

# CULTURE.PL

## Wojciech Bakowski



Wojciech Bakowski, photo by Joanna Kinowska, courtesy of Zachęta National Gallery of Art

His work in film reflects a newfound internationalism that references the developments of modernism whilst simultaneously engaging with the legacy of the former East. His trademark style consists of expressive images and his low, trance-like voice in the background.

Born 1979 in Poznań, Wojciech Bakowski is a director of animated films and videos, a visual artist, poet, musician, and creator of audio performances and alternative music. He is also known by the stage name WuEsBe. The world depicted in his films shows reality as perceived through the eyes of the audience - muddled, spoken in colloquialisms and barely intelligible. One critic claims that 'he creates a hyperreal world, indifferent to psychology and sociology, he doesn't stylise, he creates a new world'.

The artist is sole author of his animations, and in making them he uses his own music, sounds and poetry. Bakowski, perhaps the most prolific and visible member of Poznań's vibrant art and music community, weaves together video, audio performance and sound-based installation. His films are shown at galleries, museum exhibitions and animated film festivals, and are included in anthologies. His musical events are at times treated as audio performances, at others as concerts. He has a characteristic on-stage image - wearing white socks with ankle-length black trousers, a worn-out black leather jacket - that puts emphasis on dark circles under his eyes.

With Piotr Bosacki and Przemysław Sanecki, Bąkowski is part of the band KOT since 2004, writing lyrics and music and providing the vocals. He also belongs to the Pinkpunk association, is leader of post-rap projects and the band Niwea. Together with Piotr Bosacki, Radosław Szlaga, Tomasz Mróz, Magdalena Starska and Konrad Smoleński, he co-created the **Penerstwo art group**. Their art deals with reality in post-communist residential blocks and depicts vulgar and obscene behaviour with a certain delicacy. Bąkowski says, 'I grew up in and around the residential blocks of Poznań. The music I listened to was well-matched to the view from my window'. The group of artists belongs to the so-called new expression current in Poznań.

Bąkowski's describes his particular perception of reality:

*I'm interested in magnification. From a small image of 35 mm, one could make a **Battle of Grunwald**. This also fascinates Antonioni. When there is movement, that is when miracles happen. The movement of a finger joint is scaled to the movement of the whole arm. I'm doing the same thing in music. Peaceful murmuring, and breaths are amplified as much as possible. This is the style of [the band] KOT. The same goes for themes. I try to enlarge small things too. I do not take on global problems.*

The artist is affiliated with the Leto Gallery in Warsaw, and his work has been displayed at individual and collective exhibitions in Poland and Europe. He exhibited at the Gare Saint Sauveur at the Lille 3000 Festival in France, the Kunstverein in Freiburg, and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich. At New York City's New Museum, he participated in Younger Than Jesus, the biennial showing of young art.

He received the **Deutsche Bank Foundation's Views Award** in 2009, chosen by an international jury for his original work over recent years. With the winner of second prize, Anna Molska, a joint video, **Completed**, was prepared for an exhibition at Warsaw's Zachęta museum. In a specially arranged area on two screens, combining characteristic features of Molska's and Bąkowski's creativity, one saw a choreography played by men in specially designed wheelchairs, modelled on Bauhaus products. The images were accompanied by Bąkowski's hypnotic voice.

The artist is a graduate of the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts where he studied in the Audiosfera Studio and the Laboratory of Animated Film under Leszek Knaflewski and Hieronim Neumann.

Although Bąkowski's distinct perception of reality was already apparent in his first works, his first student shorts differed from the later, recognisably Bąkowski-style films. Completed in 2003, **Pętla / The Loop** and **Masa/ The Mass** are about the mindless everyday rituals that render the individual a slave and an indistinguishable element of a faceless crowd. The state of existing is reduced to a series of mechanical repetitions that form a never ending loop of events - existence. The monochromatic plasticity of both films goes alongside the equally important audio layer, the rasping sound of a moving tram and regular clatter of steps which just like other activities, are automated and machine-like. Both animations were honoured with a special award for outstanding artistic merit at the National Festival of Auteur Animation Films in 2003.

