

The Nostalgia of the Infinite level

SURREALISTa - The Art behind ICO

Journeying through a software showcase to the man behind the Iconic artwork.

SURREALISTa - Tribute to Giorgio de Chirico is an educational walking simulator that showcases the art of the metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico. The video game was developed by the Brazilian studio Gigoia Studios, which specializes in fine art games. The final version of the video game was released in 2016, but when you buy the video game from itch.io you can also download the two very different alpha versions of the game.

The most interesting aspect of SURREALISTa is that you visit levels with 3D built environments that are based on paintings by de Chirico. The game offers an Inception experience, where you walk around looking at de Chirico paintings while you are inside a de Chirico painting.

The two alpha versions of the game are different from each other and the final version. The alpha versions are puzzle platformer games that offer a totally different experience. Alpha version 1 is the most interesting since it can be considered a complete alternative game, and it has an interesting easter egg related to

Ico by Fumito Ueda.

The art of Giorgio de Chirico had a direct influence on Fumito Ueda and the developers of Rime (2017). Through the work of Fumito Ueda, de Chirico may have an indirect influence on many other video games. The impact of de Chirico on the gaming culture is still probably not discussed enough. At the very least, it seems fitting that de Chirico got a tribute video game.



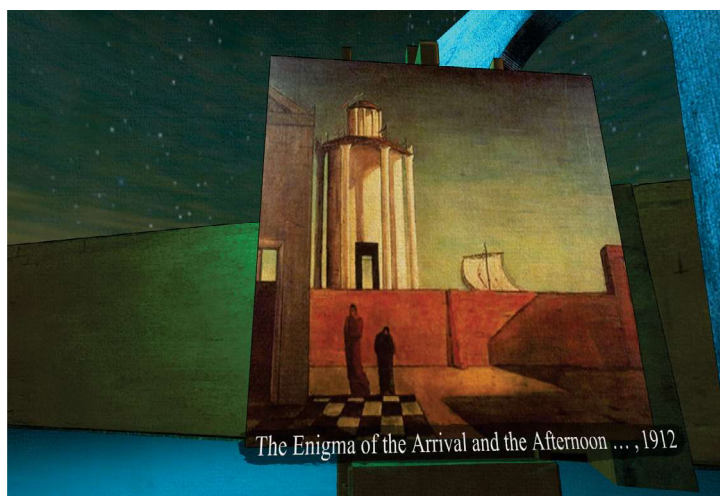
Gallery Paintings and doors with checkerboards

Final Version

The game starts in a gallery room with paintings by de Chirico on the wall. Eight of the paintings are near doors with checkerboards on the floor. The eight doors are the doors to the eight levels of the game, and you can enter whichever level you want. To enter a level, you simply go over a checkerboard and the corresponding door opens. When you enter the door, you see a text that describes the life and philosophy of de Chirico. The 3D environment of the level is based on the painting to the right of the door.

The action of entering a painting and the checkerboards are reminiscent of Super Mario 64. However, a checkerboard in front of an entrance can be seen in de Chirico's "The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon" painting. The checkerboard painting can be admired inside one of the levels. All the levels are enclosed by walls that look like the walls in the checkerboard painting.

In each level you can walk around to admire between 2 and 4 paintings that sit on canvas. To exit the level and return to the gallery, you simply must find a checkerboard that opens an exit door. In one level you exit when you step over the checkerboard.



Checkerboard and labyrinth wall in a de Chirico painting

Ariadne, the consort of Theseus, is a recurring theme in many of de Chirico's paintings. Ariadne is associated with mazes and labyrinths. The walls in de Chirico's paintings are probably also a reference to the labyrinth walls. So, it's fitting that the game plays like a metaphysical labyrinth.

The music of the game consists of nostalgic classical piano music, which fits very well with de Chirico's paintings. Many of

his paintings evoke nostalgia for childhood.

