



Giorgio de Chirico at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich

“THIS SUMMER I’VE PAINTED A FEW PAINTINGS...” CHRONOLOGY OF THE BIRTH OF METAPHYSICS

Lorenzo Canova

A Firm Date

The publication in this issue of «Metaphysical Art» of Giorgio de Chirico’s original letters to Fritz Gartz, along with their envelopes and postmarks, brings to an end a long-running debate about the origins of metaphysical painting, which was sparked by a misreading and misinterpretation of the letter of 26 December 1910 by Paolo Baldacci in his 1997 monograph on the artist.¹

The letters and envelopes, which were recently acquired by the Fondazione Giorgio and Isa de Chirico, are reproduced here in high resolution and print quality to dispel any doubts. After all, Baldacci had long abandoned his (erroneous) dating of the letter decisive for understanding the birth of metaphysical painting to 26 January 1910, recently referring to the postmark of the envelope published here, which clearly bears the date 26 December 1910.²

1 For Baldacci’s theory, see P. Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919. La Metafisica*, Leonardo Arte, Milan 1997; Id., «*La nostra poesia metafisica*». *Genesi, cronologia e fonti di un’estetica globale*, in *Origine e sviluppi dell’arte metafisica. Milano e Firenze 1909-1911 e 1919-1922*, conference proceedings (Milan, Palazzo Greppi, 28-29 October 2010), Scalpenti, Milan 2011, pp. 25-55; Id., *Una parola (quasi) definitiva sulla cronologia 1908-1910*, in «*Studi online*», 4, 7/8 (2017), pp. 5-43; G. Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti: Monaco, Milano, Firenze, 1906-1911*, Bora, Bologna 1999; Id., *La nascita e i primi passi dell’arte metafisica a Milano e Firenze tra il 1908 e il 1911*, in *De Chirico, Max Ernst, Magritte, Balthus. Uno sguardo nell’invisibile*, catalogue of the exhibition (Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, 26 February-18 July 2010), edited by P. Baldacci, G. Magnaguagno, G. Roos, Mandragora, Florence 2010, pp. 29-43. For an opposite view, see M. Calvesi, *De Chirico dall’Arno alla Senna*, in «*Ars*», 3.4 (1999), pp. 46-63; Id., *Firenze e Torino nella Metafisica di de Chirico*, in *G. de Chirico. Nulla Sine Tragoedia Gloria*, proceedings of the European conference (Rome, IRI Auditorium 15-16 October 1999), edited by C. Crescentini, Edizioni dell’Associazione Shakespeare and Company 2, Rome; Maschietto Editore, Florence 2002, pp. 37-46; Id., *Crescentini: novità e conferme su Giorgio de Chirico*, in C. Crescentini, *Giorgio de Chirico. L’enigma velato*, Erreciemme edizioni, Rome 2009, pp. 13-18; P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence nel 1910*, in «*Metaphysical Art*», 7/8 (2008), pp. 56-92; Id., *Betraying de Chirico: The Falsification of de Chirico’s Life History in the last Fifteen Years*, in «*Metaphysical Art*», 9/10 (2010), pp. 28-60; F. Benzi, *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, pp. 93-96. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are by Francesco Caruso.

2 See, most recently, *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato. L’opera tardo romantica e la prima Metafisica, ottobre 1908-febbraio 1912*, Vol. 1.1, edited by P. Baldacci and G. Roos, Allemandi, Turin 2018, pp. 51-52. For the letter, see *Giorgio de Chirico, Lettera a Fritz Gartz del 26 dicembre 1910*, in G. de Chirico, *Lettere 1909-1929*, edited by E. Pontiggia, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo 2018, pp. 23-24. There is universal consensus that the letter’s date is 26 December 1910. It is clear that de Chirico changed the date from “24 Julliet 1910” to “26 Januar 1910”, correcting the day, erasing “Julliet” and adding “Januar”. This is most likely just a slip, as has happened many times before, as pointed out by Elena Pontiggia in de Chirico, *Lettere*, p. 25.



fig. 1 G. de Chirico, *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*, 1910, private collection

The correct date thus matches perfectly with the execution of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* ["The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon"] (fig. 1), which de Chirico painted in Florence (precisely) in the autumn of 1910. This has been disputed by Baldacci, who, before being forcibly persuaded to change his mind, has reconstructed the alleged birth of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909 exclusively on the basis of an erroneous dating of the letter to 26 January 1910, now completely disavowed. Baldacci, however, has not abandoned his untrustworthy and fanciful hypothesis of the birth of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909 and what he thinks to be the alleged creation of the "myth" of the birth of metaphysical painting in Florence in 1910 by Giorgio de Chirico, which has resulted, according to Baldacci, in the presumed erasure of his brother Alberto Savinio's role "in the construction of the theoretical foundations of metaphysical poetics".³ The "downgrading" of the Milanese period, in which his brother's influence would have been purportedly crucial, would satisfy Giorgio's desire to appear as the sole "inventor of that new aesthetic sensibility".⁴

For Baldacci, Giorgio de Chirico allegedly initiated a process to conceal his brother's influence and omit Milan's role, a process culminated in the autobiographical text

3 Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, pp. 100-101. See, for example, Id., *Una parola (quasi) definitiva; Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*.

4 Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, p. 10.

“Angelo Bardi” (1929), a name long considered de Chirico’s pseudonym.⁵ This same text is very clear on the birth of metaphysical painting:

During this first Italian period he continued to work silently and to live alone, without showing his work or taking part in the peninsula’s artistic movements, of which, by the way, he knew nothing about. He spent his first Italian year in Milan. During this period he painted works in which the influence of Böcklin was still all too evident. He destroyed these paintings himself. He then moved to Florence where the influence of the masters (whose work was gathered in the city’s museums), his attraction to the Tuscan landscape and the natural evolution of his personal faculties, allowed Giorgio de Chirico to start discovering his path. It is to this Florentine period that works such as *L’énigme dell’oracolo* [“The Enigma of the Oracle], or *L’énigme di un pomeriggio d’autunno* [“The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon”], belong. We speak of two works that, by their poetic power and their element of “discovery”, are worthy, even if dated 1910, of being placed on the same level of any of his later works.⁶

According to Baldacci, this writing would purposefully omit Savinio’s role in the genesis of metaphysical painting and would be evidence of de Chirico’s artful creation of an alleged “Florentine myth”⁷

