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DE CHIRICO IN THE RENÉ GAFFÉ COLLECTION & THE ROLE OF E.L.T MESENS (BRUSSELS – LONDON)

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In 1946, René Gaffé (Brussels, 1887-1968) – the Belgian journalist, author, collector and bibliophile – wrote a short monograph dedicated to Giorgio de Chirico entitled *Giorgio de Chirico. Le voyant* (Éditions La Boétie, Brussels, fig. 1).¹ Published in Gaffé's native city, the book contains an extensive yet overlooked essay about de Chirico's early Metaphysical work, as well as a total of 24 black and white reproductions of important paintings executed in the 1910s and 1920s. As an important connoisseur and collector of de Chirico's œuvre, together with work by Belgian Surrealists such as René Magritte and Paul Delvaux, this article will principally focus on Gaffé's keen interest in de Chirico, which, in turn, helped disseminate knowledge about his painting within Belgium during the early twentieth century.² As his impressive art collection was built and then partly sold off with the intervention of Eduoard Léon Théodore Mesens (Brussels, 1903-1971), a Belgian gallerist and editor who championed Surrealism in Belgium and later in the UK (mainly initiated by the 1937 sale of a substantial part of Gaffé's collection to the British collector Roland Penrose), this paper will also examine Mesens' involvement in the acquisition and sale of Gaffé's de Chiricos.³

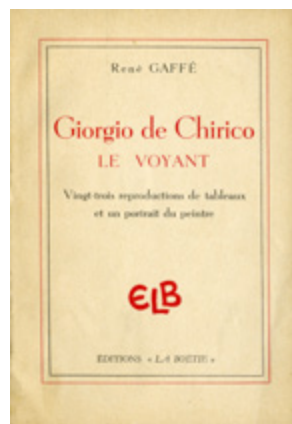


fig. 1 R. Gaffé, *Giorgio de Chirico. Le voyant*, Éditions La Boétie, Brussels, 1946

¹ This article is the expanded and revised version of the article *Le voyant: analyse des liens entre René Gaffé et Giorgio de Chirico*, in *Giorgio de Chirico. Aux origines du surréalisme belge. Magritte – Delvaux – Graverol*, exh. cat., edited by L. Neve, Éditions Mardaga, Brussels, 2019, pp. 56-73. Additional research pertaining to correspondence and other archival documentation principally involving René Gaffé's collection and E.L.T. Mesens' activity as a dealer was carried out by the author at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, in February 2020. To this end, the author wishes to extend her sincere thanks to Professor Paolo Picozza, President of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, for supporting her research, as well as the staff at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, in terms of consultation and assistance.

² For a comprehensive overview of de Chirico's rapport with Belgium, see J. André, *La Belgique et Giorgio de Chirico. Chronologie raisonnée*, in *Giorgio de Chirico. Les dix dernières années. 1968-1978*, exh. cat., edited by L. Busine, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, 2001, pp. 187-251. An in-depth examination of de Chirico's influence on Belgian Surrealism, particularly in the work of Magritte, Delvaux and Jane Graverol, was recently highlighted in the exhibition *Giorgio de Chirico. Aux origines du surréalisme belge. Magritte – Delvaux – Graverol*, curated by L. Neve, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Mons – BAM, Mons, 16 February – 2 June 2019.

³ For a detailed analysis of E.L.T. Mesens' active support of Surrealism in Britain through his involvement with the British Surrealist Group, The London Gallery and the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), see V. Noel-Johnson, *De Chirico and the United Kingdom (c. 1916-1978)*, Maretti Editore, Falciano, 2017, pp. 32-40, pp. 63-67, and pp. 94-97. For an overview of Mesens' career, see C. Caputo, *E. L. T. Mesens. Art Collector and Dealer*, «The Getty Research Journal», The University of Chicago Press Journals, Chicago, n. 12, February 2020, pp. 127-150.



fig. 2 R. Magritte, *Portrait de René Gaffé*, 1942, oil on canvas, 55.3 x 45 cm, private collection



fig. 3 R. Magritte, *Fleurs*, 1946, poster design for R. Gaffé's perfume company, 1946

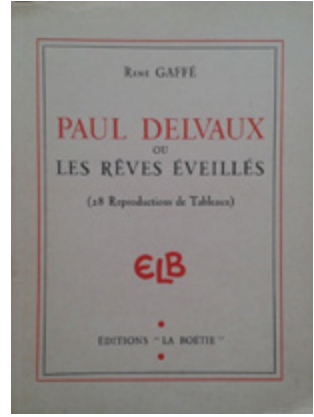


fig. 4 R. Gaffé, *Paul Delvaux ou les rêves éveillés*, Éditions La Boétie, Brussels, 1945

Born in Brussels in 1887, Gaffé appears to have led a fascinating and multifaceted life and career, culminating in him becoming one of Belgium's foremost art collectors of Cubist, Surrealist, Dadaist, African and Oceanic artwork and objects. Having studied ancient classics at school, he went on to forge a successful career in journalism in the Netherlands and Belgium, working as a correspondent for important newspapers including «Le Soir», «L'Indépendance Belge» and «L'Étoile Belge», before founding «L'Echo Belge», a Belgian French-language daily. He proceeded to make his fortune in the perfume business, which enabled him to pursue his passion for modern and African and Oceanic art, that, in turn, brought him into direct contact with many important artists and writers including André Breton, Paul Éluard, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, and René Magritte. Acting as one of Magritte's earliest patrons, the 1942 painting *Portrait de René Gaffé* and 1946 poster design for Gaffé's perfume business (figs. 2-3) are testament to their close working relationship and friendship.⁴ From the mid-1940s onwards, Gaffé combined his writing experience with his in-depth knowledge about early twentieth century art and literature, authoring several publications including *Paul Delvaux ou les rêves éveillés* (fig. 4); *Paul Éluard* (1945); *Peinture à travers Dada et le Surréalisme* (1952) and *A la verticale. Réflexions d'un collectionneur* (1963).⁵

⁴ For Gaffé's recollection about this portrait, which he described as "a coloured truth with which I am very satisfied", see R. Gaffé, *A la verticale: Réflexions d'un collectionneur*, ed. André de Rache, Brussels, 1963, pp. 124-125.

⁵ Gaffé sent Breton a copy of this with the dedication "À André Breton, j'offre ce témoignage de ma profonde admiration et de mon amitié, René Gaffé" (To André Breton, I offer this as testament to my profound admiration and friendship, René Gaffé); scanned copy consulted online at Association Atelier André Breton (www.andrebretton.fr, accessed 20.07.20).

The Makings of an Art Collection

The way in which Gaffé shaped his art and extensive book collection over the years – and his decision to intermittently sell parts of it off during his own lifetime – is both curious and compelling. Two such sales involved the impressive sale of 40 works by Picasso, Miró and de Chirico to the British Surrealist artist and collector Roland Penrose in June 1937, and the Parisian auction of his Dadaist and Surrealist books at Hôtel Drouot in April 1956.⁶ When Gaffé passed away in 1968, his second wife Jeanne safeguarded the collection until her own death in October 2000, at which point it was sold at auction in order to raise funds for UNICEF, as stipulated by the terms of Gaffé's will.⁷

Although Gaffé's art collection transformed over the years, its core of Cubist, Surrealist, Dadaist, and primitive artwork is indicative of his affiliation with early twentieth century French avant-garde aesthetic interests, as promoted by figures such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Guillaume, André Breton and Paul Éluard.⁸ In Gaffé's essay *Confessions of a Collector* (1951), he recalled:

I am deeply indebted to André Breton and Paul Éluard, the writers who steered me towards a shore which was to afford me unalloyed delights. At their homes in the rue Fontaine, these two surrealist friends had gathered together masterpieces of European art, selected with flawless taste and hung side by side with important objects from darkest Africa or Polynesia. The world of art owes much to these two men who led many young artists into new pastures at a period when many people doubted the sincerity of such pictorial research.⁹

As recently documented (Wohl, 2007), Gaffé's involvement in the European avant-garde scene as a writer and collector actually dates back to c. 1915 rather than to the 1920s and 1930s as widely held.¹⁰ In a brief correspondence between Gaffé and Tristan Tzara which took place in May-June 1916, the latter reached out to the Belgian journalist-collector in the hope that he could help publicise the (short-lived) antics of the Cabaret Voltaire currently taking place in Zurich – events that would prove pivotal to the founding of the anti-establishment Dada movement - through Gaffé's publications and literary friends.¹¹ In a letter to Gaffé dated 21 July 1916, Tzara commented on the Belgian's impressive collection of paintings by de Chirico and African objects:

⁶ See auction catalogue *Bibliothèque de M. René Gaffé. Très précieux livres des auteurs du mouvement Dada et du groupe Surréaliste. Exemples uniques, manuscrits et dossiers autographes constituant Les Archives du Surréalisme*, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 26-27 April 1956.

⁷ See auction catalogue *The Collection of René Gaffé. Property from the Estate of Madame René Gaffé (sold without reserve for the benefit of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund)*, Christie's, New York, 6 November 2001.

⁸ For example, Gaffé purchased an Easter Island figure for the then significant amount of 2,800 francs at the auction *Collection André Breton et Paul Éluard: Sculptures d'Afrique, d'Amérique, d'Océanie*, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 2-3 July 1931.

⁹ R. Gaffé, *Confessions of a Collector*, «Magazine of Art», 44, no. 6, American Federation of Arts, New York, 1951, p. 210.

¹⁰ See H. Wohl, *Tristan Tzara, René Gaffé and the Cabaret Voltaire*, «The Burlington Magazine», London, April 2007, CXLIX, pp. 262-267.

¹¹ See letter from T. Tzara, Zurich, to R. Gaffé, 10 May 1916, archive of the late Leo Lionni, Porcignano, cited in Wohl, 2007, p. 264.

I thank you for your letter and I find your collection splendid. As soon as we have the opportunity of publishing the magazine [«DADA»], I will have the Chiricos and African pieces from your collection reproduced.... On the 14th [14 July 1916], we held a big Dada demonstration at the Waag to launch Dada and celebrate this revolutionary genius of France.....¹²

Despite Tzara's praise of Gaffé's art collection and proposition to include reproductions of his de Chirico paintings and *pièces nègres* in the inaugural issue of «DADA» (July 1917), his offer failed to materialise. Whilst «DADA 2» (December 1917) features a reproduction of de Chirico's *Le mauvais génie d'un roi* (1914-1915, Museum of Modern Art, New York), this work belonged to Paul Guillaume at the time, de Chirico's Parisian dealer, as specified in the accompanying caption.

Although Gaffé's letter to Tzara discussing his early Metaphysical paintings by de Chirico has yet to surface, the reconstruction of his de Chirico collection (found at the end of this article) suggests that he probably owned



fig. 6 G. de Chirico, *Nu [aux chevaux noirs]*, 1912-1913, oil on canvas, 70 x 54 cm, private collection



fig. 5 G. de Chirico, *Mélancolie*, 1912, oil on canvas, 79 x 63.5 cm, private collection

Mélancolie (1912,

fig. 5) and *Nu [aux chevaux noirs]* (1912-1913, fig. 6) at the time of writing to Tzara in mid-1916, a period when the Italian artist was stationed in Ferrara for military duty. Further to recent examinations of the Gaffé-Penrose sale of 1937, the present reconstruction provides a better understanding about Gaffé's acquisitions and contacts.¹³ As later illustrated, Gaffé's collection of works by or attributed to de Chirico consisted of at least 14 works (12 paintings, one drawing and the 1930 publication of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*), which were acquired between c. 1915 and the early 1930s. These works appear to have been principally bought from Galerie Paul Guillaume (Paris), André Breton (Paris), and Galerie La Vierge Poupine (Brussels). While precise dynamics have

¹² See letter from T. Tzara, Zurich, to R. Gaffé, 21 July 1916, archive of the late Leo Lionni, Porcignano, *ibid*, translated by author. The original French reads: "[...] Je vous remercie pour votre lettre e je trouve votre collection magnifique. Aussitôt que nous aurons la possibilité de publier la revue [«DADA»], je ferais reproduire des Chiricos et des pièces nègres de votre collection....Le 14, nous avons fait une grande démonstration Dada à la Waag pour lancer Dada et fêter ce génie révolutionnaire [sic] de la France.... [...]"

¹³ See Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 59-62 and pp. 300-313; and C. Caputo, *Strategie del mercato dell'arte surrealista: la vendita della collezione Gaffé a Roland Penrose nel 1937*, «Ricerche di storia dell'arte», n. 121, Carrocci editore, Rome, April 2017, pp. 47-57.

yet to be established, it is evident that E.L.T Mesens - a fellow native of Brussels and tireless advocate of Dadaism and Surrealism in Belgium and the United Kingdom in the guise of dealer, curator, author, publisher and artist – also played a key role in the creation and part sale of Gaffé's collection. One notes, for example, that Mesens worked at Galerie La Vierge Poupine between 1931-1936, and later helped broker the deal between Gaffé and Penrose in June 1937, as will be detailed in due course. Similarly to Gaffé, Mesens also possessed an important art collection that featured work by Magritte (he first met the Belgian artist in 1920 and acquired about 150 works of his in 1932), de Chirico, Braque, Klee, Picasso, and Schwitters.

In the previously cited article *Confessions of a Collector* (1951), Gaffé recalled the circumstances around his introduction to de Chirico:

My first knowledge of this artist [...] goes back to a visit to André Breton who at the time owned an extraordinary painting *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*. The moment I set eyes on it, it stirred me deeply, divorced from all doctrinal directives, it posed a number of enigmas. The mystery was there, spread before my eyes and taking my breath away by its power of enchantment. I immediately proposed to buy it, but Breton found a thousand reasons to refuse. In order to retain some memento of this amazing picture, however, I bought its frame – an enormous construction by Pierre Legrain, one of the great bookbinders of our day. How differently events transpired from what we could have anticipated! Today the painting is in America and will never be mine, while the frame, which I still possess, never proved suitable for any other purpose. Subsequently I satisfied my desire by discovering other equally sensational Chiricos, like *Melancholy* [1912], which seems to await the instant when a phantom shall come around the corner, and by purchasing in all twenty Chiricos painted between 1913 and 1918 [sic].¹⁴

As Tzara's letter dated 21 July 1916 confirms that Gaffé already owned early de Chirico works, it follows that Gaffé met Breton in Paris shortly after the start of the Great War (*Mystère et mélancolie d'une rue* was painted in 1914, fig. 7).¹⁵ Gaffé's admission that he owned a total of 20 early Metaphysical works by de Chirico suggests that the present reconstruction of his collection (a

¹⁴ Gaffé, 1951, pp. 211-212. In the subsequent 1963 French publication of Gaffé's recollections as a collector, he specifies some of the de Chirico paintings that he acquired, a detail omitted from the 1951 article (all of these works feature in the reconstruction of his collection found at the end of this article): *Les muses inquiétantes* (1924), *L'ange juif* (1916), *Le regret* (1916), *La révolte du sage* (1916) and *La récompense du dévin* (1913). The original French reads: "[...] J'avais découvert sa supériorité [de de Chirico] dans la réalisation d'une toile bouleversante, *Mélancolie et Mystère* d'une rue, que possédait Breton et qui échappait à toute directive doctrinale. Que d'énigmes ne proposait-elle pas? Le mystère en effet, s'allumait sous mes yeux, abusant de son pouvoir d'envoûtement. Je proposai à son possesseur de l'acheter au prix qu'il voudrait fixer, mais Breton avait des raisons sentimentales d'y tenir et il écarta toutes mes propositions, avec son habituelle gentillesse avec moi. Pour emporter quand même un souvenir de ce tableau surprenant, j'emmenai le cadre, échafaudage énorme qu'avait inventé et construit Pierre Legrain [...]. Un jour, le tableau partit pour les Etats-Unis et le cadre qui restait en ma possession n'a jamais pu être utilisé à aucune fin. Sans doute allais-je plus tard satisfaire mes convoitises en découvrant d'autres œuvres de de Chirico aussi sensationnelles, comme cette *Melancholia* qui paraissait attendre l'instant où le fantôme déboucherait d'une rue, achat suivi de celui d'une vingtaine de ses toiles les plus connues: *Les Muses inquiétantes*, *L'Ange juif*, *Le Regret*, *La Révolte du sage*, *La Récompense*, etc. [...]."
See R. Gaffé, *A la verticale. Réflexions d'un collectionneur*, ed. André De Rache, Brussels, 1963, p. 101; in André, 2001, p. 195.

