

Press release

de Chirico

curated by Luca Massimo Barbero
Milan, Palazzo Reale
25 September 2019 - 19 January 2020

*We live in a phantasmic world
and gradually gain acquaintance with it*
(G. de Chirico, 1918)

*De Chirico, a careful painter, borrows from dreams the accuracy of
inaccuracy, the use of truth to promote the false*
(J. Cocteau, *Le mystère laïc*, 1928)

Opening on 25 September is the great exhibition devoted to **George de Chirico** (Volos, 1888 - Rome, 1978), which through **some 100 masterpieces** reconstructs the unrepeatable career of the *pictor optimus*.

The rooms in Palazzo Reale in Milan, almost 50 years since the solo exhibition of 1970, again host de Chirico's work in an extraordinary **retrospective** curated by **Luca Massimo Barbero**, promoted and produced by the City of Milan-Culture, Palazzo Reale, Marsilio and Electa, in collaboration with the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation.

An exhibition layout made up of original comparisons and unrepeatable juxtapositions that reveal the *phantasmic* world of one of the 20th century's most complex artistic figures. The exhibition offers the key to a hermetic art with its roots in the Greece of de Chirico's childhood, that matured in the Paris of the avant-gardes, gave rise to the Metaphysical art that bewitched the Surrealists, captivated Andy Warhol and finally spread confusion with its irreverent and ironic reinterpretations of the Baroque.

The substantial body of works on display comes from major international museums including the **Tate Modern** in London, the **Metropolitan Museum** in New York, the **Centre Pompidou** and the **Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris**, the **Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GNAM)** in Rome, the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection** in Venice, **The Menil Collection** in Houston and the **MAC USP** in São Paulo, Brazil. Numerous Milanese institutions are also taking part: the **Museo del Novecento**, the **Casa Museo Boschi di Stefano**, the **Pinacoteca di Brera** and **Villa Necchi Campiglio**.

Subdivided into eight rooms, the exhibition is organized by themes devised in keeping with unprecedented juxtapositions and original comparisons to create a chain of visual reactions that, as de Chirico wrote in 1918, pursue "the demon in all things [...] the eye in all things [because] / We are explorers ready to set out again."

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Biography

Giorgio de Chirico (Volos, 1888 - Rome, 1978) grew up in Greece, spent his formative years in the Munich of the Secession and matured in avant-garde Paris. Here he developed the theme of *melancholy* and the first paintings of the *piazze of Italy*: visually electrifying, his works anticipated the avant-gardes and Surrealism.

Returning to Italy on the outbreak of the war, in 1915 he settled with his brother, Alberto Savinio, in Ferrara, where Filippo de Pisis and Carlo Carrà were also living, leading to the development of the complex phase of Ferrarese interiors and the Disquieting Muses: paintings with an originally figurative character but in which each subject becomes a vision with dreamlike and mysterious overtones.

In 1918 he moved between Rome, Florence and Milan while maintaining his international contacts and, since 1924, again settled in Paris.

In these years his provocative and radical imagination made him one of the protagonists of international art. His fruitful New York experience (1935-37) was notable for a solo show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery (1935), with 8 metaphysical masterpieces chosen by Alfred Barr for the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (MoMA, 1936-37), and his decorative work for the Decorators Pictures Gallery – together with Picasso and Matisse – as well as the cover of *Vogue* in 1938.

In the same year he returned to Italy, and after a further stay in Paris, in 1944 the artist moved permanently to Rome, in his magnificent apartment in Piazza di Spagna.

Renewing his metaphysical inventions, de Chirico developed a new and sumptuous quality of painting that invested every subject and projected into the present the technical and inventive richness of painting that he provocatively termed that of the “Old Masters”. With a capacity that drew on Baroque impetuosity and a totally fantastic imagery made up of riders, landscapes and exuberant still lifes (he used the term “vite silenti” in preference to the usual Italian “nature morte”), de Chirico's painting entered into full contrast with contemporary art in the post-war period, confirming him again once, against all paradoxes, one of the masters of the mid-twentieth century.

Convinced that the road taken was the only plausible one, in 1948 he engaged in polemics directed against the Venice Biennale, which he accused of championing a modernist current. He organized a series of “anti-Biennali” in the spaces of the Bucintoro, not far from Piazza San Marco.

