

Disassembling the Canvas: A visual analysis of marine ex-voto images
from eighteenth century Quebec and France.

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Abstract

Disassembling the Canvas: A visual analysis of marine ex-voto images from eighteenth century Quebec and France.

Katrina Marie Lukaitis

The visual analysis of four Quebec marine ex-votos, namely the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin* (1709), the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* (1712), the *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat* (1706), the *Ex-voto des cinq naufragés de Lévis* (1754) is thoroughly executed within this thesis, all of which are on exhibition in the Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré near Quebec City. By doing so, it is revealed the extent to which Quebec marine ex-voto images reflect a close relationship between the divine and material realms as well as the degree of piety among religious individuals during this era. With reference to the theory of the sublime, first introduced by Edmund Burke and elaborated upon by John Dennis, which illustrates the extent to which the sea elicited fear and horror as well as the correlation between the divine and the material spheres, this thesis works to provide a window into the social and cultural structures of eighteenth century Quebec. The sources that these marine images drew from, namely French ex-voto paintings, are numerous and will provide some explanation of this 'other worldliness' that they exude. In order to effectively contextualize these four Quebec marine ex-votos, this thesis also includes a comparison between the four ex-votos and three of their French counterparts in order to detect the characteristics and distinctiveness of Quebec marine ex-votos during the eighteenth century.

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Historically, some of the earliest religious images that have been depicted are ex-voto paintings, which take their name from the Latin term “ex-voto suscepto,” or “in pursuance of a vow.”¹ These works were commissioned in order to be placed in a church, most frequently a side chapel, as votive offerings to a saint.² Ex-votos, which have also been immortalized in the form of objects, maquettes and plaques, have been in existence since the substantiation of Christianity as a practicing religion in the fourth century.³ There are also common themes within the realm of ex-voto images, one most notably being marine ex-votos. This image type generally depicts a boat at sea with a saint looking over the foreground action from a seated position at the top right or left of the canvas. Typically, these images were completed for a commissioning family in order to either protect a loved one as they departed on a marine voyage or to give thanks to the divine realm for providing their loved one with a safe return from their time at sea.⁴ In order to reveal the extent to which Quebec ex-voto images reflect a close relationship between the divine and material realms as well as the degree of piety among religious individuals during this era, the visual analysis of four predominant Quebec ex-votos that reflect a marine theme, namely the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin*, the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants*, the *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat* and the *Ex-voto des cinq naufragés de Lévis*, all of which are on exhibition in the museum of Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré near Quebec City, must be thoroughly executed. With reference to the theory of the sublime, first introduced by Edmund Burke, which will illustrate the extent to which

¹ Nicole Cloutier, “Votive Painting.” Retrieved from the *Canadian Encyclopaedia* website, July 17, 2009. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0008395>

² Ibid.

³ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris : Musée de la Marine, 1975), 29

⁴ Ibid., 30

the sea elicited fear and horror, this will provide a window into the social and cultural structures of eighteenth century Quebec; the degree of religious activity, the detrimental effects and insatiable fear among individuals of shipwrecks at the time and the artistic inclusions within the canvas. The sources that these images drew from are numerous and will provide some explanation of this 'other worldliness' that they exude. Quebec and France's history, which share many similar aspects and are quite closely tied together, also play an important role in the visual concerns of Quebec ex-voto paintings and will be included in this study. In order to effectively contextualize these four Quebec marine ex-votos, the images will be compared and contrasted to their precursive French counterparts in order to detect what may be characteristic or distinctive of Quebec ex-votos during the eighteenth century.

These paintings, often done on a smaller scale, either referenced the occurrence of a miraculous event or were produced as objects of salvation, protection or devotion. The ex-voto image itself calls upon an extremely important correlation between the divine and material worlds which is frequently a central theme of ex-voto paintings. The action that transpires within many ex-votos, both in France and Quebec, is usually directly related to the reason for the image's commission. At times, text is also included on the canvas of ex-votos in order to immortalize the names of those who were saved, those who were in need of saving or protection or the vessel that was ultimately protected or saved from harm. Therefore, marine ex-votos often depict a boat in the midst of a sea in turmoil in the foreground of the canvas with the illuminated Saint Anne seated on clouds either on the top left or right of the painting.

Primarily, to attract divine protection, propitiary ex-votos were produced in order to shield a party or a person from harm.⁵ Similarly, commemorative ex-votos were intended to remind its viewers and commissioners of a past divine intervention in the face of a threatening obstacle.⁶ Lastly, the most common category of ex-votos is congratulatory, which were commissioned to honour a favour that was granted by the saint depicted within the image.⁷ These three categories can be observed within marine ex-votos, an important image-type particularly for those living in coastal towns in France and Quebec due to the omnipresent fear among the population that the ocean brought forth at the time that these paintings were completed.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in particular, the vastness of the sea was unknown. The ocean was a site that terrified – it elicited fear amongst society because it was the epitome of the unknown.⁸ Due to the mystery of the sea, individuals became enthralled by the very thought of this unfamiliar natural element. It is for this reason that marine ex-votos were of such an interesting character at the time of their renderings; the inclusion of the sea captivated their viewers. The sea's depiction within images increased during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a subset of the theories regarding the sublime, a concept that was expanded upon by authors such as John Dennis.

⁵ Nicole Cloutier, "L'iconographie de Sainte Anne au Québec" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Montréal, 1982), 248.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Edward N. Hooker, comp. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 60.

According to Dennis, the imagination harbors aspects of a creative faculty.⁹

Clarence D. Thorpe has noted that

with Dennis, [...] ideas have their origin in sense impression. These ideas are of two sorts: those which come from ordinary objects and those which derive from the uncommon and the extraordinary. In the first case the ideas are full and clear; in the second, they are indefinite, somewhat beyond the realm of full apprehension. The first give rise to ordinary passions, the second to the enthusiastic passions.¹⁰

Dennis made the distinction between these two types of passions in his book, entitled *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704).¹¹ However, he used the term ‘vulgar’ in replacement of ‘ordinary.’ This ‘vulgar’ passion, which lends itself to “anger, pity, admiration, or wonder, are those aroused by objects themselves or by ideas in the ordinary course of life.”¹²

Dennis calls attention to the importance of the difference between vulgar and enthusiastic terror. He states that “the minimal effect upon the imagination of ordinary ideas [...] and their power in meditation to arouse terror, admiration, or horror.”¹³ Again, when an individual harbors a religious nature, their capacity to meditate and contemplate would be thorough and effective which would allow them the ability to tap into various types of passion and terror that Dennis has referenced.

Furthermore, according to Dennis, terror is aroused by calamities to individuals in similar situations.¹⁴ “The more their calamities are related to a sense of the divine and seem to result from providence, the more wonderful, terrible and moving they are.”¹⁵ This correlates with marine ex-votos because of their prominence during the eighteenth

⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

century. Individuals would have empathized when viewing marine ex-votos since many would have known a crewmember of a ship. Also, the sea's vastness would have been viewed as divine since the prominent belief at the time would have been that the world's existence was due to God's powerful hand. Therefore, one could view the sea as a vestige where the divine and material realms experience an overlapping with each other; where both spheres are encompassed. In effect, the ocean could be viewed as yielding a particular kind of powerful nature which brings together the invisible sacred world with the visible world, making it a source of 'enthusiastic terror.'

Dennis refers to 'enthusiastic terrors' as leading to "admiration, terror, horror, joy, sadness or desire, [all of which] are aroused by things outside common life."¹⁶ Furthermore, Dennis states that 'enthusiastic passions' are occasionally heightened by the mind's capacity to become conscious of reflection that is of an intense nature."¹⁷ This can be used to reference the religious comportment of devout Christians during the eighteenth century since meditation and intense reflection was called for in order to pray to a higher power. The reason for prayer was initially to give thanks and to contemplate and meditate in regards to the events that Jesus Christ, the reflection of God on earth, had to endure.

In this way, Dennis believes that religion stimulates one's passion and it also has the ability to "harmonize our passions with our reason and will."¹⁸ He stated that "religion for the believing Christian [...] implies a rational order controlling the universe, an order also manifested in the design of an [artist's] work,"¹⁹ in this case, the marine ex-

¹⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ Ibid.

voto. In terms of enthusiastic passions, Dennis associates it with the extraordinary and the divine.

The ‘enthusiastic passion’ that is felt by an individual is dependent on their mind’s ability to shape, change and interpret an object, event or natural element, for example, in such a way that extends from its original intention or nature.²⁰ This can be correlated with the perception of the sea in eighteenth century as individuals were fearful of it. The ‘enthusiastic passion’ of individuals instigated the concoction of ideas and stories surrounding the sea since its nature was unknown at the time. Therefore, it acquired a specific labeling of eliciting horror within individuals. It can be deduced that when viewers encountered marine ex-voto images, they were met with the same type of terror. Similarly, those who commissioned these images would have done so in regards to their ‘enthusiastic passions’ since they were fearful of the ‘unknown’ vastness and horrifying nature of the sea.

This theorist couches the fact that ex-votos were of great interest at the time of their productions.²¹ Their placement within side chapels, namely Notre Dame de la Garde in Marseille and the Cathédrale de Saint-Louis in La Rochelle, not only acted in their original intention to summon divine intervention and protection, but they also drew on the ‘enthusiastic passions’ of viewers.²² Therefore, due to the fact that shipwrecks were not uncommon during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the thought and vision of the sea implied a connection between the sublime and terror since individuals were not predominantly interested in beauty or becoming enchanted anymore. “The paradox of pleasure arising from the seemingly unpleasurable – from terror from pain

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 30

²² Ibid., 32.

from the grotesque and ugly in short, from the body itself, was not only enormously fascinating [...] but also intellectually frustrating, since contemporary neoclassical theories could not account for it.”²³ Therefore, from the pleasure that is elicited from viewing such intricate depictions of the sea within ex-votos, one could extrapolate the displeasure felt by harboring the knowledge of the vastness and fury of the sea. This concept is based on the material world; the contemplations and the psychology that lie within the innate thought process of the human mind in pertinence to ‘the other’ or ‘the unknown.’

With this in mind, Dennis concentrated on separating two exclusive types of terror; that of the ‘common terror’ and that of the ‘enthusiastic terror.’²⁴ The concept of ‘common terror’ is related to the material world in the sense that it is conveyed through elements that are of this world and known to mankind.²⁵ Dennis goes on to correlate ‘enthusiastic terror’ with the “human state of mind confronted with the wrath of God as the most intense moment of the sublime.”²⁶ This denotes the sacred realm as it is mystified and of ‘the other.’ The unknown is sublime and with the ex-voto image-type, two components are unknown; the sea which is of the natural world and the saints which are of the divine world.

The fact that Dennis has correlated these two spheres in terms of the notion of the sublime and its effects of terror on the individual, it becomes apparent that ex-votos acted in the same way. Their production and existence can be attributed to the unknown in terms of the divine and material realms, something that is couched in and materialized in

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Joan C. Grace, *Tragic Theory in the Works of John Rymer, John Dennis and John Dryden*. (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975), 67.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid.

ex-voto canvases themselves. Therefore, the notion of the “Sublime in Terror” is prominent within the four aforementioned French ex-votos, regardless of their category of propitiary, congratulatory or commemorative. They all encompass the sublime in terms of divine and material worldliness and act in such a way that has enthralled viewers for centuries.