However, the question is much more complex, especially in light of Elena Pontiggia’s essay published in this very same issue of «Metaphysical Art». According to Pontiggia,

a letter from de Chirico to his mother dated 27 April 1929 contains a sentence that deserves reflection. The artist pleads with Gemma to give “500 [francs or lire] to Betti as compensation for the biography he has written”. There is no known “biography” – evidently a de Chirico biography, because it is he who oversees the fee – written in this period by Savinio. However, it could be the *Vie de Giorgio de Chirico*, signed “Angelo Bardi” and published in the *Giorgio de Chirico* issue in «*Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique*», no. 8, which came out in Antwerp in December 1929 [...] In the light of references that we find in the letter of 27

5 *Ibid.* The text signed “Angelo Bardi” was first published in the monograph devoted to Giorgio de Chirico (no. 8 in the series) in *Sélection. Chronique de la vie artistique*, Antwerp 1929, pp. 20-26. The text is also published as *The Life of Giorgio de Chirico* in the English translation by K. Robinson in «Metaphysical Art», 5/6 (2006), pp. 496-499. For de Chirico’s authorship, see G. Roos, *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico. Un’autobiografia di Angelo Bardi del 1929*, in «Otto/ Novecento», 1 (1997), p. 32.

6 *The Life of Giorgio de Chirico*, pp. 497-498.

7 Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, p. 100.

April, it can be supposed that the text was written by Savinio, the only one – apart from his brother – who knew and could interpret with such clarity the events of de Chirico's life and his poetics. The hypothesis attributing it to him, however, has already been put forward (although subsequently ruled out) in Roos' essay.⁸

If, as is more than reasonable to conclude, the biography signed “Angelo Bardi” was written by Savinio (“Betti”, as he was affectionately known by de Chirico and his mother Gemma), it was Alberto himself who acknowledged the paternity of metaphysical painting to de Chirico alone as well as the significant role played by Florence in its birth. Angelo Bardi-Savinio, for example, correctly places the Böcklinian paintings in Milan and de Chirico's early metaphysical paintings in Florence.⁹

In this issue of «Metaphysical Art» is also published a draft concert program for Alberto de Chirico's (later Savinio's) sole “orchestral concert” to be held on 9 January 1911. This draft, printed in Italian with a German translation, was included in a letter sent by de Chirico to his friend Fritz Gartz on 5 January 1911.¹⁰ This draft program is very important and contains excerpts from Alberto Savinio's *Poema fantastico*, which Baldacci regards as “the initial driving force of the process leading to the birth of metaphysical poetics”.¹¹ This tenuous hypothesis, to say the least, is unequivocally debunked by Fabio Benzi in this issue of the journal. In fact, he correctly points out that all specifically Dechirican themes addressed in the program

were explicitly attributed to Giorgio de Chirico: he imbued his brother's different scenery – more Panic, descriptive, mythological, and verist – with cogitations made in the late 1910s, that is, the moment when Giorgio was conceiving his metaphysical art (with titles alluding to metaphysical art foundational painting, *L'enigma del pomeriggio d'autunno* [“The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon”]: “Enigma of Eternal Recurrence”, “Autumn Afternoon”, “The Enigma of Autumn”, up to the Böcklinian “Sacrifice of Tritons”).¹²

8 E. Pontiggia, “*Carissima Mamma*.” *Lettere della famiglia de Chirico (1924-1936)*, *passim*, in this journal, pp. 88-89. De Chirico's letter to his mother is from 27 April 1927 and dated “Monte Carlo. Saturday”. As Pontiggia points out, “the date can be deduced by a reference to a bank transfer to be made to Gemma by the artist who, as we know from the papers addressed to Rosenberg, had asked the gallery owner for it that same day” (see de Chirico's letter to Léonce Rosenberg of 27 April 1929, in de Chirico, *Lettere*, p. 423).

9 Fabio Benzi's recent investigation into Savinio's subsequent attempts to emphasize his own role in the birth of Metaphysics in the 1940s has revealed their unreliability, see *Risposta di Fabio Benzi all'intervento di Paolo Baldacci apparso sul n. 153 di «Storia dell'arte» (1/2020)*, in «Storia dell'Arte», n.s., 154.2 (2020), pp. 181-183.

10 G. de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 5 January 1911, in de Chirico, *Lettere*, pp. 30-31.

11 Baldacci, *Una parola (quasi) definitiva*, p. 9.

12 F. Benzi, *The Florentine Sojourn of de Chirico Brothers (1910-1911): The Musical, Pictorial, Literary, and Philosophical*

In a letter dated 26 December 1910, de Chirico had clearly said to have helped his brother in writing the music for a concert that Savinio had planned to give in Munich in the coming months: “I would still have many things to tell you, for example, that now my brother and I have composed the most profound music”.¹³ It is no coincidence that Gregorio Nardi pointed out that Giorgio was more likely to have “wisely advised” his brother than vice versa. “If this is the case, then Giorgio inspired Alberto”, a role that Savinio himself acknowledged in the concert program.¹⁴ This reconstruction flatly contradicts the hypothesis that Savinio’s *Poema fantastico* is the initial driving force leading to the birth of Metaphysics, since the metaphysical elements in the paintings are de Chirico’s.

All of these elements not only demonstrate that Baldacci’s entire theoretical edifice is founded on an initial erroneous assumption (the incorrect dating of the letter to Gartz to 26 January 1910, which for years has been the cornerstone of all his theories), but also disprove that the imaginary developments of Metaphysics stand on de Chirico’s alleged cover-ups. Furthermore, in his letter of 26 December 1910, de Chirico is very clear about his collaboration with his brother, a collaboration that took place in Florence and proves nothing as far as the hypothesis of the birth of Metaphysical Art in Milan in 1909 is concerned. On the other hand, the *Rivelazioni* in the concert program fits perfectly into the framework of the birth of Metaphysics in the fall of 1910, and it is unclear why de Chirico would have made the musical compositions in October 1910, given that he mentions them in December of that year and the concert was scheduled for January 1911.¹⁵ Benzi writes:

In this circumstance, even Giorgio, who had never before attempted music himself, exceptionally deviated from his pictorial path: no doubt he did so to support and assist his young brother who was clearly in a creative slump after the disillusionment with Milan, and thus to push him to complete the musical *Poema musicale* as he had set himself to do. [...] According to the concert program, several pieces must have been composed (unwillingly, but with brotherly solidarity) by Giorgio himself, who thus succeeded in assisting Alberto in his efforts to complete that first concert.¹⁶

Context, in this issue of «Metaphysical Art», p. 22.

