# Machulski and His “Vinci”: A Polish-Style Heist

„Vinci” – Press Materials
Juliusz Machulski has remained one of the most recognizable figures in Polish cinema for over four decades. A director, screenwriter, and producer, he is the author of films that both entertain and comment on reality. From the legendary *Vabank* and *Sexmission*, through *Kingsajz* and *Kilerów 2-óch*, to the more recent *Vinci* and *Vinci 2*, Machulski has consistently combined light, dynamic storytelling with an ironic view of the world.

His protagonists are often people who live on the border between law and transgression, and the director himself skillfully balances between comedy, crime, and the thriller genre. He knows how to create cinema in the middle ground — popular yet intelligent, with sharp dialogue and impeccable rhythm.

**“Vinci” – A Classy Heist**

The year is 2004. After a long break, Machulski returns to the genre in which he feels most at home — the heist story. *Vinci* is a film that could easily compete with Hollywood heist movies, were it not for the fact that its charm lies precisely in its Polish character.

The action unfolds in Kraków — a city that becomes one of the film’s main characters. It is here, within the walls of the

Czartoryski Museum, that Leonardo da Vinci's legendary *Lady with an Ermine* is kept — a masterpiece both priceless and steeped in myth. Two former partners, Robert "Cuma" Cumiński (Robert Więckiewicz) and Julian "Szerszeń" Wolniewicz (Borys Szyc), now stand on opposite sides of the law. One plans the heist; the other is determined to prevent it.

Their paths cross with Magda (Kamilla Baar), a student at the Academy of Fine Arts, who is commissioned to paint a copy of the masterpiece. It is art itself — its illusion, value, and power — that becomes the axis of the story.

Machulski guides the viewer through Kraków like through a labyrinth where past and present intertwine. On one side — the world of museums, conservators, and old masters. On the other — the streets of Nowa Huta, where romanticism clashes with the gritty reality of the criminal underworld.

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**Cinema About Art — and About Illusions**

*Vinci* is a film about illusions — both artistic and moral. Machulski asks: what defines the value of a work of art? Does the original matter more than the copy? And can a crime committed in the name of art ever be justified?

Machulski’s thieves are not brutal gangsters but gentlemen with principles. The heist becomes a kind of intellectual game. It’s not about money — it’s about the perfection of the plan and the thrill of outsmarting “the system.”

In this sense, *Vinci* recalls Machulski's earlier *Vabank* — that film, too, was about revenge, but above all about finesse and style. Here, Machulski revisits his favorite motifs: friendship put to the test, loyalty, and a sense of honor in a world where such values have long lost their meaning.

It is no coincidence that the film was made at a time when Poland had just joined the European Union — a moment of transition, openness, and confrontation with a new reality. In this light, *Vinci* can be read as a metaphor for the passage from the era of romantic ideals to the era of calculation and profit.

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**“Vinci 2” – A Return After Years**

Twenty-one years later, Machulski returns to his characters. *Vinci 2*, which premiered in the summer of 2025, is one of the most anticipated comebacks in the history of Polish cinema.

Robert Więckiewicz once again plays Cuma — this time a man tired of life, living in Spain, far from the thrill and danger of his past. Yet peace doesn’t last long. When his former partner “Chudy” plans another heist in Kraków, Cuma is drawn back into

a game whose stakes are not only a painting but also the past, friendship, and memory.

Machulski makes no effort to hide the irony: his heroes have aged along with the audience. They still try to “pull off” something in life, though the times have changed. Now, stealing takes place in a world of drones, surveillance cameras, artificial intelligence, and instant connectivity. In the old days, Cuma could rely on wit and intuition. In this new world, he needs technology — and a younger generation of accomplices.

**Between Nostalgia and Modernity**

*Vinci 2* is not merely a continuation. It is a film about the passage of time and how reality shifts around us. Machulski, with characteristic distance, observes his protagonists as they attempt to find their place in an era they no longer fully understand.

We see here the balance so typical of his work — between nostalgia and irony. Once again, Kraków serves as the stage for the action, though its image has changed: now it is crowded, touristy, filled with ads and screens. Art has lost its aura of mystery — it has become part of the commercial flow.

And yet, Machulski still manages to capture that singular

moment when a protagonist — despite the passing years — tries once more to “pull off his thing.” In this sense, *Vinci 2* is not just a film about stealing a painting, but about reclaiming meaning.

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**Art as Metaphor**

In both parts of *Vinci,* the motif of art serves as the key. Leonardo da Vinci’s *Lady with an Ermine* becomes a symbol of perfection and beauty — something humanity endlessly strives to possess. Yet it is also a metaphor for the human longing for immortality.

With his characteristic sense of humor, Machulski shows that in a world where everything can be copied, true value lies not in the original, but in emotion. In this sense, his cinema also serves as a commentary on the contemporary era — one of artificial intelligence, deepfakes, replicas, and simulations.

Is *Vinci 2* therefore a film about forgery? Yes, but in a far deeper sense. It reveals that memories, friendships, and even ideals can be false. Machulski doesn't moralize — he simply smiles and says, "that's just the way things are."

**Machulski and His Style**

It is worth remembering that Juliusz Machulski is the filmmaker who shaped the language of modern Polish comedy. The son of actor Jan Machulski (the legendary Kwinto from *Vabank*), he studied filmmaking at the Łódź Film School and later in the United States. His debut film (*Vabank*, 1981) already demonstrated his ability to blend narrative elegance with wit and rhythm.

His films are crafted with meticulous attention to detail: pace, dialogue, music, and color all work together toward a unified effect. *Vinci* and *Vinci 2* are no exception. In both, the editing is brisk, the set design realistic, and the dialogue sharp and witty. Machulski still has an ear for street language and an eye for

perfect framing.

*Prepared by Joanna Sokołowska-Gwizdka*

**20th Austin Polish Film Festival – Austin, Texas**

As part of the **20th Austin Polish Film Festival**, on **Friday, November 7**, we invite you to a special screening of two crime comedies directed by **Juliusz Machulski – *Vinci* and *Vinci 2*.**

A great time is guaranteed!

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