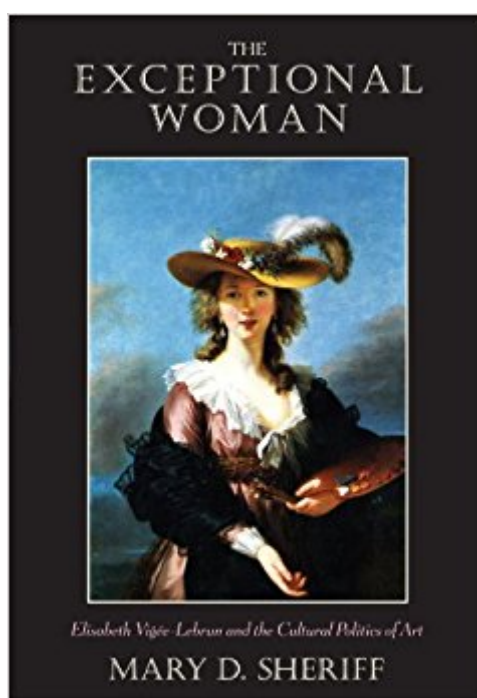


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# The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun And The Cultural Politics Of Art



## Synopsis

Elisabeth Vig e-Lebrun (1755-1842) was an enormously successful painter, a favorite portraitist of Marie-Antoinette, and one of the few women accepted into the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. In accounts of her role as an artist, she was simultaneously flattered as a charming woman and vilified as monstrously unfeminine. In *The Exceptional Woman*, Mary D. Sheriff uses Vig e-Lebrun's career to explore the contradictory position of "woman-artist" in the moral, philosophical, professional, and medical debates about women in eighteenth-century France. Paying particular attention to painted and textual self-portraits, Sheriff shows how Vig e-Lebrun's images and memoirs undermined the assumptions about "woman" and the strictures imposed on women. Engaging ancien-r gime philosophy, as well as modern feminism, psychoanalysis, literary theory, and art criticism, Sheriff's interpretations of Vig e-Lebrun's paintings challenge us to rethink the work and the world of this controversial woman artist.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mary D. Sheriff was the W.R. Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Art and department chair at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her scholarship focused on 18th- and 19th-century French art and culture. Four of her books are published by the University of Chicago Press.

good to have.

So detailed about her life and certain work of art, even how she studied art. Perfect resource book

for a report!

Difficult to read

I would like to correct the lady reviewer of Waltham, Massachusetts who does equal disservice to Mme Vigee Le Brun and to the writer of 'The Exceptional Woman : Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun and the Cultural Politics of Art' in labelling the artist an "extremely uppity chick". The writer would also be the first to correct the reviewer's odd notion that she has rescued Mme Vigee Le Brun from oblivion. Elisabeth-Louise was not only the finest portraitist of her day, and generally acknowledged as such, despite early salon criticism - compare the charm of her double portrait of Therese-Elisabeth-Charlotte, Madame Royale with her brother the first Dauphin, with the pedestrian work by Drouais for example - but also a woman of letters. Her diary, which is also available, not only catalogues the people for whom she worked but describes them in a way that would summon them to life even did we not possess the canvasses she painted of them. Her description of Marie-Antoinette and account of the Queen's sense of humour is touching; her account of being summoned to paint Mesdames Tantes - Louis XVI's rather spiteful spinster aunts Madame Victoire and Madame Adelaide - on their arrival in Rome - is also amusing. However, Elisabeth Louise was no feminist, nor would she have joined the camp had the movement existed at the time. She was fully aware of her talents and her charm, and felt not in the least disadvantaged by being a woman or of the judgements that this sometimes occasioned. Ghastly phrases - 'extremely uppity chick' is one of the worst I have yet found in describing a late-eighteenth century woman - which betray a naivety and an atrocious lack of inscape can only harm the credibility of the feminist cause. I'll leave you with the words of my great grandmother, the first Englishwoman to be a Justice of the Peace, who on finding two suffragettes in her court, said, "My dears, you should realise, as I did long ago, that it is pointless campaigning for equality with a being who is manifestly our inferior in every way." Madame Vigee Le Brun realised this I am sure. I am sure too that she, like every woman confident of her femininity and unique value, would not stoop to generally denigrating men simply because they are men. Had she done so, we would have been deprived of so many of her magnificent portraits. There is a very large collection of Mme Vigee Le Brun's works in the United States; the reviewer from Waltham can access it simply by typing 'Vigee Le Brun' into the search field on her computer.

Definitely a good purchase. I was looking for a replacement for my chef's product and this looks to

be a really well made product. Its sharp, with a nice weight to it. Will definitely recommend to anyone looking for a good product at a reasonable price. send it to my boyfriend , good product with high quality. will buy next time. good product .

Wandering goggle-eyed through Washington's National Gallery of art, I was arrested by the most lively, lush, \*real\*, and striking depiction of women in the whole gallery. Imagine my delight upon inspecting the plaque and discovering the artist was one of us! No wonder her subjects -- two rich French court ladies enjoying an afternoon in the garden with their children -- were not \*objects\*, as were the drab, blurred, unhappy-looking women in most male painter's work. Researching the artist, Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun, whom I had never heard of (but of course -- she was a \*woman\* artist!) I discovered Mary Sheriff had just published a book about her. I waited for the paperback and have ordered it, and can't wait to find out more. From what I can tell she was an extremely uppity chick, the best kind, and a survivor (usually a contradiction in terms in Elisabeth's day: she managed to scam out of France with her head and her money intact as the Revolution descended, although her buddy and patron Marie Antoinette fared less well, as we know.) Sounds like a great costume drama for Jane Campion, starring a strong, knowing, and savvy personality. Holly Hunter, Judy Davis have the strength. Elizabeth Shue has the look. Add Vigee-Lebrun to your collection of women who prevailed against the odds. Retrieve her from obscurity. Most of all: look at her work!

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