In conjunction with the visual elements of the canvas, the aesthetic theory of the sublime, first introduced by Edmund Burke and elaborated upon by John Dennis in relation to the notion of terror, becomes relevant and helps to substantiate the idea that many ex-votos, both Quebec and French alike, were intended to address the sense of fear that the sea elicited in the eighteenth century. Also, the sentiment of terror separates and divides the divine and material realms within numerous ex-voto paintings since they depict the sea, a natural element, and divinity, a sacred presence.

The theory of the sublime may be factored into a deeper understanding of both Quebec and French ex-votos for many reasons. During the era that the four aforementioned Quebec ex-votos were depicted, sea voyage was a commonality among inhabitants while the vastness of the sea was both terrifying and enthralling to France and Quebec’s population.²⁷

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century in France, many shipwrecks were recorded, now in archives, and many were written about in popular novels, which ultimately frightened and enthralled people of the time.²⁸ For example, Parisian author George Fournier wrote a book 1643 concerning the detrimental occurrences in regards to

²⁷ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 30.

²⁸ Ibid.

marine voyages, which consisted of sickness and famine.²⁹ Furthermore, many statistics of accidents at sea were published and studied in the nineteenth century for the Minister of Marine Affairs.³⁰ These appeared in yearly publications such as *La revue maritime et coloniale* and *La journal officiel*, both of which addressed each shipwreck by area or town that the voyage originally set out from.³¹

According to such sources, those lost at sea died from storms, tornadoes, fog, snowstorms, water currents, ice, collisions, floating wrecks, fire, lightning, dispelled anchors, broken chains, over loading and dilapidation.³² Problematic navigation conditions, erroneous maneuvering in navigation and routing errors also contributed to many deaths at sea.³³ It has been studied that some of these deaths could have been avoided by a greater amount of aid and involvement from crewmembers.³⁴

Also, towards the end of the nineteenth century, studies show that 56.9% of mortalities at sea occurred from a ship's submersion into water, 8.8% died from such things as trauma, asphyxiation and explosions while 34.2% died from illnesses like yellow fever, cholera, lockjaw, dysentery, sunstroke and stroke caused by cold temperatures.³⁵ However, when marine ex-votos are concerned, this last category of sickness does not seem to visually manifest itself in images.³⁶

The fear of the mysterious references the element of the sublime, which, as described by John Dennis, refers to terror and the 'other.' Due to the fact that there were few survivors after a shipwreck had occurred, this fed into the insatiable fear that many

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 31.

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 30

inhabitants of France and Quebec harbored towards the ocean. Also, an 'enchanted terror,' referenced by Dennis, was defined as the human capacity to fear the wrath of God and divinity, since this sacred realm manifested and worked in such a way unbeknownst to the human mind.³⁷ Therefore, the unknown and mysterious was a factor that elicited individuals to experience a psychological fear; a fear of the sacred which was an ever-present, spiritual element that had a supreme presence within the material world, but nonetheless, could not be seen. This presence was mystified in terms of religion; plaguing individuals to the point of being devout Christians and, in turn, being able to pray to the divine in order for miraculous interception and savior from harm. Therefore, Christianity enjoyed a large following during this era in both France and Quebec.

Dennis couches the fact that ex-votos were of great interest at the time of their productions due to the fact that their placement within side chapels drew on the 'enthusiastic terrors' of viewers. Marine ex-votos created a visual realm where church patrons were able to actually observe this mystified 'enthusiastic terror' on canvas, instilling an even greater feeling of the 'realities' of the wrath of God and the divine sphere. According to Dennis, this mystified religious visual aspect that marine ex-votos harboured enthralled viewers to the point that the images played the role of 'passions' within individuals.³⁸ These passions, according to Dennis, were comprised of "admiration, terror, horror, joy, sadness and desire."³⁹ This set of passions were focused on within individuals as they viewed these marine ex-votos as well as when a loved one would embark on a marine voyage, creating terrified passion, on a worldly level, as well

³⁷ Edward N. Hooker, comp. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

as an enthusiastic terror, in a divine understanding. Here, the material and divine sphere encounter a dialogue as they elicit insatiable emotions within the individual viewer of the image, allowing them the capacity to be and feel enthralled in different manners.

With this in mind, in commencing with the precursive French ex-votos, the three aforementioned categories of ex-votos are predominant due to the fact that France was one of the major European forerunners of marine voyages, both in its efforts to colonize America, and to trade with newly established colonies in foreign lands.⁴⁰ Therefore, many ex-votos that were rendered in France revolve around a maritime theme. For example, according to previous research, those in need of divine intervention with regards to sea rescue would pray to the Virgin and Jesus Christ.⁴¹ The fact that the Virgin and Jesus were the predominant divinities that were prayed to in terms of salvation also insinuates the magnitude of the situation since the Mother and Child are the most direct references to the ultimate, God. If and when this prayer was answered and the individuals in need of help were saved, then an image would be commissioned and placed in the patrons' church in order to give thanks to the Virgin and Child and to commemorate the event of this act of divine rescue.⁴² This differs from Quebec marine ex-votos, which depict Saint Anne, the patron saint of sea rescue.

Furthermore, akin to Quebec ex-voto images, French marine ex-votos often depict a boat in the midst of a sea in turmoil in the foreground of the canvas with the illuminated Virgin and Child seated on clouds either on the top left or right of the painting. The ex-

⁴⁰ Felix Reynaud. *Ex-voto de Notre-Dame de la Garde: La vie publique*. (Marseille: La Thune, 1997), 6.

⁴¹ J. Russell Harper. *La Peinture au Canada: des origines a nos jours*. (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1969), 18.

⁴² Ibid.

voto image itself calls upon an extremely important correlation between the divine and material worlds which is frequently a central theme of ex-voto paintings.

In many ex-votos from France, the Virgin and Child, along with the main foreground action and text are three integral areas which collectively work to create a dialogue between the material and sacred realms that are contrasted upon the canvas. They act together in a way that communicates to the viewer the reason for their commission, the severity and graveness of the experiences of those involved, as well as the degree of divine interception which saved the ship's crewmembers.

What is also prominent within French marine ex-votos is the manner in which they have been rendered. These works can be compared to each other, visually, in order to further the understanding of their artistic inclusions, such as choice of colour, linearity, foreground action, important text and the manner in which the saint is illustrated. These visual aspects work together in such a way that elicits a certain type of importance onto the marine ex-votos. The images themselves offer prominent visual grandiosities, especially the dichotomy and dialogue between the divine and material worlds. Visual patterns, if any, vertical or horizontal construction, how the colour register parallels the action on the canvas, type of construction that has been used by the artist and the kind of construction lines that are present will allow for a more thorough understanding of these images in terms of material and divine spheres and act to elevate the image to a level of great proportion in terms of the earthly and other-worldly domains they depict.

With this in mind, the type of marine ex-voto - propitiary, commemorative or congratulatory – can usually be deduced solely based on the visual criteria that are present within the canvas. For example, if the foreground scene illustrates a ship in

distress, it could be hypothesized that the ex-voto would fall under the category of commemorative or congratulatory since the image would have been commissioned after a ship miraculously recuperated from peril at sea. On the contrary, if the image depicts a ship sailing through tranquil waters, it can be inferred that it is a propitiary ex-voto since it was either commissioned as a form of protection from harm that had been granted by divine intervention.

As it will be seen, there is an obvious difference between these three types of ex-votos, regardless of the fact that they all share the common theme of the dichotomy and correlation between the divine world and natural realm. In certain images, the viewer is confronted by a ship in distress in the midst of treacherous water. Therefore, the ship that is present in the foreground is often almost or completely overturned; a helpless vessel in the midst of a vast body of water. It can be deduced that this type of painting would belong to the category of a commemorative ex-voto. The families that commissioned these types of images would have done so in order to commemorate the event of a loved one being miraculously saved from a shipwreck.⁴³ Subsequently, the families would have prayed to a particular saint, who would be depicted on the canvas, for the safe return of their family member.⁴⁴ When the crewmember returned home after encountering the high seas, their family would commission an image to commemorate their prayers being answered.⁴⁵

In opposition, there are also ex-voto images which illustrate similar subject matter, except that the boat in the foreground of the image is not navigating through

⁴³ Nicole Cloutier, "L'iconographie de Sainte Anne au Québec" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Montréal, 1982), 248.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

rough weather or perilous water. Instead, the vessel is depicted, often with a brighter colour palette, sailing through unperturbed water. This kind of image would consequently fall into the category of propitiary ex-voto due to the visual serenity included as a precursor to the ship's voyage and the fact that it was rendered before the crewmembers departed on expedition, to ask for protection of a crewmember from that saint depicted.⁴⁶

In conjunction with the visual elements of the canvas, the concept of the sublime, in terms of John Dennis' definition of terror, becomes relevant and helps to substantiate the notion that these French ex-votos were produced in order to have profound effects upon their viewers, as these were the intentions of their commissioners. Also, the sentiment of terror separates and divides the divine and material realms within numerous ex-voto paintings since they depict the sea, a natural element, and divinity, a sacred presence.⁴⁷

The idea of the sublime may be factored into a deeper understanding of these French, and later, Quebec, ex-votos for many reasons. Historically, during the era that these images were depicted, there were numerous marine expeditions and voyages that were initiated by France in order to explore and colonize new land, as well as import and export goods from France's subsequent colonies or other countries. The vastness of the sea was both terrifying and enthralling to France's population.⁴⁸ The unknown bodies of water that encircled France were potentially horrifying for those involved in marine voyages as well as their families. Copious amounts of shipwrecks and subsequent deaths

⁴⁶ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁷ Edward N. Hooker, comp. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 63.

⁴⁸ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 31.

plagued the French people during the time that these ex-votos were rendered.⁴⁹ Due to the fact that technology had not advanced to the point that it could make sufficient precautions to protect crewmembers if a ship encountered treacherous waters or stormy weather, prayer and devotion were the only means one could take to acquire protection from natural uncertainties and disasters at sea.⁵⁰ It is for this reason that many ex-votos were made in France.

The fear of the unknown calls upon the element of the sublime, which, as described by John Dennis, refers to terror and the 'other.'⁵¹ During the era in which these French marine ex-votos were commissioned, terror was present among the French population in accordance to the sea. Few shipwrecks had survivors, instigating a fear within potential crewmembers and their respective loved ones.⁵² These severe uncertainties coupled with the unlikelihood of surviving a shipwreck, fed into the fear that many felt towards the vast oceans. In addition, a certain kind of 'enchanted terror' was also referenced by Dennis to designate the fear of the wrath of God and divinity.⁵³ Therefore, the unknown was a factor that drove individuals to experience a psychological fear; a fear of the sacred which was an ever-present and spiritual element that was felt but not seen.⁵⁴ It is for this reason that the ships were depicted in these marine ex-votos while experiencing terrible difficulty in the face of horrendous storms and treacherous waters.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Edward N. Hooker, comp. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 64.

