

PATRYK RÓŻYCKI

G A L L E R I A

Arsenal

PAINT ME IN THAT JOB

DATE: 09.08 - 13.10.2024

ARSENAL GALLERY IN BIALYSTOK,
ADAMA MICKIEWICZA 2

CURATOR: KATARZYNA RÓŻNIAK-SZABELSKA

**DAD THE HERO SITTING IN FRONT
OF HIS WORKPLACE,
2024**

OIL ON CANVAS, 100 X 80 CM

**MOM THE HEROINE SITTING IN
FRONT OF OUR BLOCK,
2024**

OIL ON CANVAS, 100 X 80 CM

My parents were the unsung heroes of our family. At that time, they adhered to a traditional division of labor: Dad provided for the family financially, while Mom took care of the children and the household. Each fulfilled their roles with dedication. Dad felt a strong sense of responsibility and importance, not only because his job provided a good income, an apartment, and vacations, but also because it gave him a sense of so-



cial significance. As the chairman of the trade unions, he looked after a large group of employees. Mom, on the other hand, excelled in her role as a wife and mother. I once asked her why she hadn't worked outside the home, and she replied, „Dad earned well, so there was no need for me to work. Besides, I wanted to be with you, to be at home, so you'd always feel cared for, with meals cooked and clothes washed. I felt fulfilled as a mother.” I painted them as heroic figures because their hard work, both at the factory and at home, ensured a good life for me and my siblings. I am deeply grateful to them for that.

MAREK!

**DISCONNECT THE ELECTRICITY,
THE CONTROLLER IS COMING, 2023**
OIL ON CANVAS, 150 X 100 CM

When I was in college, I felt detached from my family's life. It wasn't until later that I realized how dire their situation had become, even to the point where their electricity was cut off. It was probably spring, and they had missed several payments, mainly due to the high cost of electric heaters. They couldn't afford coal or wood, and their stoves had broken down. A relative eventually connected the power illegally, allowing them to steal electricity for a while. I vividly remember Dad disconnecting cables and extension cords to hide the fact that they were still using electricity. Eventually, the power company caught on. Using special equipment, they traced the theft to our house. Dad took responsibility for it. I don't remember exactly how it

ended, but there was likely a hefty fine, possibly reduced due to their financial hardship and illness.

MOM WITH DAD IN FRONT OF THE
„ZERWIKAPTUR” INN, WHERE MOM
WORKED AS A WAITRESS,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 100 X 100 CM

In the 1970s, the „Zerwikaptur” inn was in its prime. Situated along national road 92, it was always bustling with activity. Cars traveling between Poznań and Warsaw frequently stopped there, the clientele was good, and the local community thrived. Before this, my mother worked at the “Warszawska” pub in Koło as a waitress. When the owner offered her a job at the „Zerwikaptur,” closer to home, she accepted. She enjoyed working at both places: „I liked working there,” she said, „especially at ‚Zerwikaptur.’ I sometimes sat at the reception desk, wearing a colorful apron and hooded blouse.” It was there that my father first saw her. Soon after, he visited her home, where she lived with her parents, and asked for her hand in marriage. The painting depicts them standing together, happy and talking, at the beginning of their relationship. Eventually, my mother left her job to support my father full-time. In the 2000s, however, the construction of the new A2 motorway drastically reduced traffic on route 92, leading to the closure of „Zerwikaptur” and many other local businesses. People like my mother, who were proud to work close to home, lost their jobs.

„YOU SEE, MY SON, ISN'T IT BETTER TO
STUDY THAN TO WORK AS HARD AS YOUR
BROTHER?”,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 60 CM

During the summer between middle school and high school, I worked for the first time. My job was to dig a trench for some pipes—something related to the bakery where my brother Klaudiusz worked. He got me the job, and I was supposed to earn about 7 zlotys an hour. It turned out to be the most exhausting work I’ve ever done. I could barely drive the spade into the ground without feeling completely drained. My dad, concerned for me, would come by on his bike and help with the work. Without his help, I doubt I could have finished the job. One day, Klaudiusz came over, lit a cigarette, and asked how things were going before heading back to work. I was eating a sandwich, and my dad was still tirelessly digging. I admired his strength. At one point, he looked at Klaudiusz and then, tossing some dirt aside, said to me, „You see, my son, isn’t it better to study than to work as hard as your brother?” From a young age, I was en-

couraged to pursue education, unlike my brothers, who didn’t finish school and ended up doing physically demanding work. My dad was disappointed in them for not making the most of their education and had high hopes for me. He believed I was destined for a better life, and my brothers’ choices served as a cautionary tale. While I now understand the concern in his words, at the time, they created a distance between us—a distance that remains to this day.