13 G. de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 26 December 1910, in de Chirico, *Lettere*, pp. 23-24.

14 G. Nardi, “*La musica più profonda*”. *Ipotesi sul lavoro musicale dei fratelli de Chirico tra il 1909 e il 1911*, in *Origine e sviluppi dell’arte metafisica*, p. 65.

15 See Baldacci, *Una parola (quasi) definitiva*, pp. 14-15.

16 Benzi, *The Florentine Sojourn*, p. 18 *passim*. This discussion includes what Baldacci says about *L’oracolo* [“The Oracle”], Savinio’s stolen drawing, which he incorrectly dates to 1909. Baldacci’s thesis had already been challenged by Paolo Picozza, who pointed out that that date “questions the iconographic novelty of de Chirico’s early metaphysical

So, after many years of stale debate, it is now necessary to frame the issue in light of its documentary evidence and the definitive (and now widely accepted) date of de Chirico's letter to Gartz, that is, 26 December 1910. After all, it is difficult to understand how the letter could ever be the primary document for the theses advocated by Baldacci and Roos, and how it can no longer be so now that their thesis of 26 January 1910 has been proven to be completely incorrect. De Chirico is very clear in the letter dated 26 December 1910, and writes: "This summer I painted paintings that are the deepest that exist". Therefore, in light of these words, there is no reason to think that he painted his first metaphysical works in Milan in 1909.¹⁷

After all, even the fanciful hypotheses of duplicates of the same painting, which Baldacci formulated in order to support now-defeated theses, appear to have no basis, as Fabio Benzi recently demonstrated for one of two versions of *La meditazione del pomeriggio* ["The Arrival"], exhibited at the Galleria Arte in Milan in 1921, which was mistakenly seen as an unknown second version of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*.¹⁸

In fact, in his solo show (29 January-12 February 1921) at Galleria Arte in Milan, de Chirico exhibited *L'enigma dell'oracolo* (fig. 2), *La meditazione del mattino* ["The Morning Meditation"] and two works entitled *La meditazione del pomeriggio* ["The Afternoon Meditation"] (first and second version) as "juvenile works 1908-1915".¹⁹ As far as these two versions are concerned, in the Baldacci-Roos catalogue we can read:

Based on the reviews, one can easily identify *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* [...]. The other was lost, but based on the descriptions available, it appears to have been quite similar to the first in terms of both general atmosphere and subject. Although he confuses the two titles (mistaking *Meditazione del mattino* for *Meditazione del pomeriggio*), Enrico Somaré provides a detailed description of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*, and the fact that he does not notice any

paintings, namely, *L'enigma dell'oracolo* and *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*" (Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico*, p. 48). According to Baldacci, it would be "impossible to determine which of the two brothers came first to define a certain iconography, to use the silhouette of Böcklin's Ulysses (which later becomes a recurring motif), and to set up a classical architecture with a something primordial to it" (Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, pp. 60-61). Baldacci's unfounded hypothesis is unequivocally refuted by Benzi, who dates Savinio's drawing between 1917 and 1918, based on precise testimonies from Filippo de Pisis and the Signorelli family, who owned the drawing donated to them by Savinio himself (see *Risposta di Fabio Benzi*, pp. 181-182).

17 De Chirico, *Lettere*, pp. 23-24. For the letter to Gartz of 27 December 1909 and 11 April 1910, see id., pp. 18-22.

18 See *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*, pp. 170-171; see also Benzi's review in «Storia dell'Arte», n.s. 151-152.1/2 (2019), p. 222; Baldacci's reply in «Storia dell'Arte», n. s., 153.1 (2020), pp. 172-174, and finally *Risposta di Fabio Benzi*, pp. 182-183.

19 See also *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*, p. 118.

significant differences between the two versions displayed leads us to believe that the two must have been quite similar.²⁰

It should be remembered, however, that, as Benzi rightly points out, in those years de Chirico used to give identical titles to different paintings and that the presence of a duplicate painting would be noticed by everyone and in particular by Enrico Somaré in his review of the exhibition published in «Il Primato artistico italiano» of March-April 1921.²¹ Moreover, Somaré's article leaves many questions open and does not allow us to reach the conclusions drawn in the Baldacci-Roos catalogue.

Somaré writes of “*the morning meditation sky, dry and bright*” (our emphasis) that “*curves over the architectural space of a peripatetic little square. There, two philosophers converse beside a statue, in front of the wall of a small temple, illuminated by the faint*



fig 2 G. de Chirico, *L'enigma dell'oracolo*, 1910, private collection

sun, over which towers a half-furled sail, hinting at the sea of the Ulysses' progeny, inciting the imagination to sail". The painting described is, without a shadow of doubt, *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* (as Baldacci also concludes), but Somaré describes it while he is talking about *La meditazione del mattino*. As a result, it is unclear why Baldacci and Roos use Somaré's text as evidence for the existence of two nearly identical versions of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*.

Their assumption appears to be completely unfounded. Furthermore, in 1932, summarizing his previous article, Somaré writes:

²⁰ Id., p. 170.

²¹ E. Somaré, *Esposizioni di Milano: Galleria "Arte" – Mostra personale del pittore Giorgio de Chirico*, in «Il Primato artistico italiano», 3,3 (1921), pp. 31-32. See Benzi's response to Baldacci mentioned above, p. 183.

L'enigma dell'oracolo, *La meditazione del mattino*, the two versions of *Meditazione del pomeriggio*, reminiscent of some of Böcklin's themes, convey a sense of Romantic melancholy veiling an ineffable mystery of ancient things. The still, shiny sky hanging over in *Meditazione del mattino* seals up the architectural space of a small square facing the sea, where two peripatetics meditate between a statue and a temple illuminated by the morning sun.²²

Somaré makes no mention of any double version of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno* and, at any rate, refers again to *La meditazione del mattino*. His text by no means proves Baldacci-Roos' thesis but rather raises some doubts about the identification of the exhibited works: for example, we cannot rule out the possibility that one of them could be *L'enigma dell'arrivo e del pomeriggio*, as hypothesized by Fabio Benzi.²³

In any case, there are two possibilities: either Somaré made a mistake and confused *La meditazione del mattino* with one of the two versions of *La meditazione del pomeriggio* – and then we do not see why this text should count as evidence; or, according to what we read, *La meditazione del mattino* and *L'enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno* are the same painting – which would raise very different and way more complex questions. What cannot be agreed upon is that there were two nearly identical versions of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno* (1909 and 1910), an entirely outlandish hypothesis supported by no documentary evidence or testimony in reviews written at the time.

