



Tiepolo Pink

By Roberto Calasso

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The eighteenth-century Venetian painter Giambattista Tiepolo spent his life executing commissions in churches, palaces, and villas, often covering vast ceilings like those at the Wurzburg Residenz in Germany and the Royal Palace in Madrid with frescoes that are among the glories of Western art. The life of an epoch swirled around him - but though his contemporaries appreciated and admired him, they failed to understand him. Few have even attempted to tackle Tiepolo's series of thirty-three bizarre and haunting etchings, the "Capricci" and the "Scherzi", but Roberto Calasso rises to the challenge, interpreting these etchings as chapters in a dark narrative that contains the secret of Tiepolo's art. Blooming ephebes, female satyrs, Oriental sages, owls, snakes: we will find them all, including "Punchinello" and "Death", within the pages of this book, along with "Venus", "Time", "Moses", numerous angels, "Cleopatra" and "Beatrice of Burgundy" - a motley, gypsyish company always on the go. Calasso makes clear that Tiepolo was more than a dazzling intermezzo in the history of painting. Rather, he represented a particular way of meeting the challenge of form: endowed with a fluid, seemingly effortless style, Tiepolo was the last incarnation of that peculiar Italian virtue sprezzatura, the art of not seeming artful.

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Editorial Review

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Calasso is an archaeologist of myths, dreams, and impressions and a superb interpreter and scintillating stylist. In his latest foray into the realm of the imagination, he excavates one of the most persistent patches of *terra incognita* on Planet Art, a series of 33 etchings by Venetian rococo painter Tiepolo (1696–1770). Renowned for his graceful and radiant frescoes and paintings of the gods and goddesses of Olympus and allegorical fantasies, Tiepolo is remembered as a happy soul who worked rapidly with esprit. How, then, to explain his ironically titled *Capricci* and *Scherzi* (two types of whimsical musical compositions), which consist of phantasmagoric drawings of “psychic density” and dark implication? Others have tried, but none have Calasso’s erudition, wit, and intellectual agility. In this beautifully illustrated study, Calasso, like Tiepolo, makes his effort look easy as he decodes the motley crew of animals, mythical beings, and humans that gather to perform grave rituals in Tiepolo’s strange and brooding prints, metaphysically rich images involving the act of seeing and “lofty instruction” that occupy the hidden heart of Tiepolo’s glorious and covertly intense lifework. --Donna Seaman

Review

“Calasso has written a brilliant, eccentric, provocative, annoying, and thoroughly splendid celebration of a great painter.” —John Banville, *The New Republic*

“The next best thing to visiting Europe and seeing the painter’s work . . . Calasso is one of the most demanding and intoxicating critics writing today.” —*Los Angeles Times*

About the Author

Born in Florence, Roberto Calasso lives in Milan, where he is publisher of Adelphi. He is the author of *The Ruin of Kasch*, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, which was the winner of the Prix Veillon and the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger, *Literature and the Gods*, *Ka* and *K*. Alastair McEwan has translated more than seventy books of fiction and non-fiction, including works by some of Italy’s best-known writers: Baricco, Calasso, Eco, Tabucchi, and many more. He also writes occasional articles in both Italian and English for major newspapers.

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