

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND THE EXHIBITIONS OF THE “NOVECENTO ITALIANO”

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A letter from Giorgio de Chirico regarding his participation in the *Prima mostra del Novecento Italiano* (*First exhibition of the Novecento Italiano*), organised in Milan in 1926, allows us to understand more about relations between the Master of Metaphysics and the group led by Margherita Sarfatti, than any other study carried out until now.

As well as contributing to the definition of a modern ‘Italian’ aesthetic which was purist, cerebral and anti-naturalist, made up of values that are absolute, severe and moralising, inspired by the Primitives, one of the major concerns of Sarfatti and the artists of the steering committee of the *Novecento* was that of widening the essentially Milanese original group to make it a national reality, and to make the 1926 exhibition a great artistic and political event. This explains the organisational work carried out principally by the secretary of the steering committee, Alberto Salietti, to increase the exhibitors through a network of artists who were ‘delegates’ of the groups and the regional groups, a dense epistolary and numerous ‘missions’ such as the ones to meet Morandi in Bologna, Soffici and de Grada in Florence, Trombadori and Socrate (after the split with Ferrazzi) in Rome, Casorati in Turin, and Tozzi in Paris.¹

Sarfatti and the Committee’s aim was to conquer a substantially political significance and recognition in the governing of art and its market. This vision explains relations with Mussolini and the presence of Il Duce at the inauguration of the exhibition with the consequent great attention from the press. But it also lets us understand the reasons why, alongside the founding artists of the *Novecento* and their companions, they sought out and solicited the presence of artistic figures that were ‘eccentric’ in comparison to the *Novecento* language, such as Medardo Rosso, the futurists Balla, Depero, Prampolini, and Russolo, Leonetto Cappiello, Osvaldo Licini and Giorgio de Chirico.

The exhibition of 1926 was seen by its organisers as a great artistic and political opportunity, but despite having different expressive methods, the artists also perceived it as an opportunity not to be missed. The *Novecento Italiano* intended to open itself up to the best artists of younger generations, it wanted to overcome the eclecticism of the Venice and Rome Biennales, replacing the selection for the competition with a formula based on invitations made by the Committee through discussions and votes. It aimed to construct a taste (a national art) and a system of power (perhaps a state art)

¹ For information on Salietti’s role and work, see F. Ragazzi, *Alberto Salietti, “impareggiabile” segretario del Novecento Italiano*, in E. Pontiggia, C. Gian Ferrari, N. Colombo (ed.), *Il Novecento milanese. Da Sironi ad Arturo Martini*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Spazio Oberdan, 18 February–4 May), Milan, Mazzotta, 2003, pp. 235–241.

to place Italian art on an international stage. Out of one hundred and thirty-seven artists invited, one hundred and fourteen accepted: there was plenty to cause alarm and opposite reactions; from the polemical refusal to participate by artists such as Felice Carena, Antonio Donghi, Tullio Garbari, Ottone Rosai or Gino Rossi, to the fear of being excluded from the circle.

The papers that constitute the "Archivio del Novecento", published by Claudia Gian Ferrari as an appendix to the first and fundamental study of the *Novecento Italiano* edited by Rossana Bossaglia in 1979,² and those belonging to the "Archivio Alberto Saliotti" of Genoa, published in the form of a document summary in 2003,³ as well as other material from the same archive, allow us to reconstruct and understand the details of de Chirico's participation in the exhibition of 1926 and the subsequent national and international exhibitions of the *Novecento*.

Like the other artists chosen by the Committee, Giorgio de Chirico received an invitation in May 1926 from Sarfatti on behalf of the *Novecento Italiano* Committee to exhibit works of art in Milan.⁴ In August, Antonello Trombadori communicated to Saliotti that de Chirico had assented,⁵ even if this consent, still lacking the formal papers, would not be considered as such in the studies of the movement and so the painter would be included among the artists that participated in the exhibition without having formally assented.⁶ However, despite making them wait more than six months, his formal consent did arrive, not hiding his joy at "exhibiting at the exhibition of the *Novecento*", showing a gesture of generosity [towards the artist Arturo Nathan]. On 29th November, he wrote to the secretary of the Committee who, after receiving the note from Trombadori, had very probably solicited his participation again (fig. 1):

Dear Saliotti,

I received your kind letter and I would like to thank you. I apologise for the delay in replying to you. I am very happy to exhibit at the exhibition of the *Novecento*. I am going to Paris for a while but I have left my brother, Savinio, who I believe you know, in charge of looking after my paintings. Therefore please be so kind

² C. Gian Ferrari (ed.), *Appendice 2. Gli Archivi del Novecento*, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano", storia, documenti, iconografia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1979, pp. 165-208. The documents which constitute the *Archivi del Novecento* were donated by Alberto Saliotti's widow to Claudia Gian Ferrari in 1969 and printed in Bossaglia's volume in the form of a document summary with the full transcription of those considered to be the most important published in *Appendice I*, pp. 65-164. Several were published again by C. Gian Ferrari, *Saliotti segretario del Novecento Italiano*, in G. Giubbini, F. Ragazzi (ed.), *Alberto Saliotti. Un artista di Novecento*, exhibition catalogue (Genoa, Museo d'arte contemporanea di Villa Croce, 15 January-29 March, Ravenna, Loggetta Lombardesca, 20 April-15 June), Milan, Skira, 1997, pp. 35-40. They continue to be preserved today by Claudia Gian Ferrari at Studio di Consulenza per il '900 Italiano, Milan.

³ F. Ragazzi (ed.), *Archivio Alberto Saliotti, Genoa*, in E. Pontiggia, C. Gian Ferrari, N. Colombo (ed.), *Il Novecento milanese...*, cit., pp. 242-248. The documents published in the volume in the form of a document summary, are conserved at l'Archivio Alberto Saliotti di Genoa, set up in 2002 at the explicit request of the artist's heirs, together with the catalogues, correspondence, documents, publications, press reviews, photographs, belonging to the Master and his widow Signora Lydia Pasetto Saliotti. Some extracts relating to the *Novecento* were published in F. Ragazzi, *Tosi, Funi, Saliotti... il "Novecento" in Riviera*, in C. Gian Ferrari, F. Ragazzi (ed.), *Arturo Tosi. La stagione figure di un maestro del Novecento*, exhibition catalogue (Rapallo, Antico castello sul mare [Ancient castle by the sea], 22 April-6 June), Milan, Charta, 1995; F. Ragazzi, *A proposito di alcune lettere inedite di Arturo Martini: la "Leda" alla Prima Mostra del Novecento Italiano*, in *Per Terram Modoëtia. Scritti offerti a Giuseppe Colombo*, edited by R. Cassanelli, Annuario dei Musei Civici di Monza, Comune di Monza, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana, 2000; F. Ragazzi, *Alberto Saliotti, "impareggiabile" segretario...*, cit., pp. 235-241.

⁴ *Lettera circolare di Margherita Sarfatti agli artisti*, Milan, 18 May 1925, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., pp. 89-92, enclosed with the letter was the *Regolamento dell'Esposizione*.

⁵ *Biglietto di Trombadori a Saliotti*, 20 August 1925, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 166.

⁶ R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 201.

⁷ For the illustrations which accompany this essay see the Italian text *Giorgio de Chirico nelle mostre di "Novecento Italiano"* in this Periodical, pp. 201-232.

as to write to him and tell him if I am allowed to send more than 3 paintings and, if this is possible, how many in total. I am including some photographs of paintings by a friend that I find very interesting. He would very much like to be invited. If you feel it possible, his address is Arturo Nathan, via Lazzaretto Vecchio 36, Trieste.

I look forward to seeing you again, dear Salietti, yours, Giorgio de Chirico

Via Appennini 25 B

Regards to Mrs Sarfatti.⁸

De Chirico, who was leaving for Paris, would not write again. It would be Savinio who took care of de Chirico, requesting a meeting with Salietti in Milan to discuss his brother's participation in person, defending his request for a greater presence than the three works established in the rules, following the choice of the paintings and communicating the titles and prices, carrying out the various practical steps from the shipping of the crates to the photographs for the catalogue, and negotiating any sales.

Dear Salietti,

I need to talk to you about my brother G. de Chirico's participation in the Milan exhibition. I will be in Milan on Wednesday morning. I would be very grateful if you could arrange an appointment at the editorial office of L'Esame, via Brera, 7.

Yours sincerely, A. Savinio.⁹

The review "L'Esame", from the homonymous art gallery in Via Croce Rossa in Milan, was managed by Enrico Somarè who had founded it in April 1922. Somarè was an old and trusted acquaintance of the de Chirico brothers. When Giorgio de Chirico held his first Milanese exhibition at the Galleria Arte (29th January – 12th February 1921), the exhibition had little resonance, and amongst the ferociously negative criticism in "Perseveranza" and "Secolo Illustrato", the rare positive reviews came from Sarfatti and from Somarè himself who wrote about the exhibition in his column in "Primato Artistico Italiano".¹⁰

Once the impossibility of including more than 3 of de Chirico's paintings in the exhibition had been confirmed, Savinio dealt with choosing the works, something he had certainly agreed on with his brother, which he communicated to the secretary (fig. 2):

Dear Salietti,

The titles and prices of the my brother's paintings for the exhibition of the 900 are the following:

"Autoritratto"

L. 4.000

⁸ Archivio Alberto Salietti, Genoa (henceforth AASGe), *Lettera di Giorgio de Chirico a Alberto Salietti*, Rome, 29 November 1925, *Documenti della Prima Mostra del "Novecento Italiano"*, Milan, 1926, *Cartella "Corrispondenza espositori"*. The letter dispels any doubts and resolves the controversy as to when de Chirico moved to Paris confirming that he did so "in the autumn of 1925" as the artist wrote in his *Memorie*. This date is supported by certain scholars who disagree with others who dated his move to Paris in the spring.

⁹ AASGe, *Lettera di Alberto Savinio a Alberto Salietti*, Rome, Monday (undated), *Documenti della Prima Mostra del "Novecento Italiano"*, Milan, 1926, *Cartella "Corrispondenza espositori"*.

¹⁰ On critics' reactions to de Chirico's Milanese exhibition, I defer to E. Pontiggia, "In the Immense Desert of this Big City". *De Chirico in Milan 1919-1920*, in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico", Rome, n. 5-6, 2006, pp. 163-173. The review "L'Esame" ceased publication in 1925. The gallery directed by Somarè lived on a little longer but he was replaced at the end of 1927 by Gaspere Gussoni and his son-in-law Vittorio Emanuele Barbaroux, who, for the occasion, even changed its name making it the famous "Galleria Milano".

"Achille" L. 3.000 (fig. 3)
 "Marina" L. 3.000

These prices are to be considered flexible. If there are any parties interested, either you or someone else can send me a telegraph and we can come to an agreement.

The crate was collected some days ago by the courier. The frame of *Achille* did not fit into the crate so I dismantled it and put the four pieces into the same crate. When the crate arrives in Milan, please see to it that the frame is put back together and mounted on the painting. The address for redelivery is: Via Appennini, 25 B Roma.

Very best wishes, yours, Alberto Savinio.¹¹

At the time of the correspondence with the secretary of the *Novecento*, Savinio was going through a particularly important and difficult moment of his life. These were intense months of work. In August of 1925, Antonio Giulio Bragaglia noted in "Index": "Alberto Savinio is multiplying: ballets, plays, novels and now (assures Giorgio de Chirico) also painting".¹² In that period he had met the dramatic actress, Maria Morino, whom he married at the Capitol in Rome on 26th January 1926, the day before he wrote to Salietti. His letter thus becomes an involuntary, even if significant, testimony to the great difficulties which followed the wedding, further proof of an existential condition which, not only did not allow the possibility of a honeymoon, but made even living together difficult as confirmed in his wife's memoirs when she wrote: "We lived separately for a while. He was earning very little, I had left the theatre and was earning nothing...".¹³ In April 1926, Savinio had sent his first works to his brother who had been in Paris since the previous autumn and, bolstered by his opinion and support, he followed him there in July of the same year staying in the French capital until the autumn of 1927.

De Chirico and Arturo Nathan

Despite the authoritative recommendation, Arturo Nathan would not be invited.

Nathan came from a cosmopolitan Jewish family, his father was an Iraqi Jew who settled first in India and then in England. His mother was a Jew from Trieste. Nathan was born in Trieste in 1891 where he stayed until he finished his high school studies. He moved to London during the war, then to Genoa, returning to his native city suffering from deep depression. It was the psychoanalyst Edward Weiss, a pupil of Freud and the first translator of the Viennese scientist's work into Italian, who encouraged Nathan to paint as part of his therapy. He studied at the Circolo Artistico di Trieste and frequented writers and artists such as Jacques Girmounsky who would publish the first monograph on the Triestian painter in 1935.¹⁴ During the day he worked in an insurance office and at night he drew, painted and dreamt with his eyes open. In 1925, he went to Rome to meet Giorgio di Chirico

¹¹ AASGe, *Lettera di Alberto Savinio a Alberto Salietti*, Rome, 27 January 1926, Rome. The artist uses his Roman address Via Appennini 25B, *Documenti della Prima Mostra del "Novecento Italiano"*, Milan, 1926, Cartella "Corrispondenza espositori".

¹² The quote is found in G. Briganti, L. Sciascia, *Alberto Savinio, pittura e letteratura*, Milan, Franco Maria Ricci, 1979, p. 20.

¹³ M. Morino, *Con Savinio*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1997, p. 35.

¹⁴ J. Girmounsky, *Arturo Nathan peintre*, Paris, Éditions Arion, 1935, republished in translation in G. Dorflès, *Arturo Nathan 1891-1944*, exhibition catalogue (Trieste, Museo Revoltella), Trieste, 1976.

with whom he established a strong connection, a "Nietzschean friendship", as the *'Pictor Optimus'* defined it, and a mutual esteem, which were documented in an unmistakable way by the previously quoted letter to Salietti from whom he advocated the invitation, and by the moving remembrance that de Chirico published in 1945 shortly after Nathan's death in an extermination camp.

