



Two Enigmas

WORKS BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO AND GIULIO PAOLINI GO ON VIEW TOGETHER AT THE CENTER FOR ITALIAN MODERN ART IN NEW YORK. BY SARAH E. FENSON



Giorgio de Chirico, *Le muse inquietanti*, 1918, olio su tela, 39 x 26 in.

GIORGIO de Chirico painted *Le muse inquietanti* or *The Disquieting Muses* (1918) while he was in Ferrara, Italy, during World War I. De Chirico, who was born to Italian parents but raised in Greece, spent 1911–15 in Paris, showing at the Salon d'Automne in 1912 and '13 and the Salon des Indépendants in 1913 and '14 and rubbing shoulders with artists and writers at Guillaume Apollinaire's weekly gatherings. Deemed unfit for combat after his return to Italy, de Chirico was stationed at a military hospital in Ferrara. There he met fellow artist Carlo Carrà and began establishing the tenets of *pittura metafisica* or metaphysical painting.

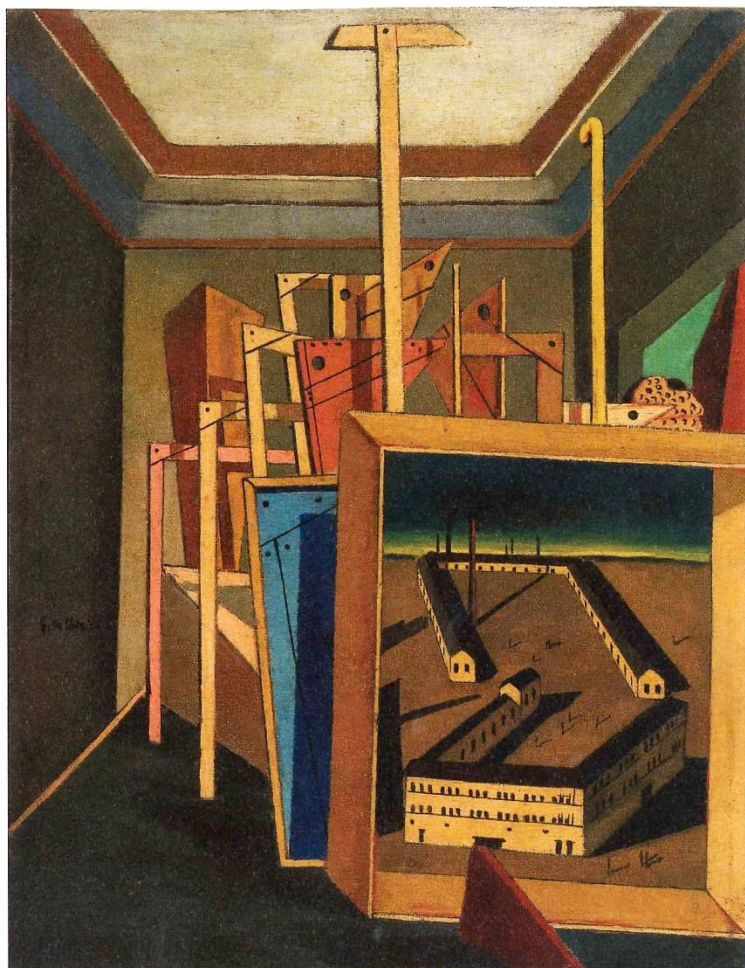
In reality, the seeds of *pittura metafisica* had been planted nearly a decade earlier, when de Chirico, studying in Munich, encountered the work of the German Symbolists and became entranced by Nietzsche's interpretations of Greek mythology and dreams as well as by the philosopher's concept of the "eternal present." Time spent in the Piazza Santa Croce in Florence in 1910 led to the creation of *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, the first of de Chirico's metaphysical town-squares series. In July of 1911, while spending a few days among the piazzas of Turin, the artist was again inspired to paint. The architecture—the archways, the open squares—of de Chirico's ancestral country, still perhaps new and unusual to the eyes of the young artist who had spent his childhood away from them, became the settings for his most admired paintings.

