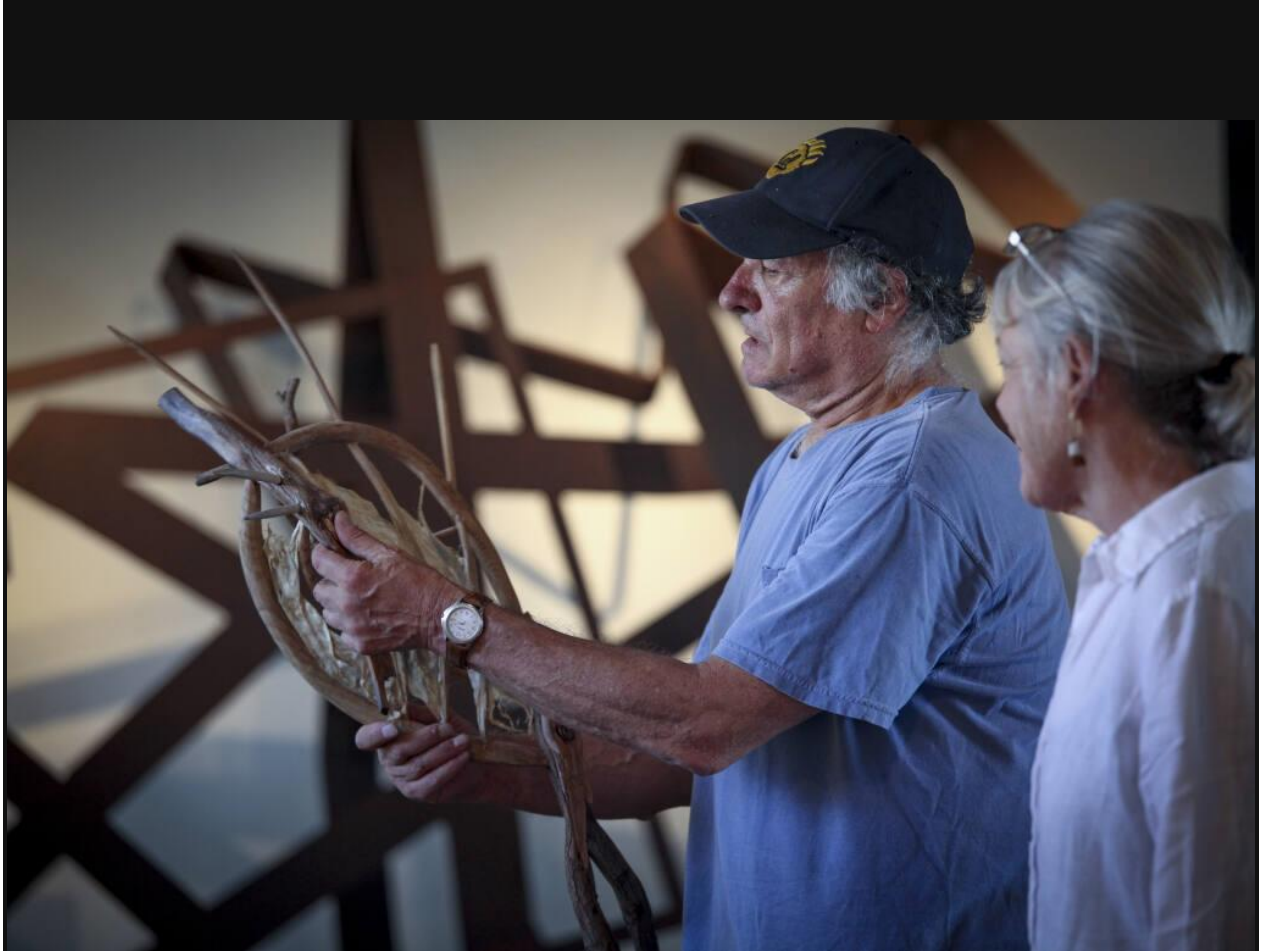


# Art show demonstrates, honors 'Laws of Nature'

Meet the artists of a new sculpture show at Petaluma Arts Center. |





Artist Jeff Key consults with curator Vicky Kumpfer on the installation of his work at an exhibit featuring local Bay area sculptors at the Petaluma Arts Center this week.

Monday, July 17, 2023. (CRISSY PASCUAL/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF)

### **DAVID TEMPLETON**

ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

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## **If you go**

**What:** 'Laws of Nature: Sculpture'

**Where:** The Petaluma Arts Center, 230 Lakeville St.

**When:** Thursday, July 20 through Saturday, September 9, Fridays and Saturdays from 12-4 p.m.

**Artist's Reception:** Opening night, July 20, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

**Cost:** Entrance fee \$5

Wood, stone, clay, metal and – though it may come as a surprise to casual gallery visitors – even plastic zip-ties. From such elemental substances come the many standing, hanging and gracefully twirling sculptures on display in the Petaluma Arts Center's new exhibition,

“Laws of Nature: Sculpture.” Curated by Vicki Kumpfer, and running through Sept. 9, this is the kind of show you should watch with your hands in your pockets, because there is something almost irresistibly tactile about seeing so much carved, shaped, melted and molded material tempting you to touch it.

But with one notable exception, you’d better not.

This is a show designed for looking only, and there is plenty to dazzle one’s eyes without engaging their other senses. In “Laws of Nature,” the point is to appreciate the artistry while contemplating the physical forces of nature that allow these human-made creations to function as art, assembly and architecture.

