

## Touching With Our Eyes



**VISIT THE BMA** and study the portraits that share the European Art galleries with Princess Galitzin. Who is wearing the shiniest dress? The fanciest lace? Which fabric is most transparent?

### *Princess Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin* *Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun*

Paint can play tricks on our eyes. Squeezed out of a tube onto an artist's palette, paint might appear to be nothing more than smears of color. But when an artist gathers it onto the tip of a paintbrush and applies it to a canvas, paint can be transformed into the most luxurious silk, the softest velvet, the smoothest skin. Paint can become crisp carvings on a table or a flimsy wisp of gauze. Or so it seems.

It's hard to believe that this image of the elegant Princess Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin of Russia started out as unremarkable blobs of paint. Posing about 1797 in her rust-colored silk gown with tasseled sash, the princess impresses us with her stylishly tall "Turkish" head-dress adorned with a fluffy ostrich plume and bristly tuft of feathers, dyed crimson to match a headscarf wrapped with strands of lustrous pearls. The painter who performed this magic with a brush was Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, a French artist who completed more than 800 portraits of European nobility. Even the queen of France posed eagerly for Madame Vigée-Lebrun and was always rewarded with flattering portraits that displayed her finery to best advantage.

But Madame Lebrun's ability to paint beautiful fabric and feathers wasn't enough to insure her success. She also needed to bestow upon each sitter an air of refinement appropriate for an aristocrat. "Women should be comfortable," the artist said, "They should have something to lean on." Here Princess Galitzin sinks one arm into a lush green pillow embroidered with gold braid while the other arm, wrapped in a sleeve of semi-transparent gauze, hangs gracefully at her side.

#### Challenge for Students

Create a portrait collage using a variety of actual fabrics and materials with appealing textures. Follow up with a drawing or painting of the same subject, using pencil, pen, paint, or marker to suggest the same textures.

Print the image on page 2 for your students.

# THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART



Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842). *Princess Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin*. c. 1797. Oil on canvas. 53½ x 39½ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection. BMA 1938.192