

# CAUGHT ON TAPE

Zilvinas Kempinas's exploration of videotape as a sculptural medium has won him many admirers, and as he prepares to show a monumental work in Venice, *ArtReview* caught up with him to find out why he can't simply leave his tape in the videocassettes like everybody else



above: *Parallels*, 2007  
(installation view,  
Contemporary Art Centre,  
Vilnius), magnetic tape,  
plywood, dimensions variable

facing page: *Tube*, 2008  
(installation view, Atelier  
Calder, Saché), magnetic tape,  
plywood, dimensions variable

"WHEN I WAS A KID in school, I used to entertain myself by seeing how quickly I could run down the stairs", Zilvinas Kempinas recalls. "But then I became curious about which leg went first. And so the next time I decided to pay attention to this particular 'problem', I almost broke my neck."

Kempinas is trying to explain the impulse that led him to create *Tube*, a 26-metre horizontal walk-through cylinder made primarily of parallel strips of videotape stretched lengthways across the space, for his exhibition in the Lithuanian Pavilion at this summer's Venice Biennale. And the story of his near-fatal childhood accident is designed to illustrate the fact that he learned an important lesson: to trust his instincts. "I realised that sometimes analytical process can affect your speed and can even be harmful. It's good to turn off your knowledgeable reasoning sometimes in order to become more open to things that lie beyond the reach of our intelligence."

Magnetic tape is a frequent component of Kempinas's work (in fact, it might be described as his signature material), and he is best known for creating sculptures such as *Flying Tape* (2004–7), in which floating loops of tape are kept swooping and spinning by fans – a display you might almost describe as a sort of lyrical minimalism. The effect is part science, part voodoo: the dark, shimmering loops of tape hover in a ghostly way, and it is impossible while watching them not to feel somewhat anxious that, in the context of the fragile ecosystems the artist creates, they're just about to flutter down to the floor. Incremental changes on such minimal work create dramatic effects; the simple doubling of *Double O* (2008), for example, in which two touching tape loops are held together by two facing fans, immediately brings to mind the fragility of relationships, while in *Lemniscate* (2008) two fans support a length of tape looped into the mathematical symbol for infinity.

Kempinas employs tape to a variety of ends: creating shimmering columns recalling Fred Sandback, or hanging hundreds of lengths of tape in front of lightboxes so that they fizz like television's white noise, or even pulled taut, in mathematically precise stripes, like glossy,

sculptural Bridget Riley paintings.

Kempinas developed *Tube* during a recent residency at Atelier Calder, the house and studios of Alexander Calder in rural Saché, France, a period that he describes as a "dream exile" (although he admits that it was "extremely difficult to stay in the French meadows for six months after living in Manhattan for a decade"). He was eager to use the enormous space provided by Calder's studio, and the assistance provided by the residency, to