

UNCLE ALBERT'S DRAWINGS*

edited by Katherine Robinson

As a preview to the forthcoming publication of a collection of documents and material concerning the family of Evaristo de Chirico, father of Giorgio de Chirico and Alberto Savinio, the present paper includes a series of drawings by their uncle, Albert de Chirico, Evaristo's elder brother. Giorgio de Chirico kept this collection of drawings all his life, in its original mother-of-pearl designed cardboard folder measuring 13 x 20 cm. One sheet bears the following handwritten dedication in French: "Octavia à son cher Albert comme un bien faible gage de l'affection qu'elle lui porte"¹. A musical score written by Albert entitled "Lily Schottisch" is conserved together with the sketches.

The drawings are "souvenirs" of places lived in or visited. Some of them, signed and dated with the name of the place depicted, supply a timeline of Albert's movements during those years: Constantinople, June 1850 – Ithaca, October 1852 – Corfu, April 1853. The scenes depict natural landscapes with architectural elements: a fort, an aqueduct, humble country cottages, or seascapes with small ports. The collection includes some sketches from everyday life, such as the one of a man shaving while his wife watches him with an impatient air; a clock is roughly sketched on the wall behind them. Or a hunter with his dog, a steamship flying a flag and a garden scene with a woman and a little girl playing beneath a tree that bears the inscription "Souvenir of Ithaca 1852 October Friday". There are two portraits: one of a small boy dressed in jacket and bow and another of a young man wearing a toga.

The family would later settle definitively in Italy between Florence and Rome where the father died at the age of 72 in 1867. Evaristo took up his higher studies in engineering at the Florence Technical Institute where he remained until 1861. It was during this period that his brother Albert composed the musical piece dedicated to "Madame Mary F. Ronalds", dated "Florence 25 février 1860". The composition for piano is a schottische in A flat major, a light, not very fast dance consisting of introduction, main part and coda. The piece is a dilettante type of composition belonging to a genre of drawing-room music intended for dancing.

* The drawings, musical score and watercolour form part of Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico's collection, Rome.

¹ "Octavia to her dear Albert as a small token of her affection."

The drawings and the score recall the atmosphere of the life and culture of Giorgio de Chirico's paternal family in the mid 19th century, giving us an idea of the environment in which Evaristo and his siblings grew up in: a well-off family in which several languages were spoken, bound to tradition yet with social openness and international relationships. The images evoke journeys to and stays in various places, in all probability connected with family relations. Uncle Albert's works are an evocative enrichment that anticipates an extensive collection of private letters and official documents recently found in Greek archives which will be the subject of an upcoming study on the family's origins.

Years later Savinio referred to his uncle Albert (despite never having met him), by portraying him in the following text as a romantic character drawn from family memories, stories and imagination:

