

Elizabeth Keithline: “Puzzle” and “Keep It Together”

A Tolerance for Chaos is Helpful



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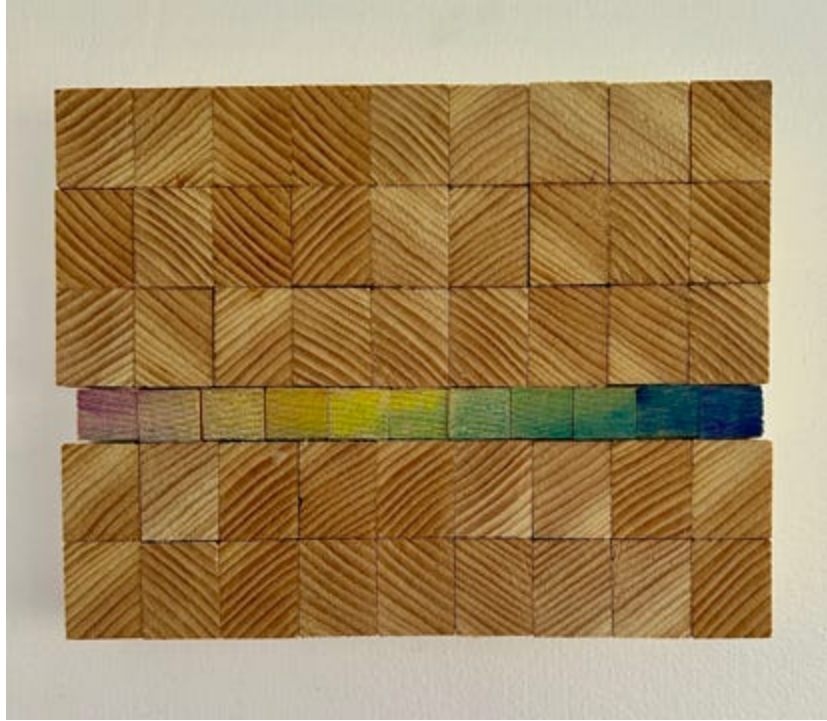
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Elizabeth Keithline’s solo show, *Puzzle* (Wallkill River Center for the Arts), takes the long view, evoking current social disorder through interdependence of control and chaos in wood scrap assemblages. Building on her 2024 show *Breaking Broken* (Jane Street Art Center, Saugerties, New York), *Puzzle* features materials found along upstate roads and at construction projects: household trim, plywood cast-offs, etc. Keithline has created *Puzzle* throughout 2026, and viewing the meditative sculptures in order of their production proposes logical evolution incorporating more and more chaos inside each successive series.



Elizabeth Keithline, "Watercolor Puzzle 2/10/26," watercolor on found wood on panel, 8 x 8 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

The Watercolor Puzzle series highlights the practical fact that lumber ends absorb paint more readily than grained sides because of the vascular nature of trees. *Watercolor Puzzle 2/10/26* assembles a broad array of pieces cut to the same height and glued to a panel in the manner of parquet floors. Watercolor paint seeps into the joins, shims, and tiny inserts, softening division and returning wood bits to a sylvan mood that recalls digital imagery.



Elizabeth Keithline, "Puzzle #1," 2026, found wood on panel, 8 x 10 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

In *Puzzle #1*, pleasing, randomly ordered wood grain direction and insertion of a single band of color made of smaller scraps sandwiches an airy rainbow within a tight procession of earthy units, recalling a showy column with flags—a color guard inside a military parade.



Elizabeth Keithline, left: "Puzzle #5," 2026, found wood on panel, 10 x 8 inches; right "Puzzle #6," 2026, found wood on panel, 8 x 10 inches. Photos courtesy of the artist.

The *Puzzle #* series conveys a growing absorption of disorder within a pattern-inventing system. *Puzzle # 6* shakes apart a bit more than *Puzzle # 5* exposing the pale blue panel support, expressing journey as the texture of wooden tire treads. Patience to seek out properly fitted pieces compromises with the musicality of diagonal movement and linear animation within the banded whole.



