SEDUCTIVE SURFACES:
THE STILL LIFE PAINTINGS OF ANNE VALLAYER-COSTER (1744–1818)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Seductive Surfaces: The Still Life Paintings of Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744–1818)

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Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744–1818) was one of four académiciennes admitted to the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in the late eighteenth century. As a woman artist and a still life painter, however, Vallayer-Coster has been largely neglected in art historical scholarship. Vallayer-Coster depicted a range of textures through vivid color and expressive facture, making the viewer conscious of the embodied acts of looking at, touching, smelling and tasting. My dissertation places her work in dialogue within eighteenth-century discourse on sensory experience, thus offering a new, synesthesiac framework for understanding her still life paintings.

This dissertation is organized around the materials that occupied Vallayer-Coster throughout her career. In each chapter, I focus on a few key case studies, exploring formal, material, and sensual implications of each work. My first chapter sketches Vallayer-Coster’s personal and professional life, her social and patronage networks, and the academic context of still life painting in the late eighteenth-century. The second chapter analyzes her three largest paintings, which allegorize art, nature and war, respectively. The third chapter deals with Vallayer-Coster’s representations of food, which are evocative of taste and entangled within the cultural, economic, and philosophic
food systems of eighteenth century Paris. Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of guns and game, best understood within the recreational and artistic tradition of the hunt, are the subject of the fourth chapter. In the fifth chapter, I situate Vallayer-Coster’s representations of shells and minerals in the context of conchological collecting practices during this period. In the sixth and final chapter, devoted to Vallayer-Coster’s flower paintings, I probe the relationship between the perceived ‘femininity’ of Vallayer-Coster’s subject matter and painting technique.
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I. Introduction

Vallayer-Coster, Académicienne

The disadvantages of her sex notwithstanding, she has taken the difficult art of rendering nature to a degree of perfection that enchants and surprises us.¹

-Mercure de France, September 1770

Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744–1818), the daughter of a Gobelins goldsmith, was twenty-five years old when she was admitted to the Académie Royal de Peinture et Sculpture (French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture) in July 1770.² One of only fifteen women artists permitted to enter the Academy in its history, Vallayer-Coster was also among the first to be awarded her own studio and residence at the Louvre. Throughout her career, Vallayer-Coster produced dozens of complex and sensual still life paintings, and she exhibited regularly at the Parisian Salon until her death in 1818. There, her work elicited ample praise from contemporary critics; she soon earned the patronage of Marie Antoinette and several other prominent members of the French court.

Since the eighteenth century, however, Vallayer-Coster’s work has received little scholarly attention, no doubt due to her status as a femme peintre (woman painter) and a specialist in the genre of still life.³ Recent surveys of eighteenth-century French art have largely neglected the work of women. For example, in his 2018 book, The Académie

¹ “Malgré les obstacles de son sexe, elle a porte l’art si difficile de rendre la nature, à un degree de perfection qui enchante et qui etonne.” Guichard, M. “Académie royal de Peinture & Sculpture,” Mercure de France (September 1770): 74-75.
² Anne Vallayer-Coster is the artist’s hyphenated married name, which she used to sign her paintings after 1781 (a practice also employed by married women artists like Adélaïde Labille-Guiard and Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun). Prior to 1781, she went by “Anne Vallayer.” To avoid confusion, I use “Vallayer-Coster” consistently throughout this dissertation.
Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture: The Birth of the French School, 1648–1793,

Christian Michel justified his disregard of women artists on the basis of their historical oppression:

Some readers may be surprised that I have given so little attention to the fourteen or fifteen women accepted as members. Though their talents (or kinship with academicians) afforded them the right to appear on the lists of members, they were not allowed to take part in meetings or to teach; until the Revolution, they played no role whatsoever in the functioning of the Académie.4

Yet Vallayer-Coster has also been overshadowed by her fellow académiciennes, the royal portraitists Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749–1803) and Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun (1755–1842). These artists, whose figurative paintings ranked above still life painting in the academic hierarchy of genres, have been well studied by feminist art historians such as Laura Auricchio, Melissa Hyde, Jennifer Milam, and Mary Sheriff.5

Vallayer-Coster has been primarily marginalized in comparison with the most esteemed French still life artist, Jean Siméon Chardin (1699-1779), who was nearly seventy years old when Vallayer-Coster was admitted to the Academy.6 Nearly all of the modern scholarship on the subject of the French still life has been dedicated to Chardin’s quiet, roughly hewn paintings of vegetables and game; indeed, his name is practically


Vigée Le Brun has also been the subject of two major exhibitions: Joseph Baillio, Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1982) and Baillio, Katharine Baetjer, and Paul Lang, Vigée Le Brun: Woman Artist in Revolutionary France (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, with Yale University Press 2015).

synonymous with the genre. Pierre Rosenberg’s 2000 monograph, for example, among
the many notable contributions to the extensive bibliography on Chardin, positioned him
as the sole heir to the seventeenth-century Dutch tradition of still life.7

Chardin’s legacy looms large today, just as it did in the eighteenth century. Critics
directly compared Chardin and Vallayer-Coster when they exhibited their work
simultaneously at the Salon of 1771. Art theorist Denis Diderot (1713–1784) for
example, described one of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings as “excellent, vigorous,
harmonious; it’s not Chardin, however, but if it’s less good than this master, it’s far above
what is to be expected of a woman…” Diderot continued “It is certain that if all new
members made a showing like Mademoiselle Vallayer’s, and sustained the same high
level of quality there, the Salon would look very different!”8 Like many philosophe s of
the eighteenth century, Diderot was notoriously conflicted in his attitudes towards
professional women artists; his paradoxical criticism of their work—alternately
venomous, patronizing, ambivalent, and encouraging—was always informed by his
understanding of the inherent inferiority of women.9

Vallayer-Coster’s reputation was largely eclipsed by Chardin’s until 2002, when
the first major exhibition dedicated to Vallayer-Coster was staged at the Frick Collection,
the Dallas Museum of Art, and the National Gallery of Art. The 2002 exhibition

7 Pierre Rosenberg, Chardin: An Intimate Art, New York: Prestel, 2000. Much more recently, Ewa Lajer-
Burchar th has investigated Chardin’s work in The Painter’s Touch: Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard (2018).
Lajer-Burchar th is primarily interested in the “deep materiality” of his works, analyzing his idiosyncratic
compositional arrangements and painting techniques. Lajer-Burchar th, The Painter’s Touch: Boucher,
8 Denis Diderot, Salon of 1771 in Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, eds. Denis Diderot: Les Salons, 4 vols.
9 Bernadette Fort, “Indicting the Woman Artist: Diderot, Le Libertin, and Anna Dorothea Therbusch,”
Diderot’s writings about women artists, and in particular his criticism of the Prussian painter Anna
Dorothea Lisiewska-Therbusch (1721/2-1782).
catalogue included several essays. French scholar Marianne Roland Michel, the author of the 1970 Vallayer-Coster catalogue raisonné,\(^{10}\) contributed a concise biographical sketch. Dallas Museum of Fine Arts Curator Eik Kahng’s essay contrasted the painting styles and subjects of Chardin and Vallayer-Coster. Colin Bailey, then the Chief Curator of the Frick Collection, outlined Vallayer-Coster’s patronage network, and Melissa Hyde situated Vallayer-Coster in the context with other female artists working in late eighteenth-century Paris. Finally, Claire Barry, the Director of Conservation at the Kimbell Museum of Art, evaluated the materials, techniques, and conditions of her paintings.\(^{11}\)

The catalogue also featured an illustrated inventory of the artist’s known works, rather than individual analyses of the works included in the exhibition.\(^{12}\) As a result, Vallayer-Coster’s paintings received little critical analysis, despite their evident complexities. In her introduction to the catalogue, Dallas curator Eik Khang articulated the exhibition’s conservative methodological agenda, writing:

> I am fully aware that some might object to what might seem to be an old fashioned, connoisseurship-driven, largely monographic species of exhibition. I have intentionally chosen not to dwell on the feminist aspect of Vallayer-Coster’s career, despite the cultural currency it represents. […] This is not to say that feminist discourse is not a legitimate arena for the study of Vallayer-Coster’s life and work. However, it was my objective to provide an overview of her paintings,

\(^{10}\) Marianne Roland Michel, *Anne Vallayer Coster (1744-1818)* (Paris: Compoitr International du Livre, 1970), which was based on her 1959 thesis for the Études Supérieures d’Histoire, under the direction of André Chastel. Her research on Vallayer-Coster has been a crucial source for this dissertation, and will be hereafter Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970.


\(^{12}\) A number of works listed in this inventory as lost or in private collections have subsequently re-emerged or changed hands; whenever possible, I note these changes in footnotes. The appendix to this dissertation also indicates the last known locations or sales of works that appeared at the Salon.
their unique virtues and shortcomings, so that scholars and non-specialists alike would have renewed access to her art (emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{13}

I believe Vallayer-Coster’s bold, complex, and lush still lifes warrant precisely the kind of formal and theoretical analysis that the 2002 exhibition catalogue avoided. In this dissertation, I foreground the “feminist aspect” of her career, while also proposing new conceptual frameworks for looking at her work. Above all, I aim to situate her still lifes within the cultural context of late eighteenth-century Paris. I argue for a historically specific understanding of the objects represented in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings, which are variously organic and artificial, luxuriant and quotidian, tangible and ephemeral. Because her still lifes are impossible to isolate from the visual and material culture that informed her subject matter, I consider her work in tandem with contemporary painting, sculpture, prints, embroidery, metal and woodwork, porcelain, as well as fur, food, and perfume.

Through vivid color and expressive facture, Vallayer-Coster’s paintings convey a range of textures, making the viewer conscious of the embodied acts of looking at, touching, smelling and tasting. I therefore employ a range of anecdotal and philosophical texts, which offer further insight into the eighteenth-century discourse on sensory experience. A few art historians have similarly considered the consequences of this emphasis on the senses for art making and appreciation in the eighteenth century. As Ewa Lajer-Burcharth argued,

Such a shift of emphasis from the visual to the material is especially warranted by the emergence of the philosophical materialism that, in the period under discussion, provided a radically new account of the self as matter…. Thus, in the

new sensualist psychology, both intellectual capacities and the sense of self were linked to experience conveyed through the senses.\(^{14}\)

As Lajer-Burcharth and others have shown, eighteenth-century theorists strove to understand how knowledge was gleaned through bodily interactions with the material world. Diderot wrote extensively on the senses, establishing a hierarchy and characterizing their unique and collaborative contributions to human cognition. As he wrote in *Lettres sur les sourds et les muets* (1751), “I have found that, of all the senses, sight was the most superficial, hearing the most arrogant, smell the most voluptuous, taste the most superstitious and the least faithful, touch the most profound and the most philosophical.”\(^{15}\) Étienne Bonnot de Condillac’s (1715–1780) *Traité des sensations* of 1754, perhaps the most frequently cited text on the subject, maintained that it was only through the integration and mastery of the senses that one could understand the boundaries of his or her own body and develop subjectivity. For Condillac, pleasurable and painful sensations were the most powerful sources of human passions and desires.\(^{16}\)

These *philosophes* purportedly address a ‘universal’ human condition of sensation and new understandings of the gender-neutral ‘self.’ Yet, as I demonstrate here, eighteenth-century understandings of sensory experience were undeniably gendered. Men and women were believed to experience and respond to sights, sounds, tastes, and smells differently—much as they were understood to think, write, and paint in different ways.

Undergirding Diderot’s *Sur les femmes* (1772), for example, is the belief that while men

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\(^{15}\) “…je trouvois que de tous les sens l’oeil étoit le plus superficial, l’oreille le plus orguileux, l’odorat le plus voluptueux, le gout le plus superstition, & le plus inconstant, le toucher le plus profound & le plus philosophe.” Denis Diderot, *Lettres sur les sourds et les muets: à l'usage de ceux qui entendent & qui parlent* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste-Claude II Bauche, 1751), 12.

use their senses to strengthen their rationality and morality, women are often overwhelmed or led astray by physical sensations—because they are “less in control of their senses than we [men] are.”

Physician Pierre Roussel concurred, writing in his *Système physique et moral de la femme* (1775) of a woman’s “difficulty in shedding the tyranny of her sensations that constantly binds her to the immediate causes which produced them”—that is, to the material stimuli that provoked various physical sensations.

Though women were considered to be subject to sensory whims, men could similarly be tempted, typically when in close proximity to women: As Rousseau’s tutor warns his pupil in *On Education*: “You do not know the fury with which the senses, by the lure of pleasure, drag young men like you into the abyss of the vices.”

This logic also informed the debates about the presence of women artists within the Academy throughout the eighteenth century. In 1790, then-secretary of the Academy, Antoine Renou (1731–1806) argued that *académiciennes* might distract male artists from their work or use their feminine charms to sway their critics: “One knows how heavily women weigh in the balance of judgment and how even judges with the most integrity risk being

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20 As Karen Offen has shown, this idea also informed broader debates about the cultural influence of women, their biological difference from men, and their rights within the political sphere, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *The Woman Question in France, 1400–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
seduced by them. The centuries of antiquity, like ours, give a thousand examples of seduction of this kind.”

Renou’s personal convictions about the professional mingling of male and female artists became more clear in a letter written the same year: “It is said that Talent has no sex but those who possess it have one, and when it is feminine, it must be kept away from the masculine because of its inevitable influence.”

Unsurprisingly, the major theme that unites the eighteenth-century criticism of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings is that of seduction, undoubtedly because they appeal directly to the physical senses. Her contemporaries debated these very qualities in her work, while emphasizing the modesty and charm of the artist herself. Critic Gabriel Bouquier praised the artist’s work at the Salon of 1775, writing, “This Demoiselle combines in her person all the graces of her sex.” An anonymous enthusiast concurred in 1777, writing the following verses:

Ah! I admire her character / Even more than her talent / She knows how decently / to combine agreeable pleasure / Candor and prudence / Intelligence and feeling. The common-place art of seduction / Has ever been foreign to her heart; / She pleases as she breathes / Without effort or reflection.

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Paradoxically, other critics hailed the “seductive color, and the refined and vigorous touch” of her still life paintings, one simply exclaiming “Superb! Truly superb! Observe how very truthful and seductive!”

This polarizing language, characterizing Vallayer Coster and her work as either prim or voluptuous, has also infiltrated twenty-first century discussions of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings. Roland Michel concluded her essay in the 2002 catalogue with the following rhapsody:

We are seduced today by this gathering of exceptional works. The contemporaries of Anne Vallayer-Coster were as well, when they visited the successive Salons at which she exhibited her finest work, recognizing and admiring the quality of an oeuvre that far transcended the minor genre within which she was officially contained (emphasis mine).

In his review of that exhibition, Mario Naves of The New York Observer noted that her paintings are “suffused with a languid opulence” and “sensual and hedonistic”—and yet “one can’t quite work up a passion for Vallayer-Coster’s art,” which warrants only “a polite admiration.” In an article entitled “Sensual Still Lifes: Built to Lust?” Blake Gopnik of the Washington Post wrote that this “modest little still-life exhibition” was populated by paintings that at first “seemed chaste and mild-mannered enough for any lady-in-waiting”; soon, however, Gopnik “began to feel a little overheated.” He proceeded to describe the depicted surfaces in salivating detail: they are alternately blowzy, delicate, glistening, frilly, fleshy, and sticky-ripe.

25 “On remarque dans ce Tableau particulièrement la couleur séduisante, & le touche fine & hardie.” Catalogue de Tableaux Précieux, de Figures de Marbre antique, de Bronze, & Vases de Porphyre, d’un Cabinet distingué, Sale of Madame du Barry, Paris, December 22, 1775, no. 34.
26 “Superbe! En vérité superbe! Mais voyez donc comme tout cela est vrai & séduisant!” in La lanterne magique aux Champs-Elysées, ou Entretien des grands peintres sur le Sallon de 1775, 28.
Chapter Summary

There is no denying that Vallayer-Coster luxuriated in the representation of a diversity of textures. She depicted surfaces with an almost fetishistic zeal, provoking memories of a variety of sensory experiences for the viewer. Accordingly, my dissertation is organized around the textures that occupied Vallayer-Coster throughout her career: erudite allegories of art and science, representations of food and dead game, as well as flowers and shells. In each chapter, I focus on a few key case studies, exploring formal, material, and sensual implications of each painting—placing her works in dialogue with the various cultural discourses of her time, in addition to the philosophy of the senses. As Angela Vanhaelen and Bronwen Wilson have written of Dutch still life paintings, “things are inextricable from the networks of people, spaces, institutions, and technologies that are brought together in their material form.” In the case of Vallayer-Coster, this is true of both the things represented, and the paintings themselves.

In the next chapter, I explore the allegorical still lifes produced in the first decade of Vallayer-Coster’s academic career. These paintings, among the largest and most ambitious of her oeuvre, contain functional and symbolic objects that stand for various individual and national bodies. The first case study is a pair of pendants, which were selected as her reception pieces and exhibited at the Salon of 1771, her first as an académicienne: The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture and The Attributes of Music (Fig. 2.1 and 2.2). These works function as both allegories of the arts,

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as well as rather self-conscious artistic statements, and may be read as a response to Chardin’s well-known iterations of the same subject. She distinguished her compositions from his in part by including a reproduction of the Belvedere torso—a clear reference to the academic practice of drawing the male body, a practice from which female artists were effectively forbidden.

The other case studies in this chapter focus on important private commissions shown at the Salons of 1775 and 1777, respectively. *The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* (Fig. 2.21), which juxtaposes the fruits of the forest and the field with a marble bust of Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, was commissioned by Joseph Terray, Louis XV’s finance minister and the author of a series of economic initiatives to increase the cost of wheat. *The Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* (Fig. 2.28) is a melancholy, patriotic allegory painted by for a mysterious patroness named Madame Vissitier. In this painting, the Roman Goddess of War presides over an elegant pile of weapons, a plumed helmet, and a furled *fleur de lis* banner. In this section, I expand upon the notion of a carefully curated, commissioned still life, which bore deeply personal, as well as broader cultural, meanings.

The third and fourth chapters deal with Vallayer-Coster’s representations of *fauna* and fruit in the context of the dining table and the hunt. This group of painting demonstrates the artist’s proclivity towards a bright, lucid colors and crisp rendering of various organic materials. Vallayer-Coster’s images of the food are specifically evocative of taste, and are thus entangled within a broader cultural, economic, and philosophic food systems of eighteenth century Paris. Similarly, Vallayer-Coster’s hunting trophies are best understood within the recreational and artistic tradition of the hunt—a primarily
aristocratic, masculine sport, which had been a popular subject of portrait, genre, and still life. In her representations of both guns and game, Vallayer-Coster betrays her own ambivalence towards the subject, emphasizing the sensuality of the plumed breasts of felled pheasants and furry underbellies of limp hares, draped over the tools of their slaughter with their limbs intertwined.

In the fifth chapter, I situate Vallayer-Coster’s representations of shells and minerals—a prominent motif of the Rococo and the Enlightenment—within the early modern tradition of collecting and displaying exotic specimens in curiosity cabinets, a practice motivated in part by the impulse to name and order living things during this period. I describe how these natures mortes were paradoxically enlivened by a throbbing, embodied femininity—exemplified by these fleshy-pink conch shells, which manifestly evoke the female anatomy.

Vallayer-Coster is perhaps best known for her representations of flowers; she painted these bouquets frequently in the final decades of her career, as she navigated abrupt shifts in political regimes. In the sixth and final chapter, I probe the relationship between the perceived ‘femininity’ of Vallayer-Coster’s subject matter and painting technique. These works are characterized by increasingly loose brushwork, in which large dabs of pure pigment stand for individual petals, while evoking the liquid sources of their natural perfumes. Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of floral bouquets thus became vehicles for some of the artist’s most intriguing formal innovations, and later inspired forays into tapestry design and printmaking.
Mlle Vallayer, Académicienne / Mme Coster, Citoyenne

Before embarking on this investigation of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings, it is important to collate what is known of the artist’s personal and professional life, and to assess her role within the Academy. Anne Vallayer was the second of four daughters born to Anne Desfontaines (d. 1791) and Louis-Joseph Vallayer (1704–1770), then an orfèvre (goldsmith) of the Royal Manufactory at Gobelins, where he specialized in the ornamentation of luxury snuffboxes; she was baptized on December 22, 1744, at the Église Saint-Hippolyte in Paris.31 After achieving the status of maître (master) in 1754, the goldsmith and his family left their Gobelins lodgings. Vallayer established his own practice, first on the rue du Doyenné, and in 1757, on the rue du Roule under the sign of “Soleil d’Or” (Fig. 1.1). There, assisted by his wife, Vallayer produced military metals, notably Croix de Saint-Louis (crosses of the Order of Saint-Louis).32

Though she was certainly raised in an artisanal milieu, the facts of Vallayer-Coster’s early training have proved difficult to ascertain. Tradition holds that she first encountered the art of painting flowers through Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (1701–1780), who became the official dessinatrice (draftswoman) of the Jardin des Plantes in 1742 and godmother to Vallayer-Coster’s youngest sister, Simone, in 1751.33 Given this intimate family connection to a professional female artist, it seems reasonable to assume that

31 Archives Départementales de la Seine; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, 13. For an example of Vallayer’s work during this period, see the gold and enamel snuffbox in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (17.190.1233).
32 Archives Nationales 01 / 2043-2. Don Guâle, no. 33; Affiches de Paris, 23 Octobre 1758; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, 14.
33 Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, 15;
Vallayer-Coster admired Basseporte, and may have initially copied her drawings or engravings of botanical specimens.

Vallayer-Coster also likely spent some time under the tutelage of landscape painter Joseph Vernet (1714–1789), another friend of her father and a member of the Academy. The clearest evidence we have of the relationship between Vernet and Vallayer-Coster is a watercolor study of a tulip now in a private collection, which bears the following inscription on the verso (clearly post-dating the artist’s marriage in 1781): “Joseph Vernet marine painter / made this study in the country to / Give a lesson to Madame Vallayer Coster / who was his student and who devoted herself to this genre // Monsieur Vernet presented this study / to Madame Biche in 1789.”

The inscription offers us fragmentary evidence of how a female artist, excluded from the official training offered by the Academy, might have informally learned to draw—that is, by copying works on paper by her master or mistress, before graduating to inventing her own compositions with oil paint on canvas.

Whoever provided her initial training, it was certainly with the support of her father that Vallayer-Coster began her career in the late 1760s. It is for this reason all the more tragic that, just two days after Vallayer-Coster was fully received at a meeting of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture on July 28, 1770, Vallayer died at the age of sixty-six, survived by his wife and four yet unmarried daughters. Vallayer-Coster began her tenure as an academicienne under the specter of this loss, but her productivity

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35 “Joseph Vernet peintre de Marine / fit cette étude à la campagne pour / Donner leçon a Mde vallayer coster / qui était son élève et qui s’était adonné a ce genre // Mr Venert fit present de cette etude a Mde Biche en 1789.” Joseph Vernet, Tulip, ca. 1768–1770. Watercolor, 11 1/2 x 8 1/4 in. (29 x 21 cm). Galerie Jean-François Baroni, Paris. Inscription quoted and translated in Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 15, fig. 2.
was by no means diminished; indeed, the paintings produced in the 1770s are among her most ambitious in both subject and scale. Roland Michel attributes the prolificacy of this period to the financial and emotional support that Vallayer-Coster must have received while living and working on the rue du Roule with her mother and sisters. By 1773, her mother had received official permission to continue her husband’s work in fabricating Croix de Saint-Louis, and the Vallayer women seemed to have prospered in the 1770s.  

In the absence of any letters from this period, evidence of Vallayer-Coster’s sense of professional identity can be found in a self-portrait drawn sometime in the 1770s, known only through a 1781 print Charles-François Le Tellier (1743–1800) (Fig. 1.2), advertised in the Journal de Paris and Mercure de France in July and August of that year. The artist pictures herself in profile, bearing all the attributes of a fashionable parisienne: she sports a towering coif buttressed by curls and festooned with a ribboned bonnet, and a square-necked gown with a pleated neckline. This attractive portrait is set within a medallion frame fringed with laurel branches. The artist’s tools—a palette, brushes, and mahlstick—rest upon a plaque below, which is ‘inscribed’ with the artist’s full married name, the year of her reception at the Academy, and indicates that the portrait was drawn by the artist herself (“Anne Vallayer Coster / de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture en 1770 / Dessiné par elle même”).

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37 Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, 32.
This confident self-representation concretized the artist’s status within the Academy. Indeed, her unanimous and simultaneous agrément and réception were important markers of artistic legitimacy; even after the collapse of the institution after the French Revolution, she was frequently identified as a former académicenne. Membership to the Academy provided the artist with the opportunity to participate in the biannual Salons staged at the Salon Carré at the Louvre, a crucial public platform for promoting her work. Moreover, the Academy provided ample opportunities for professional advancement and patronage, namely through access to elite clients. Though Vallayer-Coster’s patronage network during the ancien régime can be only roughly sketched, we know that members of the aristocracy and government (abbé Terray; comte de Merle; Jean-Baptiste-François de Montullé; marquis de Véri-Raionard; marquis de Marigny) as well as royalty (the prince de Conti; the Mesdames, the daughters of King Louis XV; and Queen Marie Antoinette, as well as a number of her ladies-in-waiting) commissioned or purchased her paintings.

As an académicenne, however, Vallayer-Coster’s status within the Academy was inherently fraught. The role of women artists was widely contested throughout the history of the Academy. No more than fifteen were admitted throughout the seventeenth and

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40 For more on the Academy and its constituent administrators, artists, and amateurs, see these two recent studies: Michel, The Académie Royale, 2018 and Hannah Williams, Académie Royale: A History in Portraits (London: Ashgate, 2015).

eighteenth centuries, a paltry number compared with the total membership of over 600.\footnote{Conflicting accounts of the number of women admitted to the Academy seem to hinge upon the rescinded membership of Margareta Haverman (Dutch, active 1716–1722), who was accused of presenting the work of Jan van Huysum as her own; see Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, Women Artists: 1550–1950, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 36.}

Still life painter Catherine Duchemin Girardon (1630–1698), the daughter and wife of Academic sculptors, was the first woman admitted in 1663, and thereafter five more women joined her in rank.\footnote{On Duchemin and other early female members of the Academy, see Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. 2001 (first published in 1979 by Martin Secker and Warbourg, Ltd.) especially 234-5.} Like Duchemin, many of the women admitted during this period directly benefitted from familial or matrimonial connections to academicians—for example, the Boullogne sisters, Geneviève (1645–1708) and Madeleine (1646–1710), who belonged to an impressive lineage of painters and were both received in 1669.\footnote{See Renaud Serrette, “De Versailles à Rambouillet: quatre dessus-de-porte de Madeleine Boullogne retrouvés.” Versalia no. 19 (2016): 87-92 and Rémi Cariel and François Marandet, Bon Boullogne, 1649-1717: Un Chef D’œuvre Au Grand Siècle (Paris: RMN-Grand Palais and Dijon: Musée National Magnin 2014).} By 1706, the Academy passed a rule against admitting any additional women—although this rule was apparently suspended to admit two foreign artists who travelled to Paris in the 1720s: Rosalba Carriera 1673–1757), the Italian pastellist, and the Dutch still life painter Margareta Haverman (1693/4–ca. 1722).\footnote{On Carriera, see Bernardina Sani, Rosalba Carriera (Torino: Umberto Allemandi, 2006); On Haverman, see Walter Liedtke, “Margareta Haverman” in Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 308-310 and Klara Alen, “Margareta Haverman: schilderend tussen passie en flora,” Master’s thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010. As previously noted, Haverman’s membership was rescinded a year later when she was accused of presenting the work of Jan van Huysum as her own.} There were no others until the miniaturist Marie-Thérèse Reboul (1735–1805) was admitted in 1757, and the Prussian painter Anna Dorothea Lisiewska-Therbusch (1721/2–1782) ten years later.\footnote{A tidy summary of these acceptances, as well as a table outlining female academic membership, appears in Williams Académie Royale 2015, Table 2.3, 95.}
Reboul witnessed Vallayer-Coster’s acceptance to the Academy in July 1770, and apparently attended meetings regularly. A specialist in printmaking and miniature paintings of flowers and other *naturalia*, Reboul was married to the academician Joseph-Marie Vien (1716–1809); however, very few works by Reboul are securely attributed, and she seems to have stopped exhibiting at the Salon after 1767.\(^{48}\) Another talented pastellist, Marie-Suzanne Giroust (1734–1772), entered the Academy in October 1770, just a few months after Vallayer Coster; yet Giroust, who trained under Vien and was married to the Swedish portraitist Alexandre Roslin (1718–1793), died of breast cancer only two years later.\(^ {49}\)

Soon after Vallayer-Coster and Giroust were admitted, the Academy moved to limit the number of women to four. In his *Reglement pour l’admission des femmes à l’Académie* (September 28, 1770), Jean-Baptiste Pierre (1714–1789), premier peintre du roi (first painter to the king) and Director of the Academy from 1770 until 1789, explained his reasoning:

> Although [the Academy] is pleased to encourage talent in women by admitting some into our body, nevertheless, these admissions, foreign in some fashion to its constitution, must not be repeated too often. [The Academy] has agreed that it will receive no more than four women. It will, however, receive women only in cases in which their extraordinarily distinguished talents lead the Academy to wish, with a unanimous voice, to crown them with particular distinction. The Academy does not pretend to oblige itself always to fill the number of four, reserving for itself the right to choose only those whose talents are truly distinguished.\(^ {50}\)

\(^{48}\) For this reason, there is no major source on Reboul; see instead Thomas W. Gaechtgens and Jacques Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien, peintre du roi, 1716-1809* (Paris: Arthena, 1988), especially pages 25-26 and 270.

\(^{49}\) Neil Jeffares, “ROSLIN, Mme Alexander, née Jeanne-Suzanne Giroust (Paris 1734–1772),” *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800* [online edition], May 22, 2018

<http://www.pastellists.com/Articles/RoslinMS.pdf#search=%22giroust%22>

\(^{50}\) *Procès-verbaux de l’Académie*, 7:53. Quoted and translated by Mary Sheriff in *The Exceptional Woman*, 79.
This rule was still in effect when the portraitists Labille-Guillard and Vigée Le Brun were admitted simultaneously thirteen years later, in 1783, thus becoming the third and fourth female members. The rule was upheld in 1790, when the Academy published an Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale reiterating and justifying their policies, including that concerning the admission of women artists:

In fact, the demands of motherhood and a thousand secondary factors prevent women from developing their talents to the height of the Academy, and it is rare that there are four celebrated women in a century. They cannot properly associate with the Academic body; they are not prepared to observe the Statutes; they are not required to produce reception pieces; when they do, we receive them with gratitude. This is the statement of their reception. They have only rarely attended meetings; it is rather by condescension than by right that they have sat at the Academy; and, besides, the decencies of their sex, and the embarrassment of being alone in the midst of a large number of men, have almost always deterred them from attending our assemblies. This mixing, in addition, appears unconstitutional in a state like ours [and] has drawbacks easy to predict (emphasis mine).\(^5\)

Remarkably, Mesdames Vallayer-Coster and Vien both signed this document. It is impossible to know if the artist’s signature indicates her enthusiastic endorsement or tacit approval of this sexist article within a much longer document. The latter sentences may even have been informed by her own experiences within the Academy (vastly outnumbered, as she was, by men) and perhaps motivated by concern for other young or unmarried women who aspired to membership.

\(^5\) “En effet, les soins de la maternité & mille causes secondes, empêchent les femmes de porter leurs talens jusqu’à la hauteur de l’Académie, & il est rare qu’il yait quatre femmes célèbres dans un siècle. Elles ne sont proprement qu’associées au Corps Académique; elles ne prêtent point fermement d’observer les Status; on n’exige point d’elles de morceaux de reception; quand elles en donnent, on les reçoit avec reconnaissance. Tel est l’énoncé de leur reception. Elles n’ont que rarement pris séance, c’est plutôt par condescendance que par droit, qu’elles ont siégé à l’Académie; & d’ailleurs les decencies de leur sexe, & l’embarass de se trouver seules au milieu d’un grand nombre d’hommes, les ont Presque toujours éloignées de nos assemblées. Ce mélangé, en outre, nous paroit inconstitutionnel dans un Etat comme le nôtre, cette association a des inconvénients aîsés à prévoir.” Adresse à l’Assemblée nationale, par la presque totalité des officiers de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, 6-7.
Indeed, it is tempting to imagine the bonds—or at least mutual understanding—that united the few women artists who became *académiciennes* in the final decades of the eighteenth century. The Vien and Roslin couples were certainly friends, evidenced by a series of portraits exchanged between them; they may have welcomed Vallayer-Coster into their circle.52 Yet in the critical press of the 1780s, Vallayer-Coster was more frequently linked with Vigée Le Brun and Labille Guiard. After Vigée Le Brun and Labille Guiard debuted at the Salon of 1783, for example, one critic mused that these three female artists submitted their paintings for the aesthetic judgment of the Parisian public—just as Paris, the Trojan mortal, had judged the physical beauty of the Greek goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. As in the ‘Judgment of Paris’ myth, there could only be one winner of the golden apple: “Mesdames Vallayer and Guiard also display their graces at the Salon; but Paris awards the apple to Madame Le Brun.”53

Evidence of personal relationships between these three artists is rather sparse, although both Labille-Guiard and Vigée Le Brun mention Vallayer-Coster in important personal documents. Labille Guiard wrote to the comtesse d’Angiviller, the wife of the director of the *Bâtiments du Roi*, in response to other libelous critiques after the Salon of 1783, impeaching the authenticity of her work as well as her personal virtue. Asking the comtesse to intercede on her behalf, she wrote, “One must expect to have one’s talent ripped apart…it’s the fate of all who expose themselves to public judgment, but their works, their paintings, are there to defend them, if they are good they plead their cause. Who can plead on behalf of women’s morals?” Labille Guiard reminded the comtesse “of

52 Williams, *Académie Royale*, 2015, 162.
the interest that you take in Mme Coster and in your sex in general”—appealing to the comtesse’s apparent sense of obligation to other female *académiciennes*.\(^{54}\)

Vigée Le Brun also named Vallayer-Coster as a predecessor at the Academy in her autobiographical *Souvenirs*, which was published long after the French Revolution, during which time Vigée Le Brun had fled Paris. Vigée Le Brun recalled that her colleague, who “painted flowers perfectly,” had already been admitted to the Academy when she was being considered for membership. Curiously, Vigée Le Brun does not mention Labille Guiard, who was admitted on the same day.\(^{55}\) Perhaps she was aware that, unlike Labille Guiard, Vallayer-Coster had signed a 1799 petition in support of an exiled Vigée Le Brun, who had been placed on a list of banned *émigrés*—royalists who had escaped during the revolutionary period and now stood to forfeit their property.\(^{56}\)

Beyond her connections to Vernet, Réboul, Vien, Giroust, Roslin, Labille-Guiard, and Vigée Le Brun, Vallayer-Coster’s personal network within the Academy can only be partially reconstructed through the institutional records. Vallayer-Coster participated in every Salon between 1771 and 1789, and intermittently thereafter until her death in 1818; she was no doubt familiar with many of the artists who exhibited contemporaneously.\(^{57}\) Her attendance at the official meetings of the Academy was less consistent, yet her very presence undermines the axiom that women artists were denied all rights of institutional membership. Between 1771 and 1789, she is noted as present during the following

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55 “…et pourtant madame Vallayer-Coster, qui peignait parfaitement les fleurs, était déjà reçue [as a member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture].” Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Souvenirs de Madame Vigée Le Brun*, vol. 1 (Paris: Charpentier et cie, 1869), 57.
57 The paintings she exhibited at the Salon are itemized in the Appendix to this dissertation.
meetings of academicians: July 28, 1771; October 2, 1773; August 27, 1774; August 26, 1775; April 13, 1776; not again until August 31, 1782; and then on May 30, 1789.\(^{58}\) Vallayer-Coster’s initial pride in membership may account for her annual attendance in the early 1770s. While she attended less frequently thereafter, it is worth noting that several of her male colleagues declined to attend such meetings, Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) being the most notorious delinquent.\(^{59}\) However, in an undated letter preserved at the Morgan Library & Museum, Vallayer-Coster wrote to miniaturist François Dumont (1751-1831), asking him accompany her to one such meeting of the Academy. This letter may indicate that the artist felt uncomfortable or unwelcome at such meetings when unaccompanied by a friendly colleague, as the Adresse of 1790 seems to indicate (Fig. 1.3).\(^{60}\)

Vallayer-Coster’s 1781 marriage contract serves as another important piece of evidence of her relationships within the Academy. The document was signed by sixteen witnesses, including Queen Marie Antoinette, the comte d’Angiviller (1730–1810), the director of the Bâtiments du Roi (whose wife had taken an interest in Vallayer-Coster, according to Labille-Guiard’s letter), and Pierre, the director of Academy and the author of the 1770 Règlement pour l’admission des femmes à l’Académie.\(^{61}\) Whatever their policies on the role of women within the Academy, d’Angiviller and Pierre must have held Vallayer-Coster in high regard.

\(^{58}\) Procès-verbaux de l’Académie, Volumes 7 and 8.
\(^{60}\) Letter from Vallayer-Coster to M. Dumont, Saturday, July 16 [no year], Morgan Library & Museum, Department of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, 106479. July 16\(^{th}\) fell on a Saturday on 1785, and again on 1791, and these are possible dates for the letter. Vallayer-Coster’s friendship with Dumont was apparently an enduring one; in 1804, he would paint a miniature portrait of the Vallayer-Coster in the act of painting a vase of flowers.
Vallayer-Coster had leveraged her connections to these high-ranking academic officials in 1779, when she launched her campaign to acquire space at the Louvre: a vacant apartment under the Grande Galerie, formerly accorded to the *Gazette de France*. By then, she had been a full member of the Academy for nearly a decade, and yet, as an unmarried woman in her mid-thirties, was still living and working at her mother’s home. Marie Antoinette seems to have advocated for the transformation of this space into lodgings for Vallayer-Coster, according to a series of letters exchanged between various royal administrators in the spring of 1779. On March 17, d’Angiviller wrote to the Comte de Vergennes of the “recommendation of the Queen in favor of Mlle Vallayer,” and on June 23, M. Dorival wrote to M. Duperon: “The Queen, who honors Mlle Vallayer with particular protection, desires that the lodgings be accorded her without delay.” Marie Antoinette’s support of Vallayer-Coster prefigures her intervention on behalf of Vigée Le Brun a few years later, when she stepped in to override various objections to the artist’s acceptance to the Academy in 1783.

On April 9, 1779, d’Angiviller wrote to Vallayer-Coster, assuring her of his intention to procure the space for her and to render it livable, as it had formerly served as a workspace for the *Gazette*. Several months later, Vallayer-Coster expressed her

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63 “La Reine, qui honore Mlle Vallayer d’une protection particuliere, desire que le logment lui soit accordé sans distraction.” M. Dorival to M. Duperon, June 23, 1779, O1 1673-570; transcribed in Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, 263
65 “Je désirois, mademoiselle, depuis longtemps vous mettre à portée cultivar avec plus de tranquillité les talens qui vous distinguissant, et c’est avec un veritable empressment que j’ai saisi l’occasion qui s’est prouestée de vous procurer un logement aux galleries du Louvre. Je vous l’aurais même déjà annoncé dans la forme ordinaire sans une circonstance sur laquelle je vois que M. Brebion s’est mal expliqué avec vous. Je suis certainement dans la disposition de fare faire dans ce logmeent ce qui sera au moins stricetement
profound frustration in the delayed renovations in a letter to d’Angiviller dated to January 26, 1780. This rather effusive letter is one of the few in Vallayer-Coster’s hand, and is therefore worth quoting at length:

Monsieur le Comte, I must rely as much as I do on all your kindness, and continually dare to speak to you about what moves me; I saw Mr. Brebilon yesterday and, from what he told me, I will not be able to enjoy for a long time the grace you have obtained for me, if you do not trouble yourself to convey my desire to know the asylum that you have kindly intended for me, that which will shelter me from the sorrows and miseries that have driven me to solicit it. It is with the utmost earnestness, Mr. le Comte, that I repeat my request, observing that it takes time for plaster to dry, and that if this is accomplished, I will sooner be able to live there without risk.

Moreover, if the promise of beneficence has briefly alleviated the woes that I have confided in you, the delay of this pleasure exposes me to them daily; I hope then, M. Le Comte, that you will do what I need you to do to get Mr. [Brebilon?] and M. Cuvillon to devote their attention to this lodging; only clear orders from you will suffice to realize my happiness, which it will be precious to me because of your kindness, and which enable me to exercise my talents with more ease... 66

Though the sources of her “woes” are unspecified, Vallayer-Coster’s desperation for a room of her own is palpable; her letter to d’Angiviller practically oozes with feminine obsequiousness. Vallayer-Coster’s impatience to move out of her mother’s home and acquire an independent work and living space must have been great. Indeed, it would be difficult to overstate the value of possessing one’s own residence and workspace at the

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66 “Monsieur le Comte, il faut que je compte autant que je le fais sur toutes vos bontés pour oser vous parler sans cesse de ce qui me touche; jai vu hier Mr. Brebilon et, d’après ce qu’il m’a dit, je ne pourrai jouir de longtemps de la grace que vous m’avez fait obtenir et, si vous ne prenés la peine de lui montrer le désir de me savoir établie bientôt dans l’asile que vous avez bien voulu me destiner et qui me mettra à l’abri des chagrins et des peines qui m’ont déterminé à la solliciter. C’est avec les plus vives instances, Mr. le Comte, que je vous réitère mes prières, pour cet objet en vous observant qu’il faut du temps pour sécher les plâtres et que, si cette partie, je trouvais faittes, je serai plus tôt à portée de l’habiter sans risque. / De plus, si la promesse du bienfait a pu éloigner, pour un temps, les maux que je vous ai confiés, le retard de la jouissance m’y expose de jour en jour; j’espère donc, M. Le Comte, que vous voudrés bien faire ce qui dépendra de vous pour que Mr. [Brebilon?] et M. Cuvillon portent leurs soins et leurs attentions pour ce logment; ils n’attendant, pour cela, que des orders précis de votre part qui suffront pour realizer le Bonheur qu’il me sera précieux de tenir de vois contés, et qui me mettra à portée d’excéver mon talans avec plus de facilité...” Vallayer to d’Angiviller, January 26, 1780, OI 1673-602; transcribed in Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, 264; translation is mine.
Louvre. These were sought-after spaces, not only because of the personal, practical, and professional benefits of having an apartment maintained by the crown and in close proximity to other members of the Academy, but also because of the more intangible legitimacy and prestige conferred upon the artist.\(^{67}\)

D’Angiviller apparently responded rather quickly to Vallayer-Coster’s pleas, issuing a work order for the space a few days later; Vallayer-Coster was presumably granted access to the renovated apartments before the end of 1780, as the Alamanach Royal of 1781 lists her as an official resident there.\(^{68}\) That year, her most immediate neighbors included the genre painters Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) and Hubert Robert (1733-1808); history painter Jean-Bernard Restout; flower painter Gérard van Spaendonck (1746-1822), as well as Vernet, Reboul, and Roslin.

Remarkably, Vallayer-Coster was the only female artist to earn her own space at the Louvre prior to the Revolution—aside from those residing with male academicians, whether their fathers or husbands (or, in the case of Margurite Gérard, with her brother-in-law, Fragonard).\(^{69}\) Indeed, after Vallayer-Coster took residence, several women were repeatedly denied their own spaces. In 1784, the daughter of artist Nicolas Lépicié appealed to d’Angiviller, asking to be able to remain in his lodgings after her father’s death; Pierre objected, describing the harassment that this woman might encounter within the bawdy fraternal space of the Academy:

Mlle Lépicié would constantly have to go past the spiral staircase and main room of the Academy, which is always crowded with young men, to reach the door of

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\(^{68}\) “Mlle Vallayer, P[ei]ntre aux Galeries du Louvre.” Almanach Royal (Paris: Laurent d’Houry 1781), 507.

the room she asks for... We could tolerate that when she was living with her mother, then her brother. But now she is alone, aged 32 or 34, quite fresh, her staying here would be indecent. Should we banish the heedless? The insolent? Would they be wrong to laugh if one exposes himself?70

As Auricchio has shown, Labille-Guiard’s repeated requests for lodgings in 1785, 1787, and 1789 were also denied; d’Angiviller disapproved of the fact that Labille Guiard had a number of young female students, arguing that their continual presence in her lodgings might pose a distraction to male students.71 These contradictory episodes indicate the internal tensions and personal biases underwriting Academic policies; Vallayer-Coster certainly seems to have benefitted from her personal connections to institutional leadership in a way that other female artists did not.

Soon thereafter, Roslin initiated a portrait of his new neighbor, which was exhibited at the Salon of 1783 and recently acquired by the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento (Fig. 1.4).72 This is an alluring image of a mature female artist at work; she meets the gaze of the viewer with an affable, satisfied expression, her palette and brush in hand. Much like her earlier engraved self-portrait, Vallayer-Coster is depicted à la mode: her brown hair has been arranged in the bouffant style popular during the 1780s, and lightly dusted with powder in order to preserve the shape and volume of the coif. Slightly more perplexing is her apparent state of deshabille, which seems to be a kind of fantasie of a female artist’s working attire: her décolletage is framed by silk blue stays, layered over lace-fringed chemise, which has slipped off her shoulders. When Roslin’s

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portrait is viewed in tandem with the letters by Vallayer-Coster during this period, a fascinating picture of the artist emerges: an independent, ambitious, and persistent woman, confident in her talents and the privileges that they afforded her—and quite willing to wield “the graces of her sex” in order to achieve her professional goals.\footnote{73 “Cette Demoiselle qui réunit dans sa personne toutes les graces de son sexe.” Op. cit.}

These personal qualities probably served her well later when she was forced to defend her occupation of those hard-won lodgings. In 1804, Dominique Vivant Denon (1747-1825), the director of the new museum at the Louvre, wrote to the Minister of the Interior in a bid to expand his own apartments by ousting Vallayer-Coster, “who occupies an arcade of the galleries close to mine”; Denon proposed that in exchange for her displacement, they would offer the sixty-year-old artist a monetary compensation “proportionate to her likely moving expenses.”\footnote{74 “qui occupe une arcade des galeries près de chez moi”...“une indemnité proportionnée aux frais que pourrait coûter son déménagement.” AN. F17 1095, dossier 14; Denon 1999 1: 165, letter 550, dated 3 nivôse an XIII (December 24, 1804); Cited in Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster 2002, 20-21, note 64. For more on Vivant-Denon’s administrative role at the Louvre, see McClellan, Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 125-154.}

If Vallayer-Coster was ever apprised of this plan, her response is unrecorded. In any case, she would not abandon her lodgings until after May 16, 1806, when Napoleon issued an edict evicting all of the resident artists from the Louvre.\footnote{75 See Olivier Merson, “Les logements d’artistes au Louvre à la fin du XVIIIe siècle,” Gazette des beaux-arts 23 (1881), 264-270. As Anne Higonnet has observed, “Two régimes overlapped in the Louvre between about 1790 and 1805. The Salon exhibition, held in its Salon Carré, was democratically open to all artists, and so was the first modern museum, in its Grande Galerie. Yet artists were still living and working in the apartments awarded to them as monarchic privileges.” In “Through a Louvre Window,” Journal18, Issue 2 Louvre Local (Fall 2016), <http://www.journal18.org/1057.>}

Interestingly, this would not be Vallayer-Coster’s last run-in with Denon. In a rather frosty letter dated to January 24, 1811, Denon responds indifferently to Vallayer-Coster’s outrage that some of her work had been withdrawn from the Salon of 1810 without her permission—apparently due to a faulty frame and the apparent risk of theft at the over-populated public exhibition. If her relationships with
Pierre and d’Angiviller had been positive and productive, the same cannot be said of her relationship with their post-revolutionary successor.  

Though she had earned it independently, Vallayer-Coster did not live alone at the Louvre for long. On April 21, 1781, at the age of thirty-six, she married Jean-Pierre Coster at Saint-Louis-du-Louvre, a church near the artist’s new lodgings at the Louvre. According to the marriage contract, the groom brought to the marriage 15,000 livres in savings, furniture, and other property, in addition to his personal income as a lawyer of the Parlement and receveur général du tabac (a collector of taxes on tobacco). The bride possessed a dowry of 20,000 livres provided by her father’s estate, in addition to 14,000 livres in furniture, personal effects, and savings from her painting practice (“épargnes qu’elle a fates dans l’art de peinture qu’elle exerce.”)  

This respectable sum offers us concrete evidence as to the viability of Vallayer-Coster’s painting practice at the height of her career.  

Little else is known about the nature of the Costers’ marriage, except for the fact that it was childless and seems to have successfully weathered the revolutionary period—unlike the marriages of Vigée Le Brun and Labille-Guiard.  

Vallayer-Coster and her husband co-habitated in her lodgings at the Louvre until 1806. According to Roland

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76 Archives des musées nationaux, registre *AA4 p. 274, 24 janvier 1811, Le directeur général du musée Napoléon à Mme Vallayer-Coster. “Madame, Ce n'est point malgré ‘mes ordres,’ comme vous me l'écrivez, que votre cadre est resté quinze jours au bureau de la direction. Jusqu'à ce jour il ne s'est rien fait dans l'établissement que je n'en aye été informé, et les observations qui me furent faites relativement à votre cadre étaient trop fondées pour que je ne les approuvassie pas….J'ai été aussi peiné que surpris, Madame, de cette récidive mais je ne puis cependant m'en prendre qu’à vous même, puisque vous avez insisté pour que votre cadre fût réexposé.”  

77 AN Fonds notarial VII – Liasse 450; April 21, 1781. The marriage contract is reproduced, and the signatures of the witnesses are pictured in Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster 1970, 264-7. Roland Michel also summarizes the contract in “Vallayer in her Time,” 2002, 20.  

78 Labille Guiard divorced her estranged husband on March 12, 1793; in 1800 she would marry the artist François André Vincent (1746-1816) (Auricchio, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, 2009, 93 and 119 note 249). Vigée Le Brun’s husband, who remained in Paris throughout her exile, divorced her in absentia on June 3, 1794 (Vigée Le Brun 2015, 237 and 242).
Michel, the couple briefly occupied another property in the Parisian suburb of Villemomble en Montreuil around 1793, at the height of the Reign of Terror; yet the artist must have returned to Paris on occasion, at the very least to participate in the Salons of the early and mid-1790s.  

What enabled Vallayer-Coster and her husband to stay in Paris for much of the 1790s—unlike Vigée Le Brun, for example, whose reputation was so intertwined with that of Queen Marie-Antoinette that she felt forced to flee? The Costers’ political views prove difficult to ascertain, although there is plenty of circumstantial evidence that the artist harbored royalist sympathies—particularly when compared to the other female artists who publically demonstrated their commitment to the revolutionary cause. On September 7, 1789, a group of twenty-one female artists and artist wives—Mesdames Vien, Fragonard, and David among them—donated their own jewelry to the National Assembly, two weeks after the publication of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Later, Labille Guiard was an active participant in the discussions surrounding the dissolution and reconstitution of the Academy—though her lobbying efforts to uncap the number of women artists were ultimately unrewarded. Vallayer-Coster, by contrast, does not seem to have entered the political fray, other than adding her signature to the aforementioned Adresse of 1790.

