

## GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND RAFFAELLO GIOLLI: PAINTER AND CRITIC IN MILAN BETWEEN THE WARS AN UNPUBLISHED STORY

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Giorgio de Chirico and Raffaello Giolli: “one is a painter, the other a historian”,<sup>1</sup> Giolli had pointed out to accentuate the difference, stung to the quick by statements (“just you try”<sup>2</sup>) and by the paintings that de Chirico had shown in Milan in early 1921, “pictures [...] which”, the critic declared without mincing words, “are not to our taste”.<sup>3</sup> The artist had brought together 26 oils and 40 drawings, including juvenilia (1908-1915) and his latest productions, for his first solo show set up in the three small rooms of Galleria Arte,<sup>4</sup> the basement of an electrical goods shop that Vincenzo Bucci<sup>5</sup> more coherently and poetically rechristened the “hypogean gallery”<sup>6</sup> and de Chirico, in a visionary manner, defined as “little underground Eden”.<sup>7</sup>

Over and above some examples of metaphysical painting, de Chirico had shown numerous copies of renaissance and classical works, mostly done at the Uffizi during his stays in Florence: a copy from Dosso Dossi and a head of Meleager (both since lost); Michelangelo’s *Holy Family* (“I spent six months on it, making sure to the extent of my abilities to render the aspect of Michelangelo’s work in its colour, its clear and dry impasto, in the complicated spirit of its lines and forms”<sup>8</sup>); a female figure, in Giolli’s words “unscrupulously cut out of a Bronzino picture”,<sup>9</sup> and a drawing with the head of *Niobe*, as well as his *Beloved Young Lady*,

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1 R. Giolli, *Il pittore e la scimmia*, in “La Sera”, XXIX, n. 43, Milan 19 February 1921, p. 4.

2 *Ibidem*.

3 *Ibidem*.

4 The show, which ran from 29 January to 12 February, was to be the penultimate in those dark little rooms of Via Dante. This cultural enterprise, financed by industrialist Amleto Selvatico (owner of the adjacent electrical materials store) and directed by writer and journalist Mario Buggelli, would close down the following month, just a year after opening, but could boast some illustrious exhibitors: from Achille Funi to Mario Sironi, from Arturo Martini to Gigiotti Zanini. For a more in-depth treatment of the gallery’s history see N. Colombo, *Le gallerie private milanesi protagoniste della storia di “Novecento” (1920-1932)*, more specifically the paragraph, *La Galleria Arte – Mostre Temporanee o degli Ipogei*, in E. Pontiggia, N. Colombo, C. Gian Ferrari, in *Il “Novecento” milanese. Da Sironi ad Arturo Martini*, Mazzotta, Milan 2003, pp. 32-35.

5 Art and literary editor for “Corriere della Sera” from 1911 to 1938 (with Ugo Ojetti, Renato Simoni, Ettore Janni and Eligio Possenti), Vincenzo Bucci (1878-1958) was an active participant and convinced supporter in that heroic undertaking.

6 In the same gallery a year earlier (20 March-15 April) de Chirico, who moved to Milan in November 1919, had taken part in the collective show presented by Margherita Sarfatti with another 17 artists (including Sironi, Carrà, Marussig, Funi, Martini and Gigiotti Zanini), exhibiting a portrait. This Milanese period (which ended in April 1920 when de Chirico moved to Florence) was dealt with by E. Pontiggia in “*In the Immense Desert of this Big City*”. *De Chirico in Milan 1919-1920*, “Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico” n. 5/6, 2006, pp. 163-173, to which the reader is referred.

7 G. de Chirico, *Esposizione Sinopico, Graziosi, Nizzoli alla Galleria “Arte”*, in “Il Convegno”, I, n. 5, Milan June 1920, now in *Scritti/1 (1911-1945). Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici*, edited by A. Cortellezza, Bompiani, Milan 2008, p. 740.

8 G. de Chirico, introductory text in the exhibition catalogue, Galleria Arte, Milan, 29 January-12 February 1921.

9 R. Giolli, *Il pittore e la scimmia*, cit.



fig. 1 G. de Chirico, *The Statue that Moved (Statue of Mercury)*, 1920-1921

arouse Giolli's indignation, together with the intolerable presumption of someone who believes that "copying means creating", with regard to which he specified: "like a kind of Cavalier d'Arpino and Pelagio Palagi".<sup>14</sup> With the result that his article on de Chirico in "La Sera", the daily then edited by Gian Luca Zanetti<sup>15</sup> bore