¹⁵ Should Gaffé's recollection hold true, it would imply that Breton owned *Mystère et mélancolie d'une rue* (1914) earlier than previously established. The work later appeared in the large solo show of the artist's work organised by Paul Guillaume, *Exposition G. de Chirico* (Galerie Paul Guillaume, 21 March – 1 April 1922, cat. n. 36).



fig. 7 G. de Chirico, *Mystère et mélancolie d'une rue*, 1914, oil on canvas, 87 x 71.5 cm, private collection

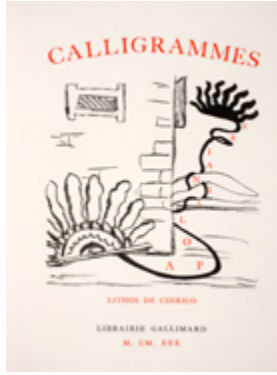


fig. 8 Frontispiece of G. Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, 1930, NRF, Librairie Gallimard, Paris, illustrated with 68 lithographs by G. de Chirico, 33 x 25.1 cm, private collection

ness to Breton and Éluard, his decision not to collect de Chirico's later work tallies with the Surrealist leaders' heavy criticism of and public aversion to the artist's overt embrace of classicism and Old Master techniques and styles that dominated his artwork from c. 1919 onwards. With the exception of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1930, illustrated with 68 lithographs by de Chirico, fig. 8), Gaffé believed to own works by or attributed to the artist dated 1912-1916/1917. Such an observation includes *Portrait de l'artiste avec sa mère* (1919, Musée national d'Art moderne/CCI, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris, figs. 9-10) – which was listed as '1916' in the *Chirico - Picasso* exhibition catalogue (The London Gallery, London, 10 - 30 June 1937, cat. n. 9) – as well as *Le muse inquietanti* (a 1924 copy based on the 1918 original, figs. 11-13), which Breton commissioned directly from de Chirico and disingenuously exhibited as '1916' or '1917' (a decision that effectively turned the 1924 copy into the 'original').¹⁶ It is not known when Gaffé



fig. 9 G. de Chirico, *Portrait de l'artiste avec sa mère*, 1919, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 60.4 cm, Musée national d'Art moderne/CCI, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris



fig. 10 G. de Chirico, *Portrait de l'artiste avec sa mère*, 1919, as reproduced in R. Gaffé, *Giorgio de Chirico. Le voyant*, 1946, Brussels

¹⁶ Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* (1924, oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm) was a near-identical copy of the original 1918 painting (oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm) owned by Giorgio Castelfranco, de Chirico's Florentine dealer in the early 1920s. The copy appears to have been commissioned by Breton (either for himself or one of his clients) following Castelfranco's refusal to sell the original. In a letter dated 10 March 1924 from the artist to Breton's wife Simone Kahn Breton, de Chirico explained that the only difference between the 1918 original and the 1924 "exact replica" would consist in the later version being "executed with greater quality and more knowledgeable technique." A recently-discovered letter from Marcel Jean (1900-1993) to James Thrall Soby, de Chirico's first English-language biographer, sheds further light on this much-discussed turn of events. Jean, who matured an interest in Surrealism from 1926 onwards upon his return to Paris (officially joining the movement in 1933), soon became a close



fig. 11 G. de Chirico, *Le muse inquietanti*, 1924, oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm, private collection



fig. 12 G. de Chirico, *Le muse inquietanti*, 1924, reproduced in R. Gaffé, *Giorgio de Chirico. Le voyant*, 1946, Brussels



fig. 13 G. de Chirico, *Le muse inquietanti*, 1918, oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm, private collection

acquired the painting but, in all likelihood, he would have been unaware that it was a later copy. Such a theory is strengthened by Gaffé's failure to convince Breton to part with his *Mystère et mélancolie d'une rue* (1914). If he had known and approved of the Bretonian practice of commissioning de Chirico copies of early Metaphysical paintings, it follows that Gaffé might have asked Breton to commission a copy of this 1914 work on the Belgian collector's behalf.

Giorgio de Chirico. *Le voyant* (1946)

Gaffé's publication *Giorgio de Chirico. Le voyant* (1946) provides much additional information about his thoughts towards de Chirico whom he knew personally. Whilst we have yet to establish when they first met, their last meeting took place in Brussels in December 1931, as stated at the beginning

friend of Breton, Paul Éluard, Benjamin Péret and René Crevel. Writing to thank Soby for his copy of his new publication *Giorgio de Chirico* (1955), Jean felt obliged to clarify the following: "[...] Concerning the letter written by Chirico to Gala Eluard about the copying for a cheap price of "Les Muses inquietantes" and "Les Poissons sacrés": Breton has shown me once the letters Chirico sent him at the same period, and one of these letters was addressed to Breton's wife (today Mme. Simone Collinet) in exactly the same terms, stating the prices asked by the owners of the pictures, offering to make copies "qui sauront d'autre difant que d'être.... avec une matière plus belle en une technique plus savante" ["that will have no other differences other than be painted with a more beautiful material and a more learned technique"], eh.... Presumably it was a sort of circular letter that Chirico sent around to sell his replicas?? The letter to Mrs. Breton is also dated March 10, 1924 [...]" See letter from M. Jean, 17 rue Hégésippe Moreau, Paris, to J. T. Soby, Brushy Ridge Road, New Canaan, Connecticut, 23 October 1955. See Papers of James Thrall Soby, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (GRI), 910128, box 3, folder 3.6. It was later established that Jean and Soby were talking about one and the same letter. See *Giorgio de Chirico. Letters to André and Simone Breton*, «Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico», n. 1-2, Tèchne Editore, Rome, 2002, pp. 151-152 (trans. by M. Harss). Prior to Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* appearing as '1916' in the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 1936), Breton listed the 1924 copy as '1917' when it appeared in the gallery window of Galerie Surréaliste in c. 1927, as well as in the dedicatory issue *Giorgio de Chirico* («Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique», Cahier, n. 8, Antwerp, Dec. 1929), and his publication *What's Surrealism* (Paris, 1934; English ed., London, 1936).

of the 1946 booklet.¹⁷ On that occasion, de Chirico bought Gaffé a copy of the recently-published *Calligrammes* (1930), a publication that remained in his collection until it was sold at auction in 1956. Although they met for the last time in 1931, the Belgian collector and de Chirico remained in contact for several years as testified by a letter the artist sent Gaffé in late 1935 expressing his interest in organising an exhibition in Brussels.¹⁸ The 1946 publication also features 24 reproductions of the artist's work ranging in date from 1910-1926, at least seven of which once formed part of Gaffé's collection.¹⁹ As an advocate of de Chirico's early Metaphysical work, Gaffé's decision to include reproductions of three paintings of horses and an archaeologist (all dated 1926) would suggest that he also approved of select artwork executed in Paris in the second half of the 1920s.

Gaffé's lengthy article (a total of 35 pages) is noteworthy for the Belgian collector's perceptive understanding about de Chirico's early Metaphysical painting and the feelings that his work conveyed. To this end, he provides extensive commentary about memory, nostalgia, infinity, eternity, enigma, mystery, immortality, silence, shadows, second vision, contemplation, introspection and displacement. Praiseworthy of de Chirico's heightened intellect and ability to combine intelligence and art, Gaffé - an important collector of Surrealist work - was well aware that the artist's work contrasted significantly with Surrealist interests and beliefs.²⁰ For him "[de Chirico's] painting has taken a genuinely new path and is less than that which Picasso and Braque were trying to rejuvenate at the same time, that of poetry understood as a means of knowledge, or even as an instrument for philosophical investigations."²¹

¹⁷ This recollection is corroborated by Gaffé's signed copy of the artist's novel *Hebdomeros* (1929): "À René Gaffé. Très cordialement G. de Chirico Bruxelles 19-12-31." For a reproduction, see «Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico», n. 17-18, Maretti Editore, Falciano, p. 391.

¹⁸ In his letter, de Chirico explained: "I would like to exhibit in Brussels (these are paintings from the Metaphysical period) where I am not known yet. I had a very successful exhibition here in Paris, and now I'm organising another one in America." Letter from G. de Chirico, to R. Gaffé, Brussels, 29 November 1935, whereabouts unknown, cited in Gaffé, 1963, p. 105; in André, 2001, p. 218. The original French reads: "Je désirerais exposer à Bruxelles (il s'agit de tableaux de sa période métaphysique) où l'on ne me connaît pas encore. J'ai eu ici à Paris une exposition qui a eu beaucoup de succès et maintenant, je suis en train d'en organiser une autre en Amérique."

¹⁹ The de Chirico works reproduced with the date specified in the publication (paintings once owned by Gaffé are marked by an asterisk) include: *Self-portrait* [1924] opposite frontispiece; 1. *Lénigme d'un soir d'automne* (1910); 2. *Autoportrait* (1910); 3. *Melanconia* (1912)*; 4. *Les Artichauts* (1913); 5. *Souvenir d'Italie* (1913)* [*La récompense du dévin*]; 6. *Le Chant d'Amour* (1914); 7. *Intérieur Métaphysique* (1914)* [*Le regret*, 1916]; 8. *Les Joies et les Enigmes d'une heure étrange* (1914); 9. *La Nostalgie du Poète* (1914); 10. *Le Cerveau de l'Enfant* (1914); 11. *Les deux Sœurs* (1915); 12. *Le Vaticanateur* (1915); 13. *La Révolte du Sage* (1916)*; 14. *L'Ange Juif* (1916)*; 15. *Le Salut de l'ami lointain* (1916); 16. *Grand intérieur métaphysique* (1917); 17. *Les Muses Inquiétantes* (1917)*; 18. *Nature-morte évangélique* (1918); 19. *Portrait du Peintre* (1919); 20. *Le double portrait* (1919)*; 21. *Les Chevaux* (1926); 22. *Les Chevaux devant la Mer* (1926); 23. *Le Mannequin Sédentaire* (1926).

²⁰ The sole Surrealist-charged comment that Gaffé makes in the entire essay regards de Chirico's *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire* (1914, Musée national d'Art moderne/CCI, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris), the bullseye portrayed on his head supposedly proof that he was, in fact, some kind of clairvoyant (Apollinaire subsequently received a shrapnel wound to his temple in the spring of 1916). Gaffé's later publication, *En parlant de peinture* (ed. de Rache, Brussels, 1960) provides a far more critical discourse about de Chirico's post-1925 production, insinuating of possible links between the artist and Fascism. By 1960, Gaffé declared his later artwork as "premature sterility, a show of powerlessness before the obstacle that constitutes, that must constitute for every creative spirit, the work that he had more or less happily produced up until that point." The original French reads: "stérilité prématurée, une manière d'impuissance devant l'obstacle que constitue, que doit constituer pour tout esprit créateur, l'œuvre qu'il a plus ou moins heureusement réalisée jusque-là." Cited in André, 2001, p. 236.

²¹ The original French reads: "la peinture [of de Chirico] a pris un chemin véritablement nouveau et qui est moins celui que Picasso et Braque tentaient, dans le même moment, de rejuvenir, que celui de la poésie considérée comme un moyen de connaissance, voire comme un instrument d'investigations philosophiques."

At the start of the essay, Gaffé provides a general interpretation of de Chirico as man and artist:

Chirico, and this is an observation that I must immediately address, combined an acute sense of imagination that is rarely seen in painters, even the most gifted of them, with the privilege of a lively intelligence. He is not just an innovator in pictorial art, but also a writer of whom it can be said that, although only occasionally mingling with the literary world, he was able to acquire an honourable place in this field. His study on Courbet, his various journal articles, the famous *Hebdomeros* above-all testify to his mind's vivacity and his perfect knowledge of a language that, nevertheless, was not his own. [...] I confess that, in front of the beautiful canvases I owned by him, *Les Muses inquiétantes*, *L'Ange juif*, *Melancia*, Chirico contemplated the source and senses of his inspirations, but he told me nothing of it and I did not have the curiosity to question him about what his brush had translated so sovereignly. I only noticed that he applied greater sensitivity to the *Double Portrait* where the painter's silhouette fades behind the image of his mother, he who had left behind (often in the hands of Surrealist writers, his earliest admirers who became his most violent critics) an astonishing work, conventional in appearance, but full of disturbing mysteries. He seemed to have definitively turned his back on this past, whose disappearance I bitterly regretted, in order to satisfy himself with issues about simple forms; and I understood that this double portrait signalled the hour of his final farewell to his Metaphysical period.²²

Gaffé also discusses more specific details about de Chirico's paintings, such as the statue protagonists that linger within his carefully orchestrated deserted Italian squares, or the disquieting presence of illogical shadows:

After contemplating these kings, these municipality heads dressed in stone, Chirico brought them to life, but with a life of mystery, beyond all birth and death. Stone has not ceased to live; there lies true immortality. The statues of Turin – and before them, those of Hermes, Zeus and all the gods of Olympus whom Chirico got to know in Greece – became an integral part of his work, familiar companions of his exploration through the pictorial universe.

[...] However, we are led to camp outside the world in front of these landscapes of infinity, but a precious possibility of escape is given to us. These few characters who are so similar to us do not sink silently into the shadow; they dominate it and, in a way, petrify it. So the drama of silence gently, slowly, unfolds, that of invisible presences, the image of a world at once real and imaginary, sterile and lyrical, old and current.²³

²² The original French reads: "*Chirico, et c'est là une constatation qu'il me faut tout de suite introduire, joint au privilège d'une vive intelligence une imagination aigüe qui apparaît rarement chez les peintres, même les mieux doués. Il n'est pas seulement un novateur dans l'art pictural, mais c'est aussi un écrivain dont on peut dire que, s'il ne s'est mêlé qu'occasionnellement au monde littéraire, il a su acquérir dans ce domaine une place honorable. Son étude sur Courbet, ses différents articles de revue, le fameux Hebdomeros surtout témoignent de la vivacité de son esprit et de sa connaissance parfaite d'une langue qui, pourtant, n'était pas la sienne. [...] J'avoue que, devant les belles toiles que je possédais de lui, Les Muses inquiétantes, L'Ange juif, Melancia, Chirico réfléchissait sur la source et les sens de ses inspirations, mais il ne m'en dit rien et je n'eus pas la curiosité de l'interroger sur ce que son pinceau avait traduit si souverainement. Je remarquai seulement qu'il regardait avec un plaisir plus sensible le Double Portrait où la silhouette du peintre s'efface derrière l'image de sa mère, lui qui avait laissé (souvent aux mains d'écrivains surréalistes, ses premiers admirateurs devenus ses plus violents contempteurs) une œuvre étonnante, d'apparence conventionnelle, mais regorgeant de mystères inquiétants. Il semblait avoir tourné définitivement le dos à ce passé, dont pour moi je regrettais amèrement la disparition, pour se satisfaire de problèmes de simple plastique et je compris que ce double portrait avait marqué l'heure des adieux définitifs à sa période métaphysique.*"

²³ The original French reads: "*Après avoir contemplé ces rois, ces chefs de municipalité habillés de pierres, Chirico les a rendus vivants, mais*

Referencing the publication's title – *Le voyant* – Gaffé discusses de Chirico's gift of second sight and ability to spiritually transform everyday objects, images and ideas, at times aided by 'extreme displacement':

This glance at an imaginary world is a sort of second vision. And it is here that Chirico appears as a Seer and meets the merit of the qualifier that we attach to his name. He is, one might say, after Plato, the contemplator of another world which was a real world. That he had found in the realities of this world the means to come to terms with these realities, this is where the difficulties which he had to overcome and which he overcame arose. For the gift of visual memory carried into the imagination (and we must insist on the virtue of this exceptional ability) is the prerogative of just a small number of artists.

