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GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

1888 Volos/Greece – Rome 1978

Self-Portrait

Graphite on brownish paper, laid down on thin card; 1909. Signed lower left in black chalk and inscribed: *G. de Chirico München*; signed, inscribed and dated upper left in black ink: *G. de Chirico, München 1909*.
334 x 216 mm

PROVENANCE: Georgios Bouzianis (1885-1959, painter), gift of the artist (1909) – Thence by descent to Panos Bouzianis, the artist's son (1959) – Private collection, Bavaria

LITERATURE: Wieland Schmied and Gerd Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico – München 1906-1909*, 'Schriftenreihe der Akademie der Bildenden Künste München', V, Munich 1994, repr. p. 163. – Paolo Baldacci, *De Chirico 1888-1919. La Metafisica*, Milan 1997, p. 45, repr. p. 43 – Gerd Roos, 'Giorgio de Chirico und der lange Schatten von Arnold Böcklin', in *Arnold Böcklin, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst. Eine Reise ins Ungewisse*, exhib. cat., Kunsthaus Zürich, Haus der Kunst, Munich and Nationalgalerie Berlin 1997-8, p. 222, fig. 18 – Gerd Roos, 'Topographie eines Freundeskreises. Fritz Gartz, Georg Busianis, Giorgio und Alberto de Chirico in München 1906-1909', in Helmut Bauer and Elisabeth Tworek (eds.), *Schwabing – Kunst und Leben um 1900 – Essays*, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Munich 1998, pp. 284-93; here p. 290 – Gerd Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti. Monaco - Milano - Firenze 1906-1911*, Bologna 1999, p. 247, repr. – Magdalena Holzhey and Gerd Roos, 'Giorgio de Chirico und Alberto Savinio. Eine Biographie der Dioskuren', in *Die andere Moderne – De Chirico/Savinio*, exhib. cat., Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2001 and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich 2001-2, Stuttgart 2001, p. 31, fig. 12 and p. 356 – Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos, *De Chirico, Catalogo ragionato*, I, fasc. 1, no. 6 (English edition forthcoming) – Paolo Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico, La Peinture Métaphysique*, exhib. cat., Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris 2020, p. 4, repr. and p. 217 – Annabelle Görden-Lammers and Paolo Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico. Magische Wirklichkeit*, exhib. cat., Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg 2020, p. 38.

EXHIBITIONS: *Schwabing. Kunst und Leben um 1900*, exhib. cat. (preface by Wolfgang Till), Münchner Stadtmuseum, Munich, 21 May-27 September 1998, p. 38 – Paolo Baldacci and Wieland Schmied (eds.), *Die andere Moderne – De Chirico/Savinio*, exhib. cat., Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 15 September – 2 December 2001; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, 20 December 2001–10 March 2002, p. 31, fig. 12 and p. 356 (featured in the biographical section of the exhibition alongside documents, drawings and paintings) – *De Chirico. Magische Wirklichkeit*, 22 January – 25 April 2021, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, exhib. cat, no. 8 (repr.)

Giorgio de Chirico was born in Greece to Italian parents. He grew up in Greece, where his father worked as a civil engineer designing railroads in the province of Thessaly. He received a solid academic training at Athens Polytechnic, mainly under the guidance of the painters Constantinos Volanakis and Georgios Jakobides who worked in the tradition of the Munich School – both artists had studied at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. After their father's death in 1905, Giorgio de Chirico and his brother Andrea Francesco Alberto (who under the pseudonym Alberto Savinio was later to achieve fame as a composer, painter and writer) were taken by their widowed mother to Munich. From 1906 to 1909 Giorgio studied at the Munich Academy. On visits to Munich's public

collections he encountered the Symbolist paintings of Arnold Böcklin and Max Klinger. This first experience was to have a formative influence on his early career. He also began to study the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

The present drawing dates from this period. It is de Chirico's earliest known self-portrait. Aged only twenty-one at the time, in the drawing he seems far older. Stylistically, the sheet owes much to late nineteenth-century graphic tradition. But de Chirico's sceptical, probing gaze, his upturned collar and his right arm firmly akimbo on his hip show self-assurance and a determination to take a chance.

Discussing the drawing in a catalogue essay Gerd Roos noted in 1997: *The self-portrait de Chirico made in spring 1909 and gave to his friend Bouzianis before he left for Milan vividly highlights how he saw himself at the time. Dressed in a dark suit and bowler hat – the insignia of bourgeois appearance – he wishes to be seen as a respectable, mature adult: a man of 'good standing'. He was still worlds away from the Nietzschean ideal of youthfulness reflected in the two programmatic self-portraits of 1911 [Fig. 1] and 1912 [Fig. 2].¹ The Munich self-portrait is, moreover, signed 'G. de Chirico' which explicitly identifies it as a private document - he used the same form in his personal correspondence. By contrast, his artworks are confidently signed with the initials 'G. C.'² [following Böcklin's example – he, too, only signed his paintings with his initials.]*

De Chirico moved to Italy in June 1909. He settled in Milan, visiting Rome, Turin and Florence and continued to produce paintings that reflected the influence of Böcklin. The de Chirico brothers had many shared thematic interests and their study of Nietzsche was to have a profound influence on their work. In tandem, they engaged with the Nietzschean interpretation of nihilism, a fundamental notion of the 'meaninglessness' of life requiring a radical repudiation of all values and meanings. They examined the impact of this on a new form of art and also articulated innovative theoretical concepts for a new form of poetry. In October 1909, Giorgio de Chirico completed a first cityscape titled *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* [Fig. 3]. The painting was his response to what he called his first 'metaphysical moment'- an 'inexplicable' revelation experienced while sitting on a bench in the middle of the Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. The work marked the birth of a style known as *Pittura Metafisica*.

