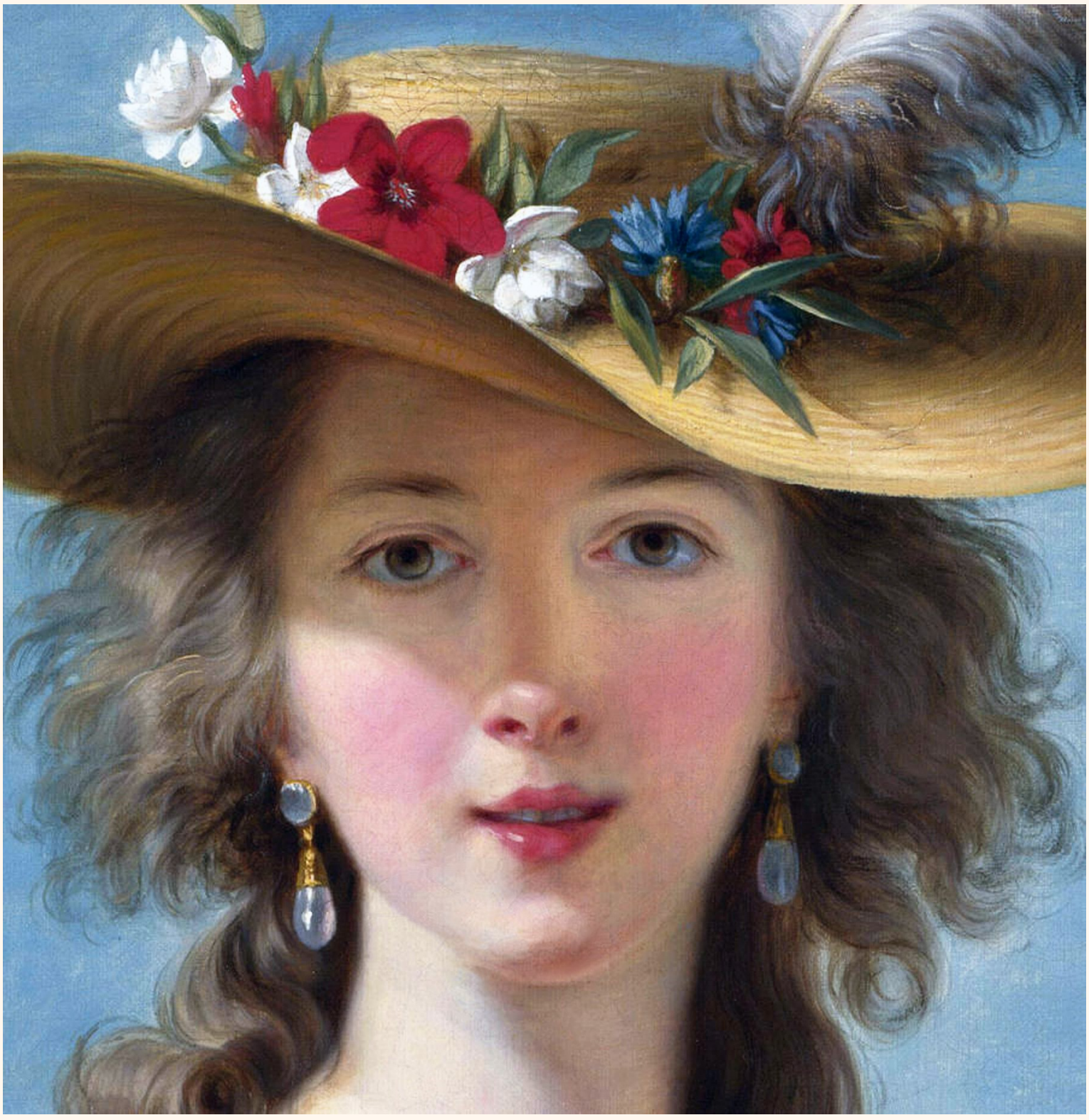
Vigée-Lebrun

2022 virtual gallery, 360 paintings and 840 Illustrations in HD, with zoomed details and a few comments, (free download, under this page).

Charles Deseilligny *(in French Here, raw images, without any text, Here)*



Self-portrait of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, at age 27.

NOTICE! This PDF document was designed to be read like an open book (written in 14 or 16 font), with 2 pages on screen, as they always complement each other visually, clicking for MACs (after having opened it in 'Preview') on 'double page' + 'full screen', or for PCs on 'two pages' + 'cover page' + put the 'F11 key' (for full screen).

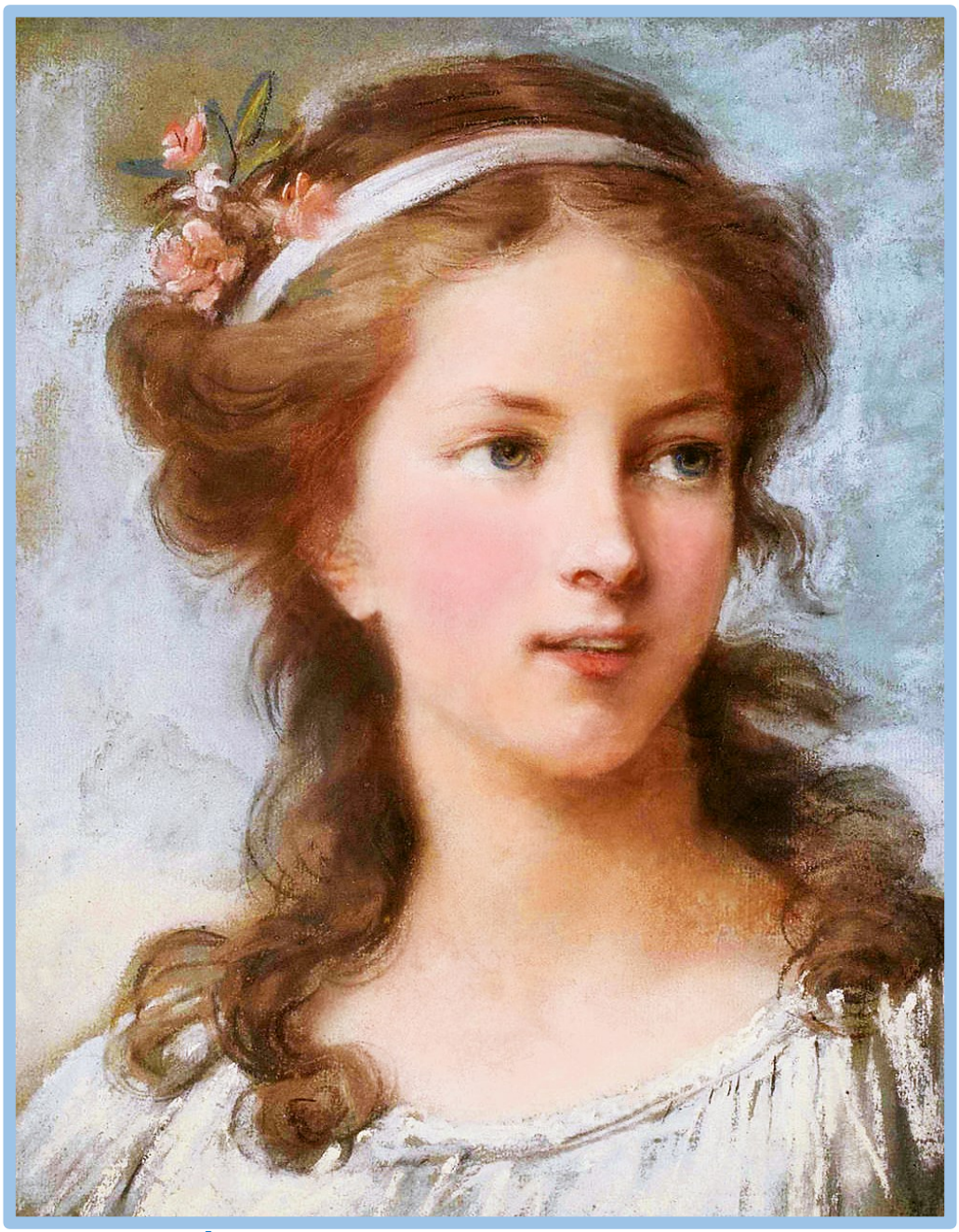
INTRODUCTION and SUMMARY. Chapter 1, early period in Paris (1755-1775). **Louise Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842),** is a famous French portrait painter who made nearly 800 paintings at the turn of 18th and 19th centuries. She saw 5 French Kings pass (Louis XV, XVI and XVIII, Charles X, Louis-Philippe 1st), an Emperor (Napoleon I) and lived 2 revolutions (1789 and 1830). She was educated in a convent where, as a child, she already made many elaborate drawings on her notebooks and on the walls of her school. She adored her father, a pastel painter, who quickly predicted that she would be a painter too. However, he died when she was only 12 years old and she was then forced to train herself. Still a teenager she quickly became an already famous painter as ***"E.L. Vigée".*** She married in 1776 (at age 21), a dealer of paintings, Jean-Baptiste Le Brun, in order to emancipate herself from her family and from her stingy stepfather. Then, she became ***"E.L. Vigée-Lebrun".***

Chapter 2, maturity in Paris (1776-1789). Her reputation growing, she received in 1776 a first "order" coming from the Count of Provence, brother of Louis XVI and future Louis XVIII. From then on, she was admitted to work at Versailles, and in 1778 she became the official painter to Marie-Antoinette, who was the same age as her and of whom she made some thirty paintings in 12 years. She sold her paintings for in general 12,000 Francs (equivalent to $35,000 nowadays), which was therefore considerable and protected her from want, although everything was pocketed by her father-in-law, then by her husband.

She was admitted to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1783, despite her modest origin, genre and age (28 years), thanks to the active support of Queen Marie-Antoinette. She was mainly a portrait painter of women, whose natural beauty she knew how to highlight, in original postures and outfits and also with expressive and often very cheerful faces, which was not classic and quickly contributed to her immense success, throughout France and Europe. At the height of her fame, she held a weekly cultural "salon" (i.e. meeting) in her small apartment in Paris. Indeed, besides her exceptional pictorial talent, she was herself of extreme physical beauty, very intelligent and cultivated, endowed with a great natural charisma, a beautiful voice and a remarkable sense of conversation which made her sought after in the highest aristocratic society as well as in the most prestigious cultural circles of her time.

Chapter 3, forced exile across Europe (1789-1802). In 1789 (French Revolution), her apartment was ransacked by the crowd and she was forced to flee with her daughter to Italy, leaving the million francs (almost € 3 million) that she had earned behind her and that her husband quickly squandered. For 12 years, she passed successively through Italy, Vienna and finally Saint-Petersburg, Poland and Prussia, each time painting many foreign personalities, which allowed her to continue to live comfortably. Her daughter Julie was married against her will in 1800 in Russia with a French secretary, which led to a quarrel between the 2 women and continued despite their strong ties for 20 years.

Chapter IV, back to France and retirement. (1802-1842). It was in 1802 that she could return to France. But, she was never in fact able to adapt to this new world and she went to London then to Switzerland, before returning to settle in Louveciennes (near Paris) in 1809. Her artistic production then dried up significantly, until when she died in 1842. She was very famous in her time, especially before 1789, then forgotten and rediscovered in late 20th century. Her main works are now in all the major museums in the world and fetch a value at auction often exceeding one million Euros. By the many paintings produced, in particular in the pre-revolutionary decade, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun brought incomparable testimony to the aristocracy of the *"Ancien Régime"* ending, while revolutionizing the art of portraiture and raising it to a quality equal to that of the greatest painters. It is shown in this large virtual gallery the best part of her production, at times slightly restored by computer to mitigate time-related defects, namely about 350 paintings in High Definition, in chronologic order, with full captions, a few comments, other illustrative documents and some extracts from her 'Memoirs'.



Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée, *1771, at age 16, private collection.*

Before the Revolution, the famous painter of the « Ancien Régime »

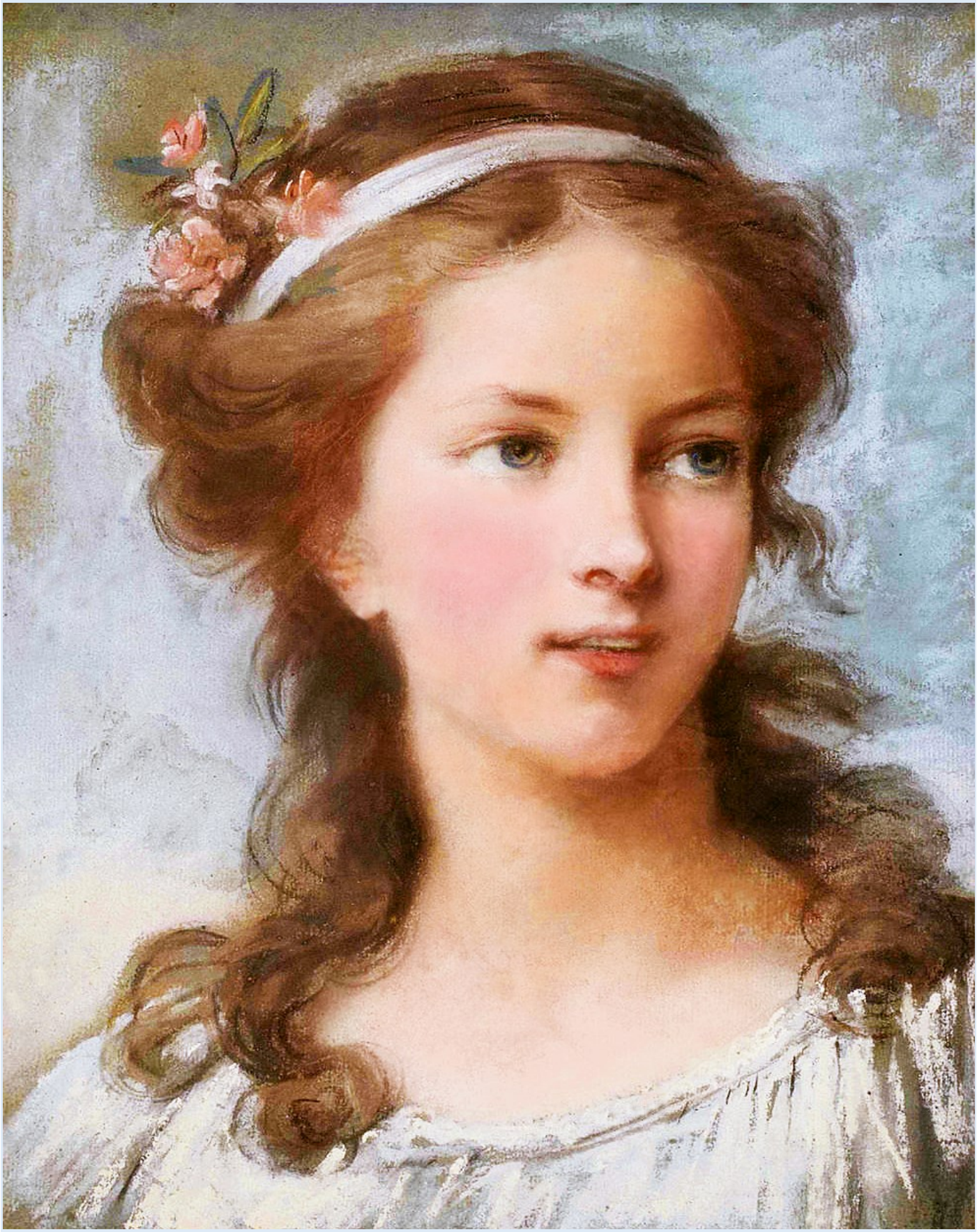


Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842), *1781, at age 26, Fort Worth Museum, USA.* Here, at the start of her meteoric success. Such success was first justified by the fact that she painted remarkably, having greatly innovated in her time. But, she was also and remained for a long time very beautiful, like 'a top model', and she dressed and did her hair in a new and much simpler way. She had this original way of dressing applied to most of her female models, which transformed the fashion of this time and redefined what is usually called "French elegance". She also had an extremely pleasant and sociable character, as well as a lively intelligence. She quickly made people forget, in a social environment then very misogynistic and compartmentalized, that she was only a young woman of modest origin. She was thus able to quickly evolve with great ease in the highest Society, in becoming an equal, by merit, of those she painted. Her fame was immediately immense and spread throughout Europe. Everyone jostled to come and see her in her little apartment in the rue de Cléry, during the day to be painted by her and in the evening to meet other illustrious people (of the nobility, the arts and politics) in her cultural "salon" where they conversed and made music, often late at night. The artist also had a good sense of business, much more to continue to satisfy her passion for painting than for the money, pocketed by her husband. Her order book was full several months in advance, both in France and then in exile, for nearly 40 years. She was very early financially and sentimentally independent, an enlightened feminist far ahead of the society of her time, which she literally fascinated by her prodigious diverse talents and her so singular personal journey. Such a fascination continues today, 2 centuries later, thanks to her pictorial work and Memoirs which allow us to relive a large part of her extraordinary destiny.

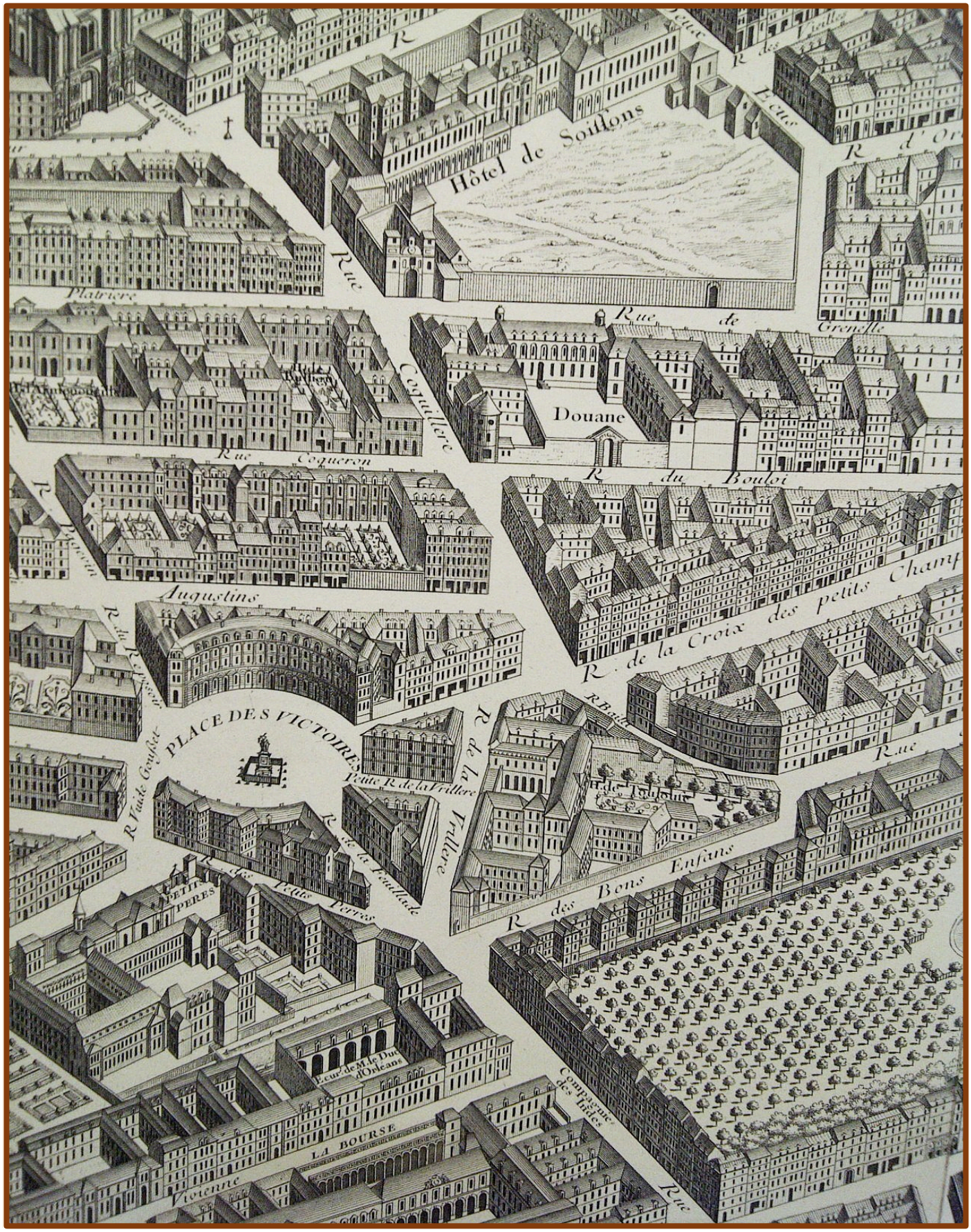


Chapter 1

Childhood, adolescence and learning her art in Paris (1755-1775)



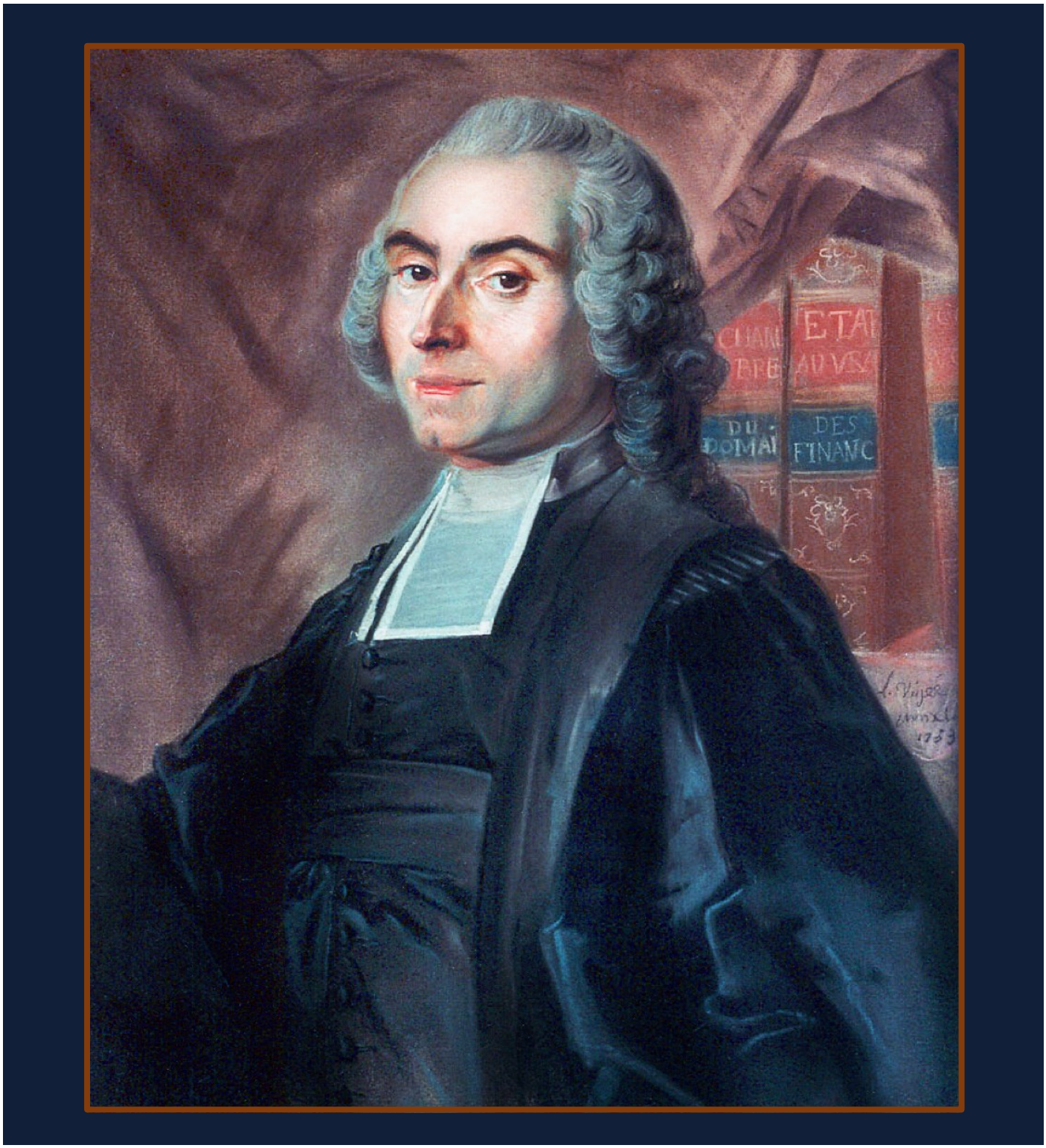
Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée, at age 16



Louise Élisabeth Vigée was born on April 16, 1755 in Paris, rue Coquillière *(above)* in the 1st current arrondissement and she was baptized at the Saint-Eustache church. *Right,* It was under the reign of **King Louis XV** (1710-1774), here at 52 (while the future artist was 6 years old), *Louis Michel van Loo, 1762, Versailles.* Grandfather of future Louis XVI.



Childhood and adolescence



Jean Nicolas de Boullongne (1726-1787), Comte de Nogent, Baron de Marigny, pastel, ***Louis Vigée,*** *1763, Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie du Périgord, Périgueux.* The model was magistrate and financial steward (tax collector) as evidenced by the background books. This portrait was done by Elisabeth's father (signature on the right) when she was 8 years old and in boarding school, but she often returned home where she loved to see her father paint.

The artist described in her "Souvenirs" (Memoirs) in 1830 her childhood from 6 to 11 years old and her father, whom she admired deeply:

*"I will tell you first, dear Amie *, of my early years, because they were the omen of my whole life, since my love for painting was evident from my childhood. I was put in the convent at the age of six; I stayed there until eleven. In this interval, I was sketching constantly and everywhere; my writing notebooks, and even those of my comrades, were filled at the margins with little heads in front or in profile; on the walls of the dormitory I traced figures and landscapes with charcoal, so you must think that I was often in penance. Then, in the moments of recreation, I would draw on the sand whatever came to my mind. I remember that when I was seven or eight years old, I drew a picture of a bearded man, whom I have always kept, under the lamp. I showed it to my father, who exclaimed, transported with joy: "You will be a painter, my child, or no one will ever be."* * This is Russian Princess Nathalie Kourakine, a close friend of the artist, whom she met during her 6-year long exile in Saint Petersburg and with whom she remained in correspondence after returning to France.

"I was in very poor health at the convent, so my father and mother often came to pick me up to spend a few days with them, which charmed me in every way. My father, named Vigée, painted very well in pastel; there are even portraits of him which would be worthy of the famous Latour.

But, to come back to the pleasures I had in the maternal house, I will tell you that my father gave me permission to paint a few heads in pastel, and that he also left me to smear all day long with his pencils. My father was very witty. His so natural cheerfulness was communicated to everyone, and very often people came to be painted by him to enjoy his pleasant conversation; perhaps you already know the following anecdote: one day making the portrait of a rather pretty woman, he noticed that, when he worked on the mouth, this woman kept grimacing to make her smaller. Impatient with this merry-go-round, my father said to her with great coolness: "Do not worry yourself like this, Madame, if you wish, I won't paint your mouth at all."

Finally, although I had hardly emerged from childhood then, I remember perfectly the gaiety of those suppers of my father. I was made to leave the table before dessert; but from my room I heard laughter, joys, songs, which I understood nothing, to tell the truth, and which nevertheless made my days off delicious.

My father showered me with kindness and indulgence. His tenderness made him more and more dear to my heart: so, this excellent father is always present to me, and I do not think I have forgotten a single word he said in front of me. How many times, above all, have I remembered, in 1789, the following trait as a sort of prophecy: one day when my father was leaving a dinner of philosophers, where Diderot, Helvétius and d'Alembert were present, he appeared so sad that my mother asked him what he had: "Everything I have just heard, my dear friend," he replied, "makes me believe that soon the world will be turned upside down."



View of Paris when the artist was 8 years old, near the neighborhood where she lived

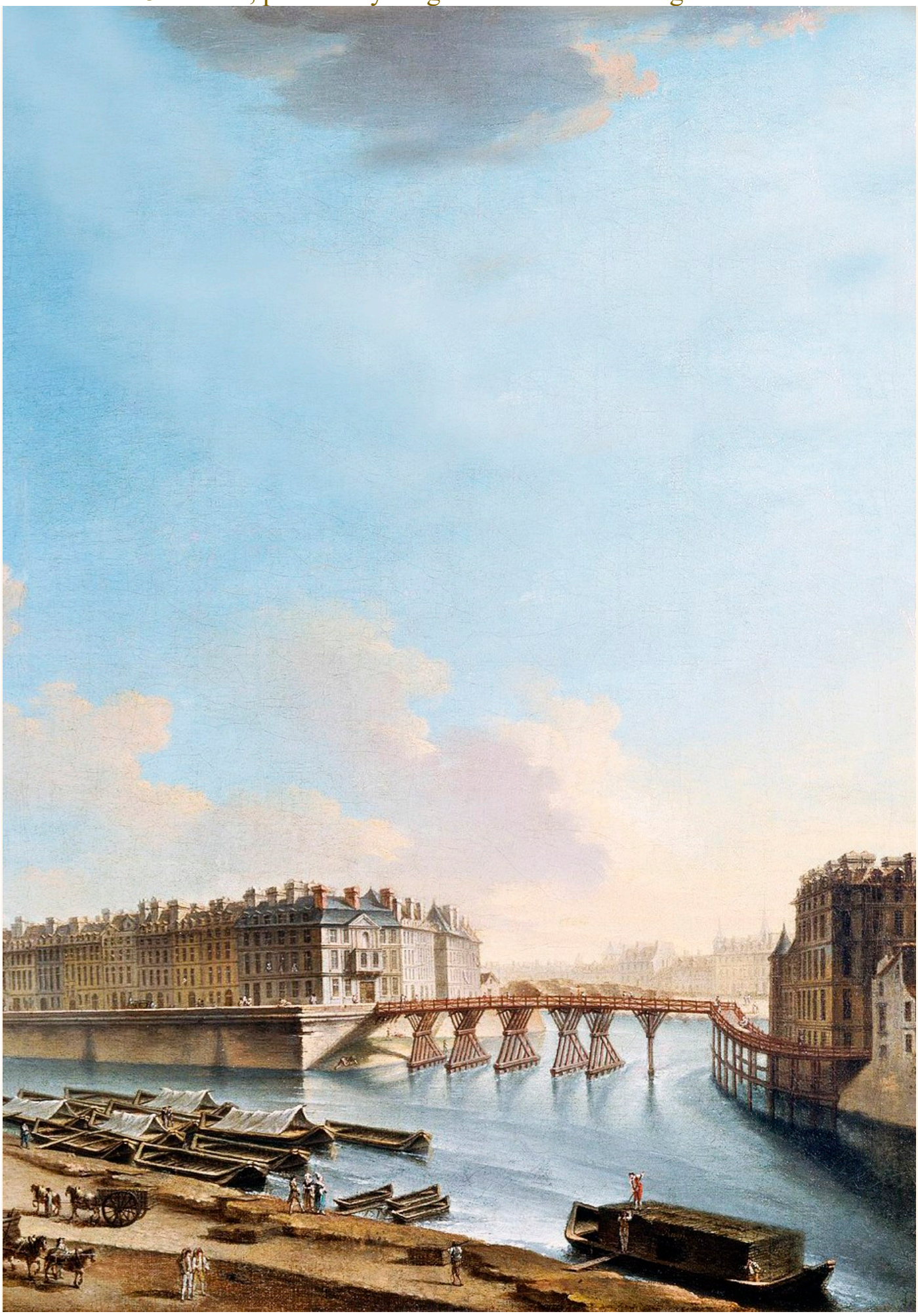


(Palais Royal), with the Pont Neuf and the Ile de la Cité, *J. Raguenet, 1763, Louvre*.

Place de Grève and Ile Saint-Louis, *J.B. Raguenet, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.*



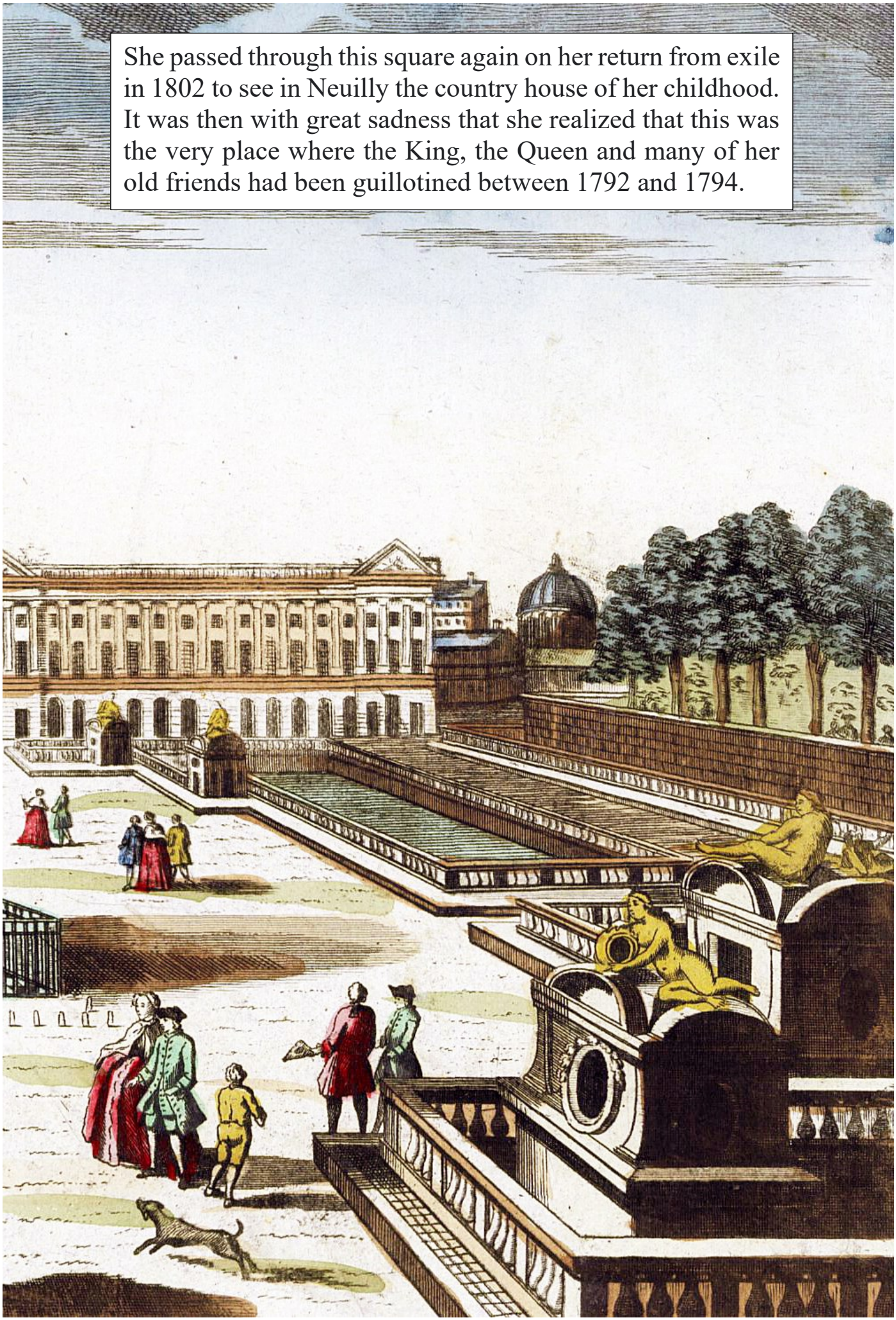
Late 18th siècle, places as young Louise Élisabeth Vigée knew them.



Place Louis XV, in the middle of the 18th century, became "**Place de la Révolution**" in 1792, then **Place de la Concorde** since 1795. As a child, the artist crossed it a lot to go to the country house that her father had acquired in Neuilly, on the banks of the Seine, and where she spent several happy summers with her parents and brother.



She passed through this square again on her return from exile in 1802 to see in Neuilly the country house of her childhood. It was then with great sadness that she realized that this was the very place where the King, the Queen and many of her old friends had been guillotined between 1792 and 1794.



Louis Vigée, the artist's father, was a renowned pastel painter in his time. He died accidentally in 1767, when Elisabeth was only 12 years old. Here is what she wrote about it and the period following this painful death for her:

"I had just spent a year of happiness in the paternal home, when my father fell ill. He had swallowed a ridge, which was fixed in his stomach, and which to be pulled out, required several incisions. The operations were carried out by the most skillful surgeon known at the time, Brother Come, in whom we had every confidence, and who looked like a true Saint. He took care of my father with the greatest zeal; despite his loving diligence, the wounds grew worse, and after two months of suffering, my father's condition left no hope. My mother cried day and night, and I will not try to describe my desolation to you: I was going to lose the best of fathers, my support, my guide, the one whose indulgence encouraged my first attempts!

When he felt close to his last moments, my father wanted to see my brother and me again. We both approached his bed, sobbing. His face was cruelly altered; his eyes, his physiognomy, so animated, no longer had any movement; for the pallor and cold of death had already seized him. We took her icy hand, and we covered it with kisses, showering it with tears. He made an effort, rose to give us his blessing: "Be happy, my children", he said. An hour later, our excellent father no longer existed!

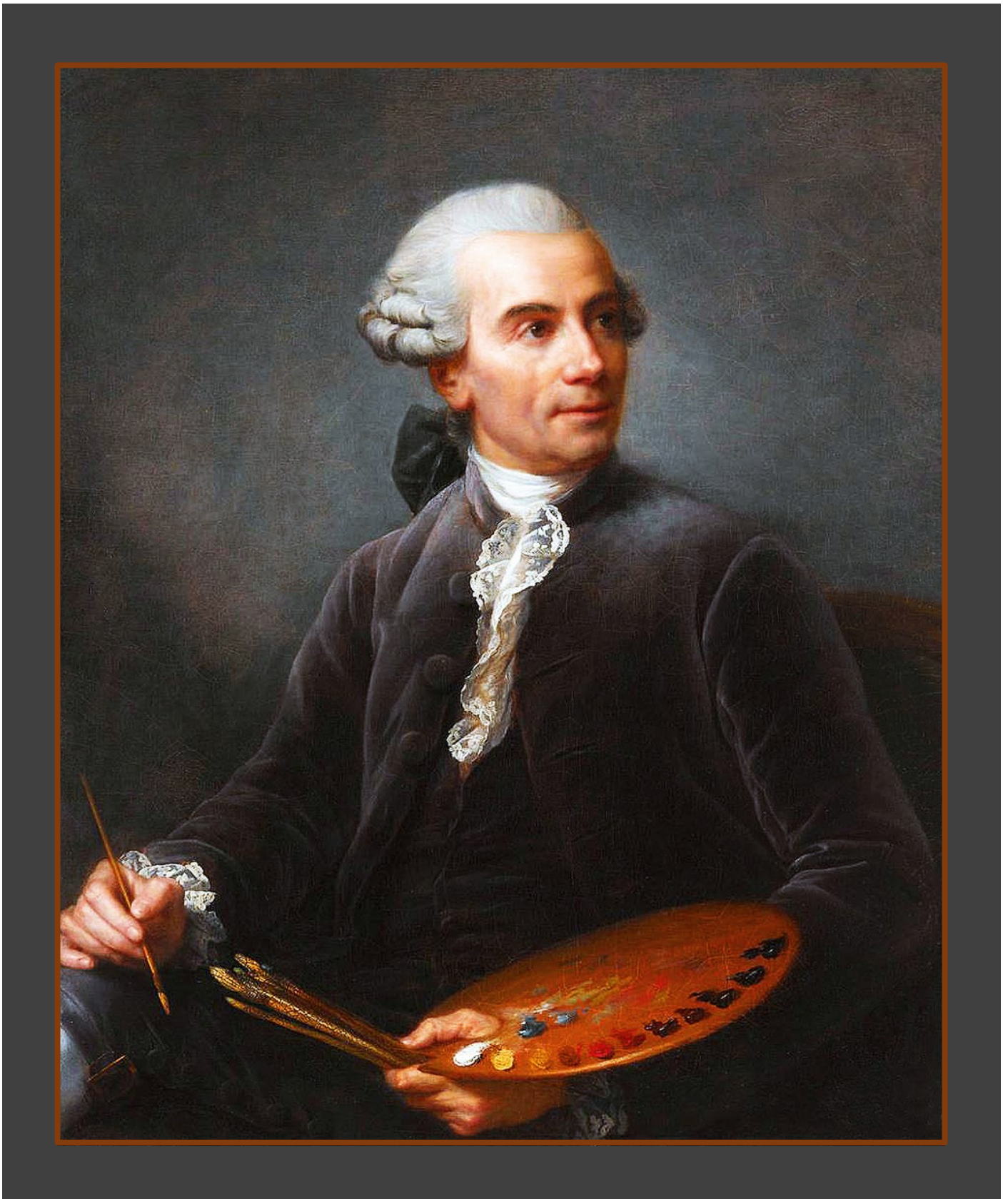
I was so overwhelmed by my pain that I was without taking my pencils for a long time. M. Doyen sometimes came to see us again, and as he had been my father's best friend, his visits were a great consolation to us. It was he who urged me to resume my cherished occupation, in which, in fact, I found the only distraction which could soften my regrets and tear me away from my sad thoughts.

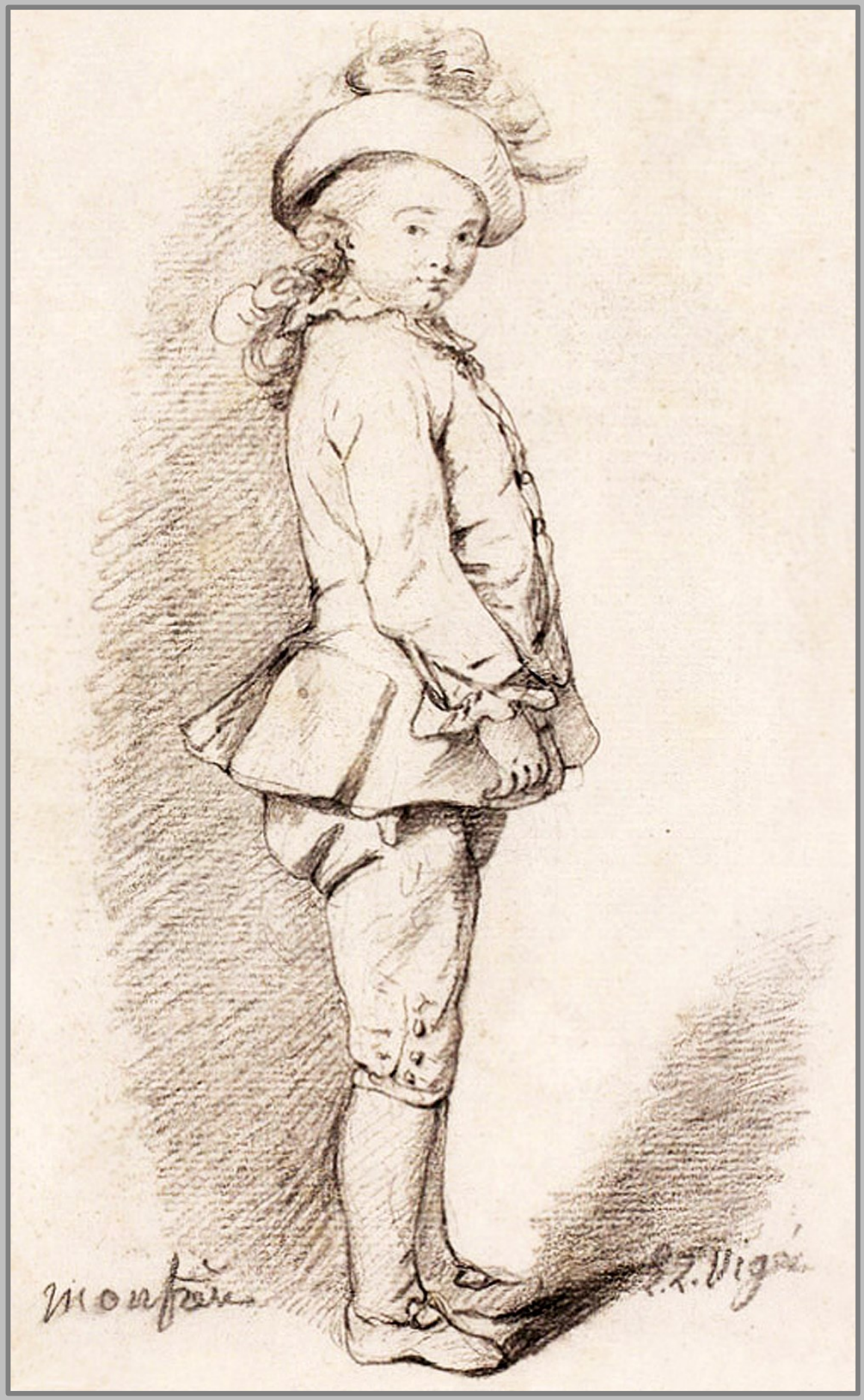
It was at this time that I began to paint from nature. I successively made several portraits in pastel and in oil. I also drew from nature and from the bump, most often with a lamp, with Mademoiselle Boquet, (future Mrs Filleul, a painter) *whom I knew at the time. In the evenings, I went to her house on rue Saint-Denis, opposite that of La Truanderie, where her father kept a curiosity store. The trip was quite long since we were staying in the rue de Cléry, opposite the hotel of Lubert: so, my mother always made me accompany.*

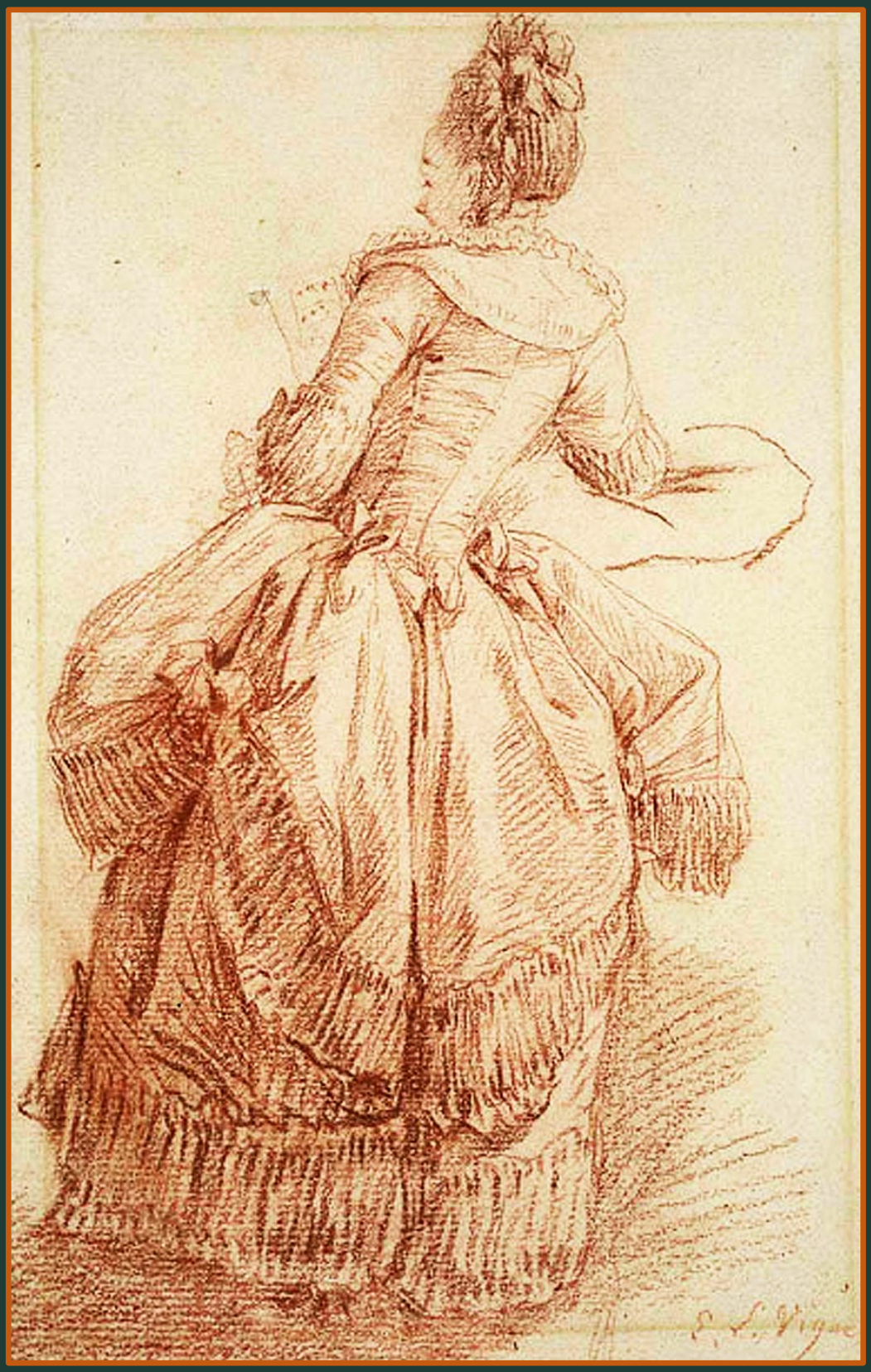
At the same time, we went very often, Mademoiselle Boquet and I, to draw at Briard the painter, who lent us his drawings and antique busts. Briard painted poorly, although he made some ceilings quite remarkable for their composition, but he was a very good designer; this is why several young people came to take lessons with him. He lived in the Louvre, and in order to draw there longer, we each brought our little dinner in a basket which the maid carried us. I still remember our feasting, buying from the concierge at one of the doors of the Louvre pieces of excellent fashionable beef.

Mademoiselle Boquet was then fifteen, and I was fourteen. We competed in beauty ***(because I forgot to tell you, dear friend, that there had been a metamorphosis in me and that I had become pretty*).*** *Her aptitude for painting was remarkable, and my progress was so rapid, that people began to talk about me in the world, which gave me the satisfaction of knowing Joseph Vernet" (Right page).**She did not repeat later, in her long 'Memoirs', this (important) aspect of her physique, but all her contemporaries also underlined it and her different self-portraits quickly spoke for her.

Joseph Vernet (1714-1789, classical painter, at age 64, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778, Musée de Louvre.* He painted mainly landscapes and seascapes, but the artist was partly trained at his place and he declared: *"'My child', he said to me, 'do not follow any school system. Consult only the works of the great masters of Italy, as well as those of the Flemish masters; but above all, do as much as you can from nature: nature is the first of all masters. If you study it carefully, it will prevent you from taking any copied way.'... I have constantly followed his advice and have never had masters."*




Monsieur
L.E. Vigée



These 2 drawings are dated 1765 (left) and 1768 (above), when the artist was 10 and 13 years old, representing her brother Étienne (7 years old) and her mother Jeanne reading a score. They are both already signed ***"E. L. Vigée ",*** which clearly indicates the later intentions of the budding artist. We can notice the details, especially in the attitudes and shadows, which denote an astonishing technical mastery for a child of her age.

"LISTING OF
PAINTINGS AND PORTRAITS
WHAT I DID BEFORE LEAVING FRANCE IN 1789.

From 1768 to 1772.

1 My mother as a sultana, large pastel.
1 My mother, seen from the back. *
2 My brother as a schoolboy. One in oil, the other in pastel.
1 M. Le Sèvre, in nightcap and dressing gown.
3 Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle Bandelaire.
1 M. Vandergust.
1 Mademoiselle Pigale, fashion merchant of the queen.
1 Her clerk.
1 My mother in a white coat. In oil.
1 Madame Raffeneau.
1 The Baroness of Esthal.
2 Her two children.
1 Madame Daguesseau with her dog.
1 Madame Suzanne.
1 Madame la Comtesse de la Vieuville.
1 M. Mousat.
1 Miss Lespare.
2 Madame de Fossy and her son.
2 The Viscount and Viscountess de la Blache.
1 Miss Dorion.
1 Miss Mousat.
1 Mr. Tranchart.
1 M. le marquis de Choiseul.
1 The Count of Zanicourt.
1 M. Bandelaire bust, in pastel.

Total 31, plus a large number of heads of studies and copies after Raphael, Vandyck, Rembrandt, etc."

* In bold, are the works presented here.

In her Memoirs (1830), the artist listed her paintings and drawings by year (*as left* for the period 1768-1772), but very 'a posteriori', so she forgot some. Others have not been found, especially those executed during this early period when she was not yet widely known. The drawing of her mother seen from the back (previous page) appears there, as well as the painting concerning **the two children of Mme d'Esthal** *(below, 1771, private collection),* her brother, her stepfather ("M. Le Sèvre"), her mother "in a white coat", "Madame Dagusseau with her dog", "the Vicomte and the Vicomtesse de la Blache" *(see the following pages).*




Dessin d'après mon frère Vigée.
L.



Above, **«A young girl »,** at times attributed to *Élisabeth Vigée, 1767*, at age 12, the year when his father died. *Left page,* **Etienne Vigée,** her young brother, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1772.*

Madame Daguesseau and her dog, *Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1771*, but the attribution and/or the date remain disputed, *National Museum of Bucarest, Romania*. It is believed she was the wife of architect Pierre Daguesseau. This painting is well in the style of the artist (composition, expression, clothing and accessories) and would already show all the mastery of the young painter, who was then only 16 years old.





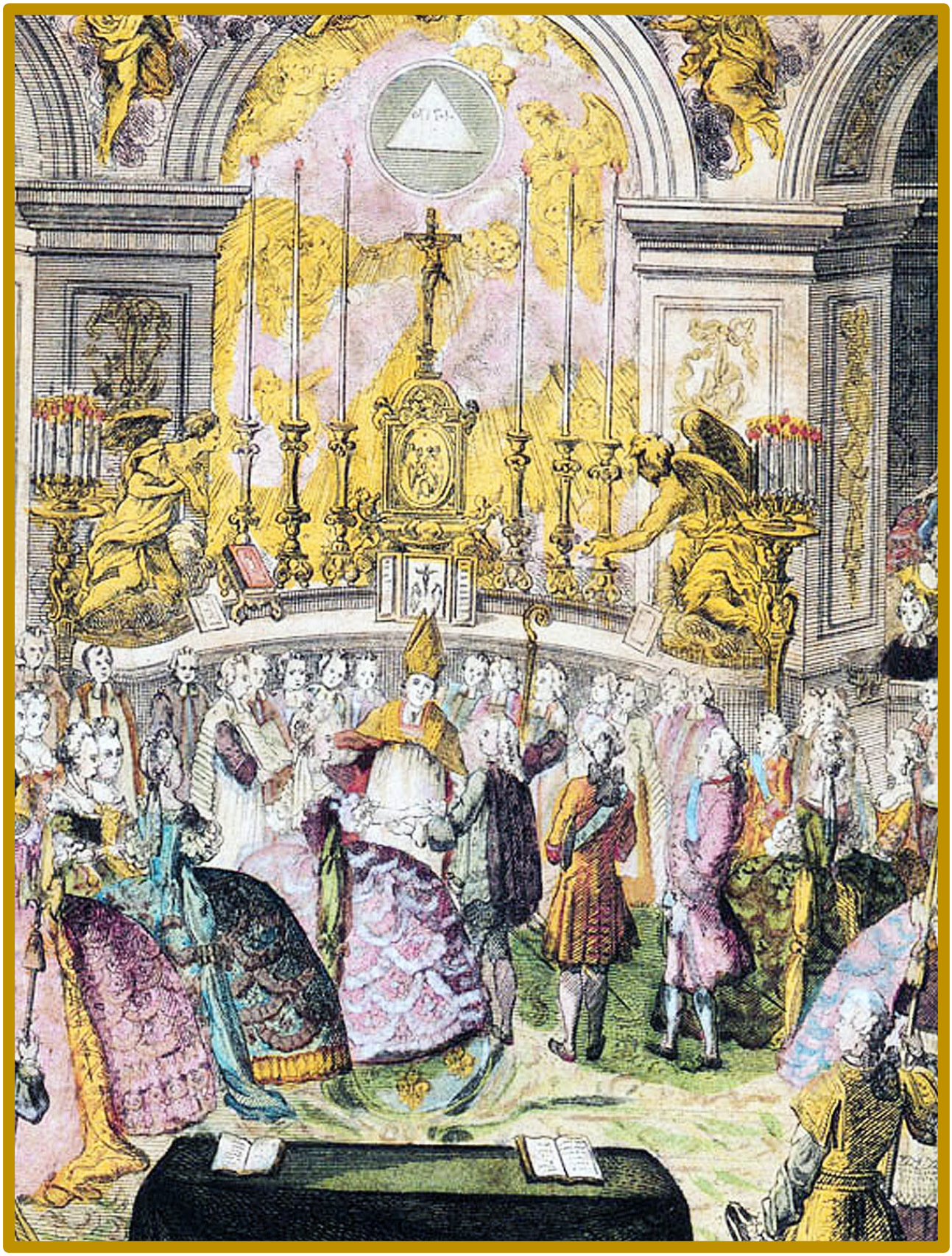


Etienne Vigée (1758-1820), at age 16, the artist's younger brother, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1772, Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York*, when she was 18. This brother was later a successful poet and playwright. With this model taken in her family, before her emancipation, we already notice again a great technical mastery. We can also note an original pose and light, with a very expressive face, which is another characteristic of the portraits of this artist.



Rose Bertin, 1747-1813, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1771, Versailles.*
She was the fashion seller of the Archduchess Marie-Antoinette.
The white coat is the same as that used for her mother *(next page)*.

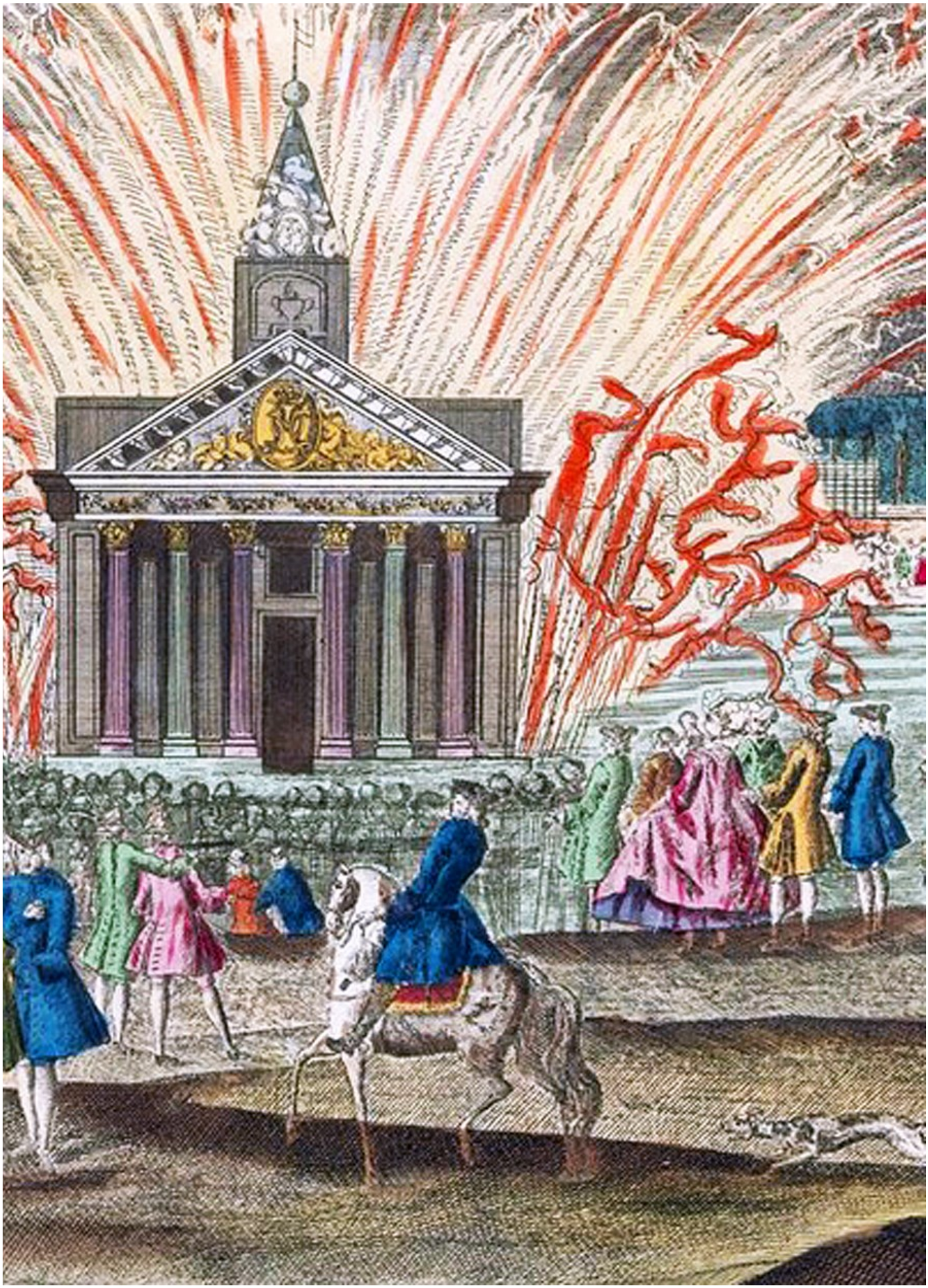




The Archduchess Marie-Antoinette of Austria (15 years old) married the Dauphin of France Louis Auguste (16) in May 1770 in Versailles *(above).* The latter became King of France in 1774, under the name of Louis XVI, when his grandfather Louis XV is dead. Before painting the milliner of the Dauphine Marie-Antoinette in 1771 *(left page),* the artist (15) had attended with her mother and her stepfather at the feast given in Paris in honor of the marriage of the Dauphin in 1770 (see next page).



May 30, 1770, fireworks given Place Louis XV (current Place de la Concorde) in honor of the marriage of the Dauphin with Marie-Antoinette. Louise Élisabeth (15) attended with her



mother, stepfather, brother and 400 000 people. It ended with a fire and a stampede that killed 132 people, but the Vigée-Le Sèvre family had already left at the time of the tragedy.



Jeanne Maissin, wife of Louis Vigée, then married to Le Sèvre, 1728-1800, at age 46, mother of the artist, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1772, private collection*. This portrait is very alive because we would think we hear her mother speak, which really launched the career of the young painter (19 years old). This mother hairdresser had first married Louis Vigée, a cultivated pastel artist, father of the artist with whom she got along perfectly and who was able to provide her with the first technical advice. He died in 1767 when she was only 12 years old *(see above)*. Six months later, for mainly financial reasons, her mother remarried a fairly wealthy but stingy jeweler, Jacques-François Le Sèvre, with whom the artist did not get along at all *(see below)*. Her mother, however, worked to bond them and helped her young teenage daughter a lot by accompanying her on all her business trips, as well as by showing her around many museums and private collections. The talented teenager was thus able to quickly progress in her learning.





Jeanne Maissin, mother of the artist, *Élisabeth Vigée, pastel, 1772.*

Regarding the visits the artist made with her mother, she wrote: *"As soon as I entered one of these rich galleries, I could be compared exactly to the bee, so much knowledge and memories I gathered there useful to my art, while intoxicating me with pleasures in the contemplation of the great masters. In addition, to strengthen myself, I copied a few paintings by Rubens, a few heads by Rembrandt, van Dyck, and several heads of young girls from Greuze, because these latter strongly explained the halftones found in skin delicate tones; van Dyck expressed them too, but more precisely."*

Jacques-François Le Sèvre, jeweler, father-in-law of the artist, *Élisabeth Vigée 1772, private collection*. The artist painted a portrait with a kind expression. However, she wrote: *"My mother married a rich jeweler, whom we had never suspected of avarice, and who nevertheless, soon after her marriage, proved so stingy that he refused us everything necessary, although I had the good nature to give him everything I earned. I hated this man, all the more since he had taken possession of my father's wardrobe, whose clothes he wore, just as they were, without having them adjusted to his size."*





Portrait of an artist, often attributed to *Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1772, private collection.* Though well in the style of the artist by the attitude and expression of the model, there are a few uncertainties about this painting, because it was not listed by her (which is not prohibitive), with an uncertain date and a model (painter too) not identified.





Woman in white dress, *Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1772.*



Vicomtesse de la Blache, born Catherine Le Roy Senneville,
Élisabeth Vigée, 1772, private collection.





Vicomte Jean Falcoz de la Blache, marquis d'Haraucourt **(1743-1821),** *Élisabeth Vigée, 1772, private collection.* These two paintings are lister by the artist for this period. The man is in hunting suit and environment.



Alexis Fereol Perrin de Sanson (1733-1820), *pastel, Élisabeth Vigée, 1772, private collection.* He was a lawyer in the parliament of Provence (south of France). This portrait (unsigned), kept in his family, was only recently discovered. The "original" frame mentions "Madame Vigée-Lebrun", which was not yet the case in 1772 since the artist got married in 1776 and only signed her paintings by "Vigée-Lebrun" from that year. However, the frame may have been put on several years after the completion of the painting.







Alexandre Jean Baptiste Rouillé de Fontaine, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1773, private collection*. He was a cavalry general under Louis XVI and Lord of Goyencort. *Left page*, his wife, **Claude Sophie Rouillé de Fontaine,** *Élisabeth Vigée, 1773, private collection.* She was born Caulet d´Hauteville. Both are listed in the year 1773 by the painter (then aged 18).

“Monsieur”, brother of Louis XVI, future Louis XVIII, **Comte de Provence,** painted several times before 1780, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1773, Versailles*.





Young girl, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1773, Louvre Museum.* Solar !



Marie Eugénie Rouillé du Coudray (1759-1815), *Élisabeth Vigée, 1773, private collection.* In 1777, she married Michel Félix Victor de Choiseul d´Aillecourt, then a minor but already captain of the King's cuirassiers regiment. They had 6 children and lived in their castle in Plessis-aux-Bois, near Meaux. Her husband fought in the 1792 campaign in Condé's army (French royalists. Fighting revolutionary armies), then separated from her and emigrated to Russia with one of their sons.

Monsieur de Roissy, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1773, private collection.* No further information on the model, whose wife was also painted *(next page)*. The poses and looks of this couple are interesting. This painting was signed on the back "Melle Vigée" and it was mentioned on the frame (surely after 1776) that the painter became *"Mme Lebrun"*.





Madame de Roissy, wife of the precedent, *Élisabeth Vigée ("Mme Lebrun"), 1773*.

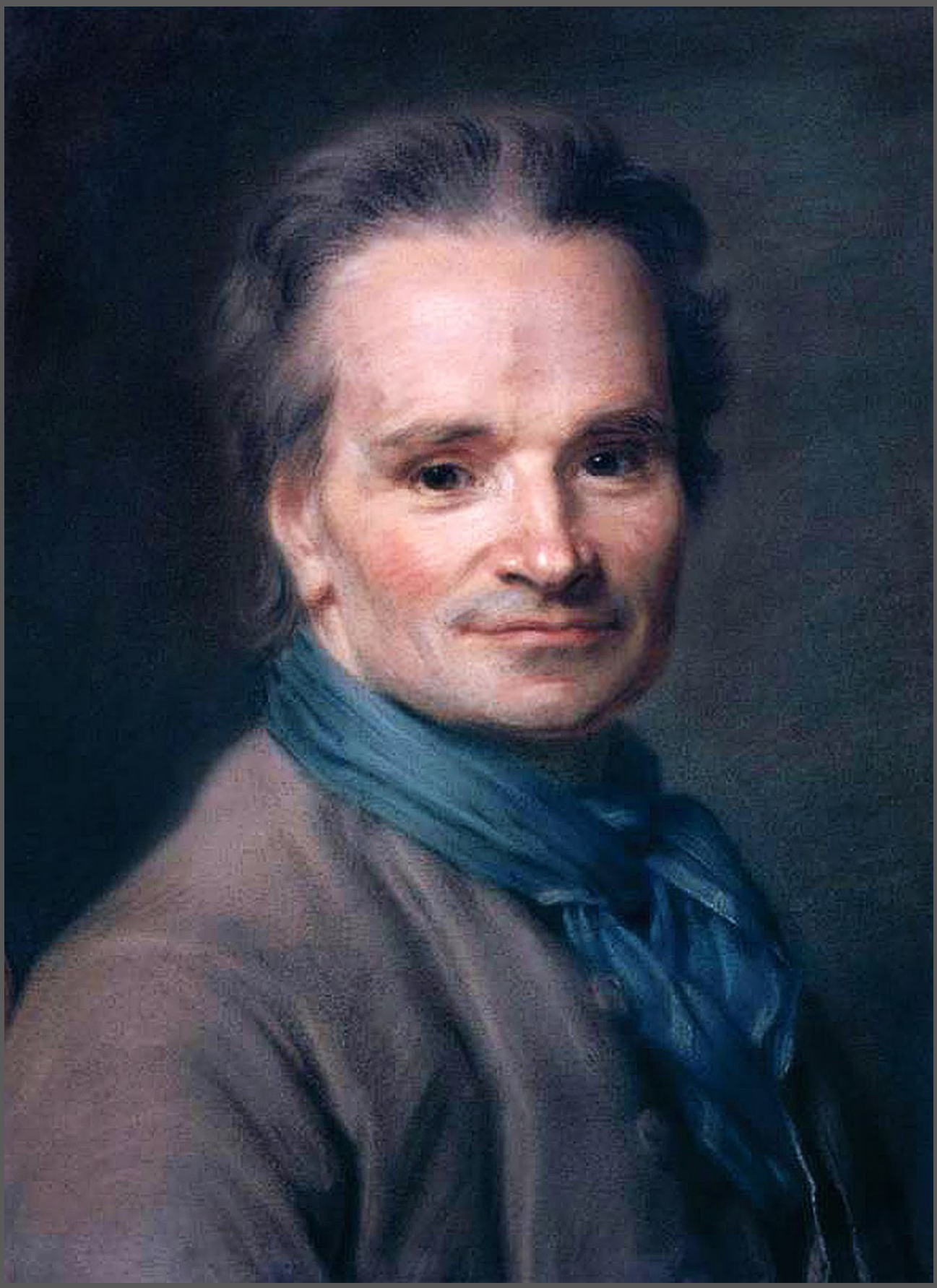
Right, the park of **Marly-le-Roi** (near Versailles) where the artist, still a teenager in the early 1770s, was walking with her mother and accidentally met Marie-Antoinette (already married but maybe not yet Queen) and her suite. She told this story in her "Memoirs": *"We went to Marly-le-Roi, and there, for the first time, I took the idea of an enchanting stay. One morning I met the Queen there, who was walking in the park with several ladies from her Court. They were all in white dresses, and so young, so pretty, that they seemed to me like an apparition. I was with my mother, and I was walking away, when the Queen was kind enough to stop me, pledging me to continue my walk wherever I pleased. ".* It was in 1778 that the 2 young women (they were the same age, 23) met professionally at the request of the Queen, who wanted to be painted by the artist, already famous in France for a few years.





The sculptor Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne (1704-1778), *Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1773, Museum of Art, Cleveland.* This is a copy of the painting by Maurice Quentin de la Tour (1704-1788) made in 1747 and exhibited in the Louvre *(right page).* The sculptor, here in his forties and in working clothes, was one of Louis XV's appointed sculptors. To train herself, the artist made a number of copies of classic paintings during her early years. Some of these copies have survived and are now considered original, due to the later fame and particular style of this portrait painter *(see further two other copies).*

The sculptor Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, *Maurice Quentin de la Tour, 1747, Musée du Louvre*. The pose of the model and the clothes are the same in the two paintings, but the 2 styles of painting are distinct. The gaze is more incisive with Elisabeth.





Chevalier Robert Benet of Montcarville (1698-1771), *Élisabeth Vigée ("-Lebrun"), 1774 (at age 19 of the painter), Château de Parentignat, Auvergne, France.* Commissioned portrait, posthumous since this model had been deceased for 3 years. This knight was of 'nobility of Robe' and had a chair of astronomy and mathematics at the Collège de France, a prestigious Academic Institute in Paris, founded by King François I in 1530.

Madame de Bellegarde, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, private collection.*



Young boy playing bilboquet, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1774, private collection*. He was the son of the De Roissy couple whom the painter painted at the same time.





Adrienne Godard d'Aucour de Plancy, born Choart de Magny Saint-Loup (1754-1782), *Élisabeth Vigée, 1774, private collection.*

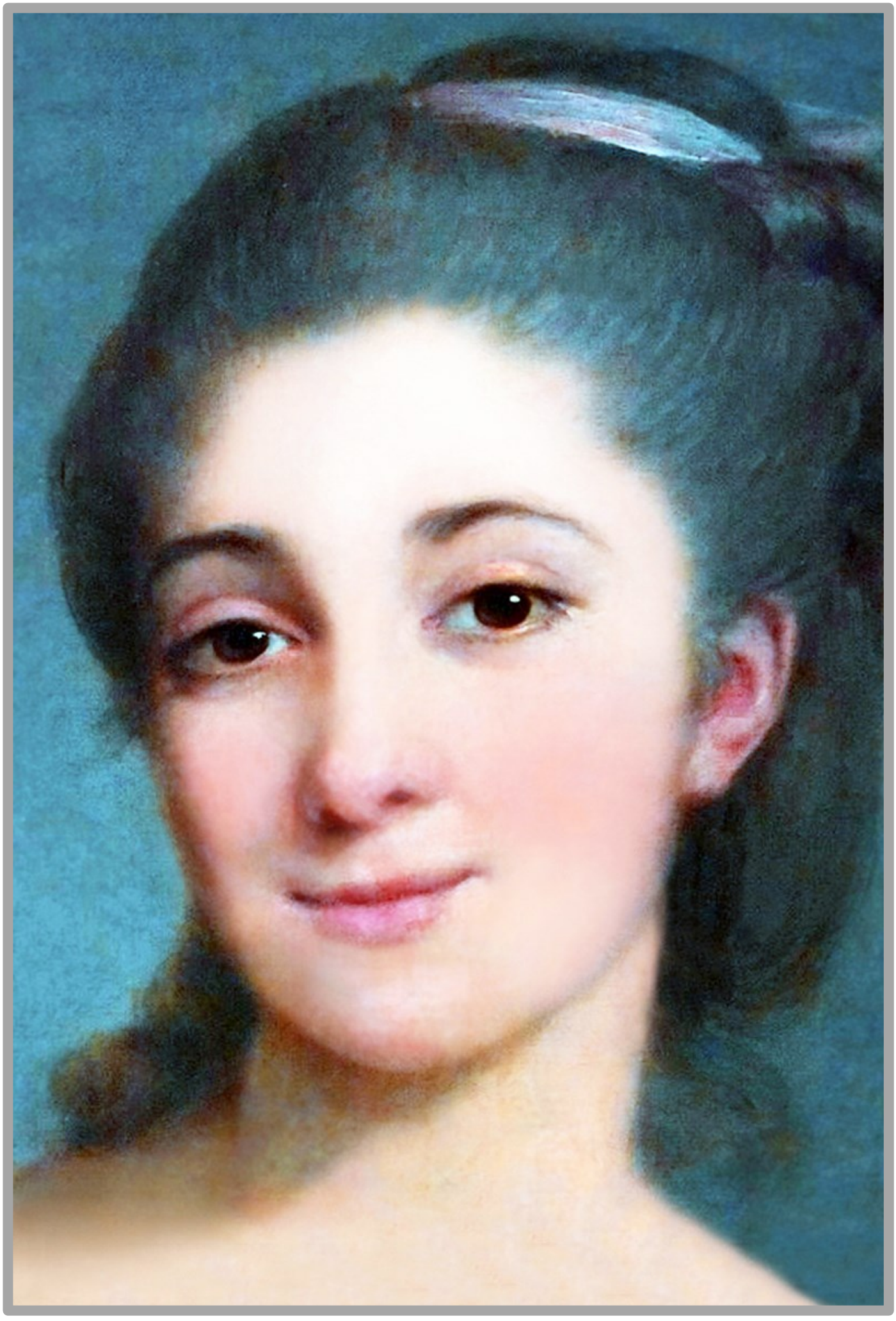
Jacques Louis Guillaume Bouret de Vézelay, Seigneur d'Esnon (1744-1840), *Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, private collection.* General Treasurer of artillery under Louis XVI and a great estate speculator in Paris.

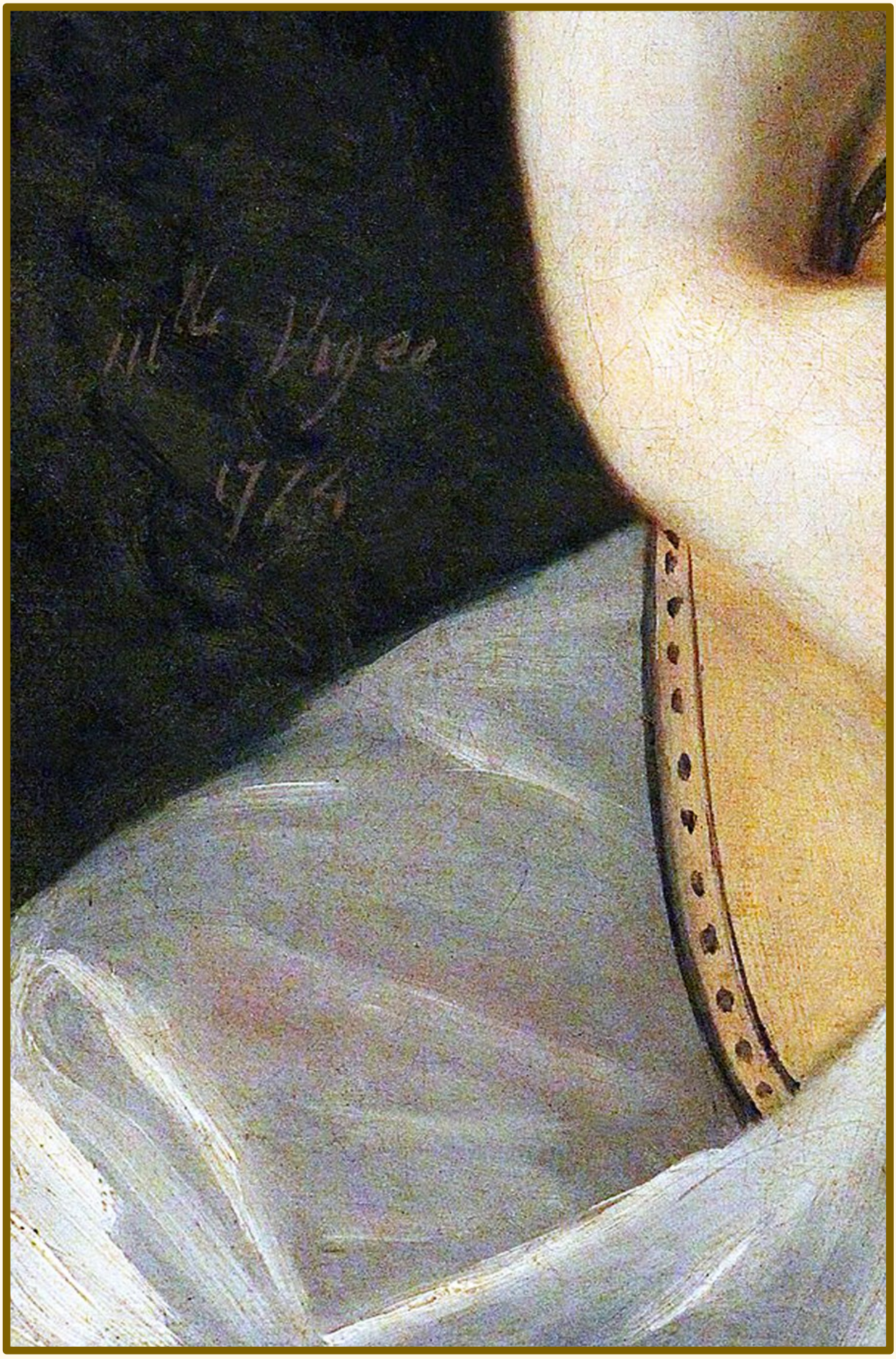




Comtesse de l'Argentière, Vicomtesse de Mirabeau, at age 18, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1774, Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris.* She was the sister-in-law of the Comte de Mirabeau, writer and deputy for the Revolution, who died in 1791 of illness. The deputy's military brother, her husband, also died of illness in 1792. *On the right*, we see a very gentle face, probably a reflection of her character.





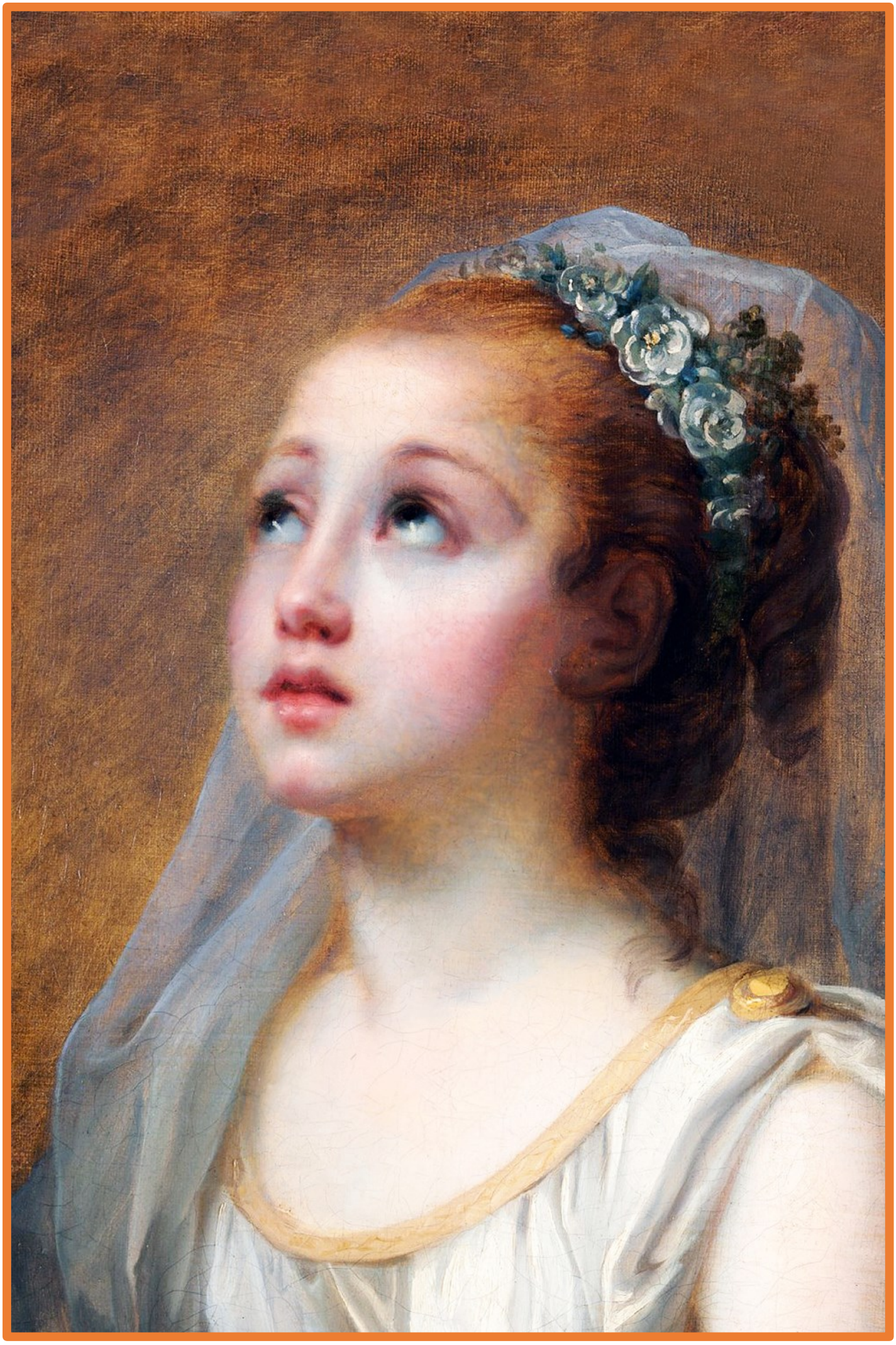




Left page, **Signature of "Melle Vigée 1774",** on the painting of the previous page (Comtesse de l'Argentière). In 1774, the painter was not yet « L.E. Vigée-Lebrun ». *Above,* **Poetry,** allegory, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1774, private collection.*



Young girl in antic dress, *Élisabeth Vigée, pastel, 1775 (at age 20), private collection: "Vigée-Lebrun paints here the child and the young woman concurrently, the passage from one to the other, which can only be glimpsed. It is true that fashion helps her, the dress indented on her emerging breasts, uncovered shoulders, silky hair with libertine locks and the flowers of the crown ..., well made to symbolize spring and the fertility that it promises to a future husband…"* (Catalog of Grand-Palais exhibition, 2015).





Princesse Anne-Charlotte de Rohan-Rochefort, de Loraine-Brionne (1755-1786), at age 20, in Diane, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, National Galerie of Victoria, Melbourne.* Nine years later, she became Abbess of the Benedictine Abbey of Remiremont for one month in 1784, but had to leave quickly this convent for health reasons and died of illness in 1786, at the age of 30. Classically composed, this painting shows the technical mastery of the 20-year-old artist, as soon as her first painting orders.





Left page, **Young child holding a basket flower**, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, private collection. Below,* **Young woman,** *pastel, Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1775, private collection.*





Young woman, bust-length inspired or copied from the painter J.B. Greuze whom the young artist admired, *Élisabeth Vigée, circa 1775.*

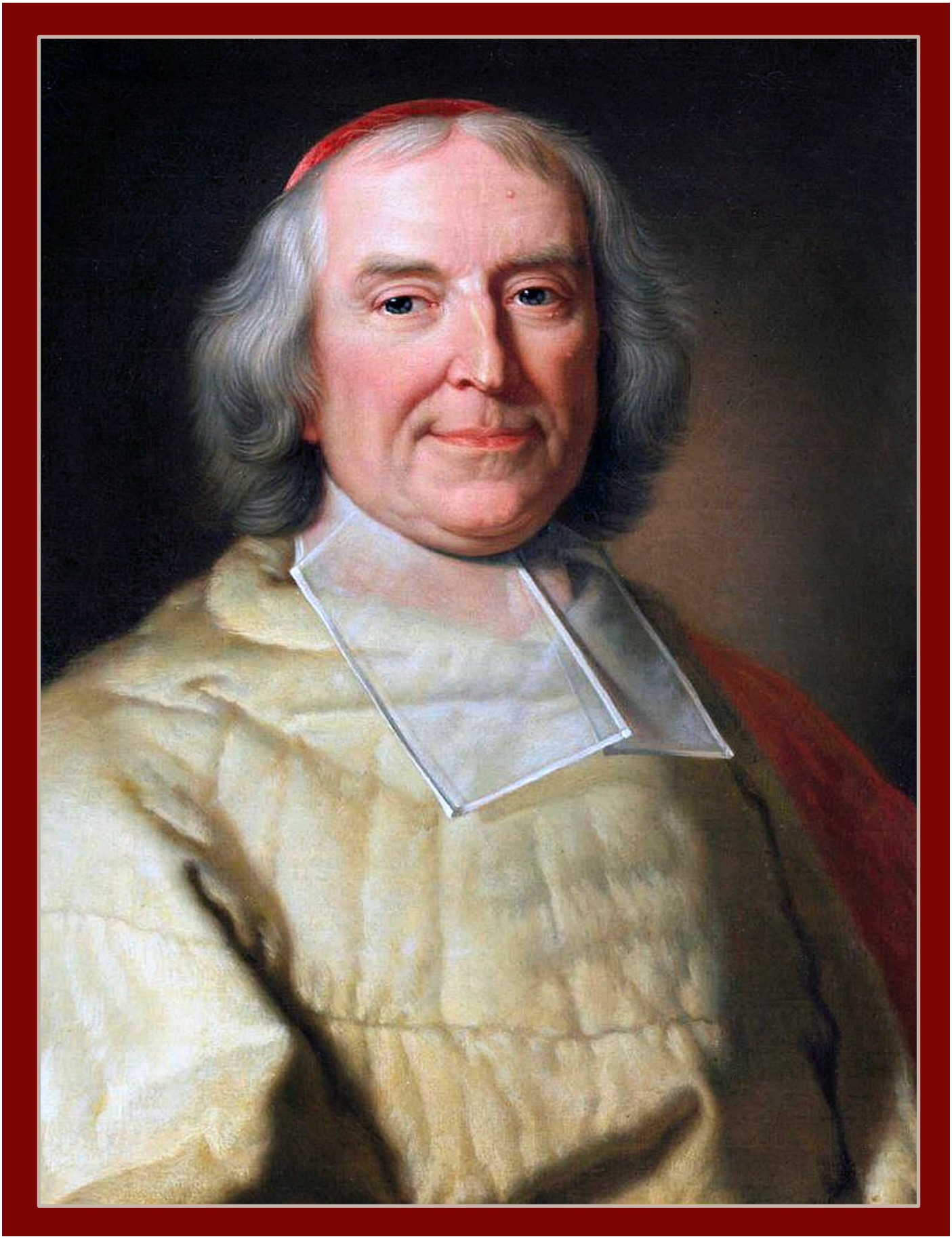
Woman, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris.*



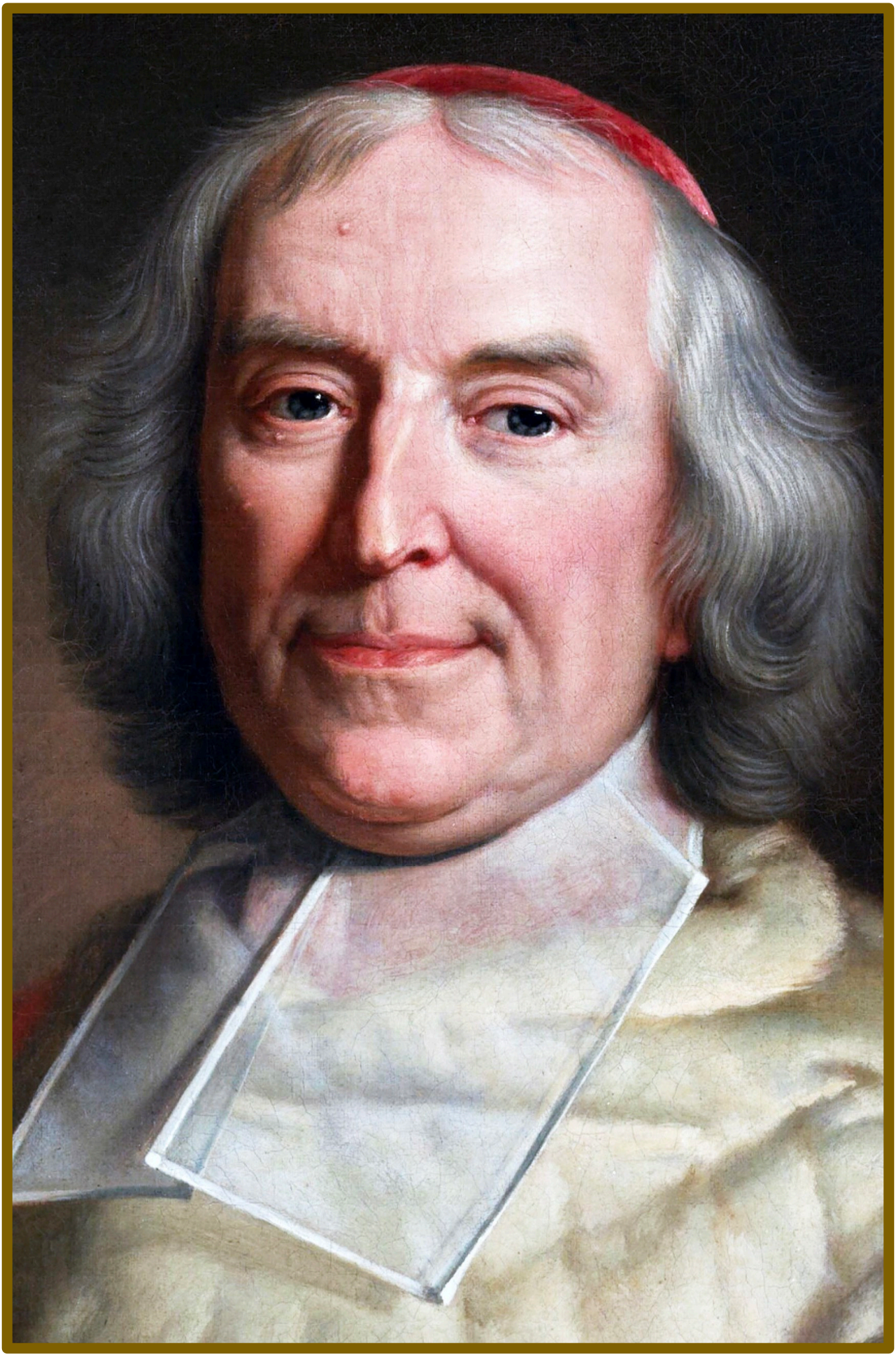


« Unknown young woman », *Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen.* The model is seductress and Cupid *(background)* is inspiring her.





Cardinal André Hercule de Fleury, 1653-1743, *Élisabeth Vigée, copy of a painting by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1743), 1775, Versailles.* He was minister under King Louis XV. It is here one of the many copies made by the artist to accelerate her training.





Left page, **Jean de la Bruyère** (1645-1696), French writer, *Élisabeth Vigée, 1775, copy of a painting attributed to Nicolas de Largillière, Académie Française, Paris.*
The artist evoked in her **Memoirs** the story of these 2 copies, Cardinal de Fleury and Jean de la Bruyère:
"I sometimes received proofs of a kindness that was, so to speak, public, of which I felt a great deal of joy; I admit it to you frankly. For example, I had made, from the engravings of the time, the portraits of Cardinal de Fleury and La Bruyère. I paid tribute to the 'Académie Française', which, through d'Alembert, its perpetual secretary, sent me the letter which I keep preciously and I am copying here:"

"MADEMOISELLE,
The French Academy has received with all possible gratitude the charming letter you wrote to it, and the beautiful portraits of Fleury and La Bruyère that you have kindly sent to it to be placed in its assembly hall, where it desired for a long time to see them. These two portraits, by retracing to Academy two men whose names are dear to us, will constantly remind Academy, Mademoiselle, of all that it owes you and that it is very flattered to owe you; they will be in our eyes moreover a lasting monument of your rare talents, which were known to us by the public voice, and which are still raised in you by the spirit, by the graces and by the most amiable modesty.
The company, desiring to respond to a process as honest as yours, in the manner which may be most agreeable to you, begs you, Mademoiselle, to accept your admissions to all its public meetings. This commission flatters me all the more because it affords me the opportunity to assure you, Mademoiselle, of the distinguished esteem which I have long felt for your talents and for your person, and which I share with all people of taste, and with all honest people.
I have the honor to be with respect, Mademoiselle, your very humble and very obedient servant,

D'ALEMBERT,
Permanent Secretary of the Académie Française.
Paris, August 10, 1775."

"The homage of these two portraits to the Academy soon procured me the honor of a visit from d'Alembert, a dry and cold little man, but exquisitely polite. He stayed a long time and walked through my studio, saying a thousand flattering things to me. I never forgot that he had just left, when a tall lady, who had been there, asked me if I had made these portraits of La Bruyère and Fleury that we had just spoken of from life? – 'I'm a little too young for that,' I replied without being able to prevent myself from laughing, but very happy for the poor lady that the academician was gone." These two famous models were already long dead!



Paris, the Pont Neuf and Ile de la Cité, *J. Raguenet, 1754, Musée Carnavalet.*



Right, the Académie Française, at the sessions of which in 1775 the 20-year-old artist was authorized to attend (it is not certain that she used this right), and, *left,* the Louvre, where she was admitted in 1783 in the Royal Academy of Painting, at the age of 28.



The Pont Neuf and the Ile de la Cité, seen from Quai de Conti (Académie Française),



Jean-Baptiste Raguenet, late 18th century, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun at age 27, see further

Chapter II

Artistic maturity in Paris and Versailles (1776-1789)

Marriage in 1776



Self-portrait, *often attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776, at age 21, Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.*

Marriage of Élisabeth Vigée in 1776, at the age 21, and acceleration of her already great success, described in her Memoirs:

"My father-in-law having retired from the business, we went to stay at the Hotel Lubert, rue de Cléry. M. Lebrun had just bought this house; he lived there, and as soon as we were established, I went to see the magnificent pictures of all the schools, with which his apartment was filled. I was delighted with a neighborhood that enabled me to consult the masterpieces of the masters. M. Lebrun showed me extreme obligingness in lending me to copy them, pictures of admirable beauty and of great value. I owed him the strongest lessons I could take, when after six months he proposed to me. I was far from wanting to marry him, although he was very well made and had a pleasant face. I was then twenty years old; I lived without worrying about my future, since I was earning a lot of money, so that I did not feel any desire to get married. But my mother, who believed M. Lebrun to be very rich, never ceased to urge me not to refuse such an advantageous marriage, and I finally made up my mind to this marriage, driven above all by the desire to escape the torment of live with my father-in-law, whose bad temper grew every day since he was idle. I felt so little trained, however, to make the sacrifice of my freedom, that in going to church, I still said to myself: 'Shall I say yes? will I say no?' Alas! I said yes, and I changed my torments for other torments. It was not that M. Lebrun was a wicked man: his character offered a mixture of gentleness and liveliness; he was very helpful to everyone, in a word quite amiable; but his unbridled passion for women of bad morals, joined to the passion for gambling, caused the ruin of his fortune and mine, which he had entirely at his disposal; to the point that in 1789, when I left France, I did not have twenty francs of income, after having earned, for my part, more than one million. He had eaten it all.

