

LETTERS BY GIORGIO DE CHIRICO TO JULIEN LEVY, ALFRED BARNES  
AND LÉONCE ROSENBERG, 1934-1936, PERTAINING TO THE TEXT:

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO – JULIEN LEVY  
ARTIST AND ART DEALER - SHARED EXPERIENCE

*Katherine Robinson*

**1.**

Paris, July 30, 1934<sup>1</sup>

Sir,

Since last fall, I have been talking with Pierre Coll regarding the possibility of holding a personal exhibition of my works in your gallery. It was Pierre Coll himself who proposed it to me. But I haven't managed to settle anything definitely yet. I also made the acquaintance of Madame Looyd, and she too, asked me to have an exhibition in your gallery after she saw my exhibition at Galerie Paul Guillaume in May. But I was unable to get what I wanted from this woman either, that is, a letter from you guaranteeing the exhibition and setting the conditions and the date. Both Pierre Coll and Madame Looyd proposed a date for the coming fall. I would prefer to it to be later on, that is, not before March 1935. Therefore, I thought that by addressing myself directly to you, I would be able to obtain a clear idea of what it is I can count on because, before making other arrangements, I would like to know if I can or cannot count on an exhibition in your gallery. If March doesn't work well for you, it could be held in February, but any earlier would be impossible for me.

I ask you, Sir, to please be sincere and let me know if by chance you absolutely cannot hold my exhibition, because in that case, I will have to consider other offers which have been made to me. But I do not hide from you that I would like very much to hold an exhibition with you, as I have heard from a number of people the most flattering things about your gallery.

While waiting to read a letter from you, I ask you, Sir, to accept my distinguished greetings.

Giorgio de Chirico

9 rue Brown Séquard

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<sup>1</sup> See image of letter, pp. 645-647. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, July 30, 1934, copy of handwritten letter in French, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico Archives. With regard to the spelling of the name 'Looyd' see K. Robinson, *Giorgio de Chirico – Julien Levy. Artista e gallerista. Esperienza condivisa*, in this Periodical, note 30, p. 332. Original letters transcribed by Katherine Robinson.

## 2.

Paris XV  
 Paris, August 25, 1934<sup>2</sup>  
 Julien Levy Gallery  
 602 Madison Avenue  
 New York City  
 (America)

Dear Sir,

I have received your letter. We agree then, to schedule my exhibition for November or December 1935. I think December would be better. Therefore, I ask you to please send me a letter in which you commit yourself to hold my exhibition on that date. I too, will send you a letter. Please include your conditions in the letter.

I will give Mrs. Looyd 2 or 3 metaphysical paintings from my recent production so she can send them to you. I will also try and find photos to give to her.

By chance, do you know an illustrator in New York by the name of Alajalov? Three years ago he took two paintings of mine to sell and I have seen neither the money nor the paintings since. I would like to have his address so I can hire a lawyer at the Italian consulate in New York to take care of this situation.

Please accept, Sir, my best wishes.

G. de Chirico

## 3.

9 rue Brown Séquard  
 Paris XV  
 Paris, November 10, 1934<sup>3</sup>

Dear Sir,

I have received your letter and am very happy that you like my paintings.

I am writing to you at present with regard to a matter of great importance to me. I do not like to speak of these kinds of things, but now that I am going to have an exhibition in your gallery, have already sent paintings to you and you are handling my work in general, I feel I must warn you. This is the situation. Here in Paris, like all well-known painters and men of value, I have a large number of enemies who are attempting to harm me. The Surrealists are among the most perverse of these enemies and are those who employ the most perfidious and dishonest means against me. This hostility originated with the two leaders: Breton and Eluard who, right after the war, managed to accumulate very inexpensively and at times even for nothing, a certain number of paintings which I had

<sup>2</sup> See image of postcard, p. 648. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, August 25, 1934, handwritten postcard in French, Julien Levy Archive.

<sup>3</sup> See image of letter, pp. 649-652. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, November 10, 1934, copy of handwritten letter in French, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico Archives.

painted before the war. With these paintings [in their possession] and taking advantage of the fact that I was in Italy, they hoped to stage a coup like the kind that was staged against Rousseau, the Customs Officer. They began talking about me in their review, describing me as some kind of hallucinated person who painted a number of paintings that only they owned... etc. etc. Then, in 1925 when I returned to Paris and started selling my new paintings to art dealers and exhibiting my work and getting people to talk about me, they became furious because they understood that I was going to spoil their business which, by the way, is exactly what happened.

