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## Confluence

The Spirit and Place theme, *Inspiring Places*, propelled my imagination to the spaciousness of the infinite universe. Quickly, I fell back to earth, telescoping like a Google Earth traveler from universe to earth, through Indiana, Indianapolis, Broad Ripple Village, and finally stopping at the most inspiring place I know—the Indianapolis Art Center.

The Art Center has artists—lots of artists. Their very bones, marrow, and souls exude creativity. They are consciously or subconsciously informed by the mystery of the universe. By their very nature, artists are inspired, so I posit that *a place is most often made inspiring by those who are inspired*. Their creativity is nurtured and the spirits of all who dare to imagine are enlivened in this open-armed and beautiful place, which world famous architect and Indianapolis native Michael Graves surely intended with his design. Upon entering this building one experiences the energy emanating through the interaction of the architecture with the natural beauty of the sculpture and nature of ARTSPARK—an outdoor gallery that complements the indoor galleries. The confluence creates an inspiring place along White River, which reflects its own sense of serenity and evokes a type of spirituality. It is a fluid metaphor for a life-giving flow that serendipitously connects most of our cultural organizations from one creative and inspiring place to another, eventually connecting to downtown, and organically reflecting the important value this physical and artistic waterway brings to a thriving and humane community.

At the Art Center my imagination is triggered by the smell of oil paint and turpentine wafting through the air, the sound of chip-chip-chipping of a sculptor chiseling a layer of limestone, marble, or wood to release the figure within, while other aspiring and professional artists fine-tune their vision into one fragile graphite line or a sweep of *conté*, charcoal, or paint that carries the eye along an edge of an invisible line to define the human figure. I'm intrigued by the muscularity and danger of molten glass, molten bronze, molten iron—art forms that take full lungs, intrepid constitution, and a delicate sense of aesthetics. Metaphors

abound—the grit yet smoothness of clay as it oozes through fingers to center a pot on the wheel, which potters often liken to “centering one’s self”—and the weaving of cloth, seen as analogous to continuing the “tapestry of life.”

This energy, the critical mass generated by creativity in the hundreds of studio classes, elevates the passion of the staff, board and patrons (both eccentric and left-brained). It is enhanced by music, performance, film, dance, and conversation. International exhibitions and exchanges create dialogue and understanding through the language of art between Indianapolis and countries like Brazil, West Africa, South Africa, Cuba, and of late, China. This creates a flow from the mothership of the Art Center into the community that impacts thousands of inner-city youth who will inspire the next generation through their newly discovered creativity.

The inspiring energy continues into ARTSPARK, where nature and art converge through the landscape, drawing butterflies, beetles, and birds to the flora, fauna, and the thirty interactive monumental sculptures by Indiana and international artists.

Thousands of trekkers who walk, run, ride down or up the Monon Trail from Carmel to the Cultural Trail downtown are seduced into ARTSPARK and onto the Center’s Sensory Path by “sound art,” which engages all the senses as one passes through the pavilions that serve as arbors for the glorious flora of wisteria, lilacs, bittersweet, and lilies. They also discover the canoe launch on White River where herons, beavers, and boaters enjoy the peace.

We are drawn back again to art, water, and parks, realizing the value of what lovely spaces and environment bring to our soul. For me, the Art Center has been a crucible of inspiration that has fired my life’s work and will continue to spur my curiosity about the world—as it has been for thousands who, in return, continue to bring their own inspiration to that space.