



Pieter Molijn  
Dutch, 1595 - 1661

## *Landscape with Open Gate*

c. 1630/1635

oil on panel

overall: 33.6 x 47.9 cm (13 1/4 x 18 7/8 in.)

framed: 53.6 x 67.6 x 2.5 cm (21 1/8 x 26 5/8 x 1 in.)

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund and Gift of Arthur K. and Susan H. Wheelock 1986.10.1

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### ENTRY

This small work, so evocative of the windswept terrain near the dunes along the Dutch coast, captures the essence of early seventeenth-century landscape painting. With free and fluid strokes, Molijn has created a vigorous and animated scene, where sea breezes, which have molded the craggy form of the dead, vine-covered oak tree and the wood slats of the gate and fence, rustle the leaves of trees surrounding the farm. The painting does not have a composed feeling, but appears as though it were a view along a sandy road that we suddenly happened upon. From the low vantage point, nature rather than man takes precedence. The road, gate, and craggy tree are boldly depicted, while the only figures, a shepherd returning with his sheep just over the rise and a man behind the fence, are small and insignificant. [1]

*Landscape with Open Gate* is not signed, but the attribution to Pieter Molijn is without doubt. Comparisons with his painting *Dune Landscape with Trees and Wagon*, signed and dated 1626 (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig), [2] and with his signed pen drawing of the late 1620s, *Road between Trees near a Farm* [fig. 1], demonstrate the same approach to landscape. [3] In each instance, this Haarlem artist has dramatically broken with pictorial tradition and situated the

viewer below the horizon. Within vistas limited by low viewpoints, the roads that pass through the rolling, windswept landscapes have no beginning and no end. Only the small, insubstantial figures traveling just behind the crests of the rises suggest the world beyond. Stylistically, a particularly interesting comparison can be made between the vigorous rhythms of the pen lines in the drawing and the black chalk Underdrawing in *Landscape with Open Gate*, which is visible with Infrared Reflectography [fig. 2].

Molijn was one of the most adventurous landscape artists of his day, one who instilled his scenes with an unprecedented sense of realism. Not only did he limit his range of motifs and color tonalities, he also organized his compositions with powerful diagonal accents that were reinforced through strong effects of light and dark. Through these means he gave his paintings both a specific visual focus and a unifying path into the distance. By 1626 his bold and vigorous brushwork had already attracted the attention of Frans Hals (Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666), who asked Molijn to paint the landscape in the celebrated portrait *Isaac Abrahamsz Massa* (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto). [4] As early as 1628 Samuel Ampzing praised Molijn for these same qualities in his chronicle of Haarlem. [5] At about the same time, Molijn's influence in both style and subject matter is evident in the work of his Haarlem contemporary Salomon van Ruysdael (Dutch, c. 1602 - 1670) and in paintings by the Leiden artist Jan van Goyen (Dutch, 1596 - 1656).

Molijn's distinctive style of landscape painting owed much to the drawings and etchings of three artists who already had been active in Haarlem at the time he joined the Saint Luke's Guild in 1616: Esaias van de Velde I (Dutch, 1587 - 1630), Willem Buytewech (Dutch, 1591/1592 - 1624), and Jan van de Velde II (Dutch, 1593 - 1641). The restive character of Molijn's line, however, indicates that he also drew inspiration from other artists, including Jacques de Gheyn II (Dutch, 1565 - 1629) and Abraham Bloemaert (Dutch, 1566 - 1651), whose landscape drawings often focused on old barns and rugged trees. [6] While Molijn's historical importance lies in his ability to translate these precedents into painted images, ones that helped usher in the tonal phase of Dutch landscape painting, he may have translated thematic concepts as well. Dilapidated farms and starkly silhouetted dead trees would have been understood in moralizing terms by some of his contemporaries. [7] The dead tree in *Landscape with Open Gate* may have called to mind Roemer Visscher's emblem "Keur baert angst" ("Choosing causes anxiety") [fig. 3], which juxtaposes a rotten and a healthy tree to stress that false appearances and lack of knowledge often lead one to make wrong choices in life. [8] This tree could also

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have been seen as a reminder of the transience of life, an idea taken up with even greater force somewhat later in Haarlem by Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682) (see *Forest Scene*).