He worked all day in an insurance office in Trieste to support his aged mother and in the evening he would spend long hours drawing and painting, or reading fantasy and poetry, always engrossed in an idealistic dream of superior thoughts and the creation of art [...].

I met him twice. The first time was in 1925. I was in Rome and he came to meet me. He was my guest in the small neighbourhood where I was living with my mother in Piazza Caprera and we lived some days of Nietzschean friendship together. The second time was in Milan in 1930. I had come down from Paris for an exhibition and he came from Trieste to see it. During the day, being busy, I could not spend time with him but in the evenings we would dine together and then we would wander around the streets of the Lombard capital until late into the night. I remember one night, it was May and the moon was out and I took him to see Missori's equestrian monument and I talked to him at length about the metaphysics which monuments and statues acquire in the middle of public squares, when they are placed on low plinths in order for them to seem to participate in the life of the city, and I told him how Schopenhauer also recommended not putting statues on very high plinths but rather on low plinths and added: as they do in Italy. I talked to him and he listened to me, very carefully and with a great deal of suppressed enthusiasm.¹⁵

Nathan was not invited to the *Exhibition of the Novecento*. He had greater fortune a few months later when his pencil drawing *Autoritratto (Self-portrait)*, fig. 4) passed the jury selection and was admitted to the XV Venice Biennale.¹⁶ A self-portrait with such staring eyes so as not to be able to see anything, in the same way as another disquieting *Autoritratto* of 1925, this time with eyes shut, with a background made up of a collection of dechirican scenography, the round arches of the portico of a metaphysical piazza square, a locomotive, the suspended atmosphere.

By examining Nathan's painting, we can understand how de Chirico's friendship influenced his artistic way of thinking which, born in the field of a realism decaying towards a magical primitivist symbolism, reaches a contemplative style and a visionary atmosphere which distinguishes him from his Triestian friends, Carlo Sbisà and Leonor Fini, with whom he held his only solo exhibition in 1928. The directions intimately linked to his own existential malaise followed the dechirican ascendancy on his fantastical imaginary. The exploration of the dream dimension was transformed into the investigation of a condition of the soul distressed by depression causing him to redevelop several of the most beloved subjects of the Master's painting: beaches out of which rise enigmatic statues, ruins of ancient Mediterranean civilisation, horses which gallop along the seafront, a pictorial geography of islands, cliffs, dramatic shipwrecks and lighthouses which show routes to mysterious far-away ships. The thematic analogies must be read through the great difference of personalities which

¹⁵ G. de Chirico, *Arturo Nathan, pittore e poeta*, in "Domenica", 3 June 1945.

¹⁶ *Catalogo della XV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia*, Venice, 1926, room 16, n. 47, p. 70. The admission jury was made up of Emile Bernard, Adolfo De Carolis, Ubaldo Oppi, Libero Andreotti, Joseph Bernard, Ferruccio Ferrazzi and Leonardo Bistolfi.

profoundly changes the sign relating to the meaning of the fantastical imaginary: of an immortal deity like de Chirico's, tragic and apocalyptic like Nathan's. Even his pictorial technique echoes dechirican teachings in the preference of tempera mixed with oil, the wood panel, the nervous and dense brushstrokes, the slow and considered way that must have belonged to the ancient masters.¹⁷

The "First Exhibition of the Novecento Italiano", Milan 1926

De Chirico's works were exhibited in room V of the permanent exhibition.¹⁸ By reading the extensive press dedicated to the exhibition¹⁹, we can reconstruct and understand the degree of interest that de Chirico's paintings excited in the critics of the period. I had previously considered his participation in the *Novecento* as 'eccentric' and unorthodox in relation to the aesthetic positions of the Sarfatti group. Carlo Carrà was right when, faced with the eclecticism of the exhibition, he observed how "no organisational committee" had "ever operated with a greater disinterest in sending out invitations. This time there was indeed no question of trends...". This is the reason why people could "see works from neoclassical currents next to neorealist ones. Official representation of the Futurists was not missing either... Avant-gardism and traditionalism were welcomed with the same treatment..."²⁰

But the opening of the exhibition to "greater forces of new artistic generations" as announced by the invitation²¹ was read by critics in a way that was different to Sarfatti's perhaps more hegemonic rather than pluralist intentions. Instead the critics were caught up in talking about their own opinions on the innovation represented by the exhibition and on the more organic artists in the new artistic creed, either accepting the exhibition or rejecting it. If we look closely, we can see that this is an attitude suffered principally by the personalities who did not conform to the *Novecento* codes.

¹⁷ After Nathan's debut at the XV Venice Biennale, where he would exhibit continually until 1936, he participated in the *V Esposizione d'Arte delle Venezie* in Padua in 1927 (where he would be present in 1929 and 1932 as well), and at the exhibitions of the Trieste Union from 1927 to 1937. In 1928 he exhibited at the *Mostra Marinara* in Rome and held his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Milano in Milan with Leonor Fini and Carlo Sbisà. In 1931 he was present at the *Sindacale regionale di Udine* and at the I Quadriennale in Rome, to which he would also be invited in 1935. In Milan in 1930 he met de Chirico again. He would go on to exhibit next to him in Florence in 1933 at the *Prima Mostra del Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Belle Arti*, and in Vienna, at the *Moderne Italienische Kunst* organised by the Venice Biennale. In 1936, again with the Biennale organisation, he participated in the *Esposizione d'Arte Italiana* in Budapest. In his works from these years, new and more distressing symbolologies were added to his personal meditation on dechirican metaphysics. These new symbolologies include: seascapes with icy coastlines, shipwrecked vessels, marine abysses, volcanic rocks, dark hues, disquieting lights, darks and clouded skies, a sign of increasing inner torment. In 1939, he stayed in Rome with his sister. When war broke out he was arrested as an English citizen and was imprisoned in the Marche region until 1943 when, due to his Jewish origins, he was handed over to the Nazis, and deported to extermination camps. He died in the Biberach camp in 1944. On the artist, see: I. Reale, in *La pittura a Trieste e in Friuli nel primo Novecento (1900-1945)*, in Various Authors, *La pittura in Italia. Il Novecento/I*, Milan, Electa, 1992, pp. 329-331; V. Sgarbi (ed.), *Arturo Nathan. Illusione e destino*, exhibition catalogue (Aosta, Centro Saint-Benin), Milan, Fabbri, 1992; G. Di Genoa, *Storia dell'arte italiana del '900 per generazioni. Generazione Maestri Storici*, Bologna, Bora, vol. II, 1994, pp. 894-895, vol. III, 1995, pp. 1434-1436; A. Rosada (ed.), *Arturo Nathan. Il ghiaccio del mare*, with several poems by Alessandro Rosada, exhibition catalogue (Trieste, Galleria Torbandena), Trieste, 2006.

¹⁸ *Catalogo della Prima Mostra del Novecento Italiano* (Milan, Palazzo della Permanente, February-March), Milan, Arti Grafiche Gualdoni, 1926, p. 30, room V, 10 *Marina*; 11. *Achille*; 12 *Autoritratto*. On p. 43 of the *Indice degli espositori* the artist is recorded as resident in Rome in Via Appennini, 25. A photograph of *Achille* was published in the catalogue, fig. 41.

¹⁹ An examination of the press reviews was carried out on the articles collected and arranged by Alberto Salietti. Today these are conserved in the AASGe, in 50 x 35 cm volumes in which articles sent by "Eco della Stampa" and other specialised agencies of the time to the *Novecento* secretary are glued. The collection can be considered almost complete even if gaps and defects cannot be excluded. Henceforth, quotes from newspapers and reviews of the time will be referred to the material preserved in these volumes.

²⁰ C. Carrà, *Il "vernissage" della mostra del "Novecento Italiano"*, in "L'Ambrosiano", Milan, 12 February.

²¹ *Lettera circolare di Margherita Sarfatti agli artisti*, Milan, 18 May 1925, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 90.

These ranged from the Futurists²² to artists like Giorgio de Chirico who were generally treated with great indifference, and if not, in the few cases in which their works were reviewed, with open hostility which further ensured the absence of de Chirico's works in the extensive photographic reportage dedicated to the exhibition.

De Chirico's participation was ignored by Papini, Ugo Ojetti, Michele Biancale and Raffaele Giolli. What is surprising is Sarfatti's silence. Whilst Sarfatti dwelt at length on Casorati, who is, as we will see, very often read contextually with de Chirico, she did not mention him whatsoever. He did not suffer a better fate with Emilio Cecchi who in his two extensive reports in "La Fiera Letteraria"²³ does not take him into the slightest consideration before going on to dispose of him, regretting that he was not "better represented".²⁴ Similarly Corrado Pavolini who, when he did mention him, it was only to judge him as "very much on the decline".²⁵

De Chirico had already met with a similar attitude from the press. At the Rome Biennale of 1923, there was "great envy and vast movements of hostility and boycotting. From Biancale to Emilio Cecchi, there was great competition as to who would write the most malignly savage article". It went worse at the following Biennale in 1925 when there was "a tomb-like silence. The intellectuals and the critics had understood that to talk and write too much or continuously about an artist's work, even if it was to say bad things, resulted in them getting more publicity. They had understood that, for certain cases, particularly dangerous ones like myself, their only weapon was silence".²⁶

Some critics did not use "the weapon of silence". Pietro Torriano wrote about Casorati and de Chirico "both in perplexity", but whilst the former was going through a period destined for "new transitions", de Chirico was "more than ever fluctuating with that amount of goodness and badness that we now know him for...".²⁷ Nino Barbantini debated the classicism brought to the exhibition by Oppi and Casorati at the Biennale of 1924 and the new classics which he considered the "real" protagonists of the Milanese exhibition like Sironi, Marussig, Funi and Saliotti, who, he hastened to warn the reader, should be "clearly distinguished" from de Chirico "the turbulent bungler of mixed ingredients and who hardly ever manages to hide the scarcity of his own pictorial temperament".²⁸ Cipriani Efisio Oppo also considered de Chirico to be among "the classical and neoclassical painters" with Oppi, Casorati, Campigli: "All of them are struggling with everything else rather than with the reality of the visible world, all of them imprisoned within international models and therefore very un-Italian".²⁹ At the newly inaugurated exhibition he wrote:

²² On the presence of the Futurists, see F. Ragazzi, *Balla, i futuristi e Novecento Italiano*, in E. Gigli (ed.), *Giacomo Balla*, exhibition catalogue (Accugi Terme, Liceo Saracco, 1 July-3 September), Rome, De Luca, 2006, pp. 123-126.

²³ E. Cecchi, *La I Mostra d'Arte del '900 Italiano*, in "La Fiera Letteraria", Milan, 21 February 1926; E. Cecchi, *La prima mostra del '900 italiano. Dal neorealismo di Oppo al neoclassicismo di Funi*, in "La Fiera Letteraria", Milan, 14 March 1926.

²⁴ E. Cecchi, *La mostra del Novecento*, in "Italia Augusta", Rome, March 1926, p. 18.

²⁵ C. Pavolini, *Alla Mostra del "Novecento italiano"*, in "Tevere", Rome, 15 February 1926.

²⁶ G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, Rome, Astrolabio, 1945, II ed. Milan, Rizzoli, 1962, for these quotes refer to the Bompiani 2002 edition, pp. 138-139.

²⁷ P. Torriano, *La prima mostra del Novecento Italiano*, in "L'Illustrazione italiana", Milan, 28 March 1926, p. 348.

²⁸ N. Barbantini, *La I^a Mostra del Novecento Italiano*, in "Gazzetta di Venezia", 16 February 1926.

²⁹ C.E. Oppo, *La mostra del '900 Italiano*, in "Il Secolo XX", Milan, April 1926, p. 227.

De Chirico returns to the metaphysical loves in the extremely lively *Achille sotto le mura di Troia* (*Achilles under the Walls of Troy*), whilst his self-portrait with its presumptuous Latin name makes us smile with its caricature of German romanticism: a genial and silly mixture which I prefer to the dull seriousness of the others and the absolute stupidity of Gigiotti Zanini's rosy painting.³⁰

Despite the fact that he was exhibiting with de Chirico at Lino Pesaro's gallery³¹, Carlo Carrà's language is as cutting and haughty as ever. He writes about a group of exhibitors amongst whom Morandi, Santagata, and Colacicchi, whom he defines as "realists and idealists of the material" whose descriptive scruple sometimes "represses their energy". But if this limit does not impede his future success, "Giorgio de Chirico presents an opposite defect, his canvases make you think of certain posters of ballad-singers and pictures from Fairs".³² Carrà's harsh comment is destined to find prose-lytes even if in less authoritative voices. Giovanni Orsini writes:

Giorgio de Chirico acts like the old chapel masters who intone their praises an octave higher in order to make the singers descend to the right note. His delirious seventeenth-century empty display of nobility. De Chirico represents the new rich man of art without, of course, the resulting image of the shark. *Marina* (*Seascape*) touches your senses in a pleasant way; the *Autoritratto* and *Achille* show the way in which an artist can exaggerate.³³

On the eve of their suppression, it is interesting to consider the opposite ways in which the antifascist intellectuals looked at the exhibition, and in our case, at de Chirico. The socialist review "Critica Sociale", which had already taken refuge on the doctrinal-cultural turf some time before, hosts the boorish "impressions of a provincial [person]":

But is it possible to accept that the current canvases by Zanini, de Chirico and Salietti are even only distantly related to Art (which is Beauty and Harmony)? Do they know how to do it? So let them do it! But they shouldn't think that they have the right to see their works supported just because "it is said" that they are "artists". They should demonstrate it; always; and they should have a more religious sense of their Art, in the way that they could never think of showing works that are artistically defective and vulgar like the ones currently being exhibited.³⁴

The critic from the communist daily appeared to be much more open when he included amongst works "to be seen... a very vulnerable *Achille* by de Chirico" and "a powerful *Autoritratto*".³⁵

In a sea of disinterest and harsh criticism, rare exceptions from very unexpected areas such as from the provinces and from the Futurist avant-garde stand out.

