

Muz., 2021(62): 53-57
Annual, eISSN 2391-4815

received – 04.2021
accepted – 04.2021
DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.8756

A SEAMAN, DIPLOMAT, AND COLLECTOR: ANDRZEJ WAWRZYNIAK 1931–2020

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Born in Warsaw on 3 December 1931, he usually encapsulated his career in the words: *a seaman, diplomat, collector*. Already as a child he would always collect something, for example, stamps popular at the time, while his favourite book, as he recalled, was *Birara the Elephant* by Ossendowski. Not all our dreams from childhood come true, however, some become good guidance for the future.

Shortly after WW II, Andrzej Wawrzyniak, aged 16, enrolled at the Gdynia Maritime School and trained on sea, e.g., on 'Dar Pomorza'. In 1950, he set sail on his first voyage aboard 'Pułaski', a vessel of the Polish Merchant Navy, heading for China. The direct contact with one of the oldest cultures of Asia and the world immediately fascinated him, as well as served as an incentive for his future. A year later, while continuing the seaman career, he began studies at the Main School of Foreign Service in Warsaw. Little is known of his studies during the Stalinist period, however his youth determination succeeded: in 1956, he was assigned to work for the Polish Delegation with the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam, and four years later he became a regular employee at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From that time onwards his work was permanently associated with Asia and the posts in Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, and Afghanistan.

What proved of key importance for his life was the period 1961–1971 which Wawrzyniak, with short intervals only, spent in Jakarta. This was much longer than the standard term of diplomatic office, but Indonesia turned out to be his discovery and the second home. It was there that he started creating his collection. He always recalled that it began with a set of kris, i.e., Malay daggers which were not merely a weapon, but an object of magic and prestige. White weapons seemed undoubtedly an appropriate hobby for a real

male and diplomat, but they were merely the beginning of his collecting passion.

The collection amassed during his Indonesian decade was impressively varied. What dominated in it were artefacts identified at the time as traditional, connected with sophisticated artistic culture of Java, Bali, or Sumatra. Apart from weapons, they included, e.g., theatre puppets and masks, musical instruments, pottery, textiles. To illustrate the search for 'tradition' in the collecting process one can view, e.g., the selection of batiks: among them what dominate are the ones adorned with old symbolic ornaments and associated with the local court tradition, while the decorative forms created under the Chinese and European influence are definitely fewer. The collector also successfully amassed a certain number of stone and terracotta sculptures dated from the 13th–16th century; the datings have been recently verified, and some of them will have possibly proven correct.

Furthermore, what can be found characteristic is the collection from Bali, whose substantial part is made up of sculptures and paintings representing the 'Bali Art Déco' trend. Regarded to be art typical of Bali, shaped as the result of the encounter of native traditions with the influence of European painting, it constitutes one of the most impressive hybrid phenomena of colonial arts. By the 1960s it had already been well established as Bali's tourist trademark. The collection was also enriched with objects of Balinese Hinduism rituals, the latter making the island stand out amidst Muslim Indonesia. A place apart was taken by the oeuvre of contemporary painters applying the techniques and stylistics of Western painters, particularly that of Nyoman Gunarsy (1944–2017). Wawrzyniak, as he explains himself, took care of the young painter, for which



1. Andrzej Wawrzyniak

he repaid with numerous paintings and drawings as tokens of gratitude. Other painters of the 1960s are represented with one or two works, the list of their names, however, being in itself impressive: Hendra Gunawan (1918–1983), Ahmad Sadali (1924–1987), Batara Lubis (1927–1986), or Srihadi Sudarsono (b. 1931), who are today classics of the Indonesian modernity. In the majority of cases their works were a gift for the collector, a commemoration of personal acquaintance.

The other extreme in a way is represented by objects which can be ranked as tourist souvenirs. With time those mats, hats, lamp shades, having fallen into oblivion, became a slightly shameful section of the founding collection; meanwhile, for some time they can be interpreted as testifying to the cultural situation of the period. It is now for over half a century that we have been able to follow the history of evaluation of the Wawrzyniak collection, as well as the fluctuating tastes or interests of the public and curators.

The choice criteria essentially coincide with the choices of earlier Dutch collectors, with the canon of the 'classical culture' of the region having gained shape in the colonial period, and in its majority taken over by the cultural policy of independent Indonesia when it was gaining its shape. Nonetheless, Andrzej Wawrzyniak followed also the opinions and tastes of local collectors, including politicians and other Indonesian personalities, as well as dealers, artists themselves, and even shamans. He would resort to the local knowledge, only in recent years widely rehabilitated: if merely to quote the instances when he invited dukuns (namely shamans, healers, guardians of the unwritten tradition) to take care of his kris, not only materially, but also in the spiritual dimension. His exceptional skill at establishing

new relations and impressing people was very useful for his purposes. First of all, however, he trusted his own judgements.

