

Expectations: A Conversation with Gerda Paliušytė About her Solo Exhibition at the CAC

The Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) in Vilnius launched its summer 2025 season with three exhibitions, including 'Expectations', a solo show by Gerda Paliušytė that opened on 12 June.

In 2024, during the Lithuanian Season in France, Paliušytė's solo exhibition 'You Look at Me' was presented at the Château de Tours. It featured two photographic series – *Guys* (ongoing since 2021) and *Blue Flowers* (ongoing since 2022) – which were conceived and exhibited as a single, unified work. 'Expectations' at the CAC continues this photographic project, introducing new works by Paliušytė alongside contributions from artist Gediminas G. Akstinas.

In the lead-up to the exhibition, we spoke with the artist about her practice and the presentation at the CAC.

How did your journey as an artist begin?

I began my artistic practice while still studying at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, collaborating with artists Gediminas G. Akstinas and Jurgis Paškevičius. At one point during our studies, the three of us created events and staged situations that responded to specific locations – such as 'Exhibition Closing' (Paupio g. 26, Vilnius, 2011) and 'Scenario for a Swimming Pool' (Lazdynai Swimming Pool, Vilnius, 2012). We also worked with other artists and individuals we were interested in, combining texts, objects, and performances within these events. At the time, we were particularly inspired by the work of Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe, whose practices revolve around space, the viewer's interaction with the work, and the collective experience. Another significant influence was the curatorial practice of Raimundas Malašauskas, who often masterfully transcends conventional exhibition formats. It was a brief but intense and beautiful

phase. A few years later, at the invitation of the CAC, I made my first documentary film, which followed the visit of the American hip-hop group Onyx to Vilnius. The film was presented at the 12th Baltic Triennial and remains a key reference point in my practice to this day, as I continue to work with various documentary strategies.

In your upcoming exhibition, 'Expectations', you continue the *Guys* and *Blue Flowers* series presented in 'You Look at Me' at the Château de Tours in 2024. According to curator Asta Vaičiulytė, in this exhibition, 'fragmented nude male bodies that almost blend into their surroundings are placed in distant dialogue with macro images of flowers, painted blue for a stronger aesthetic appeal'. What led you to explore the relationship between male bodies and flowers?

This project emerged from a reflection on the history of photography and its traditional subjects. I was initially interested in how flowers and the nude body have long been established genres – often linked to the work of women photographers or depictions of female nudes. As the project evolved, I began thinking more deeply about shifts in the photographic canon, changing notions of intimacy and gender, and our relationship with theatricality and staging.

When photographing, I consciously move away from narrative, focusing instead on form, materiality, texture, and light. The blue-painted flowers – roses, orchids – were captured primarily as an industrial phenomenon. What interested me was how these painted flowers eventually resist the paint, and the pigment on the blossoms fades. In a sense, they are a disappointing economic object. In the *Guys* series, meanwhile, the details of the surrounding environments and interiors stretch out the bodies being photographed – they act as extensions of those bodies and offer a certain timestamp.

The project *Guys* and *Blue Flowers* has already been presented in both international and local contemporary art contexts. How do different audiences receive your work? How does knowing where your work will be presented affect your preparation? Have you encountered different interpretations or expectations?

So far, the project has always been shown in contemporary art contexts, so I wouldn't say it has reached very different audiences yet. Perhaps there are slight differences in age, social background, or experience, but not in terms of expectations or openness to various forms of contemporary art. When preparing for an exhibition, I usually take into account the space – both conceptually and architecturally – so the venue often determines the preparation process. For example, when we installed the exhibition in Tours, in an 11th-century castle, the architecture itself dictated certain exhibition solutions. By closing off one of the transitional rooms with a transparent partition and limiting direct access to the work, we altered the viewer's typical trajectory through the castle's spaces. Exhibiting in Lithuania also carries a different resonance – it means being in dialogue with the art scene I'm part of.

You've been developing the project *Guys and Blue Flowers* for several years. How has it evolved? Have new thematic directions or personal discoveries emerged? In what direction are you taking it in 'Expectations'?

While the core themes have remained, my relationship to them has naturally shifted over time. The process of taking pictures and reflecting on the results helps me better understand which aspects of the original idea really resonate – what it is I'm actually looking for. On one hand, it's important for me to define the direction and purpose of my work. On the other hand, I equally value the openness of the process – the freedom to deviate from the original storylines, only to return to them from a new angle. One significant discovery has been how the project is shaped by time – how it can change depending on the situation or space in which it's shown. *Expectations* explores some of these discoveries.

What led you to choose the title 'Expectations'? Is it more about the viewer's experience or their relationship to the exhibition itself? Is there something specific you hope they experience or take away?

We live in a world where the economy runs on expectations – yet many of us feel deeply frustrated with the current situation in which economic principles are driving the systematic destruction of the world. That frustration played a key role in shaping the exhibition. The title also speaks to the expectations placed on artworks and exhibitions by institutions and audiences – the notion of art practice as a kind of investment with predictable, fixed returns. ‘Expectations’ explores different ways of experiencing both time and environment (including the works themselves), emphasising the importance of attentiveness and free choice today.

The spaces where your work is presented often become an extension of your exhibitions. What makes the CAC space special to you?

For me, the CAC is the institution where I grew up and formed as an artist. It’s where many artists who are important to me have exhibited, so I’m grateful that this exhibition will become part of the CAC’s exhibition history. Like any institution, the CAC is shaped by the people who work there. I’m glad to be continuing my collaboration with curator Asta Vaičiulytė following our work together on the exhibition in France. Working with Asta is an inspiring and smooth process that genuinely enriches my practice.

The exhibition ‘Expectations’ will also include works by Gediminas G. Akstinas. How does your collaboration work? How does his practice complement your photographs?

The objects and sculptures Gediminas created add a necessary plot twist to the exhibition, especially in relation to the space itself. I admire how his artistic practice engages with contemporaneity – how the current economic situation is reflected through architectural or industrial materials – as well as how it foregrounds craftsmanship, imagination, and a signature style. Although the exhibition’s starting point is *Guys* and *Blue Flowers*, its full script and spatial architecture will emerge through the dialogue between my photographs and Gediminas’ sculptural objects.

Gerda Paliušytė's exhibition 'Expectations' at the Contemporary Art Centre (Vokiečių g. 2, Vilnius) is open until 14 September. The exhibition is curated by Asta Vaičiulytė.

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