

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

*Les gladiateurs, 1928*



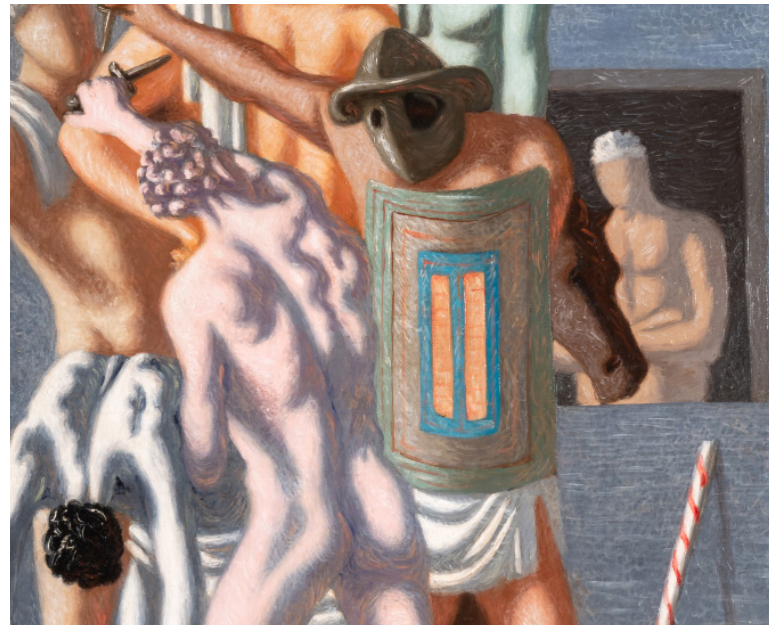
GALLERIA  
DELLO  
SCUDO

Giorgio de Chirico  
*Les gladiateurs*, 1928  
oil on canvas  
116 x 88 cm | 45 ½ x 34 ½



## *Gladiators! This word hiding an enigma*

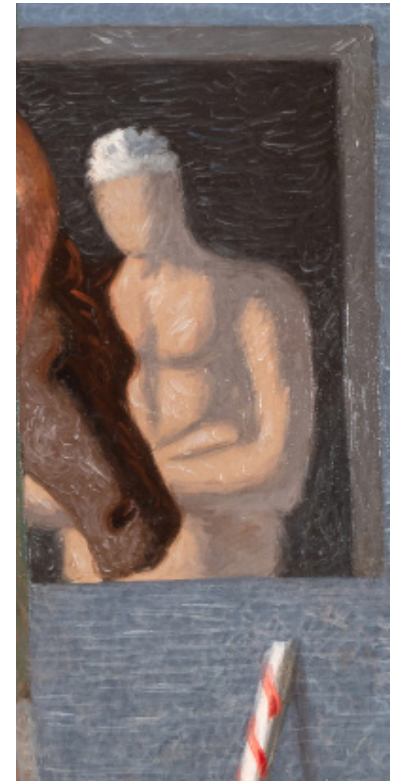
After six years (1919-1924) we could define as experimental, de Chirico returned to Paris and regained a well-defined and recognizable style. He also created a new range of subjects, which he would then develop with some temporal decalage until 1929, and again, but with less and less vigor, in the 1930s and finally in the 1960s. Among these themes, the one regarding the gladiators, whose first examples are dated from 1927, stands out for its most evident classical matrix.



De Chirico loved the cinema. Exactly in the period of his *Gladiators*, he said he was inspired by the first *Technicolor* cinema images, and indeed he wrote an enthusiastic article dedicated to his new Parisian visions in *Vale Lutetia*.



From the left: Arbiter, beginning of the III century b.C., Vatican City, Musei Vaticani (from the mosaics from the Bath of Caracalla); Giorgio de Chirico, *Les gladiateurs*, 1928 detail.



From the left: Giorgio de Chirico, *Chevaux devant la mer*, 1926, detail; Giorgio de Chirico, *Les gladiateurs*, 1928 detail.

Inspired by Roman mosaics, as early as 1928 the paintings of gladiators became a metaphor of feelings and visions related to the artist's childhood and unconscious. The figures of arbiters who look out from the windows on either side of the scene symbolize the spectator invited to attend the show, and the artist himself who quotes in this case one of the themes most dear to him in that period: the horses by the sea on the background of ancient ruins.



The central wall of the *Hall des gladiateurs* in Léonce Rosenberg's apartment on Rue de Longchamp in Paris (from "Vogue", 1929).



Léonce Rosenberg in his warehouse (after 1932). On the right the central picture of the Hall. *Gladiateurs au repos*, 1924.