Yet Vallayer-Coster must have retained a sense of loyalty to the Queen, her former patron, who had been so instrumental in securing her lodging at the Louvre and

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80 Vigée Le Brun 2015, 131-3.
81 National Assembly records, AP 8:591.
who had served as an official witness to her marriage. According to the *Mémoires* of Madame Campan, a *femme de chambre* of Marie Antoinette, Vallayer Coster acted as a trusted agent of the Queen at a critical moment, on the eve of her attempt to leave Paris in June 1791. Campan wrote:

The queen told me that she had something precious to entrust to me and that I would have to find some respectable people, financially independent and wholly devoted to their sovereigns, to whom I was to consign a portfolio that she gave me. I had the idea of choosing Madame Vallayer-Coster, painter of the Academy, residing in the galleries in the Louvre, and in whom I found, as in her husband, all of the qualities required by the queen of the persons to be charged with this article. They were as loyal as I had declared them to be. Only in September 1791 after the constitution had been accepted, did they return this portfolio to me.\(^8^3\)

Though mysterious and potentially apocryphal, this anecdote at least reveals Madame Campan’s impression of the Costers as reliable and discreet allies of the crown.

Around 1806, the year of Napoleon’s eviction of the artists of the Louvre, the Costers left the Louvre for the rue Neuve de Bons Enfants,\(^8^4\) later moving to the rue de Coq Héron; it was there that the artist died on February 28, 1818, at the age of seventy-three.\(^8^5\) Jean-Pierre Coster survived his wife by six years, but he kept much of her artwork, as well as works that she had acquired from her colleagues at the Academy.

Their collection was sold on June 21, 1824, after his death on April 29 that year. In addition to several of Vallayer-Coster’s own paintings, drawings, and engravings, the sale included a number of works by her former neighbors at the Louvre—primarily works on paper by Vernet, Robert, and Fragonard, as well as a number of studies of heads and


\(^8^4\) Vallayer-Coster is described as living on this street in 1811; see the final chapter of this dissertation and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, 37 and 259.

\(^8^5\) M. Coster, a nephew (a son of the artist’s sister Madeleine), and a doctor named Levêque de la Source signed the death certificate, and may have witnessed her death. Archives Départementales de la Seine No. 4 État Civil. Registre 26, no. 146 Caisse Laffarge; transcribed in Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster* 1970, 38, 259, 260.
académies. The Costers only owned one other still life painting: an unidentified painting of flowers and fruit by Jan Davidsz. de Heem.  

Elsewhere, it has been suggested that after the Revolution, Vallayer-Coster’s career floundered beyond repair, never recovering from the loss of major aristocratic and royal patrons, and that the aging still life artist simply faded into obscurity. Yet scholars have recently begun to complicate this narrative, attempting to understand how other academicians of the ancien régime adapted to political instability and continued to produce art—albeit, in new forms and for new audiences. Indeed, “Citoyenne Vallayer-Coster” (as she is identified in several Salons of the 1790s and beyond) was undeniably less productive, and her range of subject matter was considerably reduced. Yet she continued showing her work at the Salon and was successful in attracting new patrons—for example, Empress Josephine, and later, the restored Bourbon King Louis XVIII. This last phase of Vallayer-Coster’s career will be examined more fully in the final chapter.

The Status of the Still Life in Eighteenth-Century France

Though the title of this dissertation suggests an isolated investigation of still life paintings, it should be noted that Vallayer-Coster did paint a number of figurative works: miniatures, genre paintings, and a few large-scale portraits. She submitted to the Salon, with fair consistency, genre paintings of women, including vestal virgins, servants, and sellers of flowers and fish; only a handful of these works survive. One notable, large-

86 The Catalogue de la vente Coster: Notice des Tableaux des Fleurs peints par Mme Vallayer-Coster... Provenant du Cabinet de feu M. et Mad Coster, June 21 and the following days, 1824 was itemized in Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, 274-6. One surviving copy is preserved at the British Library, London.

87 Paris Spies-Gans, a doctoral candidate in the History Department at Princeton University is currently preparing a broad sociologically-informed study of this very subject, in a dissertation tentatively titled “The Arts are All Her Own’: How Female Artists Navigated the Revolutionary Era in Britain and France, ca. 1760-1830.”
scale figurative work was recently acquired by the National Museum, Stockholm: a Portrait of a Violinist, in which a fashionably dressed and coiffed young woman considers a folio of sheet music, holding her instrument and bow (Fig. 1.5). One of Vallayer-Coster’s sisters, Madeleine, Elisabeth or Simone, likely served as the model for this early genre painting, representing a fashionable student of music.

Vallayer-Coster also rendered the likenesses of a number of salient clients, including miniatures of the Mesdames, the daughters of Louis XV and the aunts of Louis XVI. Vallayer-Coster was initially recommended for a large-scale royal portrait by the Comte d’Angiviller, the director of the Bâtiments du roi, who wrote to the artist in 1779:

> It being the intention of Madame Sophie, mademoiselle, to have herself painted, I thought I could do no better than to recommend you to the princess for the execution of this work, being persuaded on the one hand, by the knowledge I possess of your talent, that you will fulfill her wishes to her greatest satisfaction, and on the other hand that you will be pleased to see arise this occasion to make yourself known finally to this princess and to the royal family…. 

The resulting portrait, Madame Sophie de France in the interior of her Cabinet, holding a plan of the Abbey of l’Argentière, shown at the Salon of 1781, seems to have highlighted the royal aunt’s Catholic patronage; yet the portrait is now untraced.

A few years later, Vallayer-Coster painted another large portrait of the actress Anne Antoinette Clavel (1756–1812), better known by her stage name: Madame de

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91 See Appendix to this dissertation for a complete list of works shown at the Salon by Vallayer-Coster.
Saint-Huberty (Fig. 1.6). Saint-Huberty is depicted in costume as Dido, the title character of Niccolò Piccinni’s opera, performed in Paris beginning on December 1783; she is rendered mid-song, her lips parted and her hand raised to her breast, an expressive gesture associated with French operatic performance. Yet Vallayer-Coster’s contemporaries responded less than favorably to her ventures into figurative representation. As a critic of the Journal de Paris wrote,

Madame Vallayer Coster seems to have been abandoned in some sort of a genre that is most familiar to her, that is to say, the so-called nature morte, to indulge in portraiture, and I do not think that it is favorable to her. I will cite, for example, the portraits of Mademoiselle de Coigny and Madame Saint-Huberti, both of which, although somewhat true in resemblance and color, are inclined toward a drawing that seems to me awkward and incorrect; besides, these portraits lack physiognomy, and it is a very important defect. When I look at the other paintings of this estimable artist, I cannot help but regret that she gave up her first genre.

A critic from the Mercure de France similarly praised her still life works while condemning the portraits:

Between the vegetable kingdom and the animal kingdom there is a distance, perhaps less vast than that which exists between the portraits of this artist and her genre paintings… The portraits of Mademoiselle de Coigny, Monseigneur l'Evêque de ..., Madame de Saint-Huberty under the habit of Didon, etc ..., are, to varying degrees, drawn very incorrectly and in a condemnable color, but the genre

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94 “Mme Vallayer Coster paroit abandonné en quelque sorte de genre qui lui est le plus familier, c’est à dire, celui que l’on appelle la nature morte, pour se livrer au portrait, & je ne pense pas qu’il lui soit assui favorable. Je citerai pour exemple les portraits de Mlle de Coigni & de Mme Saint-Huberti, qui, tous deux, quoique ressemblans & d’une couleur assez vraie, penchant par le dessin qui me paroit géné & incorrect; d’ailleurs ces portraits manquent de physiognomie, & c’est un défaut bien capital. Quand je regarde les autres Tableaux de cet estimable Artiste, je ne puis m’empêcher de regretter qu’elle ait abandonné son premier genre,” Journal de Paris 258 (September 15, 1785), 1064. See Amy Stidwell, “Masquerading as Queen: Anne Vallayer-Coster’s Portrait of Madame de Saint-Huberty at the Paris Salon of 1785,” M.A. Thesis (Southern Methodist University, 2003)
paintings are true with natural color and worthy of the highest praise. Eh! Why do you not want to just be yourself? Know thyself, no one remembers this ancient adage.95

In this study, I have chosen to emphasize Vallayer-Coster’s still life paintings; these forged her reputation in the eighteenth century and were the most warmly received by her contemporaries. Her representations of objects offer the most profound insights into the material culture of the eighteenth century, translating the artist’s own sensory experiences into strokes of color.

Before embarking on an investigation of the artist’s work, however, the status of still life paintings in eighteenth century France and modern art historical scholarship bears brief consideration.96 André Félibien (1619–1695), an amateur honoraire to the nascent Academy, established the hierarchy of genres in his *Conférences de l’académie royale de peinture et de sculpture pendant l’année 1667:*

He who paints landscapes perfectly is above another who only paints fruit, flowers or seafood. He who paints living animals is more estimable than those who only represent dead things (* choses mortes *) without movement. And as man is the most perfect work of God on the earth, it is also certain that he who becomes an imitator of God in painting human figures, is much more excellent than all the others…97

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96 The history of the still life in France has been most systemically and summarily studied by Michel Faré; see his *La nature morte en France, son histoire, son évolution, du XVIIe au XX siècle,* (Geneva: Geneva: Pierre Callier, 1962) and *Le grand siècle de la nature morte en France, Le XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Société Française du Livre, 1974).

Perhaps because of their lowly status in the hierarchy of genres established by Félibien, the genre that we now call ‘still life’ was still only loosely defined a century later; the term ‘nature morte’ was not ubiquitously used or understood until around the turn of the nineteenth-century. Frequently, landscape and still life paintings were subsumed by the general phrases like ‘peinture de genre’ or ‘mignon genre.’ Art theorists like Jean-Baptiste Descamps used descriptive phrases like ‘objets immobiles’ to characterize this porous set of subject matter, but Vallayer-Coster was most frequently referred to by her contemporaries as a ‘peintre des fleurs and fruits,’ notwithstanding the variety of objects that populated her paintings throughout her career.  

Though the category lacked coherence and precise terminology, a strong market for these works developed over the course of the eighteenth-century, particularly those of the Dutch and Flemish tradition.  

Marchand-mercier Edmé-François Gersaint (1694–1750) is often credited with introducing Northern paintings to the French market early in the century; the demand for these works was further stimulated by the connoisseurship of Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville (Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres, 1745-52) and Jean-Baptiste Descamps (La vie des peintres flamands, allemands et hollandois,  

estimable que ceux qui ne représentent que des choses mortes & sans mouvement ; & comme la figure de l'homme est le plus parfait ouvrage de Dieu sur la Terre, il est certain aussi que celui qui se rend l'imitateur de Dieu en peignant des figures humaines, est beaucoup plus excellent que tous les autres…” Félibien and other French academics largely drew upon the theoretical precedents of Antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, especially the writings of Vasari; see Jacques Thuillier, “Les Debuts de l'histoire de l’art en France et Vasari,” in Vasari storiografo e artista: atti del Congresso internazionale nel IV centenario della morte, 2-8 settembre 1974 (Arezzo-Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), 667-684.  


99 Dutch art theory had made strides towards defining the genre by the early eighteenth century; see Alan Chong, “Contained Under the Name of Still Life in Netherlandish Art Literature of the Seventeenth Century,” in Still Life Paintings form the Netherlands, 1550-1720 (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1999), 51-58.
Both of these theorists catalogued and offered biographies of still life specialists, increasing the name recognition of living and dead artists—as well as the value of their paintings. As Gaëtane Maës has argued, prices for works by Dutch and Flemish artists only increased when trade between France and the Northern countries resumed after the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War in 1763. Thereafter, dealers like Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun (1748–1813), husband of Vigée Le Brun, traveled frequently to the Netherlands to discover lesser-known artists, capitalizing on the French taste for the school. Given this demand, it is unsurprising that certain motifs traditional of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish still life paintings—lobsters, hams, spiralized lemons, piles of fruit, and bouquets of flowers—appeared quite frequently in French paintings by Chardin, Vallayer-Coster, and others, despite the fact that they are not known to have traveled outside of France; these artists undoubtedly solicited the attention of well-educated collectors, who would have appreciated references to the Northern school. (Recall that the Costers themselves owned a de Heem still life).

Within France, there also developed a distinct tradition of painting plants, animals, silver, and gold. Early in the history of the Academy, académiciennes like Duchemin and Boullogne specialized in painting flowers, fruits, and other inanimate

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objects. Later, Alexandre-François Desportes (1661-1743) and Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) expanded the category to include live animals, working in the tradition of Frans Snyders (1579-1657) and Pieter Boel (1622-1674), the latter of whom worked in the court of Louis XIV. Oudry and Desportes developed specialties in dynamic representations of hunting dogs tussling with or sniffing their prey, as well as exotic creatures imported to France—both part of the spectacular court ecosystem at Versailles. As academic successes who earned the patronage of both Louis XIV and XV—and who made large-scale claims for the power and potential complexity of non-figurative paintings—these artists served as important models for our still life painter; she almost certainly encountered their paintings through popular engravings or installed in the halls of the Academy. Oudry’s bright, vivid color palette and lush, energized surfaces, were probably important formal references for Vallayer-Coster. Oudry’s work is rather unlike Chardin’s smaller, darker and ‘stiller’ works, which are primarily characterized by their crumbly textures (what art historian James Herbert described as “thickly encrusted nodes” and “piled pigment.”) The formal connections between Oudry and Vallayer-Coster will be more carefully explored through specific case studies in the following chapters.

Even if there was a healthy market for still lifes in the eighteenth century, practitioners of the minor genres were largely marginalized in the critical discourse of

their own time. As Lesley Stevenson summarized in her essay, “The Still Life in France: Tradition and Equivocation”:

…the position of still-life painting within that academic system was ambivalent: at once tightly circumscribed within a strict hierarchy and at the same time granted a degree of latitude because of its position on the margins of the French tradition, where it went relatively unregulated. Unlike the other genres of painting, the still life managed largely to escape a constricting theorization. 107

Modern art historical scholarship has mostly preserved this hierarchical approach to the art of the eighteenth century. Michael Fried’s Absorption and Theatricity: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (1980), one of the most important theoretical texts in the field of eighteenth-century-French painting, affirmed the general dearth of discourse on still life painting. Fried offers an explanation as to why critics like Diderot—and, we can deduce, Fried himself—did not highly value these works:

Inanimate subject matter make the artistic and presentational aspects of the painting itself all the more obtrusive by imposing almost desperate demands on technique and by calling attention to the fact that the objects depicted by the painter were chosen by him, arranged by him, illuminated by him, and in general exhibited by him to the beholder (emphasis mine). 108

In Fried’s view, still life paintings speak to the embodied experience of the (male) eighteenth-century artist. The viewer, assuming the perspective of the artist, is unable to ‘forget’ his or her own body, thereby preventing total absorption in the fictive space of painting. Fried suggests that this critical concept of ‘absorption’ is only possible in figurative, narrative paintings, and this accounts for their superiority in the eighteenth-century French hierarchy of genres and subsequent art histories.

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108 Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricity: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 102. Fried continues, “In the case of history painting, however, the beholder’s vastly greater interest in the actions and passions of human beings relieved the pressure on technique…the painter could aim to engross or absorb his figures in action or feeling…and thereby to declare their aloneness relative to the beholder or at any rate their obliviousness of his presence.”
I agree with Fried that there can be no ‘forgetting’ of one’s body when looking at Vallayer-Coster’s work; indeed, her paintings thematize the complex relationship between the embodied subjects (the artist / viewer) and the depicted objects. I aim to contextualize Vallayer-Coster’s work within this Enlightenment discourse of sensation, which foregrounds the body and individual sensate experiences. I argue that this is the very function of her still life paintings and the source of their power over viewers—contravening Fried’s negative assessment of the genre.

Norman Bryson’s *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (1990) offered the first major critical evaluation of the genre, in a transhistorical series of essays. In a chapter entitled “Still Life and ‘Feminine’ Space,” Bryson describes Chardin’s still life paintings as exercises in the solitary, but ultimately passive nature of visual perception, as well as homages to the humble, silent, but above all, ‘feminine’ domestic sphere.109 Bryson uses Vallayer-Coster primarily as a foil to Chardin, arguing that as a woman artist, she enjoyed a proximity and personal familiarity with the objects that populated kitchens and other interior spaces of the home. By contrast, Chardin’s sex afforded him a formal distance from, and thus a kind of “alien” authority over, those same objects; in Bryson’s words, “Chardin remains the man of the house.”110

In what follows, I tease Bryson’s reductive understanding of these artists, pushing for a more nuanced understanding of gendered objects, as well as paintings of them by male and female artists in the eighteenth century.111 I also move beyond Bryson’s idea that still life paintings appeal simply to the eye (the organ emphasized in the very title of

his book), asserting that Vallayer-Coster’s works stimulate integral memories of touch, taste, smell, and sound, in addition to vision. This dissertation probes the seductive, synesthesiac possibilities of her paintings—that is, the power of her work to elicit visual, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory responses—and whenever possible, attempts to recover historically and culturally specific sensory responses to them.¹¹²

¹¹² I use “synesthesiac” not to refer to the specific medical condition, but more generally to mean to have a multi-sensory response to a single-sensory stimulant.
II. Allegories

On July 28, 1770, Vallayer-Coster attended her first meeting of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in their assembly room at the Louvre. To demonstrate her talents as a still life painter, Vallayer-Coster presented several works to the members of the Academy, including *The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (Fig. 2.1) and *The Attributes of Music* (Fig. 2.2), now in the collection of the musée du Louvre. These monumental works are among the largest that the artist would ever paint—no doubt an attempt to signal to the Academy the scale of her professional ambitions. Vallayer-Coster’s efforts were rewarded; the allegorical pendants so pleased the members of the Academy that they accepted these works as her *morceaux de réception* (reception pieces) and granted her full membership the same day.

These pendants are significant within Vallayer-Coster’s *oeuvre*, not only because they earned her a sought-after position within the Academy—and, as a result, the right to exhibit her work at the biannual installation of contemporary art in the Salon Carré at the Louvre—but because they constituted the artist’s first major statement of intent. The depicted objects demonstrate the artist’s investment in the pedagogical values of the Academy, the very institution to which she aspired. *The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*, in particular, may also be read as a response to Chardin’s *The Attributes of the Arts and their Rewards* of 1766 (Fig. 2.7). With these pendants,

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Vallayer-Coster asserted herself as a still life painter worthy of the Academy, and as Chardin’s successor.

In this chapter, I also analyze two other allegories produced in the first decade of Vallayer-Coster’s academic career: *The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* (1774, Fig. 2.21)³ and *The Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* (1777, Fig. 2.28).⁴ I expand upon the allegorical potential of these still life paintings—that is, the capacity of objects to bear complex meanings. Here, I suggest that Vallayer-Coster was less interested in employing the religious or existential symbols typical of the seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish tradition than in representing and glorifying the very substance of human life in eighteenth-century Paris: art, music, nature, and nation are allegorized through the objects represented in her work. The allegorical mode of painting was much revered from the very origins of the Academy; as de Piles wrote in *Cours de peinture par principes* (*The Principles of Painting*) (1708), “True painting…captures our attention by the fine choice and novelty of the subject it presents, through history and myth, which refresh our memory, by ingenious inventions, and by allegories that provide us with the pleasure of uncovering their meanings, or criticizing their obscurity.”⁵

While Vallayer-Coster’s reception pieces were dedicated to the Academy, the other two allegorical still lifes discussed in this chapter were private commissions—*Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* for abbé Joseph-Marie Terray, Louis XV’s contrôleur général des Finances, and *Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* for a

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³ Salon of 1775, no. 100; Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, no. 283 (as lost); Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, 200, no. 24 (as whereabouts unknown).
Madame Vissiter. Here, I explore how the artist constructed layers of meaning and embedded them in each painting, perhaps in collaboration with the patron. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the gendered dynamics of the three works—all which employ sculptures, as well as other objects, that stand for both individual and institutional bodies. These three works serve as case studies, demonstrative of her engagement with the visual traditions and intellectual discourses of her time. These paintings also represent a re-articulation of her genre, beyond the mere imitation of inanimate objects toward more complex, allegorical meanings.

Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, 1770

Vallayer-Coster subjected her work to the criticism and praise of the royal academicians in the hope of joining their ranks. The success that Vallayer-Coster met at that meeting in July 1770 is recorded in detail in the Procès-verbaux de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture:

The Demoiselle Anne Vallayer, Painter, born in Paris, presented, in view of obtaining provisional membership, several pictures painted in oil, representing scientific and artistic instruments. The Academy, after having taken the usual voice vote and acknowledging her abilities, accepted her presentation, and, there having been among the pictures that she presented and that belonged to her, two paintings, one of a group of musical instruments and the other those of the Arts of Painting and Sculpture, to which the Company took particular satisfaction, the Academy accepted them for her reception. In consequence, the Academy received and receives the Demoiselle Vallayer as Académicienne qualified to sit in its assemblies and enjoy the privileges, prerogatives, and honors accruing to this status, on the understanding that she is to observe the Statutes and Regulations of the Academy, and she sat in the assembly in this capacity (emphasis mine).  

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As this excerpt indicates, the Academy considered Vallayer-Coster’s *Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* and *Attributes of Music* to be superior examples of her work, and therefore worthy of serving as her reception pieces. These works enabled Vallayer-Coster to be simultaneously agréée and reçue—the terms used describe successive levels of membership in the Academy, each contingent upon the successful execution of two major works, the *morceaux d’agrément* and réception.

Most male artists, particularly those in high demand for royal and private commissions, presented their reception piece a few years after their initial agrément; François Boucher (1703–1770), for example, was agréé in 1731 and reçu in 1734; Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) in 1781 and 1783. It seems to have been customary, however, for female applicants to achieve full membership (both agréée and reçue) simultaneously. The precedent was set with the first woman admitted into the Academy, the still life painter Catherine Duchemin Girardon in 1663, and the tradition was maintained throughout the eighteenth century: including miniaturist Reboul Vien in 1757 and pastellist Giroust Roslin in September 1770, a few months after Vallayer-Coster. Later, portraitists Labille Guiard and Vigée Le Brun would be agréée and reçue on the same day, May 31, 1783.

Hannah Williams has suggested that the ‘chivalric’ custom of facilitating the entry of female artists was in fact a marker of otherness, ensuring that women remained

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‘outsiders.’ Similarly, Mary Sheriff has argued that this special expediency was part of an effort to limit their participation in the official proceedings of the Academy. Several female artists, including Duchemin and Reboul, were excluded from the assemblies during which their applications were evaluated; they were instead sent letters informing them that the Academy had selected their *morceaux de réception* from the paintings already submitted. According to Sheriff, this procedure prevented women from appearing before the Academy in person to make the official “oath…swearing allegiance to the institution and its rules.” In this regard, Vallayer-Coster seems to have been exceptional, for she was present at that July 1770 meeting of the Academy and received the exact same rites bestowed on contemporary male applicants: she agreed to “observe the Statues and Regulations of the Academy,” and thereby became “qualified to sit in its assemblies and enjoy the privileges, prerogatives, and honors accruing to this status” of *académicienne*.

Although the immediate gratification of full membership is typically associated with female artists in modern scholarship, it should be noted that Chardin was also simultaneously *agréé* and *reçu* in 1728, with his still life paintings *The Rayfish* and *The Buffet*. In his *Vies d’artistes du XVIIIe siècle*, written in 1749, collector and dealer Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774) recalled Chardin’s early success: “M. Chardin having had several of his pictures conveyed to the Academy, all votes cast were in his favor…he

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9 This procedure was also employed for foreign artists, including Roslin; Williams, *Académie Royale*, 94-96.
was received and admitted and, a rare occurrence indeed, two of the works he had presented were allowed to take the place of the reception piece required.”

The example of Chardin demonstrates that the rules of membership were applied discriminately. Indeed, Sharon Boedo has observed that “the reception process was continually evolving, that Academy statutes and regulations governing receptions were almost never enforced to the letter, and that exceptions were granted at every stage of the process on a regular basis.” Vallayer-Coster’s concurrent agrément and réception may be justly attributed to both her sex and to her talent as a still life painter—as demonstrated by the twin successes of her *Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* and *Attributes of Music*.

**Chardin’s Attributes**

Vallayer-Coster’s allegorical pendants situate the instruments of drawing, painting, sculpture, and architecture, as well as music, in spare, but elegant and dramatically lit spaces. The artist’s predecessor, Chardin, also painted similar allegories of art, music, and science at distinct moments in his career—in 1731, and twice in the 1760s. In 1731, he produced pendants, commissioned as decorative overdoors in the library of the Rue du Regard hôtel of the aristocratic diplomat Count Conrad-Alexandre de Routhenbourg (1683-1735)—a major coup for a young artist, who had only recently

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been received by the Academy. In the first painting, *Attributes of the Arts* (Fig. 2.3), sculpture is represented by an antique marble bust and a playful bas-relief of children playing with a goat (after a work by Flemish Baroque sculptor François Duquesnoy) in front of a billowing red velvet drape with gold tassels. In the foreground, a capuchin monkey manipulates a chalk-holder, called a *porte-crayon*, on a piece of paper, in front of a palette of brushes—representative of drawing and painting. The pendant to this work, *Attributes of the Sciences* (Fig. 2.4) includes the tools of the nascent scientific inquiries: a tawny globe, scrolled maps and various exotica (a gold incense burner, an Oriental carpet, and a Japanese porcelain vase) represent an increasingly comprehensive world geography, while a slender turquoise telescope and a deep blue microscope refer to the study of physical matter. Cool blues, deep reds, and burnished golds echo across both canvases, unifying the arts and the sciences.

Chardin approached the subject for a second time nearly thirty years later, for another decorative commission: *The Attributes of Science* (now lost), *the Arts*, and *Music* (Fig. 2.5, Fig. 2.6), all of which were exhibited at the Salon of 1765 before being installed as decorative overdoors for the gaming salon at Louis XV’s Château de Choisy, just outside of Paris. There they remained until the Revolution, when the *Attributes of the Arts* and *Music* entered the collection of the Louvre. The critical success of these works (Diderot called them “all equally perfect”) likely facilitated yet another prestigious

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14 Chardin was probably looking at a plaster cast of the original, now in the Villa Doria Pamphili, produced while Dusquenoy (1597-1643) was in Rome with Stella and Poussin. See Katie Scott, “Child’s Play” in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and National Gallery of Art, 2003), 96.
project for Chardin the following year—*The Attributes of the Arts and their Rewards* (Fig. 2.7), commissioned by Catherine the Great for the Saint Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. When she received the work in 1766, Catherine was apparently so pleased with Chardin’s composition that she decided to keep it for her own royal apartments instead; the painting remains in the collection of the Hermitage today.\(^\text{17}\)

The most significant difference among Chardin’s *Attributes of the Arts* in the Jacquemart-André (1731), the Louvre (1765), and the Hermitage (1766) lies in Chardin’s choice of sculpture, representative of the three-dimensional arts. In the 1731 canvas, Chardin included a classical bust and a Baroque bas-relief. In the iterations of the 1760s, however, Chardin chose to quote two different contemporary French works—to acknowledge the accomplishments of his colleagues at the Academy, and to indicate his own apparent preference for the sculpture of eighteenth-century France above the art of antiquity.\(^\text{18}\)

In the Louvre painting, Chardin employed a copy after a sculpture by Edmé Bouchardon (1698–1762). This female allegorical figure, representing the city of Paris, was the centerpiece of Bouchardon’s elaborate *Fontaine des Quatres Saisons*, which is still *in situ* on the Rue de Grenelle (1739-45, Fig. 2.8). Louis XV commissioned the fountain, which was designed to have hygienic and propagandistic functions: to supply water to Saint-Germain-des-Près, but also to glorify Louis XV’s reign.\(^\text{19}\) In his 1765

\(^{17}\) The paintings were probably delivered by French sculptor Etienne-Maurice Falconet (1716-91), the director of sculpture at the Sévres porcelain manufactory, who came to Russia to work for Catherine the Great at the suggestion of Diderot. See Robert K. Massie, *Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman* (New York: Random House, 2012), 528-9, and Rosenberg, *Chardin*, 2000, 306-309.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

Attributes, Chardin included a small-scale version of Bouchardon’s allegorical figure of Paris in an honorific gesture towards the recently deceased sculptor, as well as an explicit celebration of the city in which Chardin lived and worked.

For the Hermitage Attributes of 1766, Chardin replaced Bouchardon’s Paris with a copy of Mercury Tying His Sandal by Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714–1785) (Fig. 2.9)—the classical subject of which was more suited to a painting commissioned by the Empress of Russia. Yet Chardin may also have been motivated to honor the recent professional successes of Pigalle, his academic colleague and friend. Pigalle was agréé when he presented a terracotta draft of Mercury to the Academy in 1741, and in 1744, a marble version of the same sculpture served as his morceau de réception. According to Michael Levey, Mercury subsequently became one of the most celebrated sculptures of the eighteenth-century.20 Chardin, who also owned a small-scale version of Pigalle’s work, had first paid homage to Mercury in his 1747 genre painting, The Study of Drawing (Fig. 2.10), in which a student is being instructed to sketch a plaster copy of the sculpture. In this charming scene, Pigalle’s Mercury was not just a contemporary masterpiece, but also an object with inherent pedagogical value, particularly to young artists studying the movement of the human body.21

Nearly twenty years after painting The Study of Drawing, Chardin used Pigalle’s Mercury to represent sculpture in the Attributes of the Arts and their Rewards for the Saint Petersburg Academy. Chardin further lauded Pigalle by placing a black ribbon with

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20 In his “The Pose of Pigalle’s Mercury,” The Burlington Magazine, 106:739 (October 1964): 460-463, Levey called it “one of the most famous pieces of sculpture executed in eighteenth-century France.”
the cross of the Order of Saint-Michel prominently in the foreground. In 1765, Pigalle had famously refused to accept the award from the Dauphin (apparently he felt that his predecessor, Bouchardon, deserved the honor more); in 1769, however, he became the first French sculptor to receive this token of royal favor.\textsuperscript{22} By inserting the Order of Saint-Michel medal alongside \textit{Mercury}, Chardin effectively bestowed upon Pigalle the honor that he had modestly declined.\textsuperscript{23}

Chardin’s 1766 \textit{Attributes} is further distinguished from his previous iterations because it references the decorative arts and architecture, in addition to the sculpture, painting, and drawing. Pigalle’s \textit{Mercury} is accompanied by an ornate bronze pitcher with a female lion’s body serving as the handle, representative of ornamental metalwork. The composition is further embellished by an erect ruler (propped rather maladroitly between Mercury’s legs), a protractor, and sheets of architectural plans. French architects were governed by a separate institution, founded by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV’s \textit{Surintendant des Bâtiments}, in 1671—several decades after that of painting and sculpture, founded in 1648. Yet the objectives of the \textit{Académie royale d'architecture} (Royal Academy of Architecture) were closely aligned with those of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture. As Anthony Blunt has demonstrated, these royal academies were both governed by the \textit{Surintendant des Bâtiments}, and were similarly focused on “studying the works of masters in order to deduce aesthetic doctrine” in the service of the King.\textsuperscript{24} Moreover, in 1762, Jacques-François Blondel (1708–1774), author of the seminal

\textsuperscript{22} This anecdote of Pigalle’s initial refusal of the award is described in Dezallier d’Argenville’s \textit{Vies des fameux architectes depuis la renaissance des arts: avec la description de leurs ouvrages} (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1787), 2:397-8.

\textsuperscript{23} Rosenberg, \textit{Chardin}, 2000, 303.

text Discours sur la manière d’étudier l’Architecture (1747), joined the faculty of the Academy of Architecture; his reinvigoration of the curriculum was widely praised in artistic circles. The attributes of architecture, therefore, mingled unproblematically with those of the fine and decorative arts in both Chardin’s and Vallayer-Coster’s paintings.

Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes

The most obvious distinction between Chardin and Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes are the conditions under which they were painted. Chardin’s constellation of works, produced in 1731, 1765, and 1766, were among the most important decorative commissions of his long career. Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes were conceived not to adorn specific spaces, but as a part of her initial application to the Academy. Her pendants gained an even greater personal and professional significance when they were selected as her morceaux de réception in 1770 and exhibited at her debut salon in 1771. The conceptual motives behind Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes—and, indeed, allegorical still lifes in general—have long been underestimated. For example, Williams asserted in Académie Royale: A History in Portraits: “In terms of the morceau de réception practices, landscape, genre, and still life painters were given no role whatsoever in the glorification” of the Academy, nor were practitioners of the ‘lesser genres’ able to “create self-reflexive admission pieces.” Here, I will argue that Vallayer-Coster’s The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture and Music did just that. Indeed, the pendants functioned as a kind of ‘self-reflexive’ thesis—demonstrative of her talent, but

26 Williams, Académie Royale, 65.
also her commitment to her genre and to the theoretical and pedagogical values of the Academy.

Moreover, with these paintings, Vallayer-Coster seems to have explicitly courted comparison with Chardin, the most esteemed still life painter of his generation—positioning herself as his successor. Vallayer-Coster was likely familiar with Chardin’s 1766 *The Attributes of the Arts and their Rewards*, an autograph copy of which appeared in the Salon of 1769, a year before she submitted her work to the Academy. Her choice to paint the same subject was almost certainly deliberate. Indeed, her *The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* is populated by many of the same objects that figure in Chardin’s iterations from the mid-1760s, and she adheres, with few deviations, to the same allegorical formula: the arts of drawing, painting, sculpture, and architecture are represented by paper and chalk, palette and brushes, sculptural models, and floor plans, respectively.

Although she borrowed the subject and certain elements of the *mise en place* from Chardin’s canvas, Vallayer-Coster differentiated herself from her predecessor by manipulating various aspects of his composition and painting technique. First, Vallayer-Coster’s composition appears far more casual and crowded than that of her predecessor. We are positioned closer to her objects, and as a result, they obscure most of the background. Her objects seem rather disorganized; things precariously prop, straddle, lean, and hinge upon one another, with no apparent sense of order. Even the table upon which Vallayer-Coster has arranged her objects is oriented at a slight angle—unlike

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27 Chardin produced two copies of the original painting at the Hermitage: one copy was exhibited at the Salon of 1769, and the other, given as a gift by the artist to Pigalle, is now in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Rosenberg, *Chardin*, 2000, 303-309 and *Chardin*, 1999, 141-150.
Chardin’s *Attributes*, each of which feature a table that is neatly flush with the surface of the canvas.

Upon closer examination, the contrived nature of Vallayer-Coster’s arrangement becomes obvious. Consider, for example, the perfect apex formed by the rulers and a *porte-crayon* at the center of the canvas, or the unnatural way in which the bronze right angle sits astride the upended red book. This self-consciously haphazard arrangement—animated by unexpected and irregular lines, composite volumes, and discrete voids—is designed to insist upon the artist’s command over space and scale. Objects seem to have been deliberately placed off balance in order to create pockets of negative space, enhancing the illusion of depth. For example, on the right half of the canvas, the receding angle of the white and robin’s egg blue drawing portfolios, buttressed on either side with solemn, anonymous tomes, explicitly denotes the recession of space.

Like Chardin, Vallayer-Coster included certain objects to highlight various aspects of academic practice. Those heavy printed volumes, piled in the right corner of the canvas, acknowledge the theoretical and literary foundations of the visual arts.28 Wedged in between the portfolios and the Belvedere Torso are scrolls of white and powder blue paper, the preferred supports of eighteenth-century draftsmen. The downward thrust of the scrolls of paper draws our attention to the tools that occupy the foreground: an upright compass, leaning on a black-and-blue sheath (a direct quotation from Chardin’s work), and semi-circular protractor; These tools are also featured in Donat Nonnotte’s 1741 portrait of Sebastian II Leclerc, who taught Geometry and

28 Rosenberg argued that in the case of Chardin’s *Attributes of the Arts and Their Rewards*, the books functioned as a “tribute to the arts of the pen,” as “an indirect acknowledgement of Catherine’s role as protector of Enlightenment philosophes,” or as “a reference to the humanist culture that was familiar to most eighteenth-century artists, but from which Chardin himself remained excluded.” Rosenberg, *Chardin*, 1999, 146.
Perspective at the Academy from 1717-1758 (Fig. 2.11). The legs of Vallayer-Coster’s compass point to two (unidentifiable) architectural floor plans, unfurling off the front edge of the table.

At the center of the composition, leaning against the painting palette, is a double-sided porte-crayon containing red and white chalks—again, the media typical of academically trained draftsmen. Along with the blue and white scrolls of paper, the porte-crayon reminds us that drawing was considered foundational to both painting and sculpture. It was common practice for painters to prepare their canvases with under-drawing in white or red chalk, as demonstrated by a number of self-portraits dating to the eighteenth century (Fig. 2.12). Independent works on paper played a relatively minor role in the oeuvres of both Vallayer-Coster and Chardin, and according to conservator Claire Barry, we can only speculate about Vallayer-Coster’s own use of red or white chalk, for there is no visible evidence of either in infrared scans of her paintings. Nevertheless, drawing was such a critical aspect of academic training, it would have been a conspicuous omission in a painting dedicated to the values of the Academy.

The tools of Vallayer-Coster’s own trade dominate the lower-left of the composition, figuring much more prominently than they did in Chardin’s canvas. A freshly prepared palette, oriented towards the viewer, bears smears of paint that appear thick and wet—as if the artist had set down and observed her own tools, before proceeding to reproduce them on canvas. These wet blobs of paint underscore the sense

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29 Williams, Académie Royale, 49.
31 Vigée Lebrun, Self-Portrait, 1800, The Hermitage. For Claire Barry’s conservation essay, see her essay, “The Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster: Searching for the Origins of Style,” in Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 101. There are, however, extant works on paper by the artist, which will be explored in the final chapter.
of calculated instantaneity suggested by the other preciously propped tools in the composition. The outer ring of paint smears features gradients of yellow and red, culminating in chalky white and inky black on either end; the inner ring features salmon and powder pinks, as well as dashes of cobalt and charcoal blues. The thumbhole of the palette is occupied by a small fistful of brushes, including one doused with vivid red, a signature color in Vallayer-Coster’s oeuvre. As Barry has noted, the colors on Vallayer-Coster’s palette, like those in Chardin’s The Attributes of the Arts and Their Rewards, “are carefully arranged following the conventions established by the French Academy during the eighteenth-century,” with colors arranged from dark to light. Chardin, however, adhered to the three primary colors of yellow, blue, and red, while Vallayer-Coster introduced bright mixtures of pink and blue in the second row.32

**The Torso and the Bust**

Vallayer-Coster’s choice of sculpture represents another significant departure from her predecessor’s compositions. Unlike Chardin, she represented the three-dimensional art with both ancient and modern figures: a small-scale model of the ancient Greek *Belvedere Torso* and a damp clay bust of an anonymous young woman.33 Vallayer-Coster probably quoted this combination of sculptures from another iconic academic painting: Nicolas de Largillière’s 1683 monumental portrait of Charles Lebrun (1619-1690), one of the founding fathers of the Academy (Fig. 2.13). According to Williams, “Lebrun himself was a veritable embodiment” of the Academy; accordingly, his portrait

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32 Barry, “Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 102-3. There is a similar arrangement of paint on the palette in Joseph Duplessis’s portrait of Joseph-Marie Vien, 1784, Musée du Louvre, Paris, INV. 4306
33 For purposes of clarity, I use ‘*Belvedere Torso*’ to refer to the Greek sculpture in the collection of the Vatican, and ‘*Torso*’ to refer to plaster and painted reproductions of the work.
was prominently displayed in the assembly room of the Academy at the Louvre, where it functioned as a “visualization of institutional ideals.”

Largillière surrounded his subject with various attributes of the arts—including, in the lower-left corner of the canvas, a plaster cast of the *Belvedere Torso*, as well as a the head of an unidentified young woman. In the portrait, the Torso is oriented away from the viewer, recognizable by his enormous, muscular back. Though headless, the Torso seems poised to kiss—or devour—the upended, defenseless female head.

Vallayer-Coster employed the same combination of the Torso and a female bust in her *Attributes*, invoking the legitimacy and prestige of Largillière’s portrait of Lebrun. Yet in her painting, Vallayer-Coster inverted the orientation and elevation of each object; her female bust is raised on a wooden stool, towering above the other objects in the composition, including the Torso. Unlike Largillière’s portrait, Vallayer-Coster’s female bust is rendered in clay, rather than marble, and has long, fashionably curled hair, as if to insist upon its contemporaneity. The bust’s coif is partially veiled by a wet white cloth—typically used by the sculptors to smooth the surface of clay, but here left propped on the young woman’s head, as if abandoned in the midst of work. The bust’s eyes are vacant, but her head is cocked at an upward, inquisitive angle—a clear revision of the passive rapture (or terror) of Largillière’s female head.

Vallayer-Coster’s clay bust, while representative of contemporary sculpture, does not represent a known eighteenth-century work. As an invention of the painter, the bust

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34 Williams, *Académie Royale*, 44.
35 Nicolas de Largillière (1656–1746) included the same duo in the corner of a self-portrait (1686, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia, 71.513); this suggests that such figures populated several artist studios during this period. A later work by Pierre Subleyras (1699–1749) also features a Torso and an upended female head; they are oriented the same way as they are in the Lebrun portrait, although they are separated by another standing female figurine (*The Attributes of the Arts*, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, 2004.1.283).
has inevitably invited comparisons with images of Vallayer-Coster herself. Roland Michel, for example, wrote of the bust (which she identifies as terracotta): “This might be an ideal head, a kind of allegory of timeless beauty…but the facial features are not unlike those of Vallayer, and we should not dismiss the possibility that she meant to represent herself in this guise.” Comparing the sculpture to Vallayer-Coster’s engraved self-portrait (Fig. 1.2), we find resonance in the short, high forehead, the large, deep-set eyes, the slightly aquiline nose, and the small, rosebud lips. Like Roland Michel, I am loath to preclude the possibility of a resemblance—or identification, at the very least—between the depicted bust and the young female artist who painted it. Indeed, it is tempting to imagine the young artist inserting herself in the form of a clay ‘work-in-progress’ in the very painting that would launch her academic career.

Vallayer-Coster placed the contemporary bust above the severed shoulders of the Torso, yet it is to him that our eyes are first drawn. The male body figures at the very center of the canvas, at the pinnacle of two inverted apexes: one in the upper half of the canvas formed by the clay bust and the drawing portfolios, and one in the lower half, formed by the rulers and the chalk holder. The sculpture casts a dramatic shadow against the drawing portfolio, enhancing the illusion that the three-dimensionality of the sculpture, which appears to ‘emerge’ from the darkness that surrounds it.

While Largillière pictured the Torso from behind and on the margins of his portrait of Lebrun, Vallayer-Coster arranged her composition around the frontal male

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nude. She oriented the model so that the Greek’s substantial left thigh would protect his modesty—whatever there was left to protect. Yet she spared no other detail of the male anatomy, carefully observing the interaction of skin, muscle, and bone: the bulges at the knees, the linear topography of the inner and outer thighs, the folds of flesh over the torqued abdomen, and the ripple of muscles clinging to the expansive rib cage. With paint, she convincingly rendered the surface of the plaster cast, as well as the incredible bulk and tension embedded in the original marble sculpture.

Vallayer-Coster’s inclusion of the Torso was a reference not just to Lebrun’s portrait, but also to an important aspect of the academic curriculum: studying the art of antiquity. The Academy installed dozens of plaster models of ancient sculpture, including the Torso, in the salle de modèle at the Louvre.38 There, in daily afternoon sessions, young painters and sculptors copied antique models, before graduating to sketching the live male nude—stages that are conflated in Charles-Joseph Natoire’s idyllic drawing of 1746, *The Life Class at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture* (Fig. 2.14).39

This practice was considered critical to the pedagogical foundations of the Academy, as demonstrated by the inclusion of the Torso in Lebrun’s portrait—though some artists questioned its instructional value. Chardin, for example, is quoted at length in Diderot’s *Salon of 1765*, expressing his distaste for the practice:

> The chalk holder is placed in our hands… at the age of seven or eight years. We begin to draw eyes, mouths, noses, and ears after patterns, then feet and hands. After having crouched over our portfolios for a long time, we’re placed in front of *Hercules* or the *Torso*, and you’ve never seen such tears as those shed over the

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39 This practice dates to Bernini’s visit to Paris in 1665, when he asserted that aspiring artists ought to copy casts of “all the most beautiful statues, bas-reliefs and busts of antiquity’ before learning to draw from nature.” Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 37.
Satyr, the *Gladiator*, the *Medici Venus*, and the *Antinous*... Then, after having spent entire days and even nights, by lamplight in front of immobile, inanimate nature, we’re presented with living nature, and suddenly the work of all the preceding years seem reduced to nothing; it’s as though one were taking up the chalk for the first time.\(^40\)

In the middle decades of the eighteenth-century, however, a number of critics, including Diderot, bemoaned the loss of virtue and virtuosity in contemporary French art, and advocated for a "retour à l’antique et au le grand gout"—to be achieved through the careful emulation of ancient masterpieces.\(^41\) The mid-century discourse was influenced in part by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), whose *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) was translated into French (*Histoire de l’art chez les anciens*) in 1766, reinvigorating the appreciation of ancient art throughout the continent. Winckelmann’s *Geschichte* featured a lavish description of the ‘original’ Belvedere Torso, which he observed *in situ* in the Vatican’s collection in Rome (Fig. 2.15). Winckelmann asserted that the Torso, which he identified as belonging to Hercules, was among the most ideal bodies in ancient art (along with the *Laocoön* and Belvedere Antinous): “The bones seem clothed in a fleshy skin, the muscles are plump but without excess, and such a balanced fleshiness is found in no other figure.”\(^42\)

Winckelmann notes that the Torso would hold particular aesthetic value for contemporary painters and sculptors, writing: “The artist will admire in the contours of this body, the ever-changing flow of one form into another and the gliding features that

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\(^{41}\) In doing so, they revived the seventeenth-century 'Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns' among the founding members of the Academy over the superiority of classical versus contemporary art. See Else Marie Bukdahl, “Diderot’s Conception of Classical Art,” *The French Academy: Classicism and Its Antagonists*, ed. June Hargrove (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 91-115.

rise and fall like waves and are engulfed by one another.” In Alex Potts’s reading of Winckelmann, the Belvedere Torso’s “beauty becomes all the more intense by virtue of the statue's incompletion—or to use Winckelmann's own words, its ‘mutilation’.” Winckelmann’s fetishization of the ancient, fragmented body only contributed to the Belvedere Torso’s fame among his contemporaries, including French artists and collectors.\textsuperscript{45}

Even if she was unaware of Winckelmann’s ode to the Belvedere Torso, Vallayer-Coster was certainly cognizant of the sculpture’s cultural import. Moreover, the amorous specificity with which she reproduced it in her Attributes indicates that she carefully observed a three-dimensional plaster cast, rather than an engraved reproduction.\textsuperscript{46} It is unclear, however, where Vallayer-Coster gained access to such a cast. Female artists were unable to enroll in classes in the salle de modèle (model room) of the Academy—and, as a result, were excluded from the practice of copying ancient sculpture, as well as the live human model.\textsuperscript{47} In an oft-cited 1783 letter to Louis XVI, the comte d’Angiviller (director of the Bâtiments du Roi from 1774-1790), offered justification for excluding women from royally-sponsored training, as well as limiting the number of female artists within the Academy to four: “This number is sufficient to honor their talent; women cannot be useful to the progress of the arts because the modesty of their sex forbids them

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Potts, “Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution,” \textit{History Workshop,} No. 30 (Autumn, 1990): 1-21
\textsuperscript{46} Vallayer-Coster, like Chardin, never left France, and did not observe the original statue in Rome before 1770. The Belvedere Torso was among the antiquities that Napoleon absconded with to Paris (arriving in 1798), and Vallayer-Coster probably saw the sculpture when it was installed at the Louvre in 1800. It was returned to the Vatican in 1816, two years before her death. Haskell and Penny, \textit{Taste and the Antique}, 108-115 and cat. 80, 311-14.
from being able to study after nature and in the public school established and founded by your majesty."  Here, d’Angiviller refers to the perceived ‘immodesty’ of female artists observing the male body, the most powerful signifier of ‘nature,’ in mixed company, alongside their male peers.

Women were effectively forbidden from sketching the male nude, in plaster or in the flesh—although, as Margaret Oppenheimer has shown, female artists, both amateurs and those admitted to the Academy, frequently skirted these rules by studying plaster and flesh in the private studios of their male mentors and peers. Indeed, this practice was considered to be so fundamental to academic training that these figure studies are referred to as académies (Figure 2.16). The act of drawing the male nude was inseparable from the very institution that structured the execution and meaning of such works. Moreover, as Nochlin has pointed out, men were the primary actors in the most prestigious genre of history painting, and the inability to paint the nude male form had major consequences for female artists who aspired to figurative work—in her words, “To be deprived of this ultimate stage of training meant, in effect, to be deprived of the possibility of creating major art works.”

Though she had been systematically excluded from this academic practice, Vallayer-Coster demonstrated her formal command over the male anatomy in foregrounding a plaster copy of the Torso in her Attributes—if not the version that

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50 For example, Louis Lagrenée (1725-1805), Seated Male Nude, 1762, red chalk, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1985.112.1 According to Auricchio, Labille Guiard collected académies; see Adélaïde Labille-Guierd: Artist in the Age of Revolution, 27-28.
51 Nochlin “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” 159-160.
belonged to the *salle de modèle* of the Academy, then perhaps one in the studio of Reboul’s husband, Joseph Marie Vien, who was a history painter. Remarkably, the Coster sale of 1824 also included a number of *académies*, although their authorship is not indicated in the catalogue. Even if Vallayer-Coster did not produce these drawings herself, it is nonetheless significant that she owned such works on paper at some point in her career.

We know of at least one other female artist who drew and painted after nude male sculptures. In a 1764-6 portrait by Nathaniel Dance, history painter Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807) is pictured observing a miniature model and holding her own sketch after that figure (Fig. 2.17). This watercolor was likely produced when Kaufmann, also in her early twenties, traveled to Rome to study the art of antiquity first hand, and become a member of the Accademia di San Luca. As in Vallayer Coster’s canvas, however, Kauffmann’s miniature model has a severely fragmented body, and is oriented so as to conceal the genitals.

Kauffmann went on to become a successful history painter, and one of the founding members of the Royal Academy in London in 1768, though she was famously excluded from Johann Zofanny’s 1771 group portrait, which pictures the British Academicians studying the form of a male model and surrounded by plaster copies of antique sculptures. She and fellow artist, still life painter Mary Moser, are acknowledged only in the form of static profile portraits on the wall. Around 1788, however,

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53 Kauffmann might have used such a study as the basis for one of her figurative history paintings, such as *Zeuxis Selecting Models for His Painting of Helen of Troy*. See Peter Walch, “An Early Neoclassical Sketchbook by Angelica Kauffman,” *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 119, No. 887 (Feb., 1977): 98-111.
Kauffman painted her own academic thesis: a series of four decorative panels intended for the ceiling of the Royal Academy’s Somerset House in London. Kauffman employed allegorical female figures to represent Design, Color, Composition, and Invention—concepts derived from British Joshua Reynolds’s *Discourses on Art*.\(^{55}\) In this series, the figure of Design is distinguished by her look of intense concentration, an indication of her intellectual and manual labor; she is hard at work sketching none other than the Belvedere Torso (Fig. 2.18). Again, as in Vallayer-Coster’s canvas, the body of the model has again been cropped and oriented so as to conceal the genitals.

Inanimate, amputated, and effectively neutered, the Torso was perhaps the only such nude that it would have been acceptable for Kauffmann and Vallayer-Coster to paint.\(^{56}\) And indeed, far from causing a scandal, Vallayer-Coster was widely praised for her decorum in addition to her talent. Engraver Johann Georg Wille (1715-1808), for example, noted her unanimous approval at the Academy in his journal: “This demoiselle, who took her place with the appropriate gratitude, and with skillfully employed modesty, did not have a single vote against her.”\(^{57}\) Similarly, editor Dupont de Nemours wrote, “Mademoiselle Vallayer unites the grace and timidity of her sex…with an enormous talent.”\(^{58}\) The tenor of this praise recalls Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker’s assertion in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*: “A woman artist was acceptable in the


\(^{57}\) Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, 42.