*Departure of the Argonauts*,<sup>10</sup> *The Statue that Moved (Statue of Mercury)*<sup>11</sup> and *Oedipus and the Sphinx (Temple of Apollo)* (figs. 1-2), where the classical references are in any case evident.<sup>12</sup> The artist took care to point out: "In my most recent paintings such as *Oedipus*, *Self-Portrait*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Niobe*, *Salute of the Departing Argonauts* and the two versions of the *Statue of Mercury* revealing the mysteries of the gods to metaphysicians, one finds a tendency towards clear painting and transparent colour, that dry sense of painterly matter which I call Olympian and which has its highest affirmation in the work of Botticelli and that of Raphael in Perugia. However, as I indicated in my article *Pictorial Classicism*, this sense already existed in Greek painting, as borne out by the wall paintings at Pompeii and those marvellous Greek pictures painted on very thin sheets of marble which, recently discovered at the foot of Mount Pelion, at Volos to be exact, are currently in this city's museum".<sup>13</sup> And it is precisely the copies that

10 A tempera on canvas, also known as *The Salute of the Departing Argonauts*, dated 1920 and listed in the catalogue at number 23. For a complete list of the works on show see M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico. Il tempo di "Valori Plastici" 1918-1922*, De Luca, Rome 1980, p. 57.

11 De Chirico presented two versions of this work, also known as *Statue of Mercury Revealing the Mysteries of the Gods to Metaphysicians*, and wrote in the catalogue: "Among my latest works I believe that certain creations of the imagination, like the two versions of *Mercury and the Metaphysicians*, are rare things destined for the few, therefore works of great destiny; I am sure of this and am calm and happy about it".

12 He was also supposed to exhibit *Portrait of a Lady (The Mute)* (1920), but the painting had already been sent to Paris in early 1920, as he himself recalls in the introductory text: "among the works sent north of the Alps there is also a copy from Raphael [...] which I consider very important and which I am sorry I cannot show today". Painted at the Uffizi (where it was before being moved to Urbino), the copy has the identical format of the original. It would be exhibited in Paris at the solo show held at the Galerie Paul Guillaume in 1922 (21 March-1 April). The painting later formed part of the Raffaele Carrieri collection. The 4<sup>th</sup> centenary of Raphael's death was celebrated precisely in 1920, and "Il Convegno" devoted many pages to the subject.

13 G. de Chirico, introductory text to the exhibition catalogue, Galleria Arte, Milan 29 January-12 February 1921.

14 R. Giolli, *Il pittore e la scimmia*, cit.

15 In 1917 Zanetti became editor and co-owner of "La Sera", an afternoon daily printed in Milan since 1892. Zanetti, a lawyer who soon took to journalism and then publishing, supported the governments of Giolitti and then Bonomi, while he would criticise Nitti and immediately take a position against fascism and Mussolini. This intransigent and resolute stance however made his life difficult and in 1924, before the murder of Matteotti, he was forced to leave the editorship and also to transfer his ownership shares. His struggle to help solve the serious problems afflicting southern Italy have made history (he called in prestigious names such as Napoleone Colajanni in this endeavour) and above all his fight for women's suffrage, backed as early as 1919 by several articles from Fabio Luzzatto and Innocenza Cappa. Another of Zanetti's merits was his founding of the publishing house Unitas: "A name", Boneschi pointed out, "evocative of Italian unity and of social unity through cooperation", which would remain Zanetti's guiding principles. He would also

the scarcely edifying title *Il pittore e la scimmia* [*The Painter and the Ape*], though it was published only after the exhibition had closed. A piece which to date has inexplicably escaped art critics, like almost all of Giolli's writings on the artist over 20 years,<sup>16</sup> which we are reconstructing here for the first time.

So for the moment Giolli, one of the most important and heeded critics of the day, was among the detractors<sup>17</sup> of the *Pictor Optimus*, and his judgement was particularly tough, with no lack of perspicacious inferences and phrases. Yet this notwithstanding, what he achieved is a perfect analysis of what was going on in de Chirico's painting and, more generally, in the art of the period, even if he does draw some hasty conclusions. He writes: "All this painting is no other than a variant of classical themes, tones and compositions. Just as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the mannerist blithely copied the figures and attitudes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century masters, setting a figure from Raphael with one from Correggio, passing it all off as his *own stuff*, so this avant-gardist of today does the same with the mannerists of then [...]. When Paris was the city of reference, Cézanne and

