

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND LÉONCE ROSENBERG ART IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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1. Art and the economy

The art market in moments of crisis: the Rosenberg-de Chirico correspondence.

There do not exist such pinnacles of wealth, or depths of poverty, that by themselves may guarantee or prevent the birth of artistic masterpieces. Cultural development must be studied principally from the cultural roots of specific places and times. It would be fanciful, however, to affirm that such development exists independently to an epoch's economic conditions.

The Rosenberg-de Chirico correspondence is a valid instrument for the historian who wishes to investigate the manner in which the economical conditions of the period between the two World Wars influenced the work of this famous artist. I will not endeavour to formulate a theory that explains the effect of the "whole" economy upon the "whole" of art. This would simply lead to generalisation, which would hide the infinite variety of actions and reactions.

The connection between artistic development and economic depression, has long fascinated economic historians. In a well known article, Roberto Santino Lopez² described how culture rose to become the highest symbol of nobility and prestige during the Italian Renaissance, thus becoming the watchword with which to accede to the most elevated social circles. Its value grew in the specific period in which the cost of land was falling. Its economical gain increased during the pronounced decline of interest rates.

Let us now briefly explore the increase in value, during the Renaissance, of an investment in culture as a financial investment. According to Lopez, these categories of investments were inversely proportional to the business spirit of the Renaissance's governing classes. During the commercial revolution of the thirteenth century, businessmen were too busy making money to devote themselves to cultural activities. When the Renaissance financial stagnation arrived, many of them had more time to dedicate to the arts. Let us take an important dealer, as example, who was head

¹ Agostino Inguscio is the author of the first section of this article. Giovanna Rasario wrote the second, which deals with the de Chirico-Rosenberg correspondence.

² R. S. Lopez began his analysis of the late Renaissance economic crisis with his well known contribution, *Hard Times and Investment in Culture in The Renaissance: A Symposium*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1953. These ideas were later developed in R. S. Lopez and H. Miskimin, *The Economic Depression of the Renaissance*, "Economic History Review" XIV, 1962, pp. 408-426. This article stimulated a debate in which C. M. Cipolla published *The Economic Depression of the Renaissance?*, "Economic History Review" XVI, 1963, pp. 519-524 and R. S. Lopez and H. Miskimin, *A response to Cipolla*, *ibid.*, pp. 525-529.

of one of the greatest financial organisations of the fifteenth century: Lorenzo The Magnificent. He was the head of the Medici family bank, Florence's uncrowned king, poet and patron of the arts. The results of his investments demonstrate that he was probably more a master of letters than of finance. Certainly, he has been remembered more for his poetry, than for the failure of his bank! Today, in fact, no one suffers for the ruinous destiny of the Medici bank and Lorenzo is forgiven for not having invested money in commerce at fruitful interest, considering that the interest we perceive today from his investments in artworks seems inexhaustible.

The lack of commitment during moments of crisis, of capital to traditional investments, and the prosperous survival, instead, of an active artistic market, also came about during the blackest years of the Great Depression that swept the whole world over in successive waves in the years immediately following the Great War. We shall study this "financial" aspect using the information contained in the correspondence described in the following text. Our timeline will be the years between 1926 and 1936, the scene, Paris.

In spite of the exit of the pound and dollar from the Gold Standard in 1931 and 1933, France maintained the Gold Standard for the franc. In the opinion of numerous historians, this action increased the crisis's global dimension, strangling, in particular, the French economy and that of the other Gold Bloc countries. This is a very important detail. In fact, French investors, not finding themselves in a period of "cheap money", needed to carefully calculate every investment. Art was one of these, and it had its agents. Many characteristics relating to the commerce of art emerge from this correspondence, especially the manner in which commercial necessity could significantly influence the artistic and financial choices of an author.

From the correspondence we are able to understand the manner in which Rosenberg constantly endeavoured to increase the value and improve the marketability of de Chirico's works. We can follow the commercial strategies of the art dealer and his growing agitation in the face of certain actions of the artist that seem to hinder his efforts. In a letter dated 19 November 1926, Rosenberg asks de Chirico to "not paint, in the current circumstances, canvases of dimensions inferior to calibre 30³. Owing to the grave economic crisis just beginning, art lovers of small and medium financial means, to which the small and medium canvases are usually destined, will be forced to forgo all purchasing for financial reasons. Only rich clients will be able to continue. And these do not purchase small canvases"⁴. And on 2 December of the same year, Rosenberg exercised his influence on de Chirico's works once again, this time regarding theme and style. The great crisis following the economical difficulties would necessitate a rational organisation of production and

³ For the units of measurement, see the conversion table at the end of this article.

⁴ Fonds Léonce Rosenberg, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de Documentation et de Recherche du MNAM, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, C60.9600.220, box 11. All documents cited in the footnotes belong to this archive (1924-1925 box 10; 23 January 1926 on, box 11). Documents will be indicated only with their archival number. The letters by de Chirico cited in the article are published in full in the original French with English translation in the section Writings by Giorgio de Chirico in this periodical, pp. 279-338. The correspondence is unpublished except for a number of excerpts regarding the decoration of Rosenberg's apartment in rue Longchamp, published by Christian Derouet and the letters of 1925 which were published in "Metafisica" n. 7/8, with an essay by Michele Tavola, *Rosenberg and de Chirico*, pp. 364-370. See C. Derouet, *Un problème du baroque italien tardif à Paris*, in *Giorgio de Chirico*, catalogue of the exhibition curated by W. Rubin, W. Schmied and J. Clair, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 17 November 1982 - January 30 1983 and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 24 February - 25 April 1983, pp. 111-135. By the same author: *A proposito della Hall des Gladiateurs dipinta da Giorgio de Chirico per Léonce Rosenberg (suite et fin provisoire)*, in *Les Italiens de Paris - de Chirico e gli altri a Parigi nel 1930*, catalogue of the exhibition curated by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, Brescia, Palazzo Martinengo, 18 July - 22 November 1998, Skira, Milan 1998, pp. 245-254.

sales. Only those with great fortunes would be able to weather the coming financial storm with success and it was on this market category that attention must be focused.

The artist, in need of money, did not seem to agree with the commercial caution advocated by Rosenberg and, by selling paintings on his own, brought down the price of his works. Rosenberg spoke of a “methodical, reasonable and honest progression of your prices”⁵, which could only be obtained by controlling the artist’s production. He did not manage, however, to prevent the artist from saturating the market with his works. And, in fact, the gallery manager’s next letters to de Chirico show his vexation.

His interest for the artist’s work, however, never decreased. The letters also show how, in a market that continued to flourish despite the crisis, that it is the artist’s behaviour, considered incorrect, that caused the lowering of prices. This was confirmed in a letter of 14 April 1927, in which Rosenberg reaffirmed his admiration for de Chirico’s art and his intention to maintain its prices at a high level. The two would later organize a rigged sale in order to raise the artist’s prices, after one of his works had been “undersold”. The result was a success and sure enough in a letter of 3 September 1928, we learn that the artist’s prices were rising constantly.

The letters allow us, in a word, to comprehend how, during the 1930s in the worst crisis ever suffered by world finance, between 1926 and 1936, the art market was still quite active and needed careful “management” by such specialists in the sector as Rosenberg. The continuity, if not the development, of investment in artworks during the crisis period had always been an object of fascinating historiographical debate, current now more than ever, and for this, the de Chirico-Rosenberg correspondence is of substantial importance.

When this edition of “Metaphysical Art” is in print, the smoke that arose from the financial fire-works set off during the auction of Damien Hirst’s works (Fall 2008), will have cleared.⁶ It will then be time to ask ourselves some questions about this phenomenon. The auction “Beautiful Inside my Head Forever”, held in mid-September 2008 garnered £112 million, almost doubling the high-end estimate of the artist and organisers. It was, in fact, the highest sum ever paid during a single-artist auction. History teaches us “Art is money”. One of the aspects of the auction’s success, indeed, was certainly the fact that money was taking refuge in the arts while the price of land and stocks was collapsing.

Today, buying works of art is considered an investment. The database Artnet registers all prices paid for art works in various auctions. This of course has helped the development of the market (the gathering of information is the basis of every investment), but at the same time has influenced the type of art the artist creates. The only possible “art index” requires a level of continuity of a certain sort of artwork in order to establish value with sufficient accuracy. This has encouraged artists to produce works “in series”, to the benefit of those more inclined to adapt to the demands of the market. This angle certainly inspired Hirst to generate his infinite series of “dot” paintings, but just as surely, as we have seen, also had its effect upon the production of de Chirico between the two Wars. A neologism has recently been coined in English that illustrates the conduct of many art dealers, the “specollector”: part “speculator”, part “collector”. The activity itself, however, is

⁵ C75.9600.248.

⁶ B. Lewis, *Hirst’s Unburstable Bubble*, “Prospect Magazine”, n. 151, 25 October 2008.

anything but recent, as demonstrated in the following article by Giovanna Rasario, on the relationship between an artist and his art dealer.

2. The de Chirico-Rosenberg Correspondence, 1926-1936: “A Diary for an Artist”

The Merchant and his Artist: Rosenberg and de Chirico in Paris

The great European economic crisis from 1926 to 1936 may also be understood in reading the unpublished correspondence between de Chirico and Rosenberg conserved at the Centre Georges Pompidou archives in Paris.⁷ These were crucial years for Giorgio de Chirico’s artistic and intellectual experience, after his time in Florence in the early 1920s, when he formed ties with Giorgio Castelfranco.⁸ In those very years, Léonce Rosenberg had an important gallery in Paris: l’Effort Moderne.⁹

Rosenberg was born in Paris in September 1879 to a family of antique dealers. His father, Alexandre, had a gallery in rue de l’Opéra. His brother, Paul, with whom Léonce collaborated for a time, dealt in antiques and paintings of French Romanticism, impressionism and, finally, Picasso. In addition to Paris, Paul’s market included London and New York.

The Rosenberg’s were therefore a family with strong European ties and it was not by chance that Léonce, after completing the Lycée Rollin in Paris, began to study Economy and Commerce in London and Antwerp. The family belonged to the Jewish élite well integrated into Parisian society that combined open-mindedness with conservative political values. Léonce was a most interesting and sometimes contradictory character. From the correspondence, as well as from the opinions of other artists, we cannot but note his acute business sense and his occasional lack of scruples in taking advantage of difficult situations of other art dealers, as in the case of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, with whom he came into contact in 1912.¹⁰ Upon returning to Paris in 1918, Rosenberg opened Galerie l’Effort Moderne on the first floor of a building in rue de la Baume. It is here that the events of our analysis take place.

Rosenberg’s “Diary”

The correspondence between Rosenberg and de Chirico reads almost like a “diary” revealing the relationship between the artist and his merchant.

The letters were written very frequently – at times daily –, an exchange facilitated by the Parisian postal system’s “pneumatique” service guaranteeing delivery within the day. Although this

⁷ See footnote 4. Fonds Léonce Rosenberg, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de Documentation et de Recherche du MNAM, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. I also thank my friends Giovanni Salmeri and Leandra d’Antone for their willingness to discuss these pages with me.

⁸ See G. Rasario, *The Works of Giorgio de Chirico in the Castelfranco Collection*, in “Metafisica”, n. 5/6, Le Lettere, Florence, Pictor O, Rome 2006, pp. 277-303.

⁹ It is through Castelfranco that de Chirico had his first contact with Rosenberg.

¹⁰ In these years Kahnweiler was Picasso and Braque’s dealer. At the start of World War I his gallery was closed and Kahnweiler took refuge in Switzerland, where he remained for the duration of the war. This period was fundamental also for his philosophical and theoretical formation. Rosenberg invested in the artists of his group (Braque, Juan Gris, Herbin, Léger, Severini) and also did business with Picasso who ceased collaboration with Rosenberg when he directed the auction (1923) in which the artworks belonging to Kahnweiler were seized and sold. See Pierre Assouline, *L’homme de l’art. D.H. Kahnweiler, 1884-1979*, Baland ed., Paris 1988; K. Teige, *Il mercato dell’arte*, Einaudi, Turin 1973, pp. 29-30.

correspondence has never been considered particularly interesting, I consider it important, as it can truly be read as an art dealer's "diary" to his *protégé* in a period of crisis. It will be worthwhile, before a more detailed examination, to make an overview of the "plot line" of this text. In the letters, the art dealer presented himself not as an intermediary but as a buyer, even claiming the title of "publisher" for himself. Rosenberg, apart from suggesting new themes and proposing the artist eliminate abstract and metaphysical themes, as can be read in the letter of 20 July 1928¹¹, also gave him precious advice on the complexities of life as a painter living off his own earnings. Between the lines, we see how he helped him understand the requirements of the art market and foresee problems connected with finances and the crisis, whilst providing fatherly advice and organising work through very precise instructions and by setting down rules. Rosenberg has his finger on the pulse of the situation and understood the demands of the market. With the "financial" experience gained in Antwerp and London, he made the artist understand that the art market was a real "market" in which invested capital had to produce results and the risk of inattentive dealings had to be avoided.

