability. The truth of the matter is that ideas about works of art or aesthetic ideas have little relevance to an artist's personal poetics and not only to what the artist thinks, but what he feels and therefore does! This brings a third element into play in this discussion on aesthetics and poetics and that is the feeling, *Stimmung*, or poetry, as de Chirico calls it, that animates his poetics, which is indeed the atmosphere of the Nietzschean autumn afternoon with its bright light and long shadows that the painter naturally desires to translate onto canvas. It is essential to understand that the translation of this poetry, or poetic feeling, onto canvas is an entirely individual process and therefore, speaking of reciprocal communication between artists or between brothers is absolutely irrelevant. A differentiation must be made between this poetic feeling, as the founding element of a work of art, which we can call de Chirico's poetics, and the expressive means and their inner relationships, which are what the critic refers to.” *From Zarathustra's Poetry to the Aesthetics of Metaphysical Art* in “*Metafisica*”, n. 7/8, cit., pp. 126-127.

⁷⁵ See J. de Sanna *A Gambling with Intellectual Ownership*, signed with the pseudonym V. Mangusta, exhibition review *Die Andere Moderne – De Chirico und Savinio*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, 2001, in “*Metafisica*” n. 1/2, *Téchine Editore*, Milan 2002, pp. 311-316.

e) *Past and Future Research*

Since the Braidense Library document was discovered within Baldacci's own research circle, and presented at a conference he organised, it would seem inconceivable were he not to consider the fact that this document might work *against* his theory. In fact, the date "24 January 1910" on the library loan register constitutes indisputable proof contradicting this theory and introduces an element of scientific accuracy to his "Myth of Florence", something that is difficult for even him to ignore. In addition to the ridiculous explanations made (see footnotes 31, 35 & 36) in an attempt to fit the new information into his fantastical historical reconstruction, it seems that Baldacci, who can hardly afford to appear to be lacking in common sense, is now considering such evidence. In the foreword of the Published Acts of the conference, he wrote, together with his associates Maria Grazia Messina and Antonello Negri: "In his conclusive essay to this early chronological period of 1909-1911, Paolo Baldacci managed to formulate historical conclusions based on the recently discovered documentation: it is no longer an issue of inferring *everything from the fragile date of a letter* [our italics, ed.]; all things connect and fit into one another."⁷⁶

This affirmation confirms one of the main points that I have wanted to highlight in this article, which is the following: Baldacci's entire theory was developed on a hypothesis derived from the date of a single letter, instead of being based on serious and thorough research.

He now labels as "fragile" the element that he has called the "prime document" for over fifteen years and which has served as the basis for an out-and-out defamatory campaign against de Chirico. Indeed, it was with the date "26 January 1910" which he refers to as the "prime document" that Baldacci built his "sovereign" precept: Giorgio de Chirico is a liar, a postulate that has served to reign over all of his other "discoveries": 1) Giorgio de Chirico did not invent Metaphysical Art; and 2) Savinio, due to the "deliberate obfuscations" of his older brother, has been deprived of the historical recognition that he deserves.

Having demoted the date of the letter as being "fragile", Baldacci disqualifies the theory that Giorgio de Chirico lied. Without the "de Chirico the liar" postulate, all that remains on record is the simple truth that de Chirico always maintained regarding himself and his brother. As a result, the entire historical reconstruction elaborated by Baldacci over the years can be considered null and void. In no way can he sustain, as he seems to suggest in the foreword of the Published Acts of the conference, that his studies and those of Roos elaborated over the last fifteen years can be considered valid. In any case, it is important to emphasise that it is not a case of documented research, but of fantastical elaboration.

Nevertheless, Baldacci promises future studies. It will be interesting to see how he manages to sustain his theory of the supremacy of Savinio in the "birth of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909" theory, without tracing anew or recycling the identical arguments produced until now in its support, which, as we have seen, not only totally lack in documentation, but are also deprived of any theoretical backing. He may now be obliged to weigh-in Savinio's drawing *The Oracle* (1918) on

⁷⁶ See P. Baldacci, M.G. Messina and A. Negri, *Premessa*, Published Acts of the conference, *cit.*

the same scale as the dozens of masterpiece paintings created by the *Pictor Optimus* during 1910-1919 and beyond.

