

The Museum of Modern Art

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DE CHIRICO'S EARLY WORK IS FOCUS OF MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO, an exhibition of more than 100 paintings and drawings examining in depth the Italian painter's early work, will be on view in The Museum of Modern Art's West Wing from April 3 through June 29. It will be the first large-scale exhibition to focus on the artist's major work created during the second decade of this century, specifically from 1911 to 1917, though a small sampling of fine, post-1918 works will also be included. The works on view will be drawn from private collections and museums throughout Europe and elsewhere, and will include works from the extraordinary recent bequests from James Thrall Soby and Nelson A. Rockefeller, now in the Museum's Collection. GIORGIO DE CHIRICO will be directed by William Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

De Chirico (1888-1978) is considered by many to be the greatest Italian artist of this century, or indeed since the 18th century. This exhibition, concentrating on the early paintings, will make clear 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 -- and will clarify his acknowledged position as the single most important formative influence on Surrealism, as well as an important factor in the German movement, the "Neue Sachlichkeit." It will also illuminate what has been called "the extraordinary stylistic and poetic originality" of the early de Chirico.

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The exhibition was organized under the auspices of the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art and made possible by a generous grant from Martini & Rossi. Additional support has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, and an indemnity for the exhibition has been provided by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

De Chirico's early "metaphysical" paintings employed three major themes: 1) Italian piazzas with their columns and towers, calling to mind Renaissance perspective, but modified and distorted so that multiple and conflicting vanishing points express, in Rubin's words, "an atmosphere of uncertainty," as can be seen in The Enigma of a Day (1914); 2) mannequins, featureless and haunting, de Chirico's only "invented" forms, for example, The Seer (1915); and 3) interiors, depicting scaffolding, forms suggesting studio carpentry, such as stretcher bars and easels, as in The Regret (1916). Within these paintings de Chirico juxtaposed such objects as cannon, fruit, fragments of maps, artichokes, biscuits, clocks, fish, etc., to express what Rubin calls a "pervasive malaise," heightened by de Chirico's autonomous lighting, a device to be found at the heart of Cubism.

The metaphysical paintings of de Chirico "presented an art of philosophical reverie, uncanny quiet, static incongruity, evoking a sense of mystery by assembling mysterious objects and strange settings," wrote Alfred Barr, founder of The Museum of Modern Art. French poet Guillaume Apollinaire, whom de Chirico met in Paris, called him "the most astonishing painter of his period," and referred to his early paintings as "curious

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

But by 1920 de Chirico's art had altered profoundly; he had become a much more conventional and conservative painter, and he began to be critical of modern art, disassociating himself from modernism in every sense and eventually repudiating his own early works, the ones by which he is judged a truly great artist.

"Young Italian artists are now getting very interested in de Chirico," comments William Rubin. "The early paintings are already recognized as a major point of departure for the recent flourishing of realism. This exhibition will help us to understand de Chirico's equivocal relationship to this development."

A 208-page book, containing six essays and an introduction by William Rubin, is published by The Museum of Modern Art to coincide with the exhibition. Edited by William Rubin, the book constitutes the newest research and scholarship on de Chirico. The six essayists are: Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Joan M. Lukach, Marianne W. Martin, Laura Rosenstock, William Rubin and Wieland Schmied. The volume contains 34 color plates and over 150 black-and-white illustrations, representing every entry in the exhibition, as well as some important works not included, and many reference illustrations.

On April 2, William Rubin will give a lecture entitled "De Chirico's Place in Art History." The lecture will be held at the Donnell Library

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Auditorium, 20 West 53rd Street, at 8:15 p.m. Tickets will be available at the Museum Lobby Information Desk at 18 West 54th Street. Ticket holders may view the exhibition at the Museum from 6:15 to 7:45 p.m.

After closing at the Museum on June 29, a version of GIORGIO DE CHIRICO will travel to the following: London's Tate Gallery (August 4 to October 3), the Haus der Kunst, Munich (November 16, 1982 to January 16, 1983), and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (February 10 to April 17, 1983).

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