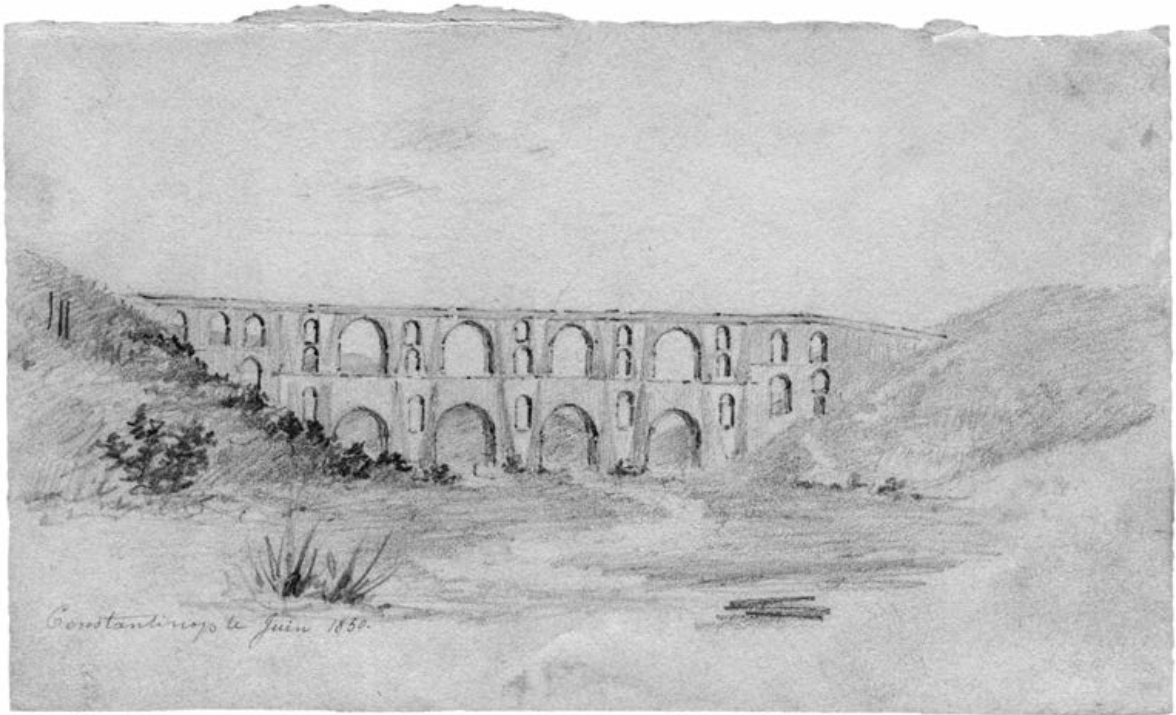
“Uncle Albert, eldest brother of Evaristo and uncle Gustavo, was tall, handsome and elegant, very much the ‘gentleman’. This notwithstanding, no significant amorous adventures are known. [...] With feminine diligence uncle Albert painted seascapes and portraits in chromolithographic style. He wrote perfectly chaste love poetry in French, which he then set to music. He played the piano with taste and feeling. Aniceto had never known him.² [...] More than anything else uncle Albert loved the sea and, unable to live far from it, moved from Florence to Livorno. [...] In extant photographs his pale, long face evinces the veiled melancholy of Narcissus, but a Narcissus with a moustache and side-whiskers. [...] He spoke various European languages with ornate elegance. Aniceto's mother, alluding to uncle Albert, let her eyes stray, stopping mid-speech, as if she wanted it to be understood that if uncle Albert had remained a bachelor and so alone, so sad, so unhappy, it was because she had married Evaristo. The romances that uncle Albert wrote in his verses were dedicated ‘*A une inconnue*’.”³

At the House-museum in Piazza di Spagna, Rome, a watercolour portrait that is probably by uncle Albert still hangs on the wall of de Chirico's studio. The portrait depicts Gemma de Chirico, wife of Evaristo and mother of the artist and of “Aniceto” – Alberto Savinio – in an atmosphere of lace and powder blue, pearl grey and ivory white dressings.