Paintings with new subjects surface from the written pages: *Horses, Horses and Temples*, *Gladiators*, *Battle of Gladiators*, *Horse and Zebra*.¹²

Rosenberg knew how to make the most out of an exhibition, whilst stimulating the artist. In a letter dated 12 March 1926¹³, he exhorted the artist to urgently send him a biographical note¹⁴, to which de Chirico replied with a small manuscript that was more than just a biographical note. In it, he outlined, briefly but efficiently, the characteristics of his painting, in particular the period in Paris (1911-1915), which he defined a "souvenir d'Italie"¹⁵. Following that was the "Époque d'Italie" and then the period of de Chirico's encounter with Rosenberg:

I painted still lifes and paintings which I called "Metaphysical Interiors"; they were views of rooms with objects set on tables; the ceiling and the floor played the same lyric role that the sky and the ground play in a landscape. However, in the years that followed, I was tempted by paint that was richer in matter and colour, by a freer technique and now, having progressed in the difficult craft of painting, I try to express, with the greatest strength possible, the images and the fantasies that haunt my spirit.¹⁶

Thus he describes what is different in his new manner of painting, which will characterise the works connected with the *l'Effort Moderne*: research aimed at careful craft, and a new, complex technique.

¹¹ C53.9600.198. The date is difficult to read: 20 or 29 July.

¹² C62.9600.271.

¹³ C53.9600.196.

¹⁴ M51.9600.198 The biographical text was published in G. Rasario, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-243. See essay for an analysis of the early years of the Rosenberg-de Chirico relationship, when de Chirico, aided by Giorgio Castellfranco, began his collaboration with Rosenberg. The unpublished document, which was discovered and published by the Foundation, was displayed in the important exhibition *Giorgio de Chirico, la Fabrique des rêves*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 13 February – 24 May 2009.

¹⁵ "[...] all my painting of this period is a souvenir of Italy".

¹⁶ M.51.9600.196.

As we shall see, Rosenberg offered advice not only on themes and dimensions, but also on “antique subjects”, such as Gladiators, Horses, Horses and Ruins, and dictated rules of conduct to the artist. And so as we read, we discover the importance of not having more than two merchants at a time, of not inflating the market, as well as being careful not to be represented in too many galleries in the same city at the same time. Additionally, attention must be paid to auctions where paintings may escape market control. But Rosenberg was also very attentive to the quality of the paintings, which had to meet the standard of his gallery. He had no qualms in sending back a work that does not thoroughly convince him, but also offered sincere praise when he unexpectedly happened upon a painting in a gallery window that he found pleasing. He confessed that he would never sell *The Consolator*, a work he intended to keep for years. “I love it, as it is splendid”¹⁷.

The dealer also made a practice of checking the sketches of other artists, such as Léger and Metzinger, whilst his control of de Chirico’s work existed, as he himself said, within “the freedom of your technique and your aesthetics”. Dimensions and subjects had to conform to the organisational necessities of the gallery. In all great epochs artwork was based on commissions and not fantasy or arbitrary decisions.

As mentioned in my previous essay published in “Metafisica”, the relationship between de Chirico and Rosenberg began in 1925, with his exhibition at l’Effort Moderne. De Chirico’s attitude towards the art dealer was one of devotion and respect. He also asked his opinion on how many catalogues to print.¹⁸ De Chirico had great consideration for Léonce Rosenberg during those years, as can be deduced from his postcard of 11 September 1925¹⁹, in which the artist asked for his opinion of a few paintings he had sent. In his reply, Rosenberg apologised for not having written upon receiving the three canvases, adding that he liked them very much, and that:

Even if they remind one somewhat of previous works, I find that they possess a richer technique and a heightened aesthetic.²⁰

He concluded remarking that all together, these paintings showed remarkable progress compared to previous ones. In the same letter, Rosenberg suggested that he return to Paris soon, stating “although I do not wish to force your return to Paris, there is a great movement is being undertaken by foreigners and French art lovers in favour of art and in defence of l’Effort Moderne”. In order to convince de Chirico further of his intention to support him, he informed the artist “Since my return to Paris on 3 September, I have sold all my Braque’s and many works by Léger, Gris, Herbin, Severini and Csaky”.²¹ In closing, he sent greetings to Savinio: “My friendliest wishes to Mr. Savinio”. The letter is particularly interesting in that it shows how Rosenberg abandoned his predilection for Cubism in 1925 and shifted it to de Chirico and Neoclassicism. It also gives us the opportunity to observe the first contact between Savinio and Rosenberg in 1924.²² Savinio, in fact, in the absence of de Chirico who was in Vichy, offered to help Rosenberg during his visit to Rome.

¹⁷ C31.104422.76.

¹⁸ Letter of 12 January 1925, C2.9600.134.

¹⁹ C16.9600.181. On the 1925 exhibition, see M. Tavola, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Letter of 15 September 1925, C46.9600-182.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Letter from Savinio to Rosenberg on 15 August 1924, C10422.1313: “[...] my brother Giorgio de Chirico left Rome a week ago, in this moment he is in

New Subjects: a Return to the Classic

With careful attention to dates – although in his letters Rosenberg insistently suggested certain themes to de Chirico, chief among these being the Gladiators – we may say that the need for a return to the Classic was already present in de Chirico at the beginning of the 1920s.²³ In any case, the works of the early Metaphysical period already contained classical elements taken from Greek mythology: centaurs, sirens, oracles and the statue of Ariadne seen almost obsessively on the metaphysical piazza with their Roman arches.

In the 1920s, however, de Chirico showed his need to deepen the meaning of this “return” through theory. The artist’s writings, such as those published in “La Ronda”²⁴ in 1920 or in “Valori Plastici”²⁵ come to mind, as well as his relationship with Giorgio Castelfranco²⁶, and his return to the museum and the search for painterly quality.²⁷ Rosenberg loved the classical world to which de Chirico dedicated himself in the early 1920s with themes such as the Argonauts, Roman Villas, the advent of the “Goddess of History”, landscapes bathed in autumnal light, the painting *October Outing* in which Mercury in flight reminds us of hermetic melancholy, of an almost visceral tie with that which will become Surrealism, from which de Chirico, however, preferred to keep his distance. The themes of this period, before his departure to France, go from *Niobe* (1920) to the Gladiators, which he would later choose for Rosenberg’s apartment (1929), from the Archaeologists to the Ephebos, from self-portraits with classical sculptures to portraits with classic citations, such as *Self-portrait with a bust of Mercury* of 1923. Once again in 1924, the artist portrayed himself as a superman in a self-portrait, with an inscription reading “Mihi fama perennis quaeritur in toto semper ut orbe canar” (I search for endless glory, to be celebrated in all the world). The virgin athletes and the gladiators return, all themes that are found in the novel *Hebdomeros*.

After the high-definition images of the early metaphysical paintings, de Chirico produced new transparencies in mellow colours mixed on the palette. The painter abandoned that particular dry, chaste definition of image with which he countered any impressionistic tendencies. Atmospheric

Vichy. It is for this that I am answering your letter from Florence, having been authorised by him to open his post during his absence. I would be most happy to see you in Rome, as also Mr. Léger, whom I met in the happy years before the War. Would you please make me an appointment in the city; this would be preferable, as you might have trouble finding my home by yourself. I will try to be useful to you in any way I can.

²³ The “Return to Order” and to the “Classic” in the 1920s has been widely treated. Among key contributions, we recall the exhibition *On Classic Ground* at the Tate Gallery in London, curated by E. Cowling and J. Mudy in 1990. See *On Classic Ground, Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism, 1910-1930*, catalogue of the exhibition, edited by E. Cowling and J. Mudy, Tate Gallery, 6 June - 2 September 1990, London 1990. See also contribution of P. Vivarelli in *ibid.* See also, *Les Italiens de Paris. De Chirico e gli altri a Parigi nel 1930*, cit.

²⁴ G. de Chirico, *Classicismo pittorico*, in “La Ronda”, II, n. 7, Rome, July 1920. Now in G. de Chirico, *Scritti/1 (1911-1945). Romanzi e Scritti critici e teorici*, A. Cortellesa, ed., A. Bonito Oliva, dir., Bompiani, Milan 2008, pp. 308-313: “The demon of Greek painting is above all a linear demon; he reveals himself again in Italian painting of the fifteenth century and later makes some rare appearance in all epochs and in different countries [...] the demon of classicism is a linear demon of signs or of style. In Greek painting it is in the line that an inexplicable emotion is revealed, an emotion that goes straight to the mark or loses itself on the way, tracing out, on prefixed points, the necessary corners and curves. Therefore we may say, that like Ingres and the Italian fifteenth century painters, also the painters of ancient Greece saw uniquely in drawing the foundation of every great Art. In this sort of mysticism of line that characterises truly classical Art, one can feel an aversion for all useless mass, for that which is firm and pulpy, and hence foreign to spiritual subtlety and to the tendency to moderate oneself to a religious alphabet of signs which form the outline of a figure or of an object [...]. Marvellously the Greeks felt the magic of the line [...]. They thought of nothing else; in no other forms did they seek joy or solace [...]. That which therefore characterizes every pictorial classicism, is the subtlety and purity of linear sensation and the complete absence of every gigantic or voluminous aspect [...].”

²⁵ G. de Chirico, *Il ritorno al mestiere*, in “Valori Plastici”, I, n. 11-12, Rome, November-December 1919.

²⁶ G. Rasario, *op. cit.*, *The Niobe* of 1920 is of course linked to his close association with Castelfranco and his assiduous frequentation of the Uffizi, where the *Niobe* room had a great impact on him.

²⁷ The writings of de Chirico, *Il ritorno al mestiere* in “Valori Plastici”, I, n. 11-12, Rome, November-December 1919, and *Classicismo Pittorico*, cit., were republished in E. Pontiggia, *Il ritorno all'Ordine*, n. 64 Carte d'Artisti, Mondadori, Milan 2005, pp. 42-48 and pp. 57-61.

veiling appears, together with soft flesh, whilst architectural and geometric backgrounds disappear, mannequins lose their wholly artificial aspect, transforming into figures of a more human posture, as if gifted with a natural life and psychology of their own and a psychology, as in the *The Prodigal Son* of 1923. The Gladiators in Rosenberg's home are ancient myths reincarnated, as the Horses on the Seashore are living things, existing somewhere between Metaphysics, Nature, and the call of Hellas.

The Parisian years were fundamental for the artistic activity of Giorgio de Chirico, who collaborated actively with "l'Effort Moderne" as may be seen from the letters, which cover a lengthy period of time from 1924 to 1941, with a long interruption from 1930 (except a few postcards) to 1936.

The Publisher

Léonce Rosenberg, a cultured, refined and intellectual man who was open to new ways of thinking, endeavoured to create a new style through the collaboration with artists, to whom he gave suggestions together with his commissions and, in his correspondence, took on the title "publisher". We may read this not only in his letters but also in the articles he wrote for "Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne"²⁸, a magazine published in forty issues between January 1924 and December 1927. The publishing house, which went by the same name as the gallery, l'Effort Moderne, also created volumes on Cubist painters such as Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger. From 1927 onwards, Rosenberg often published reproductions of de Chirico's paintings, contributing to the diffusion of the artist's work among collectors and connoisseurs in this way.

Among the letters of this period, the 28 September 1927 missive is an important one, with de Chirico granting Rosenberg authorisation to publish reproductions of his work and also to give copies of these to third parties, but only of the works that he owned.²⁹

These were important years for the artist for building upon his fame in Paris, bound, of course, to the art market of the epoch and the collectors surrounding Rosenberg.

