



arts / INDUSTRY

*A Brilliant
Collaboration*

Arts/Industry
**John Michael
Kohler Arts Center**

in collaboration with
KOHLER

About

Arts/Industry is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable collaborations between art and industry in the United States. The residency program is administered by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, a nonprofit arts organization in Sheboygan, WI, and hosted and funded by Kohler Co., a private for-profit plumbing ware company in nearby Kohler, WI. Founded by visionary arts leader Ruth DeYoung Kohler, Arts/Industry provides artists a place to make their artwork in tandem with the skilled craftspeople who work for Kohler Co. The program is rooted in the collaborative efforts between contemporary artists and industrial artisans, resulting in brilliant works of art.

Hundreds of artists have benefited from this celebrated artist residency since its beginning in 1974. Arts/Industry offers artists the time and space to focus on the creation of new work in studios located within the Pottery and Foundry at the Kohler Co. factory.

Artists need not have experience working with clay or metal, but an interest in adapting industrial processes to their practice and an openness to the factory environment is needed. Residents are exposed to a body of technical knowledge that enables and encourages them to explore new ways of thinking and working.



Cover: Christy Wittmer, Foundry, 2018.

Left: Dutes Miller, Pottery, 2023.

A Brief History

In the summer of 1973, a national ceramics invitational exhibition titled *The Plastic Earth* opened at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. In conjunction with the opening, a one-day seminar at Kohler Co. brought artists together with factory associates for workshops and demonstrations of industrial ceramic technologies. That seminar generated enthusiasm within the ceramics community and laid the groundwork for a residency program unlike any other.

Arts/Industry began in August 1974 with Ohio artist Jack Earl and Louisiana artist Tom LaDousa participating in a one-month pilot residency in the Kohler Co. Pottery. The two artists spent most of their waking hours in the factory and created more than 120 artworks from altered ceramic plumbing products. The result of this inaugural residency was the development of an ongoing, year-round artist residency program that hosts artists in both the Kohler Co. Pottery and Foundry each year.

With its emphasis on exploring new materials, processes, and directions, Arts/Industry allows for a great amount of experimentation. The residency motivates artists to engage in an exchange of creative ideas with the industrial craftspeople at Kohler Co., and strong relationships have frequently resulted because of this exchange.

Arts/Industry is a vital source of inspiration for the local and global art and design communities. The legacy of Arts/Industry alumni's creative innovations during their time in residence is visible in the works gifted to the collections of both the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and Kohler Co. These profound and beautiful traces allow current and future generations to enjoy and be influenced by the work.



The Residency



Artists have the opportunity to spend three months creating works of art utilizing the company's industrial materials and equipment. Artists-in-residence are exposed to a body of technical knowledge that enables them to explore forms and concepts not possible in their own studios. This emboldens artists to think and work in inventive ways.

The Arts/Industry residency program supports twelve artists annually, with four in residence at a time. There are three, three-month cohorts over the year. In each cohort, two residents work in the Kohler Co. Pottery and two in the Foundry to develop a wide variety of work in ceramic, cast iron, and brass.

Artists-in-residence have access to studio space in the factory twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In addition, they receive free industrial materials, use of equipment, technical support, photographic services, housing, round-trip transportation, and a weekly honorarium.

Facilities and Materials



The primary studio space for work in clay is located in the Cast Shop of Kohler Co.'s Pottery. Plaster, clay, and glaze are provided by Kohler Co. Artists use the company's strong, off-white, high-fire vitreous china clay. The clay is superb for slip casting and carving but is less effective for throwing and hand building. The slip is piped under pressure to the artists' studio spaces. Artists use plaster to make their molds for slip casting their work.

Pottery artists-in-residence have a range of glaze possibilities to experiment with. Color variations may be made by adding ceramic stains to a variety of clear and white glaze bases. Kohler Co. has an extensive Research and Development Laboratory where artists are able to develop glazes.

The Kohler Co. Foundry allows artists to cast or free-pour iron shapes. Artists create their own patterns from an array of materials and use resin-bonded sand to make molds and cores. The three types of iron the company pours—ductile, engine, and enamel—can all be used for casting. Welding and cutting facilities are also available at certain times.



Artists working in the Foundry also have access to the brass die cast area to cast forms in brass. In addition, the Enamel Shop offers the opportunity to layer enamel powders directly on red-hot iron in single or multiple applications. The Enamel Lab allows artists to experiment with and test the brilliant enamel colors available and mix their own custom blends.

Arts/Industry provides materials and equipment normally used in factory production free of charge to artists for the creation of their work. Tools and materials not normally used at the factory must be provided by the artists.

Arts/Industry studio technicians and Kohler Co.'s industrial craftspeople and engineers provide technical information and advice to resident artists. The artists do the actual work themselves. Assistants are not available unless participants make arrangements with the Arts/Industry director well before the residencies begin; in such cases, the artists-in-residence generally hire and provide remuneration to assistants.

