THE BOUNDARIES OF FEMININITY: A CASE FOR TWO WOMEN ARTISTS WORKING IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard were two of the most prominent women artists in France during the second half of the eighteenth-century. I argue in this thesis that in their responses to a range of societal limitations, Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard forged remarkable careers. I will examine just how they did so by focusing on the artists' self-portraits, their portraits of the royal family, divergent responses to the revolution, and their subsequent production. My thesis will explore the ways in which those limitations also created opportunities. Most studies on women artists are monographic, but by comparing Vigée-Lebrun's and Labille-Guiard's careers, new insights emerge. The first chapter will provide the background for my argument by discussing the long-debated "woman question." I focus my study on how women artists navigated their careers. Juxtaposing the careers of Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard with their contemporary, Jacques-Louis David, shows how societal constructs of gender impacted the different ways in which careers unfolded. In the second chapter I discuss Vigée-Lebrun's and Labille-Guiard's self-portraits. I explore how the artists capitalized on different aspects of societal ideals. In the third chapter I focus on the artists' representations of members of the royal family. Focusing on Vigée-Lebrun's

innovative portrayal of Marie Antoinette and Labille-Guiard's more traditional, yet remarkable portrait of Madame Adelaide, I will show how each artist employed different strategies in order to succeed. In the fourth chapter I contrast each artist's response to the revolution and describe how it affected their production in the later stages of their careers.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “The Boundaries of Femininity: A Case for Two Women Artists Working in Eighteenth-century France,” presented by Pamela Jean Foley, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1971 Linda Nochlin posed and answered the pivotal question "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Nochlin argued that truly great women artists simply did not exist, as there were no female equivalents to the greatest male artists, such as Michelangelo or Delacroix.[1] Such an argument was met with art historians eager to prove Nochlin wrong. Nochlin herself, with Ann Sutherland Harris, explored many of the most talented women artists.[2] In doing so, Nochlin and Harris, among other art historians, have recovered the lives and careers of many talented women artists throughout history.

Melissa Hyde addresses Nochlin's argument in the introduction to her book *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity in 18th-Century Europe.*[3] Her introduction focuses on the common questions that arise when studying women artists of eighteenth-century French society. In order to highlight the two extreme ways in which women artists have been often categorized, Hyde draws upon the Goncourt brothers' argument that women reigned in the eighteenth-century. She points out that while the Goncourt brothers were highly selective in their portrayal of women, they also placed women artists into a single group and exaggerated their influence. However, Hyde also highlights a flaw within Nochlin's argument by pointing

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[1] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (New York: Basic, 1971), 1.

[2] Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, *Women Artists, 1550-1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: Random House, 1976).

[3] Melissa Hyde, "Introduction: Art, Cultural Politics and the Woman Question," in *Women, Art, and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-century Europe*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 1-4.

out that while women did not dominate the Royal Academy, they still played an integral role. She argues that the lives of women artists often fell somewhere between the two extremes: the "reigning woman" of the Goncourt or the "undeveloped" woman artist of Nochlin's argument.

I recognize the importance of the research on women artists prompted by Nochlin's article. I also realize the importance of women artists and the need to assess their successes as an integral aspect of the art historical record. My focus in this thesis, however, is not on the outcome of a single artist's career. Instead, I explore how artistic careers were forged. More specifically, I ask how women pursued artistic careers in eighteenth-century France by exploiting societal limits, transforming them into tools for progress. More specifically, I examine the careers of the two most talented and successful women artists in the late eighteenth-century France, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803) and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842). By exploring artistic, biographical, and historical issues, I will highlight how each artist responded differently to limits society placed upon her, and demonstrate how each created a distinctive career as a result of her individual choices.

By about 1740, portraiture was at a turning point in France. Maurice-Quentin de La Tour was the leading portraitist in Paris.[4] However, the new ideals of the Enlightenment were beginning to influence the arts. As a result, the public's expectations of artists began to change. Each chapter will question the relationship between society and art. I will ask how Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard's varied responses to the obstacles that arose ultimately affected how they shaped their careers.

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[4] Rena Hoisington, "Maurice-Quentin de la Tour and the Triumph of Pastel Paintings in Eighteenth-Century France," (PhD Diss., New York University: Institute of Fine Arts, 2006), 71.

In eighteenth-century France, women artists were often taught to paint through similar channels, making the differences in Vigée-Lebrun's and Labille-Guiard's early careers more apparent. In most cases, the presence of an artist father or brother was a determining factor at the outset of a woman's career as an artist. Vigée-Lebrun's father, Louis Vigée (1715-1767), was a portraitist and her first teacher. In 1767 her father died, and Vigée-Lebrun continued her training under various masters, including the portraitist P. Davesne (1764-1796) and Gabriel Briard (1725-1777). However, it has been argued that most of her training came from copying paintings in private collections. By 1770 she had her own studio, and in 1774, at age nineteen, she was accepted into the Académie de Saint-Luc. Two years later, she married Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun (1748-1813), an art dealer.[5]

Labille-Guiard did not have the same familial introduction into the arts that Vigée-Lebrun enjoyed, since her father was a shopkeeper. However, Labille-Guiard's father noticed his daughter's talent and sent her to be trained under the miniaturist François-Elie Vincent (1708-1790). His son, François-André Vincent (1746-1816) would eventually become her second husband. Labille-Guiard also apprenticed under Maurice-Quentin de La Tour (1704-1788) from whom she learned the art of pastel. She was accepted to the Académie de Saint-Luc in 1769 and exhibited works in 1774.[6] Labille-Guiard and Vigée-Lebrun would both be admitted to the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in 1783, filling two of the four spots reserved for women artists.

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[5] Neil Jeffares, "VIGÉE-LEBRUN, Elisabeth-Louise, Paris 1755-1842," Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800, accessed April 2, 2015. http:www.pastellists.com/index.htm.

[6] Neil Jeffares, "LABILLE-GUIARD, Adélaïde, Paris 1749-1803," Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800, accessed April 2, 2015. http:www.pastellists.com/index.htm.

The formation of Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard's careers were in direct contrast with the early career of their contemporary Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). David was a student in the studio of Joseph-Marie Vien (1716-1809), an established history painter and member of the Royal Academy. From an early age David was trained as a history painter. He was able to study at the French Academy in Rome after winning the Grand Prix de Rome competition in 1774.[7] He also had the opportunity to study and draw from live, nude models. David was granted more opportunities in terms of career development, and these opportunities helped to shape his career. David's acceptance into the Academy was expected, whereas Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard were considered exceptions.[8] The concept of *emulation* was central to the academic model and also isolated the careers of women artists. Emulation not only referred to the act of imitating an admired model, it also meant to rival that model and one's peers. Through the concept of emulation artists competed and collaborated in order to advance their careers. However, emulation often excluded women artists, as emulating a woman artist was not a common practice nor was it accepted.

Another facet of eighteenth-century culture in Paris that is essential to consider when studying the formation of artistic careers was the public art forum in the form of the Salons. The Salon provided a basis for discussion about art in which the public held considerable power, which did not really exist prior to the eighteenth-century. Thomas Crow has explained how painters found themselves subject to public opinion, for the first time, through the reestablishment of the Salon in 1737. The new atmosphere of the Salon affected the

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[7] Thomas Crow, *Emulation: David, Drouais, and Girodet in the Art of Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [Revised Edition] 2006), 10.

[8] Mary Sheriff, "Jacques-Louis David and the Ladies." in *Jacques-Louis David: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy Johnson (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2006), 92.

commissions of the artists in the Academy. It was not uncommon for patrons and collectors to commission new work from artists who had received approval from the public.[9] With this new platform for public opinion came art criticism and rumors published in various salon pamphlets. This criticism provides the context in which I will discuss the art exhibited by Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard.