[...] His clarity, his precision, he expresses them by means of straight perspectives of geometric monuments, by means of hardened characters, minerals. This is not – though some may have thought – a sham, but a logical culmination of his foresight. He opens a world for us for which he alone possessed the key. [...] The elements he disposes with order, with method are natural, almost palpable, and this literal transcription is the material substance of his work. The spiritual substance, inevitably, flows from it by the miracle of transubstantiation [that turns] feelings into images, [and] ideas into objects. We saw that Chirico possessed this rare gift of creating an atmosphere [that produces an] extreme change of scene. By this, such is the power of the assembled elements, [that] it triggers a sort of stupor, mysterious and logical [feeling] within us. Let another take hold of the process, we will soon see it lead to the coldest academy. A great calm possesses it [...].²⁴

d'une vie toute de mystère, hors de toute naissance et de toute mort. Les pierres n'ont pas cessé de vivre ; là git la vraie immortalité. Les statues de Turin – et avant elles, celles d'Hermès, de Zeus et de tous les dieux de l'Olympe que Chirico rencontra en Grèce – devenaient partie intégrante de son œuvre, les compagnes familières de son exploration à travers l'univers pictural. [...] Cependant, nous voici amenés à camper en dehors du monde devant ces paysages de l'infini, mais une possibilité précieuse d'évasion nous est donnée. Ces quelques personnages qui nous sont si semblables ne s'enfoncent pas silencieusement dans l'ombre; ils dominent celle-ci et, en quelque sorte, la pétrifient. Alors doucement, lentement, le drame du silence se déroule, celui des présences invisibles, l'image d'un monde à la fois réel et imaginaire, stérile et lyrique, vieux et actuel."

²⁴The original French reads: "Ce coup d'œil sur un monde imaginaire, c'est une sorte de seconde vision. Et c'est ici que Chirico fait figure de Voyant et rencontre le mérite du qualificatif que nous accolons à son nom. Il est, pourrait-on dire de lui après Platon, le contemplateur d'un autre monde qui fut un monde réel. Qu'il ait trouvé dans les réalités de ce monde le moyen de se ressouvenir de ces réalités, c'est là que surgirent les difficultés qu'il eût à vaincre et qu'il vainquit. Car le don de la mémoire visuelle transporté dans l'imaginaire (et il faut insister sur la vertu de cette aptitude exceptionnelle), n'est l'apanage que d'un nombre réduit d'artistes. [...] Sa clarté, sa précision, il les exprime à l'aide des perspectives rectilignes de monuments géométriques, par le truchement de personnages durcis, minéraux. Ce n'est pas là – quoiqu'en aient pensé certains – de l'imposture, mais un aboutissement logique de sa clairvoyance. Il entrouvre pour nous un monde dont seul il possédait la clé. [...] Les éléments qu'il dispose avec ordre, avec méthode sont naturels, quasi palpables et cette transcription littéraire est la substance matérielle de son œuvre. De celle-ci, fatalement, découle la substance spirituelle par le miracle d'une transubstantiation de sentiments en images, d'idées en objets. [...] Nous avons vu que Chirico possédait ce don rare de créer une ambiance d'extrême dépaysement. Par-là, il déclenche en nous une sorte du stupeur, mystérieuse et logique, telle est la puissance des éléments assemblés. Qu'un autre s'empare du procédé, on le verra bien vite aboutir à la plus froide académie. Un grand calme le possède [...]."

The *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 11 June – 4 July 1936)

A triumphant feat of ambitious and complex planning and collaboration, the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (New Burlington Galleries, London, 11 June – 4 July 1936, fig. 14) marked the official launch of Surrealism in Britain.²⁵ The brainchild of Roland Penrose and David Gascoyne, who acted as the show's main organisers (with the full consent and support of Breton and Éluard), the London exhibition featured 78 artists from 14 different countries with a total of 392 exhibits. Upon opening, the much-anticipated show became an overnight sensation with around 2000 people attending the vernissage and a visitor attendance of c. 23,000 people over 24 days. Owing to an extremely short lead-in time (the show was organised in a matter of months) and the sheer width and breadth of European loans, five different committees were set up (England, France, Belgium, Scandinavia and Spain) to supervise negotiations and logistics. As representative of Belgium, Mesens played a fundamental role in securing loans (particularly works by Magritte and Delvaux) and overseeing shipping and insurance matters from his native Brussels.

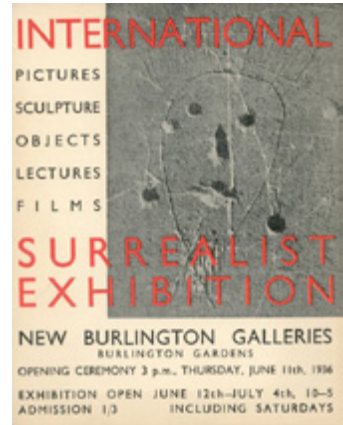


fig. 14 Advertisement for the *International Surrealist Exhibition*, New Burlington Galleries, London, 11 June – 4 July 1936



fig. 15 Front cover of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* catalogue (London, 1936)

ALEXANDER CALDER		
46. Sculpture	See by Mrs. R. P. Smith, Paris	1932
47. Mobile		1936
GERMINE DE CHIRICO		
48. The Tower	See by John Mooreaux, Paris	1932
49. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
50. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
51. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
52. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
53. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
54. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
55. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
56. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
57. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
58. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
59. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
60. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
61. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
62. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
GEOFFREY HARTNETT		
63. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
64. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
65. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
66. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
67. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
68. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
69. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
70. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
71. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
72. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
73. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
74. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
75. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
76. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
77. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
78. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
79. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
80. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
81. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
82. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
83. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
84. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
85. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
86. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
87. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
88. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
89. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
90. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
91. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
92. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
93. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
94. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
95. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
96. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
97. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
98. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
99. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932
100. The Bridge	See by Mrs. Paul Strand, Paris	1932

fig. 16 List of 12 de Chirico exhibits (exh. cat. nos. 46-57) in the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 1936)

Heralded as the unsuspecting forefather of Surrealism by Breton and the Surrealist movement, an important place was reserved for de Chirico in the show: he was represented with 12 works (cat. nos. 46-57), all of which were listed as belonging to his early Metaphysical period (figs. 15-16).²⁶ Three of such loans came from Gaffé's collection: *Mélanconia* (cat. n. 54, listed as '1913' but executed in 1912, fig. 17); *Le muse inquietanti* (cat. n. 55, listed as '1916' but painted

²⁵ For further reading about the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 1936), see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 57-59, 281-292 and 386-392.

²⁶ As detailed in fn. 16 of this paper, Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* (cat. n. 55), which was listed as '1916', was the 1924 copy commissioned by Breton of the 1918 original painting owned by Castelfranco.



fig. 17 Installation photograph of the *International Surrealist Exhibition*, London, 1936, featuring de Chirico's *Mélancolie* (1912, cat. n. 54) in the lower right-hand corner

relationships and developing friendships. In a letter dated 10 April 1936 from Breton to Penrose, for example, one learns that it was Breton, rather than Mesens, who initially secured the loans from Gaffé (three by de Chirico and three by Miró):

My dear friend,

Together with your letter, I have also received this morning a reply from René Gaffé, who has authorised me to select the works that we would like to exhibit in London from his collection. We are therefore saved as far as Chirico is concerned, as among others he has a very large Chirico painting (120 high) and "Mélanconia", which is the most sensational of the three Chiricos [...].²⁷

Breton wrote to Penrose again ten days later (20 April 1936), a letter that would soon change the course of Penrose's life and career: Firstly, Breton asked him to get in touch with Gaffé to assist with the de Chirico and Miró loans, thereby marking the start of a relationship that would soon culminate in Penrose acquiring 40 first-rate works by de Chirico, Picasso and Miró from the Belgian collector. And secondly, Breton instructed Penrose to contact Mesens, which appears to have constituted their first point of direct contact too. As detailed in due course, the two quickly developed a lifelong working rapport and close friendship, with Mesens playing a fundamental role in broker-

in 1924); and *L'ange juif* (cat. n. 56, listed as '1917' but executed in 1916) (fig. 18). A brief examination of select correspondence between Breton, Gaffé, Penrose and Mesens regarding the three loans, as well as the sale of Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* (which took place shortly after the show had opened), provides a fascinating insight into their professional re-



fig. 18 G. de Chirico, *L'ange juif*, 1916, oil on canvas, 68.3 × 45.1 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, 1998), New York

²⁷ Breton's comment about "a very large canvas (120 high)" relates to the 1924 copy of *Le muse inquietanti* rather than the smaller *Mélanconia* (1912) or *L'ange juif* (1916). It is possible that the difference in height (120 cm instead of 97 cm) relates to the framed versus unframed sizes. See letter from A. Breton, Paris, to R. Penrose, London, 10 April 1936; The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0703/3; in Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 283-284 (trans. by A. Jones). The original French reads: "Mon cher Ami, / en même temps que votre lettre je reçois ce matin la réponse de René Gaffé qui m'autorise à choisir dans sa collection les pièces que nous voudrions voir à Londres. Aussi sommes-nous sauvés du côté Chirico, dont il doit posséder une très grande toile (120 en hauteur) entre plusieurs autres, dont une «Mélanconia» qui est l'un des trois Chirico les plus sensationnels [...]."

ing the Gaffé-Penrose sale (July 1937). Further to their collaboration on the *International Surrealist Exhibition* and the aforementioned sale, Penrose asked Mesens to become the Managing Director of 'The London Gallery', which Penrose acquired in 1938, as well as work as editor-in-chief for the «The London Bulletin» (1938-1940), the gallery's monthly journal. In Breton's letter, he wrote:

My dear friend,

[...] As regards the exhibition, I have persuaded René Gaffé, of 20 avenue Louise, Brussels, to lend us: 1° Chirico's "Melanconia", "The Disquieting Muses" and "The Jewish Angel"; 2° Miró's "Ploughed earth", "Maternity" and "Harlequins' Carnival". He would like you to write to him with the name of the insurance company and to let him know if you consent to the paintings being shipped by the company Mommen, of 37 rue de la Charité, Brussels, in whom he has complete confidence. Please do your utmost to keep him happy as the six paintings that he has agreed to loan us are of crucial importance. [...].

Could you get in touch with E.L.T. Mesens, of 55 rue de Countrai, Brussels – Ovest, who is handling Magritte's shipment? You may well have already met him in London this week, but if not then could you give him any information about insurance and the shipment to Magritte [...].²⁸

It appears that Penrose followed through with Breton's request with his letter to Gaffé on 23 April 1936. Although this letter has yet to be located, Gaffé mentions it in his letter of 29 April in which he discusses the sizes and insurance values for the six de Chirico and Miró loans.²⁹ Details of the three de Chirico works were specified in Gaffé's letter as such:

- i) *Melancholia* - 0.88m (width) x 1.02m (height) with insurance value of £150.
- ii) *Les Muses inquiétantes* - 0.83m (width) x 1.16m (height) with insurance value of £200.
- iii) *L'Ange juif* - 0.82m (width) x 0.99m (height) with insurance value of £100.

Dear Sir,

In response to your letter of the 23rd [23 April 1936], with which I absolutely agree, please find below the exact list of sizes and values for the paintings that I will lend for the International Surrealist Exhibition [...]. It is understood that prior to the paintings' departure your insurers will send me a cover letter for the sums indicated above covering all risks: fire, theft, or breakage of frames or glazing that cover the paintings and make sure that the insured amount will be paid in the event that all or

²⁸ See letter from A. Breton, Paris, to R. Penrose, London, 20 April 1936; The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0703/4; in Noel-Johnson, 2017, p. 284 (trans. by A. Jones). The original French reads: "Mon cher Ami, [...] En ce qui concerne l'exposition, j'ai obtenu e René Gaffé, 20 avenue Louise à Bruxelles qu'il nous prête: / 1° de Chirico : «Melanconia», «Les Muses inquiétantes» et «L'ange juif», / 2° de Miró : «Terre labourée», «Maternité» et «Carnaval d'Arlequins». / Il demande que vous lui écriviez pour lui donner le nom de la compagnie d'assurances et lui dire si vous acceptez que les toiles soient expédiées par Mommen, 37 rue de la Charité à Bruxelles qui a toute sa confiance. Veuillez, autant que possible, à le contenter car les six toiles promises par lui sont de toute importance [...]. Peut-être pourrez-vous vous entendre directement avec E. L. T. Mesens, 55 rue de Countrai, Bruxelles – Ovest qui s'occupe de l'envoi de Magritte. Il se peut du reste que vous l'ayez rencontré cette semaine à Londres. Au cas contraire, voulez-vous bien aussi lui donner toutes indications au sujet de l'assurance et de l'expédition à Magritte [...]."

²⁹ The fact that the letter opens with a generic 'Monsieur' strengthens the theory that it was addressed to Penrose (constituting Gaffé's first address to Penrose) rather than Mesens, with Gaffé and Mesens being on more familiar (albeit still formal) terms having known one another for over a decade.

part of the paintings are damaged. You will forgive me for taking such picky precautions, but I have never lent paintings without them being returned damaged and I decided never to loan anymore if it were not for what I feel for Surrealism, for André Breton and the painters that you exhibit [who are] the most alive, [who display the] most active sympathy. But I can no longer accept seeing my paintings and frames returned in [such] a deplorable state, happened on several occasions, and I kindly ask you to ensure that all due care is taken with them.

I would be grateful if you would send me an invitation for the exhibition and all related events, as I will do my utmost to attend [...].³⁰

On 19 May 1936, Penrose wrote to Mesens with further details about the Gaffé loans, including insurance issues.³¹ Although they had only been introduced by Breton just a month prior, their frequent correspondence regarding logistics for the *International Surrealist Exhibition* resulted in a more informal tone. Addressing Mesens as “*Cher ami*”, Penrose informed him that he hoped to receive the Gaffé loans by 8 June, with the vernissage planned for 11 June. He added that Breton would arrive in London on 6 June (presumably to assist with the exhibition hang) and planned to remain for the opening, whilst Éluard (who had irreparably fallen out with Breton by then) intended to arrive several days after the opening and remain for Dalí’s lecture *Fantômes paranoïaques authentiques* (1 July 1936). In recognition of the invaluable assistance that Mesens had provided for securing loans in Belgium, particularly works by Magritte and Delvaux, Penrose informed him that he would be listed in the exhibition catalogue as part of the Belgian Committee. The two clearly had yet to meet in person, with Penrose closing the letter with his enthusiastic delight at being able to finally meet him in London at the opening.

