

Krzysztof Kosciuczuk, 'Wojciech Bakowski Dreams Of Childhood In A Post-War High-Rise,'
Frieze, August 15 2018

Frieze

Reviews /

Wojciech Bakowski Dreams Of Childhood In A Post-War High-Rise



BY KRZYSZTOF KOŚCIUCZUK

15 AUG 2018

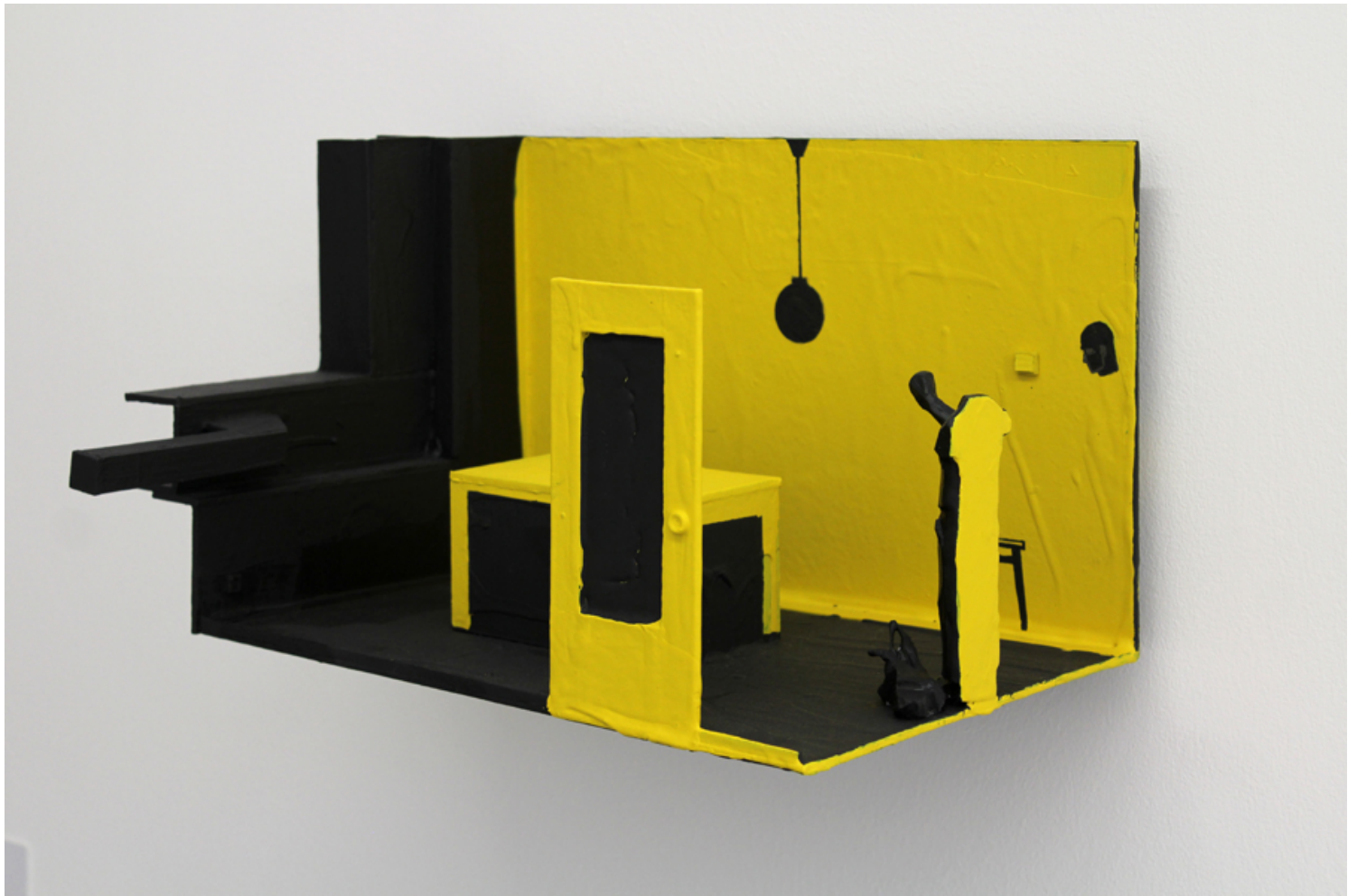
The artist investigates the possibilities in lucid dreaming, transforming the interior of Warsaw's Galeria Stereo into an urban dreamscape