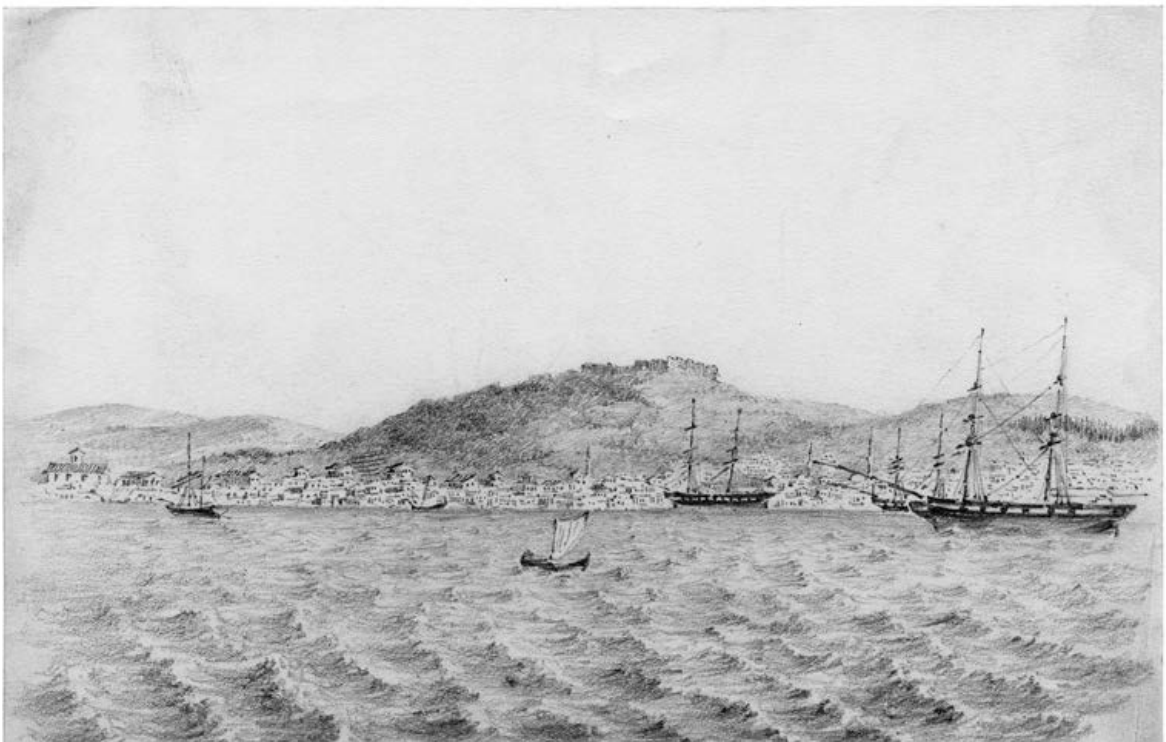
Translated by David Smith

² “Aniceto” is the name Savinio gave himself in the story.

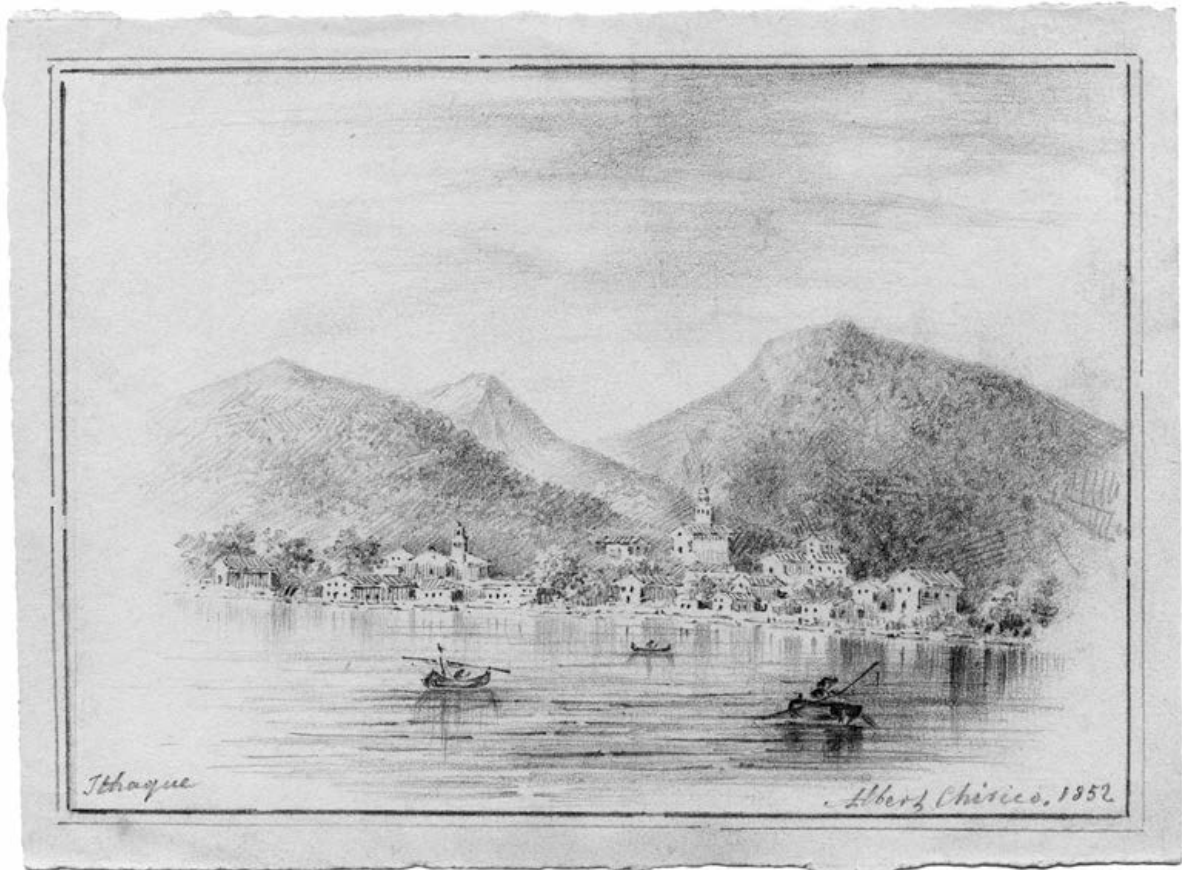
³ A. Savinio, *Casa “la vita”*, Valentino Bompiani, Milan 1943, pp. 270-271.