Since then, they have not stopped boycotting me and using the worst and most dishonest methods to denigrate my recent work. It is true that they have a very limited range of action and are constantly losing terrain because people are starting to have enough of their stories and everyone understands that they are a band of good-for-nothing individuals with no talent who try to get attention by creating small scandals and intrigues etc. Now, I happen to know that the painter they support the most at the moment, Mr. Salvador Dalí, is going to have an exhibition at your gallery and that he has even departed for America.

I know that his wife, who used to be the wife of Eluard, has gone with him. I have known this for a long time, and I am mentioning it to you now as it is one of the principal reasons why I asked to have my exhibition postponed to next year, because I am sure that Dalí and his wife will endeavour to speak badly of me in New York and ruin my reputation with your clients. I am telling you this to warn you, and it is important for me that you be aware of these goings-on. Recently, I had an exhibition in Amsterdam which had a lot of success. I sold 7 paintings, of which 2 to museums. But I kept the announcement of the exhibition secret until the last minute because of the Surrealists. Consequently, I ask you not to speak to Dalí of my exhibition at your gallery and if you have already told him, tell him you have cancelled it. Please forgive me for this long letter, but it was necessary,

With my best friendship,

G. de Chirico

P.S. I ask you, please, not to speak to anyone about what I have told you. I have only mentioned this to you in order for you to be up-to-date on the intentions of these people so you can defend my interests if necessary.

#### 4.

Paris, January 18, 1935<sup>1</sup>

Dear Mr. Levy,

I have not had any news since my letter to you in which I spoke of the Surrealist's persecution and put you on guard against their action towards me. I am told that Dalí has taken advantage of his stay in New York to speak badly of my painting to journalists. Is this true? To tell you the truth, it only affects me to a certain extent.

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<sup>1</sup> G. de Chirico to J. Levy, January 18, 1935, handwritten letter in French, Julien Levy Archive.

Now, I would like to know if my exposition is to take place at the end of this year. To date, I have not received a letter from you confirming this. Consequently, if you are still planning to do my exhibition I ask you to please send me a letter in which you set the conditions and the approximate dates. Even if it is not yet possible to set the month, you might set a rough date (November, December or January). I need to know this in order to be able to schedule my other engagements. An exhibition of my recent work is about to open in Rome: 45 paintings displayed on 35 meters of cymatium.

Did you sell the two paintings I sent to you?

While I await your reply, I ask you, dear Sir, to believe in my most devoted sentiment,

G. de Chirico

9 rue Brown Séquard, XV

## 5.

January 26, 1934 [1935]<sup>5</sup>

Dear Mr. Levy,

I have received your letter. I am sending you 4 photos of my recent work by the same post. As soon as I have other photos, I will send them to you.

I don't understand what you mean about my paintings when you talk about repetitions and too many horses. My production is very varied and art dealers in America have sold paintings of all kinds; I have many other subjects: gladiators, chariot races, mannequins, ruins and landscapes in rooms, etc, etc. There exist few painters who have the varied production that I do. In the 4 photos I'm sending you, there are two that are of a new kind that I have rarely exhibited. These are: *Return to the Country of Birth* and *The Puritan's Combat*. (fig. 4) I would like you to be specific about which paintings, or rather, which subjects, I should send for the exhibition. Which are the subjects that will be the easiest to sell? I ask you to indicate this to me very clearly, so the exhibition can be assured the maximum chance of success. I also ask you to tell me how many paintings I am to send.

While I await your reply, I ask you, dear Sir, to believe in my most devoted sentiment,

Giorgio de Chirico

<sup>5</sup> See image of letter, p. 653. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, January 26, 1935, copy of handwritten letter in French, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico Archives. Erroneously dated 1934, the year is 1935.

6.

Paris, May 22, 1935<sup>6</sup>

Dear Sir,

I have received no answer to my letters written many months ago. I don't know what to attribute this silence to, but I have a feeling that someone has put you against me. Dalí and others of his kind. It doesn't matter what the reason behind your silence is, I just ask you to please reply by return post what exactly it is you intend to do about my exhibition. If you have decided against it, or if it is put off indefinitely, I ask you to return the two paintings I lent to you.

As I have already written a number of times, I have to settle the question of my exhibition in order to make other arrangements, accordingly. Would you please ask Mr. Berman to bring me the two paintings I lent to Sig. Alajalov four years ago?

My best greetings, and hoping to hear from you promptly, yours,

Giorgio de Chirico

9 rue Brown Séquard

Paris XV

7.

