

Daniel Blaufuks

(Still) Waiting for Godot

EN

A latent world

Those who wait have a special relationship with time. Waiting involves a dual process of accumulation and relaxation of minutes which, depending on the circumstances, can give rise to either irritation or a pleasant experience. In another sense, it can be said that waiting results from an expectation that feeds itself, but which is transformed through gestures, objects, people, or words that appear throughout the process. Waiting for Godot, for example, feeds on the transformation brought about by the expectation of fulfillment, but it also feeds on the emptiness and desperate immobility of a closed circuit. If we leave the strict psychological experience of waiting and enter the field of history, this notion also comes to encompass the inscription of human life in a given era, the horizons of meaning that guide individual and collective expectations. Those who (still) wait absorb these different temporal dimensions, even if they cannot outline all the contours of their situation.

These introductory words serve as a vestibule to the room Daniel Blaufuks has prepared for us. Before we enter, let us recall one of his previous exhibitions. In *Panorama* (2023), the contiguity between the images created a horizon, a reconstructed world that we could traverse with our gaze, eventually from a point in the middle of the room. If this point invited us to keep our distance, it also ended up favoring vertigo, a harbinger of the fall. Hence its ironic developments. On the other hand, the horizon did not aim at stability or the comfort of the observer, but disoriented in the same movement in which each image, by demanding attention, created an attractive dissonance with the others.

(Still) Waiting for Godot continues to work with images that reject easy relationships and question the observer's place, but the exhibition procedure takes the fragmentation of the world further, starting with the arrangement of the photographs and the different formats used. However, it also reveals a world in a latent state, even in photographs that cannot fail to speak to us of destructive forces and human disorder, elements that the temporal suspension of photography takes advantage of to create a singular tension. In its discontinuity, there is a certain aggregating urgency in this set of images, a desire to make increasingly visible the contours of a world that both desires and prevents the arrival of "Godot."

Walking through the exhibition, we glimpse secret threads enhanced by the montage, we hear whispers, we welcome unspoken words, we imagine gazes that can no longer be seen: one of these gazes depicts a man in a waiting posture immortalized by the photographic cut; the other, ostensibly covered by a ribbon, speaks to us of the veil of time and the emptiness it leaves behind. An ambiguity sets in: in her pictorial beauty, is that woman a kind of Medusa tamed by the photographer's artifices? Or is she an inert, cold body resting in a morgue? Another woman waits with her back turned, her gaze does not appease us, we are not the center of her desires. The sea is expectation and passage, but not every sea voyage is an adventure and an epic, not every wait is rewarded by a return. Even when we return to the place where we were born or where we think we come from, sometimes we do not find a home. We are heirs to a

modernity that has built a very particular tension between exile and home, between travel and the need for intimacy. In the case of art, and in particular of artists who incorporate the multiple effects of exile and travel into their work, the return is a contact with objects and spaces, the recreation of the world in the studio. Also with her back turned, another woman knows that, even when we arrive at a place, we can be expelled. She knows that the machines that rule the world do not like downtime or unproductive human beings. She knows that the violence of borders, in their multiple relationships with power and the law, is becoming ingrained in everyday gestures and words.

As a counterpoint to travel and migration, two images of trees speak to us of earth and rootedness. In their dual symbolic and material function, these normally vertical beings, often twisted by the work of the seasons, undergo symptomatic variations in this exhibition. Fallen into a swimming pool, a voluptuous tree suggests the earth's inability to sustain its own. Waterlogged soils and abnormally strong winds are signs of the extremes heralded and progressively confirmed by climate change. A catastrophe image? Perhaps. Among the artistic and literary affinities that this exhibition establishes, another tree emerges as an evocation of Beckett's play, which in its initial indications mentioned the existence of a leafless tree, next to which Vladimir and Estragon's dialogues and waiting took place. Inverted, it creates other resonances. On the one hand, it dialogues with Rodney Graham's gallery of inverted trees, in a game of mirrors that photographers know how to manipulate like no one else. On the other hand, the inversion ends up giving the bare branches, apparently devoid of life, an opportunity to take root.

In the geological and historical spectrum of the exhibition, we subtly find, somewhere between the suspended and monumental time of ancient ruins and the unreflective time of the sharp teeth of a quarry, the slowness of stones and gestures, a hand fallen in the sand. Mineral and human porosity. The stone shapes the hand in the frame of sedimented times that all photography is. A decisive image that reminds us that waiting is also a form of welcoming.