My marriage was kept secret for some time: M. Lebrun, having had to marry the daughter of a Dutchman with whom he had a great deal of painting, begged me not to declare it before he had finished his business. I consented all the more willingly, as I did not leave without great regret my maiden name, under which I was already very well known ...

I could not stand the powder. I obtained from the beautiful duchesse de Grammont-Cadrousse that she would not wear any to have herself painted (see further); her hair was an ebony black; I parted them on the forehead, arranged in irregular curls. After my session, which ended at dinner time, the Duchess did not disturb her hairstyle and thus went to a show; such a pretty woman was to set the tone: this fashion took hold slowly, then finally became general. This reminds me that in 1786, painting the Queen, I begged her not to put powder on and to share her hair on her forehead. – 'I will be the last to follow this fashion', said the Queen laughing, 'I do not want people to say that I imagined it to hide my large forehead'.

I tried as much as I could to give the women I painted the attitude and expression of their physiognomy; those which had no physiognomy (we see some), I painted them dreamy and nonchalantly leaning. Finally, we must believe that they were happy; for I could not meet the demands; it was difficult to get placed on my list; in short, I was in fashion; everything seemed to come together to get me there. "

Jean-Baptiste Lebrun, her husband, *P.S. Duvivier, M. Carnavalet, Paris.*





Self-portrait of Jean-Baptiste Le Brun (1748-1813, at age 47), *in 1795 (private collection)*, painter, gallery owner, seller and restorer of paintings, whom the artist married in 1776 (when he was already married in Holland) to free herself from her family and her stepfather who took all his first earnings. On this point, her husband took over, but their artistic understanding accelerated the painter's career. After 1789 and the artist’s departure into exile, the art market collapsed and the husband had to sell much of their property. They divorced in 1794 (while she was in exile), but he succeeded in removing the artist's name from the list of emigrants, which allowed her to return to France in 1802. He also personally helped to bring together the first core of paintings of the future Museum of Louvre.



Gardens and galleries *(following pages)* **of the Palais-Royal** (in the center of Paris), above which the artist lived (with her father-in-law, a jeweler) before her marriage and near which she remained very close, rue de Cléry, afterwards.



It was one of the strategic places where people of high society met and wandered, thus being able to easily reach the artist's studio, very close, to have their portrait to be painted Or to participate in her cultural "salon" (meeting).

Palais
Royal





Comtesse Ursula Potocka, born Zamoyska, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776.* Portrait listed by the artist.





Antoinette de Savalette de Magnanville,
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776, Marly-le-Roi.





Madame Marie Rose Aignan de Sanlot, née Savalette de Lange, 1745-1812, at age 31, *pastel, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776, Musée de Marly-le-Roi.* Her husband was tax collector. Her half smile is well rendered.





Louis Dubus, actor, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776, collection Comédie Française.*





Above, **afflicted woman** and, *below*, **Psyche and Love,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780s.*



Of German origin, **Prince Charles Henri Othon de Nassau-Siegen** (1745-1808) was first colonel in the French royal navy, then admiral in the Russian navy, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776, Museum of Indianapolis (USA)*. He toured the world with Bougainville from 1766 to 1769, then he sailed for several years in the Pacific Islands and New Guinea, before passing through Paris to meet Louis XVI and the artist, like many celebrities. Then, he worked in the Spanish Navy and finally in the Russian Navy, under Catherine II. He won battles against the Turks, but was defeated by the Swedes in 1790, before retiring to farm in Russia.

Young musician woman, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777, private collection.*



Portrait of a woman in Diane, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777.*



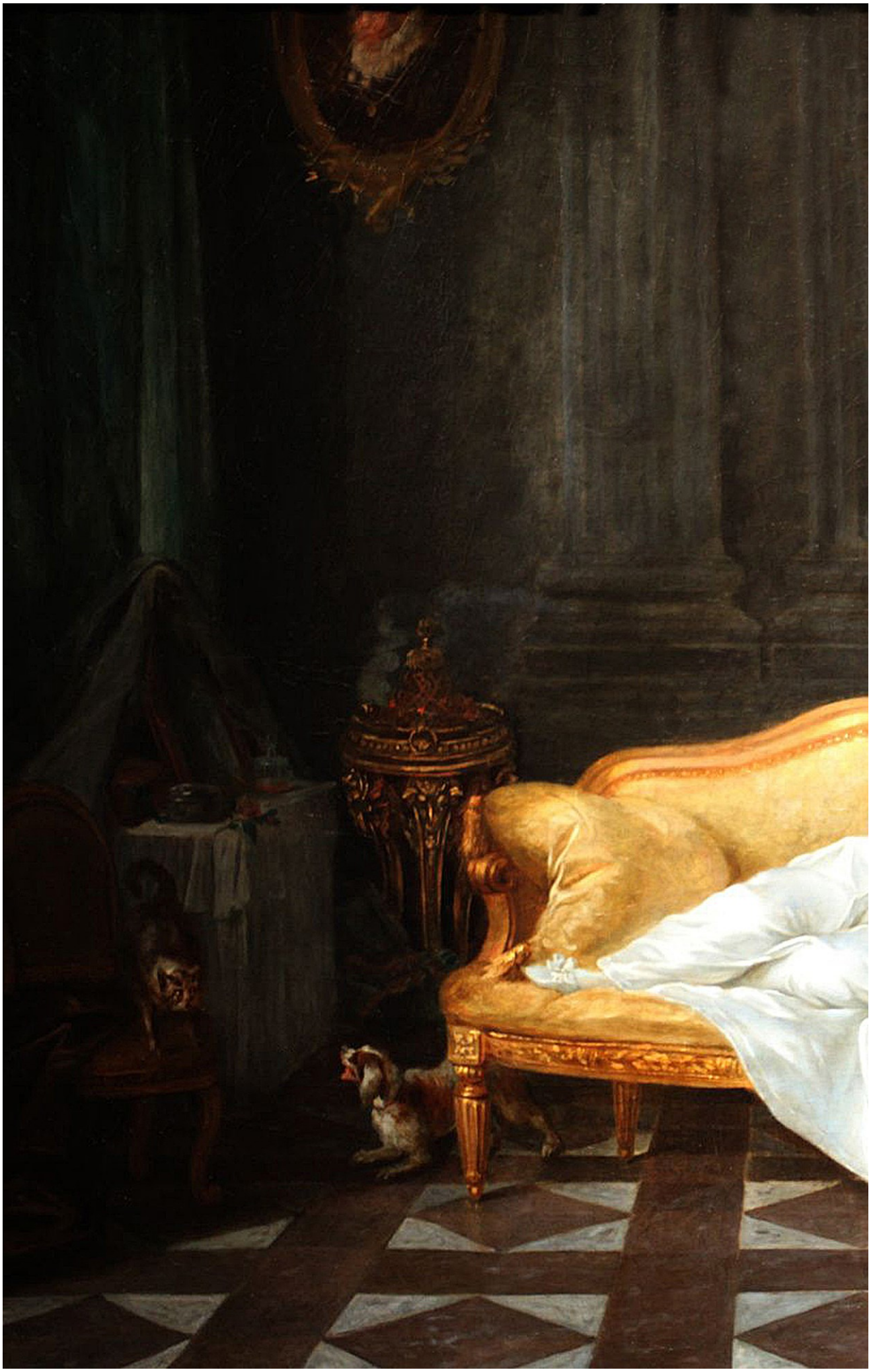


Portrait of a girl, possibly Sophie de Bourbon ('Mademoiselle d'Arthois') (1776-1783), *Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777.*



The Spanish concert, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777, private collection. Right page, above,* one of the artist's rare classical compositions, ordered by a German prince, *with details here and enlargement next pages*. Her husband (Jean-Baptiste Le Brun) served as a model for the musician, and she herself was in self-portrait for the woman.

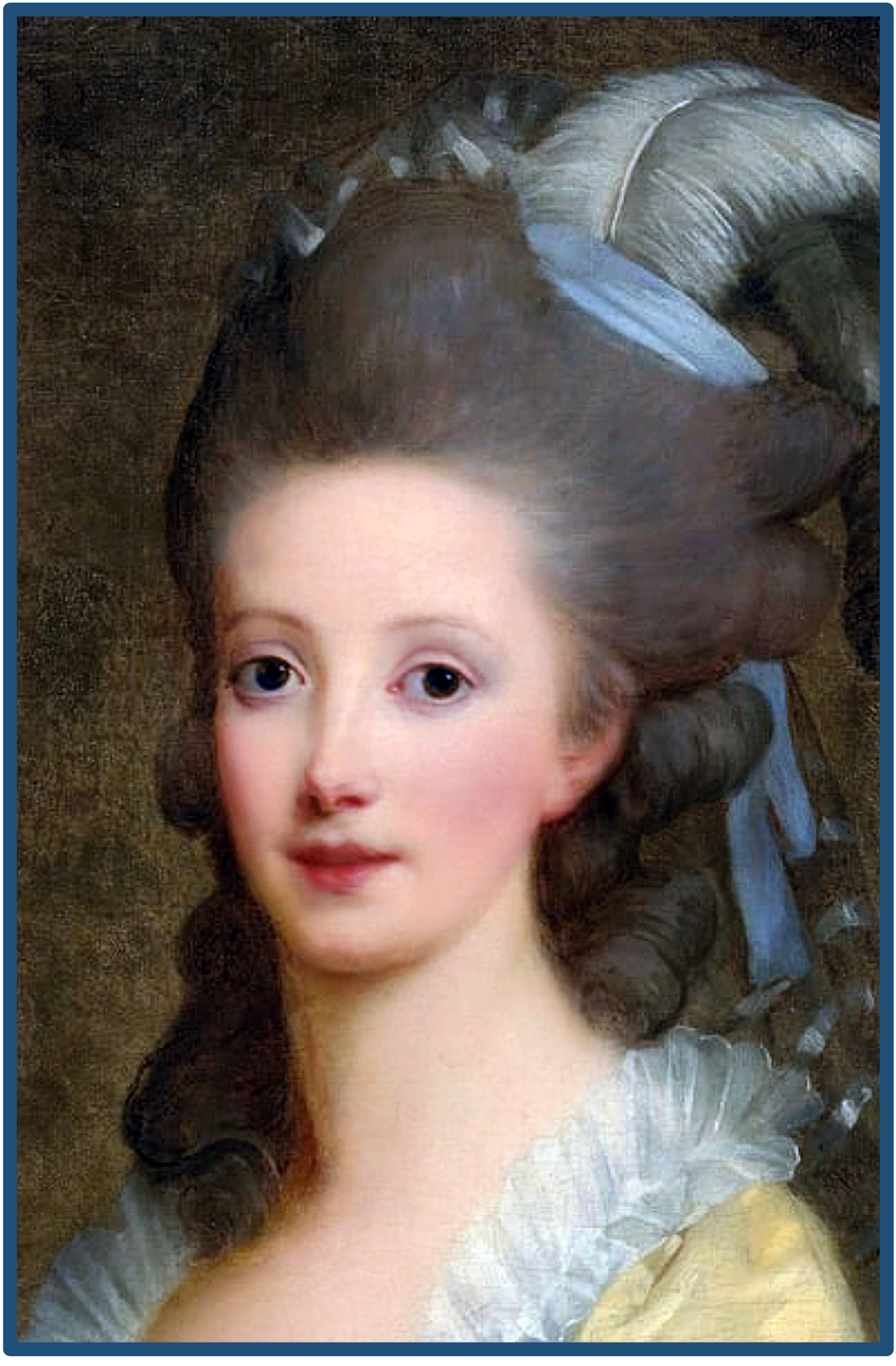






Woman in yellow dress, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777.*





Young officer of Royal Infantry, *often attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1777.*





Élisabeth de France, called “Madame Élisabeth” (1763-1793), young sister of Louis XVI, 14 years old here, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777 (see further, since the artist painted her 3 times).*





Louis Stanislas Xavier de France, Comte de Provence (1755-1824), called « Monsieur », brother of King Louis XVI and who became Louis XVIII in 1814, after the first abdication of Napoléon, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1776, private collection.* He was 21 years old here, the same age as the painter, who made several paintings of him. It was he who introduced the young artist to Versailles and allowed her to meet Marie-Antoinette 2 years later.

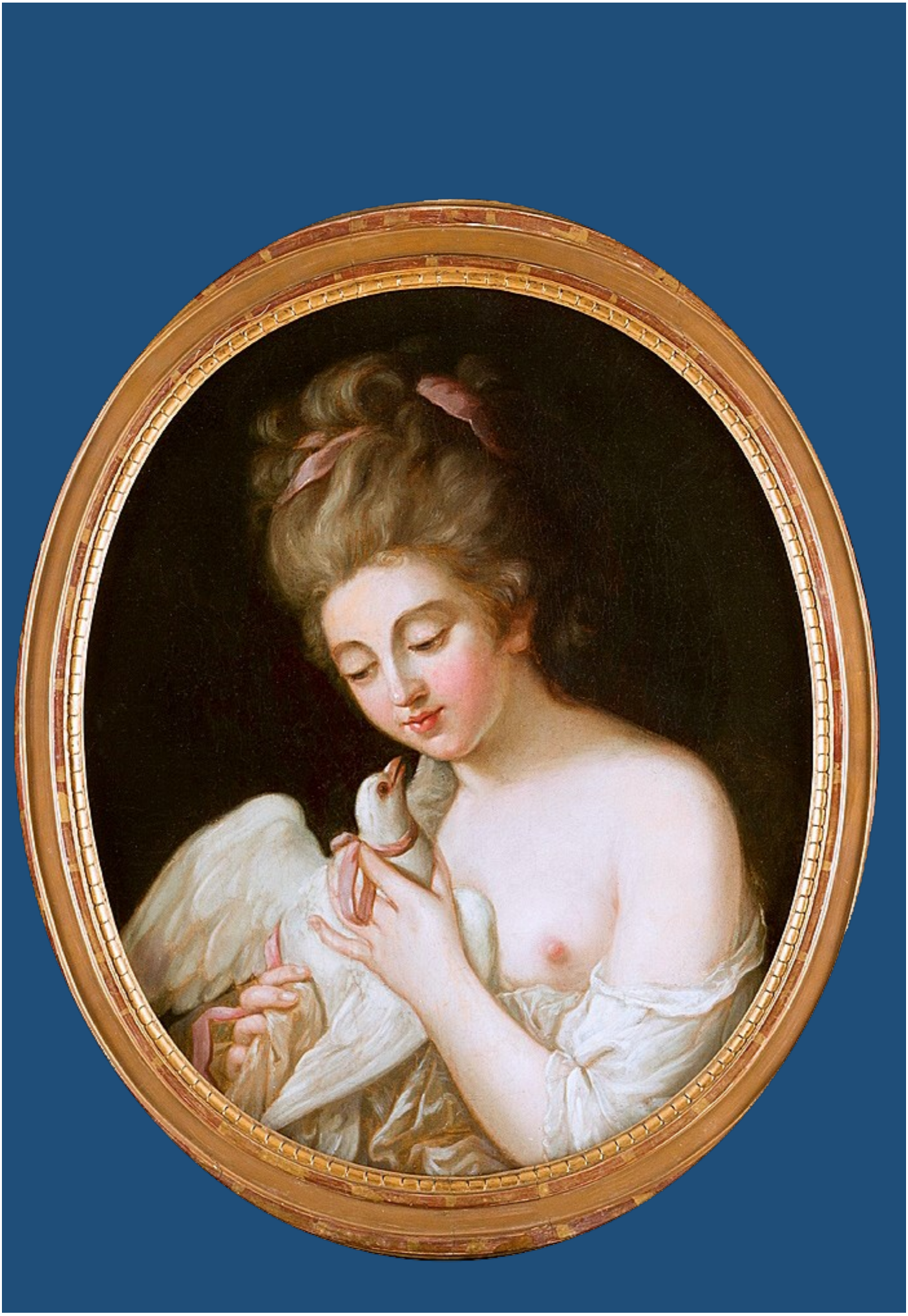


Above and right, **Woman,** *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, unknown years and models.*





Above and right, two (uncertain) attributions to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, years 1770-1780. Non identified models.



19 rue de Cléry, where Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun lived and painted 1778 to 1789, as indicated on a commemorative plaque under n ° 19.





Marie Adélaïde de Bourbon Penthièvre (1753-1821)**, duchesse de Chartres** (1769-1785), **then duchesse d'Orléans** (1785-1821), wife of Louis Philippe Joseph d'Orléans and mother of future King Louis-Philippe I, 25 aged old here, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778, private collection.* She was one of the people who made the artist known, as she wrote in her Memoirs: *"I often saw the duchesse de Chartres walking in the garden with her ladies, and I soon noticed that she was looking at me with interest and kindness. I had just finished the portrait of my mother, which was causing a stir at the time. The Duchess asked me to go and paint her at her place. She communicated to all around her extreme benevolence for my young talent, so that I was not long in receiving a visit from the great and beautiful Comtesse de Brionne and her daughter (see further), the Princess of Lorraine, who was extremely pretty, then successively that of all the great ladies of the Court and of the 'Faubourg Saint-Germain'."* It was also on the duchesse de Chartres' advice that the Queen called on the artist that year.

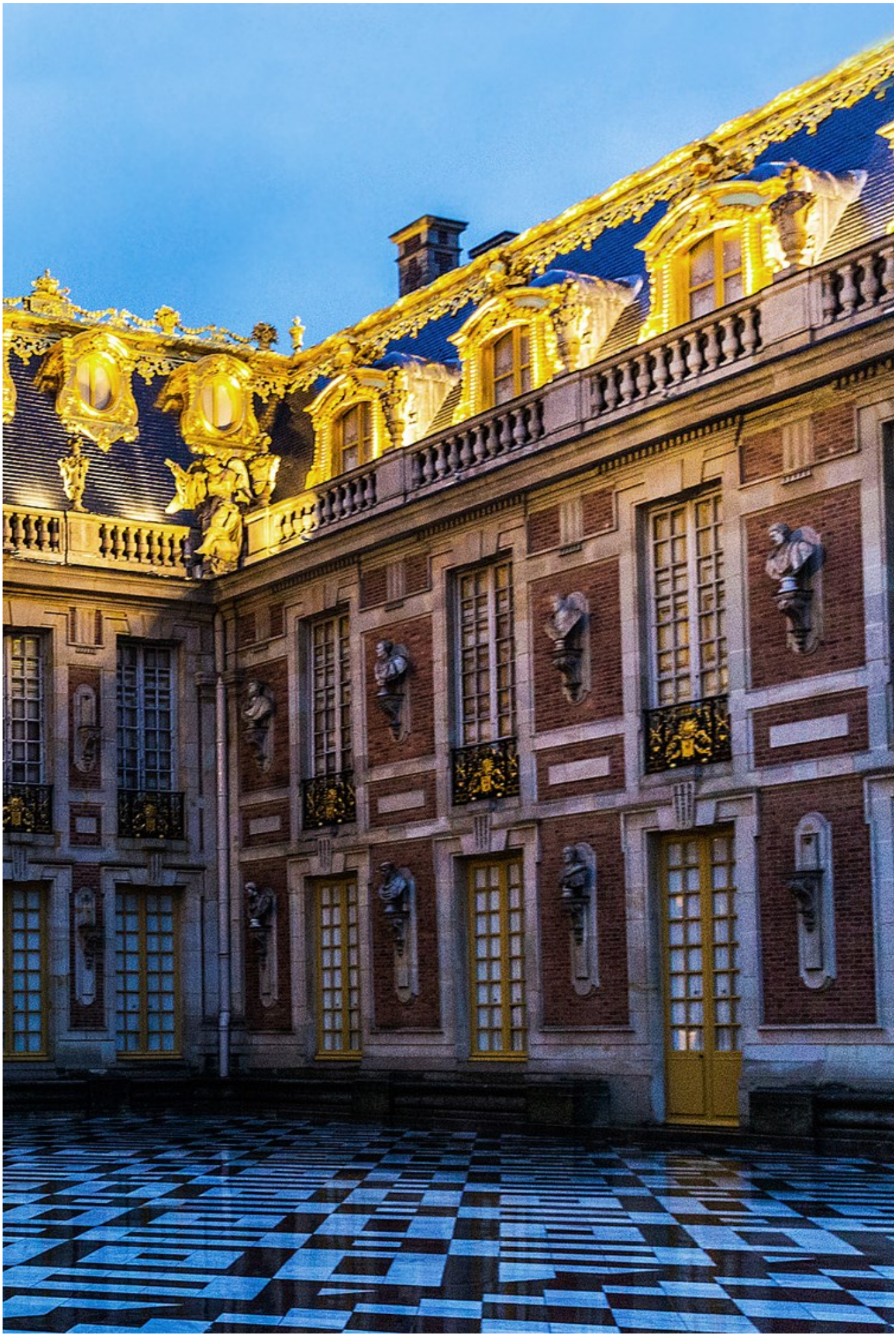


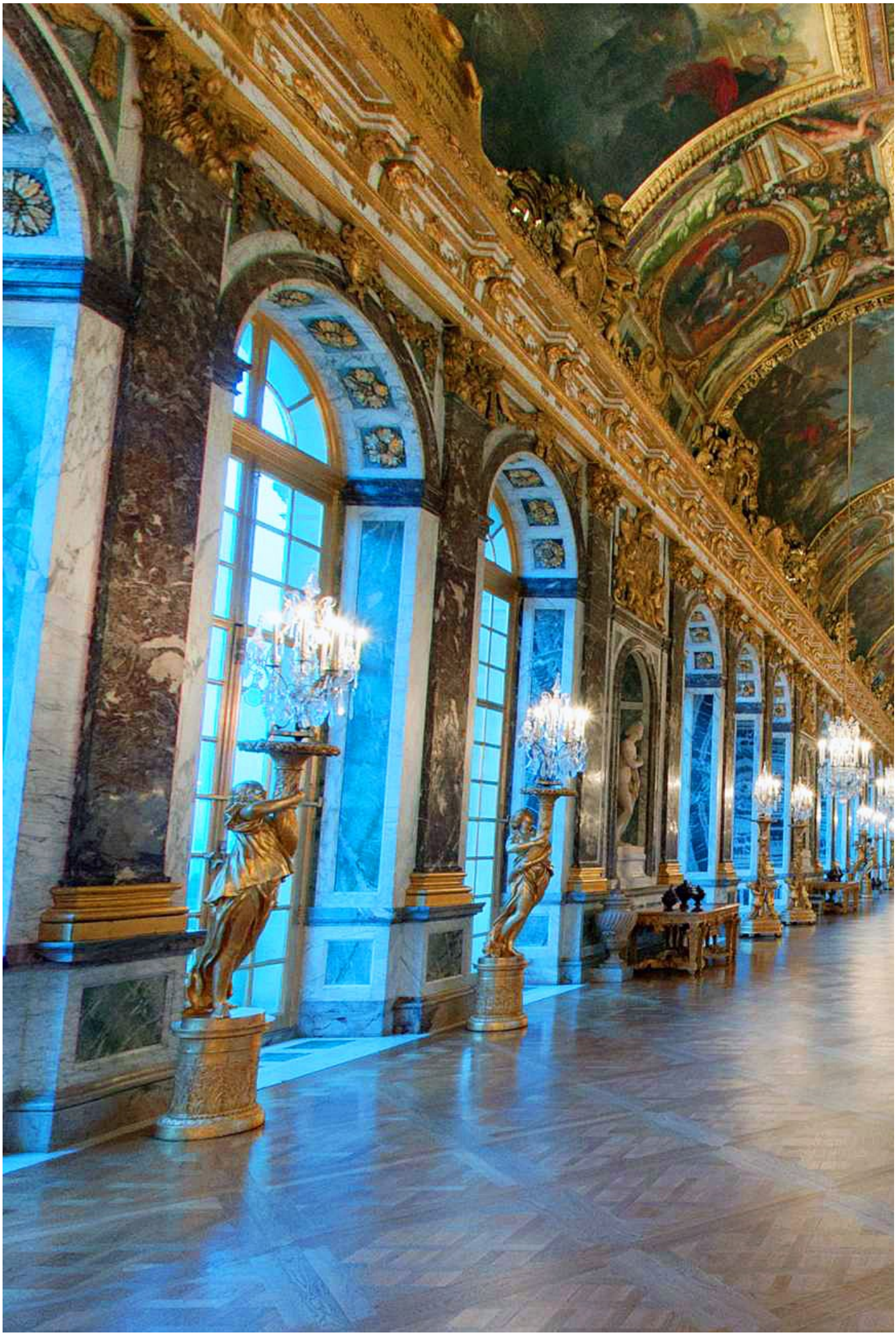
Versailles in 18th century, under Louis XV

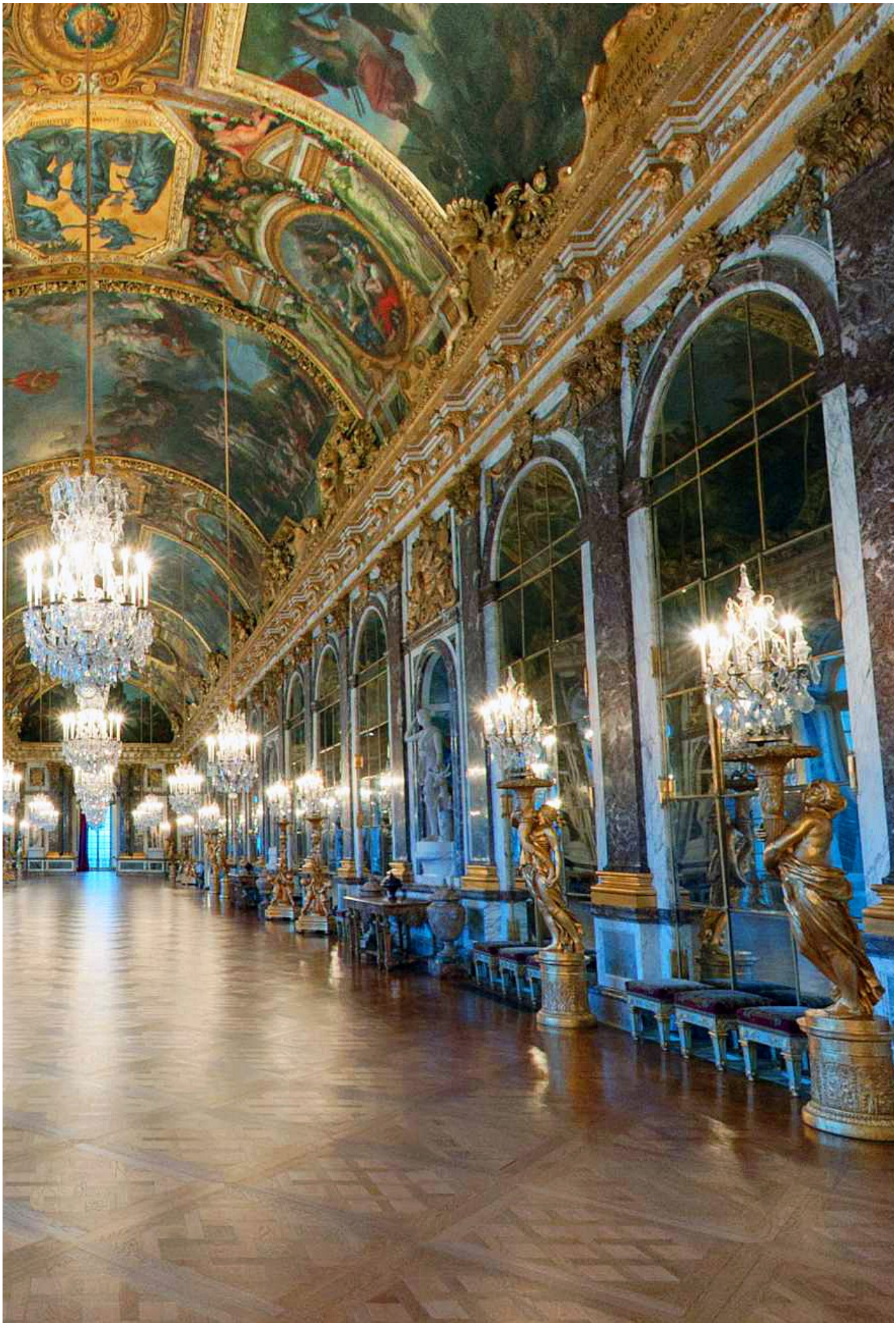


Pierre Denis Martin, 1722









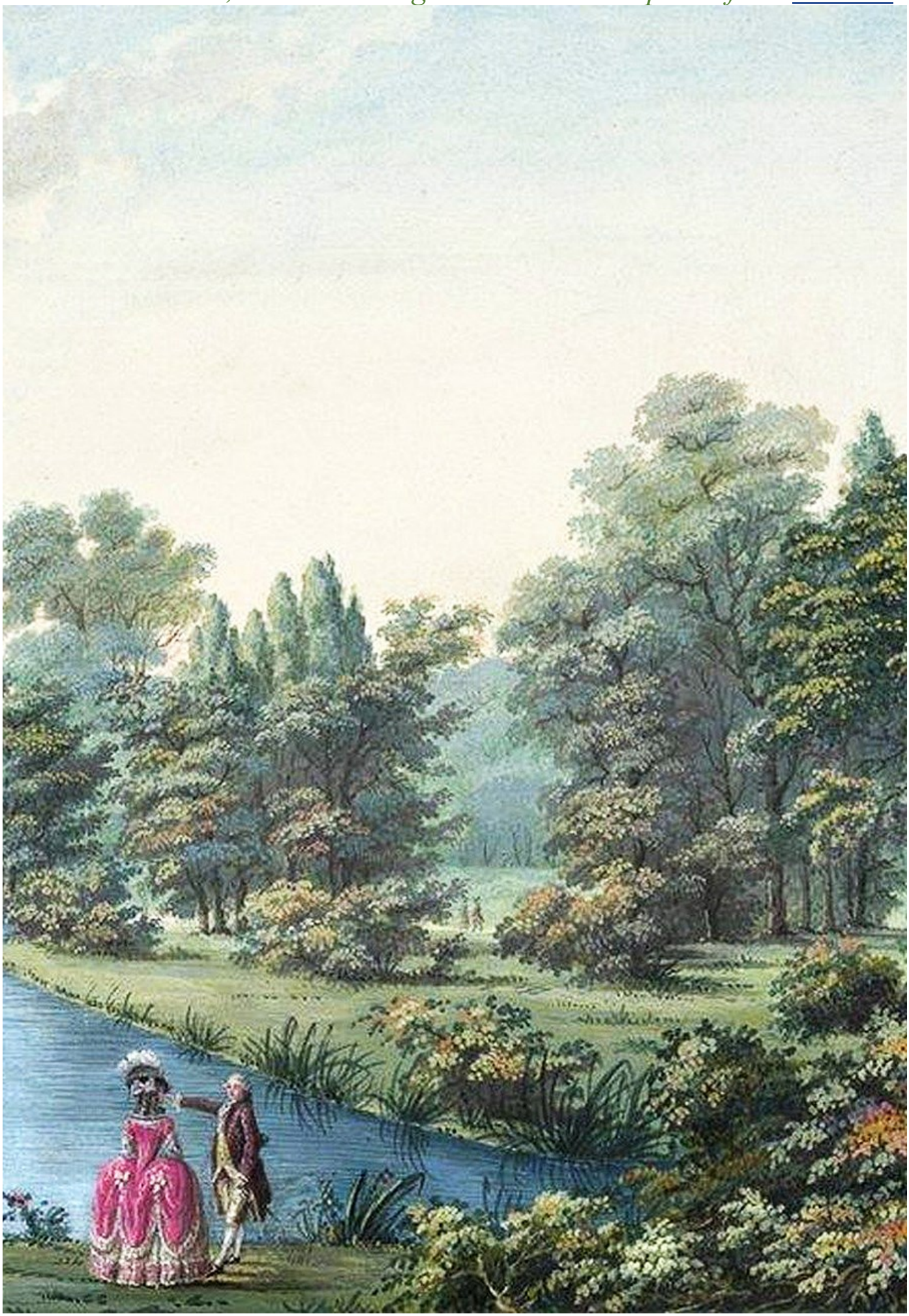




In 1778, begins the story of the artist with the Court of Versailles and



Marie-Antoinette, here with King Louis XVI in the park of the Trianon.





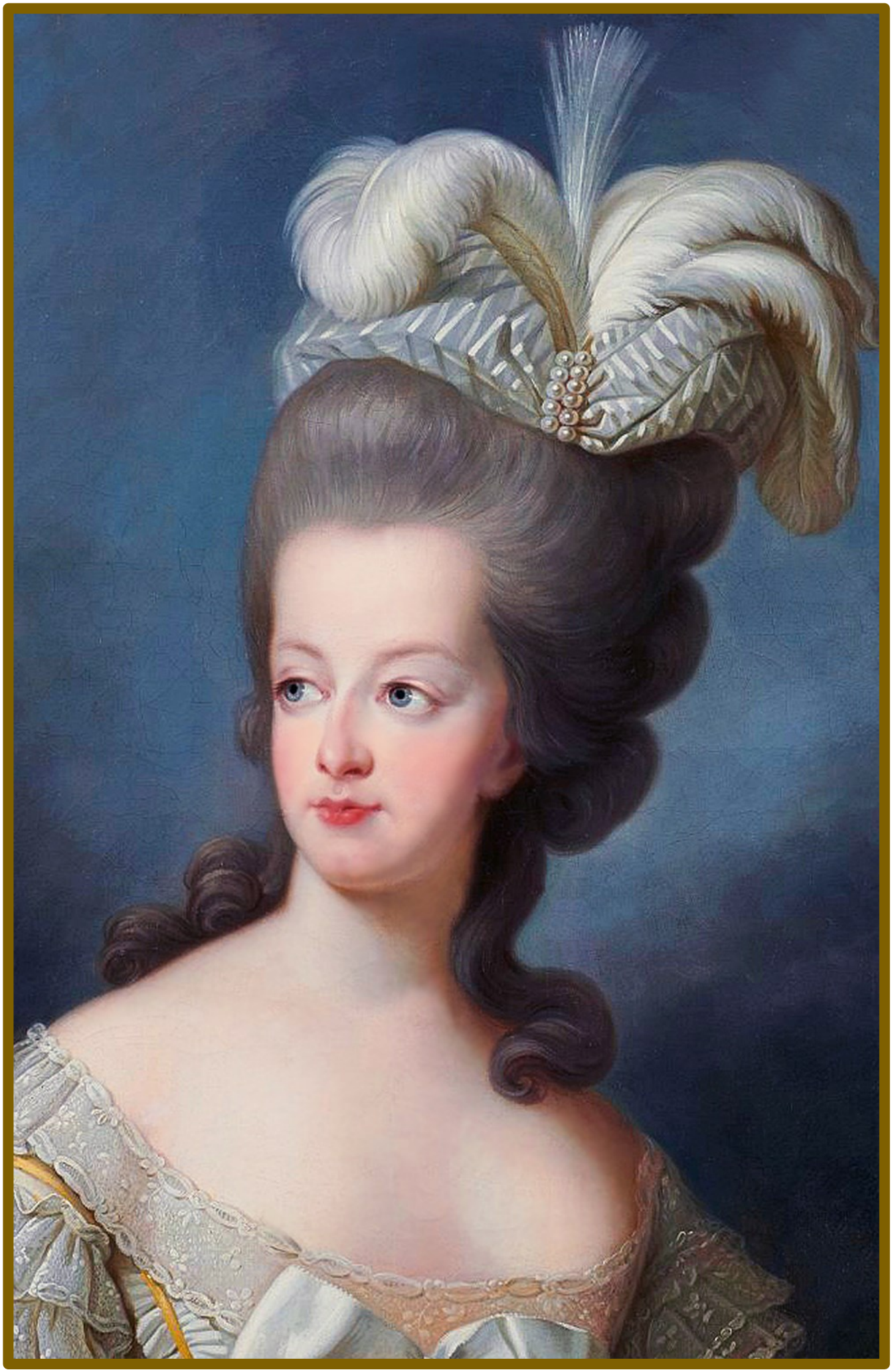
Louise-Augustine de Montesquiou-Fézensac (1761-1823), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1778, Château de Parentignat, Auvergne, France.* She was the wife of Anne-François de Lastic, Marquis de Sieujac and bridesmaid of Madame Élisabeth, young sister of Louis XVI.

Queen Marie-Antoinette, at age 23, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778, Kuntshistoriches museum, Vienna,* a few years after she became Queen of France. Her crown can be seen next to her. This is the first portrait of the Queen by the artist, in a long series, around 30, here in a classic and "very dressy" dress of that period.

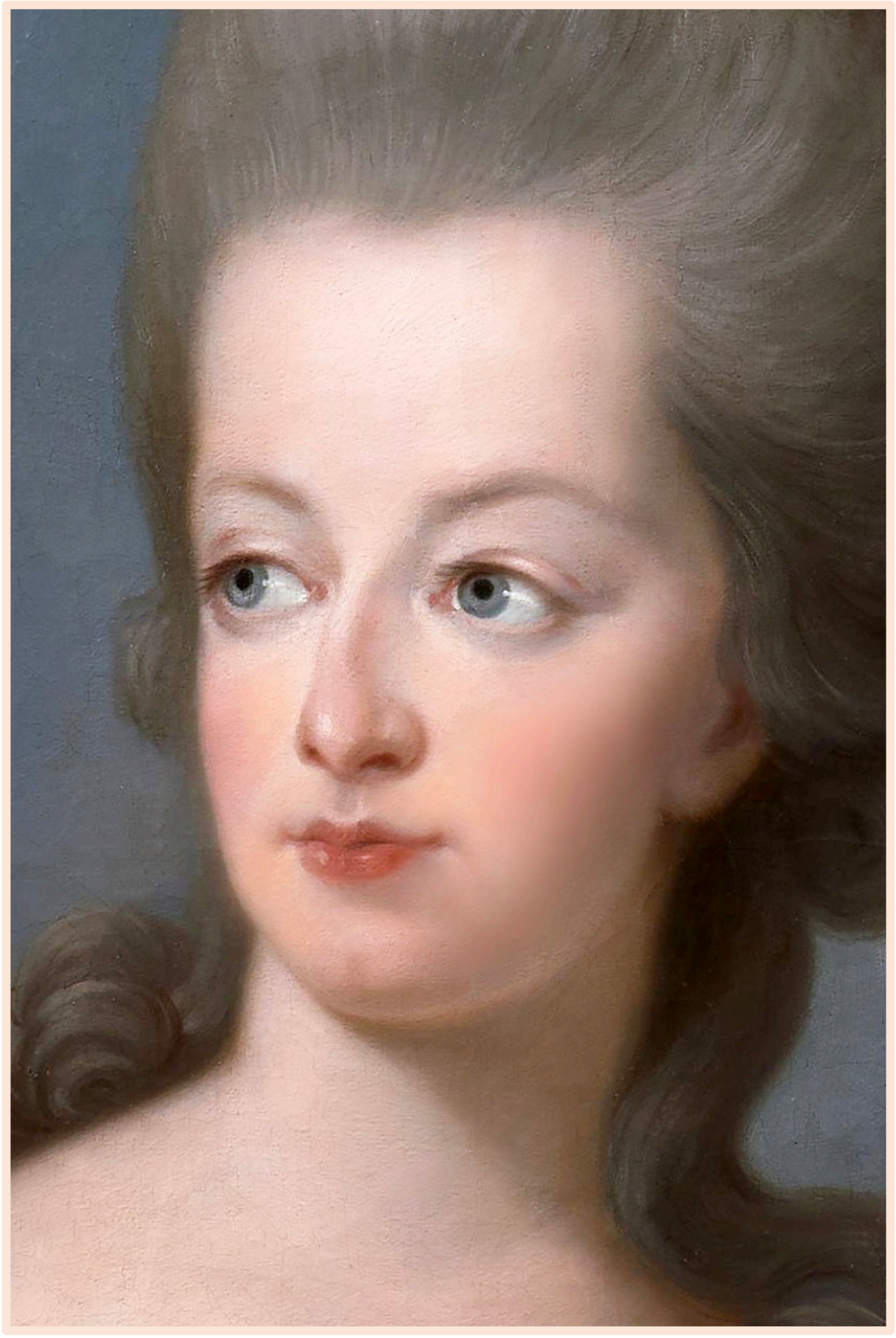


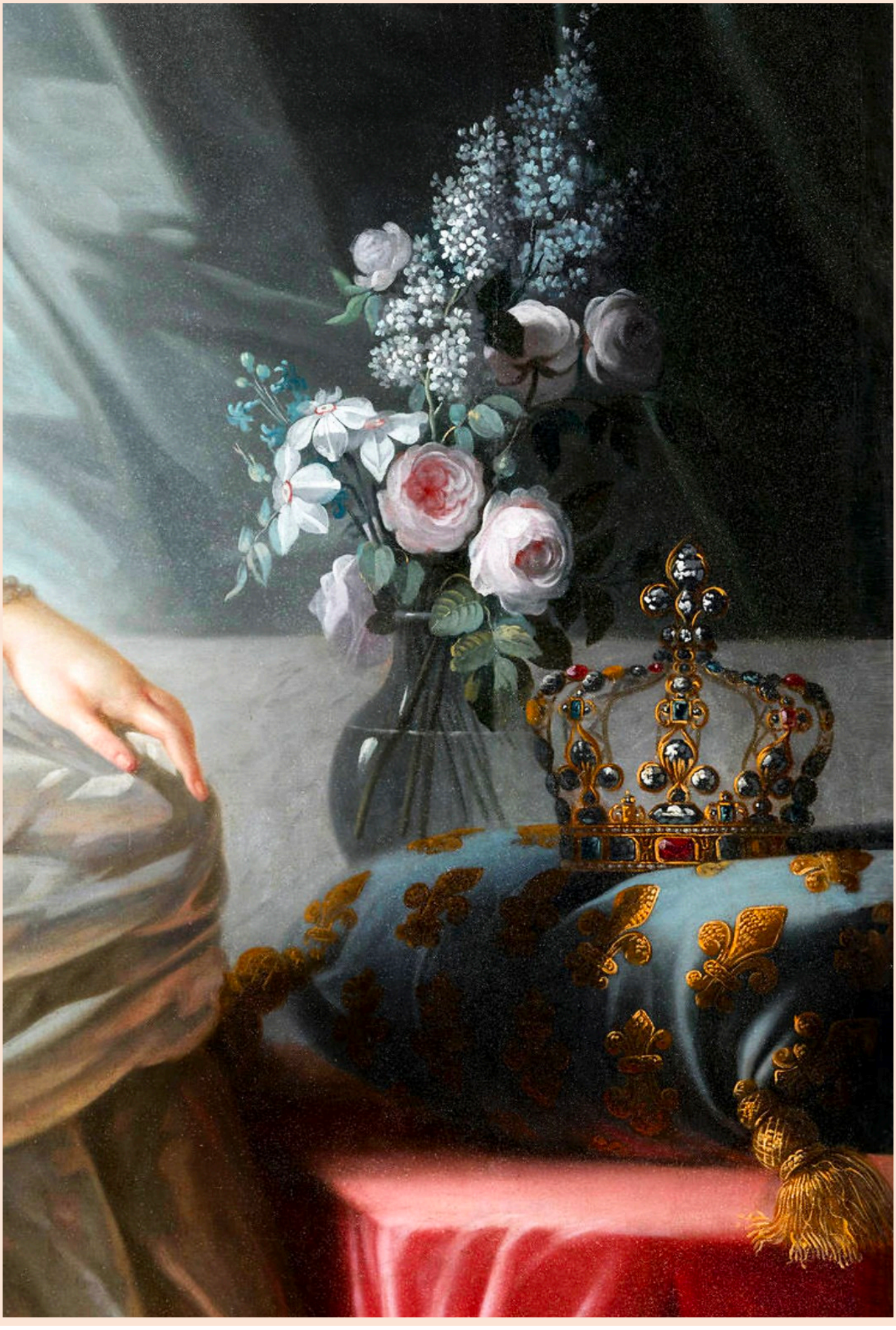
Copy of the bust of Marie-Antoinette made by the artist, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778.* Some paintings were produced in several copies, often with just the bust, as here, with at times some variations in the details.

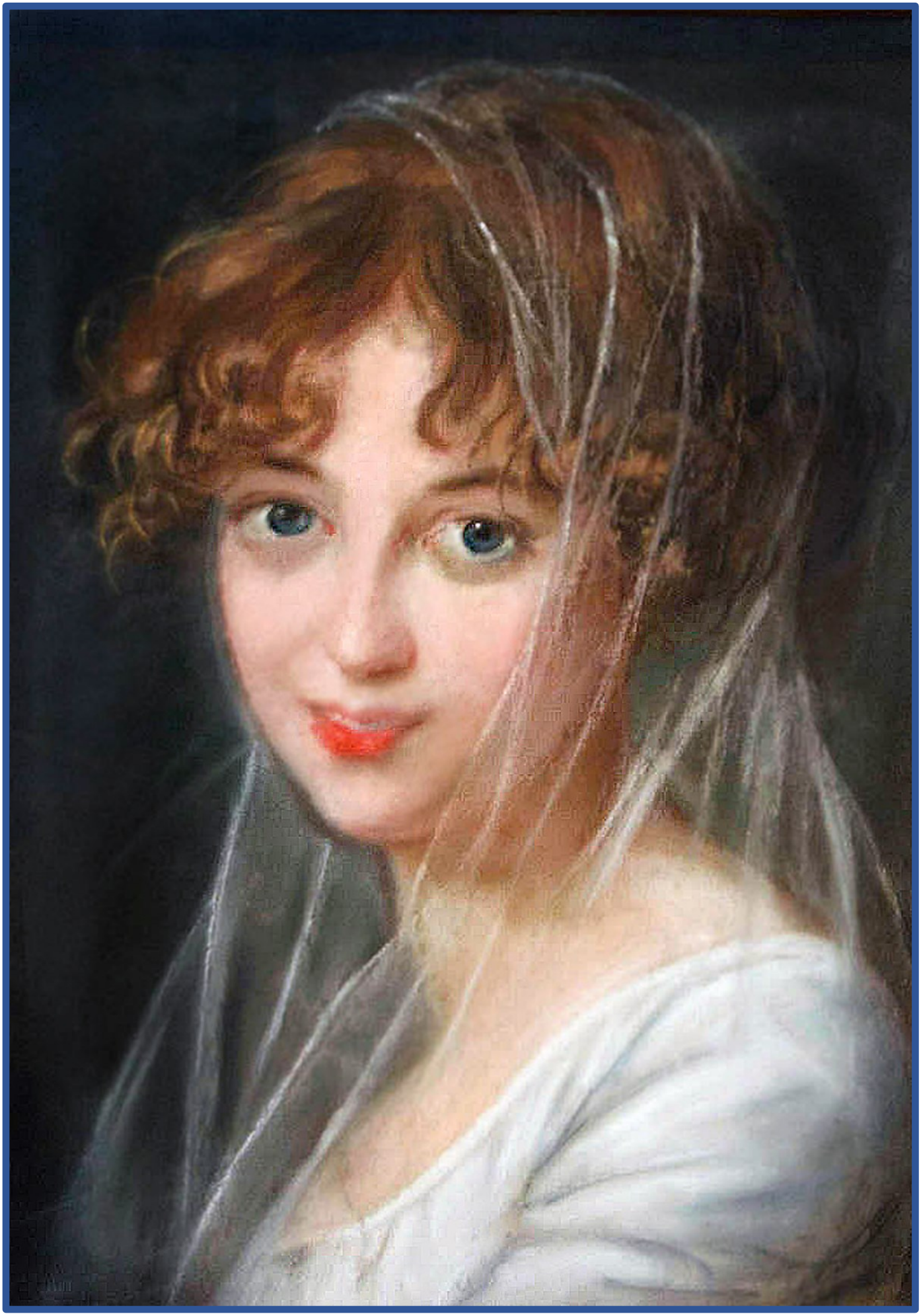












Woman with a veil, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1780.*



Louis Hercule Timoléon, duc de Cossé-Brissac, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778, collection privée*. He was colonel of the King's Swiss Guards at the Tuileries, which were massacred during the arrest of the royal family on August 10, 1792. He himself was killed with a sword in his prison the following September. His heart was carried on a pike through Paris and his head was thrown into the salon of his lover in Louveciennes, the Comtesse du Barry. The artist had met him at her house many times before 1789 and liked his conversation very much.

Marie-Antoinette, at age 23, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778, Versailles*. This portrait, made a few years after the Queen's coronation, was intended to be given in Vienna to the mother of Marie Antoinette, Maria Theresa, and her father, the then reigning Emperor, Francis 1st of Austria.





Charlotte Jeanne Béraud de la Haye de Riou, **marquise de Montensson** (1736-1806), at age 43, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1779, Versailles*. After the death of the Marquis in 1767, she was mistress of the duc d'Orléans, whom she married in secret because King Louis XV had vetoed a public wedding. Her second husband died in 1785 and she was imprisoned in 1794 under the 'Terror', but she was released after the fall of Robespierre.





Louis-Philippe d'Orléans (1725-1785), called « le Gros », duc de Chartres (1725-1752), then **duc d'Orléans**, de Valois, de Nemours and de Montpensier, « first prince of the blood », 54 years old here, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1779, Musée du Louvre*. He morganatically married the marquise de Montensson (previous page) and was the grandfather of King Louis-Philippe I (1773-1850), the last King of France (1830-1848).

Study of a head, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1780, private collection.*



Prince Alexandre Marie Léonor de Saint-Mauris-Montbarrey (1732-1796), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1779, Versailles.* Typical order of a painting for the artist. This noble of Franche-Comté was Secretary of State for the War under Louis XVI from 1777 to 1780. He was therefore painted during his government action. He was generally described as incompetent, greedy and amoral. 'Prime' Minister Necker forced him to resign in 1780. He lived in a luxurious house near the Bastille in 1789 and was then almost slaughtered by the crowd when the fortress was stormed on 14th July. Exiled in Switzerland and ruined, he died in Constance in 1796. *Right,* another version, the same year.





Prince Alexandre Marie Léonor de Saint-Mauris-Montbarrey, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1779, Versailles.* Another version.

Princesse Ernestine Frédérique de Croy, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.*





Comtesse de Verdun, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun,1779, private collection.* In classic dress here, but it's the same countess (artist's friend) that was painted again in 1782 with a straw hat *(see further).*

Young woman (non identified*), Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1777, private collection.*





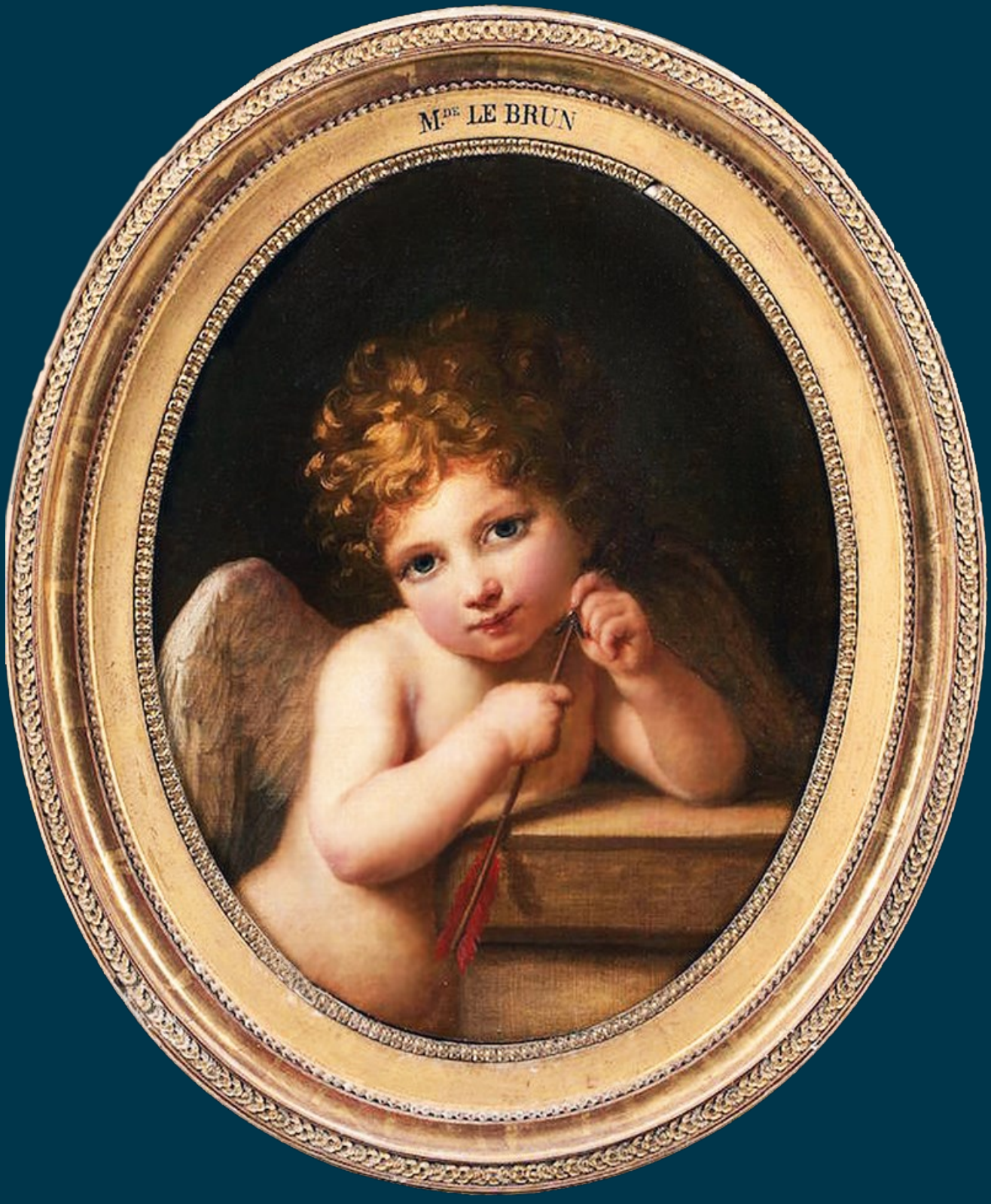
Charlotte Françoise Bergeret de Norinval, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780, Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris*. This portrait is also sometimes attributed to Jean-Honoré Fragonard. The model might have been one of the "readers" of Queen Marie-Antoinette.



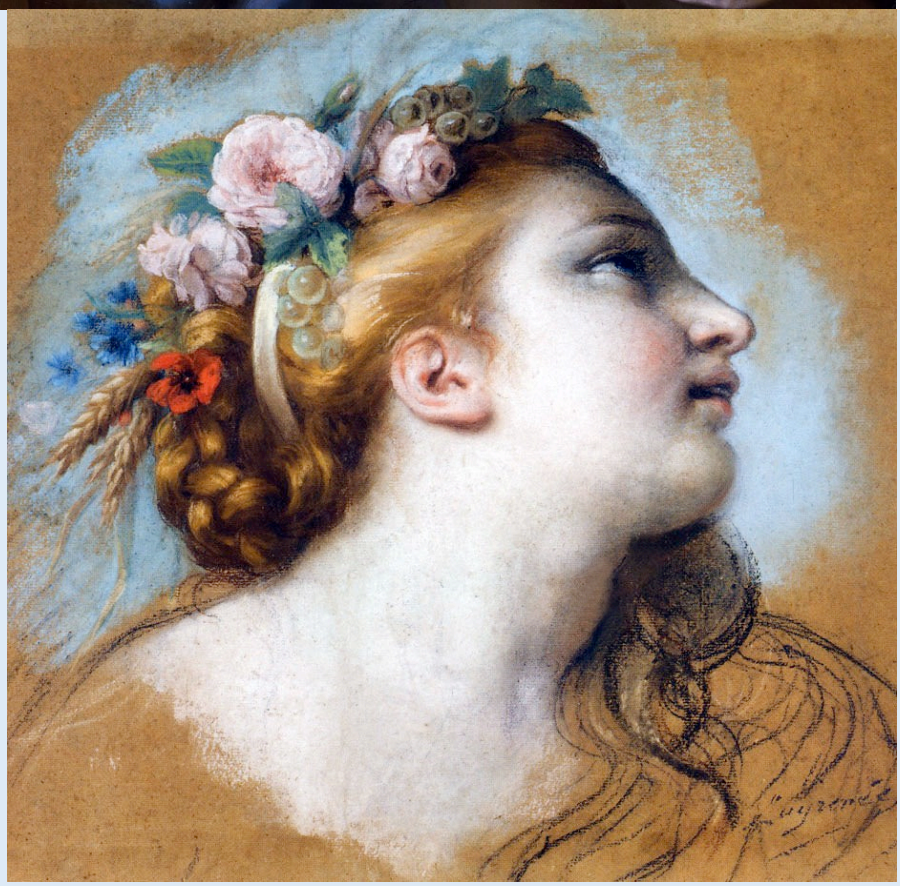
A gentleman, likely the brother of the Comtesse de Verdun *(previous pages), Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780, private collection.*



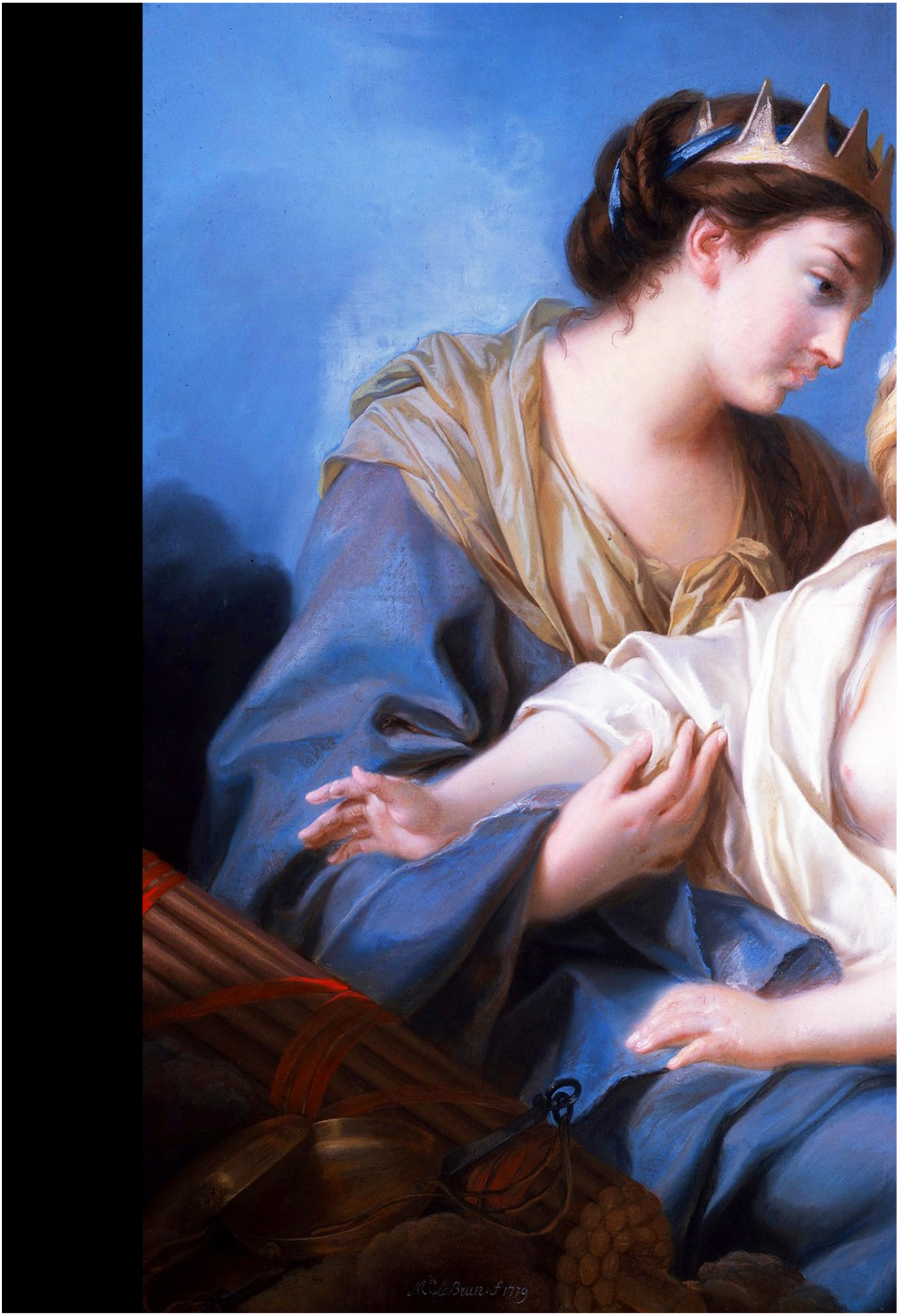
Study of the angel in the painting of 1781 « Juno borrowing the belt of Venus » *(further), Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780.*

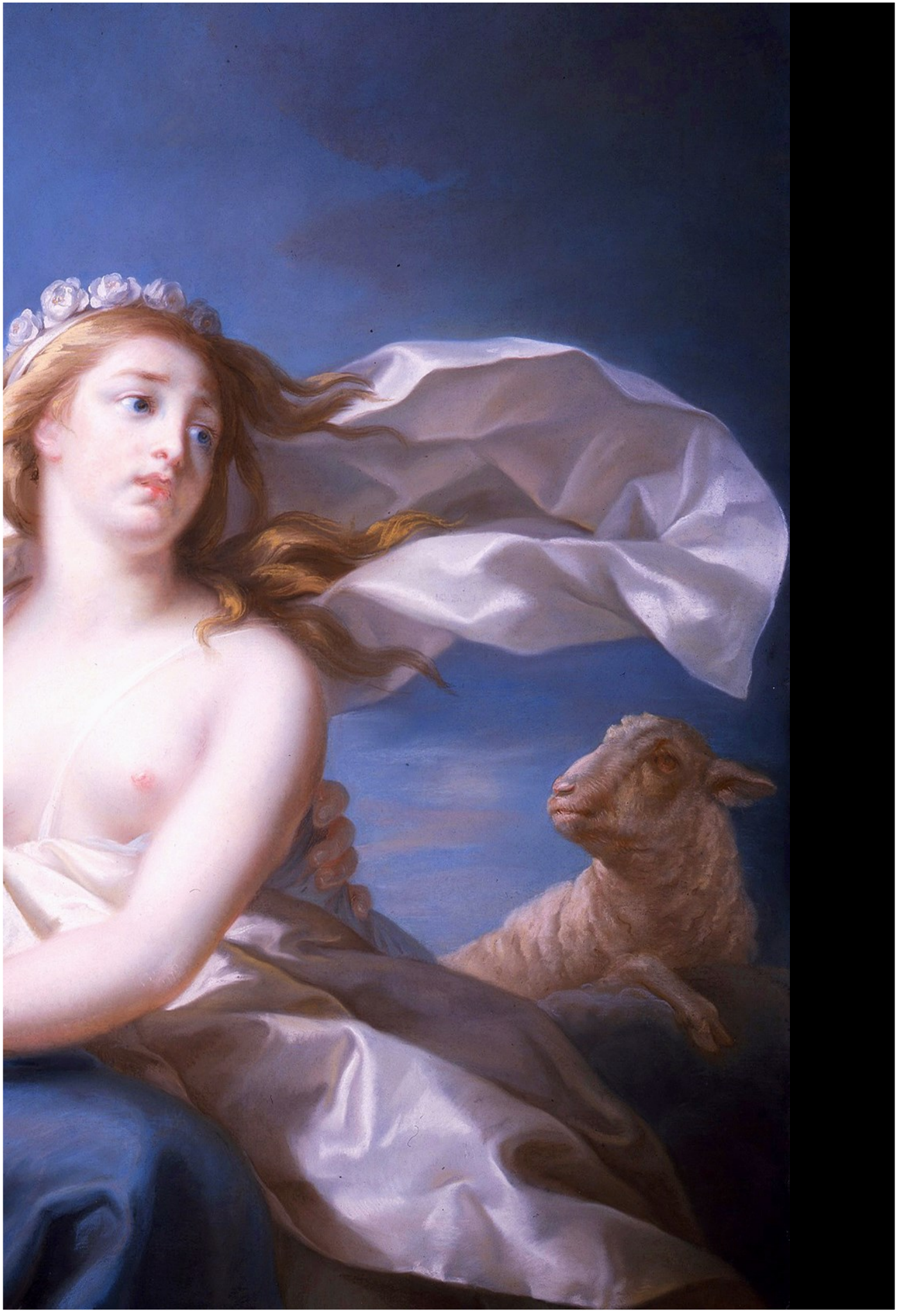


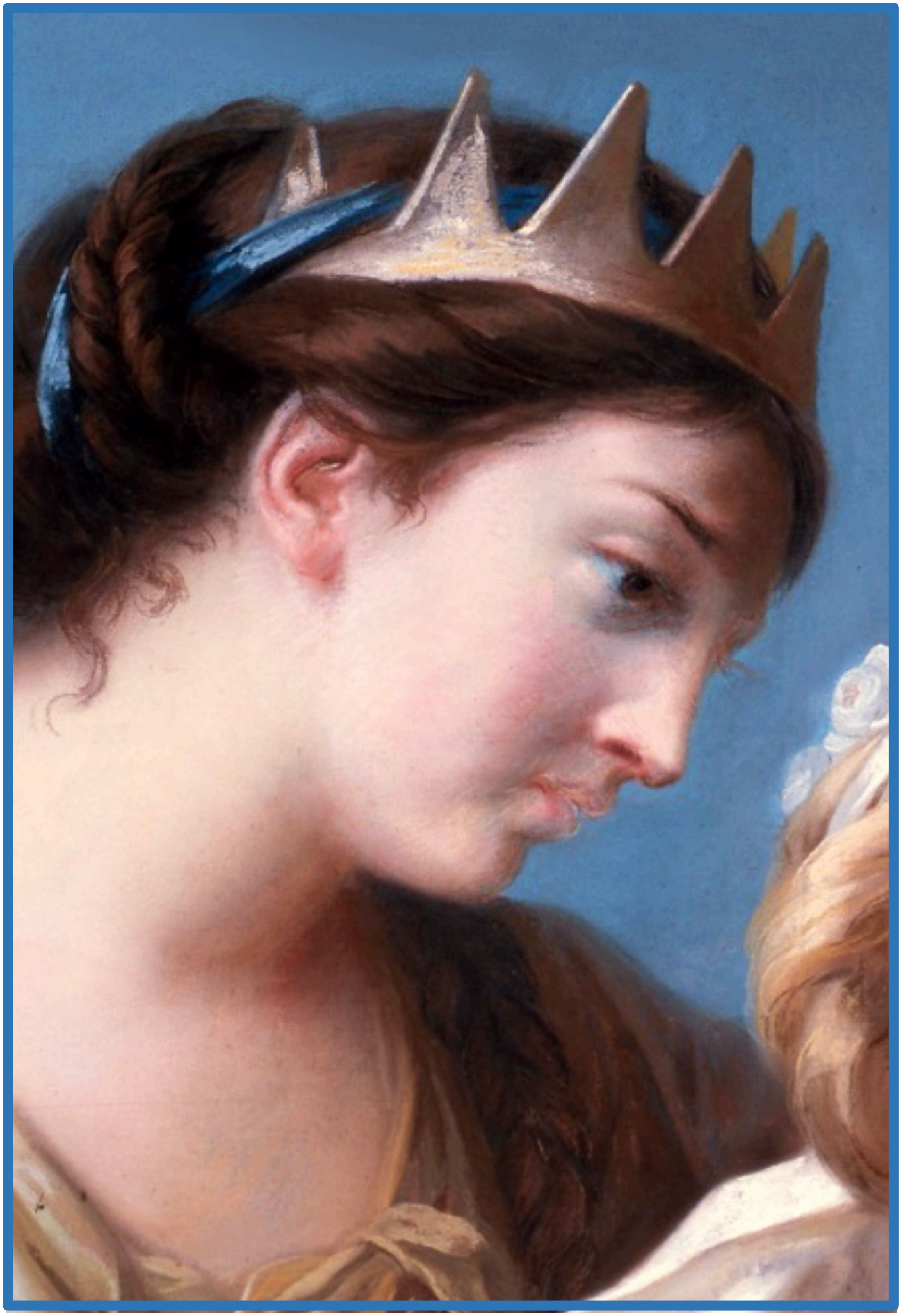
Above and next pages, “**Innocence taking refuge in the arms of Justice,**” *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1779, Musée des Arts, Angers.* Allegory.

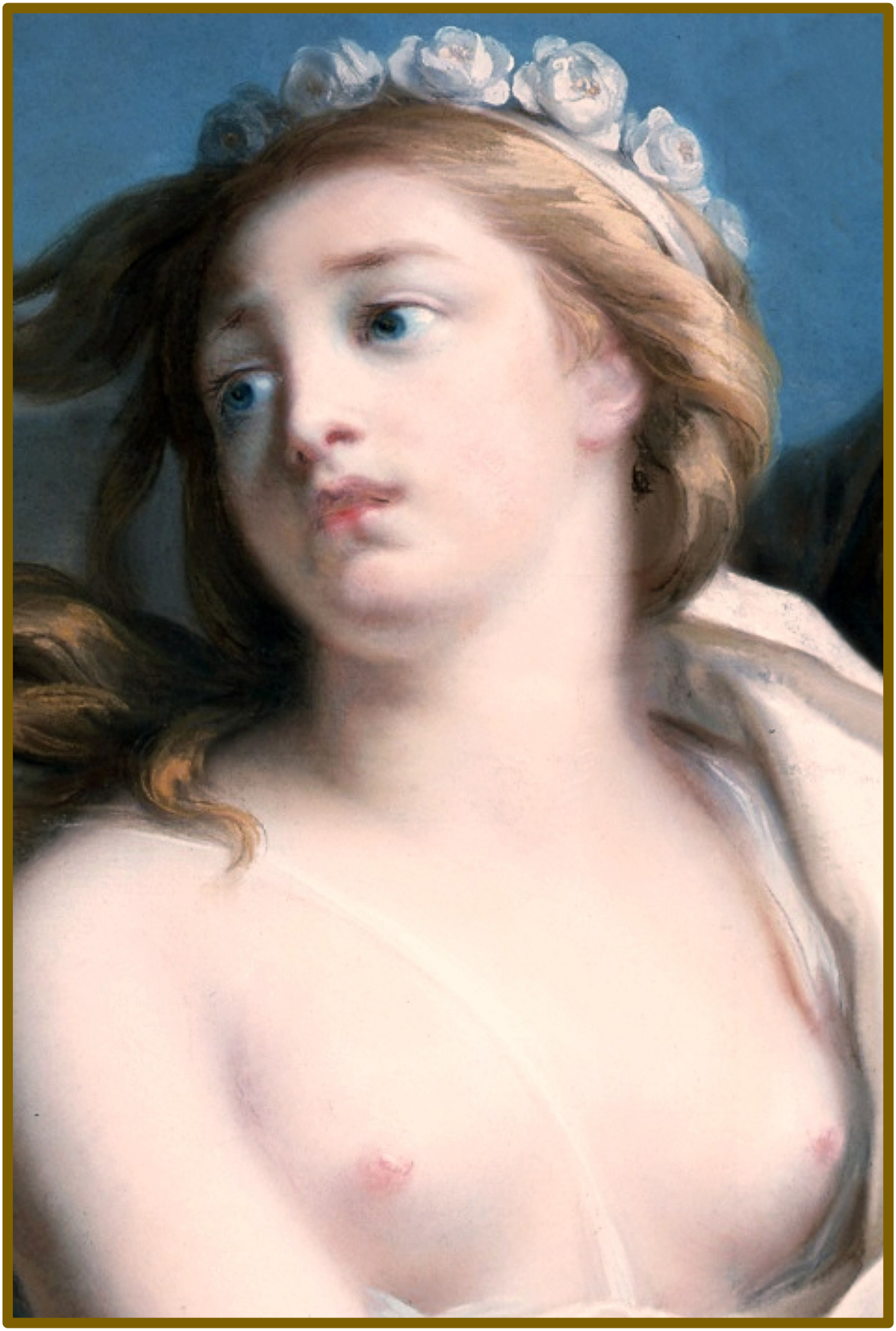


Right, study for **“Peace bringing back Abundance**,*” see the following pages. Allegory.*


Mde Le Brun. f 1779







Study made for the painting of the right page





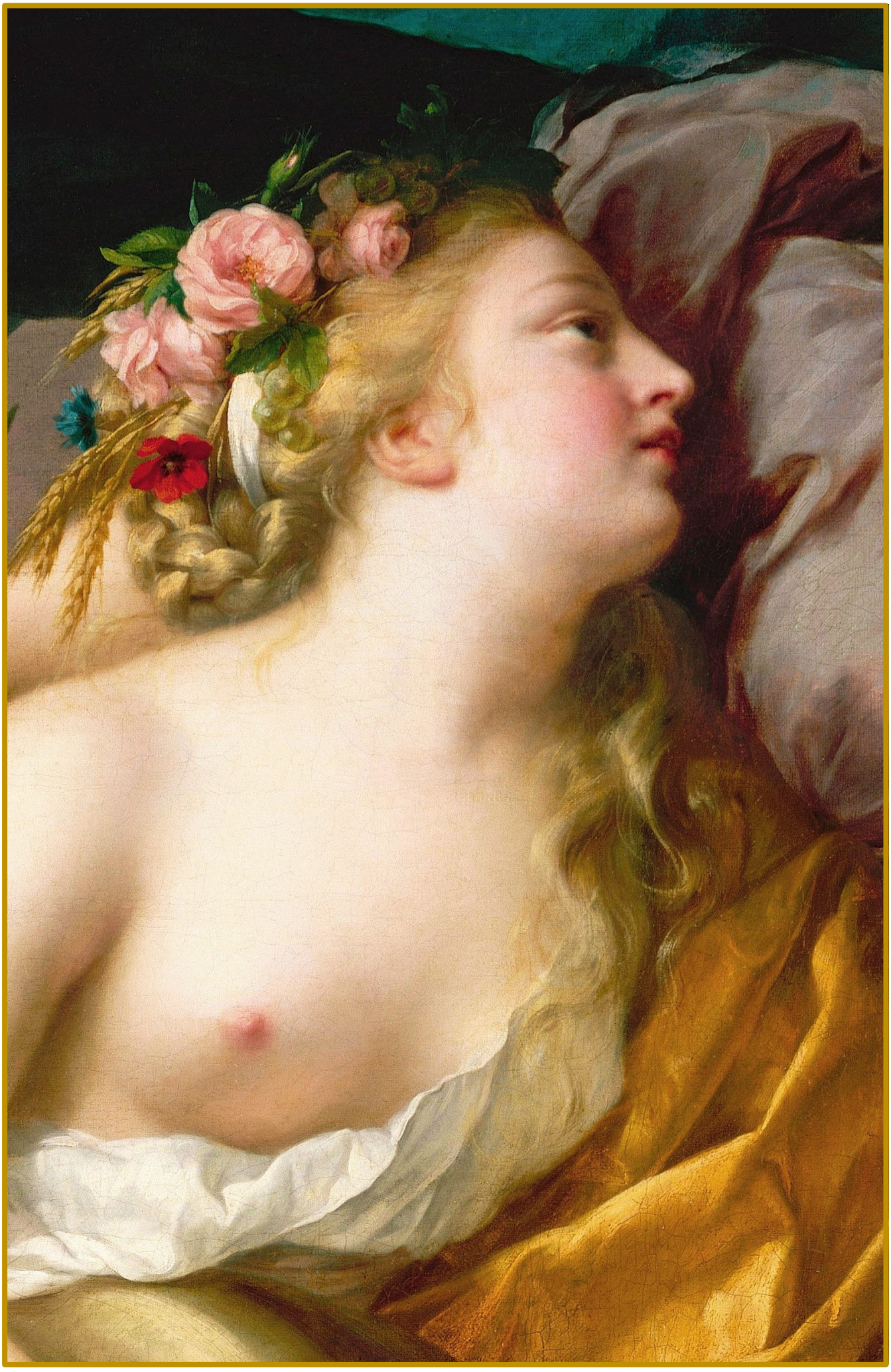
“Peace bringing back Abundance”, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780, Louvre.*

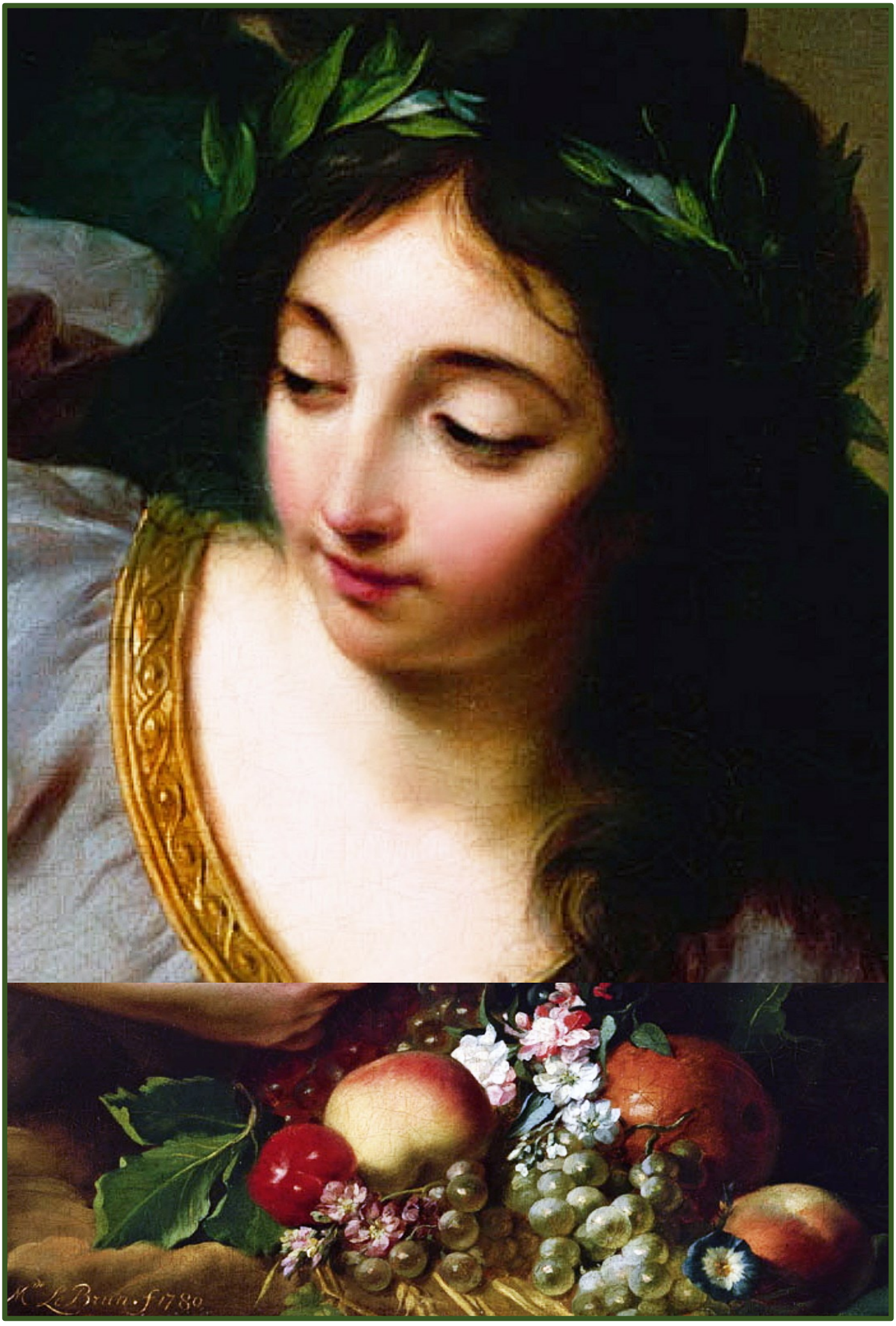
In 1774, Élisabeth Vigée became a member of the Académie de Saint-Luc, a corporation of master painters and sculptors. In 1783, at age 28, she was admitted to the prestigious Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture by presenting the allegorical scene of ‘The Peace Bringing Abundance’ (painted in 1780), which met with favorable reception. She was admitted thanks to the active support of Marie-Antoinette because some members of this Academy did not agree to admit a female painter, young, of common origin and married to a painting dealer.

“The still life in the foreground is distinguished by the virtuosity of the treatment of the vegetation as varied as it is symbolic: bindweed, shiny grapes, peach, pomegranate… The figure of Abundance appears, radiant, crowned with ears of wheat, poppies, cornflowers and roses. " Catalog of the Grand-Palais exhibition in Paris (2015). *Next pages, enlargement.*


Mme Le Brun. f. 1780






Mme Le Brun. f 1780

<u>Anne Antoinette Cécile Clavel</u>, called Madame Saint-Huberty (stage name), 1756-1812, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780, private collection.* French actress.





Comtesse Pierre de Montesquiou Fenensac (1765-1835), born Louise Charlotte Françoise le Tellier de Louvois-Coutanvaux de Montmirail de Creuzy, 25 years old here, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780.* Extensible name.



Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *1780, private collection,* which was discovered recently (2010) in an inventory. It appears to date from the early 1780s, when the artist was between 25 and 28 years old. This "very lively" drawing had

existed in the same family for many generations and it was simply marked "Vigée-Lebrun" on the back. It has been authenticated by experts and it has been auctioned off, now being in a private collection. *Below,* author's attempt at colorization.



During the period when Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun often went to Versailles, she also held a « salon » at her home from 1778 to 1789, described in her « Memoirs »:

After my marriage, I stayed in the rue de Cléry, where M. Lebrun (her husband) *had a large apartment, very richly furnished, in which he placed paintings of all the masters.*

In the modest apartment I am telling you about, I received the town and the courtyard every evening. Great ladies, great lords, outstanding men in letters and in the arts, everything came in this room; it was up to my parties when the crowd was often such that, for lack of seats, the Marshals of France would sit on the ground, and I remember that Marshal of Noailles, very fat and old, had great difficulty in getting up.

I was far from flattering myself, as you may believe, that all came for me: as happens in open houses, some came to find others, and the greater number to hear the best music that was available then did in Paris. Famous composers, Grétry, Sacchini, Martini, often had pieces from their operas heard in my house before the first performance.

For instrumental music, I had Viotti as a violinist, whose playing, full of grace, strength and expression, was so delightful! Jarnovick, Maestrino, Prince Henry of Prussia, an excellent amateur, who also brought me his first violin. Salentin played the oboe, Hulmandel and Cramer the piano, Madame de Montgeron also came once, shortly after her marriage. Although she was very young then, she nonetheless astonished all my society, which really was very difficult, by her admirable execution and especially by her expression; she made the keys speak. Since then, and already placed in the first row as a pianist, you know how much Madame de Montgeron has distinguished herself as a composer.

But, I come back to my concerts. The women who were usually there were the Marquise de Groslier, Mme de Verdun *, the Marquise de Sabran * who has since married Chevalier de Boufflers, Madame le Gouteux du Molay *, all four of my best friends, the Comtesse de Ségur *, the Marquise de Rougé *, Madame de Pezé *, her friend, whom I painted with her in the same painting* (in 1787, *see further*), *a crowd of other French ladies, whom, given the smallness of the premises, I could only receive more rarely, and the most distinguished foreigners. As for the men, it would take too long to name them for you, since I believe I have seen in my house all that Paris contained of talented and witty people.* * portraits shown here.

I chose from this crowd the most amiable to invite them to my suppers, which the Abbe Delille, Lebrun the poet, the Chevalier de Boufflers, the Vicomte de Ségur and others, made the most amusing in Paris. We cannot judge what society was like in France, when we have not seen the time when, all the business of the day finished, twelve or fifteen pleasant people gathered at the house of a hostess to end their evening there.

At home, for example, we met around nine o'clock. We never talked about politics; but we talked about literature, we told the anecdote of the day. At ten o'clock we sat down to table; my supper was very simple. It always consisted of a poultry, a fish, a dish of vegetables and a salad; so that if I allowed myself to be drawn into holding back a few visits, there was really nothing left to eat for everyone; but it didn't matter, we were cheerful, we were amiable, the hours passed like minutes, and around midnight everyone retired.* *The artist was tall and remained slim all her life. Such a dietetic diet likely contributed to her longevity (87 years).



Marie-Antoinette in Versailles, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780.

Madame Marie Françoise Lesould, born Devilly Desmarchais,
ÉlisabethVigée-Lebrun, 1780, Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans.









Jeanne de Valois Saint-Rémy (1756-1791), at age 24, who was wrongly called « Comtesse de la Motte », *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780, private collection.* This is one of the first portraits of her made by the painter, who did not know at the time that it was a future famous con artist. It is indeed she who was with her husband at the center of the "affair of the Queen's necklace" in 1783. With a forgery imitating the writing of the Queen (totally innocent), she was delivered a necklace of a great price by a Parisian jeweler. They ended up arresting her, she was sentenced to be branded with a hot iron and imprisoned for life in Salpêtrière (Paris), then a women's prison. She managed to escape in 1787 to England, where her accomplice husband was already, and died in London in 1791 at age 35, under unclear conditions.

La Salpêtrière, where « Comtesse de la Motte » was jailed,

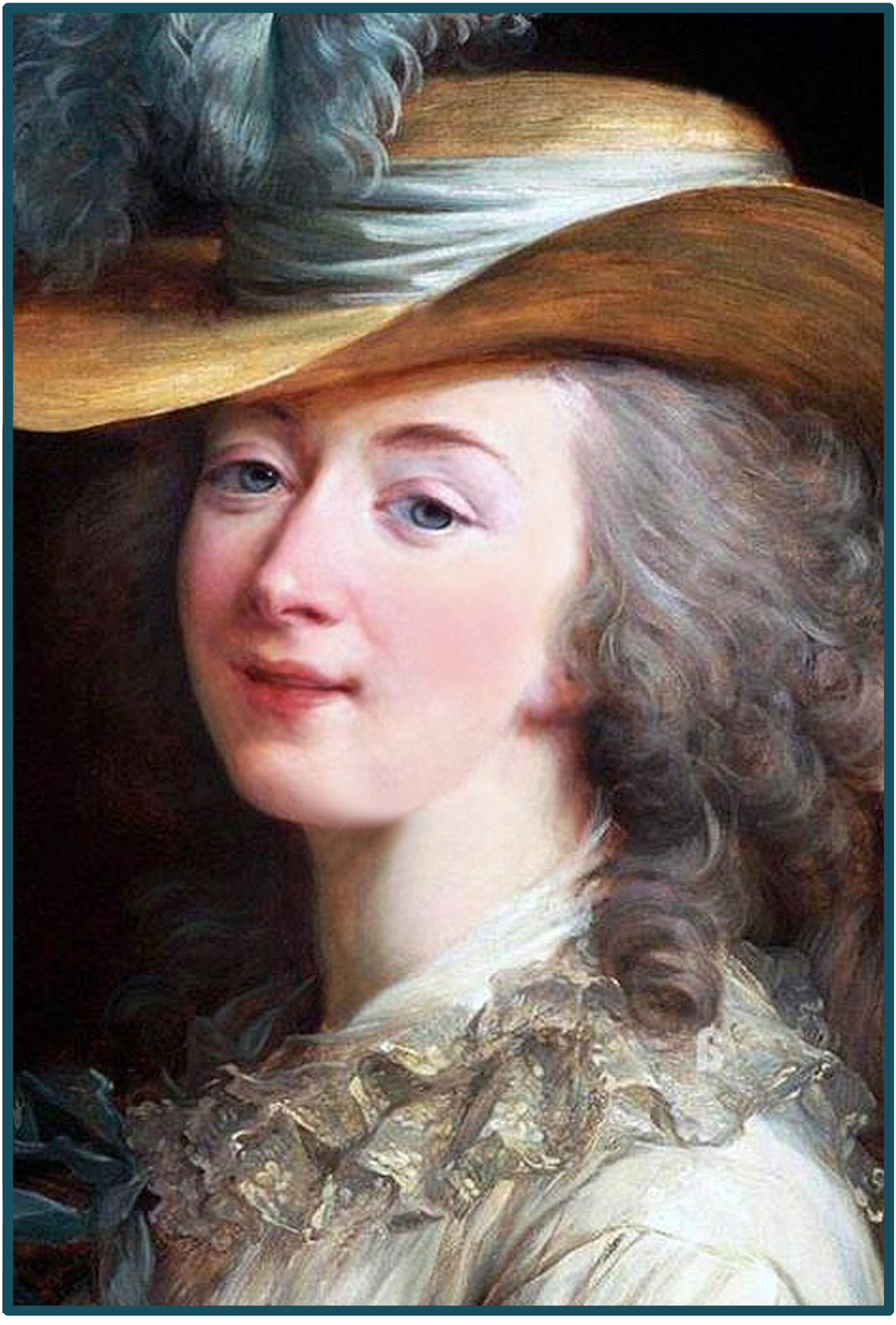


late 18th century, still in the country, J.B Raguenet, Musée Carnavalet.



Jeanne Becu, **Comtesse du Barry** (1743-1793), King Louis XV's last favorite, here at 38, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1781, Philadelphia Museum of Arts*. She was guillotined in 1793, at 50, because the famous revolutionary prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville suspected her – only because of her past - of being a "counter-revolutionary". It didn't take much more to be condemned and immediately guillotined at this terrible time.







Above, the previous painting (1781, the model at age 38), *and right*, **Madame du Barrry** *by François Hubert Drouais (1727-1775), 1770, Musée du Louvre*,11 years before (at age 27 of the model). Apart from the age difference of the model, it can clearly be seen the difference in style between the two painters: position of the model, clothing, hair and facial expression, more modern with the young artist.

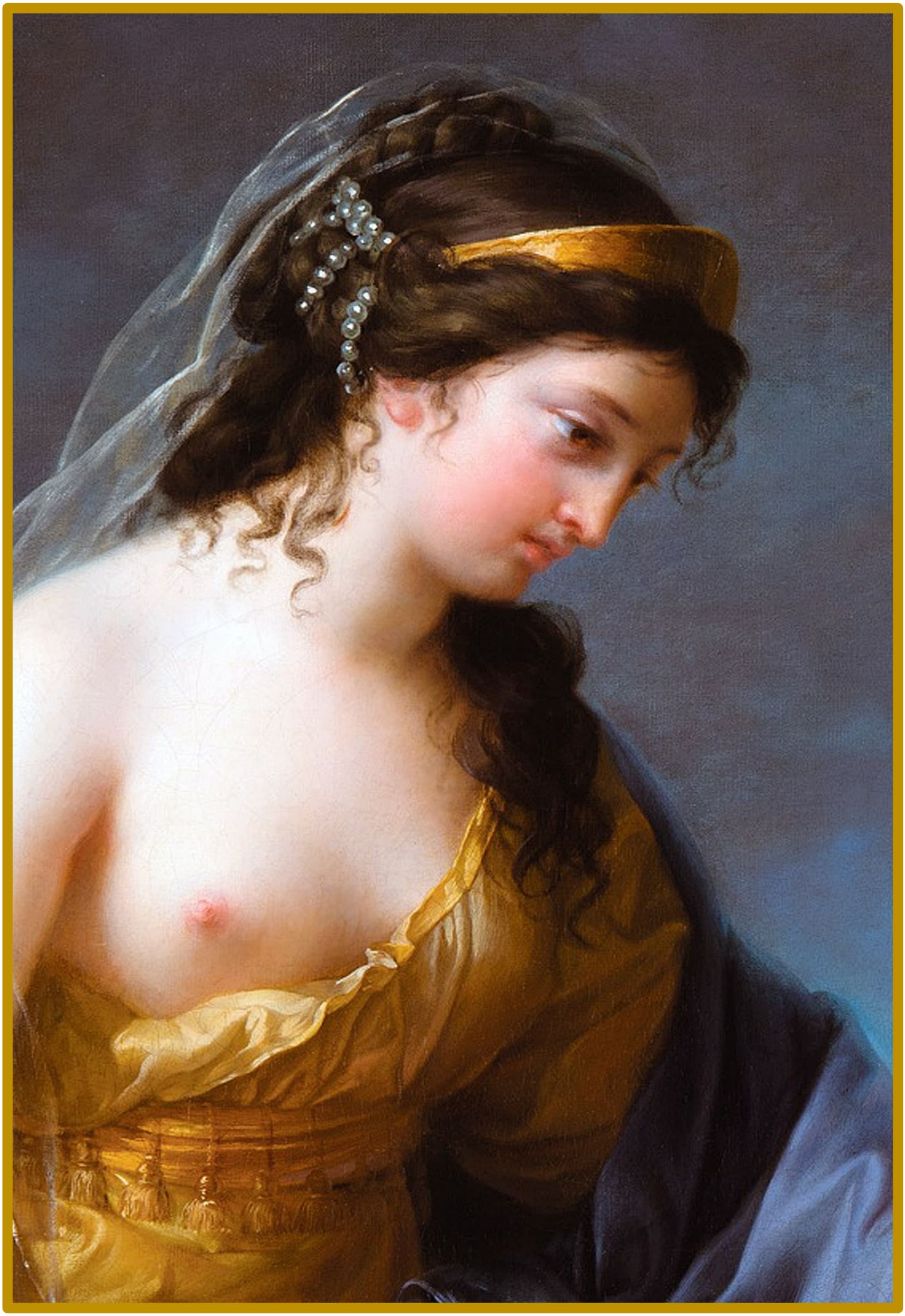


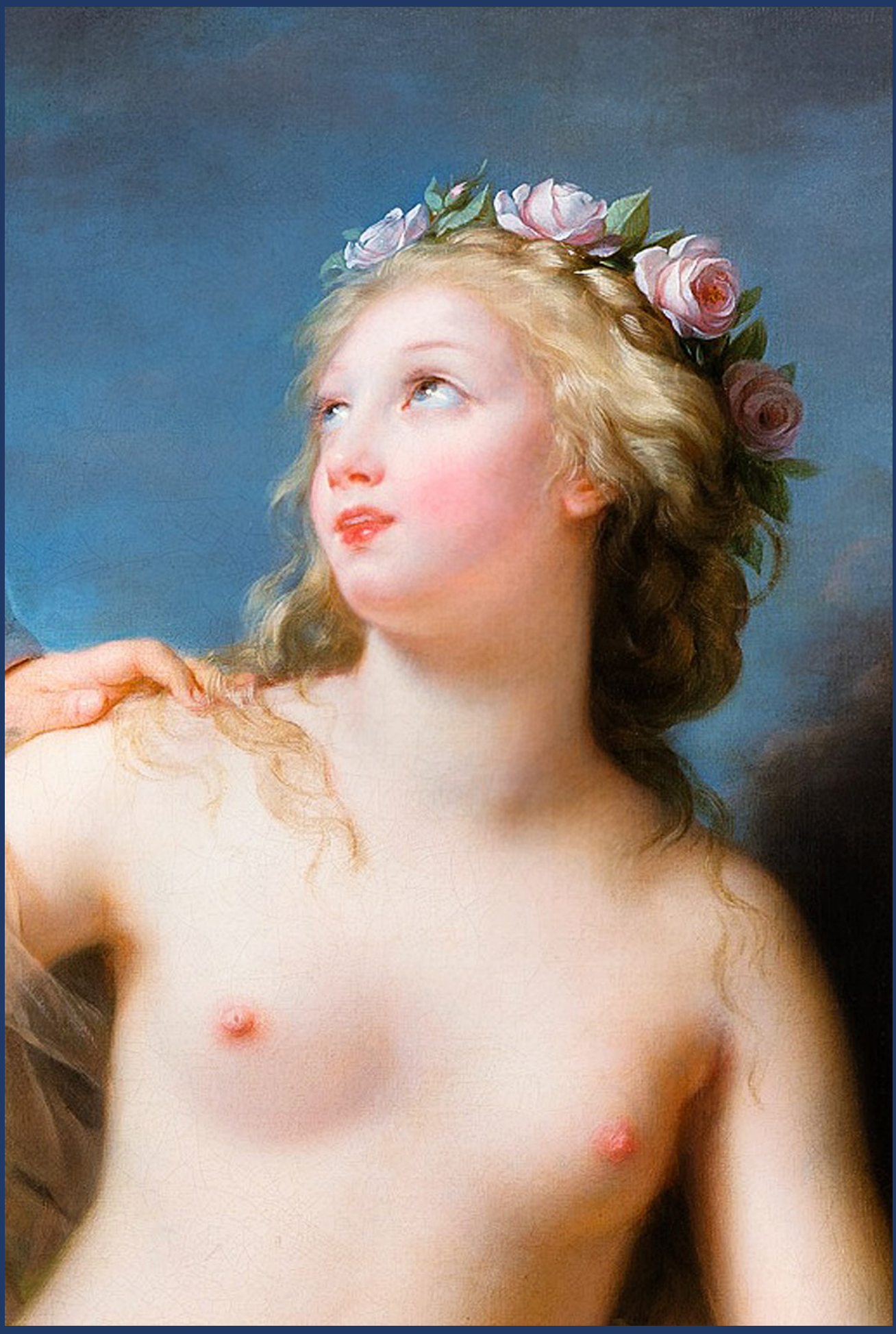


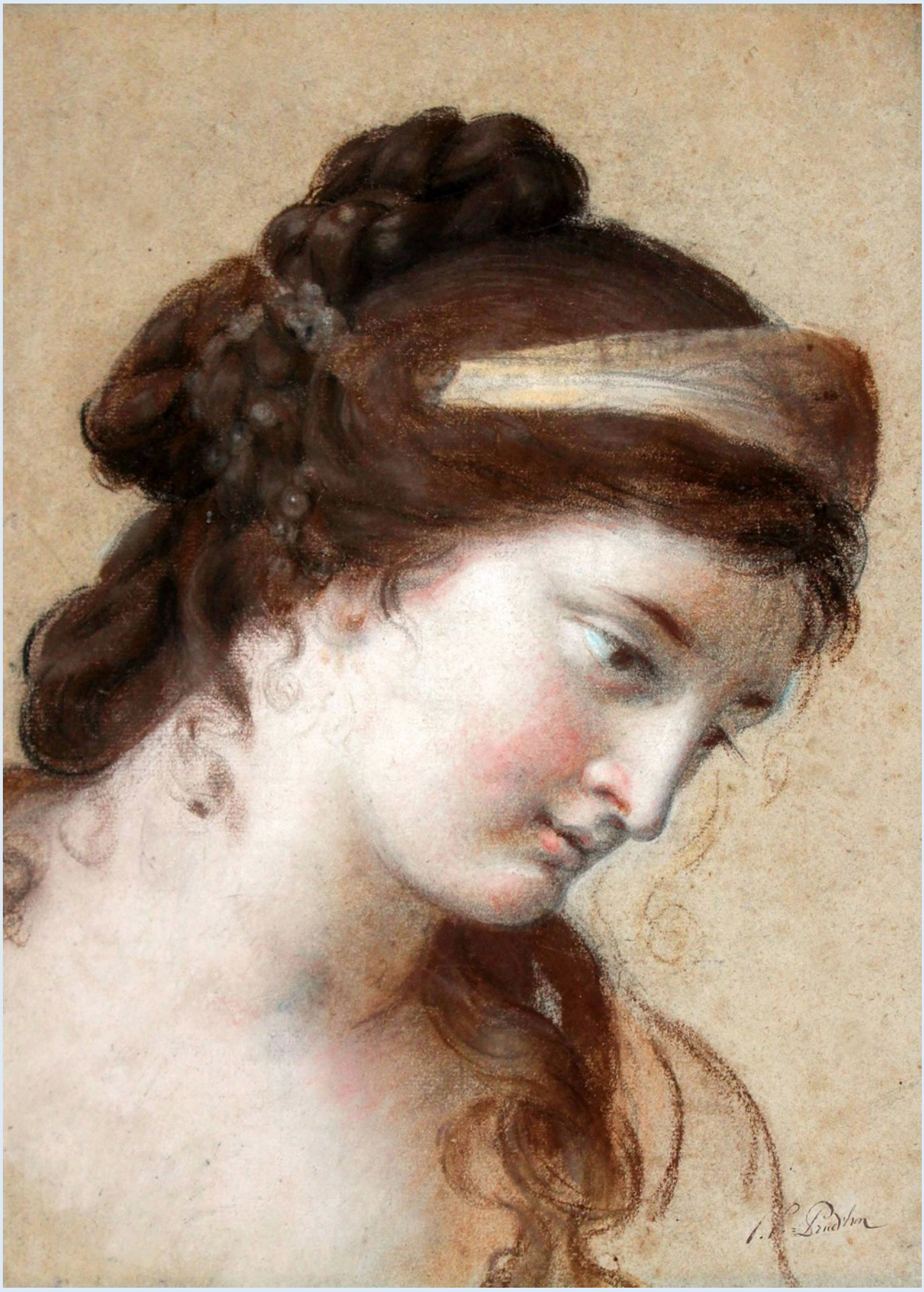
The painter had pupils, but not for long: *"I could not suffice the portraits that I was asked from all sides, and, although M. Lebrun* (her husband) *from then on got into the habit of getting hold of all the payments, nonetheless he imagined, to increase our income, to make me have students. I consented to what he wanted, without taking the time to think about it, and soon there came to me several young ladies to whom I was showing how to make eyes, noses, ovals, which had to be constantly touched up, which distracted me from my work and annoyed me greatly. Among my students was Mademoiselle Emilie Roux de La Ville, who has since married to Mr. Benoist, Director of United Rights, and for whom Demoustiers wrote the Letters on Mythology. She painted heads in pastel which was already showing the talent that gave her just celebrity. Mademoiselle Emilie was the youngest of my pupils, for the most part older than me, which was tremendously detrimental to the respect that a school head should show. I had established the workshop of these young ladies in an old fodder loft, the ceiling of which left very large beams uncovered. One morning, I go upstairs and I find my students, who had just tied a rope to one of these beams, and who were swinging as best they could. I take my serious face, I scold, I make a superb speech on the waste of time; then here I want to try the swing, and I have more fun than all the others. You judge that with such manners it was difficult for me to impose much on them, and this inconvenience, added to the boredom of returning to the abc of my art by correcting their studies, very quickly made me give up keeping this school. "*

Allegory, ***Juno borrowing the belt of Venus****,*
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1781, private collection. Interesting faces.









