

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 MISTY COUNTRYSIDE IS LAID OUT BENEATH A SOFT suffusion of luminous dusky light. The stark and imposing aspect of the castle ruin 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 their 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.

Although the present work is undated, it probably comes from de Molijn's late period, which Eva Jeney Allen classifies as being from 1648-1660.¹ During this period, which is characterised by his 'complete mastery of stylistic means and his effortless use of them for expressive purposes', Molijn often used towering manmade structures, such as towers or windmills, as framing devices in his works.² However, in his earlier works, it is predominantly trees and other natural features that serve that purpose. *Castle Ruin beside a River*, see figure



Pieter de Molijn, *Castle Ruin beside a River*, Hallwyl Collection, Stockholm (Figure 1)



Pieter de Molijn, *Italian Landscape with Ruined Tower*, 1660, British Museum, London (Figure 2)

1, features a comparable dilapidated motif which looms over the composition. These buildings tend to be an amalgamation of varied geometrical shapes, which contrast with the uniformity of the expansive flat Dutch landscape in which they are set. Although the foreground towers do not occur as much as cottages in de Molijn's work, they were nonetheless a recurring subject in his late period, in both his oils as well as numerous drawings, such as the British Museum's *Italian Landscape with Ruined Tower* (fig. 2).

De Molijn was born in London to Flemish parents, and apparently remained proud of his birthplace throughout his life, as he is frequently referred to as 'The Londoner' in archival documents.³ He is recorded in the Guild of St. Luke in Haarlem in 1616, and this is the first record of his presence in the Netherlands, at the age of twenty-one. He was to remain in Haarlem for the whole of his career and the dune landscapes around the city were to remain a constant source of inspiration throughout his career. Trips to both Scandinavia and Italy have been mooted by art historians, but both of these suggestions are disputed, in particular by Allen.

De Molijn occupies an important place in the development of seventeenth-century Dutch art. His earliest works show the influence of the Mannerists of the previous century, but under the influence of Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630), he became a leading member 'of the group of artists who brought pictorial realism in Dutch landscape to a climax', along with Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) and Salomon van Ruysdael (c.1600-1670).⁴ *A Hilly Landscape with Wanderers at the Foot of a Castle Ruin* is a fine example of his influential work.

¹ Allen, E. J., *The Life and Art of Pieter Molyn*, Ph.D. Diss. (University of Maryland College Park, 1987) p.183.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

³ For an extensive biography, see Allen, pp. 30-41.

⁴ Rosenberg, J., Slive, S. & ter Kuile, E.H., *Dutch Art and Architecture 1600-1800*, (Penguin Books, 1966), p.148.

