

GEORG KARGL FINE ARTS

PRESS INFORMATION

Rafał Bujnowski *Current Works*

On view: March 20 – May 8, 2021

Opening: Fri, March 19, 2021, 1 pm – 7 pm & Sat, March 20, 2021, 11 am – 4 pm

TENDER ERASING

The exhibition *Current Works* presents drawings, photos and paintings – classic media that Rafał Bujnowski puts to the test and transgresses their limits. He examines if our current experience, perpetually mediated virtually, and the good old arts of drawing, photography and painting can be a match for each other. Are these media able to carry the weight of our experience, are they still relevant? The exhibition's title is a linguistic ready-made perversely playing with the notion of the present that has undergone a radical metamorphosis. It is no longer banally descriptive; instead, it uncovered its semantic heaviness. The perspective which the present moment used to give us – on time, stability and presence – is no longer there. To paraphrase Marx: “All that was solid melted into air.” The same is true about work which, on the one hand, has become even more alienated, but on the other – it might be our saving grace, a therapeutic strategy in face of the constantly changing “here and now.”

The exhibition opens with ideographic drawings of lips: smiling, often drawn in one swift stroke, portrayed with tenderness and longing, as if the artist worried they might disappear. Bujnowski juxtaposes them with photos of sand where the sun-warmed grains also form the line of lips. The photos are reminiscent of a documentation of an ephemeral site-specific installation, in constant danger of being destroyed by wind or rain. The drawings and photographs enter a rare and tender relationship; it is a study of longing and a lack which is contrasted with the process of documentation, capturing, saving. The lips become a symbol of an insatiable nostalgia, they make evident the change, the erasure of lips from public space. Bujnowski tries to restore their intimacy and closeness, paradoxically looking for them in the grains of sand, in the line drawn, on the surface of paper.

In the next room we can see large format paintings: *Stand by Computer* and *Venetian Blind*. *Stand by Computer* shows the sleeping computer on the table and the chair against the glowing patch of the curtain painted in cold blues and grey, the colours of the small hours. The protagonists of the painting are light, temperature and a complex array of ambivalent emotional responses to a manipulation with chromatic black. A deep desolation, joy mixed with anxiety, a hypnotising unknown, ready to receive what the day brings, a strange temporality of this special moment, both alienating and stabilizing. The picture is also a painterly agon won. The theory of the agon, referring to the struggle of the old poet with the young one, says that the winner is the poet who will speak the most aboriginal, primal language, the voice of young Adam (the first man) early in the morning. Bujnowski, entering a dialogue with painterly tradition, creates a new quality: he manages to capture the condition of an individual in the world coming to life. He captures the individual's ambiguous spectrum of feelings – a mixture of joy and anxiety, loneliness and serenity, stability and uncertainty – in his own new language. The line of the computer, the chair and the table – the narrative part of *Stand by Computer* – is sharply juxtaposed with the anti-painting of *Venetian Blind*, a

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view of a parking lot painted with lines, a geometric abstraction depicting something like a post-human landscape, though shown without horrifying undertones. These abstractions remind me of a Casio keyboard or the notation for Phillip Glass's minimalist pieces. This is the structure of repetition, of a coolly devised order, of reduction. These abstractions are indeed repeated later in the exhibition, in smaller formats.

Bujnowski's *Torsos* were made by scratching off cobalt blue with a towel, i.e. taking off paint until the shape emerges. They resemble early daguerreotypes or, to an even greater degree, Bayard's "Self-Portrait as Drowned Man". The hypnotic power of these images has its source in the light which, as in the case of early photographs, is the key to their creation. In the case of daguerreotypes it was about the exposure time to light, with Bujnowski – it is about the precision in subtracting paint.

The last group of works at the exhibition (*Masks*) are portraits of people with their mouths covered; the pictures have been painted on paper towels, with brushes soaked in oil paint. The viewer who comes closer to identify the shape emerging from the daub, will be reflected in the picture's glass frame: a face in a mask, with only the gaze at their disposal, a gaze wherein ferments fear, a bitter coda to the uncovered lips shown in the first room.

Bujnowski proves that in order to say something about us, to create a moving vivisection of longing, fear, anxiety, joy, the feeling of unmitigated lack, one does not need to add anything, to multiply complicated narrations. It is enough to tenderly subtract something, wipe it out, erase.

Michał Łukaszuk