De Chirico, idolized and criticized, without slowing the flow of his painting, invented enchanted landscapes, irreverent self-portraits, with some in costume that anticipated today's themes of performance, to the point of claiming the right to reinvent the world of his Metaphysical paintings from early in the century. New fantastic inventions such as the sun on the easel, shadowy riders and weary troubadours were fatefully combined in the last years of his always vitalistic career with the Metaphysical rooms, the disquieting mannequins and the unique vision of this traveler in time and images.

Giorgio de Chirico died in Rome in November 1978.

Datasheet**de Chirico**

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Milan, Palazzo Reale
25 September 2019 – 19 January 2020

opening hours

Monday 2:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday 9:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Thursday and Saturday 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.
The ticket office closes one hour before the closing times

admission charges

(audio-guide included / presales not included)
Full ticket to be used on any date: € 16
Full price € 14
Reduced price € 12
Special concessions: season ticket Musei Lombardia e Soci Orticola € 10
Special reduced price € 6
Families: 1 or 2 adults € 10 / children aged 6-14 € 6.00 / free for children under age of 5

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The exhibition layout**Introduction**

Giorgio de Chirico returns to Milan, to those same spaces in Palazzo Reale that hosted his first Italian retrospective in 1970. This is the return of a different de Chirico who, through original comparisons and associations, presents himself to the new generations and at the same time is revealed in a different guise to those who already know his work. The paintings are not slavishly arranged in chronological sequence. Like the images in a book, the account unfolds in the coherence of a visual reasoning that often shuns the dynamics of logic.

In particular, the exhibition seeks to dismantle the granitic pairing of “de Chirico-Great Metaphysician”, with some rooms being devoted to a lesser-known side of his work, such as the pictorial sumptuousness of the 1920s and 30s, which often irritated official critics and displeased his art dealers. De Chirico reveals a meta-world inhabited by the thoughts of philosophers, the condition of modern poets; the Stimmung of which he often spoke and wrote and which is the necessary basis for the creation of the enigma. De Chirico’s intuitions were extraordinary, to the point where, in October 1913, Guillaume Apollinaire described him as “the most surprising painter of the younger generation”. This gave rise to a mythology surrounding the young artist that over the years would be nurtured more by fierce attacks than praise, in a debate that played out in the international journals. It created a true “de Chirico case”, culminating in a lawsuit he brought against the Venice Biennale in 1948. An emblematic year in which Picasso himself took up his defense, writing that: “de Chirico has denied the whole of the avant-garde by returning to the classical painters. He has every right to do so.”

Disregarding the harshest judgments, he pursued the path of figurative painting rendered with a technique backed by the centuries and strong in an irony that covered every area of his life, attaining a neo-baroque production that culminated in the self-portraits in 17th-century costume. Works remote from any modern or coeval influence, which he presented peremptorily also at his solo exhibition at the 1956 Venice Biennale.

The exhibition closes with a room devoted to neo-metaphysics, the summa of de Chirico’s thought with respect to a process of production of replicas, which goes back all the way to the 1920s, and which emerges in all its conceptual strength.

Room 1

The paintings in this room bring out the uniqueness of de Chirico's life and achievement. He was born in Greece to an engineer father and a mother with a strong character, who closely supervised the education and travels of the two brothers during the constant wanderings that would become one of the main themes of de Chirico's poetic. His constant state of rootlessness enabled him to hold together all his different origins, combining the whole of Mediterranean civilization, cultivated and literary, his twofold Italian and Hellenic roots with the German culture of the late 19th century. The works therefore reveal de Chirico's visual sources and at the same time they recount his biography, if correctly interpreted. The artist constructed a veritable family mythology that started from Greece when it was still a German protectorate, his life in Athens and then Munich rich in late 19th-century culture. He created a universe of images belonging to a primordial world of its own invention and translated it visually into a painting of the mystery, an unfathomable world, recognizable in the *Battle of the Centaurs* or the *Dying Centaur* (both of 1909), in which the mythological figure sprawled on the ground echoes the premature death of the artist's father. As in a Renaissance painting, de Chirico should be read in a symbolic key that often elicits a biographical reference. Seen in these terms, also the two young men depicted from behind in the *Departure of the Argonauts* (1909) can easily be identified with the brothers Andrea and Giorgio, who under the aegis of the goddess Athena leave Greece to face their destiny.

