



## A Note on The Visitation by Isaac Moillon

Or a member of his workshop AND Other Works by this Huguenot Artist

The Visitation, the meeting of a pregnant Mary with her cousin or kinswoman Elizabeth is told in the first book of the gospel of Luke 1.39-56.<sup>1</sup>

The painter of La Visitation was Isaac Moillon or perhaps a member of his circle or apprentice since this painting is not listed among his usually credited works. Isaac Moillon, son of Nicolas who was an art dealer and painter, was born in Paris in 1614. He is the brother of the famous still-life painter Louise Moillon (1610-1696).<sup>2</sup> Isaac and his siblings lost their father when they were young. Their mother remarried François Garnier, a Protestant art dealer and still-life and portrait painter.<sup>3</sup> The family lived among other Huguenot artists in Saint-Germain-des-Prés. [See the note from Christmas 2017 about LeNain brothers.] Even after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 when about half the Huguenots left Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the remaining Huguenots remained a tenacious minority who continued to live and practice their Reformed faith (as best they could) and professions despite denunciations and persecution, and forced conversions to Roman Catholicism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1&version=NRSV>. La visitation by Isaac Moillon on artnet. la-visitation-LeoBPjffPnC-OFEvzj2knKg2.

<sup>2</sup> Sowa, Helen Chastain, and Louise Moillon. Louise Moillon: Seventeenth Century Still-Life Artist: an Illustrated Biography. 1998. [Available through the National Huguenot Society.] Alsina, Dominique, and Louise Moillon. Louise Moillon, (Paris, vers 1610-1696): la nature morte au Grand Siècle : catalogue raisonné. Dijon: Fatou, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Moillon (1614-1673) <https://www.museeprotestant.org/en/notice/isaac-moillon-1614-1673-2/>

<sup>4</sup> GARRIOCH, DAVID. Huguenots of Paris and the Coming of Religious Freedom 1685-1789. [Place of publication not identified]: CAMBRIDGE UNIV Press, 2018.



Two somewhat smaller paintings, *La Résurrection* and *La Madeleine au pied de la croix*, were assigned to Moillon only in the 1990s. When the painting entitled the Resurrection was restored a signature was found. Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross is not signed but appears to be by the same painter.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2. *La Résurrection*, signed, no date.



Figure 3. *Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross*. Not signed or dated.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/docannexe/image/1222/img-9-small480.jpg>  
<https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/docannexe/image/1222/img-10-small480.jpg>  
[http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoines/patrimoine\\_monumental\\_et\\_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id\\_article=rbc002-600](http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoines/patrimoine_monumental_et_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id_article=rbc002-600).

Another painting at Hôtel-Dieu de Beaune that Moillon painted was the altarpiece depicting St. Hugues bringing a drowned child back to life. It is above an altar in Salle Saint-Hugues. This painting was part of the exhibition Grand siècle of the year 1993 and represented the first painting of Isaac Moillon that was ever shown in a public exhibition in France.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4. The Miracle of Saint-Hugues reviving a drowned child.

Perhaps, because of the numerous commissions that Isaac Moillon received at Hôtel-Dieu de Beaune, one finds paintings at nearby locations. One such painting is in Auxey-Duresses in the parish Church of St. Martin. There the oil painting *Le Christ Mort* that was signed by Isaac Moillon can be seen. The creation date is unknown.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 5. *Le Christ mort*, in the parish church of St. Martin, Auxey-Duresses.

<sup>8</sup> <http://deacademic.com/dic.nsf/dewiki/665719>. “Dieses Bild war Bestand der Ausstellung Grand siècle des Jahres 1993 und stellt somit das erste Bild dar, welches in einer öffentlichen Ausstellung gezeigt wurde.”

<sup>9</sup> <https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/docannexe/image/1222/img-11-small480.jpg>

In Beaune, in the collegiate church of Notre-Dame, there is a painting entitled Saint Yves the Advocate (of Kermartin) signed by Moillon. The year of origin is unknown.