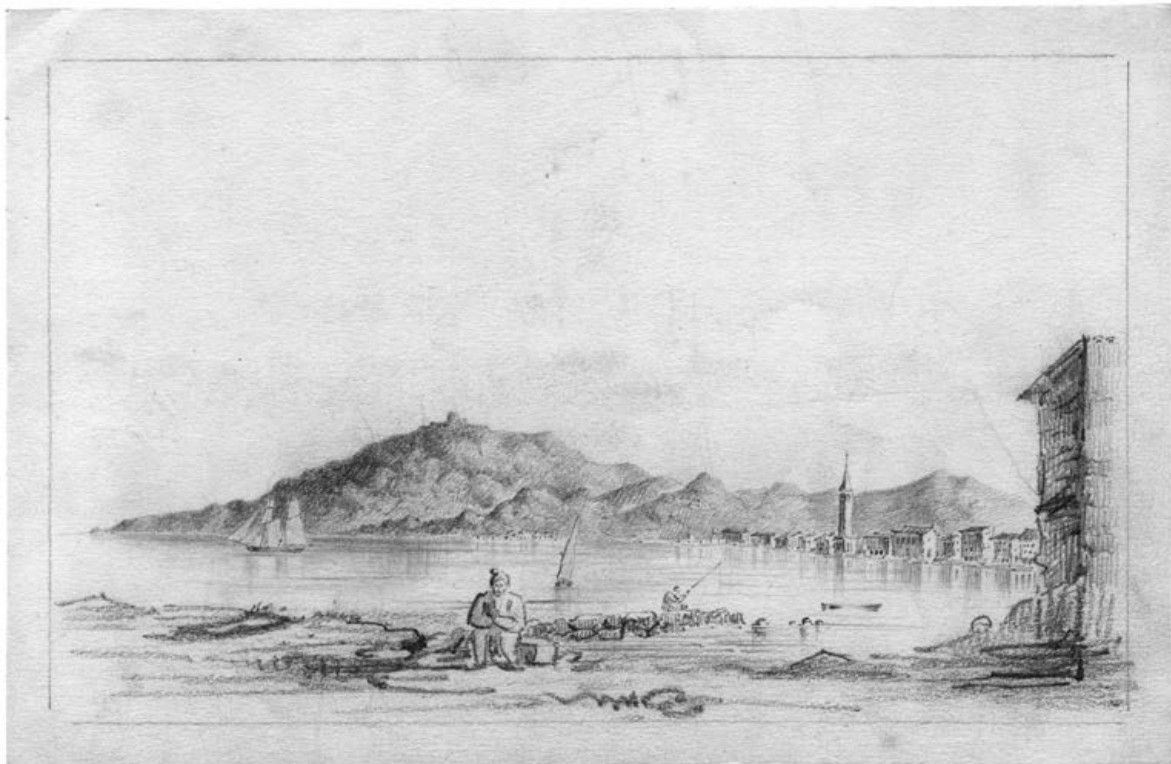
Albert de Chirico, *Constantinople*, June 1850



