



Photograph of Giorgio de Chirico sent, with a dedication, to his friend Gartz, Milan 1910

A FINAL WORD ON THE BIRTH OF METAPHYSICS

Paolo Picozza

The current issue of «Metaphysical Art» features several important in-depth studies on the birth of Metaphysics and on the 1910-1911 Florentine sojourn of Giorgio and Alberto de Chirico. The occasion was prompted by the Fondazione Giorgio and Isa de Chirico's recent acquisition (2020) of the originals of Giorgio de Chirico's letters to his friend Fritz Gartz between 1909 and 1911, as well as the concert's program that Alberto Savinio was supposed to give at La Pergola theater in Florence in January 1911.¹ The letters are reproduced here in high resolution to allow scholars to finally understand clearly and fully what Giorgio de Chirico wrote on paper using the *deutsche Kurrentschrift*, a type of German handwriting in use in the early 1900s. A transcription of the text with an English translation is also published for ease of reading and understanding, with some significant changes from the previous translation. The correspondence with Gartz is an extraordinary, almost "real-time" testimony of the birth of Dechirican Metaphysics.

I had already proven the correct dating and succession of the letters through independent and objective findings. The reproduction of the envelope of the letter dated "26 January 1910", but mailed on 26 December as the Florence railroad postmark confirms (in legal terms: it gives a firm date) what was already known, namely, that metaphysical painting had its origins in Florence in 1910.

Thus inevitably evaporates the fanciful theory fathered by Paolo Baldacci, developed even in glaring contradiction with Giorgio de Chirico's own words. For nearly thirty years, this thesis has stubbornly tried to predate the birth of Metaphysical Art to 1909, placing its occurrence in Milan instead of Florence and attributing to de Chirico's younger brother Alberto, or rather to both brothers, the figurative formulation of the Metaphysical *Stimmung* that is to be traced back exclusively to Giorgio de Chirico.²

The letters to Fritz Gartz, which were undoubtedly discussed and shared between Giorgio and Alberto, clearly show their respective autonomous fields of interest, based

1 When the correspondence was first published in this journal (see P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence nel 1910*, in «Metaphysical Art», 7/8 [2008], pp. 56-92), it was based on photocopies, the quality of which was inadequate. Some marks in the text were illegible, preventing a thorough examination of the content and potentially leading to reading errors.

2 In fact, as Fabio Benzi wrote, "as revealed by the letters, it was de Chirico who assisted his beloved brother Savinio in bringing his musical vision into focus ('my brother and I have now composed the deepest music')", see *Giorgio de Chirico e la nascita della metafisica. L'"altra" avanguardia italiana, 1910-1911*, in *Secessione e avanguardia: L'arte in Italia prima della Grande Guerra 1905-1915*, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 31 October 2014-15 February 2015), edited by S. Frezzotti, Electa, Milan 2014, p. 96.

on extraordinary inclinations manifested from an early age, as well as their innate talents, which were, we can say, well spent during their lives, and left an extraordinary artistic legacy.

However, the so-called “1909 Milanese theory”, which focused on a univocal and biased interpretation of the relationship between the two de Chirico brothers, has been even more damaging. With very few exceptions, it has not permitted an in-depth study of Alberto de Chirico’s musical innovations, which their author crystallized in the peremptory statement, never fully grasped, contained in the program of the concert he was to perform in Florence: “The first musical case. The deepest music ever written.”³

After all, this is not the first time Giorgio de Chirico has been accused of not being the sole inventor of Metaphysics. In this regard, the *Pictor Optimus*’ letter to the Editor-in-Chief of «La Fiera Letteraria», published on 1 August 1946 is illuminating:

Dear Angioletti, in the preface to the Catalogue of the exhibition of Italian Painters recently held in London, Mr. Lionello Venturi affirms that Carrà created metaphysical painting together with me (“together with de Chirico”). Now, I believe that a Professor of Art History should be better informed on some key facts of modern art, and know that I began making metaphysical painting in 1910 and that Carrà began making it seven years later in Ferrara, after seeing my paintings. Everybody knows this, both in Italy and abroad, and I fully explained it in *Ricordi della mia vita*. Thanks for publishing my reply. Yours, Giorgio de Chirico

Having ascertained and demonstrated the inconsistency of the so-called “1909 Milanese theory” and its postulates, it is now necessary to re-establish the correct dates of the Master’s works that mark the beginning of Metaphysical Art, as clearly deduced from the letters published here. It can and must thus be stated – or, more accurately, reconfirmed – that Giorgio de Chirico’s early Metaphysical paintings, namely *The Enigma of the Oracle*, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, and *The Enigma of the Hour* (let alone the *Self-portrait* in a Nietzschean pose, begun no earlier than 1910), were executed in Florence in 1910.

These considerations tie in well with the essays contained in the current issue of «Metaphysical Art», in which Lorenzo Canova illustrates the pivotal points in the 30-year-old debate on the birth of Metaphysics, shedding definitive light on the facts and circumstances that have led some to write hundreds of pages attempting to prove what cannot be proved and rejecting a truth that is actually the most obvious and simple.