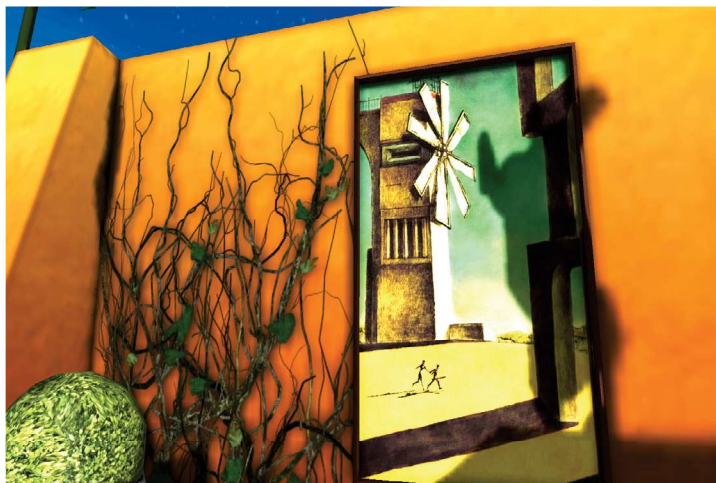
Alpha Versions

When you buy the game, you also get access to a collector's edition zip file that contains two alpha versions and an art book that briefly goes over the history of the game's development. Initially, the game was supposed to be a puzzle platformer game.

The Alpha version 1 is a puzzle platformer alternative to the final version. The gallery is missing from this version, but you still have checkerboards, doors and paintings that are placed on the labyrinth walls. There are five levels, and you have to do some frustrating platforming.

In the beginning of Alpha version 1, some players may recognize that one of the paintings was not created by de Chirico, even though it resembles his style. The painting is actually the cover art of Ico, painted by Fumito Ueda.

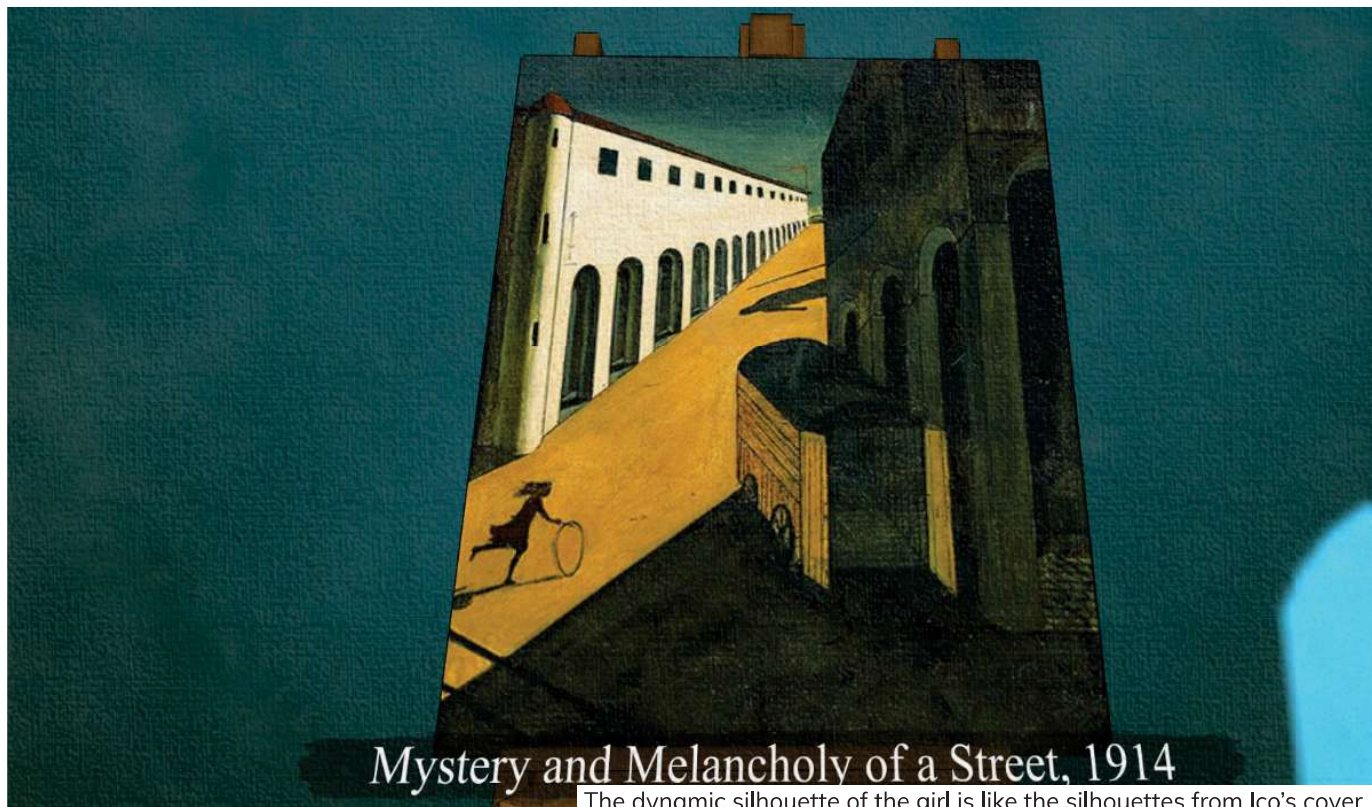
Lana Polansky wrote a detailed review of the Alpha version 1 called "Notes on SURREALISTa: The Nostalgia of the Infinite"



