

# Art of Movement

*The kinematics of Zilvinas Kempinas*

An inbuilt desire to provide enjoyment and leave an impact on the visitor is a philosophy that Lithuanian artist Zilvinas Kempinas strongly adheres to in his work. Choosing materials that have a certain life in them and then tapping into their potential and further enhancing the animated quality they possess, he creates installations that are equal parts brash and sensorial. Having evolved from the arrangement of disparate cheery objects on a rooftop to using videocassette tape and playing with the properties of light, wind, and reflection, the artist continues to stay true to himself and to tickle those who experience his inherently kinetic works.

ANNA SANSOM

Living in Vilnius in the mid-1990s after having studied painting at the art academy, Zilvinas Kempinas was infused with a maxed-out artistic vision. One Christmas, while working part-time at a furniture store where he was responsible for floor layouts, he convinced his employers to sponsor a solo show on the building's roof. "I said to my boss: 'Instead of having ordinary Christmas decorations in the store, why don't I make a show on the roof?' And he went for it", Kempinas reminisces. "There I put 60 Christmas trees and a motorcycle, quotations from the Old Testament and art history, slide projections, jingle bells, mannequins in Santa Claus clothes, spinning police lights, and hot wine for everybody."

It seems a far cry from the minimalistic, kinetic, and op art-inspired installations made out of videocassette tapes for which Kempinas, 44, is known today. Indeed, he has been exploring the possibilities of the videocassette tape as a sculptural medium for a decade, ever since exhibiting *Still* – hundreds of strings

of VHS tapes shaped into parabolas – at what is now MoMA PS1 in New York. Yet Kempinas argues that despite the obvious, aesthetical changes in his work, his motivation is invariably what he can bring to visitors. "The goal is always for people to have a personal experience", he says.

## EXPERIMENTING WITH THINGS

In 1998 Kempinas moved to New York, where he is still based, to do a Masters in Fine Art at Hunter College. Asked how he came to use videocassette tape as his main material, Kempinas replies that it was born out of a curiosity about its potential sculptural qualities. "One day, I decided to break a cassette and see how the tape inside it looked, because I suspected that it might look very appealing to use", he recalls. "I hung it up and it was like an abstract line in space and, at the same time, a ready-made, recognisable, industrial thing that was very inexpensive. I was a student back then, and I believed – and still



BEYOND THE FANS 2013  
Fans, magnetic tape  
Dimensions variable  
Photo © Daniel Spehr

ZILVINAS KEMPINAS  
Photo © Catalina Kulczar





**TUBE, 2008 (1)**  
Installation view at Scuola Grande della Misericordia, Lithuanian Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009.  
Magnetic tape, plywood  
Dimensions variable  
Photo © Zilvinas Kempinas

**BALLROOM, 2010 (2)**  
Installation view, Gallery Yvon Lambert, New York  
Fans, light bulbs, mirror film, magnetic tape  
Photo: Zilvinas Kempinas

**PARALLELS, 2007 (3)**  
Installation view at Museum Tinguely, Basel 2013  
Magnetic tape, wood, iron  
© Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris and Galerija Vartai, Vilnius  
Photo: Daniel Spehr

believe – that art has to be inexpensive and have very simple ways of manifesting itself.”

Through experimenting with the tape, Kempinas discovered other qualities too. “I found that it gets animated in the wind and reflections play on its surface, so it becomes very seductive. Something industrial and quite boring, which is always hidden, all of a sudden changes into something that is almost alive.”

The tape could be manipulated to produce different visual effects, Kempinas realised. “If you put it sideways, it’s an extremely thick black line, whereas if you turn it towards you, it can totally disappear. This aspect of disappearance was extremely interesting to me because it helps deliver the idea of dematerialisation.” Then there’s the original essence of the tape itself: “a full-bodied data carrier that is becoming obsolete.” Kempinas breathes new life into the dying medium of VHS cassettes while elevating the status of the material.



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### CREATING SENSATIONS

The artist visualises his works, some of them being site-specific. “I have everything in my head long before it goes up in the actual space or gets put down on paper”, he informs. Sometimes he makes technical drawings, at other times he reacts directly to the dimensions and characteristics of the space. The versatility of his practice is underscored in his solo show at Museum Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland. *Parallels* (2007), minimally composed of long lines of tape stretched horizontally across an entire room at just above head height, creates a hypnotic sensation. Viewed straight on, the installation is a pattern of thick, black bands; from a distance, it dematerialises into thinning streaks. Elsewhere in the museum is *Ballroom* (2010), a pulsating, vibrating environment where circles on the floor are lit by coloured light bulbs that swish in the wind and thrash against walls made of Mylar, as if a storm is raging outside.



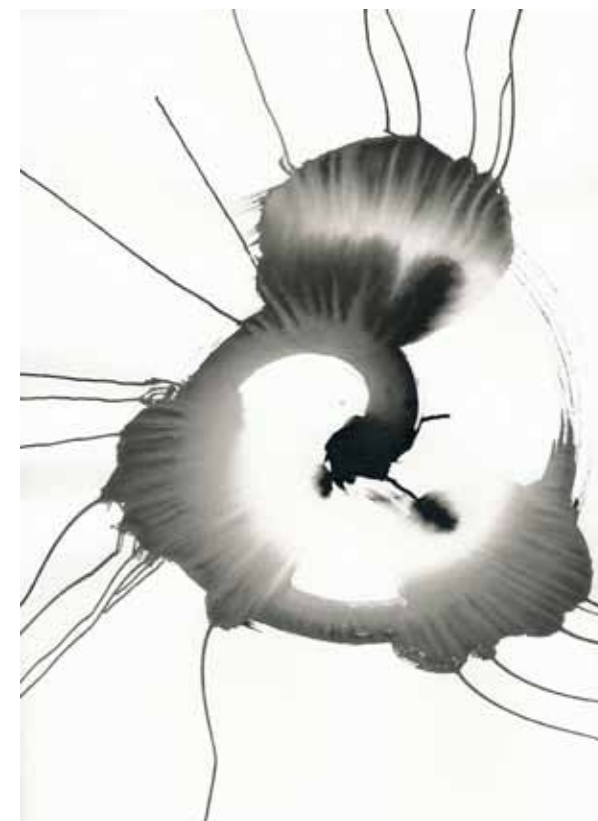
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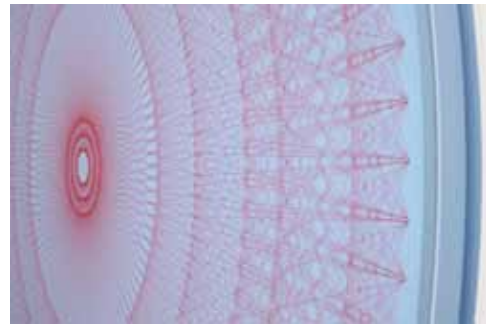
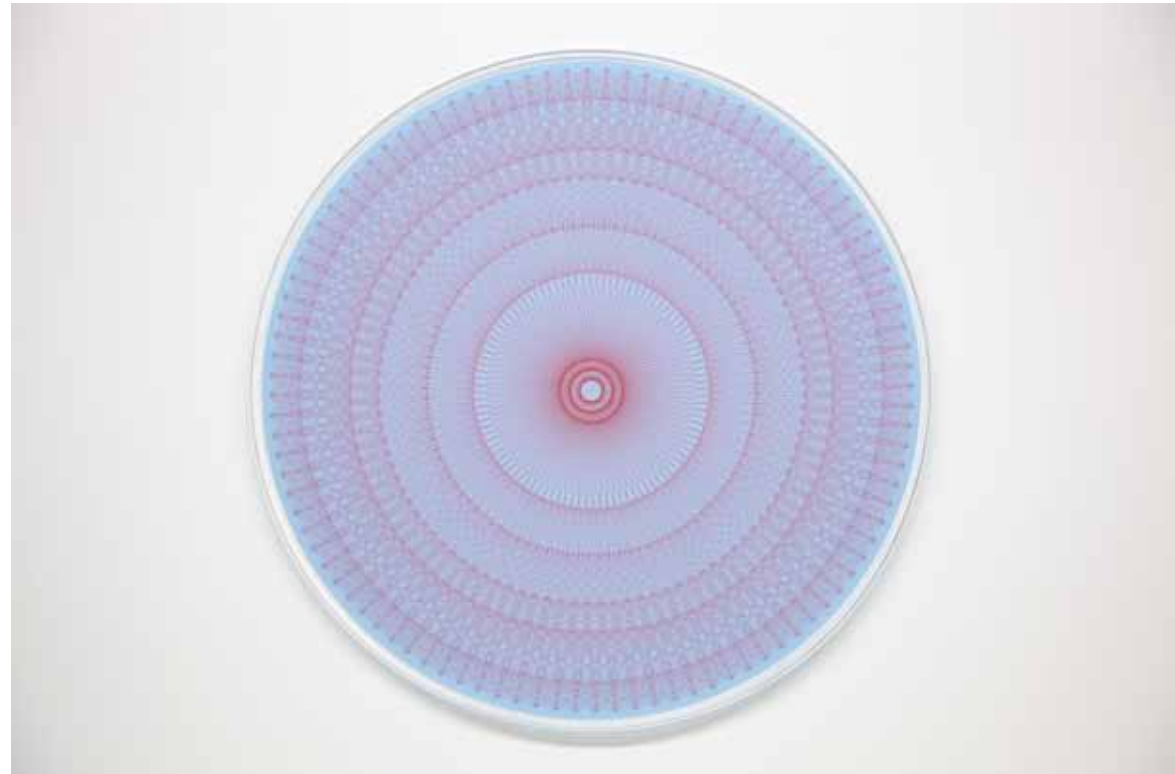
**KAKASHI, 2012 (1)**  
Installation view at the Museum Tinguely park, Basel 2013  
Snowpoles, bird repellent tape  
Photo: Daniel Spehr

