In this densely wooded landscape, dappled light draws the eye to the various figural groups that help enliven the scene. In the foreground four resting travelers quietly converse while in the distance a man and a woman tend a fire on the bank of a stream, perhaps to prepare a repast for the travelers resting in a nearby boat. Light not only picks out figural groups, but also illuminates pockets of grass and accents tree trunks and the lively rhythms of branches, even those growing from broken logs lying on the ground.

This landscape, which is neither signed nor dated, has been attributed to Adam Pynacker by Bode, Nieuwstraten, and Harwood. [1] An early work, it probably dates to the late 1640s. [2] In style and character, this painting relates closely to Wooded Landscape with a Ford in the Museum Bredius [fig. 1], which Harwood dates about 1648. [3] The stump in the foreground of that latter work, with its high projecting branch on the left and a lower branch on the right, is strikingly similar to the stump on the far bank in the Wooded Landscape with Travelers. The horizontal log with its lacelike branches also resembles the boughs of the dead tree enclosed in the underbrush in the National Gallery of Art painting. More significantly, the handling of space in these works is much the same: in both paintings the artist composed his scene with a series of planes approximately parallel to the picture plane.

Pynacker’s setting is undoubtedly imaginary, although the roughness and untamed character of this hilly terrain, the types of trees, as well as their ocher tonalities, reflect the character of the eastern region of the Netherlands. Indeed, the figures
are dressed in contemporary clothes similar to those one would expect from Dutch travelers. Whether or not Pynacker did go to Italy, as Houbraken asserts, [4] there is little evidence in this early work that he was influenced by Italianate landscapists he would have seen there, except for the use of contra-jour light to accent figures and foliage. [5]

The prominence of the broken tree trunk in this work suggests, as Harwood has already postulated, that Pynacker looked beyond his native Schiedam for artistic inspiration and turned to the far more active community of painters in nearby Rotterdam. [6] There he would have met, among others, Herman Saftleven (Dutch, 1609 - 1685), who painted in 1647 a comparable forest scene with resting travelers that is similarly dominated by a huge broken tree stump (see the 1995 catalog entry PDF for the comparative image). This motif, however, was not unique to Saftleven, and, indeed, it gained great prominence in landscape paintings of the late 1640s. For example, it is also seen in paintings as diverse as Jacob van Ruisdael’s A Blasted Elm with a View of Egmond aan Zee, 1648 (The Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire), and Salomon van Ruysdael’s River Landscape with Ferry. Whether the broken tree trunk had specific symbolic associations, such as the transience of life, or whether artists were attracted to it for other pictorial reasons is not known.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.
April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES
fig. 1 Adam Pynacker, *Wooded Landscape with a Ford*, c. 1648, oil on panel, Museum Bredius, The Hague

NOTES


TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the right, left, and top tacking margins trimmed and the bottom tacking margin turned out and incorporated into the picture plane. A hard, brittle layer of sizing is discernible below the thin, tan ground layer. Paint is applied as fluid pastes and stippling in the foliage.

The condition of the painting is only moderately good. The greens in the landscape, moreover, have darkened over time. Discrete inpainting covers scattered small losses, and later repaint is found along the bottom edge. In 1978 the painting was lined and discolored varnish and inpainting were removed.

PROVENANCE


[1] See the letter dated 24 September 1925 from Dr. Eduard Plietzsch of the Galerie van Diemen to Carl Boschwitz, in NGA curatorial files.
EXHIBITION HISTORY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


