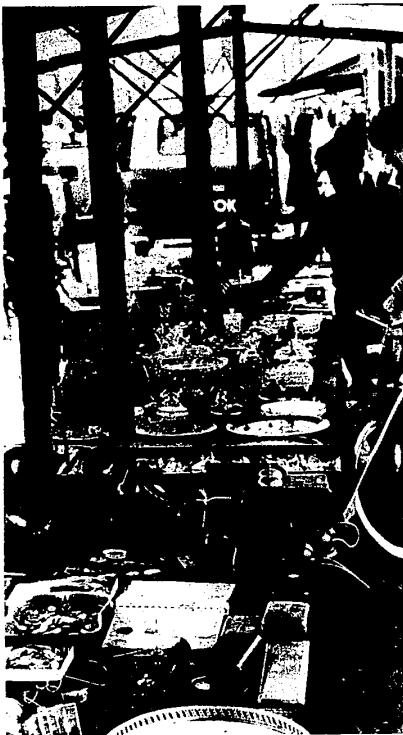


Thursday, February 11, 1982

## Amsterdam

### Sex, shoes and hot dogs — all at the big daddy of rummage sales



photos by MICKY JONES

The international language of barter continues at Amsterdam's giant flea market, which includes tables of china, crystal and knick-knacks.

**I**F YOU LIKE garage sales, you will enjoy the biggest rummage sale of them all: the flea market at Amsterdam. The slogan of this Dutch city is "Surprising Amsterdam," and some of the things you see will surprise even the chamber of commerce.

A Dutch housewife paws through a pile of shoes for a mate in the red one she holds in her hand. Across the square, a young American buys a fur coat to warm him through the winter. At the pornography stalls, a well-dressed businessman stares at four-color magazine pictures.

There are tables of brass and copper and china, piles of clothes on the cold concrete, a Dutch woman of hot dog stands and a German man who gives away watches for a quarter of a dollar, or whatever handful of coins that makes in Dutch money.

The goods come in on motorized carts, each sack holding somebody's life. "They" say that every man could write a novel out of his own life, and there it is in a sack opened before a greedy and curious crowd: the pair of baby's shoes, the child's painting, the box of silver spoons and 50 years of antiques.

WHEN A bargainer finds a real prize, bystanders don't need to understand the language to know what is going on. Her voice offers, the seller's voice rises, she shouts back in disbelief, and so the international language of barter goes on.

The participants in this drama are working people, women with shopping baskets, young men with long hair and beards, old men in old hats.

A toothless old dame with a few things on the ground speaks to me in Dutch and says we are deep in what might be called conversation about unemployment, the war and the good life.

She understands my "was ist" but she cannot reply in anything but Dutch

so she makes signs to help me understand and we decide on what sounds like "broodje gehab." It is a hot dog bun with tiny shrimps smothered in pepper and mayonnaise. It is delicious.

AS WE EAT, I see the film-flam man set up his table in the only cleared space left in the acre of concrete, near the rock where young travelers buy fur coats for the winter.

The table is up in one motion, the stacked trays come out of a suitcase like magic and the people gather one by one to hear his chatter.

They smile in disbelief because they know he is a con man, but it is fun to be seen him so they stay, and sooner or later they buy. I cannot understand the words but the meaning is clear enough.

It is the first wash of the day for a guilder. "I will love you

here and let me give you a kiss.

Don't be shy. See how she blaches. Now

isn't she the prettiest lady here? What's this? A boy without a pen in his pocket.

A gift, a gift."

By now, the one-by-one have made a crowd pressing forward with a special look on each face: "I know you will

cheat us, and naturally I am too smart to be cheated, but . . . well . . . maybe it is a good buy just this one time."

I DO NOT buy, except for a very small gift, and I am not a market

looking for something else. Memories.

I brought them all home as gifts to myself, the Dutch farmer, the broodje man, the film-flam man.

Even when you talk with your hands and your feet, you can really get to know a city at a flea market.



A housewife paws through a pile of shoes, looking for a mate.

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