BROTHER ROLAND AT WORK ON THE
CONSTRUCTION OF THE A1 MOTORWAY
BEFORE EURO 2012,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 60 CM

Roland worked on the construction of the A1 motorway alongside his partner’s brother. He would often describe the grueling conditions: walking behind the asphalt-laying vehicle, feeling the intense heat on his feet, face, and hands, working 12 to 14 hours a day under the scorching sun. This was a period of significant modernization in Poland, in preparation for the European Football Championship in 2012. Roland earned a decent living to support his partner and their young son, Sebastian. However, when he visited us, he appeared exhausted and spoke of the relentless work. The stress and his struggles with alcohol eventually led to his untimely death at 31. He suffered a heart attack in a workers’ container. Just weeks before, he had called Mom, expressing a desire to come home. Sadly, I never saw him again.

GRANDPA STEFAN BURNED HIS HANDS
WITH TAR WHILE BUILDING A ROUTE,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 40 CM

It was around the late 1950s and early 1960s when route 92, the former A-2, was being constructed along the village of Dąbrowice Stare, where my grandparents and my mother lived. My mother told me, „Stefan built this road. During World War II, he worked in Germany as a forced laborer, serving as a butcher and later running a butcher shop for a German employer, where he was content.” After the war, he returned and helped rebuild Warsaw before working on the road from Koło to Genowefa. During the construction, he burned the insides of his hands, from elbow to palm, with tar. He carried the scars for the rest of his life. Later, he worked as a gardener at the State Agricultural Farm in Kościelec. This is his story.

BROTHER CLAUDIUS WORKING
ILLEGALLY, BUILDING CONCRETE FENCES,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 40 X 50 CM

Claudius has been on a disability pension for several decades due to a slightly shorter leg. Although it's not immediately noticeable, he sometimes seems to lean unnaturally on that leg when he walks. The pension limits his ability to engage in legal work. Because it's a small amount and his brother is in debt, he has to supplement his income through various illegal jobs. These typically include yard work, chopping wood, raking leaves, occasional vehicle mechanics, and most notably, building concrete fences. This physically demanding work has taken a toll on his spine, often causing him pain. He frequently mentions this discomfort but avoids seeing a doctor, saying, „I'll kick the bucket sooner or later; it doesn't matter.” I feel sympathy for him.

MY FRIEND TAKING MANURE OUT OF THE
BARN,
2023
OIL ON CANVAS, 40 X 30 CM

I often felt a lack of belonging, which lingered for a long time. This feeling extended beyond my friendships and into the daily lives of my new friends outside of school. While I had the freedom to pursue my interests, they were engaged in physical labor, working as hard as their parents. Sometimes, when I visited and asked if we could hang out, they would tell me they might be free in an hour or two, or later, depending on when they finished their chores and if their parents allowed it. I couldn't relate, as my life was vastly different—I had no household responsibilities; my parents or older siblings took care of everything. My friends' parents often viewed me with suspicion, as if I represented a form of freedom they had denied their own children. This is merely my subjective impression; their thoughts may have been completely different. I longed to have responsibilities, to wear a house key around my neck, to be disciplined, and to have restrictions. I romanticized this alternate life that I lacked, feeling isolated and different from my peers, as if I were someone special or strange.

DAD PAINTING A „RAISE WAGES” BANNER
FOR AN EMPLOYEE PROTEST,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 40 CM

Dad served as the chairman of the trade union, and his dedication often kept him away from home. It wasn't un-

til he was diagnosed with cancer and stopped working that I got to spend more time with him. His position as chairman gave him high social standing in our city and beyond. People respected him for his work, often thanking him, saying things like, „Mr. Różycki, thanks to you, we achieved this or that,” or „Thank you, Mr. Różycki, we're glad you're our chairman.” I remember the artifacts from his work, like a megaphone I enjoyed using and the paints and brushes for making banners. One particular memory stands out: my father painting a banner for a protest. I couldn't recall the exact slogan, so I called him, and he listed several, including the one in the title: „Raise Wages.” He proudly remembered the achievements he secured for the workers of the „Korund” factory and others in the area.

ABRASIVE PLATE FROM THE „KORUND”
FACTORY, T1A 300X3X32, A24 TBNA,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, X 25 CM

GRINDING WHEEL, FLAT DISC, 250X8X100,
38A46K KORUND,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, X 25 CM

Before becoming the chairman of the trade union, my father worked at the „Korund” Abrasive Materials and Products Factory in Koło. Later, my mother, brother Roland, sister Gabriela, Roland's girlfriend Iwona, and my sister's husband Krzysztof also worked there. I was afraid that I was destined to work at the factory and subconsciously tried to avoid it. The abrasive plates I painted are artifacts from their work; these are the labels I stuck on the boards, and Gabriela probably cut them out. „Dad and Roland worked in different departments,” my mother remarked when I showed her photos of the sanding boards from the Korund factory that I found on Allegro, which I sought out for painting. This conversation, prompted by the photos, triggered my mother's memories, and she began recounting details from her work, suggesting things I should paint.

The factory significantly contributed to the city's development; among other things, it helped build the House of Culture in Koło. In 1999, the factory was taken over by the French company Saint-Gobain, resulting in many job losses, including my mother's.

BROTHER ROLAND WORKING AS AN
ELECTRICIAN, REPAIRING AN INTERCOM,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 40 CM

Roland graduated from vocational school and became an electrician. I remember accompanying him to work one day. We arrived at an apartment building with a broken intercom. He unscrewed the device, worked on the cables and buttons, made a call, and soon had everything functioning again. His skills often impressed me, whether he was fixing something at home, connecting a phone, or setting up a TV antenna. He was exceptionally talented at these tasks. Whenever I find myself holding wires, I think of him, wondering how he would handle the situation and feeling reassured that I could rely on his support if needed.

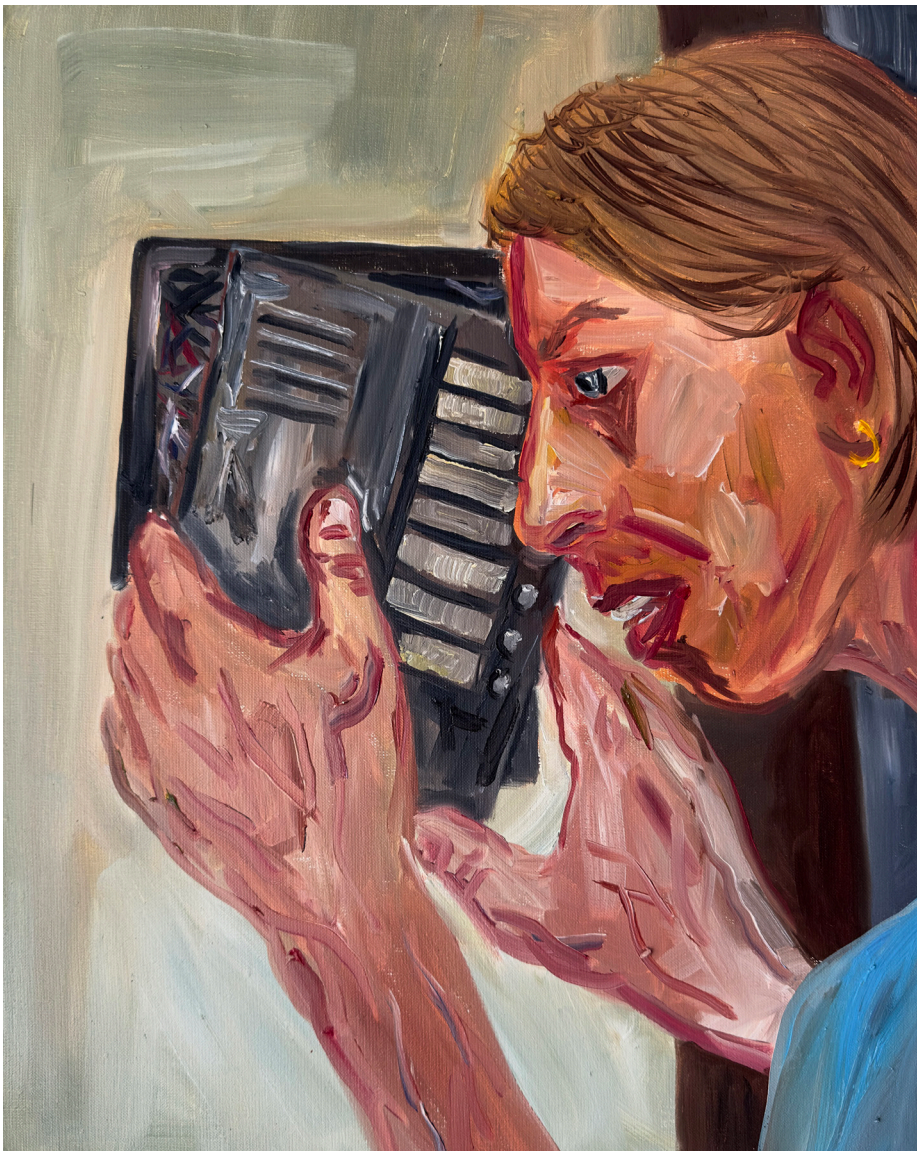
GRANDPA ANTONI TOOK MY FATHER TO
THE FIELD TO SHOW HIM THE PEOPLE
WORKING. HE SAID: „SEE, THIS IS WHAT
HARD WORK LOOKS LIKE, CAN YOU SMELL
THE MANURE? IT'S BETTER TO STUDY
AND HAVE AN EASY JOB, RIGHT?”,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 40 X 50 CM

Grandpa showed my father the hard-working laborers to warn him, emphasizing that education could spare him from such a life. Dad grew up with the conviction that only education could save him from a similar fate. He read voraciously, committed himself to his studies, attended a good high school, then theater school, and eventually seminary, though he dropped out of both. His attempts at further education were numerous. Despite these setbacks, his hard work and dedication led him to a good economic standing, which he later lost due to uncontrollable events, including my sister's death, a mental breakdown, and lung cancer. However, the belief in the importance of education, as a means to avoid hard physical labor, stayed with him. A dozen

or so years after the event depicted in the painting, Dad continued to impart the same message to me. I wanted to do everything possible to ensure my life turned out differently from his, to achieve more.

SISTER OLIVIA TAKING HER
CV TO A SHOP IN KONIN,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 60
CM

After finishing high school without taking the final exams, which none of her classmates did either, Oliwia started various internships, including at a primary school in Trzęsniew and the commune office in Kościelec. Most of these were unpaid or very low-paid positions that she took in the hope of securing permanent employment. „The money was, well, small,” she said. „Sometimes at the school, I would watch the children when a teacher left or sort documents. I would talk to the kids, and they would open up to me. One girl even confided in me on Facebook that she was attracted to girls. Later, her parents moved



her somewhere else, because I didn't see her at school anymore. I didn't have my own desk, nothing. There was no place for me there; they were pushing me so hard." None of these internships led to a job offer.

For several years now, she has been looking for employment in various places, handing out her CV to shops and offices without success. The responses are always the same: „We don't have a job for you," „If there was a job, we would have contacted you," or „You need to know someone here; you can't just walk in and get a job." This constant rejection deeply affects Oliwia. When I call her, she often says, „I still haven't found a job." She lives with our parents. Our dad managed to arrange for her to receive a care allowance, as she is a significant and indispensable support for them. She drives them to the city for shopping and doctor appointments, lifts bags, cleans the house, and feeds the animals. The allowance is small, but it helps with the modest budget, as our parents only have their pensions and are burdened by numerous debts.

GRANDPA ANTONI CUTTING A CLIENT'S
HAIR IN HIS OWN HAIRDRESSING SALON IN
WŁADYSŁAWOWO,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 18 X 13 CM

My dad often spoke about Grandpa Antoni, whom I never met as he passed away in the mid-70s. Dad shared that before the war, Grandpa studied to be a paramedic with a Jewish man. However, when the war broke out, the man was sent to a concentration camp, and Grandpa began cutting hair. He opened his own salon in Władysławowo, where he was highly respected. The town mayor and a priest were regulars; they would sit, drink, and chat. Once, people were peeking through the salon window, and Grandpa cheekily pulled down his pants to show them his bare backside, which stopped their prying. Sometimes I wonder if my dad feels saddened by not achieving as much as his father: owning a salon, earning high social standing, respect, and a home. Reflecting on my dad's stories about Grandpa, I find a guiding principle, a direction I should aspire towards—something my father, unfortunately, didn't accomplish.

GRANDMA REGINA WITH HER FRIENDS
WORKING IN THE FIELD,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 20 X 30 CM

MOM WAITING IN THE KITCHEN FOR MY
BROTHERS TO RETURN,
2023
OIL ON CANVAS, 150 X 190 CM

After the year 2000, we moved into a rented house on the outskirts of Koło. This marked the beginning of my family's financial difficulties. It was also a time when my brothers were transitioning into adulthood. As young men in their twenties, they naturally sought out fun. In our small town, the nightlife options were limited to a few pubs or friends' houses, often involving alcohol. I vividly recall my mother waiting for my brothers to return every night. She would sit alone in the kitchen, while my sister, father, and I were already asleep. My father seemed indifferent; perhaps he was preoccupied with his illness or simply felt helpless or uninterested in his grown sons' lives. This routine persisted for several years, and the image of my mother waiting—first for her husband, then for her sons—remains etched in my memory.

I'M LEAVING FOR ACADEMY, 2024 OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 60 CM

At the end of September 2012, a friend of my dad's came to pick up my belongings. The large vehicle was spacious enough to fit everything I wanted to take with me for my studies in Gdańsk. We loaded the truck, covered with a navy blue tarpaulin, with all the paintings I had created over the past year, sketchbooks, numerous boxes of books, bags of clothes, papers, and drawing and painting supplies. I was leaving my family home and moving into the dormitory at the Academy of Fine Arts, where I would spend the next year. I was filled with apprehension,



remembering how sad it had been when I previously left home for a sports academy. I packed as if I would never return, although I came back for every vacation and only moved all my belongings from Gdańsk to my family home three more times. That trip, unbeknownst to me at the time, marked the beginning of a growing distance between me and my family. We saw each other less frequently, and although we often called, our lives diverged more and more. I was changing rapidly, reassessing the beliefs I had brought from home, and stepping into adulthood. Since then, I've felt that returning home is impossible, that trip was an irreversible step toward a different life, with the hope that it would be easier and happier than the lives of my parents and siblings.

TEENAGE ME SIGNING MY KINDERGARTEN PHOTO FOR MY IMAGINARY FAN, 2024 OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 40 CM

As a teenager, I dreamed fervently of a football career. My dad once drew the number 10 on a white shirt with a marker and wrote my name on it. I also played a game called „money” with my brother, where the players were coins labeled with the names of players from Wisła Kraków and AC Parma, who were competing in the UEFA Cup at the time. I, Patryk Różycki, number 10, played for our makeshift Wisła Kraków. Later, we added a dozen or so clubs, including my beloved Real Madrid, where I imagined myself playing. One day, I took a photo of myself from kindergarten and wrote on the back: „For my biggest fan, Patryk 10.” I dreamed of success, of being someone, of being adored and loved by everyone. I still dream about it.

PHOTO OF BROTHER ROLAND, WHICH HE SENT IN HIS APPLICATION FOR THE REALITY SHOW „BIG BROTHER”, 2024 OIL ON CANVAS, 18 X 13 CM

The reality show Big Brother, popular in the early 2000s, captivated all of Poland. It offered a glimpse into the lives of people confined to one house and sparked hope that anyone could become a TV star, win a lot of money, and escape a monotonous life. My brother wanted to be on the show. He organized a photo session on the tracks at the PKP railway station in Koło, posing in carriages or standing on the tracks, trying to present himself well. This photo is probably one of the three he included in an envelope and sent to the TV station, hoping to be invited to a casting and ultimately appear on the show, changing his life. Unfortunately, it didn't work out.

SMOKING A CIGARETTE BEFORE ENTE- RING WORK AT THE “ILUZZJON” CINEMA, WHERE I WAS ASHAMED TO BE AN USHER, 2024 OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 50 CM

In September 2021, I relocated from Gdańsk to Warsaw. I resigned from my position as an assistant at Gdańsk University of Technology, despite having one year left on my

contract. After receiving my final paycheck in September 2022, I began working as an usher at the “Iluzjon” cinema in Warsaw’s Mokotów district. This job was supposed to be a temporary measure until my artistic career could take off, a dream I had no clear path to achieving. My father’s words echoed in my mind, urging me to pursue a job that would offer high social status and respect, like my previous teaching position. I felt a deep sense of shame working at the cinema, treating it as a means of survival rather than a stepping stone toward my aspirations. I avoided social interactions, especially with people who could influence my artistic career, due to my embarrassment. However, an exhibition at the Arsenal Municipal Gallery in Poznań in December 2022 brought some relief. I sold several paintings, which allowed me to live comfortably for the next three months and focus on my art. My collaboration with the Polana Institute gallery and subsequent participation in the Warsaw Gallery Weekend finally enabled me to leave the cinema job and sustain myself through painting. Although my life has changed significantly, I still struggle with self-esteem. I wish to feel valuable regardless of my job or social status.

MOM WITH MY SIBLINGS WAITING FOR A
PASSING TRAIN WITH MY DAD ON IT,
2023
OIL ON CANVAS, 100 X 120 CM

Mom often reminisces about Dad’s absence during my siblings’ early childhood, before I was born. She single-handedly raised the children while Dad traveled between Poznań and Warsaw. At the time, he was the chairman of the „Metalowcy” trade union, holding a well-paid position that earned him social status and recognition. Although the family was well-off, Mom always felt that the children missed having a father figure. She used to joke that to catch a glimpse of him, she and the kids would have to go to the PKP railway station in Kolo. I view this painting as a poignant portrayal of Mom and my siblings’ reality. Unlike them, I grew up during Dad’s illness and subsequent retirement, which allowed me to spend more time with him—something my siblings scarcely experienced.

MY BROTHER-IN-LAW’S NEPHEW WITH
HIS PARTNER IN THE KITCHEN OF THEIR
APARTMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 40 CM

Last Christmas, my sister and her husband hosted a dinner for our close family, including both Gabriela’s side and Krzysztof’s family. As we ate, drank vodka, and chat-

ted, the partner of my brother-in-law’s nephew started talking about her job in the Netherlands. It reminded me that her boyfriend was the older brother of a young boy I had spoken to half a year earlier about his aspirations. The boy had said, „I want to go abroad to work like my brothers.” The couple sat across from me, and I eagerly engaged them in conversation. I asked about their work and how they were doing living abroad. Both were order pickers at a supermarket, packing groceries for the wealthy Dutch who preferred not to shop in-store. They laughed about it, but it was clear they didn’t enjoy the job or their life in the Netherlands. I inquired about their social life and general well-being. They acknowledged that the pay was decent but felt sad being so far from home. Their days were spent working or waiting for work. They admitted that, while life was manageable, they would rather stay in Poland. However, they felt stifled by high taxes and a system that seemed unsupportive of their ambitions to start their own businesses. When I asked if they planned to settle in the Netherlands, they replied, „Never. We’ll work there for a while and then return to our own country.”

SISTER GABRIELA RETURNING WITH HER
FUTURE HUSBAND FROM WORK
IN GERMANY,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 60 CM

In the mid-2000s, Gabriela and her future husband Krzysztof traveled to Germany to work picking asparagus. They aimed to save money for their wedding and to start building their own house. Krzysztof had prior experience working there, but for my sister, it was her first time. During that period, many Poles went abroad, attracted by better wages, as the job market in Poland was challenging, especially for those without specialized skills. The painting captures the moment of their return, visiting our house before heading to where Krzysztof had been living—the basement of his mother’s house.

„I’M LEAVING, DAD!”,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 50 CM

In the opening scene of the series Londoners, which explores contemporary Polish emigration in London, a young girl with a backpack informs her father that she is leaving Poland. The father appears angry and remains silent. The girl travels to London to join her boyfriend, uncertain about finding a job. Upon arrival, she discovers that her boyfriend intended to use her for drug smuggling. Feeling lost, she searches for a way out, desperately trying to avoid returning to her family home: „What wo-

uld I go back to? My father would say he was right and I was stupid. I don't want that," she confides to someone she meets in London. In her, I see the story of my brothers and myself: the departure, the family's skepticism, and the difficulty—if not impossibility—of returning, as it would signify failure. Londoners tells a powerful tale of the struggles and emotions of many Poles who left their homeland in search of better opportunities.

„WE'LL BE FINE HERE”,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 50 CM

The scene depicts a couple sitting on a bench in London. They are Polish: she has been living here for over six months and works as a nurse, while he, a philosopher by training, has been raising their teenage son alone in Poland and working as a teacher. He was initially supposed to visit for two months but decided to move to London permanently. When he informs his wife, she becomes sad—she has started to build a new life here and is involved in an affair with a colleague. This story highlights the challenges of separation, the struggle to rebuild the relationship between mother and son, and the growing emotional distance. The man seems lost in London, hindered by the language barrier, which complicates finding a job, building relationships, and navigating social life. The dream of emigration and repairing his marriage becomes a nightmare. Londoners portrays not only the experiences of those who emigrated but also those who stayed behind and the impact on their relationships.

„DO YOU HAVE TO WORK SO HARD?! THE GUYS HATE YOU!”,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 50 CM

On the scaffolding, another protagonist from Londoners is accused by a fellow Pole of working too hard and too fast, making it difficult for others to keep up. He is simply trying to earn enough money to return to Poland and find a job in his field (economics). He dislikes working on a construction site, as it falls far below his qualifications. This scene reminds me of the experiences of my siblings and me: leaving home and engaging in strenuous physical labor. Watching this, I think of my brother Roland, who worked on scaffolding in Poznań and Warsaw. I imagine him just as dedicated, bringing back treasures like popular music CDs from these big cities.

