

J. P. MØLLER

1783–1854

92. *Landscape with Horse-Drawn Cart on a Bridge,
Farm in Background, 1850*

(*Landskab med hestekøretøj på en bro. I baggrunden en bondegård*)

Oil on canvas, 16¼ x 20½ in. (41 x 52 cm)

Signed with initials and dated lower left: IPM 1850

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 465, 1984, lot 241, ill. p. 109.

This pleasing work is immediately reminiscent of a painting by another artist, I. C. Dahl (1788–1857): *The Bridge across the Tryggevælde River with a View of Køge*, c. 1815, which is in Statens Museum for Kunst. Both works have as their principal motif a horse-drawn cart on a humpbacked bridge across a river. The especially intense light and transparent shadows characteristic of Dahl's pictures are not unlike the play of color in Møller. However, the bridges in each picture turn in different directions, and while Dahl has placed major emphasis on the depiction of the rush of the water in the stream, and a magnificent stark vault of sky against which the bridge bearing the cart is silhouetted, Møller has filled his painting with more trees and staffage¹ figures.

Dahl and Møller knew each other, mostly through C. W. Eckersberg, with whom they shared a friendship. Eckersberg and Møller had been friends from their youth, studying together in the Academy; they subsequently shared lodgings when studying in Paris. There, Eckersberg was taught in the studio of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), while Møller prepared himself for a career as a landscape artist and conservator.

These three artists developed in very different directions, but they all shared one model from their youth, the great French painter and graphic artist Claude Lorrain (1600–1682). The stagelike compositional principle in Lorrain's light-pervaded, poetical landscapes has been studied by artists at all times and copied by many. In this painting we see how J. P. Møller has remembered Claude Lorrain's famous trees, which so often act as living set pieces in the scenic space of the painting. A large tree in the foreground on one side is balanced by smaller trees on the other, and through this the viewer's eyes are led along a road across, for instance, an Arcadian landscape to a distant horizon that merges with the sky. The trees are set like dark silhouettes against a light background, whereby a *repoussoir*² effect is created to give depth to the painting.

The delicately graduated color transitions typical of that French master can also be seen to a certain extent in Møller, who has furthermore aimed at a classical color scheme such as that of the 17th-century Dutch landscape painters: a brownish or reddish foreground moves into a green middle distance, ending in the far distance with light blue. These painterly effects create a sense of perspective cohesion and, when successful, make the picture stand like some pulsating organism.

S.L.

¹Human or animal figures added as subordinate elements to the painting of a landscape.

²*Repoussage* in a painting is an object in the fore- or middle ground, emphasizing the depth of the perspective.