In between painting

*How current practice and history of the medium meet in a conceptual approach*

MA – Project in Fine Art / Thesis

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In this paper, I analyze how the history of the medium of painting adds its’ own context into the image I choose to paint and how it influences it and what happens when it meets at one point with contemporary, conceptual painting. Last but not least, I am sharing my thoughts about the role of the image in culture and how its’ accessibility and amount of reproductions influences its’ power and exclusivity. In the last chapter I am focusing on the personal and political layers of my art.

I. Introduction

The paintings I painted for My country, so beautiful are taken from photographs of the Independence March in Poland, which is organized annually on 11th of November in Warsaw by nationalist groups. On first sight, the paintings are innocent and the actions happening there concerning the story behind the images could be precepted from abroad as something ironical or irreverent. In Poland as well, because the majority of polish people is self-aware. Unfortunately with the case, that the awareness can only be articulated by those compatriots, who fit as pleasant as possible in the image of the real pole. So here we are confronted with the first problem of such exclusivity, the second one is, that the critique also has to harmonize with generally accepted and respected norms of mythology, narration and polish history. The commentary is allowed to be scathing or disparaging. Nevertheless, criticism is not welcome. As a Pole, you are even allowed to define the rest of the nation as mugs, cockroaches, paupers, onion-men, idiots, kurwas,
etc. like contemporary Stańczyk\(^1\), the YouTuber Testoviron\(^2\). He is attacking all the sacred things of modern polish history like pope John Paul II, victims of the Smoleński air disaster, the catholic faith and almost everything that can offend Polish society. But, in the end, the internet made a comedian out of him. However, talking about dark pages from Polish history like the pogrom of Jedwabne, feudal service, colonization of Ruthenia, or overthrowing myths is not accepted. Testoviron addressed issues twelve years ago, which slowly start to appear in a broader discourse now, mostly on the internet.

This project was a step out of my comfort zone. I started to deal with issues of identity, personal story and politics. Even that particular artistic research is mostly about Poland, my practice is dealing within a broader thematic field. After spending twenty-two years in Germany, four in Poland, one on an exchange in Italy and one in Iceland (not chronologically), I am aware of the privilege of being physically out of the context I am dealing with, and I can turn any flow of information off. I would probably not leave them if I would not be frustrated of the fact being there so moving to my actual Wahlheimat\(^3\) allowed me to develop more critical thinking about my two (home-)lands. So now, after receiving my master education, my frustration is backed by knowledge, anger and the acknowledgement, that the things leading to it, are not easy to change.

Finally, I turned back to figurative after trying out different media, like abstract painting, video, photography, sculpture and installations. And it is the way of artistic expression, I feel most excited about using it. There is the feeling of doing the right thing and the necessity to experiment, do more, experience and learn things. Even I should stay with that medium for the rest of my artistic career, I at least can admit to trying out anything before getting back to the starting point.

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\(^1\) Stańczyk is the most famous court jester in Polish history.

\(^2\) Testoviron (Łukasz Stanisławowski) is a former Polish YouTuber, who became popular for obscene videos addressing current political and social issues in Poland.

\(^3\) Adopted country.
My thesis works similar to a map. On first sight, it is a quick overview, but it is also narrowing to the high mountains or deep see if needed. Anyway, I recommend to take the whole route and wish a pleasant journey.
II. The art of telling stories being in between

1. Images

The image is always present in my artwork. I am taking photographs or researching them on the internet, so my mood board is filled with images. I am not painting everyone. They are more a narrow inside the context I am working in.

To have a good overview of a subject, my research needs to focus not only on readings but also on images. They do not necessarily need to be complex or found in the least accessible place – my research happens most of the time in the worldwide web, and I spend hours to get into a topic I am actually interested in.

The images as non-physical objects fascinate me as well. They are ordered representations of few chaotic activities happening at the same moment: the photographer taking the picture, the motif and the surrounding events. Photographs have a history and are, in most cases, shot for a purpose. In my practice, I am playing with that through painting.

The first example are my paintings exhibited in a group show in the Museum Einar Jonsson in 2019. I transferred images from a tourism company on canvas with oil paint, digitalized it back, printed it as a poster with parts of the original text from the flyer and exhibited them inside a people-stopper. This was a full circle of playing with a specific image within the subject. I took a generic mass-reproduced landscape photograph, painted it with oil on canvas, which implied the motive into an art-historical tradition and eternalized it through the choice of the artist to paint it. But then I questioned that choice in giving it a practical use again and exhibited it as a poster of the oil painting. This attempt is one, which appears in most of my paintings – it is not mainly about questioning painting as a medium, but about the dynamics which emerge from the confrontation of the history of art and my contemporary, conceptual painting.
Painting as a medium put into a conceptual practice lets the research start at one point and elevate it to entirely another one than I was expecting. My pictures are not only allocated in the context of contemporary art but also of painting history. So the posters from the exhibition I mentioned above are about environmental issues, mass-tourism, perception of the image and a general approach on nature in a political sense. In the context of painting, they are about landscape-painting and the actual position and intentionality of the medium. I am interested in moving between those two layers.

