

CENTER FOR ITALIAN MODERN ART

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*CIMA Presents Important Exhibition of Italian Metaphysical Painting and Drawing
Including Many Works Seen in the U.S. for the First Time*

METAPHYSICAL MASTERPIECES 1916–1920: MORANDI, SIRONI, AND CARRÀ

October 19, 2018 – June 1, 2019

(New York, NY, September 4, 2018) The Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) presents a major exhibition devoted to masterpieces of metaphysical art, with rarely seen works created between 1916 and 1920 by Giorgio Morandi, Mario Sironi, and Carlo Carrà, along with a key work by Giorgio de Chirico. Drawn primarily from the collection of the Pinacoteca di Brera, in Milan, as well as from other public and private collections, the exhibition includes works that have never before been seen in the U.S., and many brought together for the first time. *Metaphysical Masterpieces 1916–1920: Morandi, Sironi, and Carrà* will be on view from October 19, 2018 through June 15, 2019.

The term “metaphysical painting” (*pittura metafisica*) refers to an artistic style that emerged in Italy during the First World War. Closely associated with de Chirico, it often featured disquieting images of eerie spaces and enigmatic objects, eliciting a sense of the mysterious. *Metaphysical Masterpieces* concentrates on rarely seen early works by Giorgio Morandi and important paintings by the lesser-known artists Carlo Carrà and Mario Sironi, offering a richer and more nuanced view of *pittura metafisica* than previous exhibitions in the United States, creating a vivid portrait of the genre.

The exhibition is presented by CIMA in collaboration with the Pinacoteca di Brera, in Milan, and curated by that museum’s director, James Bradburne, working closely with CIMA President Laura Mattioli.

Dr. Mattioli notes, “Thanks to André Breton’s enthusiastic promotion of his work, Giorgio de Chirico is viewed as standing virtually alone in the creation and practice of metaphysical art. Yet metaphysical art was much richer, more complex, and longer-lived than that view would imply. For example, as this exhibition will show, both Sironi and Morandi were profoundly influenced by the poetics of this new avant-garde art, and developed a personal version of metaphysical painting that would prove to be hugely important in the subsequent decades. We are delighted to shed new light on this visionary painting style, which has not received the attention it deserves.”

Brief Background

Metaphysical painting developed against the background of a widespread rethinking among artists—provoked by the First World War—of the nature and role of art. Among Italian artists, for example, Umberto Boccioni's death in the war in 1916 marked the end of the first phase of Futurism and its forward-looking, optimistic belief in modernity. De Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio were sent by the military command to Ferrara, where they met Carrà and Filippo de Pisis, among others. Although Morandi was discharged after two months due to severe illness, he returned to work, meditating on the painting of Henri Rousseau and, later, on the new metaphysical works he saw in 1918. In 1919, Sironi, who had been discharged from the front at the end of the war, established himself in Milan, where he engaged with this critical moment in Italian art, marked by the opposing poetics of Futurism and metaphysical painting.

Exhibition

Metaphysical Masterpieces focuses largely on the short yet pivotal period of 1916–1920, which saw the end not only of the first phase of Futurism, but also of Cubism as initially conceived, and which in turn sowed the seeds of both Surrealism and the work that would be called a “return to order” (*ritorno all'ordine*) in the early 1920s.

Visitors to the exhibition will be introduced to metaphysical painting with a small painting by de Chirico, *Interno metafisico (con piccola officina)* (*Metaphysical Interior [with Small Factory]*), 1917, a work whose colors, themes, and use of perspective became a point of reference for the other artists in the show.



Giorgio de Chirico,
Interno metafisico (con piccola officina) (*Metaphysical Interior [with Small Factory]*), 1917.



Carlo Carrà, *L'idolo ermafrodito* (*The Hermaphrodite Idol*), 1917.

The exhibition continues with a display of works by Carrà, who, after abandoning Futurism, became one of the leading practitioners and exponents of the metaphysical painting style, and who, like Morandi, was influenced by Rousseau. Several of the paintings on view here are occupied not by the human figure but rather by mannequins, some in enigmatic poses, and all occupying unreadable space. In Carrà's *L'idolo ermafrodito* (*The Hermaphrodite Idol*), of 1917, for example, a monumentally scaled, seated figure—who would be unable to stand in the space in which he sits—raises one hand in a gesture that alludes to the Trinity, while the other is held behind his back. While the use of mannequins rather than human models is a signature feature of metaphysical art, thanks to de Chirico, the sense of quiet and stillness that imbue this painting may also remind us of Giotto, for whom Carrà professed great admiration. Another work in this display, *L'amante dell'ingegnere* (*The Engineer's Mistress*), 1921, comprises the head of a female figure, accompanied by a compass and other tools of geometry. With partially closed eyes and a

slightly open mouth, the figure looks at once life-like and other-worldly. The cryptic scene is set at night, in a space that is neither indoors nor out. It is, like all of the works in this section of the exhibition, unremittingly mysterious, seemingly located on a plane above the rational world.