Self-portraits are frequent in de Chirico's whole oeuvre. This was certainly a narcissistic operation but it was also, by his own admission, a pictorial exercise on a subject very close to himself, because a "man knows his own body better than anything else, [...] and it is closest and dearest to him" (Giorgio de Chirico). From the start, there was the mirror, the self or ego and painting. The *Self-Portrait* of 1911 was the fruit of his early reading of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, evident both from the sense of the enigma evoked by the inscription and the dreamlike pose that clearly draws on one of the most famous photographic portraits of the German philosopher. In the same year, almost as a *pendant* piece, de Chirico produced the *Portrait of His Mother*, in which he adopted the setting of a window opening onto a backdrop without the least naturalistic reference, so amplifying the psychological introspection of the faces yet anticipating what was to be one of his great themes: the interior and exterior of a room, the relationship between the container and the segment of an exterior. The enigma, by contrast, was embodied in landscape in the *Self-Portrait* of 1912-1913. He painted it during his Parisian years, when the 23-year-old artist was developing a mechanism in which the mystery of the piazza with its unreal sky and enigmatic tower served almost as in the Renaissance to make the artist a figure always in a pose. Many years later de Chirico again portrayed his mother, whom his sons privately called the "Centauress" (*Portrait of the Artist with His Mother*, 1919), now elderly, with white hair, in an austere and ancient pose, while in the background he inserted his own *Self-Portrait* of 1911: an interplay of allusions and mirrors charged with psychological values and at the same time a reflection on the evolution of his painting.

In 1911 de Chirico discovered the architecture of Turin, a city that had also bewitched Nietzsche. De Chirico then returned for a few days in the spring of 1912. Together with his reading of the German philosopher, as well as his time in Paris and the urge to paint something that would convey “feelings that were not known before”, it led to the development of that extraordinary iconographic conception that are his *Piazze of Italy*.

“The landscape, enclosed in the arcading of the portico, as in the rectangle or square of the window, acquires a greater metaphysical value, since it solidifies and is isolated from the space that surrounds it. Architecture completes nature. This was a progress of the human intellect in the field of metaphysical discoveries.” These are inventions of urban views that take into account visual intuitions, almost poetic revelations, that while repeating a certain pattern – the portico at one side, the station in the background, the train running along the horizon, the tower, the shadows sharply cast, the absence of human presence, the monument as the only inhabitant of the square – evolve towards an accentuation of the most disquieting features. Immersed in a dazed silence, de Chirico’s piazzas are pervaded by a sense of mystery, an unfathomable enigma; unprecedented masterpieces, airless, capable at most of a puff of smoke yet that touch on the profound sense of things. The suspension of time becomes *suspense* at something about to happen in a blinding light where the shadows become a physical presence, because after all “there are many more puzzles in the shadow of a man walking in the sun than in all religions past, present and future”. The piazza is treated as a scene or a box, in which the elements of street furniture are placed as objects, in a perspective that from here and forever becomes de Chirico’s, constructed on a clear horizon and an unnatural light that clearly defines the outlines, to the point of making de Chirico a forerunner of postmodern architecture.

Room 2

In his *Memoirs*, de Chirico recalls his arrival in Paris on the evening of 14 July 1911. He was welcomed by a city at the height of the festivities for the fall of the Bastille. Here, after a brief stay in Vichy, to recover from the physical and spiritual crisis that accompanied almost every move, “I returned to work and took up the thread of my Nietzschean inspiration.” The titles of his first works are the emblem of this philosophical affiliation, of “that exceptional poetry that I had discovered in the books of Nietzsche”.

In his studio on rue Campagne-Première he saw “the first ghosts of a more complete, deeper, more complicated and, to put it in one word, [...] *more metaphysical art*”. In de Chirico’s painting, the subjects reveal themselves as unexpected, visual rebuses, which attracted the interest of the Parisian public and critics. Among his early supporters he could count on Picasso, the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire and the art dealer Paul Guillaume. Between his studio, visits to exhibitions and museums and the literary Saturdays in Apollinaire’s apartment, he worked on the masterpieces of 1913. In *The Surprise*, with its highly unusual format – and *The Uncertainty of the Poet* or *Ariadne*, an extraordinary masterpiece now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the enigma arose from the impression of loss of bearings caused by the creation and displacement of objects that foster a dreamy illogicality. Although very young, de Chirico was already one of the most original major painters in France and so, at that time, internationally. Metaphysical Art was the only movement that paralleled and yet truly differed from Cubism. De Chirico was deraciné, while not belonging to any of the currents of the time. He lived in the Paris of the avant-garde and formed his own avant-garde that was Metaphysical Art.

