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Est. 1760



Louise Moillon
(Paris, 1610 - 1696)

Still life of a basket of plums

c. 1634

oil on panel

30 x 40.5 cm.;

11 3/4 x 16 in.

signed (lower right, on the edge of the table):

Louyse Moillon

Provenance

Collection of Baron X...;

Sale, Paris, Drouot Richelieu, room no. 1, auction by Oger and Dumont appraisal office, 1

December 2004, no. 22;

Private collection, France.

Literature

D. Alsina, *Louyse Moillon: La nature morte au Grand Siècle: catalogue raisonné*, Dijon 2009, cat. no. 31, p. 155, reproduced in colour fig. XXXI.

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The present painting is an early work by Louise Moillon, executed when she was around 24 years old. Evidently, Moillon was already an accomplished painter at this early stage of her career, as attested to not only by the well-balanced nature of the composition, but also by the realism with which she depicts the dusty skin of each damson plum. The fruit basket is lit from the left-hand side, bathing the open plum on the ledge and the basket above in a soft light. The background recedes into darkness, lending the still life a tenebrist sense of drama. Still lifes including plums appear to have been a favoured subject for Moillon, with the most well-known example being her *Still Life of Peaches and Plums* in the Louvre Museum, Paris, which can also be dated to c. 1630 – 1635 (fig. 1). The closest painting to ours, however, is surely the other *Still life of a basket of plums* (1629) in a private collection, which sold for €1,143,000 at Sotheby's Paris on 16 June 2016 (fig. 2). That composition also features the motif of the split plum to the left of the basket present in this work.

Like many women artists of her time, Moillon was born into a family of painters, which gave her first-hand exposure to a multitude of artistic techniques: a scarce opportunity for women in the 17th century. Her father and stepfather were both painters as well as art dealers, and her brother Isaac was one of the earliest members of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Moillon lived in the neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, an area of Paris occupied by many Protestant refugees, most of whom had originated from the southern Netherlands. Among these expatriates were numerous artists who brought with them their tradition of tabletop still-life painting, therefore furthering the dissemination of such Northern artistic ideas within France. Moillon was a member of this artistic community and was a strict Protestant herself, which accounts for the Flemish influences that can be detected in her work such as the sober and dignified style with which her fruit and flowers are always arranged.

Only about 75 paintings by Moillon are known, almost all pure still lifes, though some incorporate figures. Moillon's paintings are indebted to one of the pioneers of still life painting

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and fellow female artist Fede Galizia (c. 1574 - 1630), whose signed and dated still life of *1607* is one of the earliest Italian paintings in the genre that can be securely dated.¹

In her own lifetime, Louise Moillon received lavish praise for her artistic accomplishments and counted several important figures among her patrons, including King Charles I of England and various members of the French nobility. Indeed, Moillon was one of the very few female painters in seventeenth-century France whose work and name have been consistently held in high regard. In spite of this, she seems to have taken a break from painting between the early 1640s and the 1670s, most likely owing to the demands of domestic life following her marriage to the wealthy timber merchant Etienne Giardot de Chancourt in 1640. Moillon and Girardot had at least three children together.

¹ *A crystal fruit stand with peaches, quinces and jasmine flowers*, signed with monogram lower left: · FG · and dated lower right: 1607, oil on poplar panel, 31.2 x 42.5 cm. Sold London, Sotheby's, 8 July 2015, lot 29.

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Figure 1. Louise Moillon, *Still Life of Peaches and Plums*, c. 1630 – 1635.
Louvre Museum, Paris



Figure 2. Louise Moillon, *Still life of a basket of plums*, 1629.
Private collection