

Giovanni Boldini, *Adolph Menzel* (1895)

Abstract

This portrait of Adolph Menzel (1815–1905) was painted by Giovanni (Jean) Boldini (1842–1931) in two short sittings in 1895. Despite the speed of its execution, it was a true labor of love: Boldini was said to have stood for hours on end in front of Menzel’s *Flute Concert* (1852) and *The Iron-Rolling Mill* (1875) in Berlin’s National Gallery. When visitors to Boldini’s studio saw a photograph of Menzel tucked into a mirror frame, the artist was known to exclaim: “Ah, what a painter! As for me, I am only a dauber.” Boldini’s portrait was displayed at exhibitions in Berlin (1896) and Paris (1931). Viewers believed it showed a private, spontaneous side of Menzel; some said that Boldini had painted “a prestigious head,” while others thought he had caught the “gnomelike” qualities of an artistic genius who stood less than 4½ feet tall. (Vito Doria, *Boldini. Inedito / Inédit / Unpublished Works*. Bologne, 1982, pp. 22, 140.) It bears noting that the “von” in Menzel’s name is absent from most contemporary references, since he was ennobled late in life (1898), when he became a Knight of the Order of the Black Eagle.

Source



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