

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

On the Mountainside

Pencil, with stumping, on Whatman paper.

Laid down.

Signed A. M. at the lower centre.

Inscribed Dr. Wolfson / Hamburg and numbered 806 in blue chalk on the backing board.

Numbered M428 in green chalk and N 98 in blue chalk on the backing board.

A printed label with K. H. / 314 on the backing board

247 x 327 mm. (9 3/4 x 13 1/4 in.)

This large sheet is likely to have been drawn in the 1870s, during one of Adolph Menzel's visits to the spa town of Bad Hofgastein, south of Salzburg in the Gastein Valley in Austria. The artist visited the picturesque alpine town, where he was the guest of his friend and patron, the Berlin banker Magnus Herrmann, in 1872, 1873 and 1874, and once again in 1879. As Agathe Herrmann, one of his patron's daughters, later recalled of the artist's time in Hofgastein, 'It was a lovely, sleepy market town, blessed by the scent of romance, the fairytale beauty of the overwhelming and yet quite delightful countryside... In this small village there is probably not a single corner, no old brown wooden hut, no well, no picturesque fence, no stubborn gnarled tree that this inveterate observer and untiring, fervent creator has not studied and drawn.'

Menzel's spent the summers at Hofgastein with his sister Emilie, her husband Hermann Krigar, and their two children, Gretel and Otto. As Agathe Herrmann noted, 'Menzel lived with his family in the so-called Gärtnerhaus, where my father had a large studio built, from whose windows Menzel painted the famous 'View of Hofgastein'. For several summers, Menzel and his family were our dear guests in Gastein.' The artist found much to inspire him in these surroundings, and he produced numerous pencil studies of local buildings, interiors and countryfolk.

Several of the drawings that he made in the Gastein Valley were later used for a number of paintings

and gouaches set in the town, notably the Corpus Christi Procession in Hofgastein of 1880, today in the Neue Pinakothek in Munich, and the Knife-Grinder's Workshop at the Smithy in Hofgastein of 1881, now in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg.

Among comparable studies by Menzel of rustic farmhouses in the area of Hofgastein are drawings in the collections of the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Hamburg, the Museum Georg Schäfer in Schweinfurt and the Von der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal. The last of these drawings depicts a wooden pipe-like construction – a sort of irrigation channel to carry fresh water from higher up the mountain to the side of the farmhouse – similar to that seen running across the centre of the present sheet.

This drawing, among the largest known landscape studies by the artist, once belonged to the Hamburg attorney and collector Albert Wolffson (1874-1913), who owned a significant group of some thirty-six drawings by Menzel. Almost all of these, including the present sheet, were lent by Wolffson to the epic memorial exhibition of Menzel's work held at the National-Galerie in Berlin in 1905. In 1922 this same drawing was loaned by Wolffson's widow to an important exhibition of Recent German Art at the Liljevalchs Konsthall in Stockholm.

Exhibitions

Berlin, Königliche National-Galerie, Ausstellung von Werken Adolph von Menzels, 1905, no.5426 ('Am Bergeshang'); Stockholm, Liljevalchs Konsthall, Nyare Tysk Konst, 1922, no.496 ('Hydda i bergen'); Chemnitz, Kunstaustellung Gerstenberger, Adolph Menzel 1815-1905, 1939, no.25.

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.