Surreal Humor and Human Reflection:
Arkadiusz "Arek" Gepchard's Staged Self-Portraits

November 2025

Polish artist Arkadiusz "Arek" Gepchard has developed a distinctive photographic practice since 1999, using the camera as a site for introspection and playful inquiry. Working primarily with digital techniques, he designs hand-made props, theatrical makeup, and carefully directed lighting to construct surreal self-portraits. His images are conceived as short performances for the lens, where he acts as protagonist, director, set designer, and storyteller. Exhibitions across Europe and the United States, along with consistent recognition in international competitions, have brought his work to a broad audience.

Gepchard's practice blends satire with sincerity. Everyday objects become symbols that carry emotional weight, while humor opens the door to more complex reflections on time, desire, and mortality. The studio functions like a laboratory where improvisation meets tight composition. He often builds scenes from found materials, then refines the image in postproduction without losing the tactile evidence of the set. The result is a body of work that sits between staged photography and performance art, recalling the self-transformations of Cindy Sherman, the conceptual wit of Magritte, and the dark comedy of contemporary Polish theater, yet remaining unmistakably his own.

In "Guardian of Time," the artist faces the viewer with eyes and mouth marked by stitched Xs, a simple device that suspends speech and sight while heightening the intensity of presence. A white clock replaces the chest, its hands casting sharp shadows across the blank face, and a pair of scissors hovers at the edge like an instrument of choice. A model heart is held at the left, tubing looping back toward the body. The deep chiaroscuro isolates the figure, giving the scene a stark, almost sculptural clarity. The image reads as a meditation on autonomy and fate, on the urge to command time even as the body insists on its own tempo. Wit and gravity coexist, which is the core of Gepchard's approach.

"Poker" extends this strategy through dark humor. Set against an industrial network of gleaming pipes, the artist appears absorbed in a card game with a creature that erupts from his own torso, complete with another hand of cards. The absurdity is deliberate and precise. It conjures the feeling of playing against one's inner impulses, that stubborn player who refuses to fold. Color is restrained to steely grays, bruise reds, and sickly whites, which amplifies the mood of unease while keeping the scene crisply legible. The photograph engages the viewer first with a smile, then with the slow recognition that competition and self-sabotage often share the same body.

What distinguishes Gepchard's art is the balance he holds between empathy and critique. He never treats the human figure as a spectacle to be mocked. Instead, he uses his own body as a site of questioning, inviting the viewer to consider how objects, rituals, and choices shape a life. The craft is meticulous, the symbolism clear, and the tone both generous and incisive. In a field crowded with digital effects, Gepchard offers something rare. He stages photographs that are vivid and memorable, yet also humane, leading the audience from laughter to thought with disarming ease.

Art Review by
Circle Foundation for the Arts

Guardian of Time

Poker