

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Landscape with a Grove of Trees, Brandenburg

Pencil, with stumping, on Whatman paper.

128 x 203 mm. (5 x 8 in.)

Watermark: [WH]ATMAN/ 50.

Adolph Menzel's skill as a landscape draughtsman was recognized by many contemporary critics and connoisseurs, both in Germany and abroad. In 1903, for example, on the occasion of a comprehensive exhibition of Menzel's work at the French Gallery in London's Pall Mall, one English reviewer noted that 'Some of the landscape drawings, by the simplicity of sheer knowledge, attain a kind of beauty different from the strong, characterful attraction of the rest – as it were the flower of his strength.'

The present sheet, which is thought to depict a landscape in the province of Mark Brandenburg, the territory of the former Margraviate of Brandenburg in northeastern Germany, may be dated on stylistic grounds to the decade of the 1850s. As Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher has noted of a similar landscape drawing, 'The glimpse of the surrounding world that is mirrored with great simplicity and poetry in Menzel's work brings to mind the writings of his fellow countryman and friend Theodor Fontane (1819-1898)...who celebrated the charm of this landscape in his *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*.' Among comparable drawings of this period is a pencil study of *A Meadow with Trees*, of identical dimensions to the present sheet, in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin.

This drawing bears the stamp of the Königlichen National-Galerie in Berlin on the verso, and was included in the seminal retrospective exhibition of Menzel's work held at the National-Galerie within a few months of the artist's death in 1905. The present sheet, however, was among several drawings by Menzel eventually sold by the museum, and by the early 1920s it was part of the stock of the Galerie Ernst Arnold of Dresden and Munich, one of the leading galleries devoted to modern art in Germany. Founded in 1818 in Dresden, the gallery was taken over in 1872 by Adolph Ludwig Gutbier, and in 1893 the business passed to his son, Ludwig Wilhelm Gutbier (1873-1951). Ludwig Gutbier established the gallery's reputation in the field of modern German art, and after the First World War set up a department of drawings and prints. Gutbier had acquired this landscape drawing by Menzel by

1921, but in August 1942 he presented it as a gift to his associate, and later wife, Ella Wiese (b.1897). After moving to Munich in 1937, the Galerie Arnold was closed in 1944. In 1958 the widowed Ella Gutbier donated a collection of six hundred prints, mainly by 20th century German artists, to the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich.

A more recent owner of this drawing was the German historian, editor, journalist and critic Joachim Fest (1926-2006), who was best known for his writings on the Nazi era. Fest served as culture editor of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung between 1973 and 1993.

Exhibitions

Berlin, Königliche National-Galerie, Ausstellung von Werken Adolph von Menzels, 1905, no.3132 ('Landschaft mit Baumgruppe im Vordergrund').

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.