³⁰ C.E. Oppo, *Smarrimento*, in "La Tribuna", Rome, 25 February 1926

³¹ *Mostra individuale dei pittori Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico e postuma di Rubaldo Merello*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Galleria Pesaro, February), Milan, 1926.

³² C. Carrà, *Il Novecento alla ribalta*, in "L'Ambrosiano", Milan, 3 March 1926.

³³ G. Orsini, *La prima Mostra d'Arte del "Novecento Italiano"*, in "Il Popolo di Lombardia", Milan, 20 February 1926.

³⁴ O.G., *La cosiddetta "prima mostra del Novecento Italiano"*. *Impressioni di un provinciale*, in "Critica Sociale", Milan, 15 March 1926.

³⁵ I.l.b., *La Mostra del Novecento. Pacifismo provinciale*, in "l'Unità", Milan, 20 February 1926.

Like the critic from "L'Unità", colleagues from the "Gazzetta di Puglia" and from "Giornale di Puglia" admire the "vivid and aggressive *Autoritratto*" and the "Achilles in a Böcklin style",³⁶ just like "the ingenious modern transcriptions of mythical heroes that de Chirico delights in".³⁷ While "wandering around" the halls of the permanent exhibition, the Genoese poet, painting and critic, Adriano Grande, came face to face with the Master's three canvases:

De Chirico, the cultured man, stops us as if we were on a tightrope. I am a cultured man too and I like his cultured painting. It seems to me that in de Chirico's fantasies, we see all the diseases of the last century: and the diseased are always interesting.³⁸

The Futurist Enrico Prampolini's interpretation is surprising. After noting how only the Futurist works, i.e. his own, and those by Balla and by Depero (he forgets Russolo) are the only "audaciously alive" ones in a setting of very modest works, Prampolini sees in de Chirico "a nostalgic reference" that "exalts the metaphysical apparitions" of an artist who, like Severini, "sends us pictures of life lived spiritually in remembrance of the distant homeland from beyond the Alps".³⁹

De Chirico's participation did not improve with regard to the market given that none of his works were sold during the Milanese exhibition.⁴⁰

The "Second Exhibition of the Novecento Italiano", Milan 1929

We do not know how de Chirico reacted to this lack of success, nor, to tell the truth, if, totally absorbed in his Parisian work and his fiery polemics with the surrealists,⁴¹ he had any way, time or desire to follow the Italian diatribes. It is however a fact that in his memoirs there is no mention of his contrasting *Novecento* experience, even if, most probably, his lack of success in 1926 explains his non-participation in the *Second Exhibition of the Novecento Italiano*, organized at the Museo della Permanente in Milan in March 1929, regardless of the experience of international exhibitions which would be organized in this three-year period and which, in many cases, would see the artist's participation.

If we compare the Milanese exhibition of 1929 with the first exhibition of 1926, the considerable difficulties that the Salfatti movement met with stand out very clearly. These difficulties include both the artists' increasingly critical attitude and a lower level of attention from the press, mirroring the political climate that had changed with regard to the regime: Mussolini (in contrast to what he had done in 1926 and after making the exhibition move from 1928 to

³⁶ R. Larco, *La Mostra del Novecento*, in "La Gazzetta di Puglia", Bari, 21 February 1926.

³⁷ F. Colnago, *La mostra del Novecento*, in "Il Giornale di Sicilia", Palermo, 23 February 1926.

³⁸ A. Grande, *Vernissage e prime impressioni della "Mostra del novecento"*, in "Giornale di Genova", 14 February 1926.

³⁹ E. Prampolini, *La prima mostra del Novecento*, in "Augustea", Rome, 15 February 1926.

⁴⁰ *Elenco opere vendute alla 1ª mostra del Novecento*, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 205.

⁴¹ The surrealists actually published the damaged photograph of *Oreste ed Elettra* in March in "La Révolution Surréaliste" and in the same issue, Breton wrote about de Chirico as a "lost genius". The split with the surrealists was by now complete. Amongst French intellectuals, only Waldemar George, Jean Cocteau and very few others defended the him. In a letter dated 24 April 1926 de Chirico advised his brother, who would shortly move to Paris, "do not get mixed up with the surrealists" who are "idiotic and hostile people".

1929⁴²) did not participate in the inauguration. The first exhibitions of the fascist Union were born, whilst Farinacci unleashed real campaigns of accusations from the pages of "Il Regime Fascista". The growing refusal by the youngest artists to follow Sarfatti's rules (now considered to be style, manner, official art), the decreased interest of the regime, as well as the intrusive activism by the Galleria Milano aimed at making economic and commercial reasons prevail over artistic competency called to direct the movement, the probable reason for Salietti's progressive detachment, explain the crisis which led to the gradual exhaustion of the *Novecento* over the following few years.

The eclecticism of 1926 dissolved into a greater stylistic unity which also conformed to an increasingly explicit declaration of political leaning. In her presentation, Sarfatti defined the artists that took part in the 1926 exhibition as "youngsters" and "fascists, i.e. revolutionaries of the modern restoration, in art as in social and political life". Artists who were distant or independent from these trends were not invited, or if they were invited, like the Futurists, they did not participate. De Chirico did not appear in the list of invited artists published in the catalogue⁴³ even if his name does figure in the lists on which Sarfatti, Wildt, Tosi, Marussig, Funi and Salietti discussed and voted. On the list provided by the secretary, we find comments, crossings out and additions made by various components of the steering committee. The choice was between who could participate with three works (majors) and who could with two or only one, and between who was deleted or added. Sarfatti did not write any comment next to de Chirico's name, whilst in Wildt, Tosi and the other *Novecento* painters' forms, his name was marked as amongst "the artists that in our opinion can be invited for three works".⁴⁴

The Novecento Italiano Exhibitions in Italy

De Chirico's experience at the international exhibitions promoted by the *Novecento Italiano* was much more successful even if it is necessary to mention the Italian exhibitions.

A long and successful series of exhibitions were triggered by the first exhibition of 1926. These exhibitions were promoted directly or indirectly by the Committee with the aim of spreading the new artistic creed. In 1927, Margherita Sarfatti presented the exhibition *Quindici artisti del Novecento Italiano (Fifteen Artists from the Novecento Italiano)* (Borra, Bucci, Carrà, Funi, Garbari, Marussig, Monti, Piatti, Pratelli, Salietti, Sironi, Tosi, Tozzi, Wildt, Zanini) at the Scopinich Gallery in Milan, whilst the following year Antonio Maraini introduced Carrà, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi and Tosi

⁴² *Lettera di B. Mussolini a Salietti*, Rome, 18 February 1926: "In response to your kind letter I would like to take the liberty to observe that two consecutive '900 exhibitions do not seem advisable. The second exhibition can be organised for the spring of 1929 and in my opinion should have its obvious location in Rome, thus avoiding any coincidence with the Venice Biennale and '900 artists will have a sufficient time margin to create new works. I remain yours sincerely". *Lettera di B. Mussolini a Salietti*, Rome, 17 May 1928: "La II Mostra del '900 italiano" can be opened on the 24 February 1929 – VII. At this time the Decree of authorisation will be activated. I cannot specify anything regarding my participation at the inaugural ceremony". The two letters, preserved in AASGe, were published in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., pp. 99, 104.

⁴³ *Seconda Mostra del Novecento Italiano. Catalogo* (Milan, Palazzo della Permanente, 2 March-30 April 1929), Milan, Gualdoni, 1929, pp. 7-12. In the list, indicated with an asterisk, are twenty-nine artists invited who did not want to participate, including Bucci, Carpi, Depero, Dudreville, Garbari, Guidi, Oppi, Pannaggi, Prampolini and Russolo.

⁴⁴ AASGe, *Votazione Tosi, Marussig, Funi*, handwritten notes on the typescript with an accompanying letter from Tosi to Salietti, 13 July 1928; *Per la Signora Sarfatti*, handwritten notes on the typescript without date (but July 1928) *Votazione Wildt*, handwritten notes on the typescript without date (but July 1928). *Documenti della Seconda Mostra del "Novecento Italiano", Milano, 1929, Cartella "Liste inviti IIª Mostra"*.

at the Bellinghi Gallery in Florence as the artists "Of the Milanese *Novecento*". March 1928 saw the opening of Galleria Milano which belonged to Gaspare Gussoni and his son-in-law, Vittorio Barbaroux, which from then on would be the gallery of reference for the movement, with the exhibition *Sette artisti moderni* (*Seven modern artists*) with Ugo Bernasconi, Carlo Carrà, Achille Funi, Piero Marussig, Alberto Salietti, Mario Sironi and Arturo Tosi. In 1929, Bernasconi left and was replaced by Wildt. In 1930, the sculptor left the group to allow for Bernasconi's return. The association would be presented and supported with the official validation of a 'group' which in some ways wanted to present itself as the *crème de la crème* of the *Novecento* to the point that Giorgio Nicodemi, faced with the plurality of languages and trends which had made the 1926 *Novecento* exhibition stand out, identified in the "seven" a "precise stylistic agreement" which was expressed "by ideas which have the same form that could suit the thoughts and the naturalistic truths of our time".⁴⁵ Other exhibitions of *Novecento* artists took place in Rome, Livorno, Turin and other cities, presenting the founding artists with the Lombards at the top of the list, or the other regional groups.

The exhibitions promoted by the Galleria Milano began in 1928 and continued with some variations until 1932 when, once the original setup had collapsed and the number of artists had become variable, we also find de Chirico in the company of Carrà, de Pisis, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi and Tosi.⁴⁶ De Chirico had established a fruitful collaboration with the Galleria Milano some time before. He had exhibited work at the gallery in January 1930 with the Italians from Paris,⁴⁷ and in April 1931 he held his first solo exhibition which signalled his return to Italy.⁴⁸ Even the old name of the *Sette Moderni* was dusted off with him, albeit in a very different context.⁴⁹ However, what principally concerns us is that this was the first time that de Chirico met with several fellow *Novecento* artists again after the experiences of 1926 and the international exhibitions.

National critics welcomed the exhibition with very flattering and positive remarks, an unequivocal sign, with the undoubted public relations capabilities of the gallery, also of what had happened in the past six years. The exhibition was considered to be amongst the best and most important of the Milanese season and its artists, defined 'modern' if not 'extremely modern', were reviewed with

⁴⁵ *Sette artisti moderni Wildt, Carrà, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi, Tosi*, presentation by G. Nicodemi, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Galleria Milano, April), Milan, 1929, p. 14.

⁴⁶ *Carrà, de Chirico, de Pisis, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi, Tosi*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Galleria Milano, January-February), Milan, 1932. The exhibition catalogue which was a simple leaflet did not contain any critical presentations but simply a list of works exhibited. Giorgio de Chirico was present with: 9 *Maratoneti*; 10 *Natura morta con paesaggio*; 11 *Nudo*; 12 *Composizione*; 13 *Cavallo e Zebra*; 14 *Pesci*; 15 *Frutta*; 16 *Frutta*. The exhibition which was entitled *Mostra di diciassette pittori moderni*, duly expanded to include Barbieri, Borra, Carpi, Colognese, De Grada, Montanari, Monti, Tallone and Vitali, was presented again in Bergamo, at the La Permanente Gallery, organised by the Galleria Milano under the auspices of Sindacato Belle Arti di Bergamo, in May 1932. In the exhibition catalogue, *de Chirico gli anni Trenta*, edited by M. Di Carlo and M. Fagiolo dell'Arco (Verona, Galleria dello Scudo, Museo di Castelvecchio, 13 December 1998 - 28 February 1999), Milan, Mazzotta, 1998, pp. 294-296, which constitutes the most in-depth contribution to knowledge about the Master in the decade in question, the Bergamo exhibition was not quoted whilst from the Milan exhibition entitled *Otto pittori* only three works by de Chirico were reproduced, moreover with titles different to those in the catalogue: *Nudo*, *Combattimento*, *Cavalli*.

⁴⁷ *Prima mostra di pittori italiani residenti a Paris. Campigli, de Chirico, de Pisis, Paresce, Savinio, Severini, Tozzi*, presentation by W. George, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Galleria Milano, 14-26 January), Milan, 1930.

⁴⁸ *Mostra del pittore Giorgio de Chirico*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Galleria Milano, 27 April-11 May), Milan, 1931. I feel it is useful to quote the works exhibited, some of which we will find in the international exhibitions of the *Novecento*: 1-11 *Nudo*; 12-13 *Gli Archeologi*; 14 *Il duello*; 15 *Combattimento*; 16 *Ritratto di fanciulla*; 17 *Arianna abbandonata*; 18 *Ulisse*; 19 *Sole sorgente*; 20 *Ritratto di signora*; 21 *Gladiatore*; 22 *Malinconia*; 23-25 *Cavalli*; 26 *Autoritratto*; 27-28, 30 *Natura morta*; 29 *Cavallo in riva al mare*; 31-40 *Disegno*; 41 *Pastello*; 42-43 *Guazzo*; 44-48 *Litografia*; 49-50 *Acquaforte*. A new solo exhibition of de Chirico's work would take place in the same gallery in November 1932.