\(^{58}\) Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, 65. “Mlle Vallayer reunit les graces de son sexe a la timidite, qui est souvent une grace de plus, et a un talent plus grand qu’elle n’se le croire.”
eighteenth century…only in so far as her person, her public persona conformed to the current notions of Woman, not artist.” It seems that Vallayer-Coster’s ability to perform the role of demure eighteenth-century woman tempered any potential criticism of her paintings or personal ambition.

It was perhaps for this reason that Vallayer-Coster quickly earned the friendship and protection of powerful academicians, including d’Angiviller (who helped procure lodgings for the artist by 1781, two years before he wrote to the King), and Jean-Baptiste Pierre, director of the Academy (who served as a witness to the artist’s marriage, also in 1781). D’Angiviller and Pierre’s approval of Vallayer-Coster, untainted by her study of the inanimate male body, is particularly significant considering their mutual vitriol for future académiciennes, Labille Guiard and Vigée Le Brun—neither of whom ever painted a male nude.

Vallayer-Coster successfully employed the attributes of architecture, drawing, painting, and sculpture to ‘glorify’ the Academy, and to assert her aptitude for membership. With her representation of the Torso, in particular, she demonstrated her fluency in the (patriarchal) visual language of the Academy, and her knowledge of the pedagogical centrality of the male body—the male bodies that constituted the leadership and student body, as well as the iconic works that served as their models. Yet the clay and marble bodies represented in her painting also perform a specific gendered dynamic. The male Torso is an icon of classical antiquity and the French academic tradition that it informed; the female bust is a nameless, contemporary French work-in-progress. Both are fragmented, not quite whole—yet the amputated masculine body represents the decay and

59 Parker and Pollock, Old Mistresses, 96
60 See Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman, 288 note 53 and the Introduction to this dissertation and for a discussion of the differences between Vallayer-Coster, Vigée Le Brun, and Labille Guiard in this regard.
ruin of the past, while the feminine head represents the nascent art of Vallayer-Coster’s moment. One, blind, mute and deaf, is positioned at the heart of her composition—and the other is positioned above all other attributes of the arts, her eyes gazing upwards.

Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes of Music

Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture was accompanied by a pendant: The Attributes of Music. Though more sparsely populated, this second work echoes the dominant color palette, and the sense of casual disorder, of the first. The attributes of music—a group of instruments, and a sheet of music leaning against a wooden stand—are arranged on a table, covered by teal velvet with a thick gold fringe. As in Attributes of Painting, the table is placed at an odd angle, and the velvet is rife with bunches, particularly beneath the haphazard assortment of instruments: a pile of windpipe instruments; a wooden lute with a vivid bright blue ribbon; a brass horn, with its sonorous void oriented towards the viewer; a deflated, red velvet bagpipe, with intricate gold embroidery, similar to that in Chardin’s Attributes of Music of 1765, from the Château de Choisy (Fig. 2.6). \(^{61}\)

Perhaps the most perplexing element in Vallayer-Coster’s arrangement is the violin, which bears the scars of aggressive play and subsequent abandon: it is upended, precariously balanced on the pile of windpipes, with the chin piece thrust towards the viewer; the strings have been frayed and split at both ends. Her treatment of the violin is particularly striking when compared with Chardin’s Instruments of Military and Civic Music (Fig. 2.18 and Fig. 2.19)—overdoors commissioned for the music room of the

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\(^{61}\) A similar bagpipe appears in Oudry’s Still Life with Musette and Violin (1725, Toledo Museum of Art, 1951.500); see Hal N. Opperman, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, New York, 1977, vol. I, 79, 546, and vol. II, 1036, fig. 128.
Château de Bellevue, and Chardin’s sole contributions to the Salon of 1767. In the latter painting, Chardin inserted a violin leaning elegantly on its side, neatly presenting itself to the viewer. Indeed, with both of her *Attributes*, Vallayer-Coster consistently pursued more complicated arrangements, characterized by asymmetries, oblong angles, and vacancies, which thwart easy visual consumption. This thesis is also supported by the fact that the right-most quarter of Vallayer-Coster’s *Attributes of Music* is empty, with the exception of an unlit, half-melted candle.

In addition to complicating the relationships between depicted objects, Vallayer-Coster also incorporated several different painting techniques into her *Attributes*. Like many of her canvases, the *Attributes of Music* serves as a vehicle for experimentation with a broad range of brushstrokes. The wooden instruments, or the bright blue ribbon wound around the neck of the lute, are painted with a wet-on-wet technique, resulting in smooth, nearly slick surfaces. In other sections, Vallayer-Coster made less effort to conceal her brushstrokes, adding dashes of errant color in order to mimic various textures. For example, staccato splotches of pale blue and emerald green simulate the uneven effect of light on the thick teal velvet, and the hammered metal of the copper horn is evoked with speckles of yellow, orange, greenish-gray, and off-white. This self-referential, painterly flourish is also observable in the floor plans in *The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*. Far from the precise marks of an academic draftsman, those frayed strokes of black and red paint refer simultaneously to both to the

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63 Roland Michel writes, “The most magical passage is the bell of the horn; it is rendered by juxtaposed touches of various colors that when examined close-up resemble a kind of colored jigsaw puzzle, whereas from a distance the desired effect is fully achieved, evoking a slightly hammered copper over which daylight plays.” Roland Michel, “Vallayer-Coster in her Time,” 16.
windows and walls on the anonymous architectural plan, and to surface of Vallayer-Coster’s own canvas. Still other areas of the *Attributes of Music* canvas are “thickly painted to create dry, crumbly surfaces,” as Barry observed in her technical analysis of the work.64 Vallayer-Coster used this “textural buildup of impasto” to describe, for example, the metallic threads in the bagpipe embroidery, or the fringe of the velvet (Fig. 2.21).65

For Eik Kahng, this combination of thick and slick painting techniques was a deliberate strategy, demonstrating the artist’s ability to fuse *la manière fondue* and *la maniere huertée*. These terms were used in the eighteenth-century to describe two dichotomous ‘manners’ of painting: polished and blended, on one hand, and rough and unblended on the other. Kahng cites Pierre-Charles Lévêque’s description of these two factures in his *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, first published in 1788:

> In a blended painting [*un tableau fondu*], the hues, by succeeding each other through undetectable nuances, lose themselves, one into another, and can only be discerned by the expert’s eye. In a rough painting [*un tableau huerté*], the hues are applied broadly, one could even say brutally, one next to the other; their brusque succession is not only very visible—when viewed from close up, it is even shocking. But, when seen from a distance, the air interposed between the painting and the spectator mixes and blends the hues and transforms a crude sketch into a finished painting.66

According to Lévêque’s definition, *la manière fondue* and *la maniere huertée* are typically employed singularly. Vallayer-Coster’s painterly dexterity is all the more remarkable when compared to Chardin’s brushstrokes, which are more consistently *huertée*: summary, abrupt, and chalky in texture. (Indeed, unlike Vallayer-Coster,

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64 Barry, “Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 111.
65 Ibid.
Chardin is known to have mixed chalk in with his lead white paints, in order to achieve this ‘gritty’ effect).\textsuperscript{67} For this reason, Chardin’s objects cohere most convincingly from afar. As Diderot observed of his work at the Salon of 1765, “Come close and everything becomes blurred, flattens and disappears; stand back and everything is created and takes shape again.”\textsuperscript{68} Vallayer-Coster, however, effectively combined the \textit{fondue} and \textit{huertée} in order to fool the eye from different ranges, both up close and afar. Her choice to employ variable factures, to diversify the surface texture of her canvas, is yet another way in which Vallayer-Coster distinguished herself from Chardin.

**Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes at the Salon of 1771 and beyond**

At the Salon of 1771, her first as an \textit{académicienne}, Vallayer-Coster’s \textit{Attributes} earned much critical attention—in part because of their public significance as her \textit{morceaux de réception}. André-Charles Cailleau published his positive critique in the form of a free-verse poem in \textit{La Muse errante au Sallon} in 1771:

\begin{quote}
We admire the paintings of a new muse:  
Each of her brilliant paintbrushes is astonishing […]  
Her shells, her fruits, her animals under glass  
And the diverse attributes of the liberal arts  
The paintings exhibited at her debut salon  
Charmed the \textit{amateurs}: For a young woman,  
What art! And what genius! She excels in every genre  
Lovely Vallayer, here you receive incense  
No one can deny your rare talent\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} Barry, “Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 103.  
\textsuperscript{68} Kahng, “Vallayer-Coster / Chardin,” 48  
\textsuperscript{69} André-Charles Cailleau, \textit{Muse errante au Sallon; apologie-critique, en vers libres, suivant l'ordre des numéros, des peintures, sculptures et gravures, Exposées au Louvre en l'Année 1771} (Paris: Athenes, 1771), 33
Another poem, published in the Mercure de France, also lauded Vallayer-Coster’s allegorical paintings, and the mimetic quality of the materials represented in her work:

“You paint two arts that you cherish / Music and painting / Bas-relief, case, fruit, legumes and rabbit / Under your magic fingers have their very features.” Yet another critic, wrote in Lettres de M. Raphael le jeune (1771):

You honor the Salon with the perfection with which you have rendered the different subjects that you paint…Your [Instrumens de musique militaire], as well as [Morceaux d’Histoire Naturelle] and [Attributes de la Peinture, &c.] are surprising, for the magic that you have given your imitations; one can imagine touching the objects with a finger and with the eye, as if they were real and protruding [from the canvas].

Indeed, even in her earliest works, Vallayer-Coster was praised for the haptic quality of her work, and the appeal of her canvases to the finger and to the eye. Her objects were considered to be so convincingly rendered with her own “magic fingers” that they appeared to emerge from the canvas into the third dimension.

After the paintings appeared at the Salon of 1771, the Academy retained the pendants for its collection. According to Dezallier d’Argenville’s Description sommaire des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure exposés dans les salles de l’Académie royale (1781), Vallayer-Coster’s reception pieces remained on view in the Gallery of Apollo of the Louvre—another indication that Vallayer-Coster had successfully ‘glorified’ the institution with her work. D’Argenville lists her pendants on the same wall

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71 Lettres de M. Raphael le jeune, Eleve des Ecoles gratuites de Dessin, Neveu de feu M. Raphael, Peintre de l’Academie de St Luc, A un de ses Amis, Architecte a Rome: sur les Peintures, Sculptures & Gravures qui sont exposées cette année au Louvre. 1771,18.
as, for example, Hyacinthe Rigaud’s iconic portrait of Louis XIV and four allegorical works by Pierre Mignard (1612-1695), who succeeded Lebrun as the head of the Academy at the end of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{72}

The paintings apparently remained in the Gallery of Apollo until at least 1793, the year that the Academy was abolished. Yet the artistic theories and practices embedded in the \textit{Attributes} continued to be relevant even after the collapse of the institution to which they were dedicated; by 1801, the works were on view at the \textit{Musée spécial de l’école française} at Versailles, a Revolutionary museum founded in 1797.\textsuperscript{73} The pendants were listed once more in the collection of the \textit{Ministère de la Justice} in Paris in 1852, before being absorbed into the \textit{Musée du Louvre}’s collection in 1872.\textsuperscript{74} Thus, the paintings that established Vallayer-Coster’s reputation continued to represent the artist in various public spheres, long after they served as her reception pieces. The century that separated the painting of the pendants and their acquisition by the Louvre, between 1770 and 1872, was marked by radical cultural and political shifts; and yet the academic values that structured their production and reception in the eighteenth-century remained legible and valid.

\textbf{The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening, 1774}

The critical success of Vallayer-Coster’s 1770 \textit{Attributes} probably led to the private commission of another large-scale allegorical painting: \textit{The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening}, 1774.

\textsuperscript{72} Dezallier d’Argenville’s \textit{Description sommaire des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure exposés dans les salles de l’Académie royale} (Paris: Chez de Bure, père 1781), 76. Also on view at the Galerie d’Apollon was a pastel portrait of Pigalle, shown wearing the medal of the Order of Saint-Michel, by Roslin’s wife, Marie-Suzanne Giroust. This portrait served as her reception piece when she was accepted to the Academy in 1770. Louvre, Inv. 30860.

\textsuperscript{73} In 1801, Gabriel Legouvé noted in his poem, \textit{Le mérite des femmes}, that “one may admire [Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes] at the museum de Versailles.” Legouvé, \textit{Le mérite des femmes, poème} (Paris: Didot, 1801), 45. For more on the Musée special de l’école française, see Andrew McClellan, \textit{Inventing the Louvre}, 130-31.

\textsuperscript{74} Kahng and Roland Michel, \textit{Vallayer-Coster}, 2002, 198.
and Gardening (Fig. 2.22). The painting was completed in 1774 and exhibited at the Salon of 1775 (as “Une Buste de Cérès & les attributs de la Moisson, avec differentes espèces de legumes”) along with a pendant, *A Bust of Flora with Vase of Flowers* (“Une Buste de Flore, & un vase rempli de Fleurs sur un Bureau”) (Fig. 6.13). Each measuring approximately 60 inches high and 51 inches wide, these paintings are the only vertical paintings of Vallayer-Coster’s allegorical still lifes—which, as a group, represent the largest canvas dimensions in her oeuvre.

Vallayer-Coster received the commission for *Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* from the abbé Joseph-Marie Terray (1715-1778). As Louis XV’s contrôleur général des Finances (Fig. 2.23), Terray exerted a powerful influence over French politics; by 1770, he was a member of the Triumvirat, a powerful trio of Secrétaires d’État, and had initiated a series of major economic reforms. It was probably during Terray’s brief tenure as the Director of the Bâtiments du Roi, from July 1773 to August 1774, that he came into contact with the young académicienne, Vallayer-Coster. We know, for example, that the artist was present during the Saturday, October 2, 1773 meeting of the Academy, over which Terray presided.

Terray began to collect contemporary French art in earnest in the early 1770s. His enthusiasm is described in the catalogue for his estate sale in January 1779: “The Amateur who has formed this cabinet wanted to encourage artists, his contemporaries, & without denying his admiration for the works of the Ancients, contributed as much as he

75 Salon of 1775, no. 100.
could to the splendor of the arts in France.”78 We can imagine that Terray commissioned a set of allegorical still life paintings from Vallayer-Coster after seeing her reception pieces (at the Salon of 1771, or in Gallery of Apollo in the Louvre thereafter), which celebrate that very splendor. Her 1774 pendants may have been intended for Terray’s hôtel in rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs in Paris, which was renovated by architect Antoine Matthieu Le Carpentier between 1771 and 1775, or for his grand rural estate, the Château de La Motte-Tilly, which was situated along the Seine, 50 miles southeast of Paris (Fig. 2.24).79

The subject of Vallayer-Coster’s Attributes of Hunting and Gardening was likely determined in collaboration with, if not prescribed by, Terray. There is a clear connection between Terray’s personal and political proclivities and the iconography of Vallayer-Coster’s painting. As Louis XV’s finance minister, Terray was perhaps best known for regulating the French market for grain: he imposed an embargo on exports and required dealers to register with the government. While Terray’s efforts were intended to benefit the agricultural industry of France, his plan ultimately failed—in part because his reforms coincided with an “international agrarian slump” in the early 1770s, which required the Crown to distribute wheat to regions suffering from the dearth. Bailey writes, however, that Terray’s artistic commissions, including those of Vallayer-Coster, “reflect nothing of the social upheavals, popular distress or fiercely contested policies concerning the

78 “L’Amateur qui avoit formée ce Cabinet, vouloit encourager les Artistes, ses Contemporains; &, sans refuser son admiration aux ouvrages des Anciens, contribuer, autant qu’il pouvoit, à la splendeur des Arts en France.” Abbé Terray sale, Paris, January 20, 1779, lot 13. Terray’s estate primarily included works by several young French artists—including, curiously, another female still life artist, Mademoiselle Perrin, about whom little else is known. Two still life paintings are attributed to Mademoiselle Perrin: one representing the attributes of the arts, and another representing the attributes of war. These still lifes, currently untraceable, are remarkably similar in subject to the other works by Vallayer-Coster discussed in this chapter.
regulation of agriculture and the trade in grain. On the contrary, they celebrate abundance and prosperity … In this context, Terray’s paintings and sculptures function as justifications” of his unpopular economic initiatives.80 Yet Terray and others viewed these agricultural policies as integral to his legacy: the abbé Roger Schabol dedicated two books on gardening to Terray, “a minister who values agriculture and who takes pleasure in encouraging it.”81

Indeed, the connections between Terray’s politics and Vallayer-Coster’s subject matter are too significant to ignore. Vallayer-Coster’s *Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* juxtaposes the fruits of the forest and the field with a marble bust of the Roman goddess of agriculture, Ceres—representing the natural wealth and abundance that Terray had hoped to cultivate in France. Ceres presides over a group of animals, vegetables, fruits, and tools, assembled outdoors (rather unusual in Vallayer-Coster’s oeuvre). The objects are piled in front of a regal stone staircase in the shade of a bent tree, beyond which the clearing of a thick wood is visible. Those lush trees, the placid blue sky, and the elements of the harvest all evoke the final sighs of summer, the season most commonly associated with Ceres. The setting probably also reminded Terray of the Château de La Motte-Tilly and may even have been specifically designed to echo that landscape (Fig. 2.24).82

The attributes of the hunt are represented by a musket (only the butt of which is visible), an agape hunting pouch, and the bodies of a hare and pheasant. The wound in

80 Bailey, “The abbé Terray,” 94.
81 Bailey argues that certain ideas of Schabol’s manual may have informed Vallayer-Coster’s painting---namely, the presence of the melon and pumpkin (the domestic cultivation of which Schabol encouraged). Bailey, “A Still-Life Painter and Her Patrons,” in Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, 59–73, especially 66.
82 Bailey, *Patriotic Taste*, 75-76.
the belly of the rabbit (a reference to the practice of field-dressing dead game) finds an echo in the blemished surface of the green melon on the lower left; a missing chunk in its waxy surface reveals the sweet orange flesh beneath. The subtly rendered ‘wounds’ of the melon and the hare invest the painting with pungency—a hare freshly slaughtered, a ripe fruit gouged—which is underscored by the presence of a long wooden rake and a handheld scythe, with white impasto on the scythe providing the effect of a gleaming blade. In this painting, however, the artist dwelled not on the violence inherent to the scene, but rather on the textures and colors occurring in nature. In addition to the melon, Vallayer-Coster painted a heavy pumpkin, a light orange gourd, and a bright red tomato, and two leafy vegetables: a large, pale-green cardoon, and a head of green and purple cabbage. The latter vegetable is perhaps the most loosely-painted passage of the canvas: thick strokes of lavender and violet comprise the leaves, while minute squiggles and dots of a dark turquoise evoke the cabbage’s curly fringe (Fig. 2.25).

The bust of Ceres is positioned at the very center of the composition, elevated above the harvested attributes. The Roman goddess of agriculture, who commands the gaze of the viewer with a knowing expression, is recognizable primarily by virtue of her symbolic coif. Her fashionable, curled bouffant, adorned with plump blades of wheat, was typical in eighteenth-century representations of Ceres—perhaps most notably, a freestanding marble caryatid by Guillaume Coustou (1677-1746), installed in the Jardin des Tuileries from 1736 to 1993 (Fig. 2.26), alternately identifiable as Summer. Terray may have specifically requested that Vallayer-Coster incorporate a reference to Coustou’s bust, a very public representation of agricultural wealth, or to recall the various paintings by Oudry; see, for example, his 1719 reception piece, Abundance with her Attributes, in

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83 Coustou, Ceres or Summer, 1731-35, Musée du Louvre, Paris MR 1915.
which agriculture personified is surrounded by attributes of the hunt and harvest, which earned him the title of history painter (Fig. 2.27). Like Oudry, Vallayer-Coster’s allegory celebrates the representative of man’s command over nature, and the abundance yielded from his efforts—a theme undoubtedly designed to flatter Terray.

**The Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes, 1777**

Like Terray’s *Attributes of Hunting and Gardening*, Vallayer-Coster’s third allegorical still life was probably commissioned by—or at least intended for sale to—a private patron: Madame Vissitier, about whom little is now known. *The Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes*, painted in 1777, was executed on the same grand scale as Vallayer-Coster’s previous *Attributes* (Fig. 2.28). This painting allegorizes nation and war with the paraphernalia of the French military, set in an austere, columned space. This composition is simpler, with fewer objects and a more confident composition than her previous *Attributes*—although the artist still demonstrates a preference for intriguing visual oddities: asymmetries, diagonals, voids, and disorderly clumps and piles. She again renders surfaces metallic, stony, and silken with equal skill. Also like her other allegorical paintings, Vallayer-Coster’s *The Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* of 1777 is organized around a female bust—in this case, the Roman goddess of War.

This female bust is a reference to a full-length sculpture by sculptor Louis-Claude Vassé (1716-1772), *Minerva Leaning of Her Shield*. Even Diderot, who admitted that he did not like Vassé, could not help but admire this sculpture when it appeared at the Salon of 1767:

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She wears her helmet and cuirass; she gazes into the distance, as if looking for a victor to crown… She makes an austere impression; she’s beautiful but more beautiful viewed frontally than in profile… The more time one gives it, the more one likes the figure… This Minerva is svelte, her head is well coiffed, and her helmet attractive.\footnote{John Goodman, \textit{Diderot on Art: The Salon of 1767} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 304.}

At the Salon of 1771, Vallayer-Coster’s first as an académicienne, Vassé presented a bust-length study of Minerva, likely related to the work of 1767.\footnote{Salon of 1771, no. 234, 41.} Although none of Vassé’s Minervas now survive, his clay study from the Salon of 1771 was reproduced in Etienne Aubry’s morceau de réception, exhibited at the Salon of 1775 (\textbf{Fig. 2.29}). Aubry pictures Vassé at work—resting one hand on Minerva’s neck and clavicle, and smoothing her cheek with the other. Vallayer-Coster probably knew Aubry, who had trained in Vien’s studio and was agréé at the Academy in 1771; she almost certainly knew his painting, for she appropriated the same bust for her own still life. Both heads are decisively turned in the same direction, and wear the same distinctive helmet, with a wreath of laurel and a small female sphinx perched on top—though Vallayer-Coster’s Minerva looks like marble, rather than clay—as does the bust of Ceres that appeared in her 1774 \textit{Attributes of Hunting and Gardening}.\footnote{There is a similar sphinx on the helmet of the Minerva Giustiniani, which was purchased by Lucien Bonaparte in the nineteenth century. Like the Belvedere Torso, the Minerva Giustiniani was subsequently returned to the Vatican museum, in 1817. Haskell and Penny 1981, cat. no. 63, 269-71.}

The other ‘military attributes’ in Vallayer-Coster’s canvas are primarily ceremonial or symbolic, rather than functional. The composition is dominated by a diagonal line, formed by a large, partially unfurled white standard. The flag is embroidered in gold with heraldic insignia, including \textit{fleurs-de-lis} and crowned scepters. On the right of the composition, the flag is draped over two upended objects: a large
drum and a silk-lined cuirass, between which two muskets have been thrust. On the left are two ceremonial medals representing the Orders of Saint-Louis and Saint-Esprit, as well as the baton of the Maréchal de France, and a plumed ceremonial helmet, accented with a gold laurel trim, similar to that on the marble helmet of Minerva.

The objects that populate Vallayer-Coster’s *Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* are representative of France and its military prowess, yet they are more specifically evocative of the aristocratic male body. Indeed, the objects were designed to honor, enhance, and protect that body—at least, symbolically. By the late eighteenth century, armor had been deemed impractical on the battlefield, and was worn primarily outside of combat by royals and aristocrats.88 Vallayer-Coster’s cuirass is lined with red silk, and bears two gold buckles on the chest, much like a rare example of French eighteenth-century armor in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection (*Fig. 2.30*). That suit of armor, crafted for Louis XIV’s five-year-old great-grandson, the Infante Luis, Prince of Asturias (1707–1724), was not a functional uniform for war, any more than it was a little boy’s play thing; rather, the armor was a ceremonial costume, and a construction of the wearer’s dynastic, gendered identity.89

Similar cuirasses appear in noble portraiture throughout the eighteenth century. In the portraits by Largillière, for example, male subjects often wore their armor over luxurious velvet coats, while sporting heavy powdered wigs (*Fig. 2.31*); It has been suggested that this elite portraitist maintained a set of armor in his studio for clients to

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wear while they posed for him. In later portraits, however, the armor is often cast off, and serves a purely symbolic function. François-Hubert Drouais’s 1758 portrait of Le Comte de Vaudreil (1740-1817), for example, features an empty suit of armor at the Comte’s feet, a reference to his role as an aide-de-camp to the French commander during the Seven Years’ War (1754-1763) (Fig. 2.32).

The steel armor in Vallayer-Coster’s *Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes*, invokes this tradition of elite masculine portraiture in the ancien régime. Her representation of the armor, however, is distinguished by its rather frustrating orientation. The cuirass lies on its back, with the neck and left armhole facing the viewer, creating two shadowy, circular voids near the center of the canvas—fringed with soft pleats of red silk. The artist also uses the hammered steel of the reclining cuirass, and it’s matching helmet, as a reflective surface; she applied soft, diluted dabs of pigment to echo the colors of nearby objects, and reinforce the dominant color palette of the painting: red, white, and blue. She also used thick, undisguised brushstrokes to suggest the bulk and few errant feathers of the helmet’s tricolor plumes.

In addition to the suit of armor, the painting contains several symbols of military and class distinction. The blue baton of a Maréchal de France, ornamented with gold fleurs-de-lis, was awarded to distinguished French military leaders—for example, Claude Louis, Comte de Saint-Germain (1707-1778), who became a Maréchal de France a few months before being appointed Secretary of War under Louis XVI in 1775. The French had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the British during the Seven Years’ War.

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under Louis XV, and Louis XVI was under pressure to reconstitute the former glory of the French armed forces. Inspired by Fredrick the Great’s Prussian army, the Comte de Saint-German initiated a series of reforms to French military, which he viewed as corrupt and disorderly. He attempted to impose discipline through rigorous drills and regulations concerning the comportment of his soldiers. The Comte also sought to decommission officers who had risen through the ranks by virtue of family connection rather than skill. This rather unpopular policy probably led to his resigning in September 1777, the same month that Vallayer-Coster’s painting was on display at the Salon—but not before announcing his intention to create an *Almanach des Chevaliers des Ordres Royaux & Militaires de France*, an inventory of soldiers who had been awarded by the King, as well as their respective heroic acts and wounds. Indeed, the Comte de Saint-German’s grand ambitions for the French military were initially a source of popular pride, and a possible impetus for Vallayer-Coster’s work.

In Vallayer-Coster’s painting, the *Maréchal de France* baton is accompanied by the medals of the Orders of Saint Louis and Saint Esprit. The Order of Saint Louis (a gold Maltese cross with a portrait of Saint Louis at the center, affixed to a red ribbon) was a reward for military service, while the Order of Saint Esprit (a green Maltese cross with a white dove at the center, affixed to a blue ribbon) was a chivalric order, awarded to those

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of noble birth who were closest to the king. 95 Though they were exclusively awarded to elite men, these medals also had a personal significance to the artist. In 1754, her father, Joseph Vallayer, a former Gobelins goldsmith, opened his own Soleil d’Or workshop on the rue de Roule in Paris; there, he specialized in the production of military medals, including the cross of Saint Louis. When Vallayer died in 1770, his wife received permission to continue her husband’s work. 96 It is not surprising, then, that Vallayer-Coster placed her signature on the stone ledge, directly next to the precisely-rendered crosses, for she was intimately familiar with their iconography, production, and social function.

Vallayer-Coster had a familial connection to the making of these medals, yet her choice to include them in her Military Attributes was also strategic. The elite members of the various Orders were the very patrons that she hoped to flatter and attract. Like ceremonial armor, these medals were seemingly ubiquitous in aristocratic male portraiture. The Orders of Saint Louis and Esprit were both on display, for example, in Joseph Duplessis’s 1779 portrait of the Comte d’Angviller (Fig. 2.33), who had been named as Terray’s successor as the director of the Bâtiments du Roi in 1774. D’Angiviller had earned Saint Louis medal after the Battle of Fontenoy (1745), and later the Saint Esprit as the future Louis XVI’s tutor. 97 It was likely by virtue of his proximity to the royal household, and his personal relationship with Louis XVI, that he earned the position of director of the Bâtiments.

96 Roland Michel, “Vallayer-Coster in her Time,” 14. Joseph Vallayer died in 1770, “but his wife, who assisted him in his work, was authorized to continue stamping crosses of Saint Louis and military merit crosses, the workshop’s speciality.” (Note 7: Cf Nocq 1926-1931, 4:79)
97 McClellan, Inventing the Louvre, 52.
Duplessis’s portrait conveys the vigor with which d’Angiviller performed his new role, and his profound influence over artistic production during his tenure; he wears a modish pink satin suit with white lace cuffs, and a plan of “Galeries du Louvre” unfurls between his legs. The architectural plan refers to d’Angiviller’s plan to convert the Grand Gallery of the Louvre into a national museum of living artists. As Andrew McClellan has argued in *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, this museum was “the crux of the director general’s grand scheme to revitalize French art and to demonstrate to Europe and posterity the superiority of the French school and the magnificence of Louis XVI.”

D’Angiviller’s mandate has obvious patriotic parallels with that of the contemporaneous Secretary of War, the Comte de Saint-Germain.

In a 1776 letter to Pierre, the director of the Academy, d’Angiviller articulated his new agenda, and asserted that contemporary French art ought to “restore virtue and patriotic sentiments”—that is, to glorify France and its monarchy. In addition to creating new opportunities for public display of art, d’Angiviller was also interested in stimulating the conception and production of ‘patriotic’ works. Between 1774 and 1777, he initiated a series of commissions of history paintings depicting moments of historical significance from antiquity through the *ancien régime*, and sculptural busts depicting the

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100 D’Angiviller had wrested the hall—formerly dedicated to the display of military models and plans—from the minister of War, the Comte de Saint-Germain, whose reign would soon prove short lived. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 53.

101 McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 49.
grand hommes of French history—all intended to adorn his new museum.\textsuperscript{102}

D’Angiviller’s ambitions for French art were widely praised: in the \textit{Affiches, annonces, et avis divers} published after the opening of the Salon of 1777, for example, d’Angiviller is described as “animated by the most brilliant zeal for the glory of arts,” and credited with the general excellence of the Salon that year.\textsuperscript{103}

Vallayer-Coster’s 1777 painting was not commissioned by d’Angiviller; I argue, however, that her \textit{Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes} belongs to the same patriotic fervor that he inspired in the Academy. This is the only work in her oeuvre that refers to France through the tri-color palette, \textit{fleurs-de-lis}, and symbolic instruments of warfare. After the painting appeared at the Salon of 1777, critics also acknowledged this work as more ambitious in subject and execution than her other canvases. Louis Petit de Bachaumont for example, wrote that her “sure and faithful brush has submitted all the objects of inanimate nature. But after this triumph she courts something more substantial.”\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, with this large-scale painting, the artist challenged the boundaries of her genre, invoking the material trappings and thematic gravitas of aristocratic portraiture and history painting.

Vallayer-Coster’s elegant pile of military attributes might be read as an expression of patriotic imperative (a response to d’Angiviller and Saint-Germain), as well as patriarchal devotion (a reference to her father’s craft). It is ironic, then, that Madame

\textsuperscript{103}\textit{Affiches, annonces, et avis divers} (Paris: Bureau du Journal général de France, September 17, 1777).
\textsuperscript{104}“Mlle Vallayer dont le pinceau sûr et fidèle s’est soumis tous les objets de la nature inanimée. Mais après ce triomphe, elle court à de plus considérables.” Louis Petit de Bachaumont, “Lettre II: Sur les Peintures, Sculptures, & Gravures exposées au Salon du Louvre le 25 Août 1777,” \textit{Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des Lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours} (London: John Adamson, 1777-1789), 32.
Vissiter, a female patron, owned the work and lent it to the Salon of 1777. Moreover, the most salient precedent for her canvas was a work by another female still life artist. Madeleine de Boullogne (1646–1710) was the daughter of one of the founding artists of the Academy, Louis de Boullogne (1609–1674). She and her sister Geneviève (1645–1708) were admitted as still life painters on December 7, 1669, making them the second and third female members, after Duchemin. To the Salon of 1673, Madeleine submitted six of the eight “trophées d’armes” that she had executed as overdoors for the Queen’s antechamber at Versailles, then occupied by the first wife of Louis XIV, Maria Theresa of Spain; four of those overdoors remain in situ today (Fig. 2.34 and Fig. 2.35).

It was in this room that the Bourbon monarchs, beginning with Louis XIV, hosted the Grand Couvert, a tradition in which members of the court and invited guests watched the King and Queen dine. It is unknown if or when Vallayer-Coster ever attended this ritual, or if she had another occasion to visit Versailles and see these paintings (although we know that she had met Marie Antoinette by 1779 at the latest, for the young Queen began to commission work from the artist that year). Yet the formal similarities between the works of Boullogne and Vallayer-Coster are too striking to ignore. Boulogne’s paintings, like that of Vallayer-Coster, are dominated by a sharp diagonal line formed by a furled banner, and are populated with the same drums, weapons, vacant armor, and plumed helmets. Boulogne’s decorative overdoors, however, are set against stormy skies, lack allegorical sculpture, and are even more chaotic in composition.

105 Salon of 1777, no 101 Nothing else is yet known about this patron, or the circumstances of the commission or purchase of the painting.
Things pile, lean, and drape with vigorous abandon; in one of the overdoors, for example, an upright cuirass that has been impaled by a musket and stuffed with a white flag,

Boullongne and Vallayer-Coster’s works both recall the visual tradition of the military trophy, which may be traced back to the ancient Greek *tropaion*: the public display of a defeated enemy’s armor and weapons. From antiquity onwards, the military trophy appeared in triumphal three-dimensional art, such as Trajan’s Column in Rome. The military trophy remained a popular architectural motif throughout the early modern period, during which time they came to adorn the facades and interiors of the Louvre and Versailles palaces. Formal, symmetrical military trophies are also embedded, for example, in the gilded woodwork in the ceiling of the Queen’s antechamber at Versailles, a three-dimensional echo of the painted overdoors (Fig. 2.35). As Peter Fuhring characterized them, “Trophies of arms had already known a long tradition when they received renewed attention in the Louis XIV period. From simple heaps of arms to well-structured ensembles, whether organized horizontally or vertically, trophies were easy to adapt to the particular needs of any decorative scheme.” In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the military trophy appeared most frequently in three-dimensional architectural programs or ornamental prints, rather than in paintings—with the notable exceptions of Boullongne and Vallayer-Coster’s works. Both of these artists were willing to translate the triumphal vocabulary of the decorative arts into their monumental still life paintings.

While the objects depicted in *Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* represent a variety of male bodies (the decorated French soldier, the *grand hommes* of France, the director of the *Bâtiments du Roi*, and Vallayer-Coster’s father), they are also linked to one of the first female *académiciennes* and her most important royal commission. Like Boullogne’s overdoors for the Queen’s antechamber at Versailles, Vallayer-Coster’s melancholy, patriotic allegory was painted by a woman and for a woman. These circumstances distinguish *Bust of Minerva* from Vallayer-Coster’s two earlier *Attributes*, which were painted for the primarily male audience of the Academy, in the first instance, and for a powerful minister of the French government in the second. This painting, moreover, would be the last monumental allegory that she would ever paint; after 1777, she produced smaller paintings, primarily of fruit, game, shells and flowers.

**Conclusion**

The *Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, Hunting and Gardening*, and *Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* are linked by their ambitious allegorical themes, their monumental scales, and because they were all produced within the first decade of Vallayer-Coster’s academic career. Moreover, they are all populated by clay or marble allegorical female figures in the form of clay or marble busts. In all three works, a lively (if technically inanimate) sculpture of a young woman’s head presides over various ‘attributes’ with aplomb—a recurring motif that could be read as a kind of early artistic signature.
Of course, the presence of the female body in eighteenth-century allegories was far from unusual. Representations of anonymous female bodies, more typically nude, were so neutral, so incapable of bearing individual identities that they often served as vehicles for a wide range of ideas.\footnote{On the conflicts between female intellectual ambition and allegorical figures of women in both portraits and prints, see Mary D. Sheriff, “The Naked Truth? The Allegorical Frontispiece and Woman’s Ambition in Eighteenth-Century France,” in \textit{Early Modern Visual Allegory: Embodying Meaning}, eds. Cristelle Baskins and Lisa Rosenthal (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 243-264.} As Marina Warner argued in \textit{Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form}, the representation of woman in the guise of allegory is a “condition” that “empties her of her humanity.”\footnote{Warner continues: “These mythological principles, confusing women and art, together underpin the idea that man is a maker and woman made, in mythic reversal of biology…They have assisted the projection of immaterial concepts on to the female form, in both rhetoric and iconography. Men act as individuals, and women bear the burden of their dreams.” Marina Warner, \textit{Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 238-9.} At the Salon of 1775, for example, anonymous female bodies embodied the following concepts: Fidelity, Sincerity, Truth, Sweetness, Summer, Winter, and Wind, to say nothing of the Venuses and Virgins representing beauty and virtue.

Vallayer-Coster’s trio of allegorical busts—an anonymous young woman, and the goddesses Ceres and Minerva—could be considered ‘typical’ of her time, if not for her rejection (or avoidance) of the full female nude, and her ability to invest those ‘sculpted’ faces with nuanced, sometimes inscrutable, looks—rather than docile expressions of ‘sweetness’ or ‘truth’.\footnote{Vigée Le Brun did paint the female nude; see her reception piece, \textit{Peace Bringing Back Abundance}, 1780, Musée du Louvre, Paris, in \textit{Vigée Le Brun: Woman Artist in Revolutionary France}, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016, no. 9, 74-75.} Unlike other allegories, which Warner asserts reinforce the notion that “man is a maker and a woman made,” Vallayer-Coster’s busts serve as visual surrogates for the artist herself. That the sculptures \textit{look} so pointedly—upwards, outwards, or directly towards the viewer—underscores the fact that they ‘perform’ Vallayer-Coster’s own act of looking, and her presence before the objects that she paints.
Whether they are inventions of the artist, or inspired by the works of her contemporaries, the allegorical busts inform the meaning of her canvases, and represent her engagement with the economy of images and ideas of her time.
III. Food and Taste

In her representations of food, Vallayer-Coster engaged most closely with motifs typical of Dutch still life artists such as Pieter Claesz and Jan Davidsz. de Heem (‘spiralized’ lemons, hams, lobsters), as well as the modest combinations of the tools and materials of the kitchen typical of Chardin (pot, knife, fruit, bread). Yet again, however, the artist sought to distinguish herself formally and conceptually from her predecessors. Her paints, bright and lucid in color, are applied in strokes alternately slick and lush—in stark contrast to Chardin’s grittier and more static application of muted, earthy tones.

Rather than meticulously describing the surfaces of foods (best experienced, after all, upon the tongue), Vallayer-Coster evokes their textures: interior (chunky and pulpy fleshes) and exterior (slick, scaled, or brined skins). These objects not only represent gustatory and material opulence, but also become vehicles for a painterly expression of color and texture. In this chapter, I describe this visual effect of Vallayer-Coster’s painting technique: a perceptual clash between the pigmented residue of the artist’s touch, and the viewer’s imagined experience of touching.

In addition to sight and touch, Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of fauna and fruit are also informed by other forms of sensual experience: smell and taste. Indeed, the corporeal pleasures of food, a daily ritual of desire and satiation, are embedded in the visual consumption of her paintings. As I argue, the artist represents the aromatic and gustatory appeal of various foods. Perhaps because Vallayer-Coster’s still life paintings of food appeal to our own experiences of smelling and tasting food, however, they have been subject to a kind of reification of meaning; they have been reduced to their ‘universal’ or
'timeless’ appeal, and denied any historical content or cultural agency. In *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, for example, Norman Bryson hails the simplicity of Vallayer-Coster’s representations of the dining table. He writes of her *Still Life with Ham, Bottles, and Radishes* (Fig. 3.13), for example: “The objects are stated frankly and on their own terms. There is not desire to inflate the scene beyond itself; domestic life is left as it is, not translated into another, supposedly ‘higher’ discourse…The painter is able to participate directly in the space without anxiety about her capacity or right to do so.”¹

I hope to complicate Bryson’s rather condescending (and implicitly gendered) assessment of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of foodstuffs and offer a new interpretation. Though certainly evocative of domestic life, representations of food are no less worthy of careful discursive analysis. While Vallayer-Coster’s food still lifes are indeed expressions of the universal human need and desire to eat, they are also informed by historically-specific material conditions, customs, and systems of knowledge. Eighteenth-century food culture linked the *philosophes* of the *Encyclopédie*, the fishwives of Les Halles, and an ambitious *académicienne*—and Vallayer-Coster’s paintings are best understood within this context. In three sections—*le goût* (taste), *la cuisine*, and *les ingrédients*—I explore the rhetorical, conceptual, and material links between art and food, as contemporary writers imagined them. Throughout, I highlight the parallels between Vallayer-Coster’s paintings and the ideas surrounding the acquisition, preparation, presentation, and consumption of food in eighteenth-century Paris.²

² Joanna Woodall has written that “the shared vocabulary of pictorial and culinary recipe books” in seventeenth-century Netherlandish culture “suggests that links between painting and cooking would have been familiar to contemporaries, although they have been until recently overlooked by art literature.”
Le goût

During this period, the visual and culinary arts shared a critical concept: le goût, or taste. Much as still life painting was often described as the lowest within the academic hierarchy of genres, taste was frequently positioned at the bottom of the philosophical hierarchies of senses—likely due to its associations with the cardinal sin of gluttony.³ Defenders of the sense of taste included Jean Anthelme Brillat–Savarin (1755–1826), the source of the aphorism “you are what you eat” (“Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es”). Brillat-Savarin described the synesthetic delights of the tongue in The Physiology of Taste (Physiologie du goût): “it mingles with all other pleasures, and even consoles us for their absence.”⁴

Importantly, however, in eighteenth-century France, taste referred not only to the ability to distinguish between salty and sweet, but also to evaluate other forms of pleasure: literature, music, the visual and decorative arts, etc. The individual who possessed ‘good’ taste would be able to distinguish between the fresh and the foul, the delicious and the bland—but also, more abstractly, between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the refined and the vulgar.

³ For more on taste and its relationship to the hierarchy of senses, see Viktoria Von Hoffman, From Gluttony to Enlightenment, The World of Taste in Early Modern Europe (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 86.
⁴ Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante... (Paris: Boulé, 1850), 35.
Philosophers of the period sought to understand what constituted good taste, how it was developed or acquired, and its specific benefits to the mind and soul. Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) began an entry on “Taste” for the *Encyclopédie*, although he failed to finish it before his death. In this fragmented entry, Montesquieu identified the general qualities that appeal to those with good taste. These descriptors seem to be intentionally vague, so that they might equally describe a painting or a culinary dish. As Montesquieu asserted, “Poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, different kinds of games, all the works of nature and art can give pleasure to the soul.”

Whatever the source of pleasure, Montesquieu argued that the soul primarily seeks order and symmetry (for example, balance of composition or flavor). He acknowledged, however, that the soul also yearns for variety, contrast, and surprise (i.e., shocks of color or spice). These moments of asymmetry, Montesquieu suggests, may provide tasteful pleasure, so long as they are subtle enough to preserve the fundamental sense of order.

After Montesquieu’s death, Voltaire (1694–1778) was called upon to expand the “Taste” entry for the 1757 edition *Encyclopédie*. Voltaire began by identifying the gustatory origins of taste, but suggested that this sense has evolved beyond the tongue:

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5 Montesquieu’s draft was published in part in the 1757 edition of the *Encyclopédie*, with this note from the editors: “To this excellent article we shall add the fragment on taste, which M. le Président de Montesquieu intended for the *Encyclopédie*, as we mentioned at the end of his eulogy in Volume V of this work. This fragment was found incomplete among his papers: the author did not have the time to put the finishing touches to it. But the first thoughts of great writers are worthy of being preserved for posterity, like the sketches of great painters.” Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert, Denis Diderot, Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, and [François-Marie Arouet] de Voltaire, “Taste,” *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d’Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*, trans. Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer (Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2003), accessed March 12, 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/sps.did2222.0000.168. Originally published as “Goût,” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 7:761–770 (Paris, 1757).
“This sense, this capacity for discriminating between different foods, has given rise, in all known languages, to the metaphorical use of the word ‘taste’ to designate the discernment of beauty and flaws in all the arts.”\(^6\) Throughout his addendum, Voltaire compares taste in food and the visual arts, both of which are subject to both “good” and “bad” taste. For Voltaire, good taste was a stable and enduring mode of analysis, immune from fashionable “whims.” Bad taste, in contrast, was artificial, excessive, and fickle, and therefore oblivious to the natural order and balance prescribed by Montesquieu. Voltaire wrote: “Just as having bad taste in the physical sense means deriving pleasure only from seasoning that is excessively piquant and unusual, so having bad taste in the arts is to enjoy only elaborate ornamentation and to be insensitive to la belle nature.”\(^7\)

Voltaire suggested two major distinctions between the tastes for food and art: the way in which they developed, and their relationships with subjectivity. Taste for food (“sensual taste”) was intrinsic and highly individual. Taste for art (“intellectual taste”), on the other hand, required cultivation—ideally, in light of objective, shared standards of beauty. Voltaire explained:

> Man molds and educates his taste in art much more than his sensual taste…nature intended that as a general rule men would have an innate feeling for their needs; intellectual taste on the other hand needs more time to develop. 

> […] It is said that one should not argue about matters of taste. This is true as long as it is only a question of sensual taste, of the revulsion one experiences for a certain food and the preference one feels for another. This is not subject to argument because it is impossible to correct a flaw that is organic. The same is not true in the arts: since the arts have genuine beauty, there exists a good taste that discerns it and a bad taste that is unaware of it, and often the flaw of the mind that produces wrong taste can be corrected.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Voltaire decried that the whim, rather than good taste, “produces so many new fashions”—particularly in the material realms of “fabrics, finery, coaches.” Ibid.

\(^8\) Ibid.
In other words, we might disagree about the deliciousness of a ripe plum, but we need no instruction in order to perceive its sweetness. A painting of a plum, on the other hand, possesses an objective value—a beauty that can only be fully appreciated by a trained eye.

**La cuisine**

Good aesthetic taste, it would seem, was simply a matter of education. Conveniently, however, Voltaire believed it was also culturally specific: “There are vast countries into which good taste has never penetrated…good taste has only fallen to the lot of a few nations in Europe.” Voltaire implies throughout his essay, moreover, that French taste was more refined than that of any other country. He specifically cited the influence that French painters, playwrights, and composers had exerted over the senses of their European contemporaries:

Good taste develops gradually in a nation that has hitherto lacked it because, little by little, men come under the influence of good artists: they become accustomed to seeing pictures with the eyes of Lebrun, Poussin, and Le Sueur, they hear the musical recitation of Quinault's scenes with the ears of Lulli, the melodies of a symphony with the ears of Rameau.  

Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth-century, the French believed their national cuisine, as well as their visual and musical arts, to be superior. In the “Cuisine” entry for the 1754 edition of *Encyclopédie*, the Chevalier de Jaucourt (1704–1779) wrote:

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9 Ibid.
10 For more on the “patriotic sentiment that infiltrated all aspects of French culture from the middle decades of the eighteenth century,” see Bailey, *Patriotic Taste*, 16.
11 The Chevalier de Jaucourt was trained as a scientist in Geneva, Cambridge, and Leiden. He is believed to be the most prolific contributor to the *Encyclopédie* project; 14,000 articles attributed to him, including “Cuisine,” “Gourmandise,” “Nourishment,” and “Ragout.” Susan Pinkard, *A Revolution in Taste: The Rise of French Cuisine, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187.
Grasping the flavors which should dominate in each dish, the French soon surpassed their masters, and made to forget them; from that moment… they have found nothing so gratifying as seeing the taste of their cuisine surpass that of other opulent kingdoms, and to reign without competition from the one end of the globe to the other.  

Philippe Macquer reiterated this sentiment in his 1773 *Dictionnaire raisonné universel des arts et métiers*, writing “in all nations French cooks pass for those who cook best and whose taste is most delicate with respect to fine dining.”

Much like the visual arts, however, French cuisine had diversified to include a number of different styles. As the Chevalier de Jaucourt noted, this multiplicity could be attributed to the increasing complexity of the French palate over time, as well as the seemingly infinite fickleness of individual tastes:

The cuisine that was simple in the first ages of the world, having become more complex and more refined from century to century and from place to place, is currently a field of study, one of the most painful sciences, regarding which we see appearing without end new treatises…which perpetually change method and sufficiently prove that it is impossible to reduce into a fixed order that which the caprice of men and the dissoluteness of their taste seeks, invents, and imagines in order to conceal ingredients [emphasis mine].


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14 An artist uses a palette (wooden board; borrowed from the French) to mix paint colors, and a chef requires a sharp palate (sense of taste; palais in French) in order to discern subtleties of flavor. Though palette/palate are homophones in English, their French translations have no clear etymological relationship. “Palette, Pallet, or Palate,” April 1, 2017 <http://blog.dictionary.com/palette-pallet-or-palate/>.

15 Louis, chevalier de Jaucourt, “Cuisine.”
Perhaps the most canonical of the early texts was François Pierre de la Varenne’s *Le Cuisinier François*—first published in 1651 and ultimately reappearing in 61 editions, over the following century. La Varenne’s book spawned a rather diverse litany of other texts, which were concerned to varying degrees with the philosophical and physiological nature of taste, with some offering more practical advice for preparing and consuming food in a range of different styles.\(^{16}\)

In another recent analysis of the culinary discourse of the period, *From Gluttony to Enlightenment, The World of Taste in Early Modern Europe* (2016), Viktoria Von Hoffmann argues that French “cuisine was also progressively presented as a form of intellectual knowledge,”\(^{17}\) communicated through a new “rhetoric of taste.” According to Von Hoffmann, this growing discourse “would later spread to become the concern of the entire polite reading public in the Enlightenment.”\(^{18}\)

Indeed, while some texts were directed towards those professionally responsible for preparing food (i.e., domestic servants working in households of varying size and wealth), other texts were addressed to a new audience of *gourmets* (a ‘foodie’ in modern English parlance).\(^{19}\) To these culinary connoisseurs, cuisine was described as a form of art or science. Physician Antoine Le Camus, for example, wrote in *Médecine de l’esprit* (1769) that taste “can be reduced to a science as positive as music or painting.” After all, Le Camus reasoned, “the ear gave us the science of sounds, the eyes made an art of

\(^{17}\) Von Hoffman, *From Gluttony to Enlightenment*, 22.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 138.
\(^{19}\) See *Dictionnaire universel françois et latin*, vol. 4, (Paris: La Compagnie des Libraires Associés, 1771), 567. While Varenne’s text had been primarily aimed towards culinary professionals, subsequent texts (such as Nicolas de Bonnefons’s *Les Delices de la champagne* of 1654) would address more elite audiences—including, in Pinkard’s words, “the masters and mistresses of rich bourgeois households.” Pinkard, *A Revolution in Taste*, 61.
colors, why would the mouth not form a science of tastes?”

François Marin had employed the same metaphor in *Les dons de Comus, ou l’Art de la cuisine* (1739):

> One may have never dared to find a link between two apparently so distant objects such as the art of painting and of cuisine… These ingredients and juices have to be blended and melted, in the same way as the painter blends his colors, and the same harmony, which in painting strikes the eyes of connoisseurs, has to be felt by delicate palates in the taste of a sauce.

Pinkard and Von Hoffmann have further identified several themes that simultaneously dominated debates about cooking and painting in the eighteenth century: ancient vs. modern, and nature vs. artifice. The ‘Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns’ had polarized members of the Academy since the seventeenth century, and continued to reverberate through the later eighteenth-century art criticism of Rousseau and Diderot—informing, for example, the selection of sculpture in Vallayer-Coster’s reception piece, *The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (Fig. 2.1).