In the piazzas of Italy, time does not seem to be stretched out in a long line; instead, multiple centuries seem to exist at once. In the same squares where tourists hold iPhones, there stand churches designed by Renaissance architects, ruins of the Roman Empire, and cafés where decades' worth of intellectuals have written or argued. In de Chirico's paintings throughout the 1910s, time is also annihilated. Anachronistic objects alight within the Italian piazza—the Classical portrait bust joins a glove, faceless mannequins

in harlequin garb sit outside at easels, trains puff smoke on the horizon behind marble statues of lounging nudes. The surrounding architecture, casting dark shadows, looms with such gravitas that it seems like the moveable set pieces of a play or opera. In fact, de Chirico's paintings of the 1910s seem almost like stills from a performance or film he is directing, in which each object is like an actor. A symbol, like an actor, is merely a conduit for whatever it is trying to represent, which the observer must discover for himself. In de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, his objects, when put together, form an enigma. The enigma—something difficult to understand—was so central to de Chirico's work that the word was frequently included in the titles of his paintings.

De Chirico's posting in Ferrara actually marked the beginning of the end of his metaphysical series. In the 1920s, his work changed. Influenced by Old Masters such as Raphael, Signorelli, and Rubens, de Chirico called for a return to traditional methods and subjects and began to denounce modern art. Until his death in 1978 at the age of 90, de Chirico painted gladiators, horses, still lifes, and self-portraits in which he depicted himself in period dress or nude. The effect of this change in focus was felt relatively quickly. Once lauded as a hero by the early Surrealists, de Chirico, upon moving back to Paris in 1925, developed a relationship with the group that was far from friendly. Critics were not shy with criticism, and in general, these paintings were not received well in their time, nor are they thought of favorably in many circles today.

In the background of *Le muse inquietanti* is the Castello Estense, a medieval castle surrounded by a moat that sits in the center of Ferrara. In the foreground stands Thalia the Muse of comedy, depicted with her shepherd's staff. Seated nearby is Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy, with her tragic mask leaning against the folds of her marble skirt. Over her shoulder darkened by shadows, a statue of Apollo, leader of the muses, chaperones from a pedestal. Later in his career, de Chirico painted copies of his metaphysical works and backdated them (in efforts to make money and perhaps to

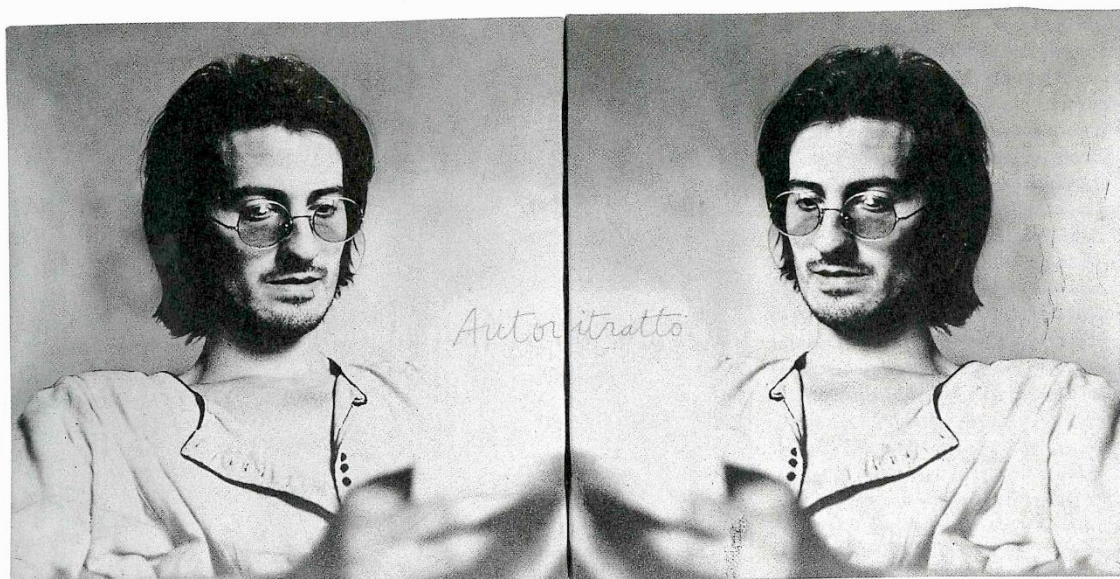


annoy his critics). It has been said that some 18 copies of *Le muse inquietanti* exist.

This fall, *Le muse inquietanti* will be on view in New York for the first time in 50 years. The painting will be featured in "Giorgio de Chirico – Giulio Paolini / Giulio Paolini – Giorgio de Chirico" (October 14–June 24), the fourth season-long exhibition at the Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA). The metaphysical masterpiece *Ettore e Andromaca* (1917) will join *Le muse inquietanti*, as well as approximately 10 paintings and drawings from the 1920s through '50s. The Italian conceptual artist Giulio Paolini will debut a new series

Interno metafisico (Piccolo officina),
1917, olio su tela, 18 x 14 in.