“Juno borrowing the belt of Venus”, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1781.*
Above, study of Juno. *Right page,* detail of Venus.





Anne Catherine Le Prudhomme de Châtenoy, **Comtesse de Verdun** (1754-1824), at age 28, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Museum of Synebrichoff, Helsinki*. The face is expressive and the black background is stripped down, which gives a strong contrast to the character. Note that most of the portraits of this artist are busts or ¾ and not feet, to better focus on the expression of the face.

The artist said of this friend:

"Madame de Verdun can be cited for her wit so fine and so natural at the same time. The kindness, the cheerfulness of her character made her generally sought out, and I can regard it as a happiness of my life, that she was my first and that she is still my best friend. Her husband was a "fermier général" (tax collector): *he was a cold man in appearance, but full of wit and kindness, and who could not see the unfortunate without hurrying to help them. He was the owner of the Castle of Colombes* (now desroyed), *near Paris. This castle had formerly been inhabited by Queen Henrietta of England; the walls of the salons and galleries were almost all painted by Simon Vouet; but the humidity had tarnished these remarkable paintings, and M. de Verdun, very amateur and connoisseur, having undertaken to have them repaired, succeeded perfectly.*

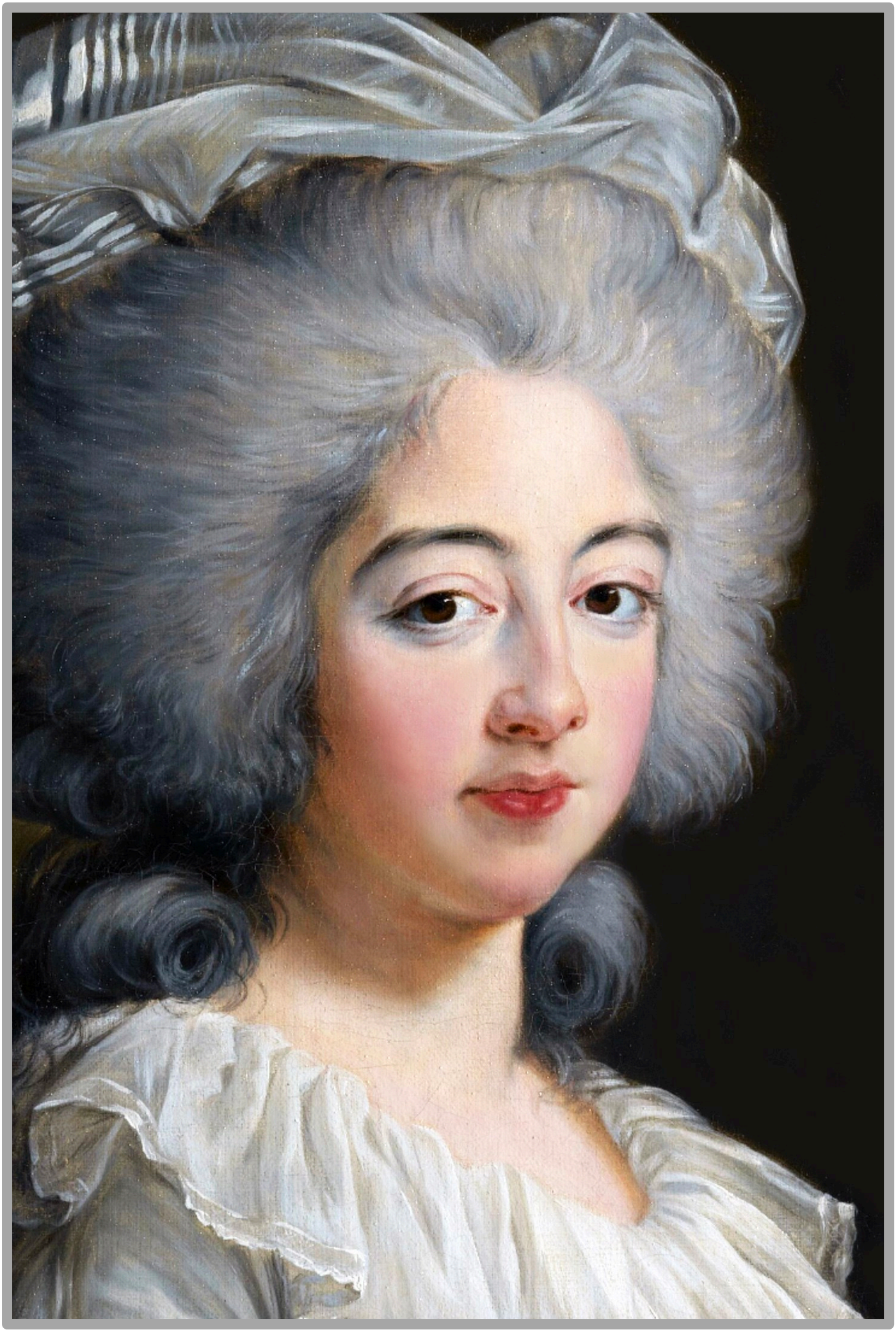
I have often gone to live in this castle for several days in a row. M. and Madame de Verdun assembled there the most amiable society, composed of artists, men of letters and spiritual men. Carmontel, a close friend of the owners of the house, was extremely helpful to us; he made us play his Proverbs. Besides, the usual conversation did not allow boredom to win us over, it was so lively and animated. It would be useless today to try to find the pleasures which then came from the charm of the conversation. Father Dellile wrote to me in Rome: 'Politics has lost everything; we no longer talk in Paris. On my return to France, in fact, I was only too sure of this truth. Enter any living room, you will find the women yawning in a circle, and the men, in a corner of the living room, arguing over such and such a law; but we saw the end, like so many other things, of what was called conversation, that is to say, one of the greatest charms of French Society.'

The Revolution came to put an end to all the pleasures of Colombes. As it was well known that M. de Verdun was very rich, he was soon put in prison, and it can be felt of the despair of his wife who adored him. It must be said to the honor of humanity that as soon as the news of his detention reached Colombes, the peasants assembled and all came to Paris to cry out for their benefactor. This step prevented the authorities from daring to put him to death; nevertheless, he was still a prisoner, when these good people returned a second time, and renewed their request with so much urgency, that at last they obtained his freedom. Madame de Verdun, on hearing this news, felt such joy that she lost her mind to the point that she sent for two cabs to pick up her husband from the prison, thinking that he would arrive sooner in this way. "





« Monsieur », brother of King Louis XVI, comte de Provence, future King Louis XVIII, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Versailles*. In her Memoirs: *"The portrait that I made of Monsieur gave me the opportunity to know a Prince whom one could boast without flattery, both wit and education; it was impossible not to enjoy the conversation of* (future) *Louis XVIII, who talked about everything with as much taste as knowledge. Sometimes, to vary, no doubt, he sang to me, during our sessions, songs which were not indecent, but so common, that I could not understand by what route such nonsense reached the Court. He had the falsest voice in the world. 'How do you think I sing, Madame Lebrun?' he said to me one day – 'Like a prince, Monsignor', I replied."*



Marie Joséphine de Savoie, comtesse de Provence, 1753-1810, wife of « Monsieur » (future Louis XVIII), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Musée de l'hôtel Bertrand, Châteauroux*. She died 4 years before the coronation of Louis XVIII and had no children. During the Revolution, isolated, scorned by her husband, she took refuge in Turin where her father reigned and where the artist found her. The countess, who gave her a warm welcome, was actively looking after the many French emigrants, often destitute, fleeing revolutionary fury.



<u>Comtesse Marie-Élisabeth Olive de Moreton de Chabrillon</u> (1761-1807), born Frottier de la Coste-Messeliére**,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, private collection.*





Travel to Belgium and Holland of the artist and her husband in 1782.



Old view of Antwerp, where the painter saw in a private home the famous portrait by Rubens described below. Note that this trip abroad was the artist's first. She later traveled throughout Europe during and after her forced exile in Revolution period.

Above, **old view of Amsterdam**, where the artist saw and describes the painting *below: "I saw at the town hall the superb painting (probably by B. van der Helst, 1613-1670, Musée du Louvre) which represents the assembled mayors. I do not believe that there is anything more beautiful in painting, nothing truer: it is nature itself. The burgomasters are dressed in black; the heads, the hands, the draperies, everything is of inimitable beauty; these men live, we believe we are with them. I am convinced that it is the most perfect painting of this kind; I am not letting go, and the impression that he made me still makes him present to me."*








D. Kaer
H. Post
P. Blaeu
Bart. Bolomeus
zunder. helet
1657

Vermeer
Delft





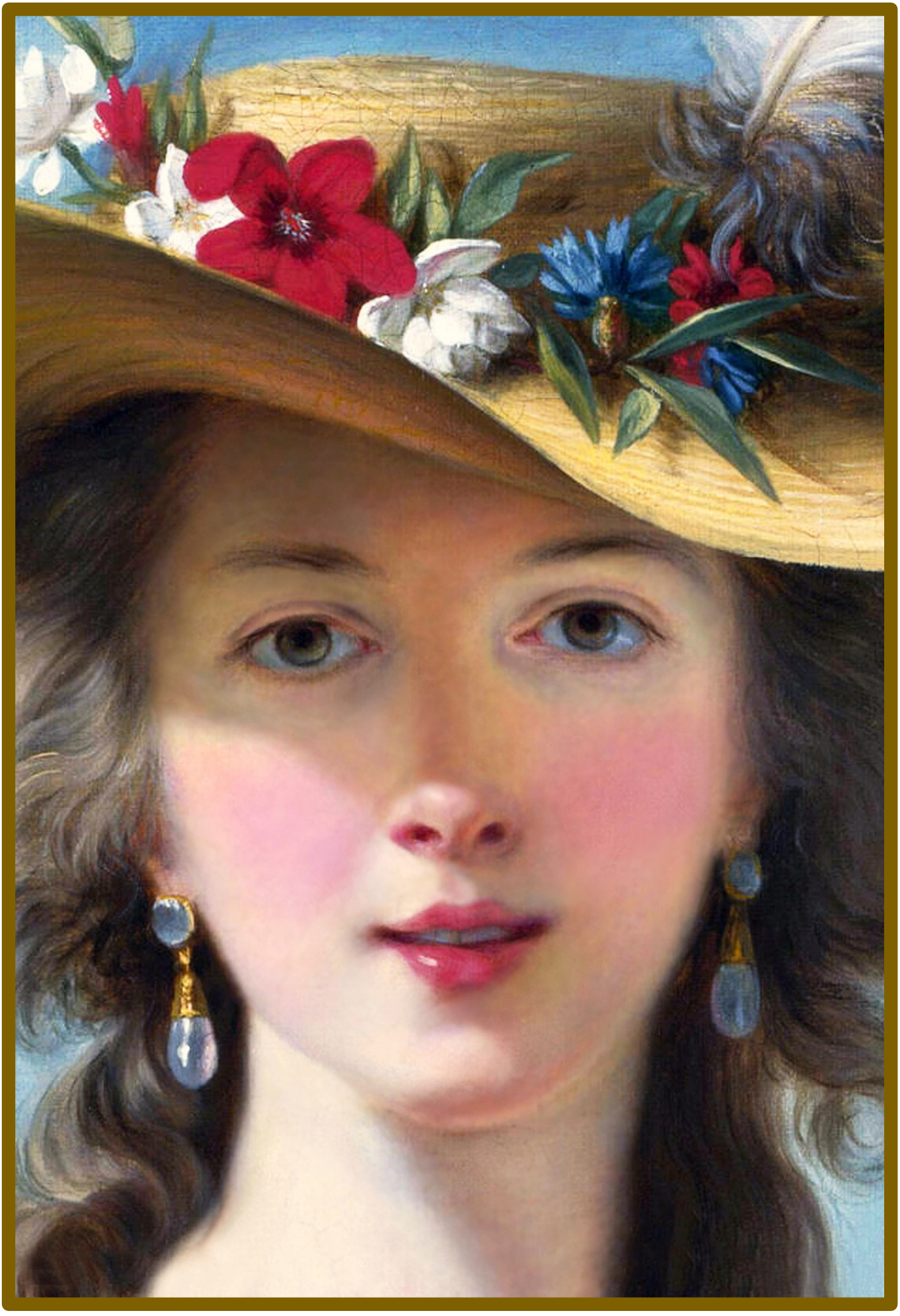
Left page, ***Pierre Paul Rubens****, 1622, National Gallery, London.* **'The felt hat or Suzanne Fourment'.** This famous painting by Rubens was seen in Antwerp in 1782 by the artist who had accompanied her husband on a business trip to that country. The hat and the resulting divide light on the face greatly impressed and influenced her, which in turn had a positive impact on her early career. **She said about it in her Memoirs:**

"We came back to Flanders to see Rubens's masterpieces again. They were in a much better position than they have since been at the Paris Museum; all produced an admirable effect in these Flemish churches. Other masterpieces by the same master adorned the galleries of amateurs: in Antwerp, I found at a private house the famous straw hat which was recently sold to an Englishman for a considerable sum. This admirable painting represents one of Rubens' wives; its great effect lies in the two different lights given by the simple day and the glow of the sun, and perhaps it is necessary to be a painter to judge all the performance merit that Rubens displayed there. This painting delights me and inspired me to the point that I painted my portrait in Brussels seeking the same effect. I painted myself wearing a straw hat, feather, and garland of wildflowers on my head, and holding my palette in my hand (see further this artist's masterpiece*). When the portrait was exhibited at the Salon* (Author's note: annual painting exhibition at the Louvre)*, I dare tell you that it added a lot to my reputation. The famous Muller engraved it; but you must feel that the black shadows of the engraving take away all the effect of such a painting. Shortly after my return from Flanders, in 1783, the portrait I am telling you about and several other works decided Joseph Vernet to propose me as a member of the Royal Academy of Painting. The clear are in the sun; what I must call shadows, for lack of another word, is day. "*

The essayist **Patrick Aulnas** (contemporary) compared this work with that of next page by delivering this pertinent comment: *"The felt hat that Suzanne Fourment wore at Rubens has been replaced by a straw hat decorated with field flowers and an ostrich feather. As with Rubens, the wide-brimmed hat allows the artist to work with light and shadow effects on the face. The composition also resumes from Rubens the contrast between the face in partial shade and the neckline in full light. The background of a blue sky dotted with clouds is also borrowed from Rubens. The artist suggests that the model was placed in the open air, possibly in the countryside. But the painters of that time working in studios, this is pure artistic fiction.*

In Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, innovations come from the image of women. While Rubens evokes a somewhat tucked-up Suzanne Fourment in a dress hugging her breasts, Vigée Le Brun dresses her model in a simple dress for the period, called "Greek style", the fashion of which she had launched. The loose neckline gives an impression of freedom and not of constraint as with Rubens. The abundant natural hair resting in curls on the shoulders accentuates this impression. The glance frankly on the observer is also opposed to the sidelong gaze of Suzanne Fourment.

Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun represents herself as an active woman, palette and brushes in hand, while the arms of Rubens' sister-in-law are modestly folded. The originality of the portrait undoubtedly stems from the successful synthesis of femininity and freedom of pace, which was not taken for granted in the 18th century. But the cultivated women of that time intended to appear as such for posterity."

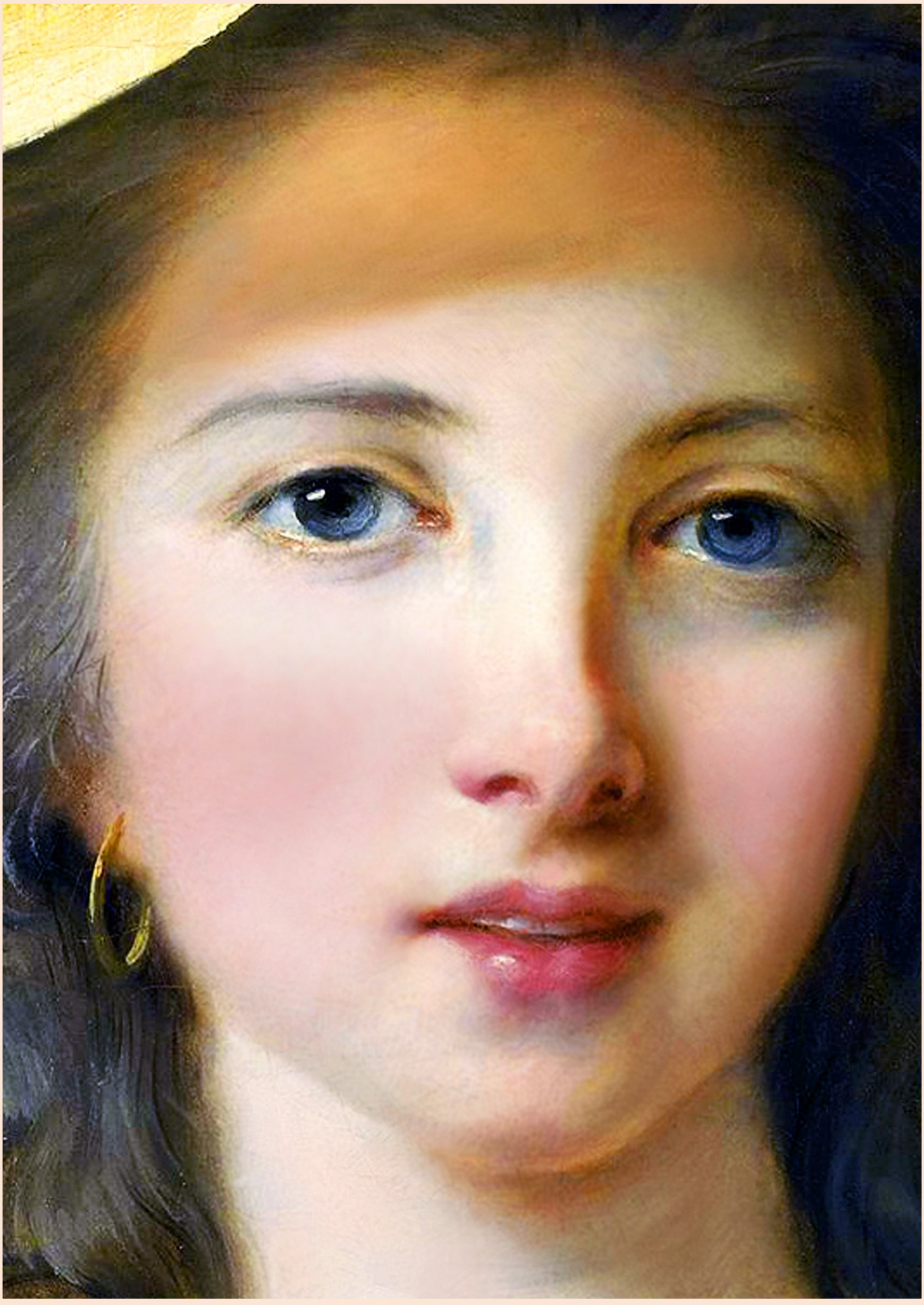




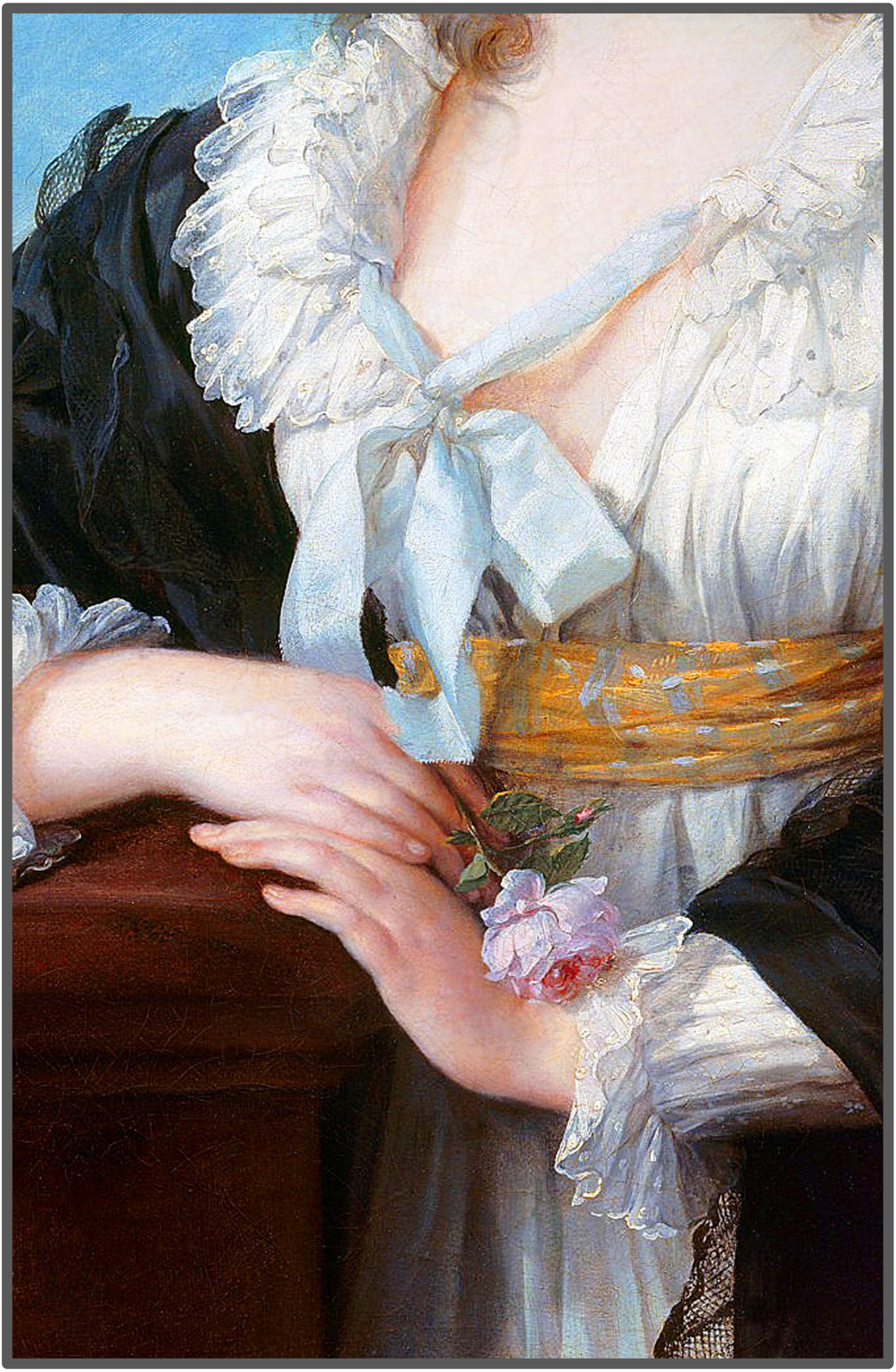
***Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun**, 1782,* at age 27, *National Galerie, London (copy of the original).* This portrait and the straw hat were very successful.

Yolande Martine Gabrielle de Polastron, **duchesse de Polignac** (1749-1793), at age 33, governess of the royal children and close friend of Marie-Antoinette, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Versailles.* She emigrated in 1789 and died of illness in 1793, at age 44, shortly after Marie-Antoinette. There are obvious similarities (face, hairstyle, hat, dress, posture and decor) between the previous self-portrait and this portrait, two masterpieces painted the same year.



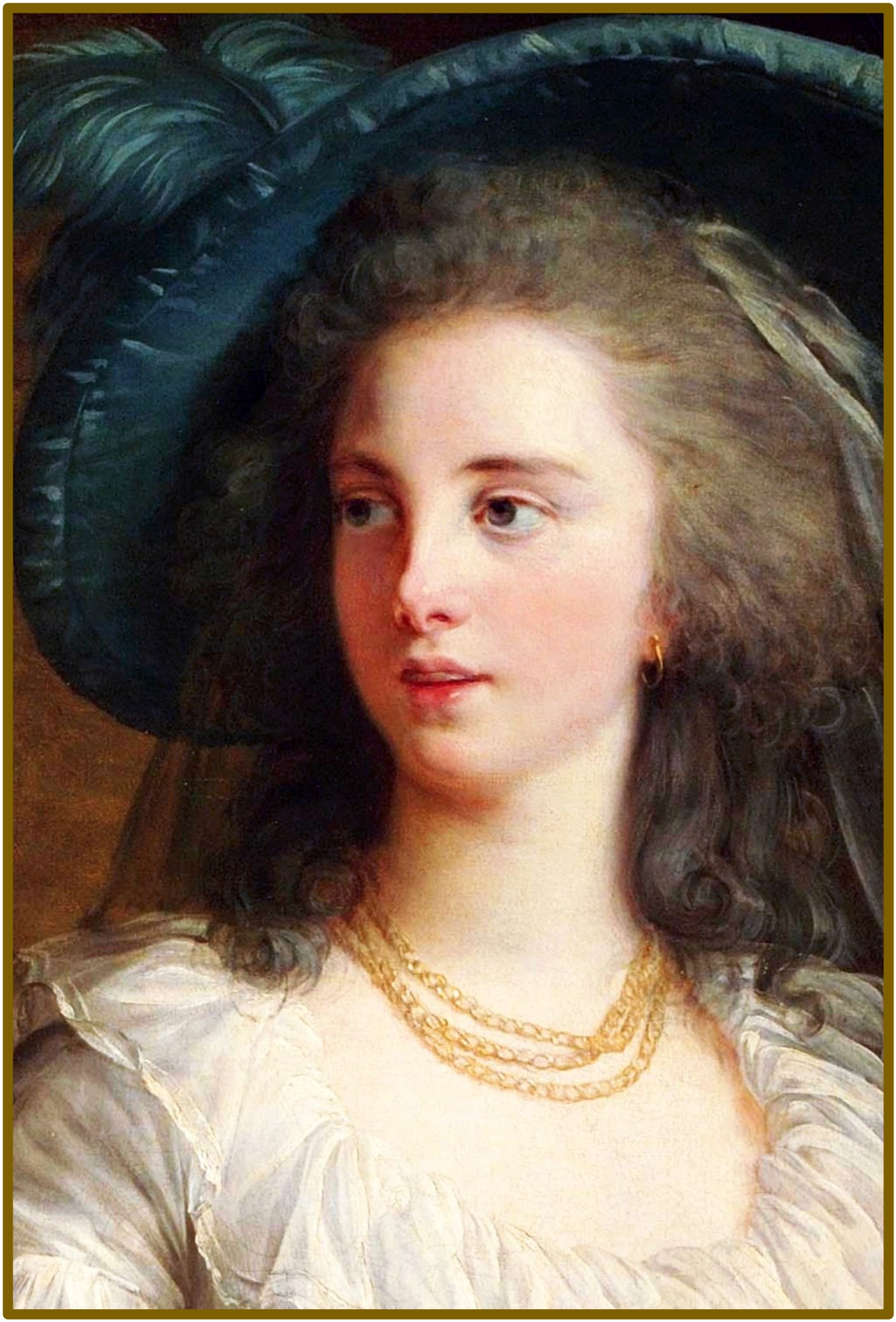


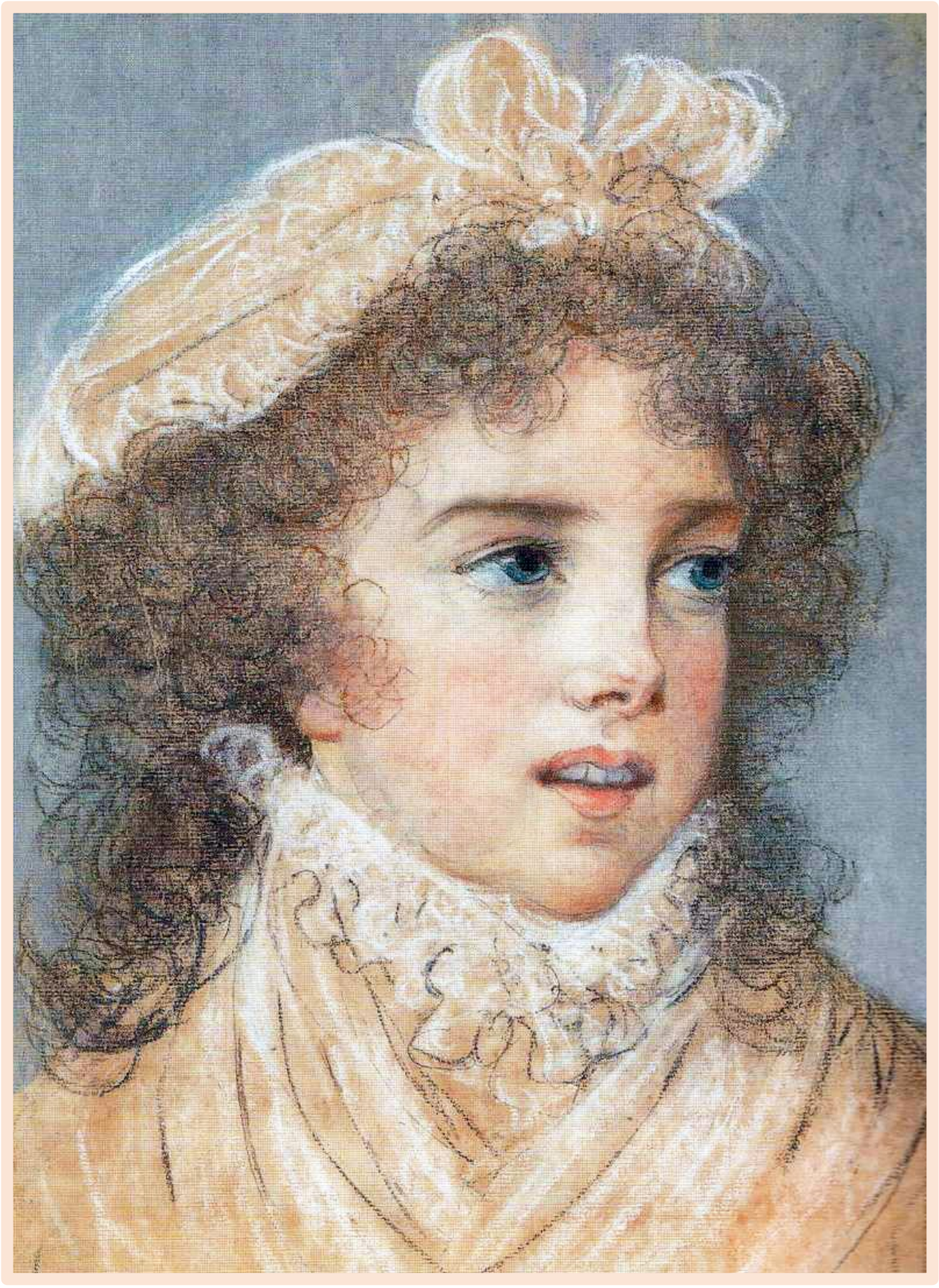




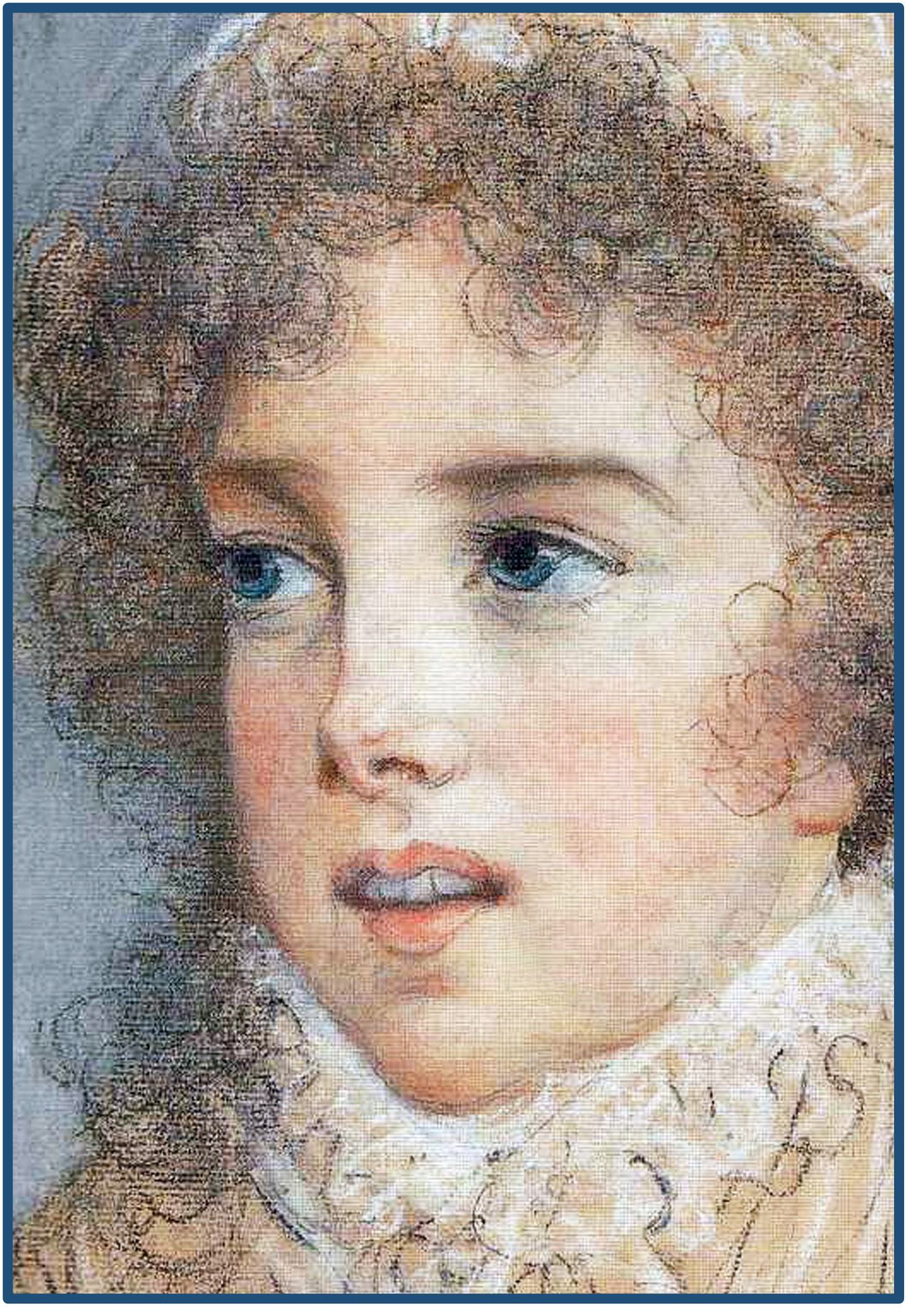
Another aspect of the **duchesse de Polignac**, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury, UK.*





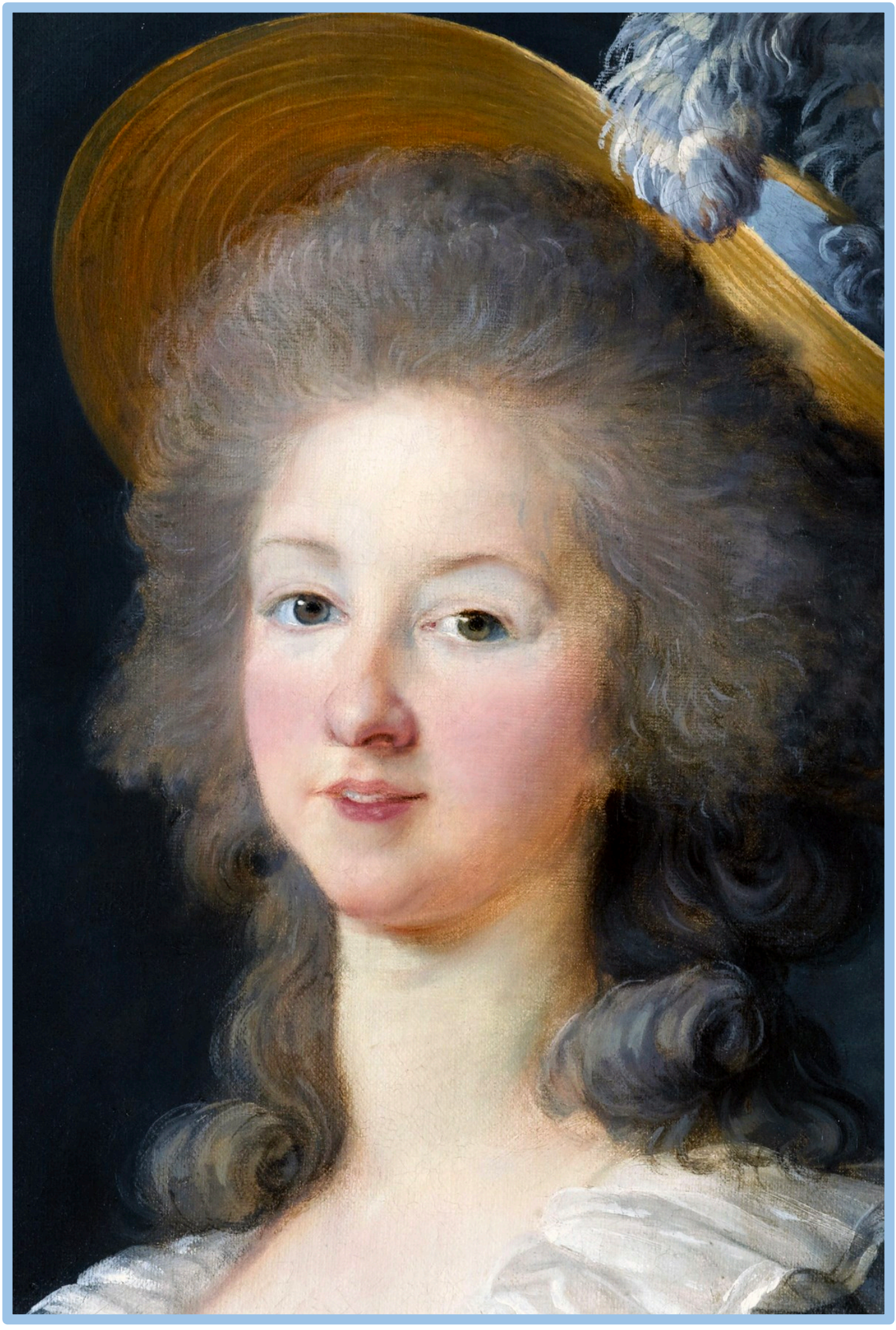


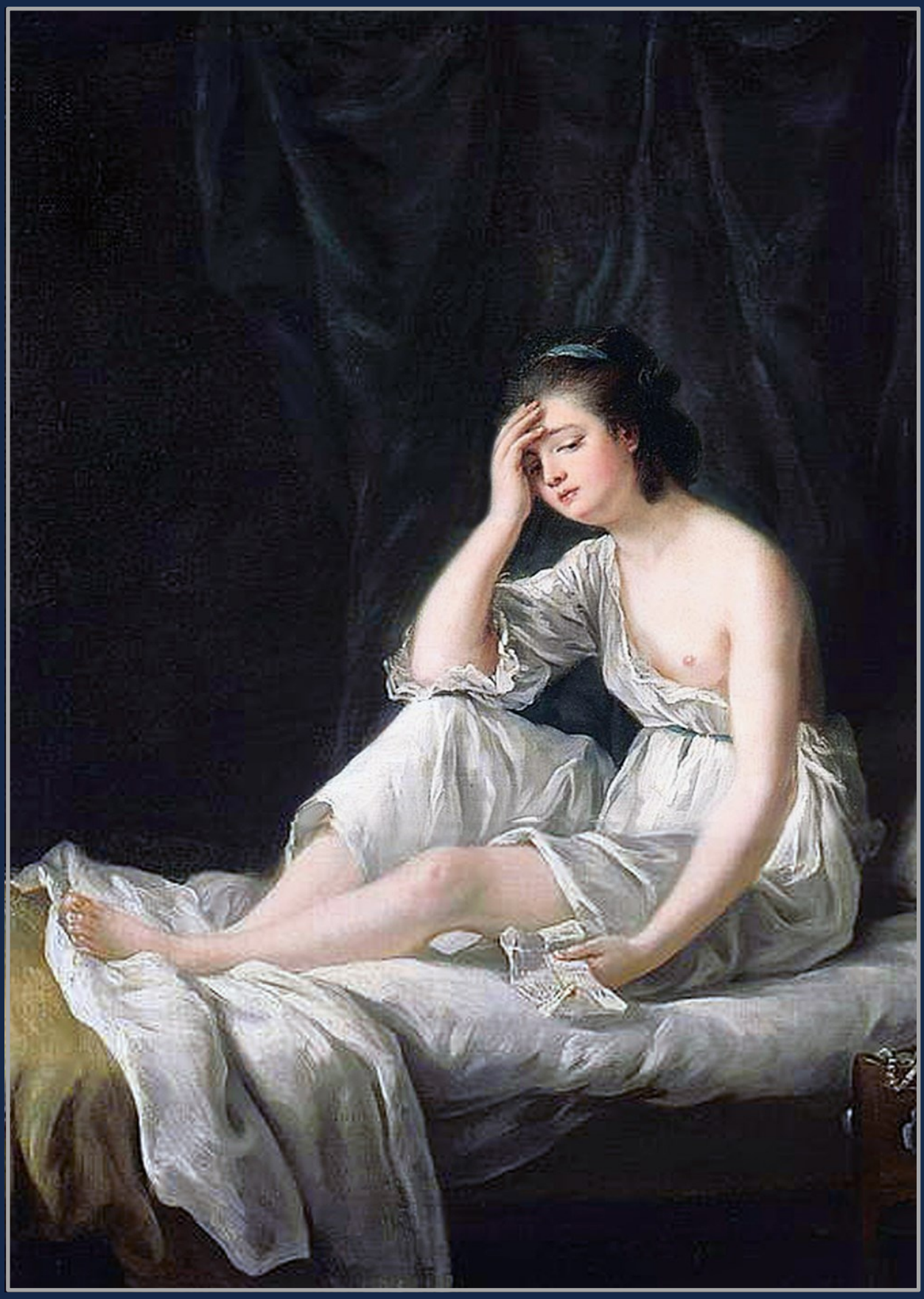
Duchesse de Polignac, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Rijskmuseum, Amsterdam.* The artist described her thus: *"Madame de Polignac looked so young that you might think she was her daughter's sister, and both were the prettiest women at Court. Madame de Guiche* (her daughter) *would have served perfectly as a model to represent one of the Graces* (of Raphael); *as for her mother, I will not attempt to portray her figure; this figure was celestial. The Duchesse de Polignac joined to her truly ravishing beauty, an angelic sweetness, the spirit at once the most attractive and the most solid."*





Marie-Thérèse Louise de Savoie Carignan, **Princesse de Lamballe** (1749-1792), called 'Madame de Lamballe', at age 33, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Versailles.* Superintendent of Marie-Antoinette, she was arrested like her on August 10, 1792 at the Tuileries and massacred in the Force prison a few weeks later, on September 3, 1792. For a long time "best friend" of Marie-Antoinette, she was supplanted by the Duchesse de Polignac, which affected her greatly but did not prevent her from remaining in the service of the Queen and sharing her tragic fate. She said in her Memoirs: "*Without being pretty, she seemed pretty from a distance; she had small features, a dazzlingly fresh complexion, superb blond hair, and a lot of elegance in all her person.*"



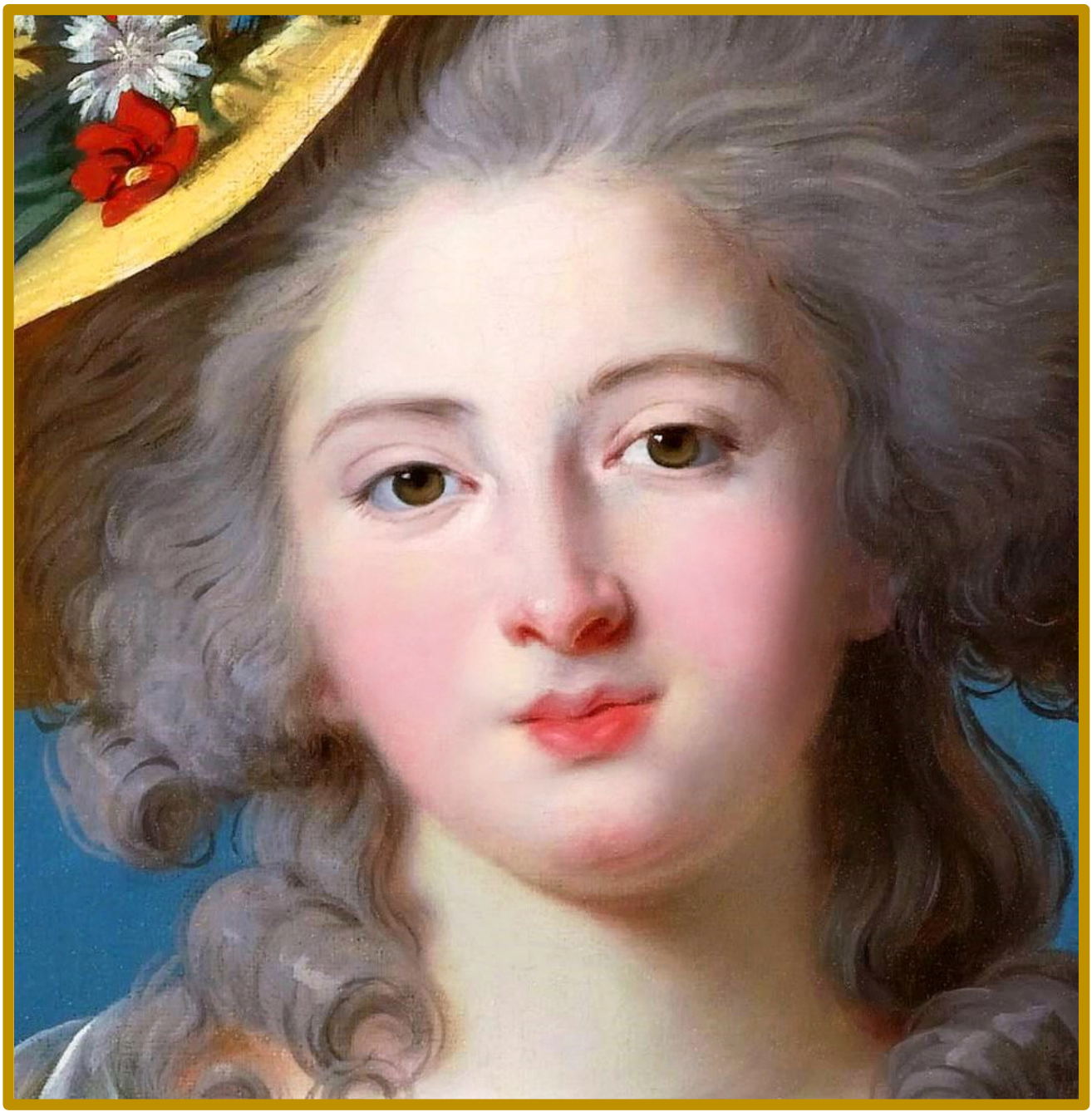


« The unresolved virtue», *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1782.* Allegory.

Jean-Jacques Bachelier, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1782, private collection.* He was a still life painter, part of the Royal Academy of Painting, to which the artist was admitted in 1783. This portrait was perhaps a means of achieving her admission.



Élisabeth de France (1763-1793), called 'Madame Élisabeth', young sister of Louis XVI, at age 19, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, with 2 versions, Versailles (detail below and next page) and Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo (right page).* She was also very loyal to the royal family, to the point of being imprisoned with it on August 10, 1792, and finally guillotined in 1794. This is what the artist said about her in her Memoirs: *"The features of the latter* (Madame Élisabeth) *were not regular; but her face expressed the sweetest kindness and her great freshness was remarkable; in everything she had the charm of a pretty shepherdess. You are not unaware, dear friend, that Madame Elisabeth was an angel of kindness. How many times have I witnessed the good she did to the unfortunate. Her heart contained all the virtues; indulgent, modest, sensitive, devoted; the revolution led her to display heroic courage; we saw this sweet princess, walking in front of the cannibals who came to assassinate the Queen, saying: 'They will take me in her place'".* They captured the two and guillotined the two!





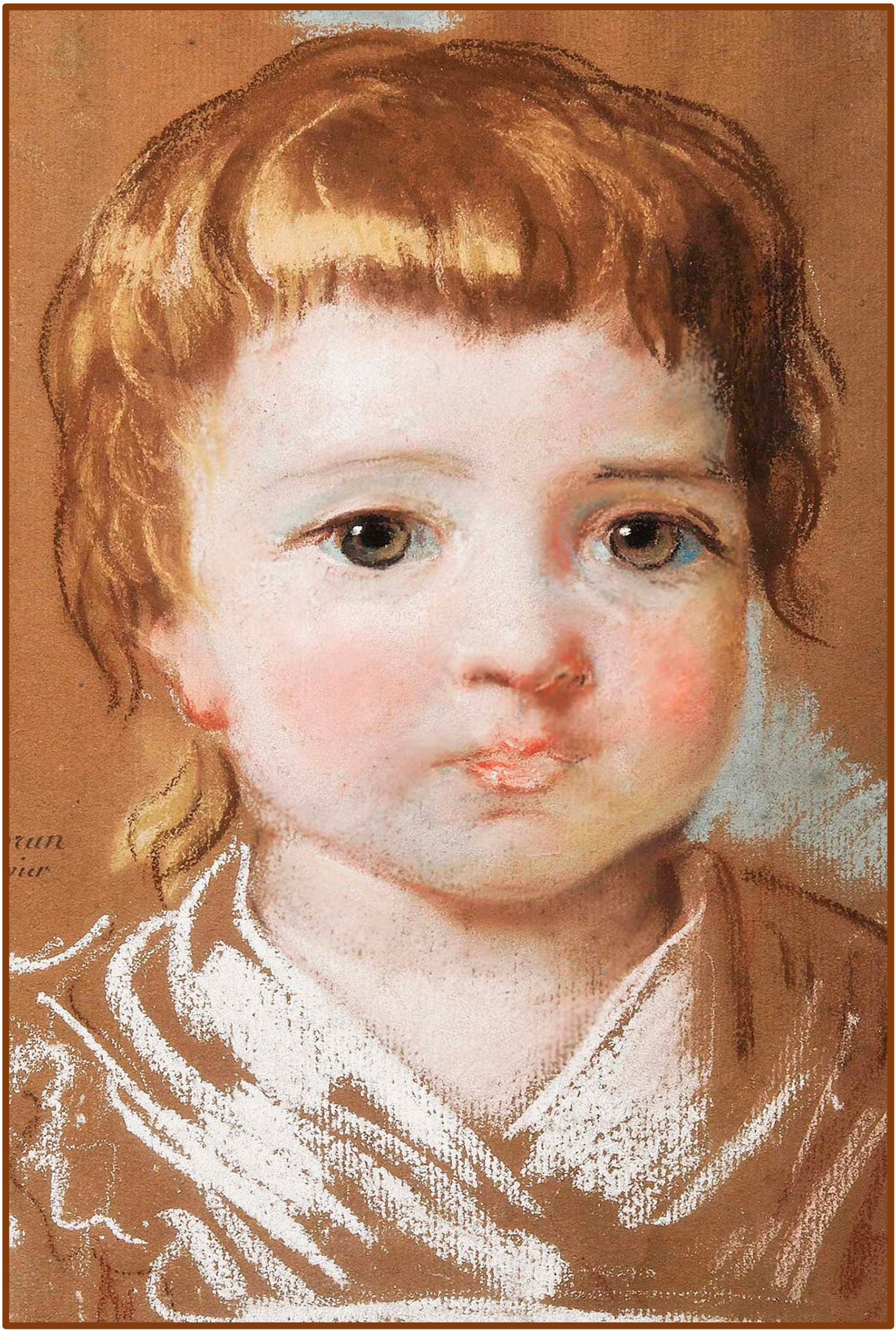


Élisabeth de France, variant with another dress, *see previous page.*



Jeanne Julie Louise Le Brun, called 'Julie Lebrun', only daughter of Élisabeth Vigée and Jean-Baptiste Le Brunet (called Lebrun), at age 2, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.* The painter did many portraits of her daughter, who was also pretty, until their scrambles and separation in 1800, when they were in exile in Russia.





Comtesse du Barry (1743-1793), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun,1782, National Gallery of Arts, Washington*. This is the second portrait of the last favorite of Louis XV.







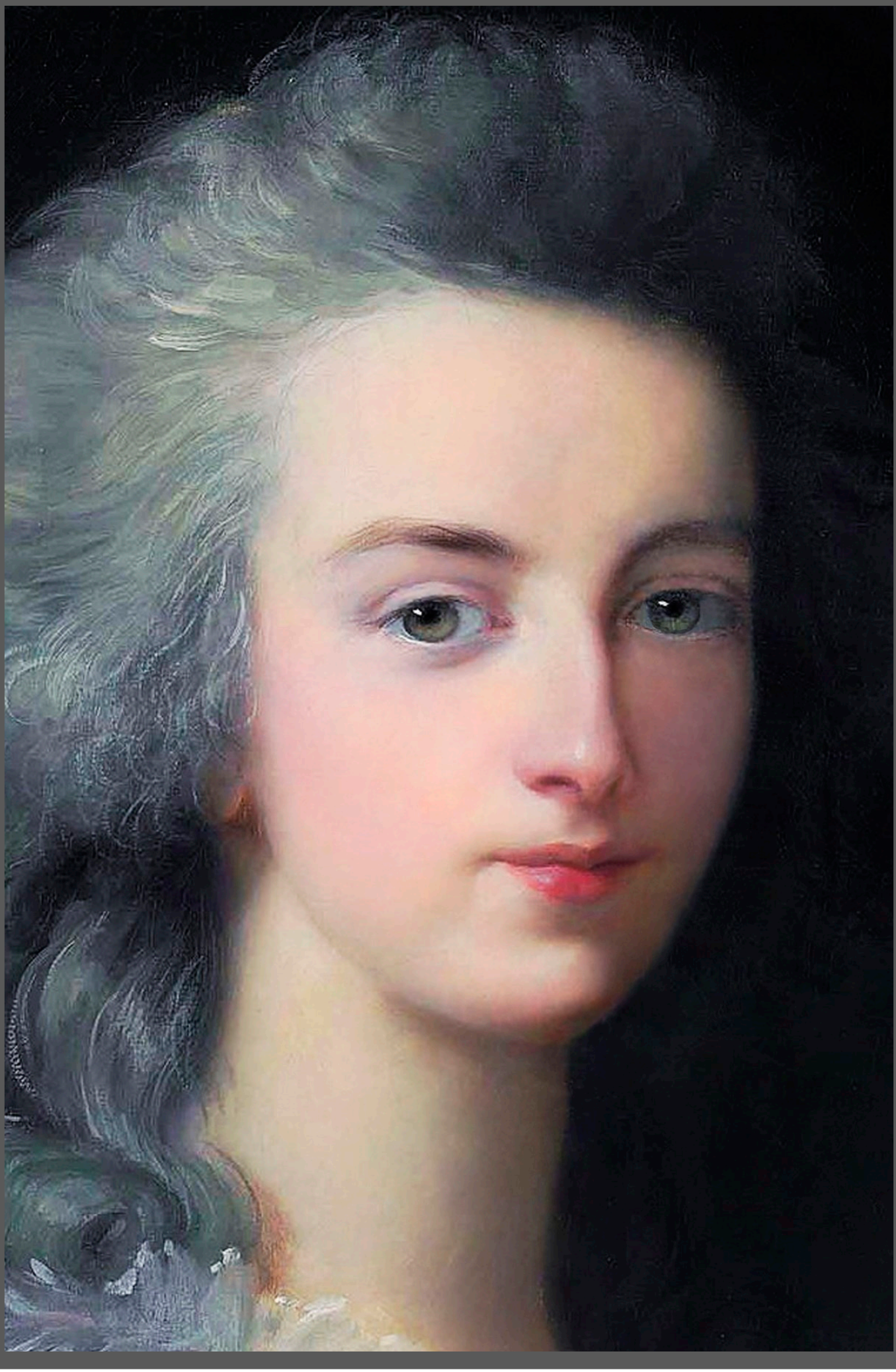


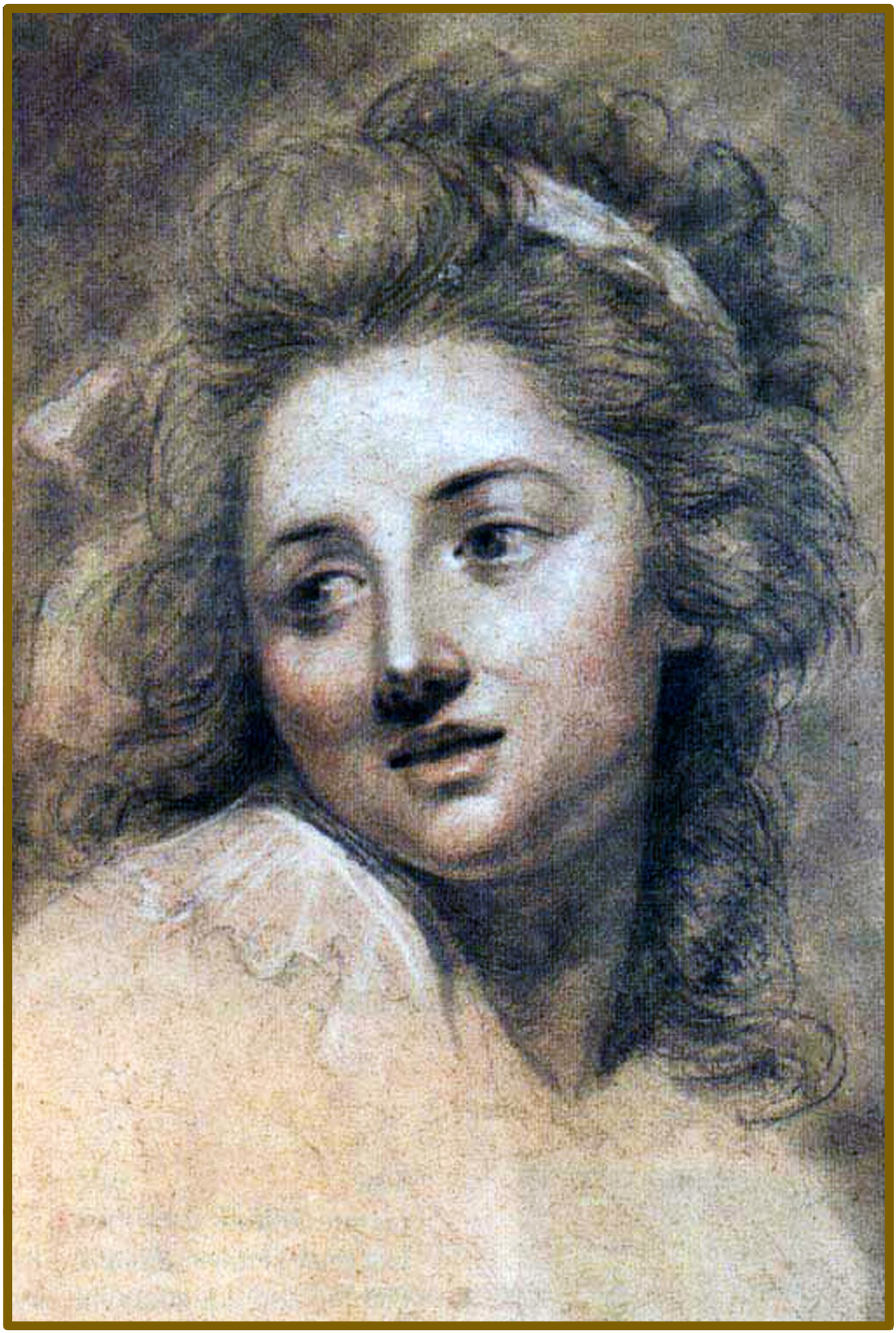
Élisabeth de France, called 'Madame Élisabeth' (1764-1794), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1782, Versailles.* Young sister of Louis XVI, not wishing to marry and not wanting to be nun either, she devoted her life from 1782 to helping the poor, but, faithful to the royal family, she shared their tragic fate, guillotined in 1794.



Marie Blanche Charlotte de Narbonne Pelet, **maréchale-comtesse de Mailly, marquise de Harcourt** (1761-1840), at age 22, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, sold at Christie's 835 000 €, private collection*. She was part of the upper aristocracy and the close circle of Marie-Antoinette. She was arrested in Picardy with her husband in 1793. Her husband was guillotined but she was released after a year, when Robespierre fell in 1794 (at the end of "Terror"). She narrowly escaped death. This young aristocrat had a great allure that the artist captured well.





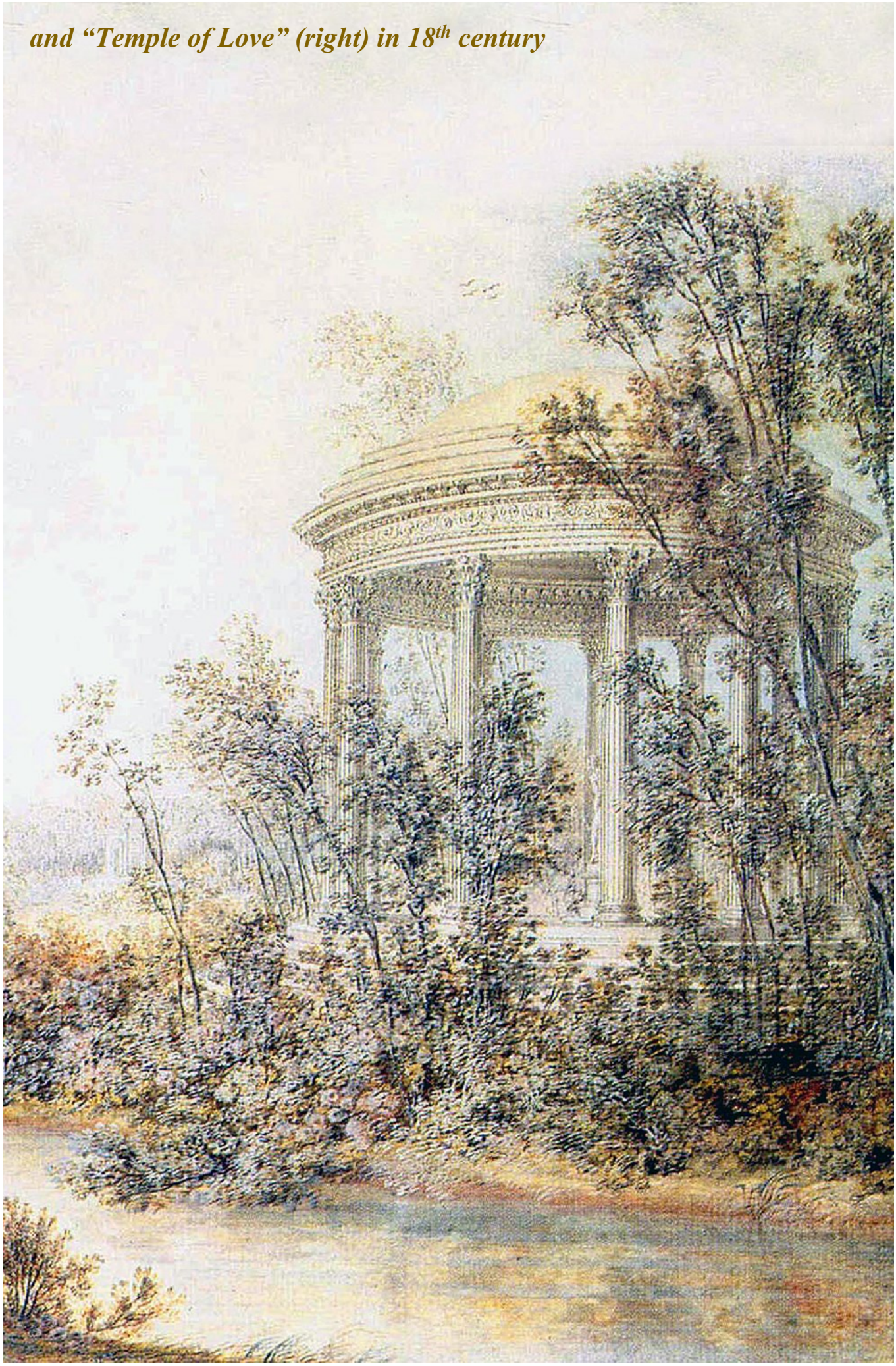


Woman, *Élisabeth Vigée Lebrun, circa 1783.*



Versailles, Petit Trianon (left)

and "Temple of Love" (right) in 18th century





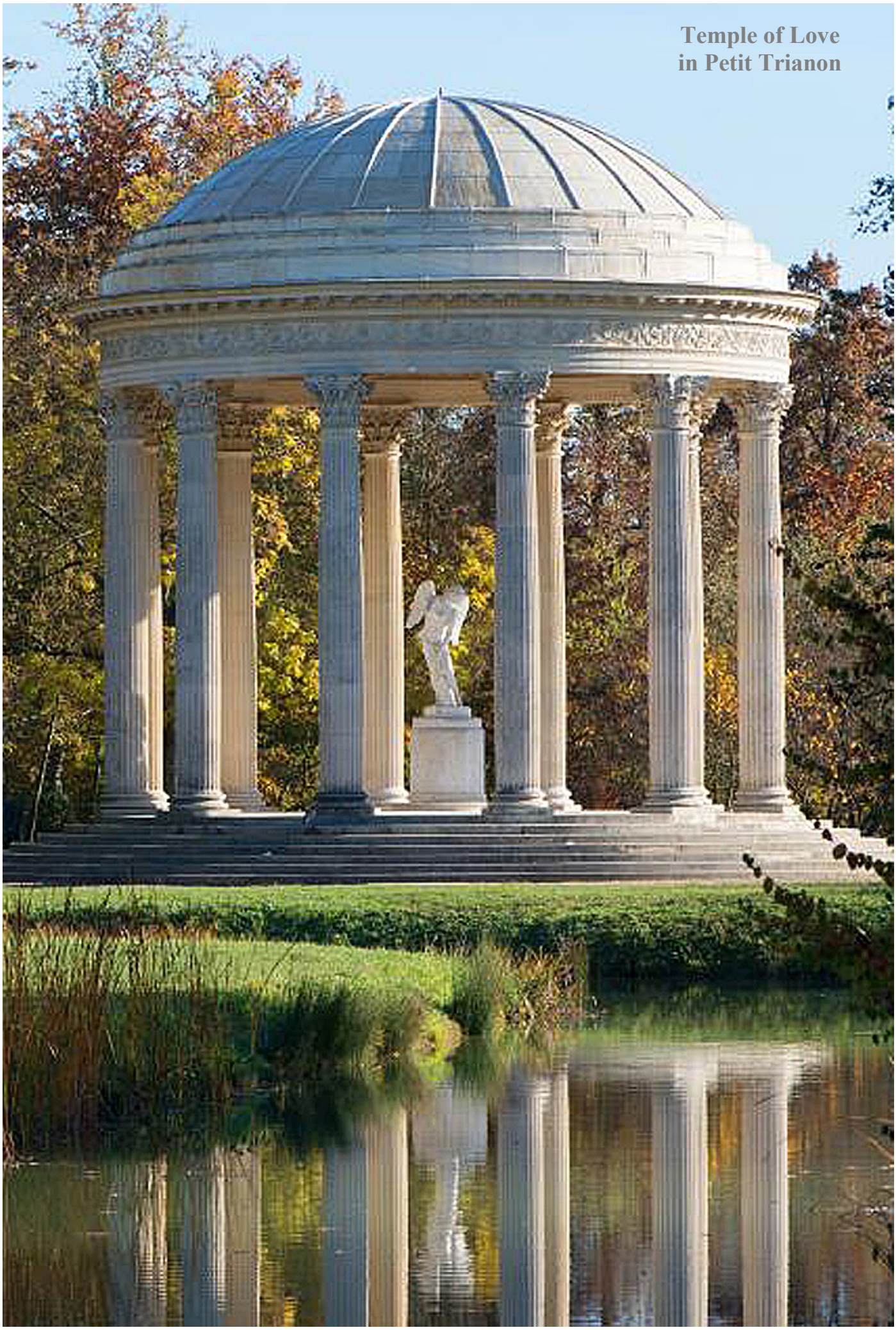
In the mid-1780s, the artist extensively frequented **Versailles**, the Trianon gardens, which was the personal domain of Marie-Antoinette, with *above* the temple dedicated to Love *(foreground),* and the Queen's apartments *(below).*





The Queen on the Hunt, *Louis Auguste Brun, 1793, Versailles.*




Temple of Love
in Petit Trianon



Night party in the park of the Petit Trianon,



Hubert Robert, 1782, Musée de Quimper, France.

Pavillon français, in the park of the Petit Trianon



Marie-Antoinette in Versailles. *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, private collection, Schloss Wolfsgarten, Hesse, Germany.* This is one of the masterpieces of the artist. *See* the comparison in the *right page*.

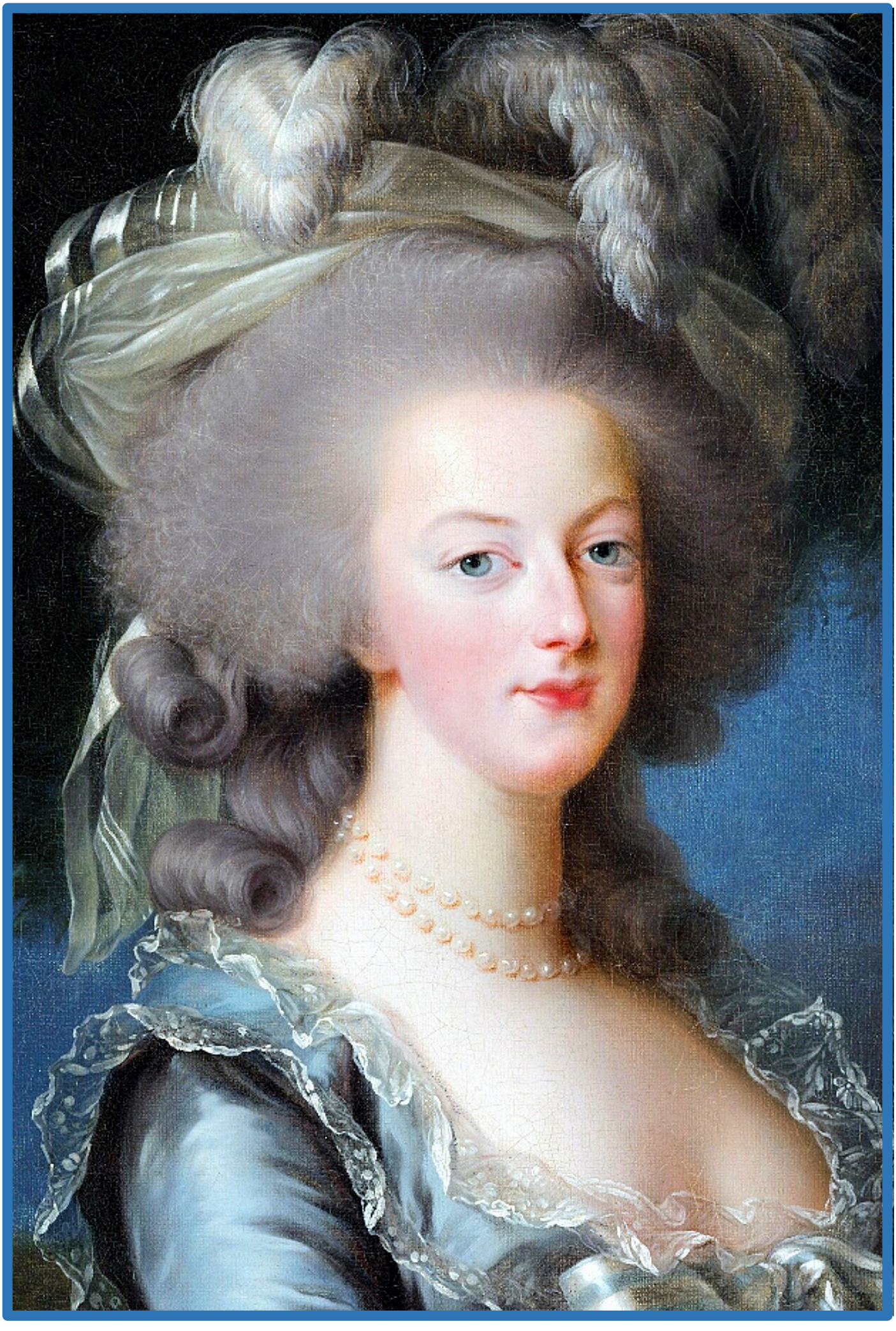


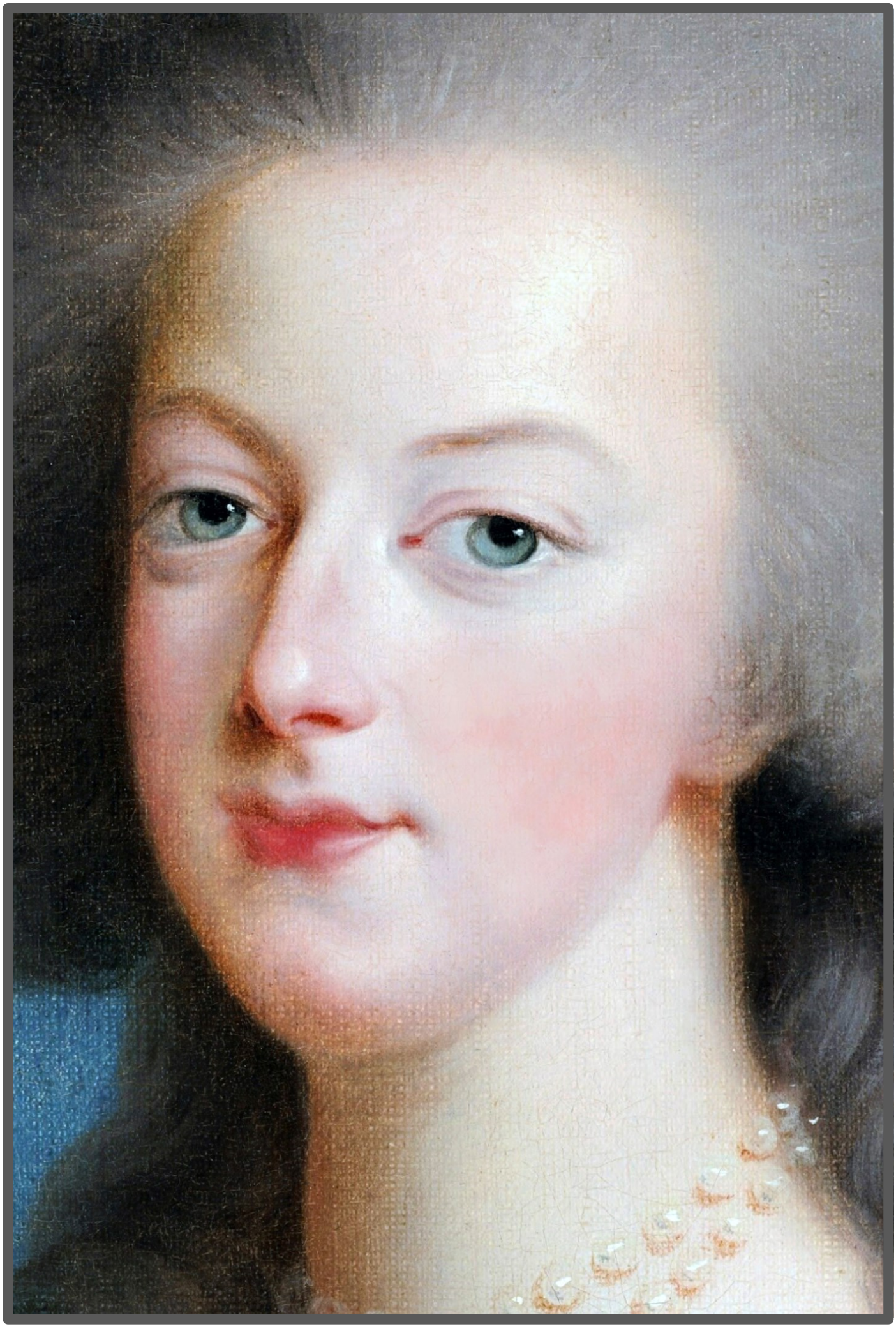


Marie-Antoinette (1755-1793) in Versailles en 1783, at 28, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Versailles*. This portrait followed the one presented on the left, which caused a ‘scandal’ because the Queen was in an ecru dress, comparable to an undergarment, with a straw hat, not very formal, and an interior decoration, too stripped down and suggesting a private room in her "small apartments". Here, dress, hairstyle and (country-style) decor are more "in order", but the pose and hold of the rose are almost identical in both paintings. In addition, the portrait above, with a less flattering face, was arguably more resembling.













Inscribed at the top of the frame: "*Given by the Queen to Madame the Princess of Hesse of Amestad in 1783*". The Queen used to ask the artist to make several copies of each of her paintings so that she could send exemplars to her family in Austria or to friends in Europe. This practice was very flourishing for the painter who could thus multiply her earnings by the number of copies (often 4 to 5), without counting the frames which were also sold with benefits. However, this repetitive work was quite long and boring for the painter, who, like all artists, preferred to work on new paintings. The multiplication of copies (which at times included variations on details) also benefited the conservation of the work when the "original" painting had disappeared or had been destroyed (revolutions, wars, fires, etc.). Note that on this copy the face of the Queen is the same as that of the more formal portrait (in the garden) and not that of the original interior painting with the ecru dress.

Laure de Bonneuil, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Louvre.*



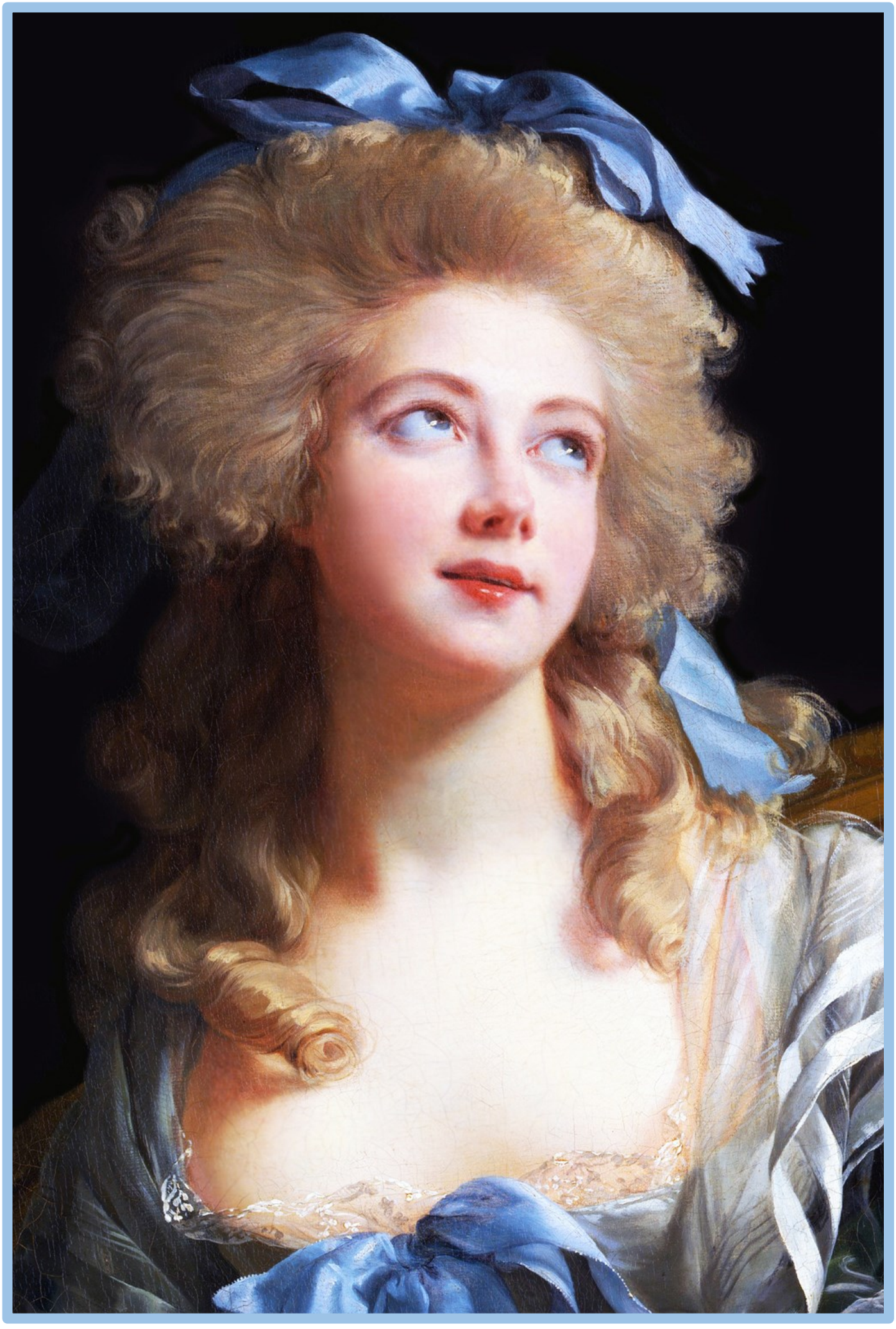


“Venus binding the wings of Love”. Engraving made from a painting (lost) by the artist in 1783 on an allegorical theme, *British Museum, London*. *Right,* colored by the author.



Marie-Antoinette (at age 28), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Tokyo Fuji Art Museum.*



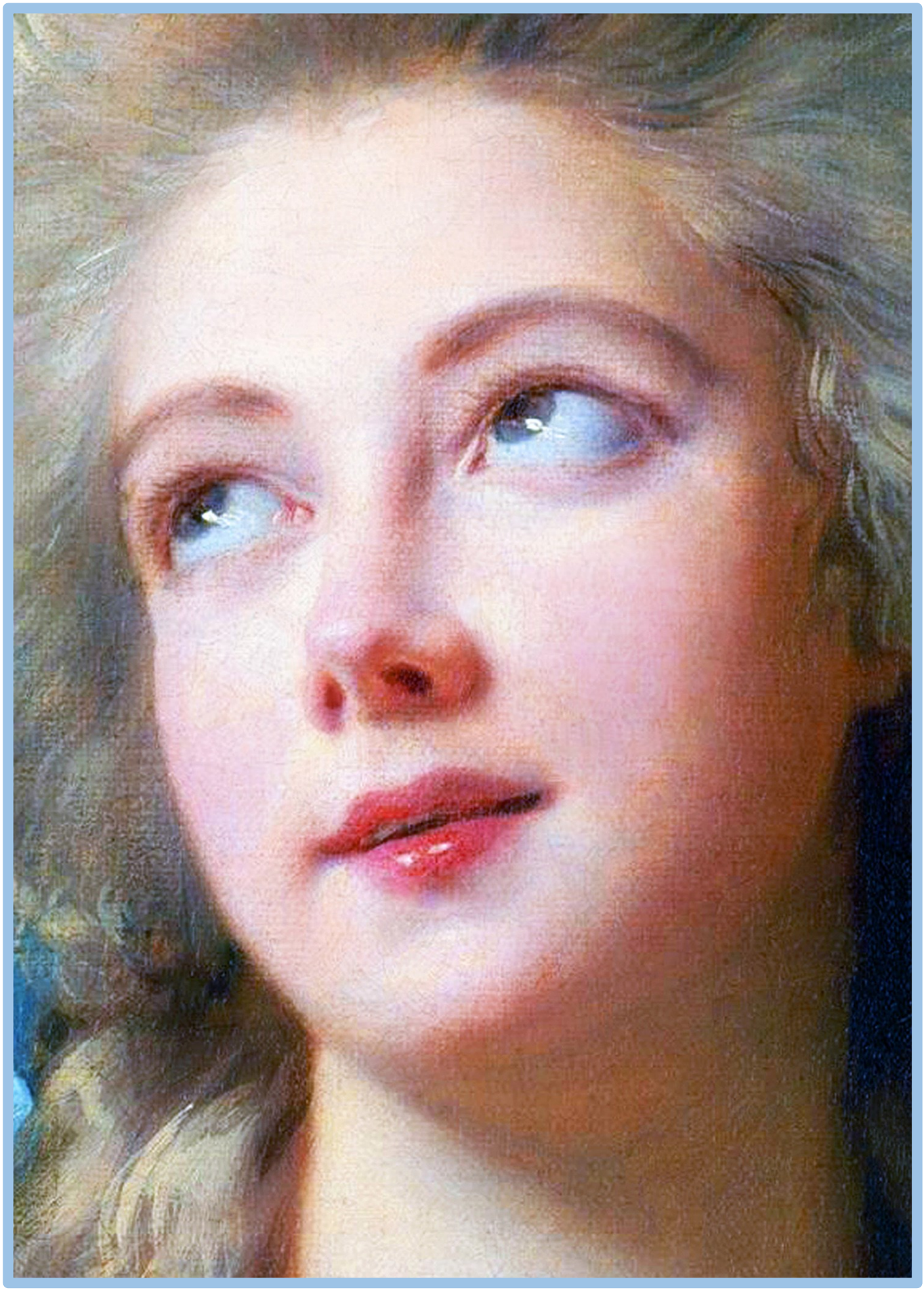




Noël Catherine Vorlée, **Madame Grand** (1761-1835), future **Princesse de Bénévent Talleyrand-Périgord** (in 1806), wife of the famous diplomat Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (from 1802), at age 22, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

Madonna, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Musée du Louvre.*





Detail of the painting of the previous pages.

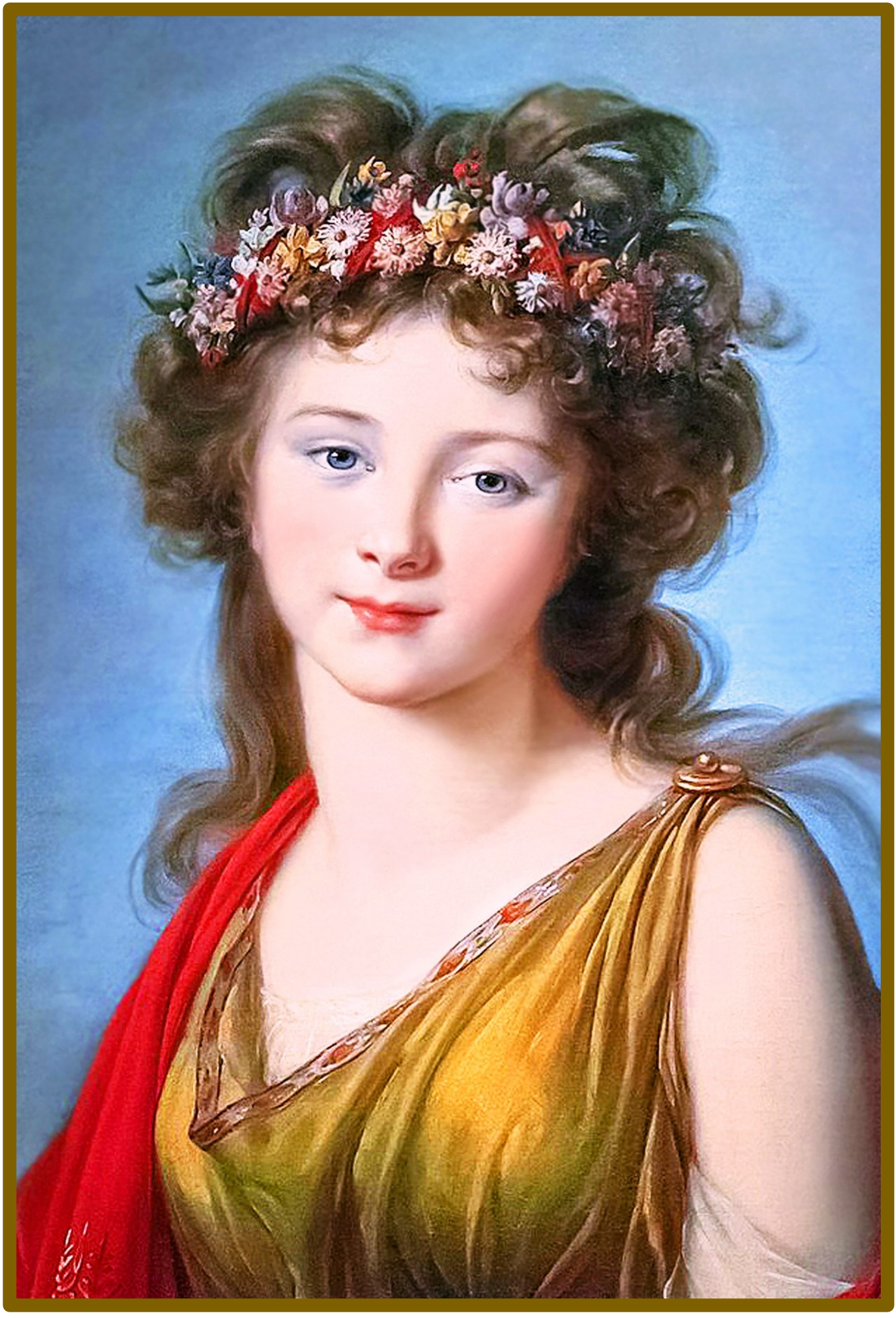




Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, at age 28, *Augustin Pajou (1730-1809), terracotta, 1783, Musée du Louvre.*



Countess Marie Beatrix Von Kageneck (1755-1842), *at age 28, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1783, Foundation Bemberg, Toulouse.* She was the mother of the famous Austrian diplomat Prince Clément Wenceslas Lothaire **Von Metternich-Winneburg**, called 'Metternich', who was in activity during the French Empire.



Paris, the Pont Neuf and the Louvre, *J.B. Raguenet, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.*



In 1783, the artist was admitted to the Académie Royale (Louvre), where she could exhibit.







Comte de Vaudreuil (1740-1817), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784, Versailles.* This aristocrat was close to Marie-Antoinette and often in Versailles. He would have had the Duchesse of Polignac for a while as his mistress. The artist, neglected by her husband, also got along very well with him and ended up seeing him a lot. They even had a rather long love affair together in the mid-1780s. They met in a small castle with a hunting place in Gennevilliers, near Paris, a property which the Count had just bought and which they decorated together. These notorious facts were not evoked by the artist in her Memoirs. She nevertheless describes the Count in a very positive way (see further).





The **Comte de Vaudreuil** was a very good friend of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and probably her lover in the mid-1780s. He was 15 years older than her. She met him again in Italy in 1790, in Vienna in 1794, in London in 1803 and in Paris afterwards, where he died in 1817 as the governor of the Louvre. Here is what she wrote her Memoirs:

"To the advantages which a high position in the world gives he joined all the qualities, all the graces which make a man lovable; he was tall, well made, his demeanor had a remarkable nobility and elegance; his gaze was gentle and subtle, his countenance extremely mobile like his ideas, and his obliging smile was speaking for him at first. The Comte de Vaudreuil had a great deal of wit, but one was tempted to believe that he only opened his mouth to promote yours, he listened to you in such an amiable and gracious manner; whether the conversation was serious or pleasant, he knew how to take all the tones, all the nuances, for he had as much education as he was cheerful.