Picasso were imitated; it was the time of futurism, dynamism, decompositions etc., whereas today they have all gone back to being Italian and classic: line, form, museum: volte-face, just like that: Giotto, Paolo Uccello or Bronzino, according to taste. [...] and one may copy Michelangelo but one remains de Chirico". And again: "Only the other day all these young men – from Carrà to Funi to Oppo – were seeking salvation in foreign art of the future. Now they've changed the watchword and are all for the national tradition [...] they're all like the prodigal son. They have squandered [their resources] and come home with a deranged conscience: some hook up with Giotto, others with Raphael or Tintoretto. Nobody is familiar with living Italian tradition. They also believe that Italy has only Renaissance tradition and they put more trust in archaeology than in their own hearts. They come back to us with a proud and irritating foreign mentality".<sup>18</sup> For someone who had always



fig. 2 G. de Chirico, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*  
(*Temple of Apollo*), 1920

appear in the two periodicals he edited, "La Rivista d'Italia" and "L'Industria", along with outstanding names such as Einaudi, Pareto, Salvemini, Sforza, Gobetti and Calamandrei, not to mention the contributions from illustrious literary figures like Ada Negri and Pirandello. On Gian Luca Zanetti, see B. Boneschi, *Gian Luca Zanetti dall'avvocatura al giornalismo e all'editoria*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2012. Giolli had begun writing for "La Sera" in 1920, after collaborating as journalist and editor with all the magazines printed by Alfieri & Lacroix: from "Rassegna d'Arte" to "Vita d'Arte" and "Pagine d'Arte".

16 Raffaello Giolli was born in Alessandria in 1889 but chose at an early age to live and work in Milan. When he was 22 he published his first literary effort with Alfieri & Lacroix: a monograph on the sculptor Paul Troubetzkoy. Throughout his life, Giolli contributed to dailies, magazines (some of which he founded), and to the city's schools and museums, swiftly becoming one of the most attentive and heeded voices on the Milan art scene.

17 He was not the only one, see for example the article by B. (Bonapace?), *De Chirico alla Casa d'Arte*, in "La Perseveranza", Milan, 2 February 1921 in which, even more seriously, he is actually accused of not knowing how to paint.

18 R. Giolli, *Il pittore e la scimmia*, cit. The argument is resumed and reaffirmed in another article entitled *Nel Limbo*, again published in "La Sera" (n. 61) on 19 March 1921, p. 3.

fought to defend the Italian 19<sup>th</sup> century – and in particular the art of Lombardy in which he saw the actual living roots of the new century – it was normal to mistrust everyone who apparently did not take it into account and who mostly came from France, the land of an overestimated impressionism, a concomitant cause in Giolli's view of the considerable loss of references to national and 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian culture in general. It was no accident that he entitled his last book *La disfatta dell'Ottocento* [*The Defeat of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*], a long treatise of social-political rather than artistic analysis of the evils that defeated the feeling of an epoch.<sup>19</sup> Giolli was not yet capable of interpreting with sufficient clarity and objectivity those returns to classicity (and he would take some time to focus on them), just as he could not admit the copy as an autonomous genre, because for him art was synonymous with life, it had to be the child of its times and an idea in continuous becoming: “the picture is a painterly organism”, he would repeat, “and not a history lesson”,<sup>20</sup> and again: “Painting is a mystery: and when there is no longer the soul in conflict but the laborious profession, then it is harder to mark its limits”.<sup>21</sup> For this reason he heavily attacked de Chirico's results by using them as a pretext to back up his anti-French rancour, his pro-Lombardy theories and the dual concept awareness-life on which, in his opinion, not only art but also criticism must be founded and implemented. This notwithstanding however, the scholar concluded his impassioned harangue with a note of encouragement: “After which we may also acknowledge that among all these artists de Chirico is one of the most representative inasmuch as what the others often do for fun and with levity he does seriously and systematically”.<sup>22</sup>

Seriousness and boldness, two attributes that Giolli did not underestimate, since in reviewing the International Watercolour Exhibition at the Palazzo della Permanente in April 1923, he missed precisely “those bold and vigorous temperaments on which Italian painting can fortunately count: from Emilio Gola to Arturo Tosi and Ermenegildo Agazzi; and all the young ones, from Carpi to Spadini, from Carrà to Soffici, from Sironi to de Chirico”.<sup>23</sup>

But mistrust is hard to overcome and once again in December 1924, on the occasion of the exhibition *Twenty Italian Artists* organised by Ugo Ojetti at the Galleria Pesaro, in which de Chirico took part with a version of *The Prodigal Son* (probably the one dated 1924), a *Self-Portrait* (1924) and a *Still Life*, the critic still had reservations, which he voiced in full: “De Chirico who stands side by side with the mannerists of the decadent Cinquecento, at times with such a fantastical boldness that then suddenly appears, embarrassed”.<sup>24</sup> The occasion however allowed Giolli to better explain his position, which helps us to understand his stubborn resistance to the painting of the master from Volos.

