

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST

ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau – Berlin 1905

The Porta San Michele in Bressanone (Brixen)

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping.

Signed with initials *A. M.* in pencil at the lower right.

Inscribed *Brixen* in pencil on the verso. Further inscribed (by Guido Kern) *Original-Zeichnung / von A. von Menzel / Wert in April 1943 er. 1500 R.M – 2000 RM / Professor G. J. Kern* in pencil on the verso.

180 x 113 mm.

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Germany – Thomas Le Claire, Hamburg – W. M. Brady & Co., New York, in 2015 – Acquired from him in 2015 by William Louis-Dreyfus, Mount Kisco.

LITERATURE: New York, W. M. Brady & Co., *Old Master and 19th-Century Drawings 1540-1890*, exhibition catalogue, 2015, unpaginated, no.30.

EXHIBITED: New York, W. M. Brady & Co., *Old Master and 19th-Century Drawings 1540-1890*, 2015, no.30.

Adolph Menzel visited the mountain town of Brixen, in the province of South Tyrol, in the summer of 1881. (At the time, Brixen was part of the Austrian Empire, but with the annexation of the South Tyrol by Italy after the First World War, its name was changed to Bressanone.) At the beginning of September that year, the artist travelled from Munich to Innsbruck, and from there took the Brenner Railway, via Brixen, to Bolzano. He was in Brixen on the 2nd of September, when he signed the guest book of the Hotel Elephant, a 16th century villa surrounded by gardens.

This drawing depicts the Porta San Michele (St. Michaelstor), one of the main entrances to the historic centre of Brixen/Bressanone. First mentioned in the 12th century and originally the chief eastern entrance to the town, the gate takes its name from the Romanesque church of San Michele nearby. The façade of the gate is decorated with faded 16th century frescoes – only vaguely suggested in Menzel's drawing - depicting Saint Sebastian, Saint Martin and the Beggar, Saint Christopher and Saint Anne with the Virgin and Child, as well as the coat of arms of the early 16th century Archbishop Christoph von Schrofenstein.

Menzel's view of the Porta San Michele is likely to have been made from the 15th century bell tower of the adjoining church, known as the Torre Bianca (Weißer Turm), or White Tower. The present sheet, drawn on a page of one of the many sketchbooks the artist habitually carried with him on his travels, shows him studying the fall of sunlight on the rough stone walls of the gate, depicted with passages of

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delicate stumping, as well as the mural decoration of the walls and the mass of figures passing through the portal.

Menzel made at least two other drawings in Brixen/Bressanone during his brief visit in 1881; a view of the courtyard of the Köstlan mansion, now in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin¹, and a study of the side of a house in the centre of the town, now in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt².

¹ Inv. SZ Menzel N 1156; Claudia Czok and Andreas Heese, “So viel gereist und so viel gesehen” – Adolph Menzel und seine Fahrt in italiensiche Fernen’, in Luciano Pelizzari, *Menzel in Verona: Die Italienreisen des großen deutschen Malers des 19. Jahrhunderts*, exhibition catalogue, Ingelheim am Rhein, 2008, p.31, fig.1/3.

² Inv. LG 6; Irmgard Wirth, *Mit Menzel in Bayern und Österreich*, Munich, 1974, p.104, fig.97; Luciano Pelizzari, *ibid.*, p.49, fig.8. The drawing measures 124 x 212 mm. Menzel also made a drawing of a corner house on the Vicolo dei Fornai (Bäckergasse) in Brixen/Bressanone.