As specified in Gaffé’s letter of 29 April 1936, he asked to receive an invitation to the opening of the show. Indeed, his name and Brussels address can be found on an undated hand-written *Private View List* compiled by Penrose.³² Gaffé did manage to attend the show’s opening in London on 11 June 1936 as confirmed by his copy of the exhibition catalogue (*l’exemplaire de René Gaffé*), which

³⁰ Letter from René Gaffé, Brussels, to unidentified person (assumed to be Roland Penrose, London), 29 April 1936, Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.7 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence D-G). A logical explanation for the presence of this letter in the Papers of E.L.T. Mesens is probably due to the close working relationship between Mesens and Penrose from 1936 onwards. The original French reads: “*Cher Monsieur, / En réponse à votre lettre du 23 courant, avec laquelle je suis absolument d'accord, je vous donne ci-dessous la liste exacte des dimensions et la valeur des tableaux que je vous prêterai pour l'International Surrealist Exhibition [...]. / Il est bien entendu qu'avant le départ de ces tableaux vos assureurs m'enverront une lettre de couverture pour les sommes indiquées ci-dessus couvrant tous les risques quelconques: incendie, vol, bris des cadres ou des verres qui recouvrent les tableaux et prévoyant que la somme assurée sera payée en cas où tout ou partie des tableaux seraient détériorés. / Vous m'excuserez de prendre ces précautions tatillonnes, mais je n'ai jamais prêté de tableaux sans qu'ils me reviennent abîmés et j'ai décidé à ne plus jamais faire aucun prêt si je n'éprouvais pour le surréalisme, pour André Breton et les peintres que vous exposez la plus vive, la plus agissante sympathie. Mais je ne peux plus accepter de voir mes toiles et mes cadres revenir dans un état déplorable, comme ce fut le cas à plusieurs reprises et je vous demanderai de bien vouloir veiller à ce qu'ils soient entourés de tous les soins désirables. / Je vous serais obligé de vouloir bien m'envoyer une invitation pour l'exposition et toutes les manifestations adjointes, car je ferai tout mon possible pour y assister [...].*”

³¹ Letter from Roland Penrose, 20 Downshire Hill, Hampstead, London, NW3, to E.L.T. Mesens, Brussels, 19 May 1936. See Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 18, folder 18.2.

³² Undated hand-written *Private View List* by Roland Penrose. See Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.10 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence P).

bears the signatures of various exhibition committee members and exhibitors (including those of Mesens and Penrose) (fig. 19). He clearly enjoyed his visit to London, remarking how charming he had found the city in June, as seen in a letter to Mesens (24 June 1936).

Shortly after the exhibition's opening, where many of the exhibits were available for sale, two collectors, Arthur Jeffress and Henry Clifford, made formal offers to acquire Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* (the 1924 copy of the 1918 original) via the show's Secretary, Diana Brinton Lee.³³ As seen in Gaffé's letter to Mesens dated 24 June 1936, Gaffé authorised Mesens to negotiate on his behalf. Although Gaffé was reluctant to let the painting go, he explained that he would be prepared to sell it for a minimum of £200, £180 of which was to go to him, leaving Mesens with a £20 commission.

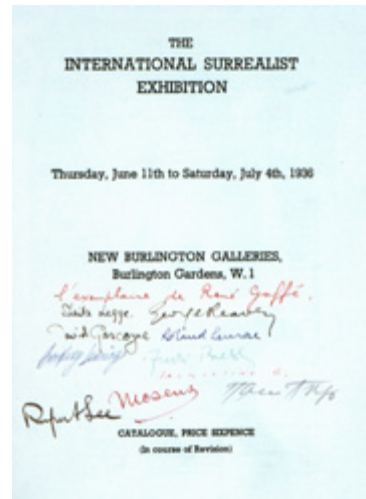


fig. 19 Frontispiece of René Gaffé's copy of the exhibition catalogue for the *International Surrealist Exhibition*, London, 1936, bearing his signature and those of various exhibition committee members and exhibitors

*Letter from René Gaffé to E.L.T Mesens, 24 June 1936:*³⁴

Dear Mr Mesens,

I found your kind [letter] of 21 [21 June 1936], upon leaping from the train. I am about to leave shortly but will be back on Saturday morning. I apologise for such haste. You've understood perfectly. I have the heart of a collector and I am saddened more than I dare to say farewell to such beautiful

³³ Caputo recently indicated that Mesens was involved in selling *Le muse inquietanti* to Henry Clifford of The Philadelphia Museum of Art [Clifford actually worked for Pennsylvania Museum of Art, Philadelphia] for £300 (although no source for this claim was specified). See Caputo, 2017, p. 56, fn. 7.

³⁴ Undated letter labelled "Mercredi" (but corresponds to 24 June 1936) from René Gaffé to E.L.T Mesens. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 9, folder 9.20. The original French reads: "Cher Monsieur Mesens, / Trouvé votre aimable du 21 [21 June 1936], au saut du train. Je repars tout à l'heure mais serai de retour samedi matin. C'est vous dire ma hâte, que vous excuserez. Vous m'avez parfaitement compris. J'ai le cœur d'un collectionneur et je suis peiné plus que je n'ose le dire de me séparer de belles pièces que j'ai eu la chance de découvrir – mais après quelles recherches! – et, disons aussi, à quels prix. Je vous sais ami, vous ne doutez pas me faire fort en ceci: c'est pourquoi j'accepte 180 livres net et au comptant pour "Les Muses Hallucinées" si vous ne pouvez en avoir 200. Je vous sais excellent vendeur et persuasif. C'est pourquoi je compte sur vous. Quant au Miro, c'est un morceau de mon cœur qui s'en va. Si vous ne pouvez en obtenir 200, traitez à 175; lâchete sera une belle opération car l'œuvre est magnifique. En somme, j'avais lâché à 375 les deux comme je vous le disais, ce qui vous permet le jeu entre les deux amateurs pour atteinte cette somme. Mais je sais que vous défendez, en ami, mes intérêts. Il est entendu que ces prix sont nets et que je serai en possessions du chèque très vite. Si j'ai tout ce hâte, si je consens à ce qui est pour moi un sacrifice, car j'aime mes toiles, c'est – entre nous – que j'ai un gros paiement à effectuer en francs français. Je comptais sur la dévaluation; elle n'est pas venue, ce qui augmente mon découvert. / J'ai pris grand intérêt au succès, que vous me narrez, des peintres surréalistes. Nul plus que moi ne pourrait s'en réjouir. Vous devez être – n'est-ce pas? – dans la joie la plus grande. Et je vous comprends. Bravo et félicitations pour vous qui vous êtes défendu. Très bien le catalogue [...]. Pour les toiles, je me fie donc à vous. Croyez, cher Monsieur Mesens, à mes sentiments très amicaux. / René Gaffé / Written below signature at bottom of 2nd page: Que Londres est charmant en juin! Bons souvenirs à Man Ray / Written down left-hand side of 2nd page: Qu'ont donc les gens à vouloir des Chirico. Je reçois une nouvelle demande [...] pour l'étranger. Rien à faire avant que j'ai reçu votre réponse définitive."

works that I had the chance to discover – but after much research! – and, let’s also add, at what a price. I know you are a friend, and that you do not doubt being able to achieve a [good deal] out of this: that is why, if you are unable to have 200 [Italian lira], I accept 180 lira net and upright for “Les Muses Hallucinées”. I know you are an excellent salesman and persuasive. That is why I am counting on you. As for the Mirò, it is like I am losing a piece of my heart. If you can’t get 200 [lira], negotiate 175; the acquisition will be a good deal because the work is beautiful. In short, I had dropped to 375 for both of them like I told you, which allows you to play back and forth between the two amateur [collectors] in order to obtain this figure. But I know that you, as a friend, will defend my interests. It is clear that these prices are net and that I should receive a cheque very quickly. If I have all of this in haste, if I consent to what I perceive to be a sacrifice for me, because I love my paintings, it is so – and this remains between us – that I receive a large payment made out in French francs. I was counting on the devaluation; it didn’t happen, which increases my overdraft.

I was greatly interested in hearing from you about the success of the Surrealist painters. No one could be more pleased than I. You must be – I’m sure - [experiencing] the greatest of joys. And I understand you. Bravo and congratulations to you for defending yourself. Very well done with the catalogue [...]. For the canvases, I trust you. Please accept, dear Mr Mesens, my warmest best wishes, René Gaffé

Written below signature at bottom of 2nd page:

How charming London is in June! Happy recollections of Man Ray

Written down left-hand side of 2nd page:

What do people have to do who want a Chirico. I received a new request [...] from abroad. I won’t do anything until I receive your final answer.

An analysis of other correspondence, however, reveals how Mesens successfully negotiated a much higher price for *Le muse inquietanti*. The first offer of £150 was made by Arthur Jeffress (1905-1961), a British-born banker, art collector and later gallerist, although it was dismissed immediately as being far too low for a painting of such calibre.³⁵

³⁵ Jeffress’ art collection consisted of at least four works by de Chirico, including *La Famille du peintre* (*The Painter’s Family*, 1926), which he acquired from Pierre Matisse in 1936, the same year as the *International Surrealist Exhibition*, London. It was sold to Princess A. M. Callimachi in 1946, who, in turn, sold it to the Tate Gallery in 1951. For further information about Jeffress, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 119-120.

*Letter from Arthur Jeffress, London, to Secretary (Diana Brinton Lee), London, 24 June 1936:*³⁶

Dear Madam,

I thank you for your letter of June 15th with regard to my purchase of “The Repentant Birds” by Yves Tanguy.

I should very much like to buy “Les Muses Inquietantes” by Giorgio di [sic] Chirico and would be pleased to know if you would accept £150 (One Hundred and Fifty Pounds) for it.

Yours very truly,

Arthur Jeffress

*Letter from Diana Brinton Lee, London, to Arthur Jeffress, London, 25 June 1936:*³⁷

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of yesterday. With regard to your offer, I regret that the very lowest price which the owner of the “Muses Inquietantes” will accept is £300. As you know, there are very few first class Chiricos in existence, and this is one of the best.

I should be glad if you could let me have a cheque for the Tanguy before the end of the exhibition, when I will send it to Orchard Court unless I hear from you to the contrary.

Yours very truly,

Diana Brinton Lee

Secretary

Whilst Jeffress’ offer was refused, it was used to wield additional pressure to increase an offer of £300 made by Henry Clifford (1904-1974), an important American collector and Curator of Paintings of Philadelphia’s Pennsylvania Museum of Art. Although the exhibition secretary, Diana Brinton Lee, explained to Clifford (clearly on Mesens’ instructions) that the painting’s owner would not sell for less than £400 (despite Gaffé having already clarified that he would accept £180 net), Clifford’s offer was eventually accepted thanks to Gaffé’s supposed gesture of goodwill. It can be assumed, therefore, that Mesens received a very handsome commission of £120, with the remaining £180 going to Gaffé, who, no doubt, remained unaware of the agreed sale price. Although Clifford asked for *Le muse inquietanti* to be sent to the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, the correspondence makes clear that the painting was a personal acquisition. This was confirmed shortly afterwards, when Clifford agreed to lend the painting to *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 9 December 1936 – 17 January 1937, cat. n. 214). The painting has long remained in a private American collection.

³⁶ Letter from A. Jeffress, 30a Orchard Court, Portman Square, London, to Secretary (Diana Brinton Lee), International Surrealist Exhibition, New Burlington Galleries, London, 24 June 1936. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.8 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence H-L).

³⁷ Letter from D. Brinton Lee, London, to A. Jeffress, 30a Orchard Court, Portman Square, London, W1, 25 June 1936. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.8 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence H-L).

*Letter from Diana Brinton Lee, London, to Henry Clifford, Campden, 25 June 1936:*³⁸

Dear Mr Clifford,

M. Mesens has at last heard from the Belgian owner [René Gaffé] of the Chirico, and I accordingly wired you this morning. "Owner Chirico says three hundred lowest price Lee".

In his letter M. Gaffé says that he believes this to be one of the finest Chiricos in existence, and had not intended to let it go under £400, but is doing so out of goodwill to Mesens and the exhibition. He mentions that a less important picture of the same period, "Les Deux Mannequins de la Tour Rose", was recently sold in America for £400.³⁹

Perhaps you will let me know in due course what you decide. We are having other offers and enquiries, but I am in any case reserving the picture until I hear from you.⁴⁰

Yours truly,

Secretary.

*Letter from Henry Clifford, Campden, to Diana Brinton Lee, London, 26 June 1936:*⁴¹

Dear Mrs Lee,

I am enclosing the cheque for the Chirico painting "Les Muses Inquietantes" made out to The International Surrealist Exhibition as Mr Ruthven Todd instructed me on the telephone today.

At the close of your exhibition would you be able to ship it to America for me or must I make some arrangement with shippers myself? If you could conveniently do it for me I should like it to be sent to

HENRY CLIFFORD

PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM OF ART

FAIRMOUNT, PHILADELPHIA, PENN.

I think also it would probably be safer to insure it for three hundred pounds while it is in transit. The shippers could send the bill for everything direct to me here.

Thank you so much for your telegram and kind letters about this picture. It is indeed an interesting Chirico and I am very glad that you and Mr Mesens were successful in persuading the owner to part with it. I found your exhibition most interesting and shall hope to get up to London one day again before it closes.

Very truly yours,

Henry Clifford

³⁸ Facsimile of letter from Secretary (D. Brinton Lee), London, to H. Clifford, Hidcote Manor, Campden, Gloucestershire, 25 June 1936. See Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.6 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence A-C).

³⁹ This painting is more commonly known as *Le duo (The Duo)* (1915, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 59 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York). The work was sold by Éluard in December 1935 to Pierre Matisse, New York, who subsequently sold it to Soby, Farmington, by the end of the year (six months prior to the opening of the *International Surrealist Exhibition*). It is far more likely that this information about the painting's sale price was provided by Mesens, who was a dealer, rather than by Gaffé. Provenance details taken from P. Baldacci, *De Chirico. The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919*, trans. by J. Jennings, Bulfinch Press, New York, 1997, p. 276.

⁴⁰ To date, Jeffress' offer for Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* is the only one to have been found.

⁴¹ Letter from H. Clifford, Hidcote Manor, Campden, Gloucestershire, to D. Brinton Lee, London, 26 June 1936. See Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.6 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence A-C).

*Letter from Diana Brinton Lee, London, to Henry Clifford, Campden, 29 June 1936:*⁴²

Dear Mr Clifford,

Thank you very much for your letter and cheque for which I enclose a receipt.

I have asked our agents, Mssrs Pitt & Scott, to write to you with regard to shipping the picture to America. We have found them extremely careful and reliable and a good deal cheaper than any other agent of which I have experience.

The exhibition is still going very well and I hope that you will have time to visit it again before it closes.

Yours sincerely

Diana Brinton Lee

The *Chirico – Picasso* exhibition (Zwemmer Gallery, London, 10-30 June 1937)

Gaffé's visit to London to attend the opening of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (June 1936), where he met Mesens and was introduced to various exhibiting artists and members of the show's organising committee, including Penrose (as attested by Gaffé's signed copy of the catalogue, fig. 19), soon paved the way for the organisation of two very important shows in London that exclusively exhibited a select part of Gaffé's art collection: *Joan Miró* (6 May – 2 June 1937, fig. 20) and *Chirico – Picasso* (10 - 30 June 1937, figs. 21-22).⁴³ Both were held at the Zwemmer Gallery (26 Litchfield Street, Charing Cross Road, London). The gallery, which was founded in 1929 by Dutchman Anton Zwemmer (1892-1979) and was run in close conjunction with Zwemmer's bookshop and publishing business, acted "as a challenge in the midst of [British] provincial ignorance and philistinism, a beacon of enlightenment" according to Herbert Read.⁴⁴

Gaffé's decision to accept Zwemmer's invitation to hold the two shows turned out to be a particularly auspicious affair for all involved (Gaffé, Zwemmer, Mesens and Penrose). It is highly likely that Mesens, who was very well acquainted with Gaffé's collection, was the first to pitch the idea to Zwemmer on the collector's behalf. A recently-discovered letter from Penrose to Mesens dated 9 October 1936 appears to corroborate this, with Penrose mentioning Mesens' imminent visit to London "[...] when you come here and completely accept the deal you

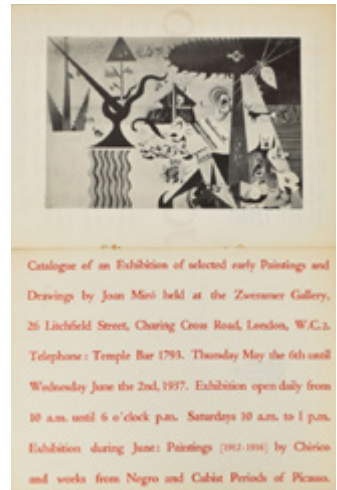


fig. 20 Detail of *Exhibition of selected early Painting and Drawing by Joan Miró*, exh. cat. Zwemmer Gallery, London, 6 May – 2 June 1937

⁴² Facsimile of letter from the Secretary (D. Brinton Lee), London, to H. Clifford, Hidcote Manor, Campden, Gloucestershire, 29 June 1936. See Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 10, folder 10.6 (International Surrealist Exhibition 1936 - Correspondence A-C).