⁴⁹ *Sette artisti moderni. Boccioni, Carrà, de Chirico, Modigliani, Severini, Sironi, Soffici*, presentation by E. Somarè, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Galleria Milano, April), Milan, 1932.

an attention that, in some cases, verges on veneration. Only "L'Italia Letteraria" presents the group as "eight of the most important *Novecento* artists", whilst all the others seemed to ignore their *Novecento* origins, considered excessively avant-garde, in order to underline instead the return of different methods of expression to areas that were more understandable to and loved by the public. "Le Arti Plastiche" supported this concept explicitly when it observed that "the favourite paintings were those opposed by the public yesterday. The public now agrees that, in the works which seem revolutionary, it is no longer a question of odd innovations, but of a real tradition carried further than the last point of arrival". The review wrote about de Chirico [as follows]:

Even in the less surreal works, fantasy appears. Those red tones inserted in the representation of the sea, are in fact justified as effects of fantasy. In all of de Chirico's work, there is something extrinsic, a fantastical meaning which bends the painting to him. A fantasy about which we do not ask the provenance, because it is interesting in every way. In some works our artist reveals his technical expertise. Does de Chirico want to indicate the new path in a verist nude of a woman? ⁵⁰

Despite not scrimping on accusations of "unbridled richness" accumulated "by all these examples of the beautiful *Novecento Italiano*", even the boorish "Perseus" is satisfied with the "successful exhibition" where even the "labyrinthine, fantastical, super-obscure de Chirico is not too grand to paint grapes, apples and oranges which effectively seem to be such".⁵¹

The authoritative Costantini wrote about "tradition" and in fact his comment in "Emporium" was entitled *Return to tradition*. He considered the works exhibited "not for the stylist models which have already been assimilated, but for the pictorial value which is intrinsic to these works, to the manifestations of the past". Thus it was natural that a painting such as de Chirico's which had for some time been anchored to the Mediterranean myth from which themes such as the Gladiators, the horses on the seashore, the turgid still lives, the sensual nudes originate, was appreciated and widely commented – something that had not happened in the press for some time. Once again it was Constantini who wrote:

"In a portrait of a nude woman, de Chirico seems to return to the 'realism' of 1860" whilst "in the other works exhibited our artist's platonic dream, in the warriors that fight, in the classical horses, in the ancient ruins, the fantastical escape is produced even in the often flame-like colours".⁵²

Other comments on the same subject:

The objective of the exhibition was achieved in full. The 'eight modern painters', in presenting to the visitor... the most recent expressions of their artist sensibility, inevitably reveal in these the developments which their technique has undergone in recent times. As such we see a Sironi who has returned more 'Sironi' than

⁵⁰ *Pittori moderni*, in "Le Arti plastiche", Milan, 1 February 1932.

⁵¹ D. Caronti, *Mostre milanesi. Alla Galleria Milano*, in "Perseo", Varese, 15 February 1932.

⁵² V. Costantini, *Cronache milanesi. Ritorno alla tradizione*, in "Emporium", Bergamo, February 1932.

ever, a Tosi... with an almost 19th century flavour, a de Pisis more 'impressionistic' than ever... A still life which would be in 19th century style, painted with absolute realism, whether fish or fruit, if it didn't have unreal landscape dominated by a classical head in the background, de Chirico collects his usual Greek heroes, shining with arms, two nude gladiators fighting and a long-maned Roman horse which, together with a zebra, guards the broken columns of a ruined temple.⁵³

With more *Gladiatori (Gladiators)* and *Nature Morte (Still Lives)*, above all with a great background of the sea, de Chirico returns to more moderate balances.⁵⁴

Giorgio de Chirico saves himself from accusations of abstruseness and literature for the not indifferent qualities of clear expressiveness of his palette. Even if we ignore the subjects and the cultural and poetic content which follow one another in de Chirico's seven 'manners' and which, from a purely pictorial point of view, are able to disturb, we should note that much of his work is valuable for their richness of colour, for the balance of the compositions, for his technique which is very natural and faithful to the forms (without mentioning the meaning). The *Natura morta con paesaggio (Still life with landscape)*, which is almost like a 17th century decorative panel, is one of de Chirico's final incarnations of the pictorial spirit, and, contrary to what we have said, its inferiority in the face of his best past work does not consist in the lesser dominance of mysterious content, but in the lesser depth of the painting itself.⁵⁵

A completely unbridled de Chirico, whose concepts give us much to think about, such as that archaic *composition*, with ancient warriors, that *horse* and *zebra* and those *still lives with landscape*, works which give the extreme limits of design in freedom and the use of colour... the exhibition is one of the most interesting and allows the public to judge with complete awareness works which – such as those by de Chirico... – the public knew more about above all through the impressions of Parisian critics.⁵⁶

After having underlined the value of the works which "make us get to know some of the most significant artists of the avant-garde", Dino Bonardi dwells on de Chirico who "cannot but make us once again savour the complex charm of those horses and marathon runners of his in which there is so much value of thought resolved in equal aesthetic values".⁵⁷

Before making us interested through the quality of his technique, de Chirico surprises and confuses us with the enigmas of his representations, we find famous subjects: the Homeric heroes in strange forms fighting alongside the echoing sea, the errant little horses of unchanging form amongst mutilated temples and columns, and some new example of the series of nudes which were seen in his last exhibition. In a still life of fish, lobsters, lemons and oranges, painted to seem real, on a background of a fantastical seascape, the contradiction between the realism and this unreality is curious.⁵⁸

⁵³ R.M., *Le mostre d'arte a Milano. Otto pittori moderni*, in "Il Messaggero", Rome, 5 February 1932.

⁵⁴ *Esposizioni. 8*, in "Cronache Latine", Milan, 6 February 1932.

⁵⁵ E.N. Rogers, *Mostre milanesi*, in "L'Italia Letteraria", Rome, 14 February 1932.

⁵⁶ M., *Fioritura di esposizioni d'arte a Milano*, in "Il Lavoro Fascista", Rome, 3 February 1932.

⁵⁷ D. Bonardi, *Artisti che espongono. Svolgimento di pittori moderni*, in "Sera", Milan, 5 February 1932.V.B.

⁵⁸ V.B., *Le mostre d'arte a Milano. Pittori d'oggi*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 29 January 1932.

A broad and thorough comment by the futurist poet Nené Centouze (alias Antonietta Drago), who was also particularly interested in the *Maratoneti* (*Marathon Runners*) and the still life of fish and fruit with the plaster cast of Apollo of the Belvedere's head, a photograph of which she published.⁵⁹

De Chirico is here with one of his by now famous *Maratoneti*: the group of giants resting on immense shields and propping each other up and on these giants appears something like an intentional division within the painting, which in one part presents a seascape painted in a lifelike way, and on the other, at the back of a wooden stage, pagan temples stand like scenery, which remain sketched, black on white, with no concern about their size. Like the infinite figures created by de Chirico in the same period, the *Maratoneti* support each other under and in each others' arms, in the form of cubes and fragments of architecture, that perhaps makes up the union of life and the memories which they carry with them everywhere as a useless but inevitable burden. De Chirico has the ability to make the most real and the most banal objects, depicted realistically, as striking and mysterious, bringing to them a light, an unforeseen relation or contrasts. Here is a still life posed as if on a ledge of an open window overlooking a seascape: fish, lemons, a lobster against a marine background and thus far everything would appear normal, if amongst other things, there wasn't a Hellenic head of statue placed there by chance, which astounds, irritates and delights at the same time. Other reasons that we find are not new: a struggle between gladiators who are faceless but have too many muscles, fantastical horses with abundant sinewy manes and curly tails which skim the ground, they could be described as Aristotelian horses. Two or three still lifes, a nude of a woman, show the possibility of a new aspect of our painter who is undoubtedly one of the cleverest of contemporaries.⁶⁰

The International Exhibitions of the Novecento Italiano

As we have already noted, the *Novecento* events that presented the best results for de Chirico were his participation in the international exhibitions promoted by the *Novecento Italiano*.

Twenty-five exhibitions were organized abroad during the fleeting active years of the Salfatti movement, from the first at the Carminati Gallery in Paris in 1926 to the exhibition in Prague in 1932.⁶¹

The exhibitions abroad are the most important page in the initiatives implemented by the *Novecento* group and, more probably, one of the greatest moments reached by the promotion of Italian art in the first half of the last century. They were planned by Salfatti and organized with great energy and capability by Saliotti who, due to limited means and his reserved character, did not travel but wrote letters, working in close contact with members of the committee and, above all, with the artists and the corresponding critics of the *Novecento* abroad: Mario Tozzi in Paris, Gabriele Mucchi in Berlin, Enrico Morpurgo in Holland, Alberto Sartoris in Switzerland, using a system based essentially on post and through trusted delegation.

⁵⁹ The photograph allows us to recognise the painting as *Natura morta con pesci e Apollo del Belvedere*, dated around 1929, from the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Rome.

⁶⁰ N. Centouze, *Otto pittori alla Galleria Milano*, in "Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno", Bari, 7 February 1932.

⁶¹ The exhibitions abroad can be reconstructed based on the catalogues and the documentation found in the AASGe as well using the sources already quoted: C. Gian Ferrari (ed.), *Appendice 2. Gli Archivi del Novecento*, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"...*, cit., pp. 177-208, e E. Pontiggia, *Novecento Italiano. Regesto 1919-1931*, in E. Pontiggia, C. Gian Ferrari, N. Colombo (ed.), *Il Novecento milanese...*, cit., pp. 249-277.

The first international exhibition that de Chirico was involved in was the *Exposition d'Artistes Italiens Contemporains (Exhibition of Contemporary Italian Artists)* organized by artists from Geneva, Turin and Milan, but initiated and curated by Alberto Sartoris who was the exhibition's general commissioner and wrote the presentation of the exhibition in the catalogue, held at the Musée Rath in Geneva in February 1927. As the catalogue specifies, de Chirico was among the artists who were invited but did not take part, as were Andreotti, Maraini, Martini, Oppi, Romanelli, Gino Rossi and Severini⁶². There is no document that allows us to know the reasons behind such a wide defection if not, at least in de Chirico's case, perhaps the impediment due to his contextual presence at the *Exhibition of Modern Italian Art* which was held at the Brighton Art Gallery in Brighton, wrongly indicated as an exhibition promoted by the *Novecento Italiano*⁶³, or, as I have been led to believe, the greater interest in the exhibition which would open less than a month later on 18th March, again in Switzerland at the Kunsthaus in Zurich.

Zurich 1927

In comparison to the Geneva exhibition which was fundamentally Torinese and Milanese, the panorama of artists on show in Zurich was notably more "Italian". The old group of Milanese (Carrà, Funi, Malerba, Marussig, Oppi, Saliotti, Sironi, Tosi) were joined by Lombards (Borra, Carpi, Monti, Pratelli, Sinopico), Tuscans (Conti and Viani), Romans (Donghi and Ferrazzi), Torinese (Casorati, Chessa, Galante, Menzio and Sobrero) and Parisians (Campigli, de Chirico, de Pisis, Modigliani and Tozzi). The exhibition poster was designed by Sironi, the catalogue⁶⁴ in which Ulrico Hoepli and Giovanni Scheiwiller edited the bibliography of each artist and of the *Novecento Italiano*, was presented by Wilhelm Wartmann, the museum's director, who chose to revive the Lausanne exhibition carrying out a considerable integration of works and artists.

Wartmann dwells in particular on the works of Carrà, Modigliani and de Chirico... "De Chirico, who lives in Paris in the surrealist circle is without doubt the most capable of today's artists. He will fade more quickly than Carrà but he works with a fragile and dancing lightness because his palette – since he has been living in France – has become extraordinarily rich from a spiritual point of view as well as being full of luminosity. There were paintings from the most recent period: transparent figures of gods with abstract heads and rigid forms which rise cubistically from the solemn aspect and are plump, which suddenly become immersed in the chromatic scale of a funfair".⁶⁵

⁶² *Exposition d'Artistes Italiens Contemporains*, presentation by A. Sartoris, exhibition catalogue (Geneva, Musée Rath, February), Turin, Stab. Grafico Foa, 1927.

⁶³ The exhibition is indicated as "one of the first initiatives of the Italian Novecento" by F. Fioravanti, *de Chirico, biografia di un decennio*, in Various Authors., *de Chirico gli anni Venti*, exhibition catalogue (Verona, Galleria d'arte moderna e contemporanea Palazzo Forti, Galleria dello Scudo, 14 December 1986-31 January 1987), Milan, Mazzotta, 1986, p. 221.

⁶⁴ *Italienische Maler. Katalog mit Abbildungen*, presentazione di W. Wartmann (Zürich, Kunsthaus, 18 March-1 May), Zürich, 1927.

⁶⁵ The text quoted by F. Fioravanti in *de Chirico, biografia di un decennio*, cit., p. 224, as part of the presentation by Wartmann in the Zurich exhibition catalogue, does not appear in the catalogue edition present in the AASGe in which the introduction by the museum director is essentially a description regarding the organisation behind the exhibition and acknowledgements to the authorities and collaborators.

The exhibition, inaugurated with a speech by Wartmann and a conference by Margherita Sarfatti, was a great success in terms of audience and sales, eight paintings were bought by the Swiss museum and numerous others – the news read “almost all of the exhibitors sold work - some sold one work and others two” – went into private collections. The echo in Italian, Swiss and German reviews and newspapers was also enormous: a great number were limited to publishing an exhibition press release had been sent out by agencies, whilst others dedicated large amounts of coverage and in-depth reviews to them.⁶⁶ Italian painting was welcomed abroad as a significant innovation, mirroring a new political reality of the country, whilst in Italy the success of Italian art was underlined as an assertion of national prestige.

Amongst the Italian reviews we find Carlo Carrà, who, after observing “the need to get to know contemporary Italian art” in the foreign press remarks and repeating the requirement to plan and unite the country’s energies for an effective “artistic expansion”, gave up on any critical judgment on the exhibitors because “when Italian art, or groups of Italian artists, are presented on foreign soil, any discussion is inopportune for us”.⁶⁷ This was an attitude taken up by almost all Italian critics, who were in general agreement in celebrating the importance of the exhibition.