This dichotomy also framed culinary discourse during this period; in Pinkard’s words, “In literature and the arts, in philosophy and politics, the defenders of tradition were pitted against men who thought that recent developments in science had allowed modern man to surpass the ancients in knowledge and taste… Cooking joined the

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21 François Marin, *Les dons de Comus, ou l’Art de la cuisine*, (Paris: Chez Pissot, 1739), xxij-xxiii. Quoted in Von Hoffman, *From Gluttony to Enlightenment*, 139. On the apparent interchangeability between the terms ‘art’ and ‘science’ in this passage, Von Hoffmann concludes, “Though the words ‘art’ and ‘science’ did not have exactly the same meaning they have today, a form of knowledge was nevertheless implied, intertwining intellectual and practical skills formerly denied to the sense of taste.” Von Hoffmann, *From Gluttony to Enlightenment*, 138.

battleground on which this contest between progress and tradition was fought.” Marin, for example, was a champion of the “nouvelle cuisine”:

Modern cuisine, established on the foundations of the ancient one with less artifice and less embarrassment, although with as much variety, is more simple, more appropriate, more delicate, and maybe even more learned. The former cuisine was very complicated and of an infinite detail.

For Marin and others writing about food in the mid-eighteenth century, the greatest merit of modern cuisine was its renewed commitment to simplicity—that is, highlighting the ‘natural’ flavors, textures, and colors of a few fresh ingredients. This emphasis on the natural, rather than the artificial, was not particularly new; seventeenth-century authors like Nicolas de Bonnefons (Les délices de la campagne, 1655) had placed value in ‘le goût naturel’ or ‘le vrai goût,’ and encouraged readers to simply enhance the texture and flavor of individual ingredients, rather than “disguise and garnish their dishes in confusion.”

Pinkard summarized Bonnefons’s recommended preparations of foods as follows: “Fruits, vegetables, breads, eggs, and dairy foods that are seasonal and local and prepared in the simplest possible way. When not eaten raw, principal ingredients should be poached, boiled, or roasted with no seasonings other than a little salt and a pinch of fresh herbs from the garden [and a] knob of fresh butter.” Various later eighteenth-century food writers echoed this advice, recommending simple, balanced meals with just a few primary ingredients, with those natural flavors enhanced or accented by a simple sauce—a silky fricassee or ragout, a thicker roux, or an emulsification of oil and acid.

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23 Pinkard, A Revolution in Taste, 157
24 Von Hoffmann, From Gluttony to Enlightenment, 138.
26 Pinkard, A Revolution in Taste, 196
27 Ibid., 108
Despite mid-century calls for a return to *le goût naturel* by Marin and others, a concurrent tendency towards more elaborate, “rococo” cuisine persisted, and remained typical of the king’s dining table at Versailles until the fall of the monarchy.\(^{28}\) Yet many critics believed that eating fussy, overwrought dishes had a negative impact on one’s physical and spiritual wellbeing, and had broader cultural implications. Chevalier de Jaucourt, author of the aforementioned “Cuisine” entry in the *Encyclopédie*, decried the excessive use fat, sugar, and spice in another entry entitled “*Gourmandise*” or “Gluttony”:

> All that goes beyond nature is useless and usually harmful: we must not always follow nature as far as she permits us to go… taste weakens and dulls with even the most delicate dishes, and infirmities without number avenge an outraged nature. Fitting punishment for the excesses of a sensuality that has had too many delicacies!\(^{29}\)

Jaucourt was not alone in rejecting the notion of excess and artifice in French culture. The visual art of the rococo (“*le petit goût*” or “*le goût pittoresque*,” as it was called in the eighteenth century) was subject to similar criticisms. Perhaps the most notorious examples are the *Salons* of *Encyclopédie* editor Diderot, who reserved his most venomous criticism for rococo art of Boucher. Diderot assailed the frivolity (and implicitly, the femininity) of Boucher’s paintings and lamented the superficialities of society that made him so successful:

> I don’t know what to say about this man. Degradation of taste, color, composition, character, expression, and drawing have kept pace with moral depravity… I’d say he’s never encountered truth; I’d say the ideas of delicacy, forthrightness, innocence, and simplicity have become almost


foreign to him…. He can show me all the clouds he likes, I’ll always see in them the rouge, beauty spots, the powder puffs, and all the little vials of the make-up table.\textsuperscript{30}

In contrast, Diderot championed the sobriety and truth of Chardin’s still lifes (and later, those of Vallayer-Coster): “Looking at the pictures of others, it seems to me that I have to create artificial eyes for myself, but in order to see those of Chardin I need only keep the eyes which nature has given me, and make good use of them.”\textsuperscript{31} Jaucourt and Diderot thus agreed: though subject to the artificial temptations of sugar and rouge, the human tongue and eye thrived on simplicity and in proximity to nature.

\textit{Les ingrédients}

In the writings of eighteenth-century critics, French cuisine and painting were linked by the concept of \textit{le goût}, as well as two discursive dichotomies: (ancient) tradition versus (modern) innovation, and artifice versus nature. Yet perhaps the most obvious point of comparison between painting and cooking is their mutual use of natural ingredients. In \textit{Les dons de Comus, ou l'Art de la cuisine}, Marin noted that both the artist and the cook mixed and arranged organic materials according to specific, inherited formulas. Just as deviations from a cooking recipe could result in disaster, mistakes in the preparation or application of pigments could result in premature fading or distortion of the painted canvas. Moreover, like the foods represented in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings,

\textsuperscript{30} Diderot, “Boucher,” Salon of 1765, 22-23. Melissa Hyde has documented the critical language of the rococo in her \textit{Making Up the Rococo: Boucher and His Critics} (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), primarily citing the writings of Diderot.

the artist’s pigments had to be grown, harvested, acquired, manipulated, arranged, and presented or preserved—or, it can be inferred, subjected to mold and decay.\textsuperscript{32}

Vallayer-Coster’s food still lifes, a group of works primarily dating to the 1770s and 1780s, can be also characterized by the artist’s selection of ‘ingredients’—that is, her combinations of certain foods in different compositions. Some have been borrowed from Chardin or de Heem, and others seem to have been culled directly from the artist’s own pantry. Tracing these motifs is far from a tidy process; her canvases are linked across the space of two decades by repetition, reorientation, and recombination—much like a familiar recipe tweaked and reimagined over time.

Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of food also seem to give visual form to the \textit{goût naturel}. Just as these culinary philosophies prescribed, Vallayer-Coster highlights just a handful of individual ingredients, juxtaposing raw and simply cooked materials, while highlighting their intrinsic flavors. Fish still scaled, fowl yet unplucked, and fruits and vegetables still attached to their roots suggest freshness, and a proximity to the moment of harvest—comparable to Vallayer-Coster’s selective use of ‘pure’ (unblended) pigments with a thick, ‘raw’ unblended facture. Smoother passages, with more subtly blended colors might, in turn, be compared to fully cooked dishes—steaming soups, baked breads, and cured hams. Whichever technique employed, successful paintings and dishes might both be described as concealing the pains of labor, without muddying the flavor of individual ingredients.

\textsuperscript{32} For more on the specific pigments used in Vallayer-Coster’s \textit{oeuvre}, see Barry’s “Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 95-114.
Eighteenth-century culinary texts were typically organized by ingredient. Marin explained to his readers, for example, the taxonomic order of his text, *Les dons de Comus, ou l'Art de la cuisine*:

After a list of fat and lean soups, I describe the anatomy of heavy or butcher’s meats. I indicate the different uses that one can make of them in the kitchen, and their varying degrees of goodness. This section includes the history of beef, veal, mutton, and lamb… The pig, which is a great resource, follows naturally and comprises the subject of a special article. After this, I move on to poultry, and then to venison and game, and I follow the same methods as with butcher’s meat. Ocean fish and freshwater fish, vegetables and herbs make up separate articles, and finish the first part of my book.”

Taking my cue from this structure, I have organized the following discussion of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of food into sections, dictated by the primary ‘ingredients’ represented therein. My order adheres not to Marin’s, but rather approximates the chronology of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of food: I begin with the earlier representations of fruit and bread, before considering later, more savory combinations of vegetables, meat, and fish.

My analysis of these works relies on an understanding of the accessibility of these ingredients to a *parisienne* in the eighteenth century. Far from static objects, the fauna and fruit represented in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings were part of a complex network of exchange—from the moment of harvest, to the urban food market, to the dining table. I argue that knowledge of these food systems undergirded the making and consumption of Vallayer-Coster’s work. Rather than providing a comprehensive or schematic overview of these networks, I offer a series of case studies, elucidating the social and material significance of the ingredients that appear in Vallayer-Coster paintings.

The foodstuffs represented in these works were primarily acquired from Les Halles. The principal food market in eighteenth-century Paris was located a block from

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33 Pinkard, *A Revolution in Taste*, 156
the artist’s family’s lodgings on the rue du Roule, in what is now the first arrondissement. The ritual sprawl of food vendors near the church of Saint-Eustache had its origins in the twelfth century, and by the eighteenth-century had become a central urban spectacle. In *Le Tableau de Paris* (1783), Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814) complains of the noises and smells accompanying the influx of thousands of suppliers to Paris, beginning at one in the morning. Writing in the nineteenth-century, Émile Zola described it as “a huge central organ [of Paris], furiously pulsating and pumping the blood of life through the city’s veins.” For Zola, as for Mercier, Les Halles was a riot of color (“the hues of the greenery had turned brilliant, the carrots flowed blood red, the turnips turned incandescent in the triumphant sunlight”) and sound (“to the right, to the left, everywhere, the shrill cries sent the treble notes of a flute into the bass rumble of the crowd. It was the sound of seafood, butter, poultry, and meat being sold”). The market was essential to the economic rhythm of the city, but its attendant sights, sounds and smells were also integral to its sensory fabric.

Vallayer-Coster would have been familiar with the dynamics of these spaces, but it is unlikely that she had any role in acquiring or preparing the food consumed by her household. Successful artisan families, like the Vallayers, would have employed at least one or two servants, typically a female cook who was responsible for trips to the market and preparing thrice-daily meals. Claude Duflos’s *La Cuisinière* engraving (Fig. 3.1) represents one such fille de cuisine presiding over a basket of fresh produce and a hock of

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34 See Rene S. Marion, “The Dames de la Halle: Community and Authority in Early Modern Paris” (PhD. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1994).
ham, and writing an inventory or preparatory list—demonstrating her command over the space of the kitchen, as well as her professional literacy. Indeed, it was to this type of domestic servant that some *nouvelle cuisine* recipe books, like Menon’s *La cuisinière bourgeoise* (1746), catered. Jennifer J. Davis notes in *Defining Culinary Authority: The Transformation of Cooking in France, 1650-1830* that while women were widely employed in private households as cooks, they were rarely admitted into the professional guild of chefs. Like the few female artists admitted to the Academy of Painting and Sculpture, the rare ‘mistresses’ admitted to the cooking guild were often the daughters or wives of established culinary masters.

While Vallayer-Coster’s representations of food were predicated upon the physical and intellectual labor of at least one anonymous eighteenth-century woman, there is reason to believe that Vallayer-Coster directly observed this labor in her own household. The catalogue of the Salon of 1783 refers to a (now lost) work by Vallayer-Coster, entitled “a young female cook flaying an eel (*une jeune cuisinière qui écorche une anguille)*.” This indicates that the artist ventured into a genre, the representation of domestic servants, for which Chardin and Greuze are better known. If those depictions of women’s work were, as William Sewell has suggested, “little more than a pretext for...”

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37 Menon was the pseudonym of the author of a number of mid-century cookbooks. Pinkard, *A Revolution in Taste*, 178.
39 See Appendix.
representing a pretty girl,\textsuperscript{41} Vallayer-Coster’s paintings nonetheless offer visual evidence of the professional presence of women in eighteenth-century kitchens.

\textit{Les fruits et le pain}

Fruit and vegetables are by far the most frequent constituents of Vallayer-Coster’s food paintings, just as they were the central focus of the majority of recipes in many contemporary cookbooks. The proliferation of produce in both paintings and culinary texts suggests their importance in the eighteenth-century French kitchen—a value enhanced by their seasonality and perishability. As Pinkard writes, “in the northern climate of Paris, fine produce was always expensive, whether it was grown in one’s own kitchen garden or purchased in the market from a growing network of well-capitalized specialty farmers.”\textsuperscript{42}

Rural suppliers to urban markets had begun to consider the impact of time and transport on the appearance of their crops; as treatises like La Quintinie’s \textit{Instruction pour les jardins fruitiers et potagers, avec un traité des orangers, & des réflexions sur l'agriculture} (1716) tell us, farmers often harvested still un-ripe fruits and privileged specimens with more durable skins. This ensured the viability and desirability of their products, piled high at market, to their increasingly well-informed customers. Vallayer-Coster’s careful consideration of the formal qualities of those ingredients reflects the specific advice offered by many contemporary texts, which taught buyers how to evaluate


\textsuperscript{42}Pinkard, \textit{A Revolution in Taste}, 73.
the quality, maturity, freshness, and taste of perishable materials simply by looking at their surfaces.⁴³

Piles of plums, peaches, and cherries populated many of Vallayer-Coster’s earliest canvases. In combination with various baked goods, they suggest morning meals; as Brillat-Savarin recalled of the eighteenth-century meal patterns in Physiologie du goût, “Ordinarily we breakfast before nine o’clock on bread, cheese, fruit, and sometimes cold meats.”⁴⁴ To her first Salon at 1771, Vallayer-Coster’s submitted A Basket of Plums (Un Panier de Prunes) (Fig. 3.2), now at the Cleveland Museum of Art.⁴⁵ The loosely woven basket is filled with a rather tidy pile of ruby and deep purple plums, still attached to their sage green leaves. That pyramidal arrangement—and indeed, the very basket of plums—seems to have been borrowed directly from a 1765 Chardin canvas, Basket of Plums with Walnuts, Currants, and Cherries (Fig. 3.3).⁴⁶ Like Chardin, Vallayer-Coster evoked the glaucous surface of the plums with alternating touches of pale, powdery grays and deep, rich burgundy red and purple. That the artist appropriated the motif of the plum directly from Chardin’s canvases of the 1760s suggests something beyond mere emulation; this may be the best evidence of personal interaction between the two artists—of, at the very least, Vallayer-Coster’s familiarity with Chardin’s ‘return’ to still lifes in the final decade of his career.⁴⁷

Vallayer-Coster would repeat the same basket of plums, observed from a further distance, in a slightly larger oval canvas. This work, dated to 1778, was probably shown

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⁴³Ibid., 128, 275-6, 335-6.
⁴⁴Brillat-Savarin, Physiologie du goût, 171.
⁴⁵Possibly Salon of 1771, no. 147, or Salon o 1773, no. 143; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 183, fig. 155; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 197, no. 7, plate 2.
at the Salon of 1779, and is now at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (Fig. 3.4).\(^48\)

Vallayer-Coster replaced the two small cakes in the 1769 iteration with a motif particularly evocative of the Dutch still life (notably, works by de Heem and Claesz): the lemon.\(^49\) Here, Vallayer-Coster has represented the lemon in two states, unripe and partially peeled. A small round glass filled with water hosts the flowering sprig of the dark green, unripe fruit. The waxy, pimpled skin of the ripe lemon, rendered in rich daubs of marigold-colored paint, unfurls over the stone ledge, revealing wet, translucent interior membranes. The handle of the knife, presumably the same tool used to peel the lemon, similarly juts off the edge, with its blade wedged beneath the basket. These citrus fruits provide important variation in color in the composition of the painting, yet they also represent a juxtaposition of flavor: a lick of bright and sour lemon juice would contrast sharply with a sweet, meaty bite of plum.

Unique to Vallayer-Coster’s 1769 painting of plums is the addition of two small cakes, which would have paired well with the rich, juicy fruit. The unevenly gouged surface of one of the cakes attests to the sweet appeal of what is likely a French sponge cake—a light, springy baked good, distinguished by ample use of butter, in addition to an airy mixture of flour, sugar, and eggs. Vallayer-Coster presents the cakes wrapped in neatly folded *moules de papier* (paper molds), which seem to have been a typical baking vehicles in the eighteenth century. For example, a pile of paper molds appears in the


pâtissier (pastrymaker) engraving in the *Encyclopédie* (Fig. 3.5). Yet the use of paper molds was also recommended to the domestic bakers by a number of culinary writers. For example, Menon wrote in his 1755 text, *Les soupers de la Cour*, “For all kinds of cakes, you make a mold with white paper, according to the size you want.”

Richer dough was featured in the National Museum of Stockholm’s *Still Life with Brioche, Fruit, and Vegetables* (Fig. 3.6). The thick spiral shape of the brioche was achieved by rolling a mixture of flour, egg, butter, and yeast into a log shape, then draping the ‘log’ into a swirl. Alternately, a *brioche à tête* (brioche with a head) was constructed by placing a smaller ball of dough on top of a larger one. The surface of the dough was then painted with a layer of egg wash, in order to render it shiny and golden brown upon baking.

Vallayer-Coster’s brioche is accompanied by a shallow glass dish of preserved cherries, a pyramidal arrangement of peaches in a basket, and a cluster of long, thin turnips. These side fruits and vegetables provide a sense of color harmony: the vivid red of the cherries contrasts with the pale, cool pink of the turnips, and the warm orange of the peaches is offset by the dabs of pale green, indicating the mossy fuzz of their skin.

Yet we should also consider the gustatory and textural balance represented here: sour and

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52 Signed and dated to 1775, this *Brioche* does not seem to have appeared at the Salon, and its eighteenth-century provenance is unknown. Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, no. 224, fig. 169; Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, 202, no. 34, pl. 18.
juicy cherries; sweet and smooth peaches; crunchy and bitter raw turnip, and the rich, flaky brioche.

Much as she borrowed the pile of plums in the 1769 Cleveland canvas, Vallayer-Coster seems to have gleaned the spiraled brioche from Chardin—specifically, his 1763 Brioche, now in the Louvre (Fig. 3.7). As did her predecessor, Vallayer-Coster paired her brioche with cherries and peaches, and topped her brioche with a floral sprig. Modern scholars disagree whether the addition of the flower indicated the celebration of Easter, summer, or a wedding. Whatever the occasion, the addition of a simple, decorative (and aromatic) flower atop a brioche distinguished this particular French baked good from any other, placing it somewhere between white bread and a dessert cake. (The brioche’s ambiguous connotations are perhaps best evidenced by the apocryphal quote “qu’ils mangeant de la brioche,” frequently misattributed to Queen Marie Antoinette, and clumsily translated to “Let them eat cake!”) Adorning a spiral brioche with a flower remained traditional in Paris well into the nineteenth century, when Manet painted at least five brioches topped with flowers (Fig. 3.8 and Fig. 3.9)—including a combination of cherries, peaches, and plums, set on a gilded Louis XV table, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

54 Rosenberg, Chardin, 2000, 294-295.
55 As Jane R. Becker writes in “The Brioche,” (Metropolitan Museum of Art Catalogue Entry, 2017, http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436946), “Richard Brettell has noted that while some French families decorate their brioche in this manner on Easter morning as a symbol of resurrection, the summer fruits depicted in Manet’s three canvases argue that they were painted during the summer.” Richard R. Brettell, Impressionist Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture from the Wendy and Emery Reves Collection (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), 60–66. Silvia Malaguzzi has made a case for a bridal brioche (“The decorative orange blossom on the brioche suggests that the food symbolizes the joys of marriage”) in Food and Feasting in Art (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 264.
56 The quote most likely derives from The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, vol. 2., written in 1767: “Enfin je me rappelai le pis-aller d’une grande princesse a qui l’on disoit que les paysans n’avoient pas de pain, et qui répondit: Qu’ils mangent de a brioche!” (Paris: Ménard et Desenne fils, 1827), 221-222.
While noting the differences—material and cultural—between the cakes and breads represented in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings, we should also note the differences between their makers. As Stephen Kaplan explains in *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775*, there was a hierarchical vocabulary to describe various pastry makers and bread bakers in eighteenth-century Paris.\(^{58}\) A *pâtissier* (pastry maker) was not to be confused with a *boulanger privilégié* (privileged baker), which referred only to bread bakers who owned shops in Paris (Fig. 3.10). These bread makers employed several apprentices, such as the *Garçon Boulanger* depicted in Edme Bouchardon’s series of studies *Cries of Paris* (1737-46) (Fig. 3.11), to deliver bread daily to wealthy Parisian households.\(^{59}\)

*Boulangers forains* (Stallholder bakers), on the other hand, came from nearby towns to sell their wares at regularly scheduled markets. According to Diderot’s “Baker” entry in the *Encyclopédie*, “The city needs 900 stallholders, who come to the markets twice a week… Bread markets have grown in size as Paris has increased. There are now fifteen of them.” For Diderot, the centrality of bread to the Parisian diet required no further explanation than this: “As bread is the most common and necessary food, the bread market is held in Paris on Wednesdays and Saturdays, no matter when these days fall.”\(^{60}\)

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A simple *pain blanc* (white bread), like those sold biweekly by the stallholders of Paris, appears in Vallayer-Coster’s *The White Soup Tureen* (Fig. 3.12).61 The painting features a chunky loaf with a crusty surface, evoked with rough touches of red, burnt orange, and yellow. The loaf has been halved to expose its starchy interior, punctuated by yeast-induced air bubbles, and loosely wrapped in a plain white cloth. The loaf is paired with a modest white clay soup bowl, the simplicity of which suggests a mid-day meal; as Brillat-Savarin noted, “between one and two P. M., we take soup or *pot au feu* according to our positions.”62 Though the contents of that vessel are not visible, the thick steam emerging from the un-lidded bowl suggests an aromatic stock or stew. The other subjects of the painting (dark, opaque glass wine bottles) offer no other clues as to the specific ingredients contained within the bowl, yet wafts of steam evoke more general sensory experiences: the arousal of gustatory desire in response to a savory smell, symptomized by the salivation of the tongue; and the hot, thick satisfaction of consuming soup and bread.

However humble the materials depicted in this monochromatic composition, the painting seems to have appealed to critics and patrons. This work appeared initially at the Salon of 1771 as *Une Jatte*; Diderot praised her representation of the bread, in particular, as “true and like nature, but without rawness (*sans crudité)*.”63 (This is a contrast with his

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description of Chardin’s “rough and uneven way of painting.”) Abel-François Poisson de Vandières, marquis de Marigny (1727–1781), ambitious brother of Madame de Pompadour, most likely acquired the painting before he retired from his post as the directeur général des Bâtiments du Roi in July 1773; the work was subsequently sold at his 1782 estate sale.  

*Le Jambon*

Similar black glass bottles also appeared in two of Vallayer-Coster’s earliest known canvases, produced before the artist applied for membership to the Academy: *Still Life with Ham, Bottles, and Radishes* (1767, Berlin, Fig. 3.13) and *Ham, Partridge, and Ham* (1769, Reims, Fig. 3.14). The frequency with which these wine bottles appear in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings is unsurprising given the high rates of wine consumption during this period, when Parisian wholesale wine traders imported vast quantities from Orléans and Blois. Bourgeois and aristocratic customers alike purchased entire barrels to store in private cellars, and periodically refilled their own carafes.

These two paintings are also linked by their mutual representation of ham, the salted or brined hind leg of a pig. Before it became a staple of the eighteenth-century Parisian dining table, ham had been a common motif in seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings.

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66 Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 221, fig. 83; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 196, no. 4, pl. 1.
painting; cured slabs are typical of the oeuvre of Pieter Claesz (c. 1597–1660), for example (Fig. 3.17). In the works of Claesz, ham has been hacked to the bone, with little flesh left behind. The offending knife often lies limply alongside the ham, its primary function already fulfilled—or leans off the edge of the table, demonstrating the artist’s ability to depict the illusion of empty space. In both of Vallayer-Coster’s ham works, however, the knife is mid-cleave, propped up by the very meat it has just incised. The erect knife emphasizes the immediacy of the act of slicing and eating the ham, as well as the materiality of the (yet to be consumed) meat.

But for the orientations of the black and gold handled knifes thrust inside them, the Berlin and Reims paintings feature nearly identical hams, situated on the same silver platter. In both, Vallayer-Coster oriented the succulent interior cut of the meat towards the viewer. The artist only briefly describes the rough, desiccated brown skin, buttressed by a thick white layer of fat. With a series of lavish brushstrokes, she dedicates the most attention to the color and texture of its marbled rosy-brown flesh.

The process of curing meats, widespread in Europe by the medieval period, was described at length in the chevalier de Jaucourt’s Cusine entry (“Meats and fish that are prepared in this fashion keep better than by any other method.”) Unlike traiteurs, who sold raw meats, charcutiers (pork butchers) provided prepared hams (such as the jambon de Paris, the boned leg of boiled salt pork) to urban markets. Though it became more readily available to consumers during the eighteenth century, ham maintained its associations with carnal indulgence, due in part to the Catholic restrictions on meat

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70 Louis, chevalier de Jaucourt, “Cuisine.”
consumption during fast days; it was only in 1774 the Crown began to relax laws surrounding the sale of meat during Lent.\textsuperscript{72} As Brillat-Savarin observed in \textit{Physiologie du goût}, “The prime elements of our pleasures are difficulty, privation, desire, and accomplishment. All these came together in the act of breaking abstinence, and I have seen two of my grand-uncles, both strong and level-headed men, half swoon with joy when they saw the first slice cut from a ham…on Easter day.”\textsuperscript{73}

This carnivorous ecstasy takes visual form in Nicholas Lancret (1690–1743)’s \textit{Ham Luncheon (Le déjeuner de jambon)} (\textbf{Fig. 3.15}), a genre painting commissioned for Louis XV’s \textit{salle à manger} at Versailles in 1735. The work features a boisterous group of mostly young men, casually dressed in loose silk \textit{banyans} and unbuttoned white shirts, dining \textit{en plein air}, in an aristocratic garden littered with empty champagne bottles. The party carouses at a table set simply with a ham punctuated with bay leaves and white porcelain vessels.\textsuperscript{74} The painting was reproduced several times in the eighteenth-century; an autograph copy belongs to the MFA Boston, and the composition was engraved by P.E. Moitte in 1756 (entitled \textit{Partie de Plaisirs}; \textbf{Fig. 3.16}), and reproduced in two catalogues during the 1760s and 1770s.\textsuperscript{75} The image celebrates the sensations of alcohol and meat, which clearly had an appeal beyond the walls of Versailles.

Vallayer-Coster’s Berlin (1767) and Reims (1769) hams also feature fistfuls of pink and white radishes, cleaned but still attached to their stringy roots and leaves. Yet other


\textsuperscript{73} This text also contains another amusing anecdote, in which the Prince de Soubise balks at the cost of fifty hams, purchased for a single feast. Brillat-Savarin, \textit{Physiologie du goût}, 37, 196.

\textsuperscript{74} Frances Gage, “Luncheon Party in the Park” in \textit{The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard}, 146-7.

\textsuperscript{75} The Versailles \textit{Luncheon with Ham} now belongs to the Musée Condé, Chantilly. On the engraved reproductions of this image, see Bailey, \textit{Ange-Laurent de la Live de Jully: A Facsimile Reprint of the Catalogue Historique (1764) and the Catalogue Raisonné des Tableaux (March 5, 1770)}, (New York: Acanthus Books, 1988), 37.
compositional clues suggest that the hams are set in slightly different contexts. The Reims ham has been placed on a spare, dimly lit stone ledge, along with two pieces of wild game: a lean hare and a gray partridge, both suspended from a rope by their legs. The freshness of the game (unskinned, unplucked), in combination with the cooking utensils that surround them (a gleaming copper cauldron and a woven basket), suggests that they are located in a kitchen nook.

The Berlin ham painting, in contrast, is more brightly lit, set on crisp white cloth, and includes an exquisitely fluted crystal bottle. Moreover, the meat is heralded by a few sprigs of green bay leaves (feuille de laurier), valued for its distinctive aromatic and ornamental qualities. The flavor combination of ham and bay leaves, which appears in Lancret’s Ham Luncheon as well, was recommended in Menon’s Les Soupers de la Cour, in 1755. These various accompaniments suggest a proximity to the presentation on a dining table. Nineteenth-century artist Philippe Rousseau would mimic the latter arrangement of ham, bay leaves, and wine bottles in a work exhibited at the French Salon of 1877 as Le Déjeuner, now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 3.18) — a clear homage to the still life tradition of the eighteenth century, and perhaps to Vallayer-Coster’s treatment of the ham in particular.

Les fruits de mer

As her career progressed, Vallayer-Coster seems to have distanced herself from the rough approximations of humble containers (copper pots, thick clay mugs) that characterize Chardin’s paintings. Her later food still lifes represent the artist’s developing

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76 Wheaton, Savoring the Past, 266.
preference for the crisp representation of finer, more delicate man-made materials (glass, silver, porcelain), as well as the illusory effects of their surfaces. This is true, in particular, of the three exceptional seafood (*fruits de mer*) still lifes that Vallayer-Coster produced in the 1780s and beyond. *Still Life of Mackerel and Lemons* (*Fig. 3.19*), for example, was identified by its exquisite, manmade materials at the 1787 Salon, where it appeared as “*Une Verrière d’argent avec des verres, des Maquereaux, un Huilier, etc.*” (A silver basin with glasses, mackerels, a cruet, etc.)

The *verrière*, a vessel that appears frequently in elite eighteenth-century dining services, was characterized by its deeply scalloped rim, which was designed to accommodate the stems of wine glasses. Around 1785, Parisian silversmith Jacques-Charles Mongenot produced a spare, neoclassical *verrière* design nearly identical to that in Vallayer-Coster’s painting (*Fig. 3.20*); both feature wide, ovular bases, and elegantly carved handles. Vallayer-Coster populated her basin with glasses, the bases of which emerge from the mouth of the vessel like a crystal bouquet. This effect is amplified by the presence of a central bloom of white flowers. On the plain body of the *verrière*, the distorted reflections of surrounding objects are rendered with strokes of yellow, white, gray, and brown; these liquid abstractions of color seem to float on the shiny silver surface. Her *verrière* rests on a white table cloth, ‘monogrammed’ in red thread with the artist’s maiden and married initials (“VC”), suggesting that this is the artist’s own table—

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a theory supported by fact that the painting remained in her collection until her death and was only sold at her husband’s estate sale in 1824.80

The painting contains another component of an elite dining surface: silver huiliers and viniagriers, cruets containing oil and vinegar. The half-filled glass bottles are set within a neoclassical silver holster, festooned with silver, neoclassical swags and fluted columns, and set upon a base with a subtle, curvilinear lip. The fatty and acidic duet of oil and vinegar seems to have been a popular pairing with fish: similar (if simpler) cruets appear alongside mackerel in another late Chardin painting: Still Life with Fish, Vegetables, Gougères, Pots, and Cruets on a Table, dated to 1769 (Fig. 3.21).81

Chardin painted seafood rather more frequently than did his younger, female counterpart; the most salient examples include, of course, his reception piece, The Ray, and The Fast Day Meal (1728 and 1731, Louvre).82 As in those early works, Chardin’s 1769 fish painting demonstrates a frank brutality. Two fish dangle from a hook; one is partially flayed, its interiority roughly etched in thick chalky white, grey, and deep red pigment.

Vallayer-Coster’s fish flop, one over the other, in a rather more sensual embrace. She employs a panoply of delicate yellows and greys to evoke the feel of the mackerel’s slimy bellies, as well as the waxy rind and citrusy tissue of the halved lemons next to them. Yet the palpable texture of the depicted substances is belied by the occasional, undisguised touch of Vallayer-Coster’s brush; quick dabs of vermillion at the mackerel’s gills, for example, allude to both the violent means through which the fish were extracted from the sea, as well as the range of oil paints on the artist’s wooden palette.

80 Coster sale 1824, lot, 31; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 211.
82 Ibid., cat. no. 2,118-119 and cat. no. 29, 176-178.
That *Still Life of Mackerel and Lemons* is the only painting to feature fish in Vallayer-Coster’s oeuvre may be attributed to the relative expense of seafood imported to Paris. Fish and oysters were acquired on commercial vessels known as *chasse-marées*, and were transported from the ports of Dieppe and Crotoy to Parisian markets via land (barring storms or excessive heat). Oily fish, like mackerel, were often cured with salt prior to shipment in order to deter spoilage—with varying degrees of success. In *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, Historian Alain Corbin maps the “flux of smells that made up the olfactory texture” of eighteenth-century Paris, and describes fish stalls of Les Halles as a particularly salient sensory experience. Corbin cites Mercier’s *Tableau de Paris*, in which the author bemoans the malodorous proliferation of fish vendors in Paris (“the fish stalls are unspeakable…our modern fishwives will not part with a scale or fin until it begins to stink”). Mercier notes, however, the putrid aromas emerging from the fish stalls did little to dampen the French appetite for seafood: “There is no one in the world like the Parisian for eating what revolts the sense of smell.” Vallayer-Coster’s familiarity with these purveyors is indicated by the Salon livret of 1783, which indicates that she painted a small oval *Marchande de marée*, now lost.

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84 In the words of the authors of *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (1941), “There are more references to stinking mackerel in English literature than to any other fish!” “Pilchard and Mackerel Fisheries,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, eds. Sir John Harold Clapham, Eileen Edna Power (Cambridge University Press Archive, 1941), 166–168.
87 Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, 58.
88 Salon Livret 1783 no. 80, along with a “Marchande de fleurs.”
Indeed, beyond its smell, the fish market was also specifically associated with the *poissarde* (‘fishwife’)—or, more specifically, the sound of her.\(^8^9\) Also referred to as *harengères*, the *poissardes* of *Les Halles* were renowned for the volume and vulgarity of their street cries. In the words of the popular *Fishwife Song (Chanson Poissarde)* of 1789, “There are more words in their lungs than in the *Encyclopédie*.”\(^9^0\) The fishwife would also assume a specific political agency in the final decade of the *ancien régime*. In 1787, the very year that Vallayer-Coster painted *Still Life of Mackerel and Lemons*, the absence of *poissardes* from Queen Marie Antoinette’s annual Saint Day festivities was widely noted and interpreted as a sign of dissatisfaction with the monarchy. This apparent act of defiance seems to foreshadow the notorious march of the market women towards Versailles two years later, on October 5, 1789.\(^9^1\) As Carla Hesse describes in *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, the character and voice of the Parisian fishwife soon “became a sign of popular legitimacy for the newly emergent political classes of the revolutionary period.”\(^9^2\)

In the late 1780s, however, Vallayer-Coster’s political sympathies likely lay elsewhere—undoubtedly because she still relied on the patronage of the monarchy and aristocracy. In the absence of any written or anecdotal evidence of the artist’s political inclinations, however, a pair of lobster paintings offer significant clues: one was painted

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\(^{8^9}\) Musicologist Mylène Pardoen of Université Lumière Lyon-II has recently produced a reconstruction of urban noise in eighteenth-century Paris, featuring “cackling of birds in the poultry market, the hum of flies drawn to the fishmongers’ stalls, the sound of the loom at the woollen mill that used to stand at one end of the Pont au Change, that of the scrapers in the tanneries on Rue de la Pelleterie, of typesetting at the print shop on Rue de Gesvres… all overlaid with the incessant cries of the seagulls that came to feed on the city’s heaps of waste”—as well as a din of human voices. Mylène Pardoen, “Visite de Paris au XVIIIe siècle,” Université Lumière Lyon-II, 2014. <https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/sound-18th-century-paris>

\(^{9^0}\) In the words of the popular *Chanson Poissarde* of 1789, “There are more words in their lungs than in the Encyclopedia.” Cited in Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

\(^{9^1}\) This march was illustrated in an anonymous engraving, “*Le départ: Du pain et le roi* (The Departure: Bread and the King).” 1789. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, cabinet des estampes, Paris.

\(^{9^2}\) Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, 19-20.
in 1781 (Toledo Museum of Art, Fig. 3.22)\textsuperscript{93} and the other in 1817 (Louvre, Fig. 3.23).\textsuperscript{94} Though separated by several decades and a radical succession of regimes, these two paintings are linked by their nearly identical lobsters, which stand for the luxurious consumption (both visual and culinary)—whether in the private collection of a wealthy banker at the height of the ancien régime or that of the restored Bourbon King in the nineteenth-century.

These lobsters are among the most evocatively textured passages in any of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings. Spongy fields of various reds describe the mottled surface of the main shells; looser dabs of red and pink color the serrated claws, crusted with spherical white barnacles. In both works, Vallayer-Coster evokes the craggy texture of the lobster shells using a specific technique: grinding chunks of lead, stone, or shell into her red paints.\textsuperscript{95} While our knowledge of this practice is incomplete, it seems that certain Dutch artists employed this same technique in the seventeenth century: see, for example, the gritty claw in painting by Pieter de Ring (1615–1660), an apprentice of de Heem (Fig. 3.24).\textsuperscript{96}

In choosing to paint a lobster, Vallayer-Coster likely sought to appeal to collectors of seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes. However, her representation may be distinguished from Dutch pronkstilleven (elaborate still lifes) in terms of the scale and complexity of composition. For example, Adriaen van Utrecht’s sumptuous Banquet Still Life of 1644, characterized primarily by opulent disorder and excess (and populated by a

\textsuperscript{93} Salon of 1783; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970 no. 226; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 207, no. 65, plate 33.

\textsuperscript{94} Salon of 1817, no. 747; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 228, fig. 8-9; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 213, no. 99, pl. 45.

\textsuperscript{95} This texture is also evident in her 1769 painting of shells and coral; see the chapter on shells for a discussion of that conservation report.

\textsuperscript{96} Arie Wallert, ed, Still Lifes: Techniques and Styles: An Examination of Paintings from the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum; Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1999), 66-68.
parrot, monkey, and a frilly white lap dog), is six feet high and nearly eight feet wide (Fig. 3.25). Vallayer-Coster’s smaller treatments of the Lobster appear much more modest, and far less gluttonous, in contrast.

The differences between these seventeenth-century Dutch and eighteenth-century French treatments of the lobster may be due to the relative accessibility of this ingredient within these two contexts. According to Duhamel du Monceau's *Traité général des pesches, et histoires des poissons...* (1769-77), commercial lobster fisheries operating on the rocky coast of Normandy filled the Parisian demand for crustacean meat; yet shellfish were far less plentiful along the sandy Dutch coast. Because they had to be imported, lobsters were much more rare in Dutch fish markets.97

Though not as rare of a delicacy in eighteenth-century French cuisine, the shellfish was nonetheless prized for its aphrodisiac qualities. As Nicholas Venette (1633–1698) stated in *Tableau de l’amour Conjugal*, “those who live almost entirely upon fish and shellfish...are more ardent in love than all others.” Brillat–Savarin, writing almost a century later in *Physiologie du goût*, agreed that seafood generally “acts strongly on the genesiac sense and awakes in both sexes the instincts of reproduction.”98 This reputation may be attributed to the passionate gestures required to strip the lobster of its shell and devour the meat inside, or perhaps, the peculiarities of its salty, alien smell and blood red appearance; as Mandy Apfel recently observed, “The precarious balance between arousal and disgust is sexual in its very nature.”99

97 Barnes and Rose, 140.
The insectile lobster seems to exemplify the erotic tension between revulsion and desire, but also the tension between life and death. Vallayer-Coster’s representations of demonstrably dead lobsters (the bold red color an indication of having been boiled) possess an uncanny, animate quality.100 In both the 1781 and 1817 works, the lobsters’ pleated abdomens are tentatively arched; their stringy antennae and sharp pincers seem to reach beyond the stony ledge toward the viewer, a visual device borrowed from earlier Dutch works. Creepy when alive and crawling, a lobster could also be a rather fearsome sight, whether real or represented; the Princesse de Lamballe, a favorite of Marie Antoinette, was said to have once fainted at the sight of a particularly unsettling painting of a lobster.101 (Jeff Koons would also exploit the quirky belligerence of a boiled crustacean with his installation of an aluminum lobster sculpture, dangling from the ceiling of the Salon de Mars at Versailles in 2008; Fig. 3.26).102

Yet tentacles and barnacles did not diminish Parisian appetite for lobster meat, or for paintings of them. In Vallayer-Coster’s 1781 Still Life with Lobster, the lobster is pictured alongside a number of savory accompaniments—from right to left, two crusty bâtards (small baguettes), a basket of pale green grapes, a glass jar of olives, cruet of oil and vinegar, and a dish of salt. Here, as with the silver verrière in the 1787 Mackerel painting, the surface of the unlidded silver tureen produces an almost hallucinatory reflection of an unseen room with a four-paned window—and the hint of a figure, perhaps the body of the artist, dressed in orange.103

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101 Blanche C. Hardy, Princess Lamballe: A Biography (London: A. Constable Ltd. 1908), 75.  
103 In the tradition of Vermeer, seventeenth-century Dutch still life artist Clara Peeters also frequently included her own radically cropped or distorted image in the reflective surfaces she depicted; see Amanda
This work found a buyer in Jean Girardot de Marigny (1733–1796), a partner in the banking firm Girardot & Cie. Girardot de Marigny acquired the Lobster painting soon after its completion, but quickly loaned it to two public exhibitions: Pahin de la Blancherie’s Salon de la Correspondance, in December 1782 and January 1783. Later that year, in July, Girardot de Marigny would lend his Lobster again to Pahin de la Blancherie, for a large-scale survey of French painting from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. It may have been in the household of Girardot de Marigny that the stretcher of this canvas was inscribed: “Second floor dining room (2e étage sale a Manger),” indicating that the work and its pendant, Still Life with Game, were at some point installed in a room dedicated to culinary consumption.

Vallayer-Coster produced a second lobster painting in 1817, a year before her death. In the nearly forty years that transpired between the production of the first and the second lobster paintings, the French Revolution had dismantled the monarchy and given rise to Napoleon’s empire. In the wake of the emperor’s exile in 1814, King Louis XVIII (younger brother of Louis XVI) restored the Bourbon Dynasty, taking up residence in the Tuileries Palace. Amid those early years of political instability, the crown struggled to articulate a ‘new’ visual identity, while contending with its own troubled history. As

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104 Girardot de Marigny’s collecting practices are described at length in Bailey’s Patriotic Taste: Collecting Modern Art in Pre-Revolutionary Paris.
106 Pahin de la Blancherie, Essai d’un tableau historique des peintres de l’école francaise depuis Jean Cousin en 1550 jusqu’en 1783 inclusivement, Paris: Bureau de la Correspondance, 1783. See Bailey, Patriotic Taste, 160, 288, n. 155, 158, pl. 142 and 141, pl. 159. The work would enter the collection of Napoleon III’s finance minister, Achille Fould, in the late nineteenth century, before it was acquired by the Toledo Museum of Art in the twentieth.
Kimberly A. Jones and others have shown, however, this provided opportunities for artists to contribute to the iconography of the Restoration.\textsuperscript{107}

Then seventy-three years old, Vallayer-Coster presented her new \textit{Still Life with Lobster} at the Salon of 1817. Given the artist’s relative lack of productivity in the decade prior, the ambitious scale \((45\,3/4\times 70\,1/8\text{ in.})\) of this work is particularly remarkable. Here, the lobster is once more the protagonist, and surrounded by a familiar supporting cast: buckets of pears and grapes, a pair of bâtards, a pyramid of peaches, a glass jar of olives, a ham mid-slice, a fistful of turnips, and a multi-pailed bucket containing glass wine bottles, are all set on a slightly rumpled white tablecloth. New additions, however, amplify the composition: a fowl strung from by its foot, and a large, pale blue porcelain vase with gold mounts, a hallmark of ancien régime luxury, towers above the raw and prepared foods. Perhaps the most symbolic addition, however, leans to the right of the composition: a small bouquet of white lilies, a naturalistic nod to the Bourbon \textit{fleur de lis}.

The work, often read as an expression of loyalist support for the newly restored king, was acquired by Louis XVIII before it was absorbed into the collection of the Louvre.\textsuperscript{108}

Though the monarchy had been restored, the Parisian food culture of the \textit{ancien régime} was long gone. Indeed, since the last time the artist publically exhibited a lobster in 1781, much had changed about the ways Parisians ate. A new generation of gastronomic literature had democratized access to \textit{haute cuisine}, and the proliferation of cafés and taverns had thrust the formerly private acts of eating and drinking into the


public sphere. Yet these profound shifts in food culture hardly register in the artist’s last canvas. We might think of this work, then, as a Proustian act of memory: a recombination of the artist’s favorite ingredients (that is, subjects from the height of her career in the 1770s and 80s), assembled for one final feast.¹¹⁰


IV. The Hunt

Vallayer-Coster painted just a few representations of the hunt throughout her career. These works have garnered little attention, perhaps because they constitute a rather small subsection of her work and they seem to adhere plainly to the hunting trophy formula established by Desportes and Oudry: hunting dog, unmanned gun, and thick piles of dead game, situated in landscape settings.¹ Vallayer-Coster certainly inherited the tradition of the hunting trophy; yet unlike her male predecessors, Vallayer-Coster was forced to imagine the hunt’s pleasures from a distance, through a close examination of its material attributes.²

In this chapter, I argue that Vallayer-Coster’s representations of the hunt are rife with contradictions. The artist emphasizes the sensual textures of the dead animal bodies, as well as the weapons used to slaughter them, which suggests a conflicted attitude towards the subject. This sense of ambivalence ultimately serves to undermine the patriarchal violence and power associated with the hunt—the same power that is unequivocally celebrated in similar paintings by Desportes and Oudry.

The visual tradition of the hunt has been well articulated at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, situated in a seventeenth-century hôtel particulier in the Marais in

¹ Vallayer-Coster may have been familiar with Oudry’s son, Jacques Charles (1722/1723-1778), who was admitted to the Academy in 1748 and continued to work in the genre of his father well into the 1770s. Jean Cailleux, “M. Oudry le Fils ou Les Avatars de la Paternité,” The Burlington Magazine 124, No. 952 (July 1982): i-vi

Paris. The twentieth-century museum probes the relationship between animals and humans through innovative displays that combine weapons, taxidermied trophies, and contemporary art installations (Fig. 4.1 and Fig. 4.2). The Musée de la Chasse collection is also rich with early modern representations of the hunt—notably, paintings by Desportes and Oudry. These eighteenth-century animaliers specialized in cynegetic representation and are often credited with establishing the genre in France.

Desportes was trained in the Flemish still life tradition by painter Nicasius Bernaerts (1620–1678), himself a protégée of the Dutch master Frans Snyders. After a brief period working abroad, Desportes was fully admitted to the Academy as a peintre d’animaux with his reception piece, Self-portrait as a Hunter in 1699 (Fig. 4.3). The portrait was installed in the assembly room of the Academy at the Louvre, and came to serve as a prototype for this subgenre of male portraiture, soon emulated by Oudry, Sancerre, Nattier, and others. As Hannah Williams has shown, however, the Academy considered Desportes’s self-portrait to be a “still life” and he was admitted to the institution as a specialist of the category of animal painter. Later, the artist would paint dozens of hunting trophies, as well as ‘portraits’ of Louis XIV’s beloved hunting dogs. Despite the apparent rigidity of the hierarchy of genres at the turn of the eighteenth-century, Desportes’s self-portrait offers evidence of the hybridity, or perhaps the

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3 The Hôtel de Guénégaud was designed by François Mansart for Jean-François de Guénégaud des Brosses, the secretary of state under Louis XIV. The private residence was converted into a museum in 1967. “The History of the Museum,” http://www.chassenature.org/histoire-du-musee/?lang=en.


6 Williams, Académie Royale, 83
porousness, of the genre of the hunt, which often required proficiency in rendering the human likeness, a natural landscape, animals dead and alive, as well as the textures of other objects associated with still life painting.

Unlike his predecessor, Oudry was admitted to the Academy as a history painter; he had been trained by Largillière, a successful portraitist and professor at the Academy. Oudry soon followed in Desportes’s footsteps, however, becoming best known for his representations of the hunt, including large-scale still lifes and noble *chasseur* portraits, such as the National Gallery’s *Henri Camille de Beringhen* of 1722 (Fig. 4.4). It was likely through the Marquis de Beringhen, who had inherited the title of *Écuyer de la petite écurie du Roi* (Master of the King's Private Stables), that Oudry earned the favor of Louis XV and his first major royal commission: the multi-figural *Louis XV Hunting Deer in the Forest of Saint-Germain*, a decorative canvas of epic proportions intended for the château de Marly. As the Director of the Beauvais Tapestry works, beginning in 1734, Oudry would later translate his most ambitious painting series, a narrative cycle following the *Chasses Royales*, into tapestry cartoons.

As the career highlights of these two artists suggest, the hunt was largely a royal pursuit, and a fairly regular one at that. Louis XV hunted three times per week on average; under Louis XVI’s reign, the ritual took place almost daily. (The last king of the *ancien régime* famously marked his diary with the profits of that day’s hunt; July 14,

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1789, was simply marked “rien [nothing].” Yet the chasse royale (royal hunt) was more than just a monarchical form of recreation; it was a symbolic expression and consolidation of masculine, absolutist power over people, animals, and land. Indeed, French law asserted hunting as the exclusive privilege of the nobility. As landscape historian David L. Hays has written, “The privilege of hunting was the cornerstone in the legislated construction of nobility in France. From 1396 until the Revolution, commoners in France were legally forbidden to hunt game animals, even on their own land.”

Nevertheless, the petite chasse was also widely and illicitly practiced, as is suggested by the title of Antoine Trémolieres de St. Saturnin 1724 text, L’art de la chasse, pour le divertissement de la noblesse, et de tous ceux qui aiment cet exercice (The Art of the Hunt, for the amusement of the nobility, and all those who enjoy this exercise).

Several historians have explored the political and cultural dimensions of the hunt; Philippe Salvadori’s study, La chasse sous l'Ancien Régime (1997), is among the most definitive. Art historians have also recently begun to consider the implications of representing the hunt in eighteenth-century French art. Catherine Girard’s 2014 dissertation, “Rococo Massacres: Hunting in Eighteenth-Century French Painting,” focuses on the tensions between the style (Rococo) and subject matter (the hunt) in paintings produced by Oudry, Boucher and De Troy between 1730 and 1750. As Girard

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10 Louis XVI maintained a diary throughout his reign until his imprisonment in 1792. This particular entry has been interpreted as a sign of Louis XVI’s ignorance of the storming of the Bastille, although this is probably false. See Journal de chasse de Louis XVI, 1769-1791, Archives nationales, Paris, AE/I/4/3.


writes, “These painted drops of blood, hanging tongues, dislocated bodies, and tortured carcasses complicate the lack of seriousness and alleged playfulness of the discursively and ideologically determined category of the Rococo.”

Amy Freund has also begun to explore the formation of masculine identities in eighteenth-century hunting portraits. For Freund, still life representations of the accessories of the hunt (dog, game, powder, gun) were designed to gratify the patron—ideally, a man who partook, or aspired to partake, in the sport. Yet Freund argues that these paintings also served as a form of catharsis; she writes that they “allowed viewers to fantasize about a visceral kind of violence and an intense form of fraternity that was denied them by the decorum of court life and the class and gender hierarchies of eighteenth-century French society.”

Freund’s interpretation requires that the viewer identify with the (unrepresented, but presumably male) hunter; she explains, “We the viewers take the position of that man, surveying what we have killed, and what still remains to be killed.” The presumed complicity of the hunter, artist, and viewer is perhaps best illustrated by Desportes’s reception piece, *Self-Portrait as a Hunter* (Fig. 4.3). The artist describes himself as the protagonist of the hunt, asserting his dominance over his slain subjects: we can imagine that the artist himself hunted and killed the very animals that he depicts laying in a heap beside him. He thus offers his viewers (and potential patrons) a kind of vicarious pleasure, allowing them to imagine themselves in a position of masculine dominance.

