

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Adolph Von MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)**

## **Men and Soldiers at a Shooting Range**

Graphite, with stumping and scratching out, heightened with white on prepared paper.

Signed and inscribed *Wollen Sie obiger Kritzelung / irgendwo ihren Mappen ein Ruhe örtchen / gönnen in Herzlicher Hochachtung / Menzel* in pencil in the margin of the sheet, at the lower right.

210 x 290 mm. (8 1/4 x 11 3/8 in.) [image]

299 x 391 mm. (11 3/4 x 15 3/8 in.) [sheet]

This large and highly finished sheet may have been drawn at a shooting club which Menzel is known to have visited in the 1840s, in the city of Liegnitz in his native Silesia. It was during this period that the artist agreed to paint, as a prize in a shooting competition in 1844, a very large target painting of a Falcon Swooping on a Dove, which is now in the collection of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin. As Menzel wrote, many years later and somewhat disparagingly, to the then owner of the unsigned painting, 'In the early 1840s, I did indeed paint the target you describe; it was for a shooting match organized by a club whose honoured guest I was on several occasions. I have no wish to see it ever again. On the contrary, I would have felt happier if it had been peppered with bullets by the club's many excellent marksmen – they have all completely passed from my memory.'

Given the impressive margins of the sheet, this drawing may have been intended as a design for a lithograph or wood engraving, although no print of this subject is known. The dedication written in the artist's distinctive handwriting in the margins of the drawing may be approximately translated as 'Would you give this little doodle a small resting place somewhere in your portfolios? With heartfelt respects, Menzel.'

## **Exhibitions**

New York and London, Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd., Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, 2006, no.41.

## Artist description:

Adolph Friedrich Erdmann von Menzel began his career working in his father's lithography shop in Breslau (now Wroclaw in Poland) and later in Berlin, where his family moved in 1830. A brief period of study at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in 1833 seems to have been the sum total of his formal training, and he is thought to have taught himself how to paint. At the outset of his career he worked as an illustrator, his activity in this field perhaps best exemplified by a series of some four hundred designs for wood engravings produced to accompany Franz Kugler's History of Frederick the Great, published in instalments between 1840 and 1842. During the late 1840's and 1850's he was occupied mainly with a cycle of history paintings illustrating the life of Frederick the Great.

In 1861 Menzel received his most important official commission, a painting of The Coronation of King William I at Königsberg, on which he worked for four years. In the following decade, his lifelong interest in scenes of contemporary life culminated in what is arguably his masterpiece as a painter; the large canvas of The Iron Rolling Mill, painted between 1872 and 1875 and immediately purchased by the National-Galerie in Berlin. The last three decades of his career saw Menzel firmly established as one of the leading artists in Germany, a prominent figure in Prussian society and the recipient of numerous honours including, in 1898, elevation to the nobility. In the late 1880's he began to abandon painting in oils in favour of gouaches, although old age meant that these in turn were given up around the turn of the century. Yet he never stopped drawing in pencil and chalk, able always to find expression for his keen powers of observation. A retrospective exhibition of Menzel's work, held at the National-Galerie in Berlin a few weeks after the artist's death in 1905, included more than 6,400 drawings and almost 300 watercolours, together with 129 paintings and 250 prints.

A passionate and supremely gifted draughtsman, Menzel was equally adept at watercolour, pastel, gouache and chalk. He was also able to draw with either hand, although he seems to have favoured his left. An immensely prolific artist (over four thousand drawings by him, together with 77 sketchbooks, are in the collection of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin alone), it is said that Menzel was never without a sketchbook or two in his pocket. His friend Paul Meyerheim described the artist's appearance: 'In his overcoat he had eight pockets, which were partially filled with sketchbooks, and he could not comprehend that there are artists who make the smallest outings without having a sketchbook in their pocket...an especially large pocket was installed...to hold a leather case, which held a pad, a couple of shading stumps and a gum eraser.' Menzel was widely admired as a draughtsman by his contemporaries, both in Germany and abroad, and Edgar Degas, for one, is known to have owned at least one drawing by him.