Figure 1  Lukas Bury, Golden Circle, 2019, C-Print in people stopper, ca. 100 x50 cm.
Figure 2 Lukas Bury, *It’s like being on the moon*, 2019, C-Print, 50x70 cm.
2. Process

My artistic process can be compared to the one of a director, who is dealing with a screenplay. In the first place, there is a story I want to tell through my artwork or exhibition. My screenplay contains the mood board, research material and the images I am selecting to paint. If I put them together, they are all allocated in a broader context, so I attempt to make the story more exciting and concrete through reduction. What I mean with that, is that I cut out the parts which are not necessary for the context I want to generate, like the director is erasing the insignificant parts of the screenplay. My subjects and objects motifs are already preexisting. It can be photos, places or objects I see.

On one side, I am dealing with images of landscapes, events, objects or topics, which are significant for my painting practice because of their meaning they activate in my context. On the other side, there is history, which is not only about the depiction of events, battle scenes or the moment the picture is taken. There is the history of the medium where my practice is allocated, and which influences my artworks. I also enjoy the contrast between the primary medium I operate – heavily focused on visuals – and the fact that it is not the image that tells the main story. The story is created somewhere in-between, just like in a good movie. I am not willing to give simple answers or quick solutions, but rather string along with recipients of my art.
3. Choice of subjects

In the beginning, I need to consider, that the discourse about my exhibition will be broader than I expected, so I need to keep the thematic field inside which I am moving, as small as possible. Here appears the next comparison to a director, who has to deal with similar issues – how to tell a story which can address a complex or large-scale issue through telling just a particular narrative existing within that context.

In my project *My country, so beautiful*, I started to think about my national identity and background. The first step was to find motifs which were most significant in that context. When the pre-research was done, I noticed that there are many directions, I could choose: famous people (icons), objects (products) from Poland and Germany, events and national colours.

What interests me in icons, is the perception and how the mass-reproduction of the image creates an aura of importance surrounding them. It is also a personal battle with *moral authorities* which play a significant part in shaping history. It is their omnipresence, which lets the recipients think that there is no way to escape from that narration. Somehow they become a materialization of the controversial lyrics from Kanye West’s song *New Slaves*

*You see it's leaders and it's followers*

*But I'd rather be a dick than a swallower*\(^4\)

Objects and products work in a similar way and are situated in an exciting art-historical context of still lifes and pop-art. Obviously, the interest of the companies is to create associations related to the product they want to sell, but what makes particular objects typical? Why are Polish immigrants in Iceland willing to pay over 350 ISK for a G-mjólk from Poland, which is disgusting

instead of a fresh Icelandic Nýmjólk from Iceland? (I am aware, that this is not my finest moment of academic argumentation, but I will make use of my artistic freedom card: it really is disgusting). On the other side, products like Prince-Polo can have a gripping story and be part of the historical context between Poland and Iceland, which is also in my field of interest. National colours work in the same way and contain a piece of general information about identity and team spirit or belonging. Probably I could think about dozens more, but each of the subjects is material for an exhibition in itself. I also believe that all those topics will come together at one point in my practice.

Anyway, I started to deal with the marches and events related to the Polish Independence Day. I figured out that my paintings are not only about that particular incident but about events in general. They do not necessarily need to be well-recognized from history. It is about the small-events happening inside, which build up the big picture of the event, which does not seem to be as crucial as the image.

So, there is the next compared to the working process of a director. The scenes, which shown alone would not represent much, can be crucial for the understanding of the whole movie or play. It is the simplicity and synergy of symbols or words, which generate a story or statement within the medium. This is, why working project-based is crucial for me, especially yet. As I am talking about a particular political context, the pictures and stories behind each need to be related to it. It is difficult to show a complex story or address identity in one painting. Philosophers have been trying to do that on uncountable amount of pages, and no one was successful.
4. Project-based exhibition

Working project-based is beneficial in its methodology. I consider myself as a conceptual painter, and that approach gives me the freedom to paint more images than I want to exhibit in the end and mostly it comes out during the process, where I want to keep my focus on.

Of course, I do paintings, which work as single artworks. Anyway, I attempt to tell a story through, and beyond the images, I am painting. Sometimes one picture is enough, but to go through the complexity of the issues, I prefer to address it with more than one painting. In that way, I am changing the way to approach an exhibition and particular artworks. On one side every painting is a piece, but the installative part, which means hanging them in a specific space and loaded with the motifs I have been describing before, allows me and the spectators to see the project as an artwork as well.

