

# Rafał Bujnowski

Karol Sienkiewicz



Rafał Bujnowski, photo: Kuba Dąbrowski / DIK FGAZINE / Forum

**Painter, graphic designer, videographer, installation artist and creator of happenings that play with everyday objects and themes. Born on February 3, 1974, in Wadowice. He lives and works in Krakow.**

Bujnowski first studied architecture at the Krakow University of Technology from 1993 to 1995, and then moved on to graphic design at the **Krakow Academy of Fine Arts** (1995-2000). From 1995 to 2001 he was a member of the **Grupa Ładnie** collective, along with Marek Firek, **Marcin Maciejowski**, **Wilhelm Sasnal** and Józef 'Kurosawa' Tomczyk. He is currently working as a painter and graphic designer, as well as creating videos, installations and artistic happenings.

Between 1998 and 2001 Bujnowski headed up a project called Galeria Otwarta in Krakow, an exhibition space that generally consisted of two, maximum four, billboards set up in the city centre. Bujnowski's work has always related to public space. As a student, he also ran a small business making artistic T-shirts; the most popular model was **I'm Not Interested in Art** (2000).



Advertisement for **I'm Not Interested in Art** t-shirts, Galeria Otwarta, 2001



**Snow**, Galeria Otwarta, 1999

However, Bujnowski is mainly a painter. He arranges his paintings into large and small series, drawing most of his inspiration from his immediate surroundings. His motifs are simplified and placed against a neutral background. Bujnowski excels at analysing the medium of painting and challenging its traditions, opposing the principle of originality with serial production and reducing the concept of mimesis to absurdity by painting replicas of real-life objects.



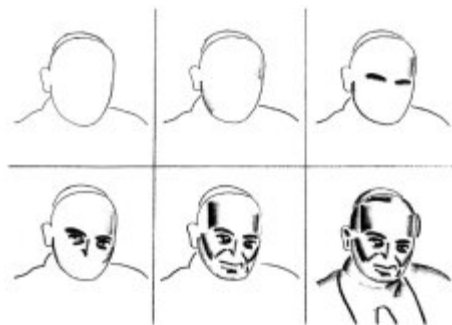
**VHS Cassette** 2000

oil on canvas, series of 100 paintings

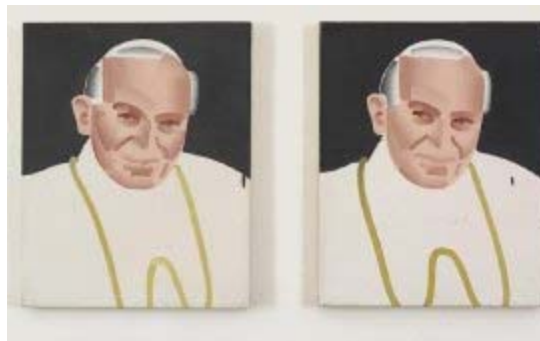
Bujnowski became famous both as member of the Grupa Ładnie and for his life-size paintings of everyday objects. The series **Paintings-Objects (1999-2002)** (see photos), for instance, was made up of **Blackboard** (1999), **Bricks** (1999) and **180 Minute Cassette** (2000). Bujnowski created up to 100 copies of each one, selling some of them at the same price as the original object. He returned to this objectification of art in the series **Backs of Paintings** and **Household Articles** (both 2000), prints that imitated the packaging of items like matches, condoms or nails, or objects still partially hidden by their wrapping (such as audio cassettes in transparent plastic boxes) (see photos).

The series **Pictures for an Apartment (2002)** (see photos) dealt with the issue of a painting's utility and poor artistic taste, with five copies of paintings designed for different rooms in an apartment – the living room, the kitchen, and so on. The author even photographed them hanging in showcase interiors in IKEA stores. The artworks from the **Framed Pictures series (2000)** (see photos), painted from photographs with a passe-partout mount and black frames painted in, were also supposed to fit into any home. The series began with **Whistler's Mother's Painting**, fifty copies of the painting on the wall in Whistler's famous **The Artist's Mother** from 1871. Bujnowski approached the same issue from another angle in **How to Paint the Pope**

(2001), in which he demonstrated how, in a series of simple steps, anyone could create a representation of Pope John Paul II.



