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Carle van Loo, The Resurrection (La resurrection du Christ), 1734

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Carle van Loo
French (1703-1765)
The Resurrection (La résurrection du Christ), 1734
Oil on canvas
30 x 17 ½ in.
Gift of the Estate of Beatrice Haggerty, 2005.9



an Loo's father and brother Jean Baptiste were accomplished painters. Carle's youth was spent in Italy working with his brother, but he returned to France in 1719 and studied at the Académie Royale. He spent 1728 to 1733 in Italy mainly painting mythological subjects. On returning to Paris he produced many portraits for the royal family and the nobility. In 1763 He became director of the Académie Royale. His style was a blend of Italian Rococo and French Classicism. His subject matter was as diverse as his style--portraits, mythology, religious paintings.

For theologians the most important event in Christ's life was his resurrection, but paintings of birth of Christ, the Madonna and child, and his crucifixion far outnumber those of the resurrection. Still many great artists from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century did paint Christ rising from the tomb. These include Giotto, Mantegna, Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Giovanni Bellini, Titian, and Paolo Veronese among Italians, and Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, Mathis Grünewald and Albrecht Altdorfer among Flemish and German artists. Van Loo is far more likely to have seen the Italian works. Van Loo painted the resurrection twice. The earlier painting (1734) is at Marquette, the later one (1750) is in the Cathedral of Besançon. The only gospel account to mention the presence of Roman soldiers is *Matthew* [27:62-66, 18:11-15]. Fra Angelico was the only painter listed above who did not include soldiers, some sleeping, some awe struck. The soldiers play an important role in both of van Loo's paintings. There are three in the Marquette picture, one raising his spear, two still sleeping. The Besançon painting has four soldiers, one sleeping, three fearful. Toward the top center of both canvases Christ rises victorious over death and floats in the air, his skin glowing, and a heavenly light shines behind his head. In both his arms are outstretched and in both pictures an angel grasps the flat stone slab from a coffin. The Besançon painting adds a second angel who removes wrappings from Christ's shoulder. Matthew and Mark have one angel, Luke has two. Neither picture shows the three holy women who came to anoint Christ's body.

Which of van Loo's pictures do I prefer? The Marquette resurrection. Jesus is more dramatic, more attractive. The soldiers and the angel are arranged effectively in a half circle below him. The picture is more unified, less cluttered. Its golden frame is square on the bottom but circular at the top and thus frames the rising Jesus better than does the Besançon frame.

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