The two self-portraits mentioned above [Figs. 1 and 2] were executed between 1911 and 1912-13 while de Chirico was living in Paris. They signal a completely new stylistic departure. In the 1911 *Self-Portrait*, de Chirico depicts himself in the Nietzschean pose of a brooding melancholic. The profile *Self-Portrait* of 1912-13 emulates ancient Roman portrait coins and medals. Both paintings bear autograph dates that pre-date the actual year of execution by two to three years. A period of fierce rivalry with Carlo Carrà began in 1918. Before the war Carrà had been a driving force in the Futurist movement, both creatively and programmatically, and did not adopt metaphysical painting until 1917. This was a domain which de Chirico claimed for himself. He predated a number of his works purposely to validate his right to be recognized as the inventor of this style of painting.

The present drawing and the two self-portraits discussed above are the prelude to a remarkably large body of self-portraits, all of which document his deep preoccupation with questions of identity. As a group, they are of particular importance in his oeuvre. The art historians Paolo Baldacci and Wieland Schmied have noted: *Giorgio de Chirico is obsessed with his own image in a quasi-narcissistic way. Few other painters*

¹ For the self-portraits of 1911 and 1912, see Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, *L'opera completa di de Chirico 1908-1924*, published in the series *Classici dell'arte*, CX, Milan 1984, p. 80, no. 10 and p. 86, no. 39.

² G. Roos, op. cit., 1997-8, p. 222.

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*have produced as many self-portraits and none have used as many disguises- disguises which became increasingly anachronistic over the course of time. In his work – which is entirely memory-based and therefore something of an extended spiritual autobiography - his own likeness has a central role.*³

De Chirico almost certainly gave the present self-portrait to his friend Georgios Bouzianis in late May 1909 (shortly before his departure for Italy). Bouzianis had left Athens in 1906 and moved to Munich with private funding to further his studies at the Academy. De Chirico and Bouzianis were contemporaries at the Academy and for a time also shared lodgings and a studio. Bouzianis returned to Athens in the 1930s but his son Panos remained in Bavaria. When Bouzianis died in 1959, his son cleared his Athens studio and took the artworks that were left to Bavaria. One of these was de Chirico's *Self-Portrait* - Bouzianis had evidently kept his friend's parting gift pinned to the wall of his Athens studio ever since his return to Greece all those years ago.

We are grateful to Gerd Roos of the Archivio dell'arte metafisica in Milan for his valuable advice and his assistance in cataloguing this drawing.

³ Paolo Baldacci and Wieland Schmied, 'Auf der Suche nach der eigenen Identität', in *Die andere Moderne – De Chirico / Savinio*, exhib. cat., Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich 2001-02, p. 271.

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Fig. 1: *Self-Portrait*,
oil on canvas, 1911, signed, dated 1908 and inscribed:
Et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est? [What shall I love if
not the enigma?],
72.5 x 55.0 cm.
Private collection

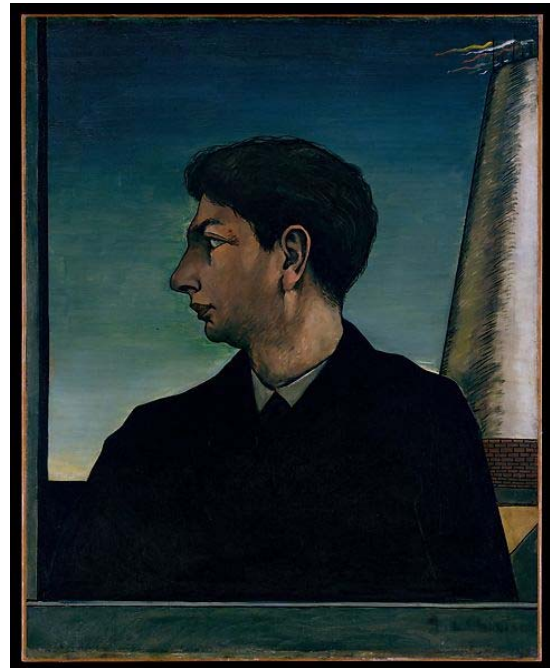


Fig. 2: *Self-Portrait*,
oil on canvas, 1912-13,
signed and dated 1911,
87.3 x 66.9 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
[inv. 1970.160]



Fig. 3: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*,
oil on canvas, 1909,
45.0 x 60.0 cm.
Private collection