

Giorgio de Chirico - Letters from the J.T. Soby-P. Eluard Correspondence

Dear M. Eluard,

I am now working on a new and very greatly enlarged edition of my book on the early paintings of Giorgio de Chirico which The Museum of Modern Art in New York is publishing. When I was in Paris in 1948 and again last autumn, I tried to get in touch with you, but without success.

I wanted to ask you whether I could get a photograph of the Metaphysical Still life by de Chirico which you lent to the exhibition at the Hotel Pont Royal in connection with the publication of your excellent book, Voir. Would it be possible for me to have a photograph of this picture and any other de Chirico's of 1910-18 that you may own? I would be most grateful, since I hope to make this edition, so far as possible, a catalogue raisonné of the early pictures. Could you also let me know whether there are any texts by de Chirico that I might consult. For example, M. Jean Paulban was kind enough to let me have some de Chirico manuscripts of 1913 in his possession photographed by Mark Vaux, 114 rue Vaugirard in Paris. It would be an immense help if I could do the same thing with whatever de Chirico writings you may have. Again, I would be most grateful.

After two special trips in Italy, I have at last managed to find the sources of many objects in de Chirico's early iconography, and I have found numerous documents relating to his years in Ferrara and, later, in Rome. I am sure you will understand that after working on this subject for so many years, I am eager to make this book as complete as possible. Your help will be a marvelous asset, I can assure you.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely

James Thrall Soby

M. Paul Eluard

35 rue Marx Dormois

Paris XVIII

France

March 6, 1950

My dear M. Eluard,

I have written you a few letters over the past six months but have had no response. I hope I have the right address which was sent to me by my friend, Ronald Penrose.

I am writing to you about my new book on early paintings by de Chirico. The new book will be published in the winter of 1950-51 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and I hope that it will be more complete than my 1941 The early Chirico.

I have searched everywhere for the 1910 painting, L'Enigme de l'oracle, and finally M. Giorgio Castelfranco wrote to me from Rome saying that perhaps you purchased the painting at the 1923 Biennale in Rome. If you have this painting, may I have it photographed by Marc

M. Paul Eluard

35 rue Marx Dormois

Paris XVIII

France

July 26, 1950

Vaux, 114 rue de Vaugirard? I have already paid M. Vaux for photos he is going to take for me, and he could do the photos when you like. At the same time, it would be very kind of you to allow him to photograph the small Metaphysical Still life which you exhibited at the Hotel Pont Royal on the occasion of the publication of your book Voir in 1948. And it would also be very kind of you if M. Vaux could photograph any letters or manuscript pages of de Chirico's as well. I would really like this book to be a catalogue raisonné of de Chirico's early works, and without your assistance this will be impossible.

*Thank you very much, dear M. Eluard,
Yours sincerely,
James Thrall Soby*

P.S. I have found a letter by de Chirico, dated February 23 only, written from Rome, in which he says a copy of the painting Le Muse inquietanti in the Castelfranco collection can be made. I believe this letter was written to your wife in 1923 or 1924. I would be very interested to know whether this is true. I cannot ask my friend Gala because she has left for Spain. The original painting is now in Milan while the copy is in New York.

**Le Mas
Sarlat (Dordogne)
August 28, 1950**

Dear Monsieur Soby,

Excuse me for not answering your letters, but I have been away from Paris for most of the time since the beginning of the year. As soon as I go back to Paris, towards the end of September, I will look into everything you ask me about.

I have received a visit from a young man sent by you who will, along with me, carry out the photos and research you require.

The letter of which you speak was, in effect, written to Gala around 1923. A long time ago I had some very important texts (* and drawings from before 1914) by de Chirico; I gave them to Picasso but I doubt you will get any information from him. I hope I have a copy in Paris. If you want to do a complete volume, I would be very happy to send them to you (if I find them!).*

*Always believe that I am your friend,
Paul Eluard*

English translation by Marina Harss

Dear M. Eluard,

I am very happy to have your letter and to know that you are able to help me with my book on de Chirico. As I have previously written, M. Marc Vaux, 114 bis rue de Vaugirard in Paris, can take the photos of your paintings and drawings, and I hope, of the texts by de Chirico. He can take them whenever you like, and I have already paid for the photos. Thank you very much for your kindness and interest. I assure you that I will publish in full all the texts by young de Chirico that you are able to send me. I have already written to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, who will be publishing my book, that I would like to wait in hope that you are able find the texts. I believe that alongside the texts of M. Jean Paulhan they will make an effective narration.