⁵² J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 31.

⁵³ Edward N. Hooker, comp. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 32.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

It also appears that the perspective in many French marine ex-votos has intentionally been made disproportional. This is in reference to the saints that are depicted at the top of the canvas, either on the extreme left or right, vis-à-vis the foreground action. Often the human activities taking place and divine intercessory figures have no correlation with each other in terms of their perspective; both do not experience any visual parallels with each other even though the saints depicted are often looking downwards at the foreground action. It can be speculated that the reasoning behind this phenomena is to highlight the fact that the realm of the divine is separate and higher in importance to its commissioners than that of the material. This dichotomy is imperatively acknowledged because it speaks volumes of the historical social context of French society of the time.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many parishioners were devout Christians and looked to their religion as a guide to lead their lives.⁵⁵ The commissioning of ex-voto paintings alone acts as evidence that wealthy Christians exhausted their monetary means in order to secure divine protection and salvation.⁵⁶ The very existence of ex-voto paintings can be seen as a reflection of the extreme devoutness that Christians felt towards their religion. Further evidence of Christian piety during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was expressed by the purchasing of side chapels within a church.⁵⁷ Families and guilds alike would procure these chapels in order to confirm their ascension to heaven. Often, when in possession of these side chapels, parishioners would pay the church by means of land or monetary donations to have a priest perform a liturgy

⁵⁵ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 30.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Felix Reynaud. *Ex-voto de Notre-Dame de la Garde: La vie publique*. (Marseille: La Thune, 1997), 15.

or mass in front of the side chapel's altar.⁵⁸ Families and guilds would also commission a work of art to be placed on the altars of their side chapels. In this case, they would be viewed as part of upper class society because these purchases were quite expensive.⁵⁹

The commissioning of ex-voto images also lends itself to the social sphere. Church patrons who were monetarily inclined to commission ex-voto images felt that the skilled execution of these images would elevate their status in both the divine and material realms.⁶⁰ Divinities would have been thought to regard the family as devout in their religion and fellow church patrons would view the family as a part of a hierarchical level of society.⁶¹ Therefore, social status also came into play with the commissioning of ex-voto images.

Specifically, the ex-voto paintings that will be referenced have been assembled into side chapels that have been devoted to maritime imagery. For instance, in the Cathédrale de Saint-Louis in La Rochelle, France, there is one side chapel that is dedicated to marine ex-votos. There are thirty three images which are hung on the walls of the first side chapel on the left when entering the cathedral's main portal. These marine ex-votos are complemented with an immense stained glass window which displays a ship at sea that sits in the middle of the chapel.

Due to the fact that La Rochelle is located on the eastern seaboard of France, many ships departed from its main ports, which are presently located in the city's Old Port. The city of La Rochelle was founded in the tenth century and was one of the main

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16

⁶¹ Ibid.

harbours in Europe. During the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, La Rochelle flourished economically because of its trade involvement with other countries.

La Rochelle became very active in triangular trade with the New World, dealing in the slave trade with Africa, sugar trade with plantations of the Antilles, and fur trade with Canada. This was a period of artistry and high cultural and architectural achievements for the city,⁶²

which is why the art commissioned during this time was abundant; La Rochelle's economy was experiencing a positive increase. However, during the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, La Rochelle

lost its trade and prominence during (...) The Seven Years War, the French revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. During that period France lost many of the territorial possessions it had in the New World, and also saw a strong decrease in its sea power in the continuing conflicts with Britain, ultimately diminishing the role of (its) harbours.⁶³

Therefore, La Rochelle's economy experienced a decline and art production and commission decreased as a result; this economic deterioration may help to account for the fact that the skill of the anonymous artists who painted ex-votos during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not as intricate, skilled or refined as in other periods. This lends itself to another explanation behind the fact that the visual perspective and linearity of many French marine ex-votos are flat and delineated; commissioners could not afford to pay a high-ranking artist to render these images whose purposes, ultimately, were to protect and save their loved ones from harm at sea.

Another cathedral in France which preserves a large number of ex-votos is Cathédrale de Notre- Dame-de-la-Garde in Marseille. This cathedral, which sits atop the city, towering above its inhabitants, is essentially dedicated to the exhibition of ex-voto paintings. Hundreds of ex-votos, marine and other, flank the walls of all six side chapels

⁶² Unknown author. <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/la-rochelle/history.html>

⁶³ Ibid

of the church.⁶⁴ Along with these images are plaques with the names of parishioners inscribed onto them which date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶⁵ Though the plaques do not state the reason for the inclusion of these names, they may perhaps pay homage to those who have passed away from illness, for example.⁶⁶ The formal characteristics of these images are comparable to those of La Rochelle and the images held in both cities are seemingly visually identical and virtually impossible to distinguish from one another.

Due to the fact that Marseille is located on the Atlantic Ocean and was also involved in much trade with other countries, it becomes apparent why the city was another center in the production of ex-votos. Unfortunately, Marseille was hit with an epidemic of Black Death and until the beginning of the eighteenth century; over forty five thousand individuals had died. Due to the high number of deaths, monetary means and economic flow were high and many works of art were produced in order to commemorate the deaths that resulted from this terrible plague.⁶⁷ However, Marseille regained its vitality and during the nineteenth century, Marseille was propelled into modern times.⁶⁸ “The policy of colonisation, the large-scale building works of the Second Empire, and the opening of the Suez Canal in particular, all contributed to its influence and made Marseille the gate to the Orient.⁶⁹” This increase in trade provides evidence for the influx of ex-votos that were commissioned in Marseille during the nineteenth century; many

⁶⁴ Felix Reynaud. *Ex-voto de Notre-Dame de la Garde: La vie publique*. (Marseille: La Thune, 1997), 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Marseille Tourisme,

<http://www.marseille-tourisme.com/en/conference-professionals/marseille/marseille-2600-years-of-history/>

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

individuals set off to sea on these voyages while their respective loved ones prayed for their safe return in the form of votive offerings to saints, namely ex-votos. Therefore, the ex-votos that have been rendered in Marseille are either aesthetically skilled or lack perspective, depending on the time of their rendering and the status of the family who commissioned the images.

In order to foreground a discussion of the concept of the sublime and the manner in which such unknown artists of ex-voto paintings successfully captured the terror of the sea, four prominent French ex-votos will be visually and aesthetically analyzed. This will illustrate that these marine paintings successfully instil a sense of fear, minute or extensive, upon their viewers, past and present. It is also important to note the differences between each canvas in order to deduce the probable type of ex-voto that was intended by the artist.

In the French *Ex-voto de Monsieur Rullier* from 1749, (Fig. 1) now in the Cathédrale de Saint-Louis in La Rochelle, France, elements of a commemorative or congratulatory ex-voto are present. In the foreground, the eye is immediately drawn to a ship that is experiencing distress in the middle of a storm at sea mainly because of the visual inclusion of the swarming action of the waves. The violent waters are highlighted with waves that are tilting the ship, about to cast crewmembers overboard. The ship's inclination to the right leads the viewer's eye upwards, towards the area where the Virgin is seated on a cloud with Jesus placed on her left knee. She is clothed in the emblematic colours of divine royalty; red and blue, which symbolize Mary as she is the mother of Jesus Christ. Her head is tilted downwards as her right hand gestures toward the ship in

the foreground. Therefore, there is an acknowledgment, on Mary's part, of the ship in the foreground; fusing together and paralleling the divine and material realms.

The artist has used a diagonal line which extends from the end of the ship, upward towards the Virgin and Child, guiding the eye from the material to the sacred world. The fact that the eye is primarily guided to the ship and then upwards, to Mary and Jesus, may suggest the correlation between the divine intervention of the saints in regards to the earthly distress of the ship, which is physically visible unlike the realm of the sacred.

In this particular ex-voto, which remains unnamed and without an attributed artist, there is some text which references the image type, year of either the image's production or the occurrence of this shipwreck, and the name of both the boat and the commissioner. At the top left of the canvas, in direct opposition to the Virgin and Child, "Ex-voto 1749" is written which categorizes the image-type as important to its commissioners because their intentions for this image was to commemorate a particularly dangerous happening that was divinely interceded. Across the bottom of the canvas, there is a continuation of text which reads "Le Bel Amy Comde Par Mr. Rullier." This gives us the name of both the name of the ship's captain and the name of the ship depicted, which have been rendered in such a way that recalls a type of plaque with the artist's name, date of production and image's title that is usually placed under a painting. This text contextualizes the event that is taking place on the canvas and directly refers to the commissioner, as a form of thanks to the divinities depicted for saving the crewmembers.

Furthermore, the ship's masts point upwards to the left, creating a diagonal line that draws the eye towards the text "Ex-voto 1759." Therefore, this is the second diagonal line that is stemming out from the ship, creating a 'v' effect which highlights the

ship. It seems as though the text, foreground action of the ship, the sea and divine presence are visually interwoven together through a series of diagonal, horizontal and vertical line constructions that were designed, perhaps, to visually guide the eye through the canvas in order to highlight the most important aspects in this image, the ship.

One more important visual aspect concerning this particular ex-voto are the tones of colour used which mirror the type of foreground action. The colour register is dark and was probably intended to instil a sense of gravity among viewers since the ship is shown in distress. In direct opposition, however, the Virgin and Christ are encircled with a bright burst of light emitting from behind them, a symbolic reference to God. The dark grey clouds in the sky seem to dissipate around the Virgin and Child, almost as to allow the divine intervention to occur; again a symbol of the relationship between divinity and the material realm. The sheer visual interpretation of the gapping void of clouds where the Virgin and Child are serenely stationed can be interpreted as symbolic allusions to their divine interception to answer the prayers of the commissioner, Mr. Rullier, which is essentially to bring the storm to an end and save the crewmembers from harm.

Another ex-voto which is currently at Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde in Marseille, France, entitled the *Ex-voto de La Fortune* (Fig. 2), exhibits mutually exclusive visual means than that commissioned by Mr. Rullier. A major difference lies in the category of ex-voto that this image belongs. Due to the fact that the painting depicts a ship sailing through tranquil waters lends itself to the category of propitiary ex-votos; the image was most probably commissioned in order to protect the crewmembers of the ship from harm. Therefore, the ship itself probably did not experience any distress while on its voyage.

The colour palette can also attest to this as it mirrors the serenity of the foreground action. The bright and calm tones operate in a manner that mirrors the calmness of the ship's journey. Furthermore, attention is focused on the ship when viewing this ex-voto, primarily because of its large size and central placement within the image. Perhaps, the anonymous artist's intention was to stress the prayers of the commissioner which revolved around the divine protection of the ship depicted. Therefore, it is perhaps for this reason that the ship is depicted in a majestic way and takes some attention away from the presence of the Virgin and Child at the leftmost corner of the canvas.

The ship is carefully illustrated with both a studied perspective and intricate linearity; it is rendered in a realistic manner with suitable shading. However, it can be argued that it does blend into the background because of the white of the ship's masts. This could have been intended by the artist because it acts to guide the eye upwards, towards the Virgin and Child who are shown with a bright, yellow light that emits from behind them. Therefore, their presence is not subservient but is as prominent as that of the ship.