Throughout their respective careers, Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard were faced with similar societal restrictions because they were women. These limits, and their responses to them, were fundamental to each painter's creation of art. I will explore their different responses in the realms of self-portraits, representations of members of the royal family, and the impact of the revolution. In each of those realms, we find different strategies for propelling a career forward.

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[9] Thomas Crow, *Painters and the Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 1-2.

CHAPTER 2

SELF-PORTRAITURE AS A TOOL FOR ADVANCEMENT

When studying the careers of women artists during the late eighteenth-century in France, self-representation reveals itself as an important category to consider. In this era, self-portraiture was often invested with many layers of interpretation, which opened up new meanings and ideas within portraiture. One of the ideals of the Enlightenment was the "natural" social order. Through this order, men and women were considered endowed with opposing characteristics. Men were associated with reasoning, liberty, and sovereignty. Women were associated with dependency, modesty, and an in-born maternal nature. Not only did these ideals become popular, they were also believed to be biologically innate.[1] Women were expected to be in the private sphere of the home caring for their children, and men were expected to participate and contribute in the public sphere.[2]

Rousseau's *Émile*, published in 1762, provided instruction on how to embody these new ideals. He used the characters Émile and Sophie to illustrate how men and women should behave. He explained that a woman's purpose was to be found in the domestic realm. Her education was dependent on how it could be used in the future to support her husband or sons. Rousseau believed that from a young age women should be taught to seek the respect of men through their charms and that to abandon this purpose was to forsake their true identity. He also wrote about the arts in his description of Sophie. He believed that drawing was an acceptable skill for women. However, he advised against teaching women landscape

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[1] Mary Sheriff, "The Woman-Artist Question," in *Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists in the Louvre, Versaille, and other French National Collections*, ed. Jordana Pomeroy (Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2012), 43.

[2] Lisa Beckstrand, *Deviant Women of the French Revolution and the Rise of Feminism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 23.

and figure painting. Rousseau deemed leaves, fruit, and flowers appropriate subjects, as they could help a woman in her embroidery.[3] Rousseau's philosophy about women was broadly influential and impacted the social expectations that Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard were expected to meet.

Lisa Beckstrand writes about these presumed disparities between males and females. She explains that scientific study of the female body at this time helped further the beliefs about women, ultimately keeping them out of the political body. Since the Revolution was based upon inherent rights for citizens, it was necessary to provide evidence that showed women were naturally and biologically inferior to men if they were to be excluded. Due to this, the research of doctors and scientists became important when determining women's "natural rights" and capabilities. These extensive studies confirmed longstanding beliefs that the European male was the example of a perfect, fully developed human, while women were underdeveloped and, as a result, less intelligent.[4]

Moreover, there was a belief that the Rococo style, which by the 1760's was waning in France, had been the cause of an over-feminization of French culture. It was thought that the influence of women had corrupted the realms of politics, literature, and the arts. This presumed corruption aided in creating the backlash within Enlightenment ideals, in which women were restricted the private sphere. Women were expected to adhere to this natural hierarchy of the sexes by living domestic lives, ignoring the political sphere, and producing children. With this ideology as the "norm," and the doctors and social theorists willing to

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[3] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile (1762)*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1955), 260-263.

[4] Lisa Beckstrand, *Deviant Women of the French Revolution and the Rise of Feminism*, 24-25. See also Anne C Vila's article "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's Systeme Physique et Morale de la Femme" in *Representations* page 83.

back these claims, women in the public sphere were not generally accepted by society. In fact, women who did choose to engage in the public sphere were often thought of as defeminized.[5]

Additionally, the idea of women forging careers in the arts was considered improper. Previously, women were considered appropriate subjects of art, not the creators. Women in elite circles were expected to become well-rounded individuals in the arts, music, and dance, ultimately making them "works of art" for others to admire. They were not, however, encouraged to pursue professional careers in the arts. In short, what was believed to be the inherent nature of a woman, to please others, was often transferred to their works as artists.

Melissa Hyde writes about how the eighteenth-century did not lack women artists and explored the ways in which their careers often overlapped. She chose to use Anne Vallayer-Coster as the artist to illustrate her argument, but noted that the careers of Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard would make for a fascinating study on the divergence of women's careers in the arts during this time in France.[6] Picking up where Hyde left off, I will discuss how Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard used self-portraits as a way to navigate through the expected feminine ideals and at the same time develop their careers.

Maternal Tools

Self-representation was integral to Vigée-Lebrun's career, and this became more evident as her career advanced. While she notably painted Marie Antoinette, she also chose

[5] Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 40, 78-79.

[6] Melissa Hyde, "Women and the Visual Arts in the Age of Marie-Antoinette," in *Anne Vallayer- Coster, Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette*, ed. Eik Kahng (Dallas, TX: Dallas Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 76.

to portray her own personal life through portraiture, in several cases including her daughter. It is important to survey the implications in late eighteenth-century France of a woman painter representing herself as a mother.

A new category of painting emerged as a result of Rousseau's philosophies concerning motherhood and morality.[7] Genre paintings were works that depicted domestic scenes of everyday family life. These paintings sometimes featured the happy mother as the main figure. The "Happy mother" quickly became an integral role model for society.[8] Artists such as Jean-Simeon Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Greuze embraced this change. The renewed emphasis on morality within the family home inspired both the artist and the viewer. For example, in *The Well-Beloved Mother* (Figure 1), which was to be exhibited in the Salon of 1765, Greuze depicted a mother in a state of bliss over her role as caregiver to her numerous children. Such a scene reinforced the ideal that being a mother brought a woman a higher moral status. It also conveyed to the viewer that to be a content woman, not only should one be a mother, but most importantly, one should be a happy mother.

Denis Diderot reinforced this ideal when he wrote that Greuze's genre paintings were successful in teaching French society how to be moral within the new ideals of the Enlightenment.[9] Diderot's comment helps to confirm that such genre paintings in eighteenth-century France were telling a new story to the viewers. It had not always expected for the mother (or father) to be happy by simply being a parent. In fact, it was often the norm for

[7] Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," *The Art Bulletin* vol. 55, no. 4 (Dec 1973), 201.

[8] Term from Carol Duncan's article "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art."

[9] Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," 202.

parents to send their infants away to be cared for by a wet nurse. And while these genre scenes depict loving families and happy mothers caring for their children, this was not the reality during this time in France. Rousseau's ideas were not just new, they were also a call for change in the French society. In a similar manner, some genre paintings may be thought of as similar calls for change.

While family life was one focus during the changing times of the Enlightenment period, women were the primary focus. A woman's morality hinged on her becoming a mother and serving her family. Carol Duncan explained in her now classic article, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in 18th-Century French Art" that the mother was now conceived as the center of the family and it was believed all the happiness of an ideal family would come from her.[10] As a result of this mentality, women who did not follow the path of motherhood or sought work outside of mothering were often labeled as immoral. This is of fundamental importance in considering Vigée-Lebrun's self-portraits with her daughter, Julie.

Two such portraits, *Self-Portrait with Julie* often called *Maternal Tenderness* and *Self-Portrait with Julie* (Figures 2-3), may be interpreted as responding to the new Enlightenment ideals concerning motherhood. At the same time, they highlight how Vigée-Lebrun used them to enhance her career. It seems Vigée-Lebrun's intentions within these self-portraits were purposefully thought out in order to appease the public and to advance her career.

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[10] Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," 213.

