

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau - Berlin 1905

Half-Figure of Lorenzo Coccozza at the Age of 13

Carpenter's pencil, stumping, on paper. Executed 1882.

Monogrammed upper right: A. M. and inscribed at the lower edge of the sheet *13 Jahr* [sic]. *Lorenz Coccozza. Ganze Größe 53 Kopf 7 ½ Händ* [sic] *5 ½*.

202 x 128 mm

PROVENANCE: Unidentified collection, Berlin (1921) – Thence by descent – Private collection, USA (to 1998) – Jill Newhouse, New York – Katrin Bellinger Kunsthandel, Munich – Antal Post de Bekessy (1999) – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Petra Kuhlmann-Hodick and Tobias Burg, *Menzel in Dresden*, exhib. cat., Dresden and Berlin 2005, pp. 226-7, no. 195, repr. p. 125 and p. 227 – Luciano Pelizzari, *Menzel in Verona*, exhib. cat., Leipzig 2008, p. 212, no. 253, repr. p. 213

EXHIBITIONS: *Menzel in Dresden*, exhib. cat., Dresden and Berlin 2005, pp. 226-7, no. 195 – *Menzel in Verona*, exhib. cat., Leipzig 2008, p. 212, no. 253

This impressive and beautiful study of a boy belongs to a large group of preparatory drawings for Menzel's highly important late painting, *Piazza d'Erbe, Verona*, executed in 1884 [fig. 1].¹ This celebrated work was his last, compellingly ambitious oil on canvas. It required immense labour – when the painting was first shown at the Verein Berliner Künstler in 1884 it was presented along with numerous preparatory drawings such as the present sheet, as if to leave no doubt as to the sustained effort that had brought it into being. Menzel had made brief summer visits to northern Italy in 1881, 1882 and 1883, stopping each time in Verona. Claude Keisch hypothesizes that the idea for the painting may have been conceived on the second trip.² Later, Menzel began to abandon painting in oils in favour of gouache and the less time-consuming medium of drawing. In any case, *Piazza d'Erbe* may be regarded as marking the advent of his late, or at least, his later manner. In 1884 he was sixty-nine, and although he still had more than twenty years to live, with his artistic powers in many respects undiminished, the basic parameters of his enterprise were beginning to change.

One way to characterize that change is to observe that *Piazza d'Erbe* frustrates visual and imaginative penetration to an extent that is unprecedented in his oeuvre. The painting, overcrowded with figures, conveys little sense of an Italian piazza open to the sky, although it shows the artist's concern with topographic accuracy. As in the present study, many of Menzel's individual figures come across as picturesque or even bizarre 'characters' – in the painting they are typical specimens of Verona's regular market-going population.³

¹ Dresden, Galerie Neue Meister [inv. Gal. 2442].

² Claude Keisch, 'Menzel Junctures Disjunctures', in *Menzel*, Berlin 1996-7, p. 88.

³ Michael Fried, 'The Later Menzel', in *Menzel's Realism – Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin*, New Haven and London 2002, p. 207.

Many of Menzel's studies for *Piazza d'Erbe* were executed in his Berlin studio. He chose Italian models, using them for single portraits and to make studies of the human body in motion. This is known to have been the case with the Coccozza family - Lorenzo, the son, was certainly his model for several years. Our study is datable to 1882.⁴ The boy can almost certainly be made out at the far right of the painting in the middle ground close to the fountain [fig. 2].



Fig. 1: *Piazza d'Erbe, Verona*, oil on canvas, signed and dated lower right: Adolph Menzel 1884. Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden [inv. G 2442]



Fig. 2: *Piazza d'Erbe, Verona* [detail]

⁴ P. Kuhlmann-Hodick and T. Burg, op. cit., 2005, p. 226, no. 195.