

The Museum of Modern Art

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Suggested Press Release

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

A major retrospective of the work of the Italian artist, GIORGIO DE CHIRICO, will open at _____ on _____, remaining on view until _____. Organized under the auspices of The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition was directed by William Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, where the exhibition was first shown.

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO (1888-1978) is considered by many to be the greatest Italian artist of this century, or indeed since the 18th century. Yet questions as to where his works "fit" stylistically, and what the nature of his contributions were to the painting of modern art, are matters of lively debate. In his paintings executed between 1911 and 1917, de Chirico probed the commonplace for its poetic, metaphysical possibilities to produce "the enigma of sudden revelation." His work of this period, acknowledged to be the most important formative influence of the development of Surrealism, was characterized by Alfred Barr, founding director of The Museum of Modern Art, as "...an art of philosophical reverie, uncanny quiet, static incongruity, evoking a sense of mystery by assembling mysterious objects and strange settings." By 1920 de Chirico's art had altered profoundly: he became a much more conventional and conservative

painter. De Chirico then began to be critical of modern art, dissociating himself from modernism in every sense, and eventually repudiating his own early works.

According to William Rubin, one objective of the exhibition is to clarify de Chirico's relationship to the development of the major modernist styles of the second decade of this century -- Cubism and the post-Fauve Matisse. Mr. Rubin has stated: "...while de Chirico's work has been fully comprehended for its poetic side, his relationship to major currents of European painting before World War II has never been clear. He was really a great composer of paintings as well as a great poet within painting, and it is this strength that he had as an architect of composition that has not been widely understood or appreciated. If, on the one hand, de Chirico's art looks forward to Surrealism -- to the work of Magritte, Dali and Tanguy -- it also differs from theirs in a certain kind of structural power, in certain aspects of the way he handles space in composition, which brings him much closer to the architectural character of the Matisses of 1912-1918, and to the Cubist Picasso. Because most criticism and writing has dwelt on de Chirico's poetic side, it is this other aspect -- and its historical context -- that is underappreciated."

Giorgio de Chirico was born in 1888 in Greece, the second of three children of Italian parents. Following the death of de Chirico's father, a railroad engineer, the family moved to Munich in 1906 where de Chirico attended the Academy of Fine Arts for two years. Influenced by the mystical romanticism

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of the Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin and the fin-de-siècle symbolism of the German artist Max Klinger, de Chirico was also strongly affected by the writings of Schopenhauer, Weininger, and Nietzsche. In 1908 he went to Italy and began to paint landscapes dominated by architectural elements that recalled memories of the Greece he had known as a boy, and that reflected the townscapes of Italy that were then part of his daily life.

In 1911 de Chirico moved to Paris to join his brother Andrea (later known by the pseudonym Alberto Savinio) and began to produce many of his best works. There he met Picasso, whose influence manifested itself in his work in a variety of ways. As pointed out by William Rubin, the effects of this new contact are seen in de Chirico's use of autonomous lighting, a device "at the heart of Cubism"; in his marshalling of compositional structure in which the deployment of geometrical instruments, stretcher bars, fragments of maps, biscuits, etc., is partially extrapolated from the formats of Picasso's collages and constructions; and in his break with "traditional notions of surface unity and continuity in favor of an anticlassical mélange of mediums, surface textures and notational techniques." He also met the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who was to call de Chirico "the most astonishing painter of his period." Through his strange combinations of extra-personal elements -- most often common objects such as fruits, vegetables, clocks, statues, canons, and architectural structures -- de Chirico created works that aroused, as one writer termed it, "the same vivid sensation as the most vivid images which occur in dreams." Apollinaire referred to de Chirico's paintings of this period as "curious landscapes,

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full of new intentions, of a powerful architecture and of great sensibility."

In 1915 de Chirico and his brother returned to Italy and were inducted into the Italian army. Because of poor health he was assigned to do office work in Ferrara, and there he met the painter Carlo Carrá and the aspiring art critic Filippo de Pisis, forming the nucleus of the group which, with the addition of Giorgio Morandi, would later be known as the "Scuola Metafisica." Continuing to paint during the war, de Chirico began to be more widely known through publications and exhibitions, including those of the Dada group in Zurich.

In 1919 de Chirico moved to Rome where his first one-man exhibition was held. He began to copy old master paintings in museums, dubbed himself "Pictor Classicus," and began a thorough study of early painting techniques. In 1920 he exhibited metaphysical paintings together with new works in his post-war Classical style, derived from the early Italian Renaissance and Baroque. Of his later repudiation of his own early work, James Thrall Soby, director of an earlier de Chirico exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in 1955 and author of an important monograph on the artist, wrote: "It is a paradox of de Chirico's career that he first attained truly international fame during the early 1920s, when his relationship with those chiefly responsible for this fame -- the Dadaists, soon to become surrealism's leaders -- was slowly deteriorating."

From 1925 to 1932 de Chirico lived in Paris with his first wife, the

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dancer Raissa Gurievich Kroll. He returned to Italy in 1932, living at various times in Florence and Milan, and in 1945, with his second wife, Isabella Far, settled permanently in Rome.

Continuing to paint and exhibit throughout his long life, de Chirico also produced voluminous writings of both autobiographical and theoretical subjects. His novel Hebdomeros (1929) was admired by the Surrealists. Theatre, in one shape or another, formed an almost continuous presence in the lives of the de Chirico brothers, Savinio being a composer as well as a painter. De Chirico participated in nearly two dozen productions between 1924 and 1970, of which the best known were his decors for Le Bal (1929), the last production of Diaghliev's Ballet Russes.

De Chirico celebrated his 90th birthday in July 1978. He died on November 20 of the same year.

Works included in the exhibition are drawn from private collections and museums throughout the United States and Europe, including nearly twenty from The Museum of Modern Art's unparalleled holdings of the artist's works, recently augmented by extraordinary bequests from James Thrall Soby and Nelson A. Rockefeller.

On the occasion of the exhibition The Museum of Modern Art has published De Chirico, a 208-page book containing essays by Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Joan M. Lukach, Marianne W. Martin, Laura Rosenstock, William Rubin, and Wieland Schmied. Containing 34 color plates and over 150 black-and-white illustrations, the book constitutes the latest research and scholarship on the artist.