

Scenes from the religious life according to Alessandro Magnasco

A number of paintings by Alessandro Magnasco (1667-1749) depict Jewish, Catholic and Protestant rituals, as well as the daily lives of religious people (priests, pastors, rabbis, monks and nuns in particular). Thematically, these paintings construct an *imaginaire* (in the sense of shared images given to the term by Louis Althusser) of religions from a Catholic point of view (that of the Genoese-born painter), but this point of view is clearly open to other faiths, as evidenced by Magnasco's depictions of synagogue interiors, convents, monasteries and Quaker preaching. In at least one case, there is also a deliberate search for comparatism, as his painting of *Jewish Funerals* (kept in the Musée d'art et d'histoire du judaïsme [Mahj] in Paris) was very likely conceived as a counterpart to *Homage to Pluto* (kept in a private collection). This combination brings together two approaches to death, one Jewish, the other ancient Greco-Roman. Through iconographic comparisons with the works of Albrecht Altdorfer, Albrecht Dürer, Giovanni Andrea dalle Piane, Jacob Isaackszon van Ruisdael, Romeyn de Hooghe, Gerrit Berckeyde, Emmanuel de Witte (Catholic and Protestant artists who all depicted Jewish worship spaces and rites, Christian and ancient Greco-Roman rites), and based on an analysis of ten of Magnasco's paintings illuminated by their historical contexts of creation (especially pre-anthropological and pre-ethnographic publications by Tommaso Porcacchi, Francesco Perucci, Claude Guichard, Pierre Muret, Claude François Ménestrier, Johann Nicolai, Bernart and Picart, among others), we will seek to clarify the specificity of the imaginary of religions shaped by Magnasco's atypical (at least in early modern Italy) paintings of scenes from the religious life. Although they cannot be taken as reliable historical and ethnographic documents, these artistic fictions that concretely acknowledge religious otherness are nonetheless important milestones in the construction of religious *imaginaire* of Italy and, more broadly, of premodern Christianity.

Matthieu Somon

Research Chair in Art and Theology at UCLouvain.

My research focuses on the relationship between art and the religions of the three Abrahamic monotheisms. I've taught early modern art history at Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University, Université catholique d'Angers (UCO) and UCLouvain. I've been curator of two exhibitions : "Moïse, figure d'un prophète" at the Jewish museum in Paris, and "Formes du salut" at Musée L in Louvain-la-Neuve, in collaboration with KIK-IRPA.