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JAN MIENSE MOLENAER

Haarlem 1610 – 1668

A Boy Holding a Tankard and Pipe.

Oil on Panel, 52 x 43.2 cm

Signed on barrel: *I MOLENAER*



Provenance: Private Collection, England (“a titled gentleman”);
His sale, Sotheby’s, Amsterdam, May 9, 1995, lot 55;
David Koetser Gallery, Zurich, exhibited at TEFAF, Maastricht 1996, and
where acquired by;
Private Collection, Virginia, 1996 until the present time.

Exhibited: Raleigh, North Carolina, North Carolina Museum of Art, *Jan Miense Molenaer, Painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, October 13 – December 29, 2002.

Literature: Dennis P. Weller, “Boy Holding a Tankard and Pipe” in *Jan Miense Molenaer, Painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, North Carolina Museum of Art, 2002, pp. 62–65, no. 1, illustrated in colour.

The below is an abbreviation of the catalogue entry written by Dennis P. Weller for the exhibition Jan Miense Molenaer, Painter of the Dutch Golden Age held at the North Carolina Museum of Art in 2002.

Undated but fully signed, *Boy Holding a Tankard and Pipe* can be counted among Molenaer’s earliest pictures. The subject is one the painter turned to often during the first decade of his career. Its composition, in which a full-length figure occupies a simple domestic interior, was also an early favorite. Although the painter clearly was responding to a larger Haarlem tradition then in vogue, he nevertheless imparted qualities upon this wayward youth that set his art apart from that of his colleagues. [1] The promise shown in this youthful picture would soon be realized, as Molenaer quickly crafted a unique and innovative artistic personality in the years to follow.

In a darkened room, a seated boy warms himself next to a fire. Wearing a tattered hat, dust-colored knee britches, and a bright red jacket, he holds a pipe in his left hand and a tankard in his right. In spite of the boy’s disheveled appearance and bad behavior – indulging in alcohol and tobacco – Molenaer painted the child in largely sympathetic terms. Absent are the overtly negative overtones associated with the majority of contemporary images of smokers and drinkers. [2] Since the novice *toebackdrincker* (tobacco drinker) Molenaer pictured was

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clearly old enough to assume some responsibility for his actions, the boy's quizzical expression provides for a number of possible interpretations. Does he seek approval for actions, or has the viewer surprised him in an incriminating act? Is the boy trying to act grown up by imitating adult behavior? Finally, does the passing innocence of youth (and his life) enter into the works' meaning? While many of these questions will remain unanswered, *Boy Holding a Tankard and Pipe* provides an important benchmark to judge Molenaer's painting interests at the outset of his career, around 1627 to 1628.

The dozen or so extant works Molenaer painted between about 1627 and 1630, including four pictures dated 1629 (see cat. 4.), contribute to a clearly marked stylistic development. Nearly all of these pictures employ one or two compositional formats; either full-length figure(s) in simple interiors or half-length figures in nondescript spaces. In most of the scenes, children are the protagonists, and like their adult counterparts, the youngsters share moments of joy and mischief. Among these works, *Boy Holding a Tankard and Pipe* must come prior to the dated pictures of 1629.

Early pictures such as the *Boy Holding a Tankard and Pipe* offer evidence that Dirck Hals played a role in Molenaer's artistic development. Nevertheless, the more colorful palette and waiflike figures found in the paintings by Hals stand somewhat at odds with the impression made by Molenaer's serious young sitter. Hals, however, did execute a number of oil sketches devoted to single-figure compositions in the late 1610's and 1620's that come closer to the Molenaer example. Typically, Hal's figures in this medium share with Molenaer's young smoker an immediacy and weightiness largely absent in Dirck Hal's finished paintings.

[1] Among those artists treating the subject during their years in Haarlem were Willem Buytewech, Frans Hals, Dirck Hals, Judith Leyster, and the Fleming Andriaen Brouwer (full discussion in the full entry).

[2] Many authors have discussed this topic, including Boegendorf Rupprath in Haarlem and Worcester 1993, pp. 246-51; and De Jongh in Amsterdam 1997, pp. 358-61.