THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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A selection of 20 early paintings by the controversial and influential Italian artist, Giorgio de Chirico who founded an important modern art movement and then repudiated his own brilliant youth, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from September 8 through October 30 in an exhibition directed by James Thrall Soby. At the same time the Museum will publish a monograph by Mr. Soby, a well-known art critic, tracing de Chirico's career from its brilliant start before World War I through its decline in the 20's. (Giorgio de Chirico, James Thrall Soby, 268 pages, 195 plates, including 10 in color, $7.50.) The exhibition has been installed by Margaret Miller, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture, who was Assistant Director for the show.

The paintings in the exhibition present a survey of the early career of the artist who was a forerunner of the surrealists and a founder of the scuola metafisica one of the most influential movements in 20th-century Italian art. Important examples of his paintings of architectural squares, metaphysical still-lifes and the mannequin series have been loaned from public and private collections here and abroad. Two of the paintings in the exhibition, Song of Love and Sacred Fish, are of particular historical interest because of their profound influence on the European surrealists Ernst and Magritte, while three paintings are 1917 versions of works later widely forged, copied and mis-dated.

In his monograph Mr. Soby points out that de Chirico's avowed intention was to record the emotional impact of imagined experience rather than the external world. He was influenced by the writing of Nietzsche and by Apollinaire, a close friend and champion who believed that the element of surprise was essential to modern art. In his paintings de Chirico revived the mysterious effects of deep perspective and within this nostalgic space carefully arranged in incongruous juxtaposition meticulously painted toys, trains, buildings, and statues, creating what Mr. Soby calls an impression of "jarred" reality. He also used scenes and objects from his contemporary world as complements of the historical relics that fascinated him. If antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the late Victorian era are the main focal points of his visionary longing, Mr. Soby points out that he reacted also and in a comparable spirit to his own age, particularly to its industrial scene. In his paintings twentieth-century factory chimneys and

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railroad station façades are combined with elements of Renaissance or neo-classic architecture to make a strange cross-reference between the old and the new. Characterizing de Chirico's early work, Mr. Soby says:

> "The young Italian painter had come upon a romantic territory which many artists before him had explored. But he had also found a personal way to describe this territory in terms of a strange and memorable foreboding, to portray it as alive but haunted, to hold it quiet but breathing. A number of earlier painters had used the same dramatic properties - old architecture, curtained doorways, distant horizons, mourning figures in a failing light. Perhaps none had managed to transpose these properties so evocatively from everyday reality to dream, to create so striking an imagery of counterlogic."

One of the earliest pictures in the exhibition is The Anxious Journey painted by de Chirico at the age of 26. Describing it, Mr. Soby says:

> "The nightmarish reality of the locomotive is sharpened by its emergence at the edge of a veritable labyrinth of arches, winding in and out, leading nowhere. The painting is clearly a dream image, expressing the terror of being lost in a railroad station before an important journey, of trying desperately to locate a train, only to discover it finally at the far end of an inaccessible corridor."

Nostalgia of the Infinite, which Mr. Soby believes is incorrectly inscribed with the date of 1911 and was actually painted in 1913-14, is the climax of a series of paintings incorporating towers. It includes a number of the most effective properties of de Chirico's strange world of reveries, with the foreground box or abandoned van, a portico sliding into view, a shadow cast by an unseen presence, two tiny figures dwarfed by their vast setting, and empty windows in a tower whose pennants blow vigourously amid an atmosphere otherwise totally inert.

1914 was the last year in which the artist used architecture as a thoroughly predominate theme. Mystery and Melancholy of a Street, painted that year, is also distinguished by its special and unique iconography and is the only authentic painting from de Chirico's early works in which a girl appears rolling a hoop.

> "To many people, however," Mr. Soby says, "the figure of the girl is an unforgettable invention; it is by now deeply imbedded in public consciousness, like Dali's famous limp watches. And there is in fact an extreme fascination in following the girl's progress within the image. She must run for the open light, past a yellow carnival wagon (an object several times included in de Chirico's paintings of 1914) past a menacing arcade, past the forbidding shadow of a Victorian sculpture lying directly in her path. One has the impression that even if she reaches the light, she is doomed, for she is herself a shadow, perhaps retracing the steps which led to her dissolution, her image invested with the horror of ghostly re-enactment. No other painting by de Chirico more piercingly conveys the sense of omen which the painter himself once described as follows: '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.'"

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Another powerful and obsessiv, painting by de Chirico painted the same year is Child's Brain which also has a special and unique iconography. It is usually accepted as a portrait of the artist's father, motivated by childhood fears of parental authority. Mr. Soby says:

> "The figure is terrifying in its flabby pallor and in the hideous masculinity of its jet-black moustaches, eyelashes and hair. Its eyes are closed, as Robert Melville has said, 'for the simple reason that the child (de Chirico) would not dare to look if they were open.' Its square torso, with long dough-like arms prophetic of the painter's later mannequin figures, presses forward against a green table."