Hulking and bleak, the prefab blok (block) estates that sprawled across Polish cities from the 1960s to the end of the '80s are rarely sought after today. But this was not always the case. The protracted, postwar housing crisis generated a massive demand for such accommodation, with waiting lists that took years or even decades to clear. *'Alternatywy 4'* (Alternatives 4), a Polish television comedy shot in the 1980s, follows a group of fortunate individuals who were assigned units in a new building in a recently developed neighbourhood in Warsaw: engineers, retired farmers,

opera singers, crane operators, doctors and party functionaries. Their tribulations in the show might be absurd, but the cross-section of social strata in such housing is accurate.

When asked whether he enjoyed living in a high-rise in Poznań, the artist Wojciech Bąkowski replied impassively: 'Not quite. I'd rather live in a decent blok. This one reeks of some gruesome fried food.' At that point, Bąkowski, who is also a well-known musician in Poland, was living in Poznań's Jeżyce – a district he described as 'a visual regurgitation'. He consequently moved to Warsaw, but this kind of succinct language lives on in his visual works and musical projects. The drawings and minuscule dioramas in 'Waking up from Abstraction', Bąkowski's recent solo show at Galeria Stereo, prove he's never been too far from the block in which he grew up.



Wojciech Bąkowski, *Difficulties with Telling Stories*, 2016, cardboard, acrylic paint, 23 × 30 × 40 cm. Courtesy: Stereo, Warsaw

'Waking up from Abstraction' follows Bąkowski's investigation into lucid dreaming and conjures an oneiric situation set in an urban high-rise. For the show, partition walls were inserted into the gallery, forming a corridor connecting the entrance to the back office. In the charcoal-on-paper work *Fading Dream* (2018), we see a room blending with an outdoor space. An ashtray and a blanket lie in the

foreground, while streetlamps, buildings and outlines of cars emerge where we expect a floor. A *Mock-up with Triangular Moon* (2018) is a watercolour showing a room with a veneered desk, wood-panelled floor, speckled, lacklustre wallpaper and a lonely window. If you look closely, the skewed patterns on the objects indicate that the drawing was made after an imagined mock-up, with all its inconsistencies. But, as in lucid dreaming, noticing such dissonances is a way of realizing one is dreaming and taking control of the plot.

In the eponymous *Waking up from Abstraction* (2018), shapes emerge from a pitch-black charcoal background: you can make out a reclining human figure, a door key and an ape-like silhouette – a nod to the Yeti brand of door keys once used widely in Polish high-rises. But as much as those symbols – which recur in other works – stem from the artist's own background, they speak to a universal experience that cuts across class and generations.



Wojciech Bakowski, *Fading Dream*, 2018, charcoal on paper, 70 × 100 cm. Courtesy: Stereo, Warsaw

Traversing the downsized gallery space, you come across another dreamscape. *Incomplete Awakening* (2018) initially seems to be an abstract collage combining a clock's pendulum, a door handle, a yellow rectangle and a tangle of wire. All float against patches of black clouds painted in broad strokes. Then, you see that this is an actual setup of objects in space, arranged behind a small, tinted, frame-encased glass. It's an unsettling scene with fragmentary shapes that impersonate real-world items: the rectangular glow of the elevator window; cables that quietly snake when the cabin is in motion; a chair with clothes left on it overnight. All this to an ambient soundtrack: deconstructed house music blends into a 1990s computer-game melody, punctuated by the analogue rings of a telephone – a call to wake from this layered daydream to a more solid reality.

Main image: Wojciech Bakowski, Waking up from Abstraction (detail), 2018, charcoal on paper, 70 × 100 cm. Courtesy: Stereo, Warsaw

KRZYSZTOF KOŚCIUCZUK

Krzysztof Kościuczuk is a writer and contributing editor of *frieze*. He lives in Warsaw.