Albert de Chirico, *Untitled*



Albert de Chirico, *Ithaca*, 1852



Albert de Chirico, *Untitled*



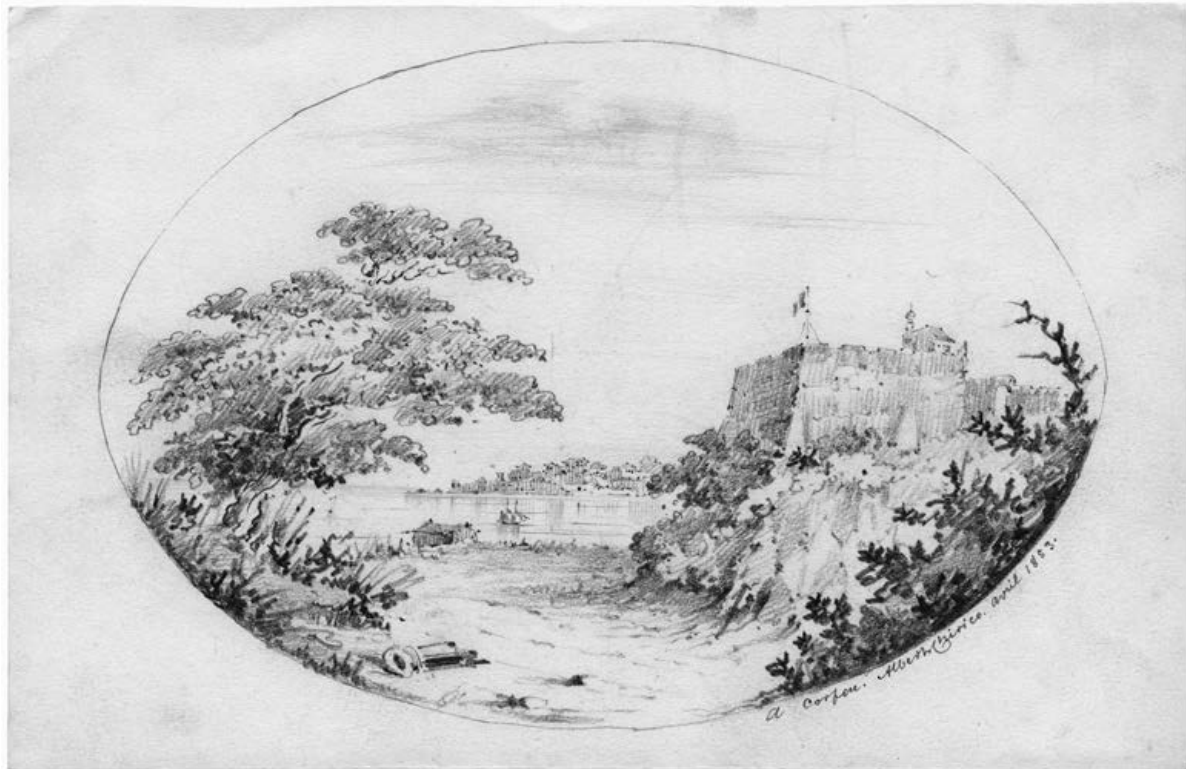
Albert de Chirico, *Untitled*, 1852



Albert de Chirico, *Calame*



Albert de Chirico, *Corfû*, 29 January 1853



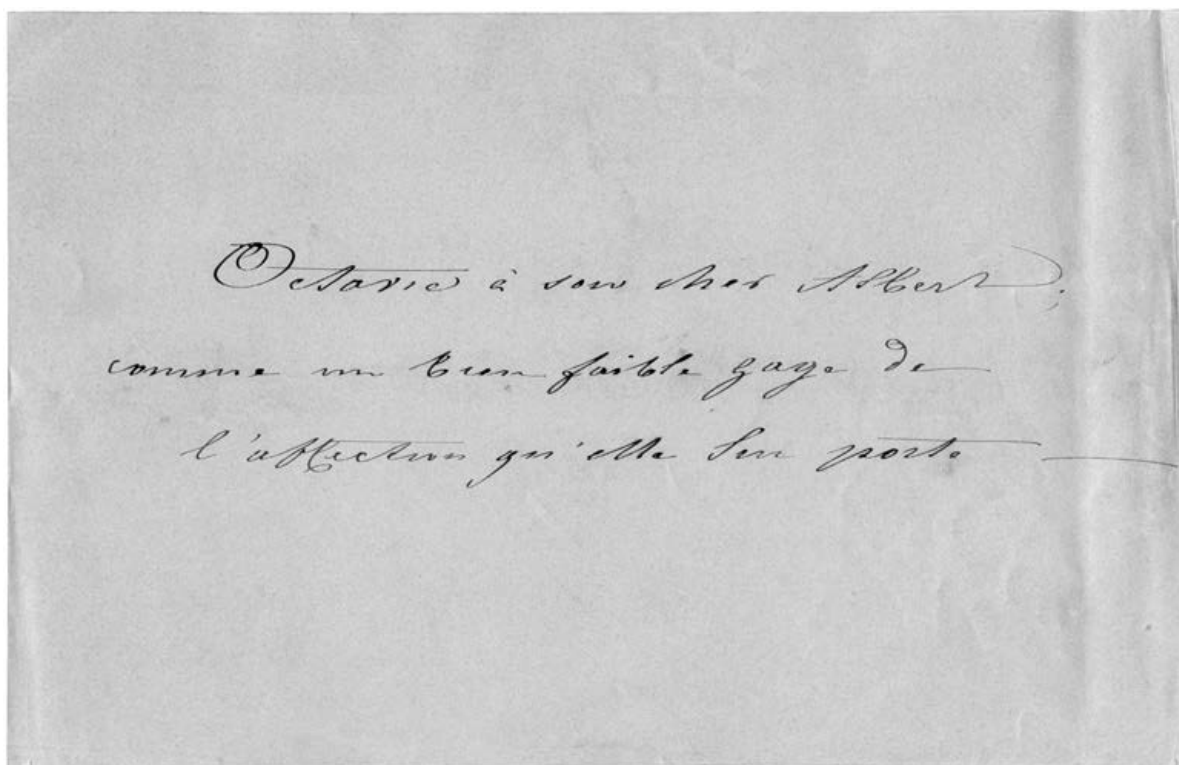
Albert de Chirico, *Corfû*, April 1853



Albert de Chirico, *Ithaca*, October 1852



Albert de Chirico, *Ithaca*



Octavia à son cher Albert comme un bien faible gage de l'affection qu'elle lui porte
Octavia to her dear Albert as a small token of her affection