In those years one of his most successful and original themes emerged, that of the mannequin, which at times was given the appearance of an astronomer - *The Friend’s Disquiet* or *The Astronomer* (*L’inquiétude de l’amie* ou *L’astronome*), 1915, a being with inhuman features but cognitive abilities.

Room 3

The years in Ferrara (1915-1919) would be recalled by his brother Andrea as a happy destiny. The two de Chirico brothers found themselves in that city of “solitary and geometric beauty [...] one of the most beautiful cities in Italy [...] inspired my metaphysical side, on which I then worked”.

In Ferrara de Chirico formalized his pictorial researches of the last few years under the label of “Metaphysics”, that extraordinary invention that Francesco Arcangeli, in the catalogue of the 1948 Biennale, would consecrate internationally as “the most radical change of course in European taste from Impressionism onwards”.

Then Ferrara was the city of the Este family, who played host to two equally visionary artists at court, Ercole de’ Roberti and Cosmè Tura, as well as the fervor of Savonarola. A city in which madness was at home due to the presence of hemp grown intensively in the fields. “It seems that the exhalations of hemp have a particular influence on the human organism.”

De Chirico was seduced by this pervasive madness. He spent months at the Villa del Seminario, a hospital for nervous ailments, and gave it a visual form in the marvelous, adamantine buildings of these years, which have the figure of views constructed, designed and painted at the extreme of claustrophobic perfection. Here he created masterpieces such as *The Sweet Afternoon* or *Greetings from a Distant Friend*, in which the perspective, completely inverted like its shadows, is at the service of a mechanism, a montage of backdrops, stage flats and trestles that appears as a construction that excludes the exterior.

The Estense castle, the great streets, the Palazzo dei Diamanti, become a stage set of mystery and an almost obsessive construction of interiors. These wooden set squares, occluded boxes, agglomerates of easels, pinwheels and biscuits anticipate some of the solutions and mechanisms of Surrealism.

Room 4

After the period in Ferrara, de Chirico was considered the most visionary, the best loved and most original painter of the new generation and at the same time his sudden, relentless abandonment of Metaphysical painting turned him into one of the artists most detested by Italian critics. And this happened in 1920 with his new strand of painting, suddenly Romantic, the result of an explicit illumination. The critics did not hesitate to recognize a Romantic inflection in this phase of de Chirico’s work.

A “Romanticism” understood “in the broadest sense [...], that of the man led by inclination to explore and discover”. This was a crucial development, in which de Chirico completely changed the significance of painting by resorting to apparently classical themes, which at the same time retained an air of mystery and a spirit of willfully ungraceful invention, differentiating it from the work of any other artist in the twenties.

The de Chirico of the twenties had already lived in Paris. He conducted his research under the label of “Metaphysics” and gave it a theoretical form from the first issue of “Valori Plastici” (1918). The revival of indisputably archaic formulas associated with the early Renaissance, promoted by Mario Broglio’s periodical, was actually already practiced in de Chirico’s work. In 1919 he warned against artists, facile and superficial returners, who “cannot count on the pretext of the primitive artifice: of the Hellenic scraper of Xoana and the 13th-century painter. The case of the penitents of today is rather tragic.”

After his solo show at Casa Bragaglia in Rome (1919), de Chirico had already gone beyond Metaphysical art and focused rather on his affirmation as pictor optimus, on pictorial quality, an urgency that now took precedence over the biographical metaphor or visual incoherence. With these premises, one of the main subjects inevitably became the supreme theme of painting, the human figure, which the artist once again presented with a statuary and indeed icy image in his 1924 *Self-Portrait*. Even in his most classical landscapes, apparently related to Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, all through the 1920s de Chirico continued to spread his sense of suspended momentum as a sort of mystery, infusing that contraction of time that places each of his paintings within an imaginary Metaphysical showcase.

Hence this development started with the nude of *Ulysses* (1921-1922) and with the statuesque body of *Lucretia* (1922), to arrive at the wooden dryness of *Orestes* (*Orestes and Electra*, 1923) and to close, once more, on himself in the *Self-Portrait* “of ice” from 1924.

