

of zealous "missionizing" the painting symbolically represents. In style it is typical of provincial work of the second half of the seventeenth century — a naive and restrained variation on the grand symbolic masterpieces of Rubens or Poussin. Nonetheless, it represents simply the noblest intentions of the first Europeans in settling the St. Lawrence Valley, and proclaims directly the central role that French culture, particularly painting, would play in the realization of those intentions.

The importance of the missions had largely diminished by 1670 and interest focused on the growing white settlements, clearly in need of a skilled painter who could decorate the new churches in the manner to which Frenchmen were accustomed. Unfortunately, the tiny community was unable to support resident talent of that order, so an accomplished artist was brought in for a period of concentrated work. Frère Luc (1614-85) has since become the star round which the lesser constellations of early Canadian painting revolve. A cleric, as were all the painters who worked in New France in the seventeenth century, he was by far the best trained.

Frère Luc arrived in Quebec in August 1670 and stayed about 14 months, designing and supervising the construction of a Recollet chapel, and painting a number of devotional pictures, including a grand altar-piece for the chapel. Now in the *Hôtel Général de Québec*, this *Assumption* is a robust example of the French Classical Baroque. A little shallow, heavy in modelling, and rather stiff, even awkward, compared to the work of the artist's contemporaries in France, it must have appeared a very vision of beauty and of inspired religious emotion in Quebec in 1671.

By the early eighteenth century we have evidence of the first non-clerical painters working in New France, reflecting a gradual secularization of life as the colony grew. Paradoxically, this broadening interest in painting did not lead to an increase in the number or quality of painters working in the colony, craftsmen employed in various aspects of church decoration, some of whom also painted primitive portraits and charming, naive *ex votos*. They were trained by apprenticing, as was usual in all the trades, a tradition that persisted in Quebec well into the twentieth century. There were never enough painters in New France to warrant any other form of artistic organization. It was only after the British conquest of 1760 that in the wider and more secular sphere of British North America such moves seemed necessary or even desirable.

First artistic organization

The first recorded organization to support an interest in the arts was the Halifax Chess, Pencil and Brush Club, founded in 1787. There were then no professional artists in that Atlantic port — established as a planned colonial town and