

Art Preserve Washrooms



The Arts Center's award-winning washrooms put Sheboygan on the map for having the world's best bathrooms, and the new facilities at the Art Preserve are no less impressive.

Artists designed and created the washrooms through the Arts/Industry (A/I) program, a collaboration between the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and Kohler Co. A/I is a competitive residency; artists submit a project proposal and interview to be chosen. Those selected spend months in Sheboygan working alongside Kohler Co. associates in the **pottery** and **foundry** to create their proposed art in the factory.



Artist-Designed Washrooms

Many A/I residents have never worked in a factory before arriving to Kohler Co. For some, even the process of casting porcelain or metal is an entirely new experience. However, Michelle Grabner, Beth Lipman, Joy Feasley, and Paul Swenbeck were all previous Arts/Industry participants in the foundry. They were invited back to design and **fabricate** the washrooms for the Art Preserve.

Michelle Grabner:

Patterns and Practicalities

Michelle Grabner trained in painting and drawing. In addition to her art practice, she is a **curator**, writer, and professor. Born in Oshkosh, WI, and now splitting time between Milwaukee, Chicago, and Waupaca County, WI, Grabner was selected to respond to the art and artists included on the first floor of the Art Preserve, which focuses on artist-built environments of Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

Grabner's washroom is titled *Patterns and Practicalities*. It reflects her interest in **domestic** patterns and textures, a theme in much of her work. She created thirty-six different tile designs of various colors, thicknesses, patterns, and sizes, which cover every inch of the walls. Most are ceramic, but if you look closely, you'll spot a few brass tiles. On the countertop and sitting on the toilet tanks are objects that look like forgotten cleaning products, scrub brushes, and rags—but Grabner actually cast the objects in ceramic! A janitor's cart, also made almost entirely of ceramic and complete with a ceramic mop and bucket, is stocked with what appear to be paper products and disinfectants. Visitors need to look closely to tell otherwise.

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Detail of Michelle Grabner's *Patterns and Practicalities* washroom installation at the Art Preserve, 2021.

Discuss

- Are any patterns on the tiles familiar to you? On what types of objects have you seen them?
- Think about the last time you visited a space outside of your home. Perhaps you enjoyed time at a park, library, restaurant, hotel, or museum. Who is responsible for keeping that space clean and inviting for visitors? What tools do they use?

Words to Know

Curator The person at a museum who selects the artwork that will be on view and who often also writes descriptions and additional information about the art.

Domestic For use in a home.

Fabricate To construct or create a product, often from prepared materials.

Foundry A workshop or factory for casting metal.

Pottery In the Arts/Industry program, this refers to the part of the factory where objects are made out of ceramic material such as clay.

Create: Gratitude Pattern Card

Draw inspiration from the patterned tiles Michelle Grabner created for the walls of her washroom and create a personalized pattern to embellish the front of a thank you card.

1. First, think of someone you would like to thank. You might think of someone that has had a positive impact in your life or someone who is an important part of your community. Maybe it is someone who you haven't thanked enough or have never shared gratitude with before.
2. Come up with a pattern that you feel represents that person or a pattern that will spark joy when the person receives your card.
3. Use a pencil and ruler to keep your pattern organized. Consider adding color with collage materials or drawing tools such as colored pencils or markers.
4. Write a note inside sharing why they are an important person to you.
5. Share your finished card with the person. If you don't know how to connect with them, keep the card as a reminder of the positive impact we can have on those around us.



Detail of Michelle Grabner's Patterns and Practicalities washroom installation at the Art Preserve, 2021.

Visit socialstudio.space to see additional ideas to incorporate in this project.