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The Smile at the Heart of Things: Essays and Life Stories

A wry, thought-provoking memoir about art, spirituality, family, loss, and love

What are the essential ingredients of a creative life? How does an artist become an artist? For those of us who strive to juggle career and family, our nine-to-five job and our true passion, ***The Smile at the Heart of Things*** offers insight into the ways working people balance their world and reveals how religion, family, loss, love, and even personal struggles inform our lives and make them richer.

The key ingredients to a creative life, suggests author Brian H. Peterson, are nourishment, honesty, beauty, depth, and hunger. Essays with these titles form five sections of the book, within which Peterson gathers essays about art and artists, journal excerpts, and

life stories—"not the entire story of someone's life," he says, "but a story *from* life that is also a glimpse *into* a life."

Drawing on his experiences as a musician, visual artist, scholar, and curator at the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, PA, Peterson connects larger issues of creativity and the human spirit with his own search for growth and meaning. "For 15 years I've led a double life," he notes, working as an arts administrator and curator by day and pursuing his photography and writing by night. "This book was born out of a simple question: Why must the two halves of my life be so separate?" And it examines how he—like many other artists before him—has begun to pull together all the parts and pieces.

But ***The Smile at the Heart of Things*** is much more than observations and musings about the sources of creativity. Peterson draws a wise and frank portrait of both the sweetness and sadness of life, the difficult times and the celebratory. Even as he looks into the face of death, illness, and despair, Peterson always turns his stories to the joy and love that underlie all—the smile at the heart of things.

Brian H. Peterson has more than 30 years' experience as a curator, critic, artist, and arts administrator in the Philadelphia area. The Gerry and Marguerite Lenfest Chief Curator at the James A. Michener Art Museum, he was the editor and principal author of the major Michener publication *Pennsylvania Impressionism* as well as monographs on painters William L. Lathrop, Robert Spencer, and Charles Rosen. His critical writing has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *American Arts Quarterly*, *Photo Review*, and *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

As a practicing artist, Peterson has had more than 30 solo exhibitions of his photographs since 1980. His work is in the collections of the Amon Carter Museum, Denver Art Museum, Library of Congress, Milwaukee Art Museum, New Orleans Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.



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The Smile at the Heart of Things: Essays and Life Stories

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