



Popularity: ★★★★★



**Masterpiece** (Sep 2008)

Review: EBSCONovelist

**Author:** [Broach, Elise](#)

**Illustrator:** Murphy, Kelly, 1977- - ill.



**Series:** [Masterpiece adventures](#)

**Description:** After Marvin, a beetle, makes a miniature drawing as an eleventh birthday gift for James, a human with whom he shares a house, the two new friends work together to help recover a Durer drawing stolen from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**Genre:** Animal fantasy

**Themes:** Criminal **masterpieces**; Being a friend

**Character:** Anthropomorphic; Likeable

**Pace:**Fast-paced

**Tone:**Whimsical; Suspenseful

**Writing Style:**Attention-grabbing; Witty

**Min/Max Grade level:**4 - 8

**Lexile:** 700    **Accelerated Reader:** IL: MG, BL: 4.8, AR Pts: 8

**Persistent link to this record (Permalink):**

## Reviews

(selected)

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## School Library Journal:

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Gr 4–8— Broach combines discussion about the art of Albrecht Dürer with a powerful tale of friendship in a novel that is entertaining and full of adventure. Marvin is a beetle, and he and his family live in the Manhattan kitchen that belongs to the Pompaday family. When James receives a pen-and-ink drawing set for his 11th birthday, Marvin discovers that he is a bug with artistic talent. Although he can't speak to James, they soon bond in a true interspecies friendship, and their escapades begin. Because of Marvin's wonderful drawing, presumed to be James's work, the boy is recruited to create a fake Dürer for the Metropolitan Museum of Art to help trap an art thief. Marvin produces the forgery, but he soon realizes that the original artwork is in danger. Only by placing his life on the line and relying on James's help can he save the masterpiece . Broach's projection of beetle life, complete with field trips to the family's solarium and complex uses of human discards for furniture and meals, is in the best tradition of Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* (Harcourt, 1953) and similar classic looks at miniature life. Murphy's illustrations add perspective and humor , supporting the detailed narrative. A masterpiece of storytelling.—Beth L. Meister, Milwaukee Jewish Day School, WI --Beth L. Meister (Reviewed October 1 , 2008) (School Library Journal, vol 54, issue 10, p140)

## Publishers Weekly:

*/\* Starred Review \*/* With overtones of *Chasing Vermeer* and *The Borrowers*, this inventive mystery involves two families that inhabit the same Manhattan apartment: the Pompadays—a slick, materialistic couple, their infant son and thoughtful James, from the wife's previous marriage—and a family of beetles, who live behind the kitchen sink and watch sympathetically as James's charms go unappreciated. Careful though the beetles are to stay hidden, boy beetle Marvin crosses the line, tempted by a pen-and-ink set James receives for his 11th birthday. Marvin draws an intricate picture and then identifies himself to a delighted James as the artist. Before James can hide Marvin's picture, Mrs. Pompaday loudly proclaims her son's talent and even James's

laid-back artist dad compares the work with the drawings of Albrecht Dürer. A trip to a Dürer exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art follows, James stowing Marvin in a pocket; before long a curator is asking James to forge a Dürer miniature of Fortitude as part of an elaborate plan to catch an art thief (can a tiny virtue defeat big lies?). Broach (*Shakespeare's Secret*) packs this fast-moving story with perennially seductive themes: hidden lives and secret friendships, miniature worlds lost to disbelievers. Philosophy pokes through, as does art appreciation (one curator loves Dürer for "his faith that beauty reveals itself, layer upon layer, in the smallest moments"), but never at the expense of plot. In her remarkable ability to join detail with action, Broach is joined by Murphy (*Hush, Little Dragon*), who animates the writing with an abundance of b&w drawings. Loosely implying rather than imitating the Old Masters they reference, the finely hatched drawings depict the settings realistically and the characters, especially the beetles, with joyful comic license. This smart marriage of style and content bridges the gap between the contemporary beat of the illustrations and Renaissance art. Broach and Kelly show readers something new, and, as Marvin says, "When you [see] different parts of the world, you [see] different parts of yourself." Ages 8–13. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed August 25, 2008) (*Publishers Weekly*, vol 255, issue 34, p74)

### **Kirkus:**

Eleven-year-old James Terik isn't particularly appreciated in the Pompaday household. Marvin, a beetle who lives happily with his "smothering, overinvolved relatives" behind the Pompadays' kitchen sink, has observed James closely and knows he's something special even if the boy's mother and stepfather don't. Insect and human worlds collide when Marvin uses his front legs to draw a magnificent pen-and-ink miniature for James's birthday. James is thrilled with his tiny new friend, but is horrified when his mother sees the beetle's drawing and instantly wants to exploit her suddenly special son's newfound talents. The web further tangles when the Metropolitan Museum of Art enlists James to help catch a thief by forging a miniature in the style of Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. Delightful intricacies of beetle life—a cottonball bed, playing horseshoes with staples and toothpicks—blend seamlessly with the suspenseful caper as well as the sentimental story of a complicated-but-rewarding friendship that requires a great deal of frantic leg-wiggling on Marvin's part. Murphy's charming pen-and-ink drawings populate the short chapters of this funny, winsome novel. (author's note) (*Fantasy*. 10-14) (*Kirkus Reviews*, August 1, 2008)

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### **Genre**

Animal fantasy

### **Pace**

Fast-paced

### **Tone**

Suspenseful

Whimsical

### **Writing Style**

Attention-grabbing

Witty

### **Location**

New York City

### **Theme**

Being a friend

Criminal masterpieces

### **Subject**

Art thefts

Artists

Beetles

Durer, Albrecht, 1471-1528

Family relationships

Human/animal relationships

### **Character**

Anthropomorphic

Likeable

Search