

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



*recto*



*verso*

ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau – Berlin 1905

*A Sheet of Various Studies, including Two Heads of Men, and Two Studies of Hands, one holding a Fan; with Test Marks of Watercolour (recto) – Various Test Marks of Watercolour (verso)*

Carpenter's pencil and watercolour (*recto*); watercolour (*verso*).

Marked with the artist's estate stamp, in violet ink, upper left center, A. M.

170 x 130 mm

PROVENANCE: Emilie Menzel Krigar (1823-1907), Berlin, the artist's sister – Thence by descent until 2015

This handsome sheet of sketches, showing four different and seemingly unrelated sketches of heads and hands, placed on the page with great sensitivity, derives additional aesthetic delight from the randomly placed touches of watercolour at the lower and left edges of the paper. Presumably, while working on a separate watercolour, the artist used both sides of this small page to blot colour tests from his brush, despite the already drawn sketches on the *recto*. The *verso*, left undrawn, is a riot of colour blots, evocative of the work of many artists in the twentieth century. While every watercolour artist used such sheets to mix his colours, to test the tone of a colour or pigment, or to dry a too-wet brush, the usual practice of the artist was to discard such sheets. Interestingly, both Menzel and his slightly younger contemporary, Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), seemed to have kept many examples, indicating the value both artists attached to this type of drawing. Indeed, Moreau preserved nearly 400 sheets of this type.<sup>1</sup> Other examples by Menzel include such drawings as *A dancing Painter – Self-Portrait* [Fig. 1], *Study for the Figure of "Germania"* [Fig.2], and *Japanese Seamstress* [Fig.3].

It has been suggested that the study of a man's head in the upper right of this sheet may possibly be a study from life of Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), who was appointed the first Chancellor of Germany by Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1871, a position he held under two monarchs for nearly twenty years. Menzel painted Otto von Bismarck twice, the first time for the great stage piece, the *Coronation of King Wilhelm von Preussen at Königsberg* (1865; Potsdam, Neues Palais). Although Bismarck was at the time the Ambassador to Saint Petersburg and not present at the actual coronation, he became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1862, and it was felt imperative to have him included in the assembly of court and government figures surrounding the king. Menzel drew his portrait from life in preparation for the painting May 4, 1865.

Bismarck sat again for the artist in 1871 for a larger-than-life size, full-length portrait, one of a pair of portraits of Bismarck and Feldmarschall Helmuth Graf von Moltke, intended to decorate the Academy of Arts building for the victorious German army returning from Paris at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. The preliminary drawing for this portrait, now in Berlin, shows Bismarck standing at a table with his hand resting on an unfolded map spread over the tabletop [Fig. 4]. The likeness of Bismarck shown in the Berlin sheet corresponds suggestively to the head, facing in the

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<sup>1</sup> See R. Rosenberg and M. Hollein, *Turner Hugo Moreau: Die Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, exhib. cat., Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle, 2008, pp. 222-43.

opposite direction, shown in the upper part of our sheet, which would suggest that our drawing was made at about the same time, *circa* 1871.



Fig.1: *A dancing Painter – Self-Portrait*, 1861  
Pencil with watercolour, 201 x 162 mm.  
Kupferstichkabinett SMB,  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.  
Inv. Nr: KK SZ Menzel Kat. 830



Fig.2: *Study for the Figure of "Germania"*, 1871,  
carpenter pencil with watercolour, 204 x 125 mm.  
Sammlung-Dr.-Georg-Schäfer-Stiftung, Schweinfurt,  
Inv. no.: 594.A



Fig.3: *Japanese Seamstress*, 1887,  
pencil, watercolour and gouache, 180 x 140 mm (246 x 170 mm).  
Sammlung-Dr.-Georg-Schäfer-Stiftung, Schweinfurt,  
Inv. no.: MGS 3829A



Fig.4: *Study for the Figure of Otto von Bismarck*, 1871,  
pencil, 399 x 262 mm.  
Kupferstichkabinett SMB,  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,  
Inv. Nr.: KKSZ Menzel Kat. 99