

APPENDIX
 THE SEVENTIES – INTERVIEWS
HOW A WORK OF ART IS BORN
DE CHIRICO '77

What follows are two late testimonies by Giorgio de Chirico, both taken from a series of interviews granted to Franco Simongini for RAI TV in July 1973 and April 1977 respectively (the latter is transcribed in full below). The artist's studio-home at 31 Piazza di Spagna, Rome, where he lived for the last 30 years of his life, provides the setting.

In the documentary *Come nasce un'opera d'arte* (How a Work of Art is Born)¹, the 85 year old de Chirico responds to the interviewer's questions while painting a characteristic Neometaphysical work: *Sole sul cavalletto* (Sun on the Easel), which appeared as a theme for the first time in his lithographs for Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* in 1930. "It is a subject related to suns; the sun turned off in the sky and lit up again in a room", he says while he begins drawing on the blank canvas. They continue to talk while the artist paints the sky green-blue and the undulating rays of the two suns, one black, the other yellowish, after which he sets down his tools and the interview continues on other topics (figs. 1-2). At the start of the second day's shooting the canvas is found in a more advanced state than de Chirico had left it the previous evening (fig. 3). Indeed, it appears that some colour had been added to the background in areas that the artist had not completed during the first day's shooting.² The artist explained to Simongini, on whom this development had not been lost, that he was taken by the "anxiety to create". Their exchange is highly entertaining. On de Chirico's opening comment, Simongini follows suit by proposing another stereotype of artistic creation by asking if a demon had tormented him during the night and if he was often "taken by inspiration". De Chirico goes along with it, giving increasingly witty replies as he finishes the picture, complete with date and signature (fig. 4).³ Simongini concludes the interview by asking the artist what painting means to him and receives the reply: "An amusement, a pleasure, a satisfaction, an amusement of a superior order". In response to his last question, "but are you a painter outside time?", the answer is: "Yes".

¹ F. Simongini, *Come nasce un'opera d'arte*, documentary filmed for RAI TV over two days in the artist's studio, 31 Piazza di Spagna in July 1973.

² De Chirico suffered from spending too much time under the strong lighting needed for the television cameras and complained about it during the interview. In this case, one may advance the hypothesis of an assistant, or that the artist himself preferred to carry on working during the interval.

³ If we wished to follow the logic of Gerd Roos, should we consider this work a fake? A painting which moreover is part of the Foundation's collection?



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4

figs. 1-3 Giorgio de Chirico during the various phases of work on *Sun on the Easel*, painted during the interview with Franco Simongini, *How a Work of Art is Born*, in July 1973

fig. 4 G. de Chirico, *Sun on the Easel*, 1973, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome

Four years later, in 1977, Simongini resumed his conversation with the artist with a view to updating the item “de Chirico”, as one does for encyclopaedias. In his brief replies we can appreciate the artist, highly lucid, as he talks about himself and comments on some recent paintings such as *L'oro nero* (Black Gold) of 1976, a work that is testament to de Chirico’s inventiveness towards the end of his life (fig. 8). Set against the background of a naturalistic landscape, black objects in the form of blocks overflow from a sort of altar-fountain. Like a small, orderly army they seem alive in their ordered chain of descent to the ground. The strange “apparition”, together with the delicate pictorial execution of trees and the sky with clouds in the background, unites nature and imagination, technique and poetic quality. In one of the very rare moments when the artist revealed the meaning of a work, in response to Simogini’s question, he identified the objects, as “solidified petroleum”.

He would not give the interviewer similar satisfaction regarding another work with a truly original subject, not specifically Neometaphysical. This work is published with the title *Fin de siècle* (End

of the Century) in the monograph *Conoscere de Chirico* which includes the interesting essay «*Pictor classicus sum*» *il ritorno alla tradizione dei Maestri* by Wieland Schmied (fig. 7).⁴ Dated 1977 in the book, the work was actually painted in December 1976 and bears the artist's dedication to his wife: "To Isa, with very best wishes for 1977". The title given by the artist was in fact *Uomini e statue* (Men and Statues) as seen in the autograph writing on the back. This title was reaffirmed during the interview when Simongini referred to it as "men looking at statues". De Chirico merely points out: "Ah yes, no. But they are not looking at the statues. The title of that watercolour is *Men and Statues*. There are men there and there are statues there..."

The present writer had the honour of receiving an explanation regarding the socio-political content of this painting from the artist himself. Set within the virtual enclosure created by the statues of the "powerful", stand the masses obliged to remain within the enclosure. Those who stand outside are the questioners, or free spirits, those who do not look at the statues but elsewhere, free of all conditioning.

De Chirico, as creator and man, remains well outside the "enclosure". This freedom of spirit is manifested throughout his entire oeuvre.⁵

⁴ I. Far and D. Porzio, *Conoscere de Chirico*, Mondadori, Milan 1979.

⁵ Upon viewing works of this kind we realise that Roos' statements that Isabella suggested the subjects or that they were executed by someone else – and should therefore be considered fake – could not be farther from the artist's true spirit and the personal and professional circumstances regarding his working method.