

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Studies of a Man Smoking, in Profile

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping, and touches of watercolour, on a sheet of paper printed with the text: 6. Ende des festes nach 11 Uhr. / Berlin, den 5 März 1886. / Der Hofmarschall / Graf Radolinski.

The verso dotted with watercolour samples.

Signed with initials and dated A. M./ 88. at the lower right.

Inscribed M in pencil on the verso.

215 x 142 mm. (8 1/2 x 5 5/8 in.)

This is a preparatory study for a seated figure of a smoking man in a small gouache drawing by Adolph Menzel entitled *In the Peterskeller in Salzburg (Im Peterskeller zu Salzburg)*, painted in January 1888 for the artist's physician, Dr. Friedrich Körte. A secondary sketch at the lower left of the drawing studies the empty beer glass in the same man's right hand, while a further sketch of his head is at the upper right of the sheet. Depicting a group of drinkers at the Peterskeller, a popular tavern belonging to the Benedictine monks of Salzburg, the gouache appeared at auction in Germany in 2015. Menzel also made a pencil drawing of the exterior of the Peterskeller some years later, in 1892, which is today in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin.

The German author Ludwig Thoma, who often wrote of life in rural Bavaria, described the Peterskeller in 1880: 'One had to walk across a wide monastery courtyard to visit the small square opening - the

Peterskeller - which was enclosed on three sides by monastic buildings, on the fourth by a high cliff. There stood about a dozen tables and benches in front of it, comfortably close together, a patch of blue sky overhead...Clergy, citizens, officers formed the crowd in which one casually found themselves. Anyone who came did not search for an empty table, but sat down alongside the guests present..'

The present sheet is drawn on a printed invitation to a court ball held in Berlin in 1886, some two years before the drawing was made. Menzel often drew on the backs of printed invitations or programmes, sometimes folding the sheet in half to make it easier to draw on. Several other sketches by the artist drawn on invitations are known, such as a group of costume studies on a printed card dated 1875, in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin.

The verso of the present sheet is covered with brushstrokes in watercolour; a practice often used by the artist to test his colours before starting work on a watercolour or gouache drawing. As Menzel's friend Paul Meyerheim recalled of the artist, 'While his oil paintings took shape on the canvas like a mosaic, his watercolours were often developed on an old piece of paper used for cleaning his paintbrush. He would shade off the chaos of colours a little and, carefully sticking this smooth paper, which no one else would have used to paint on, on to a piece of board, he started to work on the watercolour. The cardboard was itself attached to a drawing board, inside a wooden box on which he had fixed a piece of wood to rest his hand. All of this took place on a small table, as the master only ever worked standing up.'⁶ Similar watercolour tests are found on several drawings by Menzel, such as the title page of the so-called Children's Album of 1863, in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin.

The first owner of this drawing was the Austrian industrialist Moritz Edler von Kuffner (1854-1939), a brewer and property developer who was one of the most significant Viennese collectors of the 19th century. (He was also a prominent and gifted mountaineer.) Von Kuffner assembled a very fine collection of drawings by Menzel, as well as drawings by Jacopo Ligozzi, Rembrandt, Rudolf von Alt, and others. (The Menzel drawings in the collection were noted by Hans Tietze in his magisterial book on the artworks of Vienna, published in 1908.) Such was the renown of the Menzel drawings in the Kuffner collection that at one point thirteen sheets by the artist were earmarked for acquisition by the curator of the Albertina in Vienna, Otto Benesch. However, all but one of the drawings were eventually returned to the family in July 1938, shortly before they were forced to emigrate to Switzerland, following the Anschluss. The drawings were inherited by Moritz's son Stephan Kuffner (1894-1976), and eventually passed to his niece, Vera von Kuffner Eberstadt (1928-2014).

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.