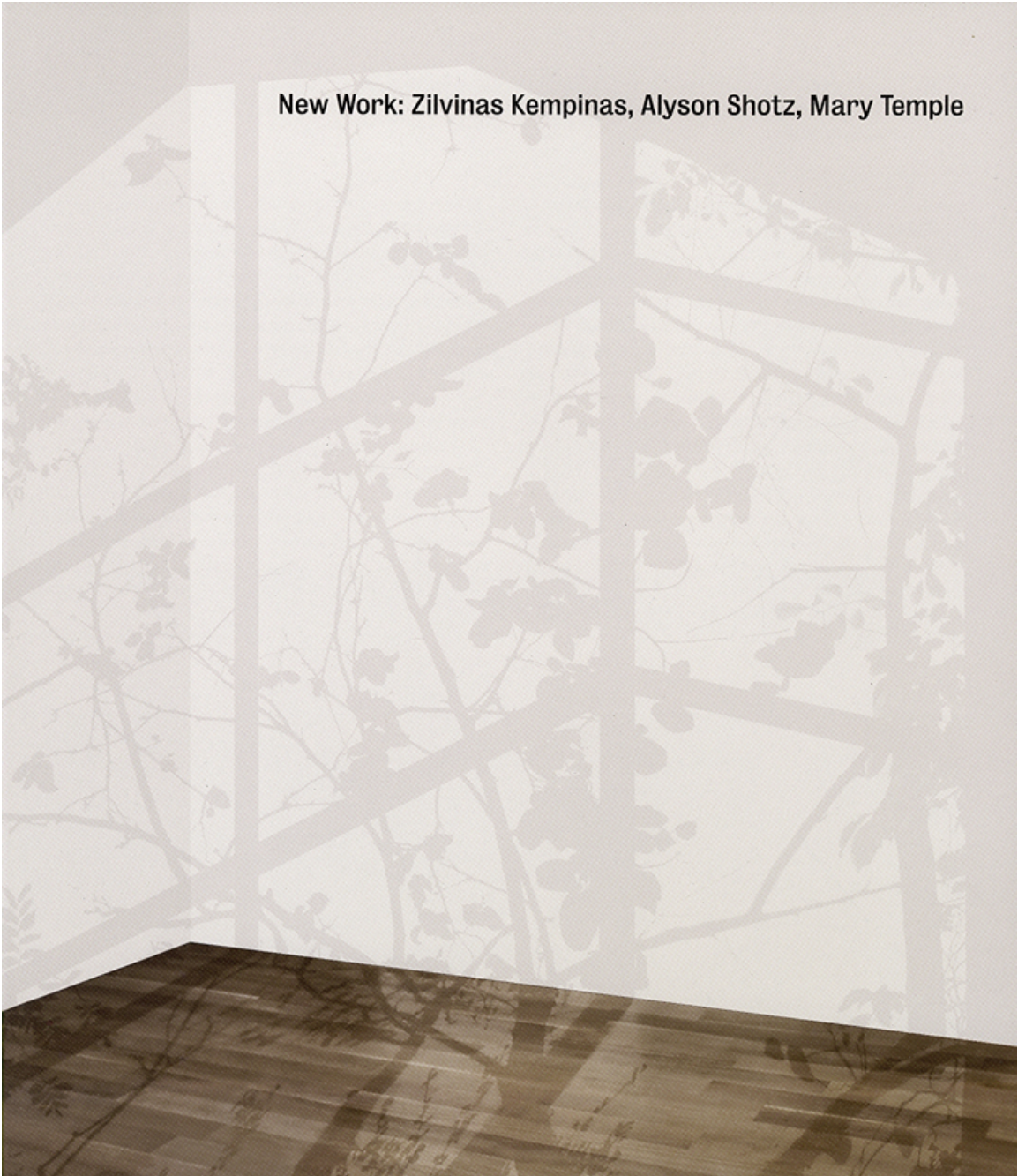


New Work: Zilvinas Kempinas, Alyson Shotz, Mary Temple



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Light has been a central preoccupation of artists throughout history, serving as subject matter and physical material for works of art across a broad spectrum of media. As light physically floods through space, so it may metaphorically infuse contemporary art practice, existing as both inspirational starting point and potential historical burden. Many artists using light today maintain a strong interest in their predecessors and frequently call upon past artistic strategies. Zilvinas Kempinas, Alyson Shotz, and Mary Temple all root their work within aspects of this history, together representing a cross section of the multifaceted ways that light has been used throughout art history. The primary themes that emerge through this artistic dialogue are light's ability to transform space, harness symbolism, and create perceptual slippages.