The society he sought by preference was that of the most distinguished artists and men of letters; he counted friends there, whom he always kept, even among those whose political opinions were not his own. He loved all the arts with passion, and his knowledge of painting was very remarkable. As his fortune allowed him to satisfy very expensive tastes, he had a gallery of pictures by the greatest masters of various schools; his drawing-room was enriched with precious furniture and ornaments of the best taste.

The only contradiction that can be noticed in this sane and upright mind is that M. de Vaudreuil very often complained of living at Court, when it was clear to all his friends that he would not have could live elsewhere. Thinking about it, however, I explained this oddity to myself. The fine temper of his soul made him a child of nature, which he loved, and which he enjoyed too little; his rank kept him too often away from a world into which the solidity of his mind, his taste for the arts led him incessantly; then, on the other hand, he no doubt pleased him to occupy such a distinguished place at Court, which he owed to his personal merit.

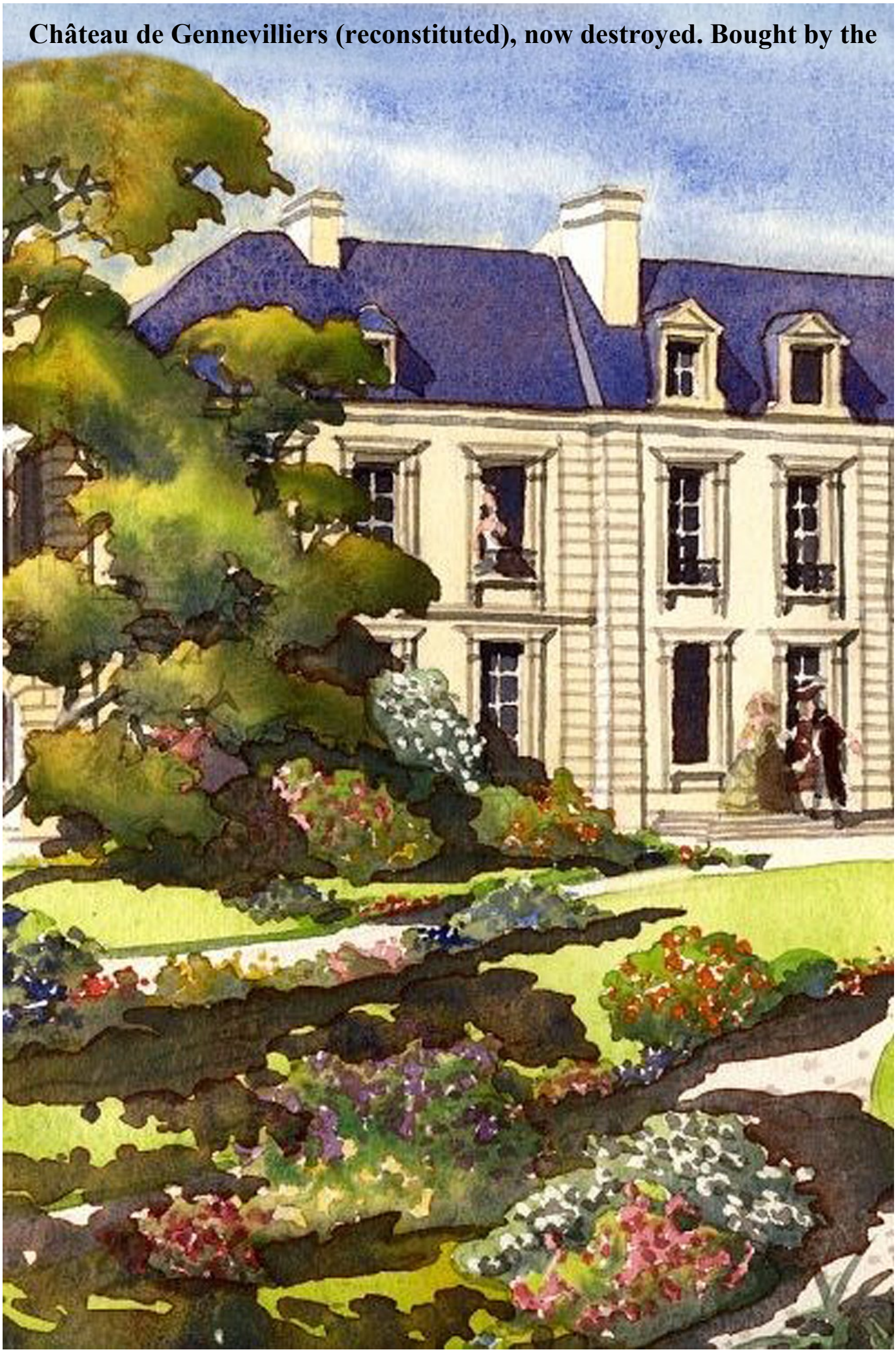
Besides, he adored his prince, Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois (future King Charles X, 1824-1830), *whom he never flattered and whom he never left in his misfortunes. It is rare for such a friendship to be established between two men, one of whom was born so near a throne; because this friendship was reciprocal. In 1814, it happened that M. de Vaudreuil had a discussion with Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, and on this subject he wrote him a long letter in which he told him that it seemed cruel to him to be thus in contradiction after thirty years of friendship. The prince answered him: 'Shut up, old fool, you have lost your memory, because I have been your best friend for forty years.'*

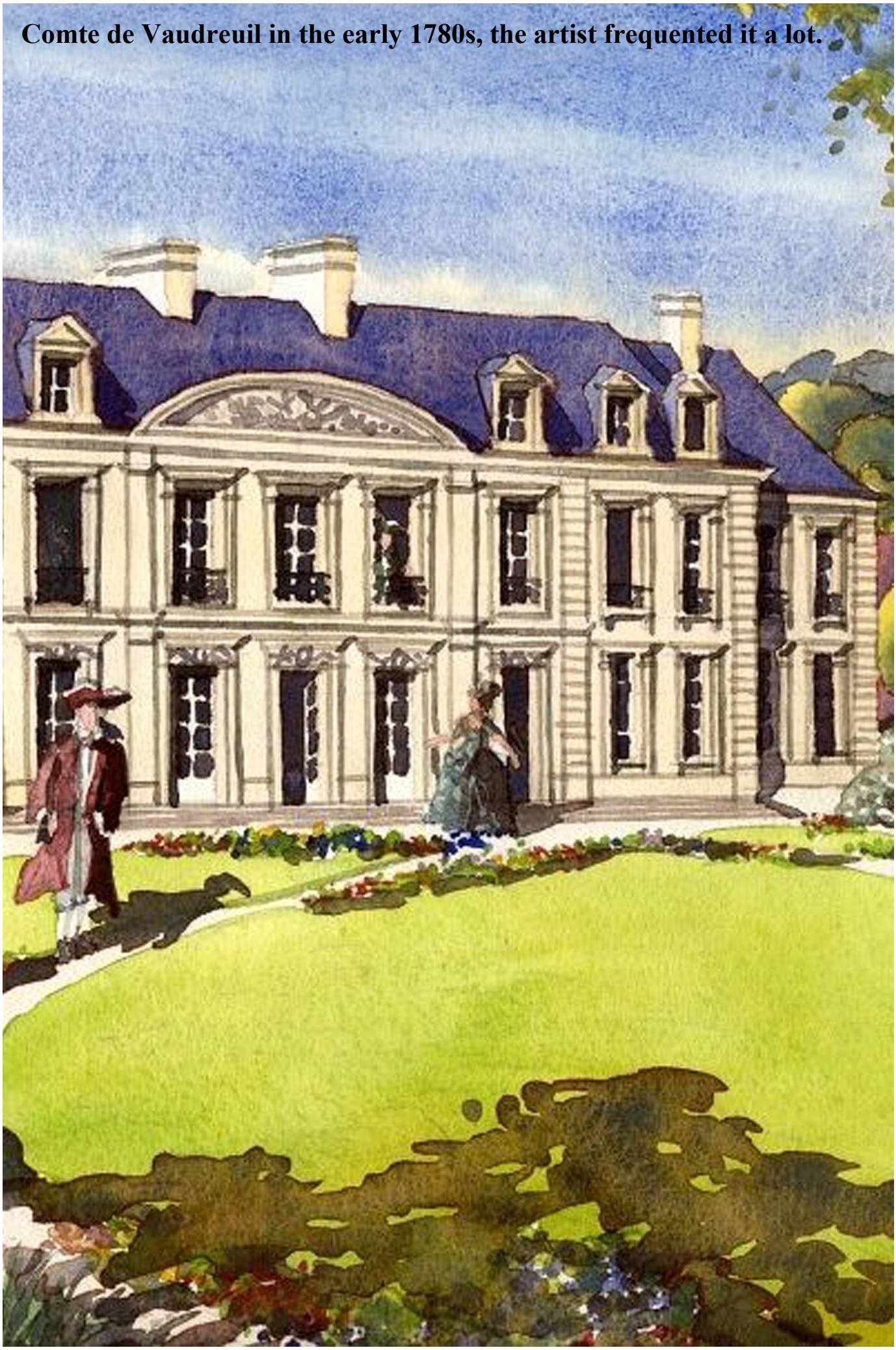
During the emigration, and at an advanced age, he married in England one of his cousins, very young and very pretty; he had two sons, and was as good a husband as a good father. Long misfortunes, the entire loss of his fortune which the Restoration has not made him recover, have never succeeded in bringing him down; he retained the same heart and the same spirit until his last moment. During the Restoration, he had been appointed ***governor of the Louvre****, so we can notice that he ended his days near the enclosure where the masterpieces that during his life he had admired so much are kept. His tender soul feeling the need to raise his affections higher than this earth, he had become very pious, but without any bigotry. These sentiments softened his end, and he died, surrounded by his friends, with his darling prince, who never left him."*



The Comte de Vaudreuil, at age 18, *François Hubert Drouais, 1758, National Gallery, London.* He is showing the island of Santo Domingo where he was born.

Château de Gennevilliers (reconstituted), now destroyed. Bought by the

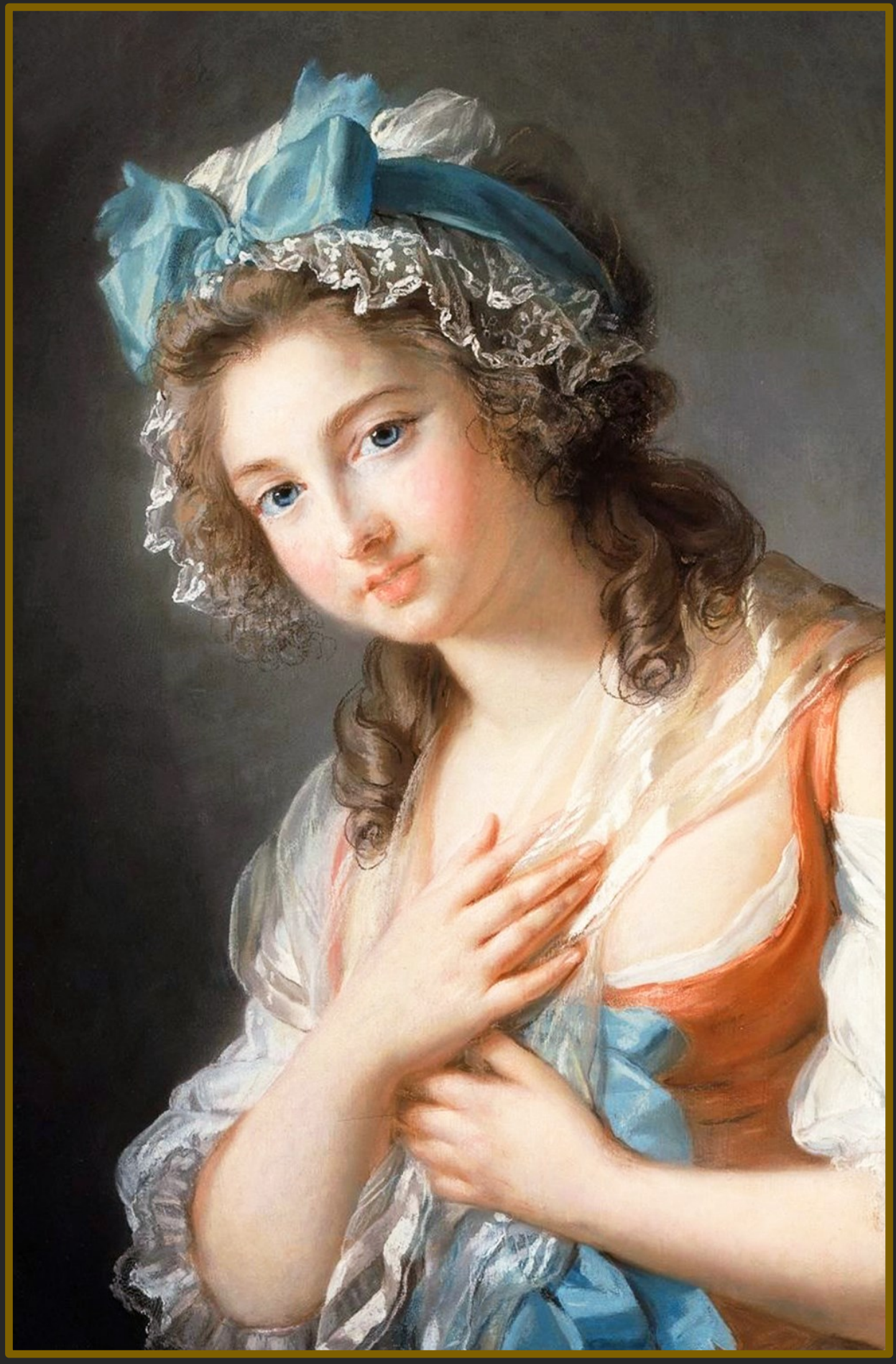



Comte de Vaudreuil in the early 1780s, the artist frequented it a lot.

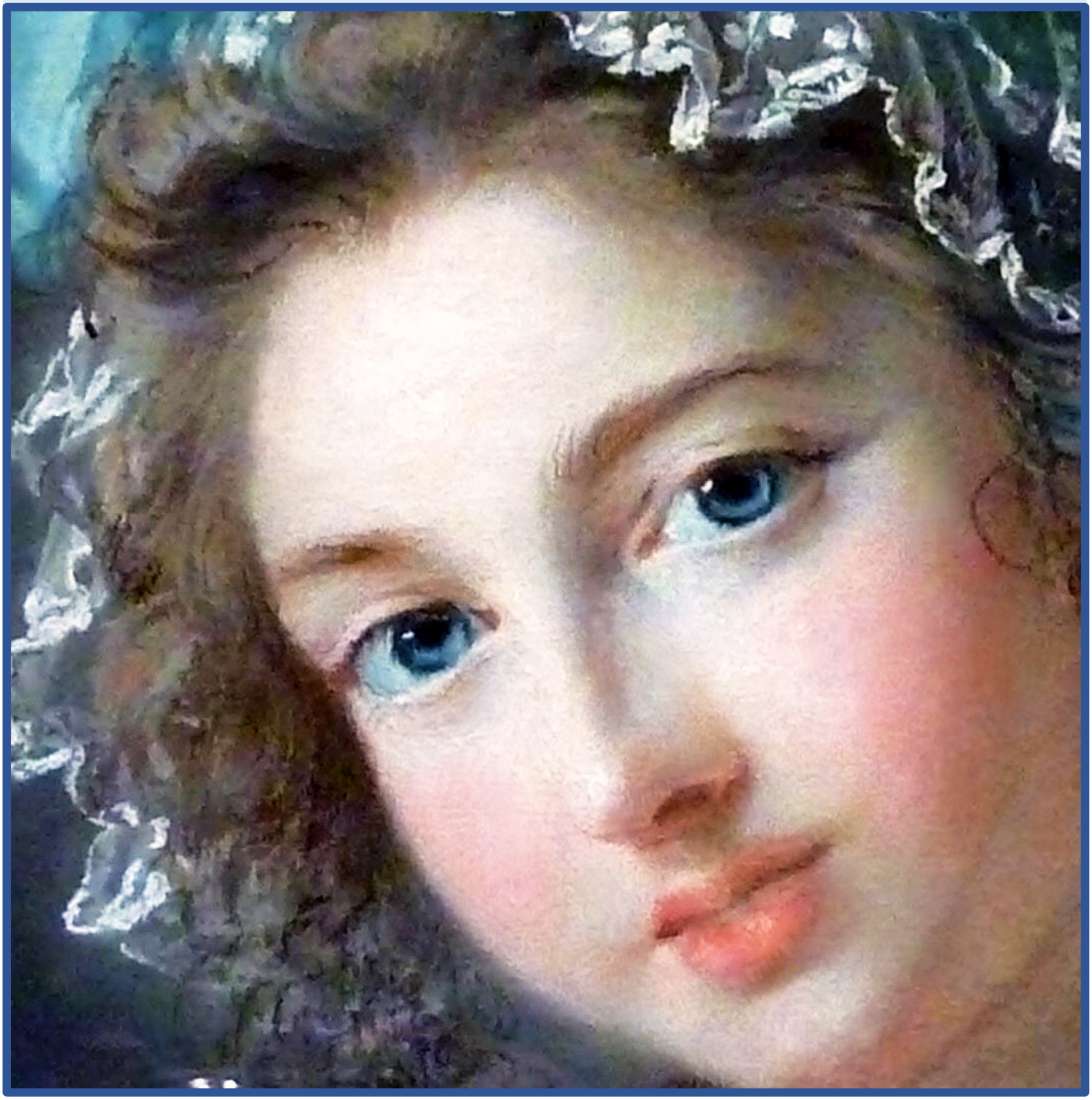


Joseph Hyacinthe François de Paule de Rigaud, **Comte de Vaudreuil** (1740-1817), at age 44, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784, Virginia Museum of Arts, Richmond, USA*. He seems to speak and shows his titles inscribed under the table: *"Comte de Vaudreuil, Grand Fauconnier de France, Chevalier des Ordres du Roi, Lieutenant Général et Pair de France, 1740-1817".* The date of his death has been entered posthumously. He had a lot of influence at the Court of Versailles and the artist considered him a true friend (and more). He wears a "French" dress, with a tricorn under his arm, to ensure his status.





Aglaé Louise Françoise Gabrielle de Polignac, **duchesse de Guiche** (1768-1803), daughter of the Duchesse Gabrielle de Polignac, favorite of Marie-Antoinette, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784, private collection*. She was 16 years old here and nicknamed « Guichette ». She followed her parents into exile to Vienna in 1789, where the artist found her and repainted her in 1794, ten years later. The artist also painted the daughter of Aglaé (granddaughter of the duchesse de Polignac) in 1824 in Paris, 40 years after her grandmother *(see further)*.




AGLAÉ de POLIGNAC D.ss de GUICHE et de GRAMONT NÉE EN 1764
PAR Mr VIGÉE LEBRUN 1784

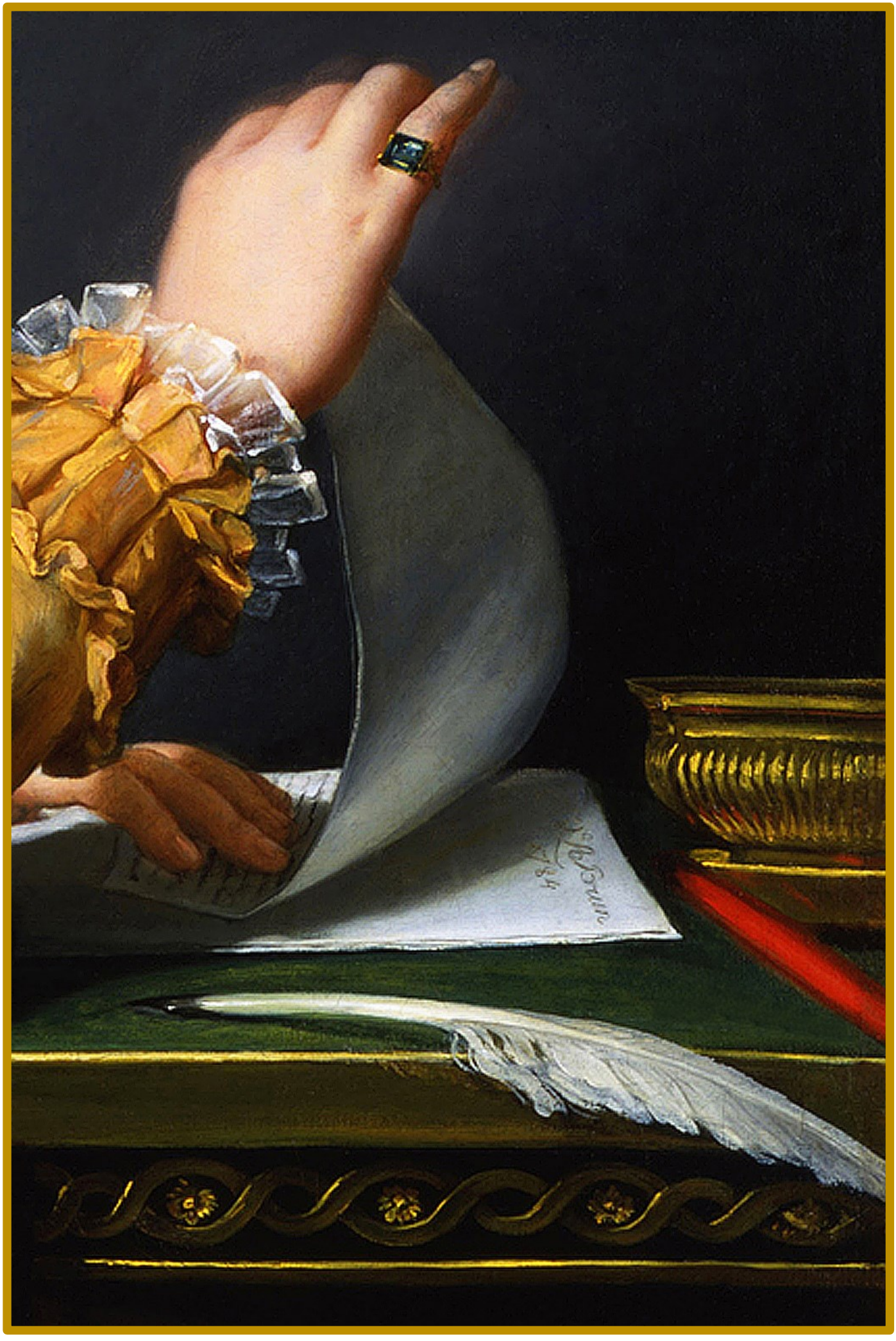
*« **A lady** », Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1783, private collection.*





Anne Marie Thérèse de Rabaudy Montoussin, **Comtesse du Barry de Cérès** (1759-1834), at age 25, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784, Toledo*. Nobility of Toulouse. Original pose, folding a letter just written. She would have supplanted the portrait painter in her liaison with Minister Calonne *(next pages),* without telling her when this portrait was produced, painted the same year as that of the Minister. The Countess's husband, 36 years older than her, was guillotined in 1794, but she was able to escape the Revolution.





Charles Alexandre de Calonne (1734-1802), in 1784 (at 50), at the height of his popularity, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Royal Collection, Kensington Palace, London.* He was Louis XVI's finance minister but, after some success, he suffered multiple financial failures from 1785, which led to his disgrace in 1787. He had to go into exile in England, from where he did not return in France before 1802, the year of his death (aged 78).






Au Roi



Marie Gabrielle de Sinety, Comtesse de Gramont, duchesse de Caderousse (1761-1832), *at age 23, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784, Kansas City.* She was also part of Marie-Antoinette's private circle. She emigrated in 1791, narrowly escaping the “Terror”, and came back in 1800. In this painting, the return to the "natural" was sought, with brown hair (and not powdered gray, as was the rule then), a simple dress and a suggested harvesting action. This natural painting caused a sensation in Paris and contributed to changing the fashion of the nobility of this period, while further increasing the success of the artist.





The first 2 children of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784, Versailles.* They are Marie-Thérèse (6 years old) and Louis-Joseph (3 years old). Marie-Thérèse was imprisoned with her parents in 1791 but survived the Revolution, while the then 'Dauphin' died in 1789 (aged 8) from a chronic infectious disease, just before the Revolution.

Another aspect of **Marie-Antoinette with her 2 children,** walking around Versailles, *Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller, 1785, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.*



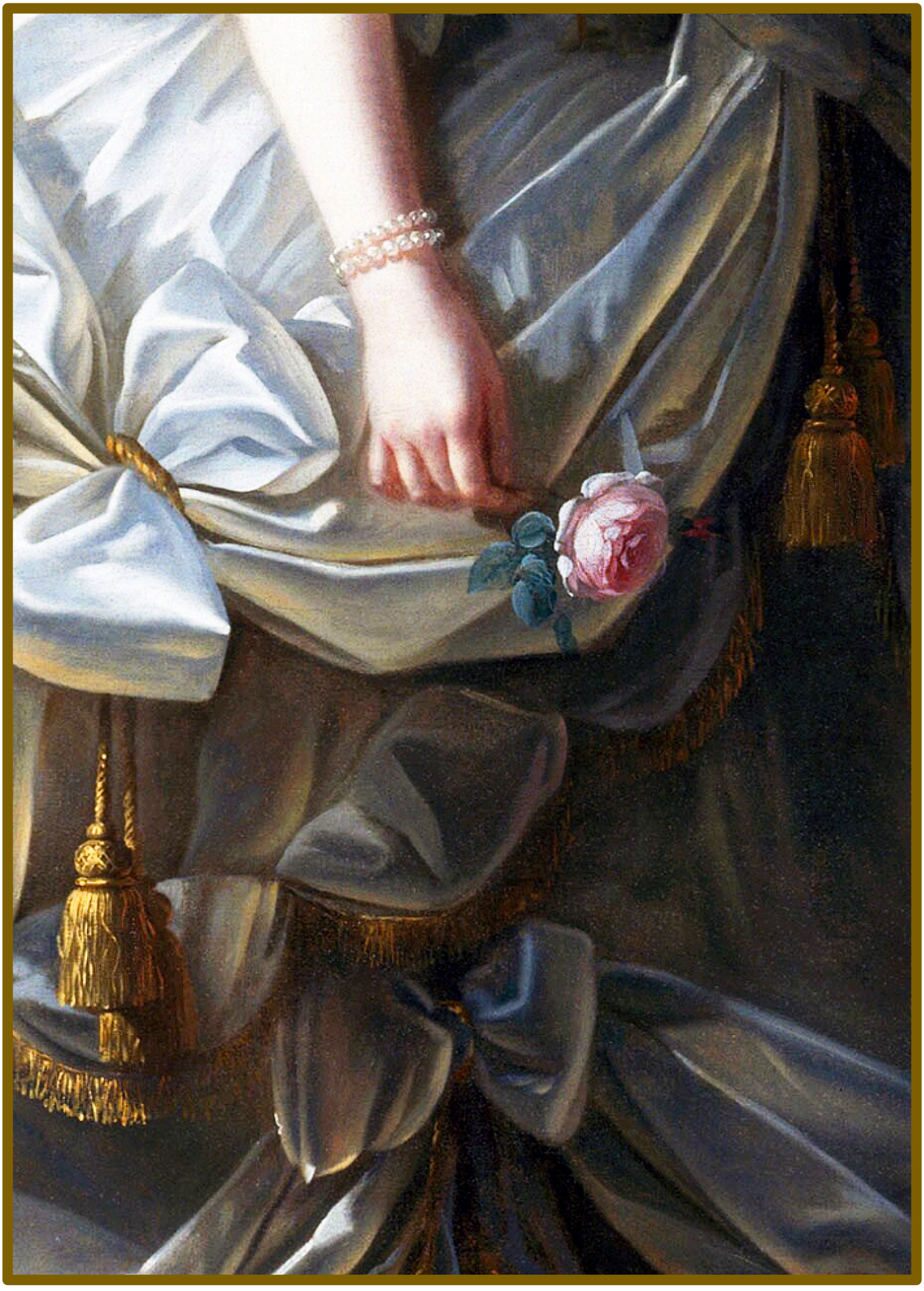




Marie-Antoinette in Versailles in 1785, again in “full dress” of ceremonial (basket dress), at age 30. *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1785, Versailles.*









Marie Joséphine Thérèse de Loraine, Princesse de Carignan, 1753-1797, 32, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Racconigi Castle, Piedmont, Italy.* Daughter of Louis de Loraine, Comte de Brionne, and Louise de Rohan-Rochefort.



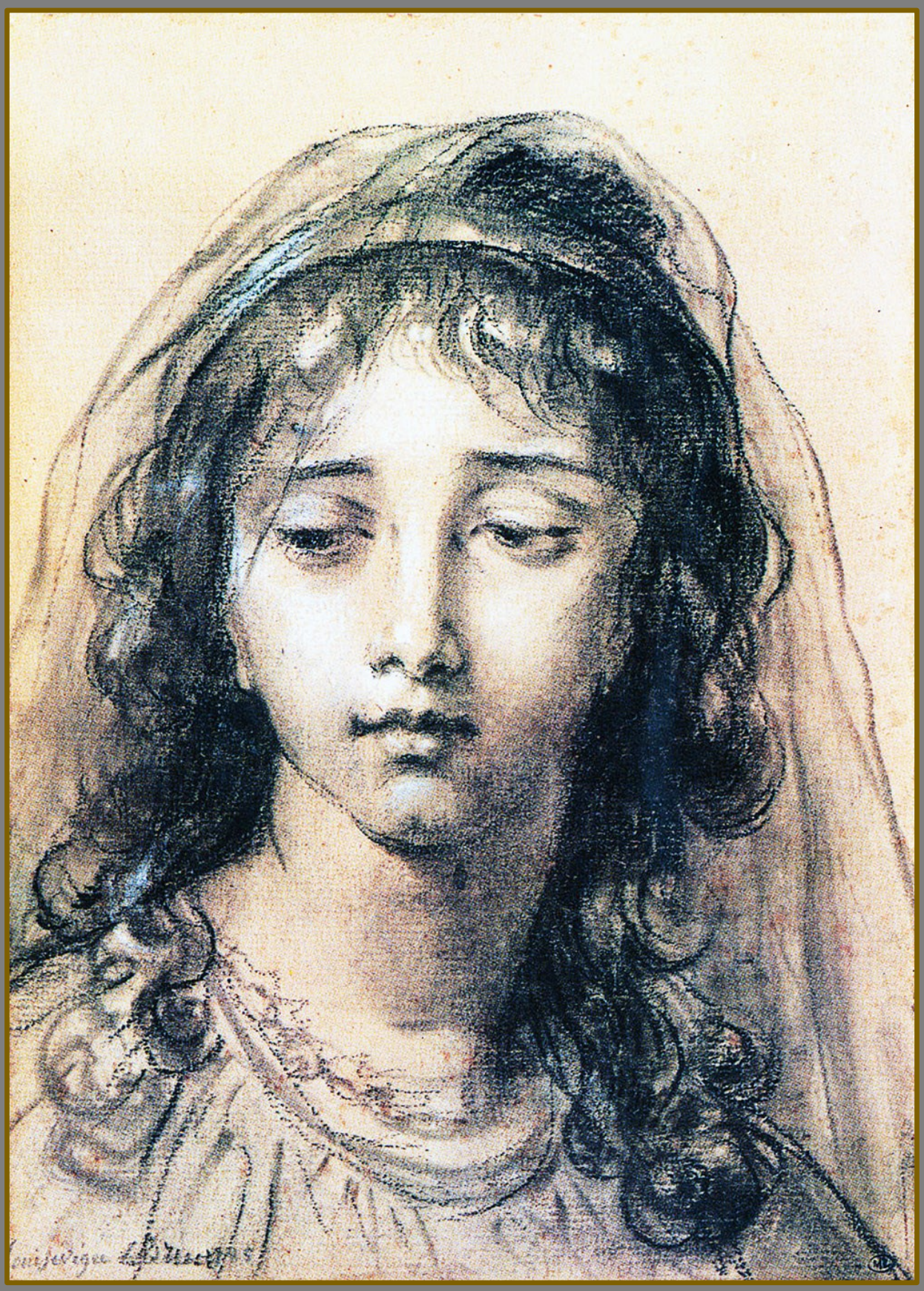


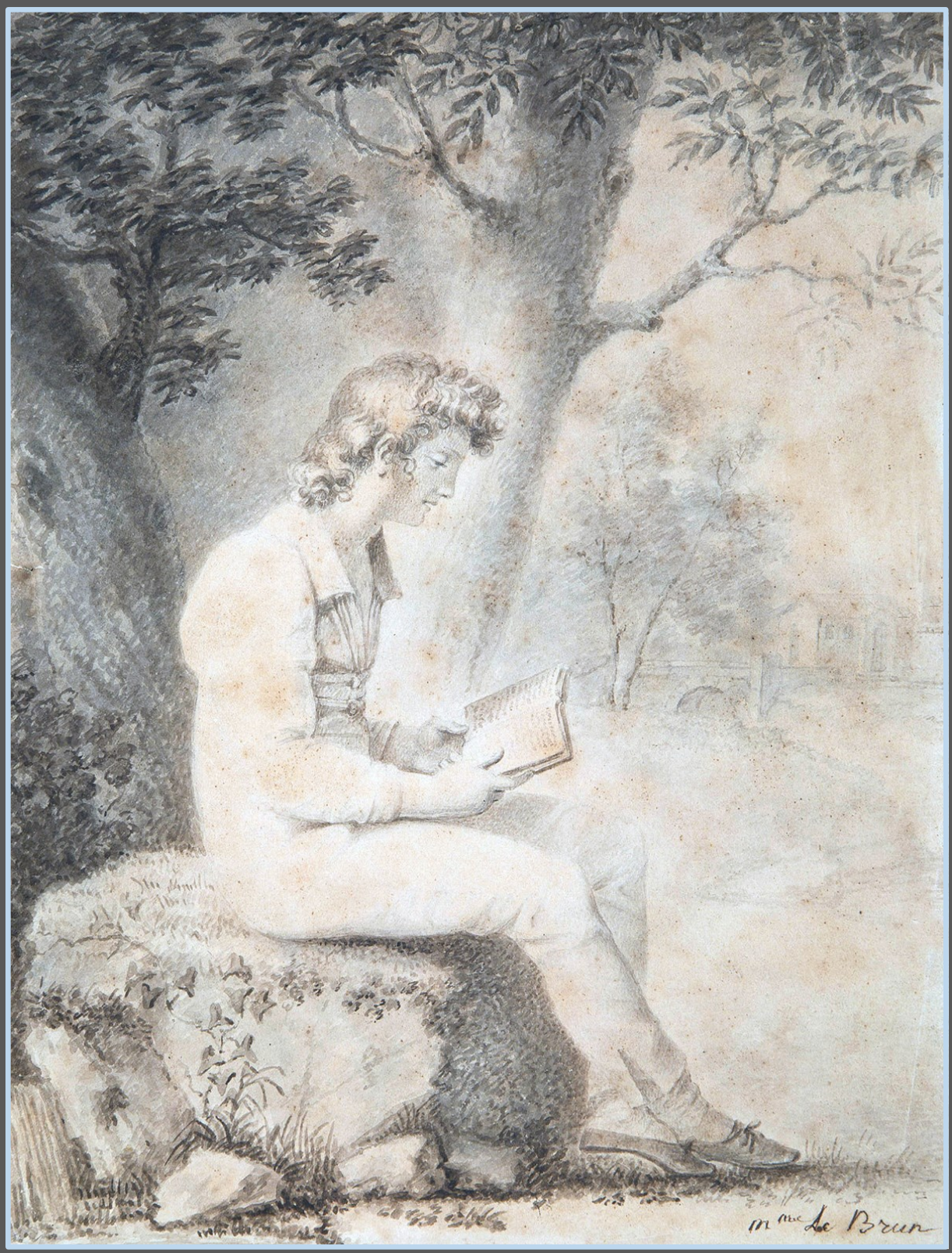
Françoise Éléonore Dejean de Manville, comtesse de Sabran, then marquise de Boufflers (1749-1827), at age 36, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785.* The artist said of her*: "She was very pretty, her eyes expressed her finesse and kindness. She loved the arts and letters, wrote very pretty verses, told marvelously. Madame de Sabran was one of the women I saw most often (before the Revolution), whom I went to look for and whom I received at home with the greatest pleasure. So, I was charmed when I emigrated to find her in Prussia. She was then established in Rainsberg, with Prince Henri, as was the Chevalier de Boufflers, whom she has since married."* She also painted but mostly made copies. At the end of her life, she had a cataract which was operated on, requiring her to remain in the dark.



Luisa Todi, musician and singer, **1753-1833,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780s, Musea da Musica, Lisbonne.*

Girl with a veil, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1785, Louvre Museum.*





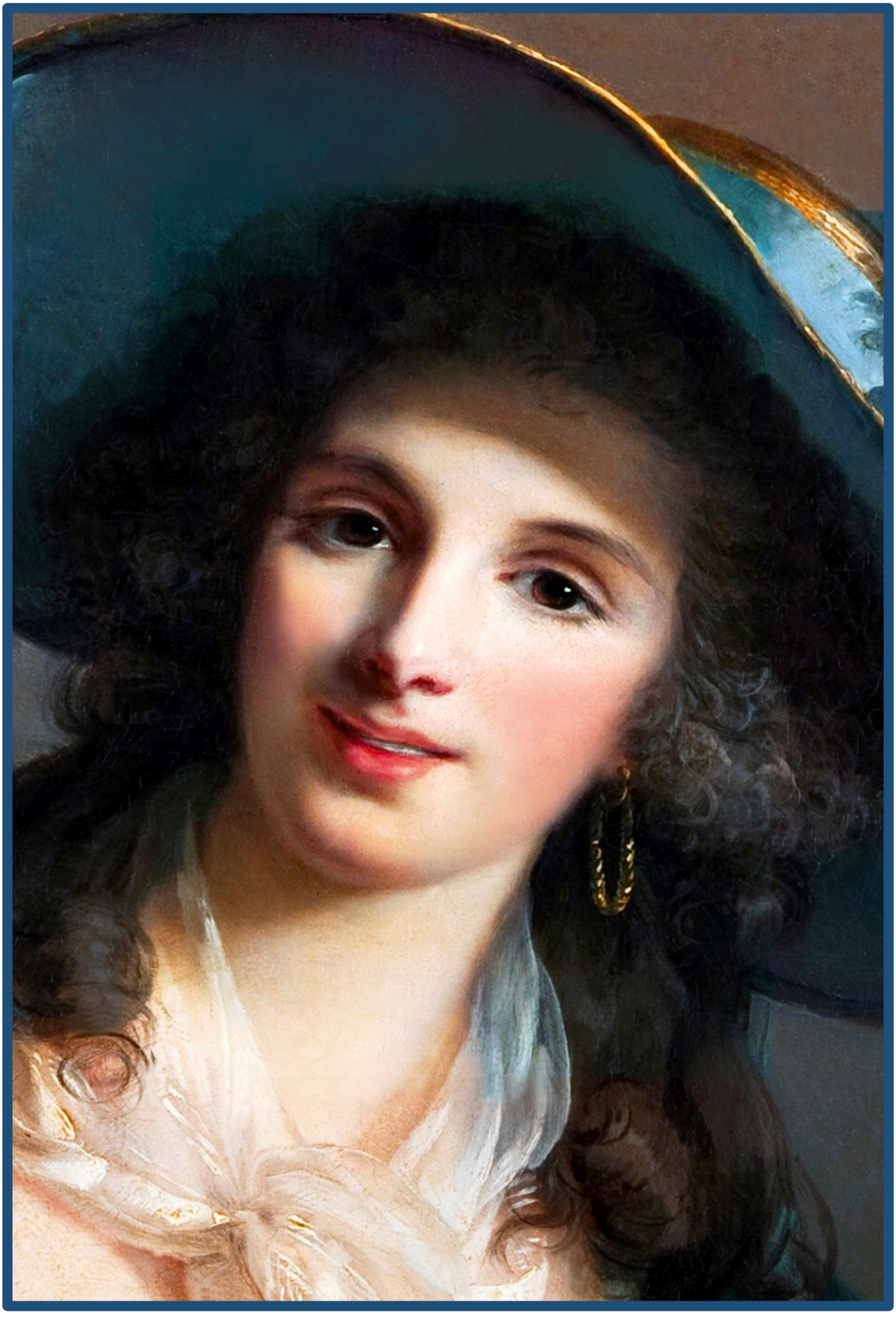
"A young poet", *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1785.* Apart from painting, the artist was particularly fond of music in all its forms and songs. Many musicians and opera singers came and performed in her "salon" and she herself sang willingly and very accurately in her “salon” as in Versailles, with Marie-Antoinette. She was also very fond of the theater and poetry and received many actors and poets in her home. She therefore painted many people of the theater and musicians, in Paris as in exile after 1789.

Nicolas Beaujon, 1718-1786, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, private collection.* He was a financier and made his fortune under Louis XV as "General Farmer" (tax collector). In 1773, he acquired the Hôtel d'Évreux (built in 1720 and now the Élysée Palace), which he lived after the Marquise de Pompadour (favorite of King Louis XV) and before many others, in particular Prince Murat and Caroline Bonaparte under the First Empire, prestigious foreign guests under the Second Empire, then successive Presidents of the Republic from 1879. Nicolas Beaujon had founded in 1784 an institution then a hospital for poor children in Paris, bearing his name. The hospital later moved to Clichy and kept his name. He brought in the artist to have his portrait painted in his palace because he was obese and impotent. He wanted his portrait to be hung in his Institution. As the artist could see and relate, he led a great lifestyle with many guests and many young women coming to dinner every day. He himself ate very little and was "harmless" to his female guests because of his infirmities. The artist clarified that he didn't have an easy to paint physique to put it to his advantage and she did what she could.





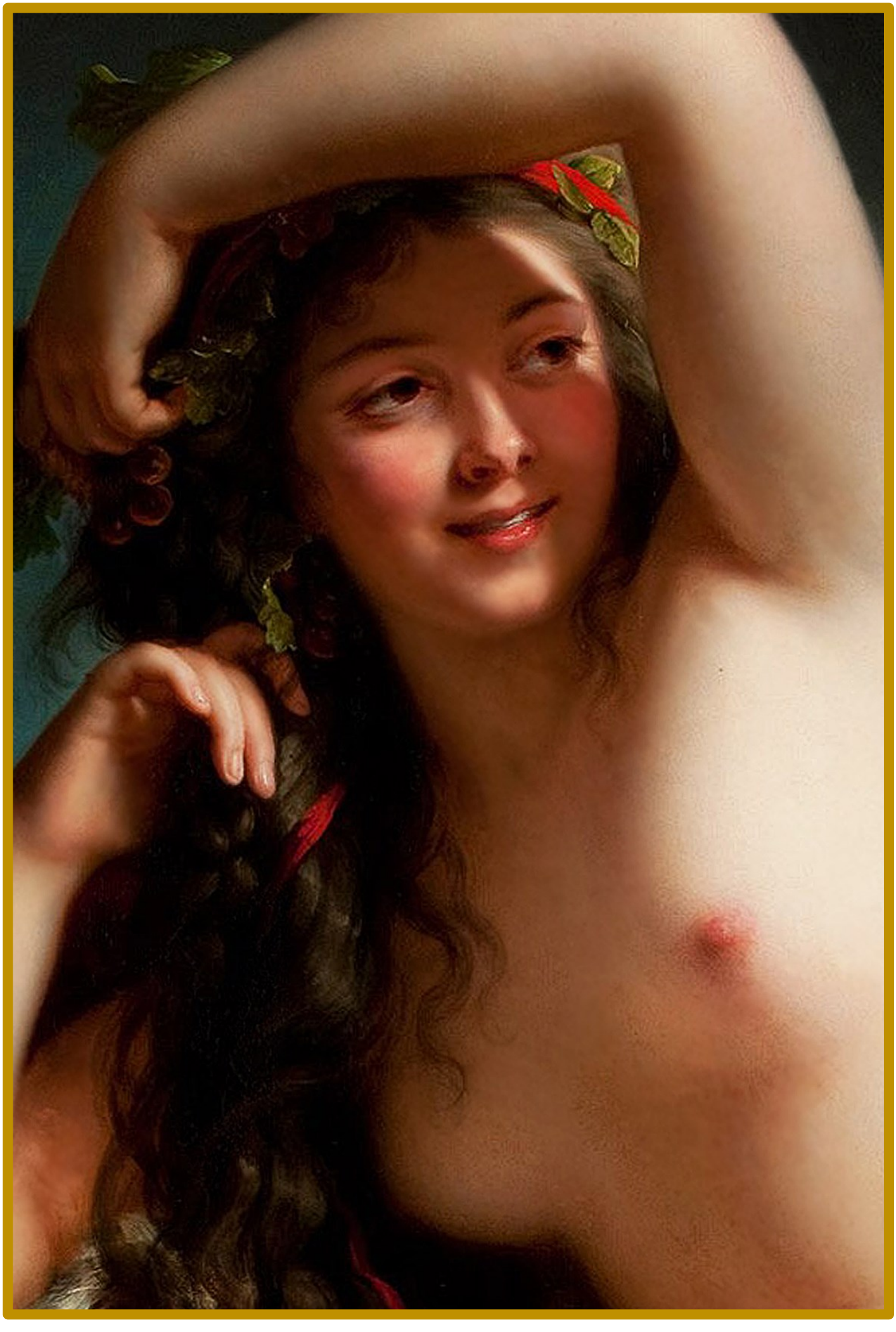
Antoinette Élisabeth Marie d'Auguesseau, **Comtesse de Ségur** (1756-1828), at age 29, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Versailles.* The family escaped the 'Terror' by quickly rallying to the Republic. Grandmother (by marriage) of the French countess writer, she was also the mother of Philippe de Ségur, general and count of the First Empire, faithful aide-de-camp to Napoléon from 1804 to 1814, historian of the Empire and who published famous memoirs.



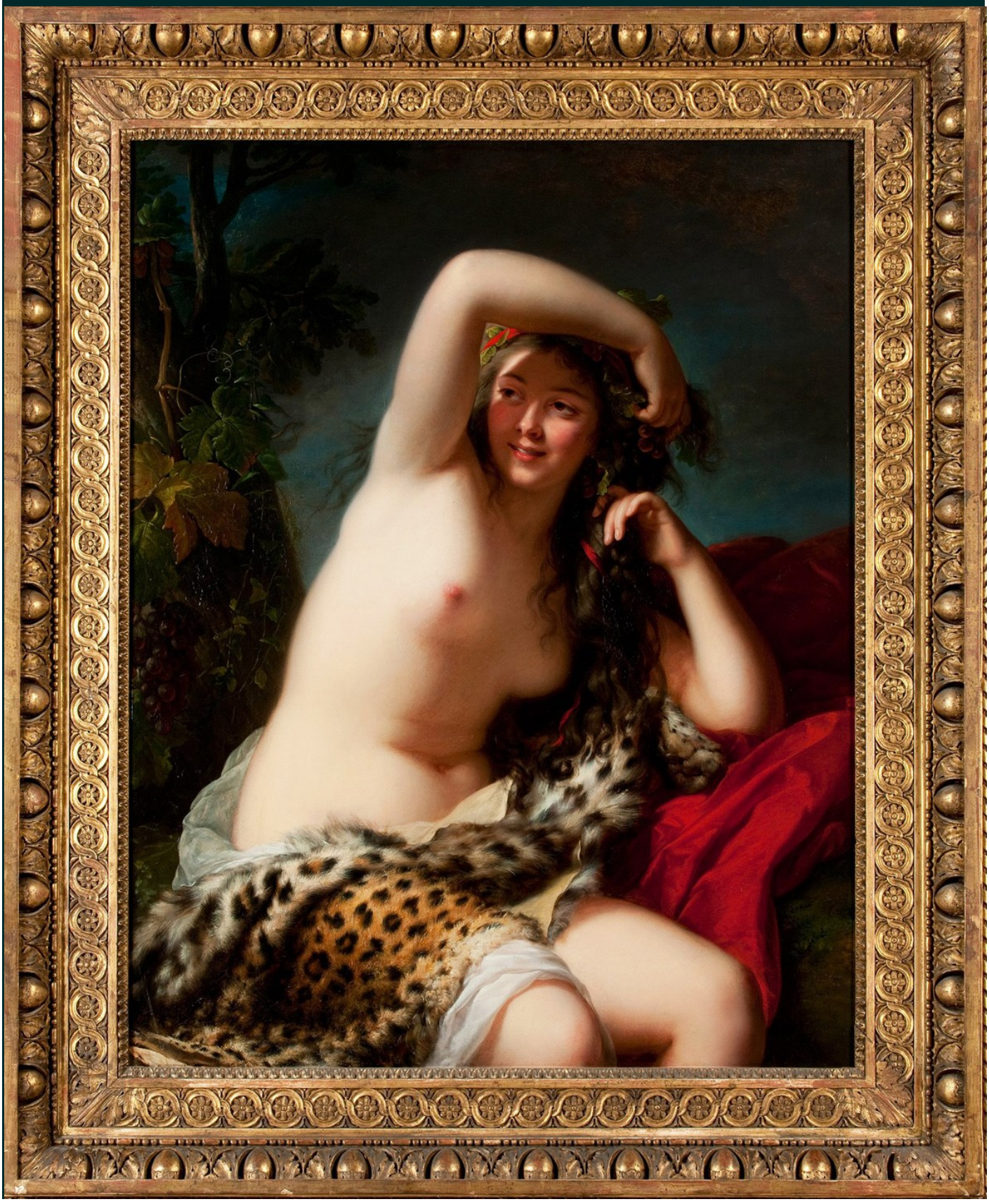
Victoire Pauline de Riquet de Caraman, **Vicomtesse de Vaudreuil** (1764-1834), at age 21, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Getty Museum, Los Angeles.* She emigrated in time in 1789.

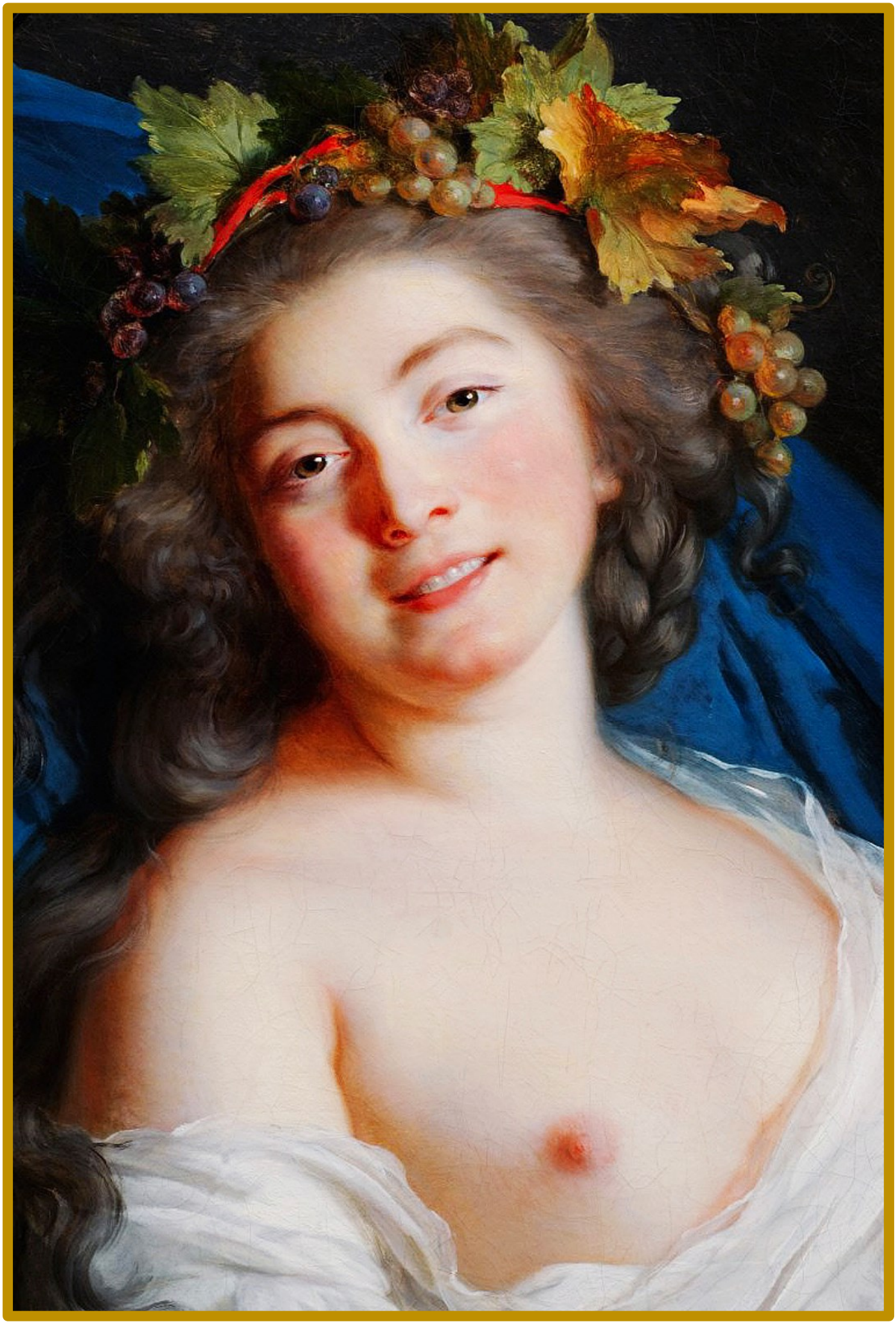






Bacchante, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785,*
Musée Nissim de Camando, Paris





Bacchante, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Clark Institute Williamstone, Massachussets.*





Charlotte Bontemps, **Comtesse de la Châtre** (1762-1848), at age 23, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*. Not being of noble origin herself, she refused to follow her husband (count) into exile and she was able to go through the entire Revolution without being worried.



Marie-Antoinette, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, private collection*. Her Skin tone was particularly famous and was admired by the portrait painter who confessed to having had a hard time painting it.







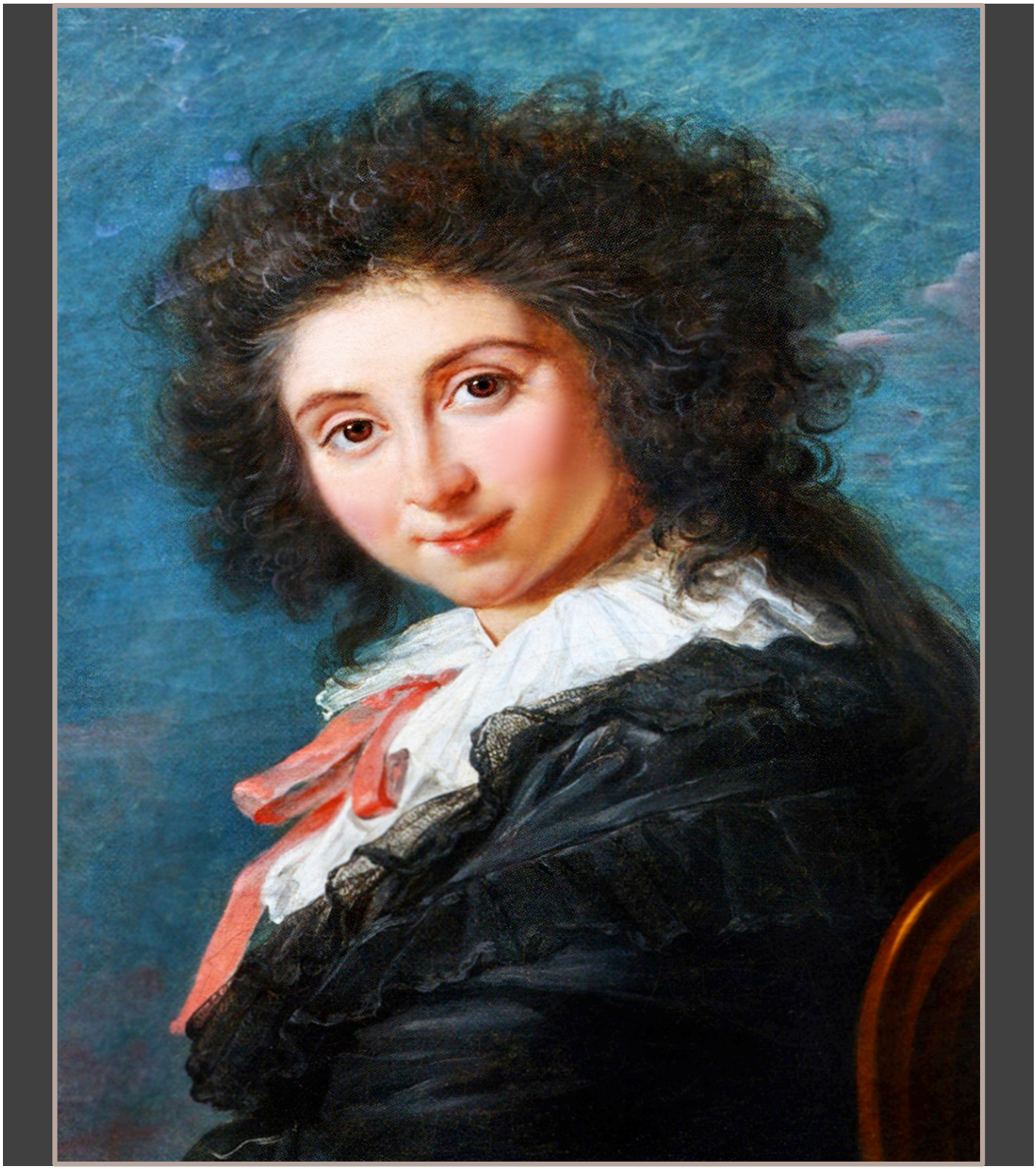


Marie Louise Joséphine Delphine de Rosières de Sorans, **Comtesse de Clermont-Tonnerre** (1766-1832), at age 19, in sultan, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Metropolitain Museum of Arts, New York*. She was in the service of Madame Élisabeth, the King's sister, from 1778 to 1790. Her husband, the Comte Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre, was assassinated on August 10, 1792 (the day of the Tuileries uprising, of the arrest of the royal family and of Madame Elisabeth), but she herself seems to have gone through the rest of the Revolution without any other major problem. She remarried in 1802 to the Marquis Justin de Talaru.

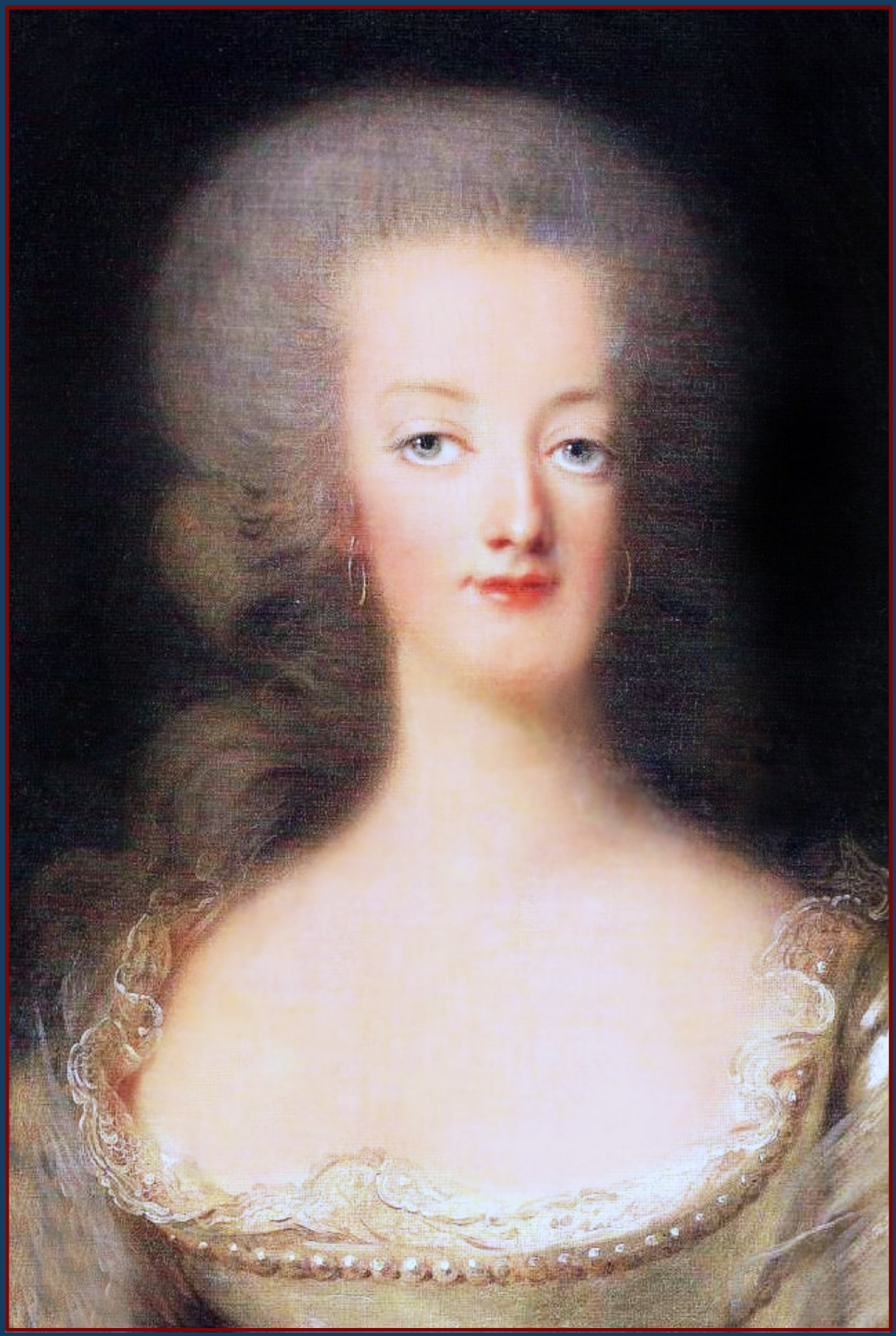
Comtesse de Chatenois, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.*







Suzanne Vigée, born De Rivière, 1764-1811, pianist and singer, married in 1784 Etienne Vigée, thus sister in law of the artist, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, private collection.* She became Madame Royale's chambermaid (Marie-Antoinette's eldest daughter) while Etienne was secretary to the Countess of Provence (the King's sister-in-law). Their only daughter Caroline, who remained the artist's only relative after 1820, took great care of her in Louveciennes and inherited the artist's property. About Suzanne, the artist declared that *"it was only her eyes which were interesting with her",* which she has highlighted here, in a pose very close to that of Madame of Chatenois *(above)* also painted in 1785.



Marie-Antoinette, attributed to *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, imprecise date.*

<u>Marie Renée Louise de Fouquet,</u> Vicomtesse de Bertier de Sauvigny (1778-1845), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1786, <u>Musée du Louvre.</u>*
Here at 8 years old.





Baronne Marie Joséphine Isabelle **de Crussol** (1752-1829), at age 33, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse.* This portrait is considered by specialists to be one of the masterpieces of this portrait painter due to the posture, facial expression and the colors and textures of the outfit.







André Ernest Gréty (1741-1813), musician, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, Versailles.* Born in Liège (Belgium), he composed operas and comic operas and worked for Marie-Antoinette and for Napoléon.





Marguerite Baudard de Saint-James, marquise de Puységur, in milkmaid,
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1786, Snite Museum of Art, Indiana, USA.



Julie Lebrun, daughter of the artist, at age 5, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1785, private collection.*



Julie Le Brun, daughter of the artist, at age 7, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.* In this second version, two years later, the attitude, model, dress, kerchief and top are the same, but the mirror frame is different, the hair is less restrained, covering the ear, and the sleeves are no longer lace. This painting was exhibited in 1787 at the 'Salon', the annual exhibition in the Louvre square salon, and it was very successful.





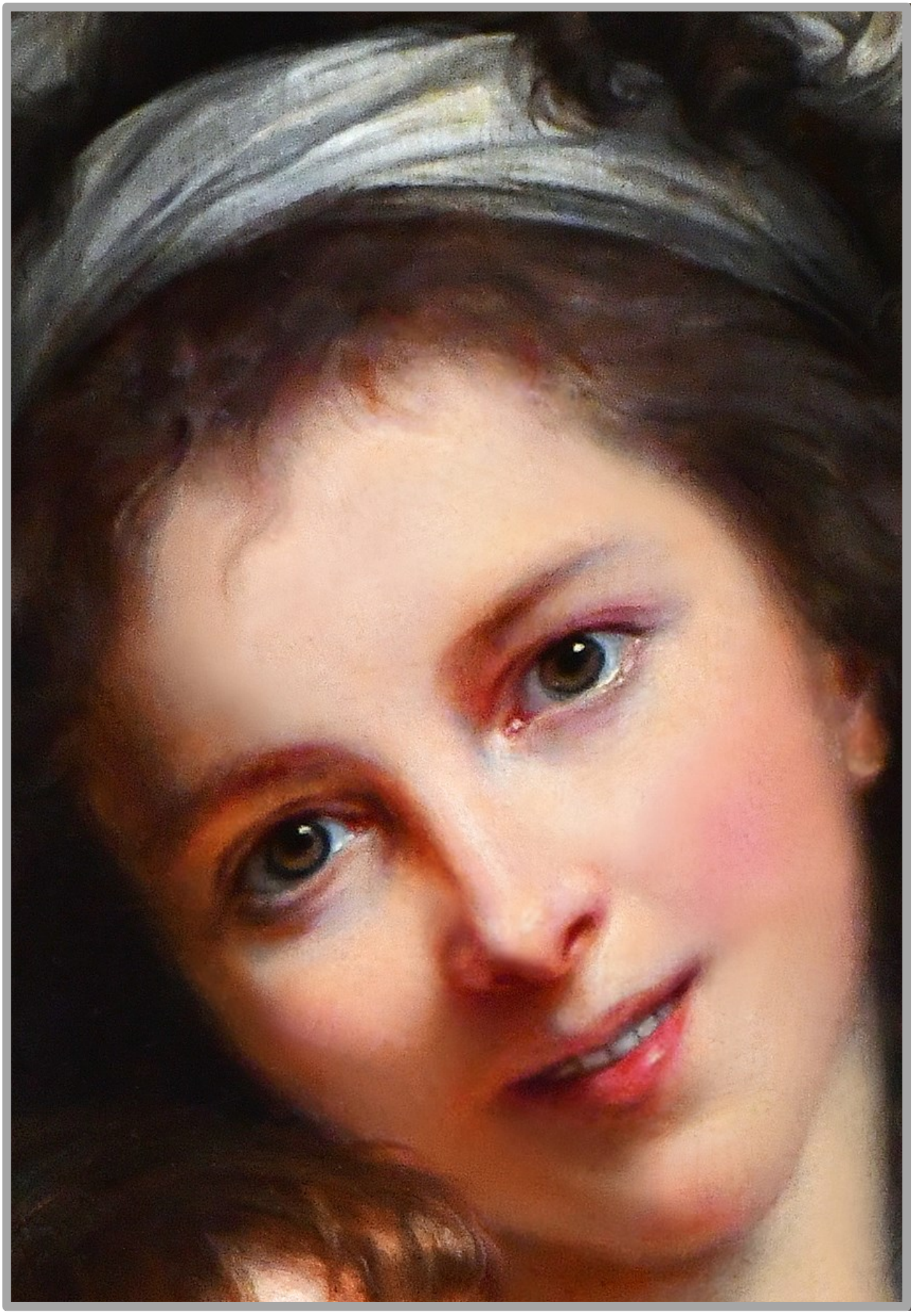




Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *1786,* at age 31, with her daughter Julie (6), *Musée du Louvre*. This painting was very successful (exhibition of 1786) given the underlying tenderness with her daughter and the clearly smiling character of the mother, which was hardly done before in classical painting and moreover displeased some traditional painters of her period. It is inscribed on the frame "given by Madame Tripier-Lefranc, born Le Brun". The latter, Eugénie, was the daughter of a brother of the artist's husband, therefore one of her nieces by marriage, who herself became a painter and who took great care of her aunt after 1820, with another niece, Caroline, the daughter of Etienne Vigée, the artist's brother. These 2 nieces were then her only relatives.







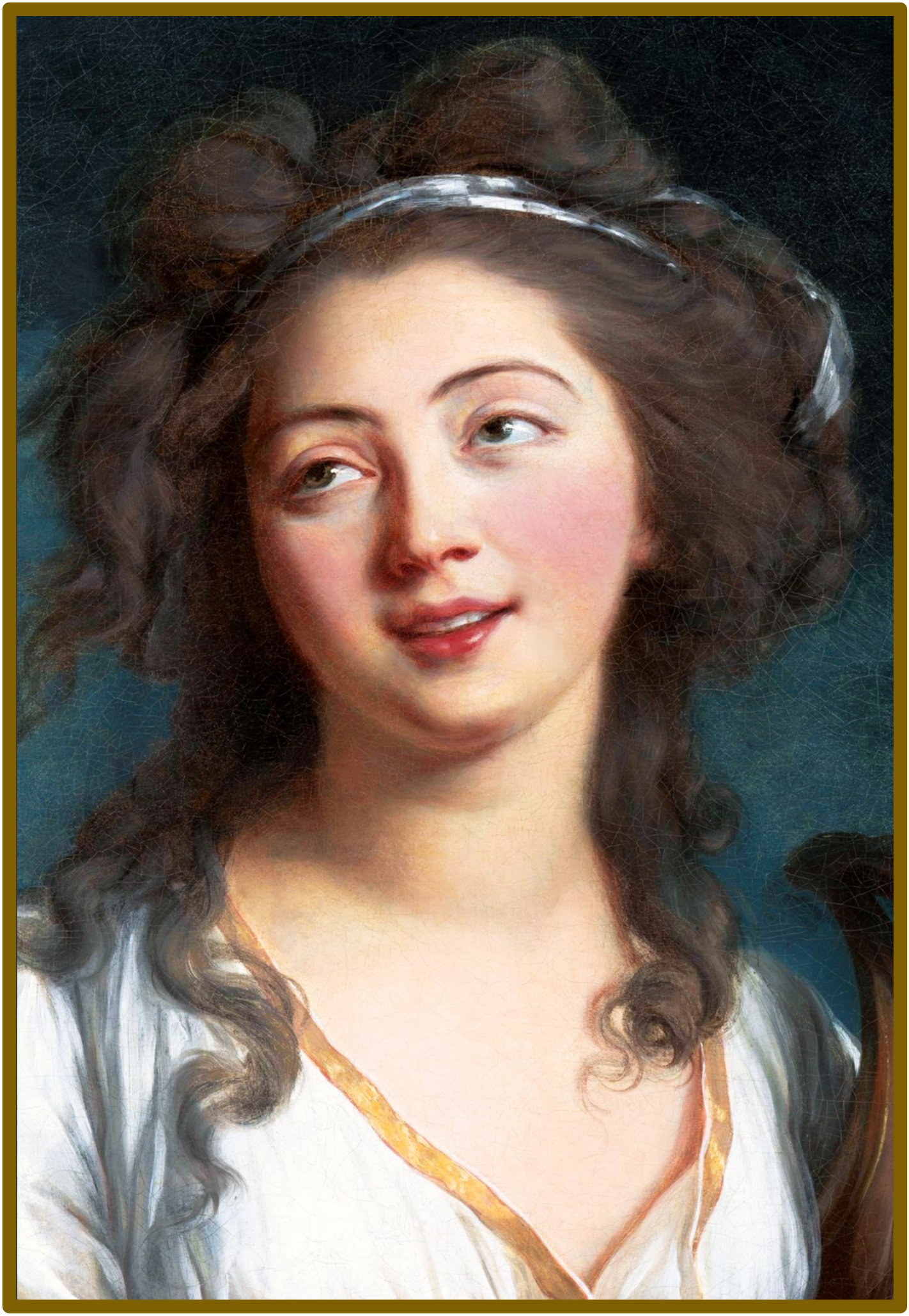


Madame Molé-Reymond, actress, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1786, Musée du Louvre.*



Below, **Woman playing lyre,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1786, Museum of Arts, Cincinnati. Right page,* **Comte d'Espagnac (1776-1820),** at age 10*, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1786, Wallace Collection, London.*









Comte d'Espagnac **(1776-1820),** à 10 ans*, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1786, Wallace Collection, Londres.*

In 1787, before the Revolution, the **Palais Royal** (garden side, with the ‘High Society’),



was near the painter's studio and remained a very popular meeting place, *P.L. Debucourt.*





The **Palais Royal**, gallery side (‘lower Society’), *P.L. Debucourt.*









Madeleine Charlotte Christine Comtesse de Béon de Massés Cazaux (1755-1830), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.* She was 'Dame de compagnie' to 'Madame Adélaïde', aunt of Louis XVI, an followed her in Italy in 1791.

Joseph Caillot, actor, in hunting costume, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.*



The son of the actor Caillot *(previous page)* and brother of Augustine *(right), Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.*





Augustine Caillot, daughter of the actor *(previous page),*
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.

Versailles, the painter and the Queen at the end of 1780s



The small **Trianon** in Versailles, Marie-Antoinette's personal castle *(above),* with her hamlet (of farms, *below)* and her office *(right page),* which the artist knew well, going many times to Versailles to meet and paint the Queen or members of the Court.







Images from a film on the painter Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun showing her in her workshop painting a model *(above),* with her brother Etienne's painting visible in the background, and in Versailles to paint members of the royal Court *(below).*





Workshop of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, presumed, with the painter (during her teaching period) and a student, Marie-Victoire Lemoine, here represented, herself become a painter and who made this painting in homage to her teacher, *Marie-Victoire Lemoine, 1789 presented at the 'Salon' of 1796, Met. Museum of Art, New* York.





Marie-Antoinette with her 3 children, at age 31*, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, 275x215cm, Versailles. Left,* Marie-Thérèse, « Madame Royale » at age 9, right Louis Joseph (at age 7), died of tuberculosis in 1789 (at age 9), and, on her lap, the future "Louis XVII" (at age 2), died in 1795 (at age 10) in Temple prison.











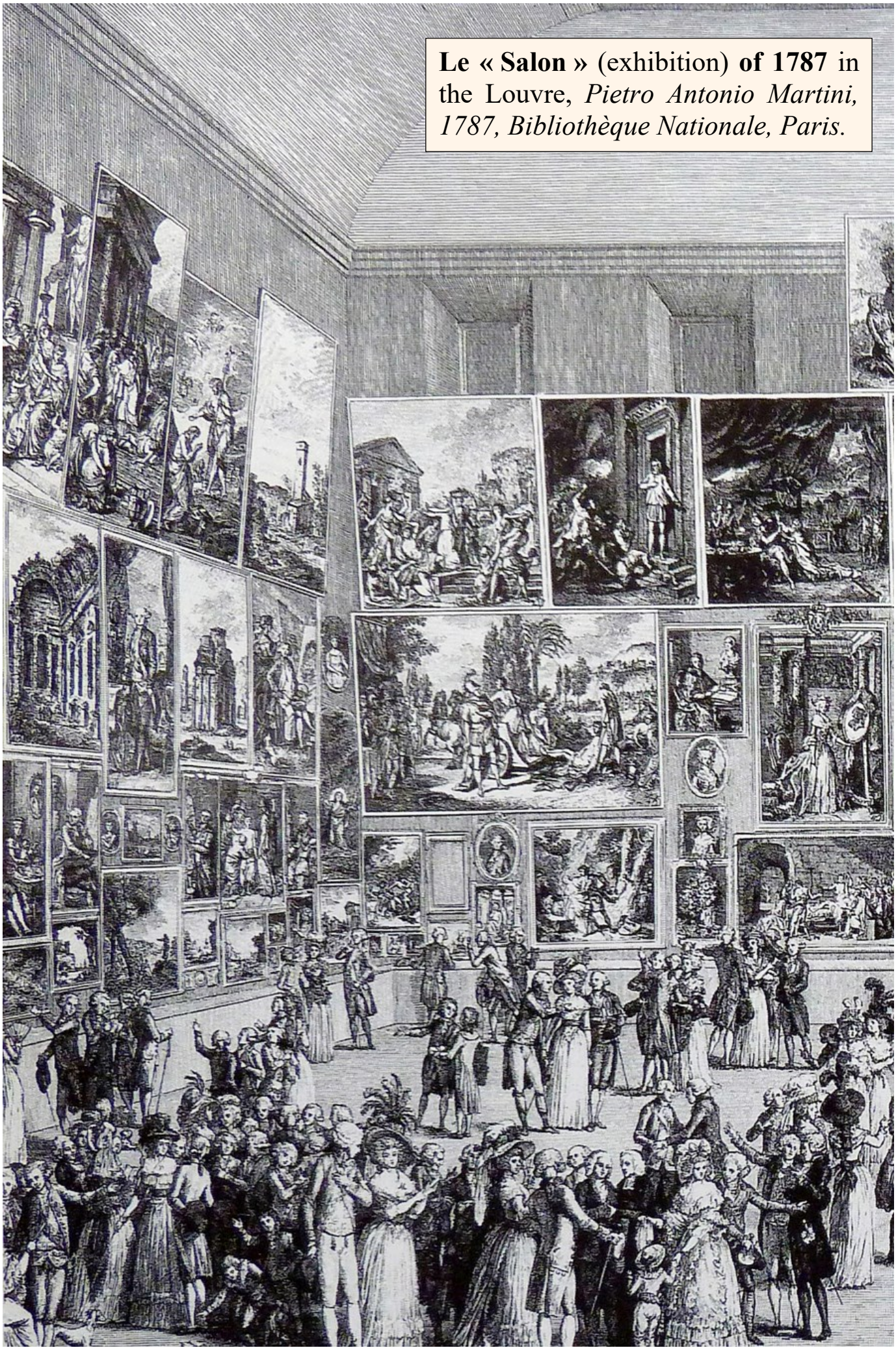
Left, detail of this famous painting of 1787. At the end of 1785, the Queen who suffered slander wanted to emphasize her role as mother, with her 3 children. She commissioned a large painting representing her with her children, so that it could be displayed prominently in the Palace of Versailles. This painting needed large dimensions (275cm x 215cm), which was not in the painter's habit. She therefore made a lot of studies before realizing it in 1786-1787. This is what she says about it in her Memoirs:

"After having made the head of the Queen, as well as the separate studies of the first dauphin, Madame Royale and the Duc de Normandie (sitting on the Queen's lap, second son and dauphin and future King Louis XVII, died in prison in 1795, at 10), *I immediately took care of my painting to which I attached great importance, and I finished it for the Salon of 1787* (annual painting exhibition in the Louvre). *The frame having been worn alone, is enough to excite a thousand bad words: 'here is the deficit', it was said; and many other things which were reported to me and made me foresee the most bitter criticisms. Finally, I sent my painting; but I did not have the courage to follow it and to find out immediately what would be its fate, so much was I afraid that it would be badly received by the public; my fear was so strong that I had a fever. I went to shut myself up in my room, and there I was praying to God for the success of "my" royal family, when my brother and a crowd of friends came to tell me that I was getting the general approval.*

After the salon, the King having had this painting brought to Versailles, it was M. d'Angevilliers, then Minister of the Arts and Director of Royal Buildings, who presented me to His Majesty. Louis XVI was kind enough to talk to me for a long time, to tell me that he was very happy; then he added, still looking at my work: 'I don't know myself in painting; but you make me love it'`

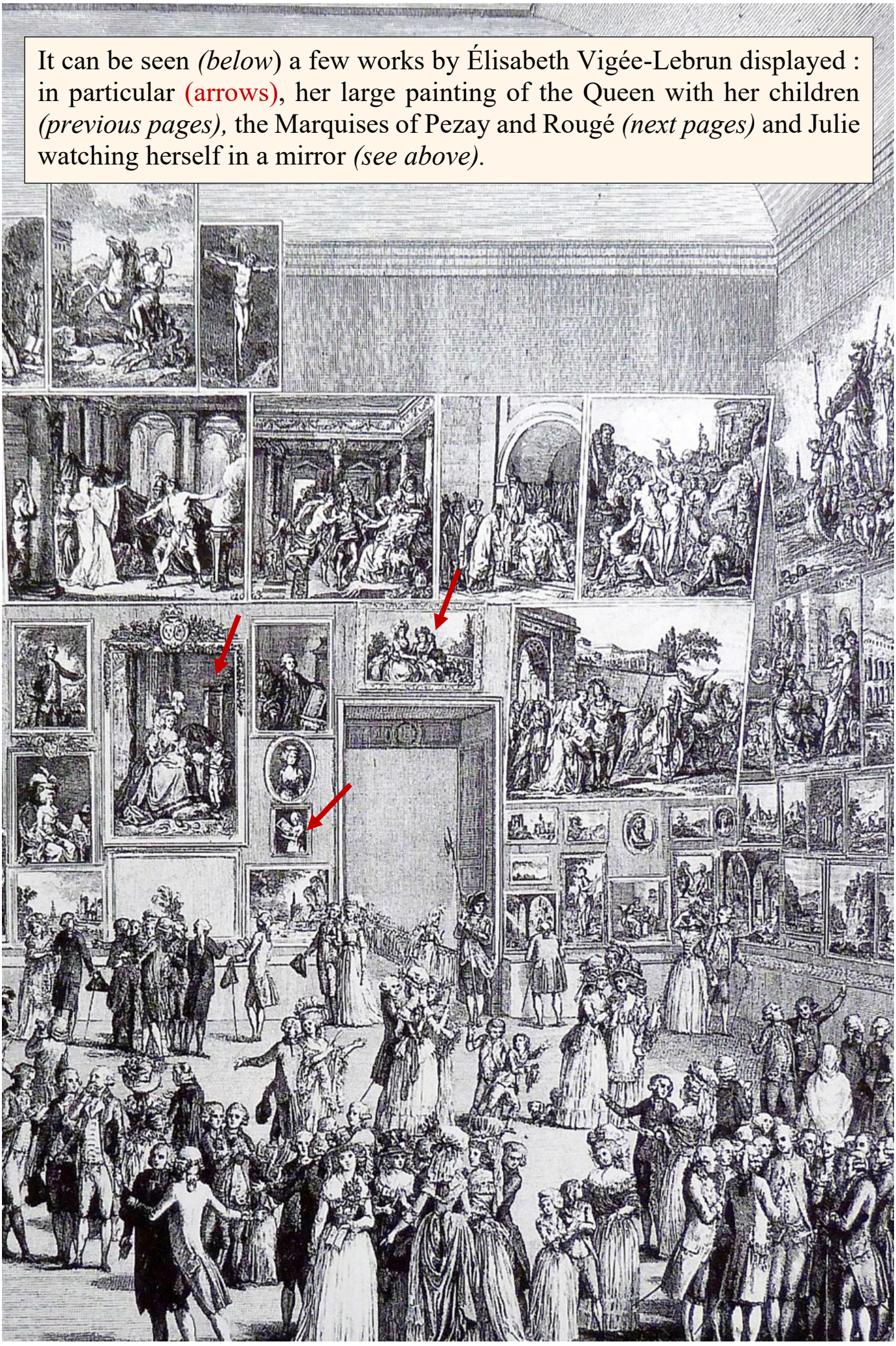
My painting was placed in one of the rooms of the Palace of Versailles, and the Queen walked past on her way to and from mass. When Monsieur le Dauphin (first son, 9 years old) *died at the beginning of 1789* (in June 1789, at the eve of Revolution), *this sight so vividly revived the memory of the cruel loss she had just suffered that she could no longer cross this room without shedding tears; she told M. d'Angevilliers to have this picture removed; but with her usual grace, she took care to inform me immediately, letting me know the reason for this trip. It was to the Queen's sensitivity that I owed the preservation of my painting; because the crowd and the bandits who came shortly after to seek Their Majesties at Versailles, would have infallibly slashed it, as they did with the queen's bed, which was pierced right through!*

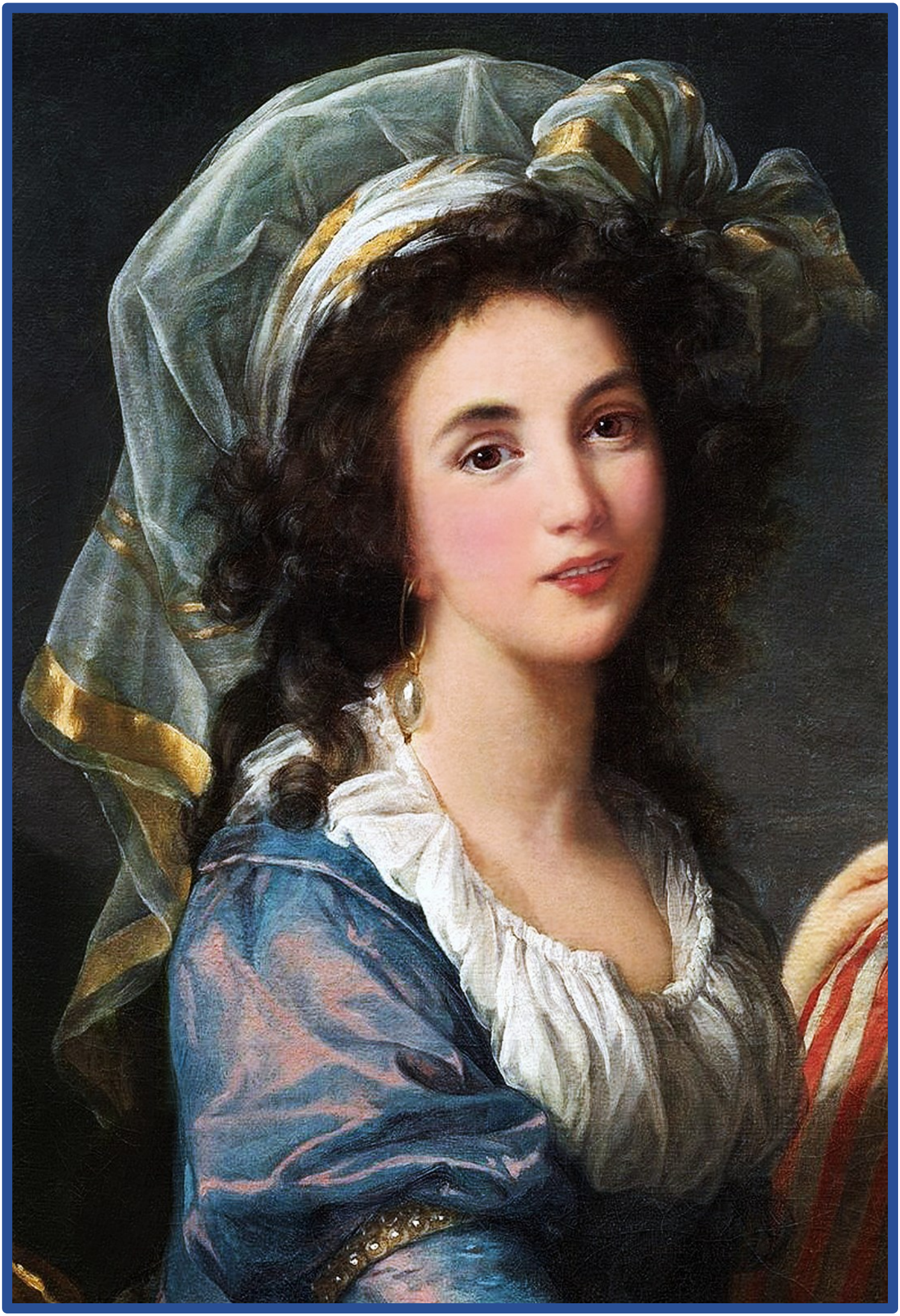
The painting was saved from the Revolution by being transported to an anonymous locked room in the palace, where it was turned against a wall. It regained its place of honor in the palace after the end of the 1st Empire.



Le « Salon » (exhibition) **of 1787** in the Louvre, *Pietro Antonio Martini, 1787, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.*

It can be seen *(below)* a few works by Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun displayed : in particular (arrows), her large painting of the Queen with her children *(previous pages),* the Marquises of Pezay and Rougé *(next pages)* and Julie watching herself in a mirror *(see above).*



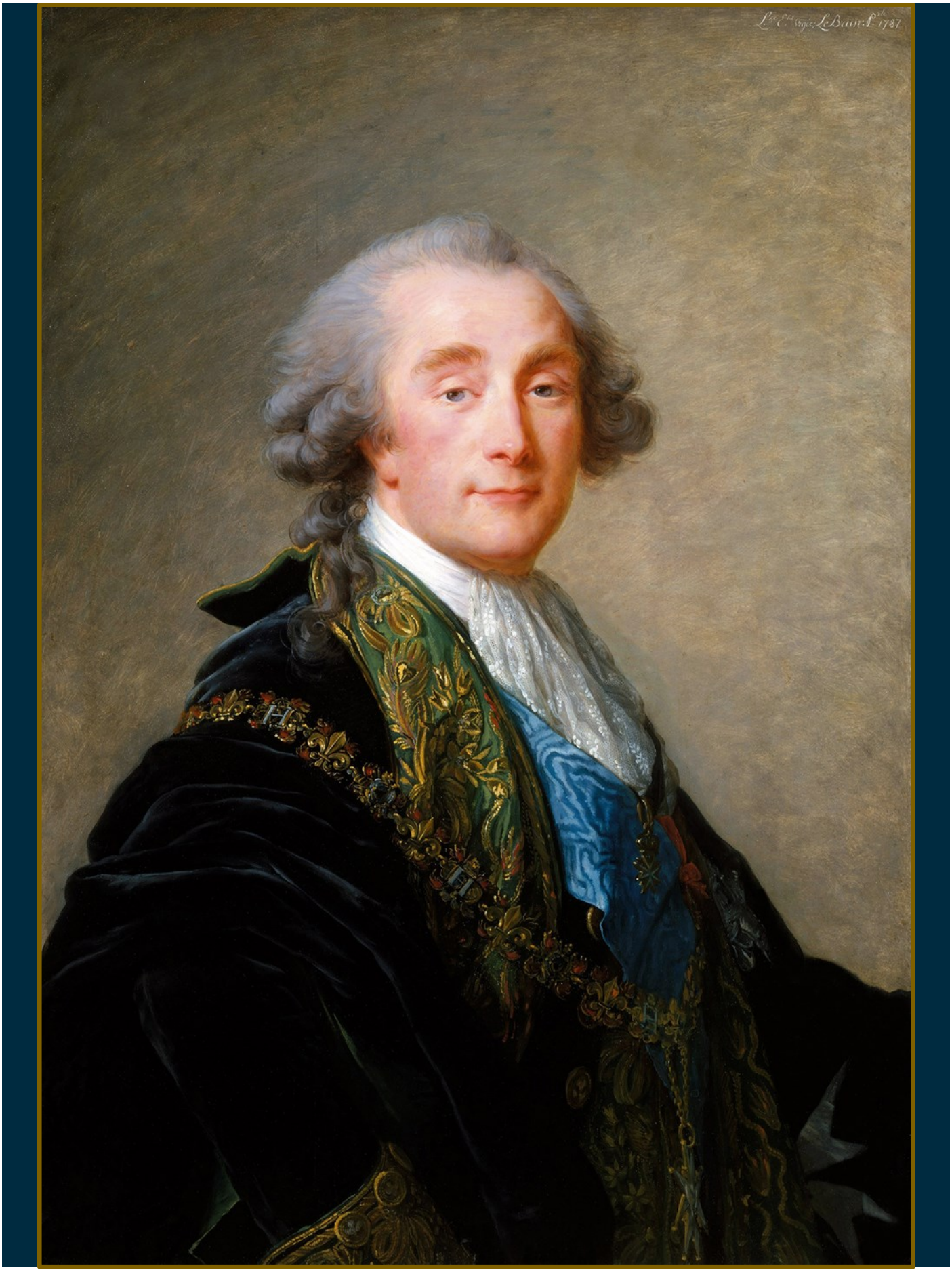




The marquise de Pezay *(left & right page)* **and marquise de Rougé** with her 2 sons Alexis and Adrien. *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, National Gallery of Art, Washington.* These 2 families emigrated in time in 1791. The rendering of light and shade, the texture of the fabrics of the 'English' dresses and the happy atmosphere of this group are particularly remarkable.







Alexandre-Charles-Emmanuel of Crussol-Florensac (1743-1815), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New-York.* He was General Lieutenant in King's armies and emigrated at Revolution.



Raymond Aimery de Montesquiou Fezensac, 1784-1867, at age 3, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.* Future French general and politician. His mother was painted in 1780 (see above). *Right,* **Woman,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780s.*





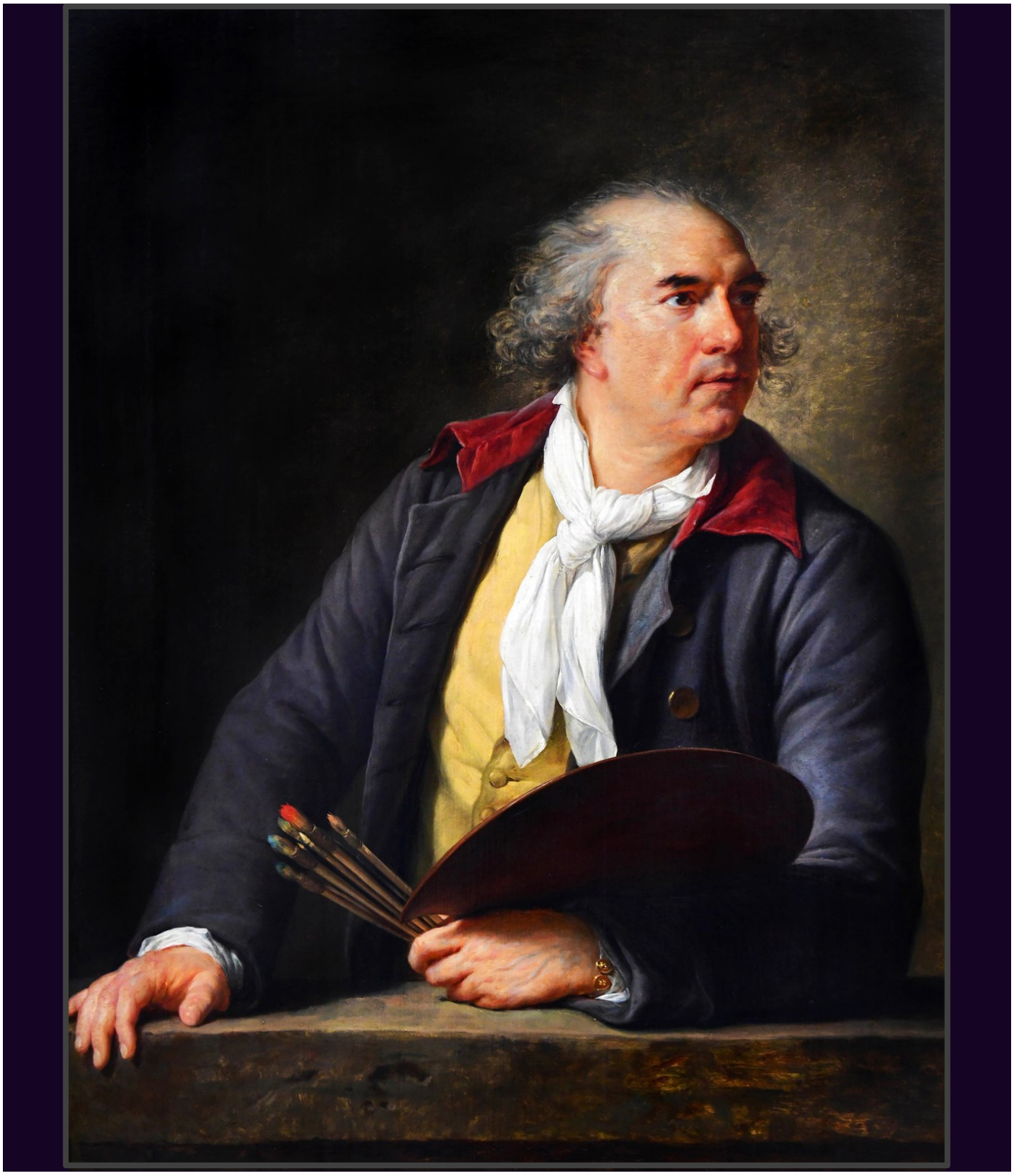
Madame Dugazon, actress, in « Nina », *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.*





Duchesse de Polignac, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1787, private collection.*

The painter Hubert Robert (1733-1802), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, Musée du Louvre.* He was fairly well known in his day, less now. Suspected of being a counter-revolutionary, he was imprisoned in October 1793, part of his works was then destroyed by the revolutionaries and he was released in early August 1794, just after the fall of Robespierre, having escaped miraculously to death. He was then the first curator of what was later the Louvre Museum. The artist considered this painting to be one of her most successful. The attentive expression towards his subject is indeed well rendered.