It was already in the 1960s that Wawrzyniak started mounting displays of his collection in Poland, resorting to various museums and other cultural institutions. Quite extraordinary in Poland, where the public had had very little opportunity to come across the heritage of the Malay countries, the collection incited vivid interest. Benefitting from this fact as well as undoubtedly from his professional and political contacts, Wawrzyniak launched efforts to establish a separate institution under his management.

The endeavours went on for several years, since the owner was determined not to entrust his collection to the already operating institutions, while the culture sector decision-makers had really limited knowledge what to do with it. The determination and persistence, so typical of him, finally yielded effect. On 22 February 1973, a notarial act was signed in which Andrzej Wawrzyniak and his wife Barbara donated to the Polish State the collection amounting to 3.046 inventory entries. Along with this act the Ministry of Culture and Art together with Warsaw's authorities established the Museum of the Nusantara Archipelago, the name derived from the native name for the region of Malay culture and language. As far as the organizational scheme was concerned, it was temporarily associated with the Historical Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw. The founder was at the same time assigned the Museum's Director, and what is more: for life, which under the circumstances of the era proved most astounding.

On 1 January 1976, the organisation gained its new legal personality and a new name: the Asia and Pacific Museum.

The latter actually allowed to extend the collection to the whole region, which actually had started happening before. From today's perspective that name seemed almost too bold: can several thousand objects create if only a partial image of the largest continent and ocean? This self-reflexive question characterizes more our world today; back then nobody really asked it, while such an ambitious action framework incited interest and enthusiasm.

A review of newspaper clippings from the time of establishing the Museum creates an essentially interesting image of the reception of the institution as such as well as of the cultures it presented in Poland of the time. Journalists focused on exoticism, curiosity, and aesthetical qualities of the collection, as well as on the very process of its formation, often shown as an adventure in the tropics. Such was the image created by Andrzej Wawrzyniak himself in his interviews, and sustained by numerous temporary exhibitions with the texts that accompanied them. 'The Exotic Collection', 'Daggers and Demons', 'Wawrzyniak's Madness', are a few of the press headlines from the 1970s and 80s, undoubtedly appealing to readers' imagination. It can be regarded quite a paradox that in the era of intense decolonization in Poland, the country which had never been a colonial power, officially proclaiming anti-colonial policy, one could see the effort to establish the colonial narrative focused on the person of the collector presenting himself as an adventurer and explorer of exotic countries.

Despite all the effective promotion the Museum was for long pestered by basic challenges of daily life. The staff were initially limited, the Director stayed abroad for long periods of time, while studying the collection was not entirely perfect. The collection often changed the address, deposited at makeshift venues and in temporary conditions. Finally, two historic buildings at 24 Solec Street, not fully suited to perform the new task, became the Museum's property in 1983. Together with two galleries rented from the city: The Nusantara in Nowogrodzka Street (from 1978) and The Asian Gallery in Freta Street (from 1980) this secured a certain stability to the Museum and allowed regular displays in Warsaw.

The basis for its activity were exceptionally numerous exhibitions, both at the Museum's own galleries, and many institutions throughout Poland. Those were almost from the beginning accompanied by events which attracted additional public. At the galleries one could come across the few lucky individuals privileged enough to travel to Asia. Among them there were true celebrities, such as Polish Himalayists supported by Wawrzyniak when he headed the Polish diplomatic post in Katmandu. Years later, many people recalling that period realize that the Asia and Pacific Museum was the place of their first contact with and the first source of knowledge of the cultures of that part of the world. And once again, if judged from today's perspective it can be seen that the Museum served as the source spreading observations, knowledge, equally as stereotypes supporting the popular vision of the 'mysterious Orient'. Interestingly, the poorly documented aspect of the Museum's operations and its interaction with the public were fascinations with religions, philosophies, and spiritual practices of that Orient, so strong in the 1980s and 90s. At the end of the day, however, the Museum was a window to the world, opening to different cultures and novel ideas.



2. Andrzej Wawrzyniak at a flea market in Indonesia, possibly in Jakarta, the 1960s, Andrzej Wawrzyniak Archive

Andrzej Wawrzyniak worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1992. His last post was war-afflicted Kabul, dangerous at the time, following which he settled for good at 'his' Museum. All the time, however, he travelled on business and as a tourist, having visited almost all the Asian countries, Australia, and a substantial number of the Pacific Islands. Travelling was his life passion almost until the end of his days: voyages recharged his energy and strength, providing him with the opportunity to meet new people, which he loved, and obviously to increase the Museum collection. The two were intrinsically interconnected. For almost 40 years the collection was mainly shaped by his choices, his taste, and his countless connections. Apart from the purchases in Asian countries, about half of the collection objects are donations: acquiring the latter the Director was essentially effective. Some donors may have been under a strong mental pressure, almost all of them, however, years later, are pleased to find their names among the Museum's benefactors.

