

Adolph Menzel, *Bricklayers on a Building Site* (1875)

Abstract

On the surface and from other images in this volume, it would appear that both Anton von Werner (1843–1915) and Adolph Menzel (1815–1905) were adoring painters of court life and royal pomp. Menzel’s motivations and talents, however, were more complex than those of his friend. This series of images shows Menzel’s fascination with everyday life and the daily labors of Germany’s working classes. In this image, the viewer is invited, through Menzel’s meticulous attention to detail, to engage empathetically with the team of six bricklayers at work on a building. This painting also documents the building boom in Germany during the “Founding Era” (1871–73). Art historians have offered conjecture on the exact Berlin location Menzel depicted here, but it may have been the site of an old garden not far from Menzel’s studio: by painting a house under construction as well as lush trees blowing in the wind, Menzel may have been offering a comment on the threat to nature caused by Berlin’s rapid expansion.

Source



Source: Adolph Menzel, *Maurer an einem Hausbau* [*Bricklayers on a Building Site*]. Gouache (1875). Private collection, New York City.

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