How to Build a Market

It was Rosenberg who built the market for de Chirico, as may be read in the letter of 6 October 1925:

In order to create a situation worthy of you in Paris, I ask high prices so that the public will accustom themselves to buying your work at sums that in the future will allow you to live comfortably here, something that will be possible when I will have sold some paintings at good prices, which will provide a basis for future dealings [...].³⁰

²⁸ "Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne", journal whose forty issues may be found at Fonds Léonce Rosenberg in the Kandinsky Library. An essay by Rosenberg, *Cubisme et Empirisme* of 1921, was published in the journal, and was a further elaboration of his reflection on Cubism (presented in the essay *Cubisme et Tradition* of 1920), considered as a movement of "construction" and of order rather than subversion.

²⁹ C63.9600.273: "I authorise you to publish in your journal and in all other French or foreign journals photographs of my paintings and also to give these photographs to third parties for the purpose of promotion, without having to take into account any copyright in my regard. This authorisation is only valid for paintings of mine that you own.

Please accept my best regards, Giorgio de Chirico; P.S. Please be kind enough to keep for "Guerschmitt" 3 photographs (which I will purchase): one of the painting "Trophy" (the most successful of the four, the one in which the antique head is seen in the middle of the painting in profile and in yellowish tone); the "Marathon Runner" and a third of the "Horses" purchased by the Count of Noailles. I will pass by to pick them up at the beginning of next week."

³⁰ C48.9600.186.

In 1925-1926, de Chirico was happy with his collaboration with the art dealer whom he held in great consideration, so much so as to consider him almost “his own critic”. In a postcard of 13 October 1925, he thanked him for the encouraging letter, writing:

Many thanks for your good letters which are a great encouragement to me. I assure you that you are the man who has encouraged me the most so far. Please excuse the tone of declaration. I will also show my gratitude when I am in Paris by doing a good life-size portrait of you, or of a member of your family if you prefer, and I would like you to accept it as a gift. I intend to be in Paris around 15 November. My mother and my brother send their best wishes. Mr. Rosenberg, please accept my devotion, esteem and gratitude.³¹

De Chirico saw in Rosenberg as the person who had encouraged him the most. In 1926 he wrote from Plombières:

I just arrived in Plombières, here is my address: Villa Bernier Av^{me} Lorraine Plombières. It would be very kind of you not to forget me. I want to take proper care of myself in order to be able to return to the work of art with renewed strength. – Goodbye dear Mr. Rosenberg and I remain yours sincerely.³²

In the letters, stages of work, as well as Rosenberg’s behaviour towards de Chirico, which alternate between moments of extreme severity and great appreciation, may be reconstructed. We also find clues as to his relationship with Paul Guillaume.

The Relationship between Artist and Art Dealer: an Economic “Microhistory”

By means of what may be considered a “microhistory”, we can glean a slice of French economic history from the end of the 1920s through to the 1930s. In the correspondence we read of alternating fortunes, shifting markets, merchants forced to expatriate because of their origins, repercussions of the great American crisis of 1929, but also economic problems influencing the Parisian market much ahead of the great crisis, as if the art market was a barometer for more complex situations.³³

It is interesting to analyse the genesis of a series of de Chirico’s works desired by the art dealer, as mentioned, with his suggestion of themes and sizes. The problem of dimensions is an interesting one, as it ties in with the market and the crisis situation, the fluctuations of which may be reconstructed through the correspondence. The beginning of the great French financial crisis seems to be delineated in the letter of 19 November 1926 from Rosenberg to de Chirico, in which we already find what will become a constantly recurring theme in the art merchant’s letters:

³¹ C18.9600.186.88

³² C30.9600.208.

³³ See the interesting thesis by M. Gee regarding the Parisian market in the 1920s and 1930s in Paris: M. Gee, *Dealers, Critics, and Collectors of Modern Painting. Aspects of the Parisian Art Market between 1910 and 1930*, Garland Publishing Inc., New York - London 1981.

Just a few words to ask you to not paint, in the current circumstances, canvases of dimensions inferior to calibre 30. Owing to the grave economic crisis just beginning, art lovers of small and medium financial means, to which the small and medium canvases are usually destined, will be forced to forgo all purchasing for financial reasons. Only the rich will be able to continue. And they do not buy small canvases. Until next Thursday, cordially.³⁴

This letter, together with the one of 2 December 1926 is fundamental in order to fully understand the relationship between de Chirico and Rosenberg, who, like a patron of the arts of ancient times, suggested themes and dimensions for his works, his motivations conditioned by the art market and the crisis situation, which had already appeared in France in 1926, before its worldwide expansion in 1929, when Rosenberg commissioned him to decorate his apartment.

The Aesthetic Programme and the Art Dealer's Control

Rosenberg commissioned canvases from de Chirico bearing precise subjects and dimensions in the letter of 2 December 1926, reminding him as well that, "our law must be order, logic, precision, discipline"³⁵. This letter is particularly important because, in addition to informing us that Léger, Valmier, and Metzinger submitted drawings and watercolours of their works to Rosenberg first, it explains the art dealer's "aesthetic programme" enamoured, as he was, with Italy and the artist who, in that moment, represented it in his imagination. Thus in the same letter, to soften what the artist might perceive as "orders", he states "we must return to great principles if we are to create a great epoch"³⁶.

Rosenberg specified the quality of the technique and subject matter to de Chirico "within the artist's freedom of technique and aesthetics". In closing, he declared that in all great epochs of art, art proceeded "by commission to the artists". Rosenberg cultivated the idea of creating a great artistic epoch. In fact, he wrote:

Regarding your next paintings, because we are no longer in times of sentimental anarchy but rather of a renaissance of the plastic, our law must be order, logic, precision and discipline.

Consequently instead of painting canvases whose sizes and subjects are dictated by caprice and fantasy, we will make paintings according to necessity and destination.

Now, for a group of ten canvases, with a view to set up a good exhibition, I need:

one canvas 80 [point] in width with figures in your style

one canvas 80 [point] in height with a figure

two canvases 30 [point] in width with horses

two canvases 15 [point] in height of still life

two canvases 15 [point] in width of still life

³⁴ C60.9600.220.

³⁵ C61.9600.223.

³⁶ *Ibid.* "Nous devons revenir aux grands principes si nous voulons faire une grande époque".

But as the artist had to feel free to create, Rosenberg added in the same letter:

Concerning their execution, I would like them to be quite audacious and as precise as possible with your technique and aesthetics. It is understood that you will always be free in your technique as in your aesthetics. In any case, since the sizes and subjects must be regulated according to the necessities of others, I would like to have the possibility to determine the nature of these in the manner that seems to me most rational and orderly.

Dear Mr. de Chirico, my best and most devoted sentiments.

P.S. Léger, Valmier, Metzinger, etc. before painting submit drawings or watercolours to me, because they are aware that their canvases are not destined for themselves but for third parties; it is important that subjects and formats be inspired by the tastes and needs of these others.

Rosenberg continues:

In all great epochs, art proceeded by orders to the artists. It was never fantasy or arbitrary decisions that dictated sizes and subjects. We must return to great principles if we would create a great epoch.

The Art Dealer and the Critic

It is precisely with this desire to create a “great epoch” that Rosenberg depended upon the Italian painter on the one hand, and on Waldemar George on the other. The latter was born George Jascinski in Lodz in 1894, immigrating first to Odessa and later to Paris. It is probable that Rosenberg’s aesthetical choices were, in part, suggested by George, a true *enfant gaté* as Gualtieri di San Lazzaro labelled him in 1930. In 1928, Waldemar George wrote enthusiastically about de Chirico in a monograph for *l’Effort Moderne*³⁷ and, in 1930, he was a great admirer of the paintings he had executed for Rosenberg’s apartment. In the essay *Appels d’Italie*, published by the critic in the catalogue of the XVII Biennale d’Arte of Venice, of the same year, he also confirmed an ideal concept of Italianism as a vision of the world and life:

[...] Italy represents a vision of the world and life. This vision is worldwide and super-national and has twice conquered the Universe [...] we care little if the masters of art are Italian-born or not (some of them are...). We try above all to show the primacy and supremacy of Italianism considered as a cosmogony, a style, a manner, an order.³⁸

³⁷ W. George, *Giorgio de Chirico*, Ed. de l’Effort Moderne, Paris 1928.

³⁸ XVII Biennale Internazionale d’Arte, Venice 1930, catalogue, pp. 91-93. The text continues: “[For W. George, Italy] represents a vision of the world and life. This vision is worldwide and supernational, and has twice conquered the Universe. In the days of Imperial Rome, Gaul, North Africa and part of Asia came under the influence of Roman art. But the Romans imposed their civilisation, their superiority, by force. At the time of the Renaissance, Italy was little more than a hearth of light, with no political action; nonetheless all of thinking Europe had drunk her milk, had fed at the source of her spirit. In the sixteenth century, architecture, sculpture, painting lived and grew in the Italian orbit and the West was an Italian province. A people that colonised the world in the literal and metaphorical sense, has the right to aspirations far superior to creating purely local glories. Their ambition is not to see the Italians take their place among European glories, but rather to tear Europe from Northern clutches, to Romanise it.” In the text, W. George refers to the room entitled “Appels d’Italie”, which he and Mario Tozzi presented at the XVII Venice Biennale. George used the exhibition to prove “a phenomenon of displacement of the centre of gravity of modern art which, after being opposed for half a century, rediscovers its faith in Rome”. The

Controversy with the Surrealists

The controversy with the Surrealists and the fall of de Chirico's market prices can be read as "live" news in the correspondence of the art dealer, who will organise a rigged sale to resuscitate the artist's market value.

The presence in the Rosenberg archives of the manifesto published by the Surrealists against de Chirico in 1928³⁹, is significant for the important consideration the art dealer must have given the matter, evidently concerned about potential risks, including financial ones, related to the violent about-face of the group of artists associated with Surrealism towards their former friend. Regarding the Surrealists, there is an interesting letter from Rosenberg to de Chirico in which the art dealer states that he considers him the greatest among the artists of this movement:

[...] I will tell you that regarding the Surrealist movement I considered you not only the most important artist of this movement but also its only true creator.⁴⁰

The Financial Relationship between the Art Dealer and the Artist

At the end of 1926 de Chirico began to have serious financial problems, which Rosenberg does not seem to have given much importance to, and he started to become critical of the artist.

Thus in the letter of 28 December, Rosenberg did not wish to hear further arguments about the prices of paintings and seemed rather disinterested about his collaboration with the artist:

Remember that in 1925 you yourself offered me three paintings for 800 francs and that you were abandoned by all. Since then, I believe I have done a good job for you and today I pay you, after a year of doing business together, much more for one painting than for the three of 1925. [...] If there are no impediments at your end, I would like to see your latest paintings on Thursday morning [...].⁴¹

text was republished by Elena Pontiggia, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-99. Pontiggia's contribution is fundamental to the analysis of this period of the "Return to Order", which was forgotten by critics for many years. At the 1930 Venice Biennale, the French artists presented and chosen by George and Tozzi were: Christian Berard, Eugène Berman, Leonid Berman, Philippe Hosiasson, Amédée Ozenfant, Pierre Roy, Roger de la Fresnaye; among the Italians are Campigli, De Pisis, Alberto Martini, Paresce, Savinio and Severini. Some of the artists chosen are part of the circle of l'Effort Moderne, which had included Braque, Picasso, Gris, Severini, Laurens, Lipchitz, Lhote, Metzinger at the beginning.

³⁹ C103.9600.303, March 1928. This historically important manifesto acquires ulterior significance for its presence in the Rosenberg archive: "NOTICE. We protest once again against certain manoeuvres whose origins can be traced to the first Surrealist manifestations in Belgium. The exposition of old works by Giorgio de Chirico at the gallery "Le Centaure" in Brussels is presented in a way, and we have difficulty in believing this was done by chance, that all sort of confusion is possible. This exhibition may, in 1928, be justified only through the denial it inflicts on a painter who has assumed the right to betray a kind of painting that has not been his for a long time, to the advantage of those who never penetrated its mystery. And one must see the welcome that this small-mindedness acquires today. It is enough for us to establish as a warning, and we need no longer explain that his miserable attempts, that try only to make our actions fall from the place where we maintain them to that of commercial combinations or that of considerations of the destiny of painting, will find us resolute in the most violent opposition, that need no longer justify itself. Louis Aragon / André Breton / Camille Goemans / Paul Nougé. March 1928, 61 Avenue Henri de Brouckère - Auderghen - Brussels."

