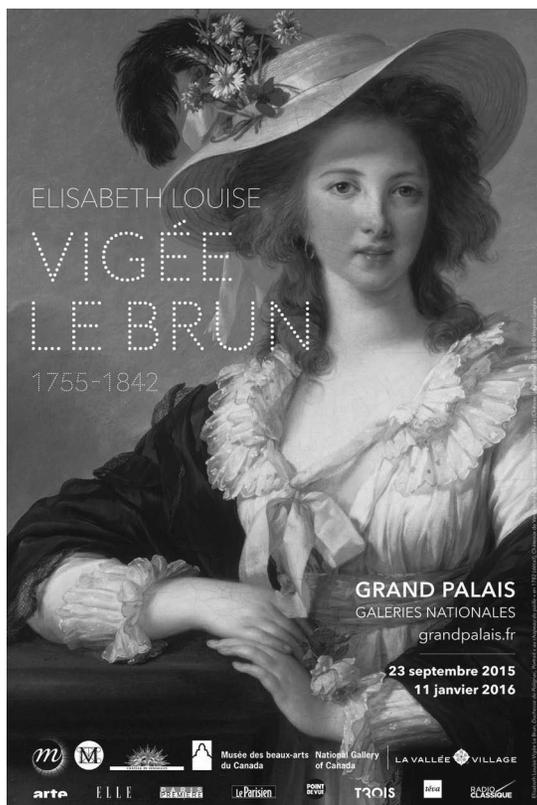




Grand Palais, Galeries nationales  
Clemenceau entrance

# ELISABETH LOUISE VIGÉE LE BRUN

23 September 2015 - 11 January 2016



#vigeelebrun



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Detailed information, programme,  
audio-guides, etc.



## **Only in painting have I found happiness**

Of all the female artists who distinguished themselves in eighteenth century France, only Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun is still slightly well-known by the general public. Not only is her name associated with portraits of Marie-Antoinette, and perhaps the famous Louvre painting featuring *La Tendresse maternelle*, the artist is also remembered as a woman of great beauty whose elegant art was able to adapt to a particularly eventful life which is related in her *Souvenirs* published at the end of her life. Born in 1755 and deceased in 1842, Vigée Le Brun experienced the splendour of the Ancien Régime, the dark hours of the Revolution, the rise of a new society under the Empire and the development of new artistic codes. Spanning two eras, she embodied French portraits, the beauties of which she disseminated during her European travels. But paradoxically, her native country never put on a monographic exhibition in her honour. Only the United States paid her the tribute she deserved in 1982. The exhibition organised at the Grand Palais will at last do her justice. Naturally, it presents the portrait artist who managed to catch likenesses while at the same time idealising them. Her paintbrush brought a whole society to life – people are depicted as solemn, happy, sensual or innocent, attentive to the refinements of fashion and their social position. Aware of her talent, the artist tried to establish herself in an eminently male world where women struggled to make a name for themselves. In 1783, when she was admitted to the Academy with the open support of the Queen, she intended to demonstrate that she was not prohibited from doing history painting, which was considered the most noble genre, and that she could pit her strength against men. Over the years, she also showed a very personal interpretation of landscapes. Now, her paintings, pastels and drawings have been brought together so we can rediscover the great variety and refinement of her art that is so full of life.

## **The image of the artist**

Throughout her career, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun strived to depict herself on canvas and on paper. Her self-portraits emphasise her beauty, her ambitions and her rise in social and professional status. Many of them were produced for friends or for propaganda and most of them enhanced her reputation during her life and after her death. Moreover, the portraitist made sure other artists reproduced her image, particularly the sculptor Augustin Pajou, who created a terracotta masterpiece of her which was sent to the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1783, i.e. the year in which Vigée Le Brun was admitted into this prestigious institution.

## **Family and friends**

Elisabeth Louise Vigée was born into a family connected to the Parisian artistic community. Her father Louis, who she adored, was a renowned pastellist who had been admitted into the Academy of Saint-Luc. He died when Elisabeth Louise was only twelve, but he'd had the time to recognise her artistic talents and to teach her how to handle the tools of her art and above all the secrets of pastel painting, his own speciality. In a prophetic manner, Louis Vigée told his daughter: «You shall be a painter, my child, or nothing at all». Quite naturally, the young artist used her family and friends as her first models. In this way, she showed them her affection and at the same time perfected her technique. Her mother Jeanne Maissin, her brother Étienne, and later his wife Suzanne Marie Françoise posed for her. The famous art dealer Jean Baptiste Pierre Le Brun, whom she married in 1776, and some friends like Anne Rosalie Bocquet and Marguerite Émilie Chalgrin formed the artist's close circle and provided support and admiration throughout her career.

## **The years of training**

After observing her father at work, taking some rather disjointed lessons with Madame Blaise Bocquet, Pierre Davesne and Gabriel Briard, and after taking advice from the academicians Joseph Vernet and Gabriel François Doyen, the young artist studied royal collections, private collections and the works her husband dealt with, particularly old masters and contemporary masters like Jean Baptiste Greuze. In this way, she gradually acquired a sophisticated and very personal technique which enabled her to pit her strength against the most skilled portrait painters of her time. This mastery, the fact her brother was a well-known writer and her husband a well-informed art dealer, together with her network of influential relations meant that she soon acquired a select client base and became increasingly famous.

## **Recognition**

In 1774, Vigée Le Brun became a member of the Academy of Saint-Luc, a guild of master painters and sculptors. Four years later she became the official painter of Queen Marie Antoinette, her patron. To expand the scope of her artistic activities, she painted some rare genre scenes and a few mythological

and allegorical subjects, classed as history painting. In 1783, thanks to the Queen's intervention, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun was received into the Royal Academy of painting and sculpture with her reception piece *La Paix ramenant l'Abondance* depicting an allegorical subject. The First Painter, Jean Baptiste Marie Pierre, was very much opposed to the new arrival. Normally, the mercantile profession of her husband should have prevented her from joining this elite because, at that time, the professional and social position of women was solely determined by their husband's position. By obtaining this rare honour for a woman, the portraitist achieved recognition.

### **Female emulation and competitiveness**

Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard were both portraitists and were both received into the Royal Academy of painting and sculpture in 1783. When they exhibited their works at the Exhibitions, critics and the public compared them and this stimulated competition. Over the years, the two rivals moved towards perfection. Vigée Le Brun was praised for her beautiful technique and chromatic innovations and the lively nature of her compositions (poses, costumes, accessories, décors). Some commentators remarked that Labille-Guiard's paintings were less flattering, her style more vigorous and realistic, her likenesses well accomplished, her compositions more wisely laid-out and her colours more natural and harmonious. In 1789, the artists went their separate ways. One emigrated and spread her idea of portraiture in Europe and Russia. The other stayed in Paris and used her talent to serve the elites of the Revolution. Moreover, in the years leading up to the Revolution, both artists trained many other students in the art of painting and drawing. They helped promote painting among women and allowed other young women to make a career out of it.

### **Painting portraits of the royal family and the court**

After painting the first major official portrait of Marie-Antoinette in 1778, to everybody's satisfaction, Vigée Le Brun was regularly asked to portray the Queen. Perfectly in line with the traditional role of a courtier, she always remained faithful, i.e. reproducing a good likeness but also enhancing the beauty of the model. She was a great success. However, in 1783, she took some liberties when she depicted her wearing a «robe en gaulle». When the portrait was exhibited, it provoked indignation. Critics were surprised that such a noble model could appear in such an intimate gown. For all that, the artist did not lose any patrons among royalty or at the court. The way she rendered women with beautiful complexions and smiling mouths, her unusual colour contrasts and subtle effects of light and shade pleased her select clientèle and ensured her success.

### **French elegance**

Thanks to her talent, her great capacity for work and her renowned physical beauty, the portrait artist promoted her career brilliantly by associating with the elite and gradually climbing up the social ladder. Her success is particularly evident in the works she produced in the 1780s. Vigée Le Brun left a gallery of portraits that superbly illustrate changing fashions. Full-figured women with beautiful complexions and smiling mouths, sometimes revealing their teeth, are depicted in indolent poses, either staring into space or looking provocative. Great sensuality, animal magnetism and even erotic intensity are characteristic features.

### **Painting children and maternal love**

The art of Vigée Le Brun reflected the evolution in French society which was impressed by the ideas set out in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's book *Emile*, and people attached greater importance to the bonds uniting a mother and her children. Extolling this maternal love, the portrait artist produced two «iconic» paintings of herself with her daughter Julie. She also painted many pictures of children alone or in the company of their mother. She often used the compositions of Raphaël as models to produce these pictures. Exhibited at the Salon and appreciated by the critics, these paintings prompted other artists to depict the same subjects.

### **Draughtswoman and pastellist**

Introduced to pastel painting by her father, Vigée Le Brun never abandoned this activity. She devoted herself to it throughout her career. She skilfully created shaded tones and effects with colours and materials and her pastel paintings matched up to oil paintings. She was a talented draughtswoman and left a small number graphic works showing great sensitivity. Pastels, black chalks and sanguine crayons lent themselves well to instinctive and fast drawings, often in the presence of models. Vigée Le Brun also liked to use them when drawing her «têtes d'expressions», a genre popularised by her friend Jean Baptiste Greuze.

## **Emigration (1789-1802)**

As Vigée Le Brun depended professionally and socially on patrons from the royal family, the court and the aristocracy, she soon became unpopular and was the subject of scathing defamatory attacks in the underground press. On the night of 6 October 1789, she left Paris with her daughter and her governess and headed for Italy. This was the start of her long voyage and exile which would last just over twelve years. Cut off from her husband who had provided for her needs up until then, the artist used her reputation and charisma to serve a European clientèle that was fascinated by the French model. Between 1789 and 1802, her talent was officially acknowledged by the artistic academies of Rome, Bologna, Parma, Florence and St. Petersburg. Wherever she went, the artist was very successful and thanks to the prices asked for her works, she was able to lead a lifestyle worthy of her reputation. She also continued to develop her social circles.

## **Italy (1789-1792)**

For Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, the trip to Italy was a great occasion to discover as many towns and sites as possible on her route, but it was also a trying experience because she had not intended to leave France for such a long period. Welcomed by her friend Ménageot who was the Director of the French Academy in Rome, she was soon called to Naples to portray the Countess Skavronskaïa, the King's children and the Queen of Naples. She also painted the portrait of Lady Hamilton as Ariadne and as a Sibyl. Her own reputation and that of her new models then ensured enough income to allow her to stay longer.

## **Austria (1792-1795)**

In the autumn of 1792, Vigée Le Brun arrived in Vienna. Here she met Vaudreuil and the Polignac family once again. The announcement of the September massacres, the executions of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette on 21 January and 16 October 1793 and her divorce, declared on 3 June 1794, confirmed that the artist was destined to pursue her trip abroad. Some Russian celebrities who were present in the imperial capital were added to the portraitist's Viennese clientèle.

## **Russia (1795-1801)**

Vigée Le Brun arrived in St. Petersburg on 23 July 1795, and was officially presented to Catherine II the following day. This was the start of a six-year period, ending in June 1801, during which the artist worked for the Imperial family and also the Russian aristocracy. In these distant lands, she seemed to have found the kind of life she had been used to in Paris before 1789. In her *Souvenirs*, she wrote: «Every evening I went out. Not only the balls, concerts, theatres were frequent, but I delighted in the daily meetings, where I found all the urbanity and grace of French society; for to use an expression of Princess Dolgorouki, it appeared as though good taste had bounded from Paris to St. Petersburg».

## **Back in Paris**

On 18 January 1802, after an absence of just over twelve years, the return of Vigée Le Brun was celebrated by her husband, her brother Étienne, her sister-in-law and their daughter. That same evening, a concert was given in her honour at her husband's house in rue de Cléry. Madame Tallien attended the event. Not long afterwards, the portrait artist associated with Laure Regnaud de Saint-Jean-d'Angely and saw Joséphine Bonaparte. She soon resumed relations with some of those who had been part of her social circle prior to 1789; her loyal friends included Greuze, Hubert Robert, Brongniart and Ménageot. Although the artist used her paintbrush to serve society during the Consulate and the Empire, she did not stop painting portraits of the European aristocracy. Thus, in 1803, 1804 and 1805, she went on a long trip to Great Britain.

## **Swansong**

In 1805, Vigée Le Brun returned to France for good, but she continued to travel and made some trips to Switzerland. In her portraits, she tried to maintain the delicate skills and sensitivity that had made her successful before the Revolution and during her Emigration. Her salon still attracted celebrities, foreign visitors and fashionable artists and writers because of the fact that she had witnessed the heyday of Louis XVI. The artist continued to paint portraits but also took up open-air landscape painting which was a new genre for her. In the lists of her works, she indicates that she had done over 200 pastel paintings of landscapes just for her own enjoyment. We only have a few of them. Yet, they illustrate the romantic generation's new feeling for nature.

## Exhibition opening times (23 September 2015 - 11 January 2016)

Open every day, except Tuesdays, from 10 am to 8 pm.

Late-night opening on Wednesdays until 10 pm.

Closed on Tuesdays.

Early closure at 6 pm on 24 and 31 December. Closed on Friday 25 December 2015

This exhibition is organised by the Réunion des musées nationaux - Grand Palais, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Canada, Ottawa.

With the exceptional support of the Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.



National Gallery  
of Canada

Musée des beaux-arts  
du Canada

**Exhibition Curators:** Joseph Baillio, art historian,  
Xavier Salmon, Director of the Graphic Arts Department at the Louvre Museum

**Set designer:** Loretta Gaïtis

The exhibition is supported by La Vallée Village LA VALLÉE  VILLAGE

Around the main entrance door, the olfactive and ornamental installation « Voir et être vu » (« See and be seen ») was imagined by the designer-perfumer Francis Kurkdjian accompanied by Séverine Baehrel, set designer. This unprecedented staging was made possible thanks to the patronage of Francis Kurkdjian and Marc Chaya, co-founders of Maison Francis Kurkdjian.

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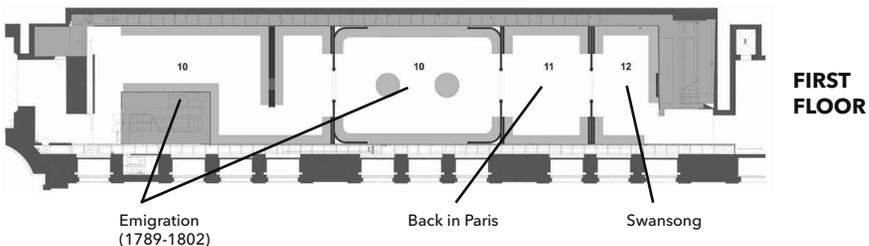
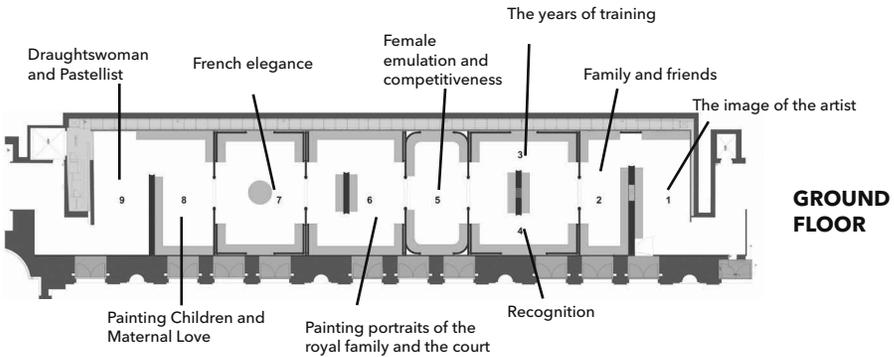
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## EXHIBITION PLAN



# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

## EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### AUDIO-GUIDES (to hire): French, English, Spanish €5 Tour for young people in French

### TOURS FOR ADULTS

#### Guided tour

Official painter of Queen Marie-Antoinette, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun was one of the first women to be accepted into the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Her painting style reinvented the genre of portraiture; her compositions are full of light, the faces imbued with realism. Accompanied by a tour guide, discover the first French retrospective of an artist with a truly remarkable career.

Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes/Price: €22 - Concessions: €16 - Tribu ticket offer: €60 (for a group of 4 paying visitors, including 2 young people aged 16 to 25)

Dates: Outside school holidays, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 2.30 pm; Wednesday at 7 pm.

During school holidays: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 11 am; Thursday and Friday at 2.30 pm.

#### Workshop tour for adults: *Dessins en promenade*

Do you like drawing? Do you teach plastic arts or run a drawing workshop? Are you an amateur or a professional artist? Come and experience the Grand Palais atmosphere for yourself, alone or in a group, during a restricted opening session. Take a tour with our tour guide and complete the pages of a sketch book featuring the finest portraits by contemporaries of Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun. Drawing equipment not provided.

Duration: 2 hours/Price: €30 - Concessions: €22. Dates: Tuesday 24 November at 2 pm.

#### Guided tour with two guides

Let Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun herself guide you around the exhibition! The official portraitist of Queen Marie-Antoinette, thanks to her memoirs we know a great deal about the career of this so-called "woman artist". Visit this great retrospective accompanied by a tour guide and an actress, allowing you to share in the inner world of the painter and her models.

Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes/Price: €22 - Concessions: €16.

Dates: Saturday 7 November at 10.45 am and 4.30 pm, Saturday 5 December at 10.45 am and 4.30 pm.

#### LIFESTYLE Art and scent workshop tour for adults

Chemistry in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century enabled the creation of the most subtle aromatic combinations. Perfume distinguished the people of the court and perfected the art of grooming, as well as the art of seduction. Perfumed fans, gloves and other bottles reveal a lifestyle closely observed by Vigée Le Brun. Explore the exhibition with a tour guide, then discover the sensory world of the artist with Cinquième Sens.

Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes (1 hour 30 minutes guided tour, 1 hour with the expert)/Full price €70 - Concessions €50

Dates: Saturday 21 November at 2.30 pm, Saturday 9 January at 10.45 am



### TOURS FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

#### Family guided tour

Accompanied by a well-informed tour guide, families learn about the remarkable works of the official painter of Queen Marie-Antoinette.

Duration: 1 hour/Price: €20 - Concessions: €14 - Family ticket (2 adults and 2 young people aged 16 to 25): €45 - Tribu ticket offer (for a group of 4 paying visitors, including 2 young people aged 16 to 25): €54

Dates: Outside school holidays, Wednesday and Saturday at 5 pm/During school holidays: Monday, Wednesday and Saturday at 5 pm.

#### Introductory tour of the exhibition. Special offer for new visitors!

Learn about the intensity of life at the Grand Palais with a tour guide and explore the life and works of Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun... The tour is followed by free time to explore on your own.

Duration: 1 hour/Price: €13. Free for under-16s, up to 3 children per adult (booking required).

Dates: Saturday 28 November at 11 am.

#### Portrait tour and workshop (for 8-11 year-olds)

Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun reinvented the genre of portraiture while still preserving its classic codes. Her compositions are flattering likenesses of the models, whether men or women, nobility or artists. After visiting the exhibition, participants will create their own self-portrait in the style of the official painter of Queen Marie-Antoinette.

Duration: 2 hours (1 hour tour, plus approx. 1 hour workshop)/Price: €10

Dates: Outside school holidays, Wednesday and Saturday at 4 pm - During school holidays, Monday, Wednesday and Saturday at 2 pm.

## PUBLICATIONS

**EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**, Publications from Réunion des musées nationaux - Grand Palais, €50

**EXHIBITION ALBUM**, Publications from Réunion des musées nationaux - Grand Palais, €10

**MADAME VIGÉE LE BRUN THE EXHIBITION**, Publications from Réunion des musées Nationaux - Grand Palais, €18.50



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# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

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## CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Admission to the auditorium is free with an invitation, which can be downloaded from [grandpalais.fr](http://grandpalais.fr).

### MEETINGS 6.30 pm

#### **Wednesday 23 September** *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (1755-1842)*

Lecture by Joseph Baillois, art historian, and Xavier Salmon, Head Curator and Director of the Graphic Arts Department at the Louvre Museum, co-curators of the exhibition.

#### **Saturday 10 October** *Figure(s): \*Di\*/zaïn evening #24 by \*interactive designers\**

Producer: Benoît Drouillat; artistic director: Marina Wainer; presented by: Geoffrey Dorne.

#### **Wednesday 4 November** *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun and Adélaïde Labille-Guaid: two women in turmoil*

Lecture by Xavier Salmon, Head Curator and Director of the Graphic Arts Department at the Louvre Museum and co-curator of the exhibition.

#### **Wednesday 2 December** *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun and friendship*

Lecture by Geneviève Haroche Bouzinac, Professor at the University of Orléans and the artist's biographer.

#### **Monday 14 December** *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun and fashion*

Lecture by Juliette Trey, curator at the Louvre Museum and author of "Fashion in the court of Marie-Antoinette", Gallimard, 2014.

