

## Programme

# Black Joy Day: Marie Antoinette Style and the Afrocentric Wardrobe

## Details

Thursday 6 November 2025, 10.30 – 17.00, in person at V&A South Kensington, Learning Centre, Seminar Room 1.

## Overview

Marie Antoinette's image still shapes global culture, yet during her reign, Black elites in France and the Caribbean made vital contributions to the arts, military, politics, and more. Explore how their contributions intersected with her legacy.

## Arrival

On arrival, please use the Exhibition Road Entrance of the Museum and make your way to Seminar Room 1, Learning Centre, Level 1 where you will be met by Janz Browne, Senior Producer Africa and Diaspora.

For details of the Exhibition Road entrance please click here [rb.gy/qzl98b](https://rb.gy/qzl98b) for the digital map. For any accessibility requirements, please email [courses@vam.ac.uk](mailto:courses@vam.ac.uk)

## Schedule

10.15 – 10.30

Arrival, Registration, and Refreshments.

10.30 – 10.45

Welcome, Housekeeping, and Introductions, Janz Browne.

10.45 - 11.30

### **Behind the Scenes: Marie Antoinette Style**

We're joined by **Dr Sarah Grant, Lead Curator of Marie Antoinette Style**, for an insightful presentation that unveils the creative journey behind the exhibition. Sarah will share the curatorial thinking, themes, and design ideas that shaped the show, offering a rare behind-the-scenes look at how diverse content was researched, selected, and brought to life.

This is a chance to hear directly from the curator, ask questions, and gain a deeper understanding of the exhibition before exploring it in person. Expect thoughtful dialogue, creative inspiration, and a fresh perspective on how history, fashion, and storytelling come together at the V&A.

11.30 - 12.00

Q&A with participants and Sarah Grant.

12.00 - 14.30

### **LUNCH AND VIEWING MARIE ANTOINETTE STYLE EXHIBITION**

You can divide your time between having lunch in Seminar Room 2 and viewing the Marie Antoinette Style Exhibition in any order you choose. **Please ensure you bring a packed lunch. Light beverages will be available.**

### **About Marie Antoinette Style Exhibition**

Immerse yourself in Marie Antoinette's lavish lifestyle through 250 objects including pieces on loan never seen outside of Versailles and France. From sparkling jewellery, silk slippers, to pastel gowns, and an array of wigs, the exhibition also includes work by contemporary designers Dior, Moschino, Chanel, Erdem, Vivienne Westwood, Valentino, and Manolo Blahnik, that speaks to Marie Antoinette's enduring aesthetic and legacy long after her death in 1793 as a result of the French Revolution.

14.30 - 15.15

### **Black Presence in 18th-Century France: Classism, Freedom, and Identity**

Our guest speaker for the afternoon segment is the **celebrated historian and distinguished Research Professor Dr Olivette Otele** who will explore the experiences of African and Caribbean descendants in 18th-century France, focusing on their legal status under the Code Noir and their public representation within elite circles. We examine codes of behaviour especially through fashion, the military, politics, and the arts, and their associations with figures such as Marie Antoinette, the Duc of Orléans, and the Freemasons.

We shall reflect on France's role in transatlantic enslavement and political upheaval, and how these shaped the Black elite across the Atlantic and their involvement in the abolition. Discover individual stories of the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Alexandre Dumas, Josephine Bonaparte, Toussaint L'ouverture, Jacques Dessalines, King of Haiti Henri Christophe, Vincent Ogee and other influencing figures who fought against or supported the abolition. The session reveals lives of creativity, resistance, and influence.

15.15 - 15.45

Q&A with participants and Olivette Otele.

15.45 - 17.00

Concluding thoughts and participant feedback. Opportunity to make a return visit to the Marie Antoinette Style exhibition.

17.00

Event Ends.

This event is in collaboration with the Black Gallery Visitor Network (UK).

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

## Biographies

**Dr Sarah Grant** is Senior Curator of Prints in the Department of Art, Architecture, Photography & Design at the V&A, and curator of the exhibition *Marie Antoinette Style*. She first joined the museum in 2006 as Assistant Curator of Textiles and Dress. Her research and publications focus on Marie Antoinette, as well as 18th-century French portraits, prints, and textiles. Sarah has curated displays on Matisse, Dalí, and Warhol, alongside exhibitions exploring 18th-century fashion plates and caricatures.

**Dr Olivette Otele** is a distinguished Research Professor of the Legacies and Memory of Slavery at SOAS, University of London. She holds a PhD from La Sorbonne and is a former Vice President of the Royal Historical Society. Olivette has received an honorary degree from Concordia University, Canada, served as a judge for the International Booker Prize, and held a visiting chair at the Collège de France. A regular contributor to the press and broadcaster, she has written extensively on the histories of people of African descent. Her book *African Europeans* was shortlisted for the LA Times Book Prize in 2022. Olivette also advises policymakers, private companies, and NGOs including the Welsh Government and *The Guardian* on colonial history and restorative justice.