In 1654, Isaac Moillon painted two works in L'Allier. The two paintings of L'Annonciation are now conserved in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Moulins. One shows the Archangel Gabriel and the other the Virgin Mary.<sup>10</sup> Moillon paints the young Virgin with the traditional iconography for the Virgin, a red dress with a blue robe. The use of these colors for depicting the Virgin Mary dated back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century or so in the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. The Virgin Mary is at prayer with a prayer book, a depiction of the Annunciation that does not become part of western Christian art until the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. See for example the Annunciation by the Master of the Golden Legend in Book of Hours, Use of Paris (the 'Bedford Hours') made in central France about 1410-1430.<sup>11</sup> From the same period, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge has a curious gold version of the Annunciation made by a Burgundian goldsmith about 1400-1420 in Paris.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 6. The Annunciation by Isaac Moillon in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Moulins.

<sup>10</sup> <https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/docannexe/image/1222/img-13-small480.jpg>.

<https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/docannexe/image/1222/img-14-small480.jpg>.

[http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoine/patrimoine\\_monumental\\_et\\_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id\\_article=rbc002-600](http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoine/patrimoine_monumental_et_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id_article=rbc002-600)

<sup>11</sup> Additional 18850 f. 32 The Annunciation Book of Hours, Use of Paris (the 'Bedford Hours'), Central France, c. 1410-1430, British Library <[http://www.bl.uk/IIIImages/BLStudio/mid/Add18850/Add\\_ms\\_18850\\_f032r.jpg](http://www.bl.uk/IIIImages/BLStudio/mid/Add18850/Add_ms_18850_f032r.jpg)>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/collections/ceramics/118318>, [https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/MP.22-1938\\_0.jpg](https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/MP.22-1938_0.jpg).



Figure 7. Annunciation by an unknown goldsmith in Paris about 1400-1420.

The depiction of the Annunciation in two panels was archaic by the time that Isaac Moillon painted the Annunciation with the Angel Gabriel to the right of the Virgin Mary. Even by the Middle Ages, the angel Gabriel appeared on the left side of Mary. Yet the curious gold Annunciation (above) suggests that some archaic regional preferences may have persisted. The lack of surviving examples makes any argument uncertain. In any case, Isaac Moillon was comfortable painting Biblical stories and images of saints using Catholic imagery. This certainly was contrary to the condemnation by Jean Calvin of painting and sculptures in a church and the Reformed Synods denunciation of imagery that supported and even promoted the perceived idolatry and superstition within the Roman Catholic Church.

From the 1650s, Isaac Moillon was apparently one of the main designers of "cartons" or templates for the Aubusson tapestry manufactory that was under Royal patronage. Thus, he occupied a semi-official position in the highly structured artistic life of seventeenth century France, despite his Protestant faith. These designs were woven for chateaux in the area. One example of a template is the painting of Aeolus giving Ulysses a bag of winds (Éole donnant les vents à Ulyssein) Musée de Tessé, LeMans, France.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tourainesereine/2805630464>. <http://notesdemusees.blogspot.com/2009/04/le-mans.html>  
<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-jofzV9wIGS4/TyHL0mjhexI/AAAAAAAAAPPO/JfNAaWqvolg/s1600/moillon-eole-lemans%2Bcopie.jpg>



Figure 8. Isaac Moillon, Cartoon for a tapestry. Éole donnant les vents à Ulysse. Musée de Tessé, LeMans, France.

Few of the cartoons made by Isaac Moillon survive, but the tapestries woven from the templates do. Moillon must have produced a great numbers of cartoons for tapestry weaving by Aubusson. One popular subject was the story of Achilles. At least four suites of tapestries made by Aubusson from these templates are conserved in the Swedish Royal collection, the Hospices or Hôtel-Dieu de Beaune in France, the chateaux of Barbentane and of Villemonteix and in the museum of Aubusson. Some reside in private collections.<sup>14</sup> In fact the production of large numbers cartoons for tapestry manufacture seems to suggest that Isaac Moillon must have had a workshop with apprentices to execute the paintings, a conclusion reached by a couple researchers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Note on tapestry offered by LaPada, London. <https://lapada.org/art-and-antiques/baroque-mythological-tapestry-aubusson-france-circa-1690/>. <https://members.lapada.org/uploads/items/320x320-1463659008-FeBhn.jpg>.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoines/patrimoine\\_monumental\\_et\\_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id\\_article=rbc002-600](http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoines/patrimoine_monumental_et_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id_article=rbc002-600).



