

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Study of the Back of a Man Bending Down

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping.

Signed with initials and dated A. M./ 82 at the lower right.

226 x 303 mm. (8 7/8 x 11 7/8 in.)

This large present sheet is an unused study for the prominent figure of a paver in the foreground of Menzel's large painting of *The Piazza d'Erbe in Verona* (also known as *The Marketplace in Verona*), painted between 1882 and 1884 and today in the *Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister* in Dresden. One of Menzel's last significant works as a painter, *The Piazza d'Erbe in Verona* measures over a metre in length, and depicts a marketplace crowded with figures in the centre of the city of Verona. Menzel made brief visits to Northern Italy in the summers of 1881, 1882 and 1883, spending some time in Verona on each trip, and the painting was begun after the second of these visits. When the finished painting was exhibited at the *Verein Berliner Künstler* (Association of Berlin Artists) in 1884, it was shown alongside a large number of preparatory drawings for the composition. About twenty-five individual drawings for the painting are known, together with several studies in two sketchbooks.

Menzel drew numerous studies for the three pavers in the foreground of the large painting, many of which remained unused. Most of these drawings were based on initial studies in a sketchbook used during the artist's trip to Verona in 1881. It has been suggested that, for figures of the pavers, Menzel may have been influenced by Gustave Courbet's 1849 Realist masterpiece *The Stone Breakers*; a massive painting, destroyed during the Second World War, which he may have seen on one of his visits to Paris.

Other drawings by Menzel for the group of pavers in the foreground of *The Piazza d'Erbe in Verona* are in the *Kupferstichkabinett* in Berlin, the *Kunstmuseum* in Bern, the *Kupferstich-Kabinett* in Dresden, the *Städtische Wessenberg-Galerie* in Konstanz and a handful of private collections.

The first owner of the present sheet was the Prussian businessman and collector Gustav Henneberg (1847-1918), who settled in Zurich and there established the *Seidenfirma Henneberg* company. He

assembled an impressive art collection, which included numerous drawings by Menzel, and which he displayed in his lavish house, known as the Galerie Henneberg, on the Alpen-Quai in Zurich. In October 1903 Henneberg sold over a hundred drawings by Menzel from his collection, including the present sheet, at auction in Munich.

Literature:

Heidi Ebertshäuser, Adolph von Menzel: Das graphische werk, Munich, 1976, Vol.II, p.1202; Petra Kuhlmann-Hodick and Tobias Burg, ed., Menzel in Dresden, exhibition catalogue, Dresden, 2005-2006, pp.240-241, no.258.

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.