He may also be required to explain how *Poema Fantastico* – a musical piece – can constitute the basis of the still, silent and eternal vision of any one of the Italian Piazzas belonging to de Chirico's early period.

3. The Erroneous Theory of the Derivation of Metaphysical Art from Literature

Let us now widen our viewfinder beyond Baldacci's tales of Giorgio de Chirico as an individual, (a man who resides in one house, moves to another, borrows books from the library) and moral (a man who thinks, calculates, makes strategies, lies, manipulates), and undertake a contextual consideration of Metaphysical Art. There exists another theory that stands as a backdrop to the theory of the "Milanese origins of Metaphysical Art" that is even more harmful than the one assigned to Giorgio de Chirico as a moral and physical person. Indeed, it is a theory that forces one to ask oneself if Paolo Baldacci, who believes himself to be the utmost de Chirico scholar, has actually understood the full scope of the question. In addition to attributing erroneous historical premises to the origin of Metaphysical Art (Florence no, Milan yes), Baldacci assigns a theoretical base to Metaphysical Art that could not be further-off target or any more misleading for gaining a full understanding of the precious artistic contents conferred to our culture through the Maestro's *œuvre*. Whilst Giorgio de Chirico's legacy could indeed weather the moral damage done to him by this scholar⁷⁷, the damage caused by his erroneous reading of Metaphysical Art is something that harms *everyone*.

Baldacci has not only altered its historical truth, but has divested Metaphysical Painting of its extraordinary quality of acute awareness experienced by the youthful de Chirico in Piazza Santa Croce, as the artist candidly recalled in his brief anecdote. Like the Surrealists, who promoted dream as the basis of Metaphysical Art – which was not the case for de Chirico –, Baldacci attributes the phenomenon of "revelation" to literature, whilst de Chirico explicitly explained why literature could no longer be considered a source of inspiration. Let us first read what Baldacci wrote in a subchapter of his 1997 monograph entitled "From Word to Image: A Working Method" with regard to the artist, whose: "[...] inspiration lies exclusively in literature and thought. Yet de Chirico [...] did not use literature merely as a compendium of possible subjects, but also as a means of extrapolating from the literary *process* new techniques of poetic communication which could also be applied to painting."⁷⁸

In the recent Published Acts of the conference held in Milan, Baldacci specifies: "In order to understand the genesis and the gradualness of the phenomenon of "revelation", one must always bear in mind that Metaphysical Art is an aesthetic that derives from literature and it is precisely this that constitutes its profound novelty."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Speaking of which, there exists no other twentieth century artist who has been more ill-treated on a personal level than Giorgio de Chirico.

⁷⁸ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 55.

⁷⁹ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 39.

To back up this theory, Baldacci often refers to a passage taken from de Chirico's Parisian manuscripts (*Testi teorici e lirici*, 1911-1915) in which the artist speaks of the direction his studies took after leaving the Munich Academy of Fine Art. In this text, de Chirico tells of having surpassed literature as a source and of the process of awareness that brought him to conceive Metaphysical Art:

When I became aware that the route I was following after leaving the Munich Academy was not the one I was supposed to follow, I ventured upon tortuous paths; I was initially captivated by a number of modern artists, especially Max Klinger and Böcklin; I thought that these deeply-felt compositions had a particular *Stimmung* that could not be found amongst thousands of others. – But again, I understood that this was not it. While reading, I was captivated by a passage from Homer – Ulysses on the island of Calypso – a couple of views and the painting presented itself before me – I then had the sensation of having finally found something; or even reading Ariosto, Roger, the wandering horseman at rest under a tree, he falls asleep, his horse grazes on the grass nearby, all is silent, one would imagine seeing a dragon appear in the air; the scene captures my attention and I imagine the horseman, the horse, the countryside, and all of a sudden, it seems almost like a revelation, but it does not yet satisfy me; could not Mantegna, Dürer, Böcklin, Thoma or Max Klinger also have been capable of painting such an image? Something new is needed.⁸⁰