⁴⁰ C87.9600.274. "In the interview I had with Mr Tériade of the magazine 'Cahier d'Art', published in n. 6 of this magazine, I will tell you that regarding the Surrealist movement I consider you not only the most important artist of this movement but also its only true creator. Notwithstanding my repeated requests, this interview was published without my approval. Nor being able to ignore this oversight I wrote a letter of rectification to Mr Zervos today with a request to insert it in the next issue of 'Cahiers d'Art'. With all my regret for this omission of which I have no fault, I am yours sincerely. P.S. This morning I made an order at the bank that the desired dispatch be sent to you."

⁴¹ Postcard from de Chirico on 11 September 1925 (C.16.9600.181) in which he writes: "It is agreed that for the three paintings I sent you, you will send me 800 francs."

He then began to specify to de Chirico that he absolutely did not want to hear that there had been mention of financial issues with his collaborators and repeated that he held himself as free as he was not the depositary but the owner of the works, who had always paid immediately for them:

Being not the depositary, but the owner of the works which I bought from you and that I have always paid for in full, I am and intend to remain free in my actions with no need to explain myself to anyone. It is not you who has created or create my situation but rather I who have created or create yours.⁴²

But in 1927 Rosenberg himself begins to complain of financial problems and had difficulty paying immediately as he usually did. On 4 January 1927⁴³ in a significant letter, Rosenberg writes:

Having examined the situation of my accounts with my bookkeeper and verified the expiration date of the Defence Bonds which I possess, I ask that you take note of the fact that payment for any paintings I may buy may not be made until the end of each month, not during the month itself. I take this opportunity to ask that you send me, signed (which you have omitted to do), the receipt for cheques numbered 631.755 and 631.756 of the Westminster Bank, Paris, which I wrote to you on 4 December as payment for my purchase on 30 November 1926.

In times of crisis, quality had to be excellent, so Rosenberg continued:

Regarding this last acquisition, having today ascertained that, as I immediately suspected, it is composed of “remnants”, and not being in the habit of buying “remnants”, I inform you that with the exception of *The Roman Woman*, I will send all of the paintings bought on 10 November to the Hôtel Drouot, for reimbursement. This is said with no ill will and I will tell you that, in the interest of your dignity, I would have preferred to have been openly “cuckolded” rather than in secret. Nevertheless, since every story must have its moral, I inform you that I consider myself free from any obligation to you, present or future; and that from now on I will buy only paintings that I have ordered and which satisfy me completely.

Rosenberg understood that de Chirico’s nature was not easily tethered and thus suggested:

I believe it is better that we work in this manner because in this way, each free in his own actions, we will have no more reason to argue; because any other system will not hold up against the demands of your nature, which is stronger than your will.

In short, after having reflected well and as we will proceed by orders, that is, that you will do paintings for me with which I am completely satisfied, I see no impediment to your releasing some paintings to other dealers. On the contrary, we will be both be labouring to create a situation for you that

⁴² Letter of 28 December 1926, C64.9600.226.

⁴³ C65.9600.227.

is worthy of the importance of your art. In this way, the cordiality of our rapport and my respect towards you will not be shaken by little secrets and shady persons. I repeat that I have no ill feeling towards you and that my devotion in defence of your art is in no way diminished.

Later, however, Rosenberg would encounter problems with de Chirico because the artist, selling his works on his own, would go on to create competition with l'Effort Moderne. Upon receiving a request from the Museum of Zurich, Rosenberg wrote to the artist on 22 March 1927:

[...] creating, even abroad, competition for your paintings that I own and which I myself loaned to the museum, I will nonetheless view with interest the copies or replicas that you have just made and have had the courtesy to offer, for which I sincerely thank you.

If I like these recent paintings, I may perhaps take them, although I should abstain from commercial transactions with an artist who continues to take such liberties in his agreements with me.⁴⁴

Trust Deteriorates: the Copies and Replicas, the Assistant

But as early as 1926, Rosenberg had begun to lose faith in de Chirico. In the letters, all of the usual problems were emphasised, ranging from copies and the use of an assistant, to the meaning of apprentices' work. A certain lack of trust towards the artist emerges in a letter dated 6 November:

[...] your latest paintings were much appreciated; they are considered more delectable despite the imprecision of *The Mannequin Family*.

As I act loyally towards you, I will not insult you by inferring that you do not do the same with me, and that on the contrary, as agreed, you do not have the intention of, nor will you, sell your paintings without first showing them to me.

Given the admiration I feel towards your art, and the lively interest I have for your career, it would be quite painful for me. I do not wish to even contemplate the possibility, to discover that you were about to "dance a waltz" with others, and to be forced to the cruel necessity to interrupt such a delightful business association developed in an atmosphere of such trust and mutual esteem.⁴⁵

And here arose another problem that can be read between the lines: the copies and replicas by de Chirico who, in order to fulfil the continuous commissions of the art dealer, produced a great number of paintings. Rosenberg did not seem to worry that the works might be "copies" or "replicas", but he wished only that they maintain high prices. Therefore, in the letter of 10 March 1927, he reiterated to de Chirico that he preferred "to not see canvases of yours at prices that are not worthy of your art or of my efforts"⁴⁶. Rosenberg's attitude in this moment showed a particular

⁴⁴ C71/C72.9600.242/243.

⁴⁵ C59.9600.219.

⁴⁶ C70.9600.241. "P.S. Regarding my account books I notice that after the day in which you offered me the canvases at 800 francs we did quite good business and after this date the value of your paintings has seriously increased [...] better than the prices that you had offered that were really too modest [...]. As I have had occasion to tell you, at this time I would prefer not to sell your canvases at prices that are not worthy of your art, nor of my efforts [...]."

duplicity: on the one hand the art dealer was still very interested in the artist, whilst on the other, he feared commitment to an artist whose production he did not have complete control over. This reached a point that the next year, he was actually suspicious that de Chirico was being helped by an assistant. Regarding the necessity of keeping prices high in order to face the crisis and not ruin the market, he wrote in the letter of 14 April 1927:

You have asked me [...] to keep your prices high. I can tell you that this is my firm intention but also one of the reasons for which I myself raised the prices of your paintings to such that are worthy of your art, that in my humble opinion I consider much superior to that of many artists, whose works are, I believe temporarily, sold at prices higher than yours.

So that I may continue in my actions towards a methodical, reasonable and honest progression of your prices, your own actions must inspire the greatest trust in me. It is impossible to work profitably in common interest with an artist whom one is not totally sure of and whose production one does not have control of.⁴⁷

Rosenberg purchased works he felt had too low an estimate at auction, as he wrote in the postscript:

P.S. As I had the pleasure in informing you on the telephone, I bought back the two canvases in the last auction. In this way it may not be said that your canvases were acquired cheaply.

He continued:

[...] if you listen to me, you will see the fruits [of our labours]. I passed by P.G.'s [Paul Guillaume] gallery window in my automobile: [...] I saw a beautiful painting of yours with a blue horse. When was this canvas painted?

Rosenberg was concerned by de Chirico's excessive production and clarified that the commercial value of paintings was proportional to their rarity, reminding de Chirico that Lhote began his commercial decline by continuously showing in all the galleries, large and small, of Paris.⁴⁸ In the correspondence of this period de Chirico seems to have had some difficulty in relating to the art dealer, and replied with very brief letters. On 19 May 1927, the artist emphasized the importance of his paintings' titles:

⁴⁷ C75.9600.248.

⁴⁸ C84.9600.262 of 6 July 1927: "In my letter of yesterday, I forgot to tell you that Marcel Raval offered me your painting 'Omero' bought here at your exhibition and that he bought back last month at the sale in which he had placed it, finding the offer insufficient. I answered him that this canvas does not interest me and that, moreover, I do not buy canvases sold to third parties by the artists. Not having been able to make a bargain at a public auction, this pseudo specialist had the naïveté to offer me a painting that no one wanted which everyone now knew the ransom price of. I also said to tell him that I was prepared to buy back the painting that I myself had sold him, entitled, 'I love not the flowers but I love the fruits'. Regarding your exhibition, I do not wish to hold it until next spring. The painter Lhote finished himself commercially by holding shows continuously in all Parisian galleries, large and small. The venal value of paintings is based on their rarity. An artist like you must keep his standing. One already says that you produce too much because your paintings are seen everywhere. Be careful, my acquisitions are also based on your market. Cordially"

I also took it upon myself to correct the titles; you know that titles are quite a delicate and important matter concerning my paintings; it is, however, my fault as I should have written the title on the frame of each painting [...].⁴⁹

In his letters to the art dealer, he treats the most varied of subjects, presenting Rosenberg with a collector, then a restorer, then a musicologist, as in the letter of 5 October 1927:

This confirms our agreement for the 6 paintings. I will send them to you at the beginning of next month. There is a friend of mine, Mr. Raoul de Certant, who is a modern music critic. He would be very happy to collaborate with your journal (free of charge, naturally). May I send him to you?⁵⁰

The Restorers

In the letter of 6 December 1927, we see de Chirico present Rosenberg with the restorer Monsieur de Saint Clair:

I would like to introduce to you Mr. de Saint Clair, who is a good friend of mine and my wife. He is extremely skillful and very able with all that regards restoration, relining, cleaning etc. of old and modern paintings; he fixed an old self-portrait of mine by restoring and relining it and I was truly amazed by the high quality of his work. I will also add, that being Russian and not well known in Paris, he has a great need to work and offers very competitive prices. Could you possibly help him by giving him work or by recommending him to any acquaintance you may have amongst antiquarians.

Thank you in advance and I remain yours sincerely.⁵¹

Rosenberg's reply of 7 December 1927⁵² is significant for its demonstration of his great consideration of artists. After thanking de Chirico for having presented de Saint Clair to him he adds that, as a dealer in contemporary art, he had no need of restorers and that "if there were necessity of work on the canvas of a living painter I would naturally contact the artist, not feeling that I have the right to 'apply' a profane hand to an artwork" but promised to present the restorer to friends and collectors of antique art.

The Importance of Painterly Material

Rosenberg was always very attentive to the quality of the paintings, enough to hope that "you may make the subject more engaging and the material richer, otherwise I will not buy it"⁵³. Thus he wrote in the most severest of letters on 28 November 1927⁵⁴ in which he declared that the works had to be worthy of the artist and of the art dealer's efforts on his behalf:

⁴⁹ C52.9600.251.

⁵⁰ C52.9600.278.

⁵¹ C68.9600.290.

⁵² C99.9600.291.

⁵³ C96.9600.286: "J'espère que vous pourriez en rendre le sujet plus sympathique et la matière plus riche, autrement je ne serai pas acheteur."

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

I have always remembered with pleasure your two large paintings of “Mannequins” and “Horses”, but I regret I cannot say the same for the small painting, size 8, that you have sent me.

I hope that you may make the subject more engaging and the material richer, otherwise I will not buy it. As you will certainly understand, I will not buy just anything. I only want works that are worthy of you and my effort.

This means that Rosenberg, if left unsatisfied, would send the paintings back to the artist so that he could improve their quality and subject. The dealer was particularly concerned about the low prices of de Chirico’s paintings and decided, at the end of 1927⁵⁵, to no longer acquire paintings “on order”, but only canvases that had already been completed and to his satisfaction, writing:

Here are the prices of your paintings at the sale of 26 November:

Experts Mr. Hessel and Mr. Bignou

The Engineer’s Springtime (52x43) fr. 1800

The Screen (90x59) fr. 900

These appalling prices have an unpleasant effect.

With regard to our business affairs, I wish to inform you, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, that from now on I will no longer buy on order, but will only acquire canvases that are completely finished and immediately deliverable upon purchase.