We can glimpse, welcome, listen to, and imagine all of this, or perhaps we must wait and pay attention. Again. As an antechamber, as a waiting room that is also a workshop of times, thoughts, and affections, these images stage the endless struggle between dispersion — in the extreme, transience — of all things and collection, to rescue from them a tenuous and delicate promise, petals thrown into an uncertain present. It is perhaps the most ostentatious counterpoint of the exhibition, but one that is still far from leading to an easy resolution: if the extraction of large blocks of stone plays with a title that presents us with a radical disjunction, capitalism or the end of civilization, the collection and arrangement of petals from two gardens, that of artist Ana Vieira and that of Calouste Gulbenkian, plays with the desire to preserve and with a paradoxical sacrifice of the flower for the sake of human gesture. The enumeration of elements is not transparent; it has translucent areas, sometimes obscure.

The tension between opacity and transparency, which runs through Daniel Blaufuks' work and covers a wide range of topics, from variations in light to the recreation of historical memory, including a deep dive into intimacy and everyday life, finds a motif of choice in windows. A window can be a threshold, but it can also be a place of reflection that pushes us inward, toward the objects that, like habits, define who we are and what we seek. When the outside world is unbearable and we cannot find the keys, we must stay at home. When we do not know what to do, boredom may be the best solution. The changing light with which photographers exercise their gaze defines the appropriate times for action.

Several comments by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* provide incisive descriptions of waiting. One refers to boredom and allows us to uncover another connection between *Panorama* and *(Still) Waiting for Godot*: “‘Waiting’ can be associated with the exhibition of imperial panoramas as much as with boredom”.¹ Another description refers to how three typical 19th-century figures deal with time: “Rather than pass the time, one must invite it in. To pass the time (to kill time, expel it): the gambler. Time

1. Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 528 [Q 1, 4].

spills from his every pore. — To store time as a battery stores energy: the *flâneur*. Finally, the third type: he who waits. He takes in the time and renders it up in altered form — that of expectation.”² We are far from the 19th century, and it would be difficult to find similar counterpoints to “the one who waits” today. However, this energetic image of the transformation of time remains relevant, primarily because it points to something that seems to be lacking in us, individually and collectively. Incorporating the paradoxes and virtues of waiting into this lack may be a good starting point for a transformative response.

Siegfried Kracauer, a contemporary of Benjamin, was also interested in the power of waiting, considering it at the heart of the uncertainty and loss of meaning that marked the early decades of the 20th century, both in relation to divine transcendence and to history. In “Those Who Wait,” however, he emphasized that waiting should not be confused with a relaxation of the soul's forces in relation to the ultimate things, those that really matter, but rather a “state of tense activity and active preparation.”³ Daniel Blaufuks has prepared for us an intimate view of the state of the world. The “still” in this work is a gesture that absorbs the passage of time and the transience of nature and human history, but it is also an antidote to nostalgia. The apple and the jug, primordial images, exert their spiritual effects. Although we know that their destiny is to perish, the photographer has fulfilled his mission.

