

Marie-Antoinette: Taste, Scandal and Myth

Dates	Monday 8 and Tuesday 9 December 2025
Times	18.00–20.00 GMT
Location	Online (Zoom)
Tutor	Dr Barbara Lasic
Level	All Levels



Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Marie-Antoinette*, 1783 (detail) Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Course Description

Discover Marie-Antoinette, one of history's most captivating figures. Through a vivid visual journey of her interiors at Versailles, the Petit Trianon, and the Château de Fontainebleau, we'll explore Marie-Antoinette's daily life as Dauphine, and later as Queen of France, with a focus on her artistic patronage. Our investigation of the team of artists working for her will include portrait painter, Elisabeth-Louise Vigée le Brun and furniture maker, Jean-Henri Riesener, both of whom feature in the Wallace Collection. Described by 19th-century writers Jules and Edmond de Goncourt as the 'Queen of fashion and pleasure, we'll also explore Marie-Antoinette's visual legacy and enduring appeal.

Session One: From Austrian Princess to French Queen

Marie-Antoinette's early life as an Austrian princess, her marriage to the future Louis XVI, and her early years at Versailles, will be our starting point. Although esteemed by the French public, she struggled with court etiquette and marital issues. Young and ill-prepared, she embraced a lavish lifestyle, becoming a fashion icon. We'll explore how the commissioning of elegant interiors and furnishings created a refined world for herself and her close circle of friends, shaping her image as France's extravagant and stylish queen.

Session Two: Downfall and Myth

In our second session, we'll explore how Marie-Antoinette's popularity faded. The final years of her reign were filled with severe public criticism and many false accusations undermining her authority and moral integrity. We'll examine the Queen's tragic downfall, and her courage and dignity in the face of adversity. Though despised during her life, she soon became a cult figure, and we'll learn how Empress Eugenie and the Goncourt Brothers played key roles in restoring her image and appeal.

Course Tutor

Dr Barbara Lasic has published on the subject of French decorative arts, the history of taste, the history of collecting, and museum architecture. Her research interests include the production and consumption of French decorative arts, 1650-1900, the private and institutional collecting and display of French art, and the intersection of the art market and curatorial practice in the early 20th century. Prior to her academic career, Barbara worked at the V&A Museum as part of the curatorial team involved in the redevelopment of the 'Europe: 1600-1800' galleries, and she held curatorial positions at the Wellcome Trust and the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through Zoom Webinar. Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for both dates. Ticket holders will be emailed the Zoom link, Webinar ID and Passcode 24 hours in advance of the first course session, which should be retained for accessing both sessions of the course.

Course Recording

This course will be recorded. Within 48 hours of each course session, ticket holders will be emailed a link to view the recording, which will be available for two weeks.