Room 5

Even before the years in Ferrara, de Chirico had introduced into his paintings the figure of the mannequin, understood as a hybrid, a robotic inhabitant of the future, that non-Metaphysical time which, unsurprisingly, is also shrouded in an important adjective: “disquieting”. In the 1920s, together with his great Romantic painting, de Chirico demonstrated a sort of nostalgia for the two great themes of his earlier work: the mannequin and the statue that here come together.

The artist attributed human emotions and attitudes to his creations: it is a poignant and moving embrace between the supreme *returner*, the son-dummy, and the father-statue (*The Prodigal Son*, 1922) and between those who part forever, the automaton Hector and his beloved Andromache (*Hector and Andromache*, 1924). De Chirico's mannequins are thinking beings that have human needs.

They sit on a wooden plank facing the sea (*Mannequins by the Sea*, 1926), they are philosophers and archaeologists, sometimes mysterious, often paired and squatting in a position that de Chirico deduced both from the statues of the apostles in Gothic cathedrals and his great love for the Etruscans, always depicted as suspended between life and death.

A few years later, in 1929, in *Hebdomeros*, de Chirico would describe those *curious* archaeologists who, “With eyes fixed to the ground, their open hands resting on their bent knees, their elbows turned out, the seven members of the family, as if they were sitting on invisible stools, looked with whitish eyes. But none moved.”

The 1927 *Archaeologist* is an exception to the pose, confirming that disproportion between the upper and lower limbs that heightens the figure's sense of paradoxical monumentality. The body defined with a scrupulous and astonishing industriousness of coloring reveals propylaea and mutilated columns, the ruins of pagan temples, various ornamental motifs, which have become the matter of a sort of nostalgic and metaphysical illumination.

Regardless of the subjects and how they are arranged in de Chirico's composition, whether they are on the seashore with a soaring perspective, enclosed in the cramped space of a room or embracing before a landscape, there remains that claustrophobic dimension that is a necessary element in the creation of the mystery of these rooms.

By complete disinterest, except for painting and fame, by his mocking cynicism and caustic irony about politics, life and reality, de Chirico lived personally suspended in a non-world. He was disparaged by the official Italian critics only to be accused decades later of an unforgivable complicity in the fascist decades.

De Chirico's estrangement and his political dimension dissociated him completely. The paintings in this room enable us to understand his position, which was remote from all contemporary forms of Italian painting, the aesthetic and political line of official art and above all from Sarfatti's Novecento myth.

De Chirico took part in everything indifferently and tactically, but he never belonged to anyone else. He was both isolated and a protagonist and his world was the world of myth. If he adopted the hauteur of *Romanitas* it was to dismantle it, as literally as a toy is dismantled. De Chirico's Trophies are in fact vertical clusters of boxes, toy propellers, plaster casts, furniture, rocking horses and headgear that stand like “buildings that took the form of mountains, since like mountains they were created by the action of an inner fire [...]. They attested with their tormented equilibrium to the ardent impetus that had caused their appearance” (Waldemar George, 1928). Hence the bright coloring chosen by de Chirico in contrast with the backgrounds, whether they are rooms or bird's-eye views of valleys strewn with columns and temples.

De Chirico's *Pericles* (1925) is a profanation of ancient history. The hero has lost all the virility of the Athenian soldier and statesman. He does not wear a breastplate but rather a sort of fancy undershirt on a body that has nothing of the physicality of the warrior but is as smooth and chalky as a mannequin. De Chirico's painting of these years is the fruit of a vision, in some cases verging on hallucination. It is an invitation to put rationality aside. In the desecration of the Athenian hero's body de Chirico is already anticipating what would happen in 1929 – in the next room – with the clashes between gladiators, also stripped of all epic quality and reduced to figurines of molded rubber, remote from all possible anatomical truth.

Room 6

The analysis of the nude, the principal theme of art of all times, took on monumental proportions in the second half of the twenties. De Chirico, however, kept his distance from both the monumentalism of the Novecento movement and the rotundity of the classical Picasso, often invoked as a term of comparison, but it was once again the fruit of a psychedelic hallucination. His *Two Mythological Figures (Nus antiques, Mythological Composition)* (1927) live in a dreamlike dimension by both the artificial tones and the wilful disproportion of those Junoesque bodies, constricted into a cramped and architecturally connoted space. Into the rooms, which we could call boxes, de Chirico packed whole landscapes: temples perched on the seafront (*Temple in a Room*, 1926) or overlooking a riverbed (*Greek Temple*, 1928) with real stone pines popping up like natural columns from the floor in a room flooded with light (*Ma chambre dans le midi*, 1927).