The text is clear. It is a shame that when quoting the passage, Baldacci omits mentioning de Chirico's final affirmations, abridging the quote on the subject of the artist's readings – as if this was indeed the subject of de Chirico's "new discovery"! In his recent publication, he did something even more ingenious. When citing the passage (in abbreviated form as usual) he inverted the order of the sentences, beginning with "all of a sudden it seems to be almost a revelation, but it does not yet satisfy me" and then cites: "While reading, I was captivated by a passage from Homer – Ulysses on the island of Calypso – a couple of views and the painting presented itself before me – I then had the sensation of finally having found something"⁸¹, thus manipulating de Chirico's statement and making him say what *he wants* him to say.⁸²

Baldacci maintains that the "profound novelty" of Metaphysical Art is that it was inspired by literature. This would then mean that Metaphysical Art, conceived as a process from reading to the image, would constitute a form of illustration – albeit a sophisticated one – but indeed a process that has nothing new to it at all. A theory such as this weakens de Chirico's greatness to a level that does not

⁸⁰ G. de Chirico, in *Scritti/1*, cit. p. 611.

⁸¹ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.* p. 39.

⁸² Going back to the "early Baldacci" and the serious essay published in the exhibition held in his gallery in 1994, we find a passage in which Baldacci accuses Breton of quoting de Chirico out of context: "quoting a manuscript passage (taken out of context as usual) [...]. *But if we read the entire passage, we see that he is really saying something else*" [our italics, ed.] In *De Chirico Betrayed by the Surrealists*, cit., pp. 35-36. Baldacci has followed Breton & Co. in another typically Surrealist exercise, which is that of changing the titles of de Chirico's paintings. In his 1997 monograph he arbitrarily assigned the painting *La Surprise* of 1914 (a work documented with this title from 1928 that also has a "Galerie Paul Guillaume" label on the retro with the title *La Surprise* written on it) with a new title: *Arcades and Smokestack*. (The fact that no source is given for this new title makes one think that Baldacci coined it himself in a similar initiative as the Surrealists, albeit with less fantasy.) At the same time, he assigned the name *La Surprise* to another painting, which was indeed published as early as 1947 with the title *Chimney* (M. Raynal, *Peintres du XXe siècle*, Editions d'Art Skira, Geneva 1947). See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, pp. 180 and 184. Bequeathed by Kay Sage Tanguy, *La Surprise*, 1914, forms part of the collection of Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown (Massachusetts). One is inclined to ask oneself what the reason behind an apparently futile operation might be.

go beyond the narration of myth found in his Böcklinesque period.⁸³ Saying that Metaphysical Art is of literary inspiration is extremely limiting and reductive with respect to the important revolution enacted by de Chirico in the form of the image, and would endorse the pre-war French critics' comment "*c'est de la littérature*" of the artist's work, a judgment de Chirico forcefully rejected.⁸⁴

Baldacci's favouring of the narrative aspect in de Chirico's work fits well with the role he ascribes to the period the artist spent in Milan, as it was in this city that de Chirico animated paintings inspired by Böcklin and the narration of myth. In the autobiographical text *The Life of Giorgio de Chirico* (1929) signed "Angelo Bardi", the artist wrote: "He spent his first Italian year in Milan. During this period he painted works in which the influence of Böcklin was still all too evident." Where Baldacci is greatly mistaken, however, is in also ascribing the production of the first metaphysical paintings to Milan, as these are works that were inspired by and painted in Florence and are not in the least bit based on literature (nor on his brother's ideas, for that matter). De Chirico continues: "He then moved to Florence where the influence of the Masters (whose work was held in the city's museums), his attraction to the Tuscan landscape and the natural evolution of his personal faculties, allowed Giorgio de Chirico to start discovering his path. It is to this Florentine period that works such as *The Enigma of the Oracle*, or *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, belong. We speak of two works that, by their poetic power and their element of 'discovery', are worthy, even if dated 1910, of being placed on the same level as any of his later works. As previously he had discovered an enigmatic Greece, very different from that documented in school books, in the same way, after Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* Giorgio de Chirico set about discovering the 'Italian mystery'".⁸⁵