Émilie Brongniart (at age 8), daughter of the architect Alexandre Théodore Brongniart, who built several buildings in Paris, including the one called "Palais Brongniart" in 1807, where the Paris Stock Exchange is currently located, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, National Gallery, London.* This painting was much appreciated by the scene and the mischievous expression of the young girl. The artist was very friend to the Brongniart couple who were regulars of rue de Cléry before 1789, to whom she wrote regularly during her long exile and whom she found with pleasure on her return (1802).





Mohamed Dervish Khan, Turkish ambassador in Paris, who was tall and wanted to be painted with his saber, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, 136x88cm, private collection.* This painting was sold for $ 7.3 million at Sotheby's (New York) in 2019. About the so-called "elusive" look, the artist reserved it for models who looked with insistence or envy too much at her, she who had a very advantageous physique.





Sophie Geneviève Le Coulteux du Molay, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.* She was a friend of the artist who painted her at the Château de la Malmaison. She ran a "salon" in this castle that belonged to her family from 1771 to 1799, before being sold to Joséphine de Beauharnais, Napoléon Bonaparte's first wife.





Charlotte Eustache Sophie de Fuligny Damas, **marquise of Grollier** (1741-1828), at age 33, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788.* She was a renowned painter of still life. The 2 artists were good friends and they met each other very often before 1789.

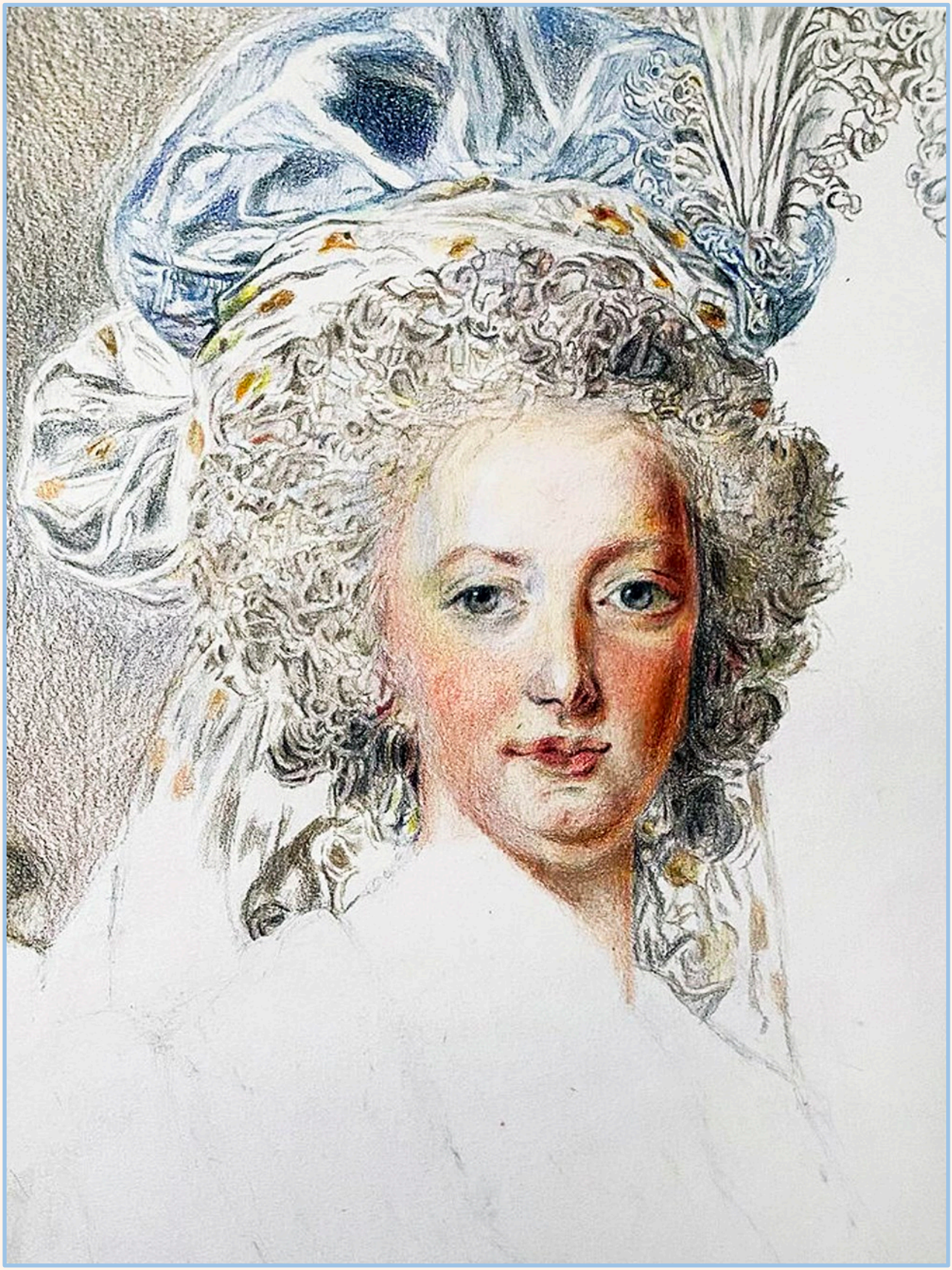


Versailles, Petit Trianon, the Queen's hamlet,



Claude Louis Châtelet, 1786, Bibiloteca Estense, Modena, Italy.





Study of **Marie-Antoinette** made by *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*,
before the portrait of next page.





Study before the last portrait of Marie Antoinette by the artist.

Marie-Antoinette in 1788 in Versailles (at age 33), before the storm and the forced exile of the artist in 1789. *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, Versailles.*





Louis-Charles de France with his dog Moufflet, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1788, Versailles.* He was born in 1785 and the artist painted him on the eve of Revolution. He became Dauphin on the death of his older brother in June 1789, who died of tuberculosis at the age of 8. Then, he became Louis XVII (for the royalists) after the execution of his father Louis XVI in January 1793. But, imprisoned with his family since 1792 in the Temple prison, orphan, separated from his older sister Marie-Thérèse, mistreated, he died in 1795, at the age of 10, likely also of tuberculosis. Sad fate!

In 1788, it was the eve of Revolution and the artist had just spent more than 10 years painting Queen Marie-Antoinette in Versailles, where she went with great pleasure. Some anecdotes in her Memoirs about the Queen, before turning the greatest page of her life:

"It was in the year 1778, my dear friend, that I made the portrait of the Queen for the first time, then in all the splendor of her youth and her beauty. Marie-Antoinette was tall, admirably well made, plump enough without being too so. Her arms were beautiful, her hands small, perfectly shaped, and her feet charming. She was the best-walking woman in France; bearing her head very high, with a majesty which made the sovereign recognized in the midst of all her Court, without, however, this majesty in any way detrimental to all that her aspect had of sweet and benevolent. Finally, it is very difficult to give to those who have not seen the Queen, an idea of so many graces and so much nobility united. Her features were not regular, she got from her family that long and narrow oval peculiar to the Austrian nation. She did not have large eyes; their color was almost blue; her gaze was witty and gentle, her nose fine and pretty, her mouth not too big, although the lips were a little strong. But the most remarkable thing about her face was the radiance of her complexion. I have never seen one so brilliant, and brilliant is the word; for her skin was so transparent that it took no shade. So, I could not render the effect to my liking: I lacked the colors to paint this freshness, these fine tones which belonged only to this charming figure and which I have not found in any other woman.

The timidity which the first appearance of the Queen had inspired in me had given way entirely to that gracious kindness which she always showed me. As soon as H. M. heard that I had a pretty voice, she gave me few sessions with having me sing several Grétry duets with her, for she was infinitely fond of music, although her voice was not very accurate. As for her maintenance, it would be difficult for me to paint all the grace, all the benevolence; I do not believe that Queen Marie-Antoinette ever missed the opportunity to say a pleasant thing to those who had the honor of approaching her, and the kindness she always showed me is one of my sweetest memories.

*One day I happened to miss the appointment she had given me for a session; because being then very advanced in my second pregnancy**, *I suddenly felt very unwell. I hastened the next day to go to Versailles to apologize. The Queen was not expecting me, she had had her carriage harnessed to go for a walk, and this carriage was the first thing I saw on entering the courtyard of the castle. However, I did not go upstairs to speak to the boys in the room. One of them, M. Campan, received me with a dry and cold air, and said to me in an angry tone, with his stentorian voice: - 'It was yesterday, Madame, that Her Majesty was waiting, and of course she will go for a walk, and of course she will not give you a session'. Upon my answer, that I had simply come to take Her Majesty's orders for another day, he found the Queen, who immediately makes me enter her study. Her Majesty was finishing her toilet; she was holding a book in her hand to have her daughter, the young 'Madame', rehearse a lesson. My heart was beating; because I was all the more afraid that I was wrong. The Queen turned to me and said gently: - 'I waited for you yesterday all morning, what happened to you?' – 'Alas! Madam', I replied, 'I was in so much pain that I was unable to comply with your*

Majesty's orders. I am coming today to receive them, and I am leaving immediately'. 'No! do not go', resumed the Queen; 'I don't want you to have done this way unnecessarily'. She canceled her carriage and gave me a session. I remember that in the eagerness in which I was to respond to this kindness, I seized my box of colors with such vivacity that it overturned; my brushes, my paintbrushes fell on the floor; I stooped down to repair my clumsiness. 'Leave, leave', said the Queen, 'you are too far advanced in your pregnancy to stoop'; and, whatever I might say, she picked it up herself. " *
This second child only lived 3 months.



This **equestrian portrait of Marie Antoinette**, *by Louis Auguste Brun (1783, Versailles)*, is an opportunity to recall the privileged relationship that existed between the Queen and Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, who first said that she rose remarkably to horse, as this hunting painting seems to show. Other remarks by the painter about the Queen:

"During the last trip to Fontainebleau, where the Court, according to custom, was to be in great performance, I went there to enjoy this spectacle. I saw the Queen there in the greatest finery, covered with diamonds, and, as a magnificent sun shone on her, she seemed to me truly dazzling. Her head, raised on her beautiful Greek collar, gave her, as she walked, an air so imposing, so majestic, that one fancied seeing a goddess in the midst of her nymphs. During the first meeting I had with HM on my return from this trip, I allowed myself to speak of the impression I had received, and to tell the Queen how much the elevation of her head added to the nobility of her aspect. She replied in a joking tone: 'If I weren't Queen, it would seem that I looked insolent; is it not true?'

The Queen neglected nothing to help her children acquire those gracious and affable manners which made her so dear to those around her. I saw her having 'Madame', then six years old, for dinner with a little peasant she was taking care of, wanting this little one to be served first, saying to her daughter: 'You must do her the honors.' The last meeting I had with HM was given to me at Trianon, where I made her head for the large picture in which I painted her with her children (1787). *I remember that Baron of Breteuil, then minister, was present, and that as long as the sitting lasted, he never ceased to slander all the women of the Court. He had to think me deaf or a good person, so as not to fear that I might relate to the interested parties some of his nasty words. The fact is that I have never happened to repeat a single one, although I have not forgotten any."*



Miniature of Marie-Antoinette on ivory, undated, by *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*, based on one of her famous rose portraits.

Young girl in Polish costume, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, Cataluyna Museum, Barcelona.*





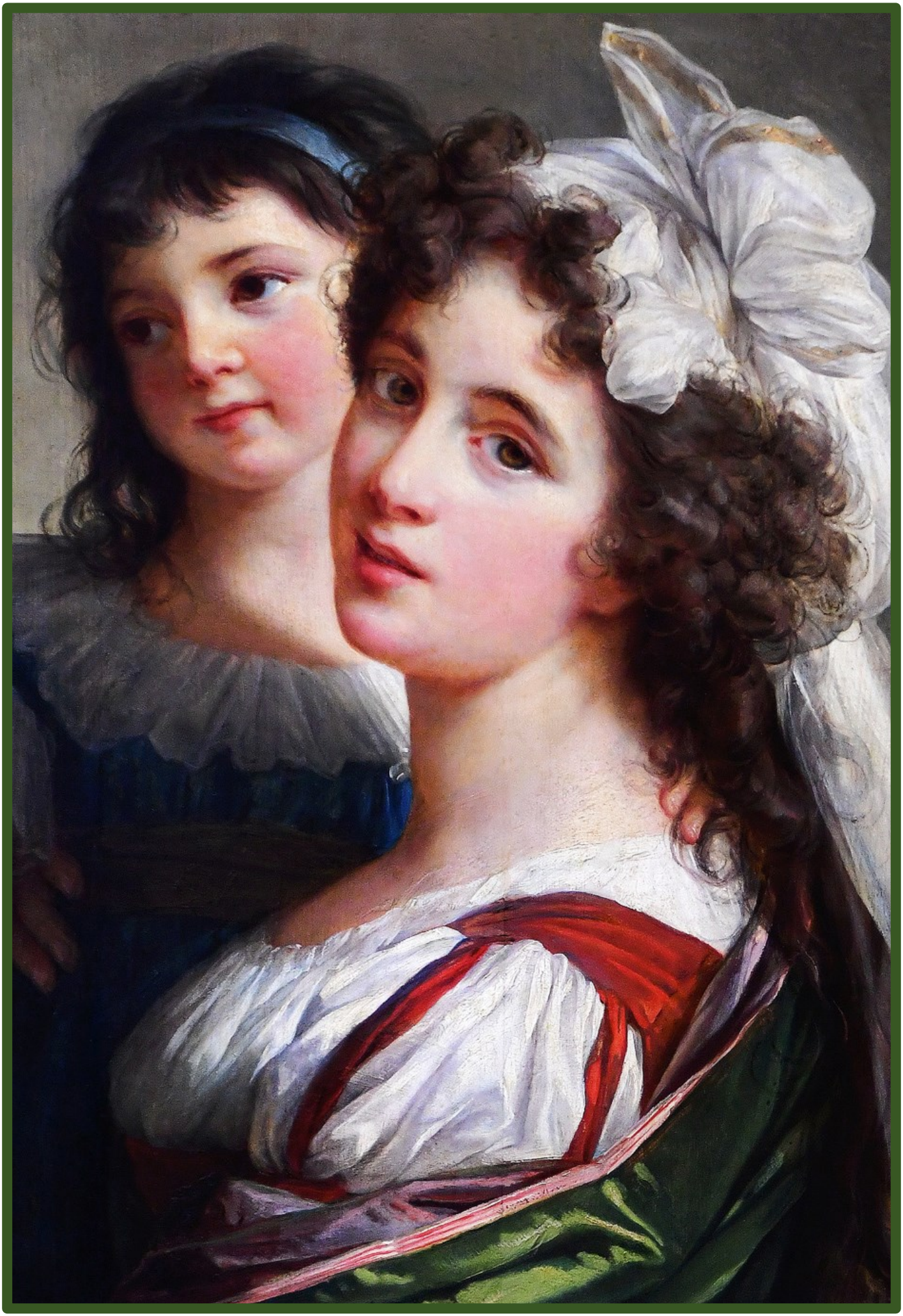
Victorienne Delphine Natalie de Rochechouart Mortemart, marquise de Rougé, 1754-1825, in hunting suit, at times attributed to *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1788, private collection.* Widowed in 1782, she emigrated in 1789 with her two children to Switzerland, then to Germany and Austria and she returned (ruined) to France in 1798. It is she who appears as "marquise de Rougé" on the famous painting of 1787 (see above) where she is in the company of the marquise de Pezay and her two sons.



Above, **Alexandrine Charlotte Sophie de Rohan Chabot, duchesse de la Rochefoucauld**, later marquise of Castellane, 1763-1839, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, private collection.* French writer. It is written on the frame *(below)* that her husband Louis Alexandre (who was also her uncle) was *"massacred in Gisors in 1792".* Her brother was also executed during the "Terror". She remarried in 1810 to the marquis of Castellane. *Next pages,* **Madame Rousseau and her daughter,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, Musée du Louvre.* She was the wife of the architect Pierre Rousseau.







The Camargo, dancer**,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris.*





Louise Josèphe Chalgrin (1760-1794), often attributed to *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, private collection.* She was the daughter of the painter Joseph Vernet, one of the artist's mentor. A royalist, she was in hiding during the Revolution with a friend, Mme Filleul (ex-Boquet), herself the artist's childhood friend. As a teenager, the two young girls Vigée and Boquet, both very beautiful and noticed, had taken drawing lessons together with the designer Briard. It was while celebrating, yet discreetly, in 1794 the marriage of Mme Filleul's daughter that Louise Chalgrin and Mme Filleul were seen in their hiding house. Denounced, they were both imprisoned and guillotined a few days later, just before the end of Robespierre and the "Terror".



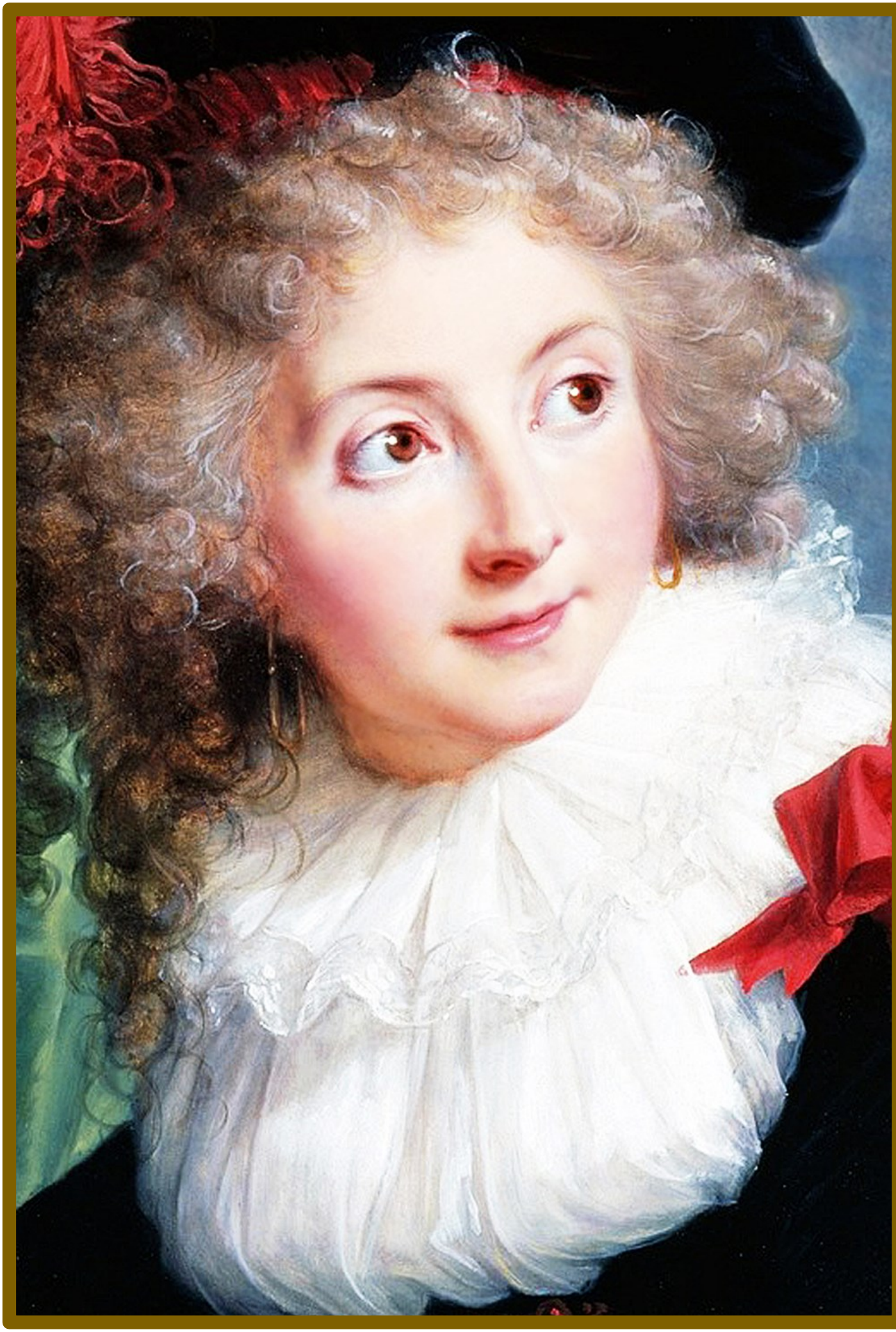
Above, "**Madame Chalgrin",** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, private collection.* It could be the wrong name, or a namesake or a relative of the model on the previous page, since the two physicals are different. *Right page,* **Duchesse de Polignac,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, private collection.*





Marie Adélaïde de Bourbon, duchesse d'Orléans (1753-1821), at age 36, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille*. Her husband, from whom she separated in 1792, was guillotined in 1793. She was imprisoned in the Luxembourg prison at the end of 1793, but was released after the fall of Robespierre at the end of 1794. She was then forced to go into exile in the Balearics, after the "coup d'état" of 1799, like all the Bourbons, not being able to return until 1814, when the Empire fell. She died in 1821, long before the accession to the throne of her son, Louis-Philippe I.



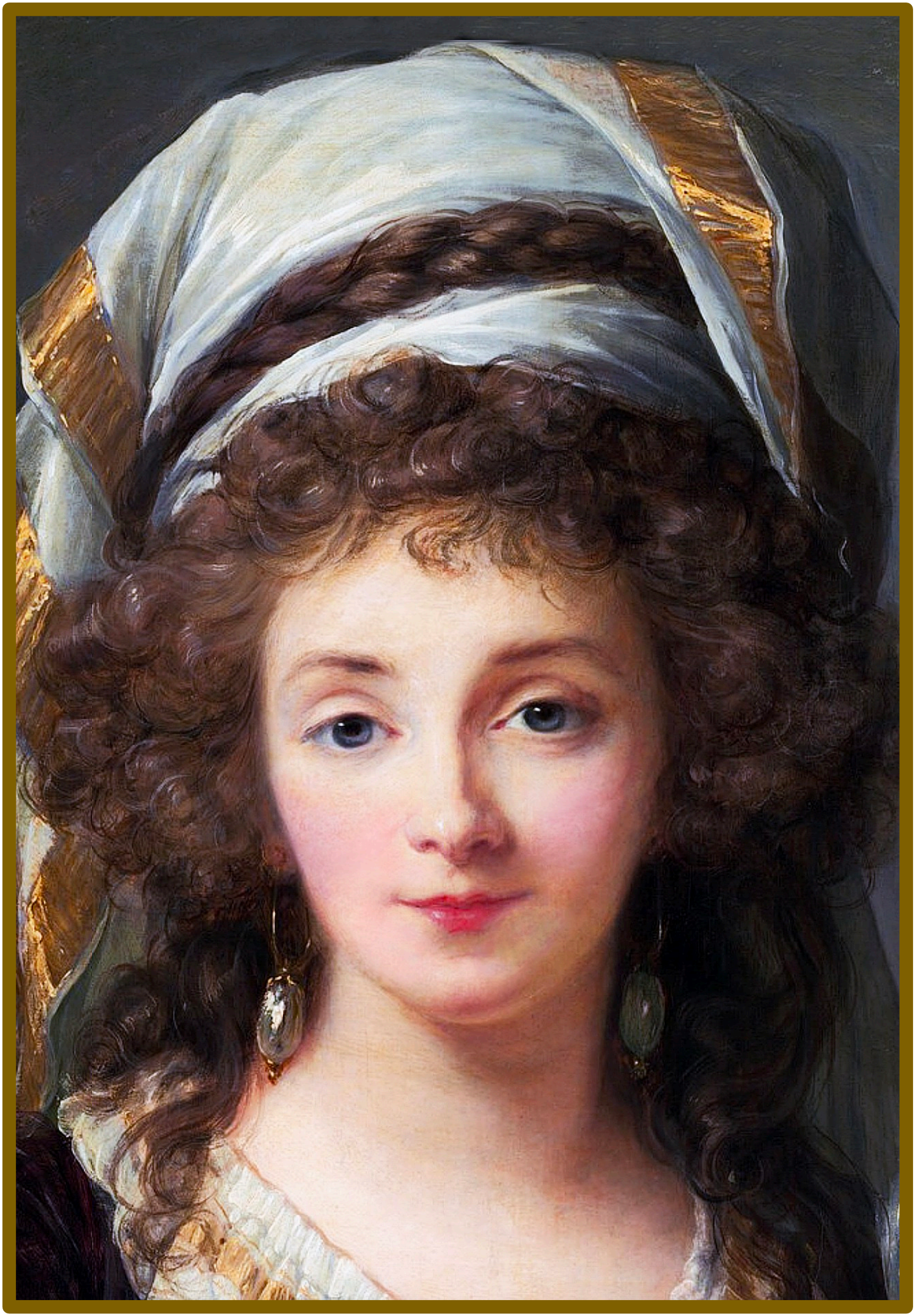


Madame Perregaux, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, Wallace collection, London*. She was the wife of the artist's banker.



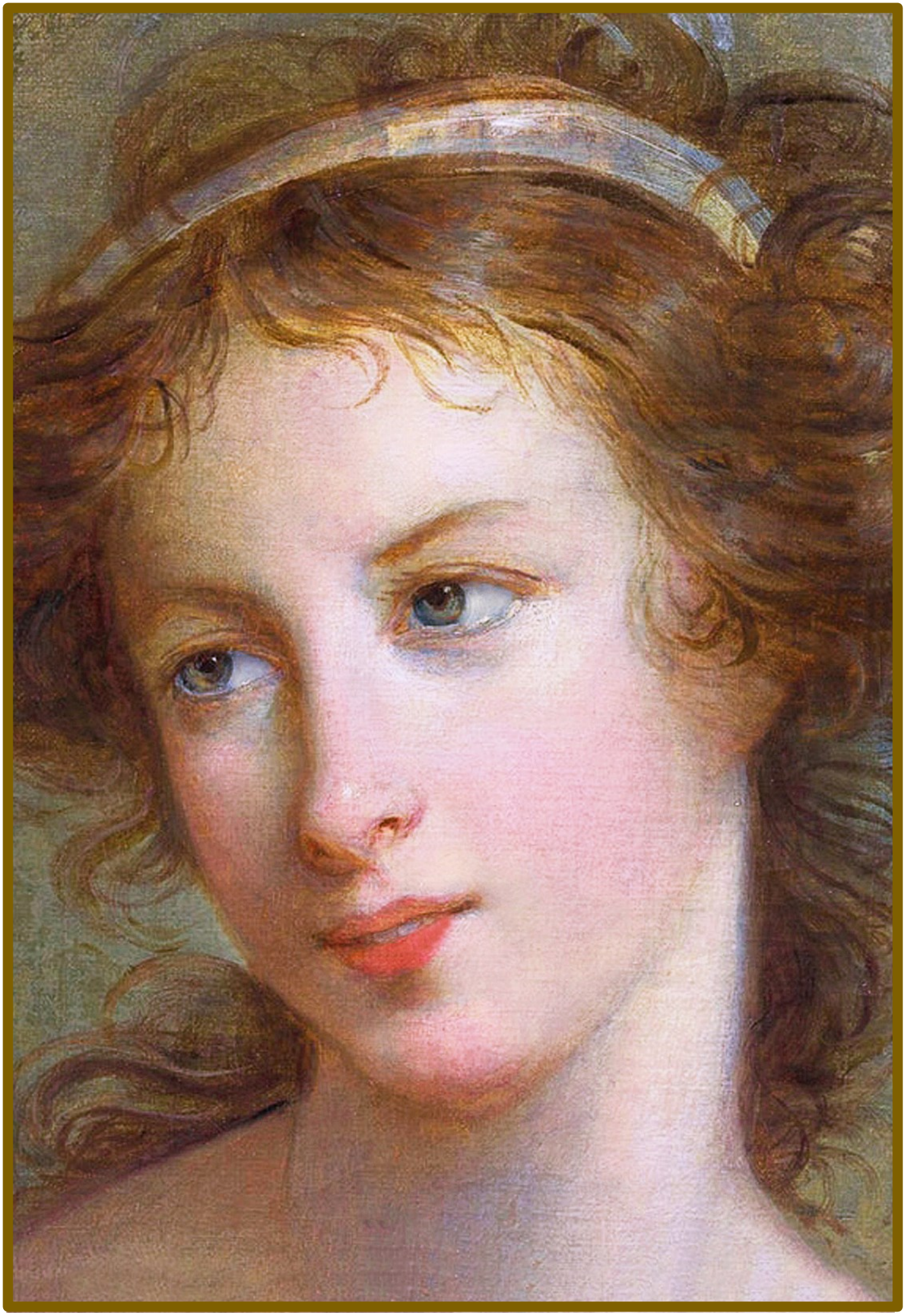


Henriette Anne Louise d'Aguesseau de Fresnes (1737-1794), duchesse de Noailles and Princesse de Tingry (aged 52), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, National Gallery of Art, Washington.* Painting done just before the departure of the portrait painter in exile. Mme d'Auguesseau was arrested in May 1794 and guillotined on July 22, 1794, because of her noble origin, 6 days before the end of the 'Terror' (Robespierre fall). No luck!





Above, **Woman in a red dress,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, private collection*. *Next pages,* the **marquis Philippe Henri de Ségur** (1724-1801), former general of King Louis XV, former Minister of War of King Louis XVI (1780-1787) and marshal of France (1783), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, Versailles.* Being relatively respected by the revolutionaries, he was able not to emigrate in 1789, but he was imprisoned for a few months in 1794. He was the grand-father of General Philippe de Ségur, illustrious aide-de-camp of Napoléon and memorialist of the 1st Empire, and also the great grandfather by marriage of the famous writer comtesse de Ségur (born Rostopchine). The artist thus painted a number of famous men, but these only represented a 6th of her production and, unlike the women, they were generally painted in a classic way, without poses or original outfits, and with their attributes of power: decorations and, here, marshal's staff. In exile, there were some exceptions to this rule for men *(below).*






M^re SEGUR



Paris, the Pont Neuf and Samaritaine fountain, *J.B. Raguenet, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.*

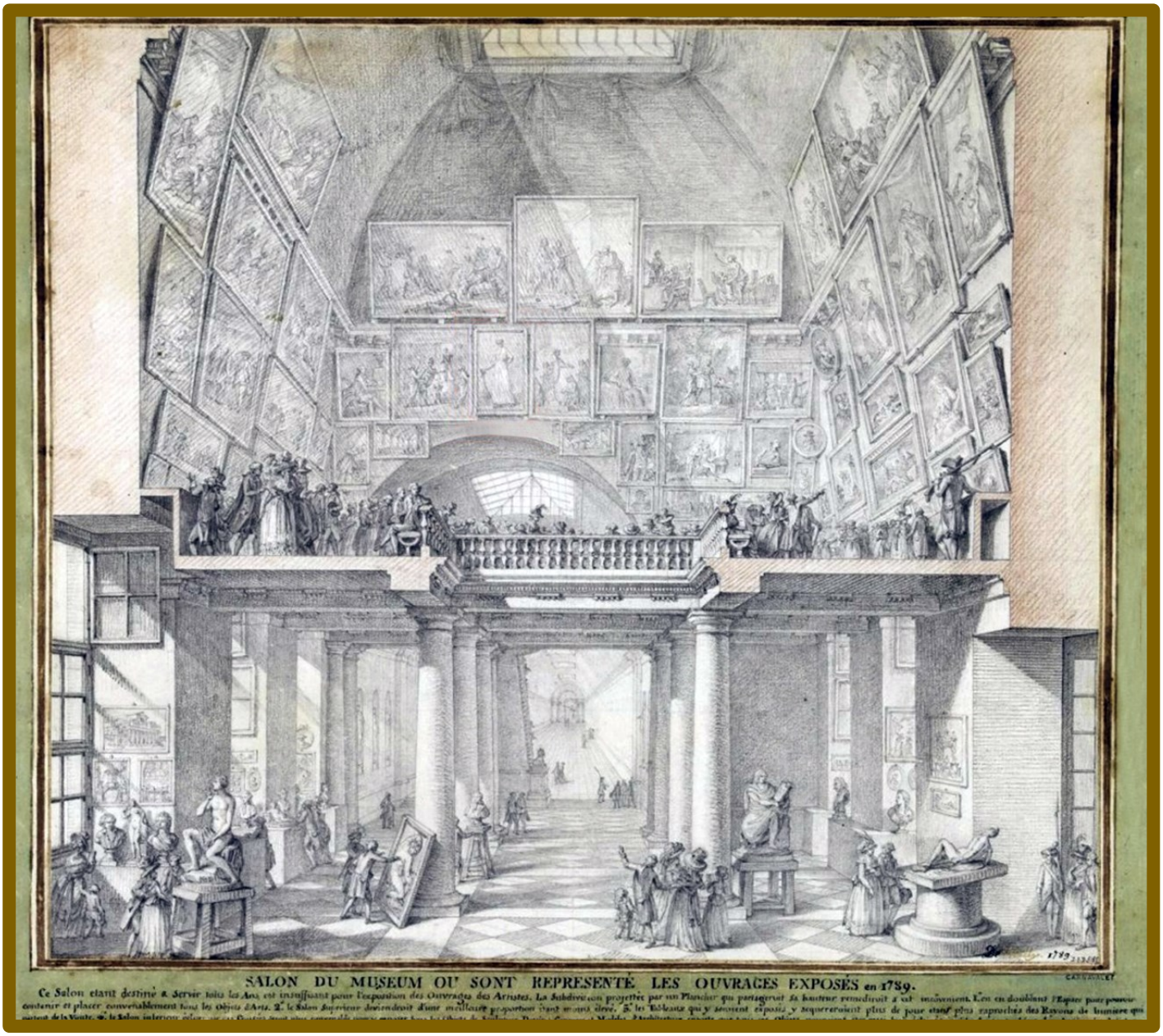


Before the Revolution, on market day, the atmosphere was still quiet.





July 14, 1789, storming of the Bastille by the mob and the start of the Revolution, *anonymous, circa 1790, Versailles*



The ‘Salon of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture’ (1725-1789), known as “the Salon”, here hold in **August 1789,** shortly after the start of Revolution. It was a biannual exhibition of several days of works by academics which took place in the Louvre square salon. You had to be part of the Academy to be able to exhibit there and have the approval of other academics. The prestige of exhibiting there was great and the public came in large numbers, in particular the "cultural All-Paris".

The artist, being an "academician" since 1783, exhibited several of her new works there each year until 1789. She often mentions this manifestation in her Memoirs. Her paintings were generally very successful, which greatly contributed to making her better known in France and throughout Europe. After 1789, the Salon became the "Salon of Painting and Sculpture", the Academy having been abolished.

Marquise de Crussols, pastel, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789.*
No further information.



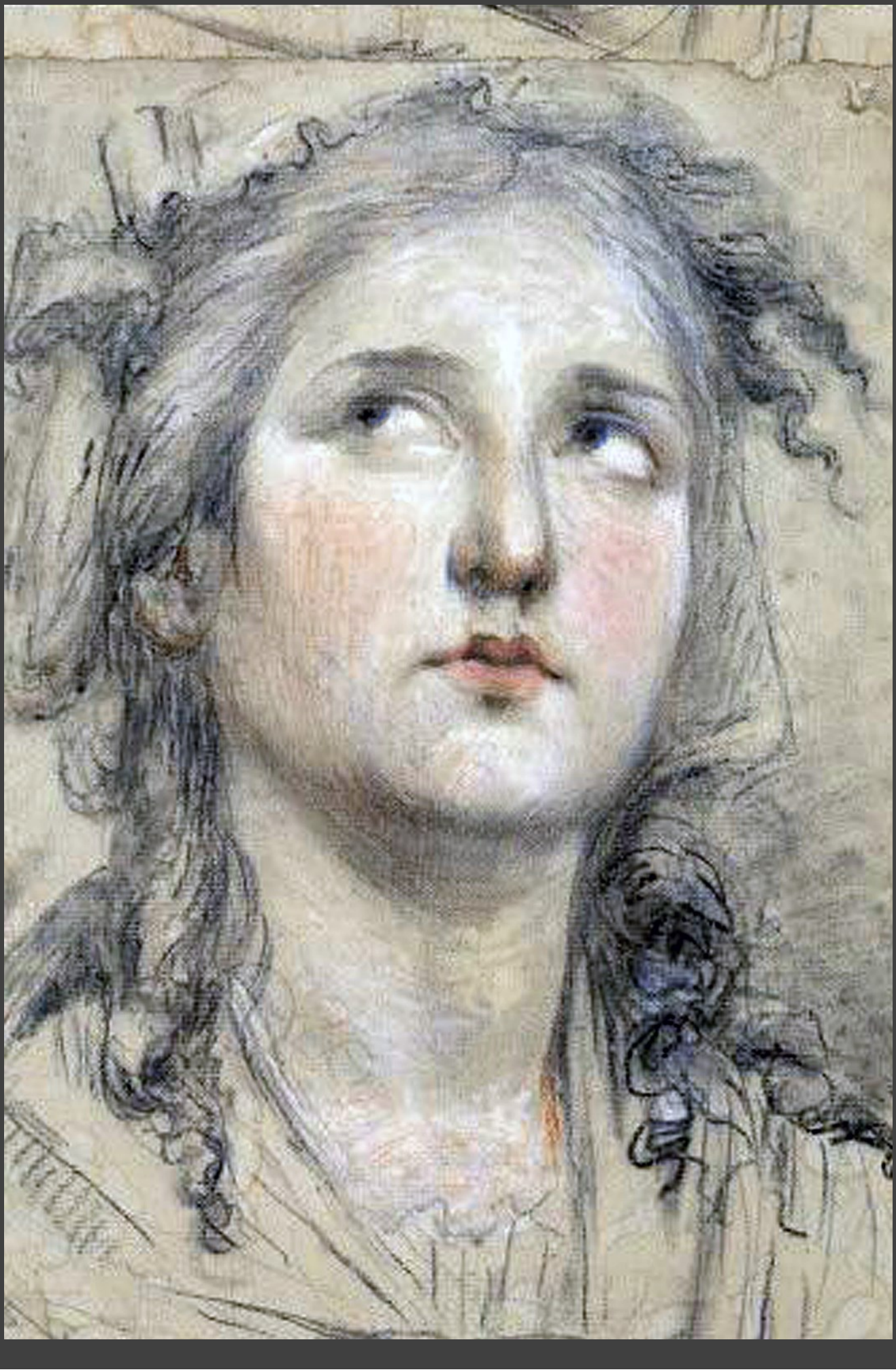


Count Pavel Stroganof, 1774-1817, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1789, Hermitage, St-Petersburg.* Born in Paris, he was still there in 1789, participating to the start of Revolution and having in 1791 a love affair with a famous revolutionary woman, Théroigne de Méricourt. Hearing this, Catherine II ordered he return immediately to Russia, which he did, then married Sophia Galitzine Stroganova *(further on)*.



Below, Prince Heinrich Lubormiski**,** allegory of the Genius of Glory, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, in Paris circa 1789, Staatliche Museum, Berlin.*
Right, **Study,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1780s*

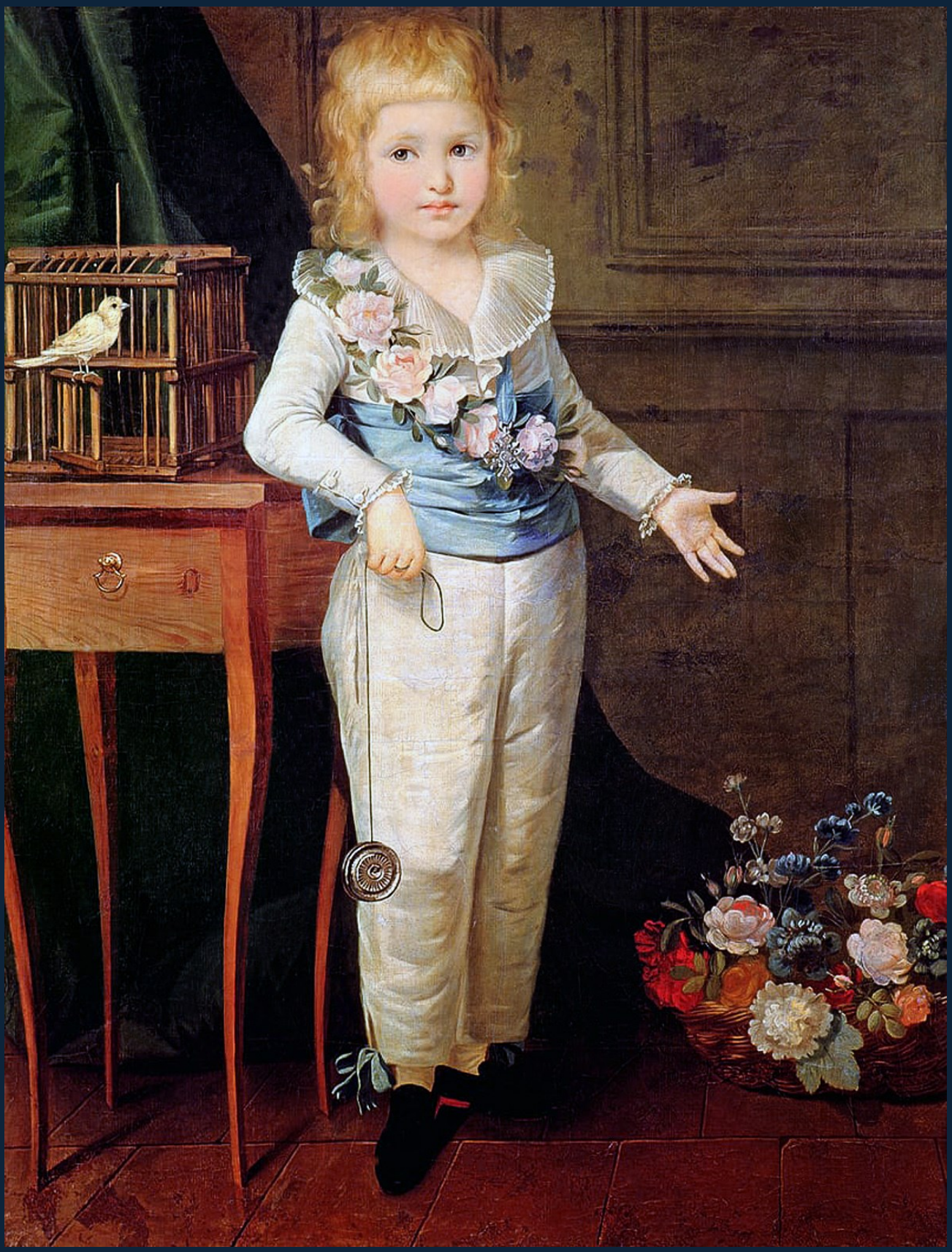








Young woman, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1789, Louvre.*



Young boy playing yo-yo, attributed to *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, Musée Leblanc-Duvernoy, Auxerre.* It might be the future Louis XVII.

Caroline Lalive de la Briche, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1786.*







Jeanne Becu, comtesse du Barry (1743-1793), last favorite of King Louis XV, here at 46, guillotined in 1793, at 50, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789 and 1820, private collection.* This is the third painting of the countess made by the artist. She was at home in Louveciennes in the process of making it in September 1789 when the 2 women heard the cannon in the distance. The countess then said that *"under Louis XV, all this would not have happened. He wouldn't have let it happen!"* The artist quickly returned home, without finishing the painting, and she had to go into exile for Italy a few days later. When she returned to France, she miraculously found the painting and was able to finish it, after more than 30 years, in 1820. It had been put aside and protected by a neighbor after the countess's arrest. The countess had returned to France prematurely in 1793 to look after her belongings after being sheltered in London for some time. She was guillotined. She should have stayed in London, in security.

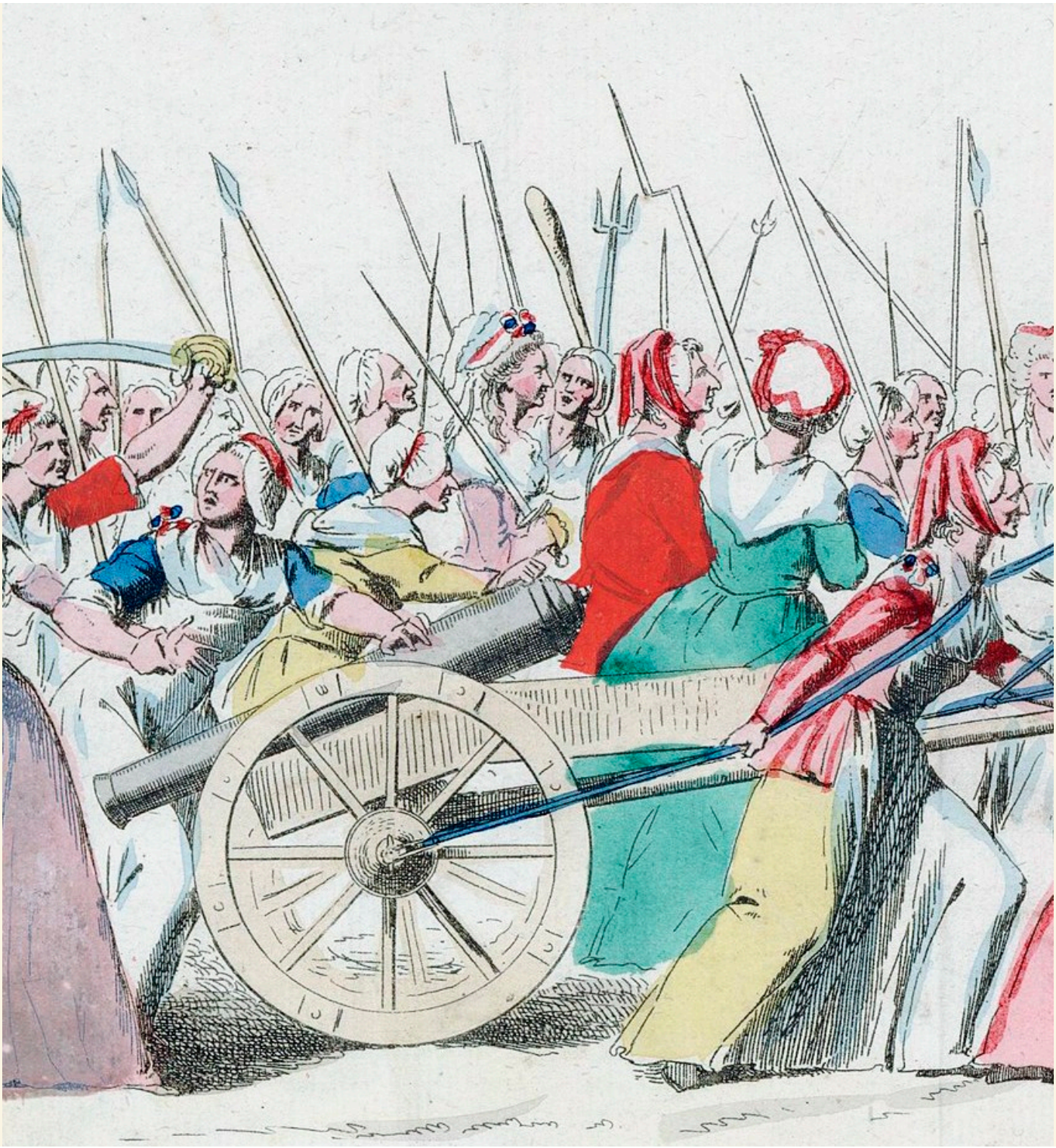


Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun in Saint-Petersburg, at age 45.

Chapter III

Forced exile in 4 European countries

(1789-1802)



On October 5, 1789**, the Revolution continued** with a new important event. A mob from Paris led by women *(above)* marched to Versailles, stormed the castle before the guards could intervene and ransacked the interior, in particular the Queen's apartments. The King and Queen were also then obliged to leave Versailles to go and live in the Tuileries in Paris and thus be under closer surveillance by the revolutionaries. A few days earlier, a crowd had also invaded the artist's apartment in Paris. She wrote in her Memoirs:

"I had my car loaded, and I had my passport to leave the next day with my daughter and her housekeeper, when I saw a huge crowd of National Guards enter my living room with their rifles. Most of them were drunk, poorly dressed, and



wore dreadful faces. Some came up to me and told me in the crudest terms that I would not go, that I must stay. I replied that, each being called upon to enjoy Freedom, I wanted to take advantage of it on my own account.
They hardly listened to me, always repeating: 'You will not go, citizen, you will not go.' Finally, they left, I remained plunged in a cruel anxiety, when I saw two return, who did not frighten me, although they were of the band, so quickly did I recognize that they did not want me of badness. 'Madame', said one to me, 'we are your neighbors; we are here to give you the advice to leave, and to leave as soon as possible. But don't go in your car; go by diligence, it is much safer.'

Escape into exile of the artist and her daughter, on October 5, 1789, as she recounted it in her Memoirs.



After the events that occurred in her Paris apartment at the very beginning of October 1789, the artist gave up, as she was advised, taking her own horse-drawn carriage to leave Paris and waited for a place in the diligence *(above)* going to Lyon, to then join the Alps and Italy.

"Finally, this long-awaited day (for leaving Paris in diligence) *was October 5, the very day when the King and Queen were brought from Versailles to Paris in the midst of pikes! The events of that day overwhelmed me with anxiety about the fate of Their Majesties and that of honest people, so that at midnight I was dragged to the diligence in a state that cannot be described. I was extremely dreading the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, which I was going to cross to reach the Barrière du Trône* (exit of Paris). *My brother* (Etienne Vigée), *the good Robert* (her friend painter), *and my husband* (J.B. Lebrun) *accompanied me as far as this barrier, without for a moment leaving the door of the diligence. This suburb, of which we were so terrified, was perfectly peaceful; all its inhabitants, workmen and others, had gone to Versailles to fetch the royal family, and the fatigue of the journey kept them all asleep.*

I had in front of me, in the diligence, an extremely dirty man, and stinking like the plague, who very simply told me that he had stolen watches and several belongings. Fortunately, he saw nothing about me that could tempt him; for I carried very little linen and eighty louis for my trip. I had left my effects, my jewels, in Paris, and the fruit of my labor had remained in the hands of my husband, who spent all.

In all the towns a crowd of people stopped the diligence to hear news from Paris. Our Jacobin (another man who was in the diligence too) *then exclaimed: 'Be easy, my children; we have the baker and her wife in Paris. A constitution will be made for them; they will be forced to accept it, and it will all be over.' The flycatchers, whose heads were raised in this way, believed this man to be an oracle. All this made me walk very sadly. I no longer feared for myself; but I feared for everyone, for my mother, my brother, my friends. I also trembled at the fate of Their Majesties; for all along the road, almost as far as Lyons, men on horseback approached the diligence, to tell us that the King and Queen were massacred, that Paris was on fire. My poor little girl became all trembling; she thought she saw her father and our house burned, and when my efforts succeeded in reassuring her, another man soon arrived on horseback who repeated these horrors to us."*

Following a long stagecoach journey, where she was disguised as a worker *(see next page)*, the artist had to cross the Alps via the **Mont Cenis pass** *(below)*, after which her life totally changed forever:

"I climbed Mount Cenis, as many foreigners also climbed; a postilion approached me:

- 'Madame should take a mule, he said, because going up on foot is too tiring for a lady like her'.

I replied that I was a worker, well used to walking.

- 'Ah!' he went on laughing, 'Madame is not a worker, we know who she is'.

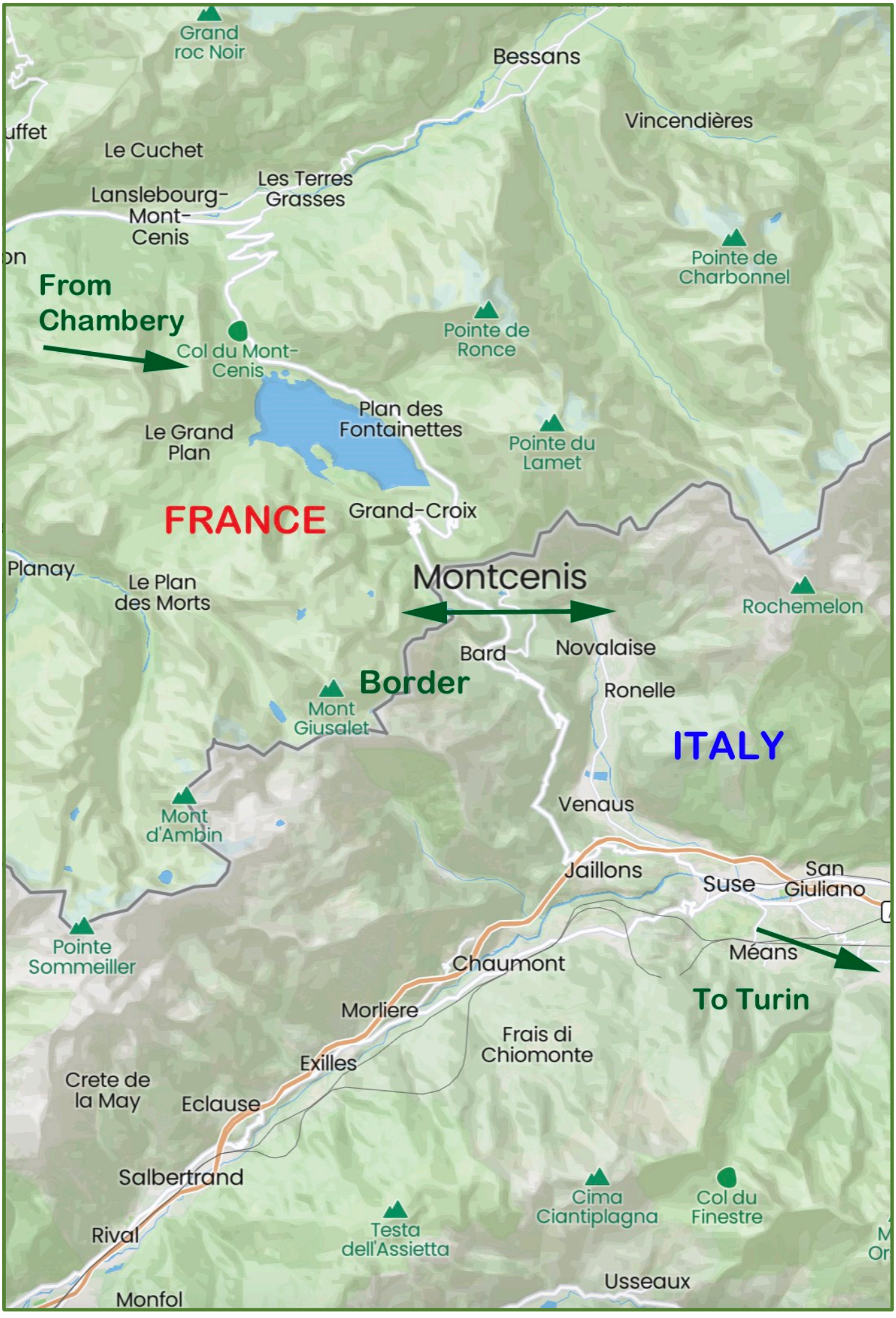
- Well, who am I? I asked.

- 'You are Madame Lebrun, who paints in perfection, and we are all very happy to know that you are far from the bad guys'.

I could never guess how this man could have known my name; but it proved to me how many emissaries the Jacobins had. Fortunately, I no longer feared them. "

Many felt that, if the artist had not emigrated in time, she would have been guillotined.




Grand roc Noir
Bessans
Vincendières
Le Cuchet
Les Terres Grasses
Lanslebourg-Mont-Cenis
Pointe de Charbonnel
From Chambery
Pointe de Ronce
Col du Mont-Cenis
Plan des Fontainettes
Le Grand Plan
Pointe du Lamet
FRANCE
Grand-Croix
Planay
Le Plan des Morts
Montcenis
Rochemelon
Bard
Novalaise
Border
Ronelle
Mont Giusalet
ITALY
Venaus
Mont d'Ambin
Jaillons
Suse
San Giuliano
Pointe Sommeiller
Méans
Chaumont
To Turin
Morliere
Frais di Chiomonte
Exilles
Crete de la May
Eclause
Salbertrand
Cima Ciantiplagna
Col du Finestre
Testa dell'Assietta
Rival
Usseaux
Monfol

Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (pastel), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789*. Coming from Chambéry (France) and going to Turin in Italy *(left page),* she was in travel suit *(below)* while she tried to pass herself off as a worker when she crossed the Alps with her daughter and ran away to the Franco-Italian border to escape the Revolution for good.



During exile, the successful painter of the European High Society



***Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun**, 1790,* at age 35, *Uffizi Gallery, Florence,* at the beginning of her exile. One of her masterpieces.

To give an idea of the **immense fame and prestige** enjoyed by this artist throughout Europe that she traveled during her exile, it can be specified that she was first received excellently in all the cities of Italy (1789-1792) by the highest authorities, including the powerful Queen of Naples, and that she was immediately included (without having requested it) in the prestigious Art Academies of Parma, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Saint-Petersburg and Berlin. This self-portrait *(left)* was given to the Academy of Florence in gratitude for her admission in its midst.
The high society of Vienna tore her away for its evenings (1792-1794) and the great Catherine II of Russia wanted to see her the day after her arrival in Saint Petersburg (1795). The influential Queen Louise of Prussia, in Potsdam in 1801, and the new "first lady" of France, Joséphine Bonaparte, in Paris in 1802, spontaneously came to meet her at her home the day after her arrival in these two capitals, the former to be painted and the second to try to introduce the famous painter to her husband, then First Consul.



Uffizi Gallery **in Florence,** that the painter visited in 1790 and where her famous self-portrait, a masterpiece, now figures prominently.

The painting in its frame in Florence. She is painting Marie-Antoinette.





Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun with her daughter Julie (aged 34 and 9), *1789, Musée du Louvre.* At the beginning of their exile.







Self-portrait of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun**,** *1789.* She was already in exile and very momentarily lacked models, which would explain this series of self-portraits. Her name was, however, already well known throughout artistic Europe and her fame very great. Orders therefore quickly flowed in, especially since, in her 3 years of stay in Italy, she often changed cities, going from Bologna to Florence, Rome, Naples, Parma, Milan, Turin and Venice. She took advantage each time to see the paintings of the great Italian masters in museums, churches and private collections, but also to be directly admitted, at their requests, to the prestigious Academies of Arts in these main cities.





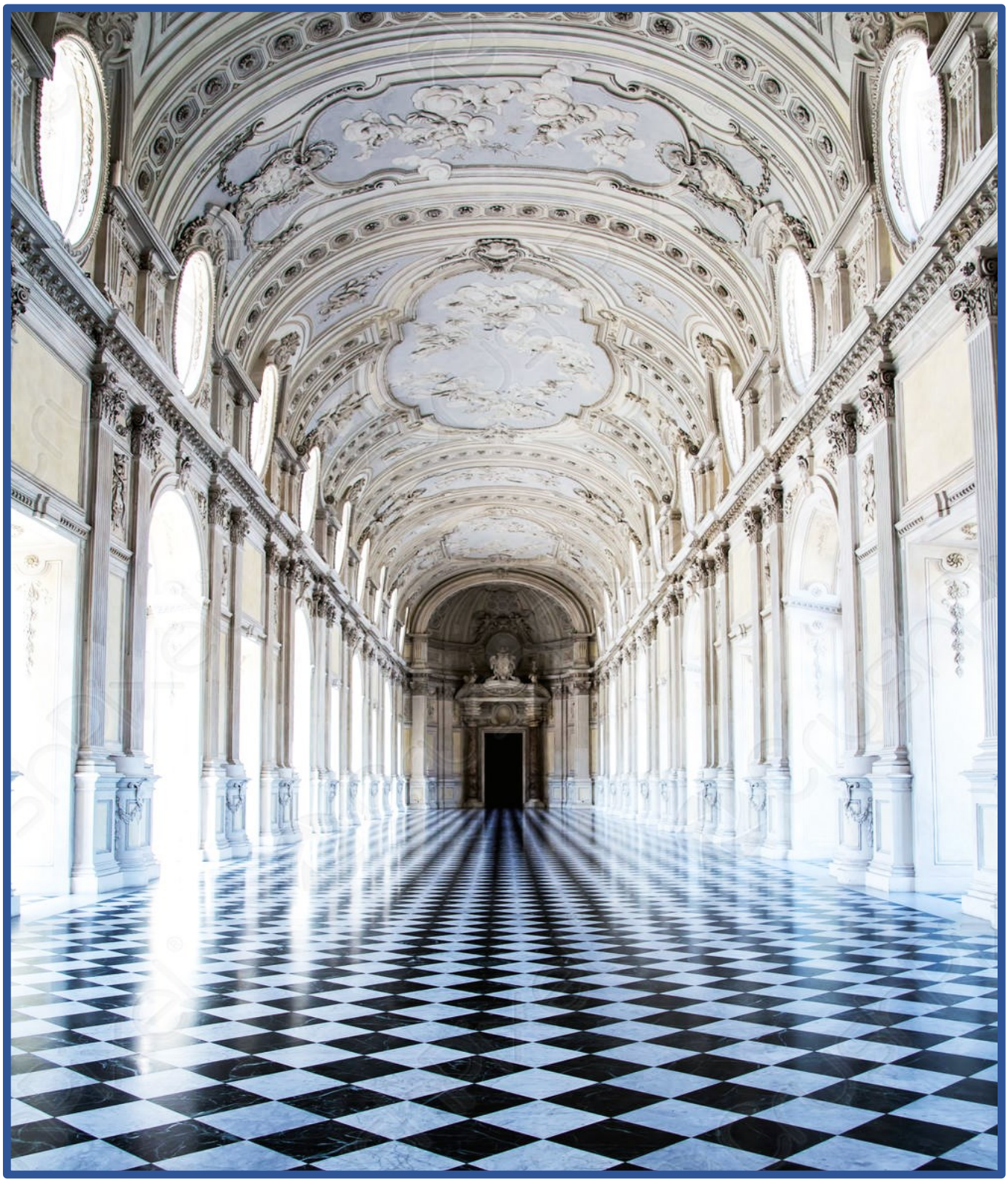
Journey of the artist in Italy,
from late 1789 to mid-1792.

Italy, late 1789 to mid-1792



Julie Le Brun, daughter of the artist, at age 9, at the beginning of exile, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1789, private collection.*

***Turin**, the first Italian city crossed by the artist after the Alps and her first artistic emotions in her many future visits to museums, churches and private collections of this country.*



Above, the Royal Palace of Turin where the artist saw the painting *opposite.* It was given later in 1798 by the King of Sardinia to the Adjutant-General of the French Army of Italy and then placed in the Louvre, thus being historically the first 'gift' received by this museum.

The dropsical woman, *Gérard Dou, 1663, detail, Louvre Museum,* which the artist saw at the Royal Palace in Turin in 1789, described as a *« masterpiece ».*




Parma


palazzo

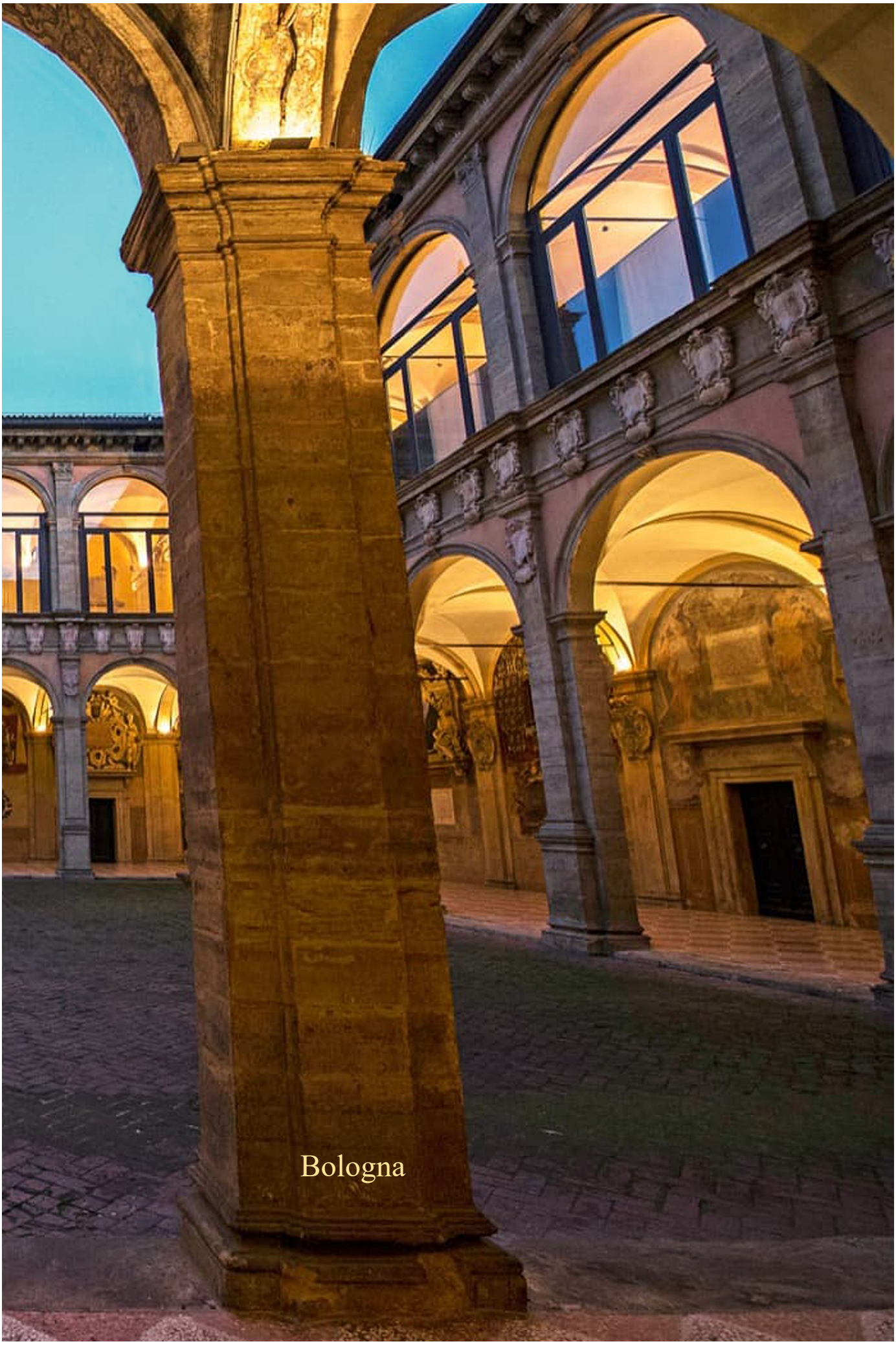


Fresco of San Giovanni Church, *Le Correggio, 1526-1530.*

In Parma, where the painter stayed a few days and described the frescoes of Correggio *(above):*

"I climbed to the top of Saint-Jean church (left); *there, I sit in the arch to admire up close a dome where Correggio has painted several angels in glory, surrounded by light clouds. These angels are truly heavenly; their faces, all varied, have a charm impossible to describe. But, what surprised me the most is that the figures are of such a finish that when looking at them closely, you think you see an easel painting without this in any way detrimental to the effect of this dome, seen from the bottom of the church."*




Bologna

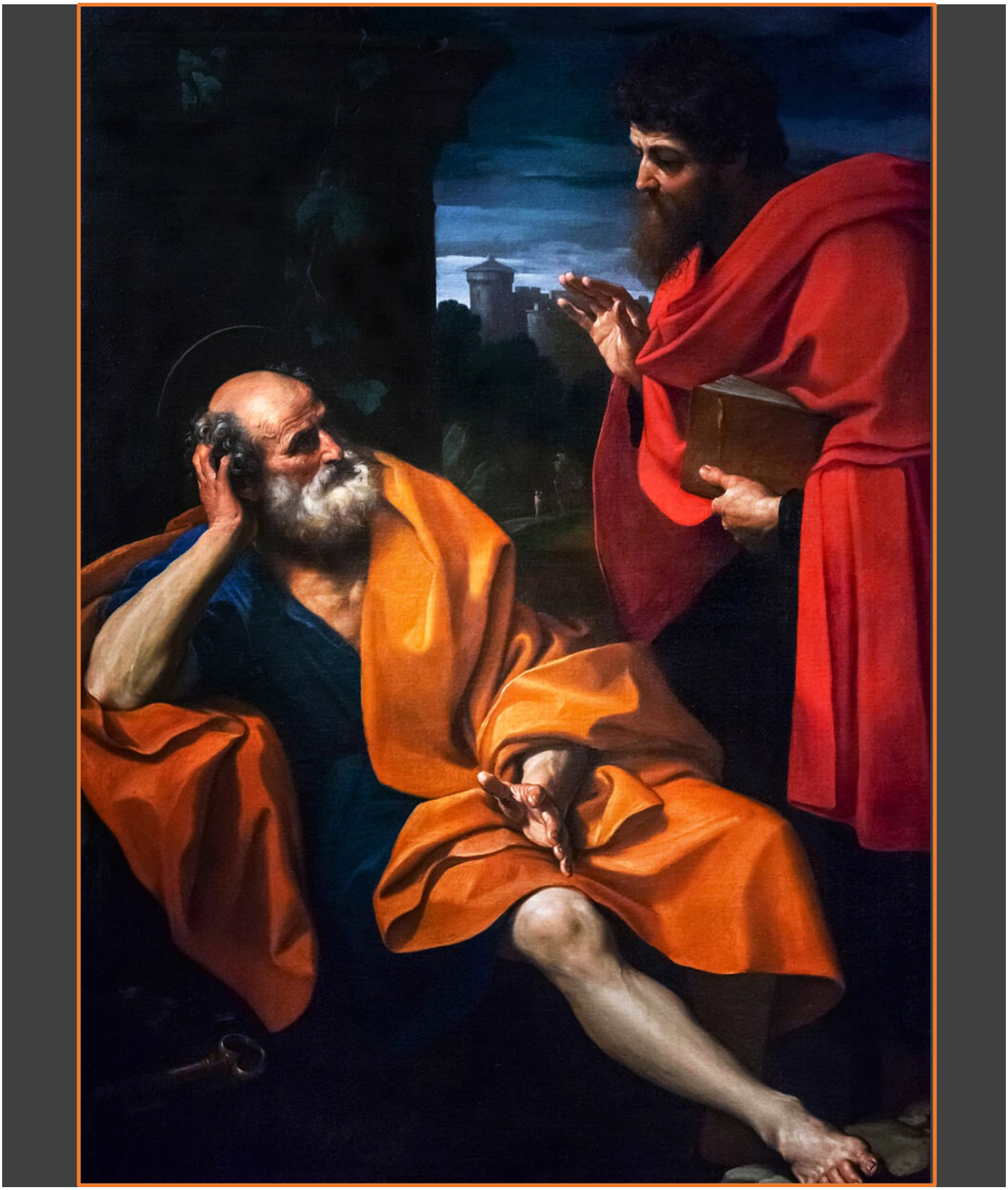


In Bologna, where the artist stayed a week at the start of her exile: *"I immediately went to the church of Saint Agnes, where the picture of the martyrdom of this saint, painted by the Dominican* (*above, Zampieri Domenico, 1621*). *Youth, candor is so well expressed on the beautiful face of Saint Agnes, that of the executioner who strikes her with a dagger forms such a cruel contrast with this completely divine nature, that the sight of this admirable picture overwhelms me with a pious admiration.*

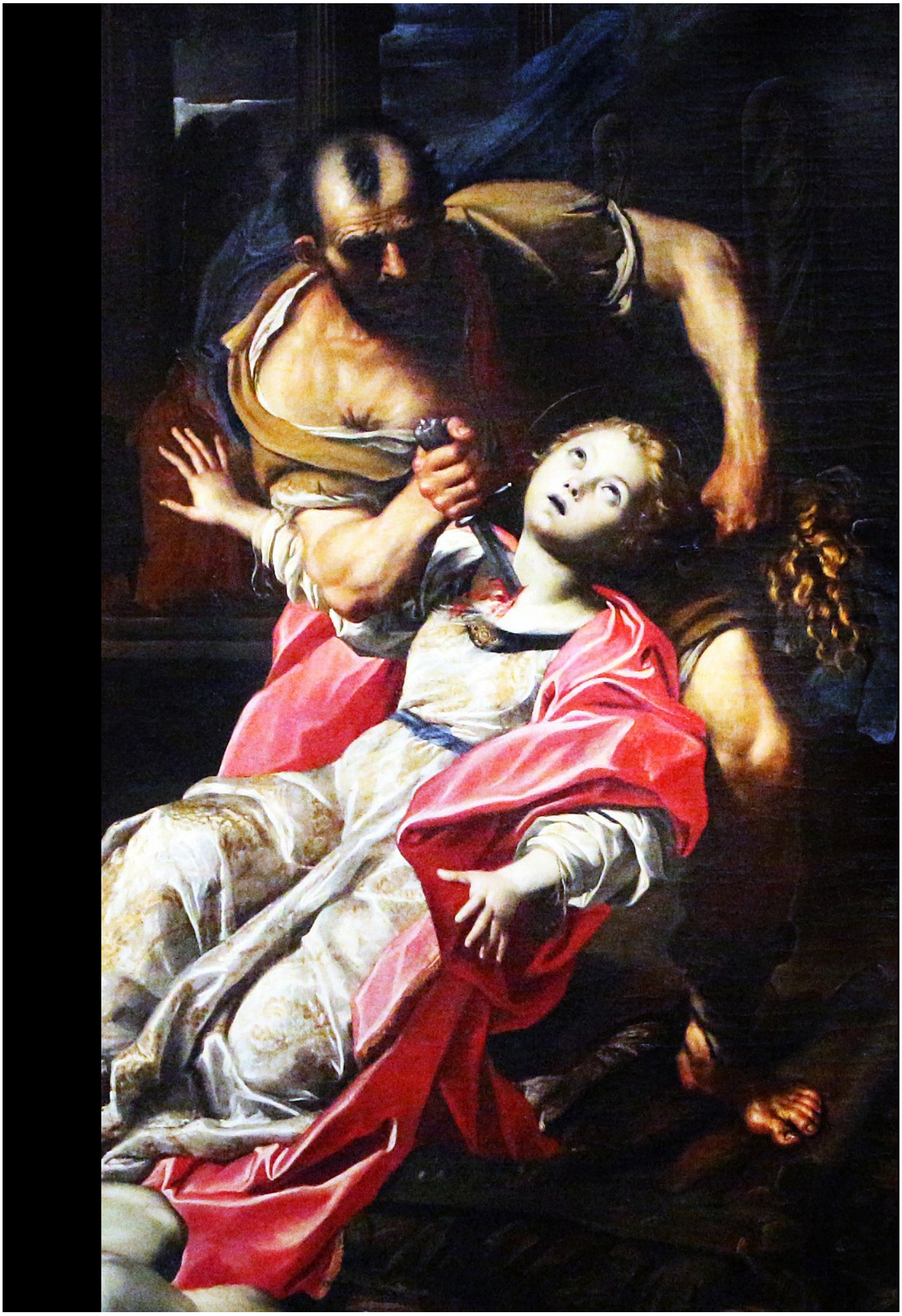
I knelt down in front of the masterpiece, and the sounds of the organ made me hear the perfectly well executed Overture to Iphigénie. The involuntary rapprochement that I made between the young victim of the pagans and the young Christian victim, the memory of the time so calm and so happy when I had heard this same music, and the sad thought of the evils which then weighed on my unhappy country, everything oppressed my heart to the point that I began to cry bitterly and pray to God for France. Fortunately, I was alone in the church, and I was able to stay there for a long time, given over to the strong emotions which had taken hold of my soul. We understand here that the artist remained very pious.

On leaving, I went to visit several of the palaces which contain the masterpieces of the great masters of the Bologna school, more fruitful than any other Italian school. It would take volumes to describe the beauties with which the Guide, the Guercino, the Carraches, the Dominican, have adorned these pompous dwellings. In one of these palaces, the museum keeper followed me, persisting in naming me the author of each painting. I was very impatient, and I told him gently that he was taking unnecessary trouble, that I knew all these masters. So, he contented himself with only continuing to

accompany me, but as he heard me ecstatic over the most beautiful works while naming the painter, he left me to go and say to my servant: 'Who is this lady? I've driven great princesses, but I've never seen one who knows it as well as she does.'"



"It is at the Zampieri Palace that we see the masterpiece of the Guide (Guido Reni, 1605, Milan), Saint Peter and Saint Paul talking together. This painting brings together all the perfections; the smallest details are so true that these two figures are so illusory that you think you hear them speak. This is certainly what the Guide has done most beautifully. "







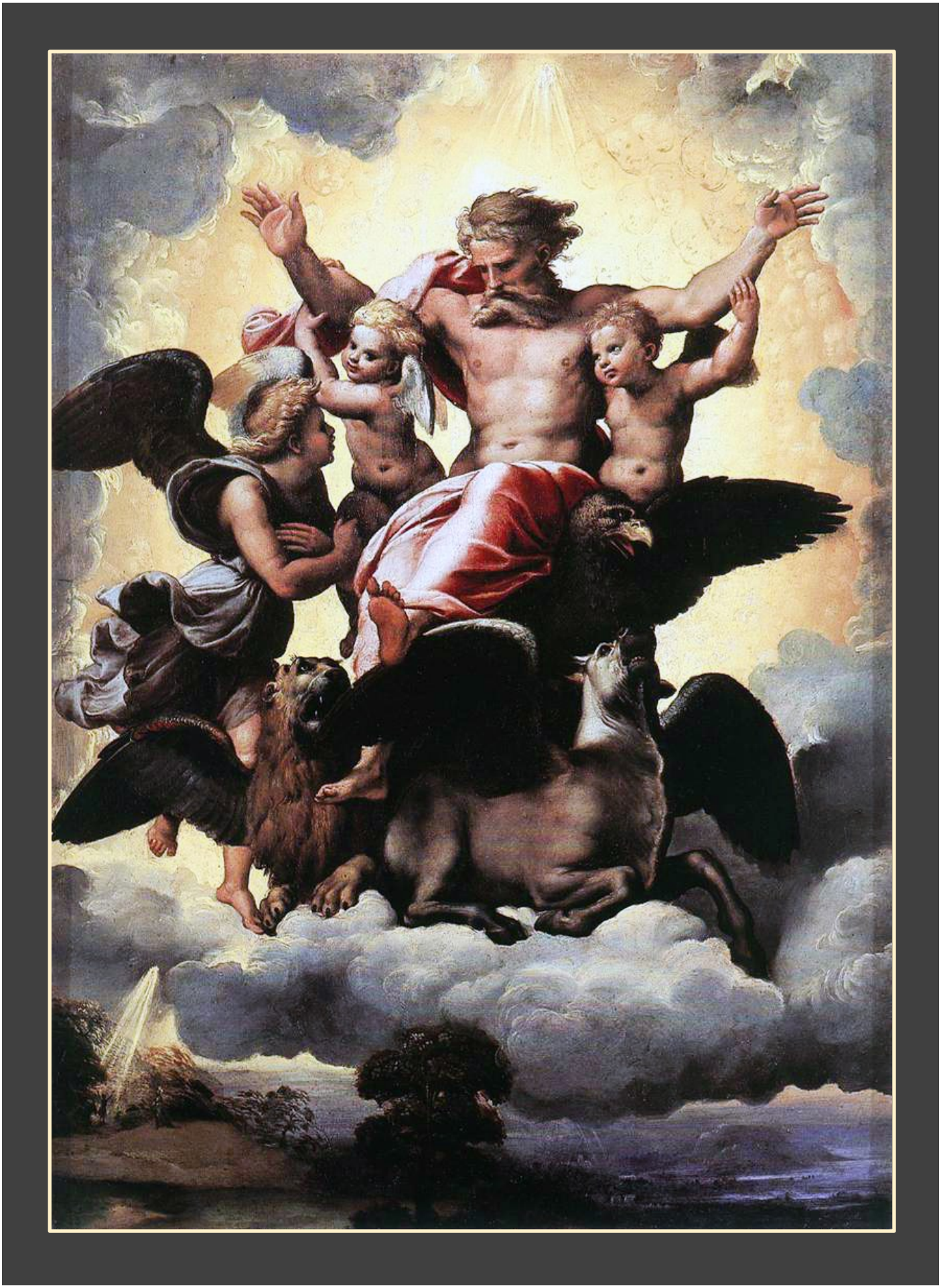
Florence





Self-portrait of Raphael, *1506, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.* The artist particularly admired Raphael and she even made a copy (not found nowadays) of this painting to have it always with her (there was no souvenir photos at that time!). Here is what she said about this painting seen during her stay in Florence: "*You can tell that I could not leave Florence without going to the Altoviti Palace to see the beautiful portrait Raphael made of himself. This portrait was put under glass in order to preserve it, and this precaution made the shadows blacken, but all the highlights of the flesh remained pure and of a beautiful color. The features of the face are regularly beautiful, the eyes charming, and the gaze is that of an observer.*"

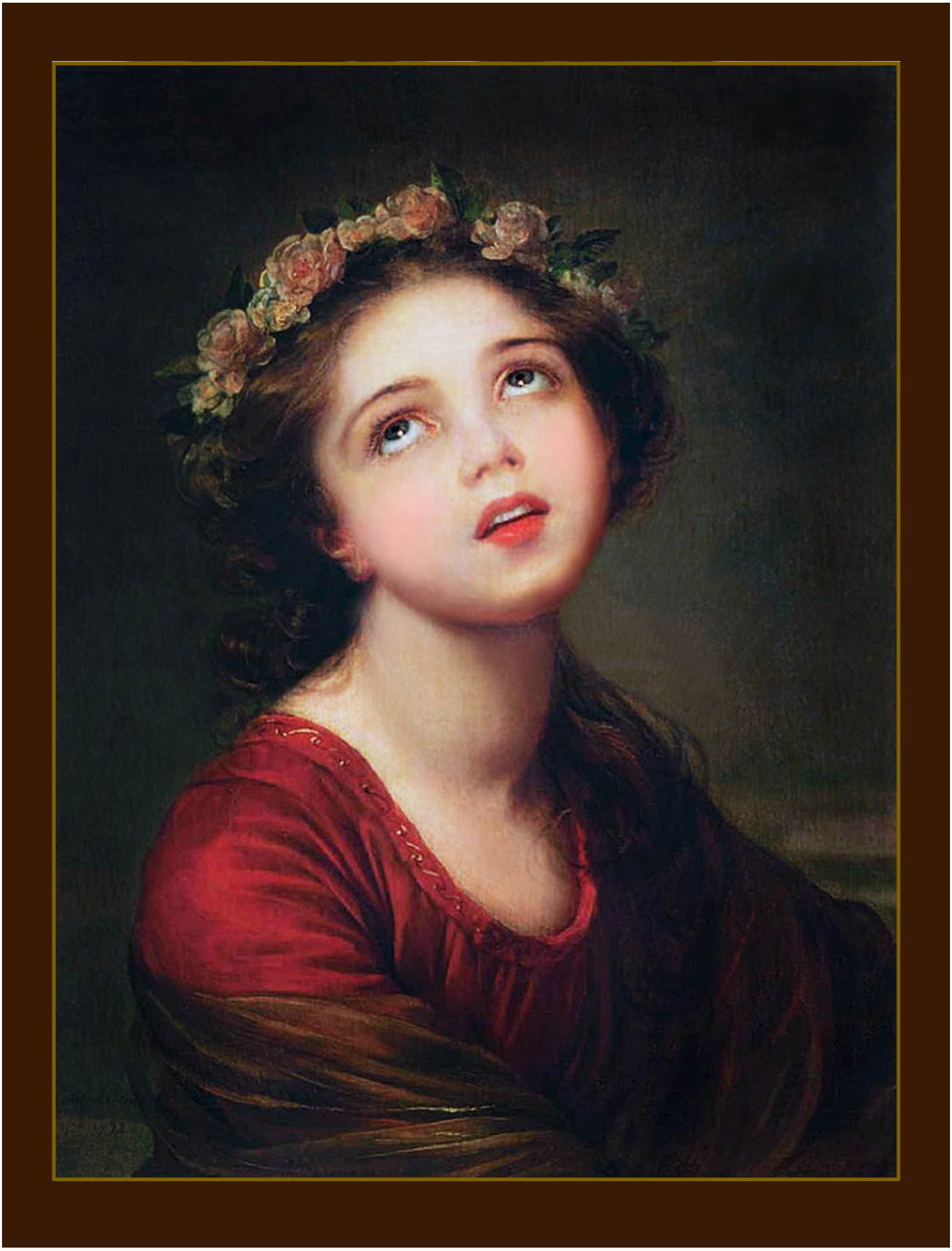
Vision of Ezéchiel, *Raphaël, 1518, Galleria Palatina, Florence. Qualified by the artist of: « admirable small painting by Raphaël ».*





Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun **drawing the** cascade of Tivoli (near Rome), in company of her daughter Julie and her servant, *Simon Alexandre Denis (Belgian painter),1790, private collection.*

Julie Lebrun, the artist's daughter at 10, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Galleria Nazionale, Parma.* She gave this painting to the Academy of Parma in gratitude for having immediately admitted her to its midst, without her having requested it.

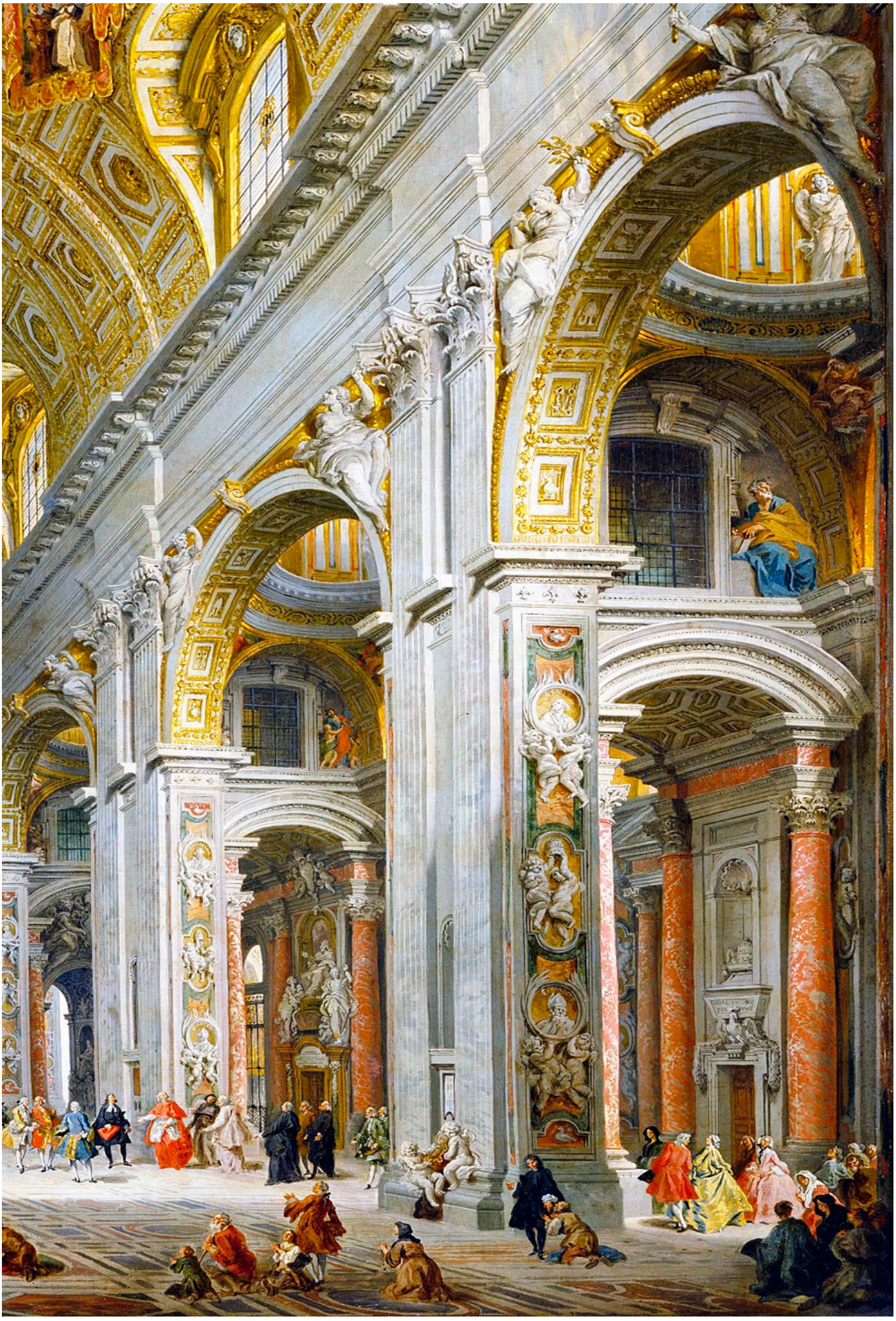




Rome







Previous pages, The Vatican in Rome and Saint-Peter's Basilica.



Self-portrait of **François Guillaume Ménageot**, 1744-1816, a French painter and a very good friend of Louise Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, who found him with pleasure in Italy. For several years, before the Revolution, he rented an apartment in the hotel of the Lebrun's couple in Paris, thus frequently meeting the artist.

"The very day of my arrival, M. Ménageot took me first of all to Saint-Pierre, whose immensity, according to the idea that I had been given, did not strike me at first glance. I attribute this effect to the well-calculated grandeur of all its details: for example, to the appearance of these two antique yellow stoups in the shape of shells, which one sees on entering, the children of four or five years which surround them are six feet in height, and this perfect proportion diminishes at first glance the size of the church; anyway, I only knew as I walked through it how vast it was. Having told M. Ménageot that I would have preferred to see it supported by columns instead of these enormous pilasters, he replied that it had been built first as I wanted, but that the columns did not appear sufficiently solid, they had been surrounded thus; he made me see from a painting in which Saint-Pierre is represented as I would like it to be. "

F. Ménageot, a friend, guided her around Roma: *'I also climbed the staircase which leads to the Sistine Chapel (left), to admire the vault painted in fresco by Michelangelo (1508), and the painting representing the Last Judgment (above). Despite all the criticisms that have been made of it, it seemed to me a masterpiece of the first order, for the expression and the boldness of the shortcuts. There is really something sublime in the composition, in the execution. As for the disorder that reigns there, it is, in my opinion, completely justified by the subject.'*

IOEL
DELPHICA
ISAIAS

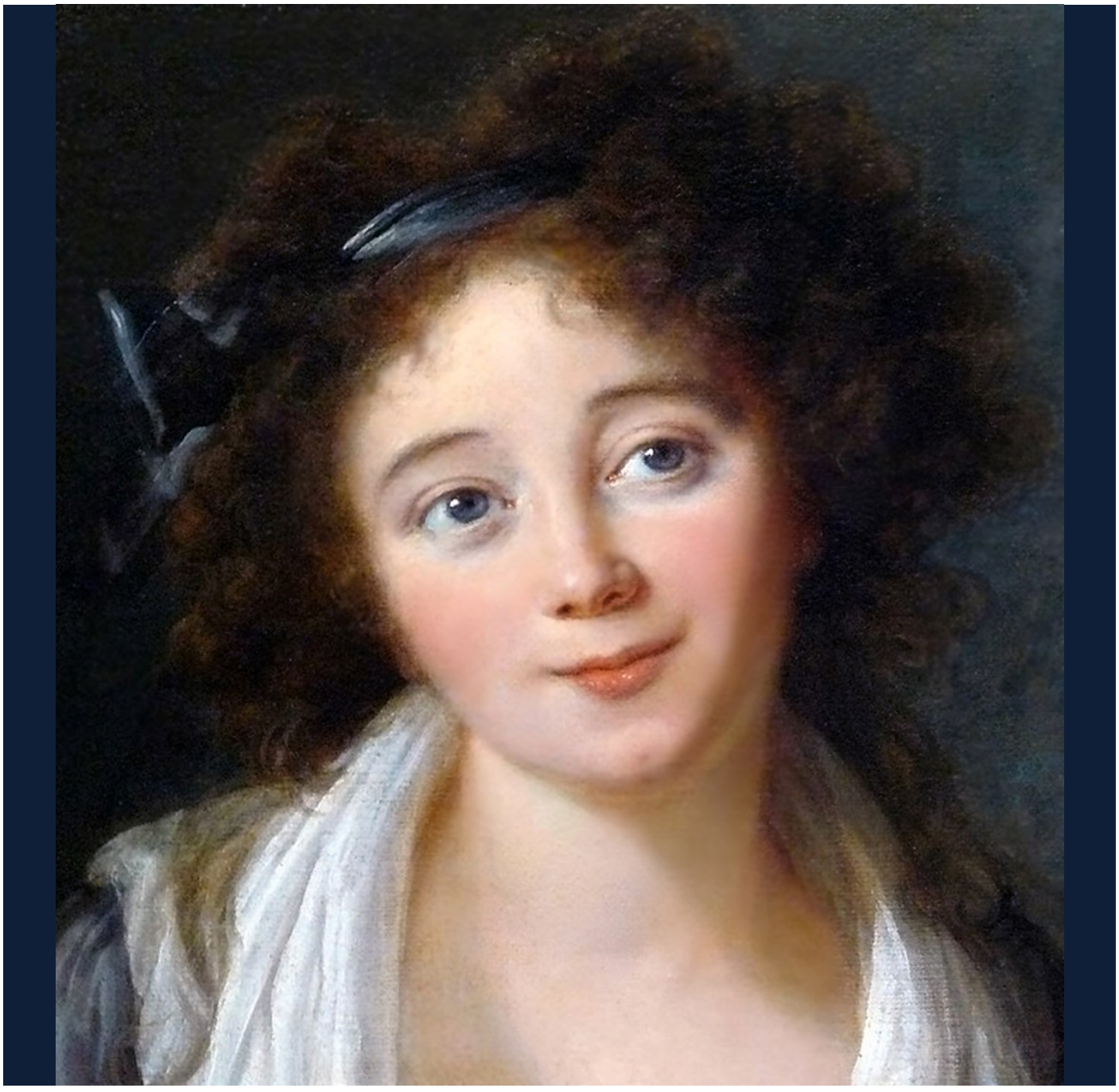




Anna Pitt (1772-1863), English writer, at age 16, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1792, Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg.* Portrait made in Rome.



Anecdotes: *"Immediately after my arrival in Rome, I painted my portrait for the Florence gallery* (see above). *I painted my palette in my hand, in front of a canvas on which I trace the Queen with white pencil. Then I painted Miss Pitt* (previous pages), *Lord Camelfort's daughter. She was sixteen, was very pretty: so, I represented her as Hebe, on clouds, tenant in hand, a cup from which an eagle was to drink* (left). *I painted this eagle from life, and thought I was devoured by it. It belonged to Cardinal de Bernis. The damn animal, who used to be always in the open air, chained in the yard, was so angry to be in my room, that it wanted to pounce on me, and I admit that it made me tall fear. At the same time, I painted the portrait of a Polish woman, Countess Potoska (below, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1791, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New-York). She came to my house with her husband, and as soon as he left us, she said to me with great coolness: - 'He is my third husband; but I think I'll take the first one, which suits me better, although it is drunk'. I painted this Polonaise in a very picturesque* (and lively!) *way: she is leaning on a rock covered with moss, and near her are waterfalls. "*



See previous page.