De Chirico's rooms imprison even horses, those that, eyeless, hence blind – like Homer, the supreme poet – run unbridled along a beach. A theme dear to the artist, both by the immediate mythological reference and the association with Nietzsche's madness, which was manifested when he embraced a horse. De Chirico's horses move in a lunar environment. De Chirico imagines them “amid the shafts of fallen columns, where, in the evening, when the square is deserted, the great dysenteric mares come to eagerly graze the tender chamomiles that bloom in the shadow of the glorious ruins”.

Room 7

“That evening, surrounded by his friends, Hebdomeros only saw the last part of the spectacle: *the tableaux vivants*, and he *understood everything*. The enigma of that ineffable group of warriors, of pugilists, difficult to define, and that formed on a corner of the scene a many-colored and motionless block in their gestures of attack and defense, [...] something so rare and profound disturbed him.” In 1928-1929 the Parisian gallerist and collector Léonce Rosenberg commissioned some artists to decorate the rooms of his Parisian home. De Chirico was given the dining room, for which he painted a series of canvases on the theme of gladiators. Far from any epic allusions, his wrestlers have lost all possible violence and credibility. To put it in the words of Hebdomeros, they fight “without conviction”. They are deliberately disproportionate human tangles and often forced into a narrow space in which they fight in static poses, next to pictures from wrestling manuals. They are heroes with lanky bodies, almost articulated, also flattened through the use of a filamentous painting that de Chirico developed from careful observation of Gaetano Previati. They are elegantly turned figures with anti-naturalistic modes and deformed like rubber toys, as terrible as they are funny. Nothing could be further from the fascist monumentalism of those years, with which they have long been associated.

As Carlo Emilio Gadda wrote with poetic sensibility ten years later, they are “heroes [who] would like to rail against their hero antagonists, and greaves, armor, spears, shields and horsehair crests stand ready to fight”.

The *Chariot Race* (1928) is a long and grandiose frieze in which the *chariots* collide, fall apart and leave a coral-colored pulp that is only later identified as one of the horses in the race. Even in dramatic peaks, however, the playful element, the vein of parody, always prevails. De Chirico presents his classicism as an optical fable and a box of toys.

The series of the *Mysterious Baths* is one of the de Chirico's most famous cycles. He started working on it in the first half of the 1930s with the ten lithographs he produced for Jean Cocteau's *Mythologie*, in which some images first made their appearance, like the cabins drawn with childish lines, the simultaneous presence of figures naked and dressed or pools connected by winding canals.

The theme stems from yet another of de Chirico's visions, manifested in a room, namely a figure drowning in a parquet floor, which took the artist back to some childhood obsessions. "A wooden ladder like those of the cabins in bathing establishments, from which we see the first steps that descend into the water ... Going back to the memories of my childhood I remember that the steps of seaside cabins always disturbed me and filled me with a great sense of dismay. Those few wooden steps covered with seaweed and mildew and immersed less than a meter under water seemed to go down [...] to the heart of oceanic shadowiness." Precisely because of their surreal and ultimately still metaphysical vein, the *Mysterious Baths* were also among the most works most highly appreciated at the Rome Quadriennale in 1935, where the more blatantly figurative and "classical" paintings, such as *Bathers on a Beach* in the next room, were harshly treated. This was an extraordinary invention, because it crystallized the theme of the immersed and the hero, a series immediately loved by writers and architects. It was so characteristic that it became a large fountain installed in Milan in the gardens of Parco Sempione during the 1973 Triennale.