„BUT YOU HAVEN'T COME BACK PERMANENTLY, HUH?”,

2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 50 CM

In one episode of the series Londoners, a character decides to return to Poland. He arrives at the apartment where his mother, his visibly pregnant sister, and her partner live. His sister is delighted to see him, while her partner greets him with a joking, „Oh, a Londoner!”. The only employed person in this family is the mother, who has just come back from work and is also happy to see her son. As they prepare dinner, the sister's partner, watching a match, asks the returning brother about life in London and how much money he's made, assuming he's amassed a fortune. He himself is struggling to find work in Poland, where, as he points out, jobs are scarce. He projects his fantasies about financial success abroad onto the returning brother, asking, „So, you're not happy there?” In disbelief, he suddenly asks, „But you haven't come back permanently, huh?” The protagonist leaves the apartment, feeling the weight of others' misconceptions about life and work in London. He knows that while there are opportunities to earn money, it requires hard work and commitment. Returning to Poland feels like an admission of defeat, a disappointment in the eyes of others. I relate deeply to this character, seeing in him a reflection of myself—torn between the idea of returning home and the fear of facing the realities and people I once left behind.

DAD AT THE MEDICAL BOARD FOR A SICKNESS PENSION, 2024 OIL ON CANVAS, 40 X 50 CM

In 1998, Dad was diagnosed with lung cancer, which led to the removal of the affected lung and the end of his professional career. The painting depicts Dad at a medical board hearing, one of many he had to attend to secure a disability pension. He recounted with some irony: „Initially, I was granted a short-term pension, as if a lung could grow back,” drawing laughter from the room. After being examined, the committee eventually granted him a pension. It wasn't much, but it had to support our large family—Dad, Mom, myself, my younger sister, two brothers, and my older sister. This was the start of our family's ongoing financial crisis, exacerbated by debts from loans for rent, education, and my studies. Dad often reminds me, „After I'm gone, make sure you all renounce everything so these damn debts don't get passed on to you. That's all I ask.”



MOM IN THE HOSPITAL AFTER THE ACCIDENT, 2023 OIL ON CANVAS, 100 X 160 CM

She sustained numerous injuries, including a fractured skull, the effects of which she still feels today. I vividly remember visiting her in the hospital, seeing her eyes bruised from internal bleeding, and how she lay restrained in bed with straps. It was difficult to communicate with her; she struggled, screamed, and

seemed unlike the person I knew. Seeing her so helpless, weak, and fragile affected me deeply. The image of Mom in the hospital is based on sketches I made during each visit, not entirely sure why, but perhaps as a way to process my emotions during that difficult time. We were taken to the hospital by a friend of Dad's.

SHAVING DAD'S HEAD BECAUSE IT PROTECTS HAIR FROM CHEMO, 2023 OIL ON CANVAS, 130 X 100 CM

Dad's illness has been a constant presence in our lives for as long as I can remember. We've grown somewhat accustomed to it. Seeing Dad spit blood, cough, vomit, or suddenly collapse became a normal part of our daily life. Recently, Dad began shaving his head, believing it would help preserve his hair during chemotherapy. He mentioned that his hair was thinning, although I hadn't noticed since I didn't see him every day. When he asked

me to shave his head, I felt the warmth of his scalp, saw the brown spots, redness, his ears, and wrinkles. This intimate act of shaving his head became one of the few moments I could share with him closely.

DAD RETURNING FROM PO- ZNAŃ BY WIELKOPOLSKIE RAIL- WAYS FROM A CLINICAL EXAMI- NATION, 2023 OIL ON CANVAS, 130 X 100 CM

Dad has been battling lung cancer for over a decade, and recently the disease has spread to his bones, throat, and brain. He now travels to Poznań more frequently for examinations or surgeries to remove new tumors. I get emotional imagining him sitting alone on the train, reciting the rosary he twirls on his finger as he returns home. I wonder what occupies his thoughts during those moments. Does he reflect on his life, fantasize, or harbor regrets? What is his inner life like? Through this painting, I sought to understand what he is experiencing, what he might be concealing from me, as he has always been reluctant to share his feelings. The solitude of the journey seems to highlight his independence, separating him from the father figure I knew, and revealing him as an individual with his own worries, hopes, and faith.

DAD MAKING A SNOW HILL IN THE YARD
FOR ME,
2023
OIL ON CANVAS, 130 X 100 CM

When Dad was diagnosed with cancer, it felt like I finally got to know him. My siblings remembered him as a strict, demanding, and often absent figure. However, after having a lung removed, he stopped working and spent most of his time at home, often playing with me or doing things for me. In winter, especially in the evenings during the week and on weekends after the World Cup ski jumping competitions, I would go outside to ski in the yard. While Dad usually took me to a hill in the forest during the day, I also wanted to ski at home. So, he would clear the snow from the entire yard and pile it into a snow hill, packing it down higher and higher. He would wake me up in the morning, proud to tell me that the hill was ready, and I could go skiing. I would quickly get out of bed, eat breakfast, get dressed, and rush outside to spend hours climbing and sliding down the hill, over and over again, full of joy.

