

SHOOTING

Stars

Miami photographer Brian Smith turns artist portraits into a tribute to the arts

BY ELIZABETH RAHE

Anne Hathaway arrived for the photo session with her hairstylist and makeup artist, two wardrobe changes, her favorite cupcakes for the crew...and those eyes.

"She's got the most amazing eyes I've ever seen," says Miami Beach celebrity photographer Brian Smith, who shot Hathaway in a New York studio for his new coffee-table book, *Art & Soul: Stars Unite to Celebrate and Support the Arts* (Filipacchi Publishing, \$40). "I couldn't stop myself from staring...It was almost like there was a performance going on just within her eyes."

It was a dream assignment in March 2009. Hathaway was already a big star with a long list of credits (*The Princess Diaries*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Rachel Getting Married*), yet she was engaging and shockingly down-to-earth, Smith says. Her luster has only grown since then, with buzz already circulating about her slinking into Catwoman's catsuit for *The Dark Knight Rises* in July and flexing her considerable pipes as Fantine in the upcoming film *Les Misérables* with Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe.

For the *Art & Soul* shoot, it was simply Anne in black against a black backdrop. Her hairstylist, Ted Gibson, operated the wind machine to stir her silky, chocolate-brown hair ever so gently as Smith focused on her expressive countenance. "The only difficult thing about working with



Brian Smith photographs Anne Hathaway as her hairstylist, Ted Gibson, operates the wind machine.

Anne is editing afterward," Smith says. "You end up with so many wonderful frames, trying to pick the best can be a little bit of a challenge."

Smith was delighted with the challenge, of course, as well as the task of photographing 122 other artists for the project. The list includes famous and up-and-coming faces from film, television, music and theater, including Tony Bennett, Harry Belafonte, Tim Daly, Alyssa Milano, Dana Delany, Patricia Arquette, Samuel L. Jackson, Spike Lee and Zoëy Deschanel.

The portraits are accompanied by handwritten testimonials expressing the subjects' thoughts on the effect of the arts on their lives. Some filled a whole page; others wrote a few choice words, as with Kelsey Grammer's simply profound "Art questions." A

handful are quips, such as Adrian Grenier's "Art is Fart without the F." Most, however, express a deep sentiment, including Hathaway's "An act of creation is an act of hope. Art gave me my heart."

What brought so many famous faces out to be photographed in their own clothes with no compensation was the cause behind the project: The Creative Coalition, a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization of the arts and entertainment community. The book is an outgrowth of its ongoing campaign to ensure that the arts and arts education survive and thrive in America. A portion of the proceeds from *Art & Soul* will benefit the coalition.

Robin Bronk, CEO of The Creative Coalition and editor of the book, says the quotes present the unfiltered, innermost feelings of the artists, paired with Smith's captivating portraits. "We're so lucky that Brian is part of The Creative Coalition and that he lent his time and artistry to this project. He's a brilliant artist. He's a storyteller. He's a master photographer," she says.

The project involved 25,000 frames shot over two years at multiple locations, surrounding a variety of events, including the Academy Awards, Sundance Film Festival and The Creative Coalition's Arts Day on Capitol Hill. In each locale, Smith set up a simple black backdrop and, usually, a single light source, which kept the setting intimate, the focus on the personalities.

One of his favorite locations was Tony Bennett's art studio overlooking Central Park in New York City, where he photographed the legendary crooner in a peacock-blue jacket. After a few frames, however, Smith could sense that Bennett wasn't completely relaxed so he asked if he could photograph him with his paintings – including a beautiful portrait of his daughter,

Antonia. "He immediately lit up and changed into his artist's smock," Smith says. "After we had done a few shots like that, I asked if he would mind doing a few more in his suit jacket."

With Bennett finally at ease, Smith was able to get the shot, including the glint in the singer's eye. "Sometimes it's a case of getting people into their comfort zone. [Bennett] was able to focus more on his painting and the arts and less on the photography. It was nice to see another aspect of him outside of music."

There were people who kept Smith laughing, such as comedian Marlon Wayans (*White Chicks*), whom he describes as "just hysterical," and Richard Schiff (*The West Wing*) who had so much fun he stuck around to pose with other artists and then brought in his golfing buddy, Peter Gallagher (*The O.C.*). Then there were people who were magic in front of the camera, he says, including Ellen Burstyn (*Requiem for a Dream*), whose eyes lit up on cue. After the shoot he took her aside and said, "That was really fantastic."

"Honey, I've been doing this my whole life," she replied. "I should know what I'm doing."

Although The Creative Coalition enlisted most of the artists, word of mouth drew others. When Smith approached Samuel L. Jackson (*Pulp Fiction*, *Iron Man*) at Sundance, the actor stopped him. "I know all about this from Alfre [Woodard] and Kerry [Washington]...and I want to know why you're doing a project about the arts that doesn't include Samuel L. Jackson."