EXHIBITIONS



From top: Giulio Paolini, *Autoritratto* [Self-Portrait], 1970, photo emulsion on canvas, 40 x 80 cm; Giorgio de Chirico, *Enigma dell'ora*, 1910/1911, olio su tela, 22 x 28 in.

of works on paper that elaborates on various tropes in de Chirico's work. A selection of works by Paolini from the 1960s to the present will also be on view, showing the full breadth of his media, including photography on canvas, plaster, collage, and drawing.

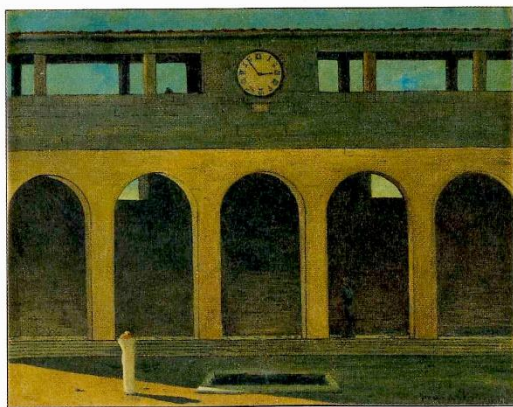
"Our shows are always about different ways to look at artists," says Laura Mattioli, the founder and president of CIMA. "With this exhibition, we want to break up the idea that de Chirico is only metaphysical and that Paolini is only Arte Povera." Showing the artists together, will, it is

hoped, broaden understanding, if not appreciation, of de Chirico's later work. Mattioli says, "I thought that using a different eye to look at de Chirico—the eye of Paolini in the 1960s—could be an interesting approach."

That Paolini feels an affinity for de Chirico is well documented. He borrowed the phrase *Et. quid. amabo. nisi. quod. ænigma. est* (And

what will I love if not the enigma?) from a 1911 de Chirico self-portrait for work in the 1969 exhibition "Campo urbano" in Como. Around the same time, Paolini also passed out calling cards that had the phrase printed on them under his name. More recently he created a special installation for the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, titled *Gli uni e gli altri. L'enigma dell'ora* to coincide with the institution's 2010 exhibition "La natura secondo Giorgio de Chirico" (Nature According to Giorgio de Chirico), that featured in part, the image of de Chirico from his 1942 painting *Nude Self-portrait*. CIMA's show will also feature a small drawn self-portrait by de Chirico that belonged to Paolini ("Paolini put it on his desk in a frame as if it was a picture of a family member," says Mattioli).

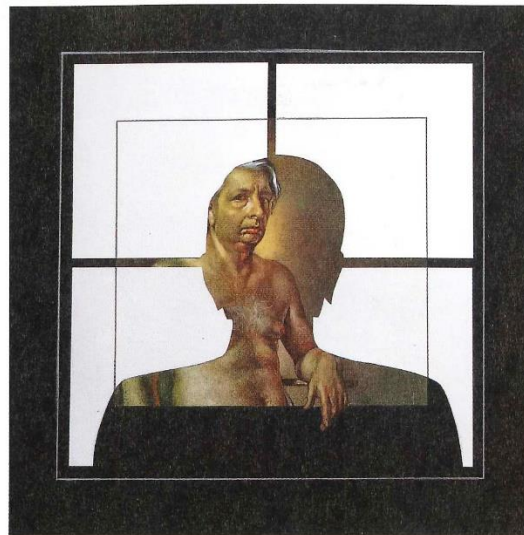
Paolini was born in Genoa in 1940, but moved with his family to Turin, where he still lives and works today. He was invited by the critic Germano Celant to participate in Arte Povera exhibitions in the late '60s, and though he considers himself a conceptual artist, he is still associated with the group. His first work, *Disegno geometrico* or *Geometrical Drawing* (1960), shows in ink the geometric squaring of a canvas painted with white tempera—the prepara-



tion that precedes all other image making on canvas, or rather, the enigmatic model for all representational painting. This image, which Paolini reproduces frequently in his subsequent work, also serves as the conceptual basis for the rest of his career.

