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**When a Queen Sets Down the Crown and Goes into the Garden  
Some Observations on the Portrait of a Queen - from Marie Antoinette to  
the Windsors - and on the Legacy of Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun**

In 1778 Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun completed the first portrait of Marie Antoinette in a way to content the queen in search of her official image: an iconography that simultaneously manages to bring out the true majesty of the sovereign and her youth. In the following ten years Le Brun produced several images of her royal patron until the great representation of Marie Antoinette and her children (1787). Already in 1783 another portrait had caused a scandal at the Salon in Paris: it was the painting of Marie Antoinette en gaule and in the context of an official event which featured revolutionary iconography. Contrary to the attacks on the extravagant life of the queen, the artist had chosen to represent her apart from any schematic image, dressed in a soft muslin shirt and with a large feathered hat, simply intent on tying some flowers with a ribbon: iconography which seemed to catch an instant of private habits of Marie Antoinette, who loved to retire in the oasis of the private garden of the Petit Trianon. It is a formula of portraiture, modern and with great impact, destined to be successful over time. Among the great sovereigns of Europe, the perfect model for Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-1873) is certainly Sissi: through his portraits the artist contributes to the myth of universal beauty of the young Empress. The road opened by Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun regarding the informal portrait of the sovereign, is now ready for permanent open space. Federico Zeri identified the reflections of the pictorial formula developed by Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun also in photography, especially the Anglo-Saxon photography. From 1930 to 1979 Sir Cecil Beaton photographed members of the British royal family. In the object glass of Beaton the ladies of the court had become new stars. It had become necessary for the future queen to withdraw from high-ranking schemes and to approach a bourgeois rhetoric. In the painting *The Cradle* by Berthe Morisot, Elizabeth is no longer literary heroine nor princely lady, but a real woman. And maybe this would not have been possible if nearly two hundred years before the artist did not realized that sometimes a queen may leave the crown and go to pick flowers in the garden.