With fourteen paintings that were produced between 1920 and 1927, de Chirico was the best represented artist in the Zurich exhibition⁶⁸, a fact that naturally did not escape the attention of the Italian and foreign press (fig. 5). Less than a year had passed since the disinterest and insults aimed at the artist on the occasion of the first national exhibition of the *Novecento* but, judging from the critical comments, it appeared that much more time had passed given this noticeable change in tone and attention which could not be solely traced back to the “regard” observed by Carrà about exhibitions abroad. We get confirmation of this from a communication sent out by the Agenzia Stefani taken from the Italian and foreign press, in which Carrà and de Chirico are placed on the same level in order to counter “German brutalities”:

A Carrà and a de Chirico lead to unanimous admiration and you can see how our profound artistic tradition has fortunately saved us from the aberrations of the most extremist modernisms.⁶⁹

Again in the Swiss press, de Chirico’s biographical self-portrait drawn on Ticinese paper was very curious:

De Chirico, born in Greece, to Italian parents, established himself in Paris in 1911. Discovered by Picasso at the exhibition of Independents, he immediately became famous. After the war, in 1925, he returned to Paris with Pirandello, to paint scenery for *La Giara* and he stayed there. He is the champion of surrealism.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ In the press review arranged by Alberto Salietti, and preserved today in AASGe, is the typescript *Giornali che parlarono della mostra di Zurigo* in which 84 articles published about the event are listed. C. Carrà, *Italiani a Zurigo*, in “L’Ambrosiano”, Milan, 7 April 1927.

⁶⁷ C. Carrà, *Italiani a Zurigo*, in “L’Ambrosiano”, Milan, 7 April 1927.

⁶⁸ Giorgio de Chirico exhibited: 36 *Die Mutter des Künstlers*, 1920; 37 *Selbstbildnis*, 1924; 38 *Stilleben mit Fischen*, 1924; 39 *Italienische Bäuerin*, 1925; 40 *Frau in italienischer Tracht*, 1925; 41 *Perikles*, 1925; 42 *Trophäe I*, 1926; 43 *Trophäe II*, 1926; 44 *Figuren I*, 1926; 45 *Figuren II*, 1926; 46 *Figuren im Freien I*, 1926; 47 *Figuren im Freien II*, 1926; 48 *Pferde am Strand I*, 1926; 49 *Pferde am Strand II*, 1927. Work no. 48, *Cavalli sulla spiaggia I*, belonging to the collection of Paul Guillaume, is reproduced in the catalogue. His bibliography including catalogues, articles and monographs published between 1919 and 1926 are on p. 18 of the catalogue.

⁶⁹ *La mostra del Novecento al Kunsthaus di Zurigo*, in “Il Secolo”, Milan, 31 March 1927; *La mostra del Novecento al Kunsthaus di Zurigo*, in “Patria degli Italiani”, Buenos Aires, 28 April 1927; J.J. Wyss, *Pittori italiani al “Kunsthaus” di Zurigo*, in “Squilla Italica”, Lugano, 14 April 1927.

⁷⁰ J.J. Wyss, *Pittori italiani al “Kunsthaus” di Zurigo*, in “Squilla Italica”, Lugano, 14 April 1927.

"Il Resto del Carlino" quotes several comments from the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" in which the Zurich daily underlines how "Italian tradition is exalted by the paintings of the *Novecento* members". It also recalls the "Parisians" Modigliani, Campigli and in particular de Chirico "who adorns the forms of his time and his spirit with fantasy and classical remembrances". Parisians who, as the Swiss paper said, "speak Italian like all the other exhibitors, and also by Italians who speak European". Because, he added, "such works can only be born in Italy, by the Italian spirit: in their genre they certainly express things that move us all and which exist for us all".⁷¹

On the 15th June, the exhibition *Novecento Italiano* was inaugurated at Hamburg's Kunsthalle. Germany's growing interest in Italian art was demonstrated by the possible transfer of the Zurich exhibition to Berlin as Ugo Nebbia lets known to us,⁷² and by the request sent to Sarfatti by von Schulenberg for an exhibition to be held in the German capital with the addition of several artists who "cannot be missed in Berlin, Modigliani, Boccioni, Soffici and de Chirico".⁷³ De Chirico would instead be present in Amsterdam and immediately afterwards in Leipzig.

Amsterdam 1927

The Exhibition of Italian Art in Holland was planned and organized by the Friulian intellectual and collector Enrico Morpurgo with Margherita Sarfatti, Romano Guarnieri, Alberto Saliotti and other Dutch personalities. The exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum saw the participation of 48 artists and 184 works. As in other exhibitions of the *Novecento*, Mario Tozzi, the delegate in Paris, took care of sending his colleagues, "the Italians in Paris", amongst whom de Chirico (fig. 6).⁷⁴

In the introduction in the catalogue, Morpurgo summarises the history of Italian modern art from the Macchiaioli to the Futurists and quotes Fattori, Previati, Ranzoni, Cremona, Medardo, Rosso, Marinetti and the "Manifesto" of 1909. He dwells at length on Boccioni and on the transformation that took place in the post-war period in Italian art and society. He recalls "Valori Plastici", the 'Primaverile Fiorentina' of 1922, the Biennale of 1924 with the birth of the *Novecento* and the Milanese exhibition two years later with Mussolini's participation. Significantly he observes how the qualitative adjectives "dynamic" and "constructive", much loved by the Futurists, were substituted by new categories: "disciplined, essential, traditional, plastic, classical"⁷⁵. In the catalogue every artist is presented with a brief biography, a list of works (one of which was reproduced), with sale prices and addresses. De Chirico exhibited five works and a sixth was published in the catalogue.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Arte italiana a Zurigo*, in "Il Resto del Carlino", Bologna, 2 April 1927.

⁷² U. Nebbia, *Cronache varie. Arte italiana ad Amburgo e ad Amsterdam*, in "Emporium", Bergamo, no. 395, November 1927. The Berlin exhibition has not been documented anywhere else.

⁷³ *Traduzione della lettera di von der Schulenburg a Margherita Sarfatti*, Berlin, 7 August 1927, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 102.

⁷⁴ *Cartolina di Tozzi a Saliotti*, Paris, 22 July 1927, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 177.

⁷⁵ *Esposizione d'Arte italiana in Olanda. Tentoonstelling van italiaansche Kunst in Nederlan*, presentation by E. Morpurgo, exhibition catalogue (Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, 22 October-20 November), Amsterdam, 1927, p. 14. The same exhibition would then be moved to Pulchri Studio in The Hague from 9-31 December 1927.

⁷⁶ *Giorgio de Chirico*, in *Esposizione d'Arte italiana in Olanda.*, cit., pp. 44-45, 113, 118. De Chirico exhibited: 48 *Romeinsche vrouwen*, lire 30,000; 49 *Paarden aan het strand*, lire 25,000; 50 *Stilleven met visschen*, lire 25,000; 51 *Ulysses*, lire 30,000; 52 *Stilleven met druiven*, lire 10,000. *Mannequins aan het strand*, from the Guillaume collection, was reproduced in the catalogue although it did not feature among the works exhibited. De Chirico's residence is indicated as Rue Henri Bocquillon 2, Paris.

Despite the breadth of the exhibition, judging at least by the documentation tracked down, the Italian press limited itself to printing the official communications,⁷⁷ whilst the Dutch press gave it ample coverage in the news, reviews and reproduction of the works.⁷⁸

Leipzig 1928

Although the Leipzig exhibition had a greatly reduced number of works and artists in comparison to the Dutch exhibition (only 15 exhibitors - with the significant absence of Sironi - and 65 works), it allows us to discover the famous critic Franz Roh's opinion of the *Novecento*. Roh was the greatest theorist of 'Magical Realism' and 'Neue Sachlichkeit'.⁷⁹ It was in fact the German scholar who visited Italy to select the works and the artists and who, most likely, wrote the presentation in the catalogue even though it was not signed. In reality the text of the presentation drew on Margherita Sarfatti's presentation at the Hamburg exhibition to a large extent, quoting her explicitly. Much more interestingly and a definite expression of Roh's opinion, is what he wrote a short time later in the authoritative "Die Kunst".

Roh made several considerations on 'Italian post-expressionist' painting through the particular observatory offered by the Leipzig exhibition. He commented with interest on Salietti, Oppi, Zanini, but he gives particular attention to Carrà, who "represents for Italy what Picasso is for France: that is a precursor of his times", and on new works by de Chirico whose

turning point in "pictor poeta" is the fruit of a new and of an old influence: echoes of modern composition, of a new arrangement of spaces and colours, united in a redevelopment of the most traditional romanticism, in the style of Böcklin.

He published *Les rivages de la Tessalie (The Shores of Thessaly)* By the "pictor poeta", traceable to 1926, with the title *Der Slave und sein Pferd (The Slav and the Horse)*,⁸⁰ a work (fig. 7) which does not appear in the exhibition catalogue where the artist was represented by five paintings.⁸¹

⁷⁷ U. Nebbia, *Cronache varie. Arte italiana ad Amburgo e ad Amsterdam*, in "Emporium", Bergamo, n. 395, November 1927; *Arte italiana in Olanda*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 13 November 1927.

⁷⁸ In Salietti's 'volumes' the Dutch exhibition is documented only partially due to several gaps relating to the period between the end of 1927 and 1929. We should quote the article by V. Bloch, *Moderne Italiaanische Kunst*, in "Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunsten", Amsterdam, March 1928 to which there is reference in *Carlolina di Morpurgo a Salietti*, 26 November 1928, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 178, which indicate the article in which works by Funi, Casorati, Conti, de Chirico, Carrà, Tozzi (one each) and two paintings by Salietti were published.

⁷⁹ Franz Roh (1890-1965), studied literature, history and history of art at Leipzig, Berlin and Basel and subsequently in 1915 he moved to Munich where he graduated in History of Art under the guidance of Heinrich Wölfflin, to whom he would become assistant. He became one of the major German critics collaborating in art reviews of the time such as "Der Cicerone", "Das Kunstblatt", "Die Kunst" and "Die Werk". He wrote the art review in "Neue Zeitung" and worked for the "Bayerischer Rundfunk". In 1925, he published *After expressionism: Magical Realism: Problems of the newest European painting*, an essential text for analysing artistic currents formed after expressionism, which analysed and compared the various European pictorial languages, such as "Valori Plastici" for Italy, in which the concept of 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (New Objectivity), a term which would subsequently indicate an aesthetic concept, was introduced. Alongside being a critic and a scholar, he developed research in photography (in 1929 in collaboration with Jan Tschichold, he selected 76 photographic works for *Foto-auge*) as a creator of collages. With the Nazi's rise to power, Roh was imprisoned in the concentration camp of Dachau for a time. After his liberation, he published other volumes and, due to the notoriety he had gained, he became president of the German section of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Arts, a role he kept until his death.

⁸⁰ F. Roh, *Bemerkungen zur Nachexpressionistischen Malerei Italiens*, in "Die Kunst", Munich, a. 29, no. 6, March 1928, pp. 169-180. Franz Roh declared that he wrote on the basis of the "main impressions received this year in Italy, where I went to help with the organisation of an exhibition currently open to visitors in Leipzig". Other works reproduced were: Salietti, *An der Adria* (the only work reproduced in colour outside the text); Carrà, *Festweise: Die Tochter des Lot*; Zanini, *Grosses Fensterbild*; Weinlese; Brand; Funi, *Frauenkopf*; Oppi, *Herbstnachmittag*; Cadore; *Freundinnen*; *Liegender Akt*; Borra, *Halbakt*.

⁸¹ *Neue Italienische Malerei (Novecento Italiano)*, exhibition catalogue (Leipziger Kunstverein im Museum am Augustusplatz, 8 January-5 February),

Not far behind but of equal interest were articles by Margot Riess and Johannes Urzidil published in "Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration", in which the two scholars examine the various personalities of the *Novecento* group with perspicacity. In every respect de Chirico is also considered to be among these. His 1926 *Zwei Figuren* (*Two figures*) from the Paul Guillaume collection in Paris was published with great significance (fig. 8).⁸²

De Chirico, who was by now increasingly integrated (at least according to the foreign critics) with the new artists of the *Novecento*, would return to Germany the following year after visiting Moscow and Geneva.

Moscow 1928

Even if we do not consider the initiatives that supported the participation of artists from the movement in the prestigious exhibitions abroad⁸³, I believe it is correct to add to the true *Novecento* exhibitions an event of considerable interest which took place in the Soviet capital in 1928. It is an exhibition that has been ignored by the *Novecento* historiography in which works by Andreotti, Bernasconi, Casorati, Carena, Carrà, de Chirico, Funi, Alberto Martini, Marussig, Modigliani, Paresce, Salietti, Severini and Tosi created an Italian room in the Museum of Modern Art.

The initiative was thanks to the Russian critic Boris Ternovetz (1884-1941), a great connoisseur of Italian and French art, who set up the Moscow Museum of Modern Art destined to be known as the Pushkin Museum, of which he would become the director. In the 1920s he often visited Italy where he followed the *Novecento* movement which he wrote about in Italian and Russian magazines. He was a personal friend of Salietti and Giovanni Scheiwiller, the Milanese publisher, with whom he published the small monograph Giorgio de Chirico, from the *Arte Moderna Italiana* series, in 1928.⁸⁴

Giovanni Comisso met Ternovetz during a trip in Russia:

"Where the spirit is consoled and congratulated with the USSR is at the Gallery of Modern Art... one of the most beautiful in the world... The works are distributed in an excellent way by its director, an extremely competent man who is meticulously informed on the progress of painting in every European nation. We find him in his office between a Gauguin and a Matisse... One room of the Gallery will soon be dedicated to modern Italian painters..."⁸⁵

Leipzig, 1928. Apart from the reproduction of the *Giovinetta* by the late Emilio Maserba, there were no illustrations in the catalogue. The following works by de Chirico were exhibited: 17 *Die Archeologen*; 18 *Rubender Gladiator*; 19 *Nach dem Kampf*; 20 *Gladiatoren*; 21 *Le poète et la claire voyance* [sic].

⁸² M. Riess, *Die Künstler-Gruppe "Novecento" in Italien*, in "Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration", Darmstadt, a. XXXI, n. 8, May 1928, pp. 70-77; J. Urzidil, *Grundsätzliches über die Kunst und den Künstler*, in "Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration", Darmstadt, a. XXXI, no. 8, May 1928, pp. 78-88. The influence made by the Leipzig exhibition is also felt in the articles, in particular in the absence of critical and photographic references to the work by Mario Sironi. As well as works by de Chirico, there were reproductions of works by Zanini, Salietti, Donghi, Oppi, Tozzi, Funi, Modigliani, Carrà, and Wildt.

