

c.1600 ROMAN SCHOOL

The Miracle of the Santa Casa of Loreto

Pen and brush and brown ink and brown wash, heightened with white, with framing lines in brown ink.

Squared for transfer in black chalk.

252 x 179 mm. (9 7/8 x 7 in.)

In splendid condition, this very fine drawing - by an as-yet anonymous Italian artist of the late 16th or early 17th century - depicts the Miracle of the Santa Casa of Loreto. The Santa Casa (or Holy House) of Loreto was the house in Nazareth where the Virgin Mary lived, and where she received the Angel of the Annunciation. The little house was a place of pilgrimage from the earliest days of Christianity. According to legend, when Nazareth was threatened by Saracen armies in 1291, the entire house was miraculously raised from its foundations and transported by angels from Nazareth to the town of Tersatto in Dalmatia, in modern-day Croatia. In 1294, with Tersatto under threat from the Moorish advances into Albania, the house was again carried by angels across the Adriatic Sea, and eventually was deposited in the town of Loreto. In the late 15th and early 16th century a large basilica was built over the house by the architects Giuliano da Maiano, Giuliano da Sangallo and Bramante, with the façade completed in the late 16th century under the patronage of Pope Sixtus V. The elaborate decoration of the interior of the basilica is the work of several generations of painters, sculptors and craftsmen. The Santa Casa at Loreto remains an important place of pilgrimage for Catholics today.

This drawing bears the collector's mark of the Milanese banker Cesare Frigerio (1890-1977[?]), a sometime president of the Cassa di Risparmio delle Provincie Lombarde in Milan about whom relatively little else is known. He seems to have collected mainly Italian Old Master drawings, as well as some 19th century sheets. Although some of Frigerio's drawings later entered the possession of his fellow Milanese collector Giorgio Dalla Bella (b.1923) and the German photographer Herbert List (1903-1975), with both of whom he corresponded, most of his drawings were dispersed after his death, and began appearing on the art market in the late 1970s.