Adolph MENZEL (Breslau 1815 - Berlin 1905)

Portrait of Fraulein Hanna Maercker

Watercolour and gouache, over an underdrawing in pencil.

Signed and dated Menzel/ Sept. 1848 at the lower left.

221 x 180 mm. (8 3/4 x 7 1/8 in.)

Between 1845 and 1847 Adolph Menzel lived at 18 Schöneberger Strasse in Berlin, where his neighbours included the family of the lawyer Karl Anton Maercker (1803-1871), director of the Berlin Criminal Court and, from 1848, Justice Minister in the brief Prussian government of Rudolf von Auerswald. Menzel became friendly with the Maerckers, and produced a number of portraits - in oil, watercolour, chalk and pastel - of members of the family. (Frau Maercker also posed for both of the main figures in Menzel's genre painting The Interruption (The Visit), painted between 1845 and 1846 and today in the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe.) In the spring of 1847 the artist moved to a new address, at 43 Ritterstrasse, and while he saw less of the Maercker family, he continued to occasionally produce drawings of them, as evidenced by the present sheet - a portrait of the daughter of Karl Anton Maercker - which is dated September 1848. In 1850, the Maercker family moved to Halbertadt in Saxony-Anhalt, ending their close relationship with Menzel.

This charming watercolour by Menzel is a portrait of the Maercker's eldest daughter, Johanna (Hanna) Maercker (1839-1918), at the age of nine. Little else is known of Hanna Maercker, apart from her marriage to Julius Albert in 1857. A black chalk drawing by Menzel of the same young girl, though perhaps a year or two earlier in date, is in the collection of the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin.

A stylistically similar watercolour portrait of the Maercker's young son Max asleep, datable to around the

same time as the present sheet, has appeared on the German art market in recent years. Also comparable is a third watercolour of the Maercker children; a double portrait of Hanna and Max Maercker seated at a table, dated 1848.

Exhibitions

Berlin, Königliche National-Galerie, Ausstellung von Werken Adolph von Menzels, 1905, no.283; Munich, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Adolph Menzel: radikal real, 2008, no. 24.

Literature:

Hugo von Tschudi, Adolph von Menzel: Abbildungen seiner Gemälde und Studien, Munich, 1905, pp.168-169, no.206 ('Tochter des Justizministers Maercker'); Georg Jakob Wolf, Adolf von Menzel: der Maler deutschen Wesens: 149 Gemälde und Handzeichnungen des Meisters, Munich, 1915, illustrated p.92; Karl Robert Langewiesche, ed., Der Blumenkorb: Deutsche Maler 1800 bis 1870, Königstein im Taunus and Leipzig, 1921, pl.46; Gisold Lammel, Adolph Menzel und seine Kreise, Dresden and Basel, 1993, p.46; Claude Keisch and Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher, ed., Adolph Menzel 1815-1905: Between Romanticism and Impressionism, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Washington and Berlin, 1996-1997, p.201, under no.28 and pp.217-218, under no.38; Bernhard Maaz, ed., Adolph Menzel: radikal real, exhibition catalogue, Munich, 2008, p.56, no.24; Hamburg, Dr. Moeller & Cie., Adolph Menzel 1815-1905: Meister der Zeichnung, 2013, unpaginated, under no.3, fig.1.

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.