If we go back to the letter of 26 December 1910, de Chirico apologizes for writing to his friend after a long absence, which was also due to poor health (“which, unfortunately, has not been very good this year”) and speaks of his new paintings painted “this summer” (presumably the warm season that ends in October), “which are the deepest paintings ever”. These paintings are certainly the earliest works of Metaphysical Art, and the poor health conditions of which de Chirico speaks in the letter are echoed in what we can read in the *Paulhan Manuscripts*, where he describes the revelation of *L'enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno*:

One clear autumnal afternoon I was sitting on a bench in the middle of the Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. Indeed, it was not the first time I had seen this square. I had just recovered from a long and painful intestinal illness and found myself in a morbid state of sensitivity. All of Nature surrounding me, even the marble of the buildings and the fountains, seemed to me to be convalescing also. In the middle of the square stands a statue of Dante draped in a long cloak, holding his

22 Id., *Cronache d'Arte Contemporanea*, Edizioni dell'Esame, Milan 1932, p. 30.

23 See Benzi's review of 2019, p. 222, and his reply to Baldacci in 2020, p. 183, both cited in fn. 18.

works to his body, thoughtfully bowing his pensive laurel-crowned head toward the ground. The statue is of white marble, to which time has given a grey tinge that is very pleasing to the eye. The autumn sun, warm and without love, lit the statue and the church facade. I then had the strange impression that I was looking at all these things for the first time, and the composition of my picture came to my mind's eye. Now each time I look at this painting I relive this moment once again. Nevertheless, the moment is an enigma to me, for it is inexplicable. And I like also to call the resulting work an enigma.²⁴

These recollections are also confirmed by a passage of de Chirico's *Memoirs*, which eloquently corresponds to what he writes in his letter of 26 December 1910:

In Florence my health grew worse. Sometimes I painted small canvases. The Böcklin period had passed and I had begun to paint subjects in which I tried to express the strong and mysterious feeling I had discovered in the books of Nietzsche: the melancholy of beautiful autumn days, afternoon in Italian cities. It was the prelude to the squares of Italy painted a little later in Paris, and then in Milne, in Florence and in Rome.²⁵

The painter's recollections are echoed in Victoria Noel-study Johnson's devoted to the artist's visits to Florence's Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in 1910, which shows that de Chirico passed through Piazza Santa Croce on his way between his Florentine homes and the library several times, as he himself recalled: "obviously it was not the first time I had seen that square."²⁶ The letter to Gartz of 26 December 1910 confirms de Chirico's poor health, emphasized in the *Paulhan Manuscripts* – a condition that (in a Nietzschean way) he extends to whole nature, which appears to him "convalescent".²⁷

24 G. de Chirico, *Paulhan Manuscripts*, in «Metaphysical Art», 17/18 (2018), pp. 53-54 (trans. K. Robinson).

25 *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, Da Capo Press, New York 1994, p. 61 *passim* (first ed.: Astrolabio, Rome 1945).

26 Victoria Noel-Johnson's study on de Chirico's visits to Florence's Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale "substantiates the traditional theory (as maintained by the artist himself) that he experienced his revelation in Piazza Santa Croce during the autumn of 1910. If we take 23 September 1910 (the official start of autumn) as the earliest possible date of this revelation taking place, the B.N.C.F. registers prove that de Chirico had already visited the library on 34 separate occasions (23 April-21 September 1910). Located directly behind the B.N.C.F., the artist would almost certainly have passed through Piazza Santa Croce on his way to and from the library during these 34 visits, with his home located first in Via Ricasoli 44 and then Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 20 [...]. This corresponds to de Chirico's 1912 description of this revelation", see V. Noel-Johnson, *De Chirico's Formation in Florence (1910-1911): The Discovery of the B. N. C. F. Library Registers*, in «Metaphysical Art», 11/13 (2014), p. 143.

27 It is no coincidence that "The Convalescent" is a chapter of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited by A. Del Caro and R. P. Pippin, New York; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 173-179.

As Andrea Cortellessa has written: “in short, there are all the ingredients for the alchemy of the enigma to produce. True, but the final and most important one is missing: convalescence. Not only is the subject recovering from *une longue et douloureuse maladie intestinale*, but, at least according to him, *la nature entière* is *en convalescence*”²⁸

In the same letter de Chirico offers a fundamental and valuable technical indication: “my paintings are small (the largest measure 50 × 70 cm), but each one of them is an enigma, each contains a poem, an atmosphere [...] and when I exhibit them, it will be a revelation to the whole world”²⁹

The measurements indicated by de Chirico are very clear, they cannot possibly belong to the earlier works. Rather, they document that the paintings to which he is referring to are: *L'enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno* (cm 45 × 60), *L'enigma dell'oracolo* (cm 42 × 61), *L'enigma dell'ora* [“The Enigma of the Hour”] (fig. 3) (cm 55 × 71) and, most



fig. 3 G. de Chirico, *L'enigma dell'ora*, 1910, private collection

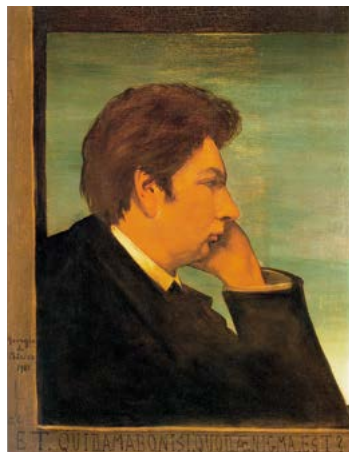


fig. 4 *Autoritratto (et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?)*, 1910-1911, private collection

likely, *Autoritratto (et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?)* (fig. 4) that measures 72.5 × 55 cm, which can be reasonably assumed to have been completed by that time, or to be almost finished by early 1911. After all, as Paolo Baldacci has written, “the paintings described in the letter to Gartz cannot be confused with non-metaphysical works, for they would not have been called ‘enigmas’”³⁰ The painter’s announcement to his friend

28 A. Cortellessa, *Il ritornante*, in G. de Chirico, *Scritti/1, (1911- 1945). Romanzi e Scritti critici e teorici*, edited by A. Cortellessa, under the direction of A. Bonito Oliva, Bompiani, Milan 2008, p. XXIII.

