

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastelists before 1800*

Online edition

VILLEBRUNE, Marianne Goüel de, Mme du Noblet

Paris 1743 – ?Paris p.1801

Mary de Villebrune, portraitist in oil and pastel, exhibited at the Society of Artists from 1771 to 1774, and at the Royal Academy between 1772 and 1782. She is evidently the “Marianne Goüel Devillebrune” of St Ann’s, Westminster, who married “Antoine Dunoblet”, gentleman, widower, at St George’s Hanover Square, on 2.XII.1773 (parish records; allegation, 27.XI.1773, which provides her age and corrects her forename to Marianne from Maria Ann), and is surely the sister of Mme J. A. de Peters, née Élisabeth-Marie Gouel de Villebrune (1732–1785) recorded in the posthumous inventory (1780) of their mother, née Marie Coquart-Chéry. Her father was Jean Gouel de Villebrune, an avocat aux conseils du roi in Paris: he died in 1769, and as we learn from her 1801 letter she must have travelled to London around that time. Antoine du Noblet had previously married a Catherine-Auguste Pellier at Westminster, 24.I.1763.

Her brother-in-law’s 1776 sale included a pastel “fidèlement copié d’après” Mengs; the source was a pastel belonging to the marquis de Croixmare which Diderot mentions as being exhibited at the École militaire in 1763. Works by Mlle de Villebrune appeared in an earlier sale (1767), again apparently sold by de Peters; in the catalogue she was described as a “jeune Artiste qui annonce beaucoup de talens”. The couple of pastel heads sold with some by Le Mettais in 1776 were presumably also made in Paris before she emigrated. To judge from the subject matter (and her advertisement below), and specifically a “Dormeuse”, she must, like Le Mettais, have been a student of Boucher. The pendants of girls, one with a pet dog, the other tying a ribbon around a cat’s neck, no doubt conform to the types of which numerous versions are found among the anonymes.

In London she had a studio in King Street, Soho, and lived in Church Road, Hampstead; she exhibited also from Castle Court, Strand, from Frith Street, Soho, and initially (1771) from “Mr Cossen’s Foreign Cordial Warehouse” near the Opera House, Haymarket (possibly an error for George Johnson, who ran the warehouse with Giacomo Justerini from at least 1777). Walpole noted her drawings at the 1771 Society of Artists exhibition, which included two ladies singing. However “her powers as an artist were not sufficiently forcible to impress the memory of [Edward Edwards] with any recollection of her productions.”

This notice appeared in the *Gazetteer & new daily advertiser* of 2.VI.1774, addressed “To the Nobility and Gentry, and particularly the Ladies, residing in, or near Hampstead”:

MRS VILLEBRUNE DU NOBLET, Portrait and history painter, having fixed her abode in this town for the summer, would be glad to teach ladies drawing and painting in water-colours, crayons or oil. She hath been taught this art in its various branches during several years, by the famous Mr Boucher, first painter to the King of France. Several of her performances have been, and some are now, part of the public exhibitions; besides many more, which are now in her possession, at her

apartments at Mr Simpson’s, hair-dresser, where she is ready to shew them to any company, and to receive the commands of such as will favour her with their orders.

NB She would undertake teaching at any young ladies Boarding school, in or near the town of Hampstead.

A further notice inserted in the *Morning post* 8.I.1777 added her address as 33 Broad Street, Soho, “being lately returned to London”, offered lessons to ladies as well as portraits.

No doubt following her husband’s West Country connections, notice in the *Bath journal* for 27.XI.1780 announced her presence in Bath; enquiries to the Pump-Room. She was surely the “PARISIAN LADY, of indisputable character, and a proficient in Painting and Musick, (having been above 12 years an exhibiter at the Royal Exhibition in London)” who advertised in the *Bath chronicle*, 28.VII.1791, wishing “to employ her talents at Taunton, in drawing Likenesses in Oil or Crayons, and to keep an Academy” for “young Ladies (not under twelve years old).” “The price of the Pictures will be from Two Guineas to Fifty”, and the address given was that of the bookseller and printer Thomas Norris of Taunton.