**How to Paint the Pope** 2002



**Pope** 2001-2002

In 2001, Bujnowski carried out a series of actions in which he physically renovated the interiors or exteriors of artistic institutions, blurring the distinction between the painter-as-artist and the painter-as-worker. He personally repainted the façade of Krakow's Bunkier Sztuki gallery ([see photos](#)), selecting the colours in consultation with the local conservation officer and creating an enormous abstract mural in the process. At Galeria Arsenał in Białystok he painted the window frames, radiators and windowsills in peach, an action he repeated at the Inner Spaces Centre for Contemporary Art in Poznań. While working, he usually displayed the empty paint cans and offered his own brand of paint for sale. Actions like these shifted attention away from the painter as a creator of images to the painter as the designer of man's aesthetic environment, emphasising his social utility. In a later series called **Traces of Paintings** (2005), he pointed out the aesthetic aspect of everyday life by creating the illusion of the trace of a painting left on the wall. A similar appropriation of random aesthetics was apparent in the series **Stains** (2003), in which he represented on canvas the round imprints left by coffee cups or teacups on a table ([see photos](#)).



**Prehistoric Tools** 2004

Bujnowski's paintings often feature isolated objects highlighted against a uniform background, which was the case with **Chocolate** (2004) and 2003's **Paintings-Trophies** series of antlers and hunting trophies, an ironic reference to the colloquial Polish term for "cuckold." **Prehistoric Tools** (2004) was a series of twenty small-format pictures painted with thickly applied paint. Another frequent motif in Bujnowski's work is simplified, virtually schematic landscapes, such as the ones in the series **Snow (2002-2004)** ([see photos](#)) and **Clouds (2004)** ([see photos](#)). In **Graboszyce (2002)** ([see photos](#)), the name of the artist's home town, he tackled the subject of detached houses, removed from any context and painted with no background at all.

Bujnowski eventually began using his paintings to reach for a reality accessible only via technology. The series **Satellite** features blurry black-and-white abstract "photos" of outer space, and in **USG** he painted scans of the human body, as they are seen on a USG monitor in a doctor's office.

Several of the artist's projects combined painting with video (such as **Flowers** or **Nails**, both 2005). Film played a particularly important role in the series **Dusk (2004)** ([see photos](#)), in which black-and-white landscapes were gradually covered with black paint. The process of the transformation of a scene into black monochrome – night falling – was recorded on video as well.

Bujnowski used his own self-portrait as the starting point for a large-scale project called **Visa Portrait (2004)** ([see photos](#)), in which he photographed the painting and attached it to his US visa application in place of an actual photo. He was granted the visa, and while in the US he attended a flying course. Thus he not only returned to his theme of originals vs. copies, making it impossible to say which came first, but also joined the debate on the fear of terrorism by showing how easy it was to circumvent security procedures.



#### **Last Saved** 2004

The artist did away entirely with the concept of uniqueness with the project **Last Saved** (2004), for which he hired a craftsman to produce eight copies of a whatnot shelf from Pope John Paul II's family home on display in his museum in Wadowice. By appropriating this ordinary piece of furniture and turning it into a cult object, he reversed the usual museum process of turning everyday items into curiosities.

In 2006, Bujnowski contacted various political parties and organisations and offered to paint banners for them, irrespective of which political option they represented. Contrary to his expectations, only left-wing organisations responded. After being used in actual street marches, the banners were then shown in a gallery exhibition. Once again, the artist was returning to the idea of painting's usefulness, this time by giving it a role in political activism.

Author: Karol Sienkiewicz, December 2006.



Banners for the March of Tolerance, Cracow, 2006 - exhibition at the [CCA Ujazdowski Castle](#) in Warsaw and photos from the march

Selected solo exhibitions:

- 1998 - "Anka", Galeria Otwarta, Crakow
- 2000
- "Cheap Art from Poland", Window Gallery, London, UK
- "Video Home System", Galeria Potocka, Cracow

- "Zdjęcia", Galeria Zderzak, Cracow
- "Artykuły spożywczo-przemysłowe", Goethe Institute, Cracow; Galeria Arsenał, Białystok
- 2001
- "Obraz okno", Galeria AMS (400 billboards throughout Poland)
- "Malowanie, odnawianie", CSW Inner Spaces Multimedia, Poznań
- 2002 - "12 przedmiotów, 150 obrazów", **Galeria Raster**, Warsaw
- 2003
- "New and Recent", IBID Project, London, UK
- "Paintings.Objects", Johnen + Shöttle, Cologne, Germany
- 2004
- "Wiza, zmierzch, muzeum", Galeria Raster, Warsaw
- "Meubles et peintures", Institut Polonais, Paris, France
- "Visa Portrait", Art in General, New York, USA
- 2005
- "Embroider", Johnen Galerie, Berlin, Germany
- "Malowanie", Bunkier Sztuki, Cracow; Kunstverein, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 2006
- Norwich Gallery, Norwich, UK
- "Bieżące prace" as part of "At the Very Centre of Attention", **Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski**, Warsaw