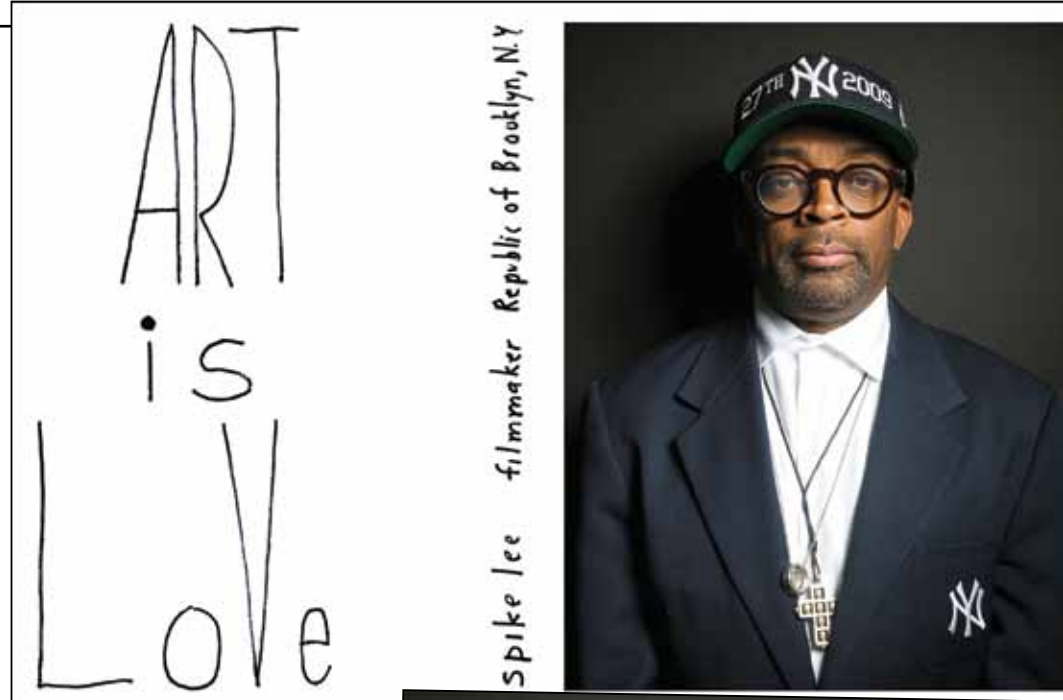
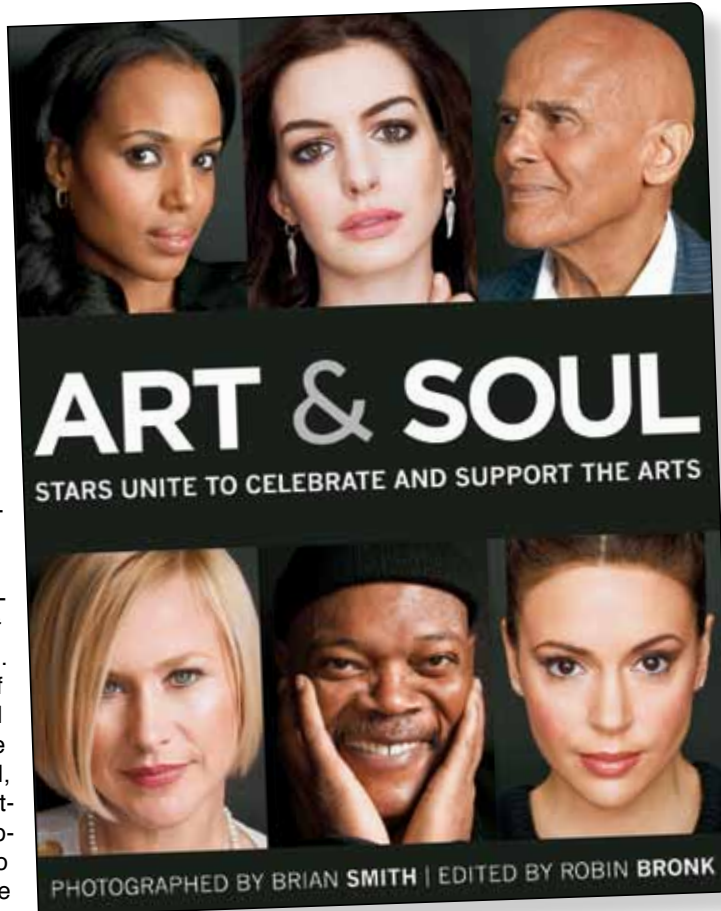
"I very quickly assured him that it needed to include Samuel L. Jackson," he says.

Smith often researched the artists so he could engage them in conversa-

tion. He learned, for instance, that Teraji P. Henson (*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*) is a descendent of Matthew Henson, the African-American explorer who reached the Geographic North Pole with Robert Peary's 1909 expedition, and that Kate Mara's (*Ironclad*) great-grandfathers founded the New York Giants and the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Of course, conversations in the photo shoots often turned to the arts. "We spoke about their childhoods and what led them to where they are today. Regardless of whether they grew up in small towns or large cities, rich or poor, their lives were all shaped and influenced by the arts and artists," he says.