Application Eligibility and Guidelines

The Arts/Industry residency program is open to artists working in all disciplines and at any stage in their careers. Applying artists need not be trained ceramists or metal sculptors. However, they must learn quickly and be able to do the labor necessary to create their work. Prospective artists will indicate their preference for working in either the Pottery or the Foundry.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to watch the artist videos at jmkac.org/arts-industry to learn more about the program and experience. Although not mandatory, artists interested in applying for a residency are strongly encouraged to tour Kohler Co. to help them understand the possibilities and parameters of the program.

Please visit the Arts/Industry web page at jmkac.org/arts-industry for deadlines and a link to the online application.

Review procedure

The selection of artists-in-residence is based upon several criteria: quality of the artist's work; potential impact of the residency upon the artist and their art; ability of the artist to work with JMKAC staff, Kohler Co. personnel, and other artists-in-residence; the ability to work within factory guidelines; and technical capabilities of the artist.

Applications are reviewed by a jury of arts professionals, John Michael Kohler Arts Center staff, and Kohler Co. personnel.

The artists' work

All of the work produced by artists during their residencies belongs to them. Artists are asked to gift two works—one to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and one to Kohler Co. Much of the work produced during a residency is photographically documented, and images are shared with the artists-in-residence.

Travel, housing, honorarium

Kohler Co. is in the Village of Kohler (pop. 2,000), WI, which is 50 miles north of Milwaukee and 150 miles north of Chicago. The nearest city, just five miles away, is Sheboygan (pop. 51,000), where the John Michael Kohler Arts Center is located.

Funds for round-trip travel to and from the artists' homes are provided by the Arts/Industry program, and artists-in-residence are encouraged to bring their own cars. JMKAC has a communal vehicle for artists' use if needed. Free, shared housing for the artists-in-residence is provided near the factory. Each artist also receives a modest honorarium for food and personal expenses. Artists are responsible for covering all expenses associated with shipping of finished works.

Upon arrival in Sheboygan, participants receive a thorough orientation to ensure a productive residency. Additional information about the residency is sent to artists upon their acceptance into the program.

Program parameters are based on available funding and other conditions and are subject to change.



Nicki Green, Pottery, 2019.



Jesse Harrod, Foundry, 2022.



Talia Mukmel, Foundry, 2019.



Cathy Lu, Pottery, 2023.



David R. Harper, *A Fear of Unknown Origin* (detail), Pottery, 2012.



Salvador Jiménez-Flores, *Foundry*, 2019.



Sarah Blood, Pottery, 2023.



Lily Cox-Richard, Foundry, 2023.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center



Founded in 1967, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center is a catalyst for creative exchanges between artists and local, national, and international audiences. Central to its mission are promoting understanding and appreciation of the work of self-taught and contemporary artists through curating original exhibitions, commissioning new works of art, offering interactive learning experiences, and presenting music, theatre, and dance.

The Arts Center's collection focuses primarily on works by artist-environment builders, self-taught and folk artists, and works created in the Arts/Industry residency program. Today, with approximately 25,000 individual works of art by more than thirty art-environment builders in the collection, the Arts Center is the world's leading center for research and presentation of this work.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is an independent nonprofit organization located in Sheboygan, WI. It is supported by corporate and foundation donors and its many members. The John Michael Kohler Arts Center and Kohler Co. share a deep commitment to the support of artists from around the world through Arts/Industry.

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jmkac.org

Art Preserve



The Art Preserve is a new facility designed to allow visitors to engage with the 25,000 objects in the John Michael Kohler Arts Center's collection of artist-built environments.

Through curated tableaux and storage, the Art Preserve answers the challenges of increased interest in this remarkable art form while safely housing the expanding collection. Artist-built environments are a unique art form encompassing spaces that have been significantly transformed by an artist to embody and express aspects of their history, place, or culture.

Researchers and the public, who were once limited to viewing the artwork only when exhibited at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center or on loan at other institutions, can view the collection year-round, year after year at the Art Preserve.

3636 Lower Falls Rd
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artpreserve.org

Kohler Co.

Founded in 1873, Kohler Co. has become the nation's leading manufacturer of plumbing and specialty products, as well as a major producer of generators and four-cycle engines. The company also operates a variety of successful hospitality businesses, among them the famed American Club resort hotel and the award-winning golf courses Blackwolf Run and Whistling Straits. Headquartered in Kohler, WI, one of the earliest planned industrial garden communities in the United States, Kohler Co. is among the oldest and largest privately held companies in the country. It employs more than 33,000 people worldwide, with approximately 8,000 employees in Sheboygan County.

Arts/Industry is a unique collaboration between the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and Kohler Co. This residency program is administered by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and generously hosted and funded by Kohler Co.

For more information

Online: jmkac.org/arts-industry

Email: artsindustry@jmkac.org



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