

# High Touch



1 Nearly forty years ago, futurist John Naisbitt coined the term “high touch” in his 1982 book, *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*. He defined it as humankind’s counterbalancing response to the impersonal nature of technology, or high tech.

Naisbitt claimed that the appropriate reaction to more technology is not to stop it, but to accommodate it, respond to it, and shape it. To look at it through a human lens.

*High Touch* brings together six artists who embrace technology as a medium and tool to research, ideate, and assemble their intensely handcrafted, resolutely analog artworks. Whether sourcing images from the Internet’s endless scroll or using digital processes to fabricate components of their works, they create highly tangible objects that transform the virtual into the physical.

The array of works in the exhibition are also unified by their ability to prompt a haptic response in the viewer—a palpable, tactile form of perception that engages senses beyond the optic. They elicit a range of visceral and psychological reactions that are triggered by closeness and proximity, and provide the immediate experience of texture, scale, and mass that is possible only in person. High touch art invokes the body through spatial nearness, asserts its physicality, and evokes emotion. It invites us to recover and hone our senses—to see more, to hear more, to feel more.

Danielle Andress creates work that places fast and rapidly circulated images into conversation with the slowness of weaving and the permanence of synthetic materials. Drawing from meme culture,

social media, and stock images, her nonfunctional weavings investigate our relationships with consumable images and objects. Andress exposes the irregularities of language and art in the digital age through works that marry the never-ending scroll of internet detritus with the archaic language of weaving.

The hand-carved and painted wood sculptures that comprise Conrad Bakker’s ongoing *Untitled Projects* series explore how objects function beyond their visual and physical state of being. The laborious processes he uses to create these simulations of everyday objects point to the physical act of their making, while their placement in consumer contexts and art exhibitions emphasizes the political economies and relational networks between people and things.

E. Winslow Funaki’s works in sculpture, video, and furniture design explore the gray area of identity and dissolve the line between art and design. They ask us to consider what happens when we encounter an object we simply don’t understand. Funaki uses scraps, castoffs, and leftover materials to create hybrid “in-between” objects that, at first glance, appear strange and placeless but whose form and function become more familiar through physical proximity and close looking.

Grounded in both the ethos of making and the expanded field of painting, Diana Guerrero-Maciá’s “unpainted pictures” are collage-based textile mash-ups that sample from her lived experience as a Latinx child of Cuban exiles and engage the intimate history of handwork. She transforms upcycled and hand-dyed textiles into hybrid works that occupy the slow space of making and destabilize the modernist grid by considering it through an empathetic, human lens.

Melissa Pokorny creates sculptural works that question ways of knowing the world and illuminate the invisible, intangible, and knotty attachments between temporal, geographical, and physical things. Her mixed-media assemblages transform a constellation of materials into objects that are strongly attached to and defined by their connection to place and time.

Jade Yumang focuses on the concept of queer form through sculptural abstraction and uses craft and fiber techniques as a haptic approach to world making. The soft, fabric-based sculptures from his *Open House Spatter* series—which are rooted in research documenting the shifting views on queer culture in the twentieth century—call attention to and retell moments in this history by giving physical form to archival materials.

In our hyper-mediated, screen-based existence, when true presence is often elusive, real-world encounters with artworks provide an antidote to the flattened experience of digital life. Situated where craft and technology intersect, where materials end and sensation begins, *High Touch* reminds us of the radical, transformative power of art, and of art’s ability to touch us.

Kaytie Johnson  
Senior Curator



- 3 Danielle Andress, *Untitled (Bowls)*, 2020-21; handwoven polyester with dye sublimation printing, handwoven glass beads, handwoven metallic and polyester yarn, battery-operated timer, and acrylic paint on wooden panel; 60 x 48 x 5 in. Courtesy of the artist.
- 4 Conrad Bakker, *Untitled Project: Blockbuster [The Corporation]*, 2006/2020; oil paint on carved wood; 15 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 1 3/4 in. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Conrad Bakker.
- 5 Melissa Pokorny, *Unmoored and Adrift in the Driftless (detail)*, 2020-21; aluminum wire, epoxy, acrylic, styrene, aluminum tape, aluminum foil, found objects, synthetic utility fabrics, dye-transfer printed textiles, and digital photographs mounted on aluminum; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

This exhibition is supported by the **Kohler Trust for Arts and Education**, the **Frederic Cornell Kohler Charitable Trust**, **Kohler Foundation, Inc.**, and the **Wisconsin Arts Board** with funds from the **State of Wisconsin** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**.