The Enigma of a Day includes a comparatively rare motif in authentic works of de Chirico's early career - a 19th-century sculpture of a standing frock-coated male figure. This painting, which hung in the apartment of surrealism's overlord, André Breton, from 1924-35, played a crucial part in the surrealist movement which brought de Chirico truly international fame. Breton and his colleagues were frequently photographed in front of the painting. Members of the surrealist group were queried on the objects, real and illusory, in the picture and their replies published in the surrealist magazine. To the surrealists, Mr. Soby says, the painting "typified an inhabitable dream. Its silence and eerie light established the mood of a great deal of subsequent surrealist art; its drastic elongations of perspective, exemplified by the abrupt scaling-down of background figures in relation to the foreground sculpture, became a recurrent poetic device in paintings of Tanguy, Dali, Magritte, Delvaux and others."

More important to the surrealist painters, however, were Song of Love and Sacred Fish. In Song of Love (in which a surgeon's rubber glove is juxtaposed with a plaster head of Apollo) painted in 1914, de Chirico's still-life vocabulary tended to become more exotic. This painting was partidularly influential in the North in Belgium and France and was of special importance to Magritte.

In the South, Sacred Fish, the latest painting in the exhibition, was of similar importance to the surrealist artists. Max Ernst has explicitly said that this picture helped propel him and other German and Swiss dadaists in the direction of surrealism. It is an ironical fact that the picture was painted in 1919, two years after the last consistently great year of de Chirico's early period. The surrealists, who strongly repudiated de Chirico's later work, and believe his creative work to have ended in 1917, continue to maintain that the picture was actually painted earlier, despite much evidence that the 1919 date is correct.

> "After the war de Chirico's inspiration, so largely oneiric in source, began to wane, though it revived at intervals as

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when in 1919, he painted the Sacred Fish," Mr. Soby says. "Its attraction for fantasists like Max Ernst is easy to understand. For here, presented in terms of extreme realism, is a pictorial counter-logic based on subconscious sources of inspiration soon to be explored by the surrealists. The brilliant smoked fish are placed on a platform at the front of a stage and become the protagonists of a strange drama of the inanimate. They are accompanied by unreasonable objects - a toy-like form and a candlestick with a starfish impaled on its wick - the known and the impossible combined to create a believeable entity."

The Disquieting Muses, (1917), one of the paintings lent to the exhibition from abroad, may well be the greatest painting of de Chirico's career, Mr. Soby believes. It illustrates the ambivalent, metaphysical nature of his early art as it attracts and repels, beguiles and frightens. At least two other versions of this painting exist. One was made by the artist as a copy for Paul Eluard in 1924 when it was impossible for him to buy the first version from the owner. Another version, which first appeared in Italy after World War II, de Chirico says was painted in 1918, a date Mr. Soby flatly disputes, particularly since no such 1918 version is known to have existed when de Chirico made the 1924 copy for Eluard.

The exhibition also includes Ariadne painted in 1913, one of a series de Chirico did incorporating the statue of Ariadne, a Roman copy of the lost Hellenist sculpture of Ariadne asleep on the island of Naxos, where she was abandoned by Theseus. Ariadne took on a profound symbolic meaning for de Chirico who painted five pictures on this theme in 1913.

Two paintings from the mannequin series, also one of de Chirico's major subjects along with his architectural squares and metaphysical still lifes, are included. The Duo, which Mr. Soby calls the most moving and tender of the 1915 series and The Seer, climax of the first series of mannequins in which the figures are armless, stuffed dummies. Among the still-lifes are Amusements of a Young Girl, (1915) and Evangelical Still Life, (1916), which illustrates de Chirico's interest in unorthodox format as the picture is on an oblique slant. Grand Metaphysical Interior the climax of his 1917 still-lifes is one of his most beautiful pictures in color, Mr. Soby believes. He calls it "an unforgettable counterplay between realism of detail and fantasy of over-all invention."

The 1917 version of Hector and Andromache and Grand Metaphysician, also painted that year are among the pictures of which later versions exist revealing the changes in de Chirico's art after 1920 when a rising respect for tradition and a pre-occupation with technical ingenuity were accompanied by a drastic decline in creative powers. De Chirico not only has renounced his own early art but has become a bitter and violent opponent of the modern movement in art of which he was once an acknowledged leader.

Photographs and review copies of Giorgio de Chirico by James Thrall Soby available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 St., N.Y.C