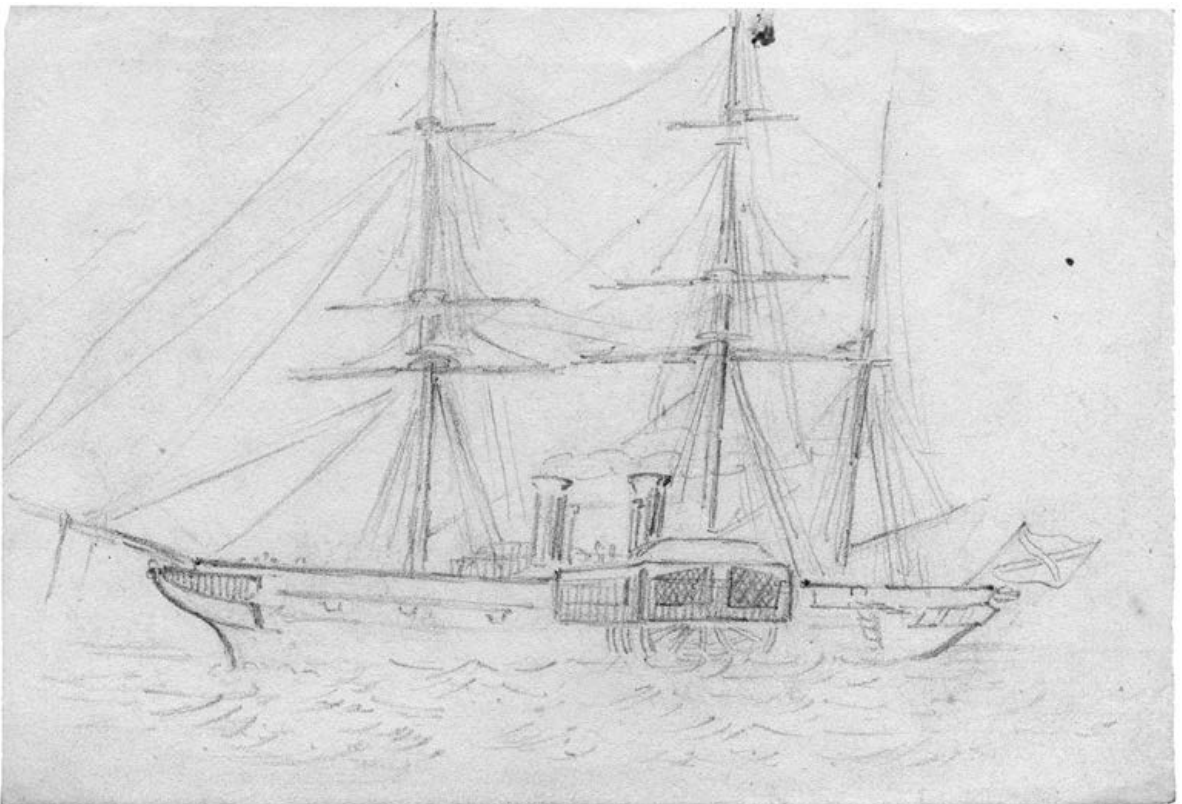
Albert de Chirico, *Untitled*



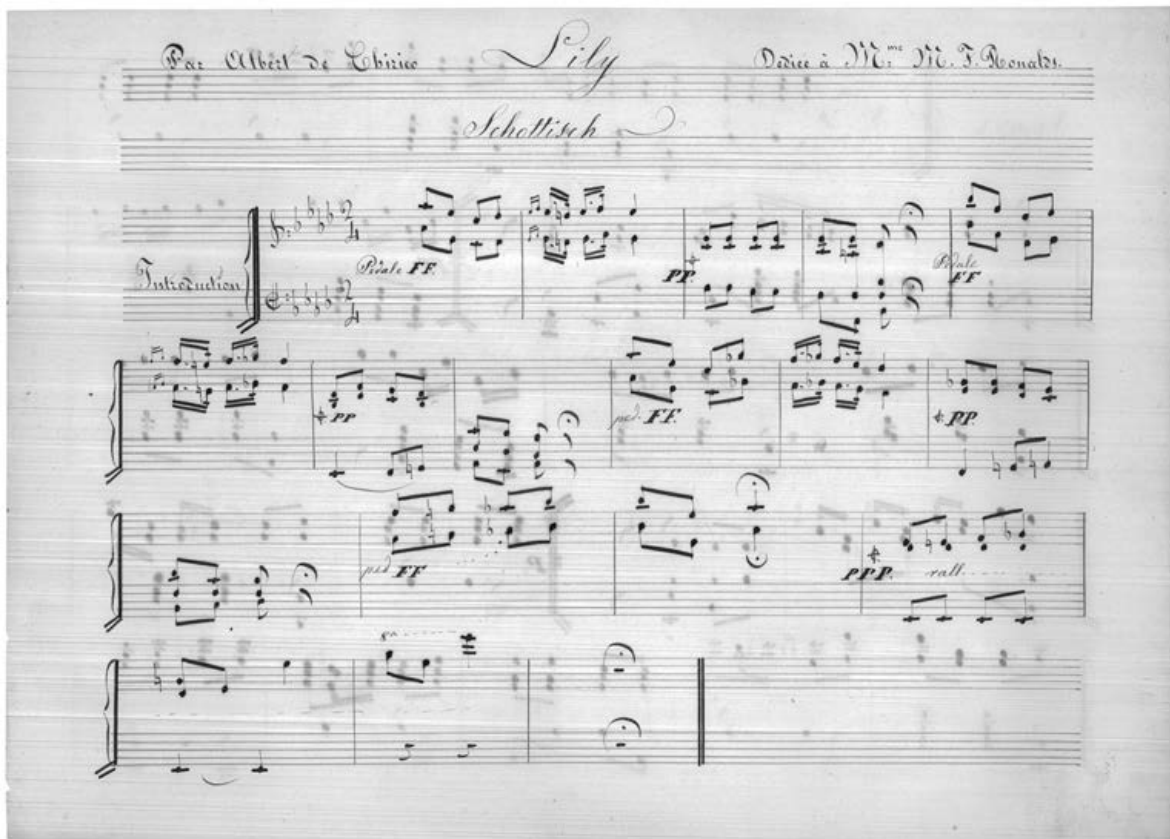