In furthering the notion that the artist and commissioner wished for the ship to dominate this image, the depiction of the Virgin and Child is neither meticulously executed nor large in scale. They are rendered quite flatly, without any real perspective, which is odd because of the visually realistic nature of the ship. The only aspect which sets them apart in importance from the rest of the canvas is the burst of yellow light that protrudes from behind them. This colour choice was probably intentional as it visually sets the crowned Virgin and Child apart from the rest of the elements on the canvas.

Again, this highlights the elevated importance of the divine realm. The yellow tone sets the Virgin and Child apart from the material world which is represented by the sea and the ship.

Furthermore, when referencing how the artist chose to separate the Virgin and Child from the rest of the canvas; with the use of colour, the artist seemed to have done something similar with the sea. Towards the top parts of the water, the artist chose green tones which act as a visual separation device between the sky and the water itself. Therefore, the water's importance is also minutely highlighted in this way.

In contrast, another ex-voto which can be found in the Cathédrale de Saint-Louis in La Rochelle, France, entitled the *Ex-voto de Monsieur Hardy* (Fig. 3), exhibits the detrimental situation of the ship in the foreground of the work. This fact alone communicates the notion that this particular painting could be encompassed into either the category of a commemorative or congratulatory ex-voto, akin to the *Ex-voto de Monsieur Rullier* (Fig. 1), because it is displaying a ship in the midst of troubled waters. Therefore, the Virgin and Child would have already intervened and saved the crewmembers before the actual commission of the image. With this in mind, the image was most probably commissioned in order to commemorate the event of divine intervention or to thank the Virgin and Child for their intervention. It is difficult to point out which of these two ex-voto types the image would belong to since both categories are quite similar.

In this image, though the ship's dramatic depiction dominates the image, the inclusion of the Virgin and Child are illustrated on a larger scale than normal; it is quite apparent that the proportion is evidently off and both subjects do not correlate with each

other in size. The ship is obviously in the midst of being overturned as the waves are shown crashing down on the ship's deck. These waves are depicted in a flat manner; the perspective is not well executed. The white colour that is used to highlight their collision with the ship draws the eye to this section, which is in the middle of the canvas. This is due to the fact that the image is predominantly painted with a dark colour palette; the white of the waves is the brightest section of the image.

This brings the viewer's eye into the canvas, primarily into the foreground scene because of the use of colour. The action is dramatized because of the artist's emphasis on the crashing waves. One gets the sense that this particular ex-voto commemorated a particularly extenuating and horrendous episode which was ultimately interceded by the divine; bringing to attention the distinct binaries of the material vis-à-vis the sacred world.

After the viewer has been drawn into the image through the use of colour in the foreground action of the waves, the eye is guided towards the inscription on the top right of the canvas by means of the ship's masts which point in that direction. This can be paralleled with the *Ex-voto de Mr Rullier* (Fig. 1), whose ship's masts operate in a similar manner; in guiding the eye from the foreground action towards the inscription. This is a notable aspect within the canvas because it stresses the fact that this act of divine intervention was factual; the action is corroborated with text.

In this marine ex-voto, it is apparent that text is also a significant detail; it substantiates a context for the image as well as points out the date, name of the ship in distress and the image's commissioner. Today, this couches viewer's interests as they grasp that this act of divine saviour actually occurred in the past. It illustrates the

importance of religion during the time of its production and substantiates the actualization of divine saviour. “La Suzanne Margeurite Commande par Mr. Hardy Ex-voto 1768” is inscribed in immediate opposition to the Virgin and Child. The text is an attestation to the fact that this event actually occurred and that divine intervention took place. Its placement operates within a dialogue with the other two elements in the image; foreground action and the depiction of the Virgin and Child, where the viewer’s attention is finally settled upon. The viewer is left to contemplate the miraculous nature of the Virgin and Child as a means to an end to the story behind the image.

One can deduce the visual implications of the differentiation between the divine and material worlds. Like the *Ex-voto de Mr. Rullier* (Fig. 1) and in contrast to the preceding ex-voto of 1729, the powerful and studied scene of the ship is contrasted by the serene rendering of the Virgin and Child. Though the worldly action is important, the presence of the Virgin and Jesus somewhat supersedes this because of the larger scale on which they were depicted. There is an obvious parallel and differentiation, at the same time, between these two elements on the canvas. The importance of the Virgin and Child is predominant because of the lighter colour palette that has been used to render them. On the other hand, the darker colours used for the ship and its surroundings work on a different level that separates them from the divine realm. The ongoing dichotomy between the realms is obvious to the viewer and acts as a vestige which carries the implied notion that though this world is important, the divine is not subject to comparison.

The visual means that acts to connect the two worlds are the expressions of the Virgin and Child as they look down upon the boat in an empathetic manner. It seems as

though they are about to reverse the action of the waves and save the crewmembers from harm or death. As their heads are bowed down, overlooking the ship, their superiority is implied to the viewer; not only are they placed on a hierarchical scale because of their divinity, but also in terms of visual concerns as they acknowledge the fact that they are placed at a higher level than those on the ship.

In terms of visual implications, it is clear that this image displays an extremely dramatized scene. The perspective rendered by the artist is interesting here because the scale of the Virgin and Child does not correlate with that of the boat; validating the difference of importance between the material and divine worlds. This image's visual conventions in particular, however, harbour a more studied nature than the aforementioned ex-votos. The perspective and linearity are both correctly rendered and settle the viewer's eye in terms of being couched in reality. Therefore, the commissioner of this work of art, namely Mr. Hardy, must have allotted a large sum in order to pay for this skilled artist to render this image.

These three particular ex-votos are emblematic of what one can observe within this image type that has emerged from both La Rochelle and Marseille in France. What can be generalized with these French marine ex-voto images is the fact that many of them have been executed by artists who were not highly skilled. Therefore, the vernacular comes into play here for both French and Quebec marine ex-voto images because the artist's name was generally not included on the canvas, labelling the piece with the term 'anonymous.' Furthermore, in most of the marine ex-votos from France, as well as Quebec, one can observe that such visual aspects as linearity, perspective and realism are not rigorously executed on the canvas, most probably because the artist was not intensely

skilled in comparison to the artists who were members of the French Academy, for example. These artists, at the time and place that their works, particularly marine ex-votos, were completed, were regarded as substantial artists by their communities due to the fact that their works were executed in two smaller and simple coastal cities of France.⁷⁰ In terms of the vernacular and lack of rigorous visual realism, the French and Quebec marine ex-votos are quite similar since French artists were present on voyages to New France and were the sole artists who painted these marine ex-votos; making it difficult to discern any differences between the marine ex-votos completed in these two areas.

In terms of contrasting ex-voto paintings from the areas of France and Quebec, one can take the presence of the saint on canvas into account. Most often with French ex-voto images, the Virgin Mary is depicted and is accompanied by Jesus Christ.⁷¹ However, those images that were rendered in Quebec depict Saint Anne, who is the patron Saint of sea rescue. The reason behind Saint Anne as patron saint of sea rescue belongs to a tradition that predates the colonization of Quebec.⁷² The cult following of Saint Anne can be traced back to Jacques Cartier's voyage to New France in 1535.⁷³ When he arrived in the Blanc-Sablon area, he realized that all of his accompanying ships had disappeared.⁷⁴ Therefore, he and his crewmembers prayed to Saint Anne for their return. Upon his arrival to New France, the other ships miraculously reappeared. When

⁷⁰ Felix Reynaud. *Ex-voto de Notre-Dame de la Garde: La vie publique*. (Marseille: La Thune, 1997), 49.

⁷¹ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 32.

⁷² Jean Simard *Un patrimoine méprise: la religion populaire des Québécois*. (Quebec: Editions Hurtubise HMH, 1979), 84.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

sailors from Brittany set off to New France in 1625, they were aware of this miraculous event and continued on the tradition of praying to Saint Anne for a safe arrival.⁷⁵ Therefore, Saint Anne has since been attributed a cult following for sea rescue, which dates back to 1535. The cult of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré was founded by the sailors of Brittany.⁷⁶ When they set off to Canada, they encountered troubled waters and as they came to the area where we now find the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, the river seemed to ‘shrink’ and the waters became calm.⁷⁷ Since these sailors were safe, they made the vow of constructing a chapel dedicated to Saint Anne, which was the first to honour her.⁷⁸ Therefore, it is for this reason that Quebec ex-votos differ from those from France in terms of visual inclusions.

A notable example of the depiction of Saint Anne within a Quebec marine ex-voto is the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin*, (Fig. 4) the commander of the small boat, La Sainte Anne, in 1709, who faced a deadly disaster at sea when his ship hit a threatening storm.⁷⁹ Edouin’s ship, which was sent to sea in a defending effort by the Governor of Plaisance of Newfoundland, M. de Subercase, was doomed when it came to light that the English planned to attack the French.⁸⁰ However, a Recollet priest who was present on the ship, Father Gaulin, prayed fervently on the deck. In turn, the ship was saved and an image was commissioned by Charles Edouin for the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré in order to give thanks to Saint Anne, to celebrate her miracle and to fulfill religious

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Francois-Marc Gagnon. *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France*. (Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1976.), 119.

⁸⁰ J. Russell Harper. *La Peinture au Canada: des origines a nos jours*. (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1969), 15.

vows.⁸¹ It is for this reason that the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin* falls under the category of a congratulatory ex-voto; it was executed in order to pay tribute to Saint Anne's divine interception. This is known because of a letter that was written by Father Gaulin on July 25th, 1709.⁸² It was probably during its journey from Newfoundland to Quebec that Mr. Edouin's boat, *La Sainte Anne*, would have experienced difficulty in stormy weather, or such, and would have been miraculously saved by *Sainte Anne*.⁸³

This marine ex-voto has been labelled as a part of the most common category of ex-voto; congratulatory, which were commissioned to give thanks in return for a favour that was granted by the saint depicted within the image. In the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin*, Saint Anne is depicted illuminated by a light emitting from behind her as she sits on a cloud in a red dress and dark blue cloak with her right hand extending downwards to the worldly action and her left hand reposed on her lap. She is looking upwards, seemingly at three angel heads as her presence occupies one fourth of the canvas. Here, there is an obvious disproportion between the worldly action and the divinity.

Below, in the foreground of the canvas, there is a ship, namely *La Sainte Anne*, which is caught in a rather serious storm. There are three visible figures on board whose identities have been previously referenced. The three men are clearly working to save the ship from tipping over and being lost at sea. The scale to which these three men have been depicted when compared to Saint Anne is very telling of the era in which the image was depicted. Saint Anne's presence is the obvious focal point of the image which single handedly mirrors the fact that many individuals were religiously devout. The serene nature of the saint in the sky is well juxtaposed with the troublesome situation of the

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

worldly action, which provides a window into the manner in which individuals viewed the divine world.