⁸³ I refer to the prestigious exhibitions of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh and more generally to the exhibitions in the USA (Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, St. Louis, etc.), the Darmstadt exhibition of 1929, the exhibitions of Italian art abroad, in Barcelona 1929, Athens 1931, as well as others in which the organisation was the responsibility of the Union or the Biennale or, after 1931, the Quadriennale too.

⁸⁴ B. Ternovetz, *Arte moderna italiana. Giorgio de Chirico*, Milan, Edizioni Scheiwiller, 1928. In the same year, the Milanese publisher published *Piccolo Trattato di Tecnica Pittorica* by G. de Chirico. The setting up of the Room of Italian art at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art dates back to the friendship between Scheiwiller and Ternovetz. Scheiwiller would posthumously publish B. Ternovetz, *Arte moderna straniera. Aristide Maillol*, Milan, Hoepli, 1950.

⁸⁵ G. Comisso, *Impressioni di viaggio in Russia. Consolazioni e disinganni d'arte. Alla Galleria d'arte moderna*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 14 September 1930.

In the rare catalogue printed in Russian and French, we find indicated works by Italian artists that make up a significant collection of drawings personally collected by Ternovetz about which the Russian critic would often write.⁸⁶ Amongst these was *Poète consolé par la muse* (*Poet consoled by the Muse*) of 1925, dedicated by Giorgio de Chirico "à M.r Boris Ternovetz bien cordialement, Paris, juin 1927".⁸⁷ Again in 1928 Ternovetz took care of the realisation of the *Exposition de l'art française contemporain* (*Exhibition of Contemporary French Art*) in which we find, this time amongst the Italians of Paris, de Chirico once again with three paintings and one sketch (fig. 9).⁸⁸

Geneva 1929

Similarly to the exhibition in 1927, the Geneva exhibition was organized by Sartoris with Sarfatti and the artists of the *Novecento* steering committee. Sartoris had been thinking about it since 1928 in continuity with the previous exhibition under the name of the "second exhibition of the *Novecento*",⁸⁹ as in fact it would be approved by the Committee and would result in the catalogue. The exhibition which was held at the Gallerie Moos, was inaugurated on 17th June 1929 with the participation of 21 artists and 95 works. In the beautiful catalogue graphically edited by Sartoris, the presentation was written by the critic Lucienne Florentin, "authoritative Swiss writer of *objets d'art*",⁹⁰ "a female critic (Sartoris said it was Sarfatti of Geneva) who wrote in "La Suisse", as Arturo Tosi described her.⁹¹

Every one of the 21 artists in the exhibition was introduced by a critical text. The Geneva poet and writer Henri Ferrare (alias Henri-Auguste Zbinden, 1905-1952), Sartoris' brother-in-law, wrote the piece on Giorgio de Chirico, who differently to the others, was represented by only one graphic work, the etching *Les archéologues* (*The Archaeologists*, fig. 10)⁹².

De Chirico's low-key presence and the correspondence between the secretary of the *Novecento* and the Swiss-Italian architect, allow us to understand the birth of a "situation", as Saliotti and Sartoris wrote in November of 1928,⁹³ the nature of which is unknown. The painter probably did not want or was unable to participate, but the artist "is highly awaited in Switzerland", as Sartoris underlined, and the directors of the Geneva and Basel museums (where the exhibition would be revived)

⁸⁶ B. Ternovetz, *Il disegno italiano contemporaneo alla Galleria d'arte moderna di Mosca*, in "Arte Sovietica", Moscow-Leningrad, no. 6, June 1927; B. Ternovetz, *Pittori italiani al Museo di Mosca. I. Ugo Bernasconi, Arturo Tosi, Alberto Saliotti*, in "Belvedere", Milan, August 1929; B. Ternovetz, *Museum für Moderne Kunst des Westens*, Moscow, 1934. For the same collection which would go on to become a permanent room in the museum, see: *Artisti italiani moderni alla Galleria Nazionale di Mosca*, in "Arte Italiana", Rome, 17 October 1930; P. Ettinger, *L'arte italiana contemporanea a Mosca*, in "L'Arte", Turin, January 1932.

⁸⁷ *Musée d'art moderne de Moscou. Catalogue illustré*, Moscow, 1928, p. 38, n. 129.

⁸⁸ B. Ternovetz, *Exposition de l'art française contemporain*, exhibition catalogue (Moscow, Museum of Modern Art), Moscow, 1928. Works by Giorgio de Chirico in the exhibition: 34 *Femmes Romaines*, 1926; 35. *Chevaux au bord de la mer*, 1927; *Les archéologues*, 1927, reproduced in the catalogue; 7. *Dessin Archéologues*, 1927. *Femmes Romaines* (*Roman women*) would go on to become part of the museum's permanent collections (inv. 3467) in which we also find *La torre rossa* from 1921 (inv. 4677): *Catalogue of painting*, State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 1995, pp. 214-215.

⁸⁹ *Cartolina di Sartoris a Saliotti*, Geneva, 7 November 1928, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., pp. 185-186.

⁹⁰ L. Florentin, *Le mostre di Ginevra e Zurigo: Artisti italiani in Svizzera*, in "Illustrazione del Popolo", Turin, 8 May.

⁹¹ AASGe, *Cartolina di Arturo Tosi a Alberto Saliotti*, Geneva, 7 February 1927, *Documenti della Mostra di Ginevra*, 1927.

⁹² *21 artistes du Novecento italien – deuxième exposition d'artistes du Novecento italien*, presentation by L. Florentin, exhibition catalogue (Geneva, Galerie Moos, 16 June-July), Geneva, 1929. The etching by de Chirico, no. 23, pp. 10, 20-21, was reproduced in the catalogue. As the catalogue specifies, the works were sent by the Galleria Milano.

⁹³ Saliotti wrote: "Nothing has been decided about the de Chirico situation yet": *Copia lettera di Saliotti a Sartoris*, 11 November 1928, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 186.

absolutely "want" de Chirico. The "*affaire*" concluded with Sartoris' lapidary reassurance that he "will sort out de Chirico".⁹⁴ We know how.

Berlin 1929

The *Novecento Italiano* reached Berlin thanks to Gabriele Mucchi who, living in that city, was able to establish the necessary contacts between the steering committee of the group and the art world in Berlin. The young painter's aim was to present the innovative and modern works that were being produced in Italy at the *Juryfreie Kunstschau*, an expository institution equal in importance to the Berliner Secession and the Akademie but more open to new art. The exhibition, a great kermis with hundreds of exhibitors and over 1,430 works, was opened in September 1929 with the participation of German and Italian artists who belonged to different movements. The central and largest room was dedicated to the *Novecento* artists and the surrounding rooms were given to works by the best German artists subdivided into the 'Dresdener Secession' and the 'Novembergruppe'. The Italian organisers would understand only at the opening of the exhibition that traditional trends, the German avant-garde (for the most part communist) and modern Italian painting (sensitive to fascism) were to be found together.

The section dedicated to the *Novecento Italiano* revived the Geneva exhibition with some integrations. There were paintings by Mucchi who had not been present at the previous *Novecento* exhibitions; works by Funi, Arturo Martini, Marussig, Salietti, Severini, Sironi, Tosi and Zanini were added but it did not change de Chirico's presence which was forced to be badly represented in Berlin as he had been in Geneva with the etching, *Die Archäologen* (*The Archaeologists*).⁹⁵

In the exhibition's general catalogue, the Italian section is briefly presented by Gabriele Mucchi who signed himself "Commissioner of the *Novecento Italiano* in Berlin":

The *Novecento Italiano* collects the most alive and modern Italian artistic forces in Italy and abroad, regardless of the school and trends, even if the artists of which it is composed betray a wholesome sign of Roman civilisation. The group is made up of important artists such as Carrà, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi, Tosi and others and, under the protection of S.E. Benito Mussolini. It has counted a great number of important exhibitions in Italy and abroad in the few years since its birth.⁹⁶

The Berlin exhibition would be remembered for being the occasion that marked one of the first clashes between artists of different political leanings. Mucchi wrote to Salietti about it with great concern and embarrassment: "You must know that a certain Heartfield is part of the Novembergruppe, he is a communist photographer who has a room of 'Fotomontages'... [in which] there are two or three extremely ferocious pages against Mussolini".⁹⁷ The communist press in Berlin very clearly

⁹⁴ *Lettere di Sartoris a Salietti*, Geneva, 1 December 1928; 18 March 1929; 4 April 1929, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., pp. 186-187.

⁹⁵ *Juryfreie Kunstschau Berlin 1929*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin, 1929, n. 188. Differently to other works listed in the catalogue, there is no price indicated for de Chirico's etching. G. Mucchi, *Novecento Italiano*, in *Juryfreie Kunstschau Berlin 1929*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin, 1929.

⁹⁶ G. Mucchi, *Novecento Italiano*, in *Juryfreie Kunstschau Berlin 1929*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin, 1929.

⁹⁷ The complete text of the letter from Gabriele Mucchi to Alberto Salietti, sent from Berlin on 10 September 1929, is found in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., pp. 111-114.

underlined the contrast between the German artist's satire and Adolfo Wildt's portrait of the Duce exhibited in the Italian room. Not only this but the controversy also reached Carrà, represented in the exhibition by very calming landscapes, making the Novembergruppe exhibit amongst (as explicitly indicated in the catalogue) the Futurist Carrà of the *Funerali dell'anarchico Galli* (*The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*) and Russolo, who was also a Futurist, with *Rivoluzione* (*Revolution*).⁹⁸ The newspaper "Berliner Horgan", as quoted by Mucchi, could thus write polemically: "Two special groups: the *Novecento* protected by Mussolini and the revolutionary Novembergruppe. Italy is stuck in the past, the Novembergruppe is in motion..."⁹⁹

Paris 1929

Organised by Mario Tozzi, the *Exposition Art Italien Moderne* (*Exhibition of Modern Italian Art*) was opened on the 30th November at the Galerie Editions Bonaparte. Tozzi, the *Novecento's* delegate in the French capital, had an intense relationship with Salietti which was made up principally of a torrent of correspondence in which organisational problems coexisted with aesthetic issues, private matters, rivalries between artists, curiosity and problems of great importance which, through the special Parisian observatory, are also useful in understanding the art and the society of the time.

According to Tozzi, the exhibition had to have the character of a broad and general exhibition, testimony of new research and different trends, which was followed by a more specific one made up of more genuinely *Novecento* group members (it would be the exhibition at the Galerie Zak in March 1930). Tozzi selected and invited 51 artists with around seventy works (no artist had more than one painting or sculpture and graphical work) subdivided into different sections into which the exhibition was developed (painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, lithographs and sketches). Giorgio de Chirico was present with an oil and a sketch. For the first time in any *Novecento* exhibition, Alberto Savinio also exhibited.¹⁰⁰

Confirming that he was a genuine "graphomane" amongst the *Novecento* members, Mario Tozzi wrote a long presentation, certainly the broadest amongst those that we have encountered in the different catalogues consulted thus far, but it is also one of the most interesting and intelligent, a far cry from the apologetic tone and the easy encomiastic availability that was fashionable at the time. After repeating the old values of the Italian spirit of art and its international importance, Tozzi reconstructed the events of Italian art from Futurism which had "the power to awaken the drowsy energies but whose innovative value was made sterile by the victory of arms and by fascism which had reawoken national sentiment", to the present times.

Pittura Metafisica, Valori Plastici, de Chirico and Carrà were [all] born from a new condition of the spirit, and later the *Novecento* movement which can be considered as their corollary. With *Pittura Metafisica* and

⁹⁸ *Juryfreie Kunstschau Berlin 1929*, cit.: Carrà Carlo, 167 *Beerdigung des Anarchisten*; Russolo, 1038 *Revolution*. The two Futurist works which came from private collections in Berlin were put on sale at a price of 5,000 lire.

⁹⁹ *Lettera di Mucchi a Salietti*, Berlin, 10 September 1929, cit. For the Berlin exhibition, see: C. Gian Ferrari, *Avanguardia e tradizione - 1929. La polemica alla Juryfreie Kunstschau*, in A. Monferini, *Carlo Carrà 1881-1966*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Milan, Electa, 1994, pp. 110-113.

¹⁰⁰ De Chirico exhibited: 7 *Les Gladiateurs*; 46 *Dessin*. Savinio exhibited: 24 *Étoiles*.

Valori Plastici, Italian art returns to a great tradition, but this return is enriched by the freedom acquired during the futurist experience with an extremely dynamic and modern spirit. The purest masters of the Renaissance and earlier periods, from Giotto to Paolo Uccello to Masaccio, served as guides. This is a very noble and aristocratic era of our art which is achieving great success. The works created in the course of these successful years by a Carrà, a de Chirico, a Soffici, a Morandi and a Martini are those that count in our history. [In comparison to *Metafisica* and *Valori Plastici*] *Novecento*, which had its full development in Milan, is of a greater traditionalism: works by the ancient masters draw upon the external and visual aspect, more than the intimate substance. This is why works by this group's artists sometimes have the taste of a museum, and the creative and eminently poetic spirit of *Valori Plastici* is somewhat absent.

