

For immediate release

## EARLY MONDRIAN Painting 1900-1905

26 November 2015 – 23 January 2016

Private view: Wednesday 25 November, 6 – 8 PM

Press preview with curator Karsten Schubert: 5:30 PM



*Roadway and Farm Buildings near Arnhem, ca. 1902*  
Oil on panel  
14 x 10 ½ inches (35.5 x 26.5 cm)  
Private Collection, London

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of early paintings by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) at the gallery's London location. Curated by Karsten Schubert, the exhibition will provide a concise view of the artist's figurative landscape paintings from 1900-1905, highlighting the period prior to his involvement with De Stijl and Neo-Plasticism, for which he is most known. The selection of works, which depict the Dutch countryside outside of Amsterdam, reflect Mondrian's lifelong interest in nature and represent some of the earliest examples in his evolution toward increasingly geometric abstractions. This is the first exhibition ever to focus on this particular period of Mondrian's oeuvre, and the first presentation of the artist's work at the gallery.

The dense, small-scale paintings included in this exhibition mark a highly prolific period in Mondrian's engagement with figurative landscape painting—an early but deeply significant stage in the artist's methodical progression from naturalistic representation to complete grid-based abstraction. Prior to moving to Paris in 1911 at age 39, Mondrian spent the early part of his life in his native country of the Netherlands, where he attended the National Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam from 1892 to 1897. While landscape painting was discouraged at the Academy in favor of still lifes or figure studies, Mondrian spent much of his free time exploring and sketching the countryside around Amsterdam, focusing in particular on trees, canals, irrigation ditches, and farm buildings, which he rendered on paper and canvas with dynamic realism. As he remarked later in his career, "Nature (or what I see) inspires me, gives me, as it gives all painters, the emotion which brings forth creative élan, but I am seeking to approach truth as closely as possible, and to abstract everything from it until I reach the foundations (always visible foundations!) of things. That for me is truth..."<sup>1</sup> His paintings, which were executed both *en plein air* and in the studio, employ thick pigmented strokes applied with great virtuosity, revealing a style that is at once free and highly constructed.

Included in the exhibition are a series of paintings executed between 1900 and 1902 that depict a single tree foregrounded against a canal or irrigation ditch that recedes into the background. While employing a highly naturalistic style, Mondrian abstracts the scenes by virtually eliminating the horizon line, thereby increasing the flat, planar quality of the land and water. In several other paintings, the horizon line is so emphatically rendered that it appears to bisect the canvas, as in *Polder Landscape with Silhouetted Young Tree* (1900-1901); *Beach Scene* (ca. 1900-1902); and *Black and White Heifer* (1904).

Part of a group of paintings that Mondrian produced depicting country barns and houses, *A Farmhouse Behind a Fence* (ca. 1904) is characterised by the loose rhythm of verticals and horizontals of a wooden fence, behind which a farmhouse articulated in flat planes dominates the background. Mondrian later maintained that this and similar works were examples of his evolution to abstraction, remarking, "Was it by chance that [the founders of Neo-Plasticism] found such an appropriate subject through which to express their feeling for determinate relationships in an unforshortened (nonperspectival) view of a farmhouse, with its mathematical articulation of planes (large doors and groupings of windows) and its primary (basic) colours?"<sup>2</sup> As explored in this exhibition, Mondrian's early works embody both the roots of traditional Dutch landscape painting, characterized by naturalistic observation, and the foundations of his later grid-based compositions that exemplified his radical contributions to Neo-Plasticism and the De Stijl movement.

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A fully illustrated catalogue with essays by art historian Richard Shiff, curator Karsten Schubert, and Gemeentemuseum Den Haag curator Hans Janssen is forthcoming from Ridinghouse.

<sup>1</sup> Mondrian, letter to art teacher H.P. Bremmer, dated 1914, quoted in Hans Janssen and Joop M. Joosten, eds., *Mondrian, 1892-1914: The Path to Abstraction* (Zwolle, the Netherlands; Fort Worth, Texas; and Paris: Waanders Publishers; Kimbell Art Museum; and Réunion des musées nationaux, 2002), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Mondrian, "Het Bepaalde en het Onbepaalde," originally published in *De Nieuwe Beelding in de schilderkunst* 2 (1918-19), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 90.

**For all press enquiries and to RSVP to the 25 November press preview, contact**

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**Karsten Schubert** is a gallerist and publisher based in London. In 1986 he founded the eponymous London gallery, where he has championed international contemporary artists, focusing in particular on artists from the United Kingdom. In 1995, Schubert established the publishing company Ridinghouse, a London-based press that is dedicated to publishing art writing and criticism. Schubert is an Advisory Board member of Drawing Room, London, and a Faculty of the Fine Arts member of The British School at Rome. His books include *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present* (2000) and *Room 225-6: A Novel* (2014).