Colosseum **and** Constantine's Arch**,** *Giovanni Pannini, 1747, Musée des Arts, Baltimore*



The artist stayed in Rome close to these 2 monuments, *see next page.*

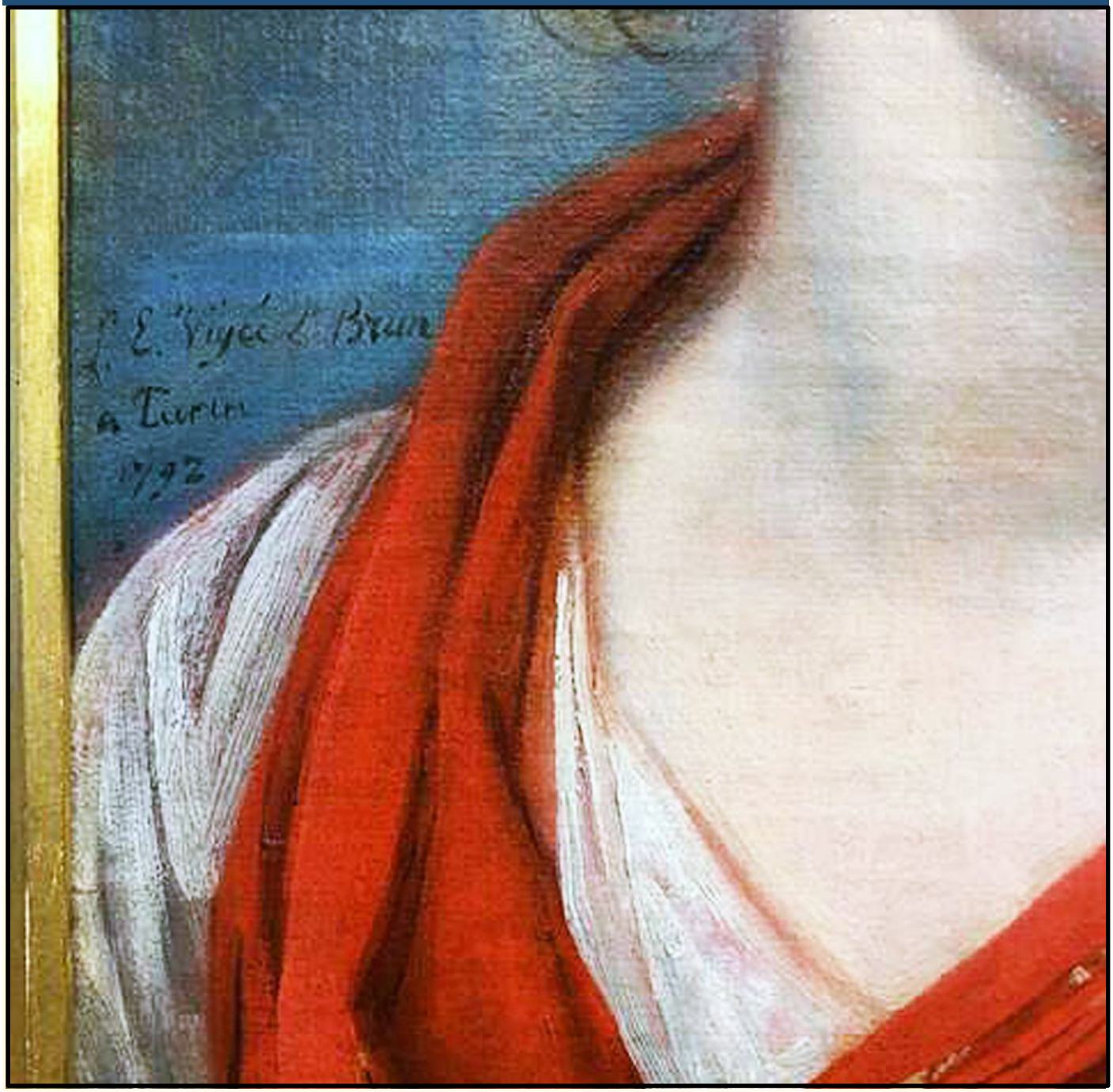
Below, detail, Hyacinthe Gabrielle Roland**,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1791,* San Francisco. *"I then painted Mademoiselle Roland, then Lord Welesley's mistress, who soon married him. All in all, I worked tremendously in Rome during the three years I spent in Italy. Not only did I find great pleasure in dealing with painting, surrounded as I was by so many masterpieces; but I also had to make a fortune again, for I did not have a hundred francs a year. Fortunately, I only had to choose, among the greatest figures, the portraits that I liked to do ... How many times, wanting to distract myself from too painful thoughts, I have been in the setting sun to see this Colyseum* (see above), *of which the imagination cannot enlarge the space! It is impossible, when one is there, to think of anything other than these effects so beautiful, so diverse! The arcades, lit in a reddish yellow tone, stand out against this overseas sky that we do not see anywhere so dark as in Italy. "*







Count Giulio Litta, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790s, copy of the original (lost).*



Signature of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *« L. E. Vigée Le Brun », L. E.* for *Louise Élisabeth*, with here the mention *« A Turin 1793 »*, shortly before leaving Italy for Vienna. Here, detail of the painting of Marguerite Porporati, see *further*.

About her stay in Rome:

"The one whom I soon distinguished among all the French ladies who were in Rome, was the charming Duchess of Fleury, very young then; nature seemed to have taken pleasure in filling her with all its gifts. Her face was enchanting, her gaze burning, her size the one given to Venus, and her superior spirit. We felt drawn to seek each other out; she loved the arts and, like me, was passionate about the beauties of nature; finally, I found in her a companion such as I had often desired. We usually went together to spend our evenings with Prince Camille de Rohan, who was then Ambassador of Malta and Grand Commander of the Order; every evening he met at his house the most distinguished foreigners; the conversation was very lively…


E. Vigée Le Brun
Turin
1792



each one spoke there of what he had seen during the day, and the taste, the spirit of the Duchess of Fleury shone above all. This attractive woman (left) seemed to me from then on exposed to the dangers which threaten all beings endowed with a lively imagination and an ardent soul; she was so likely to get excited that at the thought of how young she was, how beautiful she was, I trembled for the rest of her life; I often saw her writing to the Duc de Lauzun, who was a handsome man, witty and very amiable, but of great immorality, and I feared this affair for her, although I might think that she was very innocent. The Duc of Lauzun had remained in France; I do not know if he took an active part in the revolution but he was guillotined. The arrival in Rome of so many people who brought news from France made me experience emotions every day, often very sad and sometimes very sweet.

Aimée de Coigny, **Duchesse de Fleury,** in 1797, lover of Duc de Lauzun.

I was told, for example, that a short time after my departure, as they begged the King (Louis XVI) to have his painting painted, he replied: 'No, I will wait for Madame Lebrun to return, so that she can paint my portrait as a pendant to that of the Queen. I want her to comb me full-length, ordering M. de La Perouse to go around the world.'*

* Famous French navigator commissioned by King Louis XVI to tour the world, but he was shipwrecked and disappeared in 1788 at Vanikoro, (South Pacific).

Nothing is sweeter to me than to remember how much Louis XVI always showed me kindness, to the point that I reproached myself very much for having forgotten to say, in my first volume, than at the time when I made the large portrait of the Queen with her children (in 1787), *M. d'Angevilliers came to my house and told me that the King wanted to give me the cordon of Saint-Michel, which then only granted to artists and men of letters first class; as at that time also the most odious calumnies were attached to my person, I feared that such a high distinction would bring to its height the envy which I already aroused, and, penetrated as I was with gratitude, I nonetheless begged M. d'Angevilliers to ask the King to lose the idea of granting me this favor."*

Left page, Marguerite Porporati, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1792, Sabauda, Turin*

Bay of Naples *by Joseph Vernet, 1748, Louvre-Lens.*





Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) was one of the artist's mentors, a landscape painter, whom she painted in 1778 and who above all gave her good advice to enter in 1783 the French Royal Academy of Painting, of which he was a part of.



Bay of Naples, *Gustav Zick, 1854.*



After Rome, the artist lived in Naples in a house with such a view.

Lady Hamilton



Lady Hamilton, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Wallace collection, London.*

Amy (Emma) Lyons, an English adventurer, very beautiful physically, managed to get married by Sir William Hamilton, ambassador to the Court of Naples, then to seduce and become **the famous lover of** Admiral Nelson, met in Naples too. Returned to England in 1800, she then formed a "household of three", which caused a scandal at the time.

Her husband died in 1803, disinheriting her, and her lover, with whom she had had a child, was killed in Trafalgar in 1805, without her being able to inherit either because the admiral's family had succeeded in falsifying his will. She had a poor and difficult end of life in London and fell into alcoholism. She died of cirrhosis of the liver in Calais in 1815, at age 49.

Memoirs of the artist about Naples and Lady Hamilton:

"I saw the Chevalier Hamilton, Ambassador of England in Naples, arrive at my house, asking me in favor that my first portrait be that of a superb woman whom he presented to me; it was Mrs. Hart, his mistress, who soon became Lady Hamilton, and whom her beauty made famous.

I painted Mrs. Hart lying by the sea, holding a goblet in her hand. Her beautiful face was very animated; she had a tremendous amount of beautiful brown hair that could cover her completely, and as a bacchante, with her disheveled hair, she was admirable. The Chevalier Hamilton had this portrait painted for him; but you should know that he very often resold his paintings when he found a profit; so, M. de Talleyrand, the eldest son of our ambassador in Naples, hearing one day that the Chevalier Hamilton protected the arts, he replied: 'Say rather that the arts protect him.' The fact is that after having bargained for a long time for the portrait of his mistress, he obtained that I would do it for a hundred louis and that he sold it in London for three hundred guineas. Later, when I painted Lady Hamilton again as a sibyl for the Duke of Brissac, I imagined copying the head and giving it to Chevalier Hamilton, who sold it without hesitation.

Lady Hamilton had no wit, although she was excessively mocking and disparaging, so much so that these faults were the only motives of her conversation; but she was clever, which helped her to get married. She lacked good looks and dressed very badly when it came to a vulgar toilet. I remember when I painted my first portrait of her as a sibyl: she lived in Caserta in a house that the Chevalier Hamilton had rented; I went there every day, wishing to advance this work.

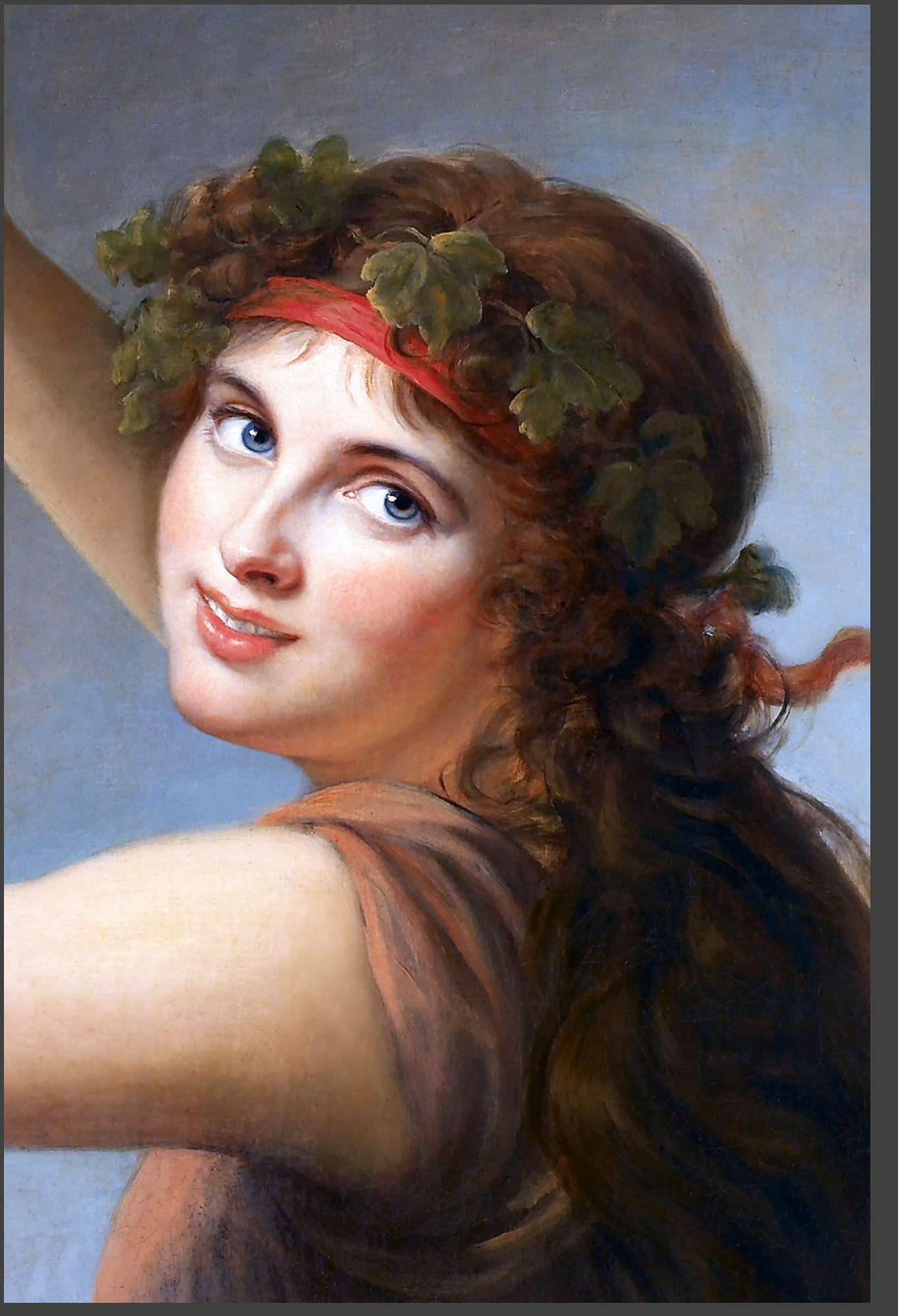
The Duchess of Fleury and Princess Joseph of Monaco attended the third session, which was the last. I had dressed Mrs. Hart (she was not yet married) with a shawl wrapped around her head in the shape of a turban, one end of which fell and formed a drapery. This hairstyle embellished it to the point that these ladies found it lovely. The Chevalier having invited us all to dinner, Madame Hart went to her apartments to make her toilet, and when she came to meet us in the drawing-room, this dress, which was very common, had changed it so much to her disadvantage, that these two ladies had all the trouble in the world to recognize her. "





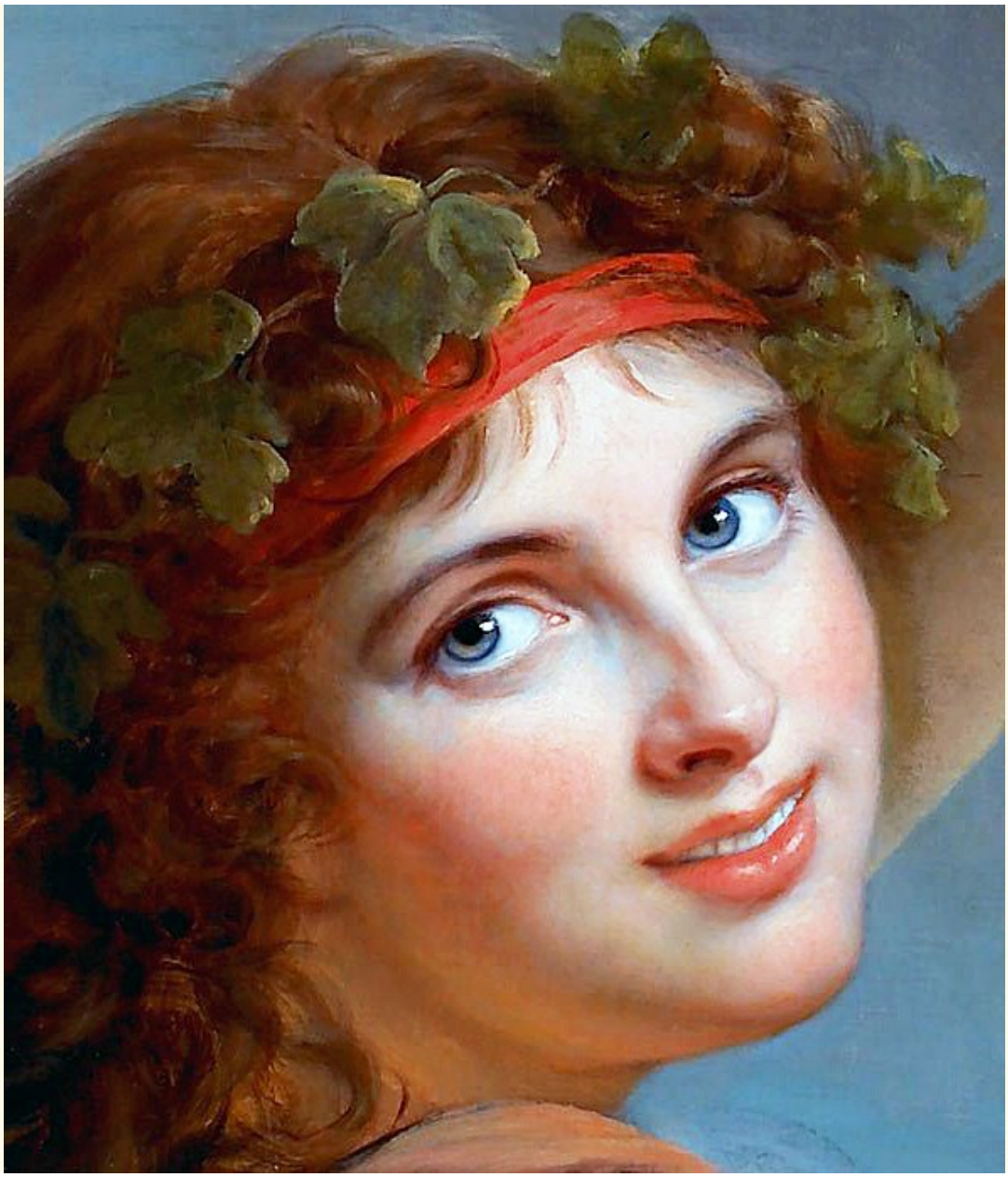


Lady Emma Hamilton (1765-1815), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Liverpool.*Painting done in Naples, with Vesuvius in the background, during the portrait painter's exile in Italy.





Left, Lady Hamilton, in 'Sybille', *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1792, private collection.*
Regarding this painting: *"I took with me the painting of the Sibyl that I had done in Naples, after Lady Hamilton. As this picture was still freshly painted, when I arrived in Parma, so that it would not yellow, I unearthed it under a frame, attached only in one of my rooms. One morning, I was doing my toilet when I was told that seven to eight student painters were coming to pay me a visit. They were ushered into the room where my Sibyl was placed, and a few minutes later I went to receive them there. After telling me about how much they wanted to know me, they told me that they would be happy to see some of my works. 'Here is a painting I have just finished,' I replied, pointing to the Sibyl. At first, they all showed a much more flattering surprise than words could have been; several cried out that they had believed this painting made by one of the masters of their school, and one of them threw himself at my feet, with tears in his eyes. I was all the more touched, all the more happy with this ordeal, as my Sibyl has always been one of my favorite works. The readers, reading this report, perhaps accuse me of vanity: I beg them to consider that an artist works all life to have two or three moments like the one I am talking about."* *Below,* detail of the painting of the previous page.





Sir William Hamilton (1731-1803*), G. Romney, 1783, National Gallery of Art, Washington.* English ambassador in Naples and husband of 'Lady Hamilton'.





Left page, Countess Ekaterina Vassilievna Skavronskaia (1761-1829), at age 29, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Musée Jaquemart-André, Paris.* First painting of this model made in Naples. The second is barer. This Countess was then maid of honor to the Russian Empress Catherine II in Saint- Petersburg, where the artist found her and painted her again.

About Countess Skavronskaia, in Naples:

"Scarcely had I arrived there, when Count Scawronski, Russian Ambassador in Naples, whose hotel touched mine, sent one of his runners to inquire about my news and immediately had the most sought-after dinner brought to me. I was all the more sensitive to this kind attention, as I would have starved to death before anyone had time to think about cooking. That very evening, I went to thank him, and then I made the acquaintance of his charming wife; both strongly urged me not to have any other table than theirs, and although it was impossible for me to accept this offer entirely, I often took advantage of it during my stay in Naples, so much did their company to me was nice.

The Countess was gentle and pretty as an angel; the famous Potemkin, her uncle, had showered her with riches of which she made no use. Her happiness was to live stretched out on a sofa, wrapped in a large black pelisse and without a corset. Her mother-in-law sent for her from Paris boxes filled with the most charming adornments that Mademoiselle Bertin, fashion seller of Queen Marie-Antoinette, was doing at the time. I don't think the Countess ever opened a single one, and when her mother-in-law expressed her desire to see her wear the charming dresses, the charming hairstyles that these boxes contained, she replied nonchalantly: 'What is the use? For who? Why?' She gave me the same answer when she showed me her case, one of the richest you can see: it contained enormous diamonds that Potemkin had given her, and that I never saw on her. I remember she told me that to fall asleep, she had a slave under her bed, who told her the same story every night. During the day she was constantly idle; she had no education, and her conversation was very poor; in spite of all this, thanks to her lovely face and angelic sweetness, she had an invincible charm.

Count Scawronski was very much in love with her, and when he had succumbed to her long sufferings, the Countess, whom I found in Petersburg, remarried the Bailiff of Litta, who had returned to Milan to be relieved of his vows, and then returned in Russia marry this beautiful nonchalant. She has only ever had two daughters by her first husband, one of whom married Prince Bagration.

Count de Scawronski had made me promise to paint his wife's portrait before anyone else's; I undertook to do so, so that, two days after my arrival, I began this portrait in which the ambassador is painted almost full-length, holding in her hand and looking at a medallion on which was the portrait of her husband."





Ekaterina Vassilievna Skavronskaia**,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, private collection.* Here, half naked.



Princesse Maria Christina Teresa de Bourbon, 1779-1849, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Prado, Madrid*. Daughter of Queen Marie-Caroline of Austria and of King Ferdinand I, she was later Queen of Sardinia.





Maria Theresa of Bourbon-Naples, 1772-1807, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Musée Condé, Chantilly.* Daughter of Queen Marie Caroline of Naples and niece of the Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, she married Emperor Francis II of Austria and was Empress of the Holy Empire and then of Austria (1792 to 1807). Note that despite this portrait (successful and rather advantageous) and the portraits of the rest of her family made in Naples in 1790, the new Empress of Austria did not open the Court of Vienna to the artist in 1792 when she started to stay in this capital, probably for political reasons linked to the state of war in progress with France. The artist regretted it in her Memoirs because it was for her at this Court an important potential source of princely clients.





Madame Charot, housekeeper of the family Vigée-Lebrun, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790.* She followed the painter and her daughter during exile.

Frederick Augustus Hervey **in Naples,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1791, National Trust, England.* He was 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry.







Left page, Marie Louisa Amélie de Bourbon (1773-1802, at age 17), Princess of Naples and the Two-Sicilies, daughter of Marie Caroline of Austria (Queen of Naples) and future Grand Duchess of Tuscany, who died in childbirth at the age of 29, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Museum Campodimonte, Naples. Above,* Carlo Gastone Della Torre Di Rezzonico, 1742-1796, Italian poet, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun,1791, Musée de l'Histoire de l'Art, Luxembourg.*

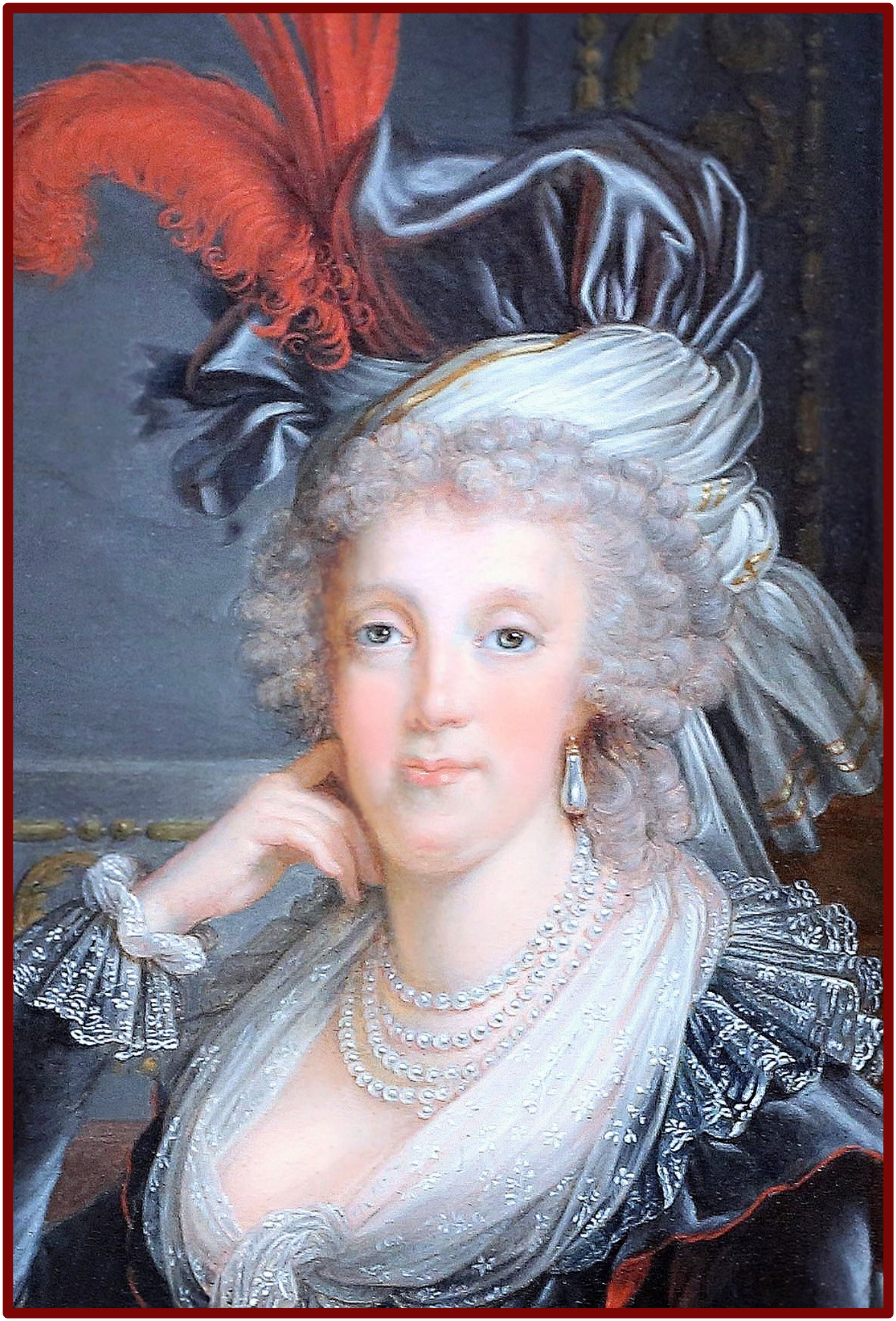


Giovanni Paisiello, 1741-1816, Italian composer,
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790, Versailles.



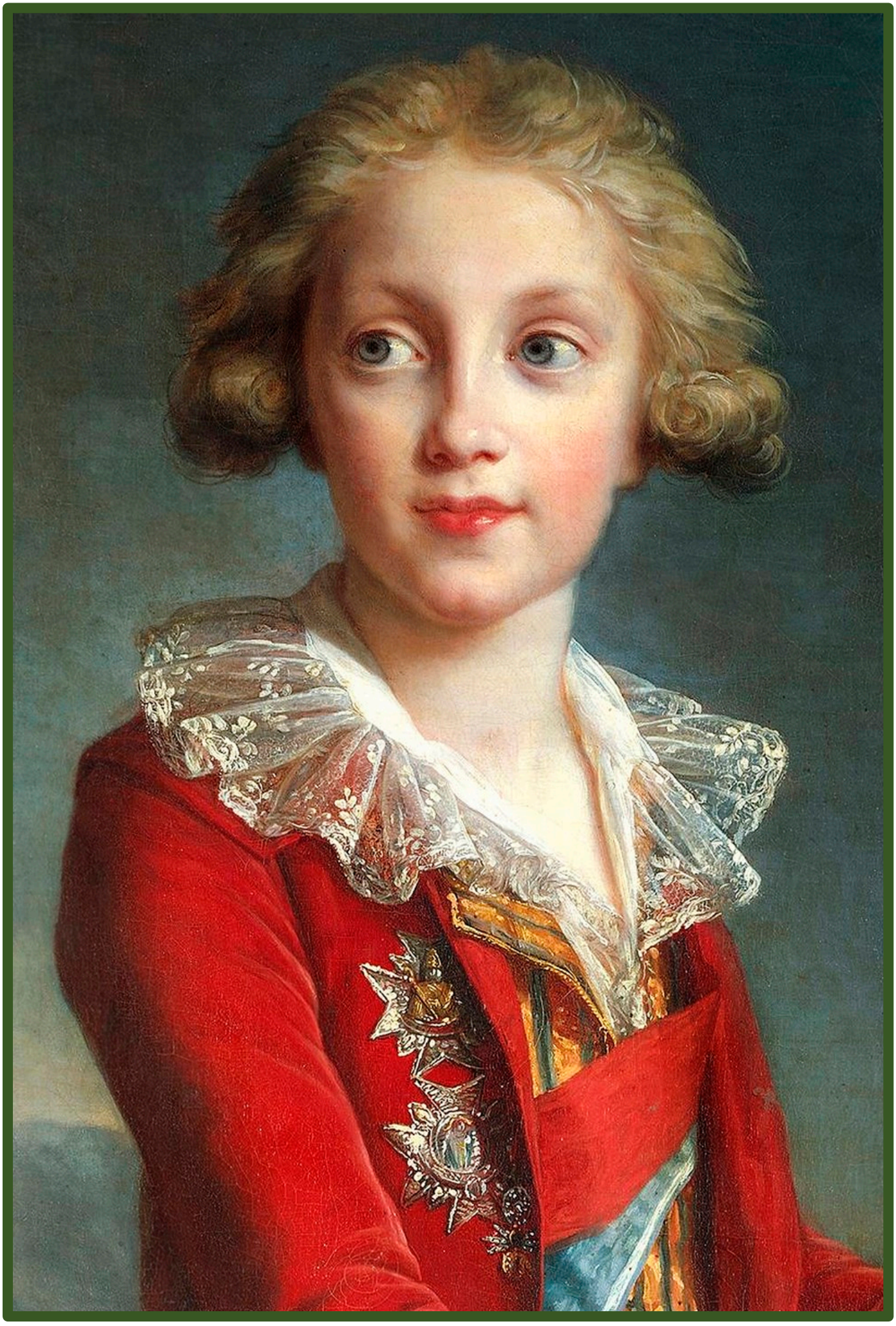


Marie Caroline of Austria (1752-1814, at age 41), **Queen of Naples** and the Two-Sicilies, wife of King Ferdinand IV of Naples, older sister of Marie Antoinette and sister-in-law of King Louis XVI, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1791, Musée Condé, Chantilly, copy of the original* (burnt in 1940). Encountered during a stay in Naples, at the beginning of the artist's exile. It was in fact she who reigned because her husband Ferdinand IV, considered extremely ugly, played only a neglected role.





Francis I of the Two-Sicilies (1777-1830), at age 13, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, detail, 1790, National Museum of Capodimonte, Naples.* He was the son of King Ferdinand IV and Marie-Caroline of Austria. He reigned from 1825 to 1830.





Below, ‘Madame Victoire’**,** 1733-1799, at age 57, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1791, Phoenix Art Museum, USA.* She was one of the daughters of King Louis XV and the aunt of King Louis XVI. She took refuge with her sister Adelaide in Naples in 1789. Marie-Caroline of Austria *(previous pages)* was not very happy to host them. They both died 10 years later. *Left,* **‘Madame Adélaïde’,** sister of Madame Victoire et also aunt of Louis XVI, in exile with her sister, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, detail, 1791, Musée Jeanne-d’Aboville, la Fère, France.*





In Naples, the painter appreciated the spectacle of Vesuvius **in eruption,** *left page, P. J. Volaire, 1771, Museum of Brest:*

"What I wanted most of all was to climb Vesuvius. I am going to copy here the end of a letter I wrote from Naples to my friend Brongniart the architect, because the impression that the terrible phenomenon had made on me was then much more vivid.

The first time I went up there, my companions and I were caught in a terrible storm, a rain that looked like a deluge. We were soaked, but we nonetheless walked up a hill to see one of the great lavas that flowed at our feet. I thought I was touching the avenues of hell. A fire which suffocated me snaked before my eyes; it was three miles in circumference. The bad weather preventing us from going further that day, besides the smoke and the ash rain which covered us made the top of the mountain invisible, we climb on our mules and descend into the black lava. Two thunders, that of the sky and that of the mountain, mingled; the noise was infernal, especially since it repeated itself in the cavities of the surrounding mountains. As we were precisely under the cloud, I was trembling, and our whole cavalcade trembled like me, so that the movement of our march should not attract lightning upon us. I arrived home in a pitiful state: my dress was nothing but soggy ash; I was dead tired; I dry off and go to bed.

Far from being disgusted by this beginning, a few days later I returned to my dear Vesuvius. This time my little brunette (daughter) *was part of the party; I wanted her to see this great spectacle. Monsieur de la Chenaye and two other people were also. It was the best weather in the world. Before nightfall we were on the mountain to see the ancient lava and the sunset in the sea. The volcano was more furious than ever, and as in the daytime we do not see any fire, we do not see coming out of the crater, with clouds of ash and lava, which an enormous whitish, silvery smoke, which the sun illuminates in an admirable manner. I painted this effect because it is divine. We went up to the hermit's. Finally, night came and the smoke turned into flames, the most beautiful I have ever seen in my life. Sprays of fire rose from the crater, and followed each other quickly, throwing on all sides burning stones which fell with a crash. At the same time, a cascade of fire descended, which traversed the space of four or five miles. Another lower mouth of the crater was also on fire; it produced a red and golden smoke, which completed the spectacle in a frightening and sublime way. The lightning which started from the center of the mountain, held back all the surroundings, to the point that the earth trembled under our feet. I was a little frightened; but I didn't testify to it because of my poor little one, who said to me crying: 'Mum, should we be afraid?' Besides, I had so much to admire that this need outweighed my fear. Imagine that we were then hovering over an immensity of braziers, over entire fields that these lavas, in their course, set on fire. I saw this terrible lava burning the shrubs, the trees, the vines; I saw the flame light up and go out, and I heard the noise of the nearby consumed brush which.*

There is something difficult and imposing about this great scene of destruction, which strongly stirs the soul; I don't stop talking when I come back to Naples; in the way I kept turning my head to see again those sprays and this river of fire. It is therefore to be regretted that I left this spectacular spectacle; but I enjoy it by remembering it, and every day I still imagine its different effects. I have four drawings of them that I am bringing to Paris. Two are already in a small model; we are very happy here."* * Not found nowadays.



Erupting Vesuvius, *attributed to Pietro Fabri,* commissioned by Sir William Hamilton,



1790 (eruption that the artist witnessed and impressed her so much), *British Museum.*





Julie Lebrun **(1780-2019),** at age 12, daughter of the painter, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1792, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New-York.*
During the exile with her mother.



Venice *(Francesco Guardi, 1730),* where the painter



passed in 1792, at the end of her Italy stay.





Venice, Pont Rialto, *Antonio Canaletto, Musée du Louvre.*

"I was burning with the desire to see Venice, where I arrived the day before Ascension Day. Whatever I had been told until then about the extraordinary aspect of this city, my eyes alone gave me the right idea, and I confess that it surprised me as much as it charmed me. At first glance you think you can only see a submerged city; but soon these superb palaces, built in the Gothic style, of which these beautiful canals bathe the walls, offer the most grandiose effect and the most delightful by their originality. I greatly admired the Rialto Bridge, which is a single arch, eighty-nine feet in length, and I remember as I passed over it I saw a poor man, very old, scraping on a bad violin, and blackmailing a sobbing five or six-years-old boy. Perhaps this poor child was dying of hunger; so, I hastened to give him a small sum; because under this beautiful sky and in this beautiful city, I wanted everyone to sing merrily. Likewise, I was for some time without getting used to this quantity of black boats which replace the cars, and in which we embark and disembark continuously at the door of all the houses. I would have liked their color to be less sad; but the ambassadors alone have boats of all colors.

*Mr. Denon, having seen my Sibyl (*Lady Hamilton*, see above), urged me to let him exhibit at his house, in order to show it to his acquaintances. It followed that many foreigners went to see this painting, which was successful in Venice, to my great satisfaction. M. Denon had also asked me to paint the portrait of his friend, Madame Marini (left page,* Isabella Theotichi Albri Marini, *1792, Toledo Museum of Art), and I took great pleasure in painting this pretty woman, since she had an infinite physiognomy."*

Left, the Miracle of San Marco freeing a slave*, detail, Le Tintoret, 1548, Scuala Grande de San Rocco, Venice.* **Regarding** Madame Marini *(previous page)* **and the works of Tintoretto in Venice:** *"The next day, Mr. Denon introduced me to his friend, Madame Marini, who has since married Count Albridgi. She was kind and witty. That same evening, she offered to take me to the cafe, which surprised me a little, not knowing the use of the country; but I was much more so when she said to me: 'Don't you have a friend who accompanies you?' I replied that I had come alone with my daughter and her housekeeper. 'Well,' she went on, 'you must at least look like you have someone; I am going to cede M. Denon to you, who will give you his arm, and I will take the arm of another person; I will be believed to have quarreled with him, and it will be for the entire time that you stay here; because you cannot go without a friend'. Strange as this arrangement was, it suited me very much, since it gave me one of our most amiable Frenchmen as a guide, not in terms of appearance, it is true, since M. Denon, even very young, has always been very ugly, which, they say, did not prevent him from pleasing a large number of pretty women. However, that may be, my friend first took me to the palace to see the masterpieces that Venice possesses, and which are in great number. In the largest room of the brotherhood buildings, we stop with delight in front of the beautiful frescoed pages painted by Tintoretto. The Crucifixion especially is admirable (next pages), and it is only in Venice that one can appreciate this great painter, who combines drawing, color and expression in his beautiful compositions. Note also, in the first room, the Flight into Egypt: the landscape is superb (below, Le Tintoretto, 1582, Scuala Grande de San Rocco, Venice).*




S.P.Q.R.









Venice, *Antonio Canaletto*



The Dauphin Louis XV**,** *Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757), 1720, Dresden.* Venetian painter.
"There we saw twelve pastel portraits of La Rosalba, which are admirable for color and truth. These portraits being those of the senator's family, have never been moved, and they are preserved to such an extent that they still have all their freshness. One would suffice to make a painter famous."

At the end of 1792, catastrophic events began in France



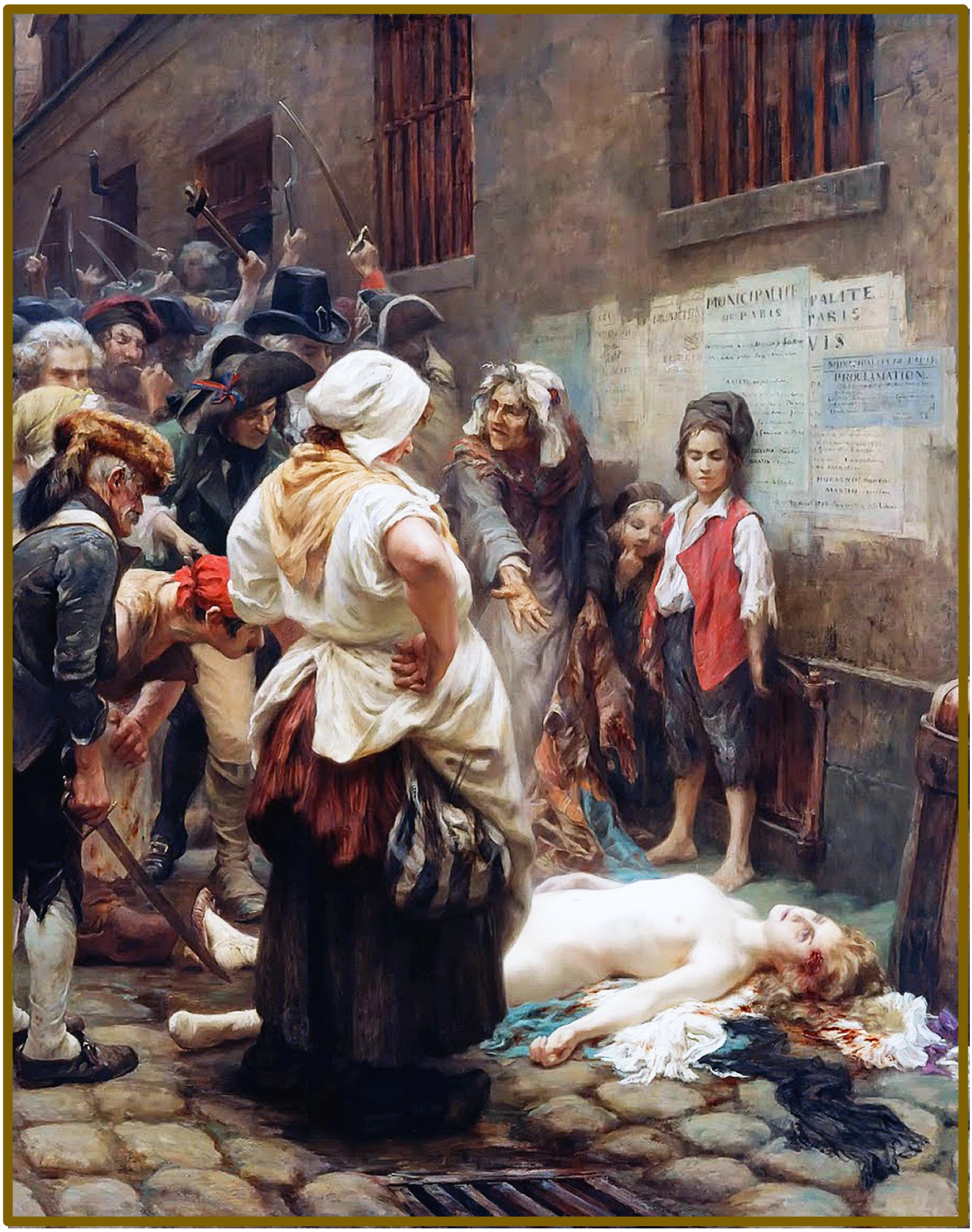
Self-portrait of **Auguste Jean-Baptiste Rivvière,** *1808, private collection.*

Auguste Rivière was the brother of Suzanne Rivière, the artist's sister-in-law, wife of her brother Etienne Vigée. Painter and engraver himself, friend of the artist before 1789 and fleeing the beginner revolutionary fury, he came at the end of 1792 to join the artist near Turin where she was a refugee with her daughter and her governess. She learned from him (and the many other emigrants arriving from France to Italy) of the imprisonment of the Royal Family in August and the numerous massacres of aristocrats, priests and "counter-revolutionaries" that took place in September, in particular of the Princess of Lamballe *(see right).*

These catastrophic events of course made the artist give up returning to France for the moment and she decided to emigrate to Vienna with a Polish couple met in Milan. Auguste Rivière accompanied them and then followed the artist to Russia, thus remaining close to her for years, having his own clientele as an engraver.

Right, Massacre of the Princess of Lamballe, in front of her prison in Paris, in September 1792, *Leon Maxime Faive, 1908, Musée de la Révolution française, Vizille, Isère.* She was Marie-Antoinette's superintendent in Versailles, the artist knew her well and had painted her in 1782 *(see above).* Her massacre was particularly atrocious.

Captured at the same time as the royal family at the Tuileries in August, she was knocked out (without trial) in front of the door of her prison in Paris a month later. Her body, completely naked, was stabbed with dozens of hits in front of the crowd, including children. Then, her corpse was butchered, including in her most intimate parts, her head was cut off and put at the end of a pike, which was paraded throughout Paris including in front of Temple jail where the royal family was, which made Queen Marie-Antionette faint. In the horrors, this was only the beginning!

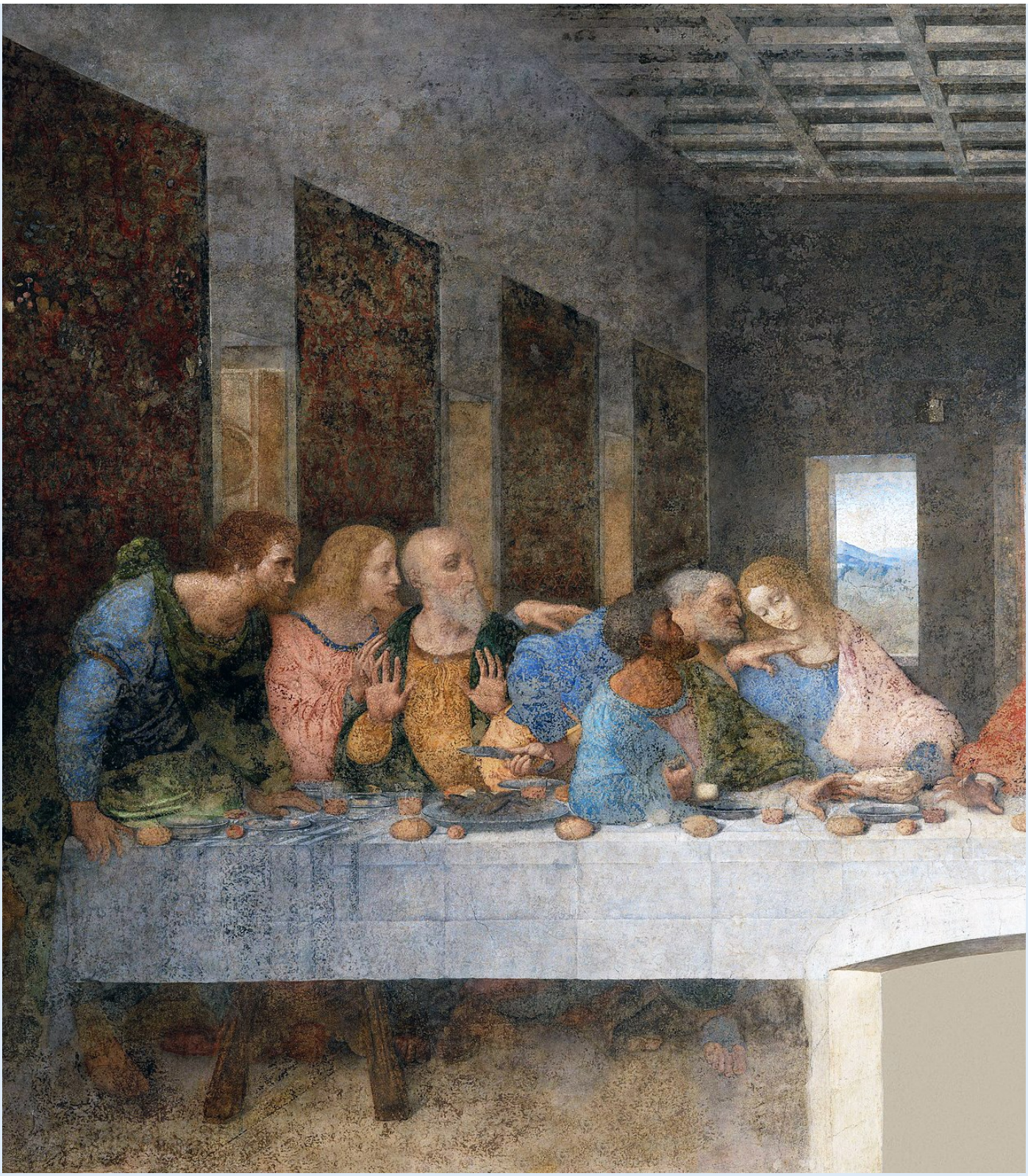




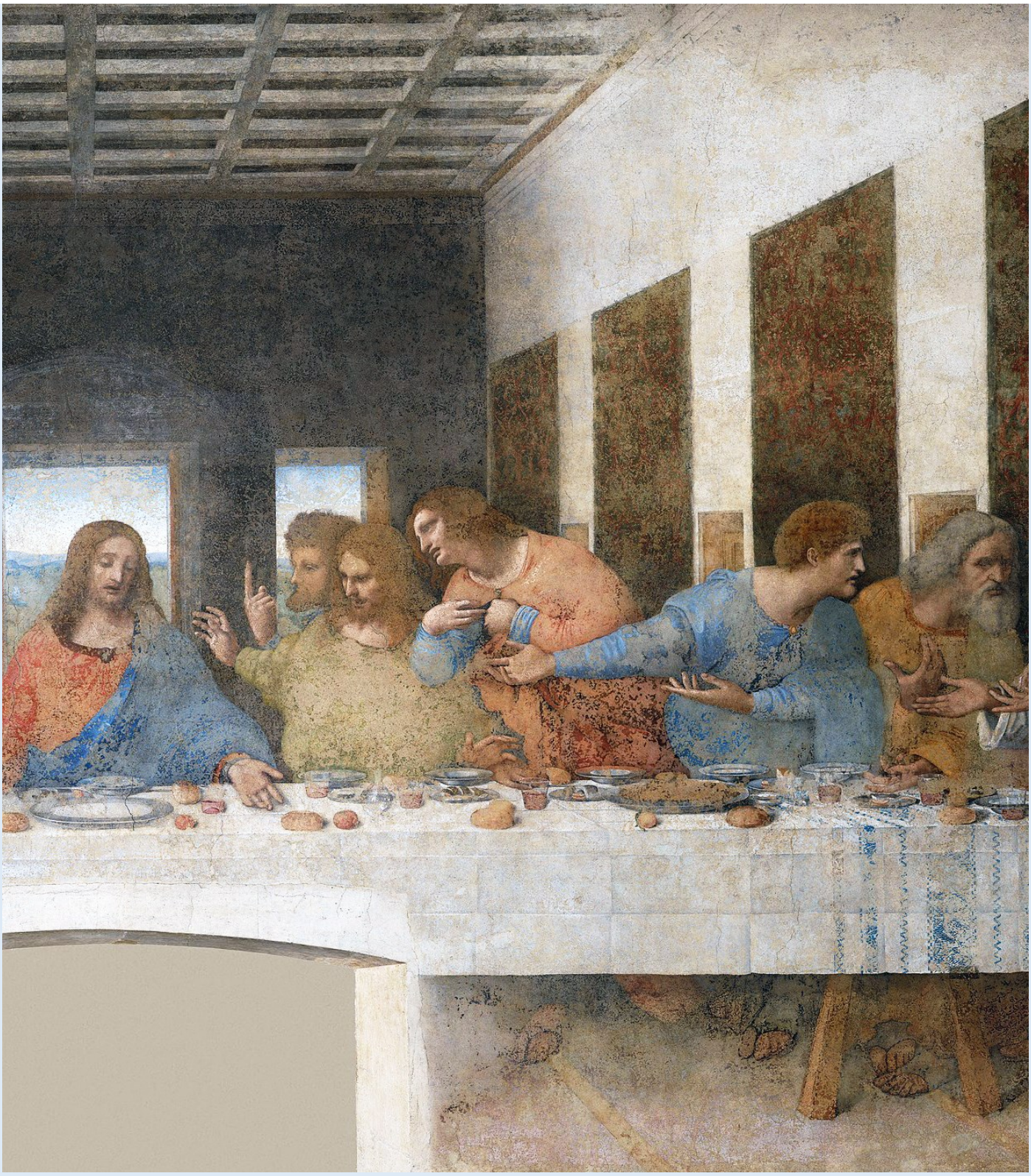
Milan, Duomo, *Giovanni Migliari,*



beginning of the 19th century.



The Last Supper, *Leonardo da Vinci, 1498, church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.*



During her last Italian stopover in **Milan**, the artist did not fail to see this fresco:
"I first visited the refectory of the Grazie church, where the famous Last Supper is located, painted on the wall by Leonardo da Vinci. It is one of the masterpieces of the Italian school; admiring this Christ, so nobly represented, all these characters, painted with so much truth and character, I groaned to see such a superb picture altered to this point; it was first covered with plaster, then partly repainted. However, one could judge of what this beautiful composition was before these disasters, since, seen from a little distance, it still produced an admirable effect. "



Vienna in 18th century



Bernardo Bellotto "Canaletto"

Vienna, mid-1792 to the end of 1794



Left page, **Countess Theresa Kinsky,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Norton Simeon Museum, Pasadena, USA.* **About the stay in Vienna and this model:** *"A few days after my arrival I went into town to carry the letters of recommendation given to me by Earl de Wilsheck. I went first to the Countess of Thoun* (next page). *She immediately invited me to her evenings, where the greatest ladies of Vienna gathered, and this house would have been enough to make me know all the high society of the city. I also found there many emigrants from our poor France: the Duc de Richelieu, the Comte de Langeron , the Comtesse de Sabran and her son, the Duchesse de Polignac's family (the Duchesse having been the former 'favorite' of Marie-Antoinette), and later the kind and good Comte de Vaudreuil* (her former lover), *whom I was very happy to see again*

I have never seen, gathered in a drawing-room, so great a number of pretty women as there were in that of Madame de Thoun. Most of these ladies brought their work, and sat around a large table, making tapestries. I was sometimes called to consult me on the effects, on the nuances; but since what hurts my eyes the most is to tie them on bright colors, by the light of lamps or candles, I admit that I often gave my opinion without looking. Among the pretty women of whom I have spoken, there were especially three remarkable for their beauty: Princess Linoski; the wife of the Russian Ambassador, the Count of Rasowmoffski, and the charming Countess Kinski (left page), born Countess Diedrochsten. The latter had all the charms one can have; her height, her face, her whole person, in short, was perfection: so, I was very surprised when they told me her story, which really looks like a novel. Count Kinski's parents and his family had arranged between themselves to marry the two young people, who did not know each other. The Count lived in some city in Germany, and only arrived for the celebration of the marriage. Immediately after mass, he said to his young and charming wife: 'Madame, we have obeyed our parents; I leave you with regret; but I cannot hide from you that for a long time I have been attached to a woman without whom I cannot live, and I will join her.' The post-chair was at the door of the church; this farewell being made, the Count gets into the carriage and returns to his Dulcinea

The Countess Kinski was therefore neither a girl, nor a woman, nor a widow, and this oddity must have surprised anyone who looked at her; for I have never seen anyone so lovely. She joined to her great beauty the most amiable spirit and an excellent heart; One day when she was giving me a sitting, I asked my daughter's housekeeper to ask something, who entered my studio with such a cheerful look, that I asked her what she was having. 'I have just received a letter from my husband,' she replied, 'telling me that I have been placed on the list of emigrants. I lose my eight hundred francs a year; but I console myself, for here I am on the list of honest people'. The Countess and I were touched with such honorable disinterestedness. A few minutes later, Madame Kinski told me that my painting dress seemed so comfortable to her that she would like to have one like it (she already knew that my daughter's housekeeper made me these blouses). I offered to lend him one. 'No,' she went on, 'I would much prefer you to split it up by Madame Charot' (that was the housekeeper's name); I will send the necessary canvas. A few days later, I handed her the dress. As soon as our sitting is over, the Countess runs to Madame Charot's room and gives her ten louis; the maid refuses; but the amiable Countess places them on the fireplace and flies like a bird very happy to have at least given this brave woman back a part of the lost annuity. "







Above, **Count Siemontkowsky Bystry,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, private collection.* Polish aristocrat. *Right page,* **Countess SemiontKowsky Bystry,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, detail, private collection (see the full painting at the end),* wife of the Count. It was with this couple, with whom the artist sympathized in Milan in 1792, that she made the trip from Milan to Vienna because she had to find another city of exile, France being then plunged into full "Terror".





Countess Franzisca Palffy, at age 21**,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, private collection. Hungarian aristocrat met in Vienna. She was from a musician family and is holding a score of Mozart.*





Count Gregory Chernisef with his mask, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Musée de l'Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.* Russian aristocrat.





Comtesse Bistri, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1792.* Austrian aristocrat.

Countess von Thoun, *Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1792.* Austrian aristocrat.



Vienna, park of Prater, *Johan Andreas Ziegler, 1783, Museum of Vienna.*







The cathedral of Vienna at the end of 18th century.

She saw this **self-portrait of A. van Dyck** *(1613, Vienna),* a painter she admired.





Vienna, park of Neuwaldegg Castle, *Johan Ziegler1792*, *Museum of Vienna.*

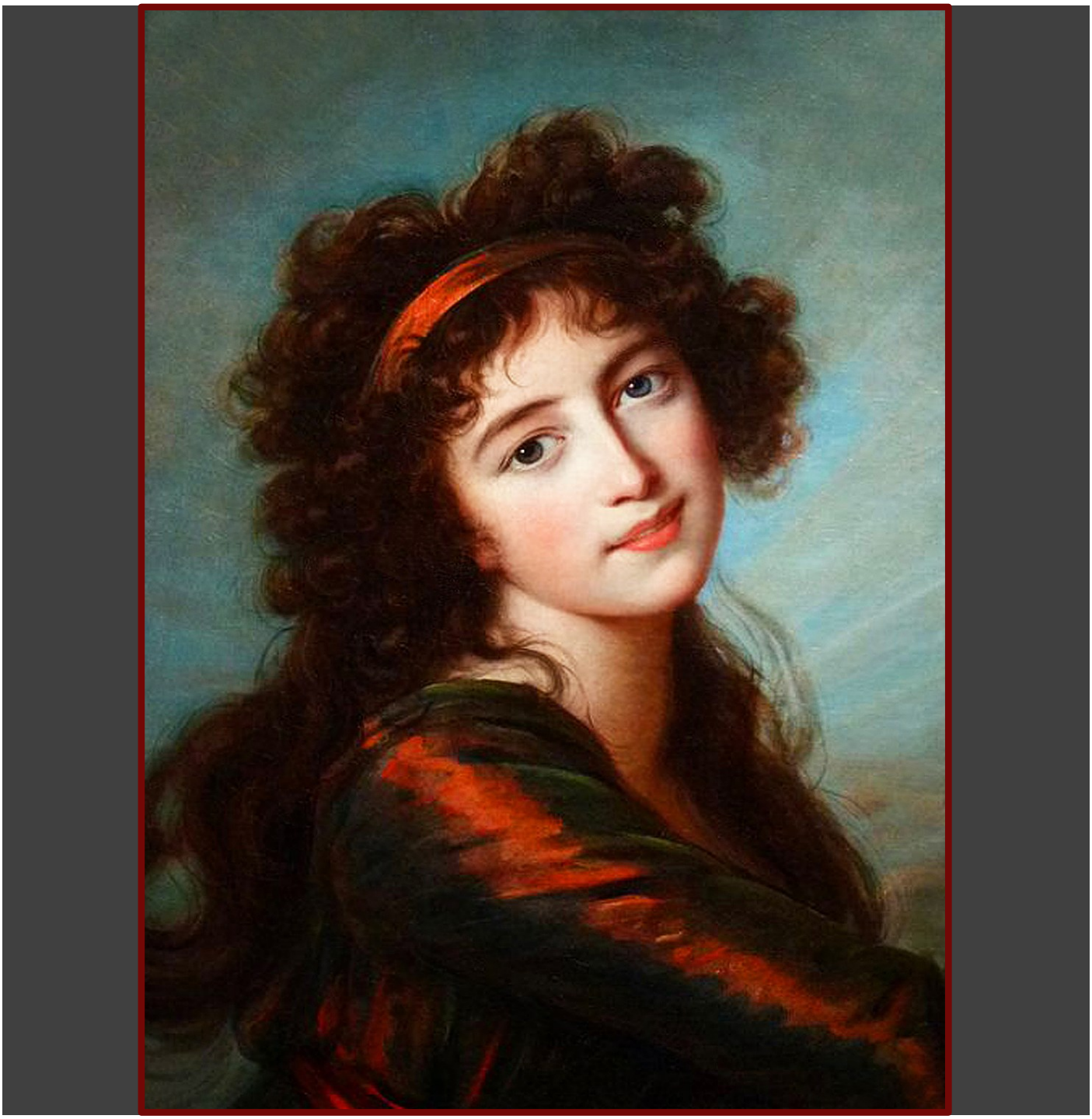


The artist arrived there in 1792. She walked a lot in the surrounding nature close to Vienna.



Princess Caroline of Liechtenstein (1768-1831), born Countess von Manderscheidt-Blankenheim, at age 25, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Museum of Liechtenstein*.

"As soon as spring came, I rented a small house in a village on the outskirts of Vienna. I brought the large portrait I was doing of Princess Lichtenstein at the time to finish it. This young Princess was very well made; her pretty face had a soft and heavenly expression, which gave me the idea to represent her as Iris. She was painted full length, soaring into the air. Her rainbow-colored scarf surrounded her, fluttering around her. It is easy to imagine that I painted it with her bare feet; but when this picture was placed in the gallery of the Prince, her husband, the heads of the family were very scandalized to see that the Princess was being shown without a shoe, and the Prince told me that he had placed below the portrait nice little pair of shoes, which, he told grandparents, had just escaped and fell to the ground. "





Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi (1746-1818), at age 47, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Toledo.* This portrait was made in exile during the portrait painter's stay in Vienna, with an agreed mountainous setting but an almost smiling, very successful expression of the model.





About Vienna, where the artist stayed for 2 ½ years, and the previous portrait:
"I worked a lot in Vienna. All in all, it would be difficult for me to express how grateful I am for the warm welcome I have received in this city. Not only did the Viennese show affection for me, but they put coquetry into placing my pictures in a way that was favorable to them. I remember, for example, that Prince Paar, to whom the large portrait I had just painted of his sister, the kind and good Countess Dubuquoi, invited me to come and see this portrait at his home. I found the picture placed in his living room, and since the woodwork was painted white, which kills the paint, he had a large green drapery put up which surrounded the whole frame and fell below (which is done on the left page). *In addition, for the evening, he had had a candelabra made with several candles, held by a guard, and arranged so that all the light was reflected only on the portrait. It is needless to say how sensitive a painter must be to this kind of gallantry. The good company of Vienna and the good company of Paris were then exactly the same in tone and in customs."*





Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun in 1794 (at age 39), in Vienna, where she remained from 1792 to 1794. It was there that everyone learned with horror of the guillotining of Louis XVI in January 1793 and that of Marie-Antoinette in October 1793. The Duchess of Polignac, in exile in Vienna, died of illness in November 1793, a month after the death of her old friend.



Bad news in 1793 !



Marie Antoinette led in a cart to the scaffold on 17 Otober 1793, by *Van den Büssche, Vizille (Isère).* On the course of the cart was the famous painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) who made a live sketch of Marie-Antoinette. The artist and David esteemed each other but were not friends. At the end of 1793, the artist learned in Vienna

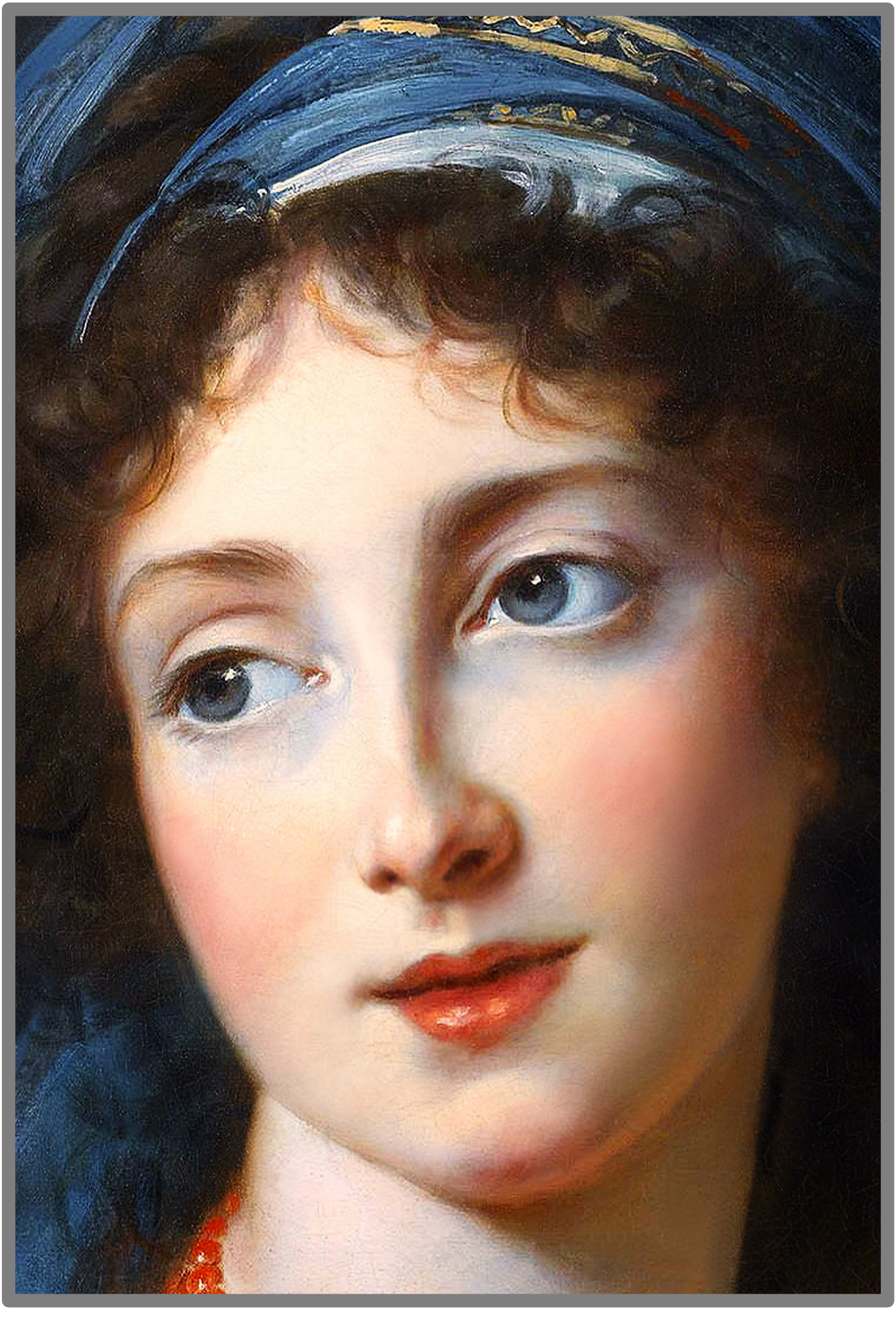
with great pain of the execution of Queen Marie-Antoinette on October 16, after that of King Louis XVI which had taken place in January. Between 1792 and 1794 ('Terror'), hundreds of thousands of people were massacred or guillotined in France, including many aristocrats, some of whom had been painted by the artist before 1789: in particular, the Princesse de Lamballe, Comtesse du Barry, Duchesse de Noailles, Madame Elisabeth (sister of the King), Madame Chalgrin *(see above)*.

Below, **the Queen's head presented to the crowd** *(anonymous)*.



Aglaé Louise Françoise Gabrielle of Polignac, **Duchess of Guiche** (1768-1803), daughter of Duchess Gabrielle of Polignac, favorite of Marie-Antoinette, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1794, private collection.* She was 26 years old here and had been in exile since 1789 with her parents in Vienna. She was then in Russia and then in the United Kingdom, where she died in 1803, at the age of 34, in a fire in Edinburgh. Sad fate!







Countess Von Schönfeld and her daughter, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Museum of Arts, Tucson, USA.* She was a Saxon aristocrat (Austrian Empire)





Jules Auguste de Polignac, 1780-1847, at age13, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793.*
Older son of Duchesse de Polignac, brother of Aglaé and Melchior *(on right).*

Melchior de Polignac (1781-1855), *pastel, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Musée du Louvre.* Second son of Duchesse de Polignac and brother of Aglaé (previous p.).





Sophia Fries-Haugwitz, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1794, Jaromerice Castle, Czech Republic.* Austrian aristocrat met in Vienna.

Princess Anna Sergonova, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793.*



Princess Pélagie Roza Potocka Sapieha, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*
1793, Castle of Montrésor, France. Russian aristocrat.





Maria Vasilyevna Kochubei (1799-1844), born Vasilchikova, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Musem Arkhangelskoïé, Moscow.* She was the wife of Victor Pavlovich Kochubei, Russian diplomat and politician.



Princess Maria Josefa Hemernegilde, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Museum of Lichtenstein, Vienna.* Austrian aristocrat.



Adam Kazimierz Csartoryski (1734-1823), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Royal House, Warsaw.* An influential Polish aristocrat and politician who served under several successive regimes and was Marshal of the Polish Diet between 1807 and 1815. *Left,* another version with a blue coat.





Pélagie Sapiezyna, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1794, Royal castle of Warsaw.*





Pelagia Sapiezyna, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Royal castle of Warsaw.*





Christiane Josepha Lichnowskaya, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, private collection.* Polish friend met in Vienna.



Dresden in 18th century, *Bernardo Bellotto "Canaletto", National Gallery, Dublin.*



The artist passed there in 1795 (on her way to Russia) and in 1801 (returning).



Madona Sixtina, *Raphaël, 1515, Museum of Dresden, Germany.*

In 1794-1795, the artist had to move again and continue her exile elsewhere.

At the beginning of 1794, the news from France was still catastrophic, Madame Élisabeth (sister of Louis XVI) was in her turn guillotined with many others during the "great Terror" of spring, and the climate in Vienne was deteriorating for the French emigrants, viewed with more and more circumspection by the Austrians at war on several fronts against the revolutionary French armies. The artist therefore had to consider moving again while waiting for better days. On the advice of some Russian residents of Vienna, including the Stroganoff couple (see below), Russia and more particularly Saint-Petersburg appeared to be interesting welcoming lands for French emigrants and a renowned painter like her, but it was necessary drive over 3000 km on bad roads. The hesitations and the preparations therefore lasted more than a year, but on April 15, 1795, the artist accompanied by her daughter, Madame Charrot (governess) and the faithful Auguste Rivière left Vienna to reach Saint Petersburg via Prague, Dresden, Berlin, Königsberg (Kaliningrad), Lithuania and Latvia. They arrived at their destination at the end of July, after more than 3 months of travel and a few stops, including the Dresden Museum, where Raphael's Sistine Madonna was already and still is *(left)*. The painter was dazzled by this famous work and here is what she said about it in her Memoirs:

"The day after my arrival, I finally visited this famous gallery in Dresden, unique in the world. Its sight does not deny its great celebrity; it is quite certain that it is the most beautiful in Europe. I have returned there many times, ever more convinced of its superiority, admiring the immense number of masterpieces it contains.

These masterpieces are too well known by a multitude of various works calculated to give an idea of them for me to enter into any detail here. I will only say that here, as everywhere, we recognize how much Raphael rises above all the other masters. I had just visited several rooms of the gallery, when I arrived in front of a painting which seized me with an admiration above all those which the art of the painter can exert. It represents the Virgin, placed on clouds, holding the infant Jesus in her arms. This figure is of a beauty, of a nobility worthy of the divine brush which traced it. The child's face, which is charming, wears an expression both naive and heavenly; the draperies are of the most correct design and of a beautiful color. To the right of the Virgin, we see a saint whose character of truth is admirable; especially his two hands are to be noticed. On the left is a young saint, her head bowed, looking at two angels placed at the bottom of the picture. Her face is full of beauty, candor and modesty. The two little angels are leaning on their hands, their eyes raised to the figures above them, and their heads have an ingenuity and finesse which it is impossible to convey in words.

After adoring this masterpiece for a very long time, I returned to leave the gallery through the same rooms I had just passed through. The best paintings of the greatest masters had lost, for me, something of their perfection; for I carried away the image of this admirable composition and of this divine figure of the Virgin! Nothing in the arts can compare to noble simplicity, all the figures I saw again seemed to wince a little."



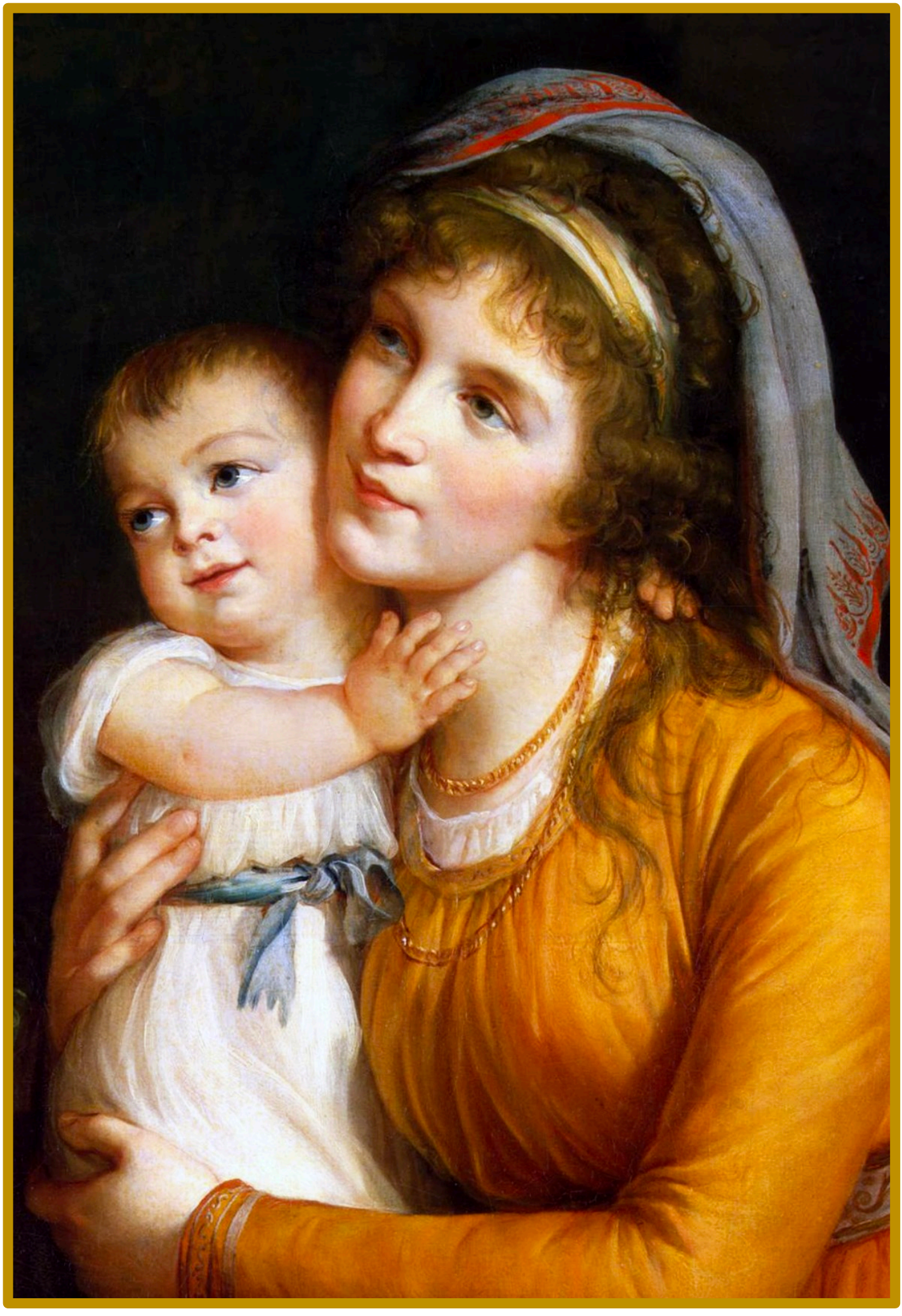
Baron Grigory Stroganof, husband of Baroness Stroganova *(next pages), Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, Museum of Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.* The artist met in Vienna this Russian couple and followed their advice to continue her exile in Russia.

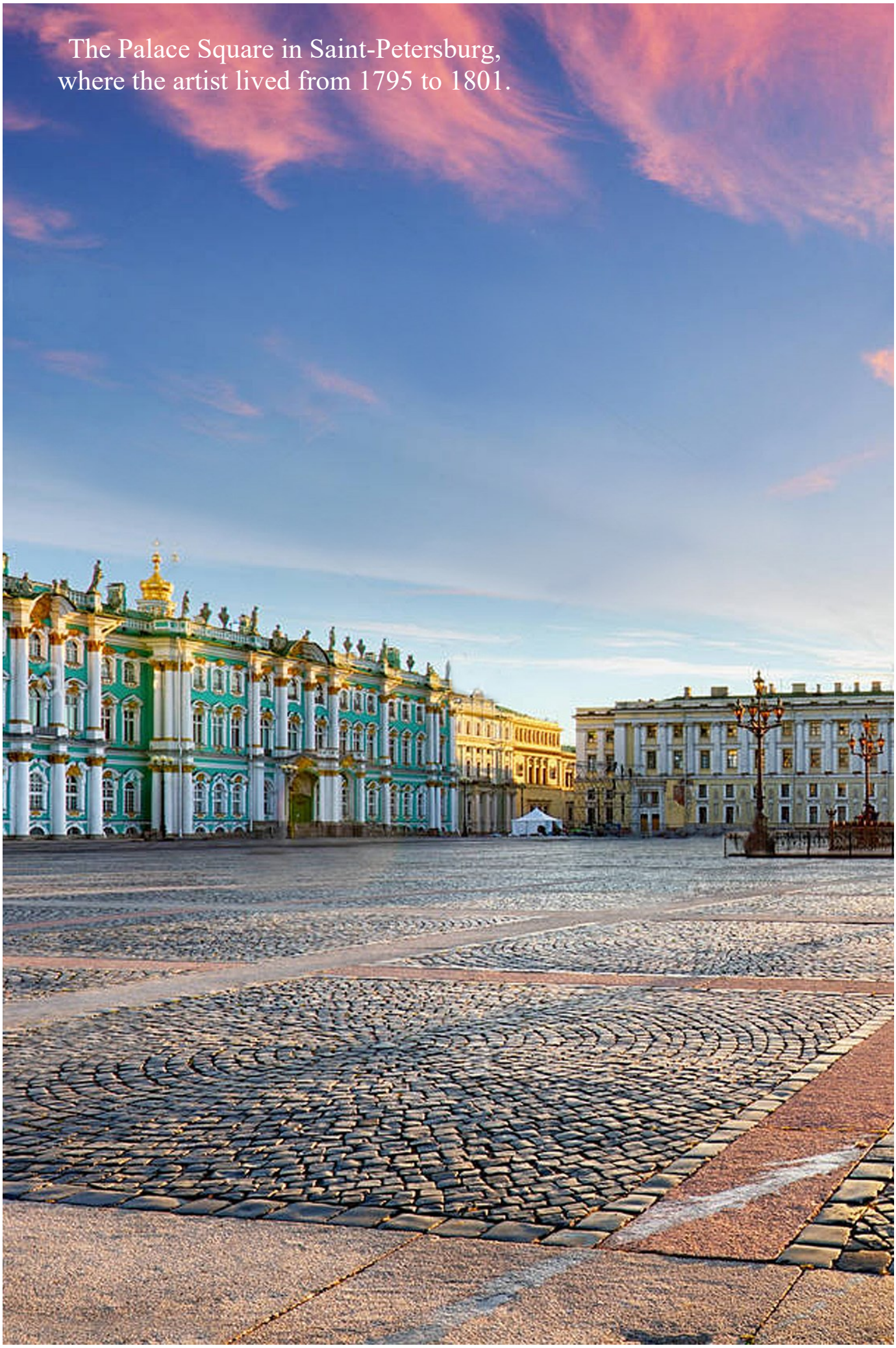


Russia, from 1795 to 1801

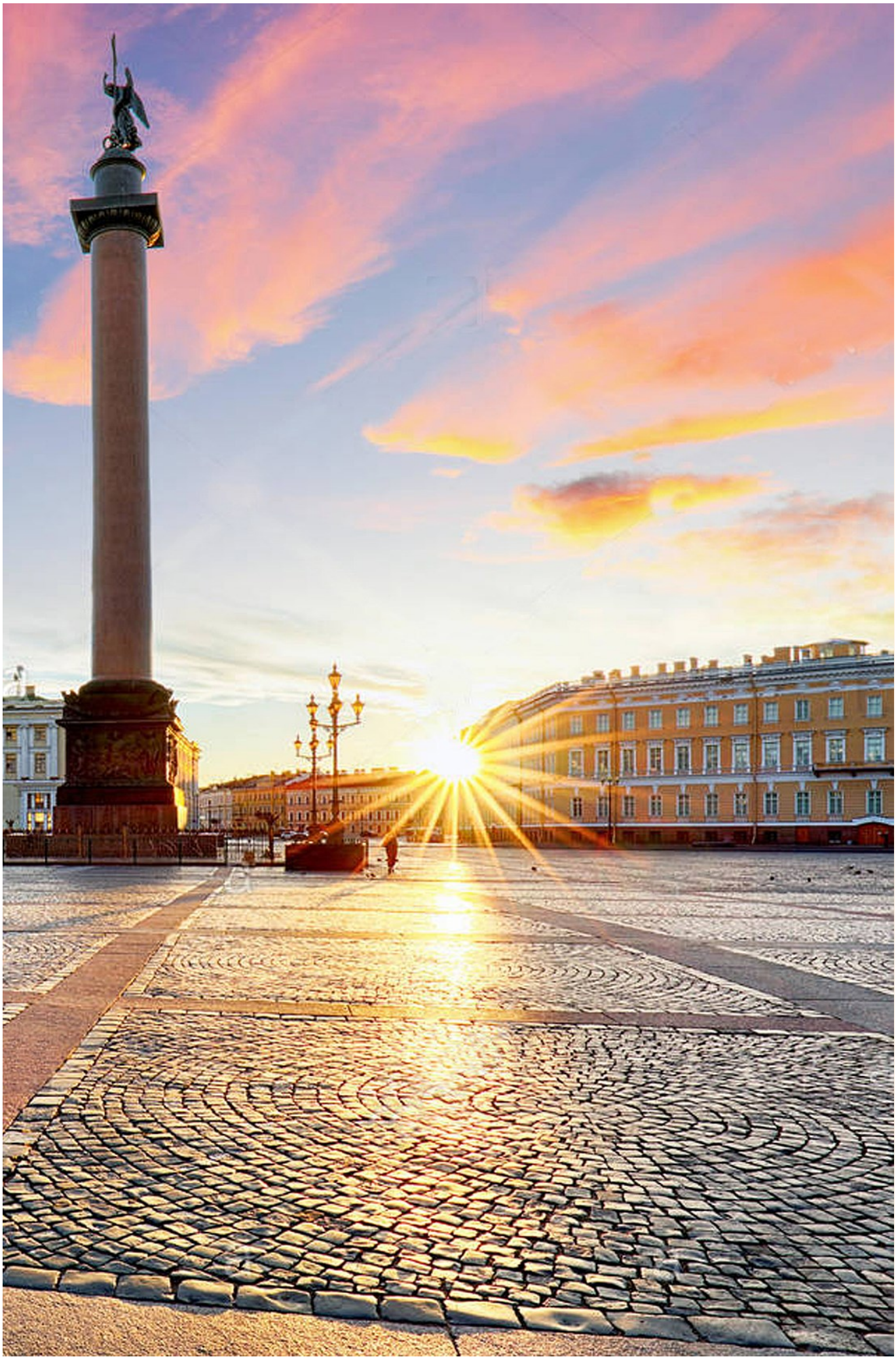


Baroness Stroganova (born Princess Troubetskoï, 1765-1824) and her son Serge (1794-1882), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg*





The Palace Square in Saint-Petersburg,
where the artist lived from 1795 to 1801.





The Saint-Mikael Palace, residency of the Tsars of Russia and



where the artist was received many times in 6 years.



Grand Duchesses **Alexandra** (1783-1801, aged 13) **and Elena** (1784-1803, aged 12) **Pavolvna of Russia**, daughters of Tsar Paul I and sisters of future Tsar Alexandre I.
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796, Museum of Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.

Alexandra married a Hungarian prince but died in childbirth at 17. **Elena** married a Prussian prince and died suddenly from an infection at the age of 18. Very close to each other in their childhoods, these two charming princesses married the same week (1799) and both died at a young age of illnesses two years apart. Sad fates too!

Anecdotes about this painting:

"As soon as His Majesty (Paul I) *returned from Czarkozelo, Count Strogonoff came to order from me the portraits of the two Grand Duchesses Alexandra and Elena. These princesses could be thirteen or fourteen years old, and their faces were heavenly, although with quite different expressions. Their complexion, above all, was so delicate that one might have thought that they lived on ambrosia. The eldest, Alexandra, had Greek beauty, she looked a lot like Alexander; but the face of the youngest, Elena, had infinitely more finesse. I had grouped them together, holding and looking at the portrait of the Empress* (Catherine II, their grandmother); *the costume was a bit Greek, but very modest. I was therefore quite surprised when Zouboff, the favorite* (of Catherine II), *told me that Her Majesty was scandalized at the way in which I had dressed up the two Grand Duchesses in my painting. I believed so much in this bad talk, that I hastened to replace my tunics by the dresses which the princesses wore, and to cover the arms with sad amadis [Long sleeves were then called.].*

The truth is the Empress hadn't said anything; for she was kind enough to assure me of it the first time I saw her. I had nevertheless spoiled the whole of my picture, not to mention that the pretty arms that I had done my best, were no longer visible. I remember that Paul, now emperor, reproached me for having changed the costume I had first given to his two daughters. I then told him how the thing had happened, whereupon he shrugged his shoulders, saying: 'It is a trick that you have been played.'

Besides, it was not the only one, for Zouboff did not love me. His malice towards me was again proved to me on another occasion. Here's how. People came to my house to see the portraits of the Grand Duchesses and my other works. As I did not want to waste all my mornings, I had fixed Sunday morning to open my workshop, as I have always done in the various countries where I have lived. I have already said that I was lodged in front of the palace, so that the cars of all the people who had just paid their Court to the Empress turned and came to stop immediately at my door.

Zouboff, who apparently could not conceive of the crowd going to a painter to see pictures there, said one day to Her Majesty: 'See, Madame, we are also going to pay Court to Madame Lebrun; these are surely appointments that

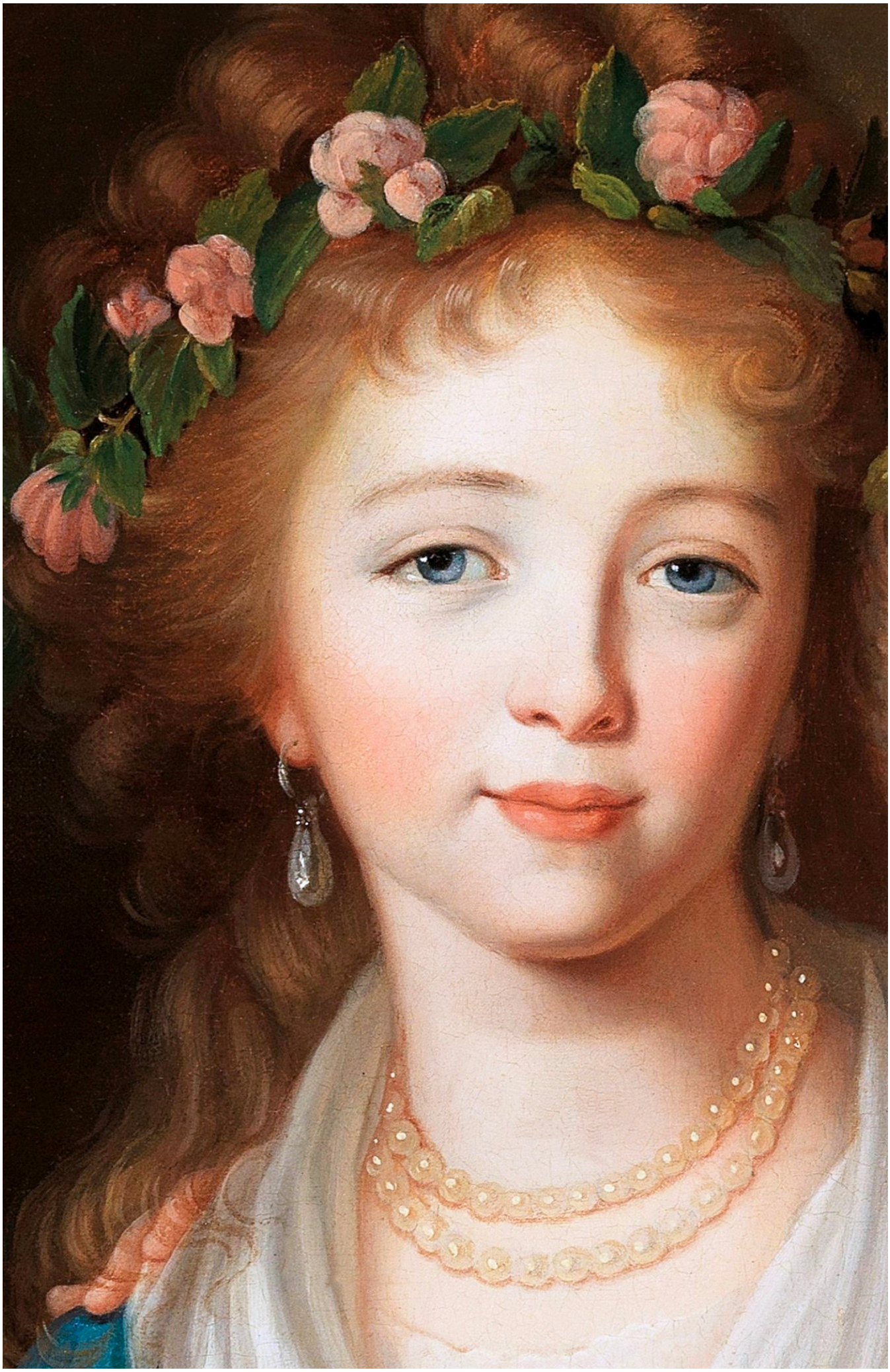
we make at her place'. Fortunately for me, littleness slipped over the lofty spirit to which she was addressing, and the Empress paid no more attention to what was improper or treacherous in these words of her favorite; but the Prince of Nassau, who heard them, came to report them to me immediately, and he was outraged."

As soon as I had finished the portraits of the young Grand Duchesses, the Empress commissioned me to paint that of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, recently married to Alexander. I have already said what a ravishing person this princess was; I would have liked not to represent under a vulgar costume such a celestial figure, I even always wanted to make a historical picture of her and of Alexander, so noble and regular were the features of both. However, what had just happened to me for the portraits of the Grand Duchesses did not allow me to indulge my inspiration, I painted her full length, in full court costume, arranging flowers near a basket which was filled (see further). I went to her house for the sessions, and I was shown into her divan, 25 draped in light blue velvet, trimmed with large silver strainers. The back of this room was all glass of a prodigious size, in front of which were the windows, also made of glass, so that they repeated in a truly magical way the view of the Neva covered with vessels.

The Grand Duchess was not long in appearing, dressed in a white tunic, as I had already seen her for the first time; it was still Psyche, and her approach, so gentle, so gracious, joined to this charming face, made her doubly dear. When I had finished her large portrait, she had me do another one for her mother, in which I painted her with a violet, transparent shawl, leaning on a cushion. I can say that the more sessions Grand Duchess Elisabeth gave me, the better and more endearing I found her. One morning, while she was posing, I felt dizzy, and sparkles such that my eyes could no longer fix anything. She was alarmed, and ran quickly herself to fetch water, rubbed my eyes, took care of me with unimaginable kindness, and as soon as I got home, they came to hear from her about me.

Staying 6 years in Russia, from 1795 to 1801, the artist was able to meet closely successively 3 tsars "from all the Russias", Catherine II "The Great", who was small in size, then Paul I, half mad and of whom she lived the vicissitudes of the assassination, and finally Alexandre I, the future great adversary of Napoleon I. All three greatly appreciated the artist and invited her many times to their classes. This enabled her to make numerous portraits of Russian and foreign aristocrats.









Above, **Alexander** (at age 18), *anonymous,* the eldest son of Paul I and future Tsar Alexandre I. *Right,* **Tsar Paul I,** who reigned 1796 to 1801, *by Pavel Borovokovsky.*



Princess Alexandra Golytzina (1774-1842), at age 20, Russian aristocrat, and her son Piotr, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1794, Puschkin Museum, Moscow.*

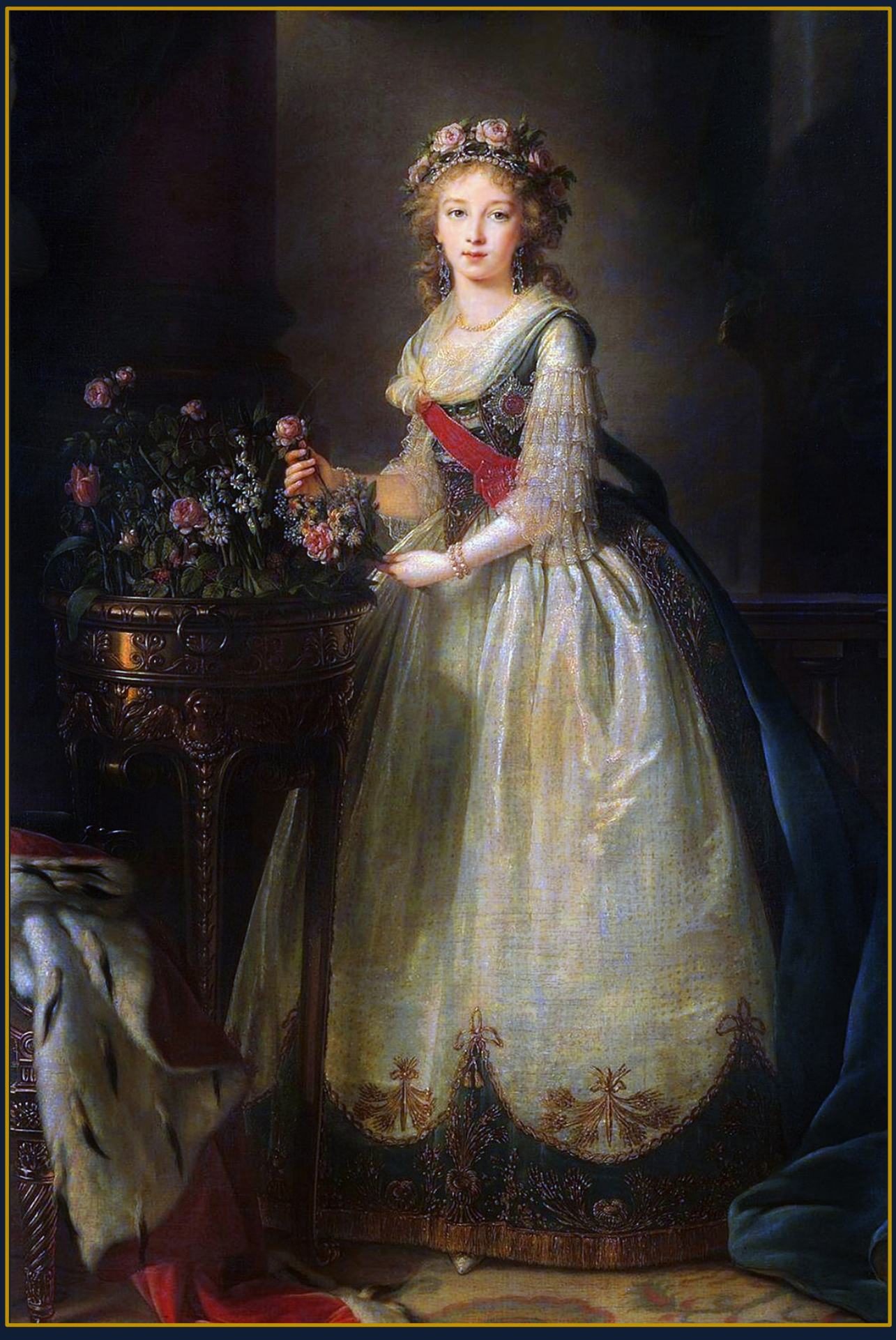








Princess Louise Augusta of Bade, become **Grand Duchess Elizaveta Alexeïevna** (1779-1826), after her orthodox wedding in 1793 with Alexander of Russia, the eldest son of the Tsar Paul I, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Castle of Wolfsgarten, Hesse, Germany.* She became Empress of Russia when her husband was crowned in 1801 under the name of Alexander I. They only had 2 daughters who died in infancy and both spouses were quite fickle. She only survived a year from her husband, who died in 1825, after going through a very mystical era from 1815. Alexander's brother, Nicolas, succeeded him. The Empress was of great beauty, well captured by the artist upon her arrival in 1795 in Saint-Petersburg.





Grand Duchess Elizaveta Alexeevna, wife of future Tsar Alexandre I and future Empress, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.*

Neva (river on which Saint-Petersburg is built), left bank









Neva, right bank

Count Ivan Ivanovitch Shouvaloff, 1727-1797, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh*. He was a Russian minister and was a great patron and art collector. He was *"very well educated"* and had a *"very pleasant conversation"* according to the painter, who mentioned him in her Memoirs.





Comtesse Sofia Stroganov, **née Princesse Galitzine** (1775-1843),
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Pushkine Museum, Moscou.



Grand Duchess Anna Feredovna (1781-1860), here at 14, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Pushkin Museum, Moscow.* Her family was of great importance from the point of view of the European elite. Born Princess Juliane von Saxe-Coburg-Saafeld, in 1796 she married Grand Duke Constantin Pavolvich of Russia, brother of Tsar Alexander I of Russia. This husband, commander of the Russian Imperial Guard, did not have "good manners" and was very unfaithful. The marriage was dissolved in 1820. Furthermore, her younger brother became Leopold I, first King of the Belgians, and her younger sister was the grandmother of Queen Victoria of Great Britain.



Countess Ekaterina Vassilievna Skavronskaia, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1795, Musée du Louvre.* Already painted twice in Naples in 1790, an old acquaintance!







Princess Ekaterina Federovna Dolgorouky, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796, Museum Palace, Alupka, Crimée.* The artist befriended her in Saint-Petersburg.

Nikolaevna Menshikova, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796, National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan.* Russian aristocrate.