An exhibition is an event itself. Then the motifs from the paintings are a documentation of another event. This creates somehow a recurrence and shows the importance of the happenings I have been painting. Technically the solo show can be compared to a premiere. In a way, it is a finished project, which gives the public access to my former studio practice. On the other side, an exhibition does not necessarily need to be the end of it. Personally, I do not like to see a field I am researching as fully explored and the project as finished. Fortunately, I do not have the same problem with saying when a painting is ready.
5. My medium

Probably, I will return to subjects from former explorations and will try to create them with another attempt or try to reinterpret them. I do not exclude the possibility of doing abstract paintings again or working with other media. I like to play with different media and techniques, and this is what keeps me busy and satisfied. If one day it turns out, that I will stay with only one medium, I will be proud to say that I tried out many ways of artistic expression to find the one, which seems the best one for me.

I would not say that I have a recognizable style when it comes to painting, but of course, there are patterns which apply to most of my works. Painting is in first place joyful for me, so I take pleasure in experimenting with it. My brushstroke is expressive, and I see it also as physical activity. It is not only important, which composition I choose and how my sketch or underpainting looks. When it comes to the painting itself, the bulk is happening after I applied the first thin layer of English-red or Van Dyke brown and overpaint it with a next thin layer of Prussian blue. After that, I start to use other colours, and the layers begin to become thicker. It happens for me to apply paint trigger-happy, and most of the solutions emerge while I have a brush in my hand. The painting Windowview. My country, so beautiful in the beginning was constructed in a manner with clear lines and forms, but when I started to paint masses of people and the fog from the flares, the result was hugely different than I expected. The fog changed into a battlefield of polish flags. Red and white mixed together would represent the colour of the smoke from flairs, but keeping them separately on the canvas ended up as a constellation of pure, two colours – the Polish national colours. It is a move, which applies more often than I expect when I use the paint pure from the tube. It is my guilty pleasure on one side and a way of genuine and noisy expression from the other. It is not very likely that my artwork will become too willful.

Applying the pure paint comes with restrictions of keeping the brushstroke as
simple as possible, and I think that this is what persuades me for my choice. I see a thin line before the painting starts to be overworked. I try to avoid it by changing the focus on different parts of it. When I feel frustrated or tired from being stuck to a particular spot, I switch to another one which needs some extra work.

Figure 3 Lukas Bury, *Windowview. My country, so beautiful*, 2019, oil on canvas, 62x48 cm.
6. Historical and military painting

Military paintings were used as a tool of propaganda, with the purpose to influence history through its narration. They are not only about the painting itself or the representations we can find on them. There is always an event following the picture. It also left a field of interpretation of the moment itself, and the artists were mostly not present at the battlefield. Jan Matejko, a true master of the genre painted the Battle of Grunwald, Prussian Homage or Stańczyk. His paintings were useful and gave solace in the political context of the late 19th century, where Poland was fighting for its independence, and those paintings were representing the most important and glorious events of Polish history. Unfortunately, in the end, turned out to be a significant part of the still ongoing jingoistic narration. Of course, my intention is not to use the medium cynically, and I try to reinterpret the attempt while being conscious about the possibilities which that field opens for me.

Even the painting Battle of Grunwald would fit better into the context of my artistic practice regarding the aesthetical approach, I would instead like to introduce another painting, which is more critical in a conceptual way and the understanding of my role as an artist. Stańczyk, the main character from Jan Matejko’s picture with the same title, was the most famous court jester in Polish history.

Stańczyk fits perfectly into the motif, which is also present in Noah’s Ark and is a typical phenomenon in human history. A catastrophe appears unseen before, and a disaster will destroy our beautiful unspoilt world. The moment, when everything seems to be all right, that is the moment, when you need to expect, that something will bang and end up everything. And that is a noisy scene, when Stańczyk figures out, that Smoleńsk is lost and he understands, that is the beginning of the end of Poland he knew, but only he acknowledges this fact. Behind his back, in between the open doors
it is visible, that the royal ball is alive and well and nobody is taking it
seriously and, in the end, he also has to take part in that game. It is a fact
that he was conflicted with queen Bona Sforza and that let him feel even
more helpless. So that is the image of the tiny bells on the court jester’s
hat, which no one is taking as ringing bells. It is Cassandra’s prophecy no
one believes in.\textsuperscript{6}

Stańczyk is a character I can identify with. I see my role as an artist and my art
in general, situated in a similar position. My paintings, it does not matter if they
are the landscape ones from 2018-2019, or my current series, strongly resonate
atmosphere of the calm before the storm. They are beautiful in a way, but
something is generating an anxious atmosphere. The painting of a father carrying
his child on his back during a nationalist march could be innocent. Possibly, a
dad and his son are just celebrating Independence Day together. But the faces are
empty, and it is painted in a greyscale. What is happening is not as ostensible as
it is on first sight, as the flags are as blank as the faces.

