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Victoria Noel-Johnson
De Chirico and the United Kingdom (c. 1916–1978)
Maretti Editore, San Marino, 2017 ISBN 978-88-98855-37-7 €60

Adrian Clark

This is a book of 831 pages. It represents a massive achievement by the author, who has collected together a large amount of original archival material relating to the artist's long relationship with the British art world. In doing so, she has had the full support of the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, whose President explains at the beginning of the book what its objective is: to provide material of historical interest to 'scholars, collectors and enthusiasts'. He goes on to say that 'the book acts as an inexhaustible source of facts about de Chirico's reception across the Channel'. Another introductory contribution, from an Italian Professor of Contemporary Art History, further explains:

> 'This is a publication that may be considered definitive and fundamental regarding an area that studies, to date, have almost wholly neglected, and yet turns out to be highly significant for de Chirico. It constitutes an example of seriousness and philology that, all too often, is absent even in the most recent dechirican studies; it demonstrates how one ought to proceed in historical inquiry'.

These comments prepare the reader for the nature of what follows. This is not a book that can easily be read, cover to cover; it is a work of research and reference. Its purpose is to enable others to base their artistic theories on de Chirico on reliable information. It will guide anyone wishing to write about de Chirico to the relevant archival sources, itself making no comment on the occasional controversies which arose in relation to his career. In particular, the author resists any temptation to participate in the old, long-running saga of de Chirico's status as a 20th-century artist. How 'important' was he? Was his only 'importance' during his early phase? Was the artist right to challenge other modern art during the 1930s? Was he right to seek to insist upon critics paying as much attention to his later work, as to his earlier work? These may be the sorts of questions which de Chirico scholars find themselves writing about and they may find themselves referring to this book if they want to illustrate their theories with examples from his British reception.

Judging the importance of such a monumental work is itself a difficult thing, whatever the difficulties of judging the underlying art work. It is a piece in a jigsaw. In order to complete the scholar's delight, there would need to be matching books about de Chirico's reception in other art world centres. Books of perhaps even greater length would be needed on Paris and on New York and so on. I imagine that, while London was one of the places where critical attention was paid to de Chirico over a long period, it was some way from being the most important place. It does raise the question of how many people there will be writing about de Chirico who will need to place heavy reliance on this volume.

What emerges of some interest is the appearance of some of the great names of the mid-century British art world. Roland Penrose, Anton Zwemmer, Edward James, Peter Watson and Arthur Jeffress were relevant to so many modern artists at the time, either by collecting their work or by promoting it in their galleries or journals. They underpinned the way in which many artists' work was received in this country, making judgments about the relative interest or 'importance' of the work at a time when its status was less established than it later became. Their contributions were a vital part of the way in which de Chirico's work was received and the author perceptively emphasises this by giving them their own individual chapters.

Another insight for me was into the controversy over three pictures lent by Edward James to the Tate in 1962. The artist popped up to allege that they were fakes and Igor Markevitch (whose best man at his first wedding had been Peter Watson) separately claimed that he actually owned one of the pictures (which of course he did not acknowledge as a fake). The Director of the Tate, John Rothenstein, in his last largely controversy-free years at the Tate before his retirement in 1964, found himself in an awkward position, being asked somehow to reconcile these competing interests. With a bit of judicious delaying and hiding behind the no-doubt anxious deliberations of his Trustees, he managed to play a poor hand as well as could have been done. In the end, although lawyers were deployed, no harm was done and the issue evaporated. Rothenstein may not always have been successful over the years when trying to address the consequences of his own actions as Director, but he was by 1962 extremely experienced in the ways of the art world and this enabled him to tiptoe to safety.

An area that the book could have explored would have been the economic aspects of the British art market's treatment of de Chirico's work. It is relatively easy to find the auction history of an artist's work, and an appendix showing how it fared at Sotheby's and Christie's and so on would have been interesting and might have contributed to and understanding of the dialogue between the market and the art world that affects every professional artist. It is more challenging, in an archival sense, finding out how much work sold for at galleries, although some information on this is given in the book. There is fascinating research to be done in the sales ledgers of those galleries whose records are in the Tate Archive, such as those of Roland, Browse and Delbanco and of Tooth's, showing not only prices but who bought the pictures. The ledgers often show how much the galleries paid for the work and who they acquired it from and how long they held it before finding a buyer. Certain types of art market scholars would have found a collation of that sort of material in easily accessible form extremely helpful.

The author rightly attributes some importance to the bulletin (initially called the *London Gallery Bulletin* but soon shortened to the *London Bulletin*) put out by Roland Penrose's London Gallery between 1938 and 1940. This seems to me to be an understudied resource. A study of how contributions to it overlapped with those to *Horizon* (1940–1950) in London and *View* (1940–1947) in New York might produce some fascinating insight into how Surrealist art was disseminated outside Paris in the 1940s. It would probably reveal how few writers were actively engaged in this task. It might also show the weight of influence brought to bear by one or two key people. Peter Watson, for example, was a director of the London Gallery, the art editor (and owner) of *Horizon*, and a close friend of Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, editors of *View*. He was certainly in a position to influence all three journals.

Even the term 'Surrealist' is fraught with danger in the case of de Chirico. In what sense was he a 'Surrealist'? Views differ; the term has been expanded to include him as appropriate where it has suited the author to do so. Less impressive have been the cases where authors have included him as a Surrealist without realising that they are thereby making a questionable art-historical judgment. The categories of the 20th-century art world hide many anomalies; they can be used as compendia of the work of artists which barely overlaps.

So, come to this book with eyes open. It will not take a position on the issues which people normally write about in

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relation to de Chirico; but it will enable those people, if they care to use facts rather than their own prejudices or instincts, to write with more factual underpinning. As the art professor said at the beginning, the book demonstrates how one ought to proceed in historical inquiry.

