

## ABSTRACT

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Title: “Étant Très Indiscret”: Notoriety and Scandal in the Portraiture of Elisabeth Louise Vigée Lebrun

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The strategies of self-promotion of the eighteenth-century French painter Elisabeth Louise Vigée Lebrun (1755-1842) were based in the adoption of masculine-coded techniques for self-promotion from which women were typically barred: emulation, networking, and building a personal reputation. Vigée Lebrun exploited the often-dangerous role of notoriety in French society through her portraits of women with dubious reputations, including herself. Through examination and analysis of her portraits of Marie Antoinette, Madame Grand, and Lady Hamilton, this unexplored avenue of Vigée Lebrun’s professional strategy can be seen more clearly. In embracing and exploiting notoriety as Vigée Lebrun did, she both challenged Rousseauian discourse that argued that women should not exist within public realms as well as capitalized on the infamy inherent to her role as a female painter. Moreso than her peers, Vigée Lebrun harnessed the rampant gossip culture of her day in order to use it to her benefit. She understood how malleable reputation and scandal were, and how this could be used to her benefit despite the growing examples of how scandal could be used to her, and other women’s, detriment. This understanding of Vigée Lebrun’s incorporation of notoriety and reputation into her work builds on the great body of analysis of the painter’s professional strategies championed by Mary Sheriff and expands it to include this element of the risk-taking, immensely savvy, and notorious painter Elisabeth Louise Vigée Lebrun.