Elizabeth Keithline, left: "Puzzle IV," 2026, acrylic and found wood on panel, 12 x 12 inches. right: "Puzzle VI," 2026, found wood on panel, 12 x 12 inches. Photos courtesy of the artist.

Things get gnarlier with *Puzzle IV* and *Puzzle VI* that exploit the oxidized adhesive that holds plywood together, the broken layers recall forest soil in sharp contrast to flat, atmospheric, pastel backgrounds, eliciting a 50s horror film with gnashing teeth, and paths and *cul-de-sacs* amidst neighborhood destruction.



Elizabeth Keithline, "Split Screen I," 2026, found wood on panel, 12 x 12 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Split Screen I parallels Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (1974), the dramatic cleaving via chainsaw and subsequent visual reconciliation of interior and exterior of a condemned New Jersey house. Both Matta-Clark and Keithline cut straight gaps through scavenged, domestic construction materials, emphasizing the stress points of architectural design and the fateful, temporary nature of every home.



Elizabeth Keithline, "Nowhere to Land," 2026, found wood on panel, 4 x 3 feet. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Much larger than *Puzzle's* other pieces, *Nowhere to Land* suggests the overhead view of a psychologically charged landscape made from scrambled, disparate bits and pieces. The sole unifying principle, a wooden bowl inserted into and filled with scraps, offers containment and protection of an individual body or a community, though isolating similar kinds of havoc does not eliminate it. As a symbol for our times, *Nowhere to Land*, though securely installed, separated itself from its moorings and landed on the gallery floor during the exhibition—a real-life illustration of aesthetic chaos fomenting its own surprise.

In the spirit of building community adjacent her solo show, Keithline curated the whopping 28-artist exhibit *Keep It Together*, which parallels her own assemblage-based work, presenting objects also concerned

with material and conceptual problem solving, and figurative works that express how people are coping now. Sharing what the complementary exhibits revealed to her, Keithline told me, "Solving as an individual is easier than solving in a group, but what we get out of group effort is so much more important." Highlights from the group exhibit follows.



left: Leslie Zelamsky, "Convergence," 2023, wood, shims, paint, nails, 10 x 10 x 6 inches. right: Linda Stillman, "Maples on the Move," 2023, leaves, acrylic, ink on paper, 8 x 8 inches. Photos courtesy of the artists.

Leslie Zelamsky's *Convergence*, though spiritually akin to Keithline's found and built wood constructions, yields more to brute force, communicating the stubborn message: make things work no matter what. Linda Stillman's *Maples on the Move*, a geometric composition of drawing, paper, and found leaves, depicts rest after effort and growth, a fateful moment in fall, poised in the dark shadows and bright colors of equinox.



left: Melissa Stern, "Pink Leg," 2018, clay, wood, oil paint, encaustic. 24. 5 x 11 x 5 inches. right: Lucy Handley, "Prosperity," 2000, mixed media, 21.5 x 14 x 4 inches.
Photos courtesy of the artists.

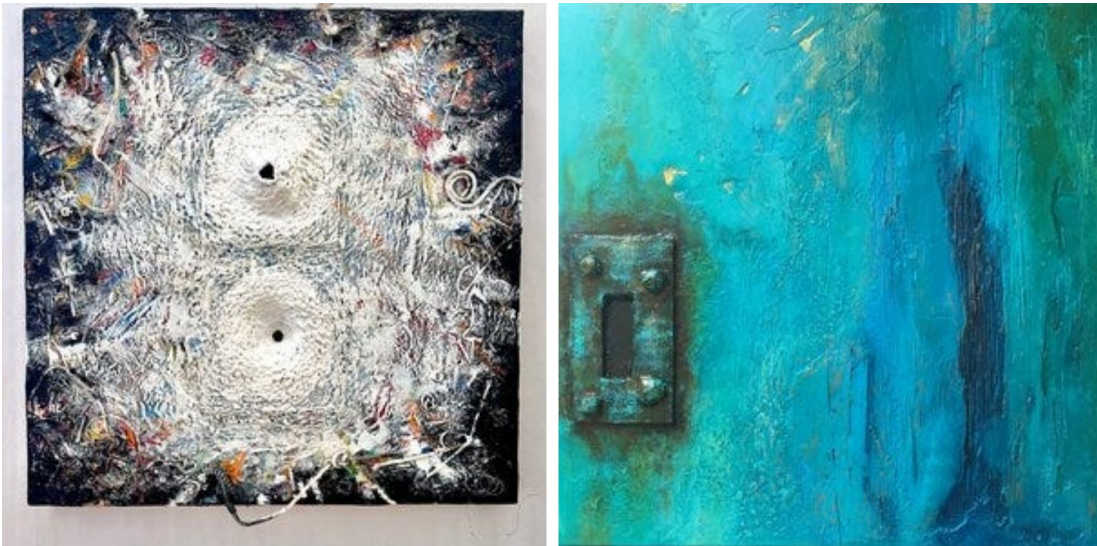
Approaching found assemblage figuratively and narratively, Melissa Stern's *Pink Leg* joins a tree branch and high-heeled appendage, updating Daphne's escape from Apollo for the modern woman. Lucy Handley's *Prosperity* links hope for healing, fertility, and growth by enclosing a green statue of Mary, a guiding lamp, smooth river stones, and bulging canvas bags within a scorched-looking shrine.



