

Elisabeth Kley

The Invisible Hands of Birds

The Modern Institute, Bricks Space

13th March – 16th May 2026

Preview: Thursday 12th March, 6 – 8 pm

Elisabeth Kley's *The Invisible Hands of Birds* poetically collides ideas of language, architecture and design across time. The intricate monochromatic patterns of Kley's ceramic sculptures and unstretched fabric paintings are derived from various cultures and redrawn, reshaped and deployed in the studio. Her slab-built ceramics combine curves, diagonals and right angles, calling to mind miniature buildings but equally the rows formed by their placement resemble asemic writing or an imaginary alphabet. Kley's inky blue-black glazes underscore a sense of written language or architectural plan. Across the exhibition, script becomes analogous to the constructions of the built environment, playing on the fact that both function via repeated shapes and the formation of pattern.

Ideas around decoration and fantasy architecture have been a consistent concern for Kley – her first ceramic birdhouses and fountains emerged from drawings of imaginary pavilions made in 1997 – and design objects held in museum collections across the world remain a vital research resource. While previous bodies of work have pulled from a variety of sources, with the artist finding and altering motifs from decorative methods in ancient Egyptian, pre-Columbian, Islamic and Asian traditions, most of the patterns here are sourced from the Wiener Werkstätte archive held by the Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna. The Wiener Werkstätte was a community of artisans, artists, and designers, operating in Vienna in the early 20th century, concerned with the artistic production of utilitarian items in a variety of media. Models for some of the motifs seen in the exhibition include a manicure set, an architectural plan and a fabric swatch.

The shapes of the sculptures are developed intuitively and assembled from coils and slabs. Once they've had their first firing and are no longer fragile, Kley begins the more involved process of their patterning, drawing from her database of images and translating them onto the three-dimensional forms. Patterns painted on pieces of paper matching each facet of a sculpture are taped to its surfaces and adapted until they feel right. The ceramics are then painted with white underglaze, with wax applied to sections that will stay white and a layer of cobalt stain and black underglaze added to unwaxed areas. The designs are set with a second firing and finally, the works are painted with unevenly applied homemade glazes and fired again. Kley's bold shapes repeat, echo each other and shift from black to white across the paintings and vessels, forming bold yet mysterious patterns across the Bricks Space.

Kley's works are accompanied by a series of colourful hand-turned wooden lamps by Torbjörn Vejvi.

Elisabeth Kley (b. 1956, New York, United States) lives in Manhattan and works in Brooklyn. Selected solo exhibitions include: 'Pattern is a Habit', The Drawing Room, East Hampton (2025); 'Cymodocea', Currier Museum of Art, Manchester (2024); 'A Seat in the Boat of the Sun', CANADA, New York (2023); 'Minutes of Sand', Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha (2023) and The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (2021) 'Garden' (with Tabboo!), Gordon Robichaux, New York (2019); 'Ozymandias', CANADA, New York (2016); 'Peacocks and Bottles', Georgian National Museum D. Shevardnadze National Gallery, Tbilisi (2011). Selected group exhibitions include: 'Other People's Projects: Pre-Echo Press', White Columns, New York (2022); 'The Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts', American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York (2022); 'I know where I'm going. Who can I be now', The Modern Institute, Glasgow (2021); 'Anthropocene', CANADA, New York (2014).

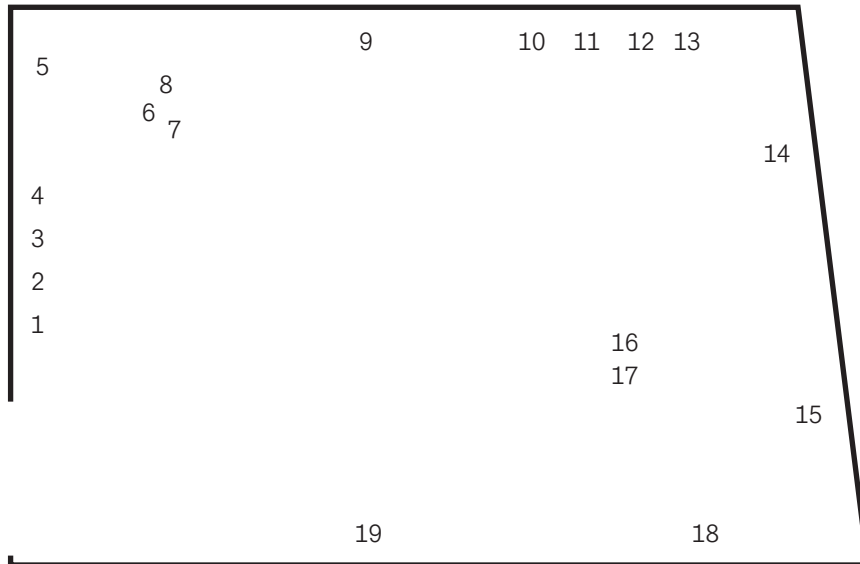
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| 1 Elisabeth Kley <i>Letter with Bridge</i> , 2024 Glazed earthenware 24.1 x 40.6 x 19.1 cm | 2 Elisabeth Kley <i>Leaves on Top</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 25.4 x 39.4 x 19.1 cm | 3 Elisabeth Kley <i>Close Window</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 24.1 x 29.2 x 19.1 cm |
| 4 Elisabeth Kley <i>Letter with FLW Window</i> , 2024 Glazed earthenware 30.5 x 30.5 x 19.1 cm | 5 Elisabeth Kley <i>Horizontal Wall Hanging with Snakes</i> , 2025 Acrylic and charcoal on canvas 134.6 x 198.1 cm | 6 Torbjörn Vejvi <i>Untitled</i> , 2026 Maple, water-based paint, electrical parts 37 x 28 cm |
| 7 Torbjörn Vejvi <i>Untitled</i> , 2026 Maple, water-based paint, electrical parts 32 x 19 cm | 8 Torbjörn Vejvi <i>Untitled</i> , 2026 Maple, water-based paint, electrical parts 40 x 28 cm | 9 Eva Rothschild <i>Bench 01 (BMS)</i> , 2019 Jesmonite, fibreglass, rebar, paint 42 x 179 x 33 cm |
| 10 Elisabeth Kley <i>B with Slide</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 27.9 x 38.1 x 19.7 cm | 11 Elisabeth Kley <i>Arch with Two Annexes</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 24.1 x 44.5 x 19.1 cm | 12 Elisabeth Kley <i>Columns in Back</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 22.9 x 29.2 x 19.7 cm |
| 13 Elisabeth Kley <i>Leaves on Top</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 25.4 x 39.4 x 19.1 cm | 14 Torbjörn Vejvi <i>Untitled</i> , 2026 Maple, water-based paint, electrical parts 41 x 28 cm | 15 Elisabeth Kley <i>Knife</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 59.7 x 59.7 cm |
| 16 Elisabeth Kley <i>Layered Vessel with Ivy</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 45.7 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm | 17 Elisabeth Kley <i>Layered Vessel with Meandering Flowers</i> , 2025 Glazed earthenware 45.7 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm | 18 Elisabeth Kley <i>Vertical Wall Hanging with White Rectangles</i> , 2025 Acrylic and charcoal on canvas 182.9 x 121.9 cm |
| 19 Torbjörn Vejvi <i>Untitled</i> , 2026 Maple, water-based paint, electrical parts 49 x 32.5 cm | | |