

Sotheby's

Tableaux, Sculptures et Dessins Anciens et du XIXe siècle

Paris | 15 Jun 2017, 02:30 PM | PF1709



LOT 109

ELISABETH-LOUISE VIGÉE LE BRUN

PARIS 1755 - 1842

PORTRAIT OF A LADY SAID PORTRAIT OF JEANNE DE VALOIS, COMTESSE DE LA MOTTE

Oil on canvas

74,5 x 60 cm ; 29 1/4 by 29 1/4 in

ESTIMATE 150,000-200,000 EUR

PROVENANCE

Sale Frederick Muller & Cie, Amsterdam, 27-28 November 1906 ;

Gallery Willis & Smith, London circa 1936 ;

Collection Sir Stephenson Kent, London ;

Acquired by the family of the present owner in the 1980s

CATALOGUE NOTE

Witness of the final flames of the Old French Regime, Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun had, at the end of the 18th century, offered her genius for the representation of a society that was destined to disappear. It is partly through their nature as the ultimate testimony that her pre-Revolution canvases are today among the most sought after.

Paradoxically, it was with this modern woman, free and revolutionary in one sense, who was accused of embodying the ideals of another era. Whereas being a female artist, she owed her ascension and support to her great dispositions, abnegation, and immense work ethic. Improperly driven out of French territory, she retained an immense resentment and found, within the reprieve of the European monarchy, a diverted means to practice her art. "The women reigned then; the Revolution dethroned them,"¹ she wrote as a final provocation in a letter to the Princess Kurakin.

Her father, Louis Vigée was a pastel painter of portraits and recognized as excellent. While the father had enjoyed an honorable career, it was no comparison with the prodigious elevation of his daughter, as member of a modest studio for a ceiling painter, Gabriel Briard² painted at the age of twenty-three the portrait of the new Queen of France, Marie Antoinette in 1778³.

At the age of nineteen, she was admitted into the Saint-Luc Academy, where her father had worked before her. All Paris then requested her. "... I was overwhelmed with orders and was very much in vogue⁴ (...)" she confided again. From Libertines, who forced Louise's anxious mother to watch her during the sitting sessions,⁵ to the Princesse of Craon in 1776, all Paris was waiting for a portrait by Le Brun.

Her method of making women pose naturally was well-liked. "After getting the confidence of my models, I was able to drape them according to my fancy⁶."

A certain tendency would have us see in our model, with a somewhat enigmatic smile, the features of the instigator of the Queen's necklace affair, Jeanne de Valois, Countess de la Motte (fig. 1). It was in 1780 that she had sought the title of Countess and tried to integrate into certain cenacles, a date that might suit our portrait. Indeed, the painter of princesses and ambassadors often no longer painted the upper middle class during this decade.

1. Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun, *Souvenirs*, t. I, Paris, 2015, p. 109
2. Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun, *cat. exp. Grand Palais*, Paris, p. 14.
3. Elisabeth Louise-Vigée Le Brun, *Marie Antoinette en grand habit de cour, 1778*, Vienne, Kunsthistorischesmuseum.
4. *Souvenirs*, t. I, Paris, 2015, p. 15
5. Ce fut réellement le cas lorsqu'entre 1768 et 1772, elle réalisa le portrait du marquis de Choiseul-Beaupré visiblement sensible au charme de la jeune prodige.
6. *Souvenirs*, t. I., p. 43



Fig. 1

Jeanne de Valois, comtesse de La Motte

Source : Bibliothèque nationale de France