

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST

ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau – Berlin 1905

A Seated Woman Reading (Portrait of Emilie Fontane)

Watercolour and gouache on thin cardboard. Signed.

Extensively inscribed and dated by the artist *Möge, Verehrte Frau, / Ihre Enttäuschung beim / Anblick des Umseitigen / nicht so groß sein, um Ihnen / zur Warnung zu Werden, / jemals wieder bei jeweili- / ger Gelegenheit mit / Jemanden / ein Vihlipbchen [Vielliebchen] zu essen / B[erlin] 16 Marz 1872.* on the verso.

112 x 73 mm.

PROVENANCE: Presented by the artist to the sitter, Emilie Rouanet-Kummer Fontane, Berlin – Thence by descent in the Fontane family from 1902 – Berthold and Martha Nothmann, Wannsee, Berlin, by 1936 – Acquired from them on 12 May 1938 by Galerie Heinemann, Munich – Purchased from them in August 1938 by Dr. Frenzel, Elbing – His sale (*‘Gemälde des 19. Jahrhunderts aus verschiedenem Besitz darunter die Sammlung Dr. F., Elbing’*), Berlin, Hans W. Lange, 18 October 1940, lot 529 – Private collection, Berlin, by 1955 – Herbert Klewer, Berlin, by 1965 – William Louis-Dreyfus, Mount Kisco.

LITERATURE: Hugo von Tschudi, *Adolph von Menzel: Abbildungen seiner Gemälde und Studien*, Munich, 1905, pp.380-381, no.581 (*‘Lesende Dame’*) – Berthold Nothmann, *Meine Lebenserinnerungen, für die Familie bestimmt* (Wannsee, November 1936), unpublished typescript, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, p.58 – Gisold Lammel, *Adolph Menzel und seine Kreise*, Dresden and Basel, 1993, p.74 – Claude Keisch, “Ja, wer ist Menzel?”, in Claude Keisch, Peter-Klaus Schuster and Moritz Wullen, ed., *Fontane und die bildende Kunst*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin, 1998, p.200.

EXHIBITED: Berlin, Königliche National-Galerie, *Ausstellung von Werken Adolph von Menzels*, 1905, no.238 (*‘Lesende Dame. Vielliebchengeschenk für Frau E. Fontane’*) – Berlin, Museum Dahlem, *Ausstellung Adolph von Menzel aus Anlass seines 50 Todesjahres*, 1955, no.119 – Berlin, Haus am Tiergarten, *Adolph Menzel 1815-1905: Pastelle, Aquarelle und Zeichnungen*, 1965, no.56 – London, The Arts Council Gallery, and elsewhere, *Drawings and watercolours by Adolph Menzel*, 1965, no.61.

This charming watercolour is a portrait of Emilie Fontane, née Rouanet-Kummer (1824-1902), the wife of Menzel’s longtime friend, the German Realist novelist and poet Theodor Fontane (1819-1898). She is depicted sitting by the railing on the deck of a river steamer, reading a book held in one hand and holding an open umbrella against the wind in her other, gloved hand. Menzel made this small watercolour as a token of affection for Emilie Fontane, who, like her husband, maintained a correspondence with the artist well into his late years. The inscription on the verso, written in Menzel’s distinctive hand, may be approximately translated as: *‘May, my lady, your disappointment at the sight of the other side [of this drawing] not be so great as to caution you against ever dining again, on occasion, with a little friend. Berlin 16 March 1872.’*

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Much of Menzel's vast corpus of drawings is executed in pencil, chalks or charcoal, and the use of watercolour is relatively rare in his drawn oeuvre. A stylistically comparable small watercolour of a young girl with a cat, of slightly smaller dimensions, is in a private collection in Germany¹.

Theodor Fontane frequently wrote in praise of the artist. As he once noted, '*Menzel is the master of every branch of his art, but, even more, he is the master of his own passions. The human in him still surpasses the artist. What he is in his greatness, he is, above all, through his human qualities, through his rare incarnation of diligence, responsibility, and courage.*'²

The present sheet was once part of the large art collection of the industrialist Berthold Nothmann (1865-1942). A native of Upper Silesia, Nothmann worked as an employee and director of the Hudschinsky tube factories in Breslau and Gleiwitz (now Wroclau and Gliwice in Poland). A friend of Max Liebermann, Nothmann was a passionate art collector, and owned works by Paul Cézanne and Otto Mueller, among many others, and is also known to have met Henri Matisse. On his retirement in 1931, he settled first in Düsseldorf and then in Wannsee in Berlin, and devoted himself to his art collection. Much of the collection was sold, however, before Nothmann and his wife Martha emigrated to London in 1939. He died there, without descendants, in February 1942.

The present sheet has been included in a number of significant exhibitions of Menzel's work, most recently in 1965.

¹ Heidi Ebertshäuser, *Adolph von Menzel: Das graphische werk*, Munich, 1976, Vol.II, p.1108; Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, *Menzel – der Beobachter*, exhibition catalogue, 1982, p.167, no.97. The drawing measures 96 x 58 mm.

² Theodor Fontane, 'Zu Adolph Menzels 80. Geburtstag', *Die Zukunft*, 7 December 1895; quoted in translation in Marie Ursula Riemann, "'Courage of Vision": Traces of Alienation and Loneliness in Menzel's Work', in Peter Betthausen et al, *Adolph Menzel 1815-1905: Master Drawings from East Berlin*, exhibition catalogue, New York and elsewhere, 1990-1991, p.41.