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16 Freund, “Good Dog!” 72
17 Ibid.
over nature. Indeed, Desportes and Oudry frequently attended the *Chasse Royale*, sketchbooks in hand—thereby gaining access to the greatest *chasseur* and patron of all, the king.\textsuperscript{18} Desportes and Oudry were both capable of allying themselves with the “hunter-patron” and producing images that recalled his trials and successes in the woods.

What, then, do we make of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of the hunt? How does her work complicate Freund’s argument? If Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of the stuff of the kitchen were unproblematic by virtue of her sex (as suggested by Norman Bryson), can the same be said for her representations of the hunt?\textsuperscript{19} As the daughter of a goldsmith, who lived her entire life in Paris, the likelihood remains that she never participated in this primarily masculine and aristocratic form of recreation.

What did it mean, after all, for a woman to paint a gun in the eighteenth-century—much less to wield one? If representations of the hunt served as a form of vicarious pleasure for aristocratic men, what was the appeal for a female artist or viewer? Even if Vallayer-Coster never attended or participated in a *chasse royale*, there is evidence that elite women in the eighteenth-century did. It is with this social history that I begin, in order to better understand the implications of a woman on the hunt.

*La femme à la chasse*

In 1737, Carle van Loo (1705–1765) produced a large-scale *repas de chasse* (hunt meal) to adorn Louis XV’s dining room at the château de Fontainebleau, one of the

\textsuperscript{18} “The king would later select elements of these sketches that Desportes would work up into finished paintings, often combining the representation of dead game with spectacular buffets and pieces of silver service.” National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Digital Catalogue, https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.157526.html

\textsuperscript{19} Bryson, “Still Life and ‘Feminine’ Space,” 161-162.
king’s favorite hunting retreats (Fig. 4.5).\(^{20}\) Van Loo’s *repas de chasse* depicts the halt of a hunting party, pausing for a picnic in a forest clearing. The intimate party, comprised of three women and eight men, is uniformly outfitted with brightly colored *redingotes* (a “Frenglish” approximation of “riding coat,” referring to an anglophilic fashion) embroidered with gold.\(^{21}\) The group is perched around a humble white sheet of fabric, laden with bottles of wine, loaves of bread, and a cured ham, studded with bay leaves.\(^{22}\) Whether feasting or flirting, the party seems little concerned with the apparatus of the hunt; to the left, a rifle lies idly in the foreground; to the right, a servant tends to the heavily festooned horse, while in the foreground, a hunting dog tends to his nether regions. Now at the Louvre, this composition found an ‘afterlife’ in several media: an autograph sketch of the painting belongs to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the composition was engraved and circulated throughout the eighteenth century.

If not a precise documentation of the king and his entourage, Van Loo’s party nonetheless indicates the complexity of the hunting *équipage* associated with the *chasse royale*, which included horses, dogs, servants, and huntsmen. This scene also highlights the social aspects of the *chasse royale*, as well as the apparently welcome presence of women, particularly during a halt. It was common for female members of the court to follow the course of the hunt on horseback or in a carriage, if not to directly participate in it. Three women close to Louis XV frequently attended the *chasse royale*: his mistress,


\(^{22}\) For more on the combination of wine, ham, and bay leaves, particularly in Vallayer-Coster’s work, see the previous chapter.
Jeanne-Antoinette de Pompadour (1721–1764), his oldest daughter, Louise Élisabeth de France (1727–1759), and his grandson’s bride, Marie Antoinette.\(^{23}\)

Pompadour’s meteoric rise from a tax farmer’s wife to the king’s favorite may be partially attributed to the Louis XV’s enthusiasm for the hunt. It was apparently during a 1744 expedition in the Sénart forest, near her château at Étioles, that Louis XV first took notice of the newly married Jeanne-Antoinette riding alone in an elaborate barouche (a four-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage)—a spectacle evidently designed to draw the attention of the royal hunting party. It was not until a masked ball at Versailles in the winter of 1745, however, that the king, dressed as a Yew tree, and Jeanne-Antoinette, dressed quite deliberately as a wood nymph, first exchanged words.\(^{24}\)

Other anecdotes suggest that maîtresse-en-titre continued to use the king’s predilection for hunting to her advantage. Voltaire reports, for example, that during an intimate dinner party with the King at the Grand Trianon, the duc de La Vallière (captain of the royal hunt) posed the question of how gunpowder was made. Pompadour coquettishly replied that she was equally ignorant of the composition of her cosmetic powders, and suggested that the party consult her (then forbidden) copy of the Encyclopédie to discover the answers—a subtle, and ultimately successful, ploy to combat the crown’s censorship of what has become the defining text of the French Enlightenment.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{23}\) Freund “Good Dog!” 79 note 10.


Of course, Voltaire’s anecdote tells us more about Pompadour’s perceived influence over the king than her specific interest in gunpowder; she seems to have much preferred the powders of her toilette and the company of artists and *philosophes*. Nonetheless, for the duration of her affair with the king, the marquise continued to make her presence felt on the hunt through a series of strategic commissions; for example, at Fontainebleau she had installed a portrait of herself in the guise of Diana, the Greek goddess of the Hunt, by Jean-Marc Nattier (1685–1766) (*Fig. 4.6*). Nattier, among Pompadour’s preferred portraitists, employed the same mythological theme for nearly a dozen other *portraits déguisés*—for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Madame de Maison-Rouge as Diana* (*Fig. 4.7*). The portraits of Mesdames Pompadour and Maison-Rouge recall Diderot’s criticism of Nattier’s formulaic practice: “All his portraits look alike; one thinks one is always seeing the same face.” Both subjects appear with cheeks rouged and hair tightly curled (a fashionable mid-century hairstyle called *tête de mouton*), wearing titillating costumes of sheer white chemises and tiger furs draped loosely around their shoulders; gold quivers and bows and the forest settings further enhance their guises.

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26 As Melissa Hyde has argued, however, her knowledge and use of cosmetic powers was rather profound. “The ‘Makeup’ of the Marquise: Boucher’s Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette.” *The Art Bulletin* 82 (3) 2000: 453-475.
28 Xavier Salmon. *Jean-Marc Nattier, 1685–1766* (Paris: Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. Paris, 1999), 99-100, 184, 266–70, no. 76, ill. We might attribute the more widespread popularity of the allegorical guise of Diana to the goddess’s ostensible virginity, or perhaps the appeal of the cyngetic theme to potential male admirers.
The material attributes of Diana, fictive props likely belonging to Nattier’s studio, situate Madames Pompadour and Maison-Rouse within the broader genre of the hunt; yet it is difficult to imagine them engaged in the bloody and sweaty enterprise of chasing and killing an animal. Their flimsy garb, delicate grips on their symbolic weapons, and the absence of game seem to preclude these huntresses from participating in anything resembling the contemporary, mortal sport.30 Indeed, Nattier’s ‘Diana’ portraits share more in common with Boucher’s erotic fantasies of the goddess of the hunt (Fig. 4.8) than they do with contemporary male portraits.31 Consider Kathleen Nicholson’s argument in “Beguiling Deception: Allegorical Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century France”: “While such dressing up and idealizing for a portrait may not have differentiated women from each other all that much… ascending to the realm of goddesses was still one way to assert their difference from men, and from men’s prominence in the real world.”32

The fantastical nature of these Diana portraits is particularly evident when they are contrasted with Nattier’s more rugged portraits of men on the hunt. One of his chasseurs, sporting simple knee-high boots and a deep blue justaucorps, possesses a particularly cool swagger (Fig. 4.9). Like Desportes’s self-portrait and Oudry’s Chevalier de Beringhen, Nattier’s subject is surrounded by hunting tools: a royal blue and gold trimmed saddle, a hunting knife, a pulvérin (which referred to both the powder horn and its explosive contents), and a hunting dog, perched on a coarse sack stuffed with dead

30 Nicolas de Largillière (French, 1656–1746) painted one (now anonymous) portrait of a woman as Diana, in which the subject grips the legs of a fallen pheasant; yet this image seems to be exceptional, even within Largillière’s practice. Christie’s, Old Master & 19th Century Paintings, Drawings & Watercolours Evening Sale No. 7782, London, Tuesday, December 08, 2009, Lot 31.
31 Nattier did occasionally depict men in mythological guises; see, for example, his portraits of Michel-Ferdinand d’Albert d’Ailly, duc de Chaunel, as Hercules (1746, Louvre), or an anonymous man in the rather amusing guise of Bacchus (The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida).
game. The butt of this hunter’s fusil de chasse (hunting rifle) rests on his upper thigh, and the gun’s long barrel projects towards the upper right corner of the canvas. The hunter grips the handle of the cocked gun with confidence and ease, as though it was an extension of his own body; his finger rests assuredly on the trigger, poised to pull.

In her essay “Men and Hunting Guns in Eighteenth-Century France,” Freund uses Trémolières de St. Saturnin’s L’art de la chasse to understand the relationship between hunters and their weapons in mid-century portraits. She suggests that de St. Saturnin’s descriptions of his guns are “couched in bodily terms. The gun is made to a man’s measure and functions as an extension of his person. Because of its identification with the man who owns it, the gun is naturalized as an integral part of the elite male body.”

Given this phallic understanding of the weapon, it is perhaps unsurprising that eighteenth-century women are almost never depicted wielding a gun.

There do exist a handful of paintings of royal women dressed in contemporary costumes de chasse; yet even in these exceptional images, the tools and trophies of the hunt, which endowed Nattier’s chasseur with such potency, are almost entirely absent. Nattier produced one such portrait of Louis XV’s oldest daughter, Louise Élisabeth de France in 1759 (Fig. 4.10). Unlike Madame Pompadour, whose amorous agenda drove her to dabble in the sport, it was filial devotion that led Louise Élisabeth to attend the hunt. Madame Infante (as she was known after her marriage to Philip, Duke of Parma in 1739) accompanied her father on hunts during three return trips to Versailles. It was during her third visit to France, from 1757 to 1759, that she sat for this portrait by

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Nattier; she would succumb to smallpox before he finished the painting in 1760.\textsuperscript{35}

Whatever her actual participation in the \textit{chasse royale}, the princess certainly looks the part of an eighteenth-century huntress in Nattier’s portrait. She wears a rich blue \textit{redingote} thickly embroidered with gold, a black \textit{tricorne} hat lined with white fur, and pair of white silk gloves—a luxurious getup, but far more practical for a hunt than Madame de Pompadour’s gauzy chemise and tiger fur. With the exception of the brass horn in the lower left, however, Louise Élisabeth’s portrait does not refer to any actual hunting equipment.

Queen Marie Antoinette’s fondness for the hunt has been much better documented; like Louise Élisabeth, however, she was never represented with weapons or game. Louis-Auguste Brun de Versoix (1758–1815) twice painted the queen as an \textit{equestrienne} (in one version, wearing trousers to facilitate a traditionally masculine stride), yet in both of those paintings, the queen bears only a riding whip.\textsuperscript{36} In a related gray wash drawing, Brun de Versoix pictures Marie Antoinette urging a small hunting entourage forward in pursuit of their prey with a magisterial pointed finger (\textbf{Fig. 4.11}).\textsuperscript{37} Despite this authoritative gesture, the queen is isolated from the momentum of the chase, and its impending, violent climax.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{35} Nattier, \textit{Madame Infante en habit de chasse} in Jean-Marc Nattier, no. 85.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Published in Joseph Raymond Fournier-Sarlovèze, \textit{Louis-Auguste Brun, Peintre de Marie-Antoinette, 1758-1815} (Paris: Goupil & Cie., 1911), n.p.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Although guns are absent from these portraits of Marie Antoinette, there is evidence that the queen bought and used them herself. The queen gifted a set of twelve *fusils de chasse à silex* (flintlock guns), complete with a velvet-lined case filled with tools to clean and maintain the weapons, to her mother, Empress Maria Theresa of Austria; one pair from that set now belongs to the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature (Fig. 4.12). Another flintlock fowling gun owned by Marie Antoinette was likely a gift from her husband; Pierre de Saintes, who had been appointed the official gun maker to Louis XV in 1763, inlaid the weapon with gold and silver. Finally, a manuscript in the Archives nationales, *État des chasses de l’équipage de la reine et de Monseigneur comte d’Artois pour le sanglier*, tells us that the queen, along with her brother-in-law, the comte d’Artois (1757–1836), purchased and maintained the duc d’Orléans’s entire hunting équipage between 1784 and 1786.38

Even if their portraits depict them as impotent spectators on the hunt, these eighteenth-century female monarchs possessed the power to buy and use guns. Non-royal women, we must speculate, did not have the same privilege. In *Historique de la Manufacture d’Armes de Guerre de Saint-Étienne* (1900), Raymond Dubessy estimated that a basic flintlock cost as little as seven *livres*, making firearms accessible to a wide range of customers; yet the vast majority of gun owners were likely men.39 Louis-Sébastien Mercier notes one important caveat in *Le tableau de Paris* (1781): as was true in many family workshops in the *ancien régime*, the wives of gun makers were often

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responsible for sales. This required them to become familiar with their products, if not to operate them recreationally.\textsuperscript{40}

According to one eighteenth-century author, the primary deterrent to female gun ownership was the feminine sensitivity to the gun’s explosive sound and ricochet—that is, the sensory experience of shooting a gun. In Mémoires sur l’Ancienne Chevalerie (1781), Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye wrote: “There are only a very small number [of women] to be found among them who dare to familiarize themselves with the noise of firearms and the idea of the dangers to which their usage sometimes exposes [the user].”\textsuperscript{41} Indeed, the eighteenth-century flintlock was, as Freund writes, “heavy in the hand, unwieldy to load, hard to aim, and prone to deadly malfunction.”\textsuperscript{42}

For others, a woman’s gentle nature and aversion to violence made her ill suited for wielding a firearm. After all, it was through hunting and warfare that boys became men. In Rousseau’s Emile, Or On Education (1762), the narrator-tutor argues that hunting would purge a young man of “the dangerous inclinations born of softness”—the feminine influences of childhood. He continues, “The hunt hardens the heart as well as the body. It accustoms one to blood, to cruelty.”\textsuperscript{43} In an earlier text, Discourse on Inequality (1755), Rousseau had identified early man’s proclivity for hunting, in contrast with his female counterpart’s sedentary nature, as the anthropological origin of the

\textsuperscript{42} Freund, “Men and Hunting Guns,” 20.
differences (indeed, the inequality) between the sexes.\textsuperscript{44} This sentiment persisted into the Revolutionary era, when the procurator-general of the Commune, Pierre Gaspard Chaumette, declared: “[Nature] has said to man: ‘Be a man: hunting, farming, political concerns, toils of every kind, that is your appanage.’”\textsuperscript{45}

If hunting was central to the formation (or “hardening”) of the male ego, and the gun was a phallic symbol of this emotional and physical transformation, the armed huntress was truly exceptional, even paradoxical. Mary Zeiss Stange writes in \textit{Woman the Hunter}. “To the extent that hunting has served both patriarchy and feminism as a root metaphor for men’s activity in the world, Woman the Hunter is a necessarily disruptive figure.”\textsuperscript{46} Consider, for example, the utter strangeness of a portrait by Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), known to us through a 1727 engraving by Benoît Audran II (1698–1772) (Fig. 4.13). The engraving depicts the female subject seated in a landscape, accompanied by two hunting dogs. With one hand, she pets her furry, faithful companion; with other, she fingers the feathered wing of a dead partridge dangling from a tree branch. A still life arrangement at the huntress’s feet (a hunting purse, a \textit{pulvérin}, and a single-barrel \textit{fusil de chasse}) offers evidence of her active role in hunt—and aligns her with the hunters of Desportes, Oudry, and Nattier. The woman’s full-skirted dress and feathered \textit{tricorn}e hat are the only material markers of her femininity.

The Goncourt brothers identified the subject of the lost portrait as the ‘\textit{chasseuse}’ Madame de Vermanton, a niece of the \textit{amateur} Jean de Jullienne (1686–1766). Guillaume Glorieux has advocated an alternative: the oldest daughter of Pierre

\textsuperscript{44} Jean-Jacques Rousseau, \textit{A Discourse on Inequality} [1754] (New York: Open Road Media, 2016), n.p.
\textsuperscript{46} Mary Zeiss Stange, \textit{Woman the Hunter} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 2.
Sirois (1665–1726), an art dealer and major patron of Watteau, who facilitated the publication of several prints after Watteau’s paintings. In either case, the original painting represents a truly remarkable image of a non-royal woman’s active participation in the hunt. Yet the historical identity of the portrait subject becomes less significant given the form in which the huntress’s image was circulated in the eighteenth century: as a black and white print, bearing the vague title of Retour de chasse. Engraved, colorless and anonymous, the woman’s transgressive potential is mitigated. She has become a vague specter of female violence and aggression; her close contact with, and manifest lethal use of, the gun becomes less problematic as a result.

Vallayer-Coster began to paint hunting still lifes nearly four decades after the publication of Audran’s print. She primarily pictured the humble material culture of the petite chasse—the individual pursuit of small game by a “thrifty rural resident, be he Bourgeois or simple Gentleman” (in Trémolières de St. Saturnin’s words). In Emile, Or On Education, Rousseau’s narrator recalls his father’s love of the petite chasse, and contrasts it with the artificial ceremony of the chasse royale. Rousseau specifically names the objects associated with the petite chasse—the very objects that populate Vallayer-Coster’s paintings:

I remember the heartthrobs that my father experienced at the flight of the first partridge, and the transports of joy with which he found the hare he had sought all day. Yes, I maintain that my father, alone with his dog and burdened with his rifle, his game bag, his kit, and his little prey, returned in the evening—exhausted and ripped by brambles—more satisfied by his day than all your ladies’ men [chasseurs de ruelle] passing as hunters who, riding a good horse and followed by

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48 The print was announced in the Mercure de France (December 1727): 2677.
49 Freund, “Men and Hunting Guns,” 19

Here, Rousseau implies that the individual pursuit of game was more ‘masculine’ than the \textit{chasse royale}, which was populated by “ladies’ men passing as hunters.” In this phrase, we can infer a double meaning. Rousseau refers to the men of the court who, more interested in \textit{repas de chasse} flirtations than the \textit{chasse} itself, simply dressed the part of the hunter. On the other hand, we are prompted to recall the various royal women who attended the hunt on horseback sporting the eighteenth-century equivalents of menswear, who might ‘pass’ as huntresses, but whose actual contributions to the hunt were negligible. In both the \textit{chasse royale} and the \textit{petite chasse}, however, material accessories were essential to both the formation of the hunter and his pleasure in the woods.

Vallayer-Coster likely never knew the pleasures of the \textit{petite chasse} that Rousseau describes, yet she painted both guns and game. How, then, can we describe the artist’s relationship to these objects? I suggest we approach this question by examining descriptions of guns by Vallayer-Coster’s female contemporaries. In her essay “Charlotte Charke’s Gun: Queering Material Culture and Gender Performance,” literary theorist Jade Higa analyzes the autobiography of Charlotte Charke (1713–1760), a cross-dressing British actress. Charke writes about her beloved childhood gun, and the adolescent trauma of her mother, appalled by her daughter’s “ungentlewoman[ly]” delight in the weapon, disarming her. In remembering and describing her gun, however, Charke recovers the pleasures it once provided her. As Higa argues,
“Charke’s transient relationship to things enables her to navigate the circumference of her body. Rather than settle on the side of a binary, she moves beyond gender binaries. For Charke, material culture is a means through which she can both access and express gender fluidity.”

Without making any claims for the artist’s gender identity, I wish to use Charke’s writing about her gun as a way of understanding Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of them. Engaging with the traditionally “masculine” material culture of the hunt, Vallayer-Coster disrupted the traditional binary gendering of these objects. Staging and painting them, she exceeded the culturally determined boundaries of her own body. Unlike Desportes, who painted himself in the guise of a hunter in order to explicitly align himself with the pleasures of the sport, Vallayer-Coster describes the very textures of that gender-transcendent fantasy: the glory and pleasure of being alone in the woods, wielding a gun and conquering prey.

As I will argue, however, her exploration of that fantasy is rife with contradictions, which suggest a simultaneous reticence toward her subject. The psychological concept of ‘ambivalence’ is perhaps the most apt term to describe these paintings, generally defined by Iris Schneider et al. as a “conflict between opposing implicit or explicit evaluations” about an object. Importantly, these authors specify, ambivalence is “not the same as feeling neutral or indifferent,” but rather “is characterized by simultaneously having strong positive and negative associations…. The idea of conflict between evaluations implies that ambivalence is inherently dynamic and the resolution of the conflict is a process that evolves over time.”

We might think of Vallayer-Coster’s hunting trophies, produced over the course of the 1770s and 1780s, as

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visual evidence of this evolving dynamic, as the artist simultaneously celebrates and undermines the hunt through her representations of its material culture.

**Game**

In a handful of early works, Vallayer-Coster positioned dead game in a shadowy kitchen nooks, alongside sliced ham and radishes (Fig. 3.14 and Fig. 4.14).\(^53\) Indeed, it was probably in the context of the kitchen or dining table that Vallayer-Coster first encountered game. There, dead animals were often strung upside down in order to drain excess fluids, facilitating the preservation and tenderization of their meat. Though unskinned and unplucked, the furry hare and feathered partridge are nonetheless situated in the context of the consumable.

In several later works, however, the artist positions the bodies of hares and birds not in the kitchen, but closer to their source in nature, and accompanied by the tools of their slaughter (Figs. 4.15-4.17). Here, the same bodies are isolated from the cycle of distribution, preparation, and consumption that characterize other foodstuffs in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings, and are instead embedded in the recreational sphere of the hunt. Within this context, the ‘use value’ of the game is secondary to the personal victory that they represent: the hunter’s triumph over nature. This contextual shift is significant to understanding the desires of the hunter-patron. According to Freund,

Hunting is defined as an activity that, while valuable as a means of educating noblemen, is essentially disinterested, suitable for men who are not bound to the production and exchange of foodstuffs and goods. The hunter is instead a man

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\(^53\) Figure 4.14: *Still Life with Dead Hare*, 1769, Jeffrey Horvitz, Boston; Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, 197, no. 10, pl. 3.
who mind and body are bent on the acquisition of power, knowledge, and pleasure (emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{54}

The ideal hunter thus enjoyed the recreational pursuit and killing of game, but would have had no “interest” or role in the preparation of its meat or the use of fur.

Vallayer-Coster’s careful representations of game in landscapes were designed to appeal to recreational “disinterest” of the chasseur. Yet these paintings might also be described as the products of her own “interestedness”—that is, the artist’s interest in shape, line, color, shadow, light, texture, and materiality. Indeed, much has also been written of Chardin’s formal interest in the substance of small game (Fig. 4.18). Charles-Nicolas Cochin’s 1779 biography of the artist begins with an anecdote that has come to represent Chardin’s entire still life practice:

The first lessons Monsieur Chardin had derived from nature committed him to continue studying it assiduously. One of the first things he did was a rabbit. The object itself seems very insignificant, but the way he wanted to do it made of it a serious study… “Here,” he said to himself, “is an object to be rendered. In order to paint it as it is, I have to forget all I have seen and even the way these things have been treated by others. I have to place it at such a distance that I no longer see its details. I must above all faithfully imitate its general masses, color tones, volume, and the effects of light and shadows.” In this he succeeded; his rabbit reveals the first fruits of that discernment and magical execution which ever since have characterized the gifts that have distinguished him.\textsuperscript{55}

According to Cochin, Chardin made himself “forget” the rabbit—his own memories and experiences of its fur and meat, as well as other images—in order to produce a truthful representation of it. In other words, formal interest requires personal disinterest in the dead animal, as well as the hunting culture that dead animals represented in the paintings of Desportes or Oudry.

\textsuperscript{54} Freund, “Men and their Hunting Guns,” 26
In “Chardin’s Fur: Painting, Materialism, and the Question of Animal Soul,” Sarah R. Cohen suggests Cochin’s formalist reading of Chardin was influenced by the “empiricism and sensory apprehension” of academic discourse, rather than by Chardin’s own attitude toward his subject. Cohen argues instead that Chardin’s paintings of animals are sympathetic meditations on the “material substance of the animal.” Citing texts by eighteenth-century physician and materialist Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751) on the existence of an animal “soul,” Cohen suggests that Chardin’s paintings “argue as forcefully as did La Mettrie for a sensitive, animal essence.”

Like Chardin, Vallayer-Coster carefully studied the “material substance of the animal,” and her paintings compel us to examine their forms. This may be evidence of the artist’s sympathy for her subjects, but I argue that that her works espouse a more ambivalent attitude. Unlike Chardin, her paintings may be read as celebrations of the ambient pleasures of the hunt: fresh air, vivid blue skies, untamed pastoral landscape, and the fleshy ‘fruits’ of a successful harvest. Indeed, hunting was considered to be one of the primary means of experiencing the rural landscape; Rousseau’s narrator exclaims, “Is one really in the country if one does not hunt?” These dead animals simultaneously represent the fulfillment of one hunter’s desires, and the stimulation of another’s—that is, the viewer’s.

Yet Vallayer-Coster’s work also seems to probe the ambiguities of those desires. Perhaps more than her predecessors, she emphasized the sensuality of intertwined animal bodies in a way that seems to belie their ‘deadness.’ The artist also offers viewers direct access to soft, tawny tufts lining hares’ bellies, as well as the densely plumed breasts of

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pheasants—inviting us to dwell on the appeal of soft feather and fur, and to indulge our own longing for proximity to other bodies.  

The inter-species ‘orgy’ in the 1782 Still Life with Game (Fig. 4.16), commissioned for the Girardot de Marigny (along with its previously described pendant, Still Life with Lobster, fig. 3.22), is perhaps the most voluptuous example.  

The tawny hare, gray rabbit, small brown pheasant and long-tailed pheasant are so entangled in a post-mortem snuggle that they are nearly indistinguishable from one another.

Indeed, Vallayer-Coster’s game animals represent various other states of in-betweenness. Much as the pendant lobster was at once delicious aphrodisiac and alien sea creature, the freshly killed game simultaneously attract and repel. While they look appealingly soft, they also seem to occupy the “eerie threshold between sleep and death” (as Shao-Chien Tseng described Courbet’s paintings of game).  

So close to the moment of their slaughter, the perished bodies may still be soft and warm, yet we know stiffness and decay are imminent. Moreover, their flesh and fur have yet to be harvested, so while they are no longer wild prey, they are not yet consumable commodities.

The artist provided more explicitly revulsive details in two earlier works: Bust of Ceres with the Attributes of Hunting and Gardening, commissioned by Joseph-Marie Terray, and Trophies of the Hunt, both painted in 1774 (Fig. 2.22 and Fig. 4.15).  

These two paintings are certainly related, although it is unclear if the latter was a study for the former, or a signature copy. In both canvases, two pieces of game are draped precariously

59 Salon of 1783, no. 76; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 286; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 208, no. 69, pl. 34
61 Coster sale 1824, lot 26; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 202, no. 28, pl. 13. It is also possible that this is the Tableau de Gibier, compose d’un Canard, d’une Sarcelle, d’un Lièvre exhibited at the Salon of 1785 as belonging to Alexander Roslin; see Appendix, Salon of 1785, no. 59.
off a ledge. Both pheasants hang by the tail feathers, with their spindly legs unnaturally splayed. The hares, limp and belly-up, bear visible wounds in their lower abdomens. These incisions are most likely not the result of the fatal gunshot, but rather refer to the traditional method of ‘field dressing’—that is, slicing the dead animal from ribcage to groin and removing the internal organs by hand. Field dressing was performed as soon as possible after the kill in order to preserve the quality of the meat and to lighten the triumphant hunter’s load.62

Just as the hunter was required to probe the meaty interior of his dead game without qualm, the artist was not squeamish in describing her dead game’s wounds, although she refrained from excessive gore. Vallayer-Coster employed a deep crimson pigment at the center of the cut, alluding to the animal’s visceral interior, and a lighter rust color to indicate the dried blood stains on the surrounding white fur. In the smaller Trophies of the Hunt, she added an additional liquid detail: several droplets of red paint trickling from between the hare’s legs.

A standard psychoanalytic reading of these two paintings might assert that the wounds function as symbols of the vagina—and in the latter painting, of menstruation.63 For Freud, the (human) vagina, primarily characterized by its ‘lack’ of a phallus, represents the threat of castration. The fear of the bloody mutilation had various consequences for the male ego. In realizing her own lack, the female ego also suffered a ‘narcissistic wound,’ resulting in penis envy. The woman might compensate for this envy

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63 Incidentally, female rabbits do not menstruate regularly or independently: “Females of the European rabbit… are reflex (or induced) ovulators that require the act of copulation to stimulate ovulation, which occurs about 12 hours after mating.” A.T. Smith, “Lagomorpha (Pikas, rabbits, and hares)” in B. Grzimek et al., *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia* (Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale, 2004), 479-489.
by assuming certain ‘masculine’ qualities—for example, professional ambition or recreational sport. In the context of this interpretation, it seems significant that an unmarried académicienne, who dreamed of her own studio at the Louvre, would lay her subjects’ wounds bare, particularly in representations of the hunt. Her frankness is particularly striking in contrast with Chardin’s general aversion to the violent and bloody facts of the hunt; his hares are almost always depicted unbloodied and whole.

In each of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings, however, the ‘original’ sex of the disemboweled and castrated hare is unclear. Whether it was once male or female, however, hardly matters; the dead animals are depicted in a liminal, sexless (or de-sexed) state, their ‘lack’ made manifest. Here, we might draw a parallel between the artist’s own desire to transcend the limitations of her own gender, performed by engaging with the materials of the petite chasse. The aforementioned paintings enable that gender-transcendent fantasy—that is, not identifying fully with one or the other.

Vallayer-Coster’s A Rooster and a White Chicken (Fig. 4.17) depicts two casualties of the barnyard, rather than the hunt, situated on a stone ledge. (In Le Tableau de Paris, Mercier informs us that poultry and wild game could only be purchased at the market at the Quai de la Vallée on the Left Bank, unlike the bread and fish sold in the markets of Les Halles; these products were thus grouped together in the eighteenth-century Parisian imagination.) The male and female iterations of the species are similarly represented in a posthumous embrace. The rooster, with warm orange-brown

65 In Chardin’s Rabbit and Copper Pot in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden, a rabbit is suspended over a stone ledge, and a few daubs of red paint appear directly beneath the rabbit. The animal itself, however, appears unwounded.
66 Salon of 1787, no. 71; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 294, fig 199; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 210, no. 80, pl. 39
67 Mercier, Panorama of Paris, 96.
feathers and a signature red comb and wattle, is semi-suspended by a thin rope; his spindly legs are awkwardly twisted in the air. His eyes are closed, but his head is turned towards his mate, a chicken. The slightly smaller female bird, rendered with varying shades of white, is oriented on her back, with her proud, thickly plumed breast thrust into the air. Her parted wings droop gracefully off the stone ledge, a gesture that mirrors the vertical swoop of the rooster’s elaborate turquoise and gray tail feathers. On one hand, the sensual coupling of the two birds, formally fused, suggests a complementary duality; yet the painting’s emphasis on the binary is the visual epitome of sexual ambivalence.

Guns

If the dead animals in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings can be read as expressions of gender duality or transcendence, their representation is not entirely sympathetic. Consider the fact that the artist frequently draped their dead bodies over the very tools of their execution, and that these weapons are rendered with the same careful detail. By including guns, Vallayer-Coster clearly situates her dead game within the context of the hunt, and the cynegetic tradition of Desportes and Oudry. As previously discussed, these artists used guns to endow the subjects of their hunting portraits with masculine authority; the presence of guns in several of Vallayer-Coster’s still life paintings might suggest the artist’s own affinity for hunting, or her aspirations to the power associated with its tools.

Though the guns in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings vary slightly in terms of color and design, they are all luxurious examples of single and double-barreled flintlock rifles. The flintlock technology was invented in the early seventeenth century by French gunmaker

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68 It is interesting to note here that Chardin occasionally paired rabbits with hunting purses and powder horns, but only once with a gun: Chardin, *Dog and Game*, 1730, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, F.1972.56.P.
Marin Le Bourgeois (ca. 1550–1634); by the late eighteenth century, it was ubiquitous in Europe. Less volatile than older mechanisms (i.e., the matchlock or the wheellock), the flintlock was still complicated and unwieldy to operate. In order to load the gun, the hunter had to place gunpowder into the muzzle and secure it with a lubricated wad of paper or fabric, followed by ammunition (small metal bullets) and yet another wad. Each layer of material was loaded into the barrel with the aid of a thin ramrod. A small amount of gunpowder was then dispensed into a small pan, directly underneath the flintlock mechanism.69

To fire the flintlock, the hunter positioned the lock, gripped the gun with both hands, placed the butt against his shoulder, pressed his cheek against the stock, aimed, and pulled the trigger. In response, the hammer (or cock) gripping a piece of flint would strike a piece of steel, known as a frizzen. The resulting spark ignited the powder in the pan and propelled the ammunition out of the muzzle of the gun.70 The igniting powder produced a bright flash of light, a small burst of smoke, and a sharp boom sound. As the ammunition discharged, the gun would recoil, suddenly and hard, into the shoulder of the user. In order to fire another shot, the hunter had to repeat this entire process.71

Eighteenth-century flintlocks all functioned in the same way, but could be distinguished by the length, texture, and number of their barrels. Pistols have shorter barrels, ideal for close-range duels. Rifles and muskets were designed to hit far-range targets and have much longer barrels—typically between four and five feet.72

71 Several YouTube videos capture the process of loading and firing eighteenth-century flintlock rifles. See “Loading and shooting a flintlock rifle slow motion,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA8vZxJslgw>
72 Freund, “Men and Hunting Guns,” 32.
barrels are ‘smoothbore,’ while rifle barrels have grooved interiors. The grooves improved the rifle’s accuracy, but also required frequent cleaning in order to function properly. For these reasons, (more accurate) rifles were preferred on the hunt and (more efficient) muskets were used in the military. Although we cannot see the entire length or the interior of Vallayer-Coster’s barrels, an eighteenth-century viewer would likely have identified them as rifles based on their context. Finally, Vallayer-Coster’s paintings depict both single and double-barrel flintlock rifles. Multi-barreled guns enabled users to fire multiple shots without stopping to reload, but were more expensive and riskier to load and fire.\footnote{See Brenda J. Buchanan, ed. \textit{Gunpowder, Explosives and the State: A Technological History}. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006.}

Vallayer-Coster’s representations of guns may be precise enough for us to identify their type; yet I argue that her treatment of them is as equivocal as her representations of game. In the aforementioned hunter portraits by Desportes and Nattier, the entire lengths of the \textit{fusil de chasse} are pictured; their barrels project into the air, ready to shoot. In contrast, Vallayer-Coster’s guns lie prone and skewed, buried underneath a thick pile of dead game. She provides only a fragmented view of the butt, stock, and lock, and obscures the triggers and barrels, rendering the gun impotent. The guns have been arranged in visually frustrating orientations; yet the unusual angles from which she paints the guns suggests that she observed a gun directly, rather than copying another representation of one. Contemporary prints, such as the \textit{Fabrique des Armes} plate in the \textit{Encyclopédie}, or the 1750 Perrier engraving now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (\textbf{Fig. 4.19}), described the gun’s profile or dissected its individual parts, but did not provide the skewed perspectives represented in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings.
Vallayer-Coster offers us glimpses of a few different types of guns, always accompanied by a soft brown leather hunting purse (designed to carry ammunition, but represented agape and empty) and a pulvérin or powder flask, made of porcelain or a hollow horn, with a gilded spout. The guns that appear in *The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* (1774) and *The Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* (1777) are simple weapons; faced with their butts, we can see their wooden exoskeletons but little else. More elaborate models appear in *Trophies of the Hunt* (Fig. 4.15) and *Still Life with Game* (Fig. 4.16). In the former, we are faced with the edge of the silver-plated butt of a single-barrel flintlock, further adorned with a red velvet cheek pad. The bodies of the dead game obscure most of the gun’s mechanisms, though we can discern the serpentine shape of the metal flintlock. In the latter painting, we view a double-barrel gun from above. We cannot see the barrels themselves, but we can see the silver-plated indent between the two barrels, and flintlocks on both sides of the gun. These mechanisms are more clearly described, although their legibility is compromised by the peculiar angle of the weapon.

The gun is further adorned with a delicate marquetry design on the wrist of the gun, between the lock and the dark turquoise velvet cheek pad. This subtle embellishment is typical of the more sober, linear designs of late-eighteenth-century guns, which replaced the figurative and abstract rococo ornaments that had flourished on firearm surfaces earlier in the century.\(^4\) The addition of velvet cheek pads to eighteenth-century flintlocks seems to have been a relatively rare modification. Only a handful of examples

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have survived—notably, Catherine the Great’s hunting rifle with a green velvet cheek pad, now in the collection of the Smithsonian, and a crimson velvet flintlock that bears the Comte de Châteaudun’s name, now in a private collection (Fig. 4.20).\textsuperscript{75} Velvet was a tufted textile typically associated with luxurious objects that came in close contact with the body, such as the upholstery of a chair or the trim of fashionable court dress; these guns with velvet cheek pads were likely designed for elite consumers who preferred to press his or her cheek against a soft, rich fabric, rather than hard wood or cold metal.\textsuperscript{76}

The velvet cheek pad served Vallayer-Coster’s purposes, as well—that is, her interest in representing a range of organic and manmade textures: shiny metal, smooth wood, luxe velvet, worn leather, frayed ribbon, ruffled feathers, and fur matted with sweat and blood. Yet the artist’s interest in these textural elements comes at the expense of the gun itself. By making its shape strange and nearly unrecognizable, and draping it with velvet and fur, she compromises the legibility and potency of its mechanisms—simultaneously undermining its lethal function and its powerful, masculine symbolism. Her representations of guns can thus be characterized by her ambivalence towards them.

\textbf{Hunting Dog}


In addition to game and gun, the hunting dog was the third component of the hunting formula established by Desportes and Oudry. Dogs, complicit in the slaughter or responsible for fetching the bodies of slain prey, were essential to both the *chasse royale* and the *petite chasse*. For them, however, the hunt was a dangerous sport; the *État des chasses de l’équipage de la reine et de Monseigneur comte d’Artois pour le sanglier*, for example, records the names of dogs hurt or killed in every boar hunt undertaken by Marie Antoinette and her brother-in-law. More than mere accessories, however, hunting dogs were prized by noble and bourgeois hunters alike; Louis XIV and XV both commissioned individual portraits of their pets from Desportes and Oudry, respectively, and dogs are ubiquitous in individual *chasseur* portraits and in historical anecdotes representative of the *petite chasse*.

As Freund argues in “Good Dog! Jean-Baptiste Oudry and the Politics of Animal Painting,” these paintings articulate the intimate relationship between the hunter and his canine companion; she cites a maxim of *L’art de la chasse*: “the hunter makes the dogs, and the dogs make the hunter.” For Freund, the dogs in *chasseur* portraits and still life hunting scenes “provide surrogate bodies for their human viewers – bodies quivering with barely restrained passions, bodies that are free and freely given over to the joint struggles of a pack of equals against a common enemy.”

These perceptions of the interchangeability and interdependence of a hunter and his dog, and the dog’s own bestial enthusiasm for the kill, seem to contrast sharply with Vallayer-Coster’s ambivalence toward the sport. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that she only painted one hunting scene featuring a dog, and that she never sold it or showed it.

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77 *Fêtes and Divertissements*, cat. 9
78 Amy Freund, "Good Dog!" 73, 76
publically; *Hound with Dead Game* (1785, Fig. 4.21) appears in the 1824 Coster sale, but not before. 79 Her composition approximates several different canvases by Desportes, notably, the Louvre’s *Dog Guarding Game Near Rose Bush* (1724, Fig. 4.22). Both of these works abandon the material culture of the hunt (gun, hunting purse, knife, etc.) in favor of dog, game, and the outdoors, though Vallayer-Coster goes one step further in eliminating the references to human interventions in the landscape that are evident in Desportes’s canvas, such as the curved rampart and the cultivated rose bush. Her white hound with brown spotted ears, appears entirely alone in this natural setting. The dog emerges from the shadow of a wood into a clearing, peering intently towards the right of the canvas, across a pile of dead game that occupies the center of the canvas: two hares, three partridges, and a long-tailed pheasant. Like the dog in Desportes’s canvas, Vallayer-Coster’s hound is alert: back arched, tail aloft, and brown-spotted ears perked, her posture is protective, like a watchful mother guarding her litter.

Of course, the dogs depicted have no apparent sex, and the furry clusters gathered by their paws are a pile of dead game, not sleeping pups. Yet a dog’s nurturing capacity wasn’t entirely foreign to eighteenth-century conceptions of the animal; consider Pierre Estève’s description if Oudry’s *Hunting Dog Nursing Her Puppies*, shown at the Salon of 1753: “We read in the eyes of the mother a maternal care, typified by the paw that she holds above one of her pups, for fear of hurting it.”80 The hunting dog was considered to be equally capable demonstrating a motherly instinct toward her own young, and a lethal one toward her prey, in collaboration with her hunting master.

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Oudry’s varied representations of dogs suggest the perceived complexity of the animal’s character, an anthropomorphization often used to justify the intimacy between pets and their elite owners. Indeed, eighteenth-century French aristocrats frequently indulged in domestic relationships with dogs. As Jennifer Milam has shown, however, representations of elite men and women with their dogs differed significantly. Milam contrasts the athletic shorthaired pointers in the noble hunting portraits of Desportes and Oudry with the ‘frivolous’ and fluffy lapdogs in Boucher’s portraits of Madame Pompadour, or in Fragonard’s erotic genre paintings of women lounging in bed. To support this visual evidence, Milam cites a 1788 essay by Mercier, published in the Tableau de Paris, which creates a gendered distinction between a man’s “dogue” who “follows and defends his master” and a woman’s “petit chien,” whose caresses and licks indulged his mistress’s wanton sensuality.

A rare large-scale figurative painting by Vallayer-Coster complicates this simple dichotomy. The work, probably a portrait (Fig. 4.23) features an older woman seated in a champagne-colored silk fauteuil at her simple wooden desk. She pauses from her writing to glance up at a younger woman, likely her daughter, who leans against the chair holding a small bouquet of roses. A small, chestnut-colored dog leaps up towards the back of the mother’s chair to greet the younger woman’s fond gesture. This painting is rife with the kind of anatomical and spatial oddities endemic to many of Vallayer-Coster’s figurative paintings—a symptom of her exclusion from the study of the body.

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82 See, for example, Boucher, Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour, 1756, and Fragonard, Young Girl in Her Bed, Making Her Dog Dance, ca. 1768, both in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich.
84 Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 312, fig. 209; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2003, 201, no. 33, pl. 17.
alongside her male peers at the Academy. Yet the portrait does offer us a nuanced treatment of the female mind (if not the body) and of mother-daughter relationships.

Similar portraits by Nattier, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Madame Marsollier and Her Daughter* (Fig. 4.24), situate a still-youthful mother at her toilette, playfully adorning her child’s hair. If not for their relative scale, Madame Marsollier and her daughter would be nearly indistinguishable, so uniformly are they both powdered and rouged. In contrast, Vallayer-Coster’s mother’s sagging skin betrays her advanced age, and the quill in her hand refers to her literacy, rather than her vanity. The space that the toilette mirror occupies in Nattier’s portrait is replaced in Vallayer-Coster’s by an ornate gilded clock—a luxurious object that signaled its owner’s adherence to the Enlightenment principle of time. While Nattier’s Madame Marsollier looks approvingly at her own reflection in the toilette mirror, Vallayer-Coster’s mother turns toward her daughter, regarding her with sober pride.

As with many of Vallayer-Coster’s anonymous representations of women, it is tempting to identify the figures in this painting as Madame Vallayer (widowed in 1770) and one of her four daughters. This identification is untenable for several reasons—not least of which, because we do not know if the Vallayer family ever kept a dog. Yet this painting captures something profound about the nature of familial love, which is so often epitomized and consolidated in the body of a shared household pet. The dog formally links the two female bodies; clearly the object of their mutual affection, the dog offers both women faithful companionship in return. The dog is not a hunting accessory (indeed, she looks quite comfortable on that silk fauteuil!), and may not be of any

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assistance in the intellectual labor of writing (or painting); nonetheless the dog’s presence clearly offers her human owner a physical comfort that facilities her work—an intimacy that has little to do with Fragonard’s voluptuous bedroom scenes. As with Vallayer-Coster’s other paintings of the hunt, this portrait complicates the gendered binary of human-animal relationships, as articulated by contemporary texts and images.

**Conclusion**

Vallayer-Coster’s emphasis on sensual textures is typical of her still life painting practice; yet, as I have argued, the artist’s interventions in the subgenre of the hunt also betray a sense of ambivalence about the material she paints. We might describe these paintings as gender-transcendent fantasies, yet they are also symptomatic of her alienation from the hunt by virtue of her sex. Her paintings perform these fantasies and frustrations. Vallayer-Coster’s equivocal practice thus differs significantly from that of the nineteenth-century French animal painter Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), who, a hundred years later, would gain legal permission to don trousers in pursuit of her subject matter at horse fairs and slaughter houses—physically transgressing the cultural boundaries that Vallayer-Coster could only imaginatively transcend.86

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V. Shells

At the Salon of 1771, her first as an académicienne, Vallayer exhibited eleven works, including two large paintings: the Louvre’s *Still Life with Coral and Sea Shells* (Fig. 5.1), and its now lost pendant, *Still Life with a Porcelain Vase, Minerals, and Crystals*. The paintings were a critical success, but Vallayer-Coster would go on to paint naturalia only a few more times throughout her career, including *Still Life with Porcelain Vase, Marine Plants, Shells and Various Mineralogical Specimens* of 1776 (Fig. 5.2) and *Still Life with Minerals* of 1789 (Fig. 5.3). Though small, this group of natural history paintings, characterized by bold compositions, brilliant color, and patent knowledge of floral and faunal taxonomies, warrants further analysis.

Vallayer-Coster’s attention to the formal qualities of shells and minerals paralleled an evolving attitude towards these specimens in the mid-eighteenth century. During this period, elite French collectors began to collect panoplies of shells and to display their collections in curiosity cabinets; there, they came to be viewed as objects of material and aesthetic value, as well as scientific inquiry. Though they had long been prized for their natural beauty and exotic origins, shells were now also subject to the Enlightenment impulse to label and classify living organisms. French curieux came to rely on a range of auction catalogues, illustrated guidebooks, and taxonomic texts to identify and organize the objects in their collections.

In this chapter, I situate Vallayer-Coster’s shell paintings within the context of the conchological discourse in the eighteenth-century. I argue that these works espouse the twin systems of meaning that structured French curiosity cabinets and conchological
texts: the aesthetic and the scientific, as well as the visual and the haptic. Though seemingly diametrically opposed, the aesthetic/scientific and visual/haptic understandings of shells are intricately connected in practice—that is, Vallayer-Coster’s painting practice and the collecting practices of her patrons. In order to elucidate the relationships between these concepts, I place Vallayer-Coster’s *nature mortes* in dialogue with contemporary ideas about the decorative and erudite value of shells, as articulated by art dealer Edme-François Gersaint, shell connoisseur Antoine-Joseph d’Argenville, and Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus. Because shells, like Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of them, simultaneously elicited desires to look and to touch, I will also discuss these works in light of contemporary discourse on interaction of the senses.

Shells also bore dual gendered inflections in the eighteenth century, associated with the primarily masculine space of the natural history cabinet, as well as the Rococo decoration of the feminine boudoir. Shells bridged these two gendered, and distinctly dix-huitième, spaces, producing overlapping cultural meanings therein. As I describe here, Vallayer-Coster’s precise paintings of natural history specimens are enlivened by a throbbing, embodied sense of femininity—exemplified by the fleshy-pink conch shell in the foreground of Vallayer-Coster’s *Still Life with Coral and Sea Shells*. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of representing the female body—implicitly in academic still life painting, as well as explicitly in contemporary anatomical models and illustrations.

**Vallayer-Coster’s *Still Life with Seashells and Coral***
The Louvre’s *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* is dated 1769, a year before Vallayer-Coster’s admission to the Academy, and two years before her debut at the Salon. The painting was originally paired with a work of equal dimensions, *Still Life with a Porcelain Vase, Minerals, and Crystals*. These pendants were listed in the catalogue of the 1771 Salon under the joint title, *Deux Tableaux représentans divers Morceaux d’Histoire Naturelle.* The two paintings appeared once more together in a 1777 sale, after which *Still Life with a Porcelain Vase, Minerals, and Crystals* was lost. This second painting is known to us only through a loose sketch by Gabriel Saint-Aubin, who drew both paintings on the blank page of the 1777 auction catalogue.

The surviving pendant is a vivid representation of twenty-four distinct plant and animal species from the waters of the Antilles, Bermuda, Florida, Mediterranean Europe, Japan, and the Philippines. These shells and plants, brilliantly illuminated against an inky black background, have been carefully arranged on a rough stone ledge. The bold, triumphant composition is dominated by plumes of stony white Venus sea fan (*Gorgonia*), as well as red and purple coral (*Leptogorgia*). To the right, Vallayer-Coster positioned a large bivalve mollusk shell with a blood-orange belly (*Pinna nobilis*), buttressed by a pleated, buttercup-yellow sponge. The artist arranged smaller specimens in the foreground – including, from left to right, a mohawked, peach-colored *Chicoreus ramosus* (which once belonged to an Indo-West Pacific sea snail); a fluted white clam (*Tridacna squamosa*); a delicate sprig of lavender-colored coral; a large queen conch.

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2 Rémy, *Catalogue d’une riche collection de tableaux des maîtres les plus célèbres des trois écoles . . . qui composent le Cabinet de feu son Altesse Sérénissime Monseigneur le Prince de Conti, prince du sang et Grand Prieur de France* (Paris: Chez Muzier, 1777); Gabriel Saint-Aubin’s illustration was published in Bailey, “A Still-Life Painter and Her Patrons,” 64, fig. 4
with its flesh-pink inner fold exposed (*Strombus giga*); and a marbled, reptilian green turban shell (*Turbo marmoratus*).³

The painting is a complex formal exercise, juxtaposing colors (lacquered reds, chalky whites, delicate pinks, iridescent purples and blues, and vivid greens), shapes (from tall marine plants to small, tightly wound shells), and textures (spiky, mossy, smooth, slick). The tight choreography of objects serves to highlight those contrasts; yet the shells also evince a kind of orgiastic intimacy—like the pyramidal swell of languid sea nymphs, born aloft by frothy waves, in Boucher’s *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 5.4). Indeed, it was the formal qualities of Vallayer-Coster’s pendants that earned significant critical praise when they were first exhibited at the Salon of 1771. A *Mercure de France* critic wrote, “The happy arrangement of these objects, their transparent color, the solidity and the precision of the touch, the artistically placed strokes of light, the well-felt reflections, all contribute to magical canvases that deceive even the most practiced and delicate eye.”⁴ *Journal encyclopédique* was equally complimentary of the young académicienne’s “vigorous and transparent” color and strong sense of chiaroscuro.⁵

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³ These specimens were identified in Madeleine Pinault-Sorensen and Marie-Catherine Sahut, “*Panaches de mer, Lithophytes et Coquilles* (1769), un tableau d’histoire naturelle par Anne Vallayer-Coster,” *Revue du Louvre: La Revue des Musées de France* XLVII (February 1998): 49-50. The Latin binomial descriptions used there and here are derived from Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae*, described below.

⁴ “Ce talent est aussi celui de Mademoiselle Vallayer dont nous voyons pour la première fois au salon des tableaux représentant divers morceaux d’histoire naturelle, les attributs des arts, différents instruments de guerre, etc. L’heureuse disposition de ces objets, leur couleur transparente, la fermeté et la précision de la touché, des coups de lumière placés aristement, des réflets bien sentis, tout contribue dans ces tableaux magiques à tromper l’œil le plus exercé et le plus délicat.” “Exposition des peintures, sculptures, gravures de MM. de l’Académie royale.” *Mercure de France* (October 1771): 193.

