

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1965

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 7, 1965. A painting by Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842), friend and court painter to Marie Antoinette, has been given to the National Gallery of Art by the Bay Foundation, whose president is Colonel C. Michael Paul.

The announcement of the gift was made today by National Gallery Director John Walker.

The large, richly colored canvas (48-5/8 in. x 61-3/8 in.) was given in memory of Josephine Bay Paul and the late Ambassador Charles Ulrick Bay. It will go on display November 10th.

The painting depicts two friends of the artist, the Marquise de Pezé and the Marquise de Rouget, with the latter's sons. It was exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1787, two years before the French Revolution.

Madame Vigée-Lebrun painted many of the famous women of her day including Marie Antoinette, Madame Du Barry, Lady Hamilton and Napoleon's sister.

She was commissioned by the French Queen on at least five different occasions and is responsible, experts believe, for history's sympathetic picture of Marie Antoinette. During frequent sittings Madame Vigée-Lebrun and the Queen became friends

(more)

and, the artist related in her memoirs, they even sang duets together.

Madame Vigée-Lebrun was trained in Paris by her father, Louis Vigée, an obscure pastel painter, and by his friend, Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Married at 17 to a picture dealer and artist, she was well established as a portrait painter seven years later when she was summoned to Versailles to paint the Queen.

In the following decade the pretty artist became famous not only as a favorite painter of the aristocracy but as the hostess of a cultivated "Salon". She staged musical entertainments for Paris society and attributed their success as much to her guests' curiosity to see who would attend as to the music. The ladies depicted in the National Gallery's acquisition were regular members of these gatherings.

During the Reign of Terror in France Madame Vigée-Lebrun took her six year-old daughter and traveled through Europe. She painted royalty and the wealthy families of Germany, Austria, Russia, Italy and, as she described it, "not so merry England." In London, though, her visit was brightened considerably when Sir Joshua Reynolds went to look at one of her portraits and praised it warmly.

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Color transparencies and black-and-white glossy photographs on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.