

# Kunsthalle Zürich

Limmatstrasse 270, 8005 Zürich  
kunsthallezurich.ch

## Kaarel Kurismaa

## Intermezzo

## 07.02.-25.05.2026

## EN

Kunsthalle Zürich is pleased to present *Intermezzo*, the first institutional solo exhibition by Tallinn-based artist Kaarel Kurismaa (b. 1939, Pärnu, Estonia) outside his native country. The exhibition centres around a selection of sound sculptures that Kurismaa developed in the late 1990s, which are now exhibited in dialogue for the first time.

Kurismaa is best known for his kinetic objects, which he began producing in the mid-1960s from mass-produced materials such as found furniture, kitchen utensils and electronic motors. Having not gained entry to the music academy in Tartu in 1957, he enrolled in the city's art school and a few years later studied large-scale painting at the State Art Institute in Tallinn. While still a student, Kurismaa worked as an artistic decorator for Tallinna Kaubamaja, the first large self-service store in Soviet Estonia, which opened in 1960 and was modelled after Western chains. This retail work allowed him to experiment with readymade materials and industrial forms. It was from this context that his first sculpture, fashioned out of a fireplace grate and kitchen utensils, emerged in 1966 – a work that is acknowledged as the first kinetic object in Estonian art history, though it has since been destroyed.

Amidst the stagnation of the 1970s – a time of ideological rigidity and cultural suppression at the height of the Soviet occupation that had begun in the 1940s – the arts in Estonia, and the avant-garde in particular, were under intense scrutiny. Kurismaa shifted his focus towards commissions for art in public space and also worked as a set designer and director at Tallinnfilm, the oldest film studio still in existence in Estonia. Following the Soviet Union's collapse and the loosening of its grip on the Republics of the Soviet Union in the mid-1990s, Kurismaa returned to focussing on his own practice, increasingly developing sculptures that move between instrument and machine.

The exhibition borrows its title from the eponymous work *Intermezzo* that was developed in two versions by Kurismaa in 1997 and has been realised in a third edition for his exhibition at the Kunsthalle Zürich. Placed on the floor, each iteration of the work consists of several tiny cymbals mounted on folded metal strips that are played by small wooden hammers and are set in motion by alternating current motors. Several unsynchronised motors are in operation, creating a constantly evolving tonal fabric that testifies to Kurismaa's ongoing interest in mechanical percussion.

Juxtaposed with the small-scale variations of *Intermezzo* is *Alma's Railroad*, 1997 – a large

three-part sculpture resembling high-tech machinery or a space vehicle. Electronically amplified through contact microphones, the work emits dark tones, conducted through purple plastic and cardboard tubing, which mingle with the delicate sounds of *Intermezzo* to create a multilayered soundscape. While the titles of his works frequently feature musical references, *Alma's Railroad* moves between personal memory and linguistic wordplay, alluding to both Kurismaa's aunt Alma and the Estonian word 'allmaa' (underground).

The first and last work to be seen in the exhibition is Kurismaa's only known video piece. *Racing the Waves*, 2001, documents a performance by the artist at the seaside in Tallinn. Its title, a literal translation of the original name *Lainetega võidu*, describes a parallel movement in which the artist leaps alongside sheets of brass reminiscent of waves – the same material he used just a few years prior when making *Intermezzo*. While, in musical terms, intermezzo usually describes an interlude, the term also denotes a relational moment of transition and the forming of connection: a mode that is also present in the context of Kurismaa's exhibition at Kunsthalle Zürich, where the artist's works converse and overlap to form a visual and acoustic ensemble.

Curated by Fanny Hauser

The exhibition is supported by the Estonian Cultural Endowment and the Ministry of Culture of Estonia. With particular thanks to Tom Engels, Mari Kurismaa, Erik Liiv and Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn.

Kaarel Kurismaa works with sound, sculpture, painting, design and kinetics. His works have been presented in solo exhibitions at Tartu Art House, Tartu; Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn; Retretti Art Museum, Punkaharju, Finland; and Temnikova & Kasela Gallery, Tallinn. His works have also been part of numerous group exhibitions, including the 15th Baltic Triennial: Same Day, Vilnius (2024); at the Halle für Kunst Steiermark, Graz (2021); at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2018); at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2018); at the SALT Galata Gallery, Istanbul (2013); and the Zimmerli Art Museum, New Jersey (2011).

#### ART EDUCATION

Kaarel Kurismaa's exhibition is accompanied by an extensive art education programme. This includes workshops for schools as well as free public tours. Further information can be found on the Kunsthalle Zürich website.

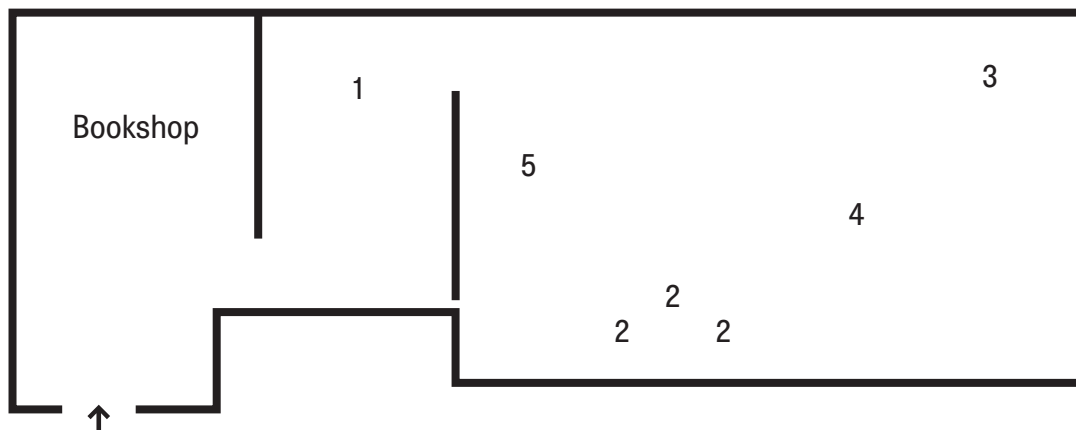
#### EVENTS

Löwenbräukunst Open House

Saturday 21 March 2026, 11 am–6 pm

Full details of further Kunsthalle Zürich events can be found on our website.

## LOWER FLOOR



- 1 *Racing the Waves*, 2001  
Video, 1'44"  
Courtesy Tartu Art Museum
- 2 *Alma's Railroad*, 1997  
Metal, cardboard and electronics
- 3 *Intermezzo*, 1997  
Metal, cymbals, plastic and electronics  
Courtesy Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn
- 4 *Intermezzo*, 1997  
Metal, cymbals, plastic and electronics
- 5 *Intermezzo*, 2026  
Metal, cymbals, plastic and electronics

All works courtesy the artist and Temnikova & Kasela,  
Tallinn, unless otherwise specified.

OPENING HOURS  
Tue–Sun 11 am–6 pm  
Thu 11 am–8 pm  
Mon closed

Kunsthalle Zürich receives funding from



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