

HISTORY IN ART

Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun 1755–1842

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1755 – Elisabeth Louise Vigée is born in Paris on 16 April. Her father, Louis, is a successful artist and encourages her interest in painting from a young age. Some of his fellow artists are also helpful to her.

1767 – Her father dies but her mother marries again the following year. She despises her new stepfather, but he is a wealthy jeweller and through him she receives some portrait commissions in her early teens.

1774 – She is accepted into the Guild of the Academy of St Luke in Paris. This is very important to her career, as the Guild supports artists and makes sure they get a good price for their work. It is also a sign of the respect that her peers have for her.

1776 – Elisabeth marries Jean-Baptiste Le Brun, an artist and art dealer.

1779 – After becoming a successful portraitist for the nobility, Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun receives an invitation to paint the queen, Marie Antoinette. She paints the queen over 30 times in the next few years.

1780 – She gives birth to a daughter, Jeanne Lucie Louise.

1783 – Vigée Le Brun becomes a member of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, after the queen puts pressure on her husband, Louis XVI, to grant her membership. This prestigious body accepted very few women members over the years of its existence (since 1648). Vigée Le Brun continues to paint the aristocracy, including the previous king's official mistress Madame du Barry. In this period, up to the Revolution in 1789, she also paints a number of self-portraits and a few allegorical works.

1789 – Vigée Le Brun flees from France with her daughter after the Revolution, believing that she may be in danger because of her position as a court painter. Her husband remains in Paris.

1802 – After spending time in Italy, Austria, Bohemia, parts of Germany, and Russia, where she paints Catherine the Great's daughters, she returns to Paris. She doesn't feel comfortable after all the changes, and instead chooses to live in London for two years. She then moves to Geneva for a short while.

1807 – She returns to settle in Paris once again. Although she lost her citizenship because she left the country, some of her fellow artists work to have it renewed. She is reunited with her husband, even though he had divorced her. In the next few years, she continues to paint the portraits of some important people, including of the Prince of Wales and Madame de Staël. She also paints some mythological works.

1813 – Her husband dies.

1819 – Her daughter dies.

1835–37 – Vigée Le Brun publishes her memoirs in three volumes.

1842 – She dies in Paris.