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25 artists you need to know

Zilvinas

MENTION THE WORD 'MINIMALISM' to most people these days and you know that 'boring' has just popped into their heads. Perhaps, if you're lucky, they'll also be picturing their tedium in the form of the odd black square or set of Judd-like shelves. The work of Zilvinas Kempinas, while comprising, in many instances, simple compositions of black and white, or light and shadow, offers a timely reminder of how rich and rewarding even the most minimal of works can be.

In 2004, for his debut solo show at New York's Spencer Brownstone Gallery, Kempinas exhibited *Flying Tape* (2004), a ring of industrial floor fans positioned in such a way as to spin a large, fluttering loop of videotape in the air above them. In practical terms Kempinas was simply exploiting – maybe doing nothing more than demonstrating – the most humdrum laws of physics. Visually the effect was mysterious and ethereal – like watching a flying carpet, or a low-budget, low-tech Siegfried & Roy magic show. Indeed, perhaps what makes Kempinas special is the fact that, in a world in which spectacles and spectaculars (and a fair proportion of the art you see these days falls into one of those categories) are words that are increasingly synonymous with biggest and most expensive, he doesn't feel the need to walk onstage in a spangly jumpsuit and frolic with a rare white tiger. More often than not, the odd bit of videotape is all he needs.

In 2006, for his second solo show with the gallery, the thirty-seven-year-old New York-based Lithuanian used strips of tape strung from floor to ceiling to create a series of ghostly tubular columns within the space. *Columns* (2005; now in the Margulies Collection in Miami) is arranged so that the edge of the filmstrips point out (and thus, when viewed head-on, are barely perceptible), and the columns – ironically, given that they are in effect stilled or frozen films – appear to be animated line drawings: the apparent thickness of the lines (or the extent to which the face of the strips of film was visible), and thus the effects of 'light' and 'shade', fluctuate as you move around the installation. And perhaps there is a further irony in all this: Kempinas is using one the most modern of media to create the most old-fashioned of effects.

Despite that, in the same exhibition Kempinas demonstrated that he is not averse to using tape in a more conventional manner. *Bike Messenger* (2005) – also in the Margulies Collection – is a four-screen projection of the results of Kempinas strapping four cameras onto a motorbike (front, sides and back) and riding through rush-hour traffic in Times Square. And it provides just the sort of effects of audio and visual disorientation that you might expect. While nowhere near as elegant as Kempinas's installations, it's yet another example of the artist extracting the most from the least.

Flying Tape, 2006 (installation view, Palais de Tokyo, Paris), fans, magnetic videocassette tape, dimensions variable.
Courtesy Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York