The "something new" that is needed according to de Chirico and which he proceeds to develop in the previously cited text, is linked to perception, to the ability of feeling the mystery of certain phenomena and the enigma of certain things. He describes the evolution of his sensitivity and his thought-process, whilst offering a philosophical reflection as a guide for the future of Art itself: "Above all, it is necessary to free Art from everything it has known until today, every subject, every idea, every thought, every symbol must be cast aside." He says nothing more about literature, other than stating: "As long as one is subject to the direct influence of something that someone else *also knows*, something one could read in a book or encounter in a museum, one is not an artist creator, as I intend it".⁸⁶

Baldacci carefully avoids speaking of the artist's description of the perceptive experience that befell him in Piazza Santa Croce, which, in fact, constitutes the most precious testimony of the phenomena of revelation and the very basis of Metaphysical Art. Although the paragraph regarding the Piazza Santa Croce passage was published in his 1997 monograph, it was not placed in relation to

⁸³ With regard to this, R. Dottori writes "de Chirico's new and personal way of painting distances itself specifically from Symbolism. The enigma does not function as a simple reference, nor does it represent another reality, but rather, suspends typical representation by conferring the search for the mystery of Existence. This mystery was revealed to the artist and his *œuvre* is the representation of this revelation. This is what constitutes his new poetics of Metaphysical Art." *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁸⁴ See G. de Chirico, *Noi metafisici*, "Cronache di attualità", Rome, 15 February 1919; now in *Scritti/1*, cit., pp. 269-276.

⁸⁵ G. de Chirico, *The Life of Giorgio de Chirico*, signed "Angelo Bardi", in "Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique", VIII, Éditions Sélection, Antwerp 1929, pp. 20-26. It is noteworthy that the pseudonym "Angelo Bardi" chosen by de Chirico, is a direct reference to the Santa Croce Basilica and the place of the birth of Metaphysical Art. See K. Robinson, note to the text, in "Metafisica", n. 5/6, Le Lettere, Florence, Pictor O, Rome 2006, p. 500.

⁸⁶ G. de Chirico in *Scritti/1*, cit., p. 614.

the artist's revelation. Rather, it served as testimony to de Chirico's choice of Florence as a "tranquil" city in which to live. The text is commented on as such: "In any case, here is what he had to say in 1912"⁸⁷, as if the passage were of little relevance!

Even if Baldacci is unable to eliminate the specific place of Piazza Santa Croce in Florence, he has done everything possible to minimise its importance, diverting the centre of attention from de Chirico's account. In any case, if this specification did not exist, he most surely could have assigned the event to one of Milan's piazzas, possibly Piazza de Carmine in the Brera quarter, or Piazza Cadorna not far from where the de Chirico family once lived in Via Petrarca.

De Chirico's text undoubtedly proves to be an awkward element in the historical reconstruction delineated by Baldacci, who ascribes the Piazza Santa Croce event as having taken place during a brief trip the artist made to Rome in the autumn of 1909 during which he also visited Florence.⁸⁸ A number of historical facts, including the intestinal illness he suffered from at the time, demonstrate without a shadow of a doubt that the episode in Piazza Santa Croce occurred during the second half of 1910 in Florence, a city which de Chirico had inhabited since the springtime. In the text he states "On a clear autumn afternoon, I was sitting on a bench in the middle of Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. Indeed, it was not the first time I had seen this square." As Maurizio Calvesi has pointed out, the latter affirmation confirms the circumstance of an event that occurred in a city de Chirico was familiar with.⁸⁹ His clarification that "it was not the first time" he had seen the piazza, purposely underlines the circumstance that he suddenly saw the piazza in a different way.

