

ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

[Home](#)
[Contact](#)
[Media Kit](#)

>

[Subscribe](#)
[E-mail your listing](#)

Spotlight Reviews

RHODE ISLAND

Newport Art Museum/Newport

www.newportartmuseum.com

OURCHITECTURE: THE LOST HOUSE PROJECT & ELIZABETH KEITHLINE

While remnants and traces of vanished lives imbue the sculptures and installations of Elizabeth Keithline with a lament over loss, these works exude the beauty and esthetic of presence and possibility. This show is presented in an upstairs-downstairs format, with the latter space concentrating on the artist's ambitious Lost House Project, a large-scale installation inspired by Keithline's move to an old farmstead in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. The property, which includes the original farmhouse and two barns-one built by hand in the late 19th century-illustrates the disappearing rural character in America. Keithline, using a sculptural process she invented more than a decade ago, pays homage to this notion with a sculpture that fills the entire room of the Ilgenfritz Gallery. Her technique involves weaving heavy gauge wire around objects, which she then sets on fire.

The burned-out objects leave behind a steel mesh sculpture, suggesting twisted ruins that resonate with passing lives and cultures. The transformed space is airy and labyrinthine, making a ghost of a house filled with repeating motifs of doorways and open walls. Adding to the sense of mystery and absence, sharply angled light forms a shadow house on the gallery's walls and floors. Equally ethereal and graphically dynamic is a series of acrylics on canvas and board that document the Lost House Project, suggesting X-rays and auras in their respective skeleton and phantom imagery. The upstairs exhibition is dramatically different in execution and intent but stays on theme by revealing how the generic, modern use of space and architecture lacks the esthetic grace of previous generations that built with artistry and practicality in mind.



Elizabeth Keithline, Whlour. Photo: Peter Goldberg.

Called Ourchitecture, the show features forty-three little Levittown-style houses, culled from among 120 built by Keithline that were constructed or deconstructed by various artists and architects. Juried by Sara Agniel, the director of a gallery in Providence, the exhibition is a delightful and thought-provoking exercise, revealing a number of inventive, witty ideas on how to bring caring and individuality to the "blandscape." Some, like Henry Mboowa's The Log Cabin, are elegant little places. He fuses wood, stone, and hex signs in a contemporary design that honors nostalgia and the well-built past. Others are primarily concerned with form and texture, as in Anne Sisco's Porcupine, which explodes in thousands of toothpicks, or Claudia Flynn's rough-hewn House of Sand.

More satirical, reflecting our nation's obsession with security as directly tied to the notion of personal shelter, are Claudia Sbrissa's Homeland Security House, which is wrapped in



Elizabeth Keithline, *The Lost House Project* (detail),
steel wire, glass, 4 1/2 x 6", 2005.

plastic showing the seal of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and Ray Martin's Safe House, decorated in Bio Guard Wrap. The Effect of Home Improvement Television on the Built Environment by Karen Nash is a standout, drawing on sandcastles, gingerbread, and the anything-goes style of amateur builders to make a house that is playful and wry. Collectively, the imagined suburbia is one of passion and humor, which, in the age of homogenous sprawl, gives the notion of "dream house" new meaning. *Doug Norris*