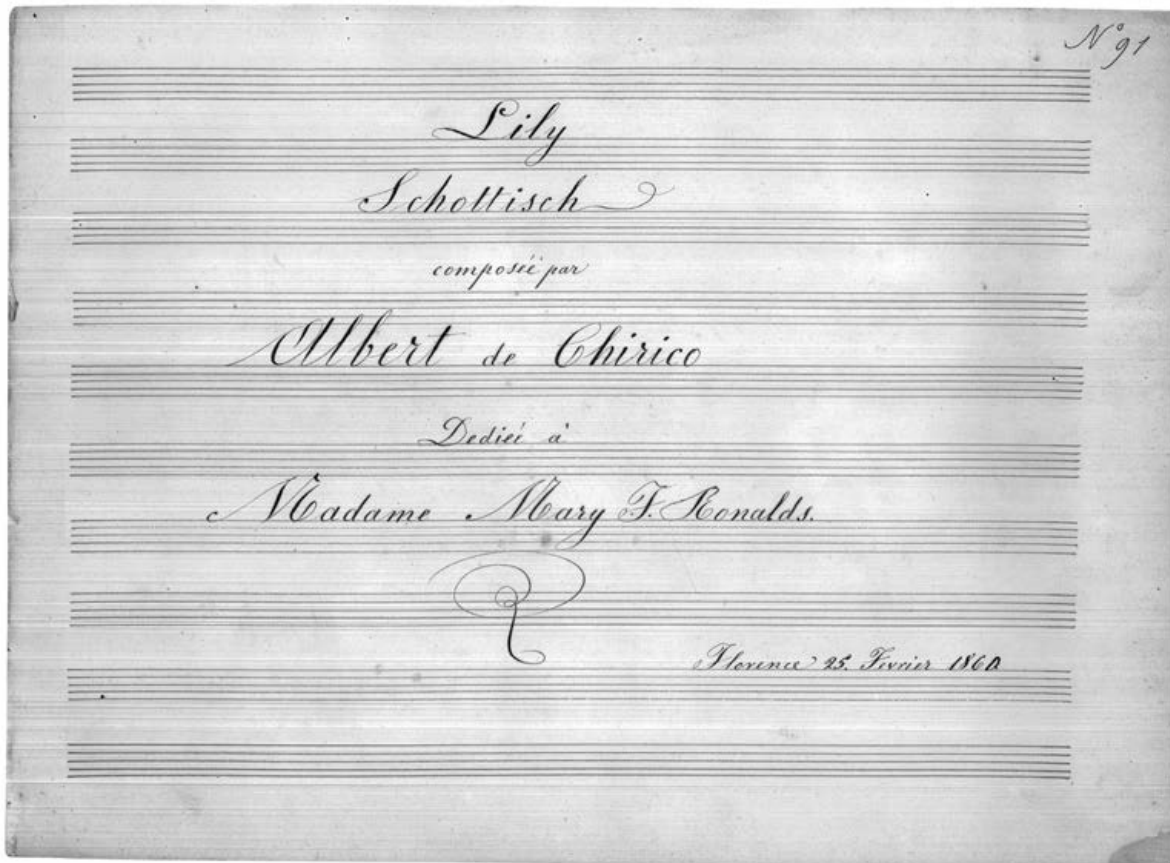
Albert de Chirico, *Memory of Ithaca, Friday October 1852*