My best regards

How to Restore the Market

It was at this time that the “rigged sale” took place, organised by Rosenberg and de Chirico, after the disappointing results of the sale at the Hôtel Drouot. In a letter dated 1 December 1927, de Chirico recounted this event to Rosenberg, clearly shaken by the fact that the painting *The screen* had sold for 900 francs. He suggests organising an auction to restore his market prices, declaring himself ready to divide the cost of raising the price of a painting at auction to 4000 francs. In this letter, sent from Paris, 2 rue Henri Bocquillon, 15 arr., he wrote:

I passed by yesterday to speak to Guillaume about the Hôtel Drouot story; he told me that the painting had not been placed by him, but by someone to whom he had sold it about 1 and a half years ago; he also added that it was not very important if by chance one of my paintings is sold at a very low price; this has happened, he said, to the most highly valued painters; he also intends to sustain, during the next winter, some works of mine in order to bring their prices up to between 7, 8 and 10,000 fr. I did not get the impression that this was a plot mounted against you. Upon leaving Guillaume, I passed in front of Hessel’s and saw another announcement for a sale on the 12 December, in which my name appears; it would be very annoying if the event were to be repeated; this is why I ask you to be kind enough to find out which of my paintings will appear; if it is a painting from before the War, there is nothing to worry about, but if it is a more recent painting, I am

⁵⁵ C97.9600.287.

ready to make some sacrifices so that the event of the 900 fr. does not happen again; and I ask you to inform and advise me on what we should do in this case. I am still in agreement with you about sharing the cost of the painting that you want to raise to 4,000 fr.
Please accept, dear Mr. Rosenberg, my best regards.⁵⁶

The above-cited letter demonstrates the manner in which de Chirico tranquillised Rosenberg, who seems to have had suspected that the sale of the painting at a low price had been “a trick” organised by someone. Rosenberg answered the same day advising de Chirico to guard his interests well:

[...] against informing your friend and publisher of our intentions concerning the future sale for the public rehabilitation of the prices of your paintings; as your friend having ties with the other three [auction] houses, the thing would be revealed to all and the effect consequently annulled.

As every story has its moral, I find that a calibre 30 canvas of yours did not, at a public auction organized by an able commissioner specialized in modern art, assisted by two authoritative and well-known experts, the sale enriched by a beautiful illustrated catalogue, during which, in the presence of a numerous and elegant public other paintings were sold at high prices, did not, I say, sell but for 900 francs; and it appears, I repeat, that you have almost no admirers left in Paris.

If this state of affairs were to persist, it would be of such a nature as to unfavourably influence your foreign admirers, and this could induce me to employ much greater prudence in my acquisitions.

Being not an intermediary but a buyer, my first concern must be the security of the funds that I invest in your painting.

I hope that the effect produced by our support on 22 December will allow me, beginning from next January, to continue to buy paintings that I might like from your studio and to attain a good practical result from the exhibition I will organise during that period with your paintings that I possess.

Dear sir, my best wishes⁵⁷

The market stabilised again, as is clear from the letter dated 24 December 1927 in which Rosenberg states:

Here are yesterday's prices:

n. 11 *Theban Interior* 1.050 fr.

n. 12 *The Fruits* 1500, bought by my brother for his collection.

n. 13 *Anthony and Cleopatra* – bought by me 1500 fr.

n. 14 *The Muses of Home* 4000 bought back by me

n.15 *Oedipus and Antigone* bought back by me 1900 Fr

As one of your paintings was bought for 4000 francs, as written in the newspapers today, the bad impression created by the sale of the canvas of 30 at 900 fr. has been completely dissipated.

⁵⁶ C67.9600.288.

⁵⁷ C98.9600.289.

A painting by Metzinger sold for 4000 francs, a small Léger for 5000, a Herbin, 3000. Considering the time and the distinctly poor quality of the paintings, the result is quite satisfactory.

Your most devoted

P.S. Never forget, Matisse, Derain, Braque, Picasso and Léger, enjoyed success as many people were able to buy their paintings cheaply and so later became, from a practical point of view, the best associates of the painter and his publisher.⁵⁸

A Publisher's Function

In the postscript of the above letter, Rosenberg clarified the importance of the relationship between collectors and artists for de Chirico.

In a paternalistic vein he concluded this series of letters concerning prices explaining to the artist that it was precisely because of his thankless job as a publisher that he was obliged to instruct him “on the good but also the bad sides of politics, illustrating them with images in such a way as to better comprehend its nature.” And in closing, he declared his function of “collaborator”, in the letter of 2 December 1927.⁵⁹

Seeing as you have disgracefully practiced dispersion, instead of maintaining concentration, it is to be feared that we will be continuously poisoned by public sales of your paintings distributed left and right with no plan or method.

The spirit of synthesis and construction that characterises our epoch and that consequently implies: precision, simplicity, logic and clarity, oppose Machiavellian methods – despite all the talent that one may dedicate to them – of the past.

Forget Apollinaire for Plato.⁶⁰ My sincerest devotion

P.S. I have just had your paintings of furniture framed. They will look very good at the exhibition. I have said all this without the smallest intention to offend you, but only to complete my thankless duty as publisher, collaborator that is, which obliges me to instruct you on the good but also the bad facets of certain politics, illustrating them with images that you may better understand their nature. All pre-war political tricks are known all too well and quite ineffective. Today that geometric discipline has conquered its space anew, one realises once again that “the shortest distance between one point and another is a straight line.”

New Artists in the Gallery

Perhaps we may read Rosenberg's desire for something new and not inflated between the lines. We might imagine that Picabia's “new manner” had begun to interest Rosenberg particularly, so much so that he included it in “Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne”⁶¹. In January 1928, he bought some

⁵⁸ C100.9600.292.

⁵⁹ C98.9600.289. 2 December 1927: “Our letters of yesterday crossed in the mail. As I have not had, nor desire to have, any relationship with H..., it is impossible for me to tell you about 12 December sale. But your friend P.G. [Paul Guillaume], being much more tied to this person, may give you all useful clarifications.”

⁶⁰ Regarding this suggestion we must remember, for example, that it was Rosenberg who introduced Ozenfant (an artist of his circle) to *Philebus*, a dialogue by Plato that he himself published and translated in the magazine he directed, “L'Élan”, in 1916 (I, n. 9, Paris, February 1916).

⁶¹ N. 38, October 1927.

of his works shown at the Galerie Théophile Briant.⁶² In 1929 at his gallery, he exhibited Picabia paintings and works by André Derain, Giorgio de Chirico, Paul Cornet, J. Csaky, Albert Gleizes, Juan Gris, A. Ozenfant, Auguste Herbin, H. Laurens, Fernand Léger, Manuel Redon, Alberto Savinio, Gino Severini, Georges Valmier, Jean Viollier, as well as Mario Vives, which he had in deposit.

Beware of the Schemes stirred up by Envious Artists

Rosenberg's letter to de Chirico dated 11 January 1928 is quite important, although difficult to decipher, and hints at schemes stirred up by other artists, envious of the constant and ever greater presence of de Chirico at l'Effort Moderne:

Dear Sir,

Merely as a question of principle [...] seeing that you have come to work at "l'Effort Moderne" relatively recently [...] if they see your ever more important presence at "l'Effort Moderne", this may create a desire to stir up intrigue in some [...] the advice that may be given to you or that they give you, will always be of such nature as to obtain a result contrary to that which you hope and will serve above all to muddy the waters between us, if not actually to provoke a break, because when one has worked for a period of time with me, he ends up knowing what I like and what I do not.

From what has been said and written to me by various artists with whom I have worked for many years, there are few publishers who have done as much for the success of modern art in general and artists in particular and that have been in their dealings materially so sure and precise as I.

This said, not to boast – which is not my style – but on the contrary that you may know what to adhere to.

I even remember that at the time when I defended the Cubists as one and when for political reasons I signed contracts even with the disciples of Cubism, I followed scrupulously, even against my own interests, the contracts I had with conscientious artists, who were more clever than talented, and of which I knew the absolute non-value; but I put the salvation of Cubism above my own interests because at the time the public did not yet know the Cubists but respected my name.

I say this as a matter of principle, and for information.⁶³

The Assistant

De Chirico also replied to Rosenberg's letter of 12 January 1928 regarding the accusation that the art dealer made him, that is, having assistants help him, in a somewhat ironic tone:

Dear Mr Rosenberg,

I received your letter this morning and I must confess that I did not understand its content; what I understood, for example, is that you do not want me to have my paintings executed by assistants and you are right; in any case I had no intention of doing so, nor do I feel the need to do so; I do not see

⁶² C. Derouet, *Francis Picabia. Lettres a Léonce Rosenberg 1929-1940. Picabia: Léonce Rosenberg, mode d'emploi*, Centre Pompidou, p. 17. The correspondence covers the years 1929-1940 and illustrates the situation of plastic arts in Paris "in the moment in which the crisis with a capital C explodes and paradoxically the strong affirmation of abstract art begins". See. *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶³ C100.9600.297.

anything wrong with a painter who needs to supply a large number of French and foreign galleries being helped by assistants; Rubens, Raphael, Titian and others have done it, but to execute the 1 ½ or 2 paintings that I sell on average by month to you or to Paul Guillaume, I have no need of help. As for the rest of the letter, I find as abstruse and mysterious as an aphorism of Heraclitus from Ephesus.⁶⁴

From the letter we also come to know that de Chirico was not well acquainted with the gallery's other painters, as he wrote:

Of the painters that work with you I only know Léger, Valmier and Metzinger; I almost never see them and if by chance we do meet, we only exchange a few insignificant remarks about the rain and sunshine.

I would not be surprised if there were some people who took a dim view of the position that I occupy in your gallery, but I assure you that no one has ever advised me or said anything about our business relationship.

I believe, dear Mr. Rosenberg (and this is said without offense), that you are too suspicious and that, in certain cases, you lend too much importance to what people say or to the attitude they assume towards you; intrigue has always existed; against real talent (and as I understand it, the talent is as much on my side as it is on your side), it can do nothing.

In the letter, de Chirico adds precious practical advice, clarifying the issue of frames at the end:

If you telephone for the frame for the big painting (recommended), I ask that you arrange it so that the frame takes away the least possible from the painting; next week I will bring you the 8 [point] painting.

All the best from my wife, who is feeling better, and please accept, Mr. Rosenberg, my best regards.

In the letter of 13 January 1928, Rosenberg explained to de Chirico what he meant by “assistant”, emphasising again the difficulty in collaborating with a person of inconstant behaviour. With regard to this, Rosenberg says:

I believe it is better that we work in this manner because in this way, each free in his own actions, we will have no more reason to argue; because any other system will not hold up against the demands of your nature, which is stronger than your will.⁶⁵

These words show the profound intuition of the art dealer, who wrote in this letter of 1928:

If I were a man who worried about “what people will say”, I would not have taken the destiny of Cubism in hand fifteen years ago, which was an object of almost universal hate and scorn and I would not have continued for so long, with everything and everyone against me.

⁶⁴ C73.9600. See also the paragraph *Trust deteriorates: the Copies and the Replicas, the Assistant*.

⁶⁵ C65.9600.227, 4 January 1927.

I am not a suspicious man; however, as “a dog scalded with hot water is afraid of cold water”, I do not wish for undesirable individuals to poison the fountain from which the artists who collaborate with him and myself drink. It is for this reason that having noted various changes in your behaviour, I had thought to put you on guard against the manoeuvres of stupid and unscrupulous people. (The painters Léger, Metzinger and Valmier, with whom I have worked for some time, are of course excluded.) In order to collaborate in perfect harmony, we must start by understanding each other perfectly and then discard whatever might divide us.

When I speak of paintings done by pupils, or by assistants as you call them, I intend those whereby the artist has only made a few brushstrokes and then signed, not those which the apprentice has prepared the canvas in order to save his master time. I remember only too well how Rubens, Raphael and Titian took advantage of the help of apprentices but this is evident and is the reason for which some of their paintings are ugly and have not stood the test of Time.⁶⁶

The experience of the collector but also that of the art historian and connoisseur bound by family tradition to the antique trade, shines through in Rosenberg's letter, which continues:

Experts and dealers of antique paintings, from a financial point of view, draw a great deal of distinction between the hand of a Master and that of an apprentice.

Speaking of Botticelli, Berenson coined the expression, “by Sandro's friend”.

Have the courtesy to let me know when you have finished something important so that it might be able to be shown in your exhibition.

The Evolution of Taste

Rosenberg's letters are also important for their view of the history of collecting and the evolution of taste and the market. We know how greatly Léonce Rosenberg figured on the inside story of the market and collecting of Cubism, with his presence in the most crucial moments ranging from the seizure⁶⁷ of the works belonging to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler⁶⁸, to the auction at the Hôtel Drouot, which he was named administrator of. Gino Severini has left us several quite lively pages⁶⁹ regarding his business relationship with the art dealer (which was contentious for him as well) and writes of the auction of Kahnweiler's paintings seized during the War. There was a bitter struggle between artists and dealers: the dealers bought back the art works, yet the artists were excluded.⁷⁰

Rather than considering the problems regarding the sale of the Cubists' works (concerning which there are numerous documents⁷¹ in the Rosenberg archives), it seems more appropriate to

⁶⁶ C102.9600.299.

⁶⁷ The material dealing with the correspondence regarding the sales (1919-1923) of the artworks seized from Uthe and Kahnweiler are conserved in the archive.

