

# PIETER DE MOLIJN

(London 1595 - Haarlem 1661)

## *A Hilly Landscape with Wanderers at the Foot of a Castle Ruin*

signed with monogram 'P M' (lower right)

oil on panel

32.3 x 49.4 cm (12¾ x 19½ in)

**A**SERENE COUNTRYSIDE IS LAID OUT BENEATH A SOFT suffusion of luminous dusky light. The stark and imposing aspect of the castle ruins commands the eye and simultaneously draws the perspective upwards and down, towards the extreme bottom right-hand corner of the composition, creating a vast space. The two walkers and a little grey dog are almost obscured by the overhang and Pieter de Molijn's uniform use of colour. In the middle ground on the far left, a delicate church spire intersects with the horizon leading the eye upwards in a bold diagonal to the castle atop its rocky outcrop. As in a number of Dutch landscapes, the presence of human beings and manmade artefacts in the untamed wilderness of nature, displays a characteristic engagement with the widely debated question of how best to represent nature in art.

De Molijn was a celebrated Dutch painter, draughtsman and etcher as his exquisite drawings attest. It is not known when he moved to Holland but in 1616, he entered the Guild of St. Luke in Haarlem where he immediately came under the influence of the great landscape innovator, Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630) (see catalogue no. 137) and his pupil, Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) (see catalogue nos. 134 and 135) who were both in Haarlem for a



Jan van Goyen, *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by the Swan Inn and at another Inn Opposite*, 1649, Sphinx Fine Art, London (Figure 1)



Pieter de Molijn, *Landscape with a Cottage*, 1629, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Figure 2)

short period after de Molijn's arrival. Works by de Molijn and van Goyen represent the pinnacle of realism in Dutch landscape art (fig. 1). Replacing the ornate foliage and severe highlights of their Mannerist predecessors, the Dutch ushered in a new and more naturalistic style.

De Molijn's most prolific and inventive phase was in the 1620s when he elected not to divide his landscapes into distinct realms as had been previously practiced. This can be seen clearly in *Landscape with a Cottage* (fig. 2). Here he exploits to maximum effect the large areas of light and shadow; yet he manages to unify them into a harmonious whole with a skilful use of prominent diagonals that lead the eye into the wide expanse of cloudy sky. In comparing de Molijn's work to that of his mentor, van de Velde, his composition exudes movement. In both *A Hilly Landscape with Wanderers at the Foot of a Castle Ruin* and *Landscape with a Cottage*, there is a distinct contrast established by the dense trees in one half and the low sunlight that catches on the sandy dune.

De Molijn's work encompassed elements both of fantasy and reality. One of his main contributions, so ably demonstrated in this present work, was the sensitive and energetically observed way in which he depicted contemporary rural life of the Netherlands and its inhabitants. In his own day de Molijn was appreciated as an outstanding artist. More recently, though, he is recognised as one of the leading figures of early seventeenth-century Dutch landscape art.