⁵ “Parmi les peintres de ce genre, on doit rendre le tribut d’éloges dus aux talents de Mlle. Vallayer. Un coloris vigoureux &transparent, une heureuse distribution de clair-obscur, des touches naïves & placées à propos, peuvent faire douter si ce qu’a représenté cette jeune académicienne, n’est pas la chose même…. Une autre tableau de la même main, représente des morceaux d’histoire naturelle, sur une table de marbre; les objets, et surtout le marbre, sont vrais comme la nature.” “Fin de la description des tableaux, des Sculptures, gravures & dessins qu’ont été exposés, cette année, au Sallon du Louvre, le jour de Saint Lou.” *Journal encyclopédique* 8:1 (November 1771): 94-95.
Diderot declared the natural history pendants to be masterpieces of the genre, specifically praising the arrangement, as well as the varied color and form, of the “polished shell bodies.” (He concluded that Vallayer’s work was “excellent, vigorous, harmonious; it’s not Chardin, however, but if it’s less good than this master, it’s far above what is to be expected of a woman.”)⁶

Vallayer-Coster had explicitly courted comparison with Chardin at the Salon of 1771 with *The Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* and *The Attributes of Music* (Fig 2.1 and Fig. 2.2). Yet with her shell pendants, Vallayer-Coster distinguished herself from her immediate predecessor, who never took *l’histoire naturelle* as a subject. Though entirely absent from Chardin’s oeuvre, shells appeared sporadically in seventeenth-and early eighteenth-century French paintings—for example, in the work of still-life painter Jacques Linard (1597–1645). Linard, who was active in Paris between 1620 and 1645, painted clusters of small, intricately patterns of shells and coral branches on stone ledges—for example, *Still Life with Shells and Coral* in the Frigits Lugts Collection (Figure 5.5).⁷ Other contemporary still lifes were primarily dedicated to the juxtaposition of *artificialia* and *naturalia*, highlighting the contrast between God- and man-made beauties, a display strategy also employed in early modern curiosity cabinets.⁸

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⁶ “Je ne puis que répéter ce que j’ai dit plus haut; j’ajouterai que ces objets-ici, beaucoup plus variés dans leurs coleurs et leurs formes, tels que les madrépores, les coraux, les mines et minéraux, etc., étant pour la plupart des corps polis, augmentent la difficulté d’en former des groups favorable au bon effet. Rien n’arrête Mlle Vallayer; chaque objet y est lui-même rendu, fini et contribuant à l’effet des autres. Ce sont des chefs-d’oeuvre en ce genre. (Magie d’imitation).… Excellents, vigoureux, harmonieux; ce n’est pas Chardin, pourtant; mais au-dessus de ce maître cela est fort au dessus d’une femme.” Diderot, *Salon of 1771*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, 512 no. 154. On the question of the authenticity of this text, see Else Marie Bukdahl, *Diderot, est-il l’auteur du ‘Salon’ de 1771?* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Muksgaard, 1966).

⁷ Jacques Linard, *Still Life with Shells and Coral*, oil on panel, 18.5 x 25.2 in. Frits Lugt Collection, Hôtel Turgot, Paris. Another Linard work by the same title, dated to 1640, is in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal.

⁸ For more on the history of *naturalia* and *artificialia* in curiosity cabinets, see Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2007).
Meiffren Conte (1630–1705), for example, frequently mingled precious, highly wrought *objets d’art* with flowers, fruits, and shells—notably, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Still Life with Silver Plate and Gold Plate, Shells, and a Sword* (Fig. 5.6).9

Seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish still life paintings exerted a significant influence on their French contemporaries. Northern European artists had more ready access to exotic shell specimens, thanks to imports of the Dutch East India Company. One such painter, Balthasar van der Ast (1593–1657) employed empty, polished shells, as well as flowers, fruits, insects, and lizards, in works such as *Flowers in a Vase with Shells and Insects* of 1630, now at the National Gallery, London (Fig. 5.7). The shells around the base of the flower vase, interspersed with fallen petals and various bugs, function as *vanitas* motifs, symbolizing the transience of life—rather unlike the French representations that they begat, which would divest the subject of existential or religious meaning in favor of a more materialist approach.10 Adriaen Coorte (ca. 1665–1707), a lesser-known Dutch artist working in the second half of the seventeenth-century, produced more minimalist, orderly representations of shells than those of van der Ast. Coorte’s shells were arranged on modest slabs of stone against a dramatic, Caravaggesque background (Fig. 5.8)—a formula that would be revived with Vallayer-Coster’s *Still Life with Seashells and Coral*.11

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9 Meiffren Conte (French, 1630–1705), *Still Life with Silver Plate and Gold Plate, Shells, and a Sword*, ca. 1675, oil on canvas, 40 x 50.75 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
10 See Julie Berger Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007). A typical example of Balthazar van der Ast’s work can be found in the National Gallery in London: *Flowers in a Vase with Shells and Insect*, 1630, oil on oak, 18.5 x 144 in.
As previously noted, Dutch and Flemish still lifes exerted a strong influence not only on French artists, but also French collectors. Northern vanitas paintings found a strong secondary market in early to mid eighteenth-century Paris. According to Gaëtane Maës, a critical mass of Dutch still life paintings flooded French auctions in the 1730s—the same period during which shells became more readily available on the French curiosities market. Indeed, works by Coote, van der Ast, or their contemporaries were well represented in the collections of the very patrons whom Vallayer-Coster hoped to attract, and thus likely constituted the most salient precedents for her work.

The Prince de Conti’s Coquiller

Despite their critical success, and their calculated evocation of the Dutch school, Vallayer-Coster’s natural history pendants failed to attract an immediate buyer; they were returned to the artist at the conclusion of the Salon of 1771. In December 1775, Vallayer-Coster apparently consigned the paintings to the well-publicized estate sale of Madame du Barry (1743–1793), a favorite of Louis XV. Madame du Barry had been exiled to the Abbey du Pont-aux-Dames since the king’s death in 1774; she most likely planned the sale in order to reconcile her debts when she left the convent in May 1775. The contents of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings were carefully noted in Madame du Barry’s sale catalogue, published by the prominent art dealer Pierre Rémy (1715/16–1797). The Louvre still life

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13 Vallayer-Coster’s shell paintings seems to have been an important influence for future still life artists, as well – namely Antoine Berjon (French, 1754-1843), whose Still Life with Flowers, Shells, a Shark’s Head, Petrifications was shown at the Paris Salon of 1829. See Joseph J. Rishel, Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995), 186.
14 Like most artists of the so-called lower genres, Vallayer-Coster painted on speculation, rather than by commission. She consigned a total of five paintings to the sale, all of which had been featured in the Salon of 1771. Bailey, “A Still-Life Painter and Her Patrons,” 61.
is described as a representation of “diverse productions of natural history in the maritime genre, such as shells, coral, and madrepore,” while the lost pendant included minerals, animals, and bottles of spirits grouped with a porcelain and bronze vase. Madame du Barry’s sale never came to fruition, for reasons unknown; yet it may have been through Rémy’s catalogue that the paintings came to the attention of the Prince de Conti, a cousin of Louis XV, who acquired the two paintings directly from the artist for 960 livres a month after the abortive sale.

Louis-François de Bourbon, the sixth Prince de Conti (1717–1776), navigated a successful (if scandalous) military and political career, before taking up residence at the Palais du Temple in the Marais as the Grand Prieur of the Knights of Malta in 1749. In the final twenty years of his life, Conti, in collaboration with his dealer Boileau, built an enormous assemblage of natural and exotic curiosities, as well as a considerable collection of French, Italian, and Northern paintings. Conti carefully organized the artworks in his collection by school and chronologically; for example, the nearly one hundred eighteenth-century French paintings in Conti’s collection (including works by Fragonard, Greuze, Natoire, and Van Loo) were displayed in the les Pièces français, three connected galleries in his apartments in the Palais de Temple. Vallayer-Coster’s pendants, however, were not displayed alongside her French contemporaries in les pièces françaises. Instead, Conti chose to install Vallayer’s natural history pendants in his

16 Foucart et al., 146.
l’appartement dit le Coquiller, one in a series of seven apartments dedicated to the organization and display of his botanical, mammalian, and maritime specimens.\footnote{Bailey, “A Still-Life Painter and Her Patrons,” 63; Chappey, Les tresors des princes de Bourbon Conti, 42 and 163.}

Conti’s habitual and omnivorous acquisition of beautiful things, both natural and artificial, was typical of elite curieux of the period.\footnote{See, for example, Colin B. Bailey’s “Conventions of the Eighteenth-Century Cabinet de tableaux: Blondel d’Azincourt’s La première idée de la curiosité,” The Art Bulletin 69:3 (Sept. 1987): 431-447.} His decision to display Vallayer-Coster’s still life paintings in his Coquiller, however, was a significant departure from his own rigorous system of display. In the mind of this eighteenth-century collector, the académicienne’s highly detailed paintings were intimately linked with the practice of collecting natural history objects—so much so, that the pendants were displayed to their best advantage in dialogue with the very specimens that they represented.\footnote{M. Guynot, the President of Grenier a sel, had previously advocated for the inclusion of “les Coquillages les plus rare, soit en peintre ou dans leur naturel” in curiosity cabinets. See his article, “Projet pour l’établissement d’un cabinet curieux & d’un Laboratoire,” Mercure de France (April 1727): 675-680.}

The Prince de Conti died in August 1776, only six months after he purchased Vallayer-Coster’s pendants. In April 1777, his son, in collaboration with Rémy, organized a sale of the Prince de Conti’s gargantuan collection, in order to ameliorate the debt that his father had amassed during his final years. The 1777 auction consisted of 2,117 lots, in addition to the 234 supplementary lots later added to the catalogue. According to JoLynn Edwards, half of the sale contained Old Master and contemporary paintings from Northern, Italian, and French artists, while the remainder of the sale was dedicated to “gouaches, drawings, prints, sculptures, and a huge variety of curious objects: mosaics, engraved gems, decorated boxes, antique medals and marbles, scientific
instruments and objects of natural history, musical instruments, and magnificent clocks.”

Despite the wealth of objects represented, the 1777 auction failed to achieve a profit for the Prince de Conti’s son, bringing in 1.1 million livres—about a third of the estimated cost of the collection. According to Edwards, buyer interest may have been mitigated by the unusual volume and diversity of objects. This overwhelming number of objects for sale seems to have diluted the value of the constituent lots, resulting in severely reduced resale values. Vallayer-Coster’s pendants were no exception: her paintings were acquired by the art dealer Jean-Baptiste Le Brun (husband of the future académicienne, Élisabeth Vigée) for a mere 240 livres. Sometime after the 1777 sale, the paintings were divorced; the only remaining visual evidence of the now lost pendant is Saint Aubin’s sketch, on the blank page of the Prince de Conti’s auction catalogue (Fig. 5.9).

Although Vallayer-Coster’s still life pendants were only on display at the Palais du Temple for a little over a year, and despite their poor re-sale value, the artist surely achieved an even greater visibility amongst the Parisian elite thanks to the presence of her work in the Prince de Conti’s collection. Indeed, the Prince de Conti was at the center of a large network of aristocrats and intellectuals, and he was known for hosting scintillating social gatherings—such as the party conjured in Michel-Barthelemy Ollivier’s painting, English Tea Served in the Salon des Glaces at the Palais du Temple in Paris in 1764.

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23 Pinault Sorenson and Sahut, “Panaches de mer,” 61.
(Mozart at the clavichord) (Fig. 5.10). It is reasonable to conclude, moreover, that Vallayer-Coster’s painting was designed to appeal to the interdisciplinary collecting interests of the Prince de Conti and his ilk—in other words, that she had successfully solicited the patronage of this breed of collector.

Indeed, Vallayer-Coster’s shell paintings are best understood in the context of the Parisian vogue for collecting shells and minerals—beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, when imported shells became more readily available to French curieux. Elite buyers, like the Prince de Conti, carefully constructed their natural history collections, seeking objects that that fit certain criteria—pleasant (agréable), rare (rare), valuable (précieux), and beautiful (beau). Once acquired, these objects were subject to equally rigorous standards of display—the so-called “art de disposer.” Much like a still life artist arranging a composition, a shell collector employed various formal strategies in arranging his or her collection, pursuing symmetry, balance and order, as well as diversity in color and texture. Ultimately, collectors sought to integrate their curiosities into a coherent and harmonious interior display, creating visual pleasure and intellectual stimulation through the juxtaposition of objects.

In order to better understand these practices, I will here describe three texts that were pivotal in cultivating the luxury market for shells, as well as the aesthetic and scientific discourses surrounding that market: a sale catalogue by Edme-François Gersaint (1736), an illustrated collector’s guide by Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville

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(1742), and a natural history taxonomy by Carl Linnaeus (1758). These texts and related images, I will argue, produced a new understanding and appreciation of shells—the cultural current to which Vallayer-Coster’s paintings directly appealed.

**Gersaint’s *Catalogue raisonné des coquilles et autres curiosités naturelles***

The Parisian demand for rare and beautiful shells in the mid-eighteenth century was stimulated in part by the successful marketing efforts of a few *merchants-merciers*—most famously, Edme-François Gersaint (1694–1750). Gersaint began his career by selling paintings and *objets de luxe* at his *Au Grand Monarque* shop on le pont Notre-Dame (heralded by Jean-Antoine Watteau’s infamous sign of 1720-1). By 1740, however, Gersaint decided to change the name of his shop from *Au Grand Monarque* to *À La Pagode* in order to reflect the exotic diversity of his inventory. To publicize this name change, Gersaint commissioned a new trade card, in which he declared himself to be a dealer of “all curious and foreign goods.” The trade card image, designed by Boucher (1703–1770) and engraved by the *amateur* comte de Caylus (1692–1765), advertised *À La Pagode*’s exotic wares (*Fig. 5.11*): a squat *Chinois*, dressed in a silk wrap jacket and seated atop a lacquered cabinet, presides over still life of merchandise

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presumably imported from the Far East. The objects on display include framed and rolled canvases, porcelain tea sets, musical instruments—and, at the very center, a plume of coral and a tumble of pebbles and shells. Boucher’s choice to intermingle shells with chinoiserie underscored the otherworldly beauty and material value of both.

The 1740 trade card also indicates Gersaint’s early dominance of the Parisian market for exotic shells. In the previous decade, Gersaint had organized two major sales devoted entirely to the marine specimens that he had acquired from collections in the Netherlands, via the East India Trading Company. Gersaint’s first shell sale on January 30, 1736, largely credited as the first of its kind in Paris, was accompanied by a 234-page Catalogue raisonné des coquilles et autres curiosités naturelles. In his lengthy introduction to the catalogue, Gersaint described significant natural history collections in Europe and distinguished between two types of shell collectors: the Curious, who were more interested in “observing the variety of forms and colors of which [shells] are decorated,” and Naturalists, who aimed to “study their cause, their principle, and their classification.” The catalogue concluded with an extensive, descriptive glossary in order to help collectors identify various types of marine life. This glossary constitutes an early,
if imprecise, attempt to taxonomize shells, and continued to serve as an important resource for collectors for several decades.  

Gersaint enlisted Boucher to design the cover illustration for this 1736 sale catalogue, now known through the engraving by Claude-Augustin Duflos (1700–1786) (Fig. 5.12). Boucher’s vertical, closely cropped frontispiece served as an important visual precedent for Vallayer-Coster’s *Still Life with Seashells and Coral*. Both images are triumphant, loosely symmetrical assemblages of madrepore, coral, and shells, situated in shallow interior spaces. Like Boucher, Vallayer-Coster anchored her composition with several pale branches of sea fans, and foregrounded a cornucopia of smaller shells and coral branches. Although Vallayer-Coster’s painting benefits from the addition of dazzling color and painterly facture, both images highlight the organic irregularity of the *mélange* of specimens, arranged to emphasize a diversity of textures, sizes, and shapes.

Vallayer-Coster and her patron, the Prince de Conti, were certainly familiar with Boucher’s design, which had become critically linked to the market for rare and expensive natural curiosities in the intervening decades. After the sale of 1736, Gersaint would re-use Boucher’s frontispiece for at least two subsequent auctions—in a 1737 sale of shells, and the 1744 sale of Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson’s (1702–1744) natural history collection.  

Even after Gersaint’s death, Boucher’s frontispiece was re-appropriated by other dealers for prominent natural history collections. Notably, Pierre Rémy (who would organize the estate sales of Madame du Barry in 1775 and the Prince du Conti in 1777) used Boucher’s frontispiece for the 1766 sales of Madame Dubois-

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Jourdain and Dezallier d’Argenville, whose *Conchyliologie* is discussed below. Indeed, Boucher’s image conferred legitimacy to shell auction catalogues long after its initial engraving in 1736; it seems likely that in arranging her still life painting, Vallayer-Coster intended to evoke Boucher’s frontispiece, and the flourishing shell economy that his design represented.

Vallayer-Coster was also likely familiar with Boucher’s own extensive collection of shells, which numbered over 2,500 at the time of his death. In his apartment at the Louvre, Boucher neatly installed his shells on mirrored tables and in the drawers of *coquilliers* (shell cabinets) for the consumption of clients and colleagues. There, Boucher alternatively experimented by creating sculptural *mélanges*—three-dimensional collages of diverse shell and coral specimens, mounted on a flat base. With these hand-made arrangements, Boucher manipulated his subjects, playing harmonies of color, texture, and scale. None of Boucher’s three-dimensional *mélanges* survive, but at least twenty-nine of them were sold at his 1771 post-mortem sale, also organized by Rémy. The descriptions of diverse clusters of coral and shells recall the composition of Boucher’s 1736 frontispiece for Gersaint. For example, lot 1578 is described as follows: “Twenty pieces, including eight small branches of two different varieties of white stony coral fixed to a large base of eight shells charged with a white coral fungus along with three other coral fungi comprised of grainy double forked branches and a small sea sponge of a wide consistency.”

36 “Vingt morceaux; savoir, huit petites branches de corail articulé blanc, de deux variétés, dont une à large empatement: huit coquilles chargées de coralloïdes blanc; trois autre coralloïdes, dont un granuleux a...
For Jessica Priebe, the author of the dissertation “Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie: The Cabinet of François Boucher, 1703-1770,” these mélanges were not simply reproductions of the Gersaint frontispiece, but were rather “elaborated and expanded” three-dimensional interpretations of the 1736 composition. Because they explicitly invoked his frontispiece for Gersaint, Priebe argues that these mélanges “engaged with the authority of the image in order to reassert [Boucher’s] identity as both an artist and a collector.”

It is unclear whether Vallayer-Coster would have had access to the Louvre apartments of the premier peintre du roi (particularly as a young, unmarried female artist, who was only admitted to the Academy two months after Boucher’s death), or whether she was familiar with his mélanges sculptural practice. However, she was almost certainly aware of Boucher’s notorious shell collection, which was sold with great fanfare in February 1771—between Vallayer-Coster’s acceptance into the Academy in July 1770 and the debut of her Morceaux d’Histoire Naturelle at the Salon of 1771.

D’Argenville’s La Conchyliologie

branches bifourchues, & un petit répétore a large mailles.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné . . . le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, premier peintre du Roi (Paris: Chez Musier Père 1771), lot 1578, 219.

37 Boucher’s collection and collecting practices are described at length in Jessica S. Priebe, “Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie: The Cabinet of François Boucher, 1703-1770” (Phd Diss., University of Sydney, 2011). Priebe writes, “The artist’s studio at the Louvre was a hub of activity with steady steam of collectors, writers and artists passing through at regular intervals… The majority of these visitors would have been aware of his design for the 1736 catalogue either in its original format, or as a reissued frontispiece… For those visitors to the studio that were familiar with the work, they were confronted with an elaborate and expanded re-presentation of that which is pictured in his design for the 1736 catalogue. This is not to suggest that Boucher used the 1736 frontispiece as a blueprint to form his collection, but rather that he engaged with the authority of image in order to reassert his identity as both an artist and a collector.” Priebe, “Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie,” 175.
Boucher would design the frontispiece for yet another influential conchological text: Dezallier d’Argenville’s *L’Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales, la lithologie et la conchyliologie*, first published in 1742, with subsequent editions appearing in 1757, and 1780.\(^{38}\) All three editions of d’Argenville’s widely read text were heralded by Boucher’s whimsical frontispiece, in which a merman and maid emerge from the sea with armfuls of shells and coral (Fig. 5.13). The muscular merman shoulders the bulk of the natural treasures in a scalloped cartouche, inscribed with the abbreviated title of the book, *La Conchyliologie*.\(^{39}\) In this image, Boucher abandoned commercial sobriety and scientific specificity in favor of visual pleasure, derived from the bodies of the sensual mythological figures, as well as their shells, mined from the depths of exotic waters (as indicated by the palm trees, elephant, and camel on the shore).\(^{40}\) The frontispiece lent artistic value to d’Argenville’s text while emphasizing the erotic and exotic qualities of the shells described therein.

In addition to identifying hundreds of types, d’Argenville’s text advised collectors about the acquisition, identification, and display of their own shells. D’Argenville dedicated one chapter to the preparation of shells for display through a series of minimal


\(^{39}\) According to Pribe. D’Argenville was the first to use the term “Conchyliologie” in 1742. Pribe, “Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie,” 76.

\(^{40}\) Like Gersaint, D’Argenville argued that the most beautiful and rare shells came from the Far East. “Les plus belles & les plus singulières ne se croissant par sur nos côtes & venant la plupart des Indes Orientales & Occidentales, ou d’autres pays fort éloignés.” Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, 15; “Ces belles Coquilles viennent de la mer, mais toutes les mers n’en fournissent pas, non omnis fert omnia tellus, nous tirons les plus belles Coquilles, des grandes Indes, des Indes Orientales, & de la mer rouge.” d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), 168.
material interventions—for example, cleaning them with alcohol, and applying a coat of
egg-white wash in order to enhance the natural shine and color of the shell.\textsuperscript{41}

This chapter also described the techniques of display employed by the two
different types of collectors (originally identified by Gersaint in 1736): Naturalists and
the Curious. In D’Argenville’s words, “Naturalists arrange shells according to classes and
families.... the Curious, by contrast, who value pleasing the eye above all else, sacrifice
methodological order for the sake of varied arrangements, in respect of the form of shells
as well as their colors.”\textsuperscript{42} D’Argenville advised his readers, however, to combine these
strategies: to group shells by family, but to organize them within that group according to
one’s own personal aesthetic taste, in order to achieve a pleasing juxtaposition of color,
surface pattern, and texture. Later editions of d’Argenville’s text included several
engravings that exemplify this approach: each plate represents a certain ‘family,’ but
shells are therein arranged in rhythmic geometric and floral patterns (\textbf{Fig. 5.14}). The
artistic value of these illustrations is demonstrated by the example of a 1757 edition, now
in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The
eighteenth-century owner of the volume, Christien Guillaume de Lamoignon de
Malesherbes (1721–1794), hired an artist to hand-paint Boucher’s frontispiece and
engravings of shells in the appendix of his 1757 edition, rendering the book a luxury
collector’s item and putting the author’s ideas about color and display into practice.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} “Les Naturalistes disposent les Coquilles par classes et par familles... ils mêlent, suivant ce principe, les
brutes avec les belles, les grandes avec les petites, de sorte que l’oeil en est quelquefois fatigue. Les Curieux, au contraire, donnant tout aux plaisirs des yeux, sacrifient l’ordre méthodique.” Quoted and
discussed in Dietz “Mobile Objects,” 50.
\textsuperscript{43} Kristel Smentek, \textit{Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East} (New York: The
Frick Collection 2007), 21. This edition is now owned by the American Museum of Natural History.
D’Argenville’s approach thus combined aesthetic and scientific modes of understanding and organizing natural specimens. Shell consumers were encouraged to understand the origin and classification of the specimens, but also to derive sensual pleasure from the visual and textural contrasts between them. Vallayer-Coster’s *Still Life with Sea Shells and Coral* seems to be an articulation of d’Argenville’s hybrid display strategy; in composing her *nature morte*, the artist demonstrated commitment to formal symmetry, balance, and piquant distribution of color, as well as specimen-specificity.

D’Argenville, himself an amateur engraver and the author of *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, also advocated for the artistic reproduction of the shells as a means of understanding them, writing, “What better way is there to understand the differences between shells than by drawing them from nature? The slightest fold, the fine details of the shape, the contour, the mouth: nothing escapes the draftsman, and nothing can better reveal their true nature.” Few of Vallayer-Coster’s graphic designs survive; in fact, the only known drawings are of singular flowers, which are considered to post-date the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the artist’s training with Madeleine Françoise Basseporte would have been firmly grounded in *le dessin*—and in the techniques of drawing individual natural specimens, in particular. In 1741, Basseporte had succeeded Claude Aubriet (1665–1742) as the official painter of the *Jardin du roi*.

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46 See Introduction for more on the relationship between the Vallayer family and Madeleine Basseporte.

which she would hold until her death in 1780, Basseporte was charged with recording the botanical specimens in the king’s botanical gardens in Paris, as well as the other royal residences. In addition to hundreds of works on paper depicting flowers and plants, several of Basseporte’s drawings of individual shells are preserved in the collection of the Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d’histoire naturelle in Paris—representing, for example, a scallop shell (*Pectinidae*), dated to 1747 (Fig. 5.15). Might Vallayer-Coster have gained access to this collection of shells through Basseporte? In any case, Vallayer-Coster seems to answer d’Argenville’s call to “dessiner d’après nature,” executing her marine specimens with anatomical precision, married with her characteristic painterly flourish.

**Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae***

D’Argenville’s popular *Conchyliologie* was eventually succeeded by Carl Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae*—the first text to systematically employ a systematic, binomial nomenclature to describe the Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral kingdoms. The Swedish botanist’s work was well known in Paris, and Vallayer-Coster was likely aware of *Systema Naturae*—possibly through Basseporte, who met Linnaeus (1707–1778) during his visit to Aubriet’s studio at the *Jardin du Roi* in 1737. Basseporte seems to have made a strong impression on the Swedish naturalist; in a 1749 letter to French naturalist

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Bernard de Jussieu, Linnaeus wrote, “Send my thoughts of friendship to Mademoiselle Basseporte; I dream of her, and if I become widowed, she would be my second wife—whether she wanted to or not, willing or unwilling.”

The tenth edition of Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae*, published in 1758, was the first version of Linnaeus’s text to include shelled creatures, likely a response to the enormous *amateur* interest in shells and the influx of available specimens on the European market. According to Linnaean taxonomy, animals with shells were referred to as *Testacea*, an order that included three subsets: univalve, bivalve, and multivalve shells. These three groups are further divided into different genera and species. Much like D’Argenville’s *La Conchyliologie*, however, Linnaeus’s system for identifying shells was a superficial one. He based his taxonomy on the size, shape, color, pattern, and texture of the shell, rather than the anatomy of the animal that had once lived inside it. Furthermore, because *Systema Naturae* lacked extensive illustration, Linneaus frequently cited D’Argenville’s *Conchyliogie* throughout the text, applying his own Latin terminology to the specimens represented in D’Argenville’s engravings. It must have been common, therefore, for shell collectors to own copies, and to make comparative use of, both authors’ texts.

Linnaeus’s terminology gained acceptance among European collectors only gradually, due in part to the controversy surrounding his use of sexual metaphor. For example, Linnaeus described one bivalve shell, the *Venus Diones*, as reminiscent of female genitalia (Fig. 5.16). He proceeded to label various parts of this shell with the

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Latin terms for the pubic mound, vulva, labia, hymen, and anus—despite the fact that those terms bear no connection to the true biological function of the shell. This sexual lexicon was considered inappropriate by many European conchologists—namely the Emanuel Da Costa, who wrote in his *Elements of Conchology* text of 1776: “Science should be chaste and delicate. Ribaldry at times has been passed for wit, but Linnaeus alone passes it for terms of science. His merit in this part of natural history is, in my opinion, much debased thereby.” Ironically, Da Costa objected to what he called “unjustifiable and very indecent terms” because he believed they were inappropriate for women to know and use. In *Elements of Conchology*, Da Costa advocated for more “chaste” alternatives, in order to “render descriptions proper, intelligible, and decent; by which the science may become useful, easy, and adapted to all capacities, and to both sexes.” This excerpt reveals contemporary concerns about women gaining and employing certain kinds of scientific knowledge. Yet Da Costa also seems to acknowledge the increasing numbers of female collectors during the final decades of the eighteenth century—for example, the British Duchess of Portland, Margaret Cavendish Bentinck (1715–1785), or the French Madame Blondel d’Azincourt, both of whom were well known for their natural history cabinets.

**Vallayer-Coster and Biheron’s Wax Anatomical Models**

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54 Ibid.
Despite Da Costa’s insistence that women avoid using the terms for their own genitalia to describe shell parts, Vallayer-Coster’s fleshy pink conch shell in *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* explicitly invokes the female body—indicating that she was well versed in the lexicon of conchology. The ‘intentionality’ of this visual double-entendre is underscored by Vallayer-Coster’s affiliation with anatomist Marie Marguerite Biheron (1719–1795). Like Vallayer-Coster, Biheron took drawing lessons from Basseporte sometime after 1741, when Basseporte assumed her post at the *Jardin du Roi*. Although she was ineligible for membership to the Academy of Sciences by virtue of her sex, Biheron nevertheless achieved considerable success—in part by developing professional relationships with several prominent thinkers, including Diderot, Benjamin Franklin, and the surgeon Sauveur-François Morand. Like Basseporte, Biheron never married; she supported herself by sculpting wax anatomical models and making her *cabinet d’anatomie* on rue Saint Paul (not far from the Louvre) accessible to the public for a small fee. In 1763, L.P. Bachaumont praised Biheron’s installation of wax models, writing, “Mlle Biheron offers a most curious and interesting spectacle. This girl, as active as she is industrious, has for several years applied her knowledge of anatomy in the most intelligent manner, executing models of the greatest perfection. She employs all sorts of materials, in order to render the diverse parts most truthful.”

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57 “Mlle Biheron donne un spectacle des plus curieux & des plus intéressans. Cette fille, aussi active qu’industrieuse, s’est depuis plusieurs années appliquée à l’anatomie d’un façon si intelligente, qu’elle en execute des modeles de la plus grande perfection. Elle emploie toutes fortes de matieres, a mesure qu’elle
In 1770, the same year that Vallayer-Coster was admitted to the Academy of Painting and Sculpture, Biheron was invited to the Academy of Sciences to give a demonstration of perhaps her most innovative anatomical model: a life-size gynecological wax model, designed to aid in the training of new doctors and midwives.\(^{58}\) The functional model of the female reproductive system featured a dilating and contracting uterus, a shifting coccyx, a removable fetus—all rendered in pigmented wax, tinted to approximate the color of flesh. Though no longer extant, Biheron’s model might have resembled the work of Italian wax modeler Felice Fontana (1730–1805) (Fig. 5.17), whose work was in turn based on the engravings in William Hunter’s *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures*.\(^{59}\)

In her 2008 essay, “On Waxes and Wombs: Eighteenth-Century Representations of the Gravid Uterus,” Lyle Massey speculates that Biheron’s models were more “schematic” than (and therefore “not nearly as graphic” as) those of her male Italian counterparts.\(^{60}\) However, this supposition seems to be predicated on the same assumptions about the ‘delicate female constitution’ that undergirded Da Costa’s rebuke of Linnaeus in 1776. In fact, Biheron’s models were resoundingly praised for their

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\(^{58}\) Biheron’s 1770 presentation to the Academy of Sciences was so successful that she was invited to return in March 1771, on the occasion of the visit of the Royal Swedish Prince Gustav. Valerie Lastinger, “The Laboratory, the Boudoir and the Kitchen: Medicine, Home and Domesticity,” *Women, Gender and Disease in Eighteenth-Century England and France*, eds. Kathleen Hardesty Doig and Felicia Berger Sturzer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 125.


verism, with language that often parallels critical reactions to Vallayer-Coster’s still life paintings. At a 1759 meeting of the Academy of Sciences, for example, Biheron was acknowledged for having “reproduced exactly the consistency, suppleness and weight” of various human organs, and for having “imitated nature… with a precision and truth which no person has yet achieved.”61 Similarly, Sir John Pringle, the physician general of Britain and later the president of the Royal Society, rather crudely exclaimed that Biheron’s models “want nothing but the smell”—indicating that they were lifelike in every other relevant sensual capacity.62

Indeed, it is tempting to speculate that Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of slick pink conch shells were inspired in part by Biheron’s anatomical models—although much like Linnaeus, Vallayer-Coster would have been more concerned with the morphological similarities between the conch and the vulva, rather than the internal function of the entire female reproductive system. The fact that the artist and the anatomist shared a teacher and a major patron indicates that they were at least aware of one another: in 1786, five years after she served as a witness to Vallayer-Coster’s marriage, Marie Antoinette purchased Biheron’s entire collection of anatomical models for 6,000 livres.63

The Sensual Appeal of Shells

Linnaeus’s and Vallayer-Coster’s associations of the shell with the female sex organs resonated with a larger cultural system of meaning in which the shell is symbolic

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63 Lastinger, “The Laboratory, the Boudoir and the Kitchen,” 128.
of female sexuality. This symbolism has ancient roots: the Ancient Greek word *kteis* referred to both the shell and the vagina, and it was from a shell that Venus, the Goddess of Love and Fertility (and the unofficial patron saint of the Rococo), is thought to have emerged at birth.⁶⁴ Although most ancient Greek and Roman textual sources fail to mention a shell in their description of Venus’s birth, the shell has long been a part of the visual iconography of the scene—the fresco in Pompeii’s House of Venus (ca. 1st century AD) (Fig. 5.18), Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (1486) (Fig. 5.19), and Boucher’s *Triumph of Venus* (1740) (Fig. 5.4) are among the most iconic examples. In these varied representations of the *Venus Anadyomene*, the shell is symbolically and morphologically genital, a kind of disembodied womb that cradles the goddess of love and fertility.⁶⁵

These associations of the shell with Venus, the patron saint of beauty, love, and fertility, persisted well into the eighteenth-century. The shell was a ubiquitous decorative motif in Rococo interiors, and was closely associated with intimate, feminine spaces in particular—namely, the bathroom or the *boudoir*, which evolved in the eighteenth-century as a new kind of room or suite dedicated to the private intellectual and leisurely pursuits of aristocratic women. As architectural historian Ed Lilley has argued, the *boudoir* came to occupy an important “place in the erotic imagination,” as evidenced by the *boudoir* genre paintings by Jean-Honoré Fragonard or the Marquis de Sade’s *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795).⁶⁶ Lilley further cites *The Genius of Architecture; or*

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The Analogy of That Art with Our Sensations by architect Le Camus de Mezières (1721–1789), who wrote in 1780 that boudoir ought to be “regarded as the abode of sensual delight… it is essential for everything to be treated in a style in which luxury, softness, and good taste predominate.”

The shell, a symbol of luxury and a conduit of sensual delight, was an important decorative motif in these Rococo feminine spaces. Shells were often embedded in ornamental ceiling moldings, gilded wall panels, or in the wooden frames of beds and chaises. De Mezières recommended incorporating “various seashells, scattered as if on the shore,” as well as a “marble scallop shell” sink basin, into a woman’s bathroom.

Shells played a prominent role in the pictorial program of spaces curated by Boucher: consider, for example, his Rocaille folding screen design, which features a fantastic, curvilinear still life arrangement of shells, seaweed, and coral (Fig. 5.20). This Rocaille (a term derived from the Italian barocco, and used to describe the decorative effect of rock and shell motifs) is clearly related compositionally to Boucher’s earlier frontispiece for Gersaint. The shell is similarly incorporated into the decorative scheme of Boucher’s Toilette of Venus painting, commissioned for Madame Pompadour’s bathhouse at Bellevue (Fig. 5.21). Here, clumsy, chubby putti aid the goddess of Love as she adorns her herself with jewelry. One, leaning on his belly beside Venus, dives forward to rummage through a pile of pearls in a shell-shaped silver dish – a clear reference to Venus’s mythological origins. These images demonstrate the era’s fascination with the ornamental beauty of the shell, as well as the allure of its volumes and voids.


68 Ibid.
Even within the primarily masculine contexts of the eighteenth-century natural history text and the curiosity cabinet, the shell never truly shed its association with the erotic and the exotic, as demonstrated by Boucher’s sensual frontispiece for d’Argenville’s *La Conchyliologie*. There, however, the shell also became the subject of a kind of epistemological vision—a means of understanding, and asserting dominance over, nature, in addition to being a luxurious object of a French collector’s lust. As scholars such as Danielle Bleichermar have argued, the curiosity cabinet, sale catalogue, and natural history book functioned as overlapping “spaces for learning to see in expert ways, and for articulating notions of order and taste.”

To this, I would add that these spaces also advocated, and satiated the desire for, a particular kind of touch—a way of manipulating shells in order to evaluate, clean, enhance, and arrange them. Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt (1704–1779) articulated the dual nature of this compulsion in his entry on “Painting” in the 1765 edition of *Encyclopédie*, in which he directly compares the sensual pleasures of both shells and *trompe l’oeil* painting: “It is easy to see how the imitations of painting can move us when one stops to think how a shell…excites restless passions and arouses the desire to see them and to possess them. A grand passion ignited by a small object is an ordinary event [emphasis mine].”

*Still Life with Sea Shells and Coral* directly appeals to both the visual and the haptic desires described by Jaucourt. Indeed, Vallayer-Coster seems to have luxuriated in

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the representation of a diversity of textures, describing natural surfaces with an almost fetishistic zeal. Vallayer-Coster achieved this vivid illusionism in part through the use of a textured ground: a warm gray layer of primer, mixed with some sort of gritty, ground pebble, applied to the canvas.\(^1\) Vallayer-Coster also employed a unique combination of painting techniques in order to evoke a diversity of surfaces—for example, wet-on-wet paint for the soft, smooth, pink interior of the conch, and a thick dry impasto to emphasize the veiny, craggy surface of the Venus sea fan coral.\(^2\) This textural specificity suggests that Vallayer-Coster had direct access to an as-yet unidentified natural history collection, and that the subjects were seen and felt by the artist herself.

Vallayer-Coster’s emphasis on tactility parallels a shift in the eighteenth-century discourse on the very nature of sensory experience. Condillac’s *Treatise of Sensations* of 1754, for example, maintained that it was only through touching other objects that a subject could understand the boundaries of his or her own body, and comprehend the solidity of seen objects. In order to illustrate his theory, Condillac famously used the example of a slowly animating marble statue (in the tradition of Pygmalion and Galatea), which gradually acquires the ability to smell, taste, hear and see. However, the statue only achieves full consciousness, and understands himself to be an autonomous body, when he at last acquires the sense of touch.\(^3\)

Diderot, meanwhile, articulated his belief that touch was the superior sense in his 1751 essay, *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb (Lettre sur les sourds et muets)*. Diderot

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\(^{1}\) The artist may have created this textured ground herself, although there is evidence that at least at the beginning of the nineteenth century, pre-prepared, textured canvases were available for purchase; these were employed, for example by Jacques Louis David. See David’s *Portrait of the Sisters Zenaide and Charlotte Bonaparte* of 1821, now at the J. Paul Getty Museum.


hypothesized that if he were to allot to five men only one of the senses, he would find
that “the sense of the eye was the most superficial, the ear the most arrogant, smell the
most voluptuous, taste the most superstitious and the most inconstant, and touch the most
profound and the most philosophical.” Diderot expanded this idea in *D’Alembert’s
Dream* (1769), in which he suggests that knowledge was obtained primarily through our
tactile interactions with the material world. Through the voice of Doctor Bordeu,
Diderot describes the “infinite diversity” of touches that comprise sensation, and provide
us with understanding of the other bodies and objects in the natural world. For Diderot,
the subtleties of experience are primarily available through touch, in collaboration with
vision and the other senses.

Condillac and Diderot’s privileging of touch over vision, however, was a reversal
of the traditional “hierarchy of the senses,” as articulated by Michel Foucault in *The
Order of Things*. Foucault argues that the supremacy of vision can be attributed to the
increasing importance of natural histories beginning in the mid-seventeenth century. The
sense of sight typically presided over this hierarchy because it was associated with the
higher faculties of observation and reason. Touch, meanwhile, was associated with
subjective experiences of pleasure and pain, and therefore irrelevant to the pursuit of
objective, scientific knowledge.

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74 “…je trouvois que de tous les sens l’oeil étoit le plus superficial, l’oreille le plus orguileux, l’odorat le
plus voluptueux, le gout le plus superstitieux, & le plus inconstant, le toucher le plus profound & le plus
75 Diderot, *D’Alembert’s Dream*, 1769, circulated in *Correspondance Litteraire*, ed. Grimm, 1782 and
76 “… If this infinite diversity of touching did not exist, we’d know that we were experiencing pleasure or
pain, but we wouldn’t know what to connect them with. We’d have to have recourse to our vision. That
wouldn’t be a matter of sensation any more, but a matter of experience and observation.” Ibid.
77 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Pantheon
As Constance Classen has shown, this hierarchy was implicitly gendered: vision was widely considered to be masculine, and touch feminine. In her essay, “Feminine Tactics: Crafting an Alternative Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” Classen relates these ideas about the gendering of touch and sight to the gendering of the ‘low’ and ‘high’ arts (in other words, ‘feminine’ craft and ‘masculine’ painting and sculpture). Classen describes how women during this period embraced those ‘feminine arts’ that were “intrinsically tactile, intimate, and homely”—for example, needlework or cut silhouettes—and therefore “excelled within the bounds of the socially permissible.”

To illustrate her point, Classen provides the example of the collagist Mary Delany (1700–1788), a friend of the Duchess of Portland. Delany’s botanical collages were composed with hundreds of delicate, colorful cutouts, pasted on deep black paper (Fig. 5.22)—the brightly hued effect of which is rather similar to Vallayer-Coster’s *Still Life with Seashells and Coral.* Like Vallayer-Coster’s paintings, Delany’s collages had textural appeal; according to Classen, her work was “readily accessible to the fingertips but less immediately apparent to the eye,” because the pieces had been cut with scissors and arranged on the black paper surface with the artist’s own hands.

The gendered hierarchy of the senses—that is, the association of men with objective vision and women with subjective touch—existed within the realm of conchology, as well. This point is perhaps best illustrated by two profile portraits by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle (1717–1806), now in the Musée Condé in Chantilly. In 1758,

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Carmontelle drew the fermier-général Monsieur de Buchelay (Fig. 523) seated at a small writing table, gazing at a mounted shell. The pile of books and scroll of paper at his feet are clear references to the intellectual discourse surrounding his shell collecting practice. Carmontelle’s 1760 portrait of the aforementioned Madame Blondel d’Azincourt however, pictures the prominent shell collector using both hands to touch objects from her collection (Fig. 5.24). Her left hand, resting in her lap, holds a conch shell, and she fingers a turban shell with her right hand. Her gaze doesn’t seem to be directed at anything in particular, and she is surrounded by none of the texts that complement Buchelay’s portrait.

Madame d’Azincourt was the wife of prominent art collector Barthélemy-Augustin Blondel d’Azincourt (1719–1783). Madame, born Catherine-Charlotte-Edmee de la Haye des Fosse, had inherited the vast fortune of her uncle, Charles Marin de la Haye des Fosses, and she was therefore able to assemble a vast cabinet d’histoire naturelle of her own, in addition to owning at least seventy drawings by Boucher. So while we might attribute Madame d’Azincourt’s touch to Carmontelle’s complicity in the gendered hierarchy of the senses, we might also describe her gesture as one of ownership—and conclude that the pleasures of owning, touching, and painting shells were not limited to men.

81 Louis Carrogis Carmontelle (1717-1806), *Mr. de Buchelay, fermier general*, 1758, mine de plomb, sanguine, aquarelle, Musée Condé in Chantilly.
83 Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo*, 49. See also Bailey, “Conventions of the Eighteenth-Century Cabinet de Tableaux,” 431-47. For more on the portrait, and the unfavorable description of the drawing, see François-Anatole Gruyer, *Chantilly: les portraits de Carmontelle*, Musée Conde, 1902, no. 210, 151 (d’Azincourt) and no. 436, 330 (Buchelay).
Returning to the Shell

Vallayer-Coster would go on to cast shells as the primary subjects of only two other paintings. Five years after the debut of *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* at the Salon of 1771, Vallayer-Coster submitted *Still Life with Porcelain Vase, Marine Plants, Shells and Various Mineralogical Specimens* to the Salon of 1777 (Fig. 5.2), exhibited along with its pendant, *Bust of Minerva with Military Attributes* (Fig. 2.28). The two shell paintings are comparable in terms of their subject matter and grand scale; yet the most striking difference between the 1769 *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* and the 1776 canvas is the later painting’s juxtaposition of *naturalia* and *artificialia*. The overall effect of *Still Life with Porcelain Vase, Marine Plants, Shells and Various Mineralogical Specimens* is, as a result, much richer in terms of color, texture, and iridescence.

A teal velvet fabric, reminiscent of that in *Attributes of Music* of 1770, forms the background of the 1776 painting—a significant departure from the minimalist backdrop of *Still Life with Seashells and Coral*. The depicted objects are arranged on a wooden table with a carved marble top. Several protagonists of *Still Life with Seashells and Coral* reappear in this painting (underscoring the likelihood that the specimens belonged to a private collection to which Vallayer-Coster had continued access)—plumes of sea fan the color of papyrus, a blood-orange bivalve, a pink conch, and spiky branches of red coral, the vivid crimson of which resembles a network of pulsing veins. Yet these objects are now joined by an iridescent mineralogical assortment: to the left, a pile of amber, lilac, emerald, silver, and gray-blue colored rocks, and a string of dark pearls hanging off the edge of the table; to the right, a cluster of blue topaz, still embedded in stone.

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With this painting, produced five years after her initial debut at the Salon, Vallayer-Coster demonstrates a more sophisticated command of the effects of natural light. The artist carefully observed the pockets of shadow created by folds of velvet, and the inky wells in the spaces between objects. She also experimented with the ways in which light can alternatively exaggerate or negate textural details; for example, hesitant strokes of white describe the veiny surface of the coral and the spiky fronds of the heather-gray sea plant. Yet that same light renders the lip of the conch shell a pale, matte pink (rather than dappled peach, as it appeared in *Still Life with Seashells and Coral*), and transforms a large calcite rock into an opaque, bright white orb, glowing at the very center of the canvas.

Vallayer-Coster organized this gathering of shells and rocks around a large, red monochrome porcelain vase with gilt bronze rope that echoes the gold tasseled cord that is strung across the upper right corner of the canvas. The polished porcelain’s surface is animated by a mosaic of reflections—the colors of the immediately adjacent rocks, as well as the source of light that illuminates the entire scene: a clean white daylight, filtered through a single, four-paned window. The window is reflected twice, on the bulbous shoulder of the vase, and again on its concave neck.

Kristel Smentek’s *Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East* has demonstrated that monochromatic glazed porcelains were quite rare in mid-century France, as they were produced primarily for the Chinese domestic market. Moreover, the technique of applying a single colored glaze was complicated, and widely sought-after; Smentek cites Gersaint, who wrote in 1747: “one… sees blue, red, and green [Chinese monochromes] but spreading these colors evenly is difficult and rarely
successful; this is what makes these pieces very expensive when they are perfect.”

Like many glazed vases from China, however, the porcelain depicted in Vallayer-Coster’s painting was likely enhanced with gilded mounting in France, in order to assimilate them to the French taste and to echo the gilded Rococo interiors they were intended to populate.

*Rococo Exotic* also describes the eighteenth-century preoccupation with, and initial confusion regarding, the materiality of porcelain. Smentek writes that Europeans were long ignorant of the process of making porcelain. Prior to the introduction of hard-paste in the French porcelain factory at Sevres in 1768, French ceramics had instead been produced with a softer amalgamation of powdered glass, clay, and chalk, which could only approximate the iridescence and translucence of Asian ceramics. Indeed, for much of the century, it was widely believed that Chinese porcelains were comprised of crushed-shells. Smentek probed this relationship between shell and porcelain with an installation at the Frick Collection, which juxtaposed an arrangement of blue porcelain and a vitrine filled with shell specimens (*Fig. 5.25*). Vallayer-Coster’s inclusion of a Chinese porcelain vase similarly alludes to this very material slippage in the eighteenth-century French imagination.

Finally, at the Salon of 1789, Vallayer-Coster exhibited *Still Life with Minerals* (*Fig. 5.3*). With this final iteration of the genre, Vallayer-Coster merged multiple genres and a wide range of luxurious materials: a conch shell, additional plumes of coral, and a few stalks of holly-hock are joined by a neoclassical, royal blue Sèvres porcelain vase with gilt-bronze mounts, including corded handles and grotesques linked by delicate floral garlands. Two figurines also populate the table: a day-dreaming, classically-draped

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female figure, probably bisque porcelain mounted on a marble and gold platform, and bronze reproduction of a *spinario*, a classical sculpture of a young nude male examining the bottom of his foot. These objects are arranged on a luxurious marble surface of a neoclassical table with spare marquetry ornament; as in the 1776 canvas, a string of pearls dangles off the edge, the single moment of disorder in an otherwise tightly arranged *mélange*. The painting was part of the collection of the baronne de Saint-Palais, a great-grandniece of the artist, indicating that the painting remained in the collection of the artist and her family; the present whereabouts of the painting, however, are unknown.

Vallayer-Coster’s returned to the shell just a few times throughout her career, after long and irregular intervals. Her repetition of the subject, however, attests to the enduring sensual and intellectual appeal of the shell, for both the artist and her patrons, throughout the 1770s and 1780s. Indeed, there was much complexity embedded in the representation of the shell, which was associated with both the masculine *cabinet* and the feminine *boudoir*, and possessed distinct scientific and ornamental applications therein. Vallayer-Coster’s shells, in particular, evoked the material economy stimulated by Gersaint, the collecting practices of the Prince de Conti, and the conchological discourses of d’Argenville and Linnaeus. While simultaneously inhabiting these related spheres of meaning, her shells provoked both visual and haptic desires, connoting the erotic and the exotic.

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86 Thank you to Professor Catherine Puglisi for helping me to identify the subject of the sculpture.  
87 Kahng notes that although the description of number 48 in the Salon of 1789 livret matches the present painting, the dimensions do not align. Kahng and Roland Michel, 2002, 211, no 87; Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970, no. 266 or 267, fig. 179. The painting also appeared in the exhibition catalogue *French Painting 1774-1830: The Age of Revolution* (Detroit and New York: The Detroit Institute of Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), no. 180, 639-640, pl. 96.
Vallayer-Coster’s natural history still lifes appealed to this taste for sensual and material opulence of the middle decades of the eighteenth-century, deliberately courting the patronage of omnivorous collectors. Yet the apparent dissonance of Vallayer-Coster’s subject matter with the political climate of 1789 Paris might strike us as evidence of naïveté or denial. That year, the Academy’s exhibition was installed at the Salon Carré of the Louvre a month after the storming of the Bastille; there, Vallayer-Coster exhibited her *Une figure de l’étudé, en marbre blanc, groupée avec des madrepiores, des coquillages & des minéraux* amidst a number of sober, politically-charged works—for example, David’s painting, *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*.\(^8\)

It is only with the benefit of hindsight that we are able to fully understand the implications of the brewing Revolution for Vallayer-Coster’s career. Though her aristocratic patronage network was crippled, and despite her close affiliation with the ill-fated Queen Marie Antoinette, Vallayer-Coster remained in France throughout the 1790s and early 1800s—unlike, for example, Vigée Le Brun, who fled in October 1789. These circumstances, and their consequences for Vallayer-Coster’s art, will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

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VI. Flowers

At the Salon of 1777, Vallayer-Coster exhibited thirteen paintings, including five still lifes with flowers. These floral paintings drew the attention of many critics, including one who wrote “Her flowers are so fresh, so vibrant, so brilliant that one is tempted to pick them and make a crown for her. She has, so to speak, treated them like history painting.”¹ This might seem profound praise for a specialist of this lower genre: in comparing her flowers to the figurative paintings, this critic suggests that Vallayer-Coster has rendered the flowers with the intelligence and gravity, and on a scale, more typical of complex history paintings.