In most cases, I also manipulate the photographs I am painting. The choice is
d dictated not only by a generic picture of the event. I am also looking for
aesthetical values and plan the composition. In the end, I do not create an exact
representation but manipulate the picture most often concerning the statement I
want to bring up. In that way, I also have an influence on the historical
discourse of the event I painted.

A more contemporary example is \textit{18. Oktober 1977}. In the cycle, Gerhard
Richter is repainting images taken from the mass-media, a police-archive in
Hamburg and reprints. Richter intends to show the ambiguity of the events
happening in 1977 wherein the end, three Red-Army-Fraction members were
found dead in their cells. The official reason was suicide, but presumably, the
militants were murdered by the state police. Even the paintings were showed
eleven years later, they became a scandal. Richter paints Gudrun Ensslin,

\textsuperscript{6} Joanna Piątek, “Too much red (1), Jacek Kaczmarski in conversation with Joanna Piątek”, translated by the
author, Miesięcznik Literacki Odra, no. 481 (12/2001).
Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe in the manner of martyrs, after death, during their life or youth photographs.

Some may argue that the transformation of current, or near-current, historical events into tragedy remove them from the heat of political and cultural contention and aestheticizes them in a determinable fashion. But the truth is that the agon that came to its conclusion on October 18, 1977, has already receded from us. Reportage and archival information can, within limits, reconstitute the context in which it occurred, but only simultaneously evocative and resistant aesthetics means will preserve its painful and confounding essence. Furthermore, much of the photographic documentation upon which Richter drew is now out of reach in government and news-magazine dossiers that are not readily available to scholars and the public. Consequently, not the least of the paradoxes of the present situation is that the only form in which some of these images can readily be seen is in Richter's rendition of them. Time, bureaucratic policy, and the material immediacy of painting have thus conspired to make October 18, 1977 the most actual and accessible representation we have, even as the pictures underscore the unreliability of official versions (or any other version) of the record, while deepening the anguish and sorrow that suffuses the images in all their previous incarnations.7

Taking the political occurrences and turning them into art, rips them from the hands of media, law system, countries or nationalities. Filtered just by artist's vulnerability paradoxically makes them more direct, more believable to the receiver than the official media coverage. It is always easier to feel detached when you see the mass of anonymous people flowing through some city streets and either praise or bash their views. It’s also disturbingly easy to dehumanize groups of people, especially when we seem to believe we have nothing in common with them.

Figure 4 Jan Matejko, Stańczyk during a ball at the court of Queen Bona in the face of the loss of Smolensk, 1862, oil on canvas, 120x88 cm, Warsaw National Museum.

Figure 5 Lukas Bury, Stańczyk, 2019, oil on canvas, 120x90 cm.
Figure 6 Gerhard Richter, *Dead*, 1988, oil on canvas, 62x62 cm.
7. Empathy towards the image

The next motive, which is a considerable part of my artworks, is how I proceed with the image itself. The paintings or screenings I show are not directly taken from a photograph. The most crucial step is not the colour grading (that obviously happens on the canvas or as the final step while post-producing a film), but the framing. I am experimenting with different perspectives and views to get not only the most aesthetical composition but also to get a powerful gesture out of the image, which stops to be only a representation in my artwork, but becomes something the spectator can emphasize with and associate not only the big story behind it, but also questions personal histories within the painting. I am aware of that that not everyone will have a broad understanding of the things I am painting and even this attempt can encourage the spectator to take a more in-depth look, and I think, that each of the paintings has an interesting story behind it. From my position, there is a deeper meaning for my art, but I accept the fact that not everyone will have an understanding of the subjects I am dealing with. I will be satisfied with my paintings to please someone only through the aesthetical values, even that is not my goal.