29 G. de Chirico, letter to Fritz Gartz, 26 December 1910, in de Chirico, *Lettere*, pp. 23-24, *passim*.

30 Baldacci, «*La nostra poesia metafisica*», p. 37.

of having created these works places them between October and December 1910, possibly including the *Self-Portrait* on which de Chirico was working when he wrote to Gartz on 26 December 1910. As a result, it is far from a coincidence that de Chirico's earlier works are always larger than the measurements he mentions in the letter, with the exception of *Processione sul monte* ["Procession on a Mountain"] (date uncertain), measuring 50 × 50 cm, but which even in the Baldacci-Roos catalogue (2018) is considered more of a "stylistic exercise in pictorial 'synthetism' in search of new expressive ways"; also, de Chirico could not certainly judge it as one of the revelatory works of his new creative season.³¹ The documents speak very eloquently on the matter, and the attempt at imagining other paintings bearing the same title appears futile.

The birth of Metaphysics in Florence in 1910 can no longer be discussed. Among other things, as noted again in the chronological reconstruction of the Baldacci-Roos 2018 catalogue raisonné, de Chirico would have painted *L'enigma dell'oracolo* and *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* in the fall of 1909, remaining virtually inactive throughout 1910, for he painted *L'enigma dell'ora* in January-February 1911 and *Auroritratto* in the spring of 1911, despite the fact that, still in 2017 Baldacci considered the latter work "the only painting executed in 1910 [...] to be placed at the end of the summer [of that year]".³² Therefore, de Chirico would have remained inactive for a whole year, a theory disproved by the letter of 26 December 1910, where he clearly states: "this summer I painted paintings that are the deepest that exist". Here de Chirico is not referring to the previous summer, 1909, but to that of 1910, which definitively refutes the hypothesis that he did not paint for a whole year in order to devote himself solely to music and composing pieces for his brother's concert. De Chirico may not have been Mandrake the Magician, as Baldacci humorously asserts,³³ but at the height of his inspiration fueled by his new revelations, in a few months he was undeniably able to work on three paintings and a few compositions in a few months; after all, he was also able to publish the *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* ["Short Treaty of Pictorial Technique"] and *Hebdòmeros* at peak of his splendid 1920s Parisian season, when painting took up most of his energies.

Roman Revelations

De Chirico's visit to Rome in 1909 plays a key role in Baldacci's theory of the genesis of Metaphysics in that same year. We know that he also visited Florence, and that, according to Baldacci, during his very brief stay in the Tuscan city, the painter had the

31 *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*, p. 100.

32 *Id.*, pp. 108-119; 132-137, *passim*. See also P. Baldacci, *La pittura e la musica "più profonde". Conferme sulla cronologia 1909-1910 e la nascita dell'arte metafisica*, in N. M. Mocchi, *La cultura dei fratelli de Chirico agli albori dell'arte metafisica. Milano e Firenze 1909-1911*, Archivio dell'arte metafisica-Scalpendi, Milan 2017, p. 15.

33 Baldacci, *Una parola (quasi) definitiva*, p. 15

“revelation” in Piazza Santa Croce that would serve as a prelude to creation of *Lenigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* executed in Milan the fall of 1909.³⁴ Baldacci believes that de Chirico’s “first revelations” occurred in Rome, about which he writes a few years later, were the immediate precursor to the birth of metaphysical painting rather than the beginning of a more articulated artistic path destined to be fulfilled a year later – as a careful examination of his artworks and papers shows.

According to Baldacci, the trip to Rome reinforces de Chirico’s “intangible concept of the ‘sentiment of prehistory’ corroborated by the emotions he felt at the sight of Roman antiquities and his progressive penetration into the primitive people’s oracular ‘Wisdom’”.³⁵ Among other things, Baldacci connects these statements to a possible influence of Giovan Battista Vico on de Chirico’s Metaphysics, echoing what Calvesi proposed in *La Metafisica schiarita* in 1982 (but without citing him). In 2017, Baldacci wrote:

Vico’s influence on de Chirico was similarly significant in the progressive establishment of that “sentiment of prehistory” meant as a childlike and poetic age of the world – one of the main themes of *Poema fantastico*. Nietzsche’s pre-logical wisdom and the “poetic metaphysics” begotten by the vigorous minds of the oracular age described by Vico were critical to de Chirico’s subjectivity full poetic and artistic maturation. “Prehistory” becomes a “sentiment” to him, a state of mind intertwined with sensations and symbolic images that make it a metaphor for a type of extralogical and divinatory knowledge like that of a dowser’s. Against this background, I believe that the painting inspired by the Homeric episode of Ulysses and Calypso, of which de Chirico speaks in the manuscript we have examined, is likely to be what is today known as *Lenigma dell’oracolo* (42 × 61 cm), although I acknowledge that that manuscript does not say whether it was executed or not, but only that de Chirico had a vision about it: “after a few imaginative attempts and the painting suddenly appears in front of me – I then had the sensation of having finally found something”. This painting is a little masterpiece owing much to a famous painting by Böcklin as well as to the possibility, offered by another version of the myth, of an identification with Ulysses.³⁶

34 Id., *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, pp. 74-85.

35 Id., *Una parola (quasi) definitiva*, p. 30.

36 Id., p. 24.

Baldacci quotes this passage by de Chirico using “the 1994 edition by Giovanni Lista”:

When after having left the Munich Academy, I realized that the road I was following was not the one I should follow. I had entered upon tortuous paths; some modern artists, especially Max Klinger and Böcklin, captivated me. I thought of those profoundly felt compositions, having a particular mood [*Stimmung*] which one recognized among a thousand others. But once again I understood that this was not what I sought. I read; a passage from Homer enthralled me – Ulysses on the island of Calypso – some views, and the picture rose before me, and then I felt I had finally found something. Or while reading Ariosto: Roger, the typical knight-errant rests beneath a tree, he sleeps, his horse crops the grass nearby, all is silent and solitary, one would expect to see a dragon fly by. The scene enchants me, suddenly I conjure up the knight, the horse, the landscape; it is nearly a revelation, but I am still not satisfied.³⁷

However, de Chirico’s text is very clear and refers to a suggestion from Homer, which is not yet decisive for that “revelation” destined give birth to his metaphysical paintings, and the reference to *L’enigma dell’oracolo* does not seem to fit at all.