⁶⁸ P. Assouline, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler: L'homme de l'Art...*, cit.

⁶⁹ *Gino Severini entre les deux guerres*, exhibition curated by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, E. Coen and G. Severini, Rome 1980, pp. 81-100. The correspondence between Severini and Rosenberg, and in particular twenty-nine letters between 1924 and 1928, is published in the catalogue. See also the writings of Gino Severini and in particular: *La vita di un pittore*, Vallecchi, Florence 1968, Ed. Piero Pacini.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, *Du Cubisme au Classicisme* where the author dedicates many pages to Rosenberg; see also *Il tempo dell'Effort Moderne*, second part of his *Vita di un pittore*, cit.

⁷¹ Cfr. footnote 4.

analyse the change in taste in the direction of a new Classicism in this essay, not only through the Rosenberg-de Chirico correspondence, but also through an analysis concerning the decoration of the *Gladiator Hall*.⁷²

Rosenberg as Patron and the Discovery of Rome: "Gladiator Hall"

The fact that Rosenberg was captivated (as were his clients and the Parisian milieu) by the discovery of Roman values, may be seen with the grand decoration ordered by the art dealer and gallery owner for his apartment in rue Longchamp. In the refined Paris of the 1920s, Léonce Rosenberg dictated style and modes, only to be overcome, perhaps, by his own utopias.⁷³ The decoration of his home in rue Longchamp is a meaningful example.⁷⁴

In the letters to de Chirico, one can detect a race against time, almost in forecast of the nearing and intensifying 1929 crisis and the imminent ruin, as well as the public's changing tastes.⁷⁵ As seen in the letter of 17 April 1929 in which de Chirico, who was in Monte Carlo working on the scenery design of *Le Bal*, assured Rosenberg: "I hope to be in Paris next week. In any case do not worry about the other 3 paintings."⁷⁶ The race ends with the inauguration of the apartment, on the evening of 15 June 1929, with only a few of the invited guests attending.

Christian Derouet maintains that de Chirico agreed to decorate the apartment because he was "merely attracted by the money"⁷⁷. I would rather not make this interpretation as it seems a bit utilitarian regarding an artist who surely, although always in need of money, must also have amused himself by taking part in the art dealer's project precisely in the period when he was involved in designing the scenery and costumes for *Le Bal*.⁷⁸

The central salon of the apartment, the most important part of the large house in rue Longchamp (an area that was certainly the most visible to a host of friends and great collectors), inspired the imagination of de Chirico, but I also believe, was able to inspire in the artist a sense of competition and rivalry with the other painters (Fernand Léger, Picabia, Savinio, Max Ernst) who were also involved in the great decoration scheme.

Perhaps the contemporaneous experience in a theatre project was at the origin of a strongly scenographic suggestion which inspired the artist, encouraged by Rosenberg, to construct a totally illusory space in which the stucco cornices inside the paintings played the same role as the real

⁷² Lhote, one of Rosenberg's favorite painters wrote immediately after the end of the War: "Finally the Louvre has reopened its doors, at least a little. We have awaited this moment with great impatience... To get an idea of our Masters was something we held as indispensable... To cancel all traces of labour in order to give the artwork a natural aspect is the purely classical method." See *The first visit to the Louvre*, in "La Nouvelle Revue Française", n. 78-79, Paris, March 1 1920. See also in this article the paragraph *New Subjects: a Return to the Classic*.

⁷³ C. Derouet published the Fernand Léger-Léonce Rosenberg correspondence for Centre Pompidou: *Fernand Léger - Une correspondance d'affaire 1917-1937*, Paris 1996; the Juan Gris-Léonce Rosenberg correspondence: *Le cubisme-Bleu horizon - Juan Gris, et d'un militaire, Léonce Rosenberg entre 1915 et 1920*; and the Francis Picabia correspondence: *Lettres à Léonce Rosenberg 1929-1940*. The volumes cited are edited by the Centre Pompidou for the series *Hors-Série/Archives*. The texts collected, written, and annotated by Derouet are a fundamental work for the comprehension of the epoch and for the documents on the artists. They are also interesting for gaining a more profound knowledge of Léonce Rosenberg.

⁷⁴ C. Derouet, regarding the *Gladiator Hall*, painted by Giorgio de Chirico for Léonce Rosenberg, see *Les Italiens de Paris...*, cit., pp. 245-255. Idem, *Un problème du baroque italien tardif à Paris*, cit., pp. 111-135

⁷⁵ Again, in a letter of 9 July 1928 Rosenberg urges de Chirico to conclude the decoration quickly because the other artists "[...] Léger, Viollier, Metzinger, Severini, Herbin, Valmier are telling me that the paintings they have had the great kindness to paint for me will be ready between 31 October and November." C107.9600.307.

⁷⁶ C114.10422.64.

⁷⁷ Cfr. *Les Italiens de Paris...*, cit., p. 247.

⁷⁸ Léonce Rosenberg writes to de Chirico excusing himself for not being present at the performance. C115.10422.

cornices around the ceiling and are able to create great niches over the Imperial and Louis Philippe furniture of the grand salon.

Significance of the Rosenberg Apartment Decoration

The true meaning behind the decoration of Rosenberg's home will perhaps remain a mystery. That said, the pages of *Hebdomeros* (a book written by de Chirico in these very years, the most surreal novel of those times), offer the reader a crowd of characters who in the end represent the artist's disquiet, giving body to Rosenberg's visionary decorative folly, conditioned as he was, by *horror vacui*: a thronging of bodies fighting and at rest, an apparition of figures in a room, in a *Hebdomeros*-style half-waking state.⁷⁹

The images of the novel form panels and fragments which are often superimposed one on the other as if placed upon a treadmill (an expression de Chirico himself used). It is the work of a poet with the sensitivity of a painter. His is not a tale; it has no plot, and the story, which is inexistent, flows freely like a continuous chain of Freudian mental associations of images which chase one another, overlapping each other. The book is fundamental in understanding and reading the themes out of time that appear in works of the 1920s. In an almost theatrical and scenic layout, the walls rise like a theatre curtain in the rooms and blissful or anguished visions come forward; fighters appear in the rooms, the gladiators from the Rosenberg home décor, painted from 1927 to 1929.

Rosenberg and his Public

It was Rosenberg who suggested to de Chirico titles and themes which evidently pleased the gallery's "amateurs" and devotees. In fact, he asked the artist to prepare six new canvases for him, as may be deduced from the letter of 4 October 1927⁸⁰ in which Rosenberg communicated that he has sold six canvases and that he wished to order others at the same conditions:

That is, at 60 times the calibre:

1. 1 canvas 10 [point] in height (horses)
2. 2 canvases 10 [point] in height (gladiators)
3. 2 canvases 8 [point] in height (gladiators)
4. 1 canvas 15 [point] in height (horses)

I suggest the subjects that they represent, but if you wish to do others I see no problem, although your horses and your gladiators are very popular.

With my thanks

Themes, Formats and Quality of Painting

The themes of Gladiators and Horses were very popular, so much that Rosenberg asked de Chirico in a letter of 29 (or 20) July 1928⁸¹ to not paint abstract or metaphysical subjects, but ancient sub-

⁷⁹ G. de Chirico, *Hebdomeros*, ed. du Carrefour, Paris 1929.

⁸⁰ C90.9600.277.

⁸¹ C108.9600.308.

jects: Gladiators, Horses with ruins, antique still lifes with figures. The letter, which was published, in part, by Derouet⁸², is important because Rosenberg suggested themes and quality of painting to de Chirico, reminding to the artist to execute “a most finished quality of painting”.

[...] to remind to you, regarding the six small canvases for which you were so good to accept the order and so courteous to promise them for 25 September at the latest: to not paint abstract or metaphysical subjects, but antique subjects: “Gladiators”, “Horses with ruins” etc... and to finish them as much as possible because now everyone wants very perfect paintings.

In addition to the finished quality of the paintings, Rosenberg insistently returned to the theme of sizes, a fundamental consideration in times of crisis, when smaller apartments were the norm.

Except for the paintings that you had the great courtesy to execute for my apartment, starting in September, I will only acquire 15, 20, 25, 30, and at maximum 40 point canvases.

In times of crisis, as Rosenberg points out, when available space was “ever smaller and fortunes ever more average”, it was necessary for paintings, as objects destined for the market, to be of a particular size:

All over the world, private apartments are becoming ever smaller and fortunes ever more average; therefore if one wishes to penetrate the market efficiently, one must stick to medium sizes. It is in the interests of the artist as well as of the publisher and the public. It is for this reason that, beginning in September, I will no longer acquire large canvases, except in exceptional cases. Everyone understands this well and this is the reason they all limit themselves to the sizes I have indicated above.⁸³

With regard to the two canvases you had the courtesy to show me yesterday, I hope you can modify them so that I may acquire them on my return.⁸⁴

The Prices, the Market, the Sizes

Unlike Rosenberg, not everyone could afford to buy works of art. Rosenberg showed a great need to possess, subject, as he was, to *horror vacui*. The art dealer, as we have read in his letters to the artist, could not “live with empty walls”. As he wrote in the letter of 3 September 1928⁸⁵, which was only partly translated by Christian Derouet.⁸⁶ The letter is interesting in that it reveals Rosenberg’s attitude towards painting and the decoration of his apartment. Furthermore, it illustrates, from a historical financial standpoint, the difficulties of the middle class in buying works of art. At the time, Rosenberg thought that in 1929 things would get better and that the winter season probably “will be good”, but his evaluation was clearly wrong.

⁸² Cfr. *Les Italiens de Paris...*, cit., pp. 247-248.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, footnote 5 p. 253.

⁸⁴ “[...] j’espère que vous pourrez les modifier dans le sens que je vous ai indiqué, de façon à me permettre de les acquérir à mon retour.”

⁸⁵ Again, Rosenberg asks de Chirico to modify some paintings. C109.9600.311.

⁸⁶ C. Derouet, *Les Italiens de Paris...*, cit., p. 297 and footnote 8 p. 253.

I hope your stay in Plombières proceeds in the best of conditions [...]. As I cannot live in my apartment with empty walls, I beg you to hasten the realisation of the canvases dedicated to me. In order for you to do the canvases for the London exhibition I asked you to delay those for my private use. Because there is no reason to defer their execution, I must tell you that I cannot acquire the works for l'Effort Moderne if not together with the paintings for my apartment. If, as I hope, the winter season is good, I will propose that you pass to 150 times the calibre from 1 January for all of 1929, but on condition that I have first choice of all that you do.

Rosenberg decided to change his policies: large paintings for large fortunes. Only the very rich, the art dealer now deemed, would be able to invest in artworks: there will be fewer buyers for highly-priced works, specifying:

Never lose sight of the fact that the more the prices of your paintings increase, the more buyers you will lose; because the moment will come when small and medium fortunes will not be able to buy from you and, because you depend solely upon large fortunes, which are much rarer, the sales of your paintings will slow in proportion just as it has for other living painters who sell at very high prices and whose paintings at this time are more a question of publicity than that of money.

An important letter from a financial point of view, Rosenberg clarifies to de Chirico that an increase in price of the artist's paintings would correspond in a decrease in the number of buyers "because the number of people able to buy your paintings will become ever more limited and the great fortunes will become ever more rare [...]". Rosenberg commissioned additional works from de Chirico for his home in rue Longchamp, for an empty space over the stairs, ordering the following paintings in a letter of 12 June 1927⁸⁷, with precise specifications on size and subject:

In order to create over my stairs a permanent exhibition of small canvases for promotion and presentation purposes in the area of the staircase, I wish you to paint for me:

5 canvases	10 [point] in height
4 " "	8 " "
1 " "	15 " "
3 " "	8 " in width
1 " "	25 " "

For 15 September at the latest if possible.

[...] over the stairs it will be necessary to paint some subjects as precisely as possible, for example two lions or some small gladiators, or some figures, some animals (lions and horses), some fruit [...]

The next year, he would return yet again to the concept that "life with empty walls is unbearable"⁸⁸, demonstrating his intense love for painting, which seduced him and, at the same time, a lust for possession that was more typical of a collector than of an art dealer.

⁸⁷ C80/C81 9600.258/259.

⁸⁸ C112.9600.317, 8 October 1928.

The Anticlassicist in de Chirico

From the few photographs published in the glossy-paged magazines of the time that reconstructed the party-event (more than from magazines of art history or art criticism in which Rosenberg's megalomaniac project figured little), we can in any case piece the event back together – in a unitary and harmonious vision – whatever the evaluation of it was.