My current paintings are related to Polish Independence Day. I try to generate a view from different perspectives of that day. I paint an image from fake news which was presented as a gesture of creating the Polish flag out of lights from Budapest celebrating the Polish Independence and turned out to be a photo on a traffic jam in Los Angeles. A window-view in the centre of Warsaw, which initially was an image of a young woman sitting in a hotel room being anxious about current events outside or a photograph taken inside the march, where a father is carrying his child holding a polish flag. This multi-channel attempt, again, can be compared to the creation of a story through the juxtaposition of many images. In my paintings, I try to find to catch the most significant moments, which let the exhibition be concrete and short like the News about themselves,
but on the other side, they open a broader context and show different perspectives.
So, I described how I deal with meaning through painting and about the narration I am generating. Now I would like to focus on the titles and texts I am writing about (in) my art. On one side, there is the concept and subjects I want to bring up and on the other the art object itself. In that particular constellation, the title is the link between painting and meaning or navigates through my artwork. Probably, they do not give a full understanding, but they make it easier to research on the topics like in the case of *Lengyel Magyar két jó barát* and think about that title in the context of the painting itself.
Most often they are my personal commentary on the event, image or subject I am painting and contain a massive portion of irony or tragicomedy. As my art is political, it for sure is not activistic. I rather like to bring my message through a reflection with a layer of irony, which can be seen as an escape mechanism, but it is also an instrument to deal with *Welt schmerz* in a thoughtful way (instead of generating content without any purpose just for creating).
Last but not least, there is the artist's statement, which allows me to articulate and position my art and where I can address the issues directly. I compared the title to a narrow, so an artist statement would be a map in that case. It does not explain or shows the work, but it gives an abstract overview and shows where the narrows are and how they interact with each other.

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8 Pole and Hungarian brothers to be, from an old Polish-Hungarian saying.
Figure 7 Lukas Bury, *Lengyel Magyar két jó barát*, 2020, oil on canvas, 130x150 cm.

Figure 8 Lukas Bury, *Father and son during a Bank holiday-stroll*, 2019, oil on canvas, 48x62 cm.
8. Being in between

In a direct interpretation, my paintings also lead to a social dialogue through the topics I am addressing. When I take the series, I am painting now as an example, they are activating discussion about nationalism, indoctrination, people inside ideologies or the innocence of evil. The problem is in how to lead it into the direction I want to.

The discourse of any event was present before I painted it. And it is a dirty one. I want to get in between and not offer straightforward solutions for difficult topics. I want to show the ambiguity through my art and the questions I am asking in it. When we take a look at western societies, they become more and more polarized. The ability of critical thinking and looking at issues from different positions seem to disappear with every year. Of course, it is easier to take a strong stand and defend it at any cost. I am dealing with political issues in my art, and I have to admit that my personal political position is not in the centre. But being in between means to have an ability to be a medium for all sides. I hope (my) art can be the place of critical confrontations, where the spectators forget or question personal beliefs and perception and try to develop a new approach on how to form their views.

Of course, my art is critical. On the other side, the chosen topics have been polarizing for many years. I also want to avoid relativism and my personal statement about the events and clear in a political sense, but I do not want to talk about, how nationalism is terrible. I want to speak, why it scares me off through its modern narration, how it makes it possible for people I know, to take part in it and how a National Day, which deserves to be celebrated became possessed by a particular political group in the least than ten years. The discussion about the pogrom of Jedwabne for me is not about members of one nation which killed their neighbors from a minority, it is not about, how bad Poles killed good Jews. I instead ask: how could neighbors kill people from their city just because the
occupant changed? Why would someone do it just to take over another person's house? Why is it so difficult to make a clean breast of it for the felons, people living there and the state? What were the reasons and coping mechanisms to do it?
9. So why painting?

Why am I painting? This is probably the most basic and difficult question at one time. I asked it myself almost every day while writing the thesis. I think that I came to the conclusion that this is the medium I want to work with.

First of all, it is an exciting medium when it comes to craft. From preparing the canvas to putting the varnish, there are many steps which require knowledge and patience. I need the time where everything slows down the process of making and allows me to reflect on the paintings I just made or am creating.

When we come to oil painting, there is the history behind the medium, which, through its own dynamics, adds a different way of approaching the artwork. Alone the fact of choosing the technique to create a representation is a statement. We are surrounded by images and confronted with them every day, especially after the technological changes that took part in the last 10 years. Images are influencing the world – their purpose and way of sharing have been changing drastically in the previous years.

Everything has been devaluing, both images and words. But, paradoxically, thanks to that, painting today has a significant role. The image is kind of a stoppage because it occurs for a long time. It is not a snapshot, widely understood advertisement of anything or whoever – selfie! – like numerous photos on Instagram.9

On one side, rare objects are seen as luxurious, but on the other hand, the omnipresence of an object or subject can lead to its' luxurity or power. My painting can be an activity across those rules. It deals with accessible objects like mass-products, icons, mass-events, kitsch landscape motifs, old pictures which are reproduced in a vast amount in many media. But, the fact of

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reformulating and putting them on a canvas to become the only piece, makes them suddenly a luxurious and rare (art) object.

Last but not least, artistic expression can tell a story differently than an article or documentary. Painting is giving a perspective on things we would not get just from information media. And maybe in the situation, where we are bombarded with information all the time and often taking them for granted, art can be the space where we have time to think about them and question them if necessary.
III. Unselbstverständlich

_In art good intentions are not of the smallest value._
_All bad art is the result of good intentions._10

1. Personally

A lot of things happened in my thinking and general worldview. I was writing about the process of inventing oneself, that means the way of working towards an ideal image of ourselves generated probably years ago. The point I wanted to get to was one of a painter and artist, who is working consistent, has an artistic agenda and a recognizable message.