⁴³ For a detailed analysis about the *Chirico – Picasso* exhibition, including transcriptions of the international press coverage, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 300-308.

⁴⁴ H. Read, 1962, cited in N. Vaux Halliday, *More than a bookshop: Zwemmer's and art in the twentieth century*, Philip Publishers, London, 1992, p. 352. For further details about Anton Zwemmer's activity as a gallerist, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 101-103.



fig. 21 Front cover of exhibition catalogue *Chirico - Picasso*, Zwemmer Gallery, London, 10-30 June 1937 fig. 22 Detail of exhibition catalogue, *Chirico - Picasso* (Zwemmer Gallery, London, 10-30 June 1937) featuring de Chirico's *Mélancolie* (1912) owned by Gaffé

made with Gaffé.⁴⁵ Although the precise dynamics about the exhibition's organisation have yet to be established due to the absence of surviving correspondence between Gaffé, Mesens and Zwemmer, Mesens played a pivotal role as intermediary, assisting with insurance and transportation issues (just as he had done for the *International Surrealist Exhibition* the year before) and brokering the Gaffé-Penrose sale upon the show closing on 30 June.

The *Chirico - Picasso* exhibition constituted the first time that the Zwemmer Gallery decided to headline a show with de Chirico.⁴⁶ Consisting of a total of 29 exhibits, the Italian artist was represented by 10 early Metaphysical works (nine paintings and one charcoal drawing), which, according to the accompanying catalogue, were executed between 1912-1916. The remaining 19 works by Picasso (ten paintings, six drawings, one watercolour and two papier collé pieces) ranged in date from 1901 to 1922. Full pages black and white reproductions of two paintings by each artist appear in the accompanying catalogue featuring de Chirico's *Mélancolie* (1912, cat. n. 1) and *L'ange juif* (1916, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York - Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, 1998, cat. n. 10).

Described by the «New York Herald Tribune» as a “stimulating exhibition” (New York, 19 June 1937) and the «Evening Standard» “as adventurous an exhibition as you could wish for” (London, 16 June 1937), the international press coverage highlighted the similarities and differences between

⁴⁵ Letter from R. Penrose, London, to E.L.T. Mesens, Brussels, 9 October 1936, Papers of E.L.T. Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 4, folder 4.3. The original French reads: “[...] quand tu viens ici et accepte entièrement l'arrangement que tu as pu faire avec Gaffé.”

⁴⁶ Since the gallery's opening in 1929, Zwemmer had thus far only exhibited six works by de Chirico in the group show *An Exhibition of Drawings, Lithographs and Etchings by Contemporary French Artists* (19 December 1933 – 6 January 1934) and *Confiserie florentine (Il mercante frigio, 1925)* in the gallery's group Summer and Winter exhibitions of 1936. For further details, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, p. 269, 285 and 295.

the main styles that de Chirico and Picasso had respectively helped develop and inspired: Cubism and Surrealism (or 'Superrealism' as the British press occasionally referred to it as). Recognising the influence that de Chirico's early Metaphysical had exerted on aspects of early twentieth century art, acting as "*the stepping stone for Surrealism*" («The Observer», London, 13 June 1937), his *Mélancolie* (1912) was lauded as being "*uncannily powerful*" («Evening Standard», London, 16 June 1937).

The collection of ten early Metaphysical exhibits by de Chirico lent by Gaffé were of extraordinary importance and quality. Flanked by the two aforementioned reproductions of *Mélancolie* (1912) and *L'ange juif* (1916), the catalogue included a simple list of the artist's work as follows:

1. *Melanconia* [*Mélancolie*] (1912, oil on canvas, 79 x 63.5 cm) – listed as '1912'
2. *Nu* [*au chevaux noirs*] (1912-1913, oil on canvas, 70 x 54 cm) – listed as '1912'
3. *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire* (charcoal and pastel on paper, 61 x 54 cm) – listed as '1913'⁴⁷ (fig. 23)
4. *Intérieure métaphysique* (*Composizione metafisica*) (1916, oil on canvas, 32.4 x 26.4 cm) – listed as '1915' (fig. 24)
5. *Mélancolie du départ* (1916, oil on canvas, 51.8 x 36 cm) – listed as '1915' (fig. 25)
6. *La mort d'un esprit* (1916, oil on canvas, 36 x 33 cm) – listed as '1915' (fig. 26)
7. *Le regret* (1916, oil on canvas, 59.3 x 33 cm) – listed as '1916' (fig. 27)
8. *La révolte d'un sage* (1916, oil on canvas, 67.3 x 59 cm) – listed as '1916' (fig. 28)



fig. 23 Attributed to M. Ernst (formerly attributed to G. de Chirico), *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire*, c. 1934, charcoal and pastel on paper, 61 x 54 cm, private collection



fig. 24 G. de Chirico, *Intérieure métaphysique (Composizione metafisica)*, 1916, oil on canvas, 32.4 x 26.4 cm, private collection

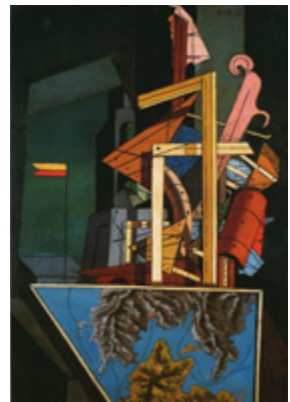


fig. 25 G. de Chirico, *Mélancolie du départ*, 1916, oil on canvas, 51.8 x 35.9 cm, Tate Gallery, London

⁴⁷ This drawing was subsequently attributed to Max Ernst, c. 1934 (see Noel-Johnson, 2017, p. 60, fn. 18, and Noel-Johnson, 2019, p. 67 and 73). According to Baldacci, it was executed in c. 1939 but the Gaffé-Penrose sale proves that it was drawn at an earlier date (Baldacci, 1997, p. 423). Based on a work by Pierre Roy, which was used for the woodcut illustration of the title page of Apollinaire's unpublished *Et moi aussi je suis peintre*, Roy's, work itself was based on de Chirico's *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire* (1914, Musée d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

9. *Portrait du peintre et de sa mère* (1919, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 60.4 cm) – listed as ‘1916’
 10. *L’ange juif* (1916, oil on canvas, 67.3 x 43.8 cm) – listed as ‘1916’

Three paintings from Gaffé’s collection of de Chirico work were notably absent from the Zwemmer Gallery show. The first was *Le muse inquietanti*, (the 1924 copy of the 1918 original), which had recently been sold to Henry Clifford during the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (June 1936), with Mesens negotiating on Gaffé’s behalf, as previously detailed. The second work was *Natura morta. Torino 1888 (Still-life. Turin 1888, fig. 29)*, a painting that is habitually dated 1914, but is widely deemed an early forgery.⁴⁸ As it was exhibited for the first time in the ground-breaking exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (curated by Alfred Barr, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 9 December 1936 – 17 January 1937, cat n. 198), together with Gaffé’s formerly-owned *Le muse inquietanti* (lent by Henry Clifford, cat. n. 214), its absence in London (1937) might be explained by a potential US sale upon the MoMa show closing. The third absentee (from the two London shows of June 1936 and June 1937, as well as the New York MoMA exhibition of 1936–1937) was de Chirico’s *La recompense du dévin* (1913, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, fig. 30). Acquired by Gaffé in 1927 from Galerie La Vierge Poupine (Brussels), the work was sold to the American collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg, Los Angeles, in 1932, thanks to the intervention of Marcel Duchamp who acted as agent.⁴⁹



fig. 26 G. de Chirico, *La mort d'un esprit*, 1916, oil on canvas, 36 x 33 cm, National Gallery of Australia (purchased with the assistance of Harold and Beverly Mitchell, Rupert and Annabel Myer, and the NGA Foundation, 13 December 2006), Canberra



fig. 27 G. de Chirico, *Le regret*, 1916, oil on canvas, 59.7 x 33 cm, The Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York

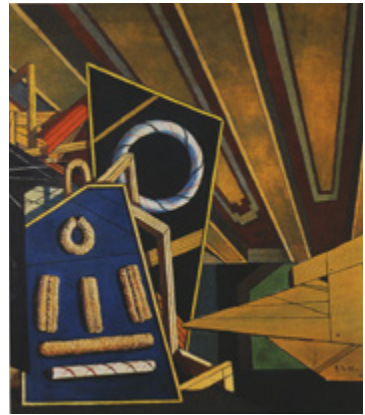


fig. 28 G. de Chirico, *La révolte d'un sage*, 1916, oil on canvas, 67.3 x 59 cm, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London

⁴⁸ De Chirico declared this work a fake. An undated black and white photograph of this painting annotated “*Falso. G. de Chirico*” is located in the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico archives, Rome.

⁴⁹ See provenance notes in a letter from Marcel Duchamp to Walter and Louise Arensberg, 8 September 1951, conserved in Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, PMA Arensberg Archives, CA Use Tax 1951. Detail extracted from the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s website, accessed 29.08.2020.



fig. 29 Unknown artist, *Natura morta*. Torino 1888, oil on canvas, 60 x 46 cm, private collection



fig. 30 G. de Chirico, *La récompense du dévín*, 1913, oil on canvas, 135.5 x 180.5 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950), Philadelphia

The Gaffé-Penrose sale (July 1937)

Despite the exceptionally high quality of the artwork present in the *Joan Miró and Chirico - Picasso* exhibitions, the Zwemmer Gallery only managed to sell 12 of the 52 exhibits during the course of the shows. Aware of the importance of Gaffé's collection and potential deal in the makings, Mesens urged Penrose to acquire the remaining 40 works by de Chirico, Picasso and Miró. Evidently impressed by Mesens' dealings with early twentieth century art since making his acquaintance just one year earlier, Penrose followed the Belgian's advice and negotiations immediately commenced between Mesens, Gaffé and Penrose during June and July 1937. The deal was formalised on 15 July 1937 with Penrose's payment of £6,750 to Gaffé, a very reasonable price for 40 impressive works by three of the most important early twentieth century artists of the time. Mesens received a separate commission directly from Gaffé for acting as the agent. Several years later, Penrose recalled this particular turn of events: "To my surprise Gaffé accepted the offer, which today would be considered derisory."⁵⁰ The collection included world-class works by all three artists such as Picasso's Cubist masterpieces *The Woman in Green* (1909), *The Young Girl with a Mandolin* and *Portrait of Uhde* (both 1910), as well as Miró's *Nude* (1921) and *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (1925). With the exception of de Chirico's *Mélancolie* (1912), which was bought by British collector Peter Watson (1908-1956), Penrose acquired the remaining nine works by de Chirico (fig. 31).⁵¹

⁵⁰ R. Penrose, *Scrap Book 1900-1981*, Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 1981, p. 170.

⁵¹ According to Penrose's list of 40 paintings by Picasso, Miró and de Chirico that he acquired from Gaffé, dated 1 March 1940, Penrose had already sold *Mélancolie* (1912) for £200 and *Portrait du peintre et de mère* (1919) for £120 to the Zwemmer Gallery (see The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0180; in Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 412-413). There seems to be some confusion as to why the Zwemmer Gallery was listed here. Firstly, Peter Watson (who was a silent partner of Penrose's The London Gallery from 1938 onwards) is widely thought to have bought *Mélancolie* during or soon after the *Chirico - Picasso* show in 1937 and secondly, Penrose told Soby that he sold *Portrait du peintre et de mère* directly to the British collector Edward James (1907-1984). Christie's, on the other hand, once specified that James bought it from the Zwemmer Gallery in 1937 (see letter from Soby to James, 15 March 1950, James Thrall Soby Papers, II.C.25, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; and Christie's sale catalogue *Twenty Eight Works from the Edward James Collection*, London, 30 March 1981, lot. 8). It is possible, therefore, that the sale of the two paintings were put through the Zwemmer Gallery's books as a formality or to justify a sales commission. For further details about Peter Watson and his collection of de Chirico works, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 105-108.

N°	Titre	Année	Dimensions	Provenance	Estimation	Remarque
1	Portrait of a man	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
2	Portrait of a woman	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
3	Portrait of a man	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
4	Portrait of a woman	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
5	Portrait of a man	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
6	Portrait of a woman	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
7	Portrait of a man	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
8	Portrait of a woman	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
9	Portrait of a man	1911	110 x 110	Collection de Gaffé	£ 100	
				Total	£ 900	

fig. 31 Penrose's handwritten list of nine works by de Chirico that he acquired from Gaffé in July 1937

Recently-discovered correspondence between Mesens and Gaffé not only confirms that negotiations about the sale began earlier than previously established, but that the deal was initiated by Mesens himself on 4 June 1937, nearly a week before the *Chirico – Picasso* show actually opened (10 June 1937).⁵² This would appear to suggest that Mesens had considered selling the majority of Gaffé's exhibited collection to Penrose from the outset. Similarly to the sale of Gaffé's *Le muse inquietanti* to Clifford in June 1936, Gaffé specified the minimum net price that he wanted for the sale, authorising Mesens to ask for a sum that he felt confident in obtaining. He could either

take his commission in the difference or, alternatively, receive a 10% commission on top of the £6,500 net. As detailed here, Penrose agreed to pay Gaffé £6,750 (excluding Mesens' commission), which means that Mesens managed to successfully negotiate a slightly higher fee on behalf of Gaffé.

*Letter from Gaffé, Brussels, to Mesens, 10 June 1937:*⁵³

Dear Mr Mesens,

I have just returned from a trip abroad and I am in a hurry to reply to your letter of the 4th [June 1937].

Your proposal has received my full attention, but it is no longer necessary to present this deal as being a figure of L. 6,500 for me. Alternatively, if you received 10% of L. 5,850, or of the total original fixed retail price of L. 7,475 (if I should dare use this term for works of art – I apologise!), a reduction would

⁵² Prior to such research, the earliest known letter regarding the Gaffé-Penrose sale negotiations is dated 26 June 1937. See Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 308-309. All correspondence cited here (26 June – 25 August 1937) that is located in the Roland Penrose Archive (Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh) was first consulted by the author in 2007 with transcriptions published in Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 308-313 (trans. by A. Jones).