Yet we should also acknowledge the patronizing connotations embedded within this statement. Female artists were unable to study the human body at the Academy, and thus largely precluded from the prestigious title of ‘history painter.’ Here, Vallayer-Coster is praised instead for excelling in the representation of a simpler, and decidedly feminine, subject, considered more appropriate to her sex. This author suggests that the lifelikeness of her flowers is not simply a compliment to her artistic talent, but might form a ‘crown’ to further ornament her own physical beauty.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, Vallayer-Coster’s artistic production was by no means limited to flower painting—though she was certainly prolific in this genre. Of the 137 extant paintings documented in the 2002 exhibition catalogue, 46 may

be identified as floral still lifes.\(^2\) Yet her flower paintings have come to be representative of her entire oeuvre—perhaps because so many of them were produced in the latter half of her career, when other subjects appear less frequently. In the introduction to the 1824 Coster estate sale catalogue (Notice des tableaux de fleurs peint par Mme Vallayer-Coster), staged a few years after her own death in 1818, dealer Charles Paillet wrote “[Anne Vallayer-Coster] constantly maintained, with her adopted genre of flowers, a great reputation she had acquired and defended against the most renowned teachers.”\(^3\) Vallayer-Coster was also remembered as a flower painter by fellow académicienne Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, who recalled the controversy surrounding her own application to the Academy in her Souvenirs:

…several other works of mine, were the cause of Joseph Vernet's decision to propose me as a member of the Royal Academy of Painting. M. Pierre, then first Painter to the King, made strong opposition, not wishing, he said, that women should be admitted, although Mme. Vallayer-Coster, who painted flowers perfectly, had already been admitted, and I think Mme. Vien had been, too.\(^4\)

Vallayer-Coster’s characterization as a ‘flower painter’ continued in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. To cite just the one obvious example, the only two major publications dedicated to this artist, Roland Michel’s 1970 monograph and the 2002 exhibition catalogue, both selected flower paintings for their cover images.

Vallayer-Coster’s reputation as a ‘flower painter’ most certainly consolidated over time because she was a “femme peintre.”\(^5\) Of course, many male artists also painted

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\(^{2}\) Those 46 paintings do not include the two portraits and four genre paintings that feature women holding flowers, or the works in other media (works on paper, tapestries, etc.) These will, however, be discussed in this chapter.

\(^{3}\) Coster sale 1824.

\(^{4}\) “…et poutant madame Vallayer-Coster, qui piegnait parfaitement les fleurs, était déjà reçue [as a member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture].” Vigée Le Brun, Souvenirs de Madame Vigée Le Brun, 1:57.

\(^{5}\) Hyde traces the language used to describe female artists in the eighteenth-century, including ‘femme peintre,’ in her article “Peinte par elle-même?”
flowers during this period; the genre developed in the seventeenth century, out of the Dutch and Flemish *vanitas* tradition and an increasing interest in the botanical science. Vividly colored works by de Heem and Huysum later found a market in eighteenth-century France; Vallayer-Coster herself owned a still life painting by de Heem. Several male artists working in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries specialized in flower paintings, as well—namely Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636–1699), Gerard van Spaendonck (1746–1822), and Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759–1840). (Chardin, it should be noted, treated the subject very infrequently, and these are the least well-known works within his oeuvre.)

Nonetheless, female artists, both professional and amateur, have long been associated with paintings of flowers, due in part to the perceived simplicity and ‘decorative’ qualities of the subject. As Norman Bryson observed in *Looking at the Overlooked*, “In all countries, flower pictures in particular are a category in which women painters may excel.” He cites Louise Moillon (1610–1696) and Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750) as examples of artists whose work and reputations have survived due to their proficiency in painting flowers. According to Bryson, however, flower painting became less professional—in other words, more feminine—over time: “By the eighteenth century flower painting itself devolves towards a genteel female accomplishment: in the

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8 On a rare floral painting by Chardin (Bouquet of Carnations, Tuberoses and Sweet Peas in a White Porcelain Vase with Blue Decoration, ca. 1755, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, see Rosenberg, *Chardin*, 2000, 40-41, fig. 4, and 272-273, cat. 72.
second half of the eighteenth century there were between fifty and a hundred women flower painters exhibiting in London alone, but in the amateur reaches of the art world, well away from the center stage of the Royal Academy.‘’

Flowers themselves have long served as symbols of femininity in European painting. The flower’s colorful, ephemeral bloom, in particular, has served as a visual metaphor for what has been historically prized about women: beauty, youth, and fertility. While not unique to this context, floral expressions of femininity manifested in specific ways in eighteenth-century France. Here, I want to explore the ways in which eighteenth-century French women were linked with flowers: their cultivation, arrangement, appreciation, and representation in various media, but above all with their appearance and smell. In probing the relationship between the perceived ‘femininity’ of her subject matter and her painting technique, I argue that Vallayer-Coster’s paintings are indeed evocative of the look and smell of flowers. Floral scents, and the very act of smelling them, were also gendered in the eighteenth century; I argue that a historically specific understanding of that smell enhances our experience of Vallayer-Coster’s work, and endows her flower paintings with a sensual complexity that belies the simple decorative and feminine connotations of the genre.

My approach is informed by historian Alain Corbin, whose The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination is credited with “mapping the flux of smells that made up the olfactory texture” of Paris in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-

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9 Bryson Looking at the Overlooked, 174-5.
Corbin’s work has inspired a litany of research on smell during the Enlightenment, including a number of broad histories by Constance Classen. The relationship between smell and early modern painting, however, has not been well articulated. This is due, in no small part, to the lack of language to describe smells; existing adjectives are significantly less varied than those that describe color or texture. Of course, oil paint itself has a smell, derived from the organic materials that also produce its specific viscosity and hue—yet that smell tends to dissipate as the paint dries, and is not perceived to contribute significantly to a painting’s status as an art object or the viewer’s experience of the painting. In this chapter, I consider Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of flowers as visual expressions of the sensation of smell, and situate her work within the visual, material, and olfactory flower culture of late eighteenth-century France.

I frame my argument with the examples of the two most prominent garden patrons of this period: Marie Antoinette at the Petit Trianon at Versailles during the Ancien Régime, and the

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and Empress Josephine at Malmaison during the French Empire. These women, whose respective patronage of Vallayer-Coster marked the beginning and end of her career, also serve as iconic examples of the conceptual and material links between femininity, flowers, and smell in the long eighteenth-century.

Marie Antoinette in the Garden

Queen Marie Antoinette’s love of flowers found visual expression in two portraits by Vigée Le Brun, exhibited successively at the 1783 Salon. Famously, contemporaries critiqued the queen’s scandalous attire of the first portrait: a loose, gauzy white chemise, cinched at the waist with sheer, marigold silk, and a straw hat topped with a plume of feathers (Fig. 6.1). Vigée Le Brun sought—or was prompted by the Academy—to suppress the scandal by replacing the portrait with another, more conservative version. In this second canvas, the queen’s expression and posture are approximately the same, but she instead wears a gray silk robe à l’anglais, fringed with white lace at the neckline and at the elbows (Fig. 6.2).

In both works, Marie Antoinette holds a cluster of pale pink roses, some budded and others fully bloomed. The roses in these portraits have been widely identified as a reference to the queen’s Hapsburg lineage, as well representative of the queen’s personal fondness for that particular bloom. In the first painting, Marie Antoinette is depicted in a shadowy interior; in the midst of arranging a bouquet of roses and other flowers in a blue

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15 Susan Taylor-Leduc is currently preparing a book on this subject, tentatively titled Designing Legacy: Marie Antoinette, Josephine and the French Picturesque Garden 1774–1814.
porcelain vase with a gilded, ornamental base, similar to that in a Vallayer-Coster still life painting of about ten years earlier (Fig. 6.15). In the second, the more formally dressed queen is pictured outside, in front of a thick rose bush—that is, close to the very source of her flowers, her garden at the Petit Trianon.17

Situated in a relatively remote corner of Versailles, the Petit Trianon had been a gift from her husband, Louis XVI, soon after their coronation in 1774.18 The king reportedly presented Marie Antoinette with the property, saying, “You are fond of flowers, Madame, so I give you this whole bouquet.”19 In collaboration with royal architect Richard Mique (1728–94), Petit Trianon concierge Pierre-Charles Bonnefoy du Plan (1732–1824), and botaniste-fleuristes Claude (1705–1784) and Antoine Richard (1705–1784), the Queen gradually transformed the property, altering the landscape and incorporating new picturesque structures such as the Temple de l’amour and the hameau de la reine. In addition to the pre-existing jardin à la française, the revamped Petit Trianon included a ‘Wood of Solitude’ and an English style garden (jardin à l’anglaise), populated by chestnut, dogwood, and magnolia trees, as well as an abundance of roses and violets, the queen’s favorite flowers.20

Increasingly fashionable in the late eighteenth century, the jardin à l’anglaise embraced a ‘natural’ aesthetic: a variety of blooms, both local and exotic, were installed

17 Pierre de Nolhac first identified the setting of the portrait as the Petit Trianon in Le Petit Trianon de Marie Antoinette (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1925), 218. Subsequent discussions of the portrait have strengthened the connection between the image and the queen’s garden there.
18 The Petit Trianon had originally served as a pleasure pavilion to Louis XV and his mistress Madame Pompadour, and later Madame du Barry. Martin Chapman et al., Marie Antoinette and the Petit Trianon at Versailles (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Legion of Honor, 2007).
19 Apocryphal quote, cited in Weber, Queen of Fashion, 131.
in asymmetric patterns, evoking the informal sprawl of wildflowers. These contrived, ‘organic’ garden designs facilitated Rousseauian fantasies—that is, unmediated (though in fact idealized and controlled) experiences of nature. As Russian nobleman Nikolai Karamzin (1765–1826) recalled of his 1789 visit to Versailles, “The garden surrounding Trianon is the triumph of English horticulture. Nowhere do you meet with cold formal symmetry: everywhere reigns a sweet confusion, a pleasing simplicity and the beauty of nature.”

The “sweet confusion” of the Petit Trianon was a significant departure from the absolutist order that had governed the gardens of Versailles since the reign of Louis XIV. The meandering paths, shady grottos, and irregular flowerbeds of the Petit Trianon gardens engendered a sense of casual intimacy—quite different from the rigidly hierarchical, carefully organized, and easily surveyed (and surveilled) landscape of Versailles. Here, the Queen and her entourage enjoyed a privacy that was impossible to achieve within the utterly public Château. Perhaps because the Petit Trianon landscape was so chaotically ‘feminine’ in contrast to the patriarchal and geometric laws that governed the rest of Versailles, rumors spread about the queen’s activities there. As Jill H. Casid has shown, the popular press characterized the Petit Trianon as the site of deviant dalliances between the Queen and her female courtiers—sapphic liaisons inspired and facilitated by the ‘wild’ landscape itself.

Yet the pleasure experienced in the gardens at the Petit Trianon might be more precisely characterized as a confluence of sensory and creative pleasure. In several letters, the queen writes of her satisfaction with the design choices implemented by her team of architects and gardeners, and her joy in cultivating her gardens with her own hands. Inspired by the flowers in her garden, the queen also produced a number of floral embroideries to adorn the interiors of the Petit Trianon. As Karamzin described, “Sofas and chairs are upholstered with the handiwork of Marie Antoinette; the roses embroidered by her seemed to my eyes lovelier than those of nature.” An example of the Queen’s technical skill survives in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: a fire screen panel emblazoned with her personal monogram, an interwoven “M” and “A.” This symbolic articulation of the self was comprised entirely of delicate flower petals represented with thread (Fig. 6.3).

In addition to reproducing them in thread, the queen commissioned various visual documents of her flowers—notably, works by Pierre-Joseph Buc’hoz (1731–1807) and Redouté. In 1783, Buc’hoz, a French physician and naturalist, published *Le jardin d’Éden: le paradis terrestre renouvellé dans le jardin de la Reine à Trianon* (The Garden of Eden, or the terrestrial paradise renewed in the Queen’s garden at the Trianon), which contained 200 colored engravings of unique plants found in the Petit Trianon, each given a vernacular name after the queen and several members of the her circle. In honor of the queen, for example, Buc’hoz labeled the Hyacinth plate the “Queen of Women”—

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a clear rejection of the Linnaean nomenclature that ruled in the scientific communities of eighteenth-century Paris.\(^{28}\)

In 1788, the queen named Pierre-Joseph Redouté as her personal Draftsman of flowers (Dessinateur des fleurs pour la cabinet de la Reine)—although his productivity in this role has been less well studied than his later work for Empress Josephine.\(^{29}\) The Belgian-born Redouté arrived in Paris in 1782, and was eventually employed as an assistant to Gerard van Spaendonck, who replaced Madeleine Basseporte (Vallayer-Coster’s early teacher) as the professeur de peinture de fleurs at the Jardins du Roi after her death in 1780; it was likely through Spaendonck that Redouté earned the position at Versailles.\(^{30}\) As Basseporte did before them (Fig. 6.4), Spaendonck and Redouté collaborated on dozens of watercolor-on-vellum representations of individual botanical specimens for the Vélins du Roi, operating within the Linnean system of classifying plant and animal life.\(^{31}\)

**Smelling Flowers**

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\(^{31}\) For more on Linnaeus and his influence over the work of Redouté in particular, see Roger L. Williams, *Botanophilia in Eighteenth-Century France: The Spirit of the Enlightenment* (Berlin: Springer, 2001).
Buc’hoz and Redouté carefully recorded the appearance of specimens in Marie Antoinette’s garden, yet their works did little to evoke the other quality for which her flowers were most prized: their scent. Indeed, contemporary accounts of the Petit Trianon gardens are often united by their descriptions of its fragrance: visitors describe the wafts of iris, jasmine, hyacinthe, lavender, lilac, lily-of-the-valley in the air—see, for example, the Mémoires of Henriette Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, Baronne d’Oberkirch (1753–1804):

Early in the morning I visited the queen’s own Petit Trianon. My goodness, what a charming stroll: the copses of fragrant lilac, populated with nightingales, were utterly delightful. The weather was magnificent; the air was full of balmy fragrance…I have never in my life enjoyed three such enchanting hours as those spent visiting the retreat.32

This intertwined visual and olfactory experience of the Petit Trianon was almost certainly deliberate. In Théorie de l'art des jardins, translated from German into French in 1779, Christian Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld asserted that the “artiste jardinière” possessed the unique power to flatter the eye and the nose; while flowers and plants primarily offered visual pleasure, one also had to account for their variable smells when arranging them within a garden.33

It was in part due to their smell that the queen routinely gathered flowers to adorn the interiors of the Petit Trianon—much like the bouquets represented in the Vigée le Brun portrait en chemise of 1783, or in Vallayer-Coster’s floral still life paintings. Freshly plucked from her garden and arranged in porcelain or glass vases, these fragrant bouquets worked to counteract the fetid odors that plagued the whole of Versailles. As Marie

33 Christian Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld, Théorie de l’Art des Jardins, (Leipzig: Chez les heritiers de M.G. Weidmann et Reich, 1779), 171.
Antoinette’s *parfumeur* Jean-Louis Fargeon (1748–1806) wrote in his memoirs, the royal château and grounds could “turn the stomach with their dreadful odors. The hallways, the courtyards, the buildings and corridors are filled with urine and fecal matter.”

Noxious fumes, and the display of fresh flowers to counteract them, were by no means limited to Versailles. In his description of the markets of Les Halles in his *Tableau de Paris*, Mercier refers to the daily influx of flower vendors (also represented in the Comte de Caylus’s engraving of the *Cris de Paris*—Fig. 6.5), as well as the popularity of private gardens in Paris. These urban plots—though modest in scale, often limited to courtyard flowerbeds or windowsill boxes—enabled bourgeois and aristocratic families alike to grow and cull their own flowers. According to Mercier, however, the presence of live flowers did little to neutralize the stench that proliferated in Paris: a potent combination of waste, sweat, and rot emanating from human and animal bodies, as well as the polluted Seine.

In addition to assembling bouquets in vases, eighteenth-century French women often used flowers to thwart their own stink—adorning their hair and necklines with fresh blooms and slathering their bodies with floral essences. (As Corbin has argued, this gendered custom of perfuming the body was a matter of sociosexual etiquette in the eighteenth-century, prefiguring nineteenth-century ideas about hygienic deodorization.)

Buc’hoz, the author of Marie Antoinette’s *Le jardin d’Éden*, also published *Toilette de...*
Flore, ou essai sur Les plantes et les fleurs qui peuvent servir d’ornement aux dames (Toilet of Flora, or Essay on the Plants and Flowers that Serve to Ornament Women) (1771), which contained several floral recipes to scent, and thereby “ornament,” the female body—an interesting slippage between olfactory and visual embellishment. He recommended, for example, different combinations of ingredients to smooth cheeks, nourish and color hair, and whiten teeth, but also to perfume the skin, counteracting the natural odors of underarms and feet.38

Professional parfumeurs like Fargeon also sold a variety of ready-made fragrances derived from flowers, similarly intended for women. In his L’Art du parfumeur published in 1801, Fargeon describes the techniques of drying, boiling, crushing, and concentrating massive quantities of flowers to extract their essences, and combining them to produce the desired effect, a process he likens to mixing pigments to yield a specific color of paint. These procedures yielded a diverse range of scented products: potpourri, perfume, pomade, soap, oil, as well as cosmetic powders for the hair, face, and body.39

Buc’hoz, Fargeon, and others also refer to another scented product: the portefeuille, a drawstring silk bag containing potpourri or fabric soaked in perfume. These sachets, concealed in armoires or toilet drawers, or enclosed within one’s pocket, sleeve, or bodice, emitted a more enduring scent than those ephemeral products applied to the skin.40 Larger, more colorful portefeuilles, several examples of which are preserved at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, simultaneously functioned as fashionable accessories (Fig. 6.6). Often embroidered with floral motifs, these scented

39 Fargeon, L’Art du parfumeur and Feydeau, A Scented Palace.
portefeuilles combined visual representation of flowers with the concentrated scents of actual flowers. These bags were also depicted in contemporary paintings: observe the bag resting on the tambour embroidery frame in François Hubert Drouais’s 1767 portrait of Marquise de Caumont la Force (Fig. 6.7), or those depicted in Vallayer-Coster’s Bouquet of Flowers with a Vase (Fig. 6.15) and Still Life of a Vase of Flowers, Bird’s Nest, and Purse (Fig. 6.22).

Fargeon would further conflate natural and artificial flowers in a brief collaboration with Rose Bertin (1747–1813), Marie Antoinette’s stylist. Together, Fargeon and Bertin produced a soft silk flowers designed to adorn the sculptural hairstyles popular in the 1770s and 1780s, which were scented with Fargeon’s perfumes and sold in Bertin’s Parisian boutique, Le Grand Mogol. Contemporary fashion plates suggest that a fashionable woman’s hair could serve as a three-dimensional canvas for ‘still life’ arrangements of flowers, fruit, fabric, and feathers (Fig. 6.8). These styles must also have had a distinct smell: the natural oils of the scalp, the scented powder used to fix the hairstyle, mingling with the smells of fresh and perfumed silk flowers.

In terms of material and olfactory synthesis, Fargeon and Bertin’s confections were closely aligned with those of Madame Pompadour, who commissioned from the Vincennes manufactory over 3200 livres worth of porcelain flowers in 1750 alone. Mimi

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41 Another purse in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection, dated to the seventeenth century, features a painted enamel medallion representing a woman sniffing a flower. This type of mixed-media bag was apparently a specialty of the French city of Limoges. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 30.135.175.


Hellman, Katie Scott, and others have demonstrated that Mesdames Pompadour and du Barry, successive mistresses to Louis XV, were known to douse porcelain bouquets with perfume, or ‘plant’ them with potpourri, in order to enhance the multi-sensory experience of the objects (Fig. 6.9).

As these examples demonstrate, floral scents were closely allied with the female body: women smelled of flowers, and flowers smelled of women. The erotic potential of these smells emerges in work of several eighteenth-century authors. According to Diderot, smell is the most “voluptuous” of the senses; Jean-François Saint-Lambert concurred, writing in *Les Saisons*: “Odor gives us the most intimate sensations, a more immediate pleasure… than the sense of sight; we get profound enjoyment from an agreeable odor at the first moment of its impression. Rousseau made this connection specifically with floral scents, writing, “Smell is the sense of imagination… Its effects are known well enough in love. The sweet fragrance of a dressing room is not so weak a trap as is thought; and I know not whether one ought to congratulate or pity that prudent and

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47 Jean-François Saint-Lambert, *Les Saisons*, 1769, 35, as cited in Corbin smells book 82-83: “L’odorat nous donne des sensations plus intimes, un plaisir plus immediate, plus independent de l’esprit que le sens de la vue: nous jouissons profondément d’une odeur agréable, au premier instant de son impression; le plaisir de la vue tient plus aux réflexions, aux desirs qu’excitent les objets apperçus, aux espérances qu’ils font naîtres, etc. Il y a pourtant un plaisir attaché à l’exercice de ce sens: c’est celui que nous donnent les couleurs douces, ou plusieurs couleurs vives qui s’adoucissent par leur mélange. Les surfaces rondes & polies, celles des corps don't les formes diminuent ou augmentant par des gradations insensibles, sont assi très-agréable à la vue; mais c’est uniquement par le plaisir qu’elles promettent au sens du tact.”
insensitive man who has never been made to quiver by the smell of flowers on his beloved’s bosom.”

These pleasures were not reserved for heterosexual men alone. In fact, as Hirschfield writes in *Theorie de l’art des jardins*, women were more sensitive to the “sweet, delicate, pleasing, and refreshing perfumes” that emerged from fresh flowers. The idea that women experience the smell of flowers differently, more profoundly, persisted into the twentieth century; As English psychologist Havelock Ellis wrote in *Sexual Selection in Man* (1914):

> It is proof of the close connection between the sense of smell and the sexual organs that the expression of pleasure produced by olfaction resembles the expression of sexual pleasures. [...] It is really the case that in many persons—usually, if not exclusively, women—the odor of flowers produces not only a highly pleasurable, but a distinctly and specifically sexual, effect [emphasis mine].

This notion manifests visually in several eighteenth-century paintings—perhaps most famously in Fragonard’s *Progress of Love*, a series of decorative panels initially commissioned for Madame du Barry’s garden pavillion at Louveciennes, in which episodes of love and seduction are staged in fragrant gardenscapes. The depicted lovers are surrounded by copious floral foliage, most abundantly in *The Lover Crowned* (**Fig. 6.10**): a woman, draped in garland, places a crown of flowers upon her enraptured male companion’s head. Fragonard expanded the series nearly 20 years later, adding a scene now known as *Reverie* (**Fig. 6.11**), which was probably inspired by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (1723–1769) more explicitly autoerotic painting, *Midday*, widely known in

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48 Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, 300.
print (Fig. 6.12). In each of these works, a woman reclines alone in a garden, apparently overwhelmed by the memory or possibility of an amorous encounter—and by the smell of the flowers around her.

This historically specific understanding of the feminine olfaction offers us a new context for Vigée Le Brun’s 1783 portraits of Marie Antoinette: the fresh roses in her hand, the ruddy flush of her cheeks, and the scandalous rumors about her behavior at the Petit Trianon. Contemporaries may have explicitly reacted against the representation of the queen en chemise; but implicit in their critiques is an objection to the queen’s look of personal pleasure in the smell of flower itself.

**Painting Flowers**

Here, I also want to consider the role of smell in contemporary still life paintings of flowers—specifically, those painted by Vallayer-Coster. In the presence of her floral subjects, the artist certainly smelled them; but how did their smell inform the way in which she painted them? In what ways do her paintings of flowers evoke scent for the viewer?

While a viewer might be able to summon his or her own memories of smell in response to any representation of a flower, I argue that Vallayer-Coster’s paintings are distinguished by an ‘olfactory texture’—to repurpose Corbin’s term, which he used to describe the urban topography of smells in eighteenth-century Paris. Here, I want to think about the olfactory texture produced by Vallayer-Coster’s painting technique: a facture

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that evokes the scent of the flowers. Her fluid touches of color retain a sense of the original ‘wetness’ of the paint but also evoke the internal ‘wetness’ of flowers. The natural oils that effuse from the central glands or the ‘pores’ of petals were understood to be the primary source of a flower’s scent in the eighteenth century, just as sweat and other bodily fluids were understood to be the source of human smells. Vallayer-Coster’s lush and plentiful daubs of paint thus evoke the liquid sources of a flower’s ephemeral scent, as well as the artificial perfumes derived from them.

The painterly quality of Vallayer-Coster’s work, described at length in previous chapters, is remarkably different from the contemporary paintings of flowers by Redouté and Spaeondeck, particularly those produced during and after their respective tenures at the Jardins du Roi. Though liberated from the religious and allegorical weight of seventeenth-century flower paintings, these works were nonetheless considered to be in the service of science.  

Accordingly, Redouté and Spaeondeck still operated within the meticulous and remarkably illusionistic seventeenth-century Dutch mode of painting flowers (a tradition to which Rachel Ruysch, the daughter of a botanist, also belonged.) Redouté and Spaeondeck’s paintings are certainly slick, but this pristine effect was achieved with thin, careful layers of glazes applied in small, meticulous strokes, rather than free, spontaneous opaque touches of paint; their linear and precisely rendered botanical specimens seem no more capable of naturally ‘oozing’ a scented fluid than did the polished porcelain flowers of Madame du Barry (Fig. 6.9). Vallayer-Coster used

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54 Marianne Berardi, Science into Art: Rachel Ruysch's Early Development As a Still-Life Painter (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2000). Paintings by these artists often represent of various insects crawling on the plants vessels, or table surfaces. By contrast, Vallayer-Coster's paintings never include these entomological details; the human viewer is the sole beneficiary of the ‘scent’ of her bouquets.
glazes sparingly in her flower paintings too, many of which are now “fugitive,” altering the coloration of these works. Still, the overall facture of her paintings differs significantly from those of her Dutch forbearers, particularly in the petals and central glands of the blossoms. 55 Eighteenth-century observers also took note of this distinction in the ‘touch’ of Vallayer-Coster and Spaendonck’s paintings, although for some this distinction was inherently gendered; one observed that while Vallayer-Coster “sustains her reputation admirably, and even survives proximity to M. Van Spaendonck, the most famous of her rivals in the genre…”56 while an earlier critic suggested that Vallayer-Coster’s was “the more precious touch, [his] the more virile.”57

Vallayer-Coster first exhibited flower paintings at her third Salon, that of 1775—the year after Marie Antoinette began gardening at the Petit Trianon. At that Salon, the artist submitted two large-scale pairs of paintings: *Vase of Flowers with a Bust of Flora* (Fig. 6.13),58 exhibited alongside its pendant of roughly the same dimensions: *The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening* (Fig. 2.22).59 Both works, which belonged to the Abbé Terray, feature parallel allegorical busts: Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, and Flora, Roman goddess of flowers and spring. As discussed in Chapter Two, Vallayer-Coster’s Ceres bears a resemblance to a sculpture by Coustou installed in the gardens of the Tuileries during the eighteenth century. Her allegorical bust of Flora, too, had a

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55 See Barry “The Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 103-105.
56 “Elle soutient admirablement sa reputation, et meme le voisinage de M. Van Spaendonck, le plus illustre des rivaux qu’elle ait combattre dans le genre.” Panard au Salon, 1781, 13-14, quoted in Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster 2002, 23 and 36, note 86.
57 “[Elle a] des touches plus precieuses, l’autre des touches plus males.” [Mouffle d’Angerville?]
59 Salon of 1775, no. 99, “Un Buste de Flor, & un vase rempli de Fleurs sur un Bureau. De 4 pieds 9 pouces, sur 4 pieds”; Le Boeuf sale, Paris, April 8, 1783; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970, no. 1, ill. 103; Most recently sold at Christie’s Sale 8584, Important Old Master Paintings, 31 January 1997, New York, Park Avenue, lot 102, USD 706,500; Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, no. 30;
sculptural precedent in the Tuileries: a full-length sculpture by Charles Antoine Coysevox (1640–1720). Unlike Ceres, Flora had additional resonance in eighteenth-century visual culture, as a popular allegorical guise in the portraiture of Largillière, Nattier, Drouais, and others. Vallayer-Coster surely knew, for example, Drouais’s portraits of Madame du Barry, the last official mistress of Louis XV, in the guise of Flora; several versions existed, and were submitted to successive salons in the late 1760s and early 1770s; the Musée des Beaux-Arts d’Agen version was also reproduced in print (Fig 6.14).

Also unlike the Ceres in The Attributes of Hunting and Gardening, Vallayer-Coster’s Flora is situated in an interior, on a neoclassical Louis XVI wooden desk with spare gilded ornamentation. The scene is framed by a teal velvet fringed with gold, the same that would later appear in her Still Life with Porcelain Vase, Marine Plants, Shells and Various Mineralogical Specimens (Salon of 1777, Fig. 5.2). The bust of Flora is accompanied by a pile of books and scrolls of blue and white paper, reminiscent to those in Vallayer-Coster’s reception piece, Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture (Fig. 2.1), and a scattering of peaches, plums, prunes, and grapes. The bust seems to peek out from behind a blue Celadon porcelain vase, mounted with a gilded base, feet, and twisted rope handles. The vase overflows with flowers, white hollyhocks, pale pink roses, bright blue morning glories and pale blue hydrangeas, orange daylilies, bold red poppies, and deep purple daisies among them.

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60 Charles Antoine Coysevox (French, 1640-1720), Flora, ca. 1710. Musée du Louvre, Paris, MR1818.
62 Salon of 1771, no. 60 (there identified as a portrait of Madame du Barry as a muse). The engraving after this painting, which erroneously identifies the subject as Noailles, belongs to Versailles, inv. grav. 6930.
63 These flower identifications are my own.
As is typical of Vallayer-Coster’s compositions, and her bouquets, in particular, the arrangement is insistently three-dimensional and asymmetrical; one can imagine the different volumes that would come into view by walking *around* the flower arrangement and viewing it from different angles. The aforementioned Dutch and Flemish artists typically oriented their bouquets with an obsequious forward thrust, and each enthusiastic flower is lit brilliantly and uniformly. Vallayer-Coster instead pictured the vase from an oblique perspective; we can see that the arrangement of flowers is so imperfectly thick that flowers droop towards the rear of the depicted space, where they are rendered nearly illegible by shadow.

Also at the Salon of 1775, Vallayer-Coster showed a smaller pair of oval, horizontal pendants, both of which now belong to the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild: *Bouquet of Flowers with a Purse* (Fig. 6.15) and *Bouquet of Flowers with Grapes*. Slightly different sprigs populate both vases, one dark blue porcelain vase, the other a fluted stone basin. The former vessel, populated by pink sweet peas, tiny pale purple violets and blue bells, and thick, multi-pleated red, pink, and white roses, is also accompanied by a *portefeuille*, while its pendant features a pile of peaches and cluster of grapes. The drawstring bag lies agape and oriented toward the viewer, in a position similar to that of the hunting pouches in Vallayer-Coster’s paintings of dead game (Fig. 4.15 and Fig. 4.16). Unlike those plain leather bags, Vallayer-Coster’s *portefeuille* features thick gold trim around its mouth and the abstracted floral motif on its body. Though its contents are not visible, we can assume that the bag was intended to contain potpourri or perfumed fabric. The bouquet of fresh flowers and the *portefeuille* represent

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a juxtaposition of flowers (‘live’ and embroidered) and scents (fresh and artificially concentrated).

These floral paintings in particular received ample praise in the contemporary press. A writer in the *Mercure de France* remarked, “Mademoiselle Vallayer has again responded to the pleas of connoisseurs, with pictures representing fruits, vegetables, vases of flowers, [rendered with] free touches and grouped with all the intelligence possible in order to produce the best effect.” In *Observations sur les Ouvrages exposés au Salon du Louvre*, the author acknowledged Vallayer-Coster’s established reputation: “Mademoiselle Vallayer [enjoys] a celebrity, justly acquired by excellent paintings... the table where we see a bust of Flora is also of the greatest beauty”; the author goes on to suggest that the flowers and fruit, in particular, have been painted as well as “a skilled man.” The author of *La lanterne magique* articulated his critique of the Salon of 1775 in the form of an imagined conversation between Old Masters, such as Rubens and Poussin; he praised Vallayer-Coster’s flower paintings through the voices of Alexandre Le Sueur (‘This is what we call painting nature… beautiful painting!’) and Michelangelo (‘Superb! Truly superb! Observe how very truthful and seductive!’). These critical excerpts do not refer to the sense of smell; read together, however, it is clear that the

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66 *Observations sur les Ouvrages exposés au Salon du Louvre, ou Lettre à M. le Comte de...* (Paris, 1775), 44-45: “Mlle Vallayer soutient une célébrité justement acquise par d’excellents tableaux...le tableau où l’on voit un buste de Flore est aussi de la plus grande beauté...les tableaux de fleurs et de fruits sont traités en habile homme.”

67 *La lanterne magique aux Champs-Elysées, ou Entretien des grands peintres sur le Salon de 1775, 28:* “Voilà ce qui s’appelle peindre la Nature; Voilà qui devrait faure crever de dépit vingt Artistes qui la négligant. Le beau Tableau!” / “Superbe! En vérité superbe! Mais voyez donc comme tout cela est vrai & séduisant!”
authors are searching for ways to describe the “seductive” quality of her paintings, which
seems to exceed the visual beauty of her “free touches” of color.

Perhaps because of the positive response to these paintings at the Salon of 1775,
Vallayer-Coster continued to paint flowers—and, at the subsequent Salon, showed five
paintings in the genre: Two small, ovular pendants (“Deux tableaux, de forme ronde….de
18 pouces”) depicting flowers arranged in different vases, one “crystal” and one “lapis,” and another painting of similar shape and dimensions of flowers in a basket. She also submitted a larger pair of floral pendants (“de 4 pieds, sur 3 pieds & demi”), which now belong to the Dallas Museum of Art: *Bouquet of Flowers in a Blue Porcelain Vase* and *Bouquet of Flowers in a Terracotta Vase* (Fig 6.16 and Fig. 6.17).

In the first painting, a blue porcelain vase with gilt-bronze mounts (‘rope’ handles and four lion-paw feet) is situated on a rough stone ledge. The luxurious vessel is filled with by now familiar flowers: pink roses; purple daisies and violets; white-blue hydrangeas; bold red poppies, carnations, and budding hollyhock; orange day lilies. There are two large, significant additions: large white lilies with fuzzy orange stamens protruding from their cores and blue irises with yellow-striped petals. Individual stalks of purple, red, and

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68 Salon of 1777, no. 102; Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, no. 38 and 39; Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 1970 no. 25, fig 145 and no. 6 fig. 44; M. and F. Faré 1976, fig 348 and 347. These paintings, both illustrated in Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, are described as being approximately 19 inches tall, were both traced together from the Étienne Lévy collection to that of Maurise Segoura, Paris, in 1989.
69 Salon of 1777, no. 103, now lost.
white chrysanthemum lie alongside the arrangement, as if waiting to fill a void in the bouquet, or having been found excessive.\textsuperscript{71}

The second, \textit{Bouquet of Flowers in a Terracotta Vase}, also features many flowers that appeared in earlier paintings (morning glories, violets, hydrangeas, hollyhock), as well as several new varieties: graceful, tubular white calla lilies, robust red peonies, yellow zinnias, and several bunches of pale lilacs. More striking flowers appear in this work, but apparently nowhere else in Vallayer-Coster’s \textit{oeuvre}: a fantastic poppy-shaped bloom with white outer petals and a thick cluster of pink and blue stamens (rendered with a flurry of strokes of paint) at the center (\textbf{Fig. 6.17}).\textsuperscript{72} Finally, a single purple tulip, striped and dimpled, droops dramatically towards the rear of the composition, in the extreme shadow to the left of the canvas.

These flowers are arranged in a terracotta vase situated on a rectangular Louis XVI-style table.\textsuperscript{73} The unreflective surface of the terracotta contrasts with the smooth, tinted porcelain vase in the pendant painting, yet the terracotta is anything but plain; the surface of the vase is roughly hewn with a bas-relief. A thick floral swag appears to drape from the lip of the vase, over a figurative scene: a group of four frolicking putti who tug at and attempt to ride, a recalcitrant goat. Earlier in the century, Van Huysum painted terracotta vases inspired by the relief sculptures by François Duquesnoy (ca. 1594–1643),

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Barry has noted that the foliage in these stems now appear blue because a “fugitive yellow-lake glaze,” which would have produced a more subtle green color. Barry, “The Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 103-104.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Evident in this detail of the painting is the ‘flaking’ of the pigment used to color the yellow zinnia--likely derived from the mineral orpiment, as well as plant-based yellow lake. According to Barry, this is “due to the weak bond between the orpiment and the underlayer.” Barry, “The Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 104.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Barry observes that at some point the artist changed the shape and style of the table, from the more ornate, “curvilinear” edge of a Louis XV-style table to the more “rectilinear” Louis XVI-style; her \textit{pentimenti} are also visible on the surface of the painting. Barry, “The Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 109.
\end{itemize}
many of which depicted bacchanalian motifs. Here, Vallayer-Coster’s vase mimics the sketchy ‘unfinish’ of works by her own contemporary, the French sculptor Claude Michel, called Clodion (1738–1814). Revered for his three-dimensional sculptural groups, as well as bas-reliefs, Clodion was also known to mold the surfaces of terracotta vases, invoking the classical tradition of vase painting. At the Salon of 1773, his first since returning to Paris from his tenure in Rome, Clodion showed three vases, including one carved with a bas-relief of “une Bacchanale d’Enfans.” While this work has proved difficult to precisely identify, it may have resembled the urns now in a private collection (Fig. 6.18), or those in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Vallayer-Coster may have borrowed the scene directly from one of these Clodion vases, which she probably saw at the Salon of 1772. As Roland Michel has shown, Vallayer-Coster had previously copied the three-dimensional work of Clodion: around 1772-3 Vallayer-Coster based a series of small trompe l’oeil paintings after bacchanalian scenes in the style of Clodion (Fig. 6.19), and at least one Clodion bas-relief appeared in the 1824 Coster sale. Yet, as Anne Poulet has noted, Clodion’s luxurious terracotta and

75 Salon of 1772, no. 247, 48: “Autre Vase où l’on voit une Bacchanale d’Enfans. Sa hauteur est de 30 pouces.”
77 Attributed to Claude Michel, called Clodion, Terracotta urn-shaped vase, ca. 1762-1771, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1989.49.
78 Coster sale 1824, lot 75; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 1970 no. 248; Roland Michel and Kahng, Vallayer-Coster, 2002 no. 20, plate 8.
marble works were often solid, and thus never intended to serve as a vessel for flowers. Vallayer-Coster must have re-imagined these thoroughly modern, three-dimensional objects to suit her two-dimensional composition, at the very least rendering them capable of bearing a bouquet.

The Dallas pendants were apparently lent to the Salon of 1777 by their owner, Jean-Baptiste-François de Montullé (1721–1787). It was there, in response to the scale of her paintings, the visual and olfactory complexity of their arrangement, as well as their connection to a prestigious patron, that the critic of Lettres pittoresques praised the brilliant ‘freshness’ of her flowers, treated as though they were the subjects of a history painting, and mused about honoring the artist with a crown made of her own flowers.

In the Salon livret, Montullé is identified as the Secrétaire des Commandemens de la Reine—that is, to Queen Marie Leszczyńska, who had died in 1768. Since then, Montullé, the heir of amateur Jean de Jullienne, had taken over the Gobelins manufactory and become an honorary member of the Academy. Despite his professional accomplishments and royal connections, Montullé accumulated enormous debts and was later forced to sell part of his collection. According to his December 22, 1783 sale catalogue, Montullé sold a floral still life by Jan van Huysum and two by Jean-Baptiste

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80 Jan van Huysum also painted terracotta vases with scenes of putti playing; see, for example, Flowers in an Urn, ca. 1720, oil on wood; Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 143-145. Later, Spaendonck would do the same—for example, Bouquet of flowers in an alabaster vase on a marble pedestal, 1781, Netherlands, Het Noordbrabants Museum, Netherlands.
81 See the first footnote in this chapter.
Blin de Fontenay (French, 1653–1715), yet he apparently retained Vallayer-Coster’s floral pendants in his collection until his death five years later.\(^8^3\)

By 1779, Vallayer-Coster had also attracted the attention of Queen Marie Antoinette, who acquired a modest, ovular *Bust of a Young Vestal* (Fig. 6.20).\(^8^4\) This modestly-scaled painting was among the nine works shown at the Salon of 1779. The ancient Roman priestess wears her own crown of roses and a satin, full-skirted gown, and holds a rather contemporary-looking porcelain vase—nearly identical in arrangement to the *Bouquet of Flowers with Grapes and Apples* at the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild.\(^8^5\) These anachronistic deviations from the traditional iconography of the vestal—more frequently depicted alongside the eternal flame that she is charged with protecting—seem to allude more generally to the modern flower culture associated with the Queen. This is the earliest evidence we have of the queen’s patronage of Vallayer-Coster, although their relationship had already proven useful to the artist; Marie Antoinette apparently intervened in the artist’s protracted negotiations to renovate her appointed lodgings at the Louvre beginning in March 1779.\(^8^6\) As Roland Michel suggests, the Vestal may have been painted as a gift in gratitude for the queen’s assistance.

Vallayer-Coster subsequently painted the likenesses of the Queen and several members of her extended circle, such as Madame Adélaide Auguié, sister to Madame

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\(^8^3\) *Catalogue d'une belle collection de tableaux des écoles d'Italie, de Flandre, de Hollande, et de France…* (Paris, December 22, 1783), no. 29 and 43.


\(^8^5\) On the fashionable iconography of the vestal virgin, see Nicholson, “The Ideology of Feminine ‘Virtue’: The Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-Century Allegorical Portraiture,” in Portraiture: Facing the Subject (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 52-72. Vivian Cameron has also argued that the vestal could also represent the female artist: “Woman as Image and Image Maker in Paris During the French Revolution (Ph.D. diss, Yale University, 1983), 71, 200-206.

\(^8^6\) See Introduction for a discussion of Vallayer-Coster’s negotiations for space at the Louvre and her relationship with Marie Antoinette.
Jean Louise Henriette Campan (whose own Mémoires, discussed in more detail in the Introduction, also offer an intimate portrait of the queen).\(^{87}\) Vallayer-Coster’s portrait of Augué, probably that shown at the Salon of 1781 and now in a private collection, features a fashionable young woman arranging a few stems of roses in a small porcelain vase, in much the same posture at Vigée Le Brun’s 1783 portrait of the Queen (Fig 6.21).\(^{88}\) The Salon livrets of the early 1780s also indicate that Vallayer-Coster had expanded her repertoire to include representations of women in the acts of culling, arranging, and selling flowers, in addition to painting the floral arrangements that resulted from their efforts. In 1783, she submitted an oval painting representing a Marchande de fleurs (perhaps inspired by the flower vendor represented by the Comte de Caylus, Fig 6.5), and in 1785, a portrait of Mademoiselle de Coigny “cueillant des fleurs dans son Jardin,” both of which are now lost.\(^{89}\)

Vallayer-Coster’s entries to the Salon of 1781 also included Trois petits Tableaux ovales, de fleurs & de fruits, likely painted on speculation. This trio probably includes Vase of Vase of Flowers, Bird’s Nest, and Purse (Fig 6.22),\(^{90}\) the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Vase of Flowers with a Shell (Fig 6.23),\(^{91}\) and Vase of Flowers and Two Plums (Fig 6.24).\(^{92}\) While it is unknown if this charming trio remained together during the

\(^{87}\) Jeanne Louise Henriette Campan, Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie Antoinette, suivis de souvenirs et anecdotes historiques sur les règnes de Louis XIV – XV (London: Chez Henri Colburn et M. Bossange, 1823). This text contains an anecdote about Vallayer-Coster’s involvement in a plot to help the Royal family escape during the early days of the Revolution; see Introduction.


\(^{89}\) Salon of 1783, no. 80, along with a “Marchande de Marée”; Salon of 1785 no. 56.


\(^{92}\) Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, no. 67; Christie’s New York, January 26, 2005, Sale 1477, Lot 50; Philip Conisbee, “Michael L. Rosenberg’s Eighteenth Century,” in French Art of the
eighteenth century, their installation at the Salon of 1781 offered a material contrast between the flowers, vases, and accessories represented in each canvas. In particular, the small, delicate accompaniments to the flowers (a ripe and glaucous plum, a spindly conch shell, a nest with two miniature eggs, and a purse) all represent pleasant contrasts in color and texture to the blooms and their respective vases. The juxtaposition between the delicately woven bird nest and the embroidered purse is a particularly compelling expression of feminine creativity, both avian and human; Vallayer-Coster visually manifests this metaphor by painting both twigs and metallic threads with the same wiry impasto.

Though modest in size and somewhat formulaic in composition, these works represent the mature articulation of Vallayer-Coster’s increasingly loose painting style. The bouquets are smaller, and the overall number of flowers has been reduced; the artist dwelled instead on the ‘olfactory texture’ of the blooms. In the Vase of Flowers with a Shell (Fig 6.23), for example, lush dabs of pure, unmixed paint stand for individual petals of various flowers: delicate jasmine; spectacularly frilly chrysanthemums; combs of hyacinth; a spray of tubular honeysuckle, and the hint of a bulbous striped tulip in the lower left.

For Diderot, who had been so complimentary of Vallayer-Coster’s work in previous salons, this loose texture was a deviation from the standard of execution within the floral still life genre, more typical of de Heem, Huysum, and Spaendonck. While admitting that there was an element of truth in these representations of flowers, he expressed a distaste for the “soft” touches of paint, which for him indicated a lack of
“finesse” or control of the brush—the same kind of feminine excess or chaos associated with the Petit Trianon, for example (“Il y a de la vérité, mais la touche est molle et froide; rien de la finesse particulière de dessin et de pinceau que ce genre exige.”)\textsuperscript{93}

More favorably received was the last major bouquet that Vallayer-Coster exhibited before the French Revolution. The canvas, which belonged to the Clavière collection by 1789, featured by now familiar roses and chrysanthemums accompanied by clusters of red and white grapes, situated in a rather remarkable porcelain vase adorned with satyr heads and bunches of gilded grapes at the handles. The author of the September 1787 \textit{Mercure de France} review of the Salon, reacted positively to the “energetic touch and excellent color.”\textsuperscript{94} However, this critic reserved more lavish praise for Spaendonck, whose \textit{Tableau représentant un piedestal de marbre, enrichi de bas-reliefs, sur lequel est une corbeille de fleurs} apparently earned him a place him ‘next to’ the celebrated Huysum.\textsuperscript{95} In his \textit{Lanlaire au Salon académique de peinture}, Louis Bonnefoy de Bouyon assured his readers that Vallayer-Coster excelled within the floral genre above all others, though he admonished her for attempting to paint other more ambitious subjects—for example, portraits or genre paintings:

Madame Vallayer-Coster is finally in her sphere, and the public applauds her; the charming flowers, pretty grapes, and game with which she has regaled us are prodigious in their naturalness… It is better to succeed in a pretty, minor genre than to stumble in a higher one.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{93}Diderot, “Salon de 1781” in \textit{Salons IV}, 365.


\textsuperscript{95}\textit{Mercure de France} (September 1787), 175: “à côté du célèbre Van Huysum.”

\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Lanlaire au Salon académique de peinture par M. L.B… de plusieurs académies}, (Paris: Gattières, 1787), 21: “Madame Vallayer-Coster se tient enfin dans sa sphere, & le public l’en applaudit; les charmantes fleurs, les jolis raisins, & le gibier dont elle nous a régalé sont un petit prodige de naturel… Réussir dans un genre mignon, vaut mieux qu’écheoir dans un plus élève.”
After the Revolution: Flowers in Other Media

As if taking her cue from this critic, Vallayer-Coster painted almost exclusively small-scale bouquets, with the occasional pile of plums or piece of game, in the 1790s and early 1800s. The reasons for her diminished productivity are potentially manifold, as other scholars have surmised: her marriage in 1783 to a successful lawyer may have eliminated the urgency of painting to support herself, and her former royal and aristocratic patrons were largely unable to commission paintings in the wake of the French Revolution. Though she maintained a residence and studio at the Louvre (until she and other artists were forced to abandon the apartments in 1806), she and her husband also acquired a home in Villemomble-en-Montreuil, a suburb of Paris about twelve miles from the Louvre in 1793. 

There, she might have cultivated a garden of her own, and continued to paint flowers perhaps precisely because of their perceived lack of meaning. This ‘retirement’ from the more provocative material produced earlier in her career might be characterized as a form of self-preservation, particularly during the political instability and anti-royalist violence of the 1790s.

Yet there is ample evidence that Vallayer-Coster still considered herself a professional artist. She continued to attend and participate in meetings at the Academy and to submit works to the Salon, albeit intermittently. Vallayer-Coster’s status as a painter of the “genre mignon” in this final phase of her career is perhaps best signified by a portrait painted by her friend, the miniaturist François Dumont (1751–1831) (Fig 6.25),

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98 Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 36.
exhibited at the Salon of 1804.\textsuperscript{99} The diminutive watercolor on ivory portrait, only four inches in width, pictures the mature artist still at work, holding a paintbrush in one hand, and a blue porcelain vase filled with flowers in the other. Turned away from a half-finished canvas, the artist closely examines her subjects—and, if her sanguine (and preternaturally youthful) expression is any indication, smells them, as well. Long gone are the elaborate pouf and corseted waist pictured in her self-portrait as royal académicienne in 1771 (\textbf{Fig 1.2}) and the alluring décolletage featured in Roslin’s portrait of 1783 (\textbf{Fig 1.4}). Instead, the sixty-year-old Vallayer-Coster wears a sheer white scarf wrapped around her natural auburn curls, and a gauzy white dress is cinched under the breasts by a cord with round gold medallions, with a modest pink silk shawl over her shoulders.

Though her subject matter became redundant and the scale of her work was reduced in this period, critics continued to respond to her modest floral works with sensual or liquid metaphors. In a review of the “Exposition de l’An XII (1804),” for example, the editors of the \textit{Journal des arts, de littérature et de commerce} wrote of Vallayer-Coster:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Lovers of nature look with recognition towards the paintings of Madame Vallayer-Coster. Did Flora reveal her secrets to her? Did she instruct her to weave the crown of Spring? What truth, what freshness in these roses, these lilacs, these hyacinths! How brilliantly purple these anemones! What modest, rural (champêtre) innocence embellishes these daisies! Do not look here for the grandiosity of Van Huysum; one of his pictures contains the remains of twenty gardens. Under Madame Vallayer’s brush, it is just a simple flower gathered by a
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Portrait of Anne Vallayer-Coster}, 1804. Watercolor on ivory in a gilt metal and enamel frame, 7.6 x 10.2 cm (2 15/16 x 4 in.). Cleveland Museum of Art, The Edward B. Greene Collection 1943.639. Salon of 1804, no. 155. Recall that the Morgan Library & Museum preserves a letter from Vallayer-Coster to Dumont, requesting that he accompany her to a meeting of the Academy; see the discussion of this letter in the Introduction.
shepherdess; it is the small bouquet that the furtive hand of the lover will slip in the presence of a mother or a jealous rival.  

A few years later, Pierre-François Gueffier wrote of the several floral works exhibited at the Salon of 1810, “It is impossible to pass by [her work] without admiring it; the best days of this académicienne were spent on flowers, she only had eyes for flowers, and they are born again under her fingers as under the dew of an eternal spring... sweet like the nectar of flowers” (emphasis mine). These quotes suggest that ancien régime ideas about femininity, flowers, and fragrant fluids lingered into the nineteenth century, and continued to inform critical reactions to Vallayer-Coster’s paintings.