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Pieter Molijn, *Road between Trees near a Farm*, 1626, pen and ink on blue paper, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam. Photo © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



**fig. 2** Infrared reflectogram, Pieter Molijn, *Landscape with Open Gate*, c. 1630/1635, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund and Gift of Arthur K. and Susan H. Wheelock, 1986.10.1



**fig. 3** Roemer Visscher, “Keu baert angst,” emblem from *Zinne-poppen*, Amsterdam, 1614

## NOTES

- [1] Two small, out-of-scale figures in front of the fence have been added by a later hand; they are in the shadows so they do not detract very much from the overall impact of the painting.
- [2] See inventory no. 338, from the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig.
- [3] For a discussion of this drawing, see Marijn Schapelhouman and Peter Schatborn, *Land and Water: Dutch Drawings from the 17th Century in the Rijksmuseum Print Room* (Zwolle, 1987), 26, where a date from “the second half of the twenties” is postulated.
- [4] Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974) 3:25–26, no. 42, where the attribution of the landscape to Molijn is first made.
- [5] Samuel Ampzing, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem in Holland* (Haarlem, 1628), 372: “En van het stout pinzeel en hand’ling van Molijn, die in de schilder-konst twee dapp’re meesters zijn” (“And of the bold brush and handling of Molijn, that—in the art of painting—are two accomplished masters”; translation by Henriette de Bruyn Kops). That Molijn would have been so well regarded by 1628 is surprising, for no paintings exist that are dated before 1625. For an assessment of Molijn’s artistic evolution, see Eva Jeney Allen, “The Life and Art of Pieter Molyn,” PhD diss. (University of Maryland, 1987).

- [6] See, for example, Bloemaert's drawing *A Shepherd with Sheep near a Dead Tree* (Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, inv. no. 11898 A 3740), illustrated in Marijn Schapelhoutman and Peter Schatborn, *Land and Water: Dutch Drawings from the 17th Century in the Rijksmuseum Print Room* (Zwolle, 1987), 3.
- [7] For a rather controversial assessment of the moralizing character of Dutch landscapes see Josua Bruyn, "Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Paintings," in Peter C. Sutton et al., *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* (Boston, 1987), 84–92.
- [8] Roemer Visscher, *Zinne-poppen* (Amsterdam, 1614), 11, as discussed in Peter C. Sutton et al., *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* (Boston, 1987), 15.
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support, a single, horizontally grained oak board, has several minor cracks parallel to the grain. Dendrochronology has determined a felling date between 1628 and 1634, with the most plausible date being 1630.[1] The back is wax-coated and the edges beveled. The double ground consists of a lower white layer and an upper light brown layer. The smooth, thin ground masks the wood grain and is extensively incorporated into the design. The fluid, brush-applied strokes of the extensive underdrawing, which is more agitated and oblique than the final composition, are readily visible to the naked eye as well as with infrared reflectography at 1.5 – 1.8 microns.[2] The two small foreground figures, which do not appear in the underdrawing, seem to be later additions.

Translucent paint is applied thinly and rapidly, with slightly impasted highlights and stiff brushwork in the sky. Frequently the ground is merely glazed over lightly or highlights applied to exposed underdrawing lines, as in a quickly executed sketch. Discolored inpainting covers scattered small losses and reinforces lines in the gate and the figures to its right. Remnants of aged varnishes indicate selective cleaning in the past. The painting has not been treated since its acquisition.

[1] Dendrochronology was performed by Dr. Peter Klein, Universität Hamburg (see report dated January 7, 1987, in NGA curatorial files).

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[2] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focal plane array InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

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## PROVENANCE

Private collection, France; (art dealer, Lille); purchased 1980 by Arthur K. and Susan H. Wheelock, Washington, D.C.; acquired 1986 by gift and partial purchase by NGA.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1983 Haarlem: The Seventeenth Century, The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1983, no. 85, as Attributed to Pieter de Molyn.

1997 Rembrandt and the Golden Age: Dutch Paintings from the National Gallery of Art, The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, 1997, unnumbered brochure.

1998 A Collector's Cabinet, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1998, no. 39.

1999 A Moral Compass: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Painting in the Netherlands, Grand Rapids Art Museum, 1999, no. 17, repro.

2016 Drawings for Paintings in the Age of Rembrandt, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, 2016-2017, no. 10, repro.

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- 1988 Southgate, M. Therese, M.D., ed. "The Cover: Pieter Molijn, *Landscape with Open Gate*." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 260, no. 12 (23 September 1988): 1662, cover repro.
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Washington, 1995: 178-181, color repro. 179.

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- 2001 Southgate, M. Therese. *The Art of JAMA II: Covers and Essays from The Journal of the American Medical Association*. Chicago, 2001: 34-35, 208, color repro.
- 2004 Allen, Eva J. *A Vision of Nature: The Landscapes of Philip Koch: Retrospective, 1971-2004*. Exh. cat. University of Maryland University College, Adelphi, 2004: 12-13, fig. 3.
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