CIMA's main gallery will provide an eye-opening view of Morandi's work. Some of the compositions from this period are reminiscent of metaphysical paintings by Carrà and de Chirico, with mysterious scenes, populated by mannequins and abstract forms, that simultaneously evoke and preclude a narrative. A still life dating from 1918, for example, includes what appears to be the bust of a mannequin, viewed from behind, as well as a bottle, a rod, and a block-like form that is obscured by the mannequin's head and shoulders. The objects are arrayed on a surface that simultaneously appears to recede in space and to be parallel with the picture plane, while an open doorway behind the composition seems to lead nowhere. Other paintings in this section include subjects more typically associated with Morandi's work: bottles, dishes, vases, and other familiar objects that have been removed from their quotidian contexts, depicted without any indication of their life as objects of use. Painted in the artist's close-hued colors and depicted in a closed space, these exude the sense of quiet mystery and timelessness that are at the heart of metaphysical art. But perhaps the most unexpected works here are Morandi's paintings of flowers, depicted with a sense of organic energy that stands in contrast to the aura of quiet typically associated with the artist. In one of these, *Fiori (Flowers)*, of 1918, the flowers, set in a vase, have begun to shed their blossoms onto the table on which they sit, while other images are painted with a kind of vitality that excites the eye and mind, as if the plants are exuding a life force.



Giorgio Morandi, *Fiori (Flowers)*, 1918.



Mario Sironi, *La Venere dei Porti (Venus of the Ports)*, 1919.

Sironi is represented in CIMA's south gallery space, where his paintings form a kind of capstone to the exhibition. Something of a polymath, he also practiced as a designer, sculptor, and illustrator. He was a close friend of Boccioni, and joined the Futurist movement in 1913. Although he never officially abandoned Futurism, both during and after the war his paintings—for which the chronology remains problematic—increasingly reflected the metaphysical style. In *Il camion giallo (The Yellow Truck)*, of 1918, the truck of the title—far from speeding by, an emblem of modern industrial might—is standing still, stopped in an empty intersection, near featureless modern buildings beneath an ominous black sky. It is an image of the modern city as a site of alienation and anxiety. In other works, like the 1919 *La Venere dei porti (Venus of the Ports)*—a reference to prostitutes who worked along the docks—figures are rendered as mannequins, solid and motionless. *La lampada (The Lamp)*, also of 1919, focuses on a similarly

expressionless mannequin-woman in an interior that is domestic yet utterly without domesticity.

2018–2019 Fellows

This year's fellows include four young scholars who will pursue research that they will present at the *Metaphysical Masterpieces* Study Days, a special culminating event held in the spring, in addition to guiding tours at CIMA, contributing to scholarship for the exhibition catalogue, and participating in public programming. CIMA will once again award a Travel Fellowship for scholars outside of Italy who wish to pursue studies in Italy, and is participating in an Affiliated Fellowship in collaboration with the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, an artist residency program located in a 15th-century castle in Umbria, Italy.

About CIMA

The Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) is a non-profit exhibition and research center dedicated to promoting new scholarship and dialogue devoted to 20th century Italian art. Through its annual exhibitions, art history fellowships, and rich calendar of public programming, CIMA situates Italian modern art in a broad historic and cultural context, illuminating its continuing relevance to contemporary culture.

Located in an expansive, sunlit loft in SoHo, CIMA is a retreat for one-of-a-kind experiences with Italian art. Every Friday and Saturday during the nine-month season, visitors are welcomed by CIMA's resident scholars for distinctive, informal tours of the exhibition aimed at inspiring unexpected insights and provoking conversations. This extended exhibition run serves as a platform for the development of new scholarship by the fellows, as well as colleagues in museum and university communities.

CIMA's public programming offers additional opportunities for in-depth explorations of Italian art, culture, and history, bringing in artists, scholars, public figures, writers, and other presenters for lively evenings of conversation, performance, readings, and even shared drawing experiences. Last season's events included an evening of conversation with artists Lisa Yuskavage, Joanna Pousette-Dart, and Sarah Sze; the first American re-staging of an avant-garde operetta by Alberto Savinio; and a dialogue between Isabella Rosellini and Yasmine Ergas, among other events.

Access

CIMA is open to the public Fridays and Saturdays; visits require registration. Signature guided walk-throughs of the exhibition, led by CIMA's fellows, are offered both days at 11am and 2pm. Visitors may view the exhibition independently between 1 and 6 pm. CIMA is wheelchair accessible and available for group tours and CIMA member appointments Monday through Thursday. Members may also visit for free during public hours. For information and reservations, visit <http://www.italianmodernart.org/>.

Media Contacts

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Image captions

Giorgio de Chirico, *Interno metafisico (con piccola officina) (Metaphysical Interior [with Small Factory])*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 14 3/16 in. (46 x 36 cm). Fondation Mattioli Rossi, Switzerland (c) 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome.

Carlo Carrà, *L'idolo ermafrodito (The Hermaphrodite Idol)*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 25 9/16 x 16 9/16 in. (65 x 42 cm). Fondation Mattioli Rossi, Switzerland (c) 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome.

Giorgio Morandi, *Fiori (Flowers)*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 25 7/8 in. (82 x 66 cm). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Courtesy of MiBAC (c) 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome.

Mario Sironi, *La Venere dei Porti (Venus of the Ports)*, 1919. Tempera and collage on paper on canvas, 38 9/16 x 28 4/3 in. (98 x 73 cm). Casa Museo Boschi Di Stefano, Comune Di Milano. (c) 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome.