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**Ambiguous images**

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"Anyone involved in the history of Western European art is undoubtedly struck by the large number of paintings with depictions of the female body. The nude, more than any other subject, connotes Art. A painting depicting a female body, framed and hanging in a gallery, is a stenographic record of art as such, an icon of Western European culture, a symbol of civilization and its achievements"<sup>1</sup>. This quote by Lynda Nead captures more than any other the importance of the nude for all contemporary art.

"Its enduring value comes from the fact that it reconciles several opposites. It places the most sensual and immediately arousing object, the human body, beyond time and desire; the purest rational conception of which humanity is capable." This is how Sir Kenneth Clark describes the reasons for this meaning in his book "The Nude. A Study of Ideal Form"<sup>2</sup>.

Although the nude is not the most important subject in the set's paintings, its impact confirms Clark's words. Like a great supporting actor, he is an object of immediate interest. He coexists with various visual quotations extracted from different realities - fragments of interiors, objects as well as animals and other figures - usually male. Often marginal objects, usually unnoticeable in everyday life, when put together in new configurations, e.g. with media personalities, become important factors building not only the composition but also specific meanings or narration of the image, which I try to include in individual works. I introduce certain meanings, but the viewer can perceive them differently. He is free to do so, as the paintings do not have titles but only numbers according to the order in which they were created.

The nudes depict anonymous women who are not associated with any particular event, which gives the viewer ample scope for interpretation. Throughout the history of art, the nude has played a variety of roles. It has been religious, as in the case of Adam and Eve; erotic, as in the case of the nude "Naked Mai" by Francisco Goya, the "Krefeld Projekt" series by Eric Fischl or "Made in Heaven" by Jaffa Koons. It has also played ornamental roles, as in the ornaments of Alphonse Mucha. In my paintings it can play any role. It is only a question of my imagination or that of any of the interested viewers. My role as an artist is to draw the viewer into an intricate intrigue which he can create using the elements in the painting. Of

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<sup>1</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis,1998, p.13

<sup>2</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis,1998, p.13

course, I also create it by using these elements to tell stories that never happened. I listen with great interest to the viewers' accounts of what they see in my paintings. They are usually viewers who do not know the reasons or the backgrounds of their creation. Each of us is different in his or her own way, coming from different backgrounds, different cultural circles. Various life experiences, sometimes causing complexes or frustrations, do not remain without influence on the emotional state of a human being, and thus on his or her perception process. Of course, there are certain cultural phenomena that are perceived much more broadly, even stereotypically, such as Christianity or European culture in its broadest sense. By juxtaposing certain elements in the paintings, I can suggest or in some way manipulate the viewer's perception of the image, but there is a limit to that.

In the painting with the umbrella, *321*, the nude takes centre stage. It is slightly receding but lighter than the other figures, making them all appear similar in size. The painting tells of a real event, but the naked woman did not participate in it. In the real event, a journalist from a right-wing publication tried to symbolically - with a cross - stop the march. The colourful element, a girl with a colourful umbrella - reflects the offensive of the LGBT community. Each of the figures in the painting is holding a prop. The man's prop is a cross, which symbolises conservative, Christian, patriarchal values. These values may be threatened by the ideology represented or symbolised by the girl's prop. Precisely, the naked woman who did not participate in the real event has a large cross behind her back. It is not clear whether she is holding it or attached to it. It is likely that different people from conflicting backgrounds would take different sides of this event. A large part of the public will side with the cross because of their Christian upbringing. Conservative beliefs stem from tradition but also from the sense of security that comes from belonging to a group. Tradition is afraid of change. The colourful umbrella comes from outside and represents people who would like to live differently. The naked woman joins with the cross held by the journalist who defends tradition. So she could also take his side. However, the display of nudity, even though it occurred before Christianity, does not suggest that we should pay homage to and identify this situation with Christian tradition. She is a woman, just like the girl with the umbrella, and that is an argument for identifying her with women's protests. The woman is clearly looking towards the man with the cross, but whether her question is "what should I do?" or "what are you doing?" is a matter of interpretation for the viewer. It may be helpful to answer another question - is the woman holding the cross or is she attached to it? Did she want to support

herself with it, or is it her cross that she carries because of intolerance? It is clear from the painting that the extreme figures are in conflict. The middle one may be the judge in this case.

Nakedness itself has in this case, arising from the history of the act, a dualistic meaning about which M. Bettini writes "When nakedness was part of the semi-divine state of innocence and perfection in which God created them to live in the earthly paradise; and naked later, when their eyes were opened, revealing nakedness as a source of shame. By placing nakedness in two different periods of biblical history - the first in the period of innocence, the second when sin occurred - the parable of Genesis speaks of the contradictory understanding of nakedness in culture: a symbol of perfection and sin, purity and shame at the same<sup>3</sup> time".

The painting *321* is saturated with symbolism, perhaps even excessively so, but for me the biggest challenge in this painting was the composition of the space. It was supposed to be an open space. You have to build it in a completely different way, especially since the space in the painting is not even slightly similar to the one in which the depicted event took place. Of course, this is not the first time I have tried to achieve an effect related to open space, but I have not tried to use scientific studies, because I thought that by not giving ready-made solutions it would not help me in overcoming the difficulties. The difficulty of building this space. However, no one will be surprised that the sheer amount of theoretical work done by authors of publications and books is helpful.

The painting of the woman covered with a red bedspread is a '*324* study'. It does not depict any specific event. The pastel colours emphasise the idyllic nature of the situation. The male figure gently suggests a well-known person from the world of politics. I couldn't decide until the end if this figure was to be recognisable. The picture suggests an official's office, and when juxtaposed with the man's clothes, it would be logically justified. Inaccurately drawn, but suggested by black and white, it is associated with a business suit and a white shirt. What the painting depicts, however, looks more like a doctor's office, or more precisely, a gynaecologist's office. A nude woman covered with a bedspread also contributes to this perception of the painted interior. The reduced clarity and the colours used for the depicted elements do not cause any disturbing tension in the painting. That is why I called it idyllic.

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<sup>3</sup>M. Bettini, *Nude. Eros, nature, art*, Warsaw, ISKRY, 1999, p. 17.

The doctor's office itself may not be associated favourably, and the situation or the relationship between the characters does not suggest a medical visit. The man's attire is far too formal, and the woman's far less formal than is usual for such visits. Nor does the woman appear to be the narrator of the situation, as in many other paintings. The scene depicted is stagnant. There is no action. The word 'study' has a very broad meaning in this painting. The man seems to come from a political office, and the woman from a massage rather than a massage parlour rather than a doctor's surgery. The space itself is a doctor's office and the positioning of the figures suggests a setting from an advertisement for the popular 1970s game, *Mastermind*. The game supposedly developed the players' intellectual abilities, which would certainly be useful to the figures in the painting.

*317* is a painting depicting a man on a ladder for hanging curtains. The man does not have a painted face but his posture and body position suggest a particular well-known person from social life. The composition in this painting posed the most problems. In fact, I could say that many well-known and politically important people have passed through it. It does not matter what kind of people they are, what political sympathies, because after many attempts I realised that they do not contribute anything to the content, the whole content is a man on a ladder and a naked woman. In the painting we see two figures but one of them is actually alone. It is a female nude without clear anatomical details, because they are irrelevant to the painting. The woman is completely asexual, which emphasises the man's attitude towards her or her nakedness. My concept of asexuality in this frame does not agree with the opinion of Lynda Nead who, referring to Clark's theories, writes "According to Clark, however, one cannot and probably should not banish sexual instincts from the creation and contemplation of art. The process of sublimation in this case does not end because the original sexual urge will obviously enter in some part into the viewer's reaction to the painting. Nevertheless, Clark does not seem satisfied with the sensations that the act stimulates. Instincts, in his view, 'howl' outwards, running the risk of disintegrating the aforementioned reaction that seems most appropriate when faced with a work of art. In the end, Clark gives us a kind of chemical concoction in which "eroticism" (a carefully chosen term, denoting some species of sexual satisfaction free from pornographic connotations) is left to bubble and bubble, constantly threatening to boil over. The act seriously forces a pure and disinterested aesthetic experience into compromise. If, therefore, the transmutation of sexual urges into artistic creation is not fully possible, it is, among other things, because the

act carries a risk - at least as far as art is concerned - associated with an excess of sex. The triumph and success of the representation of the naked body lies in the ability to control this potential danger"<sup>4</sup>

The woman in *317* can be a faceless and impartial commentator. She can also be a naked truth or a convict who, showing everything, tries to prove her innocence. Maria Poprzęcka wrote "Medieval moral theology distinguished between four symbolic meanings of nudity. *Nuditas virtualis* was a virtuous nakedness, connected with penance and mortification of the body, just like the *nuditas temporalis* of hermits and ascetics, resulting from renunciation of worldly goods, including robes. But there was also the *nuditas criminalis* - the wicked and sinful, arousing sensual lusts, nudity of pagan idols, sinners and the damned."<sup>5</sup> This is a very wide range of possible interpretations of the character. In contrast, the man gives the impression of being indifferent to the woman's presence and her behaviour. He does not consider her reaction because he is completely uninterested. She does not try to defend herself or protest, because she probably realises that the sentence was passed before the court was assembled, or there was no court and the sentence was passed without it. Probably for this reason she does not even listen to what the man says and he is not interested in what her reaction is. The man is like Napoleon - confident in his beliefs despite the fact that we do not see any of his followers whom he apparently does not need. There is a lot of smooth space behind the figures in the painting, but previously there were many different people there in many configurations. They did not fit either the content or the composition, but to find this out one had to try different versions of their positioning. The picture seems empty but for me this version is the most clear and, thanks to the simple composition, it emphasises the importance of certain elements such as the ladder.

Giorgio Vasari wrote in the 16th century about Raphael that he "as a wise man came to the conviction that painting does not consist merely in the representation of nudity, but that it has a wide field before it. Among eminent painters we may mention those who know how to render well and with ease the ideas of various scenes and their own fantasies; who know how to present their compositions, not too full or too little, in the right order, so that they are both

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<sup>4</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis, 1998, p.32

<sup>5</sup> Maria Poprzęcka, *Akt - Forma nieidealna* [in:] *Przegląd Historyczny* 100/3, Warsaw, 2009, p. 367

ingenious and valuable. To this, as Raphael rightly understood, belongs the enrichment of the picture by unusual perspectives, by houses of views, by the costumes of the figures, and by the illumination of the figures such that part of the figure remains in shadow while part in the light."<sup>6</sup>

It is possible that a large group of viewers will accuse me of profanity or at least obscenity of images, or of crossing the boundaries of culture as such. Lynda Nead writes about the process concerning the obscenity in art: "the control of borders separating different spheres of culture is entangled in the process of subjecting the viewers and the circumstances of reception of a work of art to rules and norms. It does not consist solely and simply in policing the obscene content of a text. Let us say it briefly and bluntly (something the judge in the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* did not avoid): if at a given moment a certain dominant group does not wish a certain material to find its way into the hands of another, subordinated group, he calls it obscenity."<sup>7</sup>

330 "Virtues of a Woman" is a painting in which a man plays the main role. He is so committed to the activities he promotes that he does not pay attention to the opponents of his vision. The male figure is, of course, the Minister of Education and Science - Przemysław Czarnek, and what he does is knitting. I myself see nothing wrong with this activity, even if it is done by a man, but I do not think that in the age of industrial production it can be anything other than a passion or an art form. However, it does not suggest devoting time to it instead of, say, philosophy, of which there is so little in the general education system. Women with their backs turned to the minister are not interested in his work, but this is not ignorance. The ignorance is somehow conscious and the women pay no attention to him at all. They make it clear by their behaviour that he has not gained their interest in his ideas, and their nakedness suggests their directness. The lying woman does not contribute much to the content of the painting; its composition benefits more from her presence. The other, sitting, is in advanced pregnancy. This state is something quite normal, common and arousing very favourable emotions. Nevertheless, when juxtaposed with the minister's ideas on educating young people, the pregnant woman suggests little awareness of her condition. A

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<sup>6</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Żywoty Najsłynniejszych Malarzy, Rzeźbiarzy i Architektów*, Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980, p. 406

<sup>7</sup> Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznań, Rebis, 1998, p. 154



young woman who is not sexually aware at school will know how to knit jumpers, but unfortunately this will not protect her from an unwanted pregnancy. I have been accused of pornography because of these particular acts. That is why I want to refer to the words from Lynda Nead's book on references to pornography and how it is different from art. "If we consider the rules of its dissemination in culture, as well as where it is consumed, we see that pornography moves all the time between the realms of public visibility and invisibility. As the term 'indecent visual culture' indicates, pornography draws a fluctuating line between the public (visible, open) and private (invisible, closed) domains. While art represents a public and legitimate way of showing the female body, pornography, one might say, is its 'other'. Here the body is demonstrated in forbidden forms and in the limited, marginal space of public and private culture."<sup>8</sup> The background of my piece of art is borrowed, taken from a well-known painting by Romanian artist Adrian Ghenie depicting a highly publicised event concerning the political transition in Central and Eastern Europe, which took place in different countries, in very different ways. In Romania, it took the form of a revolution which, as usual, ended tragically for many people. The picture shows the trial of the nation's leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, which took place in truly Spartan conditions - in a makeshift court organised in a school classroom. Ceausescu and his wife were tried in a flash, sentenced to death, and executed just as quickly. The use of this motif is an attempt to draw attention to how the arrogance of power and lack of respect for citizens end. It is a manipulation, but on the other hand, it is a warning against revolution. Such instant settlement is most often caused by a desire to deprive those who have been "settled" of the opportunity to voice their opinions, which are often correct at least in part, but they are also intended to conceal the revolutionaries' links with the authorities and their dishonest intentions.

There are four very important elements in image 331. There is a part of the gate with the inscription "Arbeitmachtfrei", which today is a globally significant symbol of martyrdom. The striped clothing does not even need to be explained. As in all other paintings from the set there is also a female nude, which softens the expression of the painting, and the nudity in this set may have multiple meanings. It can suggest the discovery of truth, report the truth but also soften the statement. For me, however, it is a demonstration of normality of the kind that occurs in most of my paintings. It is the beauty or derealisation of the notion of

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<sup>8</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis, 1998, p. 166

occupation, that is, the opposite of a repulsive and disgusting situation, which is what occupation is.. The deer symbolises innocence and gentleness. The figure of the man in the striped uniform has the face of a clown, a suggestion of the "wrong" comparison he used. If we were to ask why a nude in such a juxtaposition, the following quotation would explain a little - "Since the most ancient times, the intrusive and mindless nature of carnal desire has sought an outlet in images, and giving these images a form, Perhaps this purification of Venus would not have taken place at all if the abstract conception of the female body had not been present in the Mediterranean mind from the very beginning."<sup>9</sup>

"The very concept of nudity - full of inconsistencies, variously understood, inseparable from the deepest roots of every civilisation - is a product of par excellence culture. The distinction between the naked body and the clothed body goes back to the very origins of culture, depends on it and, in some cases, may even be its model. It cannot escape our attention that, according to the Genesis parable, Adam and Eve were "naked" in two fundamentally different ways. Naked in the beginning, when their eyes had not yet opened."<sup>10</sup> The act and nakedness itself express emotions cause emotions both extreme and contained. With the nude we can express literally everything, the nude is the most essential subject in art. This is not a praise of the nude but an emphasis on the influence of human nature on art.

Research on visual perception carried out by neurologists, psychologists or physiologists has a relatively short history of about one hundred years and was initiated by character psychology. Earlier, artists attempted to reflect on these issues, for example Goethe's friend, the German painter Philipp Otto Runge, or the American Albert Henry Munsell. As far as the so-called "visual grammar" and the principles of creating an image are concerned, the publications of Wassily Kandinsky and Władysław Strzemiński are invaluable. Strzemiński wrote that "The earliest type of visual awareness is contour vision. At this level a person only realises that every object has an external boundary - and expresses this object by means of a single contour line. Of the whole set of characteristics of the object, he is only aware of the existence of the boundary line outlining its perimeter. This exclusive awareness of only one contour component and the introduction of the totality of nature only to it - manifests itself in the fact that the contour is, as it were, called upon to express also other

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<sup>9</sup>K. Clark, *Nude. Study of ideal form*, transl. J. Bomb a, Warsaw, PWN, 1998, p. 26, 65

<sup>10</sup>Maria Poprzęcka, *Akt - Forma nieidealna* [in:] *Przegląd Historyczny* 100/3, Warsaw, 2009, p.366

components of the form - not only the directly contoured ones. For example, in order to express that the whole object is yellow, its contour line is drawn in yellow, while, as if it seemed natural to us today, the whole object inside should be filled in with yellow. The colour of the contour line is supposed to indicate what colour the whole object is. We find this type of vision essentially in the Palaeolithic. The child's drawing also begins with it."<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that in this way of reproducing reality we draw what does not actually exist. A contour is just a boundary between different parts of what we see, usually separating different objects placed at different distances from our sight and partially overlapping in the direction of vision. In his *Theory of Seeing*, Strzemiński wrote: 'The multiplying observations that inside the boundary line there are some components of the form characterising the object may lead not only to visual awareness, expressed by a linear drawing inside the contour circuit. A different formulation of visual content may arise: sylvian vision. Instead of the contour being filled with a linear drawing, one arrives at the awareness that the entire space inside the contour is a uniform linear mass, and that the contour is only its outer boundary. Linear drawing (the contour within the contour) better characterised the surface of the object, but did not emphasise its uniform material structure, setting it apart from its surroundings <sup>12</sup>'

The development of ways of representing reality has resulted in the creation of further forms, including hyperrealism. However, none of these forms is perfect. I want to prove that by mixing these forms, we can get deeper into reality. I believe that reality can be shown through understatement, thus leaving space for the viewer's perceptive and interpretative activity.

I wanted to use all the work on the set to develop my knowledge of how to use the different techniques and how they affect each other. I wanted to draw attention to the use of colour as an element that gives meaning, emphasising the importance of the elements in question. So why should I not benefit from the experience of others. I assign consecutive numbers to the paintings and all artefacts created on my initiative. The number is also the title of the work, sometimes accompanied by a subtitle that emphasises the nature and direction of my interpretation. The sequence of numbers relates to the moment when work on the painting

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<sup>11</sup>W. Strzemiński, *Theory of Seeing*, Łódź, Museum of Art in Łódź, 2016, p.61

<sup>12</sup>W. Strzemiński, *Theory of Seeing*, Łódź, Museum of Art in Łódź, 2016, p.79

begins, not when it ends, so often, as long as the painting is in my possession, I return to work on it and change it. As I worked on the set, my awareness, knowledge and experience changed, allowing me to approach the creation of the image in a different way, both technically and mentally. That is why sometimes paintings with lower numbers were finished later and that is why they seem to be more advanced. Sometimes the paintings that I find more appealing have cost me the least amount of work, but they were certainly the result of a lot of work on the previous paintings. Usually when I am confronted with a problem, I spend a lot of time solving it and for this reason there are many layers of paint in the painting which in itself can be attractive in itself.

An example of such a painting is *312*, in which, although the space is not constructed in any particular way, it gives the impression of truthfulness. There are no famous people in it, but there is a well-known situation, only that it is from a time that no one remembers anymore. However, it has a direct reference to contemporary times. In the background of the painting, there are two men. One of them is standing upright position and the other is sitting at a table. Both are dressed in military uniforms. The scene from the old photograph depicts a bribe, or conscription, into the army during the First World War. In Poland, we have a particular history of conscription during the First World War, because no matter which army the Poles would be conscripted into, it was not a Polish army. In addition, each side legitimised the forced conscription with a cross, which was supposed to suggest to the conscripts the rightness of the cause for which they were supposed to fight. The connection which the upbringing of these people had with the use of this symbol in a very simple way shows the manipulation that can be used to exploit traditions of upbringing that are instilled in whole societies from childhood. Because there were no official symbols of Polishness, Poles identified themselves with Catholic symbols. Of course, this does not apply only to Poles, but we were in the special situation of having this nation used for non-Polish purposes. Unfortunately, symbols of this kind are often used for manipulation. The more authority a symbol represents, the less we analyse the validity of the purpose for which it is used. After all, if one does something in the name of God, it is not enough that everyone should join in, but the responsibility lies with God himself. And although this scene is in the background of the painting, it is its central issue. There is also a partially nude woman in the painting who does not appear to be a sex symbol, however, nudity shown in any context is always questionable "One cannot, however, and probably should not, banish sexual instincts from the

creation and contemplation of art. The process of sublimation in this case does not end because the original sexual urge will obviously enter in some part of the viewer's reaction to the painting. Nevertheless, Clark does not seem satisfied with the sensations that the act stimulates. Instincts, in his view, 'howl' outwards, running the risk of disintegrating the aforementioned reaction that seems most appropriate when faced with a work of art. In the end, Clark gives us a kind of chemical concoction in which "eroticism" (a carefully chosen term, denoting some species of sexual satisfaction free from pornographic connotations) is left to bubble and bubble, constantly threatening to boil over. The act seriously forces a pure and disinterested aesthetic experience into compromise. So if the transmutation of sexual urges into artistic creation is not fully possible, it is, among other things, because the act carries with it the risk - at least as far as art is concerned - of an excess of sex. The triumph and success of the representation of the naked body lies in the ability to control this potential danger."<sup>13</sup> The positioning<sup>312</sup> of the woman's body and especially the facial grimace and the colours used emphasise the pessimism of the event. A young man who most likely did not even understand the situation of coercion will put his life at risk for the administration, whose representative is the man draped in a cross. Someone who himself will not put his life at risk by hiding behind others. There is also a big cat in the painting, which is an important element of the composition, but also symbolises power and greatness. The lion is the symbol of, among other things, the British Empire, the coat of arms of our southern neighbours - the Czechs, also the trademark of the French car manufacturer - Peugeot. It is, like the bear and the eagle, the epitome of strength, power and nobility for Western civilisation. In the painting he appears tame, belonging to a naked woman who has no other attributes of power and appears to be someone like the God of War. With her calm and at the same time resolute expression on her face, she gives the impression of being dominant, although the most important events take place behind her back. The woman is also the judge observing the event. The two other figures and the cross symbolise the drain on society.

332 - 'smiths'. This painting does not depict famous people nor is it politically involved. There is a lot of nostalgia for the times when human labour was of great value in the physical dimension that it leaves behind. A large part of the painting presents a randomly encountered photograph, taken from the old German weekly magazine "Der

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<sup>13</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis, 1998, p.13

Spiegel". Although the origin of the photo is irrelevant, it made me realise that events happen in a similar way everywhere. A photograph taken in another country depicts an event that I remember from my own childhood. Shoeing a horse used to be the most common activity on every farm in the countryside. The horse was not used, as is sometimes the case today, to build up one's image, but was a necessity serving the work. The original photograph is black and white, but the clothes of the men who worked there were not coloured, so the sepia I have used reflects quite realistically the colours of the clothes, the muddy ground and the whole background and gives the impression of a plane photograph. The figure of the naked woman without a clearly defined face comes from a completely different reality. She has a definite colour, thanks to which she builds up the space by stepping forward. The woman is undressing, and although one does not sense the erotic subtext of the figure itself, the nudity is palpable. "The nude still remains the most complete example of the transformation of matter into form". Clark in one passage, perhaps the best known and most quoted, introduces the distinction between nudity and the nude. He is concerned with the difference between a body without clothes, 'shrunken and defenceless', and a body 'clothed' in art; the nude evokes the image of a body full of balance, certainty and bloom - shaped. The transformation of the naked body into a nude is a transition from concrete reality to the ideal sphere; it is a movement from unformed perception, the corporeality of matter, to awareness and recognition of the unity and limitations of the norms of the economy of art. It is this process of transformation that makes the nude an ideal artistic object." In this form it complements the painting compositionally and with colour it adds clarity, harmonising with the mood of the painting, in particular the idyllic scene from the photograph. The stripes and gradients in the background 'set' the space, emphasising the separateness of the forge space from the photograph in relation to the space in the whole painting.

Skilful manipulation of the elements in the painting makes it possible to create a flexible space in which we can freely insert, for example, the characters needed to convey the intended message. A simple trick to set up the space was to draw a cuboid in the picture 323 in the form of a cabinet, which, despite the fact that the background is not clearly defined from behind, introduces the feeling of space with its clear solidity. It makes it easier to read the verticals and levels and the angles of the ground, which automatically clarifies the plans and distances to the individual figures. 323 is a painting with a figure dressed in an outfit similar to a judge's toga. It is a female figure with a deliberately blurred face, but it clearly suggests a

particular person. The painting does not depict any particular situation and the naked women are completely random. What is not accidental, however, are the poses they assume. The figure in the robe is instructive, decisive and even a little aggressive, and seems to be teaching the others. Her firmness and confidence suggest that she believes in what she is preaching, but her gestures and blurred face may suggest that she does not fully understand it. She certainly does not understand the values that the other two figures represent. One of them is a kneeling figure, naked, suffering and terrified. The figure partially fades away as if collapsing into an abyss. The idle arms lowered along the naked body and the grimace of pain on the face are an expression of helplessness and hopelessness. The second figure sitting on the cupboard is partially undressed and gives the impression of being in the middle of some activity. She is less involved in the depicted situation, more focused on what she is doing. Her serene face does not express any extreme emotion, the current situation is unimportant to her. This calmness may suggest that the character, briefly entangled in the event, does not yet feel the emotions associated with it. She does not show the fear, anxiety or terror that accompany the kneeling figure. The latter gives the impression that the space they are in is already more familiar and understandable to them, and thus more real and hostile. Sometimes we encounter a situation that is inconvenient for us, but we accept it because at first we think of it as something short and temporary. As time passes, however, it becomes tiresome, but we become more and more used to it and accept it. Hence, the increasing self-confidence of the people who cause the situation and, consequently, its further development and consequences. The painting is an appeal to come to one's senses and react to the first symptoms before it is too late for peaceful changes.

322 is a painting with the subtitle 'sitting', but it also bears another title, more appropriate to the situation - 'break'. The painting shows a parliament hall and two, as it seems to me, recognizable figures from the world of politics. In the foreground, however, we can see a nude of a woman in a clearly relaxed pose, but certainly not saturated with sexuality, and not even frivolous. This figure, in my opinion, very accurately captures the mood of the characters in the background. The whole scene seems to be very idyllic, and the men are not at all disturbed by the figure, which in the real world would look at least surprising here. The whole is complemented by pastel and warm colours, which further enhance the feeling of safety. The picture seems completely flat and even the men, who are sitting. The image appears completely flat and even the men, who are sitting at a different distance from the

viewer, appear to be sitting vertically above each other. There are probably many reasons for this effect. It may be due to the very good lighting in the room which precludes an aerial perspective, but also on the right side of the female nude there is no concrete space built up to complement the left side. It is even flatter. This is how Strzeminski explains the flatness of Bonnard's paintings. "In Bonnard, in whom seeing is not a thing understood and agreed upon with the appropriate paragraphs of perspective, but with the reality of the physiological process - we find so often that any fragment of a picture appears against a background that is undifferentiated and almost flat, that the space beyond this object has been treated as a flat globe, positioned vertically. These vertical directions are typical of Bonnard's paintings and are not at all due to his inability to render "normal" spatiality, but to the fact that the spatial plans lying outside the field of visual focus merge into a plane saturated with colour space. However, the same seemingly abstract flat sphere in another part of the picture changes its character, becomes a clear and detailed outline of an object, while in the previously sharp spatial plan we now see the plane of the backstage. This only proves that the shift of the gaze to other places in the painting was accompanied by a change in the attitude of the gaze to the viewing distance.(...) Painterly space is not a function of geometry, but a function of seeing as a physiological process. Bonnard's paintings are not flat and their spatiality does not result from the fact that from the small patches of colour he creates a rough texture, thus creating a kind of vibration at the very surface of the painting, but from the general concept of visual space, resulting from the laws of the physiology of vision. Bonnard's spatiality stems not from technique and its ways, but from the general conception of space".<sup>14</sup>

The men sojourning in this space are also not particularly interested in, but also do not seem surprised by, the woman, as if this situation was completely normal to them. Although this particular assumption of mine after analysing the theorists' texts seems untrue. "The desire to embrace another human body and to unite with it is a fundamental part of our nature to such an extent that it inevitably affects the judgment of what is known as 'pure form'. One of the difficulties of the nude as an object of art is that instincts cannot remain hidden, as they can when we experience pleasure in contact with ceramics; they gain strength through sublimation, but are brought to the fore, where they threaten the unity of reaction from which the artwork derives its independent life. Even then, the amount of erotic reaction that a work

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<sup>14</sup>W. Strzeminski, *Theory of Seeing*, Łódź, Museum of Art in Łódź, 2016, p. 307



of art can unleash is considerable<sup>15</sup>". Agata Araszkiewicz goes even further in her article 'Conspiracy Against Women', writing "This tension between subject and object of representation often becomes the focus of theorists analysing depictions of female nudity from the Renaissance to contemporary 'Playboy' photos. "The image is made to appeal to its sexuality," writes one scholar, the British critic John Berger, "the representation has nothing to do with its sexuality." "The sexual passion of the woman must be minimised so that the viewer can feel that it is he who has the monopoly on such passion," Berger concludes. And the only exception to this rule, according to him, are Rembrandt's works dedicated to his wife Saskia. They emanate sensuality and tenderness, which returns to the portrayed woman not only passion, but also a kind of particular subjectivity. The image does not so much portray the body as a thing as it is a record of a complex relationship of intimacy, fascination and closeness, breaking with conventional 'sexual' alienation"<sup>16</sup>.

For me, the painting is synonymous with the carefree attitude that sometimes prevails in this place. That is why the painting bears this second subtitle, which popped into my head while watching the parliamentary proceedings. Of course, such a generalisation may be unfair, because such a "break" is not prevalent in parliament, but it does less harm than many stormy deliberations. Emotions and feelings are the essence of humanity, but in order to experience them we need contact with the environment, which we have our body and senses for. Art is identified with the noble side of human nature, which is why the above text sounds at least banal.

Electromagnetic waves of frequencies higher than infrared and lower than ultraviolet are reflected by opaque objects of higher density than air and some of them enter the human eye, thus stimulating the photosensitive nerve cells located at its bottom, which by sending an impulse to the appropriate field in the cerebral cortex, they produce visual impressions. This, in a nutshell, is how the image we see is created. It certainly cannot be called a product of our imagination because it is created on the basis of objective impulses coming from outside. At the same time, through the store of sensory data stored in the brain, we are to some extent co-creators of the image of the world we perceive. It depends on many factors: the anatomy of the skull, the shape of the eyeballs, the general condition of the body, the emotional state, age,

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<sup>15</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis, 1998, p.32

<sup>16</sup> Agata Araszkiewicz, *Spisek przeciwko kobietom* [in:] *Czas Kultury* 2/2016, Poznań, p.192

gender, the objective lighting conditions, but also on psychological factors or individual associations due to past experiences and impressions. We do not know how someone else recognises the colour red, for example, and no one has any idea whether we all see it in the same way, and we will probably never find out. This determines how we perceive the artist's work.

The picture numbered 315, in which the "jittery" figures and the background maintained in a similar atmosphere make it difficult for the viewer to focus on individual elements. I have kept this image in this form on purpose in order to distinguish it from the last images in the set. 315 It depicts a well-known figure who, however, is not decisive in the field to which the statement that inspired me to paint this picture related. Sometimes we say something too strongly, something that catches the attention of others so that they stop focusing on things that are inconvenient for us. The situation is all the easier when the things we say are not within our competence, so we do not bear any responsibility for them. The man in the painting is clearly interested in the naked woman, he devotes all his attention to her. This is not at all surprising, because the woman, like Aphrodite, is more attractive than the other figures in the painting. It seems as if she was the heir of Aphrodite of Knidos, about which Ewa Bugaj writes: "Aphrodite of Knidos is an ambiguous statue, still arousing much controversy today. Moreover, the further "lush life" of this representation in European culture has inevitably complicated the search for its original meaning and message, or - according to more recent proposals - its causal action.<sup>17</sup> Ewa Bugaj, referring to M. Squire, writes "our canonical, Western image of the female body, the object of men's penetrating gaze, is drawn from the ancient visual tradition, from ancient artistic conventions, and above all from the work of Praxiteles - Aphrodite of Knidos. In a sense, then, every subsequent female act in European culture is a reinterpretation of Aphrodite of Knidos'.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this is what puts the depicted male out of touch with reality. However, as many times as I look at this painting I have the impression that it does not bother him at all. Obviously, he is also not paying attention to the world he is commenting on and at the same time finding himself in. There are also other figures in the painting who, according to the man's comment, do not pay attention to what they are doing, and because of this, the situation in this area of life does not look

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<sup>17</sup>Ewa Bugaj, *The Ancient Female Nude and Its Later Implications*, Poznań, Poznań Society of Friends of Science, 2017, p.453

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.453

good, which is important for us, because sooner or later each of us will probably depend on this place. However, for this composition, I have used photos from websites from around the world that show extremely exhausted medical staff due to the fight against a pandemic. A huge number of such pictures have been shown by photojournalists and journalists all over the world in an attempt to raise public awareness of the health care situation. To emphasise the spectacular nature of the situation, the picture features the figure of Professor Religa, from the very famous photo taken after a several-hour-long operation on the first heart transplant performed in Poland. Of course, not every day in the health service is so exhausting. Of course, not every day in health care is so exhausting and spectacular, but the transplant was an exceptional event. The current situation is similarly exceptional, but the pandemic does not affect just one patient, and this is where it is unique. It is a pity that in areas so important to our lives, opinions are given by people who do not have the faintest idea about them. It is a dangerous situation when ignorant people become opinion-formers by commenting on situations about which they have no knowledge.

The last chronologically painted image is 329. One of the figures is the former Minister of Health. This man is depicted at the rostrum because I associate his figure with constant press conferences, although I did not note in my consciousness many of his statements. Perhaps it is because of this that I have the impression that everything I have heard from him has seemed to me to be propaganda rather than information and has been more about business than fighting a threat. That is why the rostrum is more like a steel barrel. I got the idea for the barrel from a Polish film about politicians, or rather about one very amateurish politician who is equally concerned with his own interests. The film is called *The Career of Nikos Dyzma* and is based on the well-known novel by Dołęga Mostowicz. The complexity of this situation shows that it is such a Polish affliction. Of course, such careers probably happen all over the world, but the fact that a great novel has been written about it in our country shows that we accept it and it is absolutely normal for us. Unfortunately, probably because of this "normality" nobody even tries to fight against it.

There are two more female nudes in the painting, which were almost exclusively for compositional purposes. One has her reflection in the mirror, which symbolises looking at one's own actions. This symbolism, however, seemed too banal to me. Kenneth Clark gave an explanation, claiming that contact with nudity instincts are awakened and that "one cannot, however, and probably should not, banish sexual instincts from creation and contemplation of

art. The process of sublimation in this case does not end because the primal sexual urge will obviously enter in some part into the viewer's reaction to the image. Nevertheless, Clark does not seem satisfied with the sensations that the act stimulates. Instincts, in his view, 'crawl' outwards, running the risk of disintegrating the aforementioned reaction that seems most appropriate when faced with a work of art. In the end, Clark gives us a kind of chemical concoction in which "eroticism" (a carefully chosen term, denoting some kind of sexual satisfaction free from pornographic connotations) is left to bubble and bubble, constantly threatening to boil over. The nude seriously forces a pure and disinterested aesthetic experience into compromise. If, therefore, the transmutation of sexual urges into artistic creation is not fully possible, it is, among other things, because the act carries with it the risk - at least as far as art is concerned - of an excess of sex. The triumph and success of the representation of the naked body lies in the ability to control this potential danger"<sup>19</sup>. However, in my interpretation, it is not about the viewer but about the man in the painting, and naked bodies symbolise temptations that must be fought.

In fact, the last picture painted in its entirety is 333, which in my opinion, is complete. The silhouette of a woman forms the foreground. The distinctively painted sheet, although in the background, thanks to its simple form and contrast is very visible. The cat, according to the principles of behind-the-scenes perspective, is in front of the woman and this should put it in the foreground, but its non-central position and the low accuracy of its drawing make it seem as if it is in front of the foreground.

In *Theory of Vision*, Strzemiński writes:

"Proportions and dimensions thus depend not only on the position and distance of the object, but also on the direction of the gaze with which we view nature. Physiological perspective is more accurate than classical perspective. It allows us to determine not only the size and distance of an object, but also its position in relation to the gaze with which we view it.

If it may sometimes seem too arbitrary and subjective that the same object in the same place may change its dimensions depending on where we direct our gaze - let us remember that for Plato it was also arbitrary that the same object may have different

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<sup>19</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis, 1998, p.32

dimensions depending on the degree of distance. For him, there were only objects "in themselves" and therefore he believed that one should always, at all distances, draw them the same, of the same size, because they "in themselves" did not change.

But the purpose of perspective is to express all the circumstances of our vision. The more fully we express these circumstances - the more perfect the perspective.

So:

1. Not only the absolute size of the object, but also its distance;
2. Not only the distance of the object, but also its position, its angle at which we view it open (perspective shortcut);
3. Not only the specific position of the object in relation to us, but also the definition of the gaze with which we view it.

In other words, a perspective capable of expressing the entire real and physiological process by which we view nature" .<sup>20</sup>

For different audiences, image 333 may represent completely different situations, but it is by no means political. It depicts a dissecting room from a period when knowledge of the human body was not yet as complete as it is today. The painting, at least in some context, deals with passing away or, in other words, with a change of state of consciousness. For the vast majority of people, "this" place, as well as passing away itself, is definitely a drama. However, the longer we deal with it, the softer the image becomes, because aversion to the subject of death comes from fear of it, and fear comes from lack of awareness. So, by analogy, the image can symbolise all the events that we fear, mainly because we have no knowledge of them. The figure in the white coat is a researcher, maybe a doctor, in the Renaissance period also often an artist. What is important is that he is someone who wants to learn the truth that others are afraid of. A kind of "Prometheus" sacrificing his reputation in order to improve someone else's existence. Usually such words are enough to improve the image of this person in the eyes of the beholder. This man is an explorer and traveller, only in a less favoured environment, and although the knowledge he acquires is no less necessary, and none of these

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<sup>20</sup>W. Strzemiński, *Theory of seeing*, Łódź, Museum of Art in Łódź, 2016, p.279

explorers has ever achieved the popularity of Jacques Cousteau. Of course, many famous people have been involved in this procedure but they achieved fame not because of this research but because of the way they used it afterwards. There is another figure in the painting, two female nudes. One of the women appears to be getting up from the bed over which a man is leaning, like a ghost coming out of the body examined by a pathologist. The painting is difficult to interpret because it does not show or represent any specific situation or person. The woman getting out of bed symbolises her detachment from reality, of which the room and the man staring at her are a part. She looks as if she is getting up from the dissecting bed and this does not symbolise resurrection but leaving the reality of which the man is a part. It is an escape from this reality. The woman is facing a door from which a bright light shines. For Catholics, the message is clear, for me this light is rather knowledge and enlightenment. So this figure is not a soul coming out of a dead body but rather a person turning towards knowledge, towards consciousness.

The woman in the foreground, depicted in classical counterpoint as a Greek goddess, brings to mind Aphrodite. To understand her significance to the painting, one must grasp the complexity of European culture.

"The female act is a category of culture and gender. It is part of a cultural industry whose institutions and language create and promote specific definitions of sex and sexuality and specific forms of knowledge and pleasure. We cannot, of course, and probably would not want to, abandon metaphorical language altogether. Nevertheless, it strikes us in art criticism that an interpretation of the nude that is saturated with sexual references systematically reinforces patriarchal dominant aesthetics and entrenched positions on the female body. If we want to change this situation, let us ask whether a mere shift of emphasis in the figurative register? It seems that this should be accompanied by a new definition of the role of the art critic, who will cease to make aesthetic judgements and will abandon expertise in favour of a politically vigilant interpretation. Edward Said wrote about the social role of the critic, who, aware of the importance of the act of interpretation, is "extremely responsible for articulating those voices that have been dominated by 'metacriticism'". Said's words, so relevant to all critical forms, can in particular serve as a model for defining the function of feminist criticism<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis, 1998, p.105

In a nutshell, it is synonymous with beauty and feminine strength, and this is certainly evident in the painting, but the idea for it nevertheless emerged under the influence of 19th century paintings depicting medical research. Specifically, André Brouillet's painting entitled '*Jean-Martin Charcot presenting a case of hysteria*' from 1887. "This representation refers to the famous doctor's research into hysteria. Dr Charcot is shown in a room where he presents a case of hysterics to the assembled students and other doctors in a pose referring to the so-called Hysterical Arc. It is not without significance that the woman depicted has bare shoulders and an open shirt, indicating the erotic meanings of her body. Charcot himself (1825-1893) was an extremely interesting figure, also due to the creation of the iconography of hysteria. As AgataJakubowska writes: "Charcot possessed an iconographic impulse and, knowing that images speak more vividly to minds than words, he gave images the highest importance. He organised lectures, during which he showed the audience (not only specialists) his patients and their behaviour (usually developed for this purpose). He also had a photographic atelier where he recorded the behaviour of hysterical women, and numerous sessions resulted in successive volumes of the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*". [2, 3]. The author also stresses that the representations made by Charcot were very strongly connected with the conventions of depicting the female body in art, and referred to both pathetic representations and the nude itself. "In writing about this, the status of the hysterical woman's body as an aesthetic and erotic object is emphasised above all, less so as a medical object (if only because for treatment these visualisations were not necessary)" [2]. Brouillet's painting brings out another parallel between art and medicine. It is that the patient is presented in the same way as naked models were presented in studios and at academies of fine arts. The male model, which dominated until the late 18th century, was replaced by the female model in the 19th century, and the art of that time itself was dominated by the female nude. Marcia Pointon has pointed out that there is a connection between artistic education and 19th century medical research on the female body. "The lecture theatre at the medical academy was structured in much the same way as an art academy studio, where models posed and lectures were given before art students on anatomy in the same way as before the medical students".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Izabela Kowalczyk, *Pomiędzy sztuką i medycyną - ciało kobiet i mężczyzn w reprezentacjach artystycznych, medycznych i popularnych* [in:], Nowiny Lekarskie 81/5, Poznań, 2012, p. 539

Our sexuality is part of our personality, and thus the nude is its manifestation. When I started working, I had the impression that the nudes in the paintings were commentators of events, faceless observers. However, just like female carnality, their role is completely different, and it stems from the essence of human nature. It is hard not to draw attention, in the case of the nude, to its sexual source. One cannot accuse its creators of lack of professionalism because of that, since we would have to reproach such artists as Władysław Podkowiński, whose "Frenzy of Exultation" was connected with a love scandal, Picasso or Rafael about whom Giorgio Vasari wrote: "Raphael liked passionate women and was always ready to serve them. This was the reason for his constant devotion to carnal pleasures. He was highly respected and liked, perhaps more than he should have been. When decorating the ground floor hall of his villa for his dear friend Augustine Chigi, Rafael could not do his best because of his love for a certain woman. Worried about this, Chigi, on the advice of others and on his own initiative, took great pains to bring his mistress into the house where he was doing his work, so that she could remain there permanently. And so the work was brought to completion"<sup>23</sup>.

Regardless of the reason why the nude is the most important theme in art, it is understandable that this theme has absorbed the attention of historians, theoreticians and psychoanalysts, and not only in the context of art. For me, the quintessence of the nude is best captured by Maria Poprzęcka in the words "The nude - which is both the reason for its success and for its condemnation and finally feminist acrimony - it is associated above all with the naked female body"<sup>24</sup>. Even if only because I am a heterosexual man, nudity is a "state" that interests me in itself. Poprzęcka goes on to quote Panofsky who wrote: "Nudity as such - argued Panofsky in his interpretation of Titian's "Earthly and Heavenly Love" - especially when contrasted with its opposite, began to be understood as a symbol of truth in a general philosophical sense. It was interpreted as an expression of innate beauty (*pulchritudo innata*) - as opposed to artificially added charms (*ornamentum*); and with the development of Neoplatonism it came to signify that which is ideal and comprehensible by the mind as

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<sup>23</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Żywoty Najśłynniejszych Malarzy, Rzeźbiarzy i Architektów*, Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1979, p. 402

<sup>24</sup> Maria Poprzęcka, *Akt - Forma nieidealna* [in:] *Przegląd Historyczny* 100/3, Warsaw, 2009, p.366



opposed to that which is physical and comprehensible by the senses, the simple and 'true' essence of things as opposed to their various and changing 'imagination'.<sup>25</sup>

Through my work on the set, I have given nudity the status of an artefact, as I understand it. It can be elevated to the dignity of "The Nude" by interpretation, mine or that of any audience member. "Clark in one of the passages, perhaps the best known and most quoted, introduces the distinction between nudity and the nude. He is concerned with the difference between a body without clothes, 'shrunken and vulnerable', and a body 'clothed' in art; the nude evokes the image of a body full of balance, certainty and flourishing - a body that has been shaped. The transformation of the naked body into an act consists of the transition from the concrete reality to the ideal sphere - it is a movement from the unformed perception, the corporeality of matter, to the awareness and recognition of the unity and limitations of the norms of the economy of art. It is this process of transformation that makes an ideal artistic object out of an act"<sup>26</sup>.

