

STRATEGIC LOCATIONS

28.03.2025 – 28.05.2025

GALLERIA CONTINUA is delighted to present *Strategic Locations*, a solo exhibition by Zhanna Kadyrova, at its Paris space in the heart of the Marais.

One of the most powerful voices in contemporary Ukrainian art, Zhanna Kadyrova is internationally recognized for her ability to explore the boundaries of matter and form. In the current context, she uses found objects and materials to create works that poignantly reflect life in war zones. As the artist explains: "My works are not a representation of violence, but a tangible trace of violence itself, a direct testimony to the brutality of the conflict, extracted from its context and placed within the territory of art."

Since 2022, Kadyrova has chosen to remain in Ukraine, significantly limiting her international projects, to focus on creating work directly on-site. The exhibition *Strategic Locations* thus resonates with the collective experience of Ukrainians, intersecting testimonies of a war that continues to impact Europe, while paying tribute to the strength of human resistance and the persistence of life.

The exhibition brings together works created in "strategic locations" of the warfare, within conflict zones, within occupied territories, or on the shifting front lines. Delving into the reality of the war in Ukraine, the exhibition traces the military geography on the Ukrainian territory since 2014, beginning with the annexation of Crimea, and passing through several sites where natural and historic landscapes were violently transformed into war geography, theatres of operations, or sources of exploited resources, human and natural.

Upon entering, the viewer is confronted with the beginnings of the war through *HOME* (2014), a monumental sculpture depicting a map of Ukraine, fractured by the invasion. Made from bricks, the work symbolizes the collapse of the notions of "home" and safety, questioning

whether walls can protect us in times of devastating violence. Created in 2014, the sculpture reflects the early stage of the conflict –when Crimea, a place Zhanna Kadyrova frequently visited and worked in, was illegally annexed, and the war in Donbas began–while also foreshadowing the full-scale invasion that erupted in 2022.

The next location of the exhibition's journey is the series *Behind the Fence* (2014), conceived by the artist during a visit to the Biryuchyy peninsula on the Sea of Azov, which remained Ukrainian territory until 2022. In this series, Kadyrova repurposes elements of old fences to create installations that evoke separation, enclosure, and violence. The same fences reappear in *Souvenir* (2023), where shells – objects often collected by children as mementos of summer vacations – are repurposed into peephole-like sculptures. Through this work, the artist reflects on the inaccessibility of certain areas of her homeland, invaded by Russia, including the entire Azov coastline.

Furthermore, the artist presents a new series that explores nature as a battlefield, where land becomes a landscape of destruction, and cities are reshaped into military geographies. The Russian military offensive and its consequences unfold on multiple levels, devastating human lives while committing ecocide and transforming nature into an economically and militarily strategic resource.

The ongoing project *Forest* (2024)¹ brings us to the Kakhovka Dam, one of the most emblematic sites where war, ecocide and devastation of culture converge. Built in 1956, the dam's construction had submerged Ukrainian archaeological sites, including Scythian historical locations and Cossack fortifications, covering a total area of 2,155 km² by water. In 2023, the dam was detonated

1: The ongoing project « "Forest" » was conceived upon the invitation of IHME Helsinki Art Commission 2025.

by the Russian military, causing massive flooding of adjacent areas and the violent destruction of their ecosystems. Kadyrova's video documentation of her site-specific installation in this area captures a young forest growing on the site of destruction, the nature progressively reclaiming the land from violence.

Through each of her creations, Kadyrova expresses not only her personal experience as an observer of the war but also her commitment to defending the life, culture, and memory of Ukraine. For her, art is never an ephemeral act, but a form of resistance that gives a voice to both suffering and hope, resonating in every artistic gesture. Art, which the artist defines as an "act of humanity," thus opposes war – the ultimate expression of a paradoxical absence of humanity among human beings.