#### Selected group exhibitions:

- 1999 - "Namaluj mnie", Galeria BWA, Zielona Góra
- 2000
- "Scena 2000", **Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski**, Warsaw
- "Model do sklepania", Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej, Orońsko
- 2001
- "Popelita", Bunkier Sztuki, Cracow
- "Dobro", **Galeria Raster**, Warsaw
- IV Wystawa Malarstwa Młodych, Galeria BWA Awangarda, Wrocław
- 2002 - "Objects, Paintings", Johnen Et Schöttle Galerie, Cologne, Germany
- 2003
- "Ögonblickes Anatomie", Grafikenhus, Mariefred, Sweden
- "Sztuka w mieście. Zewnętrzna Galeria AMS 1998-2002", Galeria Zachęta, Warsaw; Galeria Arsenał, Poznań; BWA Awangarda, Wrocław; Bologna, Italy (2004)
- 2004
- "De ma fenêtre. Des artistes et leurs territoires", Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France
- "Wall Drawings", Museum of Modern Art, Rijeka
- "Pod flagą biało-czerwoną. Nowa sztuka z Polski", Estonian Art Museum, Rotermann Salt Storage, Tallinn, Estonia; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania; National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
- "INC. Sztuka wobec korporacyjnego przejmowania miejsc publicznej ekspresji", Galeria XX1, Galeria Program, Warsaw; **Muzeum Narodowe** in Szczecin; BWA, Zielona Góra (2005), BWA, Wrocław (2005); Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała (2005); Insytut Sztuki Wyspa, Gdańsk (2005)
- "Palimpsest Muzeum", International Biennale of Art in Łódź, **Muzeum Historii Miasta Łodzi**
- "Za czerwonym horyzontem", **Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski**, Warsaw
- 2005
- "Urban Malerei", Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany
- "Potencjał", Metropolitan Building, Warsaw
- "Czas kultury", Galeria Miejska Arsenał, Poznań
- "Boys", Bunkier Sztuki, Cracow
- Prague Biennale 2, Prague, Czech Republic
- 2006
- "Spojrzenia. II Edycja", Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw
- "Kolekcja Bunkra Sztuki", Bunkier Sztuki, Cracow
- "Gut und Billig", PackHof Museum Junge Kunst, Frankfurt Oder, Germany

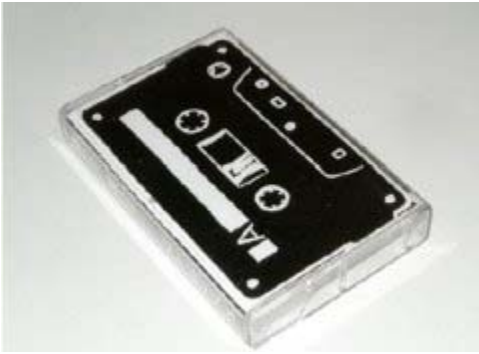
**Brick** 1999-2002, 25x12x6 cm, series of 100

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Audio Cassette from the **Household Articles** series, 2000, linoleum print; and **Up**, 2001, oil on canvas

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**Pictures for an Apartment**, 2002 (**Wedding**, series of 25 paintings; **Glass**, series of 25 paintings; **Lemons**, series of 25 paintings; **Boy in the Water**, series of 25 paintings; **Child on a Beach**, series of 25 paintings)  
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**Whistler's Mother's Painting**, 2002, series of 50 paintings; and **Framed Pictures**, 2003, oil on canvas  
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**Painting, Renovation**, 2001, Renovation of the historical façade of Bunkier Sztuki in Cracow (artistic action, series of paintings, paint cans), and **Stains**, 2003  
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From the **Snow** series, 2004  
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**Negatives (Sky)**, 2005; and **Untitled (Sky)**, 2006 (paintings made without a brush - the effect is achieved by shaking the canvas with freshly applied paint)

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From the **Graboszyce** series 2002

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**Zug, Old Town**, 2004, oil on canvas and video; **Landscape with Tree and House (near Zurich)**, 2004, oil on canvas and video

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**Visa Portrait** 2004

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