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The Secret World of Walter Anderson

Hester Bass
Candlewick Press (Sep 8, 2009)
Unknown $17.99 (48pp)
978-0-7636-3583-1

It takes a certain amount of bravery for an artist to attempt to illustrate the life of a fellow painter. Equally, it takes a certain amount of consideration to make the life of a painter interesting to children. Bravery and consideration are alive and well in this remarkable book about a remarkable person. “There once was a man whose love of nature was as wide as the world,” the book begins. “There once was an artist who needed to paint as much as he needed to breathe.” The detail that Walter Anderson was born in New Orleans in 1903 will fly right through the ears of kids, but not that he ate stuff that floated up on a beach, or sailed a boat with an umbrella, or that he had a room his wife and children weren’t allowed to enter. Bass’s words provide just the right amount of bizarre and secretive to illustrate the adventure of Anderson’s life. Lewis’s realistic watercolors ground the amazing in the natural. Older readers will be fascinated by the author’s note as it describes through actions a mind both tortured and illuminated by illness. We can only hope that this beautiful book will spark further investigation into the life of a fiercely independent American artist that deserves more recognition. For elementary grades.
HEATHER SHAW (September / October 2009)

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