I also thank you for your note concerning the letter de Chirico wrote to Gala sometime around 1923. I had numerous x-ray and infrared photos, along with photos using all the other new techniques, taken of the two 'Muse Inquiétantes' paintings I had in the New York museum last year. There are enormous differences between the original 1916-17 painting and the 1923 copy, and I believe one can see here that the enormous talent of the youthful de Chirico begins to exhaust itself. And now there is a third painting of the 'Muses Inquiétantes' in Venice. It is dated 1918 and de Chirico wrote in a letter that it is the original and the best painting on this subject. But I believe that the painting in Venice was painted only three to five years ago as it is too fresh to be a painting from 1918. As I am sure you understand, there are a great many problems with de Chirico's older paintings. Though I hope to have almost all of the true 1910-17 paintings in the book, and am very pleased to have your help. Thank you again, dear M. Eluard. As far as I am concerned the end of September will be just fine for the photos.

*My best regards,
James Thrall Soby*

Dear Mr. Soby,

I have been waiting for some time now for the visit of your emissary who was to photograph my Chirico's. I haven't seen him and as I do not have his address, I think it would be good if you could remind him of our agreement (there would be four photos to take: two paintings, the large portrait drawing of Apollinaire, a medium sized drawing and possibly a couple of small sketches which are in the book). I am enclosing copies of all the texts which belong to Picasso at this moment. I am counting on you sending them back to me as I do not have other copies.

*I remain, faithfully yours,
Paul Eluard
52 Av. De Gravelle, Charenton (Seine)*

**Mr. Paul Eluard
52, Avenue de Gravelle,
Charenton (Seine),
France**

September 16th, 1950

November 13, 1950

Mr. Paul Eluard
52, Avenue de Gravelle,
Charenton (Seine),
France

November 27, 1950

My Dear M. Eluard:

Thank you so very much for the de Chirico texts. I will of course return them to you once the book is ready. It will take some time for me to finish the book, but rest assured, I will send the texts. Thank you again; they are very interesting.

The name of the man who will be taking the photos of the paintings, the drawings and the small sketches, is: M. Marc Vaux, 114 bis rue de Vaugirard, Paris, XV. I sent him a note this morning requesting him to telephone or write you to arrange a convenient day for you to have the photos taken. I have already paid him. I thank you no end.

*The book is very complicated, but I believe I will finish in the spring. In the end I have discovered a great many things. For example, I now know that the real date of the famous painting, *La Nostalgie de L'Infini* is 1913-14 and not 1911. Furthermore, we can see in the x-ray photos of *Le rêve transformé* the date "1913" on top of the "1908". The real date of the painting *Les poissons sacrées* is 1919 and not 1917, etc., etc. And at last I have found the original statue of the statue in the big painting *L'Enigme d'une journée*; it is in Turin in Italy, and is a statue of the philosopher Bottero, and not Cavour. With this I hope after fifteen years to have done a serious study of de Chirico, so mysterious a man, who makes an incredible confusion with his paintings on his own. I will send you a copy of the book as soon as it is ready.*

Thank you again, dear Sir, my best regards,
(James Thrall Soby)

Mr. James Thrall Soby
29, Mountain Spring
Road
Farmington,
Connecticut, U.S.A.

March 27, 1951

Dear Sir,

I have asked Marc Vaux to take a picture of two de Chirico drawings for you, one of which, the most beautiful, "Le Poète et le Philosophe", is the frontispiece of one of my books: DE-FENSE DE SAVOIR.

I don't recall if I've mentioned to you that the large de Chirico drawing: "Portrait dit de Guillaume Apollinaire", is part of the Penrose collection, who have granted it to me. As for the "Muses Inquiétantes", in 1923 I asked de Chirico to make a copy of it as the owner, Mr. Castelfranco, refused to give it to me. Chirico made a copy of the same size from a photograph. The style of it is completely different: instead of flat tones, the treatment is of a very light touch, like iridescent feathers.

I hope your work proceeds well and I remain, faithfully yours,
Paul Eluard

English translation by Katherine Robinson