

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Two Studies of a Right Arm and Hand Holding a Glass

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping.

Signed with initials and dated A. M. / 90 at the lower right.

127 x 206 mm. (5 x 8 1/8 in.)

This spirited sketch remains unrelated to any finished work by Menzel, and is likely to have been drawn for its own sake. As Cara Denison has described the drawing, 'In this brilliant, nearly photographic work, Menzel twice drew the upraised arm of a woman holding a goblet: once in a full study of her arm and shoulder and once simply from the wrist to the hand holding the goblet.'

The present sheet may be tentatively associated with a small sketch by Menzel of two women, one of whom appears to be holding a glass in a similar manner, which recently appeared at auction in Germany. Another study of an upraised hand holding a glass, seen from below, appears as part of a sheet of studies of a bearded man, dated 1890, in the collection of the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts.

As the Menzel scholar Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher has noted, 'The capturing of detail by an observant eye and the committing to paper of everything seen...reflected a kind of ever-restless curiosity...By comparison with the few late works in colour, the pencil drawings occupy an increasingly important place in [Menzel's] artistic creativity. The graphite pencil becomes the single-most important tool. Together with the small sketchbooks that he could slip into his pocket – he always carried at least one – Menzel always carried pencils with him on the long trips he took until his last summer in 1904. It was in these sketchbooks that he collected his observations. His focus was on light and shade, and on perspective; two aspects that could best be studied with the possibilities offered by work in pencil. On the tiny pages of these sketchbooks, things that drew the artist's glance are captured with calm but intense observation.'

Exhibitions

New York, Flavia Ormond Fine Arts at Adelson Galleries, Old Master Drawings, 1999, no.22; New York,

Literature:

William M. Griswold et al., *The World Observed: Five Centuries of Drawings from the Collection of Charles Ryskamp*, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2001, p.115, no.103 (entry by Cara Denison).

Artist description:

Adolph Friedrich Erdmann von Menzel began his career working in his father's lithography shop in Breslau (now Wrocław 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.