

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Portrait of Frau Constanze Puhmann

Pencil on paper, trimmed to an oval.

Inscribed and dated (by Emmy Puhmann) Frau Constanze Puhmann / geb. Steinert / von Adolph Menzel 1851 on the old backing board.

Further inscribed Fürs Museum in / Potsdambestimmt. / Potsdam 29/6 1920 / Emmy Puhmann / geb. Schmeißer. on the old backing board.

230 x 185 mm. (9 x 7 1/4 in.) at greatest dimensions.

Adolph Menzel rarely accepted portrait commissions, and in general only produced portraits of members of his family, close friends and associates. As the scholar Marie-Ursula Riemann-Reyher has noted, 'Even though Menzel never wanted to be a portraitist, and his portraits were primarily created for special occasions or as favors, he succeeded brilliantly in this area. In addition to his artistic ability, his watercolors, pastels, and pencil drawings attest to his grasp of the psychological aspects of portrait painting, which were bolstered by his extraordinary empathy and his knowledge of human nature.'

The present sheet is a portrait of Constanze Puhmann, née Steinert (1796?-1852), the wife of one of Menzel's closest friends, the army surgeon Dr. Wilhelm Puhmann (1797-1882). Himself the son of a painter, Wilhelm Puhmann first met the young Menzel in 1836, when he commissioned him to design a membership certificate for the Potsdamer Kunstverein, the Art Union in Postdam, as well as a visiting card. Despite the fact that Puhmann was several years older than Menzel, the two men became close friends and established a lifelong correspondence, punctuated by numerous gifts of drawings from the artist, until Puhmann's death in 1882. In October of that same year, the National-Galerie in Berlin acquired much of Puhmann's collection of works by Menzel.

Constanze and Wilhem Puhmann were married in 1828, and had five children. She died the year after this portrait by Menzel was drawn. Other drawings by Menzel of members of the Puhmann family include a fine watercolour portrait of Wilhelm Puhmann, dated 1850, in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, as well as chalk portraits of Constanze Puhmann's mother and the Puhmann's only daughter Sophie, and another of their eldest son Oscar Puhmann at the age of fourteen.

Sold at auction in Berlin in 1929, the present sheet later belonged to the choirmaster and church organist Karl Lütge (1875-1967), who lent it to the exhibition *Ausstellung Adolph von Menzel aus Anlass seines 50 Todesjahres* at the Museum Dahlem in Berlin in 1955.

Exhibitions

Berlin, Museum Dahlem, *Ausstellung Adolph von Menzel aus Anlass seines 50 Todesjahres*, 1955, no.169 (lent by Lütge).

Literature:

Claude Keisch and Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher, ed., *Adolph Menzel: Briefe*, Berlin and Munich, 2009, Vol.4, p.1633, fig.18.

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.