Nélio Conceição

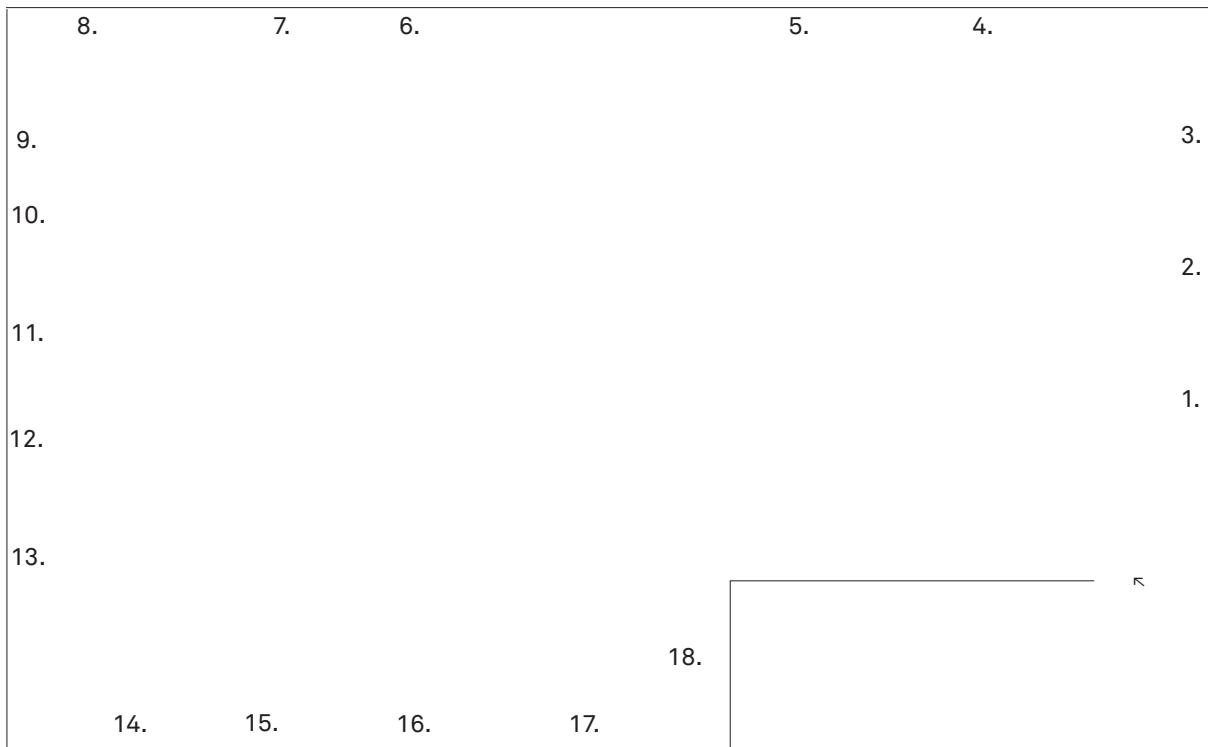
2. Idem, p. 107 [D 3, 4].

3. Kracauer, Siegfried, “Those Who Wait,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 139.

Daniel Blaufuks (b. 1963, Lisbon) has been exploring the tension between opacity and transparency, a theme that runs across the work and spans a broad spectrum — from variations in light to the recreation of historical memory and the very construction of time — through an idea of intimacy and everyday life. Questioning the role of the photographic image within the context of the pictorial flow in an increasingly digital world, he relies primarily on photography, video, and more recently collage.

In 2016, he received the AICA Award for the exhibitions *Tentativa de Esgotamento* and *Léxico*. He holds a PhD from the University of Wales, with a thesis on photography and memory in relation to the works of W. G. Sebald and Georges Perec. His films — *expanded photographs* — have been presented at various film festivals, and his most recent works explore the resistance to the German occupation in Brittany and colonialism in São Tomé and Príncipe, while continuing his non-diary *the days are numbered*.

Blaufuks's work has been exhibited at institutions such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon), the Eugène Delacroix Museum (Paris), the Serralves Museum (Porto), and MAAT (Lisbon), among others. His work is included in various public and private collections, notably the Calouste Gulbenkian Collection (Lisbon), the State's Contemporary Art Collection (Lisbon), the PLMJ Collection (Lisbon), the EDP Foundation Collection (Lisbon), MACAM (Lisbon), the Jan Michalski Foundation (Montricher), the New York Public Library (New York), Palazzo delle Papesse (Siena), Sagamore Art Collection (Miami), The Progressive Collection (Ohio), Vasco Collection (Lisbon), Portuguese Center of Photography (Porto), Center for Visual Arts (Coimbra).



1. The Enumeration of the Elements I (From the Garden of Ana Vieira), 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

2. The End of Capitalism or the End of Civilization, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
50 x 75 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

3. The Enumeration of the Elements II (From the Garden of Calouste Gulbenkian), 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

4. The Hope in the World (Olympia), 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

5. Blind Hope, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
30 x 45 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

6. The Waiting Room (Les Roches Noires) II, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

7. The Waiting Room (Les Roches Noires) I, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

8. The Wait, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
32 x 25 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

9. The Return from Tangiers (Solandra Grandiflora) II, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

10. The Return from Tangiers (Solandra Grandiflora) I, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

11. The Passing of Days (in the studio), 2026
Inkjet print on paper
32 x 25 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

12. The Root of the World, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
35 x 20 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

13. (Still) Waiting for Godot, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
80 x 120 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

14. The Tree that Lost its Roots, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
45 x 60 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

15. Woman Contemplating the Sea II, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
80 x 120 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

16. Woman Contemplating the Sea I, 2026
Inkjet print on paper
100 x 150 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

17. The Beginning of Desire (Calla), 2026
Inkjet print on paper
40 x 60 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3

18. The Beginning of Desire (Apple), 2026
Inkjet print on paper
70 x 105 x 3,5 cm
Ed. 3