



**Nicolas Loir**

(Paris 1624 - 1679)

*The Adoration of the Shepherds*

Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 8 ½" x 6 ½" (21.5 x 16.5 cm) - Framed: 13" x 11 ¼" (33 x 28.5 cm)

Period Louis XIV frame in carved and gilded wood with foliage motifs

Provenance: British private collection - Lestranger Gallery - Paris

Literature: this painting was the subject of an in-depth study by Catherine Sterling in the *Première Pensée* catalog of the exhibition held at the Lestranger Gallery from September 18 to October 12, 2002.<sup>1</sup>

Price on request

**In an intimate atmosphere dominated by warm colors, Nicolas Loir offers us here a first thought, tightly focused and rigorously arranged, of *the Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Louvre Museum, in which he expresses his admiration for the art of Nicolas Poussin.**

### **1. Nicolas Loir, a 17th-century Parisian artist inspired by Bourdon and Poussin**

Nicolas Loir was born in Paris in 1623. His father, a goldsmith, first placed him with Simon Vouet and then with Sébastien Bourdon. At the age of 23, in 1647, he left for Rome, where he stayed for two years, drawing inspiration from the classicism of Raphael and, above all, Nicolas Poussin, whom he met and deeply admired.

On his return to France in 1649, he received his first major commissions for religious paintings for Parisian churches, the most prestigious of which was the May of Notre Dame for the year 1650. He also received numerous secular commissions for hotels and châteaux in the Paris region. Admitted to the Academy in 1663, he joined Le Brun's team and participated in the decoration of the royal castles of Vincennes, the Tuileries, and Versailles. Appointed professor at the Academy in 1666, then assistant to the rector in 1668, he died in 1679.

He married Marguerite Cotelte, daughter of the painter Jean I Cotelte, a specialist in monochrome paintings, and sister of the painter Jean II Cotelte. Dezallier d'Argenville, who owned several of his drawings, tells us that he was a man of gentle and modest temperament, deeply honest, and highly esteemed by his contemporaries, including as a portrait painter. We can see his amiable character features reflected in his portrait by Jean Tiger, which is kept at the Palace of Versailles.

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<sup>1</sup> This presentation summarizes the main conclusions of this study.



Jean Tiger - *Portrait of Nicolas Loir* - Palace of Versailles

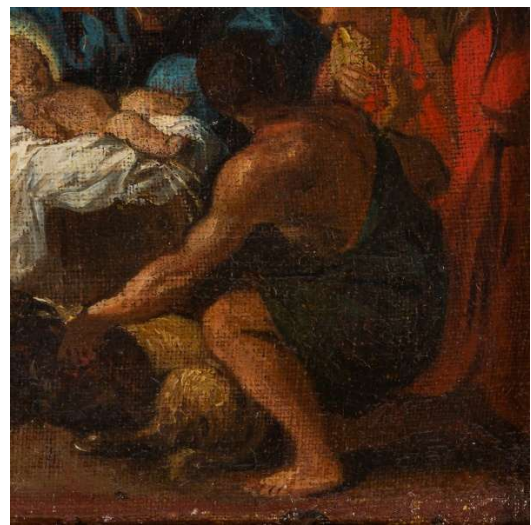
## 2. Description of the painting and related artworks

Our painting depicts the adoration of the Holy Child, presented in the center of the composition on a pristine white cloth that catches the eye, by the shepherds. While the figure draped in yellow on the left is likely Saint Joseph, the Virgin Mary is depicted from the front, contemplating the Child with her right hand raised, her fingers spread as if to indicate her amazement at the realization of this Mystery. The five figures on the left, all dressed quite simply, are the shepherds who have come to worship the Child, as evidenced by the kid goat lying at his feet. Two cherubs carrying phylacteries fly in the sky and complete the composition.

Our Nativity was painted in oil on canvas coated with a brown-red preparation, visible in the two upper corners left unpainted, which is typical of French painting in the mid-17th century and found in the work of Nicolas Poussin. The overall atmosphere of the painting reveals Poussin's decisive influence, whether through the color palette dominated by primary colors (the blue of the Virgin's cloak, the orange-red of the shepherds' cloaks on the right, the bright yellow of St. Joseph's cloak on the left), the rather tubular treatment of the figures, but also through numerous direct references to Poussin's paintings. Examples include the two cherubs, which seem to be inspired by those above the *Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus* in the Vatican Museums, and the shepherd kneeling on the right, who is largely based (in reverse) on one of *the Shepherds of Arcadia* (Louvre Museum).



Nicolas Poussin *Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus* (detail) Musei Vaticani / Nicolas Loir *Adoration of the Shepherds* (detail)



Nicolas Poussin *Et in Arcadia ego* (detail) Musée du Louvre / Nicolas Loir *Adoration of the Shepherds* (detail)

The position of the main characters—Saint Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and the shepherds—is quite like that in *Adoration of the Shepherds* by the same Nicolas Loir, held at the Yale University Art Gallery, in which the position of the Child is however reversed.



Nicolas Loir – *Adoration of the Shepherds* – Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, USA

Our composition, which is much more compact, is particularly striking for its geometric rigor: a V-shape enclosing the Child, which contrasts with the triangular group formed by Saint Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and the shepherd kneeling on the right.

We take up the argument developed by Catherine Sterling<sup>2</sup> that this sketch was an initial idea for *the Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Louvre Museum (reproduced below)<sup>3</sup>. It is important to emphasize that this was indeed an initial idea and not a preparatory study, since the composition has been completely reworked in the Louvre painting.



Left: Nicolas Loir - *Adoration of the Shepherds* - Louvre Museum - Inv. 2803

Right: Copy after Nicolas Loir - *Adoration of the Shepherds* - Louvre Museum - Inv. 30698

Although the artist reversed the positions of the figures, the painting in the Louvre has the same V-shaped composition centered around the Child, who is depicted in a manner very similar to that in our sketch. The group of five shepherds and Saint Joseph (now standing behind the Virgin) have been reversed in relation to the Child, and the Virgin's position has been shifted to the right. One of the shepherds is depicted with his arms outstretched and his hands wide open, echoing the Virgin's gesture of wonder in our sketch. The ox, whose head

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<sup>2</sup> Opus citatum

<sup>3</sup> This painting comes from a revolutionary seizure in a chapel of the Church of Saint-Honoré, for which it had been commissioned.

appeared on the far left of our sketch, is depicted in the same way in the center of the Louvre painting, just behind the Child.

It is interesting to note that there is also a pencil and gray wash drawing in the Louvre Museum that is now considered to be a copy of this *Adoration of the Shepherds*, with the two upper corners left unpainted like those in our painting, suggesting the existence of an earlier version of the Louvre painting (the corners of which have since been completed). This irregular shape is quite classic for an altarpiece and echoed the shape of the woodwork into which the painting was to be inserted.

### 3. Framing

Our sketch is presented in a carved and gilded wooden frame from the Louis XIV period, whose sides, decorated with guilloché patterns and foliage, are quite strongly raised, further reinforcing the precious and intimate character of this adoration.



Nicolas Loir - *Adoration of the Shepherds*