Figure 9. Achilles seducing Deidamia from the History of Achilles, being offered for sale. Cartoon by Isaac Moillon.



Figure 10. 'The Sacrifice of Iphigenia' by her father, Agamemnon, from 'The Story of Achilles.'

Sold by Christie's in New York in 2013 following a prior sale by Anonymous, Sotheby's, New York, 31 May 1995, lot 139. Cartoon by Isaac Moillon.

Moillon received commissions from private individuals such as the owners of chateaux at Allier and Sant-Quintin-sur-Sioule, near Vichy, Chateau de Rochefort, Châteaux de

Ravel and Villeneuve-Lembron, in the Puy-de-Dôme. Almost all these painting were based on mythological or allegorical stories and characters.<sup>16</sup> One such painting is in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Sophonisbe Drinking Poison (1653).<sup>17</sup> Sophonisba was a Carthaginian noblewoman whose husband would not protect her from being taken in triumph to Rome after his defeat in the Second Punic War in 203 BCE. Rather than being paraded in triumph around Rome, she chose to drink a cup of poison.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 11. Sophonisbe Drinking Poison (1653) LACMA.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoines/patrimoine\\_monumental\\_et\\_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id\\_article=rbc002-600](http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoines/patrimoine_monumental_et_archeologique/insitu/article.xsp?numero=&id_article=rbc002-600)

<sup>17</sup> <https://collections.lacma.org/node/220046>.

<sup>18</sup> [https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/collections.lacma.org-images/remote\\_images/ma-8039-WEB.jpg?HIVDuhrS01RI5BAJ3Mh2o9aC5WTpRp0v](https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/collections.lacma.org-images/remote_images/ma-8039-WEB.jpg?HIVDuhrS01RI5BAJ3Mh2o9aC5WTpRp0v).

The final dated painting of Isaac Moillon is at Hotel-Dieu de Beaune, the death of St. Louis (1655) in La Salle Saint-Louis.<sup>19</sup> The painting is very startling. The King Saint is not in a comfortable bed in a grand bed-chamber but lying on the floor in apparent pain and distress. Though the room is filled with servants, a physician and ecclesiastics, the king's head is turned away. He is looking away from them all to a spot outside the picture. This is not a painting of comfort but of discomfort with approaching death.



Figure 12. The death of King-Saint Louis. (1655)  
Hotel-Dieu de Beaune, Salle Saint-Louis.

There are no other surviving dated and signed paintings from 1655 until his death 17 years later. There is not enough information about Isaac Moillon to know why he was less productive. One can speculate about ill health or spiritual distress. His easy use of Catholic iconography was counter to Reformed strictures against the production of works that would tend to further superstition and idolatry. As the Reformation proceeded the strictures against the painting, carving or in any way making images of Jesus Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirits was seen as a violation of the second commandment (Exodus 20.4-5a) that forbade the making of carved or graven images.<sup>20</sup> Not just the worship of an image is forbidden but the making of them as well. The fabrication of anything sacred is a corrupt act. Perhaps the distress one sees in

<sup>19</sup> [http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoine/patrimoine\\_monumental\\_et\\_archeologique/sdx/api-url/getatt?app=fr.gouv.culture.inventaire.revue&id=rbc002-600\\_img17](http://www4.culture.fr/patrimoine/patrimoine_monumental_et_archeologique/sdx/api-url/getatt?app=fr.gouv.culture.inventaire.revue&id=rbc002-600_img17). <https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/1222>. <https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/docannexe/image/1222/img-17-small480.jpg>.

<sup>20</sup> Mentzer, Raymond A. A Companion to the Huguenots. 2016. Klauber, Martin I. The Theology of the French Reformed Churches From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014.

the saint-king Louis in 1655 reflects in some way a personal struggle with his beloved profession that included images used during worship services and the fundamentals of his faith. Without letters or other sources, this is only speculation.

The body of Isaac Moillon's work was respected by his contemporaries. Isaac Moillon was admitted to Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture Paris in 1663. He died on 26 May 1673 of unknown causes at aged 59 years, and was buried in the Protestant churchyard of Saints-Pères on 29 May 1673. He apparently did not marry.

**Suzanne Sauter, Historian, Huguenot Society of North Carolina**