**COLUMNS, 2006 (2)**  
Installation view, Kunsthalle in Vienna, 2008  
Magnetic tape, plywood  
Photo: Zilvinas Kempinas

**LIGHT PILLARS, 2013 (3)**  
Installation view with Jean Tinguely's *Fatamorgana / Méta Harmonie IV, 1985* at Museum Tinguely, Basel 2013  
Magnetic tape, fans, fluorescent light, iron  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris  
Photo: Daniel Spehr

**2-FAN DRAWING, 2010/1109-3, 2010 (4)**  
Archival ink on paper  
Courtesy Galerija Vartai, Vilnius





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The playful, optical illusions continue on the lawn outside, with *Kakashi* (2012), a rippling canopy of red and yellow lines gleaming across a circular arrangement of snow poles.

Two new solo exhibitions are now opening: one in the laboratory space at the K20 in Düsseldorf, and another at the Reykjavik Art Museum. For the latter, Kempinas has made an installation called *Fountains*, which occupies the entire floor space. It's an expansion of his smaller piece of the same title (shown at Museum Tinguely), a metal ring spewing out froths of tape that gather in a wavy circle. The decision to exhibit a single piece is a response to the limitations of the Reykjavik Art Museum – a former garage with columns that belie its former function and restrict spatial manipulation. "I wanted to elaborate more on the kinetics of *Fountain*", Kempinas explains. "There are more natural-looking, looser circles and trails for people to walk around. I wanted the floor to be like something that is alive; moving, waving, disturbing, and dangerous-looking. But delicate at the same time; elusive, shimmering, with lots of intensity." Materially speaking, it has nothing in common with his fondly remembered Christmas show at the furniture store 20 years ago. But Kempinas's desire to create a strong visual and emotional impact for other people's enjoyment remains paramount. <



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**GEMMA, 2013 (1)**  
Resin, ultralight MDF and polyester  
Diameter 118 cm

**FOUNTAIN, 2011 (2)**  
Installation view at Yvon Lambert,  
New York  
Fan, magnetic tape, steel; diameter 3m  
Photo © Zilvinas Kempinas

*Slow Motion*, Museum Tinguely; Basel, Switzerland, Until 22 September 2013  
[tinguely.ch](http://tinguely.ch)  
*Darkroom*, K20; Düsseldorf, Germany; 05 September – 12 January 2014  
[kunstsammlung.de](http://kunstsammlung.de)  
*Fountains*, Reykjavik Art Museum; Iceland; 14 September – 05 January 2014  
[artmuseum.is](http://artmuseum.is)



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