As a means to substantiate this view of eighteenth century Quebec society, the waves have been dramatically rendered, possibly to imply the severity of the problem as well as the magnitude to which Saint Anne was called to intervene. In order to further dramatize the foreground action, the artist has taken the liberty of correlating the intense difficulty that the ship is withstanding with the dreary and dark colour palette of the worldly action. This is quite well contrasted with the brighter colour choices that have been used to render the Saint as well as the light emitting from in back of her and the three angel heads that have been positioned to her left.

Therefore, with this canvas, it is apparent that the foreground worldly action is intentionally distinguished from the upper register of the image where the saint is positioned, which is where the viewer's eye is initially drawn to when viewing the image. With this in mind, it must be noted that Saint Anne is looking upwards. This may be due to the notion that Saint Anne is acting as the vestige through which God will intervene and save Mr. Edouin's crew from harm. Therefore, she is looking upwards, where God is symbolically present, in order to ask him for aid.

Though the image itself clearly sets the tone for a strict differentiation between the realm of the divine and the worldly, there is a particular aesthetic aspect of the image which acts to correlate the two realms; the ship's masts. The manner in which the masts extend into the sky acts to lead the eye from the world of the sacred, downwards into the material world. With this sole inclusion, it seems as though there may have been a sense

of the notion that, though both worlds are mutually exclusive, they share the convention of co-existence.

Secondly, a well-known Quebec ex-voto which harbors interesting imagery whose character does not display conventions of an emblematic marine ex-voto is the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* (Fig. 5) which is also located in the Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. This image exudes all characteristics of a propitiary ex-voto since it was produced in order to shield Madame Riverin's husband from harm while he was away at sea.⁸⁴ The image was commissioned by Madame Riverin herself, a member of the Conseil Souverain du Quebec, in the name of her husband, who was supposedly lost at sea⁸⁵. This ex-voto illustrated Madame Riverin, in distinct upper class Parisian dress, in the company of her four children, all of which are praying on bended knee. The style of this image enjoys the conventions of the social status of the commissioner and the poses of each individual within the image conform to popular canons of the time which mention or depict upper class society.

The *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* was completed in order to request protection from Saint Anne.⁸⁶ In this image, Saint Anne is depicted on the top left of the canvas in a dark blue and white dress with a yellow "echarpe" and has an open book on her lap.⁸⁷ She is illuminated by several bright bursts of light while Madame Riverin and her four children, depicted in a prayer position, look on in the foreground of the canvas. This ex-voto, in particular, is quite unconventional in comparison to the aforementioned marine ex-voto since there is no worldly action and the family is depicted in a chapel.

⁸⁴ Colette and Francois Boulet. *Ex-voto marins*. (Switzerland: Roto-Sadag, 1978), 157.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Furthermore, Saint Anne, Madame Riverin and her children are all depicted on the same scale of proportion which is something that is rare in marine ex-voto paintings from Quebec during the eighteenth century. This may be due to the notion that Madame Riverin was the wife of an affluent man in Quebec society and therefore, would have been able to pay for an artist who was highly skilled at the time of the image's execution.

There has been speculation in regards to the artist's identity since the canvas does not harbor any signature. Many have studied and have come to the conclusion that the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* had been painted by an artist by the name of Mr. Dessailiant since other works with similar visual conventions stemming from this time in Quebec were attributed to him.⁸⁸ During the years of 1701 – 1706, there were no documents pertaining to Mr. Dessailiant, however, the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* was attributed to him by G. Morisset during this time.⁸⁹ The image is oil on cloth of small dimensions, 18” by 20 ½” in the Musée des Peres Redemptoristes in the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré.⁹⁰ There are some archival documents from 1844 on this image, which states that it depicted Mme Riverin and her four daughters.⁹¹ This archival information also states that Mme Riverin had given the church a votive ‘tableaux’ and a book on November 1st, 1703, which allowed the image to be dated to the year 1703.⁹²

This source also provides a history of the Riverin family, which helps to explain the marine ex-voto image. Denis Riverin married Angelique Riverin, nee Gaultier, in 1696 and they had four children: Angelique-Jeanne (1697), Denis-Francois (1698),

⁸⁸ Francois-Marc Gagnon. *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France*. (Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1976.), 114.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 112.

⁹¹ Ibid. 114.

⁹² Ibid.

Marie-Madeleine (1699) and Marie-Clemence (1700).⁹³ During the formation of the colony of New France in 1700, Denis was named one of the first directors of the colony, which validated his importance.⁹⁴ Due to his title, he allocated much of his money to allow the colony to grow and as time elapsed, he became director of the Compagnie Mont-Louis in Gaspe, a place where he was eager to exploit fishing and agriculture.⁹⁵ In effect, his social status was elevated and he was named the chief representative of the Colony of France (Compagnie de la Colonie de France) and decided to leave New France for good.⁹⁶ At this point, it is speculated that this is when the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* was rendered; perhaps when Denis departed New France, his wife had commissioned an ex-voto for his safe return to France or due to the fact that he had encountered a sickness or a shipwreck on his travels.⁹⁷

With this information at hand, it may be deduced that this particular marine ex-voto was intended to be a propitiary ex-voto whose purpose was to attract divine protection in order to shield a party or a person from harm. Though it is not a conventional marine ex-voto due to the lack of a ship in the foreground of the image, it is still subject to a visual analysis whereby the divine and material realms correlate on canvas.

In this image, Saint Anne is depicted on the top left of the canvas in a dark blue and white dress with a yellow “echarpe” and holds an open book on her lap.⁹⁸ She is illuminated by several bright bursts of light while Madame Riverin and her four children,

⁹³ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Colette and Francois Boulet. *Ex-voto marins*. (Switzerland: Roto-Sadag, 1978), 157.

depicted in prayer position, look upwards toward Saint Anne in the foreground of the canvas. Due to the fact that Mme Riverin and her four children visually acknowledge the presence of Saint Anne acts as a vessel through which the divine and physical spheres are connected within this image. As they literally look up to Saint Anne, the viewer is encouraged to do the same since their stares evoke a linear path which draws the viewer's eye towards the divinity; visually linking the sacred with the worldly.

With this in mind, the light emitting from behind the Saint draws the eye upwards and, in effect, acts to highlight the sacred, which is seemingly the most important inclusion within this marine ex-voto. This notion is substantiated by the fact that the saint is illustrated at a higher level than those of the physical world, placing divinity at an implied hierarchical level. Also, since the image is depicted within a chapel, the divine realm shares a closer tie to this particular ex-voto as 'the church' is symbolically God's home on earth.

The rich tones used in this marine ex-voto are also of great importance in terms of the sacred and physical spheres. It is apparent that the colours mirror the traditional 'richness' of those who belonged to the upper class within French society. The comportment of the five individuals also mirrors the etiquette of the upper class with their straight posture and solemn facial expressions; two importantly characteristic indications of children who were brought up in a wealthy environment. Furthermore, due to the fact that the family is dressed in clothing that resemble that of royalty, it is here that the royalty of the divine family may be correlated in the ex-voto with the Riverin family. As the image arguably displays the affluence of the family as opposed to the traditional marine ex-voto where a ship is depicted at sea, it may be deduced that Madame Riverin

intentionally requested that the image display these aesthetic conventions in terms of the foreground 'action.' The matriarch may have intended to illustrate her personal view regarding her family's psychological and religious proximity to the realm of the divine, which would infer the reasoning as to the image's depiction within a chapel.

In furthering this concept, the dark, golden trimmed curtains that are laid out atop the Riverin family may allude to the religious nature of the family. Throughout the history of religious painting, many images included a domed enclosure which was positioned over those belonging to the sacred realm, namely the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and respective saints. This vertical enclosure was often used as a symbol for the dome of heaven of which these individuals would belong. Therefore, it is a possibility that this visual inclusion was intended to allude to this 'dome of heaven,' which substantiates the correlation between the Riverin family and that of the divine; perhaps at the request the commissioner, Madame Riverin, herself, who may have thought that this association may have acted as a substantial means to save and protect her husband who was at sea.

In terms of the manner in which Saint Anne has been rendered, she is by no means clothed in similar 'rich' dress as those of the Riverin family. In opposition, she is depicted in a lightly coloured garment which is somewhat reminiscent of the light that emanates from behind her. In keeping in a similar vein, Saint Anne's headdress is emblematic of the bourgeois class of the time as it is not as elaborate as that worn by Madame Riverin. Due to the fact that Saint Anne was originally not apart of an affluent family, when referring to the Bible as a primary source, it may be for this reason that she is, at times, depicted wearing clothing that references her humble roots. Whether or not

Saint Anne was depicted as a member of the middle or royal class, it was usually dependent on the artist.

It is apparent that this image's visual conventions act to both separate and correlate the material and divine realms in spite of the unconventional nature of the marine ex-voto. Regardless, this image may be considered as a creative and original rendition of a marine ex-voto that elicits a hierarchical model to its viewers in terms of divine and material spheres as well as social classes of the era that were present in Quebec during the early eighteenth century.

A third Quebec image which exhibits the main visual characteristics of a marine ex-voto is entitled the *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat* (Fig. 6). Based on the image's historical documents and knowledge, this ex-voto would fall under the category of a commemorative ex-voto which were intended to remind its viewers and commissioners of a past divine intervention in the face of a threatening obstacle. According to archival information as well as the inscription on the canvas, this marine ex-voto was executed in 1706 by an anonymous artist and is of a considerable size at 45" by 60".⁹⁹

There are two instances where the viewer may observe the inscription of '1706' on the canvas. The first is positioned next to Saint Anne and the Virgin Mary and is accompanied by 'Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat.' The second may be observed on the central flag which floats in the air atop the ship. The dual inclusion of this year acts to prove the fact that this image was executed in the same year that the Joybert embarked on its voyage and encountered an English ship, The Pembroke Galley.¹⁰⁰ This is important since the year included on the canvas of an ex-voto image is often disputed in regards to

⁹⁹ Francois-Marc Gagnon. *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France*. (Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1976.), 115.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

whether it were the date of the image's execution or the date of the occurrence that the painting depicts.

The story that accompanies this particular ex-voto is quite well known due to documents that have been well preserved at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré near Quebec City, where this image had originally been donated and still remains on exhibition to date. The ex-voto was initially intended for the commemoration of the marine rescue of Ludovicy Prat, a successful innkeeper and merchant who oversaw the port of Quebec.¹⁰¹ As a member of the town of Languedoc, Ludovicy Prat immigrated to Quebec in the early eighteenth century.¹⁰² After seeking out various types of employment, he decided to embark as a crewmember on the ship, Joybert.¹⁰³ Three months after the ship went on its journey, the ship encountered an English opponent at sea whose vessel was entitled the Pembroke Galley.¹⁰⁴ The crewmembers who were present on this English ship were demonized in historical documents because they were believed to have been responsible for burning several villages in the Terre-Neuve region.¹⁰⁵ After putting up a fight, the Joybert won against the English marines and in effect, Ludovicy Prat decided to have this image commissioned and dedicated to St. Anne as a thank you for his answered prayers of saving the ship.¹⁰⁶

The *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat* illustrates a ship in profile that is ornamented with a winged figure holding an arrow at the boat's prow, which is the projecting part or front of a ship. Saint Anne is depicted on the top left of the canvas, holding her daughter, the

¹⁰¹ Colette and Francois Boulet. *Ex-voto marins*. (Switzerland: Roto-Sadag, 1978), 111.