Albert de Chirico, *Untitled*



Albert de Chirico, *Untitled*



Albert de Chirico, musical score dedicated to "Madame Mary F. Ronalds", dated "Florence 25 février 1860"

Handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Schottisch". The score is written on five staves. The first staff begins with the tempo marking "congraza" and the word "Schottisch" written in a decorative font. The music is in 2/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A dynamic marking of "ff" (fortissimo) is present in the second staff. The notation includes slurs, ties, and various articulation marks.

Handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Brillante". The score is written on five staves. The tempo marking "Brillante" is written in a decorative font at the top. The music is in 2/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A dynamic marking of "mf" (mezzo-forte) is present in the second staff. The notation includes slurs, ties, and various articulation marks. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the initials "S. S." written in the bottom right corner.

Handwritten musical score for the first page of 'Uncle Albert's Drawings'. The score is written on five systems of staves. The first system includes a *loco* marking. The second system includes a *rit.* marking. The third system includes a *2-4* marking and a *FF* dynamic marking. The fourth system includes a *rescendo* marking. The fifth system includes a *FF* dynamic marking.

Handwritten musical score for the second page of 'Uncle Albert's Drawings'. The score is written on four systems of staves. The first system includes a *loco* marking and the instruction *Dal Signo & tutta poi segue*. The second system includes a *FF* dynamic marking. The third system includes a *P* dynamic marking and a *fff rall.* marking. The fourth system includes a *fff* dynamic marking and a *rall.* marking. A large number '2' is written in the right margin of the second system.