

# Art comes to life at Katonah Playcare

## Preschoolers become painters for a night at the school's annual art gala

BY JEREMY BROWN  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For one week, the main hall of the Katonah Playcare Early Learning Center was transformed into a lavish art gallery. The walls and tables were adorned with paintings and sculptures created by the students in the styles of such artists as Paul Gauguin, Wassily Kandinsky, Marc Chagall and Alberto Giacometti.

The extravagant gala kicked off a weeklong showing at the school, highlighting the students' creations. Parents and children strolled through the makeshift gallery, taking in the children's elaborate artwork, as classical music, courtesy of a trio of violinists from the Ridgefield Suzuki School, filled the air. As families entered and exited the event, they had the opportunity to have a picture snapped at the school's photo booth, which came complete with props for young and old.

"This is fantastic," said Joelle Moreo, who has had three children go through the school. "It's really spectacular; the amount of work that goes into producing something like this is incredible. I was a teacher, so I understand. The children learn a lot. They're exposed to art. It's wonderful."

The annual event is the culmination of the school's "Art and Artists" program, during which the students explore color, different mediums and styles of art, and learn the works of different artists from a variety of eras. The goal of the program is to immerse the children in art, discovering

different ways of expressing themselves while also learning such valuable skills as decision making, self-evaluation and hand-eye coordination. Additionally, the students learn about the artists themselves, the styles they explored and the mediums they preferred.

"Some of the 2-year-olds walked around and said, 'Those are my Kandinsky circles!' And they really knew that he did circles!" said Jeannine DiBart, co-director at Katonah Playcare. "It's about finding an artist, and something about that artist that can connect with that child. And the teachers are really purposeful in the artists that they chose so that they can connect to the kids."

The show's highlight, stationed at the head of the room, is a massive display dedicated to the work of Paul Gauguin, the French post-Impressionist painter whose work influenced such artists as Picasso and Matisse. A schoolwide project, the wall showcased an interpretation of Gauguin's "Beach Scene" by all the children in each age group, allowing parents to see the progression and growth as the children's skills and understanding develop.

"Going from the 2s to the 3s and 4s," explained Gail Porter, the school's co-director, "they talk more about the actual artists' work that they're looking at. And I think it helps them build from one year to the next. They get a deeper understanding in the work that they do, and you can see the progression."

For DiBart, the evening is one that not only represents the culmination of a particular program, but one that

speaks to the overall mission of the school itself.

"I always tell people when they come in for tours that our mission is to not just be a place where you drop your child of and go," she said. "We're really here as a resource for parents, and tonight really made me feel like that's what people are feeling about Playcare."

Indeed, those in attendance were excited about the event, with many commenting on how it's grown over the years.

"I think Katonah Playcare is better and stronger than ever," said Colette Hourigan. "They prepare the children for kindergarten like no other school. This art show is just a testament to the wonderful teachers and how they encourage the children to be individuals and to really understand artists, but to make their own art in the way that they see with their own eyes."

Alicia Benedetto said it was one of her favorite school events.

"This is my fourth or fifth art show, and it's just so special," Benedetto said. "Jeannine and Gail have made it bigger and better every year."

DiBart hopes that the art show will only grow, both in its lavishness and attendance.

"I would like it to become an even bigger event and I've really been trying to make it more about the community," she said. "I really would love to see alumni families come and let the community know that they can just stop in and see our school!"



Christopher Hourigan and Jacob Li



The Moreo family



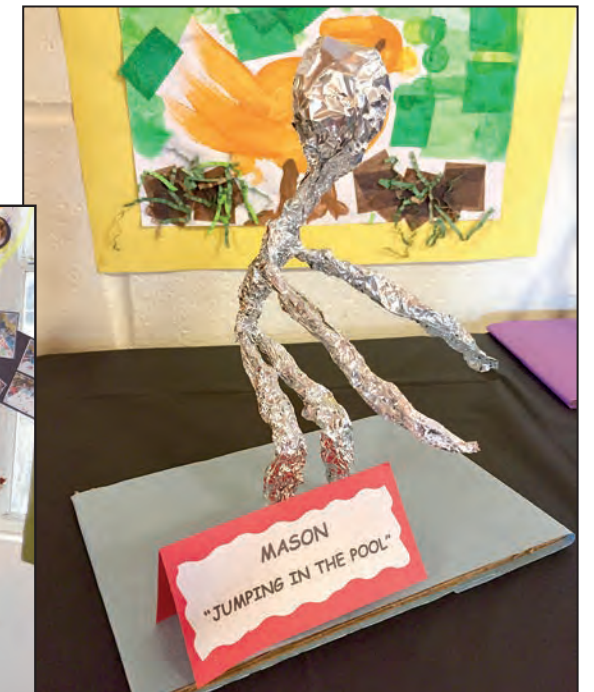
The Hourigan family



Performers from the Ridgefield Suzuki School



A block and crayon sculpture



A foil sculpture



PHOTOS: JEREMY BROWN

The polka dot photos were done in the style of Yayoi Kusama, and the teachers allowed the children to do their own dots however they wanted.



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