Room 8

With de Chirico's myth universally recognized, he upset all the parameters of taste and merged into an impossible, sometimes paradoxical realism, which the critics never forgave, while the market, like the museums, appreciated it. He was capable of creating an ancient and anachronistic world that, despite being made up of a "very happy harmony, worthy of that of some Renoirs" (Waldemar George, 1933), did not detract from his fame. De Chirico remained set like a metaphysical gem. With strenuous tenacity he spent whole "afternoons at the Richelieu library looking for old treatises and writings on painting, which appeared in times when people still knew how to paint". This led him to create an important core of classical works, exhibited at the Rome Quadriennale of 1935, where he was sharply attacked. Even a respected critic like Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti used the adjective "repellent" for the group of paintings presented in Rome, notable among them the extraordinary *Self-Portrait* in the *Paris Studio* (1934), in which some recurrent elements – the interior, the plaster cast or the easel – are treated with an almost naturalistic effect. The cut of the clothes worn in the self-portrait date it clearly to the thirties, while the portrait of Isabella Far reclining on a beach like a Titianesque Venus is timeless (*Bathers on a Beach*, 1934). This is an allegory even before it is a portrait, and the replica of this same painting in 1945 proves it. Eleven years have passed and his wife has not aged in the least, while the setting has completely changed. The woman now rests on a red cloth while the bathers move against a woodland backdrop. At this point de Chirico gave priority to the technical quality of painting. "We make it clear once and for all to men who are interested in art, that a painting can neither be sincere, nor pure, nor spiritual, it can only be well or badly painted, have artistic value or not have it, and it is precisely the quality of the painting that determines whether a painting is a work of art or just another object."

Giorgio de Chirico, here a solitary traveler in a baroque painting, literally stands naked, fifty-five years old in front of the mirror, in a *Self-Portrait* (1943, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna). It is irreverent to the point where in 1949, for an exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, he was asked to add a "loincloth". The painting, which he considers one of his masterpieces, was a shocking, dark and once again timeless, threatening and ironic paradox, at a time when international painting aspired to something else. In fact, not without a thick dose of irony did he depict himself as a bullfighter in the early forties (*Self-Portrait in Bullfighter's Costume*, 1941-1942) and later he wore true baroque costumes (*Self-portrait in a Black Costume*, 1948, and *Self-Portrait in the Park in 17th-Century Costume*, 1959), paintings completely outside any recognizable current, period or style, *mises en costumes*, but which he cared about and believed in to the point of presenting them at important international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale. On the occasion of his solo exhibition in Venice in 1956, he did not hesitate to describe himself in the catalogue as "a unique phenomenon in the whole history of modern painting [...] An artist in the deepest sense of the word, indifferent to what is said about him, Giorgio de Chirico has always followed and listened to his demon, has always judged the events and men of his time, and also of other times, by his personal criterion." Once again de Chirico was controversial through his painting and his caustic declarations. Only recently has an enlightened part of the public begun to look at these baroque self-portraits as a staging of the self, a true performance that inspired conceptual artists who practice contemporary art in the theater of the self. This anti-conformism led him to paint still lifes (*Armor with Knight*, 1940) neo-baroque in their sumptuousness and a *Grand Canal* in Venice (1952) in which the chromatic artificiality and the liquefaction of his brushstrokes presage the stereotypical destiny that awaits the city.

For decades during his career, de Chirico fought the label of Great Metaphysician. He had been the unique creator of that extraordinary invention which, again in 1948, Francesco Arcangeli remembered as "the most radical change of direction in European taste since Impressionism". In the 1960s, once again confusing the issue, de Chirico voluntarily returned to the painting of his years in Ferrara, as if Metaphysics had become a trademark, replicable by its inventor. In this way the *Disquieting Muses* returned, considered the foundational painting of Metaphysical art, in versions from the fifties and sixties that precisely by their seriality would justify the shock that Andy Warhol felt when he saw de Chirico's work. But this was not merely a replica or a lazy and almost Levantine marketing operation. Neo-Metaphysics was the bearer of new inventions – the stages, the black suns, the electric knights – but above all it was the return of situations, settings and subjects that had lost the anguished dimension of the enigma and shone with a clear and diffused light.

Again in this new period of de Chirico's output, not many contemporary voices were raised in support. One was Dino Buzzati, reviewed the exhibition at Palazzo Reale in 1970, appreciating the freshness of invention of neo-Metaphysics. He wrote: "The most recent paintings, exhibited in the last room are not pedestrian repetitions of old Metaphysical paintings that appeared in years past. These are genuine, original inventions." They became an undeniable source for the artists of subsequent generations, apparently very distant from him, from Andy Warhol to Francesco Vezzoli, who saw him as "having been eternally and incessantly faithful to his Metaphysical *visions* and, towards the end, I would say far-sightedly postmodern." Giorgio de Chirico, the *returner*, has never ceased to create mysteries and revive his extraordinary myth in the present.