

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** or **foundry**, to create their proposed art in the factory.

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 living 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 of the sink and sitting on the toilet tanks, visitors encounter 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.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center



Artist-Designed Washrooms



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?

Beth Lipman: Wild Madder

Beth Lipman lives and works in nearby Sheboygan Falls, WI. Her primary medium is glass, but she also works with wood, metal, photography, and video. Her art has been exhibited and acquired by museums around the world, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, DC) and the Corning Museum of Glass (NY). Lipman's creations often include plant forms or **domestic** objects. Lipman was asked to respond to the first-floor collection at the Art Preserve, which focuses on artist-built environments in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

Lipman's washroom is titled Wild Madder, and visitors are greeted with a tile collage depicting over twelve hundred **flora** species present in Sheboygan County. The tiles at the front of the washroom are noticeably brighter and greener than the tiles in the stalls, which appear grayish, as Lipman ponders extinction of species. Lipman worked with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Herbarium to gather images of the plants and obtain actual specimens, which she used to make slip-cast ceramic copies. Those castings hang above the toilet tanks.



Discuss

- What plants remind you of where you live or where you're from?
- Beth Lipman does extensive research before creating art. What is a topic you would be interested in researching and creating art around?

John Michael Kohler Arts Center

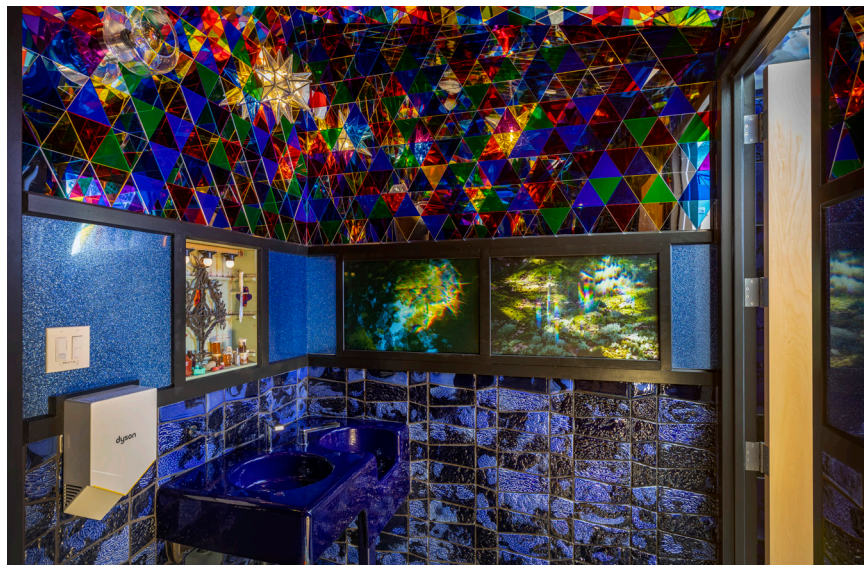
top: Detail of Michelle Grabner's Patterns and Practicalities washroom installation at the Art Preserve, 2021.

bottom: Detail of Beth Lipman's Wild Madder washroom installation at the Art Preserve, 2021.



Joy Feasley & Paul Swenbeck: Listen, the Snow is Falling

Joy Feasley and Paul Swenbeck are based in Philadelphia and often collaborate in their art practice. Feasley is an abstract landscape painter, and Swenbeck's work combines sculpture, painting, and photography. The displays of artwork on the third floor are large and **immersive**, which inspired Feasley and Swenbeck to create fantastical, immersive environments for the two washrooms on the third floor. They were particularly inspired by artist Emery Blagdon and his "Healing Machine," which is just steps away.



Listen, the Snow is Falling is the name of both washrooms designed by Feasley and Swenbeck, but each space is quite different from the other. The first washroom, playfully referred to as "The Ice Cave," features hexagon-shaped **stalactites** hanging from an angled ceiling. "The Color Room" next door has a rainbow of acrylic tiles decorating the upper half of the walls. Both washrooms have custom-designed toilets and sinks unlike anything cast before at the Kohler Co. factory. Much experimentation went into successfully building those fixtures; the failed castings of the toilets were ground and used in the terrazzo floors. The more time spent in Listen, the Snow is Falling, the more surprises are revealed.

Discuss

Think about a place that is special to you. It could be a place you go all the time or somewhere you've never been. It could be real or imaginary. Where is it? What colors, shapes, or textures are there? How does it make you feel? What makes the place special?

Create

Draw inspiration from the equilateral triangles Feasley and Swenbeck use in their washrooms and make connections to the geometric designs in the work of Loy Bowlin.

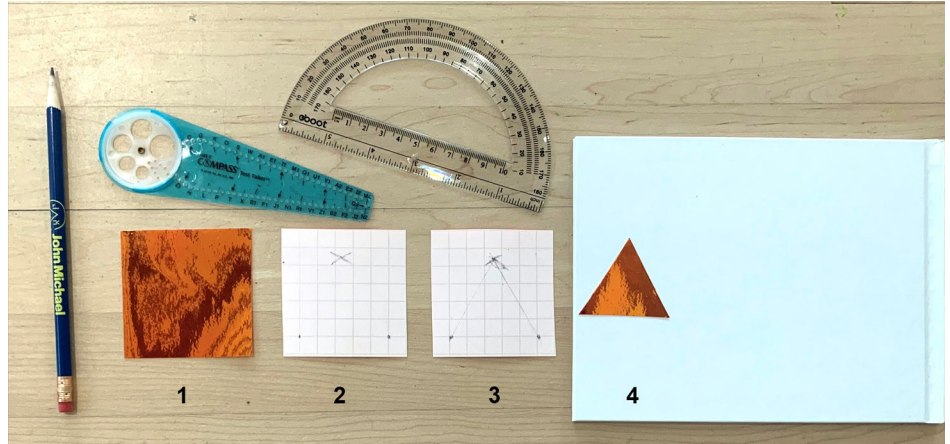
On a piece of adhesive-backed vinyl, first use a compass and protractor to create equilateral triangles or other geometric shapes with a pencil on the paper-backed side of the vinyl. Cut out your shape with scissors, peel the vinyl off, and carefully adhere to your surface.

You can consider adding designs to a sketchbook cover, a household object like Bowlin did, or perhaps on an object you would find in a washroom, such as a light-switch cover or tissue box.



How to draw an equilateral triangle

- 1 Choose a piece of adhesive-backed vinyl
- 2 On the back of the vinyl, draw two dots indicating the bottom points of your triangle. Then, use the compass and line up the center of the rotating circle and a point along the measuring side. Hold the center of the pivoting circle and place a pencil in the hole on the measuring side. Draw a mark at the top point of the triangle and then repeat for the other side of the bottom of the triangle.



- 3 Connect the points of the bottom of the triangle to the center of where the marks created with the compass overlap.
- 4 Cut out your triangle and choose a place on your object, or wait until you cut out more vinyl to arrange multiple pieces into a pattern.

Words to Know

Curator The person at a museum who selects the artwork that will be on view and 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

Flora The plants of a specific place

Foundry A workshop or factory for casting metal

Immersive In art, immersive spaces typically surround the viewer and may include many objects. It can be artwork placed in an existing space such as a room or home, a newly constructed space, or a space outdoors.

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.

Stalactites An icicle-like structure of calcium salt formed by dripping water from the roof of a cave

Terrazzo An old method of pouring an aggregate cement-like material, allowing it to cure (dry), and then grinding and polishing it to a smooth finish.



John Michael Kohler Arts Center

Detail of Joy Feasley and Paul Swenbeck's Listen, the Snow Is Falling washroom installation at the Art Preserve, 2021.