Giolli could not bear the exaggerated tones of what he saw as a wholly Italian crusade against national impressionism. Leaving aside French impressionism which had “become a theory of dissolutions and

19 *La Disfatta dell'Ottocento* was published posthumously, heavily revised by Giolli's wife Rosa Menni and Claudio Piovene, Einaudi, Turin 1961.

20 R. Giolli, *Esposizioni milanesi*, in “Cronache Latine”, II, n. 7, Milan, 13 February 1932, n.p.

21 R. Giolli, *Cronache d'arte. La Biennale di Brera. Le opere*, “La Sera”, XXXXIII, n. 262, Milan, 5 November 1925, p. 3.

22 R. Giolli, *Il pittore e la scimmia*, cit.

23 R. Giolli, *La Mostra Internazionale dell'acquarello*, in “La Sera”, XXXI, n. 89, Milan, 13 April 1923, p. 4.

24 R. Giolli, *Frase fatte: l'Anti-impressionismo*, in “La Sera”, XXXIII, n. 4, Milan, 5 January 1925, p. 3. Giolli was not the only one. On the same occasion but for different reasons Torriano too was somewhat perplexed: “Giorgio de Chirico, so singular, passes from hermetic and transcendental depictions to others more archaic, others more realistic. His drawing is robust and terse, united here and there with splendour of colour; there are ironic features and accents of true poetry, but then there is also a touch of the alien, of the remote and chaotic that fails to capture us”; P. Torriano, *Cronache milanesi. Venti artisti italiani alla Galleria Pesaro*, in “Emporium”, vol. LXI, n. 361, Bergamo, January 1925, p. 66.

dissipations” where, however, unlike in Italy, there had been no opposition but an overcoming, thanks to Cézanne and his “power of plastic integration” and then right on down to Picasso. But in Italy, where “impressionism was the most domestic and balanced in Europe [...] the polemical tones of our neoclassics and synthesists are sometimes rather comical, placed as they are without adversaries to attack and with the ambition to go beyond experiences they’d never had. So they seek credentials of Italianness by harking back to Renaissance Florentines or Venetians, thus complicating the risks of this derivative movement which threatens to transform a pointless reaction into a rhetorical evocation. Especially in Italy, this theory of the ‘return to craft’, this illusion of ruling without possessing, is one of its shoddiest equivocations”.<sup>25</sup> In Giolli’s view de Chirico was one of those and the painter’s fathers with their plastic, classic body embracing mechanical and alien sons certainly did not exonerate him.

And throughout the 1920s, each time Giolli came across a de Chirico work he would either ignore it or his refrain would be pretty much the same, expressed indeed with increasingly fewer words. For example the artist’s solo show in February 1926 at Galleria Pesaro (with Carrà and Rubaldo Merello) was dismissed by Giolli in a few lines, whilst a long and enthusiastic page was dedicated to Carrà (in whom, on the contrary, he saw “neither ‘conversion’ nor return but only a normal and genuine development”). Of de Chirico he wrote, “it seems to me that we are still more or less in the same place. He is a curious stirrer of all kinds of painting, from Michelangelo to Courbet.<sup>26</sup> He seems to enjoy translating any ‘classic piece’ whatever into his hieroglyphics. And nonetheless, however rhetorical the point of departure and artificial the point of arrival may be, a certain Romanesque impulse and an imagination of the painterly doodle manages to save its personality”.<sup>27</sup> And in spite of all the articles written on the matter, Giolli does not mention the three works that de Chirico showed in that period at the *1<sup>st</sup> Novecento Italiano* exhibition at Palazzo della Permanente (*Still Life with Fish [Seascape]*, n. 10 (fig. 3), *Achilles*, n. 11 and *Self-Portrait*, n. 12).

Just as the painter’s name would rarely appear in “Problemi d’Arte Attuale” (fig. 4), a magazine founded by the indefatigable Giolli in October 1927 as a vehicle for spreading Italian art worldwide: “the only magazine that follows and clearly supports the modern movement in Italian art”, and whose precise purpose was to “save the Italian art of today, in its most alive manifestation, from the negligence of dealers, the scepticism of collectors and the tiredness of artists. We must above all underscore with the clearest insistence, where foreigners are concerned, this ignored force of Italian art today, of all our art”.<sup>28</sup>

And it was precisely in defence of Italian honour that Giolli, in the December number, made an exception to his rule of silence and stepped into the polemic triggered by de Chirico with his highly coloured statements published in “Comœdia”, to which the critic replied with a short but biting article, unsigned, entitled *De Chirico in ritardo [De Chirico’s Late Arrival]* and accompanied by the image of *Lion and Gladiators*, a work from the Léonce Rosenberg collection (fig. 5). But let us see what he wrote:

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25 R. Giolli, *Frase fatte: l’Anti-impressionismo*, “La Sera”, XXXIII, n. 4, Milan 5 January 1925, p. 3.