I find it difficult to write about my art, probably for the same reason the same reason why I chose visual arts as a way of expression. I believe that I can express more with paintings than with words. I am not trying to compare myself to Michelangelo, but I understand very well what he said to his pupil, "that if he had someone to collaborate with him, since he had already done so many anatomical dissections, regardless of his age, he would write about it to instruct artists. He felt that he himself was not able to formulate in writing what he knew, since he had no skill in writing, although in letters he spoke freely and in few words"<sup>27</sup>.

The description of the work required an in-depth analysis of the paintings, following which I hope the actual strength of the emanation of the nude became apparent. The title of the dissertation "Ambiguous Images" suggests that both the form of painterly expression I used to present figures and build and composition, as well as the specific emotions and reasons for which these paintings were created, do not impose any interpretation. According to the current understanding of the role of the viewer, the essence of the message conveyed by

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<sup>25</sup>ibid,p.367

<sup>26</sup>Lynda Nead, *The Feminine Nude*, Poznan, Rebis,1998, p.34

<sup>27</sup> Giorgio Vasari , *Żywoty Najświetniejszych Malarzy, Rzeźbiarzy i Architektów*, Warsaw 1979, p. 523

a painting is to a large extent determined by the viewer's priorities in interpreting the work. I am aware that the events that I have depicted in the series of paintings, or rather the events that inspired me to paint, are not of interest to everyone. In fact, they may not even be identified by the viewer. My intention was not to create an unambiguous message, but rather to arouse curiosity and induce the viewer to enter my painting world. In this context, the nude is a tool in communication with the viewer, no matter what emotions it evokes, it is not indifferent to anyone. It can induce the search or creation of some narration, but it can also become the main or only motif and subject of a painting. Even when these events are in the even when the mentioned events are in the sphere of the viewer's interest, the power of the act makes the viewer become a subject placed in some episode, just as in literature a particular story is sometimes presented against the background of historical events, completely unrelated to it. I don't know if there would be viewers who would not notice the nudity in my paintings, but I have found that there are some who did not notice the message, which for me was the most important one.

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312, 2021, oil on canvas, 190x103 cm.



315 (Lack of commitment), 2021, oil on canvas, 130x150 cm.



317, 2021, oil on canvas, 130x100 cm.



318, 2021, oil on canvas, 110x80 cm.

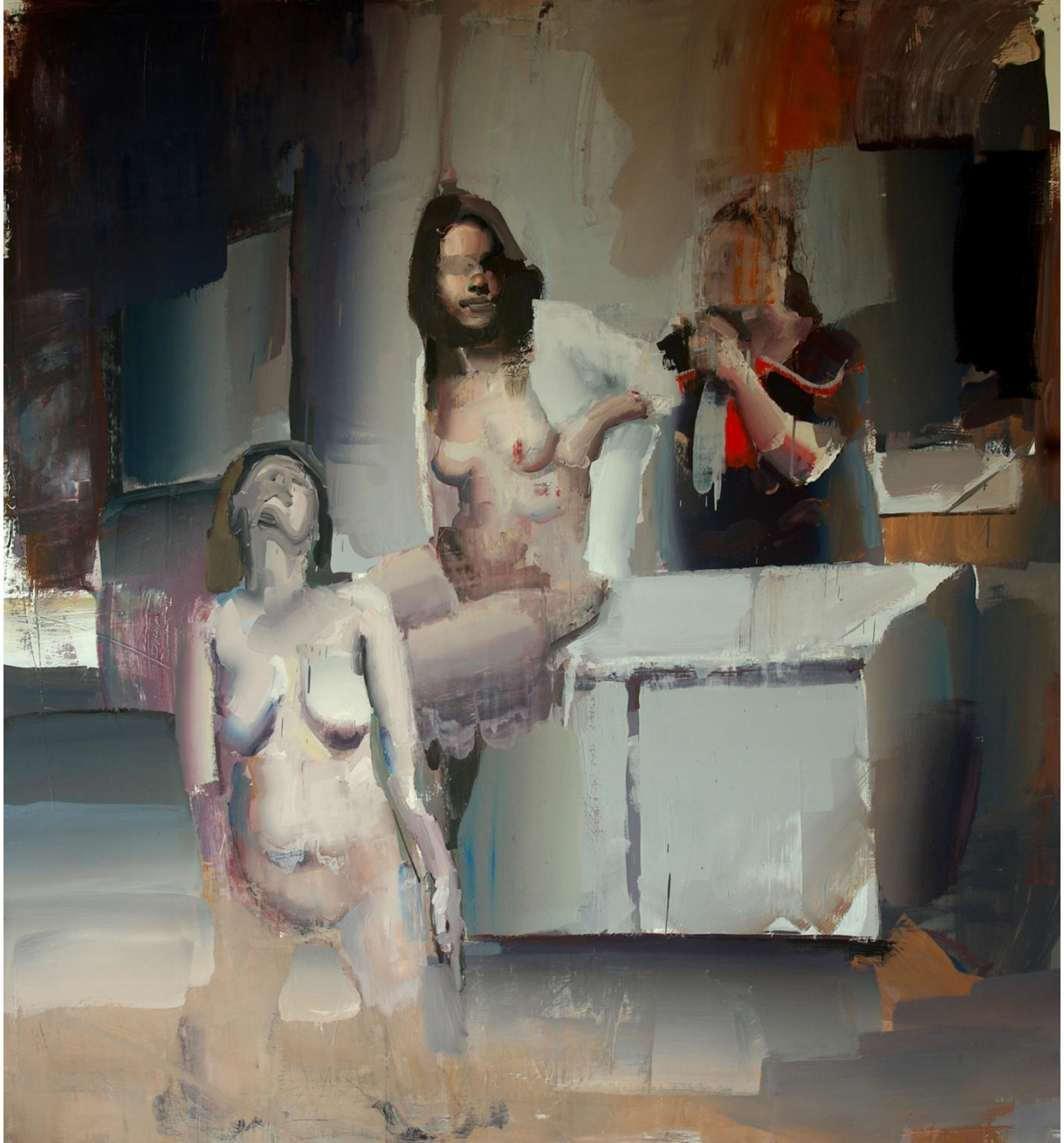


321 (Polish crusade), 2021, oil on canvas, 130x150 cm.





322 (Meeting), 2021, oil on canvas, 130x100 cm.



323 (The final judgment), 2021, oil on canvas, 130x120 cm.



