

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

The Head of a Fourteen-Year Old Girl, in Profile to the Left

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping, on paper laid down on board.

Signed with initials A. M. at the lower right centre. Inscribed by the artist 14 jähr. at the upper left. Inscribed Im Original dem Heidelberger Kunsthistoriker / Dr. Wolfgang Merkel vorgelegt und für echt bestätigt! / 28.11.05/ Zu dieser Zeichnung, gab es ein Gutachten von / Hr. Dr. Baumeister München 1925 – seines Zeichens, / damals Direktor der Graphische Sammlung München / nach einem erbfall der Zeit nicht auf find bar. Sammlung Ponto bis 2005. on the reverse of the former frame.

129 x 82 mm. (5 1/8 x 3 1/4 in.)

Throughout his career, Menzel produced a number of charming and incisive portrait drawings of young children. The present sheet, which has been dated to c.1875-1880, depicts an as yet unidentified fourteen-year old girl. (The artist has made a note of the sitter's age at the top of the sheet.) It may be a portrait of the artist's young niece, Margarete (known as Gretel) Krigar, who was born in 1860, or perhaps the daughter of one of Menzel's friends. Whoever the sitter is, this small but superbly-drawn portrait highlights the artist's undeniable skill as a draughtsman, particularly evident in the delicate use of the stumped pencil to achieve the subtle tonal gradations of the girl's skin and hair, as well as the more freely drawn bow on the front of her dress.

As recorded by the inscription on the reverse of the old frame, a note by the German curator and art historian Engelbert Baumeister, dated 1925, once accompanied the present sheet: 'München 8. 5. 25.'

/ Ein mit Adolf Menzels Signature versehene Bleistiftzeichnung / einer kinderjährigem [?](130 : 82) macht einem echten/ Eindruck. / Dr. Baumeister / Konservator a. d. Graphischen Sammlung.'

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.