### CREATIVE THEATRE *The French lightness* by Nicolas Bréhal.

Three exceptional performances: Thursday 24 September, 6 pm (premier), Wednesday 21 October, 6.30 pm and Wednesday 6 January, 6.30 pm. Dramatisation: Chantal Bronner Marie-Antoinette: Emeline Bayart Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun: Julie Debazac.

### FRIDAY FILM SCREENINGS 12 noon. **Vigée Le Brun season: an apparition.**

#### **Friday 9 October** *Marie-Antoinette Queen of France*

by Jean Delannoy (1956). With Michèle Morgan, Richard Todd and Jacques Morel. 1 hour 55 minutes.

#### **Friday 16 October** *Lady Oscar*

by Jacques Demy (1978). With Catriona Mac Coll, Barry and Christine Böhm. 2 hours.

#### **Friday 6 November** *Beaumarchais the Scoundrel*

by Edouard Molinaro (1996). With Fabrice Luchini, Sandrine Kiberlain and Manuel Blanc. 1 hour 40 minutes.

#### **Friday 18 December** *Marie-Antoinette*

by Sofia Coppola (2006). With Kirsten Dunst, Jason Schwartzman and Rip Torn. 1 hour 58 minutes.

### FAMILY CONCERT **Saturday 7 November at 2.30 pm**

*Painting told through music* with Marianne Vourch and the Quatuor Parisii. *The Great Viennese Trio*: Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Arnaud Vallin, principal violinist; Doriane Gable, second violinist; Dominique Lobet, viola; Jean-Philippe Martignoni, cello.

### DOCUMENTARIES

*The Incredible Life of Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, Painter of Marie-Antoinette* by Arnaud Xainte and Frédéric Thibault (2015). 1 hour 30 minutes. at 3.30 pm on Wednesdays: 14 and 28 October; 4, 18 and 25 November; 2 December at 12 noon on Fridays: 20 and 27 November; 11 December; 8 January

*The little secrets behind great paintings*: Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, "Marie-Antoinette of Habsburg-Lorraine, Queen of France, and her children", 2015, 26 minutes.

at 3 pm and 5 pm on Wednesdays: 14 and 28 October; 4, 18 and 25 November; 2 December

### **NUIT BLANCHE (Dusk to Dawn art event) Saturday 3 October**, late opening from 8 pm until midnight.

Free admission.

Performance by a collective of artists in partnership with Mains D'œuvres.

### ASSOCIATED PROGRAMME "History" season as part of Mondays at the Grand Palais

#### **Monday 9 November:** *What lessons can we learn from history?*

#### **Monday 16 November:** *How can French history be taught today?*

#### **Monday 23 November:** *History and fiction: agreements and disagreements?*

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## MULTIMEDIA

### **THE EXHIBITION APP** Detailed information, programme, audio-guides, etc.

Downloadable audio-guides: French, English and Spanish - €2.99/ Tours for young people in French - €3.99

### **THE EXHIBITION ALBUM**

For tablets. Available on App Store and Google Play. €3.99

### **THE EXHIBITION FILM**

#### **The Incredible Life of Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, Painter of Marie-Antoinette**

A film by Arnaud Xainte (52 minutes), broadcast on Arte.

DVD Rmn Grand Palais/Arte, €19.90 and available on VoD via the download platforms ArteVod and iTunes.

# THIS SEASON AT THE GRAND PALAIS

## PICASSO MANIA

7 October 2015 - 29 February 2016

The exhibition focusses on the fertile confrontation since the 1960s between contemporary artists and Picasso's work. Both chronological and thematic, the exhibition examines the different moments of the critical and artistic reception of Picasso's work and the stages in the mythification associated with his name. The major stylistic phases and certain emblematic works of Pablo Picasso, such as *Les Femmes d'Alger* and *Guernica*, are echoed by contemporary works by Hockney, Johns, Lichtenstein, Kippenberger, Warhol, Basquiat and Jeff Koons.

## LUCIEN CLERGUE. The first albums

13 November 2015 - 15 February 2016

Lucien Clergue, a photographer, was born in Arles in 1934. In 1953 he met Pablo Picasso and showed him some of his work. They remained friends until Picasso died twenty years later. In 1968, with the writer Michel Tournier, he founded the Rencontres d'Arles international photography festival which is held each year in Arles in July. He invited the most famous photographers to this event. Lucien Clergue was the first photographer to be elected, in 2006, a member of the Académie des beaux-arts de l'Institut de France. He was named Président de l'Académie for 2013.

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