Tozzi cites the greatest artists of the movement, he dwells on the different 'schools', from the Tuscan to the Lombard school, on the contrasting personalities, as far as "*les peintres italiens de Paris*" (the Italian Painters of Paris), who

although [they] undergo, to a certain extent, the inevitable influence of the environment in which they work, they participate in life and in the artistic evolution of their country of origin in an intense way. Prampolini remained faithful to Futurism, Severini who is abandoning it to be inspired by primitives, next to an artist like Giorgio de Chirico who is inspired more or less by *Pittura Metafisica*, we find his brother Savinio, Martinelli, de Pisis, Paresce, Campigli, myself. Finally Amedeo Modigliani who was, despite his sharp modernism, a worthy descendent of the ancient masters for his cult of the line and his feeling for colour.¹⁰¹

Berne 1930

De Chirico did not participate in the exhibitions in Basel and at the Gallerie Zak in Paris but two of his works would be exhibited in Berne in the exhibition *Artisti della nuova Italia. Künstler des neuen Italien (Artists of the new Italy)*, organised like all the other *Novecento* exhibitions in Switzerland by Alberto Sartoris who also signed the long presentation in the catalogue. Tozzi set a fashion both for the breadth of this text and for his structure which historically covered the events of modern Italian art.¹⁰² The exhibition was essentially based on the transfer of works already exhibited in Basel to the Swiss capital with small changes. The number of works by Campigli, de Pisis, Paulucci, and Prampolini increased and artists such as Fillia who had been absent in Basel were included. De Chirico was present with two works, *Malerei* and once again *Die Archäologen*, the same etching which continued to carry the artist's name throughout Europe, after Geneva and Berlin and now in Berne too.¹⁰³ Amongst the articles published in Italy, we should note the one written by the poet Henri Ferrare who had presented de Chirico in Geneva.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ M. Tozzi, *Avant-propos*, in *Exposition Art Italien Moderne*, exhibition catalogue (Paris, Editions Galerie Bonaparte, 30 November-20 December), Paris, 1929, p. 7.

¹⁰² A. Sartoris, *Die Entwicklung der modernen Kunst in Italien*, in *Artisti della Nuova Italia. Künstler des Neuen Italien*, exhibition catalogue (Berne, Kunsthalle, 16 March-4 May), Berne, 1930.

¹⁰³ De Chirico exhibited: 73 *Die Archäologen*, CHF 40; 74 *Malerei* (without price). From the title and price, the first work is identified as the already well-known etching. H. Ferrare, *Gli artisti della nuova Italia alla Kunsthalle di Berna*, in "Rivista illustrata del Popolo d'Italia", Milan, August 1930.

¹⁰⁴ H. Ferrare, *Gli artisti della nuova Italia alla Kunsthalle di Berna*, in "Rivista illustrata del Popolo d'Italia", Milan, August 1930.

Buenos Aires – Montevideo, 1930

The Exhibition of the Novecento Italiano which opened in September 1930 at Los Amigos del arte in Buenos Aires, constitutes one of the most relevant exhibitions amongst all the international *Novecento* exhibitions for the number of artists (46) and works exhibited (208 paintings and a unique sculpture by Adolfo Wildt, *Il Duce*, which opened the catalogue of works), for the quality of the catalogue and, in particular, for its particular adherence to the main inspirational figures of the movement.

The organisation of the exhibition had begun several years earlier with the usual intense activity carried out via correspondence between Salietti and the Argentine points of reference, such as the publisher Sandro Piantanida who was the founder of a publishing house which would publish an art fortnightly in Spanish and Italian.¹⁰⁵ The increasingly difficult relations between the secretary and the Committee, in particular Gussoni and Barbaroux, and Sarfatti's non-support,¹⁰⁶ explain Salietti's gradual departure from the scene. In November 1929, his contract of collaboration which linked him to the Galleria Milano was broken,¹⁰⁷ and in 1930, in the Buenos Aires catalogue, his name no longer even appeared amongst the members of the steering committee. Salietti was in charge of the exhibition until March 1929 when Sarfatti replaced him directly, writing the preface in the catalogue summarizing what was published in that same year in her *Storia della pittura moderna (History of Modern Painting)*.¹⁰⁸ In the catalogue, published in Italian, every artist was presented with a brief biography followed by a list of works and a detailed bibliographical note. The works exhibited by each artist varied according to an assessment carried out case by case, probably by Sarfatti, from one to three or four paintings for all artists with the exceptions of the *Novecento* masters (Carrà, Casorati, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi, Soffici and Tosi) present with more than ten paintings, and the Italians from Paris (Campigli, de Chirico, de Pisis, Tozzi) present with four or five works. Five works by Giorgio de Chirico were exhibited – they were as extraordinary as they were surprising, being paintings from the pre-metaphysical period: *Serenata* (reproduced in the catalogue, fig. 11), *Prometeo (Prometheus)*, *Lotta dei centauri (Fight of the Centaurs)*, *Centauro morente (Dying Centaur)* and *Sfinge (Sphinx)*, all produced around 1909.¹⁰⁹

The event was a huge success with regard to both the public and the press, and also for its clear

¹⁰⁵ Lettera di Piantanida a Salietti, Buenos Aires, 2 April 1927, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ Lettera di Salietti a Margherita Sarfatti, 20-12-1929, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., pp. 116-117, also quoted in C. Gian Ferrari, *Salietti segretario...*, cit., pp. 39-40. In December 1929, Salietti wrote about the organisation of the Basel exhibition, adding: "There is such confusion in the artistic field that no-one understands anything anymore. The academy which pulls one way, the Union the other, the young of which, idem the old, and all together against the *Novecento*. I am certain that you know the reasons, but I believe that the main reasons are the interest and *arrivisme*. In all of this, art and its manifestations and tendencies play a small part [...] As a whole I had the impression that many were disinterested, some for one reason and others for another. It is certainly unpleasant to see how they deny with the utmost disinterest what we have always done out of pure passion for our art. Does it not seem this way to you, Signora? But is it really worth carrying on like this?..."

¹⁰⁷ Lettera di Tozzi a Salietti, Paris, 13 November 1929, in R. Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento Italiano"*, cit., p. 180.

¹⁰⁸ M. Sarfatti, *Prefazione*, in *Novecento Italiano*, exhibition catalogue (Buenos Aires, Amigos del arte, September-October), Buenos Aires, 1930. M. Sarfatti, *Storia della pittura moderna*, Rome. P. Cremonese, 1930, for the *Novecento*, see p. 123 onwards.

¹⁰⁹ *Novecento Italiano*, cit., p. 25, work nos. 48-52, tav. XVII. In the short biographical note, de Chirico is presented as: "Born in Volos in Greece in 1888 to Italian parents, he studied at the Academies of Athens and Munich and with the triumph of his lyrical 'metaphysics' he also asserted himself in America as one of the few original painters of today. He was represented in the most important exhibitions; and has paintings in the museums of Rome, Essen, Grenoble, Chicago, Philadelphia, etc. He lives in Paris, Rue Messonier, 4." The choice of works was made by the Galleria Milano (we do not know the extent to which the artist agreed with the choices) where the painting *Lotta di centauri*, which today is in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, was exhibited in the *Prima mostra di pittori italiani residenti a Paris...*, cit., no. 7.

political implications. Italian, Argentinean and many foreign newspapers followed every minute of the grandiose art fair, from Sarfatti's journey on the "Conte Grande" from Genoa to Buenos Aires to the sumptuous inauguration, from the Argentinean Italians' expressions of patriotic pride to the most thorough critical readings. Several Italian newspapers quoted the broad comment of the Argentinean daily "Nacion" from which we quote the observations which interest us:

De Chirico's exhibited paintings do not have any relation to his current painting. They belong to the 'Böcklinian' cycle, an outdated cycle, in no way do they conform to his dream landscapes, illusory and real architectures together, because you cannot deny the reality of the nightmare. Think about *Piazza pubblica* (*Public piazza square*) and *Giorno di festa* (*Day of holiday*). For some reason he entitled one of his painting *Le muse inquietanti* (*The Disquieting Muses*). These muses are, without doubt, the ones that dictated to him some of his short poems in rhyme and in *Ebdomeros – le peintre et son genie chez l'écrivain* (*Hebdomeros*), a book composed of light and images. Painter, sculptor, poet, is there anything more Italian than this expansive multiple activity?¹¹⁰

The Italian press in Argentina was more critical, in particular due to the excessive interest in selling rather than promoting Italian art. Sandro Piantanida, one of the organisers of the event, published an extremely long commentary in which, with the reconstruction of historical events of European painting that resulted in the *Novecento Italiano*, he complains about the lack of homogeneity of an exhibition which "is not of the *Novecento*" given that Bucci who invented the group's name was not present, and "there are painters of trends, spirit and schools that are diametrically opposite" amongst whom de Chirico, and it is not even "a collective" due to absences that he considered too significant.¹¹¹

At the end of the exhibition there was a moment of nostalgia, regret and farewells, also for de Chirico, the "romantic spirit who was a dark conjuror of peaks and abysses".¹¹² Yet it was also a moment of increasingly poisonous polemics against the *Novecento*, in particular for the accusation of substituting themselves in the role that the regime had entrusted to the fascist trade union for the promotion of Italian art abroad.¹¹³

The exhibition proceeded to the Circulo de Bellas Artes in Montevideo, a stage ignored by *Novecento* historiography. We do not know if a catalogue exists, perhaps the catalogue from Buenos Aires was used, but from the one hundred or so articles published in Italy and abroad, all of them equal in quoting Stefani's flimsy words, we know that it had "achieved real artistic success, the affluence of the visitors was extraordinary, the sales extremely numerous" and, amongst these, works by Ferrazzi and Salietti which became part of the collections of the Montevideo Museum of Modern Art.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ *La Mostra a Buenos Aires del "Novecento Italiano" in un articolo della "Nacion"*, in "Il Popolo d'Italia", Milan, 30 October 1930, the same article in "Il Giornale d'Italia", Rome, 28 October 1930 and in other newspapers.

¹¹¹ S.P., *Genesi e contenuto del "900" Italiano*, in "La Patria degli Italiani", Buenos Aires, 28 September 1930.

¹¹² F. di Giglio, *Se ne vanno...*, in "Il Mattino d'Italia", Buenos Aires, 21 October 1930.

¹¹³ For the opposition's side, see A.F. Della Porta, *Come è giunto il "900 Italiano" a Buenos Aires*, in "Il Regime Fascista", Cremona, 9 October 1930 and M.G. Sarfatti's reply to Farinacci's article, *Bilancio della Mostra del '900 a Buenos Aires*, in "Il Popolo d'Italia", Milan, 24 October 1930.

¹¹⁴ *Il successo a Montevideo della mostra del Novecento Italiano*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 30 December 1930.

Munich 1931

Shortly before three this morning a fire broke out at the Palace de Crystal in Munich. In less than an hour, the vast palace had been completely destroyed... The cause of the fire is unknown... In the Palace de Crystal there is currently the annual exhibition of modern painting which was inaugurated last Tuesday and in which a seasoned and able representation of Italian artists from the *Novecento* are participating for the first time, amongst whom Casorati, Carrà, Funi, Marussig, Eleonora Fini, Tosi, Sironi, Borra, Reggiani, Lilloni, Salietti, Consolo, Monti, Del Bon, De Grada, Giannini, De Amicis, Carpi, de Chirico and De Rocchi... All 3000 paintings in the exhibition (which altogether represented an artistic treasure of enormous value) were destroyed...¹¹⁵

The enormous exhibition, inaugurated on the 1st of June, was arranged in the historical section dedicated to Romantic German painters, in the artists of the 'Künstler Genossenschaft' and the 'Münchener Secession' in which, on the initiative of Achille Funi who had carried out the selection and the organization, exhibited Italian artists that were all ascribable to the *Novecento*. An oil by de Chirico entitled *Das Mannequin mit den Ruinen* (*Mannequin with Ruins*) from Galerie Flechtheim in Berlin was exhibited.¹¹⁶

In reality not all the paintings were lost. Among the six Italian works saved were two by Carrà, and one each by De Grada, Funi, Lilloni and Salietti.¹¹⁷

The Travelling Exhibition in the Scandinavian countries, 1931-1932

The fire at Munich's Glaspalast had not yet been forgotten when the *Novecento* managed to action, despite the increasingly hostile climate noticeable in Italy, one of the largest and most complex promotional operations of Italian art ever carried out. This consisted of more than 180 works by 52 artists travelling around three countries, Sweden, Finland and Norway, and five cities, Stockholm, Helsinki, Turku (Abo), Gothenburg, and Oslo, a marathon of art which started in September 1931 and which finished at the end of February 1932.

The operation was managed by Margherita Sarfatti with the usual operational presence of the Galleria Milano and Alberto Salietti's return to organisational work. He was no longer part of the steering committee of the *Novecento Italiano* but appeared as "Exhibition commissioner". It was thanks to his contribution to the organisation of the Stockholm exhibition that the King of Sweden conferred upon him the high honour of Officer of the Order of the Vasa.

Sarfatti selected the artists and the works (coloured by a style peculiar to her), which vary from one to two pieces for all the artists with the exception of [certain] Campigli, Carrà, de Chirico, Funi, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi and Tosi who were represented with eight paintings each.

The variations between the various exhibitions and the relative catalogues were very slight. The

¹¹⁵ *Tremila quadri distrutti a Monaco nell'incendio del Palazzo di Cristallo*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 6 June 1931.

¹¹⁶ *Münchener Kunstausstellung 1931 im Glaspalast*, exhibition catalogue (Munich, 1 June-October [destroyed in the fire of 6 June 1931], Munich, 1931, p. 58, room 55, no. 1867, the work was not for sale.

¹¹⁷ *Il Palazzo di Cristallo arso. La mostra di oltre 3000 quadri incenerita*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 7 June 1931.

works exhibited numbered 182 in Sweden and Finland and 181 in Oslo (due to one work by Campigli being removed), Margherita Sarfatti wrote the prefaces of the Swedish and Norwegian catalogues, a brief text with a notable historiographical character that reconstructed the events of the *Novecento* from 1922 to the international exhibitions,¹¹⁸ whilst in the Finnish catalogue two anonymous critical pieces were published.¹¹⁹ As we have no catalogues from the Turku (Åbo) and Gothenburg exhibitions, we can assume that the catalogues from Helsinki and Stockholm were used.