DAD DOING A BIOENERGY THERAPY
TREATMENT FOR FREE,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 80 CM

After Dad was diagnosed with cancer, someone suggested to him, „You have energy; you should become a bioenergy therapist.” Taking this advice to heart, Dad enrolled in a bioenergy therapy course in Warsaw, with my brother Roland occasionally accompanying him. I even joined them once. After completing the course, Dad began practicing on us at home. Whether or not I believed in the energy’s effects, it did help me many times. Later, he established a one-man company, „Vita,” aiming to treat people and earn a living. Initially, he saw patients at the OPZZ office on Długa Street in Warsaw, leveraging his connections with the trade unions. Although he managed to earn a little, the costs of renting a space and traveling to Warsaw were too high. He then put up a sign advertising his bioenergy therapy practice on our house in the countryside. Our neighbors laughed at us—first for moving from the city to the countryside, and later for the perceived oddity of bioenergy therapy. We only had occasional patients.

Later, through his union connections, Dad began practicing in Konin, using the office of a colleague from the Democratic Left Alliance. He advertised in the local newspaper and teletext. The number of patients in the city grew, but they were usually elderly people who couldn’t afford much. Dad often treated them for free, later telling

Mom, „My goal is to serve others.” Eventually, he stopped traveling to Konin and focused on helping our family, providing treatments to himself, Mom, and my sister.

DAD CONDUCTING FUNERAL
CEREMONIES IN THE CHAPEL
IN KOŚCIELEC,
2024
OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 40 CM

After being diagnosed with cancer, Dad became deeply religious. When we moved to the countryside, he started biking to a small chapel in Trzęsniewo, part of the Kościelec parish. He remembered the church rituals from his time in the seminary and had a resonant, low voice that lent itself well to public prayer and song. He often arrived an hour before mass to lead the rosary, and the congregation appreciated his presence. His dedication didn’t go unnoticed; he was asked to read during mass and frequently led funeral ceremonies. People would come to our home, requesting him to publicly recite the rosary for the deceased. Though they offered him money, he always refused. This role gave him a sense of purpose, and he was respected by the community for his contributions.

MY SISTER’S FUNERAL
MY BROTHER’S FUNERAL,
2021
OIL ON CANVAS, 150 X 160 CM

Żaneta zmarła w 25 kwietnia 1997 roku, dwa dni Żaneta died on April 25, 1997, two days before my fifth birthday. Her death was sudden and unexpected and she was only sixteen at the time. My parents took it very hard, and our lives changed completely. We were planning to buy a house, but my mother couldn’t bear it anymore; my sister had already picked out a room, and it was too much for her. Less than a year later, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. He left his job, and within a few years, our savings were depleted by daily expenses. These two events caused my parents to break down. We moved into a rented house and then into a small, three-room cottage in the countryside with my grandmother. At that time, eight of us were living there. Mourning Żaneta’s death, battling lung cancer, and facing financial crises left my parents shattered.

Years later, on December 10, 2010, my brother Roland died at the age of 31. The combination of family problems, stress, alcohol, and the physically demanding job of building a highway led to his heart attack.

I AM ALREADY TERRIBLY TIRED OF THIS,
2024

OIL ON CANVAS, 50 X 40 CM

One day, while creating paintings for an exhibition at the Arsenal Gallery in Białystok, I felt overwhelmingly exhausted. I had accepted the exhibition offer with great joy, despite it conflicting with my plans to rest after several intense months of work, visit my family, and enjoy the summer. I agreed because I dreamed of this exhibition and wanted to maintain my professional momentum. I hadn't anticipated how much this decision would impact my well-being: stress, the rush of work, and fatigue.

This experience illuminated the broader realities of being an artist—working irregular hours, often at night, and feeling compelled to accept every opportunity just to stay afloat. I'm aware of my privilege; I could have declined the exhibition as I currently have enough money to survive for a while. But what happens when that runs out and interest in my work wanes? I must keep pushing, stay active, and adapt, as nothing is guaranteed in this field. Unlike a full-time job with a steady salary, insurance, and job security, my livelihood depends on finding timely, appealing topics that resonate with art enthusiasts and collectors willing to invest in my work, thus securing my existence.



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LAST ADMISSION TO EXHIBITION IS AT 5.30 PM

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