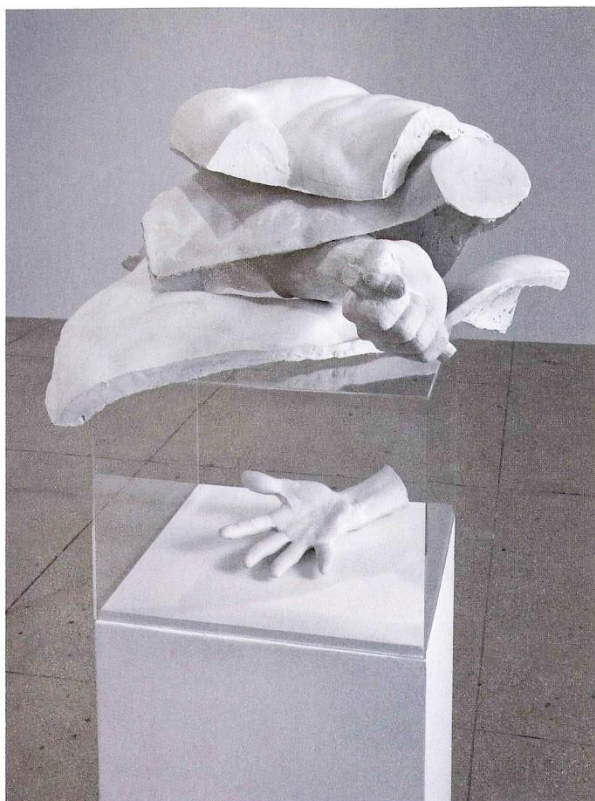
Where de Chirico, in his post-metaphysical work, used the motifs of the masters, Paolini instead integrates photographic images of existing works—either his own or those of Velázquez, Lorenzo Lotto, Ingres, or Poussin. In the case of the 1968 photo emulsion on canvas *L'invenzione di Ingres* (*Ingres' Invention*), Raphael's *Self-Portrait* (1506) and Ingres' copy *Portrait of Raphael* (1820–24) are superimposed. The two pictures don't line up perfectly, which heighten awareness of the fact that they are indeed unique works by unique artists from two different periods. The 1967 work *Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto* is an actual-sized photograph-on-canvas repro-

duction of Lotto's *Portrait of a Young Man* (1505). Though the two images are the same, Paolini changes the context, acknowledging that Lotto's painting captures the act of the subject looking at the artist, just as much as it does the artist looking at the subject. And in fact, when the viewer is standing in front of the painting, he is in the place of the painter, being watched by the young man just as Lotto himself was in 1505. *Controfigura (critica del punto di vista)* [*Stand in (A Critique of the Viewpoint)*],

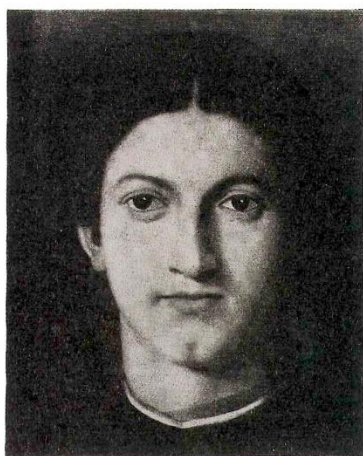


Giulio Paolini, *Autoritratto nudo*, 2014-15.

EXHIBITIONS



Clockwise from top left: *Ante litteram*, 1985, plaster casts, Plexiglas case, plinth, 150 x 70 x 60 cm.; *Ettore e Andromaca*, 1917, olio su tela, 35 x 24 in.; Giulio Paolini, *Controfigura (critica del punto di vista)*, 1981.



which reproduces the same image, will also be on view at CIMA.

Paolini's output not only references and cross-references other works, it examines the existence or life of these works. Rather than simply acknowledge a piece of art as a stagnant object, Paolini sees it as holding a record of all previous art-historical traditions. These traditions led to the work's creation by the artist who made it and influences the viewer's experience when looking at it at any given time. Thus, if an artist reproduces the same image 10 years apart, each image bears a different significance, and if a viewer encounters a painting again after 10 years, it holds a different significance than it did when it was viewed the first time. In a way, this is not unlike the

Italian piazza, nor unlike one of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings in which, during the act of looking at the work, different points of time seem to exist in one instant. For that matter, is it not unlike de Chirico's later self-portraits, in which he depicts himself—a man living in the middle of the 20th century—dressed in the garb of a prince living in the middle of the Renaissance, sword in hand? These later paintings are highly conceptual, perhaps even revolutionarily so. They collapse de Chirico's art-historical references and his current state at the time of painting into one impossible reality.

"The enigma is the core for both artists," says Mattioli. "A painting cannot reproduce a reality, but can reproduce only an idea, a metaphor—the question of reality." ■