Sculpture, like human beings, can also become a refugee suffering from war. The documentary film *IDP* (Internally Displaced Person)² tells the story of the evacuation of Zhanna Kadyrova's sculpture *Origami* (2019), which was dismantled and relocated from Jubilee Park in Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, on August 30, 2024, as the area became part of the front line. The film captures the dismantling process, eyewitness testimonies, and the symbolic significance of this evacuation of the sculpture. Shaped like a monumental origami deer, the sculpture appears to break free from its pedestal, coming to life in a desperate attempt to save itself, speaking to the broader effort to preserve cultural heritage in times of war.

The exhibition continues with *Resources* (2024)³, a new work being exhibited for the first time. Created in Transcarpathia, the western part of Ukraine, which is relatively far from the war zone. The work features severed logs, evoking the clearings left by loggers in the forests of Transcarpathia. These logs, have their bark replaced with camouflage fabric from the Ukrainian military uniforms. The logs thus transform into wounded human bodies and limbs, symbolizing the effects of war on the civilian population and the lives destroyed by the aggressor.

The exhibition path concludes with the *Shots* (2010–2014) series. The cracked tiles and marked pieces in the series reflect how violence leaves its mark on the environment, the psyche and the human body. For this series, the artist used actual Kalashnikov bullets, transforming the works into authentic acts of testimony.

Zhanna Kadyrova's *Strategic Locations* goes beyond the Ukrainian territory alone, as defeating colonial conquest such as Russian imperialism is strategic for the entire world. The artists insists that freedom and the right to self-determination are universal – just like nature itself. Through a compelling and engaged artistic path, Kadyrova creates a space for reflection on the essential role of art in times of conflict, presenting it as a powerful vehicle for the voices of those who resist.

2: The project has been filmed in collaboration with Natalka Diachenko

3: The project has been photographed in collaboration with Pavel Sterec and commissioned by Ribbon platform.

About the artist:

Zhanna Kadyrova born in 1981 in Brovary, Ukraine is an artist and was a member of the Revolutionary Experimental Space (R.E.P.). She graduated from the Taras Shevchenko State Art School in the sculpture department and received awards such as the Kazimir Malevich Artist Award (2012) and the Grand Prix of the Kyiv Sculpture Project. She also won prizes from PinchukArtCentre, including the Special Prize (2011), Main Prize (2013), and Special Prize – Future Generation International (2014). In 2025, she won the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine in visual art, becoming the first woman in 20 years to receive this distinction. She lives and works in Kyiv.

Kadyrova was working on several site-specific projects until the recent war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 changed all her plans. From March to June 2022, she worked on the humanitarian project PALIANYTSIA from her new home in the Carpathian Mountains. This project has been exhibited worldwide, including in Italy, Germany, Norway, Japan, France, the US, Sweden, Austria, Georgia, Romania, Thailand, and India. In June 2022, Kadyrova returned to Kyiv and created new works about the war, which were presented in her first major retrospective at Kunstverein Hannover (Germany) in 2023. In 2023, another major exhibition, *Flying Trajectories*, was shown at the PinchukArtCentre in Kyiv. Kadyrova also took part in the show *From Ukraine: Dare to Dream*, curated by the PinchukArtCentre as a Collateral Event of the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2024. In 2024, her exhibition *Unexpected* at Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague (Czechia) was recognized as one of "The Top Ten Shows in Europe in 2024" by Frieze Magazine.

Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including exhibitions at Kunstverein Hannover (Germany), Stavanger Museum (Norway), Kunstforum Wien (Austria), Eretz Istaël Museum Tel Aviv (Israel), Centre Pompidou, Palais Tokyo, La Kunsthalle Mulhouse (France), Kunstraum Innsbruck (Austria) Ludwig Museum, Budapest (Hungary), Museum of Modern Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (Poland); Spinnerei Leipzig; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; DAAD, Zimmerstrabe, Berlin (all Germany), the National Union of Cuban Architects and Construction Engineers, Havana (Cuba), Sara Hilden Museum, Tampere (Finland), Lviv Municipal Art Center, Lviv, National Art Museum of Ukraine and PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv (all Ukraine), Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea (Italy).

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