



**Charles-Victoire-Frédéric MOENCH**

(Paris 1784 – 1867)

*Portrait of a Young Woman*

Oil on canvas, relined

Signed and dated on the bottom left: *C. Moench 1809 (?)* and *11.1816*

117 x 89 cm

PROVENANCE

Most likely Henri Rouart (1833-1912)

Remained in Ernest Rouart's family (1874-1942) until now.

# TRINITY FINE ART

In this painting, Moench depicts a richly dressed young woman, *une élégante*, at a time of social upheaval. The Empire had just ended, and with it so had the pomp and pageantry imposed by Empress Josephine, who had been strongly influenced by the pure lines of antique art.<sup>i</sup> Fashion gradually shifted at the onset of the Restoration. The waistline, which had been marked below the bust, dropped to just above the hips. White, symbol of purity and evocative of Greco-Roman statuary, gave way to colour.<sup>ii</sup> All these changes can be seen in the young woman's outfit: the waist is indeed lower, and the silk remains white but is enhanced by touches of blue such as the trimmings, the belt and the ribbons on the sleeves, giving structure to her silhouette. A few remnants of Empire clothing persisted in 1816, such as Kashmir shawls and so-called 'Mamluk' sleeves, which had been in vogue since 1798, when French soldiers brought the style back from Egypt (fig.1).<sup>iii</sup> Much as the markings of Empire can be seen in the woman's wardrobe, so too can it be spotted in the interior design of the background which features a faintly perceptible Greek Revival frieze of palmettes.



Fig. 1 - J.-A.-D. Ingres, *Madame Rivière*, oil on canvas, 117 x 82 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre (inv. no. MI 1446).

A painter of the *grand genre* and decors, Charles Moench was a pupil of Anne-Louis Girodet (1767 - 1824).<sup>iv</sup> He was the son of Simon Frédéric Moench (1746 - 1837), a Prussian-born painter who became a French citizen in 1820 and is notably credited with the painting of the Pavillon de l'étang at Fontainebleau.<sup>v</sup> In 1811, Simon Moench and his two sons, Charles and Pierre Auguste (d. 1830), registered a firm of painters-decorators, *Moench Père et Fils*.<sup>vi</sup> Charles Moench shadowed and then succeeded his father as official painter-decorator to the King and Duke of Orléans, having completed his training on a trip to Italy. The artist featured at the Salon as early as 1810 with *The Sacrifice of Polyxena* (current whereabouts unknown), and exhibited views of Italy and various portraits, as well as mythological and religious paintings until 1861, such as *The Acadine Fountain* in 1814 (fig. 2).<sup>vii</sup> In his third year exhibiting at the fair, 1817, he won a second-class medal for *Boreas Abducting Oreithyia*.<sup>viii</sup> Many of his works commissioned by Louis-Philippe can still be seen in the Galerie de Diane and the Salle des Gardes at the Château de Fontainebleau, and Moench also restored the chapel at the Château de Versailles.<sup>ix</sup> He collaborated with his brother Auguste on the decoration of the Salle Clarac in the Louvre, depicting scenes from the life of Homer, still in place today.<sup>x</sup> These were in fact described in the catalogue of the 1827 Salon, but attributed solely to Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780 – 1867), upon whose drawings the paintings were based.<sup>xi</sup>

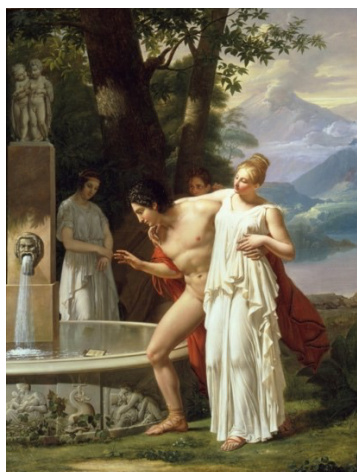


Fig. 2 – C.-V.-F. Moench, *The Acadine Fountain*, oil on canvas, 132 x 103 cm, private collection.

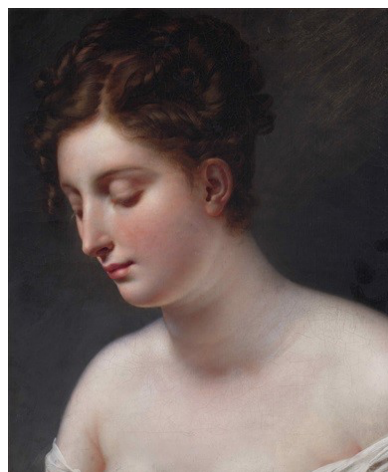


Fig. 3 – A.-L. Girodet-Trioson, *Head Study for Galatea*, oil on canvas, 46 x 39 cm, Parisian art market.