26 The reference to Courbet was for *Female Head* [aka *Female Bust in Green*], a tempera on canvas dated 1924-1925 which, with some variants, reprised the French master’s *La fille endormie*, a work that appeared on the cover of “Valori Plastici” in the special issue dedicated to Courbet and written by de Chirico. The original painting was in the collection of Rolf de Marés, the choreographer of the Swedish Ballet for which de Chirico had worked on the sets of *The Jar* by Pirandello with music by Casella staged in Paris in November 1924.

27 R. Giolli, *La pittura ermetica*, in “La Sera”, XXXIV, n. 37, Milan 12 February 1926, p. 3.

28 R. Giolli, in “1927. Problemi d’Arte Attuale”, I, n. 5, Milan 30 December 1927, p. 72.

“De Chirico always risks arriving late.

They say that he discovered metaphysical painting after Carrà had already christened it. On thing is for sure, he began to copy the mannerists of the decadent Cinquecento after they had already been discovered by German critics. Now he calls the Italians idiots, precisely when the Italians were starting to admire him. As the newspapers announced a de Chirico room at the next Venice Biennale and as bookshop windows displayed the latest volume of ‘Arte Moderna Italiana’ dedicated precisely to him,<sup>29</sup> de Chirico begged an editor at ‘Comœdia’ to print it loud and clear that Italians, painters and writers, understand nothing of modern art because they lack genius. ‘There is Modigliani and myself: but we are almost French’.<sup>30</sup>

The newspapers rebelled, justly. If not to de Chirico, we do indeed feel close to Modigliani. But it would be even more just if de Chirico the painter rebelled against de Chirico the thinker. Italy in fact goes on with its business just the same, and we are not accustomed to getting excited about polemical insolence. But it cannot be taken for granted that de Chirico’s painting will proceed much further if it is always accompanied by such a witless intelligence and if he still persists in the showy poor taste of vulgar bragging.

And it would be a shame. After so many pseudo-decadent and pseudo-metaphysical mannerisms, perhaps it was really now that de Chirico’s amateurish painting began to find for the first time its vital and simple form and to justify the praise. But of course in hearing ourselves called stupid precisely while we praise his painting, we ought to hurriedly get back on track and cut short the praise in question in order not to appear really stupid”.<sup>31</sup>



fig. 3 G. de Chirico, *Still Life with Fish (Seascape)*, 1923-1924

And for Giolli things effectively began to change. He found the gladiators (who would make him think of Garbari<sup>32</sup>), the mannequins with their bellies full of ruins and the steeds with their long manes, more convincing. But above all he was finally and definitively persuaded that the Return to Order, the name notwithstanding, did not want to skip over the 19<sup>th</sup> century but, rather, to dialogue in a constructive, across-the-board manner with all previous epochs. It was an effort for him to reconcile the solid aspect and that of life locked in

29 A monograph edited by B. Ternovetz, published by Hoepli, Milan 1928.

30 Giolli refers to Pierre de Lagarde’s interview with de Chirico published in “Comœdia”, in the column “L’Italie et nous”, Paris, 12 December 1927. Now in *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, edited by M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, Turin 1985, pp. 281-283. The interview is reprinted in this periodical together with an interview of the artist’s brother Alberto Savinio published two weeks earlier on 29 November in the same newspaper. The interviews are accompanied by a note by L. Giudici, *ivi*, pp. 391-393.

31 R. Giolli, *De Chirico in ritardo*, in “1927. Problemi d’Arte Attuale”, I, n. 5, Milan 30 December 1927, p. 70.

32 “With Garbari [...] he is the most free-and-easy of all Italian painters. The most unbound from dilemma, the freest in magical dream, the farthest from any heaviness”. See R. Giolli, *Esame del “Novecento”. De Chirico*, in “L’Ambrosiano”, XII, n. 16, Milan 18 January 1934, p. 3.



