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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in June

by Will Heinrich
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Giorgio de Chirico's "Death of a Rider," 1937-1938, oil on canvas, at Vito Schnabel. Credit...Giorgio de Chirico/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome; via Vito Schnabel Gallery

CHELSEA

Giorgio de Chirico

Through July 29. Vito Schnabel Gallery, 455 West 19th Street, Manhattan

Almost any of the 16 Giorgio de Chirico paintings in "Horses: The Death of a Rider" could sustain an exhibition by itself. A couple from the late 1920s are less polished, and you could reasonably call "Two Horses on a Seashore," 1970, a little glib. But for the most part the lush, peculiar and consistently delightful paintings show the Greek-born Italian painter at the top of his game for the better part of five decades.

As the exhibition title suggests, every canvas also holds one or more horses, often backed by one of the mysterious landscapes he's known for. Carnal but loaded with symbolism, the horse is a living link to antiquity, making it the perfect subject for a history-conscious artist like de Chirico (1888-1978). It's also full of bulging joints and fleshy mounds, and de Chirico approaches it, visually as well as conceptually, as a kind of chimera, a grab-bag of separate moments and encounters.

The majestic white steed in the title piece, "Death of a Rider," rears up on a twilight beach, letting its rider tumble off like Icarus behind it. In the distance stands a city on a hill; nearby, two voyagers or gods watch from a rowboat. But the horse's posture is actually that of a statue, its foreleg bent, its head in a dramatic profile that doesn't quite match the angle of its body. To one side it's a crouching, unconscious power; to the other a self-possessed, even arrogant personality. Altogether it encapsulates the drama of the scene, at once active and eternal.