Women artists were thought of as anomalies within society. To find fulfillment outside of the domestic realm was often cast as immoral and against the natural order of the sexes. Mary Sheriff cites a poem written about Vigée-Lebrun, which included the recrimination: "No, you are no longer a woman."[11] It may well be that, in order to offset such allegations, Vigée-Lebrun chose to feature her daughter alongside herself in two self-portraits. She presented herself as both a working artist and an affectionate mother. More importantly, I would argue that Vigée-Lebrun was creating a special space for herself among her male peers, creating a type of portraiture that men could not emulate. Vigée-Lebrun captured the tenderness of a mother and daughter relationship, while reinventing the traditional mode of artist's self-representation.

Gen Doy reflects on the issues that impacted women artists during this time. Doy questions how one should interpret Vigée-Lebrun's portraits of herself with her daughter. Was it simply an embrace of the bourgeois ideals of motherhood? Or do we read the imagery as a way to connect a woman with both a career and a family?[12] Doy argues, and I agree, that Vigée-Lebrun most likely used portraiture with her daughter as a way to unite being a working artist with motherhood. It could also be said that she had absorbed the ideological construct of motherhood, at least to some degree. I would add, however, that these types of maternal portraits were doubly significant, in that Vigée-Lebrun was also making a niche for

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[11] "A virile brush animates your portraits. No, you are no longer a woman, as opinion proclaims: envy is right, and its persistent cries, and serpents unleashed against you, better than our voices declare you a great man." Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 180.

[12] Gen Doy, "Women and the Bourgeois Revolution of 1789: Artists, Mothers, and Makers of (Art) History," in *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-century Art and Culture,* eds. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (Manchester; NY: Manchester University Press, 1994), 196.

herself among her male peers. At the same time, she advanced her career as an artist, while still adhering to the ideals of the time.

This highlights the dramatic extremes that women were forced into through the new ideologies of the Enlightenment period: one was either a devoted mother or wife, or one might pursue a career, giving up female identity. However, Vigée-Lebrun navigated through these restrictions successfully. She continued her career as an artist after the birth of her daughter. She also chose to create self-portraits with her daughter at exactly the time it became fashionable for women to take pride in being mothers.

The more popular of the two self-portraits with her daughter was entitled as *Maternal Tenderness* and it was the work that Vigée-Lebrun submitted to the Salon of 1787 that was most favored. *Maternal Tenderness* depicts Vigée-Lebrun seated on a couch cradling her daughter. Her daughter is dressed in white dress and Vigée-Lebrun is dressed in navy blue and dark orange drapery with a headpiece. Vigée-Lebrun's close embrace to her daughter embodied the ideals about motherhood during the Enlightenment. She was able to highlight he role as a happy mother, while still showing her artistic talent. Some critics praised the maternal theme of the painting, ignoring the fact that the sentiment was created by the talents of a woman artist. One salon pamphlet even commended Vigée-Lebrun for avoiding attempts at history painting.[13] It would seem that the critics at the Salon were more willing to accept women as artists when their role as mother was also highlighted within their work.

During this time in France, many women embraced the new ideals of motherhood, so it does not seem strange that women artists chose to use these maternal themes within their

[13] "*Dialogue sur le Salon de 1787*" Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art*, 43-46.

portraiture. Hyde points out, however, that often women artists chose to highlight this aspect of their identities in order to balance their so-called indiscretions as artists in the public sphere.[14] Portraying herself as a mother was useful for Vigée-Lebrun within the social context of the time.

Vigée-Lebrun made two remarkable maternal images, but they were few in number in a busy career. I believe she used the discourse on motherhood to advance her career. Her choice in using motherhood as a tool for advancement contrasts with how Labille-Guiard chose to represent herself in order to succeed as an artist. I will now turn to Labille-Guiard to show how she used her painting *Self-Portrait with Two Students* as a way to gain attention, accumulate patrons, and ultimately advance her career.

The Self-Portrait Reimagined

Self-representation was important within Labille-Guiard's career as well. Labille-Guiard's most famous and well-received painting was her *Self-Portrait with Two Students* (Figure 4). It advanced her career and aided in enhancing her popularity during the Salon of 1785. While Vigée-Lebrun highlighted the role she was expected to play as a loving mother, Labille-Guiard chose to portray herself as a teacher to two of her female students. The personal life of Labille-Guiard, a woman artist with no children, creates an interesting juxtaposition to that of Vigée-Lebrun. At first glance, this self-portrait could be deemed inappropriate, as women were not commonly thought of as teachers. It could be seen as yet another example of a woman stepping out of her expected gender norms (just as Vigée-Lebrun had done). However, it is known that, one of the students, Mademoiselle Capet, lived with Labille-Guiard and her husband, François-André Vincent. She was, in a sense, part of

[14] Melissa Hyde, "Introduction: Art, Cultural Politics, and the Woman Question," 10.

their family. Thus we see the vastly different ways in which two women artists, working in the same time period, portrayed themselves in order to satisfy the public, and advance their respective careers. Contrasting these self-portraits illuminates the two different ways in which women artists were able to manipulate the societal expectations.

Labille-Guiard's *Self-Portrait with Two Students* debuted at the Salon of 1785. It was a very unusual self-portrait. It measured over 6-feet tall, contained two additional figures, and suggested a narrative in which two students were taught by their teacher. In this portrait, Labille-Guiard is working at an easel with two students behind her. One student is looking intently at Labille-Guiard's work in progress, while the other looks off in the distance. Labille-Guiard is dressed very sumptuously in a blue gown and a feathered hat. Her two students are dressed in simpler and darker dresses and hats. While the one student is absorbed in Labille-Guiard's painting, the viewers of the self-portrait are not privy to the contents on the easel. This self-portrait was so far from the norm that art historian Laura Auricchio made it the main focus of her dissertation. She argues that this self-portrait was purposefully calculated and painted in order to bring attention to Labille-Guiard's career.[15]

Prior to the salon of 1785, vicious rumors circulated about Labille-Guiard's career. While Labille-Guiard's work seemed to prove her merit as an artist, many did not believe she was capable of producting these paintings on her own. In one pamphlet, entitled *Suite de Malborough au Salon 1783*, the anonymous author wrote about her affair with painter François-André Vincent, son of her first teacher. In 1799 he became her second husband.

[15] Laura Auricchio, "Self-Promotion in Self-Portrait with Two Students," *The Art Bulletin* vol. 89, no. 1 (Mar, 2007), 45-49.

However, it was not just the rumor of her affair, it was the implication of his "touching up" her painting that was so damaging.[16]

Auricchio argues that Labille-Guiard was in severe need of commissions after these rumors left her with few new patrons. In an attempt to override the rumors circulating within the Salon about her, Labille-Guiard chose to create a new type of self-representation. In doing so, she would also capture the attention of possible patrons. Auricchio furthers her argument by the formidable size of the painting, the fact that it was a group portrait, and the way in which Labille-Guiard simultaneously portrayed herself as a painter and a teacher. This composition further showed that Labille-Guiard was indeed playing up her talents in order to gain commissions and boost her reputation among both her peers and her potential patrons.

In order to understand fully how the public perceived this self-portrait, it is important to note that in the same Salon hung Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* (Figures 5). Labille-Guiard's painting was hung a short distance away on the wall to the left (Figure 6). David's history painting was an example of neoclassical art that arguably fulfilled the gender ideals of the Enlightenment in France. He portrayed women securely in the private sphere. On the left side the Horatii brothers are taking an oath before battle, and on the right side their sisters react to the action. The men are the active figures, and the women are passive. This supports the ideal that the woman was the "other" in terms of politics.[17] David's *Oath of the Horatii* was met with positive responses from the public. One author of a salon pamphlet

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Natalie Boymel Kampen, "The Muted Other: Gender and Morality in Augustan Rome and Eighteenth-Century Europe," *Art Journal* vol. 47, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 17.

wrote: "Finally, I have seen this 'Oath of the Horatii,' so longed for, so praised, so admirable. I owe my readers a confession of the keen pleasure it awakened in me."[18]

David's portrayal of the separate spheres of men and women was also aligned with ideals set forth by Rousseau.[19] David's history painting was hung near Labille-Guiard's large-scale self-portrait. This juxtaposition highlighted a contradiction in the perception of the role of women during this time. Sheriff writes that while the eighteenth-century is often deemed as a period in France when men and women were divided into separate spheres, there were some women who were occupying spaces that were traditionally only meant for men.[20] This is further supported by the contrast of David's *Oath of the Horatii* and Labille-Guiard's *Self-Portrait with Two Students,* displayed in the same salon. Labille-Guiard was redefining the limits put on women during this time and also creating a new kind of imagery for women.

After the exhibition of *Self-Portrait with Two Students*, Labille-Guiard secured new patrons, most notably Madame Adélaïde and Madame Victoria, the unmarried aunts of Louis XVI. In fact, Labille-Guiard painted a portrait of Madame Adélaïde in 1787 painting at her easel (Figure 7). This portrait and Labille-Guiard's self-portrait from 1785 share some similarities. Both show the women painting at their easels. In Labille-Guiard's self-portrait, however, she depicted two students behind her, and the subject of her painting is hidden from the viewer. In her depiction of Madame Adélaïde, we can see that she Madame Adélaïde is alone and in the process of painting a bust of her father, Louis XV. Representation of

[18] Quoted and translated by Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 214.

[19] Erica Rand, "Depoliticizing Women: Female Agency, the French Revolution, and the Art of Boucher and David," *Genders* no. 7 (Spring 1990), 148.

[20] Mary Sheriff, "Jacques-Louis David and the Ladies," 91.

members of the royal family, especially women, normally included attributes that could directly link them to the king. In this case, Madame Adélaïde is painting her deceased father. During this time in eighteenth-century France, painting was thought of as a morally sound feminine hobby, but only if it was treated as a casual hobby. In this case, Madame Adélaïde was using her talents in a morally appropriate way.

Antoine Vestier painted his daughter, Marie Nicole Vestier, in 1785 with similar attributes (Figure 8). She is shown seated in a three-quarters view at her easel with palette and brushes in hand. The easel is turned so we can see her painting an image of her father. Vestier and Madame Adélaïde are both dressed in satin gowns and are shown painting their fathers, while Labille-Guiard is dressed similarly, she is painting at an easel that is not visible. One might think that the two paintings that were created during the same time period as Labille-Guiard's self-portrait at the salon of 1785 veered from the type of subject matter that she created. However, upon a closer look, a bust of Labille-Guiard's father can be seen in the background of her painting (sculpted by Pajou). This shows that while was creating a new type of portraiture, she still upheld certain traditions.

However, I believe that the significance of this type of portraiture was not limited to Labille-Guiard's need to overcome the professional backlash brought up by rumors of her personal life, as Auricchio suggests in her dissertation. Instead, I will focus on the presence of her two students, Marie Gabrielle Capet and Marie Carreaux de Rosemond. Of the two students, Marie Gabrielle Capet appears to be much more engaged, while Carreaux de Rosemond's does not look directly at the painting. One possible reason for this seeming dichotomy is that Capet lived with Labille-Guiard and Vincent during the course of her studies.

While I agree with Auricchio's argument that Labille-Guiard used this particular self-portrait as a way to boost her career, I disagree that it was done only to expand patronage and business. Rather, I believe that the maternal paintings of Vigée-Lebrun created a way for women artists to advance their careers, while also adhering to the moral code of the time. The fact that Labille-Guiard chose to highlight herself teaching young women students is in some respects akin to Vigée-Lebrun portraying herself with her young daughter. As a result, both paintings appealed to the new ideals of eighteenth-century French society.

The contrast between the self-portraits by Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard brings us to the root of my argument. How did late eighteenth-century French women artists achieve success in their careers? Melissa Hyde addresses this topic, exploring how women artists' identities changed through the development of their art. She argues that women were able to challenge societal ideals placed upon them, yet still sometimes succeed.[21] I agree with Hyde, to an extent, in that women artists were able to manipulate the boundaries placed on them and, as a result, they created new career paths. However, it is important to realize that each woman manipulated these boundaries differently. In the self-portraits by Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard we see the individuality of each response. Vigée-Lebrun incorporated her daughter in order to highlight her role as a mother, while Labille-Guiard portrayed herself as a teacher to her female students. Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard's self-portraits show how personal biography impacts how they each respond to societal limits.

[21] Melissa Hyde, "Introduction: Art, Cultural Politics and the Woman Question," 4.

CHAPTER 3

ROYAL REPRESENTATIONS

Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard's representations of members of the royal family are equally important when studying the progression of each artist's career and developing style. An important aspect of artists' careers is the way in which aspects of their lives become absorbed into their work. In this chapter, royal portraiture by Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard will serve as examples of each one's personal biography affecting her work. Furthermore, these examples will also illustrate how the mode in which a woman artist chose to portray her subject was often seen as an extension of her own personal character.

Vigée-Lebrun became one of Marie Antoinette's most favored portrait painters, while Labille-Guiard became the Mesdames painter of choice after the debut of her *Self-Portrait with Two Students* in 1785. I will use a portrait from each artist's career to illustrate how both Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard used their personal lives in order to create representations of members of the royal family that conveyed new messages to the public, and in turn furthered their careers. I will further the comparison between each artist by showing the difference in how they each represented their subjects. This comparison will also illustrate how Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard continued to develop their careers independently from one another.

Creating a New Queen

Vigée-Lebrun often experimented with more casual depictions within her work and eventually applied this same kind of depiction to her representations of Marie Antoinette as

well. She employed *en chemise*, meaning that the sitter would be dressed in casual white, flowing muslin. *En chemise* was gaining popularity in England and had started making its way to France. While this style had already taken hold elsewhere, Vigée-Lebrun talks of a "Grecian" influence in her memoirs and how it first entered her social life.

In her memoirs, Vigée-Lebrun frequently described the dinner parties she held for her friends. Vigé-Lebrun wrote that during a particular dinner party, after reading parts of *Travels of Anarcharsis,* she decided to have a Grecian-themed meal, complete with Greek costumes for all those attending. She went into great detail describing the flowing drapery she had in her studio, with which she adorned herself and her guests. She then described the effect her efforts had on M. de Vaudreuil and his companion, the last guests to arrive. She wrote: "They were so surprised and charmed, to the point that they remained standing awhile, before they decided to take their places that we had saved for them."[1] This anecdote illustrated the originality of Vigée-Lebrun's dinner parties. It also shows how well received Vigée-Lebrun's new ideas were by those in her social circle.

Rumors circulated after this dinner party, with many citing its high cost, and many claiming it cost Vigée-Lebrun more than twenty-thousand *livres*. Vigée-Lebrun wrote in her memoirs how she refused the pleas that she recreate the dinner party for the ladies at court. This peek into Vigée-Lebrun's social life and the current fashions of the time provides the vital background that must be considered when turning our attention to Vigée-Lebrun's

[1] "Ils étaient surpris et charmés, au point qu'ils restèrent un temps infini debout, avant de se décider à prendre les places que nous avions gardées pour eux." Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Tome Premier, Deuxième, et Troisième* ([S.I.]: Project Gutenberg, 2007), Lettres VII, 101-105, accessed October 4, 2015, Project Gutenberg Online.

controversial portrait of the Queen, *Marie Antoinette en Chemise*, displayed at the Salon of 1783 (Figure 9).

Marie Antoinette en Chemise features the queen dressed in white muslin and a straw hat and holding a flower. This portrait caused such a public uproar that it was ordered to be removed immediately from the Salon walls. "Earlier one noticed among the portraits of this amiable artist that of the *Queen en lévite*, but because the public seemed to disapprove of a costume unworthy of Her Majesty, [Vigée-Lebrun] was pressed to substitute for it another with an attire more analogous to the dignity of the throne."[2] This sequence of events raises several questions pertaining to what was expected from both the queen and Vigée-Lebrun. Simultaneously, it highlighted the way an artist chose to represent her patron could affect her career. To understand the full extent of the public backlash against this portrait, it is important to first explain the acceptable parameters for representing members of the royal family during the Old Regime.

Mary Sheriff notes that the use of muslin garments originated in England and had started to become popular in French society around the time of this portrait. She also explains how the light muslin fabric was often interpreted as a very natural garment. In the case of Marie Antoinette, it was considered immodest. This was due to the simple and natural nature of the fabric. Muslin dress did not translate well into the rigid, formal protocols of the court. Painting the queen came with certain expectations.[3] Any painting of the queen should allude

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[2] *Correspondence Litteraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc,* ed. Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1880) quoted and translated by Mary Sheriff, "The Portrait of the Queen: Vigée-Lebrun's Marie-Antoinette en Chemise," in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Post-Modernism,* eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 121-122.

[3] Mary Sheriff, "The Portrait of the Queen: Vigée-Lebrun's Marie-Antoinette en Chemise," 121.

to the king and his power. *Marie Antoinette en Chemise* was problematic because it showed no aspect of the king's power and was far too casual.

It is no surprise then that such a painting with its depiction of the queen, void of elements that alluded to the power of the king, would create a scene within the salon. Vigée-Lebrun wrote about this portrait of the queen in her memoirs: "Among others [Marie Antoinette] is wearing a straw hat and dressed in white muslin with quite fitted sleeves. When it was exhibited at the Salon, the wicked did not fail to say the queen was dressed in her underwear."[4]

The public was offended by the queen's appearance, yet Vigée-Lebrun continued on to say that the portrait was, nonetheless, very successful. She then recounted a story in which she attended a play, during which, as a surprise and homage to her, the actress mimed painting the portrait of the queen, and everyone in the audience turned towards Vigée-Lebrun and applauded.[5] This further illustrated the broad spectrum of response.

Sheriff focused on what was deemed acceptable or unacceptable when dealing with imagery of the members of the royal family. Sheriff focuses on how this portrait created a new version of Marie Antoinette, one not associated with power or the king. I would like to explore what this portrait reveals about Vigée-Lebrun's life as a woman operating in the public sphere. The resulting public reaction became a tool that advanced Vigée-Lebrun's

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[4] "Un entre autres la représente coiffée d'un chapeau de paille et habillée d'une robe de mousseline blanche dont les manches sont plissées en travers, mais assez ajustées: quand celui-ci fut exposé au salon, les méchans ne manquèrent pas de dire que la reine s'était fait peindre en chemise…" Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Tome Premier, Deuxième, et Troisième*, Lettre V, 71-72.

[5] Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Tome Premier, Deuxième, et Troisième*, Lettre V, 72.

career. In some respects it could be considered biographical, in that Vigée-Lebrun put aspects of herself into the portrait.

In her memoirs, Vigée-Lebrun described her social life, painting an image of fanciful dinner parties with high profile guests. She made reference to the Greek style and its influences on her gatherings and dress style. It is clear that Vigée-Lebrun enjoyed these dinners, enjoyed hosting, and perhaps most importantly, enjoyed viewing herself as a purveyor of new trends, which she would graciously pass along to her friends. Vigée-Lebrun's memoirs provide a glimpse into the reality that she constructed for herself. Through this perceived reality connections can be made between her social life and the traits she chose to use in her portraits. In this particular example, the new, casual way in which Vigée-Lebrun portrayed the queen can be seen as similar to how she dressed her dinner guests at her Grecian supper.

It is evident that Vigée-Lebrun was not merely an artist in French society, she was also a member of an elite community, and it is through this aspect of her social life that we see her experimenting with new styles and trends. For Vigée-Lebrun, this queen's portrait was a way to create something new and to push the boundaries of portraiture. While the portrait did attract negative attention, and as a result, was ordered to be removed from the salon walls, the public backlash enabled Vigée-Lebrun to expand her career. And while some sectors of the public did not enjoy seeing the queen *en chemise*, the queen certainly did, as she ordered three more portraits in similar fashion from Vigée-Lebrun. By creating a new identity for Marie Antoinette, separate from that of the king, Vigée-Lebrun also created a new identity for herself as an artist who continually redefined what was expected from

women artists. Vigée-Lebrun successfully navigated and expanded her career by doing the unexpected when representing the queen.

Labille-Guiard's career also focused on the representations of the royal court, specifically Louis XVI's two unmarried aunts, Madame Adélaïde and Madame Victoria. While Vigée-Lebrun "tested the limits" in order to succeed, Labille-Guiard took a more traditional approach. By incorporating the symbols of the monarchy into her portraits Labille-Guiard found success. Labille-Guiard's preference for the traditional aspects of portraiture further illustrates my argument that two women artists working in eighteenth-century France could create entirely different types of work, and in the process forge entirely different careers.

Royal Traditions

Labille-Guiard depicted Madame Adélaïde in a manner that was subject to varying opinions, due to conventions in depicting royal women. Displayed at the Salon of 1787, *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* (Figure 7) came four years after *Marie Antoinette en Chemise*. *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* incorporated the appropriate iconography for a member of the royal family. Melissa Hyde discusses the *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* in great detail, focusing on the social and political repercussions of the portrait. She examines the problem of representing a "spinster princess" with appropriate iconography in order to prompt a positive discourse about the monarchy.[6]

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[6] Melissa Hyde, "Under the Sign of Minerva: Adelaide Labille-Guiard's Portrait of Madame Adelaide," in *Women, Art, and Politics of Identity in 18th Century Europe*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 141-145.

The *Portrait of Madame Adélaïde* presents the princess in a room with marble floors and Corinthian columns. Madame Adélaïde is dressed in a rich formal costume of red velvet, gray silk, and gold embroidery. Labille-Guiard did not hide the princess' age, yet depicted her with grace and authority. Madame Adélaïde is in front of an easel on which the viewer can see her painted medallion versions of her late family: her father Louis XV, her mother Queen Marie Leczynska, and her brother the dauphin.

This painting is slightly reminiscent of Labille-Guiard's *Self-Portrait with Two Students,* in that Madame Adélaïde is working at an easel and that the size and composition of the painting are on par with history paintings. However, several key aspects clearly show how this painting was an orchestrated political statement. The first sign pointing to this is the sculpted reliefs on the walls behind Madame Adélaïde. The reliefs depict scenes of her late father on his deathbed fifteen years prior. This image recalled a popular story that was told to demonstrate the dedication the sisters had towards their family. Madame Adélaïde and her sister risked contracting smallpox in order to care for their father. Their role as princesses meant they would never rule France. Instead they chose to risk their lives to aid their father. In addition, an architectural plan of the Augustine convent near Versailles where Adélaïde was a sponsor rests on the ottoman alluding to her religious morality.

Portrait of Madame Adélaïde adhered to all the traditions and virtues of the monarchy, making it the perfect piece to represent an embattled monarchy right before the Revolution. The painting was very pleasing to Madame Adélaïde, and she ordered several copies from Labille-Guiard. In the same way, the painting must have been quite special to Labille-Guiard, since she kept a full-sized replica of the painting for the rest of her life. Hyde argues that this imagery also alluded to the goddess Minerva through its similarities to the

portrait of *Duchesse de Montpensier as Minerva* (1672) by Pierre Bourguignon in 1672 (Figure 10), a portrait that depicted the duchesse as Minerva presenting a portrait of her father, Gaston d'Orleans. As a maiden princess, the Duchesse de Montpensier can be seen as a precedent to Madame Adélaïde, who was also unmarried and childless. Each woman is shown depicting her father, which may be viewed as a transference of the courage of Minerva to their respective ruling fathers.

Anne Marie Passez discussed the lifestyle and personality of Labille-Guiard in her catalog raisonné. Passez pointed out that Labille-Guiard often portrayed herself as serious and profound, depicting her features plainly and not idealized, yet still managed to give an impression of gracefulness and strength. On the other hand, Passez also wrote of Vigée-Lebrun's appearance, noting that above all else, the charming quality of her self-portraits was the most dominant aspect.[7] The contrast between the way each artist chose to portray herself also appears in their respective paintings of Marie Antoinette and Madame Adélaïde.

Similarly, Passez described Vigée-Lebrun as always friendly and cheerful. Vigée-Lebrun loved to host parties, dress up, and was admired by select social circles. Labille-Guiard chose to live a less active social life, often staying out of the public in order to dedicate her time to her art. Many differences arose through each artist's preference of costume style, as well. Vigée-Lebrun detested the popular fashion trends in Paris and chose to incorporate long and flowing drapery in her portraits. Labille-Guiard adhered to the current fashion.

[7] Anna Marie Passez, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, 1749-1803: Biographie et Catalogue Raisonné de son œuvre (*Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1973), 55-58.

It is clear just how different these two artists were. Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard were living and working during the same time in the same society, yet creating and promoting different lives and careers. This is further solidified by looking at their portraits of the royal family. Vigée-Lebrun depicted Marie Antoinette in the casual fashion she preferred for herself, idealizing her looks, and as a result, created a new image of the queen to be viewed by the public. Labille-Guiard chose to adhere to tradition and created an image of Madame Adélaïde that spoke to the traditions of the French monarchy, and illustrated Madame Adélaïde's devotion to her family and religion. Through the same lens of familial devotion, the personal life of Labille-Guiard can be seen as a tool that also aided in this portrait of Madame Adélaïde. Labille-Guiard rarely left France, and hardly ever left Paris. She chose to keep a small circle of friends, which included her students. Vigée-Lebrun flourished in large social circles and loved hosting dinners, whereas Labille-Guiard bypassed these social events in order to focus on her art and her students.[8] One might argue that Labille-Guiard's outlook was transferred to her portrait of Madame Adélaïde.

It is not only important to understand the differences in each artist's career and style, it is important to show how these choices set their careers apart, as well as propelled them forward. In the case of Labille-Guiard, the traditional portrait of Madame Adélaïde can be seen as the antithesis to the new, less ostentatious style of the Revolution, a movement in which Labille-Guiard later became involved. In the next chapter, I will discuss each artist's response to the Revolution. The stagnant style of Vigée-Lebrun and the evolution of Labille-Guiard's style can be seen as direct results of their responses to the Revolution.

[8] Anna Marie Passez*, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, 1749-1803: Biographie et Catalogue Raisonné de son œuvre,* 55-56.

CHAPTER 4

REVOLUTIONARY RESPONSES

I have discussed each artist's personal life, her self-representations and her portraits of members of the royal family. I have done this to illustrate how Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard made individual careers during a time when women artists were often compared to each other to find similarities, rather than being contrasted in order to uncover the differences. I have analyzed these situations in order to show how each redefined the boundaries set upon women artists in eighteenth-century France. However, just as important as their career choices were the decisions they made at the time of the Revolution. Both artists had strong ties to the Old Regime, yet each came to a different conclusion on how to proceed as an artist. Vigée-Lebrun left Paris, opting to travel around Europe. Labille-Guiard stayed in Paris and became a part of the Revolution by advocating for women artists. In this chapter, I will explore each artist's response to the Revolution. Studying the transgression of boundaries apparent in each artist's work will lead to a better understanding of the different ways in which each women artist formed her career.

The Art of Fleeing

"In those days, women reigned; the Revolution dethroned them."[1] Vigée-Lebrun was a part of a more elite circle in Paris and she was one Marie Antoinette's favored portraitists. These details of Vigée-Lebrun's life are key to understanding why she selected the option to leave the city during the turmoil.

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[1] "Les femmes régnaient alors, la révolution les a détrônées." Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Tome Premier*, *Deuxième, et Troisième*, Lettre X, 169.

Vigée-Lebrun wrote in her memoirs that it was not hard to foresee the violence that was to come with the Revolution. She wrote that sulphur was thrown in the cellar of her house and "rude rag-tails" would shake their fists and yell at her while she stood at the windows of her home. Vigée-Lebrun described her final moments in Paris as stricken with fear and anxiety, ultimately prompting her to leave. She explained that for several years she had wanted to travel to Rome to paint, but always found herself with too much work to do. It would seem that this was the perfect time to leave France. She described how all of the turmoil in Paris had caused her to stop painting. "I could not paint anymore: my imagination suffered, withered by the horrors, I stopped practicing my art."[2]

Vigée-Lebrun recounted the dramatic story of how she fled from Paris. On the day that she had gotten her carriage and passport ready, she found her drawing room full of national guards with firearms at the ready telling her she was not to leave the city. They eventually left and two, whom she recognized as her own neighbors, came back and advised her to leave as soon as possible. She departed the city October 5, 1789, the same day that the king and queen were brought to Paris from Versailles. Vigée-Lebrun first traveled to Lyons. She would eventually travel to Rome, Naples, Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. All the while, she continued her career, painting nobles across Europe. Vigée-Lebrun's choice to leave France created new and unique obstacles for her as a woman artist, and it was through these obstacles that her career moved in a direction different from that of Labille-Guiard.

[2] "…mon imagination attristée, flétrie par tant d'horreurs, cessait de s'exercer sur mon art…" Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Tome Premier*, *Deuxième, et Troisième,* Lettre XII, 192.

Vigée-Lebrun's travels around Europe highlighted certain obstacles woman artists faced during this time. Barbara Stafford writes about how eighteenth-century philosophers desperately wanted to explore the body and provide answers for everything, which at this time was technologically impossible. This, she writes, shows the yearning for knowledge that was sought during the Enlightenment, yet also shows how flawed the logic manifested as a result.[3] This directly relates to how Pierre Roussel, a medical philosopher of the eighteenth-century, constructed his argument for female madness by using the sensitivities of their organs to discredit women, such as Vigée-Lebrun, who took on the roles of artists.[4]

Vigée-Lebrun experienced the supposed effects of her sensitive organs when she visited Felice Fontana's anatomy cabinet during her time in Florence in 1792. Vigée-Lebrun was exposed to female anatomy through the model of the reclining Venus. The male models previously seen did not affect her negatively, yet when she approached the female model she felt both agitated and shocked. This problem was twofold. Female models in the anatomy cabinet had long hair and jewelry, which gave the feeling of voyeurism. Male bodies were presented in a clear factual style, with no undertones of sensuality.[5] The differences in representation reinforced eighteenth-century medical texts by echoing the notion that there were fundamental differences between the male and female bodies. The influence of these texts appeared in Vigée-Lebrun's reaction to seeing a female form portrayed in such a way.