We notice an attitude of ironic and playful reinterpretation of this out-dated historic reality in de Chirico. There was certainly an emptying of strictly classical significance in the exaggerated use of images which seem to want to make fun of Rosenberg's desire for power or his love for figures such as Mussolini⁸⁹ or in general towards Great Rome. I find it interesting that Rosenberg never wrote about Mussolini and Italy in his letters to de Chirico, as he did with other artists, for example Léger, to whom he spoke of the deeds of the Italian dictator and on the French situation. The new apartment, too new perhaps, was all façade with the stuccos and the cornices inside the paintings themselves, with figures coming towards us as in a *Hebdomeros*-style fantasy. The colours in the panels are warm, luminous, perhaps reminiscent of a Gobelin tapestry, as Rosenberg suggests in the letter of 8 October 1928⁹⁰, repeating de Chirico's words on the beautiful quality of a painting:

[...] the colours are of a vivacity and a richness that pleases me very much. You are right, it is like "a Gobelin tapestry". I only hope that the panels that you were so courteous to make for my apartment are of the same quality. I would be very grateful if you could hasten the remaining work as life with bare walls is unbearable.

The colours were luminous and de Chirico seemed quite satisfied with the painterly quality obtained in the works of this period. The work encompassed the entire range of earth and burnt tones, went well with the warm golden wood of the Louis Philippe antiques and the darker wood, especially the black mahogany of the Imperial furniture collection.⁹¹ The antique dealer's passion for his home equalled that of his collecting, almost as if to demonstrate the possibility of uniting the two areas of expertise. The interior decorating and architecture magazines of the time accentuated the public's taste for Deco that had begun to invade the parlours of the high middle class.

We might think that in the haste with which Rosenberg strove to bring the inauguration date of his apartment forward, there was an underlying fear of presenting works that were by then out-of-date according to the tastes of the Parisian élite.

The choice of a theme saturated with classicism, as that of the Gladiators, according to Derouet⁹² might have been unleashed by the dealer's infatuation for Mussolinian ideology and his Imperial aesthetic programme. In order to demonstrate this, it suffices to see an image of the fur-

⁸⁹ Rosenberg's letter to Léger of 29 April 1930, published by C. Derouet in *Les Italiens de Paris...*, p. 248 is interesting: "What will happen in Italy when Mussolini dies? I am convinced, however that at the death of Doumergue, France will go on, even if limping, in order and in peace." Rosenberg, of Jewish origin, seemed to be following the same path of Margherita Sarfatti, who, also of Jewish origin, was infatuated with Rome and the cult of the Duce, and who had to flee Italy after the imposition of the racial laws.

⁹⁰ C112.9600.317.

⁹¹ A reconstruction of the *Gladiator Hall* is published in M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Casa Rosenberg*, in *Les italiens de Paris. De Chirico and the others in Paris in the Thirties*, Schia, Milan 1998, pp. 91-93.

⁹² C. Derouet, *Les Italiens de Paris...*, cit., p. 40.

nished room, but also the description that Rosenberg made to Auguste Herbin⁹³ of the *Gladiator Hall*. It would seem an infatuation already on the road to extinction, regarding which Rosenberg already felt a faint sense of oppression and aggravation.

Again, on 27 April 1929 de Chirico wrote from Monte Carlo where he was creating the scenography for the production of Diaghilev's *Le Bal*, to reassure Rosenberg that the panels for his apartment would be ready in time:

I am here and working like a slave on the décor. I hope to be in Paris next week. In any case do not worry about the other three panels; they will all be finished by 1 June. – I would now like to ask you a big favour. I need to send 3500 fr. (three thousand five hundred francs) to my mother. It is too difficult for me to send them from here. Would you be so kind to send them to her by cheque? Here is the address: Madame Gemma de Chirico, 29 Avenue de Tourville. Please send it to her in a transferable cheque in a registered letter. Thank you in advance. I enclose the receipt. I have sent you a box of candied fruit from Nice, a local specialty.

My respects to Madame and all the best to the young ladies. My wife sends her best wishes to you and to your charming family.

The Great Crisis, 1929-1930

These were the two years in which the crisis could acutely be felt through Rosenberg's letters. If initially Rosenberg did not seem to realise what was happening, he saw the crisis for what it was immediately afterwards. De Chirico, at this point, did not believe what the dealer wrote, thinking that he was exaggerating the problems of the crisis in his own interest. Rosenberg, in order to convince him of the seriousness of the situation, wrote to him on 5 May 1930 quoting agency dispatches published in "Matin", that came from New York, to make him understand that there was a real reason for "painting a gloomy picture".

You accuse me of painting a gloomy picture of the financial situation. Here is the dispatch of the Havas-officielle agency which appeared today in "Matin", from New York, which tells of a new crack there."⁹⁴

One of the last letters from de Chirico to Rosenberg is dated 3 May 1930⁹⁵. Both the friendship and the business relationship seemed to be breaking up due to incomprehension on financial matters. We are able to read this between the lines in the letter to Rosenberg in which de Chirico requests a loan of 2000 francs from him and speaks of economical issues and his seriously ill wife. The exchange of letters itself seemed to suffer a setback. In the following years, the letters between the two would become increasingly rare.

⁹³ Letter of 29 May 1928: "the furnishings decorated with colours and loaded with bronze, that I must put in the salon." *Ibid.*, p. 247: "Regarding the furniture destined for the great hall in my apartment, for which I asked you to execute the paintings for the panels, I would prefer, if you do not mind, that you take care of the smoking room, which is next door [...] as it is very simple, without gold and bronze decoration, it will compliment your painting, whilst the furniture loaded with bronze and bright colours that I have no choice but to put in the great hall, will contrast with your paintings and create visual disorder, of which you would be the first to criticise, since you are so greatly disciplined".

⁹⁴ C31.104422.76.

⁹⁵ C129.10422.72.

Dear Mr Rosenberg,

I was very surprised this morning that you refused to give me 2,000 fr. especially given that I had told you that my wife was gravely ill in Berlin and that I needed to leave immediately. You probably thought it was a tale I was telling you in order to shave some money off the sum that you owe me; to prove to you that this is not the case, I enclose with this letter a telegram that I received this morning. Strong though the crisis may be and as strongly as you may have applied the brakes, it is not possible that you are not able to find 1,000 fr. for a painter with whom you have done business for six years now and who (I dare hope) enjoys all your esteem; especially given that the said painter tells you that his wife is seriously ill and that he needs to leave.

De Chirico was unable to comprehend the gloomy colours with which Rosenberg outlined the financial situation and actually confessed to him that he did not dare telephone him or pass by the gallery for fear of his extremely negative attitude. Thus he communicated that differently from other “poor devils”, he had other possibilities and seemed to want to break off relations with Rosenberg, as he wrote:

I should tell you that, in general, the way you act in these times of crises is not particularly heroic. I entirely understand why you do not purchase any paintings, and I also understand why you pay in dribs and drabs that which you purchased before, but what I do not understand is that you push sadism until you disseminate terror around you by exaggerating the bad state of affairs; personally I do not dare pass by your gallery or even call you for fear of hearing that nothing else remains but to shoot ourselves.

Luckily, I have some other opportunities; but I can imagine the moral and material situation of those poor devils who depend entirely on you. I would be very grateful if you could send telegraphically at least 1,000 francs (I don't dare ask more) to the following address: Chirico bei Frau Tumarkin – Heilbronnstrasse G. Berlin. You can deduct the cost of the telegraph from the rest of the money that you still owe me,

Please forgive this letter and please believe anyway in my best regards,

De Chirico wrote again to Rosenberg, an undated letter, but which should be collocated before the letter just cited. It still contains continuous requests for paintings on the same themes: Horses, in an uninterrupted and repetitive series such that the artist sent some paintings to the gallery while still fresh. We can sense a certain fatigue on de Chirico's part in feeling obliged to repeat themes “on order”:

Here are two other paintings of horses executed in the 1927 style. I hope that this time your client will be happy. Be careful because the paint is still fresh and if you have two frames of 30 fig. in which to show them it would be good.

In hope of a favourable response, I send you my best wishes⁹⁶

⁹⁶ C127.10422.73.

The Ingratitude of Artists

On 4 May 1930 Rosenberg replied to de Chirico's letter of the day before explaining the grave financial problems facing l'Effort Moderne:

Passing by here this morning I found your letter which arrived yesterday. Yesterday at ten to noon you telephoned me to send you 1000 francs in cash. The bank closes at noon and I do not carry on my person more than that which I may need for 48 hours, that is why I may not pay by cheque; so I told you that I could do this on Monday. You had not told me that your wife was ill but only that you were going to meet her in Berlin. Why this melodrama? I have never refused you anything.⁹⁷

And with regard to the "poor devils" to whom de Chirico's letter of the day before referred to, Rosenberg answered with a troubled missive, full of rancour towards the ingratitude of certain artists:

[...] concerning the "poor devils" to whom you allude, I will tell you

1. that they remember me only in times of crisis
2. that the ingratitude that I have seen in exchange for fifteen years of heroism – as you say – has so disgusted me as to induce me to offer no more philanthropy towards artists
3. that the first charity should be towards oneself
4. that *I* am the poor devil. Because I have all the past production of the poor devils on my shoulders
5. that at this time I owe nothing to the poor devils
6. that I have contracts with no one
7. that one must save the mother (l'Effort Moderne) before the children. There is only one mother, while one may have other children
8. that I could not care less about the opinions of those who do not pay my rent

I hope Mrs de Chirico is better; give her my respects.

Your most devoted

P.S. All above, without animosity or rancour. I will send you the requested 1000 francs tomorrow. You yourself told me, without my asking, that for two months you would ask no more of me. Tell the "poor devils" that l'Effort Moderne buys only according to its need and is not a public service.

In Full Crisis: a Very Difficult Situation

Let us return to the letter of 5 May 1930⁹⁸ which was partly translated by Derouet.⁹⁹ Rosenberg found himself in an extremely difficult situation: he felt the ingratitude of the painters and was suffocated by the blackmail of profiteering dealers.

⁹⁷ C130.10422.74.

⁹⁸ C131.10422.76.

⁹⁹ C. Derouet *Les Italiens de Paris...* cit., p. 250 and translation of footnote 25, p. 253.

Dear Mr de Chirico,

I wish to add some words to my letter of yesterday, which was perhaps a bit nervous owing to your unjustified rebuke, undoubtedly written in haste.

1. You accuse me of painting a gloomy picture of the economic situation. Here is the dispatch from the Havas-officielle agency published today in *Matin* that came from New York, telling of another crack there.

2. You criticise me that I lack heroism in this moment. For some painters, heroism means sacrifice, for some it means resolving their problems, for others, launching their careers. But afterwards, "the danger past, goodbye to the saint..."

The ingratitude of painters, the snickers of profiteering dealers, the egotism of amateur speculators, have disgusted me forever out of the heroism I showed for fifteen years and of which my close friends know all the greatness and secret suffering. As our business relationship dates from after 1924, all this does not concern you.

Rosenberg continued with his suggestions for de Chirico, affirming:

In any case, let me say that if our rapport had continued from 1928 to 1930 as it did from 1925 to 1928, you would have known all the advantages of concentration and you would have avoided the future disadvantages of dispersion. One day you will see that I was right. It was our combined efforts from 1925 to 1928 that produced all you have had since then. I really do not see what they added, those who came after the success of 1925-1928. Money? Money is to be spent.

Advice for the Crisis

Once again, Rosenberg gave advice to the artist in difficult moments of the financial crisis:

But when the crisis arrives what a perilous rivalry occurs between dealers who denigrate epochs and subjects that they do not have and dispute among themselves those two or three collectors who are still able to buy and who, confused by so much contradictory news, in a panic begin to reflect and prelude to a momentary abstention until the day when a strong and expert hand takes the market of your paintings in hand and gives it a powerful, serious and lasting stability. Picasso has changed dealers three or four times, but always in succession, never at the same time. First [...], then Vollard, Kahnweiler, Léonce Rosenberg, Paul Rosenberg. Today he is passing to the Georges Petit Gallery, where Braque and Léger will soon follow.

