

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau - 1905 Berlin

*Interior of a Farmhouse Loft*

Carpenter's pencil with stumping and scratching-out, on sturdy, rough-textured paper. A marginal fold and stab holes from previous binding suggest that the sheet is from a sketchbook. Probably executed in the second half of the 1870s. Signed lower right: *Ad. Menzel*. Numbered on the verso: *B 24* (in red chalk); 43 and 2129 (both in pencil).

238 x 332 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Saxony (since c.1930) – By descent in the family, West Germany

LITERATURE: *Ausstellung von Werken Adolph von Menzels*, Königliche National-Galerie, Berlin 1905, p. 161, no. 2129 (under the title: *Interieur aus einem Bauernhause*)

The present drawing by Adolph Menzel depicts the cramped, open-raftered loft space of a farmhouse. This type of bare rural interior was a frequent subject in his work. He treated even the most insignificant of motifs as an artistic challenge to be taken seriously and handled with maximum craftsmanship. On his journeys he made a point of avoiding famous landmarks and picturesque sites. Instead, he would look out for the unspectacular and nondescript. Unremarkable as the subject of this drawing may be, extraordinary artistic skill and energy have been invested in its portrayal.

Menzel executed a similar pencil study, this time depicting the *Interior of a Barn* (Fig. 1),<sup>1</sup> around the year 1880. Marianne von Manstein, in her contribution to the Städel's 2012 exhibition catalogue, discusses Menzel's draughtsmanship and handling of light. Her remarks on that study are equally valid for the present drawing. She writes: *His depiction of the somewhat constricted, low-ceilinged barn interior fills the entire sheet. It is a painterly image even though it shows attention to detail and has a high degree of finish. The broad edge of the pencil has been used to produce hatching and many areas are shaded with stumping and smudging. To this broad configuration Menzel has added vibrant highlights using a versatile pencil technique – rich, firmly applied, velvety blacks interchange with sharp, high-precision markings. Already indented lines remain crisp and white as the pencil skips over them. [...] The subtle nuances in the play of light are the real subject of the drawing, how daylight illuminates objects or throws them into shadow as it penetrates the dark interior of the barn. [...] For Menzel, a master in the depiction of interiors, this is an artistic challenge that never loses its appeal, it may even be the sole raison d'être of the image.*<sup>2</sup>

The present drawing is unusual in conception. A ladder propped against a wall divides the picture surface vertically, creating a lighter area on one side and a darker area on the other. Above the ladder, a massive beam truncates almost the entire breadth of the image. Vehement hatching and areas of

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<sup>1</sup> *Interior of a Barn*, pencil, with stumping, 247 x 326 mm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main [inv.: SG 3478].

<sup>2</sup> Marianne von Manstein in *Freiheit des Sehens, Zeichenkunst von Kobell bis Corinth aus dem Städel Museum*, exhib. cat., Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main 2012, no. 30, p. 84.

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scratching-out are used to depict the grain of the wood. The plunging lines of the roof construction in the upper left corner recall Piranesi's *Carceri* and seem to anticipate the dynamic formal vocabulary of Futurism.

Menzel's watercolour of 1873 titled *Kitchen in Hofgastein* – now in the Georg Schäfer Museum in Schweinfurt<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 2) – displays close compositional parallels with the present drawing. However, unlike the present drawing, it includes staffage. Both interiors are similarly structured, with open rafters (in *Kitchen in Hofgastein* an attic window provides an important additional light source); a raised platform or gallery at the centre of the image, supported by beams and accessed by a wooden ladder; and a wooden door in the background. A further watercolour – *Smithy in Hofgastein*, executed in 1879 – shows a comparable approach to spatial arrangement and handling of light.<sup>4</sup>

The present drawing may have been executed on one of Menzel's visits to Hofgastein in the 1870s. He stayed at the holiday residence of Magnus Herrmann, a Berlin banker and close friend. Menzel's sister and her family accompanied him. Agathe Herrmann, one of the banker's three daughters, was an observant chronicler of Menzel's visits. She noted: *In this tiny village there is probably not a single corner, old brown hut, well, picturesque fence or distinctively gnarled tree that this inveterate observer and passionate, untiring creator has not studied and sketched.*

The present sheet also bears stylistic comparison with two undated drawings – *The Kapuzinerstiege in Salzburg, viewed from below* and *The Kapuzinerstiege in Salzburg, viewed from above* (Fig. 3).<sup>5</sup> Both were probably executed in the late 1870s. Here too, vehement hatching is used to delineate the characteristics of the beams and the steps. In addition, strong emphasis is placed on the contrast between light and dark areas. Salzburg lies on the route to Hofgastein and Menzel is known to have visited the city on a number of occasions on his visits to the Salzkammergut.

