Primary Maker: Thomas Satterwhite Noble

Title: John Brown's Blessing

Date: 1867

Medium: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: Unframed: 7 ft. 1/4 in. × 60 1/4 in. (214 × 153 cm) Framed: 7 ft. 5 in. × 65 in. × 2 in. (226.1 × 165.1 × 5.1 cm)

Credit Line: Gift of the children of Thomas S. Noble and Mary C. Noble, in their memory

Object Number: 1939.250

Curatorial Remarks:

In 1859, John Brown's planned slave uprising, raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia and subsequent execution galvanized the nation. Abolitionists celebrated him as a martyr to the antislavery cause while southern whites denounced him and his northern supporters. Thomas S. Noble's heroic life-size painting depicts Brown's apocryphal last act: kissing a slave child on the way to the gallows. To commemorate the eighth anniversary of Brown's execution, John Brown's Blessing was publicly exhibited in Boston, where it received a lukewarm reception. A local newspaper reported: "[The anniversary was] appropriately commemorated by the presentation to the Boston public of T. S. Noble's picture of Brown's passage to the Scaffold, when he stopped on his way to bless a negro child... Mr. Noble is a Southerner, and served in the rebel army four years, but he regarded the execution of Brown as one of the great historic events of the century, and has lost friends and position at home by
representing SO unwelcome a matter to the South… We can hardly call it a great picture; yet there is much food for reflection and observation in it...."

Physical Description:
John Brown (1800-1859) of Osawatomie, being led to his execution at Charleston, Virginia, December 2, 1859. Brown stops to bless a young black child held forward by a kneeling mother. Two white children, accompanied by their black nurse, look on. Surrounded by soldiers, his arms bound, Brown stands tall and resolute but turns a gentle gaze on the child.

Signed: Signed and dated at lower right: T. S. Noble 1867.
Inscribed: Inscribed on back of canvas: T. S. Noble and John Brown / by T. S. Noble / C[incinnati], U.S. A.
Related Objects: