



Taschen
BRUEGEL - OUTLET

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Brossurato

185x230, 96 pp.

Italiano

OUT3822808719

~~8,00€~~ **4,00€>**

Disponibilità Immediata

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In un periodo in cui la maggior parte degli artisti erano occupati con opere a soggetto mitologico o religioso, il grande maestro fiammingo Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569) si dedicò a ritrarre il quotidiano. La maggior parte delle 45 opere di Bruegel sopravvissute fino ai giorni nostri, e tutte riprodotte in questo libro, rappresentano la vita di tutti i giorni nei piccoli centri rurali o nelle campagne del sedicesimo secolo.

#arte



Antwerp: a Booming City

We know neither where nor precisely when Bruegel was born. There were no state birth registers, and church baptismal records were more the exception than the rule. The first written mention of "Poeter Brueghels" dates from 1551, when he was enrolled as a master in the Guild of St. Luke in Antwerp. New masters were usually between 21 and 26 years of age, so Bruegel could have been born between 1525 and 1530. To put this in perspective, it would be some fifty years before Rubens (1577) and some eighty years before Rembrandt (1606) were born.

Bruegel's birthplace is assumed to have been Breda or some nearby village with a name similar to that of the painter. He would settle down twice in especially wealthy cities, first in Antwerp and later in Brussels, the residence of the Habsburg Spanish regent.

Antwerp was the city with the highest growth rate in Europe, the new financial and economic centre of the western world, the focal point for businessmen from many countries. The discovery of the sea routes via Africa to Asia, and over the Atlantic to America, had helped Antwerp to a position of prominence, with the old trade routes via the Mediterranean losing and the ports along the Atlantic coast gaining in importance. Antwerp was also favourably situated for north-south traffic, involving such goods as silk and spices from the Middle East, grain from the Baltic countries, wool from England. Artists and craftsmen also profited from the turnover of goods and rapid financial transactions. It is believed that 360 painters were at work in Antwerp in 1560, an unusually high number. Given a population of some 89,000 inhabitants (the figure for 1569), this would work out at approximately one painter per 250 citizens. For many decades, there was no better place for painters to be north of the Alps than in Antwerp.

The painters' exceptionally high numbers also made them particularly crisis-prone, however. A temporary economic slump could have been the reason for Bruegel's journey to Italy in 1552. There are no written records of this journey, but we do have sketches, drawings and paintings which bear witness to its having taken place. Virtually every contemporary painter went travelling, visiting Venice, Florence, and Rome to learn from the pictures of the Italian masters and especially to study the works of antiquity. Many of these Netherlands painters, as "Romanists", brought Renaissance ideas and ideals back with them to the north. Bruegel was not one of them, however; he returned to Antwerp from Italy in 1554, to stay there until 1562.

The boom-town atmosphere of the rapidly growing city will have been frightening for many of its inhabitants. The people of the 16th century were accustomed to life in small, manageable communities in which the population was relatively stable and everyone knew everyone else. This was not the case in the metropolis of world trade. The population of Antwerp well-nigh doubled between 1500 and 1569. Some one thousand souls of this host were foreigners, speaking different languages and practising different customs; they were watched with suspicion. The loss of church



Skating outside St. George's Gate (detail), 1559

Antwerp was to develop in the 16th from a small port to Europe's busiest. Artists also profited from its social transactions. Bruegel lived 1554 to 1563.

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The Tower of Babel (detail), 1563
Foreign merchants, new religions, and the city's rapid growth led to orientation and communication in an allegory for this situation was biblical account of the Tower of Babel tended to reach up to heaven, it is God, who stripped humankind of its common language, thereby preventing completion of the tower's construction.