It was Indonesia that remained the permanent regular destination of Wawrzyniak's trips. He was a popular individual there due to his many private contacts and friendships, as well as in the public domain. On a number of occasions he participated in official events, his life story was often shown in the Indonesian media. Many Indonesians still recall him with affection; they appreciate his authentic enthusiasm for their country as well as the efforts to promote their culture. It is worth remembering that his enthusiasm also included the Indonesian cuisine and that he was fluent in Indonesian.

Over 40 years the collection grew multi-fold. The present paper is not appropriate for its detailed analysis, however it is worth while to at least enumerate the major geographical



3. Andrzej Wawrzyniak preparing his acquisitions for shipment, Kathmandu, Nepal, ca 1980, Andrzej Wawrzyniak Archive

regions it covers: Afghanistan, Central Asia, India, Nepal, Mongolia, Vietnam, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu. With time, the collection was also enriched with the works by Polish artists created on their travels or inspired by them. This idea put forth by Andrzej Wawrzyniak became as if the Museum's trademark, since it can now boast numerous drawings by Andrzej Strumiłło, Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, Aleksander Kobzdej, or Roman Opałka. It has continued this policy to this day, and in 2020, it purchased for the first time a work with video documentation connected with the presence of migrants from India in Poland by Dobromiła Król, a young artist. This very work is perceived as symbolic: some decades ago the Museum transferred its public in their imagination to Asia, while today Asia is present in Poland not as an abstract image, but as faces of definite individuals.

At the turn of the 21st century the Museum's initial potential began to run out. A new era had begun, not only due to the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, but also to a sudden intensified flow of information and people. A growing number of Poles began to visit the world, observe it with their own eyes, whereas those who could not afford it, gained access to incomparably more media, appealing to one's imagination much more effectively. It required the change of the operation mode from the Asia and Pacific Museum; it forcefully urged it to adopt a more partnership position versus its public, taking into account globalization challenges, to leave the position of an authority shaping the image of the world. This, however, did not happen, or maybe better said: it was happening far too slowly. The concept of the 'author's museum' worked out then accounted for the Museum's specificity to a degree, though more and more often it 'justified' it. No one found the strong personality and unquestionable charisma of its founder convincing enough to appreciate the fact that he had shaped the reality around him on his own terms. For some people what mattered more were his relations with Communist Poland's regime; also the ordinary generational shift had something to do with the situation. The collection continued to grow, the Museum maintained its status quo, mounting many exquisite exhibitions, yet it found it difficult to be present in the media and attract new younger public. 'Guerrilla' and personal methods which Andrzej Wawrzyniak used to have predilection for with time proved insufficient; they began to gain the air of something passé.

Together with some controversial decisions with respect to the property at 24 Solec Street this led to the end of a certain era. In 2013, Andrzej Wawrzyniak, over 80 at the time, was dismissed from his Director's position. Since then the author of the present paper has had the privilege of running the Asia and Pacific Museum whose policy and image have now been shaped by subsequent generations. Since 2017 the Museum has been named after its founder, another quite exceptional instance of a person's name being given to an institution already during their life time.

Andrzej Wawrzyniak was in many respects an exceptional individual. His strong will, emotional commitment, unwavering confidence led to creating an entirely novel organism, unique in Communist Poland where neither collecting nor wide-reaching international contacts were favoured by the regime. His aesthetical intuition and interpersonal skills translated into an extremely interesting collection. And although these very same qualities aroused ambiguous emotions, they have nevertheless led to leaving behind a legacy thanks to which, as a colleague on the curators' team, my junior, said, *he has in a way safeguarded immortality for himself.*

Abstract: In the tribute the personality of Andrzej Wawrzyniak (1931–2020), the founder and long-standing Director of the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw (bearing his name since 2017), is presented. Working as a diplomat in Indonesia in the 1960s, he amassed a sizeable collection of artefacts from the Malay Archipelago, large even if compared to

similar ones worldwide, which allowed to set up a new museum in Warsaw in 1973. The Museum soon extended the sphere of its interests, today boasting collections from almost the whole of continental Asia and a substantial part of Oceania. For 40 years the collection was shaped mainly by the collecting choices of its founder and surprisingly numerous donations.

As a result, a unique collection was formed, documenting a wide range of cultures, at the same time bearing testimony to its author's personality. Furthermore, the issues of the perception of the Asia and Pacific Museum as well as of

Asia's cultures are discussed in the paper, and so are later alterations of this perception. Additionally, the questions of selection criteria and evaluation of museum objects are tackled.

Keywords: Andrzej Wawrzyniak (1931–2020), Indonesia, postcolonialism, collecting, tradition, Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw, ethnological museums.

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Word count: 2 841; **Tables:** –; **Figures:** 3; **References:** –

Received: 04.2021; **Accepted:** 04.2021; **Published:** 05.2021

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.8756

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Competing interests: Authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Cite this article as: Wasilewska J.; A SEAMAN, DIPLOMAT, AND COLLECTOR: ANDRZEJ WAWRZYNIAK 1931–2020. *Muz.*, 2021(62): 53-57

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