At this point, instead, it should be noted that in his *Metafisica schiarita* (1982) Calvesi had already written words that appear to predate Baldacci’s:

de Chirico seems to blend Nietzsche’s ideas with those of other authors he had read; not only Schopenhauer or Papini [...] but, as we are going to demonstrate, also G. B. Vico, so full of suggestions about “recourses” and so crucial for identifying a connection between poetry, primitivism, divination and “metaphysics” – be it a Vico set in the stunned atmosphere of a prehistory that is fixed, does not evolve but becomes meta-history.³⁸

37 G. de Chirico, *Manoscritti Éluard*, in Baldacci, *Una parola (quasi) definitiva*, p. 36. [The English translation used here, by K. Robinson, is published in G. de Chirico, *Éluard-Picasso Manuscripts*, in «Metaphysical Art», 17/18 (2018), p. 43. Translator’s Note]. This is the original French text: “Lorsque, après avoir quitté l’Académie de Munich je m’aperçus que la route que je suivais n’était pas celle que je devais suivre, je m’étais engagé dans des chemins tortueux d’abord quelques artistes modernes, dont Max Klinger et Böcklin surtout me captivèrent; je pensais à ces compositions senties profondément ayant une *Stimmung* particulière, qu’on apercevrait au milieu de mille autres. – Mais je compris de nouveau que ce n’était pas cela. Je lisais; un passage d’Homère me captive – Ulysse dans l’île de Calypso – quelques vues et le tableau se présente devant moi – alors on a la sensation d’avoir enfin trouvé quelque chose; ou bien en lisant Arioste, Roger, ce type de chevalier errant se repose sous un arbre, il s’endort, le cheval broute l’herbe autour de lui; tout est solitaire et silencieux, on s’attendrait à voir passer un dragon dans les airs; la scène me captive, je me figure le chevalier, le cheval, le paysage tout d’un coup, c’est presque une révélation, mais cela ne me suffit pas encore” (id., 23).

38 M. Calvesi, *La Metafisica schiarita: Da de Chirico a Carrà, da Morandi a Savinio*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1982, p. 89.

Calvesi also noticed a passage from the *Éluard Manuscripts* that is particularly relevant to *L'enigma dell'oracolo* and allows a better understanding of this work:³⁹

Day is breaking. This is the hour of the enigma. This is also the hour of prehistory. The song in dream, the revelatory song of the last morning dream of the prophet asleep at the foot of the sacred column, near the cold white simulacrum of a god. One of the strangest and deepest sensations that prehistory has left with us is the sensation of foretelling. It will always exist. It is like an eternal proof of the senselessness of the universe. The first man must have seen auguries everywhere, he must have trembled at each step he took.

The wind rustles the oak leaves: it is the voice of a god which speaks, and the trembling prophet listens, his face bent towards earth.

Thinking of the temples dedicated to the sea gods, built along the arid coasts of Greece and Asia Minor, I have often imagined those soothsayers tending to the voice of the waves receding from that Adamic land. I have pictured them head and body wrapped in a chlamys, waiting for the mysterious revealing oracle.⁴⁰

In this regard, the text quoted by Calvesi seems to be more suitable to *L'enigma dell'oracolo* than that cited by Baldacci. Also, it alludes to what the former refers to as “the divination stage that, according to Vico, immediately follows the terrified troglodyte’s bewilderment; to whom de Chirico will be even gladly to compare himself, sliding back to draw from Papini’s and Nietzsche’s authenticity of the ‘savage’. But he will do so by taking as a model for the ‘savage’ that very Vichian caveman, the ancient ‘metaphysician’, which will be matched by a ‘new’ one”⁴¹

It is evident, therefore, that in the gestation and birth of metaphysical painting, the impressions de Chirico received from Rome and Florence blended in an elaboration process spanning from October 1909 to the end of 1910: from the first revelations he had in the Eternal City to the revelation in Piazza Santa Croce in the fall of 1910 and the first metaphysical enigmas of which de Chirico speaks in his letter of 26 December 1910. Furthermore, in a letter to Fritz Gartz dated 27 December 1909, the artist, speaking of his trip the previous October to Rome and Florence, recalls that the latter was the city he “liked the most” and where he decided to go and live. In the letter, however, he makes

39 See *ibid.* De Chirico’s passage quoted next ends in this way: “So also I once imagined the Ephesian, meditating in the first light of dawn under the peristyle of the Temple of Artemis of the hundred breasts”.

40 De Chirico, *Éluard-Picasso Manuscripts*, pp. 47-48 (and pp. 29-30 for the original French version).

41 Calvesi, *La Metafisica schiarita*, p. 90.

no mention at all, let us remind this again, of the paintings of his metaphysical enigmas that would instead be the object of the letter written the following year.⁴²

Also, it should not be forgotten that still in 2010 Baldacci and Roos considered the debated letter to Gartz, which they erroneously dated to 26 January 1910, as the “main proof” of their chronological reconstruction to 1909, a theory that appears to have been definitively disproven today.⁴³ Of course, it cannot be denied that the trip to Rome and the powerful impressions it left played a crucial role for the birth of those “first revelations” from which the metaphysical painting developed – after all, Fabio Benzi had already emphasized this in his 1982 essay on the places of de Chirico’s *Metaphysics*.⁴⁴ It is clear, however, that the birth of the first metaphysical enigmas was the result of a gestation process in which Florence, with its artistic masterpieces and fervid cultural climate, played a crucial role, as has been well highlighted in Calvesi’s studies and Benzi’s recent essays, including the one cited above published in this issue of «Metaphysical Art».

The hypothesis that in October 1909 de Chirico in a few days visits Rome, where he has his first revelations, moves for a short stay to Florence where he allegedly has the famous revelation in Piazza Santa Croce, and where he is able to study in depth Giotto, and then returns to Milan and paints *L'enigma dell'oracolo* and *L'enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno* – it already seemed unsound and hardly arguable for reasons pertaining to chronology and to the artist’s development. Today, however, this reconstruction appears to be completely incorrect and indefensible. In fact, the “main proof” of the letter’s (wrongly assigned) date has not only proven itself to be baseless, but has also revealed itself to be irrefutable proof of the opposing thesis, held by those whom Baldacci refers to as “supporters of the fall 1910 chronology”.⁴⁵ After all and not by chance, the Roman impressions, however reprocessed, start to be more visible in the arcades in *L'enigma dell'ora* and in works painted in Paris, like, for example, *La torre rossa* [“The Red Tower”] or *L'enigma dell'arrivo e del pomeriggio* (fig. 5) (both Benzi and Baldacci rightly argue that de Chirico’s arcades are a refashioning of Florentine architectures). Finally, according to Baldacci, the manuscript where de Chirico speaks about Rome was written in Paris between the end of 1911 and 1912.⁴⁶

42 De Chirico, *Lettere*, pp. 18-21.

43 Roos, *La nascita e i primi passi dell'arte metafisica*, pp. 34-35.

44 F. Benzi, *I luoghi di de Chirico*, in *Giorgio de Chirico*. Pictor Optimus, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 16 December 1992-8 February 1993), edited by M. Calvesi, M. G. Tolomeo Speranza, F. Benzi, Edizioni Carte Segrete, Rome 1992, pp. 50-51.

