

Portraiture and partisan advantage



Portraiture is the art of making portraits and this art has never been as important as when the artist is to capture the image of a political figure. The artist has the essential critical task of making that figure seem like a real human being as well as the crucial task of capturing a larger than life figure. Two of the best examples of encompassing these qualities are the famous oil on canvas portraits of Marie Antoinette with Her Children by Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun and Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud.

The scene of each of these paintings is regal. In Marie Antoinette the setting is rich yet dark hues to give a mysterious element. Lebrun doesn't choose to use black to create this tone, but uses the deep colors of burgundy greens and browns. The only time that white or light tones are used is close to the face which gives a celestial quality. Silk and velvet materials which are associated royalty. The expensive Oriental rug and pillow is important to the element of royalty.

Louis the XIV also has rich fabrics of fur, and velvet, yet the colors are much lighter. His royalty is established in his stance while Marie Antoinette is sitting with her children giving a realistic effect. Louis the XV shows reality in his physical features. The eye is not drawn to his features automatically. However, his features are not that flattering. The clothes of each are what are considered in today's society as feminine. The fashion in the 18th century was different for men.

It was perfectly acceptable for them to wear "frilly" clothes especially those of the upper classes because they did not do physical labor. The stockings and red high heeled shoes worn by the last great king of France before the

revolution indicate his status. Marie Antoinette and her children are all dressed in velvet and lace which again indicates the lack of physical labor. Even though the garments are royal in nature, the average person would expect them to be dressed as they are. Louis the XIV and Marie Antoinette were both leaders of France.

One was successful the other was not, but they both exuded lavishness of a monarchy that would ultimately lead to the downfall of their government. The lavishness was accepted for Louis the XIV, but not by his heirs. The very points in the portrait that brought praise and honor to him brought disdain for Marie Antoinette. Over time, both of these portraits have been able to transport the viewer to another time before the French Revolution when the extravagant lives of the royalty was a reality and not a myth