



The Art of Enigma: The de Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism (New Modernisms Series)

By Keala Jewell

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In this interdisciplinary book, Keala Jewell reunites Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) with his brother, Alberto Savinio (1891–1952), a prolific writer and painter who has been kept at the margins of the discussion of Surrealism and, more generally, the culture politics of twentieth-century Italy. Yet as Jewell demonstrates, the brothers worked together during their formative years in Munich and Paris and always shared, on the one hand, a drive to salvage Mediterranean myth and history and, on the other, a deep involvement with art's power to shape cultural identity and authority.

Rather than looking for a key to unlock the secrets of the brothers' recurrent use of dislocated spaces and bizarre hybrid figures, Jewell focuses on assessing the issues of identity and mastery put at stake in the haunting enigmas that characterize their paintings and writings. Deeply impressed by Nietzsche, she argues, they believed the "human" is inherently unstable and must be constantly "rewoven" with analogies and metaphors seized from empowering states of being.

Jewell's approach to the de Chirico brothers breaks new ground, not only because it brings them together as artists and writers but also because it sets the brothers within the context of myth, history, and Italian culture politics, instead of French surrealism and its aesthetic and psychoanalytic theories. Further, Jewell's strong readings of little-known paintings and notoriously difficult texts like Giorgio de Chirico's *Ebdòmero* will expand and diversify the sources used in modernist studies.

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Editorial Review

Review

“In this fine book, Keala Jewell studies the works of Giorgio de Chirico and his younger brother Alberto Savinio who together produced an oeuvre shrouded in ‘the motif of secrecy.’ *The Art of Enigma*, an authentically interdisciplinary book, is the first study that considers the brothers together and addresses the important task of defining and characterizing the Metaphysical art that the brothers developed, especially as it differs from Surrealism, and establishes itself as an Italian, rather than a French, art.”

—Karen Pinkus, University of California, Los Angeles

“By turning her focus away from the familiar Metaphysical canvases of de Chirico’s work of the 1910s, Keala Jewell finds new and exciting relationships between the art and politics of the 1920s and 1930s. As such, this book makes a significant contribution to the field. *The Art of Enigma* has all the markings of a landmark study in the field.”

—Michael R. Taylor, The Philadelphia Museum of Art

“It must be said that Jewell, a prominent scholar in the field of Italian literature, measures up unflinchingly and with penetrating subtlety, so that, although her attention concentrates on the literary output of the two brothers, this in no way diminishes the value of its contribution to a fuller understanding of their painting.”

—Robert Radford, *The Art Book*

“What would it mean to look at de Chirico differently? . . . Keala Jewell’s new book *The Art of Enigma: The De Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* provides the answer to this question by examining the work of the de Chirico brothers, Giorgio and Alberto (later known as Alberto Savinio) together. . . . What emerges is a new picture of the de Chiricos that refuses easy definitions and is salutary for its protean spirit of inclusiveness and heterogeneity.”

—Anthony White, *Papers of Surrealism*

About the Author

Keala Jewell is Paganucci Chair of Italian Studies at Dartmouth College. She is the author of *The Poesis of History: Experimentation with Genre in Postwar Italy* (1992), editor of *Monsters in the Italian Literary Imagination* (2001) and co-editor of *The Defiant Muse* (1985).

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