Willy's Pictures

Anthony Browne
Candlewick Press (November 2000)
$16.99 (32pp)
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In Browne's latest book about Willy, the chimp (or is he a boy?) takes up painting, and produces his own versions of several well known masterpieces. Willy gives them his own titles and "stories" consisting of one or two line explanations, but discerning viewers will recognize the painting being alluded to immediately.

Young readers will be introduced not only to the original works, but more importantly to Browne's own inimitable style of illustration. This sixth Willy book might be seen as an extension of an earlier title, Willy's Dream, which also involves famous art and the mischievous chimp.

While the plot is nearly nonexistent, readers will find themselves inexorably drawn into a most delightful pictorial expedition. Browne, who has been called "the Rene Magritte of children's illustrators," once again provides his distinctive perspective on art—an odd juxtaposition of humor, beauty, and surrealism that becomes a treat for both the eye and the mind. As the book ends, Willy is seen leaving his desk (with an ape mask on top of it) and walks to the fold-out gallery with miniatures of the original paintings—everything from Botticelli's The Birth of Venus to Edward Hopper's Early Sunday Morning. These are accompanied by Browne's handwritten notes that are brief but entertaining and informative.

From the front cover, on which Willy is painting a portrait of Anthony Browne himself, to the art gallery at the end, readers are once again drawn into the world of this astonishing and award-winning British illustrator.

LEIGH FORREST (January / February 2001)

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