Focusing on the people, rather than the process, is a tactic Smith has long employed in his portraits, which have included images of the famous and infamous – Richard Branson, Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Gene Hackman, Serena Williams, Antonio



Watch videos of Brian Smith's tips for celebrity and portrait photography and his project shooting superstars of burlesque at cityandshore.com



I grew up in S.E. Washington DC. As a teenager I always looked forward to the summer work program for teens. There was an arts program called Street Theater and that's when I learned to not only dream but that's where I fell in love with acting. I want this program back because it saved my life!

Thank God 4 the Arts
Teraji P. Henson



I grew up during the great depression and unfortunately my father died when I was 10. My mother had to work and raise three children my sister my brother and myself. My wonderful relatives would come over on the weekends and help my mother feel good. as children we entertained our relatives and in turn they encouraged us. They were impressed with my singing and my paintings. That was enough inspiration to last a lifetime for me, so much so that I didn't want to do it I had to do it for this day.

Tony Bennett

Banderas, nudist golfers and burlesque performers. His work has appeared in *Time*, *ESPN the Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, *People* and *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, among many others.

Tim Daly (*Private Practice*), president of The Creative Coalition, says it's Smith's ability to get beyond the surface that sets him apart. "What I love about Brian's photos is that they capture something personal, almost secret about the subjects. My photo reveals a side of me that is often hidden. The photos are like personal, private moments, stolen as a glimpse into who you really are."

When he photographed Kelsey Grammer, the actor was ready to wrap it up after Smith had fired a dozen frames. "Well I think you've got it now. You're fine, right?" Grammer said.

"I said, 'Well it's OK, but honestly, David Hyde Pierce [who played

Grammer's brother on *Frasier*] was much better.' As soon as I said that, I got the perfect sheepish expression out of him, like he was somewhat embarrassed to be upstaged by his co-star."

Anticipating a moment like Grammer's grin is a skill Smith says he learned from his experience as a news photographer, including five years at *The Miami Herald*. In 1988 he was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for his photos of the tumult in Haiti. He had previously worked for *The Orange County Register* in Santa Ana, Calif., where his photos helped win a Pulitzer Prize in Spot News Photography for the 1984 Olympics. He has been freelancing for the past two decades, assisted by his wife, Fazia Ali, who styles many of his photographs. When they're not flying to an assignment, the couple split their time between the 1934-vintage Miami Beach home they renovated and a New York City apartment.

Smith also represents Sony as an Artisan of Imagery, an association that led to his first three-day shoot for The Creative Coalition during Oscar Week 2009. The project quickly evolved, leading him on this celebrity-shooting odyssey.

Along the way it has turned into somewhat of a crusade. Smith says he hopes that his photography and the wisdom of 123 working artists in *Art & Soul* will encourage young, aspiring artists and foster continued support of arts education programs. "That's why these people participated, so that future generations would have the same opportunities that they had." ●



Tim Daly

I AM ALWAYS ASTONISHED WHEN POLITICIANS TRY TO DE-LINK ARTS FROM OUR EVERYDAY LIVES AND OUR ECONOMY. EVERYTHING WE SEE: EVERYTHING WE WEAR: EVERY TOOL WE USE: EVERY CHAIR: EVERY AUTOMOBILE: EVERY TV SHOW: EVERY MOVIE: EVERY OFFICE IS CONCEIVED OF BY A CREATIVE MIND AND ACHIEVED BY ARTISTS AND ENGINEERS. ART IS ALL AROUND US. IT'S EVERYWHERE. OUR CREATIVITY NEEDS TO BE NURTURED AND SUPPORTED NOT JUST TO ENTERTAIN US AND BRING BEAUTY INTO OUR LIVES BUT TO KEEP US COMPETITIVE IN DESIGN, TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICALLY. MUSIC, PAINTING, THEATRE, FILM, DANCE, ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN. IT'S NOT EXTRA... IT'S WHO WE ARE.

TIM DALY / ACTOR

Shining a light

In addition to its mission supporting the arts, First Amendment rights and public education, The Creative Coalition (www.TheCreativeCoalition.org) has used its celebrity clout to bring attention to social issues. TCC members have participated in public service announcements for Blue Star Families (www.BlueStarFam.org) to promote suicide prevention in military families, and Be a STAR (www.BeASTaralliance.org) to combat bullying. Be a STAR, which stands for Show Tolerance and Respect, offers resources for students, parents and teachers to promote an equitable social environment for everyone. It was co-founded by the coalition and WWE. Watch videos about these programs at www.cityandshore.com.

Art questions.



KELSEY GRAMMER / ACTOR

Brian Smith's portrait tips for everyday photographers

■ The biggest thing is to let people be themselves in front of a camera, to capture life as it is. It's not all about

plastering a big smile on their faces. Catching people when they're in a moment of reflection can be much more telling, photographically.

■ Pay attention to moving near and far, rather than shooting everything from the same distance.

■ Watch what's going on in the background – it's just as important as what the subject's doing. You're looking for something that either enhances the photograph or at the very least, doesn't distract. Less is more.



Smith shows actor Taye Diggs (*Private Practice*) how the shoot is going.



For more information on *Art & Soul*, including the opportunity to share your thoughts about the importance of the arts, visit www.artsoulsite.com. To purchase the book at a discount visit amzn.to/saveart.