We are grateful to Dr. Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher for examining the drawing. She has confirmed its authenticity.

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<sup>3</sup> *Kitchen in Hofgastein*, ink and brush, watercolour, bodycolour on paper, 1873, 400 x 260 mm, Georg Schäfer Museum, Schweinfurt [inv. MGS 563 A]. See Jens Christian Jensen, *Adolph Menzel, Werke der Sammlung-Dr. Georg-Schäfer-Stiftung, Schweinfurt*, Munich 1998, no. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Smithy in Hofgastein*, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 1879, 419 x 288 mm.

<sup>5</sup> Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett [inv. KK Menzel N773 and KK Menzel N784].

See Bernhard Maaz (ed.), *Adolph Menzel radikal real*, exhib. cat., Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich 2008, nos. 108 and 109.



Fig. 1: *Interior of a Barn* (circa 1880).  
Pencil, with stumping, 247 x 326 mm.  
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

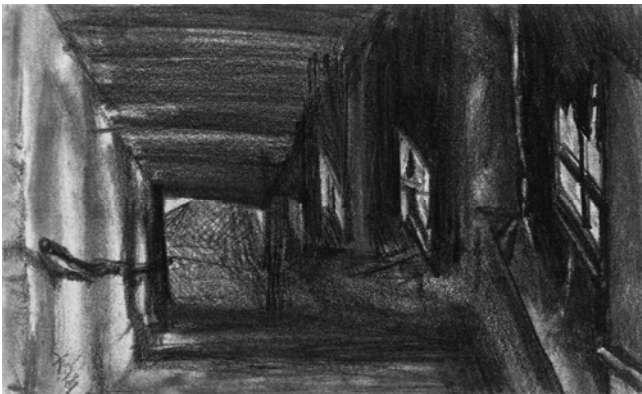


Fig. 3: *The Kapuzinerstiege in Salzburg, viewed from above* (undated).  
Pencil, 125 x 204 mm.  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

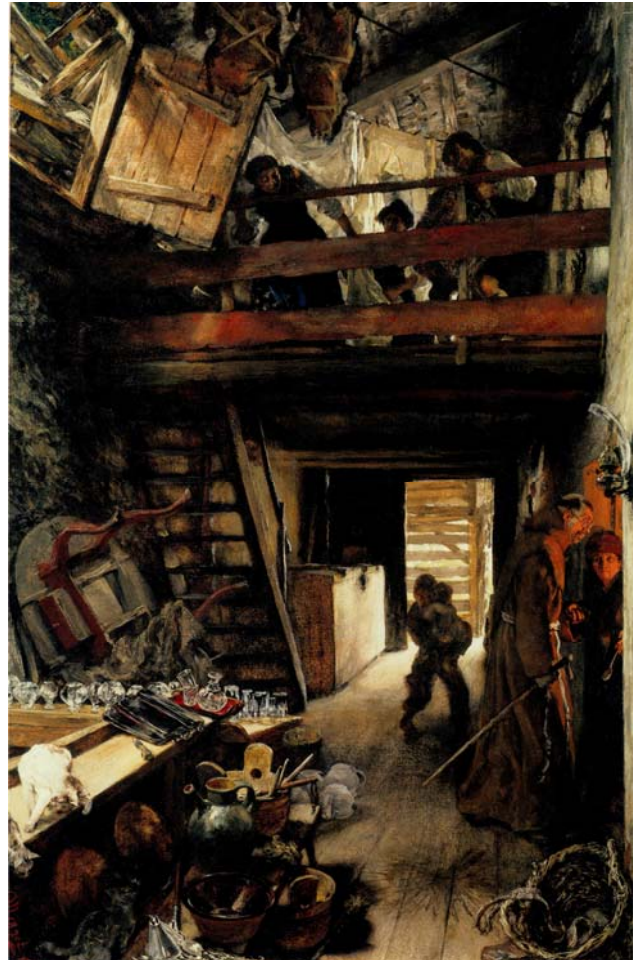


Fig. 2: *Kitchen in Hofgastein*, 1873.  
Ink, watercolour and bodycolour, 400 x 260 mm.  
Georg Schäfer Foundation, Schweinfurt