



EMMETT RAMSTAD: AFTER YOU

FEBRUARY 26 – APRIL 24, 2016

1. *You're Welcome*, acrylic mirror, magnets, permanent marker, 2016
2. *Fling*, paper towel dispensers, paper toweling, 2016
3. *After You*, donated soap nubs, soap dish, 2016
4. *Stall*, bathroom stall door, bathroom stall partitions, telephone, 2016.
5. *Community Soap*, soap, soap dish, 2016

Front: Emmett Ramstad. *After You*, donated soap nubs, soap dish, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

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ON NEGOTIATION: BELONGING AND THE POLITICS OF CHOICE

BY SUSANNAH MAGERS

Curator, Art and Public Engagement, Rochester Art Center

The instinct to categorize and compartmentalize is one of constant negotiation. The majority of social spaces are designed to support this, from physically demarcating economy and first class passengers on an airplane, to delineating women's and men's clothing in department stores. Participation in these systems is not only implied, it is conditioned—and depending on the circumstance, enforced. Informed by an interest in the history of archival practices, artist Emmett Ramstad's work investigates and re-imagines the navigation of these structures and perceived hierarchies surrounding our daily routines, as well as what he terms, "the intimate ordinary."

How do we negotiate the private and public duality of spaces, like public restrooms? Ramstad stages nuanced interior and exterior interventions with two specific aspects regarding the use of the third floor restrooms. On the exterior of the two restroom doors, signage denoting the space as gendered "male" or "female," has been replaced with circular mirrors that read, "You're welcome." This work, *You're Welcome*, 2016, functions as a coded invitation: interpreted literally as "you are welcome" reframes the experience as a matter of function, the preference to use a urinal or a toilet, versus a choice based on gender identification. While this work addresses access, the politicization and policing of public restrooms, and the notion of false privacy, it also acknowledges our tendency to choose what is most comfortable—and how those choices are mediated.

Inside both restrooms, *Community Soap*, 2016, places soap dishes with bars of soap on the opposite side of the installed soap dispensers. Introducing a choice between using the bar of soap or the liquid soap pump, invokes the notion of perceived sanitation; that a bar of soap might be more unsanitary because of others directly touching it. The process of holding and lathering the bar of soap engages a level of intimacy in that it brings you closer to those in the restroom before you—a covert connection to strangers who otherwise typically have minimal interaction with one another.

In addition to these interventions within the space of the restroom itself, *After You* includes a 30-foot long wooden soap dish sculpture (the work shares the exhibition's title) featuring joined soap remnants. Collected from individuals the artist knows, as well as anonymous sources—a collection box in Rochester Art Center's lobby collected soap for the month leading up to the opening of the exhibition—these soap remnants depict various levels of wear. Varying in color, shape, size, and scent, the soap remnants reflect and highlight traces of the individuals who contributed them. Engaging with the same visual and conceptual elements of repetition, quantity, and communal sourcing of his work *Domestic Partnership*, 2016—a shelf featuring 180 collected used toothbrushes of various colors and states of use—*After You*, 2016 addresses the relative comfort and discomfort engendered by encountering the used collateral of daily life. The viewer is confronted with objects and materials that have touched unknown bodies, provoking a consideration of constructions of cleanliness, and the connection to each other through an object that many use each day. This could also be interpreted as an intentional resistance to obviating identity—both the artist's and those who participate in the communal aspects of the production of Ramstad's work. In *Stall*, 2016, Ramstad recreates a bathroom stall, using reclaimed materials, but adds a mirror, and a working telephone. At certain times throughout the exhibition's duration, the artist will call the phone, speaking to whoever might be in



Emmett Ramstad. *Stall*, bathroom stall door, bathroom stall partitions, telephone, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

the stall at that time. Like *After You*, 2016, this work asks us to reconsider how we all participate in bathroom rituals, and if any of us are ever allowed to truly enjoy privacy in publicly regulated spaces.

Negotiation and participation are the direct, yet liminal, ways that Ramstad examines the sociopolitical constructs we interact with everyday. The work in *After You* offers up a contemplation of the following questions: Who is regulating privacy and public space? What are the rules that we follow because we think we have to? How do we craft our own sense of belonging in these spaces? Instead of focusing on the ways in which we are divided and separated, Ramstad's work encourages the viewer to imagine how we are connected through prioritizing the universality of function in the daily behaviors we all enact.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Emmett Ramstad is an artist whose work investigates the intimate ordinary through sculptural representations of bodies and their detritus. Ramstad lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota and has exhibited artworks throughout the United States as well as Amsterdam and Istanbul, including solo exhibitions at Minneapolis Institute of Arts and Rochester Art Center. He is a recipient of a Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Emerging Artists, an Art and Change grant through The Leeway Foundation, and a Professional Development Grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts. He has performed in productions by The BodyCartography Project, made costumes and sets for five touring contemporary dance productions and has curated and organized six gallery shows. His work is in collections at The Weisman Art Museum, MCAD and Second State Press. He is currently a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Art at The University of Minnesota.