Judith LeGrove
Geoffrey Clarke Sculptor. Catalogue Raisonné
Pangolin & Lund Humphries, London 2017, hb, 248pp, 1,085 col & bw
ISBN 9781 848222540 £85

Adrian Clark

Geoffrey Clarke had a very long career as a sculptor and this book lists 900 works spread over 63 years from 1949–2012. Both the work and this catalogue represent substantial achievements and, like all books of this type, the contribution made to a proper understanding of the artist's career is formidable.

The work of an artist as active and creatively adventurous as Clarke inevitably passes through phases when different materials are preferred: the iron of many of the earlier pieces were largely replaced by the end of the 1950s by the use of aluminium; the individual commissions punctuating the career were scattered among an occasional run of a series of related pieces. The phasing of a career such as this may or may not be aligned with public taste or interest. In Clarke's case, as with so many other artists, the glare of favourable critical attention lit up part of his career, but then, as it usually does, abandoned him and moved on to other artists.

Two major public encouragements to his work were his appearance with a group of promising young sculptors at the Venice Biennale in 1952 and his high-profile commission to work on different aspects of the new Coventry Cathedral in the late 1950s. For much of the rest of the time he was in the critical doldrums, his status fixed in the art-historical mind, however much time passed, simply as an important sculptor of the early 1950s. The fact that he went on working steadily for another 50 years or so was largely lost on the art world. Judith LeGrove is single-handedly looking to remedy that.

There is a tricky analysis to be performed here regarding the appropriate status of Geoffrey Clarke's work, as with so many artists. Has the art world made a mistake in crudely characterising Clarke simply as one of the 'Geometry of Fear' sculptors (the term used by Herbert Read to describe the 1952 Biennale group) who expressed in his hand-made iron works of the early 1950s the tensions and fears of the post-War world of Western Europe? [See also the review by Alexander Adams below. Ed.] Is it right that his reputation should forever be grouped with the work of the other sculptors who were shown at Venice in 1952: Bernard Meadows, Eduardo Paolozzi, Reg Butler, William Turnbull, Kenneth Armitage and Lynn Chadwick, not to mention other near-contemporary sculptors such as Hubert Dalwood and Austin Wright, whose work sometimes overlapped with the others? Was he no more than part of the wave of sculptors in this country reacting against, or moving on from, the preceding dominance of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, their moment in the sun then to be eclipsed in turn by the rise of Anthony Caro and others?

Some contemporary support for this interpretation comes from the pattern of acquisition of works by the artist by the Tate Gallery. It owns five works of sculpture, dating from 1951, 1952, 1953 (2) and 1964. The Tate had a tiny post-War purchasing budget, and any decisions to buy works by contemporary artists represented significant commitments. In Clarke's case none of the works from the '50s was purchased at the time: the first acquisition of one of those was in 1976. By contrast, the Tate owns 14 sculptures by Reg Butler, of which five relate to his winning entry for the 'Unknown Political Prisoner' exhibition. Of the others, it purchased works dated 1949, 1950, 1953/4 and 1955 as early as 1950, 1959, 1954 and 1959 respectively. It owns 12 works by Bernard Meadows, the first of which (a piece from 1951) entered the collection in 1954 and the first purchased piece (from 1958) was acquired in 1960.

Well, it is not impossible that, with its endless need to simplify and reduce to essentials the careers of those making up the 20th-century British art world, the critics have got it about right. One way or another some of the other sculptors in the group went on to achieve a longer period of critical attention or a more obvious degree of measurable artistic success. The prestigious Gregory Fellowships in Sculpture at Leeds, for example, were awarded to Butler (1950/2), Armitage (1953/5), Dalwood (1955/9) and Wright (1961/4), but never to Clarke. After the 1952 Biennale, sculpture by Chadwick and Armitage was shown again, with greater prominence, in 1956 and 1958 respectively. Clarke's prints were included in 1960 but not his sculpture. Paolozzi' s large personality and varied output ensured that he remained in the public eye for a long time. Butler famously won the ICA sponsored Unknown Political Prisoner competition in 1953. Clarke's work in the 1950s was strong, imaginative and varied; occasionally spiritually powerful, always revealing the energy of a young man brimming with ideas. In order to catch the public mood, an artist has to say something that chimes with the Zeitgeist. In the face of sustained Communist aggression, the post-War world certainly had something to be anxious about and the work of these sculptors, and of the leading painters of the time, such as Bacon and Sutherland, was noted because it was regarded as reflecting that. Thereafter the work continued to pour out but there was no pressing need for the art establishment to take any notice of it.

That is the essence of the case for the defence of the art world, sifting and probing artists' work in order to reduce it to something it may coherently write about and contextualise. The case for Clarke's wider importance would follow a different course. To his supporters, the mere fact that he had some public attention in the 1950s was neither here nor there. A proper analysis of his career, now possible after his death and with the publication of this and other books by the author, suggests that his long period of production was full of peaks, whether or not the commentators chose to notice. It may also have had a few troughs in it, but modern champions of individual artists tend not to think like that.

The attraction of reviewing a catalogue raisonné, especially one like this with profuse illustrations but almost no supporting text, is that one can up to a point make one's own mind up about the overall interest of the life's work. There can be no doubt that Geoffrey Clarke was a skilled and imaginative artist throughout his long career. There is no sense that he lived on his reputation and simply churned out the sort of work that the market might have wanted had it carried on hankering after 1950s Angst. He experimented; he toyed with sculptural ideas that interested him by producing serial variants; he branched off into totally new ideas and forms. His work was sometimes spiritually engaged; where necessary, it was practically aware of the need to accommodate settings (in his commissions for buildings, for example); it could be whimsical or even humorous at times. One is sometimes