Baldacci glosses over specific indications of this kind in his complicated historical reconstruction. He also remains silent with regard to another piece of information contained in the text that is useful to the chronology of events, specifically de Chirico's affirmation: "I had just recovered from a long and painful intestinal illness." Baldacci used the circumstance of the illness to prove that de Chirico did not execute paintings during 1910, noting: "Furthermore, we must not forget that his health did not improve and that in Florence it worsened [...]. The consequence of this, as de Chirico recalls in his *Memoirs*, is that he 'did not work'"⁹⁰. Baldacci does not seem to realise, however, that in this way he actually confirms 1910 as young de Chirico's extended period of sick-

⁸⁷ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 76. [The statement was omitted in the English translation of the publication. *Ed.*]

⁸⁸ As revealed in the documentation recovered by Paola Italia, the de Chirico brothers were absent from the Braidense library for a period of time that would allow three weeks for the trip. According to Baldacci, during this trip de Chirico would have: 1) gone first to Rome; 2) had numerous revelations in the city; 3) seen the painting *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin* at Accademia di San Luca (a painting the artist would discuss in an article in 1920); 4) been impressed by various Roman monuments; 5) then gone to Florence; 6) visited Piazza Santa Croce a number of times; 7) had the revelation in Piazza Santa Croce one day; 8) drawn a sketch "which is lost today" of his vision in Piazza Santa Croce or even sketched the painting *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* on canvas; 9) decided to move to Florence; and finally, 10) looked for and found an apartment to rent. See P. Baldacci, 2011, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-51. It must be pointed out that none of these events are documented by historical facts, even though they are presented as such by Baldacci, from the simple sequence of the trip - first Rome then Florence -, to the artist's decision taken during the trip to move to Florence and the frenetic search for an apartment to rent.

⁸⁹ See M. Calvesi, *op. cit.*, April 1999: "The fact that *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* undoubtedly dates, not to late 1909, but rather to late 1910 (as the date that appears on it correctly indicates), is proven by precise testimony. The famous painting was not inspired during a fleeting passage by the painter in Florence in 1909, but was executed many months after his definitive move to that city. The well known account in another youthful manuscript is unequivocal: 'I will explain how I had the revelation of a painting [...] entitled: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*. On a clear autumn afternoon, I was sitting on a bench in the middle of Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. Indeed, it was not the first time I had seen this square.'" Baldacci's response to Calvesi's objection was as follows: "The fact that, in the famous passage in the Parisian manuscripts of the description of the 'revelation' of *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* in Florence in Piazza Santa Croce, de Chirico says that it wasn't the first time he had seen the piazza, only means that during his visit in October 1909 he went there a number of times (sic)". *Op. cit.*, 1999, p. 69.

⁹⁰ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 52.

ness and therefore his consequent recovery, as mentioned in the description of Piazza Santa Croce thus confirming the date of the event (autumn 1910).

Baldacci, who dates the event to the brief trip to Florence in October 1909, supports this by means of an affirmation de Chirico made in a letter to Gartz of 27 December 1909: "I took a trip to Florence and Rome in October and in the spring I will probably go to Florence to live as it is the city I like the most. I have been working and studying a lot and I now have very different goals than before." The letter confirms the trip but in no way substantiates the 1909 dating of the event in Piazza Santa Croce. Baldacci's collocation of the event to October 1909 is born of his need to link the following three elements in sequence (inspiration in Piazza Santa Croce; the letter of 27 December 1909; the letter "dated" 26 January 1910 announcing the discovery of Metaphysical Art) in order to maintain that the paintings *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle* were painted in the autumn of 1909. In the 27 December 1909 letter, which indeed constitutes the only communication from de Chirico in the period between autumn 1909 and the spring of 1910, the artist speaks of his work and his studies, stating that he had "very different goals than before". If one were to accept the validity of the date of the announcement of the discovery of Metaphysical Art as "26 January 1910", it would mean that on 27 December 1909 – thirty days earlier –, when de Chirico wrote the letter, he had no idea that he had invented something extraordinary. He suddenly realised, on 26 January 1910 after a lightening-speed house-move from Milan to Florence, that he had made "paintings that are the most profound that exist in the absolute".

Moreover, how can Baldacci explain that, in the letter that he dates "26 January 1910", de Chirico wrote: "I have not been able to write until now due to my many engagements and also my health, which has unfortunately not been very good this last year." There are two elements in this statement that are worthy of note: 1) if the letter had been written on 26 January 1910 there was no need to ask Gartz forgiveness for a long period of silence, due to the fact de Chirico had just written to him on 27 December 1909⁹¹; 2) de Chirico had been sick for a year at this point.⁹²

If de Chirico had been sick for a whole year in January 1910, it would mean that he had fallen sick during the period in which he lived in Munich. His indisposition would therefore be implicitly backdated one year the same way Baldacci explicitly backdated his paintings.

Whilst undervaluing what the artist wrote about his artistic illumination, Baldacci introduces concepts that act as "filters" which detract both the experiential quality of this discovery and its very authorship. Just as de Chirico would not be the father of Metaphysical Art, but if anything the "uncle" (its true paternity, according to Baldacci, is to be attributed to Savinio), Metaphysical Art is also orphan of its mother – of its sensorial origin – and would be the child of a book, a written passage, or more precisely, of a secondary source (a quite banal one, at that), instead of being generated by

⁹¹ The long period without correspondence that de Chirico speaks of refers to his last communication: a postcard from Florence dated 11 April 1910, to the letter in question, written at the end of December 1910.

⁹² De Chirico became ill in Milan where he had moved in June 1909 from Munich. In his *Memoirs* he recalls: "while staying in Milan, I had serious intestinal troubles, chronic pains accompanied by much weakness. I could hardly climb stairs and in the street I was afraid I would succumb to fainting and always walked close to the walls." *Op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

the direct encounter of consciousness and reality experienced by de Chirico – and what else could Metaphysical Art be after all, if not the direct experience with reality?

Baldacci's theory is based on his assumption that de Chirico employed the ideas and suggestions of his brother Savinio during the 1909 Milanese period. Here again, the filter of "Savinio" rather than the artist's extraordinary realisation of awareness that came about in Piazza Santa Croce. In his latest publication, Baldacci surpassed even himself: "More than through reasoning, it would be correct to speak, at least for Giorgio, of a form of meditation capable of internalising and appropriating the creative and intuitive procedures identified in other artists, poets and thinkers."⁹³ At this point, I would say that Savinio is indeed a better choice as father – at least it remains in the family – instead of this extensive "collection" of fathers.

Affirmations of this kind underline just how off-track Baldacci's take on the artist is. De Chirico's art does not derive from someone else's, from a brother, from a book or from other "artists, poets and thinkers" but is *primal*, and it is precisely due to this unitary and fundamental quality that so many other artists, in turn, have been able to draw upon it, and in doing so, have created various, new art movements: from Surrealism to Magic Realism and New Objectivity, up to Conceptual Art. Such a fertile source cannot derive from the interpretation of something elaborated on by someone else. De Chirico had a vision that went beyond reality, through which he created a form of Art that influenced the greatest thinkers and artists of the twentieth century.

4. Conclusions

For what reason does Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico dedicate time and energy to a problem, which, in order to clarify it, it is sufficient to allow the relative documents, the artist's writings and historical facts speak for themselves? It must be specified that the in-depth study and the correlation of numerous scholarly sources is undeniably an activity reserved to those who fully dedicate themselves to the study of an artist. This kind of work demands seriousness, intelligence and impartiality, and, above all, entails an enormous amount of effort aimed at research and verification. In my opinion, somewhere along the way something went wrong in Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos's way of approaching research and they have ended up by creating a labyrinth-like amusement park full of gossip, intrigue and distorted mirrors on reality. Having established Giorgio de Chirico's wild ambition in wanting to appear as the sole inventor of Metaphysical Art, an aspiration that guided him in non-ethical behaviour toward his brother (and towards all those who desire to know the historical truth and who have been deprived of such all these years), Baldacci, having divested himself of the historian's robes, has donned those of the psychoanalyst and delved further, under a Freudian light, into the man's condition: "De Chirico presents himself in his official life like a loyal and complacent observer of moral rules, but in the utopia of Art, and under the contriving guise of philosophy, something very different awaits us". The comment refers to Baldacci's interpretation of the pictorial theme