It was during this time that Vallayer-Coster began to translate her compositions into other media. Several works painted in 1780s came to serve as designs for tapestries produced well into the first decade of the nineteenth century. Here, I want to emphasize the three surviving low warp (“basse lisse”) tapestries that reproduce her Vase of Flowers and Two Plums of 1781. Roland Michel has suggested that weaving began soon after the painting was completed in 1781, based primarily on the evidence of a woven...

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100 “Si les productions recommandables de tant d’Artistes que nous venons de citer, sécondent dans l’ame des spectateurs le germe des passions douces, les regards des amans de la nature se tournent avec reconnaissance vers les tableaux de Madame Vallayer-Coster. Est-ce que Flore lui révéla son secret? L’a-t-elle chargée de tresser la couronne du Printemps? Quelle vérité, quelle fraîcheur dans ces roses, ces lilas, ces jacinthes! Quel pourpre brillante portent ces anémones! Quelle modeste et champêtre candeur embellit ces marguerites! Ne cherchez point ici le grandiose de Van Huysum; un de ces tableaux est la dépouille de vingt jardins. Sous les pinceaux de Madame Vallayer, ce n’est qu’une simple fleur que la bergère a cueillie; c’est la bouquet léger que la main furtive de l’amant saura glisser en presence d’une mere ou d’un jaloux.” “Exposition de l’an XII.” Journal des arts, de littérature et de commerce 394 (January 10, 1805): 81.

101 “Il est impossible de passer devant sans l’admirer; les beaux jours de cette académicienne s’écoulèrent sur des fleurs, ses yeux ne se reposèrent que sur des fleurs, et elles naissent encore sous ses doigts, comme sous la rosée d’un éternel printemps... Voilà un petit poème en prose qui est doux comme le suc des fleurs.” Pierre-François Gueffier, Entretiens sur les ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure, exposés au Musée Napoléon en 1810... (Paris: C.F. Patris, 1811), 74.

102 In addition to the tapestries discussed here, there is one after an oval flower painting with a dead canary in a private collection (Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, no. 159, plate 70; Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, no. 432), and a rectangular version at the Musée Nissim de Camondo. This collection also preserves rectangular tapestries after different Vallayer-Coster painting subjects, including La Brioche, 1811, Inv CAM 265.
signature on one version of the tapestry in a private collection in France. The artist’s signature was rendered in white, yet her married name of “Coster” was added subsequently in red thread; this may indicate that the tapestry was completed before the artist’s marriage.\(^{103}\) Roland Michel does not endorse the possibility that her married name was added after its acquisition by an enthusiastic collector, perhaps one familiar with the artist’s proclivity for signing her paintings with both her maiden and married names later in her career—though to my mind, this theory is plausible, and would render a pre-Revolution date less likely. In any case, there seems to have been a renewed interest in reproducing Vallayer-Coster’s paintings in tapestry during the French Empire: at least two more tapestries had been woven after the *Vase of Flowers and Two Plums* in 1801 and 1804; iterations survive at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Musée Nissim de Comondo (Fig 6.26).\(^{104}\)

Several other questions about Vallayer-Coster’s involvement in the translation of her paintings into tapestry remain unanswered; indeed, the imperial demand for tapestry designs at the turn of the nineteenth century warrants much further study. Did Vallayer-Coster initiate the works in the 1780s and again in the 1800s, or did a loyal patron commission them? Had she maintained ties to the Gobelins manufactory through her late father, or perhaps through her patron Montullé, who was the head of the Gobelins manufactory until his death in 1787?\(^{105}\) How many different designs were woven in total, how many sets produced, and why? Were the ovular works intended to serve as


\(^{104}\) The Metropolitan Museum of Art tapestry was woven by someone named “Deyrolle,” who apparently proclaimed his success in capturing “the spiritual touch, the tonal finesse, and nuanced color harmonies of the original.” A father and son by that last name both worked at the Gobelins during this time. See the Gobelins inventories published by Gerspach and Calmette, and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, no. 429-433.

upholstery for the back of a chair, as floral tapestry designs were often employed in the mid- to late-eighteenth century (Fig 6.27)? Might they have served as fire screens, as did Marie-Antoinette’s embroidered floral monogram at the Petit Trianon? Or were the tapestries framed and hung on a wall, as they now appear at the Musée Nissim de Camondo? This, Roland Michel argues, is more likely, given the Salon ‘pedigree’ of the painted designs. A few other tapestries woven during the final years of the Ancien Régime and early French Empire are still attached to their original frames, including state-commissioned tapestry portraits of Louis XVI (after a painting by Joseph Duplessis) and Napoleon I (after a painting by François Gérard) (Fig. 6.28 and Fig. 6.29). However, the contrast in subject matter between these works and that of Vallayer-Coster is quite striking, and makes the existence of these tapestries all the more remarkable.

Vallayer-Coster’s floral works on paper are less mysterious than the tapestries. A number of her undated oil studies on paper are affixed to board or canvas, indicating the artist’s (or a collector’s) appreciation of their aesthetic value and desire to stabilize them, despite their primarily preparatory function. In *Study of White Hollyhocks*, for example, we see the artist ‘practicing’ the kinds of thick and loose dabs that also

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106 I am grateful to Perrin Stein for pointing out this possibility.
107 Vallayer-Coster submitted to the Salons of 1798 and 1817 works described as “Des fleurs dans un vase de porcelaine garni de bronze. Ce tableau est destiné à faire un devant de cheminée”; see Appendix. Are these same painting, exhibited twice—perhaps to advertise the woven fire screens based on its design? The evidence is inconclusive.
111 *A Vase of Flowers with Two Plums on a Tabletop* and the two Dallas pendants (were examined under infrared reflectography at the Kimbell Art Museum on the occasion of the 2002 exhibition; Barry writes that there is no evidence of underdrawing on those canvases, but this does not preclude the possibility of chalk sketches on the prepared ground. Barry, “The Painting Technique of Anne Vallayer-Coster,” 101
characterize her paintings on canvas, particularly in the early 1780s (Fig. 6.30).\textsuperscript{112} Such individual studies of flowers could subsequently be ‘assembled’ in a bouquet within a larger painting. This procedure that enabled the artist to paint impossibly fresh arrangements of flowers that bloomed at different times of the year, an artistic elision of nature that was also typical of De Heem, Huysum, and Ruysch.\textsuperscript{113}

Other oil sketches feature numerous views of the various pink and white roses, observed from several different angles (Fig 6.31).\textsuperscript{114} The blooms are brilliantly illuminated against a dark, muddy background, much like the early eighteenth-century oil studies of Largillière (Fig 6.32), in which eleven hands seem emerge from the ‘nothingness’ of a dark background, gracefully pointing, gripping, pinching, and gesturing. Susanna Caviglia has situated anatomical studies on paper, like that of Largilliere, within the context of contemporary debates within the Academy about the expressive potential of individual parts, and their relationship to the whole. Caviglia writes: “Isolated anatomical motifs became the unique subject of fully independent artworks. Body parts started to exist in and through their very autonomy, with no relationship to a predetermined composition.”\textsuperscript{115} Vallayer-Coster’s oil studies operate in a similar formal and theoretical mode: her multiple stems seem to float ‘autonomously,’ unmoored from the dirt, within the fictive three-dimensional space of the oil sketch, ready to be plucked and arranged in within the compositional structure of the vase.

\textsuperscript{112} Study of White Hollyhocks, n.d. Oil on paper mounted on board, 25 5/8 x 17 1/8 in. Private Collection. Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, no. 133, plate 52. When Fragonard expanded the Progress of Love series in the 1790s, he added with a group of non-figurative panels depicting hollyhock.

\textsuperscript{113} On this practice in the Dutch and Flemish tradition, see Wallert, Still Lifes: Techniques and Styles, 51.


Vallayer-Coster first exhibited works on paper at the Salon of 1802: two drawings in black chalk, representing flowers.\footnote{Salon of 1802, no. 284: “Deux dessins à la Pierre noire, représentant des fleurs.”} Though the subsequent Salon livret of 1804 does not indicate the media of the following works, they likely represent studies on paper, either in pen, chalk, and wash, or in watercolor: *Des anémones et autres fleurs* (no. 483), *Une branche de lilas* (no. 484), and *Branche de jacinthe* (no. 485). Additionally, Vallayer-Coster exhibited two gouache works on paper: bouquets of dahlias and roses (Fig 6.33).\footnote{Catalogue des tableaux de Sa Majesté l'Impératrice Joséphine, dans la galerie et appartements de son palais de Malmaison (Paris: Didot Jeune, 1811), 30, no. 242: “Mme. Coster Valayer: Deux dessins coloriés, groups de Fleurs. 13 x 9 pouces.” In addition to the two works on paper by Vallayer-Coster and a floral still life by a Madame Millet de Caux (no. 283), the catalogue of Josephine’s collection also describes a small group of works by Redouté: a painting and a small group of watercolor studies of flowers: no. 240: (“Tableau de Fleurs à l’aquarelle. Ill représente un vase d’albâtre pose sur un stilibate dans un jardin (34 x 117) The gouaches already belonged to Empress Josephine. On 27 Fructidor, Year XII (the twelfth month of the French Republican Calendar, corresponding to September 14, 1804), Vivant Denon, the Director of the Musée Napoléon, wrote to M. Charvel, the concierge of the Palais de Saint-Cloud, to send these two flower works, which were installed in the apartments of “sa Majesté l’Impératrice,” so that they might be exhibited at the Salon.\footnote{Archives des musées nationaux, registre *AA5* p. 72 Denon [450] 27 fructidor an 12 à M. Charvel. Le directeur général du musée Napoléon à M. Charvel, concierge du palais de Saint-Cloud. “Mme Vallayer-Coster a fait pour Sa Majesté l’Impératrice deux tableaux de fleurs, qui sont placés dans ses appartemens. Je vous prie, Monsieur, de les lui remettre pour qu’elle puisse les exposer au Salon; je me charge auprès de Sa Majesté de cet agrément.” Incidentally, by 1810, Napoleon had divorced Josephine and Vallayer-Coster had run afoul of Vivant Denon; see the incident described in the introduction.} The impetus for this loan must have been the artist, yet another indication of Vallayer-Coster’s enduring desire for public recognition after the collapse of the Royal Academy. The drawings were later included in the 1811 catalogue of her collection at Malmaison; they may have been sent there after their stint at the Salon in Paris.\footnote{Salon of 1804, no. 281 (Sallenstein, Napoleonsmuseum Arenenberg; Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, no 146, plate 56) and no. 282 (Artcurial, Paris, Dessins anciens et du 19e siècle, March 38, 2017, lot 131).}
Joséphine’s personal passion for flowers and gardening, particularly at her Château de Malmaison, has been well documented and analyzed, by now the subject of many scholarly studies and exhibitions. Yet contemporary portraits most vividly commemorate the empress as a patroness of both nature and art. Robert Lefèvre’s (1756–1830) portrait, commissioned by Napoleon around 1805, pictures the elegant attired Joséphine pressing leaves of a plant onto the page of an open herbarium with her fingers (Fig 6.34). The same year, Redouté was appointed the official “painter of flowers” to the Empress. Despite his connections to the Jardin du Roi and the Cabinet de la Reine, Redouté had navigated the Revolution by virtue of his position as the peintre du Museum d’Histoire naturelle. While in her service, Redouté initiated a series of watercolors depicting single specimens represented in the gardens at Malmaison, which would be translated into color engravings in the famed illustrated reference books. Les Lilacées (1805-16) comprised eight volumes and around five hundred plates, each of which are identified with scientific nomenclature and Redouté’s own observations about the morphology of the plant. The similarly massive and thoroughly researched project Les Roses (1817-24) (Fig 6.35), only published after the dissolution of Joséphine’s marriage to Napoleon and her subsequent death, was accompanied by a text written by amateur scientist Claude Antoine Thory.

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Vallayer-Coster became involved in a much smaller, less well-known printmaking project during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Beginning around 1800, she produced a series of drawings representing various groups of flowers, viewed from different perspectives, only a few of which have been traced. In the Cooper Hewitt’s *Two Roses*, for example, delicate flourishes of gray wash applied with a brush represent the robust pleats of the flower, while the thorns, edges of the leaves, and the tendrils of nascent rosebuds are rendered sharp with touches of pen with gray ink (Fig 6.36).\(^{123}\) Around 1810, at least ten of these drawings were engraved by the professional printmaker Louis-Jean Allais (1762–1833). One set of ten engravings was deposited at the Bibliothèque Impériale (now the Bibliothèque nationale de France) on January 12, 1811. The Cooper Hewitt drawing corresponds with one of these engravings (Fig 6.37). In addition to three sheets of roses, the other engraved flowers are labeled according to the Linnaean system, among them *Zinnia Hybrida* [*Zinnias*], *Convolvulus Purpureus* [*Morning Glories*], and *Viola Grandiflora* [*Violets*].\(^{124}\)

A few months after one set was given to the Bibliothèque Impériale, the engravings (*Etudes de fleurs dessinées par Mad. Vallayer-Coster, de la ci-devant Académie royale de peinture, et gravées par L.J. Allais*) were advertised in the April 10, 1811 issue of *Journal de l’Empire*, and again on October 27. (In the latter description of the series, the editor “M.B.” expresses surprise at the use of the scientific names; he

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123 *Study of Two Roses*, here as ca. 1800, brush and gray wash, brush and black ink on heavy cream paper, lined. 9 1/2 x 14 1/16 in. (24.1 x 35.7 cm). Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, 1925-1-349. Kahng and Roland Michel, *Vallayer-Coster*, 2002, no. 149, plate 57.

writes “Perhaps the common names of the flowers would be more useful here, but fashion has decided otherwise.”) 

Unlike the tapestries woven after her paintings, there is clear evidence of Vallayer-Coster’s participation in the conception, production, and sale of these reproductive engravings. The April advertisement notes that the engravings are available for purchase in two locations in Paris: “A Paris, chez l’Auteur, rue des Bons-Enfans, no. 19 / Et chez Bance, marchand d’estampes, rue Saint-Denis, no. 214”—that is, at the home of the artist and her husband, as well as the shop of the print dealer Jacques-Louis Bance (1761–1847). Later, the 1824 Coster sale catalogue noted that the artist, and later her husband, retained possession of the “original drawings,” a few of the resulting prints, as well as the ten copper plates used to produce engravings

A few questions remain about the Allais engravings. According to the Coster sale catalogue, fourteen wash drawings were framed and described as having been engraved by Allais; yet only ten engravings are preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale. The superfluous works on paper were untraced until a group of four was sold at Christie’s in 2004; two of these were acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Two Roses (Fig. 6.38) and Three Peonies. Though they do not correspond with any of the engravings at the Bibliothèque nationale, these four drawings have much in common with the Cooper

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125 *Journal de l’Empire* (April 10, 1811): 4 and (October 27, 1811): 3-4: “Peut-être les noms vulgaires de ces fleurs conviendraient mieux ici, la mode en a décidé autrement.”


127 Coster sale 1824, lot 39, 40, or 42.

128 *Two Roses*, Pen and gray ink, gray wash, over black chalk. 8 1/4 x 13 3/16 in. (21 x 33.5 cm) and *Three Peonies*, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Christie’s Paris, Thursday, March 18, 2004, lot 145. These may well be the two drawings that appeared together at the Salon of 1802, well before Vallayer-Coster began working with Allais (Salon of 1802, no. 284.)
Hewitt drawing: the sheets of cream paper are of approximately the same dimensions, and the pairs of flowers are similarly rendered with pen and gray ink, gray wash, and black chalk. These works seem to have exceeded the printmaking project, yet the precision of the drawings—relative to the soft and loose touches of her paintings—suggest that they were prepared in anticipation of translation to print.\footnote{See Roland Michel, “Vallayer-Coster in her Time,” 22-32 for an extensive discussion of the Allais engravings, placed in the context of flower engravings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.}

Interestingly, the October issue of 	extit{Journal de l’Empire} notes that a few of the impressions for sale had been printed in color (as were Redouté’s lilacs and roses), but even more remarkably that they were “retouched” by the hand of the artist.\footnote{	extit{Journal de l’Empire} (October 27, 1811): 3-4: “Quelques exemplaires sont imprimés en couleur et retouches de la main meme de l’auteur; ceux-la forment des modeles parfaits pour les peintres de fleurs, les peintres d’ornement et les amateurs.”} Her interventions within the printmaking process, rendering engraved reproductions colorful and individual, suggests how highly Vallayer-Coster valued her own touch and considered it her artistic signature, even with ‘reproductive’ works on paper.

The admittedly limited scope and marketing of the Allais engravings clearly differentiates Vallayer-Coster’s brief foray into printmaking from Redouté’s vast, systematic project. Moreover, as the April 	extit{Journal de l’Empire} advertisement makes clear, these prints were envisaged as functional tools, as well as collectable objects, sold either individually or in 	extit{cahiers}—potentially along with the wash drawings upon which they were based. The April description of the series is worth quoting at length, for it summarizes the artist’s prestigious career, while indicating the variable uses of her latest designs:

A painter of flowers of merit, such as Mad. Vallayer-Coster, was obliged to transmit to her compatriots the lessons of an art that she has brought to perfection. Admitted to the former Royal Academy of Painting at the age when young
students have barely held their first brush, this woman has since enjoyed a far-reaching and well-deserved reputation. It is therefore a real service to today’s society that she has undertaken a work as commendable as *Etudes de Fleurs*, of which we have two *cahiers* before us. Drawn with taste, rendered with spirit, engraved in a way that is as fine as light, its flowers still have the merit of being colored by the hand of their author, and this makes the gouaches truly worthy of being framed; Everyone must sense the charm of execution and the usefulness of these studies [...] Not only will artists and *amateurs* appreciate the work of Madame Vallayer-Coster, but this work will also be useful to manufacturers, to *pensionnaires*, to drawing schools, to fathers who want to give their children the talent of painting. Students will see the flower, either in bud, or blooming, its exact anatomy, and all this with an art that perfectly traces nature. One must thank Madame Vallayer-Coster for her fine idea, and encourage her to continue this enterprise, which is as agreeable to friends of the arts as it is useful to those who are destined to cultivate them.  

It is unsurprising that the engravings were imagined to serve as didactic models for students of art; Vallayer-Coster probably trained in the same way under Basseporte and Vernet, thanks to the encouragement of her father, who wanted to give his own child ‘the talent of painting.’ We find evidence of this in a watercolor *Tulip* by Vernet. An inscription on the verso, presumably dating to 1789, reads:

Joseph Vernet peintre de Marine / fit cette etude à la campagne pour / Donner leçon a Mde Vallayer-Coster / qui était son élève et qui s’était adonné a ce genre // Mr Vernet fit present de cette etude a Mde Biche en 1789.

131 *Journal de l’Empire* (Wednesday, April 10, 1811): 4: “Il appartenoit à un peintre de fleurs du premier mérite, tel que Mad. Vallayer-Coster, de transmettre à ses compatriotes les leçons d’un art qu’elle a porté à la perfection. Admise au sein de la ci-devant Académie royale de peinture, à l’âge où les jeunes élèves essaient à peine leur pinceau, celle dame a joui depuis d’une réputation aussi étendue que méritée. C’est donc un véritable service qu’elle rend aujourd’hui à la société que d’entreprendre un ouvrage aussi recommandable que ses *Etudes de Fleurs*, dont nous avons deux cahiers sous les yeux. Dessinées avec goût, rendues avec esprit, gravées d’une manière aussi fine que légère, ses fleurs ont encore le mérite d’être coloriées de la main même leur auteur, ce qui en fait plutôt des gouaches que des estampes, et des gouaches vraiment dignes d’être encadrées; voila pour le charme d l’exécution; quant à l’utilité de ces *Etudes*, tout le monde doit la sentir. [...] Non-seulement les artistes et les amateurs apprécièrent le travail de Mad. Vallayer-Coster, mais ce travail sera encore tire aux manufacturiers, aux pensionnais, aux écoles de dessin, aux pères de famille qui voudront donner à leurs enfans le talent de la peinture. Les élèves y verront la fleur, soit en bouton, soit épanouie, son anatomie exacte, et tout cela fait avec un art qui retrace parfaitement la nature. Il faut louer Mad. Vallayer-Coster, la remercier de son heureuse idée, l’encourager enfin à continuer une entreprise aussi agréable aux amis des arts qu’utile à ceux qui se destinent à les cultiver.”

132 This was also the intended purpose of Spaendonck’s *Fleurs dessinées d’après nature* (1799), which declared itself to be “useful for amateurs, for young artists, for students from central schools, and for illustrators for manufacturers.” Quoted and translated in Roland Michel, “La botanique est-elle un art / Is Botany an Art?” 24 note 9.
Joseph Vernet marine painter / made this study in the country to / Give a lesson to Madame Vallayer-Coster / who was his student and who devoted herself to this genre // Monsieur Vernet presented this study / to Madame Biche in 1789.133

Given the information provided in this inscription, it is significant that Vallayer-Coster included tulips in a number her paintings (Figs. 6.17 and 6.23).

While she is not known to have trained any of her own students, as did Labille Guiard, Vallayer-Coster must have relished the idea of offering a new generation of young female artists access to the still life tradition—those who shared Vallayer-Coster’s professional ambitions, as well as bourgeois amateurs.134 The veritable explosion in the numbers of women participating in private drawing schools and public exhibitions after the collapse of the Royal Academy attests to the new artistic possibilities in the (ever-shifting) political and cultural landscape, long after Vallayer-Coster’s own academic debut.135

Conclusion

135 The literature on the subject of female artists during the Revolutionary period is vast; see, for example, Séverine Sofio, Artistes femmes: la parenthèse enchantée XVIIIe-XIXe siècles (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2016); Marie-Josèphe Bonnet, Liberté, égalité, exclusion: femmes peintres en révolution, 1770–1804 (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012); Mechthild Fend, Melissa Hyde, and Anne Lafont, eds., Plumes et pinceaux. Discours des femmes sur l’art en Europe (1750-1850) (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2012); and Margaret A. Oppenheimer, “Women Artists in Paris, 1791–1814” (PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1996). As Hyde summarizes in her essay in Kahng and Roland Michel, Vallayer-Coster, 2002, 81, women were only briefly admitted to the Commune Générale des Arts, which had replaced the Academy in 1793; even after their membership was declared illegal, they were permitted to submit work to the Salon; according to Hyde’s calculation, their participation increased by 1600% over the course of two decades.
In Vallayer-Coster’s time, women were closely associated with the delicate and ephemeral beauty of flowers, as well as with the intoxicating scents. Said another way, flowers—and, by extension, their visual representations in paintings, prints, and embroidery—were perceived to be constitutive of eighteenth-century femininity. Like women themselves, floral images have long been dismissed as amateur and decorative, and therefore vacant of meaning. These cultural connotations have had major consequences for the reputations of all women artists, but particularly for those who painted flowers. Vallayer-Coster’s own late-career devotion to the subject has, perhaps unfairly, come to define her entire oeuvre. As I have argued in this chapter, her flower works were the vehicles for some of her most intriguing formal and material innovations, including brief forays into tapestry and print. Yet it was the facture of her mature paintings—the “soft” and “seductive” touches, so evocative of the effusive smells of flowers—that elicited the strongest reactions from her contemporaries.

Many female ‘flower painters’ followed in Vallayer-Coster’s wake, yet the Impressionist Berthe Morisot is perhaps the most significant heiress to her legacy.136 Though not a still life painter, Morisot painted flowers frequently; in her canvases, blooms appear in gardens and vases, as well as the patterned textiles of dresses and upholstered furniture. In Morisot’s masterpiece, Woman at her Toilette (Fig 6.39), an anonymous young woman fixes her hair—perhaps about to tuck in a white rose, resting on a nearby table, into her finished coif.137 The woman’s dressing room is lined with

136 Morisot’s brother-in-law, Edouard Manet, also painted several still life paintings, especially of flowers; see especially the discussion of his portrait of his student, Eva Gonzales, in the act of painting flowers in a blue porcelain vase in George Mauner, Manet: The Still Life Paintings (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 22-25.
137 Morisot painted a number of women wearing flowers in their hair, i.e. At the Ball 1875, Musée Marmatton, Paris, and Young Girl in a Ball Gown, 1879, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
silvery blue wallpaper with floral motifs, rendered so abstractly (with what Carol Armstrong has described as “blossom-strewn brushwork”) that the lavender, pink, and white petals seem to swirl off the wall, like a mist of perfume or a cloud of scented powder.\textsuperscript{138} It was in response to this painting, exhibited at the Impressionist Exhibition in 1880, that Charles Ephrussi famously wrote in the \textit{Gazette des Beaux-Arts}, “Berthe Morisot is French in her distinction, elegance, gaiety, and nonchalance; she likes her painting festive and spirited; she grinds flower petals onto her palette, in order to spread them later on her canvas in witty, airy touches.”\textsuperscript{139} It was as if Morisot, much like Vallayer-Coster, was actually painting flowers \textit{with} actual flowers, employing their delicate colors, shapes, textures, and smells in order to seduce the viewer.

CONCLUSION

Much has been made of the quiet beauty and mesmerizing “silence” of still life paintings.¹ I have argued here that Vallayer-Coster’s paintings are anything but silent, as they speak directly to the visceral textures of eighteenth-century Parisian life. Her lush and evocative brushwork certainly appeal to the eye, but neither can our fingers, tongues, ears or noses be indifferent to her work. Vallayer-Coster’s still lifes seduce the viewer inasmuch as they stimulate memories of subjective, sensory experiences of the world, provoking a desire to touch, taste and smell. This dissertation explored Vallayer-Coster’s emphasis on the cultural and corporeal experience of things, as they were understood in eighteenth-century France.

My objectives have been manifold. Above all, I aimed to situate Vallayer-Coster and her work within the evolving cultural and material landscape of the late eighteenth century, and to better understand the formal and sensorial implications of her chosen subject matter. In order to do so, I divided her extant oeuvre into categories by subject and analyzed them in separate chapters, while noting the connections between them—particularly in terms of patronage and painting technique. My first and second chapters considered Vallayer-Coster’s personal and professional life—the advantages that facilitated her exceptional acceptance to the Academy, as well as the challenges that thwarted her advancement within the institution. In this section, I sketched her social matrix, clarifying her relationships with friends and family, fellow artists, and academic

leadership and suggesting that these connections are partly responsible for her various successes. The second chapter also contained an analysis of her three largest allegorical paintings, undeniably her most ambitious, which make bold and thoroughly modern claims about art, nature, and nation through allegories of painting, sculpture, and architecture, gardening and hunting, and as well as the French military. The subsequent four chapters were dedicated to the diverse textures, tastes, and smells that constituted the remainder of her oeuvre: food and game, shells and flowers. In these sections, I placed her work in dialogue with discourses on culinary and aesthetic taste, hunting as a masculine leisure sport, conchological collecting practices, and expressions of floral femininity. My analyses of her paintings, while primarily materialist, were also informed by their gendered connotations and implicit eroticisms. This methodology, grounded in both material culture and the materiality of paint, could certainly be adapted by other art historians considering early modern material, beyond eighteenth-century France.

My own writing on Vallayer-Coster is deeply indebted to the work of other feminist art historians working in the field of eighteenth-century French art history, who have offered compelling models for considering the biographies and critical reputations of women artists, as well as Enlightenment philosophies on sexual difference. This work has been directly inspired by that of Mary Sheriff, whose groundbreaking feminist and psychoanalytic study of Vigée Le Brun radically altered our field, and Melissa Hyde, whose careful research on various women artists, particularly those working outside the Academy, has broadened our understanding of professional possibilities for women.

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2 Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*. 
during this period. My study belongs to a growing tide of research into the roles of women in the visual, material, and intellectual culture of Paris during the ancien régime—but our work is far from finished. For now, we remain frustrated by the dearth of information about other académiciennes—the Boulogne sisters, for example, whose still-life paintings appeared at a number of Parisian salons and served as decorative overdoors at Versailles. Their work has yet to be fully considered, and to be situated within the social and cultural context of late seventeenth-century Paris, as well as the internal politics of the nascent Academy.

My dissertation on Vallayer-Coster’s remarkable career and work has also been facilitated by the life-long research of French scholar, Marianne Roland Michel, who carefully catalogued the artist’s oeuvre in 1970 and again in 2002. In the nearly fifteen years since Roland Michel’s death in 2004, however, a number of Vallayer-Coster’s paintings and works on paper have re-emerged on the art market and been acquired by major museums in the United States and Europe. The appendix to this dissertation consolidates new information about the current locations of many of her works, although a number unfortunately remain untraced.

Future considerations of Vallayer-Coster may benefit from rediscovered paintings or information about her relationship with the Gobelins manufactory; others might more carefully evaluate her figurative work, including her portraits and genre paintings. Vallayer-Coster’s legacy, and the generation of still life painters (especially the female amateur artists) that emerged in her wake in the first half of the nineteenth-century, were

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4 See the Introduction and Allegories chapter for brief discussions of the Boulogne sisters in the Academy and Madeleine’s military trophies at Versailles.
also beyond the scope of this study. Indeed, the trajectory of the still life genre in France between the ancien régime and the Second French Empire (when artists like Courbet, Manet, and Fantin-Latour brought their own innovations in composition and facture to bear on the subject) remains to be studied.

Though primarily visual objects, Vallayer-Coster’s still life paintings solicit a wide range of sensory responses. In emphasizing this aspect of her practice, I hope to have complicated the imagined silence and simplicity of her genre. This dissertation offers a new, synesthesiac framework for appreciating the work of this artist in particular—but also, going forward, for re-evaluating the ‘secondary’ role of objects represented in eighteenth-century paintings more generally. How were still life objects incorporated into other types of painting in the eighteenth century—accumulating, for example, in the foregrounds of portraits and history paintings, or in decorative panels embedded over chimneys and doors in domestic interiors? What can those images tell us about eighteenth-century materialities, or about the variable relationships between people and things? To what extent are those relationships structured by gender, and informed by intellectual (or anti-intellectual) discourse? Indeed, a better understanding of the textures, tastes, sounds, and smells of eighteenth century life dwells in these unexamined margins. This dissertation represents one model for probing those peripheries.

5 For example, two wonderful and strange works by Antoine Berjon (1754–1843) have recently entered American collections: Still Life With Flowers, Shells, a Shark’s Head, and Petrifications, 1819, Philadelphia Museum Of Art and Still Life with Grapes, Chestnuts, Melons, and a Marble Cube, ca. 1800-1810, Toledo Museum of Art. Alexander Nemerov’s work on an American still life artist Raphaelle Peale offers an interesting model for studying paintings of this period: The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812–1824 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
APPENDIX:
Vallayer Coster at the Paris Salons, 1771-1817

Beginning in 1637, the Parisian Salon—the biannual exhibition of artworks by members of the French Royal Academy—was accompanied by a livret, a catalogue that listed the participating artists and their work. Before the dissolution of the Academy, artists were typically organized by medium (painting, then sculpture and engraving), and therein by rank (beginning with officers of the Academy, followed by professors and regular academicians, and concluding with those who were only agréée.) Descriptions of the artworks typically included the titles or subjects, and often the dimensions and current owners. In a few cases, pendants or groups of works with similar subjects are included under a single number.

The following tables itemize the works by Vallayer-Coster that appeared at the Salon in Paris, based on those livrets. Whenever possible, I have identified: the description of the work in the Salon livret; the current title; any known eighteenth-century owners of the painting; the current location or the last known sale and the figure numbers in the 1970 and 2002 catalogues; and the figure number if it is illustrated in this dissertation.

As this Appendix makes clear, Vallayer-Coster’s participation in the Salon was most robust in the two decades between her debut as an académicienne in 1771 and the advent of the French Revolution in 1789. The artist exhibited only intermittently thereafter until her death in 1818. In total, she submitted her work to eighteen Salons between 1771 and 1817, abstaining seven times.

Vallayer-Coster exhibited at the Salon a great number of works that are currently unidentified or untraced—mostly genre and portrait paintings, as well as paintings of flowers and fruit that are difficult to distinguish based on livret descriptions. This is especially true of the works submitted to the Salons in the 1790s and early 1800s; after the Revolution, artists were generally listed alphabetically by last name (rather than academic rank) and their artworks were rarely given dimensions or specific descriptions. These tables also make plain the fact that throughout her career, Vallayer-Coster painted a number of works that she did not submit to the Salon, many of which are discussed in this dissertation.

6 The units of measurement in the livrets, “pied” and “pouce,” correspond roughly with the modern American “foot” and “inch.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livret description</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Fig no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>142. Une Jeune Arabe, en pied</td>
<td><em>A Young Arab</em></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144. Des Fruits &amp; des Légumes. Tableau de 2 pieds 9 pouces, sur 2 pieds 2 pouces.</td>
<td>Fruits and Vegetables</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146. Un Bas-Relief imité, jeux d'Enfans. Tableau de- 2 pieds 2 pouces, sur un pied 6 pouces.</td>
<td><em>Trompe l’oeil of a Terracotta Bas-Relief, Children Playing</em></td>
<td>Possibly Sotheby’s New York, January 29-30, 2009, lot 71 (1970 no. 240, as lost)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147. Un Panier de Prunes. Tableau d'un pied 4 pouces, sur 1 pouce.</td>
<td><em>A Basket of Plums</em></td>
<td>Possibly Cleveland Museum of Art (See also Salon of 1773, no. 143)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148. Un Lapin. Tableau d'un pied 8 pouces, sur 1 pied 4 pouces.</td>
<td>A Rabbit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149. Deux Tableaux; l'un, représentant les attributs de la Peinture, la Sculpture &amp; l'Architecture; &amp; l'autre, des Instrumens de Musique. Ces deux Tableaux font ceux qu'elle a donnés pour sa Réception à l'Académie.</td>
<td><em>Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture</em></td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Attributes of Music</em></td>
<td>Musée du Louvre, Paris</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Explication des Peintures, Sculptures, et Gravures de Messieurs de l’Académie Royale

#### Salon of 1773, p. 29, no. 139-144: “Par Mlle Valayer [sic], Académicienne”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livret description</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Fig no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>139. Un Bureau chargé d’une Figure de marbre, &amp; de différens attributs de Musique &amp; de Géographie. Tableau de 5 pieds de hauteur, sur 4 pieds de largeur.</td>
<td>A Desk with a Marble Figure and Attributes of Music and Geography</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140. Le Portrait de Mme B**.</td>
<td><em>Portrait of Mme de Bouhébent</em></td>
<td>(1970 no. 309, 2002 no. 21)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142. Une Dejeuner. Un Saladier rempli de Pommes. Tableaux de 19 pouces de largeur, sur 16 pouces de hauteur.</td>
<td><em>A Breakfast</em></td>
<td>(1970 no. 223 and 123; 2002 no. 23)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143. Un Panier de Prunes. Tableau de 17 pouces de large, sur 14 pouces de haut.</td>
<td><em>A Basket of Plums</em></td>
<td>Possibly Cleveland Museum of Art, (See also Salon of 1771, no. 147) 2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144. Un petit Bas-relief, d’après M. de la Rue. D’un pied de large, sur 8 pouces de haut.</td>
<td><em>A small trompe l’oeil bas-relief after M. de la Rue</em></td>
<td>Private Collection, Holland (1970 no. 365; 2002, no. 19)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Explication des Peintures, Sculptures, et Gravures de Messieurs de l’Académie Royale

#### Salon of 1775, pp. 18-19 no. 98-102, “Par Mlle VALLAYER, Académicienne”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livret description</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Fig no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98. Une Urne, des Fruits &amp; un Homard. Ce Tableau, de 6 pieds sur 4, appartient à M. Montullé, Associé-libre de l’Académie.</td>
<td>An Urn, Fruits and a Lobster</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101. Le Portrait de M. L’Abbé le Monier. De 2 pieds, sur un pied 7 pouces.</td>
<td>Portrait of M. L’Abbé le Monier</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102. Plusieurs Tableaux de Fleurs &amp; de Fruits, sous le meme Numéro.</td>
<td>A number of paintings of flowers and fruits</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livret description</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
<td>Fig no.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>100. Deux Tableaux de fleurs &amp; de fruits. De 4 pieds, sur 3 pieds &amp; demi. Ils appartiennent a M. de Montullé, Secrétaire des Commandemens de la Reine.</td>
<td><em>Bouquet of Flowers in a Blue Porcelain Vase</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>Bouquet of Flowers in a Terracotta Vase with Peaches and Grapes</em>&lt;br&gt;(Jean-Baptiste-François de Montullé)</td>
<td>Both Dallas Museum of Art</td>
<td>6.16 6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102. Deux Tableaux, de forme ronde, l’un des fleurs dans un vase de crystal; l’autre, des fleurs dans un vase de lapis. De 18 pouces.</td>
<td>Two paintings, oval shaped, one with flowers in a crystal vase; the other with flowers in a lapis vase (<em>Bouquet of Flowers with a Purse</em>)</td>
<td>Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, Saint-Jean Cap Ferrat</td>
<td>- 6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103. Autre Tableau de fleurs, dans une corbeille. De meme forme &amp; de meme grandeur que les precedens.</td>
<td><em>Bouquet of Flowers with Grapes and Apples</em></td>
<td>Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, Saint-Jean Cap Ferrat</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104. Portrait de M. Roettiers, ancien Graveur-général des Monnoies. Tableau ovale, de 2 pieds sur 1 pied 7 pouces de haut.</td>
<td><em>Portrait of Joseph-Charles Roettiers (1692–1779)</em></td>
<td>Musée National du Château de Versailles</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105. Deux petits Tableaux: l’un, une jeune Femme, avec un Enfant sur ses genoux, qui lui offre des fleurs; l’autre, une jeune Fille, qui vient de recevoir une lettre. D’un pied, sur 9 pouces.</td>
<td>Two small paintings: one, a young woman with a child on her knees, who offers her flowers; the other, a young girl who has just received a letter.</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106. Une jeune Personne, montrant à son Amie la statue de l’Amour. Petit Tableau ovale, de 13 pouces sur 9.</td>
<td>A young person showing a statue of Love to his girlfriend</td>
<td>- -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Livret description</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
<td>Fig no.</td>
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<tr>
<td>102. Une Vestale couronnée de roses, &amp; tenant une corbeille de fleurs. Ce petit Tableau, de forme ovale, appartient à la reine.</td>
<td><em>Bust of a Young Vestal</em> (Queen Marie Antoinette)</td>
<td>Private Collection (1970 no. 318 and 2002, no. 53)</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103. Des fleurs dans un vase de lapis. Ce Tableau ovale, de 2 pieds de haut sur 18 pouces de large, appartient à M. le Comte de Merle.</td>
<td>Flowers in a lapis vase, oval (M. le Comte de Merle)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104. Deux petits Tableaux; l’un, des pêches &amp; un gobelet d’argent; &amp; l’autre, du pâté, de la liqueur &amp; du raisin. Ils ont 15 pouces de large sur 12 de haut, &amp; appartiennent à M. Gérardon de Marigny.</td>
<td><em>Still Life with a Basket of Peaches and a Silver Goblet</em> <em>Pâté, Liqueur et Raisins</em> (Jean Girardot de Marigny)</td>
<td>(1970 no. 139 and 140, 2002 no. 48)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105. Un panier de prunes, un citron &amp; autres. Tableau ovale, de 13 pouces de haut sur 15 de large.</td>
<td><em>A Basket of Plums and a Lemon</em></td>
<td>Possibly Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106. Deux Têtes de fantaisie. 1 pied de haut sur 12 de large.</td>
<td><em>Two Fantasy Figures</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107. Fleurs &amp; Raisins. 15 pouces de haut, sur 12 de large.</td>
<td><em>Flowers and Grapes</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108. Le Portrait de M. le Comte de M… Tableau ovale, de 2 pieds de haut sur 1 pied 6 pouces de large</td>
<td>Portrait of M. Le Comte de M[erle?]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livret description</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
<td>Fig no.</td>
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<tr>
<td>104. Le Portrait de Madame Sophie de France, dans l’intérieur de son Cabinet, tenant le Plan de l’Abaye de l’Argentiere. De 6 pieds de haut, sur 5 pieds 10 pouces de large.</td>
<td>Portrait of Madame Sophie de France in the interior of her Cabinet, holding a plan of the Abbey of l'Argentière</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 105. Trois petits Tableaux ovales, de fleurs & de fruits. | Possibly:  
Still Life of a Vase of Flowers, Bird’s Nest, and Purse  
Vase of Flowers with Shell  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
6.23  
6.24 |
<p>| 106. Une Corbeille de raisins | A Basket of Grapes | - | - |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livret description</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Fig no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75. Portrait de M. L’Abbé ***. 3 pieds 9 pouces de haut, sur 2 pieds 3 pouces de large</td>
<td>Portrait of M. L’Abbé ***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76. Tableau de Gibier, avec les attributs de chasse. 2 pieds 10 pouces de large, sur 2 pieds, 4 pouces de haut; il appartient à M. Gérardot de Marigny.</td>
<td>Still Life with Game (Jean Girardot de Marigny)</td>
<td>Toledo Museum of Art</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77. Une Tableau représentant un Vase d’albâtre rempli de fleurs; sur une table sont plusieurs espèces de fruits, comme ananas, pêches, &amp; raisins. 3 pieds 4 pouces de haut, sur 2 pieds 9 pouces de large.</td>
<td>A painting representing an alabaster vase filled with flowers, on a table with several types of fruits, like pineapples, peaches, and grapes.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78. Un Enfant tenant d’une main un pigeon, de l’autre une cerise. Tableau ovale d’un pied ½ de haut, sur 13 pouces de large.</td>
<td>A child holding a pigeon in one hand and a cherry in the other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79. Une jeune Cuisiniere qui écouche une anguille. 17 pouces de haut, sur 12 de large.</td>
<td>A young female cook flaying an eel</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80. Deux petits Tableaux ovales, représentant l’un une Marchande de mare, &amp; l’autre une Marchande de fleurs.</td>
<td>Two small oval paintings, one representing a woman selling fish, and the other a woman selling flowers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81. Autre petit ovale représentant deux pluviers dorés &amp; un lapreau. Ce Tableau, peint sur cuivre, a 7 pouces de haut, sur 6 de large.</td>
<td>A small oval painting representing two golden plovers [small birds] and a young rabbit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livret description</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
<td>Fig no.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. Portrait en pied de Mademoiselle de Coigny, cueillant des fleurs dans son Jardin. De 5 pieds ½ de haut, sur 4 pieds 5 pouces de large.</td>
<td>A standing portrait of Mademoiselle de Coigny, gathering flowers in her garden</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57. Portrait de M. l’Evêque de ***. De 5 pieds 4 pouces de haut, sur 3 pieds 6 pouces de large.</td>
<td>Portrait of l’Evêque de ***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58. Portrait de Madame de Saint-Huberty sous l’habit de Didon. 5 pieds ½ de haut, sur 4 pieds 5 pouces de large.</td>
<td>Madame de Saint-Huberty as Dido</td>
<td>National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59. Tableau de Gibier, compose d’un Canard, d’une Sarcelle, d’un Lièvre, &amp;c. De 3 pieds 6 pouces ½ de haut, sur 2 pieds 8 pouces de large, appartenant à M. le Chevalier de Roslin.</td>
<td>Possibly Trophies of the Hunt (Alexander Roslin, Academician)</td>
<td>Galerie Gismondi, Paris</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Un Chien de chasse posant la patte sur un Lièvre; on voit dans la fond un Fusil, Une Carnassiere &amp; une Poire à poudre, caroches à un tronce d’arbre. Ce Tableau a 4 pieds 1 pouce de haut sur 3 pieds ½ de large.</td>
<td>Hound with Dead Game</td>
<td>Sotheby’s Paris, Tableaux et Dessins Anciens et du XIXe Siècle, June 26, 2014, Lot 58 (1970 no. 288 and 2002 no. 71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61. Petit Tableau de fleurs dans un vase de verre. 1 pied &amp; demi de haut, sur 1 pied 8 pouces de large.</td>
<td>Small painting of flowers in a glass vase</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Explication des Peintures, Sculptures, et Gravures de Messieurs de l’Académie Royale
### Salon of 1787, pp. 15-16, no. 68-75 “Par Mde. VALLAYER-COSTER, Académicienne”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livret description</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Fig no.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68. Un Chien près d’un Chevreuil &amp; d’autre gibier, comme lièvre, Faison, &amp;c, avec un fond de Paysage. 4 pieds ½ de haut, sur trois pieds ½ de large.</td>
<td>A dog near a deer and other game, like a hare, pheasant, etc. in front of a landscape</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69. Des Fleurs dans un vase Porphire garni de bronze doré. 2 pieds de aut, sur 1 pied 8 pouces de large.</td>
<td>Still Life of Flowers and Fruit</td>
<td>Musées d’art et d’histoire, Ville de Genève</td>
<td>See chp. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70. Deux Tableaux ronds, dont l’un représente une corbeille de Raisons, &amp; l’autre un jette d’Albâtre garnie de bronze doré &amp; remplie des pêches.</td>
<td>Two round paintings, one representing a basket of grapes, and the other an alabaster bowl with gilded bronze and filled with peaches</td>
<td>Both Private collection (1970 no. 147 and 148, 2002 no. 74 and 75)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71. Deux Tableaux, dont l’un sont deux lapins morts, un baril de poudre &amp; autres attributs de chasse, &amp; dans l’autre, un coq &amp; poule blanche.</td>
<td>A Rooster and a White Chicken on a Stone Ledge</td>
<td>Musée de Tessé, Le Mans</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73. Portrait ovale de M. ***</td>
<td>Oval portrait of M. ***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74. Autre Portrait ovale.</td>
<td>Another oval portrait</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>75. Deux petits Tableaux ovales, dont l’un représente un Canard, &amp; l’autre deux Perdrix rouges peintes sur cuivre.</td>
<td>A White Hen Partridges</td>
<td>Both Private Collection (1970 no. 37 and 300, 2002 no. 78 and 79)</td>
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<td>48. Une Figure de l’Étude, en marbre blanc, groupée avec des madrèpores, des coquillages &amp; des minéraux. Hauteur, 3 pieds; largeur, 2 pieds 8 pouces.</td>
<td>Still Life with Minerals</td>
<td>Private Collection (great-grandniece of the artist as of 1975) (1970 no. 266 or 267, 2002 no. 87)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Un Enfant qui fait des châteaux de cartes. Tableau ovale, 3 pieds sur 2 pieds 8 pouces.</td>
<td>Mario Coster Building a House of Cards</td>
<td>(nephew of the artist)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>50. Des fleurs dans un vase de crystal, 2 pieds quarrés.</td>
<td>Flowers in a crystal vase</td>
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<tr>
<td>51. Deux petits Tableaux imitant des Bas-reliefs en bronze. Largeur, 1 pied 3 pouces; hauteur, 1 pied 1 pouce.</td>
<td>Two small paintings mimicking bronze bas-reliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>504. Plusieurs Tableaux de fleurs &amp; Nature-morte.</td>
<td>Several paintings of flowers and still lifes</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>
Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure, dessins, modèles, etc. Exposés dans le grand Salon du Musée central des Arts, sur l'invitation du Ministre de l'intérieur, Au mois de Vendémiaire, an cinquième

Salon of 1796 (V)

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Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture et Dessins, Sculpture, Architecture et Gravure, Exposés du Musée central des Arts, d'après l'Arrêté du Ministre de l'Intérieur, le 1er Thermidor, an VI de la République française.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95.</td>
<td>Des fleurs dans un vase de porcelain garni de bronze. Ce tableau est destiné à faire un devant de cheminée.</td>
<td>Flowers in a porcelain vase with gilded bronze. This painting is intended to serve as a fire screen.</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>96.</td>
<td>Des fleurs dans un vase de cristal avec des fruits. Tableau ovale, peint sur cuivre.</td>
<td>Flowers in a crystal vase with fruits. Oval painting on copper</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97.</td>
<td>Deux tableaux de fleurs, forme ovale, peints à l'huile sur taffetas; même numéro.</td>
<td>Two paintings of flowers, oval, oil paint on on taffeta</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98.</td>
<td>Deux ronds formant dessus de boîtes. L’un des fleurs et un vase de bronze; l’autre des attributs de chasse et du gibier. Peints à l'huile sur taffetas.</td>
<td>Two round paintings forming the tops of [snuff?] boxes. One of flowers and a bronze vase; the other with attributes of the hunt and game. Oil paint on taffeta.</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture et Dessins, Sculpture, Architecture et Gravure, Des Artistes vivans, Exposés au Muséum central des Arts, d’après l’Arrêté du Ministre de l’Intérieur, le 15 fructidor, an VIII de la République française

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<tr>
<td>356.</td>
<td>Un tableau, représentant du Gibier, un Jambon, etc.</td>
<td>A painting representing game, ham, etc.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>357.</td>
<td>Deux tableaux de fleurs.</td>
<td>Two paintings of flowers</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>358.</td>
<td>Un tableau représentant un petit bas-relief en terre cuite.</td>
<td>A painting representing a small terracotta bas-relief</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>
Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture et Dessins, Sculpture, Architecture et Gravure, Des Artistes vivans, Exposés au Muséum central des Arts, d’après l’Arrêté du Ministre de l’Intérieur, le 15 fructidor, an IX de la République française

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<tr>
<td>339. Vase d’albâtre rempli de fleurs.</td>
<td>Flowers in an Alabaster Vase</td>
<td>Private Collection (1970 no. 34 as lost, 2002 no. 92)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>340. Jatte de cristal remplie de pêches et de raisins.</td>
<td>Crystal bowl filled with peaches and grapes</td>
<td>-</td>
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Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture et Dessins, Sculpture, Architecture et Gravure, Des Artistes vivans, Exposés au Muséum des Arts, d’après l’Arrêté du Ministre de l’Intérieur, le 15 Fructidor, an X de la République française

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<tr>
<td>283. Un Tableau représentant un panier de pêches, des raisins, et un vase de granit orné de bronze doré.</td>
<td>Still Life with Porphyry Vase, Basket of Peaches, Grapes, and Plums (Coster Sale 1824, no. 29)</td>
<td>Private Collection (Abigail Own-Pontez, Houston) (1970 no. 151; 2002 no. 95)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>284. Deux dessins a la pierre noire, représentant des fleurs</td>
<td>Two black chalk drawings representing flowers</td>
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<tr>
<td>480. Des roses dans un verre, à côté une grappe de raisin.</td>
<td>Roses in a Glass and Grapes</td>
<td>Private Collection, North America, 1970 no. 84 and 86 (as lost); 2002 no. 96</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>481. Des reines-marguerites. Gouache.</td>
<td>Study of Dahlias (Empress Josephine)</td>
<td>Napoleonmuseum Arenenberg, Salenstein, Switzerland</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>483. Des anémones et autres fleurs</td>
<td>Anemones and other flowers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>484. Une branche de lilas</td>
<td>A branch of lilac</td>
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<td>485. Branche de jacinthe.</td>
<td>Branch of hyacinth</td>
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<td>Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture, Architecture et Gravure des Artistes vivans, Exposés au Musée Napoléon, le 15 Septembre 1806</td>
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<tr>
<td>796. Des roses dans un vase de cristal</td>
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<td>797. Anémones, reine-marguerites, etc.</td>
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<td>798. Fleurs et fruits, même numéro</td>
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**Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture, Architecture et Gravure des Artistes Vivans, Exposés au Musée Royal des Arts, le 24 Avril 1817**

Salon of 1817, pp. 85-86, no. 726-737: “VALLAYER-COSTER (Mme.)”

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<td>736. Des Fleurs dans un vase de porcelain de la Chine, enrichi de bronze doré. (Pour un devant de cheminée.)</td>
<td>Flowers in a Chinese porcelain vase, ornamented with gilded bronze (for a fire screen)</td>
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(King Louis XVIII) | Musée du Louvre, Paris | 3.23 |
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