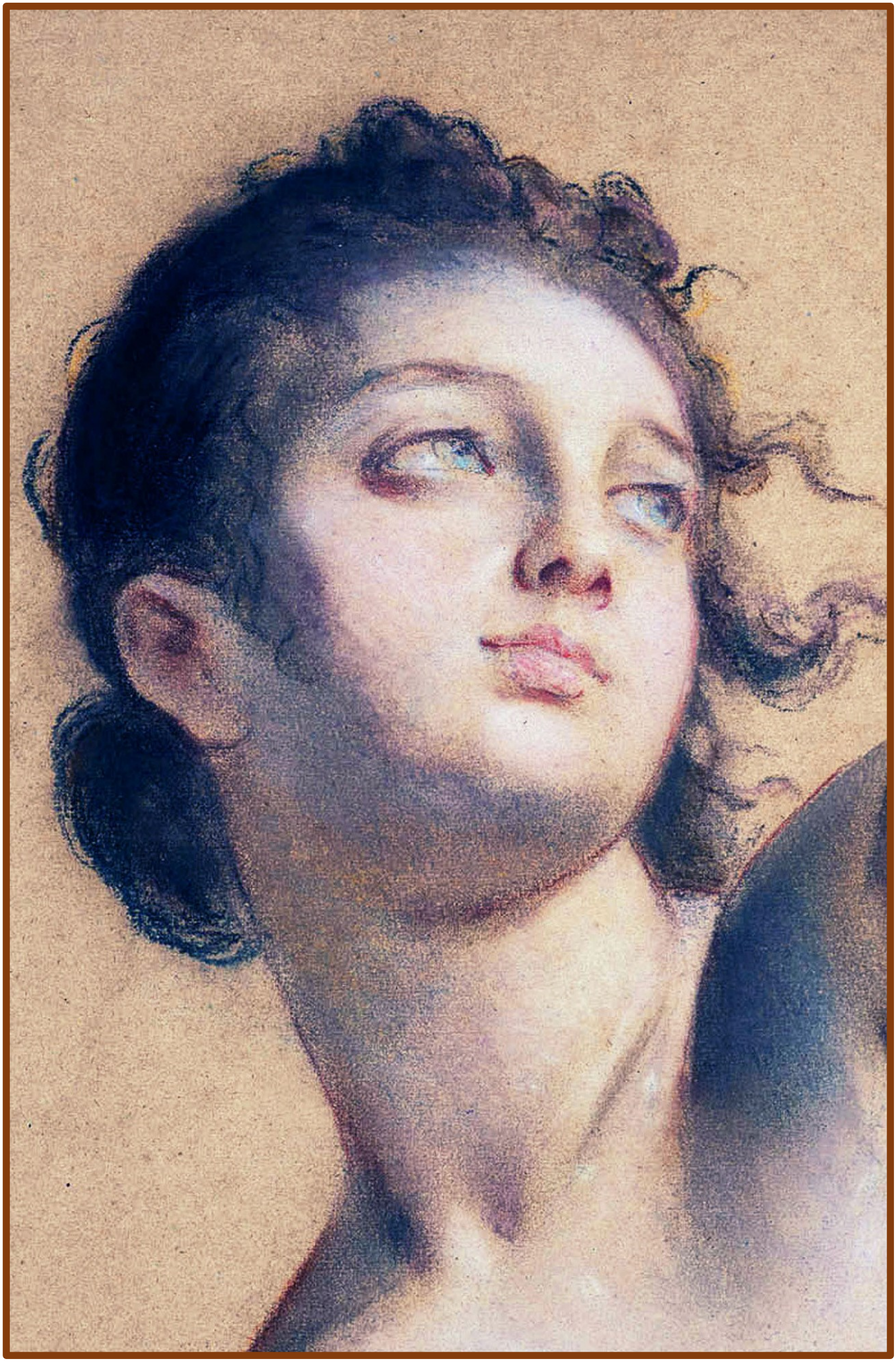
Above, **Countess Ecaterina Vladimirovna Apraxine,** born Princess Galitzine, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796, private collection. Right page,* **Count Moritz von Fries**, 1777-1826, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796, Musée du Louvre.* Austrian financial.

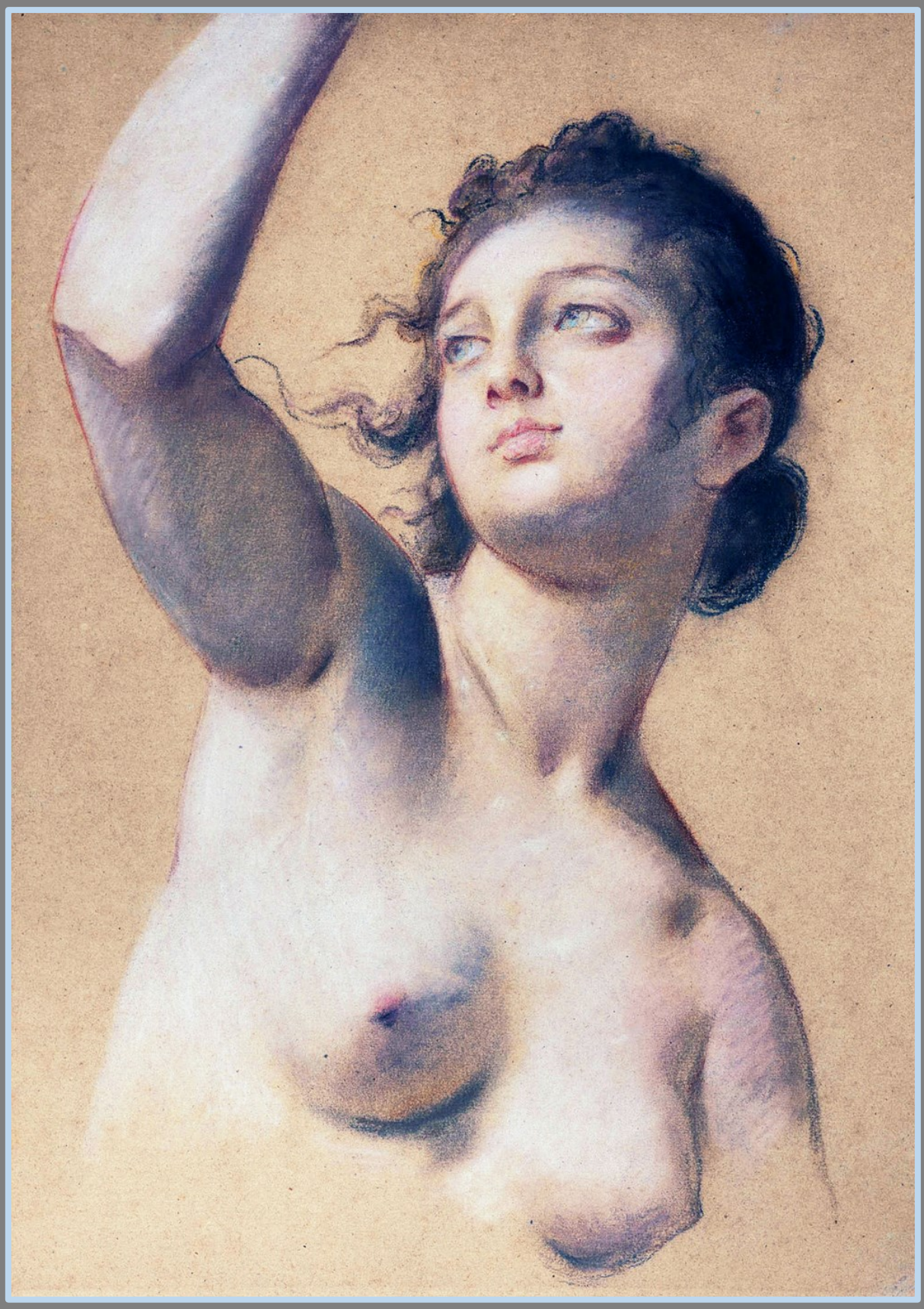




Empress Catherine II of Russia, « the great Catherine », mother of Paul I and grandmother of Alexandre I, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796.* She wanted to be painted by the artist but she actually only had time to pose once because she died suddenly a few days later. This engraving *(above)* and this painting *(right page, refreshed)* were therefore made largely from memory.







Half-length nude woman, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1796.*

Julie Lebrun, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1795-1797, private collection.*

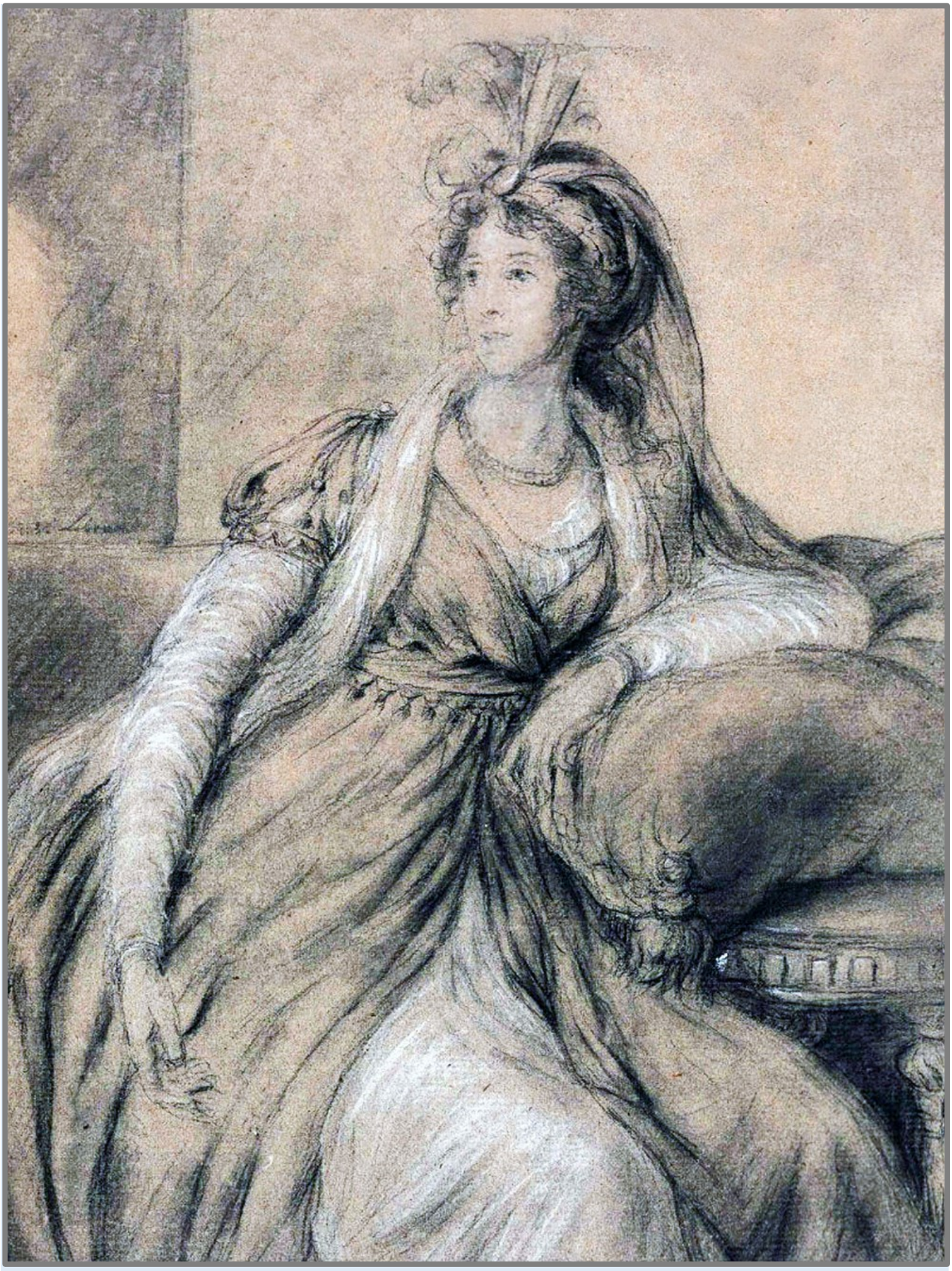




Anna Tolstoy, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1796, private collection.* Russian aristocrat.







Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, study made for the painting of the right page.*



Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin, Royal Princess of Georgia (1763-1842), at age 34, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Museum of fine Arts, Boston.*



Ekaterina Kutuzova (1754-1824), wife of Marshal Koutouzov, at age 43, met during the exile in Russia, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Puschkin Museum, Moscow*. Many Russian celebrities were painted by the artist during this time.





Stanislas Auguste Poniatowski, previous King of Poland (1732-1798), at age 65, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Versailles.* He was the uncle of Prince Josef Poniatowski, appointed Marshal of France in 1813.





Stanislas Poniatowski, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, private collection.*

About Stanislas Poniatowski that the artist met many times in Saint-Petersburg:

His kindness was truly second to none. I remember having received proof of this myself that makes me a little ashamed when I think about it. It happens to me, when I am painting, to see in the world only my model, which has more than once made me quite rude to those who come to disturb me when I work. One morning when I was busy finishing a portrait, the King of Poland came to see me. Having heard the sound of several horses at my door, I suspected that it was he who was paying me a visit; but I was so absorbed in my work that I got into a temper, and to such an extent that the moment he opened my door, I shouted to him: "I'm not there." The king, without saying anything, put on his cloak and left.

When I had left my palette, and remembered in cold blood what I had just done, I reproached myself so strongly that that very evening I went to the King of Poland to give him my apologies, and to seek my forgiveness. "How you received me this morning!" he said to me as soon as he saw me. Then he added immediately: "I understand perfectly well that when one disturbs a busy artist, one causes her impatience; so believe that I do not hold it against you at all. " And he forced me to stay for supper, where my wrongs were no longer mentioned.

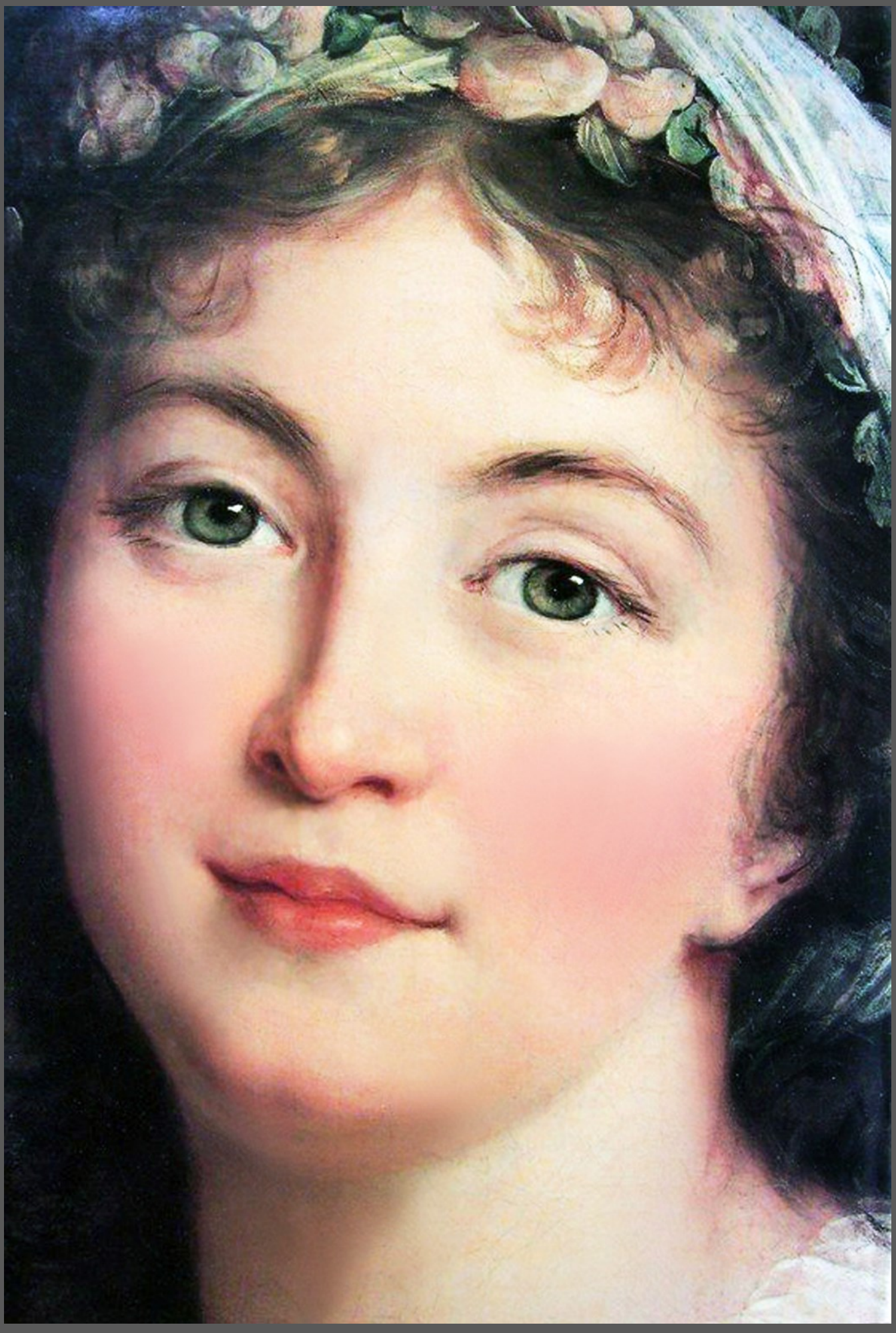
I rarely missed the King of Poland's little suppers. Lord Whitworth, British Ambassador to Russia, and the Marquis de Rivière were also very loyal to it. We all three preferred these intimate gatherings to large crowds; for, after supper, a charming chat was constantly established, which the king above all knew how to animate with a host of interesting anecdotes. One evening, when I had attended at the usual invitation, I was struck by the singular change that I observed in the eyes of our dear prince; especially his left eye seemed so dull that I was frightened.

As I went out, I said on the stairs to Lord Whitworth and the Marquis de Rivière, who was giving me his arm, "Do you know that the king worries me a lot?" "Why is that? I was told, "he appeared to be marvelous; he has just chatted as usual. " `` I have the misfortune of being a good physiognomist, " I continued, `` I noticed an extraordinary confusion in his eyes. The king will die soon."

Alas! I had guessed too well; for the next day he was struck with a stroke, and a few days later he was buried in the citadel near Catherine. I could not learn of this death without experiencing a very real sorrow, shared by all those who had known the King of Poland.

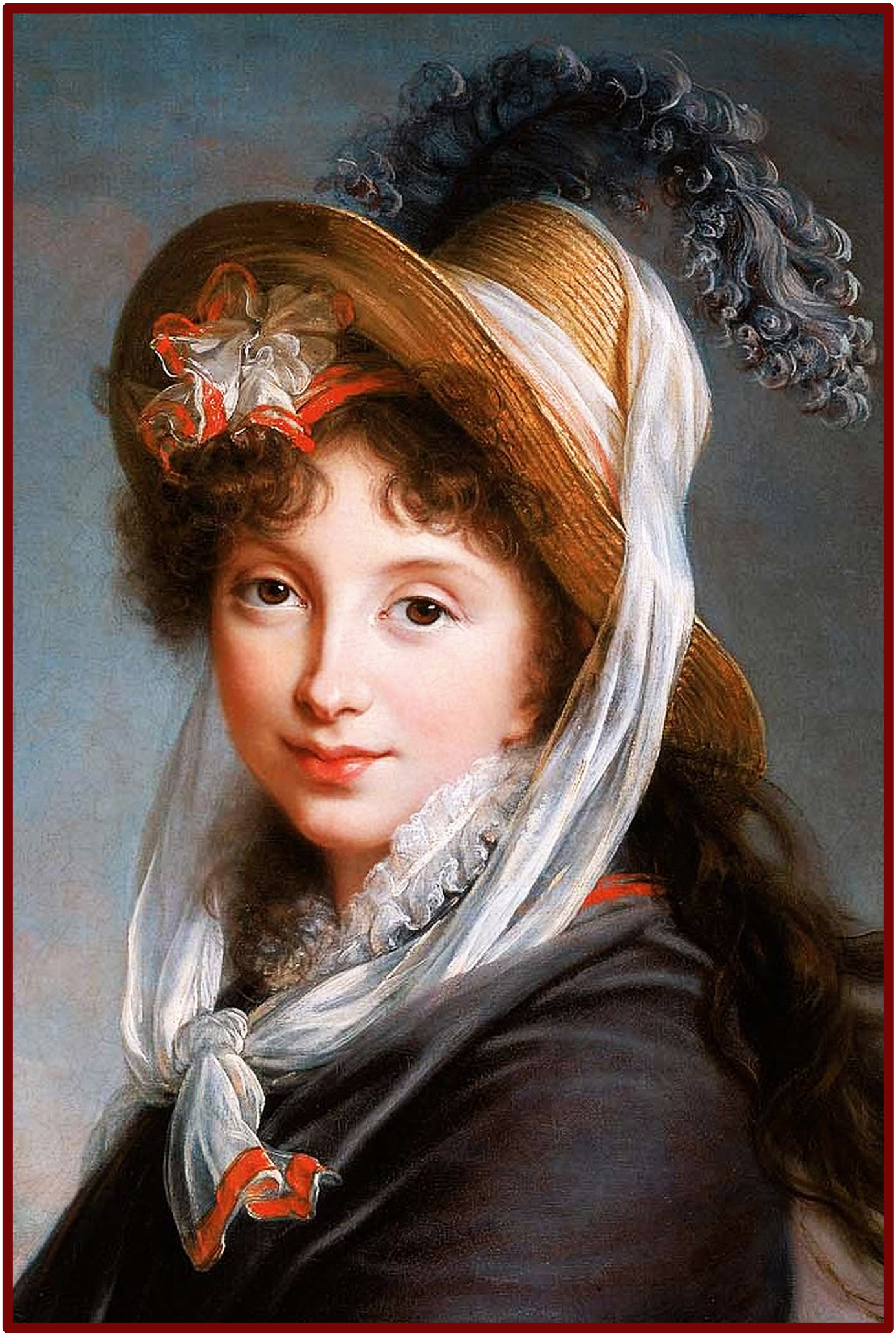


Princess Tatiana Vassilievna Youssoupov (1769-1841), Mrs Potemkine in her first marriage, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Tokyo Fuji Art Museum.*





« Young woman » (Russian aristocrat), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Museum of fine Arts, Baltimore.* Very expressive face.





Elisabeth Isabella Mniszech (1787–1830), à 10 ans, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Ljubljana Museum.*



Ekaterina Sergeevna Samoylova Trubetskaya with her children,
ÉlisabethVigée-Lebrun, 1797, Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg.





Maria Razumovskaya, 1772-1865, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, private collection.* Russian aristocrat met in Saint-Petersburg.

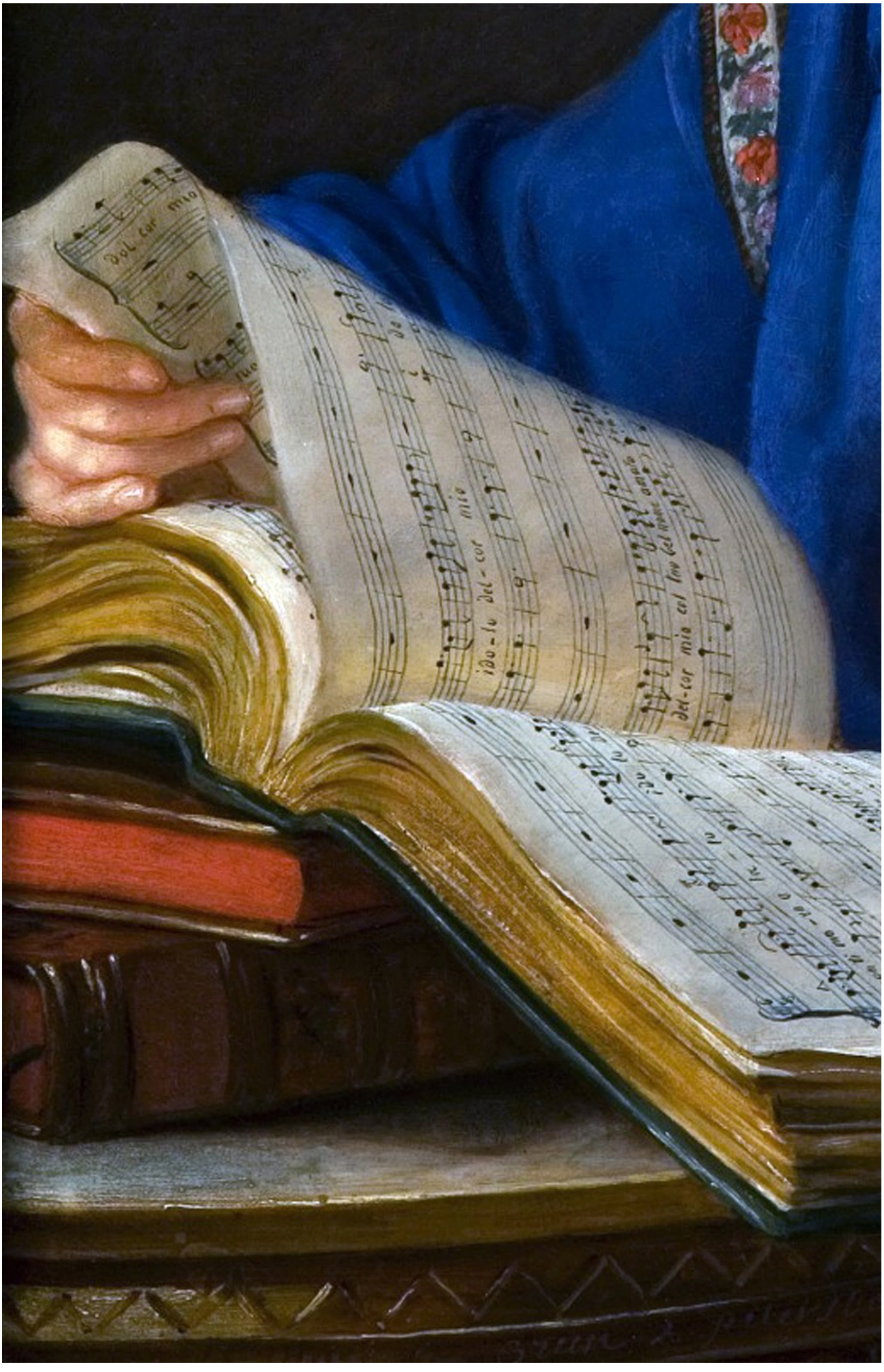






Princess Nathalie Kourakine, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, USA.* The artist sympathized a lot with this Russian aristocrat met during her stay in Saint-Petersburg, with whom she remained in correspondence after her return to France and who pushed her to write her memoirs in 1830. This Russian was therefore the recipient of the long "letters" which form Volume I of the artist's Memoirs *(see end).* She concluded this Volume I, where she had just arrived in exile in Italy, thus: *"In the absence of a homeland, I was going to live in places where the arts flourished, where urbanity reigned; I was going to visit Rome, Naples, Berlin, Vienna, Petersburg, and above all, what I did not know then, dear friend, above all, I was going to find you, know you and love you."... "Nathalie Kourakine died in Russia of cholera shortly after I finished writing Volume I, so the other 2 volumes were written as chapters and no longer as letters ending in personal words".*





Details





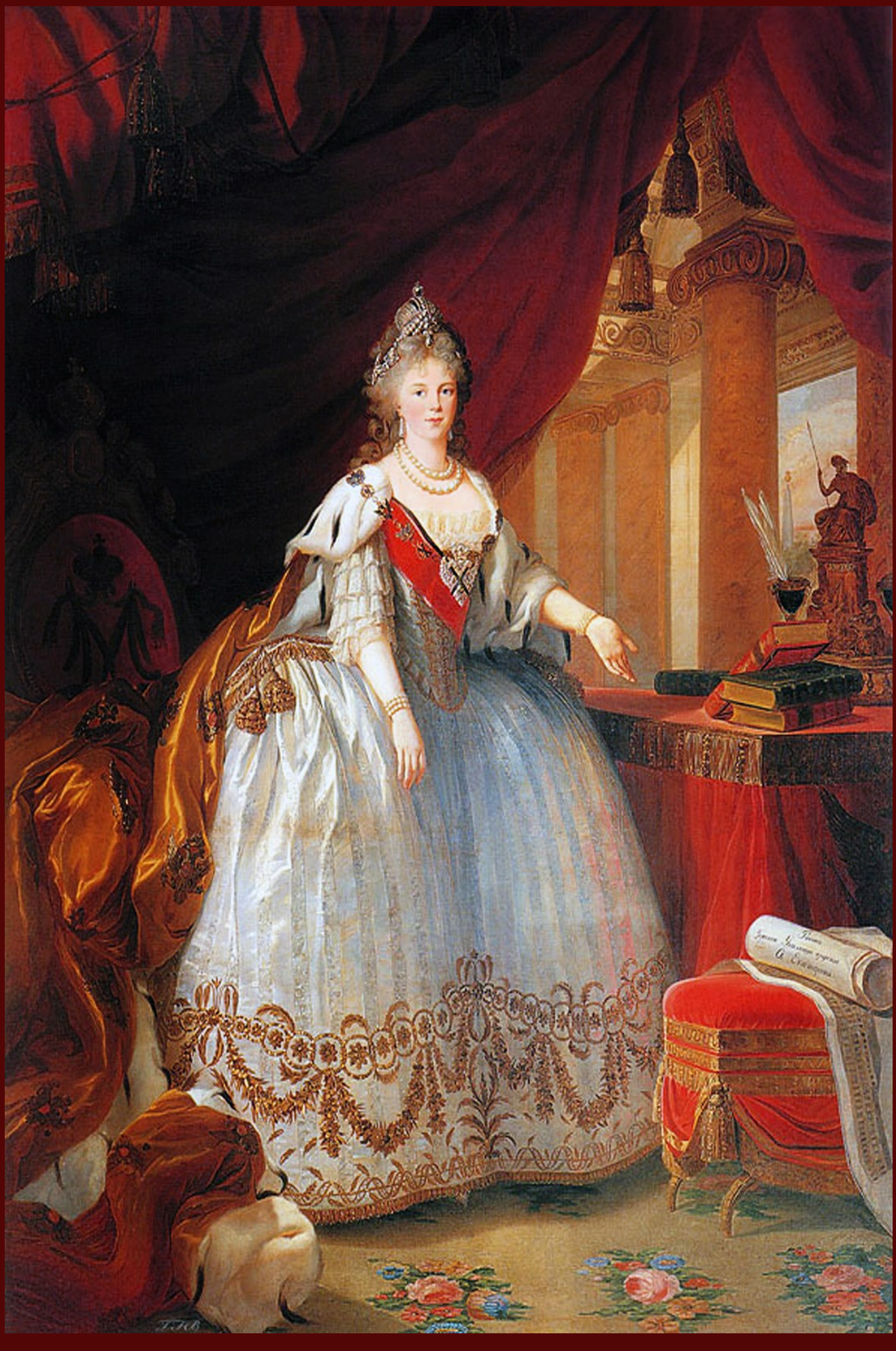
Ecaterina Michailovna Potemkine, later Countess Ribeaupierre, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, private collection.* Russian noble. This portrait, in poor condition, has been "refreshed" by the author, like a number of others in this document. Many paintings have indeed been poorly preserved and have not aged well. Many more have disappeared, because they were destroyed during the French (1789) and Russian (1917) revolutions or during various wars. Some have sometimes been simply renamed from the original noble names and dispossessed of the artist's signature, too "compromised" for revolutionaries, and thus have become anonymous and "sleep" with owners who ignore their worth. In fact, most of the time the emigres or various exiles were unable to take the paintings with them, due to lack of space during their flight. Some paintings are sometimes still found and authenticated today.

Countess Alexandra Andreevna Dietrichstein (1775-1844), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, private collection.* Born Shouvalova von Dietrichstein in Saint-Petersburg, died in Vienna. It can be seen that the model did not have a very remarkable physique. It was a commission that the painter honored, emphasizing, as usual, the liveliness of expression. Overall, the painter portrayed mostly very pretty women belonging to the French and European aristocracy or elite and there were only a few exceptions.





Vice-Chancellor Prince Alexander Kurakin, 1752-1818, Russian state man and diplomat, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797, Museum of Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.* He was ambassador in France during the reign of Tsar Alexander I. Wealthy, he was a good friend of the artist and followed her to Moscow (700 km of muddy roads!) to host her in one of his palaces. *Right,* Princess Sophie Dorothée of Wurtemberg-Montbéliard, 1759-1828, become **Maria Federovna, Consort Empress of Russia** by marrying Tsar Paul I, who reigned from 1796 to 1801 (assassinated). Mother of Alexander I. *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1798, Petergof, Russia.*





A woman, in Sapho, *attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1790s*

Julie Lebrun playing the guitar, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1797.*



Princess Belozersky, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1798, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington.*





Natalia Zakharovna Kolycheva, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1799, collection privée.* Aristocrate russe.





Princess Isabella Lubomirska, née Czartoryska, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Łańcut Castle, Pologne.* Polish aristocrat.

Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *1800,* at age 45, *Museum of Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg,* at the end of her exile in Russia. This painting was made so that an official trace of the artist, who had just been admitted to the Russian Academy of Arts, remains in Russia. She was very well received in Russia, including by Tsar Paul I, whom she saw crowned in 1796 after the death of Catherine II. He was an autocrat, hard on his people but welcoming foreigners, especially French emigrants, and admiring General Bonaparte. The artist has been received many times at the imperial Court by Catherine II, Paul I and Alexander I.







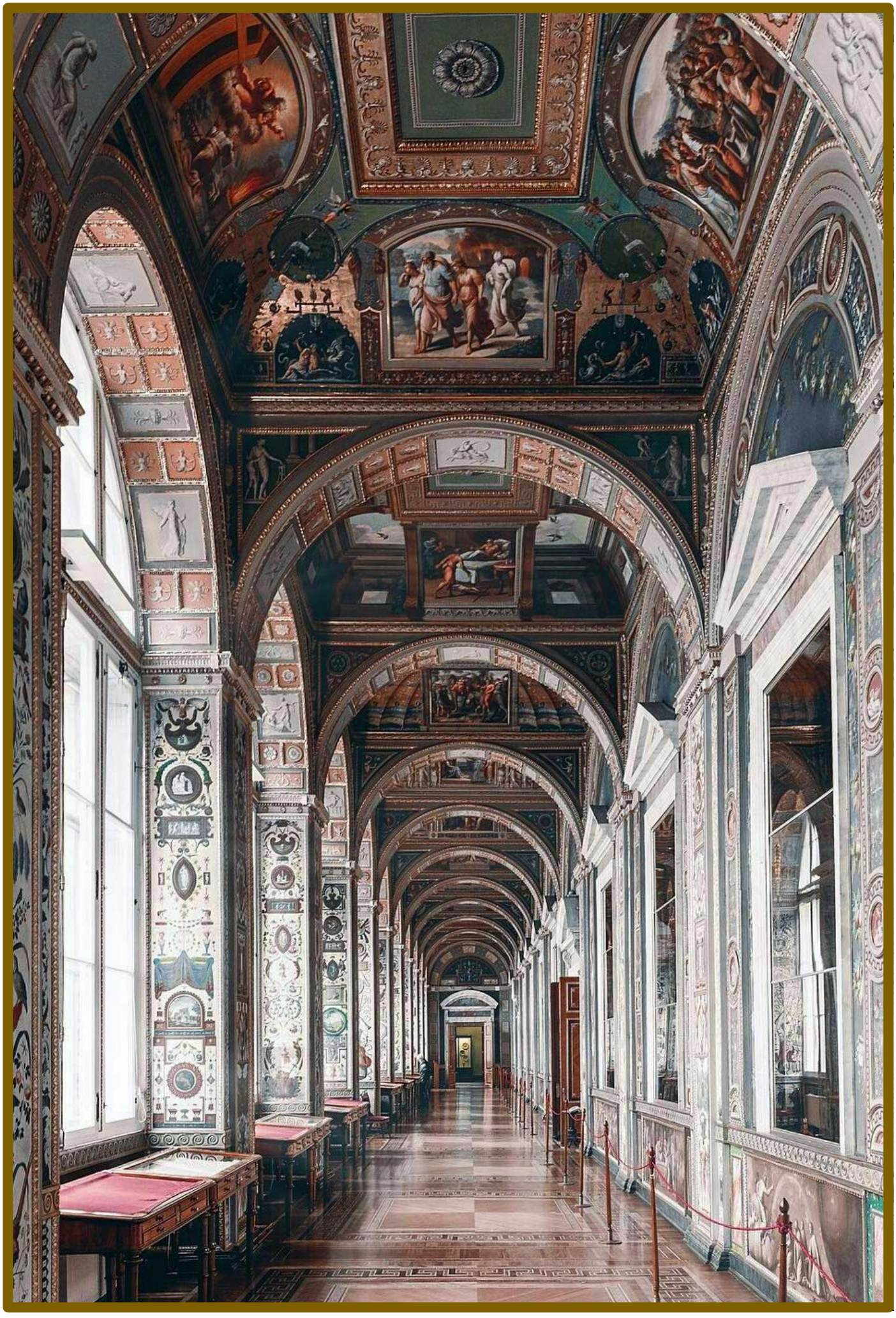
Museum of Hermitage



Saint-Petersburg



The Museum of Hermitage in Saint-Petersburg (founded in 1767) is, by far, the museum with the most paintings by Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun : several dozens, especially from her Russian period. She saw the first collections of this museum.





Moscow, circa 1800, where the



artist stayed for a few months (end of 1800).



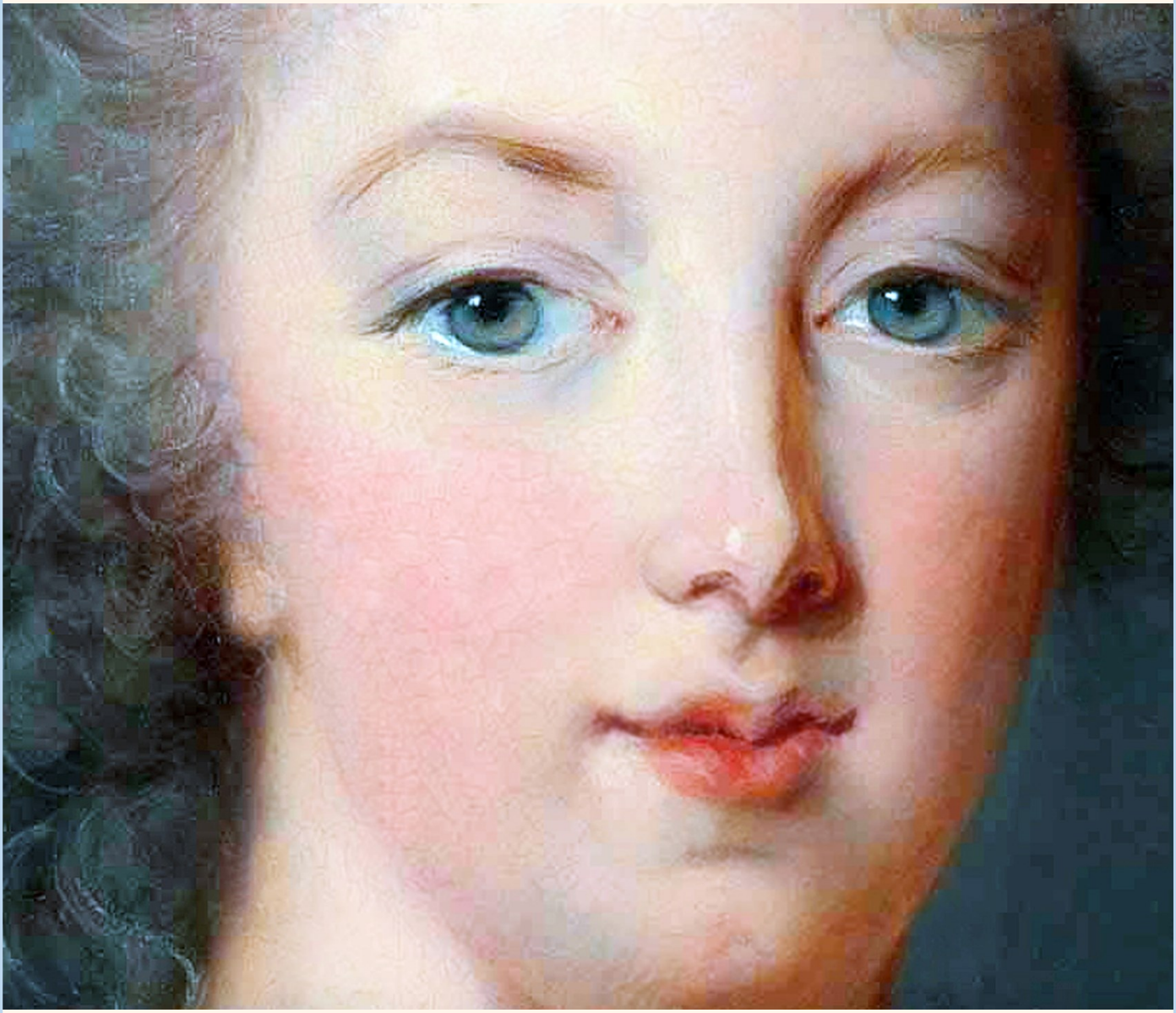
Anna Bibikova, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, private collection.*

Elizaveta Alexeevna, wife of Tsar Alexandre I, Empress of Russia,
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Museum of Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.



Posthumous portrait of Marie-Antoinette, made in Saint-Petersburg, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800*. Marie-Antoinette was more than a privileged model for the artist, she was a friend whom she painted dozens of times between 1778 and 1788 and met hundreds of times. The announcement of her arrest, of her imprisonment with her family and of her execution 6 months later were very painfully felt by the painter then in exile in Italy and Austria. Twelve years after their last meeting, she still remembered the features of her face enough to paint it from memory at the end of her stay in Russia. The eyes of the two women have crossed paths for a long time in 11 years of frequent meetings and poses.









Left, **Boris Yusupov** (1794-1849), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1800, Museum of Tchernigov, Ukraine. Above,* **Self-portrait** (presumed), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, vers 1800, Musée Pushkin, Moscou.*

Princess Eudocia Ivanovna Galitzine in Flora, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1799, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City.* Russian aristocrat.







Julie Le Brun (1780-1819), the artist's only daughter, at age 20, in a classical composition, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Fine Arts, Saint-Petersburg, USA.* This portrait, made in Saint- Petersburg, marks one of the last moments of bond between the mother and the daughter, who in 1800 married a modest French secretary in Saint-Petersburg, against her mother's advice. They then fell out almost definitively. Julie was not very accommodating as an adult. The artist returned to France in 1802 and hardly ever saw her daughter again, who returned in France in 1804 after separating from her husband. She died of pneumonia in 1819 (age 39), after trying unsuccessfully at painting and having a dissolute life in Paris.





Self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun in Saint-Petersburg, 1800.

Princess Nathalie Kourakine, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800,* her great friend.





Countess Varvara Nikolayevna Golitsyna, Countess Golovina (1766-1821), at age 34, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham.* This painting was made in Moscow, when the artist, who spent 5 years in Saint Petersburg, was returning to France. The model had been a maid of honor to Tsarina Catherine II and was very fond of the wife of the future Tsar Alexander I. The artist noted that she was a very cheerful person, which is evident in her eyes.





Prince Ivan Ivanovitch Baryatinsky, 1772-1825, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800,* painted twice in 1800 *(see right page)* and a third time in 1803.

Prince Ivan Ivanoviotch Bariatinsky, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. "I asked the Prince not to put any powder on and he agreed".*



Madame Bilibin, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg*

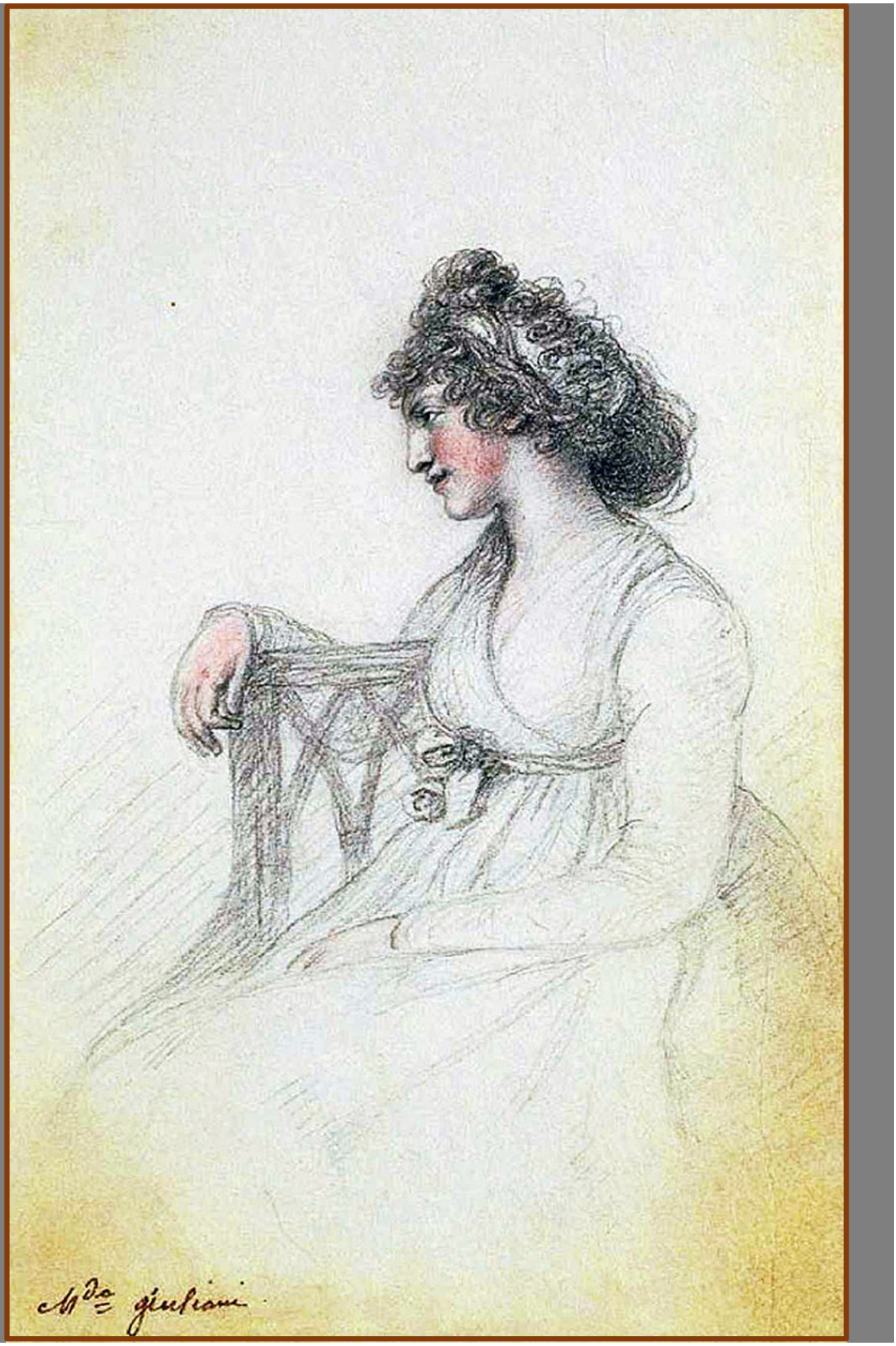




Mme Osten, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Washington.*



Above, **Woman,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1800, Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg. Right,* **Mme Guliani**, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1800.*


Mde giuliani

Below, **self-portrait with a turban,** *pastel attributed to Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, private collection. Right page,* **autoportrait**, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1801 (at age 46), Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, « refreshed » by the author*, since the original is not in good state. Initially left in Russia to make a medal. Last self-portrait of the painter in exile.







Left page, **Melle Élisabeth Tischbein,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800. Below*, **Varvara Ivanovna Narishkine, born Ladormirsky,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1800, Museum of Art, Colombus, Ohio. Russian* aristocrat.





Berlin, circa 1800





1801, return to France via Prussia

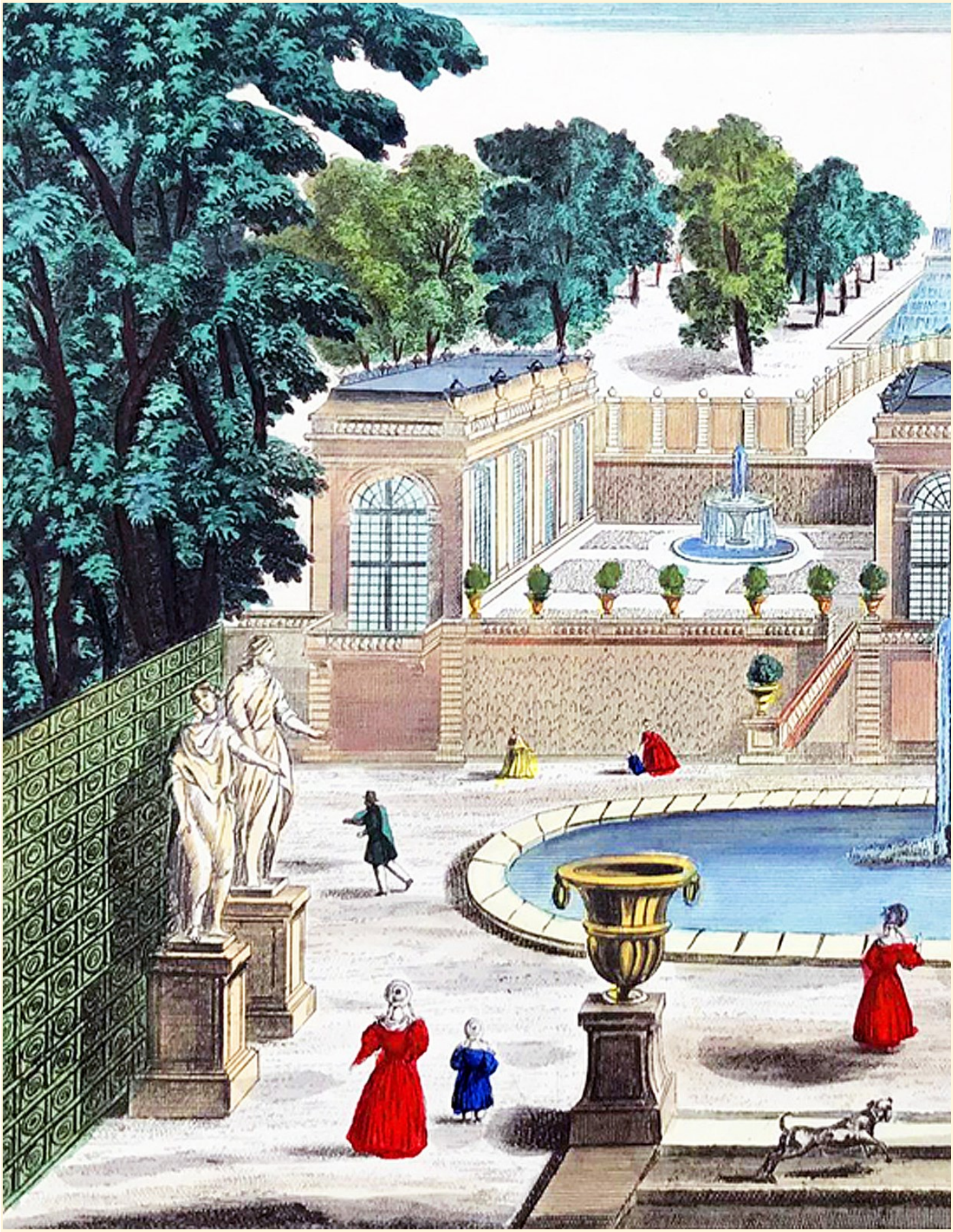


Aniela Czartoryska, **Princess Radziwill,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1801, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris.*

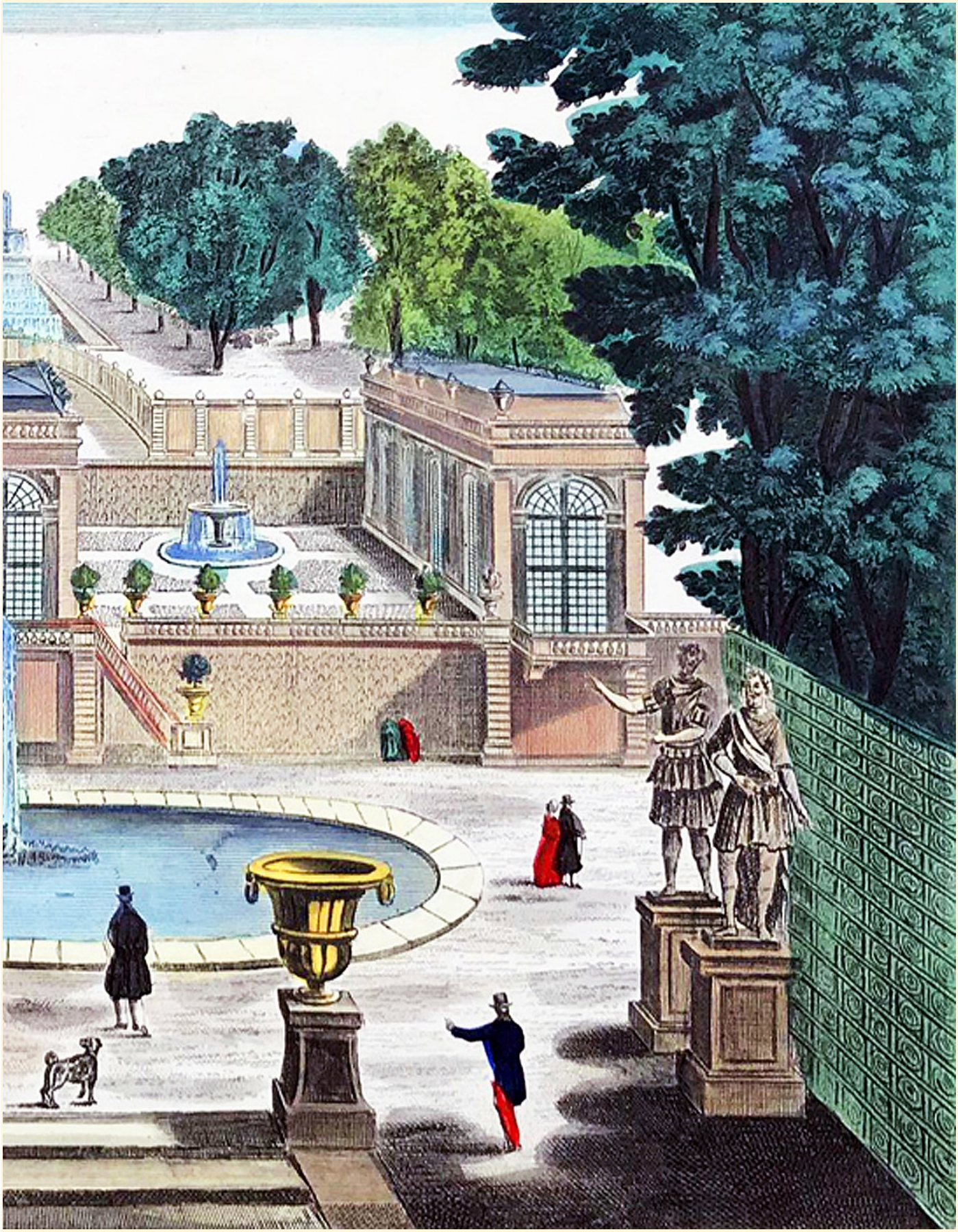


Above, **Young girl**, *Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1801, Krakow Museum. Right,* **Teresa Czartoryska,** Polish princess, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 180, Warsaw.*





Gardens of the Castle

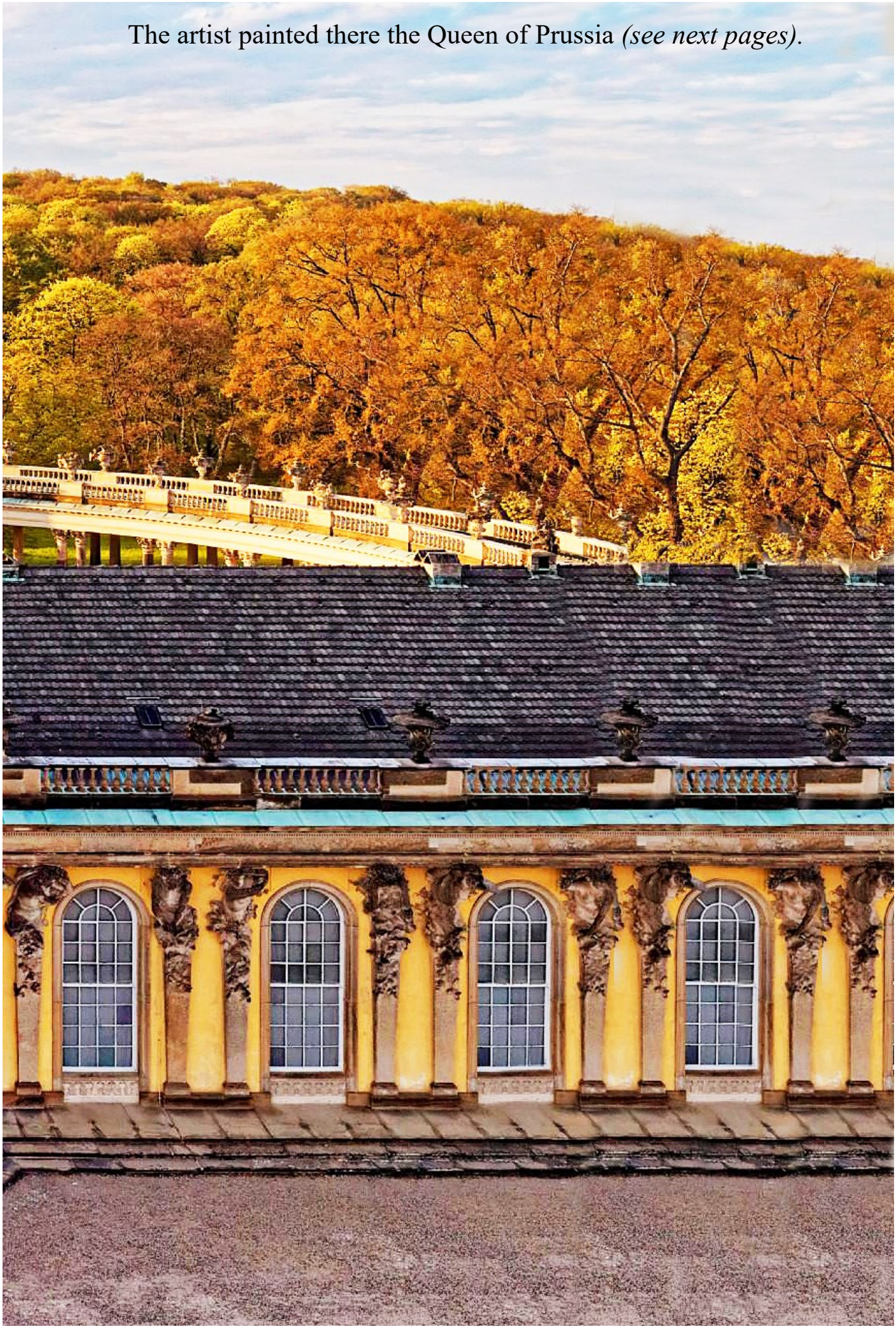


of Postdam, circa 1800.

Castle of **Postdam**, called « Sans Souci », of the Prussian rulers.

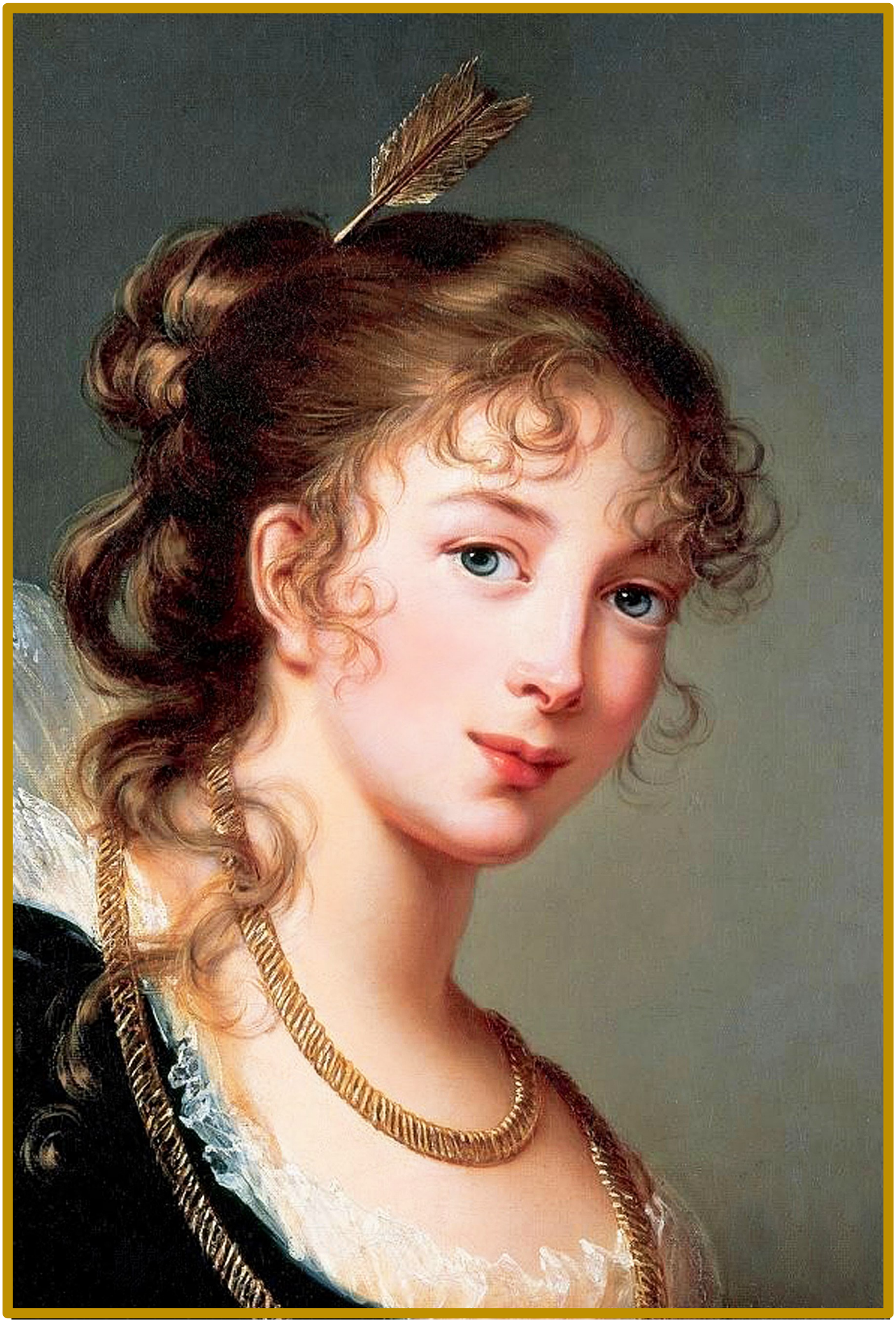


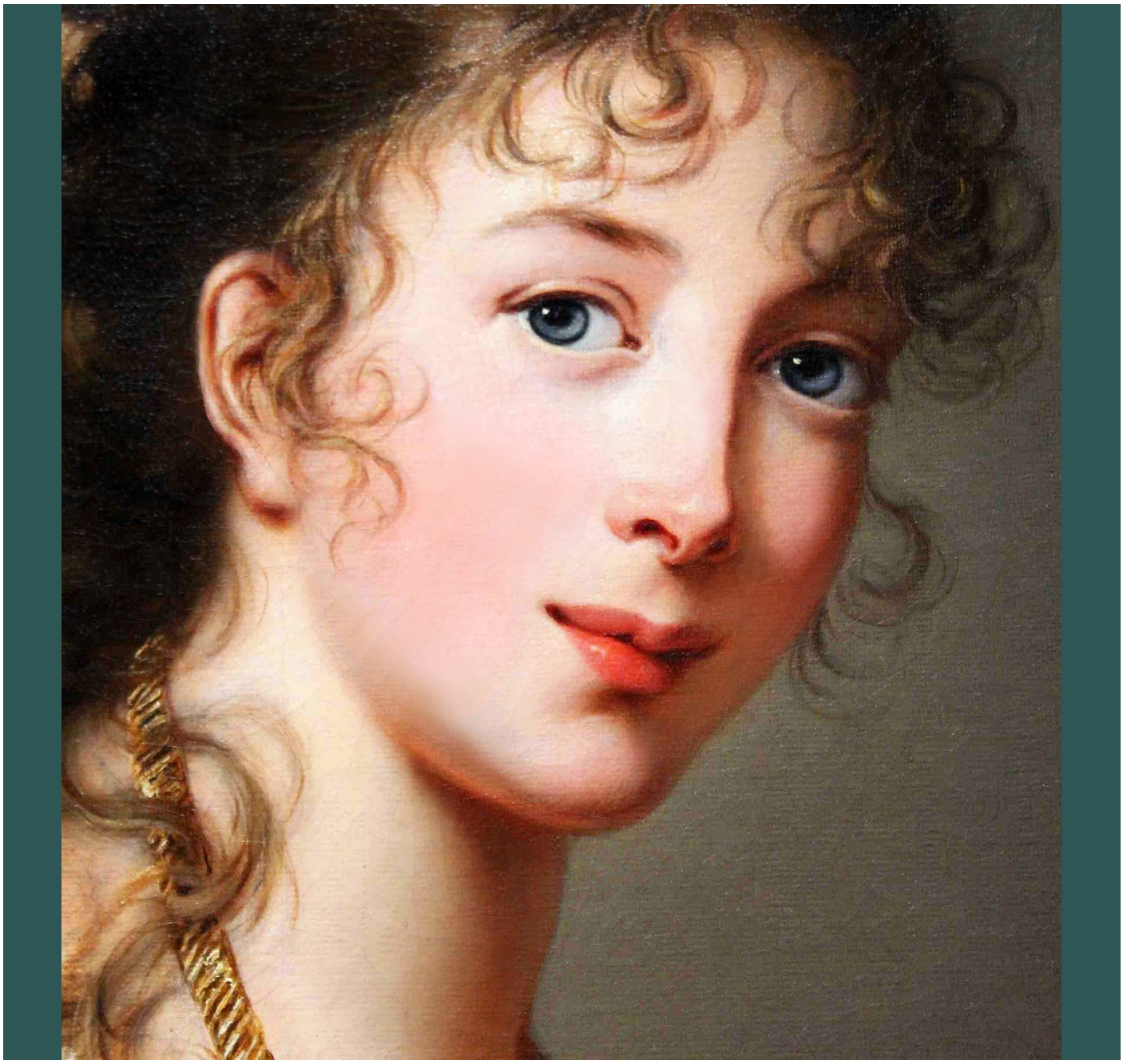
The artist painted there the Queen of Prussia *(see next pages)*.



Louise of Mecklembourg-Strelitz (1776-1810), at age 25, **Queen Louise of Prussia** (since 1797, at age 21), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1801, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.* She was instrumental in the outbreak of the Prussian War against France in 1806. She died of pneumonia in 1810 at the age of 34. She was considered one of the most beautiful women of her time and she dazzled the artist, who had seen others.







Above, detail of the previous painting. *Right,* Louise of Mecklembourg-Strelitz (1776-1810), **Queen of Prussia**, at age 26, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1802, Castle of Hohenzollern, Germany.* On her return to France, the artist stopped in Berlin, Potsdam and Dresden. In Potsdam, the well-informed Queen of Prussia came to her hotel to ask her to paint her portrait. The artist accepted and even made 2 paintings. She wrote about the Queen of Prussia, who was considered - unanimously - to be one of the most beautiful women of the day: *"The pen is powerless to paint the impression I felt the first time I saw this Princess. The charm of her celestial face, which expressed benevolence, kindness, and whose features were so regular and so fine; the beauty of her size, of her neck, of her arms, the dazzling freshness of her complexion, everything finally exceeded in her what one can imagine more charming".* In addition to her beauty, better captured in the first portrait, she also had "an indefinable charm and grace", a lively intelligence and a very firm character, appreciated by her subjects.



About this stay in Potsdam:

"The Queen stared at me on the day of the first sitting. 'I cannot, she said, give it to you before noon; for the King, who reviews the guard every morning at ten o'clock, is very glad that I attend'. She wanted me to have a place to stay in the castle, but knowing that this would have meant disturbing one of her ladies, I thanked her, and I went to lodge at once in a furnished hotel, near the palace, in which I was very ill in every way.

My stay in Potsdam was nonetheless a real pleasure for me; for the more I saw this charming Queen, the more I felt the happiness of approaching her. She seemed to want to see the studies I had done after the Emperor Alexander * *and the Empress Elizabeth; I hastened to take them to her, along with my painting of the Sibyl, which I had put back on a frame. I cannot say with what grace she knew how to show me that she was satisfied with it; she was so amiable and so kind that the attachment she inspired was quite tender.* * Whose the Queen fell in love when she met him for the first time one year later, in 1802.

I like to remember so many marks of that gracious benevolence with which she showered me even in the smallest things: for example, I used to have coffee every morning, and in my hotel furnished I have it was always detestable; I don't know how it happened that I told the Queen, who the next day sent me some excellent ones. Another day, as I complimented her on her bracelets, which were in the antique style, she immediately untied them and put them on my arms; this gift touched me perhaps more than that of a fortune, and these bracelets have always traveled with me ever since. She was also kind enough to have me give a box at the show near the seats she usually occupied; from this small distance, I enjoyed looking at her above all else: her charming face was sixteen years old.

During one of our sessions the Queen sent for her children, whom to my great surprise I found ugly; showing them to me, she said to me: 'They are not beautiful.' I admit that I did not have enough head to deny it; I contented myself with answering that they had a lot of physiognomy.

I often spoke to the Queen of my love for the countryside and for beautiful sites; she wanted me to go and see her Peacock Island. One of his cars drove me there. You arrive at this charming place through a thick forest of fir trees that you cross, then you descend a fast path that leads you to a lake on which is located the Peacock Island and its small castle. The weather was sad, it was even raining, and this stay seemed to me no less Elyos. "





Helena Radziwiłł, born Przeździecka, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1801, National Museum of Warsow*. Polish friend aristocrat met in Prussia.

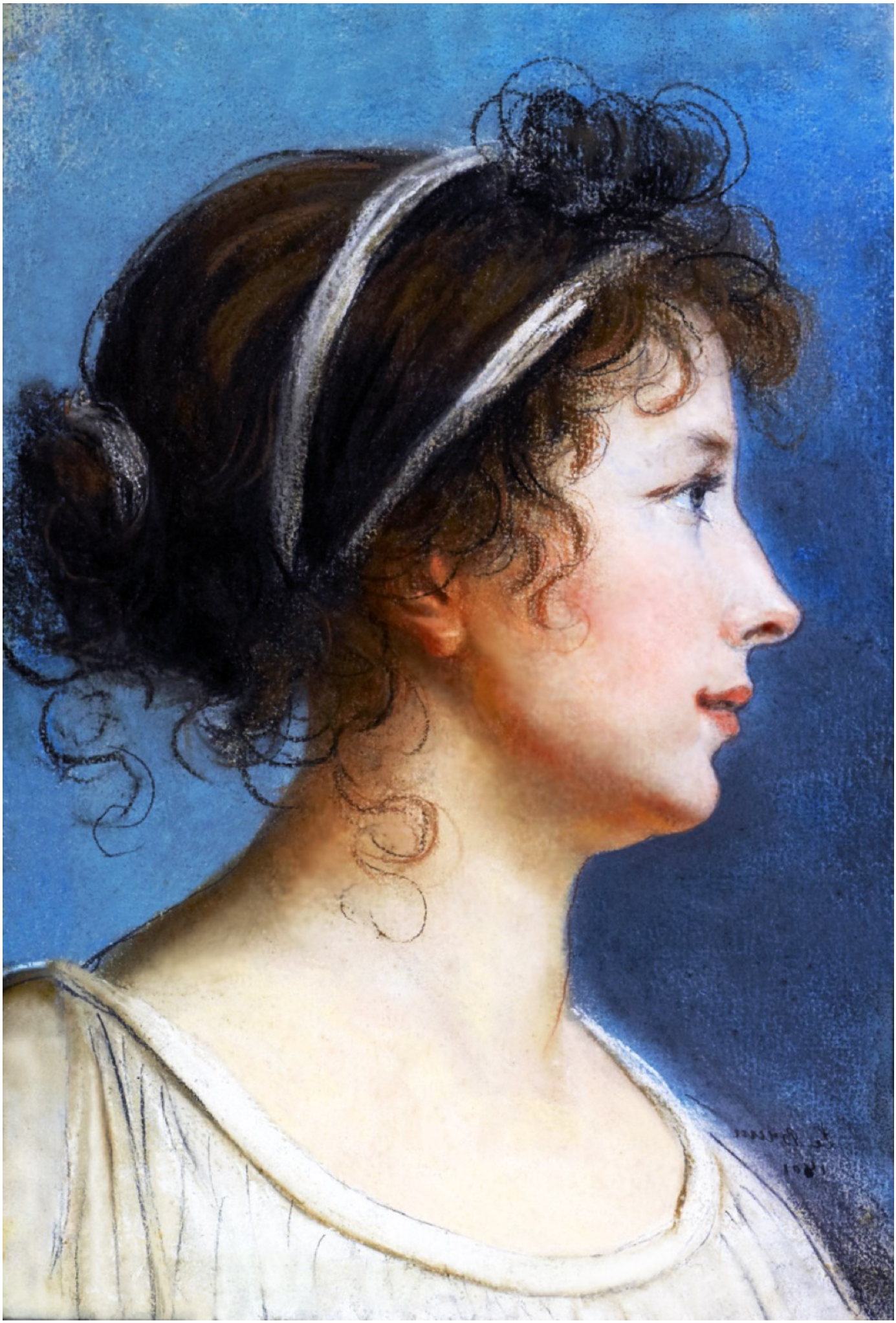






Left, **Princess Ekaterina Osipovna Tyufyakina,** born Khorvat, *detail, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1802, Chi Mei Museum, Tainan, Taïwan. Above,* **Count Franz Seraph Joseph von Dietrichstein-Nikolsburg,** (1767-1854)**,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1801, private collection. Austrian* aristocrat and military.

At the beginning of 1801, the artist no longer banished to France decided to go back to her homeland, despite attempts by Tsar Alexander 1th and his wife to keep her in Russia. Still accompanied by Auguste Rivière but not by Julie (married and remaining in Russia), she left Saint Petersburg in June 1801. Passing through Riga and Königsberg, then through Berlin and Potsdam, where she stayed a few months, she did another stopover of several weeks in Dresden before reaching France via Frankfurt.



Chapter IV

Return to France, new trips, and retirement in Louveciennes

(1802-1842)

Left, self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun in 1801 (at age 46).



Paris, Notre-Dame and l'Ile Saint-Louis, *J.B. Raguenet, Musée Carnavalet.*



At the end of the 18th century.

1802, return from exile

In January 1802, the artist returned to Paris, after 12 years of exile. She had passed successively through the main cities of Italy, Vienna, Saint-Petersburg and Berlin.

Already famous throughout Europe before the Revolution, she was very well received everywhere, at the highest level, except in Vienna because Austria was then at war against France. She continued everywhere to make portraits of the celebrities and aristocrats she met, who jostled each other to be painted by her. In fact, she was not able to complete all the orders made, far from it. This allowed her to live very largely from her work, especially since she was often accommodated for free and invited to all the (numerous) receptions of this high society of the time. She has therefore not ceased to increase her own fame despite exile.

On returning to France, she wrote: *"pain, fear, joy stirred me in turn [...] I wept for the friends I had lost on the scaffold; but I was going to see those I still had left. [...] But what displeased me much more was to see still written on the walls: 'freedom, fraternity or death.'"*

Reuniting with her ex-husband and her brother as well as a few rare old friends, who celebrated her a lot, she greatly mourned the loss of her mother (who died in 1800, far from her) and many other friends, whom she did not have already knew that they had been massacred or guillotined during the "Terror". She had therefore found it very difficult to adapt to this new society and to the new regime, the Consulate. Joséphine de Beauharnais, whom she had known before 1789, long before she married Bonaparte in 1796, nevertheless made an effort to receive her and make her know the new "master" of France, with the obvious aim of integrate her into this new world: *"A few days after my arrival, Madame Bonaparte came to see me one morning; she reminded me of the balls where we had been together before the Revolution, which I had completely forgotten; but I was all the more sensitive to her memory. She was very kind, and invited me to go to lunch with the First Consul* (Bonaparte). *However, as I was not very eager, the day of this lunch was never fixed. "*

Finally, she never had the opportunity to meet Napoleon Bonaparte, whom she only saw from a distance in 1802 through a window of the Louvre while she was visiting this museum, nor of integrate later into the Imperial Court, having only painted Caroline Bonaparte in 1807. She had in fact been told that almost only soldiers of all ranks were seen at the Tuileries, which she did not like, of course compared to the Court of Versailles before 1789.

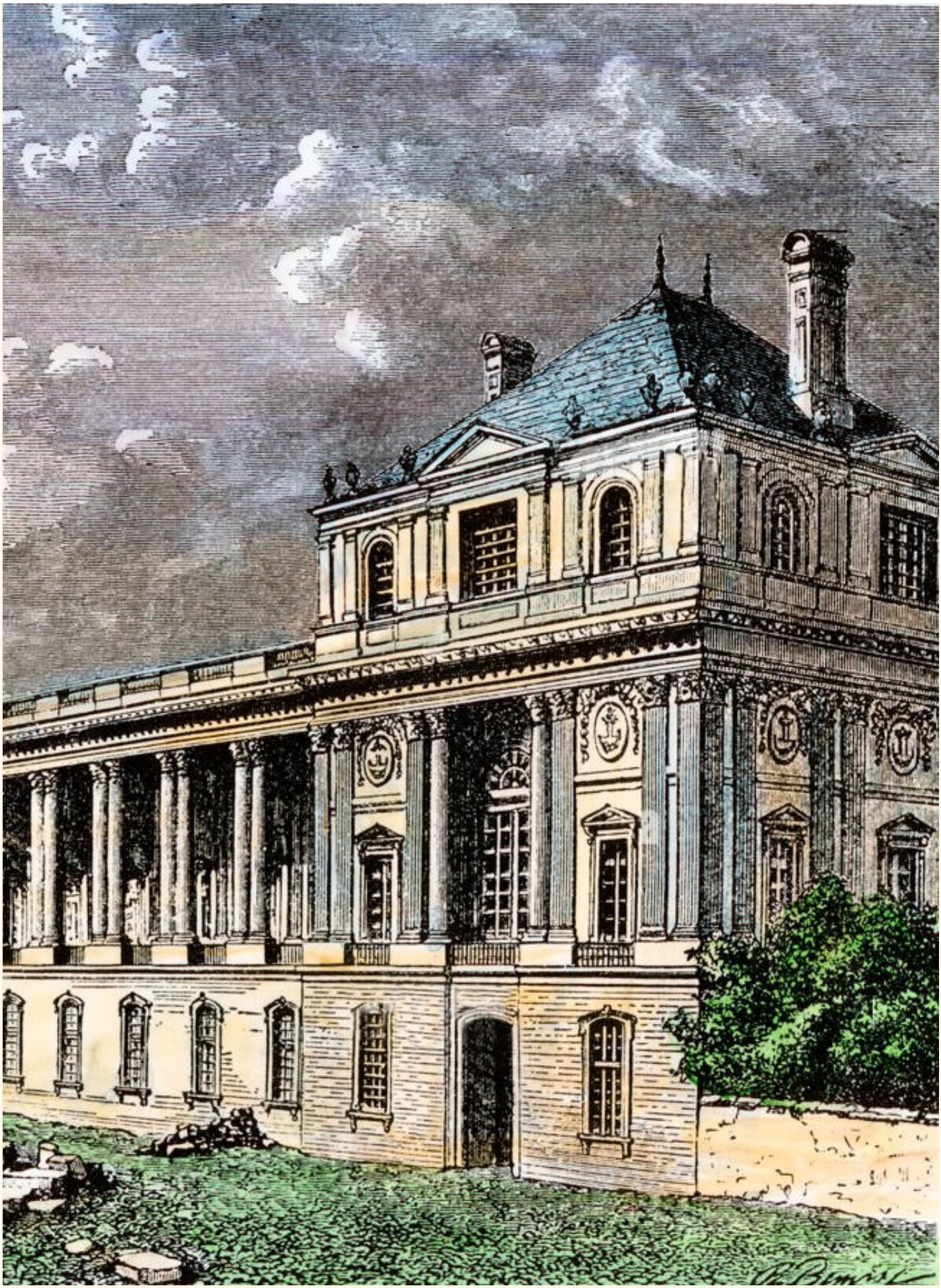
She again wanted to travel and flee this French society that was no longer hers. She first went to London for 3 years (1802-1805), then in Switzerland for 3 years. Back in France in 1809, she settled in Louveciennes (near Paris) in a small "castle", from where she hardly moved during the last 33 years of her life, successively losing her ex-husband in 1813, without great pain, her daughter Julie in 1819 and her brother Etienne in 1820, in a much more painful way. At the same time, her artistic production has greatly diminished and has mainly concerned foreigners visiting her. She died of a stroke at 87, after a busy life and never having been in need, thanks to her talent and her work, which was rare for a woman in her time.



In 1802, **the Tuileries and the Louvre**, with its first collections gathered since 1795 that the artist visited in the company of his painter friend Hubert Robert.



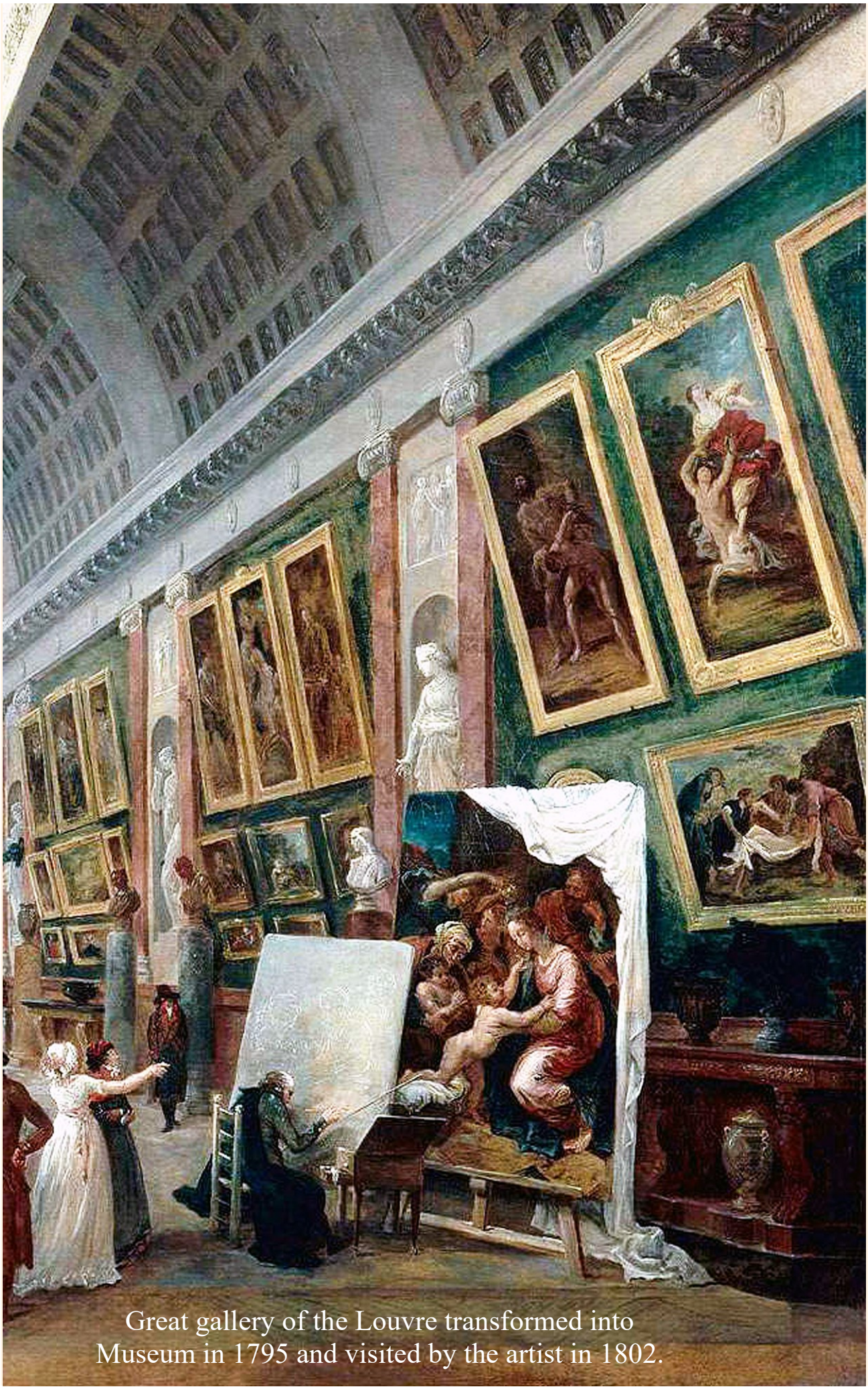
Old engraving from the **Louvre Museum** *in 1800,*



as the artist could see it after her return from exile.



Louvre 1796



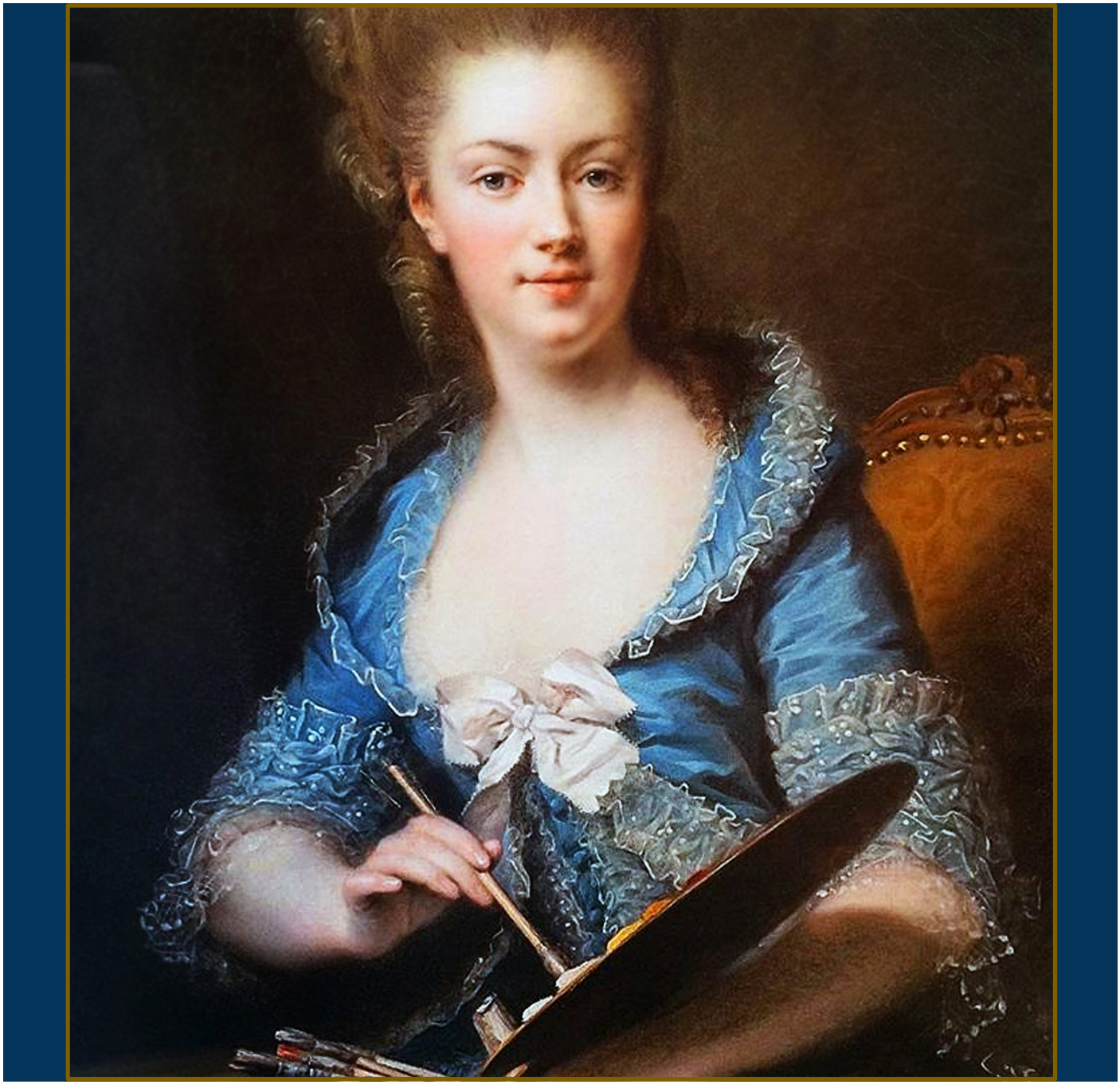
Great gallery of the Louvre transformed into
Museum in 1795 and visited by the artist in 1802.

Hubert Robert

Contemporary French women painters of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun



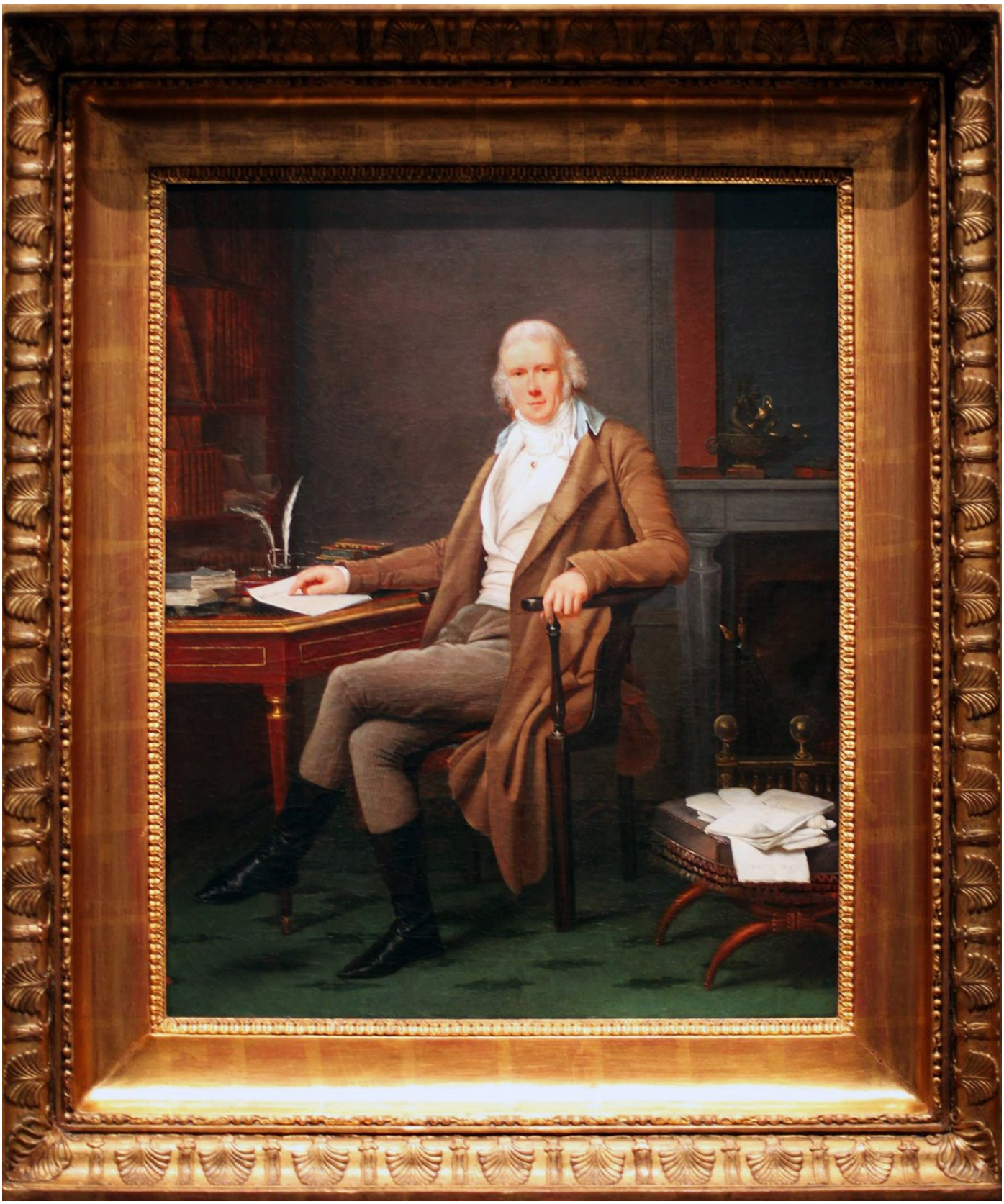
Left page, **Self-portrait of Adélaïde Labille-Guiard** (1749-1803) in her studio with two students, *1785, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.* She was a painter 6 years older than Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and who was admitted at the same time as her to the Royal Academy of Painting (1783). She had to hide in the provinces during the dark years of the Revolution. She had talent and a certain fame but she remained in the ambient classicism. She therefore lacked the innovative genius of her academic colleague and their careers are not comparable. *Below,* **Self-portrait of Anne Bocquet-Filleul,** *1779, private collection.* A former good friend of Elisabeth Vigée's teenage years, she was guillotined in 1794 with Mme Chalgrin. The famous painter Jacques Louis David, whom the artist had known well before the Revolution, became radicalized during it and could have contributed to this double execution, which he had the power to prevent and which Louise Elisabeth never forgave him after her return to France.











Left page, **Adèle Romany,** née De Romance, painter, 1769-1746, painted by *Rose-Adélaïde Ducreux, 1799, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.* Younger (14 years) than Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, they were friends but did not have the same careers at all. *Above,* **Etienne Vigée**, the artist's brother, painted by *Adèle Romany, 1800, private collection.* Etienne had made a name for himself in the Parisian literary world by writing plays, but he was nowhere near as successful as his sister, which made him a little embittered.



Tuileries Palace (west facade of the Louvre), late 18th century, J.B. Raguenet, Musée Carnavalet. This part burned down in the late 19th century and was not rebuilt.



It was the residence of the kings of France, from Henri IV to Louis-Philippe, and the First Consul (1802). The artist did not go there because she did not like the new regime.



London in 18th century



Canaletto



1802-1808, travels to London, then to Switzerland, and continuation of the exile, this time voluntarily.



Young lady, unnamed, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun,1803, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington.* During her stay in London (1802-1805).



Old engraving from London (early 19th century), where the artist stayed.

