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Spotlight on Books:

My Favorite Things by Maira Kalman



American author/illustrator Maira Kalman's exquisite ode to beautiful things is the sort of book that fills one with gratitude for art; indeed, for one's life and for all the beautiful things that abound on this sweet earth. *My Favorite Things* began as a companion to an exhibition Kalman curated to celebrate the anticipated re-opening of the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum. While her book definitely plays a role in cataloguing some of the curiosities at the Smithsonian, *My Favorite Things* is also a memoir that attempts to capture and comment on the meaning of life.

We learn from the author that in the 19th century collecting was a passion for many and "cabinets of curiosities were all the rage". The Hewitt Collections are considered to be the basis of the museum as we know it today. Kalman enjoyed the great privilege of browsing and inspecting their collection choosing pieces for the exhibit based on one thing only – "a gasp of delight". The author asks and the reader considers her question – "Isn't that the only way to curate a life? To live among things that make you gasp with delight?"

Kalman's whimsical text and sumptuous, playful illustrations pay tribute to both beauty and function as, for example, the shoe illustrations coupled with her exhortation to "Go out and walk. That is the glory of life." Her description of a book read under the soft glow of lamplight is sure to delight any bibliophile's heart – "Calming Object. Held in the Hand". Kalman has a light and humourous touch and one finds oneself laughing aloud at such wry turns of phrase as when she describes a set of dolls made by Mexican nuns. "The nuns have sensational fashion sense."

Lyrical, luminous and poignant *My Favorite Things* can be enjoyed on so many levels – a quick read but a title to savour and to ruminate on!

- Review prepared by Deborah Bruser