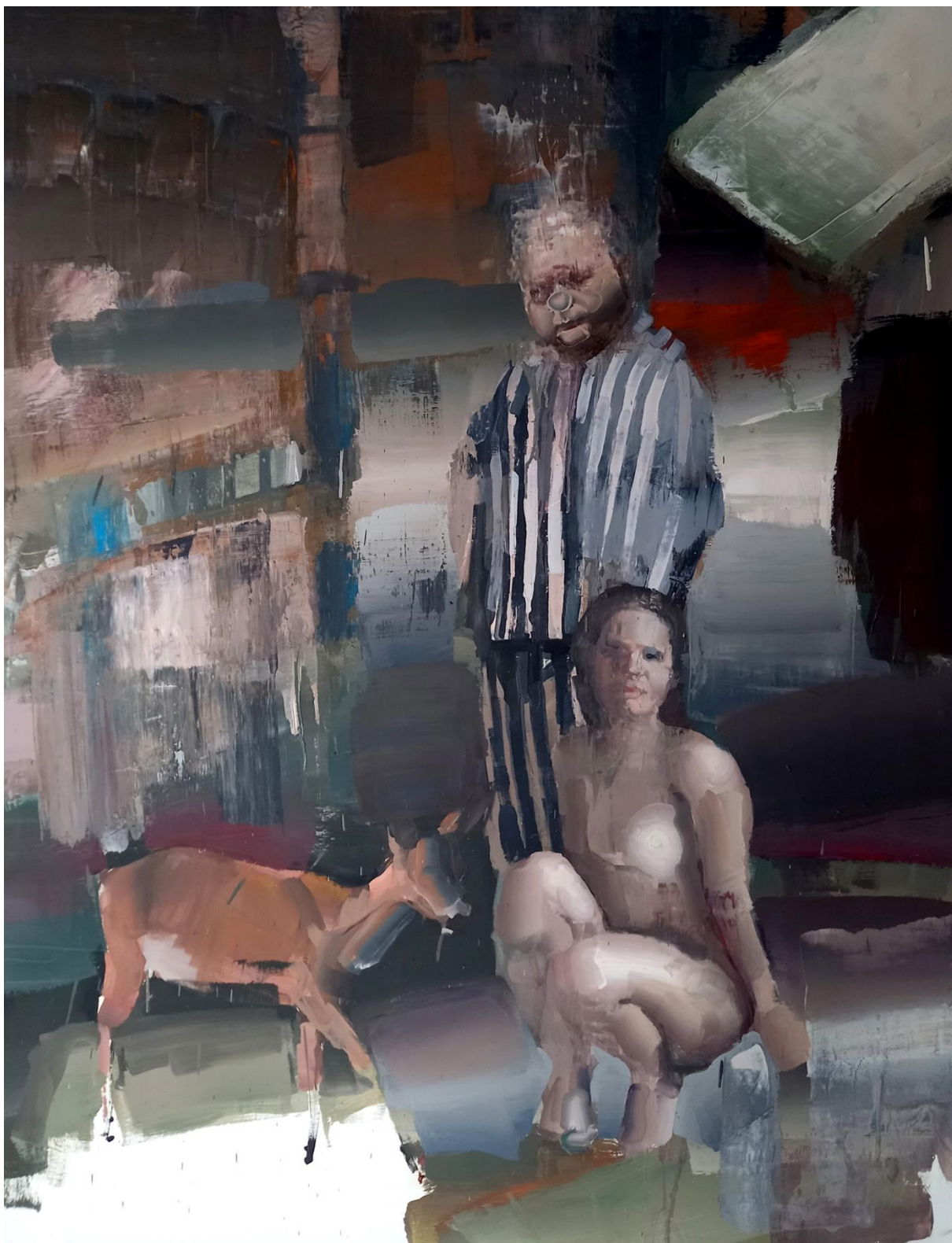
324 (Cabinet), 2021, oil on canvas, 130x100 cm.



329, 2022, oil on canvas, 160x140 cm.



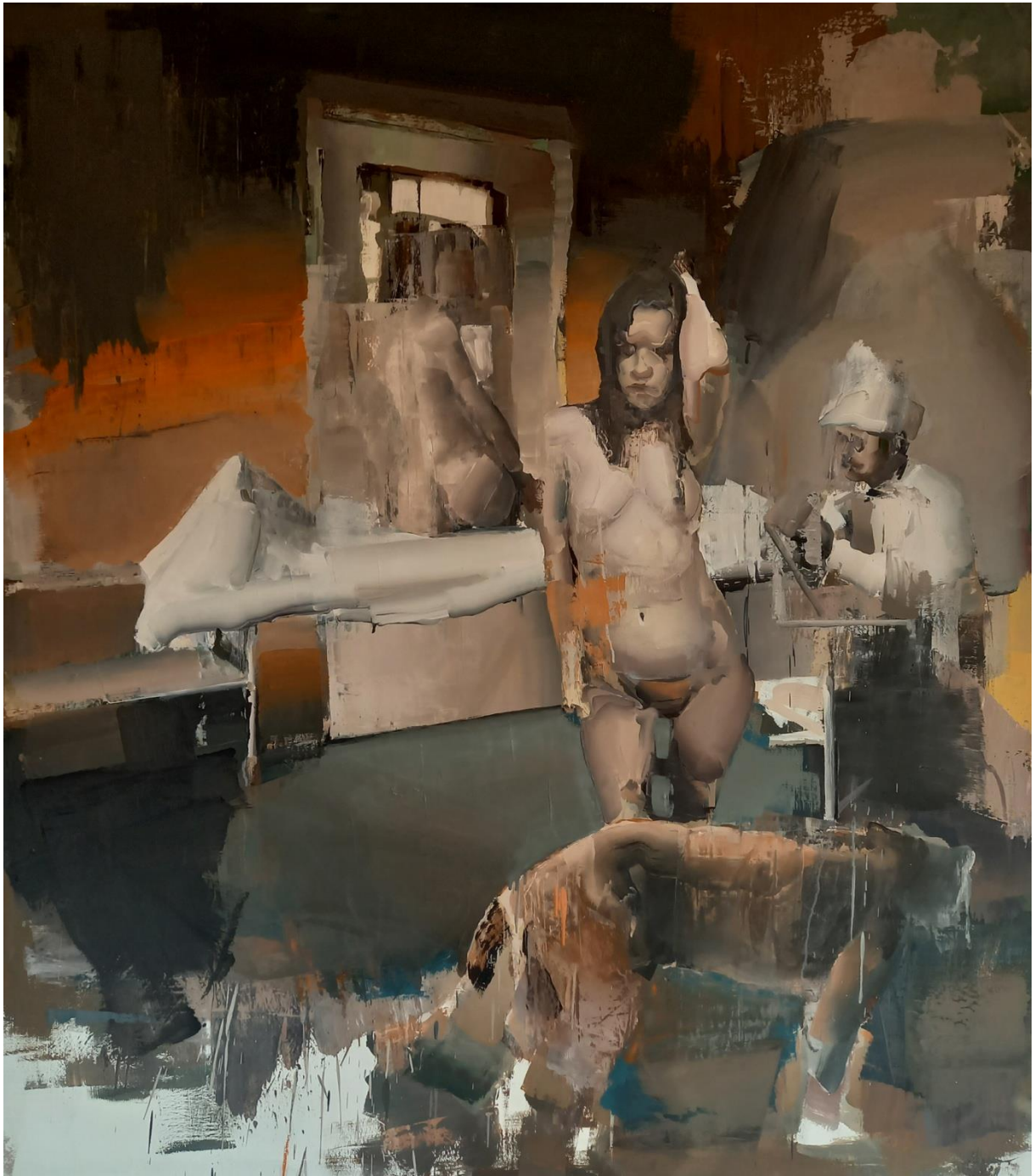
330, 2022, oil on canvas, 160x140 cm.



331, 2022, oil on canvas, 130x100 cm.



332, 2022, oil on canvas, 130x100 cm.



333, 2022, oil on canvas, 160x140 cm.