## Léonce Rosenberg, the house on rue de Longchamp and the Hall des Gladiateurs

The apartment of the Parisian merchant Léonce Rosenberg was decorated by de Chirico and other artists who referred to the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne. Born in Paris on September 12 1879, Léonce Rosenberg, the son of Alexandre, owner of a gallery in the rue de l'Opera, belonged to that elite who combined intellectual openness with conservative political and social ideas. He had attended the Lycée Rollin and then had a commercial training in London and Antwerp, continuing however to privately feed his humanistic and artistic interests. The painting *Les gladiateurs* is therefore part of the series of large canvases conceived for the Rosenberg house, documented in some photographs of the time.

*Les gladiateurs* is an extraordinary canvas from 1928 that re-proposes the same compositions of human and animal bodies made for Rosenberg in smaller dimensions but with more intense and surprising color effects. The dynamic and at the same time static “polychrome block” presents itself as a single plastic element, whose characteristic as an autonomous “monument” is underlined by the footrest shield and the rod leaning against the wall, an element which is detached but still an integral part of the composition as in certain conceptual works.



Luca Signorelli, *Dannati all'inferno*, 1499-1502, fresco belonging to the cycle of the *Storie degli ultimi giorni*, Chapel of San Brizio (Cappella Nova), Cathedral of Orvieto.



Giorgio de Chirico, *Gladiateurs*, 1928, one of the first paintings for the Rosenberg's house.



From *Drawing and Design*, London, October 1928: advertising insert of de Chirico one-man show at Arthur Tooth & Sons, the first one in Great Britain, where *Les gladiateurs* was on show.

The painting *Les gladiateurs*, which soon entered the collection of Léonce Rosenberg, was soon chosen for the artist's first solo exhibition set up in the autumn of 1928 at Arthur Tooth & Sons, London. Later on it attracted the attention of Sydney Alfred Schiff, novelist, translator, patron, friend of painters and musicians, as well as art collector. Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens, member of the same family, was the following owner of the work. He was son of the President of the British Chamber of Commerce who served as Chairman of the British Committee of the European League for Economic Cooperation.



From the book Roberto Aloï, *L'arredamento moderno*, Hoepli, Milan, 1936: the painting in Sydney Alfred Schiff's house in London.

# *Les gladiateurs, 1928*

## provenance:

- Léonce Rosenberg collection, Paris
- Galerie de L'Effort Moderne, Paris
- Arthur Tooth & Sons Gallery, London
- Sydney Alfred Schiff collection, London
- Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens collection, London
- private collection, Forlì
- private collection, Como

## exhibitions:

- London, Arthur Tooth & Sons Gallery, *First Exhibition in England of Paintings by Giorgio de Chirico*, 10 October - 3 November 1928, catalogue, text by T.W. Earp.
- Varese, Biumo Superiore, Villa Panza, *Giorgio de Chirico. Gladiatori 1927-1929*, curated by P. Baldacci, 4 October - 14 December 2003, catalogue, texts by P. Baldacci, F. Ravera and C. Sisi, repertorio a cura di P. Baldacci and G. Roos, pp. 104-105, no. XXIV, illustrated (dated 1929) and p. 130, no. 56 [dated (1929)].
- Milan, Palazzo Reale, *de Chirico*, curated by L.M. Barbero, 25 September 2019 - 19 January 2020, catalogue, texts by L.M. Barbero, C. Beltramini, G. Casini and A. Cortellessa, biography edited by M. L. Rocco, schedules of the works edited by G. Chierici, pp. 228-229, no. 61, illustrated and p. 363, no. 61.

# *Les gladiateurs, 1928*

## bibliography:

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- R. Aloï, *L'Arredamento Moderno Seconda serie*, Hoepli, Milan, 1936, p. 546, illustrated (work reproduced in an English living room).
- C. Bruni Sakraischik, *Catalogo Generale Giorgio de Chirico*, voll. I-VI, in collaboration with G. de Chirico and I. Far and the special assistance of G. Briganti, Electa, Milan, 1971-1976 / vol. VII, with the assistance of G. Briganti (for the works from 1908 to 1918) and W. Schmied, Electa, Milan, 1983 / vol. VIII (committe: I. de Chirico, W. Schmied and A. Vastano) Electa, Milan, 1987; vol. III, tome I, no. 239, illustrated. (*Scuola di gladiatori*).
- P. Baldacci, M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Giorgio de Chirico, Parigi 1924-1929. Dalla nascita del Surrealismo al crollo di Wall Street*, with an essay by N. Frank, Edizioni Philippe Daverio / Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milan, 1982 (II ed. 1983), pp. 450-451, plate XXXVIII and p. 545, no. 231, illustrated [dated (1929)].



Giorgio de Chirico in rue Meissonier in November 1929 (photo Lipnitzki). On the left, leaning against the fireplace, the sketch of *La lutte*; right, *Combat de gladiateurs*.



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