⁹³ See P. Baldacci, *op. cit.*, 2011, pp. 27-28.

of the Gladiators, which, in his eyes: "is nothing other than de Chirico's unsolved relationship with his father, his brother and the male sex."⁹⁴

The Foundation can do no less than object to this absurd defamation of de Chirico put forth by those who are supposed to support, reveal and facilitate comprehension of his work – but who have instead altered his biography –. De Chirico knew the problem all too well, expressing himself on an infinite number of occasions regarding the state of the critics who were his contemporaries: "What the critic of today is looking for is the anecdote, or 'intelligent' sounding gossip that is actually quite sly, through which they aim at appearing as a superior, acute person, a lyric and complex spirit, a person up-to-date with the most recent artistic trends. In fact, when one reads the essays in the numerous monographs dedicated to the various Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh etc., one finds nothing but anecdotes, gossip and romanticised life; on [the subject of] painting, not one word."⁹⁵

We have seen the moral injury Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos have inflicted on Giorgio de Chirico through their re-elaboration of his personal, professional and family history. We have traced the damage and manipulation applied to the Maestro's wealth of theoretical work.

The ultimate aim of this study is not to reconfirm a historical truth – which stands before everyone's eyes – but rather to re-establish the moral truth regarding Giorgio de Chirico, who, by means of the insistent and repetitive accusations of being a liar, a fabulist (and the entire range of vocabulary used)⁹⁶, an attempt has been made to deny him of his honour and dignity, qualities he rightly deserves both as a human being and as the greatest artist of the twentieth century.⁹⁷

In closing, I will answer a question that I posed in my first article on this subject, that of verifying as to whether de Chirico "is actually victim, *postmortem*, of a profound falsification of the facts and circumstances of his life, an event that is even more dangerous than that which his artwork suffered from". The answer, unfortunately, is yes.

⁹⁴ See P. Baldacci: "The enigma of the gladiators begins to become clear: by means of an ironic *mis-en-scène* of apparent 'violence', [the gladiators] aim to break taboos resulting from a rigid and moral education, in order to set free urges that have been curbed with difficulty, through artistic expression [...]". Information caption of the painting *Gladiators*, 1928, exhibition catalogue *De Chirico*, Palazzo Zabarella, Padua, Marsilio Editore, Venice 2007, p. 200. With such an affirmation, one is led once again to wondering as to whether Baldacci has actually understood Giorgio de Chirico's art. With reference to the *Gladiators*, unique both in theme and in painterly quality, de Chirico said: "The gladiator is an extremely dramatic character, full of altruism, devoted to death and destined to die. Rare are the gladiators who survive, is it not? The dramatic aspect of the gladiator has always impressed me, for the fact he is destined to..." Interview *Entretien avec de Chirico* by J.J. Marcand, questions prepared by G. Briganti, "Archives du XX Siècle", 1971. It is a shame that this important theme, which treats dramatic and universal questions such as Destiny and Death, has been reduced by Baldacci's "autobiographical method" which he seems to attribute all of de Chirico's *œuvre* to.

⁹⁵ See G. de Chirico, *L'eterna questione*, published with the title *Vox clamans in deserto*, in "L'Ambrosiano", Milan 16 March 1938; now in *Scritti/1*, cit., p. 392.

⁹⁶ See below for a brief list of the terminology frequently used by Paolo Baldacci with regard to the artist: *Giorgio de Chirico... in other words. Paolo Baldacci's vocabulary (including a few observations by Gerd Roos)*

⁹⁷ I take the opportunity of reminding the architects of such an attempt, Paolo Baldacci, as well as Gerd Roos, of something that they seem to have forgotten and that is: "the fundamental principle lying at the heart of academic activity that requires the absolute respect of documental evidence".