The challenge for artists working through these issues today is to find ways to pioneer while crossing such well-traversed artistic terrain. Kempinas, Shotz, and Temple all meet this challenge with extraordinary creativity and aesthetic capability. Each creates installations that are fully about light without physically including a light source. Rather, the visual conditions of their work derive from the presence or absence of light in the gallery space and the effects of its unique transformative impact on both materials and environment. This novel mode of "lightless" art about

light explores the slipperiness of perception. As materials reflect, refract, and block light, shadow patterns inform and transform our perception of stability—both visual and physical—within space.

The installations in this exhibition help us begin to comprehend the way shadows sharpen our perspective and create a sense of volume and depth, literally adding dimension to our daily lives. By manipulating and controlling the different effects of light and shadow on various materials and architectural spaces, these artists do not solely construct immersive or symbolic environments but rather activate our perceptual awareness. We become complicit in the artwork before us as we pause to determine how it is fooling our eye or changing the way we see.

Kempinas works in video, but not at all in the traditional sense. Instead of working with it as a filmic medium, he literally makes videotape his tool, unraveling the flat strands of film from a reel and rendering them sculptural material. Whether transforming an entire gallery space or creating discrete wall objects, this uncommon medium uniquely and intrinsically responds to the effects of light. The videotape's slick surface is reflective, and the light that bounces off it obscures the clarity of its form. Its blackness becomes shadowlike as the strands themselves and the shadows

they cast seemingly collapse into one another. This generates an optically unsettling moment for viewers, who are confronted with the patterned interspersal of dark shadows and dark strands. The visual affinity between the two renders it difficult to distinguish the solid stuff of the tape from the illusionistic patterning shaped by light's impact on the material.

In Kempinas's work there is visual kinship with geometric abstraction and Op art, modes of painting in which the presentation of gridded darks and lights confounds the optical experience, making the eye see illusionary protrusions and recessions across a steadfastly flat picture plane. Kempinas updates this now familiar push and pull of light and dark, depth and protrusion. His work is fully three-dimensional, created with sculptural strips of slick blackness that actually protrude from the wall. In *Link*, however, through the play of reflection and shadow, or bright and dark, the three-dimensional visually becomes flat, the static seems animated, and the immaterial appears solid.

Shotz's work often effects a similarly taxing optical encounter by engaging the properties of translucent rather than opaque material. Threading clear beads onto wire and weaving weblike forms that hang from fishing line, she produces work that is simultaneously substantive and ephemeral. Like Kempinas, she has created installations at both large and small scales. In *The Structure of Light* (2008), entwined, saclike forms fill a great expanse of space within the gallery but visually lack any sense of actual heft or mass. Both the shapes and the suggestion of solidity appear to shift depending upon the way in which directed light reflects off and refracts through the sinewy, beaded lines. At instances, refracted light bounces into the viewer's eye, almost obliterating one's ability to see the beads. Standing before these layers of encircling forms, depth of field slides in and out of focus as foreground and background collide. At moments, the most clearly discernible aspects of the work are the shadows cast along the walls and floor, in which form remains static, finally articulated and legible. Unlike Kempinas's

project, in which physical material and shadows share a similar optical quality, confusing the viewer as to which is real and which is immaterial, Shotz's hanging sculpture often renders the ephemeral most readable. As with Kempinas's installation, the perceptual effects here bridge the divide between three-dimensionality and flatness. These beaded contours, though fully sculptural, are indebted to traditions of drawing. As Shotz draws in space with her beaded wires, the image draws itself in shadow on the surrounding walls and floor.

In Temple's site-specific installations shadows are the substance. The usually ephemeral is now the actual material presence. Via commercial wall paint and hardwood floor varnish she captures the trompe l'oeil effect of light casting the shadow of trees through a window and across the walls and floor. In *23.5° (Autumn)*, *23.5° (Spring)*, and *23.5° (Winter)*, as in previous works, she responds directly to the site's architecture, invoking the pattern of shadow that would occur if an opening were slashed into the museum's exterior and interior walls, allowing light to cut through. This imagined fracturing of the architecture leads viewers to experience a disconcerting realization upon encountering the work: there is in reality no light source. The shadows are an illusion. Closer inspection reveals the overt paintedness of these familiar forms on the wall as well as the obvious disjunction

between Temple's installed hardwood flooring and the actual gallery floor. These discoveries produce a moment of perceptual clarification. Temple's fabricated crystallization of a mundane reality sparks an awareness of the ways in which the lived experience of reading shadows significantly informs our own understanding of our position in a given space.

In the context of this exhibition, alongside Kempinas and Shotz's varied visual collapsing of the material and the immaterial, Temple's work exposes the tension between the real and the unreal. The shadows she draws are unreal in the sense that they are not the indexical traces of light traversing the contours of an actual object or space, appearing in passing based on the changing position of the sun in relation to a window. Yet these shadows are undeniably real in the sense that they are tangible; they are the artwork, not the effect created by light on the artwork. In Temple's work the shadows exist regardless of the gallery's light source, and this independence creates the ultimate perceptual challenge.