figs. 4-5 Cover of the first issue of “Problemi d’Arte Attuale”, periodical founded by R. Giolli in October 1927, and the article *De Chirico in ritardo* published in the December 1927 issue

motionless eternity portrayed by 20<sup>th</sup> century artists with the idea of history as ongoing and inexorable flow, of painting as pulsations of the spirit. It was not so much the form it took on (which was a way like any other to uncover those Italian roots) as the substance: the breath of life replaced by fixity, the quivering darting of colour by synthesis of line, the flow of brushstrokes by the order imposed by volumes. However, when he understood that although art lives as lyrical emotion, it “represents a humanity that also lives as thought”<sup>33</sup> and as such must satisfy both, then it became a slow conversion for him, a natural and inevitable transition in the name of the “mood of a generation”,<sup>34</sup> in the name of that evolutionistic and integrative idea of history: “to continue without renouncing, to integrate and not contradict, this seems to be our task today, even if life should become slow or arduous or dramatic”.<sup>35</sup>

A first sign of the new course taken by their tortuous history came in November 1929, in the first issue of Giolli’s new magazine “Poligono” which took the place of “Problemi d’Arte Attuale”. On page 46, accompanying Otto Muller’s text on the *Novecento Italiano* exhibition in Berlin, appears a large image of *The Archaeologists*, a work de Chirico had also sent to the Galerie Moos in Geneva some months earlier (June-July).<sup>36</sup>

But it was in 1930 that the hatchet was definitively buried, when in the February issue of “Poligono”, dedicated to Modigliani with a long critical essay by Leonello Venturi, Giolli printed a piece by de Chirico whose title however seems to have the flavour of a slight vendetta, “*Tu sarai qualcuno*” [You will become someone] (fig. 6), and certain passages seem to be a settling of accounts. The piece is illustrated with a number

33 R. Giolli, *Cronache d’arte. Alla Galleria Pesaro. Al di là della pittura*, in “La Sera”, XXXI, n. 26, Milan 30 January 1923, p. 2.

34 R. Giolli, *Alla Biennale di Venezia. La disputa dell’impressionismo*, in “La Sera”, XXXII, n. 115, Milan 14 May 1924, p. 3.

35 *Ibidem*.

36 O. Muller, *Lettera dalla Germania agli “indipendenti”*, in “Poligono”, n. 1, Milan November 1929, pp. 42-49.



fig. 6 G. de Chirico, “*Tu sarai qualcuno*” published in “*Poligono*”, February 1930

read in a letter from Margherita Sarfatti to Mario Sironi: “as for de Chirico, Giolli tells me that the Gall. Milano would lend 4 or 5 [works]”.<sup>41</sup> De Chirico took part in the exhibition held in September at the “Amigos del Arte” centre, with *Serenade* (n. 48), *Prometheus* (n. 49), *Battle of Centaurs* (n. 50), *Dying Centaur* (n. 51) and *Sphinx* (n. 52). And looking at the subjects one can well believe that they really were selected by Giolli.

But it was in the mid 1930s, in “L’Ambrosiano”, when Giolli took up his own personal *Esame del Novecento*, a sort of close scrutiny of the decade just over, in which, through a series of monographic essays he fully redeemed the *Pictor Optimus* with a long article in which he weighed up his attributes and demonstrated unprecedented enthusiasm. Having set aside the recriminations, provocations and the phases of de Chirico’s painting that had not convinced him, Giolli concentrates here on the de Chirico of the mid 1920s onwards: “On his return to Paris in ’25 his painting rediscovered an direct, sensitive and penetrating technique. What had been most alive in his metaphysical period resurfaced, but it was no longer theory”. And again: “The heavy

of images of his latest work which, as defined by Giolli, comprised of “fantastical horses”.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, on the last pages of the magazine a brief article points out recent publications in Italy and France on de Chirico who, “As soon as he arrived in Paris [...] was placed on the level of great famous painters”,<sup>38</sup> while another literary feature cites him among the Italians in Paris at the Galleria Milano exhibition.<sup>39</sup> A show that Giolli also reviewed for “Emporium”, where he wrote: “On that world of spiritual hallucination, but without fogginess [referring to Carrà, *ed.*], one also gets a taste of the art of de Chirico: together with some old work we saw a very recent painting, delightful, refined and fantastical”.<sup>40</sup> The painting in question could be *Gladiators and Arbiter*, reproduced three pages earlier (fig. 7). That Giolli had been definitively convinced of the power of de Chirico’s painting is also borne out by the fact that he offered his services as intermediary in finding works by the artist for the Novecento exhibition in Buenos Aires, as we

37 G. de Chirico, “*Tu sarai qualcuno*”, in “*Poligono*”, n. 4, Milan February 1930, pp. 204-210. The illustrations are: *Horses of Thessaly* (p. 204); *The Painter of Horses* (p. 205); *Horses on the Shore of 1927* (p. 206); *Horses Wounded by Arrows* (p. 207); *The Lighthouse* (p. 208); *Horses Playing on the Shore* (p. 209) and *Horses Beneath the Acropolis* (p. 210). The text is the Italian translation of *Le survivant de Navarin*, published in Waldemar George’s monograph *Chirico*, Éditions Chroniques du Jour, Paris 1928.

