

ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau – Berlin 1905

The Zwölferturm in Sterzing

Graphite (carpenter's pencil), partly wiped, on wove paper.

Signed with the artist's monogram, dated and inscribed at the lower left: *A.M. 88 Sterzing.*

180 x 115 mm

PROVENANCE: Formerly with C. G. Boerner, Dusseldorf, 1966

LITERATURE: C. G. Boerner, Dusseldorf, *Neue Lagerliste* 44, 1966, no. 123, repr. - Heidi Ebertshäuser (ed.), *Adolph von Menzel, Das graphische Werk*, II, Munich and Frankfurt n.d. (1977), repr. p.1249

Menzel's summer trip in the year 1888 took him to Bamberg, Munich, Pommersfelden, Sterzing, Kissingen, Dresden and Merseburg.¹ He was repeatedly drawn to sights off the beaten track – a ramshackle barn, a remote farmstead or an unusual view through an archway to some secular building. This drawing was executed in Sterzing and depicts one of the town's important landmarks, the Zwölferturm. This is a 46-metre-high nightwatchman's tower flanked by the facades of Sterzing's characteristic high townhouses. A monument to St. John of Nepomuk can be seen at the centre of the drawing. The architectural setting has remained largely unchanged to this day. The high Alpine massif rises behind the Tower closing off the composition in the background.

The historic trading town of Sterzing was strategically situated between the Alpine passes on the route running between Verona, Innsbruck, Munich and Augsburg. The town's wealth was based on silver mining and its elegant buildings with their richly decorated marble facades, their bay windows, gables and portals testify to this wealth. Built in 1468-72, the Zwölferturm separates the old town from the new. Its distinctive stepped gable was built to replace the original gable destroyed by fire in 1867. Traditionally, St. John of Nepomuk – to whom the monument is dedicated – was believed to possess powers to protect populus and property from the danger of flooding such as might be caused by the nearby rivers, the Vallerbach and the Eisack.

As was his frequent practice, Menzel 'painted' with a shading stump, applying forceful, heavy strokes of black to accentuate the hazy greys of areas of shadow. Details are absorbed by tonal values. Just a single figure pervades the quietness of the deserted street. Menzel's virtuosity as a draughtsman lay in his ability to suggest more than he actually depicted.

¹ See *Adolph Menzel 1815-1905 – Master Drawings from East Berlin*, exhib. cat., New York, The Frick Collection and elsewhere, 1990-1, p. 230.