This time de Chirico was present with a metaphysical work, *Arianna (Ariadne)*, and with works from the recent period.¹²⁰ De Chirico was given the honour of being represented in a portrait twice, with his *Autoritratto* of 1930¹²¹ (figs. 12-13) and the portrait painted by Nino Bertolletti in 1924 (fig. 14), testimony of de Chirico's Roman period during which an intense friendship between the two artists was born.¹²²

Notable attention in the press, both the Italian press (which quoted the agency communications or was present with proper invitations) and, in particular, attention from the Scandinavians critics who saw in the exhibition the first, substantial presence of Italian art in their countries. In their comments considerable attention is given to the works by de Chirico, Campigli and Saliotti. In particular, de Chirico's Mediterranean myths made the Nordic public vibrate with interest and emotion.

From an initial rapid dash around the very beautiful rooms, on the whole, one has the impression that not all the works exhibited are of the highest quality. But amongst these some individual voices of noble and great beauty stand out, especially the canvases by Giorgio de Chirico, whose fantasies of marble columns and ancient stone horses emanate a strong breeze of living classicism.¹²³

The Stockholm "Svenska Dagbladet" dedicated the whole of the newspaper's front page to the exhibition inauguration with reproductions of *Pugile (Boxer)* by Messina, *Ritorno alla fonte (Return to the source)* by Saliotti and *Cavallo e zebra sulla riva del mare (Horse and zebra on the seashore)* by de Chirico (fig. 15).¹²⁴ In the "Svenska Dagbladet", the art critic Karl Asplund wrote a long piece on the exhibition, a great deal of which was quoted in the Italian press:

¹¹⁸ "Il Novecento Italiano". *Nutida italiensk Konst*, preface by M.G. Sarfatti, exhibition catalogue (Stockholm, Liljevalchs Konsthall, 9 September-4 October), Stockholm, 1931; "Il Novecento Italiano". *Italiensk Nutidskunst*, preface by M.G. Sarfatti, exhibition catalogue (Oslo, Kunstnerens Hus, 4-21 February), Oslo, 1932.

¹¹⁹ "Il Novecento Italiano". *Nykyäaikaista italialaista taidetta. Nutida italiensk konst*, exhibition catalogue (Helsinki, Taidealli-Konsthallen, 24 October-November), Helsinki, 1931.

¹²⁰ I quote the list of de Chirico's works taken from the Stockholm catalogue, p. 18, with the translations of the titles: 50 *Självporträtt* (Self-portrait); 51 *Arianna* (Ariadne), tempera; 52 *Hästar* (Horses); 53 *Naket* (Nude); 54 *Naket* (Nude); 55 *Hästar* (Horses); 56 *Hästar* (Horses); 57 *Konstnärens hustru* (Artist's wife). The following paintings were reproduced in the catalogue *Hästar* (Horse and zebra on the seashore) and *Självporträtt* (Self-portrait). In the Finnish catalogue do not change but only *Hevosia-Hästar* (Horse and zebra on the seashore) is reproduced. In the Oslo catalogue the numbering of the works changed, from 49 to 56, and *Hester* (Horse and zebra on the seashore) and *Selvportrett* (Self-portrait) were reproduced.

¹²¹ The work had already been exhibited in de Chirico's solo exhibition at the Galleria Milano in 1931.

¹²² I quote from the Stockholm catalogue p. 14: 15 *Porträtt av målaren Giorgio de Chirico* (Portrait of the painter Giorgio de Chirico), reproduced in the Swedish and Finnish catalogues. Bertolletti exhibited in Rome in 1927, at the *XCII Esposizione degli Amatori e Cultori* in the group of *Ten artists of the Italian Novecento* presented by Margherita Sarfatti. Although invited, he would not participate at the Second exhibition of the *Novecento Italiano* in Milan (1929).

¹²³ "Il '900" Italiano a Stoccolma. *Duecento opere esposte*, in "Il Progresso Italo-Americano", New York, 4 October 1931.

¹²⁴ *Nutida Italiensk Konst i Liljevalchs. "Il Novecento Italiano" bar vernissage i dag*, in "Svenska Dagbladet", Stockholm, 9 September 1931.

He lingered principally on examining the artistic personality of de Chirico, amongst the most discussed and admired painters who currently exhibit in Paris, an artist of great and original fantasy, who in his paintings with marble columns and horses makes us relive a classical art with a modern flavour. De Chirico is one of the few painters of the group who is famous throughout the world. We have not seen his well-known paintings of cities; but here we can study a couple of his no less famous paintings of horses. His horses are not similar to the horses that you know; instead they seem to be fantastical horses, modelled in plaster, with tails like crinoline. Ruins of ancient palaces and fragments of columns also enter into the composition, but the horses have a life of their own, and they seem to look, full of pride, backwards towards a great past, or forwards, towards a great future. De Chirico's paintings which have women as their theme, are a little mellifluous, like more banal Renoirs.¹²⁵

Another Swedish critic from "Dagens Niheter" wrote:

The name that is most widely and favourably known which is also famous outside Italy amongst the painters represented in this exhibition is that of Giorgio de Chirico. A speculative talent who is greatly concerned about space, i.e. the third dimension, in his paintings. Even before now I saw works by him that were characterised by a realism that takes hold of your soul and makes us remember both Mantegna and Lothe. The collection of paintings exhibited by him in Stockholm does not represent him fully. His strange dreamlike visions with white horses in a classical landscape and his nudes, reminiscent of Renoir, are more careless and less intense than those which I had previously admired as work by him. But once again his paintings exhibited in Stockholm show an artist with a very high standing.¹²⁶

The Stockholm "Social-Demokraten" agreed with what Sarfatti had written in the catalogue that the exhibited works give "the impression of artists that are seriously trying to open up a path". He observed that "they aim for monumental simplification, a vigorous roughness rather than an affected elegance".¹²⁷ In another article he particularly dwelled upon de Chirico whose *Cavallo e zebra sulla riva del mare*¹²⁸ he published (certainly one of the most reproduced works from the exhibition). Another painting by de Chirico was *Cavallo con rovine (Horse with ruins, fig. 16)* published by Efraim Lundmark together with *Nuotatori (Swimmers)* by Carrà, *Marinaio morente (Dying sailor)* by Rambelli and *Cavaliere (Knight)* by Sironi:

You can see that the new Italy has studied Masaccio, Masolino, Piero... with great love and to great advantage. The *Novecento* artists have not stopped at what is languidly lyric in classical art given that current harsh and severe times do not allow it, directing with passion their attention to monumentality.¹²⁹

On the same note, the flattering comments by the Finnish press:

¹²⁵ *L'arte italiana contemporanea nei giudizi della stampa svedese*, in "Il Secolo XIX", Genoa, 3 December 1931.

¹²⁶ *Italia artistica all'estero*, in "Il Popolo d'Italia", Milan, 4 December 1931.

¹²⁷ E.R-g, *Ny italiensk konst i Liljevalchs hall*, in "Social-Demokraten", Stockholm, 10 September 1931. The translations obtained by the notes and letters sent to Saliotti who glued them next to the newspaper cuttings arranged in his 'volumes'.

¹²⁸ E.R-g, *Moderni Italienskt maleri*, in "Social-Demokraten", Stockholm, 1 October 1931.

¹²⁹ E. Lundmark, "Il Novecento Italiano". *Italienska konstutställningens vernissage på onsdagen*, in "Nya Dagligt Allehanda", Stockholm, 9 September 1931.

With his horses, de Chirico knows how to create an original poetic and fantastical climate, someone even speaks of classical climate, and with his portrait of his wife he knows how to render a sense of beautiful delicacy.¹³⁰

The Norwegian press was also enthusiastic about de Chirico. J. Mose published the photo of *Cavallo e zebra sulla riva del mare* with great emphasis and wrote about the superb technical ability to the service of ancient style.¹³¹ In "Nationen", similar comments were made, adding a tribute to Renoir with particular reference to his [de Chirico's] nudes and portrait of his wife.¹³²

Of particular interest are Odd Hoolaas' critical observations:

The best-known is Giorgio de Chirico. It is said that he has founded a metaphysical school, but rarely has this enigmatic word ever been more enigmatic than in connection with these paintings. He breathes a *joie de vivre* which at its height in this world. His paintings of women are very closely linked to Renoir's and he has also appropriated the artist's mastery and splendour in [painting] a delicate porcelain complexion. His most interesting paintings are his compositions with horses. Rearing and with strong manes, they run alone or in pairs along a Homeric coast, in the torrent which leads to the sea. A Mediterranean vision which gives a pretext of great fascination to this master of scenography.¹³³

Paris 1932

In the *Novecento* historiography, both Bossaglia and Pontiggia conclude the experience of the international exhibitions of the *Novecento Italiano* with the exhibitions in Scandinavia. In reality, even though they were not organised by the steering committee, as explicitly declared in the catalogue and from comments published by the national and foreign press, the exhibitions at the Gallerie Georges Bernheim in Paris in March 1932 and the Umelecka Beseda in Prague from April to May 1932 should also be considered.¹³⁴ Giorgio de Chirico did not take part in the exhibition in Czechoslovakia but he was present at the Paris exhibition.

The Paris exhibition represented a highly significant epilogue for the *Novecento Italiano*. Sarfatti's decade-long adventure came to an end in 1932, but it was done with great style and with refined taste both for the place chosen and for the masters of ceremonies who celebrated its last rites, as well as for the participants and for what would result from the exhibition itself. The Gallerie Georges Bernheim situated in Faubourg Saint-Honoré 109, was one of the most prestigious art galleries in the French capital. In the catalogue, the critic Waldemar George wrote an important essay dedicated to the "*Novecento* group, elite of which is participating in this exhibition", which would be quoted in several Italian news-

¹³⁰ S. Sibilis, *Quadri e sculture italiane in Finlandia ammirate e discusse*, in "Il Popolo di Roma", 5 November 1931.

¹³¹ J. Mose, Kunst. "*Il Novecento Italiano*" *Italiensk utstilling i kunstnerhuset*, in "Morgenposten", Oslo, 12 February 1932.

¹³² E.L., *Den Italienske utstilling*, in "Nationen", Oslo, 9 February 1932.

¹³³ O. Hoolaas, *Den italienske utstilling*, in "Tidens Tega", Oslo, 5 February 1932. Once again the *Cavallo e zebra sulla riva del mare* was reproduced in the newspaper.

¹³⁴ No catalogue has been traced for the Prague exhibition and perhaps no catalogue was produced. From numerous press communications we can chronologically work out that the exhibition, held in Umelecka Beseda's artistic circle, opened on 15 April and closed on 11 May 1932 with the participation of Carrà, Funi, Lega, Marussig, Salietti, Sironi, Soffici and Tosi.

papers, and, during the exhibition, on the evening of 11th March, the Spanish philosopher Eugenio D'Ors held the conference *La peinture italienne contemporaine* (*Contemporary Italian painting*).

Waldemar George did not quote any artist, but instead he carried out a survey of the *Novecento* "group" which "represented the willingness to restore lost value to the values of painting". He divided the *Novecento* painters into three categories – nature, classicism and metaphysics.

The third part is made up of those who do "metaphysical painting". Even though they are Italian, these painters irrefutably show that Italian art represents a subtle *trait-d'union* between the Mediterranean spirit and the European spirit. If Italian art was the common source of eastern art for two centuries, it was because it had surpassed the limits of an exclusively Latin idiom. The painters I have named are not only abstract workers, shadow fishermen, sleepwalking scholars. Their unrealism is not only a form of evasion and compensation, a slit from which our chimeras, our propitiatory gods, our familiar demons, hunted by materialism, replace the target. They are younger brothers of the painters of the North, their art shows, once again, that Ancient Roman spirit or Italian spirit are synonyms of universality.¹³⁵

Eugenio D'Ors also supported the universal character of the new Italian art.

As a whole, Italian painting is represented as incorporated within tradition: not in tradition intended in the local meaning of underlining the national character, but as a tendency to renew the universal character of art. In this sense, Italian painting represents the most perfect type of reaction to the ideal of the 19th century [...] Carrà, Tozzi, de Chirico respectively represent: the spring agitated by the new trend, its long summer, and a subtle autumn already afflicted internally by a corrosive force.¹³⁶

Twenty-two artists exhibited 61 works arranged by Barbaroux and Feroni from the Galleria Milano. De Chirico was present with three paintings: *Composition* (*Composition*), *Mannequins* (*Mannequins*) and *Gladiateurs* (*Gladiators*).¹³⁷

During the exhibition, the Italian industrialist Carlo Frua De Angeli, complying with the wishes of André Dezarrois, director of the Musée des Écoles Étrangères, bought twelve paintings from the exhibition which he donated to the museum to form the first nucleus of an Italian room at the Jeu de Paume in the Tuileries Gardens which was inaugurated a year later. Amongst the twelve paintings was *Gladiatori*, "a powerful painting by Giorgio de Chirico; a red tangle of Herculean bodies of man, reminiscence and derivation of Roman mosaics".¹³⁸

Translated by Rosamund King

¹³⁵ W. George, *22 artisti italiani a Paris*, in "Corriere Padano", Ferrara, 17 March 1932. The article quotes in full the presentation by Waldemar George published in the catalogue. See also the reviews of the exhibition by A. Aniante, *Posta da Paris. Pittura italiana*, in "Le Arti Plastiche", Milan, 1 March 1932.

¹³⁶ *Pittori nostri a Paris. La Mostra d'arte italiana moderna*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 8 April 1932; P. Sighinolfi, *Notiziario. La pittura italiana del Novecento in una conferenza di Eugenio d'Ors a Paris*, in "Domus", Milan, May 1932.

¹³⁷ *22 Artistes Italiens Moderns*, presentation by W. George, exhibition catalogue (Paris, Galerie Georges Bernheim, 4-19 March), Paris, 1932. *Gladiateurs*, from 1929, was reproduced in the review by Marcel Zahar, *L'actualité artistique. Une exposition de jeune peinture italienne à Paris*, in "Formes", Paris, February 1932.

¹³⁸ D.L. Pariset, in "Nuova Italia", Paris, 24 March 1932. The other paintings donated were by Sironi, Marussig, Tozzi, Severini, Funi, Tosi, Borra, de Pisis, Leonor Fini, Carrà and Zanini.