

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

A Woman in a Large Hat, Facing Left

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping.

Signed and dated Menzel / 97. at the lower left.

144 x 94 mm. (5 5/8 x 3 3/4 in.)

This fine late drawing, dated 1897, is a study for a woman in the background of a partly unfinished chalk drawing by Menzel of a Café with Chess Players, which was among the contents of the artist's studio at the time of his death, but whose current location is unknown. Depictions of young women are relatively rare among Menzel's late drawings of the 1890s, perhaps because he felt that their faces lacked the expressive quality that he found so appealing in more elderly models.

Among stylistically comparable late drawings by the artist is a sheet of studies of a seated woman and the head of a man, also dated 1897, in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, and a drawing of a seated woman with a hat, dated 1898, which was on the German art market in 1994. Likewise similar in technique and handling are two drawings dated 1899; a study of a woman facing to the left, in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, and a drawing of the heads of three women, formerly in the collection of Charles Ryskamp and now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

This drawing bears the collector's mark of the Viennese financier and economist Wilhelm König (1880-

1955). Advised by Alfred Stix, the director of the Albertina in Vienna, König assembled a large group of Old Master and 19th century drawings, as well as works by Egon Schiele and other contemporary Austrian artists, during the first two decades of the 20th century. Much of König's collection, including the present sheet, was sold in the 1920s.

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.