⁵³ See letter from R. Gaffé, Brussels, to E.L.T Mesens, 10 June 1937, Los Angeles, GRI, Papers of E.L.T Mesens, 920094, box 4, folder 4.5. The original French reads: "Cher Monsieur Mesens, / Je rentre à l'instant d'un voyage à l'étranger et m'empresse de répondre à votre lettre du 4. Votre proposition a eu toute mon attention, mais il faut présenter cette opération non plus comme étant, pour moi, une somme de L. 6.500, mais, si vous touchiez 10%, de L. 5850, soit sur le prix total de L. 7.475 primitivement fixé pour la vente en détail (si j'ose employer ce terme pour des œuvres d'art – je m'en excuse!) un abattement qui se chiffrerait par 235.625 francs, ce qui est beaucoup trop élevé. / Je ne vous vanterai plus les mérites de l'ensemble que j'ai rassemblé. Cela aussi vaut quelque chose, en dehors de la valeur intrinsèque des œuvres. Et d'autre part, je comprends que vous teniez à être récompensé de votre entremise et de votre travail. C'est pourquoi je fixe mon chiffre, pour moi à L. 6.500 nets, mais je vous autorise à garder pour vous la somme supérieure à L. 6.500 que vous pourrez obtenir. Je pense, en vous présentant ainsi l'opération, que vous pourrez – même en rabattant sur L. 7.000 que vous présenterez à l'acquéreur – toucher une commission qui voisnera dans les 50.000 francs. Il va de soi que ceci restera très confidentiellement de vous à moi, de même que le chiffre total que j'aurai pu toucher. J'espère pour vous que l'acquéreur accepte le chiffre de L. 7.000 auquel cas il vous reviendrait 72.500 francs mais, comme vous le dites très justement, il se laissera plus vite d'offrir que le vendeur d'exiger. Mais pour ma part L. 6.500 n'est pas – de loin – la contrepartie de ce que cette collection unique m'a coûté et elle ne fera, avec le temps, que prendre de la plus-value. J'ai encore aujourd'hui ma demande de prêt pour l'un des Picasso et l'un des Miro, - que je transmettrai à l'acquéreur éventuel car je ne donnerai aucun prix tant que l'exposition ne sera pas terminée, pour autant que la collection soit encore à moi à ce moment. A L. 6.500, je laisse tomber, 141.000 francs sur les prix prévus qui, vous l'avez constaté, n'avaient absolument rien d'exagérer. Je me fie à votre talent très réel de vendre et à l'amitié que vous me portez pour caresser l'espoir de voir très bientôt terminée cette affaire pour le sens que je vous indique et où vous ne serez pas défavorisé, car je souhaite de traiter à L. 7.000 pour le total. Je resterai quelque temps en Belgique mais veuillez m'écrire au bureau, je vous prie, d'où la correspondance m'est plus régulièrement envoyé si, parfois, je devais me remettre en route. Et croyez, cher Monsieur Mesens, à mes sentiments cordiaux. / René Gaffé / 116, rue Terre-Neuve, Bruxelles."

involve a discount of 235,625 francs, which is far too high. I will no longer boast about the merits of the collection that I have assembled. It is also worth something, apart from the intrinsic value of the work itself. And on the other hand, I understand that you want to be rewarded for your mediation and your work. That is why I set my figure at L. 6,500 net for me, but I authorise you to keep the figure that you are able to obtain that is greater than L. 6,500. By offering the transaction to you in this way, I think that you will be able to receive a commission that is close to 50,000 francs, even if you settle on L. 7,000 with the buyer. It goes without saying that this will remain very confidential between us, as well as the total figure that I could have received. I hope for your sake that the buyer accepts the figure of L. 7,000, in which case you would receive 72,500 francs, but, as you quite rightly say, he will be quicker to offer than the seller to demand. But for my part, L. 6,500 is not – by far – the counterpart of what this unique collection has cost me and it will, over time, only gain additional value. I still have today my loan request for one of the Picassos and one of the Mirós - which I will hand over accordingly to the eventual buyer because I will not give any price until after the exhibition has finished, provided that the collection is still mine at that time. Of the L. 6,500, I renounce 141,000 francs on the planned prices which, as you noted, were absolutely unexaggerated. I rely on your great talent as a salesman and friendship that I cherish in the hope of seeing this deal being closed very soon in the way indicated to you and in which you will not be disadvantaged, as I hope to close with a total of L. 7,000. I will stay in Belgium for a while, but please write to me at the office, I beg you, where correspondence is sent on to me more regularly if I should occasionally go back. And please accept, dear Monsieur Mesens, my best wishes.

René Gaffé

116, rue Terre-Neuve, Brussels

Draft of handwritten letter with attached list of 40 works sent by Penrose to Gaffé, Brussels, 26 June 1937.⁵⁴

Dear Sir,

I am writing to confirm that I am purchasing from you, through my friend E.L.T. Mesens, the forty paintings by Picasso, Chirico and Miró that are currently in London as part of your collection.

I also confirm that I agree to pay the total sum of 6,750 pounds sterling. This sum will be paid to you by cheque to Barclays Bank, payable from 15 July 1937 in London.

Furthermore, it is agreed that I will take possession of the forty paintings once the current Chirico - Picasso exhibition has closed, with the exception of any paintings that have been sold. In exchange for the latter, the amount for which they are sold will be payable to me.

I would be grateful if you could confirm your acceptance of the above.

Yours sincerely,

[Roland Penrose]

⁵⁴ See The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0180. The original French reads: "Monsieur, / J'ai l'honneur de vous confirmer que je vous achète, par l'entremise de mon ami E. L. T. Mesens, les quarante tableaux de Picasso, Chirico et Miró se trouvant à Londres en ce moment et faisant partie de votre collection. / Je vous confirme aussi mon accord sur la somme globale de Livres sterling 6.750. Cette somme vous sera payée par en un chèque sur la Barclays Bank payable à dater du 15 Juillet 1937 à Londres. / Par ailleurs, il est entendu que j'entrerai en possession des quarante tableaux dès après la clôture de l'exposition Chirico - Picasso en cours à l'exception toutefois des tableaux qui auront été vendus. En échange de ces derniers, la somme qu'ils ont produite me seront sera remise à mon profit. / Vous seriez aimable de me donner votre accord sur la présente et, dans l'attente je vous prie d'agréer mes salutations très distinguées."

*Extract of Penrose's list of forty works by Picasso,
Mirò and de Chirico with specifics about the de Chirico artworks:*

July 1937 Nu [aux cheveux noirs]	1912
Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire	1913
Le regret	1914
Intérieure métaphysique	1915-16
Mélancolie du départ	1915
La Mort d'un esprit	1915
La révolte d'un sage	1916
L'ange juif	1916
Portrait du peintre et de sa mère	1917

Letter from Gaffé, Brussels, to Penrose, Hôtel Vaste Horizon, Mougins, Côte d'Azur, 30 June 1937.⁵⁵

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter dated 26 August. I agree to the sum of £6,750, made payable by cheque to Barclays Bank on 15 July, which I would ask that you make out to Lewis as soon as possible. I also agree which forty paintings Lewis will give to you once the exhibition at Zwemmer's closes. However, I do not wish to become involved in your request that "in exchange for any paintings that are sold, the amount for which they are sold will be payable to me". This is a matter for you, Mesens and Zwemmer to settle among yourselves and I do not wish to interfere in this matter in any way. It is of course understood that I undertake not to claim the total amount paid to Zwemmer for any paintings that are sold – and I believe that this is what you would like me to write. I do not want to be responsible for any differences that could arise between you and Zwemmer on this matter. I am sure that you will agree with me on these points.

I congratulate you on your purchase. It is an outstanding collection that is unrivalled at this time. Now that it will be yours, I can honestly tell you that your purchase is a masterstroke, both in terms of art and business [...]. But I am delighted for you. You have more "guts" than those who believe

⁵⁵ See The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0180. The original French reads: "Cher Monsieur, / Je suis en possession de votre lettre du 26 août. Je vous remercie. Je suis d'accord avec la somme de £6.750 payable le 15 Juillet au chèque sur la Barclays Bank, [(ce) que je] vous prierai [de faire à] Lewis aussitôt que possible. Je suis d'accord quelles quarante tableaux vous [donnera] Lewis après clôture de l'exposition chez Zwemmer. Par [contre], je désire rester étranger à la demande que vous formulez: [en échange] des tableaux qui auront été vendus: la somme qu'ils ont produit me sera remise. En effet, c'est affaire entre vous, Mesens et Zwemmer et [je ne] veux en rien m'immiscer dans cette question. Il est bien entendu que je m'engage à ne pas réclamer le montant des sommes [encaissées] par Zwemmer pour les tableaux vendus – et je pense que c'est ce que vous désirez que [par là] je vous écrive. Mais je ne veux pas davantage être [responsable] d'[une différence] qui pouvait [survenir] de ce fait entre Zwemmer et vous. Je ne redoute pas que vous soyez d'accord avec moi sur ces points. / Je vous félicite de l'achat que vous avez fait. Vous possédez là une collection remarquable et impossible à [reproduire] actuellement. A présent qu'elle va vous appartenir, je peux vous dire en toute sincérité que vous avez, du point de vue artistique, fait un coup de maître, mais aussi du point de vue affaire opération. [...] Mais je m'en [réjouis pour] vous. Vous avez en plus de «cran» que les méchants qui [se croiraient] dû santé que [...] récompenser: Et quelle [que soient] les jeux, dans un bel interview, [quelle récompense] que ces réussites [...] Ensemble se peut admirablement, [je vous prie de croire en mes] meilleurs sentiments. / René Gaffé"

that “health” is their due, rather than their reward: and whatever the game, in a good interview, what better reward than these successes [...] the whole is wonderfully possible,
 Yours sincerely,
 René Gaffé

*Draft of handwritten letter by Penrose, London, to Gaffé, Brussels, 4 July 1937:*⁵⁶

Dear Sir,
 Thank you for your letter dated 30 June. I am pleased that we agree on the price of the paintings and the method of payment. I will send you the cheque in a few days' time. I am sorry if in my letter the part about paintings that are sold seemed somewhat ambiguous – in fact, I entirely agree that I will have to deal directly with Mesens and Zwemmer concerning these payments, that you are in no way liable in this regard and that you give up any sums paid to them.
 I am of course very pleased with the purchase that I have just made, your taste in choosing such a perfect collection, even down to the less significant pieces [...].
 [Roland Penrose]

*Letter by Gaffé, Brussels, to Penrose, 25 August 1937:*⁵⁷

Dear Sir,
 Not a day goes by when I have had the liberty to think about myself that I do not regret not writing to you sooner – from London, where I found myself on 21 July for other matters – to thank you for the cheque, which I have received. Business matters have taken up all of my time of late and I have been obliged to put these matters ahead of social mores and my personal concerns, as is only

⁵⁶ See The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0180. The original French reads: “Cher Monsieur, / Je vous remercie de votre lettre du 30 juin. Je suis content que nous soyons d'accord sur le prix des tableaux et le moyen du payement. Je vous enverrai le chèque dans quelques jours. Je regrette que dans ma lettre la phrase à propos des tableaux vendues vous a paru équivoque, en effet je suis entièrement d'accord que j'aurai à faire directement avec Mesens et Zwemmer pour ces pavements et que vous vous êtes déchargé de toute ces [responsabilité] dans ce sens, [et que vous renoncez] aux sommes encaissées par eux. / Je suis sûrement très heureux de l'achat que je viens de faire, le goût que vous avez eu en choisissant une collection aussi parfaite même dans les pièces moins importantes.”

⁵⁷ See The Roland Penrose Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Library, Edinburgh, RPA 0180. The original French reads: “Cher Monsieur, / Il n'est pas de jour où j'ai eu la liberté de penser à moi-même que je ne m'en veuille de ne vous avoir pas écrit, en temps voulu – et de Londres, même où pour autre chose je me trouvais le 21 juillet – que le chèque avait été encaissé et que je vous en remerciais. Mais les affaires m'ont particulièrement accaparé de ces temps-ci et je [dois] les faire passer avant les [mœurs], avant mes [propres] préoccupations, ce qui est logique. Voilà [donc ma réponse] avec un grand retard – dont je m'excuse – ce que vous auriez [peut-être mis] sur le compte de l'oubli et qui n'est pas que le [fait du] hasard. Je vous envie à présent et j'ose avouer que je ne pense jamais à cette collection, qui est à présent la vôtre, sans un [soulèvement] de cœur. Je les ai bien aimés, ces tableaux; j'ai tout chassé avant de les découvrir [vijs], il a fallu les acheter, au prix d'autres sacrifices...../ Et pendant dix ans ils ont été [accrochés à mes murs] et j'ai eu chaque jour [par eux] de grands joies. Mais la seule raison que j'aime de me réjouir est qu'ils sortent ensemble [veiller] chez un collectionneur qui leur portera cette même affection qui me liait à eux. [Il n'est] que l'art qui puisse nous rendre supportable une existence que les [prétentieux] politiques et les guerres immondes [souillaient à tel point que l'on] aimerait autant ne plus être si l'on n'avait de grandes [idées libératrices] de belles choses consolantes, de écrits, de poèmes, des peintures à quoi auréoler, pour un temps. Ce peu d'espérance, qui [nous] reste de vivre propre et incontaminés. / Je répète que si vous passez à Bruxelles, je serai très heureux de vous rencontrer, vous voulez bien, cher Monsieur, trouver, en l'expression de mes amicales pensées. / René Gaffé”.

sensible. And so, with my apologies, here is my very late reply, which you may have put down to forgetfulness but in fact is purely down to chance. I envy you now and must confess that I never think about that collection, which is now yours, without a pain in my heart. I truly loved those paintings; I hunted everywhere for them, I had to buy them, at any cost....

For ten years they hung on my walls and brought me great joy.⁵⁸ My only consolation is that they are going to a collector who will appreciate them as I did. Only art can make our existence bearable, an existence so sullied by pretentious politicians and vile wars that we would prefer not to exist at all were it not for great liberating ideas of beautiful comforts like writing, poetry and paintings, things to lift our spirits for a time. This remaining ray of hope to which we cling of a clean and uncorrupted existence.

As I have said before, if you are passing through Brussels, I would be very happy to meet you.

Yours sincerely,

René Gaffé

Gaffé's affection for the works he had just sold is evident. One asks, therefore, what motivated him to sell such a large number of works at such a reasonable price? According to Penrose's son, Gaffé believed that he was terminally ill and wished to take care of his affairs and dispose of his collection. Others have alternatively suggested that he needed to liquidate his collection due to financial problems.⁵⁹ Whatever the reason, Gaffé later regretted his decision. Discussing the provenance of a de Chirico painting that he once owned in a letter to the de Chirico biographer Soby, he confessed: "*I sold it (along with all my other Chiricos, in a moment of madness – there is no other word for it) to the surrealist painter and poet, Roland Penrose*" (7 February 1950).⁶⁰ Precisely one year after acquiring Gaffé's impressive collection of Miró, Picasso and de Chirico works, Penrose's close friend Éluard offered him a significant part of his modern art collection. The sale included six early Metaphysical works by de Chirico, including *L'incertitude du poète* (1913, Tate Gallery, London).⁶¹ Priced particularly reasonably, Penrose chose to proceed with the sale. Having now acquired a large part of Gaffé and Éluard's respective collections, Penrose had swiftly become one of Britain's most

⁵⁸ As established at the beginning of this paper, Gaffé actually made his first acquisitions of de Chirico's work in c. 1915.

⁵⁹ See A. Penrose, *Roland Penrose. The Friendly Surrealist*, Prestel-Verlag, London, 2001, p. 83; *Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art*, 1997, ed. Umberto Allemandi & Co., London and Caputo, 2017, p. 47.

⁶⁰ Soby authored *The early Chirico* (Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1941) and *Giorgio de Chirico* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955). See JTS Papers. VII.II.C.2.19, MoMA, New York. The original French reads: "[...] *je lui cédé (avec tous mes autres Chirico, dans un moment d'aberration - il n'y a pas d'autres mots) au peintre et poète surréaliste Roland Penrose.*" Having assisted Soby with various queries about de Chirico in preparation of his 1955 publication, Soby sent Gaffé a copy of the book soon after it was published. Gaffé was particularly impressed by its contents, writing: "[...] *This is the most complete overview, I think that was published about an artist that we loved and that you have admirably understood, whose work you so intelligently managed to penetrate. Your study will be viewed as a landmark for the history of modern painting. This is the book we were waiting for, signed by the most competent art critic in the field. Thank you again, dear Sir, and please accept my most sincere best wishes. / René Gaffé.*" The original French reads: "[...] *C'est la somme la plus complète, je pense qui ait été publiée sur un artiste que nous avons aimé et que vous avez admirablement compris, dont vous avez si intelligemment pénétré l'œuvre. Votre étude fera date dans l'histoire de la peinture moderne. C'est le livre qu'on attendait et qui est signé par le critique d'art le plus compétent en la matière. Merci encore, cher Monsieur et croyez, je vous prie, en mes très sincères sentiments. / René Gaffé.*" See letter from R. Gaffé, Brussels, to J. T. Soby, USA, 6 October 1955, Papers of James Thrall Soby, Los Angeles, GRI, 910128, box 2, folder 2.12 (René Gaffé).

