

Mykolas Valantinas

*Father*

07.11.2025–01.03.2026

Contemporary Art Centre

‘With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he realized that he, too, was but appearance, that another man was dreaming him.’

– Jorge Luis Borges, *Fictions*, ‘The Circular Ruins’ translated by Andrew Hurley

The wanderer seeks to dream a man. Among the ruins of a former temple, a heart begins to beat, venous blood flows through the pulmonary arteries, and a skeletal framework slowly embraces the architecture of bodily organs, forming night after night. Skin tightens, eyelashes separate – and he opens his eyes. Having brought his son to reality and given him a fire-resistant nature, alien to his own body, the father sends him abroad, but first instils oblivion so that he does not remember his inhuman origin. Having achieved his goal, the stranger, dulled by the sameness of his days, accepts

the wall of fire that suddenly appears as a sign of his demise. The epigraph – the last sentence of this story – marks the turning point at which the character, caressed by flames, preserves his life but loses the basis of reality.

In the continuous cycle of creation, origin fades. The son-creation becomes the son-creator – a binary system that reflects the structure of DNA: two intertwined threads that weave heredity and change. Cultural continuity matters no less for the code of life: heritage, ornamentation, recognisable motif. It is reflected in language too: the Latin *pater-patronus* line, carried into the English *pattern*, traces an etymological path from father-guardian to exemplar-authority to a sequence of recurring forms.

The exhibition 'Father' positions itself between genealogy and sign. In a series of works juxtaposing the archive of Rytis Valantinas' drawings and prints with Mykolas Valantinas' AI-generated works that replicate his father's images, genealogy is read as a horizontal line of meanings without

a centre, akin to a rhizomatic structure. The hierarchical order is absorbed into the rhythm of the mark, where repetition opens the possibility of change. As a body once formed in ruins, so the father's work resounds in the son's voice.

The exhibition opens with a 1979 self-portrait by Rytis Valantinas: a confident, slightly impudent gaze rendered in precise pencil strokes. It is hung beside an AI composition of a lynx walking through a cemetery. In the father's drawing, the play of light and shadow builds volume; in the AI image, that logic has the opposite effect – shadow no longer stabilises form but destabilises it. The shadows exceed the boundaries of the figure: in some areas, they double the animal, in others, they turn into trees, clouds or motifs of obscure origin. The dense AI aesthetics and unreadable visual logic expose the principle of a diffusion model: it generates not final images but data tendencies – generalised structures of forms, textures, motifs. Here, the model, having mastered the father's drawing manner, imitates the

original lynx created by Rytis Valantinas on the provisional *talonas* – the first money of independent Lithuania – at the instruction of the son, who thereby awakens the memory of the entire archive. By incorporating a cemetery landscape taken from another work by Rytis Valantinas, a composite image is created that is close to, but not identical to, the originals.

The lynx recurs across works, operating as a leitmotif structuring the exhibition. Having adopted AI's associative way of thinking, the exhibition unfolds like a mythical atlas. The father's works, their imitations, money, photographs, film frames – each image points to another, forming a totality of shifting meanings. Gintaras Beresnevičius described 'old polysemantic mythological thinking' as a set of turning Ferris wheels, in which 'the same phenomena and structures, passing into another type of disposition, are seen from a different aspect and unfold other meanings.' In this cycle, originals and copies lose hierarchical priority and restore an older relation. Only works worthy of recognition would receive a plethora

of copies, establishing their originality. Mykolas copies by dreaming anew, each time adding one more detail, sometimes perceptible, sometimes not.

But every dream has its price. The 'Box of Money' contains 1000-litas banknotes amounting to 3.5 million litas. This is the entire stock held by the Money Museum of the Bank of Lithuania, lent to Mykolas on condition that they return to the museum's permanent collection as an artistic intervention after the show. Temporarily conceded to the artist, the money fulfils a prophecy of cyclical time – the design of these notes was created by Rytis Valantinas in 1991. Here, the connection between art and money becomes literal: the design incorporates Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' painting *The Tale of Kings* (1909). The interaction of dreamlike imagery and currency determines the speculative nature of the banknote – a promise of prosperity before the restored state had stable economic foundations.

This promise is rewritten in the present: in taking possession, Mykolas Valantinas undertakes to create value that does not yet exist. Money, when turned into an artwork, materialises the father's heritage and inscribes the son's mark. The artist's gesture is transparent: he openly states the desire to profit – to create economic value by leveraging the prestige of a solo exhibition and the organising institution's name; through an abundance of ideas that entice sponsors; and even through the intimate relationship between father and son. Money seduces with the possibility of rejecting origin and making a new identity, or overwriting the inherited one. Since the invention of coins in the Iron Age, money has promised exactly this: self-created reality. In a bottom-up model, to acquire coin is to acquire status.

Having lost its material basis, money is a system of collective agreement and trust, a social fiction. As in myth, its power lies in integrity – the illusion of naturalness concealing its production. That illusion falters when the 1000-litas banknote is

deconstructed. In the exhibition, amber photopolymer plates and blue and silver offset plates – all produced in Germany using the latest security technologies – together with aluminium silkscreen frames with watermarks and UV security features are displayed as the full set of components needed to print a banknote. Spread out on a table, these elements function as tools; hung on a wall, they assume the aura of artworks. Their meaning is twofold: the tools pulse with industrial potential, casting a shadow on the 'Box of Money', while the artworks act as props demonstrating craft mastery. The climax: the 'Čiurlionis' banknotes are fakes, but indistinguishable from the real, and impossible to disprove otherwise. The principle that binds the father's archive and the AI works is reiterated; the line between 'authentic' and 'artificial' collapses, as now and then, copies imperceptibly blend with originals. The open deceit and assurance of success frame the exhibition as a declaration of self-worth, and the excess of copies speaks not only of forgery but of the fabrication of reality.

The security system of the first litas is structurally flawed: the notes contain no metal thread, and the watermarks are merely white paint imitating them – a counterfeiter's device. In 1993, the Prosecutor General's Office, investigating the printing of litas banknotes, found that three KGB agents had followed the process from the outset; on the instruction of one of them, nicknamed 'Detail', who mediated between the Bank of Lithuania, the Government and the US Banknote Corporation, which printed the notes, these security measures were omitted. The contract with the US company was signed without tender at abnormally high costs, enabling speculation by intermediaries. If a compromised 1000-litas note were to enter circulation, a flood of counterfeits would almost certainly follow, with catastrophic consequences for the national economy. Counterfeiting – and the fragility of reality itself – is therefore encoded in the very fabric of the money.

The logic of action here is amoral, devoid of conscious value orientation. The



exhibition's position is similar: amorality is not a blatant disregard for moral norms, but rather acting beyond their boundaries. Where values and rules are not yet set, new horizons open, turning art and speculation into synonyms.

POVILAS GUMBIS