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Streltsova Maryna, PhD in Art History
Research Associate, National Art Museum of Ukraine and Kunsthalle Rostock

THE AESTHETICS OF ABSURDITY AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CRITIQUE IN THE WORKS OF LITHUANIAN- GERMAN ARTIST KĘSTUTIS SVIRNELIS

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Kęstutis Svirnelis (b. 1976, Lithuania) is a Lithuanian-German sculptor and creator of kinetic installations who lives and works in Germany. He studied sculpture at the Vilnius Academy of Arts and later earned a master's degree from the State Academy of Fine Arts Stuttgart. Svirnelis has gained international recognition as an artist whose profound and often ironic works provoke reflection.

In his practice, Svirnelis explores the interplay between individual and social processes while critically addressing capitalism, democracy, consumerism, and the interaction between natural and human ecosystems. He describes his artistic approach as a reflection on an absurd reality. The aesthetics of absurdity in his work is not merely a stylistic device but a philosophical method. Through irony verging on the grotesque, he examines structures of power and society, reinterpreting human experience and social values.

His approach to materials resonates with the principles of Arte Povera, an Italian avant-garde movement that emphasized the transformative power of art. Like its representatives, Svirnelis focuses not on the material's nobility but on its conceptual relevance. His works often include ready-mades and found objects—rubber boots, pipes, banknotes, mannequins, fur coats, or wheelchairs. These materials take on symbolic meaning and become carriers of personal, social, and political messages. He is also deeply interested in transformation—the changing state of an object—achieved through motion, mechanical interaction, and viewer engagement.

In *Capital* (2009), a rat made of banknotes laughs in response to a viewer's movement, offering a critique of global financial systems. In *Birds* (2015), made from rubber gloves and drainage pipes, he addresses emigration. *Process* (2017), a wheelchair with a translucent plastic parachute, serves as a metaphor for a fragile, unbalanced Europe.

A striking example of his absurdist aesthetics is *Crunchy, Shiny* (2022), shown at Kunsthalle Rostock during *Review. Baltic States Biennale – A Democratic Space* (2023–2024). This kinetic sculpture of golden foil and

plastic pipes spins and crackles when a viewer approaches, satirizing the allure of consumerism as hollow glamour.

His recent large-scale installation *The Change of Necessity* (2024), created for a former power plant in Schwerin (Germany) within a project initiated by Kunsthalle Rostock, features a transparent maternal form surrounded by Tyvek-suited anthropomorphic figures. As the center inflates and deflates, the figures either move in unison or remain isolated—posing questions about collective action, individual agency, and the fragility of social bonds.

Through his use of absurdist aesthetics, motion, and symbolism, Svirnelis provokes intellectual and emotional engagement. His works challenge viewers to rethink their assumptions – and the reality they inhabit.