

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



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

## **Study of a Woman's Right Hand**

Pastel and charcoal on brown paper.

Inscribed (by Kern) Dieses Handstudie gehört zur Gruppe des farbigen / Studien nach männlichen und weiblichen Händen / die en dem von Hugo von Tschudi, Schwedeler-Meyer / und mir herausgegebenes Menzel – Werk (Bruckmann / München 1905) abgebildet sind. Beim Erscheinen des / Werkes war die vorliegende Studie noch nicht bekannt. / Sie ist einer der besten dieser Gattung. Entstanden ist / die Studie nach meiner Ansicht sie das Zeit von 1860-1870. / (Auf Wunsch niedergeschrieben). Profes. G. J. Kern / Berlin, d. 10. Mai 1928 on the old backing board.

176 x 243 mm. (7 x 9 5/8 in.)

This elegant and refined pastel study by Menzel has been dated to c.1850 by Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher, but remains unrelated to any finished work by the artist. As Susanne van Falkenhausen has pointed out, 'Menzel used pastels for sketches or studies during the 1840s and 1850s, but mostly restricted himself to a limited range of colours. Later, the carpenter's pencil replaced pastels for such work.' More often than not, the artist preferred to use a brown-tinted paper for his pastel drawings. As another Menzel scholar has further noted, 'Lightness of touch, enhanced with a degree of anecdotal elegance, is characteristic of the pastels of the 1840s to 1850s. After that, economy of method and form tended to disappear.'

The first recorded owner of this pastel sketch was the German art historian, curator and artist Guido Josef Kern (1878-1953), who was one of the authors of the monumental illustrated catalogue of Menzel's paintings, watercolours, gouaches and pastels, published in 1905. In 1925 Kern mounted an exhibition of fifty Menzel drawings at the Akademie in Berlin.

Kern's extensive inscription on the old backing board reads: 'This hand study belongs to the group of coloured studies of male and female hands, which are reproduced in the Menzel-Catalogue (Bruckmann Munich 1905) edited by Hugo von Tschudi, Schwedeler-Meyer and myself. At the time of publication of the work, the present study was not yet known. This is one of the best of this type. The study was produced, in my opinion, in the period 1860-1870. (Written down on request). Professor G. J. Kern. Berlin, May 10, 1928.'

The present sheet later belonged to the Prussian civil servant and art collector Alexander Prentzel (1875-1955).

### **Exhibitions**

Berlin, Verein Berliner Künstler, Hundert Jahre Berliner Kunst, 1929, no.995; Munich, Galerie Caspari, Adolph von Menzel 1815-1905: Ölgemälde, Gouachen, Pastelle, Aquarelle und Zeichnungen, 1932, no.26.

### **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 coupe 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.