38 *Per de Chirico*, in “*Poligono*”, n. 4, Milan February 1930, pp. 221-222.

39 [R. Giolli], *Gli italiani a Parigi*, in “*Poligono*”, n. 4, Milan February 1930, p. 224.

40 R. Giolli, *Cronache milanesi. Aste. Signorini. Esposizioni individuali e collettive*, in “*Emporium*”, vol. LXXI, n. 423, Bergamo March 1930, p. 186.

41 M. Sarfatti to M. Sironi, 11 July 1930, now in E. Pontiggia, *Il Novecento Italiano*, Abscondita, Milan 2003, p. 83.

and embarrassing mannequins in stained wood now become ghosts as the pinks fuse into the pinks and the blues into the blues. His palette is simple and rich, all subtleties, clear, vibrant as the clearest 18<sup>th</sup> century French artist. What marvellous painting this is! Only because it is no longer colour nor form but light that penetrates itself, everything now becomes alive and fantastical, precious, in a word luminous: not only those little horses and their great sonorous manes suddenly freed like a cry in the sky and over the sea, but all those mute, seated mannequins! It may be said over again that light increasingly enters into colour and form to undo and penetrate them, and behold the Archaeologists, de Chirico's densest and most saturated image, a form of mystery, a moment of enchantment, his greatest, transfiguring image [...] a kind of painting never before seen.

He who had been the most concealed painter is now the most free and open. Everything he touches upon is reborn in painterly substance. Certain recent still lifes of his, with fish and the sea, are masterpieces".<sup>42</sup> Such as *Still Life with Fish*, 1931, shown at the 1932 Venice Biennale and purchased for the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of summer 1936, de Chirico took the transatlantic liner *Roma* for New York where he remained until January 1938.<sup>44</sup> In those nearly two years of absence he was rarely mentioned in Giolli's writings, whereas the latter was among the first to celebrate his return to Milan with an enthusiastic article in "Domus" entitled *Ritorno di de Chirico* [De Chirico's Return]. In the artist's new phase Giolli identified a reappearance of the "atmosphere of mystery" after the period of "raw realism", of the "true and useless posed female nudes" from which he had already distanced himself since he felt that "it was another of the artist's dead zones".<sup>45</sup> And, like some years earlier, it was the horses that elicited his highest praise: those of ten years before: "were clear as a weightless arabesque. Like fragments of columns scattered on those fantastical planes they had the unreal



fig. 7 The painting *Gladiators and Arbiters*, in "Emporium", March 1930, p. 183

42 R. Giolli, *Esame del "Novecento. De Chirico*, "L'Ambrosiano", XII, n. 16, Milan 18 January 1934, p. 3. The article includes two illustrations: *Two Horses* and *Horses on the Shore*.

43 A couple of years earlier, Vincenzo Bucci, whilst reviewing an exhibition of "eight modern painters" (Carrà, de Chirico, Tosi, Sironi, de Pisis, Funi, Marussig and Saliotti) at Galleria Milano, had also praised a still life "of fish, lobsters, lemons and oranges, painted in a lifelike manner, against a background of a fantastical seascape; there is a curious contradiction between realism and unreality". v.b. [Vincenzo Bucci], *Pittori d'oggi*, in "Corriere della Sera", n. 25, Milan 25 January 1932, p. 5.

44 De Chirico's stay in the United States has been documented by K. Robinson in *Giorgio de Chirico – Julien Levy: Artist and Art Dealer: Shared Experience*, in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 326-356.

45 R. Giolli, *Ritorno di de Chirico*, in "Domus", Milan March 1938, pp. 32-33 and 72.

accent of sublime transparencies in which an arcane line threaded ghosts of things, also those horses awakened by the Homeric hymn leapt to the ground without disturbing its silence. These other horses of today are still living solitarily in enchanted spaces but they no longer risk being solely allegories, nor, on the other hand, are they just foals.

In these new *Horses of the Hellespont*, an impetus winds the lines up in a knot, then untangling them, launches them again so that no descent of the veils of bewitching colour can occur. Here the painter is committed to a different dialectic in which colour still riots, beyond any plastic inquiry, in the temptation of a throbbing up-to-dateness".<sup>46</sup> The article is accompanied by two large illustrations of *Horses of the Hellespont* and *Comedy and Tragedy*,<sup>47</sup> works which that same March de Chirico would include in his solo show at Galleria Barbaroux, an exhibition inaugurating the new gallery in via Santo Spirito.<sup>48</sup>

In the course of the year Giolli did not fail to point out the painter's participation at an exhibition in London<sup>49</sup> contemporaneous to the showing of Picasso's *Guernica*, and a solo show at the Arcobaleno, a new Venetian gallery opened next to San Moisè at the beginning of summer.<sup>50</sup>

He would do the same in April of the following year, indicating the artist's presence at a collective show at the Milione gallery (with Funi, Ghiringhelli, Licini, Borra, Reggiani, Marussig and Marino) and one at the Barbaroux gallery (with works by Carrà, Sironi, Campigli, Tosi, Marino Marini and Soffici) which he described as "a sort of retrospective museum".<sup>51</sup>

However, one would have to wait until March 1939 to read his new reflections on the artist's most recent works, which by this time were sought by museums worldwide. The occasion was the solo show at Galleria del Milione.

In the works de Chirico exhibited, Giolli sensed an abandoning of the "lyrical dream" which destroyed "that rarefied atmosphere in which he always wanders delightfully, heading instead to analyses which, due to their extreme synthesis, led more to cutting and describing rather than dreaming and seeing". Neither more nor less than what had happened, in Giolli's view, the first time "he fell in love with the so-called mannerists" and the second when he "arrived in Milan and instead of his obsessed mannequins and inhuman figures, one only saw a series of severe female nudes: blonde hair against a turquoise sea". Among the paintings on show, the only one spared was the double portrait of the artist with his mother (1921). Whereas Giolli was increasingly enthusiastic about "those figures of silent gladiators and mysterious archaeologists which seem to come to us from who knows what zones of the unexpected and which also, in those gilded or silvery atmospheres wrapped in the vibration of a breath, become figures more real than those one then encounters in the street, who are, alas, so boring and atonic".<sup>52</sup> But the Milione exhibition also marked a turning point with regard to the latest de Chirico, on which Giolli lavishes a reflection charged with hope: "Here the apparently impressionist

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>47</sup> *Tragedy and Comedy* would also be shown at the 1939 Rome Quadrennial with another two paintings.

<sup>48</sup> The new gallery, directed by Vittorio Emanuele Barbaroux, housed the inheritance of his father-in-law Gussoni and of Galleria Milano.

<sup>49</sup> Fourteen canvases and four drawings from the metaphysical period and the *Portrait of Paul and Gala Éluard* of 1924.

<sup>50</sup> R. Giolli, *De Chirico*, in "Domus", n. 127, Milan July 1938, p. XX and R. Giolli, *De Chirico*, "Domus", Milan October 1938, p. XIV. De Chirico exhibited 30 works, including engravings, gouaches and drawings, plus ten of his latest oil paintings.

<sup>51</sup> R. Giolli, *Tre collettive*, in "Domus", Milan April 1939, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> R. Giolli, *De Chirico al Milione*, in "Domus", n. 137, May 1939, pp. 9 and 11. The article is illustrated by a gladiator composition entitled *The Triumph*.

experiences to which his painting appeared to have at times returned, with the risk of plunging into the orgiastic brushstroke of painterly sensuality which de Chirico had the privilege of overcoming instinctively, achieve valid persuasions. We need only mention that small horseman riding a galloping horse against a grey and luminous background with a tone of a rediscovered vibrant, lively and pulsating unity in order to look forward to de Chirico surprising us with another unaffected position at his next exhibition”.<sup>53</sup>

For obvious reasons he skipped the October solo show held again at Milione gallery dedicated to the metaphysical period of the artist's work which, as we have seen, he had never been keen on.

Meanwhile the climate in Europe was becoming red-hot, with the harshness of dictatorship and the outbreak of war bringing hard times to Giolli: on 4 July 1940 he was arrested by the secret police (OVRA) and interned with his son Paolo at Istonio Marittimo in the Abruzzo region. Released in February of the following year he was however obliged to live first in Senago and then in Vacciago, on Lake Orta, where he was joined by his family. He spent his evenings discussing music, literature and art with his friend the painter Antonio Calderara.

There would no longer be many opportunities to review exhibitions and artistic events. But this notwithstanding, after a year of silence in 1941 Giolli returned to writing the art pages for “Domus” and “Casabella”. With regard to de Chirico however he had nothing to add. Among the articles he published over the next three years, before he was once more arrested and deported to Mauthausen, never to return, the artist's name appears only in very brief mentions of his participation in collective shows where the works, in Giolli's view, belonged “to that same old register”.<sup>54</sup>

*Translated by David Smith*

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> R. Giolli, *Quadri, statue e il loro pubblico*, in “Domus”, n. 183, March 1943, p. 137.