3 As early as 5 January 1911, Giorgio de Chirico wrote to Gartz: “My brother had ‘the deepest music’ written on the program, and no one has noticed that, no one has understood the courage and the strange promise that those words contain. Let us hope that the people of Munich are not so inert and obtuse”.

Of particular interest is Fabio Benzi's article, who for a long time has been studying in-depth the early artistic life of the de Chirico brothers. He investigates their Florentine sojourn (1910-1911), reconstructing the musical, pictorial, literary and philosophical milieu where the Dioscuri would operate, and leads to undeniably significant findings that help shed further light on the artistic identity of the de Chiricos.

Elena Pontiggia's essay on Giorgio de Chirico's intense correspondence with his mother Gemma between 1924 and 1936 is of extraordinary importance. The epistolary exchange elucidates the family dynamics and the Master's close relationship with the omnipresent mother figure. Pontiggia also argues persuasively for the authorship of the French-language biographical work *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico*, signed with the pseudonym "Angelo Bardi", behind which she has reason to identify Alberto Savinio. It is also demonstrated that the first draft of the novel *Signor Dusdron* (later "Dudron") was written before 1932.

Compared to the Italian edition published last year, this issue contains two more essays addressing the same issue but with different methodologies and objectives: *On the Use of German by Giorgio de Chirico*, by Simonetta Antellini, and *Notes on the English Translation of the Correspondence between Giorgio de Chirico and Fritz Gartz (1909-1911)*, by Francesco Caruso. Both essays originate from what may at first seem an obvious question, namely, how familiar was de Chirico with German, a language notoriously difficult to write correctly. The Master undoubtedly spoke German and read Nietzsche's works in the original, although some speculate that he did so in Henry Albert's French translation. We know that de Chirico struggled to write in German. He says so himself in a postcard he sent to Fritz Gartz in July 1909, in which he expresses his discomfort with writing to him (in German).

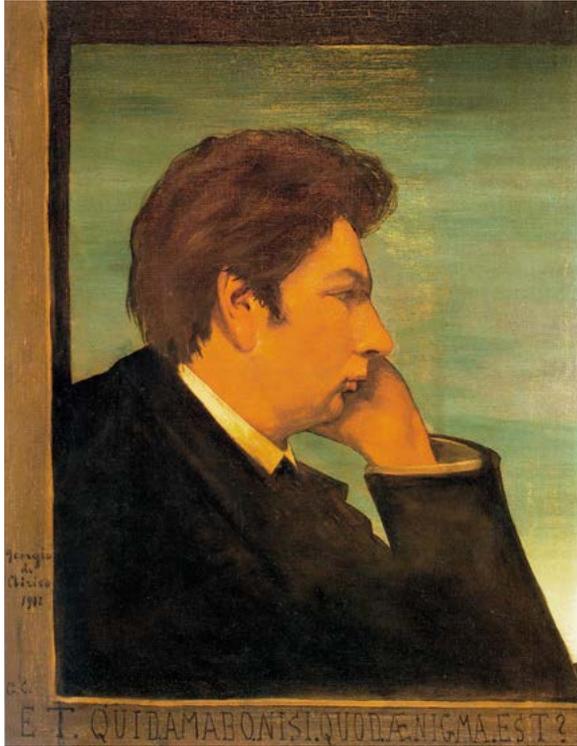
These extraordinary letters, discovered by Gerd Roos and circulated in almost illegible photocopies, were not translated into Italian until this Foundation did so in 2008. It was a formally correct translation, but assumed that de Chirico mastered the German language and that the letters were written by someone who was thinking in German, and not by someone who was translating his own thoughts from Italian into German.

In the translation used up to the present, some of de Chirico's expressions were more than puzzling, such as the use of the word "stupid" (an unusual adjective for a gentleman like de Chirico who was always guarded and discerning in his use of language) and some other less than convincing adjectivization. It had never been suggested that what he enthusiastically and colloquially wrote to his friend Gartz had been written in German without resorting to a dictionary.

Simonetta Antellini's in-depth essay analyzes de Chirico's original knowledge of the German language and the progress he made when, with the assistance of a German professor, he learned to express himself better and write correctly in *Kurrentschrift*.

Francesco Caruso, in his notes to the English translation of the letters, which he has authored together with Danila Moro, uses his expertise as a professional translator and language acquisition expert to explore the polysemy of the Dechirican German vocabulary and its significance for the systematic interpretation of the Master's correspondence with Gartz.

Finally, this issue of «Metaphysical Art» is completed by the English translation of a splendid narrative essay by Italo Calvino, *Cities of Thought*, inspired to a spectacular exhibition at Centre Pompidou in 1983, where some works of art of extraordinary beauty and depth were displayed.



G. de Chirico, *Self-portrait (Et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?)*, 1910-1911, private collection