

## Cotuit Show Offers Rare Opportunity To Touch Art

By JOANNE BRIANA-GARTNER

Jul 30, 2025

Home / Arts & Entertainment



The author runs her hands across “Spring Has Sprung,” an oil painting by Cape artist Joe Diggs. The piece is part of Cotuit Center for the Art’s current show, “Please Touch.”

I remember taking my kids to sculpture gardens when they were young (I’m sure they will tell you it was torture) and while a good many of the pieces were interactive, far too many had disappointing “please do not touch” signs posted next to them.

Why put a metal sculpture out in a field if you’re not going to let a child touch it?

And it’s not just kids who want to touch art. I’m a museum goer who likes to get as close as possible to the painting on the wall. Sure, I want to step back and take in the overall work, but I also want to see the artist’s brushstrokes, observe the layers of paint, stand

where the artist stood when the work was being made—and subsequently—give the museum docents someone to scold.



An art show where you can touch all the art.

A simple, but fantastic concept.

Cotuit Center for the Arts' "Please Touch: A curated exhibition by Maggie Van Sciver," does just that: encourage the public to touch every piece of work in the show, which is on view now through September 7.

Artists represented in the show include Michael Alfano, Christine Anderson, Sue Beardsley, J Dixon Bergman, Heather Blume, Varujan Boghosian, James Bowen, Paul Bowen, Clarke Buchanan, John Cira, Joseph Corneille, Caitlin Dailey, Joe Diggs, Michael Ernst, Abby Fay Smith, John B Flanagan, Taylor Fox, Gilbert Franklin, Jon Friedman, Gertrude Graham Smith, Liz Henry, Robert Henry, Penelope Jencks, John Kearney, John Keith, Marty Kelley, Mark B. Law, Michelle Law, Carl Lopes, Danielle Mailer, Jeffrey Maron, Yukimi Matsumoto, David McDermott, Dawn McKenzie, Deb Mell, Mary Moquin, Richard Neal, Nicolas Nobili, Kevin Nolan, Jackie Reeves, Paul Resika, Gretchen Romey-Tanzer, Rowland Scherman, Robert Scutt, Kimberly Sheerin, George Taylor, Ama Torrance, Nancy Whorf and Joel Wisentaner.

More than simply a few pieces of sturdy sculpture, “Please Touch” fills both the upstairs and downstairs gallery spaces at the center. Van Sciver has included works from well-respected Cape artists as well as pieces by unknown artists, such as an African ceremonial necklace, a Kuba King’s dance mask and a wooden angel that was once a ship’s masthead.

In her opening remarks, Van Sciver said that the inspiration for the show came from childhood visits to the Barnes Foundation, a museum in Philadelphia founded by art collector Albert C. Barnes. The collection includes works by European masters such as Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso, along with African masks and sculpture, decorative metalwork and furniture.

“Growing up, I loved everything about visiting the Barnes,” Van Sciver said, “except for one thing: the guards. They were intimidating men, stationed in every room, selected for their stern presence, and they made it their mission to keep visitors at least a yard away from the art at all times.”

While the children who were at the show’s opening had fewer inhibitions, many adults were hesitant, despite the show’s name, to touch the artwork, having been conditioned all our lives to be good museum goers and to “look with your eyes.” I saw people reach out tentatively, warming up to the idea that museum security was not about to swoop in to “tsk tsk” us.

Museums are often large, boxy and antiseptic. It’s difficult to get a warm feeling from a museum. Touching the art almost feels like a violation and, of course, it is; it’s violating the unspoken idea that there’s an invisible curtain between the viewer and the art, and subsequently the artist. Touching the art gives new meaning to the phrase, “experience art.”



There are 91 works of art in “Please Touch,” and many of them scream out to be touched, including Michelle Law’s “Alphabet Soup” with its magnetic alphabet letters that museum goers can rearrange on a soup-bowl-shaped canvas; Christine Anderson’s woven “Flutter By Pages,” a “book” created using an assortment of woven textured yarns and ribbons, each page a different color of the rainbow; Marty Kelly’s two stone works in cairn shapes that could be rotated about; Michael Alfano’s “Windswept,” an aluminum mobile of a man’s face in four separate sections that came with two soft mallets so museum goers could “drum” lightly on the piece; and Mark Law and Yukimi Matsumoto’s glass vessels that visitors could gently rock, causing lights inside the vessels to turn on.

Sue Beardsley’s “Grandma’s Had It” was a study in opposites, a squishy-looking fabric/knit sculpture with a stern-looking face and akimbo arms that seems to dare you to touch it in a “please don’t squeeze the Charmin” way.

Ama Torrance’s 10-foot-long white rabbit sculpture made of foam and fiberglass takes center stage in the downstairs gallery, giving the whole room an Alice in Wonderland feel.

Touching artwork answers questions that simply looking at a piece can’t. Is this metal cool to the touch? Is this wooden bowl as smooth as it looks? How soft is this fabric? Is this sculpture hollow inside?

The show offered a chance to get up close and personal with pieces by several recognizable Upper Cape artists: oversized tactile ceramic sconces by Kimberly Sheerin; Michael Ernst's Zen-like "Hanging Stone," a sculpture in limestone; and "Shield Series 3: Sentinel" by Carl Lopes, a piece made from acrylic, holographic papers and beads in Lopes's recognizable high-gloss poly resin finish.

While there were works that were created specifically to be touched and sculpture pieces that were interesting to touch, what brought me the most joy was simply touching the paintings in the show.

In addition to experiencing a work with another sense besides the visual, putting your hands on a painting is a visceral and intimate experience, a direct connection to the artist. Sometimes we barely touch the people in our lives, never mind touching a painting on the wall.

Imagine if you could go to the Museum of Modern Art in New York and lay your hands on Van Gogh's "Starry Night." I'm sure it would be electric, like touching the artist's soul.

It's a privilege to go to a museum. What a miracle it is to have priceless art on view for anyone to see. And of course along with that privilege comes responsibility; surely many of us have seen the online footage of museum goers in Italy's Palazzo Maffei, sitting on artist Nicola Bolla's Van Gogh-inspired crystal chair, breaking it and then fleeing the museum without alerting anyone, or the man who damaged a painting at the Uffizi this past June while backing up to have his picture taken in front of it.

There are good reasons why we need to keep our distance from artwork, so the opportunity "Please Touch" offers to reach out and connect is a rare and special one. I encourage everyone to take advantage of it.

Cotuit Center for the Arts is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 4 PM. Admission to the galleries is free.



**We are your  
APPLIANCE EXPERTS**



**SHOP NOW**