

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Studies of a Man with his Head Bowed

Carpenter's pencil on Whatman paper.

Signed with initials and dated A. M. 81. at the upper right.

126 x 194 mm. (5 x 7 5/8 in.)

This drawing is a study for a man seated at a pew in the centre of Menzel's gouache of *A Sermon in the Parish Church of Innsbruck* (*Kanzelpredigt in der Pfarrkirche zu Innsbruck*) of 1881, today in a private collection and on loan to the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. The artist spent the summer of 1881 on a tour to Frankfurt, Baden-Baden, Fribourg im Breisgau, Switzerland, the southern Tyrol and various cities in Northern Italy, returning to Berlin via Innsbruck and Munich. In Innsbruck, Menzel visited the then parish church (now the Cathedral) of St. Jakob, the setting for the small gouache painted later that year. Built in the first quarter of the 18th century, the Catholic church of St. Jakob is regarded as one of the most significant late Baroque buildings in the Tyrol. The fresco paintings and stucco decoration of the interior were the work of the brothers Cosmas Damian Asam and Egid Quirin Asam, while the magnificent pulpit seen in Menzel's gouache was the work of the Tyrolean sculptor Nikolaus Moll, and was completed in 1725.

Menzel had a longstanding interest in Baroque buildings and their interiors – a development of his earlier studies of the interiors of 18th century Prussian palaces and buildings from the time of Frederick the Great - and produced drawings and gouaches of churches throughout his career. As Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher has noted in her description of the gouache: 'With a few exceptions...Menzel's church interiors are peopled by congregations and vergers, and appear as places of urban communication.

From the hand of the priest in the pulpit, raised in blessing, the eye moves downwards to where the congregation is only partly paying attention as a server moves the purse and bell in front of them on the end of a long pole...In the gigantic area of the parish church...only the two pillars and a small part of the wall between is visible. The pillars, which are depicted much larger than their actual size, alone create the impression of a colossal church of resplendent colour.'

As one modern scholar has noted, 'a sketch [Menzel] considered failed could be unceremoniously crossed out. Very often he only crossed out the face of the figure. One can speculate about the reasons for this. The most straightforward one would be that Menzel was dissatisfied with his attempt at

capturing a facial expression. But it is also conceivable that he was only really interested in the gesture, the movement of the body, or the drape and hang of a piece of clothing – that the head was incidental to the motif.’

Other preparatory figure studies by Menzel for the Sermon in the Parish Church of Innsbruckare in the Kupfertichkabinett in Berlin, the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Hamburg, and elsewhere.

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.