



Portrait of a Lady

Date

1911

Primary Maker

Augustus Edwin John

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

65.4 x 52.1 cm

Description

This is a portrait of Dorelia (Dorothy) McNeill (1881-1969), Augustus John's legendary model, mistress and wife. They met in Holborn early in 1903. He was 25, she four years younger. She was working as a secretary for the editor of

a magazine, and in the evenings would go to classes at the Westminster School of Art. "One could not take one's eyes off her," wrote the painter William Rothenstein. Augustus John was immediately and irresistibly attracted to her, and she to him but he was married to Ida Nettleship and was the father of two small sons. A solution to the difficulty seemed to present itself to Dorelia that summer when Augustus's sister, the artist Gwen John, proposed that she and Dorelia should leave England and "walk to Rome". They reached Toulouse but then returned to Paris for a time, before eventually returning to England. Dorelia became part of a 'menage-a-trois' with Augustus and his wife. Dorelia became the subject of many of Augustus' paintings some of which depicts her as a gypsy such as this one. The two developed a nomadic lifestyle, travelling around Wales in a horse-drawn caravan. In 1907 Ida died while giving birth to their fifth child - at which point Dorelia had also given birth to two of John's children. John drew Dorelia obsessively over the next sixty years. MC