left: Jennifer McGregor, "Thetford Interlude," 2025, repurposed sweaters, glue, wood, paint, 18 x 34 x 2 inches.

right: Ann Morris, "Industrial Archaeology," 2026, decollage,
acrylic paint and found rusty objects on board, 12 x 12
inches. Photos courtesy of the artists.

Jennifer McGregor's *Thetford Interlude* coils reused wool into a compact solar system of beet-colored planets or stars pictured before the Big Bang, which pairs gracefully with Ann Morris's mystifying *Industrial Archaeology*: rusty parts on a parchment-like surface that integrates a bird's-eye view of an island with the side view of a ship that will take us there.



left: Leavitt, "Last Breath," 2014, encaustic, oil, paint, clay
forms, found objects on braced board, 24.5 x 24.5 inches.

right: Leonardo, "Blue Door," 2026, marble powder,
cardboard, acrylic paint and inks, 12 x 12 inches. Photos
courtesy of the artists.

Tracey Leavitt's *The Last Breath* juxtaposes the physicality of inhaling and exhaling inside a cloud charged with prismatic white light, echoing the duality of Jingnasha Leonardo's *Blue Door* that pairs a metal portal with one resembling a rift in the night sky or tree bark.



left: Ward Yoshimoto, "Building Family Values," 2023, Crown Royal Bag, 15 x 3.5 x 3 inches. middle: Jeannine Bardo, "Dawn #45," 2025, gouache on sugar cane paper with silver thread, 12 x 12 inches. right: Tasha Depp, "Orange Triad (Serendipity)," 2023, plastic underwear hanger, acrylic paint, 11 x 7.5 inches. Photos courtesy of the artists.

Keithline considered how the two exhibitions will feel from a future perspective. She told me, "I think about looking back on our current time, and facing the question: Why didn't anybody do anything about global warming and dysfunctional government?" To me, three pieces sum up *Keeping It Together* in fall of 2026: Ward Yoshimoto's *Building Family Values* hinting at the psychological weight of addiction mixed with the right wing push for fertility, Jeannine Bardo's *Dawn #45*, a mixed grid of ominous and cheerful horizons projecting atmospheric beauty in an uncertain climate, and Tasha Depp's *Orange Triad (Serendipity)* that looks like a scarlet Trump hat clamped down by recycled plastic.

Keep It Together ran August 22—September 27, 2026, and included: Julia Barbour, Jeannine Bardo, Jenne Currie, Melanie Delgado, Tasha Depp, Karen E. Gersch, Lucy Handley, Jen Hicks, Chong Kang, Jeff & Wilson Keithline, Tracy Leavitt, Jignasha Leonardo, Jennifer McGregor, Eva Melas, Ann Morris, Jane Nelson, Suzanne Parker, Eileen Power, Amanda Russo Rubman, Anthony Scarzafava, Melissa Stern, Linda Stillman, Kimberly Truitt, Christina Varga, Ward Yoshimoto, Mimi Young, Leslie Zelamsky.