¹⁰² Francois-Marc Gagnon. *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France*. (Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1976.), 112.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁶ Colette and Francois Boulet. *Ex-voto marins*. (Switzerland: Roto-Sadag, 1978), 111.

Virgin, while they are seated on clouds. The two divine entities are illuminated in the sky by an overpowering burst of light which is emitting from behind them. This light grabs the viewer's attention directly to Saint Anne and the Virgin Mary, as if to highlight the sacred realm in terms of its importance vis-à-vis the material world. Due to the fact that the two Saints are looking downward toward the ship at sea, a line is created which then draws the viewer's eye downward from the sky toward the foreground worldly action of the ship. It may be construed that the sacred realm is visually held in higher regard in comparison to that of the material because the image is a commemoration of the interception of the divine; had it not been for this sacred act, Mr. Prat would have not been saved and this ex-voto would have not been commissioned.

On the other hand, Le Joybert occupies most of the image's space which may imply the ship's, and, in effect, the material realm's, importance to the viewer. This correlates with another interesting point that has been expanded upon in the past concerning this marine ex-voto which is that it may have been executed in order to instill The Joybert's commercial and lucrative importance in Quebec at the time.

Furthermore, there is a figure positioned under St. Anne who has been believed to represent St. Michel, the patron saint of defending the Catholic religion against English Protestantism.¹⁰⁷ In this image, the French are victorious in the face of the English. Therefore, his inclusion becomes obviously correct since the Joybert won the battle against its English opponents, the Pembroke Galley.

¹⁰⁷ Nicole Cloutier, "L'iconographie de Sainte Anne au Québec" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Montréal, 1982), 253.

Positioned between Saint Anne holding the Virgin Mary and Saint Michel is the flag which represents Quebec's port.¹⁰⁸ This visual inclusion may act to substantiate the notion that the marine ex-voto's execution was also intended to elicit the lucrative and commercial importance of the Joybert's voyage.

The marine *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat* (Fig. 6) is quite similar to the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin* (Fig. 4). Both images illustrate comparable visual characteristics in terms of the depiction of Saint Anne since she is the highlighted area on both canvases, as well as in the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* (Fig. 5). The manner in which she is depicted in terms of her dress and the colour palette that had been used vary in each image, however, she is perpetually illustrated as a humble and devout Saint who acknowledges the foreground image of each ex-voto with empathy.

In addition to these similarities, the theory of the sublime plays an integral role and correlates each image to each other in terms of the reasoning behind the ex-voto's depiction.¹⁰⁹ As previously stated, the link that allows these images to be so closely related is both the dichotomy of the divine and sacred realms as well as the fact that the sea elicited terror within France's and Quebec's inhabitants during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The fact that the sea was unknown in terms of its vastness and its unpredictable nature, it elicited terror and fear within the population.¹¹⁰ This element of the unknown was often paralleled with an element of the divine because of the magnitude and unpredictable manifestations of the sea. It was thought that the sea's activity was

¹⁰⁸ Francois-Marc Gagnon. *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France*. (Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1976.), 112.

¹⁰⁹ Edward N. Hooker, comp. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 32.

¹¹⁰ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 32

operated by the hand of God. Therefore, in this sense, the marine ex-voto images exude traits of the divine in the sacred realm as well as in the natural world through the representation of the sea. The marine ex-voto image type, in this case, may be viewed as a 'pure' representation of divinity, in the strictest sense of the word, since the divine is exhibited in its capacity in the natural world as well as in the sacred sphere, which may be referred to as heaven.

In continuing with this thought, the final Quebec marine ex-voto to be analyzed with the theory of the sublime in close accordance, is entitled the *Ex-voto des cinq naufragés de Lévis* (Fig. 7). The story behind the image's depiction has been preserved and accounts for each visual inclusion on the canvas. On June 17, 1754, at 2 o'clock in the morning, two young men by the names of Jean Baptiste-Aucler and Louis Bouvier, were travelling across the St. Lawrence River in the company of three young women, Marthe Feuilletau, Mra (*sic*) Chamar, and Marguerite Champagne.¹¹¹ After encountering troubled waters because of stormy weather, the boat was overturned and the three young women were thrown overboard.¹¹² Only two of the young women were saved along with the two young men.¹¹³ The image shows the two young men saving one women while Saint Anne looks on in an effort to provide divine intervention to the troubled group. The marine ex-voto also harbors a rather lengthy inscription describing the incident.

¹¹¹ J. Russell Harper. *La Peinture au Canada: des origines a nos jours*. (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1969), 17.

¹¹² Colette and Francois Boulet. *Ex-voto marins*. (Switzerland: Roto-Sadag, 1978), 141.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Apparently, in the Middle Ages, the cult of Saint Anne enjoyed a large following in the North and West of France, which eventually moved over to Canada.¹¹⁴ In 1658, the Jesuits built a church in the honour of the Virgin Mary on the St. Lawrence River.¹¹⁵ This church can be seen on the immediate right of this ex-voto, whose initial location was also in the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré near Quebec City.¹¹⁶

When one first views this image, it is apparent that the artist has separated the canvas into two distinct registers. Within the top register of the canvas, St. Anne is depicted in the middle, surrounded by clouds and an inscription concerning the events of the divine interception that reads “Ex-Voto J.B.T Aucler Louis Bouvier, Marthe Feuilleteau, tous 3 sauves, , Mra (*sic*) Chamar, Mar. Champagne age de 20 ans un jour tout doux noyez. Le 17 juin 1754, a 2 heures du matin tous 5 dans ce triste état Se recomandant a la bien heureuse Ste. Anne.” This inscription is broken up into two areas, on the left and right of Saint Anne, who is positioned in the middle of the sky. Saint Anne is highlighted in this way because she is enveloped in the inscription. Her pose is very similar to that in the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin* (Fig. 4): with her right hand extended downwards to the worldly action and in red dress with a dark blue cloak.

The clouds that have been rendered around Saint Anne resemble smoke clouds with their gray colour and less studied dimensionality. The clouds, along with the inscription act to highlight Saint Anne, who is the initial subject that draws the viewer’s eye into the canvas. With this fact in mind, the divine sphere is highlighted since the viewer’s eye is primarily drawn in by the saint.

¹¹⁴ J. Russell Harper. *La Peinture au Canada: des origines a nos jours*. (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1969), 17.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Another manner in which the sacred realm is highlighted within this marine ex-voto is the presence of two visible churches on the landscape; one on the right and one on the left of the image. One of these structures, namely the one on the viewer's right, is documented as being the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. The inclusion of this church validates the importance of the divine realm as well as Saint Anne as the patron saint of marine rescue. This church represents the devotion of the commissioners of the image in terms of their religious beliefs as well as the notion that Saint Anne did in fact save these young adults, making this ex-voto a part of the category of congratulatory ex-votos. Therefore, it can be observed, once again, that the sacred is represented in both the worldly and divine spheres which may be a visual means to confirm the commissioner's gratitude in regards to Saint Anne's divine interception in accordance to this distressing event at sea.

On the other hand, the foreground worldly action within this marine ex-voto does spatially take up a larger part of the canvas and draws the viewer's eye through a vertical line that ranges from the saint toward the middle of the overturned boat. Here, one can observe the two men, Jean Baptiste-Aucler and Louis Bouvier, as they are saving Marthe Feuilleteau, while the other two young women, Mra (*sic*) Chamar, and Marguerite Champagne, are in the river, awaiting aid.

The colour register that has been used for this image is somewhat monochromatic and neutral and does not completely mirror the action that is taking place within the image. This may be due to the fact that, though the event could have been tragic, Saint Anne's interception saved the young group. What is interesting in terms of the image's colour palette is the artist's use of red; a red jacket is worn by the young man on the left,

a red hat is worn by the young man on the right and Saint Anne is clothed in a red dress. These three uses of red create a triangle which acts to visually connect the otherwise horizontally divided canvas; the upper register and lower register do not harbor such an extreme disconnect.

This use of colour becomes another visual aspect which parallels the divine and worldly spheres; it bonds the two exclusive worlds together through two young men and a saint. Therefore, it becomes apparent that this marine ex-voto holds a deeper visually grounding of the connection between the divine and worldly realms than the aforementioned Quebec marine ex-voto images.

As previously mentioned, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a time when trade and exploration were at a peak, especially in France and Quebec. Due to the fact that these two places share close cultural and historical ties, their pasts directly relate to and are enmeshed in one another. There were many expeditions and trade routes that stemmed from France towards the New World, Africa and other countries in Europe. Unfortunately, some of these expeditions on ship were subject to dangers at sea; whether it was because of stormy weather or treacherous waters. When a ship experienced difficulty at sea and did not return home, family and friends of the crewmembers would receive the information that their loved ones would not be returning home. This information would then spread among the members of their respective towns; instilling a fear among the French in accordance to the safety of their loved ones who were destined to go to sea for trade or on exploration voyages. It is for this very reason that marine ex-votos, propitiary, commemorative and congratulatory, were rendered as a means to protect loved ones, or either to commemorate or congratulate divine intervention.

The motive behind the fact that the populace of Quebec and France chose to resort to the sacred in order for the safe return of their respective loved ones was mainly due to their fear of the sea.¹¹⁷ Upon gaining the knowledge of horror stories regarding those who had lost their lives while on voyages, there was nothing anyone could do to protect travelers from these waters, other than pray and rely on divinity for intervention and savior.¹¹⁸ Therefore, yet again, the close attachment that was felt by the individuals towards the sacred realm can be observed; the reasoning and reliance behind the production of ex-votos.

Through the observations of these four Quebec marine ex-voto images, namely the *Ex-voto de Charles Edouin* (Fig. 4), the *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants* (Fig. 5), the *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat* (Fig. 6) and the *Ex-voto des cinq naufragés de Lévis* (Fig. 7), much can be deduced concerning the high level of devoutness that was harbored by the inhabitants of both France and, consequently, Quebec. Due to the fact that France greatly influenced Quebec with its colonization, it is difficult to see a difference between the two cultures and social aspects.

The ex-voto stems from a long and religious tradition of Christians who believed purely and supremely in the governance of God and his saints. Aside from devoting their lives to God in their fullest capacity, they extended their devotion through the commission of many ex-voto images which now adorn a multitude of churches and museums around the world.

The correlation between the divine and natural world is also seen through these images as they display both realms in coexistence with each other. This was the view of

¹¹⁷ J. Lepage, E. Rieth and D. Samson. *Ex-voto marins du ponant*. (Paris: Musée de la Marine, 1975), 29.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

the average religious individual living in either France or Quebec; Christianity overruled their hearts and minds and gave way to an art practice that not only documented certain tragic and joyful events, in terms of the ex-voto image type, but gave thanks to the divine and commemorated in gratitude the sacred interception and savior of otherwise disastrous events.