But, the more I started to fit into that role, I realized that it was wrong to think about being an artist in that way. The more I became that image, the more I also realized that it is not about performing it, but being deeply connected with my own artwork, making it personal and basically just being myself – an artist. Of course, I am happy to have fulfilled the plan I set up many years ago, but wouldn’t it be easier to get to the point where I am now if I would be honest with myself, accepting the fact of being an artist and just started to do what I want instead of thinking about others expectations and not my own?

Fortunately, now I have a deep connection with my artwork after diving deep into the matter of the subject and my inner (artistic) self.

When you are deep enough, you don’t need to plan the next steps and every scenario which is possible, because the activity of diving became comfortable and something, I could call intuition, is a better guide than the old one, which was following set-up constructs and plans in my head.

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Starting to work on the subject I am dealing with since August, was also a big step out of my comfort zone. I always feared to be political in my art and to deal with issues of a country, I have a deep emotional relationship with. For most of the years, Poland existed in my mind as a romantic imagination. I went there on summer holidays with my parents, short trips organized by the community in the Polish Catholic Mission in Bonn, Germany and my contact with Poland was a childish-joyful one. Even when I lived there, my life was carefree in comparison to an average person my age – mainly because of economic reasons and the fact of being “different in a good way”. This sentimental relation is, in my opinion, very dangerous. It is mostly present under the emigrants in the first generation (which in the Polish language is often called the lost generation) but is very often also projected on the next ones.

The first step out of that thinking took part a few years ago, and of course, it is a complicated process to question patterns and opinions I grew up with and which were told to be the right ones – I am talking here mainly about the influence of the catholic church and polish culture, which are strongly connected. For now, on the range of my hate-love relationship with Poland, I would position myself on the edge of hate. It allowed me to be open and radical in my art. But, there is also anxiety of being a traitor to values I have been raised in or being that bad guy complaining about Poland Western Europe. And, thankfully I have the intellectual means to rationalize those compulsive thoughts, and I do not fear to become conservative in the polish way, I am conscious of the fact, that there will always be a fight inside me and a confrontation.

And here I came to the final conclusion – this is what makes my art.

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11 Of course, I want to avoid neoliberal terminology, and I am aware of the fact having already used the idea of wishful thinking, getting out of a comfort zone and being the best version of oneself. Anyway, I have just lived in capitalism, so it is difficult to get over it, it doesn’t matter how hard I would try.
2. I am Polish, but also German

I benefitted from the experience of the first Diploma in Fine Art. I was able to avoid the mistakes that I did for the first time. I did not set up a whole idea for an exhibition in my head and worked spontaneously towards the deadline. I put the daily artistic practice in the first place, and I looked self-confident towards the solo show. I also know, that my will of creating an order in my head and thinking few steps ahead, made me less flexible during the process as I wanted to do everything in the way, I calculated before. Through eliminating it, I was able to be more free in the choice of motifs and to find joy in it. It also helped me to listen more to my artistic intuition and “paint like the wind”\textsuperscript{12}. If I would not do that, I would probably paint a whole exhibition about Independence Day. It would still be an exciting exhibition, but the strong paintings, like \textit{This is a squirrel}, \textit{This is a Roman Salute}, \textit{They were flammable}, \textit{Patriotism Premium} and \textit{The GDR has never been existing} would probably not come into being and messages I needed to send would stay unexpressed.

At the beginning of December, I finally came to the point, that it will be the best decision to paint what I want and not what I need to fit into a specific subject and conceptualize my exhibition as a whole process, into which I wanted to give an insight. On one side, I had the luxury to exhibit it in the Academy and having the freedom to do everything on my own. On the other hand, it was more important for me as a young artist to talk about the whole process and steps instead of the final effect and the crème de la crème of the paintings I made – they were hanging there anyway. Thanks to that, I was able to be analytical and to find connections between the paintings, which are not visible on the first sight. Even there are different topics and historical events, the approach on the medium does not change, the same as the relation of political issues, which

\textsuperscript{12} This is a sentence Birgir S. Birgisson often used as an advise while supervising my MA solo project.
become personal in my context. All of them are also critical – in the end, I just found a better way to express that.

Personally, it is also more of importance for me to release my thoughts and frustration than to work dictated by the need to fit into the frame of a project. And here I am with the second reflection which is also a question: maybe I should “paint like the wind” without having a concrete project, but instead move on and paint and paint. In my practice there will always be a relation between the artworks and the projects will probably crystallize out of that practice and not a project plan I wrote down a few months earlier and which I have to follow step by step in my German way.

Figure 9 Lukas Bury, *Patriotism Premium*, 2019, oil on canvas, 50x65 cm.
3. Working methods

My working methods have changed through practice and the decision to paint on a bigger format. Because I stopped to see the canvas as a small surface full of precise details and started to take advantage of my body – especially my long arms and strength, it evolved into an expressive way of painting. I would not say that it is a subject of my art, but the activity of putting colour on a canvas in the studio is performative. I always listen to music, and I try to get in the state of not thinking and just dancing and painting in an intuitive way. In this state, I find the best solutions, have the best ideas and enjoy my work the most.

I also stopped planning paintings and imagining the exact look of the exhibition a long time before the opening. Of course, I have an idea, what I want to paint and the subjects are mostly traumatic experiences; not only for me but also in a collective perception. It is impossible to be in the places I am depicting when the events happen. Also, someone needed to take photographs so that I can paint them. The texts and pictures allow me to imagine the situations and get a feeling – the people and their actions, colours and smell and the historical documents give me some insight. All the rest, like the reconstruction of it in my imagination and being a passive observer there, is something happening inside my head that I can not explain. Sometimes the tragedy can also be a beautiful image, and this makes that dissonance in my opinion even more exciting.

Also, I need to be aware of the limitations coming with the medium. Still, I am more spontaneous and allow myself to find the path to the finished painting while painting it, instead of marking it already before I touched even the canvas.

Painting allows me also to process the motif. Through the reconstruction of a pre-existent reality, I am part of it in the moment of depicting it, and I also add my narration to it. Even it is a second-hand story. It does not mean it has to be less authentic than a photograph. It is a depiction of something that is moving or hurting me, and the expression of those negative emotions with an aesthetic
approach could be a naïve desire for a beautiful world, which could exist but does not for an unknown reason.

When it comes to technique, I started to make use of other tools than brushes. I use the spatula way more often and like to experiment with oil bars, which allow me to do expressive sketches on the paintings. The size of the brush also changed with the size of the canvas, which is dictated by its practicality. I also changed the material I am painting on. I started to use linen with a gesso, which is absorbing less than the one I used before – now, the colours tend to be more brilliant than they used to be.

The spatula is essential in that context, as I am not painting the text on the canvas but writing it while erasing the paint from the canvas. With that gesture, I am adding words through erasing. The text written with paint or a stick with a good looking font would make it to poetic and would make the text-part not-self-explanatory, what in my opinion would be too much. The erased text hurts the image and reminds me of an act of vandalism. That also lets the spectator focus more on the content than on the aesthetics of my handwriting. Saying it with a metaphor, I am erasing some space in the discourse about the subject I am dealing with through actually saying something.

I already mentioned acts of vandalism, and basically, this is the source of the texts for now, but I can not say if this will change or stay. That part of language interests me because of its cynical use during the debate on issues I am depicting. It can have good connotations but also be a grotesque commentary. Of course, I am merging image and language with all my responsibility as an artist. Still, maybe that bizarre, brutal and grotesque way of doing it describes my analysis of those conditions in the shortest and best way.

To sum up, the ownership of the images and sentences isn’t an essential question in my artistic practice. I am more interested in linking those things and generate a new statement, which would occur when those two parts would stay existent on their own.
4. Not self-explanatory

I was writing about project-oriented painting and series in the first part of the thesis. After not keeping it in mind for a while, the question occurred during my group critique, and I am satisfied to get back to it. The title of the show suggested my will to experiment with the term “Unselbstverständlich” which means not-self-explanatory or unobvious. I see more ways of interpretation, but there is a relation of that term with being in-between. That means to be unconventional and be able to see many layers while addressing an issue. This term is probably way more visible in the two paintings: The GDR has been never existing, and They were flammable. They show idyllic images, which contain a complex and cruel history, which makes the beautiful and intimidating at the same moment. Another way of interpretation would be to approach it holistically as an exhibition. The difference between the paintings is also a way to read the title. I was showing a process, which exposes the way of making that motif more and more present with every image. The idea of hanging the paintings was no coincidence. The wall with “My country, so beautiful” represents a look at what could have happened if I decided to stay within one topic, whatever it might take. Also, it was following up severely to the process described in the first part of the thesis. I want to write about the future, as this question is one about the next months or years. My methods and approaches will probably change during my career, but for the upcoming months, I will try to paint more project-based or in series. The perfect plan would be to paint on two to four projects at one time, so I do not get bored or frustrated by doing only one. The possibility of doing different things will allow me to jump in between and will also let me get back to paintings always after a short reflection, which is beneficial for the process. Of course, I will allow myself to paint whatever I want at any time as well, and I am aware of the fact,
that this working method, I want to try out does not necessarily need to work out for me.