⁶¹ For further details about the Éluard-Penrose sale, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 61-63.

important collectors of early twentieth century art, particularly of de Chirico.

Whilst the Gaffé-Penrose sale depleted the Belgian collector of the vast majority of his de Chirico works, the importance of Gaffé's collection of early Metaphysical works (which was based in Brussels for over 20 years between c. 1915-1937), together with Mesens' efforts to increase knowledge about the artist's work via exhibitions and publications – undoubtedly influenced the development of Surrealism in Belgium, as has already been established by scholars and curators.⁶² One particularly well-known episode involved Magritte who was very close to Mesens and no doubt had direct access to Gaffé's collection. Upon seeing a reproduction of de Chirico's painting *Le chant d'amour* (1914, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, fig. 32) with Mesens, in 1922 in Brussels, Magritte saw how art could be employed as a tangible vehicle for conveying "visible poetry". Such a revelation immediately altered his attitude towards the development of his own art.⁶³ Recollecting the event to Soby on 20 May 1965, the artist wrote:

[...] It was in 1922, in fact, that I became aware of Chirico's work: a friend showed me a reproduction of his painting "The Song of Love", which was a revelation to me and that I still consider to be a work by the greatest painter of that time, in the sense that it [addresses] the pre-eminence of poetry over painting and the various styles of painting: Chirico was the first to think about what to paint and not about how to paint [...]⁶⁴

Two weeks later (4 June 1965), Magritte wrote to Soby again about his fascination with de Chirico's work:

Dear Mr Soby,

I am delighted to have received your beautiful book on Chirico I love Chirico's painting, which is the description of a thought that evokes mystery. I identify such a description with poetry and thus

⁶² For further reading about Surrealism in Belgium, see M. Mariën, *L'activité surréaliste en Belgique. 1925-1950*, Lebeer Hossmann, Brussels, 1979; N. Aubert, P.-P. Fraiture and P. McGuinness (eds.), *From Art Nouveau to Surrealism: Belgian Modernity in the Making* (Legenda, London, 2007); P. Allmer and H. Van Gelder (eds.), *Collective Inventions: Surrealism in Belgium*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2007; X. Canonne, *Surrealism in Belgium: The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, Marot S. A., Brussels, 2015; and L. Neve (ed.), *Giorgio de Chirico. Aux origines du surréalisme belge. Magritte – Delvaux – Graverol*, Éditions Mardaga, Brussels, 2019.

⁶³ Mesens' presence with Magritte is confirmed in a letter from Soby to Mesens dated 21 June 1954: "[...] I remember so vividly your account (which I am printing in my book) of the excitement you and Magritte felt when you saw a reproduction of de Chirico's *The Song of Love*, and I am now writing to ask your help in getting photographs of Magritte paintings which [sic] reflect the impact of de Chirico." See letter from J. T. Soby, Brushy Ridge Road, New Canaan, Connecticut, to E.L.T Mesens, 149 Montagu Mansions, London, 21 June 1954, Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 7, folder 7.1.

⁶⁴ Letter from R. Magritte, 97 rue des Mimosas, Brussels 3, to J. T. Soby, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY, 20 May 1965. See Papers of James Thrall Soby, Los Angeles, GRI, 910128, box 3, folder 3.20. The original French reads: "C'est en 1922, en effet, que j'ai eu connaissance des travaux de Chirico: un ami m'a montré alors, une reproduction de son tableau "Le Chant d'Amour", qui a été une révélation pour moi et que je considère toujours comme une œuvre du plus grand peintre de ce temps, en ce sens qu'il s'agit de poésie en primauté sur la peinture et les diverses manières de peindre: de Chirico, le premier, a songé à ce qu'il faut peindre et non au comment peindre [...]"



fig. 32 G. de Chirico, *Le chant d'amour*, 1914, oil on canvas, 73 x 59.1 cm, The Museum of Modern Art (Nelson A. Rockefeller Bequest), New York

one can say that Chirico's painting and, I believe mine, are visible poetry [...]."⁶⁵

Thirty years later, the Belgian Surrealist chose to pay homage to the de Chirico masterpiece that had proved so influential for his artistic career, painting a series of works in the early 1960s that were analogously entitled *Le chant d'amour* (c. 1962, fig. 33).

E.L.T Mesens as Art Dealer, Connoisseur & Collector

As evinced by Mesens' dealings with the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (June 1936), the *Chirico – Picasso* exhibition (Zwemmer Gallery, London, 10 – 30 June 1937), and the Gaffé-Penrose sale (July 1937), the Belgian gallerist, art dealer, editor, artist, writer, poet and collector played an instrumental role in getting Gaffé's collection better known in the UK, one that he himself had helped Gaffé build during the 1920s and early 1930s in Belgium.⁶⁶ Having successfully convinced Penrose to acquire 40 top works by de Chirico, Picasso and Miró, the British Surrealist artist and collector felt confident enough to purchase The London Gallery (28 Cork Street, London) in 1938. During its activity (1938-1950), The London Gallery used Gaffé's former collection repeatedly in solo and group exhibitions, as well as frequently reproduced select paintings in «The London Bulletin» (1938-1940), the gallery's monthly journal. This, together with other initiatives promoted by The London Gallery, helped considerably galvanise the dissemination, acceptance and development of Surrealism in Britain since its official UK launch in 1936.

As aforementioned, Mesens was a fundamental figure in the history of Surrealism in Britain from the mid-1930s until the early 1950s due to his position of Managing Director of The London Gallery (1938-1950) and editor-in-chief of the «The London Bulletin» (1938-1940). Recognising the impact that Mesens' activity exerted on the Surrealist move-



fig. 33 R. Magritte, *Le chant d'amour*, 1962, private collection

⁶⁵ Letter from R. Magritte, 97 rues des Mimosas, Brussels 3, to J. T. Soby, Brushy Ridge Road, New Canaan, Connecticut, 4 June 1965. See Papers of James Thrall Soby, Los Angeles, GRI, box 3, folder 3.20. The original French reads: «*Cher Monsieur Soby / Je suis très content d'avoir reçu votre beau livre sur Chirico J'aime la peinture de Chirico, con elle est la description d'une pensée qui évoque le mystère. J'identifie une telle description à la poésie et ainsi on peut dire que la peinture de Chirico et, je crois la mienne, sont de la poésie visible [...]*»

⁶⁶ Mesens spent the 1920s in Belgium working on editorial boards for several European avant-garde magazines including «Sélection» (Antwerp), and «Variétés» (Brussels). In the mid-late 1930s, he also edited newspapers and magazines parallel to his role as editor-in-chief of «The London Bulletin» (London), such as «Oesophage» (Brussels), «Marie» (Brussels), «Bulletin International du surréalisme» (n. 3, Document 34, Brussels), and «Message from Nowhere» (London).

ment and, in turn, helped shape de Chirico's legacy, Soby asserted that “[Mesens’] exhibitions of de Chirico’s paintings and drawings of 1910-18 have done much to establish the latter’s fame in London [...] [he] has consistently championed the early works of the Italian artist, not only in England but in his native Belgium.”⁶⁷

Following the Surrealist *modus operandi* towards de Chirico’s post-1918 work, Mesens actively supported the artist’s early Metaphysical period (1910-1918), disparaging the validity and relevancy of his later work. One will recall, of course, that the de Chirico works in Penrose’s collection (acquired from Gaffé and Éluard) – which were frequently exhibited at The London Gallery – were thought to have been all painted pre-1918 at the time. In terms of de Chirico work that Mesens owned, the nebulous distinction between his private collection and The London Gallery stock has caused difficulty in making precise attributions. Having said that, he realised that he owned a vast collection upon the close of The London Gallery in 1950, later recalling that he possessed “*Some 750 numbers: paintings, sculptures, primitive objects and others, papiers collés, engravings, collages, drawings, watercolours, etc.*”⁶⁸ With regard to de Chirico in his collection, he personally owned *La mort d’un esprit* (1916, fig. 26), which he bought from Penrose at some point between 15 July 1937 and March 1942 (when he appeared as the work’s owner in «Arson», London, March 1942). Several years later, Mesens confessed to Soby that he refused to sell the painting “*for the sake of constant fascination.*”⁶⁹

*Undated handwritten manuscript entitled Giorgio de Chirico by Mesens:*⁷⁰

Giorgio de Chirico

Italian painter, poet and writer, born Volo (Greece) in 1888. Studied at Athens art school before the return of family to Italy (1905). Copied in Milan and Florence museums. Went the following year to Munich; entered the Königliche Akademie in the class of master von Hakl [Gabriel von Hackl]. Showed first great enthusiasm for Kaspar David Friedrich’s romanticism. Despite his affinities of origin with Antiquity and the Renaissance, Nietzsche’s thought and Bocklin’s work made the greatest impression on his spirit and on his earliest work. Went to Paris in 1911, crucial period for Cubism and loud entrance upon the stage of Futurism, but, far from being perturbed by these movements, he turned his back on them to pursue alone a quest of which the consequences became only perceptible ten years later. All the valid part of his work was realised in solitude and occupies a marginal position in regard to “the modern movement”. In these short notes I refuse to give account of Chirico’s successive repudiations of his early work. I only state categorically that the works painted between 1911 and 1917, and only those, give the real measure of his genius and that these, only,

⁶⁷ J. T. Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, ed. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Letter from E.L.T Mesens to B. Goldschmidt, 23 January 1954. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, box 7, folder 2.

⁶⁹ Letter from E.L.T Mesens, to J. T. Soby, 1 July 1954. See JTS, II.C.2.6, MoMA Archives, New York, in Noel-Johnson, 2017, p. 96.

⁷⁰ Handwritten manuscript entitled *Giorgio de Chirico* by E.L.T Mesens (2 pages) with grammatical corrections added in pencil by unknown person, undated, Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 18, folder 18.2.

have had the most illuminating effect on some contemporary painters and poets. Chirico has written poems, an essay on Courbet, several short proses, and later a most poetic novel “Hebdomeros”, several years after his painting had lost its focal meaning.

Although various aspects of his career in Belgium and the UK have been investigated by scholars over the years, a focus on Mesens’ direct involvement with de Chirico only appeared in 2017.⁷¹ Recently-discovered correspondence involving Mesens, including various collectors and dealers whilst living in Belgium during the 1920s and early 1930s, proves that Mesens was actively interested in de Chirico’s early Metaphysical work from the outset of his career. Additional correspondence dated 1939 between him and Pierre Matisse (Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York) reveals how Mesens still remained actively involved in the promotion and sale of Gaffé’s former collection in the UK and abroad.

Prior to Mesens’ permanent move to London in 1938, he had accrued nearly 15 years of experience in the Belgium art world. To this end, he worked at a series of galleries in Brussels, including Galerie Manteau (starting in 1924), Galerie la Vierge Poupine, Galerie l’Époque (starting in October 1927, founded by Paul-Gustave van Hecke and André De Ridder), Galerie Sélection (set up by van Hecke), his own E.L.T Gallery (1930-1931), and the Palais des Beaux-Arts (starting in 1930). According to Caputo (2020), “*Van Hecke was an extremely important figure with regard to Mesens’ apprenticeship as a gallerist and also in the way he helped the latter mature as a collector, influencing the building of the seed of his private collection.*”⁷² Indeed, it was van Hecke who taught Mesens commercial and cultural methodologies in Belgium habitually used by important European dealers at the time, such as Léonce Rosenberg and Alfred Flechtheim, which would go on to lay the business framework for The London Gallery.⁷³ Mesens’ precious experience at the Palais des Beaux-Arts steered his career in the artworld thereafter, providing him with important contacts with international and national galleries, dealers and collectors.

The recently-discovered correspondence shines a light on some of Mesens’ dealings with de Chirico in Belgium. Correspondence dated March 1927, for example, between Mesens and Camille Goemans (1900-1960), an important Belgian promoter of Surrealism in both Belgium and Paris (he was an avid supporter and patron of Magritte) involves discussion about two unspecified de

⁷¹ For an analysis of Mesens’ dealings with de Chirico from 1936 onwards (including de Chirico exhibits in solo and group shows organised by The London Gallery and reproduced in «The London Bulletin»), see Noel-Johnson, 2017, pp. 94-97. Caterina Caputo has recently published a fascinating and exhaustive article about Mesens’ role as art collector and dealer in Belgian and British circles, although it contains little detail about his specific rapport with de Chirico, and omits correspondence involving Mesens and the artist’s work. See C. Caputo, *E. L. T. Mesens. Art Collector and Dealer*, «The Getty Research Journal», The University of Chicago Press Journals, Chicago, n. 12, February 2020, pp. 127-150.

⁷² Caputo, February 2020, p. 130.

⁷³ As mentor and friend, van Hecke taught Mesens that the accumulation of a collection parallel to one’s activity as dealer was “*motivated by the intent to actively and selectively support contemporary artistic trends through exhibition programming, publications, and the building of the nuclei of private collections. Sales revenues, in fact, serve not only as personal income for the dealers and gallerists but also to finance exhibition spaces, magazines, and artists under contract.*” *Ibid.*

Chirico paintings that Goemans had bought, despite being rather expensive.⁷⁴ Later on that year, in December 1927, Mesens appears to have sold and then bought back four unidentified de Chirico works for a total of 8,500 francs from the French painter J. Crotti (1878-1958).⁷⁵ Having obtained the funds, Crotti sent Mesens a receipt, stating that he had received the “reimbursement”. This would suggest that either Crotti had changed his mind about acquiring the de Chirico artworks or that there was a problem with them, perhaps concerning authenticity (“*Reçu de Monsieur Mesens en remboursement pour 4 Chirico la somme de huit mille cinq cents francs*”).⁷⁶ A few years later (November 1929), Mesens dealt with requests from Alice Manteau of the Parisian gallery *Tableaux anciens et modernes*, who wished to offer a client two or three de Chirico works that Mesens had access to.⁷⁷ Mesens subsequently sent her photos of the works, although it is unknown whether it resulted in a sale or not. And in April 1946, one learns that Mesens was still in contact with van Hecke, with whom he had collaborated since the early 1920s in Brussels, with the latter referencing de Chirico’s series of *Horses and Gladiators*, which he developed during the second half of the 1920s.⁷⁸

A particularly interesting affair regarding de Chirico’s work formerly owned by Gaffé took place several months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War between Mesens and Pierre Matisse, who ran a successful gallery in New York. Correspondance dated 30 March - 22 May 1939 reveals that Mesens attempted to sell Mirò’s *La terre labourée* (1924) that Gaffé had once owned (and presently owned by Mesens and Zwemmer, 30 March 1939). He went one step further making the rather forthright proposal to Matisse about organising four exhibitions dedicated to de Chirico, Picasso, Miró and Ernst during 1939-1940, which could tour to two or three other American cities. Whilst Matisse expressed interest in selling work by de Chirico, Picasso and Miró, the touring exhibition proposal failed to take off, presumably due to the rapidly changing political situation. Mesens’ letter to Matisse dated 24 April 1939 is particularly significant as Mesens explains that the work on offer belonged to his collection. Such an assertion should be accepted with caution. No evidence has so far surfaced that suggests that Penrose sold his de Chirico works to Mesens (with the exception of *La mort d’un esprit*, 1916). As such, it is more likely that Mesens’ “collection” was actually Penrose’s (which was habitually listed as The London Gallery stock) and that Mesens had Penrose’s permission to sell the work if and when the opportunity arose.