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[3] Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticisms: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 1.

[4] Anne C Vila, "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's Systeme Physique et Morale de la Femme," *Representations* no. 52 (Autumn 1995), 76-78.

[5] Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art*, 16-17.

Vigée-Lebrun wrote in her memoirs that she could not go anywhere without envisioning the anatomy underneath the clothes and skin of the women she saw. She became obsessive and disturbed during the days following, claiming that, "...I see too much and I feel everything."[6] It is clear that Vigée-Lebrun was agitated after her visit to the anatomy cabinet.

After Vigée-Lebrun's experience in Florence, she continued traveling through Europe, painting foreign nobles. Vigée-Lebrun's portraiture production after the summer of 1792 continued steadily. For example, she painted *Portrait of Elizaveta Alexandrovna Demidova, nee Stroganova* in 1792 (Figure 11), *Portrait of Countess Skavronskaia* in 1796 (Figure 12), *Grand Duchesse Anna Feodorovna* in 1796 (Figure 13), and *Portrait of Countess Golovine* in 1800 (Figure 14). These portraits illustrate how she used the problems that stemmed from viewing Fontana's models as a tool in affirming her identity as an artist while at the same time continuing her career. Despite questioningly herself momentarily, Vigée-Lebrun overcame the effects that the expectations of her gender and by doing so, she continued her career successfully. However, these portraits are also evidence that her style remained static at the end of her career. While working in France, Vigée-Lebrun was known for creating idealized and charming portraits for both her patrons and her own self-portraits. She did this for the members of the royal family in France and continued to do so for the nobles she met and painted throughout Europe. Vigée-Lebrun found a formula that brought her success, and she rarely strayed from this formula.

[6] "Pendant plusieurs jours, il me fut impossible de m'en distraire, au point que je ne pouvais voir une personne sans la dépouiller mentalement de ses habits et de sa peau, ce qui me mettait dans un état nerveux déplorable." Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Tome Premier*, *Deuxième, et Troisième*, Chapitre VIII, 163.

Vigée-Lebrun's experiences after the Revolution while traveling Europe highlighted the limitations that were a direct result of her choice to leave Paris. It is important to recognize that the dilemmas women artists faced in the eighteenth-century often became tools that helped them further their careers. However, it is more significant that for each woman and problem there was a unique response. Even though Labille-Guiard chose to stay in Paris, she still faced restrictions that effectively pushed her career forward as an artist. I turn to the last phase of her career in my next chapter.

Revolutionary Changes

Because Labille-Guiard in France during the Revolution, she faced a multitude of issues that resulted in a much different career path. On the eve of the Revolution, Labille-Guiard's career was on a much different trajectory from Vigée-Lebrun's. Labille-Guiard had won a commission for a history painting. She chose to stay in Paris during the Revolution, most likely due to the impending history painting and her dedication to her students. Labille-Guiard differed from Vigée-Lebrun in that she enjoyed teaching young women and dedicated a good portion of her career to mentoring. She had as many as nine students in 1783. In this chapter I will focus on Labille-Guiard's history painting commission with respect to how it altered her career path. I will also discuss the stylistic changes in Labille-Guiard's work as she adapted to the new political climate, further setting her career apart from Vigée-Lebrun's.

Her large scale *Self-Portrait with Two Students* helped her obtain the commission for a history painting *Reception of a Chevalier of the Order of Saint-Lazare* (Figure 15) for the comte de Provence, brother of Louis XVI, in 1788. This painting was commissioned to honor the Chevaliers de Saint-Lazare, a royal hospital order founded during the crusades. Labille-Guiard was asked to portray the comte de Provence receiving a chevalier in a neoclassical

background. This group portrait consumed much of Labille-Guiard's life, and by 1793 she had been working on it for thirty months and had spent 8,000 *livres* of her own money.[7]

Her partner and mentor, Vincent, was a major influence while she was working on this commission. Ten years earlier he painted two large paintings which honored the Marquis de la Galaizière. When comparing Vincent's paintings to the sketch of Labille-Guiard's group portrait the scene and arrangement of characters are the same, just reversed: the knight (chevalier) and the Chancellor are kneeling before the prince and are surrounded by dignitaries of the order who are seated on raised furniture.[8] The similarities between the two paintings show that Labille-Guiard was most likely inspired by Vincent. However, Passez also suggested that the comte de Provence may have requested the likeness of Vincent's paintings in order to be linked to his great-grandfather (the King Stanislas of Poland, duke of Lorraine).[9]

This history painting commission can be seen as a milestone in Labille-Guiard's career and its associated accomplishments. During the time of the painting's execution, France was in turmoil. These political events directly impacted the Salon and brought an onslaught of new opinions regarding the acceptance of women painters. During a meeting of the Salon council, one unidentified speaker said: "Among republicans, women must absolutely renounce tasks destined for men." The same speaker argued that women "who

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[7] Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard: Artist in the Age of the Revolution* (Los Angeles: J Paul Getty Museum, 2009), 84.

[8] Anna Marie Passez*, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, 1749-1803: Biographie et Catalogue Raisonné de son œuvre,* 52.

[9] Ibid.

practice art for their own personal satisfaction could be perfectly pleasant companions, but it shouldn't be taken so far as to impede the laws of nature."[10]

Labille-Guiard addressed the salon council on September 23, 1790 in order to make a case for more women artists to be able to participate in the salon, rather than the usual cap of four women artists. She stated to the salon council: "For good and valid reasons, [certain women should] be compensated by a distinction that would be only academic, honorific, and that they should have no other distinction than to be admitted among the numbers of counselors."[11] While many women were granted the right to participate due to Labille-Guiard's actions, the council and general public still did not completely agree with the concept of woman participation. The very same day, the officers of the Academy wrote a proposal for a new set of by-laws. In this proposal, the board voiced various reasons women to why women were not qualified for official positions within the arts. This most notably included their assumed dedication to motherhood as a hindrance to developing their talents and the questioning of a woman who would willingly surround herself in a room with a group of men. They concluded by writing, "beauty, accompanied by talents, wields undue power" and when discussing how to judge the art of a woman, "even the most honest judges run the risk of being seduced."[12] Eventually, in 1793, the same year Labille-Guiard was finishing up her history painting, it was deemed "anti-revolutionary" for women artists to be associated with and participate in the salons.

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[10] Quoted and Translated by Laura Auricchio, "Revolutionary Paradoxes: 1789-94," in *Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from the Louvre, Versailles, and other French National Collections*, ed. Jordana Pomeroy (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2012), 24

[11] Quoted and translated by Laura Auricchio, "Revolutionary Paradoxes: 1789-94," 24.

[12] Quoted and translated by Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard: Artist in the Age of the Revolution*, 70.

This sequence of events put Labille-Guiard's career as an artist in a problematic situation. Several issues arose. First, was her gender. Second, was the subject of her history painting. Both counted against her. As a woman artist she went against "nature", and as a citizen in a post-revolutionary France, she went against popular ideals of the time by portraying the nobility. She was subject to the societal norms of her time as a woman artist. Yet, she persevered and continued to paint and advocate for other women artists. It is this claim to a legitimate artistic identity that is evident in all of her works, not just her *Self-Portrait with Two Students.*

The group portrait was the largest work Labille-Guiard ever worked on, and I believe is should be seen as a culmination of her career. Through her self-portraits, she highlighted her specific skills and made her intentions clear: she wanted to be seen as an artist first and foremost. In doing this, she used her gender as an unexpected tool. With each portrait she completed, she built upon precedents. Each self-portrait was a response to societal expectations of women, and each self-portrait also affected her society in return, and paved the way for Labille-Guiard to reach her goal of history painting. At this time, the hierarchy of painting dictated that the most prestigious level of painting was the history painting. This level of painting was traditionally reserved for men. Women painters were often only accepted when they stayed in the realm of portraiture or genre scenes. Labille-Guiard's dedication to that large commission shows how important this milestone was to her. The fact that she continued to work on it for so long, even when the commission disappeared proves how important it was for Labille-Guiard to be seen as a serious painter on par with male history painters.

