This handsome tome is packed to the gills with paintings, and while readers might disagree with any of Sister Wendy Beckett's choices (that's half the fun, perhaps), there are still hundreds of unforgettable works of art that nearly any reader can appreciate. Most of the pictures, even those that seem unprepossessing at first glance, are made riveting by Sister Wendy's quirky, personal narratives, in which the simplest of images is suddenly rendered a dramatic focal point. A perfectly ordinary Dutch scene by Hendrick Avercamp--Frozen River, 1620--shows people going about their business on a lively patch of ice where children play hockey and adults chat and work. Sister Wendy seizes on a fishing hole cut into the ice through which a circle of cold, black water is apparent. The hole that has been cut in the ice can frighten us when our eye falls into it, and this is the only hint of the inherent danger of the scene, she writes ominously. In Anthony Van Dyck's magnificent portrait of Charles I of England, she observes of his regal hauteur, In hindsight we can see the tragedy: that a man so remote from common humanity, so superb in his conceit, must be
heading for a fall. There are bound to be some infelicitous matches in a book that is arranged alphabetically, such as the pages shared by Robert Mangolds hot, geometric Four Color Frame Painting No. 1, 1983, and Andrea Mantegnas profoundly reverent Dead Christ, 1480. And Rosalba Carrieras portraits look decidedly meretricious across from those of the masterful Mary Cassatt. But all in all, this is a page-turner with brief captions that offer guidance to any reader in search of the telling note that draws one to a work of art, whatever its era, style, size, or subject. -- Martha Hardin

Personal Review: Sister Wendys 1000 Masterpieces by Wendy Beckett
Sister Wendy is a masterpiece herself! This is my umpteenth art book, and it is by far the most enjoyable and informative.

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