The theory of the sublime gives way to these images as a reasoning behind the innate fear that was held by many in regards to the vastness and mysterious nature of the sea. The fact that it elicited a tremendous amount of terror confirms the existence of these marine ex-voto images. Since nothing could be done for ships that were caught in a catastrophic storm, for example, the only substantial thing to rely upon was prayer and religion. This can be observed within each studied Quebec marine ex-voto canvas whose visual representations, perspective, use of colour, linearity and dimensionality attest to the importance of the divine sphere in regards to the natural realm.

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Figures

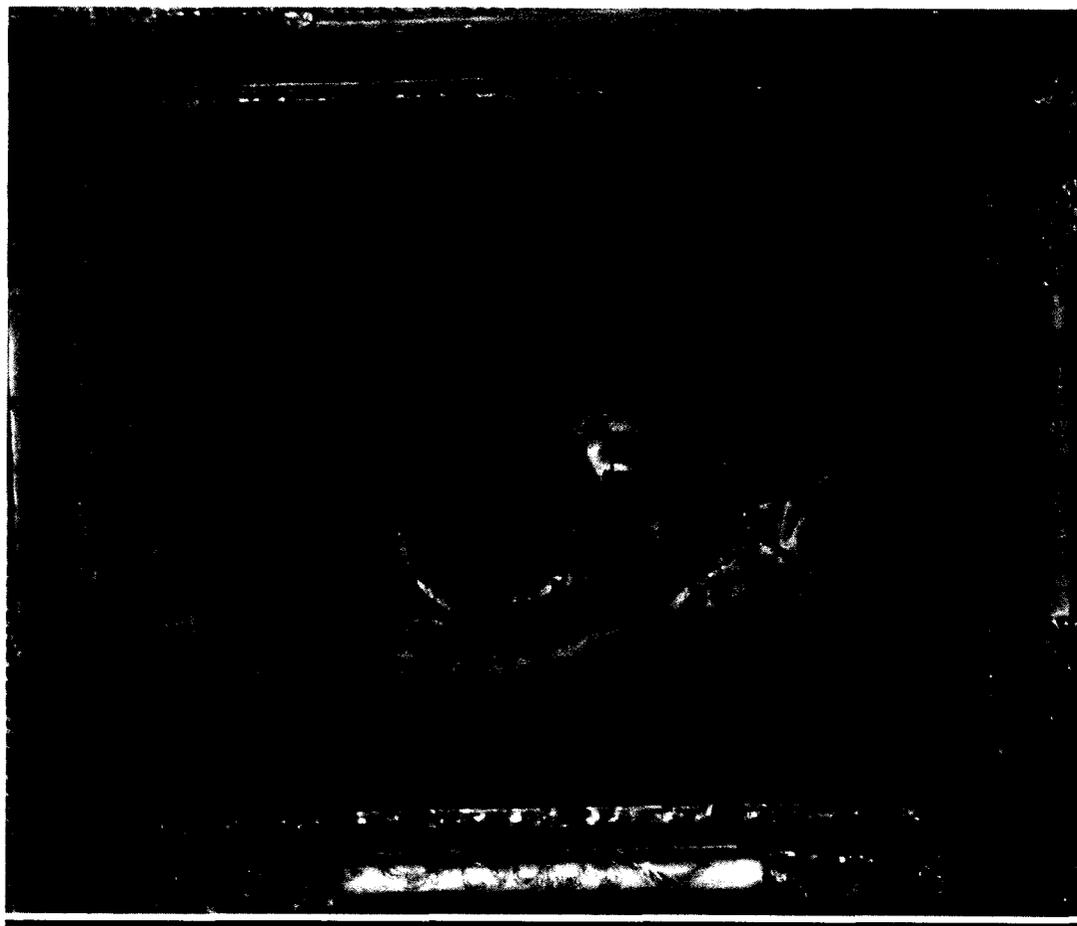


Figure 1 : Anonymous, *Ex-voto de Monsieur Rullier*, 1749, Cathédrale de Saint-Louis, La Rochelle, France.



Figure 2 : Anonymous, *Ex-voto de La Fortune*, 1729, Cathédrale de Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, Marseille, France.

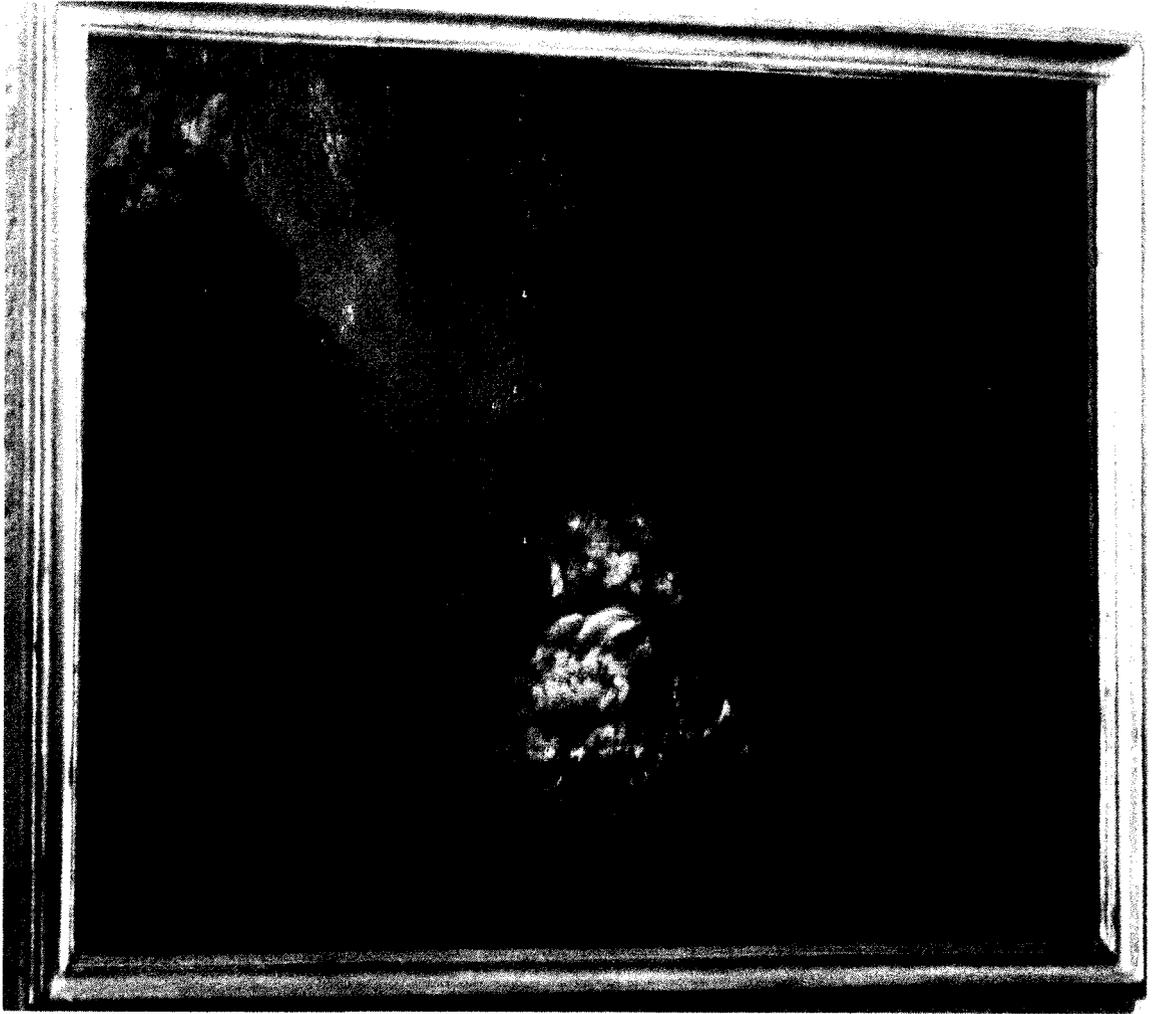


Figure 3: Anonymous, *Ex-voto de Monsieur Hardy*, 1768, Cathédrale de Saint-Louis, La Rochelle, France.

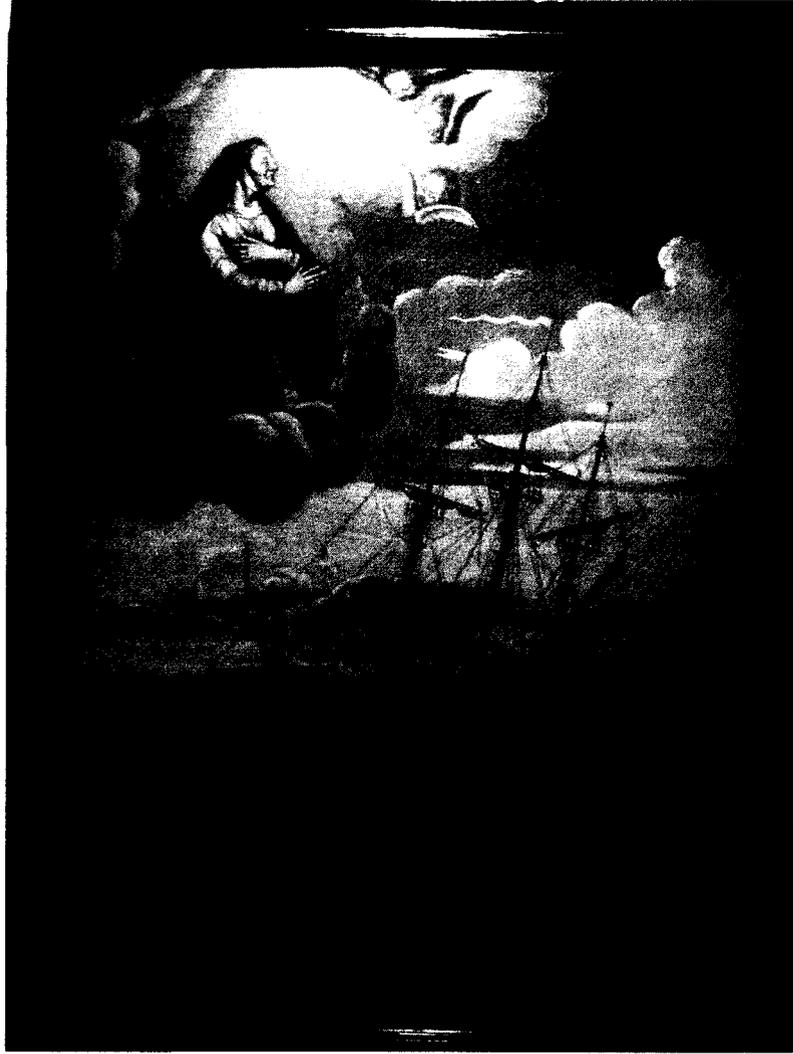


Figure 4 : Anonymous, Ex-voto de Charles Edouin, 1709, Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Québec.