Even though the members of the Academy had deemed women artists as inappropriate, Labille-Guiard continued her career by producing portraiture more in line with the revolutionary ideals. In 1795 Labille-Guiard completed *Portrait of Joachim Lebreton*, a legislator during the French revolution (Figure 16). This portrait is far simpler than her previous works. Gone are the elaborate backgrounds and drapery. Instead, Labille-Guiard used a solid, grey background, which adds to the serious mood, especially when paired with Lebreton's dark suit. The sitter's personality is conveyed through facial features and expression, rather than physical attributes.

Labille-Guiard continued a production of portraits that fit with the ideals of the late eighteenth-century with *Portrait of Joseph Jean Baptiste Albouis Dazincourt* in 1795 and (Figure 17) *Portrait of the Comedian Tournelle* in 1799 (Figure 18). Each of these portraits depicts the subject sitting at three quarters and simply dressed. The era of surrounding the sitter with multiple attributes was now gone. Instead, modest clues, such as a simple scroll in the *Portrait of the Comedian Tournelle*, were included to indicate profession. All of these portraits showcase the personality of each sitter, while also holding steadfast to the simple, somber ideals of this period.

In fact, the *Portrait of the Comedian Tournelle* was at one point thought to be a work by David, but has since been reattributed to Labille-Guiard.[13] Her new style after the Revolution shows that she was much more in tune to the new social order. However, this misattribution illustrates two things: the extent in which Labille-Guiard's style had transformed, and the concept of emulation within the arts in eighteenth-century France.

[13] Andrew Kagan, "A Fogg 'David' Reattributed to Madame Adélaïde Labille-Guiard," *Acquisitions (Fogg Art Museum)* no. 1969/1970 (1969-1970), 34.

Crow has discussed emulation through the relationship of David and his students Jean-Germain Drouais (1763-1788) and Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824). Through the student and teacher relationship the idea of emulation, or imitation, played an important role. However, emulation is not confined to the student/teacher relationship. Artists also emulated their most talented rivals and peers. This was most certainly the case with Labille-Guiard's newer style.

The end of Labille-Guiard's career sets her apart from Vigée-Lebrun. Labille-Guiard was able to adapt to a new society and produce portraiture that met the demands of the new public. Through this we see the divergence of two careers caused by differing responses to the Revolution.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard proved, through their respective careers, that their responses to societal limitations on women aided in shaping their individual identities. By studying their careers simultaneously new aspects emerge. The relationship between art and society is highlighted through the observation of Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard's careers. Each artist, through her art, shows how society and art both affect one another.

In Labille-Guiard's case, her paintings established a dialogue between the societal norms of women's behavior and the ways in which women artists reacted in order to change those norms. From the start of her career, Labille-Guiard portraiture redefined the ideals of society. *Self-Portrait with Two Students* can be seen as one of the main highlights of her career. She posed herself as a fashionable woman and also a teacher. Labille-Guiard chose to showcase the parts of herself that were not popular with the public. By doing this, she created a conversation about her career, and as a result, gained more commissions and patrons. Labille-Guiard's career as an artist also led her to speak to the salon council in defense of women artists. By doing so, she tried to create an outlet for women artists. However, when looking at her later portraiture, it is apparent that she was using the revolutionary changes as a basis for her more somber, simple style.

Vigée-Lebrun's career is an example of how an artist used the societal standards and expectations of women as a way to gain exposure as a woman artist. Through her maternal self-portraits, Vigée-Lebrun created a space for herself among her male peers, using what was expected from a woman. By using motherhood, she also protected herself from criticism often associated with being a woman artist. While her maternal self-portraits advanced her

career and helped her combat the societal boundaries of being a woman, they were also manifestations of society's influence.

However, through her *Portrait of the Queen en Chemise*, she was also an artist who helped redefine societal norms. Vigée-Lebrun strayed from the ideals of the eighteenth-century by portraying Marie Antoinette *en chemise*, rather than through the traditional fashions. She presented a far more natural queen to the public, and by doing so further developed her own career as an artist. Vigée-Lebrun cultivated a distinct style while in France. When she decided to leave France during the revolution, she continued her career using the same style.

This thesis illustrates that society and art are inseparable when observing women artists eighteenth-century France. It also highlights how Vigée-Lebrun's and Labille-Guiard's distinct responses to society created the groundwork for their careers' evolution. The analysis of each woman artist and her career leads into a discussion of how society and art work together in order to shape the artistic climate of eighteenth-century France. Studying their careers simultaneously show how one's interaction with society provides a setting where two women artists working in the same time frame and city can forge different careers and different styles of art.

Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard were recreating the parameters within which women artists were previously forced to work, and by doing so they ultimately created new and different paths for women artists to take. At the same time, they also highlighted how different women artists can be and how the formation of a career can vary from artist to artist, irrespective of gender.

Figure 1: Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Well Beloved Mother*, 1765, pastel with chalks on paper, Paris, De Laborde Collection.

Figure 2: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Self-Portrait with Julie (Maternal Tenderness),* 1787, oil on wood, 41” x 33”, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 3: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Self-Portrait with Julie*, 1789, oil on canvas, 51” x 37”, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 4: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Self-Portrait with Two Students*, 1785, oil on canvas, 83" x 59 ½", The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 5: Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1785, oil on canvas, 10’10” x 13’11”, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 6: Pietro Antonio Martini, *The Salon of 1785*, 1787, engraving, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Figure 7: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Portrait of Madame Adelaide*, 1787, oil on canvas, 106 ¾" x 76 ¾", Musée National du Chateau de Versailles.

Figure 8: Antoine Vestier, *Portrait of Marie-Nicole Vestier*, 1785, oil on canvas, 67 ¾" x 50 ¼", Buenos Aires, private collection.

Figure 9: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie Antoinette en Chemise,* 1783, oil on panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 10: Pierre Bourguignon, *Duchesse de Montpensier as Minerva*, 1672, oil on canvas, 68” x 58”, Musée national du Château, Versailles.

Figure 11: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Portrait of Elizaveta Alexandrovna Demidova, nee Stroganova,* 1792, oil on canvas, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Figure 12: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Portrait of Countess Skavronskaia,* 1796, oil on canvas, 31” x 26”, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 13: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Grand Duchesse Anna Feodorovna,* 1796*,* oil on canvas, destroyed.

Figure 14: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Portrait of Countess Golovine,* 1800*,* oil on canvas, 33” x 26”.

Figure 15: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Reception of a Chevalier de Saint-Lazare by Monsieur, Grand Master of the Order*, 1788, preliminary sketch for an oil painting, 14 ¼" x 31 7/8", Musée national de la Légion d'Honneur, Paris.

Figure 16: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Portrait of Joachim Lebreton,* 1795, oil on canvas, 28 ¾" x 23 ½", Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.

Figure 17: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Portrait of Joseph Jean Baptiste Albouis Dazincourt,* 1795, oil on oval canvas, 27 15/16” x 22 5/8”, Jeffrey E. Horvitz Collection, Boston.

Figure 18: Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Portrait of the Comedian Tournelle, Called Dublin,* 1799, oil on canvas, 28 1/8” x 22 ½”, Harvard University, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge.

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