

Amelia Noel, née Minka Levy



Wooded landscape with figures outside a cottage

Reference: 11081

Dimensions:

Height: 46.60 cm / 18³/₈ in

Width: 66.50 cm / 26¹/₈ in

Signed and dated l.c.: Amelia Noel 1795, watercolour over pencil with scratching out

46.6 x 66.5 cm; 18 G x 26 ¼ inches

Provenance : Michael Bryan Fine Art; From whom purchased by the present owner in 1985; Private collection, UK.

Exhibited : Probably at the Royal Academy, 1795, no. 429, 'a drawing'.

A most interesting and resourceful Jewish artist, who had an American father, Noel exhibited landscapes, historical works and other undescribed drawings which were probably watercolours at the Royal Academy between 1795 and 1804. The large size of the present work suggests it is highly likely to have been an exhibition watercolour.

Amelia Noel was drawing mistress to the daughters of George III. She also worked from 38 St James's Place, London, and

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advertised instruction to ladies in drawing & painting (in oil, water colours and crayons) landscapes, figures, cattle, flowers, transparencies &c , at two guineas for twelve monthly lessons. 1 She also, together with her daughter Frances, gave lessons in painting on velvet.

Noel was also an engraver and publisher and made a series of topographical etchings of Kent views which she published in 1797 and dedicated to Princess Charlotte. She presented a set of these to Princess Elizabeth (Royal Collection). The Royal Collection also has a series of copies by Princess Sophia after Noel's prints of views of Kent.

Noel's elegant premises at 32 Albemarle Street impressed contemporaries: The elegant and scientific works of this lady for her superior talents and genius, are patronized by the royal family, nobility, &c. They may be viewed gratis, and consist of paintings and drawings in oil, water colours, crayons, and chalks; and the grandeur, taste, and spirit, of the ancient masters are admirably preserved. The apartments are fitted up after the French, Turkish, and Chinese, style, decorated with ornamental paintings, by Mrs Noel. The chairs, sofas, borders, draperies, &c. are all of painted velvets, executed in a manner peculiarly tasteful, and exclusively her own, and consist of historical figures, landscapes, &c. the recesses are painted in imitation of bronzes, basso reliefs, cameos, and marbles; and the window blinds and screens are transparent paintings. A Turkish saloon, a Chinese Boudouin, and a French salle, form a most pleasing and unique coup d'œil. Mrs Noel and daughter engage to teach ladies, in a few lessons, these arts, by a manner peculiarly easy, and unclogged by the usual methods of protraction . 2

Joseph Farington's diary records Noel's networking abilities and personal charm. She visited him with her daughter Frances on 8 April 1804 to ask for his support in having her work accepted and well placed at the Royal Academy that year, as the previous year it had been rejected and damaged. She won over Farington, who agreed to help her. 3

Amelia Noel was the daughter of Judah Levy, 'an American merchant', of Heydon Square, Minories (a chapman, whose bankruptcy is recorded in 1777). She married a Jew called Zebe or Zvi Noah, known as Henry Noel, in the synagogue in Duke's Place, London, in 1781. His bankruptcy was recorded in 1783, 4 after which he appears to have run off with her money. Three children are recorded as having reached maturity: Noel's artist daughter Frances Laura, later Mrs John Bell (1786-1863); Lewis Joseph John Noel (1784-1839), a solicitor; and Horace Morton Noel (1788-1814), Lieutenant in the 8th Foot, killed in the assault on Fort Erie in Canada.

A nephew, Captain Uriah P. Levy, of the USS Vandalia, owned a portrait of her, said to be by Sir Joshua Reynolds, at his home in Monticello. The American artist Mather Brown exhibited a portrait of Noel at the Royal Academy in 1797 (no. 75, described as 'a lady') and it has been suggested that the pair were romantically linked, although there is no firm evidence for this. 5

1. The Times, 19 October 1799.
2. John Fetham, The picture of London, 1804, pp. 260ff.
3. Joseph Farington, The Diary of Joseph Farington, republished 1978-1984.
4. European magazine III.
5. Dorinda Evans, Mather Brown, 1982, pp. 142 & 220. All references are cited in Neil Jeffares, Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800 (online edition).