45 Baldacci, *Una parola (quasi) definitiva*, p. 18.

46 For the reference to the Florentine architectures, see J. T. Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, The Museum of Modern Art, Arno Press, New York 1955, p. 58; F. Benzi, *Giorgio de Chirico: La vita e l'opera*, La nave di Teseo, Milan 2019, p. 89; *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*, pp. 132-137. Among other things, the loggia on the second floor of *L'enigma dell'ora*, with its openings to the sky through which a character’s silhouette appears, seems to recall the terrace with the two figures in



fig. 5 G. de Chirico, *Lenigma dell'arrivo e del pomeriggio*, 1912, private collection

Florence 1910

In the light of the preceding documents and considerations, it is now undeniable that de Chirico's Metaphysical Art was born in Florence in 1910. In fact, what Maurizio Calvesi and Paolo Picozza wrote in 1999 and 2010 to challenge Baldacci's unfounded assumptions would have already been sufficient to put an end to the debate.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Calvesi, without ever retracting his conclusions, as has been falsely claimed, has always reiterated the truth about the birth of Metaphysical Art in 1910, as de Chirico constantly did, with serious and rigorous arguments.⁴⁸ In analyzing what Baldacci calls "the Florentine myth", Calvesi rightly pointed out that de Chirico

thought it was more ennobling to call himself a Florentine, that is, born in the city of the great geniuses of painting. This, however, was not cheating, but rather an honest identification, a cultural preference, and at the same time a claim of origins even in front of himself. So much so that even on his own property, namely a copy of Schopenhauer's *Essay on Spirit Seeing*, next to the date (1913) we can find the signature *Georgius de Chirico florentinus*. Then, in a chapter of *Hermaphrodito*, Savinio himself defines de Chirico citizen of Florence. Would this be self-harm on

The Last Supper frescoed by Andrea Del Sarto in Florence.

47 See fn. 1.

48 See Calvesi, *Firenze e Torino nella Metafisica*; Picozza, *Betraying de Chirico*. On the alleged, but in fact never occurred, "retraction" by Calvesi, see G. Roos, *Maurizio Calvesi ritratta* (1 December 2009) in <http://www.archivioartemetafisica.org/maurizio-calvesi-ritratta/> (last accessed 19 May 2022).

Savinio's part? In 1914, in an issue of *Lacerba*, Soffici writes that both de Chirico and Savinio are Florentines. In fact, the "Florentine myth" simply reiterates the fact that de Chirico looked up to that city's cultural milieu and its past, and specifically the "Art of the Primitives", which he studied fruitfully.⁴⁹

Not surprisingly, Calvesi emphasized the profound influence of fourteenth-century Florentine painting on de Chirico's Metaphysics and early painting as early as 1982, rightly noting

that the de Chirico's unique perspectives, as well as the morphology of some of his architectures, originate in Trecento Tuscan painting. To prepare for our analysis, let us go back to *Lenigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*. We know that the statue depicted in the painting is that of Dante in Santa Croce in Florence, seen from behind as if by someone who is leaving the church or giving their back to it. The church's façade, in fact, undergoes a far more significant transformation than the statue itself. In its place, a stereotypical architecture emerges that, upon closer inspection, resembles a detail of a Giotto's fresco preserved precisely in Santa Croce: *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* in the Bardi Chapel, as well as a similar detail of the same scene depicted by Giovanni del Biondo in a predella in the Rinuccini Chapel. The Dechirican structure resembles a hybrid between these painted architectures and the church façade, while the columns bring to mind a classical temple.⁵⁰

Also, as early as 1997, Baldacci himself espoused Calvesi's thesis (citing it in a footnote): "the white temple along with the small building next to it that replaces Santa Croce could be inspired, instead, by a memory of the buildings in the Giottesque frescoes that decorate the apsis of the church".⁵¹ Calvesi is proven correct in the 2018 Baldacci-Roos catalogue when *Lenigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* is discussed:

The actual scene in Piazza Santa Croce is transformed due the influence of the frescoes de Chirico saw inside the church, particularly those by Giotto and Maso di Banco. Santa Croce takes on the forms of a frigid, purist architecture through

49 *Firenze e Torino nella Metafisica*, p. 41.

50 *Id.*, *La Metafisica schiarita*, p. 58.

51 Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, pp. 80; 85.

the filter of late Gothic painting, in an overlapping of formal suggestions that will become typical of the new metaphysical style.⁵²

It is evident that from its first instance metaphysical painting is clearly influenced by de Chirico's reflections on the painting of the fourteenth-century masters, beginning with Giotto; and that his reflections are the result of a careful and weighty meditation that is strongly influenced by the Florentine cultural milieu that Calvesi highlighted as early as 1982, and Fabio Benzi has brought into focus by in his more recent studies.⁵³

In such a clear context, it is obvious that there is no reference to Raphael's *The Marriage of the Virgin* at the origins of de Chirico's metaphysical painting, which Baldacci uses as the nodal point of his theory of the birth of Metaphysics in Milan, a thesis based on a drawing that deserves careful analysis, as will be seen below. Moreover, the memory of the old notebook and the "sentimento geografico milanese", which Baldacci puts forward to support his theory of a Milan-based Metaphysics,⁵⁴ belong to a text that de Chirico wrote in the 1920s, that is, in his classic period, when he saw the Milanese Neoclassicists and looked at Milan as a "flat and geometrical" city with a very different set of eyes. It was indeed a key moment of his career, but rather far from his first metaphysical works.

After all, it should be remembered that in December 1909, after his October trip to Rome and Florence, de Chirico wrote to Gartz that "Florence is the city that I liked the most", and that he had decided to move there.⁵⁵ It is very likely that Florence, with its architecture and masterpieces kept in its churches and museums, represented the culmination of the classically inspired recollections of his childhood (well recognizable in the first metaphysical paintings) and of the "first revelations" he had in Rome. In this regard, using Raphael's *The Marriage of the Virgin* at Brera as evidence of the birth of the first metaphysical inspirations in 1909 appears feeble, to say the very least.⁵⁶ Although it is undeniable that such a masterpiece profoundly influenced de Chirico, and not by chance this suggestion connects with his Roman and Florentine impressions, Raphael's influence is not at all explicit in the very first metaphysical paintings. The centrally planned building in *L'enigma dell'arrivo e del pomeriggio* is painted in Paris in 1912 and does not seem to derive from the *The Marriage of the Virgin*'s polygonal building, a reminiscence of which can be found in the door opened onto the sky. Moreover,

52 *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*, p. 117.