It would seem however that the Academy in Taunton was never started, or soon abandoned, as we learn from a letter of 29.V.1801 to the Ministre de l’intérieur (seeking financial assistance) that she had returned to Paris more than seven years previously. The letter sets out her biography: the daughter of a lawyer, not wealthy but well educated, she had studied drawing and music (Boucher is not mentioned), and spent more than 25 years in England where the Royal Academy had accepted her work with no difficulty. Returning to Paris (where she was living in the rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes) to settle some affairs, her rental income had been destroyed and she was reduced to her talent for painting: “je fais le portrait et le genre en huile et en pastel”, but was unable to find any commissions, and sought a position as a teacher or even in a hospice. There is nothing to indicate that her request was met.

Bibliography

Archives nationales, papiers des comités d’Instruction publique (F/17/1330, dossier 5, 10 prairial an IX): Bénézit; Edwards 1808, p. 57; Granges de Surgères 1893; Greer 2001; Sée 1911; Waterhouse 1981

GENEALOGIES [Goüel](#)

Pastels

J.7602.101 Deux jeunes filles à mi-corps, dont une écrit, & J.7602.102 Pautre lit, pendants, pstl (de Peters & al.; Paris, Helle, Glomy, 26.I.1767 & seq., Lot 88, 10 livres 1; Glomy)

J.7602.103 Jeune demoiselle chantant, & pendant: J.7602.104 une autre accompagnant de la guitare, pstl (de Peters & al.; Paris, Helle, Glomy, 26.I.1767 & seq., Lot 89, 15 livres; Joullain)

=?pstls (Paris, *Artcurial*, 31.V.2010, Lot 223), v. a/r Boucher

J.7602.106 Deux autres jeunes filles, dont une caresse un chien, & J.7602.107 pendant: l’autre

attache un collier à un chat, pstl (de Peters & al.; Paris, Helle, Glomy, 26.I.1767 & seq., Lot 90, 12 livres 1; Glomy)

=?pstl (*Donnington, Dreweatt Neate*, 24.V.2011, Lot 33), v. *É.c. fr.*; numerous others

J.7602.108 Ladies, singing, pstl, Society of Artists 1772, no. 296 (2)

J.7602.109 Quatre jolies têtes de femmes, par Mettay & Mlle de Villebrune, pstl (Neyman; Paris, Basan, 8.VII.1776, Lot 1246 part, 24 livres)

J.7602.11 Jolie femme, ajustée galamment, pstl (Paris, Hayot de Longpré, Joullain, 8.VII.1777 & seq., Lot 117, 12 livres 14)

J.7602.111 Une jeune Grecque ayant une couronne de fleurs sur la tête; elle tient dans sa main gauche un chalumeau, au bout duquel il y a une boule de savon, pstl, 39.3x31.2 (Johann Anton de Peters; Paris, Remy, 9–13.III.1779, Lot 112, 120 livres; Langhier). A/r Mengs pstl, *Courtisane athénienne* (*olim* marquis de Croixmare). Saint-Aubin sketch



J.7602.113 La dormeuse, “pstl fixé” [a/r Boucher] (Paris, Remy, 7–20.II.1782, Lot 472)

J.7602.114 Young lady, pstl, Royal Academy 1782, no. 404

J.7602.115 Lady, pstl, Royal Academy 1782, no. 424

J.7602.116 Tête de femme, pstl (Paris, Serreau, Joullain, 1.V.1783 & seq., Lot 15, 3 livres with Lot 16)

J.7602.117 Quatre sujets d’enfants très-joliment composés & dessinés, pstl (Huquier fils; Paris, Basan, 21.III.1768 & seq., Lot 692, divisé: 18 livres; Basan/9 livres; Basan)

J.7602.118 Two other drawings, pstl, Society of Artists 1772, no. 296

J.7602.119 A pastoral, pstl, Royal Academy 1772, no. 266

J.7602.12 A fancy head, pstl, Society of Artists 1773, no. 354

J.7602.121 A fancy head, pstl, Free Society 1773, no. 45

J.7602.122 A fancy head, pstl, Free Society 1773, no. 46

J.7602.123 Neuf jolies têtes, pstl (MM. Belange & Nau; Paris, Buldet, 18–29.III.1776, Lot 34, 71 livres 2)

J.7602.1235 Deux pstls (Louis-François de Bourbon, prince de Conti; Paris, Remy, 8.IV.–6.VI.1777, additions, 9^e vacation, 21/1 livres)

J.7602.124 Six bustes de femmes, pstl, 13.5x13.5 (Paignon Dijonval 1810). Lit.: Bénard 1810, no. 4019