The significance of light, both natural and artificial, to visual perception is threaded through the history of art. In the mid-twentieth century light's most significant critical impact stemmed from its ability to trespass the literal boundaries of an art object and physically alter the surrounding environ-



Above: Mary Temple, *23.5° (Autumn)*, 2008 (detail)

Left: Mary Temple, *Extended Afternoon Phase I*, from the series *Light Installations*. Installed at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2005-6. Latex paint on existing architecture

ment. When a light fixture is part of an artwork, such as in minimalist light art of the 1960s, the illumination filters through the glass confines of a bulb, seeping out into the gallery and challenging the perceptual boundaries between object and viewer. In expanding the object's physical space, such works also expand the conceptual limits of what could constitute an art object and complicate the traditional viewing experience. Physically impacted by an artwork's glow, it becomes impossible to remain at a critical remove. The viewer is no longer planted firmly outside, contemplating the work, but rather within it, experiencing the illusionistic space.

The installations in this exhibition both draw upon and extend this history of light's ability to make the viewer complicit in works of art. In responding to rather than generating light, the works presented here continue to bridge the divide between viewer and object, material and immaterial. However, in these three installations the slippage is more perceptual than literal. It is cognitive experience, rather than the physical body, that must interact with the visual material at hand. In each of these works the play of light and shadow complicates the visual field. In ordinary visual encounters our eyes and brains work together to perceive and decode cues of light and shadow to determine depth of field and thus locate our own position in the physical world. Here those familiar visual cues are upended, and the historical narrative of the relationship between light effects and visual art is spun a little further. The space between illusionism and reality dissolves a little more.

Alison Gass
Assistant Curator, Painting and Sculpture

Images of Kempinas's work courtesy the artist and Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York. © Zilvinas Kempinas. Shotz's *The Structure of Light* courtesy the artist and Derek Eller Gallery, New York; photo: Michael Moran. *Allusion of Gravity* courtesy a private collection. Both works © Alyson Shotz. Images of Temple's work courtesy the artist and Mixed Greens Gallery, New York. © Mary Temple.

Reverse, from left:
Zilvinas Kempinas, *Link*, installation view at Atelier Calder, 2008
Alyson Shotz, *The Structure of Light*, 2008 (detail)
Mary Temple, *23.5° (Autumn)*, 2008 (detail)

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Zilvinas Kempinas was born in Plunge, Lithuania, and lives and works in Brooklyn. He received his BFA from Vilnius Art Academy in 1993 and his MFA from Hunter College in 2002. He has had solo exhibitions at Galerie des Franciscains and Le Grand Café contemporary art center, Spencer Brownstone Gallery, and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center. Recent group exhibitions include *Manifesta 7*. Kempinas won the Calder Prize and Atelier Calder Residency Award in 2007.

Mary Temple lives and works in Brooklyn. She studied at Arizona State University, Tempe, receiving her BFA in 1989 and her MFA in 1995. She has had solo exhibitions at Sandroni Rey, Smack Mellon, and the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. Recent group exhibitions include *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, MASS MoCA; *Inner and Outer Space*, Mattress Factory; *Second Nature*, Dexia Center, Luxembourg; and *Light x Eight*, Jewish Museum, New York. She was the New York Foundation of the Arts' Lily Auchincloss Fellow in 2006.

Alyson Shotz lives and works in Brooklyn. She received her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design in 1987 and her MFA from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1991. She has had solo exhibitions at Yale University Art Gallery, the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. Recent group exhibitions include *The Shapes of Space*, Guggenheim Museum; *Neointegrity*, Derek Eller Gallery; and *Light x Eight*, Jewish Museum, New York. In 2007 she received the Saint Gaudens Memorial Fellowship.

Works in the Exhibition

Zilvinas Kempinas <i>Link</i>, 2008 Videotape 156 x 156 x 156 in. (396.2 x 396.2 x 396.2 cm) Courtesy the artist and Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York	Mary Temple From the series <i>Light Installations</i>, begun 2002: <i>23.5° (Autumn)</i>, 2008 Latex paint on existing architecture, hardwood planks, wood stain, and varnish 192 x 198 x 108 in. (487.7 x 502.9 x 274.3 cm) Courtesy the artist and Mixed Greens Gallery, New York
Alyson Shotz <i>The Structure of Light</i>, 2008 Stainless-steel piano wire, silvered glass beads, and aluminum 120 x 198 x 120 in. (304.8 x 502.9 x 304.8 cm) Courtesy the artist and Derek Eller Gallery, New York	<i>23.5° (Spring)</i>, 2008 Latex paint on existing architecture Dimensions variable Courtesy the artist and Mixed Greens Gallery, New York <i>23.5° (Winter)</i>, 2008 Latex paint on existing architecture, hardwood planks, wood stain, and varnish Dimensions variable Courtesy the artist and Mixed Greens Gallery, New York