53 Benzi, *Giorgio de Chirico: La vita e l'opera*, especially pp. 57-72.

54 Baldacci, «*La nostra poesia metafisica*», pp. 33-34.

55 De Chirico, *Lettere*, p. 21. For the chapter "I Neoclassici milanesi", see G. De Chirico, *Considerazioni sulla pittura moderna*, in «Il Primato Artistico Italiano», 15 September-15 October 1920, later published in Id., *Scritti/1*, pp. 741-747.

56 Baldacci, «*La nostra poesia metafisica*», p. 35.



fig. 6 G. de Chirico (attr.),
*Senza titolo (L'enigma dell'arrivo
 e del pomeriggio)*,
 n. d., private collection

Raphaelesque architecture is the focal point of a central perspective that is omitted in de Chirico's work.

As Baldacci has also pointed out, the building painted by de Chirico shows a contamination with "a vaguely archaic tholos";⁵⁷ possibly an evocation and transformation of the Temple of Hercules Victor (the so called "Temple of Vesta") in Piazza Bocca della Verità in Rome. In making this fusion, de Chirico has not forgotten the influence of Giotto's and Maso di Banco's architectures, splendidly reprised in the metaphysical towers he painted in Paris. Since *L'enigma dell'arrivo e del pomeriggio* was painted in Paris in 1912 (or, for Baldacci, in 1911-1912), it should not have any connection with alleged Milan-related birth of the earliest metaphysical season. Yet, a preparatory sketch of this painting (fig. 6) would support Baldacci's thesis: in fact, what is Dechirican about this drawing is more its time-traveling quality than its being executed by Giorgio de Chirico.

This drawing made its first appearance in the very early 1980s. In 1981, it was authenticated by Claudio Bruni. In 1982, when it was published for the de Chirico exhibition at MoMA, it was assigned to 1912 and published with the same date on the first tome of the eighth volume of the *Catalogo generale* edited by Bruni.⁵⁸ In the 1997 monograph by Baldacci, the drawing makes its first backward jump in time, for it is assigned to the

57 Id., pp. 46-47.

58 *De Chirico* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March-June 1982), edited by W. Rubin, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1982, pp. 200-201; *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo Generale*, Volume 8, tome I: *Opere dal 1908 al 1930*, edited by C. Bruni Sakraischik, Electa, Milan 1987, no. 463. Bruni's certification of authenticity is dated 27 June 1981, and is kept in the archives of the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico in Rome. The drawing was brought in by Paolo Sprovieri.

first half of 1911.⁵⁹ In another text by Baldacci, published in 2011, a caption assigns the same work to 1911, while the main text says that it was “executed after the trip to Rome of 1909 and before de Chirico left Milan to move to Florence (25-26 January 1910).”⁶⁰ In the first volume of the catalogue raisonné by Baldacci-Roos (2018), the drawing is finally assigned to January-march 1910 in order to sanction the Milanese genesis of de Chirico’s *Metaphysics*.⁶¹

This willingness to backdate the drawing at all costs in order to use it as proof of the birth of metaphysical painting in Milan, however, raises several doubts, which also concern the autography, which does not appear by any means certain and should be thoroughly investigated, especially due to some clumsiness affecting the work’s composition, graphics, and conception. This is the case of the rendering of the building with its small window on the left margin, the perspective of which is uncertainly designed; or of the squat shape of the circular building, in which the depth of the door opening onto the sky (which for Baldacci demonstrates the connection with the Brera *Marriage*) appears nullified by the shoddy silhouette of a statue placed inside; not to mention the disproportions between the columns, the wall, the sail, and the figures, where everything seems to be traced in a botched attempt to adhere to *L’enigma dell’arrivo e del pomeriggio* without being able to capture its highly refined spatial and architectural connections. It would also be useful to be able to examine Louis Aragon’s handwriting on the back of the drawing, which is frequently quoted but never reproduced.⁶²

But even if we forcibly accept that this drawing is an autograph by de Chirico, one fails to see why it should represent irrefutable proof of the birth of *Metaphysics* in Milan, given that even according to Baldacci the focus on the citation from Raphael would have occurred only two years later in Paris, when the statue’s obtrusive presence in the circular building would finally open the door to the landscape behind it, allowing Brera Raphael’s suggestions to take center stage.⁶³ It also appears odd that, among the Dechirican drawings of the time, this is the only one that lacks those elements of inventive and executive rapidity, as well as what Baldacci refers to as an “almost childlike stroke.”⁶⁴ Curiously enough, this drawing, which, more than anything else, appears to imitate the

59 Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, p. 123.

60 Id., «*La nostra poesia metafisica*», pp. 44-45.

61 *Giorgio de Chirico. Catalogo ragionato*, pp. 120-123.

62 Id., p. 120.

63 In *L’enigma dell’arrivo e del pomeriggio* “The door that opens onto the void proves the unequivocal connection to Raphael’s temple, which is clearly shown by removing from the painting from the backlit statue of the god”, which is seen in the drawing, an element that would constitute a “still somewhat clumsy and educational reference to the oracular and prehistoric ages” (Id., 158).

64 Baldacci, *De Chirico. 1888-1919*, p. 122.

original painting, would be one of a kind in the Dechirican graphic output of this period, and in this sense, the many undeniable doubts it has raised appear to further erode the foundations of the “Milanese” hypothesis, which is based on such flimsy evidence.

After examining this ramified, tortuous, and, at times, treacherous path, and overcoming the pitfalls of what would have aspired to become a kind of post-truth, the figure of de Chirico appears again not only in his greatness as an artist and an intellectual, but is also liberated from a distorted vision and the thick layers of falsehood that have for far too long attempted to alter the actual sequence of events. Now, it can undoubtedly be stated, thanks to a correct and unbiased analysis, that the documents relating to the genesis and development of Metaphysical Art agree to what de Chirico always stated and remembered candidly. They serve as a fundamental starting point for future studies and new research, which can thus begin with a firm understanding of historical events that is finally free of misrepresentations and interpretive errors.