“There are fundamental truths called natural laws through which everyone and everything is governed,” declares a curatorial statement describing the show. “They are the laws of attraction, polarity, rhythm, relativity and cause and effect. With these truths, our world seeks perfect harmony for which all organisms adapt and find balance. This exhibition aligns with these concepts not only because sculpture abides by these laws but can conceptually express these natural phenomena.”

The seven artists on display represent widely varying approaches, each operating with a different set of goals and philosophies.

Barry Beach, who works primarily in wood, has exhibited his sculptures all around the country, from the Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito to the Long Island Foundation for the Arts and Sciences and Art Poetica in Brooklyn, New York.

“I am fascinated by the processes of transformation and time,” writes Beach in the artist’s statement on his photo-overflowing [website](#). “I use materials like wood that can document time and transform into many forms. Forms and processes in my work are metaphors for personal transformation. My adult life is a journey of learning and discovery, both artistic and personal, correcting what is broken, removing what is unnecessary, and trusting the process.”

Ceramicist Nuala Creed was born in Dublin, Ireland, relocating early to the U.S., but not being introduced to the wonders of clay until she took a ceramics class in her late 30s. She eventually earned a BFA from the California College of the Arts. Her strikingly fanciful, alternately disturbing and delightful sculptures have been seen in exhibitions in Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Korea and across the United States.

“My work is figurative and narrative, often addressing socio-political and environmental issues, which helps me make sense of our world and culture,” [Creed](#) says in her own artist’s statement. “Often I spend months mulling over ideas before I make a piece. Once I decide how to represent my idea I usually make a few pieces in a series. Working in series gives me a chance to build on the concept as my work progresses.”

Cheryl Coon, whose remarkably organic sculptures are made from the aforementioned zip ties, says she's inspired by the ocean creatures and other living things she's observed while kayaking in California and Baja, and on the Sea of Cortes.

"I am interested in microscopic organisms such as cells, spores, pollen and minute creatures that have the power to affect our physical well-being," writes [Coon](#). "The most recent sculptures investigate the attraction/repulsion – and the extreme beauty – of natural organisms. As abstractions of biological forms, they are indicative of many recurring patterns in nature – such as shells, spikes, thorns or fish spines – which are used by organisms for protection to repel intruders in a hostile environment."

Each sculpture is made using barbed steel, either tied or welded into organized "clusters." Her work has recently been seen at the Firehouse Art Center in Longmont, Colorado and as part of "EcoSculpt" at the Tannery Arts Center in Santa Cruz, and later this year will be exhibited at the Sanchez Art Center in Pacifica.

While Coon's creations often appear lighter than air, the stone sculptures of Penngrove's Edwin Hamilton are frequently so heavy they must be moved using cranes and trucks.

"I use a very architectural approach to my sculptures," Hamilton said in a 2018 article in the [Argus-Courier](#). "I use a lot of local stone," he explained, frequently beginning with large boulders pulled out of Sonoma Mountain.

[Hamilton](#) has been working with stone for over 30 years, having apprenticed in Europe. As a stonemason, he's partnered on countless ambitious projects. Within his work are echoes of natural forms, re-imagined to evoke images of castles, churches, spheres and mazes. His sculptures are fanciful and otherworldly, while remaining solidly grounded and, for those who live in and love Sonoma County, purposefully local.

"There are exceptions, obviously," Hamilton said, "but for the most part, I try to use all California stone."

Though some of Briona Hendren's sculptures are highly representational – such as the kneeling woman giving passersby the thumbs up at Sonoma State University – she enjoys using repetitive curls and twists, intended to suggest, as she describes it on her [website](#), "the mental loops we find ourselves in, recounting memories, re-hashing the events of what had happened, the means of trying to understand, that need to know."

Hendren has received several prestigious awards for her work, which has been exhibited at the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art in Napa, Paradise Ridge Winery in Santa Rosa and the Franconia Sculpture Park in Shafer, Minnesota.

Jeff Key uses all natural materials to create outlandish, sometimes gorgeously frightening assemblages that sometime look like specimens in a natural history museum on Mars.

"My work over the past 30-plus years as a sculptor, writer and digital media artist has focused on theories of evolution, with allegorical and metaphorical references to the past, present and future," writes [Key](#). "My visual and written work adheres to an underlying

structure of anthropological investigation focusing on sociology, political and physical science as well as psychology and theology. I see my work not as a body of definable theories but as a vessel of suppositions, to be pondered and chewed with a grain of salt and a cup of wonder.”

Key does with weird nature-based forms, Sean Paul Lorentz, a Petaluma-based metal sculptor, does for industrial decay, his work resembling the randomly scattered remains of a hardware store after a massive gas explosion, discovered by aliens 100 years later.

“My work is the product of an instinctive process involving personal experience and the perpetual development of skills within the medium I am using,” writes [Lorentz](#). “Each piece is cumulative of the knowledge gained from the ones preceding it, and represents the fluid evolution of my abilities and my own personal responses to the materials I am manipulating and attempting to master.”

Unlike many of the other works on display in the “Laws of Nature” exhibit, there is a good chance you will be invited to touch Lorentz’ kinetic objects of art.

“My work interacts with the viewer,” he explains, “requiring their participation for its activation and movement. With much of art guarded and untouchable, I break from the norm and invite people to play with my work, become a part of it, and become surprised by what their touch creates.”