Ico cover art by Fumito Ueda as an easter egg

on her blog Sufficiently Human (archived link : <https://web.archive.org/web/20161013173531/http://sufficientlyhuman.com/archives/1004>).

The Alpha version 2 is very incomplete but offers some interesting ideas. In this version you have the gallery room, but the game doesn't start in the gallery. You start in a room at the top of a de Chirico tower that has mural paintings of the Olympian gods. The loading screen says "Orfeu Trovatore" and seems to be a reference to the painting "Orfeo trovatore stanco" (Or-



Mystery and Melancholy of a Street, 1914

The dynamic silhouette of the girl is like the silhouettes from Ico's cover

pheus the Tired Troubadour 1970). The next scene called "The Great Tower" involves you descending the winding stairs of the tower. The next scene called "The Grand Palai" happens outside of the tower and involves some platforming until you finally reach the gallery room. "The Grand Palai" is a reference to the exhibition hall and museum complex Grand Palais from Paris.

In the gallery you can only go inside level 1, and there is nothing special. Even the jumping or platforming aspects disappear once you reach the gallery. Based on the art booklet, the idea was to create a game based on Greek myths and de Chirico's life story.

Giorgio de Chirico

"Beauty of the tall red smokestacks.

Solid smoke.

A train whistles. The wall.

Two artichokes of iron regard me"

From Melancholy by Giorgio de Chirico

Giorgio de Chirico is a Greco-Italian painter born in Volos, Greece (ancient Iolcus, the home of Jason the Argonaut). He is the founder of the metaphysical art movement, which in turn had an influence on the Sur-

realism movement.

In Principles of Philosophies, Descartes compares Philosophy to a tree of which metaphysics is the root and physics is the trunk. Similarly, it seems that de Chirico was interested in painting metaphysical things that cannot be seen. Some of the recurring themes in his paintings include nostalgia, melancholy, sadness and childhood memories. These unseen concepts are represented using desolate town squares, heavy shadows, bright colors and exaggerated perspectives.

De Chirico's father was a railroad construction engineer, so it's not surprising to see a lot of trains in his paintings. His interest in childhood memories is also displayed in "The Child's Brain" or "The Playthings of the Prince". Another interesting case is the painting "Mystery and Melancholy of a Street" that depicts the silhouette of a girl running that looks like the silhouettes from Ico's cover.

In the Assayer, Galileo mentions that the book of the universe is "written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth."

This sentiment is reflected in the metaphysical paintings of de Chirico which make use of triangles, polygonal forms, arcs and geometric instruments like rulers and protractors. The topic of mathematics is even the main theme of the painting “The Mathematicians”. For a greater understanding of how de Chirico used geometry in his paintings, I recommend “Metaphysical Mathematics” by Jole de Sanna.

De Chirico and Other Games

When asked if Ico was inspired by de Chirico, Fumito Ueda said that he designed the Japanese cover and that “the surrealist world of de Chirico matched the allegoric world of Ico” (Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, Issue 97). De Chirico was not the only painter who had an influence on Fumito Ueda. Other cited influences include Gerard Tringac and Francesco Piranesi. For a more detailed article about the influences on Fumito Ueda’s work see “Investigating the origins of The Last Guardian’s architecture” by Gareth Damian Martin.

