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First Impressions: Hieronymus Bosch



Synopsis

This biography of the great 15th century Dutch painter examines the social and moral climate of his age. The author explains what each work may have meant in Bosch's time, challenging the 20th-century point of view. Part of a series developed for young readers on the lives of the great artists.

Book Information

Series: First Impressions

Hardcover: 92 pages

Publisher: Harry N. Abrams; First Edition edition (September 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0810931389

ISBN-13: 978-0810931381

Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.5 x 10.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #2,873,485 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #25 in [Books > Teens > Art, Music & Photography > Art > Painting](#) #73 in [Books > Teens > Art, Music & Photography > Art > History](#) #107 in [Books > Teens > Art, Music & Photography > Art > Biographies](#)

Customer Reviews

This biography of 15th-century Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch is written and designed especially for young readers (ages 10-15). While not much is known about the life of Bosch, author and scholar Gary Schwartz melds what little information there is with vivid descriptions about what life was like in the 1400s to convey, in particular, a sense of how religion played a central role in the understanding of art at that time. Schwartz presents his own and other scholars' interpretations of Bosch's symbol-rich paintings, but most importantly, he challenges young readers to draw their own conclusions. The book is illustrated throughout with carefully selected, enlarged details, and Bosch's most famous work, the multi-paneled Garden of Delights, is presented in a gorgeous gatefold. Although intended for a younger audience, this clothbound volume is produced to the same exacting standards as any Abrams book: the paper quality and printing lavish, and no attention to detail has been spared. Included are an index, a list of illustrations, and 36 of the 55 illustrations reproduced in full color.

Schwartz (Rembrandt, 1992) begins this lucid introduction in the First Impressions series to ``everybody's favorite weird artist'' by asking readers to stop reading and to spend time with the plentiful black-and-white and full-color reproductions of Bosch's work, and to think about what they see, in order to gain a context for his words. It's good advice, because the astonishing visuals--of birds, beasts, flora, and folk--will take up full residence in readers' minds while they cover Bosch's story. He was born around 1450 in the Netherlands, and grew up in a wealthy family of painters. Schwartz sees Bosch's work as deeply Catholic in origin, with ties to the proverbs and wordplay of his native county of Brabant, e.g., the profusion of metamorphosing berries in The Garden of Delights as a pun on ``Be fruitful and multiply.'' Schwartz doesn't shirk the obvious sexual imagery, nor does he overemphasize it, but places it in the context of Bosch's religious and historical milieu even as he admits that no one actually knows, with certainty, what it means. While the author is a bit wonky on Catholic practice (Catholics do not ``worship'' saints; altars cannot contain ``a real piece of the body of Christ,'' of course), he discusses Bosch's endlessly fascinating paintings with clarity and energy. Teenagers will pore over this one. (index) (Biography. 13+) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

I just love the paintings in this book. I found it in the library, and the front is very eye-catching, I check it out right away. Earlier I have only seen his paintings, never knowing anything more about the artist than that he is known for his religious art. It was nice to know a bit about the man too, the little that is known today.

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