Paris, June 13, 1935<sup>7</sup>

Dear Sir,

I met with Madame Looyd but she spoke in such a vague manner that I have come to the conclusion that nothing can be done about it. I just don't understand why you waited so long. Due to your hesitations, I missed an exhibition in Switzerland. Actually, it is probably better that I don't do an exhibition in America. The manner in which I am working at present is too serious, and from what I hear, your clientele is composed mostly of snobs, aesthetes and other such people, that is, people who understand nothing about painting.

I only ask you to tell Mr. Berman to write to me about the exhibition in Bucharest, of which I have no news, and to tell me who it is I need to write to.

With my best greetings,

G. de Chirico

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<sup>6</sup> See image of letter, pp. 654-655. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, May 22, 1935, copy of handwritten letter in French, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico Archives.

<sup>7</sup> See image of postcard, p. 656. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, June 13, 1935, copy of handwritten postcard in French, Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico Archives.

## 8.

New York, September 16, 1936<sup>8</sup>

Dear Sir,

Here is your book with a dedication and a small drawing. If you need to write to me or telephone me, please do so at the above address, as I am not at home during the daytime.

With my high regard for Madame, please accept, dear Sir, my most devoted sentiment,

Giorgio de Chirico

P.S. Would you mind lending me your ordinary edition of 'Hebdomeros' for a few days, because I would like Colin to read it and I don't have a copy here with me.

Thank you in advance.

9. [October 1936]<sup>9</sup>

To Doctor A. Barnes

Merion P.A.

My dear friend,

I should have written to you many days ago, but I have been very busy with my exhibition, as well as being under the weather with a bothersome cold, and haven't found the time nor the tranquillity to tell you how touched I am by your benevolent and intelligent friendship, which is not only a strong incentive for me, but I am also aware of the pleiad of other painters who have found vital and necessary encouragement in you.

It is said that painting has died of old age and of overproduction, but I am sure that if there is in each century a man such as you, who puts himself at the head of painting, it will last as long as the earth. I shake your two hands,

Yours,

G. de Chirico

<sup>8</sup> See image of letter, p. 657. G. de Chirico to J. Levy, September 16, 1936, handwritten letter in French on 'Inter-Continental Productions' letterhead paper, Julien Levy Archive.

<sup>9</sup> G. de Chirico to A. C. Barnes, undated (October 1936), handwritten letter in French, The President's Files, Albert C. Barnes Correspondence. The Barnes Foundation Archives, Merion, PA.

10.

Intercontinental Productions, Inc.

Rockefeller Center

30 Rockefeller Plaza

New York

November 7, 1936<sup>10</sup>

Dear Mr. Rosenberg,

My exhibition in New York opened a week ago at the Julien Levy Gallery. It is a very big success. Barnes wrote the introduction for the catalogue and bought 4 paintings for his museum. Other paintings and gouaches have been bought by collectors in New York and Philadelphia. At present, 16 paintings have been sold and there are more sales in sight, as well as orders coming in from every direction. Vogue and Harper's Bazaar want me among their collaborators. I have also been asked to do portraits, stage-sets for the theatre and cinema etc. I am really very happy to have come here when I think of these last three years of pulling the devil by the tail amidst hostile indifference and stupidity. The success of my recent work in America is even more important since the surrealists and other such jealous scoundrels who gang together with the intention of bringing me down have conducted here, as they did in Paris, a violent campaign against my oeuvre. In addition to the [presidential] election, there were 6 other exhibitions of French painting opening almost at the same time as mine: 2 of Picasso, a Renoir exhibition as well as Derain, Vlaminck and Matisse, and despite all of this, the success was of the most complete sort.

Now, I would like to ask you something. I left 2 paintings and 5 gouaches with you, at very low prices. I hope you haven't sold them at these prices. Because, really, 1500 Fr for a big painting like the one with the horses is unthinkable. Therefore, I would like to ask you to allow Jacques Bonjean, who is the manager's partner, to come pick up the two paintings and the gouaches. I will send Bonjean with receipts.

I hope you will send me some of your news. If by chance you have sold something of mine, please send my part to the address at the top of this letter. I may be mistaken, but I have the impression that the same atmosphere is being created here as there was in Paris before the crisis; everyone is coming here, even Vuillard has just arrived. And you, my dear Mr. Rosenberg, what are your projects? Does America tempt you? While waiting to hear from you, I ask you to believe in my sincere friendship,

Yours,

Giorgio de Chirico

*Translated by Katherine Robinson*

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<sup>10</sup> G. de Chirico to L. Rosenberg, November 7, 1936, handwritten letter in French, Fond Léonce Rosenberg, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de Documentation et de Recherche du MNAM/C.145.10422.91.