Giorgio de Chirico... in other words

Paolo Baldacci's vocabulary (with a few observations by Gerd Roos)¹

"For de Chirico, everything is an artistic creation that skilfully mixes truth and myth (or **lies?**) to construct his self-portrait".

"De Chirico was a **liar**, that is, he did what he liked with dates and facts according to his whims of the moment".

"De Chirico was a **Levantine**: if he could cheat someone, he did so without scruple".

"He indeed had a **good dose of levantinism** in him and the pretence of being beyond good and evil, ready to take anyone he could for a ride, united with a childlike sense of irresponsibility, of which he was the number one victim".

"It's not my fault if the Pictor Optimus was a **fabulist**".

De Chirico's *Memoirs*: a "**monument of mystification**".

"Crafty"

"Perhaps the most dramatic of all the **deliberate obfuscations** practiced by de Chirico is his nearly total negation of the role played by his younger brother in formulating the theoretical foundation of the poetics of Metaphysical Art".

"this **hyper-documented** praxis of de Chirico".

"precisely because their work and thought developed in a **sybiotic tangle**, as far back as the 1920s, [de Chirico] started to create the myth of the solitary hero".

"The **Myth of Florence** and the Denial of Savinio's Influence".

"It was immediately after Alberto's death that de Chirico began to regret his **ingratitude**. The long passages dedicated to his brother in his *Memoirs* smack of **crocodile tears** and carefully avoid repairing his earlier silence by clarifying Savinio's contribution of ideas to the invention of Metaphysical Art".

"The fact that no negative judgement is explicitly expressed regarding the **lack of moral character** in the brother [Giorgio] and in the mother, is eloquent enough".

"Gemma and her sons **lied** about the birth of her husband and their father from the very day he died".

"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".

"De Chirico presents himself in his official life like a loyal and complacent observer of moral rules, but in the utopia of art, and **under the contriving guise of philosophy**, something very different awaits us".

"The author disguises himself behind the **mask** of his own '**constructed**' truth, designed to give a particular meaning to a particular aspect of his life story".

¹ The quotes are taken from various publications by Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos from 1997 to 2011.

Observations by Gerd Roos:

“De Chirico’s **obfuscation** of Albert Savinio, as seen in his previously mentioned writings, began to manifest itself around 1919-1920, that is, at the time that their cooperation was about to take on a competitive form, never openly declared and always developed indirectly”.

“A series of information and explanations that could come from either de Chirico or Savinio prove in some way to be the parturition of the older brother due to the precise chronology and biography linked to a **false reconstruction** of the artistic periods and to the **complete elimination** of the younger brother’s role”.

“The **Myth of Florence** contains in fact another essential component: the conception that this new Art was the spiritual conquest of a single person”.

“Savinio proved to be more impartial with respect to the initial collaboration with his brother”.

“De Chirico dedicated himself to the diffusion of this **myth** his whole life long”.

“I thank Paolo Baldacci for making me notice that the signature was not of ‘**Giorgio**’ but rather ‘**Gemma**’ de Chirico”. (See note 54)

*And, in closing... for those who do not agree with Baldacci’s “truths”, he bids: “At this point, it may be necessary to **wait for the demise** of those involved in order to see things be put back into their proper place”.*

Following this essay’s publication in the periodical’s Italian edition, Paolo Baldacci finally formally acknowledged 26 December 1910 as the correct date of the letter written by Giorgio de Chirico in Florence and sent to Fritz Gartz (instead of 26 January 1910). Baldacci’s recognition was posted as a “comment” on the Archivio dell’Arte Metafisica’s website in May 2012. Consequently, there can be no further doubt as to the absolute truthfulness of de Chirico’s autobiographical writings. The same is to be said for the historical accuracy regarding the place (Florence) and date (1910) of the discovery of Metaphysical Art, as well as Giorgio de Chirico’s sole paternity of this invention.