Rosenberg realised that the crisis would last a long time and that a contraction in art commerce would begin for all concerned. He continued:

In closing, I have no advice to give you, you know your own interests best. In any case, let me say: do not listen to braggarts, nor to the stupid; be prudent and providential without being pessimistic. The crisis will go on and the downturn is beginning for all. Is it not true that it is only from a downturn that business can be reborn? I hope that you may soon give me good news of Madame de Chirico. Awaiting, your cordially devoted [...] P.S. Have you not thought that, by dividing your production, you also divide the clientele for every dealer, clientele that in times of crisis only decreases

instead of increasing? And since not every dealer enjoys the same economic and social position and consequently has different politics and needs, you will have prevented a homogeneity of prices, which, solely, permits all to sell. The moment inevitably arrives when one or more dealers in unfavourable rivalry, unable to sell, cease to buy and try to sell at any cost in order re-employ the money in more advantageous things. In spite of this, I keep prices high for your good paintings, which I possess because I work for the future. Nonetheless, I have been unable to sell any painting of yours for a year and a half, being subjected to the disadvantageous rivalry of colleagues with diverse politics, mentalities, and needs. The two “poor devils” whom you mention – one of whom remembers me only when he has no commissions – have known for a long time that I would buy from them in full liberty, but that when there is a crisis I would cease doing so.

This letter of Rosenberg is truly exhaustive for understanding the trends of the market crisis circa 1930. He explains the different behaviour among dealers who wished to sell immediately and those like Rosenberg, who labour for the long run. Rosenberg had not been able to sell even one of de Chirico's paintings for a year and a half, but he was a dealer-collector who remained essentially a lover of beautiful paintings, with which he could not do without, with unconditional appreciation, even in his most difficult financial moments. In fact, he wrote:

This has not prevented me from giving you the order for my apartment, nor from buying your work for l'Effort Moderne, in particular a canvas of 120, *The Consolator* that I will probably keep for years. What does it matter, I love it, as it is splendid!

And you dare to say to me that in this moment I lack “heroism”! You are either unjust by nature or not of good faith in this discussion and this is not worthy of a great artist. If you think you have been given a bad bargain by selling me *The Consolator*, a 120 [point] canvas, because I do not, for all the world, wish to have regrets, I am ready to return it to you and to take something else of my choice in place of the sum I have already paid.

The Final Letters

The problems between Rosenberg and de Chirico were also of a financial nature, as we may understand from Rosenberg's second letter to de Chirico, mailed on the same day, 5 May 1930:

Dear Mr de Chirico,

I wish to add to my letter of this morning that you yourself stated, asking me eight days ago 2000 francs, “give me 2000 francs and I will leave you in peace for two months”:

Despite this, when you asked me on the telephone for 1000 francs more, I told you that if you had asked me the day before, I could have gotten them to you before your departure for Berlin and I myself proposed to send them to you in Berlin. I hope you have received them. Again most cordially P.S. An artist and a publisher must collaborate courteously and without tricks, and not fight. Common interest requires this. The *Galerie J. Bonjean* appears serious and loyal; when commercial peace has returned I would not be adverse to a possible collaboration with them.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ C132.10422.77.

During the crisis Rosenberg wished to have an “absolute monopoly” on de Chirico’s painting, believing that the prices would not go down in this way, as he wrote in a letter of February 1931:

[...] if I had had the absolute monopoly on your paintings, not only would your prices have not decreased by a cent despite the crisis, but today we would have had all the increase in price and all the economic facilitations you desired.¹⁰¹

After a Long Silence

De Chirico resumed writing to Rosenberg in 1933 with a long letter on 8 April, which is important because it was the first after a long period of silence. In 1931, Rosenberg’s gallery went bankrupt and many of the paintings were sold at auction in London between 1931 and 1932. In a postcard, de Chirico explained to Rosenberg the reasons for his silence (his separation from his wife) and spoke to him of his successes in a much more colloquial tone than in the letters of 1927-1928, adding, in the margin, that he was “more and more inclined towards realistic painting and beautiful craft”.

Dear Mr Rosenberg,

I apologise for not having written for such a long time. I have been working here in Italy for a year and a half. Despite the crisis I am managing to get by all the same; I have separated from my wife, and at present I have three families to maintain; my mother still depends on me because my brother does not earn enough; please tell Mr. Borrel that I have not forgotten my debt and that as soon as I can breathe a bit I will take care of it. Inasmuch as I know, the museums that have my paintings are: Turin – Milan – Florence and Rome; in Germany: Berlin and Essen; in France: Grenoble (in Russia: Moscow) and all the museums in the United States. Now, here in Milan, I am working on a big mural painting at the Palace of Decorative Arts. Soon I will leave for Genoa where I have an exhibition and then to Florence, where I have to attend the premiere of an opera for which I designed the costumes and the scenery. They say that it is still going pretty badly in Paris; I think it is a little bit the fault of the “French”; they are very pessimistic and exaggerate the crisis. All the best to you and your family.¹⁰²

With this letter, we conclude the analysis of the Rosenberg-de Chirico correspondence from 1926 to 1930. The relationship between de Chirico and Rosenberg was interrupted until a number of letters in 1935, which concern the Paris show organized by Mario Tozzi. The show did not correspond to de Chirico’s new artistic interests. The artist therefore asked Rosenberg to not lend any paintings.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ C138.10422.81, 23 February 1931.

¹⁰² C10422.83.

¹⁰³ C10422.84, 5 May 1935: “Please do not lend any of my paintings to the exhibition of Italian art in Paris. You would do me a great displeasure.”

Learning the Lesson: (the Pupil surpasses the Master)

The most interesting of the later letters are those from circa 1936 to 1937, written by de Chirico during his stay in New York to Rosenberg. The artist, who had regained full faith in himself and in his artistic capabilities, makes us understand that a kind of reversal of roles has occurred as he attempts to help Rosenberg to sell some of his paintings on the New York market.¹⁰⁴

In fact, Rosenberg proposes to sell his *Gladiators* in America, as he wrote on 13 November 1936:

I still possess the three large panels you painted in 1928 for my old apartment. Might there be a way to sell them in America? They might be right for a museum, or for a man such as Barnes. They have always been admired by all those who appreciate you in all your forms of self-expression. Works of this class may constitute a serious reference for you there and a means against the competition of other painters who would not be able to execute paintings of such importance in such an accurate manner. Although, as you surely know, these cost me a high price, I would content myself with 40,000 francs for all three. But I am not disposed to send them if they have not been sold. Canvases of such quality honour my gallery in such a way that I am not disposed to deprive myself of them without a substantial compensation. For an American, they are only 1900 dollars. If you know a trusted buyer, would you have the kindness to send me a telegram?

In a letter of 17 December 1936¹⁰⁵, Rosenberg established the prices and conditions for the sale in America.

Ancient Warriors, 14,000 francs net for me; *Triumph*, 14,000 net for me; *The Battle*, painted contemporaneously with *Triumph*, 14,000 francs net for me; Trophy (pastel) 3,000 francs net for me; *Warriors before Battle*, 7,000 francs net for me; *Gladiators*, 7000 francs net for me. As I told you before, I am not disposed to send them on consignment to America.

They are quite beautiful pieces that do honour to my gallery and I can only separate myself from them if they are definitely sold, above all because the prices I ask are very modest and leave me with a notable loss on what I paid in 1928. I believe that you may increase the price by 50%.

Now it was de Chirico who wanted to keep his prices high so as not to inflate the market; and he advises the art dealer in a letter of 19 December 1936¹⁰⁶:

I suggest that you keep my prices high and not be too much in a rush to sell the paintings of mine that you own. – My prices will now start to go up. –

But you might send me the photographs of my paintings, as I have already written to you, to see if I can sell them here. –

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁰⁵ C141.10422.86.

¹⁰⁶ C146.10422.90.

Success in America

De Chirico's exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery¹⁰⁷ caused an increase in prices. In fact, in the letter of 7 November 1936 from New York, de Chirico told Rosenberg of the success of the show:

Dear Mr Rosenberg, My exhibition in New York opened a week ago at the Julien Levy Gallery. It is a very big success. Barnes wrote the introduction for the catalogue and bought 4 paintings for his museum. Other paintings and gouaches have been bought by collectors in New York and Philadelphia. At present, 16 paintings have been sold and there are more sales in sight, as well as orders coming in from every direction. Vogue and Harper's Bazaar want me among their collaborators. I have also been asked to do portraits, stage-sets for the theatre and cinema etc. I am very happy to have come here; when I think of these last three years of pulling the devil by the tail amidst hostile indifference and stupidity.¹⁰⁸

De Chirico had great success and his works sold extremely well. In the same letter, he continued:

The success of my recent work in America is even more important since the Surrealists and other such jealous scoundrels who gang together with the intention of bringing me down have conducted here, as they did in Paris, a violent campaign against my œuvre. In addition to the [presidential] election, there were 6 other exhibitions of French painting opening almost at the same time as mine: 2 of Picasso, a Renoir exhibition as well as Derain, Vlaminck and Matisse. And despite all of this, the success was of the most complete sort.

The paintings' prices had increased so much that the painter, writing to the dealer, asked him not to sell the works that remained in Paris at the prices they had originally agreed upon. He says, in fact:

Now, I would like to ask you something. I left 2 paintings and 5 gouaches with you, at very low prices. I hope you have not sold them at these prices. -

Because, really, 1500 Fr for a big painting like the one with the horses is unthinkable.

Therefore, I would like to ask you to allow Jacques Bonjean, who is my manager's partner, to come pick up the two paintings and the gouaches. I will send Bonjean the receipts.

I hope you will send me some of your news. If, by chance, you have sold something of mine, please send my part to the address at the top of this letter. - I may be mistaken, but I have the impression that the same atmosphere is being created here as there was in Paris before the crisis; everyone is coming here, even Vuillard has just arrived. - And you, my dear Mr. Rosenberg, what are your projects? Does America not tempt you? -¹⁰⁹

While waiting to hear from you, I ask you to believe in my sincere friendship -

¹⁰⁷ See K. Robinson, *Giorgio de Chirico - Julien Levy. Artist and Art Dealer. Shared Experience*, in "Metafisica", n. 7/8, cit., pp. 326-356.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Letters by Giorgio de Chirico to Julien Levy, Albert C. Barnes, Léonce Rosenberg, 1934-1936*, in *ibid.*, p. 672-678.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenberg, of Jewish origin, was forced to emigrate to America because of the Nazi persecution, where he died in 1947.

"It is a tiring and sad country in the long run, and also too far from the civilized world"

In this last letter, which concludes the correspondence, de Chirico spoke of Europe with nostalgia and informed Rosenberg that he would soon return:

Dear Mr. Rosenberg,

I have not heard from you in a long time. How are you? I am in the countryside near New York. I am working quite a lot. But next year I would like to come back to Europe. One earns a lot of money here, but it is a tiring and sad country in the long run, and also too far from the civilised world. – I had the great misfortune of losing my mother recently.

How is Mr. Borel? He is not angry with me I hope. –

Please send me your news. –

All the best to you

G. de Chirico¹¹⁰

Translated by Stephanie Kramer

¹¹⁰ C155.10422.98. Postcard by de Chirico to Rosenberg, without date but datable to early summer 1937.

TABLE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMON MEASUREMENTS

POINTS	FIGURES	LANDSCAPES	SEASCAPES
1	22x16	22x14	22x12
2	24x19	24x16	24x14
3	27x22	27x19	27x16
4	33x24	33x22	33x19
5	35x27	35x24	35x22
6	41x33	41x27	41x24
8	46x38	46x33	46x27
10	55x46	55x38	55x33
12	61x50	61x46	61x38
15	65x54	65x50	65x46
20	73x60	73x54	73x50
25	81x65	81x60	81x54
30	92x73	92x65	92x60
40	100x81	100x73	100x65
50	116x89	116x81	116x73
60	130x97	130x89	130x81
80	146x114	146x97	146x89
100	162x130	162x114	162x97
120	195x130	195x114	195x97

TABLE OF ITALIAN COMMON MEASUREMENTS
OFFICIAL TABLE CORRESPONDING TO INTERNATIONAL MEASUREMENTS

POINTS	MEASUREMENTS	POINTS	MEASUREMENTS
1	18x24	10	40x60
2	20x25	10	45x55
3	20x30	10	45x60
4	20x35	12	50x60
4	25x30	15	50x70
4	24x30	20	60x70
5	20x40	25	60x80
5	25x35	25	50x100
5	30x35	25	60x90
6	30x40	30	60x110
6	35x40	30	70x100
8	35x45	40	60x120
8	35x50	40	80x100
8	40x50		