⁷⁴ Letter from C. Goemans, to E.L.T Mesens, 55 rue de Courtrai, Brussels, 4 March 1927. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 2, folder 2.7.

⁷⁵ Telegram from J. Crotti, Brussels, to E.L.T Mesens, Brussels, 30 December 1927. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 2, folder 2.8.

⁷⁶ Receipt from J. Crotti to E.L.T Mesens, 3 January 1928. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 2, folder 2.8.

⁷⁷ Letter from A. Manteau, *Tableaux anciens et modernes*, 2 rue Jacques-Callot, Paris, to E.L.T Mesens, Brussels, 19 November 1929 and 4 December 1929. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 2, folder 2.14. Manteau writes: “Dear Sir, I still have the Chirico you told us about last season. Please send me the photographs and prices. I have half of my foreign clients who would [like to] buy two or three paintings by this painter.” The original French reads: “*Cher Monsieur, / Je vous avez toujours les Chirico dont vous nous avez parlé la saison dernière veuillez m’envoyer les photos et les prix. / J’ai mi de mes clients étrangers qui achèterait 2 ou 3 toiles de ce peintre.*”

⁷⁸ Letter from P. G. van Hecke, 203 Avenue Louise, Brussels, to E.L.T Mesens, 11 April 1946. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 5, folder 5.11.

*Draft of handwritten letter from Mesens, London, to Matisse, New York, 30 March 1939:*⁷⁹

[...] This painting belonged to Mr Gaffé of Brussels for many years and was acquired, in 1937, by Zwemmer and myself for the price of 225 pounds sterling, before being sold very shortly afterwards for the price of 275 guineas. [...] With regard to Chirico, don't buy one of the paintings I own by this painter. You will find titles and references for this subject in No. 6 of the «London Bulletin», a copy of which I am sending you today, together with No. 12.

*Letter from Matisse, New York, to Mesens, London, 7 April 1939:*⁸⁰

[...] I congratulate you in having so many Chiricos of the interesting period. I like very much myself the early Chiricos and would be grateful to you if you could send me photographs and prices of the pictures listed in the «[London] Bulletin». I do not know whether we will be able to do any business because when I was last in London, I priced early Chiricos and found them rather expensive.

*Letter from Mesens, London, to Matisse, New York, 24 April 1939:*⁸¹

[...] Concerning my Chirico collection, I enclose with this letter a list with prices. These are prices quoted to my clients, but in response to the reflections in your last letter, I invite your offers for any of these paintings. Your propositions interest me very much. Perhaps we can come to an agreement. Many of these pictures have already been sold by me, and re-purchased. This means that the margin of profit is limited, but in fact I am open to your propositions. To complete your documentation, I enclose a list indicating the books in which these paintings have been reproduced, and also some photographs. [...] I am able to present the following portions of my collection: [...] 2. A selection of 18 (eighteen) CHIRICO of which the list is enclosed – unknown in America and of great quality. [...] My proposal is that if it interests you to present these four exhibitions successively during 1939-40, transport charges to be undertaken by you, I will come to New York at my own expense. Possibly we could find a means of reducing the general costs of transport by sharing them with dealers in two or three other cities - (Washington – Chicago - ?) [...]. There is material here for important transactions as Picasso and Chirico notably have attracted the attention of many amateurs, dealers, and museum directors [...].

⁷⁹ Rough draft of hand-written letter from E.L.T Mesens, London, to P. Matisse, 51 East 57th Street, New York, 30 March 1939. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 4, folder 4.12. The original French reads: “[...] Ce tableau appartenait à Monsieur Gaffé de Bruxelles depuis de longues années et fut acquis, en 1937, par Zwemmer et moi au prix de Livres sterling 225 pour être vendu très peu de temps après au prix de Guineas 275. [...] A propos de Chirico, e serviez-vous pas acheteur de l'un des tableaux que je possède de ce peintre. Vous trouverez titres et références à ce sujet dans le n° 6 de «London Bulletin» dont je vous fais adresser ce jour un exemplaire en même temps qu'en numéro 12.”

⁸⁰ Letter from P. Matisse, Pierre Matisse Gallery, 51 East 57 Street, New York, to E.L.T Mesens, London, 7 April 1939. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 4, folder 4.12.

⁸¹ Typewritten letter from E.L.T Mesens, London, to P. Matisse, 51 East 57th Street, New York, 24 April 1939. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 4, folder 4.12. An undated handwritten draft of this letter in French is also located in the same folder.

*Letter from Matisse, New York, to Mesens, London, 22 May 1939.*⁸²

Dear Mr. Mesens

[...] I have been studying your propositions and I think the best I should do is to wait until I go to Europe and see you in London about them [c. 20 June 1939]. However, I can tell you right now that I would be interested in showing a certain number of your pictures, such as perhaps the Chiricos and the Picasso and also the Miros [...].

René Gaffé's Collection of works by or attributed to Giorgio de Chirico⁸³

1. *Mélancolie (Melancholy)*

1912, oil on canvas, 79 x 63.5 cm, private collection.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased before May 1934)⁸⁴; Peter Watson, London (purchased in June 1937); Eric Estorick, London; Eric and Salome Estorick Foundation, London.

2. *Nu [au chevaux noirs] (Nude [with black hair])**

1912-1913, oil on canvas, 70 x 54 cm, private collection.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased prior to Guillaume's death in October 1934); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); Zwemmer Gallery, London; Galleria Galatea, Turin; Galleria Levi, Milan; Galleria Alexander Jolas, New York-London.

3. *La récompense du dévin (The Soothsayer's Recompense)*⁸⁵

1913, oil on canvas, 135.5 x 180.5 cm, The Philadelphia Museum of Art (The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 27 December 1950), Philadelphia, accession n. 1950-134-38.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; Galerie La Vierge Poupine, Brussels (purchased on 30 September 1926); René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased in 1927); Walter P. Arensberg, Los Angeles (purchased in 1932 with Marcel Duchamp as agent).

⁸² Letter from Pierre Matisse, Pierre Matisse Gallery, 51 East 57 Street, New York, to E.L.T Mesens, London, 22 May 1939. See Papers of E.L.T Mesens, Los Angeles, GRI, 920094, box 4, folder 4.12.

⁸³ Works marked by an asterisk denote their inclusion in the Gaffé-Penrose sale of July 1937.

⁸⁴ *Mélancolie* (1912) was exhibited in the *Exposition Minotaure*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 12 May – 3 June 1934, cat. n. 30. This show was organised by Mesens who served as Secretary of the Palais des Beaux-Arts between 1931-1936. The painting was subsequently exhibited in the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 1936, cat. n. 54, with Gaffé listed as the lender).

⁸⁵ See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa di de Chirico 1908-1924*, Rizzoli Editore, Milan, 1984, pp. 84-85, n. 28; and Baldacci, 1997, p. 169, n. 31.

4. *Le regret (The Regret)**

1916, oil on canvas, 59.7 x 33 cm, The Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, New York (purchased in May 1955), object n. 54.150.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; Guillaume family, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (presumably purchased after Guillaume's death in October 1934); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); Dimitrije Mitrinović, Serbia; Gordon Onslow-Ford; San Francisco.⁸⁶

Paul Guillaume exhibited this painting for the last time at his gallery in the following exhibition: *Exposition d'œuvres de Giorgio de Chirico* (Galerie Paul Guillaume, Paris, 4-15 June 1926, cat. n. 15).

5. *Intérieure métaphysique (Composizione metafisica) (Metaphysical Interior [Metaphysical Composition])**

1916, oil on canvas, 32.4 x 26.4 cm, private collection.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased prior to Guillaume's death in October 1934); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); Anne Burnett Tandy, Fort Worth; sold at auction, Sotheby's Parke-Bernet, New York, 15 November 1964, lot 217; Galleria Galatea, Turin.

6. *Mélancolie du départ (The Melancholy of Departure)**

1916, oil on canvas, 51.8 x 35.9 cm, Tate Gallery, London (purchased in June 1978), reference n. T02309.⁸⁷

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; Galerie La Vierge Poupine, Brussels (purchased after June 1926)⁸⁸; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased in 1927); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); Galleria Galatea, Turin; Confinarte, Lugano.

7. *La mort d'un esprit (Death of a Spirit)**

1916, oil on canvas, 36 x 33 cm, National Gallery of Australia (purchased with the assistance of Harold and Beverly Mitchell, Rupert and Annabel Myer, and the NGA Foundation, 13 December 2006), Canberra, accession n. NGA 2006.1059.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased prior to Guillaume's death in

⁸⁶ The provenance details regarding 'Dimitrije Mitrinović, Serbia; Gordon Onslow-Ford; San Francisco' have recently been documented by Caputo, 2017, p. 55, fn. 52 and 53.

⁸⁷ For further details about the Tate gallery's acquisition of this painting, see Noel-Johnson, 2017, p. 187, 772-782.

⁸⁸ Paul Guillaume exhibited this painting for the last time in June 1926: *Exposition d'œuvres de Giorgio de Chirico* (Galerie Paul Guillaume, Paris, 4-15 June 1926, cat. n. 13).

October 1934); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); E.L.T. Mesens, London (purchased before March 1942)⁸⁹; private collection, Brussels (since 1970s).

8. *La révolte d'un sage (The Revolt of the Sage)**

1916, oil on canvas, 67.3 x 59 cm, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased between June 1926 and December 1929); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); Eric Estorick, London (purchased prior to September 1953).⁹⁰

Paul Guillaume showed this painting for the last time in *Exposition d'œuvres de Giorgio de Chirico* (Galerie Paul Guillaume, Paris, 4-15 June 1926, cat. n. 3).

9. *L'ange juif (The Jewish Angel)**

1916, oil on canvas, 68.3 x 45.1 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, 1998), New York, accession n. 1999.363.15.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased between June 1926 - 1929); Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937)⁹¹; E. V. Thaw & Co., Inc., New York (purchased in April 1978); Jacques and Natasha Gelman, New York (purchased on 10 November 1978).

This painting was acquired by Gaffé at some point between June 1926 and 1929. Having been owned by Paul Guillaume for several years, the gallerist exhibited it for the last time in *Exposition d'œuvres de Giorgio de Chirico* (Galerie Paul Guillaume, Paris, 4-15 June 1926, cat. n. 8). The work entered Gaffé's collection by 1929, as confirmed by two Belgian publications that listed Gaffé as the owner of *L'ange juif*: P. Courthion and A. Bardi (pseudonym for de Chirico), *G. de Chirico*, «Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique», n. 8, Éditions Sélection, Antwerp, 1929, p. 46; and N. Frank, *Giorgio de Chirico et Alberto Savinio*, «Cahiers de Belgique», II, Brussels, April 1929, p. 131.

⁸⁹ It is highly likely that Mesens purchased this painting directly from Penrose, his partner at The London Gallery, where *La mort d'un esprit* was exhibited in *Giorgio de Chirico 1911-1917*, 14 October – 12 November 1938, listed as cat. n. 9 shortly after Penrose acquired it from Gaffé. Although a precise date for the sale has yet to be established, it took place prior to March 1942 as Mesens was listed as its owner next to a reproduction of the work in «Arson», London, March 1942. Mesens later lent it to *40 Years of Modern Art 1907-1947 – A Selection from British Collections* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 10 February – 6 March 1948, cat. n. 14). In a letter dated 1 July 1954 from Mesens to Soby, he refused to part ways with the painting “for the sake of constant fascination.” See JTS Papers. II.C.2.6, MoMA Archives, New York.

⁹⁰ The painting was included in Estorick's insurance valuation list for the first time on 23 September 1953. See *Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art*, 1997, p. 19.

⁹¹ Apart from its inclusion in the *Chirico – Picasso* show at The London Gallery, *L'ange juif* was one of three de Chirico paintings lent by Gaffé for the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 1936, cat. n. 56, listed with erroneous date of 1917).

10. *Portrait de l'artiste avec sa mère (Portrait of Painter with his Mother)**

1919, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 60.4 cm, Musée national d'Art moderne/CCI, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris (purchased in 1992), inventory n. AM 1992-58.

Provenance: --- ; René Gaffé, Brussels; Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937); Edward James, London (purchased either through London's Zwemmer Gallery or The London Gallery in c. 1938); sold at auction, Christie's, London, 30 March 1981, lot 8; private collection.⁹²

11. *Le muse inquietanti (The Disquieting Muses)*

1924, oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm, private collection.

Provenance: André Breton, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased prior to December 1929)⁹³; Henry Clifford, Philadelphia (purchased in late June 1936).

12. *Calligrammes* (G. Apollinaire, 1930, NRF, Librairie Gallimard, Paris), illustrated with 68 lithographs by G. de Chirico

1930, lithographs on Chine paper, 33 x 25.1 cm, private collection

Provenance: René Gaffé, Brussels (a gift from Giorgio de Chirico in December 1931), sold at auction, Hôtel Drouet, Paris, 26-27 April 1956; private collection.

13. *Natura morta. Torino 1888 (Still-life. Turin 1888)*⁹⁴

Executed prior to December 1936, oil on canvas, 60 x 46 cm, private collection.

Provenance: Paul Guillaume, Paris; René Gaffé, Brussels (purchased pre-December 1936); Stephen Hahn, New York; Rolf Weinberg collection, Zurich.

The painting was first exhibited with the erroneous title *Still Life "Torino 1828"* in the 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 9 December 1936 – 17 January 1937, cat. n. 198, lent by René Gaffé, Brussels). Scholars remain divided over the authenticity of this painting. Whilst some herald it a 1914 painting by de Chirico, the artist denounced it as a non-authentic work.⁹⁵

⁹² In contrast to Caputo who asserts that *Portrait de l'artiste avec sa mère* (1919) was sold during the *Chirico - Picasso* exhibition (London, 1937) to Edward James for £157.10, I believe the painting formed part of the Gaffé-Penrose sale (July 1937, as reinforced by its listing in the rough draft of the contract, fig. 23), and was subsequently sold to Edward James in c. 1937-1938 via the Zwemmer Gallery or The London Gallery who acted as intermediary. See Caputo. 2017, pp. 50-51.

⁹³ As aforementioned, Gaffé lent this work to the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (London, 1936, cat. n. 55). It was exhibited with the erroneous date of 1916.

⁹⁴ See W. Schmied, *De Chirico und sein Schatten: Metaphysische und surrealistische Tendenzen in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Prestel Verlag, Munich, 1989, pp. 57-60; Fagiolo dell'Arco, 1984, p. 92, n. 72; and Baldacci, 1997, p. 241, n. 62.

⁹⁵ G. de Chirico, signed declaration "*Falso. g. de Chirico*", back of a black and white photograph of *Natura morta. Torino 1888*, Fondazione

14. *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire* (attributed to Max Ernst)*

Executed in c. 1934, charcoal and pastel on paper, 61 x 54 cm, private collection.

This drawing is widely held to be a non-authentic work executed by Max Ernst. It is based on a work by Pierre Roy (1880-1950), the French Surrealist and friend of de Chirico's, which was used for the woodcut to illustrate the title page of Apollinaire's *Et moi aussi je suis peintre* (unpublished). Roy's work, in turn, was based on de Chirico's *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire* (1914, Musée national d'Art moderne/CCI, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).⁹⁶

Provenance: --- ; René Gaffé, Brussels; Roland Penrose, London (purchased in June 1937), private collection.

Giorgio e Isa de Chirico archives, Rome.

⁹⁶ See Baldacci, 1997, p. 423; and Noel-Johnson, 2017, p. 60.