His training as a history painter and his activity as a painter-decorator enabled Charles Moench to practice a range of genres, making him a versatile artist with a highly varied corpus of works. Our painting demonstrates his skills as a portraitist. The painter drew his practice and inspiration from the work of his contemporaries and the influence of his master Girodet is evident in his touch and his rendering of flesh. The modelling of the face and throat is achieved with a delicate *sfumato* and a palette of soft pinks, giving a diaphanous complexion that can also be admired in Girodet's female figures (fig. 3). Moench's meticulous rendering of different textures and fabrics (at times transparent, silky or thick) and his attention to detail (in particular the decorative motifs on the shawl, the jewels and the pearls of the tiara) are reminiscent of Ingres' portraits, and this similarity is reinforced by his work on lines. The Moench family has not been the subject of much study, and we unfortunately know little about their careers. Nevertheless, it would seem that under the Restoration, Charles Moench was commissioned to paint several portraits, including ours and a second one, now in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nice, dated 1818, also depicting an elegant woman, in which once again, the emphasis is on the sitter's attire (fig. 4).



Fig. 4, C.-V.-F. Moench, *Portrait de femme*, oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice (inv. no. N.Mba 1890).

The rarity of this type of work in the artist's corpus, the scale of the canvas and the quality of its execution make this a unique piece that can be placed amongst Charles Moench's great achievements.

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<sup>i</sup> Le Bourhis, Katell (ed.). *The Age of Napoleon: Costume from Revolution to Empire 1789 to 1815* (New York, NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 60, 69 & 95.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 95 & 243.

<sup>iv</sup> Janson, H. W. 1977. *Catalogues of the Paris Salon 1673 to 1881* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing), vol. 1810 & 1812, p. 72.

<sup>v</sup> Archives Nationales: [https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?consIr=&frontIr=&optionFullText=&fullText=&defaultResultPerPage=&irId=FRAN\\_IR\\_056034&formCaller=NOMINATIF&gotoArchivesNums=false&auSeinIR=false&details=true&page=&udId=d\\_d\\_8032](https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?consIr=&frontIr=&optionFullText=&fullText=&defaultResultPerPage=&irId=FRAN_IR_056034&formCaller=NOMINATIF&gotoArchivesNums=false&auSeinIR=false&details=true&page=&udId=d_d_8032).

<sup>vi</sup> Archives Nationales: [https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?consIr=&frontIr=&optionFullText=&fullText=&defaultResultPerPage=&irId=FRAN\\_IR\\_042148&formCaller=GENERALISTE&gotoArchivesNums=false&auSeinIR=false&details=true&page=&udId=c1p6zu9p5fkr--7x3pvbpi5xfh](https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?consIr=&frontIr=&optionFullText=&fullText=&defaultResultPerPage=&irId=FRAN_IR_042148&formCaller=GENERALISTE&gotoArchivesNums=false&auSeinIR=false&details=true&page=&udId=c1p6zu9p5fkr--7x3pvbpi5xfh).

<sup>vii</sup> Janson 1977, vol. 1810 & 1812, p. 72, vol. 1814 & 1817, p. 134 and vol. 1861, p. 271.

<sup>viii</sup> Janson 1977, vol. 1814 & 1817, p. 64 and vol. 1855, p. 393.

<sup>ix</sup> See Archives Nationales: [https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?consIr=&frontIr=&optionFullText=&fullText=&defaultResultPerPage=&irId=FRAN\\_IR\\_001672&formCaller=GENERALISTE&gotoArchivesNums=false&auSeinIR=false&details=true&page=&udId=d\\_96\\_6\\_3](https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/consultationIR.action?consIr=&frontIr=&optionFullText=&fullText=&defaultResultPerPage=&irId=FRAN_IR_001672&formCaller=GENERALISTE&gotoArchivesNums=false&auSeinIR=false&details=true&page=&udId=d_96_6_3), and Liardet, Olivier. 'La restauration de la Chapelle Royale de Versailles (1873-1878). Charles-Auguste Questel et les pratiques restauratrices à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Versilia. Revue de la Société des Amis de Versailles*, 6 (2003), p. 91.

<sup>x</sup> Collections, Louvre: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010061350>.

<sup>xi</sup> Janson 1977, vol. 1827, p. 12.