Traditionally, a reflection: Do not plan too much and paint. There will always be a connection between the works; even it will not be visible on the first sight. It is about movement, and sometimes you need to go back to be able to move forward.

*Figure 10* Lukas Bury, *My country, so beautiful*, 2020, oil on canvas, different sizes.
5. **Accessibility of information**

Another question that came up often is how much information should come with the painting. In my opinion, it would be a mistake to serve a full explanation because all the paintings would lose its poetics and the not-self-explanatory part. My role is not to preach, but to ask questions and offer new ways of thinking, which might occur after an engagement with my art and a process of thinking. Anyway, I noticed that the paintings require knowledge of the historical and political subjects I am dealing with, and I cannot take it for granted that everyone will have that information.

If I could set the exhibition up again, I would provide a short text to every artwork. Such writing would contain basic information about the event I am addressing without delivering any interpretation. It would only help to narrow the spectator to the discourse I want to generate and interact with my art.

*Figure 11* Lukas Bury, *Unselbstverständlich*, 2020, photographic documentation of the exhibition.
6. Awareness

After describing the issue of the Independence Day comprehensively in the first part, I want to write more about They were flammable. In 1941 a group of ethnically polish inhabitants from Jedwabne and around pushed the Jewish population into a barn and set it on fire and killed 340 human beings. This history is one of the thousands in Europe during World War II and does not surprise. The problem became visible in the 21st century when Jan Tomasz Gross published a book\textsuperscript{13}, president Aleksander Kwasniewski apologized for the massacre, and Wladyslaw Pasikowski created the movie Aftermath (polish: Poklosie). Suddenly, parts of the society showed that they are still unable to talk openly about the role of some Poles during the German occupation and antisemitism. All persons I mentioned above were stigmatized as traitors and a popular opinion claimed, that the Germans were the villains and the Poles, victims. Furthermore, the Jews were also responsible for that escalation as they were collaborating with the Soviets before.

The second painting, in which I contest historical narratives, is The GDR has been never existing, where I am addressing the discourse about the demolishing of the Palast der Republik in Berlin and the re-erection of the Stadtpalast, the former residence of the German kings and emperors. This political decision shows the selectivity about the general historical discourse in Germany. On one side, we keep former concentration camps and buildings from the Nazi era for remembrance, but we erase a building from another oppressive system. Then, the history of the Stadtpalast is referring to the history of the Hohenzollern\textsuperscript{14} who were the forerunners for Hitler after

\textsuperscript{14} Family of German Emperors until 1918
Politically, members from that family are responsible for the Herero and Namaqua Genocide and human trafficking. Then, the SBK\textsuperscript{16} plans to place the Humboldt Forum in that palace and to exhibit stolen goods from former colonies there.

My critique is in the way of dealing with history. Some things happened, and we are not able to change them anymore, but fortunately, we can talk about them and try to learn from it to avoid similar situations in the future. Using history as a political tool does not help us with being honest about history. Of course, the question of legitimacy for every state remains. But is that more important than justice for millions of people - in past and future?

Last reflection: It is a luxury to have naïve desire of a beautiful world, but the confrontation with the brutal truth is probably a better approach. Wishful thinking has probably a place next to good intentions, as \textit{the road to hell is paved with good intentions}.


\textsuperscript{16} Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (German: Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz)
Figure 12 Lukas Bury, *They were flammable*, 2019, oil on canvas.

Figure 13 Lukas Bury, *The GDR has been never existing*, 2019, oil on canvas
IV. Conclusion

I intend to keep the conclusion short and would like to focus on the aspects of the thesis per se. It was an opportunity to dive deep into my artistic practice, which was always an important part of my life, but it was not the easiest task to explain what is going on there and why. Through the writing, I was able to sort my thoughts and know better what my art is about. I realized how the political and personal part of my life is visible in it and how linked they are.

From the cooperation with my thesis supervisor, I learned, how to write a qualitative text about my art from the beginning and to find essential subjects in it. I also learned to be critical about the writing, to ask myself every time and to find the answers for those questions through writing.

From my project advisor I learned, how to concentrate on the important things in painting and to not get lost in the studio practice. Also, I learned how to be patient and calm while working on a solo-show and before setting it up.

The final conclusion is, that I became a way more mature artist and that writing will be an inseparable element from my artistic practice, as it allowed me to empty my head from ideas and concepts, to sort them out and put together to get a better overview on what I am doing and why.
Figure 14 Lukas Bury, *Unselbstverständlich*, 2020, photographic documentation of the exhibition.

Figure 15 Lukas Bury, *Unselbstverständlich*, 2020, photographic documentation of the exhibition.
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