"I saw a lot of paintings by the famous (Joshua) ***Reynolds*** *in London; they are of an excellent color reminiscent of Titian's, but in general not very finished, with the exception of the heads; I admired him, however, a child Samuel (right page, 1776, Musée Fabre, Montpellier), who charmed me in terms of finish as well as color.*

Reynolds was as modest as he was clever: when my portrait of M. de Calonne (the former minister and friend of the artist, living in London, whose portrait she had painted in 1786, see above) *arrived at customs, having been warned, he went to see it, and this is what I learned from people who heard him. When the box was opened, he looked at the painting for a long time and praised it, whereupon a flycatcher who repeated the fools about slander, began to say: 'This portrait must be beautiful, because it has been paid for to Madame Lebrun eighty thousand francs'. 'Well,' replied Reynolds, 'they would give me a hundred thousand, that I could not do so well.'*

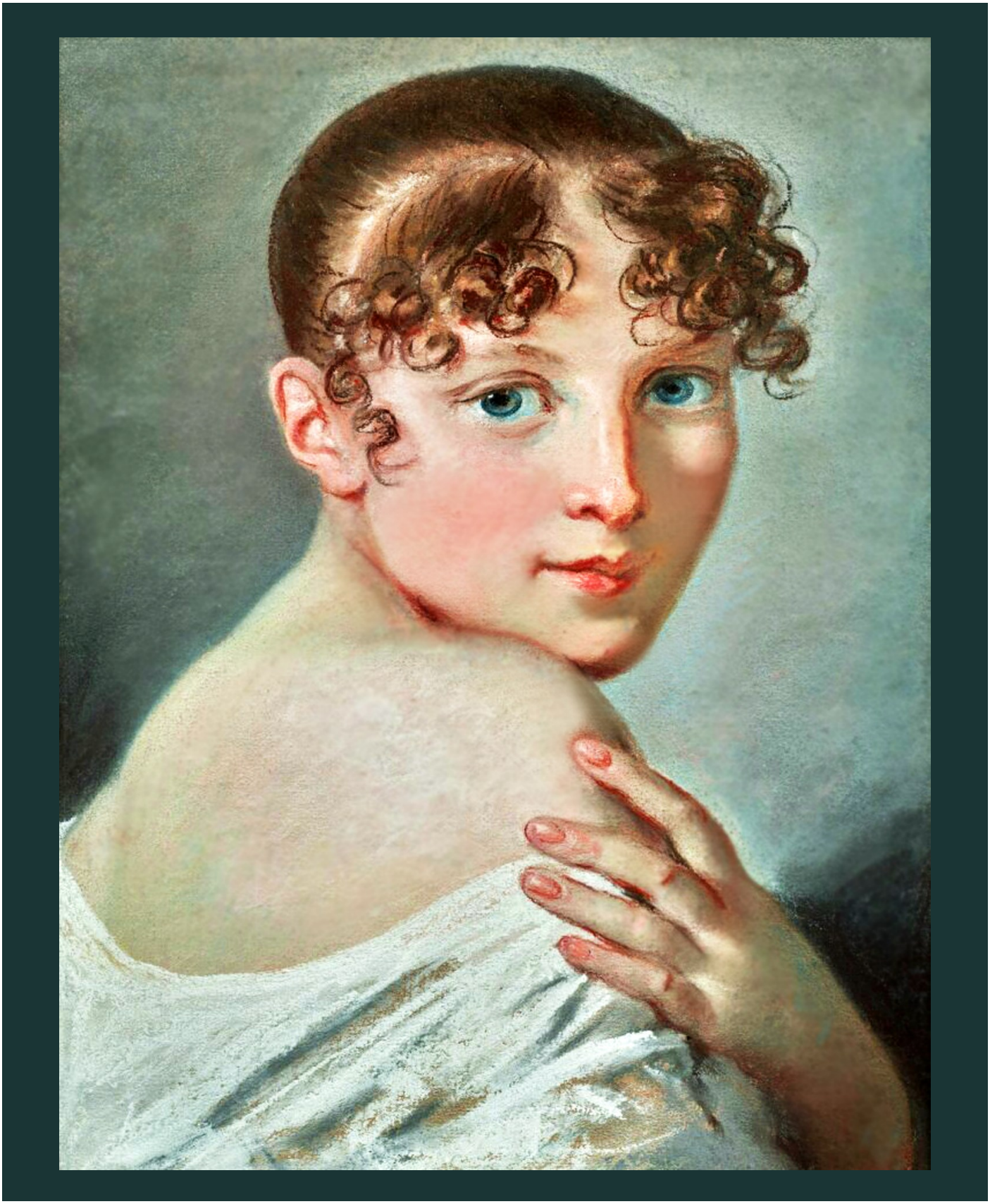
The London climate despaired him, so unfavorable it was for drying paint, and he had imagined mixing wax with its colors, which tarnished them; in fact the humidity was such in London that, in order to dry the portraits I did there, I decided to leave a fire constantly in my studio until I went to bed; I placed my paintings at a certain distance from the fireplace, and very often I left my bedroom to go and see whether they should be brought closer or away from the fire. This subjection was essential. "





Mrs Margaret William Chinnery, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1803.*
Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, USA.





Above, **Madame Landré,** new housekeeper of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1802.* She accompanied the painter on her last long trips to England and Switzerland, then in Louveciennes, during more than 30 years, taking care of her in her old age, until her death in 1842. *Right page,* **« Young woman»,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1802.* It could also be Madame Landré, since the two faces are very similar.

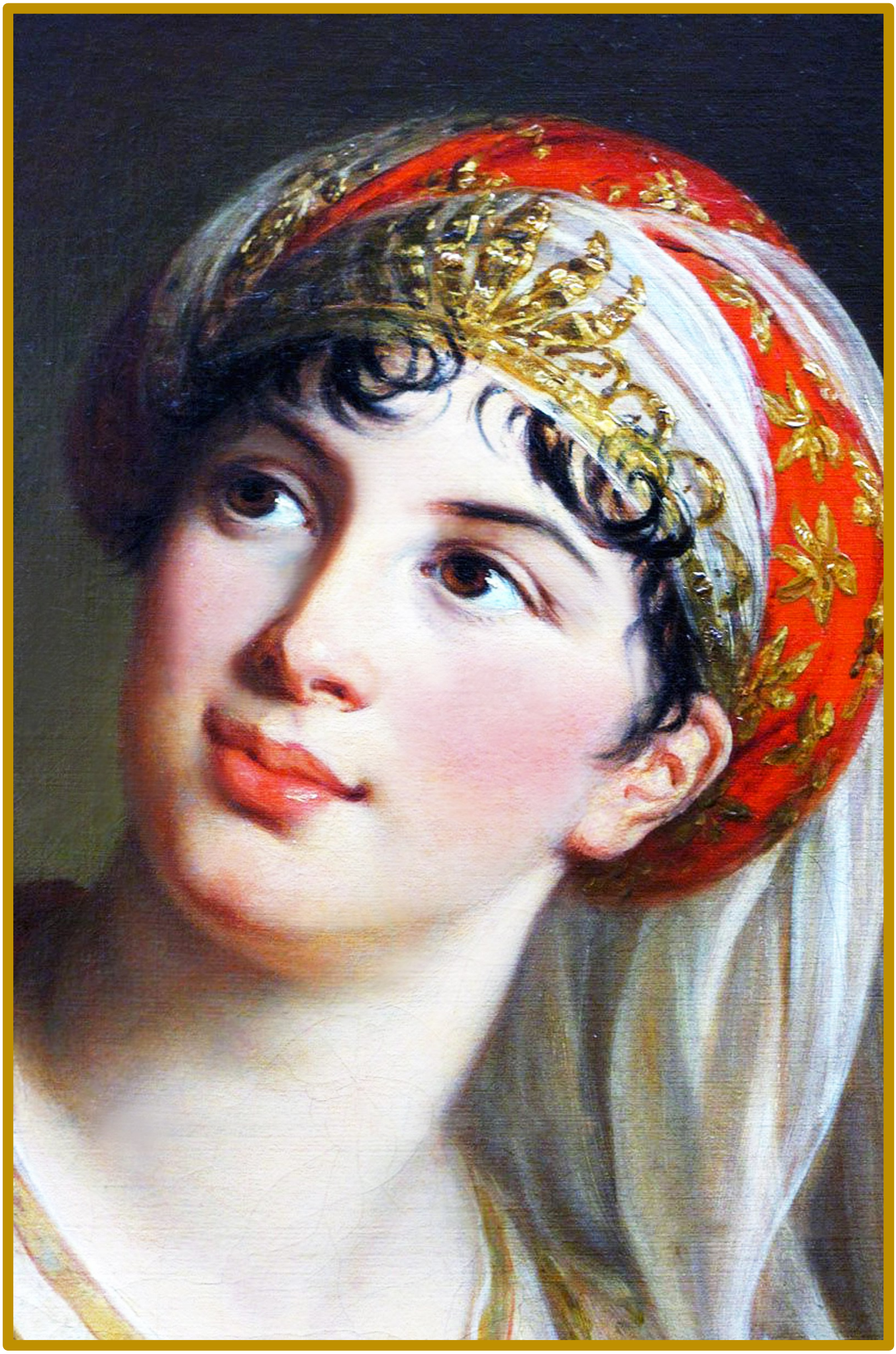




Giuseppina Grassini, 1773-1850, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1803, Musée Calvet, Avignon.* Italian lyric singer, contralto. *Next pages*, **Guiseppina Grassini**, in the role of Zaïre, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1804, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.*









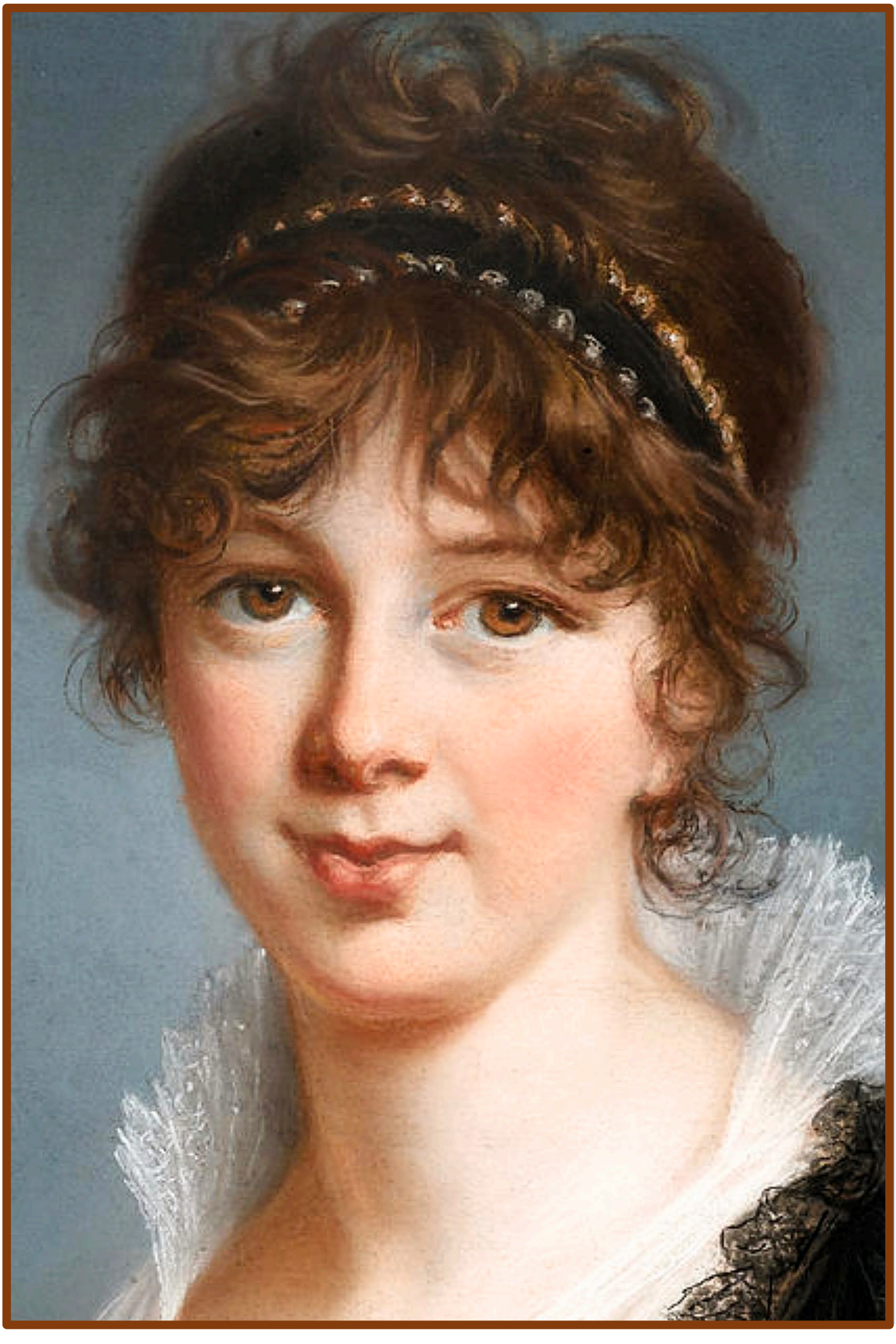
Above, **Arabella Diane Cope, Duchess of Dorset***, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1803, Sevenoaks Knole House, Kent, England. Right page*, **Prince Iwan Bariatinsky,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1803, Pushkin Museum, Moscow.* Russian friend noble, already painted twice in 1800.





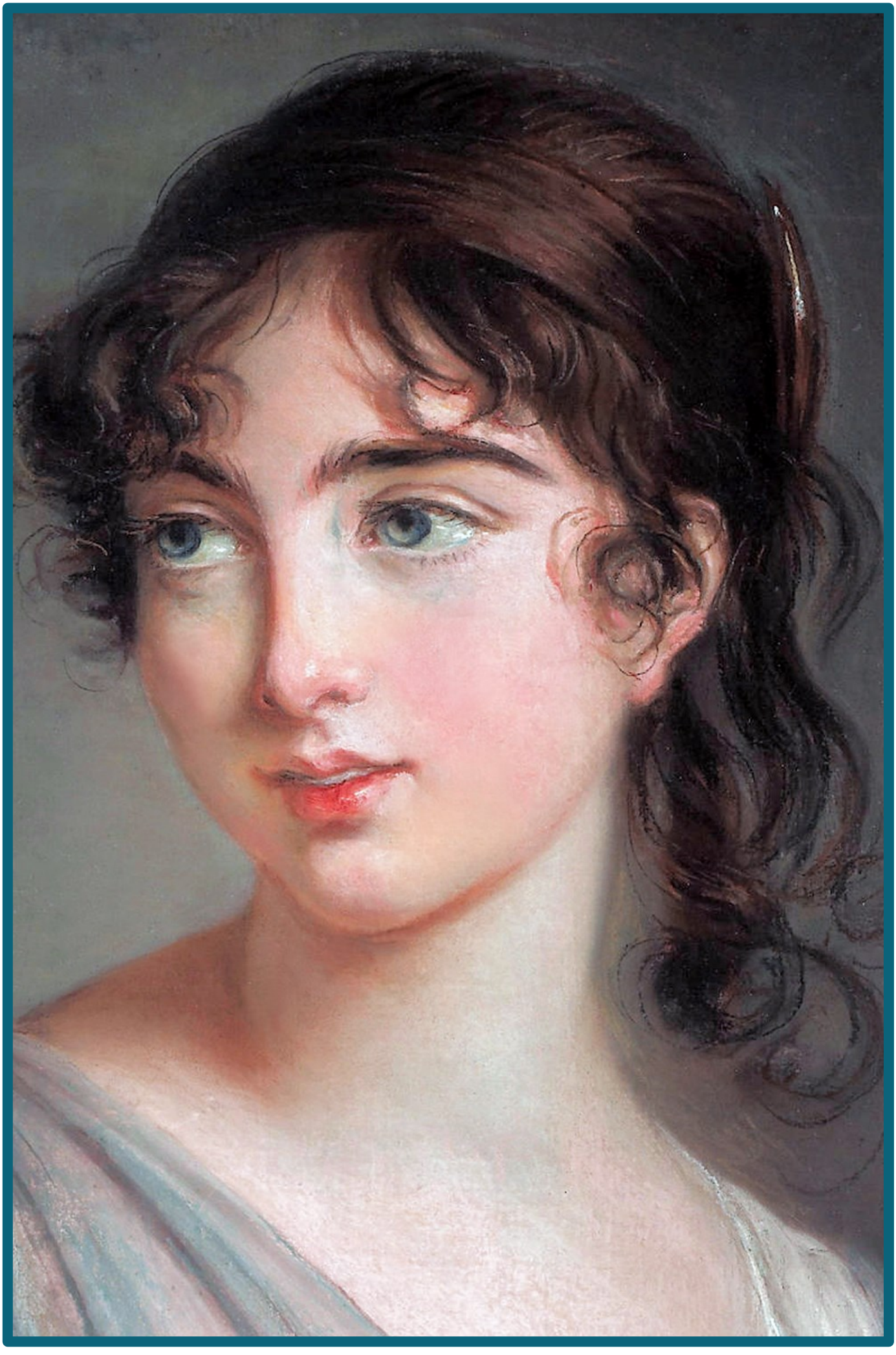
Mrs Spencer Perceval, born Jane Wilson, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1804, private collection.* Met in London, after the return from exile.

To a London critic who considered the quality of her painting to be grossly overrated, she replied: *"however much you might disparage my pictures, all the worst you could say of them would be less than I think. I do not suppose that any artist imagines he has attained perfection and I have never yet been quite satisfied with any work of mine."*



Corisande de Gramont (1782-1865), Countess of Tankerville, married to a British parlementarian, at age 24, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1806, private collection*.



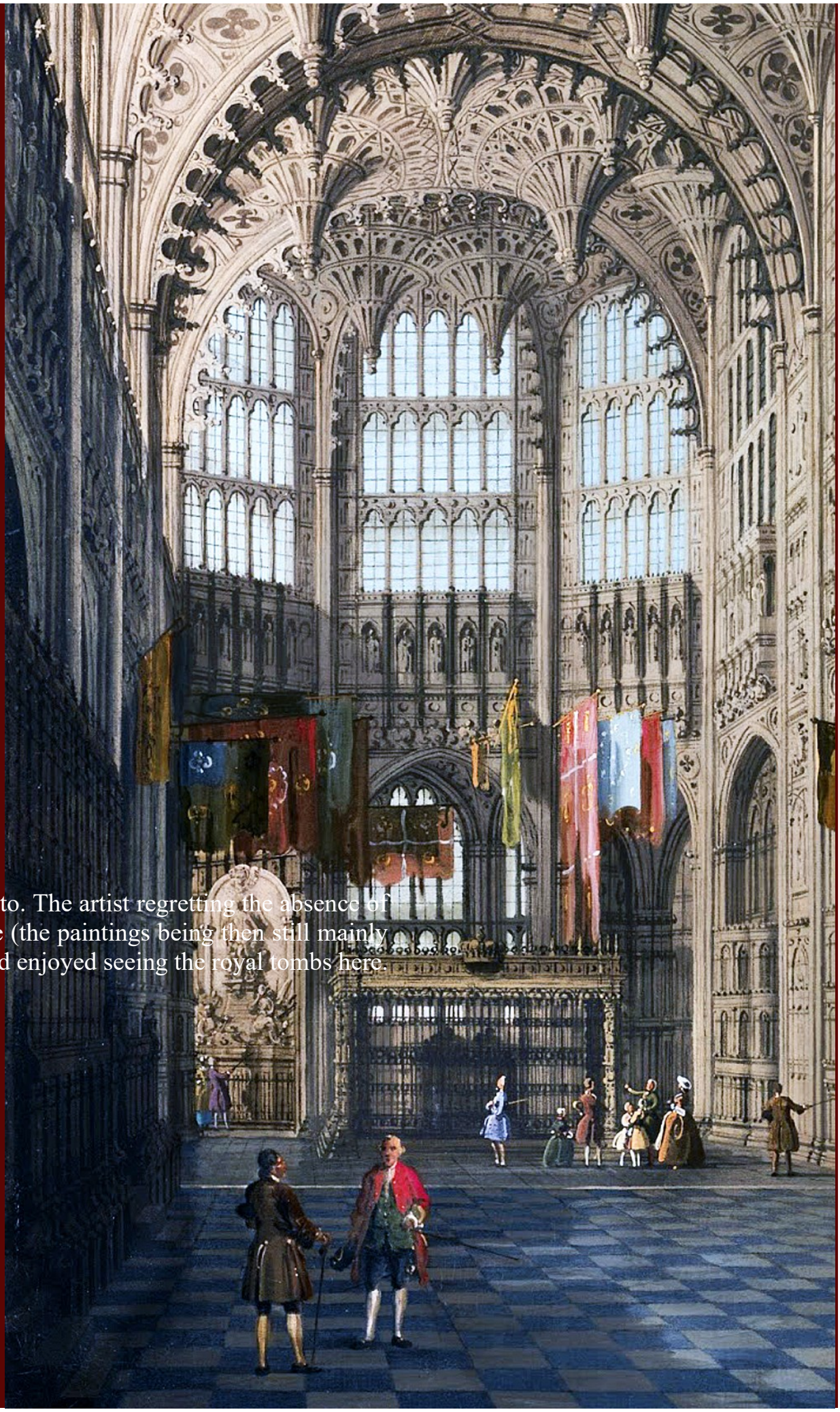




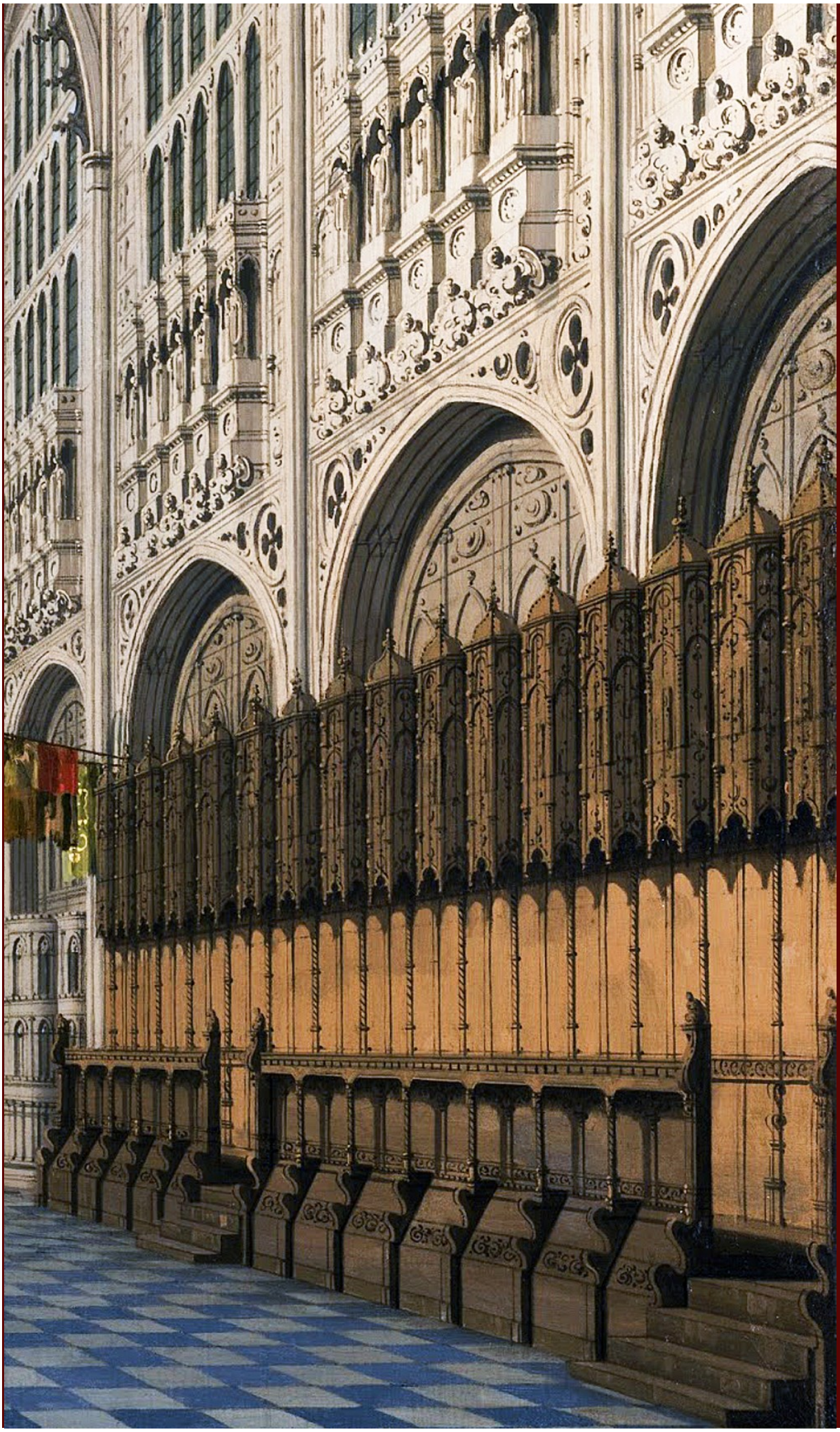
English aristocrat, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, circa 1805, private collection.*

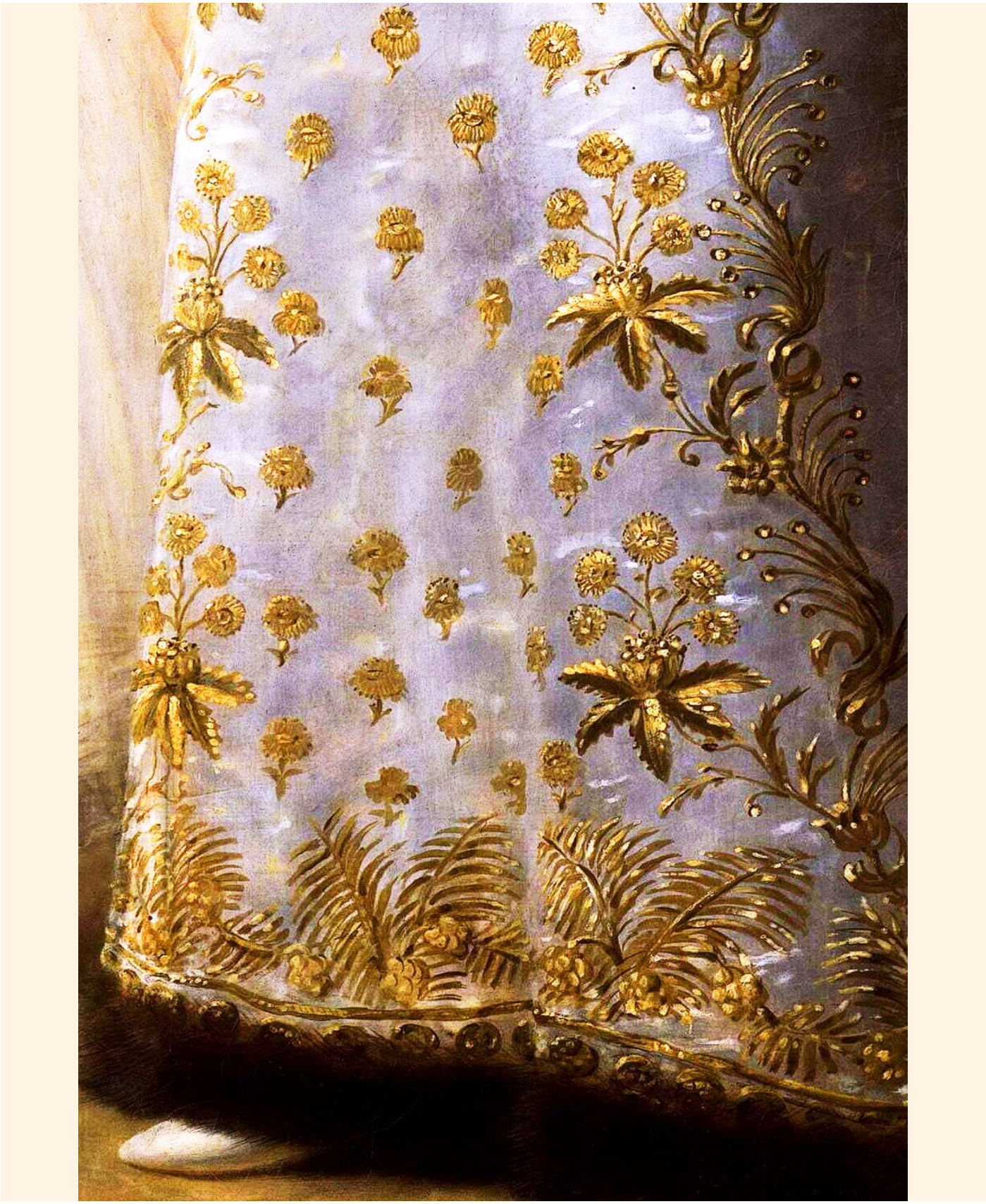
Laure de Bonneuil (1775-1857), à 30 ans, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1805*.
Wife of the politician Michel Louis Regnault de Saint Jean d´Angely.





ry, Canaletto. The artist regretting the absence of
stayed there (the paintings being then still mainly
numents and enjoyed seeing the royal tombs here.





Caroline Bonaparte-Murat with her daughter Letizia, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1807, Versailles*. The only painting, made by this portrait painter of the "Ancien Régime", of a celebrity of the 1st Empire, which had been commissioned by Napoleon to put it in the Tuileries with other members of his family. This "Princess" kept the artist waiting for a long time, who found her *"much less amiable and polite"* than the aristocrats painted before 1789.

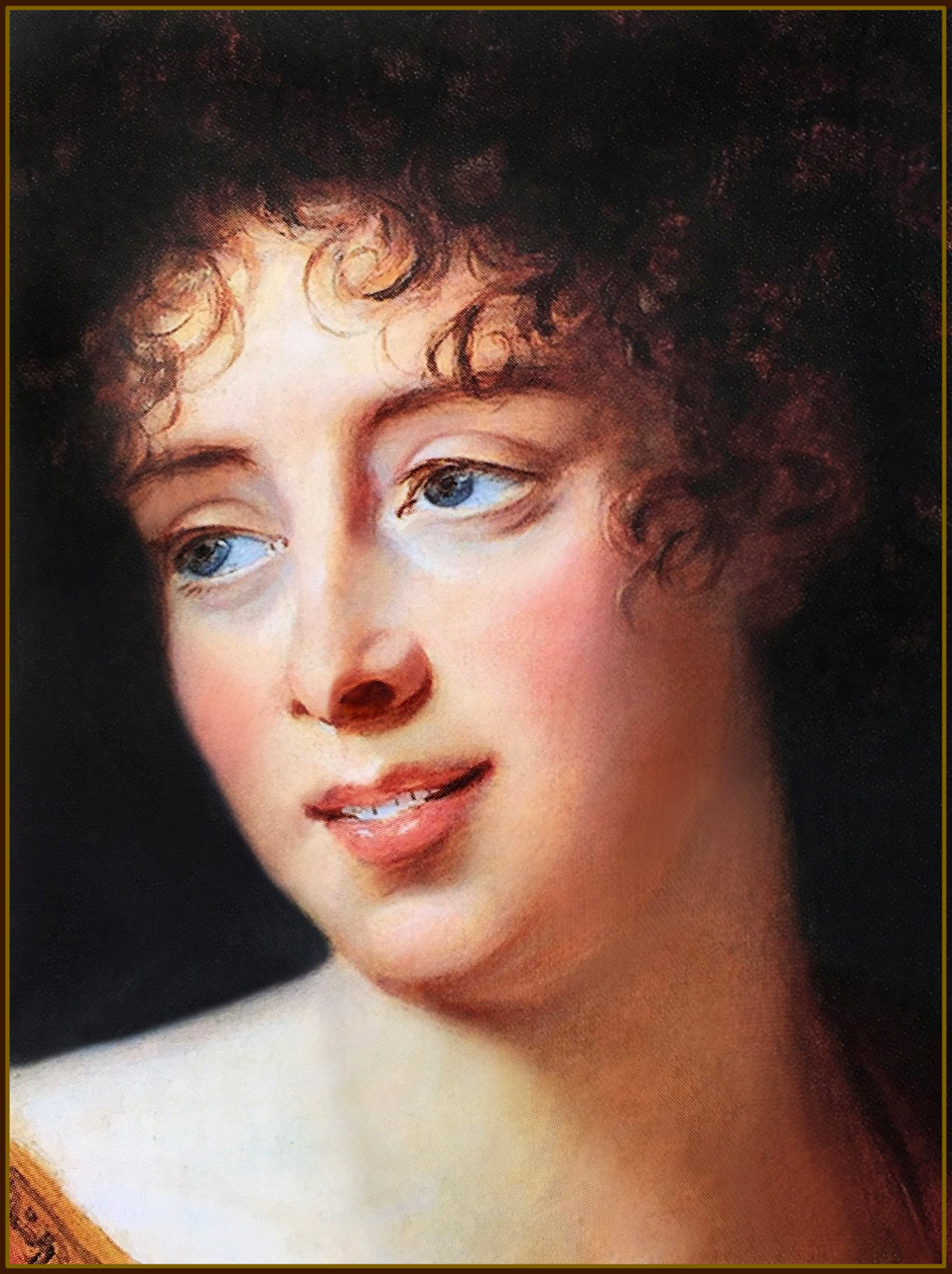








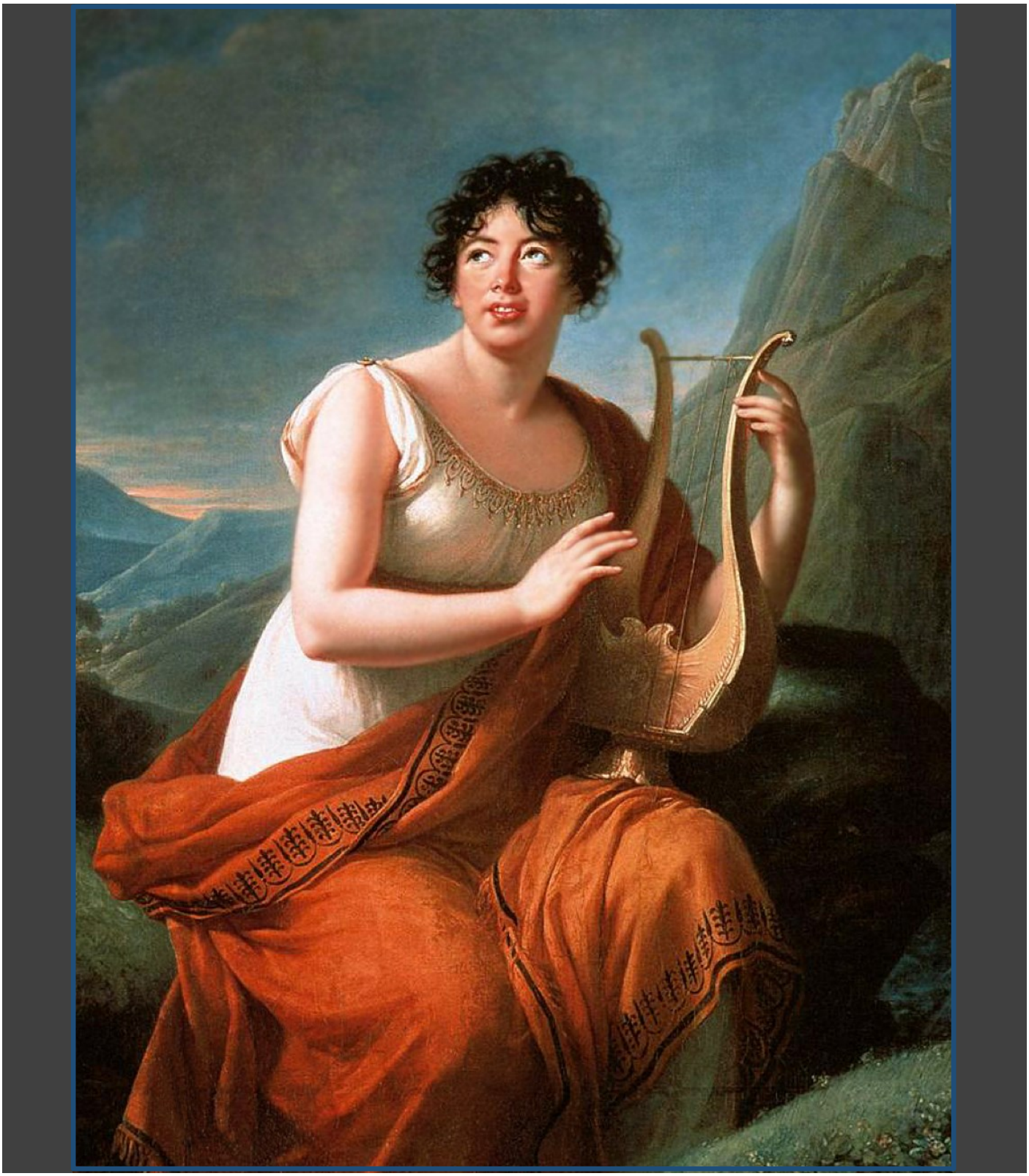
Hélène de Domo Massalska Potocka, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, oil on wood, 1808, Museum Narodow, Warsaw.* Polish aristocrat.





Angelika Catalani, Italian soprano, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1806, Museum Akhangekskoïé, Moscow.*

Anne-Louise Germaine Necker (1766-1817), known under the name of her husband, the **Baron de Staël-Holstein** (1749-1802), ambassador of Sweden, here 43 years old, in Verbiers (Switzerland), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1809, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Genève.* She was the daughter of Jacques Necker (1732-1804), a wealthy Swiss banker and minister of King Louis XVI. A relatively minor writer and essayist, she was above all a free and politically engaged woman against the Revolution and the First Empire. The artist stayed in Switzerland for 3 years and in the castle of Coppet, belonging to Madame de Staël, for several months.





Castle of Coppet, near Leman lake, in Switzerland,



where Madame de Staël lived and where the artist stayed.

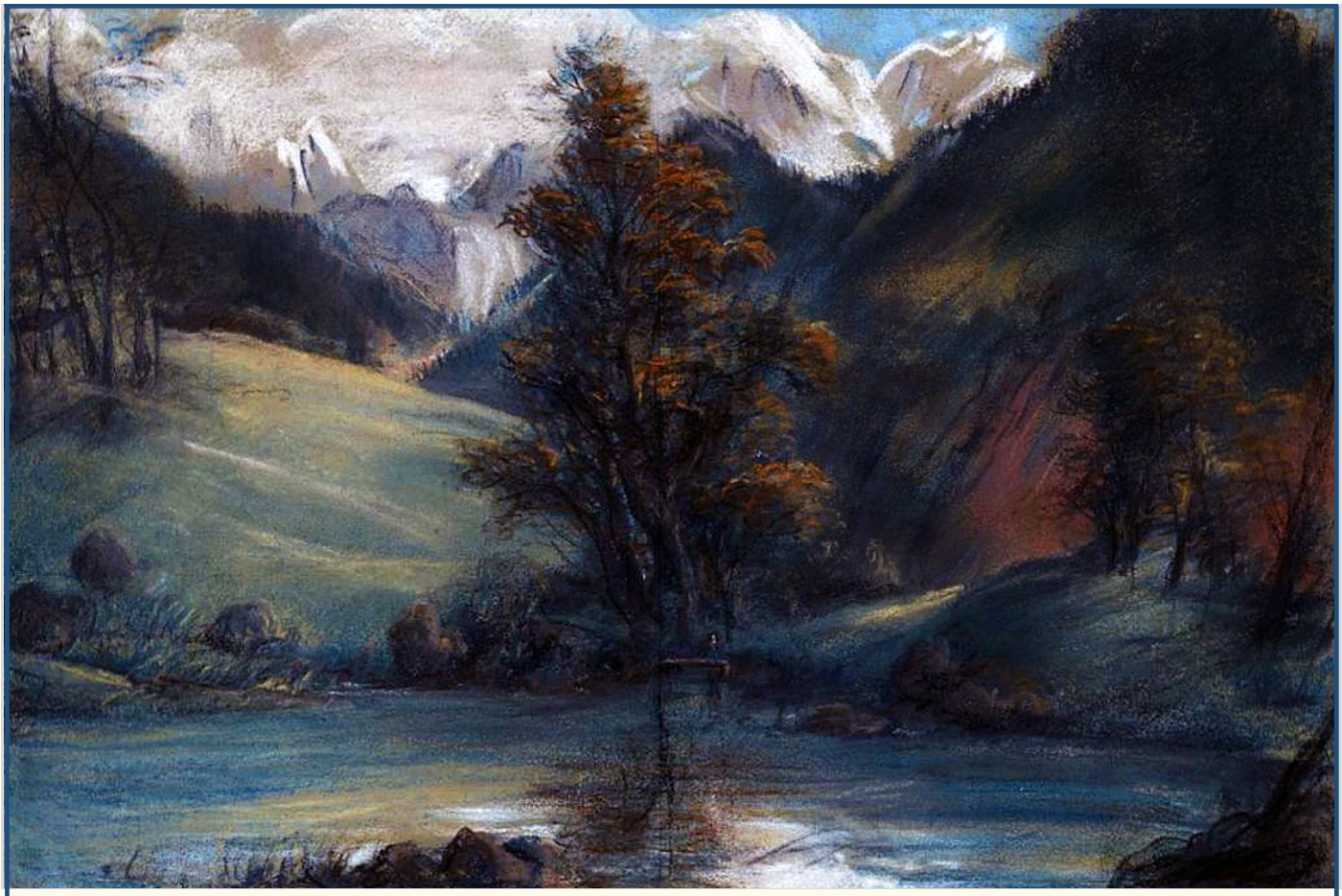




Coppet

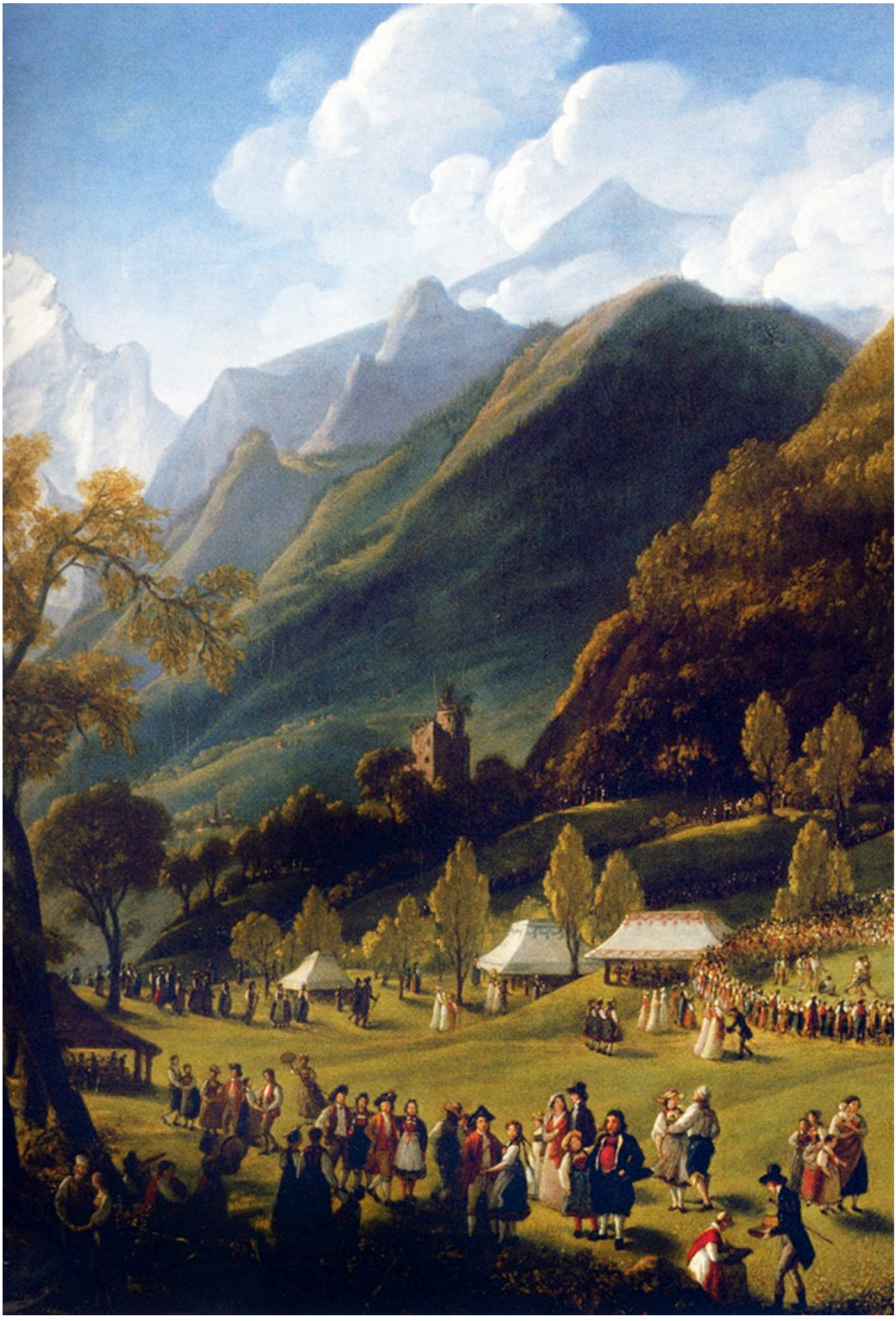
Last self-portrait of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *1808, private collection,*
at age 53, made during her stay in Switzerland (1807-1808)





Landscapes in Switzerland, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1808*, with a peasant festival *(next page)*. The artist mainly painted landscapes during this stay.







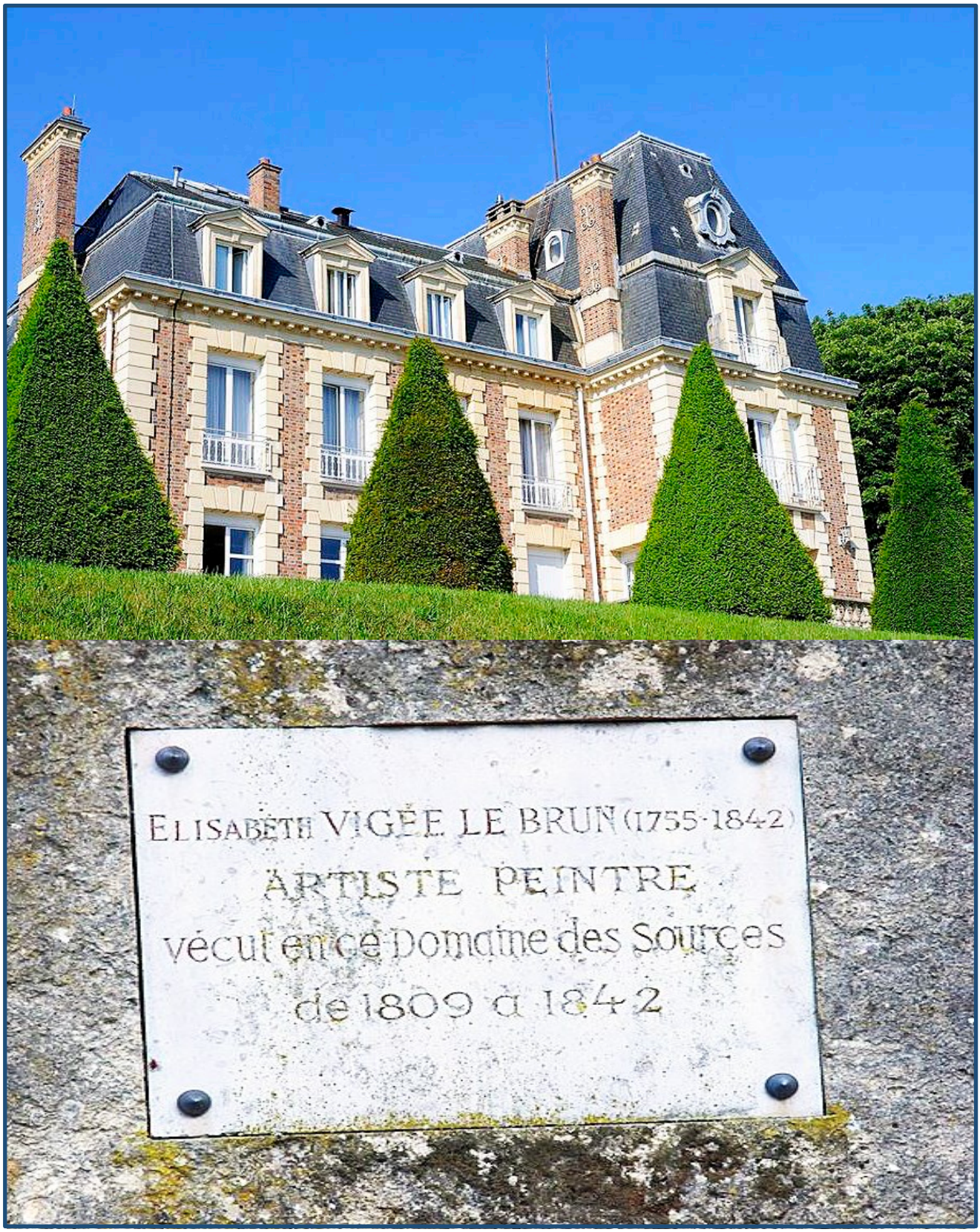


« Château » des Sources, in Louveciennes (near Paris).



It has largely replaced the country house that Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun lived in.

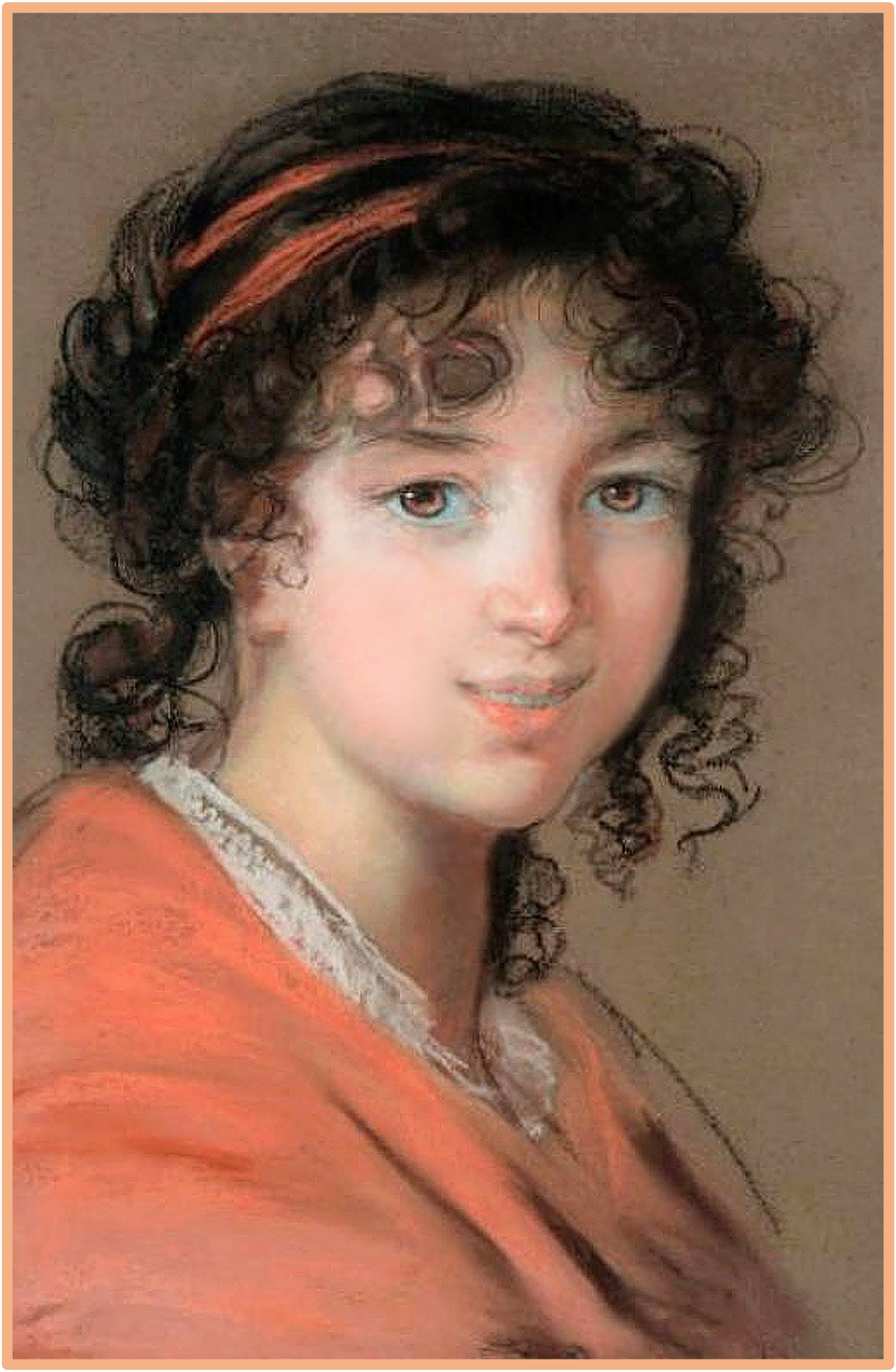
1809-1842, retirement in Louveciennes

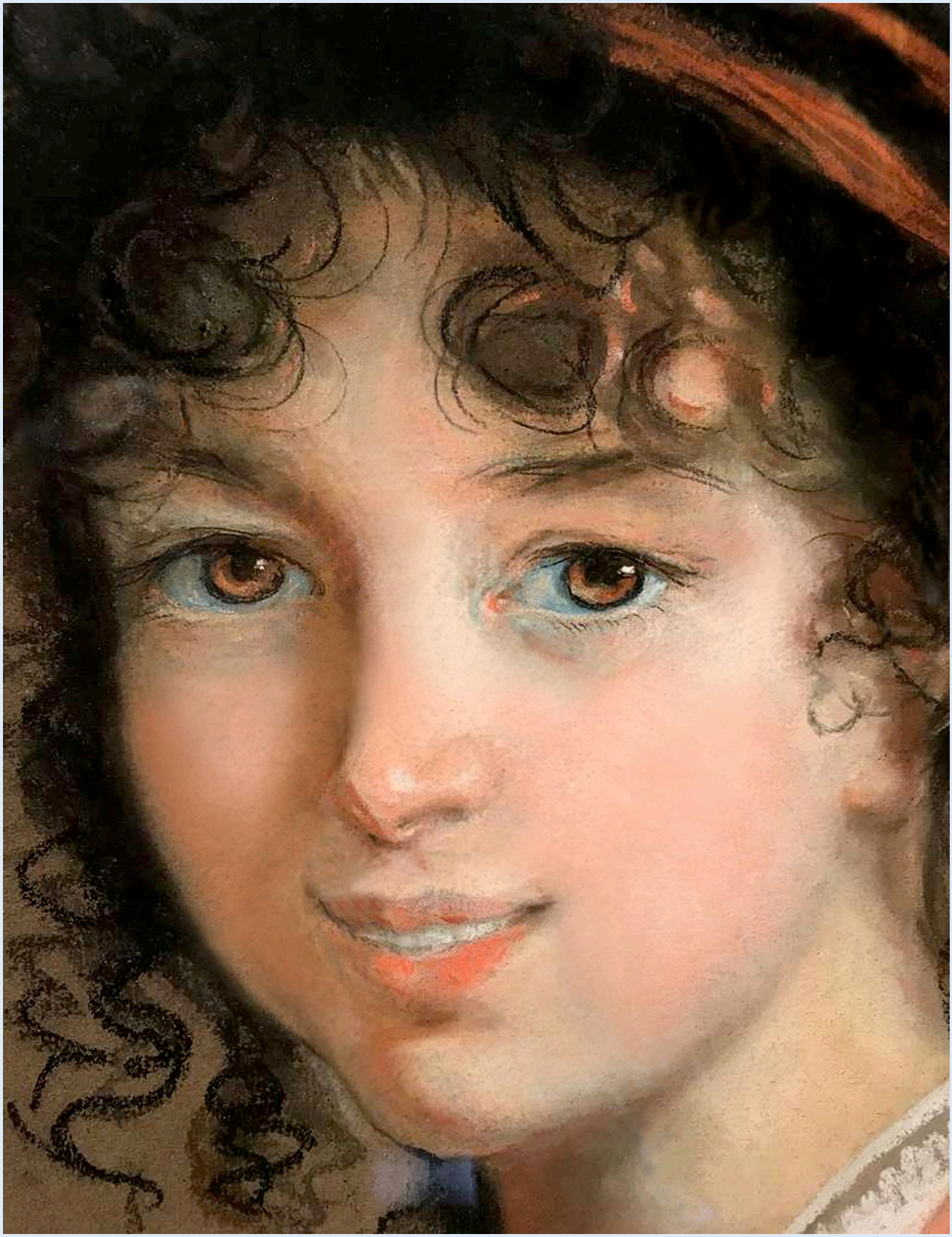


Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun retired to Louveciennes in 1809 (at age 54), to a beautiful home from which she has hardly moved, except to spend the 4 months of winter in her apartment in Paris. She painted much less than before, not having sympathized with the 1st Empire, nor with the 3 Kings of France that followed. She wrote up her memoirs in 1835 (see below), with the help of her niece, the only relative who remained to her. She

had spent her childhood under Louis XV and was already 19 when he died. It had already been 7 years since Louis-Philippe 1st, whose mother she had painted (young) before 1789, reigned when she died suddenly in 1742, at the age of 87. So many events between the two, and great paintings, which still bring some emblematic characters of her time to life! *Below,* **Eugénie Tripier-Lefranc** (born Lebrun), *self-portrait, 1820, Brooklyn Museum, New-York.* Niece by marriage of the artist, she was also a painter and took care of her aunt a lot (with another niece) after 1820.







Charlotte Jeanne Élisabeth Louise called Caroline Vigée (1791-1864), niece of Madame Vigée-Lebrun (only daughter of her brother Etienne), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1812, private collection.* She was the painter's only relative (with another niece) from 1820 (Etienne death) and looked after her aunt until her death in 1842.

Paris, 1st Empire, Pont Royal and Tuileries, *W. Eckersberg, 1812, Copenhagen Museum*.



The artist continued to pass the winter in Paris, where she still met some old friends.





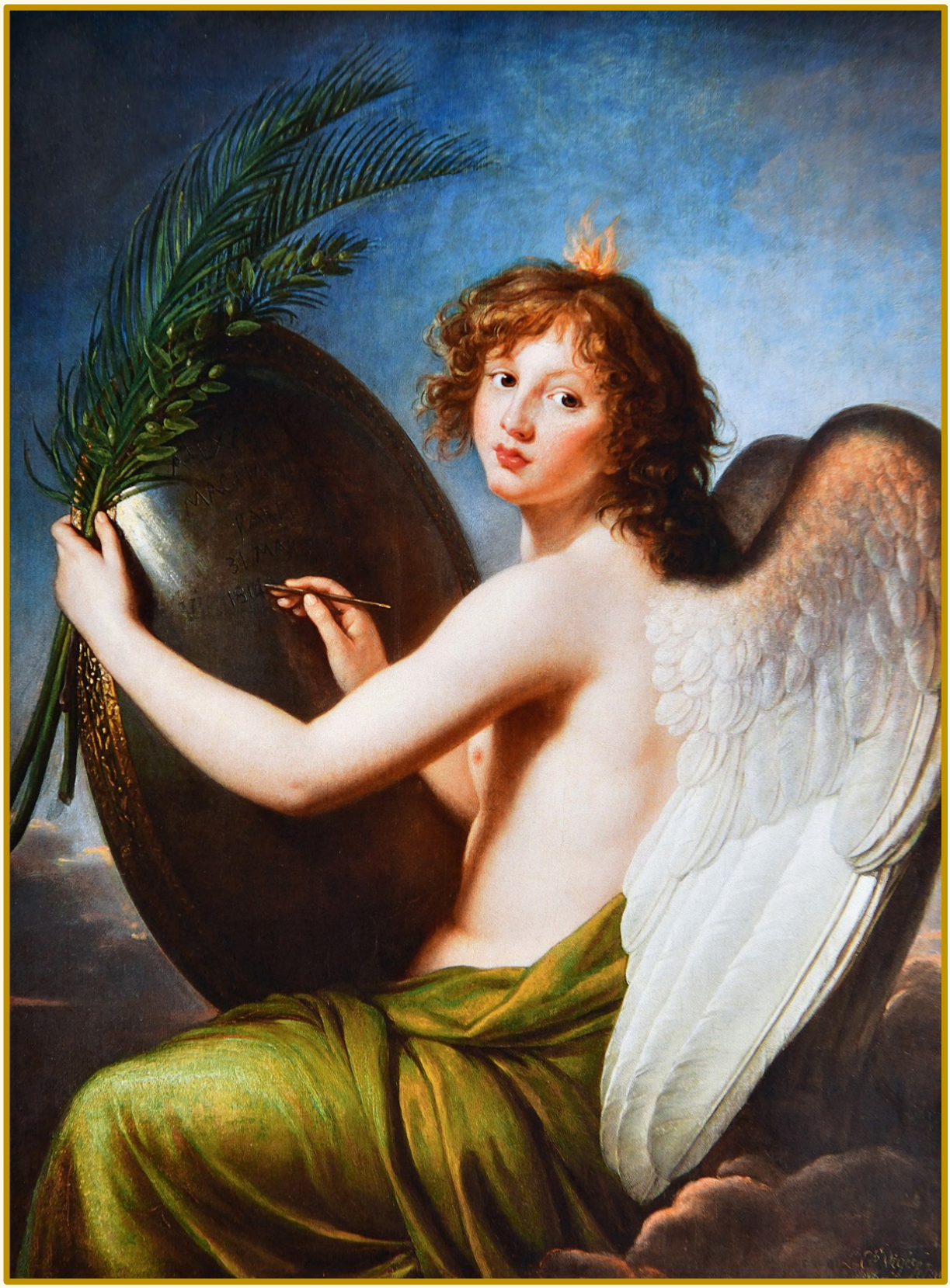
Young woman in Flore, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1811,*
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

Caroline de Rivière, *pastel, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1812.* It can be read below on right, « à Louveciennes, 21 novembre 1812 ».



Armand Gaston Félix, comte d'Andlau, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1814, collection privée. French politician.*





Above, **The Genius of Alexandre I**, Allegory, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1814, Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg.* This was a gift made by the artist to this Tsar because of his personal role in peace when he came to Paris with allied troops in 1814 (first abdication of Napoléon).

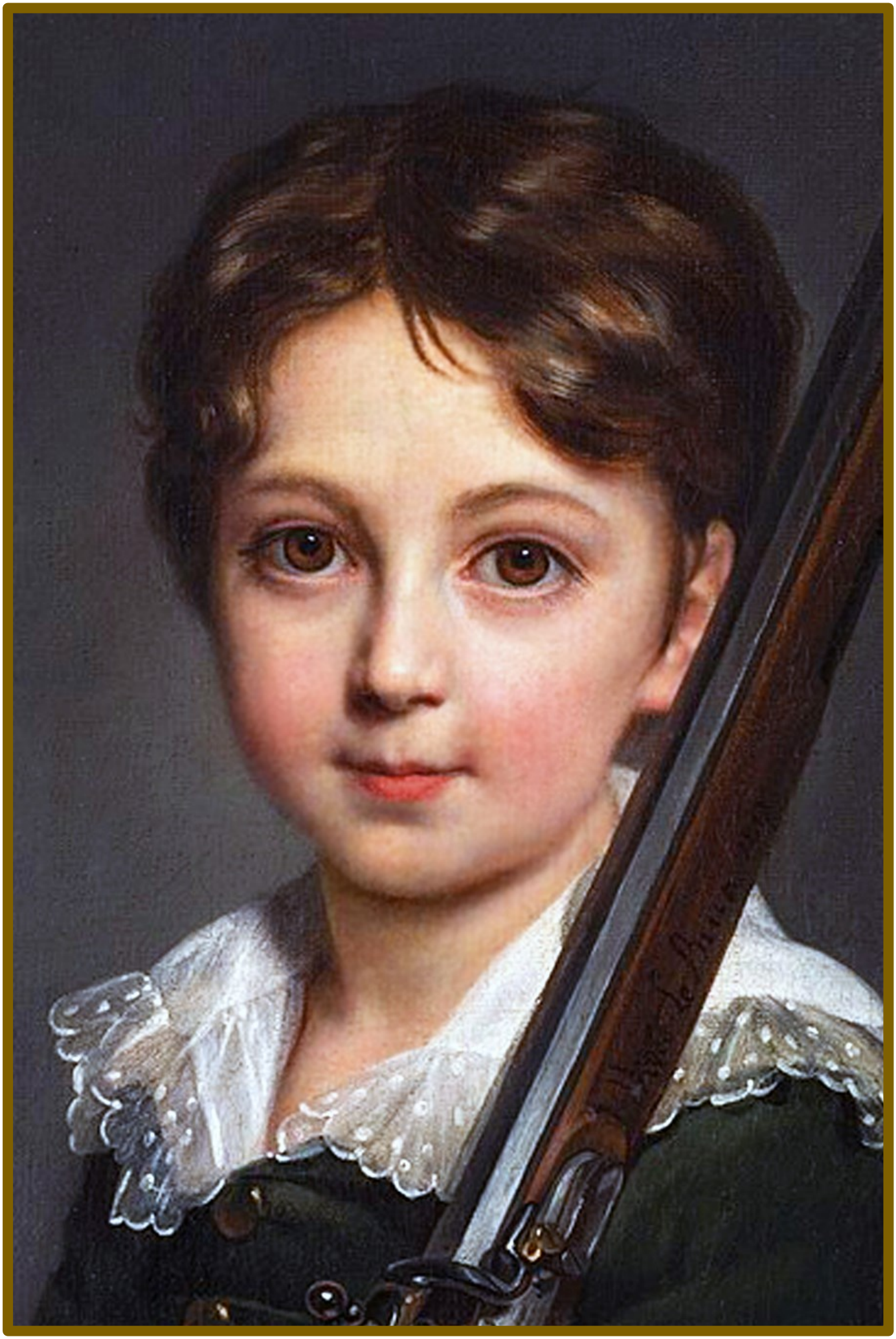


Baronne de Thellusson (1769-1852) writing, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1814, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.* She was a French writer.



Young boy, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1817, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington.*







Jean Charles Sapey, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1819, private collection.*
French military then politician.



Young Woman, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1819, private collection.*





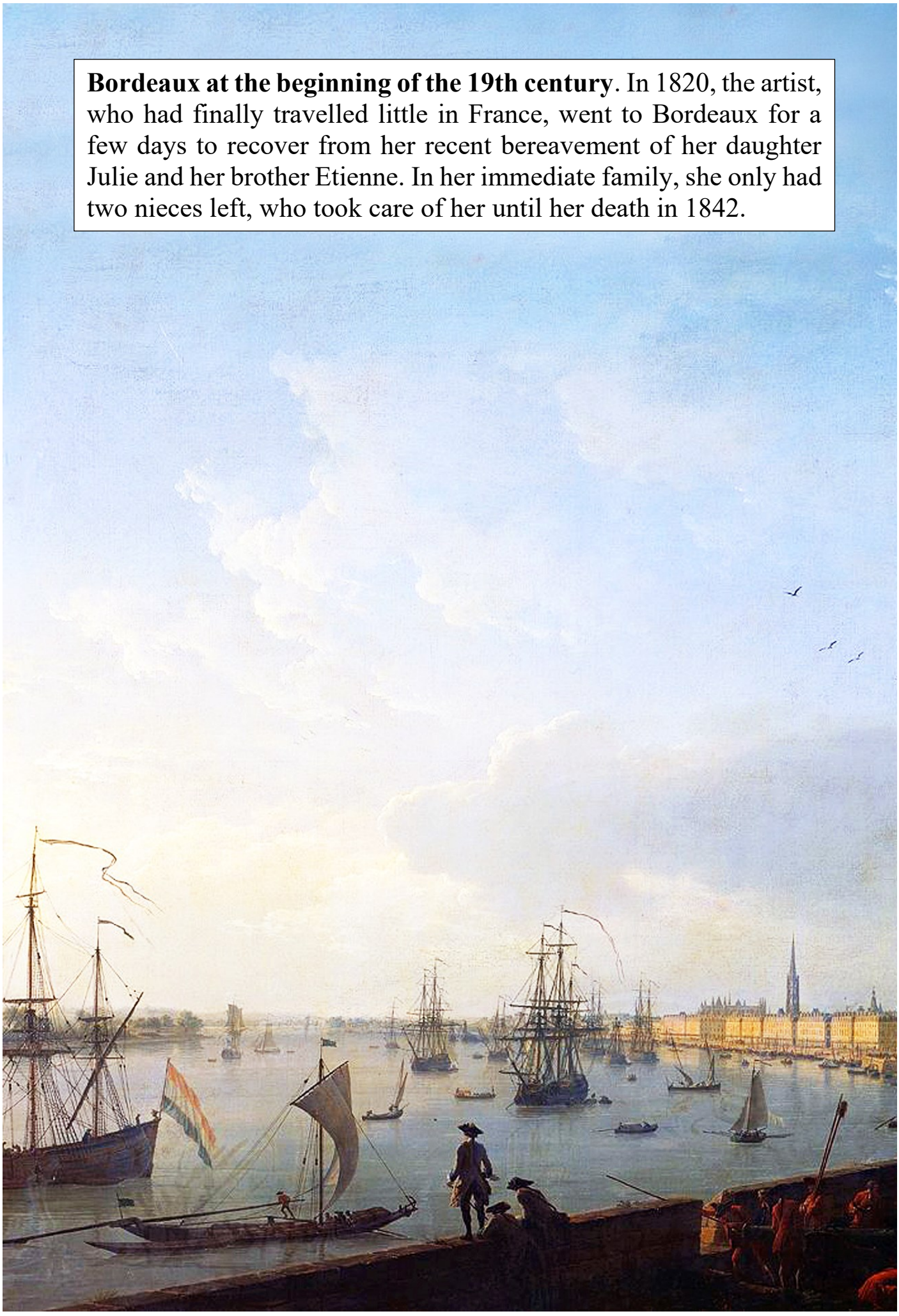
Alfred von Schönburg, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1820, Hinterglauchau, Germany.*

Tatyana Borisovna Potemkina (1797-1869), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1820, private collection.* Russian aristocrat met in Paris.





Bordeaux at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1820, the artist, who had finally travelled little in France, went to Bordeaux for a few days to recover from her recent bereavement of her daughter Julie and her brother Etienne. In her immediate family, she only had two nieces left, who took care of her until her death in 1842.







Above, **Young boy,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, after 1800. Right,* **Sainte Geneviève,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1821, Louveciennes*. This painting was offered to her parish of Louveciennes, the saint having the features of her daughter Julie, who died of pneumonia 2 years earlier. The artist remained pious all her life.





Marie Caroline Ferdinande Louise de Bourbon, Princess of the Two Sicilies, Duchess of Berry (1798-1870), at age 26, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1824, Metropolitan Art Museum, New York.* Her husband, the Duke of Berry, heir to the throne of Charles X (brother of Kings Louis XVI and Louis XVIII), had been assassinated in 1820 and she tried, unsuccessfully, to be regent in 1832. One of the last paintings by the portrait painter, where it can be felt the dynamism of her model.







Count Emmanuel Nikolayevich Tolstoy *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1823, Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.* The artist painted his mother in Russia 27 years before.



Aglaé Angélique Gabrielle de Grammont (1797-1842), *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun,1824, private collection.* Granddaughter of Duchess of Polignac and daughter of Aglaé: 3 successive generations of the same family painted by the artist in 40 years.





General Charles Yves César Cyr, Count of Coetlosquet (1783-1837),
Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1824, private collection.

Countess of Bossancourt, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1830, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Troyes.*



Revolution of July 1830



Above, **the Duc d'Orléans is leaving the Palais Royal** on July 31, 1830 and will be proclaimed King, under the name of Louis-Philippe I, *Horace Vernet, 1832, Versailles. On the right,* **Liberty Leading the People**, detail, *Eugène Delacroix, 1830, Louvre Museum.*

The **July Revolution of 1830** took place over 3 days (July 27 to 29). It was born in response to an attempted constitutional coup by Charles X following a long ministerial turmoil. Charles X (1757-1837) was the brother of Louis XVI (1754-1793) and Louis XVIII (1755-1824) and had reigned since 1824. Parisian insurgents fought against the royalist troops of Charles X. He had to abdicate in favor of his cousin, the Duke of Orléans, who was crowned under the name of Louis-Philippe I (1773-1850). This Revolution caused less than a thousand deaths and did not worry the artist who was quietly in Louveciennes and continued to paint. She had painted in 1789 the mother of Louis-Philippe I, Louise Marie Adélaïde de Bourbon, and her grandfather Louis Philippe d'Orléans in 1779. She did not meet this new King (the 5th for her!), who reigned until 1848, and she began in 1830 to writing her Memoirs, published in 1835.





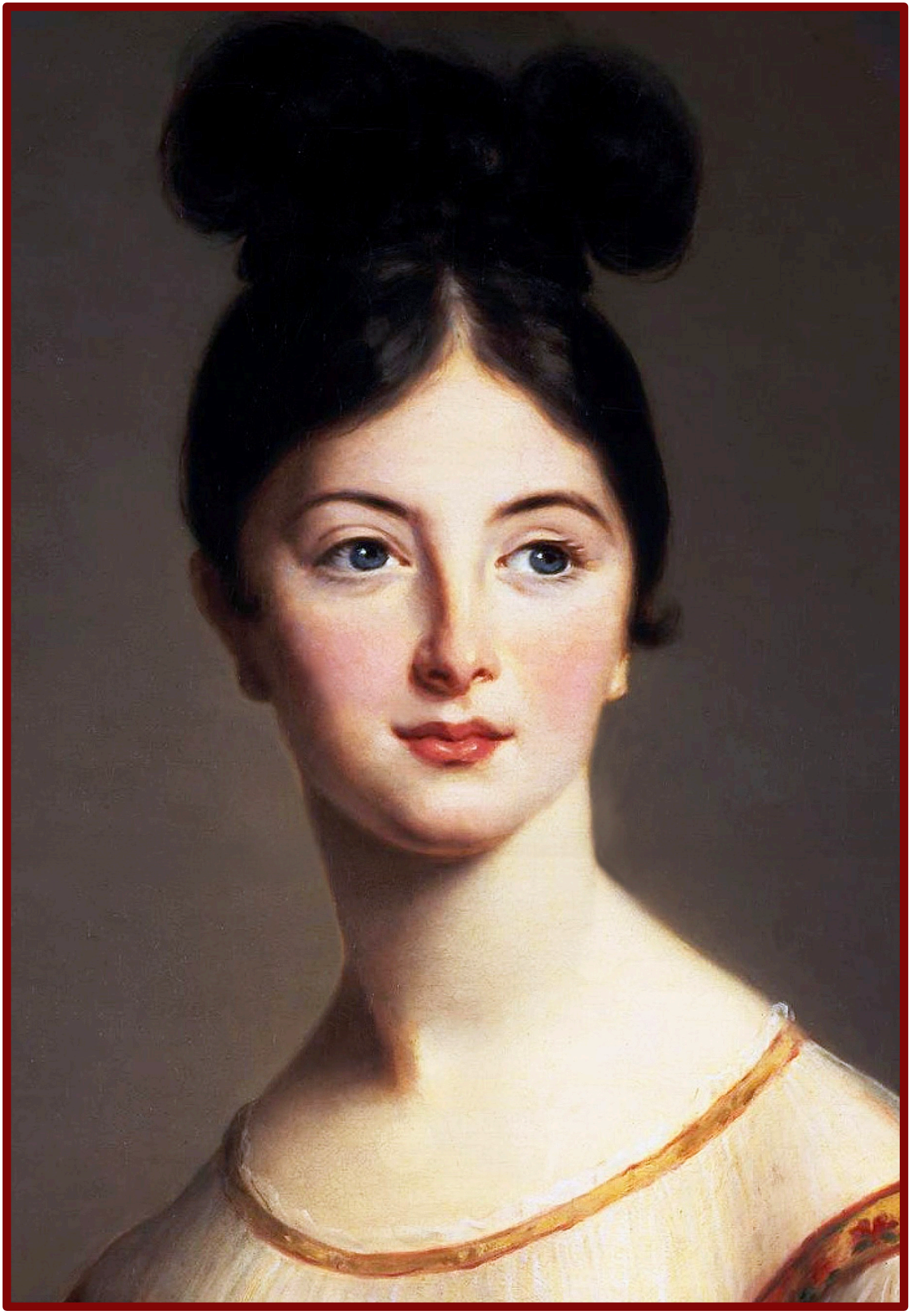
Above, **Lucie Ditte,** born Garnier (1793-1877), *1832, private collection*. The artist knew well her family for long. *Right,* **Louis-Philippe I,** *Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1839, Versailles.*


CHARTE DE 1830

Below, **Madame Baudin,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1835. Next,* **Léontine de Rivière,** *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1831, Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg.*









Memoirs of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun

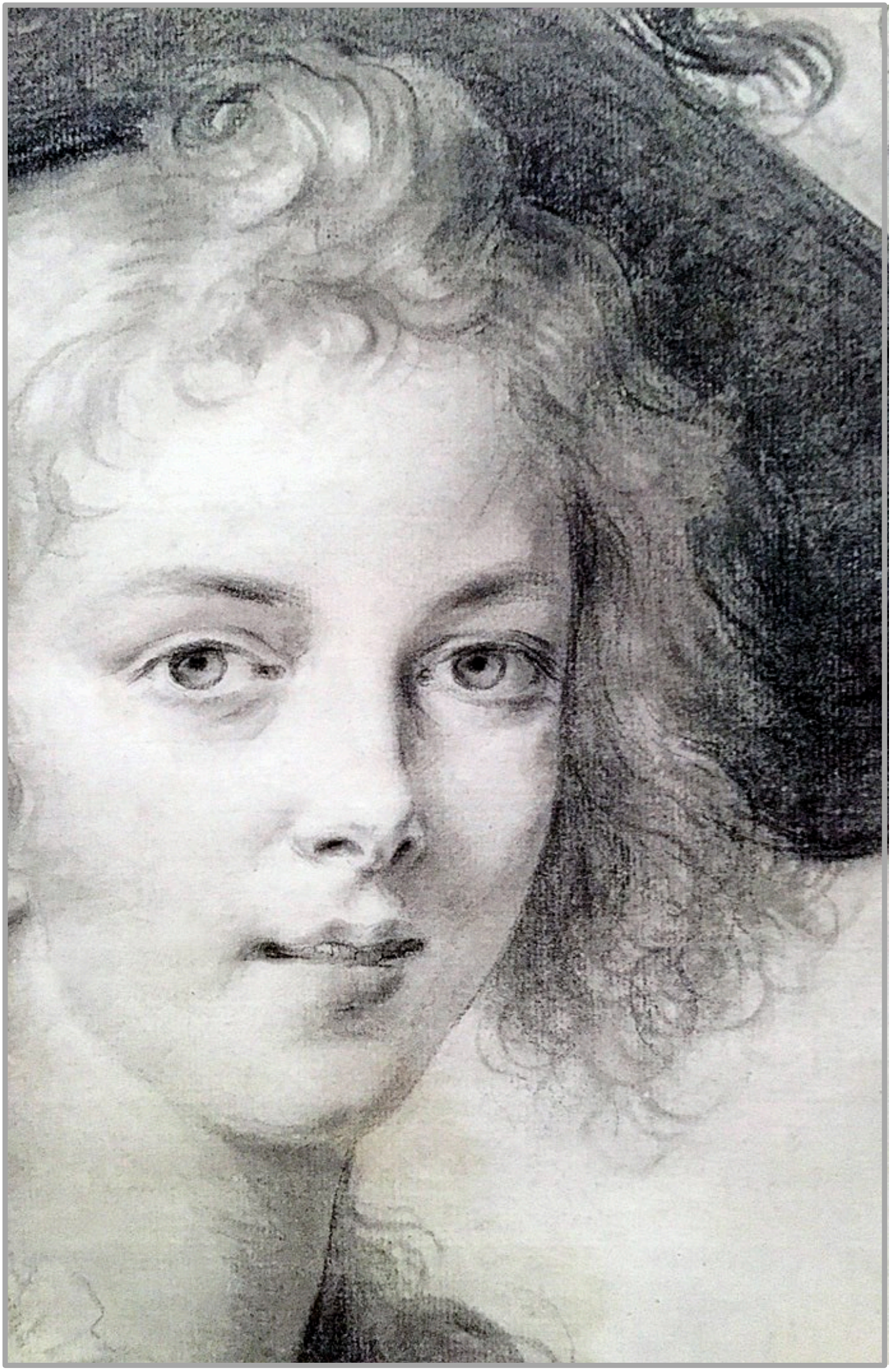


Illustration depicting one of the artist's famous paintings with her daughter Julie, existing in the original edition of **"Souvenirs de Mme Vigée-Lebrun".** These Memoirs are in 3 volumes (about 800 pages) and they were written in 1835 (aged 80) with the help of her niece. They exist in many modern editions, including paperbacks, and they are also free to read and download on the Internet. The following analysis shows their interest if one appreciates the painting of this artist, because one discovers the details of her very eventful life, endearing personality traits, multiple anecdotes on her illustrious models and daily life at the end of the 18th century and, finally, some technical secrets of her, oh so original, painting, the whole being written in a beautiful language very pleasant to read.

The Memoirs of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun are fascinating in more ways than one and can serve as conclusions in this document. We first find there the nostalgia for the time that has passed since childhood under the reign of King Louis XV for little Louise Élisabeth born in a very modest bourgeois family with a hairdresser mother of peasant origin, but a cultivated pastelist father, who educated her well by putting her in a convent until she was 11 years old. Then, there was the meteoric artistic and social rise of the very talented, hardworking and pretty teenager to the radiant young adult, *Louise Élisabeth Vigée*. She managed to train herself at the highest level in a few years despite the premature disappearance, when she was only 12 years old, of her best ally and advisor, her father, but thanks to the attentive and affectionate help of her mother who was able to mitigate the bad family atmosphere created by her detestable stepfather.

Her emancipation from this family, which had become very heavy, then quickly came (at age 21) by a marriage of convenience with Jean-Baptiste Lebrun, a doubtful individual but an efficient art dealer. Her professional and artistic activity could thus be immediately strongly stimulated, which allowed her to become *Louise Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*, a recognized painter, having from the outset a great national and international success. She had then acquired the highest level of painting, immediately making her original mark in the art of portraiture "au naturel", but she had also reached the highest social level by merit and was quickly comfortable at the Court of Versailles and with the aristocracy of the “Ancien Régime”. She thus became nothing less than a true friend of Queen Marie-Antoinette, who was the same age and whom she had met and painted a lot (about thirty times), even obtaining the admiration of King Louis XVI.

It can be imagined that paintings portraits with the necessary poses of the models led de facto to a certain intimacy, practically without anyone then to come to disturb this particular relation. In addition, each session lasted several hours and it took at least 3 to 4 sessions to make and complete a portrait. Therefore, a very privileged relationship developed between the model and the painter, who also excellently cultivated the art of conversation so that the model never got bored and always kept positive expressions on his/her face. The constant visual exchanges between the models, generally beautiful, and the painter, always herself lovely, helped to make these moments pleasant when boredom could easily have set in. The painter also succeeded, especially with women, in taking them out of their usual environment by having them put on casual and simple outfits that emphasized their femininity and beauty, and in painting them in unusual positions, often allowing ¾ to increase the play of light and shadows on their face, thus increasing their expressiveness. She often also made them undo their traditional



strict and powdery hairstyle arrangements which erased the naturalness of their hair and she also gave them various highlighting accessories (straw hat, book, pencil, etc.). All of this ultimately led them into "natural" situations and expressions that she had come to know for each personality. The result was surprisingly original and extremely "lively", which generally fully satisfied the models. This was then said by word of mouth and made many members of the high society come to see the new paintings made, often masterpieces, which of course gave rise to multiple new additional commissions among the "greats" of that world.

These Memoirs are also interesting by the successive upsetting events crossed during her long life, since the end of the Old Regime and the Revolution, through exile in different parts of very artistic Italy, concealing an incalculable number of pictorial masterpieces, then by the stay in two other capitals of European art, Vienna and Saint-Petersburg, which allowed her to complete her artistic culture. There was also her trip to Flanders before the Revolution, which had greatly contributed to her inspiration, and finally her return to France, in a new century, where then time had passed and where the playfulness of before had disappeared. During her 12-years long exile, where she was brutally separated from a large part of her family and friends by being forced to flee France in a hurry, all the foreigners and French emigrants encountered in the major European cities welcomed her with open arms and pampered, which allowed her to continue to live her passion, painting, and to easily earn a living through her talent and her work. She also said that "living and painting" was for her the same action, a passion that she kept throughout her life, despite the usual vicissitudes of existence.

She first struggled to overcome at the age of 12 the death of her father, so admired, but her grief quickly turned into additional energy to succeed at all costs and to confirm to her a posteriori that she was going to become "a painter" as he had predicted to her very early on. She hated her stingy stepfather for years and broke his hold whenever she could. She found it hard to endure her fickle husband's escapades and the squandering of their common money, although he later redeemed himself a little by helping her return from exile and helping to form the future Louvre museum. She also very much deplored the death of her mother, which occurred shortly before her return to France and especially the change of character, which had become very difficult, of her only daughter, with whom she had shared so much for 20 years, but which turned out badly followed by questionable dating, a dissolute life, alcoholism and fatal pneumonia at age 39. Finally, there was the disappearance of her dear brother Etienne with whom she had had a great bond since childhood and whom she loved dearly.

She had a horror of the Revolution which massacred a good part of her old friends, starting with the Queen with whom a great future admiration had existed, and put in great sorrow all those who had been obliged to emigrate. The Consulate, the Empire and Napoleon Bonaparte did not satisfy her either, because Bonaparte then Napoleon ravaged Italy, which she had loved so much, before fighting the courts of Austria, Russia and Prussia, who had so lovingly received and artistically protected her, which she could not forget.

She was also unable to admire a predominantly military regime that had imposed itself mainly through a permanent state of war, which she strongly disapproved of. Finally, the new French monarchies - of Louis XVIII, Charles X and Louis-Philippe 1st – were in her eyes only pale copies of the societal and artistic magnificence that she had known at Versailles under Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. She therefore found herself isolated both emotionally and socially and retired at her maturity (54) to her campaign in Louveciennes where she continued to paint for twenty years, but less and less with growing old age.

These Memoirs also contain many interesting details on everyday life at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, on clothing, food, entertainment, receptions, concerts, travel, ways of getting around various encounters. There are also a lot of technical and artistic explanations about painting and anecdotes about her models that allow us to better understand her pictorial production.

Finally, there is a lot of interest in his unspoken words, which we can guess, on the obvious effect of her charm, her grace, her friendliness and sociability, her ability to adapt to situations and always new people. On the other hand, she remained very secret about her personal emotional relationships. She was free from the start of her marriage since her husband has always been fickle, the exile separating them, with finally a divorce when she was 39. One can imagine that these relationships were not that poor with the profession that she exercised, which led her to rub shoulders with close to quality people, while her physical charm remained intact until late in her life.

Right, engraving of Queen of Prussia made after a pastel by Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun.



L. E Vigee Le Brun

Signature of the artist.

Some technical advice given by the painter as an appendix to her Memoirs:

"Before you start talk to your model; try several attitudes, and choose not only the most agreeable, but the one that suits his/her age and character; which can add to the resemblance, in the same way for the head: place it in front or three-quarters, that adds more or less to the truth of the features, especially for the public.

It is necessary to try to make the head (the mask especially) in three or four sessions of an hour and a half each, two at most; because the model is bored, impatient (which should be avoided), the face visibly changes, which is why he/she should be allowed to rest, and distracted as much as possible. All this is from experience with women; you have to flatter them, tell them that they are beautiful, that they have a fresh complexion, etc., etc. This puts them in a good mood, and makes them hold on with more pleasure. The opposite would visibly change them. We must also tell them that they pose wonderfully; they are thereby engaged in keeping themselves well. We must advise them not to bring companies. All want to give their opinion, and spoil everything. As long as you are working at the head of a woman, if she is dressed in white, put on her a drapery of an absent color (gray or greenish), so as not to distract the visual rays.

To paint the head in pastel or in oil, it is necessary to establish the masses of vigor, the halftones, then the clear ones. You have to thicken the lights, and make them always golden; between lights and halftones; there is a mixed tone that should not be omitted, it is part of the purple, the greenish, the bluish. See Van Dyck. The halftones must be of a broken tone, and less thick than the lights; that its light strongly indicates its bones and muscular parts which give way to the first. Immediately after this first light is the skin tone decided according to the skin tone of the person, it is lost with the mixed and fleeting tones of the halftones.

The shadows should be vigorous and transparent at the same time, that is to say not thickened, but of a ripe tone, accompanied by firm and bloody touches in the cavities, such as the orbit of the eye, the sunken nostrils, and in the shaded and inner parts of the ear, etc. The colors of the cheeks, if they are natural, must hold peach in the receding part, and golden rose in the protrusion, and become imperceptibly lost, with the lights caused by the protrusion of the bones; where the lights should always be, and imperceptibly degrade, is at the forehead bone, at the cheek bone around the nose, at the top of the upper lip, in the corner of the lower, and on the top chin. It should be observed that the light must diminish as it goes, and that the most prominent part, and therefore the most illuminated, must always be the luminous one.

The scintillating, fine, general lights of a head are in the apple, or in the white of the eye, depending on the position of the eye and the head (these two yield to the others by many, and are of a less golden tone), in the middle of the upper eyelid, in the middle of the lower eyelid, or at least on a part, it is according to how the head is lighted; then on the middle of the nose, on the cartilage, on the lower lip: the thinner the person's nose, the thinner the light should be. You should never paste the pupils, so that they are true and transparent; it is necessary, as much as possible, to detail them well, to take care to give them an ambiguous glance, especially to make them round. The top of the pupil circle is intercepted by the upper eyelid; to the angry eye, the apple is fully visible. When the eye smiles, the pupil is intercepted by the lower eyelid which covers it…" Etc.

Countess Siemontkowsky Bystry, *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1793, private.*
Portrait made in Vienna and related to the remarks of the left page. She was the wife of the Count of the same name, also painted in 1793, see above.



4. en 1779 premier portrait que je fis de la Reine

a la premiere Séance que j'eu de Sa Majesté je fus d'abord tres intimidée par Son air imposant, mais elle me parla avec tant de Bonté qu'enfin Sa grace si Bienveillante, me tira de la premiere impression que j'en avois ressentie

Ce fut alors que je fis un portrait de La Reine avec un grand panier, en robe de Satin Blanc tenant une Rose ce portrait etait destiné pour l'empereur Joseph II son frere.

La Reine m'en ordonna deux Copie l'une pour l'imperatrice de Russie et l'autre pour les appartemens de versailles ou de Fontainebleau

en 1783. puis en 1786 et 1788 le Grand tableau de la Reine avec ses enfans

a divers époques subsequentes je fit plusieurs autres portraits de La Reine jusqu'au genoux, avec une robe de velours noir, devant une table, ou elle tenoit un vase, arrangeant des fleurs ces portraits etoient pour les ambassadeurs. X on peut croire que le desir de faire ses derniers portraits (sans grande toilette) et surtout point de grands paniers

en 1785

je fis encore plusieurs portraits de S. M., une entre autres coiffée avec un chapeau de paille, en robe de Mousseline Blanche, avec des manches plissé en travers assez ajustée

× et ses amis

près que toutes les Seances que me donnait S. M. elle avait entendu dire que j'avais une jolie voix elle me fesait chanter avec elle plusieurs Duo de Gretri la Reine aimait la musique, mais sa Voix n'etait pas d'une grande Justesse...

On the left, **the artist's manuscript** in which she talks about her posing sessions with the queen: *"At the first session, the queen's imposing air intimidated me tremendously; but S. M. spoke to me with so much kindness that her benevolent grace soon dispelled this impression. It was then that I made the portrait which represents her with a large basket, wearing a satin dress and holding a rose in her hand. This portrait was intended for her brother, Emperor Joseph II, and the Queen ordered two copies from me: one for the Empress of Russia, the other for her apartments in Versailles or Fontainebleau. At various times I have made several other portraits of the Queen. In one, I painted her only up to her knees, with a nacaral dress and placed in front of a table, on which she arranges flowers in a vase. One can believe that I much preferred to paint her without a large toilet and especially without a large basket* (very large dress). *These portraits were given to her friends, some to ambassadors* (Author's note, perhaps to her secret great love, the Swedish Count Axel de Fersen). *Another depicts her wearing a straw hat and dressed in a white muslin dress whose sleeves are pleated across, but fairly adjusted: when this one was exhibited in the living room, the wicked were not lacking not to say that the Queen had been painted in a shirt; for we were in 1786, and calumny was already beginning to be exercised over her. This portrait, however, was a great success".*



Commemorative plaque at 19 rue de Cléry, the home that Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun lived during her greatest period of activity (1778-1789).



Above, aspects of the **"Vigée-Lebrun" exhibition** which took place at the **Grand Palais in Paris in 2015** and which then moved at the beginning of 2016 for a few months to **New York** and **Ottawa**. It gathered about 150 paintings and drawings.

The artist was very famous in France in her time during the pre-revolutionary decade, during which she became the official painter of Versailles and of the aristocratic and cultural elite of the "Ancien Regime".

It was the same during her 12-year exile in Europe (Italy, Austria, Russia, Prussia and England). She was everywhere received as a great princess already well known by all for a long time, appreciated for her extraordinary artistic talent, her beauty, her elegance of dress and wit, her charisma, her friendliness and her incomparable sense of conversation. It must be said that at the time all the major courts in continental Europe spoke French fluently. She was also able to continue to paint extensively, still producing a few masterpieces to her maturity and to live very comfortably from her art.

On her return to France (1802), her production decreased markedly in quantity and overall also a little in quality. This painter, somewhat forgotten at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th century, has only really been rediscovered and fully appreciated again for a few decades.

The 2015-2016 exhibition was a great success, but especially with insiders. It seems now difficult to restart such an exhibition because the great majority of paintings are widely dispersed in the United States, Russia and several European countries, with only a few copies existing in the Louvre and some French cities.

« France Culture » in 2015, about Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the exhibition of the Grand Palais:

"Through her portraits, of which the most famous with the public were the representations of Marie-Antoinette, it is indeed all the "Ancien Régime" which is paraded before our eyes. "Madame" Vigée-Le Brun paints the Court, the powerful, the elegant, the fashions, an art of living ...

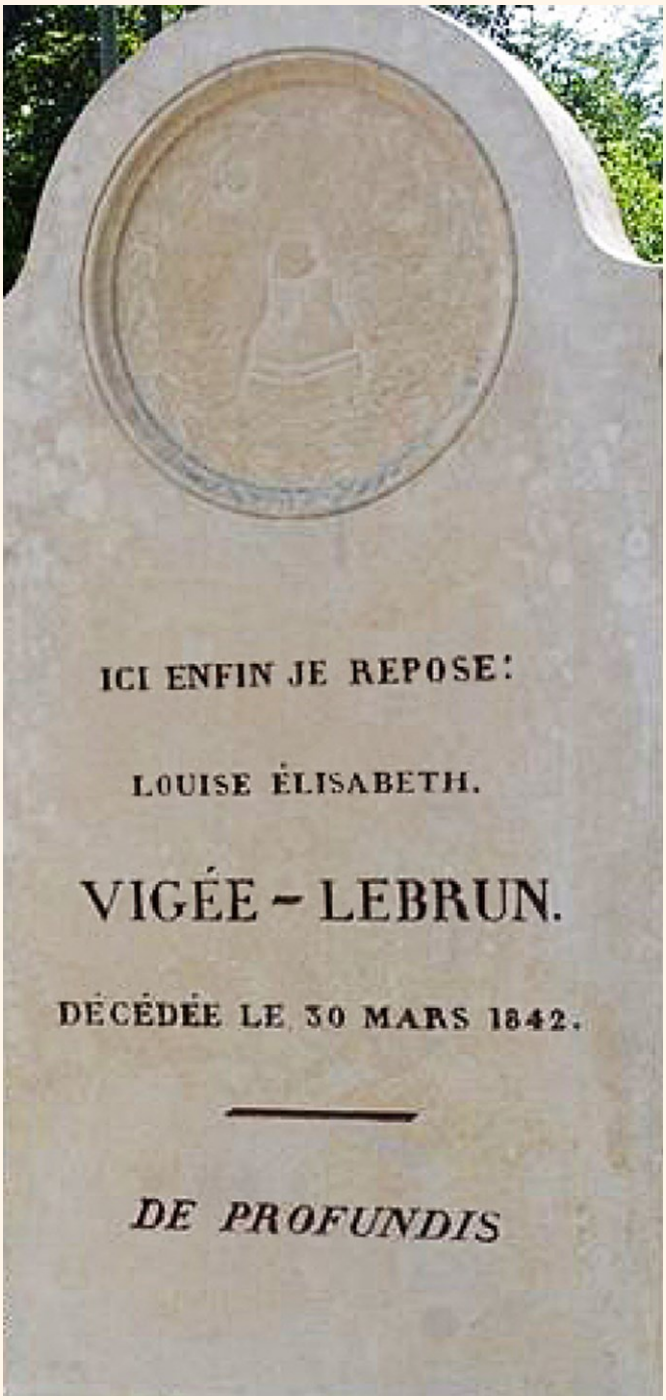
A first retrospective devoted (left page) *to all of his work at the Grand Palais today pays a fair tribute to the dazzling portrait painter and colorist that was Vigée-Le Brun. Her cultivated painting, in the tradition of Rubens, Raphaël, Van Dyck, has the art of transcribing the transparency of a complexion, the vibrations of a face, the drape and the sensuality of fabrics. Far from being stiff, Vigée-Le Brun captures life. She was a free, financially independent woman who claimed her status as an artist. No link, no event succeeded in hindering her freedom. Her is an exceptional trajectory.*

She was born the same year that Marie-Antoinette, in 1755, into a family of artists, rose to fame from her fifteenth year, frequented the elite and artists of her time, was admitted in 1783 to the very prestigious and masculine Royal Academy of Painting which only accepted five women in its midst, portrayed the Court of France and the royalty of Europe, was acclaimed in all the European countries in which she stayed during her twelve-year exile and was received in the most prestigious academies in the world.

Was she at odds with the ideas of her time? Certainly, but she was also a woman of the Enlightenment through her sensitivity, her taste for travel, the "Rousseauist" feeling of nature and her penchant for the picturesque. Lesser known aspect of her work: She produced many pastels of landscapes during her intrepid crossing of Europe during the years of emigration.

Back in France, she remained absolutely faithful to her royalist convictions, scorned the pomp and honors of the Empire, but continued to live up to the cultural news of her time, welcoming the new generation of poets to her living room and romantic musicians. In the last years of her life, she swapped the palette for the pen, portraying in words in her Souvenirs, this vanished world she had admired so much. "

« I have only had happiness in painting »



Cemetery of Louveciennes

File in French here