

Sebastian Bieniek

The real *vis-à-vis* with the fake. A conversation.

This Berlin based visual artist was born in 1975 in Czarnowanz - Poland. In 1989 he came as an immigrant to the former BDR -Federal German Republic - and from then on, he never stopped finding his way into the Art World. His advantage was his innate talent in the visual arts, and his capability to use different media for transmitting his ideas, which took him to places pursued by established and older artists.

As a painter, performance artist, photographer and filmmaker, Sebastian Bieniek has a philosophical approach to provoke and to speak through his art. He worked with Marina Abramovic and Bela Tarr which opened his artistic boundaries to a performative way of making art. His book, "Realfake", published in 2011, counts as an important work related to social media, with insight and thoughts that are up to date with contemporary society.

His studio is easy to reach, in a very popular young and touristic Berlin area. A big door leads to a 1900th Century building hallway, wood and beautiful plaster decorated ceilings take one to a second, distinctive Berlin's back "Hof" patio, where one can find Sebastian's wide and well illuminated studio. I felt welcome by his friendly kindness and by the multiple paintings covering the studio walls.

Everything looked alive; I had a feeling at that very moment, things were being created, constructed and de -constructed as part of his body of work. There was chaos in non-*chaos*.

As I asked Sebastian Bieniek to tell me a little about himself, not as a specific question but as an open access to his thoughts and to start a conversation, he candidly started:

"I am from a small village in Poland, I came to Germany when I was 14, just before the Berlin Wall fall. I crossed the border illegally. I always was good at drawing; at school everybody wanted me to make their drawings - he laughs - but I really never wanted to become an artist".
"Now I have, in a way, a very bad opinion about the cliché of being an artist. When you must do things, just to fulfill an image of yourself in order to succeed, such as a very intense night life with people, alcohol, drugs, body interventions like piercing and tattoos; you are alone at the very end."

So do you think artists are always alone?

"Well, I mean, there is truth on that, I know it from my experience. As a painter, you are mostly alone; as a filmmaker it is not that way because you need a crew, so people always surround you. It is much easy in that context. Paintings are like *dead* in my studio, they are no company".

Do you connect to your paintings like they were dead objects?

"They are *dead* until somebody sees them, until I show them. Then, they become alive, if they move someone. It is like when you make a present: you prepare the

gift, you hide it and the very short moment when you give it away, you feel happiness and you feel alive”.

So you think your paintings have to be discovered in order to have value?

“In my opinion, there are several myths in the Arts, one is the cliché of being an artist and the second one is that the artist has to be discovered. I don’t really believe in that, it is ridiculous that as an artist you have to be a solo painter accumulating paintings through the years waiting to be *discovered*.

I believe one has to go out, to expose oneself, to promote oneself, always be aware what is going on out there, and to take risks and to believe in yourself. Now we have the Internet, which is fantastic way to prop up art, I show an artwork online every day; this way I reach a lot of people at different corners of the world.

And what is your perception in relation to the competitive art market?

“I don’t believe in the art world or in the art market, there is no free market as it is well told, everybody is making deals and you have to agree prices with collectors, galleries, and the public. The art market is a matter of communication, I believe it is like a bazaar, it is not only about making money, it is more about talking and playing, like to make a game to get to know who is negotiating with you. They want to feel alive! And so do I”.

“I am lucky now to be able to live of my art, it started with one collector that really believed in me once. The relationship with them (collectors and galleries) is like family; there must be true trust in one another. I don’t like to be used as a producer of work, it can destroy you. There must be a good connection, an *eye to eye* relationship, as us Germans say”.

Do you consider yourself as part of the international art community only because you live in Berlin?

“I’ve lived in Berlin for seventeen years, and everybody knows that Berlin is not a German city but a multicultural and multilingual one. You have to know the *codes* to interact with people in this city, especially in the art scene. It helps to make connections; in every scene the codes are different; I mean, art, film, literature, theater, dance or music.”

Does it have to do with your personal idea of the “fake”?

“These codes, precisely, are what took me to work around the concept of the *fake*. I am thinking a lot about that, and I ask myself, is it true or it is fake truer? Fake is truer because the fake has more value than truth.

I developed that idea in my book “Realfake”. For me, all valuable things and people believing they are superstars are fake. Is the same in relation to exposure and fame. Nothing is real in that kind of situation.

What was your experience when you where trying to show that *double-standard*, while covering yourself with a burka at an Art Fair on 2009?

“It was a great experience. I enjoyed it! At the moment that I experienced the burka from the inside, I felt protected and hidden. For the person outside, it was uncomfortable. People were confused, and I was not allowed to get into the Art Fair even though I had an invitation. That showed me that cultural barriers exist

even though the open-minded contemporary society in Germany. Everything is about double standards and double face and it tells more about us as Europeans than about them, by “them”, I mean the rest of the world”.

You are called *Mr. Double-Face*; can you tell me a little about it?

“Everything I do, in any media has double meaning. Everything has two ways to be reached. My paintings and body-paintings became popular because of that concept. *The more possibilities we have to understand the meaning of something the farther away we are from the real.*

I was lucky that my painted faces got international attention and in that way I got into fashion collaboration at Paris Fashion Week. That opened a lot of possibilities of coverage in magazines, papers and Internet. I am still working with that subject matter”.

Do you think you belong to Pop Culture?

“I feel that pop culture is more about who you are and how you are known as an individual and artist. People know more about you than you expect, and you don’t know almost anything about them. If you see it that way, the answer, in my case, will be yes.

Travel helps a lot to know other cultures and to be popular everywhere as an artist that very moment, if you are lucky - he laughs -. But I have some political and cultural issues with some countries and it is difficult for me to connect to some of them. I need people, I need a face to hook up, I don’t need superficiality and I do believe in the connection to *earth*. I mean real correlation”.

And the Internet? Does it contradict your *eye to eye* relationship to the art world?

“I think that the Internet changed the way we communicate and behave. There is a new language that developed there and we have to learn to use it and to understand it. If you learn to take advantage of it, in a good way, it is really helpful and it opens a lot of ways.

There is another kind of vision of telling who you are. The Internet pushes society to greediness of recognition. It is also very dangerous if you believe that it means reality. But, as I said before, it is a great way to promote your art”.

Sebastian Bieniek means that no one can expect artists to *fight a fight* that is not theirs. One, as an artist must be responsible for what we create and do.

Eventually, they could become famous and well known, but it is not the reason for changing as an individual.

Our true self is never fake, and what is fake, is not our true self.

Yayo Tavorara
Berlin

For his CV please follow the link

<http://www.sebastianbieniek.com/Vita.html>