

ZEUXIS THE EXPLORER<sup>9</sup>

*for Mario Broglio*

Once the passageways are opened within the idiot fences that shut in the various groups – whimpering or roaring – the new Zeuxis' depart alone in search of curiosities that burrow like moles across the crust of the terraqueous globe.

“The world is full of demons,” said Heraclitus of Ephesus, strolling in the shade of the porticos, in the hour pregnant with high noon's mystery, while in the dry embrace of the Asiatic gulf, the salty water was simmering beneath the south-western wind.

You must find the demon in every thing.

The ancient Cretans printed an enormous eye in the middle of the skinny profiles that chased each other around their vases, their domestic tools, the walls of their houses.

Even the fetus of a man, of a fish, of a chicken, of a serpent is, in its first stage, entirely an eye. You must find the eye in every thing.

I was already thinking that way in Paris during the final years preceding the explosion of the conflict. Around me the international gang of modern painters was stupidly striving between exhausted formulas and sterile systems.

Only I, in my squalid atelier on the rue Campagne-Première, was beginning to perceive the first ghosts of an art more complete, more profound, more complicated and, to say it in a word though at the risk of giving hepatic colic to a French critic: *more metaphysical*.

New lands appeared on the horizon.

The big zinc coloured glove, with the terrible golden nails, swung on the shop door in the sad breaths of the civic afternoons; with its index finger pointing toward the slabs of the sidewalk it showed me the hermetic signs of a new melancholy.

The papier-mâché skull in the middle of the hairdresser's window cut in the strident heroism of gloomy prehistory, burned my heart and mind like a recurring song.

The demons of the city opened the road for me.

When I returned home other harbinger ghosts came towards me.

On the ceiling I discerned new Zodiac signs when I watched its desperate flight go to die at the back of the room in the rectangle of the window opened onto the mystery of the street.

The door half closed upon the night of the anteroom had the sepulchral solemnity of a rock shifted before the empty tomb of the resurrected.

And the new harbinger paintings arose.

Like autumnal fruits we are now ripe for the new metaphysics.

That strong winds may bear down from distant turbulent seas.

That our cry may reach the populous cities of faraway continents.

We must not fatten ourselves, not even in the happiness of our new creations.

We are explorers ready for new departures.

Below roofs echoing with metallic clanging the quadrants are struck at the sign of departure.

In the signal boxes the bells ring out.

It is time ...

“Gentlemen, all aboard ...!”

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<sup>9</sup> G. de Chirico, *Zeusi l'esploratore*, dated Rome April 1918, in “Valori Plastici”, dedicated to Mario Broglio, the periodical's founder, a. I, n. 1, Rome November 1918, p. 10; republished in *Commedia...*, cit., pp. 45-46. Translated by S. Heim, this poem in prose forms part of *The Collected Poems of Giorgio de Chirico* published in English for the first time in this periodical.