Forming his distinctive style – post-punk and degenerate – Bąkowski later made short animations and visuals to the music of his bands: blurred lines, vibrating, soiled frames and a yellow-grey background accompanied by the impassive voice of Bąkowski himself. In 2004-2006 he produced **Gra na psie / A Game for Dogs**, **Strach / Fear**, video images for the music of Czykita band ATK, **Leży śnieg / There Is Snow** and **Targam swój świat/ Carrying My World**. **Wstyd / Shame** is a particularly interesting piece of work where the artist looped erotic images with pictures of children during their first communion photographed with the use of a stroboscope. Praising Bąkowski's artistic courage, the video diptychs of **Wstyd / Shame** and **Strach / Fear** were awarded in 2006 at the OFAFA festival.

In 2007 the artist created a new non-camera animation - **Idziesz ze mną? - gdzie? - w dupę ciemną / Are You Coming with Me? Where? Into Blind Darkness**. It is drawn directly on film images of his childhood. Resembling school-notebook doodles, the animations were made with a blue pen. Funny and cruel stories are added to a world of childhood pranks and backyard adventures. The plethora of images is accompanied by the

Bąkowski drew the attention of critics and curators primarily as the author of the film cycle **Filmy mówione / Spoken Films** - recurring sequences of images of blurred, watered-down images painted directly on the film reel, narration by the artist, verses consisting of colloquialisms, detached, unfinished thoughts. As Jarosław Lubiak wrote,

**Spoken Films** consist of fragmented bits of sentences and images which pulsate in the uneven rhythm of the breath, showing the congested state of consciousness, abolishing its awareness of the difficult situation, awareness of a non-controlling process, a flow of thoughts and visions. Consciousness, which is under the pressure of an external reality seems to lose control over what creates it, namely on the submission of words and images in one's mind.

**Spoken Film 1** shows the repulsive, trivial nature and ugly reality of residential blocks and presents human existence in a childish, seemingly naive, yet brutal way, with an underlying awareness of what is shameful, unpleasant, even disgusting. **Spoken Film 1** was awarded the Silver Line at the 2007 OFAFA festival.

The second film in the series is **Film mówiony 2 / Spoken Film 2** depicting a scene on a tram accompanied by a monologue by an old-man/narrator full of chokes and wheezes. The distinctive poetic speech, and language play, and above all the drawings, this time painted in crayon on paper are emblematic of Bakowski's work. A constantly ticking clock, the dials on a car dashboard, motorcyclist and bullets remind the viewer of the passing reality, just like that of a sick man, whose soul rides a tram. Objects flash in succession on the screen: spectacles, a television and a kettle demarcate the world of the old man who waits for the "incomparable event, with nothing, what could happen to me". Reminiscences of returning in the memories of the past are interwoven with the here and now, with the world outside the window, residential blocks which sometimes resemble overturned gravestones. The triviality of life interacts with the banality of death, by which the old man asks a calm question, in a voice which could almost be bored, just like he were asking for the time, "when will it be over? Will it ever?".

In **Film mówiony 3 / Spoken Film 3** the theme of disease and the ticking clock reappear, as well as paintings and speech fragments referring to the first episode. The frames once again become strong, vibrating, fuzzy outlines of drawings and film turning into unspeakable reality, shapeless and cancerous. Spiritual emptiness, civil conflict, completely filled with the mindless existence of the blue-collared workers. TV is the dominant medium, emerging from the fringe area of dramatic existence. The image is of the fear of humanity in which "only cancer is okay, because it can grow", a return to the vulgar, slimy, lined with eroticism, dirt and the stench of existence, a vision of reality.

While seemingly devoid of emotion, Bąkowski movies, through the power of concentrated media, interact with the viewer's emotions. Decked in a slightly old-fashioned style, the animations' expressionism recalls the styles of Gruppa and the German Neue Wilde movements. He is the author of the book **Cieply pies / Hot Dogs**, in a print run of just a few hundred copies that includes his poems and drawings.

Artist's Website: [www.myspace.com/wojciechBąkowski](http://www.myspace.com/wojciechBąkowski),