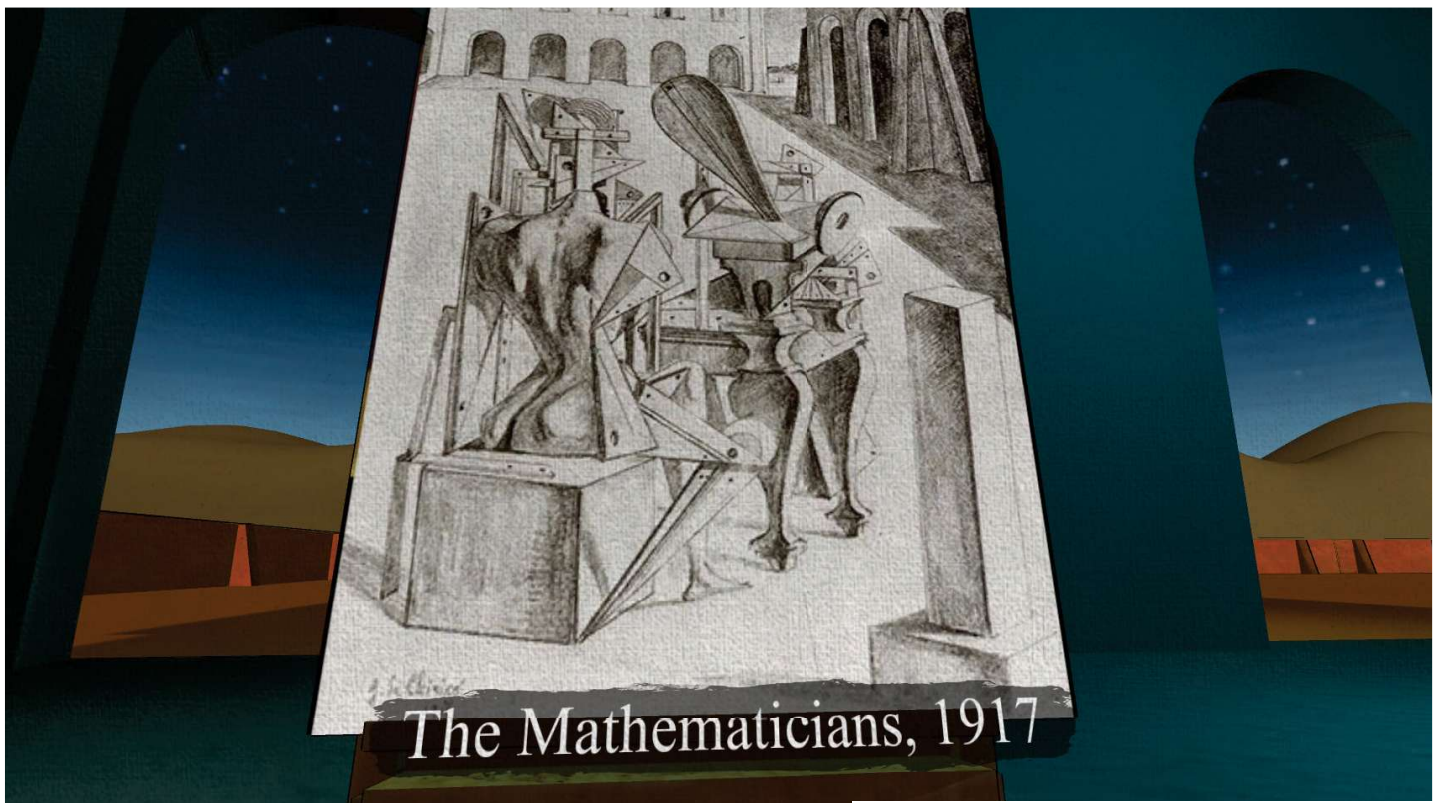
Max Derrat has a Youtube video about Ico called “The Game That Launched a Thousand Masterpieces”. If not directly, de Chirico may have an indirect influence on many other video games though the influence of Ueda’s work. Maybe such an example may include games like Journey (2012).

The creators of Rime (2017) do cite de Chirico as an important influence on the game. Using the new digital archive of the Video game History Foundation I found out that de Chirico was an influence in the creation of the experimental video game Souvenir (<http://souvenirgame.com>).

Final Words

Giorgio de Chirico’s paintings evoke a sense of nostalgia and melancholia and many of his paintings deal with childhood memories. Nowadays, for many of us video games are associated with the same feeling of nostalgia for childhood. Even de Chirico’s interest in geometry has parallels in video games since computer graphics is applied geometry. This is why his work lends itself to being an inspiration for interesting video games like Ico and Rime.

At the very least, SURREALISTa-tribute to Giorgio de Chirico provides a way to immerse yourself in the world of de Chirico. The alpha versions of the game can provide some ideas for future puzzle games. The video game should also spark a discussion about the impact of Giorgio de Chirico on video game culture.



The Mathematicians, 1917

Geometry is a key element in de Chirico’s paintings