

From the BESTSELLING author

Kate Pankhurst

FANTASTICALLY

GREAT

WOMEN

ARTISTS

and their

STORIES



BLOOMSBURY

in the following pages.

This book tells the stories of some of the most talented female artists the world has ever seen. They lived at different times and came from many different countries and backgrounds, but they have a few things in common ...

They were imaginative, strong-minded and fearless.

They never gave up on their dreams.

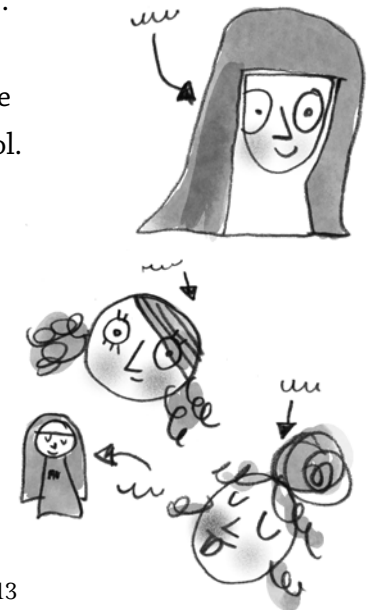
And not only did they change people's ideas of what makes powerful art, they transformed people's beliefs about what women can do.

Prepare to be inspired!



Élisabeth was born in Paris, France, in 1755. Her father Louis Vigée was an **artist**, and Élisabeth shared his creative flare. As a child, she loved to draw and paint, and she imagined painting people's portraits when she grew up, just like her father.

When Élisabeth was six, she was sent to a convent school. She was always getting in **trouble** for drawing faces on her schoolbooks, her classmates' books, and even the convent walls !





Élisabeth's teachers might have found her continuous drawing frustrating, but her father always encouraged her. When she was eight, she did a little sketch of a man, and her father told her it was brilliant.



She never forgot what her father said, and kept the drawing all her life.




"You will be an ARTIST my child if there ever was one."



Élisabeth left the convent school when she was 11 and came home to live with her parents. She was very happy taking art lessons from her father and drawing in his studio. Some of his artist friends gave her guidance too. But, sadly, Élisabeth's father died when she was 12, leaving the family with almost nothing to live on.

She was **determined** to follow in her father's footsteps and become a **professional artist**. However, at the time there were rules that said she couldn't become a painter's **apprentice** because she was a girl! But Élisabeth wasn't going to let that stop her – she would learn the skills anyway! She visited Paris's most important art galleries to **study** the masterpieces on display, and **teach** herself their techniques. She also spent many hours with artists in their workshops, perfecting her craft.





Élisabeth officially started painting portraits when she was just 15. She was **remarkably skilled**, and had a way of capturing the personalities of her subjects. She quickly earned enough money to support her mother and brother. Court ladies and gentlemen, princes, actors and writers were all eager to sit for her portraits. She could hardly keep up with the **commissions** – it seemed like everyone wanted Élisabeth to paint them!



ME NEXT!



Meanwhile, her mother had married again but her new husband was a very **greedy** man. He took almost all of Élisabeth's earnings and kept them for himself.



There was another problem too ... Élisabeth had been working as a professional artist, but she didn't belong to an **academy** or a **guild** – associations for professional artists. Because of this, at age 19 her painting materials were seized.



But Élisabeth was ambitious, and eager to be recognised as a serious artist. The **Académie Royale** was the best academy in Paris and admitted very few women. So instead she swiftly became a member of the **Académie de Saint-Luc**, the city guild her father had belonged to. It wasn't as well connected as the Académie Royale, but it meant that Élisabeth had a **licence to paint for a living**. And by the time she was 20, she was established at court. She was extremely popular, though other artists were jealous of her beauty and fame said mean things ...

She's only successful because she's PRETTY!

She'll never get into the ACADEMY ROYAL!

But everyone could see how talented she was.



Meanwhile, Élisabeth attracted the attention of Jean-Baptiste Pierre Le Brun, an well-known art dealer who was much older than her. When he asked her to marry him, Élisabeth hesitated at first, but eventually said yes because she was desperate to get away from her stepfather.

This proved to be ...

*une
grosse
erreur!**

*(*A big
mistake!)*

Jean-Baptiste was a gambler who had spent all his own money, and, just like her stepfather, he took everything she earned.

Two years later, in 1778, Élisabeth was offered a commission that would change her life. She was invited to paint **Marie Antoinette**, the Queen of France.



Marie Antoinette was an Austrian princess who married the heir to the French throne, **Louis-Auguste**, in 1770, when she was only 14. Four years later, her husband became **King Louis XVI**.

However, many people in France were unhappy with the way the country was run. The rich lived in **luxury**, and Louis and Marie Antoinette were the richest of them all. But ordinary French people were **struggling** to survive, and there were riots over the **high price** of bread.

Still, the King and Queen kept buying themselves **magnificent** clothes and **wonderful things** for their houses ... including paintings.



Élisabeth was terribly nervous when she first went to the palace – she was nobody compared with the King and Queen.

The French court was very formal, and the royal family were very powerful. It was hard for Élisabeth to see Marie Antoinette as an ordinary person, like her.

But she and the Queen liked each other at once. Soon they became good friends, chatting and singing songs together. Once, Elisabeth dropped her paintbox, spilling out her brushes onto the floor, and Marie Antoinette helped her pick them up.



Élisabeth quickly became Marie Antoinette's favourite artist. She painted portraits of almost all the royal family, but she was best known for her images of the Queen – she painted Marie Antoinette more than 30 times.