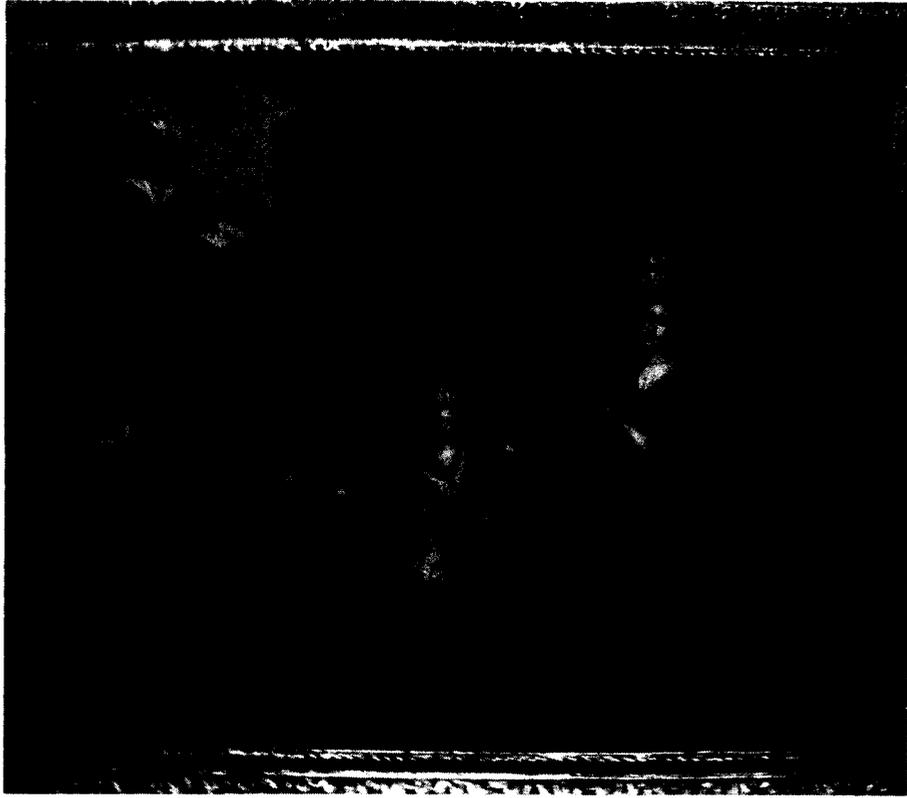


Figure 5 : Anonymous, *Ex-voto de Madame Riverin et ses enfants*, 18th century, Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Québec.

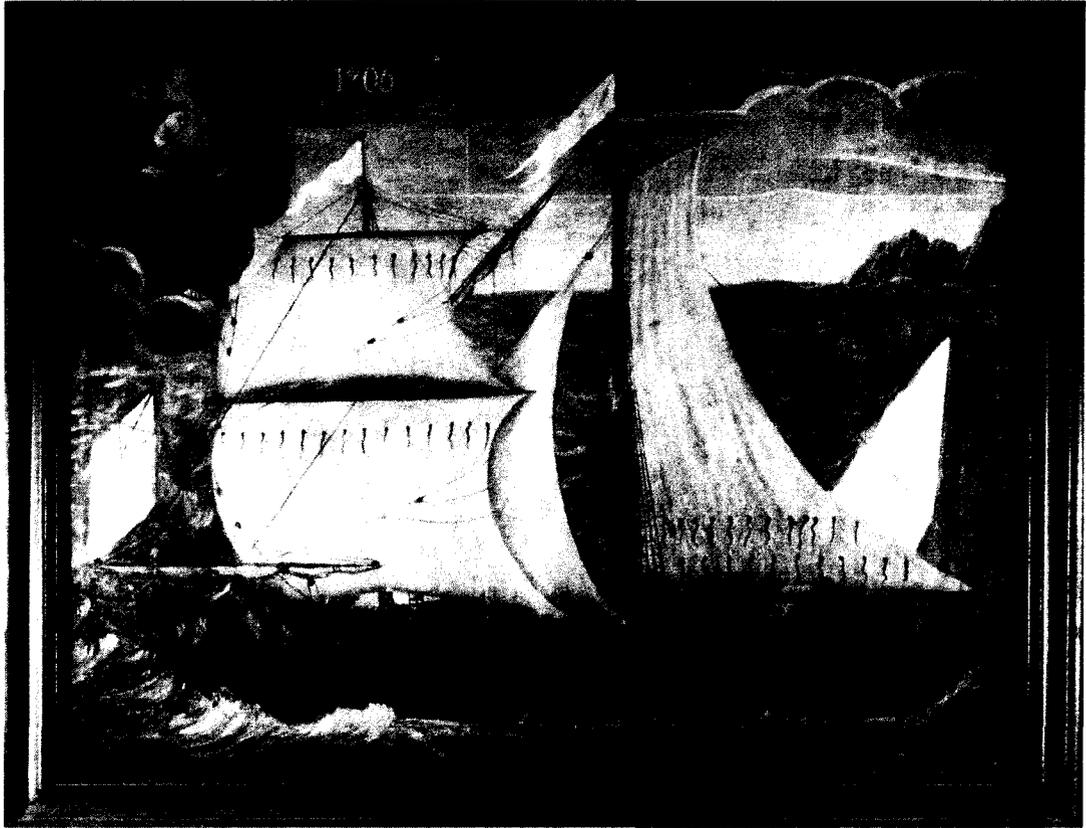


Figure 6: Anonymous, *Ex-voto de Ludovicy Prat*, 1706. Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Québec.

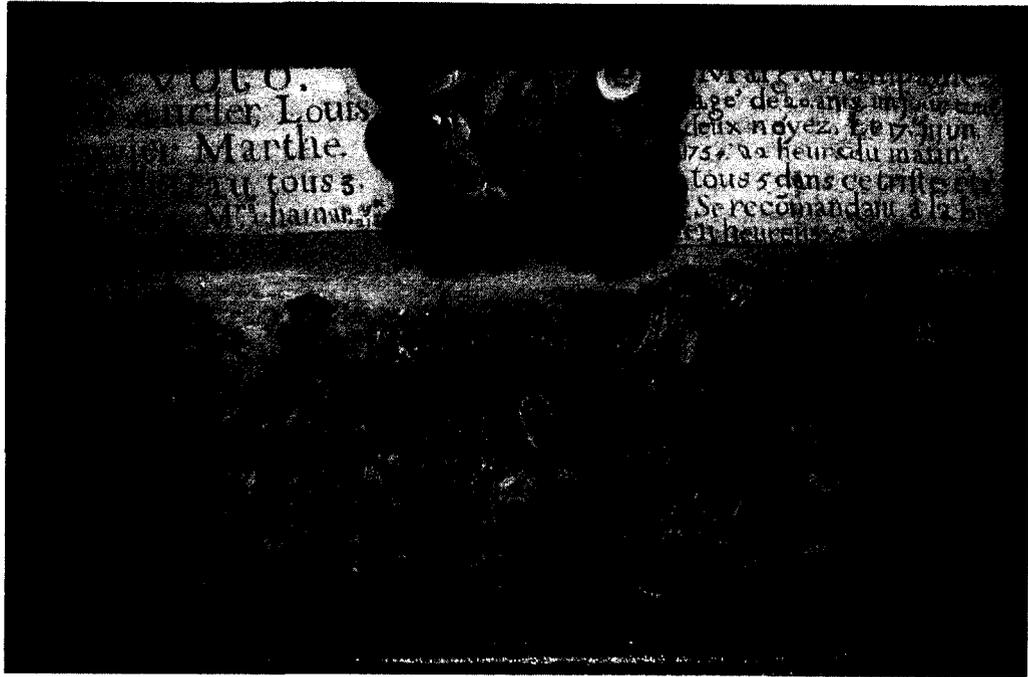


Figure 7 : Anonymous, *Ex-voto des cinq naufragés de Lévis*, 1754, Musée de Sainte-Anne-de-Baupré, Québec.

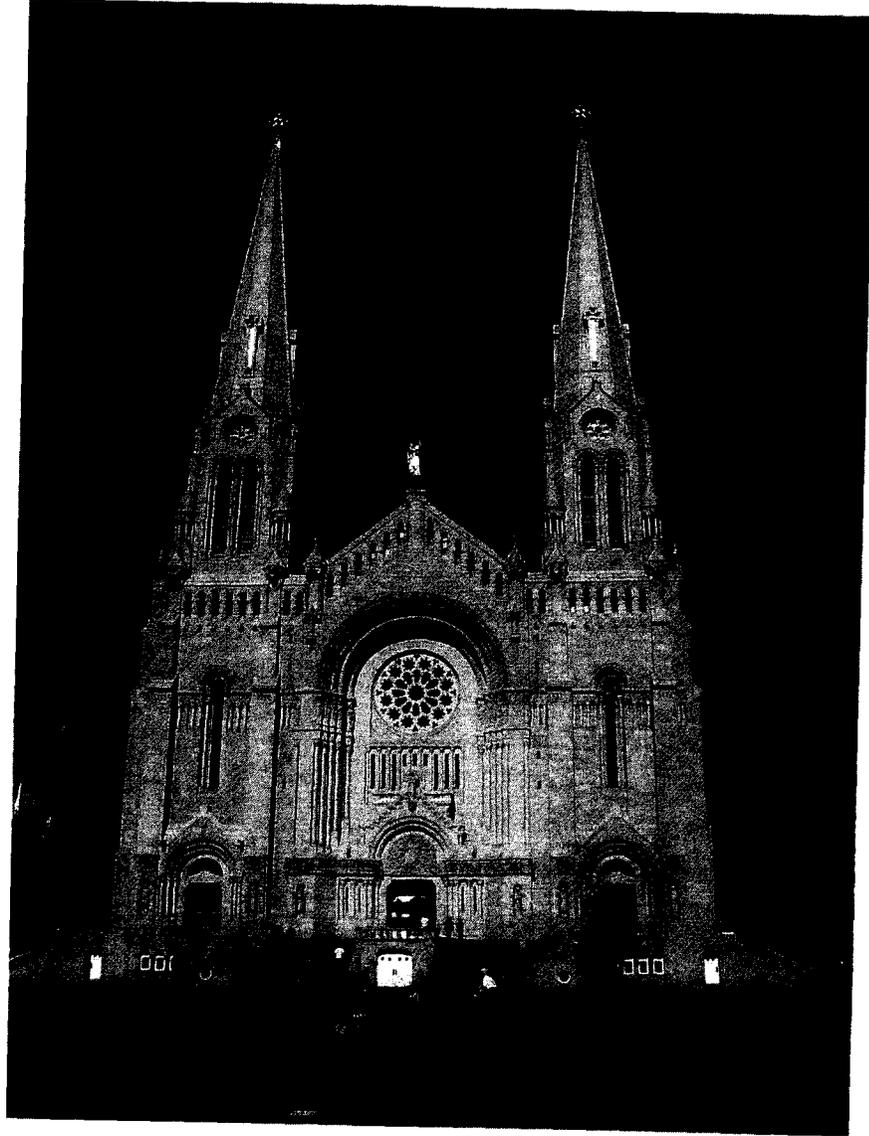


Figure 8 : Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Baupré, 1876,
Sainte-Anne-de-Baupré, Québec.